GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING AND THE COMPLEXITIES OF HOPE

“NOT EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE, BUT THE POSSIBILITIES ARE INFINITE”: GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING AND THE COMPLEXITIES OF SO-CALLED HOPE

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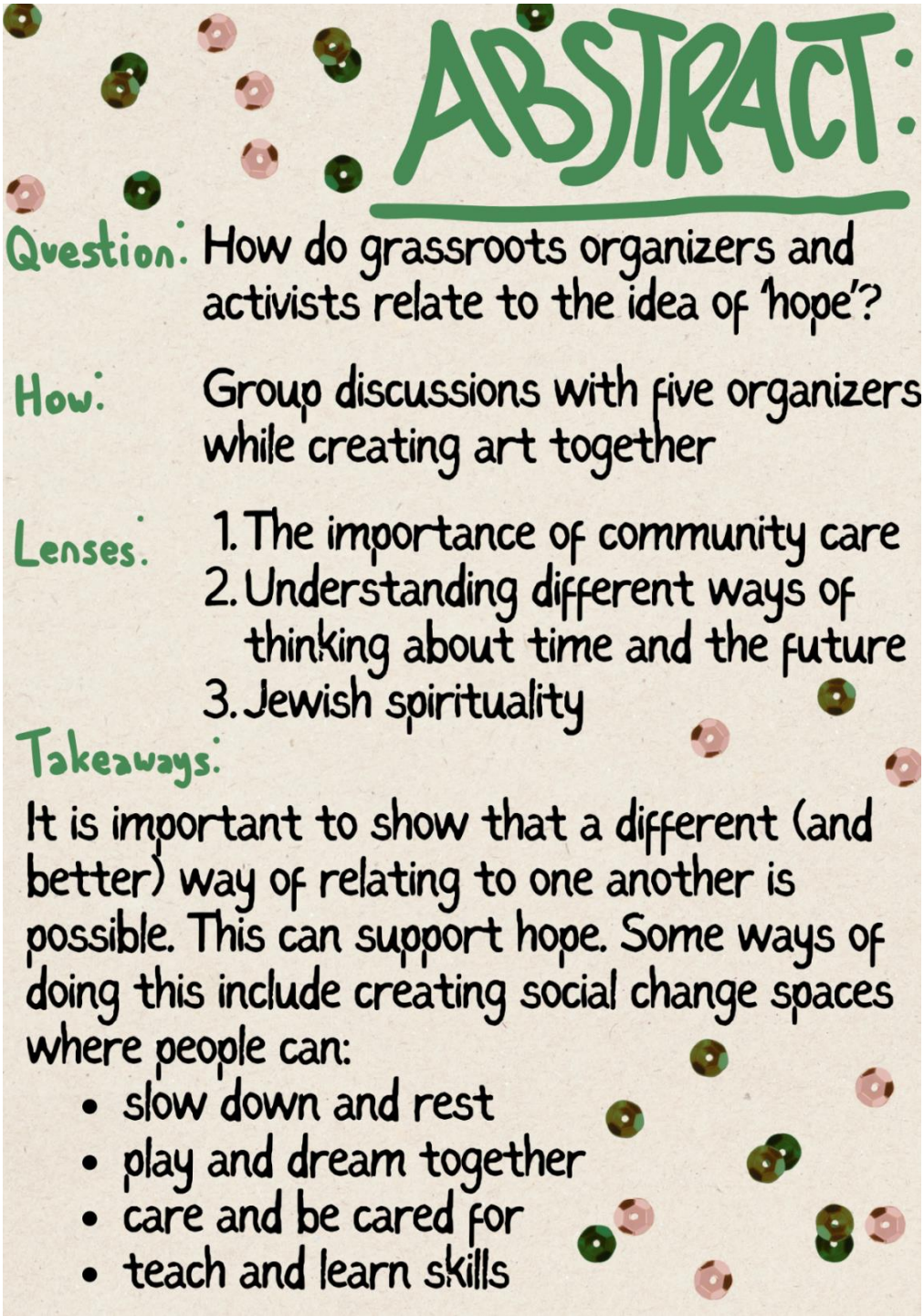
Lay Abstract



Abstract

This thesis explores grassroots activists' and organizers' perceptions and experiences of hope within their movement work. Through two arts-based, semi-structured focus groups, five participants shared their understandings of hope in relation to their organizing. Transcripts of the focus groups and the artwork created therein were analysed through three conceptual lenses: community care (largely pulled from Critical Disability Studies), futurities and temporalities (informed by a variety of critical approaches to time), and Jewish spiritual thought. The results emphasize the need for organizing groups to (1) utilize futurity-focused temporalities, (2) implement imaginative and playful environments, and (3) offer support including an ethic of care, as well as tangible resources and training opportunities. This study holds implications for organizers and activists striving to cultivate spaces where hope becomes possible, for macro-level community social workers, and for social movement researchers. Shifting the environments where social change happens to enable organizers to slow down and rest, play and dream together, care and be cared for, and teach and learn skills can support the experience of hope by demonstrating the possibility of a different way of relating to one another.

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To all organizers invested in social change work, from hopeless to hopeful. Thank you for doing the work; I'm sure you don't hear that enough. Take a breath when you can, delegate to others, sit down. This work is essential but it will not be completed alone. I hope you can take something from these pages and implement it in a way that helps to sustain you, your work, and your community into a future you're excited to live into.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Question

This thesis explores how activists and organizers operating on a grassroots level maintain hope amidst the difficult conditions of social movement work. It explores the kinds of hope that organizers across different movements hold, the practices they maintain in relation to hope, and the ways that different justice-seeking movements can learn from one another. I am interested in both hopefulness and hopelessness and believe there is lots to learn from both experiences, and those that fall in between.

I have utilized a Community Based Research (CBR) approach this study, informing all aspects of the research design from theoretical framework through to knowledge mobilization. I have also taken an arts-based approach, exploring these themes relationally and artistically. My goal for this project was to explore hope in an arts-based way to enable organizers to learn from and with one another while engaged in creative process together.

Project Context

This community-based research project arises from my own experiences within different grassroots organizing spaces. Conversations I have had in these groups have often centred on hope, or the lack thereof, and its role in social change work. As I have gotten involved in different kinds of social movement work, organizing for justice within different contexts, I have fostered deep community connections with others invested in this work. As different movements push for each of their unique visions for a just future, there are tensions and contradictions where different groups pursue pathways to justice in ways that do not align with other groups' needs and desires.

As part of my Major Research Paper at the end of my Critical Disability Studies degree, I wrote about the ways that Food Justice activism does not pay enough attention to principles of Disability and Mad Justice, and in some cases creates more harm for Disabled and Mad people

who are experiencing food insecurity. Noticing this kind of preclusion within so-called social justice movements has been difficult for me, making it harder to maintain involvement in these groups, and harder to maintain my own hope. This is especially so when the perspective being overlooked is one that relates to my own needs. For example, outside of Disability Justice organizing I have experienced barriers to accessing leadership roles in organizations due to ableism and saneism, and outside of Queer and Trans spaces I have experienced transphobia. These experiences and reflections led to my asking this research question and pursuing this project.

In particular, I am interested in the ways hope is understood and experienced by organizers and activists who hold multiply marginalized identities and experiences, and who are among the community they are organizing for. For me, this thesis has been one way to bring folks together who are involved in different kinds of grassroots work to talk across our differences and similarities, in pursuit of a better understanding of one another. There is so much to learn from these participants as organizers and activists, as people with lived experience, and as people holding knowledge stemming from different justice movements.

Much of the existing social movement research focuses on a specific movement, goal, or community. There has been little work bridging these siloes and intentionally bringing together activists that work across contexts. It is increasingly common for activists to become engaged in multiple movements as they expand their networks, learn about other issues, and discover resonances across their work and that of other groups. In a moment where many movements identify themselves as being in a state of crisis (e.g. climate crisis, housing crisis, opioid crisis, etc.), the work of engaging in community organizing has become inextricable from the idea of hope, or the lack thereof.

This thesis was written in the spring and summer of 2024, a moment full of grief within organizing spaces. Having organized through four years of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen rampant eugenic ideologies circulate in the public discourse and fewer resources and supports for immunocompromised and disabled people who continue to be endangered by those who have chosen to ignore the severity of COVID. These four years have brought wave after wave of crisis for marginalized communities. Organizers have turned their attention to police violence against Black and Indigenous people, on the housing and opioid crises, on the attack towards transgender youth and their right to healthcare. Both the United States and Canada are moving toward federal elections that seem likely to hand power over to politicians who will continue to endanger our communities. Many participants of this study have been involved in Palestinian liberation work which has intensified over the months since October 7th, 2023. Many organizers and activists are burnt out and tired of the perpetuality of the work.

This paper is thus an exploration of how the participants of this study conceptualized hope, both through their discussions with one another and artwork they created. It does not claim to describe every organizer's understanding of hope, their ways of getting through difficult moments, or their understandings of what it means to dream a better future. As explained by Stanley (2012), anything written is "contextual, situational, and specific, and that it will differ systematically according to social location… of the particular knowledge-producer" (p. 110). In deciding which bodies of scholarship would frame my analysis, I took the lead from the identities and experiences shared with me by participants, and the ontologies and epistemologies they referenced. It is heavily informed by critical scholarship and activism including Disability and Mad Justice, Queer Liberation, and Jewish perspectives on tzedek and tikkun, two words used to describe justice. I have done my best to stay close to participants' contributions as I wrote this paper, and any other

researcher may have found additional themes, focused on different comments, or highlighted quotes I have chosen not to. I hope that this exploration of hope, futurity, dreaming, and care offers you, the reader, a new perspective to think about and integrate into your own understandings of and work toward justice.

Thesis Overview

This paper begins by exploring the literature on hope, as well as literature on activism and organizing. This provides the background necessary to understand the main concepts appearing in my research question. I then describe the three conceptual framings used throughout my analysis. These include (1) community care, largely pulled from the field of Critical Disability Studies, (2) futurities and temporalities, informed by a variety of critical approaches to time and (3) Jewish spiritual thought. I outline how community-based research and arts-based approaches informed my decision making, and the methods utilized throughout recruitment, data collection, analysis, and knowledge mobilization.

After these explanations of the project background and research design, I present the results of my analysis. I focus on the language choices made by participants, and three main themes. These include temporalities of hope, dreaming and playing to find hope, and prerequisites for hope. These themes are further teased out and placed in conversation with one another in the discussion section, which also points to the implications and limitations of this study. I end with concluding thoughts and hopes for how this research might impact organizers, social workers, and social movement researchers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this section, I explore the literature in relation to key terms in my research question. I lay out various definitions and understandings, drawing out information essential to this study. Each section encompasses literature I go on to critique and other studies that align well with this thesis. I begin by discussing the concept of hope, and then go on to explore the terms activism and organizing.

Hope

Throughout the literature, there are many definitions of hope. This section explores various bodies of scholarship that theorize around hope. I begin by explaining how hope is discussed in the psy disciplines, I contrast this with hope in the broader social sciences, discussions of hope as it relates to epistemology, and finally explore critical theory and philosophical understandings of hope. I then lay out what I mean when using the term "hope" in this study, drawing from both critiques and resonances I make to the literature I have reviewed.

Hope in the Psy Disciplines

According to the Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology, the psy disciplines are "fields of knowledge associated with mind, mental life, and behavior" (McAvoy, 2014). This includes psychology and psychiatry, along with other mental health professions such as social work. This category is used analytically to investigate "particular regimes of knowledge and expert practices" (McAvoy, 2014) used by these professionals as disciplinary tools. Research on hope can be found in these psy fields, although often in pathologizing and non-critical ways.

The field of positive psychology understands hope as a "cognitive ability" (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 582), arguing that one should develop this skill to obtain better health and personal

meaning. Snyder (2002) argues that hopeful thinking includes goals, pathways, and agency. He created the Adult Hope Scale (Snyder, 1991) to measure said hope from a psychoanalytical framework. This, like many psy assessment tools, creates pathologizing categories whereby "people who do not perform, or are viewed as being incapable of performing, those expectations [are] imposed with deficit identities... [which] reveal themselves through the language of pathology and inferiority" (Reyes, 2019, p. 6). Snyder and colleagues (1991) claim that there are "higher hope people" and "lower hope people", creating essentializing categories, and then psychiatrizing people based on their scores on this scale.

While Snyder's tool is used to pathologize those who lack hope, other psy professionals also pathologize those who have what is deemed as 'too much' hope. Fromm (2012) explores what he calls "pathological hope" as an "intrapsychic obstacle" (p. 54). Having too much hope for something impossible (or deemed so by a psy professional) might be seen as psychotic. Fromm (2012) argues that false hope, or hope too strong considering the circumstances, can pull those labelled as mentally ill away from recovery, again as defined by the psy professional.

Within this study I do my best to avoid and oppose these pathologizing notions that there is one correct way to hope, amount of hope to hold, and expression of hope. Instead, I approach the question of hope in these focus groups with an openness to what arises from participants, not preliminarily having a 'correct' answer in mind, or assigning moral value to participant comments, labeling them as 'good' or 'bad'.

Social Science Perspectives on Hope

Throughout the social science literature, there are many definitions of hope, each evoking different elements of thinking and feeling. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2016), hope is "something good that you want to happen in the future, or a confident feeling about what will

happen in the future". Here, hope is seen as something that one desires and/or believes is likely to occur.

Twinley (2021) defines hope as "the emotion of expectation that something desirable will occur following a threatening event" (p. 167), highlighting the elements of expectation and desire, as seen in the Cambridge definition, while adding a factor of past or present threat. Twinley argues that hope is something unique to times of distress, a way of looking towards a better future from a dismal present. Borowitz (1968) seems to agree with this, writing that hope "encompasses of necessity the reality of pain, even of incredible, inexplicable suffering" (p. 146). In this study, I understand hope to be possible without the active presence of threat or harm, but understand these authors' perspectives, recognizing the way that hope may be strongest from a place of desperation.

While the Cambridge and Twinley definitions focus on hope as a feeling, other authors focus on hope as something that leads to action. For example, Anderson (2006) describes hope as a "dynamic imperative to action" (p. 744) and Rogers (2013) similarly considers "real hope" to require both analysis and action. While hope can be strengthened by action or a sense of possible action, hope can also rely on faith or belief in the possibility of change, even when uncoupled from personal action. Toliver (2021) contrasts these action-oriented perspectives, writing: "to be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality" (p. 110). This emphasizes the power inherent in the imagination of a better future, with or without accompanying action.

Some writers discuss hope as holding both action and feeling. Aurora Levins Morales urges others to hold both by "keeping your eyes on the stars and your feet in the mud" (cited by Bost, 2017, p. 194). Kaba argues that hope is a discipline, requiring commitment and intention to maintain it, saying: "hope doesn't preclude feeling sadness, frustration, anger or any other

emotion... hope isn't an emotion... hope is not optimism" (cited by Sonenstein, 2018). This understanding of hope includes the resolve of a discipline, while not precluding feelings that come along with it. Daly (1973, cited by Bonnycastle, 2004) "argues that hope needs to be 'active' rather than 'passive', 'communal' rather than 'individual', and 'revolutionary'" (p. 32).

It is worth noting that all of these definitions have a temporal component, specifically orienting from a present towards a future. Stanhope (2023) cites hooks (2003), when she writes that hope is "an orientation towards the future" (p. 536). In her own words, she describes hope as "collaps[ing] a linear concept of time bringing past, present and future histories into collision" (p. 533). Joronen and Griffiths (2019) explain it in a similar manner by using the language of "a process where the potentials of a future moment... enter a present situation" (p. 71). In Hebrew, this temporal quality is intrinsic to the very word for 'hope'. Its meaning specifically refers to "an expectation in time", and Hebrew-English dictionaries "often give its meaning as 'to wait for'" (Borowitz, 1968, p. 135).

In addition to this temporal aspect, some authors write about hope as temporospatial, including an element of space in addition to time. Joronen and Griffiths (2019) write about "hyperprecarious sites" in relation to field work in Palestine, describing these sites as ones "where exposure to harm is heightened and reasons not to hope are plentiful" (p. 69). Within these vulnerable spaces, they argue, practices of hope assert agency where it is unexpected. They understand hope as disruptive to both temporal and spatial spheres. By hoping, one ties future time to current place, thereby disrupting spacetime. They understand passive waiting itself as an active praxis of hope, where a "temporality of hope becomes a lived space" (p. 71). This temporospatial understanding of hope challenges the idea that hope must be active. In fact, these authors argue that waiting itself is radically hopeful when confronted with oppression and occupation.

Other definitions of hope in this body of literature include additional elements. Some explore whether hope is a positive, negative, or neutral quality. Others discuss if hope is individual or collective in nature. There is no consensus across the social science literature as to precisely what defines hope. Hope is discussed as something one desires, believes will happen, and/or expects. It may or may not come from a place of threat. It might be something that necessitates action, it can be imaginative without accompanying action, or it might encompass both. It generally has temporal qualities, and sometimes spatial qualities as well. Reading across these perspectives early in the research process, I reached a tentative definition of hope to utilize as I continued reading through various bodies of academic literature:

hope: (1) a future-oriented desire, accompanied by (2) a belief in the possibility of the desired outcome.

Hope as An/Epistemology

Authors looking to understand hope in relation to the production of knowledge have written about "epistemologies of hope", arguing that hope might itself be a way of producing knowledge. Others find that the concept of knowledge is too concrete to be congruent with the abstract concept of hope, expressing that hope is not itself a way of knowing. With knowledge of the future, insofar as it is possible, what is labelled hope may instead be called prediction. Hope encompasses not knowing what the future will bring, but still desires that it be better, and believes that it can be so. In this way, an epistemology of hope is a way of knowing that one does not know and cannot know, but also knowing that one can desire and believe. Instead of a way of knowing, it becomes a way of not-knowing, or an anepistemology.

As discussed, hope can be a feeling and hope can inspire action, but is it itself a way of knowing, or a way of understanding knowledge? Pow (2015) uses an epistemology of hope as part of an "argument for a more hopeful research practice... that seeks to formulate different ways of knowing and understanding... by challenging the inevitability of a dismal urban future" (p. 480).

While this is written in the context of human geography and thus specifies an urban future, the point stands; hope challenges the inevitability of a dismal future. It follows then that an epistemology of hope might orient away from knowledge produced based on the assumption of the inevitability of a dismal future. Gallop (2013) discusses the misnomer of 'common sense', arguing that that anything labelled as such "is taken for granted and not open to question" (p. 3). She states that work disrupting so-called 'common sense' is "the type of sense-making activity that brings the promise for something more" (p. 14). Thinking in a way that affirms the possibility of something more resonates with the notion of an epistemology of hope.

Another key question when conceptualizing whether hope can itself be epistemological, asks: What is the difference between the way one approaches the world and the way one understands the world? Barad (2007) writes that "practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather they are mutually implicated" (p. 829). Sanjakdar and Premier (2023) similarly state that "the knower, the-world-that-is-to-be-known, and knowledge [are] 'entangled'" (p. 7), borrowing the notion of entanglement from Barad (2007). Both of these quotes assert that ways of being inherently implicate ways of knowing, and vice versa. If one can be hopeful, then one can know hopefully. It is possible to orient oneself to the acquisition, creation, and sharing of knowledge rooted in hope, in search of a better future. As Toliver (2021) explains: "there are multiple ways of being, knowing, and surviving. Dreaming is one of them" (p. 103). To know through dreaming a radical future is to embody this an/epistemology of hope.

Another element that might impact hope's characterization as a way of (not) knowing pertains to the element of choice. It is often implied that one can 'choose' to have or let go of hope, which begs the question: if hope is a choice one must actively and continually make, is it truly a way of knowing, or even a way of not knowing? Can one choose how they know? If epistemology

asks “What is the relationship between the knower and the object to be known?” (Miller, 2013, p. 63), part of this relationship can be the choice to utilize the knowledge, and fluctuation in if or how the knowledge is taken up by the knower.

As per this epistemological literature, the an/epistemology of hope is one that is fluid and in formation. It can hold not-knowingness at its core, encouraging comfort with the unknown. It challenges common sense and the notion of inevitable futures by offering possible ways forward before knowing if they will succeed. It ties ways of knowing, being, and dreaming together. It is something one can choose, pick up, and drop, and necessitates a changing relationship over time to continue to embrace this unknown, this faith, and this forward-dreaming. After learning from this body of literature, I added a third element to my working definition:

hope: (1) a future-oriented desire, accompanied by (2) a belief in the possibility of the desired outcome, along with (3) an acknowledgement of not-knowingness.

Critical Hope

Other scholars articulate a more critical understanding of hope. Friere (1997) writes about “critical hope” in his work on critical pedagogy. According to Webb’s (2010) analysis of Friere’s work, this “well-founded ‘critical hope’” can be used to oppose the “fatalism of neoliberalism“ (p. 328). Webb continues, “for Freire, it was human hope that rendered education possible, necessary and necessarily political” (2010, p. 327). This pedagogical hope is described as an “ontological need” (Freire, 1997). Critical education thus “adds to hopefulness because it develops a transgenerational capacity for long-term, sustainable, critical hope in communities” (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, n.p.), tying education and hope in politicized ways.

