

Study and Struggle Critical Conversation #4

“Movement Building and Transnational Freedom Struggles”

Speakers: Angela Y. Davis, Medhin Paolos, Lorgia García Peña, Leti Volpp, and host Makani Themba

>>>MAKANI: Good evening everyone. I'm so glad you joined us. I'm so excited about this conversation. For me, to also not only be in conversation with these brilliant women, who have done such important thinking about abolition, about transnational movement building, but also for the fact that this is a project that is supporting an organization that is very near and dear to my heart-People's Advocacy Institute. So first I want to say a little bit about Study and Struggle before we get started, and share a little bit about PAI. So Study and Struggle program is the first phase of an ongoing project to organize against incarceration and criminalization in Mississippi. And I am in Mississippi right now, saying hello to you from Jackson. Through four months of political education and community building, the Critical Conversation webinar series hosted by Haymarket Books will cover the themes for the upcoming months. Haymarket Books is an independent, radical, non-profit publisher that publishes some of my very favorite books. And I want to encourage you all to check out some of their offerings. It's very very important work, and a really important model. While all of the Study and Struggle events are freely available, we ask that those who are able, and I know that this is Giving Tuesday, to make a solidarity donation to support the important work of the People's Advocacy Institute as well. Just a little bit about People's Advocacy Institute for people who don't know, is that here in Mississippi, they really lead the abolitionist work and the abolitionist dreaming that we have here in Mississippi. And some people may know that it takes a lot to dream that way in Mississippi, but we also come from real good stock.

I'm sitting in front of a picture, among other people, of Fannie Lou Hamer, who many of you hold as a hero, and many of us do right here in Mississippi. In fact, as I was thinking about today and reflecting on her three week trip to Africa, which took place in '64, and right after this Summer of Freedom, that I was reflecting on the impact of Mississippi on the world, and the impact of the world on Mississippi, and how much we continue to learn from each other. And one of the things about the People's Advocacy Institute, is that they're involved not only in being architects of abolition and creating a whole alternative system that engages many of the folks in Mississippi including people who are formerly incarcerated, but also they help lead our People's Assembly work. And the People's Assemblies is part of our grassroots governance alternative. We have influence in city government, but we're not the city government, we're the People's Government. And People's Advocacy Institute supports staff and holds down that work. So when you hear about People's Assemblies, you may not have heard about People's Advocacy Institute, but understand that they are the ones who hold that work down. And the other thing that I just want to share about them and the work here that's important is, that here in Jackson, in terms of movement folks, that we've always felt a real kinship and connection as part of our own global citizenship. So that's another reason why I'm super excited about this. Many organizers here travel, we have relationships with cooperatives in Spain and other places. Many people don't know that Mississippi is the site of some of the

oldest cooperatives in the world, not just in the country, but in the world. I mean there are some of course that are 500 years old, and 600 years old, that are also indigenous that are here as well, but we have more black co-owned electrical coops than any other place in the country. And Mound Bayou, Mississippi, which is just down the road, was one of the first big experiments in cooperative governance. And so I have to do that shout out before we go global for the home team.

And so with all of that, and all the gratitude, and so grateful for the work that everyone has done to make this possible. To Haymarket Books. I want to start off by introducing who we have here because you all already can see by the pictures these amazing folks. And I'm gonna just sort of go in the order that people are gonna say more about themselves but just let you know a little more about them. So here we go. Medhin Paolos is a filmmaker, researcher, musician, and an activist working for LGBTQ and citizenship rights in Italy. She's the Director of the acclaimed documentary film, *Asmarina*, the co-founder of the Milano chapter of Rete G2, the largest citizenship organization in Italy, and the creator of the G2 Lab. Her work with immigrant, refugee, and LGBTQ communities in Milan, Italy is internationally recognized. So we welcome Medhin.

Lorgia García Peña is a public facing scholar and activist, and the co-founder of Freedom University, Georgia, a non-profit organization that provides college instruction to undocumented students. She's the author of *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nations and Archives of Contradictions* and the co-director of Mind the Gap: Archives of Justice. Currently, she is an un-tenured associate professor at Harvard University.

Leti Volpp is a Law Professor at UC Berkeley who has published multiple pieces on immigration and citizenship law with the particular focus on how law is shaped by ideas of culture and identity. She currently directs the campus-wide Center for Race and Gender.

And last, but certainly not least, Angela Davis is a political activist, scholar, author, and speaker. She's an outspoken advocate for the oppressed and exploited, and for all of us, all of us, who have any sense. Writing on black liberation, prison abolition, the intersections of race, gender, and class, and international solidarity with Palestine. She is the author of many books, including *Women, Race, and Class*, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, and *Are Prisons Obsolete*. She's the subject of the acclaimed documentary, *Free Angela and All Political Prisoners*, and is the Distinguished Professor Emerita at the University of California Santa Cruz. And of course beloved in all of the ways for all of her work, struggle, and brilliance as we are for all of the folks who are here, so we welcome you.

So we're gonna start off with Medhin, and then we'll go in the order we talked about and give everybody a chance to talk about themselves, their work, and again thank you all for joining.

