



Library podcast

A Queer Anti-Militarism Town Hall

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[00:00:35] Who the queer anti militarism townhall at the Seattle Public Library. My name is Bean Yogi. I am a library associate here at SPRO. This is where the fun starts. Yeah

[00:00:53] Yeah.

[00:00:55] During public engagement events such as these we pride ourselves on laying to rest the stereotypes about the Seattle Freeze because our aim is to build connection community for everyone here to get to know each other. So. Take the next 2 minutes before we begin to introduce yourself to your neighbor preferably the neighbor that you don't know. Please include your gender pronouns gender pronouns such as than them those are the ones I use. She and her he and his Z and zir all of those are good. So share your gender pronouns and what liberation or anti militarism means to you. I know it's a lot to talk about. Right

[00:01:37] Because you all get a chance to meet her neighbors. Okay I come from call and response. Coulter did you all get a chance to meet her neighbors.

[00:01:46] Yeah. Did you use gender pronouns and liberation then. This program is off to a great start. Thank you for coming out to a queer to militarism townhall this is an audience that loves libraries and also knows how to do a good podcast. Thank you. I like I like a lively audience.

[00:02:09] My name is Devika Ingram and I'm the public engagement programs manager at the library.

[00:02:14] I want to start our program by acknowledging that we are on Duwamish LAN and actually throughout this year 2018 we are looking forward to doing several programs that are native led and centered around celebrating Coast Salish and urban Indian experience so please keep hanging out with us. Tonight's program is made possible with support from the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Do we have any donors in the audience.

[00:02:41] Give yourself a hand.

[00:02:44] So you may have noticed that this past weekend we had the Transgender Day of inclusion. I'm really proud to say that the Seattle Public Library when it comes to identities that we are working to be inclusive all year round.

[00:02:59] So we have today's program a queer anti militarism townhall that was created primarily by transgender community members working with allies to build a cross constituency dialogue about militarism.

[00:03:13] And on April 14 we will be holding legendary children. Have any of you all been to legendary children before. Can you make some noise. Our age so legendary children is a celebration of queer and trans people of color.

[00:03:28] Everybody is invited to this evening's celebrating Houssam ball culture with live performances hot deejays and the artistry of some of the Pacific Northwest most talented drag world tea and multitalented performers so come for the art and stay for the public runway. Tonight's conversation was made possible by our community curators Dean Spaight Mathilde Bernstein Sycamore Sawyer John and unhealth cut to zero. I hope I got unhelped because name said correctly. Instead of calling for the right to serve in the military tonight's discussion focuses on challenging the violence of the military at home and abroad. Our panelists will speak from a broad range of organizing experiences from challenging structural racism to fighting for migrant Justice Indigenous sovereignty to prison abolition. Antiwar activism to the movement against sexual violence. So please join me in welcoming our speakers for tonight. We have Meece card the US. Nikkita Oliver

[00:04:39] Soyeon John Matt Ripponlea Dean Spain and Mathilde Bernstein Sycamore.

[00:04:52] Can we give a round of applause for all of our speakers today.

[00:04:58] So turning the mikes over to tonight's program curator's. But before I do that I want to thank our community partners. Jewish Voices for Peace Seattle the South Seattle Amarone the Northwest Detention Center resistance Rosinski resistance et al. WDC international league of people struggle and we couldn't do it without a community partners or without our wonderful audience. Thank you.

[00:05:30] Hi everyone. I'm on the mike. You feel me. I'm still there. Thanks so much for coming tonight. I would like to say whatever you need to do to take care of yourselves feel free if you need to get up if you need to walk around if you need a laugh if need to cry if you need to scream. You need to dance if you need to go to the bathroom. Anything you need to do. SAP's. We don't like quiet audiences right. The only bad audience is the dead audience and I can tell this is not a bad idea. Also since we are this is a queer event this evening and we are in one of the oldest cruising areas in the world the library

[00:06:15] So if anyone is looking for a day please raise your hand. How long. Okay. Okay. It's going to be time afterwards for a day look around and get ready.

[00:06:36] When our so-called president first announced that he would ban trans people from the military.

[00:06:44] I imagined spectacular celebrations in cities across the country where trans people and anyone else with a conscience would welcome this news with extravagant opposition to militarism in all its forms. Maybe gender trends grass and couldn't bring down the state after all. Unfortunately though the institutions that call themselves the LGBT movement have long been obsessed with acquiring state and straight power. Rather than challenging structural violence. Since the early 90's when ending the ban on openly gay soldiers became a central goal of the branded national organizations so called LGBT leaders and their allies have draped themselves in the stars and stripes as the U.S. has obliterated Iraq Afghanistan Pakistan Somalia Syria Yemen and who knows how many other countries all the while funding the Israeli war on the Palestinians propping up countless despotic regimes plundering indigenous resources poisoning the land air and water and indoctrinating youth into a lifetime of brutality and trauma.

[00:08:32] The fight for a trans inclusion in the military bars for more than two decades of rhetoric in support of gays in the military.

[00:08:41] But in many ways it may be worse since trans people don't even have a fraction of the access to resources that gay people had 25 years ago. Trans people are routinely kicked out of our families of origin harassed in school and at work persecuted by religious leaders and politicians and attacked on the street simply for daring to exist. Trans people are often denied access to basic services like healthcare and housing fired from jobs or are never hired in the first place and forced to flee the places where we grew up simply to survive. Trans women particularly trans women of color are brutally murdered at an astounding rate. How does the so-called LGBT movement respond to this frightening pattern of systemic violence and exclusion.

[00:09:47] By holding up military service as a path to assimilation. What better way to prove that trans people are healthy and fit for employing men. Them by participating in war for corporate profit.

[00:10:10] We're told that military service is a human right as if the human rights of the people and villages obliterated by drone bombings don't matter. Rather than calling attention to the structural conditions that make military service a tragic option for some people desperate to escape internalize and ultimately further oppress the LGBT establishment aggrandize his military service as the gold standard for bravery.

[00:10:55] There's so much cognitive dissonance when people say they support trans inclusion in the military but not war. What exactly do they think the military is for. Or when people say the military helped trans people to escape poverty and then fail to mention the countless ways in which the military creates poverty.

[00:11:32] No one should have to become part of a murderous institution in order to escape a scary home pay for college or get out of a dead end town.