Duncan-Andrade (2009) describes critical hope as one “which rejects the despair of hopelessness” and “false hope” such as that of The American Dream. One element of this critical hope, Duncan-Andrade argues, is audaciousness. He writes: “critical hope audaciously defies the

dominant ideology of defense, entitlement, and preservation of privileged bodies at the expense of the policing, disposal, and dispossession of marginalized 'others'" (2009, n.p.). Believing other than the norm is understood as audacious here, rather than as pathological as it is seen within the psy professions. McInerney (2007) discusses critical hope as a form of praxis, explaining that "we need to be guided by a Utopian imagination that is grounded in theory and practice, sustained by conviction and moral purpose, and alert to the inherent tensions and difficulties of the task ahead" (p. 258). Hope is thus complicated by these authors, seen as both impacted by and itself influencing theory.

hooks (2003) writes that the "ability to make a space to hear dissident voices is a location of hope and possibility" (p. 188). Talking across difference and truly hearing one another creates possibilities for sharing experiences, analyses, and visions for the future, opening up avenues for hope to develop. She also writes that her friendships "rooted in anti-racist activism, in sharing our vulnerabilities, and our strengths, always gives me hope" (hooks, 2003, p. 115). In this way, friendship and community rooted in activism and intimacy "constantly restores and renews" (p. 197) hope. hooks quotes Grey's (2000) "The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope", which says: "prophetic imagination is outrageous—not merely in dreaming the dream, but in already living out the dream before it has come to pass, and in embodying this dream in concrete action". Similar to Duncan-Andrade's characterizing of hope as audacious, Grey describes it as outrageous. Both are strong words, but the authors use them with positive connotations, encouraging the outrageousness and audaciousness of holding critical forms of hope.

Thomas Bernard (2020) writes that elements of critical hope include "our time, our space, safe space, and soul food" (p. 181) which can all be made to nurture hope in community. She writes that all of these elements directly lead to actionable steps: "self-care, nurturing, political agency,

sharing with coworkers of African descent, youth mentorship, passing the torch, legal recourse, healing conversations" (p. 181). Notably, this form of critical hope relies heavily on community and care (rather than action, analysis, and critique) as central defining characteristics. While moving away from being critical as an expression of hope, Thomas Bernard (2020) establishes a critical form of hope, one which is deeply rooted in care.

It is important to note that just because a scholar uses the term "critical" when describing their notion of hope, it does not necessarily align with critical schools of thought. Rogers (2013), for example, explains critical hope as "a courageous act that does not simply rest on an imagined future ideal" (p. 220), devaluing imagination and futurity in favour of action. She quotes Jenson (2006) who writes that "actually doing something to alleviate or eliminate one's misfortune" is true hope. In Rogers's interviews, participants divided hope into two categories, deeming one "useless" ("there's the hope of the lazy, of the coward, or of the religious.... I find that this kind of hope is useless"), and one "effective" ("there's another hope.... you get up and try to go. That is effective hope"). Kaba (cited by Sonenstein, 2018), in contrast to this action-oriented model, offers a framework where "hope is really believing in spite of the evidence and watching the evidence change", emphasizing belief and observation as elements of a critical hope.

The binary categorization of good/bad hope offered by Rogers might be challenged by other authors using the term "critical hope". Rogers's model aligns more closely with the ways that the psy disciplines talk about hope than these critical scholars. Both action and observation can be elements of a justice-focused hope, without ascribing moral value to either. Critical hope can instead be critical in the ways that other authors propose above, such as by understanding hope as political, pedagogical, audacious, outrageous, or communal.

While the initial proposed definitions might make sense when looking simply at the social science literature, hope becomes even more complicated when looking at epistemological writings and critical theory approaches. Rather than lay out a definition, I am choosing to leave 'hope' somewhat ambiguous, to leave ample room for study participants' definitions and articulations of hope. I have laid out several approaches to understanding this concept, highlighting the main elements in each and pointing to various interpretations and applications. In Chapter 7: Discussion, I return to the ideas described here, considering the elements that participants gestured to in their words and artwork. I aim to point to those understandings of hope that best reflect and amplify the insights brought forward by participants in my study.

Activism / Organizing

When designing this study, I intentionally used two words for social change work: "activism" and "organizing". Taylor (2016) traces the rise of the terms "activist" and "activism" through the social movements of the 1960s and 70s. The word "activist" does not show up in written record until the 20th century (Harper, n.d., a). This word has murky origins, in contrast to the word "organizer", which has clearly traceable roots from early labour union work and shows up as early as the 18th century (Harper, n.d., b).

Organizing is defined by Rudd, a well-known organizer of the 1960s student anti-war movement, as "education, base-building, and coalition" (cited by Taylor, 2016) with the goal of "politicizing people, helping to move them from the default state in this society, which is thoroughly apolitical" (Rudd, n.d.). It is not a set of specific actions, but rather a way of building relationships and communities that can engage with their collective power and/or oppression to create better conditions for themselves and others.

Chambers (2003) discusses the difference between the two terms, arguing that organizing focuses on building power, fighting for specific and identified changes, and uses relational strategies to get there. Activism, on the other hand, is both a broader and narrower term. While it can broadly be used to describe many levels of engagement, encompassing anything from showing up to a single protest to starting a movement, it refers to direct and public action, but not the behind the scenes work of getting there. Rudd explains that "the difference between activism and organizing" is the difference between "self-expression and movement building" (cited by Taylor, 2016). Dunbar-Ortiz, a historian of social movements, shares that throughout the 60s, those involved in social movement work would use terms such as "revolutionaries, radicals, militants, socialists, communists, organizers" (cited by Taylor, 2016), with activism only gaining popularity in the 80s and 90s.

Organizing implies that there are other people being organized with, protecting against the risk of activism centring individualism over collectivism and interdependence (Taylor, 2016). While organizing "is cooperative by definition", solitary operators can be deemed activists. Many scholars see this shift towards embracing the language, and thus the framework of activism, as one that impedes the success of today's social movements. Rudd continues, "Activism, the expression of our deeply held feelings, used to be only one part of building a movement. It's a tactic which has been elevated to the level of strategy, in the absence of strategy" (cited by Taylor, 2016). Instead, action guided by strategic planning, organized across large groups of people, and intentionally targeted towards the powerful is what can create tangible and long-term change.

This kind of organizing has historically relied on lineages and legacies of organizing models, which scholars and organizers believe has been lost in recent decades. Rudd (n.d.) discusses his student organizing of the 60s, and the way there was a vital "transmission of

organizing know-how" in student groups, allowing for newer students to learn from the successes, failures, and strategies of earlier members. He cautions new activists against reinventing the wheel when we have many models of successful organizing, stressing that "without.... history and base-building, organizing bold action is merely self-expression" (n.d.). When pure activism is elevated above organizing, it can lead to the "very common self-defeating error" whereby groups "raised the tactic of militancy to the level of strategy" (Rudd, n.d.). This is not to say that militancy has no place in social movements, but rather that its place must fall within a strategy, enacted by a coalition, to meet specific goals.

Organizing approaches also tend to plan for movement sustainability, where activism focuses on direct and immediate action. As Reyes (2019) explains: "The protest is important, but the relationships are necessary for making the protest happen and for maintaining the momentum to prepare for the next event". Ensuring that the movement can live beyond the moment is an essential component to organizing strategy, involving the ability to retain members, foster a culture of care, and have systems in place to prevent burnout in the face of a prolonged fight.

BAVH (2012), a healing justice collective, states that integral to their organizing work is "not burning out. Doing what our bodies can actually do" and acknowledging that "the process is the product". Understanding that organizations are comprised of people who have needs and limitations, and redefining organizing to include the care work that goes into any community, is one way to work towards movement sustainability. Largescale actions "may appear... spontaneous, but the reality is otherwise", Rudd explains, arguing that activism is impossible without the relational components of organizing. He points to the crucial work of formulating a plan, reaching community members to participate, writing demands, ensuring there are safety measures in place, and other organizing tasks generally made to be invisible.

While the arguments for organizing frameworks over activism frameworks are persuasive, there remain reasons to value and use the word "activism", in this study and in broader social movement research. Some people may choose to engage in activism without organizing with a larger group or organization. Others may be involved in organizational work, but not feel comfortable calling themselves organizers. Halio (2017) writes,

> If you are involved in rallies, protests or marches, consider — are you just showing up? ... It is easy to call yourself an activist, but it is more difficult to be accountable for your actions. When that march ends, are you walking away from the issue entirely?

While this explanation somewhat devalues those who "just" show up, there are many barriers to group membership within organizing spaces. It is well-documented that within mainstream social movements (e.g. the feminist movement, civil rights movement, gay and lesbian liberation movements, etc.), multiply marginalized people are often excluded and sidelined. This is not to say that people who experience this marginalization are not active in community organizing work, rather, it can be difficult for them to find space within larger, more well-known movement organizations, and thus they may not identify as being involved in organizing.

Language choices are personal and political, and each choice encompasses associations beyond the word itself. For example, Macchiarulo (2023) looked at the discourses created when journalists chose to use the words "'riot', 'protest', or perhaps 'unrest'" (p. 10) to construct different narratives. Organizing and activism similarly may hold different meanings between two people using the same term, or even between a speaker and listener. Macchiarulo (2023) continues this analysis, noting that news reports that talk about "community organizers" claim that "young people had 'every right to be angry'", while those who use the language of "protesters" argue that "protesters 'don't know what to do with that' trauma" (p. 100). He points out that many definitions

of “riot” include the idea of being “disorderly/disorganized”, perhaps creating a more radical association between the words ‘activism’ or ‘protest’ and radical action, as opposed to ‘organizing’ which is understood here as less direct and disruptive. Some organizers who are invested in direct action may therefore use the word activist to describe themselves and their change work. Others may avoid the term because of its violent associations, especially if they are already more likely to be perceived as violent when angry due to race or gender stereotypes.

Iyer’s Social Change Ecosystem Map (2017) offers a framework for understanding the various roles people play within organizing and activism, suggesting terms that describe specific roles within organizing/activism. Some people committed to social change work may prefer to specify the role they tend to take, as in Iyer’s model, rather than using a broad descriptor like ‘organizer’. Iyer writes that she called the framework an “ecosystem” because “we are more effective and more sustainable in our social change work when we build connections with others”. The roles include: builders, caregivers, disrupters, experimenters, frontline responders, guides, healers, storytellers, visionaries, and weavers. Choosing to describe oneself as a ‘disrupter’ or a ‘storyteller’ within a movement space can communicate the kind of role one prefers to take on, while acknowledging the interconnectedness and importance of all roles.

To conclude, while organizing is a method of changemaking involving long-term strategy, collectivization, and multi-pronged approaches, it is a term that has fallen out of common use. Many people who are doing organizing work may refer to themselves as activists instead. Additionally, because of the barriers that many people face when attempting to get involved in organizing frameworks, some remain operating at an activist level. Others may be involved in organizing for a period of time but move to a lesser level of leadership while still showing up to actions, and change their language accordingly. As Taylor (2016) writes, “Semantics alone will

not determine history's course, for it matters less what we call ourselves and more what we do". Both words hold different histories and connotations, and there are many reasons why one might call themself one or the other, or even choose to use a different term altogether. I go on to further explain my choice to use both terms in Chapter 5: Methods, drawing on the literature outlined here.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Frameworks

Three conceptual framings guide my analysis. These include (1) community care, largely drawn from the field of Critical Disability Studies, (2) futurities and temporalities, informed by a variety of critical approaches to time and (3) Jewish spiritual thought. I approach this framing of my thesis in a similar manner to how I approach my analysis, highlighting places where there is resonance across the lenses as well as uplifting and valuing areas of contradiction. I aim to provide a general overview of each framework presented, along with a varied selection of interpretations so that all are made available to the reader.

Community Care

Community care refers to the ways that people within a community can support and rely on one another. It is often positioned in opposition to and critique of self-care (Blumenfeld, 2020). This framing moves away from neoliberal notions of independence as a virtue, to better align with justice-oriented values of relationship, interdependence, and care.

Care work is essential to sustaining community and community organizing. It supports the needs of individual community members, especially "when every able-bodied person "forgets" about us" (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 87). Many, especially disabled, people rely on this kind of care not only to be able to work within social movements, but for daily survival. Beyond the vital support it offers individuals, this work is "political, and it is foundational to building durable

and powerful solidarity and activist movements" (Bhardwaj, 2024, p. 120). These powerful movements create what Gordon (2024) calls "infrastructures of care" in which mutual aid "offers a lifeline for collective survival... fosters greater access to life-sustaining resources and encourages interdependence among otherwise disparate people" (p. 159). Care work also contributes to developing organizing theory, in addition to the tangible individual support and infrastructure it offers (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Discussions that arise between organizers during moments of care can shift the path of movements and develop new concepts both related to and separate from the care work itself.

Community oriented care models challenge expectations of self-care that "produc[e] a specific narrative of 'the good citizen'... [and] highly individualizing and depoliticizing notions of wellbeing'" (Blumenfeld, 2020, p. 6). This more common, depoliticized narrative of care places the full responsibility for health and wellness on the individual. Blumenfeld (2020) writes that these discourses of self-care "constitute the self-caring subject as a middle to upper class person... socially allowed to rest" (Blumenfeld, 2020, p. 52), to fuel their ability to work in productive ways. Instead, Disability Justice offers the principle of interdependence, or how "we attempt to meet each other's needs as we build toward liberation, without always reaching for state solutions" (Berne et al., 2018, p. 228). State solutions frequently end up extending control into entire communities, and ultimately reinforce the neoliberal idea that hard work is the way to provide for oneself, which is the best and only option for receiving care (Reese & Sbicca, 2022). When bodies "don't comply with the demands of capitalism" (Morales, quoted by Bost, 2017, p. 193) due to disability, neurodivergence, grief, exhaustion, or a multitude of other factors, self-care cannot be the ultimate solution, nor can state care. Rather, scholars and activists advocate for systems

whereby people can get most of their needs met through community, instead of relying fully on themself or the state for survival.

The idea of "care work" arises out of theories of community care, looking at the labour involved in caring and how it is inequitably distributed across gender, race, and class lines. This care work includes the "ordinary, yet difficult" (Gordon, 2024) emotion work such as supporting somebody through crisis, access work such as recognizing barriers and coordinating a response, and domestic labour including cooking and cleaning. All of these are vital to sustaining communities and the organizing work they are engaged in. Yet as Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) notes, this work often defaults to being the responsibility of those most marginalized within a group without adequate (if any) compensation or recognition. Piepzna-Samarasinha (as quoted in Wong, 2020) writes that "the radical ways that we care for each other and that we fight to care for ourselves... That is labor. That is work" (p. 325). All too often this is invisiblized labour, even within so-called radical organizing spaces.

Women of colour tend to be made responsible for this work, making care work the "place where disability justice and queer femme emotional labor intersect" (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 16). While these community members are expected to take on this labour, it is also understood "as an invisibilized or feminized form of labor to be forgotten" (Bhardwaj, 2024, p. 120), or overlooked. The expectation that this work will get done and that it will get done by racialized women runs so deep that it becomes invisible and devalued, culminating in spaces "where endless free care work and emotional labor is simply the role my community and the world has for us" (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 86). These kinds of community care models are not the justice-oriented systems that those advocating for community care are envisioning; instead, they reinforce imbalanced power dynamics within a community.

This stands in stark contrast to the recognition and celebration that labour seen as masculine receives. As Inayatulla and Robinson (2020) explain:

> What gets dismissed as feminized labor is regarded as quotidian, and what gets praised as masculinized labor is regarded as prestigious. These patterns are observable when examining breakdowns of whose writing, voices, and administrative achievements are most rewarded. (p. 327)

Kahn and Lynch-Biniek (2022) describe their choice to begin using the term 'care work' in their research, rather than merely 'caring', in part because of the way it highlights the work that caring necessitates. They write: "We are all expected to care. We are not all expected to work for what we care about" (p. 325). Tying the caring to the work that goes along with it begins to responsibilize all who claim to care to partake in the work itself.

In Cruising Utopia (2009), Muñoz responds to "antiutopianism in queer studies, which is more often than not intertwined with antirelationality" (p. 12), which he sees as obscuring possibilities of hope and futurity. His emphasis on collectivity is vital and relies on interdependence, care, and relationality. This aspect of his argument draws heavily upon "Queer feminist and queer of color critiques [as] the powerful counterweight to the antirelational" (p. 17), in part because of how queers of colour have been disproportionately made to do this care work. Toliver (2021) also pushes back against individualization. She writes that "freedom dreaming requires intergenerational imagining. Black liberatory fantasy and the radical imagination are formed within a collective dreaming space, not in isolation" (p. 93). Both authors emphasize the connections between relationships and the possibility of dreaming something different.

These bodies of scholarship on the importance of community, care, and relationship align well with the critical orientation to hope laid out above, and largely arise out of organizing/activist

spaces. Approaching community work with the knowledge that it is work and must be valued as such, while also centring the need for this emphasis on relationship building can result in hopeful communal practices.

Futurities and Temporalities

Another conceptual lens that guides my analysis is critical approaches to futurities and temporalities. Rather than focus on a specific theoretical school of thought, I draw from various ways of looking at and understanding time and the future such as Critical Future Studies, Crip Time, Queer Time, and Jewish Temporalities. These orientations toward the future all expand the possibilities of imagining something beyond what we have been led to believe is our destiny. Finding ways to understand time differently, I argue, can create conditions of hope for organizers as they work toward the world of difference they hope to create.

Critical Future Studies

Goode and Godhe (2017) lay the foundations for Critical Future Studies (CFS), a field that "challenge[s] a prevalent contemporary cynicism about our capacity to imagine alternative futures while trapped in a parlous present" (p. 108). They posit that CFS should take an interdisciplinary approach to "imagining and debating" different visions for the future, interrogating underlying values and assumptions that show up in these visions. CFS is particularly interested in futures "representing a departure from current social trajectories" (p.108), imagining otherwise. They position this imagination work as "a prerequisite for averting catastrophe" (p. 110), vital to moving forward into a livable world.

While proposing a 'critical' way of thinking into the future, Goode and Godhe (2017) emphasize that this does not require the imagined future itself to be one that is rooted in critique. Rather, "both utopian and dystopian modes of imagination are vital for reinvigorating a futural

public sphere" (p. 110). This element of public engagement and collectivity is central to their goals for CFS, offering an "expanded repertoire of possible futures available for public consideration" (p. 110), centralizing the need for visibility of this field and the imagined futures that come out of it. They ask the reader:

> What is the relationship between future imagination and future imaginaries? ... it's important to interrogate "future imaginaries", that is, ideas about the future which, at least in some – usually powerful – quarters, become taken-for-granted or congealed discourses. (p. 123)

Publicizing multiple, varied, and sometimes contradictory futures helps to preclude the risk of agreeing on, and working toward, a singular foregone and predestined future. They offer a set of prompts that those interested in dreaming a different future can use to jumpstart the imaginative process, asking questions such as, "Who would want to live in such a future (and who would not)?", "Who are the agenda-setting and gatekeeping powers in the futural public sphere?", and "What potential impact could this vision of the future have?" (p. 122-123). These questions are useful both for those imagining an as-yet undreamed-of future, as well as those investigating an existing futurity, for example one within popular culture. I take up some of these questions in my analytical work in this thesis, when looking at the futures dreamed by participants.

Goode and Godhe (2017) draw attention to the role that neoliberalism has had in preventing us from critically dreaming into the future. They write that throughout the past couple decades of deep neoliberal rule, "our capacity to imagine alternative futures has seemingly atrophied" (p. 110). This is, in part, because of the investment that those in power have in "persuading citizens that there is no alternative to the onward march of globalized markets, finance capitalism, deregulation and environmental degradation" (p. 110). Prowse (2023) extends this analysis, writing that

"environments of fear and urgency are enforced and internalized through the logics of the non-profit industrial complex" (p. 14), making it near impossible to dream. This critique of neoliberalism runs through many of the orientations to time I lay out here and is central to the discussion below.

This aspect of my theoretical orientation critiques Western notions of the future as something "systematised", "rational", and "progressive" (Goode & Godhe, 2017), instead allowing for futures that do not follow so-called common-sense trajectories leading to expected outcomes. Goode and Godhe (2017) argue that, from a CFS lens, "imagined futures are always contestable" (p. 153) and encourage this contestation.

Crip Time

Crip time is one way of understanding temporality from a Disability Justice perspective. Kafer (2013) asks:

> Can claiming crip be a method of imagining multiple futures, positioning "crip" as a desired and desirable location regardless of one's own embodiment or mental/psychological processes? (p. 13)

Crip time is explained in varying ways, depending on the kind of temporality it is responding to. For example, Price (2011) shares that crip time is a "flexible approach to normative time frames" (p. 62). Kafer (2013) takes the idea further, metaphorically expressing that "rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (p. 27). Samuels (2017) explores six facets of crip time, writing that "crip time is time travel", "crip time is grief time", "crip time is broken time", "crip time is sick time", "crip time is writing time", and finally, "crip time is vampire time".

Samuels (2017) explains that, for disabled folks navigating the medical system, "the medical language of illness trie[s] to reimpose the linear", essentially forcing the disabled body to

form itself to the clock. Wong (2020) writes that finding caring relationships within disability community leads to "helping each other imagine a world and a future where we can be loved and cared for and held not just despite but because of our disabilities" (p. 145). This is another element of crip time, imagining a future where disability is loved and held, and cross-disability relationships can be nurtured. Further, Day (2021) argues that crip time is not only a way of being in relationship, but is itself "a kind of communal time, contingent upon physiological and ecological bodies in constellation with one another" (p. 169). In this way, crip time moves away from individualized experiences of time.

Crip time is also slow time, encouraging rest over productivity. Hersey created the "Rest is Resistance" framework in 2016, which posits that "rest is a spiritual practice, a racial justice issue and a social justice issue". She started The Nap Ministry, an organization that operates under the Rest is Resistance framework, facilitating and encouraging communities to rest and dream. The Nap Ministry operates under four tenets:

1. "Rest is a form of resistance because it pushes back and disrupts white supremacy and capitalism."
2. "Our bodies are a site of liberation... wherever our bodies are, we can find rest."
3. "Naps provide a portal to imagine, invent and heal."
4. "Our DreamSpace has been stolen, and we want it back. We will reclaim it via rest." (Meraji, 2022)

Resting as a way into what Hersey calls "DreamSpace", refuses capitalist, ableist, and racist systems.

