

## Text Transcript of “Off the Shelf” Podcast Episode 5 with Ken Salo

**Augustus Wood:** Welcome back to another episode of "Off the Shelf: Revolutionary Readings in Times of Crises." I am Augustus Wood, and I'm excited about this episode because I'm getting to bring to you all one of the premier thinkers on the issue of the anti-racism, anti-colonial question. And we're here now with one of the professors who has one of the best arguments and world experiences in dealing with these issues. And so I'm here with Ken Salo, Professor in Urban and Regional Planning, and I'll get more to him in a second, so just knowing that we're going to have a dynamite episode today. But I want to first remind listeners that "Off the Shelf" is sponsored by the Humanities Research Institute at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. And we are glad to bring you this podcast that talks about the more under-seen and under-appreciated readings, scholars, writings, et cetera, that speak directly to the crises that we're facing today in 2021. And we talk to prominent Black intellectuals and Black activists, etc., who have ideas about ways in which we can learn from what's happening now and questions that we can build upon to determine new intervention strategies to fix these problems. And that's what we're all about here at "Off the Shelf," is guiding the movement, guiding the building of intellectual curiosity, back into how we deal with social problems.

So, let me of course again welcome the great professor, Dr. Ken Salo, who is, like I said, he's faculty in the Urban and Regional Planning Department here at the University of Illinois. He is a dear colleague and friend of mine that I've worked with over many years and in different projects and organizations. He's teaching courses on racism and issues within the city. And so we're going to get a lot of this now, so thank you for joining us, uh, Professor Salo.

**Ken Salo:** Gus, thanks for the opportunity again to break bread. As you said, we are living in a very dangerous moment.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Ken Salo:** And yeah, it's, the blessing is having brothers like you and fellow travelers over the years to share ideas. Because I think, as you know, we, we formulate and our ideas are created through these sorts of dialogues. So yeah, as I understand, the request was to share with you what I've been thinking about and what I've been reaching back to in this time of crisis, right? Is that correct?

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly. Because again, we often see, and we've talked about this in the past, in that one of the biggest, like I said, criticisms of the current moments in relation to the antiracist push, the protest moments in the past summer with George Floyd, going back to 2015, 2014, in relation to Ferguson, is that there was a, there was a missing element of intellectual curiosity and rigor amongst a lot of the people and actually understanding, analyzing, and creating an actual framework for how we're going to address it and also fight it in a legitimate way. And so I love the fact that you said that that you were reaching back in this, in this moment, because that's what we want our listeners to do.

So talk to us about when this started, particularly when the pandemic and, I mean, it was really kind of a, a tri-headed monster when it happened, because you had the war war happening, you had the trade war happening, then you had the pandemic, then you have the white supremacist violence, you had all these things. We're in a possible second Great Depression. And so, and not just in the United States, but worldwide.

So, talk to us, when it first started last summer, what kind of things were you reaching back to, what were your thoughts, etc., and how was that, how have you moved since then in the anniversary of the pandemic?

**Ken Salo:** Yeah, so yeah, thanks again for the opportunity. So, let me just say two things. You know, at our age and the sense of vulnerability, I'm very alert that this conversation is intended to be intergenerational. That's the first part. [LAUGHS]

So the idea of reaching back is also of course to look forward and to share whatever we can from our own experiences. But I think you're absolutely right, as we've been taught, is to, let's start with the lived experiences, you know, at each, at each moment and then see what are the lessons that we've learned or whose shoulders we stand on. So yeah, we are living in dire times. Many authors have described it differently. The historic crisis, historic inequalities, and which the pandemic has of course revealed or unveiled, especially about, if it's new to you, you haven't been paying attention... [LAUGHS]

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** So, but it's also worse than the, the, the lived experiences of particularly the oppressed and exploited. And, of course, as you mentioned, it's of concern for us about how we can resist and construct the necessary solidarities and unity amongst the social movements, social groups, to push back. So, it's about, it's not being nostalgic or wallowing in the crisis. It's about generating responses to those, to those crisis and productive crisis. Now, of course, as you know the, the way you formulate the question is really how you gonna understand the

question is how you will formulate the response. So, it's rather a question about asking problems. But having said that, I mean the, the, the situation for the oppressed has become dire. I don't know whatever marker, whatever metric. And one way I can think and talk about it is so, through the Humanities Research Institute, maybe four or five years ago, we started a project which we call "Constructing Solidarities Towards a More Humane Urbanism." And that has led me in my work to think about, so what exactly does it mean to be human at this moment in time? And I've been, you know, reading sociologists about this and I think maybe one can tease out the crisis in three dimensions. And I know you're a guy who likes numbers, but I don't have many, but you can add the numbers to each one of those. So, the sociologist Göran Therborn builds on Amartya Sen, the Nobel economist. He says this, well, just by way of analysis, he draws through what he calls three types of inequalities and he starts first of all, with what he calls life inequalities. In other words, whether you live or die is a matter of, of social economic inequality. So, we can look at who's, who's dying and the ability to hold body and soul together right now. And again they are, they are, they are political and economic reasons, but also geographies to this and the fact that, you know, it, don't think it escaped many people. The number of, I think it was more than a half a million deaths in the U.S right? I think at this moment, just to mark it, Brazil is seemingly, obviously heading that way. But, you know, by contrast, I just got Amy Goodman today, the other report with the Cuban effort to develop a vaccine. More people today died in Brazil than during the entire pandemic or in Cuba.

