

The Great Simplification

Nate Hagens (00:00:02):

You are listening to the Great Simplification with Nate Hagens. That's me. On this show, we try to explore and simplify what's happening with energy, the economy, the environment, and our society. Together with scientists, experts, and leaders, this show is about understanding the bird's eye view of how everything fits together, where we go from here, and what we can do about it as a society and as individuals.

(00:00:33):

This week I am joined by environmental peacemaker and mediation practitioner Olivia Lazard to discuss how geopolitics, mineral and energy scarcity, and climate change are interacting to have a big battle economically, socially, justice wise between the global north and the global south on potential future pathways. Olivia has worked in the peacemaking sector at both field and policy levels at Carnegie Europe. She's also worked for various NGOs, the UN, the EU and donor states in the Middle East, Latin America, sub-Saharan and North Africa. This conversation covers a wide variety of topics, and much like Olivia's research, is jam-packed with information. Personally, I think we're going to need a lot more people like Olivia, who are mediators and peacemakers, to navigate the speed bump filled roads ahead. Please welcome Olivia Lazard.

(00:01:56):

Lots to discuss, Olivia. We'll eventually get to climate and COP and geopolitics and energy transition, which is how I found out about your work, but your training is in peacemaking and mediation. So how did you get into your current work and how do these two fields, peacemaking, mediation and geopolitics climate energy, interrelate?

Olivia Lazard (00:02:23):

I had a hunch that globalization was molding complex systems in certain ways, regardless of context, regardless of geographies and history, because we were seeing an acceleration essentially of commodity trading of goods and services, and extraction quite simply. And I was lucky that very quickly in my career, even though I started off working on peace process support in Israel and Palestine, for linguistic reasons mostly, I was brought to work in the Middle East and then in Africa, in Anglophone and Francophone Africa. And I worked for a long time in the Congo Basin, in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic and Gabon and in certain parts of the Sahel and stuff like this. And whilst at the beginning of my career, I was specialized in the political economy of conflicts, over time, because I was seeing essentially that nature was becoming more and more parts of conflict economies, of illicit financial flows, I started working on the political ecology of conflict.

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How do people organize themselves, their societies, their livelihoods, their sustenance around certain types of environments, certain types of natural resources, how certain types of elites as well, which are a lot more connected to globalization through public or private institutions, manage to tap into high commodity trading based on natural extraction, whatever it be for timber, for animal and vegetable biodiversity, minerals, fossils, et cetera, et cetera. And the trend accelerated quite drastically in the last

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15 years or so. And I particularly remember one moment when I was in North Kivu, which is a volcanic area of the world, beautiful, incredibly fertile. And I was talking with conflict affected people and the communities I was talking to were telling me about all the ways in which they were affected by arm group activities. But they were also telling me, "Oh, and by the way, climate change is hitting us really hard." I was like, "What do you mean?"

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"Well, the rains are not falling quite the same way and our crops are late or early, and then they're reducing in quantity and in quality, et cetera, et cetera." And then I looked around and I was like, "But where the trees?" And we were talking about an area which is normally covered with a lot of biomass, particularly close to the Virunga Park, which is a very biodiverse area. And entire slopes and hills had disappeared in terms of the biomass. And I looked at them and I like, "What happened to the trees?" And they were like, "Well, the FDLR, these other arm groups," timber is an important part of the conflict economy.

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And then they were experiencing essentially ecological disruption, which was magnified by the global rise in temperature. And one thing led to another. I started working on regenerative practices, regenerative agriculture, trying to convince essentially the UN machine or peacekeeping missions or missions and agencies within the field to try and move towards regenerative peace building, trying to really look at how to strengthen ecosystems and look at the way in which conflict stakeholders were interacting with each other and with nature to try and see how we could support different types of peace processes and different types of political economies.

(00:06:06):

And I remember as another anecdote, because this is what led me to work on all of this, regeneration was the starting point. And then it eventually led me to work on industrialization, which is the biggest of irony of all times. I remember in 2018 when I was in the Central African Republic, we saw the Wagner troops arrive. Wagner being a mercenary company, which is the right arm of the Kremlin, and we've heard a lot about it recently in the Ukraine war. And we saw them arrive in Bongui and then they just disappeared and scattered across the country. And then a few months later we realized, oh, they're located in all the places where you find gold and diamond, but not just that. Not just that. Also rare earths and copper and cobalt and lithium, all of the different materials that we need in order to decarbonize as part of this massive energy transition that we're facing.

(00:07:04):

And back in 2018, I thought that this was quite significant, but I didn't understand the full extent of it, and I don't think that I really understood it until two years later or so when I really started looking into this overlap that I mentioned in my TED talk between a number of critical mineral deposits and their overlap with conflict affected and fragile contexts, and then the other overlap, which is about the fact that the country's concerned for the most part also host critical ecosystems necessary to regulate the global climate regime, and that these very countries are also the ones that are most climate vulnerable.

(00:07:44):

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So it's quite an explosive set of issues that since I'm based in Brussels, let's put it this way, when we were talking in the Brussels bubble about the energy transition, I had never heard of the ecological blind spots related to the energy transition. And I certainly had never really heard of the links with conflict and fragile zones, and yet it is fully present. So I started to unearth set narrative and that sort of evidence and work on all of this. And now I work on decarbonization, regeneration, and industrial policy as I said, which is just an interesting and sometimes uneasy mix.

Nate Hagens (00:08:31):

Wow. So I have several follow up questions to that. First of all, you said for linguistic reasons you worked in Central Africa. What did you mean by that?

Olivia Lazard (00:08:42):

Just that at the time at least there were few people who could speak fluently French and English. So it was easy for me to travel around different parts of Central Africa and then to work with anglophone counterparts.

Nate Hagens (00:08:56):

And you speak more languages than that too, right?

Olivia Lazard (00:09:01):

Yes. They're a bit rusty now, but I've studied in total about four additional languages. Spanish, Italian, Arabic, and Hebrew. And a little bit of Kiswahili, but that's very far and very deep and buried deep.

Nate Hagens (00:09:17):

Jambo.

Olivia Lazard (00:09:17):

Jambo!

Nate Hagens (00:09:26):

Habari bwana. Yeah, I've been to Africa many times, but for vacations, not for the important work that you're doing. So what is regenerative peace building, Olivia? I've never heard those words combined.

Olivia Lazard (00:09:40):

So there is a simple mantra in mediation, when you look at conflict. Simple on paper, not in practice. It goes wherever you can expand the pie rather than divide it. It makes sense, right? When you have conflict stakeholders that fight over resources, whatever they are, either political or natural or economic. The more you create common stakes between the conflict stakeholders to try and cooperate so as to create and expand the pie, the more interest they have into channeling their differences into cooperative or sort of collective mechanisms. And when I discovered what regenerative practices could

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do, meaning at the very least that they could actually bring back certain key natural resources including water.

