



Dance & Song: Centering Feminist Collective Care & Healing

## Authentic, Innovative, and Inspiring!

By Ablavi Gokou Adjaka

**Urgent Action Fund- Africa (UAF-Africa)** is a feminist, pan African rapid response Fund committed to transforming power relations through resourcing African feminist and womn's<sup>1</sup> human rights defenders (AWHRDs) and their formations, as an act of solidarity. Bold, responsive, creative, and consistent, UAF-Africa works with deep and expanding feminist knowledge, experience, and skills in the various contexts in which AWHRDs live, organise and work. The Fund is alert and agile in responding to the priorities and urgent needs of African feminist and womn's rights movements thus ensuring holistic security, safety, and wellbeing, movement building and strengthening using feminist philanthropic principles and values. Recognising the need to move resources rapidly on a continent where opportunities and threats arise and decline quickly, UAF-Africa has established a robust feminist crisis response infrastructure that deploys rapid financial, technical and solidarity resources across the continent when it counts the most; energising and catalysing feminist organising for longstanding transformation by, with and for feminist and womn's rights activists, organisations, groups and their movements.

The Feminist Republik Platform (also known as the African Womn's Human Rights Defenders Platform) is an initiative anchored by UAF-Africa geared towards learning and practice to inspire, mobilise, popularise, and build a care and Healing movement culture with feminists and AWHRDs. UAF-Africa believes that building a Platform focused on supporting AWHRDs is its legacy project, one that will honour AWHRDs, their struggles and dreams and give us an avenue to heal, connect with our bodies and with each other as well as to feel well.

Thus, the Feminist Republik was launched through the first iteration of the Feminist Republik Festival held in December 2019 with the promise and creation of a space created by defenders, for defenders.

<sup>1</sup> At the Fund, the use of womn is a simple act of challenging and replacing traditional ideas of what and who a womn is and can be and the links of womn to a system of patriarchy where womn are, in effect, subject to men or a sub-category of men. Additionally, womn' for us also includes lesbian, bisexual womn and transwomn.



Launched in 2020, **Dzuwa<sup>2</sup> Magazine** (aka **Dzuwa**) is an online publication by the Feminist Republik that echoes the voices, aspirations, and dreams of AWHRDs, healers, artivists, scholars, philanthropists. It showcases innovative Afro-centric stories, reflections, contemporary and traditional knowledge, practices, and experiences exploring well-being, personal and collective care, and healing throughout the continent. The Magazine aims to spotlight the nature of the Platform and its work on healing and care, collecting, documenting and producing the knowledge generated by African feminist and womn's rights defenders about their healing and care journeys.

This year, the **Feminist Republik** is proud to present the third edition of **Dzuwa**, which, as usual, celebrates AWHRDs.

For this third issue themed " Dance & Song: Centering Feminist Collective Care & Healing", we invite you to explore new possibilities to counter the multiple effects of traumas, burnout, stress and activism fatigue. Let us dance and sing as we welcome a new dawn while delving into the therapeutic virtues of practices and rituals that involve the vibratory power of sound (music, singing, slam poetry, mantras, etc.) and the liberating movements (dance, choreography, etc.). These elements are deeply rooted in our African cultures and often contribute to mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical healing, both at the individual and collective levels. Like our feminist ancestors, let us dance and sing, writing our own stories and drawing inspiration from each other.

#### This edition is a special one!

In the first part of Dzuwa III, we share highlights and revisit the vibrance and profound moments that took place at our 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival that was held in Naivasha Kenya on 28-30 November 2022. The Festival was a welcome reunion and gathering filled with joy after long years marked by the forced isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this space entirely dedicated to womn's rights defenders, we explored various healing, individual and collective care and well-being practices, together. Besides providing an insightful overview of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival, sharing the experiences of participants, and highlighting the importance of sound and movement, which are the essence of the Festival, we emphasise how the Feminist Republik Festival should be experienced not as another conference but as a festive and liberating space for defenders. This first part also delves into the replication of the Feminist Republik spirit and the new care ideas and well-being approaches emerging from womn's rights movements and spaces across the continent. Conversations with these movements will focus on the various ways in which activists and their organisations draw inspiration from the work done by the Feminist Republik, now integrating care approaches that support their individual and collective journeys of healing, care, and well-being.

2 Dzuwa means "light"/in Chichewa, a language spoken in Malawi.

In the second part of Dzuwa III, we will delve deeply into the healing effects of sound and movement through experiences and discussions with womn's rights defenders and artists (musicians, singers, actors, female slam poets, photographers, etc.). These AWHRDs utilise their art to denounce, demand, and advocate for change, expressing their responses to the numerous injustices faced by womn and gender non-conforming individuals on this continent. From Algeria to Mali, through the Democratic Republic of Congo, we will discover authentic profiles, inspiring stories, and initiatives developed by activists to heal themselves, help other womn heal while inspiring feminist spaces and movements into integrating these activities and rituals to contribute to individual and collective healing processes.

In each edition of Dzuwa, we collaborate with a guest editor who supports us in developing ideas and the entire implementation of the Magazine. For Dzuwa III, we have the immense privilege of having Awa Fall Diop, a Pan-African feminist activist from Senegal, as our guest editor. Collaborating closely with an activist who brings a wealth of experience, ideas and a sense of humour is a true privilege! We cannot express enough how grateful we are that she accepted our invitation to be part of such a powerful journey.

Together, we have risen to the challenge of highlighting the wealth and diversity of knowledge held by our AWHRDs. This produced knowledge offers a varied repertoire from which defenders can draw inspiration and ideas to support their journeys towards healing, care, and well-being.

Like our feminist ancestors, let us dance and sing, writing our own stories and drawing inspiration from each other.





## Dzuwa! Let's Dance! Dzuwa! Let's Sing! It's a New Dawn!

Let's dance with our feet, with our arms; let's dance within and with our minds, our eyes, our bellies, let's dance with our clitoris, our perineum, "the central point of overall posture and the key element of feminine care." Regardless of the place or time, let's sing, let's dance!

Dancing is about searching deep within for that "yes" and inviting it into our daily lives. It's about learning to speak, to love, to become one. Dancing is about feeling, vibrating, revealing, awakening, redefining the sense of self and others, with gentleness and strength, reviving dormant or damaged abilities. Each at her own pace... but let's dance!

Dance carries the body to uncharted expanses, fostering a new connection with oneself and others. It's about becoming one, where all differences coexist and support each other. Dancing is healing, accessible to everyone regardless of any special talent or age. Dancing is also singing, an inaudible sound that tells our joys, our sorrows, our hopes.

Since time immemorial, healing dances, always accompanied by specific rhythms, have been recognised as a medicine that reconnects the body and mind, liberates emotions, dispels unease, and instils cohesion within oneself and harmony within the community.

Music awakens the senses and gladdens the heart. With it, thoughts become lighter, tensions ease, the body relaxes, and you feel good both physically and mentally. This resonates with us as feminists, as our groups, associations, and movements, whether we are artists or researchers deconstructing unjust gender and sexual norms, whether we are anonymous individuals silently changing and improving our lives, all of us bear the burden of a multitude of oppressions.

In addition to patriarchy, neoliberal and neo-colonial capitalism, fundamentalism, and the effects of climate change, we are also grappling with the aftermath of COVID-19, political instability, and successive military coups in Francophone Africa. Our sisters in Mali, Guinea, Niger now live under military regimes that disregard women and girls' rights and well-being, just as the so-called democratic regimes they replaced did. All are deeply steeped in patriarchal values.

Elsewhere, in the African landscape, heightened political, economic, and social tensions exacerbate various forms of oppression affecting women and add to the serious threats accumulating in their lives. In addition to the oppressions stemming from patriarchy, racism, neoliberalism, and cis-heter-onormativity, capitalistic-imperialistic contradictions, driven by the relentless pursuit of ever-greater profit, combine with bad governance, militarism, and dictatorships.

Faced with these various pressures depleting our energies, it is imperative that we share and put into practice a culture of care in our personal lives and collective work. We have long been operationally aware of self-care. Innovation means elevating this awareness to a political level, institutionalising care, healing, and well-being dynamics, and firmly establishing these principles in our personal lives.

This is the immense contribution of the Feminist Republik Festivals to structural changes within our movements, to enhance how we engage in activism and live. And I was there, at both Festivals. The first edition (Naivasha, Kenya, 2019) triggered my healing process after the cruel loss of my partner following over 30 years of shared life and commitments. The second (Naivasha, Kenya, 2022) was a revelation for me, as it placed great emphasis on the role of sounds and dances in healing practices.

I have loved dancing since childhood. Dance played a significant role in my upbringing, and I was unaware that this upbringing had equipped me with self-healing gestures. At one point in my life, I had no time for dancing. One lesson I learned from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival is that, like riding a bike, you never forget how to dance. I also love music, harmonious sounds, those of instruments, nature, and the voice of a loved one. I had also neglected this pleasure that nourished my soul. African traditions recognise the power of music, modulated incantations, and sound as a mediator of a connection between inner and outer realms, even to higher spheres, activating the sensitive fiber to bring them closer. Thus, the healing offerings of the Festival, including dance therapy spaces with music, as well as artistic performances, reawakened these dormant assets within me.

And I danced until I was out of breath, drummed until my hands swelled. I came back to life, at peace with myself, relieved of body, heart, and mind tensions. The soothing effect of structured or spontaneous dances, the sounds of drums, gourds, and music, the rustling of the waters of Lake Naivasha, and the friendly voices of feminist sisters impressed on me the theme of this third edition of Dzuwa: dance and sounds.

Dzuwa, much like the Ubuntu virtual healing gatherings, serves as an extension of the Festivals, a melting pot for sharing a wide range of ideas, practices, and reflections on collective care from the perspective of African women activists.

I take immense pride in being the guest editor, and I've proclaimed it loudly, from Cairo to Cape Town, Dakar to Djibouti, through singing and dancing. I hope that this edition of Dzuwa, a new dawn, strengthens or awakens in each of us the pleasure that dance, music, and sounds bring for individual and collective well-being.

Dance, sing, listen to the sound of sand, salt, oil, powders, stone, water, fire.

Dance, sing, listen to the sound of plants, heat, cold, wind, rain, sun, moon, light, scents, animals, masks, totems, and prayers...

#### "Heal, heal oneself, learn to heal, so that happy and free women may live..."

#### Lyne des mots

Dancing, singing, listening to sound is liberating, fighting, living. And you, how do you do it? Share your experiences with your feminist sisters!

