



Library podcast

'The Stolen Ones and How They Were Missed' with Dr. Marcia Tate Arunga

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[00:00:37] Welcome to our program today. Before we get started we want to acknowledge that we are on Indigenous land and the traditional territories of the Coast Salish people today's program is called *The Stolen Ones and How They Were Missed*. It's a special author reading with Seattle's beloved Dr. Marcia Tate Arunga.

[00:00:56] Arunga. Her children's book *The Stolen Ones* explores what happens in one African village when one of the village children Nia is stolen by European slavers.

[00:01:06] In a moment my friend Shani is going to come off and read Dr. Arunga's bio and thank you so much for coming out.

[00:01:14] And without further ado coming up Shani. Good afternoon everyone.

[00:01:21] Dr. Marcia Tate Arunga is the Dean of Evergreen State College and has been teaching faculty in the Liberal Studies program at Seattle Central and Evergreen State College. Marcia specializes in human development, intercultural communications and globalism with emphasis on developing cultural competency. She is the co-founder of Cultural Reconnection Missions responsible for leading over 75 women from the Pacific Northwest. She is an activist with the Village of Hope which is committed to reducing the recidivism rate of Washington state prison population. And without further ado I'll turn the mic over to Dr. Arunga.

[00:02:04] Thank you Shani.

[00:02:11] Good afternoon. I hope people will continue to come in but as we begin it's good to honor the people who have found their way and on time and so I just want to thank you for being here as I share with you the story of *The Stolen Ones* and also how I came to make *The*

Stolen Ones story. So I'd like to kind of begin with thinking about a very important image because I'm in the image business. That's what I do. I'm looking at images in terms of children growing up, what images do they see in their homes, what images do they see in the classroom, what images do they see in adults that help them to shape some idea about who they will be as adults as well. And I did that through my study in human development.

[00:03:08] Well, in human development I also was able to venture into so I was able to hone my skills in on looking particularly at African-American children or children of African descent in the United States. And my interest there was to look at ways in which children can really fully realize their human potential. I was very interested in how people learn.

[00:03:39] So in 2000 I was also working on my master's thesis and I came to understand that in order for me to look at how people learn in particularly how people children of African descent learn I went to the women of the culture particularly in Seattle and I did that because I saw women as the primary culture bearers of children now not just women but primarily women are the people who pass the culture down to the next generation. We know in many cultures we call that the mother tongue where your language is passed down directly from mother to child. And so this is a common practice. I was looking at women in an era in this country when we had been through a really kind of interesting time in the last couple of decades before 2000 before Y2K. If you can think about the 80s and the 90s this was a pretty interesting time of disintegrating communities in the African-American community.

[00:04:57] Some of it brought on by the crack cocaine infestation. Some of it was brought about because of just the movement and migration of black families not only from Africa some 400 years ago but also looking at the migrations from the south into the Pacific Northwest.

[00:05:22] Each migration representing a time in which families are further and further distanced from their from each other. And so when you find ourselves when we find ourselves in the 80s and 90s in the Pacific Northwest we find ourselves with families that in which they are not a lot of inter-generations where grandparents, parent, child, grandchild is present.

[00:05:49] This is something that was beginning to sort of disintegrate.

[00:05:54] And so looking at those dynamics then I was wondering what is it about not only this particular last two decades but even the history of African-Americans in this country that have caused them to further distance themselves from the culture, further distanced themselves from their African origins.

[00:06:17] And as I speak I want to say that African origins that as a people of African descent in this country it's so clear that our history did not begin in the cotton patches of Mississippi but there is an assumption in our history books that as people as a race we actually began in the cotton patches of Mississippi in the United States and the history that precedes that is not meaningful or is not relevant to our trajectory today in this country.

[00:06:57] And so I began to study that and look at women and bring women together. Women of African descent from many many different persuasions and women who had come from not just the United States but also parts of Africa and also the Caribbean and other places where they had come from.

[00:07:18] And we were guided by this idea of the Akan people. It is really signified by a representation of a symbol called Sankofa.

[00:07:30] So just help me out for a minute and say Sankofa OK. Thank you.

[00:07:36] And Sankofa is a actually a goose a representation of the Akan people in West Africa in Ghana.