>>>MEDHIN: Hi everyone. It's really great to be here in conversation with all of you. I'm really honored, I can't begin to say how honored I am. I'm gonna take the conversation outside of the U.S. and towards the black Mediterranean cuz that is where I'm from. As the daughter of Eritrean immigrants born in Italy, a country that colonized Eritrea and other places in the Horn of Africa, and did not recognize me as a citizen when I was born. My commitment to abolition has been centered precisely around issues of citizenship and civic recognition for children of immigrants, immigrant rights, refugee safety, and the acknowledgement of colonialism as the

root of all of these exclusions and violence. Unlike in the U.S., where people born in the country become automatically citizens, in Italy we have what's called *jure sanguinis* or bloodline citizenship. Which comes from both colonial and fascist legislations aimed at regulating access to citizenship for mixed race offspring of Italian soldiers serving in the Horn of Africa in the early twentieth century. What that means in the present moment is that someone like myself who is born in Italy, foreign. That also means that the grandchild of an Italian immigrant in NYC who has never stepped foot in Italy, does not speak Italian, or pay taxes, can, if they choose to be Italian, where I am deemed to be foreign. To be clear this is a racist law.

This reality is shared with many Italians of color who like me have immigrant parents who came from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and it's what has shaped my work both as an activist and a filmmaker. With my film work, I try to historicize from the perspective of migrants, refugees, and second generation. Second generation is the political term we use in Italy to name kids of immigrants born and raised in Italy. So I tried to historicize the experiences of colonialism and migration and diaspora. My activist work is somewhat multifaceted. First, I work for the past fifteen years along organizers to abolish *jure sanguinis* and create a more inclusive citizenship legislation. Our actions have been educating the immigrant and second generation community around how to navigate the bureaucracy around immigration laws. If you are born in Italy to immigrant parents, the current law of 1991 and 1992 allows you to apply for citizenship when you turn 18, however you have a window of one year to complete the process to apply and complete the process. It is a cumbersome process, and it is highly restrictive. It is also poorly publicized, meaning that people often miss out on that opportunity simply because they don't know they have that option. We work with schools, media, and social media campaign, and work extensively with Congress, lobbying for change in citizenship law. The proposed legislation went up to vote, to a vote, and was approved by the House of Representatives, but was later on rejected by the Senate. So that means we are back to square one.

My other main focus of activism has been around the safety and care of refugees arriving in Italy by boat, via Libya. As we have seen in the news for the past decade, Europe has been very concerned with influx of people seeking asylum. Italy has become one of the main portals to Europe. The reality has contributed to the rise of the extreme right and increased racist acts aimed not only at newcomers, which would be bad enough, but also at those of us who do not have the right look. That means those of us who are not white. All the atrocities we have seen from shooting at boats, to letting people drown at sea, to racially targeted aggressions, to the exploitation of migrant labor in the fields and factories, to the sex trafficking of migrant women, too many to count, and still what happens in Italy to migrants, refugees of color, barely makes international news. So what we are trying to do is raise awareness to these issues by insisting in the fact that these are black lives too and that they also matter. And these injustices are historically grounded and perpetually repeated. So to me, it is not coincidence that the refugees coming to Italy are in large part coming from countries that were colonized by Italy. And other European countries. Just like it's no coincidence to me that the asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border are coming from countries that the U.S. invaded. The exploitation of migrants and the destruction of black lives are global problems. And they need to be addressed transnationally. So we're here to talk about this.

My third area of commitment is LGBTQ+ migrant rights and I am particularly concerned with the intersectional struggles of people who are migrants, second generation, refugees, who are of color and also identify as LGBT. This is something that will be the topic of my next film, so maybe we can talk more about that later. Thank you for now.

>>>MAKANI: Thank you so much, I appreciate that. Lorgia please go on. Thank you.

>>>LORGIA: So it's a great honor...(long pause for interpreters) Thank you so much, this has been a project that Angela and I have been talking about for the good part of this year, since early summer, and it's been such a great honor to be in conversation with Leti, with Medhin, and getting to know you Makani. Wonderful to be here with you all today.

So I want to talk about my work as a scholar and teacher, which is what I think is my contribution is to this world at this moment. So I am a public facing Ethnic Studies scholar and teacher who identifies as a migrant, a Latinx, and black. My small contribution to transnational struggles for justice at this moment in my life centers around abolishing the structures of the university and academia that subjugate knowledge, that subjugate the humanistic production and epistemology that comes from minoritized, colonized, racialized communities, such as the ones I come from as a black Caribbean immigrant. And I do this in my research by interrogating archives and paying attention to silences in the ways histories have been constructed. In my teaching and mentoring, by creating space both in and out of the classroom, where anti-colonial communal knowledge making can be possible. And within and outside the institutions I work in by rebelling loudly and persistently against structures of the corporate university and academy that veiled under the discourse of diversity and inclusion operate with impunity in reproducing exclusion, inequality, and violence against black indigenous people of color and the knowledge we produce. I mean let's not forget that the university has functioned as a laboratory for white supremacy, fascism, and the "experimentation" of racialized bias for centuries. It was at Harvard, for example, where the science supporting the production of Puerto Ricans as an inferior race, unworthy of U.S. citizenship, was manufactured in the early 20th century. And it is in the university, particularly the elite private institutions, where most of our world leaders, including dictators, are formed.

The power of the academy and the corporate university resides precisely on its exclusion and exclusivity, on ideas of superiority that are grounded on colonial ideas of white supremacy. Knowledge as imagined by the university is measured by its proximity to particular notions of civility that are grounded, as Lisa Lowe reminds us, on Eurocentric colonial and white supremacist use of the world. And yet the university continues to reproduce and value that scale, rejecting consciously the epistemology that comes from all other ways of knowing and the environment of that knowledge in students and teachers of color, particularly those of us who come from working migrant families, who are first generation, those of us who un-belong to elite structures of the university.

