

CONFERÊNCIAS

CLOSE THE PRISONS! OPEN THE BORDERS!¹

How Abolition is Shaping Queer and Trans Politics

DEAN SPADE²

Transcription: Antônio Augusto Lemos Rausch (NuH/UFMG)

Revision: Marco Aurélio Máximo Prado e Júlia Silva Vidal (NuH/UFMG)

Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of this conference. I wish we were together in person, but I'm really glad to speak to you all via video. Whereas, I want to center the idea that abolition, a bit, in this conversation about mutual aid, because the two things relate so closely to me. This conference centers queer and trans inquiries and, for me, abolition has been a framework of how I understand Queer and Trans Politics, and Queer and Trans Resistance. I want to do a little bit of the work that happened in my first book, *Normal Life*. To establish some of those ideas, and then talk about about how that led me into thinking more deeply about mutual aid in this moment. I just want to say that I'm grateful for this gathering, at this time where it's so hard for people to gather.

In case people are not aware, I'm coming to this video from Seattle, Washington, which is the land of the Duwamish people. I'm sharing ideas that are very much based on my experiences of doing social movement work in the United States, and I'm very curious, always, to see what is similar, and what is quite different in different contexts. And, obviously, I study social movements around the world in order to get ideas of how people are resisting, but my work is pretty much based in my own experience too.

A big idea that has been important to my work is the idea that just trying to get included or recognized is very limited and problematic. Because I came of age in the

¹ Conference given at the closing of the 10th International Congress of the Brazilian Association for Homoculture Studies (CINABEH).

² Dean Spade is Associate Professor of Law at Seattle University School of Law.

1990's in the US, where there was a rising, pretty conservative, gay rights framework that eventually included trans people at some degree, that was all about the idea of getting included in mainstream institutions.

One of the things I came to understand, in part, from studying critical race theory, which is a really important intellectual tradition in the U.S., particularly for people studying Law and legal systems, is that when inclusion and recognition actually happens – when an institution or the government says “You people should be recognized!” or “We’re going to say we’re going to protect people, instead of targeting them!” – that always occurs because marginalized groups have been pushing. That doesn’t occur out of the goodness of the hearts of the government or institutions, it comes from pressure and it’s designed to keep things the same. There’s this huge pressure coming, movements are exposing these contradictions, exposing this injustice, and the systems respond by saying “Oh, no! We’ve got that taken care of, we’ve already support you, and like you.” This idea is called by critical race theorists, like Reva Siegel and Angela Harris, “Preservation Through Transformation”. The idea is that the system changes as literal as possible to keep things the same. It has to change, somewhat, because there’s this pressure from movements, and it changes just enough to keep things mostly the same. One of the key aspects of that, is that it takes sites that are really harmful and violent, like the police. The police are a huge source of violence in the lives of queer and trans lives in the United States since the beginning of the police in the United States. The criminalization of sex and gender difference is central to police site.

In the face of resistance to homophobia, transphobia, anti-trans violence, etc. the response by the system will be “We’re going to hire a couple gay cops!”. That kind of move says “The police are a wonderful side of liberation”. It borrows the liberatory ideas from our movements, and applies them to a site that is actually the source of our harm and oppression, then, it legitimizes that institution, that system, through using our symbols and our bodies. Meanwhile, the harm that system does continues unabated. There’s ongoing police violence and criminalization against queer and trans people.

A couple examples of this are:

Obviously, I’ve just mentioned when they hire gay cops.

Another big part of this is passing laws. I'm not sure if they call this in other places "hate crime laws", the laws that say that if you attack someone because of they're queer or trans, then you'll get extra punishment. That is a rebrand that says "The state is not the punisher of queer and trans people, but they're the protector of queer and trans people". There's no evidence that these kinds of laws reduce violence against us at all. They don't have any deterrent value, but they do increase the ability of prosecutors to put more people in prisons and jails, which they are always looking for that. It actually expands the very systems that we would be safer if they got shrunken or got rid off.

