



PALESTINE AND CHALLENGING SETTLER COLONIAL IMAGINARIES

THE FINAL STRAW RADIO
MAY 21, 2021

The following text is portion of our 2018 interview with filmmaker and activist Yousef Natsha (<https://yousefnatsha.wix-site.com/yousef-natsha>) about his film about his hometown, Hebron, and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. We invite you to check out our full interview with him from March 25, 2018, linked in our show notes and we're choosing to feature this right now because of the flare up in violent evictions, home destruction and the assassination of around 100 Palestinian residents of Gaza by the "Israeli Defense Forces."

Then, we'll be sharing a panel from the 2021 UNC Queer Studies Conference called "No Blank Slates: A Discussion of Utopia, Queer Identity, and Settler Colonialism" featuring occasional Final Straw host, Scott Branson alongside E. Ornelas and Kai Rajala. This audio first aired on Queercorps, on CKUT radio in Montreal. If you'd like to engage in this project, reach out to noblankslates@riseup.net.

Search for this interview title at <https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/> to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

YUSEF NATSHA ON PALESTINE

Yousef Natsha: My name is Yousef Natsha, I am from Palestine from a city called Hebron. And Hebron is part of West Bank that's under that Israeli military occupation. I did start my professional work mainly with human rights organizations on the field and start documenting what my community is facing from the Israeli government. Since that till now I'm doing this awareness for the other communities to know what's going on in my community. I have been working on it for no less than two years, it is a long process of footaging these terrifying moments.

The documentary mainly focused on human rights violation that's the Palestinian community is facing from the Israeli military, they are occupying West Bank and Gaza Strip for sure. And when I started the process of making the documentary, I start saying, "should I go to the, you know, the the history part of what has happened and how this is ended up being existed till this moment", the issue that I ended up going back to the time to like 1917, when like things actually did start, and how the colonization system did begin on Palestine and ended up bleeding into what we're having right now. So I ended up actually, after a lot of thinking, I ended up just doing it about human rights abuses. And I saw that my community, my family, my friends are not treated as humans. And from there, I ended up just taking my community voice into this documentary to explain the suffering. It took me a while to understand what is actually going on, "Is this normal to face? Should I just live my normal life in terms of just going to the college and finish that and then find, you know, a job to be occupied with all the time, having a family building a house", and so on.

So it has been a long process for me after the age of 18, specifically, of what I actually have to do, which path I should take. And after a year or so spending it on studying accounting in one of the colleges and Hebron, I just said, "This is not my place, I can't see myself eight hours sitting behind the desk." That's the moment that I ended up pushing that college door with my foot and saying, "I am going down on the ground." I started filming with my phone. And I didn't know that these footages would not go anywhere, but at least I felt that I'm doing something for my community. Afterwards, I ended up having a media scholarship. And after that I became

more familiar with filming and photography and so on, and I worked with different local radio stations, and international filmmakers, and at the same time journalists. And on the age of 20, I ended up knowing this human rights organization based in Chicago called the Christians Peacemaker team that I did start working with them on the field. And I can say that gives me in some extent, the ability of moving around under the protection of an international organization in some extent, a lot of people had the question of how I was able to take these footages, how I was able to move around soldiers. Some people do have an idea how much it is difficult to be around Israeli military, specifically on the field and documenting these abuses.

I can say that one of the things that did help me first is English. I used English to talk with the soldiers when they come to try to turn me back to not allow me to film I use English because if the Israeli military somehow if I spoke to them in Arabic, which I can say that they can tell from my face, obviously, but at the same time using English that in some extent, let them think of, you know, it seems like he is not Palestinian at least. Does not mean that I have not been facing harassment from the Israeli military. I have been pushed away, being arrested, being interrogated within the work that I have been doing on the ground.

So I can say that the process has been super difficult but at the same time, I did succeed in making my community comfortable and me being around in terms of, you know, if they are facing harassment from the Israeli military, they will say “okay, well let’s call Yousef”. So with the years I ended up having my phone number with my community members and they will give me a call when the Israeli military is making a, you know, house search or a body search for one of the community members in the old city of Hebron, specifically.

So I can say that the footages has been taking during the process of two years or two yearsish but it does not mean that the footage is that I have to it is not repeating itself and happening now. That’s one of the things that people have to take in consideration that “Oh, with this kind of an old footage, why we need to see it?” Well, actually, it is not, it is happening daily. It shows that struggle that the Palestinians are facing in other places. As a Palestinian and a person that grew up in an environment that does not believe in government -- for sure, I don’t -- seeing the impact of pow-

er on my community, for sure, I don't believe in that. And I am seeing it first as a way of using the suffering for collecting money. And that's why I feel like I for sure will not believe in any kind of government power that's mainly using the struggle of my community for funding, for resources and saying that "we're going to use it for building houses", and that's for sure it's not happening. And a lot of money that has been directed for the Palestinian authority that Palestinians don't see it. The only thing that we do see is armed Palestinian police, that they don't have authority on anything, the Israeli government controlling even the Palestinian authority.

