

The Conch- CarolineFerguson_Final.mp3

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:04] Hello, my name is Julie Kuchepatov and I'm the host of this podcast, The Conch. We are rolling along on our journey with this podcast talking about seafood and the ocean. And most importantly, we're uplifting some of the incredible people working in the seafood sector, sharing their journeys, the challenges they face, and the triumphs they've achieved today. We are so happy to have an incredible guest joining us. Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda. Caroline is a postdoctoral researcher at Stanford University and explores solutions to equity and justice challenges in seafood systems with a focus on U.S. militarization in Palau. She also produces Surf and Turf, a seafood justice podcast featuring voices from across the country highlighting economic, racial, gender, and environmental justice challenges in seafood harvest, processing, distribution, and waste in the U.S. seafood system. Welcome, and thank you, Caroline, for joining me today on The Conch. Let's get down to business.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:01:02] Thank you for having me, Julie.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:03] I'm so excited to have you here. Finally. And I mentioned you're a fellow podcaster, so I'd love to start off and learn more about your podcast, Surf and Turf, and what led you to become a podcaster?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:01:15] Yes. Well, I love podcasts. I love The Conch. I love many podcasts. At the University of Maine, part of my funding was for science communication, which was something that I had done very little of and knew very little about but I put my head together with my supervisor, Joshua Stoll, and we decided that a podcast could be a cool new way to bridge conversations that were happening in food justice and in kind of seafood research among seafood harvesters and direct to consumer seafood marketers. And, and hopefully that's what we've done with the show. One on one conversations like this one with people who are working in the space and working to create a more just seafood space in the U.S. and learn directly from them.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:02:00] That's great, and I do recommend your podcast highly. It's really good. Can you find it on all streaming platforms or where can we find it?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:02:06] Yeah, it's on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:02:09] So tell us about some of the guests that you've had on your podcast and are there any surprising or shocking things that you've learned that you could share?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:02:18] Yes. I feel like every time I have a conversation with someone on the show, I am learning something surprising and often shocking. You know, I can talk about my most recent episode, Amal Bouhabib of Southern Migrant Legal Services. That was a really cool conversation because it centered catfish in the Delta, which is where I'm from. And we started this conversation with this kind of surprising case that she had taken on. Amal is usually representing migrants at Southern Migrant Legal Services, right. She's often working with H-2B workers who are mistreated when they're brought to this country, who are put in abusive and unfair working conditions. But in this case, she was actually representing the local workers, the Black workers in Mississippi, who had been denied access to the same jobs that these white South African workers had been brought in to do. When they were doing these jobs, they were being paid less than the white migrants that were doing the same work. This conversation was really

illuminating, I think, because so often we are talking about these issues in silos, right? The mistreatment of migrant workers or the mistreatment of Black workers. But this case really drives home that all of these workers, whether they're migrants or not, are being mistreated by the seafood system as it's currently set up. Well, when we zoom out a little bit, we see that U.S. catfish is itself in competition with imported catfish, which means that the whole new suite of international justice. So, I really love that conversation for kind of broadening the scope of how we think about who is vulnerable, who is marginalized, and then asking us to consider how do we build solidarities.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:00] So just as a quick clarification on H-2B visa, these are visas, right?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:04:06] These are visas for people who work in food processing. I'm not a lawyer, so I don't want to get too specific but if you listen to the episode, Amal describes very eloquently what these, what these visas are, but they're for people who are not here permanently, right? They're brought in to do specific jobs.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:24] And for this specific instance that you're discussing with Amal, this is about white South African workers come in to process catfish in the U.S. Delta?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:04:34] Yes. And it's a common practice in agriculture I learned too. I think migrants from Guatemala are still the most common workers. And then white South Africans are the second most common.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:45] That leads me to believe, and I get it, you're not a lawyer but that leads me to believe that it's cheaper to bring migrant labor from South Africa to the U.S. is that why?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:04:54] Well, that's what you would think but with this case showed that they're actually paying the white South Africans more money than they were paying the local Black workers. And they're also putting them in housing. And so, it's not just a question of cost. It's actually a little bit more complicated. And it is tied up with racial bias and racial prejudice and the history, well, and present of white supremacy in the region.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:18] So I definitely will include a link to that episode in the show notes because that sounds fascinating and it just speaks to how our processing sector is so, I don't want to say random because it's not random. Nothing is done randomly, but it is something that the average person has no idea about. In your bio, there are numerous challenges facing the U.S. seafood system that you list: economic, racial, gender, and environmental justice. So, what are some of the economic challenges facing the sector today?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:05:50] Yeah, I mean, there are so many. On the second season of the show, I did a series of interviews focused on privatization. And privatization takes many different forms in our seafood sector. But just to highlight a few of them that I learned about from our guests. One is catch shares, which are a very common way now of managing fisheries in the U.S. and increasingly in other countries as well. Basically, what a catch share is, is it sets a quota on the total amount of seafood that can be harvested for a given fishery, and then it distributes that quota to a select number of people who hold quota or hold permits. The way the system was set up, it was based on