[00:11:44] Nevertheless this is what we're told is progress.

[00:11:50] Unfortunately the laught which for decades ignored queer and trans lives now features pro military gay queer and trans people alongside in-depth coverage of the brutality of U.S. wars without even noticing the contradiction. This regressive tokenism is symptomatic of structural homophobia and transphobia just after Trump first announced his trans military ban.

[00:12:24] I turned on Democracy Now and watched in horror as a trans woman with 18 years in the Army including three active combat deployments in Afghanistan and extolled the glory of the military for 15 minutes without any serious question. Then a trans man currently stationed in Afghanistan told us. That it was like a vacation home because he could finally be his authentic self.

[00:13:01] After 20 minutes democracy now finally allowed Dean Spayd to articulate substantive critiques but only while debating a pro military filmmaker if this is how our so-called allies cover our lives it's hard to imagine our enemy tonight's event came about in response to that.

[00:13:30] Democracy Now broadcasts Dina and I wanted to gather together queer and trans people from a wide range of social movements to challenge the violence of military inclusion. Now the trans military band is back in the news and once again the conversation is about who will be allowed to fight in unjust wars rather than will the U.S. ever stop destroying the world.

[00:14:04] Tonight is one small intervention which we hope will inspire many more.

[00:14:13] Are we ready for a stunning mobilization of our brilliant political a round of applause for Musa US Sawyer John Nikkita Oliver Ramlee and Dean Spayd thanks so much for Matilda for that really helpful context setting and so many things that somebody thanks everybody in the library including Devita and Bean and Orlando and many others who've helped make this event happened to the wonderful speakers for being here and all of you for wanting to be part of this conversation. We're just going to dive right in. So we wanted to avoid like tantalizing and have more like a conversation because I think it's usually more interesting and the first question that anybody can answer who wants to but me just said she would generously started us out.

[00:15:16] She's an Aries.

[00:15:19] The first question is you know we're thinking about how so many different social movements have struggled with this question about military inclusion. This is obviously a very repeated question for marginalized groups in the United States. And so my question is what movement lineages have shaped your perspective on U.S. militarism or movement experiences or other experiences and what have they taught you.

[00:15:47] Thank you. Thanks so much for inviting me as that honor. You know when you invited me and I when I was getting ready today even i was like What the fuck do I know about this. Oh sorry I'm not supposed to see that in the podcast. Oh great. OK. I was like I don't know anything about this but I do actually when I think about antimilitary is I just actually don't use those terms. I mean thinking about my personal experience my father is Colombian and he was imprisoned when I was 10 years old.

[00:16:24] And that had a huge effect on me and a huge effect on shaping my ideas of politics.

[00:16:33] And I came to understand the drug war as being part of colonization. So I don't actually think much about anti militarism. I think a lot about decolonization a because transition is not something that happened in the past. It's something that's ongoing. And when we say at the beginning of this event that this is land of the Duwamish people what does that mean.

[00:16:59] Well it means that where the invaders that have been here for what 100 years 200 years calling this place Seattle this land that for tens of thousands of years belonged to other people to the Duwamish people and for this part of the country to be settled was the end of a long process of colonization of this country meaning the murder of over 10 million native people. Ninety eight percent of the native people in the United States for us to be here so that requires a really big war machine to do that.

[00:17:41] And that process continues. Certainly if we left I'm sure the Duwamish people would be thrilled to have the city back or this country back and also it continues. And what we might call neo colonialism but whatever. It's just colonization anyway in terms of the US control or domination of other countries like Colombia and Latin America so that the rest of the world can serve as like raw resources and as sweatshops or people in the United States to continue having the kind of lifestyles that we do. So colonizations really at the center and basis of politics and thinking about this topic in terms of movement lineages it was actually antiwar activism through which I first got involved in like protest kind of activism in San Diego at the San Diego coalition for peace and justice organizing against the war in Iraq in 2003. I remember people were talking then about the war in Iraq being like the first war since Vietnam and like being a major shift. But since then and really since the war in Afghanistan we've just had a state of perpetual war.

[00:19:02] I love that you frame this in terms of colonization. I mean I think of myself as a child of war right. I grew up in the 70s in a suburb of Buffalo New York. My parents came to the United States in the early 60s before the 1965 Immigration Act. You know sort of lifted the ban on immigrants from Asia and the Pacific and they came one on a world health organization scholarship and the other on an atomic energy commission scholarship. And they both came not very long after the end of a brutalizing war on the Korean peninsula. So one of the things that you know I remember hearing stories of my mother as a child she was responsible for cooking for entire family from the age of like seven. And she would talk about finding abandoned helmets of soldiers on the ground and using that as cooking vessels and she wouldn't even make a thing out of it to just say Oh yeah and then I cook

this thing and a helmet. And so it's that kind of reality that my parents generation came from. And at the same time you know growing up in the 70s there wasn't a lot of context for being Korean American in upstate New York in the 70s. So but what was happening was a kind of global economic reordering. And so you would hear a lot about the auto wars and about kind of Japan taking over. So there was quite a bit of anti Asian kind of racism at that time. The irony being of course that the Japanese economic miracle really took place because of the Korean War. You know Japan's economy was devastated after World War II World War Two hundred thirty five years of brutal Japanese occupation of Korea.

[00:20:49] And the way that Japan's economy recovered was because they needed the United States needed a staging area for logistics for the war on the Korean peninsula. So these are the ways in which I think that are our stories even you know oppressor oppressed colonizer colonized. Right. Our stories are linked in the logic of imperialism and global capitalism. And I think you know one of the one of the ways that I have started to knit together and you know I'm still I'm constantly kind of learning about this stuff. But when I was maybe starting in my teens and 20s like starting to read about this stuff really to make sense of myself and my place in the world you know coming across speeches like like Dr. King's Beyond Vietnam speech where he's so clearly and painstakingly lays out the connections between racism particularly anti black racism in the United States and capitalism and militarism. You know he talks about these as the evil triplets the giant evil triplets and that you can't really take one down without the other and he draws the real connections right between those that it made me really think of of our our place in the world. Most people re migrate not because they want to but because they have to. So I think one of the questions like maybe all of us in this room could ask ourselves is like why am I here. You know how did I get here what are the reasons that brought me here physically geographically to this location. And I think once you start doing that you start unpacking the dynamics of war and colonization and imperialism right.

