The

ACTIVIST WELLBEING COOKBOOK

RECIPES OF CARE AND RESISTANCE FROM DEFENDERS IN

THE PHILIPPINES, BRAZIL, EGYPT, KENYA, ZAMBIA, MYANMAR, THAILAND, PALESTINE, INDIA, TURKEY, YEMEN AND MORE

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CREATE A "COOKBOOK"?

A cookbook is a collection of recipes. And we know recipes carry the history of peoples' cultures and stories, flavored, spiced and marinated through time. We recognize these recipes, both of care and food, which we have right now have their own ancestries. They may have been there for a long time, perhaps with a different shape, taste, or form.

In this cookbook on care from activists around the world, we've come to recognize this: that the ways of caring we have now are recipes we've learned from those who have come before us, from the legacies and necessities of our social justice movements, all of whom,

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like us, have nourished, experimented, and transformed practices of care and wellbeing through time. Whether to survive, to reclaim freedom, or create worlds kinder to their bodies, spirits, psyches.

From one revolution after another, across collective memory, people involved in resistance and struggles for social justice and human rights have been caring for each other in so many beautiful ways. Many of these practices may not have been documented, may have been systematically erased by oppressive or authoritarian regimes, yet there are also those who continue to remember and embody them until today.

This cookbook is our way of remembering.

Remembering the languages of care by those of us who continue the social struggles that we have inherited, and which we too, will pass on to those who will come after us.

Indeed, writing the introduction to a book is no easy task, especially a book that is the materialisation of our searches, research, experiments, our desire to transform the world from the inside, from our relationships, our homes, communities, collectives, organisations, territories and activisms.

This book is a sharing from our communal kitchen of care, built from principles, cosmo-conceptions, colours, music, flavours, ethics and values by different activists and human rights defenders from the Global South / Global Majority. This is a a labor that spanned two years, where defenders have set out to explore, discuss and live what care looks like in activism and in the defence of human rights. And how care needs to look like in the face of so many difficulties, urgencies and changes in our society today.

COOKING UP CARE IN OUR KITCHEN OF RESISTANCE

Cooking is a social technology, developed over thousands and thousands of years. Beyond nutrition, it brings with it the alchemy of transforming raw ingredients into dishes full of flavours, textures, aromas and affections.

In our community kitchen, alchemy takes place in the transformation of ingredients into food to sustain life, our lives, and the lives of those who actively dream of and realise a world free of violence and injustice.

In this kitchen the magic doesn't just happen in the food, we transform ourselves together in the process of

“cooking”, in the collectivity, in the relationships with each other, with one another.

In our great communal kitchen, we bring the pleasures and displeasures of our journey, the harshness of the reality we deal with, the losses and grief, the prejudices, the sleepless nights, the pain of our exhausted bodies that fight every kind of violation day after day, our worries and also our fears.

But anyone who thinks that this kitchen only has these ingredients is mistaken, this cuisine is also full of empathy, solidarity, intimacy, deep listening, trust, long comfortable silences, joy, support, dance, hugs of comfort, and healing.

Much like spices, there are two ingredients that are never missing from the recipes we have here:

LOVE AND HOPE

These two ingredients allow us to dream, one of our greatest abilities as human beings. Dreaming is like fire in a kitchen, it’s what keeps our hearts rebellious and insubordinate in the face of injustice, no matter how old we are, no matter what happens to our territory, or how insurmountable the challenge we face.

We see this cookbook like one of those old recipe notebooks, which holds 'secrets' and 'magic' developed over the years. Like one of those little treasure boxes containing our heirlooms, coming from a lifetime's learning.

Here are recipes and tips on care, which often arise from experiences, observations, corrections and additions, being passed on. Without claiming to contain all or the best recipes, or to be a final point on the best way to prepare a dish, but rather as a record of their own experiences, so that others could continue these experiments, so that they could also add their own spices and new dishes, incorporating the flavours from their own time, in their own unique way.

And so it is with this recipe book written by many hands, minds and hearts. We recognise that this effort, energy, wisdom and ambition came before us, often from people who didn't call themselves activists, but who have always been committed to transforming the world around them.

It is knowledge, lived and developed by indigenous people, traditional communities, immigrants, community leaders, cooks, teachers, environmentalists, carers,

healers from all over, an infinity of experiences and practices that change their surroundings by placing care, well being and love as ethics in their lives. Our stories have been fuelled by many others that came before us; every idea, every dream, every alchemy, every technology were fertile seeds sown.

This book is a collective achievement, bringing with it knowledge of individual, collective and community care that has been developed and put into practice by several generations in every corner of the world!

This is a small collection of inspiration, a small contribution to the "hoping" of the activist collective, in the intention that there will be many others, presenting other flavours, textures and smells, built from other cosmo-constructions, that our stories, memories and journeys will be built, written and read from us, by us and for us!

May our stories of struggle, resistance and care be recognised and may they be told from hope, collectivity and beauty, our intention is that they be seeds with all the potential to become forests!

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In love and solidarity,

Foz, *Rede Transfeminista de Cuidados Digitais – RTCD / Transfeminist Network of Digital Care (Brazil)*

Naro, *Keri: Caring for Activists (Philippines)*

For any questions or feedback, kindly reach out to the curators of the collection through **amigue@riseup.net** and **naro.keri@proton.me**

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ENCOUNTERING CARE *and* WELLBEING *in* SOCIAL STRUGGLES

WELL-BEING AND WELLNESS FIRST AND THEN RESILIENCE

by **Faith Kasina** *an activist and a community organizer from Kenya*

Sometime back I was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Anxiety and Early Childhood Trauma. When I shared this with my colleagues, their response was not assuring. Most of them laughed and then one asked why I have 'rich people' problems. You see, I don't blame them. Growing up in underprivileged communities, we were taught to be hardcore and to never show weakness like getting sick or letting people know our struggles. This is one of the reasons why most people find it hard to open up.

The stereotypes surrounding mental health issues make survivors shy away from sharing. My aunt has struggled with mental health issues since I have known her. I grew up seeing her being taken to different doctors for diagnoses. When she did not get better, everyone treated her as a mad person and an outcast. But all she

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was to me is a great listener and the warmest of all my aunties. The people who looked only at her sickness missed many good sides of this great human being.

As I was sharing about my mental health struggles, I was thinking about her and what people would say about me. All I could think about then and even now is how much work is needed towards decolonizing mental health and recognizing it as a health issue. From accessibility to affordability and availability of services. To do so would create a response mechanism that is wholesome and dignifies the survivors.

You see, apart from the stereotypes, how we view mental wellness and well-being is influenced by different factors. When you come from a place of being forced to be resilient when dealing with traumatic events, you don't always take time to process them.

You are forced to move on and start seeing vulnerability as weakness.

My struggle isn't unique. I once shared in a women's space that I was struggling with mental health issues and young women reached out to me seeking help and support. As someone who is an organizer, I have found myself as a member of different movements. In most of

these movements, a lot is expected and so you have to volunteer your time and offer your skills. This is because in movements commitment is measured by how much one shows up. This forces people to show up even when their own personal struggles are nearly choking them to death. This commitment can sometimes be taken for granted and go unappreciated and this can cause a mental breakdown.

WHEN YOU COME FROM A PLACE OF BEING FORCED TO BE RESILIENT WHEN DEALING WITH TRAUMATIC EVENTS, YOU DON'T ALWAYS TAKE TIME TO PROCESS THEM.

When national and international NGOs are working with grassroot organizations to monitor violations and injustices, they don't prioritize the well-being of the grassroots organizers. There is a notion that since most of the grassroots organizations are situated in the communities where they work and most of the members come from that community, that they are then used to the violence and have developed a thick skin. It is a very problematic way of thinking and a stereotype that needs to be demystified.

Mental wellness and well-being conversations cannot

be divorced from the everyday struggles for freedom, dignity, and social justice. When people disregard the material conditions of the people they work with, it's as though they are disregarding the people. The blindness to the realities of the people we organize with has led to people leaving progressive spaces.

YOU ARE FORCED TO MOVE ON AND START SEEING VULNERABILITY AS WEAKNESS.

As organizers and first responders to community issues, there are a lot of expectations from the community and these can be very overwhelming and cause burnout. When creating safe spaces, it should cater to the needs of defenders and should be inclusive. Safe spaces have to be holistic, and include mental well-being, and physical, financial, legal and digital care.

Another challenge is that most of the community organizers, defenders, activists and feminists are fighting against violations and injustices that happened to them, to people close to them or that they witnessed happen. Continuous encounters with this keeps on traumatizing them. Unfortunately, most of them have no access to psycho-social support or spaces they can go to, to debrief.

In the quest to find the solutions to mental health challenges, organizers shouldn't be linked to the struggle. This is because most of the defenders feel that they only belong in the struggle, that they were born into this. To see an end to a system that has stripped them of the right to exist peacefully and with dignity.

MENTAL WELLNESS AND WELL-BEING CONVERSATIONS CANNOT BE DIVORCED FROM THE EVERYDAY STRUGGLES FOR FREEDOM, DIGNITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. WHEN PEOPLE DISREGARD THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF THE PEOPLE THEY WORK WITH, IT'S AS THOUGH THEY ARE DISREGARDING THE PEOPLE.

I have seen organizations provide support to a defender when they are experiencing burnout or a mental breakdown but then in the process end up leaving the defender more stressed. Taking the defender away to a place where they can't organize or participate in the struggle sometimes causes more harm than good. Although most of these organizations do this out of good will, it is always good to find out what works for the people and not simply do what they think works.

I have been invited to wellness centers that are

inaccessible, spaces that target grassroots community organizers. These are usually far from the target community. The means of accessing the spaces are expensive. Some of the people who would love to access the spaces and would love to benefit from them end up choosing not to. These spaces should be accommodative to the community they target.

TAKING THE DEFENDER AWAY TO A PLACE WHERE THEY CAN'T ORGANIZE OR PARTICIPATE IN THE STRUGGLE SOMETIMES CAUSES MORE HARM THAN GOOD.

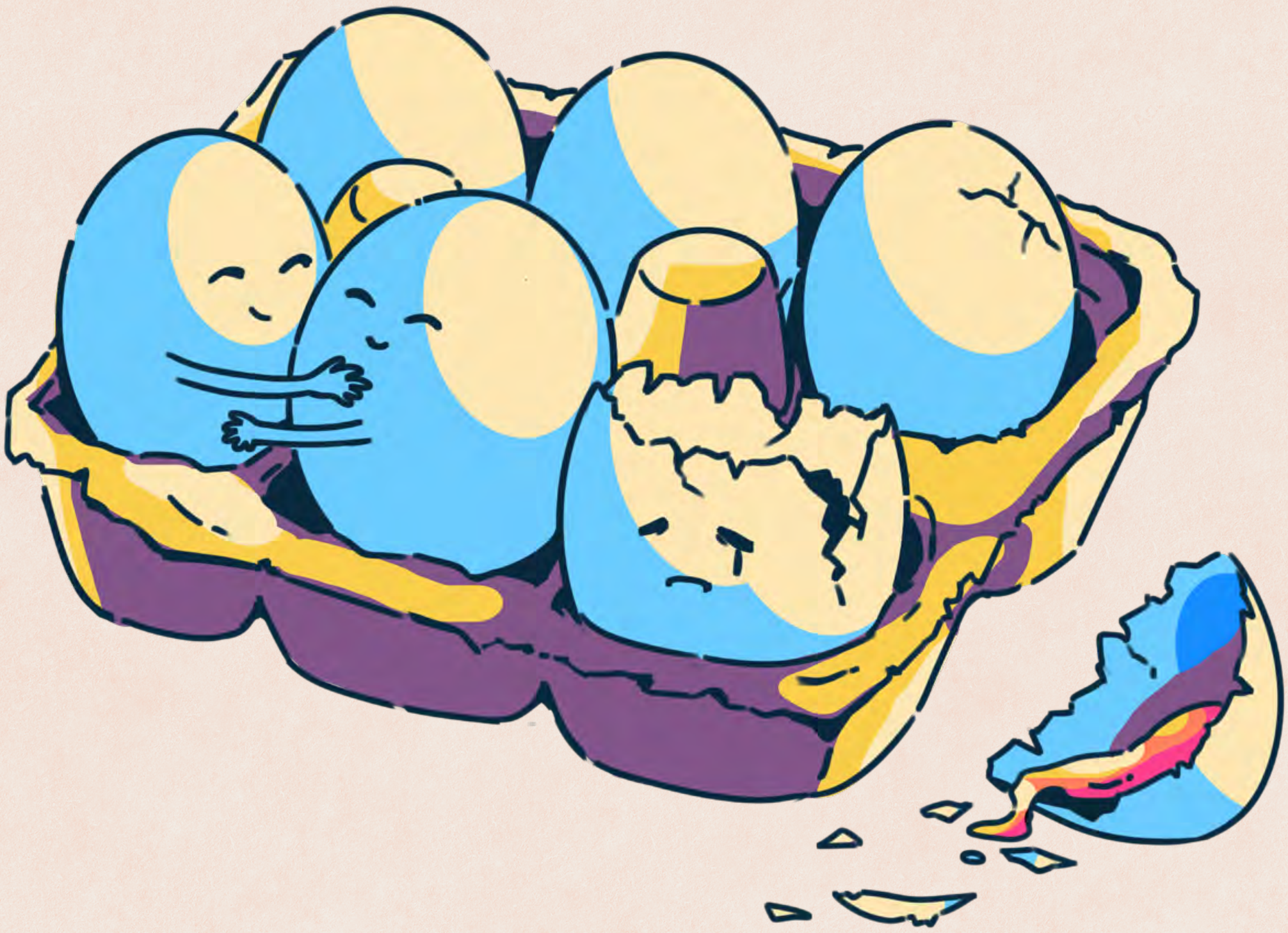
There is a need to have policies that specifically focus on the mental health and well-being of the people. This should apply to mass movements, organizations and any other place where people gather, work or interact with one another. The effectiveness and efficiency of defenders' work depends greatly on their mental well-being and wellness.

We have had people in human rights defending spaces die by suicide. Striving to create a conducive environment for people to interact healthily, work and grow is important.

Support should be all round. From supporting

someone in seeing a psychologist or a psychiatrist, and accessing medication, to supporting the work they do. Offering solidarity and support, acknowledging, and appreciating human rights defenders' work is key because that builds hope in them even on dark days where they are unable to see the importance of their work.

There is a need to create awareness on mental health and to train defenders on self-care and wellness.



It is key to connect these struggles to the struggles of other people who are fighting against oppression and repression and to understand that the only way to achieve the wellness and well-being of everyone is if

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we have a system that cares about the people, if we no longer have wars, violence, and if we see an end to colonialism, occupation and capitalism.

FROM SUPPORTING SOMEONE IN SEEING A PSYCHOLOGIST OR A PSYCHIATRIST, AND ACCESSING MEDICATION, TO SUPPORTING THE WORK THEY DO. OFFERING SOLIDARITY AND SUPPORT, ACKNOWLEDGING, AND APPRECIATING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' WORK IS KEY...

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WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

by **Nandar** *from Myanmar*

I had never left the country against my will until today

Where are you from?

I don’t know how to answer that question

Without letting the guilt swallow me alive

Without worrying about my sisters and brothers

who are moving from one place to another for safety

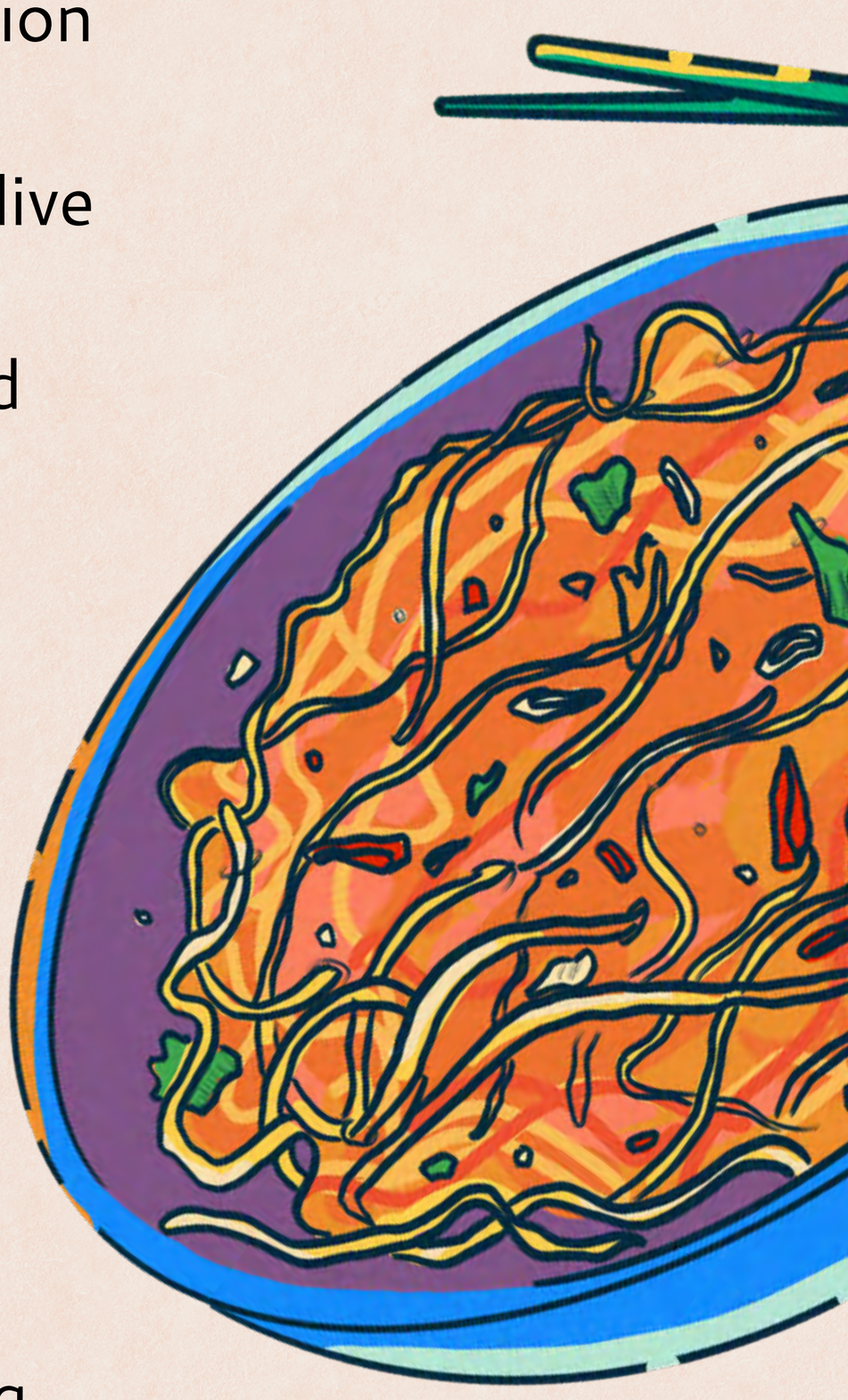
Without thinking of those
who died and who are behind
the bars

Without my heart trembling for longing

and my stomach clenching with grief

The other day, when my doctor asked me

Where you from?



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With his broken English and soft *Thai* accent

Closing my eyes, I started explaining to him

I can't sleep at night

My brain feels like it is gonna explode

It is like I don't have enough oxygen to breathe

My heart is beating so fast to the point that is gonna stop

I am choking when I eat

I don't go outside like I used to

Do you know how to fix me?

He smiled and nodded politely

His eyes wondered why I didn't answer his question

You have anxiety.

Women your age go through this. Is normal.

No need to worry nah.

I feel displaced and broken.

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How is this normal, doc? How?

Where you come from?

He asked again, this time as if for medical reasons

I came from

the land of safety

Surrounded by beautiful people and mountains

who smile at each other

Until their jaws hurt

Where the street is filled with dust, dirt, and busyness

Yet somehow charms with its delicious smell of food

Mont Hinn Khar, Akyaw, Shan Khouk Swal, Lat Phatt Htoke

A city where you can never go hungry, disconnected or cold

A home my ancestors have fought and died for

No, the irony is not lost on me.

When I say, I come from the land of safety

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I mean, I come from the land

where I don't have to explain myself to others

Where I don't have to cry every night to sleep

Where I don't have to take anxiety pills to swallow my food

Where I don't have to answer the question, where are you from?

Instead, I paused and said

Myanmar

"Aaah, Phaama." he replied with the sound of understanding and pity

Your country and we, same same

Not good people ruling.

I smiled almost wanting to cry

Breathe, you have to breathe every day

for your heart, for your brain, for your body

You no need fixing. You only need breathing. You will be

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okay nah.

Since then, I have learned that the key to living is breathing

Breathing like it is my job to be alive.

To be alive is my only way to resist.

ARTIST STATEMENT:

"Where Are You From?" delves deep into the pain and displacement felt by many in Myanmar, including myself. It's a raw reflection of the guilt and anxiety we carry when asked where we're from, a question that brings to mind the suffering of our people.

Through this poem, I aimed to capture the complexity of being displaced, unable to answer a simple question without feeling the weight of our nation's struggles. Using vivid imagery and raw emotion, I navigate the turbulent landscape of mental health, where anxiety and longing intertwine with resilience.

The encounter with a compassionate doctor becomes a

turning point, a moment of self-realization and acceptance. Despite seeking safety in a troubled land, I find comfort in breathing, a symbol of life and resistance.

I AIMED TO CAPTURE THE COMPLEXITY OF BEING DISPLACED, UNABLE TO ANSWER A SIMPLE QUESTION WITHOUT FEELING THE WEIGHT OF OUR NATION'S STRUGGLES.

This poem is a plea for empathy, a call to recognize the suffering of others, and a testament to the power of resilience in the face of adversity. I reclaim agency and defiance through breathing, reaffirming my commitment to endure and resist, one breath at a time.

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MY BODY, MY MOTHER TONGUE

by Atiaf Alwazir

When I was a child,
I occupied my body with
full confidence

I spoke its language
chatted directly with
my organs

but when my body grew
breasts

My body was no longer
جسدي

it became *our body*

I was told
what should be covered or
uncovered
which hair had to be
removed

but never shave, always
wax

Above all, I needed to be
بنت ناس

a good girl

بنت الناس

daughter of the people
I belonged to you, you, and
you

So I toned down my
femininity
until my body became an
ice cube no one could thaw
A civil war brewed inside
me, I became disjoined
split in half

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a soul in one place,
a body in another

فرحلت عنك
واختبئت منك
هجرة الروح
هجرة الجسد

For years, I hovered over
my body like a drone
(zzzzzz)

but I missed being in my
body

وسألت جسدي
ربما كنت جميلة كلون الشجر

Then, one day, I read an
article that said,
in order to ease back pain,
we must always keep both
feet firm on the ground –
at all times
whether we're standing,
sitting, or walking

15 minutes later,
when I went to pee,
I noticed that
like a ballerina,
only my toes touched the
floor

From that day on,
I became aware that
my feet were rarely firm
on the ground

I was always
ready to flee.

That's when I slowly
began re-learning
my sweet, sweet, mother
tongue
the language of my
beautiful body

استرجعت النعم
من سماء وطيور داخل جسدي

I spoke to جسدي الأنثوي
اليمني,

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I asked my tongue what
tasted good?
I discovered that I looooved
sweet potatoes

I asked اذني, how do you
feel when
I touch you?
And you بطني? Do you like
my fingers on you?
I let my hips sway يمين يسار-
يمين يسار

and with every movement,
I inched a step closer

back to my home
back to myself
back to my body

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LANGUAGE OF RESILIENCE: MY JOURNEY THROUGH QUEER ACTIVISM AND THE POWER OF LUBUNCA

by **Aras Örgen** *full-time lubunya* and queer activist from Turkey*

I've been reflecting deeply on my journey in queer activism and how it intersects with my personal life and well-being. Writing this piece has been a therapeutic way for me to navigate my thoughts and feelings, especially as I learn more about writing and its role in coping with stress. A pivotal moment for me was when my therapist emphasized that my identity isn't just about my sexual or romantic orientation; it's an integral part of who I am and how I relate to the world. This was a turning point that led me to unpack and explore the complexities of my identity and activism and deepen their relationship to my well-being.

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Although I had been aware of this idea before, it was a cathartic moment that pushed me to reflect more deeply. Through this piece, I want to share my experiences and how they have shaped my understanding of the balance between the personal and political aspects of my life. It's been a journey of reconciling these elements and recognizing how they are intertwined. This reflection is both a personal exploration and a broader commentary on the harmony I seek between my activism and self-care.

I got involved in queer activism around 2014-2015, which was a time when the government increasingly banned Pride marches in Turkey. This period was a strange mix of things: the queer community became more visible, but at the same time, restrictions were tightening. It was in this complicated situation that I started to grasp my own identity and the wider queer movement. Seeing the queer community gain visibility while facing repression opened my eyes to a world of activism that was both challenging and affirming.

