

Critical Conversation #4: International

December 1, 2021

Dan Berger: Welcome, everyone to our fourth and final Study and Struggle Critical Conversation. Our event is entitled Abolition Must be International. Huge thanks to Haymarket Books for hosting this event with us and all of their work on the backend to make this event possible. Thank you also to our captioner and our ASL interpretation services this evening. My name is Dan Berger and I'll be the moderator for the evening.

Study and Struggle organizes toward abolition in Mississippi through political education, mutual aid and community organizing. Each Fall we put together a bilingual Spanish and English curriculum with discussion questions and reading materials as well as provide financial support to more than 100 participants and radical study groups inside and outside prisons in Mississippi.

And we also make the curriculum fully online for other study groups to use as they see fit. Finally, we come together for online conversations, like this one, hosted by Haymarket Books. For our Fall 2021 4-month curriculum, we have borrowed an augmented slightly Ruth Wilson Gilmore's argument that abolition is about presence not absence. It has to be green, in order to be green, it has to be red. And in order for it to be red, it has to be international.

Today, we're going to be tackling what it means for abolition to be international. And we have a truly fantastic lineup of panelists tonight. I'm going to let them introduce themselves in a moment. If you have seen previous critical conversations this fall, you will be familiar with our format. One of our panelists on the call Felix Sitthivong is incarcerated in Washington State. Another is Jaan Laaman, a former prisoner released after 37 years inside.

We are so grateful that both of them were able to participate tonight via recording. We regret that Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz is not able to join us tonight as she is having a minor procedure. We are wishing her lots of healing.

And we are so very delighted and grateful to have Jalil Muntaqim and Harsha Walia. And one final thing, we should have a little bit of time at the end for Q&A with our panelists. So please, put questions in the chat as they come up. And we'll try to ask them before the event comes to a close.

To kick things off, I'm going to have our two live panelists here with us tonight introduce themselves. And then, we'll hear from Felix and Jaan in their videos, as well. Jalil, let's start with you.

Jalil Muntaqim: Thank you, Dan, it's a pleasure to be with all of you to share in this momentous occasion. I think it's good we're raising these questions and issues as abolitionists. I'm Jalil Muntaqim, former member, a veteran member of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army. I did nearly fifty years in prison - 1971, when I was arrested, to 2020 when I was released on October 6th. I've been out almost a year now.

I am the co-founder of the National Jericho Movement initiated back in 1998, I'm also the initiator of the most recent International Tribunal held in New York City on October 22nd through the 25th that resulted in a guilty verdict of the United States having engaged in genocides against Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.

I'm the author of two books, *We Are the Liberators* and *Escaping the Prism and Fading to Black*. And I am now a resident of Rochester, New York and a community organizer for Citizen Action of New York.

Dan: Thank you so much, Jalil, it's such an honor to be with you tonight. Harsha?

Harsha Walia: Thank you all. Greetings, good evening. It's such an honor to be here with you, Jalil, with all of you here today to listen from our incarcerated comrades alongside, as well. And thank you to Haymarket, thank you, Dan, thank you to our ASL interpreters for all of your work today. My name is Harsha, I'm on the unceded, unsundered territories of Indigenous peoples who continue to steward and have jurisdictions on the lands I'm speaking to you from today. And I've been a community organizer and also an author in migrant justice struggles. Particularly, in organizing and thinking around a framework of decolonization, anti imperialism and anticapitalism.

And very much seeing the synergy of the ways in which the border is a carceral site of governance, detention centers and prisons are prisms of each other. And thinking about abolition, thinking about the need to dismantle all forms of carceral control, including immigration enforcement, the border itself, and imperialism that gives rise to forced displacement and forced migration, right? Why are people forcibly on the move? Why are so many people increasingly being displaced from their lands, from their communities and facing multiple forms of genocide and now, of course, vaccine apartheid on top of that.

So it's such an honor to be here, Jalil, to be in conversation with you, Dan, with you and all of you all so very much support this conversation. Thank you for hosting it. And for all of the good work that you all do.

Dan: Great. Thank you both. Now, we're going to hear from Felix and Jaan.

Felix Sitthivong: To me, internationalism and practice has to begin by making forms of resistance accessible and palatable to those most impacted, right, by those actually on the front lines. And this actually needs to happen locally, [inaudible] once again, academia has this habit of always needing to label something, define it, and somehow theorize meaning in the way that can only be practiced only dogmatically right?

So when we're talking about terms like internationalism, opposition, gentrification, mutual aid, capitalism, right? All of these are examples of terms that those of us in the know are not only readily able to discuss and define, but also find ourselves defending as if, like, our status and reputation is dependent on us being in the know, right? Some sort of like academic hierarchy and by and the states of organizing circles. And honestly, I don't think front line folk, you know, actually care about these quote unquote terms and theories right?

And I feel that until we're able to truly center the voices and needs of those most impacted and marginalized and ensure that these theories of struggle and resistance are not only palatable but practical, they're always going to remain theories that are void of practice

To me, like internationalism in practice means engaging people in a way that not only shows how all of our issues are interconnected, but how our resistance is interdependent, and so is our liberation. To me, this is solidarity in spirit and practice.