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Originally I thought that it would be super useful for food security. But beyond that, I realized that it had a very powerful message for the future of conflict resolution in a climate disrupted and ecologically disrupted world, which was that specifically in arid and semi-arid zones, more so than the Congo Basin, which has a different sort of geography and therefore sort of ecological makeup that we need to take into account. And I can come to this in a minute, but for semi-arid and arid zones, we could essentially use techniques that helped over time to create, to reinforce, to strengthen natural systems through human cooperation and through essentially putting together different purses design, different dialogue sequencing.

(00:11:29):

And by bringing together a number of different either communities that are affected by conflict, but also governments and arm groups or non-state violent armed actors to cooperate over trying to stabilize essentially at the very least, the ecological integrity of the ecosystems that they all depend upon. Obviously there is the theory, but then there is the practice. Trying to get one people to understand what regenerative practices are in their technique, in their practice is one key challenge. Because technically in mediation you're not, especially if you're the mediator, as a neutral party, you're not supposed to impose any type of agenda. But you can suggest certain types of techniques that may help over time to stabilize conflict dynamics and therefore go towards addressing what we call conflict drivers, which are the fundamental drivers of violence. I can hear that you have a question.

Nate Hagens (00:12:34):

I have six, but the first one that comes to mind is we're going to get to talking about decarbonization and rematerialization and climate and COP and other things. But quite simply, doesn't the world writ large need a lot more mediators at every level? I mean, we are so lacking in that skill, aren't we?

Olivia Lazard (00:12:59):

We are, but here is the catch, and that's an interesting one. Technically, if you look at the type of conflict resolution, that sort of framework that I was active into, it is the product of a certain era. It's the product of one, the aftermath of the second World War, and even more so the aftermath of the Cold War, with also this notion that the more you did economic interdependency linkage, the more you could create peace. It's this notion of liberal peace actually.

(00:13:48):

And mediators as part of the UN system or the OSC or even the European Union, the African Union, have inherited that sort of ideological DNA to a certain extent with exceptions. But it's been a bit of the sort of running framework. That must be questioned. It must be investigated as to whether or not the framework still stands. Mediators essentially that were trying to negotiate different types of peace, which we're essentially trying to negotiate political and economic equilibriums that had a tendency actually to inscribe further natural extraction within peace processes or peace agreements that had a

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tendency to essentially rely on certain types of development pathways that would serve as backups, essentially for the political processes behind mediation.

(00:14:48):

All of this needs to be reviewed. I think that there is a lot of room for reinvention, not on the principles of mediation, because mediation is a practice that is established within nonviolence. And if you read for example, the works of Galtung or other scholars who have tried to direct humanity towards what we call positive peace rather than a negative piece, negative peace is essentially the absence of war or conflict. Positive peace is what you create over time by essentially creating societies that benefit from exchanging with one another from co-creating and co-imagining the future. And that is something that involves education, culture, arts, literature, et cetera, et cetera. But we have a lot of things to reinvent also in our relationship to one another in terms of society's communities, et cetera, et cetera, but also as humanity towards nature. And nature was never actually really included within that notion of peace. So we do need a lot more mediators. We also need a reinvention of what mediation is supposed to do.

Nate Hagens (00:15:57):

Well, more what I was getting at is on top of our big biophysical environmental challenges, we have polarization and AI and GPT chat and things that are just splintering what normally people would agree on. And I almost think teaching mediation and conflict resolution or co-creation of positive peace as teenagers as a thing would be a really helpful thing for humanity. That's where I was going with that question.

Olivia Lazard (00:16:30):

Yeah. And since-

Nate Hagens (00:16:32):

Were you always an expert in this as a child, or did you go to university and say, oh, I care about this. I want to learn how to be a mediator?

Olivia Lazard (00:16:44):

Well, I suppose that we are all somewhat influenced by our personal backgrounds and family frameworks. And my family was very impacted by different wars starting with the Second World War and then going on to the Algerian War of Independence. So my father grew up in Algeria, and I've seen the way in which conflict can impact people in very diverse ways and in very deep ways that inform their political view, that frame their psychology, their understanding of the world, their emotional resilience as well. And I was, I suppose, lucky to have on the one hand maternal grandmother who had enrolled in the resistance and who was the epitome of life and bravery and purpose for me. And my paternal grandfather who went to a concentration camp during the second World War and who came out of it profoundly traumatized and who had a difficult relationship with humanity in all sense of the word.

(00:18:06):

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And so observing these two adults when I was a child gave me a sense of the way in which each individual history can be marked by history written with capital letters and how we're all a part of it, whether or not we want to be a part of it. We're all actors and observers of it. And I was lucky that in spite of the difficulties that both sides of my family experienced, I was raised in an environment where I was told that the future was Europe, and Europe was based essentially on this peace project.

(00:18:44):

It was based on this notion of reconciliation, which is still ongoing, which we still have to reinvent on an everyday basis. And that became my first school. And then I decided to turn it, I was let... Something was gnawing at me within myself, and I let it lead me towards this path, which I'm still on, which is essentially guided by this question of what is peace? It's a very, very complex and philosophical question, and it's a very personal one at the same time as being a very political one. So it remains my everyday bread.

Nate Hagens (00:19:26):

So I met you and found out about you because of your TED Talk talking about the, "If we decarbonize, we are going to rematerialize," but since we first interacted, there is another war on top of the second World War and the Algerian War and the Cold War. There's a real war going on in Ukraine between Russia and NATO, and you have been quite active there on writing about it and maybe working there. I'm not sure. What are your thoughts on what's going on there? What are the aspects that for positive peace or any peace, what do you think?

Olivia Lazard (00:20:08):

Well, I don't know about the prospects about positive peace or negative peace because for the, well, the first thing that I'd like to offer as an insight is essentially that if we missed the war in Europe particularly, if until the 22nd of February, we just didn't fully understand the war was going to happen. The first question that I had on my mind was, what else are we missing? And there's been, there are a number of different narratives that have been developed over the last eight months now, more so than 10 months. One, that this war is about the past. I argue that it's about the past and the future together. Two, that this is a war about imperialism. I argue that this is a war about imperialism reinvented in light of climate change and ecological disruption, and that it is fundamentally about systems rivalry. And so one of the arguments that I've been developing, particularly here in my work in Europe, has been to say that Ukraine, for me represents ground zero for transition warfare.

Nate Hagens (00:21:27):

What's transition warfare?

Olivia Lazard (00:21:31):

The thing that I found very telling about Russian behavior in Ukraine, beyond the type of discourses that we have all listened to by President Putin, starting on the 21st of February of this year, or even going back a number of years in the past and since then, is that President Putin puts a narrative forward and then when you study a number of documents belonging to the Russian state or apparatus,

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you realize that there are, there's a lot more elaborate strategy and planning going into what is going on in Ukraine.