I come from a family with a strong migration background, yet even in the comfort of being 'Turkish',

I had to think about what it meant to be "Turkish" in a society that often felt quite rigid and unforgiving. My family's migration history made me more aware of how identities are constructed and perceived as I explore my queerness. As I got more involved in activism, I began to see the privileges I had previously taken for granted and how they were very different from the heteronormativity that is part of the wider culture. This made me realize that I needed to confront the norms I had accepted and explore my identity in a more nuanced and critical way. This realization came from understanding Lubunca and how it changed the narrative.

Lubunca: A Language of Survival and Connection

Lubunca is a language with a rich history and a strong sense of identity. It has been a key part of my journey. It's not just an intriguing dialect; it's a lifeline for many in Turkey's LGBTQ+ community. This coded language has its roots in Romani, Armenian, Arabic, Greek and Turkish. Lubunca was developed as a way for marginalised communities to communicate safely and build solidarity in a hostile environment.

I've found Lilith Bardakçı's interview particularly illuminating when I was thinking about writing this. She

calls Lubunca an "anti-language," a form of resistance that came from the marginalized communities of the Ottoman Empire. These communities were severely marginalised, so they created a language that helped them build a sense of community and resistance. Lubunca gave people a way to break free from the constraints of mainstream society. It offered a space where queer identities could be celebrated and where even derogatory terms could be transformed into expressions of endearment such as 'whore', 'faggot' etc.

Learning Lubunca has been like stepping into a hidden, lively world – one that celebrates our queerness and strengthens our connections. It's a language that honours our past and empowers us to shape our future. As I spoke and heard Lubunca more often, I felt a strong sense of belonging and acceptance within this community. This language, with its rich history and cultural significance, became a vital part of my life, influencing both my activist work and personal interactions.

My relationship with Lubunca has grown a lot over the years. My work coordinating a well-being programme for queer activists showed me how important it is to look after myself, too, because the demands of activism can

make that difficult. Lubunca became more than just a way of communicating; it became a daily presence in my life, improving my personal relationships and providing a sense of understanding and acceptance that was both refreshing and empowering.

LUBUNCA WAS DEVELOPED AS A WAY FOR MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES TO COMMUNICATE SAFELY AND BUILD SOLIDARITY IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT.

The intimacy created through Lubunca with friends, colleagues and partners has allowed me to explore my identity more freely and address personal traumas in a supportive environment despite the fact that the language has no words for trauma or therapy. Hearing and using this language has become a great way for me to connect with others, and a way to reflect on my own personal growth. Thanks to this feeling of belonging, I've been able to navigate the complexities of my identity and find solace in a community that understands and values my experiences.

It's been really inspiring to learn about the historical significance of it. It's obvious that Lubunca is more than just a way of communicating. It's a vital part of the queer

resistance movement in Turkey. Knowing how it came about – how it developed as a way for marginalised communities to survive – has made me appreciate its role in our collective struggle even more. Lubunca is a link to a history of staying strong and fighting back. It shows that even when people are being treated badly, queer people have found ways to support and protect each other. This historical perspective is important as we face more and more repression. By understanding our past, we are better equipped to navigate the present and build a more inclusive future.

Dealing with the complexities of Lubunca: Community and Boundaries

As I've been reflecting about Lubunca more, I've found a few challenges. While the language helps to build a strong sense of community, it also brings up some internal issues.

The comfort and intimacy provided by Lubunca can sometimes create a kind of bubble where certain problems are overlooked and stay invisible. For instance, while Lubunca encourages a sense of togetherness, it can also unintentionally reinforce hierarchies and cliques. Not everyone is equally familiar with the language, which

can result in feelings of exclusion or misunderstanding.

THE INTIMACY CREATED THROUGH LUBUNCA WITH FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES AND PARTNERS HAS ALLOWED ME TO EXPLORE MY IDENTITY MORE FREELY AND ADDRESS PERSONAL TRAUMAS IN A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE LANGUAGE HAS NO WORDS FOR TRAUMA OR THERAPY.

On top of that, the close-knit nature of Lubunca-speaking spaces can sometimes make it tricky to have important conversations about power dynamics and personal boundaries. I've learned that while the language unites us, it's important to be mindful of the different experiences within our community. We need to make sure our spaces are inclusive and respectful, even as we celebrate the solidarity that Lubunca brings.

If we can address these internal complexities, we can make sure our activism is both effective and empathetic without reproducing the normative family again and again. This might be also related to how deeply we integrate the normative customs of family internally and how quickly we project them after we accept each other as a result of sharing the same queer identity. However,

as I explained earlier, for me it was the second time that I needed to break the family customs. And now I have come to think that this is also a beautiful step to liberation.

Since I moved to Germany, I've had the chance to develop my perspective even further. I've been lucky enough to live in a country with a big queer community, which has given me the chance to see queer issues from the outside and inside.

This kind of limbo – trying to make a life for myself in Germany while still being connected to Turkey's queer community – has made me think about my position and privilege on well-being. I've found that learning about languages similar to Lubunca in different cultures and countries has helped me understand more about identity and belonging. These experiences have helped me see that the struggles and triumphs of queer communities are often connected, even if they're in different places.

Every language and cultural context offers something different when it comes to understanding the universal quest for the recognition and acceptance that leads to a safe family.

Reflecting on Lubunca supports my resilience and helps me understand the impact of activism on my well-being. I'm grateful for all the people and experiences that have shaped it.

Lubunca is a great example of how we can come together and show that we're strong and that we believe in a future where queer identities are celebrated and valued. It's been a great source of personal growth and well-being, helping me to navigate both personal and collective challenges.

I'VE FOUND THAT LEARNING ABOUT LANGUAGES SIMILAR TO LUBUNCA IN DIFFERENT CULTURES AND COUNTRIES HAS HELPED ME UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT IDENTITY AND BELONGING.

I'm optimistic that Lubunca will continue to be a source of hope and solidarity. It's a great way of bringing together the past and the present, and it's a valuable space for expression and connection. If we learn from our history and embrace the diversity within our community by respecting boundaries, we can make sure that Lubunca and our communities stay vital and supportive forces in our lives and activism rather than

reproducing the normativity which affects our well-being negatively in the first place.

- * *Read more about Lubunca* here.

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GATES OF HEAVEN

by **Atiaf Alwazir**

This is a personal story from many years ago, about my 'first time'.

Yes, that first time.

The time when I was really ready to get rid of my virgin identity. I had fantasized about it, knew exactly what I was gonna wear – or not wear and of course which Nancy Ajram song was gonna play in the background…

اخاصمك آه - اسيبك لأ

But when he was in باب الجنة or the gate of heaven – as Mama Sayyida used to call the place that had no name in our home, my body froze like a laptop with too many contradictory commands – feel desire, be afraid, be sensual, close the gates!

I was mortified to witness my vagina completely shut, no nectar, no sugar – as they'd promised, only excruciating fucking pain. After hours of muscle contractions and heart palpitations, my vagina was still locked tighter than a jar of pickles. Maybe, it even smelled

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that way.

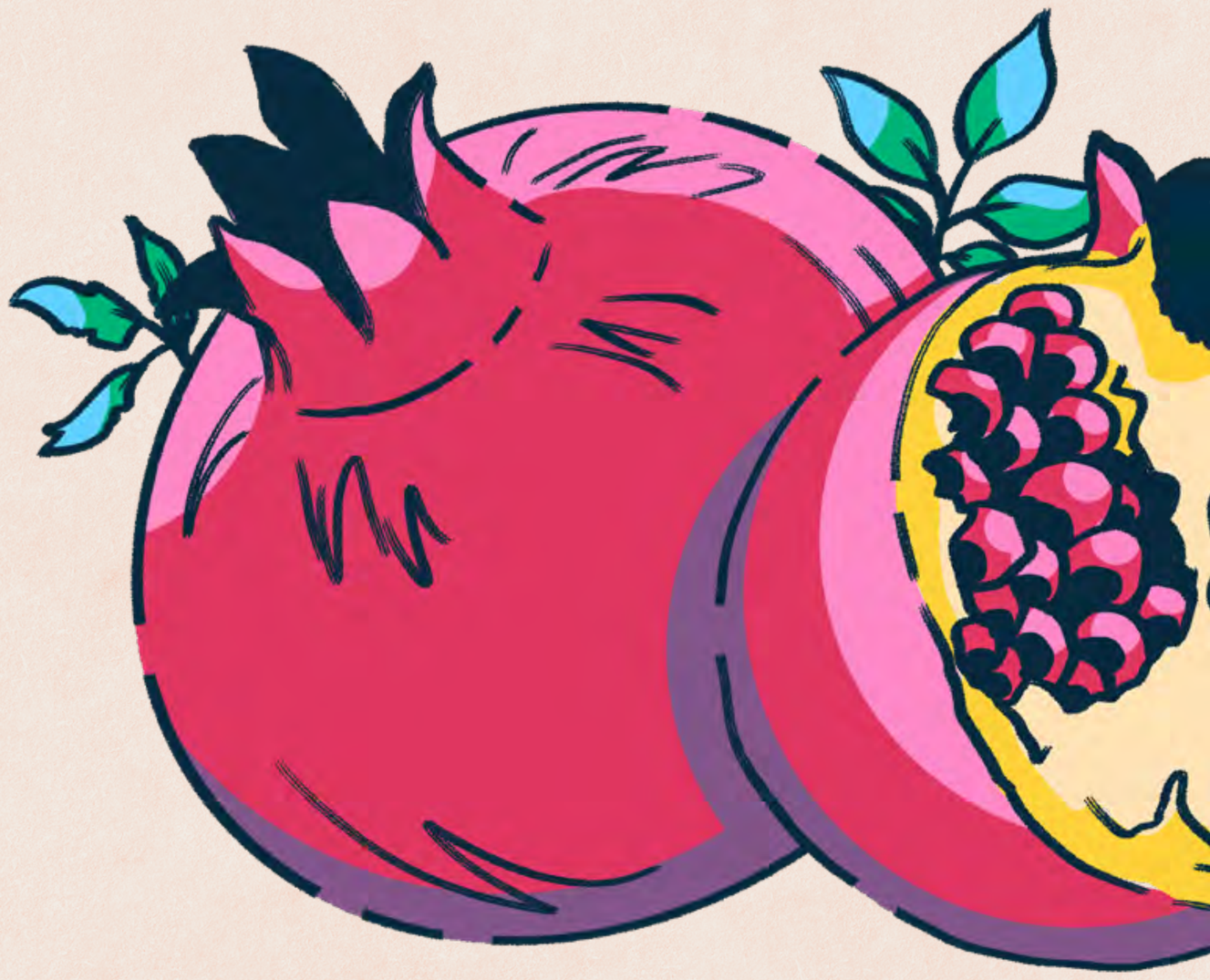
Pop culture told me the first time would hurt, but this agony was something else. Or was I too much of a coward? I wasn't sure. I was unclear just how much pain was supposed to be involved "The first time."

The second time we tried, the same thing happened. The third, the fourth and even the fifth.

My body wanted him

My body feared him

my body created a wall blocking him



Every time we tried, my vagina sought intimacy but panicked at the idea of penetration..

I searched on yahoo (that was the google before google) and typed pain, sex, can't have sex, but I couldn't find anything

I went to my doctor but all she said was "take a paracetamol and try again"

I went to a sex therapist, and she told me that I had

"Princess Syndrome." I was a narcissist refusing to let my husband inside me.

If I wasn't able to have sex, an activity as natural as drinking water, could I call myself a functional adult?

I tried to reassure myself that we did everything else except for the "entrance"

And I reminded my feminist self that the hymen was NOT at the center of sex no matter how much the heterosexual narrative said it was.

I reminded myself that sex was not a patriarchal capitalist transaction where someone "broke" a hymen and another person "lost" virginity

And I reminded myself that even hetrosexual sex was much more than penis in vagina.

Sex is a sensual bath. Sex is exploring our bodies together. Sex may also be a pleasurable solo act. Still, I wanted the ability to choose whether or not to have him inside me.

I hid this from everyone around me, and shame stored itself in every crease in my body.

Then one day, I came across a term that would change

everything.

Vaginismus

Vaginismus

Vaginismus

Vaginismus – involuntary muscle spasms to the fear of vaginal penetration.

Why I had this fear is a topic for another day, but let's just say that I had to learn to forgive my silenced inner child and remind her that it was his shame, not mine. Not hers, not ours.

Through physical and cognitive therapy, I slowly began unlearning the loads of toxic messages my body carried. Through dance I began relearning my sweet, sweet mother tongue

The language of my beautiful body.

The journey took some time, But I was finally able to have delicious, pain free sex whether it involved the gate of heaven or not.

I was also finally able to have a pap smear and most exciting of all—to use a tampon.

Maybe these don't sound like grand achievements to you, but after being exiled from my body for many years, returning home wasn't a small achievement.

It. Was. Everything.

I CAME HERE BECAUSE I AM HURTING

by **Yara Sallam** *a feminist researcher from Egypt*

I stole bell hooks' introductory paragraph of her amazing article "Theory as a liberatory practice" and I feel if amended slightly, it can reflect what brought me to regional and international spaces of discussion and practice on wellbeing, care and healing of activists. Let me try:

"Let me begin by saying that I came to [these spaces] because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to [these spaces] desperate, wanting to comprehend,to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in [these spaces] a location for healing." – bell hooks (with amendments, "these spaces" instead of "theory")

I must admit that I come to many places because I am hurting, but also because I seek joy and I have hope. For some reason these words do not seem to get along in mainstream conversations around the well-being of

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activists. How can anger and hurt co-exist with joy and hope? In my experience, how can't it?

Baba's illness and leaving left no space in me for many things. Unnecessary and hurtful relationships had to go. Cairo had to go. And my political heartbreak had to find a mending space.

My withdrawal came gradually. I can see the milestones. First, I avoided street protests—my family was not willing to have another prison visit. Second, I was no longer able to sit with victims and survivors to take their testimonies; I hid in a managerial position that provided me with some emotional distance. But you can't truly hide from your country if you're still living and working in its realitie(s) day in and day out. Not only did I leave the human rights organization I called my home, but I left Cairo, the center of Egypt, all together. My third and last withdrawal was the decision not to work on Egypt related issues or be engaged with the Egyptian activism scene. I am detached, distant and far away from where I was 5 years ago.

I had many conversations with my therapist on whether I did this for security reasons or if my cup was really full. I think I left because I am searching for a way

to heal that broken relationship with "activism" (I don't want to say 'movement(s)').

I always look for reference.

When you're learning to scuba dive, they teach you to always have a reference so not to get lost—a reef wall or some sort of underwater landscape. It can also be the boat's rope.

HOW CAN ANGER AND HURT CO-EXIST WITH JOY AND HOPE? IN MY EXPERIENCE, HOW CAN'T IT?

When I fell sick, I looked for answers to my disorientation in books. I read how others experienced the same illness, or similar one. I read about the history of its discovery and how patients courageously (or out of fear really—can both words co-exist?) paved the way to the treatments I'm taking today. Often paying with their life, or just bearing so much physical and psychological pain.

When baba left, I wanted to know how others deal with so much grief.

To fight the loneliness I'm going through, I remind

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myself that I am not the only one and I tell myself there must be someone out there who shared, and maybe is still sharing, how to survive this, and find joy beyond the misery.

My question is always how can I move with this to a more accepting and joyful way?

I started wondering – and still do – how others did it. How feminists and queer people cared for one another and healed activism wounds and heartbreaks? How did they really heal even with donors' requirements and assessment of programs and activities?

I THINK I LEFT BECAUSE I AM SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO HEAL THAT BROKEN RELATIONSHIP WITH "ACTIVISM"

Fighting against apartheid, military dictatorships, fundamentalism(s), and other forms of oppressions... how is it that the dominating conversation ends up being about taking 'time-off' and practicing (no offense) yoga? I'm sure the answer will not be some sort of internal organizational policy, and it's probably not as joyful as I imagine.

Building communities and movements is messy,

dealing with inter-movement and inter-generational conflict is messy. If we want to use feminist abolitionist approaches to justice, joyfully continuing our activism is not an easy recipe.

I humbly come to other activist spaces to learn. To find answers. To heal. And to find joy in my relentlessly hopeful heart.

I find joy in knowing that beyond consumerist colonial psychology there is a collective healing theory called "Pagdadala" (burden bearing). There is hope, far away from my context, in understanding that what we are going through is not, and should not, be individualised. There is hope that we find healing in learning how to carry a burden, acknowledging that we cannot always let go of it (as opposed to the pop psychology that advises to cut all ties with conflicts, burdens, and family members whom we struggle with).

I find joy in reading about how women in Yemen relax together; how communal it is to take time off. I find hope when I see that my longing for a community is real and felt by other women in a different country.

I find joy and hope in a community that thinks together about changing narratives, that wants to document their

own knowledge and practices. I find joy and hope in being in community with comrades who speak openly against colonial methods and how to stand in solidarity with one another.

I come to these spaces because I'm heart broken from our collective defeat. Not just the defeat against the power of a military regime, but also our internal defeat and inability to resolve conflict without cancelling one another, holding each other accountable without shaming one another, and the failure to practise what we preach. From sexual violence, homophobia and transphobia, using torture in sit-ins against 'thugs', threatening women using legal and societal patriarchal tools, and more. The list of disappointments and heartbreak from those I called comrades at some point can go on and on. It is long enough to make the military regime seem reasonable.

I COME TO THESE SPACES BECAUSE I'M HEART BROKEN FROM OUR COLLECTIVE DEFEAT. NOT JUST THE DEFEAT AGAINST THE POWER OF A MILITARY REGIME, BUT ALSO OUR INTERNAL DEFEAT AND INABILITY TO RESOLVE CONFLICT WITHOUT CANCELLING ONE ANOTHER, HOLDING EACH OTHER ACCOUNTABLE WITHOUT SHAMING ONE ANOTHER, AND THE FAILURE TO PRACTISE WHAT WE PREACH.

I come to these spaces because I'm hurting, and I know my hurt is not unique. I know that somewhere, someone has been through the same hurt. And in following their footsteps, I learn and I heal.

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CARE RECIPE – ACTIVIST PA ZAMBIA

by **Angela Ngulube** *from Zambia*

The walk can be lonely when you are an activist in a space that does not value female led activism. A place of misconception and accusations. "Mau ya Azimai ni Kambwili." A local saying which means "the words of a woman are like an axe."

A female activist is sometimes perceived as a threat because her words are said to have the power to influence the community and possibly dig out the known principles and values that the community instills in the younger generations.

The journey can be lonely, it becomes hard to depend on others. So you have to become your own pillar, encourage yourself and give YOU regular pats on the back. Checks and balances are usually from outsiders and these mostly dwell on the negative.

Very few dwell on promoting positivity or room to grow.

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What is this so-called activism? Are the usual comments from the community *gatekeepers*? What makes you think this challenge we have known and lived with for so long can change at some point? Amai code mulibe zinango zo chiti? Woman, does it mean you have no other thing to do or to occupy your time?

These are questions that activists like me are asked on a daily basis by community self-appointed journalists. To be an activist like me living in the Peri urban community of Lusaka where most people have become comfortable living amidst injustice, police brutality and poverty. Calling out decision makers is perceived as the worst of all time and something that only attention seekers do.

At Nyali Zambia, as female activists we believe when the going gets tough only the tough will go. So we keep going and we cook and recook new and hot recipes that can help clear our minds and nourish us so we can grow strong and pursue our objectives. The mind can never develop a coping mechanism if there is no situation that requires or demands it to cope.

The mind is a beautiful place where the trouble of dismantling existing systems that hamper community wellbeing starts. Thus because of the harsh

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environments, as Female activists at Nyali, we have developed a solidarity-focused coping mechanism where we cope by feeding the mind with yummy desserts and salads in between breakdowns.

AT NYALI ZAMBIA, AS FEMALE ACTIVISTS WE BELIEVE WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH ONLY THE TOUGH WILL GO.

The usual dessert is getting some time out when things get too overwhelming. Like a stove, the idea is to slowly withdraw from the heat and turn off gently until there is enough capacity to re-strategize and until there is room for clear thoughts and feelings to flow. A healthy mind.

Thus we dance when we can, cry when it gets hard, and celebrate when we achieve. Crying on its own is an art of expression. It allows one to remove what is blocking you or keeping you in a space of discomfort. As opposed to the narrative of weakness attached to this art, crying is an empowering art.

When the body and the spirit feels weak, we allow emotions to flow within, around and eventually out of the body! It is the same with dance and celebration, you don't dance because you know how to but because you

feel the rhythm flowing and dance is one way of expressing celebration. Personalize your dance, own it and let it be my thing, your thing, at Nyali no dance fits all.

THE MIND IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE WHERE THE TROUBLE OF DISMANTLING EXISTING SYSTEMS THAT HAMPER COMMUNITY WELLBEING STARTS.

Therefore when need is felt we celebrate with those that feel the rhythm and dance. We celebrate wins that most people will probably overlook because they seem trivial. Here we celebrate! Dance because you did it, you made it no matter how small! This is our ritual that helps to keep us nourished when the community becomes hostile. When the kitchen gets hot, we know the switch to press to keep it cool and functional.

Find your dessert and run with it, be the ones who Go in the tough.

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RESEARCHING MY WAY TO HEAL

by **Yahia Saleh** *a migrant writer, researcher and social worker from Nubia, Egypt*

I remember laughing while telling a friend of mine how interesting it is that I chose to settle down in Malmö– Sweden's border city with Copenhagen, Denmark. The history of the city extends from its establishment by the Danes, to being contested and later colonised by Sweden. The city became one of Sweden's working-class barricades in modern history, and now one of the most diverse cities in the country and the hot spot of migration, integration ,criminal policies and the focal point of populist and xenophobic rhetoric. There's probably nothing that is funny about this, but it was my nervous laugh at the fact that I actually chose to live here when I left Egypt in 2013, with an incomprehensible attraction to living on the edge of things, the borders of places, and the intersections of identity and definitions.

I am a third generation Nubian from the far south of Egypt, born and raised in Cairo for a middle class family originating from a village divided by the British colonial

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borders between the Sudanese and Egyptian parts. Growing up in Cairo, I had to navigate different cultural and ethnic identities, which were usually reflected in negative comments from other northern Egyptians on my skin colour, my nose or even my body. A childhood characterised by anxiety and fear of being singled out for my difference. This anxiety continued to grow up with me as I grew up developing a different sexuality and expressing a different masculinity.

Suddenly a new intersection added to the edge I am living on. The older I became, the more I understood my difference more, but the fear of childhood remained like a shadow clinging to my feet. This shadow did not restrict the way I see myself, but it made my steps a little heavier.

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I learned how to walk at the same speed as everyone, despite the weight of my shadow. At some point, I realised that I was always faster than everyone else, that I had a deeper understanding of myself, but I was always afraid they would see my shadow, so I learned how to hide it. I learned how to keep up with them, go along with them, make them laugh, and later every day hide again in my solitude with my books and my shadow.

Sometimes a new perspective is needed to be able to understand our positions. When I moved to Sweden I was able to look at my previous life in Egypt from a distance, and my position as a black, queer, muslim migrant in Malmö clarified my previous experience as a Nubian, queer individual in Cairo. This ability was not, I believe, a result of simply geographical distance but rather of what this distance provided and resulted from. Living in Sweden was like a lonely palm tree with no family or friends around. Fleeing an oppressed revolution to the cold north triggered a process of self-reflection and understanding, and possibly a step on the way to heal my relationship to myself.

Looking back at my life in Egypt while living in the very white context that is Sweden reminded me that coming to a certain understanding of myself and of liberty was a

privilege. A privilege that I earned after years of struggle. I also realised that whether living under an oppressive regime or a relatively liberated society, I had to live with myself and my childhood shadows. If I cannot be free with myself, I will never be free as long as I live. Living on the edges of identities automatically takes the private to the public, because when you live on the edge with all the hyper-awareness and hyper-visibility, the very personal becomes a political statement. The colour of my skin becomes a political manifestation, my body becomes a battlefield. How I carry myself, how I express my masculinity, and every step I walk in public becomes an act of resistance.

One aspect of healing for me was to heal my relationship to my Nubianness, my culture and my identity. I wanted to stop running from it and reclaim my very own power in defining what it means to be Nubian. Starting my masters studies inspired me to heal this relationship through research and writing.

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I ALSO REALISED THAT WHETHER LIVING UNDER AN OPPRESSIVE REGIME OR A RELATIVELY LIBERATED SOCIETY, I HAD TO LIVE WITH MYSELF AND MY CHILDHOOD SHADOWS. IF I CANNOT BE FREE WITH MYSELF, I WILL NEVER BE FREE AS LONG AS I LIVE.

Conducting research on Nubian modern history, Nubian collective memory, and the reconstruction of Nubian identity helps me to trace the changes both imposed and from within, to reach an understanding of why being Nubian is what it is today. It provided a way for me to move from the square of anger and resentment to the square of compassion. It also gave me a platform to seek deeper knowledge about the thing I thought I knew quite well—myself and my identity. It gave me the tools to open the boxes that were collectively closed, and hear the voices that were collectively silenced. It allowed me to think of my way of expressing my masculinity as part of a larger mosaic of masculinities that has been omitted for centuries and it is time for me and others to reveal it by rewriting our story(ies) so that no one else will write it for us.

