

Silver Threads

Episode 9: Love Makes Us More Militant, with Marina Sitrin

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Transcript

Speakers: carla bergman, Eleanor Goldfield, Marina Sitrin

[introductory music]

carla 0:25

Hello, hello and welcome to silver threads. This is our first show of 2021. And where we are still walking, still waking. And I'm carla.

Eleanor 0:37

And I'm Eleanor. And this is the show where we trace our present path through the people and stories of the past. As we ourselves long term radicals learn about each other from each other and continue to walk and continue to awake. And this week we're joined by Marina Sitrin, a mother, dreamer and associate professor at Binghamton University who writes about, and participates in, societies in movement, specifically looking at new forms of social organization, such as autogestión, horizontalidad, prefigurative politics and new affective social relationships. She grounds much of her work in ethnography, oral history and sociological narrative. She is the co-editor, with Colectiva Sembrar of Pandemic Solidarity: Mutual Aid During the COVID 19 Crisis; author of Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina; Everyday Revolutions: Horizontalism and Autonomy in Argentina; the co-author of They Can't Represent US!: Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy; and the forthcoming book, The New Revolutions from Social Movements to Societies in Movement.. Thanks so much for being here, Marina.

Marina 1:45

Thrilled to be here. Thanks.

carla 1:47

I also want to add that Marina is like the lighthouse in our community, like the lifeline for so many of us in these these stormy days. And I just wanted to say it on here. And I know I say it to you often. But I want to say it publicly and this Thank you so much. So so wonderful to have you here.

Marina 2:09

So beautiful. Now I'm starting with tears already started.

carla 2:16

So we'll just we just get right to your questions, we kind of have a format, because we're trying to amplify what it means to still walk still wake, still learn, still show up, even when you've been doing stuff for a long time in radical spaces. So the first thing we like to ask our guests is to kind of take us on a little bit of a history historical journey. Perhaps if you had a watershed moment that ignited your involvement, particularly thinking like your involvement collectively?

Marina 2:50

No, it's a wonderful question. Sometimes, I think, we become aware are involved in ways that we hadn't realized, because we define being involved in certain ways. And so for me, it started really young, and not the big organizations or networks or things like that. But I come from an interracial family. So I have a number of siblings from different backgrounds. And it was around race when I was younger, I idolized my older sister still do in a lot of ways. And her father had been in the black power movement. And so she's interracial. And it didn't even occur to me, I think, for a period of time, about race. And so somewhere around Middle School, early Middle School, she was being treated really differently. And people were saying awful things. And it was one of those moments where I became aware that they were saying it because she's black. And so it was a shift. I grew up in a radical family. You know, my parents were both involved in movements and continue to be in different ways. And so i was aware in an abstract way, but it was

that moment where it became so clear and personal. And so I started to get involved in unlearning racism kinds of workshops, in middle school with different groups. And then that quickly kind of turned into the anti apartheid movement into high school. And so it was kind of the beginning to be engaged. And I very quickly was dissatisfied with movements in groups and felt that was the whole system. You know, I was this teenage anti capitalist, we have to get rid of capitalism! And I met some socialist groups, and so decided that that was the way to go. I read the Communist Manifesto and joined the young socialist Alliance and was a Trotskyist and a militant, you know, we will get rid of capitalism, we will just build the party, that 12 of us or 50 of us, or whatever. And so that was I mean, it was and we can talk about this later because it was influential, continues to be influential for me into my 20s even now. And some of my thinking, but more critically. So that was a big moment. And then I was critical over the years of these different, I was in and out of a number of different socialist groups kind of struggling to -- we have to get rid of capitalism-- but there were so many problems with these groups, especially hierarchy and a lack of democracy and participation in this way, with the party being a Vanguard, you know, critiques of all of it. And I had met some anarchists, and it didn't feel right. To me, it was very identity, feeling, the people that I had met. And I didn't feel welcome in the spaces for different reasons. So then, when I was in law school, in the late 90s, 1999, actually was my third year of law school, and I was part of this women's clinic. And I went to Seattle, actually, as a part of the group MADRES, a women's human rights advocacy group. And at a certain point, I went there also, because I was interested, I knew there was going to be a big demonstration, I just had no idea how it was being organized. And it wasn't until I was there. And that was a watershed moment for me that you can be anti capitalist, you can have a different vision of society. And it doesn't have to be awful. It doesn't have to be you know about punishment and guilt and hierarchy. It can be beautiful, and joyous and super militant, and to take a page out of your book, quite literally, carla, and so that the experience in Seattle, I didn't work and do anything with the NGO, I was out on the street doing direct action and blockades and also then met people who are doing the direct action, kind of legal support and jail solidarity. And that also opened my mind as to what was possible with kind of last night, I got involved in the Direct Action Network. And, and so it's a long kind of biography. Those are some of the most could have personally significant moments, maybe later, we'll talk a bit about Argentina and some of my experience there, because that was a whole different world that wasn't, you know, an experience of people intentionally organizing in assemblies to shut something down, but an entire society self organized, which is a different kind of phenomenon.

Eleanor 7:28

I mean, I feel like we can jump right into that, because I'm super curious. And I think that that follows the the biographical wave.

