

Commons Conversations Podcast: Insights into Indigenous Solidarity, Creativity and Social Justice with Laniyuk & Te Raukura O'Connell Rapira

[Listen to podcast](#)

Iain McIntyre

Welcome to Commons Conversations, a series of interviews with campaigners sharing their experiences and insights into activism, learning in movements, radical history, and more.

This episode features a conversation between Te Raukura O'Connell Rapira from The Pod: Centre for Healing Justice, and Laniyuk, a writer, visual artist and performer of poetry, speculative fiction and short memoir. They discuss a range of topics including the power of indigenous solidarity, love of land, resistance to Rainbow capitalism, and the role of creativity and emotion in achieving story sovereignty and social justice.

This episode is from our second series, and was originally broadcast by community radio 3CR. The podcast is produced by The Commons Social Change Library, a website containing over 1000 resources for campaigners, which can be accessed for free at commonslibrary.org. The library contains many other podcasts, including other episodes in the Commons Conversations series.

Te Raukura

Kia ora everyone, my name is Te Raukura. And I've been invited to be a host of Commons Conversations by Holly Hammond and I'm here with Laniyuk, who is a Larrakia, Kungarakan, Gurindji, and French political creative, whose art practice is grounded in cultural, language, and land reclamation. Laniyuk writes and performs poetry, speculative fiction, short memoir, and is a visual artist. She also gives lectures, moderates panels, and runs workshops. Welcome to the show, Laniyuk.

Laniyuk

Thank you so much for having me Te Raukura.

Te Raukura

I was asked by Holly Hammond, who runs the Commons Library, to do an interview with a campaigner of my choosing, and you were one of the first people who came to mind. So thank you for agreeing to have this conversation. I know that you were a bit hesitant at first because you don't really consider yourself a campaigner. And I wondered if you could talk a little bit as to why.

Laniyuk

Yeah, I remember when you first approached me about speaking on this podcast, I was so confused. I was like "what has that got to do with me?" and I was like, "I don't know if I'm the right person." Like there are plenty of other people that sit on my intersection that are doing, I don't know, it kind of feels like bigger work, more organised and visible demonstrations of movement building and organising. And I'm always a little bit conscious of taking up space that isn't mine to be in, and of course, there are so many people in our communities that are doing incredible work that deserve to be platformed. So I was a little bit like, "I don't know if I'm the fit."

We agreed that part of this podcast would be you explaining to me why I'm the fit when on paper, and I suppose to myself, I really just see myself as an artist. I'm a writer, I get up on stage every now and again and perform some poetry but I don't really know if that is the same as being an organiser or movement builder.

So you know, to flip the script a little bit and to be the interviewer, Te Raukura, welcome. Can you please explain to me why I'm here.

Te Raukura

I think I see movement building, campaigning and community organising being organised around two core pou. Pou is a Māori word that refers to the post that is in the middle of our marae, or our meeting houses. It's kind of the central point in which we organise ourselves. A pou metaphorically often refers to something that grounds us and guides us in what it is that we do. And so I think with campaigning and movement building and organising, I see it as kind of two core pou, which are political change strategies and cultural change strategies.

And if I'm honest, I just really don't think that campaigners who are often lawyers and academics are the ones that are going to lead our cultural change strategies. It's artists

that know how to do that. It's artists that know how to imagine and articulate new futures. It's artists that can grip the hearts of people and shift minds and generate emotions which can generate action.

And so I guess I was interested in inviting you to this kōrero, because I wanted to talk about the intersection point between arts and activism and the necessity of building out strategies that weave together narrative change, as well as political change.

Laniyuk

A few things sort of come to mind when you're speaking, I was thinking about the role that art plays in helping us access our emotions, process our understanding of situations and you know, when we're talking about politics, or we're talking about social justice issues, climate justice issues, one of the biggest blocks and I think I'm feeling that at the moment, you know, in the current climate that we're in with the invasion and escalating violence and colonisation of Gaza and the West Bank in Palestine, one of the major blocks before action often is a process of emotion. I feel like I'm seeing a lot of people maybe hesitant to talk, not just because they don't understand the situation on paper, but because emotionally they're having trouble processing, where they land in this situation, struggling to process the violence and the horror that they're witnessing on their screens.

