

Tiana ([00:00:03](#)):

I'm really excited about this guest. So I think I'm always excited about my guests, but I mean, I like people and I like awesome people, and this is an awesome person. So, Hey guest, who are you?

Athia ([00:00:23](#)):

Hi! Thank you so much for having me on here today. I'm super excited to do this with you. It's my first podcast ever. And I guess I should just say that I'm like, uh, a millennial phony, because I've never listened to a podcast in my life. So, you know, maybe this will rectify it, right? So, um, let me introduce myself. My name is Athia Choudhury, I guess this is how you do things, right, on a podcast? So, um, I am a writer, a poet, a cultural historian. I'm a Boba tea enthusiast, um, a dedicated plant mom, um, and a person who really writes and dreams about body liberation, Fat liberation and PIP love, um, in all of its myriad of forms. So I'm really excited to chit-chat a little bit with you today about that work. Yes.

Tiana ([00:01:33](#)):

Yes. I like this introduction that you've given, I'm just like, oh yes, it's so good. And it's also like such a millennial thing: "I'm a plant mom." I love it.

Athia ([00:01:46](#)):

I know. I know. I didn't realize how much I needed green space until I moved to a city where the space was so limited because I grew up in a Floridian suburb and it was always humid and lush and green. And my parents were so intentional about cultivating our backyard with, you know, these huge mango and papaya trees and just fruits from, you know, their homelands. And I got to LA for grad school and I was like, "oh my gosh, like everything's so concrete" [laughs]. You know, I've got a tiny apartment and the best way that I've felt sort of connected and with my fingers dirty again, is just to have like a ton of houseplants, a ton of like balcony plants, and it's just been a really joyful thing.

Tiana ([00:02:36](#)):

I love that. I really love that because like ... So, I grew up in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and -- excuse me -- and my mom comes from Guam. So like where she comes from, it's a tropical island, it's green, everywhere, and so we grew up with just plants all over the house. Um, and it was like, when I moved out of my house and I went to college, it was so weird to not have something green in my space. And, um, it took me years before I actually went and got a plant. And when I finally got a plant I was like, "this is home now."

Athia ([00:03:19](#)):

I totally feel you, it -- there's something so homey and cozy about it, um, yeah, and I remember like, just resenting my folks for making us basically like plow the land till the land in our backyard. It's like, ugh, "why are we always in the backyard, why we always like gardening, I hate this!" And now I'm in my thirties, and I'm like, "I just want to feel connected to some dirt and grass right now." [laughs]

Tiana ([00:03:48](#)):

Ah, yes. So...

Athia ([00:03:51](#)):

So yeah, it's very, very sort of like on-brand millennial plant mom, here.

Tiana ([00:03:57](#)):

Yeah. Oh yeah. But like, I love it. I love it because I feel like, like, this is where we're going. Right. We're trying to go back from the dry-ass on create lives that have been constructed for us. And like, I mean, I'm -- depending on how you qualify the 1980 children births, um, I'm either gen X or like a "geriatric millennial," which I resent, I resent this title. Um, like I'm not, I mean, no, not that I'm like afraid of aging or oldness or anything like that, but like, "Yo geriatric, like that's hardcore, I'm 41. Um, let me have some time before I'm geriatric," like, "My knees aren't good, but they still work like chill out." Um, so yeah, like, you know, it's, it's just a weird place to be because somehow my "generation" is like this pivot point, and, like, it's just this cascade going this other direction right now, which is just amazing. And so that kind of brings me to the place where, when I met you, I was like, "This? This conversation has to happen. This conversation has to happen." So do you remember how we met?

Athia ([00:05:26](#)):

Yes. Um, so, we met at a book launch party, a virtual book launch party, um, for the International Fat Studies Handbook. Um, and we were both, you know, in our little Zoom boxes. Um, me on-brand came on very late because I'm like, "My internet won't connect. Why?!" I'm so out-of-breath, sweaty to a Zoom meeting. Um, but we made it and, um, I heard your voice and I'm like, "She's got a podcast for sure. Like with that silky voice, and I want to hear more from her. " Um, so it was just like a really, I thought it was a really just joyful event, you know, such smart, um, funny, compassionate people were a part of it. I'm so glad that we got to connect and we got to like have a longer chat, um, you know, a couple of weeks ago and to set up this!

Tiana ([00:06:25](#)):

Oh, well, that's, that's like super flattering. Cause like, you know, that's really serendipitous that we were both like, "Who is this person? I need to know this person." Um, that's awesome. And, like, because I was nervous as hell. Like, I was so nervous and like I went second presenting my chapter and oh goodness, I wasn't ready. So I'm glad that I came across as like silky and like together.

Athia ([00:06:53](#)):

Definitely, definitely.