Other example is the huge history of advocacy for gay and lesbian, and now trans, service in the military. Again, the U.S. military is the largest source of violence in the world. It's the largest polluter in the world. It's a workforce in which sex and gender violence are endemic, both to the people where the military bases are, to the local people, and also inside the U.S. military there's outrageous amounts of sexual and gender violence against women and queer and trans people. They take that space and say "Gay people are equal citizens because they can serve in this brutal military, and be subjected to the exploitation and violence of this as a job". It brings the sense that this is a side of liberation, and I think it's an emotion kind of borrowing for the benefit of straight people, mostly, so they get to see the military in this new light of liberation and inclusion. Which is not, in any way, what this space is about.

Of course, same sex marriage. There's been centuries of feminists trying to dismantle marriage and understanding marriage as an institution where the state rewards certain forms of sexual and family formations, and punishes others. In the U.S., over 1000 benefits come from being married. Can you get your partner to immigrate, can you share your health insurance at work with your partner? All these really important things, which are all guarded by whether you do or not your sex and family life correctly, which is so deeply unjust. Feminists have fought really hard to make it easier to get out of marriages, to reduce the significance of marriage legally with the idea of people actually being able to not be punished or rewarded for certain forms of sexual behavior or family formation. The same-sex marriage that emerged was very much centered by white upper-class people in the U.S., who have the most to gain from marriage, since marriage is about sharing

property. That advocacy recuperated marriage as a wonderful place of love and dignity, after years and years of feminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial activists saying “No, this is a side of exploitation, extraction of forced labor, sexual violence, and social control”.

I think we see this move I’m trying to name, in which inclusion and recognition demands or concessions from the government and major institutions actually benefit those institutions and they don’t benefit the people in the name whose they happen. For example, same-sex marriage, the people in our communities who are the poorest, the most excluded, have very little benefits from marriage. In the U.S., people who are poor are less likely to marry, because it’s all about having stuff to share with somebody. If you are an undocumented person and your dates are also undocumented, you don’t get anything from getting married. I don’t have health insurance, and neither does my boyfriend. There’s no point in getting married. The idea that it solves people’s problems is very limited to the upper echelon, if anyone.

There are just some examples of what this kind of move looks like. This is the New York Police Department (NYPD) rainbow cop cars, that they unveiled a few years back. The NYPD is probably the most famous source of anti-queer violence in the world. In the sense that it’s the reason for the Stonewall Uprising, which has generated our pride celebrations in late June, in so many places. Their anti-queer/anti-trans violence is unstoppable, it has continued and it’s so brutal that yet they can put rainbow flags in their cop cars and get this good PR.

Where I live, in Seattle, the police department was under investigation by the federal government because of how racist and violent it is. During that time, they enrolled this campaign, with these rainbow police badge stickers that, if you come to Seattle it’s in the window of every restaurant, every business. It’s this idea that if you’re being attacked as a queer and trans person, you can run into this business, they’ll call the cops for you. “*This is a safe space*”. Of course, queer and trans people are terrified at the police, we don’t see it as a source of safety, particularly if you’re queer and trans and homeless, or black or indigenous, or a person with a disability. This is a PR strategy from the police, and it’s also based in a rhetoric about public safety that justifies the policing as if violence primarily happens between strangers in the streets, when in reality the most

likely sites of violence in our lives are people we know, like partners, classmates, coworkers, but especially people in our families. But these stories of violence, and bad people in the streets, justifies having a huge army of police everywhere. This is all part of a PR strategy. I don't know if this will come across the translation, but we talk about *cop-aganda*, propaganda for police.

There are responses activists made. There's a sticker made by activists that said "*Safe For Who? Cops kill and abuse queers. Don't talk to cops*". They were saying this campaign is horrible. There's another response to the same campaign. "*Warning Seattle: This Rainbow has been stolen by thieves & given to the police! Stay on alert for false claims that increased policing will make any neighborhood a SAFE SPACE*". I feel it's really fun to see that activists are pushing back. There's one comic that captures the idea that if "we have women in the military", somehow it makes what the military is doing to people okay.

