Transcript

00:00:03 Speaker 1

Welcome to After the End from the Ethoc Centre at the University of Oxford, funded by the Wellcome Discovery Award Scheme.

00:00:11 Speaker 1

I'm Patricia Kingori, Professor of Global Health Ethics at the University of Oxford.

00:00:16 Speaker 1

In this series, we explore endings and their aftermaths.

00:00:20 Speaker 1

Who decides when an end has been reached, whether the end for one person is the end for everybody, and what happens after these so-called endings.

00:00:29 Speaker 1

Today, I'm with Daniel Carroll and Alicia Parinello for an exploration of indigenous and Western perspectives on time and the treatment of endings in films related to climate change and the colonial era.

00:00:41 Speaker 2

I'm Alicia Parinello.

00:00:42 Speaker 2

I worked as a postdoctoral researcher for the After the End project.

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My contribution to the workshop was an analysis of the idea of ending in both environmental films, that is films engaging with environmental disasters and catastrophes, and the aftermath of colonialism.

00:01:03 Speaker 2

Both themes were looked at in the BFI collection, that is the collections of the British Film Institute.

00:01:10 Speaker 2

Those 2 main themes, in the way that they're presented in the BFA collection, foster the idea of the archives as something in continuous transformation and perpetual becoming.

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It's not a fixed reality, but rather it's continuously reworked and reenacted and re-engaged with by various artists that I looked at.

00:01:31 Speaker 1

Thank you, Eliche.

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It'd be really great to hear from Daniel.

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I come from 2 tribal nations in the southwestern United States, the Dene, also known as Navajo, and Wiman Apache.

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I am an indigenous postdoc working in Canada at Western University.

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My main focus is indigenous health and traditional ecological health knowledges.

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I had the opportunity to attend the After the End Project launch at Oxford, and I provided an indigenous perspective of time and what we would call endings and what that means overall.

00:02:11 Speaker 1

One of the things I really wanted to ask you, Dania, to start with was something that you said at the workshop about operating and living with very different ideas of time.

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And I wanted to hear a little bit more about what that must feel like.

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Especially as an indigenous person, I, of course, first identify and live within my indigenous community.

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And on the other side, of course, is the Western world, two different worldviews.

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It's always interesting to go between both of them and the view of time is different.

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For example, when I go back with my own community, I think the time there is what we would call slower.

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That's not a bad thing.

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It reminds me to slow down and refocus, reset, get grounded because we're going so fast all the time.

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We're just living on deadlines and all these different time constraints, but that's the beauty of when I go back home, the pace is slower.

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There's this

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emphasis on the seasons, but not as much of a demand for time as in the Western world, because of course I'm living in an urban area now.

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So I think that's one of the biggest contrasts I see.

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Thank you so much, Daniel.

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Alicia, I wanted to hear your thoughts about some of the films and what you see over time as being the change in what, certainly in film, became the focus of where the world was ending.

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You've described this movement from thinking certainly about nuclear threats and atomic threats in film as really dominating most of the 20th century, and then over time, the focus moving towards thinking about climate change and

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climatic threats.

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It'd be really great to hear you talk about that and how this notion of ending and time in film and certainly that shift is depicted.

00:04:06 Speaker 2

I was thinking about the films that I look at, like you were saying, depict the change between a sort of focus on nuclear bombings as the main climate threat to films made from the 2000s onward, which depict rather the threat of climate change, apocalyptic disasters.

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And I think a connection to what Dania said at the workshop, if I'm not mistaken, is the idea of not just the archive is not fixed, but also the ending itself is not fixed.

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We have many different

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types of endings that follow one another, according also to the perspective that is presented.

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I was thinking mostly about Catherine Yusof's book, A Billion Black Anthropocenes.

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She argues that the ending has already happened for some subjects.

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And I think that resonates with what Dania said at the workshop in the idea that especially for colonized people, the ending has already happened.

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And I think that also is present in the films about environmental disasters because we see all these different ways of representing the aftermath of a disastrous event, of dealing with these disastrous events.

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The main idea is that there is not a fixed objective ending, but rather multiple ones, which again, I think resonates with the idea of different types of temporality that Daniel was just discussing.

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Thanks so much for bringing us back to that point, because that was one of the ideas that came across really clearly in the workshop, this idea that for lots of indigenous peoples, lots of people who've been colonised, the ending has already happened insofar as they're living in the aftermath of what has been apocalyptic

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events.

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I think framing colonialism as an apocalyptic event is in one way quite straightforward, but in its own way quite revolutionary because first it brings home the impact of colonialism as an apocalypse,

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but also allows us to really take seriously and see indigenous peoples in a different way as people who have lived through an end of sorts, have lived through genocide, attempts at extinction.