**Augustus Wood:** Oh, wow.

**Ken Salo:** All right. So, something like four or five thousand, just the daily death rate. So, and so now we're going to begin to understand what, the how to mark the moment and the geography of it. And, of course, the other countries, and I've heard my friend Patrick Bond talk about this in terms of the Bolsonaro, Biden and Bo Jo and then also a Brussels approach. Now juxtapose that with Cuba and even also the PRC. And I'm not an advocate of the PRC authoritarianism, all right, I think we should critique them for that, but what they're doing right now in times of saving people's lives, okay, and of course, yeah, back home in South Chicago... what do we have? We have people, administrations, closing public hospitals, right, in the poorest areas in Chicago. So, that's one of the metrics we can use is the life chances have been severely reduced. The other to add on, of course, is the resource inequality.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Ken Salo:** All right, and that's, and of course, my area of focus has been around these three issues of the gold standards of racialized social formations: the U.S with its history of plantation slavery and genocide; South Africa, similar, but also very different history; and then of course Brazil.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** So, the only number I'll mention for you for today is that the Gini coefficients. So, they have, Gini coefficients of .7 or .79 or something like that, uh, out of 1 being perfect inequality and 0 being perfect equality. Maybe one other statistic, cause I know you're a labor guy, is South Africa's official unemployment rate, right, it's already in the region of 30% plus.

**Augustus Wood:** Oh, that's the official too?

**Ken Salo:** ...that's the official, all right?

**Augustus Wood:** So, yeah.

**Ken Salo:** In other words, there's now organizations of the unemployed. That's the medical, that's the other part. The unemployed, and this is something that I know is dear to your heart, is the ability of the unemployed or the unemployable to organize. All right, and these are issues because I know you, your work is focused on the formally organized in the sense of the, of the union, unionized and we must talk later about, you know, the possibilities and potentials of the trade union. The last vector he mentions in terms of inequality is what he calls existential inequality. I mean, that's basically status inequality, right?

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Ken Salo:** And of course, this is in the U.S, perhaps most obvious through the racialized police killing and the violence. So, I think with those three metrics or criteria we can add metrics basically to argue, in short, that if anything, life has become more nasty and more brutal and more short, right...famous sociologists argue now. That has kind of asked me, or led me to revisit and reach back, so some of the, the, the, you know, philosophers or, that I grew up with was, amongst other things, the, there are really two aspects to it. As a, as a young teacher and also a recent graduate in '76, one of our mentors, who are basically the interlocutors of Fanon, was Steve Biko.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Ken Salo:** All right, so Biko taught us a critical lesson that I hope the young social justice advocates take serious, which was, and I quote, that racism or anti-racism is less about pigmentation than it is about consciousness. All right, so that was the first intellectual shift that I think, and we see this in the Black Lives Matter and in the U.S, in particular, this conflation of color and consciousness. All right? In other words, Black is progressive or white is bad. Or white is actually, that sort of... and again, I've come across, I must say, some fascinating, you know, popular education material as a WBGH graphic, an animated film that basically asks or suggests, it goes something like this: How, how skin became, became color, right? And our color became a race. All right, so I think those connections have to be traced historically, all right? And to any traces it through, of course, the Bacon's Rebellion. Of course, what they, what they don't say, and this is maybe the other thing we can talk about, is the silences of the Haitian rebellion.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes. Yes. Very much so.

**Ken Salo:** You can't understand this globally unless you go there. And of course, here is why, you know, *The Black Jacobins* must be a required reading of C. L. R., right?

**Augustus Wood:** Yes. I argue that this is actually one the most important books ever written in world history, easily.

**Ken Salo:** That's yeah, I would concur. I would concur.

**Augustus Wood:** And like you said, the fact that very few, let alone people in general, but very few scholars or students know what of this book on this campus is one of the scariest things that I've encountered because at my undergrad at Morehouse, we all had to read *Black Jacobins*. Now we may not have had the best interpretation of it because we were like 18-year-old kids, but the fact is, is that we had to know it. And I come here, and very few students had ever heard of the book, let alone C. L. R. James.

**Ken Salo:** Well, yeah, shout out to your history teacher or your, you know, social studies, I mean, that's obviously a clear consciousness. But again, in my teaching, this is against any new. So, I think our work here is to constantly, I guess, make visible or unsilence this sort of curriculum.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Ken Salo:** All right? And I think this is why the educational project is key, which is the consciousness part of it. So that was, that was foundational in South Africa to move towards the unity of the oppressed, the unity of all oppressed peoples, beyond what was the racialized categories because, of course, their tactic was still divide and rule, right? And that was based on different categorizations.

So for us, I like to tell my students, you know, race for us was a fighting word. If somebody ask you, what's your race, you know, that would that would cause a fight. All right? And we would sometimes in the little checkbox, we would just add a color in there. The "what's your race?", we would say a hundred meters [LAUGHS] because we would all argue that we were part of the human race. So that was, I think this is Biko reaching back to the Marxist Humanism of Fanon.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** Right? That we first have to see and recognize each other as, as, as human beings.

