Transforming Harm: Experiments in Accountability
Barnard Center for Research on Women
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Speaker: Welcome to everyone joining us for this live webinar conversation. I'm so excited to be joined by Lea and Stas. They are going to be introducing themselves in a minute. We've gotten a lot of wonderful pre-questions from folks who want to talk about transforming harm. Specifically, we're going to be talking about community accountability work and transformative justice work. Lea and Stas both founded an organization called Spring Up and they'll talk a little bit about that work as well.

I'm Mariame Kaba part of Project Nia. I've been working on community accountability and transformative justice. Formally. Before, informally. I'm affiliated with several other organizations. Survived and Punished. That's the most recent. I use she/her pronouns. Happy to share that with everyone.

People watching now are shocked. I don't do video ever. It's twice now I've been on video doing these conversations. This is an important topic, as I see it.

Heads up, I have a lot of dental problems going on. I broke my front tooth a few months ago. I'm in process of dental surgery. You'll hear me clearly I hope, ignore the face.

I'm happy to have you both.

Speaker: Thank you so much. We are such huge fans. So excited to have this conversation.

Speaker: Great to see your face.

Speaker: I'm Stas. full name Nastassja. I go by they/them pronouns.

And this is Lea my partner.

Speaker: They/them or he/him.

Speaker: We've done transformative justice work. Most people say, "I've been doing it formally for this long." Sometimes I think of something from previous in my life, I think of something I did at 6 years old! When there's people around you you can't help but do what you can. I can't say it's the most organized but I came out the womb, "is everybody OK??"

That's important to think about. I felt a lot of imposter syndrome not knowing what to call it. Not knowing if what I did was real or legitimate. I've learned so much from what I did before I even knew to call it these words.

Speaker: For a lot of us, it's a life practice for how you approach the world. It's a lot about boundaries and personal/professional. A lot of people feel self conscious. "Am I doing it right? Can you give me a guide book?" Miriam now has made a guidebook! Realistically, it's very context specific.

I hope today what we get into give you tools and tangibles. Ultimately there are questions we can't get into. It's about each specific situation you're in.

Mariame: Excellent. Maybe we'll start by grounding ourselves in survivorship and survival. You did more community accountability with identifiers of survivors of harm. Start with that, and what that taught you.

Speaker: That's great. I am a survivor. That's important to name. Multiple experiences. Survivors are a community for me.

That work started more formally in college.

We were intense student organizers. Filed the federal complaint against our college on the handling of sexual violence, hate crimes, and what they called "bias instances." We filed a federal complaint and a lot did. We got connected to a national movement of student survivors advocating for change.

In 2013 we were organizing on campus. We ended up leaving school and travel nationally to different universities where people advocated for student survivors. Living with them months and weeks at a time.

For a lot of activists and organizers we come from a place of pain. There's little space to work on that healing. As we worked on coalitions of sexual violence-- we worked on other issues. But sexual violence affects many. Working with queer survivors and survivors of color, building this coalition, conflict and harm came up between survivors.

These formal processes. We all have the same aims, we've experienced this harm, someone has to be accountable for the harm we've done. Someone has to hold space so we don't just regurgitate the pain. And be strategic on how we organize.

That's what I read about. We can incorporate these ideas!

All of this work came from our work with survivors. And deconstructing the idea that there are survivors and those who've done harm. All those we worked with were survivors.

Speaker: I didn't necessarily claim the label of being a survivor. Though what happened to me was violent. Because sometimes if you have an identity people associate with experiencing violence-- I thought the experience I had was part of coming out, and also as a trans person. I hear that from people of color. I didn't separate it from the rest of my experiences. Working with survivors who claim that identity, it's outside the norm, making them question who am I? Why did this happen to me?

We started from that framework. We'd done community support work. Before college work. A community organization to support the LGBTQ community.

Going back I'd say that was transformative justice work. At least in cmmmnty accountability, we heard instances.

Speaker: We knew to do the activism because people told us.

Speaker: It was very organic, out of our experiences and care for our communities.

Speaker: When I did work with survivors, I was afraid to work with folks who'd done sexual harm. I don't know if I'm prepared for that!

Speaker: When we say no prisons people always say, what about rapists and murderers.

Speaker: I realized that once I worked with survivors, I was working with people who'd done harm. You've experienced some stuff too! The tools we were using with survivors, to learn about communication practices-- there are ways to say if you learn these communication practices you won't get raped, that is victimizing. But there are ways to recognize when coercion is happening earlier. Especially in female bodies, taught to be accommodating.

Realizing those tools for survivors are the tools for those who cause harm. Where their desires do not match someone else's. Or thinking that what they want is normal. Not to say there are not people out there who are calculating. But once someone acknowledges something went wrong, there's a failure of imagination about not seeing a way they can do something differently.

It broke my assumptions on who I can work with, and why. That's how that transition looked. Realizing that some survivors had done harm.

We made a lot of headway with folks that way and found it a moving experience.

[Announcement]

Speaker: Announcement on the library behind me. But I'd love to talk about the distinction-- we used the term "harm." Maybe break down the terminology we are using. Between harms and hurts and conflict and disagreement and abuse.