[00:07:46] And there is a parable that goes with this the symbol. It says that in order for you to fly forward the head is always looking back and they say you must first understand where you came from.

[00:08:01] In order to know where you are going. And that is Sankofa.

[00:08:07] So collecting these ideas pulling in these ancient symbols and imagery of the past was helping me to shape the mission that I was on in my scholarship and I was able to use Sankofa even today as a way of looking back looking at our history looking at our ancestral past, knowing that we stand on the shoulders of people who came before us that even the stories I'm telling you today will not be new stories. They will be old and ancient stories. And that I'm talking about a people whose history did not begin in this country but precedes the United States. And that's something to celebrate and dig deeper into this really special history and people. So Sankofa being really important.

[00:09:00] Then I realized this is not only a parable something the ancient people left to honor but I also see it as a methodology because I am a scholar so I look at Sankofa as a method for how we move forward that in order for us to move forward to understand strategies of progress we have to first look back to understand what had taken place in the history, where we are,

[00:09:32] What images can we pull from our past and use and hold on to in order to thrive as a community.

[00:09:40] And that is where I began my voyage. So I don't know if I mentioned to you that I actually lived in Kenya for about eleven years during the 80s. That was a time that I left the United States. So I only knew about these epidemics and things like that add to the reading of local dailies, newspapers, magazines. It wasn't something I had actually experience myself. So much of the 80s in this country went past me. I didn't even experience it here because I was living in Kenya, East Africa and I was raising my family I raised four children gave birth to them

all in Kisumu, Kenya a very small town that is on the lake shores of Kenya, on a place called Lake Victoria, as we know it today. The People call it *lo/we* and *lo/we* in Luo language means *deep waters*. *The place of deep waters* and it's a very sacred location. It borders not only Kenya but also Tanzania and Uganda. So it's a huge lake. What we don't know, and this is something I'm discovering about the omission of facts, is that indeed the information about even the lakes is misleading.

[00:11:09] The largest freshwater lake in the world is Lake Victoria, *lo/we*. We are taught that the Great Lakes, Lake Superior and the combined lakes in the East Coast are the largest freshwater lakes. However they are combined the lakes. This is one single freshwater lake. And it expands the borders of three countries and it is a beautiful sight. It is a sacred water. And so it's really honorable that I was able to live there for eleven years and raised my children, my family there when I came back to the United States so many people were curious about my life experience in Kenya

[00:11:58] And what it was like to live in Kenya to be back in Africa.

[00:12:03] And I have to tell you that I am not the first person to go back to Africa even though I went in in 1982 and I got married to a Kenyan man right here in Seattle, Washington.

[00:12:16] And the majority of people who were my witnesses at the wedding were sure that I was going somewhere, that I was going to fall off the face of the earth. But I was not the first person to go to Africa. I want to honor the ancestors those ancient people like W E.B. DuBois who actually not only spent eight decades, studying about Africa and getting ways in and organizing international conferences about how people in the African Diaspora could come back together, but he also made Ghana his home and passed away there. There today is a monument, a library and a monument in his name for the life that he gave the end of his life in Ghana. Also, we know about people like Marcus Garvey, the honorable Marcus Garvey was a activist from the Caribbean from Jamaica. In particular he came to the United States to mobilize people and indeed he was very successful in mobilizing over 2 million people across the world, not only in the United States in the Caribbean and also in Europe.

[00:13:31] And he mobilized people who were interested, had in their heart ideas, aspiration of one day returning to Africa. So this is something that has taken place for many, many generations. And in my research what I learned was that

[00:13:50] In the United States, in a country that is multicultural like our country where people converge from all over the world, it is really quite natural--a practice, for people to go back to their ancestral home. So I came to discover people like

[00:14:07] If you if people who were from Taiwan, there were missions organized and they would go back and visit Taiwan. People going back to Ireland went back to Ireland, people whose ancestry came from Scotland, from Italy, from Japan and on and on and on. People

who had lived here for some generations but knew how important it was to go back to your ancestral homeland to touch base. To the extent that there is something today we know as heritage or roots tourism. And what that means is, looking going back to a place in which you are told as a point of origin, in which you might look at cemeteries, church records,

[00:14:57] Other kinds of records that tell you something about your people and where your people are from. And these things have been organized. We've heard of people going back for example to Europe

[00:15:10] After they graduate high school so that they can go and see their roots and understand and appreciation for their roots. This is something that Nora very famous French philosopher says that "what the father what the parent chooses to forget the grandchild wants to remember." And so there's this cycle in our human behavior that always is curious about our grandparents, about our ancestral past that leads us on a search. Now for African Americans,

[00:15:50] You can already see that that is a complicated mission.

