

How to Build the End of the World

In Defense of the Chaotic Protestor

Miliaku Nwabueze

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HOW TO BUILD THE END OF THE WORLD

In Defense of the Chaotic Protester

by MILIAKU NWABUEZE

This time when the pigs raided the forest, they hadn't expected to attack, arrest, and kill their kin. Their aunties, their mothers, and their friends willingly marched into the forest on July 4 in honor of its independence, accompanied by Black people in the surrounding neighborhood. Despite desperate attempts to portray otherwise, the protesters did not want this facility. They did not want an exaggerated shrine to state-sanctioned violence. The war zone had gone too far, and the pigs wouldn't listen to anyone else.

When the police raided the forest to attack hundreds of protestors, they failed to see that the people were their own.

The attack caused fighting within the Atlanta Police Department as police officers had to place their colleagues' mothers in jail and charge them with domestic terrorism. We had been organizing, fighting, occupying, and tree-sitting to block this facility, and yet, had not seen it coming. They organized themselves and marched into the forest from a different park. They were singing songs, clapping, praising, knowing their children in uniform would come. They'd soon learn the deadly truth: The uniform undoes even the bonds of motherhood.

This has not happened yet, but I gift you this fictional narrative anyway because "we owe each other the indeterminate."¹ The indeterminate is the gift of the Chaotic Protester who roots us in an unpredictable journey to a place we cannot determine, track, or capture. The indeterminate will save the Stop Cop City movement from elite capture, continue the Black Radical Tradition, and salvage it from the stutter of cowardly imaginations.²

I study the architecture of pre-colonial, mostly nomadic African peoples to acclimate myself with prisonless, stateless structural realities and translate them to present-day readers. My work problematizes tasking someone who has only existed in this world to "imagine" different ones—a futile endeavor in the pursuit of divergent world-building. Perhaps "remember" and "continue" feel more poignant.

On a trip to South Africa, I enjoyed a tour of Zulu, Xhosa, Pedi, Basotho, and Ndebele architecture and culture. After hustling me for my bride price, the guide shared a notable bit of Basotho history: how they wound up living in the mountains.³ The Zulu, an allegedly war-prone people who enjoyed stealing cattle from neighboring groups, were advancing on the much less war-prone, diplomatic Basotho people. Though they had defeated colonial powers in battle, Moshoeshoe knew the limits of his people.⁴ He led his people into the mountains to escape the impending terror brought upon them by the Zulu nation. As the nature of war is often chaotic, he had not predicted the Zulu would follow them. He knew that if the Zulu caught up, it would be a deadly encounter. With no resolve to fight, the Basotho people pushed rocks and boulders behind them as they made their ascension into higher altitudes. The "peaceful" Basotho waded through the chaos and unpredictability of a formidable enemy with agility, so that they could make—and live in—peace.

Even a peaceful people know peace is forged.

African parents guide African children with proverbs and stories like these. The title of this essay, and the task of our time, is "How to Build the End of the World." I don't share the home-making story of the Basotho people—fleeing violence, becoming a destructive obstruction on the Zulu's path, and making home—with hopes to intrigue. What we build must also destroy, for if we construct something that fails to deconstruct, we will fail to be a threat. More formidable

resisters were swept into the whirlwind of reform and co-optation; we must remain disciplined when they bring out the dustpan and the broom.

The Basotho, a notably diplomatic people, knew there was no negotiation or pleading with the Zulu people. They knew they were after cattle, and did not take up pleading and demanding as a mode of defense. Moshoeshoe believed people waged war because they needed resources, and nothing will stop them. And still, he delivered the indeterminate.

Mass media has continued the work to delineate between peaceful and violent protesters with sprinklings of the outside agitators to maintain a ruse of democracy and progress while fooling you into thinking protesters threaten them. Violent protesters are simply people who protest. The very dignity of a protest is measured only by its capacity to be violent, and any act of dissent is violence to the state. This is why they bring weapons of war to what amounts to no more than sign-making parties. What other ways do you stop violence? To clarify, our violence may not be shootouts with the cops, and it will be won by throwing rocks and bottles just as fast as it will be won in courtrooms: neither are fast nor likely victories. It might be occupations, cuss-outs, or things we cannot yet determine, but there is no need to label "peaceful" what the state will inevitably read as violent.

