UNDERSTANDING

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

FOR FEMINIST ACTION

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This knowledge product is an outcome of five years of JASS Southern Africa work, including feminist movement building processes in South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe; feminist participatory action research in Malawi and Zimbabwe; and cross movement/issue/border dialogues. This work has given way to the conceptualisation of 'structural violence', which has helped reframe JASS Southern Africa's organising and may be useful to other activists and movements.

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INTRODUCTION

For over twenty years, JASS has invested to deepen understandings and practices to transform power through working to support, strengthen and amplify the voices, visibility and collective power of women. This includes work as and with other feminist activists to build strategies to identify and intervene in power that operates in obvious and in invisible ways in society; the work is coupled with building our consciousness around how layers of discriminations linked to gender, sexuality, race, class amongst others affects our lives, and our organising. JASS has continuously deepened our understanding of power, more recently thinking about systemic power, a form of power that is embedded within major systems of capitalism, patriarchy, structural racism and colonial-imperialism – systems that profoundly impact on every area of our lives. Building this understanding of systemic power lies at the heart of understanding how structural violence operates.

This book is meant to contribute to our efforts to the question of why, despite years of deep struggle against wide-spread gendered injustices, including gender-based violence (GBV), these conditions persist. JASS has started to explore how to more concretely use the lens of *structural violence* as a rallying point in our continuing work to realise gender justice.

> " Feminists have been talking about structural violence for forever, but we have not been able to move it. **– Phumi Mtetwa**

RAISING VOICES AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: RETHINKING POWER AND CROSS-MOVEMENT BUILDING

As a feminist movement support organisation, JASS works with and alongside feminists and movements who daily confront multiple layers of exclusions and discriminations. In 2021 JASS Southern Africa produced the draft report *Raising Voices against Gender-Based Violence: Rethinking Power and Cross-Movement Building* (Raising Voices: 2021). The report documents insights gained using Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) methodology with 1823 women linked to the *Our Bodies, Our Lives movement in Malawi and the Institute for Young Women Development in Zimbabwe.* The purpose of the FPAR was to work with the women to develop analysis of the 'multiple and intersecting drivers and structural causes' of the violence that they challenge on a

daily basis. Through this, the project aimed to deepen our collective understanding of the ways that structural violence creates the conditions for and increases women's experiences of violence. Through considering these questions JASS Southern Africa is continuing learnings to help us to collectively develop strategies to dismantle the causes of inequality and violence in our lives.

The FPAR report provides analysis of women from those countries' interconnected experiences of "gender-based violence (GBV), HIV and AIDS, structural violence, and women's rights in general". It focuses on the collective actions by women in these countries to bring transformation on these issues.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE IS COMPLICATED

When thinking of violence against womxn, most commonly, forms of gender-based violence (GBV) like domestic and sexual violence come to mind. **These forms of violence are one symptom of gender inequality and the oppression of womxn.** To make sense of the many ways that womxn experience violence in our society, it is important for us to go further than the *interpersonal* gendered violence generally perpetrated by men, against womxn, and to understand how power operates through structural violence to oppress womxn. GBV and the failures of justice or services to womxn who experience GBV is the result of structural violence; these are not the same thing; structural violence is much bigger and much more pervasive than GBV.

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> When it comes to womxn's rights, I am concerned that womxn are seen only as the victims of violence, and that when we want to improve the lives of womxn, we need laws, and we need men to be arrested. But we have seen, when we focus our energy on that, it hasn't shifted things for womxn. As we build this theory and understanding of structural violence, how do we take it into our activism and movement building?" **– Vivienne Mentor-Lalu**

The Raising Voices report describes some elements of structural violence that inform the violence and social injustice that womxn face:

"The legacies of colonization, apartheid, racism, and the accompanying violence and inequality are largely intact in Southern Africa, making equity, freedom, and the full enjoyment of human rights a function of power and privilege. Violence is not limited to physical harm, domestic or sexual violence; it is enacted daily

through social, political, and economic systems and structures that actively exclude the majority of the population based on race, gender, class, ethnicity, citizenship, and other factors." (Raising Voices. 2021: Executive Summary)

The report demonstrates that we know and are aware of the range of forces such as the economic systems, value systems, social systems and so on, that give rise to the violence and injustice in our lives. In the report, we see strong mobilisation on access to safety, policing and justice around GBV, on challenging the social, religious and cultural value systems that normalise intimate partner violence and early marriage, or stigmatise people living with HIV/AIDS and sex workers. We are doing the work on these issues in interconnected ways and at different levels, including at the structural level. At the same time, despite understanding that these systems contribute to the status quo, our mobilisation and strategies to challenge the roots of violence perpetrated by private companies, the media, political leaders, government's policies, and religious institutions is less prominent.

The report signals that our work is driven by the strong need to intervene, support, and seek justice in relation to the immediate violence and discriminations we experience or witness in our everyday lives. Reading the report is a strong reminder that our work for safety and justice is unrelenting, emotionally intense, and consuming. To face the work of challenging the drivers of structural violence requires capacities and time that we often just don't have. The focus of our strategies is often affected by what is visible and what we can understand. For many of us, systems like economies, media, or religions, are too opaque, the way that they wield power in our lives too untouchable and normalised for us to be able to strategise on how we can bring change to the ways that those function.

HOW WE HAVE UNPACKED THE COMPLEX DRIVERS OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

In this book, we expand on this notion of 'structural violence'. We approach it with an understanding that **structural violence is not a single 'thing' that can be addressed directly in and of itself**; instead, we see **structural violence as a range of consequences** of dominant values and norms in our society that feed the ways that powerful institutions and systems function and distribute power and resources in our societies.

For **us to strategise to deal with *structural violence*, we need to break this concept down; to see, understand and then challenge the different value systems and the levers for power in multiple institutions and systems.** These include religious, cultural, economic, political, and legal systems and institutions. As much as we need to break the concept down because the rules and practices in these structures operate

distinctly, at the same time on more fundamental levels the issues are complex, layered, and deeply interconnected.

We thought we could do the work in a short, 10 to 20 pages. As we developed our understanding of how to unpack structural violence, we came to understand that some systems that contribute to structural violence are well understood and others less so. As we noted that the specifics of the levers to shift structural violence in any given system are different in different places, with different histories, and political contexts, it became clear to us that the task of 'breaking it down' and then making connections for strategy by feminist activists in the southern African region would need more consideration and space.

We have attempted to cover a lot of ground, addressing a number of the layers in-depth. We realised that we needed to make difficult choices about what we could cover. We have emphasised **understanding how patriarchy, racism, and sexism manifest in structural violence through economic, legal and democratic governance systems in the Southern African region**. These three systems play a big role, providing scaffolding to many manifestations of structural violence, including for example, ecological violence and climate-justice related policy and practices, land and agrarian injustices, and the violence of our unequal health, education, and criminal justice systems. We recognise that there are other critical systems and institutions such as religions and family structures, that we haven't managed to cover in this book.

The information in the booklet is organised around three parts, **part one sets out key contextual issues, part two builds our understanding of how structural violence manifests, and part three begins to explore our feminist strategies for addressing the drivers of structural violence**. We have woven questions of power and of intersectionality throughout the content.

In **part one** we explain, demonstrate, and question the concepts, values, and systems that contribute to structural violence. The exercise of power and different lived experiences of power is woven throughout our lives, for this reason, we underpin the conversation on structural violence with some exploration of JASS' work on power and intersectionality. We follow this with a brief conversation on the embedded patriarchal, sexist and racist values that feed structural violence.

In **part two**, we then turn more fully to unpacking three major systems through which power operates in our societies—economic systems, legal systems, and democratic systems. In our exploration of these three systems, we try to build a definition and understanding of what each system is and how it functions. We consider values and histories that shape and drive the rules and decision-making of those systems in

countries in this region. We believe that for us to develop strategies that can even begin to tackle structural violence closer to the roots, in addition to a more theoretical or conceptual understanding of the systems and what their effect is on our lives, we need a better working knowledge of some of the specifics of how these big-picture systems function. **This more detailed knowledge can support our strategising by providing practical ideas for us to intervene, including by enabling us to better observe the exercise of hidden and even invisible power.** Through that, we hope to give ideas of what the sites are for us to leverage so that we can challenge the way those systems function, the values on which the decisions are based.

Part three turns the attention inward towards our work as feminist activists in movements, it explores feminist theory and practices about how we—womxn, feminists, activists, organisations and movements—have challenged structural violence. The section engages us on our ways of working, and our range of strategies as feminists in feminist movements towards successfully shifting the drivers of structural violence. In addition to considering power and politics in the broader systems discussed in part one and two, part three considers how dominant values play out on relationships within and between activists, organisations, and movements, and offers ideas for how we can keep strengthening our movements.

WHOSE STORY?

We have relied on desktop research to develop the book. Starting with the *Raising Voices* report, we explored the ideas and information in a range of documents, and including videos and other media, that have been produced by JASS's associates and partners, and drawing on the work of other feminists in the region or globally.

The information that we travel through is layered, we have grappled with how best to separate issues out, but to also weave the complex and interlinked concepts, systems, and institutions into a logical narrative. This is an imperfect process. The book is an attempt to either define, explain, or provide a framing of concepts and ideas that people understand in different ways, and that may have multiple meanings.

As much as we are violated, overwhelmed and exhausted, we also survive the consequences of structural violence in strength and with love. We hope that this book will contribute as a resource for us to collectively build our thinking on how we challenge the power of institutions and interests that lie behind structural violence and to increase our collective recognition of the powerful ways that we survive in the face of it.

As the authors, we made choices about our explanations. We understand that due to the limits and range of our experiences (our positionality), there are things that we

may not see, do not know, or that we do not fully understand the importance of. We are mindful that there are different, and at times opposing ideas that different people hold in relation to their experiences or knowledge of the issues, and that there may be different ways of understanding or answering the questions.

With these issues in mind, we approach this book as part of the ongoing conversation, highlighting differences or conflicting ideas and posing questions as we do so. We invite, and hope for more critical conversations to expand on how we've made sense of the issues, to deepen the information we can share with each other to support our work across movements in-country, across our countries, and globally to be part of dismantling the tools that drive the structural violence that is so deeply experienced in the lives, the bodies, and the hearts of womxn.

This book has a Southern Africa focus and should serve as a motivation to feminists in the region, those of us who work practically with the consequences of structural violence at local level and those of us who work at national, regional or global levels to transform power. We know that the exercise of power manifests social and cultural norms, and colonial and political histories that are specific in and to different geographies, localities and regions within countries. At the same time, we think there are lessons that can be drawn and applied across country, regional and global contexts.

WOMXN OR WOMAN, WOMEN?

Our use of the word 'womxn' is to reflect our consideration that patriarchy, misogyny and sexism affect people who hold a range of gendered identities, including trans people, or people who identify as non-binary. The word creates room for different gender expressions, and we are signalling our recognition that there are people who identify as women or with other gendered identities who are engaged in struggles for gendered justice. We also use the term to recognise that among some feminist movements, historically, racism, transphobia and gender-binary views have created harms and conditions of exclusions of people who do not fit into 'gender binary' thinking.

Not everyone agrees or is comfortable with the use of the term *womxn*, including some trans women who express that this categorises them as something other than a woman. Another critique is that by being too inclusive, it can include 'non-binary people', some who do not face the same discriminations as many people who identify as women are faced with. An important consideration when we use the term 'womxn' is that we do not do **so in a way that pays lip service to the political idea, without engaging more fully with the range of experiences, narratives, and identities of people who are meant to be represented by the use of the 'x'.** When we use the words women

or woman in the book it is deliberate, either because the people or organisations we are referring to choose that spelling, or because we are relying on research that has only asked questions in a gender binary way – that would mean that the findings of the research only apply to the experience of cis-gendered women.

> " The 'x' creates a space for women and femme folks that aren't cis women, meaning it tells people that ALL women-identifying people are being included and addressed. This is a helpful distinction especially when certain spaces align with white feminists and/or trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) ideology. However, there are folks that don't like it, and that's okay too. The end goal is to get society into a place where inclusivity is the norm and exclusivity is the problem." – **Womxn's centre for success, UC Irvine.** *https://womxnscenter.uci.edu/why-womxn-with-a-x/*

PART 1: WHAT ARE THE THINGS? CONCEPTS

This part of the book describes our meaning of three, important, underlying themes. Firstly we offer more discussion on what we understand this broad concept of 'structural violence' to mean. We then take time to draw on, and describe JASS's deep work on understanding power, because this understanding of power sits at the heart of understanding both how social institutions operate to commit structural violence and of how we can challenge it. Finally, we think it is important to raise the ideas of intersectionality near the outset of our discussions so that we centre the conversations with the understanding that people, womxn's experiences of structural violence are very different depending on many different factors and values.

In our understanding that structural violence is underpinned by value systems such as racism, patriarchy, xenophobia, agism, classism and so on, and linked to the concept of intersectionality we take the time in this section to briefly set out some overarching thoughts on the embedded values of racism, patriarchy, and sexism in particular. These descriptions of how these, and other, dominant social values are located within legal, democratic or economic systems is given more meaning in part two.

WHAT WE MEAN BY STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE?

Structural violence is violence, oppression, marginalising, and exclusion perpetrated against some people, communities or groups of people. Structural violence is 1) committed through powerful systems and institutions across society and 2) driven by sets of beliefs, ideas, and values that dominate in society.

Institutions and systems

Structural violence operates through social institutions and systems. These are the machinery for structural violence and include **systems and institutions of democracy (including legislatures, local councils, traditional leadership structures); religious institutions; family systems; education systems; economic and financial systems; legal systems; and healthcare systems**. These layered systems that oppress are **interconnected and reinforce each other**, they also depend on each other and cannot be untangled.

Ideologies, beliefs and values

Strong **ideologies, beliefs and values** that dominate in our society drive structural violence through these systems, this **includes ideologies of patriarchy, racism, capitalism,** those that support xenophobia, agism, and ablism for example.

People who hold power, use these institutions, to cause direct harm or to prevent certain people from accessing their basic needs and rights. In these ways structural violence results in violence, exploitation, marginalising and excluding certain people and communities of people. It **can result in loss of life, low quality of life, physical suffering, hunger, fear, stress, frustration, anger. It causes ongoing *'assaults on the human dignity and self-worth'* of the people and communities that experience it.** (Dutta U, Sonn C, Brinton Lykes M: p1)

These systems and institutions are necessary to make our society function, and regardless of if we agree with the ideologies that drive them, on the whole we are dependent on these institutions for our wellbeing, development and survival. **This makes the experiences of exclusion and violation that are perpetrated through these institutions impossible to escape and their impact profound.**

The word 'structure' is referring to the *skeleton* of **ideas, values, and morals (often referred to as ideologies) that dominate** in society, and to the **system of institutions and mechanisms that are created to implement them**. These dominate and control our lives, having a big impact on the quality of our lives and on what we can and what we can't do; yet we are seldom even aware of these things that are so powerfully influencing and shaping our experiences and lived realities.

Cultural violence is a concept linked to structural violence. It creates the norms and rules that regulate how people are *supposed* to be, or *supposed* to behave, and it reinforces the power structures and systems that dominate through structures and institutions in our society. Cultural Violence includes dominant cultural beliefs and norms, language norms, and norms of who produces knowledge and whose knowledge is valued. These social norms make structural violence that is enacted as a result of the value system seems '*natural, right, or acceptable*'. (Dutta U, Sonn C, Brinton Lykes M: p2 and Galtung).

