OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

TRANSCRIPT

"RIGHTING CARCERAL FEMINISM'S WRONGS IN A #METOO ERA"

Aconversation with Erin Cloud, Mariame Kaba, Victoria Law, Gretchen Rohr, and asha bandele

Moderator: Denise Tomasini-Joshi

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ANNOUNCER:

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DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

My name is Denise Tomasini-Joshi. I am a division director with the public health program here at OSF-- and am acting as co-director for the women's right program in the interim while we hire-- a new director for the women's rights program. So the question that most often arises when some long ago instance of sexual harassment is revealed is, "Why didn't she say something?"

And immediately after that is, "Why didn't she go to the police?" And as someone who has worked on criminal justice reform and seen the ways in which-- the criminal justice system impedes progress on everything from health-- outcomes to civil rights, I'm always really amazed at the blind spot in that particular statement. The disconnect between assuming that the police are a solution and the lived experiences of women and --many of them women of color-- who can never assume to find safety from people in uniform is just always really stunning to me.

So this panel today is something of a dream team for this conversation. Activists, lawyers, organizers, writers and civil rights leaders who have to be feminist, because once you delve into these issues and know them, and know the truth about them, there's really no other

option. I'm gonna stop there because we have such a wonderful panel and I wanna make sure everybody has time-- for their remarks. But I'm gonna hand it over quickly to my colleague from U.S. Programs, Gretchen Rohr, who is gonna tell you a little bit about the U.S. Programs' interest in this conversation.

GRETCHEN ROHR:

Hi. I can follow some instructions. (LAUGHTER) Good evening.

VOICES:

Good evening. Hi.

GRETCHEN ROHR:

Beautiful crowd out there and up here. H-- I said it's a beautiful crowd out there and up here. (LAUGHTER) My name's Gretchen Rohr. I'm a program officer with the U.S. programs-- justice team. We-- deliberately do not-- name ourselves the criminal justice team. We do believe-- that the concept of justice is beyond that-- that, which is currently cre-- crafted-- and-- and deliberately crafted-- through the current criminal punitive system.

We have-- worked in partnership with-- many of our-- global partners-- and specifically with the public health-- team within Open Society Foundations, to really-- push ourselves to recognize that-- violence in all forms-- including through the form of-- of-- of verbal violence, sexualized violence-- is one that needs to be addressed-- through-- (NOISE) a careful look-- at the complex relationships-- that arise.

We have, for many years, focused a lot of our work-- in-- the realm of-- of-- of policy reforms, which have not necessarily felt very real-- for many of the people who are most caught up-- in-- the criminal punitive system. And by diving more deeply and spending a lot more time-- through-- with our grantees-- with our partners over the years, learning from our fellows, many who have been paving the way-- in this area-- we've-- we've been exposed-- to the reality-- that-- everyone definitely-- often states that those closest to the problem are often closest to the solutions.

We just really need to listen. And so many of the it's exciting-- initiative, imaginative-- work that is happening-- in creating spaces of safety, protection and self determination-- are those (COUGH) that are being developed by those-- who have been survivors-- of many of-- the-- actions that will be discussed and addressed on this panel.

And we find that there's a lot of excitement in areas of-- expansion of restorative practices-- a greater development of actually transformative justice practices, which are building our new frameworks of justice. There are small communities that we support-- that are defining and creating space where-- through actually-- community developed-- responses. They're

able to-- hold-- individuals accountable and build up accountability r-- essentially accountability circles, as well as-- restorative practice circles.

We've got a number of fellows who've been working specifically it's-- in sexual harm, as they-- as it impacts young people-- and-- transgender individuals-- and women of color. And the work that has happened-- has also made it space in looking at-- the state as actors. And that-- that's where-- I'm particularly compelled and-- have been-- have learned from so many people on this panel and what they've contributed that the dark space in which we've really pushed-- whether to sexual harassment-- sexual violence as a broader framework-- has hidden-- in the spaces that we have not ourselves held accountable.

Entering and allowing for p-- there to be policing of a space in which the police themselves have been the perpetrators, much of the extortion in the sexual harm-- is not the answer. And-- those who are to my right-- I believe carry with them many-- of those answer, but actually, (COUGH) most importantly, the questions that we need to ask ourselves-- to work and (COUGH) operate differently.

The last thing I would state-- because you're saying, "You're being very broad," it's because almost everybody (LAUGH) I know in our work is finding that there is an intersection if they really open their eyes to the work. This is coming up in housing. This is coming up in greating-- creating safe spaces.

In Florida when there was-- you know, the shift relating to after the storm and there was a push out of all of these women who-- were living with their children on the streets 'cause they couldn't get back into their house, they were unable to con-- hold on to their own housing rights protections 'cause they were afraid of sexual violence. The intersection happens in every space, not just within our justice team. And it happens within our own (NOISE) spaces.

And so we're just beginning-- to-- discover the responsibility that we have at Open Society Foundations to support you (NOISE) all in the field-- on how to--(NOISE) ensure that there is-- determination, protection -- but actually-- the courageous leadership of those without any fear-- of their-- of sexual harm within their own workplaces-- within the organizing community.

And most of that is happening-- much led by the young people themselves. And so I really appreciate that the speakers that are here today-- I know h-- all of you have been working with really young folks-- (LAUGH) and-- and they're returning back to the wisdom of those who've developed this field. And I (NOISE) look forward to continuing to support your work. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Thank you so much, Gretchen. (THROAT CLEARING) So we're gonna start-- with asha. asha, you're a writer and you have dealt a lot with the legacy of the 70s feminist movement

and with the war on drugs. And I want you to tell us a little bit how these movements developed, how they impacted women of color-- and what the removal of alternative modes of thinking about justice-- removed-- women of color responsive-- systems from the equation.

ASHA BANDELE:

(THROAT CLEARING) Oh that's-- that's a mouthful. So let me just take a breath.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

You can definitely do it.

ASHA BANDELE:

And-- say-- how honored I am to be part of this panel. Some of my greatest sheroes (PH) sit on this panel. And some are in the audience. And so thank you to-- Open Society Foundations-- and especially since you've been here-- in my experience, Gretchen, pushing us to have courageous conversations. And I hope that that's what tonight-- will be.

And so-- let me-- let me say this, Denise. I-- I wouldn't locate-- the start of-- of that conversation in the 1970s. I would-- you know, I would-- I would locate it-- with the relationship that began with the first kidnapped African woman who was brought here and whose labor (THROAT CLEARING) was extorted, whose breasts were sucked dry of milk-- who was raped with the knowledge of white women-- white women who-- did not challenge their husband, did not see-- a movement forward.

There's a history of collusion-- in how black women and women of color are treated. So we can say that in the beginning and often the defense is like, "Well that was then and white women didn't have power and were still considered property." And-- and there may (SNEEZE) be some validity to that, but there's also-- in the current day-- situations-- more occurrences than we would care to know about what happens to undocumented women at the hands of-- men they work for in the United States and elsewhere while there is no-- voice raised in anger by-- by white women.

And so I just want to kind of put it in that frame and just talk about this history of collusion and think that-- until we have a reckoning with what the relationship is-- and an honest look at it, we're probably not gonna be able to get forward and move forward in the way that we would want. And that's-- a way where every life has value and is treated-- as such.

But in-- in specific-- you know, with the 1970s, you know, you can't divorce that from much of the founding of the more modern age feminist movements. Certainly the suffragette movement said very clearly, "The niggas ain't gonna get no opportunity to vote before we do." (NOISE) That was their position. I have almost never heard white women who stand up

strongly and righteous-- and often courageously for reproductive rights, disavow Margaret Sanger who promoted eugenics.

She's often still held up. And that's that failure to reckon, you know, with one's own history. And so going forward with this sort of lie, this sort of untruth, begins to inform how, you know, feminist movements in the-- 1960s and '70s form. And-- before I say anything else, let me tell you that Audre Lorde was my first mentor, the first person to love me deeply outside of my family. If I am here it's because she was there.

And so anything I say is also-- anything wise I say (LAUGHTER) is informed-- so not anything. But anything wise I say is informed by her and by-- a group of incredibly brave, black women, most of them queer, who pushed the envelope further for all black women and women of color. I'm thinking specifically of-- Akasha Gloria T. Hull, Barbara Smith, the women who work with the feminist press and who talked about all the women are white, all the blacks are men but some of us are brave.

I'm thinking about-- Cherrie Moraga who said, "This bridge called my back." And so attempted to push these conversations further, along with Audre, along with Pat Parker, along with so many of the artists and writers and thinkers and scholars who were in this space but who weren't centered, and still continue not to be centered. When I did my MFA in 1999, you could go through the City University of New York and never study a black woman. That's the truth. And be an English major.

That's out-- let me say that. And be an English major and never study a black woman. We got a little room sort of, like, with-- Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Rita Dove, but you never got further than that. You never really got further about how-- what you were actually gonna have to study and what you were going to have to learn. And so here we are, you know, in this period of time where there was a c-- an extraordinary amount of-- silence when-- black women and-- and Latinas being-- put into jail at twice the rate of men.

Literally-- 832% increases in the incarceration rates for black and brown women. Over 416% increases for a man. And there was nothing said. And-- and in my own work-- you know, I think a lot about what happened in the Daniel Holtzclaw case in Oklahoma. And the reason that case came to-- light was that-- Holtzclaw-- attempted to rape-- a black woman who was fairly well positioned, church going, a grandmother and so was considered respectable.

But what we would find out later, of course, is that the-- women he had been raping were drug using or drug involved in some way and often sex workers. Those-- women-- were never lifted up, not even by our movements. These are the women I'm concerned about, these women we don't love when we say we love black women, and we say we love brown these-- these women we don't love-- because if the law doesn't work for them, if the society doesn't work for them, then I argue that it doesn't work for any of us.

Because what we know in this #MeToo m-- moment is that all of us can be harmed. But not all of us-- are treated as though we're harmed. Not all of us are provided access to-- that

which we need to heal. And so as we go into this movement-- I worry that the leadership we're hearing from most extends forward from a history of women who have not had that full reckoning with their own collusion-- their own engagement with white supremacy.

And-- and therefore their solutions in this moment will not allow us to get where we need to go. I worry that we're not talking about transformative justice in this difficult moment. For us, transformative justice does not look like revenge, it looks like: how do you center the harmed party, how do you ensure that they're whole, but how do you never also-- forget that s-- restoring someone does not exclude the restoration of a community?

Because if the goal is to end rape, if the goal is to end sexual harm, if the goal is to end all harm, and that's a larger social question-- it's not what the United States (COUGH) and many other-- places have made it, which is just-- a thing between individuals. Right? No matter how much they say, "The people versus," it's not that.

So-- I-- I question in this #MeToo a moment-- who-- who-- should lead and who should step back and do some reading and have (LAUGHTER) a full-- a full reckoning with their history, have a courageous conversation, one that gets us to a place where all of us in this room, no matter what our history is, is-- is one that says, "We want none of our children harmed. We want all of our children to come home safely."

I wasn't able to say that for my daughter. It's my worst pain as a mother. But I want some mother to say, when their daughter reaches the age of maturity, she was never harmed. Because the other piece of this is that we know that young people who are harmed before the age of 18-- which is what Tarana Burke taught us, are 66 percent more likely to be harmed as adults. And so we all have a stake in this, but we all have to have the courage to-- engage that stake. (APPLAUSE)

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Thank you, asha. So at one point the solutions to gender-based violence and to sexual violence were posited as more police and some automatic arrests. Policies were put in place where it didn't matter whether the woman putting a complaint or not, the police would come and arrest the person. And-- and-- and by a certain group of individuals this was-- seen to be great success. This was gonna solve everything. The police were gonna come in and arrest the bad guys and everything was gonna be fine.

