

The Practice of Freedom

TRANSITIONING THROUGH HISTORY: DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF AMERIKKKA AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE FACTS

glo merriweather

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, glo merriweather, a community organizer, activist, and public intellectual delivered a keynote address to UNC Asheville's Biennial Queer Studies Conference at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. The keynote address provides insights that can be useful for adult educators seeking to reframe ideas and practices of social justice related to prisons, gender, and race. glo reminds us of the power of language, how language matters, and how it must be harnessed to create a more equitable, just, and liberated society. They also remind us of the power we have within ourselves and communally to not just create change but be change. glo's insights provide us with opportunities to reconsider how we show up in communities both in and outside of academia and challenge us to move from inaction to action, recognizing a system that shape shifts and seeks to maintain control by any means necessary. glo is a highly sought after public speaker who offers fresh perspectives on confronting white supremacy and prejudice, unpacking the ideology of legibility, and developing a mindset of critical resistance that we, as adult educators, can use to inform our theory and practice.

Moderator: Today is the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King. That just makes us think about the state of oppression and our speaker today is someone who is facing that right now in relation to radical political work. glo is a Black non binary trans community organizer from Charlotte, North Carolina. glo has been organizing in Charlotte for the last four years, is currently facing 51 months in prison for their involvement in the Charlotte Uprising. In addition to advocating for their life and freedom in this case, they continue to organize their freedom for prisoners like Rayquan Borum and Alejandra Pablos who are currently in cages [prisons/jails]. They also collaborate with the Southeast Asian Coalition and Comunidad Colectiva to combat deportations and protect immigrants' rights. glo is deeply engaged in prison outreach, native land sovereignty, and transformative justice initiatives. I'm really excited that glo is here to speak to us and I'm just gonna turn it to them right now, so help me to welcome glo.

glo

What an introduction, I project a lot. I really might not need this mic. But, first of all, I really would like to thank you all for being here. I feel like, taking the time, it's almost the weekend, it's 7:30, this weather has me wanting to nap so I'm really grateful to have y'all in these seats and to have

someone to talk to besides my mom and Scott, who we've been emailing together. Just thank you so much for inviting me into this space. I think it's really important that we are unpacking settler colonialism at this time. We have to talk about indigenous bodies, we have to talk about black bodies and brown bodies and what happens when they resist the state. Just today, a woman was arrested fighting the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. We have to talk about bodies like my own. What's happening to me as I'm resisting the state, right. So without further adieu, I guess we'll get the thing started.

It's really important that we start with the land acknowledgment, whenever we're in space, whenever we are occupying space, because that's what we are doing right now. We are occupying space, we are occupying what is the traditional territory of the Cherokee and Creek people. So the land acknowledgment says that as many of us are grandchildren of colonizers, immigrants, or the descendants of those violently brought to this land, it is our collective responsibility to pay respect and recognize this land is the traditional territory of the Creek and Cherokee Nations, and we are here because this land was stolen and occupied, forcefully. In recognizing that this space occupies colonized and native territories, and out of respect for the rights of Native and First Nations people, it is our collective responsibility to critically interrogate and reconcile with the colonial histories and present-day implications of this, and to honor, protect, and sustain this still invaded land. Because it's still invaded, right now, 2018. There's an invasion happening. The indigenous folx who were stewards of this land, don't have claim to it, can't make decisions. You see that they're being arrested as they protect water sources, right. So, we have to be really critical in relationship with that and look at our own placement in that. Ask yourself, who are you under this? Are you the grandchild of colonizers, are you an immigrant, the grandchild of immigrants? Are you a descendant of those violently brought to this land, slaves. Position yourself for the rest of this conversation in that space. Because it's alright to be uncomfortable. We need it. If we're not, that means we know too much. That means you feel safe. I don't want you to feel safe in this space and I want that to be very, very clear. This is not a safe space. This is space that's gonna push you. It's gonna ask you to meet me where I am. It's gonna ask you to open up everything that you've ever thought and known and felt. And maybe even leave it at the door. I may not even need you to have it here. And that's real, right? That's something that we have to, I have to come to you with, and I have to be honest, because like Scott said, I'm facing 51 months behind bars because of these things. Because of state repression, my comrades are facing that time. And we have to fight as if that's right now, because it is. I have trial is 33 days, so it is right now.

Acknowledgement is not enough: So, let's go a little bit beyond even acknowledging. There is a quote and I don't want to be disrespectful to this person's name, but it's at the bottom. *Āpihtawikosisân*, a Metis person from the plains, Cree speaking community of Lac St. Anne, Alberta, Canada, another colonized space. What they have to say is, "If we think of territorial acknowledgements as sites of potential disruption, they can be transformative acts that to some extent undo Indigenous erasure. I believe this is true as long as these acknowledgements discomfit both those speaking and hearing the words. The fact of Indigenous presence should force non-Indigenous peoples to confront their own place on these lands. I would like to see territorial acknowledgments happening in spaces where they are currently absent, particularly in rural and remote areas and within the governance structures of settlers." This is another thing in which we need to be unpacking. Like this is the space where Cherokee and Creek people were stewards of the land but what are we going to do with that knowledge? Where are we going to move into after that? I have some action steps following this entire thing but that's just a place I want you to understand that I'm asking you to be in.

*acknowledgement
is not enough*

This isn't a place to just listen anymore because people are dying. Water has been tainted for years. People in eastern North Carolina have been without water for years, Flint, Michigan too. Indigenous communities

are suffering, losing numbers because of anemia because of water. So, when we talk about genocide, it's happening. It's going on right now, in the Carolinas, in the Dakotas. We must situate ourselves in the position as people who can actually change these things as stakeholders in this really messy thing, and like be like yo, we can actually combat this and resist with, not for anyone but with them. That's the place we need to be moving from.

