

COUNTRY QUEERS in collaboration with OUT IN THE OPEN

SEASON 2 EPISODE 6 : Miguel Mendías

DESCRIPTION: Miguel Mendías is an interdisciplinary artist living in Marfa, Texas, occupied Jumano and Apache lands. He is Chicano, Mexican-American, or Latinx (a term he dislikes). He is *mestizo*; of Czech, Basque, and Rarámuri (Tarahumara) descent. His father's family has lived in Marfa, Texas for five generations. In this episode Kū'i'olani Cotchay (she/they) interviews Miguel about his work to restore the adobe home that's been in his family for generations, lessons his grandparents taught him, and his relationship to his father, his ancestry, and the land.

Kū'i'olani Cotchay (she/they) is a queer, mixed-Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) living in their ancestral lands in Mākaha, Hawai'i. She is an educator, learning experience designer, musician/creative and plant person. She is the interviewer and creator of this week's episode featuring Miguel Mendías, and you can find his interview of her in Episode 2.

For this episode, Miguel is asking you to support Ekvv-Yefolecv: an intentional ecovillage community of Indigenous Maskoke persons who, after 180 years of having been forcibly removed from traditional homelands - in what is commonly/colonially known as Alabama - have returned for the purpose of practicing linguistic, cultural and ecological sustainability. You can donate and learn more on their website: <https://www.ekvn-yefolecv.org/how-can-i-help>

CREDITS: Created and produced by Kū'i'olani Cotchay, with support from HB Lozito from [Out in the Open](#), and Rae Garringer of [Country Queers](#). Sound Design by Hideo Tokui. Audio editing by: Kū'i'olani Cotchay and Rae Garringer. Editorial advisory dream team: [Hermelinda Cortés](#), [Lewis Raven Wallace](#), and [Sharon P. Holland](#) Our Featured Song on this episode is "Surftastic" by Slutpill. Slutpill is a Whitesburg, Kentucky based band made up of Carrie Carter, Paulina Vasquez, and Mitchella Phipps. Additional music in this episode is by Tommy Anderson!

[sounds of truck door closing, starting, driving]

Miguel Mendías: My name is Miguel Mendías. I live in Marfa, Texas, in the United States, along the border of Mexico, in an area called La Junta de los Ríos, which means "the meeting of the rivers". This is the land of the Apaches and the home of

the Jumano people. You are listening to Country Queers, a podcast about people, who live in rural areas, that are LGBTQ.

[sound of electric guitar and bass music - "Surftastic" by SlutPill]

Kū'i'olani Cotchay [Host]: Aloha mai kākou! This is Kū'i'olani in Mākaha, O'ahu, Kānaka Maoli lands in the U.S. occupied Kingdom of Hawai'i. In this episode, I interview Miguel, who did the intro just seconds ago.

Miguel and I are new friends, but our friendship origin story began in Huchiun, the unceded Lisjan lands now known as parts of the "East Bay." Thirteen years ago, somewhere in a constellation of punk show fliers and too many 15 cent BART tickets, my planner scribblings read "Miguel's Top-surgery Party." Of course I went to Miguel's fundraiser, where I made out with my most recent ex-girlfriend's twin sister's then girlfriend - who would later go on to date a different future ex-girlfriend of mine. So, my memory of Miguel has always been anchored among the night's L-Word-chart activities.

Fast forward to this year's Country Queers cohort, Miguel and I finally for-real meet and decide to interview each other. We speak in long stretches at strange hours, the time difference between Miguel's shifting continental-location and Hawai'i is almost unnoticed in our usual anxiety-filled insomnia. Between cross country car-breakdowns, emotional breakdowns, and other Covid-19 comedies-of-error, we manage to map out our interviews and friendship. There are lighthearted moments: a pink praying mantis on the webcam, 20-year-old queer scene gossip, and probably too many conversations about Tori Amos. Though, more often than not, our shared-time skews heavy and serious. We talk about so many things... colonization, displacement, and the impacts of tourism...Our conversations wander about, visiting various topics like the tourists we are discussing.

Alongside these heart wrenching topics, we weave-in ancestral memories and family histories, inclusive of land as living-relative. Like me, Miguel sees himself and his queerness as a product of the people and places that have nurtured him...

[sounds of wind and footsteps on gravel]

Miguel: When people ask me where I'm from, I usually just say Texas. I was born in Houston, then we lived in Austin, then I lived in my mom's hometown, Danberry, which is a community on the Gulf coast. Then, I also moved to live with my dad in Dallas, and then finished high school in El Paso. I'm Mexican American on my

father's side and we are Basque and Rarámuri, also known as Tarahumara, that's the Spanish word for the people. And, on my mom's side, I'm Czech.

