

WE KEEP EACH OTHER SAFE: MUTUAL AID FOR SURVIVAL AND SOLIDARITY

A Conversation with Dean Spade, Mariame Kaba, and Ejeris Dixon

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Video available at <https://bcrw.barnard.edu/event/we-keep-each-other-safe/>

HOPE DECTOR: Hi, I'm Hope Dector, I'm the creative director of the Barnard Center for Research on Women. I'm so happy to welcome everyone to tonight's event, We Keep Each Other Safe: Mutual Aid for Survival and Solidarity. We are gathered here tonight to celebrate the publication of this new book by Dean Spade, "Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)" which feels like a gift to us all in this moment of crisis. Offering a history, theory and practical guide for creating and sustaining mutual aid projects, Dean's book shows how doing the everyday work of meeting each other's needs is the work of transformative change and building the world that we want. In addition to celebrating the book, we are lucky tonight to get to hear from two brilliant organizers, Mariame Kaba and Ejeris Dixon in conversation with Dean about mutual aid as an abolitionist project and how it connects with anti-violence frameworks like transformative justice. I'll offer a brief introduction to our speakers in a moment, but before I do, I have a few notes of thanks and logistics for tonight's event.

I want to start with a couple of notes on accessibility. You can find a link to access live transcription for this event directly under the video on the BCRW event page or in the YouTube video description. Thank you to Joshua from Total Caption for providing the live transcription. Thank you to our ASL interpreters for tonight's event, Brandon and Kathleen. We're planning for the event to take place for one and a half hours ending around 8:30 Eastern Time.

We'll start tonight's event by hearing from each of our speakers followed by a conversation. After the conversation, we'll have time for Q&A so if you have a question for Dean, Mariame or Ejeris, you can ask in the chat on the YouTube Live page or by tweeting @bcrwtweets or emailing bcrw@barnard.edu. I also want to thank my co-workers at BCRW for making programs like tonight possible, including Elizabeth Castelli, Pam Phillips, Tami Navarro, Avi Cummings, and especially Eve Kausch who is coordinating so much of the work that goes into these events behind the scenes, including managing the social media and communications during the event. And to BCRW student research assistant, Kayla LeGrand, who is working with Eve behind the scenes tonight. BCRW is partnering with Word Up Community Bookshop, a volunteer-run community bookshop in Washington Heights to sell books related to our fall events online. There's a link in the chat and on the event page where you can visit their BCRW shop to purchase "Mutual Aid" as well as these amazing books by Mariame and Ejeris which I cannot recommend highly enough. So please visit community Word Up and support your local bookseller.

Okay, now that's done, I'm so happy to introduce our speakers tonight. In addition to the book we're here to celebrate tonight, Dean Spade is also the author of "Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law" Dean teaches at Seattle University School of Law and has been working in social movements to end prisons, borders, poverty, and war for over two decades. Though he started out at BCRW in the late 90s as a student researcher, more recently, Dean has been an Activist in Residence at BCRW working on videos and programming on topics including prison abolition, queer liberation, disability justice, and

transformative justice. One of Dean's most recent collaborations here at BCRW together with Project NIA, is a video series for the Building Accountable Communities Project conceived by Mariame Kaba.

Mariame Kaba is an organizer, educator and curator who's active in movements for racial, gender, and transformative justice. She's the founder and director of Project NIA, a grassroots abolitionist organization with a vision to end youth incarceration. Mariame is currently a researcher at Interrupting Criminalization: Research in Action at BCRW, a project she co-founded with Andrea Ritchie in 2018.

Ejeris Dixon is an organizer and political strategist with 20 years of experience working in racial justice, LGBTQ anti-violence, and economic justice movements. She is the founding director of Vision Change Win Consulting where she partners with organizations to build their capacity and deepen the impact of their organizing strategies. Earlier this year, she co-edited a book with Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha entitled "Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement". You can find longer bios for each of our speakers on the event page and there's so much more I could say about each of them and their work, but I don't want to take up any more time so I'll turn it over to Dean now.

Dean, congratulations, and thank you for this amazing book.

DEAN SPADE: Thanks so much, Hope, and I'm so grateful to Mariame and Ejeris for being part of this event and to the interpreters and to everybody at BCRW who's made this event possible, and everybody at Verso Press who helped make the book happen. Really great to work with. I wanted to just, I realize most people probably haven't gotten to read this book yet, it's brand new, if you're gonna, and so I thought I would just share some of the key points from the book and also why I really wanted to have a conversation with Mariame and Ejeris specifically, about the book and about abolition and transformative justice just to kind of get us started.

So, I think of this book as kind of having two main parts. One is about the importance of mutual aid for building social movements. And the other one is this just like, specific models and approaches for some of the pitfalls that mutual aid projects run into, like burnout, conflict, difficulty making decisions together and just like all the hard things about trying not to replicate the hierarchical systems that most of us are used to working in when we get together to do this kind of work. And for me, a lot of this work came to the surface, I'd been involved in mutual aid for decades, but this work came to the surface in a particular way in 2016 when Trump was elected, and I felt a strong desire to make the idea of mutual aid popular in a different way. And I worked on like an animated video about what mutual aid is and some other materials, the Big Door Brigade website, because what I saw was, there was a lot of people who were newly mobilizable, who were angry and scared about what was happening with Trump being elected.

And I felt like they were being misdirected about how change happens. So there was this kind of like, donate to the ACLU and they'll sue our way out of this, or, vote again in four years, or, just post things on social media, or, click on things that say that you're mad. And it was really a lot of actions that didn't bring people into direct contact with one another to build a different world or to build greater capacity for significant resistance, deep, bold resistance. And I think that that is a lot because we're sold mythologies about how social change happens, and those mythologies center law and they center charismatic leaders and they hide mutual aid. They

hide the day-to-day survival work people do that has mostly been done by women, people of color, people with disabilities, people in prisons. And so that work is not the work where someone gets famous and can be seen at the signing of the law or the big judgment coming out of the court, but I think it's actually much more central to building powerful movements.

So I wanted to just kind of lift that up. And part of that is also about shifting away from an idea of, a really disempowering idea about political action that makes us kind of like just bystanders watching political action that's really gonna be done by elites and nonprofits, or by elected officials or lawyers, and instead imagining that political movements are about everybody participating in a really engaged, direct way. And this, I think this work is also part of like a longer arc of my work to critique the limits of law, right? The fact that the colonial legal system we live under that was written to sustain white supremacy and capitalism is not gonna offer the fixes that we need. And that a lot of times when laws and policies change, it's because there's been huge movement pressure, like that's why they change at all. And then they usually change as little as they can, like only in surface ways, just as little as the powers that be can get away with giving, and then they often take it back as soon as they can.

So whether that is, one common example is the way that like civil rights laws or equality laws have been granted for various marginalized groups, but they kind of change the surface, but haven't necessarily changed the day to day outcomes for those groups. As we've seen, like a worsening wealth concentration and a growing system of criminalization and immigration enforcement. Another big example is how when there's huge uprisings of poor people, there'll be little increases in different kinds of relief from the government, and then when those uprisings die down, that relief will be reduced or tightened again, or people will be excluded. So, I have this awareness of sort of the limits of the concessions that can come out of the legal system and the necessity of large social movements for even winning those concessions, much less building the world we actually wanna live in. So, the way I think of what mutual aid is, is it's work to meet each other's survival needs that's based in a shared understanding that the systems we live under aren't gonna meet them and are actually causing the crises. Mutual aid does three big things in my view. One, it meets people's immediate survival needs. Two, it builds movements, it's an on ramp to movement participation. People come into movements 'cause they need something and then they get to engage with a politicized space of receiving that support, or they come in 'cause they really want to help people with something that they've experienced or that they know about. And when they get there, to those projects, they get to build solidarity beyond their initial experience, or beyond what they initially knew about the problem or this crisis because when they get there, they find lots of different kinds of people having different aspects of that crisis.