Marina 7:37

Totally, okay, great. No, it does. And it's kind of chronologically 1999 is Seattle in the Direct Action Network. And I was involved in the different direct action, direct democracy kind of networks. And then in 2001, I was living in New York City. So there was September 11, in New York City, 2001. And that shut down a lot of spaces, or at least we felt like space was being shut down. I think there was kind of both things happening as far as the kind of direct action and direct democracy projects we were involved in. And by chance, I ended up meeting some people, I'd heard about what was happening in Argentina. So that's the 19th and 20th of December in 2001, there was a popular rebellion, the beginning of society coming out together in the streets, it was in response to an economic crisis. But it was much more than that. It was an economic crisis. It was a political crisis. It was a history of dictatorship not being discussed. There are so many things that came together. And, so I went and met some people at the World Social Forum in Brazil. The World Social forums then had these really big autonomous spaces that were self organized from people around the world. And I met, people from Argentina and one woman, Paula said, Oh, yeah, just come come to stay in my apartment. You know, I stay with my boyfriend all the time, you can just come. and I took her seriously. And I packed a big suitcase and arrived. And culturally, it's a lovely culture. And it's one of these like, Oh, yes, come but I'm not sure that she and she actually, we are now very good friends, she jokes that she didn't really, totally expect that I was going to show up with a suitcase on her doorstep like okay, I'm here. And that being in Argentina, in those moments of mass assemblies, and people taking over workplaces and unemployed, taking over land and Indigenous getting reinvigorated and networking with all of the different movements from different backgrounds, was well and still is, I think, an incredibly significant moment in our kind of collective history of what's possible in autonomous organizing. So that shifted things for me as far as scale and self organization. And I think it should for all of us, that it's amazing when we organize things like shutting down the World Trade Organization, and use mass assemblies and forms of direct democracy. It's a whole other thing when an entire society is organizing in assemblies with forms of direct democracy without saying first, okay, let's come together and use direct democracy. Because see, the representation doesn't really work. But that it was this organic, that idea of Horizontalidad can really took root and spread throughout society and its word that hadn't been used before in Spanish, and people used it as a way to describe this relationship of, well, direct democracy for lack of that kind of shorthand. But it's way more than direct democracy,

it's creating new relationships in this dynamic with one another. And in creating concrete projects. So meeting needs, it was a terrible economic crisis, and taking over workplaces and using the same form and land and creating not just micro projects, but big projects to sustain large communities. And we're talking about hundreds of 1000s to millions of people involved in this a barter network of almost 7 million people. Tremendous kind of possibility, and transforming society.

carla 11:13

Yeah, I mean, Marina, when I, when I first heard about horizontalism I, because similarly to you, I, I really didn't like identifying as an anarchist, or really felt like I belonged in anarchism. When I was on the board of Institute, for anarchist society, my friends were like, it's, it's out the cats out of the bag. It's too late. But anyways, flipping back a bit I horizontalism, really, that's what it felt that that kind of, I could get behind that. And a lot of the writing that I was coming up against was men, a lot of men talking about horizontalism. And when I found your you and your work, I just because I think you make that connection about social relationships in a way that a lot of the work I was reading didn't do, it was still through a bit of a lens of whether it's socialism or something, there was something more about, like keeping it more about the systemic, you know, ending class and stuff. And I just, I'm wondering, and it seems to maybe connect back to that being politicized with that relationship with your sister, and maybe you can talk a bit how that sits in your work and how it continues to grow. And

Marina 12:31

so that, um, thank you. I'm so glad, though it's not, it's kind of disingenuous to call it my work. It's not I mean, it's my work in that it's my, you know, I'm dedicated to facilitating the voices of other people. So I went back and forth with horizontalism is, you know, an edited book. And it's authored, and it's authored, because it's my lens, but it's all interviews with people over the course of years, long hours and hours, kind of interviews that then I edit down, which anyone who's listening who's ever had hours and hours of interviews that then you need to edit down, and then it's hundreds of people, and you need to put it in a book not, you know, a set of encyclopedic volumes or something, it's really hard. And it was so hard. And so it's facilitating, it's what I saw and heard. And that's what I did. And I think, our listening that if we listen more, we see this more we hear this more people talk about in these more kind of transformative autonomous spaces in particular, they talk about their relationships with one another. And then the opposite. When people leave these political groups that call themselves

parties and things like that, it's often because of bad social relationships that aren't that's not addressed, because it's not seen as political or serious. But that is so much at the heart of all of this. And this is what everyone was saying. And I think that's why this Horizontalidad is not only that is not my theory or invention at all, it's what people were doing and how they were describing what they were doing. And it's why in the book, people from all different parts of the country from all different backgrounds, from unemployed, you know, kind of permanently unemployed, as a state of being to former middle class are all organizing and talking about the same kind of relationship being core in what they were doing so that yeah, I think when we start with theory, and that's often what men are taught to do, we're maybe what we're taught to do in society and women more often don't, but also kind of people who are practicing now kind of thinking about social movements and participating. It's not just a male, female. I think it's also about where you're situated in the world. Class, geography... so in Latin America, people are talking much more about social relationships in the movements. So it might be in certain parts of Europe or certain parts of what is called the The United States or Canada, people kind of start with theory. And so then let's get this into this theory that I have. And that's deeply problematic. I'm not also saying that whatever movements are doing like, Oh, yeah, great, let's just, you know, capture that and put it on paper. And that's what we should do. And but we have to listen first. And so yeah, I guess I see myself as a facilitator. I love facilitating assemblies and meetings, and I kind of do that in writing. And so I happen to be at a university, because it's a much better job than doing law or other things. And it's security for my child, and I, and I love teaching. But it's not because I have some academic aspirations. And like, you should know my name, I really don't know. It's about other people's voices. And so if we can use our positions to facilitate other people's voices, then that's great.

carla 15:52

Yeah, we can be in solidarity at every level. Yeah.

