

## S2E09 Foreword: Identity and Trauma

### Guest: Dr. Cristina Santos

[00:00:00] **Alison Innes:** [00:00:00] Welcome to forward a podcast from Brock's faculty of humanities. I'm your host, Alison Innes, and each episode, I bring you a conversation with one of our researchers from Brock universities, faculty of humanities.

[00:00:21] My guest today is Dr. Christina Santos who teaches. Spanish and Latin American studies program in the department of modern languages, literatures and cultures. She's also a faculty member with the interdisciplinary humanity, these PhD program, where she teaches and supervises PhD students. She also teaches courses in the faculty of social science, Christina's research investigates, monsters, depictions of women as aberrations of feminine nature in literature, art, and film.

[00:00:48] She has written about the folklore surrounding the notorious bloody Countess Elizabeth Barkley. Leave murdered hundreds of young girls in the late 16th and early 17th century Hungary and the [00:01:00] Latin American legend of LA. Yorona a woman who Johns for children, her 2016 book on becoming female monsters, which is the empire and virgins explores how female monsters from literature, art, film, television, and popular culture, embody social and cultural fears of female sexuality and reproductive powers.

[00:01:20] She's also co-edited volumes on cultural ideas of virginity monsters. and literature, and even the Twilight saga more broadly, Christina researches, motherhood and mothering in the Latin American dice Ora and her recent research looks at how political and social deviance and trauma in life narratives creates personal and communal identity.

[00:01:40] So

[00:01:40] **Cristina Santos:** [00:01:40] welcome, Christina. Thank you, Allison. And thank you for the opportunity. It's quite a pleasure being here with you today. We're glad that

[00:01:48] **Alison Innes:** [00:01:48] you could make some time for us with your very busy yeah. And interesting and diverse research. So I was wondering, um, if you could tell us just a little [00:02:00] bit about some of your work around monsters and women, just in, in your own words.

[00:02:06] **Cristina Santos:** [00:02:06] Well, you did a great job already, but, um, I guess I can start with, uh, But what you mentioned on becoming female monsters and, um, the impetus to that was really looking at the parameters that tend to define. Women and tend to predicate certain behaviors. And if those behaviors or roles are not fulfilled, the repercussions that are suffered by these women.

[00:02:40] So predominantly looking at social political, cultural, religious, familial, all of these external forces that are. Exercised upon a woman's becoming. So, um, I always go back to [00:03:00] Simone de Beauvoir is the second step. She had, and she has a Semiotexte sentence

there that stuck with me and it begins that book in the second sex, Simone de Beauvoir says one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.

[00:03:16] And it stuck with me. This is actually one of those graduate courses I teach, teach in the PhD program. And with unbecoming women, I, I put it to my own twist to it and made it. Into woman is not born monstrous, but is constructed as such. Right. And the idea of unbecoming, I did a bit of a play of words on that, considering all of these, um, ideas and unbecoming would be what we're usually more familiar with as unattractive, right?

[00:03:50] Someone who doesn't fulfill what, you know. Parameters around beauty or, um, whatever's, uh, defined by dominant [00:04:00] discourse. Be it patriarchal, whatever it may be and what the other twist I, when I put on that unbecoming is the ontological twist of women who decide. To become a not authentic version of themselves and not the predefined expected role or definition of what they should be for others, rather as switches to what they are true to themselves.

[00:04:34] And that's where that, that crap. In, in the depiction of women as monsters come out because of not towing the line to what dominant discourse expects them to be or roles they expect them women to fulfill. Um, so it's undoable. That indoctrination by all those external forces. And most often than not, that does come with [00:05:00] a price.

[00:05:00] And that's what we see in a lot of television, film, literature, stories of the evil witch, the woman that's exile to the fringes of society, ugly stepsisters, and yes, and those are in literature and all these other popular culture arteries. But one of the things I did point out, it also translates to real world where there are repercussions for real women in the real world when they feel that they're not fulfilling certain, certain expectations,

[00:05:37] **Alison Innes:** [00:05:37] that link then between folklore literature stories we tell and then playing out in the real world, do the stories, condition us to think a particular way and then perpetuate that.

[00:05:47] Or what's, what's the connection.

[00:05:49] **Cristina Santos:** [00:05:49] That's interesting because that's actually, yeah. Segue to my next book.

[00:05:57] Um, so unbecoming got me looking [00:06:00] at each stage of sexual maturation and how women were talked about depicted as monster. At each site at each shoe. So virginity, adolescents, interestingly motherhood got two chapters. And lastly, the one that's really a case study of Elizabeth thought three, as you mentioned, as a culmination of here's an historical figure that actually showed all stages of that sexual maturation and how she was monstrous at all stages with the complexity of this blurring of fiction.