Tiana ([00:06:56](#)):

So, so the thing that turned me on so hard about like your whole situation was that you wrote a chapter for this, for this, um, handbook called Genealogies of Excess: Toward, uh, Towards a Decolonial Fat Studies. And I was like, okay, you said one of my favorite buzzwords, which is "de-colonial" and I'm like, tell me more. I need to know more because when you shared your little 3-minute, do you really do? I was like, oh, this isn't enough. This is not enough. I need to get all my fingers and all my toes into this work. And, um, unfortunately I, I didn't finish reading it, um, because it was so heavy and it was like, there was so much to chew on. Like you would say you would write something and I would read it and I would go, oh dude, what have I been doing with my life? And like, it was, it was really deep. So for the folks in the audience who have no idea what I'm talking about, what I'd like you to do, if you would, if you would love to grace us with that, could you read us like this first little vignette? That would be awesome. I'm

Athia ([00:08:12](#)):

Sure. You know, it's, it's so interesting because I wrote this piece like two years ago, the, the academic publishing process is so slow. Um, I mean the intention it's been a pleasure to also sort of right at the slow pace, especially when like, think pieces are constantly just sort of thrown out there. Like sometimes you need to digest. And so when you say that it's chewy, I'm like, I hoped that it's chewy because this is like synthesizing all a lot of, um, work that I had done. Um, sort of like building the context and the lit review for my qualifying exams and, you know, my, the, you know, the lit review for my dissertation. And so I'm like, um, you know, it's going to take some time to get through it. And even for me, I'm like, Ooh, that's, that's a lot. I went through a lot in this one article, but I'm like, oh, it took me like a year to write, no wonder,

Tiana ([00:09:07](#)):

I can see that I can, I can feel it when I was reading it. I was like, this was not a quick piece of anything

Athia ([00:09:18](#)):

Like the slow process of publishing versus like slow digestion of information and thinking, I think that really pushes us to sort of reach into different ways of sitting and being in our bodies. And that's essentially what this piece is about. So I started off, um, by titling it on finding the fat body. Um, and so like imagining what it means to sort of, um, be a body of found things, as opposed to this whole intact, um, being right that comes into fruition overnight. It's actually a cluster of many intimacies and relations, um, that bring us to where we are in any given moment. And so, um, I'll just go ahead and read the opening. Um, so I'm finding the fat body. I'm leading a discussion section for a course titled peoples and cultures of the Americas. The professor has assigned, you know, Diaz, his novel, the brief wondrous life of Oscar Wao.

Athia ([00:10:20](#)):

My students are usually, I'm usually hesitant, stumbling over their words. The protagonist Oscar is fat nerdy, ugly, unable to get with the ladies. His fatness is a central metaphor for the destructive recursive in generational legacies of colonial and sexual violence explored throughout the novel. Not one person has mentioned the word fat, big fluffy rotund obese. They skirt around fat at whatever cost their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouths, tight by civility, civility, and decorum. I can send some of my fat body in the classroom as instructor unsettles them. How can we talk about this obvious metaphor of dysfunctional and racialized spot in the novel when such a body and flesh and bone interrupts the classroom space, despite thinking through flesh and race throughout the course, we're now struggling to articulate how empire is viscerally embodied in the characters, the complex submerged renderings of fatness and race that pressed into the novel in our everyday lives.

Athia ([00:11:24](#)):

Tightly bind us shut Oscar, and my body are swallowed whole by the visual and visceral logics of fatness. And neither I nor our discussion can move forward and tie break, open and offer up a piece of myself. My body stiffens, I ask, can we talk about how fat and racial formation it? Can we talk about that and racial formation and landed newness? What do we think about fatness being named to represent the trauma of 400 years of conquest rape culture and state? I'm unsure of the thickness that hangs between us, if I've exposed too much of my own body and what is that stake and who, and what gets left over by internalizing fat as colonial loss and dysfunction against the backdrop of maternity? I feel vulnerable to the scrutiny. Finally, someone pipes up it's up. I cannot help, but erupt into laughter. Isn't it though.

Tiana ([00:12:19](#)):

Hmm. Mmm mmm mmm.

Tiana ([00:12:23](#)):

When I first read this, oh, I got goosebumps. But like when I first read this, I had goosebumps. Cause I was like this number one, it's really amazingly real written. And then number two, it names so many experiences. I have had trying to teach something about fatness to people who clearly don't have a fat politic and it's sort of painful to know that you are literally the elephant in the room. I just, I love, I love so much about this. It loves so much about this and it was just, that was such a pleasure to actually hear you read it.

Athia ([00:13:14](#)):

Thank you. Aw, thank you. That's so sweet. Um, yeah, to that feeling right. And what I, what I worked through the piece, this piece in particular, um, is, uh, is that stiffening, right? That moment of expository pause, um, that you feel right when you're uncomfortably grazing against what you know about your own body, what do you know about your sense of self versus the projections that are placed on you? And so what happens in that moment, right? You're having this sort of bodily visceral reaction. Um, and I talk about this, you know, in the sort of like post-colonial decolonial context and we do a bunch of academic data does, um, but really what it, what it's about is like how do we tune into those vibrations and those frequencies when we can sort of sense, right? Since something is off or sense something is happening in this moment.

Athia ([00:14:09](#)):

Um, and what it requires is a sort of like to do this work, right? If we're really going to talk about fat liberation, if we're going to talk about body liberation and body sovereignty is to really break open, um, and make bare what happens to us, um, when we are grazing against the sort of colonial vocabulary around the thinness and able-bodied newness and, um, able mindedness, um, and be vulnerable and honest with people so that they can begin to be vulnerable and honest with themselves. And that's so much of how I imagine my teaching in the classroom, um, as a healing practice, because, you know, I, I brought this kind of work into these spaces and it takes a lot of patience and guidance and care, um, with the recognition that we all have these tumultuous relationships to our body and to food and eating, um, and being in our bodies in relation to each other, um, that in order to sort of fix this, we have to be there for one another, um, in ways that feel true. That's hard, there's always a lot of tears, you know? Um, but those are welcomed.