I've lived in California and in the Bay Area specifically, and I also lived in Baltimore, and New York City, briefly, and I lived in middle Tennessee for a little while, and then I ended up back in Marfa. It's where my father was born, my grandparents and some of my great grandparents as well, like on three branches of family. I've also traveled a lot when I was younger. I've hitchhiked through every state in the continental United States, I feel like I know this continental country very well.

Marfa is a high desert place and it's in the Chihuahuan desert, which is the largest desert in North America. It's the most diverse desert in the world, in terms of richness of species. It encompasses a region that covers a huge chunk of what we call west Texas, parts of New Mexico, parts of Arizona, most of the state of Chihuahua in Mexico and parts of four other states in Mexico. My indigenous ancestry is from that same desert, south of Marfa really, and those people are still there today.

Kū'i'olani: Yeah, you're talking about being from the desert. Could you explain the unique feeling or sound of being in that environment or, even, like, the smell?

[sounds of rain in the desert]

Miguel: Yeah. Most people, because where I am in Texas, they think it's going to be hot, but we're actually one of the coolest spots in Texas because of our altitude. Where I live is a bit mountainous, it's kind of windy. We might have a little bit of snow in the winter but only, like, a few days, but then we have these kind of cooler summers compared to the rest of Texas.

We have Creosote also known as *Chaparral*, or I think the Latin is *Larrea tridentata*. And it's got a beautiful golden green foliage. When the barometric pressure drops, this plant releases its oil and it fills the whole sky, the whole desert with its smell. And it's one of the most wonderful, amazing smells. If you've ever been to the desert, you probably smelled that smell when it was gonna to rain. And when I was a child for a long time, I thought it was the actual smell of the rain itself.

Kū'i'olani: Now I just want to talk about plants.

Miguel: Oh, I could go on and on about it. We have *Lechuguilla*; *Ocotillo*; *Candelaria*; all kinds of *Agave*, and Black Gum *Acacia*... *Sotol*. The *Yucca*, we call it Spanish Dagger or Spanish Bayonet.

I remember my grandparents made a point of walking me out into the desert, me and my brother, when we were five years old, my grandmother took us out and she's pointing out to me, oh, you can eat this. And you can eat that. She tells me this is Yucca and you can dig up the root and you can eat it, but you have to cook it. And I'm like "--Why don't we do that?" I got really excited and I was like, "Why don't we do that?" And she's like, "Oh, we don't need to do that." And I was like why not? And she was like, "What? 'Cause we go to the store, we can just buy a loaf of bread." And I was like and I was like why, but "Why do we buy a loaf of bread if we could dig this up and eat it?" And she was like, she said, "Okay, if you really want to eat it, I'll tell your grandfather, and I'll make him come dig one up for you so we can make it."

[soft electric guitar music]

There's all these things that my parents and grandparents taught me growing up that are specific to that region. Especially my dad, he really tried hard to pass on whatever knowledge he had, to me.

I'm really grateful to my dad. He grew up during the Chicano Movement and during the time of the American Indian Movement. And he was a self-identified Chicano and became radicalized through that and the Black Panther Party in San Antonio. And that sent him on this whole journey of reclaiming our family history and our lineage and understanding it. And self-identifying also as someone who's of indigenous descent.

My father very early on in my life started teaching me about colonization. And one thing he -- I remember him emphasizing, I swear, since I was like five or six years old, -- he was trying to explain this to me. I didn't really understand it till I got a little bit older, maybe nine, but he would talk about -- queer people, essentially, of course we didn't use that word. But he explained to me that when the colonizers came from Spain, that they, part of the genocide that they enacted upon native peoples was that they would burn, quote unquote "men who dress like women" or men who were romantic with other men, at the stake.

He just straight up said, "I know where you're living, you won't see certain things, but I want to make sure you're exposed to these things. And so you aren't ignorant." And that's - he said that kind of stuff my whole childhood, his idea of an education was that we would experience the world, not just what we were like taught in school, but it included native history lessons and it included noticing what was around us.

And, when I was like 14, he'd take me and my brother to the gay part of Dallas, just where they had like bookstores, and a coffee shop, in the daytime. But there was

also like gay bars there and lesbian bars. And he would point these things out to me and my brother. And he just told us, like, “You need to see that gay people exist. And just not think it's weird, it's normal. It's not a big deal.” And to me, this kind of made sense, cause I felt like he'd been giving me that message all along with his history lessons– that gay people were accepted before Spaniards came, et cetera, at least in the parts of the world where we lived.

