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What Do We Long For? Reflections on Feminist Movements for Social Justice

aman agah

Oregon State University, agaha@oregonstate.edu

Emerson Barrett

Oregon State University, barretem@oregonstate.edu

Libia Marqueza Castro

Oregon State University, castroli@oregonstate.edu

Val Chang

Oregon State University, changva@oregonstate.edu

Patti Duncan

Oregon State University, patti.duncan@oregonstate.edu

See next page for additional authors

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What Do We Long For? Reflections on Feminist Movements for Social Justice

Authors

aman agah, Emerson Barrett, Libia Marqueza Castro, Val Chang, Patti Duncan, and Adrianna Nicolay

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aman agah, Oregon State University
Emerson Barrett, Oregon State University
Libia Marqueza Castro, Oregon State University
Val Chang, Oregon State University
Patti Duncan, Oregon State University
Adrianna Nicolay, Oregon State University

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Abstract: In this collective essay, we contemplate tipping points including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis, and gendered and racialized forms of state violence through our reflections on shifting meanings of and movements for social justice, shaped by our own lived experiences. Inspired by the writings of feminist scholars and activists including Grace Lee Boggs, adrienne maree brown, Dean Spade, bell hooks, and others, we grapple with the meanings of social justice in contemporary contexts.

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“One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone.” –bell hooks (2014, 213)

Introduction: “What Time is it on the Clock of the World?”

We come together in this space as a professor and PhD students of a graduate seminar called “Social Justice: Theory and Practice,” an offering of the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at a large, public land-grant university, a predominantly white institution on Indigenous land. Representing diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, sexualities and genders, and geographical locations, we are scholars, educators, artists, and organizers. The seminar took place in the early part of 2022, two years into the pandemic, a time when many of us were experiencing feelings of exhaustion, anxiety, and grief. While our campus was pushing for a return to “normalcy,” it became increasingly clear to us that such a return was neither possible nor completely desired. In our class, we grappled with the meaning of social justice, thinking together through key concepts, themes, and movements for justice. As we worked together to develop a collective analysis of our course readings and themes, we began to collaborate on this essay. For the purposes of this essay, we refer to ourselves as members of a collective.

Our collective’s perspectives and work are informed by feminist methodologies and feminist pedagogies that center collaboration and community building. Our approach to teaching and learning as joyful and collaborative is grounded in bell hooks’s notion of “education as the practice of freedom” (1994, 6). hooks discusses how joy and excitement are intrinsic to this practice of freedom in addition to unpacking and interrogating hegemonic systems of domination. She states, “The classroom remains the most radical

space of possibility in the academy” (1994, 12). Through this radical space of possibility, we imagined spaces and times beyond this precarious tipping point—spaces that would nourish us and our communities. We took to heart hooks’ call for the classroom as a “labor of freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress” (1994, 207).

As we continue to weather the storms of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis, and racialized, gendered militarized state violence, we reflected together on a statement by Grace Lee Boggs in her book, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*: “Every crisis, actual or impending, needs to be viewed as an opportunity to bring about profound changes in our society” (2011, xxi). Just as the opening themes of our seminar began with and were established by Boggs’ text, we use her work to engage this special issue about global tipping points. As we write this essay, Russia has invaded Ukraine, Texas lawmakers have launched an(other) assault on trans youth, and scientists are reporting a new variant of COVID. As colonial time continues pushing for normalcy and linearity, we feel compounded by the constant build of crises.

This special issue considers global “tipping points,” focusing especially on feminist responses to the critical changes that have occurred since 2020. We engage this notion through thinking about the concept of precarious temporalities. Precarious temporalities are unstable moments, similar to tipping points, during which multiple decisions can be made, each leading us down a distinct path with few options to return to the original moment. In this essay, we contemplate such tipping points and precarious temporalities through our reflections on the shifting meanings of and movements for social justice, shaped by our own lived experiences. Using Alison Kafer’s imagining of crip time, we situate these precarious temporalities with an understanding that the new crises we endure are disabling events for humanity. “Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded,” states Kafer (2013, 27). With this lens, our essay honors both societal and personal temporalities and puts them in conversation with one another. As people who experience multiple overlapping and interconnected systems of marginalization, we inhabit precarious and liminal spaces. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorizations of nepantla, a Nahuatl word for an “in-between space” (2015, 245), we utilize our embodied knowledges of liminality to develop “perspective[s] from the cracks” (2015, 245). Hence, our essay contributes to discussions of tipping points and precarious temporalities, offering our embodied feminist practice from the seminar in the context of COVID-19, and a reimagining of the many possibilities for social justice laid bare during this time.