But I was forged in the (LAUGH) fires of legal services in New York and I know how that ended up impacting-- the very women who were supposed to have had everything come out fine. And I'm wondering, Erin, if you can tell us a little bit about your experience in family court, where you work all day. And you can tell us what are women experiencing in those courtrooms as survivors of gender-based violence.

ERIN CLOUD:

Women are s-- are being terrorized. They're being terrorized by partners. They're being-- that's a true experience. But the number one complaint that I have from women, women of color, low income women of color, that they're being terrorized by the state. (MAKES NOISE) And their fear of the state impacts their decision making and how they s-- view themselves. It injures their ability to connect to collective movements in their own communities.

And it injuries their ability to connect to their own children, their own body and their own futures. What happens in family court is hidden and much like you indicated it has to do with this larger l-- legacy of the fail-- failure to reckon with our own history. It is not surprising that we do not know what is happening to-- to droves of low income black women and brown women. And what is happening to them is that their children are taken from them, they are deemed legally dead by the civil death penalty enacted in 1997 through ASFA legislation.

They can never hold those babies due to what is considered their own moral failings. What is their moral failings? Poverty. Drug addiction. Their moral failings of loving someone that hurts them. Being in a domestic violence partnership, which the word in family court is engaging in acts of domestic violence.

I really don't know who engages in acts of domestic violence. But also, being a woman and making hard decisions. They have to decide if something's happening to me that's violent, but I have a child who loves their parent, and I also-- and has a father, then maybe they still wanna see their father. But they are punished for making difficult decisions that women must make to minimize harm for their entire family, that may not look cut and dry for everyone.

And maybe they don't wanna call the police on the father of their children because they may not wanna send the father of their children into slavery, which is what the prison system is. So maybe they have to redefine what life looks like for them outside of these larger constructs that are largely defined by white and female and male gazes as to how we are as black women supposed to organize our own lives.

And if we do not organize our lives to the plan of what white social workers, white agencies, white foster care workers, what the gaze of that entire child welfare system says that we should do, then we are no longer deserving of our children. They're given to other people. And when I say given, we are severed from them. From the moment they are severed from us, they're given a line item. They-- the price of our children increases when they're out of our care.

They're-- and when they're out of our care and they are given to other people permanently through adoption, there's long-term adoption subsidies that continue to connect to that child in perpetuity. Much like the legacy and history of chattle slavery, where the

commodification of the black womb created a financial boom for America. It's no different. That's what happening in family court.

But it's a secret. It's helpful. We need to be socialized. We need more treatment. We need more services. We need someone to come into our lives to monitor us. It's an entire system set up to monitor black women. When we talk about what the war on drugs did, it took black men out of society and placed them into cages. It also redesigned what a black woman was. We became welfare queens. We became crack whores. We had crack babies. All the things that are scientifically inaccurate and are actually untrue.

That's no different. That's the legacy of being a black woman in America. Scientific inaccuracies, that's eugenics. (NOISE) Bases of puritanical beliefs to get your child out of your home, to have moral fails, those are the same puritanical beliefs that put our bodies in slavery-- that let people believe that we were not a full person. Correct?

ASHA BANDELE:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

ERIN CLOUD:

This is no different. We need to have-- an-- a reckoning with that history to understand what's currently happening to women. Because when a line item for a child says that they are worth $1,200 a month in foster care, but under public benefits only $100 to the (BACKGROUND VOICE) black mother, (SNAPPING) that can't be true. That cannot be real. That is a moral value that society has determined. Because if the child costs that much to raise, give it to the momma.

ASHA BANDELE:

Come on.

ERIN CLOUD:

If you only decide that the child is worth that money outside the care of the black family, that is commodification.

ASHA BANDELE:

That's right.

ERIN CLOUD:

That is monetizing the family. That is monetizing a system that leads to oppressing women. And that's exactly what happens every day. Women come into court and they beg for their children. Like literally beg for their children back. They will do anything. They say, "Fine. I'll do the mental health evaluation. I'll drug test every single day. I will come into court. I will take any parenting class that you tell me to take. I will go to therapy. I know that anything I say to this therapist will be used against me and I'll have to sign consent releases.

"But I promise you, yes-- massah, I promise you I'll do it because I want my kid back. I promise you that I will allow you into my home, check my cupboards, check my room, undress my child, check their bodies. I promise you I will do that. I promise I will let you in there. Before I'm even adjudicated to be guilty."

On a preponderance standard, which is not beyond a reasonable doubt, to case workers who have direct communication with the N.Y.P.D. and the police. And they're now hiring retired police officers. That's what happens to them. And nobody talks about it. Nobody has this conversation on what's happening to them.

You walk down the streets of the south Bronx in east New York, the most feared person to black women is that ACS worker. Their most feared place to be is the child welfare system, where they know that their bodies will be attacked. That as soon as they enter in that system, that any child in the future that they ever have again, just by mere entry into that police system, that they will have less of a chance to keep any future child.

ASHA BANDELE:

Yeah.

ERIN CLOUD:

And it's terrifying. They're feeling, and in some-- to-- like the beginning. What are they feeling? What are they seeing? What's happening to them? They're terrified. Like any reasonable person would be. And they live in terror and absolute silence. And it's an atrocity.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Thank you for m-- so much for that, Erin. I almost feel like we need to--

ASHA BANDELE:

Take a breath.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

--like take a breath and, like, sit with that-- for a moment-- because it's so powerful. So the system that's meant to help women who find themselves in vulnerable situations, in domestic violence situations, actually ends up victimizing them more. They seek help for a situation of violence and they end up losing their homes, they end up losing their children. That is a unique failing of our system-- in the United States. And it is-- it's just brutal and it's heartbreaking and it's savage. And as much as it's invisible, it is slightly less invisible than what happens to the group of women that Victoria Law is gonna tell us about. Because this group of women are deemed to deserve what happens to them.

So I want you (NOISE) to tell us a little bit, Victoria, about what happens to women behind bars. And-- and when I talk about women behind bars, I'm not just talking about women who are accused of a crime and end up in jails and prisons, but also women who have not committed a crime, have committed a civil offense of immigration violation and end up in detention centers. How have movements like #MeToo failed to take into account this group of women?

VICTORIA LAW:

Hi everybody. Thanks for having me. So people who are behind bars, whether it's jails, prisons, state prisons, federal prisons, immigrant detention, juvenile detention, so when we say prisons we need to think beyond just jails and prisons, but also the other forms of lock up in which people are confined and can't leave.

So these people are-- these people who are b-- confined there are missing from the #MeToo conversation. They're also largely, when we talk prisons justice-- n-- not one more, no more detention, we're-- not talking about people who are sexually assaulted, sexually abused-- and victims of any sort of sexual assault. So I'm not gonna open with any sort of story about one of the many ways that all these forms of lock ups are sites of sexual violence.

I think that we can all think about this without me having to retrigger or trigger somebody-- with a graphic story about the crack between #MeToo and prison justice. But I want us to start by thinking about remembering that prisons and jails and immigrant detention and juvenile detention and all forms of lock up are inherent violent places. They're places of physical violence and they're places of sexual violence.

They are not solutions to any sort of violence. They're a way to confine people and keep people away and not have to think about things-- not have to think about them anymore and not have to address underlying causes of why they might have committed harm in the first place. And so let's look specifically at what happens to people behind bars and remember that even though we're talking about #MeToo we're talking about sexual assault.

People of all genders are sexually assaulted. When we talk about women behind bars, we're talking about cisgender women or women who identify as the gender that they're assigned at

birth, and we're also talking about transwomen who are often placed in male jails, male prisons, male immigrant detention centers, male young lock up, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And we don't know how many transwomen there are locked up at any given time.

And we're talking about people of all genders. You know, men, gender non-conforming folks-- people who don't adhere to the gender binary as well. So let's remember that. But I'm probably going to be lazy and just use the shorthand of women in prisons so that that way I don't have to keep repeating myself. Remember that, as asha pointed out, the majority of people of color in prisons are people-- the majority of people in prison are people of color.

They're disproportionately arrested, criminalized and incarcerated. The majority of people in women's prisons experience sexual abuse and/or family violence or domestic violence before their arrested imprisonment. So already there were systems that failed them before they ended up in handcuffs.

And so we have to remember that these state sanctioned forms of physical and sexual violence are happening to people who have been failed repeatedly by these systems that #MeToo is now calling upon to keep us safe. And then once they're locked up, they face sexual and physical violence-- in prison, both from the people around them, which is the kind of stereotypical idea of prison sexual assault, and from staff members and other people who hold the keys to their lives.

And so the sexual violence ranges from rape and sexual assault to things like constant sexual harassment, groping, touching, you know-- verbal slurs, sexually suggestive comments. And if you think about being locked up and you think about the fact that somebody has the keys to let you out of your cell, to decide whether or not you can go to your visit when your mom or your loved one comes to visit, or if they're going to, say, forget to bring you to the visiting area-- who is going to decide whether or not when you say, "Hey, I don't feel so well, I need to go to the medical unit--" so keep in mind that in prisons all movements are really strictly controlled.

It is not *Orange is the New Black* or *Oz* or any of these shows where people wander around, you know, doing their thing. The-- like you-- you have to have a pass. You have to make a request to say, "I want to go from point A to point B." And you need to have a pass. And a guard has to approve this pass. And so you-- so everything is strictly, strictly controlled.

So to have somebody who is in a position of power who decides all of these things, can you go to the dining room, I just sat down with my food and now this guard is telling me my time is up and I cannot eat my food in the prison cafeteria. Then to have that person in a position where they are able to then say, "Hey," you know, "X, Y, Z," you know, like, and perpetuate some sort of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct, whether it's in the form of a suggestion or a threat or a coercion.

So we have to think about that happening. And this happens on a daily basis to people in prison. I'm gonna give you a few statistics-- which may or may not mean anything, because

these are all self reported. But the Department of Justice found that approximately 4% of people in prisons reported experiencing sexual abuse of some sort within the past 12 months.

So-- keep in mind that this is people reporting sexual harassment, mixed conduct or abuse. And remember that they're, as well-- it's in there as well as out here, people tend to underreport. There are so many disincentives to report. Among people who identify as LGBTQ behind bars, the rates of sexual violence are much hi-- the self reported rates of sexual violence are much higher. (RUSTLING) Those rise to 12%. And then if you start looking at some intersections, like LGBTQ people who are experiencing severe psychological distress, such as having a mental health crisis or having mental health issues, that figure jumps to 15% in your local jail and 21% in prisons.

So again, we can see that sexual violence targets people who are most marginalized, most vulnerable. And then in prison, that seems to be quite a few people. And keep in mind that these statistics are only the people who came forward and said something. It doesn't include all the people who remain silent about what happened to them while they were behind bars.

And then, Denise, you said-- you asked-- you know, in your introduction you said earlier that there's idea of, like, "Why didn't she," or they, or he, "say something?" And all of those reasons apply when you are behind bars. And then there are further disincentives. In 2003 the federal government signed the Prison Rape Elimination Act which states-- which states that any jail, prisons, or immigrant detention center that gets federal funding is supposed to put in rules to address, detect, eliminate-- and get rid of sexual abuse-- and sexual harassment behind bars.

