

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



A Love Letter To The Future

On mutual aid & building power while the lights
are out

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief

The storms are coming. The water is rising in some places and running empty in others. The refugee situation now is just a glimpse at what it very well may become once we see the results of the seeds we have sown of wetlands loss, climate change, urbanization, and fossil fuel extraction

As natural disasters increase in intensity and frequency, we recognize that our hope for a livable future rests in developing resilient preparation for and response to crisis as individuals and communities, while simultaneously opposing intensive resource extraction and other root causes of climate change.

Many of us rode out Hurricane Irma in a big church sanctuary with bulletproof windows, staging to do search and rescue. But many people fled to Georgia or further north. And there were no border fences or armed guards blocking people from doing so. For anti-refugee Floridians who crossed the border into other states to escape disaster they ought to think about what this would be like if they weren't allowed access to safety. Because that is the case for so many refugees fleeing disasters all around the world, whether that be war, famine,

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief
A Love Letter To The Future
On mutual aid & building power while the lights are out

Retrieved on 8.7.2023 from <mutualaidrelief.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Love-Letter-to-the-Future.pdf>

theanarchistlibrary.org

drought, poverty, political disasters, or climate- related disasters Fortress Europe and Fortress America turn people seeking safety away by gunpoint and ruthless violence Borders themselves are inherently violent.

Some of our volunteers called the jails and prisons demanding that prisoners not be abandoned to the potential floods And with the state prioritizing trapping persons trying to get to safety to fill the prisons rather than the safety of people in their community who were facing a potentially deadly climate event, we contacted the local shelters by phone to see if law enforcement personnel were at the check-in tables and if background checks were being run. Having found that almost every one of them were, and the ones who weren't were at capacity, we built off of the organizing already being done in the area prior to Imma and contacted a local Mosque, and after ensuring that they weren't checking for warrants or immigration status we worked out how many folks they could take in. They were responsive and opened their doors immediately. We were also able to empty a Starbucks into the Mosque to feed the people taking shelter there

As a movement that is intimidated with the mechanisms of the state, it was not shocking that the Polk County sheriff was on social media dissuading people with outstanding warrants from getting to a safe space under threat of arrest upon arrival at high intensity makeshift county shelters set up in the community. And as Floridians recoiled with a historic storm roaring towards us, heartbroken as we watched communities in Barbuda, Cuba and Puerto Rico struggle under

in the least afraid of ruins We carry a new world, here, in our hearts. That world is growing in this minute

You are a part of that growing world.

It is hard to see the chaos and spectacle that surrounds us and think we are in the calm before the storm. But the signs point to exactly this Storms: weather-wise, political, and economic are on the horizon. Let's prepare. Let's build something from below that can withstand the coming winds.

Dandelions lose their minds in the wind, and spread their seeds in a thousand directions. We are a result of one of those seeds. And we know that every end is a beginning. Wherever you go, may you carry a piece of a liberated zone with you.

Wherever you stand, may you be the heart and soul of that place.

organizers and turned over our supply hookup to them. In sharing our badges with local community organizers, we rejected the role of gatekeepers and used the privileges of being humanitarian workers to break down barriers to the local community's ability to meet its own needs

Dorothy Day said, referring to the aftermath of the San Francisco earthquake over a century ago. "While the crisis lasted, people loved one another." We want that love to last. We want to stretch out these temporary autonomous zones, where people are able to share good and services with each other freely, where we reimagine new social relationships outside of the dictates of the market, where we work for something real, and build something together, even if it is just an idea, that can withstand the crisis that are sure to come. If we wait on the state to save us, we won't survive. We have to save ourselves.

Think of all the things we rely on our opposition to do for us. Our food, our water, energy, transportation, entertainment, communications, our medical care, our trash pickup. If the traditional political establishment takes care of people's survival needs, they will most likely maintain power. But due to capitalism eating itself, the political establishment seems to be on a trajectory of eliminating any and every social program and only funding the military and prisons. In this changing context, if instead, corporations or fascists meet people's needs, people will probably look to them for leadership. And if autonomous, liberatory movements for collective liberation facilitate the people's ability to meet their own needs, the better world we know is possible very well may become a reality.