Tiana ([00:15:26](#)):

Absolutely. Absolutely. It's interesting that you say that it's hard, you know, to, to be there for one another and to hold one another in this complexity and this work, because I agree it is hard and it shouldn't be, it shouldn't be, and that's like the frustrating part that that's like, where I see my frustration. Like, it should be so easy for us to hold each other. It, because it should be, that's programmed into us, you know, like it's hard wired. It's part of our inherent knowing and understanding and being as, as animals, you know, but then it's programmed out of it

Athia ([00:16:18](#)):

As someone who studies the sort of like history of eugenics and, you know, these, these sort of core debates about human nature. It always comes up that like human, you know, it's part of human nature

to be aggressive or, um, you know, competitive, but it's actually like, what about the cooperative nature of human beings, the need for community and for caring for one another and like, you know, the sort of like impetus, um, to hold each other, right? Like not only in the sort of psychic and psychological way, but like physically, we want to hold each other. Like we want to touch one another. We want to be with one another. The pandemic has really brought that forth. And, you know, I think that's part of what my work is trying to understand. It's like the fact that it's hard, it's, you know, I don't say that, um, things were set up in such a way that it went into a domino effect by some overlord who just wants us to hate our bodies, you know, um, the system, right.

Athia ([00:17:20](#)):

The system, it it's it's, um, it's premeditated and yet not right. There's so much space for a mutation in, um, how we come to know the things we know about diet and, um, food and eating and the body. Um, and just sort of, so what I'm, what I'm trying to say is that there's, there's a word which it's hard. It has to be hard, um, because our senses have sort been trained for so long. It's not just the, you know, our logical side of our brains that are trained to calorie count or diet, or to feel disgust and revulsion. When we see, um, sick, disabled, fat people, because they remind us of death and dying, um, and all the things that happen when our bodies fail us, um, which is a whole other bag to unpack in terms of vitality, you know, and, and what we consider a good life.

Athia ([00:18:23](#)):

Um, but you know, it's, it's hard because our senses have been sort of rehearsed in, or we've, we've rehearsed a certain, um, sensing towards, um, these different kinds of body types. Right. Um, it's been upheld at every single opportunity, every single corner, not only from the sort of institutional, um, systemic things, but in our interpersonal relationships as well. Um, because that's really where the policing is fundamentally happening for us. I mean, I oftentimes people, um, when was the first time you learned about the calorie, um, who did you learn about it from? Was it a health practitioner and educator? Was it your parents, um, you know, your guardians, your kin, other children, um, what did you learn about it? How did it make you feel? Um, and can you think about how you continue to practice a certain relationship to the calorie and food and eating, and regardless of if this person is fat or not, um, there's a story of trauma of hair.

Athia ([00:19:33](#)):

You know, there was a story of, um, you know, a lot of pain and shame and regret, um, that I think is just such a mundane occurrence. And it really warrants for us to excavate it. Like, why, why did this happen? So like, when I say I'm a cultural historian, I'm really, you know, for one of the pieces, I'm, I just, um, wrote, um, really thinking about like, well, what is the condition? What are the conditions in which we came to understand? The calorie is a logical measurement of, you know, um, you know, energy output and, um, but then also like individual choice, responsibility and citizenship.

Tiana ([00:20:21](#)):

Listen, you didn't, you didn't, you, you went where you needed to go. And I'm right here with you. You asked this question, you know, like, you know, how did you first learn about the Calgary? And I dropped I'm like, I don't know, actually, you know, I'm, I'm asking myself, when did you first? And I got a mental picture of like the kitchen in the house that I grew up in and a box of Snackwell's cookies, those garbage, disgusting things. Because I don't, I mean, I don't know these, these are interesting conversations, very, because I actually have like large blanks in my memory from childhood. I have like very strong memories

and then I have like nothing and then very strong memory. And, and I'm just like, the more that I learned about trauma, the more I'm like, yeah, that's what that is. That's what that is.

Athia ([00:21:32](#)):

People remember their childhoods, like, oh, that's

Athia ([00:21:35](#)):

Cool. That's really adorable

Athia ([00:21:38](#)):

For you. I love that for you.

Tiana ([00:21:40](#)):

Yeah. And just like, some of you remember all the things like spots, you know, entire blank spots and tire, and, and it's like, you know, this is dissociation. This is, this is like, like mental separation from what's going on because it is safer to be in another place mentally than it is to be in your body with what is happening at the moment. And it's like, oh, goodness gracious. You know? Cause you also said people are relaying their stories to you about how they learned about the calorie and there's trauma there, but you also said it's mundane. And this is something that is so frustrating when I start asking people about their fat stories. And when I ask about a fat story, what I mean is that like every fat body, all of your fat, it has a story. There's a story there. And that's not like, how did you get fat? It's what was your experience of life? Because you were fat and like the stories are so familiar. They're always so familiar. Every person I've asked that question of has their own unique story naturally, but they're all so familiar and I'm like, this is wrong. It's wrong that we are all having so similar experiences of trauma. [inaudible],