(00:22:07):

And one of the things that really struck me as part of the initial set of research that I did, I think it was on the 26th of February this year, that I started to just trying to educate myself about what's going on in Ukraine. The very first thing that popped up on my radar is that Ukraine is obviously the most resource rich country in the whole of the European continent. It has a lot of hydrocarbons, it has a lot of uranium, and it has a lot of critical minerals. So much so that actually Ukraine was and remains for that matter, one of two strategic partners for the European Union to develop and deploy and diversify supply chains for critical raw materials. The first one is Canada, and the strategic partnership between the European Union and Ukraine was struck in July, 2021.

Olivia Lazard (00:23:00):

A few months afterwards, Ukraine started an auctioning process for a number of deposits which are located interestingly, or at least concentrated, in the eastern part of Ukraine, where Russia is actively trying to annex and control a number of territories and has been doing for a long time. And if it was only about Ukraine, I'd be already concerned. But when you sort of compare, and it ties back to the story with the Central African Republic. If you compare the way in which Russia is behaving towards Ukraine and how it's behaving, for example, towards African contexts, deploying mercenaries, deploying military partnerships with countries like Cameroon, or Zimbabwe, or Mali, Burkina Faso, Madagascar, even, you realize that Russia is essentially targeting a number of different partnerships, or approaches, or wars of aggression for that matter, to try and gain access to certain key raw materials that they want, that Russia wants, to try and rehone their power as a geo-economic power broker, but most importantly, that other energy intensive countries such as China, the US, and European countries want.

(00:24:20):

And Russia is very, very conscious of the fact that the world, the markets of energy are changing and that it needs to cater to changes in demand for three different types of energy sources, one being hydrocarbons, the other one being nuclear power, and the other one being mineral energy that we're actively moving towards, particularly in the sense of trying to increase the extraction of critical raw materials-

Nate Hagens (00:24:52):

So, in your shorthand, you now use the word mineral energy instead of renewable energy.

Olivia Lazard (00:25:01):

Well, renewable energy is one aspect of the whole set of energy that we're going to be going towards, right? Mineral energy is also something which is incredibly used for digitalization purposes, which is also part of the energy mix that we're trying to put together. So, it came to me naturally this way to talk about mineral energy because I find that it's a lot more...

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Nate Hagens (00:25:32):

Honest?

Olivia Lazard (00:25:33):

Yeah, very picturesque. People can understand that energy can come from certain types of materials. Renewables, it just becomes this sort of composite... It's this typical thing of, it's a final product which is almost detached in our imagination from its origin.

Nate Hagens (00:25:51):

So, I know a lot more about your work than you know about my work, but in my books we refer to it as rebuildable energy because the sun, and the wind, and the hydrological flows are renewable, but the machinery that we need to build these structures are no more renewable than a pickup truck. And they are, as we're going to talk about, very material intensive. So, yeah. Another thing about my work, Olivia, that you were just kind of merging your work with mine is, I think what's happened since February 22 is we are moving towards a biophysical phase shift in world recognition of our situation. Instead of money and technology, being kind of the narratives we're moving towards resources, energy, and materials, and maybe the environment, and it just changes the whole power structure.

(00:26:52):

And of course, the leading country in the world, economically, from where I'm sitting, having this conversation with you is not going to quietly welcome a multipolar world, and that's part of the problem we have here. In Russia, much bigger country than the US, lower population, lower GDP, but I don't know how many people realize this, the US, Saudi Arabia, and Russia are the three world's largest oil producers, but a lot of the oil producing countries use a lot of the oil and gas themselves. So, on the global market of the amount of oil that's available for export, Russia has 21% of global exportable oil and 25% of exportable natural gas. So, this is a real kind of sea change that's coming is seeing the world from a financial lens versus an energy and resource lens. And I think, that's underpinning a lot of what's going on there.

Olivia Lazard (00:27:57):

Absolutely. And I think, to go back to that point, there is definitely a sort of landslide that is happening at the moment as a result of the Ukraine war, which is related to the sort of reorganization of supply chains around energy, around gas, and where sort of new markets or expanding markets are going to be created as a result of Russia's war, of aggression. And as I said, I think that what we missed, at least in Europe, I don't know so much about the US, but in Europe, we really did miss the fact that President Putin was a lot more elaborate and much more of a strategist than we suspected. When you read, for example, I got my hand, I hired a brilliant Ukrainian researcher in the wake of the war in Ukraine to help me go through a number of Russian documents in Russian. And we read through a number of strategic documents including the national sort of defense policy and security strategy and stuff like this. And I was really struck one of the key overarching documents that humanity has entered the most unstable phase of its history and the instability is essentially related to a fragmentation of power,

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multipolarity, but also very much so as a result of climate change, which is significant considering that in my sector, in the security sector, a lot of actors have focused on discussions happening in the security council over the passing of a UNSC resolution over climate security. And for years, Russia has been saying, "No, no, no, no." And sort of wavering between different types of narratives. At the beginning, saying climate change doesn't exist and then sort of saying, "Well, climate change may exist but probably not as a result of anthropogenic activity," or "Climate change may exist, but actually Russia will benefit, so why not just let it run its course. It's going to increase our GDP."

(00:30:18):

And when I went back into those documents which were dating back to 2014 or 2015, it was very clear that Russia has a very strong understanding of the fact that the biophysics of planet are being disrupted, that it is going to affect its agricultural base, it's water base, it's economic base, that it is going to lead to a number of tensions around the world, if not wars, and that this is something that Russia needs to defend itself against. And it has been very good and very, very disruptive. It's become definitely a rogue power in the international community using different types of tactics to gain access to different resources.

Nate Hagens (00:31:04):

I'm hoping by the time this podcast goes live that we're not in a hot war between the US and Russia. I will just say that in recent weeks, I've seen that Russian population, which is a higher percentage Christian, or Orthodox, some religious view have started to label the West as Satan. Satanization, we don't want those to live like that. And there's a real antagonism against the overconsumptive, satanic practices, and it's really scary when you start labeling people and cultures like that. And I had some friends that are Russianfiles and they're telling me that that sentiment is quite potent and growing in Russia. Have you seen that or witnessed that?

Olivia Lazard (00:32:08):

Well, yes, but it's also, it's being cultivated. And technically, the first thing that comes to mind when you tell me this is the narrative that was crafted also, as a result of the Iranian revolution back in 1979. The US was also indeed sort of portrayed as the ultimate Satan. And it has been a narrative that has stuck that is being nourished, cultivated and emphasized and has been for nearly 40 years now. Once again, it's part of these, if you look at sort of so-called cultural clashes, which are not really cultural clashes for that matter at international relations level, it is a matter of seeing the US as this double hatted actor. On the one hand, supposedly the sort of guarantor of international security, but also a guarantor that has been growing in strength and military power, and this was the one piece of truth that Putin on the 21st of February uttered in his address, which was that the US has also broken international law at different times, including during the invasion of Iraq.

