

Finding Our Way Podcast

hosted by

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guest Mariame Kaba

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agreement or when two people are speaking at once

[Music playing]

Prentis: [music] Is there anything we can't reimagine? More than we realize our solutions to social challenges are shaped by our concepts of good and bad, and enacted along lines of power. These simplistic conversations of good and bad obscure deeper conversations. Who are we really? What are we responsible for? And can we change?

New Speaker: Abolition as a political effort calls on us to dismantle our current prison system and the violences that surround it. It also necessarily calls on us to change our culture, our habits around punishment, and the transformation of our very beings. I was so grateful to talk with Mariame Kaba in this episode on abolition. She shares her insight and her wisdom on the culture abolition inspires us to create. Mariame Kaba is an organizer, educator, and curator. Her work focuses on ending violence, dismantling the prison industrial complex, transformative justice and supporting youth leadership development. This is a conversation I've really been excited to share with you all for months, and I hope you enjoy it.

New Speaker: All right. So this is actually a conversation I've been so excited to have. And, um, Mariame Kaba I just wanted to say thank you for being on this podcast. Thank you for being in conversation, this is really, I think

going to be a really important conversation for the folks listening to this podcast today. So thank you.

Mariame: Thank you so much for the invitation. I look forward to the conversation.

Prentis: So, you know, this podcast is called Finding Our Way and what we are doing the project is bringing voices together, people together, who we feel like are a part of a constellation of people that are helping us to create a new future, new possibilities. We may not each individually have the answer, but we have some piece of it that we feel like if we weave them together, it helps us navigate to where we're headed. So we start every episode with the question, um, that you can answer, however, speaks to you - but the question is where are we, how would you define this moment? How would you describe this moment? Where are we?

Mariame: Yeah. Um, what a question I think for me, it's been a really obviously tumultuous crisis-filled, but also incredibly wondrous time in the last year and change. *mmhmm* Um, basically since last March, when, um, and here in New York, we had a really horrible time of it in terms of the COVID pandemic, uh, starting in March through, I think at least through June. I live in east Midtown, and I live next to two hospitals and I just remember this constant, like it was persistent and constant sirens to all aspects of the day and night. There was just no end to it at a certain point. It just became this background noise, that we just had to endure and deal with and knowing what those sirens were kind of instantiations of, you know. *mmhmm* I felt so much heaviness. And the other side of it was that I was absolutely reaffirmed in understanding the importance and the essential nature of our interdependence as humans. All of the efforts of mutual aid, all of the life-affirming relationships that people leveraged in order to make sure that we all survived to the extent that we could. And we lost so many people. I mean, just an inordinate amount, so much of an excess. I think that it's hard to put my brain to wrap my brain really fully around it. But so many of us are still here in part because of that interdependence and other things that made that possible. So I think right now I see us in kind of a midst of an ongoing global set of pandemics of disease and issues of climate, poverty, and so many other violences, but also in a moment where I think there are possibilities for living in another world, building that other world together. So always for me, it's always kind of like one foot in creative destruction and the other foot in the possibility of making new things.

Prentis: Yep, absolutely. That's beautiful that reflection, you know, you grounded us in a year plus of multiplying multiple pandemics and I know something that people have been asking me to reflect on is like kind of one year later after uprisings around Breonna Taylor, around George Floyd, we see this conversation of abolition being had more often. And I'm wondering if you can talk about just kind of why you think that's happening; what's made that happen, and where you think we're kind of going in that conversation also.

Mariame: Sure. Um, I think that a lot of people have been and are trying to make sense of this moment of crisis and possibility. And I think that in times like that folks may be more willing to engage with ideas that they are new to, um, ideas that may be more challenging to them under circumstances where things aren't so up in flux. And I think that the labor and the work of generations sometimes needs a particular moment where that work can become legible to more people. And I think in part that's kind of what has happened with PIC, prison industrial complex abolition as a political vision, as a practice, and as an organizing strategy. I think that more people are ready to hear something different than what they've been hearing over time. And they think that has a lot to do with the receptivity of some of the ideas advanced by PIC abolitionists.

Mariame: I think it's up to all of us who are invested in a path, that is an abolitionist path, to try to engage with as many people as possible in the ways that we feel like we can since abolition is a collective project, it's not on one or two people, it's on a whole host of folks who live and, um, are in so many places in the world to kind of keep that momentum going. And when I say momentum, I don't mean it in a urgent sense. *mmhmm* I just mean it in a sense of, you know, con continuing to move.

