

THE
**Final
Straw**
A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW



The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

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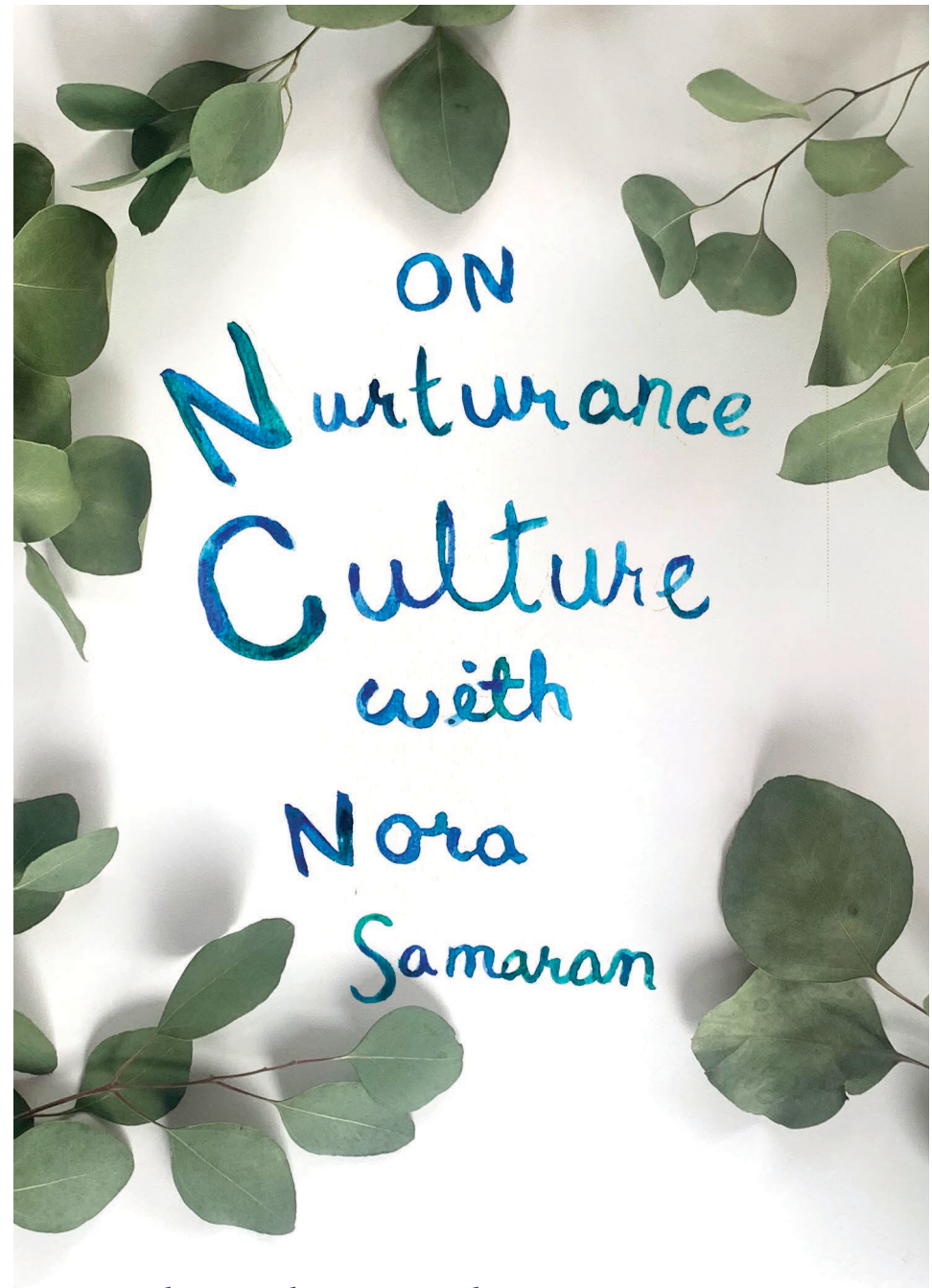
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Even though we're different, how do we connect and take care of each other?"

TFSR: I was thinking to wrap this up on that point. I'd like to do a thing that one of the other podcasters that I work with, or that I'm friends with—Tim, who does Solecast—does at the end of his episodes. He asks people... and particularly because, as you said, this piece of work is a product of a lot of hands and a lot of brains over a lot of time, I wonder if there are any titles, besides *Why Does He Do That?*, that you might direct people for further inquisition. Particularly, I'd like to hear if there are any titles in either attachment theory, which we didn't get too deep into, but I know there are a lot of good books that have been written about it, or the physical implications of in the limbic system of shame and stuff like that. I definitely want to read more on those topics. But any sort of book recommendations that you want to throw out to the listenership I'm sure we'd be much appreciated.

N: So there was a page called "*How to Not Re-Injure Survivors.*" And that started out as just me trying to get good resources together for gendered violence, but it grew from there. It's got a lot of different kinds of references about systemic violence and how to stand up to it in a way that humanizes everyone, but really does stand up to violence, whether it's coming from the state or from one another, from supply chains, from capitalism. Wherever the sources of it, to be able to stand up and say, "Hey, I see this and it's not okay," while also recognizing the humanity of all of the humans and the living-beingness of all the beings that are involved in all of these structures.