Continuing to think with Boggs, we reflect on a question she was known to open meetings with: “What time is it on the clock of the world?” In class, when asked this question, one of us responded in the following way: “*The clock has no time, and is set at all times. It is constant and non-linear. It is now and then and the future.*” This comment highlights how temporal realities are structured by access to information and the politics of knowledge production. As someone with disabilities, this class member seeks to imagine a world clock which can be set to “crip time”—not structured by capitalism, colonialism, and other systems of oppression, but moving with our navigation of precarious temporalities and shifts alongside us in resistance. Our understandings and analyses of current crises are also shaped by our various subject positions.

Another member of the collective wrote: “*[It is like] we are at 1:59am on the night of daylight savings time, right before the clock turns 2:00am, but really it either turns back to 1:00 or jumps to 3:00am!! It is a crucial time, that we’ve been warned and have been warning the world about for so long, and yet here we are. For some of us, this time-change is almost obsolete—it happens in our deep sleep as our phones adjust automatically for us so we sleep blissfully as our lives shift with the dramatic hour, fast-forwarding through an imaginary hour or rewinding to repeat an hour we’ve already lived. But for others, we recognize the time-shattering, life-altering significance of this hour change. Whether we choose*

to acknowledge it or not, we are at the time of great change.” This member echoed Boggs in reflecting on the magnitude of the crises we are living through, resonant with Boggs’ statement that “these are the times to grow our souls” (2011, 28).

Considering Boggs’ question, one member of the collective followed up with, “*What is the urgent need now across the globe? Who is facing reckonings and in what ways?*” This student connected their ideas to another question frequently asked by Boggs: “What does it mean to be human in the twenty-first century?” leading them to ask, “*Who and what are we accountable to as human beings living now, especially in thinking about globalization, imperialism, colonialism and all the ways these ripples are felt throughout the world?*” We recognize that we are living in a time of urgency— a breaking point. But this is also a time to transform, to challenge the status quo. In a conversation with Angela Davis, Grace Lee Boggs stated, “The time has come for us to reimagine everything.” What does it mean to reimagine everything? In doing so, how can we be more accountable to one another, knowing that we are always deeply, intricately, interconnected? It is this process of reimagining that we engage here.

“Social justice is an epoch, and we are living in it” (Tuck and Yang 2018, 1)

Our reading of the time on the clock of the world is informed, at least in part, by the precarious temporalities we have found ourselves in over and over again. These experiences in tumultuous times, on our own and within our communities, shape our relationships to justice. What is the shape of justice? The taste? Justice for whom? Justice where? Which justice? These questions, and others, meander like a stream. The answers, or the culmination of events that have led us to where we are today, are in the streambed.

We have arrived at justice through a variety of waterways. We were delivered to justice by the love of our families and friends, loved ones who are in this world and those who have moved on to the next. As images can complement storytelling, especially in a virtual learning space, we shared photos of parents, siblings, partners, grandparents, friends, niblings, aunts, uncles, cohorts, and pets. Our imaginings are inspired and demanded by their existence and their love. We long for justice as we build worlds for our children, our niblings, our grandchildren, and our grandchildren’s children.

We have longed for justice after experiencing and witnessing injustice in spaces that were not made for us and others. We shared stories about soaring insulin prices, quotes expressing the anger and frustration with the theft of Indigenous land and associated transformations in Indigenous relationships with land, and pictures of Kānaka Maoli protecting Mauna Kea. We are also pushed to justice by those spaces that were made for us. We found and continue to find spaces within the university and beyond that were nurturing, nourishing, and affirming: from Che Café, a radical, non-hierarchical community space in San Diego, to Liberation Spring LLC, an online-based radical education group, as well as the virtual classroom space we shared during a cold winter.

The shapes of justice are familiar to us because of the lives and works of Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and Malcolm X, to name a few. The shapes of justice were transformed for us by works like *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice* by Mariame Kaba and *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* by Dean Spade, as well as our experiences as real people in academia. We hear justice in memes, movements, music, and movies like *The Outsiders*.

Our waterways to justice illuminated the different scales of justice. There is small justice, like a care network; big justice, like changing systems, and a variety of shapes and sizes of justice in between. Sharing our stories also taught us that our relationships to justice are constantly changing with time. A year ago, the shape of justice may have been big enough to carry us through our roughest days and most difficult

challenges. Today, it is rather spiky, less stable, harder to lay in. Following the themes we explored in the seminar and emphasizing our analyses of social justice during the COVID-19 pandemic, we move now to discussions of environmental justice, climate crisis, and settler colonialism; racialized and gendered forms of state violence; and disability justice, care, and mutual aid.