These kinds of images were really popular in different movements of military inclusion advocacy, where you see kinds of "patriotic" scenes, with a big American flag story intermingled with a gay kiss, which is supposed to mean liberation, because it's so *taboo*. This is the kind of borrowing that I was talking about.

In a period when we need a lot of discernment, as we all know, we're in crisis times, global, pandemic, climate, housing crisis. The ongoing crisis that has been caused by colonialism, and neoliberal economic policies is dire. One thing that's happening is that there are legitimacy crisis happening. For example, in the United States, and I think in a lot of other places, the criminal punishment system is having a legitimacy crisis. People are in the streets, people are saying "This is racist, expensive, this is not what we need". The problem is: when we provoke a legitimacy crisis through social movement work, we should celebrate that, that's amazing, but also, often times that doesn't lead to a dismantlement of that system. It often leads to recuperation. There's an article I really love by Ruth Gilmore and Greg Gilmore in a book called "Policing The Planet", which is a wonderful anthology. They talk about how in prior periods in the U.S. where there has been a legitimacy crisis around policing, it has just been the moment where the police have expanded. In the 1960's and 70's where there were huge uprisings against white

supremacy, colonialism, war and sexism in the U.S., those were legitimacy crisis were people were naming the police as an occupying force in black communities, people were showing and seeing police violence more deeply. In response, the police did something that was hire more police officers of color, expanded police functions so the police would be in schools, “helping homeless people”, these kinds of propaganda that says the police are here to help. The police budgets have grown steadily since that legitimacy crisis, the idea that the police are here to take care of every social problem.

This tells us that when you provoke a legitimacy crisis the work is not over. That actually is a moment when we have to work, even more deeply, to ensure that the dismantling is the result. Right now, in the U.S., in the wake of 2020’s uprising against anti-black policing we see, in every state, bills to reform policing which are more of the same useless reforms, like “Let’s ban this choke-hold”, “Let’s say that the police have to get these warnings”, stuff that has never worked, that never worked. We also see bills in the legislatures of most states saying “Let’s make protests more illegal”, “Let’s make it legal for cars to run into protesters, so it’s not a crime”. You see the simultaneous strengthening of policing with more reforms that actually increase police budget-side and for the criminalization of the uprising.

We’re also in period, and I think this is a particularly to for Queer and Trans Politics for the last 20 years especially, where people call “mainstreaming” or “pink-washing” where these issues got big. There’s queer and trans people on TV, there’s some sense that we’re being seen, and there are some queer and trans elected officials in some places. The idea is “Now, these people are free, we’ve taken care of it”, and now institutions can brand themselves as progressive whenever they put a rainbow flag on something, participate on a pride parade, or whatever. These are moments of recuperation. I think Queer and Trans Politics is doing a particularly recuperative role in this era, where the worst institutions are claiming to be places of liberation by wrapping themselves in rainbow flags, literally wrapping the police car in a rainbow flag. This is really meaning for those of us in Queer and Trans Politics, how do we make sure that we have queer and trans politics that is anti-police, anti-military, anti-capitalist, anti-extraction.

Also, these moments of crisis are opportunities for mobilization. Ideally, more and

more people are saying “Oh my god! This system isn’t working, I’m scared, I’m angry about what’s happening and I’m going to join”, but it’s also a period where there’s very sophisticated efforts to demobilize us, to say “Just wait and vote next time”, “Just post things online”, “Just go to a march once a year”. There’s been very significant distortions about how social change happens that are designed to keep people passive and just absorbing politics.

I think another piece of this, I’m curious what this is like elsewhere, but in the United States there’s a big focus on the presidential election and federal politics, which most people in the U.S. have no relationship to, there’s no impact on that, and no focus on the local, where you can actually defund the police in your county if you learn about how the budgeting system works. We’re drawn into the celebrity politics of the federal level, and we’re told to ignore the local level where we might change the energy or housing policy in our city, or in our state. Which at federal level, we have basically no impact, because it’s run by elites and it’s all owned by the oil and gas industry.