Solidarity means meeting people where they're at and be willing to adapt right to provide people with an agency it takes to encourage them to re-imagine the world where, you know, we all are valued, you know, we're able to dream of, you know?

Jaun Laaman: I became active as an activist in the civil rights struggle, Black Power Struggle and the anti-Vietnam War struggle. Those are all I mean there was that happening right here in the United States, in the streets of Washington and other towns and cities all around.

But they were focused on, you know what, the empire, what the USA imperialism empire was doing in other countries and to other peoples and nations within this country. Now I want to there's much more to be said about that, but I want to come to like what I think of as extremely necessary to understand and to make clear and to put forth by all of us. And that's first of all that when we speak about internationalism within the context of us living here in the, you know, entity of the United States of America, it must mean first and foremost, support for the native people.

You know who, who were on this land long before, you know, European colonialists and British and French and other empires came over here and started stealing the land, stealing the resources. And most worst of all, of course, committing genocide against all the people that were living here.

I mean, there are so many, you know, native peoples and nations that are totally out of existence. I mean, 100 hundred percent genocide was committed against them. So that definitely has to be the beginning part of it. Secondly, well, another very similar and important thing is understanding of and support for the Puerto Rican people for the independence of their nation. I mean, Puerto Rico is a country and a people that has actually nothing to do with the United States except the United States invaded them in the late 1800s and conquered them and took them over and has never let them go since then.

The third point of this that's also extremely important to us is for us to understand and support the black liberation struggle within the United States. I mean, certainly we support, you know, struggles within Africa and so forth also, but within the United States, because, you know, enslaved Africans brought to this place that now it's called the United States of America, where, you know, a major part of the reality and the work force that actually created what became United States and and those people enslaved people stolen from their lands, you know, brought over here, abused and murdered and and worked and the rest of it.

And then after the end of official slavery in this country, you know, the the continuing. You know, discrimination, abuse, injustice that's committed against black people. You know, I mean, to this very day, you know, I'm sure nobody has to speak too many words to everyone participating in listening today that, you know, black people, you know, cops are them and everything else going on here. The injustice and abuses and discrimination that's going on that this has to be part of our overall understanding and somehow part of our struggle. And this is internationalism.

Felix: So, I mean, to me, when we talk about abolition and a world without prisons, or police within an international framework, I think we have to begin by acknowledging how policing is rooted in protecting the upper class and the commodities, right?

Prison is where you discard any perceived threat to their welfare to vanish. And, you know, in some cases, policing and prison is actually the source of that wealth. So as long as society accepts the global system of capitalism as the norm, instead of rejecting its principles and the root of these oppressive institutions and institutions will not only continue to exist, they're going to thrive being fueled by capitalistic greed and discrimination, and the cycle just keeps going on and on and on. Right extract and exploit, protect, and discard. Now this is the legacy of capitalism

When we begin to resist and dismantle this system on a global scale? There's always going to be more oppressive institutions that are in place to maintain this oppressive system, and the system is what actually legitimizes institutions in a reciprocal and symbiotic relationship.

Dan: OK. So -- we just heard it from Felix. And I just want to say a sentence about him because he didn't introduce himself. He jumped right in, as is, I think is customary of Felix. But he is an organizer and adviser for the Asian-Pacific Islander Cultural Awareness Group and through APICAG which exists throughout Washington prison system, he's organized immigration, social justice and youth outreach forums and designed Asian-American studies courses, an intersectional feminism 101 class and an antidomestic violence program.

So we heard from Felix, and we also heard from Jaan Laaman who was released just last summer after 37 years inside the federal prison system, and is a long time, as you heard, anti-imperialist organizer.

So I want to turn it back over to you, Jalil and Harsha to respond to what Felix and Jaan gave us about what internationalism means and what it sort of requires of us.

Jalil: Go ahead, Harsha.

Harsha: All right. Thank you. Thank you for playing those clips, Dan, and for having those incredibly powerful insights as part of this conversation. Thank you to Felix, thank you to Jaan. Yeah, it's, there's nothing more that I could say other than, you know, I strongly concur with what's been said. And I think, maybe if I can riff off a few things, you know, in terms of the point about our theory needing to be relevant to communities and resistance to folks on the front

lines and the concerns, the very legitimate concerns about academia needing to constantly reinvent terminology, that's all very real.

I also think, you know, there's different ways of thinking about theory. And there are no social movements that have not produced our own theories that have not produced our own ways of understanding and engaging with the world.

And when I think of internationalism, I very much think of the ways in which that is a concept which emerges from communities and resistance, right?

Internationalism, whether it's the reality of so-called diaspora communities, we understand that our lives are interconnected with other parts of the world. And we see our struggles and liberation is connected with other parts of the world. An injury to one is an injury to all. Or we see the connections between domestic and global genocidal warfare. And of course, this was consistently continuing but, of course, at the height of Black Power and Red Power movements in the '60s and '70s, that's one of the most inspiring moments, is those transnational solidarities and alliances of how we understand our struggles and our solidarities as bound up.