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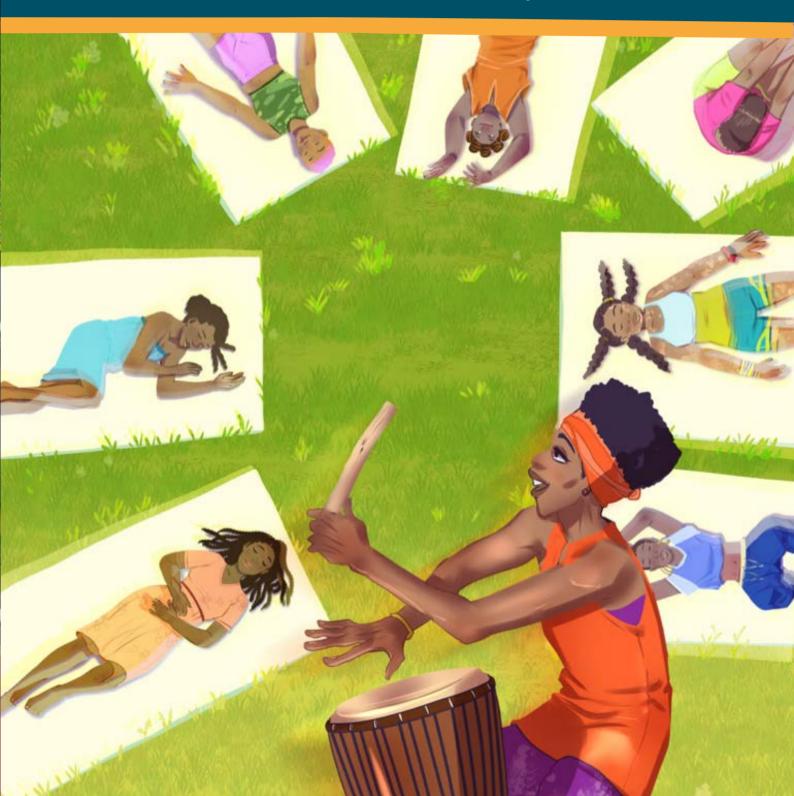
Another big thank you to all the Festival participants who shared their stories and experiences of the Festival with us. It is thanks to your dedication and support that such initiatives are implemented, and we are inspired by all your journeys.

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# Manifesting our Dreams of Transformation into Reality





## Art as a Tool for Healing and Transformation: An Invitation to Explore Activists' Life of Beauty and Purpose

By Melissa Wainaina

"Transformation happens in practice not by getting somewhere or gaining something but by recognising the right here and right now. We can have an aspiration for wisdom, healing, or transformation, but spiritual practice is a process of connecting to what's been here all along: love, joy, freedom. It's a restoration and reclamation of belonging."

-Selassie, Sebene. You Belong

For many feminists and womn's rights activists, the work of social justice time and time again comes at tremendous personal and collective cost that has left us scarred, isolated, and disconnected from ourselves and each other in our movements and communities. The settings in which we work tirelessly for change are deeply rooted in oppression and inequality and designed to exploit and violate rights and freedoms. We have witnessed unjust systems perpetuate and rely on meting out physical, emotional, and spiritual violence to maintain this status quo. As a result, many activists on the frontlines, especially the marginalised, are traumatised repeatedly, making it untenable to thrive and effect change. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to find that the trauma and pain womn's rights activists experience are a combination of the nature of the work and a consequence of challenging experiences of harm passed through generations.



So, how do we confront the ecosystem that intentionally exists to place barriers to prevent us from infusing holistic healing into our lives and experiences? It is a mammoth task but one we remain committed to, to sustain the lives and work of gender justice activists and movements.

All too often, we perceive trauma as something that happens to us. However, what is more accurate is that trauma happens inside of us when our capacity to metabolise and process crises and our struggles are jeopardised.

As a response and expression of feminist solidarity, UAF-Africa launched the Feminist Republik Platform in 2019 to support AWHRDs and their movements to cultivate a culture of care as they endure their struggles to address the inequalities that hold them and their communities back from experiencing a sense of holistic safety, security, and well-being. We are working to build a collective consciousness that enables cultivating a healing justice approach to tend to our woundedness and integrate radical care in how we address the ways oppression manifests in our body, mind, and spirit and our connection to land and territories.

One such avenue is through art and creative expression as a conduit for healing. Expressions of art as a spiritual practice offer connection, beauty, inquiry, soothing, calming and regulation and a possibility to help positively shift our emotions and feelings. Art provides an alternative to selfdiscovery to articulate, express and understand our experiences more robustly. It offers a cathartic experience to better see and respond to our thoughts and feelings, and this may very well promote a sense of well-being. Over the years, the work of the Feminist Republik has attempted to weave in art and artivists in most of the initiatives we have established. Not only has this contributed to breathing life and vitality into this difficult work, but art has also bridged the gaps in this work's resonance and practical use in activists' daily lives. In truth, we all desire a sense of connection and belonging, but this may not always be possible for those who have had to denounce or be rejected or in exile to parts of ourselves to survive. So many of us are swept by a hijacking of our nervous systems, and our energies are waned and too overwhelmed to try and process our pain before we are adequately ready or prepared. But this does not have to continue to be the case. Even in the most trying circumstances, engaging with art can allow us to open and reclaim the places we have constricted and lost. In this deliberate creative spaciousness, with time, we can grow room to expand our window of tolerance that nurtures and supports us and each other, giving us a feeling of being more connected and in control even in times of chaos and uncertainty.

In this edition of Dzuwa, we hope to share a snapshot of art, artivists and healing practitioners who invite us to embody a unified sense of healing through creative expression. At the very least, we welcome you to immerse yourself and let it surprise you. Our work as activists and feminists requires that we gently find the ebb and flow to uncover connectedness, self-love and radical acceptance and be more present in experiencing the beauty of living our lives as healing wounded warriors with purpose.



## I dance; thus, I fight

**((()**)

I Dance the World, I Dance Life. I dance until the trance. To transition from fear to courage, carry within me strength, joy, Transform weariness into fertile energy, Sweat out our beautiful dream of freedom in every drop, And infuse it through Africa and the world.

I dance the world, I dance life. I moor my body to those of my valiant ancestors, I anchor my feet deep in Africa's soil, I bundle together the lives of women crushed by life, With a vigorous sway, I pluck out their sorrows, like thorns.

I dance the world, I dance life. No matter the measure, no matter the music! A twirl, and I whisk myself beyond the here and now, From where I bring tales of glory, places, rhythms, and times, That carry within them substances to heal pains in body and soul, Unto the gates of physical and psychological nirvana.

I dance the world, I dance life. I dance to be. To be who I truly am, leaping and twirling, To be in meditation with myself, to reside within me, To be all my sisters across the world, To be love, to be peace, to be freedom.

I dance; thus, I fight!"

Awa Fall-Diop



## Collective Feminist Pathways to Healing: Unleashing the Power of Sound and Dance at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival

#### **By Jean Kemitare**

At the heart of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival, fostering cultures of care found its rhythm through daily collective practices of healing. AWHRDs harmoniously engaged in, shared, and learned from a diverse range of activities to centre collective care into movement spaces and practice. Across three immersive days, activists explored the roots of structural violence, the intersection of oppressive systems, and commitments to healing justice as a radical political act of resistance. Amidst this vibrant interweaving of old and new, the Festival infused traditional healing practices, contemporary care, and present-day activism. This edition of Dzuwa reflects on the tapestry of feminist organising at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival</sup> and how it harnessed the transformative power of sound and dance to centre healing justice and collective care, nurturing a dynamic space of joy, and liberation.

The Festival's theme focused on centering Healing Justice as a framework for feminist activism that is critical to building strong and autonomous movements as well as sustaining politicised collective action. Healing Justice is particularly critical now when the world and continent are reeling from multiple, overlapping, and intersecting crises that have a disproportionately negative impact on womn and girls.

Between 2021 and 2022, UAF-Africa engaged in research contextualising Healing Justice to movement building. The resultant **research report** and **working paper** generated a framework based on an understanding of systemic oppression, structural violence, historical, inter-generational collective trauma (and their impact on our organising) as well as feminist collective healing pathways to transform and sustain feminist activism and organising spaces.

"Healing has to be in the centre and has to be the core of our activism because if you want to resist, if you want to be resilient and to change this aggressive system, I think that we have to start by cleaning ourselves from our traumas and from the pain that we are carrying in our bodies and in our souls."

#### -AWHRD from Tunisia

The **Healing Justice framework** is rooted in theoretical foundations emerging from the theorising of African feminists and analysis from interviews with AWHRDs. Four conceptual pillars ground this framework's pathways to collective healing as a central strategy for liberation. These pillars are the basis on which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival content and activities were created.

- Politicised: transformational, rooted in an intersectional analysis, decolonising healing from recovery to regeneration i.e., an evolution from systemic injustice and trauma vs a return to the same system which is implied in 'recovery'. The 'Recovery' system is one that is based on a medicalised colonial system of healing that demeaned, erased, demonised indigenous ways of knowing and healing.
- **Collective:** an interdependent process with deliberation on creating inclusive, interactive spaces and processes for healing, centering ubuntu rather than an individualised focus.
- Holistic: healing as holistic integration of body, mind, soul and land as well as the social, economic, and political macrosystems that shape discriminatory experiences of power and privilege. This integration was erased by colonialisation's imperial agenda disintegrating body, mind, soul, and an extractive relationship to land further reinforcing systemic inequality and structural violence. Holistic healing encompasses personal, family, community pain as well as the harm caused by feminist organising.
- **Processual:** healing as a non-linear process that does not follow the same path at the same time generating incremental steps of progress along a journey that manifests in diverse ways for different individuals/collectives.

Politicised collective healing activities include group emotional processing, building pathways to social/political healing and collective action for systemic change. Key emotional processing activities for transformational collective healing identified by the research's analysis were, verbal interactive analytical practices e.g., storytelling, conscientisation (conceptual discussions); unpacking historical trauma; and embodied practices including spiritual work & collective rhythmic activity i.e., dancing, drumming and song as healing rituals.

As experiential learning for centering healing justice in activism, the **Festival's activities** integrated sound, and body movement. On each of the three days, activities at the Festival created a flexible space for collective emotional processing. Each morning the Feminist Assemblies ritualised drumming spearheaded by members from the Ndepp Community in Senegal. Activists and defenders present responded to the energy of the drums through dance, song, and storytelling.

#### When I dance, I dance for my ancestors, my feminist ancestors, I dance for my feminist colleagues, and I dance also for the young feminists to show them the way.

#### - AWHRD from Senegal

Following the Assemblies were several concurrent analytical conversations that engaged in depth with the manifestations of historical trauma and visions for collective healing. The Festival created space for participants to engage in collective healing sessions and one-on-one encounters with healers.



Combining verbal analytic, embodied and spiritual practice at the Festival, through sound and body movement had a powerful effect - it inspired healing journeys and collective action. Since then, AWHRDs have organised convenings in diverse sub-regions of the continent focused on feminist analysis and action responding to intersecting and overlapping crises across Africa, including the Sahel region. A key practice in these agenda-setting spaces was to centre collective care, and healing as part of collective political action. Diverse organisations and collectives **reflected on** centering collective care in their work. They, and many others, have increased interest and practice in centering collective care and healing as part of feminist activism, many of whom are working with healers that were present at the Festival.

"Collective feminist healing for me, is a space of love, a space of unity, a space where we come together to heal from our own traumas, from our experiences of violence in our own spaces as well that we face."

- AWHRD from South Africa

As you delve into the essence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival's journey, be inspired to adopt and foster cultures of care as a radical movement-building and sustaining strategy. The current world order demands that we adopt 'business unusual' if we are to have social justice as a reality. Let collective healing pathways centre our activism, let's embrace elements of rhythm and movement to nurture our path towards sustaining ourselves and activism as political warfare. Let the Festival's echoes linger and harmonise our efforts towards an empowering symphony of radical transformation.

"The Festival allows all these women who fight every day for women, children, minorities; all these committed women who give themselves body and soul, who do not sleep, who risk their lives, who risk their sleep and their well-being to come and recharge their batteries, to come and share, to come within a family to express themselves with the same voice." - Translated from French.

- AWHRD from Burkina Faso



### Love Differently

The Heart conceives the words, but words come to life under the tongue Words are sacred Words are truth My tongue is the vehicle of my soul and today, Its destination is your heart

To be visionary is not to see the future, just to believe in it Faith gives power Power lies in knowledge Knowledge is acquired through a vision A true vision Exists only in love Self-love Love for others

> To love is a true calling, A journey into the unknown A cross as big as Christ's Love is a language without a nation That illuminates hearts nourished by passion It is said that love can do anything Love gives everything, forgives everything It's just that... love drives one mad In love's name, each day, a woman falls victim to blows.