**Augustus Wood:** And I like, I like the way you put that too, because I think that's something that we often, particularly even if we're not, even as scholars, that's something we often forget, but at that point where you had Steve Biko, you had, and you have Fanon's book that was being circulated amongst revolutionary people across the globe, that was the idea is that we're talking about the oppressed and the idea of coming together. Even when you look at individuals like Huey P. Newton and his theory of Revolutionary Intercommunalism, like his whole argument was exactly that is that we are a bunch of small, oppressed, colonized spaces across the globe. We are interdependent islands of capital exploitation. And we have to think of ourselves in solidarity against that particular monster or else we're going to continue to fracture.

And that's something that we have seen this past summer, and other parts, is that there's been always a fractionary at the heart of movements because of exactly what you said. There is this obsession with this idea that color only is understood to be oppressed versus the actual looking at racial class like what C. L. R. James is doing or the Marxist Humanist idea of the oppressed as exploited people across the globe. And so this is, this is a very relevant issue.

**Ken Salo:** I'm glad you agree and it's still foundational because there's a lot of quagmires and dead ends. And I must share with you that for me is much more palpable in the U.S around this, you know, dead ends of identity politics and what I call Oppression Olympics.

[CROSSTALK] [LAUGHING]

**Augustus Wood:** I've never heard that... Oppression Olympics... I've never heard that phrase, that's yeah...

**Ken Salo:** Yeah. I don't know, but yeah, it's about like who's the most oppressed, right, and who's better off than everyone else... And I mean, there's enough, there's a lot of ink spilled and will continue to be spilled over this idea of identity and why we need to move to the category of the oppressed. And this is, we also grew up with, of course, the famous "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." This is Paulo Freire. So, those are two books we grew up with in brown paper wrappings. And it got to, you know, outside of school. I mean, another little saying that stood with me and I'm blessed to have had those educators, I think it's now attributed as I understand to Mark Twain, but we had elders who said to us, "Don't, don't, let your schooling get in the way of your education," all right? Which was the idea that when we went to predominantly and previously and still predominantly white institutions, don't expect liberation theology from them. [LAUGHS] Yeah, so this idea that the institutional transformation, all right, however, we must push against and expect, you know, the revolution to come from the campus. So, as the famous said, it is not going to be televised, it has to happen. Yeah. And then we yeah, we went off campus. So, a lot of my work is also I assist and even prefer taking students off campus.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah. Can you talk a bit about that? Because that's one of the coolest things that when I first got to this campus and I heard about your courses, you have this particular project you do with your students in the Champaign community. I don't wanna, I don't wanna take your fire away from you. I'm going to let you explain it, but I think it ties directly into what we talked about and why reading Fanon at this moment and those sociologists' theoretical frameworks of those three aspects of the oppressed, I think that's also...so explain your project, and we'll go deeper into that. I think it's really cool.

**Ken Salo:** Okay, you give me a minute just to close out on that second move that I think we need to make which is, that needs to be explained over and over to each generation at each time. That's very Fanon, but how to make the move and if I can, I use this mnemonic for my class. We asked to move from class to consciousness, and then from, sorry, from color to consciousness, and from consciousness, you have to move to class. All right, so racialism for me, as I tried to explain them, is a particular form of of of capital accumulation.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes. Yes.

**Ken Salo:** Right? Yes. [LAUGHS]

**Augustus Wood:** That has to be the first understood idea of number one, why race and racism were created and what they serve as today.

**Ken Salo:** Right, and so we avoid this dead end of which a lot of South African struggles have been hijacked. The idea that we can have non-racialism in a capitalist society. Right? This is the nationalist project.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** All right, whether it's neoliberal, Black nationalism or white nationalism. You know, it's again an internationalist perspective. All right, people come to that and yeah, just wanted to make sure that, you know, so those are the three Cs I want to connect, in terms of explaining to my students...

**Augustus Wood:** And who was, who was that particular scholar?

**Ken Salo:** Okay, so the class project for me was introduced through the work of Samira Mill.

**Augustus Wood:** Okay.

**Ken Salo:** All right, the African economist, the Marxist. All right?

**Augustus Wood:** I just want to make sure that the listeners got that, because we want to make sure they go out and get these books...

**Ken Salo:** We can talk a little bit about the African tradition of Marxism, all right, and the African's critique of Euro-Marxism and all those sorts of fights that people had. But I think what was central to, and maybe let me add another "C," since just to round it out, was a particular form of capitalism for colonial capital. All right, so, so that's, that's which is, which is acting simultaneously using a means idea of modes of production.

All right, so neoliberal monopoly finance capital, which is where most people will argue you'd be at right now, was always hand-in-hand with colonial capitalism and other people. And I'm



reinterpreting Rosa Luxemburg's work, accumulation by dispossession. So, I think Luxembourg was also very insightful, and of course she had lots of fights with Lenin and so on and so on, right, as you probably know better.

But I think this is, we are now back to this brutality of colonial capitalism and the extractive, the exploitative idea that exclusion, racialized exclusion is part and parcel of, of resource extraction. You know, and you can't have one without the other. One is the evil twin of the, of the other. So, anyway, we can pick that trajectory up. And you asked me to reflect on the pedagogy.

