

**“It’s Hot in Here with Silver Lining”:
Analyzing Radical Environmentalist and Abolitionist Resistance
Through Audio Journalism**

**Master’s Thesis
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***Please note that all episodes of “It’s Hot In Here with Silver Lining” can be accessed at the following url:
<https://tinyurl.com/SlvrLng>**

Introduction

I was first introduced to the concept of contemporary abolitionism while starting as a campaigner for the nonprofit Amazon Watch in Oakland, CA. My boss, who led our work to pressure banks to divest from oil and gas projects on Indigenous territories in the Amazon, casually mentioned that she was an abolitionist during a conversation we were having one day about someone who was being sent to prison. I was raised as a Quaker (though am no longer practicing), and so had heard of the term, but only in the context of the 19th century movement to end chattel slavery. I had read Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and previously worked as a tour guide at Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary, an abandoned prison that hosts exhibits and encourages the public to think about the impacts and structure of the current carceral system in the United States. I was familiar with the assertion that the modern day prison industrial complex is a kind of continuation of slavery, but I had not actually encountered people who identified as modern-day abolitionists. My boss encouraged me to listen to an interview with Mariame Kaba, and, as the George Floyd Rebellion began that summer, I started to think more deeply about how we might build a world without prisons, police, borders, or pipelines.

In my work as a campaigner, we often spoke about Kaba's reminder that "hope is a discipline"¹. I sometimes worried that that kind of thinking might be enabling ultimately fruitless or unstrategic campaigning choices; choices that served more to prop up an endless cycle of financial support from donors than to actually put a dent in the global fossil fuel economy. In an Environmental Justice class I took with Dr. Shakara Tyler during my time at SEAS, I came across an interview with Mariame Kaba on Episode 19 of the *Beyond Prisons* podcast.² During the interview with hosts Brian Sonenstein and Kim Wilson, Kaba explains that hope is "believing something in spite of the evidence, and watching the evidence change." She also encourages people to trust others until they've proven themselves untrustworthy. In the context of pushing global superpowers like banks to divest from fossil fuels, this can feel like almost paradoxical advice. Banks so often do the minimum possible to get credit in the public's eye for being "green" and then continue business as usual, adjusting their public relations rhetoric to present themselves as allies rather than enemies to the environmental justice movement.

Another challenge in our advocacy work involved the sense of doom and panic that plagued much of our campaign rhetoric. We often spoke about the impending collapse of major ecosystems (for example, the "savanification" loop of the Amazon rainforest due to unsustainable levels of deforestation³), and the loss of feasible time to avoid hitting over 2

¹ Kaba, Mariame, "We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice"

² Sonenstein, B., & Wilson, K. (2021, March 10). Hope Is a Discipline (Feat. Mariame Kaba) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Beyond Prisons*. Shadowproof.

<https://www.beyond-prisons.com/home/hope-is-a-discipline-feat-mariame-kaba>

³ The Climate Reality Project, "What are climate change tipping points?"

degrees Celsius of global warming before the end of the 21st century⁴. These challenges are real, and monumental, but framing our work to protect Indigenous autonomy and limit fossil fuel usage as the “solution” to evade catastrophic ecological shifts did us and our donors a disservice; it put us in a constant position of overpromising and under delivering, without making space for the reality that *many other projects* needed to happen alongside ours for any hope of impact to occur. This urgent framing is a remnant of white supremacy culture⁵ and an extremely difficult pattern to evade in any kind of non-profit advocacy work, where funding is limited and competitive and often requires exorbitant amounts of time and accounting for. Unfortunately, this urgent framing risked inspiring a sense of hopelessness when inadequate change was reached by the “deadline”, and directed exasperated potential supporters to search for projects that showed more visible or faster results, often reached at the expense of moving in tandem with other groups.

Observing this performance repeat itself over and over again, I’ve come to distrust the strategy of *negotiation* with large institutions, and am particularly mindful of the ways that advocacy nonprofits describe their work and progress. I’ve become more interested in what is possible when organizing is not so directly tied to funding and is happening outside of the typical nonprofit funding spheres. What happens when people are willing to take big risks together – both legal and physical – to accomplish shared goals? In 2020, at the same time that I was seeing negotiation fail as a strategy, I was also seeing direct action succeed: seemingly overnight, people all over the world were rioting for Black life. The names of people murdered by police were suddenly known in households across the country, and conversations about defunding the police were finally being taken more seriously. People in leadership were relinquishing power and responding to public pressure in tangible ways, stepping down from political positions and passing policies and budgets that limited police power. For a brief moment, the true power of the people was evident — change could happen instantaneously with enough will. In response to all of this, I found myself drawn to new strategies for resistance to ecological collapse and social injustice: engaging in *targeted direct action*, and practicing *prefigurative politics*⁶ with the people and communities with whom I share affinity.

This shift is, fundamentally, relational. Undergoing it, I feel less of the sense of chaotic urgency that plagued my initial orientation to environmental justice work. Instead, I see myself as part of a much longer history. Kaba emphasizes this in her interview on *Beyond Prisons*, as does Dr. Kyle Whyte in his piece “Time as Kinship,”⁷ in which he distinguishes the concept of linear time

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report, March 2023 update on information published originally in 2021, *Summary for Policymakers*, p. 20: “Projected cumulative future CO2 emissions over the lifetime of existing and planned fossil fuel infrastructure, if historical operating patterns are maintained and without additional abatement, are approximately equal to the remaining carbon budget for limiting warming to 2°C with a likelihood of 83% (high confidence).”