But as we're seeing with the #MeToo movement outside, there are many disincentives to reporting sexual abuse and sexual misconduct. So these rules basically don't do very much if people know that-- there are repercussions to reporting. And in prison, disincentives can include things like being retaliated by staff members.

So like what I said earlier, they have the keys to what you can and can't do. They all-- there's also, as I said earlier, a lot of physical violence that happens in prison. So reporting sexual harassment or sexual (NOISE) abuse by staff members can result in either that staff member or that staff member's colleagues-- beating you up and brutalizing you.

It can result in them setting you up to be beaten up and brutalized by other people-- as well while they just stand back and not doing anything. It can also be something a little more subtle. Not so subtle, but-- something a little bit less (COUGH) brutal like issuing people tickets, like disciplinary tickets, which means basically you broke a prison rule. And these tickets can result in somebody being placed in solitary confinement, which, for those of you who don't know, imagine being locked in your tiny New York City bathroom with nothing for 23 and a half to 24 hours each day. With no human contact except for the guard that puts your food through the food tray if they decide to feed you.

And so those tickets can land you in solitary confinement for who knows how long. It can also jeopardize your release date. So if you're going before the parole board and you

suddenly have 15 tickets that say you disobeyed a rule, you disobeyed a rule, you threw a tray, you did this, you did that, you did the other, the parole board will say, "Well, we don't wanna release you." You know? "Come back in two years when you're better behaved."

They can also-- I said that they can set you up to be attacked by somebody else. And also, it-- you have to remember that a lot of times these ticket-- when you report (BACKGROUND VOICE) it goes to the prison administration. It doesn't go to an outside entity. So why would you report to this person's boss or colleagues? It doesn't make any sense.

And there's no guarantee that the complaint will be investigated. In New York City, for example, in our lovely jail system, there were 823 sexual abuse complaints made in 2016 alone. Eight hundred twenty three. Thus far, 228 have been investigated. And that means there are almost 600 that are just kind of languishing. You know?

So-- and in the meantime, all those people that reported are subject (COUGH) to these forms of retaliation. So why would you bother reporting if nobody's actually going to investigate and you just incur all of these repercussions? In addition, keep in mind, too, that even if all the guards were sterling and wonderful and did not intentionally sexual abuse you, the very nature of jails, prisons, et cetera-- require sexualized violence as part of their daily operations.

This ranges from strip searches whenever you enter or leave the visiting room, or whenever you leave the prison to go to the hospital, to court or some other outside place, and then when you come back in. In many prisons, officers are allowed to enter places like the housing areas at night, the bathrooms or the shower areas, regardless of gender. And that's part of their job, walking in on somebody when they're showering, walking in on somebody when they're in the toilet.

In some states, like New York and Michigan, people inside women's prisons fought and filed lawsuits to keep male guards out of these areas. But this wasn't some light bulb moment on the part of an administrator. It was the fact that the women inside said, "No. No. Not anymore." And in Michigan it took 12 years to get that implemented. There are pat searches, so it's kind of like a frisk over your clothes that for anyone, but particularly survivors of sexual trauma and abuse, can be re-traumatizing.

And then are the every day insults, sexually suggestive comments, threatening remarks, verbal-- and verbal harassment made by staff or p-- others with more power. And all of these are just the daily functions of prison. So-- so I leave you with this-- all too often sexual violence behind bars falls between that crack between the #MeToo mo-- movement or the #MeToo moment and what we think of when we think of prison justice, prisoner rights, prison abolition.

We're not talking about this interconnection. And even if you don't work around issues of prisons, even if you don't specifically work around issues of sexual abuse and-- sexual assault, regardless of where you live, you work, you build communities, remember that when you sentence people, when you pick up that phone to call the police, when you rely on

policing-- and prisons to address violence, you're also reinforcing and condoning this kind of sexual violence for millions of people. Thanks. (APPLAUSE)

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Thank you so much, Victoria. So Mariame, we understand this history, we understand these realities, we understand that the system is not going to address violence if it's itself violent. So organizers, understanding all of these complexities, these histories, these realities, they need to make a decision-- work or not work with the police, develop community solutions, finding a better way. So I'm wondering if you can walk us through what are some tools to ensure restoration and community empowerment-- given the reality-- of the system.

MARIAME KABA:

Sure. Hi everybody. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Good evening. Good evening. I think I-- I-- I may just start by saying and by beginning with the statement that I'm a feminist. And I think that matters greatly. But I'm not the kind of feminist-- who is a carceral feminist. (BACKGROUND VOICE) I come from a tradition of over-- spending over the past almost 30 years working to end various forms of violence.

And my focus is really centered on addressing the sources of suffering in the lives of-- girls and y-- and women, in particular-- particularly women of color and even more particularly black women and girls. That's been kind of the animating-- focus of my work for all these years. And I kind of subscribed to a definition of feminism that's really simple and it's one that underscores my feminist politic and my practice and explains why I don't use the system to address violence.

It-- a theorist and writer, Charlotte Bunch, has-- said that feminism is about ending domination and about resisting oppression. That-- that is the very simple definition of feminism. Right? That we want to end domination and that we want to resist oppression. And if that's true, then, of course, by definition, prisons are not feminist. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Right?

Because they are themselves tools of enforcing domination and tools of oppression. Right? So you can't then use a tool that is about domination, control and oppression to, quote, "end domination, control and oppression". So it was always really clear to me that, like, that wasn't the way to go. I was stunned that other people really thought it was the way to go. (LAUGHTER)

Like even when I was working in domestic violence organizations and in rape crisis organizations, I kept thinking, "This is not the way. There's gotta be something else here for us to be doing." So, you know, I've been thinking over a long period of time now that the question we probably ought to be asking ourselves, if we are people who see ourselves anti-violence organizers or activists, is the question of, "Is all of this work with the criminal punishment system actually leading to less violence?"

Like that should just be the question. Right? But, like-- I hear people talk about violence in anti-violence (UNINTEL) and it's all about managing violence. And it's all about making violence about individual acts, (BACKGROUND VOICE) divorced from social-political systemic and structural realities, as though these things don't have-- like-- a c-- you know, connections with each other aren't self-reinforcing of each other. Right?

To talk about individual violence without a conversation about structural and social-political violence is nuts. These things inform each other. Like that's why we have what we have going on right now. Our-- also our definitions of violence are way too constricted. Right? 'Cause rape is not just a cri-- it's not even mainly a crime that has to do with sex. Right?

It's a crime of power over people to be able to control and dominate them in a way that asserts that you're the one in charge. That's the huge re-- like that's why rape is used as a tool of war. Right? (BACKGROUND VOICE) Like that's what-- that's what makes it it's-- the specific kind of thing. I worry about the way we talk about rape in this culture. Makes it almost impossible for us to end it. Right? 'Cause, like, we've actually set ourselves up on a focus that is not the thing that we're working on. (COUGH)

And so then we're like, "Why isn't it ending?" Well 'cause we are not asking the right questions and we haven't identified the actual source of the problem. So that-- all that being said, you know-- for me, basically the animating question of my organizing has been, "What is a just system for evaluating and adjudicating harms?" What is a just system then if the systems that are currently happening are so incredibly unjust and unable to deliver on the things that I would like?

Which is that survivors of violence actually have space to heal from the violence that they experience, right, and that when wounds that occur in the world, they-- they-- they kind of-- in-- that means you have needs, they engender needs and that those needs be met. This current system can't do that. There is no way for the current court system, the current criminal punishes-- punishment system, to address healing, 'cause the survivor has nothing to do with it.

The system is in an-- adversarial system that does not put survivors at the center. That's a lie. The notion that-- and also that survivors are asked what they want. Like hilarious. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Anybody who's intercepted or interfaced-- I'm a survivor of rape. If you're-- if you've interfaced with the-- they don't give a damn what you have to say. The person who stands in for you is the state.

It's the person who caused harm versus the state. You have very little to do with any of it. So all the focus is focused on the supposed person who harmed you. And that person isn't getting anything they need either. So basically every single person within that whole entire sphere is not getting what they need. So given that that's the reality, one of the ways that I've kind of looked at trying to-- address harm in the communities that I'm in is using community accountability as a form of address those kinds of harms.

And I'll just give you a very short definition of what community accountability is. Developed by-- several groups that came together as part of-- a gathering, a national gathering, in 2010. And the definition goes as, "Community accountability strategies aim at preventing, intervening in, responding to and healing from violence through strengthening relationships and communities emphasizing mutual responsibility for addressing the conditions that allow violence to take place and holding people accountable for violence and harm.

"This includes a wide range of creative strategies for addressing violence as part of organizing organizing efforts in communities when you can't or don't want to access state systems for safety." That's a long way of saying that. But I wanted to make that kind of definition known. I wanted to put that out there so people are thinking about that.

So, you know, we want accountability for harms and we want a focus on accountability. And what does that mean? Punishment often is rooted in pain and suffering. I was hurt, I'm gonna hurt some other people. And we use lots of very beautiful language to mask that that's what we want or that's what we are conditioned to want. Or that's what we are expected to want when people harm us in this culture. Right?

There's a different thing, which is accountability and consequences. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Right? So accountability is something that you can't force somebody to do-- to take. You can't just be like, "You're gonna be accountable," which we want to do. (LAUGH) "You're gonna be accountable for your b--" no. People have to choose accountability. Now what does that mean for our culture?

That means we have to have a culture where it's possible for people to take accountability for harm. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Raise your hand if you think we currently have a culture where if you do something wrong you can easily take accountability for it? If you think that's true, put your and up. Yeah. Exactly. (LAUGH) Right? So then we're all shocked that people deny to the death when they do something terrible. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

Because the incentive doesn't exist for you to say, "Yeah, I did it and now I'm tryin' to figure out how to repair this harm. And now I'm tryin' to figure out how to make sure that I am taking an active part, an (NOISE) active part in resolving the harms that happened." Most of punishment is passive. It's always passive, actually. It's something that's done to you. Accountability is something that you actively (BACKGROUND VOICE) take on.

That is much harder, by the way. Think about that. Think about yourself. 'Cause everybody in this room has harmed somebody at one point in your life. You've hurt somebody, you've done something that you made a mistake, you've done something that's hurt another person. Think about how difficult it is for you to say and admit to yourself that that is something you've done and then to go and try to rectify that harm. It is hard.

And if you don't know that that's true, you're lying to yourself. You are. 'Cause it is hard to say, "I'm sorry," and really mean it and then try to shift. But when you're punished, (NOISE) "They did it to me. I'm sitting back. I may or may not admit that I actually did anything. I'm

gonna cross my arms and I'm gonna wait for them to get past it and then I'm gonna move on to the next thing." And nothing's been fixed. The wounds remain. And there's no room for the healing to occur.

And so we have a whole bunch of unhealed people walking around this world harming each other daily. And community accountability just basically says that-- and so this transformative justice, it demands that we don't just address those kind of interpersonal harms but that we also look at the roots of many harms, that we look at the poverty that causes so much harm, that we understand that organized abandonment, as Ruthie Gilmore calls it, of our entire, you know, communities that are causing inordinate harm.

And I always love the fact that-- my friend Andy Smith has made this comment before and it's really true and it really is the thing that I'd s-- been animating to me, that what we're talking about, these are not problems of punishment but of political organizing. (BACKGROUND VOICE) And we hate to organize in this country 'cause it's frickin' hard work. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

So we like to call 3-1-1 and let them do all the work. But we ourselves, we don't wanna-- we don't wanna engage in any hard work. It is like, (MAKES NOISE) "Okay we got the cops. Call them." That-- as you as a bystander and community then have no responsibility to do a single thing, when it should be the complete opposite. Which it should be like, 3-1-1, you call that and your neighbor shows up. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Right? That is not the way of thinking about things.

