



## ETHER

Ethics & Aesthetics of Encountering the Other:  
New Frameworks for Engaging with Difference

### ETHER Podcast Episode 1

#### The Art of Seeing and Hearing the Other: Curating Difference for Collective Action

<https://ether.leeds.ac.uk/ether-resource-library/>

#### TRANSCRIPT

##### NARRATION:

**Pari:** How do people of conflicting worldviews, memories and future visions encounter each other? And what role do social identity categories play in these encounters?

My name is Parinita Shetty and you're listening to the first episode of the ETHER Podcast series. Over the course of different episodes, we're going to explore what it means to encounter difference across diverse spaces of social life. We'll listen to conversations among academics, artists, public commentators and educators. This is all part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project called Ethics and Aesthetics of Encountering the Other – or ETHER, as we like to call it. Here's Maggie Kubanyiova, Professor of Language Education at the University of Leeds and the Principal Investigator on ETHER:

**Maggie:** ETHER is a global network of researchers, arts practitioners and educators whose interests circle around a core question: What does it mean to live our lives in the world of diverse others? And, in essence, how should our institutions, communities and public spaces enable such encounters?

As advertised on our project website, the questions are of course rooted in contemporary challenges of conflict, polarisation, injustice. But although these challenges around the Globe might feel uniquely 'now', the impulse to exclude, to judge, to impose 'my' way is perhaps a perennial one across diverse human societies and histories.

So I think what we're doing is building a theory of encounters with difference with a very practical purpose: To help us not so much to address conflict, division and polarisation, but to seek ways of being with one another that can counter such impulses and engage with them productively before they become serious threats to social life that they have become in many specific contexts that we personally face and know. ETHER does this theory building primarily through listening; in fact, I think that's what ETHER is actively doing: learning the art of hearing and seeing the Other. So what you see in our outputs so far is perhaps a little different from typical research outputs. It is a track record of our collective listening to one another. The process which is ongoing, always humbling, and ever expanding

**Pari:** Our first podcast series comes from ETHER Seminar 1 which focused on the Art of Seeing and Hearing the Other. In the next three episodes, we will look at how productive and unproductive social categories by themselves can be; the ways in which bringing art, cultures, and languages to life provoke encounters with difference; and finally, the political dimensions of such encounters in different spaces.

But now back to today's theme: What do we mean by 'the Other' when we speak about 'encountering the Other'? Maybe let's break it down a little: What role do social identity categories – like a person's ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and disability, among others – play in meaningful encounters with difference? Can these categories help negotiate differences? To what extent does a "meaningful encounter with the Other" require going beyond such social categories? Lara Stephanie Krause is an Academic Assistant in the Institute of African Studies at Leipzig University. Her current research explores Black Lives Matter protest slogans in Germany. She proposes that some of these slogans productively racialize White German bodies i.e. White bodies which are normally not racialized in contemporary Germany.

#### **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

##### **Lara's provocation:**

In encounters in Germany, there are apparatuses at work that constantly measure for blackness but not for whiteness, so these apparatuses actually, of which I am a part of, actually enact cuts that produce black bodies and German bodies but not white bodies because white bodies and German bodies are conflated so there are no cuts being enacted there - only between German bodies and black bodies. So, what does it mean for us? - well, I would say that this means that participation in material discursive practises which enact cuts that produce white Germans, because currently white Germans are not a thing because there are the thing and inverted commas; white Germans and black Germans that might actually be our responsibility. So let me get back to the Black Lives Matter slogans and what we couldn't learn from them in this regard and also with this theoretical lens; so, you've met Eileen already further on in an interview we're talking about this slogan, and she started talking about all the other slogans, but she didn't really talk about this one. And I said: 'Well you've ignored this one so far so let's look at it', and she said: 'Yeah it was easy for me to ignore that poster because for me it's essentially a poster but if we're talking about Black Lives Matter protests it must and should only be brought and carried by white people or by people who are read as white'. So, we can see here in this picture of Cutting Together Apart, there's a cut being enacted here between white people or white bodies who would be the ones forming assemblages with this particular slogan 'word body assemblages', enact a cut between them and black bodies within the Black Lives Matter movement. But then immediately she goes on to say: 'Well I would love to take the poster with me if I went to protest against trans or homophobia, for example, to say I go somewhere where I stand in for trans rights, then I can put myself in in those shoes and take on the perspective that maybe a white person would have at a Black Lives Matters protest'. So this I find really interesting because not only does that show that a different word body assemblage in a different protest would produce a heterosexual body that shows solidarity with transgender people, for example, but what is more important for my purposes here also is while first it does cut apart white and black bodies, so white and black Germans in this case, it also connects them in a way then she now says – 'well this would also make it possible for me to take on the perspective that maybe a white person