⁵ Jones, Kenneth and Tema Okun, “White Supremacy Culture”

⁶ Dixon, Chris, “Another Politics: Talking Across Today’s Transformative Movements”

⁷ Whyte, Kyle, “Time as Kinship”

from that of “kinship time.” Linear time, which he points out is often used in climate change narratives, frames time as a diminishing resource, leading to swift actions that may neglect responsibilities to vulnerable communities. Kinship time, in contrast, understands climate change as a result of changing relationships; it emphasizes shared responsibility and the importance of restoring and maintaining kinship relationships between both human and non-human entities. The stronger these relationships, the more able a society is to coordinate and adapt to change; acting without consent, trust, accountability, or reciprocity often leads to speedy but ultimately ineffective “solutions”⁸. To me, this looks like building cultures of care and critique where I live. It looks like openly questioning — and inviting others to join me in questioning — the current status quo. Placing myself on a much longer time scale enables me to see the slow relationship-building and culture-shifting work I’m doing now as worthwhile enough to put real intention into, and as something that will have an impact long after I’m dead.

While taking a course on building community power with Michelle Martinez during my time at SEAS, I was exposed to the work of Benjamin Case, a writer who I had also heard interviewed on the *It's Going Down* podcast⁹. Case’s book “Street Rebellion: Resistance Beyond Violence & Nonviolence” reexamines the prevailing narrative in social justice theory that “strategic nonviolence” is the most effective form of resistance and changemaking¹⁰. Having been raised Quaker — a group with a rich history of civil disobedience — I had grown up with the saying “there is no way to peace, peace is the way”. Pacifism was to be employed at all costs, and anything that could be construed as “violent” was inherently ineffective¹¹. While taking Peace and Conflict Studies coursework with prominent Quaker activist George Lakey during my undergraduate studies at Swarthmore College, I was exposed to the work of Gene Sharp, who Case critiques in his book. Sharp is renowned for his extensive work on nonviolent resistance, particularly his influential “198 Methods of Nonviolent Action”, and has identified a number of nonviolent tactics that he argues could be used to achieve many kinds of political or social goals (in fact, as part of my work with Lakey, I contributed research to an extensive database¹² of exemplary nonviolent campaigns that had employed Sharp’s methods). In “Street Rebellion”, Case also critiques the work of acclaimed academics Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, who wrote “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict” which presents empirical evidence showing that nonviolent resistance campaigns are more effective than violent ones in achieving political change¹³. Case challenges Chenoweth and Stephan’s

⁸ Whyte, Kyle, “Too Late for Indigenous Climate Justice”

⁹ It's Going Down. "Benjamin Case on Street Rebellions, Beyond Violence and Non-Violence." *It's Going Down*, 25 June 2021, <https://itsgoingdown.org/benjamin-case-on-street-rebellions-beyond-violence-and-non-violence/>.

¹⁰ Case, Benjamin. *Street Rebellion*. AK Press, 2022.

¹¹ For an in-depth discussion of the term “violence” in relation to social justice and environmental movements, see pg. 69 of Andreas Malm’s “How to Blow Up a Pipeline”

¹² Global Nonviolent Action Database (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/>)

¹³ Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria J. Stephan. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. Columbia University Press, 2011.

methodology, re-examining their research, analyzing global protest data, and interviewing riot participants himself, to show that tactics considered violent and therefore unstrategic by prevailing social justice theorists have actually been critical in moving major campaigns forward. Case argues that while strategic nonviolence has become popularized, it often dismisses the potential effectiveness and historical importance of more confrontational tactics, such as rioting and physical resistance, in achieving social change. He goes further to argue that the massive institutional acclaim awarded to scholars and thinkers like Chenoweth, Stephan, and Sharp, as well as the establishment of entire fields of research such as “Peace and Conflict Studies” — all of which reifies the legitimacy of “nonviolence” as a valid form of struggle, and condemns “violence” as invalid — is actually a strategic misremembering of movement history that ultimately protects the interests of the global elite by placing limitations around the scope and therefore power of “viable” forms of resistance.

At a quick glance, doing something as drastic as property damage might be written off as impulsive, unstrategic, or "not in right relations" with the people whose property is being destroyed. But this framing mischaracterizes the targets of actions (ie, those seeking to profit from the destruction of life, land, and water) as just as equally entitled to protection, respect, and comfort as those seeking to protect life, land, and water. Property destruction and rioting are often dismissed as violent and unstrategic, nevermind the violence that the infrastructure projects or institutions targeted by direct action campaigns are actually responsible for (devastating environmental damages, militarized police, or the displacement of vulnerable populations from their homes are all examples of the kinds of violence perpetrated by extractive infrastructure projects that direct action campaigns are subsequently labeled as "violent" for targeting).