Environmental Justice, Climate Crisis, and Settler Colonialism

Climate change is a precarious temporality long discussed, from warnings about carbon emissions and the ozone layer to “global warming.” In recent decades, climate change has and is incurring devastating consequences in many dimensions. Many western environmental justice efforts evaluating, quantifying, and “mitigating” climate change impacts, such as carbon trading and taxes, are market-based metrics which offer economic value: trees for timber, water for municipal use, fish for consumption. Though seemingly effective ways of understanding and managing the effects of climate change, these attempts to address climate change impacts fail to address the root causes of climate change: settler-colonialism, and its many arms—industrialization, militarization, and extractive industries—all capitalist-driven ventures devised by settler-colonial states in the so-called West. As Audre Lorde so eloquently states, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (1984, 110).

Since these market-based climate-change solutions operate within capitalist structures—and are structurally determined to continue to benefit corporate and governmental entities responsible for global environmental change—they will never actually produce any just or adequate solutions to the climate crisis. Furthermore, these metrics of evaluating and quantifying climate change impacts fail to integrate the cultural and human-based shifts these physical changes cause because these changes are less empirically quantifiable. How does one quantify the value of the changes to the sense of place of a glacier as it retreats, the changes to spiritual connection to a marine environment as ocean acidification changes its coral composition, the shifts to relationality to land and cultural practices as salmon no longer return to a river?

The western environmental justice movement, as the previous example of market-based carbon-mitigation tactics shows, fails to address the root causes of global climate change: capitalism and settler colonialism. As designed, their efforts also fail to address racial and class inequities. US policy initiatives ranging from the EPA to executive orders from sitting presidents, have consistently hidden behind vague wording rendering policy unenforceable and generalized terms lumping together people of color with Indigenous peoples, which erases the unique injustices Indigenous peoples face due to historic and ongoing settler colonialism and land dispossession. Based on these policies, the US government’s conception of environmental justice minimizes it to fit the government’s frame. Dina Gilio-Whitaker further explains, “the extent to which the US government has incorporated Indigenous peoples into its environmental justice policy regime has, predictably, mirrored and replicated its hegemonic relationship to Native peoples in the language of benevolent supremacy” (Gilio-Whitaker 2019, 40).

Gilio-Whitaker claims that for environmental justice to be responsive to the needs of Native peoples, it must be Indigenized—tailored to account for their very different histories, relationships to the land, and political relationships to the state (2019). This Indigenization must occur in all aspects of the environmental justice realm, including within academia, and must also confront the foundations of white supremacy.

One of the ways to work towards just climate-futures, as Gilio-Whitaker articulates, is to repair the relationships people hold with land. Kyle Whyte calls this process “renewing relatives,” which “involves both restoring persisting relationships that are part of longstanding Indigenous heritages but also creating new relationships that support Indigenous peoples’ mobilizing to address climate change” (2017, 158). Our

relationships must shift away from settler-colonial extractive ideas of land-as-capital. We imagine and hope for relationships that are respectful, reciprocal, and life-giving, situating humans as kin to more-than-human beings. In line with this, we envision climate futures of healed relationships between different Earth-based entities, following the leadership and decision making of Indigenous people. Such practices move us toward food and land sovereignty, and our collective well-being.

Maintaining and sharing relationships with land is not new to us. In the winter of 2016, thousands of Indigenous people responded to calls led by Standing Rock Sioux youth to stop the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline to protect Mni Sose (the Missouri River) and our interconnected waterways. In this historical moment, Indigenous people across the world took on the identity of water protectors. Water protectors mobilized around the phrase, *mni wiconi* (water is life). *Mni wiconi* tells us what water is and what water can be. In a letter to the Army Corps of Engineers asking them to stop the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, AnnaLee Rain YellowHammer situates the call to action within ancestral and future connection to Mni Sose. For AnnaLee and other water protectors, their relationships with water exist beyond settler colonialism and capitalism. This is what *mni wiconi* tells us.

The survival of Mni Sose and the Standing Rock Sioux would transform our collective futures. Also in her letter, YellowHammer writes: “If the pipeline breaks, the oil will spill on the ground and into the water. Grass, crops, trees, and animals will not be able to grow and live because of the oil. People will not be able to drink from the river or use the water” (Native Knowledge 360° Education Initiative, 2018). The camps at Standing Rock were physical spaces that embodied self-determination in the way we related with land, governed our communities, and took care of each other. Of the thousands of people who lived in the temporary camps at Standing Rock in 2016, no one died by suicide (Red Nation, 2021, 92-93). This is significant because Native communities are often surrounded by colonially-induced violence and death. When we are cared for, fed, invited, in ceremony and community, and sheltered, our people have a much better chance at not just surviving, but living.

