

Healing Justice as a radical approach to African feminist organising

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“ If we are interested in arresting cycles of violence to create less violent outcomes, it is no doubt important to ask what, politically, may be made of grief besides a cry for war” .

Judith Butler, preface to Precarious Life 2004

Intro to the research process – Jackie Shaw

Research questions

- What does healing justice and collective healing mean to WHRDs and feminist activists in different African contexts.
- How can collective healing processes evolve and be supported to build stronger feminist movements?



Research process

INTERVIEWS

3 case countries - DRC, Senegal, and South Africa

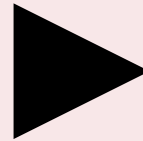
Recruitment and training in-country research teams
Developing research processes and topic guide

47 virtual interviews – with 3 categories of participants – feminist activists, healers, and academics

LEARNING EVENTS

2 learning events to address gaps and deliberate on findings

External – feminist activists/healers from 11 countries
Internal – UAF-A and FR



Published findings so far

Working paper

Shaw, J.; Amir, M. and Lewin, T., with Kemitare, J.; Diop, A.; Kithumbu, O.; Mupotsa, D. and Odiase, S. (2022) Contextualising Healing Justice as a Feminist Organising Framework in Africa, IDS Working Paper 576, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/IDS.2022.063

<https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/contextualising-healing-justice-as-a-feminist-organising-framework-in-africa/>

Research report

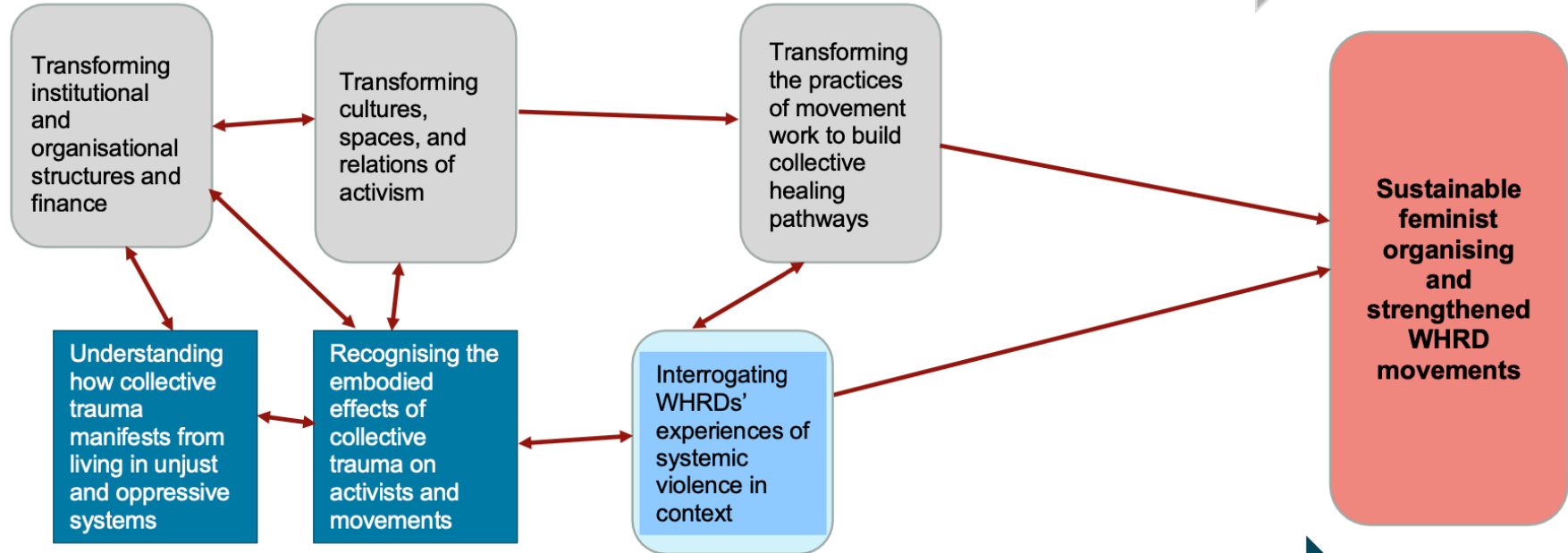
“We carry generational demands for healing that will not rest” An African Feminist Exploration of Healing Justice. M. Amir (2022), UAF-Africa