[00:22:32] So yeah I'll leave it at that.

[00:22:36] So I didn't grow up and like quote unquote Wouk family like some of the conversations I hear young people in Seattle have like I know would have never had as a young person. I grew up in Indianapolis Indiana. My father is black and my mother is white. So I am the descendant of both white so black colonials and formerly enslaved black peoples which is complicated when we talk about. The land that we're on because one part of me didn't ask to be here and the other part brought that part here.

[00:23:16] And so when I think about conversations like anti militarism it goes to a little bit of a different place. So I was taught that acquisition of power would get me access. So I was taught to occupy and colonized by acquiring power by working in and through the system. I could acquire enough power to have access to power to be OK. That's what I was taught. American Dream bullshit.

[00:23:50] But over the course of time also growing up in the Christian church which is its own complicated bullshit sorry folks.

[00:24:00] Happy Easter.

[00:24:03] It was also April Fool's Day. So you know. I'm recovering

[00:24:10] But I went to Seattle Pacific University and I remember sitting in classrooms where I was the only person of color but I was the only black person and learning things that started to feel not right and starting to question them. Fast forward I go to law school and I'm sitting in a property class where a professor is teaching the Macintosh trilogy. Like all other things about the discovery doctrine nobody is questioning the stealing of land. Fast forward a little bit forward and I'm at my first internship at the Center for Constitutional Rights and I'm working on the Guantanamo Bay cases. And at the same time George Zimmerman is on trial for the murder of Trayvon Martin and he is acquitted of murder. And so all these things are swirling around in my head and I am enraged by what just happened in this court system that I'm being told by you double all that if you just follow the process. Justice will prevail. And I don't see justice prevail. In fact we've never seen justice prevail when a cop murders a black person or really any person. And so I go into the streets in New York City and I've protested in Seattle before. I was not fortunate enough to see the WTO protest here. But I'm in New York City and the streets are all these different types of cops I never knew existed. There are like homeland security and I can't even think of the list but they all have different types of equipment on them and I'm starting to feel like I'm in an occupied space. I come back to Seattle on November 24th 2014. The nonindictment of Darren Wilson is announced in Ferguson. And I go into the streets with my comrades because I need a place to mourn with people who feel the same way that I do.

[00:26:17] And within an hour SPD throwing flash bangs and mace people and using their bikes as weapons and so after 28 years or so however old I wasn't 2014. Growing up in this system of slowly unpacking what I had internalized about colonialism and occupation as kind of a positive acquisition of power. There was this moment where everything finally clicked into place and I started to see as PD as an occupying military force and all of the things that I had experience growing up and the cognitive dissonance started to unravel itself. And that's when I really got involved in Seattle around how do we dismantle the police. How do we dismantle prisons and the court system. Because that's a part of keeping in place militarism here and getting us very used to it and comfortable with it. So we will justify it and other places. I tell you that long story because most folks who don't grow up in a city like Seattle are not having conversations about anti militarization on a regular basis. It's not something that young people are talking about in their classrooms in Indianapolis Indiana where I grew up young people are still being taught the same bullshit that I was taught and as a result of not getting the opportunity to have the kinds of experiences I've had to question the oppression they had and they've internalized. There's a whole group of folks who don't even know that they've been force fed a narrative. And I think that's the base for me that's the framing of this conversation is there are a lot of people that don't know that they're buying into a narrative that's why they think trans folks being excluded from the military is a violation of human rights as opposed to seeing the military.

[00:28:11] And what we do abroad as a violation of people's global human rights and human dignity is because we've been told to acquire power and then you'll be all right but we're never told about other people like the folks at Guantanamo Bay upon whom those that power is built and how it was

acquired. And for me Black Lives Matter was a huge moment of coming to a realization of what militarism in general how that continues to oppress black folks in my own community.

[00:28:40] But how our investment in that structure is oppression of people globally Kippy Chanti was still not choose Oppy why not on a much Yapi ya was Slon a the high yellow Ottway Wakey Charles trimly y Akey Donna Harrison Duwamish or Yachty Duwamish shmuck Schicchi a while we Czechia you. Good evening. My name's Matt Ramlee my Lakota name is Wakayama not Don. I'm from standing rock but been living here in Seattle for quite a while out in South Beacon Hill and first and foremost want to acknowledge two Amish folks Amish land and speak a little bit of history here in a second. But the organizers into to the other panelists for inviting me to speak here tonight and it's an honor to be amongst you. You killed it with that intro. There wasn't really much to add to it.

[00:29:43] That was amazing.

[00:29:45] So I'll just add a little depth of history in it and specifically native history into the narrative of militarism the military of course the U.S. military that is came about because of their colonization of our lands and attempts to settle the West.

[00:30:10] That's the foundation of the U.S. military. The goals of it haven't changed.

[00:30:19] Locations and geographies may have changed but the goals to expand colonialism around the globe to remove Indigenous populations to access the resources for the benefit of set or call colonizers remains the same.

[00:30:37] To this day a little bit about the place where we're sitting. One of the first acts of the forerunner of the Seattle City Council was to pass an Act to ban and prohibit any native peoples from the Seattle city limits. At that time of course is predominantly Duwamish peoples whom ironically years before helped those same folks survive the winters out here in ALCA beach area where they first settled and brought them over to actually in this area here to survive.

[00:31:18] A few years later the course turned their backs on them have their own government and when it acts like I said was the ban native people from this area. That was followed by white militias going around and burning down all the longhouses in this area including one not too far from where this library is a longhouse housed about roughly 100 to 200 individuals a collection of families.

[00:31:46] Burned in driven now of what we've become. Seattle my own family.

[00:31:53] So I'm Lakota. We declared war against the United States back in the 18 18 18 60s for their attempts to to colonize our lands and specifically the black hills of which we actually defeated the United States. And that's how we got our treaty the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty and this is important to note because it directly ties into the fight at standing rock that most people are now familiar with. Following the military there the defeat of the U.S. military they still wanted to acquire our lands and resources because of the Black Hills which is sacred to us where we were many of our sacred sites

are located where we conduct ceremonies as instructed as Lakota people to fulfill annually is the one and most Rennell mineral resource rich areas in the entire globe.