Buenaventura Durruti, an antifascist revolutionary in the Spanish Civil War said that our opposition might blast and ruin its own world before it exits the stage of history. But we are not

the whipping live wire of climate chaos, Tampa Bay area shelters were segregating the houseless with a color-coded bracelet system.

The environmental ramifications of a corporate, capitalist empire thrashed into communities in the southwest of the state while police busied themselves with involuntarily committing the houseless who refused to be jailed in segregated warehouses "for their safety," while simultaneously their safety in regards to access to food, water, physical health care and mental health care are ignored, leaving them stranded in an altogether different kind of storm on a daily basis.

We see clearly the alternative from above: involuntarily committing houseless individuals in the path of Hurricane Irma under mental health pretenses, utilizing shelters as traps to fill the prisons, keeping prisoners in unsafe flooded out conditions, and of course bureaucracy and red tape.

But something is growing from below. Civil society, people-powered, decentralized, liberatory, network based, climate-justice focused disaster response.

There is an ancient Greek word called Kairos, which means the right or opportune moment (the supreme moment) almost a time lapse, a moment of indeterminate time in which everything happens. The Zapatistas, similarly, speak about opening cracks in the walls of history to look in order to imagine everything that could be done tomorrow. At the same time that there is heightened anxiety about the future and uncertainty and instability in the political and other realms, now more than ever we need strategic vision and action, movements that articulate the revolution by prefiguring it, by remembering things yet to be, and embodying those potentialities in our work. This very well may be a crack in time in which more is possible, and in what direction we go, towards environmental and other catas-

trophes or awakening and collective liberation depends on the choices we make.

We know that unnatural disasters imposed on communities are but one aspect of a unique set of disasters that, in totality, compose the invisible fabric of our social existence. There is the ongoing disaster of social and economic inequality; the disaster of atomization, precarity, rootedlessness, and the meaninglessness of selling our days just to be trampled on by the iron heels of those above. And we know that once the hurricane passes, then comes the gentrification, disaster capitalism and shock and awe vulturism as a storm surge in its wake.

Unless. Unless someone like you does an awful lot. In Jacksonville, law enforcement threatened civilian rescuers responding to flood affected areas with trespass charges if they didn't disperse. Not only did law enforcement refuse to adequately do the needed search and rescue work, they physically stopped civil society from doing it. The state has taught us once again its irrelevancy. Distribution of wealth too need not come from an authoritarian state. Instead, we can raise a flag of mutual aid and solidarity, do the work of love-of revolution, and defy the forces that would bring us these catastrophes. And in so doing, inspire and facilitate a more just distribution of wealth from below. At least for this moment in time, this is happening in Tampa. There is a crack in their wall. And in times like these we can see glimpses to the other side of that wall. We see the end of history there, and the end of its hierarchical power. We see people living outside of time,

through those cracks. People connect, share, and that better world we are constantly fighting for isn't a distant hope but a current reality, if only temporarily. This communal solidarity and concern for each other is a microcosm of the world we want to create. It is an echo from a future that we bring closer to existence through each small simple act of kindness and courage

We continued to circulate items daily to communities in need as the days went on, painig pop up clinics with distro in the community With just two days left in Puerto Rico, our base of operations in Guaynabo was "swatted" and medics, assessment, supplies and distribution team members were held at gunpoint after doors were broken down Our volunteers were told that we had kidnapped people and had guns and bombs. All told, we were not asked any questions about guns and bombs. we were, however, asked if we had been organizing against fascism, if we had ever raised our fists before and if we were planning on overthrowing the government

In responding alongside the community in a decentralized fashion, without red tape, without bureaucracy, and being effective in circulating goods to areas most in need deemed inaccessible by the authontres and doing so without hierarchical structure, chain of command or leaders, we posed a threat to the state and non profit and military occupation and trump administrations false narratives

Just hours after the raid, the team continued its supply distribution and medic work. And before the team left, we made badges for local community

survival and recovery from this modern mix of natural and human-made disasters.