To you, ladies, you who can hear me you who are trapped in this cycle I wish to dedicate these words

Celebrate love, Share love Live love differently, Love turned towards oneself To all the victims, those trapped in fear May romance never again rhyme with violence Love is a language without a nation that illuminates Hearts nourished by passion The passion for the better that brings forth healing... Yes to love...

> Lyne Des Mots 20



## The Feminist Republik Festival was Expansive, Transformative, Loud, Bold And It Cares!

#### By Masa Amir

Perhaps the best way to introduce this reflection is through the title of this reflection, which is a quote from an AWHRD who attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival. Reflections from activists and healers paint a picture of a space that was unique in centering healing (both conceptually and physically). It is interesting to further note that a central observation shared by activists and healers was that they felt they were in a space that cares about them. This is caring that is felt in creating a programme that did not feel rigid, being in nature, rather than stiff conference rooms; creating the time and space for healing offerings; dancing; eating delicious food; rest and connecting with other activists in an expansive green space.

We asked activists and healers to reflect on their experiences at the Festival and around what the healing justice framework means to their lives and activism. We heard ideas, feelings, fears, and dreams that are presented here in the voices of the activists and healers themselves.

#### The Festival as an Experience of Access Intimacy<sup>3</sup>

A Ugandan WHRD with disabilities tells us:

"Since my childhood I have been crawling and using a wheelchair [...] I have gone through a lot of discrimination, stigma, bullying [...] all creating layers of unhealed trauma. The Feminist Republik Festival space was unique in that I felt my body relax. From interactions with other activists and healers to easily getting a massage, going on a boat cruise [...] I felt free. I did not have to wonder about whether or not a certain activity or space at the

3 Access Intimacy is a term coined by the American-Korean disability justice thinker and writer Mia Mingus. She wrote in her blog, Leaving Evidence, that access intimacy is "that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs", https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/ Festival was access friendly. I did not have to worry about feeling the weight of spaces built from an ableist worldview. I did not feel isolated. I felt relaxed enough to ask for support whenever needed. This sense of freedom is revolutionary."

The activist's reflections are reminiscent of the concept of access intimacy, especially in the way it describes the illusive nature of the feeling of ease experienced at the Festival. In the words of Mia Mingus: "Similar to meeting someone you just "click with," access intimacy has felt like a distinct form of attraction, desire and energy on to itself".

#### "We Are Rising from our Ashes"<sup>4:</sup> Curating a Space for Dreams

Florence Ouattara, a AWHRD from Burkina Faso attending the Festival, shared with us that her strongest reflection from the Festival is that "*it was all our collective manifestations of dreaming radically different realities for African women human rights defenders*".

The Festival centered an exploratory dive into the roots of the trauma and harm WHRDs have experienced for generations. Folded into the discussions was a question of how we could do things differently. This was done in conversations and through artistic expressions. In so doing, the Festival did not present a rigid agenda of discussions that need to happen, but rather open spaces to mull over ideas such as how are we internalising the criminal justice system in our ideas of justice and accountability? What if we centre healing as a core ideal and skill in our communities? What if we acted like our liberation is rooted in our interdependence? How can we politically address the loneliness experienced by AWHRDs?

These are complex questions that cannot be held in a conference room. These questions need a Festival.

#### **Centering Sensations**

One of the healers, from Kenya, shared that the Festival is unique in that it realised the importance of centering how we feel, see and hear, and that such an acknowledgment is "subversive" in that it challenges how we have come to understand ourselves to exist from "the neck up". This is a colonial inheritance, one that has instilled a largely, solely clinical understanding of how and what it means to *exist*. In the words of the healer:

"Rarely have I been in a space of so many colours, sounds, literal vibrations that I experienced at the Festival. Experiencing these sensations in an activist space was unheard of to me."

4 Quote from Florence Ouattara, a WHRD attending the Festival.

Echoing this reflection are the words of an Egyptian WHRD who shares:

"The healing offerings, group discussions, and free spaces for connecting all grounded my body, mind and soul to create linkages to the agendas we are setting as WHRDs. We reflected on masculine energy and that we organise from a place of that energy. This depletes our creative power and the urgency of collective organising."



The thoughts and reflections of activists and healers at the Festival centered on the radical realities we dream of and cannot wait for. We end with a poignant quote from a healer from South Africa:

"Feminist imagination is the reason we are able to continue to shift power. This is the beginning of the Revolution, which does not take place in isolation, but with strong movements that are leading by love and courage."

## The Justice Guardian of the Sahel

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The Justice Guardian of the Sahel, with resolute words I surge, In this world burdened by shadows and silence. I boldly proclaim the unveiled truth, My impactful verses, my inflamed rhymes.

So, listen to me.

Women, unconquered warriors, sisters of undefeated arms, Our struggle resonates in echoes of enhanced freedom. I reject resignation, injustice concealed, I rise, I fight, proud and united.

Like raised fists, we shatter the chains, Dispel barriers that hinder our sorrows. I reclaim the right to be more than an ornament, To be the resounding voice, the echo of our essence.

I decline the docile label, superficial seduction, I am so much more, a rebellious flame. In my raw words, I denounce established norms, I transgress limits, freeing my outcry. I am armed with my pen and my courage To expose those cowards Who exploit misery and war To satisfy their murderous urges.

I tread the streets, bearing a voice that screams, To break prejudices, the chains that bind us. I awaken dormant minds, I challenge ideas, In the hope of a world where all are respected.

The truth is sometimes unsettling, undoubtedly, But within this provocation lies the awakening of consciousness. My incisive pen, the fury in my words resounds, I am the Justice guardian of the Sahel,

the fervent soul.

### Chorus:

I am the Justice Guardian of the Sahel Bearer of the torch and the spark I am the voice of those who rebel Against injustices and their aftermath I am the Justice Guardian of the Sahel

Bearer of the torch and the spark I am the light of those who hope for a better and more united future.

Epiphanie Dionrang



## Resourcing Collective Care Initiatives: Reimagining Movement Building

#### By Immaculate Mugo

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival was a dreaming space for AWHRDs, diverse feminist movements and funds, our partners, and funders to come together to: reflect on our work as a collective, celebrate, connect, and learn from an intersectional, cross movement lens. The space was a reminder on the need to promote self and collective care for activists who continue to drive much needed change in this rapidly shifting world that demands so much of us within a global context that is shifting to the right, towards an increasingly conservative stance. Resistance has therefore become the exception where we are reclaiming our lives, bodies, hearts, and minds from the systems of oppression that devalue, dehumanise, deplete, and destroy us. We also took an opportunity to centre AWHRDs from Francophone countries.

The Festival presented an alternative, a space that reimagined and showcased why rest is important in the fight for liberation for the sustainability and success of movement solidarity. Therefore, the recognition of the need for such a space and the resultant support from our funders speaks volumes to their acknowledgement and commitment to strengthen and support our movements. The Festival was a reminder that self and collective care are self and collective regeneration and healing, while enabling us as a Fund, as well as our funding partners, to locate ourselves within our movements in a changing context in which activism persists and remains the mainstay to fostering just societies.

At UAF-Africa, we continue to think deeply about the concept of collective care, healing justice and movement solidarity and how this can be more effectively placed at the heart of a systems change agenda, not only for ourselves but our partners and peers in the philanthropic space. Our funding partners continue to come to the fore to resource care and wellbeing initiatives, by intentionally curving out financial support for movements to convene and explore self and collective care and what that means for the feminist and worm's rights activists.

The ripple effects of the Festival continue to be seen. The impact felt including conversations on healing justice have continued post the Festival. We have had activists from the **Feminists Initiative South Sudan (FEMISS)** hosting a five-day healing retreat in Uganda. Also, there was a feminist festival in Burkina Faso in March hosted by the **Initiative Pananetugri pour le Bien**-être **de la Femme (IPBF)**, while the first **Sahel regional meeting** was hosted in May in Senegal with activists from Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal exploring feminist strategies. These offshoots speak to the need to curate more spaces where collective care and healing are spoken about, unpacked and internalised.



We applaud our funding partners who resource these collective care and healing spaces and call for more funders to do the same. These spaces challenge what movement building and strengthening look like, as they show a move away from the traditional log-frames and complex programmes curated and implemented to satisfy funders' imaginations of building movements and effecting change. Therefore, to effectively embrace collective care, we need to cultivate and dedicate networks of support, by resourcing, replenishing, and nourishing our movements as central pillars of reimagining what resistance and transformation look like.



## The Festival Through the Eyes of the Defenders

Let's take a look back at some of the highlights of the Festival in pictures, and discover the experiences of the participants in their own words. What were their best moments? What emotions did they feel? What did they take away from the Festival in terms of ideas, behaviour, reflections or care and well-being practices? Here are some of their reflections...

### **Smiles and Tears**

My favourite part of the festival was the dance party. There was no country, no language barrier, just MUSIC. Whether we understood the words being hummed or not, the music made us feel emotions depending on our state of mind at the time. My wandering eyes were filled with smiles, laughter, tears, hugs and dance steps.



### Inspiration and Joy

The scale and grandeur of the event did not detract from the quality of the organisation and running of the festival. Every activity and session was organised in a relaxed atmosphere, and the relaxation sessions, which contributed to our well-being, were a great benefit to our experience. It was truly inspiring and full of joy.



### Love and Respect

As a feminist artist committed to the cause of women, I was over the moon when I played at the Gala evening and felt the love, respect and above all the joy of the participants listening to my music, getting involved to ensure the show, the dances, the repeats of the choruses, the harmony and the feeling of Africa as a whole, free from stigma and stereotypes.



### **Cultures and Values**

My greatest moment was finding women and girls from several countries who, like me, are campaigning for justice and for the rights of marginalised women and girls. What I took away with me was the appreciation of our local cultures and values.



### **Kindness and Maturity**

Seeing all this positive energy around me was just wonderful and moving for me. This festival was a safe place for me, I wasn't afraid to be myself and I wasn't afraid to say what I thought. The kindness and maturity shown by my feminist colleagues also made a big impression on me.



## Inclusion and Active Listening

From the festival, I took with me a baggage of ideas and practices for wellbeing, a treasure trove of reflections that continue to accompany me on a daily basis. I learned that personal and collective healing goes beyond theory, taking shape in our interactions and actions. Connecting with women from different backgrounds showed me the importance of inclusion and active listening.



### Letting Go

During the festival I learnt to do a lot of meditation and yoga. I learnt to be completely in the present moment. Above all, I learnt to let go and, above all, to put things in perspective over which I have no control, because I'm convinced that we can't move forward if we're dragging around the pain of the past.



### **Breaking Down Barriers**

The festival, which is constantly evolving, embodies for me the promise of a world transformed by love, compassion and collective courage. My heart yearns for a festival that will continue to break down barriers and sow the seeds of profound and lasting change.



## Happiness and Regeneration

To be honest, the festival has fulfilled all my expectations and more. I'm just happy that this isn't the normal regular workshop mode. It is really a space to relax and it has re-defined what regeneration means to me.



### **Cultivating Intimacy**

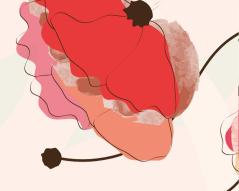
What I took away from the festival is that it's important to be able to recognise and have your own moment of personal intimacy. Moments of intimacy can evolve and change, but it's important to know how to listen to yourself and give yourself your moment of intimacy. We need to take care of ourselves so that our soul is at peace.