[00:32:56] Many of the wealthy families the Bushes and all of them who derive their wealth directly from the stolen resources and gold coming out of the Black Hills so they still wanted access to the Black Hills but because they can militarily defeat us. They devised other strategies to attempt to subjugate our peoples and the two things they did. One was the paid folks both from the military and the calm buffalo hunters to come out west and they just slaughtered a buffalo. The buffalo was our economy. Much in the same way that the Coast Salish peoples economy is around the salmon fishing but Buffalo was our economy. They the population of Buffalo went from 100 million down to 28 in the shorts in a very short time span.

[00:33:56] 20 Buffalo actually ended up in what's now a big park in Montana. It's basin in Yellowstone. Thank you. So I'd attempt to military subjugate us by destroying our traditional economy and our food supply.

[00:34:13] And that was followed by a second act which was to pass the boarding school policy in importing school policy where it was required of all Indian children from ages 4 to 18 to be militarily removed from their homes and placed into these government sponsored church ran boarding schools off reservation.

[00:34:38] These were two policies put in place to subjugate us to get access to resources. That was followed up by a camp of mass slaughters that we saw at Wounded Knee.

[00:34:51] There were wounded knee was the last March largest military buildup in this land until nineteen seventies when the American Indian Movement and others occupied the sight of Wounded Knee. And at that time that became the largest military buildup on U.S. soil since the 1890 slaughter at Wounded Knee.

[00:35:21] Fast forward to just a few years ago the third largest military gathering happened in standing rock as we were fighting against Dakota Access Pipeline.

[00:35:32] So you're mentioning colonization is about to remove all indigenous peoples off their lands to access resources for the benefit of settler colonial peoples.

[00:35:42] And that's exactly what happened at Standing Rock.

[00:35:46] You saw a joint effort militarized effort. You had police jurisdictions around the country being brought out there along with Department of Homeland Security the FBI the CIA National Guard and other military forces with snipers on hills pointed down into our camps to remove us from our lands to build this pipeline not for our benefit but for the benefit of corporations.

[00:36:16] So I'm bringing this all up as a very local example of the militarism that continues to happen against us in our own homelands precisely what Nikkita is talking about. Don't worry. The thing I'd like to add is if folks do need to express themselves in some form of of kind and when you're talking people like wanting to fight against something then join us on the front lines in standing.

[00:36:45] You don't need to join the U.S. military. We've got warriors out there fighting against these corporations and stuff like that. You're more than welcome to come with us. You're welcome.

[00:36:55] Whomever you are bringing your families just like those who might have went to stand in Iraq. I'm sure you felt very welcomed out there in love. So there are other ways to express yourself other than joining the U.S. military. Thank you.

[00:37:14] Thank you all for such thoughtful ways of bringing us into how you think about this stuff it's really really helpful and really pacts with important histories and experiences that help us set up a frame around it. One thing I wondered if you'd speak to any of you or all of you as much as you want is is the fact that there has been a lot of histories of different marginalized groups being excluded from the U.S. military and then included and there's been perhaps some patterns across different movements of what those moments of advocacy do and look like and how they play out. And I wondered if anyone wants to speak to any of those parallels. I think they can be instructive for us.

[00:38:01] So Helyer Cesaro is supposed to be here tonight and I am a very poor a stand in for that bad ass fierce and fearless lawyer and organizer and thinker but she would kill me if I didn't bring this up.

[00:38:20] Which is that you know various forms of the DREAM Act have included military participation as a path to legalization a path to to right to out of the oppression of being undocumented.

[00:38:35] That is nothing new right. In fact if we a lot some of you have probably heard of the Moynihan Report. So the morning end report comes out in the 1960s and it talks about the pathology the cultural pathology of black families right. And it essentially pathologies as black women in particular and black female headed households and uses that as the explanatory you know description of black families why black families are in poverty.

[00:39:12] And it's a terrible report.

[00:39:15] It has huge implications and lasting implications not only in terms of public programs and government but also in terms of sort of public perceptions of blackness. One of the things that doesn't get talked about much is that the report poses as a solution. Military participation of black men that they say the way to solve this pathology. Right. This culture of poverty in the black community is to send black men into the military. What's happening at that time of the Vietnam War.

[00:39:45] Right.

[00:39:48] That's one example. But we can also look at other examples of what black people have been sent to war right and I come back to face Jim Crow or even worse right. In some ways war and military participation has also been a politicizing moment particularly for people who see the blatant hypocrisy the brutal lie right. A racial logic in racial thinking of some people deserve to live. Some people don't deserve to live. One of the things that I was going to mention to you is that you know military participation is always offered material benefits. Right. You can get the benefits of a veteran's pension or healthcare or free education. Right. These are the material benefits that the state has used to bribe us into participating in an institution of death essentially death and destruction. And I think that one of the ways that it does this is also hinges very much on ideas of gender rate of hypermasculinity of strength. And there is a way that there is a way that our ideas of gender and our ideas of race are so cleaved together in institutions of violence and the ways that we think about national boundaries for example. I mean people literally still in the military call refer to enemy territory as an Indian country. The term Glueck which is a derogatory racial slur that's used usually against Asians has been used against people around the world by the military including Haiti right including Arabs including Africans historically. So we're all bound I think within this really warped logic of what is required of us to be safe to be powerful to be included.

[00:41:46] Right. And it's very much gendered. And I think that there's something really potent potentially right about building a trans and queer resistance movement to the military in this moment especially when we're living in a time of as as as you said at the very beginning.

[00:42:04] Perpetual war right. Well I was in college in 1990 1990s early 1990s when the U.S. invaded Iraq right when Iraq invaded Kuwait and I remember at that time so George Bush the older one of the younger one was speaking to Alec and said We've done it. We finally kicked the Vietnam syndrome you know.

[00:42:29] And really that set off an era a new era of war on terrorism of permit a state of permanent war between 1990 and 97. I think there were 30 U.S. military interventions.

[00:42:41] How did they do that. Well they created a different boogeyman. Right. It's not communism anymore. It's Islam it's terrorism. And so I think on some level if we don't figure out how to caucus not if we don't figure out how to end the logic of imperialism of war of militarism that started so long ago it's a deathwish. Right now we're facing the threat of nuclear war with North Korea. Well I when I was a child to talk about not growing up in a Wouk family I didn't even know Korean War had not ended. I was like oh that happened. It's done right. The Korean War never ended.

[00:43:15] That's why we're in this situation right now. The Korean War is essentially an imperial war between the Soviet Union and the United States.