Athia ([00:23:15](#)):

I mean, it's intense, it's really intense. And I think back often, um, to when I started doing this work, and even before I started doing this work and inhabited a fat body for most of my life, I've always been like a chunky kid and like a fat, um, teen and now a fat adult. Um, and my experiences have really, or just like my embodiment folks will just kind of be open about how they feel about their bodies with me, which I think is a really interesting thing because it's like something about a fat fem of color is giving them permission to interrogate their own relationship to their bodies. Um, and maybe not in a super critical way, but to even articulate it, I think is, um, is something right? I think it's, it's like a powerful thing. Um, and I noticed that, you know, um, especially other women of color, um, would talk to me about, you know, um, the sense of criminality that they felt, you know, like when they were eating in public, like a sense of shame about eating in public and how they felt uncomfortable or unable to do it, um, or, you know, they'll track in their heads, um, in this more innocuous in slash insidious way.

Athia ([00:24:42](#)):

Like I ate these good foods or these good or bad foods today and I'll have to make up for it later. Um, and just sort of like articulating, um, this sort of like relationship to food and eating and their bodies that I found that I found like really disheartening and heavy and painful. Um, and so much of the work that I try to do as an academic and as an educator is to allow people, a pathway to talk about this in meaningful ways so that they might, you know, be able to have a different kind of relationship, um, to these things like ask, well, why is it that you feel a sense of, um, criminal behavior when you're snacking

on something you're not supposed to wear when you're eating in the public eye? Um, when did that begin for you and why did it begin for you?

Athia ([00:25:36](#)):

Um, and also to recognize that, like, that's not a personal failing, it's not an individual thing that's happened. Like there's actually a, a sort of like, um, historical sense in which we've come to understand this. Like I was reading, um, I'm working on this chapter right now and in my discs about, um, sort of like vernacular is the fat. And one of the things I'm trying to think about is the carceral logics that appear when women eat. Right. Um, when did this, how did it happen? Um, and part of this, you know, Cesar Lombroso has this really famous penal text called the criminal woman. And it's, it's one of these sort of like, um, in, in the field of parcels studies in the field of, um, you know, uh, penal reform studies, like it's one of the sort of quintessential texts, criminal woman and the criminal man.

Athia ([00:26:30](#)):

And he talks about how the criminal woman or the prostitute, um, has these excessive rolls of fat, right. She's always sort of like, um, fat and stout and darker skinned. And so there's this history there, right? This keep this, um, this feeling that is perpetuated, um, on a sort of like larger scale. Um, and we all internalize that right for centuries. It's something that our bodies capture and hold on to and learn to sense about ourselves. So like when we say that, so when I hear people say that, like, I feel uncomfortable eating while other people are looking or eating in public, it really flags for me like, oh, this is a sense of criminality around eating that women have internalized for centuries. Like there's a reason for it, you know?

Speaker 3 ([00:27:24](#)):

Mmm Hmm. Mmm

Tiana ([00:27:28](#)):

Hmm. Wow. What I love is how you're putting language to things that, that I, myself teach, but have also experienced, um, because I had, for years, I had this, this narrative where it's like, if I'm eating in public, I can not be alone because a fat person eating alone, fat fat woman eating alone is sad. Like that was the story that I had. And so what I would do is I would order food and I would go eat in my car and it's just like, okay, look, what is Saturday someone sitting in a restaurant comfortably consuming their meal, or somebody sitting in their car, uncomfortably consuming their meal. And like, it's just terrible that I was doing this to myself, but I was also doing this to myself because like you said, there's this criminality and this carceral around this whole idea, this discourse around women and eating and like, you know, I'm, I'm bred as feminine and definitely like, oh, we're gonna see, you know, I know that people are judging the fact that I am fat and I am eating, how dare I do that in this body?

Athia ([00:28:54](#)):

Exactly. Um, Amy Ferrell's fat shame has a great chapter on, on this and she does a reading of Caesar limbo. So that's really great as well. Um, but yeah, there's, it's not like it's something that you ever grow out of. Um, or I don't know. I haven't gotten to that point in my life where I've, you know, somehow ascended. Um, I just, the other day I was picking up, um, dinner for me and my partner and, you know, it, it was two servings of food and I went to go pick it up and I was like, oh my God, are they going to think that I'm the one eating this two servings of food? Um, and I was like, wait, why am I even worried about this? You know, um, why am I even worried? Like why would they make the assumption that I'm

eating this alone and all of this on my own. And even if I were what's the big deal, um, and again, it's, it's that uncomfortable grazing right? Between what you know about yourself versus the assumptions, um, that people have. Um, and I think for so long, I used to believe that it was all in my head. Right. Um, because like, Ooh, goodness and white supremacy will try to Gaslight you all day long

Tiana ([00:30:10](#)):

About it.

Athia ([00:30:12](#)):

It's that, um, that pseudo, um, like gentle feminism, that's like, oh, you're not fat. You're beautiful. You know, that kind of thing. Um, and that's like a gaslighting tool because I'm like, I know, you know, I'm bad. Just be honest to yourself. And to me, I know you have these thoughts about like, should she be eating, should she be doing these things? Um, and so like part, part of what drives me, you know, um, to these like sites of paranoia is like, no, one's being honest and upfront about these things. So they don't surface in ways that we can actually have the necessary confrontation to like move forward in more productive ways. Right. It's that, that disability and decorum that, um, really stops us from having transformative spaces know, having transformative compensation. Just be honest.

