

Jon Spooner ([00:02](#)):

Hello and welcome to Live From the Space Shed a podcast all about space and science, hosted by me, Jon Spooner, and me.

Mini Jon ([00:10](#)):

You mean me.

Jon Spooner ([00:11](#)):

Sorry. Yeah. I mean, you,

Mini Jon ([00:14](#)):

Mini Jon.

Jon Spooner ([00:16](#)):

Mini Jon. Long story short, a few years ago I accidentally set up my own space agency based out of the shed at the bottom of my garden. Turns out that if you go around telling people you are the director of human space flight operations for the unlimited space agency, wearing an orange spacesuit, more people than you might think want to play along. And now the British astronaut Tim Peake, is our patron. And he took me with him to space.

Mini Jon ([00:39](#)):

He took \*me\* with him to space.

Jon Spooner ([00:40](#)):

Alright. He took you with him to space. So Mini Jon became UNSA's first astronauts. Woo. Since then, we've been touring in UNSA's mobile headquarters, the Space Shed to festivals like Latitude and Blue Dot telling stories, talking to some super cool space and science people. And we've recorded our chats so you can find out about their amazing work as well.

Mini Jon ([01:09](#)):

Jon?

Jon Spooner ([01:09](#)):

Yes MJ?

Mini Jon ([01:11](#)):

Who is your favourite person?

Jon Spooner ([01:11](#)):

Who's my favourite person?

Mini Jon ([01:14](#)):

Yes.

Jon Spooner ([01:14](#)):

What in the, in the world? Ah, do you want me to say it's you, Mini Jon?

Mini Jon ([01:24](#)):

Maybe...

Jon Spooner ([01:24](#)):

Okay MJ. I am my favourite person.

Mini Jon ([01:29](#)):

You mean me?

Jon Spooner ([01:30](#)):

Yeah. I mean you. What did I say?

Mini Jon ([01:36](#)):

You said you.

Jon Spooner ([01:36](#)):

I said you,

Mini Jon ([01:39](#)):

No!

Jon Spooner ([01:42](#)):

Me? Or you?

Mini Jon ([01:44](#)):

No!

Jon Spooner ([01:45](#)):

Now I don't know who either of us are anymore. Anyway, another of my favourite people is this episode's guest.

Mini Jon ([01:54](#)):

Really?

Jon Spooner ([01:54](#)):

I know, right? What are the chances that this little chat between us should lead us really neatly into the podcast that people have chosen to listen to? Quite. Let's get into it. This episode was recorded in the Faraway forest at Latitude Festival, where we were joined by one of my favourite humans. She is a poet, a lawyer, international human rights activist, and along with me and four of our other dear friends, a founding member of Unlimited Theater, Dr. Louisa Ashley. Press go for launch, MJ.

Jon Spooner ([02:42](#)):

Hello Latitude Festival! Hey. Hey, my name's Jon, Jon Spooner. I am the director of Human Space Flight Operations here at the Unlimited Space Agency. Welcome to UNSA HQ, the Space Shed. Give it up for the Space Shed. Yeah. Yeah. Hey, who thought it was gonna take off? Wow. It's like definitely first day of the festival vibes, right? <laugh>. We're gonna do a little bit of that actually. Anyone here want to go to space? Yeah, you're doing well. Literal family in the front row here. Thanks for your support. Um, we're telling stories from here. Uh, we are hosting conversations with amazing, brilliant people, climate scientists, activists, uh, some space scientists, as many of you all know, this is, uh, the weekend of the 50th anniversary of the Apollo Moon landings. So we've got some very cool stuff here happening. We've got cinema in the evening, we've got DJs going late.

Jon Spooner ([03:36](#)):

There's loads of stuff you to see and do all over the weekend here. But like I say, one of my favourite things as my job as director of Human Space Flight Operations is I get to meet some really cool, very interesting people. And I have one of them here for you today. We're gonna have a chat. You get to ask them some questions. They are a poet and recently been appointed the head of Law at Leeds Beckett University, very, very clever, and one of the most brilliant human beings that I know on this planet. Would you please welcome into the space shed, Dr. Louisa Ashley. Hi.