Oftentimes people feel as though by flattening, we aren't addressing the intense abuse some people experience. Which calls for a different kind of intervention.

After that, some questions sent were focused on actual examples people want to hear on your work.

Let's start by laying out, as you see it, useful definitions of terms we're using.

Speaker: We also have cute PowerPoint slides we'll share with the Center folks. They'll post it. And us on our website too. We'll talk through it. Sorry for those who are more visual learners. They'll be available.

Speaker: We've talked about this a lot. Clarity came from a recent training. Definitions did adapt. We

went with Impact Justice in California. They shared helpful definitions.

They define disagreement as a lack of consensus. We might disagree about the coolest color, I mean that's basic. Like I might like this yellow, and you like black.

Speaker: I also like yellow!

Speaker: But we might get into that disagreement but it's simple. Conflict though is when there's a disagreement between opposing wants and needs, values and directions. I like to think about collaboration. If we were designing a shirt and we were disagreeing about the color, that would become a conflict because we need to make a decision, or mitigate something to make a change that overcomes the disagreements we have.

That has more active opposing forces that need to be acted upon.

When you get to harm this is when the actions of a person or a system have negative impacts that create unmet needs and obligations. This can be along power lines and can be what we understand to be violence or coercion. So the violence of force is what people think about with violence, but the use of coercion or power is something that could also create unmet needs and violations.

Like discussing different colors, if it were like a Mean Girls thing where I didn't let people sit with us because we only wear pink, then that creates these unmet needs and obligations. I used my power to create harm.

Abuse is more of an ongoing thing. Harm is a instance, but abuse is a pattern that reinforces the dynamics of the original harm.

These are the skills I would think about.

We got into a great meaty conversation around harm versus hurt. But before that, do you want to add anything? Okay.

Harm and hurt. This was an a ha! moment for me. For example someone has an open wound on their arm, a big cut. If I brushed against that, it would hurt badly. It would hurt much more than an area that is not cut. But that's not harmful. I didn't cut you, but I activated something that was already there.

That distinction creates a distinction around accountability and who should be held accountable. You are hurt. It's legitimate. There should be space for that but who is responsible for it, and who needs to take the accountability for the generation of that hurt. How did you get the cut? I activated the pain that was there, but I didn't cut you.

If I scratch you, and it took off a scab, that's different. But it's a challenging thing. This could be used argumentatively. People can say I didn't harm you, I didn't hurt you. But it's about asking one's self, and I do this! I say, okay. I feel hurt. How much of this happened or how much is coming from before. We are in this world now where we feel hurt all the time! So there are these wounds on the surface and we ask can these people even be held accountable. But the question is of depth and magnitude, who should be accountable for this deep wound, versus activating it?

Or did you even know the wound was there?! Did I just trigger something in a way that I know I won't have to be held accountable for.

Speaker: This is in systems of harm like racism. People bring this up when it comes micro-aggressions. You seem like you are overreacting because there's hundreds of years of continued harm happening. So you may have brushed it, but we encourage people to say in the case of micro aggressions, you didn't cause the full scope of the harm, but you did do something. So what could you be held accountable for? It could be just a joke, but you should take some accountability.

Mariame Kaba: Something for me distinguishing between hurt and harm, people experience these two things as pain. There's a real thing that happens. But to think about harm as deliberately inflicted versus hurt that's not deliberate, that distinction for me is part of conflict. It's a disagreement and we are not aligned on values. You feel pain, and maybe even physically pained but that's from disagreement. And you are hurt from the disagreement. That could be a natural consequence from the conflict.

But this is something we need to distill; to not collapse things on top of each other. To feel that emotional and physical pain that someone was deliberate about is different from conflict and disagreement. You maybe are triggered to when someone did things to you years ago. We need to stop collapsing these things.

Like doing work in sexual assault for the last 30 years, I am worried about the liberal use of the word "abuse." You should ask about if it's afflicted repetitively and if it's a pattern. It's different. We not to stop conflating these things and get familiar with the differences to deal with accountability. People will feel a way if you tell them to be accountable for hurts versus accountable for harms.

Speaker: Yes. I won't generalize outside the United States but at least here in the United States there's not the level of depth in dealing with emotions I would like to see. People jump to I'm triggered. I'm a fan of taking space and doing the journaling and the self care work, boundary mapping or therapy, but thinking about where it came from and why it bothered me. You get stressed when someone is in conflict with you. But conflict is healthy. It's not just going along with the person in power.

Speaker: And conflict can be generative. Especially in working with others and you throw around these ideas. "No! Yellow really sucks. We should go with taupe" this can be a generative and productive thing. Thinking that conflict is bad is leading us down a road where anyone that says something that disagrees with you is calling everything harm.

Speaker: We are living in a world where these harmful things are normalized. People need to be willing to say, hey, no let's think about things differently. We don't want to be stagnant through conflict avoidance. In my ideal world there's tons of conflict. I debated in school. I love a good argument as long as we know what we are talking about. You get to a better outcome and idea. In business this is a big thing.

If you have one team with the same ideas and you put a product out, most of the people in the audience are not like your team so they won't like it. So you need to understand that more.