These cultural norms hide and make invisible, the ways that structural violence assaults people. The fact that structural violence is driven by ideas and values, makes it difficult to identify and makes it hard to find who to hold responsible and accountable. In this way, structural violence is an 'invisible' force that is enabled by invisible power. The belief systems are so deeply embedded that *"they function as absolute and inevitable and are reproduced uncritically across generations."* (Galtung)

Structural violence relies on 'systemic power' that comes from **history** where groups of people with power have set up the **value systems** that shape the daily realities of oppression

and exclusion that some people are subjected to in the present day. **The value systems that run through these institutions create a powerful story about what is normal, or not normal; what is good, or bad; wrong, or right in our society (*social norms*).** They set up norms, or 'rules' about what is 'correct' in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class and income-level. The historical value systems have been kept dominant in our society decade after decade through the people in the institutions. (Urmitapa Dutta et al; Mentor-Lalu 2013)

i ## Examples

- **Capitalist beliefs** and values embedded in **healthcare systems** mean some people have no access to medical treatment (for example HIV/AIDS, Cancer, Covid 19). This results in people losing their lives and quality of their lives.

- **Patriarchal beliefs** in most institutions of our society (**families, religious institutions, justice systems** etc) that prioritise men and hold that womxn belong to their husbands or fathers, and that these men, therefore, have the right to make decisions about that womxn's life and her resources.

- **Patriarchal, sexist, and misogynist beliefs** embedded in our **legal systems** that say that womxn are the cause of sexual violence, that healthy men cannot stop themselves or that sex workers cannot be raped, lie behind why womxn don't report sexual violence, they underpin the unresponsive and unsafe police systems and are behind the very low conviction rates of men who perpetrate sexual violence. **Heteronormative beliefs** in the **legal systems** result in sexual violence against men, or people with other gender identities being completely ignored allowing it to be perpetrated unchecked.

- **Racist beliefs** in many **education systems** mean that our governments invest fewer resources in the education of Black children or children from certain ethnic backgrounds. This deepens the injustice and inequality experienced by those children and adults.

- **Capitalist and classist beliefs** in **businesses and other places of employment** argue that people, not systems cause poverty, if poor people were willing to work harder then they would be more successful.

- Heteronormative and homophobic values in government, social and religious systems that exclude gender non-conforming people from family life and normalise ostracising and isolating people.

These examples demonstrate that despite much work to change these conditions (GBV, access to health and education) they don't fundamentally shift unless we tackle them at the structural roots.

POWER

To take action for social change, to challenge structural violence, needs us to understand power. If we examine and map the systems of power that affect us and the issues that we work on, we can build strategies for solidarity and support to that challenge power. **This work is both about the power of other people or systems outside of us, and about the power that we each hold.**

JASS has invested in resources to support understandings of power; analysis of how power affects discrimination and inequality; as well as how we can draw on power for activism and change in our society. This book on *Structural Violence*, must also engage on this fundamental concept of how power operates and how to use that understanding to build strategies for social change. **We encourage people to access the many resources that JASS have developed to support this work.**

'JASS' power framework, developed by JASS founders, scholars and activists, enables activists to understand and strategize to address the multiple visible (policy), hidden (non-state actors controlling the agenda) and invisible (internalised and ideological) dynamics of inequality.' (*JASS Core Principles for our work: Power at the Center*)

JASS's website has a JASS Big Ideas page on Power

Big ideas includes information, tools, and short videos of womxn reflecting on the meanings of and how to engage with power.
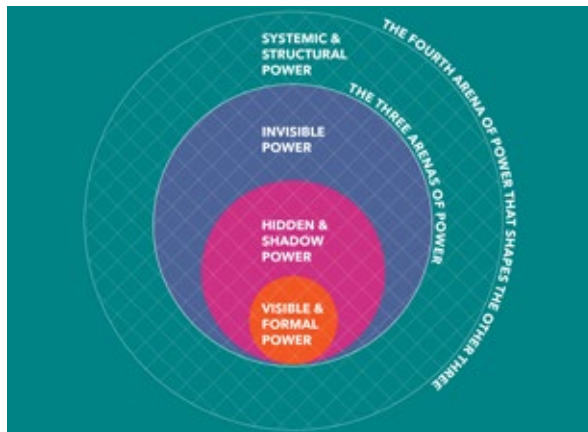
> Power is the capacity of individuals or groups to determine who *gets* what, who *does* what, who *decides* what, and who *sets* the agenda." **– Srilatha Batliwala, quoting and expanding on the definition by Aruna Rao and David Kelleher**

Dictionaries tend to define *power* most simply, as the 'ability to act and have an effect'. To understand why something is done in a particular way, it is important to look at who or what is acting and having an effect on that situation. The word *power* often invokes ideas of control, force and even cruelty. That is but one view of power – power is not automatically negative, we use **power for positive change in our lives and in our movements**. Beyond that, we understand that **power is not simply, *either* bad or good**; the power we or others hold shifts depending on circumstances, and how it is being used or manifested.

Power is complex and has different dimensions. The way power plays out can't be simply described as one person, or institution, or idea, having power over or dominating over another in a negative way. Power is enacted by and among different individuals, groups of people, and institutions. "*Power is embodied* – both in terms of repression, control and domination but also in our many resistances, actions and ways of being – and ultimately in our own liberation." (JASS: July 2022)

How power functions

Power is dynamic, it can shift between different structures and people over time. It's this important quality of power–that it is changeable–that we seek to use to transform inequalities, contest and challenge structural violence, and achieve justice. **Transformative power is an expression of the strength of positive power that we create in our collectives to bring the changes** in our lives and the world we live in that we are seeking.

Power is held in sets of ideas or concepts–ideologies. **Ideologies** include ways of thinking about the way the world should be, or how a country should be run, or what financial systems to use and so on. They include ideas about what and who is important, and should be prioritised when making decisions. Capitalism, socialism, racism, feminism, environmentalism, traditionalism, and different religions, are all examples of ideologies. **The ideologies that dominate in a particular group, or system tend to shape decisions on the political, social, and economic direction that's taken by that group.** Some forms of power dominate in our society or movements, creating **'hegemony'** or setting standards of what is normal, based on the ideology of the group with the dominant power.

Power affects our society in terms of economic, political, social and cultural systems and institutions. These systems are made up of **and upheld by different people, groups and structures**. For example, different sections of our governments, or political parties, courts, civic groups, community-based organisations, urban or rural social movements, or NGOs, journalists or the media companies they work for, different

religious groups and structures and so on. Each of these carries different potential for influence, different power. On a single issue **power plays out differently at different levels**.

Social, economic and political power do not exist on their own. The values, systems and structures that enforce power are created and practised by people. This means that people have the capacity to change the way that power is used.

Those who hold power very rarely share it, or simply give it up. Mostly they work actively to increase their power. **Power is constantly being contested.** This contesting or **pushback**, happens in formal decision-making processes when powerful actors try to take control of public debate, it happens in our own relationships, organisations and communities. The ways that we contest can increase division or increase connections. When we develop strategies, one of the questions we ask ourselves should be, how are we contesting power and how will/is our power be contested. (JASS; July 2022)

Understanding this contestation is important for us so that we can prepare for backlash and pushback for the gains that we make through our organising and activism. Linked to this, threat of violence, including political violence creates strong fear. Generating this fear is part of the strategy of those with overarching power in any context to maintain their control. These responses to actions that transform power must be considered in our strategizing. (JASS; July 2022)

It's important to **build our knowledge of how decisions are taken**; and consider which individuals, groups, institutions, or social ideas (like language, religion, or law) have influence over decisions and actions linked to the issues. Being involved with feminist organising and movement-building requires that we understand and analyse how power operates so that we can challenge and disrupt this operation.

Tools for mapping power

Power does not operate in ways that can always be seen, in fact **the most impactful power is often exercised in invisible ways**. In processes to map power, to understand where it is functioning and how to intervene, JASS has worked with the concept a 'power cube' framework that talks about three main types of power (over). Visible, hidden, and invisible. More recently JASS has developed this thinking further, to include systemic power, as a fouth layer to this understanding.

Visible power, which is generally the most obvious, is the action of **power formalised through rules, policy, and official or formal decision-making structures**. It is exercised through institutions by decision-makers, some of whom are elected, others appointed. Think about a magistrate or judge in a court, a teacher in a classroom, the line manager

in a factory, or the national 'Cabinet' or forum for government ministers to make high-level decisions. With these, there is often a set of rules, or even laws that make it clear about the kinds of things that those people or structures can make decisions about and how people should interact with them. Generally, with visible power, the scope and opportunity, as well as the limits and boundaries of engaging with this are quite clear. Members of the public, activists and movements, may organise to advocate for influence through these spaces.

Hidden power is generally exercised between people in interactions that are more difficult to see. It refers to interactions between people or **organised groups that bypass the formal spaces completely, or who influence how things are done and what decisions will be made in the formal (visible) spaces**. These decisions and processes are seldom on the record. For example, a small group of people may lobby or have an informal conversation about who to invite to an event and exclude important stakeholders in that process. Politicians may, over dinner, agree to award a contract to a specific service provider. Frequently it is organised interests such as corporate actors, criminal networks, other governments, or religious groups, who work seek to influence the decisions in these spaces.

Invisible power runs deeper, it shapes the way people feel and think about themselves, an issue, or a space at a fundamental level. Invisible power is **linked to dominant ideologies and values**. For the most part, people and interest groups will perpetuate the standards, and norms, that serve their interests and their position of power for as long as they can. Invisible power includes processes of deep socialisation, and ways of thinking/belief systems (ideology) that build over time. These shape how we understand what is real, what is 'normal', what is right, and what is possible. These narratives of belief systems are used to reinforce or create standards that perpetuate inequality and exclusion of some. **Invisible power impacts on how things are framed, described or explained ('narratives'), and can be mobilised to manipulate and impact on what people believe or feel about a thing, about their place in society, or their right to be (legitimacy).**

To transform invisible power, we need to do the work to identify it, make it visible, to observe and name the narratives that are being used to set the standards; we can then work to disrupt these by developing and sharing our own narratives. JASS talks about '*radical reimagination*' – the importance of doing the work of envisioning the future we are working for – **as underlying our work of shifting narratives.**

JASS has developed understanding of a fourth dimension for power, **Systemic power**. This underpins the other layers described and recognises that "*unequal power dynamics are institutionalised* and reproduced through the embedded codes and

logics of the overarching and *interlinked* systems of **capitalism, patriarchy, structural racism and colonialism-imperialism**; these systemic codes are harder to perceive and disrupt than other forms of power" (JASS: July 2022). This understanding of **systemic power is at the heart of our understanding of structural violence**, where deep codes of what is normal are hard-wired into these intersecting systems that affect our lives in every area across society.

Forms of power

One of the ways that we have developed to understand power is to draw attention to the forms that power can take, this includes the ideas of **power over; power to; power within; power with; and power for**. Thinking about forms of power helps us in our collective work to make the interactions of power between us more visible so that we can think about how we are working with our individual and collective power toward the transformations that we care about.

Power over refers to how most of us understand and experience power. Power over uses domination, control, discrimination, force and fear to 'get its way'. A crucial way that this type of power operates is through the control of resources (land, healthcare, jobs) and decision-making. This creates and maintains inequality while hanging onto power. It's through this that some people are privileged while others are marginalised and discriminated against.

Power to is closest to the dictionary definition, it refers to the unique potential that every person has to shape their life and the circumstances of their world. *Power to*, is based on the belief that each of us has the ability to act and the power to make a difference. Often when we feel powerless, or disempowered in some areas of our lives, we don't also notice the ways that we do affect our circumstances and the people around us. Because, in our activism, most of the issues that we are working towards are complex and the problems are deeply rooted, it is important for us to stop and reflect on our successes along the way.

Power within is important, it is about our sense of self-worth and our self-knowledge. Power within allows people to recognise their "power to" and "power with", and believe they can make a difference. It involves people having a sense of their own capacity. As feminists, we need to take time to reflect on our own, and support each other to take notice of and strengthen the sense we have of our power within.

Power with, is about collective power – sharing power by finding common ground through solidarity, mutual support and collaboration while also respecting difference and working with and through conflicts. This is a crucial strategy for collective work and movement building.

Power for is deeply connected to the idea of transformative power, it speaks to how we collectively work to identify and hold our shared values, and how we build a shared vision and agenda for the changes we're committed to. This collective visioning brings the power of inspiration and motivation to our work.

These forms of power are interconnected, strengthening one form, with consciousness can build on another form.

Too often, the people, systems, or ideas that are strongly influencing decisions are invisible; at other times the power is visible, but **we don't question its dominance because it has been normalised – and we tend to think 'that's just the way it is'**. Feminist organising seeks to bring light to, and question, invisible power. We also work to challenge ourselves and others' assumptions about where power lies and if that is the way that we think it should be.

The resources that JASS has developed include valuable tools for activists and movements to 'map' and understand the way that power is functioning and to develop strategies to transform power.

JASS Resources on Power

- Big Ideas: *Power*
- *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. 2007.
- *We Rise: Power Analysis for Strategy*. Workshop activity from the We Rise toolkit
- *Making Change Happen: Power.* Concepts for Revisioning Power for Justice, Equality and Peace; JASS; 2006

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is another layered and complex concept that we thread through this book, this is an area of thinking that has many different meanings to people. In the editorial to an *Agenda* journal dedicated to intersectionality, the editors explain that "some have asserted that intersectionality does not refer to a single theoretical framework but is a way of understanding divisions and hierarchies of social life that may be used in various ways" (Anthias, 2013, cited in Meer and Müller p3). They describe that a strong value of the idea of *intersectionality* is that it has broken down the idea that women are a single category of people with the same experiences. Given that this

is another complex, contested and continuously developing theme, we encourage the reader to engage with the resources discussing intersectionality below.

In our discussions we focus on intersectionality in two ways. One of the ways we consider it is about the layers of our identities, how we see ourselves in society and how we are percieved in society (co-constructed identities). Another way that we look at it is in terms of how different values and ideologies of opression, and how different systems and institutions of oppression intersect with each other.

> **i** The JASS website includes this quote from Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989: *"Intersectionality is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power…. It's basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which* **various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other.** *We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status.* **What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.**"
>
> The [Activist Handbook](#) website adds: *"Crenshaw was a black feminist scholar who was concerned with the ways in which black women were being left out of both feminist and anti-racist movements. Since then, intersectionality has become an important part of social justice work. It is now widely recognized that different forms of oppression do not operate independently of one another, but rather, they intersect and overlap in complex ways."*

JASS's website has a JASS Big Ideas: Intersectionality page

[JASS Big Ideas: Intersectionality](#) includes information, tools, and short videos of women talking about why it is important to reflect on and work with. The full resource can also be downloaded from the web page.
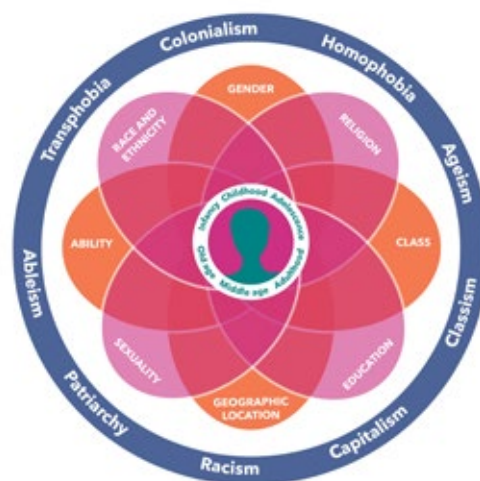
The *JASS website* explains that Intersectionality is a way to understand how different aspects of people's identity interact and converge to shape very different experiences of life and power. How do gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class and other differences shape us and our contexts? For Phumi Mtetwa, a working-class black lesbian feminist in South Africa, these intersections shaped the injustices she has faced and also the ways she has organized for change.

Awino Okech - Making the Connections

Womxn's experiences of structural violence are affected by intersecting systems of oppression and intersecting layers of our identities like our race, class, and sexual orientation that result in various additional oppressions. We are mindful **not to deal with intersectionality as a list of different identities or categories**, which reduces it to words on a page without grappling with the contexts and realities of how they play out on different womxn's bodies.