Prentis: I love that distinction at the end about it not being about urgency necessarily, but I want to kind of go in a little bit into the conversation around prisons and incarceration, but I kind of want to come to it from a standpoint of what this kind of system that we live in, what it kind of requires of all of us, I guess, what are the concepts that it gives each of us about who we are in relationship to people who are incarcerated, or who we are in relationship to goodness and badness, those kinds of things. Um, cause I think in, in your most recent book and writing, there's a lot of clarity about what it is that we all end up ingesting, I think when we're living inside of these systems. So I guess maybe to start my question is what do you feel like are some of the concepts that

we take for granted that actually emerge from a, a logic that sits underneath this prison system that we currently have? Like, what are some of the things that we might not even realize that we believe that actually uphold this?

Mariame: Yeah, I think at the center of these death-making institutions, always at the center of it has to do with power-over, has do with fear of the other, has to do with a real desire, and in some cases, a real need for punishment. I think also just the necessities of a structure that is built on domination and oppression -necessitates these death, making institutions both to create a sense of quote unquote 'order', but also to literally reorder, um, so that some people have more and others have less. And I think that all of those things, a punishment logic, and a logic that is focused on domination and control has a real deleterious effect on human beings, that I think is just not, maybe it's not as understood how the corrosiveness of that impacts us on a daily basis in so many different ways, even for those who feel like they're outside of those systems.

Mariame: Um, I'm always interested in have always been interested in this notion of that, I think some people aren't holding on so tightly to what exists, not only out of fear, but also because it serves them in some way. So we have to lean in when we're having conversations with people about these death making institutions, we really have to lean in to the fears, but we also have to be honest about what needs the current system actually is fulfilling for people. And I think that part we don't do as well, we kind of lean into being like, we understand why people want these death-making institutions because they're afraid because they desire something we call safety; which is really just an illusion. People desire various kinds of things, but people also get pleasure out of punishment. *mm* People also get validation out of punishment. People also have a way of building community out of punishment. Like these are not things that are incidental. These are things that are very much part of why we hold on so tightly to what exists. And why any attempt to try to shift that can often cause people to viscerally and sometimes violently fight back against any possibility of something different than what exists. But I think we have to have those conversations and be honest. We, you know, we have to talk about the pleasure that we get out of punishment. Um, but that's also a thing because if we don't talk about that, then we're always just talking about, 'oh, punishment feels hard, you know, it's suffering' and it has, but no, it actually also the person

who's doing the punishment often feels pleasure out of that. Um, and we have to like be honest about what that means.

Prentis: There's like three questions I have lined up for you. But I think that this point that you're making, like you're saying, we don't really talk about this very often, but I think about when I facilitate transformative justice processes or even facilitating conflict. *Yeah.* And it's not even just facilitation, let me be real. *yeah* It's also in my own experience of my own life and being myself *yeah, yes* that there are times where we can, you know, the questions I have for people early on in a process, are like what would, what would satisfy you as an outcome? Or sometimes reminding people that no process will undo what has been done. *Yeah.* And I've had that feeling both in myself and witnessed it in other people of what we actually want is revenge or what we actually want is somehow to make it all go away. But that, that drive or that urge for, it's not always revenge, some people just want to, in some people have the urge to, like, you're saying, find pleasure in that. But I feel that in us, we just kind of overlook it. We're like, oh, this is a, this is the way you should be. But people do have that initial urge at times to - 'I want to punish you for making me feel this way.'

Mariame: But also like, I, I, why for me, this is not a, I don't think it's a judgment on people *mmhmm, that's right* for taking [inaudible] punishment. Like I actually also, when somebody hurts me, want to hurt them back. *Exactly.* And when something terrible happens and befalls them, I too, in some cases feel a sense of gladness that, that occurred to them. Like we are not these perfectly, you know, pure, [Prentis laughing] unflawed individuals who just have like deep forgiveness in our heart. [Prentis laughing] We're not seeing, you know, and I, and I guess for me, like when I came to the conclusion many years ago, like I really kind of leaned into this notion of the ways that punishment actually is pleasurable and also easy, like much easier to engage in than actually helping people take accountability for their bad acts. Like it's so much easier because they don't have to do anything. *mmhmm* you do everything and they just are passively there. Or if they're not there there's somewhere else, but like, you don't have to do much work. You can just punish people. And like that is also real, like it's a time consuming thing to be sitting with, help, you know, forcing people to have to take account for what they've done or being in a space where you are making that possible with people. Like it's so much easier to just go ahead and punish folks. *yeah* They don't have to be involved then, um, we don't have to wait for them. We can just take it on. Um,

and so to me, I wish there were more real spaces for that real conversation to be happening amongst us so that we can acknowledge that where we're at, *mm* and then do the work of moving from where we're at to where we want to be like, do you know, to shrinking the space, I always say this, but you know, shrinking the space between my values and my actions. That's like a lifelong process that isn't linear and that I'm not going to always get right. And that is going to be four steps forward and five steps back sometimes.