Eleanor 15:59

Yeah, I love it. I also think it's really cool that there there's there are several professors that I know of, that are these radical human beings and have chosen to be to be professors for that, that same reason. And also because as one, as one of my friends says, he's like, I wanted to be insidious, and be the be the anarchist, that's teaching your kids as opposed to the right wing nutbag. But I also wanted to kind of pinpoint like, on one of the questions, specifically with regards to your place, like your geographical

place, because from what I've heard, I've unfortunately, never been Argentina, but I'd love to go i feel like you like, and this is true for a lot of places in Latin America. But there is this like, deeper cultural understanding of imperialism, and, and capitalism. And not to mention, you know, Argentina has the coup to look back on that wasn't that long ago, the US backed coup, as opposed to the US where there's really a more so I guess, like in my generation and older, a lack of understanding of capitalism and imperialism, I think younger folks have a better or they're getting a better understanding of way earlier age than I did. But I'm curious, like in terms of radicalism, like what it means to you, having experienced both like the American version, or, you know, American events, and watershed moments, and then being a part of this moment and movement in Argentina, and how that looks differently, both like on a surface level, but also like deeper on a on a deeper cultural level as well.

Marina 17:37

Yeah, you know, it's different, and it's not that different. I mean, it's different for all the reasons you're saying, as far as histories and understanding, you know, kind of an intellectual understanding, but also an embodied understanding. And, of course, you understand imperialism, because that's the system that overthrew the government that killed your grandparents, you know, there's that kind of direct lineage that you can't break. And so there's that, but I don't. At the same time, I guess, I fear saying too much cultural difference, depending where we're talking about. And so there's power and power imbalance all over the world, and within each of our different societies. And so I try to think more about where we have the points of meeting an intersection and possibility. Without making it, he knew clearly I was coming from this imperialist country going to Argentina as well, there wasn't like, Okay, I'm one of you. And we're in the same place, you know, let's go with the unemployed movement or things like that. And that's really important, I think, for all of us doing different kinds of organizing work, whatever that community is that we're getting involved in, if it's different from our backgrounds, kind of knowing where we are. But um, maybe this isn't really what you're asking, but it's something that occurred to me because when I was younger, I used to feel guilty. You know, I have this privilege. I come from this horrible imperialist country. And no matter how much of an anti capitalist and anti imperialist I am still kind of carrying that weight with me. And it was people not in Argentina, it was actually earlier, I think, in Nicaragua, who said in a really gentle, loving way, get over it. Like, you need to just be in the struggle with us and lose your guilt. It's not helpful, and it's about you. They didn't say it like that at all at all at all. But that was my takeaway. It was like, oh, wow, this is really my holding all of this and it becomes an obstacle in creating relationships. Yeah. And I've done work I mean, it's Argentina, but I've spent a lot of time in different places

around the world. So in Bolivia or Mexico, Nicaragua was a long time ago, and but also in different parts of Europe. So Greece and Spain, you know, parts of southern Europe that are just not the same as you know, when I lived in Berlin for a while just very different kind of political situation and historical situation. And yeah, I think it's more about trying to make connections with people and across geographies as much as we can. So that's, I guess, personally, politically, I've been thinking about this, as it's been a few years I'm living in, you know, near Binghamton, New York. So one of these many kind of posts, small industry, towns and cities, that becomes more of a jail town. And so being involved in things like anti prison work, and the local mutual aid networks, but also continuing to try and use the different relationships with people around the world to help people meet one another. And I think the more we can do that, the better. So it's both important to be super locally situated. And not to forget all those other connections we have from different places, because if we can be conduits, that's one of the things I think we're missing the most right now.

carla 21:08

Yeah. Can we? I was just thinking about listeners. And can you talk a little bit and maybe explain or what horizontalism is? I think what I liked about it was that it's it's a lot of times with collectivism, particularly anarchism are, there's this like desire to be flat, right, completely flat. And that's, that's where the problems happen. That's like ignoring power, ignoring the natural authorities that are in the room. The verticalism, I think was kind of, is another way to talk about that connection outside of the horizontal community. Is there a way that maybe you could? I don't know. I know, it's like, I know, it's a complex notion. But I know that if I was listening to this, I'd be like, somebody tell me what it is.

Marina 21:55

No, I think that's great. And I actually think it's really important because having participated in Occupy Wall Street in New York, and and, you know, visiting spending time with people in other parts of the world afterward, some people have started to use the language of horizontalism, as if it's a thing, like I'm more horizontal than you almost. And I'm joking. And I'm not joking. Like, it really is like we are the most horizontal and from the use in Argentina, and my sense of the word it's, or that it's a relationship. And actually Emilio, who also became a very good friend, who continues, he was organizing way back. So when he's interviewed in the book, he's 17, he now has been living in the north, coordinating and working with the Guarani communities, in defense of the land.