your previous year's catch, and the fact that they are transferable means I can sell you my quota. And what this has resulted in, in many different contexts, is the consolidation of quota among a small number of wealthy fishers or even companies that employ fishers, right. So, in many cases, this has turned owner operators into employees of these large companies. It's made fishing economically unsustainable. Another challenge that's arisen with catch shares that I talk about with Will Sennott on the show is private equity ownership of fisheries, buying up of commodities that this bank essentially determines they can squeeze profit out of. It often results in kind of like mergers and acquisitions. Their goal is accumulation and consolidation. And what that looks like in New Bedford, where Will Sennott is based, is that Blue Harvest, this company is entirely owned by private equity firm, has bought enormous amounts of the seafood sector on their waterfront. Turned fishermen into employees. And what's happened is that now that they're finding they can't squeeze any more profit out of these fisheries, they're selling off their assets and the fishery is closing. They've lost the community benefits of this industry that has served them for centuries. And now it remains to be seen what's going to happen with the fisheries that Blue Harvest had consolidated. So, there's another thing I think we need to have on our radars, and the effect that it's having in communities. And then the, the kind of third aspect of privatization that I think was really interesting from those conversations I learned from Nico Gómez Andújar and to her is from Culebra, which is an island of Puerto Rico. Culebra is a tourist destination. It's also home for people who've been there for generations and who have used seafood resources as part of their cultural and economic and food practices. And rich people are buying up so many of the houses and so much of the land on the island that I think the most recent number I saw was that 50% of all housing on the island is an Airbnb.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:08:40] What? Wow.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:08:41] So with this illegal privatization of waterfront. So again, in Puerto Rico, the beaches are all public by law. But what these private landowners have done is illegally privatize piers and other waterfront access that fishermen rely on to go catch fish. And so, another aspect of privatization is this, like very on the ground, very practical, right, very concrete example of privatization. Another economic challenge that we've talked about on the show, and that I really am hoping to cover more on the show in the future, is the challenge of competition with imported seafood. You know, we produce a ton of seafood in this country. We export a ton of seafood out of the country, and we import a ton of what we eat, including shrimp. Shrimp prices last year got so low, local fishermen really couldn't afford to go out. Gas prices were high. Prices for shrimp were low.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:37] So that was a really great, I think, and thorough exploration of the economic challenges. And but they're all like intertwined, right, and as you mentioned, you know, it's not cheaper to import or to have migrant labor come in and work at the processing facilities, at some of them it's more of a racialized issue, right. And so, what are some of the other racial challenges and how do they manifest themselves in our in our U.S. seafood system?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:10:04] Yeah. I mean, the racial challenges are totally intersecting with the economic challenges. So, in my interview with Tony Sutton, who's a professor at the University of Maine and a member of Wabanaki Nation, how dams in their territory were created really to be a part of the very intentional genocide of Native Americans. And it was intended, in many cases, to cut off food sources. Those dams are still there today, and they still impact people's ability to eat native foods. In Gullah Geechee