Being here, I feel a sense of wonder and magic, like I've returned, but to a place I've never been. This is the island of my ancestors. I come after a most powerful series of storms, to learn both my history and my future, in this moment of recovery. It is, after all, from the native Taino word *huracán* that the word Hurricane is derived. Here, I am reminded of the cycling of the flows of time, and the cycling winds of the hurricanes Irma and Maria. Those storms have swept by, and they've destroyed many things. By knocking out the energy grid, and cutting access to food and water, they left the island of Boriké dark. But in that darkness countless Boricuas have awoken, and they stay awake late and get up early again, doing the work of reproducing life.

Neoliberal capitalism and colonization is the disaster - the rigid roles, the meaningless drudgery of the work, the loss of authentic social relationships, the isolation and alienation, the destruction of the water, the air, and everything we need to survive. In some ways, even though a hurricane or a fire or a flood is immensely devastating and full of trauma, it also in a sense washes away the unnameable disaster that is everyday life under neoliberal capitalism. In this space, without coercion from above, the vast majority of disaster survivors default back to meaningful relationships based on mutual aid. At the same time that disasters cause so much devastation and loss. They also act as a wake up call. They are moments of possibility wherein whole communities reject the ethos of profit before people and instead spontaneously come together to care for each other's needs. Suddenly, a spell is broken, a crack in the borders that divide us widens. And, yes, we can see each other

quitting their jobs to work for something real, recognizing that young migrant farmworker children have been without access to air conditioners or fans for almost a week, are sweating severely dehydrated and sick under the burning south-west Florida sun. And all the FEMA and all the Red Cross continue to do what they do with nearly unlimited financial means, and walk past or maybe hand a Styrofoam tray of food. Not so with us. With tears in our eyes, we empty the shelves of every nearby Walgreens CVS, and Walmart of their Pedialyte and drive 200 miles to our future friends and their children.

This is what solidarity and mutual aid looks like. And this is a window to what a future world could look like. People with wealth were daily dropping off their surplus. People without, were picking it up. There was no bureaucratic state apparatus administering it, no reliance on the violence of the state to defend it. When one strikes a chord on one violin in a room, another violin in the same room sounds a note

The thing that is key is our established networking community. We are involved in Food Not Bombs, radical refugee solidarity work and disaster relief in other areas with solidarity-not-charity based groups. So having a network and being involved in the community in the first place is key, and our Black Lives Matter comrades here have been a huge part of making this space what it is. So having the network and working in the community is the first thing.

This approach of empowering people has flourished here. Every day I come in, the space is more gorgeous, there's new signs, art work, new

stations, and I think empowering people has magical and powerful results. And this is what is beat out of us every day in a capitalist system, and that's what we can see here, that the quality of the oil shows when the olive is pressed. I think this space could be recreated anywhere there is a community ready to empower each other and work in cooperation.

The Mutual Aid Disaster Relief convergence center in Tampa is growing by the hour. The first aid station has grown into a wellness center, including acupuncture, trauma counseling, peer support, herbal medics, and other alternative medicine modalities. Local community members know to drop off hurricane supplies that they didn't need. Community members also know to come here if supplies are needed. And that these supplies can be received with dignity. Here, there are no powerful givers of aid and powerless receivers of aid. We are undermining that dynamic in a process that contributes to the liberation and consciousness-raising of everybody involved. Mobile distros base out of the space, channel their inner Robin Hood, and reach across Florida with supplies, especially to historically marginalized communities. We have funneled over 10 tons of food, water, diapers, and other supplies to hard-hit Immokalee, FL.

Through resonance, through affinity, we spread an alternative vision of a revolution of everyday life. And we can do so from below. As the Zapatistas taught us, "Don't seize power, exercise it."

There are alternatives, and there are real solutions. Those solutions come from below. They come from the power of the

so too is the world's current system of societal organization. This decay of modern capitalism has turned people's lives here into a daily toil that is, at the same time, imaginative and full of energy. We are all grappling with these chains of the past, and they still violently attach themselves to the body and minds of many Puerto Ricans. But a growing minority here is aiming to inspire people to remove those chains, and, they're collectively self-managing the kinds of local decisions necessary to care for their fellow Boncuas. And this may be one of the most salient truths about the legacy of the old world: it's not that people in revolutionary struggles need to be fighting for their own flag, as much as, they find their emancipation in the compassion and dignity of self-determination and collective direct action.