Now I think all of us sitting at this imaginary table today share the understanding that education can be a critical tool for abolition, however the education we receive, that I myself received, in all our institutions from the moment we begin kindergarten all the way to PhD is incomplete and is flawed. In schools, as in the world, we still are experiencing the afterlife of slavery and colonialism. We're still dealing with the systemic violence against black people, with

the exclusion of minoritized voices, with economic disparity, with environmental injustice. Schools are not immune to these ills, and what is worse, they reproduce it in their organizational structures, through their hiring practices, admissions, and in the syllabus and class programs that education our children and youth.

We have been socialized with notions of history and valuations of arts, science, and literature that are biased, racialized, flawed, lacking. That is the way we have learned about human and social processes from revolutions to the birth of the nation to feminist movements to the artistic and literary trends. Even the way foreign languages are taught in our schools is through the lens of white supremacy. Then we have constitutions and legislations and institutions that become the source of the entire nation's universal truths. Take my country, the Dominican Republic, for example. The partial lies that have been institutionalized in literature and history, have led to extreme xenophobia against Haitians for over a century. The tangible truth, the tangible results of these learned lies have been the loss of lives. It's tangible violence and death of human beings. What we teach in schools has direct impact on how people understand themselves in relationship to those who are different from them. It shapes how we choose to border each other, to police each other, and inflicts violence.

So what I am interested in doing through my work is to bring attention to the systematic ways in which academic institutions of learning participate in border, excluding, and silencing human beings through structures that are grounded in white supremacy. I try to insist on the importance of subjugated knowledge and silences in helping us unlearn all that bullshit we have been fed. Those silences are what we truly need to understand our human experience. And it is that knowledge and those silences that I'm committed to through my research and through my writing and through my teaching. And given the state of this nation and of our world, where we sit listening to presidential candidates debate, who cannot talk about Latinx and black communities without reproducing this same violence on those communities, who cannot talk about racism and white supremacy without blushing or saying something completely ridiculous. These are college education men and women, most of them Ivy League graduates. So I must insist that there is really no more urgent matter in our learning institutions than to abolish their own frameworks and to start over, begin again.

But, I digress. I have been asked to introduce my work, a task that I must admit I find quite difficult to do, and would much rather introduce my brilliant colleagues who are present. What I could say as a way to summarize the work I do is that I have two very simple goals. The first is to abolish through my research, teaching, and organizing, the violence and toxic white supremacist frameworks of knowledge production that the university privileges and sustains. My foregrounding is that subjugated knowledges, lives, and people. And the second is simple, is to build, support, and sustain multiple forms of transnational and intersectional communities of rebellion that build possibilities of what Jonathan Lear calls "radical hoping" through tangible and practical acts of solidarity and justice aimed at contrasting the violence and destruction many of us face everyday, with possibility and joy. It was these two goals that were at the center of many of the projects I've embarked through the years, including my participation with the creation of the Freedom University, an organization that provides college instruction to undocumented students, and more recently in the creation of Mind the Gap: Archives of Justice, a project that historicizes the contribution of women of color, migrants in the United States and Europe to historical processes and events. As well as in my scholarship on borders,

archives, diaspora, and local blackness. To me as a scholar, the work that we must do within our institutions of learning must also decidedly be within the framework of anti-coloniality, abolition, and transnational solidarity. That is the work to be done. That is where transformation can be possible. So I'll stop here and look forward to hearing from Leti.

>>>MAKANI: Thank you so much. That was beautiful. Leti, would you mind, you ready?

>>>LETI: I am ready, ready. So honored and moved to be here. I'm coming to you from the territory of xučyun [Huichin], the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo speaking Ohlone people, the successors of the sovereign Verona Band of the Alameda County. I am so honored to be here speaking alongside Makani, Medhin, Lorgia, and Angela. As Makani said, I work on immigration and citizenship, and in particular on the way in which race and gender and ideas about identity and culture shape immigration law and citizenship law. One strand of this work looks at how presumptions about culture are deployed in immigration law to enforce and exacerbate gender subordination and racial subordination. So this work is deeply concerned with ways in which racism is used in the service of eradication sexism, so that claims about feminism serve as a proxy for xenophobia or islamophobia. These claims rely on the presumption that certain communities or certain parts of the world or certain cultures or certain religions are more gender subordinating than others. As a recent example of this work, I've written about the way in which the Trump administration invoked the term "honor killings" in different iterations of what we know as the Muslim Ban. The deliberate inclusion of this term allows Muslim immigrants to simultaneously aligned with terrorism, gender subordination, and the threat to sexual liberty. This enables the administration to pretend to be concerned about gender or sexual equality while banning Muslims from entering the country.

This work links to the abolitionist project in criticizing in what has been termed carceral feminism-the calling for increased criminal enforcement, punishment, and imprisonment in response to gendered violence, which similarly relies upon racist structures and the violent state in order to save women. I also write about immigration and citizenship as a topic of legal history and as a contemporary concern. Writing for example about how post-911, we saw the consolidation of a new identity category of those who appear Arab, Muslim, or Middle Eastern, dis-identified as citizens and identified as terrorists. Or about the transnational movement of an image associated with immigrants, the running immigrants traffic sign of southern California, which in the U.S. context symbolizes illegal immigration, and it's movement to Germany where in 2016, it appeared on signs and banners saying "Welcome refugees", later manipulated by anti-immigrant groups such as Pegida to say "rape-fugees" not welcome.

And all of this work, what might be the unifying theme, is how the nation narrates itself and patrols its borders in relationship to persons whose identity is considered in some way antithetical to the nation state. But I've also been working on the question of the relation of immigration and indigeneity bringing together legal history and political theory to think through the relationship between a nation of immigrants and settler-colonialism. How immigration laws imagines a way pre-existing indigenous populations through how it thinks about space, time, and membership. How immigration serves as an alibi to settler-colonialism, and how this vision of a nation of immigrants allies all the ways in which the U.S. creation of and manipulation of

borders and bodies in the service of capital accumulation and territorial acquisition, has been deeply violent.