[00:43:21] The Korean people were just mileage which is so often the case just fodder right. So I think this is an existential crisis and it's something that you know it's not clear people or trans people for our own liberation. It's like not you know tribal sovereignty and the rights of indigenous people for

Indigenous people know it's for the planet. I mean the water protectors have been trying to teach us that right. This is a death wish. If we don't figure out how to get out of this way of thinking of deserving undeserving who belongs who doesn't belong.

[00:44:01] I was trying to get Mat's ago one Mad's. So this makes me think. I mean again back to where I grew up.

[00:44:09] So in the Midwest it is not unusual to see young poor folks but also young poor black and brown folks coerced into military participation that you are convinced that being in the military is your only way to gain access to the American Dream that by getting some sort of educational benefit having a steady income. Oftentimes they'll tell young folks like this will give you discipline.

[00:44:42] And so as a result I've had family members and friends join the military not because they wanted to be a soldier so much but they wanted to have access to the American Dream quote unquote and this idea of get your hands dirty with us and then you can belong is really about. I feel like getting communities implicated in the Empire about getting people so far into it that they feel like they cannot accept it or rebel against it. And in my relationships that I've been able to build with people through things like I hope yes or honor by on learning about black soldiers who did join the military and they'd go to the Philippines and they would see that they were killing folks who look just like them. And a lot of ways or experiencing similar things to them and we're living under the same empire and oppression and suddenly realize they were playing a role and continuing to push the oppression of the United States globally in understanding looking at history.

[00:45:50] This is why we don't teach young people history the fact that that that black soldiers joined the military during the World War during World War Two and when they came back because of the promise of the G.I. bill like this is your way to be included in U.S. society. When they came back they were denied access to the G.I. Bill the G.I. Bill was actually one of the root causes of redlining because there was this promise of if you go to war for the United States when you come back we will help you get a home. We will help you get a college education. And when black families black soldiers would go to get those homes they wouldn't be denied access to the suburbs. So this promise of the American dream through military service has time and time again been denied to black and brown folks. And they don't tell that history because usually what happens next is black and brown folks catch on and say shit like

[00:46:51] This was really just about continuing the oppression over our communities and then getting us to be willing to go oppress other communities and enforce borders. We weren't really about in the first place.

[00:47:01] And so a lot of times you see that the same folks who end up being important figures and movements are the same people who at one point in time participated in military service and saw firsthand what the Empire is doing globally. And so I think one of the things that's really important about these kinds of conversations I think is actually having people tell those stories when folks who found themselves in military service because they were coerced by some promise of access decided

to rebel against that system because it happens. How do you undo it if you're not inspiring people to be willing to rebel against it but also support those folks and be a part of telling those stories so that so we know it's possible but it's really important to see the coercion. And it's hard in a place like Seattle to understand why people living in the Midwest or the final example I have a lot of friends from Samoa and one of the only ways for someone to get access to U.S. citizenship has been to join the military industrial complex to become soldiers. And so they are told that their land is being occupied by the United States. But if you want access to benefits as the benefits of a U.S.

[00:48:22] citizen you have to become a part of the military force. And that's why I'm always one of the biggest military bases in the entire world at one point in time. And so I think we have to understand some of the reasons why people maybe would be coerced into participating in the structure and find ways to tell a different story. Like Matt was saying is there are other ways for us to participate to gain access to a community to movement to be in a part of something bigger than ourselves which is what I think most people are yearning for. And what those who are invested in the the military industrial complex actually what is it like benefit from they build. And is our desire to belong and they use that to coerce people into the military. What else can we be building to bring folks into our movement to bring folks into anti motorization to understand that the root for some communities as to why they would become a part of the empire is because they lack access to resources access to community and access to economic opportunity. How do we build alternative sustainable systems that make the military look a whole lot less attractive.

[00:49:38] Maybe I should have went first so I didn't have to follow that. I forgot to mention in the first part the last question some of my early activism back in the mid 90s was actually brought up the first Iraq war was for my own personal involvement was was around when Clinton imposed harsh sanctions against Iraq both economic and medical supplies which led to the deaths of some one and a half million Iraqis. The sanctions the deaths of some one point five million Iraqis predominantly children is my understanding. And we also got different number. Please please let me know what did the other NGOs that want to bring in about militarism that's often overlooked but has a deep impact on tribal communities is what we would call environmental racism. So we need resources to build these bombs uranium stuff like that. The majority of uranium mining has taken place on or next to reservations just east of us in north of Spokane is the Spokane Indian Reservation and where a great amount of Reate uranium mining took place.

[00:51:10] You can go to the Spokane Indian Reservation now and this is back in the 40s to build the bomb for bombs and nuclear bombs in World War II.

[00:51:19] And these sites were left and kept. You can literally walk to these they look like lakes out there he can walk up to him. So their entire water supply. We're talking about water you know here 2000 18 contaminated water to Spokane Tribe in Spokane. People have had contaminated water with uranium since the 1950s.

[00:51:48] Radium was taken down to Hanford Hanford is considered the most polluted site in the Western Hemisphere. How Hanford was acquired is on the Yakama Indian Reservation and the U.S.

military U.S. Army Corps came in and took the land in the same way that our land was taken for to quote access pipeline to build the Hanford Nuclear Power Plant.

[00:52:13] So the there is a tremendous amount of lupus and other diseases that native peoples from the Yakama Indian Reservation some of the other tribes that are downwind of Hanford experience to this day.

[00:52:30] When I brought up the American Indian Movement takeover of Wounded Knee back in the 70s that was primarily around the fact that they wanted to do additional uranium mining in the Black Hills. Our water table in the Lakota People's Army been polluted since the 50s because a vast majority of uranium mining also took place in and around Lakota Reservations.

[00:53:03] Other than mining you have the testing of these bombs.

[00:53:06] So some of the test sites the Western Shoshone people of Nevada the Western Shoshone tribe is considered the most bombed nation on earth because over a thousand nuclear bombs have been detonated on Western Shoshone lands there is also testing in the Badlands of South Dakota which is next to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Other Lakota people. There is also bomb testing of these bombs out in Hawaiian Islands indigenous Hawaiian islands as well as down in Puerto Rico.

[00:53:45] So we have we live with the consequences of US militarism in our health daily lower life expectancies cancers and so forth. So I just wanted to kind of bring in this other angle that there are other lasting impacts from militarism that poor indigenous communities globally continue to suffer from so many brilliant things already said I just had a couple things.