The thing is like, "Somebody else (NOISE) is gonna do it. (NOISE) What's going on." Right? With no thought about the fact that you have to put yourself out there. So, you know, I always think about the fact that, to me-- what we wanna try to do in a political organizing way is that we want to basically build stuff that crowds the state out. (BACKGROUND VOICE) That's our job. So the interventions that we're making are about crowding out the state, making it so that we carve out a little piece of earth for ourselves (BACKGROUND VOICE) to handle our problems without the state intervening to the best of our possible ability.

And that's what those of us who are building community accountability processes in our communities have been trying to do now for many years. The last thing is, the question that I'd like to leave you with is a question about, how do we organize to make violence unthinkable? What is the work of organizing that sustains that? Not the service provision work.

I am not against crisis services. Okay? I think we're gonna n-- (NOISE) we're gonna need as many social workers as are needed and wanted by people. We're gonna need, like, services that are coming on the spot, you know, what-- but I don't think that's the problem we're facing. There are plenty of social services around. In fact, most people aren't reaching out to those services, either 'cause they don't know they exist or they hate the people there. (LAUGHTER) And I tell you, I used to (BACKGROUND VOICE) work in those places. A lot of people who are social workers are working as actual arms of the state.

(BACKGROUND VOICE) They are not there working on behalf of the community. They have been completely (MIC NOISE) they're taking the drug test, (MIC NOISE) they're being awful to people. They're acting as (MIC NOISE) probationary officer.

People are just not interested in that crap. So, like, what is it po-- what kind of spaces are we gonna create so that people can come together. And I have ideas for that, of, like, how to make those kind of things come up more at scale. And maybe we can talk about that during the Q&A period of time. But, like, I just think, you know, the stuff's not hard. The question is a will question, a question of will.

And also a question of whether or not, I'm gonna end here, like,-- you know, white supremacy is maintained through the apparatus of the criminal punishment system. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Okay? That's the important thing for us to think about and say. And that's been the case in this country from time immemorial. That has been its use and its usage. That really doesn't ma-- the important thing to also say is that replacing white people with people of color in that system still rema-- retains white supremacy.

So I'm not v-- I'm not that person who's like, "Let's get all the black cops." Black cops killed Freddie Gray. (BACKGROUND VOICE) So that's not it. Okay? We're not gonna do a representation issue to uproot the white supremacists' roots of the criminal punishment system. Ain't going to work. So we really are gonna have to some, like, real work about how we transform the punishment mindset.

Keeping in mind, as I end, that prioritizing punishment means that we keep patriarch-- (UNINTEL)-- patriarchy firmly in place. If you are saying that punishment is a system that you're gonna used to adjudicate and harm and evaluate harm, then that means that pri-- patriarchy's gonna be in place. Because what does patriarchy doe-- do-- does, you know, does? Yeah. What do-- (LAUGHTER) what do patriarchs do? They punish people in order to maintain their control over them.

So we cannot use, literally, the master's tool to dismantle the master's (BACKGROUND VOICE) house. It is not going to work. And the people who continue to offer this as a solution are content with the horrors of the current system. I don't care what p-- they have to say. They are not tryin' to do shit. They're tryin' to tinker around the edges to keep the actual current system in place 'cause they're kinda comfortable with it. And they don't want, quote, "these people running down the street to kill them," as though that's what's going on. Which it's not. Okay. Thank you. (LAUGHTER) (APPLAUSE) I went over by two minutes, but I had to say it.
(OVERTALK)

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

So I actually wanna give every one of the panelist-- a few minutes to respond to each other, because now you've heard what each other had to say. And-- and I'm-- I'm sure we all have

reflections about it. As-- as Mariame was talked about, we need to organize, we need to putting-- the work.

I-- think about all of my former clients who were working 70 hours a week to be able to afford an apartment and still were in eviction proceedings 'cause they couldn't afford that-- that apartment and how the-- our system of labor-- makes people so-- busy-- and still not able to survive, still not able to support themselves, that it sucks away the energy and the ability to organize.

And I-- I always think that that's also by design, that there's all these other intersecting systems that are putting us in a place where we don't have the ability and the energy to fight back. So that piece was coming to me as Mariame was talking. But I'm sure other people have reflections and I wanna-- start off by giving-- Gretchen-- a couple of minutes and then going down the line. Thank you.

GRETCHEN ROHR:

Oh thank you. Yeah. (LAUGHTER) ash-- asha and Mariame know I'm all-- I stalk them already-- (LAUGHTER) and I-- you-- you-- you, too, got a new stalker. Sorry. Erin and Victoria, I'm after y'all. I-- I-- I particularly really wanted to appreciate-- what was-- what you shared-- Erin, and that I-- before I came to OSF I-- I was-- actually on the bench. And-- many people asked, you know, "What brought you to OSF? Why in the world are you here?" I get that-- (LAUGH) I got asked that question quite a bit.

And-- in Washington, D.C. our-- our-- our superior court is one in which judges do we-- we just-- have a general jurisdiction. So-- one year you can be on the civil bench. The next you're going to be in criminal. We all handle arraignments. We would all most definitely-- take time to address-- the civil calendar-- specifically-- of-- of the-- what was called the DB (PH) calendar.

But-- that of intimate partner violence. And-- most judges can't stand that, that assignment, because-- they-- they really would come out of it saying, (MIC NOISE) quite honestly-- it just seems like everybody's lyin'. So, you know, they just really wouldn't take it-- as a calendar that they felt that you put much-- dedicated work into. I, myself-- what I found was the devastating cycle of how every single person in that courthouse, whatever calendar you're on, (LAUGH) but it was so present-- in that one, because that's the one where you would think it's so cleanly is, well, someone has a complaint, they come to the courthouse, they're asking to be there, obviously, someone's gotta be happy with the result. No one's happy.

Not only is no one happy, everyone is devastated. And I was convinced almost every day people were leaving worse-- in-- in a framework where there was danger that was-- created-- through the exposure, through the-- the-- (NOISE) also the-- limits of-- separation that was also-- always crafted-- and then how-- the justice system was used as a tool of punishment itself.

(BACKGROUND VOICE) And that's-- that's where it was kinda just the end for me, is to-- whether you believe in it or not-- someone believes that it's punitive enough just to throw around. Whether you believe-- as you should actually, (LAUGH) in-- the stories of what people have to do-- to find and seek safety in any way they can when they come into your courtroom, whether you believe in their dignity or not, your story about, "They're just comin' here, makin' up lies," there's a story underneath that.

Even if it's true, they are using your courtroom as a tool of punishment. They're tryin' to hurt somebody with something that was supposed to be meant as a protection. And-- and so absolutely, I-- I-- I just agree with the-- whether we are-- wanting to build out-- and-- and tinker with models-- that can be adjusted in some ways-- that's work that I still do.

(LAUGH) That is-- that-- that's work that OSF-- U.S. programs, we are still trying to-- we still support many folks who believe that at the same time-- do the work of reforming systems. But there has to be something else-- because the harming actually-- is reinforcing-- and it's not just a matter as-- mad science on the side-- it's-- it's-- it's clear in every single demonstration that I've seen. So-- really appreciate-- you speaking to the reinforcement of the overlapping oppressions-- each of you-- and-- and how it arose in that context. (COUGH)

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Thank you, Gretchen. asha?

ASHA BANDELE:

Thank you. Thank you, Gretchen. You could always be my stalker. (LAUGH) And just-- you know-- a breath for everybody who spoke today. N-- you know, I do have a few reflections. You know, one of the things-- Vicky, when you were talking, one of the people who came to mind was Susan Burton-- who said, you know, so clearly-- we incarcerate trauma. Right?

So as you were talking about, you know, all of the people who go into prison, right, these— this-- idea of the, you know, the incarceration of trauma and-- and, you know, and-- and Erica, you know, is-- even as you were talking about the-- you know, women-- you know, it's weird, I grew up in a middle-- I came outta foster care and was placed in a very middle class family and-- in very, very privileged life.

Especially if you compare it to most black-- not if you compare to some of the white kids I went to school with, but comparison to many others, very privileged. From the day my daughter was born, I worried (NOISE) ACS would come for her. And so I don't where that thing comes in our bones, but that is so real and so terrifying-- that, you know, the idea that someone's gonna come and take your child because it's also rooted to the idea that we've never actually had the right to our children. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

It's never actually been a right-- that-- that black women-- have. And sorta-- also, you know, with-- with the carceral state-- the things that are raised-- and I don't care what it is, whether it's murder, whether it is sexual assault, rape-- whether it's drug use, we know that that's actually not what prisons exist to do. If they wanted to-- incarcerate murderers-- Dick Cheney woulda been in prison a long time ago. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

(LAUGH) I-- you know what I'm saying? Laura Bush, who took out a few drunk drivin', woulda been in prison a long time ago. If they wanted to in-- stop race-- rapists, to Vicky's point, there would be a whole lot of people in prisons. Prisons-- actually will put people-- in cells with folks they know will-- will rape them.

I heard a harrowing story the other day from a friend and colleague of mine-- Jason Hernandez, where this was something that was done as punishment in some of the federal penitentiaries where they would just put people in prison because-- in a cell with someone they knew would sexually-- assault them.

But-- you know, Lieutenant Calley-- just go through Vietnam, the history of Vietnam is also the history of rape. There's a whole lotta people woulda been doing time. And certainly when it comes to drug use-- there's a whole range of people who woulda been-- put in prison and drug selling. Right? Most of the-- if not all the kids who sell drugs in my daughter's white private school are white. Right? First people I ever saw with-- with drugs were white. Selling it. Moving it. You know?

So, I mean, you know, so we know that this is not what prisons--exist for. But, you know, the thing that-- Mariame, you know, got me-- the-- I mean, there were a lotta things that you said that got me, but this piece about tinkering around the edges, because that's-- that's the mirror piece. Right? That's the piece we gotta turn on ourselves. You know, as I sit here, a beneficiary of Open Society Foundation funding, a whole lotta funding (LAUGHTER) from non-profits-- you know, I wonder if these exist to keep us just tinkering (BACKGROUND VOICE) around the edges.

You know, I've watched shifts happen in non-profits-- as more-- business people got involved and-- there was more of a business model format put forward to some. It's not put forward to all. Right? But, you know-- your-- whether or not you could get funding was tied to if you were, for example-- looking to-- reduce mass incarceration. Right? (UNINTEL) said how many beds do you think, you know, you're gonna-- you're gonna disrupt. Right?

That's a lotta-- but, you know, s-- no-- no disrespect, it's a lot about what the Close Rikers campaign built it's funding on coming out of (UNINTEL). And this is not to say that that wasn't a good campaign. But it's largely built on this idea that if we give you this amount of money you will disrupt this many beds. So when I think about that, I think about Bob Moses. And I think about McComb, Mississippi. (BACKGROUND VOICE) And I think about him going down to register people to vote that first summer. Do people know how many people he registered to vote that first summer?

FEMALE VOICE:

I think it was one.

ASHA BANDELE:

And you got it. (NOISE) One damn--
(OVERTALK)

FEMALE VOICE:

One person.

ASHA BANDELE:

One.

FEMALE VOICE:

Yeah.

ASHA BANDELE:

One person.