Working Terms

Invader: A person or group that enters another territory, forcefully; goes into said territory with hostile intent. Often times, descendants of colonizers and current invaders will use the term settler to white-wash how the settling happened. I really, really, really want to talk about that. You know, it's why I put that people settle into beds at night. You know what I mean, you get comfy, you chill, you smile, you're getting ready to rest, dadadadada. That isn't what happened here on Turtle Island, right in this colonized space. Native and Indigenous folx were living their way of life. Europeans left Europe because they felt like they were being oppressed, there's oppression happening, right. Like the same thing that's happening here, which I think is kind of a joke a little bit. But they were being repressed religiously, and so they came and then they stole, and then they stole some people to till the land that they stole, and then they talked about rights, and man and like humanity, all these different things and constructed this whole myth that we're living under, right? That everyone's like oh, Indigenous people are like this far off thing. Native people gave land. What? They gave a gift? They just packaged blocks of land for the pilgrims and said "you know what, y'all are so sweet, take all, actually, and relegate us to a small portion". That is what a gift is. No, I think what happened was coercion. I think people didn't want to get sick anymore. I think there was technology that colonizers were using that native folx didn't have, and they wanted to preserve themselves. So, we have to tell that truth as well, we have to talk about who is an invader. We have to talk truthfully about that from now on. I really invite all of you to replace settler with invader, so that we can be honest. So that we can stop erasing Indigenous peoples and other nations by saying like "people settled [in a place]" because when we say that, [we erase] all the folx who died during our settling. What does settling really mean? What are we participating in?

Abolition: A political vision with a goal of eliminating imprisonment, native land theft, policing and surveillance, and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and policing. Critical resistance are the collection of things that I'm talking to you about right now. I want you to be in a space that when you get up out of your seat, you're hoping to find something to do to combat and resist these things tomorrow, the next day, until it's all gone, actually. We want it to be gone. We must eliminate borders and detention centers if we are to build a just and liberated world. This is what we are working toward.

AmeriKKKan mythology: So, let's talk about debunking some AmeriKKKan mythology. Syed Khalid Hussan, who's quoted in *Undoing Border Imperialism*, a really great text by Harsha Walia, like beautiful, beautiful work that really shows the implications of coloniality and how that affects like the different ways that people are able to move, then, now, and probably even later if we don't finish this, said "Our fights must be rooted in experiences, in stories, and in anecdotes. People remembered these more than sterile numbers or facts. Myths are powerful magic and can turn enemies into friends. In a world where too many still tell stories that some are illegal, and that to be free we must control the movement of others. The work of making new myths is essential".

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[Making new myths] talks about our power to create the next thing, the same power that colonizers had in 1492 to create a new thing. Yes, theirs was birthed in violence, and wasn't birthed in actually all humanity getting free, being liberated. It was selfish. It wasn't earth centered. And we're still dealing with that now. But we can create something new. They did it without cellphones, with some wooden ships that I don't know if I would have got on in this time. Like I don't know, who built that. This is not something that people may have thought was possible. But they sailed across and managed to steal people and land. So, what can we do with positive intention? What can we do with intention that's really, truly in liberation practices that are transformative. What can we do? This is justice, I want you to play with it.

Gender Binary

The myth of the gender binary (insert eyeroll). I hope y'all saw that. What do we know about it? It is an oppressive system, used to determine legibility and eligibility. So, I want to talk about that. So, legibility, being able to be read, being able to be digested. Being read, what does that mean? Your body, your experiences, your trauma, your pain. All these different things, right? I want to take it back to, before even, not even before, but also while the gender binary was happening, when race relations were beginning. People actually didn't believe Black folx could feel pain. It was because of the legibility of their bodies. They actually didn't believe Black folx were even human. You (Black people) were 3/5ths of a person under slavery, right? So, when we talk about legibility, and being able to see things, being able to see experiences, it's really important to understand the lens that you're looking through. So, understand that it's a constructive lens.

When we're going into gender binary, that's a similar thing. When we talk about the ways that different bodies are unable to be read in prisons, right? For example, when trans folx enter prisons, they're typically in solitary confinement because the prison system, which is based out of a binary gendered system, actually doesn't have a place for bodies don't identify under the binary. So, what does it do? It puts you in a cage alone. What do we know about solitary? Does anybody know about Kalief Browder? A show of hands of you know about Kalief Browder. Kalief Browder was a young Black man who spent 3 years on Rikers Island for stealing a backpack, allegedly. Mind you, later found out he actually didn't do this crime but he was there nonetheless. He stayed 3 years [most of the time in solitary]. I think from the time he was 16 to 19. Um, don't quote me on that, Google. Um, but, long story short, he got out, and because of what the cage and the system had done to him, continually trying to force him to make plea deals and plead guilty to something he really didn't do just to get free, which really isn't free because you're tied to the state with a guilty charge, right? We need to talk about that as well, but Kalief never felt safe after that, and took his life. He took his life. He never, ever, ever got a life. This is what we're facing.