So I mean, again, we were fortunate, especially under Biko, not only did he help us to think, get a conceptual clarity, right, but he also left us with a methodology which was liberation of freedom is not going to come through the state, all right? It's going to come through a dialogue with the oppressed, all right, and that's that's, that's the point. So, for them and we got to pick up and it may be, was easier because we always rejected the, the, the racist institutions that was created for us; the revolution or the rebellion in '76 was against what we called gutter education, I don't know if you're familiar with that term.

But it was, it was what we called "Bantu education," all right, cause we wanted global education, cause we were people. So we rejected that, and, in fact, the proper, the name, the official term, and this might be also useful, was "Christian National Education."

**Augustus Wood:** Yes, I've hear of that.

**Ken Salo:** And yeah, I think it's also seminal the role of religion, right, and religious schools. Because for us the project there was, of course, and this is one of the... was to argue, you know, what's, what's the value of educating a dark-skinned African, African, beyond I think it was the sixth grade back then. They just going to become quote unquote "hewers of wood and drawers of water." Right? In other words, there was education not for liberation, but for industrial exploitation.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** All right, so again, this brings back the question of, you know, education we should have, but education for what, right? And I asked my students, are we all going to make a million dollars before we're 21? Is that what we are doing or how many of you still want to change the world? But I beg you better because it may be too late. [LAUGHS] Anyway, that brings in the

politics, but to, to sharper focus on what you've just shared, in terms of this "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," and Fanonian practices was the idea to use both the Freirean term that comes to mind, and that was my first Portuguese word I learned, by the way, was the idea of what Freire called *conscientização*, which was conscientization. In other words, he was an advocate of adult education. And for him, education was about the transformation of the human being, but the realization of the human potential. And for him it was starting with where you're at. Now the colonial and state of education was always denying what you knew. In other words, it was a disruption and a dislocation from what we call mother tongue education right? So, so this was the rebellion against Afrikaans. You would be cursed if you and, and ostracized and punished, if you spoke in the, in your home language.

Now imagine a young kid, all right, uh, you know, elementary school coming in, right? Not being able or being taught that the language you're speaking at home, all right, is an inferior language and is an outcast and it should now move towards Afrikaans to English, the psychological disruption. So, that's another level of why multilingualism is so critically important. But, anyway, this is all the project of disruption, dislocation, dispossession. And for us, it was recovering the human through first the language, right? But also the idea that, you know, and this was repeated, I guess very famously in 198--, in 1994, during the post-apartheid rebellion. An anti-eviction activist was quoted as saying, "We are, we are poor, we're not stupid." All right? And again, this academic status and privilege that we have, that poor people can't think. And it's a very liberal tendency of the white savior complex that people need help. All right? I got to know this in another way from I think a group in Minnesota, you're probably more familiar with the switches. If you, yeah, because to help me, you're wasting your time but you, yeah, because you think your fate is tied up with mine and lend a hand, right?

**Augustus Wood:** Sure. Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** And you probably know it. That's, that's the, that's the formulation I got to experience here. But, in short, the idea was that I insist on going off campus because they have to ground truth all of this abstract BS, or somebody said "bad sociology."

**Augustus Wood:** Yes. [LAUGHS] Well said.

**Ken Salo:** Because look, I mean, they they make up stuff, and it's such abstract stuff.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** And then people get praised for doing that. And we know it's, it's, it's, it's, it's, I mean, people write journal articles on the sex of an angel and stuff like that. And, you know, what is the, what is the practical elements of, of all of this? So the idea of ground truthing, you know, who's the young lady, I think was Emma Gonzalez, right?

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Ken Salo:** At the... it wasn't Columbine... Marjorie Stoneman Douglas. Remember the, the, the, the tragedy there and what she said, that famous speech, the most revolutionary silence in the history of the Internet with, she just had a minute of silence and, but she had famous and I remember I have a little badge, you know, those things that you pin on you, and so she said, "well, they say this and we say BS."

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah, I remember that.

**Ken Salo:** You follow, and this is what I'm trying to suggest to my students: you need your own BS GPS now.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** All right, but, that needs a historical consciousness. So, anyway, the point is to emphasize, sorry it took a long way to get there, but we need to ground truth and by that I literally mean not just having conversations, but you know, the other pedagogy for me, Gus, is walking through the space, the social justice tools. You know, I firmly, I'm an advocate of that, walking through the space, engaging. In other words, that's the idea of informal learning and opening up the dialogue. And when they walk through there, I asked him to tell me or to journal, you know, how do you feel. We go to the North End, and I say, so how do you feel and those kids have never been there, or have been socialized to expect different. They share that they, they, they're feeling nervous, so then we start the conversation, where do these feelings come from? Where did you learn to say that? I mean, I'll end with the story that in my generation, in South Africa, in Jim Crow, yeah, that was probably before your time, we grew up with actual signs that said "Negroes there," or "coloreds there," or "Africans there," or "whites there." And, you know, and usually people of color behind the back. But, now they're growing up there's no signs. All right, there's no signs, but when they enter these spaces, you know you don't belong.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** Where does this come from?