Speaker: Taking it to a extreme it becomes the source of discrimination and exclusion. Like there was an example of this idea of everyone having to be the same, but if you don't understand each other, then you won't work well together. But you don't want to come out with a product that misses the perspective of your user group. You don't want to exclude diversity from the team. That's a source of lots of the lack of diversity in teams.

It's an explicit strategy to keep people in a low conflict zone, but the impact is harmful.

Mariame Kaba: I was going to say we could talk about this forever. We all experience this and find people using these words in loose ways that are difficult to manage and navigate in TJ processes or using the practices that are not the same as using the processes. But I want to think concretely about examples.

Some folks asked about the distinctions in drawing boundaries and disposal and punishment for those who cause harm.

Someone just shared a problem. This person stays in contact with two friends that caused another of her friend's harm. So they didn't know about this, but there was a potential TJ connector -- I think this is a question about the mechanics and staying in contact with those that caused the harm and what that looks like to mitigate the situations in your work through boundaries and disposal and punishment.

Speaker: There's lots to that. But I will start by saying boundaries are a real thing. Boundaries are on community too. There can be a negative impact when those boundaries are not met. If they don't respect a boundary then I have to step back for example.

Listen to your body. Listen to your emotions and what comes up. Your body wants boundaries to keep you safe. As for when the boundary extends to what someone else should do, that gets tricky. That person's body might think, maybe I should move in closer because that person is my friend. Maybe I could grow with them and work on their behavior together. That's a tiny red flag to me.

But if the person is harmed and they feel triggered hearing from that person and from their social media posts, that's real too. If this person does continue to be in relationship with the folks who caused harm, that could cause the structure to need boundaries. Boundaries are okay, and it's okay to move apart.

Speaker: I think of a specific example. You wanted more examples. I'm thinking of one where both people involved were queer survivors of color on a campus, small community. These folks were doing lots of things together. The person harmed was upset by how much of the community was still in relationship to this person.

There was an unclarity on what was happening in private. Were they just ignoring what happened? Do I not exist anymore? Can we talk about this? I think getting the clarity on the nature of what was happening would help. And the grounding -- a sense of how this person will learn more in community than isolation. And they will be accountable more if they felt held accountable in the community versus the community abandoning them.

We did clear lines. Like I would prefer if you didn't mention them to me. That's fair. Very fair to ask. Or like, I just want you to know how it makes me feel, and my concerns. I'm concerned that in private

this is what it looks like. I would like for these things to be covered. Or just talking about the relationship and how it existed for a long time, and the   Nature of the relationship has changed. We talk about things differently and I look at them differently, but I think they still have the ability to grow. That's important to make.

In this situation, the survivor did leave and go to a different school. It wasn't the place for them, the community was too small and they needed their space but that's not on the community. It was on them to create that space for themselves. It was about the whole environment.

Speaker: But what's key is that it was not an enabling environment. The community was like, you are stressing us out. So thats something -- being toxic as the mutual friends. You don't have to be like that.

Speaker: Like the individual who is the friends with both, we don't know their situation. You need to have conversations about it and determine what's important to you and in these individual relationships as opposed to making EVERYONE -- and that's so common -- in the community and everyone feels this way! But do that? Let's talk about it and figure out what it looks like. What do you need from them? Get more specific and less vague.

Mariame Kaba: Lots of conversations about transformative justice in the last 4 years I have seen, and I have had these conversations longer, I see people use these terms like processes and seeing more people interested. I'm sure you have seen this uptick too.
There are lots of questions here around failure, messiness, mechanics of doing this work, how you keep yourself centered while you do the work, should you be doing the work with people in the community or facilitating outside the community because you know them too well? What would you say generally around the mechanics of the practices and processes of transformative justice and in your work around this?

Lea Roth: There are a lot of subponts to that. And the question of "does this work?" Practices work best in their appropriate cultural context. We look at practices related to our cultural context while being aware of where those don't work.

I'm from a small rural community and a lot of practices are there when you're in a small rural area. It's the people around you you turn to. And other intentional communities like religious communities.

Quaker circles and active social practices not just in the walls of the church. Particularly healthy communities. Whether church or rural, it can become insular. And normalizing of violence because it's what it takes for everyone to be good. And if people need to leave, they leave.

There are a lot of good things to take from that, and also warning signs. A lot of communities have looked into accountability and growth. If there's a community disincentivizing divorce, resources go into avoiding that. That can also enable abuse.

Speaker: When people say they know the structures and practices, there's a difference between a formal practice and other. Every community has practices. "What did your grandma do?" My Nona and my other grandma, there are things they do. It works, you figure it out. It may not be in an academic paper. "How to mitigate harm through eyes of a black Grandmother." There are practices that work. It's important to name.

When things get scaled up and adapted they're less likely to work.

Mariame Kaba: Mia Mingus [sp?] was doing a training recently for a TJ Hub [sp?] we just launched. Why do people assume they can just do this stuff without any study? It seems strange. She gave analogy of, you build a house. You don't just start building a house. You find, what are the materials needed so it can stay up. You look for someone who can do the plumbing. You look for the foundation so it's sturdy. You do a whole bunch of things.

I remember this. I was steeped in people doing restorative justice work. They didn't want it to be an expert thing, they wanted it to be something anyone can do, including an 8-year-old. It's a good skill. Learning how to keep a circle can be built by anyone.