And immediately I said, and at 17 years old, that horizontalism is a tool and a goal. And it's a tool and a goal that when you started talking, you were talking about the walk, and it's this tool and a goal toward freedom, as a part of a walk and a relationship and you don't become horizontal, you don't become horizontally, that it's a alley that it's not like a it's not a thing, it's a relationship. And so it's about creating relationships that create more space for people to participate. That's, that implies a more of a power with one another. But also and this isn't to say it was done perfectly in assemblies and in workplaces, not at all people were very continued to be very self reflective about how this worked, particularly around the question of leadership, that certain people play, you know, we play different roles and have different skill sets and recognizing that, and in recognizing that and talking about it, then that's still a part of this world or something like that, because someone can speak really well or give big speeches and someone else happens to have a law degree so they can help negotiate what happens when the police come. It's not to give them special power, but it's to recognize they have specific maybe knowledge. So someone with medical training might have a specific knowledge, but someone coming from an Indigenous community has a very different concept of health that they're bringing in, to think in a totality. So seeing all of these different pieces as different and yet, one is not above the other. implied also in Horizontalidad , that was an effect. It was something that I heard first in Argentina and was like what politica afectiva What do you mean, like, affective, like within A politics Like what? You know, and I've since you know, looked it up and over the years, it can be like this heavy theory that some people talk about linguistics and I don't even understand some of the things people write about it, quite honestly. And the way people were talking about it in Argentina was just like, it's about care. It's about love. It's that in these relationships, we care for one another. And that develops as Part of the relationship, and then the relationship changes, but the care is there, and then the kind of care changes. And so it's this whole dynamic in an ever changing relationships, the idea that someone could be more horizontal, doesn't even make sense because it has to be like a live thing that's occurring. And unfortunately, I think we missed some of that and, you know, not missed, like it's a permanence, but things that we have to learn more is to keep it as an on going kind of relationship, and then also autonomy. And that was also something people in Argentina talked about in a not like autonomous Marxism as much as Negre. And all kinds of people are great, like, read that, that's fine. That's good. But just more like when you hear the word autonomy, what do you think? we might seven year olds talks about my autonomy, sometimes to a point where I'm like, No, but your autonomy and you still have to go to sleep. But that sense of, you know, your relationship to power, I guess, with my child, I'm the power, um, but that we are autonomous kind of from and we're doing this together with one another. And so it implies a lot. And it's not like a theory that like, okay, let's take it and do it. It's, it's about practices and thinking together about the kinds of relationships we want to have in our groups or networks or

movements. And then and doing it, I mean, I think a lesson to be learned, not that it's like wrong, or something like that. But just as we walk, we learn these different things. I think we do need more agreements, rules, even if you will, like if you're okay with the word rules. But we have to commit to certain kinds of agreements. So what happens when we say we're going to have this kind of relationship? And then it you know, people step out, because we're all kinds of messed up by capitalism and sexism, racism, like all this stuff, we're all gonna mess up all the time? And what do we do? And how do we keep a relationship that's based in care, and that's horizontal, when we mess up, I think call out just calling someone out on it is actually not going to do that. And it doesn't do it in a care based way. So how can we make sure these things are dealt with collectively?. And that was one of the challenges people faced in Argentina. And I think something we could learn and are learning and a lot of spaces, but how we have Horizontalidad with a kind of alternative way of thinking about healing with harms. People should read the voices of people from Argentina for Horizontalidad and, and those people reflected on it, and others, so many other spaces around the world in different ways, whether we're the same language or not the Plataforma in Spain, the land, and the kind of housing, the anti eviction housing defense movement that started before 2011 that really took off kind of with the movement of the squares. They start all of their assemblies, it's about people coming together and talking first just checking in and telling their stories, where are you? Who are you?, and that creates a care with one another, and from that care, and this is something that workers told me in recuperated workplaces, also in Argentina, like that care, that love and these were like dudes in Argentina telling me about love. that also, then people are gonna step up for each other. And that means like levels of militancy. So when the police come to evict that workplace, or when it's time, you know, in Spain, that someone's home might get evicted. There's a relationship that's not just ideologically, or politically, you believe someone shouldn't be evicted. But you've grown to really care about all of these people in this room, and their homes. And so we know from our personal relationships, you know, going back to me and my sister, I guess that you know, you're really willing to put your body on the line when someone you care about is being threatened. And so it, you know, Love makes us more militant. Thank you, carla. I know that's your book again.

carla 29:20

I think that is but you too. I mean, we interviewed you for our book and you made that connection about and that's why I interviewed you because you did make that connection between relationship and militancy, like an increase of care and trust in our relationships builds an increase, It just the outcome is an increase in militancy. And that's something you said before we even wrote our book. So thank you.