The nation of immigrants idea is one of individual immigrants making the choice to come to a welcoming United States, buttressing the notion of the United States as a political community created through consent of the governed. Dispossession, genocide, forced migration, enslavement, colonialism, imperialism, death, all disappear, covered up by immigrants choosing America. This idea of a nation formed by immigrants voluntarily moving through space also naturalizes the formation of those borders. The national borders of the United States were drawn through pre-existing nations, turning indigenous peoples into immigrants, also erasing colonialism and conquest. While immigration laws imagines present day borders as fixed and people in motion, borders also move, as is said “we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us”. So I am speaking to you from what is both Ohlone territory and what was northern Mexico. What is also naturalized is the idea that immigration starts and ends at the border. That it only needs to concern itself with the problem of managing the movement of those seeking to come, as opposed to thinking about, as we’ve heard from actually both Medhin and Lorgia already, why people are forced to leave their homes. As people say, we are here because you were there, or we are here because you are there. Right, immigration is about a deeply unjust world and the focus needs to be on the role of the United States creating instability and destruction in shaping why people move.

I have devoted a lot of time over the past few years thinking about how Donald Trump mobilized tremendous support for his presidency by equating America First with white supremacy. The borders are to be used in the service of keeping out and kicking out Muslims, Mexicans, Central Americans, rapists, criminals, terrorists, animals, those who do not have what he refers to as “good genes” who should go back to their filthy, shit hole countries. In this vision, the United States is innocent and vulnerable to penetration, and needs the defense of the wall, built in part by Israeli military contractors through Tohono O’odham land. But it is important to think about the ways in which Trump’s verbal articulations only overlay the violence of borders. We see this violence with human caging, forced sterilizations of women in ICE detention, and countless people who have died trying to cross deserts and oceans. The violence of borders appears on the body.

So I’m also interested in my work to think about the violence of liberal approaches to immigration. We can imagine with a new Biden administration, that we might see something similarly to an Obama administration, which relied for deportation priorities on the sorting of immigrants as “good” and “bad”, targeting “felons” not families, as if people with felony convictions don’t have families. And which explained the deterring of refugees from coming to the United States, not through Trumpian invocations of xenophobic racism, we don’t want you, but through the language of humanitarianism. Don’t try to travel here because it is too dangerous a journey. And in order to deter others from making that journey, we will put mothers and children together in family prisons. So I’m gonna end there and I look forward to hearing now from Angela.

>>>MAKANI: Thank you so much Leti. Angela...

>>>ANGELA: I'm very moved by all the presentations thus far. So let me say first of all, I am really happy to be a part of this event, organized by Study and Struggle. And I want to thank Lorgia especially for inviting me. And I really love the focus of this discussion, movement building and transnational freedom struggles, because this is how I might characterize the context of my own work over the last fifty years or even longer.

I'm thinking, I may begin with a story about growing up in the South and imagining that the North was the venue of freedom. That if I only made it to the North, I would be free. Turns out I went to high school in New York, and I discovered what I recognize now as more complex forms of racism, more hidden forms of racism, which I sensed then. And so I began to think about where freedom might be located in the world. And because I had become really interested in French literature, I decided that France was the venue of freedom, of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité". So I traveled to France. And one of the first things that happened to me on my very first trip to France, was that some women from Martinique warned me that I might be mistaken as Algerian by the French police. And that generated an interest in what was happening in Algeria and I eventually participated in some of the demonstrations that were being organized on behalf of the Algerian Revolution. And so later I realized that although I did not find freedom, I didn't find freedom in the North, I didn't find freedom in Europe, but I did find international solidarity. I found the Algerian Revolution. And that has remained with me.

I've been doing work that might be described as abolitionist since the 1970s. The Attica Uprising took place in 1971, when I myself was in jail. And I remember the call for abolition that came from the Attica Brothers, struck me as explaining so much of what I had not been able to explain or understand. The historical process for example, the connection between the putative abolition of slavery and what needed to happen with respect to prisons. I think I've always been interested in processes that emphasize and popularize historical consciousness. I studied French literature, and I studied philosophy, but always in historical context. And I say that because I think historical consciousness is what we lack in this country. There are white people who still think that because they or their immediate families were not directly involved in slavery, that they're completely exonerated, that they bear no responsibility. They have no idea what historical responsibility means. Capitalism, especially capitalist ideology in its neoliberal form, benefits from this historical amnesia. Because the temporality that capitalism urges is a perpetual present. It is one of the reasons we find ourselves trying to address problems now that should've been addressed over 150 years ago.

And it's also, it seems to me, why we end up calling for reforms over and over and over and over again. If one looks at the history of incarceration, and the history of policing, one discovers that there have been calls for reforms throughout the histories of these institutions. As a matter of fact, the calls for reforms have constituted a central element of the history of these institutions. And as such, have become the glue that has held these institutions together. And of course, even as these reforms have been instituted, both incarceration and policing have only grown more racist, more repressive, more violent. And this is why I was so struck by the call for abolition, a radical alternative. And when I say radical, I don't know how many times I've made this point, I sound like a broken record to myself, that etymological meaning of radical is "root". So abolition allows us to get to the root of the problem, it enables us to escape from being trapped by the same framework, and the same footprint, so we don't look at

policing and incarceration as discrete institutions that must perpetually remain at the core of our attempts to make human community.