Louisa Ashley ([04:09](#)):

Hello.

Jon Spooner ([04:10](#)):

Lou. Welcome to the Space Shed.

Louisa Ashley ([04:13](#)):

Thank you. Oh God. I've got a massive spider. Sorry. There we go.

Jon Spooner ([04:16](#)):

Someone told us yesterday actually, that there is apparently a nest of tarantulas somewhere in the Faraway Forest. We don't know where. So if anyone, anyone got spider phobia, just two of you, they'll probably get you. Um, Lou, thank you so much for joining us this morning. You are a poet, like I said.

Louisa Ashley ([04:34](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Spooner ([04:34](#)):

You have just been appointed head of Law at Leeds Beckett University.

Louisa Ashley ([04:37](#)):

Yes. Scary.

Jon Spooner ([04:39](#)):

But it's an interesting route that you've taken to this point because you actually started, uh, you studied theatre at the University of Leeds.

Louisa Ashley ([04:47](#)):

I did English Literature and theatre studies.

Jon Spooner ([04:49](#)):

That's cool. Well, I studied English literature at, uh, university of Leeds. Yeah, yeah. And then after university you set up a theatre company with five friends.

Louisa Ashley ([04:57](#)):

Yeah. Including you.

Jon Spooner ([04:58](#)):

That's how it works. That's how you get your guest passes at Latitude <laugh>. Um,

Louisa Ashley ([05:04](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Spooner ([05:04](#)):

Yeah. But actually no. The reason is that, uh, you are an artist who's moved into now law working, uh, particularly in human rights law, international human rights law. You've got a doctorate. Lou, how do you describe yourself these days?

Louisa Ashley ([05:17](#)):

Oh, I don't actually know. I, I suppose I describe myself as um, an academic. Yeah, yeah. An aspiring academic. Cause you're always trying, you know, you're always learning new things. And I also, I'd like to describe myself more as a poet. So.

Jon Spooner ([05:33](#)):

I just did.

Louisa Ashley ([05:34](#)):

I know, yes.

Jon Spooner ([05:34](#)):

I've giving you that title.

Louisa Ashley ([05:35](#)):

That, that, that was great. Um, and as a, as a facilitator of learning in life, I think. Really. Yeah.

Jon Spooner ([05:42](#)):

But a facilitator of learning in life. I like that. Head of Law and facilitator of learning in life. That's beautiful. We worked together for a long time.

Louisa Ashley (05:49):

We did.

Jon Spooner (05:50):

Uh, like, I dunno how many years it was running a theater company. And then in 2003, you very sadly left the, the theatre company.

Louisa Ashley (05:57):

Yes. Yes.

Jon Spooner (05:58):

Um, but to go on and you retrained in law.

Jon Spooner (06:02):

Yes. So I'd started studying law part-time while we, you know, we, we were touring, weren't we? And Liz was doing psychology and we'd be there reading our books before going on stage and I really enjoyed it. And then I got recruited by a big corporate law firm in Leeds. So they sponsored me through my studies. So I left Unlimited, uh, the day after leaving Unlimited, found out I was pregnant with Mia. So yeah. And then started, um, my training contract as a solicitor when Mia was just four and a half months old. So that was, it was quite intense.

Jon Spooner (06:37):

Because yeah, you did your final exams.

Louisa Ashley (06:40):

I'd had Mia two weeks earlier. Yeah.

Jon Spooner (06:43):

So Lou not only got a degree in English and theatre studies, retraining to be a lawyer doing those final exams, <laugh> as your literally anytime, anytime you could have appeared. Uh, and there she's being this superwoman, uh, doing that. And then straight back into the world of work as well.

Louisa Ashley (06:59):

Yes, yes. So corporate tax was my first seat. Um, and that, yeah, it was, that was really intense with a tiny little baby. So learning to be a mum and learning to be a solicitor. Um, so I thought this is really full on, I think the only solution is to have another baby <laugh>. I need some time off. <laugh>

Jon Spooner (07:20):

But this is really extraordinary. People say it must have been, it's a big gear change, right? Going from being an artist to a corporate lawyer.