Eleanor 29:43

I guess that's mutualism right there. Yeah, no, I, I was thinking of the Fred Hampton quote, when you were talking about, you know, theory, that I can't remember exactly how it goes. But it's like theory is nice, but without practice, it ain't shit. And I always loved that quote. Because it's just so succinct like, Yeah, it's great if you want to sit and like, I am a total theory nerd, but, you know, when we're doing like a community garden, or when we're stopping ICE from deporting a neighbor, we're not really talking about Kropotkin in that moment, we're busy doing other shit. And, and it's also a way to bring people in because people aren't going to be engaged. If you're like, Hey, can I talk to you about Kropotkin? They're gonna be engaged. If you're like, hey, do you want some kale? But yeah, so I was also curious, because you, you know, you talked about, like making those connections earlier? I imagine like in the past, it's there. Hurdles, that I feel like that, like COVID might have plateaued a little bit, because we're all dealing with the same disaster kind of all at once. So I'm curious how COVID has shifted or changed your work if it has?

Marina 30:55

Yeah, I mean, not being able to be out face to face with people for sure changes things from direct organizing to kind of helping to facilitate voices, it's much harder on zoom. So it's changed. You know, it's, it's different things. It's something I'm thinking about a lot. It's a good question. I don't have an answer exactly. Because I'm not sure I've reflected on it enough. I am. I feel like I kind of go back and forth with my understanding of where I am even with all of this, I spend a lot more time talking to people about how they're doing, helping to, you know, adjudicate conflict. So outside police and state and laws and things like that there are a lot of conflicts that come up in harms, and helping people to try to resolve those. So doing that a lot on zoom. And it feels like, that's been a shift, and where a lot of my focus has gone over the last, you know, year plus, and listening to people who are having a really hard time, which I think we have to do with each other a lot more.

And it's a horrible time, and a really inspiring time, I think, to say, you know, and it's totally true, it's laid bare, again, what capitalism is and what it's about, and, you know, the values and it's not about life and caring for people, and what are our priorities and society? You know, in the United States, it's like, keep the restaurants open, and do not help people have access to homes makes all kinds of crazy. And I don't know, you know, because it's laid bare again, again, like happens in crisis, does that mean, you know,

we're going to kind of step in and meet that challenge now. And that's the part that honestly, is what I'm struggling with most, that's about me personally. And that's about us collectively. And it's an incredibly horrible time. And an incredibly inspiring time with a numbers of people around the world. This is what we did with our project and Pandemic Solidarity, we try to just take some snapshots, quick, quick, quick, things that are happening around the world, and there's so much care, so much mutual aid, so much solidarity everywhere, in neighborhoods, you know, in big scale, or at least medium scale. And early on, you know, in the first I don't know, many months, I thought that was going to scale over More, so that networks would begin to coordinate with more networks with more networks, both regionally globally. Of course, it makes sense, similar to kind of what happened in Argentina, where there'd been more division, say, with certain groups in the past or tensions and that people started to work together more. And I know that's happening in a lot of places, but not the level that that i think i and we were all hoping it would and it's not like the opportunity still isn't there. It's of course, it's still there. But I wonder about why, like, I wonder, are we afraid of our own capacity for power? And I know a lot of people have said that. I wonder why more of us aren't talking to more of us, especially because we're at home, like those of us who are self organized. Because organizing locally in this horizontal way, with mutual aid we do fairly naturally in a time of crisis. And then we call it something political more recently and that's great. Like calling Mutual Aid and, and it's quite radical and revolutionary when we talk about it, and what we're practicing. And so why isn't that scaling over? More? What's happening there? And I don't know, what do you think? Why are we afraid of our selves? Like, are we I don't know. I mean, that sounds too awful to say like, we're afraid of that kind of power. But there's some there's a block and I don't understand that. I'd like to dig more into that and talk to more people and figure out why why do you think that's happening?

carla 35:36

That's such a good question. I mean, right away, I, I have to point to Empire. I mean, we're so bloody subjugated. Even those of us who are, are excited about the possibility of ending capitalism and, and the response that link the immense responsibility of creating a new world, it's it's huge, right? So that I think even those of us who are like up for that challenge to sit sit in the fire is the one author called it I can't remember who said that, but sit in the fire together. But I think like, you know, we were really subjugated. I think empires part of the problem, and maybe that's too abstract. But, I mean, just surviving capitalism, like, I, my partner is working class, like he works 40 hours a week, like, so that just takes up most of our time. So that's just my personal

story. And you just amplify that, I think that would be my first response. But I'm definitely gonna sit with it longer. I think it's a great conversation to be having publicly.

Eleanor 36:41

We've had that we've had conversations in a couple of spaces that I'm a part of, and the answers are pretty varied. I think a friend of mine who grew up in India occupied Kashmir, said that the Americans think that they have something left to lose, and so they're clinging to that idea. So I think that there's some of that, I also think that, from what I've talked to folks in our community, they're like, well, we're not ready yet. We don't we like we don't even have shit on lock, so that we can take care of our own community, like people are drowning in the need. And the need, like, we thought it was gonna like ebb this time, and it just keeps going, like the need just keeps skyrocketing. So that's also one of the things that I've, I've heard and, I mean, I've, I've sat with it, too, and like my own fears of my own aspirations. And I think it's a complex question. And I think depending on the day, I'll have a different answer.