Kū'i'olani: How did coming out as trans to your dad, who seems like he knew that you were queer, right? So how did coming out as trans go?

Miguel: By the time I came out to my dad, he had a massive heart attack–

Kū'i'olani: Oh, wait, not having a heart attack that your kid is having sex?

Miguel: Oh, yeah. For real. Yes.

Kū'i'olani: Oh, I'm sorry.

Miguel: I... it seemed like he was going to have a heart attack, if I told him I was having sex, but yeah no. My dad, when I was a senior in high school, he suffered a massive heart attack, almost died. And then he had some neurological issues after that, including some memory loss issues, okay? So, when I came out as trans my dad's memory had gotten... it went through waves over the years. Like, they would try medications and his memory would improve for a little bit, then it would just turn and be really garbage again. So the funny story is that --and then my dad passed away last year, he actually died of COVID.

Kū'i'olani: Oh, gosh. I'm sorry to hear that.

Miguel: Thanks. But before that, he had a lot of physical health conditions and he was in a nursing home. I knew he was going to pass away. I knew as soon as I knew there's going to be a pandemic. He's living in a nursing home in Texas. I knew it was going to happen. But anyway... my dad, he had memory loss. So, I had to come out to my dad AT LEAST 13 times in my life.

And, of course, the first time I came out to my dad was like when I came out to my mom, I like hemmed and hawed too, it took me sooo long. I was, like, 25, and it just took me, I was just like nervous, and took, I like, probably it was like a two hour long conversation... or, I think I came out to my mom, technically-first, but then I came out to my dad. But, my mom, she really struggled, she rejected me and we had a hard relationship for many years and it took her a long time to come around and accept

me as trans. My dad, on the other hand, though, it was 12 out of 13 times it was like instantaneous. He immediately was like, there would be a silence, of course he'd be shocked. But then he would immediately just embrace me and start calling me *mijo*, instead of *mija*, which means "my son" instead of "my daughter". And it was really sweet.

And the one time, though, that he had a hard time when I was telling him, when I was coming out to him is, I called him and he was in some -- he had chronic pain, he had back problems-- So I called him and I asked him, "How are you doing, Dad?" He said, "Not so good." I'm like, "What's your pain level at today?" And he told me it was like an eight or nine. For some reason, I still needed to ask him something, wanted to talk to him. So I keep talking to him anyway. And then also for some stubborn reason, he like forgets that I'm trans, he starts calling me by my old name, my birth name. And I'm like, "Oh yeah, Dad," and this was after I'd already come out to him many times, probably like 11 times. And he was always super accepting every time. And every time it was like a total surprise to him, like a total shock. And we'd gone through it so many times where first I'm like, "Oh yeah, dad, I'm trans." And then there's a pause. He's in shock. And I'm like, "do you know?" I'm like, "Are you in shock, Dad?" (and he says) "No, no I'm there" -- even though he's obviously in shock. And then it always felt a little bit cruel in a way, because I know that I'm going to shock my dad all over again.

I don't know if you've ever talked to anyone with dementia. I imagine it would be like, if you're with someone who has Alzheimer's or dementia, sometimes you just don't tell them, it's easier because, yeah. Every time he would be a little bit in shock and then, but then he would and I would, and I knew it was going to shock him, and by shock like he's speechless, he can't speak his, heart's probably racing, his blood pressure's pounding in his ears, like that kind of response. And so it felt a little cruel to keep doing that to him. But I also knew he could handle it cause we've been through it many times before.

So I got blasé about it, where I'm like, "Dad, you're forgetting, like, I changed my name." And he's like, "No, I'm not forgetting anything." And I'm like, "Yes, you are Dad. You're forgetting. I think you forgot. I told you this before, but remember, I'm trans and I changed my name?" And then, there it is, the silence, the shock. And then I'm like, "Dad, are you okay? Are you there? Are you in shock?" And he's, "I'm okay, no, I'm here." And I'm like, "Okay." And then immediately it would start in with the acceptance. He'd be like, "So you're transgender?" And I'd be like, "Yes...We've had this conversation a million times, but I know you don't remember." And he'd be like, "That's okay, that's okay. I want you to know... " And it'd start. He'd be like, " I want you to know something." I'd be like, "What is it Dad?" And he'd be like, "I'll always love you. No matter what, I accept you, one hundred percent." I'm like,

“Thanks, Dad. You've told me this 11 times before, so I really appreciate it.” And then and I was just going from there and then he'd start calling me *mijo*, and then he'd just say a bunch of nice stuff.