But running a process is not an anyone skill. It's a blueprint where you go through a set of things. Figure out your team. That takes work and study. When people say community accountability doesn't work, I say what did you try?

And they say one conversation. When does major change happen from one conversation. Or when is someone told they did something wrong, and then it changes.

I feel a lot of concern. A lot of people aren't actually practicing these processes, haven't done one, reading someone's Facebook post somewhere. Saying that nothing works. And you haven't tried anything. That's a real concern.

Second concern I'm having is this notion that transformative justice and the alternative to incarceration. People are holding onto that so tightly. No, it's not the alternative. It's its own framework. For intervening at some period of time. Not a catchall for everything. In the same way prisons are set up as a catchall. That's why they don't work. Why set up a new framework doing the exact same thing.

No we won't dismantle the state through transformative justice. We need livable wages. Universal healthcare. A clean environment. There's a lot to this for the practices we run to transform our relationships.

I keep saying I'm threatening to write a piece, "Calm the Fuck Down." There's a lot of pressure put to come up with THE one way of ending generations and millennia of faith. We can't do that. That's where a lot of the pressure comes in some ways. I don't know what you all have experienced but that comes up over and over.

Stas Schmiedt: So much in what you just said. First point. You named that the circle is not the process. Circles are a specific tool you can use in a whole toolbox in other things you can do as well.

You don't just throw a circle on it and it goes away. Many people of different ages can hold circles. But that's not the process necessarily. They can be a huge component. But one circle is not what an accountability process is.

The other thing is time. People really underestimate how much time it takes. And how core time is to the whole process.

People need time to digest things and transform. You don't just transform a behavioral norm overnight. Even if I psychologically was like, you're right I shouldn't do that. It's not enough for me to shift the behavior. I've been that person. "I really shouldn't do that." Two days later I do the same thing. Oh my gosh! It takes practice and time! Like any other thing you do in the world!

You can't expect people to do that just because you had a conversation.

Lea Roth: Like an iceberg people see what happens publicly but 80% of the work is personal work. When you hold someone accountable or help in healing there are powerful tools.   Tools people can use to support themselves. But realistically there's no shortcut to months of personal introspection and value setting and identifying what are your needs.

Mariame Kaba: The other reason this is not an alternative to the incarceration state is because this is something you choose to do. It won't replace the current involuntary coercive state. People want the involuntary punishing state because that person hurt me, I want a response. Transformative justice will never do that. It can be the thing you use for other kinds of things you want to address.

We have to make that much more palatable for people. They have to understand what we are talking about when we use these concepts and words. It'll take the pressure off people feeling like they need the perfect answer, no mistakes, no nothing. You'll have a ton of failures and fits and starts. That's normal. That's life.

Things are messy.   We have starts and stops. We don't do everything perfectly. Sometimes we cause harm. We need to figure out our responses. That's important to think about. A lot of questions came up on, how do you know for sure someone's not just performing?

Well, how do you know? At any time? That people are telling the truth?

Stas Schmiedt: One thing you named is, there'll always be mistakes. You just hope the mistake will be different next time. In business people are getting really into mistakes! Yeah, fail forward! It's absurd we think we need to be perfect. Compared to these people with so much money and support. "I love that fail!" Come on, let's embrace that, growth mindset! We are working with folks who made mistakes. To think we can't mistakes feels hypocritical.

"You made a mistake. We'll help you process. I won't make a mistake." Of course we all make mistakes! We'll be human together in the process. It's easier for folks to own up if you acknowledge it.

Lea Roth: What's out there and what we draw on, is this work by Paul Eckman [sp?] and micro-expressions. Some folks use it in law enforcement. Is someone lying?

That's an interesting way to use it. You can't really tell if they are lying. You can tell the underlying emotion. I can feel an underlying emotion of sadness or anger. That's more how we use it.   We do think about micro-expressions. What is someone telling you with their face, body language, affect.

For one, that can be a flag. We aren't mental health practitioners. But you can tell early signs of affect disorder or something causing them to process feelings in a different way. That can be a sign of that.

If someone comes at you with a lot of bravado, "I didn't do that," but underneath you see they're sad, that helps you see you shouldn't raise the anger. I should help them feel comfortable.

Stas Schmiedt: People aren't trained to be in tune with their emotions. But to mask. We talk about gendered socialization. People socialized male mask a lot of emotions with anger. That's an emotion they are allowed to show. You perceive anger in their voice. But in their face you see sadness and fear. Not as appropriate to express. They might not be able to tell they're feeling that way. They're so used to shift to anger.

Different for those socialized as females. You are socialized to feel sadness. You might be actually feeling angry. You know that people respond positively to sadness. We create spaces for people to feel authentic emotions. And not policing that. Letting them connect with the organic emotions is the first step to getting at what they feel.

That's where the performativity comes in. "You don't want me to say this. I'm just going to say what you want to hear." You don't get to the moment of, "I just really thought this was OK!" Or, "I thought this is what it took for someone to love me." You need the breakthrough before they shift in the way where the person is ready to hear.

You need things to come out that'd be difficult to hear. For it to be authentic.