Mariame: And so I guess maybe I should also say this because I think sometimes when I have conversations with people, I think for me being acutely aware that human beings are flawed, makes me actually feel more connected to others. And also opens me up to being more courageous and more compassionate. *mmhmm* Like I am not under any illusions of, that I won't be disappointed sometimes by people, but I still think people can do good. *mmhmm* I'm less interested in the conversations around whether people are good or are bad, but I do believe that everyone can do good and take on good action, and live into better behavior. *mmhmm* So I think maybe that's a little bit about like kind of where I sit on the, you know, on the, on that line around trying to wrestle with these things in a real way, rather than pretending that I'm dealing with folks who have a perfect politic, a perfect set of values that, you know, conform to the best of our intentions for ourselves in each other, but that we're actually always in struggle with ourselves. And we're always trying to figure out how to reconcile all of our contradictions all the time.

Prentis: So can I ask you a kind of, um, maybe it's a basic question in some ways, but given that we at times can find pleasure in punishment, *yeah* can you really lay out for us? What does an abolitionist future then give us that we are not able to get to the way things are currently ordered?

Mariame: Well, I think just this, which is an acknowledgement that punishment can be pleasurable. *mm* That, um, you know, like talking about that in an honest way, putting that on the table and not skirting it. I think it also offers us this opportunity to understand that human beings are always in process, that there's no like, you know, I say this often, but like there is no abolition land like that we're getting to, you know, there is only an ongoing set of processes that will allow us to have better responses to what I see as inevitably we're going to constantly harm each other because we're human beings. *mmhmm* Like I don't, I don't foresee a time. And again, this also is probably a product of my very limited imagination about this, because obviously human beings

evolved and will continue to evolve. And so I'm not here for like, you know, for what I'm sitting in for this moment, at this time. I don't imagine that we're going to be humans that we'll be humans in the way that we're human now and not harm each other, I just think that's going to happen. And so my interest as a PIC abolitionist, it's just always been an abolition rooted in transformative justice, but that's not everybody's abolition by the way. Like not all abolitionists subscribed to transformative justice as a framework, um, or an ideology or, um, a practice. *mmhmm* And so we have to also be open to that. Mine is rooted in transformative justice, but other people's are rooted in other things. And so, um, so I really think that's important as a distinction for people to also understand. And so for me, because my abolitionism is rooted in transformative justice, I'm constantly interested in relationship, and harm. And harm defined, not as crime, but harm, which, you know, not everything that's harmful is criminal and not everything that's criminal is harmful.

Prentis: Can you break that down? Cause that, that was actually one of the questions I had here. And, um, you know, when I was reading, *We Do This Til' We Free Us*, I was like, 'this is this distinction, this, this distinction is some of what people need to hear.' So can you just take us through that, that again, the relationship between crime and harm, cause they get so conflated,

Mariame: Well there is no relationship, right? Like that's actually the bottom line there simply isn't crime is a socially constructed set of norms that define what a society decides for itself they will criminalize. Like that's all, that's all it is. It's not anything about "this is supremely harmful and therefore we make in a crime," what we as a society and usually not even created by us, but created by people years and years and decades and decades ago. And then we just keep adding more things to the criminal code. So that it's a hundred trillion pages instead of a hundred million pages, right. [Prentis laughing] And the perfect example of this is something that I was just talking about earlier today, which is all this moral panic stuff that's happening around Walgreens. And people saying that people are stealing material stuff from Walgreens, and that this is like the height of harm and people, random people who are in Walgreens are now calling the cops on people they see shoplifting, right. Um, and shoplifting, I'm anticapitalist, I don't think shoplifting from Walgreens is a major harm at all. Like it's not, you know, and I certainly don't think it should be criminalized, right? Like, cause people should have what they need to survive. So under that construct, right,