<https://www.uaf-africa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/An-African-Feminist-Exploration-of-Healing-Justice.pdf>

Findings 1 – Masa Amir

The Healing Justice Framework: a political, collective, and holistic process

Branch 2 Changing the nature and practices of feminist organising and movement-building work



Branch 1 Understanding and addressing the causes and impacts of the injustice and harm African WHRDs

Root causes of trauma and violence

1. Structural violence
 2. Transgenerational and collective trauma
-

Structural violence

- The ways in which social structures are designed to stop certain individuals and groups from reaching their full potential.
- The research goes into exploring structural violence as it is experienced by WHRDs in healthcare, economic and criminal justice systems.

Reference: Structural violence (Galtung 1969; Farmer 2004).

Structural violence of healthcare institutions

- Denial of access to affordable, culturally specific and anti-oppressive health care as one of the root causes of trauma.
- Pathologizing the experiences of activists with depression, burnout, distress and fatigue, enforced by doctors and social workers.

People have gone into treatment [...] and yet we are all so sick. We are sick spiritually [...] we are not healing, and we are not healed .

- Oppressive lens of what constitutes “healthy bodies”.
-

Transgenerational and collective trauma

- The collective sharing of an experience of trauma
- The impacts go beyond the individual to having broad social and political consequences.

- **Roots:**
Living under unrelenting threat and violence

- **Manifestations:**
Feeling “born with a wound”

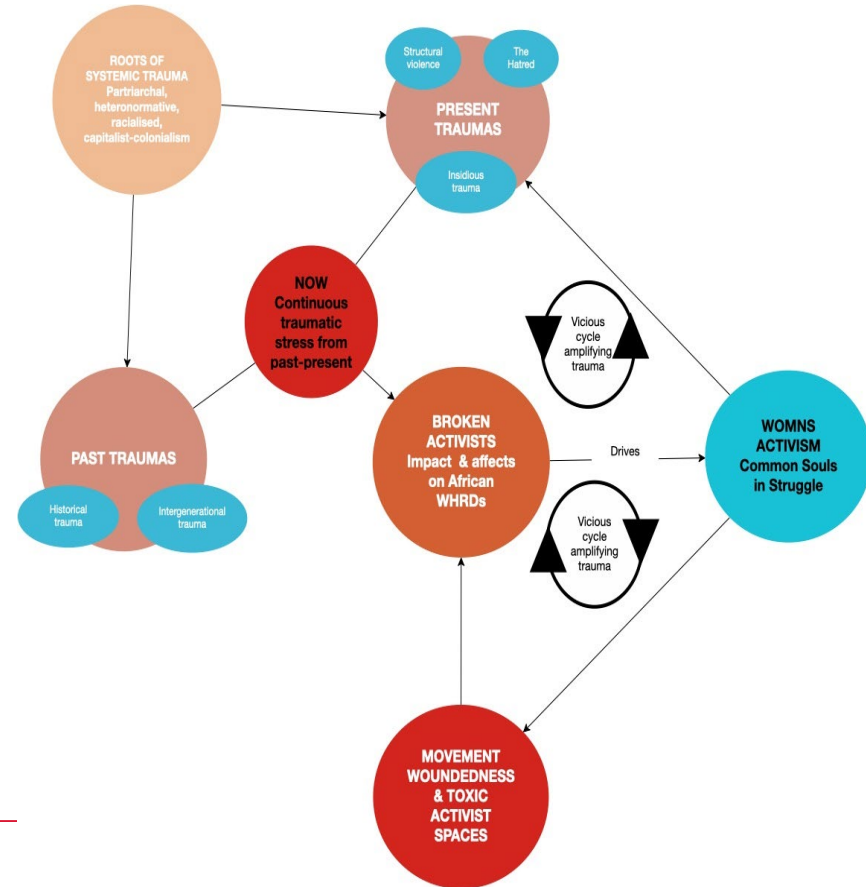
We have given birth to children but it's almost as if our children are born with that wound already, because we have so much trauma that we did not process.

Reference: collective trauma (page 25 of report). (e.g. Erikson 1995, Watkins and Shulman 2008; Horn 2014; Hirschberger 2018; Kistner 2015, Fanon 1967; Martín Baró 1994, Menakem 2021 .