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Which has been used by the enemy enemies of the US as the ultimate substantiation essentially of what they were trying to show the world that the US was this hidden ultimate power working for the worst of humanity. But any type of hegemon, this has always been the fundamental paradox that big

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powers have had to work with. And as you were saying, the US is dealing with a very, very complex political makeup at home, very, very strong fractures, very strong economic forces working at odds with democratization at times and with social sort of safety nets. And there is an element where, from an international perspective, it is a country that has shown to have its shortcomings in terms of international diplomacy and peace-building sort of mediation as well, and global redistribution of wealth, obviously.

Nate Hagens (00:34:44):

As a mediator, knowing something about the situation, what is our best hope to avoid some sort of World War III at this point?

Olivia Lazard (00:34:58):

I don't know, I'll be very honest.

Nate Hagens (00:34:59):

I don't know. I don't either.

Olivia Lazard (00:35:04):

As short of an answer as it can give, as long as we don't know the extent of Putin's ambitions and motives behind the war, it will be very, very difficult for any type of option towards peace. Again, there is a difference between peace and sort of stabilization. Ukraine knows this very well because the post 2014 situation was some kind of stabilization which didn't work in Ukraine's favor in any case, and which obviously sort of led to Putin being able to regaining strength and to work on a sequence of events and efforts that led to the 24th of February 2022. And we have to learn from history, including the Second World War, and the run-up towards the Second World War, and understanding, indeed, as long as we don't fully understand the motives of an enemy, there can be some backdoor information sharing and diplomacy to try and ensure that the escalation is not going to get out of hand. This is something that Europe, the US, Russia, China, Turkey, a number of different sort of countries are working very hard upon. But can we work towards peace right now? I don't think so.

Nate Hagens (00:36:29):

Well, but you said something earlier about a core tenant of regenerative peace building is expanding the pie, but my work shows that we are about to globally no longer be able to expand the biophysical pie of energy and resources or for not much longer. And the way we're doing it now is changing rules and including cocaine and prostitution in GDP measures in Europe in order to allow us to keep issuing debt to kick the can further. But at some, point we won't be able to expand the pie. And that's why mediation and peacemaking is about the... Well, and probably, a better governance system globally and nationally are the best possible paths for humanity. And I'm worried about it. Any quick thoughts there?

Olivia Lazard (00:37:32):

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Yes. So, two levels. One is it would be great if we were all educated the way that you are, for example, Nate in the biophysical and geochemical realities of our planet and understanding essentially that we're going on overshoot in so many different directions that we have to work collectively in order to find an economic system that allows for solidarity in the form of various types of independent exchanges, but at the same time, allows for diversity and for much more diversified economic exchanges, like political, and economic, and ecological diversity, let's put it this way. The problem is that one is the understanding that we're quickly overshooting on planetary boundaries or geophysical realities is not a narrative that is widely shared. And when it is widely shared, it leads to two different sort of responses grossly. One is techno solutionism, how to carbon capture our way out, for example, of the climate crisis or how to GMO our way out of the ecological crisis.

(00:38:58):

You talked about this I think, recently with Vandana Shiva. And the other one is also to sort of say, "Well, let's transition away as rapidly as possible, de-grow and go towards some economic equilibriums which are a lot more responsible towards the planet." In between those two polar opposites, there is a vast array of nuances and options available and we need to find our way forward because it's going to be a question of mix, but one would be indeed to sort of get world leaders on the table and to say, "Well, indeed, war is definitely not going to go in the direction of trying to respect biophysical boundaries." And our priority, if we are, to indeed sort of be able to respect some kind of equilibrium of nations, equilibrium of powers, and different diversity of systems, then we have to come to an understanding of what not to go over in terms of threshold and what to go towards in terms of objectives at the international level.

Nate Hagens (00:40:04):

I do think that all of the work that I've done on energy depletion risk, mineral scarcity, given the energy transition, the financial overshoot that we keep papering over our problems with debt, the six-continent supply chain and the complexity of our just-in-time system, all of those problems and the ecological overshoot are all made worse if we go to a big war. So, I think, every path has to avoid a hot war between the leading nations. And I'll just leave it at that. I don't know how to get there either, but I think it's a central question. So, yeah.

Olivia Lazard (00:40:47):

I think, maybe just building on that, because I was leading towards my second point. There is a problem... We've mentioned the ecological and biophysical literacy problem. The second part is that, and this relates back to the point on transition warfare. China, and I talk about it in my Ted talk, is managing to turn the tables on the international economic system, has used its foundations in order to harness and hone into its own power and then to then from a position of power, try to empty it, or give a different sort of direction of travel to the way in which we organize ourselves from a value system, from an ideological system, from a governance system, economic one, et cetera, et cetera. The part that I think is really complicated regarding this particular war is the fact that it is a moment of break. It's a moment when essentially this notion of systems rivalry is being enacted with a war of aggression very

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rapidly, where both actors' into it and observers of how it unfolds, and everybody is right, Russia included, the Ukrainians included, China included, obviously.

(00:42:13):

And it's about seeing how strongly does the international system sort of manage to withstand the pressure of this war of aggression without crumbling in its own foundations, but also how does it manage to really evolve. And the evolution part is going to be the part where it either breaks or manages to hop over into a different moment of its history. But I think that this is the part that worries me most. It's to me, the war in Ukraine is a sign that some countries believe that wars of aggression and sort of taking supply chains hostage, including food-related supply chains, is a completely sort of effective and an acceptable way forward into climate disruptive futures. And that's the part that we really worries me.

Nate Hagens (00:43:11):

So, this gets into another area of your expertise and I will get back to your Ted Talk, but you talked about supply chains. So, Europe is really struggling right now with the electricity prices because of the Nord Stream pipeline and natural gas. But Europe is, on balance, a wealthy area, but what about the global south that they have to buy natural gas in the open market, and food, and other things? And they have no say in this war, no stake, but they're at the end of the supply chains. So the pie, even if it's the same size right now, the global resource pie, it's being shrunk to the global south because we are rationing by price in the global market. So, can you talk about that both from a resource and also maybe a climate standpoint on how the global south is set up to really take the brunt of these dynamics?

Olivia Lazard (00:44:22):

Well, you said something, they're at the end of the supply chains, technically they're at the end in the beginning. We are already sort of seeing it, it's one of the second or third hand effect from the war in Ukraine. There is a number of different fossil infrastructure which are being locked in on the shores of Africa, for example, as a way essentially to try and reassure markets and investors and as a way also to try and appease certain African elites, may sometimes, as we saw at COP27 at the expense of how African Civil Society actually truly feels, which is no fossil fuels. But that's the part which is very, very complicated-

Nate Hagens (00:45:11):

Wait a minute. African Civil Society says, "No fossil fuels"?