would have at a black lives matter protest', so these assemblages, these word bodies assemblages, also open up new possibilities of then again making relations, identifying with each other.

#### **NARRATION:**

As Lara describes, otherness is contextual, and some social categories become more relevant in specific environments. One of Lara's interview participants, a Black German woman, talked about how in the context of a Black Lives Matter protest, she remains a cultural insider. But when she travels to a trans rights protest, she becomes a cultural outsider who has to work to understand experiences which don't mirror her own. This definitely resonates with me. I am currently an immigrant in the UK where I have suddenly become racialized. But back home in India, my racial identity is irrelevant whereas my religious background and caste provide me with significant cultural, social and political privileges. Which goes to show that people can be marginalised or privileged in different settings.

Lara's contribution to the seminar is just one of many, all of which explore themes of diversity and otherness in a range of academic, public, and artistic spaces and contexts. These included museums and music performances, stories and poetry, schools and churches, books and media, arts festivals and fan podcasts, academic research projects and social justice protests. As a researcher and as a writer who works with young people, I'm really interested in the different ways in which learning occurs in informal spaces outside schools. The public pedagogy scholars Ruben A. Gaztambide-Fernandez and Alexandra Arraiz Matute don't think that the spaces themselves are as important as people's interactions within them. They believe that it's only when people come together in order to challenge and expand each other's perspectives and learn from different experiences that change occurs. Lara described an instance of this happening in protest spaces. But the ETHER seminar itself, in a way, provided a space for such interactions or encounters with difference, which sparked a variety of conversations.

People's diverse social categories have different impacts depending on the spaces they travel through. Linguist Suresh Canagarajah uses the term "strategic constructivism" to describe how people from marginalised backgrounds deliberately and strategically use their identities to resist the oppressive dominant structures they inhabit. Dagmar Dyck is a Pasifika artist, social justice activist, and art educator in New Zealand. She is also a first-generation New Zealander, born to immigrant parents. When it came to Dagmar, her social category, her *difference*, plays a fundamental role in her art, storytelling and the ways in which she navigates the world.

#### **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

##### **Dagmar's provocation**

Kia ora koutou katoa

Ki te taha o toku māmā

Ko Talau te maunga

Ko 'Utungake te hapu

Ko Wolfgramm ko Hemaloto aku whānau

No Tonga ahau

Ki te taha o toku pāpā

Ko Feldberg te maunga

Ko Aasen te hapu

Ko Dyck ko Kuechte aku whānau

No Hāmene ahau

E ngare, I whānau mai ahau ki Aotearoa ki Raki pae Whenua.

E noho ana au ki Maungarei

Ko Dagmar Dyck toku ingoa

No reira,

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

I am a first-generation New Zealander, living and working in our largest city, Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. My mother is German Tongan from Vava’u and my father is German, Polish Dutch. My entire life I have felt my difference- I look different to the dominant culture, my name Dagmar Dyke sounds different my parents speak different languages, our family traditions are different. Being different is part of the framework of my identity.

In *Our Sea of Islands*, Tongan scholar Epeli Hau’ofa writes: ‘Whatever we produce must not be a version of our existing reality, which is largely a creation of imperialism; it must be different, and of our own making. We should not forget that human reality is human creation. If we fail to create our own, someone else will do it for us by default’ -

Hau’ofa believed in an individual’s right to be custodians of their “own knowledge and identity,” so that their realities are not only learned and understood but also shared. Thank you ETHER for providing this virtual vā, or space, to offer my personal experiences framed by three guiding questions.