That this is not *just* a theory – that we understand the violence of the system is not an aberration, it is taking place across borders, very deliberately and targeting Black and Brown and Indigenous communities and poor communities and oppressed communities.

And the other piece I wanted to think through and very much echoing what was said about, you know, really that the foundation of internationalism is to really not create that distinction between local and global. Again, there are two sides of the same coin, what happens locally happens globally, what happens globally happens locally. And also, that what we understand to be the local is in, itself, a form of international struggle.

Because of, especially because of centering Indigenous sovereignty. The occupation of the lands means the country we're in is a settler colonial slave state, right? And that is the history of genocide, of enslavement, of settler colonialism and empire. So internationalism has to be understood. Not just as something that's quote unquote over there, but something that is also in these geographies over here.

I mean, the last thing I'll say is the piece about our resistance needing to be interdependent, and I just really wanted to uplift and amplify that, right, that this is in as much as the violences are transnational, our resistance is interdependent. And we see that, for example, in resistance to the border wall, an Israeli company is operating both at the US/Mexico border and also operating and occupying Palestine. This is one example of a global movement that is part of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions campaign to tackle and to dismantle Elbit systems as part of the Zionist occupation.

Or if we look at the ways in which resistance is interdependent from Ferguson to Palestine in fighting against tear gas canisters that the US is employing both here and and funding in Palestine, or that drone warfares that, you know, the drone warfare that continues by the US government, including under Joe Biden that is bombing Yemen, for example, and bombing Somalia and bombing Pakistan, that those drones are also being fought in Tedonionan lands

whose communities are broken apart by the US border walls and who are fighting militarization and drone surveillance on their communities.

So the ways in which, in which violence is transnational and migrates and moves, I think, also, the ways resistance is interdependent is a beautiful way of thinking about internationalism and thinking about the liberation of all peoples.

Jalil: Actually, I really like the way you explained that. Making the connections between internationalism and various fronts of fighting US imperialism. And the apartheid system of Zionism. However, I had to take another approach to this matter. And my approach is this here, we -- when I say we, I'm talking about the American populous are guilty of genocides. We have engaged, we have been complicit with the United States' engagement of imperialism, both nationally, on international platform. International plane, arena. And because of that, the international community is waiting for the American population to wake up. To wake up and find, and find their own humanity. One of the things we have lost in the last 500 years is the American populous has lost their humanity.

They have engaged in the processes of imperialism, of genocides for 500 years. And the American population for the most part has been complicit. They have been sending their young people to these wars, imperialist wars and adhering to the indoctrination of what the Monroe Doctrine, right? And the exceptionalism of the United States.

And so, therefore, in my opinion, in terms of internationalism, we, American population, must become *internationalists*, right? In understanding our common humanity with the rest of the world.

Another thing that we have to look at in terms of this idea of internationalism is the philosophy, the aberrant philosophy of white supremacy, right? We have to address that issue, why? Because it is an aberrant philosophy, right? White people, any people that believe themselves to be superior to any other people on the planet is suffering from a -- what I thought was a neurosis. Right? Psychologically, an aberration. I once spoke to a psychiatrist about that. And I said that, you know, white people suffer from a trauma, from their own trauma of white supremacy. And that they are neurotic in understanding of themselves being superior to any other people on the planet. However, the psychiatrist said, no, he corrected me and she said, they're psychotic. And I said what do you mean by psychotic? And she said, because of the degree of violence and mass murder that they committed around the world. That's a psychosis.

All right. And so, what we find is that the United States, particularly the United States, and more importantly, white people in the United States are suffering from a psychosis, right, they believe they can, in fact, kill people of Color with impunity.

Now, the other thing I wanted to address is this matter of abolitionists, right? The abolitionist movement more often than not, I think, really evolved from Angela Davis when she established Critical Resistance - keep in mind Critical Resistance was formed in 1998, the same year that we organized the Jericho Movement in support of political prisoners. But now, today, in my thinking, in regards to what needs to be abolished, remember, abolition means to to abolish,

putting an end to something. In my thinking, we need to put an end to everything anti-Black, anti-Brown, anti-Indigenous people. We need to abolish everything that is harmful, that degrades, dehumanizes, and diminishes the value of Black, Brown and Indigenous people. If it does that, abolish it. And white people have to take the front line in doing so and abolish it. White supremacy is white people's problem. Black people, Brown people and Indigenous people's problem is when they try to impose that on us. That's why we need to fight back. Yes, Dan?

Dan: I think that's a great segue to our next video clip, and then we're going to come back to you and Harsha for more. But I think that point about linking critical resistance and Jericho founding is really important. And I know the next video we're going to hear is Felix and Jaan reflecting on prison in this context. I want to see if that segues and then we'll come back to you after that.

Jalil: Thank you.

Felix: The question to me was just like, how attached are we to terms, right? How attached are we to certain definitions of you know, that we give these different practices and how we're not willing to adapt and not willing to speak the language of others. And I'm not talking about literally language, I'm talking about in a way that people can understand. These are things that always come up for me when we're talking about abolition work.