And I think that art is such an important part of being able to tap into ourselves, tap into our bodies, tap into our emotions. And I see that with performance poetry, the ways that people can be transformed through witnessing art, creating art. And so the following thought, for me that came from that was the way that whiteness in the Western world creates this sort of elite culture around art, and creates this idea of art as a luxury and an excess. And that it's really something that you do if you have time, or if you have the luxury of time and money to access the resources to create art, and that it's not for everyone.

Whereas as indigenous people, we understand art as being an integral part of the human experience, that creating something, expressing ourselves and connecting through art is part of the very fabric of life, of existence. And so I'm also curious to talk about the ways that we are discouraged from understanding ourselves through art, and also the ways that accessing art in our daily life is a form of resistance, and contribution.

Te Raukura

One of the things I've heard you talk about in the past in terms of poetry, in particular, is that it is a very accessible means of storytelling and, you know, getting messages out there, you know, all you need is a pen and paper or, you know, I know that you take a lot of notes into your phone, while you're in the middle of doing things in your everyday life. And I think about the CIA during the kind of rise of the Black Panther movement in the so-called United States, in Turtle Island, they very deliberately targeted poets because they knew that poets have this incredible ability to capture and storytell the power of our movements and create and articulate and imagine futures that galvanise people to take radical action. And so I wondered if you could speak a little bit to the power of political poetry in particular.

Laniyuk

I will often say to people that there is something really special about the accessibility of poetry, and I'll often say that if I want to make a movie, there's a huge amount of resources that have to go into the production of a film, even at its most basic level, there's a lot of time that's required, usually a lot of money that's required, you need to have a network of people supporting you in the filming, maybe the acting, the production, the bill just gets bigger and bigger and longer and longer.

And I think that there's something so beautiful and so powerful about poetry as an art form, in that you don't even necessarily need a pen and paper, even if you've just got a good memory, you can just like create a little, a little poem in your mind, and have that there for you. And it's such an incredible tool of emotional processing and storytelling, I think because of its accessibility, and because of its flexibility, because poetry, although our schools wrongly will tell us that there is a form and a method, and a rigidity, to poetry, anything can be poetry, it can be a couple of lines, it can be a books worth of storytelling, it can rhyme, it can not rhyme. There's so much flexibility, which allows a playfulness and a freedom in our expression in our storytelling that often is withheld from us in so many other art forms.

And I enjoy that as a poet in that really, what I create is mine to define. And that comes through, I think, with political poetry, as well in that it allows a spaciousness to either capture the beauty of our worlds, the complexity of our worlds, and we get to share that

through simple storytelling, which means that a lot of people that are otherwise locked out of the arts world are able to access poetry: Aboriginal people, people of colour, working class people, you can write a poem on the tram. You can write a poem waiting at the light. You can write a poem on shift.

And so that means that we get to hear so many beautiful stories that otherwise aren't platformed in popular media, art and storytelling, which I suppose yes, it's how we come to places like the CIA targeting poets, which just seems again, sort of, I suppose coming back to the beginning of this conversation seems really bizarre to me, because I'm like, "we're just poets, we're just writing cute poetry and doing cute things and wanting to tell our story and how threatening is that?" How threatening is that, the ability to tell our story? It terrifies government enough for the CIA to target poets.

Te Raukura

I've been thinking about in this political moment, where we are seeing mainstream media outlets throughout the so-called Western world, throughout the colonised world, water down and obfuscate what is happening in Palestine. I've been thinking a lot about how our movements are all too reliant on mainstream media as a tool for us to get our messages out into the world.

I've been a part of a lot of different campaigns both in Te Whenua Moemoeā, which is the Māori word for this continent, as well as Aotearoa, where I come from, and there's a huge amount of time and energy that goes into how we can get mainstream media to tell our stories, and I would love to see an equivalent or a shift away from this kind of upholding of systems that don't really serve us or the kaupapa, the causes, that we believe in towards prioritising of and telling of our own stories and a kind of embracing and embodying of story sovereignty, because I think you're exactly right: settler colonisers, settler, or invader state governments know how powerful we are when we have our own platforms and can tell our own stories. And that is why poets and journalists who tell stories of truth are often the targets of state violence.

Laniyuk

And I think that when we internalise the idea that art is not for us, we then come to understand that storytelling isn't for us. And then we give control to someone else to tell

our story, and to understand our story for us. Which I think is the role of, you know, media, I suppose, colonial history, and yeah, popular sort of entertainment.