[00:15:56] It's complicated largely by the way that people exited the continent. It was a kind of a kind of haphazard activity.

[00:16:13] There were very few records kept and people were scattered and retribalized. In other words there are records of people being dragged from the Congo for example in the interior of Africa and moving toward places countries in which they would end on the coastline, like Ghana and Nigeria and the Ivory Coast and it is from there that ships are known to take people away, but we know now based on the studies and the research of people like Walter Rodney, that in fact people were taken from all over the continent to different coastlines in which ships came and took people away. But who they were from, where their people were, what languages could be retained as a result became a haphazard event.

[00:17:13] Let me even go deeper than that.

[00:17:16] Our great historian Dr. John Henrik Clarke has said that if the chance, that if the Atlantic Ocean were to dry up today, what it would reveal is the trail of bones that stretch from Africa all the way to the Americas and that those bones would be the ancestors that did not make the voyage. And there were not thousands of voyage but tens of thousands of voyages. Just uncovered recently were evidence of ships that came even from places like the Cameroon, which had said for centuries that they had no activity of ships leaving.

[00:18:02] And now they know that many centuries and many ships had a record of going into such places.

[00:18:11] And so as we begin to uncover this records I began back to those people who I was studying, the African-American woman, who I believe is the culture bearer whose job is to

impart to the next generation a sense of self concept and efficacy so that the children now are having a strong trajectory, that they can be guided by and supported not only by mother, but also by father, by grandparents, by aunts and uncles that everyone begins to understand their role in the cycle of life and in the community village.

[00:18:51] And so I was on a journey. It began with the year 2000 with seven women of African descent. Now I want to point out that I had received interest from more than 20 women, so I really thought I had a business going. But it turns out that only seven actually paid the money and one of them was my mother. She didn't have a choice. So we set out on this on this voyage going back to Kenya where I had lived for 11 years and had been a women's activist very excited about a time I lived in 1985, the end of the Women's Decade conference by the United Nations occurred in Kenya. So I was very excited to be a part of the plenary sessions for that time. And so as an activist, I was able to bring women back to the communities I had interacted and to meet and collaborate with women who I had considered leaders in their own right. And so there we were. Now, from that time I have to tell you that I have continued to take women to Africa. We have traveled more than nine delegations and we have taken more than a hundred and 12 people. Many of the 75 women went repeatedly and they have come back and they have done amazing work in their own right because this was experiential learning and professional development.

[00:20:23] And so one of the groups that we took in 2006, was a group of educators and those educators came back to Seattle, Washington today many of them are principals of schools, they are licenses, they are running departments in early learning. Dr. Deborah Sullivan was on that trip, shout out to her, just launched Ashé Preparatory Academy this week for

[00:20:52] A charter school for children. So these were some of the people on that trip, and Dr. Zakiya Stewart, who has since passed away but laid such a foundation for educators.

[00:21:03] And so I'm really proud of the work in education that we did. Now to tell you something about *The Stolen Ones*.

[00:21:12] It happened in the year 2000. Thank you. Okay. I'm a get this book.

[00:21:19] And we were travelling with the seven women and in the home of our hostess which was a very beautiful home a very large home. She had built it maybe, it was five years old or so, it had more than it had at least eight bedrooms. There was a light that shined right down the middle of her home in a circular fashion. And it was the light of the sun every day coming in the middle of her home. They thought very carefully about that home and she had been the person who invited the women to come to visit her in Africa. And she was quite a woman's leader in her own right.

[00:21:58] The next day after our arrival, we found in the backyard lots of lots of tents being pitched and tables being set up and we found chefs with chef hats and we found people who

were digging a pit in the ground where you can now turn over a goat, which had been cut and slaughtered in our honor. And there we were, able in my okay to be here there we were in a in just in preparation to be celebrated by people who had heard that these African-American women were coming to to visit and so they came from all over the place. One of the women who came was an elder.

