

Antifascism can be meaningful and liberatory, but it can also be traumatizing and isolating. How are we fortifying ourselves and each other for what is shaping up to be an increasingly turbulent era? This zine offers discussion and ideas to tackle some common problems and difficulties including trauma, fear, dehumanization, abuse, ego, and despair.







## In Loving Memory



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*And everyone who has died fighting fascism or has been victim to it*



# Tough Mind Soft Heart

*Nurturing solidarity  
in the struggle against fascism*

This zine is held under creative commons and anybody caught slingin it without our permission, will be mighty good friends of ourn, cause we don't give a dern. Publish it. Write it. Sing it. Swing to it. Yodel it. I wrote it, that's all I wanted to do.

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ungovernable-interview-lorenzo-kombo-ervin.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

*“One must have a tough mind and a soft heart.”*  
*- Sophie Scholl*

Thank you to the village it has taken to keep me going through the rough patches! Shout out to free self-defense classes, jail support, community gatherings with food, and places to sleep. Thank you to my family, therapists, and the many comrades and friends who I've worked with and supported me in all different ways throughout the years, I appreciate you!

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- <sup>1</sup> Eltahawy, Mona. *Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls*. S.L., Tramp Press, 2021.
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sources of strength, encouragement, and inspiration for each other and those around us, and to build new tools and avenues for growth in this era of great uncertainty and even greater possibility. At its best, antifascism can be a much needed cultural zone where fierceness, intensity, love, and joy not just coexist, but nurture each other in ways that are healing and difficult and beautiful. The world badly needs more of this as well as help extricating itself from the grasp of fascist domination.

There is on-going psychological warfare being waged against us and we must resist. We have a duty to ourselves and to our communities to be accountable and ready to struggle. Moving forward I hope we can keep discovering and creating new ways to find strength in ourselves, in our processes, and in radical solidarity. At the end of the day, I don't regret any of my actions against fascism despite the fear and consequences, but I do regret when I have been unkind with comrades. I wish everyone the best of luck in contending with the difficult but important work of figuring out our internal dynamics. It's a long haul, and a worthy one. Solidarity is our greatest weapon!

## **Introduction to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition**

“We need a feminism that is robust, aggressive, and unapologetic; a feminism that defies, disobeys, and disrupts that patriarchy, not one that collaborates with, coddles, and complies with it.”- Mona Eltahawy <sup>1</sup>

This work is an attempt to help alleviate some of the root causes of distress, trauma, fatigue, and burnout in antifascism, but these discussions will never go far if we can't first admit that there is a lurking eugenics within this movement, deplatform and delegitimize our own toxic elements, and work to protect and uplift the marginalized people in our own spaces. I'm done messing with intractable misogynists and look forward to working with people who are done with it too. We can and will do better because we have no choice if we are going to make it.

2020 was a transformative year in many respects so to address some of the changes from the original 2019 version:

-I've changed the tone and approach in some places

because I am concerned with how often the zine was characterized as “sweet”, which isn’t an insult, but doesn’t feel good to me. “Sweetness” can denote a saccharine naïveté which I do not possess and I’m not making these recommendations so we can be palatable or inoffensive. I have dodged death (multiple times) to bring you this and these issues deserve some gravity.

-I have taken out some of the original quotes as they came from sources I no longer wish to platform. This zine is meant to uplift those who are having to struggle to have a voice within the movement itself *plus* the state *and* the right-wing all at the same time, and I deeply apologize for giving anyone more legitimacy by including them in the original version.

-“Community” as a concept can be a way to distinguish an audience or commonality, but can also reflect a mini-nationalism of exclusion or performative identity. I use the term loosely in this work to describe the general grouping of people who consider themselves antifascist, but know that “community” means different things to different people and I want to caution against anything which serves to uphold internal hierarchies or create boundaries. Antifascism is for all.

-The uprising against police violence after the murder of George Floyd further exposed dangerous and racist ideological rooting of some spheres of antifascism, so I have drawn out that criticism more and incorporated more about abolition. I’ve also deepened my analysis around dehumanization/compassion after digging deeper and being confronted with the ways my own writing could be furthering some dangerous discourse.

## Conclusion

There is scholarship and conversation happening in all different corners of social justice spaces around the issues of how to maneuver to meet the increasingly dire circumstances of this century. Our current struggle will continue to morph significantly in the coming decades, and it is probably going to get much harder before it gets any easier. There may be times in the future when there is no work that can be done other than maintaining our spirits. While we must remain anchored to the present moment, it is hard to forgo seeing all the different possible futures ahead (some of which are quite bleak), and it is in these moments of darkness it becomes even more clear that everything we do now on the slow steady walk towards resiliency is invaluable. The connections we are making now and the ways we practice remaining flexible, curious, compassionate, and loving in a disorienting world make all the difference to the livability of the present moment while helping set us on a better path.

We’re still exploring all the ways healing and care work factor into our movements, and I know we’ll keep connecting those dots between us and other struggles as we weather these storms. I have nothing but faith in antifascists to continue to be

care work we can free each other in spirit even as they still try to keep us demoralized and alone. You are never alone when you are fighting fascism even though sometimes it can feel like it. It's so wonderful and important when we create systems where everyone feels that connection, presence and love, and when we can break through isolation and be heartbroken together. Standing with the vulnerable and with each other imbues life with meaning and strength, creating courage beyond what we ever could imagine. Incorporating direct solidarity results in rupturing futurity in the vein of the anarcho-nihilist without acting from a place of hopelessness, but also not relying on a wispy unreliable hopefulness either.

Humanity loves the image of the rebel because we all know deep down that at this moment in time we must fight back to live, and to care for those (including ourselves) that the system deems expendable is to rebel. We all reach for "that reflexive spirit of resistance rooted in the basic existential understanding that recalcitrance is simply a more meaningful and joyous form of existence than docility."<sup>50</sup>

Struggle so that all may live this rich, overflowing life.  
And be sure that in this struggle you will find a joy  
greater than anything else can give. - Pyotr Kropotkin

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of the resistance movement. Underground activities in the hospital included establishing contacts with patients, saving lives by falsely diagnosing illness (to avoid selections or work), executing informants on the grounds of falsified illness, and most spectacularly, breeding lice infected with typhus to be used as biological weapons...The general reluctance of the SS to enter the disease-ridden hospital made it one of the safer places for the organizations to operate." *Serafinski. "Blessed Is the Flame: An Introduction to Concentration Camp Resistance and Anarcho-Nihilism."* *The Anarchist Library*, 2016, [theanarchistlibrary.org/library/serafinski-blessed-is-the-flame](http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/serafinski-blessed-is-the-flame).

## Introduction

Antifascism has ebbed and flowed throughout the years depending on the need for it, and it seems the tide will not be going out for some time. The stresses of climate catastrophe and the corresponding global decline in democracy has made fascism a more present and pressing menace than it has been in decades, with no clear end in sight. There has also been a corresponding uptick and interest in fighting against fascism, and with it a new wave of antifascists have emerged from all different corners in an inspiring upswell of action and energy alongside growing worldwide unrest and revolt. We're taking on new challenges, and so new forms and paths are emerging. Antifascism can help people on both the individual and community level become more whole, more healthful, more liberated, and more militant instead of more traumatized, broken, and isolated. Doing so is hard work and not always very straightforward, so how are we fortifying ourselves and each other for what is shaping up to be an increasingly turbulent era?

In this piece I highlight the renewal of a solidarity focused antifascism along side some of the underlying assumptions and values that help create the environment for it, as well as

some of the barriers and some suggestions for how to deal with those difficulties. Even under apocalyptic conditions the human capacity to live fully and well is vast, and I hope I am able to articulate some ideas to help our antifascist movements be spaces of care and joy. The last few years I have spent fighting fascism have been the most terrifying, joyous, difficult, rewarding, lonesome, connected, and intense time of my life. Some of that time I have felt powerful, supported, enveloped in community and able to take on anything, while other times I have been terrified, despairing, and alone. Through remembering my more difficult times, and in working to learn more about healing, I realize that other people may also be grappling with similar experiences. Other folks doing antifascism may also feel isolated and traumatized as thousands of people have taken to the streets, or started small collectives, or tried to fight on their own out of a moral imperative. I wrote this for the survival of those who are just entering the fight now and for those who have been in it for a while and are dealing with cumulative strain.