### **Business with Pleasure**

As we learned so well from the festival, which succeeded in "combining business with pleasure", I think it's important to reconcile well-being with daily work. In other words, we need to take care of ourselves while we take care of others by defending their rights, and we also need to improve the working environment for the well-being of those involved in the fight.





## Proud To Be

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Ampela, Jampela, Rakemba Ya mwasi, Wanawake, Magnangy Viavy, Vaiavy, woman, Femme

Une femme est une plume Une source d'inspiration, une muse Une femme est une voix Une vérité qui murmure la conscience. Etre Une femme est une grâce, un privilège Un honneur qui me rend fière et reconnaissante envers Dieu. Une femme est une douceur Une force, une énergie Un espoir qui humanise l'humanité Une femme est une affection, une lumière qui attise la paix. Fruit de l'amour Une femme est un corps, un organe qui nous fait naître Une femme est un esprit, une sagesse, une vie Alors... Je suis une femme et fière de l'être.

> Car tout au fond de mon être Il y a une Femme guerrière, Femme de carrière, Femme fière. Femme soldat, prête à se battre Prête à faire couler sa sueur Prête à affronter la douleur Femme, je suis une femme tout comme toi. Femme, je suis une femme et je me bats Pour mes droits

> > Hoan-tsika (pour nous)

### Ampela, Jampela, Rakemba Ya mwasi, Wanawake, Magnangy Viavy, Vaiavy, Woman, Femme

Woman is a feather a basic life revelation/ of which stimulates our soul/ a muse Woman is a voice a truth consciousness whispering Being woman is graciousness A privilege, an honour that makes me proud and thankful to God Woman is sweetness Woman is strength, A power A hope of which humanises the world Woman is a condition A light that stirs up peace Fruit of love A woman is a body An organ that makes us born A woman is a spirit, a wisdom, a life So, I am a woman and I'm proud to be it

> Because deep in my being There is A Fighter Woman A Career woman A proud woman Woman of arms Ready to Fight Ready to sweat Ready to confront pain

Woman I am a woman like you Woman I am a woman and I do win

Makwa Joma





## A conversation with Coumba Touré and Leila Hessini, Co-facilitators of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik Festival

## Question (Q): Why was it important for you to take part in this ideation process and to take part in such an event?

**Coumba Touré**: UAF-Africa is one of the organisations I am most aligned with on the continent. I am a former board member and a supporter. I participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> Feminist Republik Festival before COVID-19, so I knew I wanted to participate in the second convening and wanted to contribute to making it successful. I have always wanted to be part of the community of people who support UAF-Africa.

**Leila Hessini**: I also participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> Feminist Republik and was impressed on so many levels: it was a feminist space, it was Africa-led and grounded in a pan-African politic and it was focused on healing as a feminist issue. I also deeply admire UAF-Africa's boldness, creativity, and ability to convene beautiful, inspiring, and nurturing events.

#### Question (Q): What is your fondest memory of the Festival?

**Leila**: One of my fondest memories is facilitating with Coumba Touré from whom I learned so much! Coumba combines stellar feminist facilitation skills with a keen ability to read the room and respond to the needs of the moment. She is also a fashionista who planned our stunning outfits and was able to weave art, music, dance, and joyfulness throughout the Festival.

**Coumba:** I keep memories of the colours, the space where the meeting was held, Naivasha and the lake and the music and the sounds. Also facilitating with Leila standing on the stage wearing the same clothes calling on amazing panelists, artists, and staff. I enjoyed engaging people, announcing activities, and figuring out the time. The diversity of the participants was beautiful and having the permission to look at everyone and to welcome everyone.



#### Question (Q): What emotions did you feel during the Festival?

**Leila**: I felt deep gratitude and connections with others in the room, joy as well as an appreciation for the pain that many were carrying. I had deep gratitude for being able to facilitate such a diverse group of people while also holding pain and joy simultaneously. I felt a deep sense of connection and belonging with others in the room and a deep appreciation for the beauty of Naivasha and the natural environment that we were in.

**Coumba**: A lot of excitement, a lot of hope. All these women are so engaged, so strong, so many possible ways to heal and such diverse ways to heal. I was so proud of us, here we are, and we are African, and this is organised by and for African organisations and people. And it went against the idea that African women had to stay in beautiful but local and small projects. This was a massive, international, global but was not initiated from the west. It took a lot of collective energy and other resources, I was just proud.

#### Question (Q): What were the highlights of the Festival for you?

**Coumba:** Bringing so many from the Sahel to Kenya, especially those who had not participated before in events like this. The different healing spaces, the food was beautiful, the artists, the sound of the music.

**Leila**: One of the most powerful moments was when our Saharaoui sisters were given the floor to speak about their struggles. It was their first time in a pan-African feminist meeting and the response was overwhelming. Audience members lined up at the mic to express their solidarity and to offer concrete ways - through therapy, healing, trainings, etc. of supporting our sisters. Aita Senghor also made such a powerful impact on me. She travelled with her newborn, and I was in awe of her ability to sing, breastfeed, take care of her band, and participate fully in the meeting. And finally, I had an incredible healing session with Lamia Samir from Egypt. It was a group of us using crystals and reflection and I was together with many of our sisters from Sudan who were coming out of the painful revolution that led to the deaths of feminist activists. It reminded us all of the price feminists pay to wage our battles.



## Question (Q): How do you plan to reinvest what you have learnt, felt in your personal life and/or in other feminist spaces?

**Coumba**: I am taking with me all the creativity and we know that we need healing, music, beauty and that we need this as we fight and that it is part of everything we do. We need artists who are part of the political work that we are doing, and we need to give them space and resources. Through the Black Link Initiative, I am bringing artists to Selma for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery march - Aita Senghor, Sister LB, and other artists - I will be bringing feminist space and healing space beauty into all the work that I am doing moving forward. I am meeting with artists around the Black Link in LA with Sankofa and figuring out what else Black artists can bring to our movements. What the contribution of artists can be in all our political spaces - feminisms, race, etc. This has been part of my practice, and I am now even more reaffirmed.

**Leila**: I have taken so much back to my personal and feminist spaces. One is the understanding of the rich history and practice of healing across the continent. The research that UAF-Africa conducted unearthed the richness of analysis, practice, and leadership around collective healing so much of which has been marginalised or purposely silenced by the colonial regimes and Western hegemony. I also learned concrete methods to care for myself and to integrate collective care strategies in everything we do. My days are better when I remember to integrate movement and dance into my daily life. It allows us to connect in a deeply emotional way across silos. I also know that language justice is key to our liberation and so appreciated facilitating in French and having Arabic, Wolof, Portuguese, and English translation.

## Question (Q): How were sound and movement used at the Festival and how do they contribute to healing?

**Coumba**: I want to write an entire article on sound and music as a healing practice as we have a practice of healing call in Senegal from the Lebou people. And we know that with the participation of Adji Fatou Drame to the Feminist Republik, the music was healing and people expressing their joy and pain through movement. To have it so available at the Festival, and we were able to dance at any time and we were able to do healing actions when we were there.

**Leila**: What was important about the Festival was that we were centering the importance of sound and movement in real time. We were in a beautiful environment and the music of the natural environment - including the trees, the wind, the birds, monkeys, and hippos - was part of our daily experience. In addition, we had music to open and close our days as well as to inspire us throughout the day. Movement was constant as participants could dance at any moment and this was an important part of the healing process.





# The Inspiring Evolution of Feminist Movements in Togo: Integration of Healing and Well-being

By Reyhanath Touré Mamadou, Elsa M'béna Ba and Floriane Acouetey

The involvement of the **'Les Négresses Féministes'** community in the Feminist Republik Festival has left a lasting impression on our spaces and initiatives. Now, every aspect of our movement is infused with the concept of well-being.

Before our participation in the Festival, we organised the **'Togolese Feminists Colloquium'** in October 2022, a biennial event with the theme 'The Well-being of Togolese Feminists.' The discussions during this colloquium went beyond theory and the development of strategies for the struggle. We incorporated sessions on healing and physical and mental well-being to nurture the soul and encourage our regeneration. From the setup to the decoration of the venue, we aimed to evoke our roots, integrating massage and traditional healing sessions.

Following our participation in the Feminist Republik Festival, well-being has become a ritual within our movements, drawing inspiration from community-based Indigenous practices that have always been an essential part of our identity. The integration of well-being practices was reinforced by the topics discussed and the experiences gained during the Festival.

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addition the In to 'Togolese Feminists Colloquium' organised Négresses by Les Féministes, the fourth edition of the 'Train of Champions' program, implemented by the feminist association Tchowouré. was also transformative а experience for the participants. The 'Train of Champions' is an training annual and program coaching young dedicated to girls and women. The usual format was quite traditional with chairs and tables. This year, it was the first edition in

northern Togo, over 700 km from Lomé, a region declared under a state of security emergency. In addition to the precarious situation of women in this region, the security instability further exposes girls and women to vulnerability. Panic, stress, and fear are constant, and women's human rights defenders are facing even greater challenges. Inspired by the spirit of the Feminist Republik Festival, the Tchowouré feminist association ordered woven mats made from tree leaves, colourful patterned cloths to create a soothing and cheerful atmosphere. Canaries and flowers were also part of the decor. The setting provided a friendly atmosphere of trust and serenity.

During two days of training and even during the evening, the atmosphere remained soothing. Music and massage were tools used for learning, healing, and calming each participant. From the inception of the event to its preparation, implementation, and evaluation, the choice of facilitators, the layout of the space, and the content, were all undertaken with due consideration for the well-being aspect.

With these experiences, the integration of care and well-being principles has changed the way we organise and facilitate our activities. These principles are no longer exceptions; they have become fundamental elements in every aspect of our movement. The monthly meetings of the **'Survivors Anonymous'** support group, started for the healing of the souls of victims of sexual and gender-based violence, have been transformed into a space of mutual protection where each survivor is her own guardian, but also the guardian of other women. This support group has become a place where sharing experiences is accompanied by special attention to well-being. One of the most beautiful aspects of this group is that it was created as a safe space for survivors to express their feelings without judgment. It has also become an outlet for us activists.

We have come to understand that we can make every activity, every day, a step towards healing and a moment of well-being, and better yet, that we deserve it and that it is normal to think about it. This does not diminish the seriousness and importance of our work.

#### "I allow myself today, without guilt, to work on creating my well-being space, and even better, to do it in the company of other activists and women's human rights defenders."



Creating our spaces for gatherings, small enjoying pizza, skewers, board games are ways for us activists to create and maintain a bond of healing and well-being continuously. Both collective and individual activities draw care inspiration from the spirit of the Feminist Republik.

These changes have brought about profound transformations among activists and women's human rights defenders for African women and gender minorities. By integrating care and well-being principles, we have changed how

we interact within the movement. Interaction is imbued with an increased sensitivity to each other's needs. This evolution has allowed activists to change their behaviour, embark on a healing journey, and collaborate with a more sincere intention. The information and training session called **'Let's Jump into Feminism,'** conducted with the support of AWDF (African Women's Development Fund) March-April 2023, even started to explain feminism to those still seeking their position in the struggle.

The meeting between Togolese activists and participants in the Feminist Republik Festival, as well as the actions undertaken by Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa) in Togo, have brought about a benevolent revolution. The integration of healing and well-being approaches in our initiatives has brought significant transformation to our movements. The principles of the Feminist Republik have strengthened our ability to create lasting change by engaging in personal and collective healing journeys.