When we believe that storytelling isn't something that we're capable of doing, then we relinquish our story to someone else, which I think is why it's so significant and so important for invader cultures and colonial cultures, to make us believe that storytelling is not something that is inherent in your being, as a poet. You know, I've had to do a lot within myself to understand my pathway as something legitimate. I remember in high school, this idea that you had to get a 'real job' and that, you know, being an artist wasn't a 'real job,' and you'd better learn maths, and you'd better learn science, because you're gonna have to make money. And, I'm not saying that being a poet is a flashy job where I make a lot of money, but it is legitimate work. And it does contribute something to society, art creation does contribute something to society.

And so I think it's an interesting strategy on the part of the colony to undermine art and storytelling, and for capitalism to take and to deprioritize art creation from I suppose payment and to create this idea of the elite art as being something inaccessible.

Te Raukura

So I'm interested in talking to you about some of the political themes that I see in your poetry, and some that I pulled together when I was doing a little bit of prep for this is the mana and power of Indigenous women, the importance of global Indigenous solidarity, Rainbow capitalism and the perils of our movements being co-opted, the abolition of police and prisons, Indigenous tokenism in the climate movement, and Indigenous love of land, I think is a real core theme that I see in your work.

And so my question is, which one of those topics would you like to explore first?

Laniyuk

It's so interesting hearing you read these out loud, because I've never really thought or looked at the list of topics that come through. It's always just been a slow process of responding to the world and responding to what I'm seeing. And so when you create this sort of like, dot point things, I'm like, Oh, wow, yeah, I hadn't quite realised the scope of what I've been covering through poetry, while really just trying to tell my own story and

my own perspective. I can't help but smile at the topic of Rainbow capitalism. It's a sad sort of sarcastic smile. So maybe that's a good place to start.

Te Raukura

Yeah I think that's a great place to start, because it's also on theme, or on brand, in terms of what we're talking about today, which is a lot about narrative strategies. And I do a lot of trainings with campaigners and community organisers and I talk about this concept, which is a right-wing concept called the Overton Window, which is basically this idea that through narrative strategies and legal strategies, you shift ideas from being unthinkable and radical to sensible and popular. And I often use marriage equality as an example of a shift in the Overton Window, because often people will think marriage equality, and the campaign for that to be passed happened, you know, just a couple of years earlier, but in the Aotearoa context, and I think it's the same in Te Whenua Moemoeā, I would say it started long before that, and the kind of moments that I pinpoint is that in the 1980s lesbian women and gay men largely organised against the criminalization of homosexuality or homosexual law reform to be realised, which essentially means removing criminal penalties for practising homosexual acts, and that humanised us to the colony and created the conditions in which a few years later or few decades later, civil unions could be passed, in which we could enter into legally binding arrangements that made it easier for us to be recognised by the state in terms of our relationships and our love, which then created the conditions in which marriage equality was possible.

And so every single one of those shifts humanise queer people a little bit more to the colony, and decolonize our relationship with homosexuality and queerness. But so much so that we're now in a situation where we have banks and the military and police rocking rainbow flags.

And so you know, you were commissioned to write a poem for Pride March, and you created something that spoke to what it was that you were seeing, and then the people who had commissioned you decided not to platform the piece that you had created. And so you released it anyway, yourself. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that poem, that process and the message.

Laniyuk

I was approached by Pride March to write a poem about Pride March to be aired during the Pride March. And I sort of remember seeing the email and kind of knowing at the time that they weren't going to like what I had to say. I think that there's a lot of interrogation that the queer community has to do in what we are moving towards and what it is fighting for. I think that we really have to be more critical about the role that our identities are playing in the continuation of violence and colonisation.

The poem that I wrote, 'March with Pride,' really just expressed what I feel like I've been witnessing in the queer community, which is a prioritisation for assimilation over liberation, and that we are making the mistake of measuring the safety that we experience the closer that we get to the heart of white supremacy and colonisation, for freedom.

And so we kind of get waterfed these rewards from the broader society if we comply with what is appropriate behaviour. If we accept the presence of armed forces, like the police and military in our community, which we know uphold systems of violence, and continue to colonise Aboriginal land, continue to colonise other Indigenous lands across the worlds. If we accept and allow ourselves to be appropriated into that identity, then we can continue to experience some form of acceptance, which is conditional, and the queer community continues to experience violence from these armed forces. And if we excuse that behaviour, then we can continue to pretend and be under the guise of safety.