And one thing he would always say, after some time had passed and he got over his shock is he would always say, “This makes sense!” And I'd be like, “Oh yeah. Why does it make sense, Dad?” He'd be like, “Cause you were always different.” And I was like, “Oh really? You think so?” And he'd be like, “Yeah, I can totally see. This makes sense to me, *mijo*. I understand it. It makes sense. I understand, because you were different. You, I always knew you were different. I think this is cool, *mijo*. This is great. Like, you're amazing!” He'd just go on like that. Very wonderful.

And the one time, though, I called him and he was in pain and I was being blasé and I was like, “Dad, I think you forgot again, we've had this conversation. I'm trans.” He was like, there was a pause and then I was ready for him, I was like, “Dad, are you there?” And he's, “NO!” And I was like, “What?” He's, “No! I don't accept this about you.” And one thing we would always talk about is, my dad was like, he's always, “I was there when you were born. I delivered you with my own hands.” Which is true, he was in the delivery room. And, I was born second, because I'm a twin -- I have a twin brother-- and I was a breech birth. I came out feet first. They tried to turn me around, but they couldn't. My brother was already out, my twin brother.

So I know this. My dad would always say this, “I know you, I delivered you. I was there, delivering you with my own hands.” I'm like, “Okay, Dad.” (Laughs.) So he's, “No! I don't accept this about you!” And I was like, “What?” And he's, “No, like, I was there when you were born. If you were any of these things, I would have known.” And he tried to say that to me one time about me being gay. He's, “I would have known. If you're gay, I would know.” And I was like, “You're wrong. I'm telling you right now.” So he said this to me and I just laughed. And then I was like, wait, this is not a laughing matter. He's serious. He's really upset. And I'm thinking, oh no, this is a mistake. I shouldn't have told him when he's his pain level is eight or nine. This is terrible! My father's never rejected me, never for anything! And I can't believe it's happening now, but so I'm like, “Wait a minute Dad. Just think about it. Don't be upset. Just think about it. Dad, think about it. I was always different, wasn't I?” And then there's a pause and then he's like, “That's right.” And I'm like, “I was always different. Wasn't I always different? You were there when I was born, you delivered me, but you always knew I was different.” And he goes, “You were always different.”

Kū'i'olani: Oh my god. I like that you repeated his words back to him and it triggered that response.

Miguel: (Laughing) And then he was like, “I got to go though.” He had told me he needed to get off the phone because he was in so much pain and I let him get off.

Kū‘i‘olani: Oh my god, you’re like, wait! Before you get off, even though you're in pain, let me come out to you! (Both laughing) Oh god.

Miguel: I know, I was too blasé about it, way too casual. So I guess it serves me, right. But it was a shock to me to hear him go, “No! I don't accept this is about you.” And that was hilarious, but I have all these other memories... Memory loss is like, it's so hard. It was hard for me and my brother, my dad having mental deterioration and just going back and forth where he'd get better sometimes, and he'd get worse, then he'd be good, again, really good sometimes.

But what a gift in a way, right? ‘Cause I got to come out to him sooo many times and, like clockwork, he always said the right things, was so nice to me. And it's a really sweet memory. And even though, even the one time he rejected me, it wasn't hard to turn him back around. You know?

I felt like my dad understood me better. ‘Cause he had less rigid ideas about how things have to be. And I felt like that was based also on a more indigenous perspective. But, my mom is incredible in many ways. And one story I sometimes tell about her is that, when I was like five years old, like going into kindergarten, people would make a big deal about my blue eyes. And, in Hispanic culture, if you compliment someone, a child especially, you have to touch whatever you're complimenting ‘cause otherwise you can give them the evil eye. So, my childhood --my brother remembers this too-- women were always coming up to me even when I was a baby and they would put their hands across my eyes and tell my mother, in Spanish, that I had pretty eyes. So, I just always grew up with that. I never minded, strangers would touch me on the head or put a hand lightly across the eyes. And that was totally normal to me.

But when I went into kindergarten, my mom - and a little bit later throughout my childhood too - my mom would tell me about my blue eyes. She pointed out to me that she had the same color eyes as me. She would make us look at our faces side by side and look at our own eye color. And my mom would point out to me, “Everyone compliments your blue eyes, but they don't compliment my blue eyes the same way.” Which was true. And she would say, “Do you know why that is?” And of course I didn't. And she'd say, “It's because of your beautiful brown skin.” And she'd be like, “The reason people see your blue eyes is because of your beautiful brown skin. See, look at my skin, I'm much lighter than you and they don't stand out. But it's your beautiful brown skin that makes your blue eyes stand out.” And I thought this

was amazing and so wise of my mom. So every time people complimented my blue eyes, I took it as a compliment about my skin. And my mom did that on purpose. And, I just think that was so wise of her and cool for her to do that.