Nation, which is in the southeastern United States, they're fighting the development of their islands as, you know, sometimes recognized Indigenous group, the Gullah Geechee people are descended from both Indigenous peoples and free and escaped slaves. Their ancestral territory is Hilton Head, if you've ever heard of it, it's a very popular golf destination. Their other islands are now under threat as well. And so, they've been fighting what they call destruction of their land. That certainly has a racial element to it as well. We also explored the exploitation of processing workers, not just in catfish but in New Bedford, where mainly Central American workers. Adrián Ventura is one of the organizers, one of the leaders of the movement to organize and demand better conditions. He came on the show to talk about the racial dynamics at play in processing facilities, and the denial of fair treatment of workers and even the inequitable treatments among workers from different places. He talked about in one facility, people of certain racial and ethnic groups being able to eat at tables, and others being forced to eat sitting down or standing up.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:43] Wow.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:11:44] And then finally, I think, another really interesting conversation that I had on the show dealing with racial justice was with Mary and Marie Hill. So, Mary is an eighth-generation oyster harvester in Chesapeake Bay. She is the only, as far as she knows, Black water woman doing this work now, and she really views her connection with oysters and oyster harvesting as resistance. And she talked a lot about not only the structural challenges that she's faced, but also the interpersonal racism that she has faced trying to buy a boat, trying to harvest the oysters that are rightfully hers, and the dynamics with the white oystermen in the area. And so, it really is at every level. It's intersecting across all issues, and I'm certainly no expert on it but those are the conversations that I would start with for listeners to dip their toe in a little bit more.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:38] Yeah, that was a really great recap. And again, you know, we're going to post links to all these really essential and amazing conversations that you're having and I just I can't tell you how amazing I think you are having these discussions. It's and your guests I mean, come on, this is amazing.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:12:56] Oh thank you, it's really the, the guests.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:58] Well, yeah. And you're, you're, you know, you're providing this platform for them and these people sharing their challenges and their stories and, and really highlighting some injustice in our, in our seafood system. You also, as a postdoctoral researcher, you're pretty prolific in publishing papers. And there's a lot of papers that you've published and coauthored with others and, I wanted to bring up one, in 2021, you published a paper titled *A Rising Tide Does Not Lift All Boats: intersectional analysis reveals inequitable impacts of the seafood trade in fishing communities*. And, and in this paper, you ask the question the guiding question of the paper is how are the harms and benefits of the seafood trade distributed in fishing communities? And to answer that question, you conducted interviews and research and wrote a case study of the sea- of the sea cucumber trade in Palau. So, what did you learn? Are you, were you able to answer this question? I know that's a big question, but I'm just curious how did why sea cucumbers? What's going on there? How did you answer that question if you did?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:14:01] Yeah, it is a big question. It's one that still motivates me. Still, the question that I'm asking on the podcast, even, but I was able to answer it, I think, in, in a narrow context, which was the study of sea cucumbers in Palau. So why sea cucumbers? Why Palau? Palau, for those who aren't familiar, is a sovereign

nation in Oceania. It is near Guam, near the Philippines. If people are familiar with the Western Pacific. It's a former colony of the U.S. and it is currently in free association with the United States, which is a kind of unprecedented and complicated relationship that makes it mostly sovereign but not quite. So, Palau is a really amazing place because it is a small community. The whole island is fewer than 20,000 people, almost entirely Indigenous, and almost everyone fishes for food and for customs and some people for the markets. So as someone who's interested in, in fishing and in learning from fishermen, it's a really exciting place to be. So, in Palau, there's a gender division of resources and sea cucumber is, is one of the ones that women collect. But for those who, who know something about sea cucumber, they might know that it's this incredibly valuable commodity in East Asia. And it's part of traditional Chinese medicine. It's also served at, you know, very formal banquets. You might serve it at a wedding. And so, it fetches really top dollar. And when in 2011, Chinese exporters arrived in Palau to buy sea cucumbers, they were offering these prices that local people had never seen except the last time the Chinese were there to buy them. We would never see those prices on the local market and Palau. A sea cucumber might go for \$3 in Palau, and this is going for \$45 or something, you know, like something outrageous. And it was really happening at a large scale, even though it was still individuals going out. It went from women going out, you know, on foot to harvest at low tide for their families, to everyone, including men going out on boats, collecting as much as they could possibly bring in and then selling them to the exporters at the end of the day. This only went on for six months before the Palauan people put a stop to it recognizing that it was decimating their resource. But even in that time, the fishery collapsed in many places and has still not recovered. And that's just because of the reproductive cycle of sea cucumbers. They're very hard to recover after a collapse. But what we see is now these women who have been relying on the resource forever, really, for food and nutritional security for their rural markets, they have to go out much longer, much further, take many more risks to come home with many fewer sea cucumbers. And in fact, a few days ago, I didn't see a single sea cucumber for sale at the local market. And what I'm told by the local women is that's because it's just not worth it anymore. It's too much work to go get them. And so, we can see that in this case, yes, there were benefits. People made a lot of quick money, mainly men, mainly people who had boats, right. Mainly people who were already more powerful and better resourced. But the harms have really fallen on primarily these rural women who have been relying on the resource forever. So, it exacerbated these existing inequities and created some new inequities. And this is what happened in Palau but it's really not unique to Palau, right. Whenever we see this large-scale extraction from a local resource-dependent community, we find that they are almost always worse off after the fishery has been depleted.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:33] Well, I mean, it stands to reason, right? And it also, I think, I read a paper a long time ago about, when I think this was specific to aquaculture, but when a farm becomes a profit center, then the gendered division of labor comes in, right? I mean, even more so, meaning that the men will come in and say, okay, we're going to, we're going to handle it from here. And I think that sounds like what happened in Palau, right?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:18:00] Yeah. And, you know, I, I don't think it was the men who were consciously wanting to seize control. I think it was that, you know, people saw the opportunity to make a killing. And the people who were able to make a killing were people with boats, and people with boats are men because in Palau, again, the traditional gender division of labor is that men are going out on boats harvesting finfish. And so, it was just this existing system that, you know, at the start, wasn't necessarily inequitable.

