



Santiago

November 16, 2024

Interviewed by Ashby Combahee and Dartricia Rollins

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Ashby Combahee 00:00

Alright. My name is Ashby Combahee and I'm here with Dartricia Rollins, and we are interviewing Santiago for the We Tell Our Own Stories: Reproductive Justice Oral Histories event. Today is Saturday, November 16, 2024 and Georgia Dusk: a southern liberation oral history project is conducting this oral history at Loudermilk Conference Center in downtown Atlanta as part of JusticeNOW2024 a cross-movement, power-building, and power-shifting national conference. You have been asked to participate in this oral history as part of the documentation of the long history of resistance, struggle, and organizing in Georgia and across the US South. SPARK Reproductive Justice is one of the central organizations within this legacy of community networks, organizing strategies, and resources for healing in response to constant state repression. The oral history interviews provide elements of history that are often not apparent in traditional archival documents or dominant media. The interviews enable participants to reclaim the narrative and historical representation of reproductive justice organizing and movement building. And with that, Santiago, can you please introduce yourself by saying your name, your pronouns, age and organizing or cultural work that you do?

Santiago 01:31

Word. Okay, so hello. I am Santiago. My pronouns are they/he. Umm..I'm 26 and was the last one, organizing or cultural work? *Yes* Umm.. yeah, I am an organizer of some sort. I've dipped my toes in labor organizing. I've got involved with Stop Cop City organizing, and do various little things in between, especially with the mutual aid and specifically with food distros in Clarkston, Georgia, for like, immigrant communities there, so kind of like all over the place. I write, I DJ at like these kind of, like political raves called furtherance. I don't know if anyone either listening or here has heard of them, but my friends throw them, and I sometimes DJ them. And I also feel like DJing is also like a political work that is done

right, creating the vibes, getting people to like, you know, both relax and dance, but also like, hear specific messages that matter. I do really shitty poetry. And, yeah, that's kind of it. That's kind of about me. Was born in Chile, but grew up in the metro Atlanta region.

Ashby Combahee 02:49

Okay, that's expansive, yeah, so before we really dig into it, and thank you for that grounding, we asked everyone, who would you like to dedicate this oral history to?

03:03

Yeah, when I was initially reading it, and I said this before the recording, like it was like getting a little emotional, but I want to dedicate it to my grandmother.

Santiago 03:10

I call her Mimi. She has Alzheimer's right now, so she I recently was hearing back from my own mom that she's being placed in like a old person facility--care center thing. And, yeah, I don't know like, when I when I first read that question, that was like the first person that popped in my mind, so I want to dedicate it to her. I feel like, yeah, memory in general, is so important to like, not only just like movements, but I guess humanities, and I think in some ways society experiences a form of like memory erasure, and in many ways it manifests into like an actual physical illness, like my grandmother has..ummm.. with Alzheimer's, in which memories are literally, like, fading away or getting mixed up or whatever. And, yeah, I feel like just, you know, hearing about this oral history project, hearing about, like, the work that y'all are doing, yeah, memory is like, so important to me. And in Chile, we have, like, this phrase it's from, like, when the dictatorship ended, and like, the concept of, like remembering what happened, like the crimes and like the brutality is that it's, it's un país sin recuerdos un país sin historia, or a country without memories, a country without history. So, yeah, that that line has always, like, been really influential to me, but like, yeah, seeing it in my grandmother, seeing it here, seeing it in the world. Yeah, shout out to my..my Mimi. Grandmother.

Ashby Combahee 04:49

Shout out to Mimi, thank you for bringing her into the space and for already, like, digging into the significance of the, the, this moment in this process. So Santiago, tell me more about your journey from Chile to here, and what was it like growing up in the Atlanta area?