So I was trying to find ways to tap into that in this poem and to say that I will not march at Pride March with cops. I refuse.

I refuse. And I think that that is an accessible place. At this point in time. I think that was an accessible place to come into this conversation of the ways that queer identity is being appropriated into white supremacy and colonisation, particularly with the global awakening of the Black Lives Matter movement. It was a time that perhaps that message would be received a little bit more than if I'd written that poem, say five years ago, or 10 years ago, it might not have spoken to people in the same way. But with the current political, global awakening that we're experiencing with the Me Too movement, with the Black Lives Matter movement, and I think now with the narrative shift that we're seeing across Palestine of not just interpersonal or cultural conflict, but actually colonisation

and oppression; we have the coloniser and the colonised Indigenous, I think that we're able to use some of these more accessible topics to really shine a light on broader issues.

So I think that was my approach with the March with Pride poem, was that I wanted to talk about the presence of cops, which allowed me to also talk about the ways that our identities as queer people are being used to hide the violence of the police, and is being appropriated into other areas of violence and assimilation.

Te Raukura

I think that we, in this political moment, are seeing just how powerful that kind of pinkwashing can be, right? Like if you go onto any comments section of anything about what's happening in Palestine and people are expressing solidarity with the people in Palestine, there's someone who leaves some kind of comment that says something along the lines of: 'queer people are poorly treated in Palestine, and you wouldn't last a day there,' or something like that.

And so they, the kind of amorphous, settler, colonial supremacist governments and the corporations that uphold them are very aware of what it is that they're doing, and the power of weaponizing our identities for their own ends, which is why we as people that sit on the intersections of those identities have to be vigilant and have to be protective of the mana of our identities, and conscious of what it is that we are giving power to, and what it is that we are taking power away from.

Laniyuk

I think that queerness is such a beautiful intersection of solidarity. Queer people exist in every corner of this world. And the intersection of queerness is one of love. One of self love, one where we allow ourselves to experience the world outside of a colonial binary, and one where we define and redefine ourselves outside of these systems. And one where we experience love and redefine love outside of colonial systems with other people. And so I think it's a really beautiful intersection that reaches all areas of this world, and queer solidarity is so powerful, because we understand our solidarity to not be transactional.

And I think that really confuses the coloniser because colonialism and capitalism is built on transaction. And so when our solidarity is so powerful that someone says: "why would you ever support Palestine, if you were there, you wouldn't last the second," we say: "that's not what solidarity is, we're not in this for transaction, we show up for anyone and for everyone's liberation, for the betterment of this world." And I think that queer liberation, and queer solidarity is such a threat to the colony, of course, it's a priority to assimilate us into their systems.

Because if we actually leaned into the power of our identities, into the power of our queer experience, that exists and challenges colonial binary so magically, and so effortlessly, if they can't control that, then they're in trouble. And so of course, they have to assimilate us and they have to appropriate our cultures.

And it's really important that we remain critical of that assimilation process and continue to resist it every step of the way. And unfortunately, one of our most popular and visible expressions of resistance, Pride March, has been coopted by capitalism, and by cops. And there are so many of us that can't engage with our expression of cultural liberation because of the presence of cops, and many other criticisms.

Te Raukura

One campaign that I'm really proud of having been involved in when I was living in Aotearoa; after a lot of community conversations, the Auckland Pride board asked that police don't march in uniform. So they were still invited to be part of the march. But being there in the presence of the uniforms just make people feel unsafe because of the role that they play in upholding colonial violence. The cops got mad and sad about that and said, "fine, we want nothing to do with you." And then a bunch of corporations pulled their funding for for Pride to go ahead. And I remember I was travelling to Ireland at the time for a conference. And I was just so sad because I grew up in Tāmaki-makau-rau, which is the Maori name for Auckland. And I remember that Pride was one of those sites of visibility that was really important to me as a young person, even though it didn't really necessarily speak to me because glitter and rainbows and expensive floats isn't necessarily my vibe, but seeing happy gay people made me happy. And it made me feel safer to be out.

And so I remember I was flying to this conference, and I got in touch with a bunch of queer people. And we decided to launch a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds to replace the funding that would have gone into it from corporations and hundreds of people chipped in and we managed to raise not a huge amount of money. I think, compared to what corporations were giving, I think it was about \$30k.