for me, like it maybe as harmful to like the CEO of Walgreens. Like, I don't know, you know, but it's not harmful to workers. *Unlikely* It's not harmful. You know what I mean? Like, so what are we really talking about here? But you know what happens every single year? It's billions of dollars of wage theft from workers, *mmhmm* from companies that are literally stealing from their own employees through multiple ways that are totally legal, but that's billions of dollars, people aren't stealing billions of dollars worth of goods from Walgreens. And so I think it helps us to really think about that kind of stuff, right. Something that might be super harmful to me, you might see as not a big deal to you. Right. And there's a lot of subjectivity to that. And so we have to constantly be, this is part of why to me, transformative justice is so useful is because it sits with what we all like, what the person who's been harmed is interested in while also putting that in conversation with the broader community's needs, ideas, thoughts. So it's always kind of a negotiation there about like, how can we try to repair what's happened within the context of what we can actually accomplish together. And so I think to me that's much more useful and much more fruitful of a way to be addressing, what are various kinds of harms? I hear people who say like, if you use the word harm, then it flattens everything and makes everything, everything. But that's also true of crime. [Mariame laughing] you know what I'm saying? so I don't know what people are talking about, honestly, you know. *mmhmm* And I, I just think that our need to be acknowledged when a bad thing has happened to us, our need and our desire, and want to be taken seriously and not dismissed and not ignored and neglected. That, that thing is the thing to work around and to work with. Right. It's like, how do we, how do we meet people's desire to be acknowledged? How do we prevent people from being alone when they're harmed, and for ruptures to have occurred in relationship to make it so that that person doesn't end up getting their needs met or gets pushed out the community, even worse when they're the one that was actually harmed? Like how do we, how do we engage with that hard stuff? You know? So, yeah. So that's a little bit of my thoughts on that. I mean, it's right now, um, it might be a little all over the place, but it makes sense in my mouth.

Prentis: No, uh no, [Prentis laughing] it, it also makes sense in my head. And you know, one of the things I really appreciate about your work and your leadership is, you know, whenever I read you, I hear you speak, there's such a, it's like a piercing clarity at the same time, you have such nuance around this practice. Like there are just so many places in here that I, I see you looking and asking hard questions. And I guess I kind of have a

question about this moment that we're in, where more people are, are practicing transformative justice or engaging in the ideas around transformative justice or engaging in ideas around, um, abolition. *yeah* And yet we're still, many of us still are embodied or mired in the kind of binaries that disrupt our kind of creativity and listening that I think transformative justice that you're pointing towards requires, I'm just wondering how, if you've experienced that or how that's been in this moment of like kind of increased practice attention and the ways that I think maybe collectively we are, I don't know, challenged by the implementation.

Mariame: I'm constantly challenged by everything all the time. Like, I don't know how people live in the world of 'this is one way, and this is the other way. And that's all there is.' *mm* Like in my experience of living, um, my 50th year, I'm turning 50 in a few months, couple months. Um, and like for me, wondrous things always have happened alongside and parallel to the terrible, *mmhmm mmhmm* like, I don't know how to, how that suss all that stuff out, you know? And I want to say too, a thing about transformative justice that I think people want, is for it to mirror what we currently have, but just less horrible maybe. *Come on* I think people want to hold on to the pleasure of punishment, want to hold on to all these other kinds of things, *woooo* but to make it a little less messy or a little less, you know, maybe visibly harmful, I'm not sure *mmhmm*, but I think that's where I see stuff going on.

Mariame: I realized something many years ago, which was that like, people will get mad at you very often. Like one of the things that I have found over time has been the conversation. You know, I started doing anti-violence work by working in a rape crisis center *mmhmm* when I was in college and basically spent years then working in domestic violence organizations and other places, both as a worker and as a volunteer. And I realized pretty early on that, I think people genuinely care about people who are harmed by violence, but they care about them in the box that they'd created for them, *mmm* not caring for them in how they are. We often throw around terms within TJ, but also within the anti-violence movement - it's more a field, It's not a movement anymore - Um, that is always about, um, survivors centorship, for example, *yep* but it's not clear to me, which survivors do you actually mean? *ooof* Like what, like what do you mean by survivor hood? Like what does that mean? Like how do I get into the club? Do I have compulsorily confess that all things bad that have ever happened to me? Like all those things are the mess and the murkiness of it and the difficulties of it. And so