Lea Roth: We're in favor of pre-conferencing. More an RJ thing. Before you meet, you can meet together for months. If you get from that that the survivor is not ready to see the person, and the person who did the harm is still in the angry defensive place, don't put them in circle together.

That's why in the beginning, everyone does a safety plan. That sets up boundaries and communication. "Don't hang out in my apartment 'til we resolve this." "Don't call me 'til we figured this out." People think they need to figure it out in circle. That's not a great thing to do.

Come up with your communication plan. Your plan for what you'll do. The facilitator and support people can do the ongoing support meeting or pre-conferencing. The prep work for people to be ready to speak to each other.

The survivor can decide they don't want to see them, just move in separate spheres. That's an OK outcome. When we think of success and failure. If people have gained self awareness. If the community is involved. If there's incremental growth for respect and healing. The person who did harm respecting boundaries is success.

Stas Schmiedt: The question about abolition and TJ being a replacement. There is an accountability process. But transformative justice does include a lot of stuff. A lot of organizing to shift the root cause of violence. Raising the minimum wage. Shifting conditions is transformative justice as well. It's not just the literal formal processes we do once violence happens. But anything to shift the normalization of violence. The more we can do to be responsive to each other. To meet our needs. And prevent harm to each other. The criminalization of poverty. We won't replace that with TJ. But we can use TJ to shift the conditions of poverty. That is a part of TJ.

Mariame Kaba: The difference is about TJ processes and practices, versus organizing. That's what we want is to uproot and shift conditions. Getting better clarity on this even in terms of language we could be further along.

With domestic violence, there is a question here . . .

[Reading question: . . . They fall back to exile punishment and don't peel back the layers of the intent that caused the impact. So how do we be more proactive and less reactive to reducing harm?]

Lea Roth: I'm glad you brought that up. The more rewarding thing we do is the prevention work. Survivor after survivor they are young and have these traumatizing experiences. We are like, it just gets so heavy. I think you think, could a portion of this be prevented. Our organizing work fits with the community accountability work with this. If you are in an organizing community and then the harm happens that's difficult and it comes up. We realized though that everyone needs this preventative education when talking about gender based, or sexual violence. There are things you can teach to young adolescents and older children, people of all ages. This is our cute Cultivate Consent Workbook. We mail these to everyone that signs up on the Patrium [sp?]

We will link to it.

But we do this with folks in schools and organizations. It's awesome to see people of all genders and ages be like, ugh, I thought this was normal. I can communicate clearly and have the things I want and have a healthy relationship with my partner. Doing that outside a case of harm. When you do that, you have the survivors and no matter how woke they are, we did a circle and summit of people processing the information. More than 2 people were like, yeah, I have done this. I didn't know what to do. And I think it's so empowering for everyone to realize there are ways you can behave that are not going to cause so much harm to people and doing as much as that as you can preventatively, I there's lots of anti-racist education stuff.

There's an understanding that we can all be complicit in some of these things, but being in these education spaces it helps people not be so defensive but be more empowered and share tools with others.

Stas Schmiedt: This is the case we are swimming in. We were doing this work before there was the big social media Me Too. It was harder before to convince people of it, and show this is what went wrong for us to be willing to do this. But I think there's more awareness so we get more folks in managing it preventatively.

But then we have people who are like, yeah! We are doing it! But then we show up and we are like, uh, people are reporting this. But I think we should all be advocates and doing preventative work then it's less hurtful and brings up less hurt feelings and instead do the work before. So then there's a shared language and you know what to do if a situation presents itself.

Lea Roth: And with gender and intimacy issues and conflict dealing. Like in a work place or a high stress environment we come to it with different ways of communicating. I think that's where the hurt and misunderstanding happens in the workplace and in organizing just how you communicate with

each other. And the community styles and how it changes when you are in conflict. You need consensual collaborate work environments.

Mariame Kaba: Can we talk about another question?

" . . . Where harm was caused by one or to both people, how can we apologize without . . . Examples or language?"

Lea Roth: I am a fan of taking space. If someone alleges something or brings something to their attention, if that blindsides you and you go into a panic, and you don't know what to do, in that case just validate what the person is saying. Be like, thank you for bringing this to my attention. If you are not ready to apologize, tell them you will take the time and ask how to follow up with them.

When people are put on the spot, they start going in spirals and might say things that are not intentional. Some people feel like the best way to handle a conflict is to have it out, but with self awareness and emotional intelligence, validating, taking the space, doing your self care practices to deal with it. Depending on your community style maybe it's best to write the person a letter.

Some people don't feel this way, but I think taking things into e-mail, getting off text, but sending thoughtful e-mails -- it depends on your communication style.

Stas Schmiedt: You might need to really talk about why this happened. But you might not be the person to hear it.

For a good apology, we have a handout. I can share that as well. But I think really thinking about in a workshop what does remorse really mean? I understand the impact of what I did, and I genuinely feel -- not like, I wish I hadn't done that -- but to be the person that wants to understand and not do it again going forward and do whatever it takes to repair it.

I think focusing less on the why, and more like validating it, not wanting to do that again, and show what they will do so it doesn't happen again, that's the main pieces. Then it depends on what the person is looking for from you.