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Abolition has been a really central framework for me to understand everything I’ve been talking about. What abolition is, is a call to abolish all forms of caging people, which include abolishing borders, police, prisons and abolishing disability incarceration. Also, seeing being medically incarcerated in hospitals that are actually prisons as prisons are. Abolition is a really big call that I think totally transforms our relationship with the state. Abolitionists have to constantly ask ourselves if a current reform going to move us towards our goal of getting rid off the police, border, etc., or is it going to recuperate the very thing we want to get rid of. For me, I leaned this form of discernment through work as an abolitionist that I find very useful everywhere in my work.

In case this is new to anybody, there are really common responses to when people bring out abolition that we’ll be mentioning. A lot of people say, at first “If we didn’t have cages for people, what would happen to the dangerous people?”. There’re a few big pieces around that.

I live in the most imprisoning country in the world, we have 5% of the world’s population, and 25% of the world’s prisoners. Our prisons are full of black, indigenous and other people of color, immigrants, people with disability and poor people. That is

who's this system is targeted at, and the story that is told is that these people are in prison because they are dangerous. In reality, the most dangerous people on earth are elected officials, corporate heads who are poisoning our water and our land, our food, militaries and people who are in and run them, and the police. Those are the most dangerous people, who are actually ending our lives, harming and enduring us. People in prisons mostly are there because they are poor. They did the same thing as everybody else does: use drugs, cross the street the wrong way, etc. and got criminalized for it because of who they are, or did the things they did because they are poor. For example, sleeping and pissing outside are crimes where I live, and a lot of people are criminalized for it. Of course, queer and trans people are disproportionately criminalized because we lack family support, we face barriers everywhere we go, and because cops are looking for us, for things such as sex work etc.

The problem with the dangerous people idea is that propaganda comes in again. We have TV shows on 24 hours a day that show cops catching criminals, and it's always serial killers or serial rapists. It tells us that the people who are in prison are these very people, instead of people who are poor and who are criminalized for being black, trans, etc. at public. We're also told in this propaganda that the people in prison are psychopaths or sociopaths, these diagnostic words that mean something about being a monster in contemporary language. Which, of course, we have to ask ourselves: what is that medical language describing? Who is it being applied to? And also, that thing on TV has nothing to do with being in jail for pissing outside, or doing drugs. There's a huge industry that tells us that we should be scared of who's in prison.

I would argue that being in prison has nothing to do with being dangerous at all. There are dangerous people inside and outside of prisons. We have to ask what dangerousness means. The most dangerous people in our lives, as I mentioned before, are usually our lovers and our family members. That's who we usually get hurt by. If we think about that, we may ask how could we resolve the levels of sexual violence in our families, or violence between partners, what would help that? Since putting people in cages has not reduced that at all. I just want to question the whole idea of dangerousness, because it's a central obstacle to a lot of people thinking about abolition.

Also, a lot of people, when they hear about abolition, say “That’s impossible!”. I especially hear this in the U.S., where there’s a deep logic, we live in what Beth Richie calls a “prison nation” – the logic of the prison underscores everything –. It’s really helpful to remember that for most of human history people didn’t put anyone in a cage, and they certainly didn’t put millions of people in cages. It’s the worst way to address conflict, stress and difficulty in a society. Especially, this kind of imprisoning is brand new, so it’s important to not imagine it can’t be taken away. And a lot of people in the abolitionist world talk about how chattel slavery was happening people though that would be impossible to get rid of. It would be impossible to ever end a system of racialized chattel slavery, so it’s useful to say “why do I believe that’s impossible to imagine something different?”, “How do I live in a society that has this racialized caging approach and be told that’s the only way it could be?”. That’s a key piece to move away from whatever we’ve been told that another way of life is impossible. For those of us who lives in the U.S., is not impossible to imagine something else because every other time period, and every other country is not doing this. This is the most imprisoning project ever, in the history of the world.