Direct action as a strategy appeals to me because it places the power to change a given outcome directly in the hands of the people taking action, rather than imagining it as in the hands of some higher up authority figure that people then have to appeal to. Usually that appeal is done through negotiation, shame, or spectacle — all tactics that I have used during my time as a professional campaigner. Direct action requires the people engaging in it to rely on one another, rather than on authority figures, to accomplish a given task (for example: instead of asking pipeline executives to stop construction, people using direct action as a tactic might actually directly block a pipeline from being built by setting up an encampment on its construction easements, or destroying construction vehicles). Because the legal and physical risks of taking those kinds of actions are usually much heavier, direct action requires greater trust building among participants and longer-term accountability and commitment to a cause than do other forms of resistance. In this way, I think it is a form of struggle that is arguably more aligned with the kind of long-term kinship-building that Indigenous orientations to sustainability advocate.

Negotiation over the fate of the fossil fuel economy (and other global resources) is often lauded by academics, policy-makers, and organizational leaders (the bourgeoisie) as a primary strategy

for mitigating ecological collapse because it maintains the illusion of hierarchy and the requirement of appealing to authority to accomplish change. In an abolitionist world without police, borders, prisons, or pipelines, I imagine a much more horizontal form of conflict resolution and decision making than what currently exists in the United States and elsewhere, where resources (both natural and intangible) are shared at a highly localized level, and communities reach decisions autonomously, independently of a state or centralized authority. The reality that we live in a world dominated by state violence, however, creates a dilemma: how do we change material conditions *now*? A prefigurative political approach to the problem of ecological collapse would necessitate direct action against its drivers, while an approach oriented to outcomes and less concerned with aligning means with ends would permit negotiation with state and market authority. I think that, especially in academic and policymaking circles that declare themselves abolitionist, direct action should be more of a priority, and negotiation should be less so. Scholarship and rhetoric that uplifts the strategic importance of direct action, rather than dismisses, could contribute to encouraging a movement culture that prioritizes direct action as a strategy over negotiation.

One other takeaway from Mariame Kaba's writings that Dr. Shakara Tyler shared with me had to do with the question of blueprints, which is also something that Peter Gelderloos, whose work will be discussed more in depth shortly, addresses in his book *The Solutions Are Already Here*. Kaba points out that the urge to hide our process, or the *way* we got from point A to point B, the *labor* involved in producing it, is a capitalistic one. Replacing one finished product with another, without regard for how it was formed or how we might create it ourselves (ie, sharing the means of production), is ultimately harmful and unhelpful to the process of building mutual accountability and liberation. This is a culture and a mindset, not just a value; it shows up in the way we present ourselves to others, in our ability to be vulnerable and authentic with one another.

Moving away from blueprints is important because it enables us to push for an abolitionist world without having all of the pieces in place beforehand. If we need everything planned out perfectly beforehand, we will never begin. I think that the process of destroying an old system is inherently constructive, as actions that challenge authoritarianism, carcerality, and exploitation—however small—require us to imagine and build a world without these elements. While Kaba cautions against “highlighting” any specific models of resistance for fear of characterizing them as somehow more effective or relevant than any other, I find myself curious to learn about and compare and contrast examples. This includes, especially, examining struggles that employ direct action in accomplishing their goals. In doing so, and in sharing my findings with others, I hope to clarify my own understanding of what makes environmental justice work effective and impactful, and to help and encourage others in finding more clarity on this as well. My work at SEAS for the past two years, and the work of this thesis, is to do just that.

Methodology

In January of 2023, I began to broadcast a weekly environmental justice radio show on 88.3 WCBN FM, the University of Michigan's student and community-run radio station. My show, called "It's Hot in Here with Silver Lining", was a revived version of a former SEAS student radio show called "It's Hot In Here" that had broadcast from 2008 to 2020, under the guidance of Dr. Rebecca Hardin. In addition to doing a live broadcast each week, I uploaded slightly more polished versions of each episode to a Spotify feed, accompanied by brief descriptions and relevant music and content references. Every episode began with the tagline: "Hello, hello, hello, you're listening to 88.3 WCBN FM and this is It's Hot in Here with Silver Lining; I'm your host, Silver Lining, and this is a show about how people all over the world are fighting to protect life, land, water, and one another in the midst of ecological collapse." Unlike the original "It's Hot In Here" podcast, my version focused less on the field of sustainability more broadly, and more on providing specific snapshots of current environmentalist and abolitionist direct action campaigns, as well as the major theoretical issues or questions they grapple with.

Early on in my time at SEAS, I helped bring aforementioned writer Peter Gelderloos to campus to speak about his newly-released book, *The Solutions Are Already Here*, with a small group of students from other schools around campus. At the time (the Fall of 2022), a large amount of public attention in Michigan was focused on the Camp Grayling National Guard training base located in Grayling, Michigan. The National Guard wanted to expand the base to be twice the size of Chicago by annexing an additional 253 square miles of state forest land from public use, against the wishes of multiple groups. We took the opportunity of Gelderloos' talk to also feature speakers who were deeply involved in kicking off a campaign against the expansion of Camp Grayling, as the work they were doing was emblematic of some of the "solutions" that Gelderloos had written about in his book.