Lea Roth: I think it becomes performative when people are like, I won't do it again, so don't bring it up. There's a big apology and oh, I don't want to do it again, but it's rough to talk about it again. Like, "uh, you are doing that again!" So there's a part that needs to be, please tell me if I do it again. What's a comfortable way for you to let me know?

Mariame Kaba: That's helpful and thanks for the language people can use. It's all in practice practice practice. You have to keep saying those things, and do the work of accountability and do it for the small things so you are ready for the big things.

Questions around the nuts and bolts of writing processes. I would go to creative interventions and download the 700 pages of the toolkit. It's not a book! Don't read it in one fell swoop. It's a practice. You should use these sections in workshop and work with others.

Transformative justice and community accountability work is always better when you find a team of

others to work with. It could be 1-2 other people, but work together with others, because it's too much to do if you are doing a formal process by yourself. I encourage you to download that piece.

If you are already facilitating processes, Lea mentioned journaling. If you want to keep the practice going, ask questions, and think about the questions in the accountability processes we have a book, Fumbling Towards Repair. You can start there, and then once you are facilitating the workbook can be useful for the language and tools.

We root it in survivorship being centered. I think about community accountability being about survivor centered. Survivors shouldn't have to lead their own recovery. So we will put the links at the bottom so people can go to it. You don't just know how to build a house. You don't just know how to do these things. You have to study, and practice and do it over and over and over again. That's just to feel like you have a modicum have understanding. Every time I start again, it feels like I don't know what the hell I am doing! Everyone has different experiences and circumstances.

This is why we created JUST Practice. It's also just practice. Do the work. Do it, do it, do it.

Stas Schmiedt: That house example is so good. Like in Grand Designs. It's a show of these people trying to build a home who don't know how. There are all these environments and ordinances by the government and the contractors, and I was like, I would have to prepare for ten years to do this!

Lea Roth: And then, do we have our TJ toolkit posted?

Stas Schmiedt: We will put it for our patrons.

Lea Roth: Stas has read the whole thing. And distilled that down to our 15 page document. I know some of you are looking for the steps, I mean, no one model is it. There are lots of great resources out there. This is a packet and roles to play.

Stas Schmiedt: The toolkit has the answers to most questions. There's a worksheet and you can ask these 5 questions when something happens. But what I found, I didn't know what page to go to. So I made this thing that's shorter and you can fill out these communication plans, and fill in the blank confidentiality thing. Then you go to the other toolkits based on what comes up in the process. It's a starting process on who plays what role and it's easier to digest.

Mariame Kaba: You should all sign up for this! We need more and more tools.

Just a few more minutes but there are a few other things. The stages of institutional accountability. What's accountability mean? When in conversation of members with law enforcement? Is this accountability possible? Are that models in cities?

Stas Schmiedt: I'm excited to talk about that.

Lea Roth: If you have models where it's done with law enforcement, we have been doing more with universities and large institutions. But --

Mariame Kaba: I don't think you can hold the police accountable. I have zero to say on that.

[LAUGHTER]

I don't think we can hold them accountable if they have this power and force given to them by the state. People have to take accountability so how would you even do that with the police. It's difficult. It's even more so than a museum, or a university where you could do work.

I just think policing is very different.

Lea Roth: Yeah. Totally.

Women of color in law enforcement come to us. They say they got into it because they saw violence in their communities and they wanted to change it. But there's potential of folks in the culture, but I know their issues is that there's push back and --

Stas Schmiedt: And how much power do they have?

Mariame Kaba: The issue is the policing and the institution and structure of the system. The individuals in there to me are almost immaterial to the system.

Stas Schmiedt: There's good stuff on this in Davis' book, Restorative Justice. I think that came out this year or last year but there's a whole section on that. About a truth and reconciliation program on that in the United States.

But we saw this pattern with the university and these stages. Its like the staircase of accountability. I think it's about taking responsibility. But that's a whole other conversation. It's for within institutions where there's normalized harm. There's a consistent scale that ordinances or institutions go through. They get stuck at stages and not want to move forward. That's the role of activists and organizers though.

So that's important to name. The thing that triggers shifts between stages is the push of the community and saying this is still not enough.

Lea Roth: We're in an institution. There's normalized harm in the institution. Then what happens?

Stas Schmiedt: some whistle blower. "This is not OK."

Lea Roth: Or an egregious incident. _

Stas Schmiedt: Causing people to say this can't happen. Usually there's denial. Then usually there's a continued statement that it did. Then usually there's a concession.

Lea Roth: We've all seen the emails and tweets.

Stas Schmiedt: The next stage, a committee is formed. A group of whistle blowers are brought in. Often without power. A committee to investigate it. The next stage is assessing the problem. An audit, survey, investigation, working group, consultants. Often, what happened with the findings of the audit.

Lea Roth: might not be publicly released.

Stas Schmiedt: Often the finding is a hiring of a representative of the community in a support role. Tokenizing role. "Now we have a dean of whatever." It's bigger than the assessment. Now there's action taken.

Next thing, may be a shifting in organizing. A new value. Or a new thing.

Lea Roth: Or we do the onboarding differently.   This is where you see institutional changes. And cultural change. The new folks are being onboarded in a different way. Then it's less performative.