Marina 37:48

It's good. I mean, it's good in that it's helpful, and hopefully, more people think about it, if maybe, and maybe it's also just me, personally, my impatience like that I was a Trotskyist a long time, you know, like, Trotskyist, and that anarchist impulse, you know, just like smash the state and be done with this, you know, but, and not, but and what do we do about prisons, and alternatives to the little micro stuff I've been doing, personally, and I know, people who are involved in as far as trying to work on harm and circle justice and things like that, I think we definitely need a lot more of that in place, not, you know, political party program that kind of in place. We need more practice, maybe in some of the healing practices so that when these bumps come up, as we're scaling over, we're able to, as best we can, anyway, begin to deal with that. Because it seems like that's been one of the big, big challenges in so many groups and movements. You know, people often refer to it as interpersonal, but it's much more than interpersonal. It's about power and gender and race and, and these pieces of capitalism that we need to talk more about that create these divisions, and then we have to, yeah, stop the misbehavior.

Eleanor 39:23

I think like that's another thing that I've heard is like the vacuum that, you know, when everything goes to shit, people tend to lean back on their programming. And unfortunately, our programming is largely to rebuild something shitty and hierarchical and not, not just and so I think people are also worried about that vacuum. And in particular, for something like the United States with the largest military the world has ever seen. I think there's a very big fear that, that we're just it's gonna be like, it's gonna be like, one large massacre,

[music]

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carla 40:31

I think sometimes we avoid these conversations because there's so they seem so impossible to even get your head around. And I think like speaking about prefiguration or building or creating these newer collectively or horizontally run, I guess for lack of a better word and kind of institutions is necessary because like they need to be on the horizon for people to see that it can be done. And you know, I think about Greece and like, the medical clinics, I was talking to a friend yesterday who's a paramedic and studying, doing more studying because he's like, you know, the back end of 911 is just like it can you know, and thinking about building new worlds and, and even and being there for people in that way like that. Even that, like needs some real prefiguration thinking. Anyway, I could you could probably talk more about the Greece things. And I you spent time there. But I also I'm curious to maybe swing back to our questions about this kind of laying bare time of capitalism and people being more aware of how terrible Empire is whether it's racism or patriarchy or capitalism, like, do you have more hope now? with this?

Marina 41:56

So I do as well, yeah, I know, that's gonna be crazy. It's like, I've spent more time talking to people who are sad and having a really hard time. I mean, it's people we love are dying, you know, whether it's because of COVID, or because of COVID. But COVID isn't

the, you know, on the piece of paper. And so there's that horror, and I do have more hope. I do think it's more possible. I'm, if we had had this conversation a little over a year ago, my concern might not have been, how seriously are we taking the question of scaling over our mutual aid projects, our self organization and our not meaning, self identified political groupings, people organizing in society that you know, what I saw in Argentina, what I you know, what people experienced of society, the idea of societies and movement themselves, that's something we're experiencing around the world, which is huge. And it's something that I think most of us would agree like, of course, that's what happens when there's a, you know, Earth earthquake or a flood people come together, we help one another. We have that mass crisis. And there's that mass level of helping so I am more much, much, much more hopeful now, for sure. And I'm thinking more about the questions of, so what does that look like? It's not a transitional program, it's not, you know, there's like the party line. And so thinking about what, you know, what organizations are inspiring now, and of course, all of these mutual aid groups everywhere, just anywhere you look, there are groups, you know, people who are listening, if you don't know them, put in the name of your county, or your province and put in the word mutual aid or solidarity or care, or COVID help or something non institutional, for sure will come up, lots of things will come up, there's so many ways to participate. So that's incredible. And so I was thinking about all of these groups, obviously, are really inspiring. And then there's a network. And I love a lot of the people in it. So what I'm about to say might come off a little strange. So in base to kind of started with a handful of people in the US symbiosis, which is a grouping of people who have come together to try to create a network kind of scaling outward, kind of based in North America, more US Mexico, of projects that are a networks and groups that are based in this idea of Horizontalidad , even if they don't say that, but it's kind of direct democracy, autonomy, self organization. And it's not to say that Symbiosis is perfect. You know, I wouldn't say like Okay, everyone go join Symbiosis, that would be fine and great if people did become a part of that network. But it's an attempt to create a confederation. It's an attempt to link all of these different networks and so that is really exciting and important. Whether it is Symbiosis itself, or it's other kinds of projects like this, because it's thinking in that, okay, what does society look like, as a whole? How do we continue to move? outward? I keep saying outward, because, you know, the Zapatista's early on had that phrase about, from below into the left, where the heart resides. So it's like that out. It's not up, it's not, you know, it's just out. And for sure, hope and finding it all around us.