Standing Rock shows us that relationships to water shape our communities and also shape our relationships to each other, the ways we care for and listen to one another as humans and more-than-human beings. This is a preview of one of the futures we can build, even in a changing climate.

Racialized/Gendered State Violence

Connecting the violence of colonialism to other forms of state violence in this precarious time, we recognize how gender-based violence and racialized state violence have become increasingly visible, especially as our overlapping communities have organized to resist such violence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, reports of domestic violence have increased in both prevalence and severity (Luthra 2020), and anti-trans rhetoric and violence have also increased dramatically, especially targeting BIPOC trans communities. Police violence against Black, Indigenous, and other people of color has escalated. In March 2020, Breonna Taylor, a young Black woman, was killed in her home by police in Louisville, Kentucky, underscoring the long history of police brutality and violence against Black communities. In May 2020, George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis, leading to protests erupting across the US and in cities all over the world. And just two days after George Floyd was killed, Tony McDade, a Black trans man, was shot and killed by police in Tallahassee, Florida. As Black feminist scholars have argued, police and state violence are structured by anti-Blackness, and illuminate the dynamics of systemic racism.

When it was revealed that George Floyd was murdered outside of an Arab Muslim owned business with the “standard protocol...to notify police about fake money,” we grieved his death and simultaneously wondered with anxiety how Southwest Asian and Muslim communities would be treated, and how they

would respond (Chapin 2020). Anti-Blackness is rampant within many of our communities, and within Southwest Asian Muslim communities is sometimes coupled with a silent and spoken claim to being “original” Muslims. This false narrative of Islam belonging to one region or group of people within our communities enacts anti-Blackness and erases the murders of Black Muslims by police as a form of both anti-Black and anti-Muslim state violence. Stephon Clark and Jacob Blake, two Black Muslims, were recently killed by police, and in 2019 Rayhanah Alhanafi, a Black Muslim woman, detailed her traumatic experience in which she suffered a fractured neck by police, who also denied her right to request being searched by a female officer (Singh and Walters 2020; Venugopal 2019; Walker 2018). Those of us who claim ourselves as Muslim must confront anti-Blackness within our communities and fight alongside Black communities for justice. We must recognize the overlapping temporal realities we experience and navigate the waterways of justice cooperatively.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, in “The Urgency of Intersectionality,” demonstrates how systemic racism works in tandem with racialized gender violence to target Black women, girls, and non-binary people. Likewise, Charlene Carruthers argues that anti-Blackness goes hand in hand with gendered violence, capitalism, and homophobia/transphobia, writing, “Black queer and trans women have been on the front lines of anti-police and Black liberation organizing in the United States” (2018, 6). To analyze structural forms of oppression, Carruthers relies on a Black queer feminist lens as political praxis, “based in Black feminist and LGBTQ traditions and knowledge, through which people and groups see to bring their full selves into the process of dismantling all systems of oppression. By using this lens, we are aided in creating alternatives of self-governance and self-determination, and by using it we can more effectively prioritize problems and methods that center historically marginalized people in our communities” (2018, 10).

Since the start of the pandemic, anti-Asian violence has escalated, particularly targeting Asian American women. According to a recent report by Stop AAPI Hate and the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF), there were more than 6,600 reports of anti-Asian violence between March 2020 and March 2021, with the greatest numbers reported against Asian American and Pacific Islander women, girls, and non-binary people. Anti-Asian racism has long been woven into white supremacist, settler colonial narratives, and as an insidious tool within settler colonialism, it has “[disrupted] inter-racial solidarity, and has been used against Indigenous, Black and other racialized groups” (Lee-Ann and Chen 2021). The myth of the model minority “has been prevalent in the general public as a counter argument for anti-Asian racism” (Lee-Ann and Chen 2021). This myth, made popular more than fifty years ago, holds varied ramifications for Asian communities. It enforces the narrative that Asians are homogenous, while simultaneously separating South, South East, and East Asians from Southwest Asians (commonly referred to by the British colonial term, Middle Easterners). The myth of the model minority ignores the varied experiences of Asian communities, including differences in socioeconomic status, immigration status, and access to education and healthcare, and “it also excludes a specific form of anti-Asian racism against Asian women that is intertwined with gender and sexuality” (Lee-Ann and Chen 2021). The model minority myth allows for white settler narratives to ignore the long history of anti-Asian racism within the US. In *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech*, Patti Duncan states that “one logical starting point for any discussion of Asian Americans, especially one focused on historical silences within Asian America and critical rewritings of American historical narratives, is the history of Asian immigration to the United States” (2004, 33). Duncan details the migration of Asians to the US, who were frequently viewed as “less than human” (2004, 35), as well as the various restrictions placed on Asian immigrants, specifically women. Through historicizing the long record of Asian American resistance to violence, she also traces movements for solidarity among Asian communities and other peoples of color forced into labor.