**Augustus Wood:** Where does it come from? Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** In post-apartheid South Africa, you know, where they oppressed, they had so much trouble following orders to go around the back that when they ask the guy to sign at the back of the check, he said he refuses. This is the new South Africa. He was not signing on the back of anything now. [LAUGHS] He wants to sign on the front. Anyway, the point I'm trying to say is that the consciousness about how you socialize, but also the, the, the spatial aspect of that, and if we have time, I'll talk about this question of residential segregation, what they call spatial apartheid. I want to bring apartheid back again because it explains a lot more productively than segregation.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly. And I think this is kind of, this is kind of the thing that we talked about a bit, and other spaces too and looking at it, taking it even though you're, even though you're talking about South Africa and also the global perspective... in a more local context of what you're arguing, the exact same thing happens in Atlanta, in relation to gentrification, because you have the exact same politics and the same type of... I'm using quotation marks for listeners—"activism" happening under the guise of anti-poverty for human rights, when in fact, they're literally taking resources, as we just mentioned, away from the oppressed to where they are literally fighting to survive in these Black working-class spaces or ending poverty-stricken parts of cities, right? And so it's really interesting when you see how, how, how, how transnational this issue really is, especially the strategies of the oppressors in doing these things. And what you said at the beginning really hit that the pandemic has only exacerbated these issues.

I mean, I'm sure you've heard the stories that this is actually one of the richest periods in Wall Street history, was during the pandemic, right? And we're just talking about, we're talking about, the widespread loss of homes across the world, mass debt, all of these things happening, jobs that will never come back that pay a living wage, and yet Wall Street, and those who are, who are big stockbrokers have made tens of millions of dollars within a few months. And so here we go and we're supposed to listen to this leadership class come in and tell us to believe in this system, and follow the guidelines of this system that rewards that kind of exploitation, right, and to not resist the colonial project in motion. And I just find it to be really funny because those same people are the ones that are saying that, well, you know, you shouldn't protest anymore... you know, you shouldn't have to find a way to put together a project. And the academy is enough to where you can do things. And so, yeah, this is, I'm really glad you're, you're bringing

this to the perspective that this is not simply just a U.S problem, but the strategies and tactics of the ruling class have always been in this way to exploit oppressed people.

**Ken Salo:** Yeah. Yeah. No, I think you're absolutely right with two things. One, if you ask anybody of the oppressed, and again, I know billions in Africa, you know, what does freedom mean? They say, well, we want our land back.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly. Thank you.

**Ken Salo:** The demand is simple.

**Augustus Wood:** Free the land!

[LAUGHS]

**Ken Salo:** That's right. [LAUGHS] This is the Mau Mau rebellion. This is the project: we want our land back.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** And in South Africa right now is very interesting that, I mean, the African National Congress, we had lots of fights back then, uh, maybe for some time later. But they're a neoliberal nationalist project which produced one of the, you know, finest legal constitutions bristling with rights, is of no value.

And I've had fishermen explain to me about fish workers, which by the way is another story I need to share with you about workers at sea, I had fishermen explain to me the trouble with this is I can't eat right, I need fish because I need my, I need my land back. And so, you know, land acknowledgment statements go so far. You know, we want our land back and they said, how can we be free, in fact, April 27 in South Africa coming up now is celebrated as, by the oppressed, as un-freedom day because they say we can't be, can't be free unless we have our land back, and they're clear. So the ruling elites in Africa have gone out through a treadmill three times, and the sad reality is they have all the legal instruments to do what is called expropriation without compensation.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** Like they just need to do it, but they're dancing all around commissions and all sorts of stuff, right? So this is, this is the faultline, a very hot faultline in Africa right now is the take back the land, it's happening in all forms, and this is what I'm working on right now: people occupying buildings, taking back land, squatting, you know. And OK, they, the argument is that we'll just squat everything, they can't evict everybody. Right? So you're having these mass occupations. Mass...and you know, you know about occupying factories and stuff like that. But yeah, people are staying very precariously. The state has become increasingly more brutal, all right, in the evictions. But it hasn't stopped, and basically because people have to, they have to have a roof over their head. They have to have clothes to wear, they have to have food to eat.

And that's what they're saying. So the other point you raised around the, I mean, the moment in global capitalist history at this point. So maybe two things I'll say to that, you probably know better on the second point, but I also was able to watch during the pandemic, and I highly encourage, uh, there was a film version by an Australian filmmaker on Piketty's "Capital in the Twenty-First Century." I don't know if you've seen it.

**Augustus Wood:** I've heard of it, but I haven't seen it yet.

**Ken Salo:** Piketty's film is like that, I don't know, the weight of the book. It's an amazing... I don't think anybody reads it. So, this filmmaker took it upon himself and made one of the most amazing historical documentaries, and basically making a very cogent argument that, you know, if at any time capital was democratic, right now it's gone into a system of feudalism. He makes the parallel back to the pre-French Revolution.

And then lastly, I don't know, the other guy I've been following is the ex-Greek finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis. He talks about a period now, what he calls, post-neoliberalism as techno-feudalism. In other words, he's arguing, it's the, it's the digital feudal lords now, like they had the landlords and the nobility, it's the tech companies who are unaccountable who are ruling the roost, right? And we see what these guys do, you know, the speculative economy... I mean, I don't know if you understand that digital currency stuff, but these guys are just, they're not putting their money back into any productive resources, right?

**Augustus Wood:** No, and I'm glad, I'm glad you kind of bring that up though because that is something that I think that we don't press enough when we're having our critique is this issue of digital currency because I think that's one of the biggest things in relation to the issues of the oppressed, and again, you know, my big thing is always resources. How do we have enough

resources to survive, and then how do we have enough resources to build the social movement for liberation? And digital currency is one of the worst creations in exactly what you said is that because you have digital currency you don't necessarily have to put it back into anything to produce...

