Tuck: Popwink is a trans-owned sticker club and art shop. Sticker club members get to vote on the theme every single month. Recent sticker club themes have include: Unhinged Barbie Summer, Cryptids, and Aggressive Affection. Sticker club plans start at just five dollars per month, and ship for free worldwide. Use the code GENDER20 for 20% off your first order, or your first six months of sticker club, at popwink.co.

[Gender Reveal intro music starts]

Tuck: Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

[Gender Reveal intro music ends]

Tuck: Hey everyone. Hope you’ve all been hanging in there.This week on the show I am very excited to share my conversation with Shuli Branson. Shuli is the author of Practical Anarchism*,* and a co-editor of Survivng the Future: Abolitionist Queer Strategies. In this episode, Shuli and I talk about transness as a form of anarchism, and the way that gender abolition and family abolition overlap.

Shuli: Family’s also like the laboratory of gender. It’s like where gender is forced on us.

Tuck: We also talk about the concept of breakup theory, and why not *everything* needs to last forever.

Shuli: When I’m thinking about breaking up, I’m not saying you *must* break up, I’m saying there’s always the possibility to end things.

Tuck: Just a note, Shuli lives near a train. Occasionally in the background you will hear a train. Don’t worry, if it gets loud, the train will chug away really soon. But first, it’s time for This Week In Gender.

[This Week In Gender tone sounds]

Tuck: Look, I spent four days trying to find gender news that was A, broadly relevant, and B, not a huge bummer. Ultimately, I did not succeed. So today we’re just going to have a little talk for a minute about relationships and control. It’s different than what we normally do, but it does tie in very well to the theme of the episode, so. Here we go.

[strings plucking]

I get a lot of advice questions, at this job, at my other job, just interpersonally with friends, we all do, and a major, unspoken theme that shows up across so many questions and conflicts is really control. How do I get my parents to gender me correctly? Unforntunately, you cannot control them. How can I come out at work and guarantee that people won’t be weird to me? Ultimately, you cannot control them. What do I do if I want to go on HRT, but my partner doesn’t want me to transition? They ultimately can’t control you.

Even outside of gender, so many family conflicts, relationship conflicts, daily life conflicts, teye ultimately boil down to wanting to control the other people around them. And yes, it would be so cool to have more control over the world, whether that’s like ending genocide, prisons, and police, or like…making people be nice to me at the bodega, but unfortunately I am only in control of decisions that I make for myself. I get to make choices about myself, like: this is my name, these are my values and beliefs, this is what I’m willing to do to stand up for these values and beliefs. And with that comes [heavy sigh] boundaries, a word that I’m afraid has lost all meaning in our community, [laughs] but what I really want to stress today is that boundaries are a way to decide when to remove yourself from a situation. It is *not* about controlling or dictating what someone else does, and it’s also not about punishing someone for not doing what you want them to do.

So. Say you have a big fight with…I don’t know, what’s a good nonbinary name? You have a big fight with your ex, Moss. And now your mutual friend is stuck in the middle, and *that* friend is named... Lantern. Has anyone used Lantern yet? Lantern up for grabs. Anyway. You can only control yourself, right? So you might say, “Hey, Lantern, I know you’re friends wth Moss. I really don’t feel ready to think about them right now. When we hang out, do you think that we can agree to not talk about them today?” And either Lantern says “Yes, great,” or they say “No, I don’t want to agree to that,” and you say, “Okay, well, I don’t think I’m up to hang out today then. Maybe we can check back in the future when one of us might feel differently.”

[contemplative acoustic guitar plucking begins softly]

What we *don’t* want to do is try to control other people, which would be like “Moss is not allowed to talk to *any* of my friends any more” or “Lantern and Moss are not allowed to talk about me when they hang out,” or something clearly punitive, like “Lantern, you have to choose between me and Moss, and if you choose Moss, I will never speak to you again!” To be *clear*, Moss and Lantern, I cannot believe I named them that, also should not be trying to control you. Moss cannot be like “It’s illegal for you to go to my favorite coffee shop because that crosses my boundaries!” [laughs] That’s not what a boundary is! They *can* decide that if you do go to their favorite coffee shop they will leave, that’s fine. And one more thing about boundaries. I think sometimes people try to use the word boundary to try get the moral high ground in a situation and like guilt you into going along with it, but there’s nothing inherently virtuous about having a boundary, and there’s nothing inherently devious about bumping up against someone else’s boundary.

This varies hugely case by case, obviously. If someone says like, “Please don’t touch me,” absolutely respect that boundary, don’t push that. But if you want to go to the coffee shop that your ex likes, you can go to the coffee shop, that’s fine. They will probably be annoyed if they see you at their favorite coffee shop, and that’s also fine. Sometimes people are not being abusive or manipulative, they are simply being annoying. So many of us are *so* annoying, and unfortunately that’s just what it is to be alive. Why am I talking about this? Because we all bump into this every day, in different ways, and some of us fall on the side of trying to control the people around us, and that makes us mad and sad because it’s impossible to do, and some of us fall on the side of letting other people control us and dictate *our* behavior and *our* decisions and that makes us mad and sad because we aren’t living how we want to. And some of us do both, and try to control others because we don’t feel like we can control our own lives.