In terms of the history about Palestine and what has been sent abroad for the international media about my community struggle. It became super tricky about how we're going to name this struggle, how we can finish it, how we can focus on a something, you know, a anything, to try to solve this issue. And my community did resist this occupation, we have used different way of resistance to try to take this occupation down. And unfortunately, the international media did play a big role of sending the wrong image, to the extent that the Palestinians being called "terrorists" for whatever we are doing. Us naturally as human beings, we have to resist against a racist armed power to control us. That natural resistance became titled as violent, it became titled as a terrorist act. That's one of the reasons why I actually focused about human rights and the documentary because unfortunately, that's the only language that's being accepted in the international community to talk about the Palestinian suffering and the Palestinian struggle.

And I can say, through the screenings that I had, so far, I have been seeing a lot of people being engaged with the conversation and saying that "yeah, it is completely terrible that Palestinians are not treated as humans", which to be honest with you I didn't see that reaction when I just spoke to the people about the struggle itself without showing them a documentary or the language that's internationally being used. The history is repeating itself, some people will say they are from Saudi Arabia, or from Jordan or from Syria or whatever, I can say that they are Indigenous community. Other thing that people don't recognize, sometime when we say Palestinian, they will think that we are just only Muslims, and that's wrong. The Indigenous Palestinian community are Palestinian Muslims, Palestinians Jews, Palestinian Christians. There is different ways to make a direct action to go marching down the streets, you know, for people to recognize

that there is a community, an Indigenous community, that they are suffering from an armed military occupation, and their struggle needs to be ended before the time being too late, as the history have told us about other Indigenous community around the world. About how they have been suffered from their voices not being heard, their resources being taken, their history being being colonized, it is completely a colonization system, an apartheid system, and it needs to be stopped and my dream, really my dream is to see people marching all over the world about this struggle. One of the things that I do keep repeat all the time: first, our fight is not with a religion. Our fight is simply connected with an armed power coming to our houses, to our lands and saying that “it is not yours anymore”. Palestinians refugees, most of them still have keys for their houses. They are still having it. They are still hoping one day they will go back and having the right of being returned.

Scott Branson: I'm Scott Branson, they/them. I live in western North Carolina, and I've been part of organizing this conference for this session, this one and the last one, which is where I met my co-presenters, collaborators, E and Kai, and we started working on this project together. I'm a teacher, writer, translator, etc. Just as my background.

E Ornelas: My name is E Ornelas, I prefer E, so no pronouns is great, but they it's also fine. Yeah, I also met Scott and Kai at the last Queer Studies conference that was in person, and so I'm happy to be back with y'all, but in a digital space. And yeah, I don't really know what to say about myself. I'm a PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota and I currently reside on Ojibwe and Dakota land, although that's kind of...there's a really long, complicated history of that, those claims to land. And, you know, it's now called Duluth, Minnesota. And I have a lot of feelings about land acknowledgments, but I feel like it's important to at least name -- as someone who is not Indigenous to this land, my ancestors were Indigenous to what is now central Mexico, as well as Canada, settlers from Southern Europe -- I feel like it's important, at least to say, you know, as a visitor to this space, whose land I'm on. Yeah, and I think I'll pause for now and pass to Kai, just in the interest of time, and we can get into more stuff about land acknowledgments and who we are and all that hopefully soon. Pass.

Kai Rajala: All right, thank you E. I'm Kai, they pronouns. I am joining you from Kanien'kehá:ka land, colloquially known as Montreal, also referred to by many as the island of Osheaga. I am originally from unceded Coast Salish territory, in what is commonly known as Vancouver, British Columbia. I met E and Scott at a conference in Asheville a few years ago and I'm happy to still be collaborating with them on this project. I'm a bit of the anti-academic, though I did do a BA in French language and studied with Glen Coulthard at the University of British Columbia in the Indigenous Studies Department. So a lot of my work is very referential to Glen's work. Yeah, and we'll talk more about the project.

E: I like that name drop, very jealous of that connection.

K: *laughs* I mean, it's there, right? So name it.

SB: So we started working together, cuz we had overlapping interests in terms of working on like utopian vision within radical -- particularly anarchist, social movement organizing -- and the way that utopian ideas are entangled with colonial and settler colonial visions. So we had all done our own sort of work and were trying to figure out how we could collaborate on a larger potential book project, and this, so today is going to be one sort of installation of that ongoing project that we're building. And we've each prepared like a little bit of where we're coming from, to read. We also talked a little bit, before we open the session, we're talking about land acknowledgments and I just wanted to also add that like, we're in a university setting, and part of the stuff that we're talking about is how the implications of settler colonialism get invisibilized and many of the institutions that we are working within are, you know, have profited off the theft of land grant institutions. We were talking about that a little bit, right before, and land acknowledgments have been used even by these institutions as a way to kind of show some kind of like, performative solidarity that has nothing to do with, like, any material follow up, right? So like, it's a thing that gets used but it's also we thought worth acknowledging, you know, that we are not Indigenous to the land that we're speaking from.

K: So I think what's interesting to note is our project and actually start out as anything really queer related, we're all queer, and for the purpose of this conference we decided to shape what we're working on to fit kind of the lens of Queer Studies and, you know, queer experience. It actually started with a few things. I ran into E and Scott in Atlanta at an anarchist conference two years ago and then that's kind of where this conversation really began, the ball started rolling. But one of the things that started with was a critique of sustainability politics and the kind of sustainability movement, which I think is like this liberal, kind of like nonviolent political, which refuses to surrender settler agency or control over territories, and instead it's kind of focusing on preserving settlement and attempting to reduce the ecological imprint that the settler State has on the planet. And so you know, it's kind of naively asking like, "how can we delicately tap the earth of its resources? How can we like politely remove indigenous people from their land? And you know, if the current practice of capitalist accumulation by colonial dispossession are destroying the waters? Like, how can we make the colony sustainable?" It started with that. And we're

also looking at ways in which as Scott was mentioning, in the beginning, more radical parts of our settler movements are actually reinforcing the settler state and the colony, and queerness.