[soft electric guitar music]

[EPISODE BREAK]

HB Lozito [Host]: Hey, friends, I'm HB Lozito. Because we know the impact of colonization on people, land, and resources, we're encouraging our white listeners with access to wealth to engage in an ongoing process of reparations. So, during each episode break, we're asking our white listeners who have extra funds, to donate to projects founded and led by, queer & trans, Black and Indigenous folks, and people of color.

Today, Miguel is asking you to support, Ekvn-Yefolecv.

Ekvn-Yefolecv (ee-gun yee-full-lee-juh) is an intentional ecovillage community of Indigenous Maskoke persons who, after 180 years of having been forcibly removed from traditional homelands - in what is commonly/colonially known as Alabama - have returned for the purpose of practicing linguistic, cultural and ecological sustainability.

The link to their website, where you can donate and learn more about their work is in the episode notes, and over on our websites at www.countryqueers.com and weareoutintheopen.org

Now, back to Kū'i'olani's interview with Miguel

[END OF BREAK]

[music fades out, ambient sounds of truck starting, driving, dog snoring, train, rainstorm throughout host narration]

Kū'i'olani [Host]: I've never been to Marfa. My exploration of the town is largely limited to online information rabbit holes and Marfa tours in Google-street-view. Miguel supplements these with text, audio, and short videos recorded during drives in his 1984 Ford F-350 truck.

In one series of moving images, Miguel's dog Daisy lies curled up in the passenger seat, uninterested in the current soundscape— a backdrop of constantly-displaced wind under the familiar patterns of public radio. The visual landscape is partially obscured by windshield decorations— that is, a light spattering of once identifiable bugs. In focus, just beyond the bug blobs, lies a long stretch of road dividing the green-mottled, but mostly yellow and brown landscape. The sun sets on the horizon, a bright, red-orange glow framed by distant clouds. Miguel links the sun's colorful sinking to common motifs found among indigenous arts of the Southwest. While my mind is recovering from this very obvious but formerly unrealized information, Miguel points out a thundercloud occasionally backlit by flashes of lightning. The cloud slowly releases parts of itself and gently floats water down to the mollisol... Mollisol is one of the clay-dense soils used to make adobe, the base material Miguel uses to restore his home— an adobe house that has been with his family for many generations.

Miguel: I moved to Marfa for really one very specific reason. There was a property in my family, a house that I'd been very sentimental about when I was a teenager. But, with things going the way they did in Marfa, and my family not having a lot of wealth, and definitely not having a lot of generational wealth. My, my family said they were going to sell this house and the proceeds were going to be split between many family members, but primarily, my dad and his first cousins. And I gave up on the idea that I'd ever be able to own real estate in Marfa, *ever*. Real estate went through the roof a long time ago. Like, by 1999, it was getting crazy. And I just thought I'll never be able to live there.

And then, come to find out that this house, that I thought had been sold out of my family, like many years ago, actually never sold. And it was abandoned and the county was about to put it up for public auction for unpaid property taxes. And it was at least 10 years of unpaid property taxes. And so this felt like a strike of lightning and I thought. This is it, this is my only chance, I have to jump on this. I realized that the only one who is going to save this house from being demolished and made into a parking lot for an art gallery would have to be me. No one else wanted to deal with it.

And it's a sentimental house to me because it's the house where my grandmother was born. She explained that house to me. But My grandmother walked me all through this structure when I was a kid. And I told her, "I would like to live here one

day.” And she was like, “Oh no, you wouldn't come back to Marfa.” I was like, “No, I will come back to Marfa.” And she was like, “There's nothing for you here.” And I was like, “No, there is, I've been coming here my whole life. Of course, I want to come back here. Of course I'm gonna come back here, but I'd like to have a place to stay, and I would live here.”

So, it's very special to me. And when I realized that I had a chance to save it, I literally just put everything I had into it. I had very little savings. I had just graduated from art school. And in debt from that, but whatever money I had, I literally put into the house to keep it from being auctioned off. But it just felt like I can't believe that I get to reclaim this house and keep it in my family. So, really, it's just about trying to hold onto it and I've been fixing it up and it's been a four year process.