Stas Schmiedt: New curriculum, new webinar, something consistent and ongoing that shifted based on the findings.

The institutionalization of the changes is the board, trustees, going through a training process, maybe hiring and firing, shifting in regulations. Not just the lowest level of new students but a shift in what the board and executives are doing.

Finally a systemic leadership change. For complicity in ongoing harm. That can look different depending on the norm of harm. Restructuring who has power, putting resources with the apology.

Lea Roth: That is possible.

Stas Schmiedt: One thing to keep in mind is it's not very possible to skip stages. You need to take each of those steps to get to the overhaul. You don't know who should be in power unless you try the earlier stages. We work with organizations to go through the stages. And to shift policies and change the leadership.

I share that because often people don't know what would it look like. In trainings people say I can't even imagine an organization doing that. And we've found ones that have done it. It's possible for an institution to be accountable. And see which aren't willing.

Lea Roth: There are scales. Individual, institutional, and ideology up here. It's hard to make changes in ideology. And also hard personally though you have more control.

Right now, I am optimistic on creating more accountable organizations. Especially value based organizations. Say schools, non-profits are constrained by laws and funding. But full of people who want to optimize outcomes for who they serve. That's where we're putting energy. More accountable organizations.

Stas Schmiedt: That's a more formalized organization of community. "Who's in the community?" you have the job. There's a clear organization and you can hold people to high standard in the closed or porous community.

You can put in structures to make it more normal and expected. Much harder in an informal community. And very difficult in families. For rename, that's the hardest work. Within families. There's not the same type of opting out. Of course you can. But it's harder personally for me.

Mariame Kaba: Thank you for that. So helpful and illuminating. A couple minutes to wrap up. Anything you both want to share. So many questions we didn't get to. For people paying attention, we'd love to do another couple webinars next year in 2020. Very interested in hearing back from folks on burning topics on transformative justice and transforming harm work in your communities. Bringing experts and practitioners to answer questions.

And also give insight. Be in touch with Barnard Center for Research on Women about that.

What would you like to end with?

Lea Roth: Final thought is I encourage folks to be visionary. Go deep into your imagination. A 20 year vision for the society you want to live in. Get transformative with your imagination. Then find small, tangible things in your locus of control. I see you encourage folks on social media. "But how can I live in this world?" There are small local things you can do. With a liberated imagination. Not getting so caught up in the latest egregious thing some politician did. Shifting things to the small and local. What can I do in my day to day life. What practices can I shift.

A lot of people are struggling with their wellness and mental health in the current context. I'd say imagine the world you want to live in. Then do small things in the world we currently live in to make your peace with that.

Stas Schmiedt: Two points. If you want to practice this, practice this in your own life first. We went through a multi-year process in our relationship. We inevitably harm the people we love. You might not even bring up all the ways. We went through an accountability process. We both played both roles. I talked about the ways I'd been harmed. We did that for ten months. Then we switched to Lea and that took a lot of time.

Telling the person I loved, "this is how you harmed me." And seeing how hard it was to shift the behaviors. I don't want to do it anymore! And doing it the next day.   Doing it in an intimate way transformed my practice and made me more empathetic on all sides. Also not making assumptions. "I can't!" Yes we can, we'll stick through. Being able to play those roles myself made it easier for me to empathize when I facilitated.

Lea Roth: Having the conversations with our friends is something we normalized more.

Stas Schmiedt: We have one conflict a day. We are harmful and abusive less frequently! I won't say it doesn't happen but we catch the conflicts quicker.

People laugh, all this bickering.

Lea Roth: We've been in a relationship for 8 years and this organization for 5 years. Being in a place where we're honest.

Stas Schmiedt: And not having to hide the arguments.

Lea Roth: It gets to better quality of work and offerings for people.

Stas Schmiedt: There was a question on if you're in academics. How to theorize the work people are doing. This is personal and sensitive. It happens frequently that people use our work and don't cite us or do it anonymously.

It feels likes this is one of the main ways organizers and practitioners are taken advantage of. I'm someone who planned to get my PhD, I got pushed out because of this work. It's offensive when "you naturally intuited that this is what's happening in sociology" then don't cite us. It'd make a difference to me if it's translated without my credit. That's a big thing for me. Being willing to cite the practitioners.

Let us know if you cite us. I'd love to hear that! Give feedback, input! I'd love to collaborate. Considering the life path I thought I was going to take. I love that I can take the theories and see what works. There's so much I can support academics on. And not have them assume. With this opportunity with Barnard I wanted to mention that.

Mariame Kaba: Absolutely, I've experienced the same.

Two things. More questions came in as we talked. So many questions came pre but two I wanted to pull up quickly.

One was what happens when the community itself is harmful? And can you speak about working through understanding harm on a spectrum in a community?

The spectrum issues, yes. Not all harms are the same and not all should be held the process. I think this is important to keep in mind. Everything is not everything. If everything is everything then nothing is nothing. People need to discern. We were talking about the differences between hurt, harm, and abuse, etc.

I have been working on a activity with groups and identifying the spectrums of harm and what counts as harm. What people see in that activity is how disparate it is.   How what we think is harm and what triggers us is not the same across the board. So the idea that we can address all that is foolish.