Question one: how does being different add value and meaning to your work? As a Pacifika artist, social justice activist and art educator, I believe the arts and storytelling powerful levers for those like myself where being different are our lived experiences. Arts and storytelling are interlinked in the way that we, as Pacific Peoples, create our arts and provide the vā or spaces in which we tell them.

My difference plays a fundamental role in the way I navigate my world. Throughout my schooling years I never had a teacher or lecturer who reflected me, nor did I have conversations with teachers about my exact identity, an experience that made me feel culturally invisible. However, through deliberate actions of my art teachers they recognised the creative capacity in me. They encouraged me to use my art as a platform and vehicle to tell my story. The rest is history.

#### **NARRATION:**

Both in her provocation and during our panel conversation in the ETHER seminar, Dagmar elaborated on the inequalities which underpin the New Zealand education system and emphasized why the students’ social categories need to be at the forefront of any potential solutions.

## **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

### **Dagmar's provocation**

What strategies and visual arts education can we use to meet the current inequities within our education system? Firstly, the potential for culturally sustaining pedagogies in visual arts education. The underpinning idea supporting the ethos of culturally sustaining pedagogies is the recognition of social and educational inequality. The call for teachers to be culturally responsive is a popular discourse that regularly appears in attempts to address an equitable outcome in education for minority groups. New Zealand education system has generally remained silent on the topic of "Whiteness, White privilege and supremacy and the Eurocentric nature of our schooling policy and practice". Relevant to New Zealand, born Pasifika students and families is the acknowledgement of language and culture loss as a result of colonisation. While the disappearance of this cultural capital is evident, visual arts education presents the possibility for reimagining schools through approaches that validate Pacifica perspectives.

### **Dagmar's reflection in the panel:**

"I think in the New Zealand context, we have our indigenous people Maori, so we need to place them first. When we look at our educational outcomes, in New Zealand, Maori and Pasifika children are the ones that don't achieve very well here. We've got all the work to do in that space because we've got a dominant educational system that set up for the white person, the European - it has been founded like that. So we've got a lot of work to do in that space."

## **NARRATION:**

What I found really interesting was how people in different contexts use traditional markers of their social categories to begin conversations with others. These conversations then go on to present a much more complex and nuanced picture of their identities.

Adam Jaffer is the curator of World Cultures for Leeds Museums and Galleries. He titled his contribution "Where's the art for White people?" because he noticed it was a theme and question which kept cropping up whenever there were museum exhibits of Non-Western and non-White cultures. Adam describes how a seemingly innocuous activity in a museum became a way to discover and learn about another community in ways which went beyond the picture painted by mainstream narratives.

## **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

### **Adam's reflection in the panel:**

"I also feel that it inspires curiosity amongst the other visitors as well if they feel that they can ask people questions. As I say, we do tend to do displays in museums, we have artists come in and do residences. And I would say, as well as seeing the art being made, it's important for visitors to be able to talk to the artists and ask them questions about who they are, and what they do. The one that sticks out to me from my point of view is we had a Sikh Education Council come to a venue where I used to work and they did and turban tying on the public. And so it's a bit like having a haircut you kind of sit down

and you get your turban tied. So the first thing would be to kind of you know, learn what a turban is, what it feels like, and why it's worn. But the more subtle kind of interaction was that people felt comfortable to ask the person tying their turban what it's like and kind of get their experiences. And those aren't the kinds of things that you can put across in the graphic panel as a non-Sikh curator, for example."

#### **NARRATION:**

Thanda Gumede is a musician from South Africa who is now based in England. He innovatively and deliberately uses aspects of his culture as an educational intervention. On the one hand, he visits schools in the UK where he wears traditional Zulu clothes and sings Zulu music to teach British students about his heritage. At the same time, he also uses these visits as an opportunity to create counter-narratives against stereotypical images about African people which the students may have encountered.