And look, that makes *so* much sense to feel that way. Governments are passing new laws every day over whether trans people are allowed to access healthcare or drive or write books or live, and that goes for all sorts of other groups too, right, immigrants, incarcerated people, children, disabled people, people who could get pregnant.... Lots of people have very basic, fundamental parts of their lives controlled by the state in really scary and fucked up ways. But we *cannot* take it out on each other, it does not get us anywhere, you *cannot* control what other people do, you cannot control who they talk to or what they wear or what labels they use for themselves or where they spend their money, or whether they post the way you want them to post, you cannot *really* even control how they see you as a human being… But, ideally, if you don’t like it, youand can’t change it, at least you can leave. This has been This Week In Gender.

[This Week In Gender tone sounds]

Tuck: We’ve got a TheyMail message for you today. TheyMails are of course little messages from listeners, there’s a link in the show notes if you want to submit your own. This message is from Elya Lerner and it says: Have you ever been a queer person in a school? Check out a new project sharing the stories of queer teachers for examples and visions for what queer people thriving in schools can be. Go to Linktree, that’s L-I-N-K-T-R dot E-E/QueerThrival, OR Queerthrival on Instagram and Facebook, Q-U-E-E-R-T-H-R-I-V-A-L. Okay, one more quick ad, then we’ll get to the interview. Here we go!

[Ad music plays]

Believe it or not, I’m a pretty private person, I don’t like to share intimate details with people I just met, I *certainly* don’t want strangers to be able to look up my home address or my family members’ names, or any other personal info, really, and that’s why I continue to use DeleteMe. DeleteMe routinely scans hundreds of data broker sites to make sure my personal information is not easily available online. DeleteMe can also scrub info tied to deadnames and other aliases. You can join today at JoinDeleteMe.com/genderreveal and use the code TUCK20 to get 20% off your entire order. That is TUCK20 for 20% off. Join DeleteMe.com/genderreveal.

[Interview segment intro music plays]

Tuck: Shuli Branson is a writer, teacher, and artist currently living in New York. She wrote *Practical Anarchism: A Guide to Daily Life* and co-edited *Surviving the Future: Abolitionist Queer Strategies.*  She also translated Guy Hocquenghem’s *Gay Liberation After May ‘68* and Jacques Lesage de La Haye’s *The Abolition of Prison.* She’s currently holding conversations about liberation and how we end things on the Breakup Theory podcast and is working on a book about trans and youth liberation.

[Interview segment intro music ends]

Tuck: The way we always start the show is by asking, in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

Shuli: I describe myself as a transfemme, on the sort of genderfluid side.

Tuck: You have been doing slow-boil rollout of a new name, I feel? Did you do that intentionally? I feel like it’s been a process.

Shuli: I had to like battle with myself, because I like publish stuff under my former name and I was like, “Well, I’m stuck with it, [laughs] and therefore I have to have it forever.” And you know like how everyone thinks that like they don’t deserve the thing? I was like, I don’t deserve to have a different name. I also like, honestly, the name that I had had for myself for a really long time, I was like, all the bitches are called this name. [Both laugh] And so I was like shit, I would go by Jules, and then a friend of mine was at some trans conference and was like, “There were like eight transfem Juleses,” and I’m like, “All rright, can’t fucking use that.” And so I was just stuck for a while. Then a friend of mine gave me Shuli, which to me has a similar sound to Jules, and has a Hebrew connection, and I’m Jewish, anti-Zionist Jew, and also connected to Shulamith Firestone, the radical feminist who is… weird and cool. It finally clicked. And then in terms of just going for it, I was just in various places using different names. Part of that is just being timid and shameful and whatever. [Laughs] Basically now, I’m publishing under Shuli and I think people can just make the connection.

Tuck: Yeah! I mean, it’s not like you’re exclusively writing about trans stuff, but you do write a lot about queer and trans theory, and it’s like yeah, everyone’s trans, they all change their names, and most of them change it to Jules, and you did something new and fun. Okay, let’s just start with such a big one, then we’ll talk about your book. How does anarchism inform the way you think about gender? Whether it's your gender specifically, or the concept of gender.

Shuli: I’m kinda torn between a kind of nihilist desire to negate and destroy this world, like Eric Stanley, the great trans theorist that was like “We must demand the end to this world,” and then the hope that we can do things differently now, and not like wait or give up completely. And for me, transition is one of the many different kinds of refusals of the world as it is that we can do, and transition as a process is, to me,indicative of going into the unknown. Because thinking about ‘trans’ not specifically as an identity that you land on once and for all, but this ongoing possibility that changes with time and economic status and political climate and whatever… but, yeah, it’s a way of refusing, and for me anarchism is saying, this world, as it stands, it’s wrong. Right? It’s based on hierarchy and oppression and we have to do everything to refuse it and work in the places where we already are to promote collective liberation and mutual autonomy. So transness for me is like so ingrained in that. I know not all trans people are anarchists, and to me I don’t really care if you identify as an anarchist, but transitioning is a kind of anarchism because it’s not accepting what you’re given and it’s doing something different.

