

## Episode 3.27 Killjoy Survival Kits

April 26, 2019

Hannah (Host): [00:00](#) [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. And we've got another, let's say, genuinely mini one coming your way this week. I am, as appears to be my M.O. in 2019, heading off on another trip. Leaving town tomorrow for two weeks heading to Toronto, and Ottawa, and Guelph, and then Toronto again. Doing the old Ontario circuit. I'm looking forward to the trip. I'm going to see a lot of friends. I'm going to see some family. I'm also, while I'm in Toronto going to be doing a free public event on *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*. This is one of the last events I'll be doing around *Refuse*. Super excited to be doing something in Toronto. And this will also be the only *Refuse* event that Erin and Julia and I are all able to attend, so it will be the one event with all of the editors, which is really delightful. Each of us is going to be in conversation with one of the contributors to the book. So I'll be in conversation with Phoebe Wang, Julie will be in conversation with Dorothy Palmer, and Erin will be talking to Gwen Benaway. And I think it's going to be great. It's at the Toronto Reference Library on Tuesday at May 7th starting at 6:30 PM. And yeah, it's free because it's the library and libraries are great and you can find out more about that on the Toronto Public Library website. So onto the topic of this minisode; I talked in the last minisode about podcasting and because this is the, sort of, final cluster where I talk in all kinds of, I dunno, self-reflexive ways about public scholarship and feminist scholarship and the different kinds of work this project is doing, and the different kinds of work this project is engaging with, I'm going to use these last couple of mini sites to keep thinking about specifically genre as a feminist and knowledge creation. The last minisode is going to be a long awaited (by me) minisode about the anecdote and the kinds of knowledge that anecdotes are capable of creating. But that one's going to require a little bit more, sort of, reading and research on my part, and because I am traveling this week, it was let's say less than feasible and so this week I'm cheating. Cheating? This week I'm talking about something I've already done the reading for, but I'm still excited to talk about so well let's go. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans].

Hannah (Host): [02:43](#) I want to talk about feminist killjoy survival kits. If this is an unfamiliar turn of phrase for you, don't worry. It was an unfamiliar turn of phrase for me until last week when I read, for the first time, Sarah Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life*. For those of

you who aren't familiar with Ahmed's work, you're going to get a much better sense of her next week when she is a guest on *Secret Feminist Agenda*. If you are anything like me, that information just made you squeal, maybe quietly, but nonetheless. I was so thrilled to have the chance to talk to Ahmed, whose work I have been reading since I started grad school. It's been incredibly formative for me, and a big part of what's been formative about her work for me is the way that she has really focused on how a feminist knowledge needs to be open and available knowledge, and thinks about that at the level of language as well as the level of medium. She keeps a well known blog for example, and her most recent book *Living a Feminist Life*, it's still a scholarly book. It's published with a scholarly press, but it is, I mean it reads differently. Well what we talk about this in the interview, but it's a different genre of writing, or a different style of writing than than you really will have encountered in a lot of other scholarship, if you've read a lot of other scholarship and if you haven't, I would suggest picking up this book and giving it a try, if you're interested in hearing what one of the most important living feminist thinkers has to say about living a feminist life, because I think it really is quite an accessible book. And one of the most striking parts about it for me is that it has has a double conclusions: Conclusion One and Conclusion Two. Conclusion One is called "A Killjoy Survival Kit" and Conclusion Two is called "A Killjoy Manifesto." I'm super interested in manifestos, and we could have a whole episode about the manifesto and the kinds of rhetorical and political work that manifestos do, but I feel like that's a a bigger topic for another day. Let's call it a topic for season four. You know what? Actually I'm gonna write that down: topic for season four. But the survival kit resonated with me for all kinds of reasons, including that we've talked about survival kits on this very podcast. I believe we've talked about emotional earthquake kits, and the idea of what it is that you stockpile or gather to care for yourself in moments that are really, really hard. The feminist killjoy survival kit is that same kind of idea, a list of the things that you need to survive, in this case, the very difficult and often exhausting work of being a feminist killjoy, and particularly of committing your life to that work of making that part of how you live your feminist life. So let me read you a quick paragraph out of this description of a, of the killjoy survival kit. Ahmed writes, "we could think of this feminist survival kit as a form of feminist self care. However, to think of a killjoy survival kit as self care might seem to be a neoliberal agenda, a way of making feminism about the resilience of individuals. I discussed the problem of resilience in chapter seven, the way in which we are asked to become resilient so we can take more, more oppression, more pressure,