[00:06:35] And non-fiction. Right. But she really was a case study for that. And,

[00:06:39] and

[00:06:39] **Alison Innes:** [00:06:39] our listeners might be familiar with her story from some of the legends that sprang up around it. Um, she was reputed to bathe. And so

[00:06:49] **Cristina Santos:** [00:06:49] the story is that, uh, Now the number is disputed of having killed 650 virgins because the Virgin [00:07:00] blood, um, would maintain or usefulness.

[00:07:02] She did not ingest it. So the, the mythology of her being a vampire, that's where it comes from. Um, but it's that blood beauty myth, you know, that other women, um, famous women. Yeah. Also partake. And even to today, we have the Kardashians doing a blood facials, so it's still around. But the, the part that I'm in unbecoming that really brings us to the real world, let's say from, takes us out of literature, mythology, television.

[00:07:37] And into the real world, um, really happened also in the chapter on mothers, on monstrous mothers, in which it's linked to my work with and the idea that, um, there's this archetype of the perfect. That is exists, right? Cross-culturally and may differ across cultures and religions, [00:08:00] but there seems to be this dynamic of perfect mother.

[00:08:04] And then if you're not the perfect mother, then you're a bad mother because you can't fulfill what the perfect mother. Is, and my question then is, well, what about the good enough mother? Should we not be just happy being good enough mothers? And I use two cases to illustrate the impact of these archetypes of these views of what womanhood or motherhood should be enacted.

[00:08:30] Um, where two cases out of the states and there's many more. So Susan Smith and Andrea. Yeah. Two, um, women who killed their children. Um, and I think it's Andrea Yates. She had five children and she drowned them in her bathtub. And later came out. Um, she was suffering from severe postpartum psychosis and it had, progressively gotten worse and worse with each pregnancy and to the point where she had to be supervised.

[00:09:00] [00:08:59] She underwent counseling and she had to be supervised until one day. Her husband thought, oh, she's better. I don't need my mom to come over and supervisor today. That was the day she ended up drowning her children. And that's a severe case where it plays out in it's postpartum psychosis. But the interesting part is some of the transcripts out of her court trial was that she viewed herself as an undeserving, as an UN.

[00:09:26] Good. She wasn't that good enough mother and that her children were better off dead without her. So although we talk about fiction mythology, these archetypes do translate into our social psyche, right? As women, as girls, as, as individuals, as persons, these, these stories do carry weight into our individuation, into.

[00:09:54] How we see ourselves as persons. Now that got me to [00:10:00] thinking, well, I only did one chapter on adolescents and at that time, um, I was also working on the Twilight saga and looking at how Bella was depicted in the book. I saw it as I'm in love with the bad boy image of Edward and reading it at the same time that my God daughter who was 14 was reading it.

[00:10:24] That's an interesting book club. Yes. And I got to thinking I'm like, what are your thoughts about? And I would ask her certain questions and I would get into a discussion with her. I go, well, do you think that's real? Okay. Do you think that behavior of him stalking her at her window is okay of him telling her when it's okay for her to have sex for the first time.

[00:10:51] And those questions really stuck with me for a while about what is. This literature, this young adult literature, [00:11:00] what is this telling our girls today? What are they reading? What are they watching that they are processing? And then it does impact your life. And that started to be a concern for me because what I started noticing, especially later on the hunger games, franchise came out, both in the books and really successful for you.

[00:11:24] And then divergent, which was it overlapped a little bit with hunger games. The first couple of film installations were more successful. The last one, not so much. Um, but here we have this trilogy Twilight hunger games, divergent innovation. Short amount of time depicting or what I sell, like, um, these, uh, powerful girls, these empowered girls that are able, especially with hunger games and divergent, they're able to, you know, go into the arena and fight [00:12:00] alongside the boys, um, fight against the boys.

[00:12:04] And to me, I was like, Hmm, hold on a sec. Here. This to me, isn't it. A revision where repackaging it as here's this great feminist message to young girls. Yet when you really delve into the meat of the material, you start to see it's just a repackaging of the same messaging. And what concerned me was that it's mixed.

[00:12:33] Messaging for young girls, young girls that, um, you're there at a very intricate, complex time of becoming right. And that they are, their bodies obviously are physiologically changing. Right? There's the, the point of puberty. But as an adolescent, it's that ontological becoming right. It's and it's not just how [00:13:00] you see yourself, but you're hyper aware of how others see you.

[00:13:06] And then you have that last stage of having to negotiate how you want others to see you. And it's, it's very complex. And I really find that, um, some of the examples I'm I'm dissecting in, in my next book is saying, yes, these are great stories. However, um, closer, critical examination. It's a problematic messaging.

[00:13:32] It's a very mixed messaging to young girls. And, um, there are points of concern around it.

[00:13:39] **Alison Innes:** [00:13:39] So they're not. Empowering and as liberating as they might seem at first glance.

[00:13:44] **Cristina Santos:** [00:13:44] Well, that's my opinion. And I must say I had the opportunity of teaching a couple of courses in social sciences, on a hunger games and divergent.