Taking advantage of the fact that Gelderloos was visiting campus, I asked him if he'd be willing to do an interview with me for my future radio show, and he generously obliged. Our discussion can be heard in an episode titled "Solutions to Ecological Collapse, with Peter Gelderloos"¹⁴. Explaining the premises for his book, he posited that history has thoroughly demonstrated that all states are inherently ecocidal, and that "solutions" to climate collapse *must* and *are* coming from non-state actors, rather than the market. In addition to echoing some of the aforementioned critiques of non-violence and praising the effectiveness of direct action as a strategy, Gelderloos outlined 3 main categories of non-state solutions to ecological collapse that he's encountered in his own research: blocking destructive projects, building autonomy and creating survival systems outside of capitalism, and strengthening global solidarity and building infrastructure without

¹⁴ Gelderloos, Peter. "Solutions to Ecological Collapse, with Peter Gelderloos." It's Hot in Here with Silver Lining, October 2023, Spotify, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/6yLOyrvWF7XztE9W5yPQ6l?si=fe292bf3a6b642e2>

regard to state borders. These three categories are crucial for ecological stability and resilience because they prevent irreversible damage to ecosystems and biodiversity, promote sustainable practices that enhance community resilience to environmental crises while reducing reliance on ecologically harmful industries, and strengthen capacity for collective action to address transnational environmental challenges while also challenging capitalist expansionism. Advocating for decentralized and autonomous forms of organization, Gelderloos envisioned a world where communities can reclaim agency over their lives and resources, challenge the dominance of centralized authority and build a more just, equitable, and sustainable society.

Being a part of that discussion helped guide my thinking around what to do with my time at SEAS: I decided that I wanted to do public-facing research about current environmental campaigns that fit into these three categories. I wanted to create content that highlighted the relationship between abolitionism and sustainability, and that showed how fights against authoritarian state control were also fights for a livable future. I wanted to tell empowering stories that showed what people are doing *right now* to stop ecological collapse, and that also countered authoritarianism, carcerality, and exploitation. I have generally used Gelderloos' framework to organize my research for "It's Hot in Here With Silver Lining", highlighting struggles that fall into three categories, and discussing the theoretical or ethical questions that emerge from them: Blocking Destructive Projects; Building Autonomy; and Strengthening Global Solidarity.

As this writing is a summation of the work I did for "It's Hot in Here With Silver Lining" and not an exhaustive account of the research that went into every single episode, I am looking at a sampling of different episodes from the past 1.5 years and dividing them into the aforementioned categories of resistance for deeper analysis. To determine the sample episodes, I used the show's analytics to find a list of the most listened-to stories, adding in a few more personal favorites that I had either never published, or that didn't happen to perform highly with listeners.

In analyzing the transcripts of the episodes from each category, I looked for the key themes of each campaign or discussion, and then asked the following questions:

- On content:
 - What were the biggest challenges and successes for campaign or movement participants?
 - How does this story relate to abolitionism?
 - What does this story indicate about the future of movements for social and environmental justice?
- On process:
 - What themes from this story appear in others? What themes are unique to it?
 - What, if anything, was challenging about the process of doing research for this episode? Were there any gaps in information that would have been helpful to fill?

- What was my goal in sharing this story with a broader audience?
- What are other areas of study that I would like to learn more about after doing this research?

The shows are divided in the following three categories:

Blocking Destructive Projects: These are episodes about grassroots movements that are successfully blocking or slowing projects and practices that are harmful to ecological and social sustainability, such as deforestation, resource hoarding, or fossil fuel infrastructure development. These movements often operate outside the mainstream media and NGO circuits, which can be a reason for their limited visibility, and which drove my decision to cover them. This list of episodes includes several stories about resistance to attempts to raze forestland to make way for police and military training centers (the movement to Stop Cop City and Defend the Atlanta Forest in Atlanta, GA; the campaign to stop the expansion of the Camp Grayling National Guard base in Grayling, MI), an episode about resistance to attempts to blow up a contaminated superfund site near a vulnerable community for the benefit of a city's wealthiest residents (the campaign to Stop the Roof Depot Demo in Minneapolis, MN), and an episode about resistance to attempts to hoard and control access to water among small and medium-scale farmers in rural France (Soulèvement de la Terre). The episode titles and publication months are as follows:

- **Enviro-Abolitionism and the Defend the Atlanta Forest Movement (January 2023)**
- From Atlanta to Grayling, Stop the US War Machine! (February 2023)
- **Updates from Atlanta: The Fifth Week of Action to Defend Weelaunee (March 2023)**
- Stop the Roof Depot Demo! (April 2023)
- **Block Cop City Report Back (November 2023)**
- Les Soulèvements de la Terre, aka Earth Uprisings (April 2024)

Building Autonomy: These are episodes about the ways that some communities, particularly Indigenous and marginalized groups, are developing alternative ways to sustain themselves outside of capitalist frameworks. This includes traditional agricultural methods and self-sufficiency practices that contrast sharply with industrial agriculture and the exchange of money for goods and services. The episodes here include an interview that was done in Spanish with a member of a community of campesino farmers resisting displacement from paramilitary and state violence in rural Colombia (the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, located in northwestern Antioquia), and an interview with documentary filmmakers producing a feature length film about mutual aid in North America (Ypsilanti, MI based storytellers Payton McDonald and Leah Ayer). The episode titles and publication months are as follows:

1. Paramilitarism and Multinational Extractivism in Colombia: A Musical Interview with Bladimir Arteaga (October 2023)
2. **The Elements of Mutual Aid (November 2023)**