05:14

Whoo..Well, oh man, there's a beautiful Cardinal out there. Sorry. Anyways, he's like a little red guy just chilling in the parking lot. I have, like, a unique view right here, just chilling. (Dartricia, "oh yes, I see it") Anyways, sorry, that kind of maybe gives you a little hint about where I grew up. So I was born in Chile, but I moved out of the country very quickly my life, I moved initially, like lived in Spain for a second as a baby. Don't remember it, but seems dope. And then from Spain, I moved to Forsyth County, Georgia, and I remember, like, being one of the few, like, Latino kids in my school and experiencing like, you know, racism there. But then by the time I graduated, like, still experiencing racism. That was just a constant but like to see then Forsyth County just change, like, demographically, like to be this majority, majority white County, to then being this kind of, like a diverse county with folks from all over the world. Yeah, I mean growing up here, I mean, it was very much like a lot of like, just cultural differences, but

also like learning and appreciating things like that, having no concept before. Like, I learned American football myself because I was, like, my parents didn't know the sport, and I was like, Really, like wanting to, like, I guess, immerse myself in, like, American culture, so like learning the rules and all those kinds of things. It's been a lot of like, feeling of, like catching up to, like, learn what's going on. And then whenever I went back to Chile, because I did live back in Chile for a year when I was a kid, and then visited what, five years ago now, also catching up there too, of like, what are the norms in Chile? What are things are we saying? I remember distinctly when I was a kid, my when I was in school, like I had some bullet school bully like, punch me in the stomach or whatever. And I didn't know how to say stomach, but so, so I kept saying, and this is, like, very specific to Chilean Spanish, but like, I kept saying, "pegarme en la guagua" which is like, directly translated as, like "they hit me in the baby," which I learned what I meant to say was "pegarme en la guata," which is like stomach. And just as a cute little thing about language, the prefix "gua," I believe, I don't know if it's like Mapugandun or like another indigenous language, but that the prefix "gua" of the stomach. So "guagua" like, baby comes from the stomach. "Guata" the stomach. "Guatón" like, if you're, if you're fat, like, that's from the stomach, right? So it's like, the prefix of "gua," like, carrying it, but that's an aside. But, yeah, no, it's very much like, like, feeling like, always, like, out of place, because on one end I'm like, very Americanized, and on other ends I'm very immigrant. Like, if you ask me to tell a saying, you know, like, oh, it's raining cats and dogs or whatever. Like, I can do that one. That's an easy one. But some others, I just struggle, like, I'll mix up the words, I'll say this instead of that, and then people are like, "Did you mean this?" I get two sayings or three sayings or isms combined together, and they're like, Huh? So that's when I feel really like, just not in the States or whatever. But then in other cases, like I go to Chile and be like, Oh, you're gringo. You have an accent in your Spanish. *laughter* That's not ours. Very much like navigating different spaces in my family, we speak Spanglish. My dad speaks more Spanish with me. My mom, she grew up in Australia, so she speaks Australian English, and I have the southern English. And then it was just like a really like, eclectic mix, and then go, go out there, and then it's like, very like, Y'all or, you know, saying like, just like, very like, and, you know, Forsyth back then was like ex-urban, not Suburban. So they were still like country. They were still like forests and things and, and, as previously mentioned, lots of birds. So like, then, you know, any very nature vibes. But yeah, so like, just these differences in culture, these differences in vibes.

Santiago 09:27

Sorry, that was, like, a really long answer.

Ashby Combahee 09:28

No, perfect. It's perfect. I really appreciate that grounding. It says more about who you are and kind of, yeah, how you're showing up in this space. So in your introduction, you mentioned a plethora of organizing work that you do. And I'm curious, you know, particularly talking about being an immigrant coming through or from an immigrant family, and particularly in Forsyth, you also do mutual aid work with them. So I want to hear more about that story and that connection.