So it kind of, participating in mutual aid expands our politics beyond what our initial interest was so it builds movements in that way. And the third thing is that mutual aid projects are where we practice the world we're trying to live in. We practice actually giving each other everything we need and having systems that wouldn't have strings attached and stigma for people who are in crisis, and rigid eligibility criteria, and where we practice cooperating and co-stewarding resources. Mutual aid is just one part of the larger social movement ecosystem, it's just one tactic inside that, inside movements that are trying to get to the root causes of poverty and violence. That mutual aid is essential to all the different pieces of work that are happening. So we see it on every front, including seeing it, I think about the example of the Montgomery Bus Boycott which is a famous story in US history and people often think about the charismatic leaders from that time or pivotal moments, but people maybe think less about like

the actual coordination of rides that was necessary day in and day out to make that collective action happen. Or I also think about some of the occupations we've seen, like I live in Seattle and the recent occupy protests zone that was really creating a police-free space. The visible infrastructure of that space was mutual aid tents, people giving each other food, water, free mental health support, haircuts, people were doing nails, it was really great.

Or the occupy decolonize encampments that happened all over about a decade ago, or the tent cities that are all over our cities now and the housing crisis. Mutual aid is an essential part of these big oppositional strategies. We can think of a lot more examples, I'm sure. So that's one part of the book is like, why is mutual aid important to social movements?

The second part is about, it's based in my experiences over the last 20 years of trying to be part of addressing the patterns of conflict and dysfunction that undermines so many groups' work. We're conditioned by the systems we live under and when we work together, these forms and norms come up and create a lot of obstacles that are common, that we can see repeated in a lot of groups. Like, one person dominating who is making all the decisions and then other people are being kind of passive, and that person's adding more and more work for the group and they're being bossy and then people feel unseen and leave. Or a common pattern of groups relying on a charismatic leader who then is abusing or hurting people and no one's really stopping it, maybe that person has access to a lot of resources or credibility. Or groups not having clear processes about how to decide things together and moving really fast, and then having conflict about decisions that have been made by some people without consulting everybody. Or a really common problem, groups becoming really focused only on the external, like on how many meals we're delivering, or how many people we're reaching, or what our social media says, or how we're being seen outside, and not focusing so much on how we're treating each other and whether or not we're using ethical processes inside our work together, which makes sense in capitalism which is all about appearances.

So there's a lot of these kinds of patterns and there's just these behaviors of hierarchy, overwork, flakiness, disorganization, rigidity, all of these things. They refract also through our particular identities, so that when we hurt each other in these ways, it has the weight of centuries of hurt and it causes really brutal conflicts that can tear apart our movements, and also make our movements more vulnerable to law enforcement infiltration. So I really wanted to have this event focus on abolition and transformative justice and be in conversation with Mariame and Ejeris because abolition and transformative justice are essential to both these prongs of what the book is about, like why mutual aid is so important to root causes work, and how we do it in ways that are more sustainable and kind and world-building in the ways we want. So abolition is a movement that's about getting to the root causes of state violence instead of just tinkering with state violence and refining it. And mutual aid has always been central to abolition work. Two big examples for me are one, all the abolitionists I know and all the abolitionist projects I know do direct support to people who are imprisoned and to criminalized communities. The deep connection and relationship and involvement and wisdom from people who are currently imprisoned and criminalized is the way we know how to assess reforms, and whether or not they're taking us towards getting rid of the system, or whether they're just expanding or legitimizing the system.

So it's essential to abolitionist movement work. And transformative justice is essential to abolition because it's about how we create the safety that people really need and want and that the police and prison and border systems never deliver but use to justify their existence. So they say they're gonna keep women or queer and trans people or Black people or people

with disabilities safe, and we know they endanger all those people and get in the way of what we might need to be safer. So all kinds of TJ work, like prevention work, like trying to build skills together for healthier relationships. The work that we do to address conditions that lead to harm, like work to try to see how childcare would help prevent harm, or housing would help prevent harm, or transportation would help prevent harm.

And also the work people do to support people who've been harmed directly and to support people who've done harm to stop doing it. All of that work in my view is mutual aid work because it's providing immediate survival needs and it's based in a deep strategy to get at root causes. At the same time, transformative justice work is a frame for thinking about new ways of being together. Like what are the recurring conflicts and the harms in our movement organizations and in our relationships? And how do we build the skills and capacities to stop those repeats and to address conflict and stay in the work together? And the experiences of people like Mariame and Ejeris with building and sustaining and experimenting and mentoring in transformative justice practice for decades has really rich lessons, I think, for all mutual aid work about some of the challenges that mutual aid groups face. So I came with other questions for them, but I'm gonna turn it over now I think to Mariame, maybe to Ejeris, I forget which order we're going in, but I'm really glad to be here with you all and grateful.

EJERIS DIXON: Hi y'all, I'm so excited to be here, I'm really grateful to be here. My name is Ejeris Dixon and I wanna say thank you to BCRW, to Dean, and to Mariame. And Dean as you were speaking, I was really thinking about what all three of us share a bit and I think of us as like helpers with a lot of range. Meaning like, all three of us wear varying hats within movements, but also, all three of us really think about like what helps our movement organizations of people, organizers, and activists create work that is more aligned with their values and of deeper impact in some way, shape, or form. And so what I really love about your book is actually this compliment that someone gave me connected to, I co-edited "Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories of the Transformative Justice Movement". So a friend of mine was like, I have a copy of your book in my bag, and I carry it to my meetings because I can pull it out and there's something in there I can use. And I feel the exact same way about your book because not only do you describe what is mutual aid, but there's an agenda framework, there's a decision making chart, there's a chart around are we talking about charity or are we moving from a mutual aid frame?

And I just think that we're at the place in both like, abolitionist movements, transformative justice movements, TJ movements, where we're talking about the how. We have the opportunity where we've established the why and the what in so many ways, where there's a tremendous opportunity for people to really grow their projects. But the how gets really complicated. And as a person who is drawn to complexity, that's something I really wanna think about. And so similarly, within Beyond Survival, we kind of list some different practical, like Oakland Power Projects and their work to train people, which is also in your book, their work to train communities on handling medical crises themselves. And so yeah, I'm excited to be in good company maybe in a very long and a wordy way. I felt really inspired and sometimes even overwhelmed by the incredible expansion of mutual aid in these times as a response to the pandemic. And I think about the opportunities, I think about the need, and sometimes I think about what do we have to offer not to reduce idealism, but to add also, maybe it's just like the tools we needed when we were all in this and didn't quite have or lessons learned the hard way.

And so within my organizing work and in some ways life, has always included some form of mutual aid because I think there's a piece around being Black and queer in this world and just needing to survive oppressive systems. And so whether it was from an organizing perspective, making sure that people had food so that they could be fully involved with the work and the meetings, or the way that particularly queer and trans people of color house each other when somebody gets evicted or someone's in an abusive relationship, the fundraisers that people have for each other the ways that, the ways that people figure out how other folks can get their medications. There's just like, so many ways that deeply woven within to the survival of our communities, there is a form of how do we take care of each other so that we can build more resilient movements.