You can learn more about us and stay updated on our activities by following us on our Facebook account: Les Négresses Féministes.





## Being a Woman

It's tough being a woman, It's tough to claim your rights, It's tough being a woman, When you should carry your cross.

When the spirit extinguishes its flame, When the body grows cold, The pain of feeling afflicted Cuts the mood, cuts off everything.

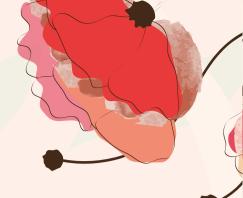
Stress, mental turmoil, Anxiety, Overwhelmed, and oops, activist burnout. And outside, there are still others, So many injustices to fight. Holding on to time, but with each dawn, The anthem of barbarism rings louder, And in the end, we are of mind and body...

> How to fight for the rights of my people If... if... so many ifs...

> > But silence!!! Just listen to my voice, Listen to it all vibrant, Proof of our faith In these inherent energies.

Listen to the sounds invade your synapses And like a bath with a singing bowl, Reduce your anxiety and your such unhappy ifs, Feelings of discomfort through sound...

Between thirty and forty decibels, Healing from deficiencies indeed. Cheaper, breast cancer Just by varying the notes of the C major scale...



So, sing!!! Ooh ooh ooh Aah aah aah Eéh ééh ééh Iih iih iih

Sing to the sound of the Guitar, the djembe, the gong... Heal mental and physical wounds With the Yadaki, or even with the Huso 2.0 headphones.

> So, sing!!! Ooh ooh ooh Aah aah aah Eéh ééh ééh Iih iih iih

Let the fascia communicate the harmony of sounds to your body. For resonance and practice, trust your vocal cords. Even to heal painful periods. Sound, music calm children...

> Gnétor bé dzédzévi yélo Tobolo

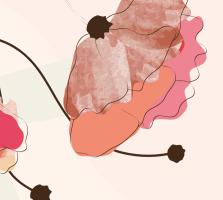
A woman who listens to joyful music Has more energy and a longer life.

> So, sing!!! Ooh ooh ooh Aah aah aah Eéh ééh ééh Iih iih iih

> > And stop!

And what if we moved a little? A bit like those happy children. Just move as you like.

Dance for those who know



Movements often save... Small mudras like Buddha Spreading energy, flashes Of life...

A bit of calm, living in slow motion With yoga exercises Strengthen your Běnshì Circulate the qi

Dance, dance, dance

Even the Tango to heal Parkinson's

Migraines, anxiety

Sometimes find balance, morale

So move, move your limbs

One step to the left, two steps to the right Turn around, stop, and smile

The price of relaxation and its benefits??? Nothing at all...

Feminists, now, resume your fight for the world.

So, sing!!! Ooh ooh ooh Aah aah aaah Eéh ééh ééh lih iih ihh

So move, move your limbs One step to the left, two steps to the right Turn around, stop, and smile.

#### Wapondi Djéri



# Making the Principles of Healing a Transversal and Institutionalised Ritual, Through Political Reflection on Well-Being in our Organisations

Interview with Solange A. M. Kibibi and Nataka Gmakagni, co-coordinators of QAYN (Queer African Youth Network)

## Question (Q): How does the spirit of the Feminist Republik influence spaces and initiatives like yours?

**Answer (A):** The Feminist Republik Festival has been revolutionary in its influence. It has reached thinkers, opinion leaders, organisation heads, and networks and, in a very short time, reshaped the world toward the dream of justice. Even though the Festival only lasts a few days, its impact lingers, much like a stone cast into water, creating ripples that expand infinitely. We, as leaders, carry this philosophy of healing and integrate it into our new ways of thinking and doing. The Feminist Republik Festival is not just a school; it is an exemplar. It combines theory and practice, offering a multitude of possibilities and options that every organisation can personalise. When you come out of it, you are transformed and committed to remaining so. There is an energy within us that we cannot keep to ourselves; we want to infuse this healing power within ourselves and those around us.

## Question (Q): How have spaces like yours now integrated collective-care and well-being approaches into their proceedings?

**Answer (A):** After taking part in the two Feminist Republik Festivals, OAYN has resolved to infuse a sense of well-being into our daily practices. Within our organisation, we have created a well-being policy that takes into account the aspirations of each team member, their roles, and work rhythms. Moments of well-being have been incorporated into our daily tasks, setting up suitable work environments and schedules that blend remote and in-person work. We've

reimagined event planning by including experts in healing, massage, psychologists, and incorporating relaxation moments, games, and sports. Event spaces have been redesigned, varying energies between indoors and outdoors, offering different seating positions, all with participant well-being and comfort at the centre of each activity.

# Question (Q): How does well-being become an institutionalised ritual in the feminist spaces you create? How are healing and well-being principles woven into the organisation and facilitation of activities rather than being separate add-ons?

**Answer (A):** To institutionalise healing principles and make them an integral part of our processes, it's essential to create a political framework within our organisations, fostering common understanding and broader buy-in from all stakeholders. We have come to realise that healing cannot occur without first looking back, examining what made us unwell in an honest and sincere introspection. This introspection can only be thorough if we create a moment of retrospection, a scan of our feelings, emotions, current energies, our life, surroundings, environment, the air we breathe, and its impact, the warmth surrounding us, and the energy we emit. It is both a physical and mental scan, a self-check. After retrospection and introspection, we can contemplate the transformation needed to achieve the healing we seek.

Do we all understand healing the same way? What does it mean to each person at the table, and what does it represent within and beyond us and our respective environments?

After progressing through these stages, both in theory and practice, we can claim to incorporate this ritual into our several ways of doing things until it becomes institutionalised. Sharing tools like best practices to be incorporated both institutionally and individually becomes necessary to keep humanity at the core of our deepest aspirations.

# Question (Q): How do feminist spaces draw inspiration from and use community-based indigenous practices to their advantage?

**Answer (A):** Respecting an individual's dignity begins with respecting their culture, origins, deep-seated beliefs, and spirituality. QAYN, as an African feminist organisation with Pan-Africanism as a core value, places significant importance on positive community-based indigenous practices. As we contemplate the type of healing to offer in our spaces, the quest for indigenous healing practitioners remains central to our concerns. Finding indigenous African healers who understand and embrace the queer concept in their practice is a challenge. Where can we find indigenous African healers who are comfortable with our diverse identities, identities related to our sexual orientations, gender identities, multiple expressions, and physical characteristics that deviate from the norm? As important as it is to integrate indigenous practices, we must also acknowledge the limitations and barriers faced by members of our communities in accessing full-scale indigenous practices and practitioners. At this point, another form of introspection is necessary, one that is no longer centered on individuals but on the movement as a whole. The fundamental question becomes: "Who among us possesses such indigenous knowledge or practices, and who can share them with

us, among us, for us?" This introspective look at the movement changes everything. We realise that the movement is brimming with talents, knowledge, and untapped wisdom that would benefit both the movement itself and the external world.

#### Question (Q): How do WHRDs benefit from changing their behaviour, if not their healing, at least their interactions within the movement? How do they draw inspiration that supports their individual and collective journeys of healing, care, and well-being?

**Answer (A):** Healing is a process, both collective and individual, and these are equally important. AWHRDs learn, when coming together, that the barriers, obstacles, rejections, and inequalities they face in their daily lives aren't singular and isolated experiences but are structured by the patriarchal social organisation. They understand the systemic weight of the oppression they face. These encounters increase the need for belonging, sharing, solidarity, and mutual support among women who experience such oppressions. Moving beyond "I" creates a "we," and individual suffering becomes a galvanising engine for creating individual change that subsequently spills over into the collective. Suffering becomes political.

This mutual support has been observed and experienced more specifically within QAYN's activities on four occasions. Firstly, during the meeting of trans and non-binary individuals with health and legal service providers, an open conversation highlighted the limitations of each group and each professional body that interacts with trans and non-binary individuals. The same expression of vulnerability was observed during the TAssi Hangbè Interdisciplinary University where the course that makes the personal political opened debates on how our suffering is not unique, isolated, and should not be confined to a closet. Instead, it should be our engine of action, and fear should shift sides. Examples of movements born from this anger were presented, and participants in these spaces experienced a renewed creative force for action born from their suffering. The sixth school, dedicated specifically to introspection and retrospection toward healing, saw a lot of peer support and accompaniment.

#### Question (Q): Any additional Comments?

**Answer (A):** If the concept of well-being and healing is not naturally ingrained in our everyday practices, it remains relatively new as an institutional concept and a political expression of our actions and orientations. Organisations still struggle to understand and integrate this concept, to incorporate it into their strategic plans as a cross-cutting practice, and to gain full understanding and commitment from their teams. Stakeholders, including technical and financial partners, do not uniformly express it. While it is a trend for some, it is a necessity for others. In the rush to incorporate this new way of doing things, it is important to follow the pace of each entity, each organisation, and take the necessary time for healing practices to cease being practices and become the very culture of the organisation. Before being a state to which we aspire, healing must be a state that characterises the process itself. It is not a finality but a continuous state that should guide each of our actions.



### I Know It!

#### | know it!

You know it!

They know it too!

Oh, yes, they know that I know that they know there's nothing more beautiful than a woman taking centre stage.

Nothing more marvellous than a woman using words to untangle our woes.

Well! Yes, they know it. They know that it's no longer possible to have a hold on my femininity.

They know I've taken back the reins long ago.

That my sleeves are rolled up.

That my shoulders are broad enough.

That I no longer lower my gaze.

That I no longer mince my words.

That I no longer hold my tongue and my intelligence is no longer gagged by the system.

They know it.

They know I'm no longer sensitive to prejudices and stereotypes.

They know I've decided to embrace my existence.

That I know my future, my destiny, and my happiness are in my hands.

They know now I don't determine my beauty and brilliance through their gaze.

I am the one who decides that!

They know they can't hide behind anything and everything to distract me, intimidate me, or even steer me away from my goals.

You know why? (a little moment of smiling)

Because I've realised that despite all that noise, I am the muse.

Yes! The muse of fraternity, of humanity, and even of the universe, for I am the

matrix.

The Matriarch.

#### Mariam Dembele



## Go to Kër Kumbë and Feel Good

By Awa Fall Diop

In Thiès, Senegal, I have created a space for us, our refuge. It awaits us, arms outstretched, to unload our burdens, without a word.

At twilight, when the sun casts golden rays that caress and soothe the skin and spirit, I admire the filao trees, which, towering over 6 metres, sway to the evening breeze's music.

A Sahelian wind from the north, refreshing, a wind that tells and retells, through yet unknown musical notes, the suffering of women.

So, I lift my head and watch the clouds' lascivious, languid dance. Then, I hear a hibiscus flower defy gravity to unfurl in a silky rustle, unfolding its velvety petals like a sabar dancer.

I listen to a rosebud crack its stem with strength to unfold a young leaf, a hope for life, but with elegance, without violence, like the drums of Rwanda.

And the jasmine exhales its enchanting fragrance, in balsamic wafts, like a melody from paradise.

As I pass through the lush foliage, they absorb the negative energies within me, infusing me with strength, revitalising me.

Then the birds sing, chirp, flutter among the dozens of nests through the shimmering green foliage of the Mantalys.

Here, in this place of life, replenishment, healing, reconnection with oneself, with life, the messages become clearer, magical.

This magical place, this haven of rest, is Kër Kumbë (House of Kumbë)!