We've repeated endlessly that the state has a monopoly on violence—because they do. They have more advanced weapons and armies willing to do their bidding, even at their own expense, even as they are being replaced by robotic dogs. As was the case with Tortuguita, we know the state will meet "peaceful" protesters with violence, and we know people will be punished for protesting, regardless of any legal commentary to the contrary. So if you decide to fight, you might as well fight like you're going down anyway.

If there is a distinction, there are those who protest and fight to the death for the living, and then there is everyone else, who live to kill or die—so those who protest and those who don't. Separately, I want to make the case for the Chaotic Protestor. The Chaotic Protestors are those who aspire to be untraceable, untrackable actors creating unpredictable situations; they deliver the indeterminate. I think we've given these folks a bad rap, when in reality they are the people creating the conditions necessary for our successes. But the Chaotic Protestor, as implied by the rhetoric of its title, is at odds with the movement organizer. Therein lies a problem: solidarity remains fleeting, as the latter is tasked with the duty to establish order and legibility, while the former is committed to random acts of obstructing the state's path to maintaining its mastery. Metaphorically speaking, if the organizer is at all on that path, sweeping up the crumbs of erasure left in the state's path of destruction, the Chaotic Protester is in the organizer's way. But we know from the Basotho narrative that pure brilliance can emerge from chaos, and if we who are engaged in any capacity on the frontlines struggle to track or *capture* movement activity, so will the state.

The organizer sets the conditions for capture, with dustpan and broom, and the chaotic protester sets conditions for evasion.

We needn't mistake chaos with structurelessness—there is always a structure, or a few, at play. In lieu of centering structure, perhaps a more appropriate relation to attend to is that between chaos and experimentation. I posit this strategy as a necessary shift towards continuing the Black Radical Tradition, absent an allegiance to past strategies that failed to end captive suffering. The relationships between chaos and experimentation is the Black Radical Tradition, and rather than filtering the failed blueprints of our valiant forewarriors into peaceful or violent, it is important to remember them, learn from them, and iterate as they did for us.

Jack Halberstam's introductory essay in Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's *Undercommons* revives the Fanonian roots of a dichotomy between rational and crazy, which are perhaps subconscious synonyms for violent and nonviolent. He writes:

"Moten reminds us that even as Fanon took an anti-colonial stance, he knew that it 'looks crazy' but, Fanon, as a psychiatrist, also knew not to accept this organic division between the rational and the crazy and he knew that it would be crazy for him not to take that stance in a world that had assigned to him the role of the unreal, the primitive and the wild."

This is the trap we fall into, as it creates the logic of a peaceful protester. We decry its use in media narratives, but we follow the logic when we label our resistance "peaceful" or demand that it must be peaceful, organized, and therefore legible for mass acceptance and participation. We're trying to avoid looking crazy, but to whom?

Halberstam continues: "Fanon, according to Moten, wants not the end of colonialism but the end of the standpoint from which colonialism makes sense." We denounce the binary of the violent versus nonviolent protester without removing ourselves from the standpoint from which such a dichotomy would make sense, least of all as a way to categorize our protesting. Further implying we organizers are still fighting the state from the standpoint of its own episteme. Even if that logic informed a tactic that was strategic and valiant 30 to 60 years ago, our context has changed and adapted to absorb and disarm what was once meaningful dissent.

"Blackness, for Moten and Harney by way of Fanon," Halberstam summarizes, "is the willingness to be in the space that has been abandoned by colonialism, by rule, by order." That space is definitively *movement*. The abandoned space from which the Chaotic Protester picks up the Black Radical Tradition; the space from where we experiment, remember, and continue, as opposed to simply imagine or fill in where the state has failed to include us. Consequently, in the lineage of Fanonian discourse through Moten's interpretation, the Chaotic Protester isn't a set of assignments or a checklist, but rather, it's a thing to become; a disposition to inhabit.