[00:22:48] She had traveled from a place called Taita and Taita, if you know Kenya or anybody been to Kenya? OK. Yes.

[00:22:57] Somebody was born in Kenya, my daughter Ebony there. But in Kenya, one of the things, it's a hill. And just as it begins to descend to the Indian Ocean they have very particular and peculiar stories there. So this elder came and my colleague Benita Horn, was sharing a photo album. And she said this is an African-American church and this is an African-American school, and this is an African-American club, and the elder said "you keep calling yourselves African-American, now where from Africa do you come from?" Well now we couldn't answer that question but we did try to explain to her how the records had not been well-kept. And she gets this epiphany and she said, "oh, you must be the stolen ones." Now I had never heard this so I wanted to know who are "the stolen ones." She began to explain that in her family as a young girl when she is growing up, everyone must learn some sense of their ancestry for children before they reach puberty, they should be able to recite at least ten generations of their ancestors. And you would think knowing this is an oral culture, although I say that hesitatingly, because we know also that the African cultures were not only oral cultures. What were those Andinkra symbols about, what were the hieroglyphics in the in the in the pyramids? What was that about, if not the first writing that occurred? But as an oral culture, it is very important that a child know their ancestry. And so as this elder, as a child, learned her ancestry she also learned that never forget that there were stolen ones.

[00:24:56] She said in her family she had learned of a young child, who a girl, who had gone to a nearby village market with her fruits and vegetables to sell her vegetables there and sold them you know she went there she was a regular visitor at that marketplace but this particular day she did not return. It took about two or three days, the parents got very worried and they said to the men "come together we must form a party a search party and find our child." And indeed they went from house to house. They went from neighborhood to neighborhood village to village. They even went to the edge of the waters where the waters were. But they never found anyone in fact what they came back and said was, "We are sorry your daughter must be dead." And so they spent their lifetime mourning this child. And it wasn't until the end of their lives that they were told that well there was, you know a traveler came. He said "I was at the waters where I saw ships taking people away. So I think that your daughter didn't die. I think your daughter was taken stolen to serve the purposes of the transatlantic slave trade" and so as I'm being told this, and as this elder is discovering in her knowledge of an ancient story, that in fact now she is putting it all together as she speaks. And we are listening and we I am

[00:26:36] At that very moment thinking, I mean human development.

[00:26:40] I'm looking at not only the children and how the children grow. I'm looking at women and how we inform our children. And I'm also thinking about how we have been omitted certain facts that really shape what we know about ourselves. Like you were, your people sold you off. Get over it. That's what I heard as I was growing up. This is what the classroom tells you. This was a trade. You know it's a trade. People benefited from it you know, time to move on. And here's an elder telling me, that not only were we taken from our natural habitat, which is something we knew but now for the first time I was being told that we were missed, had never been told that we were missed.

[00:27:33] We only thought it was a transactional deal.

[00:27:38] And so then I began to think about the children. And if the children knew, that not only yes there were horrific events that have occurred. Yes we wish they didn't occur but they did and guess what, we have ancestors who made a way to be in this country and they built it and they made a major contribution to this place called the United States of America. But where you came from, you were missed. People tell stories and they have not forgotten you. I think as a child if I knew that my back would have been a little bit straighter. My self-concept would not have had to struggle, an inner struggle of internalized oppression. So I think about that. I also think about the fact that in my study, I found out that sixty two percent of the people who were taken out of Africa, were between the ages of nine and twenty five years old and I look at those children today between the ages of nine and twenty five years old and I see that age as the age that is targeted. I see that as the age of able bodied young people, who have a chance to build a wonderful trajectory, of a community that can thrive.

[00:28:59] And yet, they are constantly being subjected to police brutality. We have children today, that are in cages right now, probably similar ages in which they will now be subjected to the same kind of post-traumatic stress. That our children have grown up with for the last few generations. And so how do we address that. Well I wrote a book and it was called *The Stolen Ones and How They Were Missed*. And so there were some things I wanted people to know in the book. One of them was that, this language we call Kiswahili is not hooga booga language. Does anybody know what I mean by hooga booga language? Is there anyone who doesn't know what that means? OK. OK. Thank you. So there are assumptions and there are images of Africa that were transmitted largely by the media, partly by our education system and maintained by peers and family about Africa in a kind of underdeveloped state. Right.