We returned Pride to its roots, to community, and that year 1000s of queer people marched and for many of our disabled whānau, or relations or family members, it was the first time that the march was accessible for them. And I think a lot about you know, the the necessity of intersectionality in our politic and, and I think one of the things that queer movements have to teach the rest of our movements is this ability to build relationships of of care and kinship outside of family structures, often because we have been kicked out of our family structures. And so we know what it is to build chosen family and to build networks of mutual aid and care.

And then I think about, you know, the Disability Justice Movement and what they have to teach us, which is how to be vulnerable with one another and ask each other for support, how to create movements and strategies that move at the pace of our bodies and our wellbeing, how we can organise for justice without killing ourselves, without making ourselves sick.

And one of the things I've always appreciated about your approach to your politic is that you have taught me a lot about what it means to weave disability justice into my organising but also into language, into the words that we use. And I wonder if you could speak a little bit to that.

Laniyuk

Such a big topic. The disabled people in my life have taught me a level of compassion and kindness and safety that I have never witnessed anywhere else. I think that at the heart of disability justice is a world of care. I feel really emotional, I feel like I want to cry. I'm so happy to hear that, you know my prioritising of Disability Justice has reached in and influenced your politic as well.

But my understanding of disability justice is so informed and rooted in the love and experience of disabled people in my life, that have taught me so much through their

love. And I think that to move towards a world of accessibility for all people, is to really create systems of care for everyone. I guess I want to say that I feel sad, that my education on Disability Justice has fallen on the shoulders of individuals that I'm in relationship with. It wasn't until I tried to go to a Pride after party in Adelaide. And a friend of mine, who uses a wheelchair, couldn't get into any of the after parties. They all had stairs. The one that was accessible was completely packed and was at capacity. And so we tried to go to another and we literally were unable to get in. And I think that was such a moment for me where I was like, "this is not what queerness is, this is not what community is about." No one should ever be unable to access community and have such a solid and resounding no to their ability to access community. And of course, you know, wheelchair access is just one of many access issues that we have to take in consideration when we're, you know, creating spaces and building and upholding community.

But it's through, you know, an interpersonal relationship, that my politics around access have been informed. I don't know, I'm just sort of like, what are the ways that we continue to shift culture, and the ways that we create community so that that labour just doesn't constantly fall on disabled people. I think we're having slow shifts in that direction. And particularly as our understanding of the category of disability, we're understanding that to also open up. And so more people are paying attention to these to the details of access in a way that maybe hasn't existed before.

But disability is another important intersection that, again, crosses every every area of this world, particularly to consider that the world is becoming increasingly militarised and populations are experiencing the violence of colonisation either through the prison industrial complex, or through genocide and war, the population of disabled people across the world increases. So disability justice concerns everyone and is such an integral part of the liberation of our lands and our people.

Te Raukura

And I like what you say about, you know, we can lift some of this labour from individual disabled folk from having to do this. And I know that, I mean, you probably wouldn't advertise this about yourself, but I know that you have a rider in place for performances, which is to say that the venue is not wheelchair accessible, you won't perform there. And there's those kinds of everyday acts that we can put in place to ensure that we are uplifting the mana and the dignity and the kind of lifeforce power, inherent lifeforce and

power of disabled people in our everyday acts and the way that we show up in the places that we give our power to as well.

I am going to move us just in the interest of time to talking about global Indigenous solidarity, which is another theme that I see come up in your poetry, but also because you lived in Aotearoa for a year, which is where I first met you. And you've written about Māori and Aboriginal resistance and solidarity between our various nations and use speculative fiction as a tool to imagine futures in which we've liberated ourselves.

And so I guess my question is what you notice about Māori resistance and movement building from your time and Aotearoa and how that informs your politics, and then I guess anything else you want to speak to from your visits to other areas around the world where you've spent time with Indigenous peoples.

Laniyuk

This is gonna sound really dramatic. But I feel like my time in Aotearoa gifted me hope. Which I don't think was something that I was carrying consistently, before spending a year in Wellington. I think like many Indigenous people, many colonised Indigenous people, I'm carrying a lot of grief, a lot of grief for the things that we as Aboriginal people have had to put down to hold other tools and tactics of survival, and for the things that have been taken out of our hands. And I carry a lot of grief for my lack of language, my lack of access to our languages, and spending a year in Aotearoa I was able to witness such strong language reclamation. And I found out that te reo Māori didn't become an official language until I think the 1970s.