TFSR: That's awesome. Yeah, I see. I pulled it up here. It's very good. How can people find your book?

N: They can find the book everywhere. AK Press is amazing and has a very wide distro. They can go to any little local bookstore they want and ask for it, and they can get it in. It's also available if they don't have it already. And actually, that's a big help, if they call their local little bookstores. If they get a couple of requests, they're more likely to keep it in stock. It's also in all the big bookstores, Barnes and Noble and whatever. They can also get it directly from AK Press. I believe there's even a discount if you go through AK Press currently if they live in the States. If you live elsewhere, it's a little trickier to get it directly from the publisher, so it's better to go through a bookstore, literally all over the world. That's part of what's so wonderful about AK, this little radical anarchist publisher who just distros globally. They work so hard. They can also get it on the capital A evil machine place.

TFSR: We should avoid that. Thank you so much for having this conversation.

N: Thank you.

This week, Bursts spoke with Nora Samaran, author of the essay "*The Opposite Of Rape Culture Is Nurture Culture*", which became the seed of her book *Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurture Culture*. This book is recently out from AK Press.

We talk about harm, entitlement as relates to positions of power like masculinity or whiteness in our cultures, the need for connection engrained into our biology and sociality, accountability and healing among other topics.

You can find further reading up at norasamaran.com. You can find a list of suggested further reading by searching "*How To Not Re-Injure Survivors.*"

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.

TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself for the audience?

Naava: Hey, my name is Naava, and I am currently in Massachusetts. I don't know the protocol here because I'm a visitor, but my understanding is that I'm on Nipmuc and Pocumtuc territory in Western Massachusetts right now.

TFSR: Would you talk a little bit about how you came to write *Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture*, who is it intended for, and what do you hope that it can achieve?

N: It kind of wrote itself through me, so it's hard for me to say, "this is the reason I wrote it." I had personal reasons for writing it. I was trying to understand things that were happening to me in my life. It was just really about trying to understand my own experiences. And also because I stopped being able to read for a while—there was about six months period in which I couldn't read at all. Then I was slowly working my way back up. I teach literature for my job, so I needed to figure out if I was going to be able to write and read again. I was writing this blog just to have a space that was very free and very personal, where I wasn't worried about what I was saying. I was really listening to myself. The nurturance essay came out of that. And then because the nurturance essay went all over the place, I was able to write this book. That's the short story of how it happened. I don't know if that gets to the heart of the question. I think you're kind of asking something else.

TFSR: So it started out of your need to express yourself, and then it went viral online, I think, is how it's been described. The title of that essay, which listeners may have read or come across is "*The Opposite of Rape Culture is Nurturance Culture*," is that right?

N: Yeah, that's right.

TFSR: How did you see that spread, and how did people engage with that?

N: There were a lot of different ways. Some of them are funny. For example, I did not mean it to say, but many people received it as that, (when I looked back on it, I agreed that it does kind of say that) for men to get closer to other men, cis-men particularly, but all men—both trans men and cis—to get closer to other men. A lot of folks took it that way, that we should build relationships with each other. And that wasn't what I was saying, and it's been beautiful. It touched on what I hadn't fully understood, but that makes sense to me, that there's this profound need that a lot of masculine-identified folks feel to be intimate with each other, and that's denied. Part of the reason it spreads so quickly was because it created room for that closeness. I was actually saying to challenge each other so that you can be better to everybody else in your life, but it has fostered a lot more openness between men talking to one another, which I think is beautiful. Some of the funny downsides are

er, that just accrue relationship and trust, which is so much more valuable than having individual power. The organizing spaces that I came up in, for the most part as a white person in those spaces, sometimes we got asked to help strategize, but my job was to fold the chairs, watch the kids, make the food. That's a beautiful role. Sometimes I think that I'm not really contributing that much because I'm not contributing to strategy. But I'm not a good chess player. I'm really good at taking care of kids and fetching people, and that's okay. There are lots of different roles. That created long-term relationships that are much more meaningful and beautiful for me than the type that form when you're publishing articles and getting a reputation or getting famous, which is sort of a skimming-the-surface type. You can meet interesting people, but then relationship building is separate from that, that has to happen separately. And it's so important, especially right now because our relationships of trust are what we have to protect us in the times that we're moving through now. I have to build where I live, and I have to be accountable to people in relationships over the long term, like for 10 years, 20 years, 30 years. That's how real solidarity forms, where you can be like, "Yeah, we might not be best friends, but if you're going to be deported, I will show up, and I will surround the van, and I will stop that." Those kinds of genuine things.