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The next question which people come to is such a great one: if prisons, borders, and mental health hospitals aren’t making people safe – they are actually a form violence and not reducing it –, what would make people safer? I think queer and trans people, especially feminists, have been leaders in thinking through this question. Why is there so much domestic and sexual violence in our society? Why do people attack queer and trans people? Why is this stuff happening? And I think there are a lot of answers to that, there’s a huge amount of murder of trans women of color in the United States, and it’s clear that if those people had housing that would drastically reduce their vulnerability to violence. Or, when people are really desperate and poor they are put into a dangerous situation. Basic answers abolitionists provide are: we could actually have people to have their human needs met. Instead of spending all money on policing, we could spend it on housing, child care, health care, food and basic needs, and people would actually be a lot safer, and there would be a lot less violence. Also, what are the ideas of gender and sexuality that are circulating in our societies that make it seem okay to harm trans people?

What are the ideas of racism and xenophobia that justify the attacks we're seeing on people of color? What it takes to actually build safety has nothing to do with the police state – since it adds violence, and doesn't provide any safety. We know a lot about what would make us safer.

This kind of abolitionist thinking has helped me a lot with how to discern on whether is recuperative or dismantling, and I want to give a few of the principles that I found useful in it.

One thing is I think abolitionism is really good at questioning declared historical breaks, moments where elites tell us “This was resolved! The United States used to be racist, and now it's anti-racist because of these laws”. These kinds of narratives that are meant to cover and recuperate harmful systems. For example, in the U.S., critical race theorists and abolitionists have said, as I mentioned, the existing police and imprisoning system is an actual extension of the chattel slavery system. Instead of believing the idea that slavery ended with the Emancipation Proclamation, abolitionists say – especially Angela Davis is famous for her theory of this – actually that system continued, it just took a new form. Similarly, Dorothy Roberts talks about how in the slavery system when enslaved people had children, they did not belong to them, but to the owners. They could be separated any time, this feature of slavery it's called natal alienation. That system continued today, in the child welfare system in the United States, which breaks up black and indigenous families more than any other families. Noticing that when we're told something has been fixed or resolved, it's usually just slightly shifted to be sustained is a very useful framework.

Abolitionists also avoid narratives about individual rights and individual culpability, because the system of criminalization and the system of rights are frameworks for covering the realities of collective dispossession. They ask us to think about how systems are controlling populations, instead of just what's happening to a bunch of individuals. It's a vital view frame, particularly at a very individualized legal system that wants to avoid noticing or naming collective experiences of dispossession. They also refuse the idea that some people are deserving or underserving, which is the most common type of reform.

For example, in the migrate justice framework in the United States there's been an immigration reform where only people who never had conflict with the police, those who have kids, who are the value Victorian of their college class, or joined the military, are the ones who got relieved, while the other people are bad – if you had contact with the police, if you ever had public benefits, if you didn't get through school. Those are recuperative moments, in which the institution is saying “We are justified in excluding, harming and killing these people, because we're going to lift up these few good ones”. It divides movements, it undermines power and movement building. In one of the ways, in the recent period, there has been a mainstreaming of the idea of criminal justice reform in the U.S. in which a lot of what has been proposed is only for those who have “non-violent charges”. Of course, we know that the way charges are made is racist, transphobic and homophobic. The prosecutors are most likely to add violent charges to particular groups of people. If we divide into deserving and underserving, then we're agreeing with the government when they say someone is violent or non-violent, and we don't want to take on those deserving/non-deserving frameworks.

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A lot of this is about not believing in what systems say about themselves. A lot of them are saying “We now love trans people!”, but instead we're looking at what it does. It's very fundamental to ask who's actually being devowed in that system. It is also about not limiting critique to state systems, but looking at the relationship between state systems and private sectors. We're not just going to look at the police, but also at the private security firms. We're not only looking at the U.S. military, but also at it's contractors. We're looking at the ways they interact and operate together.