As we organize against these multiple complex structures of violence, we also suggest that an engagement with social justice requires our critique of carceral feminism, prisons, and policing. We follow

scholars and activists like Mariame Kaba, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Angela Davis in claiming an abolitionist vision for the future, taking to heart Kaba's question, "What can we imagine for ourselves and the world?" (2021, 3). This question, like the question we reflected on in the first part of our essay, invites us to imagine a different kind of world. As Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie write, "Turning away from systems of policing and punishment doesn't mean turning away from accountability. It just means we stop setting the value of a life by how much time another person does in a cage for violating or taking it—particularly when the criminal punishment system has consistently made clear whose lives it will value and whose lives it will cage" (2021, 65-66).

Forms of policing and state violence within the US are intricately connected with structural violence within global and transnational contexts. Angela Davis argues that we need a broader global context to understand "the workings of the apparatus that has produced mass incarceration [in the United States]" (2016, 14). She writes: "What we saw in the police reaction to the resistance that spontaneously erupted in the aftermath of the killing of Michael Brown [in Ferguson] was an armed response that revealed the extent to which local police departments have been equipped with military arms, military technology, military training. The militarization of the police leads us to think about Israel and the militarization of the police there—if only the images of the police and not of the demonstrators had been shown, one might have assumed that Ferguson was Gaza" (Davis 2016, 14). And, argues Davis, just as Black people are disproportionately represented in US prisons, in Australia, it is aboriginal people who are disproportionately imprisoned (Davis 2016, 25). In this way, surveillance, policing, and prisons "consolidate the state's inability and refusal to address the most pressing social problems of this era" (Davis 2016, 25).

Eithne Luibhéid and Karma Chávez take up the issue of policing with regard to migration and border-crossings, with a focus on queer and trans migrants. In *Queer and Trans Migration: Dynamics of Illegalization, Detention, and Deportation*, they rely on queer and trans analytic rubrics to center the experiences of LGBTQI migrants and cross-border communities in discussions of migration. As they discuss, nearly 300 million people currently live in the world as international migrants or internally displaced people, but while the presence of migrants is frequently framed as a "migration crisis." Luibhéid and Chávez counter this idea, writing: "if there is a migration crisis, it concerns the unaddressed conditions that push many to migrate when they would prefer not to, and the impacts of punitive state, supranational, and populist responses including expanding illegalization, detention, and deportation" (2020, 1). Anti-immigrant sentiments, rhetoric, and policies shape the experiences, possibilities, and lives of migrants. And migrants are frequently scapegoated for a host of social and economic problems, as authors in *Queer and Trans Migrations* point out. Queer, trans, and gender nonnormative migrants are particularly vulnerable to immigration policies and practices that result in surveillance, policing, and violence.

In their discussion, "Imperialism, Settler Colonialism, and Indigeneity: A Queer Migration Roundtable," Leece Lee-Oliver, Monisha Das Gupta, Katherine Fobear, and Edward Ou Jin Lee reflect on settler colonialism and highlight some of the connections between queer and trans migration and Indigenous struggles for sovereignty. Lee states: "A queer and trans of color and diasporic critique suggests that practices of militarization, interior enforcement, illegalization, detention, and deportation informed by colonial and imperial logics cannot be untied from patriarchal cisnormative and heteronormative processes. In order to challenge the colonial border regime, one must also challenge heterocisnormativity and patriarchy" (Lee-Oliver et. al. 2020, 231). Lee's words and the roundtable discussion as a whole remind us that the colonial and imperial logics undergirding processes of surveillance, militarization, policing, and detention are deeply entrenched in patriarchy and cisheteronormativity. These structures are entangled in multiple ways, and their undoing requires our sustained analysis and resistance.

Disability Justice, Care, and Mutual Aid

We are inherently informed by disability justice, a movement and term grounded in the work of Black, Brown, queer, and trans members of the original Disability Justice Collective, founded in 2005. As Patty Berne writes, disability justice recognizes that ableism intersects with other systems of domination and exploitation: “The histories of white supremacy and ableism are inextricably entwined, both forged in the crucible of colonial conquest and capitalist domination” (2017, 149-150). COVID-19 demonstrates the necessity of disability justice discourses in our imaginings of time. Disability justice is in our memories and stories, it is in our pasts, our present, and our futures. The pandemic has affected society in a way that amplifies the precarity of time and what it means to minoritized individuals, especially those with disabilities. More specifically, COVID-19 is a clear example of the ways we all exist within a multitude of temporalities. While capitalism and neoliberalism urge us to return to “normal,” Kafer reminds us that crip time “requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of ‘how long things take’ are based on very particular minds and bodies” (2016, 27).