The range of intersectional identities experienced by different people also cannot be unlinked, people experience many different identities at the same time. The *Raising Voices* report paints the picture of the many different intersecting identities that we may hold, many of them simultaneously. We are young women, old women, divorced women, married women, we are women living in rural places, we are women in townships, we are farmers, we are informal traders, we are Muslim, we are Christian, we are African, we are widows, we are queer, we are living with HIV and AIDS (*Raising Voices*: p30-31).

As much as these 'categorisations' of people in terms of identities linked to gender, race, or class and so on are used by people with resources and power as the basis for oppressing and violating those people; **these identities are also a strong basis for groups of people organising to oppose and resist the inequality and marginalisation that they experience**. (Dutta U, Sonn C, Brinton Lykes M: p2) *Our shared and diverse identities can also offer us the basis for building power with others and envisioning liberation.* (JASS: July 2022)

We have **different identities** that are **linked to our characteristics, or experiences,** or social constructions of who we are: our gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class and other factors that are important to us. Thinking about *Intersectionality* allows us to examine the different exclusions and discriminations faced by different womxn. Some examples include: Black womxn, poor and working class womxn, womxn living with

or caring for other people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, migrant and refugee womxn, womxn living in rural contexts and in urban poor contexts, womxn living under traditional authorities, farm womxn, womxn in the informal economy and womxn in insecure employment. "People's experience of the intersections between class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and location, etc. create the fault lines of discrimination and inequities of power and privilege embedded in all structures." (JASS: July 2022)

Many of the **'identities' that we take on, that we have listed, are constructed or made up by conditions and beliefs in our society.** It is also true that we define our own identities based on what we think about and feel about our experiences. We shift our identities at different times; often these shifts are because we are exposed to new information or ways of thinking.

Our **intersectional identities are tied to our histories**. In Southern Africa it is a long history of violence, systemic dispossession of our human dignity, rights, resources and land, and discrimination that continues to disadvantage many of us. The effects are felt across generations.

Each of these sets of circumstances results in the person **having different experiences of their own power in society**. *Intersectionality* is a way to understand how all these different aspects of our identity shape our unique experiences of life and power. Depending on our different identities we experience, use, or are subjected to power in different ways.

In addition to intersections of our identities, we see the layers of oppression intersecting. **People do not experience different oppressions separately. Instead, layers of oppression interact with each other,** overlapping and compounding conditions of discrimination and inequality. For example, a Black man may experience racism, and a white woman may experience sexism. For a Black womxn, racism and sexism together create a very different reality. If that woman is also living with a disability, or if she is unemployed, she may experience other exclusions. At another level, legal systems and democracy are embedded and interwoven through each other; economic systems and the values that underpin them are deeply linked to decisions in education systems, health systems, and on environmental justice.

Understanding **intersectionality is a powerful analytical tool** to use to understand our own and others' relationship to power as we organise for social justice and equality. It is a tool that will help us to see the overlapping and intersectional nature of our struggles and move us away from single-issue activism.

Thinking about **intersectionality in our organising is not about making some forms of oppression more important than others.** This is something we should be conscious and thoughtful about. Many people have experiences of the ways that they are violated

or oppressed being minimised-told that it's not so bad by other people who don't experience that same form of oppression. When we try to reset this imbalance in groups, there is often much pain, trauma, and anger, that is linked to people's experiences of being unseen, that we should be prepared for.

Working with *intersectionality* is about recognising/seeing each other's different experiences. It helps us to challenge the different layers of power that affect other people differently – as well as the power that we are directly affected by. **Intersectionality allows us to consider not only the ways that we are each oppressed and experience that oppression; but also the different layers of power that we each hold and how we use that.** In this way, our organising can become more inclusive. Intersectionality is closely linked to ideas and practices of diversity. Along with diversity come the questions of our differences and how we manage those in constructive ways in our alliances and movements.

Part 3 looks deeper at questions of what we could do, what questions we could ask, or processes we can use, to increase the ways that we engage with intersectionality to build solidarity while also respecting differences among people as we do our organising work.

> "
> We have to become fluent with each other's histories.' This fluency with each other's histories allows us to not make assumptions of the particular histories of oppression or the contexts that different people across the continent actually experience" – **At the JASS Dialogue on** *Women Radically Transforming a World in Crisis***, Ruth Nyumbara from Kenya cited US Black feminist, Jaqui Alexander.**

JASS Resources on intersectionality

- JASS website *Big Ideas page on intersectionality*
- Crenshaw, Kimberle (July 1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color". Stanford Law Review. 43 (6): 1241–1299.
- Leslie McCall, "*The Complexity of Intersectionality*," in *Signs*, Vol 3, Issue 30, Spring 2005
- Talia Meer and Alex Müller (Eds) *Considering Intersectionality in Africa Agenda*, Vol 31, Issue 1. 2017.

VALUES THAT DRIVE STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Sets of values that dominate in our society lie behind the invisible power that infuses what is considered normal, good or correct in social structures and institutions. These form the basis of justifying practices or decisions that are unjust or that favour some but exclude others. Taken together these values operating across the structures of our society create a form of power that JASS refer to as structural power. This structural power manifests in structural violence.

We expand on the fact that patriarchal, sexist and racist values are deeply embedded in structural violence, first providing a short overview of how we have understood these ideas here and through weaving these layers throughout the conversations of the book. In considering where we'd place emphasis we made the assumption that most of the people who draw on this resource will have a strong understanding of how patriarchy and racism impact on our lives.

There are other critical value systems, also intersectional, that we have not fleshed out. These include belief systems that create the norms that people of certain ages, or living in certain countries or areas, or people who have different physical or intellectual abilities, or people who follow certain religious beliefs are more or less worthy of resources or justice. Where appropriate we have drawn those intersections in practical examples through the discussion.

PATRIARCHY IS EVERYWHERE

Womxn experience structural violence differently from men because one of the strong pillars of structural violence is patriarchy, a set of ideas and values that create the norm that womxn are less worthy than men.

Patriarchy, like many of the concepts we engage with in this booklet, is difficult to define. It is difficult to define because it is complex, difficult to see and has persisted for so long that it is considered normal and natural. But similar to the other complex systems we are discussing in this booklet it is important for us to make visible what patriarchy means to us and how it affects us individually and collectively. It allows us to begin to 'see' all the different ways womxn experience inequality, misogyny and sexism.

Patriarchy is an oppressive social system that relies on power over, it is generally *heteronormative* (founded on the idea that heterosexual expressions and relationships are the only normal expressions). It manifests in the performance of masculinities – men being expected to, and then behaving and living in ways that are considered 'manly'. Patriarchy is typically authoritarian (the man, or the father's, or the chief's word is the

final word), competitive, values masculine notions of strength (physical and mental) and is frequently aggressive in how it is enacted. Patriarchy is not only harmful to womxn, it causes harm to people of all genders and sexualities.

Patriarchy refers to male domination in the public and private spheres of life where people who hold non-masculine identities, including womxn; are oppressed in many different ways and where masculine expression is normalised and institutionalised. Womxn and people who do not identify as are excluded from access to power and are subjected to control and oppression.

The concept of patriarchy as a structure that needs dismantling has gained popularity in the public domain in recent years. The #MeToo movement that started in the USA and the #TotalShutdown in South Africa are some of the ways that womxn demonstrated their utter frustration that **violence against womxn persists** unabated. Even though there are examples of some gains that have been achieved in the fight for womxn's equality, **patriarchy continues to adapt to keep womxn's oppression and inequality in place**.

> " Patriarchy doesn't work alone. It is intertwined with other systems of domination based on race, class ethnicity, sexuality, religion and other aspects of identity. As a result, women experience inequality differently. – *(https://justassociates.org/big-ideas/ intersectionality/)*

The **interaction between patriarchal values and other systems of oppression** like capitalism and racism, produce and reproduce the oppression of womxn. Understanding the relationship between patriarchy and other forms of oppression working together helps us to understand how different womxn experience inequality differently. It also helps us to begin to understand what we are up against in how we organise for equality. Fighting patriarchy must include fighting other systems of oppression.

In the *Raising Voices* report the participants describe how patriarchy maintains womxn's oppression through economic, social, cultural and political systems. For example, even though there are progressive policies and laws, the lack of will to realise womxn's equality ensures that these are not implemented.

> **JASS Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary**
>
> **Patriarchy:** Literally means "rule of the father." Historically, patriarchy refers to systemic and institutionalised male domination embedded in and - perpetuated by cultural, political, economic and social structures and ideologies. These systems explicitly make women inferior and subordinate and confer control and decision-making on males while making values associated with masculinity the norm or ideal. Patriarchy has many particular forms in different stages of history and in different cultures. The concept, as it has been developed within feminist writings (because it has existed in anthropology far longer), is not a single or simple concept but has a variety of different meanings.

> **Resources on intersectionality**
>
> - JASS *Big Ideas webpage* on intersectionality.
> - JASS *Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary*. 2012
> - *Feminism for Today*. ILRIG. 2007.

RACISM, RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES

The notion of race and ethnicity seems easy to define but is complex, messy and used interchangeably. The notion of racial classification can be traced back four centuries and has helped to justify slavery, colonialism and the belief that some races are superior to others. **Race** appears to present as biological and therefore 'scientific', but as with all science, it is socially constructed. **Racism, racial discrimination and racial inequality** are all concepts that deal with how race is used to oppress and disadvantage certain groups of people while other groups are privileged by their race category.

Ethnicity is a broader concept and can include race. A simple explanation of ethnicity is that it describes any group with a shared cultural, social and historical background and experiences that include shared beliefs and values.

White supremacy used to be associated with extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan in the USA but the use of the term has evolved to include the socio-economic-political structural advantages enjoyed by white people while other racial and ethnic groups are excluded. This expanded understanding of white supremacy builds on the concept of racism and emphasises the structural, unearned entitlement and privileges that have been institutionalised and normalised.

Power over operates to make injustices of racism seem invisible and people who are marginalised are blamed for 'creating' their own oppression (and sometimes even blame themselves); for example, blaming Black people for being poor because they don't work hard enough ignoring the structural and systemic systems that create the conditions for poverty.

With the abolition of slavery and the dismantling of colonialism, racism is often viewed as something that is no longer a serious issue. This ignores the pervasive nature and systemic roots of racism and how it is **interrelated with other forms of oppressions and the legacies of apartheid and colonisation is ignored**. Ethnicity can lead to violence and discrimination and has been used to oppress different groups

Race and ethnicity may seem abstract yet they have enormous power over how societies work. Race continues to be fundamental in determining someone's socio-economic reality. All research clearly demonstrates that Black people and People of Colour, or ethnic minorities experience higher levels of poverty, and lower access to and quality of education, and are systematically denied health services. **Intersectional identities**, discussed in the section above, describe how womxn face multiple layers of oppression and inequality based on race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and others.

JASS Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary

Racism: Prejudice or discrimination is rooted in the idea that race or skin colour is a determinant of human traits or capacities, and that differences in skin colour confer or reflect inherent inferiority and superiority. Racism and racial discrimination can be overt, for example, in the form of discriminatory laws and policies. More often, racism is deeply embedded in social and political institutions and in belief systems in ways that are unexamined or disguised.

Ethnicity: A social construct that groups people based on a common language, history, religion, culture or background. It is melded with the concept of race, which refers solely to physical characteristics. For example, within the "Asian" racial category, ethnic groups include Japanese, Thai, Cambodian, and Pacific Islander.

PART 2: THREE KEY SYSTEMS THAT DRIVE STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

There are a number of significant systems that drive and enable structural violence. These include religious and spiritual systems, family systems, economic systems, democratic governance systems, and legal systems. As discussed above the structural violence that is perpetuated through these systems is fed by the invisible power of dominant values of patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, racism, ablism, and so on.

For the purpose of this book, considering the limits on how much ground we are able to cover, we have decided to focus in-depth on three of these systems: The economic systems that dominate in the region; the legal systems in our countries; and the democratic systems that are meant to guide governance in our countries. We recognise that colonialism is a central pillar for systemic power still manifesting through our Southern African societies in various ways. We have viewed colonialism as a political, legal, religious and economic system based on racist patriarchal, and largely Christian values.

The exercise of power through these significant and overarching systems manifests in further structural violence through health systems, education systems, through pervasive GBV, and through ecological and agricultural injustice.

In our exploration of the three systems, we try to build definition and understanding of what each system is and how it functions. We consider values and histories that shape and drive the rules and decision-making of those systems in countries in this region. To increase the visibility of that which is hidden in the systems, and to support more concrete strategising for transformation, we provide more detailed information on the workings and mechanisms through which decisions are taken in these structures. Doing this offers us ideas of what the sites are for us to leverage so that we can challenge the way those systems function, the values on which the decisions are based.

THE ECONOMY (NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM, GLOBALISATION)

Introduction

Understanding what an economy is and how it works can be complicated and will take considerable time but in thinking about structural violence we have to discuss the

economy. The economy is one of the systems through which structural violence takes place and is a site of significant oppression of womxn. In order for us to be able to discuss the links/relationship between structural violence and the economy, this section of the booklet, will in broad strokes attempt to explain what an economy is and how it operates particularly in southern Africa.

What is 'the economy'?

In general, economists define the **economy** as a complex system for deciding how limited or scarce resources are used so that goods and services can be produced, sold, distributed and consumed by those who operate in that economy. Scarce or limited resources could include things like natural resources, land and labour. An economy can be a small system like a household or a big complex system like a country. Countries' economies are shaped by political and social factors as well as by the resources available, laws, history, geography and culture. **Feminist economics** considers the broader wellbeing and human rights of people and challenges the limitations of how economies work and how its success is measured. Feminist economics is concerned with producing a gender-equal society.

The **private sector** is that part of the economy that is run and owned by individuals and companies with the main purpose of making a profit. On the other hand, the **public sector** of the economy is controlled by the state with the main purpose of providing goods and services for the benefit of the public using public funds. **Public funds are money that belongs to the public**, often collected through taxes and made available for public spending on goods and services to the public. It is controlled by the government. Governments decide how to spend that money through an ongoing cycle of budget planning and preparation; budget approvals; reporting and accounting; accountability; and audits. **These processes of deciding how to spend public money should include democratic engagements** which should be visible but are often hidden. For this reason, the public sector is often the site of our struggles for equality and decent service delivery.

Neoliberal Capitalism and Globalisation

Capitalist hegemony or the power and domination of capitalism, is so well established that it is viewed by many as the only or best option as an economic system. **Patriarchy** preceded capitalism yet the two are closely linked. **Patriarchy and capitalism reinforce each other** and capitalism serves patriarchy by formalising the devaluing of womxn, womxn's role in the economy and womxn's work.

Capitalism and colonialism are closely linked and have affected and continue to affect African economies. **Colonialism in Africa**, made possible the widescale dispossession

and plunder of African resources and brought with it capitalism particularly based on extracting 'raw materials'. **Extractivist capitalism is still a strong feature in post-colonial Africa** where particularly extractive projects in mining, forestry, energy and agriculture persist with little regard for communities or the environment. Colonialism adapted, as systems of oppression often do, as African countries gained independence from colonialism. **Neocolonialism** emerged and in general terms describes the **ongoing economic and political control of previously colonised countries** by capitalist nations and corporations.

Under capitalism, prosperity and freedom are defined by the individualistic accumulation of wealth at all costs. **Neoliberal capitalism** is the best-known and dominant economic model across the world and countries in southern Africa have adopted some aspects of it. **Neoliberalism or neoliberal capitalism is so pervasive and woven into the fabric and language of our everyday lives** that it almost becomes invisible, normalised and unchallenged. Many of us measure our success and happiness by what we own and we are therefore driven to continually obtain material possessions.

Neoliberal capitalism is a powerful ideology and **shapes governments' economic policies and also the way that we see ourselves**. It is important that we make visible the ways that we are affected by neoliberalism.