An interesting piece of it also is around the quality of organizing spaces having a bit of a scene, like trying to be cool. I'm just so done with that. I'm not cool. I've never been cool. I'm a big nerd. That's not true. I was cool for two years when I was 18 and 19. And then it was over. It's okay that a lot of us come to this because we're really soft, gentle people who want a world that is livable for caring, kind people, and I think the world currently is being run by sociopaths. That's just the reality of it. So how do we create care where all of the gifts and beauty that people are bringing into this world can grow and can be called on and can come out into the world? We need to create a culture that deeply sees each other and can really accept one another as we truly are. Whether that's respecting people's pronouns is the tip of the iceberg, but really seeing people for who they truly are all the way down that's a completely different kind of culture. That's what I'm hoping for when I say that nurturance is the opposite of violence or that violence is nurturance turned backward. It's not a direct opposite, it's much bigger. Acceptance is much bigger than rejection. This one bodyworker, this naturopath that I was working with, said that to me when I was dealing with trying to get rid of parts of myself that were doing things I didn't like. And I said, "Can't you just get rid of it?" She said, "No, you have to accept it." And I said, "How do I accept these parts of myself that feel so shameful?" She said, "Acceptance is not the opposite of rejection. Acceptance is much bigger than rejection. It's not that you just accept this bad thing that you're doing. It's that you accept your whole self, you love your whole self. Then you get more able to relate to others in a more full, whole loving kind of way." I want to expand that in all of these relationships where we're protecting one another. To be accountable, but also to be really able to see each other as we truly are. Not just the surfaces, in a simplistic way. Not like, "Oh, we're all the same. Kumbaya," which is just like bullshit, but in a really profound way, like "Who are you actually?"

over, being on a stage, or self-promoting. In the North American organizing world, there's a funny tension because a lot of us get into it because we care about things, we want the world to be a better place, and we're not trying to be visible in any way. My most comfortable place is in a background role. I'm most comfortable being a runner. I get food. I get people places to sleep. I pick people up. That's where I'm comfortable. I'm very, very uncomfortable being public in any way. It's not my nature. I'm super introverted. If this book thing hadn't happened, I wouldn't be doing this. I have a love/hate relationship with it. I mean, it's fun to build more relationships, but putting a person above is not something that I feel is really appropriate or good for movements. There are folks want to be above and who want to be on stage and really crave being looked at and attention given to them and becoming gatekeepers. Those folks can do weird things to keep that power.

For example, the Charlie Glickman case, which is super public. I don't know if you follow that at all. It's not in my world directly. It's the sex educator kind of world, which is adjacent to mine. It's been interesting because I've watched it from a distance. It's not my own community. He's a very powerful sex educator who was pretty well known and was a gatekeeper. (It's all out on the internet, you can look it up). I found out as it was happening that he could decide whether people got work or not. He had quite a lot of power. And he was doing the kind of subtle, manipulative gaslighting abuse for a long time with one former partner, and it all finally came out. Turns out lots of people that had those experiences with him. Many people reached out to him to say, "You're important to this community. We care about you. Here's what you're doing that's harmful. Can we do a process with you? But in the meantime, can you stop self-promoting yourself, stop doing talks and putting yourself up on stage as an expert? Clearly, you've got issues to work on before you put yourself out as an expert and gain power." I think that people who have that slightly narcissistic trait, or are a bit disconnected from themselves internally, might not know the difference between being told, "Hey, don't be on stage, just be one of the many in the room, with everybody else." They might not know the difference between that and being shunned, canceled. They might literally not know what you're talking about. "But the only way I can belong is if I'm on stage." There are many ways to belong.

TFSR: Yeah, or "the only way I contribute." No one is replaceable, that's a given. But if someone's doing movement work, intellectual, academic work, physical labor, or whatever, we should be trying to model our communities in ways where it's not just up to this one person who could fail anytime, hypothetically, or need a break or whatever else. Putting it in the best possible perspective, it someone says, "Well, I just have these really important things to say." We can say, "Well, cool, but now give the mic to someone else. Share your ideas and let someone else be the one vocalizing them for a while." Kill your own internal Subcomandante Marcos, you know?

N: Right. There are lots of ways to be part of communities that don't accrue power.

that it has resulted in all-male panels on masculinity or all-male events, where only men are invited to come. And that's not what I meant. I think it's nice that you're all connecting with each other, but I don't think I meant to create, like another, you know...

TFSR: Boys club?

N: Yeah, boys club. We have had all-male spaces before in the world, and I wasn't really suggesting that we should reproduce that. Some of the other things that grew out of it... I was writing about things happening to me, and I was also learning about things that were happening to other folks, things I'm not targeted by. I sat in on a class that Rachel Zellars taught at McGill. She's this incredible, brilliant Black feminist scholar and organizer. She's from the US, but she's based in Montreal now. Some mutual friends introduced us, and I just sat in on her class, and it blew my mind. I learned an incredible amount in that class. I didn't write about that because I felt that it was not my place. It's not my knowledge or my wisdom. I was telling myself: "Stay in your lane." But all of that stuff that was bubbling underneath. I was thinking about it as a white person, trying to understand it. As I was writing about masculinity, I was also thinking about racism.

