

BUILDING JUSTICE PODCAST



CRISJ Building Justice Podcast

Season 2, Episode 9: Centering Indigenous Student Voices: Decolonizing Academia and Our Future

Moderator: Rosalba Gomez Bautista

Guests: Alejandra Lopez, Elizabeth Meza, Lillian Weese, Maria Elena Pulido-Sepulveda

Please note: This transcript may be imperfect.

Music lyrics:

Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with.

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Rosalba Gomez Bautista: Welcome to Building Justice a podcast by Sacramento State University Center of Race Immigration and Social Justice. We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world. Your host for today is myself, Rosalba Gomez Bautista. I am Indigenous woman from the Mixtec Nation representing the Ñuú Saví and Ñuú Snuviko community. I am also a third-year undergraduate studying Political Science with a minor in Ethnic Studies. I am currently the President of

Advocates for Social Justice located here on campus and a member of CRISJ, to talk about Centering Indigenous student voices “Decolonizing Academia and Our Future”.

Elizabeth Meza: Hi my name is Elizabeth Meza. I am a Guatemalan and Mexican American and a first-generation student. I am fourth-year Political Science and Journalism major, and I am also the President of the Central Americans for Empowerment club here at Sac State.

Lillian Weese: Hello my name is Lillian Weese and I am Wukchumni a tribe located in Visalia, California and I am also a Puerto Rican Hawaiian. I am a first-year Political Science major, and I am also minoring in Native American Studies.

Maria Elena: Hello my name is Maria Elena I am descended from the Caxcán and Otomí people of Central and Southern Mexico. I am the Secretary for the E.N.I.T club Ensuring Native Indian Traditions and I am a fourth-year Sociology major.

Alejandra Lopez: Hello, my name is Alejandra Lopez. I am Mexican American specifically from Oaxaca and the central coast in Santa Maria. I am also a third-year Political Science major student at Sacramento State.

Rosalba: We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the land our campus sits on today and the stewards of this land across Sacramento area: the Miwok, Maidu, and Nisenan people, in addition to the one federally recognized tribe in the county of Sacramento: Wilton Rancheria. While they have endured colonization by three nations, they have continued to keep language and traditions, and have done their best to maintain stewardship over the land. We would like to thank and recognize their resilience and willingness to continue to share their practices and knowledge with the people living in present-day California. We are humbled by their continued action to ensure that their culture and practices go forward to future generations. We hope that these words direct you in ensuring that you leave Sacramento a better place for future generations. I would like to begin this episode as a beginning the conversation of “What does Indigenous Sovereignty mean?” So, to you all what does being Indigenous mean to you?

Lillian: Well to me being Indigenous means practicing your culture. I know a lot of people, especially in tribes here and down south really care about what percentage you are but technically I do not fall under blood quantum laws, but I highly consider myself as an Indigenous woman because I actively practice my culture and speak my language.

Maria Elena: Being Indigenous to me means being of the land and not just the land you currently occupy but the land in general and caring for that land and caring for the water and ensuring that things are better for future generations.

Rosalba: I Rosalba would like to expand my definition on what does Indigenous mean by acknowledging that being Indigenous or carrying that title also comes with responsibility. Not just to oneself as in your own sovereignty, but it's also to your community and beyond transnational borders which they extend for myself in Oaxaca Mexico. And being Indigenous also means that I am here today due to my family and past generation's efforts of resiliency. Knowing that being Indigenous is more than just a title but rather an act of labor that I can

contribute back to future generations and my past generations. My next question for you all since you are all currently undergraduate students attending Sacramento State University I would also like to ask “What has been your experience here as students carrying the identity of being Indigenous?”

Elizabeth: I in particular do not identify as Indigenous but as a Central American and Mexican American my experience here at Sac State has been a little bit rocky I would say. I do identify as Mexican American but being an undergraduate student and trying to reclaim my Central American identity I have struggled to because in particular there aren't a lot of Central American Studies classes or Central American faculty that I can say I feel supported by.