we're in this place where, especially in the age of social media and I have a lot of, I have a lot of empathy for particularly young people growing up only having experienced this world. I have, I've had people very, very angry at me, for example, for facilitating public processes with people who've raped people, and will be like, "this wasn't, this wasn't hard enough on them", or "this was" like by the way, they were not part of the process at all, right. So they don't know what they may have read something or heard from a friend of a friend *right* or whatever so they're commenting based on where they're at. It's about them. It's not about us or the process. *mm* And I always say like, "actually, those of us who are engaged in transformative justice are the people you need to be yelling at the least about quote, unquote being rape apologists. We actually talk about rape all the time." We're in our community and sexual assault and violence. And like, that's what we're constantly bringing it up. Right? Like we're not the ones trying to shush it away or hide it. We're always like, let's get to the acknowledgement stage. Let's pull that out. Let's work with people so that they don't continue gaslighting people. So that's, I'm always so calm about it. Like friends of mine will be like, "so-and-so's dragging you on social" and I'll be like, "I don't really care." [Prentis laughing].

New Speaker: There's a lot of reasons I don't care. The main one I don't care about is they don't know me, they don't know the process, they weren't part of it. And if somebody I facilitated a process with who's a survivor is upset. I care about that. *Yeah.* Do you know what I mean? But when I, when you look at a process and the person who was the survivor feels like they got what they needed out of it, even if the person who did the abuse, or did the harm chooses not to take accountability; that's not a failed process. There's a lot of confusion, which I totally, totally understand. I really do. And I'm not like it's not condescendingly at all. I totally get it. And I also get like, when you're not part of something that you have all sorts of imaginings of what's really happening and going on that aren't based on anything *yep yep* but your own goals and your own values and your own behavior and your own desire. And so I get it and you're kind of projecting, *yeah* you know, like "if it were me, I wouldn't do this." Well, TJ never says you should do anything you don't want to do. It's actually voluntary. *mmhmm* So like, I'm not forcing you to do anything. Why are you so upset? Like what what's making you mad?, Like really at bottom? What is, what is really troubling you? And I'll just say, the last thing is, I've been hearing in the last few years, as people try things, a lot of stories of supposedly failures. *Uh huh* "TJ doesn't work", I hear. Right. *Yeah, yeah* And I'm always like, I'm really

curious about that, you know? Like, I'm really curious about that. Like, what do you mean doesn't work? *mmhmm* What did you do? How did you do it with whom did you do it? What did you learn from the experience? I believe in failure being actually an opportunity for improvement. *Yeah yeah* And the fact that failures can be glorious because *mmhmm* as long as it's not further harming anybody in a really negative way, it's something that you have an opportunity to learn from. And then you can move on to making something else that was informed by that previous failure. So I guess I'm not afraid of the word failure in the way that the USians are, like the way that it gets posited by certain quarters in the US um, because I have to say the people in the big, huge corporate capitalist companies also don't care about failure. *hmm* They fail all the time. In fact, they teach their folks who are doing very destructive things. That failure is encouraged because it means you're taking risks,

Prentis: Right? Fail forward.

Mariame: Fail forward. Fail big, so that at least, you know, that you might hit some part of where you're at. Like they're on that path, *thats right, that's right, that's right* but we're like stuck in the sense of the binary. It's like failure or success. And like, *that's right.* Who's taught you that? *that's right* Everything is more murky than that. And I think the last thing I'll bring up here around this too, that I think is so important. I remember reading on Facebook a few years back, something that, um, came from, I don't know somebody was, it might've been Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's page. And Leah was talking about the same thing about failure and you know, what people demand of things. And I thought it was so interesting that somebody, a friend of theirs, mentioned something around the way that transformative justice has really opened up an opportunity for them to be in a real community, and real solidarity with survivors in their lives. *mmhmm* Like that, regardless of whether the other party does anything at all, that they've been able to build community care in new and different ways that they've been *yes yes yes* able to listen in different ways that they've been able to do all this other stuff that their friends wouldn't have had before and never had before actually. *yes* And I just think about that so much on a regular basis about what do we measure as success? What does that mean for us when we're talking about people and their lives and experiences? Um, I have to find that I have to find that quote at some point, I'll try to find it or the end of this, um, this conversation, just so I can read it because it really just shifted something in me and

just reading how it got laid out. It's something I always have known, and I've tried to embody, *mmhmm* but it was such a moment of like, just being like, no, this is what we need to be sitting with. And just doing something else, which is trying to respond in different ways when harm occurs.

Prentis: That's right. I mean, I think that's the piece, I often talk about, I started getting into healing work or healing justice work because I'd been organized into abolitionists organizing and the, the vision that opened up for me, you know, it left me with these questions of 'okay, if, to make that possible, what do our institutions have to look like? What do our systems have to be? What, what needs to be going on kind of internally in order to practice that vision or that kind of future?' And that, to me, you know, there's not a disconnection for me *yeah* between what we call healing work and, um, abolition that there's a deep, they're the same [laughing] in a lot of places to me in the way that I hold it.