When the book happened, I was like, well, clearly when we're talking about nurturance culture, it resonates around more kinds of violence and disconnection. The core idea is that... It's not new, right? This is stuff that I have learned over many years, reading a lot of different people, that oppressors also lose something, right? We lose, let's say if a white person in the system, you lose a part of yourself, too. I had understood that that was happening for people who were positioned as men that I was close to, that part of them was disconnected in some way. Not for everybody, but for certain, specific people that I'd gotten close to. In all kinds of ways, existing in a gender binary cuts parts of us off that are really here and that are bubbling up and wanting to come to the surface. For everybody, not only for trans and gender-queer folks, but even for cis folks. This is what Serena writes about in that chapter on gender: When we center the folks who are the most targeted by systems of oppression and center that knowledge and make it the core of what we're looking at that opens up freedom. It creates a better world for targeted folks, but it also opens up freedom for everybody else who's existing inside oppressive systems.

So I've experienced a bit of both. As a white person with Canadian citizenship who was born in Canada, I have a lot of privilege. Then as a working-class person, as a woman who's experienced a lot of harm in my life, as someone who's experienced poverty, both inter-generationally and intermittently, and also my dad's a Holocaust survivor... So it's close to my family. For people my age it's usually two generations away, but for me, it's my dad and my uncles and my aunt. I feel like I had this funny place straddling both oppressor and oppressed experiences. And I was putting the pieces together.

I knew that I wasn't the right person to talk about race and racism or colonization, so when the book happened and the possibility arose to connect what

I was learning to these bigger systems of harm, I thought this has to be relational, this has to be in dialogue with people who really have that knowledge because I'm not the right person to talk to that. And that's how that grew. We're just gonna have conversations and learn from each other.

TFSR: I really appreciate the fact that you made it so conversational, that you brought in those dialogues and made space for the guests to bring in other points, push back, and challenge. It actually made it a lot more dynamic. As insightful as the essays that you wrote were, you were also curating who you brought in because you knew that they had some things that we all could learn from. I really appreciate that as a reader.

N: You know, I don't feel like I did. I don't know that I curated exactly so much as I just opened up and reached out to my own community. One of the other things that I was really trying to do was... I didn't put out a call for papers or anything like that. This knowledge is already here. People know. You don't have to have a degree in something to have expertise in it. What I had done for a long time—I'd been an organizer in a grassroots migrant justice organization that was led by folks of color. It was led primarily by people who had been through the immigration system. One of the things that they taught us that we learned there was that expertise comes from the bottom. It comes from the people who have the lived experience. That is expertise that you look to and you hold up. It's wisdom. It's more valid than the kinds of stuff that I was learning in school, which often piggybacks and borrows on that knowledge. That's just now really central to how I think. If you want to really understand what has to change, you look to the people that have that expertise. And I was lucky in my community to have relationships. I just realized, I'm having a coffee with this friend, or I'm working out with that friend, and they know this stuff, so let's talk and let's make a chapter together. It grew really organically, which was a little bit tricky for my publisher because I was saying, "I need a chapter like this, but I'm not gonna go ask someone. It has to just happen." It meant it took longer than maybe expected, but the relationships are really genuine as a result. It matters to me to build trust and not just be a like, "Hey, famous person, will you be in my book?" Because I'm really not seeking power at all, quite the opposite. I really value being able to share power, that this is everybody's knowledge that we're creating together through pushing each other and challenging each other and being excited to grow across our differences.

TFSR: Was there anything about your choice of writing under a pseudonym that reflected not to make it about personal power?

N: Yeah, for sure. It feels like this came through me in a bunch of different levels. The essays, which were written first, I don't even necessarily still agree with everything in those essays. They were what I was thinking at the time. They just grew really intuitively. They almost wrote themselves. I wanted to just give it to the world

they were impacting did not have to do any of it. The directly affected folks got to just go on with their week. They did not have to do the process with that person, and they did not have to make sure they were okay because the rest of the circle held it. The people who were not getting directly affected, one or two of them, and then the organizers moved into that role. It was amazing.

When it was explained to the group why that decision had been taken, it wasn't said that that person sucks, and there are good and bad people. It was like, if they've been conditioned to patriarchy, to not able to read cues, they have to do that work. This isn't the place to do that work, but we understand that they're person, and they have their own history of pain, but we're centering the needs of the people who chose to be here who don't want to have to deal with that. And we ask that people not to gossip and not to be mean about it, and we're just gonna go on with the program, and that was respected. There was a little bit of working it out, for example, people who were friends with that person needed to know what had happened. There was a lot of transparency about the process. Then, the next day people were back to the training we came here to do, and there wasn't a lot of nastiness about it at all, neither towards the people harmed nor the person causing harm. The container was held. On with the program. Someone's checking in with them. Folks are checking in with the folks who've been harmed—their needs are taking priority. We all felt that this can work. Now I understand how it works. It only works when you have a circle, and belonging in that circle is contingent on agreeing to respect those ways of doing things.