[00:54:22] You know when thinking about histories about this question about militarism and colonialism and what you said about race and gender are being intertwined. I mean what kind of related to all of you said I think about this moment in Jackie Alexander's book or Leslie Feinberg's book where they talk about colonizers coming to Petru and encountering Inca people who they looked at and said oh these look like men dressed like women. So what we're going to do is kill them and actually what we're going to do is feed them to our dogs. And so this idea that we only have this choice of being male or female is a fairly recent idea that we could see as part of Western ideologies enforced on the rest of the world and even the idea of trans is really a western medical definition enforced on the rest of the world.

[00:55:19] That doesn't necessarily fit.

[00:55:23] I mean the gender binary also doesn't necessarily fit on different cultures in different ways. When I think about this question about like what are we told versus what's really going on that Nikita was bringing up I think about a lot of this question for me about inclusion in the military is always about actually defining who is going to be excluded or who is who is worthy of being included.

[00:55:48] So anytime that government or big institutions are saying oh we're going to include these people it's a way of saying we're going to include some of these people so we can say who are not going to include. Right. So South African beer is tequila and Bombay has talked about this idea of Nacro politics which helps me think about all this that what we're told is that the government is there to keep us safe keep things orderly serve and protect some shit like that right. And that is part of this European history.

[00:56:20] But what Mbambo describes from a global south point of view or from a South African point of view is that actually what governments are there to do today is to keep some people safe and protected and healthy and to guarantee that other people die.

[00:56:37] And so I think we see that again reproduced in this question of inclusion in the military.

[00:56:42] It's a way of saying oh yeah we'll include trans people trans people who are patriotic trans people who want to murder for us trans people who are willing to kill for money.

[00:56:52] Sure those are the trans people that we want other trans people. We will make sure that their deaths are not even investigated or reported. Make sure they don't have jobs or housing or

[00:57:09] Events. We don't have that on this panel. Thanks for asking that. One of the reasons that also led to this conversation.

[00:57:18] After the Democracy Now report trans fats were people I heard from the most and it was really interesting people talking about how the current framing that's happening in the media that Matilda was talking about that centers like positive experience of military service had made them feel like they couldn't be heard. And some of those people were invited to this panel but don't feel like they want to be publicly seen in that role like weren't ready and then I asked one person could I like take your written story and they said I still don't feel like I want to.

[00:58:00] Yeah that's great. I'm so glad. Wonderful.

[00:58:03] See if you would like my seat. I'm happy to relinquish it to you. I don't mean this like as some sort of like like I'm not offering it as like a fake offer but

[00:58:17] I'm totally down if one of your wants to have my seat on the panel for you to take it. I'm I'm literally offering a but I think what's important to model here is that you're right. I'm not trans am a person of color and I haven't been in the military because it's just it's not something that I have. I don't think I would be very good and military man I don't support the military. I don't support police I don't support jails or prisons or courts. It is my life's mission to dismantle those things. But when I when I say I want to offer you my seat because I think you're pointing out a serious equity issue. I genuinely would like one of y'all to take it if you're interested in having your voice on the panel.

[00:59:06] Which would you like my seat. Just wondering if I can ask folks to use mikes because we really want everyone to hear what everyone's saying and it is time for the Q and A so we can just have a mike Hendler just to make sure that people who are hard of hearing don't miss what's being said.

[00:59:18] It's also not my right. It's not like a Zero-Sum thing when you're just joining us. I could just have a conversation not like one has to leave when asked to come.

[00:59:26] Well I just wanted to be clear that like I agree and my way of trying to show I agree and like want to the same way I feel when I go listen to a group of white people talk about black folks.

[00:59:40] I wanted to step down but also like I would love to be joined.

[00:59:46] Well now it's time for the Q and A for anyone in the audience who wants to participate and the questions do you have any comments any feedback anything you want to talk about about trans inclusion in the military and its problems does you want to start.

[01:00:03] Yeah I can go ahead and start again. I am a transgender veteran and I'm also white passing Native American. My family's from Carvell which also did get hit with poisonous water because of uranium mining. But I don't understand how excluding trans people from the military is actually going to solve the military issues because of the military. I've actually been able to transition through the VA. Now when I started they didn't cover that stuff I fought for it but you know if I didn't serve in the military I would not have been able to transition at all. It also got me out of an abusive household in a very poor area where we had no money no resources I had no chance of going to college so either I was going to end up working on a ranch or I was going to end up selling drugs. So being able to go into the military did kind of saved my life. Now I'm not saying that we definitely need the military as big as that we do and it is causing a lot of issues. How is keeping people like me out of it. The solution.

[01:01:08] I take this one. One thing I'll say about that because I've had this antimilitary position as a trans person publicly and people often ask me does this mean that you like. What does this mean about trans people currently in the military and trans vets. And my take on it is what I'm criticizing is an advocacy strategy that is pro military while and talks about trans people in the military in a way that ignores what the military is really like both for people in it and people who's been in it. So in my view we could have a robust trans movement and many of us already do this where we fight for the rights of trans vets to access things that they're being denied. Where we fight for people who are facing violence and harm in the military or because they were previously in the military and it doesn't have to be one that produces a fiction. So this is a debate I've had for years with people who run the trans the LGBT pro military service advocacy I'm like can't you just do that advocacy. Because we care about all those people who are currently and formerly in the military but not do it in a way that promotes the military right.

[01:02:10] Like there's there's been a huge history as we've heard of people in the military and formerly in the military opposing US military imperialism and fighting for the rights of vets and fighting for them against the privatization of the VA and all the other things we care about. Like I was a poverty lawyer before this and so so many of my clients and people in my communities are people who are vets who are suffering from extreme poverty mental health issues because of their service. So I think that what we're talking about here isn't saying that people who are who have been coerced into joining the military because of poverty are doing anything wrong for doing that. It's not about like targeting people who are in the military. Vets it's about asking why the most funded LGBT organizations have framed this in a way that lifts up stories like the ones that told that was showing like the military is a vacation and a wonderful place to be trans and a great job. When I think that we know from trans vets in our communities that that's not the case.