There can be a lot of criticism or shame placed on people who we don't think are doing right by each other or the movement, but there are complex and deeply human considerations we need to take into account. These are not excuses for bad behavior, but an opportunity to understand ourselves better and reshape our spaces to be ones that don't foster or encourage abusiveness. I'm hoping this will be an invitation for us to dig deep and be compassionate with ourselves and each other as we consider what some of the deeper causes of our difficulties are. Some of our toxic politics are affecting our efficacy, and this is also my attempt to more clearly articulate a nurturing style of antifascism that can be undervalued or overlooked despite its prevalence. This organizing philosophy fosters resiliency, creates space for all different kinds of people to be able to participate, and has been the backbone of long term success. While I am not introducing

Blessed Is The Flame:

I am interested in the sort of resistance we pursue, not because we necessarily believe it will produce desired changes or lead us into a brighter future, but because it is the most meaningful response to this world we can imagine. Because we simply can't stomach the idea of being passive in the face of a system this brutal, regardless of how far we may be from our dreams. We might think about acts of resistance not as a means of liberation, but as acts of liberation in themselves.<sup>48</sup>

The nihilist speaks of 'stopping time' to achieve "jouissance", or the joy at the shattering of the oppressive order, essentially asking us to sever any attachments we have to the existing order and to position ourselves outside of and against its progress.<sup>49</sup> For those of us who are disabled or chronically ill, we already understand this innately as our bodies do not fit within a 'progressive' time scale. We simply do not function in a capitalist framework of continuous productivity and "improvement". Movement spaces which are anti-ableist have a better understanding of the more natural rhythms of ebb and flow as we listen to ourselves and have times of energy and action move smoothly into (often longer) times of rest and recovery. Instead of a constant grind that wears us down into dust and despair, life becomes a delicious soup comprised of silence, caring for others, and being cared for, punctuated by intense ruptures of joy, noise, and attack that then recedes back into rest and love and gratitude. In this way we can open our arms to despairing moments knowing they are just one part of the richness of life which we can move through into the next moment.

Interestingly, and I don't think coincidentally, one of the most effective sites of resistance in the concentration camps during WWII was a hospital.<sup>xviii</sup> When we pair resistance with

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<sup>xviii</sup> "The hospital was slowly established as a place that was not only occasionally capable of healing people, but was also one of the central pillars

society and changes history. I've also seen the quieter but in many ways even more powerful effects of the joy, relief, and strength I can bring people who are scared when I have been willing to confront bullies and abusers. Through the solidarity I have been shown I have also learned how deeply meaningful seemingly small acts of kindness can be, through virtue of which I am alive today. I don't know if I will survive being an antifascist, but I know I wasn't really surviving not being one, and in the end no one "survives" at all anyway. It is hard to imagine going back to a "safer" reality devoid of the connections and purpose I have gained being antifa.

It's the reductionist approach to life: if you keep it small, you'll keep it under control. If you don't make any noise, the bogeyman won't find you. But it's all an illusion, because they die too, those people who roll up their spirits into tiny little balls so as to be safe. Safe?! From what? Life is always on the edge of death; narrow streets lead to the same place as wide avenues, and a little candle burns itself out just like a flaming torch does. I choose my own way to burn. - Sophie Scholl

The opposite of despair is not happiness, which is just shallow pacifying ephemera continuously sold to us by Empire. Neither is it joy, which is only meaningful in its nature as a rupture, and while is an important shot in the arm to disrupt despair, is not a sustaining force against it. The opposite of despair is movement; is struggling alongside others as we make each moment more livable. Whatever may happen in the future, right now this moment exists and can be used to help someone, interrupt abuse, bring joy, create space for peace, prevent harm, rest, and stitch together the fabric of our lives. Antifascism is a chance to open up space for life. One punch to Richard Spencer's doofus face made the whole world erupt in joy and power. I watched those remixes on repeat as it broke through the depressed, fearful malaise the world was falling into in the face of rising fascism. Some one was fighting back, and that lit my soul on fire. Life! From

new concepts, the bits and pieces of information on these considerations tend to be buried in other works and overshadowed in the mainstream dialogue by other versions of antifascism which, despite attempts at internal reform, often remain dominated by misogyny, racism, and/or ableism. My aim is to explore ways we can strengthen and create new antifascist movements which incorporate wisdom from those versed in abolition, healing, feminism, and disability justice. I know there are many others with more experience and insight into these topics, and I hope that this will not be seen as a set of answers as much as a jumping off point for more inquiry and discussion.

It has been pointed out to me that much of this piece is translatable to activism outside of the specifically antifascist sphere, and I hope that people will not limit themselves into only working on antifascism and will share insights learned across different struggles. I am very wary of anyone who's only political identity is "antifascist", as white antifascism is beginning to bolster ideologies akin to racist carceral white feminism which ultimately helped undermine the fight for Black liberation during the 1970's and 1980's. If our work is to stop fascism at the root and not simply further entrench settler & state violence, we must also be abolitionist and anti-colonial in our politics.

I decided to write about antifascism in particular because that is where I have been hanging my hat (or bandana), and also because the fight against fascism speaks to many of our universally deepest held issues and concerns about how we treat each other and approach the struggle for life. The thoughts and ideas I share in this zine come from a place of respect for everyone fighting fascism, and an understanding that the struggle for justice, equality and dignity flourishes the best when it is diverse, has room for everyone at whatever place they are at, and supports whichever ways they feel led and able to create change. Many of the ideas come from the



following works which I have quoted throughout and I highly recommend for further reference:

Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk

Anti-fascism Against Machismo: Gender, Politics, and the Struggle Against Fascism by Petronella Lee

As Black As Resistance: by Zoé Samudzi and William C. Anderson

Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times by Nick Montgomery and carla bergman

Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement edited by Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Blessed Is The Flame: An introduction to concentration camp resistance and anarcho-nihilism by Serafinski

in the internal work of fighting for my own life against despair is itself a meaningful antifascist struggle as by doing so I stubbornly proclaim that we, the impure, the poor, and the degenerate<sup>xvii</sup> have value. That life itself, the planet and the people on it (including myself) are worth saving and fighting for, even while concurrently holding that the fight in this moment is worthwhile independent of whatever the future holds. From an anarchist essay on morale:

For me, accepting that my actions cannot derive their meaning from some future goal is intertwined with the process of coming to terms with my mortality. Recognizing death as inevitable, I don't hurry any faster towards it... We may be defeated by our enemies, we are certainly doomed to become dust ourselves... In this regard, my ability to believe in the possibility of change—not as something to occur in the future, but as something I can pursue right now—is a fundamental part of my power to live fully, to maintain a healthy relationship to my own agency.<sup>47</sup>

For me antifascism tied together the confused strings of thought which found evidence all around that something is seriously wrong and no one seems to be doing much about it. Fascism is the rot at the core of our intertwining systems of patriarchy, racism, capitalism, ableism, and domination that strangle a world aching for freedom. To fight fascism and work towards abolition is to get to the crux of the matter and to get the most bang for your buck when it comes to actions you can take to help turn the tide of the world away from death and destruction. For the first time in my life actions I have taken have had tangible, meaningful effects in the world and I've seen how our work as antifascists ripples out into

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<sup>xvii</sup> I'm intentionally using the terms "impure" and "degenerate", which are originally Nazi terms to highlight diversity, disability, queerness, and sex-positivity. Fuck you, nazis.

to our values. People hate antifascists because we shed light onto liberal society's shame and the fact that our current system of "democratic" nation-states seem to devolve into fascism as a matter of course. Fascists are a symptom of a disease no one wants to talk about, and we're talking about it. We live with open eyes and it scares those who would rather not acknowledge the dangerous realities of our time.

While I would argue that life can't be truly meaningful unless it is rooted in a clear-eyed view of the challenges facing us, it is also hard on the soul to stare into the depths of the abyss. The dominant systems are so entrenched, so brutal, and so cruel it can be really difficult to function or see a path forward under their weight as the genocidal logic of capitalism is trying to march us all off a cliff. Some respond to this pressure by trying to look past the current world and focus on a future utopia where our systems value life, or look even further still past death to a heaven where we can finally be at peace and are freed from the boot on our neck that strangles us. But as an antifascist I feel it is my job to puncture holes in any fantasy that becomes all encompassing and keeps us suspended in inaction or grasping at campaigns reliant on a world whose demise may be imminent. To focus on the future is to delay experiencing the present, and to require a happy ending is to live half-dead engulfed in yet another fantasy that would try and sell us back the status quo that is killing us. As the anarcho-nihilist says: "It speaks to the very nature of our domestication that we only choose resistance so long as it feels like something we can win."<sup>46</sup>

To be an antifascist is to fight for life surrounded by cults of death, whether in the form of neoliberal stasis or fascist domination. Antifascism is at its core a philosophy which affirms life in defiance of the destructive illogic of genocide. I live in order to spite the systems that would prefer me dead. While I do hope there is a future utopia and I do hope to experience heaven when I die, putting hope in them is not the animating feature of my life as I have found them an unreliable source of energy. I say that human life has value *now*, and we can bring bits of heaven to earth *now*. To engage

## Solidarity Antifascism

I'm going to try to put words to what has been described by so many actions and work which is often unnoticed or under appreciated. The vision is of a movement which is:

- **Inclusive**

Anyone of any age, ability, or identity is seen as an asset, has meaningful work to do, and feels as safe as possible, useful and valued<sup>i</sup>

- **Relevant**

Seen as a resource to their communities, approachable by people in need, knowledgeable, helpful

- **Connected**

Has solid community ties and is able to be in solidarity

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<sup>i</sup> The discussion rages on surrounding including formers (ex-fascists) in organizing spaces. My take is that we should always consider the safety of the most at risk in our spaces and privilege what they need and want. We do not all need to be in the same spaces and can work in parallel instead of conjunction with each other.