Louisa Ashley (07:27):

Yeah. It, it, in many ways it is. You know, it's a completely different sort of organization values set, but you know, you're, you're working with people who are questioning the world around them. You know,

what, how, how does life work? How does society organize itself? How do we make sense of the world around us? And I think that's what has always interested me in law. You know, how do, how, what are our codes of behaviour? What are our norms? Where do they come from? And I think what's interesting about law is you can think about it, it's got an expressive function. So this is the kind of society we want to live in. So let's make some laws that are aspirational. So we've got human rights, norms and principles. That doesn't mean that all societies abide by those. Well, this is the, this is the direction of travel, but then law is also instrumental. So, you know, if you don't abide by the codes and the norms, um, that we've set, then you, you will be punished that that's the system we've got here anyway.

Jon Spooner ([08:22](#)):

And not just as an individual. Right. Everyone is held to account, be they individuals, companies, firms. We're gonna come onto that a little bit more. Countries being held to account as well. Yeah. Um, because moving from there, you became a teacher. When did you start at Leeds Beckett?

Louisa Ashley ([08:36](#)):

2008.

Jon Spooner ([08:37](#)):

So that is only 10 years ago.

Louisa Ashley ([08:40](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Spooner ([08:41](#)):

And you started as a lecturer? Senior lecturer.

Louisa Ashley ([08:43](#)):

Senior lecturer.

Jon Spooner ([08:43](#)):

Senior lecturer. Yeah. And in 10 years you've become the head of law.

Louisa Ashley ([08:46](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Spooner ([08:46](#)):

Yes.

Louisa Ashley ([08:47](#)):

Thanks.

Jon Spooner ([08:47](#)):

But you have recently completed your PhD as well. And this is where we're gonna get into, uh, the title of your talk. Uh, well, our conversation. Chocolate, yes. And eco feminism. What was the PhD based in?

Louisa Ashley ([08:58](#)):

Okay, so the PhD has nothing to do with chocolate or eco feminism that is about international human rights and the way that states have to report to this particular mechanism at the United Nations and what the function of that mechanism is. And in particular, I was looking at how it functions for states in crisis and my focus was Yemen. So when I started doing my PhD research, this was in 2014, 2013, um, Yemen was in crisis, but it wasn't in war. And now obviously it's uh, yeah. In a terrible mess.

Jon Spooner ([09:31](#)):

But that has led you into becoming quite activist in your work. Yeah. And this is, go and tell us about the chocolate.

Louisa Ashley ([09:37](#)):

So, chocolate, chocolate family, what I've got here is some chocolate from Columbia and it's from a little town, well, village really called San Francisco, which is very different to San Francisco in the States. Um, I eat a lot of chocolate. I'm, I'm addicted to chocolate, so much so that I carry it around in a little tin. And after I'd finished my PhD, I was thinking a bit more about how much do we consider the, the place of origin of the things that we consume, particularly in, you know, the brushes on the environment, our carbon footprint. And so that got me thinking about the chocolate that I was eating and where did the cocoa or the cacao come from for the chocolate that I was eating. Then I got the chance to go to Columbia and ate some chocolate while I was in Columbia. And that tasted amazing cuz I'm always tasting the chocolate as, oh, this is great.

Louisa Ashley ([10:26](#)):

I need to find out more about the carbon footprint of cacao. You know, what's, what's going on with all the chocolate that I'm eating? What I'm, you know, should I be eating this much chocolate? I'm probably not, but from an environmental perspective. And so then I, I, I got some funding and I went back to Columbia and I discovered, I went and visited the, the, the cacao farm where this is made. And it was such an amazing story. The woman who runs that farm, there's this a series of families and they very much focus on a sort of a cyclical process where the, the land is an entity of itself. So eco feminism that is taking the idea from feminism that male dominated societies will generally, um, oppress and subordinate women. And that is what's happening with the environment. It's being commodified, it's being, it's a very linear process where we are extracting and using and we are not returning and we need to move to a more cyclical approach.