[soft electric guitar music]

When I moved into it, there was no... just walls and a roof there. The windows and doors are really old and many broken. There was no water line. A sewage line was collapsed. Wirings from the thirties and forties primarily, and maybe a little added in the sixties. So moving back has been a lot. Because the house needs so much work and I don't come from money and I don't have intergenerational wealth to put into this house. It's just me. I'm the electrician. I'm the plumber. I've spent, like, the last four years doing all kinds of community, adobe projects, --adobe projects-- in Mexico and in the region so that I could learn, hands-on, how to do it. And learn from actual teachers, from people who have learned for generations. I'm not, I can't be like some Anglo that reads the book and is like, “I read a book, now I'm an expert.” That's just not how I work, it's not how I was taught.

So, I've been learning and it's been a process to learn how to repair a hundred, over a hundred year old adobe home, and to do things the right way and want to preserve it, and want to restore it, and think about the future. That's all natural to me because that's how I was raised and to take my time and learn to do things the correct way and to learn from elders and to respect tradition and respect history. That's how I was raised. So of course there are other ways to do this. But, I decided I was going to restore it the right way, the way that would honor my grandparents and honor my great grandparents and honor the work they put into the house and the land and being there and all of it. And I really have tried to do that, but it's made it a long process. So, I decided I'm just going to throw everything into living in Marfa so that I can work on the house while I'm working other jobs, making money, and saving money, and working on the house. And that's been my whole life for the last four years.

Marfa's very divided, segregated place. You've got the people who are still a majority that are like locals, native people who are like literally native, and of indigenous descent. And then you've got all these people moving there from LA and New York, Berlin, or Zurich or whatever, and buying houses there and all this art tourism and art world tourism and blue-chip galleries. And, I went to art school, so it's not, I don't feel like I'm not part of that also. I'm invested in that system as well. But I went to art school on the East Coast, and, still trying to go to grad school and get an MFA and all of that. But anyway, I moved to Marfa and it is this kind of segregated world. And I've really experienced that and seen that a lot firsthand.

And, I wouldn't have time for dating or anything like that anyway, but I did do this thing when I decided, "Okay, I'm going to live full time in Marfa." I downloaded Scruff and Grindr. I set my parameters to like 250 miles. It was like, I just want to see, am I really like the only trans person? And honestly, at first, it was October of, I think 2017 when I was looking. And it was like, it was really bleak. It was like, Oh wow. Like I knew I wasn't really the only queer person, but I just wanted to know, am I the only FTM, like what's going on? And I get on the apps and I'm like, it looks pretty bleak. And I just was like, okay this is what it is, but I'm not really moving to Marfa to date or to find the love of my life or anything. C'mon, it's a town of 2,000.

Luckily for me, friends will actually come by to this out-of-the-way place, cause I have a lot of friends who are artists, so they've heard of Marfa. They want to go to Marfa. They want to visit it. For a while, it was like, when I first got there, people, even in my friend community, thought it was, like, glamorous, wow, I own a house in Marfa.

Kū'i'olani: And you're like, nah, I don't have a roof... or windows.

Miguel: Some of my friends, some of my acquaintances, man. Yeah. It's like sometimes I post stuff and it's something ridiculous. Like, one time, I posted some pictures from this, like, adobe mansion - like, straight up mansion - it was on the market for a million dollars. And my friends are like, they're like, "Cool, is that your house?" And I'm like, "Okay no." My house is like a 680 square foot, very humble adobe home. And it still doesn't look amazing, even after four years of working on it, I have so much left to do. It is an intense labor of love. And it's taking *everything* I have but I thought it was funny. So I didn't move to Marfa to date.

The thing about living in a place that is majority people of indigenous descent is that actually, even to me, Marfa does have a high percentage of queer people in it. And it's not, it is partly because of the art world, yes. There's a lot of older, white, gay men that move there that are connected to the art world, but there's also, within the

indigenous population, like, I am far from the only trans or two spirit or non-binary, gender queer person. That's cool in a way.

Oh my God. One time I was like, just walking down the street or some tourist was drunk and... yes, I noticed that this tourist was like a trans guy, seemed like they were probably FTM. But one time, this drunk tourist was talking to me and I just gave him some simple directions or something like how to get back to their hotel. And, it's kind of nighttime and they're drunk. And they're like, before they like stumble away, they're like, "You're really brave." And I'm like, "What?" And they're like, "I just think like they tell me basically it's cool that you're here, like rock on or something. And I was like, oh my god, they're literally telling me. Wow. They're acknowledging we're both trans, but they're like "rock on brother, because you live in the middle of nowhere and like a tiny town." And I was like, oh god (laughs).