Maria Elena: I would support Elizabeth, I Maria Elena in her statements of kind of feeling excluded on this campus even in spaces that are said to be for me.

Rosalba: I would also like to share I haven't been on campus as frequent until this past Spring semester due to COVID and since I've attended Sacramento State University in person, I have seen the lack of recognitions for Indigenous students. And this encompasses students in Central America and Latin American and even from my own community or Native American experience, but I would like to see and have Sacramento State build that support build that support and build that recognition for Indigenous students.

Lillian: I Lillian would like to add on to that saying that even here within my first semester, my first two months of school I've seen very small numbers in the E.N.I.T club not much participation. I remember when I was researching the school they very hyped up about how much they cared for the Indigenous community and not only is there low participation within the student body but also are they excluding a very large portion of it in not taking into consideration of those South of us the Latinx community, they only are really concerned about California Native community which I am lucky enough to be a part of so I am able to participate in these activities but they are neglecting other states and other Indigenous people and I find that upsetting because we all deserve equal support, we have all dealt with colonization and the struggles that came with it.

Rosalba: Alejandra, you also mentioned that your roots are connected back to Oaxaca Mexico and that your roots are also connected to the Central Coastal region of California so I would like to ask you how has it been moving from such a large distance where it's like heavily and found and surrounded by community coming to a school where, that doesn't give that type of support or necessarily seeing that type of representation here.

Alejandra: So, moving from the Central Coast to Sacramento County has been very different, it was very shocking. Just coming over here yes Sac State is very diverse I see a lot of people of different races inside my classrooms, but I do not see a lot of staff that look like me or represent in any way my identities. Yes, the resources may be there but it's because I am looking for them, I have to look for them, I have to you know talk to not just one person but talk to multiple people in order to you know find the resources I'm looking for because they are not, no one talks about it especially coming to Sac State during a pandemic even though here just last semester it was

really hard just not finding resources available to me or having to be frustrated going from one place to another trying to find the resources that can help me.

Rosalba: Yeah, thank you for sharing that Alejandra. I would also like to add that it is very difficult especially trying to find a space for my own being, being Oaxaqueño I am extremely proud to carry that identity however much of the Hispanic community here is focusing on the Latinx community which at times is exclusive towards the Indigenous communities in the southern region of Mexico, and even then some the resources provided here at Sacramento State focuses on Native American students and yet again I am not accepting the University's proposal of having me in a box of choosing whether to be a Latina or to be a Native American because I am more than what they, more than the options they have for me here. A quick question for you all I would like to ask you what does it mean for you to be empowered here at Sacramento State and what does empowerment look like to you and what type of resources are you emphasizing on and where would that stem off of?

Lillian: I Lilly would like to see a lot more voices, like hear voices see people who look like me because often times it's just a lot of people who aren't of color or really high faculty saying there are resources but it's usually very vague. They are saying that they are here for us but who can I trust that knows and relates to what I am going through. I know that people are aware that our life hasn't been easy, but how can you trust their resources if its created by people who aren't us. So, I'd like to empowerment for me is see people who I can look up to who I can relate to seeing them become accomplished so either networking opportunities or just more faculty who can relate to us on a personal basis and better suit our needs.

Maria Elena: I think empowerment for me, and my experience here has been lifting up my voice and trying to let other students know that they're valid and they should be okay with being recognized here. And as far as the institution goes if we wanna talk about the fact they're a Hispanic serving institution but they are not serving all those people they put under the Hispanic label are they?.

Rosalba: My next question for you all as in the title of this episode is called Decolonizing Academia what does that mean to you and where would you like to see that begin and where would you like to see that grow?

Elizabeth: One of the things that I would like to see more in academia is probably the acknowledgment of United States interventions in Central and Latin America and how that has contributed to not only my experiences as a first-generation student but also the experiences of my parents and their journey to migrating here to the US.