Jon Spooner ([11:28](#)):

So this was an opportunity to look at cacao chocolate, to look at principles around the environment. And Columbia is fascinating because, I dunno how much anyone knows about this, the, the political history of Columbia and the fact that in theory, it recently in 2016 came out of around about 50 years of civil war. But one of the consequences of the, the, the left guerilla warfare that was going on is that they would hide in the jungle. And so actually Columbia is one of the most biodiverse countries because it's all been protected. But since the peace accords, the rate of deforestation has, has massively increased. And also the Colombian government are trying to get farmers to diversify from growing the coca leaf to growing cacao. So chocolate is the answer.

Jon Spooner ([12:16](#)):

Chocolate bringing peace to the world.

Louisa Ashley ([12:18](#)):

Yes. And there's, there's actually something called the Cocoa Forest and Peace Initiative in Colombia,

Jon Spooner ([12:24](#)):

Which is nice. And how, because this is, you've always used and worked with artists and, uh, used art in that work that you've taken to be it, international human rights or to the eco feminism work that you're talking about here. How, how do we bring the arts and that work together?

Louisa Ashley ([12:41](#)):

Well, I think, you know, obviously we were in a theatre company. I think if you, if you've got that creative side that, that's how you understand and process the world. So, so for me, when I went through a sort of traumatic personal event a few years ago, um, I started writing poetry again, having written poetry, a lot of poetry as a teenager. And these poems would just arrive in my head. You know, I'd, I'd wake up in the middle of the night and a poem would be there. So I'd have to start popping it into the notes in my phone so that I didn't forget. And before I knew it, I'd created a, a short show. So then I'm thinking, well, if I've used poetry as a way of dealing with trauma, how do other societies use that? And obviously my PhD was looking at Yemen and there's a, there's a poetry movement in Yemen where the, a group of young people are taking the traditional oral poetry form and they are writing poems to their elders about the, about the civil war, about, you know, and, and their experiences of it.

Louisa Ashley ([13:41](#)):

And it's really powerful. Uh, similarly in Afghanistan there is, um, there's a landi oral tradition, and it, it comes from the sort of the caravans, you know, so you're traveling along, says someone at the front, there's a call response and this is how messages would get sent back. And there's women in Afghanistan that have set up this poetry society and they record their poems on WhatsApp to each other, but they're risking their lives because if they get discovered doing this, then their families come down really heavy on them. So what's, this is something that I'm starting to look into. So what is the role of poetry in conflict? Not just sort of conflict at a state level, but yet in an internal sense as well.

Jon Spooner ([14:20](#)):

And how to get involved with the reconciliation processes in there.

Louisa Ashley ([14:23](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Jon Spooner ([14:23](#)):

Extraordinary work. I think you will all agree. In fact, I'm wondering who would like to hear one of Lou's poems Yeah. For the podcast. Uh, that's a, a big show of hands. Lou, what have you got?

Louisa Ashley ([14:35](#)):

Which one do you want, visceral reactions first?

Jon Spooner ([14:38](#)):



Yes. Yeah, yeah.

Louisa Ashley ([14:38](#)):

Okay. I normally start, I'm gonna have to stand, stand up. Yes.

Jon Spooner ([14:42](#)):

Yeah, let me move that and don't fall out.

Louisa Ashley ([14:44](#)):

Okay. So this is called visceral reactions. I'm not used to the visceral reactions I've been having of late where my head explodes and my nerves excruciating, my intellect and powers of reason where I want to flee from the room, the conversation, the treason. So I seek to turn my back on what has gone, but there's this voice that pops up and goes on and on, obsesses and fixates and makes me want to run away, away from the complexity of the old and the new, be alone by myself, shut down, and instead pursue a life without drama in which I'm not the protagonist, not the girl that feels caught in a point of convergence of everyone's past collapsing into my presence that shoots into the heart of my natural effervescence, makes my mind spin, my scripts start to slip, my head, go under my sanity dip.

Louisa Ashley ([15:34](#)):

The purpose of life is to enjoy every moment the yogi tea's words of wisdom speak to me. And I'm trying to enjoy the view from my van of the stream and the kids and the sheep. But there's this sadness that won't let me sleep. It creeps up when I'm making the tea or hanging the washing or left on my own. I feel my inner peace start to groan under the weight of this mess. I'm fine and I'm in pieces excited about future possibilities and paralysed by shock. I no longer want to be stuck. No longer want to be stuck.