with others, and others are in solidarity back

- **Healthful**

Participants are supported both in times of crisis and healing, daily operations leave people feeling good, seen, strong and/or held

- **Liberatory**

The work moves us all towards collective liberation while achieving interim goals

- **Uplifting**

Directed by and/or comprised of those most at risk; emergent from oppressed communities

It should be noted that this doesn't mean every antifascist group or project ticks every one of these boxes, but that as a connected network we strive in those directions. It's partly coalition building, but it moves beyond that into the realm of deeper connection and care, and antifascism is the strongest when it is an outgrowth of existing liberatory struggles. Everywhere I've been I've known many people doing antifascist work to be kind, caring, deeply compassionate people who often share a vision of abolition and total liberation at the heart of their work. This is not well reflected in the current self-described antifa movement's outer aspect or seemingly dominant culture, which in many cases de-centers existing struggles and acts as though both fascists and antifascists are isolated from their socio-cultural context. Despite the Trump-era resurgence of often white settler driven antifascism, the roots of the movement in amerika are deeply tied to Black liberation and building cross-community connections:

It was their understanding of fascism as being linked to

## Despair/Meaning

When people come into contact with their own power - with their capacity to participate in something life-giving - they often become more militant.<sup>45</sup> -Joyful Militancy

As a disabled femme who has been told my life will be nothing but a hopeless mess of heartbreak, medical intervention, shortened life span, and constant struggle, the question comes up from time to time about why to keep going on. The simple answer is: because fuck you, that's why. I didn't always have this confidence. This has been one of the most difficult sections to tackle, as the subject of despair is one I hold close to me and continue to wrestle with as we hurtle forward into an unstable, darkening future. I came to antifascism hoping to have a meaningful death and have found instead a meaningful life, with a previously tenuous connection to existence having been fortified in ways I could not have imagined. The powers-that-be would have us hide away in various forms of disengagement, but there is something ecstatic about living in the real world even in all its terror. I worry my time here may be shorter because of the stand I have taken, but that seems to be the trade-off many of us are making in order to reject pacification in favor of being present and reacting to the events of the world in accordance

doable by average people and we do it every day. We often have no choice. The big secret that police (of all flavors) don't want you to know is that they don't defend us. We are defending ourselves, and by 'we' I don't mean via big burly armed cis men. It only takes some audacity and a couple pounds of pressure to do real damage, and when push comes to shove I can antifa and so can you. It's great to have trained comrades available to help out, but only if they are trustworthy, humble, and safe to be around, which is not true if they act like cops. The abuse and toxicity that is the cost of the security specialization model isn't worth it. Abolish *all* police, including supposedly anarchist ones.

anti-Blackness that led the Black Panther Party to host a United Front Against Fascism conference in Oakland, California, in July 1969, which attracted other Black as well as Latinx/Caribbean, Asian American, Native American, and progressive, working class white organizers and organizations from across the nation. It was their shared understanding of U.S. fascism that united the organizations and the people. -Jeanelle Hope<sup>2</sup>

There is an orientation towards care and resilience which is translatable to projects that are not about building community as well as those that are. From this vision emerges an understanding of struggle as multifaceted, incorporating activities such as education and care work as equally vital to liberation as physical defense.

Conceptualize anti-fascist resistance broadly and engage in multi-layered struggle. Embrace a variety of organizing strategies and tactics, and move away from the tendency to look at anti-fascist struggle in terms of a hierarchical ranking in which certain forms of activity (e.g. combat/fighting, involvement in formal political organizations etc.) are placed at the top, and all other forms of activity are seen as secondary and less important. Anti-fascist resistance isn't just one thing. It involves a lot of different types of activities, and requires a diversity of things. - Petronella Lee<sup>3</sup>

This type of care focused orientation can be seen in many antifascist circles and is described in an article written by Kim Kelly about antifa after the Charlottesville attack in 2017:

Whether it's collecting shoelaces, cigarettes, and Metrocards to give people once they get out of jail, or cooking big vegan dinners for folks as they carry out

letter-writing to political prisoners, or offering childcare when others hit the streets, it's all necessary and valid. This is the fierce, radical care with which we support one another in the struggle. This is the beating heart of the liberation movement, the crux that sustained our forebears in every other revolutionary grassroots organization. Solidarity is our strength and our greatest weapon.<sup>4</sup>

This includes personal growth, healing practices, education, and building community connection, and it rejects the patriarchal notion that militancy is undermined by kindness or warmth. Instead it proposes that militant action cannot exist in any sustainable manner without a strong infrastructure of training and care work wherein people feel supported and encouraged. As stated in *Joyful Militancy*, "When people find themselves genuinely supported and cared for, they are able to extend this to others in ways that seemed impossible or terrifying before."<sup>5</sup>

We conceptualize the struggle for liberation as inseparable from the daily toil for survival and respect violence but are not dominated by it<sup>ii</sup>. Don Hammerquist writes in 'Confronting Fascism':

A revolutionary culture must not incorporate violence

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<sup>ii</sup> "Absolute dismissals of violence are limiting, but so too are absolute defenses of violence as always-already necessary or inherently virtuous when committed by the oppressed. Rather than reinforce either position, [Ben Case] grounds violence in the needs of current social movements to respond to the contemporary moment. It is important to move beyond the violence-nonviolence dichotomy, and instead to think of violence as a constitutive element of a long-term objective." *Editorial Committee. "Building Everyday Anti-Fascism." Upping the Anti, 2 Aug. 2017, uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/19-building-everyday-anti-fascism/.*

study done on a program in Kenya called IMpower, which educated adolescents in rape prevention. "Findings include an average 51% decrease in the incidence of rape among trainees in the year after the program—no mean feat in a country where one in four women has experienced sexual or intimate partner violence in the last 12 months."<sup>44</sup> Having enough people trained in defense creates herd immunity. Fascists need to know they are playing Russian roulette when they attack. Being the cowards they are they go for the people they think are isolated or weak, so we must help defend our outer edges.

This identification with law enforcement shows in the ways antifa right now is also beginning to devolve into a liberal project of recuperating settler-colonial, patriarchal, and state violence. It has been all too common since the uprisings after George Floyd to see self-identified antifa acting as an extension of the police state; tagging law enforcement on Twitter, jumping on racist and misogynist attacks of other leftists, and trying to reclaim the amerikan flag. In some ways this is a triumph as the entire concept of antifascism had been waylaid into extremist territory and it has been a hard fought battle to renormalize, but now it must be defended against co-optation by liberals to allow more vulnerable people to have safer cultural access and support for the militancy they need to survive.

Much like in the struggle to abolish the police, the status quo is going to be difficult to dislodge. There are some antifascists who at their heart of hearts enjoy positioning themselves as part of an elite faction and aren't invested in the expansion of antifascism out of a subcultural bubble. They want to believe it's really too difficult for the average person, necessitating their suffering and excusing their abusive behavior, much like cops. I have heard the refrain that 'some people just shouldn't be antifascists'. I heartily disagree and think there is a role for every one, and as it turns out, with a little training and some bravery community defense is entirely



people who will have weapons, *those* are the people who will directly confront the nazis, and the rest of us will just kinda do *our* stuff.' That's not a good dynamic. The dynamic we were trying to get, and I won't say we had total success, but we did develop a number of people to feeling 'yes, I'm *part* of the security of this group and I won't back down.' -M. Treloar

The fight against control is endemic to humanity right now as we all resist being overcome by the systems and ideologies driving our current society. It's a battle on every level; individual, group, network, movements, nations, and the world. When fighting this battle it's easier to believe it is only external, that the nazis are the only source of the problem. I wish it were that easy. The false equivalency of antifascists with fascists is absurd, but many antifa do not seem to be trying very hard to do the internal work to fully separate themselves from the structural violence which feeds fascist creep. The mentality of policing creates a false sense of safety within perceived borders of cultural identity and excludes potentially great antifascists while including abusive or toxic people simply because of a cultural bond. Vysotsky's book proves that many antifa do see themselves in terms of the same existing frameworks of authoritarian control and dominance<sup>43</sup>, and we must deepen our political analysis away from these models which only reinforce the conditions for fascism and abuse.