...HEAL MY RELATIONSHIP TO MY NUBIANNESS, MY CULTURE AND MY IDENTITY.

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The thing with doing research is that it made me meet other Nubians and hear different sides of their stories, it made me meet with Nubians from the past, it made me look deeper into myself and mend my connection to these individuals. It made me see them, and myself as fully Nubian, because being Nubian is something that shines from my own soul, not just an outfit or a behaviour I'm forced into in order to fit in. I slowly stopped looking at myself as a flawed one, and shifted the gaze onto the flawed memory that was altered for generations, pushing every slightly different individual down.

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FOOD for the SOUL part 1

OF FARMERS AND CARABAOS

by **Zofia** *is part of Gulay Lang and co-organizer of Gulay Pa More, a plant-based food heritage festival (Philippines).*

The most common question I would get when I went vegan and ate out with my friends is: can I eat (insert meat dish here) in front of you? To which I would always answer yes.

Through the course of our meal and updates on each other's lives, the topic of veganism would always creep itself in. When did you go vegan? Why? What food do you eat? What about human rights? And of course, buti okay lang sa iyo na kumain ako ng karne sa harap mo ("I'm glad that it's okay that I can eat meat in front you").

As much as I did not enjoy seeing an animal's body in front of me, I learned to understand how food, and the act of eating, plays into our relationship-building. Hunger is not a good feeling to endure. And to judge someone who I am sharing a table with will not go well.

To answer the questions: I went vegan in 2017

because my father-in-law got diagnosed with Chronic Kidney Disease. Having lost my father in 2014 due to cancer, I thought that maybe a lifestyle change can be a solution to our health concerns. I eat rice and ulam basta gulay lang, and no, I do not like eating salads. Yes, okay lang sa akin na kumain ka ng pagkain mo ("it's okay for me that you eat your food"). After all, I believe in a person's right to eat what they want, tulad na lang ng pagrespeto mo sa aking food choices("in the same way that you also respect my food choices").

Out of mutual respect and understanding, we get to continue the conversation.

Veganism, as defined by the Vegan Society in 1988, "is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals."

The key phrase for most vegans here is "as far as possible and practicable", in recognition that we cannot

be fully perfect vegans in the current state of the world where the use of animals is still the norm.

This is why veganism is more than just non-consumption. It is also to look deeper into why a world where everyone is free and has dignity to live is so hard to achieve, not just for animals, but for humans as well.

In the Philippines, an issue that could be common ground for animal rights and social justice advocates is the use of carabaos to till agricultural lands.

If we are to look solely on the plight of the carabao, we would see the hardship that he had to endure ploughing land under the heat of the sun, with the rope already enmeshed in his hooves.

The farmer, on the other hand, tills all day and night, on a land that he does not own. After ensuring that consumers would have food to eat, it is the farmer who is hungry and remains poor.

The challenge here is for all of us to look at the bigger angle and ask: why are the carabao and the farmer in the dire situation they are in? Who put them there? Where are the technological advances that were supposed to help them both? And how do they get out and free

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themselves from their marginalization?

The country remains in a feudal state. Despite being rich in resources, the majority of the Filipino people experience varying degrees of poverty. This is exacerbated by the destruction of our natural environment and biodiversity in the name of profit for the already rich.

...IT IS THE FARMER WHO IS HUNGRY AND REMAINS POOR.

There is no local language to explain what veganism and being a vegan is. To continue to pursue veganism as just a philosophy would be lacking. Now is the time for us to dismantle what we know about veganism and to start making it our own. One that is grounded in our current reality, issues and struggles.

In the course of having conversations with foodies, social justice activists, environmental advocates and animal welfare workers who may or may not be vegan, a common theme emerges – we all just want to create a better world for all of us. And to be able to create a better world, we need each other, working in solidarity with one another.

After all, change is achieved by people pursuing a common goal. The only way for us to achieve a just and peaceful society is if we enjoin every person we can to address the root cause of our problems.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR US TO DISMANTLE WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT VEGANISM AND TO START MAKING IT OUR OWN.

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We are called to learn from each other and to seek solutions together – as Filipinos who believe in the inherent dignity of every living being.

Now is the time for us to fully embrace the Filipino Vegan Movement.

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BRAZILIAN FAROFA

by **Foz** *facilitator of learning processes and human re-enchantment through nature and technologies from Brazil*

Farofa or "Farofinha" (since, in Brazil, we use the diminutive form for things that we treasure), is a dish that is widely consumed in Brazil and can accompany any other dish. It can be made from any leftovers that we have in the fridge, it is a dish that reflects the resilience and creativity of Brazilians in the face of any situation.

It basically consists of sautéing something with spices and then adding flour. The flour can be fine or coarse, soft or very hard, in flakes or balls, made from cassava or corn, so there are endless possibilities for combinations.

It's common to use up any or a lot of leftovers to make our farofas. It can be made with just one ingredient–it's very common to make a farofa with just fried onions, for example. It can also be made by sautéing leftover meat, vegetables, olives or making full use of parts of the food that would usually be thrown away, such as carrot or beetroot leaves, parsley stalks, banana peels (organic because of the poison in conventional crops).

We can even use unconventional food plants, often

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available in our backyards and rarely used, such as taioba leaves (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*), picão preto (*Bidens pilosa*), ora pro nobis (*Pereskia aculeata*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), beldroega (*Portulaca oleracea*), and so on... And we can even make sophisticated farofas with ingredients such as asparagus, dried tomatoes, eggs, grated carrot, dried coconut, smoked tofu. The limit is our imagination, and what we have in the kitchen ;)

And a good Feijoada in Brazil is always accompanied by a farofa and usually a banana farofa! In this case, we're going to use the banana itself, but as I said before, you can also use the peel of organic bananas, which reduces food waste, ok?

Before you start, choose and chop your ingredients and set aside a frying pan, preferably one that doesn't stick.

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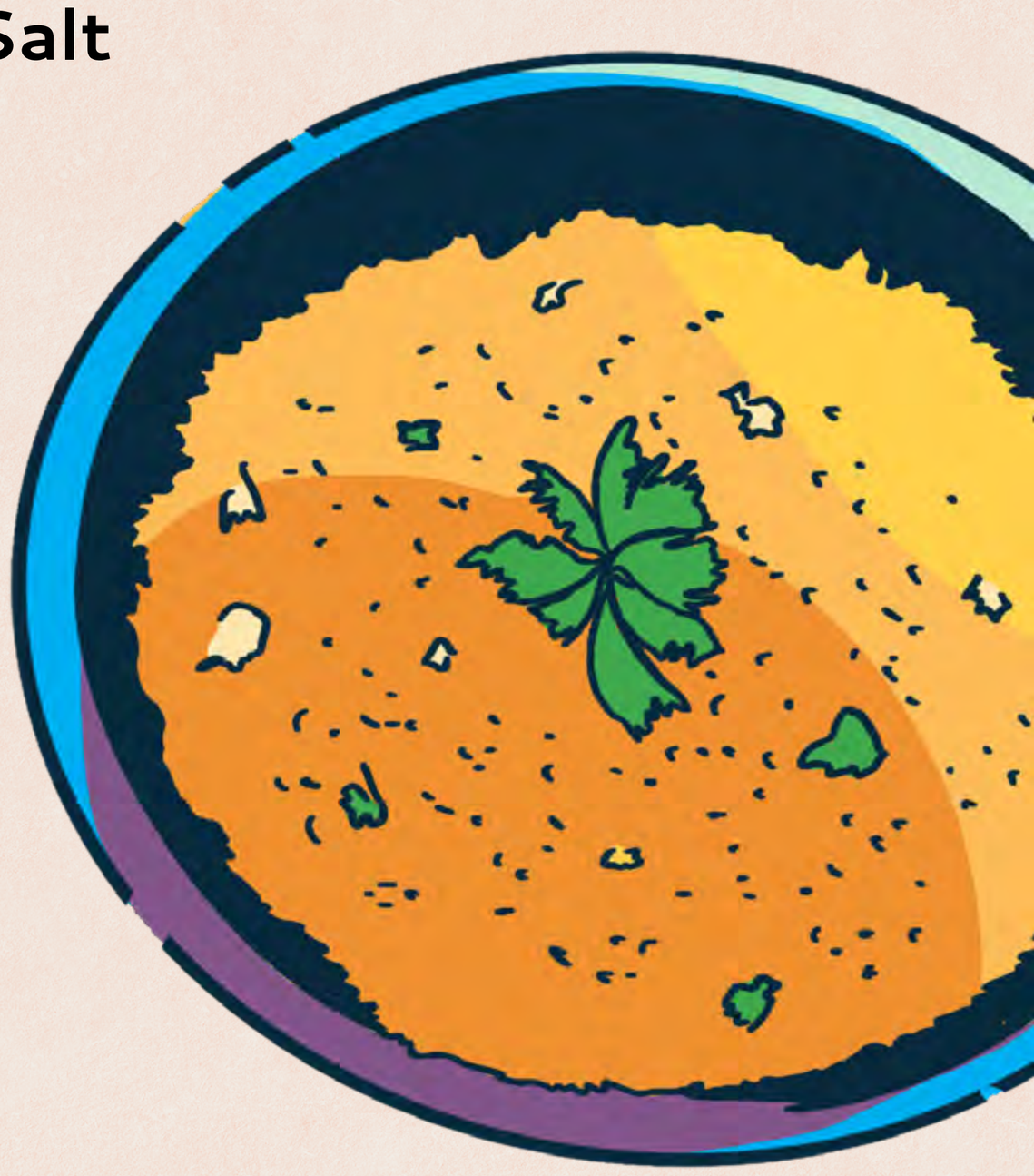
INGREDIENTS

- **2 Large Bananas** *(I use nanica bananas, but you can use frying bananas such as plantains, or any other banana, the riper it is, the more contrast there will be between sweet and savoury)*
- **1 Onion** cut into thin slices *(if you like it a lot, you can use 2)*
- **Green Seasonings** *(also sprigs of parsley, coriander and/or spring onions)*
- **1 grated Carrot** *(optional)*
- **1 cup of Cassava Flour** *(choose your favourite!)*
- **Vegetable Oil** for sautéing
- **Salt**



COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

1. With a little oil in a non-stick frying pan, fry the bananas, sprinkle a little salt, and then flip to brown the other side. Remove from the heat and set aside.

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② Using the same pan, sauté the onion in a little oil until golden.

③ Add the grated carrot (if you have separated the other ingredients, sauté them together here), sauté until slightly softened, then add the fried bananas.

④ Add the flour, stirring constantly, and adjust the salt if necessary.

⑤ Finally, switch off the pan, add the chopped greens, a drizzle of olive oil and serve! "Bom Apetite"

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TUNA SAMBAL MATAH WITH TORTILLA (INDONESIA)

by **Dita** *a feminist who loves the culinary world and considers the kitchen and cooking to be a form of therapy for her. This recipe was created as a form of resistance against the stigma that feminists can not cook.*

I got this recipe when I participated in a rural community cooking class. Through this recipe, I want to break the stigma that feminists can't cook. This recipe also serves as a form of self-care and resistance against the stigma that feminists can't cook. I hope that with this recipe, my love, care, and resistance can be conveyed well.

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INGREDIENTS

Main Ingredients:

- 200g of Fresh Red Tuna
- Small-sized Tortillas

Salad Ingredients:

- Green round eggplant
- Carrot
- Shallots
- Baby green beans
- Bird's eye chili
- Red tomato
- Coconut oil
- Salt and pepper

Spice Paste Ingredients:

- Turmeric
- Makrut lime leaves
- Galangal
- Ginger
- Lesser galangal
- Garlic
- Shallots
- Bird's eye chili
- Curly red chili
- Roasted coriander
- Roasted candlenut
- Lemongrass
- Shrimp paste
- Salt
- Pepper

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COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Blend the spice paste ingredients until smooth, then rub it on one side of the tuna.
2. Cook the tuna with the spice paste in a pan over medium heat for 2 minutes on each side. Let it rest for 5 minutes, then cut into pieces.
3. Cut the salad ingredients into julienne or as desired, then mix with coconut oil in a bowl.
4. Lightly toast the tortillas.
5. Arrange all ingredients on a plate with the tortilla at the bottom, then place the tuna on top of the tortilla and the salad as a topping.
6. Tuna Sambal Matah is ready to be enjoyed.

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CARE *as* COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

SELF-CARE AND COLLECTIVE CARE AS STRATEGIES FOR POLITICAL ACTION

by **Centro Feminista de Estudos e Assessoria CFEMEA (Brazil)**

Self-care and collective care among activists is a political and prioritized strategy within feminist anti-racist activism. We feel that by taking care of ourselves and other activists, we open up the real possibility of strengthening, protecting, promoting and sustaining struggles for the Wellbeing. In the same way that self-transformation and social transformation nourish each other, so do self-care and collective care.

We are convinced that no social transformation is possible if the people in the struggle are not themselves bearers of other desires, another ethic, another imaginary, another culture.

The political context and the need to fight for life cause deep exhaustion for women human rights

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defenders. The struggle can often be a catalyst for painful emotional processes, which can lead to the physical, emotional and psychological illness of women who are fighting to transform and break all forms of oppression in the patriarchal, sexist, racist, homophobic and ableist capitalist system that violates the body and soul of activists.

That's why it's so important to foster spaces where these issues are shared, places that maintain an ethical commitment to transforming the world and ending the patriarchal and racist logic of hegemonic politics.

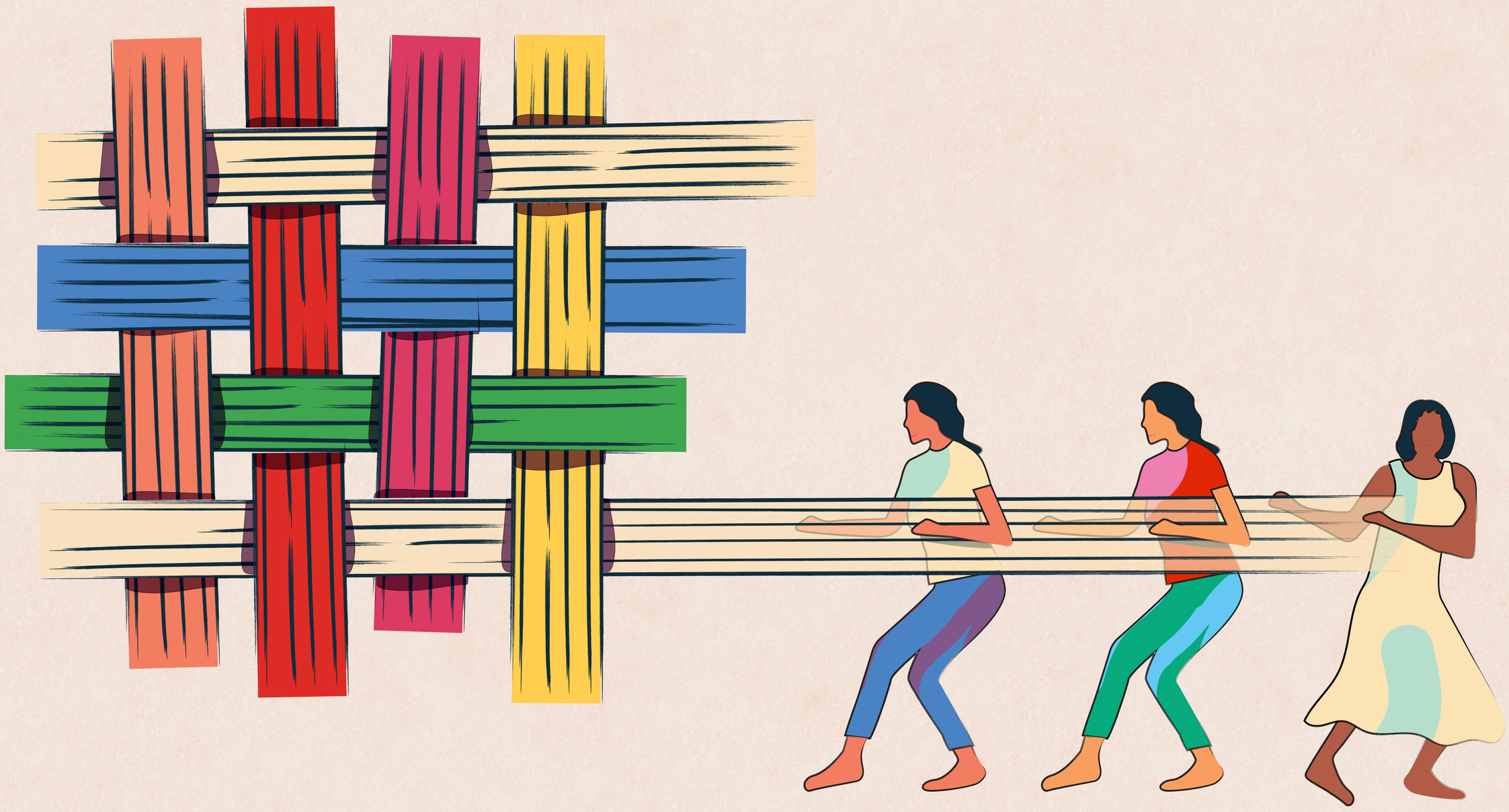
Since 2015, CFEMEA has been developing Self-Care and Collective Care processes among activists with the aim of promoting spaces for breathing, debate, self-knowledge, and knowledge exchange.

This includes passing on practices that favour reducing stress and anxiety, stimulating creativity and collective reflections on the importance of care within activism.

Our approach is based on feminist pedagogy through the principles of horizontality and circularity and intercultural dialogue.

Through the Self-Care and Collective Care among Activists process we wish to:

- Recognise activists' capacities and the effects of social and cultural relations on daily life.
- Generate reflections on care as a transformative and political action in women's lives.
- Recognise the experiences of each woman and understanding and respecting their rhythms in order to contribute to the processes of individual, social and community recovery and reparation.
- Strengthen autonomy and self-awareness.



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- Strengthen our resistance and resilience to the violations and violence that oppress and sicken us.
- Provide bonds of affection, struggle and acceptance to strengthen our abilities and potential.
- Recognise our diversity and weave plural paths of anti-racist feminist care.

One of the methodologies that we have anchored over the years is the "Rodas de Autocuidado e Cuidado entre Ativistas" (Wheels of Self-Care and Collective Care among Activists).

...FIGHTING TO TRANSFORM AND BREAK ALL FORMS OF OPPRESSION IN THE PATRIARCHAL, SEXIST, RACIST, HOMOPHOBIC AND ABLEIST CAPITALIST SYSTEM THAT VIOLATES THE BODY AND SOUL OF ACTIVISTS.

These are based on our experience as anti-racist feminist activists who believe in the importance of paying attention to emotions, sensations, intuitions, as well as the body, mind and spirit in order to keep up the fight, creating cohesion between our desire for self-transformation and the transformation of the world.

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To this end, we add aspects that favour free expression, affection, solidarity and the creation of strong, permanent bonds between activists. The Wheels are a safe, confidential space where we practice speaking in the first person, without advice or judgement, where the word circulates and everyone has the right to speak and be heard.

At each turn of the wheel, an objective/theme is outlined and unveiled throughout the meeting through bodily, expressive and reflective practices such as breathing exercises, games, dance, visual arts, creative writing, group dynamics, mindfulness, sewing, stretching, meditation, SRT (Stress Reduction Technique), etc. Every meeting includes a moment of sharing to share learnings, difficulties, mobilise solidarity and the reciprocity of care between us.

In the face of the great challenges that move us as activists, we feel that being part of a network, holding Rounds and other care actions is a way of strengthening, growing and supporting each other in confronting issues with affection, dialogue and complexity.

We believe in the power of coming together to create content, methodologies and ways of supporting and

strengthening our struggle and resistance. That's why we have joined together in the weaving of a network called "Tecelãs do Cuidado" (Weavers of Care), made up of activists from different territories and engaged in different struggles that place care at their core, as an ethical principle capable of mobilising, bringing about profound transformations and helping to build a truly radical, emancipatory political and social project for the Wellbeing.

This weaving is done by many hands, based on the knowledge that each person brings, which is many and is constantly enriching and strengthening the network. We can see this strength in the individual impacts, in the processes of healing and self-transformation, in the benefits to physical and emotional health, as well as in the impacts on political articulations and social relations. We can see the resonance of these gains in everyday life, as they have enabled new dialogues, conflict resolution and the promotion of balance at home, at work and in the collectives and groupings of the anti-racist feminist movement that we have built.

Being a weaver means sowing, planting and harvesting with each other

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To be a weaver is to connect our roots and weather the storms together

To be a weaver is to drink the sap of life sip by sip

To be a weaver is to weave our flags and our struggles with affection and care

To be a weaver is to take care of yourself and those around you

To be a weaver is to dance, sing and let the wind sway

Being a weaver is learning in a circle, it's circularity, it's roots and wings.

(Ana Nossa, Tecelã do Cuidado / Weaver of Care, February 2023).

During all these years, in partnership with the "Tecelãs" and many social and women's movements, CFEMEA has seen the idea of care grow as a political strategy that needed to become an integral part of the fight against inequalities, especially gender, race and class inequalities.

This gave rise to the idea of territorialising the processes of self-care and collective care as a

constitutive part of sustaining life in the daily lives of activists. We are currently cultivating this idea as a seed for strengthening Territories of Care, Struggle and Sustaining Life, which systematises and structures a methodology that adds care to struggle, to the same extent that we believe that the personal is political and that overcoming these separations is fundamental for building a better world for all people and species, a world where we can truly Wellbeing.

"TECELÃS DO CUIDADO" (WEAVERS OF CARE), MADE UP OF ACTIVISTS FROM DIFFERENT TERRITORIES AND ENGAGED IN DIFFERENT STRUGGLES THAT PLACE CARE AT THEIR CORE, AS AN ETHICAL PRINCIPLE CAPABLE OF MOBILISING, BRINGING ABOUT PROFOUND TRANSFORMATIONS AND HELPING TO BUILD A TRULY RADICAL, EMANCIPATORY POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PROJECT FOR THE WELLBEING.

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FROM MENTAL HEALTH TO PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH

by **Clemencia Correa,** *Director of Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial in Mexico*

At Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial[1], we have been practicing psychosocial accompaniment, training, research, and social advocacy for 11 years, mainly in Mexico as well as other Latin American countries. Our efforts are based on three pillars: human rights, socio-political violence, and psychosocial health.

Or work draws from mental health approaches developed in Chile and Argentina within the context of dictatorships and the dirty war in Colombia. Faced with the extent of damage caused by socio-political violence, there was a need to address its impacts, as well as the ways of coping with it, from a perspective that transcends individual harm and instead allows us to understand and address collective and social damage. We are opposed to positions that pathologize human beings by placing them into categories of suffering and that

pathologize the harm itself. As Ignacio Martín-Baró put it, in contexts of socio-political violence, the impacts are normal and the dominant power structures along with the violence that creates them are abnormal.

We have drawn from the ethical-political approaches of this Salvadoran social psychologist, who took a critical stance against conceptions that restrict the definition of mental health to the absence of mental disorders or to the proper functioning of the human organism. For Baró, mental health "is a part of the basic nature of human relationships that defines the possibilities of humanization which present themselves to the members

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of every society and group. [...] It constitutes a dimension of the relationships between people and groups rather than an individual state, though this dimension might take root differently in the organism of each individual involved in those relationships."[2] For Aluna, the approach to mental health is part of the political stakes that contribute to building a humanized social fabric in the face of the personal and collective de-structuring that creates violence.

AS IGNACIO MARTÍN-BARÓ PUT IT, IN CONTEXTS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL VIOLENCE, THE IMPACTS ARE NORMAL AND THE DOMINANT POWER STRUCTURES ALONG WITH THE VIOLENCE THAT CREATES THEM ARE ABNORMAL.

From the perspective of our practice, it is fundamental to approach health from a political, intersectional, and intercultural perspective, allowing for people, collectives, and communities to recover dignified conditions. Spiritual and environmental dimensions, as well as socio-economic conditions, are also part of health. Therefore, it

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is essential to analyze and transform them. For Aluna, mental health is a social product that is inseparable from the development of a life that is dignified, safe, and respectful of nature as well as the changing and diverse collective and social configurations of subjects, peoples, and cultures.

For all of these reasons, we believe that, today, the concept of mental health does not meet the needs of individuals and groups. Instead, we have chosen to call it psychosocial health, which must be addressed not simply to benefit an individual as a product of capitalist society but to humanize relationships and dignify life.

IT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO APPROACH HEALTH FROM A POLITICAL, INTERSECTIONAL, AND INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE.

One of the challenges we face is continuing to reflect on health from an anti-hegemonic perspective, which we are doing with organizations from other continents.[3]

- 1 For Aluna, the psychosocial approach is a way of seeing, interpreting, and understanding the personal, collective, and social harm that presents itself in contexts of socio-political violence with the aim of strengthening strategies and methods to address this

harm using political, psycho-emotional, and security tools and strategies so that political subjects can continue to develop their work as well as their political and life projects.