Jon Spooner ([16:14](#)):

Thanks Lou.

Louisa Ashley ([16:14](#)):

Thank You.

Jon Spooner ([16:16](#)):

When did you write that one?

Louisa Ashley ([16:18](#)):

Ooh, that was on my birthday and that was in 2015.

Jon Spooner ([16:23](#)):

And what was it? When did that arrive? Did that arrive in the night?

Louisa Ashley ([16:26](#)):

Yeah, so I was, I was camping in my camper van and had this, I started feeling very claustrophobic actually. And, and it started coming then, so I had to turn the lights on and sometimes you just write a little seed of it and then the next day you work on it and a little bit more comes. And then actually this

poem here that I've just shared with you is actually a combination of two different poems that I revisited recently and felt that they would work better put together.

Jon Spooner ([16:52](#)):

Nice. And in part you've chosen this one as well because we were talking before we came, but this weekend we're really focusing on, uh, the climate crisis activism involved in that. And you've chosen this one in response to that broad brief, I think.

Louisa Ashley ([17:04](#)):

Yeah. Well this is just one of my favorites actually. <laugh>, I think my cow's poem is more relevant to that. Yeah.

Jon Spooner ([17:11](#)):

Well, like the visceral reactions part of it, this is a big thing for me at the moment, the idea that a lot more people are beginning to really feel the impacts of the climate emergency and, uh, feel lots of feelings of anxiety. Yeah. Um, grief often, um, fear and the a way of dealing with that, similarly to what you're talking about with, uh, in post-conflict, that just by talking about it at least, is a great first step to dealing with some of those often quite terrifying feelings.

Louisa Ashley ([17:37](#)):

Well, and I think you're right because I think the, the decisions that we make on a day-to-day basis are getting increasingly harder in terms of the anxieties and the fears that we have. You know, and I, and I'm sure you all felt, you know, you're sitting in the supermarket and I, I've, I've walked out not getting what I want to get because I can't get it in the way that I want to get it. Mm-hmm.

Jon Spooner ([17:56](#)):

And this is where I think, uh, there's a really interesting crossover with that way of describing, uh, expressing emotions and emotional responses to things through art. And then the work that you teach as a lawyer and the activist. I remember we've spoken before, you've talked about how you love that you are activating your students as well.

Louisa Ashley ([18:14](#)):

Yeah. It's really interesting having, so having been in higher education for 11 years now, the, the student, does anyone, does anyone here work in higher education? No.

Jon Spooner ([18:24](#)):

None of this lot have proper jobs. Look at them <laugh>.

Louisa Ashley ([18:28](#)):

So it's a real, uh, privilege because I get to work with hundreds of generally 18, 19, 20, 21 year olds. And so to have them in a space where you can invite them into a difficult conversation around very difficult concepts, particularly where international human rights are concerned, the environment, the obligations of non-state actors, including multinational corporations and, and then the, the preferences and the choices that we make on a day-to-day basis and how they fit in to that very, very complex web. And therefore what you do about it, cuz it's very easy to feel utterly powerless and lost and bereft and

therefore do nothing. So, you know, talking about sort of the, like being a facilitator of learning and, and life and it's just encouraging people to, to not accept the narrative that they are being pedaled or that we are being pedaled around us constantly and to question everything. But in a constructive dialogue

Jon Spooner ([19:28](#)):

At two o'clock we're gonna be doing a show called How to Save the Planet, which is my attempt to try and work that out, um, if you're interested in that. But what we've also done is that my feeling was it's often really difficult to know what to do. Yeah. And you need a starting point. So we've got a website called Howtosavethe.earth. If you've ever wondered what can I do or what more can I do, how to save the.earth, go there. And one of the things of different levels, level 1, 2, 3, 4, fives, level one is something you can do right now, uh, instantly today. Level five is if you wanted to dedicate your life to fighting climate, uh, change and breaking the climate crisis that you could, uh, study to become a law, a lawyer, and start to use the legal system Yeah. To make that change so that you can take corporation. We've got kids that are taking their schools to court.