If you ask anyone who grew up in Marfa, like went to Marfa elementary, middle, and high school there and is queer. I know because I've talked to them. I don't want to tell other people's stories, but they will say that it was hard. They all say that it's hard. And then they will say that maybe they tried to move to a big city, but then they probably came back because nowhere else is like Marfa and we all love it. And it's hard just because the dating pool is small, but that being said, it's not as small as it should be. You know what I'm saying?

Kū'i'olani: Uh, what? (laughing)

Miguel: Just saying that the straight people aren't always as straight as they pretend or whatever, but...

Kū'i'olani: Are you saying this outta personal experience?

Miguel: No, no. People tend to come and go. And some of those people are people that moved to Marfa to be artists and then leave.

Oh. And I started to tell this funny story— when I first got to Marfa, I was just hanging out. I was reconnecting with family. I was hanging out with cousins and those cousins were like, I had to come out to them as Miguel and explain. And they were like, oh. And they would sometimes they'd be like, "Oh, there were people just like you. They were just here." And I'm like, "What do you mean? Just like you?" And they're like and they're telling me like this TV show that was on Amazon. *I Love Dick*, had just been filmed in Marfa.

So there was Joey Solloway, who I think, I'm trying to remember if they identify as non-binary or specifically use he/him, but anyway, the executive, the producer, and director, and they made it a point to hire all of these like trans and queer cast and crew. So there had been a huge, relatively so, large contingent of people working on this TV show, *I Love Dick*. And I missed them, barely, by a week, and everyone was like, all my cousins. They're like, "Oh, you just missed them." I was like, "Don't tell me this stuff!"

Kū'i'olani: You just missed all your people You could have had orgies with them.
(Laughs.)

Miguel: I know. I was like "Don't tell me!" They're like, oh, everyone's like, "Weren't you on that show? Weren't you actually on the show?" I was like, "No, I wasn't."

There's a character on that show. That's, basically, like it's hilariously, very similar to my identity. Like one of the characters on that show is an assigned female at birth person. who's like masculine-of-center, who lives in a trailer, writes experimental screenplays, or something, is like a performance artist. Or has a trailer in the backyard, which I do. Like, an old vintage trailer. And this is also like a Marfa trope, but the truth is there isn't anyone else like that really in Marfa right now who's like Mexican-American, assigned female at birth, like, but also in the art world or like an artist. It's kind of intense. But, I did miss all of that. And that can happen there. That can happen in Marfa.

Kū'i'olani: Ok Is there going to be another season of the show? Is there going to be another opportunity for you to have...?

Miguel: Nope, that ship has sailed, not to use a weird colonial metaphor.

[fade in soft electric guitar music]

My grandmother used to always tell me this thing, she used to get so angry, and she would tell me like. If I - if someone was making fun of me at school or a friend upset me, or someone's being mean to me or didn't let me play with them or whatever, I'd come home and be upset. She'd say, "Why are you upset?" And it'd be like, "Oh, _____ is mean to me." And she'd say, "Why do you care what that person says? Like, you can't listen to them and she would get so mad! But she would say, "You can't listen to them." And she used to have the saying where she would say, "They're just dogs barking, let them bark." And what she meant is that I didn't understand it for so long, but what she meant is that certain people are going to act certain ways, and you can't, you've got to ignore that and just do what you're going to do. And just

understand that. What do dogs do? They bark. That's what they are. That's how they're made. So do you let that bother you? No, you just keep walking. You just walk past them. Dogs are gonna bark. You let them bark and you keep going. Like you have to be strong in who you are and it doesn't matter what other people think of you.

I also know she said that as somebody who is discriminated against a lot, as a Mexican American woman, from a working poor family. She wasn't, she literally couldn't go into certain businesses or go sit in a movie theater or apply for many jobs or go to school. She couldn't go to college. Or it was hard for her to travel. Or she could only do certain things as a married woman. And she took every opportunity she could, but there were so many doors that were just closed to her permanently. For life. And so now I really - living in a small town and I see what she meant. I understand her. I understood her - I grew up with my grandparents, so I feel like I know them really well. But living in where they're from in their town, it's a whole nother level of understanding how they came to be who they are. And I feel like it's changing me in the same way, for better and for worse.

When you live in the place where your ancestors live, you might learn things that you never understood before, that you never could understand. If you're native, you already understand that the land shapes the people. That's why, in native origin stories... or I was going to say cosmologies, but that's the word that Anglo culture uses to look at it. In stories of how people came to be, it's always like, where did the people come from? They came from *this place*. And, so when you live in a place you really can understand how that place shaped your ancestors and all people, really. You start to really see that and understand that.