Findings 2 – Jackie Shaw

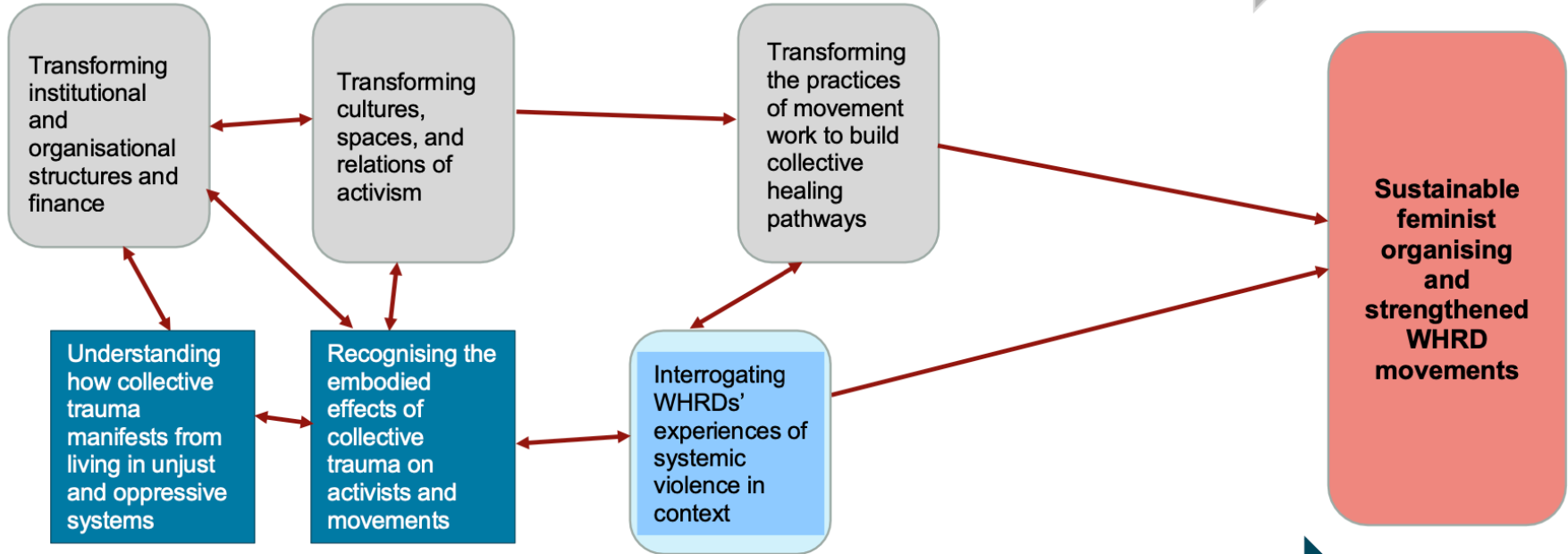
'Common souls in trauma' –feminist activism contexts

- **Feminist activists not only engage in trauma but live it** (Hope Chigudu, 2015)
- **Motivation for Activism** 'Lived' experiences of injustice and trauma (Shaw et al 2022, p.56-60)
- '**Common souls**'– positive experiences from sharing/ bonding/ solidarity/ protesting together.
- But, **Continuous traumatic stress** – from unaddressed past/present structural violence and collective trauma
- **Vicious cycles of trauma amplification**
- Need for **collective care/healing in movements** – branch 2 of HJ



The Healing Justice Framework: a political, collective, and holistic process

Branch 2 Changing the nature and practices of feminist organising and movement-building work



Branch 1 Understanding and addressing the causes and impacts of the injustice and harm African WHRDs

Healing justice – conceptual pillars

Political - transformative feminism (Okoli 2021)	Collective orientation (Shaw et al 2021)	Holistic healing towards 'Wholeness'	Processual - navigated pathways
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Addressing the ghosts of historical injustice (Amadiume and An-Na'im 2000)- <i>A departure from and evolving not a returning</i> –status quo never 'just' (Afuape 2020, Horn, 2020)- Shifting iniquitous power relations at the centre of trauma (Chigudu 2015) with intersectional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Collective healing practices- Supporting healing spaces – and facilitating inclusive interactional dynamics across difference (Shaw 2017) and liminal (Turner 1967) processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Traditional African health ontologies and practices (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae 2018).- Theory of three bodies – body-self, social bodies, and body politic (Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987)- Liberation psychology practices (e.g Baró	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Extended temporal scales (Motta and Bermudez 2019)- Iterative processes- Navigated pathways - negotiating inherent tensions (McLean and Gargani 2019)