[00:30:16] And that the language back going back to the Tarzan days, represented nothing substantially said, that in fact the language was not of substance.

[00:30:27] It was hooga booga that's all they were saying behind Tarzan, who was intelligent mind you. Imagery, imagery is everything. So, what I'm looking at then about the hooga booga the language in the story is that it is actually a very beautiful language. It's a language of many African languages including Arabic. And it is a language in which the person in the story is

called Nia can you say Nia? Thank you Nia is, in Kiswahili means someone with purpose, strong intention. And I wanted people to think about what would happen if purpose was not in our community, if we lived in a place where there was no purpose just kind of going along with the program because we had no personal or collective purpose. And then she lived in, I wanted people to know her talents, because I learned that we were taken out of Africa from agriculturally strong places. In other words, we had the ability not only to grow fruits and vegetables in hard and hard soil, we can hybridized seed. We had knowledge of seed and how it could plant. And this is what was needed to grow in agricultural society. And that made sense to me that they went to places like Senegal, where people had mastered the rice growing knowledge.

[00:32:00] And with that they brought people right into South Carolina, Louisiana, where they had swamps similar to in Senegal and knew that knowledge of growing rice in small pieces of land. Also, which comes to mind are the metalwork that came out of Africa. Benin, in particular, where people had a mastery of how to create metal for farm implements and gates and things like that. And people were taken directly out of Benin, so that they could create farm implements for agriculture in this country. So these were not just people who were with lacking skills, they were people who were sought out for their skills that shifts the whole thinking about the way that Africans came to this country and what contribution they came with to give. And that I think is really worth telling, for a child to know that. So I wanted them to know that the child that Nia had her own *Shamba*, that is what you call it in Kiswahili her own garden. So it's called *Shamba*. Very good. And she grew this vegetable, this fruit. Does anybody know what that is? Papaya. In Kiswahili,

[00:33:25] it is *Papai*. *Papai*. Very good.

[00:33:31] Not like Popeye the spinach eater but similar, similar.

[00:33:35] Ok. She also grew this at this fruit *maembe*. Does anybody know what that is? Mango. Yes. These are all fruits that are naturally grown in Africa. So it would be called *maembe*. Thank you.

[00:33:54] She also grew these, what do you think that is? Bananas.

[00:34:00] Yes bananas. And in Kenya the bananas are very short, very very short enough to pop in your mouth.

[00:34:08] You can pop them right into your mouth and they're very very sweet. So it is a daily consumption of food.

[00:34:16] And then she grew this, does anybody know what that is? OK.

[00:34:26] It was meant to stump you. These are oranges. In Kenya, the orange tree is green. They come off the tree as green. You cut it and it's orange inside. And very very sweet. So this is now, Nia is ready to go to the market when she gets out before she goes to the market. She's at home. I want you to see her home. It's very important that you know as a child you know you hear about the *hut*, the hut is one of the most ecologically sound structures you will ever know because it comes from the earth. So we call *kibanda*.

[00:35:07] Yes it's a home and it was built with the earth. So during the day it contracts the heat and it's cool inside. And then at night, when you are resting it releases the heat and then you are able to be warm and get some warmth in the in the room. And so that was what her home looked like. Also, I wanted people to see the kind of village that she lived in. If you can see, it was intergenerational. There were the children who played, there were the adults who helped them out, there was the drummer there who is an adult. We have the grandparents, the elders who met together. They were the ones who gathered and considered some of the issues of the of the village and they came together. Everyone had a role. The adults knew their role. They were the nurturers and the teachers and the gardeners and the people who fed and nurtured the community and so they knew their role. And they all contributed to their role. Well now Nia was ready for the market and I wanted Nia, I wanted all of us to know that before Nia went to the market she understood that her harvest was not because of herself her harvest was for greater reasons and she would call out the name of her ancestors which we is a ceremony we call *Tambiko*.