Tortuguita, a beautiful, young soul killed by police during a forest raid on January 18, 2023, had 57 bullet wounds in their body. After that, there should be no version of us showing up and expecting anything except violence. This is not abandonment of strategy nor a call to bear arms. It's a sobering disabusing of ourselves from the violence versus nonviolence binary towards chaos and madness brought on by our increasing capacity for experimentation.

A music festival in March following Tortuguita's murder by Georgia State Patrol, Atlanta Police Foundation, Andre Dickens, Atlanta City Council, and all other parties involved in the construction of this facility, ended with a direct action that led to many unfounded arrests. People feel the events that occurred during the March 5 rally were unsafe. Perhaps it could be argued they weren't strategic, but if we believe we are always unsafe in a world run by the state, the unsafe modifier becomes complicated even while correct. If you live in a world where knocking on someone's door or getting into the wrong car or camping in a forest can get you murdered, aren't you already unsafe? Perhaps the larger fallacy is a misunderstanding of the phrase "Stop Cop City"—that peace is attainable without winning war or supporting a rally or protest in any form against the state is supposed to be safe. Actions like those that took place on March 5 are the indeterminations we owe to one another.

The Cop City camp has made it evident that the state's alignment with the training facility's development is unwavering, despite it now being a place to literally practice killing people. In

response, there were a series of public actions that explicitly labeled themselves as "peaceful" or "nonviolent," in what seemed like direct frustration with the events of March 5. There were apt points about respectability, public perception of the movement, and its need to be nonviolent to be seen as valid or undeserving of domestic terrorism charges. However, showing up in various community spaces has the same effect. Showing up in dance class, cooking class, the local electronics store, your job, your local gym, or coffee shop and aligning yourself with the movement to people who know you undoes the media's attempt to denigrate direct action. It becomes: "my dance partner is a forest defender," or: "my colleague is a forest defender," not imaginary outside agitators. Divisions over the image of the Stop Cop City actions that followed in the wake of Tort's murder demonstrate a clear demonization of intentional turning away from and antagonism towards doing anything "crazy."

The shift towards a label of "peaceful" following the March 5 rally marks a decisive move away from the very chaos necessary to triumph in this struggle. We are moving things away from chaos when chaos is the space we need to learn to be comfortable in. Perhaps the issue on March 5 is that people gave into the media narrative of peaceful protesters and thought rally or party as protest meant "safety from the police" in a forest where they killed someone who was sitting crosslegged with their hands up. Are we unclear about the will and the might of our enemies?

Returning to the lessons from the Basotho parable, leveraging rocks down the mountain teaches us there can be no peaceful anything in times of war, even if we are not the ones directly bringing the violence. Any logic based on the idea of order and peace is not a logic contending with the senselessly violent nature of our current realities. It's sympathetic to the epistemological standpoint of our enemies.

Cop City, as a project that seeks to restore and maintain order following the 2020 uprisings, is defended by the full force of the state it is intended to preserve. This deems anyone who declares their opposition to the facility an enemy, making every tactic deployed against the bombing grounds the state seeks to build upon unmarked graves of prisoners subject to the full force of state violence. The state has made its alignment clear. If you are against the facility, you are an enemy, and in every channel you utilize to block their progression, they will remove you by force, even if they make it look cute in a courtroom and get a sellout nigger to do their bidding.⁶ That's what slaves... do.⁷

The second bond hearing on March 23, which followed the arrests on March 5, was a circus. The opening statements were from John Fowler, Georgia's Deputy Attorney General of the Prosecution Division, who has a reputation for specializing in Racketeering prosecutions. In other words, they brought in the big guns. He quoted organizers from a series of YouTube Videos and Instagram shorts, referring to the use of encrypted messaging and information platforms. He also complained about lacking access to these messages and called flyers about protesting "propaganda." Throughout his opening statements, he referred to protesters as a "criminal organization" and let us know he was tracking people across different movements.