In my time here, I often recall a motto for resistance - "If they don't let us dream, then we won't let them sleep." - which has been passed around between movements, generations, and regions. Although Boncuas in struggle aren't getting much sleep these days either, in this moment, for them, I don't think it's about bringing the alarm bells of revolution to the doorsteps of the powerful. It looks like people have decided to dream with their hands, with everything they have, towards the immediate and tangible goals of activated, empowered and resilient communities.

They're doing so by organizing for their self-determination, and Overtaking organized coercion with collective disobedience when necessary. We can all learn a great deal by their examples of

The shortcomings of dependence we are witnessing here brings up questions of independence. There is plenty of talk and symbolism, of Puerto Rican independence scattered across much of the island, in graffiti, in poetry, and in philosophical proclamations at the end of rowdy celebrations. The conversations about independence are complicated and complex though I can feel the trauma of the repression of the Puerto Rican independence movement in our conversations with people here. After the Spanish rule of the island was repelled in 1898, Puerto Rico was autonomous for only six months before the US claimed the island as part of the Treaty of Paris, which concluded the Spanish-American War. Activists here share the stories of leaders and participants in the movement for independence being assassinated, in the 19th century, and throughout the 20th century.

Independence can mean many things. It seems the host of problems being faced by people on the island after the storms, are being solved locally, by Boricuas working together in community, and allies from all over listening to their leadership and requests. The amount of work getting done every day to rebuild, and to survive, is testament to locals' ability to handle the challenges facing the island, even with very little to work with. Given access to the right tools, resources, and autonomy, there's no doubt that Boricuas can rebuild the island, and account for any hardships, even without "help" from the island's government.

The infrastructure here, and across the globe, is intimately tied to the petrol world. But the petrol world is dying, its infrastructure is crumbling, and

people, which is incredibly vast, if only we have the vision and the courage to recognize it. We need radical responses to natural and unnatural disasters. We need communities that are eager to build power, eager to adapt, and eager to serve those who are neglected by a system which empowers only those who already have the most power. We see, in post-disaster city after city, the power that the people have when we work together. We saw the efforts of ordinary people, organized, dedicated, and listening compassionately, able to rescue schools and entire neighborhoods from the gentrifying bulldozers. And we see that same power growing and touching more people here today.

We see multi-racial and intersectional groups in city after city rise to challenge the legitimacy of city and state government, FEMA, and the Red Cross. In disasters or other chaotic scenarios we can often make great strides in short time by filling vacancies left by when the government and other established authorities lose their tenuous control. In more stable times, we can still steadily gain power by organizing, struggling, fighting, utilizing our strengths (moral, relational, artistic); by acting strategically, creatively, bravely, diversely, and by never giving up.

In today's world, responding to a "natural" disaster must be about more than merely providing food and water and shelter. It must be about Justice. It must be about Dignity. And it must be about Power challenging those who have it, sharing it with those who do not, and thereby aiding communities in building power of their own. Disaster response is not only about hurricanes and earthquakes our compassionate emergency hearts need to respond to the all-too-frequent unnatural disasters like hate rallies, for-profit prisons and criminalization of the poor, endless genocidal wars, mine waste spills and pipeline developments. We recognize that only people power can adequately respond to these and other disasters.

Without any designated drop-points or sites to go to, we searched for affordable and Section 8 housing to try to find neglected neighborhoods in need. Upon entering Key Largo, the first island in the Florida Keys, we were immediately greeted with large construction signs warning residents to boil their water in Monroe County and the curfew in place from 10 PM-6 AM. Trees and debris were scattered everywhere, power lines were still down and much of the area seemed to be still evacuated, except for the very vocal signage warning potential trespassers of the now common, "You Loot. We Shoot" slogan

This was not the first time we would see this phrase used to support white supremacist fantasies of black greed and criminality, as its repetition re-affirmed the desire to protect property over human life, or to reassert that property is more valuable than the lives of those suffering. Since Katrina, this narrative has solidified into a matter of fact coupled with the fear of black desperation, treating those in need as if they are animals to be controlled and approached with great caution. For racist NGOs, poor black and brown neighborhoods are regarded as war-zones, while folks in these communities often remain trapped with limited resources or remain at the whim of vigilante justice from anyone who accuses them of committing crimes.