Mariame: What do you think, um, of where things seem to be going though *yeah* in terms of the conversation about false healing and being healed and all that stuff. When we talk about it in connection to the big structural eternal struggle for more, you know, for liberation that we're engaged in right now, what, what do you think on the landscape there? I'm interested.

Prentis: I love that question. Um, I mean, I think similarly to what you're saying about transformative justice, we're in a moment where a lot of things are up in the air, there are different narratives that lead to different outcomes. There's different practices that lead to different outcomes. And I think that there are, um, a significant number. I mean, I think what I feel excited about is, understanding for me, understanding healing as a process, much like transformative justice or abolition, that's actually a process, to me, it's a process that actually sits at the root of how do I say it, it's, it's very similar to what you shared earlier in that I think that trauma is going to happen in a human beings life. Because that's just what life is like - you're going to lose somebody love something's going to happen catastrophic. You will have that experience. But when we have systems designed around care, when we have culture and ritual designed around care and processing, what happens in a body or in a, in a group or in a collective; then to me, that's healing-centered or care-centered, it's, it's attending to the process that is biological, that is communal of, uh, our need to process things that are sometimes overwhelming. So to me, the, the question of healing sits very squarely inside a question of culture and inside a question of,

um, how we transform our systems and the structures that we currently live in. And I don't think that you can pull it out or put it to the side, or, um, I think that there are people that are, are skilled in certain modalities and that those folks are necessary inside of, uh, inside of a purpose inside of a culture inside of, um, inside of liberatory work. And, um, I think we always have to know that, that, you know, I, I think we're at a moment where it could go a bunch of different ways.

Mariame: That is so real, like that last part, particularly all of it. And the last part, like we're at a moment where it can go a million different ways. *mmhm* I always tell people, especially my, um, you know, Godkids, nibblings, and others who have ask me lots of questions about the world, and where we are kind of in the way that you in, not in the language that you offered at the very beginning, but *mmhmm* certainly their concerns about like, you know, they're very concerned about environment destruction for example. I think about my nephew who's very obsessed with it right now, and I use that term 'obsessed' because that really is what it is for him. *Wow.* I use it as this like existential thing about like survival. And I say to him all the time, I'm like, "you know, I don't know how things are going to turn out, but the important thing for me is that I'm committed to something other than this. "I'm committed to *yes* something other than the current structure and the state of this society. I don't think that we have to live the way that we do. I think that something else is possible and that's the thing to be focused on is the, what is the something else that is possible?" And so instead of sitting with the existential dread, which I see in him of like, "it's all going to shit anyway," like "we're going to not make it," the planet is going to make, first of all, the hubris of that, like the planet can actually throw us off it anytime it wants, [both laughing] like you know? We are so small,

Prentis: Everyday it could happen.

Mariame: It could happen every minute and does, right. *Yes, it's true". Like we are not, like there's this weird human hubris about nature and what the planet, it's like, I know I get it, you know, but you know, the planet is resilient and, and not just resilient, but has much more power over us sometimes than we do over it. *yes* And so I think, I think, you know, I think like just sitting with that, like, I always wanna, I try to bring him back to this around, like, "I'm okay with the small. And I think that it's okay for you to try to concentrate on the things you have a direct purchase over right now, *that's right* the things that you can uniquely do that will lessen and alleviate suffering to the extent that you can.

And that, that is within your control and that you can do the best you can around that." And I think to me, it connects to this thing that you were talking about, about the not knowing and the, the fact that healing is a process. And it's a process that extends both before and after us. *That's right* Um, and that like some humility on our part, some sense of understanding ourselves as not these lords of the universe, but rather that we're in deep, deep interconnection with all living and non-living things, um, gives you just, I think maybe a sense of potentiality *mmhmm* and allows you not to, I think, not to despair, um, in a way. Um, yeah. So anyway, I just,

Prentis: I think it actually, um, the question of healing too, for me, it, it, it helps supports that capacity. And that capacity to, um, remember that you belong. *Yes.* Cause that's one of the things that gets broken when we're overwhelmed. *Yes* It's like "I can't belong here. It's not possible." So, you know, for me, I'm like, what are the capacities that trauma has tried to take from us or that the trauma of oppression has tried to take and how do we recover those capacities so that, you know, we have the capacity for connection? We have the capacity for intimacy. We have capacity to see ourselves in those shadow places that you're talking about, not to disown. Yo sometimes I, I get pleasure from this or whatever it might be that you try to disown. I mean, I think part of the reason why we're caught in this, this vying for innocence, that I think the carceral state sets up for us, which isn't actually about whether or not what your actions were, but how can you scramble to innocence? How can you buy for innocence? *That's right, that's right* It's, it's, it's trying to answer, are you good? Are you good enough?