Eleanor 45:33

I'm also curious, because one of our, one of the kind of points of the podcast is to, to share vulnerabilities and to also share the the simple fact that the idea of like purism or you know, as carla puts it in her book, rigid radicalism, or like you said, I'm more horizontal than you. Like, that's bullshit. And that folks are still learning even if they've been doing this a really long time. So I'm curious for you, how do you feel that you're still learning and and what? How do you feel that your journey has shifted? And what what does the future look like in terms of your journey? Do you feel

Marina 46:18

Oh, I make mistakes all the time, it's so important to say that we do some of them are harder to say out loud than others. And the easier ones to talk about are the ones that were further away, you know, when I was it, like, an aspiring political party and dropped out of college to work in a garment factory, and I was like, I was gonna recruit the workers in this garment factory. And I think of myself now, then, you know, and all the workers would buy my newspaper, like, why would they buy my newspaper, they would have bought pie that I brought in, you know, it was like an act of solidarity. And so there's certain things I've done that I definitely look back and like that are big, and a lot of them are related to more lecturing, type politics, you know, I have the truth, I'm bringing it to you in this whatever way, whether that's, you know, a Trotskyist group, which is easier to pick on. But it could also be, you know, here's my horizontal plan, you know, this is how we're going to create this new care based relationship in our organizing, and maybe people not feeling that. So listening more, not kind of going in with the idea of, even not that it's like a perfect theory, but just going in to whatever situation listening and I try hard to do that, and I messed up a lot. And are more bumps that I have. So this is like a very recent confession. I don't know if confession is the right word. But there was a group I didn't get involved in locally for a while. Because I knew that one of the people who was core and organizing it had been saying things about me, you know, basically, that I'm, like, not theoretical enough, because I, you know, facilitate people's voices, and whatever it's like, kind of an academy critique that I know, is nonsense. And if I heard of anyone else, I would say, Well, you know, movements are creating their theory. And so, you know, what do you think theory is, where does theory come from I, you know, and yet, being on the receiving end of that critique, made me take an extraordinary long time to begin to participate in that group. So the kind of lessons of recognizing our own vulnerabilities and all of this, and that's okay. Um, you know, I should have gotten involved earlier, but I didn't, I reached out to the person, we had a really good conversation, it's like, all good now. And that sometimes people maybe are uncomfortable with that, maybe you have someone else help you reach out to that person. But so yeah, being more trying to be more self aware of kind of our

position who we are listening more and. And if something is like an Ouch, finding a way to tell somebody and talk about it, because these couches, actually, you know, I am 50 years old, I've been organizing since I was like, 10. That I could feel awkward means I imagine that most people have had these experiences, you know, where you just feel like, Oh, this doesn't feel right. Because whatever, or you imagine something something... So the personal is political. So these things are all like we just take it up together... I'm not sure if that's exactly what you were asking. But it's what occurred to me.

Eleanor 49:41

Yeah, reminds me of, um, I worked in recording studios, when I lived in LA for 10 years, and one of the things my mentor said was, if you're gonna fuck up fuckup loudly and then we will deal with it. Don't try to be shy and fuck up. fuckup loudly. So.

Marina 49:58

it's great. Yeah, now it's totally true. And it's sometimes surprising the things that we don't want to share and they're actually getting in the way of our ability to fully participate or other people's. Yeah.

carla 50:11

My youngest he has a speech impediment like me and, and he would often say things wrong and stuff and his friends would always correct him and when he was five, he said, Everything I do wrong is wonderful. Just Oh, that's gonna be my mantra. Everything I make every time I make a mistake. It's fabulous.

Marina 50:34

That's great. I love that.

carla 50:36

Yeah. Yeah. I'm curious about like you, I mean, you already spoke to you, seeing what was happening with your sister and the racism and stuff, but is there kind of like a guideposts person or collective or a book or something that has kind of been this touchstone thing that you refer to that is guide you or sparked you

Marina 51:06

early on, like when I was younger, younger, and I grew up with my parents listening to folk music a lot, mostly us folk music. So it was at first Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie. And now it's amazing. I think about you know, I'll sometimes play music and my child will ask about the words and I think, wow, I grew up some pretty hardcore lyrics. I'm like about songs about lynchings and, you know, really horrible. Hiroshima, Nagasaki, like big stuff. And so music played a big role when I was much younger, not so much. Books, you know, I had to read a whole bunch of books in these different socialist groups, but know his music and relationships. Later. So like, now even is that kind of the question, um, one of the books I go back to all the time is Rebecca Solnit Hope in the Dark. And it's so you know, Rebecca, you're listening, I love you, we

carla 52:08

love you. We love you, Rebecca,

Marina 52:10

we love you. And you don't have to read the whole book. Like every single page. It's like, it's, there's just pages within it, that remind us that we don't know the effects of what we do, later, so that we're organizing now. And we don't know, you know, we sometimes feel like we failed, or we don't know what the impact was. And in the little book, she asks the question, well, you just kind of flips it. And so what if we hadn't what if we hadn't organized in, then what would things have looked like if we hadn't organized around the Iraq war? How much worse might it have been? And we don't know when we're creating these relationships with one another how, and what they'll turn into later, or how they'll spiral outwards. So it's a wonderful reminder of that, but things aren't so linear, and she talks about history being like a crab and how it scuttle on. So that's a beautiful one for me. And then literature. More than,

I guess, like the big theory. And I mean, I love a lot of Latin American, more public intellectuals and people housed in universities. So like Raúl Zibechi, and Rachel, it is people. I would highly recommend as far as thinking about societies in movement. But for the imagination is what it is, for me. It's about, you know, those books that help us think. And I don't just mean imagination, new society. So like Ursula Le Guin of course, Starhawks, The Fifth Sacred Thing that will series I've read them an absurd number of times. Because they allow you to imagine that different world, in fiction. So it's it just for me, it just allows my imagination to open further I don't come to that, like, well, how is that possible? And how is that going to work? Like all of that has to be put on hold because you're reading somethin That's a novel. And then I just love literature for fun, magic realism and certain books that just free free my mind more. So I would suggest that it's finding your like, What thing music words help to let your imagination flow more into the possible and the impossible? Isn't that an Alice in Wonderland? Imagine one impossible thing every day.

carla 54:36

Yeah. Yeah. Love that. Yeah, fiction over here, too. And Rebecca's book, that was a it was a main book for Joyful Militancy.