#### **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

##### **Thanda's Provocation:**

For me, for instance, music and education are interchangeable. As a person of the Zulu and Xhosa heritage our history was not recorded down but it was actually orally relayed and transmitted from the older generation to the younger generation through music and through poetry et cetera, so there is a lot in our music that ensures that there is education, there's language, there's culture. When I reached the United Kingdom, I started my own company called Zulu tradition that began to tour around the United Kingdom, but it also had a programme for schools. Education was a huge and integral part in everything that we were doing so for instance, if we did a showcase, we would perform for people, but we also had to deconstruct what we did and be able to explain and expand the significance of the music that we were doing to our culture.

**NARRATION:** Now, here's Thanda in conversation with Cornelia Bock, fellow ETHER participant and a PhD researcher from the University of Hamburg:

#### **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

**Cornelia:** "With reference to the school programs that you mentioned, how did you go about engaging the students and help them understand what's going on?"

##### **Thanda's Panel Conversation:**

"With regards to the schools and the kids, this one is quite simple. So when we talk with Zulu tradition that is basically me with a group of other Zulus – maybe 6-10, depending on the event – dressed in traditional Zulu regalia. And what would happen is, we would go to different schools across the United Kingdom, we would perform. We are just performing for 15 minutes or 20 minutes. But afterwards we then performing then explain what we are wearing, so this is a contemporary African thing but that's one includes like umqhele, which is the Zulu crown; it will include Imbata (unclear if this is the correct Zulu word here), the covering. I would say the reason I'm wearing this is because I reached that age, I

would have been topless. So it's a different kind of culture, etc. And so, when they see what we are wearing and explain what the colors mean, they then come on stage to sort of join us, because we wanted that exchange. We also speak about that Africa is not just a tree with just giraffes and lions around you know, they need to understand the contemporary aspect of that. so In conclusion, we feel that education is Part of everything that we do, because in Zulu culture, we have a thing called (Zulu phrase here). That means the information was orally relate, so we had to memorize songs. One of the things I mentioned in the video is that my last name is Gumede. We don't have ancestry.com; we don't have things written down to say this is your ancestral tree or whatnot. So I have to memorize a poem (Zulu phrase here). Those are the names of my forefathers before me. So if somebody else sings their poem, if there is a line that is similar to mine, it means I cannot marry that person. We cannot date with that person. So this is why music and poetry and dance is important. When they were teaching me to dance, I thought I was doing a dance, only to find out that they were teaching me to defend myself. So those things, the subliminal education is embedded in the music, in the poetry, in the drawings, in the art. So that is why, when we go into schools, we are like "Hey music cannot be distinguished from education. So we sing, and then we explain."

#### **NARRATION:**

Thea Pitman is a Professor of Latin American Studies at the University of Leeds. Her contribution talks about an art exhibition in Brazil which brought together indigenous and non-indigenous people. The following extract comes from Thea's research video which was a part of her provocation for ETHER. In it, some of the artists speak about how their identities *as* indigenous people helped them have conversations with non-indigenous museum visitors in ways which challenged stereotypes about their cultures. One of the artists believed that people wouldn't recognise them as indigenous if they didn't dress up in their traditional clothes. So these traditional markers of their identities became instrumental in subverting tropes and expanding imaginations.

#### **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

**Thea's Provocation:**(The video abstract shows some parts from the event taking place during the project. The participants of the event look around the museum and share their experiences and feelings about the event.)

#### **NARRATION:**

People's social categories can also become a way to discuss topics which aren't always explored in mainstream discourse. Helen Finch is an Associate Professor in German at the University of Leeds. By focusing on the literature written by survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, Helen's contribution studies whether encounters between German-speaking survivors of extreme violence and other members of the German community can be meaningful, given the power imbalance which results from such violence. She discusses how Jewish survivors used literature to stage fantasy encounters with fellow Germans to explore uncomfortable emotions and to reclaim those cultural aspects which the violence excluded them from.