Tuck: We say all that, and also you say elsewhere that transition is not liberation and we need to fully abolish gender. Can you talk about why that is, what that would look like for you when you say ‘abolish gender’?

Shuli: Yeah. Okay, so, I understand gender as a colonial tool of power and discipline. And so changing your gender from one gender to another within that gender system isn’t freedom in itself. It is indicidate of a *refusal*, like I said, to participate, but, like the way that I understand it, I take this from Guy Hocquenghem who I translated, in the way that he talked about homosexuality and the gay liberation movement in the 70s, he said like, “We started the gay movement, we came out, but that wasn’t enough, we have to give up homosexuality too. We can’t cling to this sort of identity that is defined by the system itself. We’re so stuck within it.” Again, also, this is connected to the idea that not all trans people are political radicals trying to destroy the world, right, and I don’t want to impress every trans person into some political agenda, I think the fact of transition is a sign of a refusal of this world, but to get to whatever liberation would be, if we get ever there, I don’t think we would call it transness? My idea, would be that we wouldn’t organize the world along a gender-power system. I guess the word gender is so hard because it is so ingrained with these colonial power systems, and the way that the state and capitalism distribute labor, all these things that you can’t *imagine* a liberatory *gender*, so ingrained in that, there’s no getting outside of that. So we can like, play with these things, find ways to crack things open, but to like, do something different,we would have to havea new way of talking about it or have a new king of relation. Josie Giles wrote the essay “Wages for Transition,” and it’s talking about how gender is a labor and transition is a labor. If we want a world where we’re not forced to work, we also want to be not doing the gender work.

Tuck: Yeah. Actually, let’s just jump to that. When you talk about how the anarchist argument has to be for the abolition of work, and I don’t mean this in a shitty way at *all…* what is the definition of work here? I guess I’m trying to make this about me, and….do I work? [Laughs]

Shuli: It’s so confusing, right? [Laughs] I get stuck in this all the time. Especially since I do a lot of organizing work, and movement work, and I also do work for pay…and they overlap in ways, and I’m just trying to find a way to survive… So I always have to check myself, am I expecting productivity of myself in this capitalist way. Am I doing the shit that I *want* to do? Where does it bleed? So, yes, you do work. Because you have to work. Your relationship to the thing that you love doing, like podcasting, is poisoned in some way by that relationship work. But that doesn’t mean that in some world where work wasn’t a forced thing, that you could find a way to do the things you love and are passionate about. When people have utopian visions of the world, a lot of the time that we’re forced to work for a wage is empty time that we’re not doing shit, and the actual amount of time it takes to reproduce the world is smaller, and so we’d have all of this other free time to do all of this stuff. So then we won’t have to turn our hobbies into careers, or our passions into careers.

Tuck: Right. That was the argument for industrialization in the first place, because then we’ll have so much time to do hobbies…and then it was like, oops! [Laughs[

Shuli: Right. They were still deluded by the idea that technology will liberate us, but it’s always used to put people out of work or make people work more for less.

Tuck: I want to go back to what you said about how you don’t actually care if people identify as anarchists. It made me think of the first two lines of *Practical Anarchism*, which are, “The main argument of this book is that anarchism is a name for something most of us already do. The name itself matters less than the doing.” And it’s so funny, this actually came up for me recently, and I thought of you immediately, because I was having a conversation about some of the principles in your book, so I mentioned the title, which has ‘anarchism’ *in* it, and the guy who responded to me lives in an intentional community where they do consensus voting, and everything is this group of ninety people living together in harmony, and he responds to me by going, ‘Yeah. One person living in our intentional community is an anarchist. He won’t go to the meetings because of his beliefs, but he does clean the fridge.’ And I’m like, “So much is *happening* right now??” [Laughs] And there’s this part of me that wanted to pull him aside and be like, “So you are all living in what sounds like an anarchist philosophy, and the fact that this guy doesn’t go to meetings doesn’t mean he’s more of an anarchist than you are,” but I was just like…I don’t know that that serves anything to have this conversation with this guy. But I really *wanted* to. [Laughs] So, I have more questions, but my first question is: do you think there’s a point in explaining, in that context, anything?

Shuli: The word ‘anarchism’ has so many connotations, and part of that is the whole propaganda campaign going back one hundred and fifty years to discredit anarchism as anything valid. So people often won’t want to identify with it because they think it mean chaos and violence, which, sometimes it does, but that’s one reason why the labelling to me doesn’t matter. There’s also historical, traditional, cultural reasons why someone wouldn’t identify as anarchist, despite doing things we might call anarchist. I like this example, because it made me think ‘Even anarchists have an anarchist’. That person lives within this community and lives somehow in relationship with them through some form of refusal of doing the norms of that community, so in a way, if that is an anarchist community, that’s an anarchist’s anarchist.