Jaan: We're locked up for four for so-called political crimes or acts against the government. You know, things like being charged with sedition, trying to overthrow the government or at least stop them from doing some horrible things like supporting a puppet but organizing the prisons.

Let me just kind of broadly say this, too. And this is certainly true for all political prisoners. You know, in captivity right now, as well as, you know, going into the past when when we I mean, it's a horrible reality, anybody in prison will tell you that most of the kind of political prisoners are thrown into some of the harshest, worst, most locked down prisons around the country. Control units and various horrendous seg units and all that. But when we went in there and this is as true for the sisters as it is for the for the for the men in captivity, when we step, you know what's going on behind those walls? I mean, certainly we had to kind of gain our bearings and see what's what and whose who and all that kind of stuff. But prison and the struggle behind the walls is just another front within the overall struggle or revolutionary, you know, reality activism that goes on.

It's just another front. Now it's a very limiting front and it's a very dangerous front in many ways, but it's just another front. I mean, it's not like any different, except for, you know, day to day conditions and realities.

But I mean, that's the work that we do, the organizing that's done the the political, you know, education and activism and organizing other prisoners, you know, offering so-called social prisoners. And there's often and more so after, you know, work has been done, there's often like, you know, politicized revolutionary prisoners, you know, not just political prisoners that are, you know, they're carrying the, you know, the flag and moving forward and organizing other

prisoners on many, many levels, education and otherwise. So that that certainly was my reality for all the 37 years that I was in captivity. I walked in doing it and I left doing it.

Felix: Yeah, yeah, I mean, I mean, I think I think that there's a lot of times where like, you know, I've been, I've been in circles where like people come into prisons and they come, and they they give these grand lectures about abolition, anti capitalism, financial literacy, all all of this stuff that you know, and they they they come in with your big words, but then you know, you have someone who's been maybe a gang member his whole life, or has been hustling his whole life, or been doing whatever it takes to try to feed his family and also contribute in his own way to his community. Yet because it doesn't look like what these academics, people with the big names, like to have this projected image of, somehow that's not valid, right? That somehow it's not abolition or mutual aid in practice that somehow you have to like in order to practice this stuff, you have to fit into a box. And I think that a lot of us are not willing to step outside of our comfort zones. And if they're like, you know, we don't know everything. And I know that like, people say that a lot, but it's definitely there's definitely prevalent in prison when people come in to work with prisoners and say to me that they want to center the voice of prisoners, yet, they already have an idea of what they're trying to, you know, project on to us. And it's no different from like old school missionaries showing up to like, countries back in the day trying to preach their dogma.

Dan: So, Jalil, I wonder if you want to pick up on some of the work you did inside and sort of continue that conversation that Felix and Jaan were having.

Jalil: Yeah. I think it's important to understand in terms of being political prisoners, you always come under some degrees of repression, surveillance, some degree of control. And the reason, one of the reasons why, they don't want that idea of revolution. The idea of liberation, the idea of emancipation is understood to be infecting the prison population, liberating minds in the prison population. So therefore, they have to curtail that. And in so doing, they generally suppress political prisoners in their capacity to become leaders and/or advisers and/or counselors to other prisoners. They do not like that. Do not want that. Because they want the prison population to change from a criminal mentality into a revolutionary mentality.

I have a direct experience with that, with teaching, having been permitted to teach in 2018, in Attica. I was teaching a Black History course and I started in 1861 dealing with civil rights and came all the way to 1966, talking about The Black Panther Party, that was the biggest thing to jump off of at that time. And as I began to talk about the Black Panther party, they felt I was trying to change these gangs Bloods and Crips from a criminal gang into revolutionaries. They put me in solitary confinement for four months for teaching history, which I had been approved to teach. But it's a matter of changing the mentality, from the criminal mentality to the revolutionary mentality, which they try to suppress in prisons. Mostly, political prisoners receive the brunt of repression inside the prison system across the board. There's no distinction between how they treat us because of our politics more so than anything else, who we believe ourselves to be, and how we interact with other prisoners.

So that's one of the things that Jaan had really expressed in how the treatment of prisoners are across this country. And there's a reason why Jericho was brought into existence. To raise up the

idea that political prisoners does exist in the United States, is extremely important. So I don't know what much more you want me to say about that. I can go on and on, of course. But I'll allow someone else to share the podium.

Dan: I think that was perfect. And you know, one of the things we want to talk about in talking about internationalism is both the repression of prisons and the borders. And the kinds of solidarity that borders foreclose or try to foreclose. So why don't we hear from Jaan and Felix on the concept of borders and then we'll hear from Harsha.

Jaan: So internationalism and borders are a very immediate and direct issue when we're talking about prisons and prisoners and locking people up, and should they? Know why are they locked up and, you know, because they're undocumented workers over here on this side of the river and on the other side, they're not, you know?

So I think that's that's, that's part of it. But overall, more broadly. I mean, I certainly support and do what I can in terms of helping other struggles in other countries, you know, dealing with their oppressors and dealing with their injustices and so forth.