## **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

### **Helen's provocation:**

When speaking particularly in reference to my research on the literature written by German Jewish survivors of the Shoah, or the Holocaust, the mass murder of European Jews at the hands of Nazis and other associated allies in the middle of the 20th century. This research encompasses a number of questions very germane to this project, particularly looking at life writing in the aftermath of trauma. The writers that I am looking at encountered violence at the hands of the Nazis because of being 'othered' as Jewish and yet there were people who shared a culture with their German prosecutors, they shared a language with their prosecutors, often they reflected on the fact that they knew their prosecutors intimately as friends. So my questions that I am bringing to this provocation are asking, well, - how can somebody who has been 'othered' by the 'majority culture', who is experienced extreme violence at the hands of that culture, still encounter members of that dominant culture within their own shared language, how can to put it more specifically, how can a German survivor, somebody who was born in the German lands, write in German to a German speaking audience about their history of pain and suffering, how can they make a German audience who in the 1950s and 1960s often wanted nothing more than to say that the past was over and done with, to say that enough compensation had been given to people who had suffered persecution, who wanted their literature to reflect an optimistic sense of moving forward from the past, how could these writers find an audience? What role did their literature have in staging this encounter between Germans and Jews that would acknowledge on the one hand the shared culture but on the other the radical different experience that German Jews had over the period of Nazi persecution? There are lots and lots of questions that emerge from this. The practical questions of what's German publisher is going to publish. this material that often accuses the German public of crimes and attitudes that it would rather forget. Such works might find a publishing house in other parts of the world but when the people being accused of for example culturally persecuting Jews, other people were publishing the literature - how what how does that encounter play itself out? In fact, in many of the literary text that I'm looking at, this encounter is fictionalised and re-staged over and over again. The German survivor attempts to publish their work and yet it is rejected or in other fictionalised accounts the German survivor attempts to testify to in the German language to a fellow German only to find their witness ignored or in some way rejected, misunderstood, overheard, patronised, or dismissed as being over emotional. Ultimately, the encounter takes place but the encounter is trivialised and is not allowed to have the impact that survivor wished to have, it does not carry with it the hope of genuine societal change.

## **NARRATION:**

Here's Lara Krause again responding to Helen's provocation.

## **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

### **Panel conversation:**



**Lara:** “In your title and in your research, you mentioned the idea of the ‘same other’. You also talk about language some of what constitutes the sameness in your concept. How do you operationalize that concept? What is part of the sameness in the other and how you're using it?”

**Helen’s Panel Response:**

“The question of sameness is about a cultural claim on the part of survivors, saying that ‘the act of violence cast me out of the community’. During the Holocaust, obviously, there was an extreme example of excluding people and putting them into ‘the zone of exception’ - dehumanizing people, excluding them from the community, of humanity, never mind the Community of the nation; and the people that I’m writing about make the claim: ‘no, I have equal dignity and I have an equal claim to this culture’. That's about equality, also saying this is my identity - you've tried to steal it, to take the language that I speak and to make it do violent acts, but I’m going to have a claim to that language, I’m going to have a claim to write literature in that language, in the way that I see fit. That might be drawing on traditions that are Jewish and have not been acceptable in this language; or it might be drawing on traditions which are traditionally seen as German and say ‘no, they belong to me as well’ - so it's an act of reclamation - the sameness.”

**NARRATION:**

In the same vein as Helen’s contribution to the seminar, my provocation also explored how people use a fictional framework to discuss potentially contentious real-world experiences and perspectives. In my research of media fans, I found that many fans from marginalised groups foreground their social categories as they discuss fictional representations. By critiquing misrepresentations or the erasure of their identities in some of their favourite media, disabled fans, queer fans and religious fans talk back to existing media and social structures. Here, both mainstream media supplemented by fan-authored media become a way to highlight how existing structures uphold inequalities. Robert, one of my co-participants in my PhD project, discussed how in mainstream science fiction and fantasy media, magic or advanced technology is often used to fix and thereby erase disabilities. It’s rarely used to imagine creative ways for disabled bodies and minds to navigate these worlds. He was deeply uncomfortable with the idea that his disabled mind and body don’t belong even in most people’s imaginary worlds. As he said, “It comes back to the idea of always being told that a progressed world is a world which has eradicated you.” Such conversations can act as consciousness-raisers and enable a collective process of decolonization as people from both marginalised and dominant cultures become aware of issues they may not have previously considered.