Eleanor 54:49

So part and part of that question, too, in terms of inspiration, I mean, you you've mentioned a few people that have that have inspired you kind of wanted to circle back to that like Is there an organizer or a radical, or thinker or even a collective that has inspired you like in a really powerful way to act or to jump into something that that turned out to be like a watershed moment in your life or something like that.

Marina 55:17

There are a lot of people's that wouldn't know the name of stuff that I met in Argentina, who had that impact on me, some people would know that calia cuna from lavaca. And more people know her name much more now. As far as guiding people can have mentors for me that I'm so grateful for. And like so many people, probably the Zapatistas as a, you know, as Marcos translated, much of that experience in the later 90s was huge for me, because it's kind of like where the literature meets theory and practice, but it's all real. And as far as organizations and things like that, I don't know. Y

in Seattle, had it not been for the people doing jail solidarity, and Katya Komisaruk in particular. And the work that she was helping to spearhead with jail solidarity, I don't know. So what I ended up doing is not practicing law, but doing activist legal work. So continuing to be in movements and doing kind of sometimes liaising with lawyers and things like that, and movements. And by not being admitted to the Bar, it allows one to speak with a kind of authority, but at the same time, you don't have to risk losing your Barcard. So you could talk about like, oh, if you were to do this, you know, this might be the consequence or not, or, and, and so I did that for a few years. And that I think, just personally was part of determining my path. And I not seen that possibility and might have ended up doing human rights law or something for a while, which, you know, still being an organizer and a militant, without a doubt. But, you know, I wonder like all of these people who touch us in our lives, that would be a fun thing to do. Maybe it's like a New Year's, experiment. List all the people who, without whom, what might have happened?

carla 57:16

Yeah, that's beautiful. And connected to that. And I think you'll, I think you'll appreciate this question, because you're a facilitator of Amplifying Voices and stories. We like to also ask our guests if there's a newer activist or organizer or collective that maybe has come about in the last year or two that is inspiring you that you want to amplify and share some solidarity for.

Marina 57:44

There are a bunch of young organizers around Binghamton in this area very locally, locally postindustrial, upstate New York, and people who've been doing so much amazing work from these carceration projects, together with people the group is called to carcerate. And that's been in existence for a while. And then there's now mutual and mutual aid group and a radical cooperative bookstore that if anyone can't afford books, they give away the books and it's really nice. And so the folks putting all of that together, like in my local, my immediate area, yeah

carla 58:28

that's lovely

Eleanor 58:29

Reminds me a little in DC there are these little like book cubbies. like the look of birdhouses. I guess it's not just in DC, I guess it's in a lot of places. But, but yeah, that because there's oftentimes like a lot of crap like those like crappy romance novels from like the 90s, where there's like some, like, half dressed woman and then like some guy, some Fabio dude, is what I do is I take those out, and then I put a copy of your book, carla in there. And then I put a copy of scott's book in there, and I was just like, here you go. Here's some better shit.

carla 58:31

I love that.

Marina 59:02

That's great. That's great. Yeah, no, that's definitely and there are people who you know, do have access to university. There are many publishers who will give you a book if you're considering using it for a class, for example of the cost or the cost of shipping.

carla 59:15

Wow

Marina 59:16

lots of faculty contribute to this bookstore now.

carla 59:19

Mm hmm. That's neat. We, early on in the pandemic, we have those boxes, too. I went around and put toilet paper in a bunch, and some food because you know, there was

just a lot of misplaced fear, but there was fear around that. So books matter and you know, so does toilet paper.

Eleanor 59:45

Silver threads is recorded in different places across borders. carla is located in Canada on Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh lands. Eleanor is located here and they're usually either in Sweden or on Piscataway land now known as Washington, DC. And our guests join us from around the world. You can find out more about the show and our guests at Grounded futures.com. To learn more about Eleanor's work, visit art killing apathy.com and follow her on Twitter and Instagram at [RadicalEleanor](https://www.instagram.com/RadicalEleanor). For carla, follow her on Twitter and Instagram at [joyfulcarla](https://www.instagram.com/joyfulcarla), you can also reach out to us at silver threads show@protonmail.com. And lastly, if you want to support the making of the show, you can donate over at Grounded futures.com Thank you to the Grounded Futures team for supporting us with promotion. All of this snazzy graphics that you see are created by Jamie-Leigh Gonzales. Grounded Futures is a multimedia platform and is produced by carla bergman, Jamie-Leigh Gonzales and Melissa Roach. post production audio for our show is done by Eleanor Goldfield the intro and outro music for our show is a song called Floodlight by Eleanor's former band rooftop revolutionaries. Thanks for listening. And now let's go rattle thrones and topple Empire.

End of transcript.