I mean, you know, as you know, from afar, I certainly support those efforts as I can when I can. But you know, the world is broken up into these nation states and so borders are a reality and how the rulers of the states and primarily, I would say, most of those states of the world today are run, you know, not for the interests of the public and run by a minority against the interests and needs of the majority of people in that country, just like the United States, is maybe in some cases, not as harshly as horribly, but but in many similar ways.

So borders are a reality. The laws that kind of keep people so you can't go here, you can't go there from the perspective of of a person of certainly of the working class in this country and around the world certainly are just a person in this world.

Those rules and laws, almost, I would say, totally. I mean, I guess one could argue about the areas here that are not the interest of us, whether we're standing on this side of the Rio Grande or this side of the Great Lakes or wherever we are.

I mean, as far as most of us in the public, in all of these countries, these laws and these and these borders are not in our interest. You know, no matter how much, you know, various fascistic type politicians might try to say, you know, that this is good for America and American.

Felix: Oh, this is actually pretty funny, right, this is literally coming from a guy that still wakes up every day and sees walls and concrete cages and fences and razor wire. But then also like I'm able to see blue skies and trees, right?

And by knowing that there are invisible borders there as well. I feel like for me in jail, people have a reliable and consistent way to have their needs met and are able to like, feel safe in their community.

Prisons and borders will always exist, right? There's this illusion that somehow prison walls and razor wire would keep the quote unquote bad people contained and the community safe, right, that somehow this is the answer to all the society's issues.

You know, and obviously this is same notion when it comes to borders that as long as there are borders that the quote unquote bad people are kept at a distance in our community is safe but what we fail to realize is that these very borders that actually act as our as our communities prison walls, right, that we're actually in prison in a never ending cycle of greed and exploitation, that these borders are what the rich have constructed to keep us in our place and divided their ass protected right and honestly until able to acknowledge that our safety and livelihoods is not depending on the absence of others, but rather the solidarity of our spirits and resistance.

People are just going to, you know, people are just going to continue to look towards prison and borders as the answer to all of our fears. So to me, that's the connection.

Dan: I wanted to turn that over to you, Harsha. Connection between prisons and borders they were just speaking about.

Harsha: Yeah. That was powerful to listen to, again. And I think it was comrade Felix in the last clip describing, you know, the razor wire and the prison, right? The prison is a border and it reminds me of Angela Davis when they wrote the prison is a border drawing on the experiences of incarcerated peoples.

And so, that really, I think, captures it, right? They are sites of control, of containment of oppression and really, like, immobility, right? To contain you and immobilize you. And I think when we think, particularly of the southern border, the US/Mexico border, one of the things that I think we don't often remember but I think it's such a useful trajectory and to the function of the border is that even before border patrol was formalized, some of the first vigilantes at the border, particularly at that time, you know, as Texas was annexed and captured by the US, through US conquest. In 1850 when the fugitive slave act was passed, some of the first vigilantes at the border were at the border to ensure that Black people could not escape into Mexico, right? The border was functioning to control and contain people within the so-called border, right, within enslavement.

And we have to remember that that the border is not just to keep people out, it's also to contain people, like when we think about migrant workers or undocumented workers. The US is, you know, the largest carceral prison state in the world. It has the capacity to detain and report every undocumented migrant worker if it wanted to. But of course it doesn't. It relies on exploitable cheap labor. It exploits deportability without deporting all people, creating that fear. And using deportation and union busting and termination together to keep people immobilized and precarious. And I think there's, in terms of internationalism and abolition, for me, borders are really at that. They're that linchpin, right, between how do we control people? How do we create a population that is constantly displaced through imperialism, Jalil, you pointed out so poignantly, the US is complicit at a global scale, ongoing. And people are increasingly forced to move. And then, when they move, they face these militarized borders. And we have to keep in mind that the border is not, is not a site of militarization for all people, right?

We're also in an era where thousands and thousands of people are dying at the border, while there's the 1% who are, you know, have power, are rich and white, who have access to western passports who can travel all around the world. Who are literally Columbusing around the world, extracting, mining, polluting, who are bombing, who are traveling all around the world on their, you know, business class Visas or whatever.

So the crisis of the border is not for everybody, right? Which is the reality of all systems, the police, the prisons, the military and the borders are intended to inflict violence on certain populations while ensuring the continued domination by others. And so that's also the reality of borders. And borders really prop up, this is my last point. I'd say, they prop up global apartheid today. Right?

What is one of the main ways in which the so-called difference between the global south and the global north continues to exist today? One of the many ways is through citizenship. Right? The luck of where you're born will determine your access to how you're going to live. Whether you can get a vaccine in today's era. Whether you're going to be able to access that in an era of global vaccine apartheid. It's definitely not the only one, but borders are a key pillar of maintaining racial citizenship and racial empire in the world today.

And so abolition absolutely must include the dismantling of borders because it's fundamental to dismantling capitalism and imperialism.