However, one of the downsides of strategically employing social categories in this way is that people from marginalised groups are saddled with the burden of constantly having to explain themselves since the default in mainstream media and society rarely includes their experiences and perspectives. For example, Robert found it difficult to explain what it’s like to live with a disability because he’s never experienced anything else. He’s always had dyspraxia and he’s always been on the autistic spectrum. He didn’t know how his experiences differed from other people’s lives.

Primarily relying on social categories can also mean that certain monolithic expectations and assumptions become fixed in people’s minds which leave little room for multiple experiences and identities. In South Africa, Thanda’s work focused on contemporary and American gospel music whereas in the UK, he has almost exclusively focused on traditional warrior song-and-dance compilations which

draw on his Zulu and Xhosa heritage. During the seminar, Thanda described his struggles with his contextually situated categories and how people's expectations differed based on where he was and which identity he inhabited. When he was in South Africa, he was expected to sound American without a trace of his own accent; but in the UK, he was expected to perform his Zulu and Xhosa identities; identities which were often restricted to occasions like Black History Month. Latest research in interactional sociolinguistics and multilingualism suggests that when it comes to thinking about diversity, it's important to remember that people's identities aren't limited to specific elements based on their race, language or geographic origin; instead, people creatively draw from multiple practices and interests as they construct new identities which transcend traditional assumptions.

Another limitation of relying on social categories is that some people are excluded because a specific group becomes the norm. As Lara previously explored, in a German context, Whiteness isn't racialized; only Black bodies are. White bodies and German bodies become conflated. As she pointed out, "Currently White Germans aren't a thing because they are 'the' thing." This theme also came up in a conversation between Lara and Helen during our seminar. Here they are again.

#### **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

##### **Panel conversation**

##### **Lara's question:**

"The second question would be related to colonial and post-colonial history of contemporary Germany, which is where I think our things come together. What I've seen in my research is that a lot of Black Germans are frustrated that it's always about the Holocaust, and it's always about that part of the German past. So racialization of others is silenced by this overwhelming genocidal history, which is not the only genocide that Germany has perpetrated; but the one against Black bodies is not really spoken about. Do you see any possibility of bringing together the force of these two debates or part of history, in order to effect change? And not always have this idea, 'This is overshadowing us and we have different issues' but maybe to think it together and what literature could do in that context."

##### **Helen's response:**

"I think the final question is so interesting, because I think this is exactly what the term 'memory theatre' is all about. This idea of a public performance, with a predetermined outcome and limited range of players who have a limited range of options that they can play. The idea of 'multi-directionality' comes from an American theorist Michael Rothberg where he talks about how the 'memory of suffering can be used to build community between excluded groups. So rather than the 'memory theatre' which sees excluded groups or minoritized groups somehow battling for attention in the public view, that comes back to what Sophie was talking about the value of attention; it's about building solidarity between those groups, seeing the commonalities and also the historical continuities between them; for example, what happened in Germany, South Africa and what happened later in Europe - and using those communities to productively build solidarity that doesn't always have to be mediated via the white community."

## **NARRATION:**

This idea of solidarity is one I'm particularly interested in. Ruben A. Gaztambide-Fernandez and Alexandra Arraiz Matute believe that a commitment to solidarity is necessary when it comes to spaces which include people who may have multiple perspectives and different priorities. Several scholars and activists think that it's important to centralise radical differences rather than aim for universality when it comes to developing solidarity amongst diverse groups of people.

Suresh Canagarajah points out that for many people from marginalised groups, their differences can be an important part of their identities – differences they're unwilling to let go of in order to assimilate into the dominant culture's norms and structures. He doesn't think people need to leave their differences at the door when it comes to building relationships with others. At the same time, he believes it's important to be open to other people's differences as you interact with them. He thinks that such an orientation towards understanding diverse worldviews can help people understand themselves as well as others.