When I first, I came to the term mutual aid later, like literally in the last year or two, but have spent most of my time really inspired by the Black Panther Party's survival programs. And what, if there's something that feels really important for me to name about the role of mutual aid in these times is it's a part of a movement ecosystem. Because sometimes I can feel that people are saying, mutual aid is movement building in and of itself. And I'm like, yes, it's a part, it builds communities, it builds relationships, it fortifies people in the work, and our fights against state violence, our fights to build a more liberated world or liberated communities are all interwoven and intertwined. And so there are perspectives at times on mutual aid that I will push on or push back on. I believe in open projects, and I believe in building relationships with strangers, and I believe in finding a space for as many people in a room, and that can be also really challenging recognizing that sometimes progressive movement cultures are not as open, that our folks don't always have the, like that even within a consensus decision, everyone has to understand the language that's being used. And people have to be able to understand the context or the references. And in some ways, we need to build communities that are more resilient to navigating conflict. There is a way that the concept of harm has been thought of as, some people think of that as all conflict as harmful, even. And I was like, our movement spaces need to be spaces for learning, disagreement, for someone to say the wrong word, for someone to not know what a word means, if we're actually building liberated spaces. So there's a piece around this work that I think, like step one, get involved, step two, grab your tools, step three, practice, get your heart broken, come back, keep doing it 'cause there's lessons in all of the hurt.

One thing I learned the hard way was around defining the scale and scope of your work. So when I was at the Audre Lorde Project and I was one of the founders of the Safe OUTSide the System Collective, and we were, like we're gonna help people with violence. And there are just things we learned along the way from when a survivor comes to you and they need immediate support and you have a slow decision making system, that things can be really, really sticky. Or some folks from, many of us from our histories of survivorship have a sense of how to navigate trauma, but that's not everyone. And so who are the right point people to engage with folks? We learned really early on that different forms of severe violence were kind of outside of our scope but that's not what we'd said to people. So we had promised the thing that sometimes we couldn't always hold. And had to hold the sadness and guilt and sorry of fixing and making and renaming.

So I think about how are we supporting people and building communities and projects that are resilient to all of those kind of complex dynamics? I need to think of how much time we have. One thing that was, a story that I have, it's a little interesting, maybe I'm a little all over the place today is, because I am a severe asthmatic, I have sadly had to watch from afar, watching

so many of the projects kind of expand all around the country. But me and my neighbors have been in a pretty strong practice of sharing cleaning supplies and toilet paper. And so it's our own little project. So, one of my neighbors says to me, and she's like, girl, she's like, there are white people who are bringing food. And I was like, what? She's like, you call this number, there's some white people from Jersey and they bring you food. And I was like, oh, like a mutual aid project. And so what's beautiful is that, right, like in my neighborhood and in my building that is like a mostly Section 8 building, there's a thing that I'm hoping for, which is that mutual aid networks and projects are expanding among the people with either similar class backgrounds or people that folks immediately know. But the challenge is still, my neighbor didn't feel like this is something she could join. She didn't feel like this is something she was a part of. She didn't feel the shared community. She didn't even realize that these were not people from Jersey, they were just people who had a phone number from Jersey, right? And one that I really learned, in my work at the Audre Lorde Project too, is particularly in, I don't know, within cities or within urban settings, we have to talk about, whether we're talking about transformative justice, abolition, mutual aid, we have to talk about housing and we have to talk about displacement, and we have to talk about gentrification. And like one really simple example is, we were building this network of organizations and businesses that people could run into if they were avoiding violence. And the first wave of all of those safe spaces, the majority of them had been displaced out of the neighborhood within a five year period. And so there is this piece around, who is the work for, who gets to stay, and how are we building the relationships where the mutual aid project is also a place where not only, like, let's say it's to distribute food, but how are we also fighting eviction and how are we also navigating state and police violence and how are we kind of creating those interconnected movements? And that the mutual aid network doesn't in itself become its own site of privilege because of either a lack of relationship building or a lack of access?

So, I mean there's so much to say so I come to this with excitement and a richness because if there's one thing that has been guiding my organizing and my work is how do we build liberated communities? What do they look like? What are the building blocks? What are the concrete steps? What are the pitfalls? And I absolutely see mutual aid as a part of the construction, and how we practice what liberated communities look like. And I also wanted to really name that there's so many complications in the process, all good reasons, and invite us all into both the lessons that we've learned and the questions that we're still asking. And I'll pass there.

MARIAME KABA: Great. Hi, everyone, good evening. I'm so happy to be here this evening and to be part of this conversation with people I admire so much, Dean and Ejeris. I wanna thank BCRW for all the work for pulling this together and for having us here this evening. I'm Zooming in from New York City on Lenape land. And so again, I'm just glad to be in conversation. I'm so, so excited about this book, Dean, I think you know. I can feel, I want to congratulate you for pulling it together, I think it's so needed. I've been hoping for something like this and I'm just glad to see it out in the world. I really appreciate the way that you lay out a definition of mutual aid that's inclusive enough to meet the expansivity of the concept. I appreciate how you share historical and current examples. I appreciate how you name that mutual aid isn't new and that it's been called by different names by different people in different spaces, even if codified by particular groups. I love the fact that it is something that's ongoing and is happening all the time every day and that that comes through in the book.

I very, very much, echoing what Ejeris said, I appreciate that the book offers templates for how to engage in decision making, how to try to begin to deal with conflict, which is inevitable and not something to be shied away from, how to try to begin to think about when you're burning out, just even to notice and to know that that's actually what's happening with you. I think a lot of people come into spaces and they are working, working, working and don't even realize that they're going through burnout and that tends to exacerbate sometimes whatever problems are lingering within the space, and there are going to be problems. I've never understood people who think that disparate people who almost had nothing in common except an idea maybe, coming together was going to be smooth sailing at any point. Like that's something for me that's always been confusing, not actually, but just like yes, of course, if we're all coming with very different ideas about very different things, very different experiences, life experiences, family experiences, traumas, all of those bumping against each other isn't going to always be smooth. I am a person who very much issues catastrophizing things, like one problem is not the end of the world. One problem if you have it, is you're lucky that it's just this one at this one time. Usually there are 10 that we're dealing with at the same time. So, I always like to see things that way and I appreciate that, kind of just leaning into the notions of these ideas within the book.

I was thinking, my friend Shira Hassan always says that she wishes she would write a book called *All the Mistakes I've Ever Made*. And parts of this book are all the mistakes I've ever made offered back to the public in a way that's digestible and that they can use in their own lives. And they think we can all write a version of that book, especially if you've been doing this work for more than a minute. I was thinking the other day again of a quote, a series of questions I like to ask myself that's from a document called "Towards Land, Work & Power". And the quote is, "To fulfill her task of building organizations and a broader movement, the conscious organizer must be guided in her work by her answers to basic questions. "What's the nature of the system? "What are the current conditions within this system? "And what are the forces that have the interest and capability to make change?" I think that the best mutual aid projects that I've been part of, but also that I've witnessed from afar, have included some attempt to answer the questions about the nature of the system and the current conditions of the system.

And the best ones have also asked, what are the forces that have the interest and capability to make change while also attending to the politicized survival work that is so critical to all these mutual aid projects? So I think about that as we're moving in this moment, this pandemic economic collapse, climate disaster moment that we're in the midst of, wondering how we might answer these questions together in our mutual aid projects that would actually enhance the world that we're trying to build, prefigure it in some real concrete ways. I've been thinking a lot for myself about the language we use to try to explain things to other people within our spaces and within our movements, how important it is to find different language and different ways to share with folks and talk with each other and try to come to some understanding. I've heard mutual aid described in some ways as part of like the survival pending revolution, work of the Black Panther Party for self defense and their very specific politicized survival work that mutual aid has found a place within that. I've heard mutual aid described as cooperation for the sake of the common good. I've heard mutual aid described within an idea of collectivity towards survival when we're thinking about organizing. I've heard mutual aid described as in part what you mentioned within a larger abolitionist frame as rehearsal is what Ruthie Gilmore talks about often, but also as prefiguring the world in which we want to live. And that mutual

aid kind of finds itself as one of the ingredients and parts and mechanisms through which we rehearse and through which we try to prefigure that world.