EO: My starting point is usually from fiction. You know, I sort of blend maybe some of the more science and climate change stuff that Kai was just talking about, but with like, you know, a science fiction lens, and how like apocalypse, and climate change, and dystopia and utopia show up in speculative. And so that's sort of my general subject area or interest. But yeah, I will explain shortly, I definitely made it queer for this. But I think generally, kind of radical politics, the whole, and how it takes up a lot of these narratives is what I'm concerned with.

So I'm definitely excited to work on this project. And I am excited to hear also people's responses or questions as we're sort of shaping this larger project we're working on, we would like to make it some sort of tangible thing, a book or whatever out in the world. So feedback is very much encouraged throughout this, so that we can sort of be in conversation and not just like talking or writing at people. I really, very much want to welcome like, yeah, conversation.

SB: Yeah, even maybe inviting, like, collaborators too. Because like, another thing that we're trying to do is envision projects that aren't like single author ownership based. So but I guess let's go into the reading of our prepared statements, and then go into the discussion so we have more time to unpack those things. So I'm going to start out with grounding in in the kind of like, questions about queer movements. I'm going to start reading.

Today's radical queers are stuck in terms of figuring out how to inherit the legacy of gay liberation over against the more recent legacy of gay rights or assimilation. And I think that this dialectic between liberation and assimilation is a little bit misleading. And from like, retrospect, we can see the cooptation is like the goal. I mean, that's a kind of pessimistic narrative, but it's the thing that keeps happening. Often, this stuckness produces a nostalgia for the time of general militancy and rebellion across different groups experiencing domination, a time that ultimately splintered through hierarchy, liberal identitarianism, counterinsurgency, murder, incarceration and incorporation into the dying liberal bourgeois state.

And yet, today we see a proliferation what at least previously were deviant genders and sexualities, especially among younger people, while acknowledging an easier terrain for older people to come out and a culture that replays images of queer criminality, liberationist slogans, and apparent subscription to the radical claims of those movements. And when I said like a “dying bourgeois state”, I don’t mean that in like a good way, because something worse might be coming, right? Um, some kind of neo-feudalism or whatever.

Theoretically, a major issue in inheriting this legacy of queer liberation or gay liberation has been how to deal with a liberationist ideology that sees queerness, or more precisely, homosexuality, or even more precisely sex between men, as somehow inherently revolutionary, spelling the eventual doom of cis-hetero patriarchy and racial capitalism. Like if men fuck each other than the world will fall apart. If only for the reason that that efflorescence of public queerness via the movements didn’t actually produce this liberation right -- that didn’t happen -- but instead various backlashes on public sex and cross class contact over against recognitions of certain rites, we might discard the idea that queerness is radical. Of course, we still would have to contend with the way that HIV AIDS forced gay movements to combat the state and scientific communities for the very lives of those who are dying. But I think we can also get to the understanding of the limits of gay liberation theoretically, simply in the idea of the homosexual.

One version of this is the transgressive or even criminal, that category tends to rely upon the normative for its power. So it can always be absorbed. And this has been talked about by like, lots of people like Bataille or Judith Butler. For us, this absorption has already taken place, because gay now means a specific consumer niche.

Another version of this like paradox inherent in gayness is articulated in the early days of so called queer theory by Eve Sedgwick in her reading of Billy Budd, as what she called “the crucial question of a potentially utopian politics”. And this is what she asks, “Is men’s desire for other men the great preservative of the masculinist hierarchies of Western culture, or is it among the most potent threats against them?” I’ve been, like, sitting with this question for a really long time. For Sedgwick, this ambivalence is tied up with a “definitional incoherence” -- that’s what she calls it -- that

plagues modern attempts to classify homosexuality. Is it a minority group, an identifiable class of person, or is it a universalizing tendency that represents a possibility across classes and types and also, like, nations?

The modern gay rights movement has strategically employed the minoritarian response in a bid for recognition and incorporation, and thereby has left behind some of the more destructive and dangerous impulses of gay liberation -- like the movement -- which often call for general homosexual realization of culture, or transgenering everyone, so that society, like a capitalist society, and all its norms of oppression would be destroyed.

Sedgwick certainly looked fondly on the liberationist tendencies, but overall she operated within the typically academic Foucaultian framework that came to displace ideas of liberation, especially in Anglo queer theory. This framework sees the invention of homosexuality as a modern phenomenon occurring through the biopolitical intersection of criminal, medical and even literary discourse. The theoretical approach that is dominant, then, sticks to incoherence in homosexuality and this paradox without deciding to resolve it towards liberation, right, like it doesn't take an ethical stance often.

Now I've been really, like, this new recently released book by Christopher Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony* -- it was a posthumously edited volume by a friend Max Fox -- has really been reframing some of the ways I think I'm thinking about this. Chitty supplies Foucault's discursive production of homosexuality with a class analysis of various nodal points of capitalist development. Ultimately, Chitty shows another picture of the ambivalence of same sex practices and communities with the practice could signal both the potential of proletarian unrest, and also the punishment that enforce social norms across classes on top of the oppressive economic and material conditions, creating the condition for the possibility for these sexual cultures to blossom in the first place.