One of the themes which came up repeatedly in the different provocations and conversations was that engaging with differences requires an active effort and an ethical orientation so that certain assumptions aren't uncritically taken for granted. Suresh Canagarajah calls this process of deliberate interaction and mutual collaboration "dialogical cosmopolitanism". In this case, imbalanced power hierarchies are recognised and addressed so that no one group's values and interests dominate.

Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández says:

"It is about imagining human relations that are premised on the relationship between difference and interdependency, rather than similarity and a rational calculation of self-interests."

Writer and activist Audre Lorde agrees with the assertion that people should work together to co-create shared meanings and goals while still respecting each other's differences. As she says:

"You do not have to be me in order for us to fight alongside each other. I do not have to be you to recognize that our wars are the same. What we must do is commit ourselves to some future that can include each other and to work toward that future with the particular strengths of our individual identities. And in order to do this, we must allow each other our differences at the same time as we recognize our sameness."

In our seminar, sociolinguist Ana Deumert elaborated on this idea of placing a commitment to difference and collaboration at the heart of solidarity in political projects.

## **VIDEO EXTRACT:**

### **Ana Deumert:**

"To me, the idea of solidarity resonated very strongly with my own thinking about positionality. I've always found the term 'ally', very problematic. It seems to me to be about the liberal subject, but it misses the deep collective commitment that shapes solidarity. The political scientist Jody Dean recently suggested that we should rather use the word comrade. And I do like her suggestion. Jody Dean notes, that the word comrade indexes political, and effective relations. She writes, 'no matter their differences, comrades stand together. They are united by political vision, they dream of a different world, and

actively struggle to achieve this world'. A similar vision of solidarity was proposed by Kwame Nkrumah in the 1960s and linked discourses of revolution and African liberation. Comrade, first appeared as a term in the 16th century, when it referred to a person with whom one would share house, and food, here closeness was not as implied by Derrida grounded in the sense of emotional and effective sameness, but grounded in practices, in doing, and in cohabitation. I like this idea of solidarity and revolution, where political vision and dreaming, allow for connections that are not based on traditional ideas of sameness, but on a common purpose and respect for each other.

Linked to this for me is also the idea of love for others. We should not be shy to use this word, and to liberate it from its romantic connotations. James Baldwin's reflection provide inspiration. Love, for Baldwin, demands psychological and embodied self-transformation. We might not love everyone all the time, but we can engage with others, based on a practice that is informed by love."

### **NARRATION:**

Thanks to my own political and philosophical passions, I particularly love discussions about social justice, equality, liberation, and revolution. At the same time, I think it's important to temper this enthusiasm with some considerations. When we talk about social justice, whose society are we talking about? Who is fighting? What are they – what are we – fighting for? In thinking about equality, who is this equality for? Who does it include and who does it exclude?

These questions go some way in emphasising the importance of contextualization. Even people working towards a similar goal come from different social, cultural, political, and historical backgrounds. Identities and terminologies don't always mean the same thing in different spaces. It might be more helpful to focus on the *process* of encountering different social categories rather than the social categories themselves. In this case, identities and ideas can become more contextualized rather than definitively framed in predetermined ways.

How do we create counter-narratives to the dominant ideas of universality and sameness? How can we encourage an openness to different others? Do our ideologies – both ones which form a core part of our sense of self as well as ones we've unknowingly internalised – stand the test of the encounter?

As tempting as it might be to claim, "We've solved problems of diversity and inclusion!", we don't really have definite answers to these questions. It's something different ETHER participants have explored and continue to investigate through their projects set in different spaces. However, the questions themselves as well as our lack of clear answers helps highlight the fact that encountering difference is an ongoing and lifelong process. People's social categories become an entryway to this process rather than an end goal. This is a process which will require several bouts of learning and unlearning. As we encounter new people, new identities, new ideas, and new contexts, this is a process which will never quite be finished.

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