So I've been trying to kind of think for myself when it comes to transformative justice, which is basically for most of us ways to address harms that facilitate transformation and accountability, the beginnings perhaps of healing rather than focusing on punishment. For transformative justice for me over the years has always had kind of layers, we've had practices that are individual ones and interpersonal ones and community-focused ones, but all of it involves some form of organizing. Part of the reason I've been engaged in participatory defense work for so many years as a form of politicized survival work is because I consider that to be mutual aid as well. Defense campaigns are very good examples of mutual aid in practice. And I think a lot of abolitionists who are engaged in participatory defense work perhaps don't see their work in that very specific way of a mutual aid project but it very much is, right? We are often within those participatory defense campaigns doing court watching, we are providing fundraising for people's legal needs and their life needs, we are having individual conversations with families of the people who are directly harmed. We are ourselves learning, we are learning about the system that we want to completely in some cases overthrow and in some cases transform, and in some cases remodel, I don't know, depending on where people are coming from, but we're doing constant analysis of the situation and learning with that. And also very deliberately choosing not to agree with the way that the law often privatizes harm and says that only certain people can be available to care about this. That only people with expert knowledge are allowed to engage or feel like they should engage. We're doing that work on a regular basis. at Survived and Punished, and other places, and again, I see that as a form of mutual aid work.

So I'm gonna end just with a couple of things that I was thinking about in thinking about your book where there potentially is generative conflict and disagreement amongst people who might be reading it. Questions that remain and that aren't yours to have answered, I don't think because not one person can come up with the answer to these things, this is ongoing. The question of is mutual aid enough and what does enough mean? Questions about how do we think about dual power? Questions about the state and its role, and whether we are arguing over the form of the state or whether the state should exist at all? How would mutual aid and how should it look like now in the 21st century in terms of needing to adapt? Sometimes we stick with old models of how we do things 'cause those are what we know. But now we're in a pandemic and digital life is so different. I'm thinking a lot about what mutual aid in the digital world where we can't be together in person, we're not gonna be able to argue about issues in person. It causes a really difficult thing to have to have deep conversations on email streams or on Signal or on Slack versus sitting across from a person seeing how they're reacting, seeing where their body language is so that you can interpret what's happening. We're not having that right now. What are the challenges of that and how is that going to impede or facilitate what it is that we're trying to do?

I'm also thinking about what is reciprocity when power imbalances exist that are actually reified by the fact that we can't be in the same spaces together? And I'm thinking about something that I know people are pushing back on a lot right now and I understand their pushback and hear it, but people are very upset I've seen in various spaces about they have a different view of what care is and the notion that care itself can be oppressive and not necessarily be seen as a positive thing, especially people who are thinking about that within a disability justice frame, I get it, the condescension or the potential oppression of the notion of

care. For me however, I take that critique and I continue to center care as critical to remaking the world. At its best, transformative justice is rooted in care, at its best, PIC abolition for me is rooted in care. I'm not willing to, while I'm willing to problematize the idea of care, I'm not willing to give up on care and love, and these things that have been universally talked about for generations as we think about movements for social change and justice. So I've been thinking a lot about those terms and those ideas.

And finally, I've been thinking a lot about the fact that everything doesn't have to be everything. I think there's too much pressure sometimes put on one formation. We're not gonna be able to do everything and not all formations necessarily need to become part of some large network of things. I feel like what we really need is like 100, 1,000,000, 10 million different experiments happening all the time in every place so that people can plug in where they can and where they want to and where they can find their people and then also expand on those people. But I just think everything doesn't have to be everything, there's too much pressure on everybody right now for that to happen, and it's actually, to me, leading to a narrowing of possibilities rather than an expansion of it. So those are some of the things I've been thinking about that the book really had me continuing to deepen my thoughts about and to question and to put out there so just thank you for making this book and allowing us to keep thinking together and thinking separately about these ideas. So, I now know that we're coming back together all of us to talk and to kind of build off of what we've said to each other, maybe pick up on points we've made, and so maybe I'll just throw it to both of you and ask you, if you're asked by people to define the world we're trying to create, the world we're trying to live in, the world we're trying to build, how do you answer that for folks in this moment? What are your kind of inspirations and points of departure to help people come through that journey of kind of dreaming and envisioning that other world together?

DEAN: Yeah, I'll start 'cause I kind of wanna tie that in with this question, with some things you were just saying that was so beautiful, I really appreciate it. It was some things you were saying about how we're not looking for each thing to be everything and how instead we want like zillions of projects and experiments that people can plug into in ways that are appropriate to them and that I would say are like based on local knowledges. Like I would say for me, we're not trying to, people are always like, how do you scale up mutual aid, and for me, that's not about like, we'll create one format and we'll have like one name of it and it'll be across all the whatever, states or all the counties. Like that whole framework, that's to me the framework of the nation state and it's inevitably like colonialist, inevitably tied to like erasing local knowledges and all the differences between people and trying to make like, one model and roll it out over territory. And I think that's really different from saying, we want proliferation of experiments that have different kinds of wisdom and work for different kinds of people. And that for me, that's a question that feels central to this question of like, what do I want the world to look like? Like really, the main thing I think about is collective self determination.

So I'm not talking about like individualist ideas of self determination where we're gonna just be thinking about individual people, like protecting their private property, like that's the US kind of idea of freedom or whatever, capitalist idea of freedom, white supremacist idea of freedom. I'm thinking about what it means when people together get to decide the conditions under which they live. And I was just reading Naomi Klein to like teach something in my class and one of the things she was writing about was like, how we don't get to decide whether or not it's coal that the energy that comes through our houses is, or whether it's coming from solar, or whether it's coming, we get to make no decisions about this and so different people in different towns are

trying to like take back their grid or build their own smaller grids. And like that's just an example of what it would mean to have collective self determination. But also over workplaces by having workplaces be collectivized, or over childcare collectives or food systems, like moving away from bosses and corporations and elected officials who are all beholden to them, or militaries, deciding what our lives are like. And instead having people decide that in the complex ways that are as groups, not as individuals, but as groups. Like not just by buying something, but by like actually stewarding wellbeing together.

And one more thing about this, I come at this from an anarchist perspective, that wasn't always my political identity, I really came to my understanding of anarchism through women of color feminist practices and intellectual traditions that made me suspicious of institutions and the ways that institutional power creates harm and reproduces certain hierarchies. And so I came to this anarchist politic and over time realized more and more that some of the things I want, like a world with no prisons or borders, that those just don't have nation states because that's what the nation state is made of in the world I'm living in now. And that like, I don't believe in a kind of, like I think some liberals believe in like a kind of positive, like mommy daddy state that will eventually give us poor relief in a way that's not racist or not sexist or give us... I just see that whenever the United States gives something out that we are asking for, it does it in a way that is designed to reify white supremacy and ableism and hetero-patriarchy.