[00:13:54] And I always worked by students. Yeah. I apologize. I am going to [00:14:00] ruin your experience of these books. Um, and that was an interesting class dynamic because the, this was a group of students who had read these books at that young adult stage a few years had gone by, and now they're critically analyzing.

[00:14:15] With me in the classroom. And a lot of them said, I never realized that. And it makes sense. Right. But it took them a few years of growth to realize, yeah, that is mixed

messaging. Yeah. That's not that empowering. It is problematic. And one of the common threads is that it's a repackaging of old fairytale.

[00:14:40] Right. We're getting. Fairy tales that are being revised. We visited and retold either through adaptation, into film, graphic, novels, TV, whatever form it may take. But the question then is what's the messaging. Is it really revising the [00:15:00] message that we are accustomed? The very traditional, hetero patriarchal focus that.

[00:15:07] A lot of, um, scholarship has been written on regarding these stories.

[00:15:13] **Alison Innes:** [00:15:13] So that's your current book project that you're working on right now. And I'm looking forward to reading that one. You've um, you've also kept yourself busy with a number of edited volumes as well. Looking, looking at some of these same topics.

[00:15:30] Um, and you have another project on the go looking at. Trauma and testimony. So I was wondering if you wanted to maybe talk a little bit about how you moved from looking at these complex ideas of how we construct ideas of, of women. Um, and how you've gotten involved in this project on, um, documenting and researching people's [00:16:00] experiences of the Argentinian disappearances between 1976 and 1983.

[00:16:05] So I'll warn our listeners. Is this a pretty deep topic? If it's not one that you're already familiar with?

[00:16:11] **Cristina Santos:** [00:16:11] Um, so I, I guess I should start by saying, um, I'm a trained Latin American inst and trained by one of the best, uh, professors, Mariel Valdez. Um, and really, if you look at the research we've been discussing and we look at this project, there is a very strong, philosophical, humanitarian law.

[00:16:36] I've always been driven by this idea of how do we see ourselves as individuals? How do others see us as individuals, but then how do we negotiate this to be part of a collective of a community? So if we transpose what I've been talking about specifically for the female [00:17:00] ontological becomes. Put it into a political context and put it into my Latin American training.

[00:17:06] And this is where I began to really put out that part of my research. And I have to say that is done in collaboration with a dear colleague who is, um, a very close friend of mine. We did grad school together. We've published many of those edited volumes you've mentioned together. Her name is ed, the DNS fart.

[00:17:29] She is a retired, uh, professor herself, um, from grant MacEwan university. And she's also an immigrant to Canada who came here from Argentina, who was in Argentina. Dictatorship. So in our work over the years together, we've always joked about saying she's the politically minded one. Who's always doing the political side of our research, collaborative research.

[00:17:56] I'm the philosophical one. We always talked about this time [00:18:00] period in Argentina. I was always listening very carefully to the story. She would tell me about what it

was like being in Argentina at that time, and also what it meant to her. So on the professional aspect, it's my Latin American training, obviously, and my interest in this type of testimonial work, human rights, social justice, that was always there, but it's also combined now with a more personal story.

[00:18:29] So. And it was a difficult decision to make, I have to admit, but I've made it not for myself, but for a greater purpose, so to speak. Um, maybe I should just give a little blurb of what really this time period is characterized in our project. I should mention that the project is funded by, um, the social sciences.

[00:18:54] And humanities research council as an insight grant. And we got to start the [00:19:00] project under the COVID restrictions.

[00:19:03] **Alison Innes:** [00:19:03] So that makes everything easier. Doesn't it.

[00:19:09] **Cristina Santos:** [00:19:09] So right now we are working on it. So. But just to give our listeners a bit of a context. Definitely. Please do. Um, so from 1976 to 1983, the dictatorship in Argentina was marked by a genocide of political descendants in which almost 30,000 Argentinians were kidnapped tortured, murdered or disappeared.

[00:19:33] There is. A memorialization site called Memorial, which is an English park of memory. And I've had the privilege of visiting this in 2015. And it's a site right by the river that contains three massive walls containing 30,000 name plates, representing the disappeared person. Of these 30,000 plates, only 9,000 have been [00:20:00] identified and engraved with the names which include men, women, pregnant women, and even children.

[00:20:07] The youngest, um, I think was 14. So there is this, um, what we're working with in this project is the official history. Which is created by the military dictatorship and their allies. It could be civilians media, even part of the clergy. And then the true history, which is the line that looks at human rights violations.

[00:20:37] Uh, it's been really field by human rights organizations. Local ones like mothers of class at Mio, um, children of, of the disappeared, various, um, human rights organizations to bring to the forefront to acknowledge, to prevent this culture. [00:21:00] Of forgetting that we have all these people who were disappeared during this dictatorship.

[00:21:07] In addition to that, um, the other inheritance, if I can use that word, um, we have those who survived being held in client S dine detention center. Torture centers who survived and who were released and stayed in Argentina or some who were released and forced into exile. So immigrated to other countries.