FEMALE VOICE:

Ford Foundation would have been--
(OVERTALK)

ASHA BANDELE:

All-- I'm glad you said because I said it-- I said it--
(OVERTALK)

ASHA BANDELE:

(LAUGH) --on video tape the other day and I got scared. (LAUGHTER) I was like-- li-- listen, I still gotta get my daughter through college. But I'm tryin' to say that if Ford Foundation was funding that, not just Ford, I'm using Ford (UNINTEL)-- I love Darren

Walker. I don't wanna-- you know-- use it as a stand-in. But if any of us were funding, he would not get funded.

FEMALE VOICE:

No.

ASHA BANDELE:

There would have been no freedom summer. There would have been no act. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Right? Voting right act for them to later sunset and for us to have to re-fight and get back. But there would have been none of that. But Bob Moses was in large part funded by us. And the young people led by Diane Nash was in large part funded by us. Not the big six who didn't believe they should go into the heart of darkness. Right?

And Diane Nash said, "I know we gonna die in two days, but I'm going anyway." And when she would ask why she did that by a group of students 40 years later, she said, "Because I loved you before I knew you." That is not tinker around the edges. That's what an organizer does.

And I wonder what mirror we have to turn on ourselves for those of us who benefit from the non-profit industrial complex and how much we are allowing that to have really good conversations over good wine (LAUGHTER) and lobster rolls, which-- bless you India (PH). Bless you. (LAUGHTER) But actually not doing what you charged us to do, Mariame, which is have the collective will (NOISE) to say, "Not on my Goddamn watch will another one. Not on my watch." So thank you all. (APPLAUSE)

FEMALE VOICE:

Thank you, asha.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

We can always count on asha to give us the unvarnished truth and (LAUGHTER) to-- (OVERTALK)

ASHA BANDELE:

That's all I'm tryin' to say. I have four years.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

But you-- you know we appreciate it and we know we need to hear it. So-- it is-- it-- it-- it's well taken-- and-- and a good reminder. Erin?

ERIN CLOUD:

I'm actually really glad that you ended with this concept of collective will. As black women in our-- in black communities, (NOISE) you talked about the difficulties about organizing. And when I think about (NOISE) the difficulties in organizing, the-- the difficulties in harnessing our collective (NOISE) will, it really brings me back to Dorothy Roberts who writes--

ASHA BANDELE:

(MAKES NOISE) Come on.

ERIN CLOUD:

--that this injury to family, the infiltration of family in black family, injuries our social networks and our connection to community. We have to understand, and you touched on it, we don't have-- we have a fear of our own child, of our rights to our own bodies, that is subordinate to the way that white women can experience their own bodies and their own children.

Your family is your first concept of community. (BACKGROUND VOICE) If your family and your body and your connection to self is purposefully dismantled by the government, how, and this is what Dorothy says, like Professor Roberts, Sister Dorothy says, how can then we ever garn-- c-- collectively organize in a way that's powerful. (BACKGROUND VOICE) (NOISE) I don't really care about the #MeToo movement.

It doesn't speak to me, doesn't speak to the women. They don't g-- I'm sorry, excuse my language, but they really don't give a fuck about #MeToo. They've been saying #MeToo (NOISE) since they were born, since their grandmothers have been around, and any family that they had, grasping to know because they don't get to know their family in the same way that we-- other women get to know their family and experiences and histories. And we have to look at the fact that at low-- at black women's births-- number one, we're dying at higher rates.

ASHA BANDELE:

Yes.

ERIN CLOUD:

The government's coming in and taking our children at higher rates. From the moment your legs are spread open with your less than adequate health care as a black woman, they take your child and give 'em to the state or monitor you and put you on probation. What bar of expectation can we have to collective action, (BACKGROUND VOICE) if that's how you were brought into the world?

And when we are talking about the second concept of why it is difficult to heal, you hit (NOISE) the nail on the head. How can we heal if we punish? So let's just talk through what healing is-- look like from my clients every day. (BACKGROUND VOICE) My clients come into court, that's because a case has been called in against them, the CSR report.

This ACS worker comes to their home, knocks on their door, comes into their-- into home without a warrant, normally with police, they question their families. Then they're told that they must do services to rectify whatever problem that individual worker has decided that that family has. Sometimes there is an actual issue. Sometimes there is just actual racism and bias that comes into this family.

So maybe they're set-- maybe they're told, "You need to go do therapy." Because our clients are Medicaid recipients, therapy looks very different for them than it does for wealthy people. Because they are-- very likely to have their therapy in a s-- under the scheme of the non-profit industrial complex led by social services engines, when they go to therapy all of their records are likely subpoenaed to be used against (COUGH) them later on in litigation.

And is-- at least in New York and I-- in several other states that I've been to, almost always granted by judges that these therapy records can be handed over and being used to prove child neglect. So then my clients say, "Well I didn't know that-- my-- you guys were gonna find out what I was saying to my therapist. I didn't know that that was gonna happen." So what do we do? We're intelligent, smart people. As black women, we tell each other, "Don't say anything." Because that's rational and reasonable. If you think you're gonna try to-- get-- heal by speaking about your issues (BACKGROUND VOICE) to this mental health professional--

ASHA BANDELE:

That's right. It'll be used against you.

ERIN CLOUD:

--and people in your community are telling, "Well don't do that. Don't do that." Because if you do that, and you actually tell them that you were raped, if you actually tell them about what happened to you as a child, you actually tell you-- s-- talk to someone about the fact that, like, you can't stand your kid today-- because I got two kids and there is, like, three

days out of the week I cannot stand them (LAUGHTER) sometimes. But it's a real feeling. Right? That-- that can be used against you. Then where do we go? (BACKGROUND VOICE) What space do we have.

FEMALE VOICE:

That's right.

ERIN CLOUD:

And we have created and designed systems that completely eviscerate privacy for these women. Their lives are surrounded by mandated reporters who are required to tell all their secrets, every interaction they have with all these social service agencies are entered into this database called connections which is-- that lives in perpetuity from foster care, to placement, from birth to just these, quote/unquote, community based organizations.

How do you heal in that environment? You can't talk to anybody. Of course you're gonna feel like you-- of course you're gonna bottle up and feel all this energy. And this is not just-- it-- you-- you have nowhere to go. And it's a hard lived reality that people don't really know. And, you know what?

Honestly, many middle class black women don't know. (BACKGROUND VOICE) And so I think we-- it's comfortable to sit with us, with a certain level of privilege in this conversation because we can intellectualize what's happening-- and the experience of what's happening to people.

The people that are uncomfortable and that are having difficulty can't be in these rooms. And so how do we get out there? How do we get to those places? How do we then connect that action? And I think you raise a really good point. We definitely can't do it with the systems that we have set up right now. It's-- it's-- it's literally impossible.

ASHA BANDELE:

(OFF-MIC) (UNINTEL PHRASE) ask questions like that. Wherever she was. Right? So it's comfortable to have me in this room. She was in Australia she'd be like, "Well where the Maori women?" (BACKGROUND VOICE) Right? She always asked. Thank you for that.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Thank you so much, Erin. Vicky?

VICTORIA LAW:

Was really glad that we ended on the-- on-- on-- we ended the formal panel part with this idea that we need to create (COUGH) systems that crowd the state out. You know, listening to Erin talk about what her clients go through in family court, what are the systems and the strategies that we're creating to support families so that they don't end up in the system? And not just the people who might be considered more sympathetic, you know, people who are poor, people who are in bad housing, et cetera. But what about the date-- the people, the parents who sometimes--

FEMALE VOICE:

Yeah.

VICTORIA LAW:

Really dislike their kids and are just like, (NOISE) "I have (NOISE) had it. And I have done harm to my child." Like how do we support families either when that moment happens or hopefully before that moment happens, to be like, "You look really stressed. You look really overwhelmed." (NOISE) You know? Like, "Your apartment is full of lead and asbestos and, you know, your heat doesn't work. And, you know, the landlord is gonna raise your rent and your block is getting gentrified and your kids can't go to school."

And, you know, (MAKES NOISE). You know? And the person's just like-- and then the kid is just like, "Mommy. Mommy. Mommy. Mommy." And they're just like (NOISE) whack. You know? Like how do we build systems of support that aren't like, "You bad parent, you did bad, you know, go to court." Go through everything that Erin has just talked about.

You know, how-- how do we build these kinds of systems? How do we build these kinds of support networks? So even before we think about systems, which might be kind of intimidating, how do we build that kind of support network? So think of the folks that you know in your community, in your building, you know, like that-- that you work with, you know, that have, you know, family situations. Right?

Like it might be like they've got kids, they're, you know, like, they've got kids in their lives. You know, like what-- like how are you connecting with them? You know? How are you like, "Oh wait, you know, like, this is the third day in a row that you've stayed till 8:00 at night." You know? "You okay?" You know? Like, you know, like, what's going on with that? You know?

Like, or, "Your really s-- I overheard that you're really stressed out on a phone call, you know, about your kid's school, you know, are you okay?" I remember once at the Allied Media Conference, which is a great conference in Detroit. My daughter and I were there and

I think it was like the first year I let her, like, be outside of the kid's space without me. And I was like, "Okay, meet me at this place at this time." And she wasn't there.

And I started freaking out. You know? And I'm kind of, like, getting more and more, like, "Oh no, something happened. Something happened." You know? Like, she was hanging out with another kid and they f-- they lost track of time. But by the time she actually, like, rolls down the hallway and she's all happy, I am ready to lose it because I have just had these scenarios. And fortunately other people were like, "Don't kill your kid." You know? Pl-- you know, like, "Calm down. Calm down." You know? Like, "She was just having a good time. She was safe, you know, that's what counts." But it's like at that moment, I was so angry and so ramped up that's it's like I very well could have, like, you know, like, yelled at her. I could have, like, said really harmful things. I might have, like, been like, "What is the matter with you?" And those are things that can land you in family court.

Somebody would be like, "Oh no, this mother brought her kid (LAUGH) to this conference and (BACKGROUND VOICE) she let her kid--" yes, and arrested. You know? As opposed to somebody being like, "Calm down. Calm down. Okay. Okay." You know? And that's just one instance. So when we think about support networks, how do we do this, like, in our communities, where we are right now. We don't have to, like, start by thinking like, "I must build something and get the Ford Foundation to come (NOISE) and give me money." You know?
(OVERTALK)

VICTORIA LAW:

(LAUGH) They could also do that, too. You know? And also, like I-- as-- as I keep looking at all the books in the back-- my daughter took my copy. (LAUGH) I don't have it anymore. (BACKGROUND VOICE) When she goes off to college I'm taking it back out of her room. One of the beautiful things that this book that everybody should pick up that asha co-wrote, is that it talks about every day strategies of survival that aren't relying on the system.

So kind of maybe trying not to spoil any parts of the book, you know, like, but, like, you know, when somebody experiences a mental health crisis, what do you do if you don't call 9-1-1? You know? What does that look like? What does that community support look like? You know? Like, how does this-- how does this get handled? This is a mental health crisis. This is not, like, you know, I-- I don't know, forgot my Metro card or, you know, like-- it's, like-- it's a mental health crisis for somebody that has severe mental health problems.

And the family figured out a way to address this without having to call the police who will come with their tasers and their handcuffs and their, you know, whatever else they come with these days, you know, to, like, deal with a black person who is having a mental health crisis. So, like, you know, like, so people are practicing some of these every day survival strategies (NOISE) without necessarily, you know, like, calling them systems or support networks or even calling them abolition.

FEMALE VOICE:

Exactly.