A big piece of this, and we're going to get this in one second, is doing mutual aid work, immediate relief work. Sometimes, when people hear critiques of these kinds of reforms, they think it means we're going to abandon everyone who's suffering in the systems. That's not the case, abolitionism is about how we can immediately support people in these systems, but not buying into any reforms that are going to expand them. Frequently, in the U.S., in response to critiques about what happening in women's prisons, the answer will be “Let's build new and better women's prisons”, or “Let's build prisons for trans people”. What we're saying is build more prisons for women or trans

people is not going to reduce suffering. We want to directly support these people, we want to push people to get out, we want to advocate for people who have being denied medical care, we want to stop people from getting inside, but we do not want to anything that will help to expand the system. This is sometimes called non-reformist reforms, because reformist reforms expand the legitimized systems, and we're looking into things that shrink. We're saying "let's decriminalize something", "let's stop building a new facility". It's not that we're not doing any reform work, it's that we're accessing innovative reforms.

In this kind of work, abolitionists talk a lot about how it's based on horizontalism and mutuality. While we're doing the social movement work together, how do we make it operate in an abolitionist way. How do we refuse to throw each other away, how to resolve conflicts in ways that aren't punishing, and how do we make decisions together using horizontalism.

Some of the key strategies here are Politicized Survival Work – which I'll talk about more in terms of mutual aid; and Dismantling Work – all ways to stop expanding the system, police budgets, building facilities, criminalization of people. All of this is about building the world we want and need. It's about how we can practice the social relations that we need in the world that we're living that aren't based on extraction, punishment and control while we do the work. Some people call this pre-figurative politics.

Just a few things about mutual aid to wrap up.

Mutual aid is the work we do when we are providing material support to survive the existing systems, but aiming towards building a movement. Aimed at inviting people to join collective action about what they're going through. Instead of "Come here, get some water in a tent and go", it's about "Come here, get some water in a tent and let's talk together about why so many people are homeless. Do you want to come to this rally?". It's about movement building. It provides a way to engage in political participation that's about care and action, which is really important right now because of the demobilizing moves we see, that are saying "just click on these things online", or "just go to a march once a year", in which people are supposed to symbolic brand themselves as "angry at what's happening at the border", but not actually dig into participation in

their community. Mutual aid is about building thick participation, instead of thin engagements that are non-disruptive.

Another thing is that mutual aid is about building actual safety and well-being right now, because we are living through disasters, and we have so many more coming. What would we want to have in place, in our communities, to help us survive what's coming next.

A fundamental idea is that the system, not the people suffering under it, is what creates poverty, crisis and vulnerability. This matters because charity models have the opposite framework. Charity is about how wonderful it is that rich people are giving crumbs to poor people. It's framework is that if you are in crisis there's probably something wrong with you, we need to access you, and your poverty is a moral issue. You should be more chided, you should get sober, you should take psychiatric medication. Charity is about celebrating the rich, while blaming and controlling the poor. It's also always been about identifying the "deserving poor". "You can't access this shelter because you have no criminal charges", or "because you use drugs". Mutual Aid is the opposite of that: let's have everyone to have what they need right now, let's stop blaming people for poverty, and obviously, rich people are to blame for poverty.

Ultimately, charity is about sustaining extractive relationships, giving a few people something now and then to build good public relations for rich people and to make the system look like it cares. It's also used to reduce uprisings, while giving as little as possible and not in the ways that are about changing and eliminating the production of vulnerability.

A few examples of Mutual Aid work that are really meaningful to me:

This one, particularly, blows my mind. Oakland Power Projects is an abolitionist project in Oakland. When you call the emergency number, 911, to get medical help, they always send police with the ambulance. In black communities, there're many experiences where, when the police arrive, they hurt and kill people. People are aware of that it doesn't work, you can't call 911. Oakland Power Projects is deeply training tons of people in these communities to be able to do immediate medical care for acute conditions, like gunshots, for chronic conditions, like diabetes, and for mental health crisis, so that people

can not have the police come. It's literally creating an alternative system for meeting this immediate survival need, and it's building tons of community capacity.