The idea of "slow violence" (Nixon, 2011), originally theorized in relation to environmentalism, has been used by crip theorists to explore the ways that capitalism,

neoliberalism, and imperialism disable the human body over time (Day, 2021). Drawing from this idea, Mauch (2019) proposes the concept of "slow hope", arguing that "we need to identify stories, visions, and actions that work quietly towards a more hopeful future" (p. 19). This quiet and slow work is essential, reflecting Hersey's notion of "rest as resistance", and offering "subversive stories – counter-stories of slow hope" (p. 38) in stark opposition to the hyperproductive pace forced by capitalism. Essential characteristics of slow hope include "a language of positive change" (p. 18), "stories that provide us with alternatives to narrowly defined pathways" (p. 37), "acknowledge[ing] setbacks" (p. 39), "critical thinking" (p. 39), and "the insight that time is both malleable and infinite" (p. 40). Mauch (2019) writes:

> Winding down and creating breaks in everyday life can help restore both human and more-than-human natures. Stress-related burnout in modern societies and the burn-out of the Earth's resources are closely related and identifying ways to transcend the craze of consumption, production, travel, and extreme workloads in a merry-go-round world can be inspiring and subversive. (p. 40)

Mauch (2019) contends that slow hope requires rest and inaction to avoid exhaustion and burnout, necessitating a slow temporal turn to avoid personal and collective burnout.

Chamberlin (1998), writing about the Mad Movement and consumer/survivor futurity, says that "we need to start encouraging people to dream, and to articulate their own visions of their own futures... hoping and wishing are food for the human spirit" (p. 52). The projection of psychiatric hopes for recovery onto patients precludes the possibility for patients to dream and define their own futures, both individually and collectively. Chamberlin (1998) pushes back against this, arguing for consumer/survivor run spaces that allow for dreaming, hope, and a Mad future. Crip

time and Mad time highlight the temporally malleable wisdom generated from the experience of living in a non-normative bodymind within a linearly structured world.

Queer Time

Queer temporalities have also been imagined and written about, centring 2SLGBTQ+ ways of interacting with time, the future, and one another. Muñoz (2009) argues that to be queer is to reject the present and insist on the possibility of the future. He writes:

> We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there... we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds... The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. (p. 1)

This insistence on futurity is central to Muñoz's understanding of queerness as a way of doing, a way of being, and a way of dreaming. In fact, he says that, to him, "queerness is primarily about futurity and hope", in that it is "a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity" (p. 16). His writing of Queer Theory, then, looks to the past in order to analyse the present, to create a different future.

Yaffa (2022) writing about their hopes for a queer and Muslim utopia, emphasizes "spirituality built on love and hope-filled organizing" (p. 540). She uses the term "vision-build" to explain how dreaming and building are interrelated and rely upon one another to fuel each other. Yaffa draws on Queer Futurity and their own experiences in their spiritual and cultural spaces to identify three elements of utopia: "decolonized wisdom sharing and reclamation", "understanding intersectionality and assemblies", and "transgenerational healing from colonization" (p. 545). She challenges the utility of utopian visions built for those with the most privilege within the 2SLGBTQ+ community, noting that many White Trans spaces end up creating "White

Supremacist and/or systemically oppressive vision of Utopia" (p. 547). This intersectional and layered futurity centres those who have been left out of more mainstream 2SLGBTQ+ futures. Weigman (2002) shares a similar sentiment, reinforcing how important it is to differentiate "social movements from the institutionalized projects founded in their names" (p. 27). These Queer futures necessitate dreaming, visioning, building, and theorizing the possibility of a Queer future in order to work toward it.

Jewish Temporalities

Within Jewish scriptural, legal, and philosophical writing, temporality and futurity frequently appear as themes. There are practical writings on time, for example as it pertains to Jewish law and practice, as well as metaphysical explorations of time in an effort to understand its spiritual elements. Rabbi Sacks (2011) writes that "time in Judaism is an essential medium of the spiritual life" and explains that there is a "duality that runs through [Judaism's] entire temporal structure". This duality encompasses Godly cyclical time and "linear-historical time". Sacks (2011) argues that in order to understand the three-dimensional aspects of time and space, Jewish time uses at least two perspectives and two rhythms at once.

Gribetz and Kaye (2019) push for a temporality that goes far beyond the dual quality Sacks proposes. They write that "Jewish scansions of time can only be realized through multi-focal analysis, which includes historical, theological, social and philosophical analysis" (p. 343). This multi-focal analysis led them to "three interwoven elements" of time: "linearity, cyclicality, and punctuation" each of which is "resistant to simple characterizations" (p. 346). Beyond these understandings, Jewish time is a somewhat fluid object pertaining to daily practice, even outside of mystical and esoteric Jewish texts. Here I briefly introduce some of the ways that Jewish scholars and leaders explain time as it relates to Jewish legal temporal structures, mysticism, and rest.

Jewish Legal Temporal Structures

Within Jewish law, time is not fixed. The Rabbis use relative hours rather than the common fixed hour system when determining timebound commandments and festivals. Whereas in my daily life an hour is always 60 minutes regardless of the time of year, hours that relates to Jewish legal obligations are not quite as simple. In this system, the time between sunrise and sunset is divided into 12 equal parts, each being a relative hour. In the winter, this can be significantly shorter than 60 minutes, and in the summer significantly longer. If there is a Jewish obligation that must happen at midday, it does not mean 12:00PM. Rather, it is the moment the sixth relative hour begins which may be as late as 1:30PM. Jewish legal texts work within this varying system.

As another example of the fluidity of Jewish time, our calendar has regular days and holy days, just as in other traditions. However, there are times in the Jewish calendar known as hol ha'moed or literally "the mundane of the festival". These times exist between the two states, operating both as holy and mundane at once. There is another concept called ben ha'shemashot often translated as "twilight" but more literally as "between the luminaries". This category is a unique period of about an hour that is sometimes classified as the day before and sometimes classified as the day after. This is why, for example, Shabbat, the day of rest, is observed for 25 hours rather than the 24 one might typically associate with a 'day'– to account for the twilight on either end. Moreover, the Jewish calendar operates outside of binaries. Whereas Christians use a solar calendar system and Muslims use a lunar calendar, the Jewish calendar is lunisolar, existing within both and outside either system (Sacks, 2011). Because of these variances and fluidity in Jewish understandings of calendars, holidays, and even hours, temporality is inherently less fixed in Jewish communal life.

Mystical, Cyclical Time

In his book on Kabbalistic temporalities, Wolfson (2021) explores various elements of Jewish mystical understandings of time and the future. Linear circularity, temporal eternity, and the temporalization of space are three of the concepts he focuses on. These explain Jewish mystical conceptions of past, present, and future as well as how God fits into human temporality (or rather, how God does not), and the ways that space and time are inherently related concepts.

"Linear circularity" is one element that reflects the fluidity of Jewish spiritual time. Wolfson cites Nahmanides, a medieval Jewish scholar, who explains one of the names of God used in the Torah, "Ehyeh". Ehyeh is an odd conjugation of the root "to be" that can be translated both as "I am" and as "I will be". Nahmanides writes, "the past and the future time are wholly in the Creator in the present... Therefore, all the tenses in [God] are designated by one name" (translated by Wolfson, 2021). Wolfson elaborates that the name Ehyeh "embodies the essential feature of time realized in the futurity of the past taking shape in the eternality of the present" (p. 349). He describes "timeswerve", explaining how:

> instead of speaking of every actual present becoming a repetition of a past that induces the expectation of a future, we should readily speak of every actual present becoming an expectation of a past that induces the repetition of a future. (p. 354)

These fluid, cyclical, and interrelated understandings of past, present, and future are understood as part of what makes God Godly. Similar to other temporal scholars, Wolfson draws connections between messy temporalities and imaginative possibilities, arguing that there is an "intricate relationship between temporality, imagination, and hermeneutics" within Kabbalistic texts. This understanding renders both temporality and imagination as holy.

To Wolfson, understanding Jewish temporality requires one to understand the timelessness of God within a specific moment, thereby grasping "temporal eternity" (p. 513). He writes:

> temporal eternity, which is a reflection of God's eternal temporality, [is] concretized in the moment that takes shape within the imagination. The temporal, consequently, is most fully realized in the human momentariness that is an instantiation of divine everlastingness. (p. 513)

This encapsulates a dynamic element to time, opening up the "radical possibility of time as future" where "the past itself is only past insofar as it is the reiteration of what is always yet to come" (p. 512). Understanding the past and present as parts of the future expands the possibilities for dreaming up worlds of difference, drawing on histories, experiences, and desires at once.

Wolfson (2021) also writes about the "temporalization of space" or "a conception of time that involves the expansion of duration into place" (p. 501). This full and complex concept is far beyond the scope of this thesis, but the practical application and conclusion Wolfson draws, is worth noting. He writes that the future is determined "by the power of regeneration... to break the karmic chain of causality so that the fate of an individual is not irrevocably determined by past events" (p. 566). In other words, by understanding the simultaneity of past, present, and future alongside their spatial qualities, one disrupts the linear path from completed past toward destined future, instead allowing one to reshape their future by reshaping their relationship with time-space. According to Wolfson, "the futurity of the past is determined in the present by the pastness of the future" (p. 511), empowering one in the present moment to feel able to shift both the past and the future at once.

Absent, Rest Time

Jewish spiritual practice emphasizes the need for rest time. Traditionally, these were legislated in cycles of seven: refraining from work on the seventh day by observing Shabbat, refraining from working the field on the seventh year by observing Shemitah, and celebrating the Yovel year after seven cycles of Shemitah. These mandatory rest periods for those observing

Jewish law serve as reminders that "my humanity is not dependent on my ability to get things done" (Watts Belser, 2024), an idea resonant with principles of Disability Justice such as "anti-capitalist politic", "recognizing wholeness", and "sustainability" (Berne et al., 2018). The idea of all people being "b'tselem Elokim" or made "in the image of God" applies to all, regardless of race, class, gender, dis/ability, and so on, and reinforces that all of us deserve and need to rest.

Katz (Katz & Martell, 2017) argues that this rest not only reifies spiritual and communal connection, but also can be a tool for resistance to "Christian hegemony and capitalism". Martell (Katz & Martell, 2017) echoes this idea, sharing that, in their experience,

> Being in Jewish time reminds me that creating space for rest, self-care, joy, loss, being present and reflection is central to the cycle of our lives and our weeks, that rest supports, and is not in contradiction to, our resistance work.

Watts Belser (2022), both a Rabbi and a professor of Jewish Studies, grounds this experience into Jewish law. She outlines the ways that these rest cycles offer ways of approaching modern policy and practice rooted in Jewish Ethics. The weekly Shabbat restricts any physical labour, but largely it describes agricultural work, "cultivat[ing] an inner transformation that has profound implications for Jewish ecotheology: a way of living gently with the Earth" (Watts Belser, 2022). As a part of the Shemitah year, she points out, The Torah "mandates that all people be released from their debts" (paraphrasing Deuteronomy 15:1), and in the Yovel year, "all land reverts to its ancestral portions and any enslaved person is freed" (explaining Leviticus 25:8–17). These institutions not only structurally support rest for human beings, but also "offer an ecological-economic vision that profoundly undercuts private property and land ownership".

Shabbat, writes Watts Belser (2022), is described in Jewish texts as "a foretaste of the world to come, a little touch of paradise", moving people into the future for the duration of the day,

and then back again. Part of this futurity that we return to each and every week is "a commitment to building and dreaming a different way of being... a world that values us for who we are, not just for all that we have done" (Watts Belser, 2022). By mandating weekly cycles of rest where we visit the world to come, that realm does not seem so far out of reach. We know we will return to it once more, always within seven days.

These periods are understood as out-of-time in some ways, when rest is understood as absence. Fishbane (2018) explains "Shabbat [is] a temporal dimension that inherently facilitates human access to the sacred; a realm in time that is timeless, that transcends all earthly time and space" (p. 178). The word kadosh, commonly translated as holy or sanctified, comes from the same root meaning for the word 'separate' (Steinsaltz, 1980). Gillman (1990) draws a parallel to "the English word 'distinguished,' which can mean both 'separate' and 'special'". The holiness of Shabbat is derived from its separation from the rest of the week, or its out-of-time temporal quality.

As a transitionary ritual at the conclusion of Shabbat, many do a ceremony called Havdalah. Literally translated as "distinction", it helps to move one "from a consecrated day to the ordinary days of the new week" (Shulman, 2011, p. 222). The main blessing in the ritual "praises God who distinguishes between the holy and the mundane... and the Sabbath and the six days of work" (Shulman, 2011, p. 222). However, as discussed when explaining Jewish law's temporal structures, these distinctions are not as neat as the blessing makes it seem, allowing for moments in between temporal landscapes, or between out-of-time and within-time. As I elaborate at end of this chapter, I use these broad ideas of time as non-linear to understand the futurities present in participants' contributions to my study.

Jewish Spirituality

Jewish spiritual thought is the third lens framing my analysis. In some respects, this is unavoidable. This spiritual tradition is a large part of my life and influences how I understand the world around me. Additionally, most of the participants in this study also identify as Jewish, and some used terms borrowed from Jewish spiritual concepts. Judaism has religious, spiritual, cultural, and ethnic aspects, and different people who identify as Jewish may identify with some or all of these elements. There is a long history of Jewish texts that grapple with morality, spirituality, and law, and many of these continue to be relevant to modern Jewish practice and understanding. As with any spiritual tradition, Jewish philosophy is not monolithic, and different people interpret texts, practices, and laws differently.

I use the concepts of olam ha'ba, dayenu, and emunah to further tease out comments made in the focus groups, as well as extending these concepts as reflections of other comments made, regardless of whether the term itself was used. These concepts will be picked up later in this thesis, in discussion with the results below, where I utilize these complicated ideas using the shorthand name for the concept that has been briefly unpacked here.

Olam Ha'Ba (עוֹלָם הַבָּא)

Central to this study is the concept of "olam ha'ba", which connects to both temporality and futurity. Literally translated as "the world which will come", the concept has many understandings and applications. Here I briefly explore interpretations of olam ha'ba throughout historical Jewish texts and modern practices.

The afterlife

Some understand olam ha'ba as the afterlife, or a spiritual realm one's soul enters after death. In contrast to Christianity and Islam's more concrete concept of afterlife, "in Jewish sacred

literature, discussions of an afterlife are sparse, obscure, and miscellaneous, offering no cohesive view on the subject" (Patai & Oettinger, 2012, p. 12). Halkin (2016) identifies different kinds of writing on this topic including halakhic (rabbinic law), philosophical, homiletic, intellectual, emotional, visionary, pseudo-visionary, fabulistic, scholarly, and reflective writings. Bronner (2015) traces mentions of the afterlife from the Torah, through Rabbinic literature, early Jewish philosophy, all the way into the modern day. While she finds no direct mention of olam ha'ba in the Torah, there are "hints and allusions" (p. 36) throughout that point to both the idea of an afterlife and reincarnation, albeit obscurely. Following the Torah, there is a "large body of literature in the post-biblical period filled with speculations about what follows death" (p. 38). These writings were not canonized but still inform Jewish belief systems and understandings of life and death. She speculates as to why this theme features so prominently, noting that these were written during times of persecution, so that "they formed an undercurrent that fed Jewish thought about life after death when the subject was much on Jewish minds" (p. 57).

Within the Mishnah, a set of six texts that "presents the legal and theological system that came to be known as rabbinic Judaism" (p. 59), the term "olam ha'ba" is used around 30 times, although Bronner (2015) is uncertain as to where it originates. This is the first era where afterlife is discussed as a core belief within Judaism, although the Rabbis "do not venture to describe what the World to Come might look like or the possible mechanics of bodily resurrection" (p. 59). In the Talmud, the legal literature following the Mishnah, the notion of olam ha'ba is discussed in a less conceptual way, and used more as a way to enforce and motivate adherence to Jewish law. Talmudic writing is famously "a wide-ranging compendium of ideas with no systematic format" (p. 80), full of contradiction and disagreement. Bronner writes that these "contradictory ideas and disparate interpretations are treated with respect; a page of Gemara might record vastly differing

views about an issue, yet none is omitted" (p. 80). As an example, one rabbinic interpretation of olam ha'ba is purely spiritual:

> The future world is not like this world. In the World to Come there is no eating or drinking, no procreation nor business nor jealousy nor hatred nor competition, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads enjoying the radiance of the Divine Presence. (Berakhot 17a:12)[1]

while another incorporates elements of physicality:

> The World to Come is not like this world. In this world there is the trouble of treading and harvesting grapes, but in the World to Come a man will bring one grape on a wagon or a ship, put it in the corner of his house and use [the grape's] contents as if it [were] a wine cask, while its timber [the stalk of the grape] will be used as fire for cooking. (Ketubbot 111b:15)

Both interpretations agree that the world to come is unlike the world, but they differ entirely in their understanding of what that difference might entail. Bronner (2015) cautions against making definitive statements about what "Judaism" or even "rabbinic authorities" thought about the afterlife, writing that "any attempt to systematize their notions of the afterlife imposes upon them an order and a consistency they do not have" (p. 89).

Bronner (2015) then turns to Medieval Jewish Philosophers, where some thought of olam ha'ba as a physical place, some as a spiritual concept; some as where bodies go after death, some as merely for souls; some for everybody, and some for only the righteous. The threads begun by Talmudic scholars were picked up and elaborated upon, further complicating and differentiating between the ever-expanding possibilities of what olam ha'ba might mean. Kabbalistic

[1] Translations used for Jewish legal texts have been taken from the Koren Steinsaltz, William Davidson Edition – English translation. I have used the Sefaria.com digitized version and cite the name and chapter of each book in-text.

understandings of olam ha'ba take an esoteric turn, talking about the circularity of reincarnation, constructing four mystical realms between God and humans, and discussing redemption of the soul:

> From the first readers of the Zohar[2], to the Lurianic kabbalists, to the hasidic rebbes who lived on the brink of the modern age, Jewish mystics drew direct, if often blurry, connections between our world and the supernal worlds of spirit and reward. While study and devotion to God did not decline in importance, the mystics promoted an emphasis on righteous behavior in this, the lower world, as well as an urgency to perform the mitzvot[3], to gather in the holy sparks and help achieve tikkun olam[4]. In this way, every good person, rich or poor, learned or uneducated, could help bring about tikkun olam and have a share in the World to Come. (p. 152)

As demonstrated, there are differences in understandings of this concept across time and place, but also within any era of Jewish thought. As time went on, the concept featured more prominently, and had more variation of interpretation across scholars and legal authorities. Judaism encourages interpretation of text and debate, exemplified by the value "mahloket l'shem shamayim", or "conflict for the sake of Heaven". Watts Belser (2017) writes on this topic:

> Theology, as I see it, is a grammar of the imagination. I want us to become multilingual: to make room for difference, to remember that all our different languages, all our ways of mirroring the Infinite, are limited and partial-and also vital, generative, rich. (p. 112-113)

[2] The foundational text used in Kabbalistic study.
[3] Literally "commandments", colloquially "good deeds".
[4] Literally "repair of the world", to be discussed later in this section.

I thus do not attempt to say with any finality what olam ha'ba is, to preserve and respect the holy debate had across Jewish history. Rather, I present multiple possibilities for what olam ha'ba might represent.

Current olam ha'ba projects

Ideas of olam ha'ba have been taken up in a number of current Jewish projects and conversations. This demonstrates that it is still a relevant concept to many Jewish communities and continues to be utilized and applied in new ways. Even as Jewish communities develop modern practices across the diaspora, olam ha'ba remains in our spiritual and communal vocabularies.

Tikkun olam, literally "repairing the world" was mystically used to explain an esoteric mission to be granted entrance into olam ha'ba "by gathering the scattered holy sparks and restoring them to their proper place" (Bronner, 2015, p. 142). Nowadays, it is a term used broadly to mean "social justice and communal responsibility" (Watts Belser, 2022), understanding "repairing the world" as referring to bettering the social landscape of the current, physical world we inhabit. For some, this is still seen as a way to merit olam ha'ba after death, and for others it has since been disconnected from the idea of the afterlife and rather is a moral imperative to do good deeds.

Bergen (2021) writes about modern Jewish movements as reinterpreting both time and relationship through the lens of olam ha'ba, specifically in the context of Jewish community in the diaspora. They explain Jewish diasporism as:

> a full-fledged, embodied movement within Judaism, one that draws creatively on resources of Jewish memory, ritual, calendar and activist rhetoric to live into a Judaism that reimagines homeland as relationship, in a temporality described as 'the world to come'. (p. 1-2)

Bergen (2021) discusses olam ha'ba as an "ever-evolving temporality" (p. 29), "an ethical state" (p. 124), and a "daily prefigurative practice" (p. 139). For example, The Simple Queer Mikveh Guide (quoted by Bergen, 2021) writes that:

> we understand 'the world to come' as a shape of being that is currently unknown to us. It is the shape of dignity and material resource for all beings, and true loving connection, and interdependence. We also understand it as being alive and well in our current world, in moments where love and liberation are present.

This is connected to diasporism in that it is a way of living a Jewish future that was imagined in the past to be present in a specific physical location. Diasporism makes it possible to "'live into' olam ha'ba through a queer, multiracial Jewish liturgy, scripture and practice" (Bergen, 2021, p. 124). From this understanding of olam ha'ba, it is seen as more of a practice than a state or location. It is relational, ritualistic, and present.

Two projects that take up this temporal turn are the Dreaming the World to Come planner[5] and the Radical Jewish Calendar[6]. The Dreaming the World to Come planner is "a tool for touching into ancient timekeeping, while... connecting with the earth, the heavens, and the stories of our lives and dreams". It was designed by a group of Jewish people who largely identify with 2SLGBTQ+ and disabled experiences, and draw upon those wisdoms. Talking about the inspiration for the name of the planner, they write:

> This vision, often referred to as Olam haBa in Jewish thought, includes Reparations, Land Back, a Free Palestine, abolition of police and prisons, Disability Justice, Reproductive Justice, Climate Justice, queer and trans liberation, and a world where all bodies and beings are treated as sacred.