TFSR: It's interesting. That makes me think of an accountability process, which this wasn't—this was an immediate solution to a conflict. With accountability processes, the things that I've mostly witnessed are that, at a certain point, there may be faults in the way that a thing is structured, either the way that it has a resolution or the way that it communicates with people who have been most directly harmed, in terms of how that processes go. One of the big flaws is often the lack of connectivity, where someone can just get frustrated, get up, move somewhere else (which they can do anyway), but where they're willing to, where their connection to this community where the harm has taken place, where they've helped to harm people, is so limited that they just feel like they can discard it.

N: Yeah, exactly. "Oh, you're trying to hold me accountable? Bye. See you later." Yeah, that's one of the many, many kinds of manipulation that some folks do when they're asked to be accountable. I've watched so many of these processes now, and if there isn't a strong container, then it's very difficult to say, "Well, if you want to be in this community, these are standards, you have to meet them" because it's very difficult to say, "We care about you, and we'll work with you, but you can't take up space publicly or grow power."

I don't know if this connects to what you're saying or not, but it might, tell me if it does. There's a really big difference between belonging and having power

In the introduction, you started off with stories of the Windsor House as an experiment of observing kids who have accountability with each other and are socialized to have this interconnectedness with each other. Maybe socialized—I don't know if that's too hard of a word (like "reeducation")—if it's something that fulfills a lot of their need for nurturance and trust that they can hear critique from other people around them and know that it's not the judgment of their essential being. I think that's really inspirational.

N: Even more for me that the kids... You're not powerless there because if you get hurt by somebody, you can get heard. You can get a remedy. Particularly, I think that holding the circle—because what I'm learning, and really understanding more profoundly, is that you have to have a container in order to have values that you decide are what this group of people is going to do. You have to set baseline expectations for how we treat one another in the circle. And if you can't meet those... Those are the conditions required to be part of this particular circle of humans. And otherwise, you have this strange free-for-all all where people are like, "Who decides?" And I'm like, "We decide." We decide that it's not okay to do this or that harmful thing to other people.

I recently had an incredible experience—for me anyway (I don't know if the person who caused harm will agree, maybe it'll take 5 or 10 years before they agree). I was recently at a retreat where we had a pretty tight container. It was around 35 people, and the organizers all had long, deep relationships with each other. They'd known each other for years, and they had a lot of trust. There was someone who was pushing boundaries, asking to cuddle with people who may or may not have been there for that. And then getting close with folks, asking them to take clothes off, people who were not saying no, but not really enthusiastically saying yes either. And just kept doing stuff like that. After asking them to stop, and then they couldn't... They weren't in a place where they could take the feedback in a way that would allow them to stop quickly enough. It was short, just a week-long thing, and we were there for something else. We were not there for that. So the organizers said, "Okay, we've asked you to stop. You haven't stopped. This is changing the dynamic of the group. People are not here for this. We can't take the whole rest of the week just to work on this with you because that'll stop us from doing the goals that we came here for. We're not doing that." They ask the person to leave. I've never before seen it done in such a way. I felt that this is real. We can do it when we have a solid container. The person was asked to leave, but there wasn't malicious gossip or bad talk. It was just like, this was the thing they were doing, and we understand that they also have their own history and their own reasons for their own pain. This isn't that they're a bad person, but what they were doing was causing them to disrupt this space. They've been asked to leave, some people bought them a bus ticket, people took them to the bus, we checked in to make sure they got home, got across the border. One person they asked for, and who agreed, committed to be their ongoing contact person for the next weeks and months to check in and see how they're doing and how to work with them. So the people that

in a way that wasn't really too connected to me, if that makes sense. I didn't make up a lot of that stuff. A lot of it are things that I've learned and it becomes implicit at some point. If you learn something 15 years ago, it's there, and it's hard to track back. So when we were making the book from the blogs, I had to go back and re-source everything and reference everything. It feels that it's not really about me as a person. It's relational. That's gotten really reinforced in the last little while. Of course, once you're putting a book out and then you are being asked to represent the book, there's a certain responsibility that comes in. Well, I did make this book, so I'm responsible for it.

You can start to feel that you have to have everything figured out, and I definitely don't. I'm definitely not trying to pretend that I have all the solutions. I want to be in a conversation, particularly right now, when we're experiencing really different kinds of harm. The harms that are most ratcheted up right now are not directly targeting me a lot. Although it's creeping over more and more towards the point of targeting me. Like the Tree of Life shooting targeted people that I know. I am in a community, and we can't expect that we'll stay safe just because we stay out of the mess. That's been a mistake in the past, to think that if you just keep your head down it won't affect you. That's not true. Eventually, we all get affected in one way or another. I'm not in the most targeted group right now, so it feels like there's this distance and a gulf in life experience. We don't have to necessarily be best friends to have solidarity. It's okay to have intimacy with folks that are like you while also reaching across and showing up for people.