Louisa Ashley ([20:15](#)):

So Yeah, absolutely. And you know, we, we might think of, uh, in Brazil, the collapse of a mine. Well what does that have to do with us? Well, that's owned by a German company. You know, there, there's, there's a lot of activity that goes on in the west that is actually directly or should be held directly accountable for, for what is going on in the global south. So yeah. And then that impacts directly on the environment.

Jon Spooner ([20:36](#)):

So I think it's a genuinely extraordinary career that you've made and achieving all the things that you have. But this is an opportunity. Lou knows loads of stuff about poetry, other places in the, the world international law. So, does anyone have any questions they would like to ask of Lou about or any of her work?

Louisa Ashley ([20:55](#)):

There's one down here.

Jon Spooner ([20:56](#)):

Yeah. Hi. Hi.

Audience ([20:58](#)):

Actually, just from what you said earlier, that in Columbia they're trying to encourage farmers to grow cacao instead of coco

Louisa Ashley ([21:05](#)):

Instead of coca.

Audience ([21:07](#)):

Instead of coca. Yeah. Is that, why is that?

Louisa Ashley ([21:10](#)):

So the, the coca is used to produce cocaine and that's,

Audience ([21:15](#)):

So, not chocolate ever. Coca produced chocolate as well, or

Louisa Ashley ([21:19](#)):

Uh, ah, so we've got an issue here with the, with language. So cocoa and cacao are the same. Yeah. But then there's coca, which is the cocal leaf, which is what cocaine is then produced. Yeah.

Jon Spooner ([21:35](#)):

So that's an excellent bit of clarification. Otherwise you'd have gone away really confused. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's great. Any, anyone else? Hi. Uh,

Audience ([21:42](#)):

So back to the consumption, the environmental concerns in relation to the cocaine leaf. What, what, what, um, why is cacao better than cocoa?

Louisa Ashley ([21:50](#)):

We've got environmental issues in terms of deforestation, but I think the major issue, which is linked to environmental is that in 2012 they stopped doing the crop spraying. You know, that's sponsored by the US going in and spraying all of the coca leaves. And what that crop spraying process did was it just, it killed everything and it was also killing the jungle and the rainforest, which the coca farming abutted, and they stopped that in 2012. But there was a, a new president that was elected last year in Columbia, and they're looking at reintroducing that. But also the issue is with the, with the supply chain. Um, and that now that the peace agreement has happened, then actually there's been an increase, as I said, in deforestation and in the growing of the cocal leaf. So it's very political as well because the US is involved with the war on drugs policy

Jon Spooner ([22:44](#)):

And just another example of people in some of the poorest parts of the world and those communities being disproportionately affected by, by people taking stuff away and out of the planet. Right?

Louisa Ashley ([22:55](#)):

Yeah. And I, on my recent research trip to Columbia, I met, uh, a girl whose family have always farmed coca. They've always farmed it. And they were given the opportunity to diversify into cacao. Uh, so they took that opportunity, but they continued farming the coca as well. And she said, that's just that, that's, that's how we make our living. And until you've got a supply chain for the cacao, we can't stop, we can't stop farming the coca. So it's a, it's a, it is a really, really complex issue. Um, but now that the, the Farc the guerillas have moved out, the issue you've got now is that you've got other drug cartels that criminal Mexican drug cartels moving in. So it's an environmentally where you've got this biodiversity really needs preserving. And so then the answer being to reintroduce crop spraying is really bad for the environment.

Jon Spooner ([23:47](#)):

So what is, is it, and it's a bit unfair to ask you this question because what is the answer? What is the answer? And because this is this thing for me definitely at the moment, feeling really hopeless in all of this. Yeah. Is there, but there is reason for hope, right?

Louisa Ashley ([23:57](#)):

It comes back to, you know, me sort of thinking about the choices that I make when I'm stood there buying my chocolate. You know, we as Western consumers are, are actually very powerful. So we might think that as individuals we are not, but actually as a collective, we are extremely powerful and we've got an opportunity to harness that power, uh, and, and influence our trading relationships. The amount of aid that the UK sends into places like Columbia, like Yemen is enormous. That's our money as taxpayers. Okay. And then the relationship that we have in terms of the goods that are coming back to us, uh, or the ramifications of that process. So we, we need to mobilize.