[01:03:09] I am one of the voices that got interviewed significantly after the trans military band came out. I did serve in the White House for two years so they really liked interviewing me. I had two news articles and a radio thing and radio interview done on me. Last year alone and part of the reason that we need to be able to have trans people in the military other than them being able to serve if they want to is because the more you limit what trans people can do in the military the more they limit the services we get in the V.A. You open up the military in order to get trans people in there and if they get in there and start getting the proper medical care they need. We might actually start getting more care at the V.A. So it will solve other issues.

[01:04:00] So I think for me that like thinking about my own community thinking about young black and brown youth who choose to go into the military because there is no other option. I think about my brother in law who was living in San Diego and he was told he was undisciplined he would never get into college. He wouldn't be able to get a job so he joined the Navy and what. I hope we would do as opposed to criticize people who make decisions for their well-being and an economic system that is intentionally oppressive to those of us who are not white cis gendered men wealthy and Christian it builds everything around that group of people and tells the rest of us if you want to belong if you want to have access you have to do X Y Z one of which is military service. What I would rather us do is think about how do we build an alternative system that doesn't determine who is worthy of education and worthy of health care and worthy of economics so that our only decision doesn't become join the military become a basketball player.

[01:05:11] I hope you get a wrap contract. You know that's what it is in my community so. I think at the root of this is challenging the whole system that has structured itself to determine who was worthy as a human being and who is worthy as capital and that is rooted in this whole system of colonization and occupation and it does. I think it does make me uncomfortable to have conversations with my family members who are in the military about you are a part of an occupying force globally that is literally doing to black and brown folks around the rest of the world. That was done to us and it may have happened 317 hundreds. But we're repeating the same behavior again. And so for those of us who want who consider ourselves antimilitary and consider ourselves abolitionists it is actually more important that we figure out what we're striving to build than it is for us to always be talking about what we're trying to tear down. And so what I hear and I like this dialogue about access is what are

we providing. It's just like when I work with young people who are caught in gang culture and I'm supposed to be like yo leave that gang that you in those become your family your economic service your home. You know all the things that you need. But then on my butt I don't actually know what she's supposed to go to. I have to be providing a sustainable alternative for that young person for them to leave this system that they have been able to find there their health. And so I mean that's that's what I'm hearing. But that's the route that I come at it from because I also think in my community there are certain coercion that if you want to be cared for and you want to be cared about then you got three options and you better hope one of them comes through for you.

[01:06:58] I think it's also important to point out that no one is saying that trans people who are in the military and accessing basic services in order to live shouldn't have those services. I think what we're saying is that the military as a central institution of global oppression you know busy obliterating the world in service of U.S. empire and corporate profit should not be the way that people access those services.

[01:07:27] Right and I think if we look at it from a movement standpoint we can take a look at these LGBT organizations and we can say what if all the money that's being put into the fight for gays in the military the fight for trans people in the military.

[01:07:47] What if that money was actually put into creating the services that people need without the military right.

[01:07:58] And I I think instead of calling for the necessity to fight in U.S. wars all of us you know queer trans everyone else needs to be talking about the necessity to fight against U.S. Imperialism and that means essentially opposing the military. And I think if we take a look at the rhetoric around trans inclusion in the military right. People say or these institutions say to us oh well there are more trans people in the military than any other employee or right. Never mind that that's a fake statistic pulled out of one demographic study which was a general demographic study about trans people in general where it's 70 questions. One of the questions was you know have you ever been in the military. It wasn't. Why when or how. And there were no other questions there and no other. No one said how many trans people work at Goodwill. No one said how many trans people are social workers. No one said there were there was nothing to compare it to because the only goal was to support us imperialism and I think if we just took one other institution people are saying there are so many trans people in the military because there are so many people in the military period right. So there are one point thirty five million people on active duty in the military at one time in particular. So if we take a look at prisons for example there are two point three million people approximately in prison at any one time. And as we all know from many many many so-called studies trans people are overrepresented in the prison system especially trans women and specialty trans women of color. And so what if we had a movement that instead of calling for the right for trans people to serve in unjust wars was about getting trans people out of prison.

[01:09:58] And I think we need to be talking about getting trans people queer people people of color disabled people everyone in this country access to the services that yes sometimes the military can

get you out of a dead end town can get you access to healthcare get can get your trans affirming services a healthcare transition you know a wide range of services. Sometimes the military does become a way of supporting yourself. But how do we create options so that isn't the case because that is tragic. That is not progress. That is horrifying to say that is progress that you know this institution that it's about obliterating villages around the world by pressing buttons in Nevada that that somehow we need to be supporting that that isn't progress. It's a sad tragic symptom of our place in U.S. empire and everyone on the panel has been talking very clearly about the active role and colonization that the U.S. has been engaging in and continues to engage in now.

[01:11:02] And so I think we need to be talking about how do we take ourselves out of those systems of oppression and make it so that they are no longer necessary for any war I just want to add.

[01:11:17] I want to add also that I am not in favor of excluding trans people from the military. I'm not in favor. That's not what I was trying to argue for. I'm not in favor of excluding trans people from any job that they want to do.

[01:11:32] What I am in favor of is ending war and ending prisons and ending police and ending the military. And you should be able and you should be able to have whatever transition services you need and a decent job without having to sign up to kill people for it. It's possible. I mean I think the whole point of Trump saying he wants to ban trans people from the military is to set a gigantic legal example. Say yes it's perfectly reasonable to ban trans people from X profession and say that it's too expensive.

[01:12:05] Whereas like whatever drive three hours north you can have whatever surgery you want for free. Plenty of other countries have figured out how to provide services for trans people without asking them to murder people for it. OK we have a question also it's a long term plan. I'm talking about decolonization. I mean we've had Collin's issue for 500 years. I'm not talking about this happening tomorrow I'm talking about restructuring society. So we've got OK so we've got 15 minutes and I'm going to try to get through questions.

[01:12:34] Five minutes excuse me. So we've got like half a question and I'll take one question here and then we'll go back here.

[01:12:43] Hi. I'm really glad. Thank you. You've deepened by analysis and I appreciate that.