[5] See https://www.dreamingtheworldtocome.com/
[6] See https://www.radicaljewishcalendar.com/

They developed the planner to provide structure, aesthetics, and wisdom for keeping on Jewish time in the modern world - “a space for collaboration and collective dreaming, re-imagining Time and the ways we relate to it”. This planner is common is leftist Jewish spaces, used to keep us on the same timeline as our ancestors have been, while rooted in community and ongoing work towards justice.

The Radical Jewish Calendar is another time-keeping, olam ha’ba oriented tool, “layering Jewish and Gregorian dates, astrological happenings, holidays, and political history”. In addition to the typical holidays and days of importance listed in a standard calendar, the curators crowdsource and include other relevant dates “that reflect and build the Judaism and Jewish culture that we want to live: that celebrate queer and feminist history; honor the racial, ethnic, cultural and historical diversity within Jews” (Radical Jewish Calendar, n.d.). Each month is accompanied by an associated piece of artwork inspired by Jewish, astrological, and/or temporal associations with the month. This layered approach allows olam ha’ba to be brought into the world we live in, acknowledging both Jewish time and the Gregorian calendar, holidays and memorials, practicality and beauty.

Olam ha’ba thus has maintained some of its earlier connotations throughout Jewish history, while morphing into a full-fledged temporality that many modern Jews live within. There have been calendar and planner tools developed to facilitate living in this temporality. It both holds the idea of an afterlife and the reminder that there is work to do for this current world as well. Some work toward olam ha’ba to merit life after death, and others to merit a better physical world for future generations. Olam ha’ba thus holds hope, temporality, and futurity at once.

Dayenu (דַּיֵּנוּ)

Dayenu is the repeating chorus of a litany sang at the Passover Seder. The word literally translates to “it would have been sufficient”, but holds deeper meaning difficult to translate directly.

The verses list 14 things done by God for the Israelites during and following the exodus from Egypt, and after each item the word "dayenu" is repeated as a response. Some call this passage "The List of Thanksgiving", but generally it is just referred to as "Dayenu".

This passage has long been discussed by various Jewish thinkers. Many have pointed out that following each miracle by responding that it would have been sufficient does not make sense. For example, one stanza reads:

> If God had supplied our needs in the desert for forty years, and had not fed us the manna; *Dayenu*, it would have sufficed us!

While having been provided shelter in a desert for 40 years is remarkable and worth gratitude, without the manna, the food the Israelites ate while wandering in the desert, the nation would have died. Many of the phrasings seem confusing in this way. They follow directly from one another and might be seen as portions of one, larger miracle rather than miracles in their own right, and yet we remark that each would have been sufficient.

This word is thus understood as saying not that the task itself is in isolation sufficient, but rather, each individual step of liberation is situated as part of a whole narrative that is greater than any of its parts, while simultaneously expressing that the gratitude had for each and every step is so much that it is as though it itself were sufficient. Dayenu thus acknowledges the imperative of gratitude not just for the end result, but to move toward each sequential step along the way, recognizing the butterfly effect of all actions. Sacks (2011) writes about the exodus story, "Hope takes seriously the present situation, but also shows that something better is possible". This song reinforces the need to value each move towards a bigger goal, even if the move itself seems incomplete or insufficient.

Some understand "Dayenu" to be more of a question than a statement, asking if it is sufficient rather than saying it is so. As Niran Frigyesi (2018) writes,

> perhaps it is a question: "Dayenu?" "Is that all?" "Is it possible ... this life and this history... is this enough for one to carry on with faith?"

This concept draws on, and perhaps could be answered by, a commonly referenced Jewish proverb: "He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it" (Pirkei Avot 2:16). It is on every person to contribute to justice seeking projects, but it is not on any individual to reach justice themself. We are grateful for each additional step in the butterfly effect sequence of events that lead to larger outcomes.

Spin-offs and additions to *Dayenu* have been developed over time. kaufman, for example, wrote a Disability Justice version of this litany, saying "dayenu" after statements such as "If we have found ways to act for change from home; Dayeinu", "If we have prepared food, or even just eaten some; Dayeinu", and "If we have hope; Dayeinu". These additions to and reconfiguring of the original poem has allowed it to develop into a broader concept used in Jewish circles, moving it out of the specific context of Passover and expanding its utility.

In one expanded usage of the term, Dayenu is the name of a Jewish climate justice organization out of the United States. Their interpretation of the term aligns better with a translation of "we have had enough! But we also have enough. We have what we need to transform our world" (Dayenu, n.d.). This dual meaning encompasses both the need to act and the fact that action is possible. Their goals include mobilization, building power, grassroots leadership models, and raising Jewish perspectives within the climate movement. They refer to their approach as encompassing "spiritual audacity and bold political action" (Dayenu, n.d.), utilizing the audaciousness of gratitude without conceding sufficiency.

Emunah (אֱמוּנָה)

The last concept I will discuss is that of emunah, generally translated as faith. Not a direct parallel to Christian connotations of the word faith, the concept of emunah holds aspects of hope, trust, belief, confidence, lineage, relationship, and truth. The Hebrew language operates on a root system, with each word formed around a three-letter root. The root for the word emunah is *ʾmn* (אמן) which can mean "to trust, have confidence; and faithfulness" (Abrahams et al., 2007). The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion (2011) instead defines the root *ʿmn* as "firm" or "steadfast".

Maimonides, a 12th century Sepharadic Rabbi, defines emunah in a cognitive sense, more aligned with what one might call belief. Following this idea, some scholars understand the first line of Maimonides 13 Principles of Faith that is generally translated as "I believe with complete faith" as "I am firmly convinced" (Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion, 2011). This was the standard understanding of the term in Jewish philosophy until the 1300s, when it developed multiple different interpretations and understandings (Abrahams et al., 2007). This is when, for example, emunah began to encompass a dogmatic sense of faith, borrowed from Christian theologians.

Later in the development of Jewish philosophy, Bibago (cited by Abrahams et al., 2007) wrote that learning through inquiry is different than learning through emunah. He claimed that knowledge gained through practices of emunah are better than that obtained through inquiry, due to the lineage that emunah follows. Because, according to Bibago, emunah can be traced back through Jewish teachers and learners to Moses at Sinai, it is undisputable, while many philosophical beliefs can be debated. This leads him to conclude that "since rational knowledge is not as certain as knowledge acquired through faith, the mind of the faithful is superior to that of the philosopher" (Abrahams et al., 2007). Of course, faith-based beliefs are just as disputable as

any other, but this value placed on faith-based knowledge and lineage learning is important. Within Bibago's definition, certainty in one's morals, beliefs, and cultural understandings are upheld as a form of knowledge, even when they cannot be explained according to the rationality of the time.

Emunah is also conceptually related to being in relationship. Haselaar (2022) writes that there is an epistemological orientation related to emunah, classified as "relational knowledge, a third form of knowledge, besides objective and subjective knowledge". Some refer to this as intersubjective knowledge. He continues:

> In essence, emunah allows not only for reducing radical uncertainty… Emunah makes it possible to embrace radical uncertainty by creating meaning based on relational knowledge in the midst of radical uncertainty.

Emunah is emboldened by creating meaning alongside others. As an outcome of this relational faith, according to Sacks (cited by Hasselaar, 2022), "hope is a fundamentally related concept that intersects with emunah". Sacks further characterizes the connection by explaining that it is hope that underpins trustworthiness and faith, rather than the opposite. He argues that hope always holds this kind of "radical uncertainty", and therefore exists as part of emunah.

Berkovitz (1959) uses the term emunah to explain the concept of emet, generally translated as "truth". Emunah thus has an aspect of truthfulness and rootedness in reality, rather than a misguided or unfounded faith. Others also hold of this connotation, understanding emunah "with truth as interpersonal trust", intersecting both relational and truthful qualities.

Hasselaar sums up his understanding of emunah as follows:

> [Emunah] not only reduces radical uncertainty, but embraces radical uncertainty by orienting us to something liberating beyond what we can express with our words and thoughts in the present.

> Emunah is part of a cluster with hope. Hope underlies trust, and is best expressed in the narrative of the Exodus that gives meaning to the whole.
>
> Emunah does not demand a leap of unreasoned faith, but refers to relational knowledge that underlies reality and has shown in history that it can be trusted and will be liberating in the future.

Regardless of the ways emunah is understood, it is upheld as a core tenet of Jewish belief systems. Faith, belief, rational thought, hope in relationship – these are central to Judaism's teachings. The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 11:1) goes so far as to claim that one who does not have emunah will not merit a share of olam ha'ba, concretizing the need for this faith/hope/belief/trust within a system where action in this world is rewarded in the one to come.

Utilizing these Concepts as Analytical Frames

These concepts of community care, futurity and expansive temporalities, and Jewish spirituality have been central to the framing of this thesis. I have used them in determining my approach to reading and analysing the collected data. Each is a lens in itself, and layered together, they offer frameworks of caring time, community spirituality, Jewish temporalities.

Community care, care work, interdependence, and relationality show up throughout the rest of this thesis. Participant contributions about their own experiences of community, care, and togetherness reinforce the importance of these concepts. As Rogers (2013) writes, "If togetherness and community engenders hope, then the experience of isolation results in despair and hopelessness" (p. 228). Looking away from futures of neoliberal individualism and toward possible futures of collectivity in caring relationship opens up pathways towards spaces and futures where all are cared for, and all feel responsible to care for others.

Various ways of understanding expansive notions of time in order to dream a better future also guide my analysis of this data. While these specific temporalities have been chosen because of their resonances with identities held by many of the participants, there are many ways of conceptualizing time. Other marginalized groups seeking liberatory ways forward also write about futurity, centring their own dreams, needs, and experiences. I use the broad idea that time is non-linear and that a different (and better) future is dreamable to understand the futurities present within comments made by participants and depicted in artwork created. I approach the data I have collected, not looking for a single, agreed upon hope for the future, but rather for as many future-focused dreams as came up in the focus groups.

Key concepts from Jewish spiritual thought including that of olam ha'ba, dayenu, and emunah feature in my discussion of the results. While not every participant identifies as Jewish or necessarily used these concepts, some of the main themes point to these conceptual categories. I use these ideas to help contextualize and frame my understanding of the results arising out of the conversations and artwork created in the focus groups. Having a basic understanding of each concept, then, lays the foundation for the discussion explained thereafter.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Community-Based Research

This thesis takes a community-based research (CBR) approach to study design, recruitment, data collection, and knowledge mobilization. According to Vaccaro (2024), CBR is "a participatory approach where research projects are driven by community priorities" and lived experience is valued as a form of expertise. Approaching the study in this way aligns with my own values. CBR offers frameworks for meeting community member participants where they are at and incorporating reciprocity throughout the research process. I strive to do my research in as thoughtful, caring, and relational a way as possible and, utilizing the wisdom that has come out of CBR, I was able to build these considerations into my study.

What is a Community?

In order to do CBR, there must be a defined community that is involved in the research. I struggled with identifying specifically what community I am interested in while conceptualizing this study, because the potential participants of my research did not necessarily know one another and may not feel as though they are part of the same community. Had I chosen to focus on a specific organizing group or even a specific social justice issue that all participants would be organizing around, it would be much clearer what community I would be referring to. However, I intentionally left the recruitment criteria broad to allow folks from varying justice-oriented spaces to talk across their differences and knowledge bases, sharing and co-creating knowledge informed by these different ways of thinking.

Typically, community is defined in terms of shared identity, geography, and/or values. Israel and colleagues (1998) write that community refers to "an aspect of collective and individual identity... characterized by a sense of identification and emotional connection" (p. 178). Requiring

a sense of identification of oneself as a part of the community and an emotional connection with others in the community holds assumptions about the people involved. For example, this criterion assumes that those within the category have a way to build relationships with one another, and an interest in doing so. Kwan and Walsh (2018) explain that, from their understanding, "a community can be bound by geography... by shared identities... or by shared values, norms, and interests" (p. 372). The use of the word "or" here allows more room for communities to be defined by one or the other, rather than all of the above. However, many people across different contexts share values while not understanding themselves to be in community with one another. The participants of this study included those organizing for different kinds of social change, in multiple locations, and alongside various organizations, using many different strategies.

Banks and colleagues (2013) acknowledge that there are "issues in defining 'community', taking account of conflict within and between communities and groups" (p. 267). This not only applies within definitive groups of people that identify as being in community with one another, but also to disparate groups that have something in common but are not necessarily communal in the traditional sense of the word. This is the case with the group I identified for recruitment. While grassroots organizers and activists tend to have relational networks, they do not necessarily conceptualize these networks as a community. People may not identify as an organizer or activist, and even if they do, areas of activism and organizing differ vastly, and the goals of two organizers/activists can be in opposition to one another.

There were definite elements of resonance across those involved in this study. In keeping with my recruitment criteria, participants all held one or more marginalized identity/ies (albeit, not the same ones across the group) and were involved in organizing for justice on those axes of their identities. While they may not share a collective identity, they share similar experiences of working

toward a more equitable world in a way that would directly impact themselves. They may not have an emotional connection with one another, but all participants expressed an emotional connection to the work of organizing. Many expressed shared values with others in the group, even while disagreeing with one another, and some relationship to the idea of hope and/or hopelessness. This, to me, constitutes a community, and one that is valuable to research across.

Research studies with unhoused women have explored a similar complication of doing CBR when working with of a group of people who do not think of themselves as a community (Clover, 2011). These studies demonstrate that participating in CBR projects, especially those that are arts-based or long-term, creates a sense of community for participants. Clover (2011) writes of their research participants: "Using the term 'we' began to overtake using the word 'I'" (p. 21). Their work shows how CBR can be used not only as a research method with established communities, but also as a way to form community amongst those with similar experiences.

Further, broadening the idea of "community" can allow for CBR processes to identify latent communities, helping people understand themselves as already part of a network of likeminded people who they may not have identified with beforehand. While this study arguably built community amongst participants as in the Clover (2011) study, it can also be seen as identifying organizers and activists as being a community, beyond the individual participants in this study. Identifying this group as embodying aspects of 'community' may shift researchers' approach to social movement research to centre CBR values and principles.

Why Take a CBR Approach for this Study?

The principles of CBR are important no matter what the group of participants looks like. I believe that ethical research values the leadership of those most impacted, works toward reciprocity, centres accessibility, and utilizes plain language whenever possible, all factors central to CBR approaches.

One principle of CBR is ensuring that when community gets involved, there is "still time/space for us [the community] to help shape the direction of this research" (Boilevin et al., 2019). This protects against the risk of becoming an example of "exploitative relationships or tokenistic partnerships" within so-called CBR (Kwan & Walsh, 2018, p. 376). The idea underlying my research question arose from conversations within various organizing spaces and relationships over the last few years. It points to a theme relevant to many contexts of social movement work and brings together varying perspectives. I investigate a question that has come up repeatedly in my community work and has not been thoroughly explored, neither within CBR nor in other formats. While designing the study, I drew on my knowledge of organizing and activist communities and my own experiences in these spaces to guide decision making. I also informally discussed some of these questions with community members to get a sense of what other folks might be curious about and want to explore through this kind of project. Within the timeline and expectations of an MSW thesis process, I was not able to further involve community members and participants in research design, but these conversations led to the research question being asked initially, and informed decision making throughout the process.

In my own experience, I have felt a sense of community with similarly justice-oriented organizers and activists. I have been able to connect with and learn from many people who are activists in areas I know nothing about. The shared goal of creating systemic change on issues that matter to us and the people we care about is enough in common for me to feel a sense of belonging. Notably, this is only the case when I feel broadly aligned with their organizing purpose. For example, although we are both organizing, those that organize in opposition to the change I work towards would not fall into this feeling of camaraderie and connection.

Part of the reason why I have not selected a specific group of organizers/activists to focus on (e.g. those working toward Disability Justice, defunding the police, or other specific goals) is because I am interested in identifying if and how the idea of hope is utilized across differing movement spaces, and how these groups can learn from and challenge one another. For this thesis, taking a CBR approach is a demonstration of community care and, hopefully, a development of community connections, rather than merely an investigation of a community. I believe in the power of, and the need to, converse across movements to inform all our work and construct futurities that can meet as many needs as possible.

Although the boundaries of the community I am identifying are blurry, this study takes up many principles of CBR, and reflects the values underpinning this method. The study design values generating conversation across affiliations and experiences to co-create knowledge and artwork. It responds to a question that arose in the community, rather than only within the academy. This thesis draws on my knowledge of the community insofar as I was able to do so within the limits of the Research Ethics Board process, constituting a CBR process.

Arts-Based Research

Utilizing arts-based methods is common within CBR studies. According to Butterwick and Selman (2000), art-informed inquiry disrupts the "limitations and oppressive features of traditional scientific research, opening spaces for experimentation of alternative approaches" (p. 13). It is a well-documented feminist practice, challenging the idea of art as "frivolous and trivial" (Clover, 2011, p. 12). This fits well with my study's purposes. Not dissimilar to the notion that art is frivolous is the idea that hope is naive. Many social change researchers minimize the idea of being hopeful for a better future, diminishing the way that hope can sustain organizing work.

Highlighting the power of the arts and the power of hope are interrelated goals that can be achieved together.

Zines were selected as the medium of choice for this project for several reasons. Notably, zines have been used in many social movements. According to Bird and colleagues (2008), "zines have existed since people began to write" (p. 6), not in the form they currently inhabit, but in a looser sense. What this means to say is that casual, political, personal, radical, written assertions have existed as long as written language itself. These were most prevalently seen in the Riot Grrl movement (Baker & Cantillon, 2022), punk scene zines and patches (Reid, 2019), and the "underground 'comix' of the 60's and 70's" (Suresh & Venkatesan, 2022, p. 990). Craft is a particularly feminist form of activism and community work, using something conceptualized as domestic and feminine towards revolutionary aims (Reid, 2019).

The stated purposes of zines have been varied across contexts. Zines have been "tools for activism in social movements" (Baker & Cantillion, 2022, p. 539), whereby they are used to share information, mobilize, and otherwise move a group of people toward action (Garramone, 2006; Reid, 2019). Reid (2019) calls this "craftivism", a portmanteau combining craft with activism. Some also see zines as "a form of community archive", allowing silenced communities to document their history through their own frameworks of understanding, "while also offering an important resource for community-building and political resistance" (Baker & Cantillion, p. 539). This deeply resonates with the goals of CBR and of this project.

In addition to being used towards action, zines have been utilized in the articulation of theory, "help[ing] people develop and share grassroots knowledge about experiences, conditions, and identities that have been marginalized" (Spandler et al., 2021, p. 5). The dataset analysed in my study consists of the artwork created along with transcripts of the conversations had during the

focus groups. This is in line with approaches that use "art works themselves [as] a data gathering instrument, a medium of information storage rendered visible by their own ubiquitous nature" (Clover, 2011, p. 17-18). Compiling the zine was a part of my analytical process. Once marginalized perspectives exist in zine form, they can be used to mobilize knowledge, opening radical possibilities to uplift lived experience as a form of knowledge and a site of theory. The utility of zine as a format for marginalized community publications lies in their self-published nature, which counters the "rapid centralization of corporate media" (Barker, 2020, p. 5).

Zines have also been used as a research method in academic spaces, especially in arts-based participatory research (Baker & Cantillion, 2022). Reid and colleagues (2019) highlight "the convergence of social movement with academic institution, innovative curriculum with radical pedagogy, [and] critical scholarship with art/aesthetics" (p. 256). One of the ways this convergence happens is when zines are used in the creation and distribution of knowledge. Garramone (2006) uses zines in her academic publishing as a tool toward "exploring the political within the writing practices of the university" (p. 161). However, she also warns that "zine-making [is] a form of direct action against the colonized spaces of the academy" (p. 171), and not something to be used to benefit the academy. Janes (2016) similarly argues that CBR "holds the potential to democratize and decolonize knowledge production" (p. 72). I have co-led research utilizing zines as method in the past, and it is an art format I feel comfortable facilitating. This meant that I was able to focus most of my energy on supporting the group, rather than solely on facilitating the creation of art.

Zines are also useful because of the flexibility and accessibility of the format. They can be used as a form of activism that do not require language literacy and can be accessible across various disabilities (Suresh & Venkatesan, 2022). Research participants can contribute to a zine with physical materials or digital art, with words or images. Zines mix genres and media, co-creating

between author and listener to create "a dialogue across differences" (Garramone, 2006, p. 167), promoting mutuality in learning. This connects to the way that CBR aims to minimize power imbalances between the researcher and the researched (Clover, 2011). It also leaves art style and medium choices open to each participant, combining visual, text-based, collage, and other art forms. Clover (2011) discusses the tensions experienced between individual artmaking and collaborative artmaking throughout their CBR project. Zines inherently exist in the in between, as they can be seen as a standalone piece of art, and as a compilation of individual art pieces.

In addition to being an accessible method, zines are also a fantastic tool for community building. Clover (2011) suggests that art is just as much about process as product. For example, Madness Network News (1972-1986) and Phoenix Rising (1980-1990), were historically significant Mad community publications. These both fostered a vibrant community of contributors, editors, designers, distributors, and readers around them, developing collective analysis, care, and community (Tsao, 2013). The organizers of these groups "had always found creative activity and 'having someone to talk to' more therapeutic than any form of somatic treatment" (Tsao, 2013, p. 41). This led to the use of graphic novels, zines, and poetry in anti-psychiatry book clubs and peer support groups (Tsao, 2013). This radical history of finding community and raising consciousness through self-published zines is a history I want to invoke in my work.

Relatively recently, zines have begun to be used as pedagogical material within the academy. As Mad Studies has more concretely entered the academy, engaging with non-traditional ways of creating knowledge has entered the pedagogical space. This has included utilizing zines as texts to be learned from and analysed, as well as having students create zines as a deliverable to assess learning. Academia is generally insistent on specific styles of writing and producing that

are deemed academic, professional, and respectable; zines challenge this notion. This too feels in line with the goals of CBR, by inviting plain-language and non-language contributions to a dataset.