Jon Spooner ([24:42](#)):

We do Lou, I, we talked, um, a while ago. We must pick this conversation up. You got in touch saying we should do something about the arms fair. Uh, yes, that's happening. Yes. But this is because you're very hot on Yemen. I'm not sure - it's still not in the media a huge amount. It's not necessarily, you know, lighthearted festival fair, but highlight what's happening in Yemen right now.

Jon Spooner ([25:03](#)):

Okay. So, I mean, how long have you gotten, if it starts getting boring, just tell me to shut up. But we've currently got, in Yemen, 80%, uh, of the population are dependent on humanitarian aid. Around about 14 million people are at risk of famine. Uh, the major port Hudaydah, which is where all of the aid supplies go into, has been shut down re recently reopened. But the coalition, which is led by Saudi Arabia and includes the UAE, uh, the UK, we, we sell billions of pounds worth of arms to the Saudis. Um, and if you look at the graph of those sales, whilst this war has been ongoing, it is just enormous and outrageous really. Uh, we also give an awful, as I said before, an awful lot of money to Yemen in, in aid, but the, it, it's not being reported on and not, not in the mainstream media. And there's clearly reasons for that.

Jon Spooner ([25:57](#)):

And I think, well, some of the reasons being that as a nation, we are subsidising the firms that are then or supporting the firms.

Jon Spooner ([26:03](#)):

Well we're, we are providing military intelligence. So we are training the Saudis. We are also providing, um, there, there are reports that we've got certain people on the ground, particularly in the border region. So Yemen is just at the, that south, you've got sort of Saudi Arabia like that, and Yemen is just across the bottom here and it's the poorest country in the Middle East. And Saudi Arabia is one of the richest

Jon Spooner ([26:23](#)):

And big thing for us this weekend is about mobilising, but how, when you talk about we need to mobilise how we, someone said, I wanna mobilise, I wanna get involved with that. What, where do they go? What do they do?

Louisa Ashley (26:33):

Well, there's, there's lots of things that you can do. So from, from Yemen's perspective, if you're interested in that, there's a campaign against arms trade. They've just had a, a case go through the Court of Appeal, uh, which they have won part of it. So the, the decision to continue licensing the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia has just been ruled as unlawful. So you can join Campaign against Arms trade and support them because it works. Yes. And they are currently getting all of their activism ready for a big arms fair that's gonna be going on. So you can get involved with that. Um, you can use the arts and creativity, so you can have a look at the work, the poetry work that's going on in these different countries. And I think just become more, become more knowledgeable.

Jon Spooner (27:13):

<affirmative> Because it is, it's easy to ignore it. And I think that's, like I say, I'm aware that this year we, there's slightly less sort of fun banter that we are doing in the Space Shed. We're trying to keep it light, and at the same time there's some really serious [beep] that's going on that we don't want to ignore because it's better to talk about it. Right?

Louisa Ashley (27:29):

Yeah. Could go vegetarian. Yes. Let's put that out there.

Jon Spooner (27:32):

Yeah. Um, that's, I think that's a level that's, I think that's a level two suggestion. Anyone got a question for Lou before we Uh, yes. Hi. I knew you were waiting to ask something.

Audience (27:44):

Thank you very much. Um, you spoke earlier about laws being aspirational on your sort of travels, is there a region or a country or somewhere where you think they've kind of cracked it that we should be kind of following their blueprints?

Louisa Ashley (27:55):

I think that's good question. Yeah, I think it's a really good question. Um, you know, on the face of it you might say, oh, the Scandinavian countries, because they're, they're really on it where human rights are concerned. Um, I could also say, well, you know, let's take a look at Yemen. They are party to nine of the major international human rights conventions. But my goodness, it doesn't look like there's, they're making much of a difference. So I think the whole international human rights framework is fundamentally flawed. Yes, it's aspirational, but if it doesn't actually secure rights for people on the ground, then it's, it's pretty futile. And going back to the sort of Scandinavia model, actually, I was in, um, Oslo a few years ago and speaking to people, there's, there's a populist movement going on there that's very anti-immigration. And you know, there's a rising number of refugees that are being marginalized that are really struggling to survive. So now more than ever, I think it's actually, it's quite critical. Sorry, that's not a very ...