09:58

Yeah. I mean, I think. Think, you know, I think for me, I've always felt like an affinity to other immigrants, immigrants in general. Like, obviously, my immigrant experience is very different than others. Like, I grew up more in a, you know, upper middle class background. So, like, you know, privileged,

economically, you know, coming from a more class space, but then also, like, so for me, at least, like, more so than like classroom for me was, like, really resonating more with, like, just the immigrant like, experience in general, and like looking towards that, than looking towards more, like my privilege class kind of thing. So like, when coming into, like, for example, Clarkston, which is like, for those that don't know, is like, one of the most diverse, like, cities in the United States, because they accept so many refugees from and immigrants from all over the world. And you know that that, for me, feels like very at home, like to see so many folks from around the world, to have this kind of, like, I don't know, Global South, Third World-ist whatever you want to describe it. Kind of like, solidarity, right? So coming into those spaces, like, you know, I'm always wanting to, like, show up the best I can, but then also, like, actually meet material needs. So, you know, I got into, like, mutual aid and, like, I've always been interested in it. My politics are like, you know that I'm that I'm an anarchist, but then not to like, have that as, like a, as a, as a noun or as an adjective, but to have it as a verb. So like, for me, it's like, how I act and how I move and how I like I move through this, through this world. So like, when it comes to mutual aid, like, I was really inspired by a bunch of different thinkers, but like, you know, Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, William C Anderson, Kropotkin, like those folks, like, you know, like, specifically, you cannot, like, have capital R revolution without, or even a movement without, like, really meeting the material needs of the people that you're trying to mobilize that are you're trying to like, also join you in this walk, right? And, you know, as someone that, like, started off with, like, labor organizing, like, you know, the fantasy that the big goal, the dream, is the general strike, right? It's to, like, get people to stop working, to stop reproducing capitalism and all it's it's evil to take over the factories or the workplaces in general, like to have that really radical vision beyond just, like, obviously meeting getting a better wage, but like, going even further about that, right, workplace democracy. But you can't have any of that without being fed, you know, without having food. So for me, like there was a there was a point, I want to say, like last year, where I was really thinking about like food as being like the kind of like basis of like organizing in general. And you know what I find really exciting about Clarkston is, yes, it's it's immigrant community, it's a working class community, and it's a community that's in need in general. So for so, for me, it's like, can I meet these material needs for these for these folks, and how can I just continue to plug in? I've been working there, working in Clarkston, for about, like, a year, and a bit now, with spurts in between, even the last three years. But like, really focused coming in, trying to plan, organize, that kind of thing. Because, like, you know, in developing these relationships with these folks, like, I'm starting to, like, you know, see, like, their day to day struggles. Like, you know, one works at a one, one of the folks that I know, she works at, um, at a cookie factory, and also is studying to be a nurse, so her whole day is just occupied between those two things. And you know, my like, in developing these relationships, in meeting some basic material needs, hopefully expanding upon those two things, I'm also just thinking, okay, she works at a factory. What are the working conditions there? What are the things that she could potentially start to organize in? And there's also just again, like it's so for what I've experienced in this this year of doing specifically food distros, is like the Clarkson context specifically is just like the breadth of just like specific, like issues that are, like, all interconnected. Like a lot of the folks that we help are from Afghanistan. And, you know, there's like, language justice that is needed there. There's like, there's there's mothers, and there's fathers that only speak Dari or Pashto, or like, other languages indigenous to Afghanistan, and the kids are the ones that speak English. So we're communicating with the kids. And then there's folks that are from from Mexico, and then I'm speaking Spanish with and it's like, it's like all these different languages. You know, for for a good while, we had some Haitian folks come in too. So it's just like, you know, they're, they're bringing their language too,

right? So it's just like all these different languages. And it's like, how can we meet material needs, not only with the food, how can we establish connections when, when language is different, and then also like, yeah, what are the other issues? Like tenant rights, you know, because there are scum lords in Clarkston, tenant rights, labor rights, and even like, you know, just like, what, what is the what is, what is like? You know, misogyny looking like, what is like, all these other issues looking like, because it's like, once you once, everyone's uncomfortable with each other, no one's trying to act like a certain way, so you start to see certain patterns. But you can't really speak on specific patterns just yet, until you build those relationships of trust and care and like, yeah, like just respect in general. But yeah, it's been a really immersive experience. And it's been part of, like, something that, for me, longer term, would be very like, interesting to, like, engage in-- with like, again, like buying mutual aid with labor, with what's what we've been seeing with like anti-police and anti-state movements, with like Cop City and stuff like that. So just like marrying those three.