VICTORIA LAW:

But, you know, like, let's start with that, thinking like, "How do we start, you know, building that support and then how do we start branching out," so that-- that way, you know, folks who are, like the folks who end up in family court, the folks who end up in criminal court, you know, the folks who are on Rikers Island and their family members, you know, can also be like, "Oh wait, yeah, those three things that I always do, you know, oh yeah, that-- that's actually not that hard. It's not this intimidating thing."

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Thank you so much, Victoria. Give you last word-- before question and answer, Mariame.

MARIAME KABA:

Sure. Sure. And so many really important things-- that were said. I always think about-- one thing that we could do right away to help with the issue around, (NOISE) I think, DCFS (NOISE) is to stop acting as though it's a social service agency. (BACKGROUND VOICE) And I think the community-- I think most people, honestly, who (NOISE) call are calling with the intention to get services for the people who are being, in their view, harmed.

So the idea of it being a law enforcement agency doesn't come to mind. Right? That, like, DCFS are actually the (BACKGROUND VOICE) cops. And I always tell people, I'm like, "If you're calling child welfare, they are the police." Whatever the euphesm-- euphemism is around it, that-- they're in law-- they're the law enforcement agency. They're not-- they're not like Catholic charities. Right?

And, like, but I think most people don't know that, so part of this is also, like, training the communities to understand what systems actually are supposed to do and what they actually are doing so that people can be more judicious in how they kind of make these kinds of-- s-- entangle people within the systems that exist. So I was thinking about that a lot, Erin, when you were talking-- just now.

And, you know, when-- when Vicky's talking about, you know, the experimentation and trying multiple strategies, like, I am against (COUGH) the notion of failure. I do not think that these quote/unquote-- first of all, I don't think that the system we current have is broken. I think it operates as designed. So I think that if you figure that out, you're free. You know what I mean? 'Cause then you're not like, "It's broken and now you gotta put--" it's-- no. This is how it's supposed to be working.

If you take that on, your life is so much better (LAUGH) and less stressful. Right? So then you're not like, "Why is this happening?" It's supposed to be this way. So-- so that's one thing. But I think the second question is always, for me, about, like, the de-- notion that we're-- our-- our projects and processes are failing. No. They're opportunities for continuing learning. Because we have to continue to, like, in community-- fight with each other-- like people aren't always gonna-- yeah. They're not gonna just say, "I'm taking accountability right this minute."

And if you do a process where the person doesn't immediately say, "I'm taking accountability," people are like, "that's a failed process." But they're looking at all the other things that were put into place. For the survivor maybe who all of a sudden has a new community of support while that person is still not taking responsibility, those are (COUGH) new folks who are now engaged in helping that person heal on their journey.

You know, it may be that all of a sudden now together we have new people going, "Oh my God," in my building, like, I-- this is something that I organized years ago in my building in Chicago that I lived in for a million years. It was just a phone tree that we had internally before you call the cops. So that, like, you're not e-- alone waiting and hearing the thing happening upstairs by yourself and, like, your heat beating and, like, "Maybe I should call the co--" call your neighbor first.

FEMALE VOICE:

Right.

MARIAME KABA:

The two of us will talk, put our heads together. And if I'm not home, call the second person on the list, the third person on the list. Because we-- what I was finding was a lotta young people in the community getting arrested from phone calls from the building. And I'm like, "Y'all don't know what's happening to these young people." They're coming back worse, by the way.

And if you think your car looks bad now, it's gonna be 20 times worse when they figure out that you're the one who called the cops on them. (LAUGHTER) Do you know what I mean? So, like, that is community accountability work. It's like we can talk to each other first about these situations. Like call me before you call the cops.

And, like, we got-- we had-- a building that was relatively small, but we had like-- close to 85% of the people on that list. So the notion that, like, community members don't wanna talk to each other, neighbor don't-- no. People aren't doing the work of actually talking to their neighbors. (BACKGROUND VOICE) I bet you if somebody came to you and established a relationship with you, you'd be much more likely to actually come to their support and defense when something happened, rather than them being a stranger to you and you not knowing what the hell to do.

So that's part of the work that we're talking about doing here that ends and helps to end violence. Because we are cultivating the relationships we need with each other in order to be each other's supports when things go wrong. Because things will always go wrong and because people will continue to harm each other, even in the abolitionist future.

That's gonna be the case. The question is: how will we respond? That's the thing. Will we respond in a punitive way or will we respond in a completely different way that takes into account people's full humanity and brings them to accountability? That's the question on this point. So I think that's really important. And finally, I think-- you know, asha's point about Bob Moses is so apt. Right?

And that whole commun-- because the conversation is too often, like, "Who's in the room?" The wrong people. And you know what I learned years ago as an organizer who's been organizing a long time is, I don't know who the hell's in the room. (LAUGHTER) I never assume. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Because that person you're looking at, who looks all put together, (NOISE) you have no idea what their life's like. You don't know where they come from. You don't know where they came from to get to where they are. Right?

And the-- and again, I say this to young organizers all the time who come in like (MAKES NOISE). You know? I'm like, "Who-- you don't know these folks. W-- what are you talking about? This person has two brothers that are locked up tomorrow. You don't know (NOISE) shit about them." They're all put together and turned down on the panel. But what I-- I'm-- just gonna, you know, leave as a final provocation is that what we've created in this culture right now is a cor-- culture of force confession (BACKGROUND VOICE) in order to have legitimacy to be able to speak about anything.

And it's the tyranny of, quote, direct impact, as though you know what the (NOISE) fuck people's lives are. Part of organizing (NOISE) is figuring that out. Fannie Lou Hamer was (NOISE) nowhere near the person she ended up as-- at the-- when she started. Nowhere as a che-- arts-- as articulate. Nowhere with the analysis. She studied with people. They did political education. She learned. And she learned how to speak. It was just down-home experience level. This is bullshit.

ASHA BANDELE:

That's right.

MARIAME KABA:

And so, like, this is-- and that is what keeps people from thinking they can also organize, (BACKGROUND VOICE) is that somehow you gotta be pre-- you gotta already be in the package to have the thing happen. No. People are doing mutual aid (NOISE) right now (NOISE) in some building (NOISE) in Brooklyn that (NOISE) we don't know about. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

They've developed their support network. (NOISE) And their support network is, "I'm about to lose it, girl. Take my kids." (BACKGROUND VOICE) That simple. With somebody who already has eight. So I just think we gotta shift the lens a little bit and be a little less like thinking we get shit that we don't actually get, and spend more time actually learning who people are in order to be able to build towards what we need to build.

You know nothing about me just by looking at me, or the school I went to, or the-- you don't know shit about my life. You assume you know some things about me. And if I chose to, I'll tell you (NOISE) some more things about myself. But you won't know my full experience, which is why, again, yes directly impacted, but that has got to be self-defined and it has to be not forced confession.

'Cause I'm never gonna stand up here and tell you every bad thing that's ever happened to me. And we'd make that-- we make-- especially young black children-- you meet them and the second question is, "Hi, Jimmy, how you-- tell me the worst thing that ever happened to you (BACKGROUND VOICE) and put it in a poem." (LAUGHTER) Trauma porn.

(BACKGROUND VOICE) And that's not leadership development. That is not leadership development. I'm gonna tell you the truth to shame the devil. And a lotta non-profit people do this all the time.

ASHA BANDELE:

And don't pay them.

MARIAME KABA:

And don't pay (NOISE) them to come and give a poem. Now this is-- this is my-- this is my pet peeve, and I've worked with young people for a long time. And I'm not gonna put them up on stages to be trauma porned by people, and also to be put up there to be, like, "Confess your entire--" they're bleeding on the way off the stage and nobody's there to hold the blood.

No-- there's no suturing, nothing. They just opened themselves up and pour-- I refuse. This is why people hate me because (LAUGH) I refuse. I refuse a lot. Even when people really, really want me and they say things like, "Well how did you start working on prison?" They want me to tell them the story-s.

And I say, "No. I was interested because everybody should be interested in prison." And when I say that there's so much anger. (LAUGH) You could tell 'cause they want you to give the-- you-- them the sob story that got you where you were. Hell no. I choose when to s-- to share. And we should allow every single person, no matter where your stationed in life, to have that (NOISE) choice.

So I think refusal is important. Refusal is important. Just like protest is important. Just like a lot of-- just like-- if you wanna confess you should be able to tell your story, too. But I-- but

I really-- I'm-- I'm-- I had to put out there, because particularly in the #MeToo moment, where everybody who's allowed to speak is being force into having to tell your whole rape story in order to l-- ex-- be seen as legitimate, to be able to speak about rape, a societal issue which-- epidemic, which impacts all of us, whether we ourselves were sexually harmed or we know people who were sexually harmed or we sexually harmed people, it is epidemic.

We're all involved. You shouldn't have to get up here and talk about your-- rape story in order to be able to talk about rape. Just like you shouldn't have to talk (NOISE) about your prison story to be able to talk about prison. You should be able to talk about everything 'cause we all are impacted by everything.

Once that happens we're actually gonna solve our social problems. Because there's no way rape survivors alone are gonna end rape. There's no way all the people who are in prison (NOISE) who come outta prison (NOISE) are gonna alone end prison. They need all of us. We need all of us. Right? So I just wanna end with that thought as we're, like, moving on to questions that like-- I'm just, again, against the culture of forced confession.

And I think that in social justice, quote/unquote, worlds, that's the thing now. It makes-- people not wanna come to things, even in-- the audience, 'cause the expectation is you gotta throw yourself on that thing and bleed all over the floor in order to be able to see as-- be seen as a legitimate expert on the issue. Bullshit. Thank you. (LAUGHTER) (APPLAUSE) All I have to say about that.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Thank you so much for that. I mean, I-- you-- you say this why people hate you. I-- I would say this is why some people love you.

MARIAME KABA:

Yeah. Some people love me.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

That you--
(OVERTALK)

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

(LAUGHTER) On that note of agency and dignity and acknowledging all the truths about the design of the state to be violent-- who wants to ask some questions?

MARIAME KABA:

Hope we didn't scare everybody into submission--

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

No.

ASHA BANDELE:

You know what, Mariame, I would say, too, about that, which I think is an important-- point, is the other piece that it does is it allows us to-- have the performance of inclusion (BACKGROUND VOICE) without actual inclusion.

ALL:

Yeah. Yes.

ASHA BANDELE:

Right? So it's-- just-- and it limits people's roles. It doesn't do what you just said about Fannie Lou Hamer. I just wanna underscore that. Right?

FEMALE VOICE:

Yes.

ASHA BANDELE:

This-- this act of teaching, this act of--

FEMALE VOICE:

Growing.

ASHA BANDELE:

--of ensuring that there's real development so that Fannie Lou Hamer gets to a point where she doesn't even talk about being-- beaten in the prison. Right--

FEMALE VOICE:

Yes. Yes.

ASHA BANDELE:

She talks about how this is-- how you create a Mississippi Democratic Freedom party.

FEMALE VOICE:

Yes.

MARIAME KABA:

We-- we slap the person, "You're the-- the formally incarcerated person who can only ever talk about your life being formally incarcerated."

ASHA BANDELE:

Yeah.

MARIAME KABA:

Period. As though you have no expertise in anything else. You might be a great crocheter. I wanna (LAUGHTER) hear about that, too. You know what I mean? Like-- yeah, I'm down-- I'm done with that. (LAUGHTER) Goodbye to the-- all that--

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

S-- if people are finding it intimidating to come up to the microphone, India can maybe walk around-- with it and you can raise your hand and she'll bring you the microphone.