[00:36:34] Now *Tambiko* is a simple procedure of just pouring water a liquid to the ground. I know that in many of the Tupac records we hear where they point out liquor for their homies. That is a libation and it is *Tambiko*. They are practicing ancestral behavior when they do that and that's what Nia did.

[00:36:56] She would call out her ancestors ten generations even more and that was before she went to the market. The other thing I wanted people to know was about the basket, because the basket as she used, we look at people with the basket on their head and we go oh that's kind of funny cause we're not used to it but if you think of the kind of weight that Nia had to carry if she carried it like this, she would have hurt her back, right? This is how we carry heavy things. If she had carried it out with a handle then she would have been lopsided and it would have been bad for her posture.

[00:37:37] So Nia came from a culture and a culture that took a lot of practice to put that basket on her head, which was anatomically the best way she could travel for long distances. And so there she is, going on her *safari*, now *safari* means a long journey. Can you say *safari*? All right. You've been saying key Swahili words because I've heard people say *safari* and that is a key Swahili word and look at Nia on her way to the market and I just love this picture because I think of that long straight body and the fact that she had to practice and that this is a celebration of her girlhood in her community. So she gets to the *Sokoni* that's the market,

Sokoni, and she manages to sell everything that she brought with her and of course everyone loved her.

[00:38:36] She had a beautiful personality and she knew many people and her fruits were very very, very good.

[00:38:42] These are the kind of shells you used to sell her her things for. We learned that *cowry* shells are now we're the oldest form of money exchange. So can we say *cowry* thank you *cowry*. Ah I think I'm I'm wearing *cowry* shells today. People call them ancestral beads.

[00:39:05] They were indeed the oldest form of money exchange that we know existed and then Nia was on her way home and thinking about all of the wonderful things she had sold and what she was going to grow and how she was going to meet her family.

[00:39:21] When she heard rustling in the bushes and then was taken she was tied by her hands and tied by her feet. And she was knocked unconscious and dragged to the ocean coastline, placed into a dark cold dungeon. And there she laid not knowing where she had gone to or what was happening to her. There were people around her. You can see the little shadows of faces down there and they asked her who she was where she came from. But she couldn't understand them. In Kenya alone there are more than forty three vernacular languages used. Everyone doesn't necessarily understand each other with one common language and Nia laid in in her space wondering if she would ever again see her family, ever again see her brother, her grandmother who had given her the basket all of that was now fading into a distant memory. One day a ship came and she could hear the people opening the ship doors and people coming out of the dungeon and they were placed into the bottom of the ships and tied there and Nia too was placed into one of those ships and she sailed away at that time never to return to Africa again. But meanwhile at home there were people and I want to tell you this is what the elder wanted to make sure that I knew in the story. Everything else was just so that she could say that there were people who looked for her and they just didn't know how to find her.

[00:41:09] They didn't know how to go about finding her. They didn't know where she had gone.

[00:41:15] And they missed her and they cried because the people came back and said, "We're sorry. She's dead." And one day when the traveler came and told them that,

[00:41:27] Actually your daughter had been not necessarily stolen. I mean dead. She may have been stolen to serve the purposes of the transatlantic slave trade. And I will read to you this section where it says "and people thought of those who had gone missing. The hunters, gardeners, healers and thinkers who were so violently stolen from them.

[00:41:53] And then they wept with despair.” We call that day, that time, those three hundred years span of people disappearing from their homes where families lived in the unknown of where their children were, where they had gone to. And we call that time the *Maafa*. So the front of the book represents all of the children in that one village, that had gone missing and that people didn't know how to find them and began to think about how that had devastated their home, their homeland. And when we think about underdevelopment today, I want us to think about what happens to a society, when you take the very young and the very you know the very able bodied out of that society. What are you left with? You are left with now the, the old people who may not be as capable to build a society again.

[00:42:57] You are left with children whose direction is not as solid and then the parents that would have raised them, are absent. And that makes for a disintegrated community and we call that under development.

[00:43:15] But I think the book that Walter Rodney wrote called *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* is a more accurate picture of what actually occurred.

[00:43:27] And today it's just beautiful, that we can say that we, many of us in this room are the survivors of the people who traveled those waters during horrible circumstances and were intent on surviving. We're intent on making a way in a new land and were able to thrive and come up with new institutions and new inventions that could be contributed to this society. And as the stories are often hidden and sometimes forgotten, our job as adults, is to remind people of the stories that actually shape, not only African-American children, but all of America.