Strengthening Global Solidarity: These are episodes covering campaigns and questions around building solidarity across different social and geographic boundaries. This can look like sharing resources and organizing in ways that challenge state-imposed boundaries and categories. This list includes two episodes about foreign involvement in Israel's genocide on Gaza, one of which is an interview with an anti-zionist military analyst (Adi Callai's thoughts on what happened before, during, and in the aftermath of October 7th, 2023), and one of which is a series of interviews with university students occupying public space to disrupt support for the war (participants in the student encampment for Palestine on the University of Michigan's Central Campus diag). This section also includes a recording of a panel discussion about identity politics held at an anti-repression conference in Pittsburgh, PA, and a recording of a panel discussion about the rhetorical difference between violent and non-violent actions in social justice movements (a recording of a SEAS-sponsored panel discussion I facilitated between two movement participants and two movement lawyers). The episode titles and publication months are as follows:

- Inside the Student Encampment for Palestine at the University of Michigan (April 2024)
- Gaza, with Adi Callai (October 2023)
- Identity Politics in Radical Movements (June 2024)
- **The Role of Violence in Movement Building for Environmental Justice (April 2023)**

In the sections that follow, I provide brief summaries of each [bolded] episode¹⁵ as an example from its broader category, and then analyze them with the aforementioned research questions. After summaries and analysis of relevant episodes, I offer some concluding reflections about this work, including a discussion of how it might be useful for strengthening environmental justice movements going forward, and what topics and research questions came up while completing it that might be expounded upon in the future.

¹⁵ When there are multiple episodes on the same campaign or issue, I provide a summary of their whole.

Campaign Summaries and Analysis

Blocking Destructive Projects

1. Enviro-Abolitionism and the Defend the Atlanta Forest Movement (January 2023)
2. From Atlanta to Grayling, Stop the US War Machine! (February 2023)
3. Updates from Atlanta: The Fifth Week of Action to Defend Weelaunee (March 2023)
4. Stop the Roof Depot Demo! (April 2023)
5. Block Cop City Report Back (November 2023)
6. Les Soulèvements de la Terre, aka Earth Uprisings (April 2024)

The Movement to Defend the Atlanta Forest and Stop Cop City

Episodes 1, 3, and 5 on the above list all center around the movement to Defend the Atlanta Forest (also known as DAF) and Stop Cop City (also known as SCC) based out of Atlanta, Georgia. *Enviro-Abolitionism and the Defend the Atlanta Forest Movement*, which aired in January 2023, was the first deeply-researched episode I broadcast live on WCBN¹⁶. I chose to report on the fight to stop Cop City at that particular moment because it was experiencing a major turning point and rapid increase in public scrutiny following the January 18th, 2023 murder of one of the movement's participants: a young person named Manuel Paez Terán, who used the forest name "Tortugita" with comrades.

The movement to defend the South River Forest in Atlanta — also known as "Weelaunee" for its Indigenous Muskogee name — first began in 2020, when activists learned that the Atlanta City Council had plans to turn over the stewardship of Weelaunee from public to private hands: the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF), a public-private-partnership between the Atlanta Police Department and a number of wealthy corporate sponsors, wants to raze the forest in order to build a 90 million dollar, 85-acre police militarization and training facility there, dubbed "Cop City" by opponents. The compound would not only cause immediate harm to the local ecosystem via the loss of critical forest cover and rainwater absorption, it would also cause harm to communities across the country and world impacted by increasingly militarized police violence¹⁷.

After an intense grassroots campaign to pressure City Council members to #StopCopCity and veto the project failed to prevent it from moving forward, activists took direct action and physically moved into the forest in November of 2021, living in tents and treehouses and

¹⁶ This was following a pilot episode during which I had primarily introduced myself to listeners, offered a brief explanation of my goals for the show, and played music from social justice movements to fill the hour long time slot.

¹⁷ 43% of the police trained at the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center (aka "Cop City") are expected to come from outside the state of Georgia, not only from around the country but also from around the world. ([source](#)). The Atlanta Police Department's GILEE program (which was founded in 1992 and stands for Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange) has a longstanding partnership with the Israeli Defense Forces ([source](#)).

frequently sabotaging construction equipment and infrastructure. This strategy saw great success in stalling the project for over a year, but in December of 2022, the police began ramping up raids and attacks on the occupation. Tortugita, who was shot 57 times by Georgia State Troopers while sitting cross legged inside their tent, had been living in Weelaunee for nearly a year at the time of their death. I had met and spent time with them in the Weelaunee forest while participating in the encampment there myself just five months before they were killed.

Following Tortugita's murder, the Stop Cop City movement escalated rapidly, with participants frequently organizing intense "Weeks of Action" in the forest to disrupt construction of the facility and bring public attention back onto the fight. Importantly, the movement has not presented itself as primarily organized around keeping a forest intact; rather, it seeks to challenge the privatization of public lands for the purposes of increasing state capacity for violence, and frequently calls for an environmentally sustainable and abolitionist future. My guest, Adi Callai, and I use the term "enviro-abolitionism" to describe this unique intersection of environmental and abolitionist activism, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these struggles. The other episodes on Cop City, including *Updates from Atlanta: The Fifth Week of Action to Defend Weelaunee* and *Block Cop City Report Back* offer in-depth coverage of two distinct "actions" – one that took place on March 5th, 2023 and involved a massive group of activists destroying police and construction equipment located in the forest, and the other of which took place on November 13th, 2023 and involved another massive group of activists directly confronting a line of riot police while attempting to enter and disrupt the Cop City construction site.