Lillian: I would personally like to see some information be corrected; I know a lot of the times due to poor education back then those same facts keep being taught. I know personally one of my experiences was being told that Native Americans hunted mammoths even though we were not alive in the same time periods in the slightest. So, I feel like this is a time when we could all look through our syllabuses and through our textbooks and make sure they are actually accurate and that is something that I would like to see. It's something as basic as making sure we are teaching all of our students current information and yeah.

Maria Elena: I think decolonizing academia while it's important to bring in more information and correct information it's also important to understand that we as students it's very impactful to get that information and it can be very heavy on us and we aren't really given, we are here for sixteen weeks every semester we aren't really given the chance to process that information that has impacted our lives or the lives of those who came before us.

Alejandra: Decolonizing academia I do feel like creating Indigenous Studies such as like workshops, minors, or majors would really help a lot of the people like myself who are kind of in this not bubble but trying to embrace not just what they try to generalize us as like Latinas, Mexicans, Hispanics, because like myself I feel like I have a lot of past traumas and experiences that are not helping me embrace being Indigenous just because like for example the recent social media audio leaking of LA former city president council Nury Martinez spoke about I think it was quote unquote short brown people and to me that was when I first heard it, it wasn't shocking because I've heard that term like my whole entire childhood and it wasn't shocking but then later I realized that it came from someone that was a Latina that is supposed to uplift me. Someone that I am supposed to look up to and it was just frustrating and so many mixed emotions. And just creating a space for not just, creating a space for everyone especially Indigenous students and addressing this issue because I haven't seen anyone address this issue in a correct manner.

Lillian: I would like to say that it has definitely been hard on all of us being Puerto Rican I've never really been proud of saying that, I have been bullied a lot for my Native American heritage being Wukchumni and also as a Puerto Rican I know there a lot of Latino people who have experienced racism within their own community for being darker for being different looking it's just really hard to get put on this general term of Latino, Native American, Indigenous because it doesn't really show how diverse each community is but each different tribe or person deals with it against each other even. It was just really hard for it to spread like this and not have the proper commentary we deserve.

Rosalba: When talking about decolonizing academia we also need to take into consideration how to transform the colonial system that occurs within our institution, holding our educators and the knowledge that they provide us accountable so some of the initiative that could possibly be taken within the departments and hopefully beyond the courses could be as in decolonizing their syllabus and the types of readings that they provide to their courses as in having more diverse voices more BIPOC voices as well and yet again decolonizing academia is not done just solely on the shoulders of Indigenous students or students from our backgrounds but it also has to be supported through the institution itself and the faculty being able to listen to us and understand where we are coming from. This isn't solely just for us but it's also to take into consideration of the future generations and how this education that is provided at a public institution is also very intersectional with other fields of study. So, my main question for you all is what can the listeners do? Such as hearing your stories, hearing your experiences here at Sacramento State what would you like the listeners to take out of and where would you like them to either support you or see those resources whether extending to your audience.

Maria Elena: I think that listeners for me you can acknowledge that we are here we're not past we are very much present, and I think just maybe encouraging this institution to support us more and hear our voices and uplift us and not pit us against each other.

Lillian: I Lilly would like to say that even if you do not have personal experience with this, even if you do not understand what we are talking about or what different things we mean something as simple as sharing or liking or showing someone else that may understand could be so beneficial or just to help spread it to other Latino people other Indigenous people show them that they are not alone that there are people here on campus that want to support them could be that kind of uplifting that someone needs that day.

Elizabeth: Elizabeth here, I support the previous speakers before me, I also believe that increasing visibility, representation and awareness of these issues not only helps us further find a solution to these issues but also just acknowledging that they exist is the first step in improving our experiences here as students at Sac State.