During the recruitment stage of this study, multiple participants expressed excitement about co-creating and having a zine at the end of the project. The zine not only offers participants something tangible exploring the discussions we had, but also serves as a plain-language deliverable from this research process. While some of the participants may decide to read this thesis in its entirety, others may not for a wide range of reasons, including its length and use of academic language. The zine offers a way into the results of the study that is accessible, engaging, and in a format conducive to sharing within organizing spaces.

Utilizing arts as part of the focus groups and data collection process resonates with the values of CBR and holds important movement history and community building that has come from zine making and sharing. It offers accessible and non-verbal ways of sharing knowledge and provides a study deliverable that includes images directly created by participants. It also follows some of the philosophical writings on hope explored above that use poetic language to try and reach this difficult to describe concept, making it well-aligned with this project's goals and values.

Chapter 5: Methods

This chapter lays out the reasoning behind the methodological choices made in designing this study, and outlines the process from recruitment and data collection, through to analysis and writing. I also introduce the participants and discuss the way I showed up in the focus group as a researcher with lived experience paralleling the recruitment criteria I selected. Finally, I explore the community- and arts-based nature of the focus groups, explaining why these frameworks fit with my research question.

Recruitment

To recruit participants for the focus groups, I used a purposive sampling method, reaching out directly to grassroots organizers and activists that I know through my own organizing and broader networks. Potential participants were people involved in grassroots organizing and activism that hold identities implicated in their organizing and activist work. For example, people who identify within the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella that organize for 2SLGBTQ+ rights would qualify, but cisgender heterosexual allies to the 2SLGBTQ+ community involved in the same work would not. Participants also needed to be able to communicate in English.

Asking that participants hold an identity that is relevant to the change they work toward acknowledges the various limits on activists' time, energy, and capacity, and the ways these disproportionately show up for those who are directly implicated in their change work as well as across race, gender, class, and dis/ability lines. I chose to use both the term 'organizing' and 'activism' to guard against self-disqualification for potential participants who use one word and not the other to describe their work. All participants of this study were involved in grassroots change work, regardless of the words they used to express it.

I sent each person I identified as a potential participant the letter of information, some context about the study, and the reason why I thought they would be a good fit. In total, nine people agreed to participate in a focus group. However, due to scheduling conflicts, disability needs arising, and other factors, only five people participated in a total of two groups.

I offered a virtual focus group, facilitated over Zoom, and an in-person focus group for local participants who felt comfortable gathering in person. Those who agreed to participate were also sent a snowball recruitment script. This would enable them to invite organizers who are in their networks but outside of mine to participate in this study. I am unsure if any of these recruitment materials were circulated, but nobody reached out to me from the snowball distribution.

When somebody agreed to participate in a focus group, I shared the snowball recruitment script for them to share with their networks if they chose to do so. I also sent a form where the participant could write a two-to-four sentence paragraph of biographical information. These paragraphs were used in the focus groups as a way for each participant to introduce themself and share information that they felt was important for other group members to know going into the focus group. These were also used in lieu of a demographic survey, and they appear later in this chapter to introduce participants to the reader. Asking participants to introduce themselves rather than using a set demographic questionnaire avoids the assumption that certain aspects of identity and experience would be equally important to each participant's self-conception across the group. This also allowed for more flexible sharing of who they are, what kind of organizing they are involved in, and what brought them to the group. Participants were also asked to provide the name with which they would like to be referred to throughout this thesis.

For those in the online group, we scheduled a brief (15-20 minutes) phone call for me to review the study information and gather their oral consent to participate. I also used this

opportunity to find out more about their participation needs to assist in my facilitation. For the in-person group, this same information was reviewed on the day of the focus group and consent sheets were signed before I began recording the group.

Participants

Participants ranged in age from those in their 20s to those in their early 40s. All participants identified broadly as queer, with varying identities falling into the LGBTQ+ community. All except one participant identified as Jewish, and all identified as white. Three participants disclosed disability and/or neurodivergence, although others mentioned these experiences during the group. Those in the online group were located outside of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, while those in the in-person group lived locally.

As mentioned, each participant provided a short biographical introduction to themself and their organizing context. The study included the following people:

Abby

I am a 25 year old genderqueer, white, Ashkenazi Jewish, disabled person living in Pittsburgh, PA. I've been organizing for climate and disability justice for 5 years (at the national level), and for Palestinian liberation for one year (here in Pittsburgh).

Calvin

I am a peer worker, researcher, futurist, and creative based in Hamilton, Ontario. For the past decade, I have been engaged in community and peer support work within Mad, disability, queer, and trans communities. In recent years, I have found myself fluctuating between feelings of hopefulness and hopelessness about this work. For the past two years, my work and scholarship has been focused on exploring futures thinking through a lens of peerness, and encouraging a (re)turn to dreamwork within the peer sector.

Jason

I am 43 years old, male, and I live in Toronto, Ontario. I use queer to describe both my sexuality and gender. I am Jewish and white. I am neurodivergent. I have both physiological and mental chronic illnesses. I have been an artist and educator for more than twenty years, and a program and event administrator for twelve years; the community building and justice education components that I integrate in all my projects represent my most sustained organizing efforts. Most recently, I co-chaired a social justice committee for a Unitarian Universalist congregation, and I worked as

an event planner and coordinator for a Jewish organization acting for Palestinian liberation. Currently, I'm experimenting with ways to develop local circles of education, mutual care, and action outside the bureaucracy of branded institutions.

Or

I'm a queer, non-binary, white, Israeli-born Jewish person of Moroccan and Ashkenazi ancestry. I've been organizing around justice in Israel/Palestine for 3 years, and more intensely since October 2023. I've been offering spiritual care and processing spaces for people involved in the Ceasefire and Palestinian liberation movement, as well as for those questioning their relationship to Zionism.

Robbie

I am a 26 year-old white Ashkenazi Jew. I get excited about relational dynamics between individuals, groups, communities, and networks. These days in my work I mostly frequently bring facilitation, coordination, spacemaking, and presence towards Jewish liberation, Palestinian solidarity, and food justice.

I also wrote a short biographical description and used it to introduce myself to both groups and situate myself in relation to the research question:

Emunah

I'm a white, trans and nonbinary, disabled and neurodivergent person of North African Jewish ancestry. I have been involved in organizing and activism primarily around Queer and Trans Rights as well as Disability and Mad Justice for about 6 years formally, and most of my life informally/communally. I have also participated in justice-focused work around Harm Reduction, Housing Justice, Food Justice, and other issues in both Hamilton and Toronto, Ontario. I see art as a tool towards my activism/organizing and towards community building and care.

Data Collection

Data collection took place through two focus group, one offered virtually and one offered in-person. This was determined based on a desire to meet various accessibility needs and geographical locations. While some participants indicated a preference for gathering in-person, others lived far away or were taking COVID precautions and preferred to meet online. Offering multiple options supported both modes of engagement. The virtual group was conducted over Zoom. Participants were asked to bring supplies with which to create art. These could be as simple

as a pen and paper, or any other materials they may feel inspired by. The in-person group was held in a private room at a local community organization. I supplied some art supplies but also invited participants to bring along any specific materials they would like to use. I recorded the groups in order to auto-generate a transcript which I checked for accuracy.

Both focus groups began with a 15-minute introduction to the project and an outline of what the time spent together would look like. Once all questions were answered, I began recording the groups. Each participant introduced themself with their bio, and any additional information they chose to share with the group. Each group lasted approximately three hours, including a 15-minute break around the halfway mark. About 45 minutes from the end of the session, we began to share the artwork we created, reflecting on the focus group experience, one another's artwork, and sharing any closing thoughts.

I framed the group to participants as a focus group with less of an emphasis on the need for consistent focus around the topic, based on an understanding of various accessibility needs and the importance of research practices that are responsive to the communities participating in the study. I felt hesitant about presenting a framework of gathering with expectations for consistent focus and on-topic contributions. I shared with the groups that I like to think of the meeting as one that is a somewhat out-of-focus group. I explicitly welcomed participants to share anecdotes and thoughts that arose in their mind in relation to the conversation, even if they were not entirely sure how it connected to hope. I shared that somebody's contributions could be primarily or solely visual, primarily or solely verbal, or some combination of the two. This openness allowed for participants to share without worrying if what they had to say was "good enough" to be mentioned in the group.

Rather than having a structured focus group guide with specific questions set in advance, I chose to use a semi-structured guide with predetermined themes and areas of inquiry to prompt discussion. This allowed for participants to guide the direction of discussion, focusing on the elements that felt most relevant to their work within the broad framing of the research question. I aimed to bring participants into the study design and focus as much as possible, within the limits of an MSW thesis process. We began by exploring what hope means to each participant, and further prompts were chosen from the focus group guide based on the themes arising in the conversation. Themes chosen for the focus group guide where chosen based on topics and tensions that have arisen in my organizing communities, but the ways that they were engaged with and responded to were open for each focus group to determine. In fact, the two groups went in very different directions, according to participant interest and inquiry, demonstrating the utility of focus group guides that are open-ended and able to be co-directed between researcher and participants.

While we discussed these themes, the participants and I were creating art in various ways including writing, doodling, drawing, and collaging. The art component was introduced as a way to contribute to the conversation visually, with the understanding that artwork would be compiled into a zine to be used for knowledge mobilization. Some participants used artmaking as a tool to track the conversation through notes and doodles, some made art that extended their verbal comments, and others made creations inspired by the other participants' comments. The virtual group requested a quiet 15 minutes before sharing our artwork to individually focus on crafting, but the in-person group discussed throughout crafting. Thus, the dataset used in this study includes the transcripts of the focus group conversations and the artwork generated during the discussions. The in-person participants gave their artwork to me at the end of the group, and the online

participants scanned or photographed their art and uploaded it to a secure OneDrive file or emailed it to me directly.

Primarily, I was acting as facilitator of the groups, raising prompts, asking follow-up questions, and guiding the conversation. However, at times I also shared my own experiences and perspectives on what was being discussed, especially when asked by participants. As somebody who knows each of the participants personally and shares experience as an organizer and identities as a queer, Jewish, disabled person, I participated in the conversation actively, within the context of my role as facilitator of the group. Considering the small size of the groups and the vulnerability of being asked to share emotions and experiences in a group setting, it made sense to actively contribute to the conversations.

As a part of the research process, I took notes by hand during both groups to remind myself of anything I wanted to bring up later in the conversation, highlight words that had been used a lot, or note a theme I saw arising. It also helped me make sure that no one person was taking over the conversation if others wanted to speak. These notes were useful during the group, and they have also been useful as I conducted my analysis and looked back on the transcripts. In the hours following both groups I wrote short reflection diaries about the focus group, the discussions, the artwork, and anything else I wanted to remember throughout the analytical process.

I experienced some technological difficulty with the in-person focus group recording. Some of the recorded audio was inaudible and therefore unusable as direct quotations in this thesis. During the analysis phase of the study, I utilized my notes, memory, and reflection writing from after the group along with the data that did remain. I also submitted a research ethics amendment which allowed me to gather further reflections on the main themes from participants. Two

participants chose to share additional information in this way, uploading their comments into a secure OneDrive folder, sent to each participant over email.

Analysis

Both the artwork created and the audio recordings of the focus groups are analysed in Chapter 6: Results. I listened to the audio recordings and edited the transcripts for accuracy, finalizing each document and taking notes of themes and terms to return to while developing a coding framework. I then began to sift through the artwork, looking for depictions of themes discussed in the groups and cross-referencing with the ways that participants described their art in the last 45 minutes of both groups. Using an iterative process moving between the transcripts and the artwork allowed me to understand the data holistically, rather than as two separate datasets.

After an initial readthrough of the transcripts while editing, I identified tentative themes (for example, the importance of relationship; the detriment of urgency culture) and noted any words used many times in the groups (for example, “possibility”, “nourish”, and “change”). I constructed an initial coding framework based on these themes and went through both transcripts, identifying comments that fit each code. I refined the coding framework, combining a couple of the identified themes and adding those I had not noticed in my initial read. I then finalized the codes according to this refined coding framework, and identified key quotes that best exemplified each theme or concept. Some of the key quotes resonated strongly with more than one theme. These sometimes appear in multiple subsections within Chapter 6: Results, but are unpacked differently each time in relation to the topic at hand.

With the artwork, I played around with groupings and juxtapositions of different pieces to see what story they might tell. I brought in some quotes from the transcripts that aligned with the images well, or those used by participants to explain choices they made while creating the art. I

thought about each of the themes I had identified in the transcript, looking to see if and how they appeared in the artwork, and what might have arisen in the artwork that was not verbally identified. These art pieces have been compiled and edited into a zine exploring the idea of hope in organizing. Compiling the zine, further discussed below when describing knowledge mobilization tools, also aided in my analytical process. Constructing a narrative through the artwork allowed me to immerse myself in the art and understand it as another form of knowledge the participants offered, related to and independent of the verbal conversation we had.

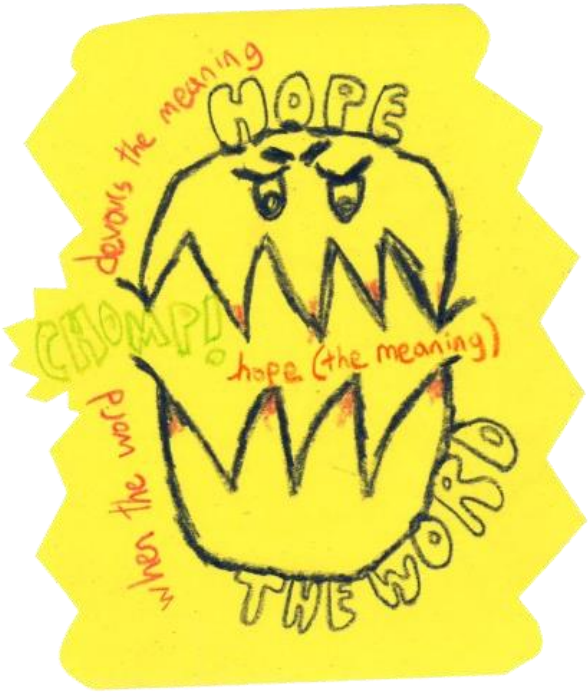
Knowledge Mobilization

The main deliverable that will be used to mobilize the knowledge generated through this study will be the zine created out of artwork participants made during the focus groups. Each participant will receive a digital version of the zine along with physical copies. They will be welcome to use this in their organizing if they choose. A copy of this zine can be found in Appendix A. This zine also functions as a plain language and artistic summary of the results.

Secondly, I will be working to develop a workshop based on the outcomes of this research. I hope to include main elements of the themes explored below in Chapters 6 and 7 and utilize this workshop within movement spaces to hold conversations around hope. I know that this knowledge might be useful to many organizers and activists who do not have access to academic articles or those who may find academic jargon alienating or difficult to understand and apply to their work. Offering this information in community-centred formats like a zine and a workshop will help to make sure this knowledge can impact the communities it was developed with and for.

Chapter 6: Results

Language



Hope as a Difficult Word

Throughout both focus groups, the idea of "hope" was explored, with different participants holding different understandings, definitions, and associations with the concept. Some participants felt connected to the word "hope", while others critiqued it, making statements such as "I feel super challenged by the idea of hope" (Robbie). Alternative words were proposed that participants used to describe a similar concept. While there was no consensus on the word itself, participants seemed to have some agreement about what we were talking about and had their own understandings and experiences to contribute to the discussion. Calvin asked, "how do we have conversations about hope without the word hope?" when the conversation began to get difficult with the number of alternative terms that had been proposed.

During the in-person focus group in particular, much of the time was spent exploring what this concept I call "hope" is, how each of us understand it, and what some less troublesome words might point to, personally and in our organizing spaces. Some participants felt "irritated or aggravated by the limitations of the word" (Robbie), noting that "there's frustration about this whole fricking hope thing. It's a hard word. It's a hard concept, and sometimes it's really fucking annoying" (Calvin). Some participants chose to explore the concept more thoroughly in their drawings. Jason explained this: "You know, at a certain moment when you're super activated, you just want to draw the stuff!" Even the combination of images and words were sometimes limited in what they could convey. Calvin shared, "There's no way of capturing something completely, there's always something that's missing, some sort of element". At one point, I asked the group, "Is hope a tool or an outcome or a process?" because of the different ways that participants were using the term.

Varied critiques of hope were raised by participants, including the ways that hope can be made to feel obligatory, can be used in neoliberal and capitalist ways, and can be forced rather than allowed to arise naturally. Participants explained that in some organizing spaces, the idea of hope is made to be almost mandatory, resulting in "obligatory hope" or the idea that "you have to hope, because how else will change happen?" (Calvin). We discussed some of the deeply neoliberal aspects of how hope is weaponized both within and against social movement work, and the way that there has been "capitalist capture" of the concept that is now "being used a lot by the nonprofit industrial complex" (Robbie). This mandating of a specific feeling and approach to change work was counterproductive, as Abby expressed by sharing that, "if you have too much hope it can go into despair, and too much despair can go into hope". This "circularity" (Abby) of hope and despair might be especially frustrating in organizing spaces where hope is made to feel

essential to the work, or when it is used "as a means to an end... without allowing hope to be organic" (Robbie).

Possible alternatives to the word hope were proposed throughout the focus groups, including creativity, dream/ing, emergence, escape, expectation, futurism (including specific concepts such as Afrofuturism, crip futurism, peer futurism), futurity, imagination (along with modifiers such as positive imagination, moral imaginations, imagination work), play or playfulness, possibility, tenacity, utopia, and vision. Jason explained, "if I'm just feeling hopeless about the thing, it's usually because I'm only imagining that it could go one way and that way can't happen", suggesting that hope is a way of imagining different possible futures. Other participants also explained hope by sharing what they understand to be the opposite of hope. When describing the urgency of organizing culture, Abby explained that this "urgency, fear-based, traumatic culture... I don't think is actually very hopeful or helpful". Abby also shared that "burnout is the opposite of hope in a lot of ways" and Or echoed this idea, explaining hopeful thinking as "the opposite of trauma brain". Participants used these external concepts to help clarify their perspective when they could not find the right language to describe hope itself.

What Does Hope Hold?

While each participant had different understandings of hope, there were common elements expressed across both groups. We discussed what the essential "building blocks of hope" (Or) might be. Some saw hope as related to positivity, using terms such as "positive optimism" and "positive imagination". Others used more spiritual language such as having "faith" or "belief" in a more positive future.

Many felt that hope had an imaginative quality to it, using words like "dreams", "imagination", "vision", and "wish". This connects to the concept of olam ha'ba and the idea that

"another world is possible". Or shared that having "more of that openness and spacious and curiosity" can result in a hopeful environment.

Another common theme was a drive that creates "the possibility of staying in something longer" (Or). Words like "sustaining", "mobilizing", "nourishing", "supporting", "resourced", and "sustainable" connected to this understanding of hope. I also noticed words like "tenacity" and "steadfastness" denoting the ability to stay within a difficult circumstance over a long time. Additionally, a few participants mentioned "long term visioning" and "longer term thinking" when explaining what hope means to them.

Many words that invoke togetherness were used to describe hope and what is needed to have hope. These include "unity", "symbiosis", "interconnection", "relationality", "compassion", "participatory", and "community". Abby discussed the work of researcher Ian Haney Lopez, describing his findings that, for organizers tasked with recruitment, "the most effective messaging is a multiracial, cross class message of hope and unity".

Participants also associated hope with building or creating something different, beyond the present reality, using words such as "changing", "restructure", "reconfigured", or phrases such as "create something bigger than itself", "build the world they want to see", and "a plan for the future". Others alluded to a similar idea of change, though in a less directly-intervening sense: "the assumption that people will change and things will shift" (Or). Some specified that the hopeful change they were imagining had to do with "healing and social justice", one that was "values-aligned and justice oriented", or creating "a feeling of abundance of liberation".

Other ideas that came up were hope as believing that it is "worth it" to show up or to care, and the notion of capturing nuance and richness within a particular movement space. There was lots of visual imagery in participants' responses, and many related to nature. Hope was referred to

as “rooted”, “grounded”, something that “has things growing”, reminiscent of a “fresh leaf”, and a thing that meets “what ecosystems need to thrive”.

Contradictory Perspectives

Some perspectives on hope directly contradicted one another. A beautiful vision of what they imagined when thinking about hope was shared by Or:

> There’s a lighter, brighter, sort of fluffy kind of hope, and then there’s hope that’s like... I’m imagining roots that are kind of gnarly or one of those trees that has been in the wind for too long and is bent over, but the roots are just grabbing on for dear life, and still alive.

Abby also shared a visualization, explaining hope in terms of visual associations they have with the concept:

> I was thinking about how would I visualize hope and I was thinking of things like a spark or a glimmer or glitter or a small flame or something that kind of is eye-catching.

In contrast to these imaginings, Jason explained that “hope to me is not very pretty; it’s very pragmatic in a way”. Abby described hope as bright and attention-getting, while Jason specified that their idea of hope is not necessarily visually appealing, rather it is more practical and use-focused. When Abby said “I’d like to think of hope like glitter”, it directly contracted Jason sharing “I don’t think of hope as being shiny”. While all three had discussed similar facets of hope such as imagination, relationality, and sustainability, they had very different ways of understanding how it might look or function – one poetic, the other more practical.