I've been scared. Since Trump came in, I've been scared. A lot of people have had that collapse when it first happened. And then I had to understand that this wasn't new for a lot of people. It was just stepped up. This kind of violence is the foundation of Western culture, and it's been there the whole time. But suddenly, it's apparent and increasing in pace. I've been in kind of paralysis mode. Over the last little while with a lot of the ICE blockades and resistance finally really kicking up in a loud way, with some things like Cosecha and some of the migrant justice groups that are just fighting and organizing, I'm finally feeling hopeful and feeling less scared and less paralyzed. I went through this training recently that really helps. It's like, "No, you can do this". Ordinary people can do this. You don't have to be somebody special. It's always been ordinary people who were stepping in in a way that has each other's backs whether or not we're going to automatically listen to the same music and wear the same clothes and like each other. How do you build trust when you don't automatically have the same background or the same culture so that you can protect each other?

TFSR: I like that fact that starting with the first essay the concept of interconnectedness between communities and between peoples that are affected by these disconnections and displacements is brought in constantly. Since you brought up the shooting—we were already set to talk, but one of the reasons that I really felt compelled to try to get this conversation out soon (and I hope to have more on the topic) is, in the response to the El Paso

shooting and the Dayton shooting, a listener and a friend had read a tweet by Bree Newsome that he didn't disagree with but he just didn't fully understand, so we had a chat. She named one of the causes of the shooting to be male entitlement. We had a nice chat about that. Mass shootings are this really spectacularized amplification of the violence that's already so present in a really sick patriarchal, heterosexist, white, settler, anti-black (I could go on listing)... ableist society that we live in, that we both live in it even on different sides of the border. They're similar, like cousins. This sort of violence is always bubbling underneath the surface, or it's impacting people on a more personal, one-on-one basis that doesn't make the news, like familial violence or intimate violence or microaggressions on the subway or whatever. There's an issue of people who feel their privileges or entitlements slipping away engaging their anger or fear or loss through otherization of people that are already marginalized by the system. Could you talk about some of the insights that putting this project together or your conversations have brought you that listeners could understand about the connection between a fear of a loss of entitlement and lashing out?

N: So I was thinking about that story that I think we've talked about before. The book *Why Does He Do That?* by Lundy Bancroft I found really helpful. Is that the stuff you're thinking about?

TFSR: Yeah.

N: There's a story that Lundy Bancroft uses in this book that after I wrote the nurturance essay—because at the time when I was writing the nurturance essay, I was deep in empathy for someone who was harming me and several other people, someone I had observed causing harm. And I was trying to feel as deeply into that experience as I could to try to understand it. I got part of the way to understanding it, but I missed a big piece of the picture. As I moved away from that, a whole bunch of friends put this book in my hands, and told me: "You need to read this book. There's a big piece of this puzzle, you're not understanding." I read it, and it helped explain so much more. It put into words, things that I had felt and known, but I hadn't been able to articulate.

There's a story that he tells that I told to my nine-year-old godson. He was trying to understand why... He's kind of cute, and he has this curly hair, and adults are always touching him and putting their hands in his hair. He has some sensory issues, and he hates... Even people who love him, he has ways that he likes to be touched and not to be touched. You give them a firm squeeze hug, you don't gently touch his hair because he doesn't like it. All these adults are always touching him without asking first, and he's learned how to say: "I don't like when people touch me." We were talking at a dinner, and he was asking, "Why people always do this?" His mom trying to explain that he's a kid, and so they don't really listen to him. And I realized the story would help, and it would also teach him. He's also a big kid,

when somebody hurts somebody else, you don't go say you're sorry because that's often very fake and superficial. You ask what they need. With her kids, if one kid hurt another kid, she'd model: She'd turn to the kid who got hurt and be like, "Are you okay? Do you want a hug? What do you need?" It's more about meeting the person's needs than it is about shaming the person who did something wrong, although an apology can go a long way. And to teach that, watching kids learn it—because as I've been healing, I've been watching healthy parenting. I've also been re-parenting myself and then thinking about my adult relationships too. That's a roundabout story, but does that answer that a little bit?

TFSR: Yeah, Awesome. Just to get to the specific: a child does something out of frustration that ends up hurting their parent and then mistakes the feeling of sorrow for being told that they've hurt their parent for being accused of being a bad person. If someone's told, "That thing that you just did is racist," then what a lot of people will hear is, "You're a racist." "You're are this thing," as opposed to, "You are this person that did this thing," which is repairable. If you are this thing, that's not repairable. That's a statement of...

N: Essence.

TFSR: Yeah, exactly.

N: And then of course, there's the whole notion that it's not about you at your essence having something wrong with you. It's that this culture we live in positions us to cause harm. And so it's not that you are or are not racist. That's not the point. When you take a step, you're taking a step in which gravity has been structured to cause harm to people. To work with that and be like, "Okay, so I have to step differently, I have to recognize the gravity that I'm operating in."

TFSR: It also sets us up for failure in a way, and not just the people who are causing the harm. I experience that society teaches us to think in terms of essentialism and putting people in boxes, saying, "Someone is this thing, therefore, they should go to prison for the rest of their life because they surely never can change".

N: Yeah, irremediably. Exactly. To be a degenerate human who can't change. Or to be the type of person who XYZ, and then that creates these swimming upstream experiences for people who are having all this shit thrown at them that's got nothing to do with who they are at all.