I am working on making that activity available to more people in their spaces and sites to have those conversations. That's coming early next year.

And if the community itself is harmful, to some community is meaningless. We use the term community as a catchall, but I love the idea of pod-mapping. That way we can talk about your community for the time you are living there and that space looks like. And how it looks in context. Your community looks different between when you cause harm, versus when you are harmed. These are contextual.

So sometimes you need to build a new community when the community you are in is harmful.

So do you have a response to either of these questions?

Lea Roth: Briefly.

I think what you got to at the end is very relevant both for folks who have immigrated or moved to

different places, I think that's especially relevant. You look around and you don't have family, or long standing relationships. Be intentional and specific about the communities you seek. Like if I want a community that's a feminist knitting club, and I want three people in that I could call if I'm having a mental health crisis. Make it that specific. I think there are groups like Meetup and we are in that space now since we just moved to a new city.

And I think most communities have some unhealthy behaviors and practices. That's normal. It really is a sense of what you can live with. Like taking stock and if it's reciprocal. And are you giving where you are getting? It can fluctuate. But if you find yourself in a community that's toxic, or extractive, not accountable or trivializing of harm and violence, you can't change all those people. You have probably tried to bring these things up too. So I think it's healthy to cut ties and build new healthy relationships with what you are looking for in your life.

Stas Schmiedt: You have to ask what's best for me. Don't just jump to that, but if the community is not there with you, there's a martyrdom attitude in these activist environments but we need yall! You need to find the space where your input will have an outcome. I think that's important.

The other thing, yes, what looks like harm is different between people. But I can't handle all the harms as a facilitator. There are just some types of harm I feel equipped to hold or handle in my body. For others, I just can't. Yes it's bad. Yes it's serious and someone should handle it, but its' not me. You have to be able to say no to things. And it's hard when you are in a community that you care about. People need to do things for individuals but if you can't do it because of the way it relates to yourself then you have to say no and have others do it.

Lea Roth: A side effect of self criminalization that's harmful, looking at what's considered a felony, like what R. Kelly or WEinstein did, versus a teen sending a nude photo someone they are involved with, these are all considered sex offenses. But we need to consider what's actually harmful. And we need to consider the context. When you say words like "sex offender" people jump to what they see on television, like Law and Order SVU, or -- it's just important to understand the situations as each is.

When you impose this fits under this category of law, it collapses the uniqueness of a situation.

Stas Schmiedt: And maintaining confidentiality, you have to be specific too though. Like we manage cases where if you knew the specifics of it, you would realize you have heard of that before or experienced it before. But with sexual violence cases people jump to rape and there are rapists in the community. Not to say it's not real --

Lea Roth: Each situation is specific. We look at things like unwanted advances or coercive dating behavior.

Stas Schmiedt: Another thing about communities is we look at what gives people power in a community. For example someone being stylish in one community that gives them power, or someone who is highly intellectual, that gives them power. So what enforces power?

In social justice communities there's lots of power in the role of being a victim or if you have experienced violence. So let's think about getting respect for the ways you are healing or being accountable to how you are being better about not causing harm. We need to be willing to go through

the role and step outside that. In social justice we can also create a power or incentive to healing and working jrhg the pain and not just sitting in this happened to people.

Mariame Kaba: There was a question -- is it fair for the survivors to be the impetus in social change? It's the reality of where we are. If we have survived harm we are pragmatic people. We are trying to find a way to heal, move forward, and invite people to take accountability on the harms they caused us. In the workbook we say it's coming from the perspective of survivors but I have caused harm too. I am also the survivor of rape. But I hope that what we are doing, and I know it's uncomfortable, but I'm not just talking about abuse, but we do harm people too. We survive things and we harm people too. We must hold both things in tension with each other for us to figure out how we will make a culture where it's the norm to take accountability when you harm others.

Right now, the incentive is to lie, gaslight, all these other things. Until we are at the point where it's the norm to say, I hurt this person and I will take accountability for that, and figure out how to repair, whether or not they ask me to, I will do that. Until we are there, I don't see a way to end violence. It sits uncomfortably for people based on what's happening to you, but here at the building accountables community project, we need to have these conversations because other places are not having them intentionally.

Thank you for being here today. I value you and your work. I encourage people to have these conversations in your communities. If you want to share this with people, and critique the helll out of this video, great! Do that! Use it and be like, these are bullshit for us, but these are real for us. I say take what you need and leave the rest behind. This is in spirit of that.

Had we figured out how to solve all this, we would have done it already. We want to not reproduce the thing we are trying to dismantle. So thank you both!

Stas Schmiedt: Thank you so much. So lovely to be in a space with you. Watch this as much as you need to, share it, ask questions on the website.

Time to spring up dot org.

Lea Roth: There's a form to submit and you can ask things. Timetospringup.org
And we are on Instagram. Twitter.

Stas Schmiedt: We are happy to continue this conversation. Thank you so much for this time. We could talk all day.
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Mariame Kaba: Yes we could. Bye everyone.

[END]

*****This transcript provides a meaning-for-meaning summary to facilitate communication access. TypeWell speech-to-text service may not be a fully verbatim record of the proceedings.*