Tuck: Totally.

Shuli: And part of the thing about anarchism, to me, it’s different from other kinds of leftist ideas in that we have to imagine we won’t all agree, and we can’t force anyone to agree. So it’s interesting that that guy was like, “I don’t agree with this process and yet I’m still going to be part of it.” Because that can cause problems if you’re in groups where someone is like, “I don’t agree with anything you’re doing, and I’m going to be here and obstruct everything.”

Tuck: And I don’t live there, I don’t know, but it didn’t sound like he was in the meetings, holding up consensus, he was like, “Y’all figure it out, I’m going to clean the fridge and that’s going to be my contribution, and you all figure out what you want.” And that brings me to, is that disidentification? You use that about fifty times in your book, what does it mean? [Laughs]

Shuli: The queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz uses it to think about ways of working against the system without an imaginary break with the system, and I pull on that a little bit. This is basically the whole aim of the book, in *Practical Anarchism*, thinking about anarchism in our daily lives, is looking at all the places in our daily lives where we internalize, enact, repeat power systems, sometimes unthinkingly, it’s the way we’ve been brought up. DIsidentification is taking a step back from the ways you inhabit power, power over people, and look at how that power’s working through you, and to try not to do that in whatever way. So if you see someone doing something wrong, and you want to go to an authority to get them in trouble. Ruth Wilson Gilmore talks about ‘guard duty’, and she gives an example, if you’re working at a place and you see someone taking from the till and you want to turn them in, that’s a way we’re policing each other in ways that we don’t have to do. So, disidentifying would be like, “I don’t need to play the role of the police, and this person taking this isn’t taking away from *me*.”

Tuck: Speaking of sort of curbing your own authoritarian impulses, I feel like you talk about this all the time with being a parent and how…parenthood has made you catch your own little impulses. I was wondering if you had any specific examples? I’ve heard you say it a lot, but not in what ways it’s cropped up in your life.

Shuli: It’s like any time you say ‘no’ to a kid, it’s arbitrary basically, and based on your own whim at that moment. ‘Cause there’s the mismatch of whatever a kid wants or needs and whatever an adult wants or needs, based mostly, for adults, on having to work and do all the annoying parts of life that we hate. So, if a kid wants to play in some specific way, and I’m like, “I don’t feel like it,” or, “No, don’t do that thing,” it’s just an arbitrary no that comes out of nowhere for the person who’s asking for it. That’s something I’ve learned from my partner is to check that impulse. Why do my needs supercede the kid’s needs at this moment? Obviously it’s impossible to do everything perfectly, and there’s time where you have limits, like observing limits and boundaries is also important, but also when you’re caring for someone who can’t care for themselves, that brings out the authoritarian impulse of if they’re about to do something unsafe, “No! Don’t do that!” and you try and stop them, sometimes physically. Sometimes you physically grab a kid out of danger, and that’s taking control of their body. “I don’t feel like it” and “because I’m an adult and I don’t want to do this thing” is kind of a rejection of whatever their world is.

Tuck: You said on another podcast something that really struck me, you said, “We are in this crisis where all of us want support and care, and it puts a lot of pressure on us to take care of each other all the time, and we’re all burnt out from trying to take care of each other.” This is something I think about all the time, but I’m not sure what the options are. I need support, let me go to my friends who all are also tired and exhausted and also need support. My other option is like, don’t burden anyone, just try to take care of myself, neither of those seem ideal…are you seeing other options, or just kind of naming a problem and being like, well, this sucks? [Laughs]

Shuli: One of the ways I’ve tried to talk about it, tried to think about it is that we have to both be willing to ask for help and come to each other, but also accept other people’s limitations, or let people off the hook, because often in our crises we want someone to swoop in and save us or help us in a way that isn’t actuallyeven possible, or that isn’t actually cognizant of whatever their current states are, so letting people off the hook is really important. A lot of the stuff we get stuck in is projections, expectations that are mismatched, and miscommunications. So it’s both the vulnerability of asking for help, or being able to share difficulties, but also realizing that other people have their own shit and limitations. I think one of the things that has been influential for me is Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha, in *Care Work* they have this essay “A Modest Proposal for a Fair Trade Emotional Labor Economy.” And from disability work, she’s talking about how disabled people, and I’m a chronically ill person who relies on people’s help and I’m not always able to do everything, there’s moments when we have a lot of capacity, and moments when we don’t, and we organize our lives around helping each other while having to be aware of it. A lot of it is being explicit: “This is what I’m capable of, this is what I’m not capable of.” And not taking it personally, which is really hard.

Tuck: Yeah. I was thinking this on the other side too, where there was this one week I was doing very well, and I had these four friends who were in crisis, like, well, I’m doing well personally, so it’s my turn to take a shift at the depression factory. Let me try to support these people. And after like a week of that I was like, “Well…that’s enough of that for a minute,” you know? [Laughs] I don’t know if that…?