And I remember finding that out and just sitting down and you know, counting the decades on my hand and being like in someone's lifetime, in someone's lifetime, te reo Māori has come to such strength and such vibrancy that you can hear whole radio programmes completely in te reo. You can watch game shows. I remember sitting in a hotel room, watching a game show on free to air TV, completely in te reo Māori. And I was just so shocked. And obviously our situation, and our experience of colonisation has its similarities and has its differences. And our road of language reawakening, strengthening and maintaining will look different to that of te reo. But I saw what had been built in someone's lifetime.

And I realised that my dream for language return is not as far away as what I thought it was. And that was such a special and valuable experience, to be able to see the work and strength and success of another Indigenous people. And I think that we have a lot to learn from one another. We are learning a lot from one another. We have always learned a lot from one another. We've strategized and shared solidarity in our resistance and in our seeking of justice, since the colonisers arrived, and I've had other experiences of my politics and my vision being informed by other Indigenous people.

I was recently in Timor and had the good fortune, the blessings, to sit with some Indigenous people a few hours outside of Kupang in Mollo. And that was also such a special experience to see their journey with food reclamation and the ways that they're bringing their Indigenous foods and their Indigenous practices back into their communities and back into their day to day and combating a lot of what the colonisation of their lands has done in terms of planting shame associated with their cultures and their foods. And so to be able to see and witness that and also be informed, and to learn from that.

I think there's so much that global Indigenous solidarity can bring to our movements. When we come to each other's lands and communities and work with love and respect and solidarity, our own politics and our own movements can be informed and strengthened.

Te Raukura

One of the things I love about the Māori language revitalization movement is that it was built by nannies and aunties in the 1980s in their setting up of what is called Kōhanga Reo, which is language nests. And there were essentially lots of Māori women, Indigenous women, always doing the most, seeing the plight of our languages and deciding to do something about it. And what they decided to do was to solve the problem themselves, rather than relying on government to solve the problem for us. And so they went about setting up language nests, in homes, in sheds, in garages, in community halls, in marae, in meeting houses, and just started teaching our babies and our children our languages.

And then through the Kōhanga Reo movement, it became a site of political organising, which also contributed to campaigns around land rights and water rights, and issues

around self determination and sovereignty. And so I often think, again, to the kind of opening discussion we're having around the pou of political change and cultural change, to my mind when we talk about Indigenous ways of campaigning and organising and building movements, language reclamation as part of that cultural reclamation as part of the returning of land, the returning of water, the returning of ceremony. And I know, that's something that's really important for you and the work that you're doing as well.

And so, one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you is because there is a campaign happening right now on your lands, which are under threat by the military. And I wondered if you could talk a little bit to what's happening on your lands and what you want people to know about the next couple of months.

Laniyuk

So at the moment in Darwin, about a 15 or 20 minute drive from the city of Darwin, there's an area of land called Lee Point, Binybara or Lee Point, and it's at threat of being demolished. It's this beautiful, beautiful, lush area of old growth bush, it's in a sort of urban-ish environment. It hits the water, it hits the ocean, it's got lush bird life and it's it's a beautiful place of biodiversity within an urban location. And Defence Housing Australia is currently trying to get the paperwork across the board to to demolish this area of old growth bush to build about 800 houses for the defence force, but it's also open to private sales. And it's being advertised to an international community as well.

Since these plans were made public, people in Darwin have been protesting and resisting this destruction, and this demolishing of bush, which is on my grandfather's Country, Larrakia Country, most of my family lives in Darwin, I grew up in Darwin. And I was watching this all sort of taking place over social media, while living in Melbourne, and being a little bit unsure about what I could do to support because at the time, what was the most important sort of course of action was to camp out on location to stop the bulldozers from coming through, and to push back the demolishing. And so since then, Defence Housing Australia has had to go back to sort of review their paperwork and have postponed development, destruction, till March 31st of 2024. Which buys us a little bit of time to continue campaigning and to protect that area of land, which is significant for so many reasons.