The biggest threat overall tended to be seen in public sex, which reinterpreted urban space outside of bourgeois hegemony, and created cross class connections which threaten the state. In this way, the policing of sodomy, according to Chitty, gets looped in with criminalizing vagrancy and sex work. So these categories all kind of go together. Chitty's work

reinscribes the political ambivalence of queerness for it's no longer that homosexuality is simply a threat to hegemony but actually plays a role in statecraft and state consolidation, and historically. Chitty offers a different definition of queer, and I'm quoting now, "as a social category queer would then describe the morbid cultural forms by which the normative logics of gender and sexuality become irreparably damaged, desperately reasserted and perversely renaturalized within a generalized social crisis, rather than marketing some utopian release from these logics in the pursuit of self transformative play". So this kind of, again, is a way of getting rid of the utopian possibilities inherent and queerness. What remains of the liberationist drive was ultimately tied into a liberal bourgeois idea of identity subject to it in progress. The modern queer identity that we have today is just as much a product of bourgeois ideology, despite its intermittent threat to social order, or its intermittent use as a targeted police force, which then creates a community under siege and looking for reprieve.

Not only is it a product of capitalism, but also colonialism, as colonial outposts historically did and still do provide areas of sexual license for bourgeois European American men. And similarly, the experience of settlers in the US on the frontier were propitious for same sex encounters and love between men, but that was inextricably bound with a project of removal, replacement, genocide, and settler colonialism.

One of the things that Chitty brings up that I think is worth further developing, that doesn't get developed in the book, is that we could boil down all the contradictions of homosexuality as well as heterosexuality to questions of consent and the deployment of power. Along with the extraction, displacement and erasure of different life ways and colonized lands, the European proletarian cultures of sex and even sexual identity were eventually displaced by a bourgeois homosexual identity that's still overdetermines our understanding of sexuality today. And the theory and science that this gay identity produced also created an industry of history and knowledge that tried to trace the universal aspects of same sex love and gender deviation across times and cultures. These gay myths and origin stories could mine colonized and genocided cultures for proof of the biological minoritarian naturalness of gayness or transness, while not analyzing the power dynamics that produce this Eurocentric gaze on other ways of doing sex and gender outside of bourgeois sexual hegemony.

And so, like, you know, in the 19th century anthropological discourse there is this like fascination with the berdache as, like, a third gender and that idea that some people claim for a kind of naturalness of trans identity that we see in our modern, like, settler colonial state is, like, coopting, appropriating and also misunderstanding something, and it is all part of the process of the kind of binary gendering of colonization.

If we follow the association of homosexuality with nodes of capital development and crisis, then we can't collapse these other cultural life forms into something that we know in the same way, except as appropriation, extraction, colonization, erasure. In the end, it turns out that the good part -- I'm arguing -- that the good parts of gay liberation, I mean, besides the pleasure of cruising, of public sex and creating possibilities of contact, were in fact versions of militant anticapitalism, antiracism, and decolonialism. The gay identity that ultimately won recognition and military inclusion and marriage rights reworks the utopian lines of liberatory thought into a utopia of identity, which is ultimately a white utopia purchasable by certain norms. And this function also largely minimizes and forgets the ongoing HIV AIDS crisis worldwide.

For example, we have queer conferences at universities and support for queer students and perhaps visibly queer professors, but that hasn't changed the institution itself, which trades in an empty promise of upward mobility for life of debt peonage, not to mention its entanglement in the legacy of chattel slavery and the ongoing project of settler colonialism. The joke is that this respectability politics came at the same time with a deeper crisis in capitalism and so arguably queerness itself is an artifact that we might want to discard. For it's perhaps nothing but a scrap of meat thrown to another marginalized group to get them to consent to being ruled. So one thing that, again, going back to Chitty, he deflates the utopian impulses and gay liberation and rights using Benedict Anderson's concept of an imagined community to describe this universalizing attempt at, like, global solidarity. Not to resist state violence but to gain recognition. But this queer imagined communities only imaginable through coordinates of a bourgeois him to hegemony of interiority, subjectivity and identity. If gayness is an identity is already colonized, and colonizing, whitewashed and recoupable.

Early gay liberation thinkers like Guy Hocquenghem, someone I work

on, were committed to a decolonial, feminist, anti racist, anti capitalist division of liberation. And they said this even at the beginning of the gay liberation movement Hocquenghem pronounce the end of gay liberation within a year or two of the opening of the of the movement and his involvement in the Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaire, not just because the gay liberation movement was splintering along lines of misogyny and moralism. Hocquenghem demanded that as soon as homosexuality was one it has to be given up or else you just serve the purpose of being a token fag or professional revolutionary. In this spirit, I want to point to a different way of thinking of the possibilities of radical queerness liberation and utopia that don't work through erasure of settlement, terra nullius, or liberal forms of identity and sameness.

I'm influenced by theories developed from study of anarchism, abolition, Indigenous knowledge and Black radical tradition, and ideas like fugitivity flight, the undercommons and marronage. But as a settler, as a white person, my position has to be taken up critically, dispossessed settlers, as well as arrivants on the American continents have long sought ways to escape the dominant forms of colonial identity, the demands and allegiances that became codified as race, gender and sexuality. In fact, these notifications often happen from on high in order to root out cross class, cross race, same sex affiliations that could never fully be controlled by criminalization. And yet the legacies of these laws have become written on our bodies, and the discipline runs the gamut from parental pressure to police murder, or perpetual incarceration.