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So it'd be really interesting, Daniel, to hear your views on that.

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Well, participating with this project, it really made me think more about that aspect, how pretty much any indigenous people in the world, they went through colonialism, which of course was very destructive and harmful in many ways.

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There's the acknowledgement that no matter how many attempts there were to eradicate our peoples, eradicate our knowledges and our

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our very existence, we've survived all of that.

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One of the major strengths of indigenous people is that I'm not a big fan of the word resilience, but they're the most resilient people on the planet.

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Unfortunately, yeah, that's a very common thread among all of our histories and experiences.

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But it's also a reminder that no matter what's happening in the world, climate change being one of the major ones of our generation, we will always be here.

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And that really goes to show that our ancestors, throughout time and history, were always looking forward.

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They had that foresight.

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They knew what they were doing then would greatly impact future generations.

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Even in the work that I do, that's a huge motivation for me.

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You know, what am I doing today that will positively impact future generations?

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And how can I help to ensure that we're still here, of course, and then our knowledges and then our territories?

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We want a healthy world for future generations and these apocalyptic type of events that happen, really horrible events.

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It just shows that we find a way to survive all these things.

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We just went through this pandemic and we know that's not uncommon for a lot of Indigenous peoples.

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This is incredibly hopeful.

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It's so interesting to speak to you at a time when so many people think and really believe that the world is coming to an end.

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We've got so many separate threats.

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threats of war, threats of ecological collapse, and it's something that people are taking really seriously, that human beings are on a path to self-destruction.

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Yet when I speak to you, you say, well, we've always been here, and we always will be here, and we're thinking about our future.

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It feels like this idea of not buying into these arguments of endings liberates us to think about things in a hopeful way, that actually thinking about endings also stops us from making plans for the future that are constructive and beneficial to future generations.

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And I think that's really helpful.

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I wanted to bring Eliche into the conversation, thinking about films and how the films that we've looked at as part of the BFI project, how they've taken this idea of endings and future and hope.

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While Daniel was speaking, I was thinking especially of the work by John Akonfra, especially his Mothership Connection and The Last Angel of History, which are both films that engage with this futuristic, almost dystopic earth, in which we don't know what happened, but something's happened and now the

00:09:19 Speaker 2

are set in a desertic, futuristic society.

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I was thinking about it in terms of there was a disastrous event that has happened prior to the films taking place, but this didn't stop the protagonist from doing things and living in these films.

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And also what Daniel was saying is, I think, mirrored in the way that Akonfra created his films in the sense that there is the tragic element, but then he uses the montage and the technique of intermixing different

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different temporalities in his own films that questions the idea of a fixed ending.

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So he goes back in time, goes forward in time, but he talked about the idea specifically of the coexistence of, I think, different temporalities as a communal effort, as a way to promote different perspectives together, to construct a different futurity for those that previously were marginalized, especially if we look at The Last Angel of History, which is a film about Afrofuturism

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and music and the creation of a different future.

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Thank you, Eliche.

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Really insightful points and thinking about this concept of Afrofuturism as well.

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One of the things, Daniel, that you've mentioned a lot, and the word you use a lot, actually, I'm not sure how conscious you are of using it or how much of it is part of the way that indigenous people speak about time, but you very rarely talk about endings.

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Instead, I've noticed you talk about transitions.

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So you'll say that this is a transition or things are transitioning.

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I'm really interested in the word transition instead of ending, if that's something that's an integral part of the way in which indigenous peoples conceptualize time.

00:11:02 Speaker 3

When you talk or meet probably any indigenous person in any area of the world, what resonates with all of us is this very powerful teaching coming from ancestors from the past that we have always been here and we will always be here.

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When we talk about different periods of time and that idea of transition, I don't know if that would be the right word for that period of time.

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Especially elders talk about the time before colonization in our area, because a lot of our peoples are now on reservations.

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We talk about the pre-reservation era.

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How was life at that time?

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Because I know we don't have very many, if any, people left from that period of time.

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Of course, now we live in this time.

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But a lot of the work that I do and many others is bringing back what was very strong before colonization and these different policies that established reservations.

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It's a lot about remembering what that time was like before we had what we could describe as apocalyptic type events.

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And of course, we can't return to the way it was before, but if we can bring back those really strong aspects that were very beneficial to our nations, I think that's worth fighting for and working towards.

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And we're seeing that resurgence right now with Indigenous peoples all over the world, reclaiming the overall way of life that's

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That's what a lot of the work is around when we talk about land, health, well-being.

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Thinking a little bit about endings in terms of shifting, I know that one of the things that the films have discussed is climate change.

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And I know that one of the things, Daniel, you've been very interested in is thinking about climate change and time.