[00:21:36] There is also in that time period, women who were pregnant while being held in detention, um, some of those women were had their children while in detention were allowed to keep their children up to a year. And then they could then send them to be with a family member outside of the prison. There are other [00:22:00] cases though, that women who had children while they were in detention, those children were taken away from them and adopted at some to military families.

[00:22:09] So there's been a lot of activism and done on that part of identifying these children that were taken from their mothers. And adopted out illegally to military families and in others, there's been a lot of work done on that. Um, a lot of DNA work and, and one of the questions that has arisen from that type of work is what if the child doesn't want to know.

[00:22:37] And some children have come forward and say, I don't want to know if I'm a doctor.

[00:22:42] **Alison Innes:** [00:22:42] And when we're saying children here, I mean, these are people who are now late thirties, early forties, like there. Yes.

[00:22:49] **Cristina Santos:** [00:22:49] I'm there they're full adults. So they, this started quite a few years ago. Let's say they may have even been in their early thirties and it's, it's difficult.

[00:22:58] And some of them [00:23:00] who work already identified and did find out that the parents they grew up with were sympathize. With the people who killed their biological.

[00:23:11] **Alison Innes:** [00:23:11] That's a lot, that's a lot to process to think about even in, even in, in, in the abstract. And I can't really imagine what it must be like for the people who actually have to live with that as their, as their reality,

[00:23:26] **Cristina Santos:** [00:23:26] it's the psychological impact on the individual and on the collective.

[00:23:34] How I really engaged with us because I do have to mention as a non Argentinian, I'm very hyper aware of my positionality. As a non Argentinian. And luckily that's my work without the Deanna. She has that firsthand experience of what it was like under that dictatorship and living in Argentina. So [00:24:00] that's my checkpoint with her, but in my.

[00:24:04] Approach to this is always been for me, almost like an empathetic, um, approach where I'm a mother. I can't imagine that happening. First of all, but even the whole concept, you have the disappeared. People we, whose bodies have never been recovered. And they found a lot of mass graves, some of the bodies that were dumped out of helicopters into the river, some of those washed up.

[00:24:37] So they found some of those. But again, there's over 20,000 identified. On found disappeared. People that is an inheritance, a very haunting inheritance that is intergenerational it's the parents of these disappeared who [00:25:00] have never had a body tomorrow. Although they know the individual is dead, but when you don't have that body to more, when you have this spectral existence of somebody who's disappeared, you don't have that physicality to mourn.

[00:25:17] That's a huge burden. And, and yeah. It's something that's written onto the psyche.

[00:25:24] **Alison Innes:** [00:25:24] I was just going to say, and it's a, it's a, it's a huge gap culturally, as well, to have that many people missing from a generation of what those people would have gone on to do, gone on to be, um, the families that they would have had.

[00:25:38] **Cristina Santos:** [00:25:38] Yeah. Yes. Um, so we recognize there's quite a bit of work. In those areas. And we actually are working with, um, human rights league in Argentina. They're been part of our project since we put the shark together. And one of the things we made very clear is that [00:26:00] what we are specifically looking at. So the project.

[00:26:03] Two bro. Two main components. What we are looking at are not the children that were adopted out. We are actually taking a look at intergenerational trauma of children, of survivors. Of these detention centers. So children who were either born in prison with their mother, but were then taken outside of the prison and, you know, grew up with grandparents or uncles or grandpa.

[00:26:38] Other children that, uh, were not born in prison. They were probably born beforehand before their parents were held at, in detention camps or possibly even after their parents were released. Um, looking at that inheritance. How they saw their lives. What do you [00:27:00] remember? Especially the ones held with the mother in the detention center.

[00:27:04] So we're looking at that idea of storytelling, this intergenerational trauma, um, storytelling possibly. Could it be almost like not only documenting this as part of history, that explains why I think like this or that explains why I have this interest or it can be simply, and we've had the case. Well, I don't remember anything.

[00:27:34] My parents were never there. So that's a large component of this.

[00:27:40] **Alison Innes:** [00:27:40] I realized this is the early stages and you're, you're just getting started with this project. But do you expect to see maybe some, some parallels with other cultures where there has been generational trauma? I'm thinking obviously, um, Canada.

[00:27:57] Example with indigenous people. Uh, [00:28:00] Ireland's been in the dues a lot lately with some of the revelations around, um, the mother care homes. I've, I've forgotten exactly what they call. Yes. Thank you. The Magdalene laundries. Um, are you expecting. To, to see some, some parallels or some, some cross connections with those things or

[00:28:20] **Cristina Santos:** [00:28:20] not really.

[00:28:21] I think it's a bit difficult to say. Um, like I mentioned, and I don't want to preempt any of our findings and unfortunately COVID has prevented us from doing what, um, was supposed to be a three week research. Last summer. But one thing that we are also seeing, which is the second component to this project is a pictorial, uh, it's, uh, photographic evidence of, um, this culture of re ratio that's occurred, um, post dictatorship.