We are on the brink of a cultural rejuvenation of the radical left, and the more time we spend on new growth instead of trying to reform the existing in-crowd the better. New projects that fall outside the purview of existing antifa networks need the most attention and support and we need more projects based in community self-sufficiency and empowerment rather than a focus on elite militias or parallel non-governmental policing forces. Wide spread community training can be effective at stopping attacks, as shown by a

into its internal functioning. This is an extremely important distinction with all variants of fascism and unfortunately with many variants of leftism. It has to be a place where everyone feels safe, particularly those who are the objects of violence in society generally. This is not at all easy to combine with the importance of militance in the general struggle, with the necessity to reject strategic pacifism, and with the need to sharply challenge and vigorously debate various ideas and attitudes which inevitably will be part of the scene.<sup>6</sup>

We embrace the long work of building connections, changing systems, healing wounds, and overcoming a continuous series of obstacles to a better world that is never truly finished. We reject the status quo discourse which falsely dictates that our main concern is to fight a battle based in war and domination where we fight for glory to defeat our enemies towards an end goal when we've "won". As long as white supremacy, capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy are hegemonic, fascism will continue to be a problem. We not only stop fascists in action, but also to stop the creation of them by undermining the systems and logics that support them while simultaneously working to heal the damage they do. The penultimate goal of this vision is not a thriving antifascist community (although that is an intermediate goal), but rather a community that is antifascist, or even better, for the category of "antifascist" to no longer exist at all because antifascism is no longer necessary. Unlike fascists, we don't work to impose our will on the world, but to be outdated relics of a more barbaric age.

While hatred can be an animating force, it isn't the main collective focus. Zoe Samudzi and William C. Anderson write:

What we must come to understand is that a willingness

to defend ourselves and our communities is rooted in politics of collective care. Rather than seeking vengeance and aiming to harm oppressors, our desire to defend ourselves should be rooted in our love for one another. We are not ready to fight because we love fighting. We are ready to fight because we are worth fighting for.<sup>7</sup>

This type of antifascism is one where healing and connection are part of the bones of the movement at all scales from our smallest interactions with each other to our biggest campaigns. Using emergent strategy framework, this vision knows that “how we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale”<sup>8</sup> and “our movements themselves have to be healing, or there’s no point to them.”<sup>9</sup> In this vision, we fiercely love each other, which is shown by how we care for each other, hold each other accountable, and keep encouraging each other to be better and grow in new directions. As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha says:

I didn’t know that one group falling apart didn’t have to mean that was it — for the idea of building a care web, for the movement. I wish we could’ve known that the struggles we hit weren’t failures or signs of how inadequate we were but incredibly valuable learnings.<sup>10</sup>

level) and increasing local capacity to fight fascists. We know from police that relying on an outside group doesn’t work. “We keep us safe” doesn’t mean we have our own private cops, it means that all of us are responsible for each other’s safety and well-being and as many people as possible have the knowledge and tools they need to defend themselves and each other.

It’s possible the intent of the specialization of defense is to spare the general populace from the damaging effects and backlash, but as we can see with the police this insularity is a recipe for abuse and oppression and does nothing to stop the violence already being enacted. We saw the gravity of re-creating policing in radical spaces unfold during the tragedy at CHOP/CHAZ in Seattle with the murders of Antonio Mays Jr. and Horace Lorenzo Anderson, two Black youth killed by “security” persons while fleeing to the autonomous zone for help. Policing cannot be divorced from anti-Black violence. The specialization of defense and a monopoly on the use of violence will always tend towards producing tragedies such as that which occurred at the CHAZ, as the role itself creates the conditions for those with a perceived entitlement to play out their own egos, paranoia, and biases with potentially fatal results. This has been an ongoing discussion throughout decades of antifascist organizing as narratives of heroism and specialization continuously must be pushed back against. As part of the Coalition for Human Dignity in Portland Oregon during the early 1990’s, antiracist activists were contending with the same issues. From an interview on the podcast “It Did Happen Here”, an oral history of organizing during that era:

We were trying to get away from a more macho model of ‘I’m going to get tough, I’m going to get weapons, I’m going to attack these nazis.’ That works at a certain level, but it also leads to a bad intra-group dynamic of ‘*those* are the people who will do the security, *those* are the

rhetoric of antifa as “anarchist police” as people who enjoy and feel entitled to violence try to justify themselves and can only conjure a parallel rooted in systemic abuse.

Stanislav Vysotsky in his new book “American Antifa: The Tactics, Culture, and Practice of Militant Anti-Fascism” has a chapter called ‘The Anarchy Police’ where he writes: “Antifa activists take on the protective role of law enforcement in a manner that reflects their radical ideology and non-hierarchical values”<sup>41</sup>. This is a clear demonstration of the cognitive dissonance between some antifa practice and values, and we must remain hostile to any group configuration that understands itself in paternalistic terms of policing and control. Vysotsky also stated that within the antifascist movement “in general, power is decentralized because it is temporary and not invested in a durable institution”<sup>42</sup>, which only remains true if we make sure to not allow the calcification of isolated institutional antifascist or ‘protest security’ formations, and always push to help support, educate, and train more targeted peoples while deplatforming, dismantling, and rescinding the legitimacy of abuse apologist projects.

Abuse persists as long as we rely on abusers for safety, and right now it’s often people prone to abuse who are in training spaces for physical defense. Access to the knowledge and means for defense is heavily gate kept. This is not just a fight against the state monopoly on violence, but also the white monied abled cisheteropatriarchal monopoly on violence as well. More marginalized people need to have the resources to protect themselves. Our approaches need to be designed to increase autonomy and empowerment, so *everyone* can bully fascists as a fun community activity. People closest to the problem know how to deal with it best, and relying on outside specialists instead of empowering communities creates a lack of localized responses and can endanger people, so we need to make sure that the work is about increasing hyper-local agency (down to family/neighborhood/community group

## Obstacles

While revolutionaries must never in bad faith attack other revolutionaries that in good courage put themselves on the front line, nothing should be above analysis and critique from comrades who are involved in the same struggle. To avoid analysis and critique would lead anarchists to the same sort of ideological blindness that stopped many communists from critiquing Stalin.. - Alex Trocchi<sup>11</sup>

What keeps us from this vision more widely? First, antifascism is highly autonomous and very diverse, so not everyone shares this vision. There are many variations or deviations, some of which have not wrestled with unexamined biases or favor the abilities and/or organizing styles of people with privilege (abled, cis, white, monied, male, etc). Secondly, we're under constant attack from fascists (non-state and state), which severely undermines our efforts through threat of violence, actual violence, surveillance, and infiltration. Not only a three-way fight, this is a four-way struggle as we also must contend with the internal damages of infighting, paranoia, poverty, and burnout. The sheer amount of important and meaningful antifascist work which has been

done under these conditions is truly remarkable!

While we don't have control over external threats, we do have control over our internal responses and what directions to grow to help us move forward. Working towards solidarity antifascism can help soothe our work by consciously detoxifying our praxis and creating an intentionality behind healing ourselves and our communities to maintain the ability and capacity to fight and evolve. It is important to acknowledge the relationship between our inner selves, the minutia of our interactions with each other, and our efficacy in stopping fascism. Whether or not we feel we are succeeding in our goals, we can exist in ways that make our lives more luscious and worthwhile and stop the violence we inflict on each other. All of our actions arise out of our deeply held values, our state of mind, and the wholeness or brokenness of our hearts. As adrienne maree brown says:

What we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system. Grace [Lee Boggs] articulated it in what might be the most-used quote of my life: "Transform yourself to transform the world." This doesn't mean to get lost in the self, but rather to see our own lives and work and relationships as a front line, a first place we can practice justice, liberation, and alignment with each other and the planet.<sup>12</sup>

We are not immune to unintentionally recreating oppression, and we need to question what we are doing or can do to interrupt those systems of harm and to heal as an intentional antifascist praxis. The world in general is a difficult and damaging place to live in, and world building can especially be so since it is stressful, emotional, and high stakes. Antifascism is among some of the higher stakes types of activism and also one of the most explicit about being willing to/ needing to use violence as a tool when necessary, which

## **Abuse/Abolition**

One thing I'll be most anxious to say to people is we can't organize the way we organized back in the 60s, we can't organize the way we organized even 30 years ago, 20 years ago. We've got to break new political ground and have new political theory and new political tactics. These don't come from one person or group alone, it must be decided by the people themselves. - Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin<sup>40</sup>

In trying to understand antifascism, comparisons are occasionally made to law enforcement or private security. This is unfortunately sometimes an accurate comparison, for in some circles there is an unexamined re-creation of policing models where a small group takes on the burden of violence for the whole village, whether or not that village wants them to. This mindset acts as a refuge for abuse. It seems that some are turning to antifascism as a socially acceptable way to be abusive under the guise of heroism, much in the same way people become cops. This is where we begin to see disturbing

subject Lipsky writes,

We need to acknowledge the value of what we bring without making our work be all about us. Once we cross that line, it can be difficult to come back. We can lose an accurate sense of our individual capacities and limits as well as our actual interdependence with others working in our fields.<sup>39</sup>

The causes of fascism are complex and global, including geopolitical forces that we have no control over. No one person or group is responsible for stopping it alone and the piece each person is doing is very important, but it is just that, a single piece. If your identity and self worth have become tied to the work this admission can feel deflating, but the reality is a grandiose mindset is isolating and destructive, and relinquishing it allows space to see and be inspired by all the myriad ways that humanity is fighting for liberation. If you are feeling like your personal work is the only thing stopping humanity from slipping into the stranglehold of authoritarianism, you need to take a break. This is the importance of solidarity, because when you are working with others it is easier to take care of yourself without feeling like everything will fall apart. It is too much of a burden to bear the whole weight of the world on one set of shoulders.