Olivia Lazard (00:45:16):

Well, what I saw at COP27 was really quite impressive in terms of how African civil society groups were mobilizing very visibly in the COP27 venue to say no to the development of fossil fuels in Africa. And you've got, I think, Tzeporah Berman, who works on the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, has been also sort of shedding light on some of the work of these African civil society groups, which have issued a number of reports in COP27. One is called Don't Gas Africa, and the other one is the... I forget the

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name, I will sort of dig it up for you after the recording. Something like the gas illusion or something, which demonstrate very vividly how gas infrastructure locking in and in on the African continent would have tremendous costs in terms of its economic future, in terms of its water resources, in terms of the impacts on ecosystems and ecological integrity and how it's just not something that a lot of African civil society groups approve of.

Nate Hagens (00:46:23):

So what are they advocating instead?

Olivia Lazard (00:46:28):

So I'm going to use the word leapfrog, even though technically it's not the best of use, but essentially to sort of skip the fossil box and go towards different types of renewable mixes from hydrological or hydropower sort of energy sources to renewable to nuclear. Although I'm not entirely sure that the people who were mobilizing against gas infrastructure would be in favor of nuclear. I didn't ask them. But I think that there is definitely a very strong conscience, at least in the activist that I talk to, that the fossil investments that are pouring into African countries right now will work at the detriment of long-term development and stable development. And again it's-

Nate Hagens (00:47:24):

Well, I mean, if that happens then they're even more in the belly of the global super organism because they get dependent on that whole structure. So you were about to say something important, and I interrupted you again, that the global supply chain, the inputs to the processes and manufacturing actually start in the Global South. I meant that the outputs, the food and the things in the grocery stores, they're at the tail end of that. But keep expanding on your idea there.

Olivia Lazard (00:48:01):

And again, it's both, right. But like from what I've observed working in African countries and a little bit in that in America and Asian countries, is that indeed there is a huge amount of extraction, as I was mentioning in the beginning of the podcast, which serves processing, refining, consumption and export economies in the so-called Global North for the most part. So there is indeed, it's the typical story that we've studied for a really long time in development economics where a lot of countries in the Global South are kind of stuck and some would argue made to be stuck at the extraction sort of economic level.

(00:48:49):

And then all of the economic value goes up to the Global North in terms of refining and exporting as I were saying, which essentially means also that because a number of countries in the Global South remain quite non-diversified in their economic big makeup, they're highly dependent on imports, including for agricultural goods, even in spite of the fact that they have a lot of arable land and very diverse and complex agroecological sort of productions, which are a lot fitter for that matter to a climate disrupted world.

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(00:49:32):

But they bear the brand of, well, the sort of legacies of the structural adjustments in this 1970s and 1980s of debt. Well, debt servicing, including which debt servicing which is increasing because of climate disruptions. They're actually sort of servicing debt five times more than they're able to actually repair or recover and adapt to climate disruptions coming their way. And that means that when a war like the war of aggression in Ukraine breaks out, any type of product and commodity dependent on energy, fossil, diesel is usually going to increase in price and therefore lead to a fragmentation of socioeconomic sort of workings towards equality, which is already very, very difficult in fragile countries for a number of different reasons, including the political and economic makeup and the fact that the poor sections of society which are quite extensive, are going to suffer tremendously from a lack of mobility, a lack of access to food, which is going to lead to the type of revolts that we've seen during the Arab Spring. Not in every context, right, because-

Nate Hagens (00:50:51):

And higher wet bulb temperatures, et cetera.

Olivia Lazard (00:50:54):

Yeah, absolutely. And all of this combines means that indeed in, if we look not so long into the future, I would argue even two to five years, we're going to see even more of an acceleration towards this notion of poly crises or sort of interlinked crises depending on what kind of language you want to use, but financial inflation, economic inflation, debt crises, ecological disruptions, climate shocks, and then more political crises in nature, which have to do with growing levels of marginalization and inequality.

Nate Hagens (00:51:36):

So this itself was a core part of your TED Talk. Certainly a takeaway sentence that I have used of yours is in an attempt to decarbonize, we're going to rematerialize our economy and that has huge implications for the Global South, as you were just saying. So can you say a little bit more about that? I mean, it's like out of the frying pan into the fire from a biophysical sense. What are your summary thoughts on that?

Olivia Lazard (00:52:11):

Well, I mean, you can also direct your listeners to your podcast with Simon Michaux and with a number of other people who have been here on the podcast before-

Nate Hagens (00:52:20):

Yeah. But he's talking about the availability and the cost. You're actually talking about the geography and the people.

Olivia Lazard (00:52:27):

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And the ecology. That's the two part which are really interlinked. So I mean essentially the world has always been dependent on minerals. That we know. If you use a spoon to eat your yogurt, which is made of steel or aluminum, like, this is a product essentially from the mineral economy. But what we're facing at the moment with the decarbonization process, and even more so with the twin transition between digitalization and decarbonization, is that the demand for critical raw materials is about to explode. I take a few examples in the TED Talk extracted from different sources from the Wellbank, the International Energy Agency, but an electric car uses on average six times more material inputs than a conventional car. The level of sort of electrification that we need for our grids requires nine times more materials than we currently rely upon for fossil infrastructure.

(00:53:36):

For certain types of materials, we're facing a 500% increase in terms of demand by 2050. We're talking about graphite and lithium and that kind of thing, especially for the world of batteries and anything related to individual and collective mobility. So that has two combined effects. One is obviously that we'll have to dig deeper and in more places in the world in order to meet that demand. The ecological effects of digging deeper or digging in different parts of the world differ in terms of the type of material and the type of technologies that we use. But we have to be very clear that any type of mining is environmentally invasive, very water intensive and tends to have very strong effects, some of which are fully known, some of which are less known in terms of air pollution, ecological pollution, and disturbance to biodiversity of different kinds. And this is something that is not yet fully computed in terms of what are going to be the first, second, third hand effects, especially as climate disruptions come with full force at us, especially regarding the use of water.

(00:54:59):

At least as far as I'm aware, and I've asked a number of different sort of experts and mining actors, the notion of how climate impacts will come and hit any type of given context where mining is taking place is not understood in terms of how it will affect the availability, quantity, and quality of water today, five years, 10, 40 years from now, and especially what your repercussion's going to be on local communities. So that's the ecological part. The geographical part is, and I invite all your listeners to actually watch the TED Talk where I show sort of an overlap of different maps.

(00:55:39):

If you look at the concentration of ore and deposits in the world for different types of minerals that we need, and we need a lot of them and a lot of different types of materials, we can see that they're actually located in Latin America, in Africa and Central Asia, in Indo-Pacific and in some places in Europe, and obviously you've got also the three four big poles between China, Australia, Canada, and the US and then you've got Greenland and the sort of Arctic. But I focus a bit less on that because that's less of the issue when it relates essentially to high densely populated sort of countries. But the reason that got me to really delve into this topic is that when you look at the overlay of data, you find that the deposits are located in context, which score very high in terms of corruption indices, in terms of fragility indices, in terms of water stress, in terms of climate vulnerability, which are all foundations essentially for anything going bad, unless-

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Nate Hagens (00:56:48):

And those things are happening now, not in the future. They're happening now.