Dan: Thank you so much, Harsha. Yeah, my mind is expanding with these amazing connections that we're making. I know we have one more video from Jaan and Felix and I want to hear from them on their takeaways. And then, we can come back for comments from Jalil and Harsha and questions from the audience.

Felix: Honestly, like what makes me optimistic is youth organizing's leadership. You know, I've had the privilege of working with some super dope young folk out of Seattle and also in prison that have not only taken a stand against oppression but have invested in their future and the future of this community, right?

They've taken the opportunity to educate themselves and truly embody the lessons of generations before them in a way that makes sense to them, right? And if anything, you know, this is another example of abolition being great, right – efficient, life-affirming, sustainable, right, to power the people.

What concerns me is this new age of like nonprofiteers, right? The nonprofits, who say wear our clothes, speak our language. But ultimately, who's funding relies on our prison? You know, these nonprofits that claim to be about the people but that are tied to the various institutions and systems that are in place to keep us in our chains, right? These folk that come and and with concepts in mind and practice this respectability politics rather than truly empowering the people to speak right and in voice, which really matters to them.

You know, I've had experiences where I've worked with folks from different non-profits that come in with this, with this, with this grand idea. You know, we're here just to be an ally, right? While we're looking for accomplices that are willing to only put us so far as long as it doesn't take away from their funding and their access. And that's what concerns me is that when people come in from the community representing these nonprofits that you know, it's just smoke and mirrors that organizers on the inside start to rely on them. For support.

And, you know, all of a sudden we're where we are now, tied to the institutions and systems, right? And you know, I'm not saying that all nonprofits and people that work for nonprofits are bad because there's a lot of bomb work going on that I love and support. And there's a lot of great people that I know. I'm just saying that we need to be more mindful and intentional about understanding who we are aligning ourselves with because not everybody has the best intentions.

Jaan: All of us are out here, something myself included, you know, struggling, you know, week by week, month, year by year and decade by decade. And oftentimes, you know, we're pushing the same things and and and, you know, it's like an uphill battle, you know, all that, true.

But at the same time, we have to keep in mind that struggle brings results. And just recently, in the last few weeks, I want to bring a few examples. About three weeks ago, there was an international tribunal that was organized.

It took a long time to organize an event. The International Tribunal of International Judges that were had a multiple day kind of like a trial with lots of tremendous testimony and so forth about the US state and government, you know, committing genocide and crimes against black people, natives, all people of color within this country.

The tribunal came back after hearing days and days of testimony and ruled that in fact, the United States government was guilty of exactly those things. Now, obviously, the US government is not going to say, Okay, we're guilty. So, you know, how can we rectify?

Who do we have to pay or whatever? But the fact is, this is an international tribunal that carries the weight of international law. Speaking of international law again. And you know, it can have a follow up impact.

People can take things to the U.N. people it there's actually statutes within the USA law that people could file and sue the government under. Based upon this ruling, that was that came down the day that ended, that was on a Sunday, the next day, Monday, probably a lot of people are familiar with the Maroon, Russell Maroon Shoatz, a long, long time held political prisoner who very ill. In fact, he's, you know, extremely ill. But after decades and decades of captivity, he was released on Monday. Now he was released because he was so ill and released for medical reasons.

But he's in the arms and embrace of his family and and people that love him now. The following day Tuesday, David Gilbert, long held, 40 something year-held political prisoner of the New York state, wanted a parole board and was granted parole.

And actually, he was released just recently, last week or something like that. So it just goes to show you that struggle brings results, and we should never get discouraged because, you know, we can't push a certain thing that's so important to be pushed.

Dan: What a wonderful way to wrap up with this idea or this reminder, this encouragement that struggle brings results. And Jalil, you were intimately involved in that tribunal. So I'd love to hear from you. Any sort of closing remarks as we move towards finishing. But just before you speak, I wanted to remind everyone that we do still have time for questions if you put them in the chat.

Jalil: Thank you, Dan. I want to thank Harsha for her succinct explanation of borders, it was very well stated and it's important for us to understand that borders, for the most part, and I'm going to have to be a little bit critical of us, borders are artificial, right? We create our own borders. We created borders dividing us as people in our own humanity. We have created borders. In this kind of social order that has been created by US imperialism for the most part and white supremacy.

We've created borders within our own relationship that we have with each other as people on this planet and species on this planet. And it's important for us to rise above that in our own, learning in our own common humanity. I don't know where we are with that. Or how far we need to go in getting to that point. But that's part of our struggle, as well. And becoming a new man and new woman or we say revolutionaries.

Now, in regards to the genocides, voting by the International jurists and convention or tribunal, I was, again, I made mention, I was put in solitary confinement for 4 months for teaching a class. While I was in solitary confinement, this was in 2018, I decided to write a proposal that the international jurists returned to the United States, they had been there in 1981 for campaign I organized around an investigation into political prisoners.

And Jericho organizations took my proposal and created an international tribunal and that was started 2018 and then resulted in an international tribunal in 2020. And the international jurists, 9 international jurists from around the world declared the United States was, indeed, guilty of commission of genocides.