[00:44:17] And so when the mother when, when Nia got old, she was able to call together what we think were maybe two children because we know that families were not legal. In the African context in this country, families were never regarded.

[00:44:34] If you had a, if you were married to someone that was not a legal binding if you had children it was not legally binding that you would keep those children. So Nia had two children left. We just estimated this.

[00:44:48] She called her children together when she got very old and said, “one day I'm going to die soon but I want you to remember something we live in America.

[00:45:01] But our home is in Africa. Tell your children to tell their children tell their children. So one day they'll make it back home and see their relatives again.”

[00:45:12] And so that's the story. Did you like it?

[00:45:19] Thank you.

[00:45:21] So we have time for a question and answer? Or did I take up the time? Great. Any comments, questions, answers?

[00:45:29] Just a reminder I believe Shani is gonna help run the mic with us. So if we could have the mic go out into the audience, if you can raise your hand we'll get the mic to you and thank you to Dr. Arunga for repeating the question from the front too. Yes sorry is not it is not a question OK. It's not a question it.

[00:45:50] I was just wanted to say so I'm from I'm from Ethiopia and I speak the Oromo language and the word Nia also means what you had described in my language as well. Yes I just wanted to point that out. Yeah. So I think cause we speak Kiswahili and Oromo have a lot of shared words and meanings. So it's hard to point that out. So I feel I feel very like in the book. Thank you. I appreciate that. Thank you.

[00:46:22] That's very insightful. Thank you. There are often words that that cross over in different African languages and that's that's exciting to hear that.

[00:46:33] And also I had studied this Oromo behavior we've talked about this with Jamal, the the system of, thank you, *Gada*.

[00:46:45] And this *gada*, that system requires that the child be by age eight knows the generations of their family and can recite that and every eight years, for some reason eight is a significant number, every eight years is a rite of passage for people in that culture in that tradition. It's ancient, it actually predates what we know to be highly Selassie and the Oromo.

[00:47:12] I mean the Amharic language is that correct. Oromo is actually even more ancient.

[00:47:17] I just want to honor the many Oromo people who live among us in the Pacific Northwest.

[00:47:26] I just was curious about some of the historical reference for when I've always thought of the transatlantic slave trade, I always thought of West Africa. Yes. And you mentioned East Africa and if you could go into a little more expansion on that that would be great.

[00:47:47] Ok thank you. Well there were several migrations out of Africa. There were several, I want to say, there were several enslavement era. There were at least two that we know of. We talk about the Arab slave trade as well as the European slave trade. So we believe that a lot of the Arab slave trade took place on the east. However, according to Walter Rodney, whose book is *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, he talks of evidence of actual trade ships going into the Indian Ocean and even going as far as the Horn of Africa and taking people indiscriminately. Now remember, this was not the record kept stories. These were the stories of sort of piracy and theft and probably desperation as we get to closer to the time when

enslavement, international slavery was outlawed which is closer to the eighteenth hundreds. And I'd also like to point out that what we call slavery in this country, should have another name because it's not slavery. What we think of slavery in the African practice of people going and giving servitude to some family or some people and at some point they always know where they came from, they know their tradition and they know how to get back to their people their next generations are not automatically enslaved in a caste system in the way that it occurred in this country. And it did not there's no evidence of people being actually subhuman in status as they were depicted in this country. We were considered not to be fully human, which was part of the cognitive dissonance around having slaves, to be able to say well they're not really human makes the case for keeping slavery going. This country did that. We don't have a record of that happening in what we called the African slavery. Not to condone it but I think we need to redefine what occurred to us over three hundred and fifty year period in the United States of America.

[00:50:13] What are your thoughts, a lot of us are with the City, of how we can incorporate what you're talking about into our everyday work?