[00:28:56] So Latin America has a very strong [00:29:00] history of testimonial literature bearing witness. To human rights infractions, um, and other historical events. The other side of the project really emerged from a 2015 visit to winnow side is, which was actually the second half of, of course I was teaching. So two students came up.

[00:29:24] Led to complete the course while we were there. And it was around testimony, embodying trauma and memorialization. This second part of the project, I was interested in what I was actually seeing at these memorialization sites, which, um, were quite productive. Under at that time, Christina Cushner. And it was the use of mural art and street art to tell, to testify, to serve as a testimonial of what happened at [00:30:00] these sites.

[00:30:01] And they're all inspiring. They're both formal murals as well as informal street art. So I made a record. Um, large collection of photography while I was there visiting the following year in 2016, a new president Modi comes into power. And what, uh, Deanna and I started to find, because I did Hannah would make a yearly trip back to Argentina and she started to find in 2016, some of the sites we had visited were now.

[00:30:36] Having shortened hours for visiting funding was being cut. And when one of the major sites that we visited that had a collection of huge murals, like probably nine by 10 feet, like very predominantly positioned murals were gone and we're talking over 20, it was a [00:31:00] huge collection, a huge, um, exhibit. So. We had had communication with the workers there when we were sick, when I was setting up the course trip and we said, oh, where did all of those murals going?

[00:31:12] We're working on this project. We want to identify the artists. We want to make sure everything is copacetic. And the response we got from the employees was very formulaic. Have they been sent elsewhere? Oh, we've returned them to X. So then, uh, the Deanna tried. She was the first attempt and she got that response.

[00:31:35] I'm like, okay, let me try since I'll use my Canada, um, university professor type lingo, and I got the exact same response. This was scripted. So this is where we started saying, wait a minute, wait a minute. And this occurred at both sites. So essentially the photography I have, those pieces of artwork have been [00:32:00] erased.

[00:32:00] They no longer exist in one particular site, it was a huge concrete wall. Um, that was murals and it was painted over totally gone. So it's gone. So we started saying, well, this is now we're entering a culture of a ratio. If the Cushner government was a culture of acknowledgement. Right. Like our Trudeau government, you know, we have the truth and reconciliation.

[00:32:26] We had this acknowledgement under the commissioners came in and we're seeing the C ratio. We have to do something. And I, and this is where we really, this is going beyond just giving tests. Right. It's happening again. We had the, a ratio when all of these disappeared people were disappeared and others killed.

[00:32:52] We had a point of acknowledgement of putting and acknowledging their time in history. That these things did [00:33:00] happen. And there's your a re ratio now, and this is where our impetus, our fire, if you want to say really came in. Um, so when, and that was integral to our sheriff and that's where we work tra

[00:33:15] **Alison Innes:** [00:33:15] so, so it seems, um, really that there's a fragility to memory and memorialization just because we memorialize something once that does it.

[00:33:24] Necessarily secure its place in culture or in history.

[00:33:28] **Cristina Santos:** [00:33:28] Yeah. Yeah. This is fragile. This, these pieces of artwork or fry child, because it took only a can of paint to get rid of a huge mural that told the story of the disappeared and of the dictatorship and their human rights infractions. And. It's a story that luckily by, you know, karma or whatever, it may be.

[00:33:54] Some of us have pictures of them that, um, that really need to tell the story and [00:34:00] prevent this re ratio. That's our hope is that with this pictorial narrative, this pictorial testimony. Of these pieces of artwork, along with these, um, interviews, these testimonies of these children of survivors that we are hopefully giving something.

[00:34:25] To memorialize some, you know, artifacts that have been destroyed. And this is the impetus of our work with the human rights league in Argentina with this group of children and our meager appertain nation to not allowing this eraser. And also the fact that. We're seeking for it to be a bilingual publication and we're actively seeking to make sure it's published outside of Argentina, because we really want to open this to a, an international audience [00:35:00] of this is what happened.

[00:35:01] This is what happened in Argentina. And the example I give, even with my, my own children who are avid soccer players, they know I do a bit of this research. They're old enough to know, especially my oldest, who just did a high school course on genocide. And I showed him and I said, look in 1978, Argentina hosted the FIFA world cup in soccer in the same stadiums.

[00:35:27] Or close to places where political prisoners were being tortured and killed. That gives you perspective. These detention centers were not far hidden places. These detention centers were, could be in the middle of town. One of the memorialization sites we saw was an old lady. Bus station garage type and across the street there's houses.

[00:35:56] People were living there to me [00:36:00] again, as the non Argentinian on the, on the project, the level of dehumanization that occurs that permits one to treat someone so badly. So inhumanely, that's my point of, of engagement. Is to basically say we're talking about the Argentinian example and going back to your question what's to say, you know, we don't do a study of the missing and murdered women here in Canada.

[00:36:31] Femicides are happening around the world. In hundreds, why isn't it more prominent in our discussions? And I do think, although our example is specifically on Argentina and specifically on this time period, from my perspective, when there is such a traumatic impact on a collective, on a community. I think that does carry through in generations and [00:37:00] black lives movement.