The people, Black, Brown and Indigenous people, mass incarceration of political prisoners and their existence in the United States, environmental racism and health inequities within the United States - they ruled that all of it collectively created conditions that can be considered to be genocidal. The first time genocide was brought to the United Nations was in December 17th, 1951, 2 months after I was born, by the great Paul Robeson and Will Patterson. And what we have done was succeeded in what they attempted to do in 1951. We got a verdict. And our next move is to file a petition in the United States District Court with the charge of genocides based on 18USC1091, that is the treaty by which the United States has signed onto the international convention on genocides.

And so, for us moving forward, our struggle and human rights struggle is that anything that the diminishes, degrades and devalues Black people across the board, whether it's environmental

issues, health issues, police killings, mass incarceration, we are saying they are engaging in the process of genocide.

All right. We are not -- no longer holding this idea that we find with Civil Rights that we're fighting for or to be included within the system of the imperialism. We are now fighting for independence. And our goal and objective is to ensure that the new narrative. The new narrative in America is that anything that diminishes, degrades and dehumanize Black, Brown and Indigenous people is in the rubric of genocide. And it's important to understand this new narrative and building an ideal of movement that addresses the issues of genocides.

And how we are going to actually ensure that people around the world understand that what's going on in the United States is a question of us fighting against genocides. Like, to save our own selves. Now, two other points right quick, if I may.

One, in terms of internationalism, if in fact we are building international fight, right, then it's important that the people around the world who have been waiting for American people to rise up, all right, because of their own complicity with the United States imperialism, that we have to recognize that we in the United States, in the belly of the beast, are the vanguard. And therefore, the people fighting against imperialism around the world are the rearguard in this fight.

We have to come to that understanding. If we are on the tip of the spear in the struggle, then the international community is the shaft of that spear. It's important for us to turn inward, right? And recognize that our struggle and our fight is not only saving ourselves, but we're saving all people around the world. Against this -- against this bloody, purveyor of violence, as Martin Luther King has stated, that the United States greatest purveyor of violence in the world. We need to stop this, end this. This blood lust of the United States and the imperialism. Right? And if we don't do it, it's not going to get done.

Harsha, you want to share on that?

Harsha: Yes, thank you, waiting for the interpreter switch. Thank you, comrade Jalil and to Jaan and Felix, it's an honor in listening and thinking alongside you. I agree. I mean, I think in the context of internationalism, we have to center imperialism. It's impossible to have a conversation about internationalism without contending with this immense reality as the United States as the greatest purveyor of violence. And I appreciate very much and whole heartedly agree about the narrative that has to shift from one of civil rights or assimilation and that's certainly true in the context of the immigrant rights movement where the mainstream rights movement focused on integration and assimilation in a way that ignores the reality of imperialism that this myth of multiculturalism that ignores settler and that ignores enslavement as the reality. What does it mean to integrate or assimilate into settler colonialism and enslavement and imperialism. That's not acceptable. Instead, we need a much more robust anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist orientation. To understand that, you know, migration itself is an internationalist phenomenon. It's not about just the border over here. It very much is about what's happening all around the world.

Also, I wanted to add one more thing, Jalil, after you spoke, it reminded me that one of the other ways that the border works is to create, you know, those divisions, right? It becomes easier to

scapegoat when we're on the shop floor, when we're in our neighborhoods. The migrant worker for supposedly stealing our jobs and resources and the enemy becomes, you know, the person on the boat.

And that's also, you know, the function of the border and part of internationalist struggle. Exactly what you said, breaking down the borders that divide us. And maybe the other takeaway that I was thinking on is, you know, Dan, you opened up with invocation of abolitionist presence, and hearing Jaan and Felix in a few of their clips in talking about the ways in which those are not incarcerated enter into this work, the savior mentality, the nonprofit industrial complex, you know -- how important it is to challenge the structures. When movements are tied to funders who are coopting our movements -- all of that is part of what we have to be skeptical about. And I think, especially, there's a lot there and of course, that's a whole other but necessary conversation. I think in particular, one thing that nonprofits do is they silo our issues. A nonprofit's whole mandate is, you know, we work on one thing. And we know that abolition and the revolutionary horizon, revolution means dismantling everything, everything that degrades and dehumanizes and perpetuates genocide. That's not about a single issue, that's about dismantling this whole corrupt system.

And so when we're entering into this work, we can't just be fighting single issues, that can't be our mandate. That's not a revolutionary mandate. You know, we really need to be meeting people where they're at and understanding it's all of this. It's the health care system, it's the police. It's prisons. It's the border. It's the shop floor, it's the boss, the banker. It's the military, it's all of it.

And that, you know, that is the struggle, that is the struggle. And I really, also want to echo struggle, struggle brings victory. If we don't fight, we don't win. That's just the reality. If we don't fight, there is no chance of winning. When we fight, we build collective power, when we fight, we build our capacity to dream, our capacity to believe in our -- and to strengthen our political imagination. And to really build with each other. Right? That's also part of what capitalism wants us to believe. To believe that there's no alternative, that we're going to live as isolated atoms for the rest of our lives. So part of that muscle is our collective muscle to constantly dream and to constantly fight, as Mariame Kaba reminds us, hope is a discipline. And only when we struggle do we have the possibility of winning. And more often than not, we do. We win. And so I also wanted to emphasize and echo and affirm that takeaway from the clip, as well.