[00:50:21] Yes beautiful. Thank you. OK. So I think what this does for me what this story did. The reason I really wrote it was because of the omission of facts and how that shapes who we think we are, and what we think we are capable of and what we are not. Now as a person of color, you internalize that notion and you're navigating all the time a fight to prove that you are somebody. Right. As Jesse Jackson said I, we, I am somebody that was that's all we were looking for. I think though that when we look at people in the city of Seattle with this kind of awareness we know that facts are often admitted. So I challenge us through this story to always question the facts to always question what we are doing to not just do things blindly but to really be critical about the decisions we make and also to hold people the decision makers to the fact that we are a dignified people and that we should be seen that way black and brown people are contributors, major contributors, to this society. I think that's the biggest story there and that we have to uphold that, if we don't then we're always going to be operating at a deficit and our children will continue to die at the wrong hands. Our elders will continue to suffer from stress related diseases because they are afflicted with all kinds of stress that is undue. It's not something they should be living with. And our children continue to face suspensions in school and also ways of not feeling fully able to realize their potential. These are the things we hope that we can arrest. And I see the employees at the City of Seattle as the key frontline figures of people who really are to combat that we can no longer take salaries that and we are not pushing the envelope and doing the work that correct some of those images that we're living with, so pushing the envelope is important.

[00:52:46] It's the only way that we've ever received anything in this society and so we need to do that in strategic ways. I didn't get to tell people more about being a teacher for the last nineteen years, being able to write this story get the response from not just children because it is an allegory written for adults and elders alike, but also that as a teacher I'm I feel so blessed to be able to have studied something that I was very passionate about and it turns out that

people don't always take their scholarship time to study themselves, their community and I just feel really honored that not only was I able to do that but now I can be the Dean of a school, at Evergreen State College, where we can lean into our differences even more,

[00:53:52] Study scholarship that is relevant to black and brown people, to look at culture instead of race because we know race is socially constructed but culture is very much a part of our everyday lives. And so I feel very blessed to be there right now and I want to invite everyone who has an inclination, if you don't have your B.A. degrees or your master's degrees, we offer that at Evergreen. Yes it's a shameless advertisement. Only because I believe in it and I am doing legacy work. I stand on the shoulders of Dr. Joye Hardiman for thirty years who maintained evergreen and I and she and I both stand on the shoulders of ninety one year old Maxine Mims who still has pretty strong shoulders and this is a legacy for them as well.

[00:54:51] I want to leave space for more questions but I also know that Dr. Arunga has books for sale. Yes. And would you be so kind to sign books for us to know. Of course

[00:55:01] I would. Not only would I just want to encourage you this is the last one of the last days in August so you don't even have to worry about all that holiday shopping if you just unload right here. And everybody, I think this is a book everyone should have in their library.


[00:55:20] I just can't tell enough people if even if it's just a dialogue tool at Thanksgiving. You know when you can talk about what stories we have been told and what omission of facts we have been grappling with in our lifetime and today you know we're grappling with the not only the omission of facts. But just, flat out fake news. So I think it's really an appropriate time to own the book and I think I'd be happy to sign it today. And feel freedoms encourage the library to add Dr. Arunga's book.

[00:55:57] I think we have it in the collection. But if we don't please encourage us to add it. Your voice is louder than mine. And I also wanted to mention that we have another program if you liked this talk on September 10th we're bringing Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs. She's doing a program called breathing underwater. It won't be at the Central Library. It will be at Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute. It's September 10th at 6:00 p.m.. We'd love to see you. Thank you so much for coming out. Please grab a book. I also think that there's some really beautiful other crafts and earrings over there too so you can check that out as well. We have the auditorium until 3:00 so you get a chance to mingle and chat and enjoy one another. Thank you so much Dr. Arunga. Can we give her a warm round of applause.

[00:56:44] Thank you so much.

[00:56:46] And huge thanks to our colleagues at HSD for making sure that we could do such an amazing program. We appreciate you. Thank you. Yes.

[00:56:54] Thank you so much.



[00:56:56] And the shout out to my friends at Dia over here, to the Village of Hope. And all of the people who have really been with me and the work we've done with the Black Prisoners Caucus and also with Africatown. So if you, the fall is coming for Communiversity there and we want to invite people to come in and just being part of a dialogue circle and cultural enrichment. Every Saturday, every other Saturday beginning September 14th running through October and November check the Web site of Africa town so that we're always coming together and learning more leaning more into our culture and history and just being enriched by that. So thank you

[00:57:50] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