[01:12:50] I want to say that I'm old so way back in the day. I almost joined the military. I was somebody who I'm trans racially adopted and wound up in the foster care system as many trans racial adoptees do because were thrown out of our families of origin particularly if you're genderqueer and I wound up on the streets of New York and in the shelters they would scream at us every night to go into the military I'm talking screaming for two hours every night to go into the military. And them more in group homes more propaganda at us in the group homes. And I'm saying that trans racially adopted queers deserve better than that. Our kids deserve better than that. And so that's one thing I want to say. And the second thing is when this started an organization asked for twenty five thousand

dollars from the community to support some lawsuit about this. Twenty five thousand dollars where I come from that's a lot of money. So I asked them in the last ten years have you ever put twenty five thousand dollars to getting trans kids off the streets or twenty five thousand dollars to any services for trans folks in prison. And the answer was No.

[01:14:25] And so I am not willing. I don't care. I am not willing to spend that kind of money after that stupid gay marriage thing happened. Millions of dollars happened and our kids are still on the street and transgendered people are still overpopulating dangerous jails. I am not willing to have another one of these never ending endless amounts of money. Things that don't speak to what I want. I am not willing to do it.

[01:14:54] And the last thing I'll say is had I joined the Coast Guard which is what I wanted to do to be search and rescue in the Coast Guard.

[01:15:03] I would have wound up turning back Haitian refugees who were fleeing here for help and healthcare and to eat and to be alive.

[01:15:16] And as a Jew I am telling you that if I had to do that I would have killed myself. So there is a price and it is an untenable horrible price.

[01:15:34] Thank you so much for that. Thank you. All the panelists. I am here as a veteran. I'm also here as a sales person and as a white person. So I recognize the space that I'm taking up and I respect everyone in the room for allowing me that I absolutely agree with every single thing. All of you have brought to the table the reason that I wanted to speak today so badly is because of the lack of representation of veterans on the panel. I as a veteran gave me opportunities to work in the fishing industry which I worked for for ten years as a laborer and I came to a point where I had an opportunity to work as a civilian for the Coast Guard. So I have worked for the last 10 years as a civilian. Back with the military where I never imagined I would be I believe the military needs to end. I believe that it is deeply deeply flawed for everything that imagines going forward and everything that you've presented however is an example of civil service. I learned things in my four years in the Marine Corps that taught me how to be a better human a community member an activist being able to be present for the immigrants of color who speak English as a second language that I serve in the fishing vessel safety community and I do believe that we need to restructure our military into civil service.

[01:17:08] We might not see it in our lifetimes any of us in this room but it is an example. And as this individual mentioned our veterans care system is the only example of socialized medicine that is attempting to even happen in this country. So we need to look at that and see how we can make corrections with the veterans to have a successful socialized medicine. So to just come here and say the military is a horrible machine that we need to have it. And I think speaking to the choir we're talking into an echo chamber. But to listen to veterans who don't believe in that system anymore but have had a life benefit from it to be better community members. How can we take those systems that we benefitted from and create civil service that works for us and move forward. And I believe that the

deconstruction of our military is important and trans civil rights are separate issues. So to lump them together it feels a little unfair because it's excluding trans veterans by not having them on the panel.

[01:18:30] So I hope that I've made that a little bit of sense.

[01:18:35] I hope I contributed to the conversation and the fact that I'm taking up so much space here as a white person. But I do thank you all of you for really providing a lot of history on the destruction that the military does on our world and I want to see that end but I also want to see trans folks have civil rights to gain the same experience that I did in leadership and discipline. I liked it. I was into it. Whoever mentioned I believe discipline is something that is raw and poor and person of color communities to bring those military members in and it uses them up and turns them out. But what if we can take those people that don't have access to education and want to get out of a small town that's hurting them and put them into civil service where they're helping the world helping that country helping their fellow community members.

[01:19:32] That's what I would love to see as talking about the future. Thank you.

[01:19:39] Just real quickly I want to thank you all for your service for those who are familiar with the Native community know that we actually completely uphold our veterans native and non-native. I'm sure if you've been to powwows you know there are not grand entries are native veterans and non natives are not granted entry and we recognize them and some of our veterans have come back and bend some of our biggest leaders in Indian Country. When I mentioned the wounded knee occupation both Dennis Banks and Brussell means who were leaders of American Indian Movement both veterans. That said when I mentioned standing rock I was sitting on the drum saying all those veterans that came out to support us are native and non natives and it was a very beautiful essay. And what I saw from a lot of these especially the non-native veterans coming out we were very honest with them because they're seen they were seeing what we were. We've been discussing the country the United States was engaged in the continued colonization of our lands. And here they were fighting with us. But it was a very beautiful thing. So thank you feel free to come to any powwow and you'll be you'll be honored that way. And with that said we it's OK to hold critiques and criticisms of these various institutions.

[01:21:08] Me personally I have a huge win against our financial institutions and call out our tribes and tribal governments who still take money from the likes of Wells Fargo and stuff. But that doesn't mean that any of us are pushout or discard any anybody from our community.

[01:21:24] So thank you we have time for one more question.

[01:21:34] Just say one quick thing.

[01:21:36] I'm sorry I would be remiss that I had conversations with folks earlier today and promised I would bring this up which is April 4th this Wednesday is the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of

Dr. King in Memphis a year to the day after he gave his Beyond Vietnam speech thank you so much for this panel.

[01:21:54] I learned a lot. I want to address the question of civil service and the military as a conduit for the cultivation of civil service because I think that the value that you are according to civil service and then valorizing it that value it really accrues and serves global capital right. The valuation of civil service and participation. It's really serving global capital because the military serves global capital and it serves global capital because it is providing the rationale for the American arms industry which is directly tied to our national economy. And as long as we have the arms industry and we don't eradicate the arms industry there will always be a rationale for the existence of the military. And so we think that we will cultivate notions of citizenship by being in the military but we're really supporting the accruing of global capital thanks for that.

[01:23:08] We are about to have the sound system cut off.

[01:23:10] So I just want to say a few final closing words I'm so grateful to this panel for being here and for having this conversation. I think the framing that trans peoples rights are a separate issue from the question of U.S. military imperialism is exactly what we were trying to disrupt during this session and in case other people are interested in really thinking through what queer and trans opposition to US militarism looks like. In Seattle Mathilde's and I just organized a quick follow up meeting. So if you're interested on April 11th which is a Wednesday night at 7pm we're going to meet in Broome see one of the Seattle University School of Law which is that 12 and Columbia room C 1 7 p.m. April 11th. So if other people are interested in thinking about creative ways to build queer and trans antimilitary imperialism activism here in Seattle please join us. Thank you all so much. Thank you for hosting us

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