[00:37:01] We saw the Chauvet trial, the verdict came through that's trauma. We've seen this, you know, coming through other aspects in the world, not just Argentina, but this rise to just say, no, this is not right. And one thing that I'm also finding, and it goes back to the book on girlhood. These social activists are getting younger.

[00:37:30] They're young people who are stepping up to the plate, using social media media, using their platforms. They're comfortable with getting the word out, spreading the word that's what is, I think I'm hoping to give my little part to, and, and to bring it's an awareness that maybe. We're all comfortable in our little world and it can get uncomfortable stepping outside of our world, [00:38:00] but you have to look at it with a bigger perspective and it is hard work.

[00:38:04] **Alison Innes:** [00:38:04] Well, that's something I want to ask you about as well, because these are, I mean, this is not a light topic. This is, this is a very dark, very heavy topic to be dealing with. You're collecting, examining. People's stories of trauma, their experiences with their parents' trauma. Um, so how do you as a researcher and, and I know you've got a few other people working with you on this.

[00:38:31] How, how, how do you as researchers. The handle that what's what, what is the, the trauma like the second or third or fourth hand trauma risk to researchers engaging in something so

[00:38:45] **Cristina Santos:** [00:38:45] heavy. It, um, it has a weight, it carries a weight. I can speak for myself personally. It carries a very heavy weight emotionally, psychologically, where I do [00:39:00] sometimes.

[00:39:00] Yeah. Some of the reading I'm doing. Yeah. Atrocious. You don't want to believe that it's true. And sometimes I do have to set it aside and then go to my work on girlhood. Right. I'm not saying it as a joke, but I do that gives me my distance from that work because it's some of the readings and some of the things we have to read are extremely.

[00:39:26] And I, and that doesn't really encapsulate the feeling, but extremely unpleasant. And for me even more so, because you, you're not talking about fiction, this happened, these people are real. We have here now we're talking to the son of someone that went through this. So that's, that's very difficult. So I do, we do have that idea of taking a break.

[00:39:55] I personally then go on to do something else. Ironically, if you [00:40:00] looked at my publications that I've had without the Deanna that's, what's happened there to our work in testimony. When we need to take the break, we've pumped. On monsters, we've published on virginity just to get that break from this type of traumatic research.

[00:40:15] And we have a research assistant this year and we've had to make it very clear to her. We're very cognizant of what we're sending her. Luckily she's bilingual. So she's been working with the trans transcribing the interviews, and then we go over it. And then eventually this is about the only work we've been.

[00:40:36] Able to do under COVID is the interview, the transcription and translation, but we've told her if you get to a point that you cannot work on the, on the transcription, stop, stop, and tell us one of us will pick it up. So it's very much a team effort and don't be shy about it because this is what the Deanna and I have done all these years.

[00:40:59] And having that [00:41:00] team and having that option is integral to maintaining our own mental health. The other thing that really drives us, especially as Deanna and I, as,

as the main authors here, it's not about us are what drives us in this is, especially with the interviews is maintaining their voice. They are telling their story.

[00:41:23] It's not about us. They are telling their story. And even with the photography, I may have taken the photograph. It's not my story. I'm, I'm just putting it out there and disseminating it because it needs to be acknowledged. And of course we have a mental health care provider that it is on the team we need to have on a project like this.

[00:41:46] You need to have that backup

[00:41:48] **Alison Innes:** [00:41:48] sometimes. Um, it's, it's easy for us to think of research as being very objective and kind of add an arms length. And, um, I think this is something that. That really [00:42:00] highlights the mental, emotional toll that research can take on individuals and how that can influence, uh, influence isn't the right word, but how, how bad it is is a part of the considerations of, of the research process.

[00:42:18] **Cristina Santos:** [00:42:18] Definitely because the way I work on my other, my monster swim in, um, my work on girl hood. It's my work, it's my investigation. It's my research. It's my, you know, publishing on that. This type of work is personal. You know, there's that very famous saying the personal is political. The political is person.

[00:42:38] Right. So there is a personal investment, but the way I at least try to deal with it is keeping in, it's almost like my little mantra. This story needs to be told. They need to hear this story. People need to know. So it's not about me. It's about giving the opportunity, putting it [00:43:00] out there to an audience.

[00:43:01] They may not have been aware of these events, this existing, and hopefully getting more of a globalized education on genocide that happened in Argentina. But guess what? That happened elsewhere? That is still happening today. Genocide has not gone away. Yes, here, here. I'm giving you this example because this is what I'm working on, but there are many, many, many, many examples in the world and it's the ugliness of how humanity can be so inhumane.

[00:43:36] **Alison Innes:** [00:43:36] How does your position as, as a non Argentinian fit with telling Argentinian stories? It's a difficult question. I know you've kind of already touched on it, but I just want to maybe bring that out a little bit more, that you're an outsider helping to tell the story of a very traumatic story. So what are some of the approaches or some of [00:44:00] the considerations that you keep in mind?