> *i* **The market** in its simplest form is a place where things are bought and sold. In economics, the market is more than a place and also includes systems, procedures and institutions involved with the buying and selling of goods and services.

Under neoliberalism **companies can do what they need to *maximise profit and accumulate wealth*** and so that the state does not interfere or regulate. This economic model also often results in a large portion of a country's resources owned by the private sector. In fact, under neoliberalism, the state actively supports and promotes the idea of **free market capitalism – where the government takes a 'hands off' approach**. An example of this is not having minimum wage laws so that companies can get away with paying really small wages. Neoliberalism actively promotes the idea of the free market. This means that the economy is self-regulated based on the laws of demand and supply with little or no government control and regulation. **Most countries have what is called mixed economies with aspects of neoliberalism and government regulations.** For example, eSwatini's economy leans strongly towards a free-market economy while Zimbabwe's is a mixed economy with high levels of government control.

Globalisation refers to the growing interconnectedness of the world economically, politically, and culturally. It results in cross-border trade and the flow of goods, money, information and people. The dominant form of globalisation is neoliberal globalisation – a globalisation that serves neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberal globalisation, as an extension of capitalism, is similarly presented as inevitable and without alternatives.

Many of the features of neoliberal globalisation are contrary to the ideals of equality, human rights, respect for the environment and solidarity that human rights defenders and activists continue to fight for. Neoliberalism does not consider structural forms of violence and oppression or intersectional identities. It places everything on the individual – if you do not succeed it is your failure as an individual. Probably one of the biggest issues is the **lack of concern for human wellbeing. Neoliberal capitalism has led to a obscene increase in inequality** and the concentration of wealth with an ever smaller number of elites. The **pursuit of profits above everything else creates** *perverse incentives* - *things that incentivise actions that cause harm.* Think for example about lifesaving equipment and medication that is priced out of reach of most people. During the COVID-19 pandemic, access to vaccines were severely restricted for poorer countries because its production was controlled by big multinational pharmaceutical corporations with the support of governments. Africa was significantly affected by COVID19 vaccine inequalities and countries in Africa continue to have some of the lowest vaccination rates in the world.

The State and neoliberal capitalism

A country's economy can have a profound impact on the quality of people's lives. Inequality, high levels of unemployment and poverty along with cuts in government spending is widespread in southern Africa with womxn worse affected. **Governments are formally responsible for managing the resources of countries and the choices they make about public finance** – how to collect and spend money. These decisions are influenced by the dominant political and economic ideologies and often influenced by hidden power of other non-governmental international structures. It is therefore no surprise that many governments have bought into and adopted neoliberal capitalism in decisions about public finance.

In countries where governments have a neoliberal approach to public finance, public services – such as schools, prisons, water, electricity and others- are moved from the public sector to the private sector. This **moving of the control of property, business, or industry from government (the public sector) to private business (the private sector) is known as privatisation**.

Nationalisation refers to the opposite process where transfer of control of the services or industry is **moved from the private sector to the public sector (governments).**

Privatisation has resulted in the move of essential government services to the profit model of the private sector including the power of financial and other managerial decisions. Private companies motivated by profit would not, for example, want to provide health care or education to people who are most marginalised. There are often debates and tensions in countries in the region relating to nationalisation or privatisation. Activists and human rights defenders sometimes call for **renationalisation where assets, industries and services that were previously privatised are brought back under government ownership and control**. This call for renationalisation is done in the hope that government will provide better protection against exploitation and the rampant profiteering of the private sector.

The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) are all international institutions concerned with global economics and international trade. These institutions support and promote the ideals of neoliberal capitalism and globalisation and often **influence public finance decision-making though hidden power. The World Bank and IMF provide loans** to countries in crisis to alleviate poverty and many African countries are deeply in debt to these institutions. African countries are forced to prioritise paying these loans back by adopting economic reforms known as **structural adjustment programmes. These programmes generally require governments to cut public spending on things like education or healthcare.** The burden of structural adjustments falls most heavily on women, children, and other vulnerable groups.

Austerity is a policy adopted by some governments and in simple terms **means steps introduced to reduce government spending to lessen the gap when a country's expenses are higher than its income.** This usually takes place in the face of an economy that is performing poorly. Countries are often obligated to introduce austerity measures when they have loans from institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. Neoliberal and austerity financial policies have led to a reduction in essential services to communities.

Public participation in government processes is a central principle of democracies (we discuss this in more detail in the section on democracies below). **Increasing the control of government resources through partnerships between government and the private sector has resulted in reduced opportunities for democratic involvement.** Activists and human rights defenders have to also target the private sector. Most democracies have legislation and policies regarding public participation but private companies are generally accountable to their shareholders.

Care work

> " By care economy, I am referring to the sector of economy that is responsible for the provision of care and services that contribute to the nurturing and reproduction of current and future populations. More specifically, it involves child care, elder care, education, healthcare, and personal social and domestic services that are provided in both paid and unpaid forms and within formal and informal sectors." **Article:** *What is the Care Economy and Why should we Care?* **Website: Care work and the economy. Author: Ito Peng. April 2021."**

Globally, womxn spend between three and ten times more time on **unpaid care work, like cooking; cleaning; caring for children, the sick and elderly, and voluntary community work** than men. To a large extent, womxn also carry the responsibility for providing food - growing, buying, and cooking food. Womxn face higher levels of hunger, in attempts to shield children from hunger. It was widely reported that care work increased significantly for womxn during the COVID-19 restrictions. These disproportionate responsibilities fall on womxn because of **gender inequality and gender norms that have labelled this work as womxn's work**.

Underpaid care workers like community health workers and early childhood development workers are insecurely employed and are mostly womxn. **Unrecognised care work is unpaid and underpaid, this contributes to inequality and womxn are left in precarious jobs with insecure incomes**, and no social safety net.

Often the valuable contributions that care work contributes to wellness of individuals, families, and communities are overlooked and undervalued. The responsibilities womxn carry for this work also limit their ability to seek and find more formal and remunerated forms of employment. In what has been referred to as the **'double burden' of work for womxn**, many womxn are responsible for unpaid care work in addition to their paid work. Governments across the world fail to acknowledge unpaid care work and do not view it as an important part of economic activities. This **contributes to economic gender inequality**.

Reimagined feminist economies

Economic structural violence experienced by womxn are caused by intersecting ideologies and systems discussed throughout this booklet. **Womxn** who bear the brunt

of multiple economic, environmental, climate and political crises **have developed strategies to adapt, resist and transform**. Powerful global systems like neoliberal capitalism use a range of strategies to undermine any attempts to challenge and transform it. This can include strategies to co-opt and subvert, but often includes brutality and violence. Capitalism is essentially patriarchal in nature and it is difficult to imagine ways of challenging patriarchy without also confronting capitalism.

We often hear the language of womxn's economic empowerment as a solution to improve the economic discrimination womxn face. **Many years of economic empowerment strategies have not made systemic changes in the economic realities for most womxn** but have made room for some womxn in the existing economic system which remains deeply patriarchal and sexist.

Activists and feminists have tackled the **reimagining of economies** in different ways including **working with and within the existing systems; challenging the existing systems to transform it; and finding alternatives to the system**. It is important for activists and human rights defenders to continue to build knowledge and collective analysis to deepen understanding of local realities and how it connects to these hidden and invisible systems of power.

Economic decisions taken by governments and international financial institutions perpetuate and reinforce patriarchy, inequality and human rights violations. Womxn are often excluded from influencing and engaging with these big economic decisions. **Womxn's unpaid work, underpaid work and the informal sector are typically excluded from capitalist economic models, yet the formal economy would not be able to run without it.** Feminist economic thinking looks more broadly at what constitutes the economy and attempts to look holistically at what is needed to produce gender equality. Feminists have worked hard to advance feminist agendas in macroeconomics and challenge government decisions regarding public finance and public spending.

We have been made to believe that the current dominant economic system of neoliberal capitalism is inevitable and the only model available. **Socialism is an economic and political system that calls for public ownership and control of the economy,** property and natural resources and is based on the belief that shared ownership of resources and central planning results in a more equitable society. China, Cuba, Laos, Vietnam, and North Korea are modern examples of socialist countries. Within countries who have adopted neo-liberal economic practices, communities and activists are challenging this and organising and exploring other ways of participating in the economy.

In some instances, people are forced to find other ways due to exclusion from the formal economy. The **informal economy** is a clear example of this. **Across the world countless**

people participate in the informal economy to earn an income. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that more than 60% of the world's employed population are in the informal economy and women are more exposed to informal work. Most of the womxn who were part of the *Raising Voices* feminist participatory action research project in Malawi and Zimbabwe were engaged in subsistence activities. The C19 pandemic had a severe impact on informal workers, especially womxn.

Microfinance is the broad term for **financial services provided to people with low-income who have been excluded from the formal banking sector.** Microcredit is one of the services provided under microfinance and it provides small loans at low interest rate to low-income people. Some controversy around microfinance is that the private sector has entered the microfinance terrain and are shifting the purpose from supporting poverty alleviation to making profit. Some microfinance projects deliberately target womxn who are seen as more responsible on the one hand and also more likely to be excluded from formal banking services on the other. **Feminists have raised concerns that microcredit does not offer the structural solutions it claims and still traps low-income womxn in debt cycles.**

Resources that expand on ideas for building alternative feminist economies

AWID's webpage on *Building Feminist Economies*, describes that this *"is about creating a world with clean air to breath and water to drink, with meaningful labour and care for ourselves and our communities, where we can all enjoy our economic, sexual and political autonomy"*
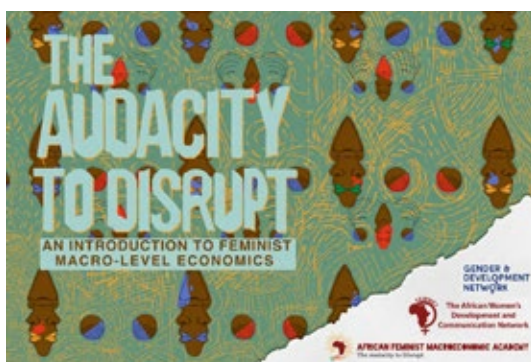
The *Audacity to Disrupt* is produced by the Gender & Development Network; the African Women's Development and Communication Network, and the African Feminist Macroeconomic Academy.

Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs) are practised across the world where people get together to form their own savings and lending clubs and cooperatives located at community level. These clubs are run on a volunteer basis and are based on mutual trust and rarely have formal contracts. These savings clubs have different names: in Mexico it is called cundinas; in Somalia it is ayuuto; in Ethiopia it is ekub and in South Africa it is called stokvel. People excluded from formal banking or who choose not to use formal banking have used this system for savings and credit for a long time. ROSCAs are now used largely by women.

⚙ Resources

- African Feminism *https://africanfeminism.com*
- The Association for *Women's Rights in Development (AWID)*: Building feminist economies
- *Gender & Development Network* (GADN): Feminist economic alternatives.
- JASS *Roundtable on feminist economic alternatives*
- Intercontinental *Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy* (RIPESS)
- *From Women's Individual and Collective Power to Political Change Pekka*

LEGAL SYSTEMS

Legal systems are established to ensure and enforce the formal rules that are set up in society. The type of power exercised in legal systems is *power over*. While 'on paper' they function in the 'visible power' space, actually the rules and decisions are driven by **invisible value systems** that **deeply affect the way the legal systems function**; in addition, many decisions are shaped by powerful actors who use hidden power to shape how the rules are defined and applied. This is especially dangerous because people claim to be following the 'letter of the law' as if it is a neutral or objective thing when the reality is that the laws that are followed were influenced by value systems and ideologies of the people who had power and access to decision-making at the time they were written down, and are influenced by the values of the people who implement them. This is why they are extremely **powerful tools for structural violence**.

In the global south, our legal systems have been fundamentally shaped by colonial histories, the rules and norms are based on the moralities that are linked to and dominated in northern social systems. In Southern Africa, these are rooted in British, Dutch, Portuguese and French systems, that carried particular versions of (hetero) patriarchal, racist, and capitalist moralities.

What makes legal systems especially powerful and dangerous is that the 'social norms' that are written and protected through them are often spoken about as if that is absolutely the right way. '*The law has spoken*'. We say that the 'law' has the final word, but actually, that final word is **the final word of the people who have power to write the laws and make decisions** about how they will be implemented. The legal frameworks most of us live under, are **founded on patriarchal, racist, and neoliberal norms t**hat come from history, and that our societies have recommitted to repeatedly over centuries and decades.

The law, truth and justice

This is why **legal systems should not be called 'justice' systems**. Even though people often consider that legal systems deliver 'justice' and many of our governments refer to 'justice systems'. This is not true. To show the issue at a very obvious level, most of our countries have had (some still have) laws that allow husbands to rape their wives, or allow forms of slavery and apartheid. These have been called 'just' and 'fair'. The fact is that there are many laws that are deeply unjust, they reflect the value system of those who have ruling power. In more recent times, governments bought into the globalised capitalist world have 'criminalised' poverty. For example, through criminalising informal traders for being in certain places, or requiring that only people who can pay for permits may trade; or criminalising acts of daily living (sleeping, doing washing); of people who live on the street.

The concept of justice is much greater than what happens in legal systems. Our experience of *justice* is also personal. As individuals, and in groups we must **give our own meaning to justice.** The idea of *healing justice* has been developing among movements. These ideas are about activists, feminists, going beyond the limits of the framing for justice that is promoted in our colonially influenced legal systems. It recognises the deep trauma, grief and distress that activists experience in our work to challenge state oppression and structural violence and is about creating conditions and practices of caring, support and safety amongst ourselves in community with each other.

Not only the laws themselves but also **the systems to implement the laws are sites of great injustice**. For a start, **access to the law is not equal** for everyone. Access is affected by the privileges that come with wealth, race, gender. This bias towards certain people is experienced in obvious ways where some people just cannot afford a lawyer, or pay for transport to a court. The invisible layer is where, although it goes against the laws and rules that are written, the values that people in the system hold also act strongly. For example, where a woman who seeks protection from an abusive partner, or an informal trader who has her goods confiscated (stolen) by police, are treated as

if they are the people who have done something wrong. Too often, that violence and those injustices, are not even called crimes.

Legal systems are not places for finding truth. Many of us are taught to believe that legal systems are the place where we can find 'truth', this is extremely powerful and very problematic. Court cases (including those that are finished before or without ever going inside a court room), are guided by sets of rules about who can have their say, when they can speak, and what may or may not be said. After the people who are allowed to have a say have done this, one person, sometimes a small group of people (judges), decide on the outcome. You may notice that in a criminal case, they may make the decision that a person is 'guilty' or 'not guilty'. The reason they don't use the word 'innocent' is because the law actually does understand that it is not possible to absolutely know if a person didn't do something.

It's valuable to understand this because there is a **deep psychological impact on individuals and on society when someone who has committed violence or a crime is found not guilty** and the social response is to claim that it means that that person is innocent. The meaning is actually, that the court could not prove 'beyond a reasonable doubt' that that person had committed that office. This 'reasonable doubt' is subjective, it is influenced by the value judgements of the people making the decisions, it is affected by what those people are taught in our society is good or right or wrong – in this way dominant beliefs about different intersectional identity characteristics, like race, gender, sexuality, physical or intellectual disability, mental health, age, economic class or wealth affect the decisions that courts take.

There are some positive changes being made in the past decades showing more examples of shifts in the *'letter of the law'* for example towards recognising the experiences of womxn or LGBTI people's experiences. These **changes have been hard fought for by activists.** After the changes are written into the laws of a country, there is much more work still to do to ensure that the new laws are implemented by the people in the system who still hold on to the old beliefs and value systems. Also, as much as we see positive developments, we also see the opposite happening. We see the increasing development of more and **more violent laws that are designed to oppress people based on their sexuality, gender, and nationality for example.**

As much as the legal systems we are subjected to commit violence, and we cannot assume that they are automatically just, or able to uncover the 'truth'; **legal systems can be tools** to promote social justice. The law and legal systems which are the tools to enforce patriarchal, racist, and neoliberal norms in society, also have the power to challenge those norms.