significantly heightens risk both of physical harm, psychological harm, and repression from the state. Culturally, antifascism has also embraced a certain venomous style in order to engage in psychological warfare and halt the rightward shift of the Overton Window,<sup>iii</sup> arguing that society should not show any tolerance of racism and fascism and we need to actively attack appeasement of any kind. That is an absolutely important stance, but sometimes that intensity and confrontational attitude is directed inwards resulting in collateral damage. Without recognizing healing and care as integral to our movement spaces, this stress and intensity build up and spaces become toxic. Disability justice writer and activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha wrote:

Most folks I know come to activist spaces longing to heal, but our movements are often filled with more ableism and burnout than they are with healing. We work and work and work from a place of crisis. Healing is dismissed as irrelevant, reserved for folks with money, an individual responsibility, something you do on your own time. Our movements are so burnout-paced, with little to no room for grief, anger, trauma, spirituality, disability, aging, parenting, or sickness, that many people leave them when we age, have kids, get sick(er) or more disabled, or just can't make it to twelve meetings a week anymore.<sup>13</sup>

I have witnessed the ways internal toxicity affects our efficacy and disrupts our ability to work together, to grow as a

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<sup>iii</sup> The Overton Window describes “commonly held ideas, attitudes and presumptions [that] frame what is politically possible”. *Russell, Nathan J. “An Introduction to the Overton Window of Political Possibilities.” Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 4 Jan. 2006, [www.mackinac.org/7504](http://www.mackinac.org/7504).*



movement, and even to effectively stop fascists. This toxicity is actively dangerous to the most vulnerable in our spaces, creates isolation, can spur backlash and counterproductive actions, and pushes out diversity by creating a hostile environment. I want to reiterate that antagonism and hostility are important tools to the movement, and I'm not suggesting that we all become fluffy bunnies. However, an antagonistic stance and approach can be wrapped up in unexamined oppressive or destructive behaviors and be corrosive to each other as well as the work itself. Some of these obstacles are *trauma, fear, dehumanization, ego, abuse, and despair*. All of these are very commonplace to the human condition, and instead of finding strength in an ego-driven exceptionalism, we can find strength in the knowledge that we're not alone. We don't need to recreate the wheel as much as continue to actively apply existing concepts and approaches to our struggle and the specific needs of our communities and can respond to these difficulties with *support, boundaries, agency, solidarity, abolition, and meaning*.

thanks from them, and there is nothing more meaningful or more moving. If you're never receiving any appreciation, you may want consider why that is, why you feel entitled to it, whether or not you are really acting in solidarity instead of charity,<sup>xvi</sup> and what you can do to improve your relationships with your community. I've also experienced how we can become bitter, defensive, and critical when we don't feel valued or connected to others, and it's a reminder of how important good process and inclusion are to the work and our self-image as a whole. When everyone has a voice and useful work to do our egos are less likely to try to step in to protect us and stir up acrimony. From a handbook on collective process from AK Press:

How many intelligent, motivated individuals have left projects behind because they were attacked, neglected, undervalued, or silenced in other ways? When we work to develop and sustain stronger, more egalitarian sets of processes to guide our interpersonal interactions, we help to ensure that our collectives are something more than a group of frustrated people sparring with one another. Instead, a truly egalitarian collective is a model of the society we want to see, someday, in miniature.<sup>38</sup>

One last note on ego: sometimes what seems like ego may actually be burnout. As mentioned briefly before, one symptom of trauma exposure response is 'grandiosity and an inflated sense of importance related to one's work'. On this

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<sup>xvi</sup> From the group Mutual Aid Disaster Relief's model of "Solidarity, not charity." Solidarity means working horizontally with someone to solve a problem together, while charity denotes that you see yourself as above them and are doing something for them, often more to make yourself feel good than because you care about them. "Core Values." *Mutual Aid Disaster Relief*, 15 Oct. 2019, [mutualaiddisasterrelief.org/core-values/](https://mutualaiddisasterrelief.org/core-values/).

our identity, the work of self-liberation, education, and deepening our analysis to extricate ourselves from patterns of domination is never done. An important aspect of this is uprooting our own biases and white supremacy. An important dynamic is addressed in this quote from the zine Uproot White Anarchism:

White anarchism is a phrase describing the cultural hold and maintenance of euro-centralized anarchist theories, culture, dynamics, figures, and mechanisms built on the directives and assumptions of a colonized society...if we continue to fail to acknowledge and address the need to dismantle the toxic patriarchy, neocolonial culture, and white supremacy in our own spaces, we will only continue to disseminate these problematic platforms and experiences...Often what is being theorized even in good intentions is stuck in theory, and if direct action does take place, it is too often removed from the communities about which are being theorized.<sup>36</sup>

Deepening and creating real working relationships with our larger communities and rooting our action down into a local context and culture are key to us being able to be in meaningful solidarity with others, instead of re-creating euro-centric charity models. As stated in *As Black As Resistance*; "Any ideology of self-defense must have the will, desire, and support of the communities we claim to represent."<sup>37</sup> People have been fighting various forms of authoritarianism for centuries, so we can ask ourselves what the local iterations of that fight are and how can we support work that is already being done.

Questioning our own motivations for doing this is important to our praxis. Are you here for the right reasons, or are you possibly going to do more harm than good? Find joy in helping people with no reward, although when you are working in good solidarity with people you usually do get

## Trauma/Support

Trauma is defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary as "a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury".<sup>14</sup> Fighting fascism often causes trauma, so trauma care is already part of our movements but is sometimes overlooked, under appreciated, or neglected. An understanding of trauma and how to care for it shows at every scale, from one person talking about burnout with a comrade up to more organized large scale responses for thousands of people at large protests. How are we incorporating trauma care into our spaces? Contemporary life is by itself already traumatic and difficult, and we all bring different lived experience into the work. Unaddressed trauma can sow havoc and produce serious consequences to our organizing, especially since antifascism can exacerbate existing issues. Are there norms or structures we can create to help mentally ease newcomers into the work or help prepare folks for shocks and life disruptions? While individuals are ultimately responsible for their own health, we are strongest when we move away from "self care" models and work to create structures to support each other. As explained in the book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*:

It's not about self-care - it's about collective care. Collective care means shifting our organizations to be ones where people feel fine if they get sick, cry, have needs, start late because the bus broke down, move slower, ones where there's food at meetings, people work from home - and these aren't things we apologize for.<sup>15</sup>

I will not go too deeply into severe trauma, but it is useful to learn to recognize the signs. It's easier to be gentle with ourselves and each other when we understand some of our reactions are because we are deeply traumatized. These can include; Repetitive thinking of worrying thoughts or memories related to the event; intrusive memories and feelings, chronic fear, staring off into space ("thousand yard stare"), flattened or frozen expression and body: freezing and numbing, feeling of "Emptiness", extreme defensiveness and rigid thinking, irritability, explosive overreaction, sexual preoccupation and constant interest, continuous discomfort, pain, stress, illness: "nervios", and returning to traumatizing situations.

We know that trauma is going to occur in this line of work, but the worst effects are not inevitable. When someone has just been traumatized;

1. Help any bodily injury, medical issue, or physical need first.
2. Make sure to go to a safe place.
3. Don't get up and act like nothing happened. Stay dry, warm, and still. Trembling or being emotional is part of healing, and better than 'numbing out.'
4. If the person wants to talk, listen without interrupting or

## Ego/Solidarity

It takes a lot of chutzpah to take on literal nazis and a certain amount of posturing can be both effective and entertaining, as when one antifascist I know ripped their shirt off and sent some big goons packing by sheer force of personality. However, sometimes that attitude can become a liability when it moves into the spheres of machismo, elitism, or self-righteousness. The 'ego' I'm referencing to is different from audacity or self worth, it's ego which becomes toxic when rooted in unexamined privilege or disconnection from community. This is where being in strong solidarity with each other and other liberation movements is key not just to our praxis but also to our own well being. We need each other, and some of the most humble and honorable people I have ever met are antifascists, usually those doing work deeply rooted in solidarity and mutual aid. There is nothing more humbling than working with those who are suffering and resisting in ways that are different from you.

To be able to accomplish solidarity and build community with groups at risk from fascists requires us to continuously do the internal work of disinvesting from oppression. While most of us are under attack from fascism for some aspect(s) of

radicalized but very clearly haven't who are relying on this emphasis on compassion to basically white-wash their reputations.<sup>xv</sup> - Dr. Joan Braune<sup>35</sup>

Respecting a diversity of tactics and each other's agency helps us oil our internal mechanics even as it challenges us to be flexible and creative in our approaches to the work. We can respect each other's agency to choose the tactics that suit our situations best, emphasize fascist's agency in our discourse instead of their inhumanity, and focus on figuring out creative solutions that give us new tools and paths to combat rising fascist extremism outside of the destructive dehumanizing structures of state violence. Destroying the life of a hardened fascist is often an important part of stopping fascism, but we lose ourselves and our message when it becomes the only end goal. It is a small, yet important distinction that the ultimate goal be to destroy fascism, not just fascists.