Collective healing processes as feminist political action

“I’ve learnt that healing is fluid, it is like water, like a river that flows... It has a beginning, but then the end is difficult to define... Words are not enough to describe a healing process, there are unspoken things, unnamed things, that significantly contribute... I have learnt that what we are wanting to achieve through healing is actually something we do not necessarily know... the magic is not in the end product, but... in the process”.

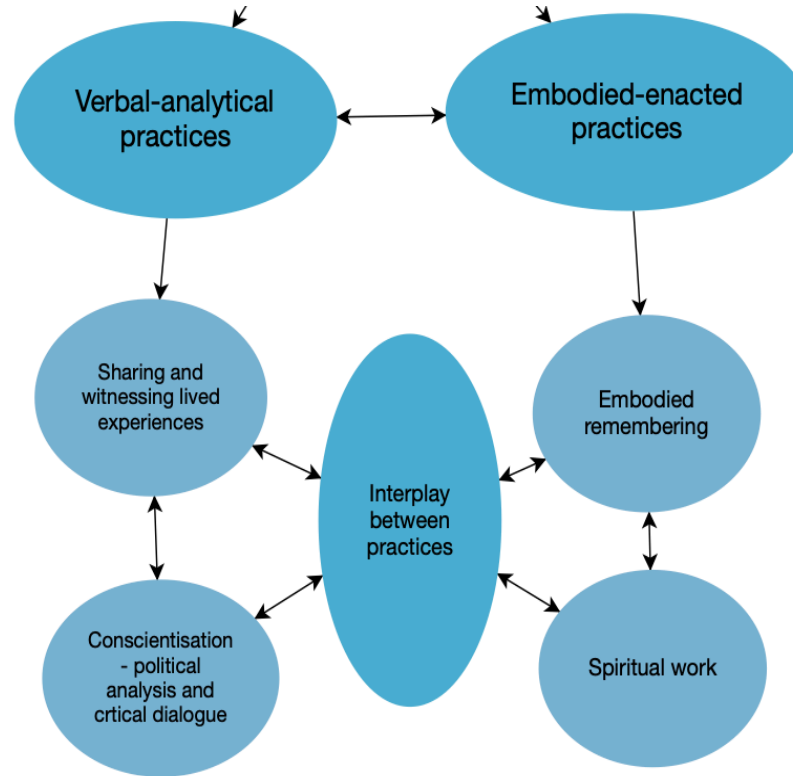
(Ntlotleng, external learning event)

The healing needs and journeys of each feminist activist and movement is unique, and practices should be combined adaptively in response to this. However, we found some common foundational healing elements that could be drawn on in creating contextualised processes in particular situations

Healing *broken* activists – processing and moving on

*I saw so...
much of myself
in many
people's
stories. I
realised this
thing is
systemic, this
thing is
pervasive, this
thing is
everywhere.*