Kumbë! In Wolof, it's the brave women's song who, in the face of difficulties, say no to resignation. It's the call of women to encourage, resist, fight against adversity, take control again.

Kumbë also means the cloth that elegantly cinches the women's waists and has come to symbolise THE woman.

Kumbë! It's also the name of four women, like the cardinal points, four guardian genius women of the water peoples in Senegal, still celebrated by communities through prayers, libations, songs, and dances.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, Kumbë survived slavery and resisted the erasure of African memory. There, together, they are called Makumba.

Makumba is a diverse fusion of traditional West and Central African religions transported during the slave trade, blended with Catholicism. They are present in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay.

Makumba or Kër Kumbë, it signifies courage, regeneration, and healing, faith in oneself and faith in the future.

# Exploring the Healing and Liberating Power of Sound and Movement





## Dance

Poetry without words,

Moving emotions,

Dance, like a feather so light,

Carries secrets and prayers in its flight.

As activists,

Who fight so fiercely,

It's our refuge, our motion clearly.

It transcends words, Languages too,

In each step, it's heard, Expressing our blues.

Under dimmed lights or the starlit skies,

It sets us free, lets us dream.

And when the moment arrives, We dance to express our views, Be it Salsa's energetic groove, Or Coupé Décalé's moves, We dance to denounce and refuse.

Dance is our defence, our shield, Revealing our hearts, And lifts us from lethargy

It's our silent cry, It enables us to break vicious bonds. And in every movement, Judgments we subdue, Dancing to live without torment,

It unites our bodies, souls intertwined, Dance is our weapon, our protest refined.

Against violence, oppression's grip, It's our resistance, redemption's ship. Linked in a solid circle of care, Women dance, a sisterly affair.

From sensual sways to bold displays, We script history, inequalities erase. Dance heals us, soothing our pain, Turning our wounds into an echoing rain.

Amidst sometimes hostile gazes, We find strength, defy life's snares.

So, dance, sisters, dance unreservedly,

Liberate yourselves, proclaim boldly,

Dance is our anthem of rebellion,

In its vein, our sorrows are undone.

It elevates, inspires, a fervent devotion,

Together, in motion, we are a torrent,

And dance, it fortifies us profoundly.

When our diverse bodies merge, the fight takes shape,

Despite varying paths, we share the same tape,

Dance unites us, transcending time, and space.

So, let's dance for equality, for limitless grace.

Pacifique Sognonvi

## **Guest Editor's Reflections:** Dancing Perineum, Nurtured Femininity!

African dance, whether ritualistic or secular, opens an intimate space of freedom and expression intricately linked to nature and the cycle of life. It awakens feelings, desires, and liberates bodily memories. Dance is a form of resistance, a safety valve, a source of well-being that connects us to our deep nature and roots. We were already dancing in our mothers' wombs.

We dance with various parts of our bodies, but not often with our perineum. The perineum, an ensemble of muscles, membranes, and ligaments, forms a dynamic hammock-like structure. It has long been a neglected, tabooed, and underestimated organ, except during childbirth. Traumas to the perineum occur in 20% to 60% of childbirths, according to a case-control study involving women who gave birth vaginally at the main maternity ward of the Central Hospital in Yaoundé. Now, consider childbirths in remote rural areas where basic social services are seriously lacking, which is the norm, especially in West Africa. Perineal tears contribute to maternal morbidity and mortality during the postpartum period (haemorrhage as a significant risk in cases of neglected tearing).

Furthermore, consciously, or unconsciously, the perineum enables us to retain urine. When the perineum loses its tonicity, its alteration affects our comfort and sexual pleasure. Its weakness can shatter our self-body image and diminish our quality of life. Perineum tears also, notably having an impact on the intensity of women's sexual pleasure.

Despite a greater openness to women's bodies and sexuality, to which our numerous struggles on the continent have contributed, there still persists a deep silence on certain extremely important aspects to explore concerning our bodies and sexuality, like the clitoris and the perineum. With over 200 million young girls and women falling victim to sexual mutilation in 30 African countries, publications and mobilisations are spotlighting this atrocity and demonstrating the importance of the clitoris in women's well-being and fulfilment. However, the perineum still lingers in a dark shadow. In an era where nudity is increasingly displayed without inhibition, the perineum stands as one of the last unspoken, unexplored subjects.

We need the overall good health of our bodies, down to the tiniest, most secretive parts—especially those contributing to our pleasure. We need this for our comfort and well-being, to ensure an effective and enduring presence in our struggles, in our movements.

Taking care of our perineum is thus indispensable for us. And dance offers an opportunity to nurture this comfort, to continue feeling good, to preserve a high quality of sexuality.

This is the new exercise that Saïda Naït-Bouda invites us to explore through the dance "El hâl."



# "El hâl Dance: An Art of Movement Born from a Long Quest for Identity"

By Saida Nait-Bouda

Whether in therapeutic rituals, mystical ceremonies, or secular dances, I observe that the dancing being can express something sensitive and unique, transcending social norms and taboos. This is where the being can go "beyond" and express the deepest part of oneself: the "hâl," or state of divine presence.

From this observation, I developed my own **dance technique**, "El hâl or the Body of Memory." Through trance experiences, I explore questions arising from the quadruple burden faced by immigrant women in France: the common challenges of womanhood, the weight of tradition from their countries of origin, the colonial imagery's eroticisation of the female body, and racial discrimination. The practice of El hâl gives rise to a new form of expression that reflects my identity and history.

El hâl, or the "State of Divine Presence," is a practice for nurturing the body and spirit. It invites reconnection with the body through trance (awakening ancestral memories) and "Intranse" (presence and connection between interiority and collective consciousness). Rooted in North African rituals, it's open to all through a transcultural method based on studying the mechanics of movement inherent in these traditional dances—movements already imprinted in the human body, ready to be reactivated.



This isn't about adopting a form or tradition. It's about returning to the knowledge inherently within each of us. It's not about learning; it's about rediscovering these pathways within the body,

#### connecting individuals to their ancestral memory.

#### An Artistic Healing Process

The transmission of the "anchored feminine" is based on studying archaic movements in earthcelebration rituals (pelvic and fertility movements) and female healing rituals (trance and lamentation), practices grounded in connecting to the earth. El hâl extends across multiple domains: art, women's support, therapy, physical therapy, and social mediation. It offers a new approach to grounding, at the intersection of ancestral knowledge and new practices for self-care ...and caring for others.

#### Dance, the Perineum, and Ritual

#### "Reconnecting Broken or Active Bonds with One's Belly!"

Often misunderstood, the perineum is central to our overall posture and essential for nurturing the feminine throughout our lives. The El hâl dance workshop is an integrated experience where each woman, according to her body and history, discovers her self-care resources. Through a progressive approach, the workshop offers awareness and awakening of the perineum through breath-led warm-up, seated and standing pelvic dance practices, partner exercises to tone the perineum, and moments where individual presence resonates with the collective.



#### Healing Ritual: Journey into Anchored Femininity

"Exploring, Healing, Nurturing Your Feminine Essence" is an initiatory journey through two rituals:

- The creation of a self-care ritual called "Earth's Womb," which encompasses personal, ancestral, and generational memories.
- The creation of a collective ritual named "From Lamentation to InTrance," a transformation from releasing tensions to achieving the essence of being. This process oscillates between verticality – finding inner balance – and horizontality – receptivity and communication – allowing the feminine to express itself with serene and grounded strength.

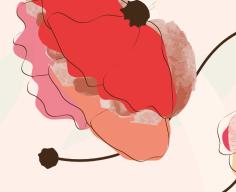
#### The Anchored Feminine: A Tradition of the Future

Between an over-sacralised feminine and a feminism that has largely remained theoretical regarding the body, "Anchored Femininity" represents an approach where women reclaim their bodies by reconnecting with ancestral wisdom. Acknowledging the societal oppressions we face, it's a space for women to create themselves and a world of autonomy, free from rehearsed discourse or intellectual concepts. Through and within their bodies, rooted in unwavering confidence, women generate their own traditions and articulate their needs. Embodied and grounded!

Here are some fundamental aspects of the practice:

- Embracing verticality and feeling the body resonate through reconnecting with the surroundings.
- Harmonising breath and movement, allowing the body's intelligence to emerge.
- Reviving connections severed or still active with the core, awakening the perineal area, to rediscover our foundation and inner security.
- Releasing tensions through repetitive movement during the In-Trance, progressively learning to live with and manage our emotional states.
- Embodying this grounding in our lives. In our relationship with ourselves... and others.

With a gradual approach, the workshops comprise a collective meditation moment, accompanied by incense fumigation; body preparation for presence and specific bodily awareness linked to El hâl dance (the adama); engaging in repetitive movements following the theme; and a guided improvisation phase where each participant finds her hâl.



## Géhenne

**(**)

She said,

I was 12 years old, class 4 C My dreams darkened one night at school In the fierce grip of my French teacher Who sullied me and trampled on my dignity My teacher shamelessly raped me. The beast took my virginity. 30 minutes bathed in my blood Atrocious abdominal pain Anguish and desolation My only companions As a result of my father's and mother's silence

> And a month later, as if that wasn't enough, I was once again, prey to a predator My uncle, in his fifties, stumbled on me Would my eternal destiny be to be raped? What did I do to suffer this hell of torment? Aren't my family and the rapists' accomplices?

Violated day after day My uncle took pleasure And me, pain to die for Rape after rape I took a blow The cup of early sexuality. To bear the yoke of sex that conditioned my life I turned my hell into an illusion of paradise. But today you see? Today, I'm better So calm down, you've been haunted by these bastards But it's not late Just have the desire, the will to forget Find a passion that keeps you busy A sport that you practice You also need a psychologist to help you cope A counselling team to help you enjoy life again Because you are the mason, the builder of a world where we teach others to respect women

> So come out of your silence And speak out Don't listen to your parents Speak out And in unison, we will heal ourselves.

> > Wapondi Djéri

## **Guest Editor's Reflections:** What it means to Dance

When we talk about dance, we often overlook its intrinsic dimension of engagement. Dancing is entering into motion; it's a ritualised staging of the body that not only redefines individuals within the community but also reflects social conceptions and representations.

For us, African feminists born from time-honoured traditions where dancing is a means of celebrating, challenging, negotiating, transforming, or reinforcing a status or social organisation, dance serves as a way to anchor ourselves to our land. It's a space to fully invest in as a vector of social transformation and a practice of individual and collective care.

Dancing while critiquing social chaos or a sociopolitical system, managing to give social functions to movements – this is what Fatoumata Bagayoko accomplishes brilliantly. Through dance, she denounces violence inflicted on herself and other women. She asserts herself, expresses her doubts, fears, and hopes. But, through dance, she also finds peace, brings relief to other women, and advocates for changes in the dynamics of patriarchal violence and domination.

# Dancing to Heal the Community and Oneself

By Fatoumata Bagayoko

In my Malinke community, girls undergo female genital mutilation on the seventh day after birth. My sisters and I were subjected to this practice, leaving us scarred both physically and emotionally. Moreover, at the tender age of 10, I became a victim of sexual assault, adding to the indelible scars and wounds that I carry with me to this day.



For years, I searched for a means to express my pain honestly and to protect other girls from falling victim to these heinous acts. These burdens weigh heavily on me, and their pain still lingers. Thus, I made the resolute decision to become a champion in the fight against these harmful practices unfairly imposed upon girls and women. I stand before my family, my society, and my country, bewildered, and deeply opposed to practices that have no place in the lives of women.