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<sup>xv</sup> For example; Tommy Robinson, Jack Buckby, Matthew Heimbach, Jeff Schoep

changing the subject.<sup>iv</sup>

5. Encourage them to feel the sensations in their body fully (mindfulness)<sup>16</sup>.

PTSD occurs when an experience becomes disjointed from the regular memory creation systems, so in jail support we encouraged people within the first 24 hours of getting out of jail to find a trusted friend or family member to talk all the way through everything that happened, from before the trauma to the current moment, in order to re-incorporate the event into their life and re-engage the proper neural processing. This is useful for any traumatic event. After that first 24 hours however, continuing to talk about it can potentially be re-traumatizing instead of helpful, and it is important to engage with someone experienced in severe trauma care.

An under recognized aspect of this work is secondary (also known as vicarious) trauma. Whether you are a researcher reading reports of domestic violence, a social media moderator sifting through death threats, or simply watching videos of actions, even when it doesn't seem direct we are being exposed to intense violence and it takes its toll. A recent article about antifascism spoke about the difficulty:

Despite the Antifa researchers' successful track record, everyone I spoke to talked about how emotionally draining the work can be. "At first when you look at one of these chats, you're like, 'Oh, more racist internet crap, nothing new,' David said. "But then you see the seething mass. We often take breaks or switch off, because when

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<sup>iv</sup> The difficulty of maintaining good security culture while dealing with so many traumatized people is a source of constant stress and we need to figure out some better social norms. German activists have a system of having liaisons bring activists who have just been traumatized or are spiraling to a private place off site to speak to a trusted caregiver. More of this please.

you see somebody dreaming about killing you for who you are, for hours on end, it's unsettling."<sup>17</sup>

In her book "Trauma Stewardship" about what she calls 'trauma exposure response', Laura Van Dernoot Lipsky writes, "If we are to do our work with suffering people and environments in a sustainable way, we must understand how our work affects us. We need to undertake an honest assessment of how our feelings or behaviors have changed in response to whatever trauma we have been exposed to."<sup>18</sup> She goes on to describe sixteen symptoms of trauma exposure response which include; feeling helpless and hopeless, a sense that one can never do enough, hyper vigilance, diminished creativity, inability to embrace complexity, minimizing, chronic exhaustion, deliberate avoidance, dissociative moments, sense of persecution, guilt, fear, anger and cynicism, inability to empathize/numbing, addictions, and grandiosity / an inflated sense of importance related to one's work.<sup>19</sup> More than one of these strongly resonated with me, and while I believe that much of this simply describes the reactions of living under our current myriad systems of oppression, I see them even stronger in some antifascist spaces in a way that is worth scrutinizing.

Some of these responses have come to be seen in some spaces as cultural norms and feed into the larger phenomenon in radical spaces of hostility, inflexibility, and anxiety in what Joyful Militancy describes variously as "sad militancy, grumpy-warriorcool, monarchism, [or] puritanism" and says "this phenomenon is difficult to talk about because it presents itself as the *most* radical, the *most* anti-oppressive, the *most* militant."<sup>20</sup> However, this phenomenon is not relegated simply to radical spaces and is in a way reminiscent of other trauma adjacent work like EMS or social services. We are not alone or even particularly extraordinary in these regards, and I would say we are actually often ahead of the rest of society in our

leftist de-radicalization efforts alone. We can give incentives<sup>xiv</sup> for them to leave movements, but it's not our job to save fascist's souls, it's our job to keep ourselves and their targets safe. If they also leave fascist movements, great. Leaving a hate movement is hard and they have to come to that decision on their own. All we can do is show them the door.

[People putting forth compassion narratives] will clarify that it's not the job of marginalized people to do this kind of outreach to dangerous people who want to kill them, but I think the subtext is often that it kind of is; that [supposedly] 'the only thing that could have de-radicalized me is compassionate outreach. Antifa throwing rocks at me never would have helped.' So essentially what communities are being told is hey, if you are under threat, you have two options; you can either outreach to people who may want to harm you, and that seems dangerous, or you can submit to experts and let the counter-terrorism think tanks and the police and these former Neo-nazis fix your community if they get around to it.

And so it doesn't leave much room for empowerment and struggle on behalf of people who are victims or targets. I really have to wonder too, if you're a victim of hate crime, what is it like to hear the perpetrator being applauded and embraced on television and forgiven publicly and ritualistically now they've received compassion? ...It enables people on the far-right who are able to use this discourse to give cover to themselves and to allies on the far right.

For example, you can accuse the left of harming de-radicalization efforts by asking hard questions or by holding people accountable by saying 'only compassion can heal and you're not being compassionate enough'. And then you have people who supposedly have de-

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<sup>xiv</sup> Sometimes very strong incentives.

time recognize that those failures are human ones and not demonic.<sup>33</sup>

Keeping in the front of our minds that fascists are human is about retaining our own mental well-being. The most important part of the fight is our survival, and that's a battle which can last long after an attack is over. Maintaining a sense of personal agency is crucial to heading off lasting psychological damage. Physical defense is a costly choice and punching nazis is not realistic in every situation, but nazis are human and have other weaknesses. Wisdom comes from sex workers who work under often extremely dangerous conditions and know the importance of having many different tools and approaches beyond only physical retaliation when under attack:

The most important thing isn't how these self-defense strategies affect the aggressor. It's that this makes the sex worker feel powerful. Facing a r\*pist or thief can be mentally destroying, but [having tools like avoidance/manipulation/negotiation] gives agency back to the sex worker, gives the sex worker time to collect evidence, and connects the sex worker to the aggressor's humanity. This is so important for building resilience. How you manage your agency in crisis really affects how much you are traumatized. To deal with crisis, you need to manage yourself, manage the situation, manage the aggressor.<sup>34</sup>

It does us well to remember that fascists also have agency. They are choosing to cause harm and can choose not to. One way fascists manipulate people is by denying their own agency and insisting the impetus for their change lies outside of themselves and in the compassionate open-heartedness of

responses. In speaking generically about care work Lipsky states:

Secretly, many of us may feel that if we admit to having a hard time, we will open a door that we won't know how to shut. In organizations where toughness is promoted as a virtue, there may be a great deal of incentive to keep up our façade. As one community organizer told me, "I think we're all fronting with how we're doing."<sup>21</sup>

When we recognize these patterns and see how we can situate ourselves as part of a larger culture of people and workers exposed to trauma we can learn from others and continue to adjust our own internal culture towards resiliency and sustainability in ways that make sense for us.<sup>v</sup> Really simple practices can be healing; for instance, one antifascist I met uses an exercise bike while he does research (which helps counter the build up of stress hormones), and another group begins every meeting with check-ins and ends them with expressing gratitude for each other. A recent article describes the community care orientation of an northeastern antifascist training:

One of the organizers pointed out the refreshments by the window (sliced pineapple, pretzels, trail mix) and urged participants to make use of the yoga mats, blankets, and foam blocks stashed in the corner. "Whatever your body needs," she said.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>v</sup> There are entire fields of research and human experience dedicated to mental health, spiritual health, and trauma care. If the discussion of trauma exposure response resonated with you, I recommend reading the book "Trauma Stewardship" and exploring her advice and conclusions on how to deal with it.

Group dynamics where we don't make space for trauma are going to unconsciously discriminate against those holding the most trauma, which is often going to be people dealing with different intersectional oppressions as well as our own movement veterans. This is one way that we unintentionally recreate oppression and capitalist disposability as people with trauma aren't held and leave spaces. Taking care of those suffering from trauma is not always an easy task and movement spaces are not always the right places for it, but what can we do to get people the help and support they need and create a community where people can still be involved in some capacity while they work through issues? This is an area we can deepen our praxis and there is a lot to be learned from mad pride and disability justice movements, or by simply listening to, learning from, and putting more support towards those in movement spaces who are already engaged in this work. It is beneficial when we don't see healing as secondary, as an add on that is required in order to keep the 'real work' moving forward, or as an unfortunately necessary consequence of the result of action, but as a main tenant of what we do. Healing each other and holding each other as we navigate this world *is* the work. As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha said:

It doesn't have to be either healing or organizing: it's both. Someone asked me at a talk I was giving at Portland State University's Take Back the Night how we choose between healing and activism. I tried to tell them that healing justice is not a spa vacation where we recover from organizing and then throw ourselves back into the grind. To me, it means a fundamental - and anti-ableist- shift in how we think of movement organizing work to think of it as a place where building in many pauses, where building in healing, where building in space for grief and trauma to be held makes the movements more flexible and longer lasting.<sup>23</sup>

because for all their peace and love they low-key ascribe to a dehumanizing ideological framework: for liberals, 'fascists are people too' is a resolve-shattering realization that prevents them from militantly opposing them. But the truth is that real, flesh-and-blood humans do terrible things sometimes, and a politics that seeks to create a world worth living here in reality will come into (sometimes violent) conflict with these humans.