MARIAME KABA:

We know you have comments.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

We know you have comments--

MARIAME KABA:

If you not-- questions. Everybody always has comments at these things.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Over here-- I-- we see two. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

MAVE:

Hi, good evening. My name is Mave (PH) and hi everybody. I work at an org-- in an international women's right organization called MADRE and we work with a women's organization in a remote indigenous community in Nicaragua and there is-- it's very remote. There is not a lot of state presence. There-- is very little police presence.

And as a result of-- there's also, as a result of the country wars, there's a very high rate of violence against women. And-- so we work in this community to-- to help the organization there to build community action plans and they-- they build-- they build the capacity of the women's right defenders in those communities.

And Mariame, it really-- speaks to what you were saying, speaks to the work we do because they are really working on community actions plans that be-- as-- almost a lack-- due to a lack of police presence, they are relying on building community support systems. And they have-- and their-- some of the-- to get to any support system it would, you know, police or medical or anything in support system, it would take a day.

And you travel down the river on a boat and it's dangerous. And-- so they have action plans where they bang the pots together to alert one another where they go to if they have a bag packed or what they have to do. And it's really relying on a community support. And I f-- think it's really interesting because it's almost-- it's a result of a lack of police presence, but it's also the same idea of the-- and the program is called Shelter Without Walls to build a com-- a community support system that is without having to-- you know, needing four walls.

It's actually a community that is sheltering and supporting one another. And so I just also wanted to share that comment but also hear if any of you have experiences about working-- international as well and learning from other experiences where maybe communities that are-- as this example, where it's also-- whether it's due to over policing or over incarceration or if it's due to a lack of police presence, what those actions are.

FEMALE VOICE:

That's awesome.

MARIAME KABA:

Somebody wanna say something about that?

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Yeah. (THROAT CLEARING)

ASHA BANDELE:

I-- I didn't work internationally, but I grew up around white people. They've always had-- there were no systems that had to be created. I knew a woman who threw her daughter into a bathtub with scalding hot water. That child screamed all night. No one called the police on her. Her grandmother came the next day, took her to the hospital, got her arm fixed up and she's all right now.

I'm just saying that there are all kinds of systems (UNINTEL PHRASE) don't have to look for them. They're here. They've always been here. They just haven't been applied-- to everybody. So we don't have to look beyond. You can look at, you know, Lincoln Towers on 66th Street where I grew up. And-- so-- you know, I think that-- we've always known what to do when we felt like a life mattered. Right? We've always known what to do.

We've always-- Joyce Rivera, who runs a St. Anne Harm Reduction-- Clinic (NOISE) in the South Bronx, will tell you the story of-- when HIV infection was just-- at that height in the South Bronx. It was-- it was people who were selling drugs she was able to work with to ensure that people had clean needles. We know what to do. D-- I mean, you know-- whether it's in the-- you know, in-- in real streets or you-- you pick up *Beloved* and read Toni Morrison and we see the women come together at the end of the book and-- and call Sethe back to whole.

You know, there's all these, you know, examples. I don't think we have to look far. I just think that it's a question of-- of will. I-- I look at it at my daughter's school. And, you know, the children who are resourced and the children who are cared about are circled with protection and individualized education plans.

And let me (UNINTEL PHRASE)-- this is a real thing. It's a condition. You know what it's called? School refusal. Right. When you I were growin' up it was called truancy. Okay? They-- they had a condition, school refusal. And so all the teachers came together because a child was traumatized and they sent the work home, and psychologists came in. They thought this is a real thing, like in Brooklyn. (LAUGHTER) Right? I'm j-- I-- I was like, "What? Didn't you just, like--" you know what I sayin'? Didn't we get picked up for that? (LAUGH)

But I'm just sayin' that all of these things exist and we know how to do them and we don't have to look beyond our (MIC NOISE) borders, we can look in the communities we choose to value. (BACKGROUND VOICE) And there-- there are-- there are any number of examples. You know? And-- and then I'll just say this, Mave, you know, thank you-- MADRE has carried the water for such a long time. So asha.

MARIAME KABA:

I do wanna say that, you know, we are-- you know-- yeah, I have done-- years ago my sister-- worked in Senegal with (MIC NOISE) women-- from-- a town where there was no kind of-- systems around addressing harm or violence or things like that. So she worked on a similar kind of campaign where it was a community accountability, work with these women. And she would always send me inf-- ad-- ask me, "Send me curriculum stuff so I can work with them on the--" you know, and we actually had these exchanges.

So I think that's happening. But I do wanna point out that right here we have cases where undocumented women-- for example, in Chicago years ago there was a great group called Casa Seguda (PH)-- of undocumented women who couldn't access the systems, they couldn't go to the-- unless they went to the emergency room, like, they couldn't call the cops 'cause they were afraid of getting deported.

They couldn't-- so they created this program in Chicago around addressing domestic violence. And the-- one of our friends in common, Anna Romero (PH), was part of that group to help those women learn about the s-- the cycle of violence, the political education that it took for them to then be able to work together. So one example that I remember was-- one of the women, her husband was incredibly abusive, he beat her regularly.

These women got together, in something that I would call a community action team, and thought together about all the things they would do to get her out. So first of all, one woman actually went and lived, like said that she had to live in the house 'cause she was leaving her husband's house 'cause she was in trouble. So they literally came to the house and was, like, surveillance for that woman for at least two weeks of time to help make sure that she was in the room and present, to interrupt the violence that had been going on and escalating for a long time. During those two weeks, they basically plotted this woman's leaving that house. Right?

Like, and that's something that you would, like, immediately think, "That's the solution." But that was a solution as a group they came up, was because they couldn't figure out a way to where somebody could be there to make sure she was safe. And so they come up with this whole entire story. And she-- and she's-- and then she was allowed in the house.

You know, this is a big Mexican family, they're like, "Yeah, sure, come and stay." And she was there present to interrupt this violence for two weeks, until they figured out as a group how to get this woman to safe-- to safety. So, I mean, that's just an example here of, like, yeah, there are lots of people who can't access any systems here and, in fact, if they do then

they'd be criminalized for it. So I just wanted to put that out there as a story that these things are happening and we can learn a lot from beyond our borders, but we could also learn a lot right here. So thank you for your work.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Thank you.
(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

DESI ROBINSON:

Thank you. Hello. (MAKES NOISE) (LAUGHTER) My name is Desi Robinson (PH). And-- I feel very fortified right now. asha, it's always wonderful to see you. And-- I was thinking about, well, one, I agree, we don't have to reinvent any wheels. We know how to work to save lives that matter.

I mean, we can look at the opioid crisis and how we've mobilized to be able to work for communities that are largely white to have empathy and sympathy for communities that are struggling with addiction. When it was crack when I was growing up in the Bronx it was a moral failing, you know, on our part.

And so we-- we know how to work through-- saving and empathizing and empowering communities that-- that matter. And-- and I'm tired of struggling porn as well. (LAUGHTER) I'm currently a student, I'm a health and lifestyle-- journalist. And right now I'm a doctoral student in health education. And-- and I-- I meet people and they're like, "Oh you're so lucky." I'm like, "Well I'm smart, too." You know? (LAUGHTER)

'Cause they wanna hear about, like, how I had to pull myself up by my bootstraps to get into that program. And-- like give it a rest. You know? So-- I-- I would say that one of the concerns that I have in-- I love this idea of-- of cu-- community engagement to be able to sort of side-step systems that are generally not designed to work for marginalized people.

My only concern is-- is that we've been indoctrinated with such a mistrust of each other and so I'm really concerned about-- wanting to engage with communities or-- not so much concerned but really want to know how to do that, the language to be able to do that so that we can trust each other. Because we back bite and, you know, girl, you don't know about her son, that's the reason that that w-- you know? And so people don't want to deal with that. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

And so they isolate themselves. They don't trust systems. They don't trust each other. And so how do we-- form and build community engagement with people that were probably more likely to trust and have-- likeminded understandings about how to heal ourselves, because those answers largely lie within, you know, how we work with each other and how we know to heal.

FEMALE VOICE:

Sure.

DESI ROBINSON:

How do we develop the language and the skill set and the-- the trust that we need to be able to have with each other to be able to do--

MARIAME KABA:

The community--
(OVERTALK)

DESI ROBINSON:

Absolutely.

MARIAME KABA:

Yeah. Thank you for asking that question. I-- I would just say this that-- for many, many years-- there's a group in-- the Bay Area called Bay Area Transformative Justice cola-- Collective-- or Collaborative. I think it's one or the other. (BACKGROUND VOICE) Bay Area Transformative Justice Collaborative. It's run by-- a woman named Mia Mingus-- and several other volunteers.

And what they've really perfected is this model called the pod mapping model. P-O-D mapping model. You can find it on their website, you can download the pod. The question that you ask about, like, we back bite. Yeah. The question is: how do you define your own community?

Because I think the question of like the imposition is the assumption that your community is around you, when for many people, especially yeah people I work with who are already disconnected have no family, what-- that's not their community. Their communities are made communities. They're found family members.

They're-- so what they do is they have this mapping that you can download from the site and through a training on pod mapping they will ask you to think about who are the people you could immediately call if something was going on in your life, like your kid needed, you know, money right away for medication. Who might be the person in your life, in some way, that might give you $5. Right? Building-- so start the bridges of like-- then who might be the people in your life who when-- it's a situation where you gotta run and you gotta drop your kid off there, who are those people?

And then maybe you have one. Put that in your pod. And surely, but surely, small, wise-- you find that all these people who are around you, who you could go to for various things-- you can't go to all those people for everything. And those people maybe aren't the right person to talk to if you've just been raped and you need to get support.

They may be like, "Girl, what'd you do?" Right? That-- but that person may be the one could give you groceries. But that's still part a member of your community. So for people who have a hard time conceptualizing that, you kind of lay out pod maps and then your charge is to go and talk to those people that you have on your list about violence. To talk with them about what their thoughts are about domestic violence and rape.

To figure out if you were in trouble would they take you in. To ask the questions of people that we never ask. We just assume. Like, I mean, I-- maybe I'm not the right person to call because I don't, like, deal well with stress. Do you know what I mean? And, like, maybe you should ask m-- that's not me, but-- you know what I mean? Like maybe you should ask me first if I would be somebody who would be a pod person for you and have the conversation.

That also builds community because now you have a pod map of all these people that you kind of didn't even expect were gonna come to your defense in multiple kinds of ways. I challenge all of you to go home tonight, (NOISE) bring-- download that pod map and see if you can figure out for yourself who all these people would be in your own life. For many people, and particularly organizers, they struggle mightily, because they are that f-- for everybody else.

And then the question is: who the hell is that for you? The challenge of doing that, and I think f-- particularly for black women to ask for help, is not something easily done and it's not something rewarded within the culture 'cause it's n-- seen as, like, being needy or help-- you know, helpless or whatever. But to form-- when I made my pod map, it took me a long time to, like, identify my people when I thought I had so many people.

And I started thinking about that, I'm like, "Yeah, I wouldn't go to my sister for that." She's not r-- you know what I mean? Like I love her, but she's not the person I'm gonna talk to about that. I have, like, these other four people that-- and I was surprised at who ended up on my list. And then I was more surprised that when I had conversations with some of those people, they were like, "Mariame, c-- take me off that." R-- s-- like, you know what I mean? "I love you, but actually I would be better doing this."

And, like, all of a sudden we had these conversations about what people were willing to do in my life to support me, should certain things happen. And now I have, like, all these pod people. Now I think that's the way we're talking about when we're talking about building a community. It's not a geographical base necessarily. It's not necessarily everybody who looks like you. It's not necessarily-- like it's all these folks who-- appear in various points of your life who might help you at a certain moment.