The Stop Cop City campaign has faced significant challenges, including aggressive legal actions and physical repression by law enforcement. Activists have been charged with domestic terrorism, racketeering (also known "RICO" charges, for The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act of 1970), and — in addition to Tortugita's violent murder by police — have experienced police harassment during protests and direct actions.

Despite these challenges, the movement has seen successes in mobilizing a diverse group of supporters and raising national awareness not only of the specific struggle to prevent the construction of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, but of the broader intersection between environmentalist and abolitionist movements. The campaign's emphasis on creating alternative visions of public safety (ie, protest signs read "we keep us safe") and environmental stewardship ("trees give life; police take it") reflects core abolitionist ideals of transformative justice and community-led solutions. Perhaps key to the movement's success has been its decentralized and organic organizational model, wherein mostly smaller, disparate clusters of people (usually acting in what are called "affinity groups", or small groups of politically and practically like-minded individuals) carry out direct actions on movement targets. Because the effort to stop the project is not tied to any particular organization or leader (or group of leaders, for that matter), it has been especially difficult for law enforcement and other movement opponents to

identify and usurp the activity of participants. Similarly, movement participants have largely adhered to the St. Paul's Principles¹⁸, keeping conflicts internal and outside of the media so as to avoid playing into the state's attempts to weaken the movement by isolating its more radical factions.

In my interview with Adi Callai, we discuss an intense debate that was circling at the time around risk; movement participants and analysts sometimes fall into a trap of blaming the people who take a high-risk action (whether legal or physical) for the state's *response* to that action. Callai draws a parallel between the movement to defend the Atlanta forest and the movement to liberate Palestine; he points out that just as critics blame March 5th saboteurs for placing dozens of music-festival goers at risk after police indiscriminately and illogically began to arrest anyone in an area of the forest over a mile away from where an attack on construction equipment had taken place, many critics of Palestinian insurgent groups blame said insurgents for the illogical and outsized response of Israeli forces on Palestinian civilians. Callai claims that admonitions of inadequate consent in radical, high-risk action planning are a thinly disguised weaponization of a progressive concept against truly liberatory action.

My research and reporting on the movement to Defend the Atlanta Forest and Stop Cop City touches on a number of significant themes and questions related to the future of social and environmental justice work as a whole. The Stop Cop City campaign indicates a growing trend towards intersectional activism, where social and environmental justice movements converge. This approach not only broadens the base of support but also amplifies the impact by addressing multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. The campaign suggests that future movements will increasingly adopt holistic frameworks that integrate diverse struggles, leveraging collective power to challenge systemic issues comprehensively.

Situating the movement to Defend the Atlanta Forest as part of a global struggle against colonialism and highlighting the ways that police militarization and environmental degradation are interconnected forms of state violence, participants bring up important questions for "It's Hot In Here with Silver Lining" listeners to grapple with. How do we honor one another's autonomy while also keeping each other as safe as possible? How do we avoid falling into the narrative traps of our oppressors when they seek to pit us against one another? And how do we practice accurate risk assessment? These are ongoing and inconclusive conversations.

¹⁸ Established and adopted by a diverse array of groups organizing against the Republican National Convention held in St. Paul, MN in 2008, the St Paul Principles are meant to enable different groups with shared goals to work together despite strategic or tactical differences they may hold. They are widely adhered to across movements for environmental and social justice. They are: "(1) Our solidarity will be based on respect for a diversity of tactics and the plans of other groups; (2) The actions and tactics used will be organized to maintain a separation of time or space; (3) Any debates or criticisms will stay internal to the movement, avoiding any public or media denunciations of fellow activists and events; and (4) We oppose any state repression of dissent, including surveillance, infiltration, disruption and violence. we agree not to assist law enforcement actions against activists and others."

Building Autonomy

1. Paramilitarism and Multinational Extractivism in Colombia: A Musical Interview with Bladimir Arteaga (October 2023)
2. The Elements of Mutual Aid (November 2023)

The Elements of Mutual Aid

The episode "The Elements of Mutual Aid" is an interview with Ypsilanti, MI based filmmakers Payton McDonald and Leah Ayer, who are currently making a documentary series profiling around a dozen mutual aid projects across North America that are – in their words – “tending grassroots alternatives to systems of oppression”. Hoping to inspire and educate viewers about what sustainable, community-driven projects can look like, the filmmakers have organized the series around the four elements — fire, earth, water, and air — ascribing specific themes inherent to mutual aid to each element. Fire is the name of the first chapter of the series, which discusses the origins of mutual aid, and its potential to be ignited in all people. The earth chapter discusses the material and structures from which mutual aid projects emerge. The chapter on water is dedicated to highlighting collective healing and protection processes that different groups are undergoing, and the chapter on air focuses on collective decision making and resourcing choices.

We began our discussion with an overview of McDonald and Ayer’s backgrounds, as they each have experience working on mutual aid and community relief initiatives in the wake of natural disasters, as well as prior journalistic and film experience. They explain that the concept of mutual aid has existed since the early 1800s, but — though they themselves identify as anarchists and know that anarchists tend to engage in mutual aid projects and highly value the practice of mutual aid in creating autonomous and self-sufficient communities — mutual aid did *not* originate with anarchism. In fact, many police departments and religious groups have engaged in what they refer to as mutual aid practices for a long time. Mutual aid, McDonald explains, is not an explicitly anarchist term or a term explicitly belonging to police or religious institutions; it is simply a strategy of communal and collective support that anyone can use.