Another example that I thought that was meaningful was when there was a really big outraising in Baltimore after Freddie Grey was killed by the police, and activists there began a new mutual aid project where they'd do jail support. They would wait outside the jail, and when anyone gets out they would ask them if they needed to do any phone calls, needed a ride anywhere, clothes if it was cold outside. They were offering support, because so often people get released from jail and immediately arrested again, because they don't have nothing on them, any ways to get home, or any ways of telling their family where they are. There're no eligibility criteria, nothing like asking "what were you arrested for?", "are you the right kind of person?". This help is available to everybody, and people are volunteering to do shifts outside of the jail.

A group that I really admire are Black and Pink, that have chapters all around the United States, and that does prisons letter-writing with queer and trans prisoners. So many queer and trans people that are in prisons in the United States don't have families, or don't have outside support, are getting harassed and often facing a lot of assault inside of prisons in part because the prison knows that they don't have anybody. Just having someone outside, having any kind of support, having someone to do internet searches for you if you're getting out, about how you're going to live, help you with basic support, having someone send you some money in your commissary so you can have soap, more food, it's such a deep and beautiful abolitionist project.

We're seeing this a lot, because there's so many street protests happening right now. Street medics are a form of mutual aid where people train themselves to provide direct medical help to others during big protest events, which is really important for keeping people safe, or dealing with tear gas that it's often used by the police. It's very powerful and empowering to have people doing this, instead of having to go to an institution where you would also might be criminalized.

I want to name this group Survived and Punished, which is a group that provides defense campaigns all around the U.S. for women, queer and trans people who've been criminalized for defending themselves against an attack. People who fought back their

abuser, or against their rapist, and then been criminalized. They bring attention to those cases, they fight to get people out, and they've had amazing successful cases. That's also a mutual aid work, it's about immediate survival work in the context of these big struggles to abolish prisons and the police. While the prisons and police still exist, people are still being criminalized for trying to survive.

I don't know if this footage has made it towards you, but I've been really moved by people surrounding people when the Immigration Control comes to arrest them, and their neighbors surround them and refuse to let the ICE get them. Also, right now, in the U.S. there's a severe housing crisis, there're many homeless encampments in all of our parks in our cities, and when the police come to raid them, destroy and get rid of their items, people surround and refuse to let them in, barricading them. This kind of work of getting in between law enforcement and vulnerable people, while fighting back, is also mutual aid, immediate survival work.

Finally, in the context of the climate crisis we're living in, and the pandemic, there's so much disaster relief. In my experience, our governments don't show up for disasters, or they show up late, and only bring relief to people who are the wealthiest, who are homeowners, but most people don't get anything. What we've seen, again and again, is people in those communities doing projects that actually provide real disaster relief. Also, they fight back against the ways, after disasters, the governments try to come and dispossess people even more, take away land and making sure people are permanently displaced. It's a really important work that I think we're going to be seeing more of.

Just to wrap, Mutual Aid is providing us a lot of different pieces that we need. To me, most importantly, it's a way to build deep participatory movements for us to all be learning how to co-govern our lives, instead of having everything being decided by corporations and elected officials who they own. It's how to actually become involved in our communities in a deep way, and build our capacities to be a different kind of people. Right now, we tend towards passivity, judgment and isolation, and those are the ways people cope with capitalism, white supremacy and colonialism. What we need is deep connective interdependence, and that is a set of skills we get by actually practicing together, making decisions, sharing things and doing stuff together.

I'll just end with this image from Seth Tobocman: "The government does not care. We the people must help each other!" To me, it feels so true with the pandemic, with climate crisis, and it's on us. I believe that our greatest help is actually in deeply supporting one another, and thankfully I have really deep models of that in Queer and Trans community for a long time.

Thank you so much for listening!