So I see abolition as a revolutionary perspective. It asks us to understand and resist not only the particular institution we're concerned with, and of course we've talked about policing, we've talked about prisons, and Lorgia has talked about educational institutions, the university. But it asks us to address all of the conditions and forces that enable the continued existence of the institution. So we won't simply add the adjective "humane" to the name of an institution that is so deeply flawed, so structurally racist, so profoundly influenced by heteropatriarchal ideologies, that we would have to say, well we know policing is racist, so let's struggle for a more humane racist policing. We know incarceration is inherently class-biased, inherently violent, so let's struggle for a more humane class-biased, a more humane violence, a more humane wall, a more humane ICE. And so I've come to the conclusion, both as a result of my scholarly work and my activist work, is that we have to enlarge our analytical framework if we want to avoid being trapped on this treadmill of reform. We have to ask questions about connections and relations, relationalities, in other words we have to do a feminist analysis. We don't ask the question, what can we do to make an institution that has already demonstrated that it can never fundamentally change, how do we make that institution change. But rather we ask whether, what are the contextual conditions and surrounding social forces that need to shift in order to ensure that we don't need to rely on these institutions in order to survive, and in order to flourish. Therefore we need schools, not jails, but we don't need schools that try to become jails, which is what we have now. And I would say that this is what we have come to call an intersectional approach.

And the part played by feminism, anti-racist, anti-capitalist feminism, is not only to ensure that we keep gender within our frame, but it is to ensure that our analysis is not lazy. That we don't shy away from complexity, that we realize that abolition involves both the negative process of overturning and disestablishing, but also and more importantly the reconstructive process of creating something new. Not just one new thing, but addressing all of the enabling conditions. So I guess I conclude by saying, and I did a webinar with Leti not too long ago on abolition feminism, and the meaning of abolition feminism, and I would end by saying that abolition needs feminism, it needs anti-racist, anti-capitalist feminism. But feminism needs abolition, otherwise it becomes the kind of carceral feminism that Leti was talking about. And I think that abolition has to be placed within an internationalist framework. Let's not only think about the U.S., but let's think about Brazil, let's think about Palestine, let's think about Europe, let's think about Australia. And with that I think I'll conclude.

>>>MAKANI: Well thank you so much, and thank you everyone. It's good to hear from each of you. I have a couple of questions and they're gonna be a little different I think from listening to everyone. And I have been reflecting a lot on the fact that this is the 65th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, and for many folks a turning point and understanding of themselves as international, not the birth but certainly an important milestone in how many of us thought about how our movements were connected and all these kinds of things. And I also think about this question and this makes me think about something you brought up Lorgia, in terms of these communities of rebellion, this idea of sort of de-bordering and resisting. And when I was listening to Angela and actually all of you talk about the ways in which we are, we continue to

replicate these oppressive models, even sometimes in the ways we organize, as people trying to translate what does it mean to organize from this place of freedom, from liberation. And so I was curious if you wouldn't mind talking a little bit about how you see these communities of rebellion, like what does that look like? And that sort of process of, of education or maybe un-educating, or dis-educating, to disrupt all that. What does that look like?

>>>LORGIA: You know, you hit the nail right on the head. I mean, the process requires a lot of unlearning and quite a bit of, quite a bit of mislearning that we have all done and a lot of the work that we're doing, all of us around this table, but also a lot of people watching is precisely trying to unlearn. I think, for me, I think that the work is exactly is how Angela was describing. It has to do with building and with being able to and willing, having both the fortitude, the amount of hoping that needs to happen. And when I say hoping, I'm not talking about sitting with the rosary and praying, but rather believing that the kind of work that you're putting energy into is going to actually create effective changes. Because although, what is the point of doing the work we're doing. But I think for me, when it comes to learning, when it comes to creating communities that are, that are hopeful, that are feminist interventions into the world what we are choosing to create, not the world that we are inheriting. It has everything to do with community and with transnational community, with sitting with each other together.

I think for those of us who are scholars, and who are trained as scholars, we've been trained to believe that, especially if you are a woman of color, that they can all be one of us. That can all be one of us in the room, that they can all be one of us in the classroom, that they can all be one of us teaching this particular subject, and that is how we've been socialized and this is how the institutions operate, and this is how they maintain this exclusion, this violence, because it is both oppressive and isolating. And I think in the classroom with students that is replicated in the ideas of we found something in the archive, and therefore you own it and now you own history and it legitimates you. And I think that the work that I am hoping to do and the work I am trying to do with my students and colleagues, is to think about learning as communal, think about learning as a process that can only happen if we all together put a little bit and think together. And we all know this, we all know that we learn from each other, this is why we're here as a group and it's not an individual lecture. Because we know that we learn from each other and we learn from bouncing off ideas.

Somehow, our educational systems do not reward that. We reward the individual paper, we reward the individual book, we reward the individual intervention and the awards and the what not. And I think that one of the main goals that we should have as educators is to not only abolish that idea but invite collaborations and invite unlikely collaborations of multiple people cuz this is how we learn but his is also is how we can grow. This is also how, this is a very practical way in which we can build this kind of transnational communities that we're striving to build. We can't build those by staying in our corners, we have to talk to each other and we have to find that space. And that space needs to also be practical. We have to think of things like childcare and caring for the elderly, and so on. If we don't have those resources, if we don't have that as part of what we're doing, then we can't move forward. It is not taking into account that we're dealing with humans. And sitting here with you all, my Dad is in the hospital right now, so how can my head is thinking what is my father doing, and that is human process. And I think for all the work that we do, we have to acknowledge that we all come from multiplicities

of experiences, of responsibilities, and as we build together we have to take all of this into account. And that's how we grow and that's how we build. And that's the kind of university I want to be part of, one that takes into account that maybe I'm gonna need babysitter to teach, and that maybe my students are going to need a meal in order to sit in the classroom. And all of these things need to be part of the equation, communally, for all of us.

