Episode 15: Guarding the Forests (English)

**Joanna:** [00:00:00] Hello, and welcome to another episode of Politics Under the Microscope. My name is Joanna, and today we turn to an often forgotten voice in the climate change debate: that of indigenous communities. Today, we sit down with João Victor, a youth advocate and Pharmacy PhD student from Brazil. Joao speaks Portuguese and his translator today is Lina, whose voice you will hear in this episode.

**Ellie:** So the first thing that we'd like to ask is to please introduce yourself to the guests. Please tell us a little bit about yourself and your advocacy efforts and the organization that you work with.

**Lina:** My name is João Victor. I am from the Pankaru people in Brazil. I am a youth representative for the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities. I am currently a student of pharmaceuticals in the Federal University in Brazil, and I am a youth leader.

**Ellie:** And from your bio, you started at a very young age. You started at 16, I believe. Can you tell us a little bit about your journey? [00:01:00] Like where you started and how you got to where you are now?

**Lina:** I actually never thought that my journey would take me to spaces as big as right now - the climate week in New York - because when we work, we are not setting ourselves up to the goal of just reaching larger spaces. What I mean is that the work we do is just natural - the natural work of protecting our resources and territories. When we leave our houses and ask for the blessings of our elders to go out and do our work, we simply remember everything that our ancestors have always been doing.

And that's something, that continuous part of the work we do in the preservation of the environment. When we reach places like this, it's very exciting, very emotional to realize that there are other people also interested in this cause of ours. I actually have confessed that it's a little hard for me to think about this [00:02:00] because it's not something we usually talk about, but it's so good to be able to talk about it and to see that there are other youth around the world also working on that care and to also learn that there's so much more people who could help us in that brand network of the transformation of society.

**Ellie:** So, João, you're a pharmacy student and an advocate for anti-climate change efforts. Does your scientific experience inform what you're doing as an advocate?

**Lina:** For a lot of time, we actually saw a lot of researchers come to our land and extract information about our healing, our therapeutic systems, our medicine, and they would extract that knowledge. And then they would never come back. And so that was one of the first reasons why I decided to embrace this cause. The second reason was [00:03:00] actually seeing how capitalist practices were invading us and forcing us to live in a way of life that wasn't ours.

So I started seeing how our communities were actually losing traditional plants, medicinal plants, and that was happening because of climate change. And so I started to realize that I needed to take on that fight and try to stop that. And then we have also seen so much technology, so many things come into our communities, and that started to worry me. So from that point on was when I started trying to mobilize other indigenous youth to work for the same cause and to try to preserve our indigenous identity. So what I actually desire is to see other youth embracing and having a fight for this cause.

**Ellie:** So what does this fight look like? I'm curious about what role your advocacy efforts have played in policy, different legislative [00:04:00] efforts, et cetera?

**Lina:** What we have seen is that youth have started really caring about these decision-making spaces, the growing insertion of our youth in superior teaching. The insertion of this youth in creating their own media. The boldness that our youth have in leading acts of protests and then seeing our youth have the authority to take on these discussions as based on the legal knowledge of what is going on. They have even started using that legal action as a tool for our fight. For instance, we know the pacts and international actions that Brazil has ratified. We've heard and understood the international treaties and diplomatic instances that Brazil is due to. So for instance, there's the Convention of the [00:05:00] International Organization for Labor, as well as the High Commissioner of the UN. Those kind of legal pacts.

**Ellie:** So turning towards climate change, what are the challenges that are climate change-related that indigenous communities face?

**Lina:** So in former times, our communities were able to foresee when would be the time to harvest, when would be the time of the rain. And a lot of our rituals were actually based around that. And so with the changing rain patterns, for instance, the times for the fruits to be harvested, for them to be collected have changed, and that has had a large impact in our culture. All of course have altered our cosmo vision as indigenous people. And so we've been suffering greatly, like extra hot summers and extra cold winters. And sometimes it seems as though there is nothing we can do to [00:06:00] change that. But actually, our collective actions have shown us that it is possible to transform society. For instance, we didn't actually used to do any reforestation because we would see that nature had its own natural cycle of regeneration. But we have seen that it is now necessary to take on this action to aid nature in its recovery.

We actually do forest monitoring work to identify fire hotspots invasions of our land or deforestation. This is actually a work that we do just by our own initiative. We have no support from the government or a lot of times from other institutions. And a lot of us youth have actually been directly threatened because of that work we do. What we actually do is that we divide into teams and we go into the land to monitor the forest based on the knowledge transmitted to us by our ancestors. And that helps us understand how far is the territorial dimension of [00:07:00] our peoples. And that work has led us to see some indications of what is actually going on. There are several signs that nature gives us that we believe are actually signs coming from our ancestors to show us what the alerts are, by seeing patterns in the stars, in the sounds of birds, in nature itself.

**Ellie:** I just wanted to clarify that you said that you and your community have received threats for the work that you do that is not supported by the government. Did we understand that correctly?