TFSR: Especially because these values are thrown down the social hierarchy on more and more people and accumulate in all these intersecting ways. It's pretty terrible.

specific other people. I think that there's a gift in our nervous systems that allows us to understand our ecological belonging and our social belonging in a less intimate sense but still very deep. For example when we go into the forest, or we're in a wild place... Our nervous system developed over many, many eons to be part of webs of life. It's not an idea, it's a physiological reality.

I think that's what this Western culture has denied and told us not to notice, not to pay attention to. "We're all individuals. We're supposed to bootstrap ourselves to success. We're not supposed to need each other too much. Needs are bad." The lone wolf running off into the sunset is a good thing, I'm mixing metaphors there. The cowboy. You know what I mean. That's valorized, and that's not our physiological or biological reality. As a cultural worldview, it denies a lot of physical reality. What I was writing in the nurturance culture essay, nothing in this child's world gives them any signposts and yet it's true. I was trying to feel towards this deeper sense of belonging that our nervous systems give us in concentric circles. Yes, we belong, we're more intimate with a set of certain people. We have children, partners, parents, siblings, aunts, and uncles. And it grows from this profound intimacy, where we were meant to be completely held. But it doesn't end there. I think what's weird about psychology is that it just describes that, and it doesn't understand that maybe our nervous systems are also part of our ecological sense of connectedness, in the earth and with other humans. That for me is where empathy comes in. We have a part of ourselves that can feel what other people are feeling. We're capable of it, but it's not automatic and has to be honed. And it can be killed in us. It can be numbed or shut down. If we want to see the kind of culture that can live in balance ecologically and also belong with one another socially—be fully human be fully expressed—then we need to recognize that our nervous systems are built this way and cultivate that gift. When that fails, or when it's not cultivated, that's when you get people growing up mixing up their internal experience of shame because they don't have a connection to that wholeness with that external person—"They're making me feel bad, and I should punish them."

And that's where that story comes in, where at six... He's outgrown this. He laughs about this now. I told him that he was in the book, and he doesn't really understand what that means, but he'd kinda get a kick out of the fact that people were reading a story about him. We told him, "Well, the reason that it's interesting is not just because it's about kids. It's because there are adults who don't know that." And he's like, "What? That's so silly." Because at 6 he didn't know, but by 8 he knew. Because we worked with him to be like, "You did this thing that hurt somebody. We love you. You're good. You belong fundamentally—that's unbreakable. But go say sorry." Or not necessarily say sorry in the shame way, but go check what that person needs.

There's this close friend of mine who I've learned a ton from—my friend Shania. One of the things I've learned about parenting and kids—And I'm not proposing that I know how to parent. Everybody's going to parent differently, and that's fine. It's more just that I think about this in terms of adult relationships, too. Because often what kids need grownups need to. What I learned from her is

and he has to learn about other people's boundaries, too.

The story is, there's a little boy, and from the time he's very young, his family tells him (and they really believe) that there's this beautiful big area, this piece of land that belongs to the family. They tell him: "For now, while you're a child, because you're so generous, you're allowing the community to use this land. But it's really ours, and when you grow up, you're going to inherit it, and it will belong to you. You're just allowing people to fish, hunt, camp, and enjoy the territory, the land that our family owns." The boy goes many times to visit the land. He walks around, and he feels really good about his generosity as he sees people camping and enjoying the land. He knows that when he grows up, it'll be his, but for now, they're sharing it. Then the time comes when he comes of age. His family says: "Okay, now it's time." He goes to the land, and he says to the people that are there: "Alright, all of these years, you've enjoyed our generosity, and the time has come for me to take the land back. So please, it's time to leave." But it's not actually true that it belongs to his family. They've been mistaken. He's been mistaken. But he's been told this since he was very young. Actually, the land belongs to the community. You can think of it as Crown land or a state park or a big public park. He's just wrong. It's just not the case that that land belongs to Him. The people there are like, "Who do you think you are? This isn't yours. We're allowed to be here. This belongs to everyone." He gets angry because he feels like he's being pushed back on. Not only are they not appreciating how generous he's been, but they're refusing to leave. They're taking what's his. He gets angry, and he starts pushing their things. He starts taking their things and trying to get them off the land and breaking their stuff. They get mad at him. And it's understandably that they get mad at him because he's behaving really badly. But he's behaving badly because he believes that something that is his by right is being pushed back on in a way that's bullying him or oppressing him.

Lundy Bancroft uses that story to describe the making of an abusive man, someone who believes that they not only have the right to their own body but your body too. I've known people who have this mindset. It's not to say that this is generalized or that all men have it. Of course, many people can grow up in a system that encourages that kind of thinking and nonetheless be kind empathetic caring and have good boundaries. But that the culture might foster it. So if it's not being countered at home—all the TV, all the movies, all of the pop culture, video games, it teaches that if you're born into this particular type of body, and that is who you identify as, and if you do all the right things, you're owed certain things. You're owed a pretty wife, you're owed a nice house, you're owed an income that can support a family, and you're owed a certain amount of deference. You're owed not only to be treated as an equal but to be deferred to, and that that's yours by right. So there's a mindset that treats that as natural. It says that if this woman or non-cis-dude expects to be an equal that they are somehow imposing, they're taking up more than their fair share. And it's a mistake, it's not accurate. People can really experience it as bad as an imposition on their God-given rights or their natural rights. I've tried to extrapolate that and understand that, what it means for me growing

up as a white person in this society. I even think of it in a simpler way. If you grew up sitting on three-quarters of the couch, and the other person who's the same size as you only gets a quarter, you might not notice because you're comfortable and you've been there the whole time, but they're getting squished. When they push you and say: "Hey, move over." You might feel like you're being oppressed.