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Given that so much of the way that Indigenous peoples tell the time is through ecological and environmental cues,

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Changing of seasons, rainy seasons, dry seasons, and how much change there now is in those ecological and environmental cues.

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I'm interested now in thinking about how...

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that affects the sense of time or how that affects how we feel time.

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Leach, I don't know if you want to go first and then Daniel, it would be really great to hear from you as well.

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So in the films of the BFI collection, we have different types of climate endings.

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For instance, we have films from the 60s and 70s, which, for clear socio-political reasons, focus on nuclear threats.

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For instance, we have The Day the Earth Caught Fire from 1961, La Jete from 1962, and The War Game, which all depict these apocalyptic, disastrous events linked to nuclear bombings.

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As we move in time, however, and we reach the early 2000s, we have films such as the infamous The Day After Tomorrow, or we have The Book of Eli or Children of Men, which rather focus on climatic disasters, but more in the sense that we understand now as a climate disaster, more connected to the consequences of climate change.

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The difference between the two, let's say, trends in films is that these ones from the early 2000s focus on one single individual saving humankind.

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We have the big climate disaster, and then usually the protagonist who tends to be white and male saves the day, saves humanity, and allows temporal linearity to continue, which was not what was depicted in the 60s and 70s, where we have more of a communal effort, but also a timeline that's more

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circular, less linear, more flash forwards, flashbacks, and everything is much more complicated.

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We have different timelines.

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Now we also have other films in the BFI collections, such as the ones by John Oconfra that I mentioned, Kibo Tavares, who also focus on this sort of jumps in time rather than a single individual reinstating one unique temporal linearity.

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Daniel, I'd be really interested in hearing your views on this as well.

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The main point to think about with that when we talk about indigenous people, especially now there are massive ecological changes that are happening, it can't be stated enough that connection between indigenous people and their lands, that connection has been there since the beginning of time.

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also how indigenous peoples live in their land and their traditional ecological knowledge.

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Especially now, this area is getting a lot of attention, especially in research spaces.

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Even the research I've been engaged in recently, looking at how indigenous communities are being, you could argue, forced to adjust once more to these changes.

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I've been trying to figure out the best word to explain that because it's not really adapting.

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They're being forced to adjust to changes that are happening because of these outside entities that are causing these massive changes in the environment.

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Of course, carbon emissions, they're not doing that.

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They're not doing the polluting and the damaging of the lands, but all these changes are impacting them firsthand.

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There's, of course, some areas of the world that are being hit a lot harder than others.

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For example, here in Canada, the Arctic areas, Indigenous peoples in those areas, they've been seeing those changes already happening many decades ago, and they're still happening.

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But those changes are really impacting their ability to preserve that knowledge and use that knowledge in their communities in the same way that it was used before, because the environment's changing, these different time markers

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that they would usually use.

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Those might not be as dependable now because there's so much change happening on the land, the ice.

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There's even research that supports this.

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The Inuit peoples, they've observed that there was a shift in the where the sun was positioned.

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They would use that, of course, for time, but they already were suspecting that the Earth's axle had actually changed.

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That, of course, directly impacts time.

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And their knowledge systems that they've used for thousands of years, they are having to adjust those to the times that we live in because there's so many changes in their environments now.

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The Indigenous peoples in Northern Canada, they're the ones that are, in a sense, that canary in the coal mine.

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They're really seeing those changes happening so fast within their own lands and their waters.

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This is such a great point about the people who are really focusing on looking at what's changing and noting that and documenting that, probably the indigenous peoples, because of their relationship to the land, are these custodians and stewards of the land.

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But more than that, I think paying attention to indigenous narratives about ecological change and time can really help us to articulate and shape the way that we think about time.

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One of the things that was really present in the films was this shift from apocalyptic ends, the relationship between that and decolonizing, and what they were saying in relation to endings.

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Alicia, I don't know if you wanted to speak a little bit about that.

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The way that I worked was to first focus on the BFI collection, but I looked at the BFI collection through other films.

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obviously, the first point in reference were those mainstream disaster films that I mentioned, such as The Day After Tomorrow.

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But as I worked on them, I then looked at the work by Anne Kaplan, who studies climate pre-trauma films.

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So the films that engage with these types of films, and she noticed how they foster a mostly male and white perspective.

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So I was wondering how

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other perspectives on the same topic deal with the idea of climate endings.

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And that's how I moved to other films such as Pumsi or The Fullness of Time, which is about Hurricane Katrina and how they differentiate themselves in engaging with climate disasters.

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And through those films, I ended up looking at Kibbe Tavares and John Akonfra as a way to see a move from mainstream narratives to more marginalized perspectives and

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how they offer new sense of time and temporality, and how can we approach this now very real climate threats.