We can see clearly that changing laws and putting our energies and resources towards **changing laws does not do enough to bring change to people's lives.** At the same time, the letter of the law can act as a powerful **signal of 'new norms' a feminist reframing of what is right and just.** At this level there is value for us to engage in law reform work, to make sure that 'on paper' the rules that are written for our society are consistent with our feminist values for social justice.

The laws that are used in most Southern African countries have developed in different ways. Some laws and legal rules come from far back in history, and others are more recent. (Section 27 Manual on the law).

Constitutional law

Most of the countries in the region have developed Constitutions in recent decades, generally since gaining independence from colonial/apartheid rule. These constitutions create a **legal framework for the ways that the democracies should work at a political level,** and they set out the **fundamental values and human rights that must be implemented** in that democracy.

Constitutions are the 'supreme' law in each country, which means that no other law may go against the 'bottom lines' that are contained in that constitution. Like most laws, constitutions are a mixture of hard legal rules and of social values. Because most of the constitutions in the region are relatively young, many of them include valuable rights that can be used to fight injustices. At the same time, in the past years, we have seen some Constitutions being changed to support increasingly unjust actions such as the violation of the rights of people in the LGBTQI community. It is possible to change constitutions by building majority political support for those changes, this is something that cannot be done easily and generally **needs there to also be a strong public base to support action for changing constitutions.**

Statutory law

These are the laws that are **developed through most legislative processes (parliaments, senates, legislatures).** In most democracies, the constitutions state that new laws must be made through democratic processes. The idea behind requiring democratic processes for making laws is that **the public should be a significant part of deciding what the rules are in our society.**

We are able to have a say in two ways, firstly, through voting for people (politicians and political parties) to make the decisions on our behalf **(representatives)**; or secondly, by being **directly involved** with the law-making process. The rules about and possibilities

for the public to be directly involved in law reforms are different in different countries.

When we get involved in a law-making or law reform process, we can quickly see how decisions on more complicated issues are not driven by facts and evidence, but by power, values and feelings. They are often extremely political, with different parties, or groups of people fighting for laws that reflect very different values and rules.

Common law

"Common law" is the laws that have been brought by colonial settlers from England, Holland, France and/or Portugal to most Southern African countries over the past five or six hundred years. As a result, **common law is mainly based on old Roman, Dutch and British laws** and reflects the moral values and codes of those northern countries. Common law applies both to crimes and to the procedures that are followed in courts. These laws are mostly not written down in the form of legislation, instead they are carried over time through decisions made in the courts.

In modern times, many countries are **'codifying' or making legislation through legislatures to cover common law issues.** The processes to develop new versions of the law can be used to 'update' the patriarchal, colonial, racist standards and values that have been imported. They are a valuable **opportunity for progressive, feminist activism to influence the rules of society** at this level. For example, in South Africa, the Sexual Offences laws that were passed in 2007 writes new laws about what rape is legally considered to be, and about how rape cases should be dealt with by courts.

Common law is also developed by decisions that are made by courts as **new issues (influenced by changes in modern society)** and as new knowledge and new ways of understanding issues develop. In these cases, **the courts may interpret the laws that are already written in a different way.** These court decisions are called **precedents** and these precedents should be followed by other courts. There are some rules about which level of courts can set precedents. Sometimes the courts, especially higher courts and Constitutional Courts, make a decision (or ruling) that the current law is a problem and then they require that the legislatures/parliaments must fix those laws.

Activists may choose to take **'test cases'** to courts, this is where a common law or statutory laws are challenged. **The courts may set new rules (*a precedent*) about how the law should be understood and interpreted going forward.** This kind of activism needs resources and links between frontline activists and legal activists. At the same time, this tool can be used by structures that are working to increase the power of capitalism, racism, patriarchy, religion. These structures frequently have greater access to the resources needed to enable often expensive legal processes.

Customary law

Custom and customary law were practiced in the region long before colonial rule and Roman-Dutch, British, Portuguese or French legal systems were imposed, formalised, and came to dominate. Many of our **Constitutions refer to and recognise the status of customary law.** But that does not mean that they are always treated with equal value in practice. There are deep debates about if and how customary law is valued with the same level of power as formal legal systems. The fact that the systems and resources for implementing more formalised legal rules are embedded in and linked to economy and the dominant forms of democracy means that frequently customary systems take a back seat.

Section 27's _Introduction to the Legal System_ defines that "_Customary law is written and unwritten law which develops from the customs of a community. When the customs of a community become fixed practices (customs) which people use and believe in, these customs become a form of customary law._" They explain that a custom becomes customary law when the custom is 'Generally known" and "followed by everyone in the community", and when that custom is enforced in some way in that community. The manual points out that it is not easy to find customary law, or to use it in more formalised legal systems, even though constitutions allow for this because customary law is not written down. They also note that where it is written down, very often it is not a good reflection of how it is practised in communities.

The values held in customary systems may shift to positively reflect changing social norms, **many values that were historically held have been deeply affected by religious missionaries, colonialism, and patriarchy.** Scholars often use the phrase 'living customary law' to describe the fact that there are changes to the values and systems in communities and that these are reflected in the customs and rules that are applied over time.

International human rights law

The African Union and the United Nations are systems of governments coming together to set up global, and regional standards for human rights. These standards are for the most part 'aspirational' or wishful and they are difficult to enforce. They are contained in documents with a range of names including: Treaties, Conventions, Charters, Protocols, Platforms for Action and so on. These international structures also set up committees and systems to support that the charters and conventions are implemented by countries that are formal members of that international system and that have signed on to implement the different commitments.

These human rights treaties cover issues such as 'civil and political' rights (political participation, access to justice, prisoner's rights, freedom of movement) and socio-economic rights (education, healthcare, sanitation, etc), there are also specific documents that deal with womxn's rights and gender justice, children's rights, the rights of persons with disabilities amongst others.

Many **countries include in their national constitutions that international law will apply in the country.** Even though there are hardly any significant consequences (from the perspective of the public) to governments for not following international law if they don't want to. These tools and the committees that monitor their implementation are a valuable place for us to use to promote more progressive feminist values about gendered justice, and human rights that could begin to tackle structural violence.

International commercial and trade law

With the globalisation of economies, has come sets of rules and laws, and structures to enforce them. International *commercial* law includes conventions, treaties, legislation and customary business practices that have an effect on private-sector business transactions that take place across countries. They are meant to create the conditions and rules for cooperation between different countries that deal with economic policy. This ranges from granting licenses to trade and setting up businesses, rules for imports and exports, intellectual property, tariff and price ranges, taxes and tax breaks, complying with regulations and rules, and managing disputes on these issues across different countries.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is an international structure that is intergovernmental (made up of many different governments) and plays a major role in regulating international trade. The WTO trade agreements are meant to be negotiated and signed by 'a large majority' of the world's countries or trading economies (like the European Union), and they should be ratified by the parliaments in those countries. This means that they use the language of democratic input in how these 'agreements' or rules are developed.

The WTO is meant to ensure that there is cooperation with the United Nations System - suggesting that the rules for international trade should align with human rights law value systems. But the driving value system for international business trade is mostly one of 'free market' or 'free trade' within structures for neo-liberal capitalism. For example, the WTO website talks about facilitating negotiations among members for 'lowering trade barriers'. This often means lowering the rules about wealthy business entities paying taxes, or **lowering labour regulations at the expense of the wellbeing of working-class people, including those in the informal sector.** In this way, the trade agreements

are often in conflict with the aims of achieving international human rights law goals.

Because of globalisation, different countries' markets are interconnected. The countries that have gained their wealth and power off the back of colonial rule and slavery–and that have continued to reap the benefits of the systems that were established under those–still dominate in setting and enforcing the rules of engagement on these issues. **Low and middle-income countries' economies are significantly affected by these decisions which have an impact on employment rates and conditions, wellbeing, people's income levels and income inequality, and wealth.** The international legal framework is supposed to provide protection against the exploitation and oppression of low- and middle-income countries by the wealthier ones.

These **'agreements' are not as democratically developed as they should be,** for the most part there is little or **no transparency**, so members of the public do not know what the agreements are that affect business transactions, or the terms and conditions of those transactions, in our countries. Ministers of finance, or other government leaders make the decisions and if they do go through legislatures, it is with very little information, or attention paid to them by public representatives or the public directly.

In this arena of law, there is much work that can be done to intersect in structural violence. Firstly to build consciousness of what these rules, structures and agreements are; secondly to increase transparency of the processes; and thirdly to increase the democratic decision making (people influenced) on these issues.

Resources

- *Constitutions* of the Republic of Malawi, eSwatini, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, South Africa
- *CEDAW* Malawi Report
- JASS '*Feminist Contextual Socioeconomic and Political Analysis for Malawi*' 2018
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' *Rights on the rights of Women in Africa*
- Section27's *Introduction to the Legal System*
- Section 27 *Manual on HIV/AIDS and the law*

OUR DEMOCRACIES: SYSTEMS FOR STATE POWER, STATE VIOLENCE

'Democracy' is first and foremost about people governing. While most countries across the world have committed to forms of democracy, most have political systems where power is concentrated in a small group of people with a single leader. In this globalised world that is deeply driven by capitalism the political systems create conditions for domination, power over, greed, corruption and repression.

The fight for feminist versions of democracy and womxn's equality cannot be achieved **without womxn's equal participation and leadership** in public and political life. Yet, womxn, who also carry the main responsibilities for implementing essential services and care work (paid and unpaid), remain excluded and underrepresented in the processes and structures for political decision-making. This **discrimination of womxn's socio-political exclusion is based on patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny working together to maintain men's power over womxn in our society**. This is another way that structural violence takes place against womxn, and it has deep effects on the dignity and quality of womxn's lives and our societies.

Southern African democracies are influenced by deeply rooted colonial legacies that established unequal societies. In Southern Africa and across the world **democratic systems remain deeply patriarchal and sexist**. Although womxn and men fought side by side for **liberation from colonialism**, womxn are faced with a post-colonial oppressor in African countries largely run by liberation movements. 'The socially constructed inequalities between men and women that took root during colonialism worsened during the liberation struggles across Africa, despite women's participation in those struggles.' (Furaha Joy Sekai Saungweme).

JASS Feminist Movement Builders' Dictionary

Post-colonialism: *In a narrow sense, post-colonial thought analyses the relationships and power dynamics between and among former colonies and their rulers. Post-colonial feminists analyse women's inequality in the public, private and intimate spheres within the context of colonial dominance and*

FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDER'S DICTIONARY

oppression. Post-colonial feminist analysis rejects the narrowly conceived "Western" categories of analysis as the reference point for all notions of ration and logic. It is important to note that the term does not imply that colonialism, as a system of political and territorial domination and as an internalised system of social control, is over. The ideological tools of colonialism, such as racism, religious intolerance, control over women's reproductive capacity, slavery, sexism and militarism, continue to be hard-wired into modern societies and cultures.

Constitutional democracy

The current systems for democracy and government in the region are guided by each country's **Constitution**. All express the same basic value system: that **the people of the country should govern** the county. The democracies are different in how much weight is placed on the will of the people and the role of people in decision-making in comparison to the will and role of political parties or Kings. People with citizenship of a country **elect the people (and political parties) that they want to have to represent their interests in decision-making** (these are elected representatives). Most of our democracies formally **include traditional leadership** in the decision-making and functioning of that democracy. Queens, kings, chiefs, head womxn and headmen, and councils have roles that are confirmed through the constitutions, to perform governing functions. For example, in Lesotho, the King and chiefs make up the Senate, and elected representatives are in the Parliament. In South Africa, the national and provincial houses of traditional leadership, as well as local Chiefs and traditional councils, have a role alongside the government at different levels. Traditional leaders and structures are often closely entwined with political parties as well as with government. At the same time, we notice that there may also be **tensions relating to the power of the elected government and the powers of traditional leadership**.

Elections should not be seen as the be all and end all of opportunities to engage with democratic processes. Movements may choose to use elections as an opportunity to organise, or could choose to view them as not worthwhile to bring about any meaningful changes. Elections are seldom enough to transform power because they are but one part of a broader democratic system. One issue is that there are limited options of political parties to vote for; frequently the political parties that may share a feminist, intersectional, and social justice agenda are very small, and even if they do get enough votes to go to the legislature, they don't hold much power there. **Monitoring political parties**, knowing the policies of different parties, forming political parties, and calling for accountability among political parties is critical in our democracies.

> *i* The specifics of how each democracy is organised and **where constitutions officially assign power is different in each country.** Knowing that each Constitution contains is a vital first step for organising against the impacts of structural violence.

Most of our constitutions also include provisions for the public or citizens to be **involved directly in decision-making** in between elections. This direct involvement (public

participation) may be through engaging in the work of legislatures, parliaments and senates to make laws and hold government departments to account; and/or through interacting with government departments and agencies from local level, and up to national level on decisions about priorities and service delivery.

Official structures in most of our democracies include **three 'branches'** 1) the legislatures/parliaments/senates that should set the rules and priorities by creating law and overseeing government, 2) the Executive (president, ministers, government departments) who should implement the direction that is given to them by elected representatives in legislatures and 3) the courts that must ensure that the legislatures and the executive undertake their duties in line with the Constitution of that country. These are meant to have separate powers and the legislatures and courts in particular should be independent from executive interference.

The 'public' representatives who are in legislatures are mostly people who actually **represent political parties**, and powerful or ruling political parties have a big say in who the leaders of government departments will be. For that reason, when developing our analysis and strategy, it is important to think clearly about **political parties as a fourth layer** of our democratic governments. Understanding the official role of the branches of government in each country, as well as working to understand how power actually sits in relation to them, and in relation to political parties is extremely important.

Other important aspects to look at are how the laws of each country allow for power to or limit the **power of civil society organisations, the media/press, and also the military**.

In our democracies, political parties, different levels of government, traditional leadership structures, different government departments, the courts, and different civic action groups, religious institutions, and the media, are all acting on this landscape. Our analysis and strategy to challenge structural violence, needs to consider the relative power of each of these.

A critical point to think about in our organising work, is that **democratic systems are political**, first and foremost about gaining power to make decisions. This power is gained through relationships between different groups. That **power can be and is constantly shifting** or being tightly held. Political systems for democratic government are designed with an understanding that there is a difference in ideas, values and motivation among people in our society (plurality), and that **political systems are intended to be sites of contestation** (places for disagreement and change).

Thinking about the fact that democracy is acted out through the relationships between different groups, structures and entities in society, and these **relationships do and can change, is valuable**. As much as shifts in powerful relationships may be dangerous to

people's wellbeing, may increase exclusion and oppression of some groups, as those who seek to hold on to power resist the change; these **changes in relationships of power can also be a force for creating politics that are influenced and driven by feminist social justice.** In our organising and activism, we need to make sense of the complex landscape of different interest groups and power structures that operate in our democracy (stakeholder and power analysis and mapping).

It is extremely important to do the work to understand what the constitutions of our countries say about the **duty on the government to be open and transparent** and provide information to the public. International standards for human rights, and many of our constitutions place very high value on the issue of transparency. **All public decisions should be taken in the public eye.** In addition, the public should have access to all of the necessary **information** that is relevant to the decisions that are being taken.

This knowledge helps with our strategies for activism. Whether that is to call for changes to the constitutional framework so that there is more scope for public engagement, or if it is to use the fact that the constitution requires these standards to make claims for them to be realised.

It is clear that across the world **democracies are failing**. At the first layer, failing to serve the interests of the majority of people, and at the second layer to achieve intersectional feminist social justice. Some constitutions and democratic systems are stronger than others on enabling spaces for activism. Many claim to be democracies, with government led by the people, but despite these constitutional provisions and claims, the small print, or the bold practice, contradicts these bigger claims.