Olivia Lazard (00:56:51):

Absolutely, and it's one thing, so maybe one additional thing, one additional layer of complexity, it would already be bad if it were happening in a world where geopolitical tensions were not running that high because we would still have a number of different sort of extractive companies sort of going into different places where governance systems and the application of certain standards around environmental, social and governance standards are not very strong, but the dangers are that much higher as a result of the sort of Paris system fragmentation at a geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic level. Because when you look at the fact that a number of supply chain, both from extraction to processing, refining and exploitation allocated in China or in Russia, and that this is the backbone essentially of the system's rivalry and the way in which power sort of redistribution or competition of power, overpower, is taking shape, then you realize essentially that you've got different models actively sort of competing in those countries with disastrous environmental, social and governance effects.

Nate Hagens (00:58:06):

So many questions, on that part, specifically. If growing the pie, the economic pie of the global human economic system means that we have to rematerialize, and if we don't do that, then we have a smaller global biophysical pie. How do you see the central powers being reshaped? Because China's obviously a big one, Russia, the US still part of that. Is it still possible that we can shape a shift to a multi-polar world to be one of a more cooperative nature right from the beginning? Or is it doomed to be a resource grab power struggle after growth stops?

Olivia Lazard (00:58:52):

It's going to be both. Because when we look at the way in which history unfolds, it always unfolds in multiple competing simultaneous ways. So I do believe that reaching some kind of equilibrium somewhere down the road around how to reorganize power within the confines of planetary boundaries or geophysical, biophysical boundaries is possible. We're not currently working within this confine. We're not currently having this framework in mind in order to rationalize and reason where's power. And this is the crux of my work, or at least it has become the crux of my work. Because when you look for example, at the way in which we've even bifurcate for a second into the sort of climate negotiation regime around the Paris Agreement or the sort of Kyoto Protocol and that kind of thing.

(00:59:51):

We're still working with this notion of let's accept business as usual and organize essentially different types of technologies and different types of economic modeling or territory governance or mobility around business as usual, because business as usual is essentially what maintains this sense of international equilibrium. And I'm looking at it in a very dispassionate way. I've come to understand that it's not just purely about greed. There are some fundamental sort of needs powering economic

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growth, which have to do with social welfare system, which needs to be reinvented, but in order to be reinvented, we have to reinvent the financial system, the macroeconomics sort of system. We have to go into debt conversations. We have to go into really, really difficult and complex topics.

(01:00:43):

But at the moment, we are facing a level of geopolitical tension and geo-economic race and fragment coupled with fragmentation over supply chains, which is sending markets into all kinds of panics that we're essentially seeing that new scramble for resources. It used to be the scramble for Africa, now it's the scramble for resources writ large, and indeed the Global South is at the center of it, and this is what needs to be stopped. Because if we go down that road, one, we know what the scramble for Africa gave in terms of legacies regarding global inequities and inequalities, poverty, political sort of conflicts, et cetera, et cetera, that needs to be avoided at all costs because the result would undo any type of efforts that has been put into place over the last 17 years trying to work towards more peace and more development.

(01:01:44):

The second problem, and this is where I think that to a certain extent we need to create the right sort of narrative and political and economic framework in order to try and reason with power, is the fact that if we were to sort of delve into the scramble for resources, we would actually plunder the planet on our way to decarbonization. We would actually lose the future of humanity trying to save it on behalf of the climate. And this is ultimate irony, right?

Nate Hagens (01:02:16):

Exactly. I totally agree with that. Well, here's a deep question. Would global access to all these materials and energy even solve the problems humanity is facing anyways?

Olivia Lazard (01:02:29):

No, absolutely not. And this is one of the fundamental, I would say, sort of logical errors as part of how we deal with the climate crisis or climate change, climate transformation, however, whatever name you want to tag onto the climate. The current international negotiation framework is looking at it as the ultimate sort of problem, rather than seeing it as a symptom of a deeper crisis. If you look at Johan Rockström or the Stockholm Environmental Institute's sort of framework over planetary boundaries, you see a number of different overshoots which are all inter linked with one another. And one of the key, and this is one of the key messages in the TED talk as well, something that really struck me for years in my sector around security, people didn't understand the link between the climate regime and terrestrial and marine ecosystems, something as basic as that, right.

(01:03:24):

Because we're just not like, we don't deal with nature. We don't deal with physics or chemistry within our sector. And I remember having to run through some sessions, which for some were completely sort of obvious and others for whom it was completely oblivious. It was just like saying, well, terrestrial and marine ecosystems are the critical regulators of the global climate regime, and it's a two-way street. If we lose ecosystems, we lose the climate. If we lose the climate, we lose the ecosystems, or at least they

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get rearranged in a different way. We're going to see a sort of fundamental redistribution and reshifting of global natural resources, which will mean essentially something which is differences or at least a questioning over this notion of boundary, this notion of sovereignty, this notion of human settlements. We're going back into a notion of how to organize peace and security in a world that is so far away from the one that we know, that we obviously know that the current foundations are not going to hold, but we don't know what's next.

Nate Hagens (01:04:35):

My friend Randy Hayes, who founded Rainforest Action Network starts many of his speeches by saying there is no social justice on a dead planet. And so there's all these layers of priority here. So given how everything fits together, Olivia, personally, I see de-growth as what we should do, but post growth is what we're going to have to do. So what do you think about this statement, especially as it pertains to the Global South?

Olivia Lazard (01:05:09):

What do you mean by post growth and what do you mean by de-growth?

Nate Hagens (01:05:13):

Yeah. De-growth is a voluntary, more equitable contraction that the world cooperates and contraction and convergence, where the wealthy North gives up some of the resources and GDP in order to give a basic existence for the Global South at some level, and that the environment and the planetary boundaries are somewhat respected. That would be the planned de-growth. I just think that's behaviorally and energetically implausible. By post growth, I mean that we are part of a metabolic system where we've outsourced our decision making to the market and we are compelled to grow to payback prior claims and that everyone is pursuing this GDP and we're not even trying to do it. It's just the system has been built around that and we're running out of cans to kick and with oil depletion, which is a whole another story, that once oil starts to decline in earnest globally, we won't be able to continue to grow the 19 terawatt global society.

(01:06:27):

And then we have a date with a financial recalibration because we've built all these monetary claims. So then we're going to go down to a 15 terawatt or a 12 terawatt society. Once we start to go down, there's no way to predict what's going to happen. As you said, there's evolving responses. That's what I call The Great Simplification is we're going to have to prepare for that smaller biophysical global economy. But then there's the distribution, there's the geopolitics, there's all the things that you're working on. So I'm just wondering how you see the, or maybe you believe that growth will continue. What do you think about everything I just said?