There were differences, right? But they became advantages and disadvantages when that trade came into play.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:18:34] What does sea cucumber taste like?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:18:36] It tasted like an oyster. I really found it delightful. And depending on the sea cucumber in Palau they either only eat the guts, or they'll eat the whole body. But what's really cool about many of the species they harvest is that they can just cut an incision in the body wall of the sea cucumber, take out the guts, and then put the sea cucumber back. And because sea cucumbers are amazing animals, they'll regenerate all of those guts, and it can be harvested again. So that was another thing that was different about this trade. In Chinese medicine and food, they eat the entire sea cucumber. They dehydrate it, and then they rehydrate it often as part of a soup. And so, it wasn't a renewable resource in that way.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:14] So you mentioned about Palau that it is a former U.S. colony, and now it's in this thing called free association, which means it's mostly sovereign, but maybe not completely. So, you know, and then in your bio, you say, or it says that your work has a focus on U.S. militarization in Palau. So, could you tell us about that and, and what we should know?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:19:38] Yes, it's an issue that I hoped I would never have to work on, and that I didn't anticipate working on when I did my PhD on fisheries. But the reality is, Palau is a place that has come to be really special to me. It's a place that I have gained so much. I have friends and even people I would call family in Palau now. And when the military showed up, the kind of writing was on the wall. I had worked with folks in the Marshall Islands before and had colleagues in Guam or Guam who had encountered U.S. militarization on their islands. And we knew that it was bad news because everywhere the military goes, contamination of soils and seafoods follows. And not only contamination, but, but all sorts of destructive activities in the community. Very strongly a pull to do what I could to be an ally to communities in Palau who are resisting militarization. And do as much as I can also recognize my privilege being at Stanford University, right. Having a PhD. Being connected to the folks that I am, be a networker for people to have access to legal recourse and to solidarity with people who have been organizing on other islands for a long time. So that's been my role. My husband is a Marine. He was in the Marine Corps for ten years. I have tremendous respect for service members and, and for the sacrifices that they and their families make. And I say that only because I think it's really, really important that we're able to separate the individual service members that we love and that I really do believe we need to support from the institution that is the U.S. military, which mistreats service members as much as it does members of communities living near military facilities. So, I like to get that out of the way too. The fact is, a lot of Palauans also serve in the military, have family who serve in the military. People from the freely associated states serve in the military at much higher rates, actually, than American citizens do for a lot of reasons. With this most recent research, I work with a group of Palauan young people. I teach them how to do social science, but I co-teach it with a Palauan colleague, mentor and really auntie of mine who teaches the Indigenous protocols, the right Palauan way of approaching people and approaching topics. And so, together with these young people, we conducted interviews with community members living near these military sites. And what we learned is that already there's been this massive destruction of habitat of land crabs and coconut crabs, which are such critical food and livelihood resources for people living in these communities. We learned that there's been a disruption of local life and really a disrespect for local life and local values.