Mariame: It is. And the, and the being, the quote 'being good' thing I have just, I just rejected years ago. *Yes, yes.* I'm like, I am just so uninterested in this and I'm not interested in being good. I'm interested in being. And that means I'm with all my flaws I'm interested in being, and that's what actually allows me to connect with other people, it's that. *That's right* Because it's a constant obsession with quote 'being good' is a separating factor for me, from other people, *yes* because I'm constantly at the point where I'm going to have to be judging myself against all of them constantly about whether I'm good enough. Whether like, no, am I make, am I taking actions that are good in the sense of, am I doing good things in the world? Am I actualizing those values that I have that are deeply held values, that I'm constantly struggling to put into action and to inhabit? Like that's much more interesting to me. Um, *that's right, that's right* that's kind of the, the,

am I a good person? I really, really actively reject that. Like, it it actually does something to my system, when people, when I hear people say, "well, that's a good person." I'm like, "I don't really care." Does that make sense [laughing] I'll say like, "I don't really care."

Prentis: What is that? *Exactly* Even does that mean?

Mariame: Yeah and I don't care. I care about whether this person is enacting good things and whether they're behaving in a way that I would see as useful and non-harming and, you know, healthy and pushing for the wellbeing of their community. Right. Like,

Prentis: That's right. That's right. Yeah. And when we let that go I feel like we, we'll see, you know, I'm putting a value judgment on it too, but it just helps. It has helped me grow. Deepen. I actually enjoy my life to be like, "it's not about good." It turns out. *That's really true. Yeah.* And social media, have you tricked out here too? Because that's, [Mariame exhales] I feel like we're all trying to show a good, *yeah.* "This is me, I'm good." *Yeah. Yeah.* I get, I get trapped in that. "This is me, I'm good." *Everybody does.* you know?

Mariame: Well, the reason why is because it's this concept of the Looking Glass Self, which was created by this, uh, sociologist named Cooley, um, who believed that other people help me see myself. Like I am myself, because other people in part reflect myself back to me. And that's how I know I'm myself. *I see* So in a way that you are made, you're not, you're not just a per...you are made a person. *That's right.* You are made a person through how other people view you. And that I think social media is like explodes that, and exponentially makes that more so. So that you begin to only see yourself through the reflection, which is of course a funhouse mirror - these people don't know you, you know what I mean? Like they don't know you, and they don't really don't care about you for the most part. Right? Like if something terrible happens to you, maybe one or two people will think about it again, but most people will just go on with their day. Like, no problem *mmhm*. Maybe there'll be like a tweet or a Facebook post that's about *a heart emoji!* But people are going to keep it moving. Right. Like this is not. So I think this is part of what has distorted people's sense of themselves in part. Right. But it's actually makes total sense if you take that kind of looking glass self theory of how we're made into ourselves through the eyes and the reflection of other people's views of who we are. Um, it makes total sense then.

Prentis: Ah, that's so interesting, Mariame. I mean, some down, down...some time down the line, I want to do a part two because I'm like, "okay, how does that relate to how we are made through relationship?" But let's, I'm going to pause because I want us to, um, there's so, I didn't even get to half my questions. [Mariame laughing] *It's ok* there's so many things to say, to ask you,

Mariame: This is the conversation we're supposed to have today, [both laughing]

Prentis: I guess so. I wanna just end here with, um, maybe your reflections on I'm going to try to fit two in here in a way, um, but the role of imagination in where we're going, but also, you know, you talk about, I'm just going to fit these two together. You talk about hope as a discipline. And I, we had someone on the podcast, a, a teacher writer, same is Bayo Akomolafe he talked about the end of hope and in a way, uh, I think pointing to some similar places that you were talking about is like, "let's get in the water let's practice." Um, but the way you talk about hope as a discipline is that; it's a practice. So I wonder if you can talk about both our imaginations and what that means for this moment, and then also hope as a discipline. Cause I, I hear it in you Mariame. I feel like I hear, I hear it. There's something that I can't quite describe that actually feels very remarkable to me about, the way you hold possibility in this work, even though you have been so deep in understanding the real violence and costs *yes* of the system as it currently is. So I would just love to hear your thoughts as you know, we move towards the end on, on, on both imagination and hope because I think people listening will hear what I'm talking about in your voice.