Democratic space for civil society, feminist movements, and organising

Strong democracies should include space for **strong civil society (or *publics*)**. NGOs, community-based structures, media, labour movements, religious institutions and others, are different role-players among *Civil Society*. These are not all the same, again we see *plurality* here, different structures are driven by different value systems, ideologies and goals. Some structures have more power and access to decision-making tables than others do. NGOs, social movements, labour unions, or community-based organisations' work mostly fits into two categories, even though the line between those categories is not very clear. The first is linked to social development and providing services to communities. The second role is to **contribute to political accountability** for social justice, increasing transparency and holding the government to account.

Activism and **civic action have the power to challenge the exercise of state power** and state brutality. Where a government is corrupt or not committed to a social justice

agenda it is often not in the interest of the government, or for that matter of the business sector, to have a strong and empowered civil society sector. This is where we see *backlash* against front line activists and movements who are seen to be 'dangerous' to the state or others in a position of power. With this those with power, use the resources and tools under their control to oppress and persecute those who are challenging their authority. This persecution is often justified by using the language of human rights, morality, or community cohesion, an example of those with power invoking 'invisible' power to enable the violations.

Movement building and action that is **aimed at challenging the causes of structural violence at the roots of its power, while the governing structures are determined to hold on to their power can be dangerous**.

The **democratic and legal space for civil society organisations is very different in our different countries**. We are increasingly seeing the development of repressive laws that are designed to significantly limit what civil society organisations can do (examples include Ethiopia, Malawi, and Zimbabwe). In other cases, even though the laws still allow for a relatively wide range of actions among civil society; governments, political parties or other powerful actors may still use violence and other measures to intimidate or oppress actors in civil society who are considered powerful (for example in South Africa against activists from the *Abahlali baseMjondolo* shack dwellers movement).

In addition, governments may invest in *militarisation*. In a number of countries, the military and/or policing forces are used to clamp down on activities that are labelled as 'anti-government', this often severely limiting the space for public action. Generally the military are part of the Executive branch of governments and should ultimately be subservient to the people-driven legislatures. But as we see, regardless of the constitutional framing the military can be used to overthrow democratically elected governments. Some governments may choose to invest public funds and resources into strengthening the military to increase the power of the state in relation to other countries; but for many that choose this route, the **military is used to increase the power of political forces or ruling parties** within a country. The eSwatini Constitution actually recognizes the value of having the military at your command, and even though it declares that the government system is democratic and participatory (section 79), at the same time, it specifically assigns the King as the commander in chief of the defense force, police services, and correctional services (Subsection 4(3)).

The consequences of many of our states shutting down the democratic space for critical civil society, or critical opposition politics are severe, including persecution, imprisonment, and assassination of activists.

In countries where the state increasingly shuts down space for civil society, for activism, for free speech, (either due to reinterpreting their constitution, or because the constitution is conservative in the first place) it raises serious questions of how we can act to challenge the forces behind structural violence in dangerous contexts. **Sometimes action is not safe, not possible.** Here is a critical role for **activist networks of support across our country's borders** in the region, and broader international networks of feminist support.

Resources

- The Constitutions of all the countries in the region can be searched using the internet. *The Constitute Project* website is particularly thorough and regularly updated.

- Furaha Joy Sekai Saungweme, *A critique of Africa's Post-Colonial Freedoms through a feminist lens:* challenging patriarchy and assessing the gains. Heinrich Boll Stiftung. 2021

PART 3: OUR FEMINIST STRATEGIES FOR ACTION: WHAT DO WE KNOW, WHAT DO WE DO?

In this part, we turn to look at some of 'what we know' and 'what we do'. We draw on feminist theory and on practice, using examples of the strategies and methods that have and are being used by feminist movements and womxn's rights groups in the region and globally to challenge structural violence and inequality.

Structural violence is caused by a set of systems that are deep and big. It is based on centuries of practices, and ideologies have been operating to support the conditions that enable it. These are really difficult to dismantle. To do so needs strong solidarity and connectedness, it cannot be 'fixed' by dealing only with single issues, in small groups.

For a start we need to **do the work of making structural violence visible**, naming it, and seeing the forces and power systems that enable it. We need to do the work to understand how these systems function both in terms of the pervasive 'invisible power' level and in the lived experiences of womxn, and other people who are marginalised and excluded as a consequence. **Because structural violence is made possible by so many factors that have been 'normalised' the more we identify them, the more possible we make it that those systems will be challenged.**

Generally, activists and organisations take action on **specific issues** such as working to ensure girls' access to sanitary products at school; or supporting womxn who experience domestic violence to access shelters; or to get a mining company or farmer to install a wellpoint in a community. This is driven by the many immediate problems of life, survival, and wellbeing that must be addressed. To bring change, it is important for us to **focus on clear and achievable goals**. In addition, to take on work to fix the system from the root causes of the problems, without also having more achievable goals, can become exhausting and disillusioning.

> " JASS focuses our movement building work on a participatory investigation of structural violence to enable women to collectively analyse the causes of inequality and violence in their lives and collectively develop strategies to dismantle them." **– Raising Voices**

While we continue to focus on specific issues, we should also invest in work to dismantle structural violence more broadly.

Firstly, through <u>analysis work to make sense</u> **of the underlying economic, political and social forces behind** the specific situation that we are working on. A benefit to thinking about our work on single issues within this bigger picture frame of the systemic drivers of structural violence is that **we start to notice that very similar systems and power structures are at work to create those various conditions.** For example, capitalist driven farming systems affecting the housing, or access to education of people working and living on farms. This broader understanding makes it possible for us to start with including messaging about the structural underpinnings of the situation into our communications and activism on the single issue. At the next level, building this background picture creates ground for us to collaborate with others across issues, and to tackle some of these underlying structural drivers, without also losing focus on our specific objectives.

In the face of the daily struggles to provide services, support, or care through our movements and organisations on those specific goals, it is sometimes not possible to find the time to invest in stepping back and reflecting with other feminist activists. It's worthwhile considering this when planning our projects – **can we build the time and costs into our plans – firstly, for the internal reflections within our movements and organisations, and then for coming together across movements and organisations to do the joined-up analysis and strategising.**

Following the work of building our understanding, we need to **keep *linking our actions and building solidarities*, across issues, across organisations, and across movements.** For a few strong reasons, discussed in the sections below, that this is easier said than done. However, considering the large numbers of people in our society who are not critical of the way society is structured, and thinking about the relatively fewer numbers of people who are critically engaged in social change and transforming power, it makes sense that we should work to multiply our impacts, to **build a 'critical mass' of people in our society** who are acting in joined up ways towards the same bigger picture goals.

To do *co-creation* of the analysis of systems, and to do the *linking up* of our actions, means that **we must do the work amongst ourselves.** To think about and address the way that we use power and interact with our power and privilege, and see the ways that may be part of building or preventing co-creation and collaboration.

Even though there are overlaps in the ideas, this part is split into two main sections, the first considers what we do in relation to external systems of power to address structural violence, and the second looks inward at how we, as feminist activists, work together to achieve this.

JASS has, over the years, invested deeply in movement-building, supporting co-creation, idea-sharing, support systems, and strategies that link feminist activists up.

JASS We Rise Toolkit

"We Rise weaves together stories, tools and ideas from the experiences and insights of women at the forefront of change to provide in-depth learning about movement building. Explore the site: you can see and collect popular education tools in your own personal toolbox, click through a real movement building journey full of strategic insights, and you can learn more about cycles and different aspects of movement building. Find out how We Rise can support you in building your movement."
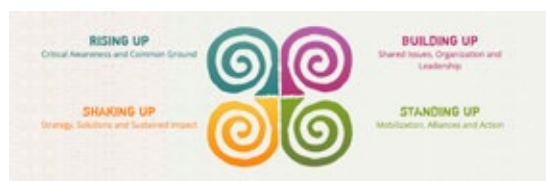
JASS Resources

- JASS *Big Ideas*
- A *New Weave of Power, People & Politics*: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation (2007)

WHAT WE DO TO TRANSFORM POWER, SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

This section looks at the work we (can) do as feminist activists and in movements to transform power and intervene in structural violence. Much of what we cover is well known, and we recognise with respect, the deep work that has been done by many to develop and build these understandings of what we do. We pick up on the issues of working among movements and civil society structures to do the work of political education and conscientising that engages us on understanding power.

TALKING ABOUT POWER: FEMINIST POPULAR EDUCATION AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

> " JASS' approach to feminist movement building has _feminist popular education (FPE)_ as the foundation for critical consciousness, feminist movement leadership, power analysis, alliance building and strategy development. **– We draw on the thinking of Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, Malena de Montis, Mariela Arce de Leis, Marcos Arruda, Ella Baker, and others.**

We need to talk about power!

Understanding the way that power works, and recognising that the use of **some forms of power dominate (or create hegemony)** in our society, is at the heart of how we understand the causes of structural violence. What is needed in our organising and mobilising, is to lift and make visible the dominant but invisible belief systems and ideologies, like patriarchy or capitalism, that are in operation. Because they have been so normalised for us – we generally just accept that's how it is, and we often don't question them. Power is always an issue, and the questions that we, activists, are faced with are: what do we need to do, and create, to start to shift power? How can we reimagine the society we live in, and be part of creating a new, strong system based on the values of feminism and social justice that dominate and are institutionalised across society. (Laclau E and Mouffe C. 2000).

To create the conditions where the institutions and structures in our society speak to the lives, and serve the interests of the majority of people, particularly those who face exclusions from social, economic and political participation, we need to understand the dominant systems of power. Both in terms of recognising that they have become part of the fabric of institutions, and understanding how these systems are maintained. That will enable our work to shift them. To bring this level of transformation in our society, we need to make sense of, and try to dismantle structural oppression from an intersectional feminist framework. To ask, how do patriarchal, sexist, economic, racist, agist or ableist norms operate in institutions and systems to reinforce power. (Smith AM. 1998 p22).

'Political discourse' – or having political conversations – is important to our processes of trying to understand and make sense of these complicated and often difficult to see ideas that have such real and daily impact on our lives. **By _talking_, we are able to**

identify the ways that the hegemonies and abuses of power are affecting our lives. Through this, not only are we able to see it in action more clearly, very importantly, it increases our ability to push back against the oppressive values, people, and systems.

Politicised **conversations** among activists about structural violence and the systems of power that cause it, help us to do the reimagining, to see that it is possible to change. They can remind us that collective struggle can dismantle these oppressive structures and **rebuild new feminist versions.** (Smith AM 1998). In addition to these conversations naming the ways that we experience oppression, and are violated, it is important that they **focus on our intention to build strategies, to interrupt the current systems of power, and bring change**. (Bell Hooks. 2000) In this way we recognise the need to take concrete action, and that we should value the time that it takes for us to talk, to debate, and to build our collective analysis. These conversations prepare the ground for us to support each other to see, and to take opportunities to act when they arise.

There is strength in sharing information and ideas about these political concepts of power and structural violence with people who may not have been thinking about these things before (*popular education*). Part of the actions we can take as activists is to **create spaces for these conversations among the people, the womxn, around us.** We may also have a role to support the creation of spaces like these for other groups of womxn. The way that these forms of oppression affect people is different depending on context, place, who the person or group identifies as, and so on. When we do, we must hold in mind that the strategies for action that movements choose can only come from the people who are of that place and that experience. **The conversations should be led by the people experiencing that specific context.** (Bell Hooks. 2000).

i The Raising Voices report emphasises this point: the study brings about significant evidence that women's movements grounded in local struggles and experience of the affected groups of women are the key to making real change.

To have the potential to bring transformation, we should **collectively invest in encouraging and creating many spaces, led and defined by different feminist activists.** The next layer of this work is for us to work to **link these conversations up. We can do this by** creating bigger rooms where womxn come together, or through using media and social media to share our experiences, thoughts and strategies. By encouraging many spaces, led by a diversity of people, asking similar questions, we also **increase the diversity of responses and ideas to challenge the way things are.** These linked up conversations build our collective consciousness about invisible power,

and the driving ideologies behind structural violence. When held with love, respect, and consciousness of our own power, we create the conditions for ourselves, through cross-movement building, to be more mindful of intersectionality and difference.

COLLECTIVE ORGANISING: MOVEMENT BUILDING AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

> " The work of organising, popular education, and movement building is critically important. It is this work that sustains the displays of public protest that visibly challenge and change the system. The slog work, which a friend jokingly calls the slug work, is about organising street-by-street, block-by-block, and neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood, paves the way for the slow growth that allows people to seize the political opportunities when they arise.' **– (JASS Director Shereen Essof, _https:// justassociates.org/blog/long-haul/)_**

JASS booklet describing the action of four movements organising for change
View the report here.

To have an effect on these deeply entrenched systems of power and the values that drive structural violence that have been built over centuries, we need to **organise, mobilise, to act collectively, and to approach it as a long game that needs sustained actions.**

Building our **solidarities in action, being and finding allies, organising and building movements, and investing in cross-movement building are vital to increase our power.** We have more chance of political influence than when we act as individuals or in smaller groups. These help to build common understanding and strategy.

Developing, building and drawing on **networks** of diversity of activists and structures sets the ground for us to increase solidarities, alliances and to build movements. The work of investing in networks is to **challenge tendencies of sticking with the people and structures that we know, the ones that are more like us, or that do not challenge us.** The more movements are grounded in the struggles of people experiencing those contexts, and led by those people, the stronger that movement. At the same time, NGOs, academics, and human rights lawyers for example, may have a valuable role to play to support.

Alliances, movements, and cross-movement organising create the conditions for a diversity of skills and capacities that support the range of actions that we need to address structural violence. It also widens our systems of support, in the extremely harsh conditions we face as we do the work, and in the face of backlash from those who hold power.

MULTIPLE APPROACHES: WORKING WITH THE SYSTEM INSIDE, WORKING FROM THE OUTSIDE

Investments in popular education, and consciousness-raising, critical discussion, and mobilisation are the basis of action to shift power. To be effective our strategies should utilise a **range of approaches** to address the different forms of power; processes should aim to engage with **visible** policy and decision-making processes through research and formal engagements with structures. They use **information and mobilisation to challenge hidden power;** and engage in **popular education, consciousness raising** and capacity-building of people **to identify and push back against and equalise underlying invisible power.** (John Gaventa. 2006)

The broad front alliances and movements that are successful in significant struggles to challenge structural violence tend to **invest in a range of activities** in addition to building their constituent support bases. These include **creating information resources**; using a range of strategies to **share information**; creating **spaces for critical conversation**; creating (*inventing*) spaces and **platforms for political engagement** between activists, movements and decision-makers (including protest action; and calling for civic meetings); and engaging directly in *advocacy* with the structures that hold power (courts, parliaments, private sector stakeholders, government departments, oversight bodies and so on).

Power is **layered in complex ways through many different institutions, structures and systems** in our societies. These operate at different levels from the local to the global. For example, to work on an issue such as access to food, we could engage with

committees in legislatures, government departments and agencies at national and sub-national levels; private sector companies and farmers, community co-operatives; we may also work with regional and international human rights or governance structures to increase the impact of our work.

Ways of thinking about our work

It can be useful as we develop strategies, to understand some of the political framing of the types of actions that we choose to take. There are many different layers, terms and words that theorists have used to make sense of the ways that democracies work and how to gain power in these systems. For the sake of this book we focus on two concepts. Theorists use language of **radical democracy, or radical approaches to activism**; and/or of **deliberative democracy or deliberative approaches to advocacy**. These ways of thinking about democracy share the approach of trying to expand the range of publics who are actively engaged in democratic struggle for social transformation, equality and justice. They try to **increase the range of *publics* that engage in setting the social and political agenda and to create conditions that serve the interests of the people** in the democracy. The theories grapple with the questions of what the best ways are to interact, to shift or even transform power towards the people. Both sets of theories agree that power is spread out across many social or political actors and institutions.