We now know the state is tracking us through the technology we use and sites we visit (even if they can't always get access to the information we share), as well as our purchases, the serial numbers of equipment used at various actions, and the clothes we wear. We know they can have no real evidence and still rule against our favor. For instance, the biggest piece of evidence presented throughout the hearing was that people crossed rivers and then changed clothes, so they arrested people with wet clothing. If they changed clothes, why would they be wet? Prosecutors

had nothing, but still brought in the big guns, barely even fired, and denied bond only to give out consent bonds later, some with the stipulation of cooperation. We also know that the FBI called parents of defendants looking for the person who persuaded their kids to join the movement. Then, during the bond hearing, the FBI claimed a supposed "leader" hid behind a network of nonprofits—one of which was the fund, run by many—that bails out protestors.

They are looking to take out huge players. But we've learned this already: There should be no key players. Let us earn the decentralized title. Leaderless movements have meant folks step back and refuse to give direction, to strategize, to call the shots, to hold all the responsibilities. Such actions feel necessary because we have not become the types of people who are able to responsibly operate without leadership.

But what does it mean for everyone to step up and move in the general direction of their own volition? It may mean chaos. It means that things will certainly get weird politically and culturally. That's the point. We have leaderless, non-targetable movements when we all step up to carry larger parts of the work. To have such movements means we must steal hours from our day jobs to give to our lives and the lives of our children. We will need to rest, but I think we've got that rhetoric down. We will also suffer, forget to eat, and lose sleep. It is this suffering in struggle that necessitates we set up actual mutual aid and care networks that support our movements and nurture our comrades. This is the work required of us, and not that of exhausting ourselves doing charity work alongside people with whom we share no common conditions. And yet, we keep finding ourselves building mechanisms that ensure the survivability of state infrastructure and dependence on capital rather than building relationships.

We keep making charity (even if we call it mutual aid), the organization, co-op businesses, and Black ownership as radical and revolutionary care—care that moves us—as if they are not sanity ushering in the next wave of the state's survivability and the salvaging of its increasingly unnecessary performance of having a conscience.⁸ The Chaotic Protestor differs from the organizer in knowing how or in having a willingness to build from the memory of the Black Radical Tradition, without copying and pasting—rather than erasure of where the state has chosen to fail or cause harm.

Stepping up so there are no clear leaders, building from memory, and accepting the inherent violence in meaningful resistance are the moments in which slaves can become prisoners of war, guided by their own agency in their ability to lend a disciplined allegiance to a liberatory ideal.⁹ There is, at least in rhetoric, an air of escapism afforded to a prisoner that a slave just does not evoke. Though it would be correctly argued they are the same, as dictated by the 14th Amendment post-emancipation, a prisoner must be a prisoner because they would not obey the law—terms set forth, in this case, by the oppressor. As Anthony Farley states, "there is no law before the slave bows down."¹⁰

Prisoners do the same thing to the law that they can do to attain their freedom: *break*. They do not bend nor bow. With that verb in mind, I posit: what does it mean to direct a movement away from work that captures us? How can the organizer steer clear of the Captive Maternal for the Chaotic Protester? Chaos is emergent; the answers are indeterminate.

The burning and destruction of equipment as recent as the second week of April—at the time of my writing this—per an anonymous communique is creating chaotic opportunities by both being a blockade and wreaking havoc in being a true enemy of progress. It is piquing people's interest as it is circulated through the press—no matter how fascist. And as it does, it opens points of solidarity and proves without a doubt no one (except wealthy whites, Blacks, aspiring

elites, and politicians) want Cop City to be constructed. It's no wonder they didn't build the bombing grounds in Buckhead, close a nearby school, empty apartments, and ship working-class Black people out of the city. It is evident that the project's aim to aid the state in "combating crime" is a proposed remedy for a sensationalized issue, as the literature on crime-combating strategies recommends the distribution of life-sustaining resources to alleviate the conditions that produce the desperation that is the target of policing. It is pure and inexplicable violence.