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The gender binary is new. That's some new-fangled bull. We have the Sulawesi of Indonesia, five recognized genders. The Hijras of India are a third gender that has written records dating from 400 years before the common era. The Kocek of the Ottoman Empire [1600-1800, at least], the Muxes of Mexico that date prior to Columbus' invasion. Two-Spirit of Turtle Island. Many, many, many Native tribes recognize more than two genders. Transgender folk of colonized AmeriKKKa because we have to say that trans and Two-Spirit are two different things. Two-Spirit is a cultural connection. You know, it's something that has to do with your people, where you come from. Transgender is also birthed out of that. It's birthed out of many coming from invaders. Maybe descendants of slaves don't have a connection to Two-Spirit identity but you do have a different gender. Two-spirit is definitely something that Native and Indigenous folx have coined themselves

and it's sacred. So, it's really not ours to play with that. We also have the Ashtime of Ethiopia. Gender is a fucking universe y'all. You can see it across just this world on its own. The different spaces, we have Africa represented. We have Mexico represented. We have, you know just so many different spaces, Asia. All these things were happening. People just bending gender all before this baby of a nation, the United States, the united colonized states of AmeriKKKa. All before this [gender binary] all happened. So, what does this mean about the inception of AmeriKKKan ideology in this place, and what it meant for us when we came in and up in it, right. Gender was a weapon of mass destruction.

European colonizers had many weapons at their disposal when they entered various tribal territories: guns, diseases, religion, white supremacy, and gender. Gender is actually one of the most violent and pervasive ways that they were able to colonize spaces. When you tell a people how to relegate, and how to like, place themselves among each other in a way that actually isn't theirs, in a way that is um, rooted in white supremacy, you create inequity. You create destabilization. You do that. And so that's what we're looking at. We're looking at how western ideologies [destabilize] which are highly influenced by Christianity and Catholicism: super hella binary, y'all, like Adam and Eve. Two genders right? What was the joke in like the 90s, Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve, y'all. Like, you know, like they're letting you know there's only one way this thing goes and it's this way, right. Women, defined in relation to men, subordinate, even. Power is patriarchal. These are biblical things, right. Not always does the Bible have to be used in this way but this is definitely how it was weaponized here. As colonizers destabilized various nations across the globe, they brought these violent ideologies with them, including race, gender, an extractive practices in relation to earth.

*gender was a weapon of
mass destruction*

So, I want to really quickly talk about how when you talk about religion, and how we discuss how different religions and spiritual practices are practiced. When Christianity was brought here, the practice did not center earth, it actually began to center man-kind. And so, at that point, when it's this ego-centered thing, you actually move away from earth and being able to protect her. This is why you see water protectors, Indigenous people doing this thing because their creation story actually includes protecting the water. It includes being a steward of land. Their creation story, they're talking that way. There're many creation stories even in Indonesia, like the last slide showed, that talk about the way the world came about not in these violent [ways], [in which] man just went around and did things, had children and tilled land. No, no, no, no, no. There were so many things at play in this space. This is a wide, vast universe that we're in, and to think that man and woman in this binary ideology is the only and right way is really violent and has killed many, many, many, many people. And mostly, um, I would say, Indigenous folx, who were killed when colonizers first got here, and who are still being killed today. And then you have Black folx, who were killed when they were brought here and are still being killed today. And all other folx who fall in the margins. These are the people who the gender binary is coming for. This is who's the next. Those are the next that you see on the news, right: Trans, Black, women being murdered. That's because gender has been weaponized in correlation with race. They're coupled. What happens when you have two White supremacist ideologies in bed with one another? Trans Black women die. You know, that's where we are.

Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, a Black, dope theologian, said, "the idea that biology is destiny, or better still, destiny is biology, has been a staple of western thought for centuries. Whether the issue is who is who in Aristotle's polis, or who is poor in the late twentieth-century United States, the notion that difference and hierarchy in society are biologically determined continues to enjoy credence, even among social scientists who purport to explain human society in other genetic terms. In the west, biological explanations appear to be especially

privileged over the ways of explaining differences of gender, race, or class. Difference is expressed as degeneration.” So, I want to talk about this for a second. And that came from the *Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. So, when I read this, what this stirs up for me is, first of all it’s a reminder that gender is a constructed way under which we’re living right now. It’s constructed because when they say making an African sense of western gender discourses, first of all, it makes westernization not the centralized theme. I love that, I’m like, oh, wow, so, we can think about this from a nonwestern sense and center ideologies that happened prior to this one. And that’s cool, right. Like, let’s play with that. I mean, I wanna do that, that’s a new toy for me.

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Degeneration. And so, what I wanna do is talk about how differences express degeneration. Degeneration, does that have a positive context? When you, when you create a hegemonic thing and things are othered and things are degenerate, like what does that mean for how society is able to move forward? Is it this melting pot cute little like Amerikkan story y’all got maybe in second grade? I got it. And they’re like we’re a melting pot. Everyone’s happy, have turkey, and you’re good, you know. And then like myself you’re seeing people in 2018 getting shot in the back, you know in their grandmother’s backyard. We’re seeing water protectors arrested simply for video recording. We’re seeing the state move in particular ways with particular bodies. And that’s really important, it’s really important to see that. And it’s important to choose to combat it and resist it in whatever ways that is, and whatever ways that you’re able. Sometimes it’s money, y’all. Y’all might need to be sending money to the Bayou Bridge Pipeline water defenders right now to get them out of jail. You might need to be putting money on their bail funds. You might need to be writing letters to trans prisoners, letting them know that folx on the outside are prepared to do this work with them. These are just some examples of things you can do even if you have five dollars, send it. Those people who are putting their bodies on the line for you to drink safely. Cause where’s your body, right? We can, we can talk about that. We can talk about it cause your body can go somewhere else. We can talk about where it is now and where it can go. That isn’t inherently wrong to say, yo, there’s more that we could be doing. Because there is. And that’s totally fine, I’m hoping that we will all do it.