Ashby Combahee 15:53

Absolutely, yeah. So I'm curious now that Spark's as a cross movement, this gathering particular, it does center in reproductive justice. What is your experience in the reproductive justice movement look like?

16:10

Oh, you know. And I was looking at that question, I was like, shit, to be honest, not, not that much. I mean, of course, I have friends that either had abortions or or, like in general, are involved in these kind of movements. But like myself, you know to be, to be, to be honest, while I'm very sympathetic and I'm very like, like, yes, let's, let's, I'm gonna follow what, what folks are saying. I'm a little bit ignorant. Um, it's, you know, it's like, one of my my blind spots, not in a way that, like, I don't know anything, but it's just more like, like, I'm just being real, like, right? I haven't read, but again, I'm very sympathetic, and I'm always wanting to learn, and I'm very much, like, against what's going on right now, right, with everything, both, like, the mortality rates for Black and Latine folks that are giving birth, the complete stripping of abortion rights in general. Like, I'm very aware of it, but now it's like, what is that politic look like? I'd be very curious to learn. That's where I'm coming from.

Santiago 16:11

Yeah. I mean, this is a great space to, like, get the information and try to build with already the knowledge and skill set that you bring to the table, yeah. So then what led you to come to this particular conference? Well, my partner is, is part of the organizing for this. They graciously, like, invited me for this kind of weekend thing. And, yeah, I mean, I definitely want to check it out. I'm not sure, like, what the the parameters of like, Did you sign in? Did you know this, thinking you just walk in? I might just walk in, but I would be curious to, like, come in and check what's going on. But yeah, like, what I mean? I don't know. I think it's really cool, like learning what I've learned so far about this being kind of like a cross movement kind of thing. I also am very intrigued by the fact that it's hosted in the Loudermilk Center, which, for folks that don't know, like Charlie Loudermilk, the Loudermilk family are, like one of the big proponents for for Cop City, and also just like the Atlanta Way as we know it, and how, like the Loudermilks, like completely changed Buckhead to their own image, specifically like East Village, now called Buckhead Village, but then also too like, just like Atlanta in general. And this is not like a critique or criticism, but it is an invitation, I think, for for us to really show up for each other's things more often,

because it's like that's not any fault..anyone's fault for this. It sounds like we just need to, like, get out of our silos and, like, talk to each other more and be present in each other's spaces. Because I feel like, you know the the movement to Stop Cop City to Stop Cop Cities in general, is intimately linked with reproductive justice is intimately linked with immigrant justice is intimately linked with labor rights and labor struggle. Because it's like, who are the people that are going to enforce the fuckery of laws that come out from the state? It's going to be cops, like, if we're doing abortion clinics or underground abortion clinics, if we're giving out plan C pills, if we're doing all these things like, police are going to be the ones that are going to be shutting down regardless what police might be feeling themselves. They, they, they're, they're just automatons that follow the law, you know, like, like, you know, labor not speaking up against Cop City in a massive way, also shows, again, a siloing and, like, a lack of talk, but also lack of, you know, you know, awareness and that, because, like, who are the ones that break strikes, who are the ones that crack open workers heads, you know, globally, like, historically, um, you know, immigrant rights as well, right? I can go on about that, but, yeah, like, it. I think it's an invitation, like, for both me as someone that is, like I said earlier, wanting to learn and curious, wanting to come into these spaces that actually come into the space, but then also too to like, see like and again, like the theme of this conference, being like, right, connecting different movements together, to like, to dig deep with that, that that theme right, to connect because, like, the irony of holding such a dope conference here in the Loudermilk Center, not a critique at all, at all, at all. But just like, it's an invitation for, like, continue, continuing to challenge ourselves. Like, where, where are we holding these spaces, where are we, you know, those kind of things.