Working on the 'inside', working from the 'outside'. Other language to use for this may be to think about 'inside/outside' approaches. **'Inside' approaches include the things that we do inside the structures that currently hold power in our society,** like making submissions in law reform processes, or using the court systems to change the laws and rules for society. In these approaches we generally need to follow the rules of that place, in order to have any effect. These are often more 'deliberative'.

'Outside approaches' may be literally protesting or taking action outside of the buildings and meeting rooms of seats of power. For others, it means going outside the framework of the established rules for that society (constitutions, social norms). For example, the act of being (openly) transgendered in heteronormative societies; or engaging in battles to reclaim land, or occupy buildings for housing where laws don't allow for this.

In alliances, and across movements we often engage in complementary inside/outside strategies, with different organisations or movements taking on different roles.

Improving our impact through dialogue and deliberation

Deliberative democracy is foremost about **building consensus among diverse groups** through *deliberation*, discussion and engagement. Deliberative approaches mostly

take place in the **'invited' spaces for engagement, and 'inside' the structures** that already hold power (even when we call **leaders with power** to our spaces very often, we follow the protocols and rules that are defined by their spaces). When done well (because of considering who is in the room and that everyone can express their views and that all views are taken seriously with the possibility of influencing the outcome), **deliberation can increase understanding between people who start off with very different views and experiences.** For example, if because of deliberation a committee in the legislature, local councillor, or large business owner comes to understand the issues differently and agrees to support a community project.

Too often though, deliberative approaches don't *include critical thinking about power and hegemony* **in the practices;** and then don't challenge the ways of engagement that favour those with privilege or power speaking and having their opinions given more weight. For example, legislatures are designed for deliberation between different political parties, and in some of our democracies also between publics and elected representatives. But because there is no attention to power they mostly are very weak in the outcomes we can get from them. The reality is that those who hold power will prefer to 'sit at the table' with people who don't push the boundaries of that power too far. We also often see this is the kind of approach to social change being favoured by more formal or professionalised NGOs or academics.

Pluralism and radical approaches for transforming power

Radical approaches recognise that **we need a wide range of struggles by different actors if we want to be effective in challenging power** in all the woven spaces that it holds. The idea of *'plurality'* is strong – that we need many of us, who think, and act differently to create the big-scale changes that are needed. Radical democratic theory accepts that **there cannot be consensus between those who hold power and those who are challenging power**. Mostly **radical approaches try to think more deeply about how to disrupt hegemonic power on terms that are set by the movements and activists.**

A FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGISING

The Institute for Democracy Studies, University of Sussex, UK introduced a useful way to help our movements with our thinking about the strategies that we use. This framework talks about participating in spaces where we are **invited, claiming** spaces that already exist for us to engage with those in power (not waiting for an invitation!), and **inventing or creating our own spaces for action** to shift power. The framework considers decision-making spaces of those holding power as being either **hidden, closed, or visible**.

Engaging in invited spaces

The opportunities for 'public participation' that are provided for in our democracies to engage with legislatures or government departments on policy and resources **are invited spaces**, inside dominant power structures, engaging in decisions about visible power. The terms of the engagement, the issues under discussion, and who is at the table are decided by the people who hold the power. Generally, the **people who hold power in a space will subvert any strong challenge or opposition**, either through subtle manipulation of rules and processes or with overt bullying tactics. These spaces do have the **potential to be deliberative, but mostly, they are described as being box-ticking exercises** – they fulfil policy requirements without upsetting the balance of established political or social power.

The actual decisions are mostly taken outside of these spaces through the exercise of hidden power. For example, in many of our Parliaments, political party leadership decides outside of the committee rooms on the outcome of major laws, and if committees in the legislatures take comments from the public, it doesn't affect the decisions that are made. Or a mining company may have a community 'consultation' when the decisions were already taken in the board room. They typically favour the participation of civil society elites and exclude many from the rooms. Because of this they generally have little value in changing the conditions people face on a daily basis.

Evidence shows us that these **inside, invited approaches have value to making changes on the ground if we increase their deliberative qualities** (ensure a diversity of voices, and engage in meaningful dialogue that is mindful of power) **and when we use them as one part of broader strategies.** The issue is that overall, resources in civil society are given to work in these spaces as the main way of bringing change (doing research for advocacy in inside spaces). When we step back, it is clear that this layer of work is necessary and important, but that it should be seen for what it is: an augmentation, next steps, that follow the primary work of movements that struggle for transformative power in society. When we choose to engage in these spaces, it is important for us to do the power analysis to **understand the nature of the space, and be strategic to engage in it to serve our movement's agendas.**

Making claims on spaces – not waiting for an invitation

Another approach is to **increase claims that our movements make on open, or invited spaces** in the official systems. **Knowing what levers international law agreements, our constitutions, or our laws allow for publics to engage with decisions of both political and private sector structures allows for us to push the boundaries, to engage with these without waiting to be invited.**

In addition **expanding who is invited is a way of claiming**, many movements work to claim space for their members to be in rooms that are normally reserved for civil society elites. Another example of claiming spaces, would be to know what the requirements are on those with power (government structures, businesses) to make information public and use these to **demand that that information be made available.**

It is critical for movements and allies to **invest in building a broader base of activists** with the **knowledge** of what is possible for engagement in relation to these structures of power, and to support each other to build our **confidence** to take those opportunities. At the same time, we should do the work (often in outside spaces) to insist that those who hold power, take these voices seriously.

Another critical layer of work for movements in order for us to be able to **make claims on closed or hidden spaces,** is **firstly to make those spaces more visible.** Most major decisions are taken in closed spaces, a fundamental problem is that most invited opportunities don't allow engagement with the sites of power where decisions are actually taken. Sometimes we see investigative journalists or activists exposing situations where those with power have met to make decisions. This often involves **'social' and informal meetings between people in government, or between people in government and those in big business** (e.g. mining companies and government stakeholders). Decision-making in the private sector is largely hidden, closed and inaccessible to most of us. **Because these are the spaces where many decisions that affect our lives are taken, the work to make these more visible, and to increase knowledge about what is decided in these spaces is important.**

Strategies must **build on the political analysis of power and where decisions are made to** consider how to gain *direct or indirect* access to those spaces through mobilisation, leveraging points of contention between those closer to the decision-making power (for example within political parties, between different government departments, or between private sector entities), and trying to influencing the information that is being engaged with in broader public discourse through using social and mass media.

Creating and inventing spaces to bring change

Major transformations in our societies, that have dismantled some of the systems behind structural violence, have taken place because movements have taken action by **creating or inventing spaces for political engagement**, regardless of the buy-in of the structures with power. Most obvious and at scale are the liberation struggles that our countries have been through. Movements claim our roles in our democracies to act, to create the platforms for engagements that have the potential to challenge hegemonic power in its different dimensions. This can be done at mass scale or on more localised levels.

Our *popular education work, developing critical consciousness, and movement-building* are powerful examples of invented or created spaces for action, the methods are central to radical and 'outside' approaches.

At a larger scale, *Public protest* – marches and other often creative forms of mass demonstration – is a significant form of created and invented engagements between the publics and the state or other powerful actors, in some countries it is the dominant form of civic action. Movements have used *boycott actions* – not buying certain products or staying away from some businesses to challenge the power of private sector structures and networks. These strategies engage with power without necessarily sitting down at a table and talking. **These should in some way 'disrupt' the normal flow of government or private sector business; or they should 'disrupt' the invisible power of the hegemonic norms** – cause people to see something differently. Countries that 'allow' protest tend to put many rules and laws in place, so that it does not disrupt the normal operation of power.

i Contentious point

Movements have different views and spend much time in debate to consider questions of the 'violence' of our protest against structures that hold power. For a start, the point of the protest is to address the structural violence that we experience at the hands of the structures we protest against. Secondly laws put a lot of weight on the value of property that belongs to the wealthy which is by its existence, an act of violence against the bodies and lives of those who live in poverty. The facts of our situation, our collective trauma, and sense of helplessness often lie behind the deep anger.

We observe that when movements turn to more violent and destructive approaches, this is frequently an enacting of our justified anger, but that it may not be driven by a considered and long-term strategic approach. It can also result in strong and dangerous backlash against people who have not taken part in that protest.

This is where building our commitment to approaches of healing justice in movements (which we discuss below) has the power to hold us, so that the outward strategies we choose are consciously driven.

Many movements and organisations *create platforms and spaces for dialogue and deliberation* by inviting people who hold power in our society to attend meetings

with members of the movement, or communities. **By creating spaces like this our movements can shift the norms and terms of engagement, including deciding who is in the room, towards our own ways of working.** For example, we may not tolerate politicians arriving late, or we may give activists (not the 'dignitaries' or NGOs e.g. the platform to start and end the conversations. In these ways we increase the deliberative value of the engagement, people who hold political or social power are exposed to different publics experiences, new information, and research. These spaces, when we design them thoughtfully, have strong potential to build relationships in good faith between people in different parts of the socio-political system.

Creating space using media – being 'the media'

Making **use of media is key to creating** platforms to engage. This ranges from working with **traditional and mainstream media**, where the content is strongly controlled by private or government interests, and to the more democratised or participatory **social media** where to a great extent we are able to create the content. Our power analysis should consider the range of systems of media, and their audiences, that are acting on the context where we are acting.

We can see from research in African countries that people's political activity, and activism, is affected by our interest in and ability to follow 'current affairs' through different media and through other social interactions. (Lockwood and Krönke. 2018) **Using different forms of media can amplify the reach of our work.** It allows more voices to be raised on issues; it allows us to let those with power know that we are lifting the invisible layers and that they are being monitored; it creates space for discussions about more ideas (plurality).

Media can either be used in ways that increase divisions and competition, or in ways that build understandings and solidarities. It can be helpful to think about the media as a whole system and that there are parts that are polarised; our work is to keep **presenting our experiences and understandings, as alternatives to the mainstream messages, and to increase the balance of what is shown**.

Mainstream media in most of our countries is dominated by a small number of media companies that work together in 'oligopolies' that centralise power and decision-making into small groups of people. Different governments have different levels of control over mainstream media. **Mainstream media has been used to create sameness (*homogeny*) where everyone and everything is treated as if it is the same** and some things that are true for a small group are amplified as being normal for everyone. This presentation of homogeneity/sameness through media lies deeply in the, now globalised, machinery of invisible power by normalising some bodies, some ways of

being, and some value systems as being correct, and others as wrong or non-existent.

For the most part **engaging with mainstream media is an 'invited' space**. Sarah Chiumbu's research in South Africa shows that the media cover public protests in selective ways, emphasising the 'moments of protest' and the negative impacts on the parts of society that are targeted by the protest action, with very little attention or coverage of the structural violence that sparked the protest. Her research shows that the media often avoid asking protesters 'why' when they do interviews. In this way, mainstream media are able to *delegitimise* the actions of movements; instead framing the actions as 'conflict' and destructive, and labelling protesters as 'troublemakers'.

'Social media' has taken important space in democracies to offset the hegemonies of mainstream media. Social media platforms have become more and more central to our work in movements and offer us spaces to engage in political discourse to resist dominant ideologies.

While generally being a **less hierarchical form for political communication, social media is also layered with mechanisms and practices of exclusion, for silencing voices, or for obscuring dissenting views**. The fact that the costs of internet access exclude many people from using these platforms on equal terms as those people who can afford data means that these mechanisms are not the be all and end all for political engagement. At the same time Chiumbu's research shows that social movements active in low income and poor urban communities have been effective in using technology and social media to communicate to support action.

> ## *i* The politics and social media
>
> The expansion of social media over the past two decades has not only brought this enormous opportunity to our activism and movement-building. It is also bringing layers and layers of discussion to our movements, on how to optimise our use of this space. These were initially seen as being stronger democratic systems of communicating ideas and information. As the systems for social media have unfolded, it has increasingly shown the dominance of massive non-democratic privately owned structures that make decisions without the democratic processes that governments are subjected to (at least on paper).

What our approaches mean to us

Different people and organisations often have very **strong feelings about the approaches** that we take. For activists in movements, this **question of approaches is not about academic debate, it is about life, safety, and survival**. On the one hand the absolute imperative to change the conditions of inequality and violation that cause hunger, fear, pain, illness, and loss of life for some on a daily basis; and on the other, the need to stay safe against the violent and violating consequences that sometimes follow struggles that expose and challenge hidden or invisible power. Many activists amongst us, living in the face of violation and injustice point out that they do not have the luxury not to struggle for transformation and justice.

While there is tension in the value systems that lie behind these approaches, a *pluralist* way of thinking can see the value that the different ways of doing things brings. We can also notice that sometimes, **the different approaches can be complementary**.

At the same time we can recognise that **the moments of big change in our societies, where the first decisions are taken, are moments that follow more *radical* action**. These are often followed by a time where the approaches shift towards more deliberative and inside strategies to make changes at a visible power level – especially to laws. We've experienced great frustration that in many of our countries, these hard fought for paper changes have not had the impact on people's lives that they promised to have.

We have learnt that we cannot stop organising and mobilising at this stage of the process, the work of movements outside must continue through and beyond any formal deliberative processes that are happening on the inside. Examples of successful struggles for transformation show us the power of joining up and strategising for both inside and outside approaches, that some of us must hold the radical position and others should take a more deliberative approach.

Where inside, deliberative approaches become extremely problematic is when there is an **unconscious disconnect from the layers of politics of power** in the processes. Feminist activists express a sense of betrayal by, and anger at, organisations and activists who have some (often middle class) buffer from the hard onslaught of inequality; who without taking direction from people living and working in any context, invest resources into strategies that are not considered powerful enough to have the impact that's needed on the ground. Structures, such as national or international NGOs, donors, and academic institutions that have more resources, that choose to invest in work at the 'inside' level have a **responsibility to be transparent** about their strategic decision-making, **to challenge (or be challenged on) the assumptions about how they utilise the resources**, and to take direction in their work from the people affected in whose name they are doing the work.

RESISTANCE, BACKLASH AND RISKS

Structural violence is rooted in power dynamics, and the inequalities and violations that structural violence produces serve the interests and power of elites, including corporate and political stakeholders. Those who hold power are motivated to maintain that power. As a result, movement building, activism, and action **aimed at challenging the causes of structural violence at the roots of its power carries risks**. Actions to shift power, by their very nature, create tension and discomfort; we can expect that when we are being effective in our actions to redistribute resources towards those people who hold less power, that will be met by resistance and opposition. The institutions and structures that enable structural violence adapt and change to hold on to power. In this way our activism unleashes power or backlash.

'JASS recognizes that 'political violence, the threat of violence, and the *fear* these create, are essential features, not aberrations, of the overarching systems of power, and need to be disrupted and factored into our strategies and ways of organizing.'* (JASS. July 2022)

For many the choices are between the deep threat to wellbeing of *normalised* daily hunger, indignity, interpersonal physical violence, and health or facing persecution and physical violence from the state. For example, the struggle for 'access to healthcare' is very strongly about having access to life. **Working at the level of the causes of structural violence to dismantle the power structures and interests that lie behind it through our work in movements needs us to take care.** While we may undertake the actions to have a wellpoint installed in a community, or we may offer counselling services to survivors of GBV, with some relative safety; when we move our action to the causes of those injustices and start to challenge the people and structures of power that lie behind the injustice (the farmer who will not allow access to water, or the politician who rapes a woman), they are motivated to hit back. The fact of their power makes this dangerous in many contexts. For example, the group who move their action to lobby against or resist mining companies for controlling access to land, instead of lobbying those companies to provide (once off) social services. **State actors, businesses, or corrupt community leaders may act against activists who speak out against their power.** This may include violence or threats of violence against activists and their families, property or livelihoods. These threats are intended to prevent people from engaging in activism. (UNSHRHR on extreme poverty. 2013)

Because of these risks, our movements have found that we must constantly hold in consideration the consequences to people's lives, wellbeing and livelihoods.