I have tirelessly worked to raise awareness,

initiate dialogues, and shatter the silence surrounding these issues through the art of dance, hoping to bring about change. I dedicated myself to researching female genital mutilation and early marriage, two pressing concerns that weigh heavily on my heart. Gaining insights into these harsh realities, engaging in discussions with elders on these sensitive matters, and understanding their perspectives has enriched my journey.



Malinke In our community, there is a prevailing belief that cutting a girl diminishes her sexual desires. ensuring her virginity until marriage and her faithfulness to her future husband. Our community further propagates the notion that girls who have undergone the cut, born to mothers who submit to their husbands and the community, will lead successful lives. It is believed that their sons will return from even the bloodiest wars unscathed. Conversely, sons born to nonexcised, non-submissive

women are seen as bringing chaos, inconvenience, and shame. Female genital mutilation is perpetuated by women who subject other young girls to this ordeal.

#### Harnessing My Art to Heal the Scourge of Female Genital Mutilation

From this point, I crafted the performance piece **"Fatou, You've Done It All,"** which delves into the subject of female genital mutilation. Through my dance, I convey the act I witnessed and experienced firsthand. I bear the suffering and injustice within my body, experiencing indescribable resentment. It's a scar, an indelible and irreversible void that I will carry with me forever. A pain that I insist on acknowledging.

Clad in red and black in a solo performance, I confide in the audience about female genital mutilation, sharing my own harrowing experience. I lay bare my pain, anxiety, and profound anger towards the irreversible harm inflicted by patriarchal tradition upon girls. Drawing from real-life narratives, I transform them into bodily expressions, conveying emotions and the experiences of female genital mutilation victims through gestures and movements.

I employ both traditional and contemporary dance forms, everyday gestures, and feelings, ranging from joy to confinement, from pain to release, from fear to hope. My dance serves as a source of solace for myself, alleviating the pain experienced by victims. It also fosters understanding among the targeted audience, encouraging them to embrace my message. My creative works draw inspiration from the sounds of nature to narrate these stories, explore these emotions, and incorporate both natural and artificial sounds, as well as sounds of musical instruments.

#### Approaches to Individual and Collective Well-being

Dance serves as a means of release, a channel for expressing grief, dreams, or joy through movement, accompanied by a message, whether spoken or unspoken. Each dance step carries its own significance. To convey my discontent with these pressing issues, I make symbolic movements such as forming a cross, which people understand to mean "stop." Even my posture, whether standing or sitting, conveys meaning. My dance style is accessible to audiences of all backgrounds, as it translates words into the universal language of movement.

During performances, women of all backgrounds- married women, young girls, minors who are not artists, and who come to learn use dance as a medium to express what words cannot. These awareness activities take place in open spaces and are followed by discussions and interactions with the audience to facilitate understanding and **inspire change**.

Through dance, I empower victims who may be afraid to speak out, helping them find their voices and build the confidence to become advocates within their communities. During my performances, the audience sits in a circle, creating a comfortable and trusting environment for listening and discussion.

Following my solo performance, "Fatou, You've Done It All," which sheds light on the patriarchal brutality of female genital mutilation, I continue to share the untold stories of women in a world where women's bodies are subjected to the worst atrocities. In a space filled with objects, fabrics, medicinal plants, and materials that serve as living characters, I perform "My Sweats Have Turned into Tears" to convey the stories of women; stories that are seldom voiced and often overlooked. It's all part of my dance for healing women, me included, and healing our communities. Feminist spaces should incorporate dance into their discussions, experience-sharing, and communication activities to strengthen processes of individual and collective healing.



## A Woman's Smile

**((** ))

Like the eternal magic of the rising sun, A woman's smile forever remains alive, Profound, full of feelings, Radiant, conquering the present, Offered as a sacrifice to time. Just as sweat comes from labour, A woman's smile is born of honour.

Under the spiteful yoke of days of fears, Behind the rigid veil of tears of pain, The weight of injustices anchored in her heart, A woman's smile, against all odds, carries hope.

On the pages of passing time, Our deadlocks are written ceaselessly, Attempts, failures galore, For us, the future wears a mask. A woman's smile makes a fresco of this life.

In the dark hours of lost loves, The seal of betrayal imprinted on a shattered heart, The soul in distress of overwhelming pain, A woman's smile emerges, fierce and strong.

> On the path of reason, Marked by so many seasons, Anchored in determination, A woman's smile, full of passions, Is reborn for the ultimate healing.

Because a woman's smile Carries life with determination, Born from pain, Illuminating life May all the warriors of freedom build a world Where nurturing smiles with determination is the norm. Healing, self-healing, learning to heal, So that happy and free women may thrive...

#### Lyne Des Mots

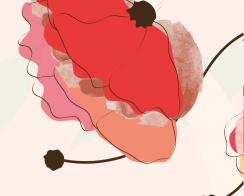
## Dhoruba Inapungua

Healing is first an emergency, then a wish. The wish is to be well; to clothe the face with a smile that, by its very existence, slays an infinity of other realities. Healing is the answer to the metastasising malaise that, for a long time, made the day darker than the night. Healing is relinquishing death to choose life, and that is the essence of my work: to assist in healing.

In this series of photos that I have named "**dhoruba inapungua**," (meaning the storm calms down in Swahili), I call for the healing of all survivors and victims. Addressing women first, I chose to depict myself with symbols inspired by this year's theme, echoing the healing process as conceived in my culture. It is not surprising, therefore, to find colours, movements, flowers, smiles, and many metaphors in these photos. Do not just see pictures; listen to these scenes that sing an ode to healing.

Lina Mensah





## Like a Lioness

**(**))

Sister! It's not just for today, Make sure that this 8th of March is every day of your life, The day you unfasten your freedom from the cross, The day you lift your veil to affirm your choice, The day you find the strength to conquer your fears and raise your voice high, Yes, make every day that you rise like a Lioness to defend your rights.

Zaho mila ano isan'andro mijoro kara Lionne Miady kara Lionne Tsy magneky resy, masaky, masiaka kara Lionne Tava feno tsiky, mamiratra antsika, mamaritra antsika Fa manan-kery mi Rayonne I want to see you with your head held high like a Lioness Fight like a Lioness

Don't allow yourself to be beaten down, dare to roar like a Lioness With a big smile on your face, illuminating, affirming who you are And sharing your strength, don't forget to shine.

#### Sister

When tensions get on your nerves, And overloaded thoughts drown you in an ocean of pain, Breathe!

You see these woes in all colours, The violence, the injustices in this cruel world, And you feel empty. If you can no longer find the strength to continue the battle, Then let go!

Let yourself go crazy, shatter the barriers and rules, Rebel! Vibrate!

Ignore, toss stereotypes in the garbage, Forget all this chaos and make yourself "a free being." And above all, don't hold back, Let your body speak, Listen to your heart, Open your soul, Free your being, Sing as you wish, Dance as you are, And soar like birds. Move as you can, release it all in motion, You are in evacuation, You are in liberation. You are in purification The universe is with you So, listen and let yourself heal through the sounds.

Satria, Zaho mila ano isan'andro mijoro kara Lionne Miady kara Lionne Tsy magneky resy, masaky, masiaka kara Lionne Tava feno tsiky, mamiratra antsika, mamaritra antsika Fa manan-kery mi Rayonne Because I want to see you with your head held high like a Lioness Fight like a Lioness Don't allow yourself to be beaten down, dare to roar like a Lioness With a big smile on your face, illuminating, affirming who you are And sharing your strength, don't forget to shine.

#### Makwa Joma

### **Guest Editor's Reflections:** Combining Feminist Activism, Dance, and Dramaturgy for Resistance and Healing

In African cultures, marionettes have multiple meanings and serve ritual, religious, social, educational, health, political, entertaining, or aesthetic functions. Manipulated in a ritual or secular theatrical context, puppets tell a story through tragic, lyrical, humorous, or satirical dialogues. In Africa, since ancient times, puppets have been used in magico-religious practices during individual or collective healing sessions. On stage, puppets can reflect social tensions such as colonisation, violence, and exclusion. They can also narrate struggles, resistance, problems that eventually find solutions, and tensions that eventually subside. Puppets are involved in processes of emotional support, healing, and spirituality, serving as a deep interaction between our sacred ancestry and our contemporary world. Puppet theatre in Africa remains a vibrant popular art form, witness to historical phases such as colonisation, independence, various development strategies, and the current globalisation movement. It has managed to resist and adapt by reinventing itself and renewing its repertoire and means.

Today, puppets are entering the realm of feminist demands, gender-based violence, and the decolonisation of the female body, which remains a site of torture and political oppression. Through the intersection of art and activism, artists use puppets to create empathy and broaden the audience's perception. As objects, articulated or not, puppets have characteristics that allow for boundless creativity. The artist, not addressing the audience directly but through this medium, wields extraordinary power and freedom.

It is in this space that Rachida delves to make her marionettes dance, tell stories of feminist resistance, and healing for the well-being of women. Puppet theatre has the power to multiply communication channels, diversify the means of popularising mobilising songs, innocently discuss still taboo subjects, and promote a strong dynamic to raise awareness among various groups in favour of women's rights.



# Puppet Shows and Dances as Tools for Defending Women's Fundamental Rights.

By Rachida Tahirou

I am a storyteller, percussionist, and puppeteer from a Muslim family. I am both the example and the response to discrimination against women.

Even today, people continue to believe that women should neither touch nor play certain musical instruments like the drum, the kora, the balafon, etc., under the pretext that these instruments are reserved for men. I encourage women with my performances to defy these old taboos by introducing them to music: they learn to play the drum, the gong, the rattle, and this gives them total confidence in themselves and their potential.

With my group, we usually work on rhythms from the northern and southern regions of Togo. For example, the Agbadja rhythm from southern Togo is a contraction of "Agbéa - dja," where "agbé" means life and "dja" means to rain. So, Agbadja means "it's raining life." By using this dance, I help women externalise their emotions and enjoy life since it's a dance of celebration that involves swaying the upper body so that the two shoulder blades touch each other, accompanied by foot movements that pound the ground alternately depending on whether the rhythm accelerates or not. After practicing this dance, they feel a certain relaxation since it's both physical and athletic, working on the shoulder blades, the spine, the soles of the feet, and the nerves. We also practice Gazo, a faster version of Agbadja that involves moving the entire body. I remember that after a Gazo dance session with women, one of them confided in me that she no longer felt her palpitations and promised to continue the exercise. Dance practices are moments of letting go, feeling joy, motivation, and decision-making for us women, as we often do not have the time or are not used to having that opportunity to simply experience happiness and pleasure.

I also lead a group of artists that I train in puppetry and who perform with me. To conduct my mission, I create shows on various themes such as women's leadership, self-confidence, the fight against violence against women, or forced marriage. In my repertoire, there is a storytelling show titled 'Courageous Women,' aimed at encouraging women to take initiatives and make decisions. There is also 'The Hell that is My Home', a puppetry show aimed at helping women break their silence about the violence they endure while raising awareness about the existence of human rights

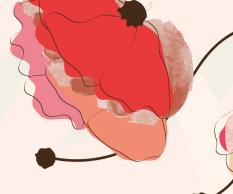
organisations for women. The themes I address are often related to the well-being of women and children. My puppetry theatre shows are performed in front of attentive and excited audiences. The songs we sing, and the applause express the joy of sharing. Today, we live in a world where individualism and selfishness keep us in front of our multiple television or phone screens. I believe it's possible to heal by leaving our homes and sharing a brief moment of live performance (puppet theatre). Also, the puppetry shows offered by my company are a valuable and playful tool for defending women's fundamental rights.