Ashby Combahee 20:38

Absolutely, yeah, yeah. I mean, I think those things need to be said in this type of set like and conversations with each other, and it can't happen unless we're all convenient, right?

Santiago 20:50

Totally, totally.

Ashby Combahee 20:52

So this is kind of a question to wrap us up, but I also want to, you know, leave it open in case there's additional reflections, given where you're at right now in the movement, and you know, I think the cultural work that you named, the DJing and having this, this, this space that is really around the socialization of our work, and then the Stop Cop City work that you've been doing, the continued mutual aid work that you've been doing, and all the expansiveness. Where do you feel like we're going, and what do you think is required for us to reach the big liberation,

Santiago 21:30

Capital L liberation.

21:31

I mean, I kind of like, I feel like I kind of hinted it with the invitation to get into each other's spaces, more to get out of these silos. I really think it's, it's like a mixture of like being humble, to know when we fall short. So like, if we have folks that are, you know, really about immigrant or really about reproductive justice, but is lacking a class analysis. Like, be humble that. Like, man, I fell short on that in my end too.

Like, okay, I am not as well informed or, like, well politicized with reproductive justice work. I'm humble, like, that's, that's not, I'm short on that. And I feel like that. There's a little bit, sometimes a pride and ego thing in our movements, in which it's like, you know, a critique is suddenly like the evisceration of one's ego. It's like, no, it's, it's, again, I keep saying invitation, but it's an invitation to to reflect and to like, grow, and I think in many, many different movements, it's, it's very much been this kind of like, I cannot admit defeat, I cannot like, show weakness. And that's weird. But beyond weird, it's like, yeah, it's just not good. Because it's like, we learn from our mistakes. We learn from our shortcomings. We just have to be humble enough to, like, take those in. And I would say also to just like, yeah, being being honest, being like, you know, forthright with your... with your critiques as well. Like, again, going back to, like, this kind of image thing of like, oh, but we're not weak. We're not this. We're not that. Like, of course, there are times and places and of course there is some information that should stay in, stay inside. But like, when, when you start seeing a pattern, when you start seeing, like, a thing that we keep consistently falling short in. Let's critique it. Let's be real about it. I feel like, like lying to ourselves and saying, everything's fine, everything's great. Like, maybe it makes you feel good in the moment, but in the long term, I feel like, you know, it just sets us up for failure, because again, then, then suddenly, we're not adjusting our systems of movement to the the general, like, pressure points that the state and capital put on our movements, right? And I'll say, like, I guess one, maybe one more, last thing is that I think, I think we really, you also need to be considered about, like, the pace that we're moving, and are we leaving people behind? Because there's this sense of, like, urgency culture that is really rooted in white supremacy. But also it's very like ableist. It's also very like like, not cognizant of like, the working class, and it's not cognizant of like, how where people are at, you know, and to be doing work at such a specific pace, like you're gonna lose people. And I'm not saying at the same time, it's a balance, right? But it's not at the same time going so slow that it's glacial. Because we have to do movement. We have to, that's why it's called movement. It's a verb, right? It's not. We have to keep going, but like how we're going and like the pace that we're going is really key too like, if we're trying to, you know, out compete capitalism and the United States empire in terms of, like, who can hit the hardest, the fastest, the for the most time, unfortunately, because of the inherent systems of capitalism and the state, like, they got institutional memory. They got like, reserves of people. We're trying to build our own new system. So we had to be cognizant of like, our capacities as a movement, and not to if we're gonna use like a boxing metaphor, you know, not punch where we're gonna be exhausted and then we're gonna take hits that we cannot handle. But then too, like, at a at a kind of, like, you know how we're moving kind of thing, it's like, are we moving in ways that are, like, replenishing for people, like, is there a good food at a meeting? Like, like, part of, like, the food stuff that that I mentioned earlier about, like, my interest in it was, like, going to meetings and, like, they're only being pizza, or only being like, some, like, you know, you know, like, like, clearly someone, of, like, a of, like, a more, like, higher class was able to invest in the food, and that's great, that's sure. But like, like, why aren't we putting care into the food too? Like, we're putting so much care into, like, the plans and the actions and other things. But like, why not the food too, right? Like, why aren't we, like, replenishing ourselves in a way that's, like, really wholesome, and it's like, inviting everybody, you know, that is, like, you know, all meetings, especially if they last more than an hour, should have food. Should have really delicious food, should have nutritious food. It shouldn't just be pizza and also, too. Like, you know, when we, when we go through, like, really, like tough things, a loss, you know, as folks might know, you know, the assassination Tortugueta last, last year, like, or even, like, really, really big events, like the raid on March 5th on the music festival. Like, I think it's again, like, this kind of thing, of like, how do we slow down? And like, like, have pace, places to