I'm gonna skip over this, but I was talking about like the ways that sort of racial codes came through controlling sex and reproduction. And also through these complex alliances between people who were keen to be defined as Black and white settlers against Indigenous populations. All these things are densely complex, and they have different relationships with eventual strategies of state formation, through parceling up of identities and accumulation, extraction and dispossession. But another side that we could think of through queer history of like escape, and maroons is thinking about how these histories are modeled counter hegemonic, counter institutional, counter powers and the fissures of capitalism's ever constant crises. These histories that don't often get told or those of communities who lived in uninhabitable places which, by which I mean like undeveloped, or undevelopable, often across racial lines. And these histories

aren't utopian, they can't serve as a salvific function of escape for white queers. Instead, they point to the alternative and living organizations that still happen today outside of the nation state across identity markers that could be continued in explicitly decolonial struggle. To join that struggle white queers would have to put their own status on the line, no longer to help to clear the land but to give possession up, along with queerness too and identity as we understand it. The whole reason queer liberation has ceased to be a problem is that is no longer generally a threat to the bourgeois status to be gay.

Or on the flip side, the relative sexual freedom that has become hegemonic is coincident with a crisis in capitalism and the dissolution of the bourgeoisie as a moral enforcer, may be on the way to this new neofeudalism. And yet here we all are, every one of us imperiled in our attempts to survive in the system that exists. And that identity is packaged as race, gender, sexuality and class marks certain populations out for easy disposability.

So just to kind of sum up, settlers have to give up queerness along with whiteness to reenvision the relation to the land, we have to give up utopia both in our identities and in our methods, since it is a concept steeped in the processes of racialization, settler colonialism, the production of the human through genocide and enslavement. Our relation to the land can't romanticize past life ways and must promote self determination and some sort of coexistence outside of the hegemony of European knowledge production. So my question to like, go into the discussion, and I'll reiterate it when we do that is whether there's a need for queer liberation movement right now? And if so, why would it be called that and not something else?

EO: Thanks so much, Scott. I'm going to pick up some of what Scott brings up at the end there and expand on it in my remarks. And yeah, I also have some questions and things I'd love to discuss. But again, I'd love to hear other folks thoughts. So I'm going to give some, like, definitions just to start us off in a place, so we're all kind of on the same page, starting with settler colonialism. So Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice defines settler colonialism as quote "distinguished from the more traditional ideas of colonialism, wherein invaders claim resources but then return home. By emphasizing the settler population to creation of a new social order,

that depends in part on the ongoing oppression and displacement of Indigenous peoples” end quote. So this is what Patrick Wolfe also calls the elimination of the native.

This oppression, displacement, and elimination is always ongoing. It's not just a one time thing, it's continually happening even now, and it's always gendered and sexualized. So that is to say, settlers, demonize, punish and violate Indigenous peoples along the lines of gender and sexuality, and simultaneously, settlers seek to replace diverse native views, practices, identities, lifeways, with a homogenous, Western, cis-hetero patriarchal system that ensures the future of a white settler population. So my main challenge, our main challenge here, and this is for radical queers to re-think the kinds of futures we try to include ourselves in, and how our liberatory work can suddenly replay exclusion and erasure. So specifically, I'm going to grapple with the questions: how does utopianism show up in radical queer and feminist discourse? How does this perpetuate the settler colonial imperative of terra nullius, erasure, genocide, etc, through utopian ideals? And how do radical queer politics romanticize Indigenous knowledge and modes of living to motivate utopia? And then I'm going to end with a question sort of everybody, what other forms of futurity and speculation resist the settler colonial imperatives of a terra nullius utopia?

So one of the obvious examples of utopian thinking is the sort of assimilative drive within mainstream liberal LGBT movements and cultural productions, sort of this desire for acceptance, the promise of protection and homo normative procreative future that is the ability to keep living, but within the dictate of the US nation state. So borrowing from Jasbir Puar's term "homonationalism", which indicates that certain queer bodies -- often read as white and white passing -- are reconstituted as worthy of recognition and protection. Scott Lauria Morgenson says that "settler homonationalism is the product of the sexual colonization of Indigenous peoples insofar as queer subject hood and queer pride becomes tied to a sense of modernity, rather than a "primitive" quote unquote "Indigeneity" and indebtedness to a supposedly progressive nation. With this normative gay pride perhaps best visualized by "love is love" yard signs rainbow striped us flags, and Rue Pall singing "I am an American just like you too", is easily dismissed by more radical queer activists. Or is it?

With the recent rise of media such as the Brown sisters podcast "How to

Survive the End of the World” as well as Alexandra Brodsky and Rachel Kauder Nalebuff’s edited collection *The Feminist Utopid Project: 57 Visions a Wildly Better Future*, there’s been a noticeable uptake and interest on the left in the construction of a wildly better future, in spite of a supposedly impending end of the world. I’d like to challenge the radical queer feminist urges to create these utopian visions of a society based on the apocalyptic crumbling of the present. A radical queer politics that relies on unquestioned utopian and dystopian visions, risks aligning itself with a settler colonial imaginary of terra nullius, or blank slate space.