Tiana ([00:31:13](#)):

I, you know, it's, it's interesting because like I wonder, I wonder about this. Um, and I am not a scholar, so I will put that out here first. But what I know is that there's a lot of conversation about nice, you know, be nice and it's not nice to be honest because honest isn't nice. And, and like, I I've started to parse out the difference between when people are saying nice, but meaning, meaning kind

Athia ([00:31:57](#)):

Exactly. And

Tiana ([00:31:58](#)):

When they're saying nice and they're meaning acceptable.

Athia ([00:32:02](#)):

Exactly. You know, and honestly, that's part of what I was trying to get at with, um, the beginning of this, this chapter that I just read. It's like my students, weren't saying fat because they were trying to be nice. Um, you know, and there's a difference between niceness and kindness, like kindness means standing in your own truth. It means like, um, being vulnerable and having space for people to be vulnerable as well, without fear that you'll be cool without fear that, um, you know, you'll, you know, we make mistakes, but you won't purposefully try to be. Um, and, and so, you know, there's, there's this fear that like, oh, if people are honest and you're just going to get a bunch of tools where like, you're fat, we hate you die. Um, but even those poles I want to just be like, okay, but why are you feeling that way?

Athia ([00:32:58](#)):

Where is this anger coming from? Like, why are you having this feeling, this reaction to us existing to us, trying to talk honestly about our experiences of what it feels like to be in these kinds of bodies and even more so to offer you the opportunity to think deeply about this so that you might, he, oh, you know, like even, even the fat phobic tools were just like, we hate fat people. It's like, okay, the, why do you hate fat



people? There's, there's a reason. So say it right. What did fat people do to you? Yeah. And so much it's that, that like, oh, it's disgusting. Um, but what do you mean by discuss what is, what is discussed, bringing up for you? Um, how do we catalog and index discuss as, you know, another term for, you know, racial right. Or gendered or class, right. Like, that's, that's a part of it. Um, what are, what are the feelings, the sensations, how are they attached to a longer history? Um, and that's, you know, that's, that's the work for me

Tiana ([00:34:19](#)):

That's right. Like, so this is something that I think is really interesting because, um, who doesn't love a fat baby, right? Like, I mean, who doesn't love a fat baby, like fat rolls and chunky chunk and squishy and soft, um, all them cheeks, the dimples and things like, we love that, but there is a point where that's not okay anymore. You know, there is an age where that's not okay anymore. And this is interesting because you mentioned, um, in your opening, you know, where fatness is being made to represent the trauma of 400 years of conquest rape culture and state violence. Because I think it was Sonalee Rashwatar who, or Rashatwar who brought that kind of connection for me, because I had never really made that connection before, but like, it's sort of hovers, like you're cute and fat when you're a child, but when you're no longer perceived as a child now, fatness is no longer cute because in our sort of rapey cultures, we sexualize people who are no longer children and no longer children, not because they are, you know, of age and like actually adults, but because we have decided that they are no longer children and there's research out there that shows that you're a child much longer, if you're white and the darker your skin is the less long you are perceived as a child.

Tiana ([00:36:16](#)):

So you were talking a bit about that.

Tiana ([00:36:19](#)):

Not that specifically. Yeah.

Athia ([00:36:22](#)):

Um, I'm super interested in the way that you sort of narrated that. Um, but yeah. Oh, there's so much there. Um, but in particular, what it's talking about in, in a novel, especially because, uh, you know, DIA's, whatever, he's, he's got his, he's dealing with this stuff, you know, like, but also, you know, ideas is, has fallen from grace in terms of the literary circle. But, um, yeah, because of there, there's just been like a bunch of, you know, moments in which women have come forward about his inappropriate behaviors and things like that. So I felt uncomfortable writing about him, um, during that me too moment or during the me too moment when, um, you know, so much was coming into a reckoning and I just found it fascinating that he had, and he wrote an interview, um, about this book that Oscar was fat specifically because his body is supposed to represent, um, the rape of the land, the rape of his mother, the rape of, um, you know, lemme Lynchian right, the original, um, indigenous woman who, um, was a part of, you know, court was Cortez's, um, translator and slash mistress and gave birth to quote unquote, the first mulatto.

Athia ([00:37:49](#)):

Right. Um, and we'll often call her lemon. Malinchak has this pejorative, right? Is this this woman who the, right? The woman who betrayed her people, her land, um, to be one with the colonizer. And I think there's a, certainly a resurgence and decolonial feminist thought where people are rethinking, um, who

Melinda is and what she represents. But anyway, so for you unit Diaz, like Oscar being fat is supposed to represent, um, these centuries and centuries of unresolved colonial trauma. And so I really think about like, when you move from being a fat child into a fat adult, there's something that's marked on your body as being dysfunctional, right? Like you haven't properly gone through the cycles or the phases of the human body or the human psyche, um, in order to sort of rid yourself of, um, you know, this, this horrible for that, um, of the baby fat, right.