At the first housing project we went to in Key Largo, we were met with an overwhelming sense of desperation from those living there. Many were still without power and they said that no one had come through to see if they needed anything.

are collectivizing the means of survival and building for future resiliency. Many of these community centers are known as Centros de Apoyo Mutuo (CAMS), or Mutual-Aid Centers. The CAM in Caguas has reclaimed an abandoned Social Security office just around the block from Huerto Feliz, and they've begun major renovations. Almost every day, people from Caguas, people from across the island, and visitors, are seen fixing holes in walls, painting, and reinstalling water and electric systems to the building. When finished, community members will serve breakfast and lunch at least three times a week, run a wellness clinic for the whole neighborhood, and there are even plans for a radio station to be started there. This network of projects is truly inspiring and vital

I'm told, the scene here in Caguas just days after Mana passed was surreal and scary. Hundreds of people without food and water lining up outside of a hastily constructed community kitchen to eat.

The CAMS, many other organizations, like Urbe Apie, and community members throughout the island, have taken on the work of cooking, or offering their spaces for large meals to be made for neighbors several days a week, sometimes several times a day. Those who can, when they can, seem to have made bringing food, clean water and tools to each other a regular part of everyday life. The organizing of these Boricuas is essential for so many in the vacuum of care and ability from the government. But still, huge gaps are left for people to fill in order to figure out a new normal that meets all their basic needs

the same way that a window in a prison cell is. And people can be forced to do all sorts of things against their will and interests, if offered a breath of fresh air in suffocating conditions.

When money is scarce, and food, water and other human needs are only available at a price, then money can be that breath of fresh air. But this is called coercion, and it turns whole communities into markets, used to cheaply produce for a global demand without regard to local needs or sustainable development. After the storms, the regular flow of imports and exports was put on halt. With global supply being largely inaccessible, people here started doing what makes sense: meeting local needs with local supply.

We recognize that our current way of life is unsustainable. We are addicted to fossil fuels and drunk on prosperity. In addition to the default back to mutual aid that so many people experience, disasters and crises sometimes make us question things we would otherwise take for granted, and these extreme events carry with them the potential, or even necessity, for us to become more resilient and connected in order to survive future storms. Ultimately, our massive exploitation of each other and the planet is a dead end. And we have found that in the eye of the storm, disaster survivors often see more clearly what truly matters and have fertile visions of alternative ways of relating to each other and organizing society that resonate deeply and offer a needed breath of fresh air compared to the constant refrain of "there is no alternative" we hear from neoliberal capitalism.

There's also an excited support here for the spontaneous social centers being put together and operated by locals all over the island. Neighbors

Rather than rationing out any items, we climb into the truck and start passing out cases of bottled water and asking people what they want. Canned soup, diapers, baby wipes, paper towels, MREs, fruit snacks, bread and anything else we could dig to find in the packed truck. There is never a moment of the supposed "chaos we are warned against, as we let people take whatever they need and they are always the first to insist on leaving more for others.

Nearing the end of our trip when we had almost dispersed all the goods, we continued on to another housing project to see if folks needed water, cleaning supplies, medical attention, and to find someone who could put a brand new generator to use. We made a wrong turn in the truck and drove down a street lined by abandoned cars and decimated houses overflowing with trash. We drove by one couple living in their car, so we stopped to give them water. The man said that he only wanted water and he wanted to show us why. He brought us around to the backseat of his car to reveal a large plastic bin in the backseat filled with bubbling water. He reached in and pulled out a catfish, which he said was one of his best friends and all they really had left. They took a few cleaning supplies to try to salvage what they could from their home, but mostly they urged us to go where other folks need even more help.

We went up the road to a trailer park community called Galway Bay, which was completely destroyed. We talked to a woman who had recently come back and pointed to the trailers of where all of her best friends live. She was finally in

remission from breast cancer and talked about resilience and the strength she knew they all had in order to build again. After walking around the complex we finally found someone to take the generator, a group of 4 neighbors living in their partially demolished trailers, who agreed to share it with each other.