And so, in my view, the battle between like doing these mutual aid projects that are about the root causes and that like also are threatening to the government and then they're also meant to kick down a concession that covers some of the same stuff, and maybe they'll even reach more people 'cause they have more administrative power. That's not the end, then we like fight more and are like, but you left out all these people. But we're actually trying to build a world in which we just actually provide all of this without having everything extracted from our communities and then maybe crumbs come back as they concentrate wealth more and more.

And so what's interesting about that for me is I don't need everyone in a mutual aid group with me to agree about that, like we can actually have productive interesting difference and have juicy conversations while we send letters to prisoners and while we deliver groceries and while we work on somebody's defense campaign. We also don't need to have exact same political vision about our end goals, but we can enjoy arguing and trying to influence each other, and then we can have moment where it does matter, where like, no, we won't take that money from Ford for this or whatever the story is. Or we won't do this thing with the city that would require us to report something to the police. Or whatever, you get to these moments that are like the rub and then people sometimes get to expand their politics or their solidarity or learn new depth. But I feel like, both it's important right now for me to name this anarchist vision that I have and what its view is on the coercive powers that we live under now and that we're really trying to dismantle them. And also for me, that's not absolutist, I also am part of the fight to like defund the police and move that money towards housing. I'm not like I refuse to have money go from this part of the budget to the other in my city or county, you know? Yeah, so it's like how to have these conversations in ways where we can influence each other, where we can try stuff, we can learn it didn't work, or learn there was a big, it bit us in the ass after and we don't wanna do it that way next time, notice our opposition's countermoves. But I just feel like both of your work for me has been a model of experimentation focused in local knowledges and not trying to make something that's perfectly replicable but instead is about, hey, we practice this, this is what we learned, do you wanna try practicing your versions?

EJERIS: Yeah, I can jump in or add. Where do I wanna start? I've been thinking, maybe because it's election season, I've been thinking a lot about like the word democracy, right? Like, what does it actually mean? And I historically like, democracy, you know? And then I was like, wait, I've never experienced, like I don't live in a democracy, right? Like I'm oppressed by this system that was designed to exploit and oppress me and my communities. And so I've just been like very curious about, is actual democracy not what the US calls it, possible? And what...And really hanging out around a term of like liberatory agreement, and not being sure around what the scale of that means. So, I feel like I know I'm a socialist, I don't think I'm an anarchist, I'm not inherently anti-certain institutions 'cause I'm so tactile, that I think a lot about the delivery of just services or systems. So like, even in this conversation I remember, Dean, when I was writing the piece for the AR, and I was like, I don't know. And you were like, well, which systems? Like the post office? I was like, yeah, maybe we keep the post office and we keep public education. I think a lot about it. But the world I want involves communities being able to determine their needs and how they're met in not oppressive ways, right? And because of my own, also, hesitations around how much oppression lives within us no matter what configuration we construct, there's not like an inherent size of that that reduces oppression for me, it's process, that is a bit about that too.

So at the beginning of this year, or no, at the start of the pandemic, I started to think about what are the, I do this thing where I'm like, what are the key things based on how I'm supporting organizers in groups that people should be thinking about. And I was like, oh, I really want myself and I want others to live at the intersection of healing justice, mutual aid, and liberatory governance. Like I wanna live there. Because I think that's how we survive these times, right? The way that the response to the pandemic and state violence and all of these crises are creating... The level of crisis and honestly of death and sickness that's happening in our communities means that we have to think about even our most revolutionary work in ways around how we're keeping ourselves and each other alive. And there's also a piece around how are we taking care of each other in that process? And how does that build towards the world that we want? So, I literally am in conversations all the time around like, okay, so what's the design of how do we respond to violence, right? Like, what is the actual design of that system, community support network? Because a lot of my work has been around like how do neighborhoods respond to violence without police. So I'm not sold on a specific direction or scale because I haven't practiced. Like it's about the practice points for me, but I do know that we need our work to, we need more conversations around governance, we need more conversations around like what liberatory governance looks like because we need more of a through line around what we're building, even if we're building it in all kinds of different ways. I'm just in a lot of progressive communities where we avoid the question of what we want and from my perspective, or we keep it like, we want a world that's free. And I just desire something more than that because the organizer in me needs to know, what are we asking people to join? What are we building towards? And how are we selling people on a affirmative vision as opposed to a vision that is against a bunch of things, right? And so, yeah, so I guess this is just my way of saying like, some of this I have a sense of and the rest of it, I wanna keep being in conversation with y'all about.

MARIAME: Yeah, I thank you for that, both of you. I've been really interested over the last, at least just even the last month, I've seen a few kind of visual representations through video of folks who are putting out potential ideas for that vision of a world we want to be moving towards. I really appreciated the piece that came out, the video that was created by Intercept by Opal Tometi and Naomi Klein and others where it was a very short, seven minutes or so,

video that kind of tries to think about climate in connection with the PIC, in connection, all the things we talk about all the time about like, we're gonna have to change everything and it's gonna, but like that becomes overwhelming to folks. I think they really did a really decent job of at least putting it out there as a offering of like these things could change and that would make everybody's life so much more livable, which is what we're ultimately, in my opinion, what we want is to end premature death and make life livable for people. And understand the importance of life and affirmingness of that in multiple kinds of ways, no matter what our politics might be aiming towards, whether you're an anarchist or a socialist, or in my case, probably a commu-socialist. There's any labels that I would put on that, for me is more about like how I want to see the world be liveable for people on a day to day basis. So I really appreciated that Intercept video. I also appreciated a video that partners, I forget what they're called, I'm gonna have to post this on Twitter when I get a chance, they put out a recent video where they just kind of talked about, what is the social contract that we want to be able to have just in the interim? Like what is the interim work? Like forget the horizon and forget the very basic but like what's the interim stuff we should be asking for that becomes operationalized in order, again, to make life livable for people, right, to allow us to live? Like I don't understand how that's not seen on a regular basis as one of our biggest goals that we ought to be working towards every day every day. Is the fucking health care plan making life livable for people? No? A bunch of people dying, that's seen as collateral damage? That shit isn't good. You know like, why can't that be a way to try to orient ourselves towards more justice? I feel like to me, that's like the rub, you know?

I also am thinking about my friend, Tamara Nopper, Dr. Tamara Nopper, put on Twitter recently a quote from Ruthie again that was saying be wary of fetishizing the state. Fascists fetishize the state and anti-fascists tend to fetishize the state as well. The state does not think and do, people in various configurations of power including from below enliven states to think and do. It's part of why I haven't moved to anarchism for myself, is because I believe that deeply. I think people in relations of power enliven these institutions. I don't think the institutions in and of themselves, because they exist are these kind of these things that can't be controlled by us, that can't. And I don't mean here in the case of like institutions like prisons, policing, et cetera that are death-making institutions that just have to go, I'm talking about life affirming institutions that we want to keep. So anyway, so I have lots of thoughts on this, and especially within an abolitionist horizon, I would love to be talking with more abolitionists. And I have always, I mean, these conversations we're having right now are not new and we haven't not had them with each other in multiple kinds of forms and ways, but I think people are hungry for them even more, especially as newer people are coming on board around that. So I think maybe other people have more things to add, let's have that happen so thank you.

DEAN: Yeah, that's really helpful. I just wanted to, as like a thing you were just saying about Ruthie's comment, about not fetishizing the state. I feel like I really learned that from reading the work of Michel Foucault. And what I got out of that, like there's some piece where he talks about how leftists fetishize the state, and I hear this when people talk about, they'll use the state, the state, the state in the sentence over and over again. Which is important 'cause naming state violence is like a fundamental intervention of women of color feminism and identifying those dynamics, but with what I'm interested in about it. So people who do say Foucault talked about how institutions have regimes of practices. So like that it's not about the state being one unitary thing, in fact, we know that there's just like, even in our own cities, like the Department of Homeless Services is like doing this thing to trans people and it's like kind of the other thing from what's happening in the juvenile punishment system. You know like, we

know how at odds it is in itself and actually totally fine with it. But that instead what it lets us ask is like, well, if prisons treat people like this, how does the same practices happen in the shelter? And then actually, we see them happen in the public school.