Shuli: I totally relate to that. I make myself available to friends in crisis a lot, and then I do find sometimes I’m *too* available and I don’t have space for myself, or I notice that being involved in someone’s crisis and being a support person for them is draining me in a way that doesn’t feel good, so trying to communicate, “In this moment, I am not capable.” My new podcast, the Breakup Theory, is sort of based on this work that I’ve been doing with friends… not work, but, the relationships I’ve been building of supporting people through crises over the last years, a lot of breakups, and thinking about how mostly trans, anarchist-radical people have been trying to live our relationships try to support one another and care for one another. Commit to destroying this world. I’m trying to create a space where I can have these kind of conversations about how we go through those difficult moments.

Tuck: Yeah. I wanna talk more about Breakup Theory. I was gonna say I love the podcast, which is true, but it is only one episode, but I *love* the one episode.

[RECORD SCRATCH SOUND EFFECT]

Okay, future Tuck here. I just wanna say, as of this recording, there are now *two* episodes of Breakup Theory Podcast out in the world. The second episode is all about despair, hope, and relationships, and Palestine solidarity.

[RECORD SCRATCH SOUND EFFECT IN REVERSE]

Tuck: Can you explain what you mean by ‘breakup theory’, and specifically how it connects to family abolition, which we’ve talked about on this podcast.

Shuli: So, the breakup theory *comes*  from practical anarchism, because I’m proposing in that the anarchism helps with the breakingup, and teaches us how to end things. We are taught in this world things are valued for their longevity and should last forever. Marriage, or the idea that capitalism and the State are the best we can do and you just have to give in to that. Or, ‘Vote Blue, No Matter Who!’, you know, dedication to the Democratic Party no matter how many times they fail you. So, anarchism gives us the flexibility of organising the world where, the things that aren’t working, we pivot and stop. It actually puts the emphasis on experimentation and failure, rather than trying to find something that will solve a problem once and for all. We know things change so quickly and so much, that nothing’s going to work forever. And whenever we start building institutions, they want to continue themselves, rather than continuing the thing they’re supposed to be doing. I try to take this wisdom out of ending relationships. Ending relationships is terrible and heartbreaking…also it’s totally liberating, and how to we balance those two different things? Noticing that something has a rhythm and a time limit that’s over, and that also creates the new possibility for something else. Also thinking that we can relate to each other without putting that pressure on each other to have to be there forever in the same way, relationships change and shift over time.

In the podcast we’re talking about how…the point of it really si to have conversations with friends and radical people about how our political outlets or radical commitments come out in our relationships and the way that we’re doing things in the world. I wanted to have a place we could bring those things together rather than to think that our private lives are separate from our organizing lives. A lot of people who are committed to doing things have their whole social life bound up in that world, so there isn’t that disconnection. So it’s the place to start thinking from that angle of ending things an breaking up, how we live our commitments to the world, and let each other off the hook. For me, as I’ve talked about gender aboliton as one of the horizons. We have to get rid of the systems. Our understanding of family, and also I think the domination of adults over children, which is part of family, is one of the major obstacles from a collective liberation, and it’s one we take so for granted. It’s ‘natural’ that we should live in Mommy, Daddy, Kid families and adults have total control over their kids, like parental rights and all that stuff. It’s not to say giving up care, or depersonalizing it. There’s people who work on this, like M.E. O’Brien wrote a book on family, and she was on your podcast. Sophie Lewis also wrote about this. I learn a lot from people like them, it’s a way, as M.E. O’Brien says, of ‘communalizing care’. Right now it’s privatized. Family’s also the laboratory of gender, wheer gender is enforced on us. So breaking up with the family is also breaking up with gender and being trained into cisness. I also pull from my own experience growing up in a family, and closeting felt like suffocation. It’s so isolating to have to care for people and imagine all the other things that we need are unavailable or unimportant.

Tuck. Yeah. I think it’s so easy these days to write off someone off forever as soon as they do a thing you don’t like? I know that’s something I’m fearful of, if I will unknowingly say something or give someone a bad vibe, and that’s it forever for me for that person. And I’ve done that to people too, because there’s so many people in the world, it’s like, “thank God, one less person to think about.” [Laughs] “They did something I didn’t like, and I’ll just ignore them existing now!” Not even in a carceral or malicious way, just like, “I’m not gonna bother anymore.” So how do we make sure breakup theory isn’t something that allows us to avoid conflict or avoid disagreement, or avoid accountability?