So imagine if every one of us did pod maps, we would be so much better. Not-- not pod maps in our head, pod maps when we have to actually talk to the person and find out if

they're gonna be there-- there for us. And, like, also not be, like, personally affront-- offended when the person says, "Unh-uh (NEGATIVE). I'm the wrong person to call about your kid. I hate children." (LAUGHTER) Do you know?

Like really, like, they should be allowed to say that to you so you can find the right person to drop your kid off to. "Why are you gonna drop them off to me? I'm gonna give them ice cream 24/7 and comatose them and put them, like, to bed with Benadryl. I'm not your person." (LAUGHTER) Do you know? "But I have other skills that you can come to me for and I'm down for that." Right? So we gotta have those conversations with each other. That's about building community, too. Yeah.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

That's so great, Mariame, because-- a tool for starting those conversations sometimes is what people need.

MARIAME KABA:

Yes.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

You just-- it's so stigmatizing to ask for help--

MARIAME KABA:

Yes. It is.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

--in certain environments. Right? Particularly if people perceive you as being very strong.

MARIAME KABA:

Yes.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

It's like, "Why do you need help?" And you feel guilty about asking.

MARIAME KABA:

Exactly.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

And you feel like-- ashamed. There's just a lot of stigma around it. Having a tool to start those conversations is super important. I really appreciate that. I'm gonna look that up. (LAUGH) Right here--
(OVERTALK)

FEMALE VOICE:

Okay. So I have a question. Can any of you foresee a positive role for the state in helping to implement transformative justice in our society?

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

Well. (LAUGHTER)

FEMALE VOICE:

What is the state's role (UNINTEL PHRASE)?

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

I wanna be facetious and say if it removed itself that would (BACKGROUND VOICE) be awfully helpful. Because it's not just-- what it does, it's also-- it's what it does and it's the way it gaslights us about what it does. (BACKGROUND VOICE) So you're being punished because you're-- because there's lead in your house and there's no heat and hot water, but it doesn't provide-- safe and affordable housing.

You're being punished because you're poor, but there are no proper jobs. You're being punished because your kids are sick, but we don't provide health care. And so it's just-- the gaslighting is really-- almost worse than it-- it's intended purpose, in some-- in some ways. But-- I'm curious whether any of you agree/disagree with that. Erin.

ERIN CLOUD:

Yeah. I think-- when I'm think-- if I'm-- if I'm putting on my policy hat this is what I would say. First of all, I think that we can definitely reallocate funding, Title IV funding, which has

increased, which is what-- funds foster care and funds adoption subsidies. I don't understand why that funding can't shift into public benefits for people who have families.

And I don't understand why we still continue to have child caps in certain state. I don't understand why we do not have actual access to cash benefits and food stamps that will actually feed and support families. (COUGH) That is something the state could do. They could reallocate those funds accordingly that would actually prevent a lot of families-- going into crisis and allow them to self rely and not have to move out.

It can also eliminate many of the reporting requirements that are tagged onto (COUGH) funding. So for people to access these services that exist in the community-- on our greater journey, this is not transformative justice, but this is-- incremental change. Right? What they could do is-- they could remove restrictive-- restrictions on privacy, so removing mandated reporting for people who fear, "Oh my God, what's gonna happen? All these children are just gonna burn up and die."

That's not gonna happen because the reality is, is that if someone sees some-- a child in danger they will call about a child in danger or they will support the child in danger. The requirement of mandated reporting just creates an amazing onus on people that fear the loss of their jobs, like public school teachers and hospitals, who don't understand what the implications are, and place people in positions to police communities even if that's not necessarily their initial intent or desire to do so.

So just get rid of it. The state could do that. The state could get rid of those types of-- legislations and it's-- making do. We could repeal the Hyde Amendment. That's something that comes up on every congressional budget to actually equalize reproductive justice and access for women so that they do-- they have a little bit more levels of (NOISE) privacy and autonomy with their own b-- bodies.

When we are giving women, black women, the same levels of privacy rights that white women have, you are increasing autonomy and liberty within our own bodies, which will then elevate our own experience and ability to be able to be full citizens in the society which has enormous implications. Right?

If you have-- if you minimize the rights of black women on their own bodily autonomy there are enormous impacts that that can have. So there are specific policy changes. That's not transformative justice. That's just not it. They're different things. But they are things that you could actually lobby for and advocate for in the interim.

GRETCHEN ROHR:

I could jump in on that-- just also. I-- I mean, I-- I-- I think agree-- I-- I agree there's a role-- is-- is it transformative justice?

ASHA BANDELE:

No.

GRETCHEN ROHR:

But-- but-- no. (LAUGH) But I-- I-- I think that the-- where's the role? And I think-- I think a key question to ask, and it's-- it's I think the charge to the community is what role do we see for government? (BACKGROUND VOICE) I mean, I think that-- that-- that-- the simplicity of it-- it's-- it's not even just a matter of-- of the-- criminal, punitive system, but what role do we see for-- our housing administration?

I-- I mean, the-- the-- the idea of right now sitting-- there are more homes that are sitting empty in this country than there are individuals who are homeless. The-- the role of the government could be to (LAUGH) exercise the power it always does have to transform all of those properties into the hands of individuals who need them.

I mean, there-- there's-- I believe that there-- there are role that can be played, but the problem is it does not necessarily get into the space of-- of-- where is the community demand and where's the community empowerment with it? I think right now actually-- I'm-- I'm-- I'm intrigued by the defensive role that government-- because I think much of this is under-- what underlies much of this is the-- the power of capitalism (BACKGROUND VOICE) and where-- where-- many advocate's resources, and mine-- (LAUGH) especially, have been targeted towards addressing the abuses of a governmental system-- and have-- and have potentially-- missed many opportunities to be fighting the corporatization-- of many of the problems and solutions. You know?

Create the problem then also sell the solution. And how-- and-- and-- and that-- that's fed through capitalism. And so what is the role of a government in being able to-- align itself, be accountable to-- its people-- to protect us from-- (LAUGH) what is becoming-- a major-- additional-- and more clear-cut-- ally?

Money has always been (LAUGH) the underlying channel, but-- but now it's much more clear in a corporate model as to-- to-- where the challenges and the target of-- of the work needs to be. So I-- I do see that as a role of government. But there's also just the defensive, like-- even in the clear about staying away-- and pulling yourself out, it's not-- it-- it's just like accountability.

And-- and then the last-- when-- what's been noted about the c-- clear need for reckoning and the clear need for reparations-- and (BACKGROUND VOICE) looking at structural harm-- and some of the biggest challenges that we've had in the United States of having a true-- process is that they've always been civilly developed, they've always been more so-- structured processed through a voluntary process.

And-- in many other g-- in many other countries through transitional justice-- (THROAT CLEARING) it has been the transition between regimes that has created some level of accountability-- in the reckoning, as well as in the reparations. It's very limited. (LAUGH)

Those who work in the international context know much so-- so much better. But I-- I see the-- I'm curious as to what is the role of the government to ensure that there is accountability for that process.

ASHA BANDELE:

Yeah. And I think it's two questions, you know-- Gretchen. Right? So is there a role of government? And there's almost always been governing structures that we can look to. (COUGH) Some of the-- most successful ones we've disrupted. Right? So the longest government structure-- to hold peace was the Iroquois nation and we disrupted that.

So-- so I think that-- so we-- let me just leave that right there. But to-- Erin's point, I mean-- the state could choose to help people not invest in the prison system. Right? They could say, "We're going to put these projects-- in small rural communities where-- people are deeply anchored to the carceral state because it's the way they feed their children." And so-- you know, there's other-- there's other jobs for you. We could choose other jobs.

We could say-- "It's illegal for Victoria Secret and everybody else-- to use prison labor." The state could choose to amend the 13th amendment. You know? And we know that the-- you know, if you think about World War II, right, and what was done when so much (NOISE) of the male workforce left and they needed women to-- work, to make munitions and what have you, they made that easy. Right?

So they had vans that took (COUGH) people to jobs, or c-- you know, buses, they had childcare. You know? All these sorts of things. What are the-- so there are roles that the state can play. And then consequently, you know, the G.I. didn't work for black people-- we were left outta that, but the G.I. bill was largely used to-- you know, ensure that there was a body of people who's invested in the fight against capitalism. Right? Which was the red menace. That's why pe-- they're like, "Well you ain't gonna come take my house. I-- I-- I got my house now," and whatever.

And so there are things that the state can do to-- ensure a political will, a political thought, a political action and investment. And I think that-- that that's certainly been made clear. And, you know-- so there is a role for state-- whether this state as it exists has the ability to be-- transformative or just tinker around the edges is probably-- the way that question may need to be nuanced.

MARIAME KABA:

Can I make an announcement (BACKGROUND VOICE) for a minute? So I brought some things over in the back, but not enough for everybody. I—co-founded, along with several

other people, a few years ago a project called Survived and Punished that works on addressing the criminalization of survivors of violence-- who are survivors of domestic and gender based violence of-- of various kinds. We have this collaborative tool kit-- which is on our website that people can download at survivedandpunished.org.

The-- the-- the thing that I want you to, like, think about is-- is, especially for those of you who are New Yorkers, is that we've had-- the governor has only commuted the sentence of one survivor of gender based violence in his time in office. Cuomo. But there only have been three-- this was-- information that Vicky found in her research.

There's only been commutations of gender based violence survivors by any governors ever in the history of New York state. This year we're going to be pushing a slate of close to a hundred names of survivors in prisons that we want commutations for, clemency and commutations for. The commutations and clemency-- administrative policy that Cuomo has put in place is ridiculous. It is too limited, too limiting. We're throwing it away, we don't care about that.

We're not telling people to fill out applications based on that. We're telling the governor to commute lots of people, lots of survivors of violence out of prison. So we're gonna be making an announcement of those names-- on the 14th of April at Barnard College at an event about mass commutations where people can come and learn more. Please be on the lookout for information about that at the Survived and Punished Facebook pla-- page and on our-- on our Twitter handle-- about that as well.

But I just want to you, like, start asking questions about why this governor refuses to commute sentences of people he can be commuting, who have already served their time, in some cases over 20 years? Why he's not allowing these people to get out of prison? Why that's not enough time served? And why he's so goddamn stingy about it? So we're gonna make him famous (LAUGH) or infamous about his stinginess around commutations-- throughout this election season.

And we would love it if folks would pay attention, would start asking questions, would start talking to other people about that. So stay tuned. We'll have a website coming out soon with stories of the people that are going to-- we're gonna be pushing for commutation, clemency and just release. We want people free from prisons. So please join us in that struggle. Thank you.
(OVERTALK)

MARIAME KABA:

April 14th. Yeah. It'll be--

FEMALE VOICE:

(UNINTEL) birthday.

MARIAME KABA:

Oh there you go--

ASHA BANDELE:

(UNINTEL) is a good day.

MARIAME KABA:

That's a good day.
(OVERTALK)

MARIAME KABA:

Look on the Facebook page for Survived and Punished. You'll have more information there.

DENISE TOMASINI-JOSHI:

That's a really great note to end on because you have given us a specific thing that we can now start organizing around. And I really appreciate it. So-- I think, you know, the quote that you had from Charlotte Bunch about ending domination (RUSTLING) and resisting oppression as being the definition of feminism is also something that we should-- just close with. Go to the website, look for the document-- get involved and help us all-- end domination and resist oppression. This is-- we have a chance to do something. Thank you so much all-- (APPLAUSE) I truly appreciate you.

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *