

THE ELEMENTS OF MUTUAL AID

DOCUMENTARY
DISCUSSION GUIDE

CH. 2

CRASH

◆ EXPERIMENTS TOWARD LIBERATION ◆ TOWARD THE ABOLITION OF THE STATE ◆



Colonization & capitalism are dams holding us back from each other. This chapter is all about tearing them down so we can let mutual aid flow between us. We discuss creating safer spaces, handling crisis without police, & navigating power dynamics, burnout, & conflict.



CH. 2

EARTH

RUNTIME—65 mins

Before 2020, mutual aid lived in the margins of organizing spaces, rooted in radical traditions of community autonomy and antifascism. When the pandemic hit, the term exploded. But with that popularity, its political edge was blunted by a misconception that mutual aid boils down to just distributing goods.

That misunderstanding has led to burnout and apathy. But liberatory mutual aid transforms our relationships, sustains us as we fight the State, and prepares communities to defend their autonomy. It's time to resharpen mutual aid's edge together.

How do we move out of reacting to crisis and into responding with strategy and vision? How do we prepare ourselves and our communities to live freely beyond the State?

This series is a tool to help communities reflect on their efforts, build strategy together, and sow real relationships and infrastructure that will sustain us as the systems around us crumble.

CONTENTS



BEFORE WATCHING

USING THE DISCUSSION GUIDE 3

ABOUT THIS CHAPTER 4

AFTER WATCHING

THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS 5

SET AGREEMENTS 5

PICK A TOPIC & DISCUSS 6

QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES 7-8

NEXT STEPS 9

GLOSSARY 10

RESOURCES 13

STEP 1 HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



FACILITATION TIP: *Feel free to read the sections of this guide aloud together as a group!*

The Elements of Mutual Aid is a four-part series made to spark conversations. Today's episode is *Chapter 2, Earth* and this discussion guide offers a few **QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES** to help dig into some deep conversation afterward.

Ideally everyone has a copy of this guide so everybody can help move the conversation along together.

Use the **NOTES** section at the end to jot down thoughts, the **GLOSSARY** section for helpful terms, and the **RESOURCES** section to find other powerful media.

The entire series is freely available on YouTube and PeerTube with English and Spanish subtitles. For support with organizing more screenings and discussions, visit: theelementsofmutilaid.com/screen-the-series

STEP 2 ABOUT THIS CHAPTER



Before pressing play, let's check out a few of the main ideas in this chapter. *Earth* focuses on what we can build with mutual aid and how smaller, local efforts informed by their communities' needs and capacities can network and build longer-term infrastructure.

LEARNING GOALS

- *Level up from just reacting to crises to having a vision of what we're building toward*
- *Develop an understanding of why we have to be ready to defend any autonomy we build*
- *Think strategically about how to prepare our communities for tomorrow's disasters*

Does everyone have what they need before starting the film?

STEP 3 AFTER WATCHING



3.1 THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS?

Does anyone have any immediate reflections they want to share? Did anyone hear any terms they weren't familiar with? (*Check out the **GLOSSARY** if helpful*).

Optional: Take a quick 5-10 min break for people to use the bathroom before discussion.

3.2 SET AGREEMENTS

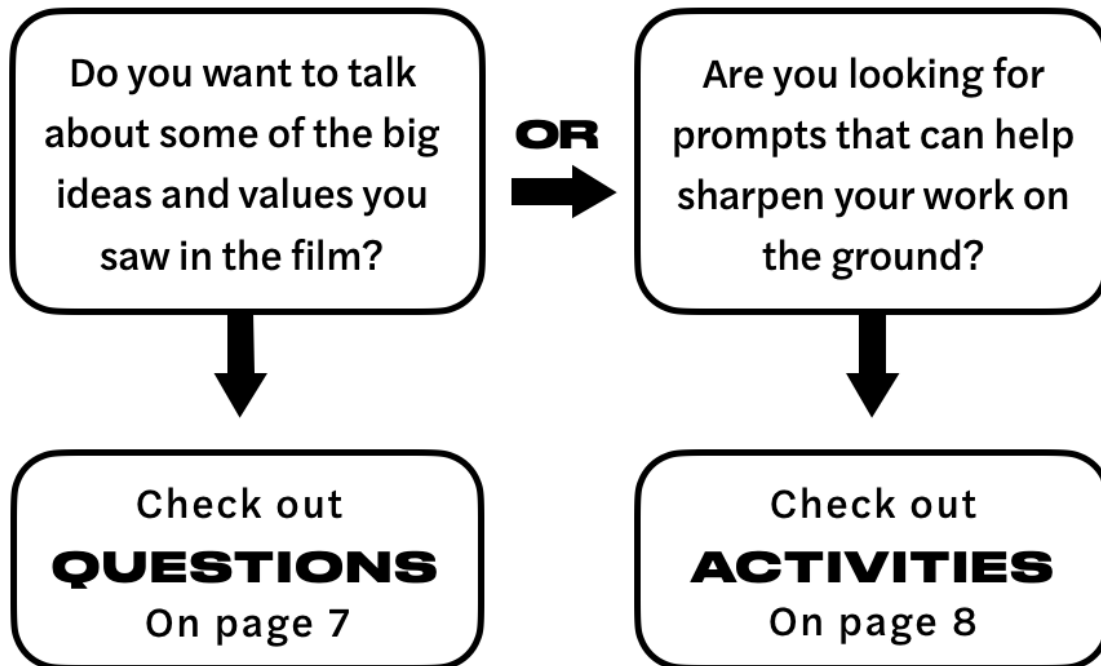
Before getting into discussion, it can be helpful to set a couple agreements to call back on. Here are some basics:

- *make space for quieter voices*
- *help keep the conversation focused*
- *be mindful of time*

Does anybody have others they want to add?

FACILITATION TIP: *If the conversation meanders, you can say something like: "That's a really great point but could we refocus on the question?" If a few people are talking a lot while others are quiet you can say: "Can we make some space to hear from voices we haven't heard from yet?"*

STEP 4 PICK A TOPIC & DISCUSS



Take a few minutes to look over the **QUESTIONS** or **ACTIVITIES** as a group and pick one to focus on. Throughout the discussion, refer back to this list if you need more inspiration.

FACILITATION TIP: *Do you have a larger crowd? Divide up into smaller breakout groups and set an amount of time for discussion. At the end of the time, have all the groups come back together and share their main takeaways.*

QUESTIONS



1. How can we mature our work beyond just giving stuff away and reacting to crisis? What does it look like for mutual aid to be the foundation of community systems that sustain our everyday lives?
2. What are some ways to defend our efforts when the state is threatened by our autonomy?
3. In what ways do the relationships and skills that we're building today define how we're able to respond to tomorrow's crises?
4. What social infrastructure would a mutual aid-based society need to make the nation-state obsolete?

ACTIVITIES



1. Map out the different mutual aid projects in your community. Then talk about how these projects support each other. Are there ways they could be supporting each other more? Are there resources, skills, or relationships that you need?
2. List some local economic, political, and cultural challenges that stop your community from building projects or infrastructure. Then come up with a few specific steps you could take today to address each of them.
3. Talk about how well your neighborhoods could respond to an emergency today. Then brainstorm some ways to build more preparation and relationships before the next crisis.

STEP 5 NEXT STEPS



It's hard to take time away from the work of caring for our communities to have these conversations. But they're so important to our ability to doing this work well and to moving intentionally toward liberation instead of just reacting to crises. We encourage communities to continue prioritizing conversations like this. Here's a couple ways to keep using this series as a tool in your community:

- *Apply key takeaways from this discussion into your organizing.*
- *Plan a screening of another chapter with this group.*
- *Plan a screening with the wider community and offer the lessons you learned here.*
- *Dive into some of the resources and form study groups to digest them.*

GLOSSARY



- **Accessibility:** A practice of making our physical infrastructure, technology, ways of participating, and cultures easier to access by people who have disabilities, who know different languages, who have kids, or who have other barriers to participating in an event or project.
- **Agency:** When we feel empowered to take action, use our voice, and put our values in to practice.
- **Consensus:** A decision-making process where each member of a group works to reach agreement on a decision. Consensus requires us to build trust, communicate, and compromise.
- **Consensus Minus One:** A modification to consensus that allows for a decision to move forward even if one person disagrees with it. However, if two or more people disagree, the group has to go back to the table and address the concerns.
- **Hierarchical Structures:** A limited number of people in a group make decisions and everyone else is tasked with carrying them out.
- **Horizontal Structures:** A group holding power collectively so that more voices contribute to decisions and more people share access to resources and information. The people most affected by decisions should be the ones making them.

- **Dual Power:** The concept of creating alternative infrastructure that can one day replace our reliance on the dominant power's institutions.
- **Harm Reduction:** The practice of providing support and supplies to people who use drugs to minimize risks.
- **Hierarchical:** A structure where a limited number of people have power over those beneath them.
- **Rojava:** A region of Northern Syria (or Western Kurdistan) made up of about 2 million people that has built a participatory system of direct democracy focused on women's rights and ecology. Also known as the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.
- **Safe-Injection:** Having the supplies, knowledge, and peer-to-peer support to use needles safely and reduce the risk of infections, injury, overdose, or death.
- **Solidarity Economy:** Practices for meeting our needs without private property and that aren't driven by profit. Solidarity economies require us to have relationships with each other and include our communities in decision-making.
- **Sovereignty:** Having control over territory and often includes being recognized by other national powers.
- **Top-Down Institution:** Formal organizations that have a command and control style of organizing and limit people's ability to make decisions for themselves.

- **The War on Drugs:** A global campaign led by the US since the 1970s supposedly to reduce the production and distribution of drugs. In reality, the US just became the world's biggest kingpin. The War on Drugs has been used as a excuse to manage global drug markets, manipulate foreign affairs, conduct genocide, and spread mass incarceration.
- **Zapatistas:** A Maya indigenous rebel movement in Southeast Mexico that started building autonomous zones in 1994 with their own schools, hospitals, collective agriculture, and culture. The Zapatistas are still resisting colonialism and capitalism to this day.



RESOURCES



Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice

by Jessica Gordon-Nembhard (*Book*)



Palestine 1492: A Report Back by Linda Quiquix (*Book*)



Building Power While the Lights Are Out: Disasters, Mutual Aid, and Dual Power by Jimmy Dunson (*Book*)



Rebirth of African Civilization

By Chancellor Williams (*Book*)



The Kurdish Women's Movement: History, Theory, Practice by Dilar Dirik (*Book*)



Autonomy Is in Our Hearts: Zapatista Autonomous Government Through the Lens of the Tsotsil Language

by Dylan Eldredge Fitzwater (*Book*)



Saving Our Own Lives: A Liberatory Practice of Harm Reduction by Shira Hassan (*Book*)



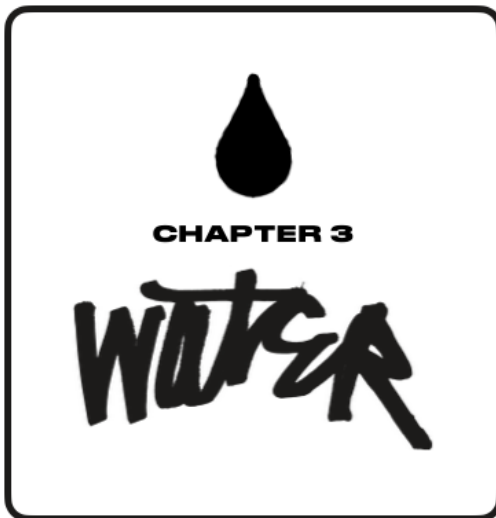
The Communes of Rojava: Video Essay (*YouTube*)



People Without Faces: Zapatista Documentary (*YouTube*)



Against The State by James Stout (*Book*)



Watch the full series for free on
YouTube & PeerTube!

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