[CROSSTALK]

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** ...because they're not producing stuff anymore. They're going into the speculative world; they might as well be in cyberspace, right?

[CROSSTALK]

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah. That's all it is, it's simply to have money just to keep. There is no investment, and again, a lot of this goes back to a lot of the issues in a lot of these government contracts across the world, particularly I can only speak for the U.S. But all those, all those NAFTA agreements and all the other federal court decisions that have unregulated capitalism to allow it, to do these things, to go unchecked, and, you know, we haven't seen the true roots of it yet, but this second NAFTA deal that was passed under Trump is so much worse than the first one. And what it allows these companies to do, in terms of going, going further unchecked than the first NAFTA deal. And I'm sure that there are other governments across the world that are looking at that deal and drafting similar legislation. So, I think you're exactly right on this. That's another area that we need to be studying and critiquing, because it's growing every day that we see digital currency growing.

**Ken Salo:** Right. Yeah. And again, that is a symptom of the crisis, you know, of where we're at right now. And maybe the idea that they characterize this as a sort of feudal relationship meaning, meaning that if ever capitalism was democratic, it certainly is not now, no longer now. And even this kind of bailout, I mean, the Biden period now obviously has had some relief, right, in terms of its social payments. But the reality, you know better than me, in my view, I haven't seen evidence of that going into productive assets.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** This is going into, right, it's going into consumption.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** And it's going...I don't know, they have this infrastructure plan that they still have to vote on. Keep your fingers crossed, I guess if that happens, then amongst other things, it'll have some productive value, but okay, that's just speeding it up, right? I mean, isn't it a little fast?

**Augustus Wood:** And you and I both know that by the time that bill finally is voted on, after it gets destroyed by the moderate and centrist and conservative, that it's going to be very little productiveness in the bill when it's finally voted on, so.

**Ken Salo:** Right, right. So I think your comment reminds me maybe just to segue back to Samir Amin. So one of the texts, you know, I read reflecting on the crisis of capitalism or what he calls... he has an opening chapter that talks about the crisis of capitalism and the capitalist crisis. In other words, capitalism itself is the crisis we should be dealing with. Not with the symptoms of the crisis, but the crisis itself. This text, and I wanted to share with you a quote... it's called *Spectres of Capitalism*. The subtitle is "A Critique of the Current Intellectual Fashions" and it was produced on the sesquicentennial of the manifesto, *The Communist Manifesto*. So that was, well, 1990, this published '98. The manifesto was added fifty years earlier. But anyway, he starts out with a very famous reminder, which is why I found him to be insightful. And if I can just find it, I want to read it without distorting it. It's basically a very insightful riff... "Like the manifesto, it's good to recall the plain rationale, which is one that capitalism is incapable of overcoming its fundamental contradictions." All right, and then he goes on to argue, and he puts this...a little bit more meat to this.

He says, "History has proven that capitalism, like all social systems, is able at each stage of its expansion to overcome its own permanent contradictions, but not without worsening the violence with which they will be experienced by succeeding generations." In other words, this, he argues, is at the core of the manifesto. It's at the core of the Marxians for it. Which is this idea that maybe in terms of the geography of capitalist expansion starting in colonial, there was a way that's what David Harvey might call the "spatial fix," right, capitalism would get up here and go elsewhere. But now we had a period that expansion is no longer possible. All right? We now have, well, what started out as Mao as China... also in a form of what some people might, I think, rightfully call state capitalism?

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah. State capitalism.



**Ken Salo:** Different characteristics.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Ken Salo:** All right, but it's a worldwide system, the Soviet Union. I mean, again, this is the challenge that faces us, but he argues, if that possibility of geographic expansion is no longer possible, the only way it's expanding now is by deepening the crisis through violence.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly. Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** So we seeing increasing forms of violence and this is Rosa Luxemburg. This is, you know, barbarism or socialism. And I'm of the opinion that right now we have to declare ourselves as part of the movement for the social redistribution. In other words, we have to declare ourselves, not just Democratic Socialists, but Socialists.

**Augustus Wood:** Thank you. Thank you.

**Ken Salo:** All right.

**Augustus Wood:** I'm glad you said that.

**Ken Salo:** This is exactly the, I think this is the project right now so, and it's... because there is no other alternative. If it's not clear right now that the social redistribution of wealth has become a matter of life and death, I don't know when.

**Augustus Wood:** And that's, that's the part, that's the part, that really gets to me and why I'm so adamant about doing this series and doing the work that we do is because whether to get to that point and Terry Barnes, who did an episode earlier had a great point about this... when do we, as people, get to that point to where we understand this as life or death? Because there is that fraction of society, many of them are responsible for just kind of, well, I can always just walk away, once the protests are over, and go back to my life and not have to worry about this, who feel as though it's not life or death.

And we have the other segment that are literally scrapping and fighting for their lives right now as we speak and have been for so long. How do we get over that hump? It is exactly what you said is that until we stop with the, you know, kind of the half-truthing or the "you know what-ing," everything we do and just flat out say that this is, we have to have a redistribution of resources and wealth if we are going to survive, and build organizing organizations, then we're not gonna, there is just nowhere else to go. There is no, I like the way you said that too, Professor Salo. You said there are no, there are no other alternatives at this point, and that's the argument I get when I, when I get those people who come in and say, oh, you're too radical, you can't talk about these things. We still have a chance, like give me one actual other alternative that we currently have after this pandemic. Because if this pandemic doesn't show you how gross the symptoms of what's been, what's been existing for so long have gotten, then you clearly aren't on the same reality that other people are living in.