Olivia Lazard (01:07:07):

Well, so I have a few thoughts. The first thing is we're now in December 2022. I remember one year ago precisely hearing still people in the Brussels bubble and across Europe saying market, market, market,

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technology, technology, technology, when talking about climate adaptation and climate mitigation. One year later, we're saying state, state, state, market will have to take second place, right? This is-

Nate Hagens (01:07:42):

Are you hearing that globally or only in Europe?

Olivia Lazard (01:07:44):

No, only in Europe, and this is my second point. We are facing a world where obviously there are different economic needs and different economic realities depending on where you sit. So if you look at it less from the sort of greenhouse gas emission sort of regime, especially if it's counted on a national basis rather than a per capita basis, and more towards this sort of slightly tentative data computation where how many planets does every region sort of consume, then we know, for example, that in Europe we need to drastically reduce our consumption because I think that, I can't remember exactly, but I think that we may consume in a country like France or Germany between two and three planets per year. But if you look for example, at the US, the consumption is that much higher and would need to really that much more drastically decelerate.

Nate Hagens (01:08:44):

You mean that if the whole world consumed like France or Germany, it would require two or three earths?

Olivia Lazard (01:08:51):

Exactly.

Nate Hagens (01:08:53):

Yeah, right.

Olivia Lazard (01:08:53):

And it's shifting essentially the conversation from purely greenhouse gases towards material use, which essentially looks at water, soil, at different types of material consumption that then also lead towards the greenhouse gas consumption-

Nate Hagens (01:09:08):

Which is a major advance in the conversation, in my opinion.

Olivia Lazard (01:09:11):

Exactly. Because it looks at things holistically and it looks at the way in which we use nature and organize our societies and economies and exchanges on the basis of non-regenerative or regenerative rates. Because at the end of the day, regeneration is about allowing nature to regenerate naturally and sort of organically in order to sustain life on earth, it's as simple as that. But then obviously if you break

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it down, it gets very complex. But that's the simple logic. So here is the part that gives me hope about the sort of growth, post growth, de-growth sort of modeling or alternative economic modeling that we need to be headed towards. One has been the result of the war in Ukraine, the fact that we're now sort of focusing for now on very something very specific, which is resource efficiency. We're not pushing the button far enough because technically we would need to be a lot more consequential in how we reduce our use of energy, including with regards to the solidarity with Ukraine.

(01:10:13):

And including with regards to the future sustainability of Europe, knowing that for now, this coming winter, we're fine. The next one is going to be a question mark and everybody's talking about it already. So this is something where we should be inviting European citizens, depending on different, where they sit in terms of meteorology and stuff like this, to try and be a lot more consequential, with their use of energy that it also includes shops, if you walk in Paris at the moment, you'll still see shops which are lit at night and never sort of fundamentally reduce their energy consumption. The second part that gives me hope is that if I look, for example, at the type of research grants that have been given in the last few months, including by the European Commission, we find one of the largest piece of research has just been allocated by people, two people like Jason Hickel and a number of other researchers precisely on de-growth, precisely on trying to understand what the future of Europe is going to be when we start taking into account global wealth for distribution, climate disruptions, and the future of adaptation.

(01:11:24):

So it is a very, very clear message that at the highest instances of the European Commission, there are some really hard questions that are being asked. They may not be discussed publicly yet because, and this is the part also that leads me to my final point, we should be very clear-eyed at the moment about the fact that we cannot afford to have a conversation about the future of economic equilibriums and the future of economic resilience and adaptability, which is tainted by ideology. What I want, for me personally, as a researcher is data. Data coupled with foresights, scenario building and an understanding of complexity. If somebody tells me we should be headed towards de-growth, sure, if you look at a certain type of equilibrium, if it's only from a national perspective for a country like mine, for example in France, then let's look at the way in which we can reorganize sectors in a way that still maintains a certain sense of social welfare that tries to generate indeed more social and economic fabrics, that tries to generate more solidarity and that tries to generate resilience and adaptability.

(01:12:43):

I'm obviously in favor of that, but let's always remember that especially as a result of globalization, there is no country that can pretend to be an island, except potentially for North Korea and not even then. And if we're not islands, then that means that if a country goes into a de-growth mode, it's obviously going to have some impacts on the countries on which it depends. And if I take a similar process in terms of comparison to try and convey my point across, the European Green Deal, when President von der Leyen came to the presidency of the commission, was held essentially as Europe's Man on the Moon moment, it was a project sort of made of 13 different policy packages from energy, mobility, construction, agriculture, demonstrating or trying to demonstrate European leadership, especially on the climate question.

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(01:13:40):

The European Green Deal was designed for Europeans, by Europeans, and it didn't have a foreign policy component. It had certain elements of it with mechanisms such as what we're now calling, "The carbon border adjustment mechanism," which is raising a lot of tensions with countries in the global south, upon which would depend to be carbon intensive in order to feed and sustain the European markets. So there is a logic of trying to say, "Yeah, we're taking the leads because our consumers are asking for change and therefore we're going to try and take other countries with us." But if it is not accompanied in the design phase, in terms of policy packaging, by an understanding of the global economic metabolism of the interdependencies that work for the best and for the worst for different countries, then we will not have a healthy conversation about the future of alternative economic modeling, including de-growth. De-growth currently has a bias towards national types of economic fabrics. What we need to have is national fabric reorganization at national levels and in terms of how they impact sort of global economic exchange.

(01:14:58):

And that is the part that is currently missing, which I think is particularly prescient for now because let's be honest, if we were to say, if we were to sort of you focus or dial on the climate crisis and say, "Let's go towards de-growth." And you turn to President Macron or Chancellor Schultz with that, you will not get their attention for the simple reason that there is a war going on, and that any type of economic sort of destabilization, which may be used or poached by foreign influencers, which is already the case. We're talking about China and Russia, there is a lot of disinformation and misinformation going on, and a lot of support for far right and far left, sorry, parties in countries like France and others, Italy, for example.

(01:15:53):

If you try and convince leaders to say, "Let's go towards climate targets," without taking into account the fact that we are in a systems rivalry, we are in a very dangerous moment of history that requires a fully multi-dimensional thinking over what security is. Security in terms of climate adaptability, in terms of ecological integrity, in terms of socioeconomic welfare, in terms of educational literacy as we were talking about before, in terms of defense systems because they're not just inappropriate, they serve a purpose. Otherwise they wouldn't be in existence, they were not going to have a healthy conversation and we're going to have an ideological conversation. And I'll end on that.