That is what "Solidarity Not Charity" means - the inspiring vision of a shared destiny of justice and dignity, the power of direct action building a new world within the shell of the old, the realization of alternatives to this neoliberal hell. "Solidarity Not Charity" means learning, teaching, growing, struggling, advancing, and opening our eyes and hearts through this experience of radical love and compassion; it is an opportunity for transformative change for individuals and communities. "Solidarity Not Charity" is a real solution, a space of possibility, in which our instincts toward cooperation and community flourish as we build a sustainable future together.

We have learned from those who have come before us.
"Everything for everybody. Nothing for ourselves."

Navigating forth, there are many communities that are still in utter shambles from the hurricane.

There isn't much middle ground in the Florida Keys. There are mansions of the wealthy and there are impoverished communities who serve them.

And while FEMA guards structures of wealth, autonomous mobilizations have been getting supplies into the hands of those who truly need them sans the red tape/applications/and bureaucratic procedures that barricade skin to skin cooperation and participatory relief and rebuilding efforts.

With multi-millions pouring into the Red Cross and FEMA "operating" in affected zones, we

gnd. These remnants of devastation can be seen everywhere, and everywhere there are people getting by and adapting to the changes Imma and Maria left behind with whatever limited tools are at their disposal.

In speaking with people, it comes as no surprise to them either that the government isn't doing much to resolve the problems here. As many non-Boricuas are only now discovering, the island's government has been suffocated with public debts, issued and purchased by predatory Wall Street hedge funds. Aligning with what has now become a global custom with these kinds of debts, Puerto Rico's creditors are forcing the island's government to enact austerity measures on the population, with help from the US and its Fiscal Oversight and Management Board. This Board is an unelected entity established by the US Congress to decide how Puerto Rico spends the tax revenue collected from its people.

Creditors tend to blame debtors for being in debt, but the reality is that savvy debt obligations that never go away are big business, and these creditors are in that very business. Boricuas are not alone in bearing this kind of imprisoning weight. Puerto Rico is just one economy, in a vast global sea of economies, that are put into the red by inequitable economic relationships. It's one part of the general economic practice of turning people themselves into commodities. As only pieces in a labor force, people can be managed over in exploitative ways because access to their basic needs are controlled through the need to make money first. Money is a human need in

liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself, to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the state can crush it. The goal of these zones is not permanence or confrontation, and its lapse is not defeat, but a seed planted that will be carried to another time and place to be recreated again.

The aim is to spread these autonomous zones far and wide, so that everywhere and every-when, not just in disasters, people share goods and services freely, connect deeply and authentically with one another, have agency, self-determination and meaning in their work, live in the moment, and are free to imagine with minds, but also with hands and feet, the better world we know is possible. These moments, when our bodies are sung electric by the possibilities taking wing inside and all around us, need not be fleeting. Most of human history has been spent in communities whose foundation was mutual aid, and, our future can be likewise, if we have the strength and courage to follow our vision through to where it leads.

"It was like an atomic bomb went off a local Boricua, as people bom in Puerto Rico are often called, is saying about the view of the mountains the day after Mana passed. "Every branch, and every tree, was tom apart and broken, and scattered everywhere. Every green area was gray and brown." The view now, almost three months after las tormentas, is eene. The greenery is back, but the forests are very bare compared to how they were. Things can appear to be normal, except for the 60 foot telephone pole hanging over the edge of a cliff here, or leaned over at 45 degree angles onto a building there. As long as they still carry power to their destinations they're left alone, even doubled over, to triage the other downed poles that are actually causing disruptions in the

shouldn't be hearing from the most impovenshed community housing projects that we've been the first ones to deliver aid there.

But we are.

There are cracks that open when disasters happen, and we can see each other through those cracks Finding, recognizing, respecting, and listening to each other are all revolutionary acts. We expect push-back from the forces of white-supremacy and the state. We know that we cannot depend on the powerful to save us. We have to save ourselves, we all have to play our part. And with the economic, political, ecological and other storm clouds that are moving closer by the hour, we have come to understand that humanity's best chance at survival is through mutual aid survival programs, pooling our skills, networks, and resources together and meeting immediate needs while simultaneously raising consciousness. Hope is not naïve optimism. It is envisioning a future into being, against all odds, making a better world more probable through small, everyday actions.