The military is in many cases illegally developing and forging ahead despite local opposition, including elected leaders and chiefs. You know, people with real authority in their own community. Just because Palau has a relationship, a freely associated status with the U.S., does not mean that the U.S. military can and should go and do absolutely whatever they want in these places. And so, part of my work, as I said, has been just trying to connect local people with resources. I do that through my nonprofit, which I run with Autumn Bordner, Allies for Micronesia Project, and you can find us on Instagram to look for opportunities to engage, to be an ally, to stand in solidarity with these communities. It's a really, you know, rapidly evolving situation and that's where we try to keep track of things for people that are interested outside of Palau in, in supporting.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:15] Thank you. That was a really great synopsis of that, and I appreciate everything that you just said. So, we will definitely also link to the Allies for Micronesia Project. I hadn't heard of that before, so I'm very excited that that exists and it sounds like an amazing effort. So, I'm going to switch gears a little bit here. And again, I mentioned you've got a lot of papers out there, and a lot of your work also intersects with gender and fisheries, which I love, and you coauthored another paper titled *Practical Ways to Implement Gender Sensitive Fisheries and Aquaculture Research in the Pacific*. So, what are some examples of these practical ways that you outline?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:23:55] This is a paper that was led by Sangeeta Mongubhai, who is an incredible researcher in Fiji. But this really came out of what we saw as gender emerging as kind of a hot topic in fisheries research, which is an important dimension in fisheries. But many people are taking it on for the first time, and they don't necessarily have a background in gender studies or even in social science, right? So, these people are natural scientists that they're kind of coming to gender and to social science for the first time. And for a lot of the reasons you've explored on this show, like, it's possible to do a lot of harm, right? Exploring these topics without some sensitivity and some training around it. So, we talk about considering the gender makeup of the research team itself, of being aware of gender assumptions in the study design, of considering how to communicate findings to diverse members of the community, right? For example, something that really commonly happens in fisheries research still is, especially in the Pacific, because, as I mentioned, there is a gender division of labor. Women do fish, and even women who don't fish, of course, have valuable input to provide about their resources. Oftentimes when people do interview women, they assume that all women are alike, and they can just talk to a couple of women or one type of woman. And in reality, women with different intersecting identities have different relations with the fishery. And so it's really important to talk to a diversity of women. I was recently involved in a study that inherited survey data that was collected this way. So, they spoke with just a few women in every village. They spoke with the most powerful women in the villages. But when we went back and a local researcher conducted in-depth interviews, we learned that actually these powerful women didn't necessarily understand what was going on with more marginalized women in communities. That was because they were younger, they were unmarried, they were migrants to the village. And so, it was really important, right, in this case that you speak with a diversity of women. And I was involved in another study recently that I think was done more the right way. So, it's a survey that we designed in collaboration with local fisherwomen who know their resource and know their community. And when we were deciding which kind of demographic factors to consider, they knew that asking for marital status was going to be really key in their community. We had a PhD student who's analyzing the data like an error, or it was a fluke that marital status explained all of these things about the fishery. But when she presented it to our whole team, the Palauan researchers explained right away, oh yeah, that's why this makes sense. This is why

marital status is so critical for women in this place. And so that highlights, you know, not only the need to include women, but to foreground the voices and the choices of local women who know the context and again, focus on a diversity of perspectives of women.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:36] Is that paper out yet? Because I want to, you know, link to all this stuff.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:26:40] Oh thank you. So, the two papers that I just talked about in more detail are not out yet. Yeah. But the practical ways to implement research is available.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:47] Yeah. That's out, so I will, I'll keep my eyes peeled for those two. And that's, those sound amazing. I imagine it's really difficult to inherit survey data or any kind of data from someone else and then try to work with it, right? That sounds complicated.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:27:01] Yeah, it can be a real challenge. I mean, no survey is perfect, right? Every. Yeah. Every study design has compromises and priorities, and we wouldn't always make the same one as the people who design the study, or we don't always understand the choices that they made. In this case, the survey data were great, but they just had this, like, you know, methodological challenge that we were able to address with the interviews. So, it highlights a number of things. A number of things.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:27:26] Yeah, yeah. So, I asked this question of everybody that comes on the show and SAGE is about building gender equality and empowering people in the seafood industry and your work definitely straddles seafood and academia. We've had several academics on this program as well, and some of the challenges are definitely similar. So, could you share 1 or 2 aspects of any of these industries or, you know, sectors that may contribute to inequality in their respective sectors? And what are some of the things that we can do to lessen these inequalities?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:27:57] The first thing that comes to mind is just I'm really sick of hearing that seafood is male dominated, and I kind of believed that when I first enter this field and it's just such B.S., right? Like women are running family businesses. They're running family life. They're on the water. They are dominating the processing workforce. They are like most of the leaders in fisheries management. They lead powerful fishing associations. I think it's just important that we recognize that women are very, very much a part of the seafood industry, often in underpaid or unpaid roles and undervalued roles. And so, I think as a first step and part of what I've tried to do with the podcast is just recognize, like seafood is not a male dominated industry. Stop saying it! And I should say too, it's not just women, that it's non-binary and trans folks, right? Like, we are a very gender diverse space, and we've had folks on the show who have great ideas about that. But I would love as a first step, just recognizing, right, that, that we're here.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:55] Yeah. I think that's an amazing yes. Totally agree with you. And I even fall into that trap sometimes. But we're everywhere. And again, like you mentioned, you know, people, diversity is all over the place. So, let's acknowledge that. And I think, you know, you mentioned in the survey data that you just inherited, you know, the, or not even in that survey, but there's in sometimes when you're designing a survey or someone's designing a survey that's not gender kind of responsive, they're thinking, okay, only the men are fishing, right. And that, you know, that may be true in a, in a given