So on the one hand, dystopian and apocalyptic visions perpetuate the unquestioned assumption that a societal collapse is impending, right? As if the continual degradation of human and more than human communities has not already arrived. So in an article on science, and science fiction narratives of Indigeneity and climate change, Pottawatomie scholar Kyle White reminds us that quote, “the hardships many non-Indigenous people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have already endured, due to different forms of colonialism. Such as ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation and cultural disintegration” end quote. This critique could certainly be extended beyond the climate crisis to other hardships that Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, also known as North America, have endured, such as the continued murder or disappearance, dispossession, removal, forced assimilation under resourcing, and what elsewhere I have called “phenomenological ignorance”.

So when I hear fellow radical queer activists and scholars lamenting the current social, political and meteorological conditions were weathering, who balk that this is anything new, let alone impending. To accept that it is, I think, would be to erase the experiences of my and many others Indigenous ancestors. Particularly dangerous in this assumption is the kind of crisis rhetoric that fosters opportunities for settler colonial sentiments of insecurity, and in the face of this insecurity, assertions of belonging and sovereignty in land and lifeways. So I think Emily Potter succinctly summarizes this, quote, “the non-Indigenous fear of dispossession or exile manifests in the need to defend their jurisdiction over land” end quote. So this implicitly creeps into radical queer discourse when settler queers faced with very real contemporary issues, such as anti-Black legal and extra legal violence, neofascism, militarized policing, etc, attempt to

construct autonomous or occupied zones, buy up land, houses and property, some kind of, you know, maybe manifestation of radical prepping, or in other ways individualize and privatized their survival. So Additionally, painting disruptive phenomenon as “apocalypses” belies the human made, in fact, settler made, emergence of these crises.

April Ansan, shows how quote “settler apocalypticism” end quote, obscures colonialism, and its attendant, disaster capitalism, as the true culprit of quote “racial and environmental contraction.” end quote. Therefore, if settler queers insist on using the language of dystopia and apocalypse, they also work to veil their own complicity in these processes. So one apparent amelioration to this could be found in the call for radical queers to quote, “learn from Indigenous peoples”. But this could also easily fall into a trap of what Jean O’Brian calls lasting, or the idea that Indigenous peoples are the last of a nearly decimated group, whose wisdom belongs to bygone eras, yet can still help settlers avoid their own potential extinction. This assumes that to return to Kyle White, quote, “Indigenous peoples are communities who primarily reside in the Holocene, and over time have been gradually deteriorating to the point that the plight of the modern era threatened to kill them off permanently” end quote.

So instead, right, so I would ask radical queer, non-Indigenous accomplices to see Indigenous peoples as of this time, and not monolithic, right? And not to covet these knowledges. And then in thinking about our utopias, rather than dystopias, I do worry that that sort of notion of the future as this mysterious open space and having this sort of as yet to be realized, or as yet to be colonized quality, creates then another terra nullius space.

To be forever looking towards this horizon, as the space of resistance as a space of resistance like finally realized, and safety finally secured for queer and trans people, I think, one: makes it seem like we can’t create this in the present and that many Indigenous and other queer, trans, two-spirit folks aren’t already creating this in the present. And two: I think this re-inscribes yet another, “other”, quote unquote, space that is not yet “ours”, and also ours is in quotes. But it will be one day, right? We can colonize it, we can be there one day, we can claim that one day. Hence mirroring the settler colonial imperative of elimination replacement and what E. Tuck and K. Wayne Yang tell us is the intention of making a new home on the land, homemaking, insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their

new domain. This would be the domain of the future utopia. So this discounts the ongoing presence of Indigenous alternatives to the current settler colonial dystopian reality, and instead preserves a view of geographic and social space as blank and ready to be improved with a new model. Again, here we have a problem of erasure, of the oppressions and resistances that have been ongoing in different durations in favor of the blank space of the utopian frontier.

In other words, radical queer politics romanticizes Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies to create a future utopia for themselves, and potentially “altruistically” quote, unquote, for others. I therefore argue against any linear progression of societal environmental collapse, which then promises to bring about this future idealized world of rainbow diverse identities. Instead, I propose -- I think we propose together -- ways for radical politics, particularly those espoused by non-Indigenous people, to disavow such settler colonial mindsets. And then again, to end, I’ll reiterate this later, I opened with the question to everyone “what other forms of futurity and speculation might be imagined that resists the settler colonial imperatives of terra nullius”?

KR: Thanks E, I guess it’s me. Okay, so I’m going to begin by positioning today’s discussion within the larger body of my work, thinking and research. I’m currently interested as a mixed European white settler predominantly of Finnish descent in the ways in which Finnish immigrants have contributed to the expansion of the Canadian project of settler colonial occupation. Finns traditionally settled in Thunder Bay, Ontario in Canada, elsewhere around the Great Lakes in the United States and the Midwest, including Minnesota and Michigan, and are revered amongst leftist historians as being important to the labor movement in Canada. This contribution was not only through the overt methods of settling and primitive accumulation, which included work as loggers clearing land for settlement, and as pioneer homesteaders, but also his workers involved in union organizing.