Alternate Terms Suggested

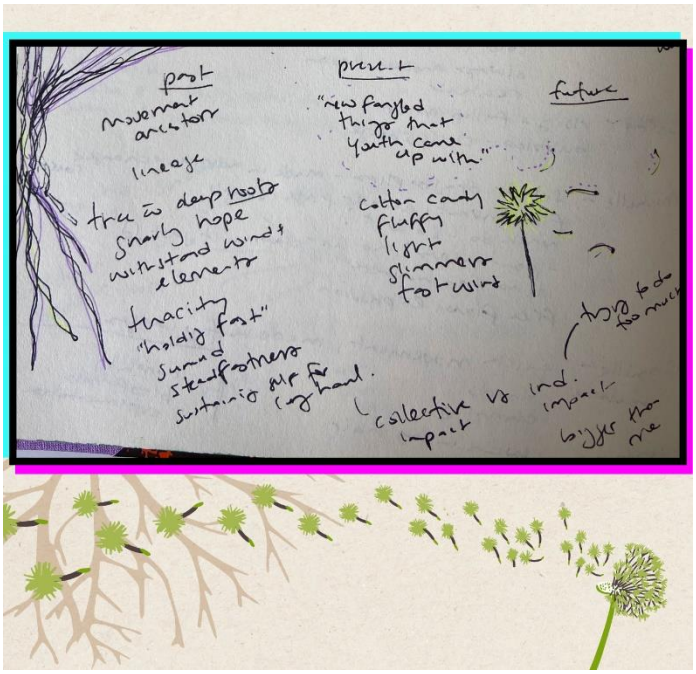
Throughout the conversation, many words and phrases were used to describe a concept that there was some level of agreement on, even though we did not reach consensus on preferred language. Robbie shared that “the conversation, it felt like a mystery game” as we tried to figure out what we were talking about when hope did not feel like the right word. It seemed that most

participants agreed that this thing I am calling hope has something to do with imagination, with sustaining or being sustained, with relationship or community, and with change - anywhere on a scale from active to passive. I have chosen to use the word hope throughout this thesis because it is the word I began with and recruited participants with, there was no consensus reached about a better alternative word, and to simplify the writing process. When reading the results, think of this imaginative, sustaining, and relational idea of change whenever I use the word "hope", and substitute it for a word that captures this idea for you, whether it be hope or something else entirely.

Some of my participants chose other words that resonated, although often their choice did not resonate for others in the room. For example, when the word "dreams" was proposed, Jason associated that word with the idea that one should "follow their dreams", without the necessary critique of the ways that certain people are much better resourced and free to follow their dreams than others. When a participant mentioned "positive imagination", discomfort was raised with the ways that term can add to feelings of obligatory optimism and maintaining a positive outlook in the face of oppression. This diversity of experience, feeling, and language is refreshing and pushes back against the notion of homogeneity within communities or among activists.

Language is and always will be limited. Until we find words that better describe this idea, hope will have to suffice. As Calvin so aptly phrased it: "Yeah. I don't think the words matter. Not really... They mean different things to different people." While, to each individual, the words mattered very much, it was meaningful to be able to talk about shared understandings of a concept across different ways of describing it. "Hope" is far from a perfect solution, but it is what I will use to describe this concept that we named and described in different ways, but all valued the presence of in our organizing work.

Temporalities of Hope



The theme of time came up repeatedly in our conversations about hope. It showed up in the words we chose, the stories we shared, and the ways we understood and used hope in our organizing work. In trying to figure out what is needed to create hopeful spaces, Or asked: "What do we need to enable more of those states where we can do that 'past, present, future' [thinking], and not just, 'this moment is all there is'?" Many participants nodded towards the idea of spacetime being connected, using the word "space" when talking about time, or talking about certain kinds of temporal spaces. Sometimes space was used to mean a physical place, and others it referred to the idea of spaciousness, or a feeling of there being permission to explore, try something new, or rest. Here I share some of the main ways that this theme arose during the focus groups.

The Past

One source of hope for participants was their relationship with organizing history. Abby noted that in order for social change work to be rooted in justice-focused values, "we need to ground it in all that history and on those building blocks". Or shared that one of the things that

"gives me hope are people who have been doing this work for longer than me" talking about how impactful it was to learn about "movement ancestors", learning from "elders and that kind of gnarlier tenacity-hope combo". They found it "sustaining and hopeful for me [that] there is a lineage to this, reading about The Jewish Labor Bund[7], or, you know, movement ancestors and being like, cool!" Understanding that there is a history to these fights for justice, and that people in the past have held hope in similar ways, keeps the work connected to that lineage of organizers. It takes up the work left by those before us, along with their hope that the work would continue, like the aforementioned proverb, "It is not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it" (Pirkei Avot 2:16).

This long history of social change work can also be a difficult idea to think about. When Or shared the joy they get from learning about organizing history, I commented that "I wish we weren't having to say the same things that [organizers have] been saying for 70 years, 100 years, 200 years". Or agreed that "there's always been these sort of counter forces at work, and there's something like a nuance" in the kinds of hope gained from historical organizing as compared to the kinds of hope gained from new ways of thinking and doing justice work. They shared that they wish there was not a need for anybody "to be steadfast in the face of this oppression for 100 years", but it also reminds them to slow down, remarking: "who am I to show up here and just be demanding immediate results and fast changes" when the work has been going on so long.

Calvin talked about the hope they get when they think even farther into the past, reminding themself of the grand scheme of time and space that came together to create our present reality:

[7] A political group of Jewish socialists operating in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia from 1897-1921.

> All these things evolved from single celled organisms that just by fluke happened to exist. There's something kinda hopeful about that. In the grand scheme of things, so many fucking amazing things have happened across so much time.

This allowed them to reflect not only on current change work and movement histories, but truly enabled a hope beyond the current human context, toward a cross-spacetime and species perspective. This comment resonates with a wish that Or expressed for "imaginative and zoomed out" spacetimes, proposing that these can enable the development or maintenance of hope.

The Future

Hope seemed to be a mostly future-oriented concept in the way it was discussed throughout the groups. Abby noted that, in their opinion, "hope is a prerequisite for building a better future". When they were exploring what might be needed in communities to achieve hopeful spaces, they explained it by "thinking about how much work we have to do ... in order to be able to move into a future where there's a feeling of abundance of liberation, instead of a scarcity of liberation". Jason also drew on this theme of hope begetting more hope, describing hope as "about building more and more space for the next time and the next time and the next time". In this way, hope was explained as a prerequisite for building a better future and simultaneously as an outcome of moving towards that future, creating a cycle of hope that sustains organizing work.

Notably, the future did not necessarily have to be radically different or agreed upon in order to create conditions of hope. The mere ability to see a future was able to create hope for some participants. In response to this idea, I commented that "some of the times that I felt the most hopeful was when I was able to see that there was a future that we were working towards, even if that future was, in six months we'll be having the same conversation with a different politician". Calvin agreed, emphasizing the utility of future-focused thinking across differences:

> We hear someone's dream about the future and we're like, that sounds like a nightmare! Or some parts of that feel icky to me. Or maybe there's something really interesting here that I can't quite put into words. And sometimes that teaches about the stuff we want, maybe? And the stuff we don't want too.

They further characterized this kind of thinking as a way to "approach the future with a playfulness, a curiosity, experimentation... not actually taking things too seriously". Using organizing time to dream and share these dreams for the future thus created hope.

Or mentioned the concept of olam ha'ba in one of their responses, which is an apt framework for understanding this. There are many different interpretations and understandings of what a 'world to come' might look like or refer to, as described in Chapter 3: Conceptual Frameworks, and there is much to learn from the version any one person dreams. Thinking about olam ha'ba whether on a spiritual level referring to how our actions impact the future, a practical level about building the future you would like to see, or something in between, olam ha'ba denotes an orientation towards the future.

Jason discussed the ways they actively tried to reach a more hopeful state in difficult moments:

> If I'm feeling like I'm doubting that I have hope or positivity or... something mobilizing, sustaining, something like that. Then playing with hope has to do with figuring out what other feelings or what other point of view could help me reach that relationship to the thing.

This intentional shifting of perspective and understanding of a situation allowed Jason to find a more hopeful state that could mobilize them to begin and sustain their work. Approaches to finding hope differed, in part based on how each participant interpreted the concept of hope – those who understood hope as an organizing tool talked about using it to spur action, like Jason does here.

Others, like Robbie, understood hope as a state of being to come to naturally, sharing that they "want to allow hope to catch me by surprise... to learn how to ensure that I am not suppressing hope, but not how to ensure I will feel hope". This difference of interpretation led to Robbie feeling like it would be artificial to work towards hope, whilst Jason felt that seeking hope was useful according to their understanding.

Similarly to the ways participants talked about elders being a source of hope, young people were also seen as hopeful. Abby, talking about a former job, explained that working with teenagers created hope for them, while also warning against the ways that adults can rely on younger people to be the ones to create change:

> I was working with teenagers and I think that gave me a lot of hope, but not in the way that people are always like, 'oh the children give me hope and I don't have to do anything as a result, cause they're doing the most!' But really, how do you be in it with what's not actually the next generation but is this current generation? And you know, having all the generations that are currently making change work together.

I mentioned the hopeful feeling I experience when working with queer youth, sharing that "it's a special feeling... to get to be in a room with just a bunch of queer and trans, mostly neurodivergent, absolutely silly, light-hearted teenagers is so special". Part of why this felt hopeful to me was the marked difference over time, in how many queer and trans teenagers are out and have spaces where they can just be silly, which "gives me hope. That is a pretty short timeline where things didn't necessarily get better on a public policy or governmental level, but there are these pockets and spaces being created" for young queer people. This example also highlights the ways that meaningful change can happen interpersonally and communally, not only at a macro level, and

especially how the timeline of interpersonal change can be drastically different to the expected timeline of creating policy or governmental changes.

For Abby, this was especially hopeful because of a trend they notice in the climate organizing spaces they frequent:

> I'm a relatively new organizer in the grand scheme of things and already feel like sometimes I'm by far the most experienced in a room... I just notice so many people my age and stage of life leaving organizing for other things that definitely can make change and fulfill some of the same things. But they're not based on that same theory of change, because it's really hard to stay!

Seeing many fellow organizers decide to pursue other strategies of change work, or burn out of movement work entirely, is disheartening. Being able to see a future for the movement in these passionate younger people can create conditions of hope. Abby learns from these teenagers who are not "jaded - they do funny things, but they also make real change and are really smart". The hope of seeing youth in organizing spaces is partially about noticing necessary changes in organizing approaches as different people step into decision-making positions.

Or described the relationship between the hope they get from elders and the kind they get from young people. Describing the hope they gain from learning about movement ancestors, they exclaimed:

> This isn't just some newfangled thing that the youth came up with! Even though I love newfangled things that the youth come up with! It's both. I love that, and I love when there's this thing that helps me to feel not alone and rooted in lineage.

This lineage was especially remarkable when it stretched both into the past and into the future at once. Just as it is vital to learn with and from elders, it is also important to continue "valuing the

energy and the perspective and the wisdom of young people" (Or). Abby discussed the feeling that teenagers are seen as a liability in movement work sometimes, because they may not have all the knowledge and experience that adults do. They explained that even though there is "so little capacity to do those trainings", deprioritizing the onboarding of younger and newer organizers into movement work is "just going to create such a challenge in the long term". Investing in the future of our movements is vital, and requires valuing and bringing in younger people and teaching them the wisdom of more seasoned organizers.

The Present

In both groups, participants talked about their relationship to the present. The context in which these focus groups were being held was one of difficulty and hard work for organizers. When asked about hope, some felt the need to contextualize the moment, using modifiers such as "The world is fucked up in so many ways right now, but I'm just imagining..." (Calvin). I also did this near the end of the focus group, explaining why this research feels so important to me, beginning my sentence with "the world feels like it has fallen apart in a lot of ways, and...". While most of us felt the need to stress how difficult it was to hold hope at this particular time, we also recognized how needed this conversation was, given the context. Abby closed out their contributions by saying: "I really needed this! I feel like it was an offering. I mean, I know we're offering you something, but it feels like you offered us something back" and Or said that the group "helped me to kind of weave together" thoughts they had "over the intensity and urgency of the last eight months" since October 7. The moment in time was recognized as a reason for both the difficulty of and the importance of thinking about hope.

Even while discussing hope in the present moment, participants were speaking in forward-pointing terms, however, there was a difference between actionable hope and hope that was more stagnant, but still future-oriented. Further, participants challenged the idea that hope must always

be moving. Certain language choices rejected the notion of pushing forward, and pointed to the ways that we miss responding to the moment and to one another when constantly in motion. For example, I highlighted how hopeful it was to be in "silly, lighthearted" spaces and Calvin pushed folks to ponder if hope can "just" be "an interesting thing to think about". These future-oriented comments were firmly rooted in the present, urging organizers to pause, even when thinking about the future.

There was a lot of curiosity and uncertainty about how the idea of hope fits into the present, rather than being a way of looking backwards and forwards in time. I explained that, to me, "hope is knowing that even if it feels like nothing is working or changing, or that we're going in circles, that's not where we will necessarily be for the rest of time". Robbie shared that "there's sort of a freedom" in relation to hope, "with as responsive a dynamic to whoever and whatever, in the moment". Some understood the present moment to be one that can be leveraged to be able to look towards the future. For example, Or asked: "what are some of the conditions in the present that allow me to want to carry forward?" Jason wondered "Is [hope] a matter of being active? Is it a matter of being patient?" To me, this question of taking action or being patient relates to the question of if hope can encompass staying present in the moment, or only relates to actively moving towards a future. Another tension that arose here was the worry that not thinking ahead might result in temporary fixes. As Or exclaimed: "How can you create something different out of the same toxic sludge, you know? [We] can't just restructure it differently temporarily!"

Calvin had an idea that responded to this worry, reminding group members that thinking about what change might look like is an important part of the work that happens before action is taken. They said, talking about their visions for a peer-led mental health support system: "[I'm] not even saying we go out tomorrow and change the system entirely to be like this. And just,

wouldn't this even be an interesting thing to think about?". This emphasizes the possibilities of staying in the present moment, as movements figure out what to do next, without prioritizing the action-focused work above the preliminary thought work. Thinking into the future without necessarily actively working towards it can be a form of hope that is needed at certain moments between action.

Or reached a place of balance between these pulls backwards and forwards, explaining the utility they see of hope as it relates to the present as well as the future -

> We actually need all of these things to thrive so, I think [I'm] just wanting to move out of a hierarchical, you know - the long-term visioning is the important thing, and the in the moment thing is reactive. They're all needed and important and can contribute to feelings of hope to different people in different times.

Similarly, Robbie remarked that hope is not "a set trajectory" or "a set amount of hope we need to have" in any given moment. They felt it important to have hope as it arises "in the moment", explaining their more present-focused perspective that allows them to "go wherever we feel called to go and sort of a freedom" surrounding where, how, and how much hope they could engage with at any given time.

Malleable Time

Outside of these more linear understandings of time, some participants discussed ways to play with time in a more non-linear fashion. Robbie shared that they like to think that "not everything is possible, but the possibilities are infinite", as a way of complicating the feeling that the better future we dream of is impossible. We discussed the idea that, even if the hope we hold is unlikely, there may be infinite other hopes and possibilities we have yet to dream into existence that can be equitable and just. Moving outside of linear time and away from direct and predetermined organizing pathways can open up these infinite possibilities.

Abby, describing the thought process that led them to create one of the pieces in the zine, said: “we might have more time than we think, and who says an hourglass can’t be refilled?” This poignant comment prompted a discussion about when we are told “to make time for [something]” and if time can be found or made. I responded that the way I play with time resonates more with the thought that “hourglasses can’t be refilled, but they can be flipped around”, thus resetting the time that was thought to have elapsed. Or shared that, for them, “hope is an active dynamic process, not a flat line”, fluctuating with time, energy, community, and other factors. I agreed that it felt like an active and fluctuating process in my experience as well, and that “being able to play around with time a little bit and put yourself in a time where you aren’t, in order to be able to get there” felt essential to my own hope.

Finding and creating experiences that shift the feeling of linear time, as well as spaces where exploring and expressing this non-linearity was welcome, also created hope for some participants:

> These immersive time warping experiences of being at a protest or an action or a training or an in-person gathering with organizers or even a Shabbat or a ritual space. I think those definitely give me a lot of hope. (Abby)

Being in these spaces and experiences of time-shifting allowed for a similar shifting for organizers’ ideas of what the future might hold. Notably, “finding time” is a more passive concept, whereas “making time” is an active process. Patient and slow temporalities can offer organizers the spaciousness to act, to learn, to connect, and to engage with spirituality. This understanding of time as dynamic and nonlinear, Abby expressed, offers them hope.

The importance of being able to pause and process was also an important element of hope for Or, who has been “offering spiritual care and processing spaces“ as one strand of their

organizing, creating these kinds of "time warping experiences", as Abby described. Or explained hope as an exercise of homeostasis, saying that "it doesn't mean a flat line, there's this movement that's happening, of trying to come back to this baseline of maintaining hope", rather than expecting to be at the same place, always. Allowing for this flexibility can help to prevent what Calvin calls "obligatory hope" or the idea that "you have to hope, because how else will change happen?". Being able to understand time through a holistic lens and recognizing its fluctuations can create a more self-compassionate space from which hope can (or cannot) be experienced without judgement.

Jason similarly commented on the utility of these kinds of open spaces that allow for flexible and patient notions of being in time:

> being able to share imagination, to share a dream means that there has to be some kind of space, and some kind of capacity to hold on to the discomfort of not understanding right away or the discomfort of disagreeing, but still working with someone to come to at least some point of connection.

This vision of a physical or metaphorical space where people can sit in disagreement and discomfort for an extended period of time, whether the length of that time is objective or subjective, is vital to enabling hopeful dreaming in community. Playing with time allowed participants to sit with the knowledge that "nothing's perfect, but we still need to be hopeful" (Abby), allowing for expansive understandings of futurity, time, and a better world.

Urgency and Burnout

Spaces that were fueled by a sense of urgency or a feeling that there is a scarcity of time seemed to lead to a lack of hope and an increase in burnout. Abby sees this in Palestine solidarity organizing, describing a "very urgency, fear-based" environment that is not "hopeful or helpful". They reminded us that "we also just know scientifically that urgency messaging does not work",

citing the research of Ian Haney Lopez. At the same time, spaces organized around this urgency, whether manufactured or reflective of the actual circumstances, are hard to avoid. I asked, "if I lose hope, is that okay?" knowing how difficult it is to escape burnout-filled movement work.

This thread brought in the idea of "dayenu". Or said: "even if all we're doing is what we're doing, dayenu". This concept is a powerful way to stay committed to and cognizant of time-bound goals, while also offering flexibility and care to ourselves and our co-organizers. It is a way of avoiding the urge to "come on fast and strong and burn out like a comet" (Or), instead remembering that to be in this work is to be in the long game. It is a way to avoid "demanding immediate results and fast changes" and a reminder that change work is "not a lightning fast thing" (Or).

Movements need to "find ways to keep people in it for the long haul" (Abby). This includes planning for both proactive and responsive care when organizers burn out. Preventative measures can create a culture where rest is prioritized and help in avoiding situations where organizers burn out and leave social change work. Burnout response can intervene early in the experience of burnout to avoid furthering the harm, and help those who have left these spaces find ways back in without shame for having taken a break. This should be a communal priority, because "sustaining yourself to do organizing or other forms of change making over the long haul is really tiring" (Abby). Or explained that they think there needs to be a "combination of jumping into action and responding to the moment" when there is an influx of new organizers with things like recruitment, training, and care work. We discussed the role of strategy in promoting "long-term visioning" (Or) and future-focused thinking. I shared that:

> I was involved in an organizing space that...did a lot of things very quickly without necessarily thinking about strategy or long-term goals... 7-8 months later down the line, most of the people who jumped on are not in those spaces anymore.

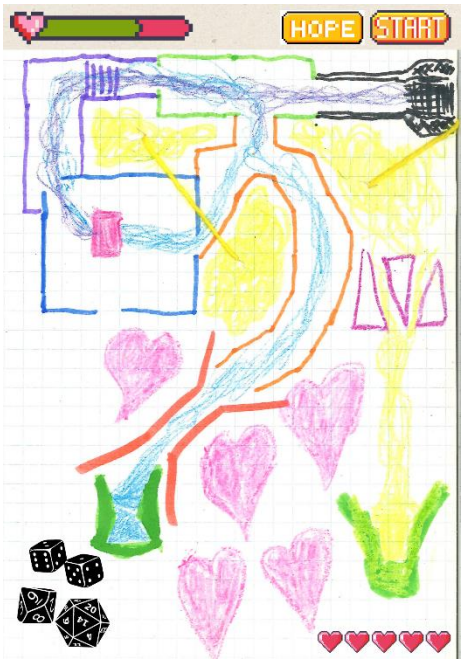
Abby resonated with this, sharing an anecdote of their own:

> Five years doesn't really feel like a long time. But so many climate organizers have gotten so burnt out, or jaded, or moved to other, also important causes. And there just aren't that many of us left that are still really in it that are from the pre-pandemic era and that's just not even that long ago!

Not only does enforced urgency create burnout, as Abby explained, but it also leads to the loss of valuable knowledge gained from the work, leading to the repetition of the same mistakes, further burnout, and cyclical hopelessness.

Participant comments thus highlighted the relationships between hope and the past, the present, and the future, as well as complicating these divisions by discussing the malleability of time. The interwoven nature of hope and temporality led to deep critiques of urgency culture and the burnout all participants have experienced in organizing spaces. When movement leaders reinforce capitalist demands of productivity on organizers, it becomes difficult to find hope in the process or the product of social change work.

Dreaming of, Imagining, Playing at Hope



In both focus groups, an appreciation of dreaming, imagining, and playing with different possibilities or hypothetical worlds was raised as something that can create hope. Approaching such difficult work with a childlike playfulness and imagination, allows organizers to sustain their efforts and push for possibilities not yet considered. Doing this communally was especially important, with Or sharing that "there's this alchemy that happens when you get people together in these ways that are present and curious and playful, that creates so much possibility and so much hope".

Calvin describes "playing with hope" as looking like "fun energy, creative, not taking things too seriously" and says that they think these kinds of spaces are "so important". In one of the art pieces they created, they wrote "hope is a playground", nodding to the idea of hope as a place to have fun, be imaginative, and let go of some of the seriousness that can be present in justice-oriented movements. Jason also thought that this was an important factor in finding and

maintaining hope, commenting that "being able to play is just curiosity and experimentation... [being] sensitive to your knowledge of the situation without necessarily really trying to drive it to a particular end". Or also used the words "curious", "playful", and "imaginative" to describe hopeful spaces or processes.