mourn places to to to break down because we cannot. Sometimes the moment calls. We just need to tough it out a little bit. But in things like this, if we're playing the long game, like, we need to go through the whole range of emotions, of like grief, of like sadness, of despair, of breaking down and being vulnerable in that. And I think sometimes that comes in conflict with this kind of like urgency, like we need to respond, we n respond, we need to respond. And again, sometimes you do, but sometimes we also need to be walking slow, like we like, walking slowly enough that you can realize, oh, you know what? I scaered my knee instead of just like you're consistently running until, like your knees give out, or whatever, you know. So, yeah, I feel like, if we're gonna get into this, like, liberation zone, capital L, liberation, capital R, revolution, end goal, end game. It's realizing that this is a long game, and that everything that I just said is, like, in part of, like, thinking about it long term, building these systems out. And honestly, enough of a fucking like, can I cuss here? Okay? Everybody's like, fucking like, Oh, I know such and such from this such an org, blah, blah, blah. It's like, let's, let's be homies. Like, let's, let's, like, have a relationship. Like, of course, you can only have so many friends, literally from the capacity of, like, having these intimate connections. But like, like, let's, let's be real. Like, let's, let's connect. Let's, let's get out of our silos. Let's, let's, like, like, I love chisme, I love gossip a little bit. That's fine, like that, that can exist. That's beautiful. But let's also, like, get away from that, in the sense of like, that being the only form of interaction we have. Like, oh, did you hear about this org and that org, like, let's just, like, talk to each other. Let's, let's, let's get to know each other. Let's hang out. I'm sure we'll find more in common once we talk to each other. Than we will see, from like a paper, like, you know, glancing of like, of each other and like, yeah, like I said earlier, like when we build these connections together in the in this conference, or, like in mass spaces like this, we're, we're getting out of our silos. So, like, habitually getting out of our silos, habitually getting out of like, our little the word rinconcito, or like, little corner, comes to mind for me. Of like, Okay, this is my these are my friends, and that's great. But like, let's, let's venture out a little bit. Let's talk to each other, because then we can know that. Like, Hey, fuck the Loudermilk Center. Or, hey, let's we need food justice in our movements. Or, hey, we need to, like, also add the angle of reproductive justice into what's going on in the fights to Stop Cop Cities. Hey, let's, let's invite anti-imperialism to our talks about Palestine. Because it's not just about freeing Palestine. It's about ending American hegemony over the world. You know, like it's, it's, it's these connections that can only happen through intimate relationships.

Ashby Combahee 29:59

Absolutely.

Santiago 30:00

But, yeah...

Ashby Combahee 30:01

Thank you, Santiago

Santiago 30:03

thank you.