The ten principles of Disability Justice, written by Patty Berne with Aurora Levins Morales and David Langstaff on behalf of Sins Invalid, include centering intersectionality, leadership of those most impacted, an anti-capitalist politics, cross-movement solidarity, a recognition of wholeness, sustainability, commitment to cross-disability solidarity, a focus on interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation. They write, “This is Disability Justice, an honoring of the long-standing legacies of resilience and resistance which are the inheritance of all of us whose bodies and minds will not conform.... Disability Justice is a vision and practice of a yet-to-be, a map that we create with our ancestors and our great-grandchildren onward, in the width and depth of our multiplicities and histories, a movement towards a world in which every body and mind is known and beautiful” (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, 29). While ableist rhetoric and practices have surfaced repeatedly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with assumptions about whose lives and health are expendable, activists and advocates for disability justice have resisted such frameworks, creating care webs within many of our communities that rely on mutuality, solidarity, and love.

Care work, in the words of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, is “a place where disability justice and queer femme emotional labor intersect” (2018, 24). Care involves both physical, material care, as well as the emotional labor associated with love, respect, mutuality and community building. During the pandemic, many of us have emphasized care for one another, sharing food, information, and resources, offering childcare, rides, and emotional connection, creating care webs. Our world is informed by disability justice and care work, work that is collective and inclusive. But what does it look like when we are able to chip away and see the dark clouds roll back? What remains, and how do we rebuild? Perhaps our dreams may seem too big—out of reach and untenable—but they are only too big if we insist they must take place immediately, within our own lifetime. In fact, they are already taking place, not as swiftly or as dramatically as we might hope, but our very selves are an extension of this work, and we cannot limit our dreams to our own bodily existence. In “The Story of America: A Tribalography,” LeeAnne Howe (Choctaw), discussing Indigenous stories, states: “our stories are unending connections to the past, present, and future. And even if worst comes to worst and our people forget where we left our stories, the birds will remember and bring them back to us” (2002, 47). While Howe is writing about Indigenous histories and stories, she is also discussing the collective—including humanity, animals, nature, the universe. Howe makes an offering in this work for all of us to acknowledge and embrace our positionality in the past, present, and future.

Piepzna-Samarasinha’s *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* is a multifaceted text exploring what it means to be queer, disabled, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The writing is a call to care, an

open letter, a memoir of what has taken place and a scaffolding of work that is needed. Care, through solidarity, connection, and acknowledgement of our complex lived experiences, has the capacity to dismantle oppressive structures, and help us imagine new futures, new worlds. This care for each other while acknowledging our unique positions can be done through mutual aid. In *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*, Dean Spade states that “[d]isasters are pivotal times” (2020, 32). He argues that “[i]f we want the most people to survive, and to win in the short and long term, we have to use moments of disaster to help *and* mobilize people. Mutual aid is the way to do that” (2020, 32 emphasis in original). It is with this tiny light that some of us held hope for the first month of the pandemic. Like many others, we experienced uncertainty, sorrow, fear, and despair, but the urgency created by the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic caused mutual aid to blossom in spaces that it might not have otherwise. Many marginalized communities have long histories of creating networks of care through and alongside movements for social justice. With the pandemic, many who had not practiced mutual aid before became familiar with the ways that we can care for each other and meet one another’s needs without relying on institutions. As Spade discusses, mutual aid can be an “on-ramp for people to get to work right away on things they feel urgent about” (2020, 43). In addition, new members of mutual aid networks “build new solidarities” (2020, 43). This is one of the most powerful aspects of mutual aid. It can meet people where they are, address their needs, and bring them along in the fight for a just future.

Spade describes mutual aid as “only one tactic in the social movement ecosystem” as it “operates alongside direct action, political education, and many other tactics” (2020, 42). Since all of these methods of social movement organizing are a part of an ecosystem, they depend on one another. From Boggs’ focus on sustainability and collective action, to Gilio-Whitaker’s storytelling of Oceti Sakowin, and Piepzn-Samarasinha’s discussion of care webs as strategies of resistance, we are reminded of the importance of caring for one another alongside our revolutionary feminist and anti-colonial work. All of us in this collective engage in care work throughout various forms. We are caregivers, community facilitators, organizers, educators, and community gardeners.