- 2 Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (2022). Main booklet of the series Keys to Psychosocial Accompaniment. Mexico: Aluna. Page 19. Click here for the English version or here for the Spanish version.

- 3 We are part of a transnational space for reflection on psychosocial accompaniment and staff care in contexts of socio-political violence. It is made up of ten organizations from countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

ACCOMPANYING IS THE VERB OF RESISTANCE

by **Nicole Martin** *is an investigative journalist and feminist activist from Argentina*

What are the threads that sustain us? When we look at ourselves and recapitulate our collective steps, when we feel the joys and pains that marked our activism, we find constellations of people who crossed paths and accompanied our history. If resistance is boiling in a big pot in the kitchen, it must be because there are encounters, intimacy, listening and mutual support. A word present and a sororal gaze that is our mirror and resonance box. The verb, to accompany. With "a" for " abrazo " (embrace), for "apoio" (support), for "autonomía" (autonomy).

At Vita-Activa.Org we accompany women, LGTBIQ+ people, journalists, activists and defenders of mother earth and the freedom of expression. Our work, through psychological first aid, is to support people facing digital gender-based violence, stress, trauma and burnout.
We recognise the plural nature of the verb to accompany: it is an exercise of two, which generates mutual trust

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and security.

We often imagine our support in the form of crutches. During the empathic interview, we look together for what can keep us on our feet. Usually these crutches are made of past experiences and learnings of resilience that kept us afloat in crises. We think of crutches because we recognise that accompaniment must cultivate autonomy, not co-dependence. We rely on the strength of each person to walk forward, with all the support they need.

We discovered that empathic accompaniment is often practised without knowing it. We see it present in attempts to build safe spaces in our collectives and human rights organisations. In fact, it can appear in any place where empathy and horizontality are practised. The comfortable silence in an embrace is a sign of its invisible transformative power.

In the world of every man for himself, presence and empathy have become the oxygen that saves us. For this reason, accompaniment is framed within the framework of community care, which includes other strategies for collective resistance. With these actions, we resist a system that privileges individualism, competition, extreme productivity, selfishness, exploitation and

unsustainable accumulation over people's need for care (L.A.M., 2023).

IN THE WORLD OF EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF, PRESENCE AND EMPATHY HAVE BECOME THE OXYGEN THAT SAVES US. FOR THIS REASON, ACCOMPANIMENT IS FRAMED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF COMMUNITY CARE, WHICH INCLUDES OTHER STRATEGIES FOR COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE.

In the process of accompaniment we find actions of well-being that can be as diverse as there are people in the world. However, there are bridges that can be found: inhabiting the pause and breaks, recognising the value of being people beyond productivity, celebrating the courage to ask for help, showing oneself to be vulnerable and under construction– not as a finished product for sale–, and finding spaces for leisure and connection with nature and the body, among other possibilities.

We discovered that resistance can (and must) be celebrated so that joy multiplies efforts. That it can be woven from dreams and not nightmares. That the compañeras and compañeres (comrades) support us in their own care, because their wellbeing is their own,

and part of the collective. In our bodies we observe the learning and the victories. In accompaniment, we listen to all the ways of imagining, inhabiting and building the world as well as echoing that we are not alone in these searches. That we ourselves are a safe space. And that is where we find ourselves in order to heal.

IN ACCOMPANIMENT, WE LISTEN TO ALL THE WAYS OF IMAGINING, INHABITING AND BUILDING THE WORLD AS WELL AS ECHOING THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE IN THESE SEARCHES. THAT WE OURSELVES ARE A SAFE SPACE.

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INDIGENOUS PSYCHO-SOCIAL MECHANISMS IN DEALING WITH CRITICAL EVENTS AMONG THE PEOPLE OF TANGLAG IN KALINGA, PHILIPPINES

by **Cordillera Women's Education and Resource Center Inc. & Tanglag Women's Organization, G. Cynthia Dacanay-Jaramillo** *Community Mental Health Practitioner & Women's Rights Activist, CWEARC Inc from Cordillera Philippines*

Psychological intervention to mitigate the mental health impacts of critical incidents in communities is a relatively recent development in psychological practice in the Philippines. Two of the current and commonly utilized mechanisms in addressing the psycho-social impacts of disasters/calamities are Psychological First Aide (PFA) and Psychological Debriefing. There are however debates and issues being raised about the

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efficacy of such methods of intervention in building community resilience. Moreover, these approaches oftentimes require external responders to facilitate the process.

What is disheartening is the nominal awareness of Mental Health practitioners or first responders on local processes employed by communities, particularly indigenous knowledge systems and practices serving as psycho-social support mechanisms in dealing with critical events. The dearth of studies and specifically the documentation of local practices which are now quickly disappearing also reflects this sad reality.

TANGLAG'S Indigenous Psycho-social Mechanisms:

A study conducted in 2011 on a tradition still alive and utilized by the indigenous people of Tanglag, in Kalinga, Philippines, in responding to critical events reveals the truth about the existence of such local mechanisms: while they still persist in a considerable number of villages, they are far from being acknowledged or even given due recognition.

Kalinga, like the other Provinces of the Cordillera has a population which are still predominantly Indigenous

Peoples. Traditional lifeways of the Tanglag people still persist in the present where the community still carries a strong sense of collectivism. They promote values for the common good such as mutual help, compassion, caring and sharing and combatting individualist ways or outlooks. Nurturing the land and environment is a norm which endeavors to benefit present and future generations. These values and practices are linked to their fundamental concept about LAND which to them is considered SACRED and the vital source of life.

Thus, for the Indigenous Peoples of Kalinga, protection and defense of their ancestral land, including its resources and people are essential and paramount. It then follows that whenever life-threatening events occur in their villages, the people's spontaneous response is to safeguard its people, land and territory. Their response clearly illustrates strong community cohesion, demonstrating that using their collective strength to address the debacles they confront are common traditions. These indigenous knowledge systems have allowed them to cope, rendering the impacts of calamities more manageable and less traumatic on those affected.

The research was able to determine local approaches, including various stages of the spontaneous process

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practiced by the community. Such mechanisms have been established to have mitigated the mental health impacts of disasters and other adversities on the affected populace. The study was also able to ascertain local concepts and terms referring to a range of psychological conditions or reactions exhibited by affected individuals.

...FOR THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF KALINGA, PROTECTION AND DEFENSE OF THEIR ANCESTRAL LAND, INCLUDING ITS RESOURCES AND PEOPLE ARE ESSENTIAL AND PARAMOUNT.

Findings:

When the study was conducted, the community just experienced one of the most devastating tropical cyclones that hit the country in 2009, typhoon Pepeng. A community-member narrated the precarious situation the villagers faced when an oversized boulder rolled down from upstream of the Chico River.

They feared that this was going to block the watercourse. A villager who first witnessed this occurrence saw the danger this may bring. So, he started to call the attention of the entire village. The process starts with the practice of **MANGAJEW** – Initiated through a **Bhug-ang/Pakoy** by someone calling the

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attention of everyone in the village.

This is done through a long howling sound which serves as a warning about an impending emergency prompting each one to stay alert to respond to a potentially life-threatening situation.

...INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS HAVE ALLOWED THEM TO COPE, RENDERING THE IMPACTS OF CALAMITIES MORE MANAGEABLE AND LESS TRAUMATIC ON THOSE AFFECTED.

The next stage is termed **AGPAKNI**. This is when adult members of the community ensure everyone's safety, especially the most vulnerable sectors in the community, the children and the elderly.

Then the community-folks (umili) gather into a designated place for a community meeting called **PANAG – UUMONG**.

The native leader of the village (Pangat) leads the assessment of the situation and plans the steps to be taken, called **MANG-UUKUCHEN**. Each person is assigned a task (mabhenbhentu/Mafinfintu) such as food production or preparation; search, rescue or retrieval, and taking care of the children. Through-out the incident,

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Elders monitor the situation until the critical incident ends.

The process continues even after the catastrophe is over. In cases where families are affected, for instance – their homes or fields damaged, villagers extend assistance and support (termed as **TUYUNGEN**) to the person or family affected.

CHANG-AS is collective work in a day involving the whole community to assist the villager in need. This includes hauling construction materials or rebuilding damaged structures. It may also come in the form of doing incidental tasks such as food preparation for those lending support.

Under Chang-as no payment is required for those who work but they are provided with meals.

The practice of **PANGU** is done after Chang-as to continue helping villagers requiring further assistance. Compensation is already expected though may not be monetary but in kind or through labor exchange.

Local/indigenous terms referring to a range of psychological reactions or conditions that individuals may experience when confronted by a precarious situation

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are also common.

These include emotional states such as **LANGCHU** which indicates sadness or sorrow; **OGDYAT** – phobia or anxiety; **MANJEBJEB** – grief; **NAKUSCHAVEN** – shock or trauma; **MANCHOCHO-OY** when someone manifests symptoms of depression; and **KUCHKUCHAVONG /MATINNGANG** that describes someone undergoing psychosis or exhibiting odd/bizarre behavior.

For people manifesting these states, local customs and rituals are usually performed to ease the psychological burden of the ones suffering from them.

A ritual called **LUMANGPAW** is performed at dawn by a Dawak to aid in the healing process and restore the shattered spirit of the afflicted person. People show their sympathy and empathy through the practice of **MANCHEKU**.

The people also have forms of stress release or management. **MANG-UG-UG-UDJ** is storytelling for children. But during times of disasters, this is a form of helping them calm down and distract them from the distressing incident.

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A practice used in the past during times of militarization of villages is what is termed as **IYAVEG**. It is when villagers collectively "curse" a subject who has done them wrong to show outrage but it is done in a joyful manner with hands raised.

The people recall an incident when they performed this act after a military helicopter was seen roving around the villages dropping bombs. The women were working in their "payew" (rice fields), when they saw the helicopter coming. They all stopped working, looked up to the chopper, raised their hands and in unison cursed it while laughing.

Some of the noted psychological effects of the processes they conducted were: collective feeling of respite they term as **MAGSISINAGKAT**; a sense of relief from a distressing experience – **MAKAANGOS/ TUMIYOK**; and psychological unburdening and rising above a depressive state which is called **LUMMEGPOT**.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Indigenous knowledge and practices are not yet considered as formal psycho-social processes by mainstream Mental Health practitioners as other developed and structured psycho-social processing

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techniques like Stress Debriefing and Psycho-social First Aide.

However, indigenous processes, though unstated or undocumented have practically the same goal. In addition, they have been spontaneously performed by members of indigenous communities through several generations already. Traditional practices have been articulated to ease the psychological burden of those affected. They operate as forms of survival and coping mechanisms by the community, making them appropriate and relevant.

If we look into the differences between mainstream and indigenous methods, we may find the latter to be more fitting in community settings. Instead of introducing a system that is unfamiliar to a community, existing systems that are already in place must always be considered.

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Comparison between Mainstream and Indigenous Methods of Psycho-social Interventions:

	Mainstream	Indigenous
When conducted	Reactive initiated after the event	Pro-active performed during and after the event
Responder/ Provider	Usually External (provided by responders from outside the community)	Internal – facilitated by the leaders and members of the community
Aim	Deals with individual's experience	Deals with individual and collective experience

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	Mainstream	Indigenous
Familiarization of Context	Needs to familiarize with culture/ context of community	It is integral to the culture of the affected community
Process	Usually unfamiliar and needs to be introduced	Spontaneous and is part of community's lifeways
Continuity	Process usually ends when program has been terminated	Continuing process/ regularly practiced by the community

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Documenting existing local or indigenous mechanisms when they are still observed in villages is important. These traditions can either be reintroduced to the community or can be incorporated into established methods with the aim of making psycho-social interventions in such settings more relevant and appropriate for people affected. Innovations in the approaches can also be instituted to enhance the process and adapt to the community where psycho-social interventions or accompaniment are to be conducted.

Note: This article was revised for this publication taken from the presentation by the author during the Third International Cordillera Studies on Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development Goals held on 5 July 2021 via virtual zoom. It is part of the study being conducted by her organization to document local/indigenous practices which serve as psycho-social mechanisms in dealing with critical events.

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JUSTICE WITH SELF-LOVE AND COMPASSION: INTEGRATING WELLBEING AND COLLECTIVE CARE AS A PARTNERSHIP CULTURE FOR ACTIVISTS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.

by **Ouyporn Khuankaew** *of International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice (Thailand)*

Since our inception in 2002, International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice (IWP) has integrated wellbeing and collective care practices into our foundational framework. We use the term 'spirituality', which we define as the cultivation of inner peace, joy, contentment and happiness through various self care and well being practices.

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In the early years of teaching workshops with grassroot women around the SE Asia region we often heard participants say: if I take time off to take care of myself, it would be seen as a selfish action. This is a deep socialization and internalization of a false standard that says that women's happiness comes from taking care of everyone else's well being.

Thus, in every workshop we challenge ourselves to deconstruct the deep internalization of gender roles that taught us to believe that the value of a good woman comes from being a caregiver. And many of us perform those roles to the point that we neglect our own needs and even harm our own well being. Because language is power, we use the words "self-love and self-respect" to replace the words "selfish and self-indulgence" when we are taking care of our wellbeing and needs.

When leading a guided meditation, we keep saying the following phrases: "coming back to feel the breath and feeling our body is a way to love and respect this body, and to care for this life that we often forget" and "to come back to the breath is to rest our mind and to relax our body. It is a practice of loving kindness and compassion to this life that needs our care and attention."

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When working and sharing about trauma, we focus on having participants name all the self-care techniques that each of us has developed to help ourselves to feel more calm and stable, even before we were aware of the words self-care or well-being. For most of us, trauma was a topic we did not know how to talk about or who we could talk to, even in our community and organization, and yet we have all developed ways to cope and survive.

When we look at our trauma, we focus on seeing strengths–which we name as our power from within–the inner power and wisdom that we use to heal, to organize, and to work for justice.

The following are the qualities of the power within ourselves named by political activists from Myanmar who participated in our first in-person three day wellbeing workshop in early 2022, one year after the coup:

> "wisdom, mindfulness, ethic, honesty, courage, nonviolence, sincerity, creativity, joy, humbleness, forgiveness, calmness and inner peace, clarity of the mind, compassion, loving kindness, ability to let go, life purpose, strong will, determination, inspiration, hope,

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dream, persistence, integrity, self confidence, self respect and self love, flexibility, openness, trustworthy, commitment, the love for justice, peace, freedom and equality."

WHEN WE LOOK AT OUR TRAUMA, WE FOCUS ON SEEING STRENGTHS–WHICH WE NAME AS OUR POWER FROM WITHIN–THE INNER POWER AND WISDOM THAT WE USE TO HEAL, TO ORGANIZE, AND TO WORK FOR JUSTICE.

We practice collective care and wellbeing through a workshop model so that we can openly and collectively acknowledge our trauma and talk about our pain, anger, fear, uncertainty, confusion, guilt, shame, grief and loss in a safe space. We look deep underneath the mental and emotional suffering to rediscover and reconnect to our love, passion, compassion, hope, dreams and new visions to work for justice, peace and social change.

THE IWP WELLBEING AND COLLECTIVE CARE RECIPE

Our wellbeing recipe is based on the following concepts/ framework and skills:

1. We see wellbeing as a core quality/condition for

building a culture in which we are committed to cultivating joy, compassion, inner peace, contentment and happiness while working for structural change. Our work for peace and justice is based on and driven by care, love and compassion for ourselves and for others.

2. We see wellbeing and collective care as one of the core foundations and strategies for feminist groups/ organizations and movements. We are reclaiming our wellbeing that was taken away by patriarchal culture/ tradition, corrupted and overpowered by state, colonization, capitalist economic systems, nationalism, militarism, war and conflict. Thus wellbeing is a justice issue particularly for grassroots women, LGBTIQ+, poor people, people of color, and people with disabilities, etc.

3. Wellbeing and collective care is not a personal issue for which organizations and movements can tell their burned out and traumatized staff to take a break, see a counsellor or take a yoga class. It needs to be part of an activist culture, a partnership culture that we are working toward. A culture of caring for our holistic health and sharing our resources.

4. Wellbeing is not about different self-care techniques. Wellbeing includes building our resilience, our belief in our own value, our hopes, our dreams and our visions for change. It includes the commitment to a practice of power sharing, collective leadership, deep listening, and non-violent communication as the culture of activists working for personal and structural social change.

5. Many activists with whom IWP has worked are marginalized groups in their own society. Thus, the trauma they experience is intersectional and insidious. Many women and youth activists experience gender, sexuality, class, age, ethnic oppression and political oppression. A discussion of trauma needs to be framed by, and understanding of structural violence and the layers of oppression that cause the trauma. With a structural violence lens, we see the strengths, wisdom and resilience of trauma survivors, not their victimhood, their limitations or their mental problems.

6. We run wellbeing workshops particularly for activists whose very lives are in danger (political activists from Myanmar and Thailand, grassroots women and LGBTIQ+ working on their rights, land rights and protecting their local resources), and for whom mental

health and trauma are collective and communal.
We create a safe space for them to share through the practices of deep listening and bearing witness to help build trust, to reconnect, and to support isolated activists to not feel alone in their suffering.

7. We train participants on mindfulness with the body and the breath as the base to hold our own difficult emotions and to support others who talk about their suffering. This is the main technique we use to hold safe space within oneself and within the group.

   We create safe space through the practice of deep listening from throughout the workshop. Deep listening or bearing witness involves listening to each other without judgement, suggestions or questions. Allowing the expression of strong emotions normalizes them.

   We have been socialized to see strong emotions as inappropriate or shameful. This leads us to either suppress these emotions or explode emotionally. Either way is harmful to our well –being .
   Throughout the workshop, we invite people to practice mindfulness through an exercise that brings awareness to the breath and relaxes the body.

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Participants do this for 5 minutes about 5 times a day, including right before practicing deep listening in a pair work. When strong emotions arise in a group or in pair work we invite participants to come back to the breath and focus on relaxing any part of the body that is experiencing discomfort. We also normalize crying– it is a way for the heart and body to release strong emotions, the same way that the dark clouds release their heaviness through rain.

8. Our wellbeing workshops help participants to continue to practice different simple self-care techniques in their daily life after they leave the workshop and return to their own environment

Throughout the three to five day workshop, the participants start their day with one hour of mindful Yoga. We integrate five minute breathing exercises 5-6 times a day. We invite everyone to practice a silent mindful lunch to enjoy the good and healthy food cooked from local produce. We use drawing, painting and journaling to reflect on our life journeys. We practice deep listening throughout the day to build safety, connection and trust. We practice tapping, singing and dancing as a way to release tension and pain stored in our body. We do a one hour evening

mindful walk in the rice field.

9. We invite participants to see well being as a strategy. At the end of the workshop we asked them to strategize their well being in three ways. One is to STOP actions, attitude, feelings and behaviors that are limiting their well being. For example, the feeling of guilt when they think about taking care of their well being. This comes from our socialization of sacrifice because we think that the people we are working with experience more suffering than us. Second is START, meaning to think about how and when to start a helpful self care technique. Third is CONTINUE, to carry on practices they used to do but may have stopped. The STOP, START and CONTINUE practice will help participants see well being as a strategy. The activists' lack of well being is caused by structural oppression, thus having a strategic well being within a group, organization and movement will help in sustaining our social movement. After each person has a well being strategy, we ask participants to find his/her/their well being partner or a well being family to continue supporting each other.

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WELLBEING COOK BOOK

by **Salome Nduta** *Executive Director of Women Human Rights Defenders Hub Kenya (The Hub), advancing human rights, gender equality, and defenders safety from Kenya*

About the Kenya Hub:

The Women Human Rights Defenders Hub (also known as The Hub) is a feminist initiative led by WHRDs in Kenya that advocates for women's rights, provides safety and support to WHRDs voluntarily, and establishes feminist networks of WHRDs through community organising. The Hub exists to secure the well-being of WHRDs and respond to the challenges they face in their work. It supports WHRDs engaging in advocacy on violence against women, advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights, and championing economic justice for WHRDs.

The Hub envisions a world in which fundamental human rights and freedoms are universally recognised and respected by all and where everyone has the right to defend these rights and freedoms without fear of threats or attacks. It supports WHRDs through holistic

protection programmes that invest in their self-care, well-being and empowerment. It also advocates for an environment of gender justice where WHRDs are respected, protected and are living in dignity without fear of reprisals.

The HUB's programmes enable WHRDs to build their collective and individual capacities for managing their protection effectively by focusing on the four pillars of safety and security, livelihood support, wellness and well-being, and mentorship. Over the years, the Hub has invested in organising annual wellness clinics for women defenders with the goal of reflecting on the past year and planning for a fresh start in the new year. The clinics are normally run, guided and managed by women defenders.

The "Sisterhood Circles"

The Hub's Wellness and wellbeing recipe was born out of a "Gals' coffee day out", where ten WHRDs working within the human rights sector in Kenya would meet monthly and share their frustrations at their workplaces and their aspirations. The monthly coffee dates transformed from spaces of lamentations into spaces of solution seeking and eventually debrief spaces where mitigation, management and solutions were mooted. As a result, the ladies noted better performance

at work and appreciation of each other.

The Hub leadership embraced this approach and opened up space for more women defenders to share about their work, challenges they faced and how they were coping. The Hub's sister hood circles was thus born. The "Sisterhood Circles" by the hub is done through two approaches: healing circles and wellness clinics.

Healing circles where women defenders working on common projects meet at the start, mid and end of the project to reflect their implementation, debrief and hold fireside chats.

Wellness clinics are held annually as country conversation circles where women defenders reflect on the past year and plan ahead for the coming year.

THE "SISTERHOOD CIRCLES" ARE CARRIED OUT THROUGH FOUR STEPS:

Meet/ talk/ cry:

Creating safe spaces for women defenders to gather, share experiences, and express emotions without judgment. This is normally a powerful form of emotional

release and solidarity, helping to alleviate stress and build a supportive community. WHRDS are encouraged to openly discuss challenges as well as victories. "Cry" acknowledges the importance of allowing oneself to express vulnerability, which is often crucial for emotional well being. The Hub brings on board a counsellor who is on standby to walk with those who get overwhelmed.

Cooking:

This exercise can be therapeutic and promotes mindfulness and creativity. Organizing communal cooking sessions by the WHRDs serves as a bonding experience, providing an opportunity for women defenders to nourish themselves both physically and emotionally. It is also a way of sharing culinary expertise, cultural traditions and fostering a sense of belonging.

Eating together:

Sharing meals together can strengthen connections and create a sense of community. It's an opportunity for women defenders to relax, enjoy nourishing food, and engage in meaningful conversations. This act of breaking bread together can symbolise unity and mutual support.

Dancing:

Dance can be an empowering way to release stress, express oneself, and celebrate resilience. It promotes physical health and emotional well-being, offering a joyful and liberating experience. Dancing in circles by the WHRDs teaches women defenders new dance moves and songs, but most importantly it is the last step to releasing all the tension raised during the sharing sessions.

These activities have helped women defenders recharge, strengthened their support networks, and maintained their physical and mental health in the face of the challenges they encounter in their work.

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ESSAY FROM URGENT ACTION FUND AFRICA

by **Masa Amir** *from Urgent Action Fund Africa*

At the heart of the Urgent Action Sister Funds' mandate is supporting the collective care needs of women human rights defenders (WHRDs). This was born out of the realisation that the activism of WHRDs and their identities largely lead to unexpected situations where they need to quickly respond to stop a violation, hold their ground, or ensure the safety and security of themselves and their communities. At that early stage, doing away with bureaucratic processes (up to this day, our grant forms are concise with flexible criteria to lessen the burden on activists) and ensuring the rapid disbursement of funding (The Urgent Action Sister Funds disburse funds within 72 hours) were illustrations of care: trying to be as flexible and quick as possible in the urgent situations activists often find themselves in.

Since the inception of the Urgent Action Fund in 1997, the model has grown and expanded to its current formulation of four sister funds, whose work spans the globe. These independent organisations are united by the

core mandate of putting WHRDs at the heart of what we do and continuing our support through rapid response grants.

Each Sister has engaged deeply with the concepts of collective care and healing, which have always animated how we work and who we support. This is a statement of the insights of Urgent Action Fund-Africa's (UAF-Africa) feminist political approach to healing and collective care.

Having a core mandate of being a rapid response fund means that we are in daily contact with African WHRDs (AWHRDs), learning about sudden, expected, incremental, heart-breaking, triumphant change every day. We are privileged to be in this position that enables us to have a constant sense of how contexts change, and along with them, the shifts in the needs and priorities of AWHRDs. The Fund's approach to care grew from supporting largely self-care approaches to approaches that centered WHRDs and the groups/organisations they work with, to the current approach of understanding that healing must be centered in feminist spaces – at the heart of the work, rather than an activity that takes place during rare moments of rest.

This journey was guided by insights from AWHRDs and the critiques we received about the ways in which

protection and care support are largely individualistic. Activists receive protection support and are safer but are not well; that therapy in its classic sense is helping but the drivers of depression, burn out, exhaustion are still there so how can they ever feel better; feel lighter? That groups are struggling to survive and to take care of each other in contexts of persistent persecution and criminalization.