[00:44:02] Um, or even some of the strategies that you use? In, in your research to be respectful of your position compared to theirs. Oh,

[00:44:11] **Cristina Santos:** [00:44:11] definitely in that I'm hyper aware of that. And I always make sure I check myself on that. And these are discussions that either Deanna and I continuously have, um, because she, she is the one who was, who lived in Argentina during that time period, who knows some of these stories.

[00:44:31] And she's my checkpoint on that. An interesting thing comes about from this. And in one of our discussions where we were, I was telling her, okay, I'm uncomfortable in this respect because XYZ, I wasn't, I'm not, I'm not in the Argentinian context. So I'm looking from the outside in, and she kind of told me something that kind of made me step back and say, wait a minute.

[00:44:54] And she said to me, you're not that much of an outsider. Because of your own [00:45:00] personal history. And I looked at her cause she knows, and I said, my personal history, she goes, yes. You know, you know, the feeling and my personal history is that I was born in Angola, which was a previous. Portuguese colony. My family and I, um, were refugees from the war of independence and the civil war that occurred after independence.

[00:45:25] And we were refugees to South Africa, stayed in a refugee camp there for nine months, but then second stage refugees back to Portugal. And then third stage we ended up in Canada. Is it. And her point to me was, you know what, it's like to be a refugee and you know what? It's like to be an immigrant. And I say, but I don't know what it's like to do that because of a political genocide.

[00:45:52] And she reminds me the war is political. I go well, but the inheritance is different. So when [00:46:00] it comes to the discussion of trauma, because ironically I'm the same age group. As a lot of our interviewees, and this is a point when she started doing the interviews, she actually admitted that she started with me, you know, in one of our coffee chats.

[00:46:17] And I'm like, well, thanks for asking, but I still hold true. I'm still very hyper-aware I'm not Argentinian. My method of checking in is checking. With other Deanna, she, she is the person with the experience of having lived there and herself being immigrating to Canada and actually having known some of these people.

[00:46:45] But it's ironic that she sometimes does praying in my own history to try and get me to understand. And it kinda sorta makes sense, but, um, I'm going to be honest, I'm still working that out because I [00:47:00] still don't think my trauma is anywhere near what we're doing. They live

[00:47:05] **Alison Innes:** [00:47:05] here. And what you say really highlights your, your, your earlier point, that it's not, the trauma is not defined.

[00:47:13] I guess by the geography of Argentina, that there are people here in Canada who are burying that trauma, um, through immigration. And then there are of course countless, um, experiences around the world that not identical, but similar kinds of connections, connections,

[00:47:34] **Cristina Santos:** [00:47:34] and displacements. As we're working through these interests.

[00:47:38] Some of the themes popping up is this idea of the sense of displacement, not just physical, but psycho, emotionally displacement. And then the idea of trying to find one's place because it's, it's this negotiation of different stories that our interviewees are having to

do. Right. The stories [00:48:00] that you've had, this very active culture of censorship and denial, official denial.

[00:48:08] And then yet you are a product of this event and your parents have their stories that it did happen. And I really think again, the global impact it's it's much broader. Yeah. What we're doing is specific to Argentina, but the points of commonality may be more numerous than one would think to other, um, events globally.

[00:48:40] I mentioned the murdered and missing women. The feminism. But, you know, look at black lives matter and look at the prison system in the U S there's wonderful documentaries out right now about that genocide, um, social injustice, human rights [00:49:00] infractions. It's this idea of humanities in humanity. There are points of commonality and the fact we haven't learned from our past,

[00:49:11] **Alison Innes:** [00:49:11] and, and for those of us who through privilege or luck, haven't had to engage with these kinds of trauma.

[00:49:17] There's lots of different perspectives, I guess, that we can use to begin to listen to these, to these stories and to, to understand other people's. Lived realities

[00:49:30] **Cristina Santos:** [00:49:30] and, and you've, you're barely right. And that, and, but that's contingent, um, one being open, not, not to hear the stories, but to really listen to the story.

[00:49:43] And I would say, unfortunately, there is still a culture of denial that occurs, and I, and I'm not talking specific to just. Our example in Argentina, because it's more comfortable. It's [00:50:00] not disconcerting. It's not, um, uncomfortable to, to actually engage with. Um, I don't want to say. But these things are

[00:50:13] **Alison Innes:** [00:50:13] with the trauma that the, of these stories.

[00:50:15] Yeah. Yeah. Wow. You have given me a lot to think about, and I still have more questions, but, um, we are running close to, uh, close to time for our listeners. So I would love to hear more about this research. As it continues and, and, and your final product, and we will have some links as well in the show notes.

[00:50:38] Um, but just before we go, I wanted to ask on a completely different track of some other really interesting work that, um, you've been involved in. And, and for full disclosure, I should say that I have been to one of these conferences. Um, so aside from your research, you've been really involved in a group that is used to be called [00:51:00] interdisciplinary.net is now, um, reformatted as progressive connections with an X.