It holds a lot of significance for Larrakia culture, Larrakia kinship, and holds a lot of stories. It is an important place for us. It's also an important place of biodiversity for migratory birds, for endangered species of birds and lizards that live in the area. And I think something that I think about a lot as well is that it holds significance and importance for even the city of Darwin itself in keeping the surrounding area cool. With these cities, you know, they're really just so focused on expansion, and adding concrete onto concrete onto concrete and then wondering why it's so hot. And then they'll put into place like greening strategies and greening programs to combat the heat and to you know, enrich biodiversity. You know, I even saw, through my studying of the situation, this plan that the Darwin City Council had created to green the area almost simultaneously as these plans to destroy Lee Point and its biodiversity came into play. So there's a lot of contradiction happening, but a lot of organised resistance from community members, from Larrakia people. And we are in an important time of pause, which buys us a little bit of time to continue resisting and continuing to protect that land before March 31st of next year.

Te Raukura

I know that you recently completed the first nations impact lab with GARUWA and Doc Society, which because you're interested in working, I guess, at the intersection of film and truth, telling, and justice. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the campaign itself that you're going to be working on over the next couple of months, and how you're weaving together arts and activism to save your lands.

Laniyuk

You know, it's really interesting, because as you know, we said at the beginning of all of this, I don't consider myself a campaigner. And I almost don't consider this a campaign. Even though I think on paper, it presents itself as a campaign strategy. And it is a very well thought out, I suppose attempt at influencing narrative. And I was thinking about this last night, thinking about what the word campaign means, and why it doesn't land so softly in my body.

And I think part of that is because rather than seeing this, as a campaign, or a moment, with a beginning and an end, it really feels like my ancestral responsibility. And that has no beginning. And that has no end. And that is a continuation of relationship with land and protection of land.

So what I'm hoping to achieve over the next few months, is a shifting of culture and of narrative about that space. Which is, which is, you know, really just building on the work that people in Darwin have been doing to protect Lee Point, you know, the existing campaign, the existing strategy that has been underway for months now in protecting that land. And what I'm hoping to do is just contribute to that work, I completed GARUWA and Doc Society's Impact Lab, which spoke to the ways that we can influence policy and influence social change through storytelling, through documentary. And I hadn't thought about doing a documentary before attending the impact lab. I was sort of focused on the skills that I had available to me at the time, which was like, "okay, well, I can do some videos for social media, I can do some videos for Instagram, maybe I could write a poem," and then sort of seeing the ways that documentaries are an important strategy of storytelling, and weaving in fact, emotion, different arguments and perspectives. It can be really powerful tool for narrative shifting, to now doing a documentary.

I'm going home to Darwin to record some stories, and to record some elders and their relationship to that area of land, in hopes to inform the broader discussion around the protection of that land. Because I think that the value of Aboriginal culture is still a little bit lost on the wider public. Yeah. And the importance of protecting land, the importance of protecting our lands, for the continuation of culture, for the continuation of biodiversity, for the continuation of human existence, is just a little bit lost on the colony and capitalism. There's just like a little stepping stone that's missing. So I'm hoping through my art, through documentary and filmmaking, we can strengthen that stepping stone to help people understand how important it is to protect land and water for everyone.

You know how we can wrap this up?

Te Raukura

Your poem?

Laniyuk

No Te Raukura! My question to you, is, so given all of that we've talked about in terms of poetry and art, and, and resistance, I'm still yet to be convinced that I am a campaigner, and the right person for you to be interviewing.

Te Raukura

I think your hesitation around the word campaign is a good one, because you're a person that's so passionate about the power of language and words. And I would hazard a guess that campaigning has a lot of origins, or at least a lot of use in military terms, in capitalistic spaces.

Laniyuk

Parliamentary politics.

Te Raukura

Exactly. And none of those things really speak to the politics that you have. And so I can understand your aversion and your resistance to that word. And also, I know that the people that mostly listen to this podcast are campaigners, and I guess I'm interested in just to be explicit, expanding our understanding of what campaigning is, as a person, I'm a person that self identifies as a campaigner, I've poured the last 15 years of my life into campaigning, community organising, and movement building, to achieve real world political change.

And I have come to believe that it is essential for us in our movement building, that we weave cultural change strategies into our political change strategies, and that we do not have the tools to do that without artists. I've been reflecting a lot about Indigenous, I guess, resistance over multiple generations. And I've come to believe that it is our commitment to cultural perpetuity, the idea that our culture continues in perpetuity, that we continue to exist; our languages, our ceremonies, our practices, our beliefs, our knowledges, the commitment to ensuring that those things exist generation after generation after generation, is what has enabled us to survive horrific, cruel, despicable acts from invader state governments over multiple decades.