As a movement of folks in the South from a variety of experiences, working collectively across a multitude of issue areas and niche roles, Cop City presents a different opportunity. An abandonment of the American psyche, where the nation looks for guidance in redeeming its moral conscience, foregrounds this struggle in Georgia. A battleground state, the stakes of further political divisions between liberals and conservatives who mutually desire the preservation of the state, its law, and its order renders such a movement a threat to order at the local-metropolitan, regional, national, and, therefore, global scale. The present order desires poor people and displaced niggers as its opposing insurgents, given that these subjects under the violence of antiblack predation and capitalist exploitation have proven in past struggle to lack the capacity to overcome the barriers that obstruct their path to the destruction of the order.

But here we are, presented with the opportunity to take this uniquely united-divided leftist front to another level. As we continue to launch random, uncoordinated attacks that plant obstacles to wealth and privilege in the pathways of liberals, progressives, and conservatives, with each strike, we move closer toward materializing what it looks like to actually "#StopCopCity."

We will continue to gather in our corners of the movement and in front of the park barricades. We will remain committed to resurrecting destroyed gazebos, planting fruit trees, hosting nationwide gatherings, and fighting for the release of our unjustly charged comrades on 9 p.m. to 4 a.m. shifts outside of prisons. We will struggle like hell to build something that aims beyond the worthiness of fighting for it or a preoccupation with making demands. We are worthy of more, and therefore must build something worth defending. I know this because if we have the resolve to engage in active, embodied risks to destroy the material and immaterial manifestations of this violent system—in our case, a mock city to practice killing rebels—we have the bodies and warriors we need to defend something that is as worthy of us as we are of it.

We must ride the wave of this momentum in hopes of remaining unco-optable by the city and nonprofit industrial complexes, and to be prepared to restructure as often as necessary so as to not build anew and reify what we're fighting against.

I have compiled a list of strategies that might inform how we might move forward from the standpoint of the Chaotic Protester:

1. Take time to be honest about the stakes of having revolutionary abolitionist movements in the face of antiblack violence.

2. Understand that our security and counter-terror strategies are inadequate in some areas.

Practices such as establishing a shared security culture and ensuring our comrades are kept abreast of any changes are vital to our movements. This, in combination with digital vigilance strategies, are key counter-repression tactics against the threat of state infiltration. Note that your phone is a tracking device and Instagram and YouTube are the opps. After the bond hearings on March 23, it is smart to be restrictedly thoughtful about what needs to be comms.

3. Understand that your comrades are navigating survival in the face of state violence.

Nonprofits and other community institutions have budgetary goals and a saturated neoliberal social service market to compete in. Individuals and institutions siphon visibility off of this work in order to raise their budgets, expand their influence, and increase their affluence. That offers our movements nothing more than visibility and respectability compliant with the liberals' reformist agenda. It helps us not look crazy. Knowing this helps us make it part of a strategy to gain resources.

4. Remain mindful and strategic regarding our pace. We need not rush unless it is evident that such a change in pace is necessary.

The burnout that is often associated with our movements drains capacity and prevents rapid-striking strategies and the building of adequate support infrastructure. The most tiring piece of movement work can be dealing with each other and interpersonal conflict. It would do us well to build self-awareness, apologize when needed, reflect, and be dependable. If nothing else, this honors the legacy of Tortuguita. Rushing ahead without attention to such internal conditions contributes to a tactlessness in the way we deal with each other. So long as adequate time is not allotted for conflict resolution, our movement will suffer from persistent burnout.

5. Recognize when you are out of your element because it saves a lot of time and energy.

It's important to know no one can "train" you for what is to be done. You "train" yourself.

6. Understanding the importance of naming one's own distinctions and departures as an organizer is vital for moving beyond our political movements' present stagnation.

Put differently, if your domain is electoral politics and campaigns that legitimize the state and its democracy, you are not aligned with radical insurgency. Staying in one's own lane is essential for preventing counter-insurgency tactics from within a movement that is too negligent of the plurality of agendas within the broadly defined "Left."