Athia ([00:38:55](#)):

The baby fat. And they're supposed to be this moment where you've arrived, right. You've shed the fat you've arrived. You've arrived at your life. You've arrived at your body. You're now desirable. You're now a proper citizen. We're now someone who can properly function in society. And I oftentimes wonder, well, okay, so how did we come to this narrative? Right. That the body, um, has to change from one form into the other. Um, but then like, why is it so linear, right. First place? Why do we not think about bodies is constantly changing, um, in their appearance, in their cities, like from day to day, you know, from day to day. Um, and how might that change, um, how we perceive what is, you know, seen as desirable or not desirable. Um, but yeah, there's, there's something super interesting about that, that moment between, um, the fat child, you know, who's seen as a delight and the fact, um, teenager who's seen as, um, you know, almost, it's always like, oh, you're depressed, you're traumatized.

Athia ([00:40:08](#)):

Something has happened to encase you in this, you know, Roxane Gay's, um, I don't know if you read her, uh, memoir hunger. Um, yeah, that was intense. I, it took two years to finish it because I just kept having to stop, but there's something so fascinating about narrating, um, you know, this, this sexual assault as being a catalyst for hiding her body and, you know, um, explaining, right. There's, there's this, there's this desire that we seem to constantly have to explain how we became fat. We need a reason for it. Um, and I think that's so, that's so interesting and compelling and painful, but also there's, there's something that I questioned about that, right? Like why do we have to name how it came to be, right. Because the whole point of that is just naming it so that we could stop it ever from happening again, or to reverse its course. Um, and I don't think that's necessarily what we should strive for.

Tiana ([00:41:15](#)):

I agree. I agree. I mean, years ago when I had, when I was still in my dieting journey, searching for that thin woman within, um, all the heavy dose of air quotes there. But, um, I, I met a health coach and, um, the thing that convinced me to work with her was that she made the connection that I had started getting fat because I was unseen as a child. And by making myself fat, I was basically trying to be seen. And I, at that time was like, yes, that's it, that's it. That makes so much sense, you know, the timing, the things that were going on in my life. Absolutely. And, you know, cause I, I basically, I've always been big. Like I've always been bigger than other children, but I wasn't really, like, I didn't tip over into like fat fat until I was about eight years old.

Tiana ([00:42:26](#)):

And in actuality, I don't think that's completely true. I think I had already been chunky before then, you know, but it was at eight where it became a problem and it became a problem because my stepfather noticed that I needed to wear a bra. And that's when I viscerally remember being, having my body being commented on by my stepfather prior to that, I have no recollection of that, but that was the turning point for that experience. And so I really felt like, yes, this health coach has made this connection for

me. That is the answer. Now we just have to fix that, you know? And I was, I was a firm believer in that for so long. Um, and it's interesting because, you know, Virgie Tovar actually had a really negative reaction to Roxane Gay's hunger, where she was basically saying that, you know, my fat body is not a trauma body, you know? Um, because a lot of people took Roxane Gay's hunger as like, like this explains it, this is why all y'all are fat. You're all fat because of Jeroma. And it's like, some of us are, and some of us are just fat. Exactly,

Athia ([00:43:47](#)):

Exactly. And I think that's why we need more stories. Right. Um, because people are so quick to take a person's, especially a minoritized person's, um, experience and to extrapolate that as being the entire story for everyone. Um, and it's like, it's what happens when you're a mind nor Ty subject, you become the sort of cultural ambassador of your people. Well, because you're not a purse because you're not a person. Right. You become, you're a myth, you know, you're, you're not fully fleshed out. And like I said, like that, that, that memoir was true to is true to her. Right. Um, and that's why we need more writers. We need more stories. We need to elevate, um, fat people's crafts. I, I think about this often, like when I was in organizing spaces in, um, Orlando, I was around fat people all the time, you know, fat people were doing the work on the streets, you know, like if you think about like, especially fat black women, like they're on the front lines constantly trying to save our lives.

Athia ([00:44:57](#)):

Um, and I don't deserve it, but they're trying, you know, and the thing is like, when I came to academia, um, I noticed that like, I'd literally be any fat person here in any given like seminar or a talk or, and it's very hard to, to sort of reconcile, like who's doing the work on the ground versus like who's writing these stories and in academia. Um, and so it was just a very sort of like interesting experience when I'm very much about like let's support fat artists. Like let's more fat workers like, um, because we are doing, we are here, like we're here and where we're doing the work and like let's elevate the craft, you know, let's like, they don't have infrastructure for us. Of course they don't, let's build it ourselves. We need to build it for each other.

Tiana ([00:45:51](#)):

Yes. Yeah. I love that. I love that because, because you know, it calls back to what we were talking about earlier about how we are inherently communal, you know, and, and it, it's also talking about something that I find very, to be very, very true. Like, um, I learned this through my own experience, my own journey toward body, you know, toward body liberation is that like, when I started being able to make space for myself, like have actual compassion for what and who I am, I was able to like, extend that outward to any, and everybody, like, it was, it just became so simple, like simple, simple, it was so simple. It was just like, yeah, yeah, you're right. I do have a bias against like disabled people. Let's talk about that. Let me, let me, you know, figure out how I can make space for them.