Shuli: Right. You could hear ‘breakup theory’ and be like oh, cancel everyone, anyone crosses you then they’re banished for life. And that *isn’t* what I mean. Though there is an element where we need to empower ourselves and be like, there are people in my life – that were in my life at one time, and are now are not feeling good to be around, and it’s okay to decide this relationship has reached its fulfillment, and we don’t need to be in this relationship anymore. Just like you can also work with people, and collaborate with people you don’t like – and transition really brought this out for me – like oh, there’s nothing wrong with theses people, we’re just different people, and I don’t feel like explaining myself. And I don’t doubt that they would be with me and understand, but I’m just like, “Ah! That was a different me, I’m just shedding things.” So it’s not malicious, it’s just a different phase. What I want, on the positive sense for breakup theory to mean, is that we practice conflict. That we practice engaging in conflict woithout being afraid that having a disagreement will ruin everything. So, when I’m thinking ‘breakup’, I’m not necessarily saying you *must* breakup. I’m saying there’s always the possibility to end things there. We’re not locked in forever in everything we do. I think we have this idea that ‘you break it, you buy it,’ or something? Anything you choose, you need to be choosing forever? And that’s just not the case. So it takes a lot of pressure off. “Well, if this all goes to hell, I’m not stuck in this thing. I can end it.” That can give you the space to engage in conflict without the stakes being so high, because you’re not figuring out the rest of your lives in that one moment. I think that happens a lot in romantic relationships, where any conflict becomes a validation of the whole relationship, like is this even worth it? So, it’s the hope that we can figure out ways to practice conflict and find ways to resolve. Like I said, anarchism is this ideawhere we all don’t agree, we all have different visions of the world, we all can allow space for coexisting different perceptions of reality. So it;s not a forced resolution where everyone agrees, but to be able ot hear each other and allow for that break between experiences without it being you’re erasing me, and I’m erasing you.

Tuck: Yeah. Absolutely. As I was reading through *Practical Anarchism*, I was noticing climate change is really present in the book, which makes sense, because it’s so present in the way that we *should* be thinking about everything. It always throws me off, because people always say, “So Tuck, you live in New York now. Do you think you’ll ever leave?” And I’m like, “I don’t know, where’s underwater? And where’s on fire? And where is there air? And we’ll just kind of know that later and then we’ll know.” [Laughs] Like, what are you talking about? So, anyway, can you talk about hwo the climate crisis plays into the way you think about anarchist organizing, anarchist work?

Shuli: One of the things, from an anarchist perspective, is to think about how all of these struggles or issues of oppression are connected, and climate is a place where you can think about the connection of indigenous resistance to colonialism, the endless extraction of capitalism, the state’s control over bodies and movement and all these things. And it’s terrible to think about how the world’s just on this incessant death-march without stop. And all of the tools within the system are just not enough. So my anarchist perspective is that there is no solution under capitalism, capitalism cannot save us from climate disaster because it is *causing* it, and all the solutions that it poses just puts it from one place to another, and so it forces us to take the perspective of this antistate, anticapitalist, landback understanding of the world, that all of these struggles are totally connected. It’s hard, because this doesn’t make me feel hopeful. We’re not on the edge of a revolution, like massive revolution. And I don’t think a massive revolution would be good, because they’ve just been another authoritarian swapped in, it seems like impossible to stop this thing. So we have to just think about what are the possibilities? Like you were just talking about living in New York. I just moved back to New York after living rurally, and feeling like, “Oh, I’m living in a place that will be okay with climate disaster,” and now I’m living in a big city that is totally at risk, and potentially unsustainable, and I’m trading things to live here. I could have ideas about what could unfold, and what people can take from the disasters, but it’s hard to go into that space and feel good thinking about it because it involves disaster an ddeath. When I talk abotu Gaza, and how there’s this inspiring resistance from the people of Palestine right now, and there’s a global movement in response to it, but none of that is worth the death of the people in Gaza. Whatever good change could spark from that, we can’t trade one thing for another. It’s hard to be optimistic, because I don’t see things suddenly shifting, there’s no willpower in teh governing bodies to actually change tings.

Tuck: Well, yeah, speaking of that, since we’re already kind of in the despair spiral and we can crawl out of it after this question, you recently published this essay called “No State Solution,” and the quote I underlined from that is when you wrote, “My feelings of despair have not only been limited to frustration with marching in circles demanding politicians who think of us as another lower species stop a war they aren’t actually in direct control of. (How many times do we do this? Forever?)” I was like *toootallly…* what else do you do, but also what are we doing here? It’s so challenging for me as someone who has hashtag PTSD, where I could totally go to this march and be one of the thousands of people at this march, but I will also be a liability because I will be losing my mind the entire time. I want to show up for Palestinians who are *actively* experiencing genocide… I don’t know if what I’m contributing by walking around and being kind of nuts is actually helpful? You know? Are there other things I can do? So I wonder, are there actions that you’re taking where you don’t feel total despair, or is this kind of just where we’re at?

Shuli: This is such a hard question, and something I’m constantly turning around and having different thoughts about. I want to say, first of all, the fact that so many people around the world are consistently showing up in the streets is a good thing. Not only because the people in Gaza, they’re feeling solidarity, but if it's not getting the demand that it’s asking for, it’s still doing something in terms of having people find each other, form new relationships, there’s been discourse change, there has been an outpouring of support for Palenstine which has not been true for a really long time, and I don’t want to shame people for what they’re doing. Often there’s this feeling like, “I have to do *something*,” and then there’s this. The thing that I was writing about and trying to think about is yes, there’s a common grammar of protest that to me feels like a dead end. It makes us *feel* like we’re doing things. I also am starting to think that it’s preparing an alibi for politicians where they’re going to wash their hands on our marches. They support the genocide, but after they can say, “We were wrong, but there is a moral conscience in this country evidenced by millions in the streets.” That’s my cynical way of thinking about it. I don’t think they give a shit. Every movement over the last decade has shown us that overwhelming, popular dissent doesn’t change what politicians do one way or another. And even if people topple a fucking government, an authoritarian will take over, which is something I’m worried about in terms of Gaza. So that’s not the thing.