TFSR: There's a quote that's in the book. I don't know if that was attributed to Audre Lorde, but it said something similar that really stuck out to me. I wish I had it accessible right now. If you're used to a level of privilege, equality feels like oppression.

N: Oh, that one? Yeah, that's the mystery quote. It's a rabbit hole. Many people use it. No one knows where it comes from. Of all the people that I've seen quote it, no one knows who said this. That's beautiful. It's all shared knowledge. When you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression. That's exactly it. You feel like you're being pushed back on, but you don't realize that you have been stomping on people and not even realizing it. Because it's like gravity. All you're doing is walking. But the whole system is structured so that your experience of just walking is walking on other people. It's set up that way. So then, when people push back, you feel that you're being pushed on. People can get really dangerous, right? Push back on white people's sense of "everybody's the same," and white people can get really dangerous, like scary-dangerous.

TFSR: That fragile undercoat. Just feeling that any sort of pushback is an attack on us and our integrity or our right to exist.

N: Yeah. And that it's racism, "reverse racism," all of which is just a profound lack of empathy, a profound inability to really recognize what's happening around you. I'm experiencing both of those. I've spent years trying to learn, recognize, and listen deeply to people of color who are talking about their experiences, whether through reading, listening, or organizing. Slowly trying to build relationships where you keep showing up, and people are like, "Yeah, you said fucked up thing." And you're like, "Oh, thanks." Then you keep coming back. "Okay, cool. I'm gonna keep learning." We need to just keep showing up and keep learning and being really, really open to growing our ability to recognize things that our entire conditioning teaches us not to recognize. And that's the same kind of thing that I've been asking, or that I was hoping that men in my life would do, with mixed success. It can be painful to do it because it means questioning the foundations that we grew up with.

TFSR: You were talking about the way that people are, the way the expectations are built for us. There was something in the last thing that you said that sparked me to think of another story about a child that you relate in the book. The kind of activity that you were saying was good modeling just now, of going to and being in a space and listening to people. And then

when somebody—a person of color, for instance—says, "You did this kind of fucked up thing," being able to take that and say, "Oh, all right. Thank you for sharing that. That must've been an uncomfortable thing to share."

N: Yes. That's generous. That's a gift, right? To receive it as a gift.

TFSR: One has to be ready to receive something like that and to be of a mental state where that is viewed as a gift.

N: So here's the thing. This connects in, but it might be in a big roundabout way. A lot of that stuff isn't new, right? A lot of those are things that I've learned previously and were just floating around for me, and that came out in the writing because I was trying to understand. Often I write as I'm learning, actually. So it's not me being like, "I'm an expert, and I'm not going to tell you what to do." It's me absorbing: "Oh, that's what that person meant. Now I understand." Because I write to think. If there's anything in the writing that I think might be a little bit new it's the thinking of all of it in this long tradition of challenging oppression, a tradition that came a long time before me, and I'm not one of the main people who's written about it—but connecting it into the nervous system. Why is it that we get these defensive reactions and that our entire sense of self collapses when someone says, "Hey, that thing you did is a super white person thing to do? Please stop. It's hurting people" Why do we collapse? Why does that happen? Why do white people get super defensive and crazy? What do we have as a gift in us that can counter it?

I think it was through some struggles that I was having—I have a dissociative disorder caused by gendered violence, among other things. I was learning, initially, when I found out, that I didn't have words, and I couldn't access words for any of the things that were happening to me. But as I was healing, I was integrating layers of myself that had been shamed. Shame and terror, when I was developing, had caused these fragments to happen. As I was integrating, I was learning that actually that's very common, that almost all of us have parts of ourselves that have been fragmented off so fully that we can't access them. Not everybody has it to the extent that I did, and some people have it even more than me, but it's actually not unusual. It's a way that our systems cope with shame when we're very young. I was learning that dissociative disorder is caused externally. It's not something you're born with. It's caused through attachment trauma or breaking of belonging. I was reading all this stuff about attachment and attachment trauma and betrayal, high trust betrayal trauma. Meanwhile, I was putting that into everything that I had been learning for many years about racism and came to understand that one of the things that's so messed up and causes such compounded trauma is not necessarily an act of racism or an act of systemic violence—It's that plus the by-standing and the normalizing of it. There's a sense of betrayal when harm is happening and the humans around you don't see it or can't see it. There's a fundamental break in our nervous systems that require us to know that we are connected to the other humans that we are close to. Usually specific other humans—like attachment is attaches to