In working toward our futures, we reflected on what we envision in a just future through a class writing prompt. One member wrote, *“A warm, yellow sun shines down on us. Children, grandmas, and grandpas laugh together and at one another. There is joy and gratitude for where we are now and there is also grief for what was lost, what has changed, and those who, at least in their physical bodies, are not here to share in this moment. They are alive in our hearts, which are now heard and supported. They are alive in the land and in the stars. We are learning how to feel, navigate, and appreciate our joy, our laughter, our grief. We are learning to love others and love ourselves, to love their lives and ours. It is scary, but also possible. It is happening. We are less scared because we are together.”* Another member also highlighted the importance of being together and the way that we have power through each other: *“Learning is my past, my present, and my future. I never want to stop challenging myself to be the best I can be. And I don’t mean perfection—I mean being the best for my family, my community, and most importantly (and often neglected), myself. I hope to be involved in activist communities. I want to serve others. I want my future to always seek out happiness. I want my needs to be met.”*

Connecting on the theme of needs being met, another member of our collective wrote: *“I dream of a future beyond the here and now. A time when the institutions that cause us harm have been left to rot and in their place systems of care, community, and reciprocity have sprouted. This utopia is made by us and for us. We rely on one another and grow together. Shedding the learned habits of colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy, we reach towards being in right relationship with our communities, our more than human kin, the land, and water. We energize each other rather than feeling burnt out and bitter. We navigate conflict and harm without carceral and punitive systems. These are the lights that pull me forward.”* However, these lights and drives are not always apparent. One member of the collective

wrote: “Kher. Fate. Kher bashe, shab beh kher, sohbeh beh kher. To fate, morning to fate, evening to fate. I have spent most of my life incapable of imagining a future for myself. When I closed my eyes and tried to envision my future all I saw was emptiness, emptiness rich and black, velvet to the touch, terrifying and comforting like an abyss at the bottom of the ocean. It is only within the last decade that I have been able to see truly within the emptiness, shades of green, stories built from loss, and the surrounding waves crashing against these blurred visions, shaking them to life. But I accept that my future is irrelevant. I am fine with the occasional return to emptiness. My own emptiness. Future does not need to belong to or include me. All I can do is create futures for others. All I need to do is to take yesterday and today to scaffold futures for others. I am in the middle of the abyss looking out, looking in.”

As we move through the world, we keep these things in mind. While sometimes we can get caught up in an abyss or need to pause and feel the heft of our grief and sorrow, we know that we are loved. We remind ourselves and others that rest is part of the process. As Tricia Hersey of The Nap Ministry theorizes, our “[r]est is a form of resistance because it disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy” (@thenapministry). In our weekly class meetings we held space for each other, and we looked forward to seeing one another. It is these glimmers of hope and connection that we hold dear, illuminated in a poem written by a member of the collective:

*A future worth living
Designed in our ancestors' dreams
Love restored, a flower weeps
Collective awakening, moonlight keeps
Us up at night, conspiring
Community healing woven
With threads of our labor
But are we ever truly deserving?
Sunlight illuminates snow falling off my cheek
Today, a gift
Tomorrow, we'll see.*

Conclusion: What Do We Long For?

“What we pay attention to grows, so I’m thinking about how we grow what we are all imagining and creating into something large enough and solid enough that it becomes a tipping point.”

–adrienne maree brown (2017, 19)

As we continue to try to understand and survive these tipping points and precarious temporalities—the fault lines that have been created by unprecedented historical events—we consider how major shifts have highlighted a critical need for change, for care, and for mutual aid. We cannot deny the dire effects of the collective grief we are experiencing; we must continue to resist the complex overlapping systems of domination and exploitation that structure our world. In *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, adrienne maree brown states, “We heal ourselves, and we heal in relationship, and from that place, simultaneously, we create more space for healed communities, healed movements, healed worlds” (2017, 192). How do we create the space and time to heal when something new is unfolding everyday? We propose that we can find this healing through love.

To begin using love as resistance, we must first look within ourselves and begin the process of “de-indoctrination” (Taylor 2018, 65). Audre Lorde argued that caring for ourselves is an act of political warfare that is necessary for our survival. Using these values as our guide, we can engage in acts of radical self-love

that contribute to the transformation of systems from the inside out. When oppressive systems use fear to uphold hierarchies, they scare us into submission. Radical self-love is fear-facing; when we interrogate fear, we interrogate the very systems that drain us, exploit us, and harm us. From here, we can begin to understand the importance of our individual survival to the collective.