(01:16:42):

The ideological segmentation and polarization is one weapon of war and of choice for the enemies of the European project, and ultimately, the enemies of climate delivery in terms of more solidarity and in terms of being able essentially to couple the future of democracy or open societies with climate adaptability knowing there... We could also spend an episode talking about this because I'd like to nuance also my own thinking about this, but there is definitely something which is very strong being used at the moment, ideologically, the use of ideology as a weapon.

Nate Hagens (01:17:28):

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I totally agree with that, I just sent a tweet out yesterday showing that the ChatGPT won't let you talk positively about fossil fuels. So there's ideology built into the AI, pro or negative, it's not the point. We have to look at facts and data, and describe what is, and then have mediators and educators craft a path forward. I have so many questions for you, I'm so glad that we did this because now I am going to have you back and have a deeper dive on this. I've got some personal questions that I close my interviews with that I'd like to ask you. But before that, something that I just thought of, last week, I was reading a book called Braiding Sweetgrass by a woman named Robin Wall Kimmerer. Have you read that book?

Olivia Lazard (01:18:26):

Not in depth, unfortunately, I've never sort of, yes. But I know of it and I admire her thinking-

Nate Hagens (01:18:33):

Given that you are-

Olivia Lazard (01:18:34):

She's really quite something.

Nate Hagens (01:18:37):

Yeah, I don't know her, I'd love to be introduced to her so I could interview her. But she, in the book, and because you're a linguist is why I'm bringing this up, she brings up that English is 70% nouns in contrast to some other cultures like, I think, the Potawatomi Indian tribe is 70% verbs. So one of her students asked a question, "Wait a second, doesn't this mean that speaking English, thinking in English somehow gives us permission to disrespect nature?" And that's kind of the heart of your philosophy as well. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Olivia Lazard (01:19:18):

It's fascinating. I mean, it would require me having a good thing about it, but the very first thing that it brings to mind is indeed objectification. And we know that we have a rapport towards nature, which is seeing nature as something, it's a resource, it's not life. Even the way in which we hear certain world leaders at COP15 or COP27, or the G7 or the G20. They say we are part of nature, this is wrong, we are nature.

(01:19:55):

And every person who has indeed ever been in contact with indigenous populations have had, I was incredibly lucky a number of years ago to go to Ecuador, and to, well, learn from indigenous communities something that profoundly impacted me and changed my understanding. I mean, it sounds very cliché to say it, but it was incredibly true, it did change the way in which I understand myself, my own nature, my own biology and the way in which I look, touch, sense nature around me. And it just helped me, I think, to a certain extent, I would even argue that it was the very beginning of this journey that I've been on, the sense of relationship and its dependency and inter-being. I think it was Thich

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Nhat Hanh as well, who sort of talks about this notion of inter-being that I profoundly relate to, so yeah.

Nate Hagens (01:20:58):

Yeah, you were the ninth of my guest that's mentioned that it. All makes me very sad because we take it for granted, like we're energy blind, we're also ecology blind and sacred. We will miss the creatures that we share this planet with after they're gone. And again, you don't know much about my work, but ultimately, that's what I care about the most. But that's why I think we have to bend, not break human systems to make sure we propel as many species, ecosystems, values, knowledge, things that are important through the coming difficult times. So a few closing questions for you, thank you so much for your time, Olivia. So you are a peacemaker, what are some pieces of advice that you have for listeners, watchers of this show to be a diplomat or a peacemaker in their own community in these kind of highly uncertain, tumultuous economic cultural times?

Olivia Lazard (01:22:03):

Take the time to cultivate your critical mind. Take the time to, especially in a world where we're flooded with information and where propaganda is rife, it really is about... For me, peace has always been associated with a necessary understanding of complexity, from an emotional perspective, from an intellectual perspective, and then from there, from a technical technological energy resource perspective and that kind of thing. But take the time to hone in on understanding the complexity and looking at it in a fairly dispassionate way, I would say. Doesn't mean, and again, I will end on this, I'm a very, I'm known, particularly in Brussels, apparently, for having a very passionate character, which in Brussels can be something which is a bit unwelcome, let's put it this way.

(01:23:17):

But I channel my passion towards rigor and trying to make sense of the world and trying to understand what trade offs we have to face, what costs we have to face in order to really craft the vision that we need to go towards. And it takes time and it takes humility, which I'm sure I could use a lot more of in myself at times. But it takes a lot of emotional maturity and intellectual sort of curiosity in order to sit back when we're sort of ruffled in our feathers, ideological ones and emotional ones. And yet we should, because there are some things that just need to be pondered. We're in living in very complex times, the way forward is not going to be easily drawn.

Nate Hagens (01:24:18):

A subset of that question then, do you have any specific recommendations for young humans listening to this program who are becoming aware of the economic environmental equity challenges that the world faces?

Olivia Lazard (01:24:37):

It's somewhat related. I fear a lot of, so whenever I give lectures to younger people entering the sort of job market, I often get this question, which is, "Do you still have hope?" And I've started to, for me, the word hope has lost a bit of its meaning, not because I don't believe in hope. That's not at all the case,

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but I believe best in hope when we can look at reality with equanimity, when we can look at the really catastrophic situations that we've created for ourselves, that we don't stop at them. And that's where interestingly, it sort of connects back to the very beginning of this conversation where I was talking about my family history.

(01:25:47):

I was raised on stories of a time where darkness was omnipresent and it felt very powerful. And I was so lucky, so incredibly lucky to be raised by people who were the descendant of people who had fought back against that notion of darkness, which was first and foremost, something where if you gave into it from an emotional perspective first, there was nothing left that you could do. And I think that this is a teaching that I certainly take for myself in which I'd say to young people, just don't fall into emotional binarity. Just, we're so complex, we're so resilient, we're so strong as humans, and it is about cultivating the right type of emotions, even in spite of what looks like a very bleak future. It's not about discarding it either. It's going to be tough, but it's life.

Nate Hagens (01:27:01):

I like that, I like that. Instead of hope, the little framework that you just offered. Last question, if you were benevolent dictator, and there was no personal recourse to your decision, what is one decision that you would do to improve human and planetary futures policy or whatever?

Olivia Lazard (01:27:26):

Something about figuring out our way, our framework or indicators towards regenerative economics, and channeling a huge proportion of world resources towards doing regeneration through food system transformation, through peace building and mediation in conflict affected zones, and through business practices without endangering indigenous lands and critical ecosystems that are still standing. That would be the overarching framework. I think that if we were to use our compass around, "What is regeneration?" which for me is interestingly now the same question as, "What is peace?" without wanting to sound too simplistic, right? But we would start asking the right questions, I think. Right, asking the right questions is already a good start, maybe we should start there.

Nate Hagens (01:28:43):

We're going to talk more, Olivia, thank you so much for being on this show, and to be continued, my friend.

Olivia Lazard (01:28:51):

Thank you so much, Nate. It was a pleasure. Looking forward to the next time.

Nate Hagens (01:28:55):

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