Destabilizing ideologies. So, when we talk about European colonizers forcing the idea that race, gender and sex are biologically determined in humans, thusly, creating a stratification system that serves those who align themselves with such ideology or fall under its stipulations, we can also talk about how some people don’t, [and] some people may want to [but can’t], right. They may try to align themselves, but they don’t actually get the protections of the thing. We can talk about the people who just happen to fall under those stipulations. We can talk about how Jewish Americans were named white, at one point in time, right. They weren’t always white people in America. They were their own group, right. We can talk about who got to be and who didn’t get to be [white]. Everything else becomes other, illegible, unable to be read, and even criminalized under the new constructed system. This is what we’re talkin about when we talkin’ about trans fems of color in detention centers, in prisons, in spaces where they should never be, especially because of how violent the gender binary moves. But they’re there because stratification has put them at the bottom of this thing. Not their works, not how they move in the world, but literally a system. A thing that says you’re not gonna get this job, so, now you’re poor. Now you’re poor. Maybe you’re doing sex work. Sex work is criminalized. You’re in jail. You’re in solitary. No one’s bailing you out because they have you under your government name, right. Let’s talk about it. Let’s talk about who gets caught, violently [in these systems]. Assimilation becomes the only tool other people can use to survive. And even then, survival isn’t guaranteed. Consequently, by erasing cultural identities and separating humans from their historical practices, fractured identities are what is being created. Borders were joined where there were once none.

We can talk about how Indigenous peoples and nations, many of them were migrant nations, moving from Canada down to South America and back up, over and over again. But the difference in those practices was not going to colonize these places. When a lot of Indigenous peoples come into other space with other Indigenous folk, they have ways of greeting one another, ways to say what are your practices so I do not fuck up where you come from. And you do that, and you honor it and you move that way. That is not how this happened here. This is not what's been going down, so that even these borders are moved from a colonizer mindset. Because that didn't exist, it just didn't.

Decolonizing is the only way out. Trans and gender variant folk in AmeriKKKa and across the globe have been resisting these incredibly violent and toxic ideologies through rejecting assimilation and engaging in revolutionary struggle. I want to talk about rejecting assimilation and myself, you know, my own body, right.

I wanna talk about how when one of my aunts found out I was coming to “keynote” speak, right, at a university, she said, “Girl, what chu gonna wear?” I said, “What chu mean, what I’m gonna wear?” She said, “You got some nice slacks, nice shirt?” I said, “Nice and slacks, What!?” I’m like, who am I gonna go talk to and why do they need that from me, right. Decolonizing also looks like showing up differently sometimes. Sometimes it looks like

decolonizing also looks like showing up differently sometimes. sometimes it looks like challenging the ways we’re supposed to show up, the legitimate ways to show up

challenging the ways we’re supposed to show up, the legitimate ways to show up. When I go to court, for these judges, I’m aware that my body is already guilty. I’m aware that, that what they’re wanting, they have already gotten money from my bail, so if I go and I show up dressed in my Sunday best (I don’t know what that is because I haven’t gone to church, well I actually did just go to church on Sunday), but, whatever best I have, if I go dressed that way, and other black poor people who don’t have accessibility to such a wardrobe, show up to court, they are then posited against my respectable body. That’s not decolonizing. That would be me upholding the state if I show up in my best because I have accessibility to “the best.” Let’s talk about why I have it. I can tell y’all why. You know, my grandmother, she worked, and she did trade, and she did a great job. And my mother, then went to college, and she was able to get a PhD, she studied. My aunts, they do trade work. My uncle went into the military. Most of my family is not college educated, but my mother was. So, I got a little bit of accessibility along the way, right. So, like, like some of my cousins who, their main vernacular is Ebonics [could not code switch], because being able to code switch was a privilege, learning to code switch was a privilege, right. So, she might not be able to come up here and deliver this in the same way. She’ll deliver it and it will still be true, but will it be legible, because of the current thing, you know. And these are things we have, we have to talk about. I have to talk about it. I have to talk about my situation in the thing. Where am I situated?

We can talk about Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, these folk who put their bodies on the line during Stonewall riots, and then, were erased because of legibility. You know, Stonewall just said gays and lesbians did a thing, right. Trans folk weren’t included because after Stonewall, gays and lesbians had a movement, which said “we did Stonewall”. I’m sure there were gays and lesbians there, but it was started by trans women of color but because they weren’t able to talk about and tell it and be on those platforms with those folk, subsequent erasure [occurred]. Trans organizers from Charlotte, like Michael Johnson, Jamie Marsicano were arrested and jailed in 2016 for resisting police brutality, myself included. We were in the streets of Charlotte, and when we talk about these arrests, when we talk about who was arrested, there were thousands of people. Yet the people we were bailing out for those weeks, were black, brown and trans. The people doing the bailing out were trans, doing 24 and 36- hour shifts at the jail because no other bodies

understand bondage as well as we do. Isn't that a shame? But isn't it beautiful our resistance too? But it's also a shame.

Two-spirit folx were tear-gassed and arrested at Standing Rock while resisting the continued ecological warfare taking place across AmeriKKKa. A person had their arm almost shot off by a rubber bullet, and they'll (the police) tell you they're not using rubber bullets. But something you should know is because AmeriKKKa is informed by Zionists practices, many of our police departments are being trained by Israeli military forces, Charlotte Uprising, right. CMPD (Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department), the reason they were able to tear-gas us and used these like really awful tactical like strategies against us, was because they were trained, trained by Israeli forces. Yeah, like yo, here's what we are doing in Palestine. Here's how y'all can do it here. And they did it. They did it to us for days. They arrested us for days. Beat us for days. And we went back. We'll always go back.