Jalil: One more little brief comment in regards to our system, this system of imperialism of capitalism and imperialism. I have a group of young people in my house and study group, right? And so I got an Alexa. And somebody say, you shouldn't have a Alexa in there, you know, data mining and all that. Anyway, I asked how many billionaires are there in the United States? And Alexa responded 544 billionaires in the United States. And then I asked Alexa how much is accumulated wealth of thedr billionaires in United States. She said 6.299 trillion. Trillion dollars. All the wealth of western Europe. All the wealth of western Europe is accumulating in the control of 544 people. We have a population of 333 million people, and the country is controlled by 544 billionaires. That's a disconnect and our own mentality and our own thinking and our

own association with one another and who controls what. And we're fighting for the crumbs. Fighting for the crumbs. That's insanity.

That's insanity. And we don't understand that. That they 544 people, 28,000 families controls majority of the wealth of this country. And we're fighting over the crumbs off their table. Come on, people. Come on, people. That's ridiculous. 5 -- 544 people. Controls the wealth of this country. 330 million people. And we're fighting over what? Huh? And due to what? Capitalism? Divide and conquer, right? Individualism. Individualism and what? Competition.

And so, what we need to change the narrative from individualism to collectivity. Right? And from competition to cooperation. Those are two principles are going to fight against capitalism and imperialism. Cooperation and collectivity.

That's what we need -- to begin to voice that idea across the board. And we say abolitionists, like abolish everything that's anti-people, right, anti-humanity, common humanity. It needs to be abolished. All right. And so this is the idea that I think we need to begin to have a new narrative of what it means to be governed. To be -- what it means to be governed. Also, keep in mind, go to 28USC3000215A. Says the United States is what? A federal corporation.

All right. So in essence, what they're saying, we are citizens of a corporation. We're corporate citizens, we understand that. All right. And so, this is also important. Thinking of how we are living as a people. The United States Supreme Court stated under the case of Hobby Lobby that corporations are people. When they say we, the people, who are they talking about? They're talking about corporations. They're not talking about human beings. Human beings are the means by which the corporations reach exorbitant profits, wage slavery, for the most part. And that's the reason why we are divided into classes in a capitalist system. So it's extremely important for us to understand some of the dynamics, the inner workings of the system how to be operates, and we are complicit. We have blood on our hands.

And the world is waiting for us to get our act together. All right? Because when we free ourselves, we're freeing the world. We take that burden. We have to take that burden. Recreating conditions that exist in the world today. All right. We are complicit in that.

All right. And so, for us it is extremely important to understand that at this point in time in this system of governing, right, there's a system of government of plutocracy, where minority of billionaires control the wealth of this country and they are having us fighting over the crumbs. And we don't understand the big picture. We need to look at this thing, a little bit more deeply. Thank you.

Dan: Thank you so much, Jalil and Harsha, this evening has been so wonderful. We just have a couple of minutes left. And so, I wanted to see if either one of you had anything you wanted to draw viewers' attention to about projects you're working on or website they could go to for more. And then we'll wrap up.

Jalil: Yes. I'd like to share, please go to SpiritofMandela.org and learn about the movement we're moving forward with after the international tribunal. We'll begin the process of organizing

A People's Senate in 2022. We need to divorce ourselves from Democratic and Republican Party. We have to create a new narrative of what it means to be governed in this social order. Right? And so, the people saying it could be equivalent to a united front. Building a united front so we can have a new narrative and how we look upon ourselves and how we engage in struggle, to free ourselves from this corporate governing that we have allowed ourselves to be governed by. And so the People Senate is the next move in 2022. Go to spiritofMandela.org and learn more about what we're doing.

Dan: Thank you so much. Harsha, is there anything you wanted to shout out?

Harsha: Not in particular. I wanted to shout out a lot and then I would miss something. So just want to say thank you, truly, for organizing this and thank you to the interpreters for sticking with us and my apologies for my fast pace, I realize I'm probably speaking really fast. But yeah. Comrade Jalil and Jaan and Felix?

Dan: Jaan.

Harsha: Yeah, it's been an honor and I'm blessed to learn alongside.

Dan: Yeah, well, thank you all so much for joining us this evening. This was such a wonderful way to wrap up this fall's 2021 of Study and Struggle series by talking and thinking together inside the walls and outside about abolition, the ways it must be red, green, intersectional and international.

If people want more information about study and struggle, check out the website, studyandstruggle.com. I'm sure we'll be back next year. But you can see the curriculum we've been using this year and the one we used last year, as well.

And I want to just, again, reiterate my thanks to Jalil, to Harsha, to Felix, to Jaan, to everyone interpreting and captioning and making these events come off as wonderfully as they have. So, thank you so much.

Jalil: Thank you for speaking to the listening and viewing audience. Extremely important we have these forums so we can share these ideas going forward. This system has to be abolished, period.