Unlike police mutual aid practices, which involve accumulating resources, training, and data for the explicit purpose of repressing social justice movements (as is the case with Cop City), Ayer points out that the state can’t actually engage in what they distinguish as “liberatory” mutual aid. This refers to the act of communities supporting each other in a non hierarchical way, and logically leads towards abolition of the nation state, of capitalism, of white supremacy, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and all forms of domination that exist in the world. Ayer notes that while it can be difficult to unlearn the hierarchy that is all around us and replace it with a sense of collective commitment, they see how curiosity, listening, and a willingness to experiment are all traits that help mutual aid groups strengthen their work together.

The filmmakers address a common concern raised by skeptics of mutual aid: how is it scalable? McDonald points out that mutual aid is sometimes framed by authoritarian communists as a “stepping stone” towards seizing control of the state, when in actuality, *“Mutual aid is a throughline, not a buffer or an appendage that will become obsolete when we ‘take power’.* *Without it, we’re left only with the master’s tools.”* Ayer adds to this by emphasizing that liberatory mutual aid is inherent to humanity, and is the most effective way for communities to meet their needs in the wake of disasters (as they have seen in their prior disaster relief mutual aid work). They point out that mutual aid does indeed scale, as evidenced by the work of the Zapatistas and the fighters in Rojava, who have successfully built up adequate agricultural and medical systems for themselves. The biggest challenge to scaling mutual aid practices is not so much getting started, since that is so innate to human nature, but defending systems from attack or cooptation. For this reason, they have chosen to focus on small, grassroots efforts in their documentary; they believe in the power and necessity of people with few resources anywhere being able to rekindle a spirit of mutual care.

The interview continues by examining some of the challenges and ethical concerns inherent to documentary making, and how McDonald and Ayer have attempted to address them. When asked about what they think the role of a documentarian is, McDonald says they strive to *“abolish the charismatic hero. Biopics are nice, but nobody lives in a vacuum. I think the role of the documentary is to reveal interconnectedness; specifically where we assume it isn’t.”* Ayer adds that good interviews come out of interviewees having autonomy and control over the recording throughout the entire process. In line with that value, they strive to include the communities and subjects they interview and film directly in their work, sharing footage with them and offering support to their projects as much as possible.

This interview is different from other kinds of episodes I’ve done for the show, in that it isn’t about a specific campaign or story, but instead about the process behind an attempt to tell another series of stories, and about the significance of that process. When I think about the implications of this interview, I’m left asking myself about the role of storytelling in social justice movements. This is of course relevant to me as a person creating public-facing content about social justice movements. I think of storytellers as non-hierarchical educators, in a way. The way information is revealed deeply reflects the values of the information sharer, and can have major implications on the way information is understood. This interview encouraged me to think about how I bring my values to my work as a journalist and researcher — do I maintain relationships with interviewees after I’ve extracted information from them? Do I show concern for their concerns? Do I give them room to disagree with me, or direct the conversation in ways they find useful?

The experience of making this episode made me more curious to learn about the ethics of documentary and journalistic work, and to see if there are qualitative research methods that have

a distinct goal of uplifting social justice and equity concerns in their practice. My goal in sharing this episode with a wider audience was not only to offer a spotlight on the work of local documentary makers and comrades, but also to deepen my own understanding of their work, and of the concept of mutual aid, since it is so often such a loosely defined term.

The discussion around documentary work as movement work was fraught for me, as I do struggle sometimes to understand the line between being a voyeuristic careerist, dedicating too much time to documenting movements at the expense of participating more materially in them, and being a movement participant whose primary contribution is as an educator and information sharer. This is a difficult division to assess, but an important one for me to consider as I continue to work in the field of movement journalism.

Strengthening Global Solidarity

1. Inside the Student Encampment for Palestine at the University of Michigan (April 2024)
2. Gaza, with Adi Callai (October 2023)
3. Identity Politics in Radical Movements (June 2024)
4. The Role of Violence in Movement Building for Environmental Justice (April 2023)

The Role of Violence in Movement Building for Environmental Justice

This episode was a panel discussion I set up with my advisor, Dr. Rebecca Hardin, as part of the “Lunchtime Lecture Series” orchestrated by the School for Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan. Aiming to challenge the construction and use of the “violent”/“non-violent” binary in characterizing actions taken as part of the environmental justice movement, I orchestrated a discussion with four speakers with diverse perspectives on the topic. Two speakers, who used the pseudonyms “Sewer” and “Grandma” during the discussion, simply described themselves as movement participants who hold radical anti-state politics and encourage a diversity of tactics to protect life, land, and water. The other two speakers were lawyers working for the Climate Defense Project, an organization that supports environmental activists, often arrested for their engagement in “non-violent direct action” (also known as “NVDA”) tactics. The discussion highlighted the nebulousness of the term “violence”, noting that what is considered “violent” by one person or group may not be considered so by another, and that often the term is used to further a particular political agenda or maintain state control, rather than objectively describe behaviors.