I want to say really quickly more about that. Um, because I want to talk about how Standing Rock is a cannonball in North Dakota, on a reservation that was given to Indigenous people by the state, right who go over the Atlantic Ocean to Palestine in Israel. Israel is a state, created by a government, put in the middle of something that already was existing. [Palestine is] defending the same things, but because Israel is able to militarize, because of this funding as well, in a certain way, Palestine is getting hit and fucked up. There are youth in the Gaza strip being murdered, who were murdered last week. I think right now the total is like 20? more? [someone from the audience says yes), more, right. These are people defending the same things, sovereignty. Being able to say, yo being stewards of a space does mean something and you cannot effectively erase us for money, for oil, for anything. That's what these people are saying. It's all the same. It's all out U.S. imperialism. We have to name that.

Inside prison walls, Marius Mason, a trans man fighting for accessibility to healthcare, informs folx like myself, and Ash and Jamie. We led a teach in where we wrote letters to Marius and other trans folx, and we talked about what are we going to do together cause folx on the inside, on the inside keep being left out of the conversation. We talk about tearing down the jails. What cho gon'in to do, blow em up, and say screw everybody on the inside. How we gonna get em out? They have to be an integral piece. If we're not working from the space with the most directly affected individuals, this is some liberal ass work and I don't want that. I want radical work. I want work that changes at the root, not work that changes based on my interests, based on my current needs because as a black person, maybe three hundred years ago, my needs, I may have been advocating for something else. I might have not been talking about gender. I might have been like yo, can you get these chains off me, like, what's the T, seriously? That's where I would be. So, we have to talk about the current conditions and what that means too. Theses folx are decolonizing our relationships to each other and the State. I'm grateful for them. I think I finished it, yea. So, we're gonna do a Q & A. Um, I hope y'all were able to get some info. If you didn't get enough, hopefully you'll be picked during the Q&A. Thank y'all so much for your time. I'm really grateful to have gotten your nods, and faces and laughs. And like, yes. Um, I appreciate that. Thank y'all.

Q & A

Moderator: Who wants to ask a question? Does anyone want to start?

Question: This work is super hard. How do you keep yourself going when things get extra hard?

glo: The ancestors, no I'm kidding. Definitely the ancestors. I think, um, oftentimes, I make sure to situate myself in an historical context and understand that, yes, I'm fighting State repression. My homies are fighting State repression. People are dying. But people have [always] been fighting State repression. People

have [always] been dying. And the fight must continue. I try to make sure people understand that it's not like a conversation around martyrdom, but more a conversation around knowing your power and your ability to change things, if you just do everything you can, every time you can, whenever you can, right. And um, so, a lot of time just checking in with these two over here. It's like "y'all, I might not be able to make it to the teach in tonight, cause like, I'm exhausted and I have court in a few days, yadayada". And they're like, "I know, yeah, I'm tired too, like, should we just reschedule the whole thing?" You know and then we talk about that. We talk about how capitalism teaches us a certain thing about production, and I'm trying really to unlearn that, and really understand, and like yes there is a lot to do as well. I'm doing a lot of making sure that like, I'm eating, you know like fruits, vegetables, like, I do smoothies a lot of the time. You know just doing really good things for my body. When I understand that outside forces have a lot of control over things, and like, I am powerless in some ways, making sure that I harness and use the power I do have, like put forth the things I want to see, like wellness in black bodies. So, if I want wellness in black bodies, I got a black body, so like, let me just do that with this one and then inform the next one, and like, "fruits and veggies my friend, why yes". You know, and that's what we do. Thank you.

Question: I am embarrassed to ask this, but this time I was fixing to go on the Birthright trip to Israel. And there into it, for various reasons opted out, but given all the parallel to geography and given the relationship between Israel and Palestine, as symbol of oppression, how do I navigate this moving forward with my influence and probably advocacy for others?

glo: Yeah, um, I think there's definitely a ton of like, um, Muslim and Islamic groups that are like organizing against these kinds of things. Some of the ones I know are *Within Our Lifetimes*, it's a group I know in New York. But some might even be closer groups. You have an answer?

Question: *If Not Now, a Jewish Voice for Peace* for sure are like leftie radical Jewish organizations working to end occupation from an American Jewish perspective in the next 3 to 5 years. Um, and they're mass training, and I can totally get you hooked up into them. We do a lot of antisemitism work and other movements. My question that I want to ask you, is that I see a lot of polarizing happening in those movements, what's your opinion on the way polarization is being weaponized in active spaces, because I think it's killing the nuance and it's like making it really difficult for me to be in activist spaces. I'm so tired of it and it makes me very angry and then I feel compromised because, who else is doing the work, like how much do I have to compromise to be pro Palestinian and be Jewish. You know what I'm saying? I'm curious about on your thoughts on that.