Written above the Finnish labor temple in Thunder Bay, Ontario is the Latin phrase “Labor Omnia Vincit”, which translates to “hard work conquers all”. This can be read many ways, namely, that if one works hard upon arriving in these lands, one will be promised the bounty of the Canadian dream, property ownership and middle class prosperity. But

the word “conquer” is perhaps the most important part, and interpreted through a lens that challenges settler colonialism, really hones in on the role of the Finnish worker in the nation building, as being the soldier of conquest able to tame the wild Canadian frontier. Finns and also Russians would attempt to establish utopian colonies on the west coast of Canada, which included Finnish Slough in Richmond BC and Sointula Village on Malcolm Island.

So, right, there’s this anti-Indigenous idea of terra nullius, which the three of us are bringing up, that this land is somehow empty and it is not already utopic or to European standards, it is empty and needs to be transformed. This research -- namely how ethno cultural utopian and socialist settler movements were important in the construction of the settler political imaginary and essential to the structure of the Canadian settler state -- will represent the bulk of my contribution to our ongoing collaboration, which we hope to turn into a book project titled No Blank Slates.

In the realm of queerness, and settler colonialism much of my research and writing for the past few years has been on the history of the so called gay liberation movement in Canada. The ways in which it has differed from that of the United States and how gay and lesbian settlers and their pursuit of rights throughout the later half of the 20th century helped to strengthen both the image and the political power of Canada as a supposedly inclusive, multicultural and progressive nation state. In the 1960s, there was a pivot in both the direction of settler governance and the modes of control over Indigenous nations. Canada’s natural governing parties, the Liberals, under the leadership of Pierre Elliot Trudeau, who many of you will recognize as Justin Trudeau’s father, was promoting the idea of a just society, which sought to incorporate those once outside the Canadian body politic. And here I quote “the just society will be one in which the rights of minorities will be safe from the whims of intolerant majorities. The just society will be one in which our Indian and Innu populations will be encouraged to assume the full rights of citizenship through policies, which will give them both greater responsibility for their own future, and more meaningful equality of opportunity.”

Aspects of this strategy were to be achieved through the criminal law Amendment Act Bill C 150, which drew inspiration from the criminal law code reforms going on at the same time in England, as well as the

proposed 1969 white paper. During their transformative era of the 1960s Canadian government actors were retiring the overtly genocidal tactics of segregation, starvation and eradication that their predecessors had employed against Indigenous peoples, opting instead for more covert ways of dealing with sovereignty claims, by way of legislation, which would effectively attempt to trade title to land for Canadian citizenship. The white paper introduced by Pierre Trudeau government and then Minister of Indian Affairs John Chrétien sought to eliminate Aboriginal title and treaty to lands by abolishing the Indian act as it stood, and to assimilate Indigenous people into Canadian society, but was ultimately rejected through the organizing of Indigenous leaders and activists.

Settler colonialism is not only a social and psychological project, however, it operates primarily in a material way relying on access to land and resources in order to continue the process of capitalist accumulation by colonial dispossession. Indigenous nations stood in the way of Canada's access to land. The growing Red Power movement was not one of identity, but instead centered on self determination, and was a result of Indigenous peoples refusal of the insulting tactics of Trudeau government and the Canadian state.

At the same time, the Canadian gay liberation movement emerged as a response to 1969s Criminal Law Amendment Act, which effectively decriminalized aspects of homosexual sex between consenting adults in private. Queers demanded increased rights and accommodation from the state, encouraged by the Stonewall riots in the United States, and by the olive branch Canada had extended with its progressive reforms. At this historical moment, there was certainly room for radical potential of settlers and Indigenous people uniting against the assimilatory actions that Pierre Trudeau's government attempted to enact towards each group, but no coalition materialized.

For upwardly mobile gays and lesbian settlers, those that desired recognition from the state and representation amongst the high ranks of its governance structure, the Canadian state becomes a utopic vision. The incorporation of productive white homosexual men into the folds of nationhood -- which began with reforms to the criminal law code -- was a decision that ensured the Canadian state could expand the viability of its capitalist economy, and maintain its assumed authority and legitimacy in

the minds of those it subjugates. It is also something that of course necessitates private property. As Jasbir Puar reminds us settler colonialism has a long history of articulating its violence through the protection of serviceable figures, such as women and children and now the homosexual. In this historical process, so called gay liberation, presumably from hetero patriarchal norms, transmutes into gay assimilation into the nation's body politic. White homosexual men were, in fact, so eager to penetrate into Canada's body politic, that they named the first Canadian gay periodical, *The Body Politic* after it.

What was lost in this moment of assimilation was the radical potential of a combined movement -- between those organizing around gay liberation and gay rights -- with the burgeoning Red Power movement at the time. While the gay movement in Canada throughout the later half of the 20th century shifted their focus to the pursuit of rights and recognition from the settler state, Indigenous people, for the most part, continue to refuse Canada's attempts at assimilation, and instead to reaffirm their rights and titles to land which had not yet been seated. The 21st century saw a new marriage of sorts between queers and the Canadian colonial project. For queer settlers the promise of recognition in the eyes of the progressive state did not end with the passing of the Civil Marriage Act in 2005.