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Thank you.

00:19:41 Speaker 1

I think that leads nicely into the next question, which I had for Daniel.

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To what extent do you think that the global minority in the Global North, so Europe and America, really need to have these indigenous knowledge as indigenous peoples to be the stewards of the land and to pay attention to these kind of transitions?

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This question is kind of timely, because I've been doing a lot of interviews with Indigenous peoples from across North America.

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The biggest narrative that I'm hearing is the world needs to listen to Indigenous people.

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They've been stewarding, protecting their lands for thousands of years, and those areas where Indigenous peoples still are, still exist, still have power over protecting their areas, those are the places in the world

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where those ecological systems are still intact.

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There's still a lot of biodiversity, a lot of indigenous communities, land protectors, leaders, elders, everyone is saying that the world needs to listen to us.

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Look at the state of the world right now.

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We're in a climate crisis.

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For example, back in the States, there's these massive wildfires happening in California, unprecedented wildfires, but then again, people don't believe that climate change is real.

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I hope that there's a shift in that thinking, just listening to Indigenous communities and how we can be better stewards of the planet.

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And that teaching ties to time.

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We're here for the present, but our actions today will affect future generations.

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That's what I always hear from my communities and many Indigenous peoples, especially elders.

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What are we doing today that will ensure there is a world in the future for future generations, but also a healthy planet?

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Because we know that a healthy planet is also very intimately tied to our own health and well-being.

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I think there continues to be a need for more spaces, for Indigenous voices to be heard.

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The big contrast, you know, that anthropocentric worldview versus more of that relational indigenous worldview, that in itself is a major reason why we're seeing what we're seeing in the world now, just the way we view the world, the way we view the land.

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And I think there's a lot to be learned from indigenous communities on that, just restoring those relationships with the earth and knowing that the earth is not just there for our taking, it's not just there to serve us.

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And I think a lot of the Western world, a lot of thinking is we're just going to extract, extract, extract, but how are we actually giving back to the earth?

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So I hope that we will hear more of Indigenous voices in those spaces to really share their stories and knowledges about how can we restore that relationship with the Earth, but also how can we create a more sustainable and just future for our communities.

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Thank you so much.

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I think that really encapsulates so much of the things that we discussed at the workshop.

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It would be really great to hear from both of you what you felt were some of the key take-home messages for you from the workshop.

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and how you think the idea of questioning endings is going to shape your future work and how you think.

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Alice.

00:23:06 Speaker 2

It's a difficult question.

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I guess echoing what Dania was saying earlier, one of the main takeaways is focusing on the plurality and the communal action and how looking at temporalities now can incite us to engage differently with climate change and how we should foster not just a single fixed perspective.

00:23:29 Speaker 2

On my side, on the archive and how we tell stories about colonialism and climate change,

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but how we should foster plurality and diversified perspectives?

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Thank you so much, Dania.

00:23:42 Speaker 3

You brought up an important point.

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I don't ever really use the word ending.

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I think this is the first time that I've really looked at that word and thought more about, okay, what does that mean?

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And especially what does that mean in the work that I do and being an indigenous person in general?

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The way I've always thought about time and the way I was taught was time is cyclical and things aren't so definite.

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That whole teaching around, we've always been here and there's not an ending to that.

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We might feel like there's so many things happening in the world leading to some type of ending, but I think it's important to bring that indigenous perspective that life will always go on.

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We always find a way forward.

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I find comfort and knowing that I know the role that I have right now, it's clear to me the work that I need to do and how I need to contribute to ensuring that my people will always be here and also other Indigenous peoples, but of course, the rest of the world also.

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I've heard that from other Indigenous people.

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We know what our job is right now.

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And I think every generation has their own major events and issues that they have to deal with.

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But I think just knowing my role and what motivates me and my work, I think that's very important not to lose sight of that.

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That was great.

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It's just been such a pleasure talking to you.

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I really appreciate your time and generosity of all of the feedback and insights.

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I'm looking forward to having future discussions with you on this as the project unfolds.

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So thank you very much for your time.

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Thank you very much.

00:25:27 Speaker 3

Well, in my own indigenous languages, we don't say goodbye.

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The words we use, they mean, I'll see you again.

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So it's and Apache is.

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That brings us to the end of this podcast.

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Thank you for listening.

00:25:47 Speaker 1

Do join us next time when we hear from lawyer Ricardo Labianco, International Policy Manager at the Mines Advisory Group, also known as MAG, on dealing with the explosive remnants of war.

00:25:59 Speaker 1

I'm Patricia Kingori, and you've been listening to After the End, brought to you by the Ethoc Centre at the University of Oxford, funded by the Wellcome Discovery Award Scheme.

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