community but again, you know, they've got, you know, families and people that are supporting them. And, and like you said, in these unpaid or underpaid roles. So, so let's really give some credit where credit is due.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:29:33] Hell yeah.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:34] Hell yeah. So, I do, I do like that. Good first step. So, this podcast is to inspire people working in or thinking about starting a career in the seafood sector. And I'd love to rephrase that question to ask specifically about your choice of career in academia. So why did you decide to get a PhD and join a university?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:29:54] Yeah. I mean, we met when I was fresh out of college. I was working at Fish Wise, which is a nonprofit, sustainable seafood consulting firm. I was directly partnering with Albertsons and Safeway, which have merged. Massive grocery chain, right. Trying to switch their sourcing always from, you know, unsustainable to sustainable seafood. And I love, the people at Fish Wise I learned a ton when I was there and, and one thing that I learned and became really frustrated with was the lack of good social science research in seafood. Like, we didn't really understand what happened when we switched from one seafood to another. You know, to us it was a line on a spreadsheet but to the harvesters in that community, it was their livelihoods. And what happens when the Seafood Watch gives you a red rating? Or when you lose your MSC certification and suddenly you can't sell your seafood to these companies anymore? We didn't know. And I really wanted to know. I wanted to know how do people benefit from seafood livelihoods? How are they accessing seafood livelihoods? So how are people benefiting from seafood? How are they accessing seafood and seafood livelihoods? How does the expansion and intensification of industrial fishing and aquaculture impact small communities? I think in many cases these forces are doing harm, right? And so I really wanted to go do my PhD so that I could begin to build this body of knowledge. And the field has grown and changed a lot since then. Even at Fish Wise back then, there was a real focus on human rights, kind of the most egregious human rights abuses. But I really loved coming to academia and having the freedom to explore those questions that kind of keep me up at night. I work really closely in fishing communities in Palau, and I've been able to support other community based through collaborations. So, I'm always looking for my work to be directly relevant, right, to the people that I aim to serve and who I learn from, but also hopefully applicable to the sector and to the way that we are thinking about managing fisheries and sourcing sustainable seafood. I mean, certainly it's changed the way that I eat seafood.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:00] Yeah, I think these are all really good questions and I still think, like you said, I mean, it's definitely changed a lot since then and well, since you started kind of, you know, wanting to explore this on your own through your academic career. And I agree, there should be way much more of this. And I think it's such these are all incredible questions to ask. One more question I have about academia. So, I'm not on Twitter anymore, but I used to be on Twitter, and I know you're on Twitter a lot. Or you were.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:32:26] I'm not on Twitter anymore ever since it imploded.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:29] Yeah, exactly, exactly. But you were active. You were quite active. And I really, I actually really learned a lot from you on Twitter. And one of the things that I, I guess, you know, you say I was in this corner of the social media and I think I was