[fade out electric guitar, fade in sound of rain and wind in the desert, followed by sounds of chickens, roosters, and dogs barking in the background]

[HOST NARRATION]

Kū'i'olani: Hawai'i and Marfa are our homes. Places where Miguel and I have inherited the work of our ancestors. Repair/to-do lists— broken lighting fixtures, electrical outlet installations, room insulation... and also their unhealed trauma, heartbreak, and definitely related mental health challenges.

But, from them, we've also inherited joyous endeavor, a unique relationship to place— that is, reciprocal care between land and person, and a hypercolor awareness of

collective histories. We understand ourselves and our queerness through these landscapes.

Island. Desert. Miguel and I live in two places, two concepts used to speak about scarcity, sparseness, and loneliness. Island and desert. These words are often understood as an absence of living things. But as Miguel pointed out the desert is populated with an abundance of life. As indigenous people, that abundance expands beyond what is biological. It includes the names of winds and rains, the origin story of a rock, all of the stories and memories our ancestors filled these spaces with. The richness of being from and living surrounded by this abundance is special. And still we can feel profoundly alone.

The concept of island and desert as normally used, is not exactly correct for the loneliness that I am speaking of. It is the experience of aloneness, contrasted against multigenerational, multidimensional colorful explosions of life. A loneliness that is further accented by witnessing the destruction of that abundance. The appropriation of it for profit. The use of island and desert as an invitation for music festivals, hotels, atomic bombs.

Hawai'i. Marfa. These are places that our queer friends will visit and vacation, but somewhere they would never permanently want to call home. For Miguel and I, it's a unique but similar kind of queer indigenous loneliness: living on a remote tropical island or in a vast alpine desert.

[fade in featured song: "Surftastic" by Slut Pill]

I'm Kū'i'olani Cotchay and thanks for listening to my interview with Miguel Mendías for the Country Queers Podcast. Aloha. E mālama 'oe. Kū kia'i.

[HOST NARRATION]

Rae Garringer [Host]: Hey there, I'm Rae Garringer and next time on Country Queers you'll hear Zach Henningsen's interview with Dana Kaplan who lives on unceded Abenaki territory in Burlington, Vermont. Dana Kaplan is the Executive Director of Outright Vermont, where they help young queer and trans folks discover themselves and healthy peer connections, strengthen families, and transform schools, communities, and systems. When not working, Dana's best time is spent

making music, fermenting food, people watching, and hanging out with his spouse and their two kids. Here's an excerpt from their conversation:

Dana Kaplan: “A piece of being queer and trans in a rural space is like, creativity and innovation. I think that like, I mean.... Burlington, for example, like at this point, there's not a designated queer bar - as just an example of one of the ways that we find community and social connection and like, the spaces that we gather in. And so instead, it's like, creating queer and trans space, in other ways, and in other in other formats. And there's something that I think is really cool and exciting and joyful about that.”

Rae Garringer [Host]: This episode was created and produced by Kū'i'olani Cotchay , with support from HB Lozito from Out in the Open, and myself. Our fabulous sound designer for all of Season 2 is Hideo Higashibaba. Audio editing in this episode by Kū'i'olani and myself.

Endless thanks to our brilliant editorial advisory dream team: Hermelinda Cortés, Lewis Raven Wallace, and Sharon P. Holland. Sharon was the editorial advisor for this episode, thank you so much Sharon. And thanks most of all to Miguel for sharing your story with us all, And to Kū'i'olani for this really beautiful episode you produced!

Our Featured Song on this episode is “Surftastic” by Slutpill. Slutpill is a Whitesburg, Kentucky based band made up of Carrie Carter, Paulina Vasquez, and Mitchella Phipps, you can find them on soundcloud. Additional music in this episode is by Tommy Anderson!

If you liked what you heard, please subscribe, rate, and review the Country Queers podcast, it helps other listeners find us. You can find all of our episodes and more about the project at www.countryqueers.com. While you're there, you can also sign up for our mailing list and please consider signing up to be a sustaining supporter of Country Queers on our Patreon page. This project would not exist without the contributions of our listeners and supporters.

You can also find this episode on the website of Out in the Open, our co-facilitators of this collaborative Season 2 adventure, at www.weareoutintheopen.org. While you're there, check out and connect with their rad work building power of rural LGBTQ+ folks in the northeast!

Until next time...stay queer out there, friends!

[END]