Rosalba: I Rosalba have a few initiatives that Sac State can take upon themselves whether its student leadership or leadership as in the faculty or even within the departments it can begin with providing representation in spaces for all Indigenous students such as beyond communities that are extended past transnational borders, I understand Sacramento State has a Native Student Center that focuses on Native Student's needs however how expansive the resources that are provided could actually be an avenue for inclusivity and intersectionality. In addition, I would also like to see Sacramento State provide opportunities to Indigenous students from all communities to build a connection between the lawmakers here in the Sacramento area or even just in general with the Indigenous communities as they can understand the policies that are built and impacting Indigenous communities all throughout California. In addition, within the educational portion I would like to see more of a diverse staff, faculty, mentors within this institution that represents Indigenous leadership from all communities. I would also like to see more funding and to provide events on Indigenous People Day, Native American Heritage Month, and International Indigenous People Day and those are just a few of the opportunities that they can jump upon for one it could amplify as what Elizabeth has mentioned it can amplify our presence here on campus but as well as external issue or just our knowledge that is very much alive today and again I would like to see Sacramento State formally state the rename of Christopher Columbus day as Indigenous People Day and solely as Indigenous People Day not only will we have a proper title but I would also like to see committed action behind the recognition that will further support Indigenous knowledge, autonomy, and culture retrieval on campus. So, my question to you all is what is the importance of this, what do you want your audience to gain from this episode?

Maria Elena: That we are not a monolith community. Whatever box you want to put us in we represent diversity just within each of ourselves as individuals. I think that's what I would like you to take away from listening to this today.

Alejandra: I do feel so I feel like this is a very important issue because it's hurting a lot of students, its hurting all of us and it hurts to feel no support or no mentorship available to us especially in our faculty because it's sad to realize that or just point out that even though Sac

State is one of the top diverse universities its staff is not diverse just this year Sac State hired a lot of diverse faculty and why just this year? If when I, I applied to Sac State in Fall of 2019 that's what was eye catching to me seeing that diversity and seeing that there's people that look like me or people that I feel included in and coming to campus and not feeling that, not feeling like I fit in or feeling that I have to be in my little bubble is upsetting and frustrating because I don't feel that support around me.

Rosalba: Thank you for sharing Alejandra and again I would just jumping onto what you said I also feel like there is a lack of support, recognition and resources and just lack of acknowledgement honestly, lack of acknowledgement for all Indigenous students of all Indigenous backgrounds and communities because again we are very much present and we deserve to be here, we deserve to be represented and especially from like what you mentioned a University that claims on their diversity but I don't feel that sense of representation here and it is actually very harmful and it actually contributes to post colonialism then it contributes to generalization of identities and furthermore it contributes to Indigeneity erasure. Not only do I want to see more students attending this campus from our communities, but I would also like them to feel supported not just solely by students like us, but I would like them to feel supported from faculty because this shouldn't be normalized. This shouldn't just be accepted and brushed off this there's a reason why we're here and there's a reason why our communities still continue to thrive because we are built on resiliency, and I would like the school to acknowledge that we're not going anywhere and making sure that the Indigeneity Erasure continues no longer.

Elizabeth: I think that this episode in particular is important because having the voice of students who have felt unwelcomed or felt like they were unsupported is important to address in order to avoid this happening in the future for future students to attend this school. I think that for example being President for the Central Americans for Empowerment Club I've wanted to create a safe space for Central American students and make sure that they feel like they're listened to, they're heard and that there is a space and platform for them to share their experiences apart from the Latinx community.

Lillian: I just really wanna reiterate what we've been saying in that just because somewhere is diverse does not mean that it's inclusive a lot of times people like to group those two words together but if this campus were really inclusive, we would not feel pushed aside. They may allow us to be here but that doesn't mean that they allow us to feel included and that is something that we really need to highlight the difference in that. Yes, I will agree that Sac State is a very diverse campus. All my classrooms you see a lot of different people, but does that mean we are included in the conversation? Does that mean that there are a lot of resources for us to be included, yes there are some but are they enough, is there enough for everyone, and are they properly told for us? So, I hope after hearing this podcast you might feel inclined to learn how not included that we are and maybe think of new resources or find someone who can help us.

Rosalba: You just listened to the Building Justice Podcast the information contained in this podcast represents the views and opinions of the host and guests and does not necessarily represent the views and opinions of Sacramento State or CRISJ

Outro Music Lyrics

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice,"
"Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.