>>>MAKANI: Thank you for that that. We're gonna take a minute for the interpretation to change...And then I'm coming to Medhin. I have a question for you about storytelling...yah, we're off script right now. We're in it. So here we go...Jon you give me the high sign and we'll start rocking. Got it...Alright, so and thank you so much for our interpreters, one you all are lit, so much beautiful energy, and two we just appreciate this and appreciate the opportunity for as many people to be a part of this. That it's possible and you all are making it possible, so thank you.

So Medhin, you are a storyteller. You're a person who has used a lot of different media to talk to people about these issues. You know, to take it outside, right to where people are. So I'm curious, I'd love for you to talk a little bit about the importance of story and transforming and helping to imagine a difference, but also to feel. Like I got a chance to watch your beautiful film, *Asmarina*, thank you for that, so beautiful. And I also was sort of reflecting myself, like when we the first time I imagined myself free. And it was really in reading a poem and watching a picture and you know, and you know, that was sort of like the things. I'd love for you talk a little about your process and how you see this contributing to how we think about abolition and freedom and liberation and why you decided to embark on this as one of your tools.

>>>MEDHIN: Thank you for this question, and also thank you for watching my film. I'm always appreciative of when anybody who watches and listens. My storytelling, I don't tend to call myself that because most of all, and first of all, I consider myself to be a story listener, that's what I've done. I always joke, but not even so much, that I started talking at 12, before that I just listen. I was raised in an environment and a space, Europe/Italy/Milan/Eritrean and Ethiopian community, where all that was said about me, or anybody like me, was said by somebody that was nothing like me. And that came to me from all fronts. When it came for me to establish my identity as an Eritrean, when it came to me, for me to establish myself as a lesbian. When it came to me to start speaking up and asking for our rights and so I simply listen. And I try to give back. What I think is important is to switch the perspective. Everything I read about colonialism, about any part of history, in school, in high school, and university, was either very poorly written or non-existent.

So various parts of my, of the puzzle that is me, were missing. The pieces were missing. And I always also had the feeling, that okay, I am part of this community and I am gonna live and express myself in this space over here. And then I'm also part of this community, and I'm gonna feel and express myself separated. But I'm a person, I have to find a way to fuse all of me into one. And I also am very, very interested in shedding light on what I tend to call the space in between, this space, we are all a multiplicity of things and experiences and anything. Even things that are not visible or recognizable at first sight. We are not just black women, we're so much more. But when you're part of multiple communities, there's sort of an exclusion that can happen. When you're the daughter of immigrants in Europe, anywhere in Europe, really the

risk is that to be left out from one community and the other one. But there's so, it exists, a space that's in between, that's already full of so many types of people from all backgrounds and experiences. And I've always tried to do that, whether through folk music, through film, through photography, through activism, to put in connection people. With themselves, but also with each other. And, you know, I consider myself a filmmaker, but I did photography and music for a long time as well, so I tend to follow the idea and then the media comes to me. I use the media, I use the media that is necessary to tell a specific story, it could be audio, completely audio without images, it really depends on what the story is. I give it the respect it deserves.

>>>MAKANI: Thank you for that, I'm glad I asked the question cuz I was curious, I don't know about everybody else. Leti, I have a question for you. As I was listening to you talk, and it doesn't matter how many times you hear the story, you are never desensitized to the horror and the just, just the, just the depth of all the things that this brings up. I mean I know as someone who's spent some time at the U.S.-Mexico as an observer, and things like that, you just never, ever get to the point where you're callous about that. And I appreciate you telling me stories. You also are a law professor, and you also think about policy, which is another way in which borders get created, right through the law. And so we have these, these places of enforcement, of terror, and all these things, and like you were talking about, sort of the bloodless version, right, through policy. I wanted to get you to talk a little bit more about that, but from an abolitionist perspective. So when you think about, here's the way we understand law right now, right, and then, and then here's the way we think about, about law in this feminist abolitionist framework.

>>>LETI: Okay, unmuting myself. That's such a fascinating question. How to think about law in a feminist abolitionist framework when essentially the law enacts violence, right. So can the tools be used, right, to deconstruct the master's house is the question. So many people go to law school because they're really interested in trying to change society. And one of the things I think that's really frustrating is, people realize that the way that how legal changes have been traditionally tried to be accomplished don't necessarily tackle systemic questions or utopian visions or what would really be the kinds of abolitionist reimaginations, right. So, I mean essentially law is set up as a process either of band aid, of trying to help individuals navigate a system and ensuring that this individual gets a particular benefit through providing these services, or it's trying to challenge policies and practices but it's within the confines of what is set up as the law. And what the law is, is legislation that is created by some purportedly democratically elected body, right, and we know all the ways in terms of voter disenfranchisement and gerrymandering and redistricting. Yesterday the Supreme Court heard oral arguments from the Trump administration is trying to take away undocumented immigrants from being counted as "people" for purposes of apportionment in the census, right. So, I don't think it went very well for the administration which is, which is good.