We sat with many reflections and realized that, while it is apparent that urgent responses and individual security measures remain vital, the times demand a revolutionary approach that focuses on why our realities are structured in the ways we experience them. Why are many feminist spaces grappling with internal divisions? Why do we all largely feel unwell? And what can we do about it? It strongly felt like something was missing from current conversations and available support to WHRDs.

This is when we arrived at healing justice as a global conversation that engages with a lot of what activists are grappling with: layers of trauma, structural violence that is a constant source of harm that keep us depressed, sick, exhausted and distracted from the work of taking structures of oppression down.

We are currently seeking to ingrain a healing justice

approach in the many areas of the work of the Fund.

This includes building a network of politicised feminist healers and engaging them as co-conspirators in all our spaces rather than service providers; integrating budget lines for collective healing in all of our grantmaking work; and building a healing farm that is set to become a pioneering space in the ways in which healing-centered spaces can be structured. We have arrived at an approach that centers healing as the pathway to building transformative realities for AWHRDs and the wider world. We are thrilled with the possibilities this framework opens us up to!

...HEALING JUSTICE AS A GLOBAL CONVERSATION THAT ENGAGES WITH A LOT OF WHAT ACTIVISTS ARE GRAPPLING WITH: LAYERS OF TRAUMA, STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE THAT IS A CONSTANT SOURCE OF HARM THAT KEEP US DEPRESSED, SICK, EXHAUSTED AND DISTRACTED FROM THE WORK OF TAKING STRUCTURES OF OPPRESSION DOWN.

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A Care Practice

One undergoing process is building the healing farm as a political space that seeks to center the ways in which our feminist ancestors have always had traditions for collective mental, emotional, environmental and spiritual wellbeing that have been criminalised and deliberately erased.

The Healing farm seeks to unpack a central question around the roots of trauma and harm and how we experience them, while asking: how can we then heal from these roots and the traumas they birth, as we fight to end them? This work for us is rooted in solidarity, not charity. Through this work, we transform ourselves as individuals and collectives, around how we internalise and relate from spaces of trauma, and how we fight to end them.

The Healing farm will operate as a catalyst for political dialogue and practice, contributing to the transformation of structures of harm and injustice for African feminists and collectives as they fight for liberation. This will be done in a variety of ways, from building a network of grassroots healers, surfacing African healing traditions, shifting perspectives of what constitutes health, healing, the role of healers, and creating a feminist library and a

healing garden that center connection with nature.

We are building a transformative space for collectives that will support activists in achieving and practicing their visions of healing from trauma as they seek to transform them. This is a legacy project that the Fund is working very hard to materialize. We hope to welcome WHRDs to the space in the coming years!

A Personal Essay

I consider myself very lucky to have joined UAF-Africa. I do not think many other spaces would have presented me with this many learning opportunities to grow what collective care and healing could entail. I believe this learning is enabled by who UAF-Africa is: a flexible organization that is open to stopping and shifting how it does its work, truly governed by what it hears from AHWRDs.

One of my proudest moments is the decision to shift our funding practices when Ebola hit Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone in 2014. At the time, our understanding of the areas in which we support AWHRDs did not include what is broadly dubbed "humanitarian support", which includes support for sanitation, cleaning and hygiene supplies, among others.

During the Ebola epidemic, these forms of support became strategic and life-saving in contexts where women's care roles were a major source of their susceptibility to the virus. The insights we gained from Ebola were applied in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where, in addition to also supporting women's groups in accessing much-needed cleaning supplies and life-saving masks, we also responded to the epidemic of violence against women in various ways. In the case of one group in Uganda, the Fund's support went to establishing a safehouse for women. The quote that one member of the group shared still moves me:

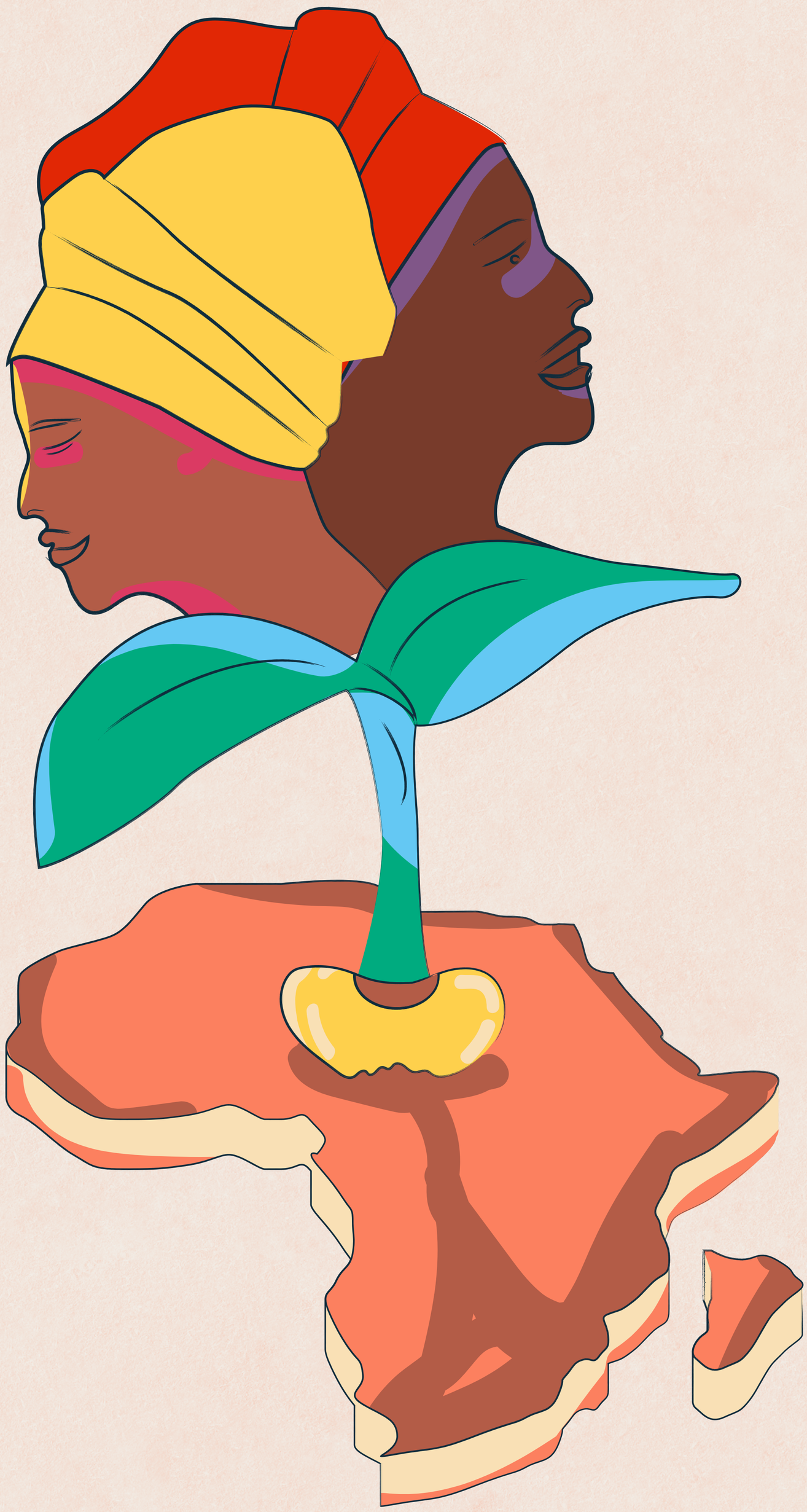
> UAF-Africa was the first funder to say, 'what can we do?' We had no pre-existing relationship with them. They were able to establish trust and deal with the issues we were passionate about which other funders did not see the need to invest in at the time. However, after they gave us the grant, the Open Society Initiative and GiZ also reached out to offer support. See how a funder that does not fund what everyone funds started a movement. See how a seed grows because of a responsive funder like UAF-Africa.

This quote resonates with me because I think it epitomises the ways in which the Fund has grown its

conception of collective care and healing. It was the "what can we do?" mindset that drove the brainstorming sessions that were conducted from 2018-2019 with activists, academics and healers to reflect on persistent questions and critiques we received from activists around the support that is present for their protection and collective care needs. I am lucky to have been part of these sessions and to have had the chance to be in the same rooms with activists while we drew the plan of what it is that UAF-Africa can do. It is out of these conversations that the Feminist Republik was borne, a platform that seeks to center feminist understandings and approaches to politicizing healing in feminist activist spaces, out of a vision that it is this centering that can sustain us, and transform our realities.

When I reflect on how the Fund is integrating a politicized healing approach in its work, I feel like this is a journey I am lucky to have witnessed: from setting up the Feminist Republik, building the healing farm, deepening our work with healers in various contexts on the continent and working on healing justice research to document African feminist understandings of the framework. I believe the Fund is supporting what activists have been eager to work on, but found little support for. I believe we are on the cusp of transformative change on

how we think about trauma and the centrality of healing them in order to transform them.



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A CALL TO ACTION: CENTERING MENTAL HEALTH AS INTEGRAL TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

by **Raj Mariwala** *Director of Mariwala Health Initiative from India*

Human rights activists face frequent trauma exposure. Not only do they bear witness to harm, abuse and violence, they may experience this themselves as part of the community but also as part of speaking up.

This work also means having to work in hazardous situations or locations with the chance of facing a range of violence from multiple actors, including the carceral state.

In recent years, the psy-disciplines have explored ideas around trauma and mental health (MH), documenting some of the impacts borne by human rights advocates. However, there is still much to be done to understand vicarious trauma or for example to understand the range of stressors faced in different contexts and types of

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social justice work. However, while academic or expert-led research on this topic has gathered some steam, little attention has been paid to actual resources and support for human rights defenders.

Perhaps, the most critical lapse is the approach taken - an expert led, biomedical approach that is focused on diagnoses of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder or borrowing from neoliberal wellness - the idea of 'building resilience' in social justice workers. This Eurocentric approach further supports an approach toward an individual idea of wellness rather than the understanding that collective wellbeing may be suitable in multiple settings. It's crucial to go beyond the dominant approach to mental health and share diverse socio-cultural ways of understanding both individual agency and collective strategies to well-being.

This particular approach is also reinforced by the structures of international development aid - be it intergovernmental or philanthropic because funding dynamics have a pivotal impact on the sustainability of human rights activism.

An overwhelming majority of people, collectives and organisations deal with the added stressors of financial insecurity, short-term funding and low wages (if at all).

Further, burdensome fundraising and reporting requirements exacerbate distress. This means that there is even less structural, systemic resourcing for mental health and well-being practices in human rights and social justice work.

...THE MOST CRITICAL LAPSE IS THE APPROACH TAKEN - AN EXPERT LED, BIOMEDICAL APPROACH THAT IS FOCUSED ON DIAGNOSES OF DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER OR BORROWING FROM NEOLIBERAL WELLNESS - THE IDEA OF 'BUILDING RESILIENCE' IN SOCIAL JUSTICE WORKERS.

On the flip side, the field of mental health itself doesn't foreground that human rights and social justice are critical to the pursuit of mental health. As a MH advocacy and grant-making organisation, Mariwala Health Initiative (MHI) believes it is imperative to recognise that MH is a human rights issue. Those who are users/survivors, those who work on the rights of those with psychosocial disabilities, on carceral systems and on violence within families and systems tend not to be commonly referred to as human rights defenders. The same discourse that diagnoses individualises and

pathologises mental health glosses over the realities of grave human rights violations in the name of 'treatment' whether in carceral systems or in clinics.

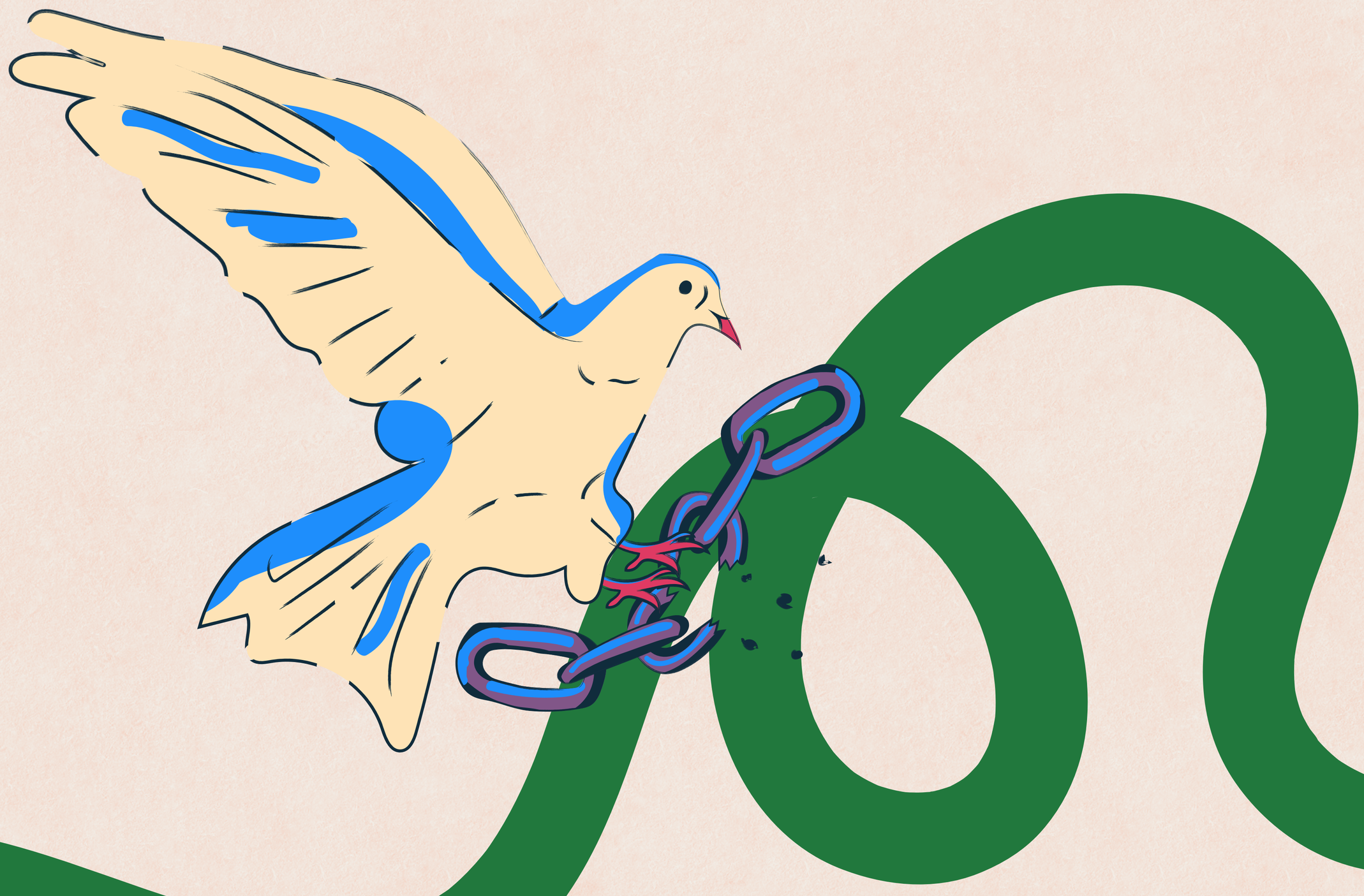
For MHI it is incumbent to not only fund and support mental health work as social justice and human rights advocacy, but also to support work on oppressive systems that influence mental health of individuals and communities. Following the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), mental health funders need to widen the definition of mental health beyond just mental health services and support efforts to realise fundamental freedoms such as the right to life, freedom from torture, the right to political participation, legal capacity and access to justice as well as an adequate standard of living.

We call on funders to recognise that wellbeing in human rights work demands embedding collective responsibility for mental health at multiple levels through the ecosystem rather than approaching it as individual effort. This must include changing the way funders work to reduce pressures on individuals and collectives. Any resourcing for human rights and social justice must allocate support to socio-culturally relevant approaches to mental health which include but are not limited to peer

support initiatives, mental health professionals, healthcare and financial security.

Transforming mental health in human rights requires major reforms and structural changes that address activists' specific needs. As a mental health advocacy and grant-making organisation, we call on funders to prioritize holistic, movement-wide wellbeing strategies that engage with economic insecurity, lack of safety and systemic inequality and oppression.

TRANSFORMING MENTAL HEALTH IN HUMAN RIGHTS REQUIRES MAJOR REFORMS AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES THAT ADDRESS ACTIVISTS' SPECIFIC NEEDS.



SOWING ECOTRANSFEMINIST FORESTS: MONSTER REBELLION AND RADICALISM IN SUSTAINING LIFE

by **Thiane Neves Barros, Laila Almeida Braga, Fernanda Monteiro, Violeta Cunha & Foz** *Rede Transfeminista de Cuidados Digitais - RTCD / Transfeminist Network of Digital Care*

Introduction:

In this text, written in the style of magical realism, we, from the Transfeminist Digital Care Network, share some of our reflections and experiences of activism alongside feminist and LGBTQIAP+ people and organizations, with content, methodology, and practices for learning processes in integral care. We also share reflections on what transfeminist care means within our own contexts.

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The text has a circular writing style. These are ideas that do not close or end, but rather open up. Uncertain but possible possibilities! Lives, ideas, and struggles carried out in cycles, loaded with ancestral wisdom.

Through monstrous characters with dissident bodies, we make our radical manifesto of care, presenting knowledge, technologies, and methodologies that guarantee not only subsistence but also joy, affection, desire, creativity, even in the face of so much violence and difficulty faced in realizing our activist purposes.

We are building our knowledge about care among activists and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and the Earth, through much reflection and collective practice, from feeling, sensitivity, intuition, empathy, and listening. The great subversion and potential for transformation of care lies in small gestures, in communications that happen in silence, in internal changes that occur in the relationship with each other and in the power of feeling.

The text also seeks to share that, for us, technology only makes sense if it is at the service of life and good living and that, whether we are monsters or not, life happens in community, in collectivity. It is in the relationship between us, with the whole, and with every

being that surrounds us.

We make ourselves vulnerable to talk about care and feeling from our journeys! And we are proudly monstrous, subversively monstrous, we honor our past, celebrate our present, and shorten the distance to our ecotransfeminist futures.

Rebellious Monsters: A Manifesto

We're no longer human, not since the world started distinguishing its own kind. We ceased being human! And so, we transmuted into the existence of our essence. We're monsters, we're creatures, we're the river flowing into the ocean, and also the destructive and fertile lava of the volcano, the force of tornadoes.

We're the fruit of the decomposition of every fallen body. The fruit of pain, which differentiated and differentiates us by our race, gender, sexuality, territory, belief, which tries to subjugate us and remove us from spaces of abundance and good living, but we insist on returning.

We look to and revere the past, celebrating the present, in the permanent construction of ecotransfeminist futures, and we accept nothing

less than this. Futures, with an "s," of all the possibilities of futures that we construct hour by hour, day by day, month by month, year by year, generation after generation, thus, in circularity, cyclically, the sum of the existence and wisdom of all.

MONSTERS! Multiple and singular, living in packs for survival, but also for pleasure, with a thirst and hunger to live, to love, and TO BE!

Untamed, uncontrollable, and indomitable, and therefore feared, if not feared why so persecuted? Our power is rage, rebellion, but it's also empathy and joy!

Why do they fight us? Why do they think we're dangerous monsters? Why are we dangerous monsters? Because we upset and often shatter the comfortable stereotypical images that white people have of us. (Gloria Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 230)

Therefore, no one can take away our affection, our pleasure, and our joy! What sustains us and sustains the rising and setting of the sun and moon, the changing of the seasons, the air that enters and exits in a rhythm unique to each one of us.

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And with every encounter, every shared gaze, every conspiracy, and even when we sit together in silence, we generate fertile and multiple ecotransfeminist seeds, seeds loaded and reloaded with wisdom and technologies with each cycle and generation. With every laugh, dance, and song, we bloom and thus we are monsters and also forest.

As we mature, we become fruit once more, inspiring with scents and colors, nourishing all kinds of existence with flavors and nutrients, and again becoming seeds, multiple seeds to be carried by the rain, by beaks, by fur, carried to new territories by the wind.

Thus, we are not only monsters, we are air, minerals, electricity, water, carbon, cells, molecules, in the end we are all the same thing, indivisible, inseparable. One monster does not exist without the other monsters, nor without the sea, without mountains, without the microorganisms of the earth, without the sound of birds, without the changing seasons, without the sound of cicadas, without the smell of rain.

Our existence demands radicality in our actions, words, and experiences. But our bodies, minds, and hearts are much more than violence, erasure, and anti-colonial battles; they are also freedom, desire, creativity,

and much more. We transform everything around us with our presence and sensory and extrasensory sensibilities. We have ears much larger than our mouths, attentive eyes: receptors beyond the image, that capture sensations and intentions.

OUR EXISTENCE DEMANDS RADICALITY IN OUR ACTIONS, WORDS, AND EXPERIENCES.

Our skins, scales, and fur are capable of capturing subtle vibrations, giving us the power of active listening and touch beyond touch and empathetic feeling. We carry in our cells the abilities of care, the capacities to resolve conflicts and alleviate pain. We heal even the incurable, and in collectivity, we create enchantments capable of opening mountains, moving constellations, and softening the hardest of metals.

Our sustenance is to not lose the ability to affect, even in the face of precariousness, of barbarism, we resist. We seek beauty in small gestures, we feed our hopes in exercises of building and rebuilding new futures day after day, we love each other and ourselves as we deserve, and in the reciprocity of intentions, we strengthen, conspire, and dream.

And as the daring monstres we are, we create

our technologies.

Methods and technologies committed to life, to the sustenance of life, to the continuity of life—not just our own, and not just the lives of monstres, but of all lives, because we do not exist without one another, whether sentient or non-sentient beings, animate or inanimate, from the vegetal, mineral, animal, spiritual, or cosmic-existential realms.

WHY DO THEY FIGHT US? WHY DO THEY THINK WE'RE DANGEROUS MONSTERS? WHY ARE WE DANGEROUS MONSTERS? BECAUSE WE UPSET AND OFTEN SHATTER THE COMFORTABLE STEREOTYPICAL IMAGES THAT WHITE PEOPLE HAVE OF US. (GLORIA ANZALDÚA, 2000, P. 230)

By sustaining life, we understand our continuities, in soils strengthened by care technologies, free from poisons, free from degradation, free from dams. Inspired by our ancestors, we also reject the collective cultural/ religious beliefs of masculine origin, we question the definitions of light and dark, we give new meanings to the dead world, and we ourselves will explain our participation in the pluralities of these worlds:

I am without culture because, as a feminist, I challenge

the collective cultural/religious beliefs of masculine origin among Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet, I have culture because I am participating in the creation of another culture, a new history to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to one another and to the planet. I am an amalgamation, an act of gathering and uniting that not only produces a creature of both light and darkness, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. (Gloria Anzaldúa, 2005, p. 708).

We oppose technologies of exploitation and control, perpetuating the multiple technologies and strategies developed for life! We are creators of technologies—ancestral, makeshift, digital, security, survival, and of the possible. All are oriented toward caring for ourselves and our support network, crafting knowledge rooted in affection.

We do not hierarchize knowledge, nor do we rank the spoken languages and activated languages; we do not allow any discourse or doubt to be considered small. We embrace the stories, struggles, rhythms, symbols, and achievements of all. If we consider that all infrastructure is political, then the infrastructure of affection is a

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political-methodological decision whose pillars are sharing and free knowledge.

It is a monstrous methodology of work that seeks to establish affective bonds more than to reach an end. It is interested in listening, where words are sovereign, and we trust each other, the process, and time.

This intersection is where we find our monstrosities. There, between infrastructures, affections, and knowledge. Between territorialities, technologies, and trans-ancestralities. It is in that seemingly small and empty balloon that our seeds bloom, and from them, we emerge with our monstrosities.

WE ARE CREATORS OF TECHNOLOGIES—ANCESTRAL, MAKESHIFT, DIGITAL, SECURITY, SURVIVAL, AND OF THE POSSIBLE. ALL ARE ORIENTED TOWARD CARING FOR OURSELVES AND OUR SUPPORT NETWORK, CRAFTING KNOWLEDGE ROOTED IN AFFECTION.

Our infrastructures are subversions, our affections are our networks and collectivities, our knowledge is asynchronous, and within it lie the stories of our trans-ancestralities, which also connect us to our futures. In this way, we cultivate an infrastructure of affection, from

where we call upon everyone to meet in our monstrous journeys.

And through this manifesto, we call upon everyone to together spread our seeds, so that monstres may sprout in the form of walking trees, beings from the borders where everything meets and blends.

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Since 2018, the Transfeminist Network for Digital Care (RTCD) has been made up of activists and civil society organisations (MariaLab/Vedetas, Coding Rights, Cl4ndestina, IntersecLab and Blogueiras Negras) working

on information security in Brazil. The emergence of the RTCD was a response to the drastic changes in the national political scenario and the increased demand for information and training to protect ourselves in the use of technologies within the field of the Defence of Human and Earth Rights.

The Transfeminist Network is made up of a diverse group of people with vast experience and different skills and knowledge, including technical and pedagogical profiles, as well as collective care, self-care and holistic health, providing an environment of great exchange, mutual support and diversity of approaches to technology,

Our purpose is to diversify voices / bodies / practices / care methodologies to empower women, trans and LGBTQIAPN+ people to be protagonists in technologies and affect change through solidarity and relationships of trust with human rights groups and activists.

We work on information security from the perspective of care and affection in the design of our projects, as we did with our beloved website https://pratododia.org, which works on the parallel between food security and sovereignty and digital care.

We understand information security not only as a set of practices that protect our data, our online activities and our lives, but also our digital sovereignty, which we promote through the use and development of free and open software, without neglecting a broad view of the value of our information, be it posts on social networks, research or even our general internet browsing.

We realise the urgency of investing in the multiplication and decentralisation of knowledge in digital security and feminist infrastructures, encouraging more trainers who respect the territorial and cultural specificity of causes, struggles and realities through transfeminist and anti-racist methodologies throughout Brazil.

In addition to digital care, the Transfeminist Network promotes the narrative that access to and use of technology is a choice and a political struggle. We therefore address issues such as online identities, the role of anonymity, free and autonomous technologies, data protection, the digital body, gender, self-esteem and the impact of technology on transfeminist and activist communities and collectives.

1. *https://pratododia.org*
   Publicises digital care from a transfeminist and

affective narrative, drawing parallels between digital care and food security and sovereignty. [en][es]

2. *https://www.apc.org/en/cuidados-digitais-para-ativistas-feministas*
   This infographic shares the entire process of the "Gincana Monstra", an online learning process in integral care, with 27 Brazilian activists. It was a process focused on joy, empathy, bonding and solidarity networks at a very difficult time in the Brazilian context. [en][pt]

3. *https://en.ftx.apc.org/shelves/gincana-monstra-abrindo-o-codigo*
   Our learning processes have evolved and we have deepened the transfeminist pedagogical and methodological processes, in what we call "Infrastructures of Affection", this is the result of our experiences, culminating in an online learning process with digital care facilitators, mostly from the Global South, which became the Module on APC's FTX Platform, called "Monstra Gymkhana: Opening the Code".

4. *https://desvelar.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Griots-e-Tecnologias-Digitais.pdf*

Book: Griots and Digital Technologies. Conceived. Organised by Thiane Neves Barros (UFPA) and Tarcízio Silva (UFABC / Mozilla), the book aims to contribute to the recovery of ancestral teachings in emerging contemporary debates. Digital version for download. [en]

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https://www.genderit.org/es/feminist-talk/4-semeando-florestas-ecotransfeministas-rebeldia-e-radicalidade-monstra-na

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FOOD for the SOUL part 2

MULTIMIXTURE FLOUR / FARINHA MULTIMISTURA

by **Foz** *facilitator of learning processes and human re-enchantment through nature and technologies from Brazil*

This recipe was shared by Dr. Clara Brandão during the Células de Transformação Urban Agriculture course held in 2015 in the city of São Paulo. This recipe is the result of decades of her work and research in an attempt to eradicate child malnutrition, and is considered a social technology. It uses low-cost ingredients, some of which are often discarded as production leftovers or only used in animal feed/supplementation, such as cassava and pumpkin leaves. Her invention has reached various social organisations and has been able to save hundreds of children.

Generally made up of bran (rice, wheat and/or maize), seeds (pumpkin, watermelon and/or sesame), dark green dried leaf powder (cassava, sweet potato and pumpkin), with regional variations in terms of the quantity and quality of the formulation and according to the local availability of the ingredients.

Characterised as a food supplement because of its

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nutrient content and variety, it is recommended for nutritional recovery/rebalancing. These qualities, combined with its low cost and simplicity of preparation, have led it to be widely used in Brazil to combat child malnutrition and other diet-related deficiencies.

The pioneer of the use of multimixture in Brazil, Dr. Clara Brandão, alleged that the withdrawal of government support for multimixture programmes was associated with its replacement by industrialised flour produced by multinationals, so it is an act of resistance to perpetuate this knowledge.

The Ingredients

- ***Rice bran:*** This ingredient concentrates minerals and vitamins. In Brazil, you can buy rice bran at a feed store, as it is often used to supplement animal feed. But the ideal is to buy it directly from producers. To be consumed, the bran is sieved 2 or 3 times. To toast it, put the bran in a thick pan over a low heat and, with the pan hot, leave it for 25 minutes, stirring constantly, until it is toasted.

- ***Sesame:*** It's a perennial plant that is consumed all over the world. For this recipe, you can make sesame sprouts by soaking them for 8 hours, which increases

their vitamins. However, drying must be carried out properly after the first sprouts appear. The grains are usually lightly roasted so that the formula lasts longer, but special attention must be paid when roasting so that the sesame doesn't burn, in which case it becomes harmful to our health. White and black sesame have almost the same properties and you can use either variety, enriching the recipe with calcium, protein, magnesium and fibre. In ancient times it was common to use eggshells, but due to the risk of pulmonary fibrosis, which can affect those who breathe egg dust when making it, eggshells have been replaced by sesame in recent decades.

- ***Pumpkin Seeds:*** we're used to eating the pulp of the pumpkin, but most of the calcium is in the seed. Pumpkin with peel, seed and pulp is nutritionally complete, which is why we recommend eating the whole plant.

- ***Cassava Leaves:*** They contain half the selenium found in Brazil nuts. The only caveat is that the leaf must be completely dry when preparing the Multimix.

INGREDIENTS (SUGGESTED FORMULA)

- **Rice Bran**
- **Wheat Bran**
- **Dark Green Leaves** *(cassava, sweet potato, pumpkin or chayote)*
- **Seeds** *(sunflower, sesame, pumpkin, watermelon or melon). In their absence, peanuts and chestnuts from the region can be used)*

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

Pre-preparing the ingredients

The ***rice bran*** should be sieved and toasted to the point where it smells like roasted peanuts. If it's toasted too much, it will have a bitter flavour, so pay close attention at this point.

If the wheat bran is too coarse, it should be ground and sieved again before toasting.

Dark green leaves should be washed and dried in the shade in dry weather, or in an oven or ventilated kiln in rainy weather. The drying process, especially for cassava leaves, must be strictly followed, as the green leaves might be toxic. The juiciest leaves require special care when drying. Once completely dry (they become brittle),

they should be ground in a blender or pestle and sieved.

The ***seeds*** should be washed, dried, toasted (without burning), ground and sieved. Everything is stored dry and ground into a powder.

Multimixture preparation

Suggestion 1

70% rice bran (if there is no other substitute)

15% cassava leaf (powdered)

15% toasted sesame (so it doesn't spoil)

Suggestion 2

3 measures of rice bran;

3 measures of wheat bran;

½ measure of sesame seeds;

½ measure of sunflower seeds;

½ measure of pumpkin, watermelon and melon seeds mixed together;

½ measure of pumpkin leaves;

½ measure of sweet potato leaves.

How to use (Recommended use)

Children: 1 tablespoon a day in the diet.

Adults: 2 tablespoons, mixed into the diet.

In addition, all-purpose flour is considered ideal for revitalising white flour dough (such as wheat) in other culinary recipes (in breads, pies, cakes, farofas, soufflés, omelettes) and also with yoghurts, milk, beans, rice, soups and others. In these recipes, it is suggested to add a spoonful of all-purpose flour for every cup of rice, wheat flour or cornmeal.

Text references:

- *https://pt.wikiversity.org/wiki/Curso_de_Agricultura_Urbana_-_C%C3%A9lulas_de Transforma%C3%A7%C3%A3o*
- *https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farinha_m%C3%BAltipla*

A RECIPE FOR COOKING CHAPATI

by **Faith Kasina** *an activist and a community organizer who believes that food is healing and so the fight for food sovereignty should be everyone's struggle especially in our time when we are faced with food colonization.*

INGREDIENTS

- Flour
- Salt
- Grated Carrots
- Oil
- Water

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a large bowl, combine flour, salt, grated carrots and oil and mix thoroughly. Add a little lukewarm water at a time to form a soft and sticky dough.

2. Turn to a floured surface; knead for about 10 to 15 minutes until it becomes smooth and elastic. Add some little oil and knead for 3 minutes. Place in a bowl. Cover and let it rest in a warm place for about 20 to 30 minutes.

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③ Turn onto a lightly floured surface; divide the dough into your desirable equal parts and roll each piece into a circle. You can roll out the dough into a circle and cook the Chapatis at this point. However, if you want a flaky and well-layered chapati, move on with the rest of the steps below.

④ Lightly brush the rolled out chapati with some Oil and roll it as you would roll up a mat. At this point, it should be like a rope. Roll the "rope-like" chapati to form a coil then pull the tip towards the center of the coil and tuck it in using your index finger. Finally cover it with a damp towel and leave it to rest for about 10 to 15 minutes. (see the photo below)

⑤ Flour your work surface again and start rolling out each of the coiled dough to about 1/8th thickness (the dough will eventually shrink up to about 1-2/4 inch thickness).

⑥ Preheat a non-stick pan or a heavy bottom skillet. Place the chapati on inside the pan and leave it to cook for a few seconds before disturbing it.

⑦ Brush the surface of the chapati with a very thin layer of oil. Once you begin to see bubbles rise on top of the chapati, flip it over to the other side and brush it also

with a thin layer of Oil.

8. Continue to flip over about one or two more times until you achieve your desired brownness. Serve hot or warm and enjoy with your favorite dish.

9. Kenyans love chapati a lot and it's always served with beef, goat or chicken stew, beans or vegetables.

Photos showing steps to achieving a flaky chapati

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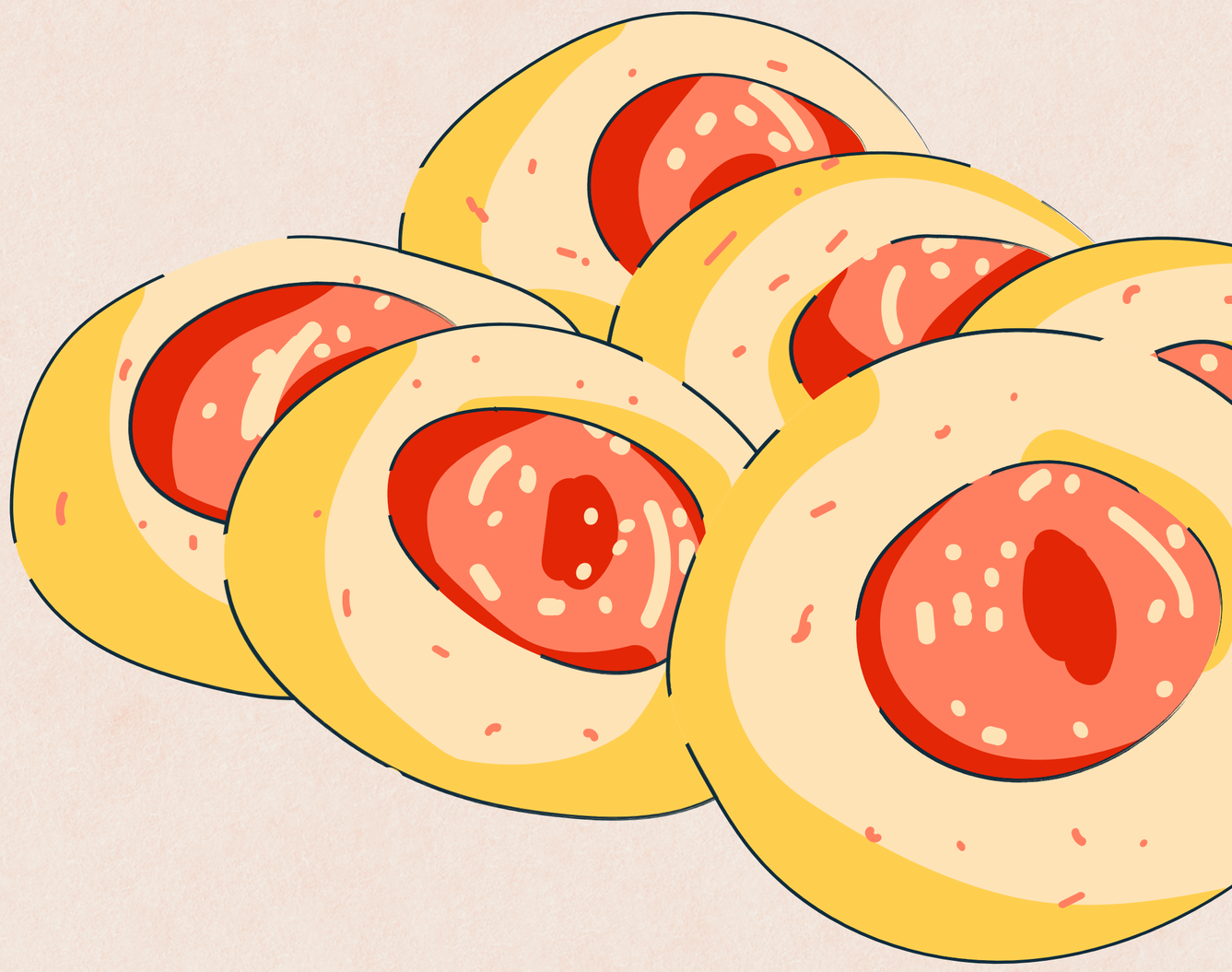
QUINCE OR SWEET POTATO NUGGETS

by **Nicole Martin** *from Argentina*

As for the recipe, I don't know how it should be presented. These biscuits are my favourite, they are a classic Argentinian snack and so I'm writing it down for you here.

INGREDIENTS

- 200g **Flour**
- 100g **Butter**
- 75g **Sugar**
- 1 **Egg**
- **Zest of 1 Lemon** *(or orange)*
- ½ teaspoon **Baking Powder**
- Quince *or* **Sweet Potato Paste**
- 2 tbps. **Boiling Hot Water**



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COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a bowl, mix the flour, sugar and baking powder. Add the cold butter in chunks and crumble with your fingers until you get a sandy texture.

2. Add the egg and knead until the dough is smooth.

3. Refrigerate the dough for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 180°C.

4. Take small portions and roll the dough into small balls. Place on a buttered and floured baking sheet and flatten each ball slightly, making a hole in the centre with a spoon or your thumb.

5. Mix the dulce de membrillo with the two tablespoons of boiling water and stir until a paste forms. Fill the holes in the seeds with the quince.

6. Bake in the oven for 15–20 minutes. Leave to cool and... enjoy these delicious homemade quince jelly!

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NASI LEMAK GORENG (FRIED NASI LEMAK)

by **Janna Sugiharto** *a dreamer and feminist from Malaysia*

INGREDIENTS

For the Nasi Lemak:

- **2 cups Rice**
- **1 1/2 cups Coconut Milk**
- **1 cup Water**
- **1–2 Pandan Leaves** *(optional)*
- **1/2 tsp. Salt**

For the Stir-Fry:

- **2 tbsp. Cooking Oil**
- **2 cloves Garlic**, *minced (adjust to taste, I love using a lot of garlic!)*
- **1/2 cup Cooked Chicken, Shrimp,** or **Tofu** *(optional)*
- **Chopped Chilies** *(optional and adjust to taste/spice level)*
- **Salt & Pepper** *to* taste
- **Soy Sauce** *(optional)*

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COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

① Prepare the Nasi Lemak:

Rinse the rice under cold water until the water runs clear. Drain.

In a rice cooker, combine the rinsed rice, coconut milk, water, knotted pandan leaves, and salt. Cook according to the rice cooker's instructions.

Leave the nasi lemak in the fridge overnight or let it cool for a few hours before making the fried rice for best texture. Otherwise, you can also just fry the freshly cooked rice.

② Stir-Fry the Ingredients:

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a large pan or wok over medium heat.

Add the minced garlic and sauté until fragrant.

If using chopped chilies, stir in the chopped chilies and cook for an additional minute.

If using chicken, shrimp, or tofu, add them to the pan now and stir-fry until heated through.

③ Stir-Fry the Rice:

Add the prepared nasi lemak to the pan, breaking up any clumps. Stir-fry until everything is well mixed and heated through, about 5-7 minutes.

Season with salt, pepper, and soy sauce (if using) to taste.

④ Serve (optional):

Remove the fried rice from heat and serve hot, garnished with chopped green onions.

Top with sliced hard-boiled eggs, fried peanuts, fried anchovies, a spoon of sambal and cucumber slices (the classic way!).

Nasi Lemak Goreng is a flavorful twist on the classic dish. Enjoy this aromatic and satisfying fried rice!

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RECIPES of COLLECTIVE CARE and RESILIENCE

CULTIVATING RESILIENCE: A PALESTINIAN RECIPE FOR THE WELLBEING OF ACTIVISTS

by **Dr. Samah Jabr** *from Palestine*

The Psychological Impact of Activism against Oppression

For activists and the defenders of freedom working and living in regions besieged by occupation, colonization, and oppression, the psychological toll can be immense. The relentless exposure to violence, loss, and trauma can lead to profound psychological challenges, including anxiety, depression, traumatic stress, emotional fatigue, and burnout.

The psyches of activists are continually bombarded with information, images, and memories that disrupt their peace of mind, creating a feeling of pain and moral injury. When they escape direct threat or retaliation,

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witnessing horrible actions that violate one's ethical beliefs can cause profound helplessness, guilt, shame, confusion, and a crisis of identity. For those fighting for justice, the moral conflict between necessary actions and deeply held values can be particularly tormenting. Among activists are those who survive when others do not—and who therefore often grapple with survivor's guilt, questioning why they lived while others perished, making it difficult to find peace or feel deserving of life's small joys.

Sumud: The Essence of Palestinian Resilience

In the context of the Palestinian struggle, the concept of Sumud—steadfastness or perseverance—embodies the spirit of our resistance. Sumud is not just about enduring hardship; it is about maintaining our identity, dignity, defiance to oppression, and hope for freedom in the face of relentless oppression.

Sumud can apply to the mental health and wellbeing of those who resist state repression and fight for liberation around the world. It teaches us to stand firm, to draw strength from our roots, and to believe in the possibility of a just future. Sumud is about finding strength in community, in our shared struggles, and in the unyielding belief that justice will prevail.

For activists, embracing Sumud means cultivating resilience, fostering solidarity, and nurturing hope. It is the promise to not give up, even in weak moments, until we find the power to stand up again to our cause and to continue the fight for a better world. Through Sumud, we honor the past, live fully in the present, and remain committed to a future of freedom and justice.

My Personal Perspective

As a psychiatrist in Palestine, keeping myself afloat amidst pervasive trauma and ongoing violence is a complex but deeply rooted process. I was born into a traumatic context, so my defenses and survival mechanisms have developed naturally and steadily over my life. These mechanisms are not just my personal way of survival; they are a testament to the Sumud that defines me as a Palestinian.

SUMUD IS ABOUT FINDING STRENGTH IN COMMUNITY, IN OUR SHARED STRUGGLES, AND IN THE UNYIELDING BELIEF THAT JUSTICE WILL PREVAIL.

On a more specific level, my faith plays a central role in my life. I sense Allah's care and mercy guiding me through the most challenging times. This faith not only

provides me with strength and solace but also instills in me a sense of purpose and duty. I firmly believe that the Palestinian cause is a just and noble human cause that I am honored to defend; I think I would have done the same if I were not a Palestinian, I think it is a profound example of a confrontation between right and might, which is a common reality that can be experienced everywhere.

In this struggle, the example is Palestinian, but the lesson is global.This belief provokes my sense of responsibility and ignites my perseverance and determination. My supportive family and reliable friends are a cornerstone of my strength. They provide me with a network of emotional support, understanding, and encouragement, which is essential in the face of ongoing adversity. We share a common bond and understanding of our struggles, which reinforces our collective steadfastness.

For me, my profession is not just a job; it is a calling that allows me to be of service to my community. By helping others heal, I find purpose and avoid becoming paralyzed by the traumatic helplessness meant to be inflicted upon us in Palestine. This active engagement in the healing process reinforces my engagement and sense

of agency.

Ultimately, I do what I believe I have to do in my life, guided by a deep sense of purpose and acceptance of consequences. This acceptance brings me comfort, even in the midst of turmoil. By integrating my faith, the support of family and friends, and my professional purpose, I navigate the immense challenges of my work and life in Palestine with a resilient heart and a hopeful spirit. I understand that Palestine is in difficult and painful labor, and our liberation will come one day.

Of course, there are many difficult times. When I feel tired, sad, or grieving, I especially find peace in my connection to the land.

My journey towards healing amidst the pervasive trauma of occupation has led me to the humble yet profound practice of gardening. The sanctuary of flickering leaves and blooming flowers became my refuge, offering a respite from the haunting accounts of torture and suffering that I encountered daily in my profession. Gardening videos initially helped me push out the residual images of horror and flashbacks, and once I moved to a house with an allotment, I embraced the practice wholeheartedly, and started planting my organic vegetables and fruits.

In the aftermath of the heart-wrenching losses inflicted by the genocide in Palestine, gardening became more than a hobby—a lifeline. It became a sacred ritual through which I communed with the land and honored the souls of those who had fallen. Amidst a brutal political strategy aimed at weaponizing starvation, planting my own food was a profound act of defiance. The occupying forces sought to starve our people into submission; every seed I planted was a rebellion against this oppressive tactic, a declaration of a Palestinian will to live, to nourish ourselves, and to resist.

BY INTEGRATING MY FAITH, THE SUPPORT OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AND MY PROFESSIONAL PURPOSE, I NAVIGATE THE IMMENSE CHALLENGES OF MY WORK AND LIFE IN PALESTINE WITH A RESILIENT HEART AND A HOPEFUL SPIRIT.

Each seed planted was a whispered prayer for the departed, each blossom a tribute to their enduring spirit. The garden became a microcosm of Sumud and resistance. Every vegetable that sprouted, every fruit that ripened, was a testament to our resilience. Nothing went to waste—food scraps were turned into compost, enriching the soil that, in turn, sustained us. This cycle of

growth and renewal was a powerful counter-narrative to the destruction and despair imposed upon us.

As I worked the soil with my hands, I felt a profound connection to the earth beneath me—a connection that transcended mere physicality and touched upon the very essence of existence. In the fertile soil, I saw the precious bodies of martyrs interwoven with the roots of the plants, their souls mingling with the fragrant blossoms that adorned the garden.

AMIDST A BRUTAL POLITICAL STRATEGY AIMED AT WEAPONIZING STARVATION, PLANTING MY OWN FOOD WAS A PROFOUND ACT OF DEFIANCE.

Every morning, as the first light of dawn kissed the horizon, I would walk among the rows of vegetables and flowers, tenderly nurturing each plant as if it were a cherished soul. And as the sun dipped below the horizon, I would offer my gratitude to the land that had become my safe haven, my shrine, and my companion in grief.

My garden is a reminder that even in the darkest of times, life finds a way to bloom anew—that from the

ashes of destruction, beauty can still emerge. Observing the seasons, experiencing loss and death in this natural context, and witnessing new growth provides me with a profound sense of grounding. It reminds me of the continuity of life and the hope inherent in nature.

Other Strategies for Mental Wellbeing and Healing

While I find my mindfulness and meditation in gardening, others might find it in praying, relaxing, contemplating, etc. Techniques such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery can be beneficial to many people. These practices ground us in the present moment, providing respite from the relentless march of traumatic memories.

For some, building and maintaining strong community ties is essential. Sharing experiences, offering mutual support, and fostering a sense of solidarity can mitigate feelings of isolation and helplessness. Together, activists gain synergy, drawing strength from each other's resilience and shared purpose.

Engaging in creative activities such as writing, art, music, and dance can serve as powerful outlets for processing emotions and expressing the inexpressible.

Art transforms pain into beauty, giving voice to the unspoken and renovating a sense of subjectivity and agency.

Sometimes, accessing professional mental health support, such as peer support, therapy or counseling, can provide invaluable assistance. Human Rights Organizations and solidarity groups should strive to provide access to mental health resources for activists and establish environments where activists feel safe to share their experiences and emotions without judgment. Safe spaces foster open dialogue and containment. Encouraging a culture that prioritizes self-care and mutual support, recognizing that caring for oneself is integral to sustaining the fight for justice, and promoting a culture of care validates the need for rest and recuperation.

It is also important for every activist to recognize one's limits and set boundaries to prevent burnout. Taking

regular breaks, delegating tasks, and ensuring time for rest and self-care are critical.

As I reflect on the fruits and vegetables I harvest from my garden, I am reminded of the French proverb, "chacun fait sa cuisine interne," which means "everyone creates their own inner cooking." This metaphor speaks to the unique blend of ingredients that contribute to our wellbeing. For activists, it is vital to remember that their personal well-being is essential to sustaining the noble causes they champion. Each of us must find the right balance of practices that nurture our resilience and Sumud, enabling us to continue our fight for justice with vigor and clarity.

THE ART OF RELENTLESS BREATHING: AFRICAN CARE RECIPE

by **Stephen Okwany** *from Kenya*

Telling tales of the those whose breathe illuminate the very purpose of existence, resilience and humanity

My name is Stephen Okwany and I like describing myself as a Queer Narratives Farmer and Artivist. This is because I am intentional about farming Narratives that affirm us in our diversity for purposes of building empathy, kindness and collective wellness.

Traditional activism and solidarity building actions socialized African activists to believe that rest is an elusive concept and a demonstration of extreme weakness. Branding activism as a calling isolated activists from tapping into the existing spaces of wellness and thus, further advanced a status quo of continuous burnout, economic sabotage and disenfranchised relationships.

Conventional African activism is breaking the norm, enabling activists to recognize their humanness even

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while at the forefront of civic actions. The concept of breath and rest as radical actions of resistance continue to disrupt the usual and create an ecosystem of activist lived realities that affirm their very existence.

Grassroots organizing and movement building among activists has led to a proactive care recipe of wellness. Collective wellness and therapy have continued to rejuvenize the lost energy, glory and change processes as envisaged by activists.

What does this mean?

One key mandate of Kenyan activists, like myself, has always been to empower communities of their civic rights and responsibilities. This is a global reality. Within the Kenyan context, grassroots organizing has translated to mass movements like the recent compassionately radical Gen Z protests which were rooted in questions of accountability. This wouldn't have been a reality in the early 90's where tyrants ruled and orchestrated violence on activists. While we continue seeing attempts by the State to orchestrate state-sanctioned violence towards activists, global human rights instruments have been bold enough to ask questions and hold duty bearers to account as demonstrated by the 2012 post-election violence International Criminal Court (ICC) engagements.

Kenya has continued to intentionally erase the existence of Queer and Non-Binary citizens due to religious, cultural and legal dictates. This has continued to isolate LGBTQ+ activists from proactively organizing due to consistent attacks, targeting and online phishing.

THE CONCEPT OF BREATH AND REST AS RADICAL ACTIONS OF RESISTANCE CONTINUE TO DISRUPT THE USUAL AND CREATE AN ECOSYSTEM OF ACTIVIST LIVED REALITIES THAT AFFIRM THEIR VERY EXISTENCE.

While physical organizing is met by radical opposition and infiltration by state-sanctioned extremist movements, the digital space offers an alternative against the realities of tech-dependent and tech-enabled violence meted on LGBTQ+ activists based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

So, what has been the practical care recipe for us Kenyan Queer and Non-Binary activists?

Collective organizing has worked well for us. Isolated organizing enables opposition infiltration whereas collective organizing enables us to share learnings, knowledge and capacity for purposes of collective action.

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Secondly, breath and the realization of breath continue to work for us. We recognize when we need to step aside for a minute and breathe. This doesn't demonstrate any form of weakness but we have realized that lack of breath can make us project our internal biases to the larger movement with some of us still battling internalized homophobia or mental disorders.

ISOLATED ORGANIZING ENABLES OPPOSITION INFILTRATION WHEREAS COLLECTIVE ORGANIZING ENABLES US TO SHARE LEARNINGS, KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY FOR PURPOSES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION.

Lastly, solidarity building is the key. We believe that numbers can always push systems to change. We are intentional about holding space for our folks who are battling any form of oppression. We speak up and out. We ask the difficult questions and we show up.

If your presence irritates them, keep showing up.
Let them choke to death!

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THE WELLNESS NOOK: A STUDY IN NURTURING A CULTURE OF REST AND CARE IN ACTIVIST SPACES

by **Meg Yarcia** *Psychologist from the Philippines, gives advice at Dear Meg*

Pahingá [noun] rest; relaxation; break; vacation; breather; downtime.

Rest, in Filipino, is pahinga. Its root word, "hinga", means to breathe, while the pa- prefix connotes enabling. Pahinga is therefore allowing oneself to breathe, which is a basic act of human existence. I have taken this to mean that in order to live, one must rest.

But if years of counseling among progressives taught me anything, it's that the act is a challenge, if not an impossibility. Taking time off activist work almost always brings shame and guilt, so there was a real inability to find pleasure in breaks. Moreover, the longer their break,

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the worse the feeling.

I wished to understand the phenomenon, which might also exist in progressive communities elsewhere. But it should help to discuss the particular context of my country's social movement.

My country and its struggles:

I live in the Philippines, a country of over seven thousand tropical islands sitting on the South Pacific. It's a most beautiful place, one that's home to breathtaking mountains, beaches, and cliffs, lakes, rivers, and reefs. There is colorful, abundant life under the sea, and the tastiest crops grow in the fertile valleys.

Over the course of 400 years, these wonders have launched a thousand (war)ships. Spanish, American, and Japanese troops have descended on our soil, for tons of forest timber haul, and our rich reserves of copper, silver, and gold.

But my country is also a country of proud, brave people. My forebears stood against these colonizers, whose men and firepower were ten times their own. And with nothing much more than a desire for freedom, they won.

These days, we face similar battles: against global superpowers encroaching on our territories, and a local elite whose policies mire our people in poverty. The tradition of courageous, against-all-odds resistance goes on – in the streets, in the parliament, and in the countryside.

Resistance and care

I have been thinking about how this revolutionary tradition has been passed on to us, and what values and standards were borne in the process. How did we define success, strength, meaning, even love, based on this framework? How does it accommodate things like mistakes, failure, and weakness?

In particular, I wish to understand where the concept of rest and care fall in the map of the militant struggle. Is there a space for doing nothing, in a world where there is always something to do? In the immortal words of a wise old man:

> "So many deeds cry out to be done, And always urgently;
>
> The world rolls on,
>
> Time presses.

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Ten thousand years are too long,
Seize the day, seize the hour!"

Perhaps our history books write less of it, but surely, the yang of our resistance – that which drove men and women lunging forward with their swords and rifles and torches – could not have been possible without the yin: the rest, the care, the quiet retreat into sanctuaries when people are wounded or exhausted, or even afraid.

As we carry forward the revolution of our ancestors, not just in the Philippines but wherever there is oppression, I believe that the need for yin, persists. It persists because, as I like to tell my counselees, revolutionaries are also human beings.

Even as the fight for a better world is all-important, the reality of their mortal existence is that they will need to replenish their energy. It seems self-explanatory from the lens of physical health, but somehow less intuitive for the psychological: if one is hungry, one must stop what they are doing, to eat. Similarly, if one feels mentally and emotionally drained, it should be alright, if not highly recommended, to seek care and respite.

...REVOLUTIONARIES ARE ALSO HUMAN BEINGS.

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THE WELLNESS NOOK

One example of a care practice that organizations can adopt is the wellness nook. I got the idea from my counseling sessions with activists, which always begin with questions on their daily routine. I ask how they rest, and whether there's an opportunity for it during the day.

It sounds simple enough: the wellness nook is a space within offices or headquarters or staff houses where people can rest. And I think it already exists in various forms: the pantry, the back of the office, where one can "get some air," or even the desk of a colleague who's known to hold space for others.

But by institutionalizing the idea, a commitment is made. The leadership will be urged to allocate resources towards the nook's creation and maintenance, while members will be better able to internalize its purpose. It will no longer be an arbitrary location, or come with the unhealthy habits that people tend to do in these spaces (e.g. smoke, stress-eat, gossip).

Formalizing the idea also takes away the shame and guilt that hound activists when they rest. Instead, it will be viewed as an acknowledgment of their humanity, the same humanity that allows them to feel the suffering of

their fellow human being, which brought them to activism in the first place. Also, it should show an understanding that taking breaks does not mean less commitment or less willingness to sacrifice. It's simply a material response to a material need to renew one's strength.

FORMALIZING THE IDEA ALSO TAKES AWAY THE SHAME AND GUILT THAT HOUND ACTIVISTS WHEN THEY REST.

This concept of a wellness nook comes with the caveat that the specifics will have to change based on the context, although some general principles apply. And I invite progressive organizations and wellness practitioners to share their experience of keeping the space with each other, in the spirit of pooling wisdom to inform our collective struggles.

Ultimately, I would like to think that the goal is for there to be no need for a wellness nook in the future. We will aim to reimagine our entire communities as spaces that nurture our whole being, spaces where we will always feel accepted, valued, and loved.

(These texts can/must be edited to suit the particular contexts of the organization).

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Items needed:

- A couch
- A small side table
- Straw mats
- Sheets (neutral colors, no print)
- Yoga mats
- Pillows (neutral colors, no print)
- Secular reading materials

The wellness nook: An introduction

- This space is a sanctuary, an acknowledgment of our humanity.
- Feel free to read, take a nap, meditate, stretch, pray, journal, or just stare into the void.
- You are allowed to be sad, afraid, weak, and/or tired here. You are no less accepted or valued.

House rules

- Please wear appropriate clothing, or that which covers the sensitive parts of the body even as one

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moves about.

- Please do not wear low-cut shirts, very short shorts, or sando.
- Please keep this space tidy at all times. Kindly leave it exactly as you found it.
- We want this space to be as simple and neat as possible, a break from sensory stimulation. Please do not put up posters, play music, or use scented candles/essential oils.
- To maintain the inclusiveness of this space, kindly refrain from leaving items associated with religions. If you need to use them for your wellness time, to pray, meditate, among other things, please take them with you afterwards.
- Please keep quiet and do not talk to other people. People come to the nook for silence.
- You may drink water but please do not eat here. We encourage dedicating a space and time for everything, and the nook is not the ideal space for eating.

- If someone is crying, please leave them be unless they specifically ask for comfort.
- No smoking or drinking (alcohol).
- The use of electronic devices is highly discouraged. If you have one with you, put it on silent mode.
- Make space for other users of the wellness nook.

Guidelines for maintaining the wellness nook

(for the organization's leadership or wellness committee)

- Ensure the cleanliness and orderliness of the nook. Assign a person to inspect it at the start and end of the day. Assign committees to clean it up regularly, and assess the state of the items inside.
- Pay attention to details: Ask questions like: is the couch comfortable to sit on? How many people fit on the mat provided? Is the noise from outside blocked? Does it have directions to the fire exit? Is there proper lighting and ventilation?
- Revisit the house rules and the nook items list every six months: get people's feedback, and adjust accordingly.

SELF-CARE AND CARE AMONG ACTIVISTS – HOW TO DO IT

by **CFEMEA** – *Feminist Centre for Studies and Advice from Brazil*

Objective of the circle: How do I take care of my emotions and how do I express them?

Connection Wheel (guided experience):

- Stand in a circle, with your eyes closed if possible. Bring your attention to the soles of your feet and feel their contact with the ground. Gradually imagine that from the soles of your feet come roots that begin to grow rapidly, growing so much that they reach the centre of the planet earth. Feel the connection with the centre of the earth and gradually imagine that everything that is in excess is being taken to the centre of the earth, especially what you no longer need to carry. Let mother earth receive and transmute all expectations, unwanted feelings, annoyances, anger, pain, discomfort, tiredness.... When you feel that all the excess has been left behind, connect with your spine and notice each of the vertebrae, from the coccyx

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to the neck...Take a deep breath, notice your cup, the top of your head, your feet and every part that makes up your dwelling and rest on it for a while.

Body warm-up:

- Place a piece of fabric in the centre of the circle and one by one take the fabric and transform it into something that is understood/identified by the way the person relates to their creation. After everyone has played with the fabric, put on some music for free dancing (if possible, give each participant a fabric).

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Feeling-Thinking *(a time to reflect on an issue based on some stimulus and express this feeling-thinking in some way):*

- Reading of the poem "Poemas Presos" (Trapped Poems) by Viviane Mosé, followed by free expression with melted crayons (give each person a candle and several crayons. On a sturdy support, drip the melted crayon onto the candle and make a composition of textures and colours).

Sharing:

- A moment of exchange where those who wish can talk about how they felt, what they felt during the circle, any specific question that arose from the feeling-thought, etc.

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RECIPE FOR THE DANCE OF RESISTANCE

by Atiaf al-Wazir

1. When the music begins, close your eyes.

2. Keep your eyes shut the entire time. Wear an eye mask if it helps.

3. Let your body move and sway as it pleases. Don't guide it, don't control it. Let it do what it wants to do.

4. Try not to ask questions or analyze why it's moving the way it does.

5. Remind yourself that no one is focusing on you. Everyone has their own insecurities.

6. When the sounds of music echo in the room, begin to stomp your feet, one, two, three times.

7. As your feet touch the ground, feel that union between your body and the ground. Think of the many other times you weren't present. Always running. Always on your toes. Release that feeling for the time being. Come back here. Touch the ground.

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8. Keep swaying with the music.

9. Now make a fist, and think of everyone who has hurt you. Punch the air, to punch the pain away. Repeat as many times as you need.

10. Return to stillness. Breathe, and let your body sway as it pleases.

11. Now shake your hands, your legs, your arms, your body. Shake slowly or fast and release all the toxins from your body.

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⑫ Ignore any idea of what "you should" be doing. Follow what your body needs and do it shamelessly. If you need to scream like a toddler, do it. Your voice may at first be timid and low, but then it will grow stronger and it will mix with the pounding of the drums, and become one with the music.

⑬ Now hop around the room feeling light and free, you are on your way back home. Back to your body.

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FOSTERING RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF GRIEF

by **Jeffrey Ambion** *a mental health right advocate from Philippines, Edited by: Darwin Mendiola, Medical Action Group from Philippines*

Introduction:

This article is dedicated to helping individuals "navigate the complex emotions that accompany grief and empowering them to cultivate resilience. Grief is a natural response to the loss of something or someone significant in our lives, whether it's a loved one, a cherished pet, personal possessions, or property. It triggers a range of emotions, from deep sadness and guilt to shock and a sense of disconnection from our familiar world.

Grief's impact on our physical, emotional, and psychosocial well-being is particularly profound in traumatic and unforeseen circumstances like accidents, natural disasters, or personal tragedies. It's crucial to recognize that the effects of grief often extend to the mental health of family members. In Filipino culture, the tradition of "Pakikiramay," which embodies deep

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sympathy and empathy, involves providing emotional and financial support to those undergoing the grieving process.

Understanding Grief and the Period of Processing:

Grief is a natural response to distressing losses, such as the death of a loved one, a failed marriage, health issues, job loss, or unfulfilled dreams. The duration of grief varies, lasting for days, weeks, or even years, especially in cases of traumatic loss that may necessitate psychological intervention for complete recovery.

The grieving process is highly individual and cannot be compared. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to grief; how individuals cope depends on factors like personality, coping style, life experiences, faith, and the significance of the loss. Healing is a gradual process that takes time, and there's no fixed timetable for grieving. It's crucial not to suppress grief; facing it is vital for genuine healing.

Grief can manifest as sadness, fear, loneliness, or even anger, and all these emotions are valid. While crying is a common response to sadness, it's not the only way to grieve. Some individuals may not cry but still experience

profound pain. Respecting and supporting each person's unique grieving process is essential. It's also crucial not to pressure someone to "move on" or "forget." Grief doesn't follow a set timeline, and it's possible to move forward in life while keeping the memory of the loss as a meaningful part of one's identity.

Stages of the Grieving Process:

In 1969, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced the "five stages of grief." These stages, initially observed in terminally ill patients, have been widely applied to various types of loss, including the death of a loved one or the end of a significant relationship. The five stages include:

- ***Denial:*** This initial stage is characterized by shock and disbelief. Right after a loss, it can be challenging to accept the reality of what has happened. People may feel numb, struggle to believe the loss is real, or even deny it altogether. In some cases, individuals may expect the lost person or thing to reappear, despite knowing it's impossible.
- ***Anger:*** Grief often leads to feelings of anger and resentment. Even when the loss was accidental or beyond anyone's control, individuals may look for

someone or something to blame for the perceived injustice. Anger can be directed at others, oneself, or even spiritual beliefs.

- ***Bargaining:*** In this stage, there's a desire to reverse the loss or seek a different outcome. Regrets, guilt, and a longing for a miraculous change may lead people to make promises or express a wish for something to happen to reverse the situation. At times, individuals may even wish for their lives to be taken in place of the lost person or thing.

- ***Depression:*** Profound sadness is nearly universal in grief. Emotions like emptiness, despair, yearning, and loneliness are prevalent. Crying, emotional instability, panic, fear, and anxiety are common during this stage. Significant losses can trigger worries and fears about the future, including concerns about personal safety or the burden of responsibilities left behind.

- ***Acceptance:*** In this stage, the intense emotions of grief may begin to subside. While the pain may still linger in the background, individuals often desire to move forward and face the reality of their loss. The suffering becomes more manageable, and there's an effort to return to a semblance of normal life.

It's essential to understand that these stages provide a common framework for understanding grief, but not everyone experiences all of them. The grief journey is not linear, and individuals may move back and forth between stages or skip some altogether. The key is to honor each person's unique experience of grief while seeking support and healing.

The Role of Compassion in Nurturing Resilience

Families play a central role in supporting individuals as they navigate the complexities of grief. However, their coping strategies can vary significantly. Grief within a family is influenced by internal dynamics and external factors, shaping how each member copes with and responds to the loss.

Seeking assistance and support during grief and loss can be challenging due to the stigma and discrimination often surrounding these experiences. In many societies, grief is a topic not openly discussed, and those grieving may encounter judgment or insensitivity.

However, direct, in-person support is invaluable on the path to healing. It acts as a crucial buffer, alleviating the emotional burden of grief. By providing a listening ear, empathetic understanding, and a compassionate

presence, family members, friends, and the community contribute significantly to the healing process.

The concept of "pakikiramay" or compassion is deeply rooted, especially during crises or loss. Rooted in the values of "pakikipagkapwa tao" and "pakikisama," emphasizing social connection and support, this cultural trait plays a crucial role. During challenging times, Filipinos often demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity, drawing strength from the compassion and support of family members, relatives, and close friends.

Acts of compassion within these communities embody the spirit of "bayanihan" or communal unity and cooperation. This is evident after natural disasters, where communities come together to provide assistance, including rebuilding homes, offering medical care, and extending emotional support to those who have experienced loss. These acts of kindness and empathy help grieving individuals and families cope positively and build resilience.

The role of compassion in fostering resilience during the grieving process cannot be overstated. It is through shared compassion, in the form of "pakikiramay" and communal support, that individuals find the strength to manage their grief and eventually emerge stronger.

Nurturing Resilience within Families

The concept of Resilience-Focused Family Psychoeducation represents a powerful psychological intervention designed to empower family members to understand their psychosocial circumstances, equip them with knowledge and skills, and rectify misconceptions that may hinder the healing process. This approach comprises a series of structured processes, each playing a distinct role in the journey toward resilience:

- ***Connecting:*** The initial phase fosters a strong rapport among family members, encouraging open communication, trust, and empathy. This foundation allows individuals to share their thoughts and emotions comfortably, setting the stage for the rest of the intervention.

- ***Centering:*** Centering works to stabilize family dynamics, creating a balanced and harmonious atmosphere within the family. This balance helps members find their footing amid the challenges of grief, ensuring they are emotionally grounded and prepared for the healing process.

- ***Co-creating:*** This stage emphasizes a collaborative

approach, with family members actively participating in the assessment and planning process. This shared involvement ensures that the family's unique needs and circumstances are considered, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the healing journey.

- ***Clarifying:*** Information-sharing and the correction of misconceptions are pivotal components. This stage allows family members to gain a deeper understanding of the grief process and rectify any misunderstandings or erroneous beliefs that may hinder their progress.

- ***Cultivating:*** The cultivation phase focuses on skill development, equipping families with the tools and techniques needed to navigate the complexities of grief effectively. This includes learning effective communication strategies, coping mechanisms, and self-care practices.

- ***Contracting:*** The final step involves establishing a "behavioral contract" or family tasking. This process delineates responsibilities and expectations within the family unit, including changes in family rules, roles, delegation of tasks, sharing of burdens, and maintaining routines. It also outlines a plan for seeking medical or psychological care when needed and

designates who will provide support to family members with specific needs.

The culmination of these processes leads to the establishment of a clear and resilient family belief system, improved communication channels, and effective organizational patterns. By addressing misconceptions and providing the necessary skills, this approach empowers families to adapt and thrive despite the challenges they face.

The ultimate goal of Resilience-Focused Family Psychoeducation is to help individual family members regain a sense of equilibrium, meaning, and resiliency within the family unit. It facilitates their journey toward recovery and healing, allowing them to reintegrate as fully functional members of their community.

Conclusion:

The experience of grief is a deeply personal and transformative journey. It encompasses a range of complex emotions and challenges, but it also offers opportunities for resilience, renewal, and self-discovery. With understanding, compassion, and support from family, friends, and communities, individuals do not traverse this path alone. Resilience serves as a guiding

light, enabling them to emerge from grief stronger and more compassionate, prepared to face the future with renewed vigor. Ultimately, the tapestry of human connection grows stronger, making the journey through grief a profound pathway to personal transformation and healing.

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AROMATHERAPY

by **Manoella Mignone** *e* **Karine Batista**, *taken from Coletiva Caminho Natural Fanzine from Brazil*

Humans can distinguish up to five different types of flavour by taste, while studies estimate that our sense of smell is capable of distinguishing around 10,000 different odours. The sense of smell is the first to develop from the time we are embryos, and it is also the most primitive of all the others. Aromas have the ability to trigger emotions, feelings, memories and behaviours, which is where aromatherapy comes in.

Aromas travel through the nostrils and reach the olfactory bulb, a set of cells that make a direct connection between the nostrils and the central nervous system, more precisely the limbic system. This region of the limbic system, in turn, is associated with emotions, feelings, memories and behaviour. Have you ever smelled something and remembered someone or a moment in your life?

There are a number of methods for extracting essential oils: steam distillation, cold pressing, solvent extraction, supercritical carbon dioxide or enfloration. They can be used in a number of different ways: inhalation, bath,

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massage therapy, aromatiser, compress, in cosmetics, among others.

Essential oils are so called because they are soluble in oils, butters or alcohol, are aromatic and have various therapeutic properties. However, they are not oils (composed of fatty acids). They are a mixture of various substances that plants produce to fulfil various functions for their development and survival. More than 150 compounds can be found in a single essential oil! Essential oils are volatile, i.e. they spread in the air, perfuming the environment and are stored in different parts of the plants like leaves, stems, roots, fruits, seeds etc.

Aromatherapy is the therapeutic use of essential oils extracted from the plant kingdom. Using their subtlest part, the essence, which acts directly on the harmony of the three spheres of the human body: mental, physical and emotional. Different essential oils have different actions and can help us with stress, insomnia, irritability, lack of energy, and focus to name but a few.

In most countries, we can buy essential oils, usually available in small packets (5 to 10 ml), which are super concentrated and yield a lot, but unfortunately, the cost is

often very high and inaccessible to many people. But we can benefit from the action of essential oils by using aromatic plants that have essential oils in their composition.

Both essential oils and aromatic plants can be used in a variety of ways, such as: personal (necklace) or room spray aromatizers, electric room or candles diffusers, for the purposes of body massage by diluting them in vegetable oils, dripping a few drops on the pillow, or placing fresh or dried herbs in sachets to put under the pillow, as an eye patch or to carry around and inhale a few times a day.

We can use several different plants for each desired action and the tip is to look for what is available in your area and research the ones that work for the desired action. A very simple way to use them, which I particularly like, is to heat a pan of water, switch it off and throw the plants into the hot water, perfuming the house with the volatile essential oils in the room.

Some examples for scenting the house are: tangerine, lemon and orange peel, which help to bring joy to people and the environment; sage, which helps to balance hormones; lavender and jasmine, which help with stress, insomnia and mental overload; and rosemary, which helps

us to focus when we are tired and devitalised.

When using pure essential oils, it's important to bear in mind that they are concentrated and therefore care should be taken when handling them, and if using them on the skin, always dilute in vegetable oils. Some are photosensitive when applied to the skin, especially citrus oils. The fundamental tip is to know the need for use, to know the plant of origin and its essence, and understand the most appropriate form of use for each case.

PROPERTIES OF SOME ESSENTIAL OILS:

- **Jasmine** *(Jasminum officinale)*
  Analgesic, antispasmodic, general tonic, regulates the endocrine system, anxiolytic, antidepressant, calming, sedative, combats insomnia, aids relaxation and meditation. Note: unfortunately this oil has a high commercial value.

- **Frankincense** *(Boswellia carterii)*
  During panic attacks, inhale Frankincense oil (Boswellia carterii) to stimulate deep breathing and promote serenity of mind.

- **Lavender** *(Lavanda officinalis)*
  Can be used on small burns, directly on the skin (an

exception in the world of Essential Oils). Can help with anxiety and sleep difficulties through inhalation.

- **Neroli** *(Citrus auratium)*
  The flower of the orange tree. Invaluable for resolving any nerve problems, chronic and temporary anxiety (even panic attacks), eliminates depression and creates a feeling of euphoria.

- **Ylangue-ylangue** *(Cananga odorata)*
  The plant is known for having aphrodisiac, calming, hypotensive, anxiolytic, antidepressant, sedative and antiseptic properties. An essential oil is extracted from ylang-ylang flowers.

- **Marjoram** *(Origanum manjorana)*
  Sleep-inducing oil that has the benefit of warming and relaxing the muscles. Excellent if diluted in massage oils and for people with muscle pain.

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MASSAGE OILS:

To make massage oil, add 1% to 2% of essential oils to the mixture with vegetable oils such as sunflower oil.

HERBAL PILLOW

Materials:

- Cotton fabric
- Needle and thread
- 500g dried chamomile
- 100g dried macela
- 100g dried lavender
- Cut the fabric to 30cm x 40cm. Sew it into a bag. Place the herbs inside and then sew the entrance to the bag. This pillow will last up to six months.

IMPORTANT WARNINGS:

- Many essential oils are not recommended for pregnant women. Only use it if you are sure.
- Never use pure essential oil on the skin (unless you have experience), dilute it with vegetable oils.

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- Citrus oils should not be used directly on the skin as they can cause spots (photosensitivity).
- Do not ingest essential oils (unless you have experience).
- Essential oils are volatile (they dissipate in the air) and can catch fire, so don't handle them near a fire and close them as soon as you use them.

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KAMAYAN: THE MULTIFACETED AND DELICIOUS SIDES OF HEALING

by **Gabes Torres** *from the Philippines*

I strive for collective healing to reside at the heart of my commitments. When I speak of collective healing, I mean a shared and growing awareness of our minds and bodies in light of their powerful capacities and natural human limitations, as well as the sociopolitical contexts and forces that impact our collective and individual experiences. We apply this awareness of our human capacities into our collective actions towards social change in order to make our work sustainable.

Audre Lorde says that, "There is no thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives." Similarly in mental health, our experiences around depression, anxiety, etc. do not occur in isolation, neither will our practices and cultures of healing.

I live, relate, and play at the intersection of collective

healing and liberation, especially within international communities. I provide peer support, offer mentorship, and host process groups for human rights defenders, grassroots organizers, and justice-oriented mental health therapists from different parts of the world (especially in the global South and Turtle Island), to sustain their mental wellbeing in the struggle towards collective liberation.

I'm drawn to the multidimensional ways we, as communities on the ground, approach and imagine healing in various cultures and ways of being and relating. This makes me passionate about subverting hierarchies that impose dominant methods of healing, which mainly centralize the West and inferiorize bodies that are not the White, cis, abled, and thin. From there, I hope I may accompany students and practitioners within the fields of psychotherapy and wellness towards practices and ideas that uplift collective flourishing.

I also write for solutions journalism from the same intersection of collective healing and liberation. You can find my column on Yes! Magazine.

Collective Care Recipe

In the Philippines and beyond, Filipinos have been

practicing an ancient style of eating called kamayan. Kamayan means 'by hand'—a tradition where we use our hands to share a large meal. Participants of a kamayan gather around a table covered in sterilized banana leaves. There is no separate plating in kamayan. Everyone shares a single large meal on the leaves. The leaves sit under a small mountain of rice that serves as the meal's foundation. Alongside the rice are various types of protein (mostly grilled pork or chicken), vegetables, salted egg, and tropical fruits, making a feast rich in flavor, color, texture, and aroma.

What I love about the kamayan is that it involves a diversity of food options. Similarly, in the intersection of mental health and activism, a diversity of approaches enlivens the process—be it called care practices, wellness plans, or coping strategies. We can welcome a delicious and nutritious assortment of them, as opposed to fixating on a singular, static formula towards collective healing. The kamayan tradition gives us a recipe for collective care through community embodiment, cultural connection, and direct action.

Community Embodiment

Upon thinking of community embodiment, perhaps you and I initially imagine similar scenarios. Maybe

you and I thought about a yoga class, a running club, or a sports event. But here, I speak of community embodiment beyond the world of fitness, and instead look back at the meaning of embodiment, which is to be in one's body. It is about presence.

In kamayan, the invitation to presence is not just in the human-to-human contact, but also in one's attention to bodily senses. Kamayan is a deep embodiment practice, where we are attuned to the senses: those of us who are able to use our hands to eat the meal. There are no utensils that separate the body from the food. The fingers feel the varying textures and temperatures from grains, sauces, and meats.

When I partake in kamayan, I sometimes wonder if I can tell apart the saltiness of my skin from the savory food. Eating gets messy, making sweet moments of closeness: "I don't always have to be tidy to be welcomed and accepted here."

There is a vulnerability in kamayan, creating a radical practice of presence. In our efforts towards collective healing and liberation, how can we step into radical presence in our bodies and in community? How can the spirit of kamayan manifest in our practices and interactions?

These practices can be as simple as doing a brief meditation or breathwork together before starting strategy meetings, or getting educated on protest safety before a public action. In a way, some activists have already been practicing community embodiment in the form of marches and rallies, where we chant and, if able, walk together for a cause, which strengthens our nervous systems as much as our sense of belonging.

THERE IS A VULNERABILITY IN KAMAYAN, CREATING A RADICAL PRACTICE OF PRESENCE.

There is no urgent need to get every component of kamayan right in our collective embodiment. I believe what's most valuable is the willingness to get messy and be present in our bodily selves and the person in front or next to us.

Cultural Connection

While I was living in the United States, I met Filipino-Americans who host kamayan dinners as a way to reconnect with the motherland while being an ocean or so away. Some of them are homesick, while others have never even set foot in the Philippines but will find ways to reconnect with their roots.

Kamayan is a centuries-old tradition in the Philippines, dated as early as pre-colonial times. In my work with activists, I find it important to engage with their ancestral and cultural lineages. Often, their relationships with their homelands are directly linked to their commitments to social justice, especially for the activists whose homelands are ravaged by global imperialism. They are no strangers to the history of violence that their ancestors and lands endured. At the same time, I find it crucial to also remember the parts of their lineages that have little to nothing to do with trauma and suffering—not as a means to minimize the severity of colonization, but to remember that we are more than our wounds.

When I help my clients and mentees remember their ancestral stories, cultural medicine, and all the life-giving parts of their heritage, they light up. Their spirits are revitalized in the memory of their honorable ancestors and the stories and myths of their motherlands.

Whenever my community faces emotional fatigue or despair in the movement, I invite us to harken back to these stories and myths. The ancestral medicine and traditions. The songs and language. This is why colonizers attempt to erase these parts of our heritage

(epistemicide), because they know that when the colonized are in touch with their ancestral and cultural lineages, they are energized and motivated to stay in the anti-colonial struggle. They are compelled to protect and guard the lushness of their culture and history. They are compelled to remember.

I FIND IT CRUCIAL TO ALSO REMEMBER THE PARTS OF THEIR LINEAGES THAT HAVE LITTLE TO NOTHING TO DO WITH TRAUMA AND SUFFERING—NOT AS A MEANS TO MINIMIZE THE SEVERITY OF COLONIZATION, BUT TO REMEMBER THAT WE ARE MORE THAN OUR WOUNDS.

How then would you remember?

Direct Action

When mainstream discourse and media speak of healing and mental wellbeing, there is a tendency to focus on the gooey, philosophical, or surface-y sides of healing—but in the world of activists, the notion of healing gets a lot of flack for being over-indulgent, individualistic, and apolitical. This can be and has been true for countless wellness spaces—especially in the West—which makes it important to be critical about the

politics of healing, and to take strategic and collective actions towards the change we want in our world. With the language of Filipino food, how can healing be as delicious as it can be revolutionary? Could kamayan encapsulate this spirit?

The names for most of our food in the Philippines are in the form of verbs, and the verb for each dish indicates the way the food is made. The dish nilagang baka translates to 'beef that was boiled or stewed.' The dish inihaw na liempo translates to 'pork that is grilled.' Halo-halo is a Filipino dessert with an assortment of different ingredients on top of cheese, ube, or mango ice cream. Halo-halo translates to 'mix-mix.' These names are action-focused. What might this part of the Filipino language teach us?

I'd like to think that the revolution can be as healing as it can be delicious, and that resistance work doesn't always have to be at the expense of our experiences of healing and pleasure. So often in the world of activism, we overemphasize the aspects of sacrifice and hardship while organizing and working at the frontlines. While this is true, the struggle is not all sacrifice and hardship. Some of the most meaningful, electrifying, and pleasurable moments of my life include my friends in the

movement, as well as the everyday people we coalesce with. My most favorite memories involve the eureka moments whenever we come up with good ideas during strategy meetings, or the late-night dinners after collective actions. And of course, nothing matches the taste of victory after running a successful campaign or gaining new members in our organization.

How could the revolution be as actionable? Or healing? Or pleasurable? Listen to the poetry and songs of Black and Brown and global south-based artists. Find and feel the collective energy of local unions. Turn to the stories of the indigenous peoples of the land on which you're on.

Together, we learned how collective care can consist of community embodiment, cultural connection, and direct action. Community embodiment invites us to collectively be present in our body. Cultural connection helps us remember who we are in light of our heritage, as a way to revitalize our sense of belonging and purpose. Finally, we turn to direct action, and remind ourselves that there is delight and aliveness in the movement. The Filipino tradition of kamayan can guide or remind us of how revolutionary healing can be like—as diverse as it can be delectable.

STORIES OF THE CONTRIBUTORS

AFJP (ARTISTS FOR JUST PEACE)

is a solidarity network of cultural workers and creatives, campaigning for anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggles from within the Philippines.

SAKA (SAMA-SAMANG ARTISTA PARA SA KILUSANG AGRARYO)

is an anti-feudal alliance of artists and cultural workers that support and advance the peasant agenda of genuine agrarian reform, rural development, and food security in the Philippines. By establishing study groups, integrating with peasant communities, and building a network of peasant advocates, the group learns the fundamentals of the peasant struggle for land justice and helps develop creative communication materials for its advancement as part of a broader mass movement for national democracy.

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ANGELA NGULUBE

Angela is a Gender activist with over 5 years of experience working in local communities with marginalized women and young girls in Zambia. Angela holds a bachelor degree in Development Studies and is a trained movement building coach.

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ANNA ZOFIA LEAL

Zofia is a co-founder of Gulay Na!, an organization focused on food activism in the Philippines. She is also a social entrepreneur and educator. Her favorite vegetables are garlic and chili, especially siling labuyo and yellow habanero.

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ARAS ÖRGEN

Aras is a queer activist from Turkey, working and learning mutually to foster well-being and resilience in LGBTQ+ communities. They are committed to nurturing spaces that prioritize healing, connection, and meaningful transformation.

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ATIAF ALWAZIR

Atiaf Alwazir is a Yemeni educator, bilingual writer and storyteller. Atiaf teaches "Introduction to the Arab World," and "Revisiting the Arab Uprisings." Her writing explores concepts of identity, trauma, exile, the reclamation of the body, and hope in the midst of chaos. Her TEDx talk, "The Other Side of Yemen's War," invites audiences to rethink whose stories are heard, and whose are lost."

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CLEMENCIA CORREA

Clemencia is a Mexican psychologist born in Colombia.

A forerunner of the psychosocial approach in Latin America, since 1990 she has been accompanying victims of human rights violations in different countries.

In Colombia, from 1991 to 2002, she accompanied victims of forced disappearance and communities displaced by the armed conflict. In Mexico, she founded Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial in 2013, which she has directed since then. The organization accompanies and trains members of human rights organizations, journalists, and people in general who are affected by socio-political violence, primarily in Mexico.

She has promoted joint efforts between organizations both in Latin America and across different continents to strengthen the approach to health from a psychosocial perspective. As a psychosocial expert on sexual torture and forced disappearance before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, she was part of the Jury of Conscience of the first Tribunal on Crimes Against Humanity committed by the Ortega-Murillo regime in Nicaragua.

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CYNTHIA DACANAY-JARAMILLO

Cynthia is a Mental Health Practitioner from Cordillera, Philippines who currently works with the Cordillera Women's Education Action Research Center (CWEARC Inc.), a non-profit organization engaged in programs in support of women's initiatives in the locality. She helped establish CWEARC in 1987. She has been active in the advancement of women's rights and indigenous people's rights since she was a student in the University.

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COLETIVA CAMINHO NATURAL

The idea for the 'Health, Environment and Autonomy' workshops arose from our research and personal practices to take care of our own health, save on household expenses, use products whose ingredients we know are safer and more ecological and empower us with autonomous practices in our daily lives. By reviving, recognizing, valuing and sharing ancient knowledge, practices and technologies to promote the care and well-being of people, communities, activists and environment. The activities are divided into 5 major cycles: 'Health and Cosmetics', "Therapies", 'Everyday Solutions', 'Ecological Awareness' and 'Food'. All this wisdom is made available in hundreds of fanzines with free licenses.

Facebook: facebook.com/coletiva_caminho_natural

DITA NIRMALA SARI

Dita is a feminist actively advocating for the ratification of the Domestic Workers' Protection Bill (RUU-PPRT) and participating in movements to eliminate gender-based violence. A mother of two children with a hobby of cooking.

Instagram: @ditanslr

FAITH KASINA

Faith is a community organizer with Kayole Community Justice Center, an organization that monitors and documents human rights violations and supports victims and survivors towards their healing and justice seeking journey. She is an activist passionate about dignity, equity and justice for all. Her dream is to see everyone having access to land, food sovereignty and freedom.

Facebook: @KayoleCJC & @Faith Kasina

X: @KayoleCJC & @FaithKasina

FERNANDA MONTEIRO

Nanda is an Information Systems Technologist, researcher and facilitator in Digital Security, and collaborates with Transfeminist Network of Digital Care – RTCD.

FOZ

Foz is a journalist, video documentarian and Traditional Chinese Medicine therapist from Brazil. She has been working for more than two decades in activism, facilitation of learning processes, digital care, organisation of horizontal collectives and human re-enchantment through nature, technologies (ancestral and digital), collective care and Buen Vivir. Foz is one of the coordinators of the Rede Transfeminista de Cuidados Digitais - RTCD / Transfeminist Network of Digital Care.

Emails: foz@systerserver.town & amigue@riseup.net

GABES TORRES

Gabes is a mental health practitioner, grassroots organizer, and writer based in the global South. Her clinical practice and research focus on collective and intergenerational trauma and healing methods, including the psychosomatic implications of imperialism, racism, climate catastrophes, and human rights violations. Her passion is elevating communities and models of collective flourishing.

Website: gabestorres.com

Articles: yesmagazine.org/authors/gabrielle-gabes-torres

Instagram: instagram.com/gabestorres

Threads: threads.net/@gabestorres

X: x.com/gabestorres

Substack: gabestorres.substack.com

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JANNA SUGIHARTO

Janna is an advocate for the wellbeing of children and women from Malaysia. She is a part of Southeast Asian Feminist Action Movement (SEAFAM) which brings together grassroots feminist organisations, collectives, and communities from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines to build solidarity and support one another. She also owns a weekend supperclub highlighting Malaysian cuisines and her heritage.

JEFFREY AMBION

Jeffrey holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology and is currently pursuing graduate studies in the same field. With extensive experience in studying and working with human behavior, he is currently a project staff member at the Medical Action Group (Philippines), focusing on mental health training and advocacy.

Website: magph.org

Facebook: facebook.com/MAGPHOfficial

X: x.com/medactiongroup/status/1785429451016221039?mx=2

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LAILA ALMEIDA BRAGA

She has a degree in Geography from the University of São Paulo and a postgraduate degree in Communication and Digital Marketing from the Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing. She works with a focus on technology, culture, free software, human rights and digital care, as well as researching data sovereignty in national academic production.

Website: labcriativo.info

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MANOELLA MIGNONE

Manoella is a Naturopathic Therapist, Phytotherapist, Socio-Environmental Educator, Body Therapist, Acupuncturist and Yoga teacher. She works with agroecology and permaculture with a focus on medicinal plants, teaching practices that promote autonomy in health and the recovery and dissemination of ancestral knowledge.

The main focus of her work is women and children. She organises face-to-face and online activities, facilitating conversation circles, retreats, lectures and workshops on women's health and sexuality education, as well as working in the field with STI prevention and therapeutic practice with women. She is an environmental activist who dedicates her work to ensuring that as many people as possible have access to natural medicine practices and health autonomy through nature. She is one of the founders and creators of the Coletiva Caminho Natural.

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MASA AMIR

Masa is an Egyptian feminist and currently Feminist Knowledge Leadership Program Manager at Urgent Action Fund-Africa. She has extensive experience in research and documentation of the experiences of women's human rights defenders (WHRDs) across Africa. She is passionate about exploring protection and collective security and care needs of WHRDs and the centrality of healing to feminist movement building. Masa holds an MA in International Human Rights Law from the American University in Cairo (AUC). Her dissertation focused on the feminization of poverty in Egypt and its connection to violations of the right to social security. She has a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations minoring in philosophy from the American University of Sharjah (AUS).

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MEG YARCIA

Meg holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in Psychology from the University of the Philippines – Diliman. She works with progressive organizations in building cultures of care and resistance, through counseling, workshops, and awareness-raising activities. Meg also gives advice on life, love, and the struggle to letter-senders via her page Dear Meg. The exchanges appear on @pinoyweekly, and have been published as a book collection by Gantala Press.

NANDAR

Nandar is a feminist activist, a writer, and a podcaster from Shan State, Myanmar. As the founder of the Purple Feminists Group, she amplifies marginalized voices and champions gender equality. With over a decade of activism, her poetry reflects the struggle for justice, truth, and freedom, speaking to the heart of Myanmar's ongoing fight for equality.

Facebook: facebook.com/people/Feminist-Talks-With-Nandar/61565583341605/

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NARO

Naro is a tagahabi (psychosocial accompaniment) for Keri: Caring for Activists, a resistance collective supporting the ginhawa (wellbeing) of social justice defenders in the Philippines. They provide trauma-informed mental health and psychosocial support to activists and communities impacted by human rights violations and facilitate collective care and wellbeing workshops-retreats. Apart from their activism, they work as a freelance psychosocial security provider to human rights defenders in Asia Pacific, with a focus on caring for indigenous, land, and environmental defenders.

Website: keriforactivists.org

Facebook: /kerimentalhealth

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NICOLE MARTIN

Nicole is an investigative journalist, feminist activist, and co-founder of Revista Colibrí, a transfeminist and self-managed media outlet from Argentina. She has led initiatives and organizations at the intersection of gender, technology, and human rights, including Vita Activa, Chicas Poderosas Argentina, and cross-border collaborative investigations. Her work centers on digital autonomy, collaborative journalism, and developing strategies for social change with a gender and class perspective.

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/nicolemartin27

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RAJ MARIWALA

Raj is Director of Mariwala Health Initiative an advocacy, capacity building and grant making organisation focusing on mental health for historically marginalised communities. Currently, Raj serves on the board of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP). While work on mental health is from a space of lived experience, their day job is as a practising Canine and Feline behaviourist. In the past, they were actively involved in feminist, lgbt organising.

Instagram: /mariwalahealth & /citizen9india

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/raj-mariwala-6587931

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REDE TRANSFEMINISTA DE CUIDADOS DIGITAIS - RTCD

The Transfeminist Network of Digital Care, began in 2018 and aims to strengthen the active participation of trans people and cis women in the techno political debate and in the decision-making and development spaces of technologies from the perspective of digital care. RTCD works to build learning processes in digital care, to build transfeminist narratives in the field of technology, and to support and promote the field of digital care in Brazil. It has a website in Portuguese, English and Spanish to bring the issue closer to transfeminist activists and organisations through the analogy of food security and sovereignty and digital care.

Digital Care Websites: dishoftheday.com & platodeldia.org & pratododia.org

Institucional Website: redetransfeminista.org

Instagram: @rtcuidadosdigitais

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SALOME NDUTA

Salome Nduta is a dedicated Woman Human Rights Defender, feminist, and gender expert with over nine years of experience protecting activists at risk in Kenya. She is the founder and Executive Director of the Women Human Rights Defenders Hub, Kenya's only national organization supporting women advocates across various domains, from safety and security to movement building. Salome has a rich background in program leadership, having developed protection models and guidelines for women defenders in Africa, in collaboration with a fellow woman advocate for Equality Now. She has a proven track record in strategic fundraising and organizational management, fostering collaborations that amplify the voices of women and sexual minorities. A recipient of multiple commendations and holds an MA in gender and development, BA in Social Sciences, a diploma in Development Studies among other advanced courses in gender and leadership.

Institucional:

Facebook: facebook.com/WHRDHub/?_rdc=1&_rdr

Instagram: /whrdhub

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X: /WHRDhub

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/women-human-rights-defenders-hub-the-hub

Youtube: youtube.com/@TheHubKenya-w7y/videos

Personal:

Facebook: salome nduta

X: @ndutagachie

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/salome-nduta

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DR. SAMAH JABR

Dr. Samah is an Associate Clinical Professor at George Washington University and a founding member of the Palestine Global Mental Health Network. She has dedicated over two decades to advocating for the mental health rights of Palestinians, particularly those affected by torture, historical trauma, and occupation. As a global trainer in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mhGAP, and the Istanbul Protocol, Dr. Jabr combines her clinical expertise with liberation psychology to address the psychological impact of colonial oppression. A prolific author, her work sheds light on Palestinian resilience and the ethical responsibilities of mental health professionals in conflict zones.

Facebook: /drsamahjabr

Instagram: /jabrsamah

X: /DrSamahJabr

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/samah-jabr-25509883/

Threads: threads.net/@jabrsamah

Tiktok: tiktok.com/@drsamah.jabr?_t=8o9HhBhdToW&_r=1

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STEPHEN OKWANY

Stephen is a proactive Queer Artivist leveraging arts, culture, media and tech for deepening affirming narratives and humanizing LGBTQ+ Storytelling for purposes of building empathy and kindness. Stephen is the current Director of Programmes at Talanta Africa which is a collective of Queer Artivists using conscious arts for social justice.

Twitter: @OkwanyStephen

Facebook: @Stephen Okwany

THIANE NEVES BARROS

Thiane Neves is a researcher, communicator, educator and technopolitical organiser with transdisciplinary work at the interfaces between communication, race, gender and technologies in the Amazon. With a PhD in Communication from the Federal University of Bahia, she develops research and training aimed at the critical appropriation of digital infrastructures by black, indigenous and peripheral communities, with an emphasis on hacker feminist practices, digital care and data sovereignty. Her career combines activism and research committed to social and environmental justice, especially

through participatory training methodologies in open technologies, pedagogies of listening and strengthening community networks. She is a member of the Transfeminist Digital Care Network, the Centre for the Study and Defence of Black People in Pará, works with other collectives and sits on the board of the Voices for Climate Action programme, an alliance between the Avina Foundation, WWF and HIVOS. She is currently a Fellow at the Mozilla Foundation and collaborates with civil society organisations in tackling racism, ableism and cisnormativity in digital contexts. With roots in Belém, her practice is anchored in situated listening, the production of knowledge in co-authorship with territories and the construction of technological ecologies committed to the self-determination of Amazonian peoples.

Thesis (portuguese only):

"Neguinhas que armam a quizumba: debates sobre ações tecno políticas e apropriações das tecnologias pelas herdeiras de Ananse da Amazônia Paraense": https://repositorio.ufba.br/bitstream/ri/40190/1/Neguinhas_que_armam_a_quizumba_Thiane_Neves_Barros_VFinal.pdf

VIOLETA ASSUMPÇÃO

Violeta holds a Master's degree in Scientific and Cultural Communication from the University of Campinas (Unicamp), where she conducted research on feminisms, activism, digital care, and surveillance. She is a collaborator with the Transfeminist Network of Digital Care in initiatives that explore the intersection between technology, access to rights, digital protection, and care practices. She also serves as Digital Transformation Project Coordinator at FETAPE. With a background in project management and facilitation in learning processes, she has experience in themes like protection and care for human rights defenders and activists, feminist studies, digital activism, technology and society. She has already collaborated with organizations such as InterSecLab and ELAS+ Fund, as well as initiatives like Cryptorave.

Thesis (portuguese only):

"Rede transfeminista de cuidados digitais : tecnoativismo, antivigilância e o cuidado como estratégia de resistência": https://repositorio.unicamp.br/Acervo/Detalhe/1456577

YAHIA SALEH

Yahia is a Nubian Egyptian activist, researcher, writer, and social worker. Saleh's work focuses on the intersections between migration, forced displacement, memory, sexuality and masculinity. Yahia's work is grounded in active involvement in socio-political initiatives in Egypt and Sweden, focusing on Nubian cultural and land rights and social engagement in civil society organisations, migrant and black queer communities.

Instagram: /yo7ia

LinkedIn: /yahia-saleh

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YARA SALLAM

Yara is an Egyptian feminist living next to what she loves the most; the Red Sea. For almost two decades Yara has been working on diverse human and women's rights issues, including criminal justice, regional and international human rights mechanisms, transitional justice, freedom of religion and belief, and women human rights defenders. Since the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 she has been interested in wellbeing, care and healing in feminist and activist circles through research, writing and facilitation. She is the author of "Even the Finest of Warriors", and currently is leading the Peer to Peer Support Initiative within the Human Rights Resilience Project.

Website: eventhefinestofwarriors.org/en

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