So this is what abolitionists already do and I think this is what the term PIC already does, is it identifies for us how shared regimes of practices are happening across spaces, including ones that we've been told are the life making institutions and the ones that are like the explicit punishment. And this is also what I think the disability justice analysis that's happening around how we really don't wanna replace cops with social workers, or we don't really wanna replace jails with psych facilities. Like, wait, stop, these are different forms of prisons, even if they call themselves different things, they like still target the same groups and they use a lot of the same practices that are deeply like coercive and violent and not moving us towards well being. So for me, I think the reason I care so much about organizing our mutual aid projects horizontally is 'cause those same regimes of practices come into our groups. So suddenly, we're like, oh, no, you can't get a spot unless you can show us that you're sober, which is the same shit they're saying down at the shelter, or like we end up also replicating harmful regimes or practices that are happening in the state spaces that we know are bad and exclude the same people. Or we don't want people who've done X or Y kind of harm, or who the state has labeled this or that.

So, I guess part of my, I'm interested also in not seeing the state in some kind of flat way, but instead asking, how do we get rid of certain coercive practices, we wanna get rid of them wherever they are. And that could be that they are happening in our schools, but they could also be happening in our families and they could also be happening in the group we just started that's trying to get rid of some kind of violence. And that's that like deep intentionality around actually creating new ways of being together or ways that we know are more healing. Like, for me, friendship is the model I use. I have treated my friends better than I've treated other kinds of people, other relationships. I've found friendship to be where I can give and receive the best kinds of feedback, harder in blood family, or harder in dating relationships, or harder with boss/worker. So for me, I'm like, that's the social relations that seemed to work best, I feel like I'm naturally engaged in consensus decision making often with friends about our plans. Whereas in some other relationship, I'm being told what to do or I'm trying to tell somebody what to do or whatever. So I feel like the new, we're trying to like notice, where are generative regimes of practices and like social norms between people that are loving and caring and kind, and move away from that. And sometimes that might happen, you might have that happen at the post office which is amazing, or we might have it on the bus, but often, we let something terrible happen in those spaces because they're under this structure that is of extraction, that is like the formation I think for me of the way US governments, whether it's the federal or like the state or the specific institutions. And one more piece I wanna add to this. A place I look for inspiration is that just transition framework zine from Movement Generation.

MARIAME: Yes.

DEAN: They've got that centerfold and it's like, this is what an extractive economy based on militarism looks like and feels like in how it distributes well being, and this is what a world based on care and sacredness is like. And it's all about making things more local. Like in the middle, there's this arrow going down, making things more local, making people have more

say in their lives, and you can kind of look at their chart and like ask any question, you can ask about education or about feminist questions. I feel like it's an expansive framework and I recommend to people as like a place for inspiration.

MARIAME: I love that, I love that. I'm gonna be quiet for one second after this because I think people are going to pelt us and accuse us of being elite academics when I mention Foucault one more time, even though I really dislike a lot of Foucault, I just wanna say one part of what I appreciate about him is he does tell us that every system of power has within it the key to its own undoing, right? That every system of power really does have within it the key to its own undoing. That tells us a lot about how we organize then, that we are not at the mercy of these systems without power to actually shape and transform and change them. To me, that's a critical part of PIC abolition's promise for me. And also a thing that allows me to not remain despondent about the fact that nothing can ever change and nothing can ever be undone. It's the fact that everything can be undone. And like if I did not believe that, honestly, I don't think I would be able to get up every morning and keep pushing forward in the ways that we do. And I think mutual aid sometimes gives us the sliver of windows of the actual possibilities of the ways that these institutions, these systems of power, have within them the key to their own undoing. The practice of that mutual aid can be a window into that way forward of dismantling of these larger systems and institutions. So, I just wanted to also put that out there and I promise never to mention Foucault ever again 'cause I really tend not to.

EJERIS: I almost can add, but I am wondering if we, do we wanna move to questions? And then we can add on ideas from there?

MARIAME: You're on mute, Hope.

HOPE: Thanks. I'm just gonna start synthesizing some of the questions that have been coming in through the Q&A. So I'm gonna look over and get you a first question right now. Okay, so we've had a few questions coming in from folks who are just starting up mutual aid projects. So I'm just going to read one of them that sort of gets at some of the questions that a few different people are asking. Do you have any guidance for people trying to develop mutual aid networks and in new location that might be politically concerning? I'm in a community for the first time in years that has become really Trumpy and where my family has previously been targeted in mostly harmless ways, but I don't wanna rule out that it's possible to build solidarity with the people around me.

DEAN: There's a lot of people in the region that I live in the northwest organizing working class white people who are really easily recruited right now to white supremacist formations and where there's a lot of recruitment by like, there's lot of people in the police forces and in ICE and in other law enforcement who are also part of these white supremacist formations. And there's this like, people are suffering very intensely from the brutal economy and then being told to blame immigrants and to blame people in the cities and to blind people of color and stuff. And so I feel like some of those projects are what I look to like how people are just meeting people where each other are at. So like a lot of people are struggling with like drug abuse and overdose, and so a lot of families are interested in mutual aid projects that relates to that because that's something that people are going through. Or people are struggling with child care. I feel like what mutual aid projects do is they just like meet needs that are not being met and then let people have conversations about the root causes of those needs. And so I think like my instinct when people are, especially whenever we're in a new setting, it's great to

just find out what's already going on and who to connect with. And a lot of places, communities of faith can be a place where people are already connecting and meeting each other's needs, or people might be having a network around a prison in a rural area and supporting people inside it or families of those people. But I think A, finding existing mutual aid resources that are naturally happening and helping them grow and sustain, or supporting having a politicized conversation in those spots about the root causes of what people are facing. And there's a website called mutualaidhub.org that may be of use, it doesn't have every single thing happening in the country on it, but I do think some people have been able to find folks in their region by going to that site or find something that looks like their region and what could they replicate and could they ask somebody who's doing something in a space that's got some of the same qualities. I don't know if Mariame or Ejeris have thoughts on that.

MARIAME: No, I don't really, I'm gonna let Ejeris go ahead.

EJERIS: I don't really either, I'm down to go through more questions 'cause I know we're pressed on time.

DEAN: Great, I see that Hope just posted a question for me in the chat. Can I speak to the co-optation of the term mutual aid by nonprofits as a new term to refer to nonprofit services? And how nonprofit services are fundamentally different than mutual aid and the dangers of the mainstreaming and watering down of the mutual aid that has also come with its popularization? Yeah, I do think that with the mainstreaming of the term mutual aid in the context of COVID, there's been some misunderstandings about what the term means, and often the media are using the term in a way that kind of takes the teeth out of mutual aid as threatening to the existing system. People wanna make it like just volunteerism or imagine that it can work hand in hand with the police or hand in hand with the National Guard, as opposed to being root causes work that has beef with the system and is part of movement building to transform. Personally, I don't think that mutual aid and nonprofit are like absolutely mutually exclusive. I've been part of nonprofit organizations that are doing mutual aid in the sense that they're doing grassroots work that says that it's systems that are the problem, not charity work, that says that it's people in crisis who are the problem and need to be fixed. But overall, most mutual aid work over most time, like most social movement work has been done by people who are not paid.