Through love, we can imagine and create the futures we long for. brown tells us that “when we are engaged with acts of love, we humans are at our best and most resilient” (2017, 9). Love strengthens us. Love guides us. Love is justice and we have the capacity to transform ourselves and our kinships through love. In *Mutual Aid*, Spade reminds us that it is through the collective that we build solidarity. Solidarity is built in the moments we are able to laugh, cry, yell, and be calm together. bell hooks shares that “the choice to love is the choice to connect—to find ourselves in the other” (2000, 93). Now is the time to cultivate connections and rely on our kinship networks. Many of the works we engage in this essay emphasize the need for collaboration with “an ethic of incommensurability [that] acknowledges that we can collaborate for a time together even while anticipating that our pathways toward enacting liberation will diverge” (Tuck and Yang 2018, 2). In short, we cannot heal and resist without one another, no matter what our personal causes may be.

When asked what we long for, inspired by the writings of brown and Carruthers, our responses and engagement with the question and one another were profound and intense, especially as we acknowledge our mutuality and relationality. One member of the seminar evoked a deeply relational longing: *“I long for gratitude for feeling and being able to feel. I long for time for change and for more time. I long to want to be here. I long for courage and strength. I long for acceptance of change and acceptance that I may not experience that change. I long to be ‘excellent at loving’ (brown 2017, 110). I long to always tell you that I love you. I long for laughter and stories. I long for all of this for all of us, that is, if you long for it too.”* Another member also highlighted our interconnectedness, stating: *“I long for a feeling of fulfillment. Often I encountered this feeling when doing community work and connecting with others. I long for not feeling burnt out and possibly some semblance of ease. Not that everything is going to be easy or I won’t have moments of feeling tired or unmotivated but I hope if we eventually become adapted to or acclimate to this big sick, that things will not feel as heavy and sticky. I long for a just future, without structures of harm and inequity. I long for a future that honors my ancestors and my descendants. I long for the dismantling of the prison industrial complex.”*

Some of us expressed longings through our desires and love for our family members, echoing the commitment to honor our ancestors and pave the way for our descendants. One member of the collective wrote: *“I long to be surrounded by love and to deeply love those around me. I long to share with my future loved ones the memories that keep my departed loved ones alive—like the sound of ashes popping, dancing alive in the pile of hot coals as I’m waiting with my grandma for the lady outside the Asian market roasting sweet Japanese yams in the ground to hand us a perfectly piping hot parcel of deliciousness to enjoy on a ‘cold’ LA winter day. I long for my mother to find her happiness in a world repaired.”* Another member stated: *“I finally understand the desire for immortality. I cannot fathom being physically removed from my sibling’s children, to be unable to provide them safety and security, to know they are happy and living in a world even slightly better than I have. I long to live forever. In the words I leave them, my voice, their memories, in all the spaces and places they need me. To die is not to be gone -> I know this. I will return to the earth and be recycled into some new form of giving. And the ‘I’ they carry with them will be for as long as they need.”* And another member wrote: *“I long for meaningful connection, balance, and healing. I long for my child to not inherit the intergenerational trauma within our family, but instead to live in a future that is peaceful and whole. I long to honor the resilience and coping mechanisms of my mother and other members of my family, and to focus not only on the trauma I’ve*

inherited but also the strength and power. I long to be, echoing brown's words, 'in right relationship' with the natural world and those around me. I long to stay hopeful."

The desire to stay hopeful, to remember our connections to one another, and to be in community, was echoed again and again in our writings and discussion. In *Emergent Strategy*, brown writes, "Relationships are everything" (2017, 28). This core value was expressed by another member of the collective in the following way: "*I long for peace within myself. I long for the moments where I can put aside negative self-talk and anxiety and be mindful of what's around me. I feel like if I have peace, I can put more effort into my community. Self peace = more action. I long for a future where folks can get their basic needs met and then some. I long for a time where capitalism is dismantled and people are doing what makes them happy and are able to survive on their happiness. I long for love and dialogue. As cheesy as it sounds, I believe love is a viable solution to survival...I guess at the end of the day that's what everything I have said chalks up to: love. Love for myself, for my kinships, for my community, for this world."*

It feels impossible to conclude our essay. Multiple tipping points, both local and global, have existed long before we came together and they will continue to emerge. However, the opportunity to be in community with one another at this pivotal moment in time birthed a sense of urgency to theorize our engagement with social justice. Throughout this writing, we have relied on feminist methods grounded in care, accountability, and collective process. We know that creating a just future is connected to our ability to come together and imagine new possibilities. We reflect on what we long for as one route to this collective process of hope for just futures.

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