Some of the key themes of the panel include: the false binary between violence and nonviolence, the criminalization of effective protest, and the importance of building relationships and movements through nurturing and consent cultures. The point around the importance of consent in risk-taking – brought by lawyer Kira Kelley – is an interesting contrast to the aforementioned dilemma around blaming movement participants for the reaction of the state, which came up during my interview with journalist and military strategist Adi Callai while discussing the Movement to Defend the Atlanta Forest. Perhaps there is some nuance in the debate around consent, risk-taking, and bearing the reaction of the state to the actions of the movement. Comparing these two discussions to one another, new questions arise in me. Does assuming that there’s any way we might be able to accurately assess the reaction of the state to a given action then implicate us in mitigating the harms of that potential reaction? Is there a way to adequately prevent people (who are not ready to bear the brunt of police violence for an action planned by movement participants) from being in harm's way, without compromising the safety or effectiveness of that action? If our priority is to effectively and safely carry out an action, how much information do we need to share with one another?

The panelists challenge the traditional notions of legality and legitimacy imposed by the state, arguing that the state's definition of violence often suppresses meaningful solutions to systemic

problems, erasing the long-term motives, values, or goals of movement participants and labeling them as violent terrorists. They advocate for an abolitionist approach, emphasizing the interconnectedness of environmental justice with social justice, and the need to dismantle systems of oppression, including police, prisons, and borders. This is, of course, a challenging and nuanced position for lawyers – whose livelihoods are tied to the continued institution of the state and the court system that upholds it – to maintain.

Towards the end of the panel, Sewer questions the usefulness of the entire discussion, saying:

“Direct action against the state doesn't need to be calculated, doesn't need to be debated, doesn't need to be strategic; our enemies are everywhere and we need to take power because every single day that we don't, more and more people are dying and suffering and have no dignity....Sometimes I feel like these conversations are a little bit boring, and I want to see people out there putting their bodies on the line and sort of betraying risk assessment.”

This was a moment for me as a host that was challenging, because I could feel my own defensiveness creeping up in response to Sewer's words. I had to practice separating my identity as a movement participant from my role as a host and facilitator, noting that just because someone says something I don't agree with or have a strong reaction to on a platform I'm providing doesn't mean that I endorse or agree with them. Ironically, even though I *do* believe in strategy and in practicing some amount of risk assessment, I could understand the rhetorical strategy behind Sewer's statement: in a way, they were shifting the Overton window for what is possible by urging people to act, and by naming the tendency (especially) for academics and theorists to spend too much time deliberating at the expense of action.

I chose to include this episode in the section on “Strengthening Global Solidarity” because I think that gaining some shared language and understanding around the role of violence in movements is useful across time and place, irregardless of geographic or social differences. It is critical that people all over the world understand that “violence” is in the eye of the beholder and that condemning social or environmental actions as “too violent” and therefore worthy of isolation is strategically harmful to movements everywhere. Perhaps this discussion points to an incredibly volatile and chaotic future, where movement participants engage in direct action with increased urgency. At the same time, it is through holding discussions such as these that I hope to contribute to a greater awareness among movement participants of the ways that their actions can and will be pathologized or criminalized, so that in anticipation of this pattern, they can avoid criminalizing one another and continue to act urgently.

Conclusion

I've only provided a few snapshots of episodes featured in "It's Hot in Here with Silver Lining", but I hope that they offer a diverse and textured understanding of my work. With more time and resources, I would love to be able to continue the show, using it as a platform to introduce radical environmental and political theorists to a broader audience. I greatly enjoyed doing reporting and researching, though producing one show a week proved a difficult timeline with a full graduate student course load.

Perhaps the greatest stories I covered were stories about people defending land or resources that had deep historical or cultural significance, and that could be located within a much broader history of colonization, state violence to land and people, and resistance. With more time, I would have liked to find more examples of struggles outside of the United States/North America/Turtle Island (my two foreign episodes featured speakers and activists in Colombia and France). I am also interested in doing more research on environmental justice struggles related to gendered violence, as there is a well-documented relationship between land degradation and violence against Indigenous women in particular¹⁹, and I would love to highlight ways that communities are pushing back against that kind of harm.

This was a preliminary attempt at a project that, if it truly blossoms, could turn into something like Kelly Hayes' "Movement Memos" podcast, or "It's Going Down" or "The Final Straw" podcasts, all of which feature interview with movement participants and grapple with big questions around violence, identity, and community building. Reflecting on the role these productions have played in my own political journey, I am deeply grateful for the audio medium. Podcasting and radio broadcasting is, I believe, deeply effective for sharing information. Hearing the spoken words of subjects makes them more relatable, and provides exponentially more information to listeners than does simply reading words on a page. Audio processing also enables people to ingest information while on the go, making it less daunting to access and broadening the base of listeners and people engaging with the ideas presented. "It's Hot in Here with Silver Lining" can also serve as a valuable archive of my own changing perspective on environmental justice campaigns and issues. Most importantly, I hope that by focusing on the ways that people are *resisting* ecological collapse (rather than on the collapse itself), I can contribute to increasing senses of agency and urgency in the environmental justice movement.

¹⁹ Joseph, A. S. (2021). A modern trail of tears: The missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) crisis in the US. *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, 79, 102136.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jflm.2021.102136>

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