The storms are increasing in intensity and frequency, but so is our diverse movement's power from below and our capacity to bend reality to will. In the face of growing fascist threats, we know a simple return to the politics of economic austerity, endless war, and the slow breakdown of authentic social relationships is not enough to stem the tide against authoritarianism. What we need is a radical restructuring of our social ties, based on mutual aid and our shared vision of the future.

In addition to meeting people's immediate needs for survival post-disasters, this is what we are building. Every hurricane, every fire, every earthquake, mudslide, flood, and every other disaster, is a space of profound suffering, but in these ruins, there is an opportunity to rebuild a better world in the shadow of the old.

A land abandoned is one in which no one has come to respond That's not the case in Puerto Rico.

Thousands of fema/military/bipolice and others have flooded the island and where, at first, we imagined an occupation, this does not qualify as such An existing occupation would be a visible occupation. But the optics are lacking. No, Puerto Rico is flush with "responders". But the people have been left to fend for themselves in streets with defunct street lights, creating penous conditions at large and busy intersections. Debris stretches across roads; collapsed walls, snapped light poles, chunks of cement, hundreds of downed power lines and what doesn't block the roads hangs precariously over them, teetering over cars and pedestrians

We are circulating literal tons of procured food/water/hygiene and baby supplies to areas that have been cut off from aid Going directly to people's homes with local residents in our vehicles, being welcomed into homes, listening to stories, responding to requests, that is mutual aid That is solidarity

Building power from the streets

Building power while the lights are out

Hierarchical relationships, based on class and race. forced into light by a disaster, are only reinforced by charitable institutions unless they address privilege and power. Self-determination and agency are critical in this process.

People impacted by disasters have more of a stake in their own survival and well-being than well-intentioned paternalistic givers of charity, and will firmly grasp the tools to participate in a communal recovery given the chance Survivors of

Throwing money and resources to power structures that have proven their bottle neck relief structure to be sorely lacking at a time where "sorely lacking" means life or death to people not privy to catered buffets in air conditioning at the glitzy Sheraton hotel where these defective models legitimize their worth through meetings and op sec tactical strategizing while people cook to death in their living rooms.

We are working to reduce harm and provide access to medical care. We are supporting radical, grassroots efforts on the ground with supplies and amplification. We are countering the narrative taped over the mouths of a people with a history npping at the seams with endured violence, colonization and exploitation from San Juan to Aguadilla.

In Puerto Rico, relief efforts continue to be constructed by the determined hands of communities rooted in environmental justice and supported by the hands of comrade movements.

We drove through neighborhoods in the mountains with local residents and comrades, delivered food, cases of water, water purification tablets, and provided health care to elderly residents and their families sweltering in damaged homes. surrounded by narrow, penous roads with no power and waning supplies. We are sharing our time, access to resources, knowledge, skills and quickly beating hearts to contribute to people's survival and self-determination.

Hakim Bey, the originator of the term temporary autonomous zone says they are "like an uprising which does not engage directly with the state, a guerrilla operation which

Long stretches of lush fields of trees, crowded in elbow to elbow are naked of leaves and have tom appendages scattered across the land.

Many of us in this country got our start to this type of organizing in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. We responded to a call from Malik Rahim, a former black panther. At the time there were white vigilantes roaming the streets of his neighborhood in New Orleans shooting and killing black men. We caught them on video bragging about it, saying, "It was like pheasant season, if it moved, you shot it."

The legacy of the black panthers melded with the insights, skills, and inspiration we learned from major mobilizations against global capital. Whether it was feeding large groups of people, setting up independent media centers, doing street medic work, or using our words as weapons, we found a place where these skills could be deployed to support people's survival and self-determination. With the help of an agent provocateur FBI informant, the organization - Common Ground - as it was called, spiraled into chaos, suffered from toxic disaster patriarchy, and was largely unable to realize its latent potential.