It's our organised resistance, but it's also our commitment to our culture, and the strength that that gives us that has enabled us to survive these moments and to rebuild from these moments. And so yeah, I think the invitation to you to be a part of this space

and to designate you a campaigner despite you not wanting to identify as a campaigner, is more for the campaigners among us than I think it is for you, and I think resistance to that term makes absolute sense. So with that, I asked you at the beginning, before we started recording, if you'd be willing to close this out with a poem of your choosing, for the listeners of this podcast and this radio show, and so I wonder which poem you've decided to share with us today.

Laniyuk

I think given the context of the time that we find ourselves in with the ongoing colonisation of Palestinian land, and the attempted genocide of its people, I thought I would offer a poem that I wrote in 2019, for the Aboriginal and Palestinian solidarity community paper, The Sunday Paper, which was a pleasure to write to (*Editor's note: the Sunday Paper was actually published in December 2021*).

When I started writing this poem, I was really trying to weave in as many arguments and facts and dates and really just wanting to try and inform the wider community of what was happening in Palestine historically, and at that time in 2019. And while trying to write this poem, and spending weeks listening to podcasts and writing down, you know, all of these dates and statistics, I realised that the poem that wanted to be written and that needed to be written was a poem of grief, and of what I was feeling for Palestine and for the people of Palestine and for Indigenous people everywhere.

And I suppose I offer this poem to the listeners also as an opportunity to use poetry as a place of emotional and political processing. What is the poem that your body is asking you to write?

And so this poem is called 'Only Words:'

What use is poetry

فلسطين ?

I'm scrolling through your suffering

As bombs land in the beds of your children

Divided by oceans

Brought together by a screen.

I grieve for you فلسطين

I have nothing to give
But words
No matter the weight
Or ache
Or yearning for your release

I speak with your daughters فلسطين
We list all the things we would be
If our existence wasn't predetermined by colonialism
If I wasn't busy trying to sew together all the missing and faded parts of me
I tell her I would bake cakes
She tells me she would deep dive oceans and seas
We would write love poems
For sundrenched summer days
Then publish them in deep red bound books
Our laughter would bubble to the surface
And I could find something funnier in this world
Than my own misfortune
To laugh at
We laugh loudly anyway
Pushing our joy from the deep trenches of our sadness and longing
Breaking through our fear

I would be soft enough to cry
She would be soft enough to break
I wonder what it must feel like to not have to be brave

I have only words فلسطين.
Some days
I barely even have hope

I dream for us
And wonder of your creation stories
What brought the first Olive Seed
To grow at our feet?

How were your skies raised?
What brings your rivers to meet?
Who is listening to your morning calls
And your night songs
As your children sleep?

I have only my words فلسطين
So I send the rains that rise from Delengwa
To fall to the olive branches of Bethlehem
To raise the flowers of Lifta
To Gaza, rushing down the street
To meet with your own Spirit
And join with our collective Dream

From our Rivers
To our seas
Until our lands are Free

(Editor's note: فلسطين is Palestine)

Te Raukura

Beautiful, thank you. Good luck for your campaign to protect your lands. And for the folks that are listening. They can keep an eye out for some videos and some materials to be coming out around this closer to Invasion Day. And there'll be ways for people to take action and solidarity with the mahi, the work, of your people.

Are there any last pānui, announcements, anything that you want to say before we sign off?

Laniyuk

I would like to say that one of the things I have been reflecting on a lot this week with the escalation of violence and genocide in Gaza was that when things really began to escalate, a lot of things were reprioritized. And I realised that perhaps a lot of the grievances that I was feeling amongst other activists and the tensions between different spaces, although maintaining our relationships can be difficult, I think it's been an

interesting, or an important reminder of where our grievances really belong, and that's with systems and not with people and it's an important time for us to re-strategize and build in tools of strengthening our communities to prepare us for the work ahead.

Te Raukura

Very Katniss Everdeen, Hunger Games of you: remember who the real enemy is. Which is important. And I think one thing you and I have talked about a lot as well is the importance of building our skills in navigating conflicts within our movement spaces so that we don't stifle our own momentum when our relationships are torn apart because of the division that the colony and the capitalists thrive on, and push onto us as well. And so that also requires active resistance.

Iain McIntyre

You've been listening to Commons Conversations, produced by The Commons Social Change Library, a website containing over 1000 resources for campaigners, all of which can be accessed for free at commonslibrary.org