Mariame: Yeah, I think, um, yes, I I've told the story about, you know, being in a space and hearing this person who was a nun kind of in passing and her conversation with say something like, you know, say "hope is a discipline". I hope I got that actually correct. But I, I remember it that way. Um, and then kind of moving on, but that, that kind of the, the words together, they just crystallized for me something in that moment that I then held on for years, like decades since. And, um, the thing about it for me, you know, Rebecca Solnit, uh, for people who are interested in like ideas about hope has a really beautiful short book called Hope In The Dark, Um, and I always tell people to read it. Um, but one of the things she talks about is that hope isn't a, actually a substitute for action, but a basis for it. *mmhmm* And I really agree that that's the case. And I don't have, maybe I have a materialist, a materialist interpretation of hope. Like for me, hope doesn't reside. Hope isn't like a thing. It is also not an emotion. It's not something that I

have. It's something that I do. And so I think about it in the context of hope, being a discipline for me is that I choose every single day as part of my gratitude practice. I choose to do hope every single day, it's a discipline. It's something I am committed to doing all the time. And, um, and it's not something for me, it's not like a fluffy thing, and it's also certainly not optimism. Because optimism makes you think that things will turn out fine. And I don't know if things are going to turn out fine at all. Like things may not turn out fine. I have no idea, but what I'm committed to is the daily practice of trying, and the daily practice of doing, and the daily practice of struggle. And so this is for me, at least that's where hope that's what hope looks like and means for me. Um, and I also think on the kind of very specific level, that part of imagination allows you to prefigure things, you know, you don't have to be in the thing in the moment to think about the possibilities of that thing. And it, in a way is also its own way of, um, kind of allowing you to travel a little bit while being firmly rooted in the place that you are. I've always been someone who, um, since I was a very small person, my mother tells me this all the time that like what's the world in which we actually want to live and how are we going to make our way towards that world-making? Has always been something that I've been interested in. I've always, I guess maybe I've always thought of my life as a site for experimentation. And that allows me to not, it's tied to my concept that I mentioned to you before about understanding that failure is just a part of life, and not being worried about it, and not being beaten up about it. And also not seeing it like as a personal reflection on my goodness [laughing] *mmhmm* or that I am bad because I quote "failed". And maybe I also got that from my father who was very much of the belief and of the teaching that you should fail often and make tons of mistakes because that's how you can figure out how to improve. And all of us are on a mission of life to be improving constantly. Um, and so because I had those kinds of groundings and foundations, I think all these things make sense. And I've, I've read all the, you know, I've read, you know, [inaudible] on hope,

Mariame: And I just thought [exhale] what a just, a huge exhale in reading those words and in thinking about them and in inhabiting them because that's been my experience too, all along the way. It's also been my experience, obviously, having worked with people who've caused harm to also experience their transformation too. And that also is part of a discipline of getting up every single day and choosing; choosing, to remain of the world, in the world and deeply in the struggle of all of it. That's, at bottom that's what this is all about to me.

Prentis: Wow Mariame, you sharing that just, um, it touched a bunch of places in me and a bunch of memories too, so I'm grateful for that. Thank you. *Of course* And, um, just thank you so much for, thank you so much for sharing your insight, for being in conversation, for being, um, someone that is getting up and facing these questions and, and expanding, helping us to expand what we're able to hold in this moment. I'm, I'm really, really grateful. And, and thank you so much.

Mariame: Thank you so much for having me Prentis. And for doing this show, which is also hugely important in terms of giving us more ability to have tools and resources and to listen, um, to learn, and to grow, um, in our practice and in our attempts to, you know, build this other world that I think we're pos, that we can, that we actually can build another world is actually possible.

Prentis: That's right. Thank you. Thank you.

Prentis: [music] Finding our way is co-produced and edited by Eddie Hemphill. Co-production and visual design by devon de Leña. Assistant editing by Amy Piñon. Please make sure to rate, subscribe, and review wherever it is that you listen to this podcast. You can also find us on Instagram at finding our way podcast or email us with questions, suggestions, or feedback, and findingourwaypod@gmail.com. You can also help sustain the podcast by becoming one of our Patreon subscribers. You can find us on Patreon @findingourwaypodcast. Thank you for listening to finding our way [music].