In the US that followed Justin Trudeau's election assimilationist gays, lesbians and transgender settlers, who already desired upward mobility within the capitalist order were offered even more fruits from the state. In his role as Prime Minister, Trudeau marched with his family at the head of a slew of pride celebrations, from 2016 to 2019, emphasizing the importance of family values. In response to the violent repression that queers had endured at the hands of Canadian policing, Trudeau performed a very public and very emotional apology. In March of 2019, when President Donald Trump moved to ban transgender troops from the US military, the Canadian Armed Forces, the CAF, overhauled its existing policy to extend an arm and welcome Canadians of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Like the US military under Barack Obama's presidency, the revised policy incentivize transgender Canadians to enlist in the army, offering support services for those who wish to medically transition as well as insisting that the CAF would create an environment where transgender members were free from harassment and discrimination. This served to only widen the Gulf that existed between those fighting for self

determination in Canada and gay, lesbian and transgender settlers.

And again, though we can only speculate on the radical potential the combined forces of gay liberation and the Red Power movement as they emerge simultaneously in the 1960s and 70s Canada, a queer anticolonialism exists today amongst the queer, trans and two-spirit youth on the frontlines of resistance against the Canadian state. The current generation is leading the Shutdown Canada and Land Back movements, as well as the efforts to abolish the Canadian colonial police force the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, RCMP, and defund municipal police bodies in major Canadian cities. A radical political analysis rooted in a necessity for Indigenous sovereignty has been growing momentum as radical, queer and anarchist organizers continue to learn alongside and build relationships of solidarity with Indigenous peoples and nations. As Canada moves to secure land for resource extraction amidst a global pandemic, and pacify conversations around repatriation and abolishing the police, all settlers, but especially queers, must commit to pushing back against their own government structure, which will continue to erase voices of resistance and mount its own narrative of the benevolence.

In his book *Red Skin White Mask*, Glen Coulthard applies the theoretical concept of the politics of recognition to post 1969 Canadian society. Expanding upon Franz Fanon ideas surrounding the shift from the overt violence of colonial control, over colonized subjects, towards recognition and accommodation as a form of state management. Coulthard concludes that because rights and permissions are distributed by the state, the cycle of colonization continues and the rights must be rejected. He extends the strategy of rejecting state management to “other subaltern groups, not just the colonized” and which is a quote, which would include the working class, people of color and gender and sexual minorities. Because the Canadian state privileges the treatment of respectable and middle class gay, lesbian and transgender settlers at the expense of Indigenous people, it makes sense for queers to turn this recognition and accommodation provided by Canada on its head.

Theoretically speaking, this extension of Coulthards call to reject recognition and the gifts of the settler state by marginalized groups other than Indigenous people has not yet been taken up. The project of queer refusal of the settler colonial project is not an ideological attainment or position,

but instead an ongoing commitment to the disruption of settlement and the economies which sustain it. Radical queer settlers who choose to align ourselves with Indigenous peoples and nations whose land we continue to occupy, and whose stolen wealth we continue to benefit from must start by refusing the recognition and the gifts that the nation state offers us, as well as actively disrupting the ways in which our identities are used to advance Canada's myth of progress. Armed with the lessons of the past, we must help to enact decolonization in its fullest, most literal sense, moving beyond the perfunctory gestures of acknowledgement, and towards outcomes that are material.

This project is one that destabilizes queer utopian ideals and settler agency in imagining alternatives to capitalism and colonial governance, and instead centers the repatriation of lands and the reclamation of laws, Indigenous governance structures, and Indigenous economies that have been suppressed. It is a commitment to action and relationship building, to solidarity and learning.

A few weeks ago in a talk given at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, BC, Susan Stryker signaled that in a post-Trump era, Biden certainly embraced liberal inclusive model of recognizing trans rights. She continued and emphasized that -- and I'm paraphrasing here -- the laws are not going to save us, the institutional power is not going to save us. We have to become a new body politic moving beyond the state. With the return to liberal inclusion politics in the US, I want to signal a potential area for collaborative prefiguration between radicals living in both nation states to challenge the ways in which both of these settler states weaponize queerness and building off of the proposal of Coulthard and in response to the remarks put forward by Stryker. I would also like to suggest the imperative task of taking up the project of queer refusal in a serious manner, and then instead of a new body politic, a disembodied politic of sorts that rejects the narrative of queer progress, and challenges the very nature of queer identity formation be pursued instead. The greatest threat to the settler state, then, should not be seen as the radical queers lifestyle or rejection of heterosexist society, and social and sexual reproductive norms, but the rejection of state power and capitalist accumulation.

So to end, the question that I had for the discussion is, where do we go from here? How do queer movements engage with the state? How do they

build relationships with Indigenous movements? And one thing that I wanted to add is that some of these sites of refusal have already begun. In anticipation of the 50th anniversary of the 1969 Criminal Law code Reforms, Canada announced it would issue a commemorative dollar coin, quite literally a token of gay capitalism. Beyond mere pinkwashing, Trudeau was in more ways than one continuing this project of assimilation, the fabled construction of the “justice society” that his father had begun in the late 60s. And amongst several disruptions, myself and other queer activists and academics, gathered in Ottawa in March of 2019, for the Anti 69 conference -- and that’s anti 1969 as in the Criminal Law Code Reforms, not anti 69 is in the sexual act *laughs* -- to trouble the mythology of the Omnibus criminal code reform bill and to shed light on the Canadian states ongoing crimes on Indigenous people within Canada and abroad.



The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

You can send us letters at:

The Final Straw Radio
PO Box 6004
Asheville, NC 28816
USA

Email us at:

thefinalstrawradio@riseup.net
or **thefinalstrawradio@protonmail.com**

To hear our past shows for free, visit:

<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org>