glo: Um, but what I have to say about that is, first of all is getting comfortable in your history. Right, and being like that is a thing, it is real. I am real. My people before me were real. Um, and being to be like, yo, like um, and also, me comin into this space is not inherently negative. Me being alive is not an inherently negative thing because I get to make choices about now too. You know, I think about the different ways as someone, who was once socialized, you know, in a certain way with gender. Like the ways I don't have to weaponize like what I used to know because it made me pass, or because it made me safe. And I can name, like yo, that's some really fucked-up shit and I'm so sorry and as the person that I am, um in this body right now, I'm gonna do everything I can. What do you need? What do your people need? And then say like, maybe it's the accessibility. Maybe, maybe you have to start talkin' about your accessibility to Israel, because something that I know, like Palestinians can't go directly into Israel. They go through a really, really difficult, um, what's it called, um process to get in, just through the border. They have to land in Jordan and then go through like 8-hour processes of just being like, checked. They can't go straight to Televiv. So, maybe talking about that privilege, and being like, yo, as a Jewish person, this isn't something I want to hold onto. Because, just like my people are saying they want to lay claim, there are people, bodies who also deserve to lay claim, and why is mine placed over this, and is it because of the relationship with

the United States. And you can name that too. You know, and be very real about it because right now, truth telling is one of the most amazing decolonization tools that we have. AmeriKKKa has yet to do any truth telling. It told us that that slaves, um, I don't even want to talk about what they did to slaves, because it's just gonna piss me off. But they told us a lot of lies, right. Like, you can look at like the McGraw Hills books and see what they're feeding children about the way AmeriKKKa came into being, right. And we can talk about that. And say that that's a bunch of lies and that telling truth actually brings about liberation, and if not anything, it stops erasing, really, really horrible things and it stops erasing people. But thank you for that question. I definitely want to continue to like, see how that moves in the world. And if y'all want to connect, see what y'all are doing so if other folx have questions I will know where to point them.

Moderator: Also, just to note that Saturday our film screening and keynote discussion is gonna be about Palestinian solidarity work. And we'll screen this movie *Pink Washing Exposed* which is about a movement in Seattle. But we're gonna have local people who are involved in JVP and Queer folx and talking about themselves.

Question: Thank you, you're so smart. I'm from Canada. My grandparents were United Empire Loyalists, who ran for the hills. And it's really nice to be down here and hear this kind of conversation. It's very brave, it seems that you're having it in such a lovely place, as well, a real honor. I'm interested in you talking a little bit more about not wearing a suit to court, because you miss so much these days about not being able to change something unless you're on the inside. I'm also, I work in theater, so, it also has a double meaning, you know, because there is, life is a stage, you know, you have to play a role in order to make that change that you aspire to make and in not wearing that suit and rebelling against the role, it's awesome, it's cool, I like it. Tell me more about how you're going to accomplish your goals without cow towing to that part of the system.

glo: Um, so, thank you first of all for that question. Welcome, um, to Asheville. Did you say you still live in Canada? O, yes, so, definitely welcome to the state. I'm from Charlotte, that's a couple of hours away. Um, but I think, when I think about your question, I think about my goals, when I got caught up in this trial, right. I was like, what is my goal? Is it to not go to jail? Is it to, you know, um, have a space to talk about things? Is it, um, to, like, I don't know, what is my goal? My goal is actually not to *not* go to jail because the options with that actually, some of them are like accepting plea deals, right. So, if I accept the plea from the Mecklenburg County [court] that says I incited the Charlotte Uprising that happened in response to the police killing of Keith Lamont Scott, which is actually what incited the uprising, right because killer cops are actually what incite uprisings [then I avoid jail or at least not as much prison time]. People showing up to where violent things happen is not the incitement, is not the inciting act, right. And so, we're talkin' about that. They're saying the riot was incited, and in those days, um, another man was murdered, right. So, If I accept this guilty plea for inciting the Charlotte Uprising, I accept guilt for Justin Carr's murder. I accept guilt for every black body that got into a cage. I accept guilt for pretty much everything that the police state has been able to do in Charlotte, North Carolina by saying "yes, it's our bodies that we respond to violence that are guilty". And I can't be of that legacy.

truth telling is one of the most amazing decolonization tools that we have. America has yet to do any truth telling.

If they determine me guilty, that's on them. You know, my spirit isn't caught up in that. Many people have done time, Mumia is still there. And he's alive and he's organizing and he's legitimate. So, what I want to remove is the idea that those of us who may or may not go behind bars are now illegitimate, are now, no longer able to participate. Cause there's work to do in there too. My people are on the inside, know that. And by my people, I mean the murderers, I mean the rapists, I mean every person who has acted out of this

state-imposed violence. Because let's talk about people who are in there because of robbery. If private property in the state didn't exist, and didn't firstly rob First Nations and Indigenous people, how the hell can somebody rob anything here? When we talk about violence, when we talk about murder, especially when we talk about murder in marginalizing inner city spaces where people's lives have already been determined as meaning this much [uses hands to show a small amount], when we talk about that, when we see life get taken in those spaces, we have to talk about the space they were placed in? Were they given humanity at any point. Did they even see themselves as being able to participate in this ever? Or, were they the animals you relegated them to be? And then manifest destiny, right. It's really garbage, but it happens. And so, I think, for me, I show up for them. You know, I'm like dang, I bet the boy who got caught up, you know, and so when we go to court, it's um, like a, a room of maybe 10 or 15 people who might be seen that day so, you all to get to watch each other go through. And so, a lot of times I see people in like shorts with holes. You know and like, um wearing like sandals and things, and you hear a judge say, you didn't get dressed for this. And you're like, and you say what? Get dressed to come have you make a judgement on their life after knowing them for 5 seconds. A, I think not, and B, do they have the resources? And so, for me when I come in and I still like, say these things to them, right, and I'm like wearing maybe this, they have to wonder like oh, wow, are only the people who can speak the King's English, the ones who should be able to determine they should get to be free? Are the ones who dress like the king, look like the king, act like the king, are they the ones, are they the only ones that should be free? Or is it all of us? And if I go in, I'm going in in solidarity. And if I go out, I'm going out in solidarity. Nothing changes. But they will know some different things about us. They will, this case is being covered. So, more people are learning. They screwed up. They gave me a platform and a mic. And now I'm like in Asheville. Wow, what idiots, right? Like, that's what we're here to do. Yeah, thank you for that question.