But in New York after Superstorm Sandy, another rose grew up from the concrete, even if just for a moment in time. Occupy Sandy rebirthed decentralized, liberatory, people powered disaster response, only to fade away once again.

And rather than learn from a decentralized model of human to human, neighbor to neighbor circumvention of FEMA and military protocols which limit food resource output to 200,000 meals per day on an island of more than 3 million people needing 3 meals a day, they continue to prop up their relentless disaster occupation ethic against stacks of financial subsidization

disasters look for accomplices who can assist them in achieving this communal recovery without imposing the stigma of receiving assistance. This is what we are here to help facilitate.

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief responds in a flexible, responsive and effective manner by not assuming everybody's needs are the same or that we know best what a community needs, but instead acts humbly, asking, listening, and responding. To us, disaster survivors have a right to be part of a communal recovery.

We recognize survivors' rights to determine what their needs are and how best others could assist them and we utilize the knowledge, skills and networks gained from our background in social movement organizing to respond from below, with direct action and without bureaucracy or red tape. This mutual aid, solidarity-based, grassroots approach to disaster relief, in addition to meeting the self-determined needs of disaster survivors more effectively, has the added benefit of building bridges, serving to unite disparate elements of social justice and liberation movements and build power from below.

Our weeks, like our hearts, have been so full lately. As the phases of relief and recovery transition rapidly, we are reminded how much work is still in front of us. We ask ourselves, how can we create this new world when we are all so damaged by the old one? And the answer(s), not found in any theory, come back to us-through walking, through action, autonomous, but together

In today's world, neoliberal capitalism is a daily disaster. The history of colonization has been a 500-year disaster. Enough already! It is time for a new model. We are proving the power of mutual aid and inspiring hope and resiliency through our actions; we are going beyond words and symbols

and demonstrations to proactively construct collective power from the bottom up, the kind of power that is ready to respond to community needs when the government fails. We are building bridges between the most vulnerable and disempowered communities, working as hard and as smart as we can to facilitate countless nodes of people power, infinite overlapping communities of resistance and resilience, and strategy that maximizes the effectiveness of all of our collective actions.

Rolling through the gates of west end Aquadilla's Medium/Minimum security prison Institución Correccional de Guerrero, our view widens to capture barbed wire buildings, a generator screaming a guttural something off stage left and the funous reality of captives of the state existing on the other side of liberation, scraping elbows with the humid air.

"These perimeter fences fell down during the storm and we had to position a line of armed special forces to guard the prisoners," offers a sleepy guard at the end of a double shift "They are still guarding the back end 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

"The warden is here, she's coming," a prison guard tells us. We are in this space continuing our post-hurricane jail support of ensuring captives of the state have access to clean water, calls to family and lovers, proper ventilation and correctional facility meted out "privileges,"

Outside the prison, the weather is sweltering Inside the prison. an entire building full of prisoners have been merged with another building full of prisoners and now overcrowding is the new hurricane to survive.

These are extreme events, but mutual aid also takes place all around us all the time. People often survive extreme poverty, unemployment, and post- incarceration, not because of top-down government services or aid agencies, but because of networks of horizontal assistance, mutual aid that oppressed communities and individuals show each other when the system fails. This rarely makes it on anybody's linkedin resume or media platforms. But is foundational for so many people's survival and acts as a constant reminder that other economic and social models exist here and now and we do have alternatives.

As the days grind up in number, creating time and distance from the thrashing winds and surging inundation of the deluge of water hurricane Maria pulled over Puerto Rico, statistics remain alien from the view on the ground, a tangible contradiction to a popular and racially charged narrative that Puerto Ricans "need to stop relying on the trump administration for relief and rebuild themselves".

A Puerto Rico which was already a decade behind in infrastructure, limping with debt and who is projected by economists to run dry of money by November... How can they rebuild from this level of damage?

Puerto Rico is heavily scarred with countless homes populated by home bound and bed bound elders sitting in a silence that was once occupied by the sounds of air conditioners and televisions, sheets of perspiration from the sweltering heat

falling into their frustration furrowed brows. Debris clogs traverses. Telephone and Electric poles are snapped, bent, broken and either lie on people's roofs or sprawl across busy roadways.