Dehumanizing fascists can give them the power of the super-human or a veneer of surreality which they can cloak themselves in, while giving us an excuse to not contend with the truth of humanity's capacity to be truly horrific. Confronting fascism is to confront our own demons about what it means to be human, and that is an existential battle which we cannot shy away from. Daniel Harper of the antifascist podcast "I Don't Speak German" spoke eloquently on the subject in their episode on famous white supremacist David Duke:

I think it's important to note that these are human beings and to understand them as human beings, as opposed to treat them as monsters all the time. I think to treat them as monsters who are fundamentally different from you and I avoids the real issue, it avoids the fact that these ideologies do not just come about because people are just like, always bad, and it plays into the very thing that allows someone like David Duke who comes across as, 'well he's very polite to that one Black person he knows, so how could he possibly be racist', you know?

It's that exact failure of knowledge and imagination that allows these people places to grow...seeing him as a person as opposed to as a villain gives us a sense of the reality that seeing him as kind of the cartoon cut-out of just 'racist man bad' does not and I think that we can acknowledge the evil and acknowledge the real harm that this man has done over his life while at the same

Every vision is also a map. As freedom fighter Kwame Ture taught us, “When you see people call themselves revolutionary always talking about destroying, destroying, destroying but never talking about building or creating, they’re not revolutionary. They do not understand the first thing about revolution. It’s creating.” [Prison Industrial Complex] abolition is a positive project that focuses, in part, on building a society where it is possible to address harm without relying on structural forms of oppression or the violent systems that increase it. -Mariame Kaba<sup>32</sup>

We’re entering a political moment eerily reminiscent of the late 70’s and early 80’s movement to stop rape and violence against women when the continuous challenge against prison abolition and justice for incarcerated persons was the refrain, “What about the rapists?” Now radlibs are turning to “What about the nazis?” as the excuse for the continued anti-Blackness of responses to extremism based in state violence. Just as the sexual violence of the state was invisibilized 40 years ago in the name of progressivism, the complicity and centrality of the state in fascism is beginning to be obscured even by the left. We can’t fight fascism with one hand and hold up the police state with the other. When direct action is also framed as dehumanizing or complicit with state violence, it can look like just another bad option when people deep down are seeking a way out of domination entirely. Dehumanizing in our movements is never inclusive.

As a conrad<sup>xiii</sup> wrote to me on this subject:

An ideological framework that decides who is or is not human leads nowhere but back to fascism. Liberals who imagine ‘one big human family’ get hung up here

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<sup>xiii</sup> It’s an inside joke from antifascist meme land circa 2017, don’t worry about it.

## Fear/Boundaries

Fear is the mind killer that leaks into our spaces and praxis and compromises our ability to function. The goal is not to be fearless, but to effectively manage our fear and not let it destroy us. Everyone has different strategies to contend with fear, and the Center for Applied Non-Violence and Action Strategies (which has put out guides on taking down authoritarian dictatorships) states that “fear is a normal, instinctive response to a perceived threat. Fear is observed in the entire animal kingdom and therefore has no moral value attached to it. Most of us cannot overcome fear itself. However, all of us can overcome the detrimental effects of fear.”<sup>24</sup> Security culture,<sup>vi</sup> community, and solidarity are key, as well as continually building resilience through good

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<sup>vi</sup> “A security culture is a set of customs shared by a community whose members may be targeted by the government, designed to minimize risk. Having a security culture in place saves everyone the trouble of having to work out safety measures over and over from scratch, and can help offset paranoia and panic in stressful situations—hell, it might keep you out of prison, too.” *CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective. “What Is Security Culture?”* *CrimethInc.*, 1 Nov. 2004, [crimethinc.com/2004/11/01/what-is-security-culture](http://crimethinc.com/2004/11/01/what-is-security-culture).



nutrition, exercise, spiritual/therapeutic practice, and self-compassion. The access to these things often depends on privilege, so a healthful, resilient culture means we try to incorporate access to food, exercise spaces and programs, spiritual/therapeutic spaces (including nature), into our work collectively to share resources as we are able. Courage is communal. People are doing this by having food at meetings, creating martial arts clubs, prayer groups, mental health support groups, and more. Also, when as a movement we acknowledge a plethora of different types of activism actions as valuable, people can stay closer to their comfort zone and manage fear in that way. More advice from CANVAS:

If members of your movement are too afraid to take directly confrontational or high-risk actions, it is worth considering if there is a lower-risk alternative action that they could do. It does not help a movement to put its members into situations that they are not prepared for. If your activists are too afraid for one action, it is important to find other actions that they can do. Also, many activists frequently assume that actions that require great courage, risk, and publicity will be the most powerful and effective actions that they can take. However, this is not always true. Sometimes, low-risk, low-profile, dispersed actions can be more effective.<sup>25</sup>

Fascism thrives on fear, and the state injects it into our movements however they can. How do we expand our reach, but remain safe? We must first contend with the reality that fighting fascism is not safe and if you choose to do this work you are compromising any sense safety you may feel. We must also recognize that if you do not do this work you are still not safe, and any “safety” society has given you is a lie meant to weaken your resolve and allow the horror of the status quo to continue and worsen. Especially for those of us who are white, white supremacy functions by telling us that

arguments turn very nasty when badjacketing becomes involved. In leftist spaces badjacketing is a form of dehumanization as someone who has been marked as a cop or informant is no longer afforded respect or dialogue from their peers and can become a target for abuse and exclusion. In extreme cases we can treat each other like we treat fascists with devastating consequences for the targeted parties. This can only happen if our core values include dehumanization and disposability as acceptable, a weak link in our politics which hands a powerful tool to the state to destroy us from the inside. This doesn't mean you have to work with everyone, but there's a difference between setting a boundary and treating someone like trash.

Antifascism coming from a dehumanizing disposability framework can also reinforce the carceral state. Antifascism can be uncomfortably celebratory about incarceration, when in reality jail doesn't necessarily stop fascists from organizing. A lot of fascist literature and organizations have come out of prisons, which can serve as nazi boot camp to the detriment of our imprisoned communities as well as those on the outside when fascists come out hardened. We win when fascists stop being effective fascists, either by abandoning the cause, becoming too impeded to continue effectively, or dying disgraced and alone. If jail aids in those aims it can be seen as a win, but when we celebrate incarceration as the end goal we are not furthering collective liberation and instead reinforcing the prison industrial complex.

As part of a larger liberatory movement we are crafting new ways of understanding and practicing justice, and although we are severely limited by being trapped in the system we are in, the way we conceptualize and dream of a new world will affect our praxis. What do we want social accountability to look like? Abolition is a framework for imagining and working to answer exactly that question.

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Respecting the power of violence to be damaging or alienating and working to continuously reconnect with our ability to have a healthy emotional range are key to feeling safer to comrades and community partners who experience dehumanization as a matter of daily existence. Being aware of dehumanization as a tool used by Empire<sup>xii</sup> can make us less likely to unintentionally reinforce those systems of domination in the course of our work. Dehumanizing can backfire when used casually as it reinforces destructive structures instead of working to dismantle those systems, and when we dehumanize fascists we undermine our argument to the larger public that we act from a place of ethicality. As CrimethInc put it in August of 2017,

We have to become adept at spelling out the ethical differences between fascism and anti-fascism, and all the justifications for forms of direct action that can actually be effective in this struggle. We need allies from many different walks of life who can help us make this case to the public at large.<sup>31</sup>

Tactics of dehumanization rely on relegating someone to subhuman status and the tropes people use tend to come from the existing eugenic undergirding of our society. For example, grinding down fascists by calling them fat/crazy/low IQ/poor is classist, ableist, and often even racist and sends a message that people with different bodies or experiences aren't welcome in our spaces. Engaging with dehumanization can also leak into how we treat each other, as disagreements or

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<sup>xii</sup> "The web of control that exploits and administers life - ranging from the most brutal forms of domination to the subtlest inculcation of anxiety and isolation - is what we call Empire." - *Bergman, Carla, and Nick Montgomery. Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times. AK Press, 2018. P. 48*

we are safer if we allow people of the global majority to suffer and die and will try to tempt us away from the fight, but if you don't resist you are complicit.

We need to consider the extent to which racial violence is the unspoken and necessary underside of security, particularly white security. Safety requires the removal and containment of people deemed to be threats. White civil society has a psychic investment in the erasure and abjection of bodies that they project hostile feels onto, which allows them peace of mind amidst the state of perpetual violence. - Jackie Wang<sup>26</sup>

"An injury to one is an injury to all" is not just a saying, because these intertwined systems of ableist capitalism, white supremacy, and cisheteropatriarchy<sup>vii</sup> are truly going to be the end of our species if we don't tear them down. We need to breathe into this reality of constant danger but not let it consume us and not become nihilistic about the perceived omnipotence of the state.