more work. But this is our problem. Feminism needs feminists to survive. We might still need to be able to take it, the pressure we are put under when we refuse to take more, when we refuse to put up with a world. Feminism needs feminists to survive. My killjoy survival kit is assembled around this sentence." You can really hear the, the echoes of Audre Lorde in this, in Ahmed's work, and those echoes, you know, that, that subtext becomes text a couple of paragraphs down when she literally quotes Lorde and talks about Lorde's quite well known argument that caring for the self is not self-indulgence, but is an act of political warfare. And of course we need to think about the complexities of self care and the way that it is turned into a neoliberal agenda, particularly when it's rendered synonymous with forms of, of capitalist indulgence, and the way that self care as warfare signifies differently for you know, a Black lesbian like Lorde than it does for you know, for, for other subjects than it does when oriented around heterosexuality or whiteness, for example. And so there's an insistence in the survival kit that we are talking about survival, that we are talking about what allows us to keep going when we are doing hard work, when we are doing the hard work of refusal of saying "no" to the patriarchy, of saying "no" to oppression, and how exhausting that can become and how it seems to never quite be done, to never be even close to done. And so the things that go into the killjoy survival kit are things that, things that keep you going. So Ahmed talks through the various things that are in her survival kit. She talks about books, about sort of surrounding yourself with, what she calls, "kickass feminist books." She talks about things. This actually might be my favorite passage in this conclusion. She talks about how, in her words, "convention is a thing maker. The wedding photographs, the signs of a reproductive life that can gather like weights on walls. We need to have things to, things that gather around reminders of a feminist life, happy objects, even. Reminders of connections, shared struggles, shared lives." She writes, "surround yourself with feminism." She has other things. Killjoys need tools. I mean, one of my tools is a microphone, one of her tools as a blog, your tools might be different. Killjoys need time. That's both taking the time, giving yourself the time to do the things that need to be done, but also giving yourself time out. Killjoys need life. That's the messy occupying business of living life, of the life around you, of the world around you including, in her definition, relationships with animals which bring the sort of external force of life into your work. The other items that Ahmed has in her killjoy survival kit are permission notes, other killjoys, humor, feelings, and bodies. And a thing that really comes through, especially those humorous feelings and bodies, and the way those things tie together is that is that one of the

tools in the survival kit is joy, is the possibility of joy, is finding those moments of joyfulness, of pleasure, of indulgence, and that that's part of the work. That part of the work of the killjoy is not just killing the joys of the patriarchy, is not just refusing those joys, but is also finding other joys, right? You kill the joys of the patriarchy so that you make space for feminist joy, because feminist joy can't survive or thrive in the context of the joys of the patriarchy. You know, they're, they're mutually exclusive. I can't take pleasure and joy in my body when the joy of the patriarchy is telling me that my body is, is wrong and aberrant. Those things are, that's a, that's a zero sum game, so to speak.

Hannah (Host):

[10:41](#)

So I've been thinking a lot since I read this, this beautiful conclusion about killjoy survival kits, I've been thinking a lot about what it means to pack your own survival kit, to surround yourself with things I mean, that don't just let you survive, but they'll let you survive as a killjoy, which I think is the really key and crucial difference, right? It's the killjoy that needs to survive. It's the capacity to continue being a killjoy that needs help surviving, that needs help being made sustainable. And those are certainly books, both, both old books that I return to, but even more so for me in recent years, new books that I discover as I expand my reading and, and think about the world in different ways. I don't think I have, in the way that, that Ahmed describes, a sort of personal collection of the feminist books that I carry around with me either, either physically or intellectually, but I think that I'm starting to put that together. I'm starting to think about what those texts would be for me. Her description of the need for other killjoys also really resonated, because when I think back to starting this podcast, that was undeniably part of the impetus, was the way that your capacity to keep being a killjoy really relies on having other people who are doing this work in conversation with you for various reasons, including the way that you kind of ungaslight one another via the, via the conversations via shared knowledge via a scene one another's experiences and the work, the work that you're doing. There's also a way that the survival kit, in how Ahmed describes it, sort of, opened out the capacity to think about things I might not normally have thought of as part of my, my personal killjoy survival kit, for example, cats. That, that the presence of these other joyful living creatures in your life, I mean joyful might not be how a lot of people describe cats, but, but they are joyful. You know, animals are joyful in that sense of bringing a, sort of, raw presence of, of life into your world. And they bring me a huge amount of joy and comfort, and in that way become themselves part of the feminist work that I'm doing, that I'm capable of doing. And as I've been thinking about