really in the academic corner of Twitter because I would see people post like, don't, become, don't go get your doctorate. You know, these are the questions you need to ask. So, is that accurate? Like what advice would you give to people thinking about going into academia to kind of get an advanced PhD or, you know, that advanced degree?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:33:02] Yeah, I know I see those conversations a lot, too. And I feel like academic Twitter is pretty negative. It really. There are good reasons for that and I, I always give the same advice when someone is considering doing a PhD. I think you really need to go in with clear eyes. First, you need to know why do you want to do a PhD? Like it's not something to just do because the job market is bad or you're not sure what you want to do, right? Like it's a big commitment. You basically have to write a book about it, and you should have a clear vision for what you want to do with that degree. Being an academic, being a professor requires a PhD, so if that's what you want to do, that's a great reason to get a PhD. Increasingly, we see PhDs in positions at some of the international nonprofit organizations. But understanding that they're, like most jobs don't require a PhD. I also always recommend if you know that you want a PhD, your priority should be finding a compassionate advisor who really sees you as a human being, who doesn't see you as a workhorse, but understands that you have a personal life, and that doing a PhD is a job, you know it can and should be more like a 9 to 5. It's not always, but, you know, it's not something that you feel like you have to put your life on pause for five years. There are really great programs out there. The program that I did at Stanford is called E-IPER. They pay a livable salary. They provide benefits. You're not rolling in dough, but I was never worried about paying rent or where my next meal was going to come from like I hear some grad students. There are federal grants like NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program. But always to speak with a potential advisor to find out is this someone who's going to support me when life gets hard, inevitably, and is this someone who's going to help me identify funding sources so that I'm not financially insecure?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:44] That's really great advice, and I would definitely encourage everyone to think about that, because especially the debt part, right. Well, especially the mentor kind of trusted relationship part with an advisor and then the debt part, because I think everyone's going into debt over whatever, and we just don't need any more debt.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:35:01] Yeah, not a good reason to go into debt.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:35:03] No. So SAGE is about uplifting and amplifying diverse voices in the seafood industry and this podcast is one of the main ways that we are doing this. And I'd love to give you the opportunity to uplift someone or something. So, who would you like to uplift and why?

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:35:19] I love this question, and I had a list of like 30 people that I decided ultimately. Yeah. I know this sounds self-serving. I'm going to promote my own podcast, but that's just because, really, the guests that I have on the show are inspiring people who are really fighting for justice in their communities and in our seafood sector. I really try to pay attention to highlighting diverse voices and intersecting identities on the show. Just like you, I also try to highlight genderqueer folks, non-binary folks. So, if I could just pull out like an episode from each season. Season one is about seafood access, and I really recommend you listen to feini yin's episode. They work at Fishadelphia, which is a really unique CSA or I'm sorry CSF, where they're doing pricing according to the solidarity economy. So, they are really trying to make seafood accessible and affordable to everyone in Philadelphia who wants access to it. We also in that

conversation discuss creating inclusive spaces for queer folks and particularly queer youth in seafood. And so, I think, you know, listeners to this show might really enjoy that conversation. Season two, as I already said is about privatization. I mentioned my interviews with Queen Quet and Nico Gomez Andujar. Those are two of my favorite conversations. They deal with the intersections of colonialism and privatization, which I think, you know, I'm still teasing apart in my mind how that works. The thing is really, really relevant to remember that historical perspective when we're looking at fisheries today. Season three is about worker justice and I have a great conversation on foodservice and hospitality workers with Kirby Page and Radhika Sharma. They're in New York City organizing workers, and I think their work is just amazing. Radhika also works with the Queer Food Foundation. And so again, listeners to this show might find their work particularly exciting, but those are just some starting points. I know that's a lot more than one. My podcast is kind of my, my venue for doing that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:37:10] That's great. Thank you. And we actually have one of the founders of the Queer Food Foundation, Mavis-Jay Sanders, on an upcoming episode. So, we're excited to share about, more about the Queer Food Foundation and hear about that on our own podcast, too. So we are at time, and I just want to say, Caroline, thank you so much. Yeah, you mentioned that I guess we met each other when you were just out of college and so you're now up, you're a PhD making these great research papers and these amazing podcasts, and I'm just so thrilled to see your career journey and adventure in life. I'm just really, really happy to know you and, and grateful that you came on the podcast finally. So, thank you so much.

Dr. Caroline Ferguson Irlanda [00:37:50] Oh, thank you so much, Julie. And it's been so fun to watch you evolve as well and I'm just so happy. It's beautiful. So, thank you.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:37:57] Thank you so much. Thank you for tuning in to The Conch podcast. It would be amazing if you could take just two seconds to leave a review and share this podcast with your ocean loving friends. Thank you.

Crystal Sanders-Alvarado [00:38:13] The podcast is a program of Seafood and Gender Equality or SAGE. Audio production, engineering, editing, mixing, and sound design by Crystal Sanders-Alvarado for Seaworthy. The theme song "Dilation" is written and performed by Satan's Pilgrims. Funding for The Conch podcast is generously provided by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and Builders Initiative.