And we cannot build a movement of all people who work at nonprofits 'cause then it's controlled by funders which might be government or rich people. And because there's not enough money to build a movement of hundreds of millions of people which is what we need to make the changes we seek. So, to me, nonprofits can sometimes have a specific technical role in mutual aid. Like if we're doing work where we need like a couple people to be able to go to court during the day and do this particular thing. But to build powerful mutual aid projects, they might have a couple of people who are paid or stipended or who are doing interpretation work or other work that specialized, but a lot of people being recruited in to do that work as part of their life purpose, and that's not the model of nonprofit that's been popular in our lifetimes. Instead, it's been just staff-centered, hierarchal, kind of run like a business and producing elite solutions. It hasn't been a model that's about organizing millions of people.

So, I just would put nuance there and I have a chart in the book that's about like the differences between kind of a non-profit, charity, social service set of ways of doing stuff, versus a mutual aid ways of doing stuff, but it's not like a hard binary line, it's more about like

how do we do things in ways that are about getting to root causes, directly supporting people, not creating eligibility criteria that excludes the most vulnerable and stigmatized people, and actually building large scale participation in governance that is meaningful. So yeah, so I would say it's good that we're suspicious of a nonprofit model 'cause it wasn't designed to make our movements grow, it was designed to contain them. And like any other tool, like a hospital or like anything, when do we use some of these things that have really hurt us but also like when we use them strategically, they might have a purpose.

MARIAME: Can I also just add in here that, listen, y'all, I'm gonna say something I'm probably gonna get me, again, yelled at by millions, I don't know. But if we get popular, our shit's gonna be co-opted, okay? Like the minute something hits the "mainstream" in any sort of way, it is rife for being co-opted, that's what these institutions of power do, is to try to say, you know what, no, no, no, we're not that far apart, we actually agree. We're actually on the same page here. It's like, no, you're not actually on the same page, you don't have the same analysis as we do, you're not giving up any power. But we are going to be co-opted if we are becoming irresistible and if we are making strides among people and among communities. And so sometimes I feel like our conversations that happen in our "movement spaces" can be so, I don't know, they're just not edifying at all. It's like they just become navel gazing and a concern and like it's a different form of concern trolling, because we don't have control over those systems co-opting us, they will. So now the question is, we know we're gonna get co-opted so then what? What are we up to? What are we doing? How are we moving? How are we elevating ourselves? We're in the moment right now whereby the entire Democratic party establishment has decided that defund police is going to be their main message that came out of the election and that they are going to use that, they're gonna beat down that demand, that that is going to be their thing in life. That's a different form of cooption, right? It's a way of trying to completely delegitimize something so that you don't have to shift any power and you don't have to actually change anything. So we're dealing with that right now. I think we all knew this was coming and the question we have now is, how are we going to respond in the best possible way through the power we have built to say, no, we are still going to be wanting a demand of defund and actually, it's a demand of defund towards abolition by the way, so you're not gonna like it even more, you know? How are we gonna do that? So, yeah.

EJERIS: I can add in on this question around nonprofits and co-optation. So for me, I was helping coordinate a project that was operating as horizontally as possible, but within a larger and hierarchical nonprofit. So it was deep contradiction, right? And my role within that, it was also a chance to like channel resources to support a project for queer and trans people of color leadership in a particular way. So, I feel like my job was kind of like scheduling, getting food, supporting people with reminders. So I think there's this piece around most mutual aid work has to address the question of resources in some way, shape, or form, particularly under this society, otherwise, we start to just get into structures where we have projects led by people who are independently wealthy and quiet about it, right. So there is this piece around like, how are we gonna grapple with the question of resources? How are people channeling resources? How are people supporting their groups? And how are we figuring out what that means within all the legal structures?

It did also create a whole host of other issues around like, legally, what could happen, around reporting work around violence, and what, there are a lot of things that we had to really think about around legal liability and how it impacted members of the group. And so I just think that

there is a lot to think about there and all mutual aid groups should be thinking about distributing resources because some of... Why some movement organizations moved into nonprofit models was because people were really struggling all being volunteer in particular ways. But the one contradiction I get really curious about is I feel like on one hand, there's a lot of folks who are talking about, you know, all volunteer run projects, and then I'm also in other sectors of the movement where people are talking about everything I do in a social justice space should be compensated. So I would like to just like really lift up that we sit in this like what I find is a dizzying contradiction around, how will we take care of ourselves in our work, and what the expectations of what that work looks like and I think we're all figuring it out as we go.

DEAN: I also wanna say, I think there's something we're talking about like capitalism and alienation from labor and, just the the ways in which a lot of times when people like a lot of this like, when I was young, and would make zines it felt so enlivening and then as soon as I was supposed to write something for like, a class or to get paid, I was just like, oh, shit, I can't write it. Like a lot of people submit their artwork and their music and caring for children, and all kinds of things or like I'm baking a pie for my friend, it's lovely, but if I just said I make 10 pies to get paid, suddenly, it's like hell, you know? Like, I think there's something about why it's really also beautiful to do things, for purpose and for free, and most social movement work overtime has been done for purpose and for free by working class and poor people. And it's just this thing where like, everyone is to get paid for everything. It really feels like it just guarantees rich people control of what we get to do.

And so I just, I think there's no right answer for this, like, everybody has to figure out how to balance getting the bills paid, and being part of movements in meaningful ways. But for me, spending a lot of time talking to young people who wanna be lawyers, or social workers or teachers, I think it's essential that they not only engage with a movement through their job, because they're just gonna get a really limited part of it, and be less likely to be tied to the most vibrant demands that are coming from the most impacted people, if they're only doing it during their paid hours at their job, whether that's a nonprofit job, or a school or whatever. And I talk to people a lot about this a lot. And also that the hot stuff, the amazing relationships and the really deeply fun, hard, interesting stuff is often happening in the spaces that aren't paid.

And where, everywhere I've lived also, it's the groups that are volunteer based, that are usually furthest to the left in abolitionist thinking, pushing all these nonprofits that are kind of like slower. I see this a lot in the northwest, it's been this group Resistencia that's really pushing the abolitionist line around detention and deportation and then they're always like, pulling on the other immigrant rights ecosystem groups to get more abolitionist. And they've really had a big impact, and they've never had a staff, they've occasionally had a couple people stipended. They're the ones running a hotline for people inside the detention center, they're doing really high impact work to shut that place down. And so I just want us to like hold that contradiction. I appreciate you saying that Ejeris, that like, yeah, it makes sense people wanna get paid, people are sick of being exploited and extracted from of course, and that also happens inside our movements all the time. And it's a deep reality that like having to get paid for everything really limits it.

MARIAME: I do wanna mention to you right now that you're probably going to be blasted as being extractive as fuck of poor people for... Like this conversation is not, we can never have it

in public because so many people are afraid to say what they're going to say because they're afraid of being like, this means it's exclusive. Do you know who's been working on the ground from time immemorial? Poor people, okay? People with very little funds and money who are pushing for justice on a regular basis. If they waited to get paid to do it, we'd all still be on the goddamn plantation as Black folks, okay? Or in colonized horror wherever we were living. Like people, we have to be able to hold multiple realities at once while recognizing. I just wanted to point this out 'cause it's very important, people have asked me for years around transformative justice holding processes work, Shira and I in "Fumbling Towards Repair" very clearly state that we have never gotten paid for holding a single process in our communities. Why? Because for us, it's always been a political commitment, right? It's a political commitment towards an abolitionist horizon that we believe we have to be skilled up in addressing very serious harms within our communities when they occur because of the world that we want to build.