Question: I have two questions. First, I know there was so much trauma that like, came out of the Charlotte Uprising. I'd be interested to hear, like, what practices you and folx you're organizing with have, like to heal after all of that, like still, there. Uh, and then also, I wanted to ask, just like logistically, how do you navigate how they, um, like bringing, well, having meetings, where folx are on the inside [of prison] are the decision makers, do they like call-in?

glo: Right, so, [directs comment to co-organizer] actually do you want to talk about how we got Marius' letter? Do you remember? When we were doing the letter writing, how did we get in contact with them?

Co-organizer: We got in contact with them from the *Trans Prisoner Day of Solidarity* website and then we asked for folx in our community to reach out to them directly. We reached out to them directly.

glo: Thank you. Um, so that's one of the ways we're navigating that. And then, to speak on your first question, for me in particular, something we haven't said in this space, but something some of you may know, is my charges were actually placed after I witnessed the police killing of Justin Carr. And, um, I had to carry his body under the Omni Hotel, so definitely like trauma, right, literally witnessing murder on the streets of Charlotte. Um, where like the SWAT team is kind of where this row of folx is right here. And Justin's laying right here, we're screaming, and they did nothing. They did nothing to help us. T-shirts are just coming, flying in, [to soak up blood] actually. Um, and, yeah, he lost, he lost his life on that sidewalk, right. And, so, um, some of what I've been doing is telling that, right. Is letting people know that like yo, like, this happened, um, I was there and there was blood on my glasses, on my clothes. I don't think I got more than four hours of sleep for at least a solid, yeah, at least a year, right about a year. And so, and like my comrades know

*no other bodies understand
bondage as well as we do. Isn't
that a shame? but isn't it
beautiful, our resistance
too? but it's also a shame*

because this is who I check in with so, that's another thing. Like, checking in and being like I am not, am not good, um, I'm being haunted by like this man's face who, I watched some of his head get blown off, right. And so, like, that's real. And it's not just me. You know, sadly, youth in Palestine are seeing that, people in Standing Rock saw that. This is happening. It's happening and we're all becoming people who can tell now these stories of violence on the streets of these spaces that are supposed to be better and newer and free, or whatever. I don't know. It happened right outside near Bank of America, near a movie theater where people do commercial things. Um, and so, um, outside of that I've really been making sure that I don't really know how to explain it. Um, I'm trying to get more connected spiritually, you know, not even just like in terms of a god or a thing like that, but more in terms of like, knowing myself, and my body and where it is in spaces. Cause sometimes I didn't understand why I was getting anxious or like what was going on. So, like, trying to be more grounded, um, trying to make sure that like, I'm um, drinking enough water and the thing I said about food is actually really important, making sure that I'm eating. Cause, definitely lost a bunch of weight since the Uprising. I'm probably still losing weight. I don't know. Um, and, I'm trying to think what else. Lately I've been trying to connect with other people who've seen like, brutality in that way. It's kind of hard because like, support group for seeing someone murdered by police, Google, no results. Then like, (makes sound), so, I'm kind of just like, checking in with like, do you know, it's like, how do you ask that? Do you know someone who's seen someone murdered? Like, what do you know about this? Um, but like, definitely just telling it is being, has helped a lot. But it definitely gets harder closer to court, because, for me, my court case is wrapped up in Rayquan Borum's court case. Someone that Scott referenced earlier. Rayquan is a young Black male being framed for the murder I witnessed. Um, and it's really important to say that my warrants came out after I talked about Justin Carr. What we found out when we looked at my discovery documents from the police, they scanned my social media, first, and foremost. And so, what they said is they saw a young Black woman saying that someone was killed by the police, they went to that news story, got my name, searched my name in police database for traffic tickets, all that, pulled my face up, sent that picture of my face to officers who responded during the uprising, asked if any of them had ever seen me. And we have all these documents now because they don't redact anything we they give you your discovery. So, I can see all the emails between like the Chief saying, "oh yeah, we're going after glo merriweather now. We're looking at their Facebook". And then, "oh, and did you see glo. I didn't see glo on this day, but I did see them leading chants on that day. And you know that kind of back and forth. There's nothing saying that I did you know, anything, um, violent. They did charge me, they're charging me with assault on a government official as well. Though they said they never saw me throw rocks or do anything like that. Because other people were revved up by Black Lives Matter chants, I don't know, I'm being charged with assault, right. And so, even though they're stating they don't have evidence that I did this, or they don't remember me doing it, but only that I was there. And it's also important to note that I've been doing organizing in Charlotte for a few years now, so some of the police, know me, right. Because like, they've been killing us. In 2015 they only killed Black people, who are 30% of Charlotte's population. So, like, how does 30% of the population getting 100% of your bullets for the same crimes I've seen white bodies get taken to jail and released for. What happened, um, but yea, I hope that answers your question.

Question: Yeah, um, I appreciate what's happening here today. I just got out of prison.

glo: I'm glad you're out.

Question: But, I go back in tomorrow.

glo: No.