[00:51:05] And again, we'll put a link to that. Um, could you tell us a little bit about that project and, um, what got you involved in, in, uh, in it.

[00:51:16] **Cristina Santos:** [00:51:16] So my work with began, as you said, with interdisciplinary.net, and really it began like yourself with attending one of their conferences on monsters. And I found it to be very engaging and truly interdisciplinary.

[00:51:36] There's a difference between saying you're interdisciplinary and actually engaging in interdisciplinarity. And I found that, um, my experience at that conference, I was very welcomed and it was a wonderful experience being in a room. Of 60, 70 odd people. So rather large [00:52:00] workshop, let's say, and being with those people for two days straight, you'd have breakfast and lunch together, and you'd be always together listening to everybody's presentation.

[00:52:10] And I found that very collaborative where you were in with these people, you know, big conferences. You may have five, you may have 15 and you're just going from room to room. I don't, you don't really get to engage. And this really provides you that engagement and your engagement with people in the field.

[00:52:30] Psychologists. Um, one memorable one was somebody who worked in the jail system talking about having to treat a serial killer. You have academics, you have artists, you have theater actors. Everybody in the same room discussing the same theme. And I enjoyed it enough that a year or so later, I took a group of my grad students who had done my course, Miami course in monsters.

[00:52:59] And they [00:53:00] presented and I found from a pedagogic perspective, it was a very good warmup. To giving papers because it was a welcoming, interdisciplinary, and in the way of welcoming, because you knew the faces, you spent two days with those people and you got to know people and you had sidebars with those people.

[00:53:20] So having had really positive feedback like yourself, um, and, and my students, I was approached to become more active member. So, um, Basically took on what was back then called the hub leader for the monsters. And I ended up for a couple of years being the editor of the monsters journal. Unfortunately, that ended when interdisciplinary.net kind of stopped.

[00:53:48] And as you said, it resurged reworked as progressive connections. And I, you know, I was approached by the director and said, Hey, I'm starting it up again. Do you still want to be on board? I said, yes. [00:54:00] I still believe in the ethos of this, um, group you have. And, and that I find that it's very productive and I would say.

[00:54:11] Most of my connections, professional connections have come from there of like-minded people. And so there's a, it's a commitment to exchanging ideas, experiences, um, practical practice, um, as well as research that you not always get from the big association conferences. So nothing wrong with those, those of course they have huge academic impact and very fruity.

[00:54:40] For me personally, these workshop type meetings that they have were very fundamental in so much that when at the piano and I were working out the shirk proposal and how we would proceed with testimony, um, we created a new hub in progressive [00:55:00] connections on storytelling trauma, and we, um, organized and hosted two conference.

[00:55:06] Under progressive curtain connections? Um, no, actually one might've been under interdisciplinarity, but, um, really putting out that work in that type of, um, workshop

model. And they also now have had to pivot with COVID who thought COVID would be so prominent in our discussions. Um, so they are like everybody.

[00:55:31] Going online, they've hosted a few of their conferences. Um, actually just this past spring online. And it's very positive feedback coming from, uh, from the attendees. So if you're into interdisciplinary, If you'd like to hear other points of view and you really want to get your feet wet. I think it's a wonderful tool.

[00:55:55] **Alison Innes:** [00:55:55] I, um, I went to the conference on evil woman the year. It was in [00:56:00] Warsaw, which is a long time ago now. Um, but as a grad student, it certainly, um, opened my eyes. I was blown away that there were people doing academic research, who weren't, professors who didn't have access. Positions. And that was hugely eye-opening for me.

[00:56:15] And it has definitely been very influential personally. So if anybody's curious, I, in my very biased opinion, it is, it is definitely, um, worth, worth checking

[00:56:26] **Cristina Santos:** [00:56:26] out. And I think that's an important point in making. That in the current climate of PhDs and post PhDs, what do I do with my PhD? If I can't go into the academia, but I really like doing research while you can keep doing your research, you can be an independent scholar.

[00:56:44] You don't have to stop doing your research because you're not affiliated officially with a university or college. And that's exactly what you said. You can still do what you love to do.

[00:56:55] **Alison Innes:** [00:56:55] I am certainly glad to end on that positive [00:57:00] note. And I hope that some of our listeners will, will find that, that a tip useful as well.

[00:57:06] So thank you very much for joining us today and for our conversation. And we look forward to hearing more about your research in the

[00:57:13] **Cristina Santos:** [00:57:13] future. Thank you, Allison, and thank you for anyone listening. Um,

[00:57:22] **Nicole Arnt:** [00:57:22] Thank you so much for listening to forward. Find all of our footnotes links to more information, transcripts and past episodes on our website. Rob you.ca forward slash humanities. We love to hear from our listeners. So please join us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at rock humanities, please subscribe and rate us as well on your favorite podcasting app.

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