**Lina:** Yep. That's what he said.

**Ellie:** Wow. Wow. That's crazy. So another question that we wanted to ask before I turn it over to Naira is you mentioned earlier that capitalism has a lot of detrimental effects on your lives and in the community as well. And so the US, [00:08:00] the one that us hostesses reside in, is a pretty capitalist country. And so I wanted to kind of turn the conversation towards the US. So my question is what role does the US have in your efforts?

**Lina:** It's key to start rethinking the way of life that is leading their current actions. Is it really necessary to accumulate so much? Do people actually need so much to live? I mean, what's the point of all this progress if people are not even seeing that all ways of life deserve to be respected? And how is it possible that people actually feel comfortable using so many things that come from extraction, slavery, and destruction of our territories. Don't people even feel responsible for all the deaths, for all the deforestation, for all the blood that is being shed? I think that even [00:09:00] just to begin reflecting, that is a huge point in itself.

**Ellie:** Thank you so much. I'm gonna turn it over to my lovely co-host Naira, who will be asking questions that are more focused about the US simply because most of our listeners are based here and we like to have a domestic focus specifically on policy.

**Naira:** Thank you. Thank you, Lina and João, for your amazing responses thus far. So from a more domestic point of view and US involvement in your efforts, I was curious about what your efforts are doing or inspiring in indigenous communities based in the US; if you are collaborating or communicating and if so, are there any initiatives that you have started, given that your methods and [00:10:00] efforts have been quite productive in Brazil.

**Lina:** Actually one of the difficulties we currently face is to be able to set up effective communication with youth from other parts of the world. So actually as a youth coordinator for the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities, it's one of those things that I keep very close in mind. We recognize that it's incredibly important for us to start creating those connections and making big initiatives happen back home based on that. Our actions need to be joined when we find ourselves in different parts of the world, doing actions that are transformational, that need to be shared, and that's actually something that we're still currently missing, to be able to see more of what our brothers or sisters are doing within their realities.

**Naira:** Mm, definitely. And you know what are the ways [00:11:00] that, you know, we could overcome some of these barriers and what support do you need either from other indigenous groups or other either like national or domestic communities?

**Lina:** It's very difficult, but one thing that's really helpful is the communications work through social media and other means of communication. We can be up close with what others are doing. And maybe that's work, a job that all of us should be doing. To be thinking of ways of connecting and to break down the barriers that are separating us so that every day we can set up more firm and strong luck against all the threats we are facing. Both us as indigenous youth as all of the youth of the planet.

**Naira:** Yeah. Yeah. Completely. And you know, one last thing: so you talk about this [00:12:00] importance of getting connected and the importance of social media as a tool. Are there any successful collaborations that you've had or people that have learned from your work that have begun implementing the same thing in their location, whether it was US or in other nations?

**Lina:** We're actually very often youth who are leading this initiative and it's very interesting because it's possible that it stimulates other youth to take on similar paths of work. But it requires understanding that big block that is the youth - self representational. There's many of us doing many things, but the initiative should be one and only. So you can have one person, one leader speaking on behalf of all the youth because what goes on is that while our voices and our messages are similar, it is the [00:13:00] sum of our voices that is creating echo and that is bringing forth other youth to assume this responsibility. And it is that posture that has led us to become guardians of tomorrow.

**Naira:** Awesome. Yeah. Thank you very, very much.

**Lina:** I feel very grateful for the space and for the opportunity to be able to talk about their actions.

**Naira:** Absolutely. And one last thing, actually that came to mind, how could people from non-indigenous communities support your efforts? Even if they're not in the same country?

**Lina:** That's a good question because a lot of people ask that question often and to be honest, we don't have an answer to this, but listening with open hearts. To listen to what we're saying and to rethink the basic ways of life of your everyday life. This way of life of extreme [00:14:00] consumption, of automation of recklessness. That way of life has actually disengaged people from what it is to live as humanity. So that's it. Just join us to save the planet.

**Naira:** I think one thing that speaks to me a lot from your response is rethinking the way that we live and implementing changes to the best of our ability to make our way of life more sustainable. I think it's worth pointing out, that there's a lot of systems in place that make it very difficult to dramatically make the changes that you need to be able to live a sustainable life and one that is in harmony with nature. So it might be easier for some people than others. However, I think our collective efforts, whether it's through the [00:15:00] work of indigenous peoples that have a lot more knowledge of natural resources and how to utilize them for this way of life or through people in other groups that are working to make more structural change. I think we can definitely reach an outcome that accommodates everyone's needs and the needs of the planet.

**Lina:** It's exactly that.

**Naira:** Yeah. Awesome. Thank you so much again for your time. And such insightful responses. This has been very incredible and very inspiring to say the least, we thank you again for your time.

**Joanna:** Thank you for tuning into another episode of Politics Under the Microscope. We'd like to thank Lina for her translation and hope you enjoyed our climate change series. Our next series will be focused on fast fashion. Stay tuned!