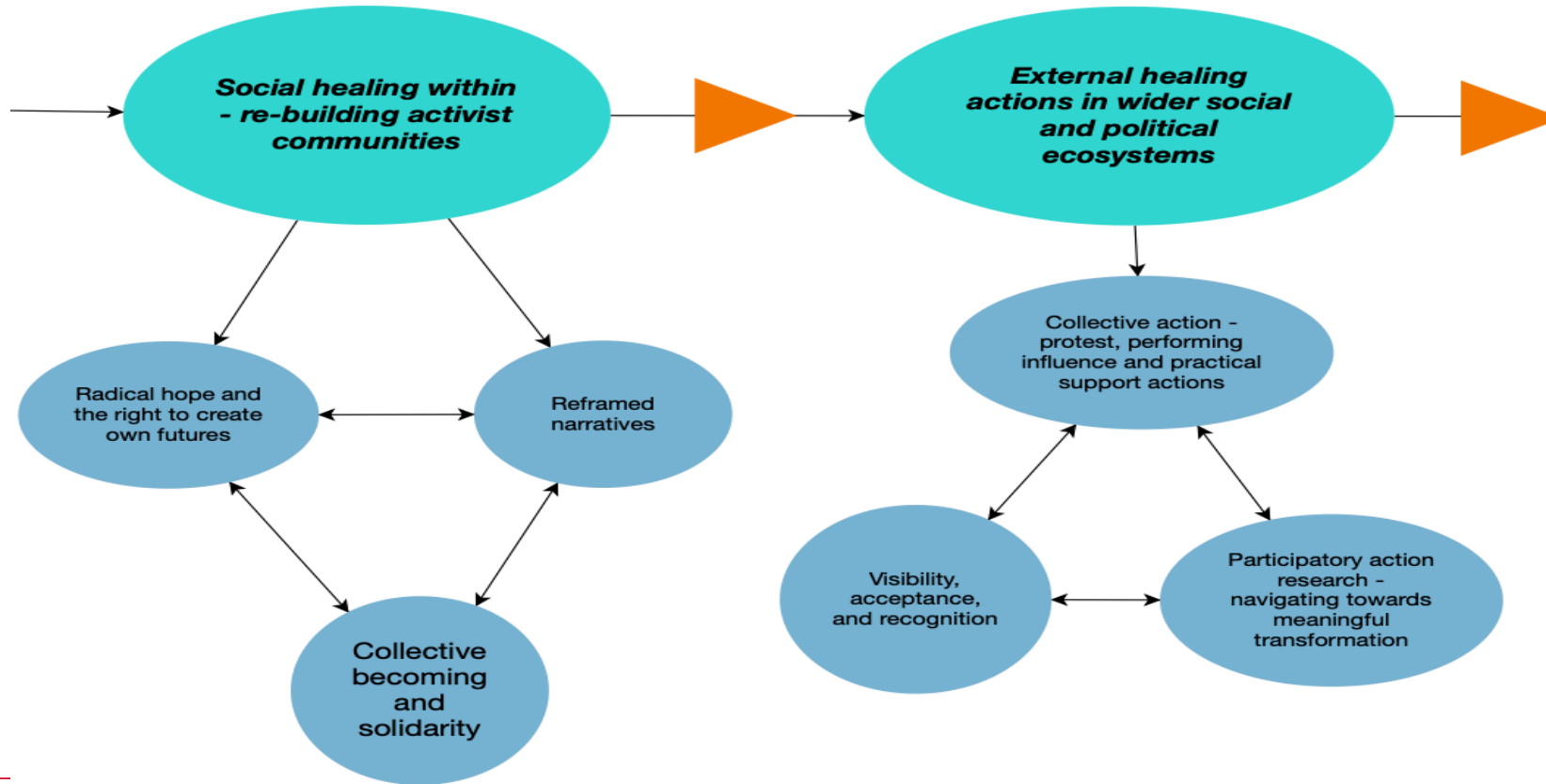
(WHRD, SA)



*When I heal
myself... it also
heals people in my
bloodline, my
ancestors... Doing
the work, so that
the kids don't have
to battle with the
same trauma.*

(Wanelisa Xaba,
external learning
event)

Pathways towards social and political healing



Feedback and questions from the audience

Nuancing insights 1 – Olga Kithumbu DRC

Les violences sexuelles comme arme de guerre en RDC

—La guerre qui a servi pendant plus d'une décennie en République Démocratique du Congo, précisément dans sa partie orientale, est à l'origine d'un traumatisme intergénérationnel et collectif vécu par les défenseurs des droits humains des femmes dans cette partie du pays.

Effets du traumatisme transgénérationnel sur les espaces d'activisme

- Les activistes féministes ont dit avoir le sentiment qu'elles n'essaient pas seulement de faire face à leurs traumatismes et les histoires de violence qu'elles ont vécues, mais qu'elles sont alourdies par le fait que d'autres féministes ont vécu des expériences similaires, et parfois pires.
 - Les blessures et les traumatismes se manifestent dans les espaces féministes de différentes manières. Les espaces militants deviennent le lieu où la colère, la frustration, la peur et la douleur s'expriment, souvent contre d'autres militants.
 - Cela nous amène à penser que le problème se trouve chez les autres militants, alors qu'il s'agit en fait de structures de mal qui ont marqué notre psychisme et la manière dont nous nous rapportons à nous-mêmes et les uns aux autres.
-

Comment le traumatisme transgénérationnel de la violence sexuelle a-t-il façonné les idées de justice ?