the tools, and things, and books, and joys that make up my survival kit, I've also been thinking about the other feminists in my life and how their survival kits are different. How their survival kits might be beautiful stationery and pens and pencils, or their survival kits are 5:00 AM kickboxing classes, or their survival kits are baking increasingly complex and elaborate loaves of bread for people that they love. You know we, we put together the kits that work for us, that bring us joy, that help us survive. I said at the beginning of the episode that I was thinking about, you know, the genres of feminist knowledge creation and it would have been more obvious to think of a manifesto as a genre, as an important feminist genre. But I think we can think of the survival kit as a genre as well, in the sense that it rewrites and reframes the worlds that we build around us to make them signify or make them mean in different ways. For me, starting to think of the world that I am building around myself as my killjoy survival kit has been really exciting and really illuminating, and I thought it might resonate similarly with you. So let me know what's in your survival kit. I want to hear about it. All right. Speaking of self care as warfare, let's hear from Kaarina. [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Kaarina:

[14:45](#)

Hello and welcome to Kaarina's Cozy Self Care Corner. Today's segment is going to be a bit longer and a bit more different than what I usually talk about. Last week I was lucky enough to attend a lecture by Dr. Charmaine Nelson, who's an art historian who currently works out of Montreal. And Dr. Nelson's current work is on runaway, or fugitive, slave ads in 18th and 19th century Canadian and Jamaican newspapers. So often slave owners would post ads about people who had run away, hoping to get them back. So that would include, include a description of their age, their name, their clothing, their physical appearance, their skills, and offers of rewards for information or for capture. This was a brilliant lecture and if you're an academic, I'm sure you know that, you know, you hear a lot of great lectures and read a lot of great pieces, but then every once in a while there's something that just kind of shatters you in a good way, in a bad way, that just is unforgettable and that really, really has an influence on the way that you think and work, and that's how Dr. Nelson's lecture felt for me. And one of the points that she made is that Canada has a strategic cultivation of ignorance around slavery. So Canada, as she pointed out, has worked very hard to emphasize the 30 years in which the Underground Railroad was active, but has worked equally, if not harder, to erase the 200 years in which Canadians owned slaves and participated in slavery. So a lot of her work is about recognizing slavery in Canada and also recognizing the effort that Canada has undergone to hide this history and uphold a notion of

Canada as good. Right? I've been thinking about this a lot, and part of it I think is that there is a self care in the sense of community care, like the maintenance of our communities and the care of ourselves as empathetic and active human beings. There's a care and releasing and unlearning some of the things that are harmful. So I propose kind of releasing the smugness that we feel as Canadians, that many of us feel, when we compare ourselves to the United States. And part of that is recognizing our history of slavery and our history of colonization, and the kinds of racism and abuses that we are perpetrating right now, or that are occurring within Canada. So thinking about that kind of defensive feeling you have when people talk about Canada as racist or settler colonial, or think about that kind of desire, you have to cling to our betterness in comparison to other nations, especially the United States. Like who does that kind of discourse serve and who does it do a disservice to? And in this case, I see it as dismissing and disserving the people who have experienced, survived, resisted, and called out racism, slavery, colonization, anti-blackness within our borders. And recognizing too that this smugness was taught to us; it's not something that for the most part, we came by on our own. It's something that was instilled on us through our education system, through the media, through political discourse. So I mean, don't feel like you're the worst person in the world for thinking that Canada was better when that was what you were taught, but be prepared to unlearn that and to think critically about why that was taught to you. That's something I'm doing this week. I'm trying to unpack my own gut reactions to things, whether it's smugness, whether it's defensiveness, and thinking about the process behind those feelings and the consequences of those feelings and how I can improve upon those in order to be a better person. Shout out to the amazing work that Charmaine Nelson is doing. Shout out to the many of people who didn't need to hear this self care corner, who have never or who have not for a long time felt these feelings of smugness and defensiveness, but also a invitation to unlearn with me, I guess. So have a great weekend. [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Hannah (Host):

[19:47](#)

As always, you can find show notes and the rest of the episodes of *Secret Feminist Agenda* on [secretfeministagenda.com](http://secretfeministagenda.com). You can follow me on Twitter @hkpmcgregor. You can follow Kaarina @kaarinasaurus and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. As per usual, you also can and should rate and review the show, "should," "should" is strongly put, you can rate and review the show and I would appreciate it if you did. My rating amalgamator tells me, that's right, "amalgamator?" Not sure if that's a real word. Anyway, it

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

tells me that there are no new reviews of *Secret Feminist Agenda* this week. Heartbreak Emoji. The podcast theme song is "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans off their album Chub Rub. You can download the entire album on [freemusicarchive.org](http://freemusicarchive.org) or follow them on Facebook. Kaarina's theme song is "I Will" by Mitski. *Secret Feminist Agenda* is recorded on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh first nations where I'm grateful to live and work. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]