**Ken Salo:** Right, right. So no again, from the political economy, I think, you know, it's clear and evident. But now grappling with the same question you raised and I guess Terry has also with, so what is it that's stopping us from seeing the plight of our brothers and sisters, all right? Or as other humanists have talked about the pain of others, right? This empathy and those sorts of connections. And Gus, tell you the truth again, maybe, you know, as I grow older, wiser, I've started to lean into the kind of feminist approaches. And personally for me, it actually was the passing of my late sister, who was an anthropologist, and she was able to share with me, amongst other things, she wrote about mothering in, in marginalized spaces. All right, so this is, I think Ruby is also doing that sort of work with this, this, this bond. We have to think, pay more attention. And it's something beyond just the solidarity of the brotherhood that develops because you're working in the same factory, right?

**Augustus Wood:** We're past that stage at this point.

**Ken Salo:** Right. Sorry, I missed that.

**Augustus Wood:** I said we're beyond that stage at this point.

**Ken Salo:** Right. So I think they, there's a lot to be said about, you know, spending time together in a factory floor and building up that connection and getting to know people and going through that struggle, that builds their brotherhood. But, of course, we know now that the factory floor is, the factory has been outsourced...

**Augustus Wood:** ...and it's gone.

[BOTH LAUGH]

**Ken Salo:** What we are left with by and large in South Africa in large, is also the family. All right, and this is where I'm beginning to get wiser, as I said introduced by my sister's work on how young mothers who are stigmatized in marginalized areas for kind of quote unquote "breathing," sorry, "breeding." And both breathing, you know, like, you know, like rabbits. In other words, they have more kids than...so all of that stigmatization, and we ourselves, I must say, and even although I mentioned to you about racism, look, an elder of mine who also just recently passed, always said, look, we are all infected by this stuff. That's, that's the first part of it. You use the, the medical analogy, which is apt right now. And we've got to develop a vaccine. And this is the anti-racism vaccine, which is to understand...and there's a quote from Fanon which I just don't remember about getting rid of the, the, the, the toxins in our minds, right, the colonial toxins. So we had to unlearn this, that's the point. Just as much as you learned racism, you can unlearn. Right, but you need education and elders and experience. But I was apt to be schooled about the extent and the beauty of that type of love and caring. And recently I saw this on display at the ceremony for the commemoration by the mothers of the victims of gun violence.

**Augustus Wood:** Mhmm. Yes.

**Ken Salo:** All right? And I don't know what to make of it. Also, I saw these mothers are now running for elected office and those sorts of things. But again, you know my view on elected politics and stuff, but I must say at, at the municipal level, I am, again, I'm open to be convinced to the contrary, right? But obviously as you go up from there, the corporate influence begins to dominate. So most recently—was it the mother of Tamir Rice?—critiqued, and I know, you know, better than me, who's the artist who won a Grammy or of a rap version on the execution of her son, Tamir Rice? Was it at the Emmys? Anyways, the Grammys...

**Augustus Wood:** Oh, it was the Grammys, but I can't remember who the artist is.

**Ken Salo:** Yeah. Anyway. So what is, Samaria Rice, the mother, tweeted the next day. She's sick and tired of these people making money.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes. Commodifying this, uh...

**Ken Salo:** That's right.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** It doesn't bring her son back and it doesn't build anything.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly.

**Ken Salo:** And that's maybe the other point that I wanted to share with you on what I admire of your work. I mean, I think you, like me, grew up with this idea that we've got to build something.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** You can't just, you can't just work with people. You got to build institutions; you have to build organizations. And yeah, you have setbacks as we know, we do have, but...

**Augustus Wood:** Sure.

**Ken Salo:** If you don't build the unity of the oppressed through organizations, you're going to have these hashtags floating around becoming global corporations, right? And they're free-floating, not accountable to anybody and usually end up being corrupted and co-opted by global capital.

**Augustus Wood:** And now we're seeing a lot of these corporations now that are facing the brunt of not only their own members, but possible federal intervention to find out where all that money has been going, right? So again, I'm glad you brought that up though, because that's that's that's really the, that's kind of the endgame for a lot of what Tamir Rice's mother is seeing happening, and what Fanon warns us about in his works with the nationalist neoliberal project. And he was prophesizing exactly what would happen if we don't actually mention, we don't build something and then when something doesn't work, then we reevaluate and then we try something else, right? You know, revolution is always going to be a living thing, right? It doesn't just stop. You have to try and create and you have to have that type of "this is life or death." And so, yeah, I'm glad you said that...

**Ken Salo:** And in your work, I mean, you have to have the discipline and the accountability. All right, and so I grew up where we were in a movement and there was a discipline, there was an accountability, there was a mandate. You didn't do things without a mandate.

**Augustus Wood:** That's right.

**Ken Salo:** We were accountable. And there was neighborhood organizations and that was one of the first thing that the ANC did when they, when they returned from exile, they dismantled those structures.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** And they created a party.