Having everyone taught about security culture before working on projects can help alleviate stress. There is a lot we can do to protect ourselves and make the work safer. When people are not trained, it can lead to exclusion, paranoia, and an inability to expand. Fear of infiltration and the need for tight security is justified, but depending on the type of project the threat model can also include the threat of being isolated and disconnected from wider society. Not all projects are

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<sup>vii</sup> "Cisheteropatriarchy: a system of power based on the supremacy & dominance of cisheterosexual men through the exploitation & oppression of women and the LGBTQIA. Also referred to as sexism. This includes oppressive constructs such as homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, etc.." "Glossary." *Decolonize ALL The Things*, 12 July 2017, [decolonizeallthethings.com/learning-tools/glossary-of-key-terms/](http://decolonizeallthethings.com/learning-tools/glossary-of-key-terms/).

about community engagement or growth, but as a network our approach to safety can involve security culture as well as building connections, as community roots keep us safer by making it harder for the state to justify force and by giving us access to needed allies and resources. Also, while the edges are the least safe because people are new and untrained, they are also some of the most bountiful in terms of revolutionary energy, vision, and surprise. To be an antifascist is to be on the edge, and it is scary, but also exhilarating. An extremely strict security culture that hasn't taken an effort to train newcomers or has not clearly defined the type of security required for its goals can end up creating a culture of shame, badjacketing,<sup>viii</sup> frustration, and in the end actually intensify fear rather than alleviate it.<sup>ix</sup> Learn about threat modeling.

It behooves us to always be assuming that we have already been infiltrated, especially with larger visible projects, and know that we are generally not very good at discerning who is or is not a threat. Ironically, an attitude of too much paranoia can make a project look more dangerous, which can create interest by security forces or bad actors.<sup>x</sup> Set security needs at

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<sup>viii</sup> "BADJACKETING: creating suspicion, by spreading rumors or unsubstantiated accusations, that people are undercover, infiltrators, snitches, or cooperators." Badjacketing was a tool used effectively by the state to undermine both the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement. "No Badjacketing: The State Wants to Kill Us; Let's Not Cooperate." *Twin Cities General Defense Committee*, 29 Nov. 2015, [twincitiesgdc.org/badjacketing/](http://twincitiesgdc.org/badjacketing/).

<sup>ix</sup> A gentle way of reminding people about security culture comes from the oogglesphere; saying "dcsc" (pronounced "dee-see-ess-see") which stands for "dude (comma) security culture" is a way of letting people know that they have crossed a boundary without shutting them out or down.

<sup>x</sup> "Understand that changing normal activities or acting differently calls attention to yourself. Security services conduct pattern analysis. They analyze patterns of people's and organization's regular behavior. When an

## Dehumanization/Agency

Violence and dehumanization can go hand in hand, and it is understandable that we sometimes end up using dehumanizing language or attitudes towards fascists. A dehumanizing framework can simply be descriptive of actions or political positions which themselves are already void of humanity. Sometimes the use of violence is necessary for survival and the utility of dehumanizing your enemy goes along with that, such as in self-defense where you are trained to refrain from eye contact with your attacker because seeing their humanity can damage your ability to hurt them in order to escape alive. Also, the media is far too invested in humanizing fascists while continuing to dehumanize their victims. However, beyond a survival function, the act of dehumanizing others is at the heart of our oppression, is the mechanism by which we do truly terrible things to each other, and is a key tool of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. Violence is a type of power and while it can be a tool for liberation it can also be corrupting, especially for those who already hold institutional or systemic power of other types, so those holding that privilege need to be acutely aware of the harmful side effects.

derby league? The list could go on.<sup>29</sup>

It's important to note that it can be problematic and ineffective to use "antifascist" as a solo add-on label denoting a cultural identity instead of as a key value or focus of a project. "Antifascist" is a baseline, not a political identity. There are serious downfalls to subculturalism, including an insularity we can't afford in an era of increasing and widening crisis. Depending on the level of threat in the area at that time it may make more sense to bring an antifascist perspective or knowledge base to existing groups, communities, or projects instead of trying to start something new.

Can we face our fears and be gentle with people on the edges to get them more training or give them something lower risk to do instead of discarding folks? Can we balance individual safety and community safety? From Trauma Stewardship:

When we acknowledge our fear, we have an opportunity to deepen our compassion, not only for ourselves but also for every being that has ever been afraid. If we look deeply, many of us will discover that the fear that underlies all other fears is the fear of our own death. It is worth asking how we want to live knowing that we will die. The answer is generally not that we would quit. Rather, it is that we would embrace the preciousness of life. We would choose to be loving and compassionate, and to deepen our caring for others and the planet even in the face of our inevitable end.<sup>30</sup>

When we understand and respect boundaries, can communicate those needs in a clear, firm, and loving way, and have structures in place to accommodate those needs, we can be less fearful and more confident in our dealings with each other and new folks.

the level corresponding with the openness of the project, as too much or too little can both be detrimental. You can't take back security that is too open, but you can start new projects. I've also noticed that it is often people with privilege who are the most concerned with strict security and the discussion of security breaches can be unaware of that social power dynamic. This can alienate those who are more accustomed to being targeted by white supremacists and the state, and security is only useful up to the point where it enables the work and becomes counterproductive when taken to an extreme, making the work itself undoable or is seen as more important than treating people with respect. When done well, everyone feels safer without compromising personal connection or dignity.

Security is not about being macho vigilantes or being super suspicious or having techniques of this or that. It's not some spy game. Security is about good politics. That's why it's so difficult. And it requires good politics from the movement as a whole. Not from some special body or leadership or commission—from the movement as a whole...We don't need good politics because that makes us into super people because it doesn't. It's that bad politics—like opportunism, patriarchy, sexism, class privilege—rips up the fabric of our terrain, the area of our radical culture and it weaves instead into that terrain all their old oppressor politics, their values...

The reason we need to push the whole underlying question of politics is because a lot of people particularly guys try to present security as an area essentially where it's about cool techniques or it's technology. That's

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organization or individual start behaving differently (breaking the pattern), he/she/it (sic) attracts attention." *Popović Srđa. CANVAS Core Curriculum: a Guide to Effective Nonviolent Struggle: Students Book. Centre for Applied NonViolent Action and Strategies, 2007. P. 171*

completely not what it's about. -J. Sakai<sup>27</sup>

It can be helpful to use a feminist lens and frame security culture as being about respecting boundaries instead of exclusion or a decision about the innate character of who will make a good activist, which can be rife with sexist, classist, racist, and/or ableist judgement. Rape culture teaches us to have no boundaries so we often don't learn how to respect them, but to be able to do this work effectively and minimize fear we need to learn. Teach yourself and each other about boundaries. Security culture is less confusing and more natural when we understand it as respecting privacy and the desire to not know too much rather than as a condemnation of not knowing the rules, since everyone's boundaries are slightly different while rules are seen as immutable. Small talk is certainly more awkward but we can respectfully set our own and feel out each other's boundaries instead of being frightened about trespass. Practice a way of saying "I don't mean to be rude, but I don't feel comfortable with this discussion right now." Also, "Thank you for letting me know about your boundaries, I apologize for crossing them."

In a discussion of good boundaries the book *Joyful Militancy* states "for joy to flourish, it needs sharp edges."<sup>28</sup> Prioritize the safety and comfort of the most marginalized and be able to reinforce those boundaries. Stand up to bad behavior and don't work with dangerous toxic people. However, be aware of who those edges may be cutting. I read one description of what to look out for when determining infiltrators which described being too friendly, helpful or talkative, all traits gendered feminine. By those metrics feminine people are much more likely to be seen as infiltrators or as expendable, and neurodiverse people are at risk of being seen as untrustworthy because they are socially awkward. Everyone has a right to choose who to work with, but I've seen security culture used as an excuse for hidden underlying

biases. A strong movement has space for every type of person, if not everyone in every space.

Maintaining good boundaries and moving at the speed of trust<sup>xi</sup> means having a variety of groups or activities with different levels of trust needed, instead of having to move people prematurely into an intimate level of security in order to work with them. The balance between openness and safety in these 'gray spaces' is not an easy one, but it is an area we must breathe into if we are going to maintain the upper hand in the coming years. How can we help encourage in-between cultural spaces where people can be involved and learn more while not being a security risk? The need for tight security measures can be offset by being in large community groups and spaces open to all (except fascists and abusers, of course.) Cultural spaces such as sports, music, art projects, movie screenings, and other community events are great venues for this. What other spaces can we grow into? More from Petronella Lee:

It's important to have spaces, roles, and activities that account for the variety and diversity of social life - for example considering things like ability and age. Historically, there existed a wide range of anti-fascist cultural spaces. These included things like reading groups, social clubs, collective kitchens, daycare centers, workplace organizations, and sports associations...Anti-fascist gyms are great, and anti-fascist football clubs can be useful. But, what about an anti-fascist neighborhood association? Or anti-fascist story-telling time for children, or an anti-fascist food program? Or maybe, anti-fascist day at the nail salon or an anti-fascist roller

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<sup>xi</sup> "Move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass - build the resilience by building the relationships." - *brown, adrienne maree. Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds. AK Press, 2017. P. 42*