So we put ourselves out there. Is that something that everybody can do? Certainly not, it's not every day, not every week, not every month, but is it something that everybody can do once in a while? Yes, it absolutely is, it absolutely is. Now, I have gotten a lot of pushback particularly from younger organizers around that stance, right? And I'm okay with the pushback and I'm okay with us being in disagreement with each other, I feel like that's generative. They may find a new and a different way of doing and being, I just don't see how people are going to "get paid" for doing the work of making safety in our communities for each other and ourselves. If we are going to move from a different model than "services" as safety, or police as safety. You know what I mean? These institutional models. Now, do I think that those dollars and those resources from those very death making institutions ought to devolve to this community? I absolutely do. And we may figure out new configurations and ways to use those dollars to compensate people for some of their time to do some of those things. But if we start from there, it's very hard to see how we're gonna move to the next stages of the work that we need to do in order to change the current circumstances that we live under. So I love this, I love that we're having this conversation publicly, but I'm just gonna let you all know, get ready for the evil sub tweets and the Facebook posts calling you an extractor, oppressor of the people is coming. So anyway, I know Ejeris had a question for you Dean so I'm gonna put that out there.

EJERIS: I know, and I'm gonna like, step my foot in it even more because I already do, which is like when people have decided that, at least the organizations I know where they're like, everyone who comes to the demonstration will be paid, right? And I'm like smallest actions ever. And so I just don't know, I don't know any revolutions that were built in that way, that were constructed in that way and I think we should be real with that. I don't want people to be exploited under these contexts either, and, and. So anyways, I have this question on my heart for you Dean, but also for all of us. And the backstory of my question is, after I left Audre Lorde Project, I was asked to write the history of the SOS collective and it was this like really painful three minutes of getting things down and re feeling every hard moment and every breakdown that I think like there's like a tool for now in your book. So, when I was reading your book, Dean, and they're just different tools around like, I don't know, even domineering leadership, or all these pieces, I felt the experience that the tools came from like viscerally. And so in some, what do they call that, like VH-1 behind the music or whatever, like I wanna know the backstory of what the tools that you chose to put in the book and also, kind of what we generate from the hard moments within mutual aid.

DEAN: Yeah, I mean, we could sit here for the next 20 million years and I could tell you all those stories. But yeah, I mean, I think that's really real. These experiments that I've been engaged in different mutual aid groups for years, especially the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, but also other groups. I've been part of being in conflict and supporting other people in conflict coming out of these things, I've experienced burnout, I've experienced the ways that like internalized capitalism, white supremacy, hetero patriarchy, have like lived in my psyche and caused me to do the work too fast or to not care about other people's feelings enough or to ignore my own boundaries and feelings or to numb out and escape or to treat the work very outcome oriented, or to be ego invested or insufficiently consultative or overly consultative, hoping that I could somehow escape feedback and judgment. I mean, just all of it, I think obviously, we all have kind of tendencies on those ranges.

Some people have a tendency to work avoid and some people have a tendency to overwork and control. There are lots of tendencies, but I've worked with mine, and with people who have the reverse where we've been in a dance together sometimes, and seen cultures of groups. Like sometimes you're in a group culture where it's really loose and everyone's coming in. And then the person just got to the meeting for the first time and we give them a big task and they don't do it. Or other times, we're in a group culture where it's like super security and no one can get in there and so we're all burnt out 'cause we never get new people in. Or sometimes we're in a group culture where an idea surfaces and immediately we're all doing it, and I've been in groups where there's so much hesitancy and fear of doing it wrong that we never get it out the door. You know, I've been in groups that are rigid about time, everyone needs to be on time and report all these things in these ways and it can be really ablest or really push people away. And I've been in other groups where it was like, everyone's late to the meetings and you don't know if anything got done from the task list. Like, all of these norms and habits that just makes so much sense to me both in roles related to our big identities, like our racial identities, or our class histories, or experiences of immigration, but also related to like family roles we've been in or how does the fact that I grew up in an alcoholic home show up in how I act in orgs, or different experiences people have had of surviving, going numb or being always ready to fight or being always ready to appease.

Just again, we've got some deep embodied experiences that shape our groups and make group dynamics. To me, they make organization spaces potentially of great trauma and spaces potentially of great healing, like where you could finally feel accompanied or you could finally feel like people heard you and saw you or you could finally feel like you weren't the only one who noticed this bad thing was happening like it was when you were a kid. I've seen and experienced like great relief and healing and as we all know, there's intense take downs happening in our orgs and lots of abuse and also lots of just like, people wearing themselves down. So yeah, so the stuff in this book is just like based on like 20 years of talking to each other about what's going on. And being in it myself and making mistakes and getting loving feedback from people about my own habits and patterns that have not been beneficial to a group, or that have had an impact. And there's part of the book that's about the ways we spit out when we're in conflict and like what it's like when you're up all night thinking about that other activist and how they're the absolute worst and just like, what can we do when we get, we're gonna get activated like that, like if you do stuff you love with other people, you will freak each other out, you know. So, that actually is a crucible for growth and for healing and change.

One of the things I think about a lot is like that phrase from 12 Step, like, you may not like all of us but you will come to love all of us the way we already love you. And it's like, that's my goal,

is like, can I love everybody in the group even if I don't always like them? And can we create a container while we also are open to giving and receiving feedback about stuff that's not working or ways that we are impacting each other. And I hope that the book helps people get to that orientation a little bit more, just day to day, and remind each other of it using some of those tools. Thanks for that question, Ejeris. Mariame, you gonna?

MARIAME: Yeah, no, so I was gonna say, I think we're closing out, it's now 8:37. Time went so fast. As usual, I can talk with both of you for hours upon hours upon. I think we have talked for hours upon hours over the years, but I just had one thing I wanted to put out there for folks which is that on the 23rd of November, if you're at all on social media, on Twitter, I hope you will join in on a mutual aid Monday effort of getting funds and resources to the groups that are doing direct feeding work in our communities, unmediated feeding work in our communities kind of in time for thanks taking so that... What I'm hearing from my friends who are doing this work and even my friends who are in nonprofits who are doing food justice and food work is that the numbers of people have exponentially increased who are coming to use pantries, who are food insecure or just hungry in general. We've seen this in the lines that people have shown on the TV news of the lines of people waiting to get food. People are hungry and there are ways that people are already on the ground through mutual aid projects trying to address that on a regular basis. The story that Ejeris gave of the New Jersey folks who come and drop off food for people is a perfect example of that work that people are doing on the ground. And so I'm hopeful that people will take mutual aid Monday on November 23rd if you're listening to this and find a local mutual aid project in your community and make a donation that is significant to you to those groups that day. You can do it before then, you can do it every day, you can do it every week, but we're gonna try to make kind of visibility effort on social media on the 23rd of November, which is a Monday. And I will also be posting and people have been sending me names of groups and I will be posting a list of groups for folks to be able to pick from in your community or beyond, thanks.

HOPE: All right, well, thank you all so much. This has been such an amazing conversation, I feel really lucky to have gotten to hear what all of you had to say. Dean, thank you for your book, I hope that everyone will go out and get a copy and read it. I know there were a lot of questions we didn't get to tonight, we already have people asking if they can send you questions and I just wanna let people know, a lot of the questions we didn't get to are actually answered in the book so you should go ahead and read it. So thank you Mariame, Ejeris, and Dean and to our ASL interpreters and live captioner. Thank you all so much and it's been really fantastic.