Should We Dream?

The open-endedness of play contributed to participants' valuing of spaces where imagination was welcome. Jason commented that they find it "really meaningful" when spaces are designed "so that playing isn't about coming up with response per se", but rather allow room for exploration without an intended outcome. They continued: "If you're talking about being able to share, you end up being able to share imagination, to share a dream". This enabled the finding of "hope through whatever, as a creative process" (Calvin). It allowed Jason to "imagine other possible" outcomes, countering their experience where "if I'm just feeling hopeless about the thing, it's usually because I'm only imagining that it could go one way and that way can't happen". They describe this feeling as "sort of between dreams and expectations", where the dream can create new and hopeful expectations for a future outcome. Abby similarly pointed out that in order for "movements to build the world they want to see within them", they need to get out of "that sludge" of being stuck with the future we have been told we are headed towards, rather than imagining alternatives.

Dreaming was talked about as an exercise that is useful both for individuals and as larger groups. Calvin expressed that dreams "don't need to necessarily be concrete" and said that "we can dream a personal dream, and... we can recognize it won't work for everyone". I agreed, sharing that "the idea of playing with [hope] to me, holds that it's going to look different for different people" and that "there doesn't have to be ***a*** hope that we hold, but what feels sustaining and nourishing to individuals". Or shared that when people feel empowered to have individual dreams,

it infuses organizing spaces with “individuals who are moving with hope or embodying hope” who can then “pass onto other people and to create this overall sense”.

That said, Or emphasized that “you also need the environment that you’re in, or the communal space, to be reinforcing that and supporting that and nourishing that” for the individuals to dream, pass on that energy, and create space for others to find their own imaginative explorations of hope. Others also talked about collaborative dreaming, with Jason calling play “a social thing” and Calvin saying that they understand “processes of co-dreaming as play”. Hoping and dreaming definitely change when done in isolation versus alongside a community or a movement. Abby remarked that “grappling with things with people is good”, as part of a reflection at the end of the focus group, and also a broader comment about generating hope through conversations with others. As I reflected at the end of the group as well, I commented that “I love that so much of what was said was stuff I’ve been thinking about, and so much of what was said was stuff that I hadn’t thought about. I think that’s a really wonderful thing”. This showed me what can happen when dreaming with others, even after spending time imagining hopeful futures by myself in the lead up to the focus groups.

While participants saw the utility of dreaming, many also expressed that dreaming has been devalued. Calvin reflected that they “think the language of dreaming is particularly important because of the ways that it has been actively discouraged within our current society”. Or expressed that they have heard right-wing groups say that “the role of the left” is “naive, it’s not grounded in reality, it’s idealistic and can never pan out”, discouraging this kind of expansive and hopeful dreaming. They compared it to the ways that children get scolded into choosing practical career paths, rather than following their dreams:

> I just got an image of their inner child, who was told... you can't be a fairy or an artist or whatever. That's unrealistic! You know, the ways that each of us in our own ways has gotten that squashed out of us.

Calvin commented that "one of the things I think about play is, I think we can dream new worlds and not actually want to make them the reality", emphasizing the importance of dreaming regardless of if practical changes follow. They explained,

> Even if it's not a dream that we're actively working towards, I think it's generative to think about... if we wanted to implement some of the things we learned from it, how might things change, so that we take some of those elements that we think would be cool about that system.

Both participants stressed that whether organizers aim to make a dream into reality fully, partially, or not at all, the dreaming itself is important and worth prioritizing.

Another related term that came up repeatedly was "possibility". Or said that to them, hope is "being able to hold that something else might be possible". When Jason was discussing a difficult situation they had been in as it relates to their experience of hope/lessness, they asked, "Is there even a possibility to imagine something [different or better]?". After Robbie shared their belief that "not everything is possible, but the possibilities are infinite", I mentioned that I feel a tension between those two words, describing "the shininess of possibility" and the endlessness of the infinite. Some of this language expresses the way that one can be broadly hopeful without necessarily finding the specific dream they are hoping for, while believing in the possibility for things to change in a positive direction yet to be imagined. As Abby exclaimed, "There's got to be a better way to do it! I don't know what it is, but...", trailing off with hope, rather than constructing a specific idea of what it might look like. Or mentioned an art piece they found in the "Olam Ha'ba

Planner" (referred to above as the Dreaming the World to Come Planner) that said "another world is possible", and connected this sense of possibility to the maintenance of hope.

Between playing, dreaming, imagining, sensing the possibilities, engaging creatively, experimenting, being curious, and other similarly light and exploratory frameworks, these orientations towards thinking and feeling allow for hope. Whether these create a personal dream, a collective vision, or no concrete idea at all, participants found this to be a valuable way into finding, maintaining, and utilizing hope in their organizing and community work.

What Might We Gain from Playing, Dreaming, Imagining?

Playfulness and imagination was used to create a number of outcomes. Some participants used it as a way to learn about themselves or others. Calvin commented that "we learn things about ourselves through making these dreams or looking at other people's dreams and responding to them", learning both from the dreaming itself, and the response we have to other people's dreams. Robbie shared that "what play gets at is allowing for… autonomy and emergent imagination". Jason, talking about their experience of the focus group's collective imagining around hope, remarked: "I feel like I understood some new things that just had really different perspectives" to their own ideas about hope.

Some found that playfulness creates the ability to act with hope. Abby, sharing about conversations they had while canvassing for a politician and being met with cynicism, reflected:

> [When] people are trying to call me naive, I think they're actually jealous that I have hope or that I'm doing something, or they actually want to be a part of it... I think they wish they could have that hope.

Abby sees their own so-called naivety as part of what enables them to be "doing something" and working towards tangible change. Jason expressed a similar idea, saying that "to explore", "to

dream", and "to discuss... makes that [change] more and more possible", directly connecting the thought work to the active work.

Jason also discussed play as a tool towards emotional regulation. When describing some of their drawing process while creating pieces for the zine, they shared that they chose shapes and colours based on other times where that imagery helped them to stay regulated. Jason explained: "well, let's just return to that space and see how it works. I feel like it's keeping me kind of how I want to be", especially enabling them to remain "feeling pretty steady and pretty sensitive" within an at-times difficult conversation. They also described the ability to "talk and support one another as we're working" as a way to "build a certain kind of capacity to stay in playing and stay in exploration", further enabling the supporting of one another.

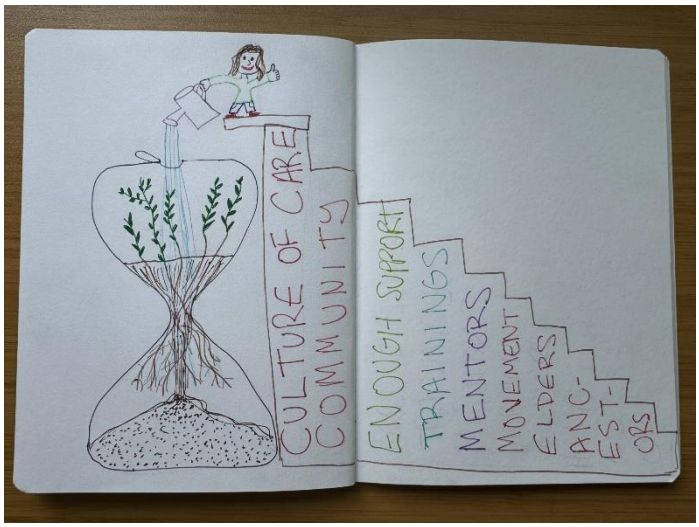
Lastly, play contributed to openness – openness to connection, exploration, action, and hope. Or explained that the arts-based, playful setting of the focus group set up the conversation for "spaciousness and openness, [which] gave us that oxygen for these things to happen". They stressed that this kind of openness "does the thing that we ultimately want more than trying really hard to program stuff" in rigid ways that lead to forgone conclusions. Robbie expressed a similar idea, describing this dynamic using terms such as "emergent", "freedom", and "responsive". They posed the question:

> I think cultivating our spirits such that we are prepared to feel and navigate hope when it does arise could be tremendously powerful for our movements. Because it will come. And how do we feel it fully, while understanding the troubles that can still arise?

Jason expressed that the openness of play-spaces and dream-spaces are "probably not about correctness" and not about finding "**the** solution or **the** answer or **the** perspective to have". Instead,

they allow for open exploration and connection that can create newness in organizing work and the relationships involved in getting there.

Prerequisites for Hope



Two main categories arose when participants discussed what they needed in movement spaces to hold and sustain hope. Firstly, all participants discussed the need for spaces of relationship development, building community across difference, and the work that goes into caring for one another. Having these values prioritized in organizing groups allowed folks to meet their own needs, alongside those of community members, in hopeful ways. Secondly, participants discussed the tangible and structural resources, training, and mentorship that was needed to sustain hopeful spaces.

Community Care

All participants discussed the need for community in organizing spaces, to create the conditions where hope could arise and be sustained. As Abby explained, “I feel the most hopeful when I’m in community and not alone”. Participants specifically mentioned the need for supportive relationships, building community across differences, and the presence and valuing of

care work. These were important to feeling supported, valued, and cared for in a way that sustained the change work on a larger level, while also sustaining the people creating the change.

Relationships

Relationality was noted as one component of environments that nurture hope. For Or, spaces that created hope were ones that allowed them to "keep growing and keep nourishing, and for me a huge part of that is my relationships". Feeling able to nourish and be nourished was directly tied to the relationships that Or has within change-making circles. They emphasized the importance of "that interconnection and relationality" and that "how we show up matters" in ways that can support others. They shared that in order to find hope, they needed "a feeling of not doing it alone and feeling... grounded in myself and my relationships". Abby shared that "human interactions give me a lot of hope", with Or agreeing, specifying that "one-on-one" and "more intimate conversations with people" create spaces for nuance. This nuance was recognized as hopeful because it allowed folks to learn from one another's visions for the future, and dream together in ways that support a multitude of needs and desires.

Jason also talked about the role that relationships play in their experience of hope, commenting that hope is tied to the idea of being in "honest relation and mutually supportive relation". When explaining the pragmatism of the hope they held, they shared that sometimes organizing feels like "slogging through" and the hope comes in as other organizers offering "a 'you've got this' or something". In this way, Jason tied the development of hope with their relationships with other organizers. Being able to count on co-organizers and organizing leadership to provide this reassurance and encouragement enabled hope, even when the work got difficult.

Calvin spoke extensively about the idea of peerness and shared lived experience, emphasizing the importance of relationality when offering or receiving support. They shared a dream where "when someone says they're struggling, the response isn't 'have you talked to your

doctor?' but instead 'have you tried talking to someone else that's been through it?'". These relational networks would be able to offer support in ways that centred peer-to-peer relationships and reclaimed power from the psy disciplines. Robbie discussed being "responsive" to other people, in a way that suggests ongoing and caring relationship, and an ability to show up for others' needs.

For some, creating change on a relational level was able to sustain hopeful feelings even when larger-scale change was out of reach. Or explained: "if that's all that we're doing and it doesn't change anything, we're still changing something because we're changing ourselves and we're changing each other". Abby agreed, saying:

> I think when I often lose hope is when I stop believing what you just said, Or. I think it feels like there's so much wrong with the world and there's so much work that needs to be done, and it's not enough to just change ourselves and each other.

I reflected that "I've left a number of movement spaces that didn't feel open to that kind of relationship work", because of how vital it is to my ability to sustain my organizing and my hope. Robbie shared the ways that these relationships can help one embrace hope after an organizing win, describing what happens after "hearing news that makes us think that something may go well for our community... we can hug each other in pre-emptive celebration and hope for our shared future." Others echoed this experience, suggesting that relationships are not only important to ensure that change work happens or to ensure that organizers are hopeful, but also are involved in how long one might stay in an organizing role.

Community across differences

Reflecting on relationships, participants emphasized the particular importance of having community with others who have different perspectives. Or critiqued the lack of diversity they see in some movement spaces, sharing that "what we need to create movements that are thriving"

involves organizing beyond "just having a bunch of mostly young, mostly white organizers coming in with... shared perspectives on how to do things". They specified the need for "racial diversity, class diversity, [and] gender" diversity, stressing "the difference between really diverse, rich ecosystems, versus a monocropping situation". This apt analogy between what is nourishing and sustainable for the earth and for people was a powerful vision, especially as we discussed climate activism. I reflected that the word sustainability is often used in climate justice movements "as in, sustaining the earth", whereas I hear it used in disability justice movements "about sustaining your energy and sustaining the work". Ensuring that we bring the diversity needed to sustain organizers can enable movements to continue to sustain the earth as well.

Organizers within a movement do not have to agree on method or outcome in order to collaborate, working towards a similar goal. In fact, part of the value of having diversity within a movement is that you are better resourced to meet "all of these different roles that are needed in social change movements" (Or). Abby shared "how good it feels to grapple with these things together", emphasizing that "sharing our uncertainties about hope can actually make us maybe more hopeful" when we talk across differences and share our perspectives with one another. Calvin proposed a new approach to disagreements within a group, offering that we can ask ourselves:

> How do we... understand dissenting opinions and not do the shitty thing where we're compromising or finding that halfway point? But how do we actually work towards something that we can all get behind [and] participate in?

Having the ability to be in community with others who disagree with us and still find a way forward that different people can support in their own way, created hope for Calvin.

Further, participants wanted to create avenues for different movements to talk to, support, and learn from one another. Or explained that they find hope in "this idea of the whole. That we're

all connected, all these struggles are connected". Abby agreed, noting that "so many powerful interests want to keep us divided" and it is important to combat that with less "division messaging and much more communal and hope-based messaging" across justice issues. I resonated with this, sharing that "I think most movements can do a lot of learning from other movements" in order to work toward a vision of justice that is responsive to many people's needs.

In our discussion about building community across disagreements, we noted the ways that we have experienced these diverse communities doing harm within the group, and talked about how organizing spaces can respond to this harm when it happens. Abby told the group that they have "never been a part of a movement that hasn't created some harm to someone at some point". They asked us, when our movements "are made-up of messy humans and it's going to be harmful, how do we work with that?" This is a difficult topic that all of us have witnessed happen within and across organizing spaces.

Or expressed that in order to prevent and address intracommunity harm, it is important to challenge some of the "cultural ideas baked into organizing where... there is a lot placed on individuals and their charismatic ways of speaking" and the idea that, for any one individual, "you uniquely have these things and we need **you**". When certain people are placed on a pedestal, it can become even more difficult to address harm that comes from that person. Another idea that Or had was to intentionally try to avoid "the ways that people's humanity and nuance gets flattened online", and actively prioritize nuanced conversations that centre the humanity of all people, especially when somebody has been harmed. Recognizing and valuing the diversity of perspectives within a community can enable these conversations when harm arises, allowing all group members to express their opinions, their needs, and their experiences to others in the group.

Care Work

Organizing within cultures of care was another value that felt important to sustaining hope for many participants. Abby expressed that having "spaces that are centering community care, disability justice - not only is that taking care of the people who need it most, but also everyone!" They shared that these kinds of spaces are "creating a culture that hopefully stays hopeful and prevents burnout" for all organizers, but especially those who offer the care work and are most in need of receiving it. They also explained that although there are "some mistakes you just have to make", they have seen how "some are preventable with community care". It is thus important that "we help each other prevent burnout so that we're not having this cycle". Or shared that "seeing care woven into organizing spaces" brings them hope, explaining that "healing and social justice movements are not these separate strands. We need one within the other, always". They also emphasized that "our movements need... the people that are making soup for the people coming back from the protest" in addition to those at the protest itself. In this way, participants highlighted how care work enables hope, offers healing, prevents burnout, and intercepts mistake making.

Unfortunately, this care work is often "not valued in life, in professional spaces, and movement spaces because of the ways that it's been gendered" (Or), along with the associations made between care work and race, sexuality, and socioeconomic status explored by Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018). Even though they were able to recognize why this work is devalued, Or still expressed that when care is "one of the main ways that I've been showing up" they still end up "feeling like it's not the actual work! I should be doing other stuff too". Calvin dreamed about a "world where there are supports available for people, but this entire system is led by people with lived experience", a dream that Or is meeting in their organizing spaces by offering this kind of care work to other organizers. This also highlights a tension whereby many marginalized folks feel

safer to be cared for by others who share their identity, and also wish that nondisabled allies would take on some of the labour, because of how "care work is exhausting" (Abby).

Communities that allowed for and encouraged rest were also seen as ones where hope was easier to access. For this to be possible, movements needed to avoid "overreliance or overemphasis on individual people and not on the whole and the collective" (Or). This reinforced for individual organizers that "it's absolutely bigger than me and that I can take breaks and I can try out new roles in movements" (Abby). These elements helped "to create the conditions such that when [hope] is ready to emerge, I can actually feel it", as Robbie shared. Restful spaces reflected the value of Shabbat and its ability to connect communities in rest, not only in times of difficulty and hard work. Or pushed back against the kinds of spaces that make organizers feel like "taking a nap or resting are antithetical to organizing", instead emphasizing the hopefulness of restful and caring spaces.

Resourced Communities

Training

Practical supports that participants mentioned include trainings, mentorship and support, leadership, skills development, and theoretical learning. Abby stressed that "I think we need to find ways to keep people in it for the long haul, both in terms of hope... and also training and mentorship and support". They pointed to training as itself hopeful, saying that "training gives me hope! I love giving and receiving training and I think they're very important in these times", when many people are entering social change work for the first time. They stressed that if you are going to organize, "you gotta know certain skills, you gotta know certain history" in order to do so responsibly. Abby explained that when they have been given training, it felt "so empowering" to realize that "things that feel like a mystery actually might not be a mystery!" Finding these answers and resources where they could learn more, enriched their organizing and their hope.

A few organizations that were mentioned as meeting these leadership and skills-building needs well include Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), and The Nap Ministry. Or shared that in October 2023 when there was an influx in organizers, JVP leadership had "a recognition that there's a need for that training" of new organizers. Shortly thereafter, Or saw them "putting together and offering these trainings for people that are in any sort of leadership role and [it] is amazing!" This allowed for skill development, institutional knowledge transfer, community building, and an understanding of the skills and knowledge bases that new organizers were bringing to the space.

We discussed the kinds of trainings we have seen and the ones that we would like to see developed and offered. Abby wanted to see more introductory-level trainings, in addition to the specific skills-based training they see:

> I don't know of a single basic organizing training that's happened in Pittsburgh. There's been 'decontaminate your eyes from tear gas'. There's been 'how to be a marshal'. There's been 'de-escalation'. They're very protest focused. But I've not seen any organizing 101s. Here's how you do a one-on-one. Here's how you do base building. Here's how you build a team. Here's how you make decisions.

Abby explained that even though they know some organizers who are "ready to meet the moment on that", it is a rarity "because it's not a thing that's been that valued or that trained". I agreed with this, adding that I have seen "trainings on very immediate in the moment skills" but "I've never really seen a training for organizers on how to be in relationship with each other in a way that prevents burnout". Abby also noticed this, exclaiming: "and that's so scary! We have all these people who are now in leadership without any of that training". Both of us worried about the ways this sets up newer organizers for making errors and burning out, especially when movements do

not have "the right skills or the right training or support for those people that are coming in", something that Or agreed can be "drains to hope in communal spaces".

Jason shared about a kind of training they offer in the form of "drawing courses" that are used to create spaces that avoid the question, "Is this a good drawing or a bad drawing?" This helps to "build a certain kind of capacity" for folks to work through the ways "that people relate to that and have internalized their version of that", in their art practices as well as other areas of life. Creating these spaces that allow for expansive notions of outcomes beyond "good" or "bad", is a hopeful organizing skill that can be taught through creative trainings and community building, beyond specific organizing skill acquisition.

Mentorship/support

Outside of training for specific skills building, general mentorship and leadership was also valued in relation to hope. Jason, sharing more about their drawing classes, explained that the approach is "not [focused on] a lot of accumulation or developing technique. It's very responsive and very intuitive" to the needs of the group. Or shared that it is important to "keep them [more experienced organizers] around so that they can share this hard-won knowledge" merely by being present, even if they are not able to offer specific trainings or workshops. Abby reflected this idea when they commented: "I'm not growing very much. I don't have a lot of support or mentorship or resources to get better and [I] feel myself hitting walls sometimes". This stagnation of organizing growth contributed to a lessening of hope, in that it made future change feel out of reach. When this is not prioritized, it can lead to the breakdown of organizing relationships:

> It's so silly! We're just going to put people in a position where they have too much on their plate and not enough support and then also not be okay, when people make mistakes! It's just - what a recipe for disaster. (Or)

They emphasized that mentorship is especially important to making sure that new organizers can find their place in movement spaces "in a way that will ultimately be sustainable for them and for us and for all of us", calling the inability to do so "a disservice".

Accessibility

Most participants of this study identified with experiences of disability and one component of hopeful organizing spaces was a commitment to accessibility. Abby shared that when they entered a movement space that already had accessibility considerations built into the work, they thought of it as "a green flag in many ways". Or also expressed this idea, saying that "when I see those things already baked into organizing spaces, that feels hopeful because it's considering people and their needs and their ability to stay in movements". They recognized this value as one that is "more sustainable to have that built in", rather than added as an afterthought once confronted with a disabled organizer's individual needs. Continuing our discussions of having left movement spaces that did not feel aligned with disability justice values, I mentioned that I have noticed that it is often due to "not having accessibility needs met or not feeling safe in whatever other identities you hold in that room". This connects to the value participants placed on diverse communities across differences, whereby organizers can bring their full selves into the movement work.

Skills

Participants mentioned some specific skills useful to having hope in their organizing work. Abby wanted to learn skills for talking to people who are "telling you their deepest fears" when met with the prospect of change work. Being able to respond to these fears in ways that are validating but not hopeless was important to Abby. Jason was interested in "building skill, building language" and "building experience" talking to folks across differences. They talked about an experience they had in which:

> it wasn't just a disagreement. It was an inability to try. There was a lack of, I guess you might call it empathy, but just an inability to figure out how to be comfortable with where all the parties were.