Question: But see, I can say that because I'm a social worker for prison. It's just east of here. And so, the challenge is how does one enter into that kind of environment when one has a kind of role, one has to dawn

a costume to kind of be in that kind of setting. And the challenge is how to effectively raise consciousness, when one does it as a staff person or when one does it as a term offender as used in North Carolina. It is very much a challenge in terms of how you assert the rights. Women as well as men who are incarcerated. So, it's one thing, constantly of going in and out of that place for me is the only level of comfort I live with. I've got a job here. I also realize that my work is right now again, I appreciate your work. I don't know where we might connect again. Maybe I'll see you in prison.

gm: You might, I might be at that prison. If I am, I hope you're giving my people some letters. I think something you can do in that space, more importantly, is like make sure you outwardly reject their [the State's] space there. Maybe that will compromise like your ability to still go in and out. But like, it's important that people who are on the inside, and people who say that they want to be working for them are actually wanting to do that and are willing to do like the radical things. Because like wanting to do things, but then like being tied-up by systemic things, is like, I don't really know, it doesn't really sound like you'll

if we're not working from the space with the most directly affected individuals, this is some liberal ass work and i don't want that. i want radical work. i want work that changes at the root, not work that changes based on my interests

be able to achieve your goal from there, um, but I think that continuing to be like in coalition with those folx and making sure that their humanity is upheld [is important]. And I know of correctional officers, or different kinds of people in other spaces, they go on strikes with inmates. You know what I mean. And so, like there are things to do in solidarity, you know, with those folx, right. And so, just making sure you're never speaking like for them. Maybe asking like, what do people on the outside need to know, how can I communicate that. And like maybe, we're trying to figure out how to do bail funds and different things like that. Since you have, you know access, maybe you know how to get things like that going, but definitely like, maybe not just doing your job anymore, but having to do more in speaking and doing more.

Question: Um, so, I have a similar question about how to be a conscious, inaudible, in Charlotte and all this time we see it, and things are actively happening, but how do we be conscious about things that are not feasible to us. I think it's really important to ask this question. Because when we are compromising our history of like oppression and we tell people of this history, there always are people who are erased through that process. How can we vocalize about our history without compromising those people who might be [in] our narratives?

glo: So, a lot of what I do and what we do, actually we had a delegation of folx in the Charlotte Uprising collective go to Standing Rock in November 2016, and um, ever since I've been making really intentional, moves toward being in right relationship with Indigenous and Native folx here, where we can hear their stories from them. A lot of what you heard me say today, a lot of what I had access to sharing with you, come from people I'm actually in community with, come from Native and Indigenous folx. A lot of it is actually, like, are you in community with people who are like being fucked over and that's kind where we're getting to when we talk about liberation. We're talking also about community building. Um and so, in community building we actually do have to go do some time and sit with people and observe and like see what is life for different folx, and let their stories be their stories and not something that you speak of or from, but like that you can lament on and tell on your own because what I tried to do today was tell my own story and also connect it to others without telling someone else's story. And like that is something I only am able to do because I am in community with such individuals. So maybe it's getting in coalition with other organizations like Indigenous People's Power Project, which is a really dope initiative and

project coming out of indigenous and native folk who are wanting to resist ecological warfare in the many different ways the state is poisoning and harming people. We also do work with the Southeast Asian Coalition in Charlotte, so we are very closely, we are actually in coalition with them. So, we know a lot and do a lot with Southeast Asian deportations and things like that, having to learn the histories of refugees and the true histories. You might have to do a little bit of research. You might have to not talk for like a year to just learn, right. Because sometimes that's part of it too. Sometimes it's literally just like a little bit of listening and being able to situate yourself within another person's story. Because when I think about Palestine, I see that happening here. It's not far off. It is the same weapons, it's the same tools. It's the same ideology, right. And so being able to not other, other's, you know is something that works for me. I hope that helps.

*i try to make sure people understand
that it's not like a conversation
around martyrdom, but more a
conversation around knowing your
power and your ability to change
things, if you just do everything you
can, every time you can,
whenever you can*

Moderator: You got a court date coming up. You want to share that?

glo: Oh yeah, I have a court date, May 7th of this year in Charlotte. I think it's at 9:30m, if y'all would like to come through, we have information on that, Jamie, Ash and myself will be here until Sunday. Also, there are go fund me's for legal fees. Rayquan Borem, like we said, actually I don't know if I said that but he's been in a cage since those days without trial. His trial is not set until December 3rd. So, that's two years in a cage with no trial for something the police did, right. Those of us who were witnesses were actually in communication with one another and none of us has been contacted by the police so they're clearly not building a case otherwise, right. And so, why is he there, like what's happening to him. He's been in solitary many, many times. I think we raised now, 55 thousandish for him, and we still need to raise another 30ish thousand. This is still like grassroots, we're not an organization. We're not a 501c3. We are trans and queer people who have jobs and lives, and like, you know beds that we want to see sometimes. But, people are on the inside, right. And so, we're really trying to push and work and make sure that he doesn't get lost in this system that's trying to deeply incriminate him for something that clearly wasn't, that he didn't do. And so yeah, so if y'all wanna link up with us about that, you can also follow Charlotte Uprising on Facebook, and then we're available, as well.

Moderator: Thank you so much glo merriweather

glo: Thank you

**Continue to unlearn and relearn
how to be in right relationship with one another and the Earth**

If you wish to get involved or learn more, please check out these groups/organizations and be ready to do a lot of listening.

Mijente

L'eau est La Vie Camp- Water Protectors resisting the Bayou Bridge Pipeline
Charlotte Uprising- a Collective of Trans and Non-Binary organizers
The Southeast Asian Coalition of Charlotte
Indigenous Peoples Power Project
Black Youth Project 100

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glo merriweather is a Black, queer community organizer who spent two years on trial for felony protest charges, stemming from the 2016 Charlotte Uprising. Now, glo works to build healing centered communities and families, in Charlotte and globally.