Tiana ([00:46:52](#)):

Because, because like making space for them makes more space for me. Like this is wonderful. Let's do that. Trans people, I didn't know, trans people existed before this period of time. Okay. Great. Trans people exist. That's great. Let's, let's just make space for them. Next space, big party, all of us, because we're here, like it's a human race as an amazing, just colorful and diverse, just fantastic species, you know? And it's like, we have these artificial systems creating these boxes that say, this is good, and this is not good. And it's like, no, it's all good. It's all so good. And it's amazing that it can happen.

Athia ([00:47:45](#)):

Yes. You know, coalitional spaces, so, so important. Right. Um, and just sort of fattening the horizon, making it more abundant. Like, I, I don't believe in this fantasy of austerity. Right. Like we're under these sort of like capitalist models of, you know, there's a scarcity, there's a lack. And it's like, actually, like, what would it mean to broach, um, our politics through abundance, right? Like there's enough. There can be enough. Like, let's make sure there's enough for everyone as opposed to like, fighting for the same slice of, uh, you know, the same pie, you know, like I don't want to on, you know, me something else. Um, and so, you know, when I, when I think about like coalitional politics, making space for other people, um, kindness is also in boundaries, right. In establishing, um, your boundaries and allowing people to have their own boundaries and respecting, respecting those things.

Athia ([00:48:47](#)):

Um, they're not mutually exclusive. Like we can be in this together, um, to do the difficult work together. And I, I think about, um, oftentimes, especially with what it means to like fight for justice or liberation, it means to really examine our internalized, um, suppressed feelings and present mint and rage and anger. And I think this happens for a lot of young folks and I mean, young folks and like the movement, you know, I mean, young folks in terms of like people for the first time encountering this language, um, around racism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, um, fatphobia all, um, classism, you get angry. Like I, me, you know, in my 1819 and my, um, classes and learning about injustices for the first time and you just get so angry. Um, and you're like, why did I not learn about this before? But why didn't everybody else?

Athia ([00:49:55](#)):

Like, why doesn't anybody else care? Like, there's, there's the sense of rage that horses through you? Um, and it's rage and righteous anger in a lot of ways, but I don't think that people, um, get oftentimes are able to sort of like get to this point of, um, uh, qualified rage, you know, where you're like, okay. So I needed to go through this phase of anger. It's weird. Like, you know, that we're, call-out co culture kind of, um, that's really, you know, really sticky, um, because people are angry I think rightfully so. And they don't have a way to channel that anger into a more productive sense of like, okay, so how do I work on things in myself and versus how do I work on things in the public sphere? Um, because both of those things need to happen at the same time. Um, and they, they rarely do.

Athia ([00:50:53](#)):

Right. And it's, it's why you have, um, you know, this impossibility in like the unbearable whiteness in, you know, fat spaces or, you know, um, trans exclusionary feminism, like this is all coming from, from the sort of like under-development of rage. I think we need to like really sit with anger as a feeling, um, and to explore it, um, and to interrogate like, again, like where does it come from? Why are you feeling it? Um, and like, okay, how do we move forward and, and have confrontations we need to have so that we can get somewhere. Absolutely.

Tiana ([00:51:33](#)):

Absolutely. I mean, I really believe that like, one of the reasons why we don't get further is because we are not taught critical skills, like conflict resolution, oh, a hundred percent. We're not taught, we're not taught critical skills. Like, um, you know, how to feel your feelings in a way that is not destructive, you know, it's, it's just like, these are, these are basic and everybody

Athia (00:52:06):

Has a different story for that. Oh, sorry. Yeah.

Tiana (00:52:13):

Crap. Yeah.

Athia (00:52:16):

No, everybody has a different story for that. And that's what I find so fascinating. Right. Because, um, people, you know, it's a universal thing of like, we're not taught these critical skills and how to feel our feelings, but for me, like I grew up in an, um, Asian immigrant multiethnic home, um, you know, a working class home and for children in this home, like you're supposed to be quiet. Right. Like you you're, you know, um, you're supposed to sort of like suppress your feelings because your parents are suppressing their feelings because like, they're, you know, there's this whole history of migration and displacement and militarism and like intergenerational

Tiana (00:52:59):

Trauma

Athia (00:53:01):

Comma, can't talk about like, as a child. And so you internalize it and you stuff it down and you're not allowed to sort of, you know, um, say why, well, you're not, even for me, at least I wasn't someone cognizant of like having a feeling as an adult and like overwhelmed because I think I'm having a feeling, you know? And so I think that's the reason why so much of my work is about feelings affect, you know, um, precisely because there's something about that entanglement about the temping down, uh, feelings that erupt in these really, um, violent ways for so many of us, um, that can actually be traced to that legacy of colonialism and imperialism and nationalism and, um, you know, diaspora like migration, like so much of it, um, is a part of that story for me, you know? And, um, when I was, uh, introducing myself, um, at the panel that we were, you know, a part of, I talked about how, um, for me, the work really began because like, my life has been sort of scaffolded between these twin balances of the war on terror and the Warren obesity. But these two things never spoken of at the same time, like these forms of securitization, I've never spoken of at the same time. And I'm like, why not? They function in primarily the same way. Um, and they also have these sort of intersecting legacies. So like, let's talk about them, right? Like slips talk about their function in policing, um, the terror of fat and the terrorist body. Right. Um, both of these things kind of, you know, have encompassed my life in such profound ways.