**Augustus Wood:** That's right.

**Ken Salo:** All right? And we can see what is, this is, the party is the first step, is the graveyard of all of the movements.

**Augustus Wood:** That's right.

**Ken Salo:** All right, and of course from there, this is why the state becomes, you know, the, the, the colonial state that, this is the tragedy of African independence is demobilize the anti-colonial movements.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly,

**Ken Salo:** All right?

**Augustus Wood:** Thank you.

**Ken Salo:** Yeah. And they are great representations of this. And I guess our task right now as I see, you know, in South Africa, just to switch it out to kind of more optimistic... um, the idea that you can fool people, some people, some of the time, but not all the people all the time, the students are standing, fighting back, as of course they do. The fees must fall, the roads must fall, for the students against austerity right now, I've been, you know, enthused by students against exclusions. Your amazing strike, all right, on the campus, who can forget that? Many memorable. I still have my hat that I got from the, I don't part with that.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah. Excellent. [LAUGHS]

**Ken Salo:** I think at another occasion you reflected, you know, and what was your predecessor's name? Carrie?

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** Yeah. So I had the privilege of her being in one of my classes and what a firebrand. And then she went on to lead amazing stuff. And of course, you took it to even further heights. But that was the point about you've got to work and build an organization. You can't be a free-floating, you know, cannon. This is the discipline. So I see this coming back in South Africa...

**Augustus Wood:** Because the colonial powers will see you as someone, as that individual and of course, what are they going to do? Co-optation. Immediately, immediately. And then we see again, it's always fun when you hear people say, where are all the leaders right now? Like you know what I'm saying like, the sixties and seventies, we had over dozens of leaders that you could point to and say that person is a leader, where they all now in the 21st century? Where are they?

**Ken Salo:** Yeah. Which is also to emphasize, and I don't need to remind you, I probably could do another show on the anti-democratic tendencies within the trade union movement, right?

**Augustus Wood:** Oh, very much so.

**Ken Salo:** Which is why I think the idea of of, of democratic movements, we have to hold onto that, all right? Yeah, we have to practice democratic movements and institutions at the civic

level, at the trade union level. And again, now in South Africa, you know, what's really heartwarming for me is there's a union of, of, of, of people who've been evicted.

**Augustus Wood:** Mmhm.

**Ken Salo:** All right? They're organizing themselves now in tenant unions, because they are occupying multi-story buildings. And there's movements of the oppressed, the group I'm working with, the housing assembly, all right, and it's just amazing what they've been doing. I mean, with a tenth of the resources and the indignities that they suffer daily being evicted during a pandemic, some of them naked.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Ken Salo:** All right. But they live to fight the next day.

**Augustus Wood:** Yeah.

**Ken Salo:** You know, so my role and ... has really been just to, just to amplify those voices.

**Augustus Wood:** And that's, and that's, I think that's what we have to continue to do regardless of what level we're at, we're in the scholar level, we're in the neighborhoods, etc., we have to amplify the voices and the actions to strengthen and build those movements, even if we are themselves, even if we're not directly in the movement, it is our job. And this is always my biggest issue with the trade union movement in general is that there's very few times, like if there's a strike happening in Chicago or Minneapolis, Atlanta, etc., all the unions should be putting out statements of support or rallying or mobilizing support, bringing them food, getting a strike fund started. That should be the consensus around the world and the, again, to have that kind of non-solidarity is the reason why that much of the labor movement today has been corporatized and become a business union model, which again, as you mention, is not in the rank and file or the local spaces to control. It's like you said, undemocratic.

And I think that's the best way for us to end, and I loved your lesson there is that, yeah, at the base of what we do, we have to build institutions that are democratic at their heart. And that is the way that we're going to ever fight honestly the anti-racism, and fight racism and the colonial projects that continue to take away oppressed people's rights and resources. That's where we

currently are, and like you said, the good sociology, always know... [LAUGHS] ...always points to those issues. If you're reading some sociology, and it doesn't point to those questions, then you gotta...

**Ken Salo:** You gotta have a GPS to, to, to be able to detect which, which way is, which way is up and down.

**Augustus Wood:** Exactly. [LAUGHS] You know, I'm telling you... Professor Ken Salo, thank you so much for this wonderful, enlightening interview. I'm telling you, I know our listeners are going to get a lot out of this. I've known you for years and even I got a lot of out this, just from this short conversation. So appreciative.

**Ken Salo:** Okay, I want to end off with two things. In South Africa, whenever we have a wonderful dialogue or we have a meeting, we always say *a luta continua*.

**Augustus Wood:** Yes.

**Ken Salo:** Which of course is the Portuguese for "the struggle continues." And then there's a call and response, all right, that has *amandla* and then you have to say *awethu*, which means "power is still ours." So I say *amandla*, and you have to say *awethu*. And then I'll say *amandla*.

**Augustus Wood:** *Awethu*.

**Ken Salo:** There we go. All right, "power is still ours." Take care.

**Augustus Wood:** Thank you, thank you, Professor Ken Salo. You just had another episode of "Off the Shelf: Revolutionary Readings in Times of Crises." I hope you got a lot out of that episode. We will see you next time. This has been Augustus Wood and the Humanities Research Institute. Take care and be safe. Power to the people.

**Ken Salo:** Namaste. See you, Gus.