Jon Spooner (28:52):

Well no, it's clear. It's like there is lots of aspirational stuff out there, but at the moment people just continue to ignore it. And this is a terrifying thing. It's like the way that, you know, we see it happening in our politics every day at the moment. Here's the rules, this is the deal. This is what you said, I'm gonna

do something else entirely different. And it's why we need to, it's why with Extinction Rebellion, closing down city centres in five cities and keeping going actually, and that's the thing, staying active as much as we can. Lou, maybe you could see us out and Lou, you're not gonna run away, are you? Yeah. You're not gonna run away, are you? So we often get people, if you were just a bit shy or didn't get the opportunity or feel it was the right moment that Lou's gonna be sticking around. You know, what she looks like now. Um, you can go over and have a chat with her. There's a gin bar just there buy her gin and have that conversation. Lou, you've got a poem to, you've got another poem, haven't you. Want me to hold your chocolate for you?

Louisa Ashley ([29:42](#)):

Yeah. Okay, thanks. Um, yeah, so this poem is called Cows because I actually think we need fewer cows in the world and more trees. Uh, and this, I wrote this poem as I was going for a run maybe two, three years ago. So cows. Those hills whose crisp definition had yesterday, wooed a lazy bank holiday love affair, are today unseen. I pant upwards, the usual way marks absent by the mist. My usual turning points too easily missed. I can only hear the bleat of lambs, can't see their origins suddenly ahead of me and in my path, guarding a usually open gate, soft brown, solid figures that make me hesitate. Oh, hello. I say to the moist air, they view me with detached disdain. I'm a city girl. These cows don't sit easy with me. I recall when a quarter of a century ago, their friends on the Cheshire plane had lined up at 3:00 AM to cast their disapproving looks my way. I pause and retreat, I pause again, turn 180 degrees, wave my arms and call shoo! And all they do is nothing but continue to chew the cud. If I was brave, I'd plow on through the mud and traverse the gate, but I'd pause and wait, then say, okay, and turn about, run back the way I came.

Jon Spooner ([31:24](#)):

Dr. Louisa Ashley, everybody

Jon Spooner ([31:27](#)):

Just, just say goodbye properly. That is Dr. Louisa Ashley doing amazing work this afternoon. Two o'clock, uh, gonna be doing a show, How to Save the Planet. Come along for that. Later today, we've got Dr. Alice Bell, who's, uh, an extraordinary climate activist, scientist writing, uh, the history of climate change for Bloomsbury at the moment. Then we're showing Hidden Figures, amazing film if you're not seeing it about the amazing women that did all the, uh, maths to get the Apollo missions to the moon. Then we've got DJs, uh, later. This, I can't remember who's, oh, Alice Bell is DJing. And then we've got Frau DJs, our resident DJs. Loads of stuff happening today. Thank you for coming along today. One more time, Dr. Louisa Ashley, everybody.

Jon Spooner ([32:08](#)):

Yeah, the cow poem is great, but Visceral Reactions still my favorite. Louisa is a true inspiration to all of us. Thanks for listening to this episode. If you enjoyed it, please subscribe. Share us with your friends and family. Live from the Space Shed is an Unlimited Theatre production with Season One, brought to you in association with the Science of Technologies Facilities Council, the Cockcroft Institute, The Space and Arts Council England. With special thanks to Dr. Rob Appleby of Manchester University. Our theme music is Go! By Public Service Broadcasting used with their extremely kind permission. Our sound engineer and editor is Andy Wood, with additional sound, designed by Elena Pena. This show is produced by Jon Spooner and Alice Massey. With support from our friends at Storythings. Live from the

Space Shed is an Unlimited Theatre production on behalf of the Unlimited Space Agency. See you again for more Live From the Space Shed soon.