Tiana (00:54:56):

Hm Hmm. Yeah. So

Athia (00:55:00):

It's always about something thicker than just individual drama history. It's like, it's the collective. And that's why I think that even folks who don't name themselves as having an eating disorder or disordered relationship to food, it's like maybe look a little closer, maybe think about it a little more. Um, and you'll remember certain experiences in your life that you could actually, you know, connect and link to, um, these bigger stories, these bigger narratives.

Tiana ([00:55:33](#)):

Yeah. I mean, and that that's calling to this idea that we need more stories because I think the great majority of people who go, I don't have an easy answer. I guess I I've said this myself. I don't have an eating disorder. I've never had an eating disorder. Um, and in reality, why have I never had an eating disorder really? Because I've never had a diagnosis, I've never had access to the system that would have diagnosed me. Number one. And then number two, there's a narrative around what an eating disorder looks like. And I've never experienced that because I live in a fat body, you know, I, I didn't, I didn't have that experience that you see and like, you know, the afterschool special where like, you know, everybody knows there's something wrong with Laura because she's, skeletally thin and all she does is run, you know?

Tiana ([00:56:31](#)):

Um, and it's like, well, I didn't have that experience because my body, my life looks very different. And so maybe I have had an eating disorder. I do know for sure that my eating has been disordered. My relationship to food has been disordered. And these are things that I'm working still working after eight years of, you know, being on this journey, I'm still working on untangling and like figuring out my relationship to food. Um, and then I had a kid who, who, who, who that takes you right back to the beginning, you know? So it's, um, it's just like, when you talk about de colonialization of fat studies, like D colonialization of this whole discourse, this I feel is what you mean. Like, let's tell all the stories, not just the stories that are centering the white Eurocentric situation. Like let's tell all the stories.

Athia ([00:57:44](#)):

Exactly. It's, it's about proliferating from the peripheries, right. Um, to really just like saturate, I want to hear all the stories. I want all of us to be able to tell our own stories. And, you know, when you're, when you're talking about, um, disordered eating or eating disorders, as they appear on the fat body, like I realized that so much of my dieting throughout my childhood adolescence and adulthood, it was praised, right. Like as being health. Um, even though, um, being on a 500 calorie diet, um, is literally a starvation tire. It lead to potential organ failure, but we're like, cool person, good for you. You need to be. And so I think a lot of folks are hesitant to even openly talk about the fact that they have a dis eating disorder or disordered relationship to food, because it's already assumed, right. Again, it's that story.

Athia ([00:58:45](#)):

That's already pathologizing you from the very beginning. Um, and it's like, I've had such a tumultuous, unhealthy relationship to food and eating. Um, since I was a child, I used to remember, um, uh, very viscerally, like when we would go over to friend's houses or relatives houses, I wouldn't eat at all because I knew that as soon as I ate something, someone was going to comment like, oh, you're eating. It's like, yeah. It's like lunchtime. Everybody's eating. Um, can I live? No, I can't as a child. No. Um, and so like, those things become internalize and then you learn to like sneak food and eat like, um, for me, I was like, oh, I'm gonna eat, um, in my room. And I'm getting like all over much until I get full, because I know I can't eat in front of other people without them saying things.

Athia ([00:59:41](#)):

So like, these are not healthy habits. These are not like, quote unquote healthy habits, but they're practices that you do in order to cope with the world around you. And like, even talking about having unhealthy habits, people are like a dove course. You do, but I'm like, so do you, so do you, in your thin fit muscular body, so do you, so like maybe we can ease up on each other and to meet again, talk honestly

about it. Um, so that we can have a different relationship to one another to our eating and food and like maybe move towards a liberatory future for assault. I don't know, whatever. We'll see what happens.

Tiana ([01:00:25](#)):

Oh my God. It's super casual about it. I love it. I love it. I think that's a good note for us to stop because we're going to go on, we're just going to keep going on. This is so deep and it touches all the things and we might have to have another part of this conversation because this has been good. Thank you so much for, for being here today with me. It's here because delicious.

Athia ([01:00:52](#)):

Thank you so much for having me. Oh,

Tiana ([01:00:55](#)):

And I have one final question for you. I almost forgot. Yeah. So can you tell me how you are living your best fat life?

Athia ([01:01:06](#)):

Oh, I'm living my best fat life by like, um, going on lush picnics under giant eucalyptus trees and Elysian park. Um, having really nice home cooked meals, which I'm almost sick of because I'm really hating washing dishes. And like, I want my deck rolls, but like, dishes at this point. Um, I'm living my fat life by, oh, really getting into body lotions. Um, there's something about, I, for some reason my entire life I'm like, oh, I just need to lotion my face. Right. I'm like, no, no, you got to lotion your whole body. And so I've just started like really, um, trying out all these body butters and lotions and things. And I'm like just being able to touch, um, my own fat and in these ways and to like rub oils and it feels super, um, just relaxing and central and just like amazing. Um, and yeah, I'm reading a lot, um, outside of school, which is great pleasure reading because I've got a library card and I'm an E reader and I'm like, oh, I'm a reader again. How cute let's, I'm living my best flat light decadent meals, body lotion, and reading.

Tiana ([01:02:27](#)):

Okay. I want to live your best life because that just sounds fantastic. Oh my goodness. Good. God. Thank you so much for being here. This has been a pleasure.

Athia ([01:02:37](#)):

Thank you for having me. Excellent.