- Les entretiens ont souligné que la fourniture de réparations est essentielle pour obtenir justice; pas étonnant étant donné l'importance du récit des réparations dans les situations de conflit.
 - Une compréhension sexospécifique des réparations est nécessaire : va au-delà d'une compréhension du préjudice fondée sur les violations des droits civils et politiques pour intégrer la violence structurelle et les inégalités et discriminations préexistantes.
 - La justice doit être centrée sur la guérison et traiter les sentiments de “destruction” ; ce dernier terme basé sur des souvenirs d'expériences de violences sexuelles qui laissent les militants et les femmes “détruits”.
 - Essentiellement, la discussion sur la guérison ne peut être séparée de la discussion sur la réforme juridique et politique.
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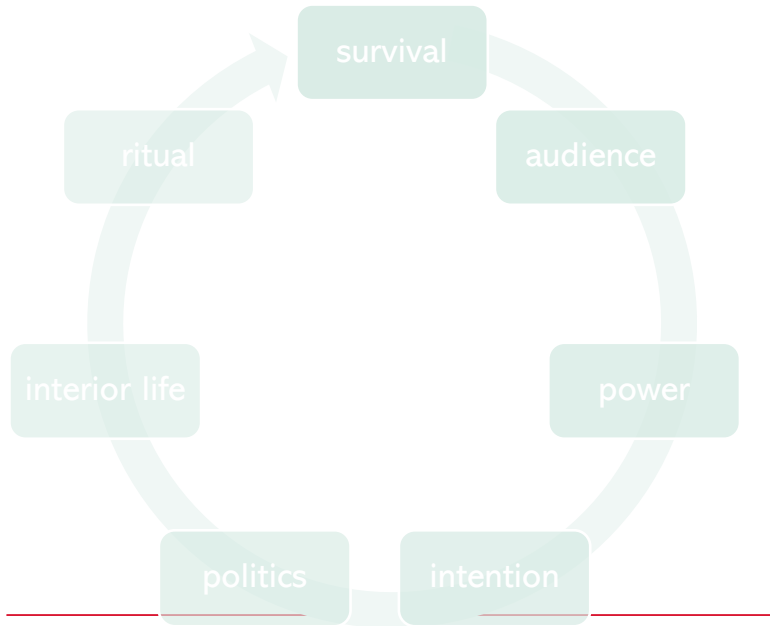
Nuancing insights 2- Danai Mupotsa, South Africa

the political

- entering politics
 - categories of the political subject
 - social movements and trauma
 - Institutionalizing social movements
 - ‘habits’
-

umzabalazo/ imvuselelo

– language



Findings 3 - Ablavi Gokou-Adjaka

THE FEMINIST REPUBLIK'S SUPPORT TOWARDS FEMINIST ORGANISING

The core mandate of the Feminist Republik is to build and strengthen the feminist movements across the continent through integrating cultures of care in their lives and activism work and other aspects of healing justice

Shared Leadership with Feminists and AWHRDs

- All our work is led and always informed by AWHRDs because we recognise the collective wisdom of defenders to find solutions to their care and protection needs.
- Establishing various virtual and in-person platforms for Feminist Republik AWHRD members, partners & collaborators to connect and engage with HJ work (healing gatherings, FR festival).



Knowledge Production on FR to ensure Deep Learning, Memory and Inform & Influence Work

- AWHRDs have been practicing collective care all their lives through communal practices. We aim to decolonise, theorise, generate and amplify African indigenous knowledge & practices on healing justice.
- Documenting the ripple effects of FR's work impact and building on feminist analytical knowledge. Ensuring knowledge documentation/production is accessible, creative and inspiring.

Investments in Collective Care & Healing Justice Projects in order to escalate and accelerate the Culture Shifts in Activism/Movement Building

- We are committed to walking with AWHRDs as they develop their responses for care and protection based on their needs by offering both practical and financial support.
- Supporting self-led organising of AWHRDs with investments in healing justice projects.

IMPROVING THE CULTURES AND PRACTICES OF FEMINIST ORGANISING



The FR intends to support AWHRDs to take the healing justice analysis forward through various actions:



Feedback and questions from audience

Publications

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