But the, so the way the system is set up is you have these purportedly representative bodies which really are not representative bodies, right, which create these laws, and then you have the judiciary which is supposed to interpret them. And we know how the Trump administration has essentially packed the Court with members of this group called the Federalist Society. We have the most reactionary judicial system in the United States that we've

ever had, right. Maybe going back to what people refer to as the “Lochner” era, which is basically this era of pure economic rights. And we have the executive which enforces the laws, and here in terms of the national scene, we have had this monster in office. So it’s very difficult to think about entering that path and trying to do something different. What I think many people have done is to try to create alternative spaces and alternative ways of working which are deeply holistic. They’re community driven, where people say I am a lawyer, I am a lawyer for the community, the community will help me figure out what it is that needs to be done. I will not identify myself as a working as “x” issue because that particular issue may not be one that the community articulates as most important to them. So the lawyer in some sense is serving community organizing. And where the legally trained person makes themselves available to try any kind of tactic, whether it’s filing something in a court or it’s protesting with a sign or it’s engaging in public shaming of an official or it’s babysitting, right.

I’m reminded of work that a dear friend Julie Sue who’s now the Labor Commissioner for the State of California did. There was a large group of us who were representing about 70 people from Thailand who had been brought to the United States. They were working in a condition of indentured servitude, sewing garments for some of the nations’ largest manufacturers and retailers. And once they were liberated from this enslavement, basically Julie who’s an attorney, helped people buy shampoo, figured out this is how you use the public transit system to the extent it exists in Los Angeles, this is how you open a bank account, right. And these kinds of ways of dealing with people as people, as humans, right, that are very different than the traditional attorney-client relationship. Anyway, so I can go on but I won’t. And just say that there are a lot of really progressive, revolutionary groups often times associated with rebellious lawyering or independent workers centers which are doing this kind of work, which are deeply important.

>>>MAKANI: Thank you for that. And also just want to acknowledge all of the folks who are out here thinking about this from an abolitionist framework who are coloring outside the lines. And I know I wrote a book now 20 years ago, which is a textbook on community policy, and just all the examples of when regular people get involved. And this turns me to Angela who gets to close us out in a way. And that is, you know, we both have the same color hair so you won’t mind me saying veteran in the most beautiful way, that so many people are, we’re in this place where we are, it’s easier for us to connect. More organizers are traveling. And we’re trying, and many, there’s a lot of organizers watching this conversation. So I was wondering if you wouldn’t mind sharing your thoughts about what is it that we should be thinking about now, in terms of building this feminist, abolitionist, transnational, anti-capital, like all these things, this intersection. What are some of the lessons that organizers should be reflecting on now as we’re trying to build this work out?

Can you make sure, unmute yourself cuz we want to hear this.

>>>ANGELA: (laughs) Thanks for reminding me, I always forget to unmute. Well, you know, first of all, this is really an exciting moment. And you know, as much pain and suffering as we are collectively experiencing in the world as a result of the pandemic and of the disparate impact on communities of color, poor communities. This is a revolutionary moment, and I’m really, I’m

really happy as a “veteran” to be able to witness it. To be able to recognize that the work that we may have done 50 years ago, really has made a difference.

And, Leti I was thinking about the fact that you were talking about revolutionary lawyering, and I was just on a call the other day with the Abolitionist Law Center. The fact that we have such a thing that is called the Abolitionist Law Center, that is directed by an amazing man, Robert Saleem Holbrook, who spent I don't know, 25 years in prison. We're recognizing that a lot of the knowledge that has been really important and helpful during this period comes from unlikely places. You know, we tend to forget that, that particularly in the context of mass incarceration, the prison has been the venue for some of the most interesting ideas and knowledge that has been produced by people who have been in prison sometimes for, I don't know, 40-50 years. I was just watching a film the other day called *Since I've Been Down*, which is an incredible film about the ways in which prisoners in this prison in Washington created, created the kind of university Lorgia that I think you would be interested in. Because, and the kind of storytelling you would be interested in Medhin. Because they weren't allowed to have a university produce courses for them, they decided that they would learn how to create a curriculum, and they would learn how to teach. And it's the most amazing thing. One of the, one of the young, one of the men, said when I'm teaching I almost feel free. And that, that, that comment has haunted me since I saw the film.

Yah, so I think that we're, we're seeing developments and processes that we could never have really imagined. Years ago, when we were talking about how to popularize abolition, it would've been impossible to predict that at one point, there would be huge massive demonstrations during a time of a global pandemic when people are counseled to say inside, but no they went out and protested against racism at their own peril. Using slogans like “defund the police”. So, I would, I guess I would say, there's so much I want to say but, I think that I'm gonna go back to the internationalist framing of this conversation and how important it is to create ties and recognize that the U.S. is not the only place where important work is happening. Even those of us who are opposed to the systemic structures of racism, government, and so forth, we sometimes forget that we have not extricated ourselves from this sense that the U.S. is the center of the world. And we therefore don't look towards other parts of the world for inspiration, for knowledge. Racist police crimes are probably, the country that has experienced more racist police violence than any other country is Brazil. Or we can even look at Nigeria and the struggles that are unfolding against the, what is it called, Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Struggles in South Africa. I, a young man, a young boy, 16 year old, by the name of Nathan Julius, who had down syndrome, was killed by the police in Soweto not long ago. And so they're dealing with structural racism, even though all of the actors are black, even though the police are black. They're still dealing with a system that was created during the apartheid regime but retains the structural elements of racism even though all of the actors are black.

And this is something that we should definitely learn from in this country because there's still those people who say well we need more black police, right. You know we need more black people here or there and then things will automatically get better. But that's, we know that diversity, diversity doesn't fundamentally change the structures. Yet, yet, almost well, the, the, almost all of the major institutions now have their diversity, what is it called, diversity inclusion and what is the other one? Anyway. If the structure remains the same it's

gonna continue to do the violent and racist work it did before. So, yah, I think that we should, we should really emphasize the internationalist dimension of our work. I'm glad Makani you mentioned a 1955 in Bandung, you mentioned the anniversary of Bandung. I think it's important to be inspired by these efforts in the past to create, to create international solidarity but not only international solidarity, and I think I'll end with this.