They wanted to learn how to create spaces where organizers are consistently "committing to... trying to figure out what that meant and how to help everyone else figure out where they were in relation to one another". These experiences, Jason felt, are difficult to move through without chances to practice these skills in supportive environments. Calvin agreed, sharing that "we can learn organizing skills... if we can have a conversation" with those that disagree with us.

Abby and Or both discussed the hope that can come from figuring out what your role might be in movement work. Abby connected this directly to their ability to hold hope, remarking: "I think I'm still really wrestling with, how do I maintain individual hope? And also what is my individual best role in movements?". Or suggested a framework, known as the Social Change Ecosystem Framework (Iyer, 2017), as one that might be supportive for Abby. Or explained that it "has been really keeping me hopeful, and I've shared [it] with a lot of people and [it] has helped other people feel hopeful, too". They also explained that there is a skill in realizing that you can hold multiple roles, and in knowing when it makes sense to move into a different role, rather than getting stuck. In their own words:

> I think to me it's just again coming back to this idea of diversity in a healthy ecosystem. We actually need all of these different types of people and energies and different people can embody more than one role.

Part of this is self-knowledge and self-awareness, a skill Jason thought important. They explained that "if we understand those pieces of ourselves in parts, then we also understand how to recombine them and build them, deepening and articulating that". Understanding yourself, your skills, and

the areas where you still need to grow can help you figure out what kinds of movement roles can feel possible, hopeful, and right for you at any given moment.

Theory of change

Abby used the term "theory of change" in one of their responses, referring to the ways that different movement groups understand how and why change can occur in a given context. They suggested that a group's theory of change can encourage or devalue training and skills-development, as well as help newer organizers learn how change is understood in the group. I expressed that part of why I am interested in this topic, is that "I think most movements can do a lot of learning from other movements", in part because of the variance across theories of change. To me, "having strategy can lead to hope", especially when this strategy takes into account different perspectives, methods, and actions. Reflecting on this idea, Abby shared that:

> What I'll take with me into my movement space is more of a focus on those things I wrote on the steps [in an art piece for the zine], especially in newer organizing happening right now around Palestinian liberation.

The words on the steps include the words "mentors", "trainings", and "enough support". Having these kinds of structural opportunities for learning can ensure that our movements are grounded in history, specific theories of change, and opportunities to learn both hope and action.

Robbie emphasized that theory of change should come from the community, rather than falling into the ways they saw "hope being used a lot by the nonprofit industrial complex", which they described as asking organizers "how can we create hope so that people continue to engage with our cause, even as we are actually hopelessly failing and structurally we may be enabling harmful structures more than we are (re)creating positive ones?" Having a clear theory of change that is developed and enacted by those most impacted by the issue being organized around can allow for a more organic hope to arise, rather than hope in service of meeting arbitrary targets.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This thesis sought to understand how grassroots organizers and activists maintain hope, given the difficult nature of social change work. In this chapter I outline the relationships between each of the results, and connect them to relevant literature outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. Drawing connections between the findings begins the work of understanding participant contributions more holistically, rather than divided into distinctly separate categories. As with utilizing zine as method, this approach to the discussion layers unique contributions atop one another, thus creating additional, new conceptual understandings of hope that have arisen out of the focus groups and artwork created within them.

	TIME	**IMAGINATION**	**CARE**	**RESOURCES**
TIME		Futurity	Flexibility	Elders / Mentors
IMAGINATION	Leaving time for imagination / visioning		Supporting visioners	Dreaming workshops
CARE	Lack of urgency	Imagining a relational future		Access infrastructure
RESOURCES	Consistent, planned trainings and mentorship	Playful imaginative spaces	Care for the carers / access-centred culture	

Imaginative Time and Time for Imagining

Creating time for imagination and playfulness is one factor that may lead to hope in an organizing context. Even the "possibility to imagine something", as Jason shared, was a hopeful prospect. Understanding this kind of dreaming as essential to the work of organizing allows for possibilities to be imagined and then "lived into", as expressed by Jewish Diasporist Bergen (2021).

Imagining that another world is possible and dreaming it into being enacts an olam ha'ba, a world to come, as existing in the present. This follows hooks's (2003) assertion that hope is an orientation towards the future, and takes up Goode and Godhe's (2017) explanation of critical futurism as challenging the ever-present cynicism about what the future might hold.

When organizing cultures urge people to be constantly acting, this dream time is missed, making it much more difficult to imagine the future that change work could be moving towards. Participants highlighted the ways that "we can dream new worlds and not actually want to make them the reality" (Calvin), finding value and necessity in the dreaming itself. Dreaming allows organizers to collapse linear concepts of time (Stanhope, 2023) and challenge perceived inevitability in a way that offers something more to our futures (Gallop, 2013). Bringing playfulness into these contexts is essential to imagining a future one wants to work towards making a reality.

Further, taking an imaginative approach to time itself by thinking in ways that align with futurism can enable hope. Embracing nonlinearity through temporal orientations such as crip time and queer time, as described in Chapter 3, creates the openness needed to develop hope. When participants discussed the ability to "move into a future" (Abby), they were expressing moments of timeswerve (Wolfson, 2021) and drawing on futurism as a way to sustain hope. Playing with time in this way reminds organizers of the possibilities beyond the linear and encourages varied and personal temporalities of change to emerge. Utilizing timekeeping tools that bend normative ideas of how time works, such as the tools mentioned in the Chapter 3 subsection on olam ha'ba, allows storytelling and collective dreaming to enter into temporal practices. Being in these spaces and experiences of time-shifting allows for a similar shifting of organizers' hopes for what the future might be like.

Care Time and Time for Caring

Operating through a caring temporality and making intentional time for care work is another way toward creating organizing spaces where hope can emerge. A key to this kind of care time is embodying a lack of urgency, focusing on relationship building and maintaining momentum, as discussed by Reyes (2019). It is important to remember, and remind others, that justice work has a long past and will have a long future of the organizing lineages Rudd (n.d.) discusses and that Or mentioned in the focus group. Long-term change involves many people taking on many roles, such as those outlined in the Iyer Social Change Ecosystem Map (2017); we cannot expect ourselves or even our immediate organizing groups to finish the work. This reflects the words of Rabbi Tarfon, noting each of our responsibilities to do the work, and none of our responsibilities to do it alone or complete it. Taking a patient and slow temporal orientation to change work ensures that we can take care of ourselves and one another, and maintain hope in doing so, while trying to do tikkun olam, to repair the world.

Participants shared difficult experiences in urgency-fueled movement work, sharing that they noticed a loss of wisdom as burnt out organizers left their organizing roles because of the ways some movements believe that "resting [is] antithetical to organizing" (Or). Disability Justice wisdom, such as Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2018) book "Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice" demonstrates how essential care and community is to getting true justice work done. Creating time for building relationships, caring for one another, and developing community can lead to hope and create relational and values-aligned orientations to time. Even when the goal is to think into the future, encouraging moments to pause and be present are necessary and, as Mauch (2019) argues, deeply subversive. Maintaining these relationships with elders and retaining the wisdom of more

seasoned organizers was directly linked to hope in participant comments, further reinforcing the need for this shift away from urgency.

Another part of the work towards a patient temporality of organizing, as suggested by Jason, is embracing flexibility by allowing different people within movement work to operate on different timelines, take the rest they need, and engage how they can and when they can by offering multiple modes of and opportunities for engagement. This follows Thomas Bernard's (2020) understanding of critical hope, rooted in accessible community care. This can also ensure that neither those giving nor receiving care are pathologized or looked down upon. Encouraging an embrace of non-linear time such as through crip time or queer time, and Price's (2011) notion of individualized approaches to normative time frames, can be one way of offering care, utilizing the ethic of dayenu, recognizing the import and sufficiency of each and every action towards justice. This inherent value placed on all organizers and their work can be one way of embodying care time and honouring the time used for caring.

Resourced Time and Time for Resources

Where time and resources overlap, one might find movement elders. Ensuring that there is a place in movement spaces for folks who have been committed to social change work for a long time is essential to creating environments where hope might arise. This perspective holds what Or refers to as the "gnarly tenacity-hope" in addition to the fresher, brighter hope of younger organizers. Both Toliver (2021) and Duncan-Andrade (2009) point to the need for intergeneration and transgenerational communal dreaming and education, stating that this quality contributes to hopefulness. Or also pointed to the quality of steadfastness in relation to hope, which was identified as the root of the word emunah by the Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion (2011). To have

steadfast spaces, we need to embrace movement elders, even when they may not be able to contribute in a frontline manner or may be advocating for older changemaking strategies.

Making time for resources by implementing consistent, proactive training for organizers can also contribute to hopeful environments, whilst bridging the gap between individual action and building sustainable organizations as discussed by Taylor (2016). Allocating time and resources to training development and facilitation, especially in moments when there is an influx of interest in a given issue like Abby and Or had mentioned, is vital. Putting time toward resourcing organizers is not a waste of time that could be used in action, instead, it can be reframed as an organizing action itself. Proactively strategizing around burnout prevention and equitable distribution of the work can help sustain movements, leading to a hope that is rooted in the knowledge that breaks have been planned for and the work will go on. This challenges a core component of what Webb (2010) referred to as the "fatalism of neoliberalism" that many of these movements are working against by actively moving away from hyperproductive expectations of those doing the work.

Imaginative Care and Care Imaginations

It is clear from participant comments that many organizing spaces are not practiced at integrating and valuing care work into movement work. By infusing our spaces with imaginative care structures, we can build toward relational futures, working against what Muñoz (2009) calls antiutopianism and antirelationality. Instead, embodying emunah as Haselaar (2022) understands it, as an epistemological orientation toward relational and intersubjective knowledge, allows these dreams to be co-created and realized with care in community. Developing these trusting relationships allows for the embracing of Haselaar's (2022) "radical uncertainty" of the future.

Participants emphasized the usefulness of play in these dreaming and caring practices, noting that playfulness can lead to co-dreaming and prevent organizer burnout. Intertwining dreams with community can support hope in moving from an individual experience to one that can be shared with others. Dreaming, playing, and imagining care differently is, as Bhardwaj (2024) explains, political and foundational to the work of social justice. Building and maintaining communal temporalities by developing timekeeping tools that centre the need for and value of care as central to justice-oriented projects, allow for these dreamy and playful moments that can set the course for organizing work.

Another connection between these two core concepts is the work of supporting the visioners in our community. Some folks feel drawn to this visioning work and are able to tap into a future-focused role imagining what the future we work toward might look like. Or pointed to this when discussing the need to support those who move through our spaces with hope by providing environments conducive to that hopefulness. Understanding visioners as audacious, like Duncan-Andrade (2009), and recognizing that dreaming is a way of knowing, as Toliver (2021) suggests, ensures that dreamers feel supported in their dreaming, even when their dreams seem unlikely or others disagree on the utility of the dream itself.

Care Resources and Resourced Caring

In order to have well-resourced organizing environments, developing a culture of access and creating accessible infrastructure is necessary. Seeing “care woven into organizing spaces”, as Or mentioned, and “spaces that are centring community care [and] disability justice”, as Abby said, was a way to sustain hope. Really building the structures and processes of organizing work around accessibility considerations, relationship building, and community care is important in a world

where bodies are punished when they "don't comply with the demands of capitalism" (Morales, quoted by Bost, 2017, p. 193).

Creating onboarding processes and ways to bring folks new to organizing into community and mentored into a role can allow for easy entry into the work. This can also provide a framework for organizers already involved in movement work to explore different roles, both learning from and teaching others. This is part of the critical hope described by Thomas Bernard (2020) as "mentorship" and "passing the torch" (p. 181). Participants pointed to this need when discussing what was nourishing for them in community and in organizing.

Another part of this care resourcing is the idea of planning for how to respond when harm is done, as participants pointed out how many organizing groups end up doing harm to individual people or other communities. Structuring accountability processes and reparative procedures may help organizers repair ruptured relationships, rather than leaving movement work entirely. hooks (2003) suggests that approaching these processes with a caring and intimate rather than punitive approach can sustain hope when harm has been done.

Building what Gordon (2024) refers to as "infrastructures of care" helps to ensure we create spaces where we can understand dissenting opinions and hold the nuance that participants noted as important. Calvin saying that we need spaces where we "understand dissenting opinions" reflects hooks's (2003) notion that the "ability to make a space to hear dissident voices is a location of hope and possibility" (p. 188). This infrastructural work also helps to protect against instituting neoliberal rhetorics of self-care, rooting instead into community care models. It can distribute the labour involved in caring by planning it intentionally and proactively, rather than delegating when care needs arise. Crucially, it also establishes care for the carers in a community who, as Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) notes, often get forgotten in the distribution of support.

Imaginative Resources and Resourced Imaginations

Ensuring that organizing spaces remain playful and imaginative, or what McInerney (2007) describes as "imagination that is grounded in theory" (p. 258) can be another way of centring accessibility and multiple ways of engaging in the work. Part of this is recognizing the utility of hopes and dreams that do not necessarily lead to concrete action, as Calvin continually reminded the group. Resting is important even if it does not lead to an increase in productivity later, as the values of disability justice and shabbat teach us. Dreaming is valuable even when the dream is out of reach or unrealistic to work toward. Hope for the sake of hope is enough.

Playful spaces might also create room for curiosity and experimentation, as Jason pointed out, leading to new and different ways of approaching familiar issues. Playfulness can be seen as the opposite of the fearful and urgent ways of being many of us are used to, especially those working in the non-profit sector. Structuring spaces around Toliver's (2021) idea of dreaming as a way of knowing affirms the time spent on dreamwork as a kind of knowledge generation activity necessary for effective and responsive organizing.

In order to resource people's imagination, organizing groups may consider offering dreaming workshops, or other ways to support dream identifying and future-focused thinking. Many participants shared that the focus groups themselves met some of the goals they would want out of these kind of dreaming resources. The ability to discuss hope, or the lack thereof, with others and hearing different perspectives on organizing goals and cultures was valued. Jason appreciated the arts-based component, sharing that it was useful to have both the conversation and the creative process happening parallel to one another. Or mentioned that it was exciting to see different threads of discussion coming together through each of our unique lenses. Calvin shared that, while we did

not come to an answer about hope, the discussion was lovely and impactful. These participant experiences point to the ways that dreaming together and crafting together can be hopeful.

Closing Thoughts

Implications

This thesis has explored how grassroots organizers relate to and maintain hope in their social movement work. The results shared here have implications for organizers, community based social workers, and social movement researchers. The research suggests that organizers should ensure that community care and relationship building is central to their work, and that this work is appropriately valued. Ensuring that there is playfulness and imagination in and among the more difficult work can also sustain organizers' ability to hope. Creating spaces where hope is welcomed and valued, but not made mandatory, allows each individual to find their own relationship to hope and allows these relationships to fluctuate. Utilizing flexible temporalities and encouraging future-focused thinking, for example by offering dreaming workshops, is another way to avoid urgency and burnout within movement work.

Community based social workers who work with marginalized folks involved in fighting their own oppression can also learn from this research. Understanding some of the drains to hope identified, such as urgency-fuelled cultures, lack of community care, and hyperindividualized expectations, can help workers to understand their clients and better meet their needs. Ensuring that mental health professionals are avoiding pathologizing narratives around hope, and instead allow clients to determine when their hope/lessness is negatively impacting them, can help to maintain justice-focused mental healthcare and shifts toward models centred on community and peer support.

Social movement researchers may find areas for further research arising out of this thesis. Hope is a complicated concept, and the same study with different organizers would produce new and equally valuable insights. Exploring different communities, cultures, and organizing focuses in conversation with one another may be a generative area of further research for this field. Developing and facilitating dreaming workshops and offering them to organizing groups can lead to interesting case studies that follow the active and dynamic nature of hope discussed here. Further inquiry into alternate terms for hope that better resonate with a wide variety of organizers can help to capture additional perspectives, or even propose a new term for this concept.

Limitations

As with any thesis, there have been limitations to this study and the results I have taken from it. Being part of an MSW process, I had a limited amount of time to put towards this study. This meant that my recruitment time was short and I only offered two focus groups, whereas I may have offered more groups and recruited more participants if I had done this study outside of this context. As well, I was limited in my ability to bring community into the study conceptualization and design processes because of the MSW timeline and the limitations placed on ongoing community engagement when operating under a university Research Ethics Board.

The participants of this study were limited to those within my network, and thus many participants shared identities with me and with one another. The results outlined throughout this thesis reflect these identities, and I have built my conceptual framing around epistemological resonances with participant comments. As I allowed the collected data to lead the framing of the results, they would have looked very different had the participants held different identities or emphasized other community wisdoms. It is clear in this paper that many participants held two or more queer, disabled/neurodivergent, or Jewish identities. Had the sample looked different, the resulting thesis would as well. I am cognizant of the lack of diversity in terms of racial and ethnic

identities, given the differences of experience I have heard many people of colour note when discussing their time in organizing work. Further research might explore this theme of hope in organizing with various populations to continue building understandings of what helps to create organizing spaces where hope can arise.

Following that, had this thesis been written by another researcher, the interpretations of the collected data would reflect that researcher's knowledge bases, lived experiences, and research style. All of this work has been filtered through my own lenses of what felt interesting and important for me to highlight, where others may have disregarded the points I found most compelling, instead highlighting those I chose not to include here. Especially with regards to knowledge mobilization, the zine, as a creative expression of these results, would look very different and communicate different highlights.

Reflection & Conclusion

This thesis has explored the notion of 'hope' in conversation with grassroots organizers and activists who are deeply invested in their social change work. Over two focus groups, one virtual and one in-person, I recorded conversations and collected artwork created by participants in relation to hope in their organizing. I have used community care, temporality and futurity, and Jewish spirituality as conceptual lenses through which to analyse the collected data. My results point to the limitations of the word 'hope' and the varied perceptions participants associated with the term. Results also point to three themes necessary to find and sustain this thing I have called 'hope'. According to participants, it is important to ensure that organizing groups are (1) futurity focused and temporally malleable, (2) open to playfulness, dreaminess, and imagination, and (3) are supportive both in the culture of the group and by offering tangible resources. Key to these elements is the letting go of individualized responsibility for change work to maintain hope, embrace change, and shift with the moment. Spaces that enable hope were ones that were fun and

playful spaces, slow and nonlinear spaces, caring and accessible spaces. Ones where organizers could feel safe to make mistakes and learn from them. One where folks can share their dreams and have them validated, even when they differ from others.

Notably, the experience of the focus groups felt aligned with some of these takeaways. Even during the conversation, participants identified the group itself as offering hope. As Or said, "I feel like we're not just talking about the thing. We're doing the thing, you know?" In planning the focus groups, I spent time imagining what access barriers might arise and how I might mitigate these. I prioritized asking about the needs and comfort of participants in the recruitment process, to build these needs into the space. Centrally, participants brought in an openness for dreamwork and carework and a flexibility to meet each others' needs throughout the conversation we were having. All of this contributed to an open and spacious environment where disagreements could be acknowledged and feelings shared.

As the virtual group was ending, Or commented that even our one singular conversation reinforced their hope:

> This feels like it's sort of reinforcing my view of hope where we just had this one conversation and we shared some of these different ideas and things that are meaningful to us. And then we're each already taking certain pieces from it that we are integrating into our ways of thinking and ways of looking at things. And we're going to carry those forward into whatever conversations we have next.

In the in-person group, Jason looked around the table and said "let's do this again sometime!". Both of these statements point to the desire for more open, creative, generative gatherings to think through difficult issues. Had there been more time and resources, these groups could have been even more impactful – both in terms of the knowledge generated and for the participants

themselves. Given the difficult context this study was conducted within, being able to offer and experience these conversations felt particularly important. Having an artistic component was in service of these goals, where participants could share in multiple ways.

Understanding critical hope as a form of praxis, as McInerney (2007) does, points to the need for a prefigurative politics, one where organizing groups embody the world they are working towards. If we are working against capitalism and neoliberalism, as so many groups claim to be doing, then we must embody anticapitalist ways of being together. We must care for one another, prioritize resting, and imagine a world other than one dictated by property and ownership. I am glad that participants noted an experience of this ethic in participating in hopeful and accessible group conversations about hope and accessibility. Mauch (2019) writes that we need "ideas that seemed unimaginable before they were voiced and… paths that seemed unwalkable before they were walked" (p. 37). How else to find these ideas and paths without stepping into the mindsets we hope to cultivate?

In Chapter 3 I introduced the idea of 'mahloket l'shem shamayim' or 'conflict for the sake of Heaven'. This idea is one I would like to see better reflected in movement work. Conflict is not the thing we are working against. Good natured and kind debate is necessary to find new futures and ways of getting to them. I found moments of disagreement between participants to be enjoyable and interesting because they were respectful and curious. I do not think there can be complete tikkun olam, repair of the world, without dispute. To echo Dayenu's work "we have enough. We have what we need" to navigate these difficult conversations and find justice together.

In saying so, I want to acknowledge that this is difficult work. Kahn and Lynch-Biniek (2022) write about care work:

> Putting that ethic of care into practice is simple in the sense that pretty much everyone agrees we need to care about each other; and complex in the sense that institutional structures and political forces make it difficult, sometimes dangerous, to withdraw our consent from hegemonic regimes of power. (p. 328)

This work is not easy. It sounds simple – care for one another, slow down, think ahead, have fun, teach and learn. But all of these actions are in their very essence radical, and what is radical is often dangerous or, at the very least, uncomfortable and out of the norm. And yet, I believe it is possible.

As I take these learnings back into community and share what I have written here with others engaged in social change work, I am hopeful that I will continue to learn from everybody I encounter and each space I enter. I am firm in my critiques of these ways of organizing precisely because of my belief in the possibility of something different and my care for the people who do this work, even when we get it wrong. With the right time, the right dreams, the right care, and the right resources, we can work towards imagining and creating the just future that all of us deserve.

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Appendix A: The Zine

The zine that was created with participant artwork and disseminated as a knowledge mobilization deliverable can be found at this link.