When I’m taking about the politicians thinking we’re not even another species, and this is happening, is instead of going around making demands of ceasefire, which is the bare minimum that we can ask for, what we really need is end fo occupation. I don’t single out Israel, the reason I call it “No State Solution” is that I think there should be no states, and any kind of state-based solution is going to reproduce these problems. They’re not going to ceasefire, so why not disrupt their lives in any way we can? Just make it unbearable, not because we want them to do things, but because these people that have power use it to create mass death-worlds, so they shouldn’t have any peace or sleep at night. And I think a lot of the things we do when we’re protesting is keeping a sense that civility and society, and we think that society is worth saving in some way, and all of the kinds of disruptions ae seen as infantile, or dangerous, or disruptive. But we should nto allow things to continue as normal, Gaza right now being the most essential one. I’m thinking about outside of massive politics that don’t rely on millions of people to make a point, we can do this in small groups, we are at a breaking point, and I think at every moment the world is in the balance and we can refuse their world. So any kind of action we can do, like, to me, putting FREE GAZA everywhere on every surface, stickering,is something, because that message is threatening enough that people want to silence it. It seems like sometimes that’s not anything, because you’re not blocking shipping, or linking arms, but just wheatpasting and stickering people are doing, but that puts the word out and makes people have to confront this stuff. People going around and doing noise demos at people’s houses or meetings, stuff like that. I think people are innovating and doing lots of different things. The fact that it’s consistent is something, even if it’s not going to get a ceasefire, it’s something, and we don’t know where it will go, and that’s where I have some hope.

Tuck: I think that brings us back to the central topic of your book, is anarchism is something people already do without realizing it’s anarchism. Do you have any more top of mind examples of things we might all be doing in our lives already that you want us to notice and realize there are these sort of in-between moments where we are able to practice anarchism in our day to day lives?

Shuli: We’re trained to believe that people are out to get each other, and you can’t trust anyone, and you should be afraid of everything. But all the moments that we don’t enact that are momebnts when we’re opening space for anarchism. All the moments we use whatever access and resources we have to help other people have access to what they need is an example of that, that’s mutual aid. So I try to think about what are more ways we can continue to do that rather than feel competitive or worried about what other people are getting that we aren’t, be like, “What do I have and how can I share that?” A lot of people do that a lot, it’s just that we have this family structure, the nuclear family structure, but it’s a lie. Everyone relies on other people to help, do care, but we dont’ call it the same thing and we don’t prioritize in the same way, drawing our attention to these different ways that we connect with each other is a place we can think about how we can promote each other’s autonomy and liberation. There’s all this time we’re not playing the role the state demands of us, so just being aware of these moments when we’re outside of their control and try to widen those, and act from those spaces, we can continue to refuse those roles, or disidentify. For me, anarchism is a perspective, an ethics, a relation, it’s not an identity or a set ideology. And it shifts the way you look at the world, you can be like, “Oh, all these things that I’m told are natural and normal and inevitable don’t have to be that way. And I don’t have to wait, right, now I can see them in another way, and use what’s there toward a different purpose.

Tuck: So when you were talking about sharing resources and mutual aid, I was thinking about how you talk about money in the book, and you write that an anarchist relationship to money would be an anarchist spending whatever they have on anything and everyone. And I think that’s I’m just overthinking this as a concept, but at the same time, we joke that we’re giving the same $20 in a circle, but we’re not actually. I’m taking $20 and I’m giving it to someone and they’re giving it to their landlord. Somebody give me $20 and I’m giving it to the government. So that money isn’t getting passed in a circle, it’s actually getting taken out of circulation. And even if I’m giving $5 to your Patreon, and every month you give $5 to my Patreaon, that actually means we’re both giving a dollar to the Patreon corporation that we could have kept. So I’m just curious, where is the limit where it’s irresponsible for me to not protect myself for the future, because what if we get to the point where it’s like, “Okay it’s my turn to have $20,” and everyone’s like “We don’t have it!”?