Since we've been talking so much about abolition, and we're also talking about borders, I think this is the time when we begin to imagine a planet where the nation-state does not constitute the primary form of human community. That we can imagine ourselves as global citizens, we can imagine a world without borders. And if we, if we imagine what we want, what we think we need, and then you know, one day there's a possibility that it will be an important, a part of an agenda for change. Nobody ever imagined that abolition would help constitute agendas for change in our lifetimes. And I think that the, the work that is being done in Mississippi, I'm so happy to be a part of this Study and Struggle conversation. We need knowledge, we need struggle. That, that these are the formations that will not only allow us to imagine a different future but encourage us to do the work now that will definitely lead to change tomorrow, whenever tomorrow comes.

>>>MAKANI: Thank you, thank you for that. I do want to check in, we're gonna do, we have seven more minutes. We're gonna do an interpreter switch. Let them catch up...And alright, we're all set and that question just in, so we had one question that hasn't been answered. And so this will be a lightning round, of books or resources that folks would recommend that they check out in their journey to be radical, free, revolutionary, abolitionist....transformative folk. Whatchu got fam, what would you like to share with people that you think, and we want to say watch the film *Asmarina* please, that's a good one. We have Lorgia's book, which we mentioned and is in the bio, and we have lots of books by Angela, but I want to give folks an opportunity to share any other resources that they think are important for folks to have.

>>>LETI: Can I mention another book by Angela?

>>>MAKANI: Yes!

>>>LETI: This is the forthcoming *Abolition.Feminism.Now.* from Angela Davis, Gina Dent, Erica Meiners, and Beth Ritchie.

>>>MAKANI: Yes, yes, what an all star lineup, look at that too. Yes. Say the name one more time Leti.

>>>LETI: It's *Abolition.Feminism.Now.*

>>>MAKANI: Thank you.

>>>ANGELA: Know we're desperately trying to finish it. (laughs)

>>>MAKANI: Well we know it's forthcoming and we'll be anxiously, anxiously awaiting it, yes.

>>>ANGELA: Also Haymarket is publishing it.

>>>MAKANI: Hey, all the more talk about, cuz we're talkin about a free publishing company not one that's caught up in the corporate trappings, but a non-profit committed to the movement. We love Haymarket. Any other resources that folks want to share?

>>>LORGIA: I think for those of us who are teaching, in whatever spaces that we're teaching in, whether it's in the university or outside the institutions of learning. This book, *Insubordinate Spaces*, by Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz has been a good accompaniment for me. And I highly recommend it when, if you're trying to create a learning experience that's communal and that is in the spirit of the conversation we've been having.

>>>MAKANI: Thank you for that. Medhin, do you have anything you'd like to share and that's it.

>>>MEDHIN: I have many. First one that comes to mind is *Black Italians* by an Italian writer whose name is Mauro Valeri. And another is from another professor, a colleague, her name is [Need names]...There's so much, so much, literature. These are just some.

>>>ANGELA: Okay I have, let's see. This is a book called *Decarcerating Disability* and it's by Liat Ben-Moshe. It's an amazing book that addresses the ways in which the disabled community has struggled against and sometimes successfully, against incarceration. And how historically the incarceration of disabled people has pre-figured and helped to create the conditions for mass incarceration. It's a great book. And then another one that I just recently read by Adrienne Marie Brown, do you all know her?

>>>MAKANI: Yes we do.

>>>ANGELA: And it's *Emergent Strategies*. And I've done a couple of calls with her that were absolutely amazing. I think, she's also interested in turning activism into something that's pleasurable. So that we don't have to think about activism as this you know, always really heavy kind of process where we don't have fun, where we don't experience pleasure or joy. So Adrienne Marie Brown.

>>>MAKANI: Well I love that, and I love the fact that so many of our loved ones got put up and quoted in this lightening round of resources. Thank you for that, and I know AMB would be thrilled. And then, and we also have this wonderful, one of the legacies of abolition is more attention to joy. People talking about joy in the work. People talking about, you know, you know dancing and singing. In fact Adrienne Marie Brown and I will facilitate and one of the ways people would make decisions is we would have a dance for each decision. So I love the fact that all of them, that's part of the legacy of abolition because we're trying to break out and rethink our bodies in meetings, our brains, our thoughts, our engagement. So I want to thank each and every one of you for this. You know we thought 90 minutes is a long time but it's not. We're here, we're here at the end. Some of the titles are coming up, thank you for posting them. We'll also make sure folks get copies of it. I would be remiss as the co-chair of the

Highlander Board, not to talk about Highlander as a resource for decolonizing education. And also just grateful to everyone who joined us, grateful to Haymarket Books for always making this space in our brains and our hearts and online to have these conversations. Again, shout out to People's Advocacy Institute, who will receive donations. Thank you to all who donated. And than you to our interpreters and all of the wonderful folks who put this together including John and other folks on the team. And with that, unless I hear anything else, I think we're about to close. Yes, oh yes, shout out to Chandra ___Mohanty. All the homies are getting shout outs today. We're very excited about that, very excited about that. Thank you, and thank you everyone.

>>>LORGIA: Thank you Makani for getting us all together and organizing. It's lovely to meet you.

>>>MAKANI: It's awesome and I actually, you guys pulled this together. And Lorgia, and Charlotte, and all the wonderful people who put this together. And I'm gonna stop recording.