Resources

- JASS: *Solidarity, Safety and Power*. Young women organizing in Indonesia

- Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on the Right to Participation of People Living in Poverty.

HOW WE ARE/DO: FEMINIST ORGANISING (BEING 'RADICAL' WITHIN)

As much as we need to map, understand, and challenge power, inequality, and violence 'outside' in the structures of our society, the work must also happen within. This section raises issues linked to the idea that *'the personal is political'* – as individuals and between individuals, and also between the different formations, structures and organisations that work together in movements, networks and coalitions. The way we think about ourselves and interact with each other is political. At the same time the conditions we live in, and the work that we do in our movements affects us as individuals and collectives. The tiredness, exhaustions, elations, sense of power, and experiences

of being powerless that happen through our struggles, impacts on our wellbeing and our relationships.

This section works on the idea that strong democracies that can deliver on social justice and transformation **need strong, independent *publics* – including organised groups in civil society** such as NGOs, community-based structures, social movements, and labour movements. These need to be able to act together or separately to influence and hold accountable the structures with power – including state actors, private sector entities, and other leadership structures – as we work towards transforming the systems that underpin structural violence.

The work to challenge structural violence needs us to embrace the work of **opening our spaces, making room for others**, and setting the ground for *'new voices, new communities, and new identities'* to join our movements. (Sarah Chiumbu. 2015). For these reasons, at the heart, structural violence needs us to build quality relationships with each other and our ways of being alongside each other. The work of building, and of connecting movements and alliances includes a critical awareness and practices that allow us to transform our power, hegemony and inequalities within our movements.

> " The enemy within must be transformed before we can confront the enemy outside." The threat, the enemy, is sexist thought and behaviour. As long as females take up the banner of feminist politics without addressing and transforming their own sexism, ultimately the movement will be undermined. P12 **– Bell Hooks 2000**

INTERSECTIONALITY AND PLURALITY – CONSENSUS AND SOLIDARITY

Embracing and working with plurality

With the strengths of our embracing intersectionality comes *plurality*. Plurality suggests that there are differences in our experiences, in our values and what we care about, and in our ideas and approaches. It is inevitable that there will be these differences and also divisions within society broadly, and of course, also in our movements. The issues of our differences underlie our understanding of the exercise of hegemony and oppression; they also are the basis of dissent, contestation, and tensions between us. This contestation has the power to challenge and expand our thinking and our actions and is not a bad thing. When we are mindful of our own practice of power, the

differences between us should be valued as good. **Embracing our plurality allows for more diversity, activism, innovation and dissent**, and on the whole, it allows us to deepen and broaden movement towards equality and freedom. (Adam Smith in Laclau and Mouffe. 1998. p32)

Radical theorists argue that we should **be suspicious of attempts to *normalise* and dominate with any one idea, practice or approach** – this applies both when looking at the positions of governments, economic institutions, religious, cultural and other social institutions, and also when looking within our movements and other civil society structures.

This is not at the expense of the fact that **we do need to build agreement and consensus** on our understanding of problems and on the work that we do in our organisations and movements. The heart of this is that in our movements and over time there should also be **space for alternative and even dissenting ideas**. It is that we develop strategy, we can do this while honouring the different identities of the activists and structures that form part of the movement. **Our work is to develop consensus, not to force it**; to challenge our capacity not only to disagree but also to be disagreed with in ways that do not destabilise groups. **Celebration of plurality is not the same as accepting hegemonic values and practices within or between our movements.**

As we engage towards consensus, we can **hold the question of if we are, in the process, also oppressing differences** of opinions, races, ethnicities, classes, genders, sexualities, physical capacities, expertise, mental healths, or languages. Or if we are **allowing for the pluralistic expressions of these differences and engaging in, and holding, the discomforts** this may bring to us. This still recognises the need for fundamental alignment of ideas and actions, especially within organisations and movements. Where there is absolute disagreement, it is appropriate that individuals or structures may need to walk away from that movement and continue the work in other spaces.

In our cross-movement work especially, the unspoken assumptions of common goals can undermine our practising solidarities. But by **acknowledging that the exercise of hegemony will arise in our interactions between movements, and that full agreement is not necessary in order to work towards a shared cause we can create unities and solidarity without losing the identity and autonomy of different movements.** We can ensure that to act in solidarity does not also require that the agenda of one progressive struggle be imposed upon others - it enables us to work against tokenism, co-opting and assimilation in our cross-movement work.

Increasing intersectionality and inclusion in movements

As we know, our organisations and our movements exist within, and may often replicate the norms of our deeply unequal society, where many (groups of) people are excluded, marginalised, or oppressed linked to their identities. To **expand our movements and open our spaces, feminist movements do conscious work to increase inclusions, and be engaged with intersectionalities** among members, at the same time that we challenge power and privilege within.

This means responding to the range of social inequalities and exclusions and engaging with each other's political, economic, social and historical contexts and identities. To do this goes beyond thinking about and honouring intersectionality. It needs us to plan, dedicate resources to, and take practical action to be inclusive. How we invite people, when we meet, where we meet, how people get to the place, how we communicate, and how information is presented, the length of time for inputs, and many other factors can affect inclusion or exclusion.

Big Ideas

Big Ideas, talking about intersectionalities as consciousness not box checking.

Zukiswa White - A tool but not a vision

Because of the depth of our life experiences of exclusion and discrimination, and the reality that this plays out in our movements in a way that may diminish the value that is placed on some of our experiences; it is still necessary and often correct for us to **create closed spaces for groups amongst us that we choose to define along the lines of our identities**. For example trans womxn, or womxn in informal employment, or womxn with some disabilities amongst us may choose to create these supportive closed spaces. These spaces within our movements work to **strengthen the voices of those amongst us who hold trauma and distress because of our shared experiences**, and to embolden us to address similar experiences of exclusion and discrimination in our movements.

Challenging elitism, power and hegemonies in movements

The layers of power that play out in hegemonies within and between our movements are as varied as those in society. This includes the continued dominance and

unconsciousness of privileges of whiteness and of the norms of developed countries. It includes our assumptions of *ableism* in terms of a wide range of physical, mental and intellectual barriers to participation and disability.

The way that we use language is a form of power and the ways that people use language with each other is an expression of the power relationships. This includes any expectations of equal communication using a dominant language such as English; the technical words we use that are loaded with meaning, but not described; and the style of our 'discourse' – the way that we express ideas impact on inclusion.

We continue our work to question the values that are placed on different knowledges and 'expertise', bringing consciousness to and challenging norms of whose knowledge is valued and legitimised, in which spaces. In our engagements within and among our movements, and in those with structures outside our movements, we must continue to work to ensure that the expertise of activists who live the experiences of injustice lead our conversations and strategising. To caution ourselves against starting conversations with the so-called 'educated' voices.

There are critical dynamics in the relationships between better-resourced and *professionalised* NGOs and community-based and activist-led structures. As much as there has been consciousness about these dynamics for decades, we continue to witness this NGO and academic elitism that can make unapologetic claims on resources, and on spaces and forms of engagement. These dynamics are exacerbated by the fact that to do the work needs resources. Requirements and systems for accountability on and management of donor funds, favour NGOs and structures that have the capacities to access and report on these funds. The T&Cs that apply to many sources of this funding create pressure for movements to formalise and professionalise, which in turn undermines organic and dynamic ways of working that are essential. The divisions that are linked to limited access to resources, also operate between local-level structures and within movements.

These questions of the impacts of unequal access to resources and funding need our time attention. We need more conversations that focus on donor's, NGO's, and academic institution's transparency and accountability. Strategies to collectively challenge the donor community on the norms of practice that they create. Conversations to expand our thinking in feminist ways about where and how we source, share, and distribute resources and funding to do our work.

We can serve our organisations and movements by building in systems to be conscious about our decision-making, leadership and leadership structures. Sarah Chiumbu's research shows us that even when we work in formations that aspire to have *flat*

structures and be non-hierarchical, there are concentrations of power that will emerge. The fact that there are these concentrations of power are not problematic on their own, the issue is if these are hidden. Similarly in movements that choose to include decision-making hierarchies we have work to do to ensure that background systems of power aren't hidden. These systems of power are also noticeable in Black-led movements, as they play out along the lines of age, class, ethnicity, gender and religion. To hold an understanding that **all leaderships, even those that are feminist and progressive, carry a risk of becoming resistant to opposition or challenge to power** internally helps us to manage these tensions more constructively.

Creating and being safe(r) spaces – Towards healing justice

This work of organizing and mobilising to challenge power in the ways that we do creates additional unsafety to activists due to resistance and backlash from those whose power we are seeking to redistribute. In addition, as we expand and build our movements we increasingly stretch the boundaries of established, and more safe relationships and that increase of diversity within may increase our experiences of unsafety.

So, while it is important that we recognise and challenge our practices of exclusion or discrimination within movements. **We must centre ourselves on doing this in ways that are as safe as possible, and that promote our wellness and healing.** We should consider both, **how to keep ourselves safe and how we are, ourselves, safe towards others**. JASS holds the practice of safe spaces at the heart of our work, one of the core principles of JASS's work is that *Safe spaces are political spaces*.

> JASS' *website* explains: "Safe spaces are **carefully constructed** in a way that allows each woman to be **fully present**; this is essential for the deep reflections and dialogues that not only foster **meaningful connection and understanding, but also deepened political trust** – the foundation of collaboration and mutual support. It is from here that women can identify common problems, find solutions, navigate conflict, and make decisions together. **Over time, these spaces evolve into cross-issue solidarity and mutual protection networks, offering a sense of belonging and support** in challenging contexts."

As the quote demonstrates, it takes our thoughtfulness to consider what it means when we say we are creating safe spaces and practices. The work of our movements is to face and try to prevent deep violence on our own bodies and on our communities; our activism is affected by powerful forces outside of our movements over which we have little control; the pace of our work is often fast and we feel the great pressure to act

quickly in response to the onslaughts. We then are also trying to create intersectionality and plurality amongst ourselves as we do it. This is why it is imperative that we be deliberate to nurture generosity, kindness, and love for and amongst ourselves so that we increase the conditions of safety of ourselves and each other.

Our strategies need to stay alive to this question of what safety means to us and how we create it in all the spaces and actions of the movement. How do we encourage healthy 'self-consciousness', cultures of support where people can raise their experiences in a way that we call each other 'in' as much as we can.

Heart, Mind, Body (HMB)

'In southern Africa, given the insecurity and violence women and women activists experience on personal, professional and public levels, JASS has developed its HMB approach. HMB puts women's bodies - which hold so much knowledge and history - at the centre of the women's organising and movement building. JASS convenes wellbeing circles of diverse women activists as safe spaces for taboo breaking conversation, support, safety, solidarity and strategy.'

Practices of **healing justice** have been developing among movements. **These integrate practices of care towards each other, into the work of our struggles to transform power in society.** Practices for us to centre being present to ourselves, in community with each other, where we are located, to understand how to cope with and heal from the stress, loss, grief, and trauma that affects communities of people as a consequence of the daily attacks on people's dignity. Healing justice centres on building 'resilience and survival' to create safety, and nurture *emotional, physical, spiritual, environmental and mental wellbeing among communities'*.

Recognising that traditional systems of therapies and psychosocial support are often non-existant or they are unavailable to activists due to language or social barriers, feminists are increasingly developing practical steps to help develop wellbeing and

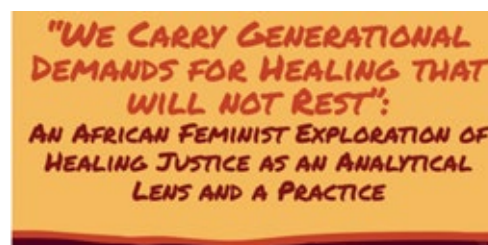healing that can be embedded in our movements. These may include collective creative processes and activism.

In addition to these systems for wellbeing and healing, given what we know about backlash and the profound dangers that are faced by many activists in the region, some feminist organisations and movements are explicitly including in our strategies, plans and resources to help prevent or deal with physical attacks or imprisonment of activists, and to build exile networks of safety across boundaries and borders.

The Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa) _resource on Healing Justice_

UAF-Africa worked with African Womxn Human Rights Defenders, healers and academics to explore _healing justice_ from African, feminist, activist perspectives. _"The framework shows the evolution of feminists toward healing, health and wellness. It reflects the analysis that lies at the heart of feminist theorizing: What is fundamentally wrong with the ways in which our realities have been structured to exclude us? How do these realities and the traumas they generate affect our wellness and the heaviness we carry to our organizing spaces?"_

"WE CARRY GENERATIONAL DEMANDS FOR HEALING THAT WILL NOT REST":
AN AFRICAN FEMINIST EXPLORATION OF HEALING JUSTICE AS AN ANALYTICAL LENS AND A PRACTICE

The _Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice_ has also developed a useful resource on the concepts and practices of 'healing justice' and of 'holistic security'.

The Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice developed a resource on healing justice and holistic security.

"When integrated into movement strategies, these practices support us, as organisers and communities, to prioritise our safety and to care for each other towards our long-term survival."

Healing Justice
Building Power, Transforming Movements

ASTRAEA LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE
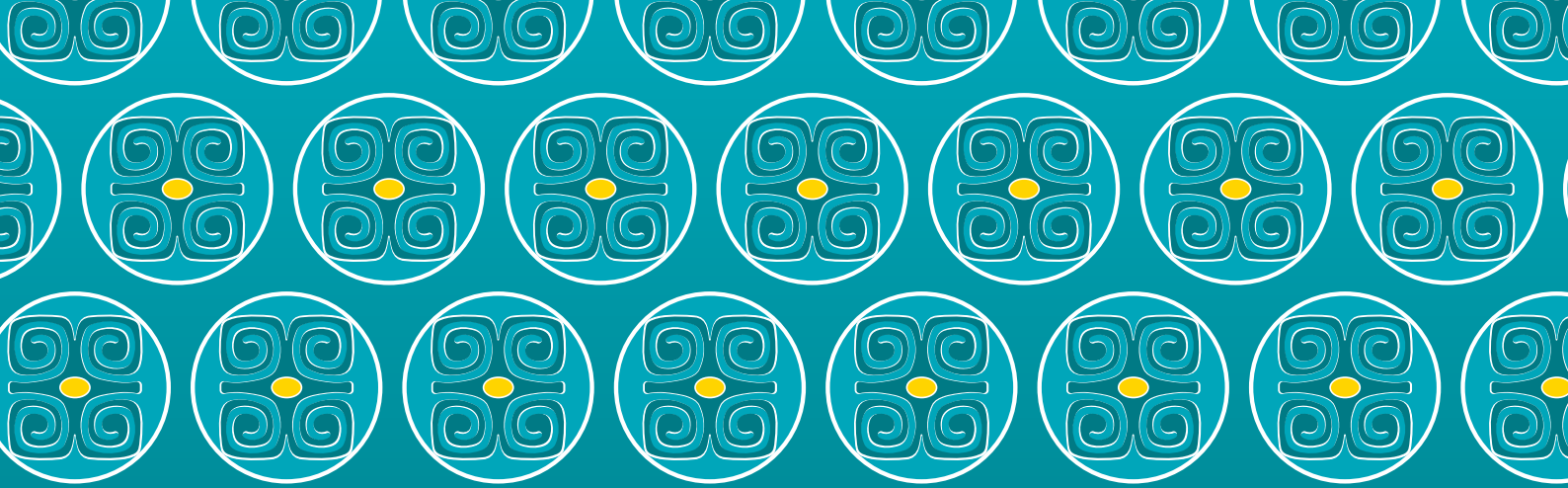
This book should serve as a motivation, an invitation, for feminist cross-movement, cross-issue building. It will not only engage with what we deal with, and how we understand the issues. It will consider how we take action on these issues. It should challenge activists to think about our ways of working, what strategies support successes and what holds us back from taking the actions we are able to identify in theory.