7. Seize this opportunity to rethink how we organize ourselves in such a way that we—and our strategy—remain largely illegible to the state.

We do not need public-facing, organized campaigns, membership applications, and other formalities. I pose this question to our comrades: How can we move without the artifacts of "law and order" rules governing our movements that make us rigid in action and steer our movement away from the task of anti-state insurgency that ends the current order? Again, how do we avoid capture?

8. Avoid labeling things as peaceful. The term is not a cloak, and it plays into botched media narratives.

The state is looking to target who they perceive to be "our leaders," even those who remain committed to a "nonviolent" political posture, have no connection to our movement, and have not even been into the Weelaunee Forest, nor committed themselves to its defense beyond failed attempts at appealing to the violent state in hopes that it might reverse its decision.

9. Make connections between the #StopCopCity movement and other abolitionist, environmental, and anti-development struggles.

This gives us the capacity to scale up our anti-state strategy. While building such coalitions might be a great outward-facing comms and propaganda strategy, we must remain mindful of our commitments to our security and counter-repressive tactics. This means never forgetting that the cops are watching our every move and making a record of our every public statement. Interviews, social media content, canvassing materials, and other media tools should not give state agents

information that inadvertently connects the dots necessary to counter our next moves. Even if it is damn good analysis, it does not need to be shared.

Though we are in the belly of the beast,¹¹ the Black Radical Tradition has persisted. For centuries, those at odds with the state have accepted this fact, and in turn, pursued its destruction for the preservation of those vital and sanctimonious things for which we struggle. With their wins, lessons in warfare, and warnings of what it takes to kill a movement, I assert we remember and continue. If we are to "imagine," we must become crazy enough to be worthy of the worlds we want so we can desire them in the first place.

Refusing to build from erasure is a form of jumping off the slave ship, like my Igbo people did off the southern coast of Georgia. It's sending rocks down the mountain to crush your enemy. It's prisoners of war breaking free from the hold. It's wading with uncertainty through chaos to inhabit the standpoint of something else entirely. It's delivering the indeterminate. We might take the wood from the ship on the path of its destruction, but we will wade through the waters of uncertainty to construct another slave ship if that's the only thing we can imagine that floats.

1 A quote from *The Undercommons*, by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney.

2 "Elite Capture" is a term popularized by Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò in his book of the same title.

3 Read a non-oral version of this history.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-african-history/article/abs/sotho-arms-and-ammunition-in-the-nineteenth-century1/DCCBA048A77FAED986FE50DA54BD4D07>

4 Read more about General Moshoeshoe, also spelled Moshweshwe.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-african-history/article/abs/sotho-arms-and-ammunition-in-the-nineteenth-century1/DCCBA048A77FAED986FE50DA54BD4D07>

5 Important to recognize the politics of respectability here.

6 This is in direct reference to getting Black mayors to usher in the construction of this facility and a Black judge to deny bond to concert-goers charged with domestic terrorism on March 5.

7 The inability to meet the force of state violence—which includes all means of state repression—with the full force necessary to vanquish it as our enemy, mirrors the compulsive docility by which we "control ourselves" in the face of terror, indicative of slave status in the afterlife of the non-event of emancipation, as discussed by Saidiya Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection*.

8 Dr. Joy James discusses this concept in depth through a lens she titles the "Captive Maternal." One of my favorite essays by Dr. James that discusses this phenomenon is *The Womb of Western Theory*. To summarize, the Captive Maternal is the ungendered function of Blackness (Black people and movements) who, in their care as resistance to state predation struggles, stabilize the state and fortify the production of its technologies of violence.

9 This framing came out of a lively discussion with Aziz Milo.

10 From the essay "Perfecting Slavery," by Anthony Farley.

11 Phrase popularized by Da'Shaun Harrison as the title of their book, *Belly of the Beast: The Politics of Anti-Fatness as Anti-Blackness*.

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