Shuli: I don’t know that I have a satisfactory answer. From my anarchist perspective, I would want a world without money. But we live in this world, where we’re taught to have this orientation towards money that what to do is to save for the future. For a house, for your children’s college, but most of us aren’t going to have those things anymore because the world has changed. And we were talking about New York, and where’s going to be on fire and where’s going to be underwater because in ten years we don’t know what’s going to happen. Everything feels so calamitous and on the edge of total catastrophe, that for that reason, saving for some future possibility when something is necessary now is foolish. You have a real job, right? That gives you retirement. That’s invested in the stock market, and you’re going to cash it out when you’re old enough. But what if the stock market crashes, or there is no stock market? Like none of that money’s real. It’s only real right now when you use it for something. I actually got this from my friend Glow who’s just a strong, amazing, wise person, and they were just talking about how that impetus to save for next month’s rent instead of helping someone with this month’s rent is one way we separate ourselves from each other. I like the way you were talking about that, I like that joke. It’s particularly around trans people and anarchists, we’re always crowd sourcing shit for each other, it feels like we’re just passing that money along. But that shows that people are willing to do those things, that is the way we get the things that we need right now. The idea is to shift away from a state based solution to be like universal basic income, universal healthcare, those things in this current system would improve things for a lot of people, but they give power to the state, which ultimately controls our lives. So thinking more about what do we have to help each other is more important. But it’s really hard, because so many of us have such precarity. I fall into this too, when I’m making decent money, it’s really easy to give it away, but when I don’t know what my income is going to be from one month to the next, from one week to the next, I really have a hard time not trying to save something. And people have health issues and all these things. I’m not making a moral judgement, I want to take out the morality from money. Like the morality of saving and spending wisely. But I also want to give us permission to indulge in luxury. The best way to get the things we need is to steal them.

Tuck: Before we ask the last question, you’ve said in the past that gender is a form of discipline and the outcome of violence, both historical and contemporary no matter the form it takes, and then also in the intro to the book *Surviving the Future* which you wrote the intro for and coedited, you said, “The future is a kind of violence,” and if gender is the outcome of violence, is it violent for me to spend the last six years asking people what the future of gender looks like?

Shuli: [Laughs] Yeah, you’re being really harmful, Tuck, and I’ve been meaning to call you out on that question. No, I mean, we have to let our imaginations go. When you ask that question, people have all kinds of answers, and the multiplicity of that, to me, escapes the violence. No one here is dictating what gender is. None of the people on your show get to come and be the gender czar. But like I said earlier, if you are asking me that question also, “what is the future of gender”—

Tuck: I will do that right now, I’m so glad that it’s not a terrible crime I’ve been doing because I *have* to. The way we always end the show is by asking in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

Shuli: Yes. For me, the future of gender, is the absence of the gender/sexuality discipline system that is tied to the state, tied to anti-Blackness and colonialism, so the way that I want to think about it is in that world the word ‘gender’ would be too confusing to use because it would carry all this baggage. When we talk about people in different cultures who did gender differently and we call them different names than that are within our gender system, we can’t fully comprehend what they were doing differently, right? We bring them into our world. So it would have to be something that is different.Guy Hocquenghem, who I translated in *Gay Liberation After May ‘68*, and I translated him because he thought in a way that was still speaking to us now, he talks about trans people in particular in this one moment it’s not about going from this to that, but kind of the unleashing of particular body parts into different desires. That’s what’s so amazing to me about the possibility of transition as a kind of futurity is that we can imagine it as having multiple timelines, multiple outcomes that change over time. So when people are trying to do things like get hormones to people for free, and make them freely available in places where you wouldn’t normally have hormones, it changes the idea of transition because it makes it not this momentous decision you have to consult with experts about and really do some soul searching, it’s like, “Oh, here’s some estrogen, let me try that for a little bit. I like it? Cool, I’m going to continue.” Or, “I don’t like it, well that was cool for a while and I had boobs but now I don’t.” Something like that where we can constantly be making and remaking ourselves if we want to. Or we could do nothing. That’s the sort of way I want to think about it.

[Gender Reveal Theme music plays]

Tuck: That's gonna do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode with folks in your community. You can find Shuli at sjbranson.com and on Instagram @shulibranson. Her podcast is at patreon.com/thebreakuptheory, and of course, in this very podcast app, where you can go subscribe. *Practical Anarchism* is available now from Pluto Books, and she also recently co-edited a book called *Surviving the Future,* which we did not talk about at all, but you can find both of those at bookshop.org. We are on Instagram and at genderpodcast.com, where we’ve got transcripts of every episode. You can also sign up for our bonus podcast Gender Conceal, where I think I’m gonna get Shuli to show up soon, and you can also sign up for our weekly behind-the-scenes newsletter. Those are both at patreon.com/gender. This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman, and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Special thanks this week to Io, who connected me and Shuli, and also to the guy who I told a story about in this episode, who I think maybe just started listening to the podcast. If you’re hearing this, sorry my dude! Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music by our friends at Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender. Free Palestine.

[Gender Reveal Theme music plays out and ends]

Tuck: Hashtag PTSD! Wait, how did that happen?

Shuli: [Laughs] I don’t know.

Tuck: That was crazy! I have to have everyone know this, but I literally said, “Hashtag PTSD,” and then Zoom put balloons up. [Shuli laughs] And I’ve never seen that happen in my life and that was so crazy. Was that like the NSA hearing this part and being like, “We did that to you, bitch!”? That’s *crazy*.