Feminist organisations can create puppetry theatre training and/or workshops request my shows to raise awareness and promote the full enjoyment of women's fundamental rights and freedoms, as a puppetry show is a lively art that quickly captures the audience's attention.

During these moments of performance that we share with women, we see that they forget their worries, get carried away by our songs, start dancing to the sound of the drum, and thus,

pleasure is shared. Bodies become more flexible, souls lighter, and it brings joy. The laughter, cries of joy, pleasure expressed and experienced by women and children, are all moments of happiness that deserve to be repeated and expanded.





## **Quiet Little Drum**

There are gazes filled with poetry, Lips laden with stories, But they may never dare to speak. There are arms that carry life,

Yet they cannot carry themselves. There are fragile bodies that bear the world, But no longer live within it. There are cries that resonate within silences, Tears that dance behind smiles. Pain acquired as fate, Passed on like an inheritance, in silence. There are hopes nurtured by despair,

Nests of happiness that are unfamiliar with the essence of living. Feats that we've learned. Aren't worth anything at all. There are hands that shape the world,

> Yet each day they beg for bread. Supernatural strengths that carry nations, But are denied the right to speak. There are cries that resonate within silences,

These beings so fragile, yet so strong, made to believe they are nothing. There are those feared and muzzled, Voices too vivid and virile to be those of women. They are the weaker sex who've taught the strong what it means to be a man. There are women whose intelligence and speech disturb,

Whose drums of rejoicing have been chained and imprisoned. There are drums that have turned into silence,

#### A DRUM OF SILENCE.

There are women who bear the world, Who nourish it with their small hands, But are told their voices do not matter.

You are that woman they fear, You are that intelligence they dread, You are that dream they fear becoming real, You are that hope they're afraid to see blossom. You are that little thing that makes them tremble, Those supposedly strong men. So let your small voice shine, Shine in the darkness where they've confined you.

May your cry resonate like a drum, And the poetry of your pains traverses the ages of your small voice, May it resonate beyond nations, And go tell them that the little thing they fear has awakened.

Resonate, quiet little drum, Resonate so that no one dares to cast you into oblivion again, Because you existed before the world was. Resonate, resonate, resonate.

#### Epiphanie Dionrang

#### **Guest Editor's Reflections**

The voice is heard within, in absolute closeness, an immediate experience. The subject does not have to step outside of themselves, their words never leave them, they do not fall out of them or their breath. Our words never cease to belong to us, to be at our disposal. Our words, our voice, are sonorous, resonating within themselves.

Therefore, speaking, singing, is to occupy a space.

When you have long been silenced by traditions and religions that are the essence of patriarchy, reciting your life, in your own words, with your own language, reclaiming it, being a living, sonorous part of history, creating the world, is a key aspect of restoration and healing.

This healing spreads and multiplies through empathy. When we manage to project ourselves into another's situation, we experience an emotional response to their emotion.

Empathy signifies two movements in two directions.

To depart from oneself, to let another take possession of you, to keep the door open to melodies, movements once misunderstood and/or despised, but also to take the time to feel other feeling, to listen to them, to let them resonate within us. Like in a dance of metamorphosis, becoming the other, letting the other become us. And healing each other, healing together.

These are some lessons we can learn from Oumou Sy.



## At the Heart of Creative Activism in the Mauritanian Landscape

By Oumou Sy

The struggle of women lies at the heart of creative processes and development efforts aimed at achieving genuine well-being. Mauritania is no exception to this rule, and a prime example is the issue of the failure to pass a law punishing violence against women and girls for nearly two decades. Additionally, there is the absurdity of the personal status code, which, after forbidding any Mauritanian woman from marrying before the age of 18, adds the phrase "except the incapable," an undefined expression that opens the door to all sorts of abuses and misuses. These two elements represent just a small fraction of the visible side of the iceberg of women's rights issues, which makes achieving well-being for women and girls here nearly impossible.

As artists, it is this reality that guides our choice of "Creative Activism" as our approach and foundation for projects that address our endogenous realities. We believe that the success of a struggle lies in our ability to internalise the issues and use our creativity to initiate a relevant process of fighting, known as creative activism.

Our approach through creative activism involves individuals driven by outrage who engage in the social realm to find innovative solutions. As such, many of our projects and activities are participatory and inclusive responses to the traumas faced by women. They serve as care for women and are a form of healing practice.

#### Seizing the Public Space for Healing and Feminist Existence

Launched at the headquarters of the Nouakchott Music Action Association (NMA), the Dynamic **Woman Vector RED** (Regeneration-Enrichment-Development) is a dedicated entity for human rights, specifically focusing on girls and women living in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. It works towards women's regeneration, enrichment, and development. Through innovative advocacy, RED focuses on women's empowerment to secure and strengthen their rights across all aspects of life. It is at the forefront of the fight against violence against women and girls.



The overarching project aims to harness the dynamic potential and voices within our Mauritanian geographical sphere to create a unified force in support of human rights, particularly women's rights. This framework seeks to engage stakeholders from various sectors, encouraging them to utilise their talents and expertise for social causes. To effectively reach a broad audience, Creative Activism is employed. Our strategy is holistic, inclusive, and easily embraced by all generations, speaking with a unified voice that resonates with our multicultural identity through shared living and actions.

#### Expressing Their Pain in Their Own Words

"Women's Voice in the Chapter" is a project that brings together women from various social, economic, and cultural backgrounds to bring forth the pains and words of women on stage, in 60-second chronicles, in the language of their choice, and supports the

creation of innovative advocacy tools (songs, paintings, theatre, urban arts, and more).

Through **"Women's Voice in the Chapter"**, a participant recounts how "raising her voice" in public changed her relationship with her family and children, and she concludes, "Since I started speaking up, I matter, and my opinion matters!"

Another participant testifies, "We are in a society that makes women invisible, so an initiative like **Women's Voice in the Chapter**" (Femme Voix au Chapitre) is lifesaving, as the female voice is priceless."

#### "I am you; you are me, together we are one!"

"Dimension Femme" is another project aimed at women, encompassing several programs. The "In My Skin" aspect seeks to strengthen sisterhood through empathy-driven interactions among women, rather than mere compassion. For 24 hours, the duration of the Earth's rotation, a full day, 16 women from diverse backgrounds agree to step into each other's shoes. It's in this action that empathy truly comes into play.

This program, centered around discussions about biases and social perceptions, aims to deconstruct societal norms surrounding women. The **"Museum of Digital Humanities"** segment involves creating components for a travelling exhibition dedicated to women's empowerment through dance, makeup, artwork, music, and more. Lastly, the **"Journey of Shattered Lives"** aspect, guided by visual communication, reclaims urban spaces hostile to female expression, weaving together different forms of expression as bridges.

#### **Reliving My Life and Healing**

The various projects are processes of reclaiming oneself through speech and expression in various forms of our existence as women in the public space. This makes our projects a healing process for a full and complete existence. It's a social and individual therapy that can and should spread through duplication and expansion of practices in feminist spaces, serving as essential sources of well-being that allow women's full potential to blossom.



As advocates for women's and girls' rights and sense of well-being, we could consider convening a symposium on best practices and the cross-pollination of knowledge and experiences, with the aim of collaboratively producing a handbook of healing practices and initiatives inspired by our realities and on-the-ground activities, as a contribution and legacy to future generations. Building bridges and connections is the most impactful endeavour, along with codeveloping joint projects that unite our initiatives. Additionally, establishing a virtual platform to promote and share our activities could be part of this comprehensive effort.

### Music

**(**)

Melody pleasing to our ears, Uniting sounds and voices, It's the language of our emotions, And begins where words lose their power.

In the struggle, music resonates, It's a force, an echo, a crown. When trials try to break us, It lifts, dances, encourages to move forward.

In a world where many voices are silenced, Music, it rises, soothes. It illuminates the shadows, breaks the chains, Liberating words flow in its veins.

It sings of equality, sisterhood, Reveals the truth, shatters inequalities. It's the voice of the oppressed, the forgotten, A symbol of courage, of pride.

> In its rhythms, we exalt our rage, It's the energy that destroys cages. It heals wounds, dispels fears.

Music is therapy, an inner balm. It celebrates our victories, our resistances, It resonates with strength, without compromise.

It's the echo of our struggles, of our hopes, And in each note, it weaves our story. As the struggle is so tough, Music is a refuge, a torment.

It reminds us that we're not alone, That we're united, powerful, that our voice flows. So, let music heal our souls, Carry its words, its melodies, its flames.

Let's unite our voices, our hearts in harmony, And together, build a world of infinite equality.

Pacifique Sognonvi

Guest Writer's Reflections: The Sound of Protest, The Sound of Healing

It is well known; music has powers over us! It can motivate us, calm us down, and even put us to sleep. It can also make us cry and evoke a whole range of emotions.

Music comes with multiple benefits, such as reducing stress and increasing the effects of relaxation. Music can facilitate communication and support individual expression. Music can also reflect revolt, protest, commitment, and/or opposition with goals of social and/or political change.

Where words may not persuade, music can more easily touch people. Revolt, protest, regeneration, and wellbeing for a humane social justice: that's Kalam, the queen of "kundé".



## My Healing Through the "Kundé"

By Kalam

**Playing the "kundé"** (a traditional musical instrument in Burkina Faso exclusively reserved for men) brings me an indescribable zest for life, a feeling I can't even put into words. Playing the "kundé" has healed me from many traumas I've experienced and has helped me overcome challenging moments. The sound of the "kundé" saved my life and gave me with a fresh lease on life.



When I was seven, I was not allowed to attend school. At twelve, I narrowly escaped female genital mutilation; and at seventeen, I fled from a forced marriage. Drawing from my life and the lives of **African women**, the themes I develop are related to our experiences, our struggles against prejudices. I unveil the pains that affect women in African society.

At the beginning of my career in Burkina Faso, some people labelled me as a rebellious woman who wanted to break traditions and challenge norms by competing with men. Nobody wanted to help me learn to play this instrument, which is reserved for men, but that didn't stop me. On the contrary, it became a source of motivation, a battle. After two years of searching, I found a mentor (Aboubacar Djiga) who had the open-mindedness to teach me how to play the "kundé." Initially, I felt alone, but as I played, I saw the faces

of women light up, laugh, or become thoughtful while listening to my music and songs. Being able to feel this connection with them gives me even more strength to forge ahead on this path.

My uniqueness is reflected in five fundamental strengths: the "Kundé," the "Kalambatt" (a musical instrument I designed myself), my voice, my veiled face, which earned me the nickname "Poogpaala de la musique" (music's bride in Mooré), and my strong societal commitment. I merge cultural roots with the spirit of the feminist revolution through song and rhythm.

The role of the "kundé" in the feminist movement is to denounce, give voice, soothe, and bring joy to all suffering women. I wear a mask that serves as a veil for my wedding with music, and behind this mask lies an angry woman demanding the well-being and respect of women's rights. And I wear a hat to remind men that we, as women, hold power.



## Dance Therapy as a Healing Tool for Survivors of Extreme Violence

Interview with Amina Alice Lusambo, art-therapist at the Panzi Foundation

#### Question (Q): Could you please introduce yourself to our readers? Who Is Amina-Alice and which organisation do you work for?

**Answer (A):** My name is **Amina Alice Lusambo**, a clinical psychologist and art therapist at Maison Dorcas, an institution within the **Panzi Foundation** that focuses on women's empowerment. The Centre started a program of psychological reconstruction and **dance therapy**. The Centre prepares women for social, professional, and economic adaptation, providing accommodation, various professional training, and home-based support in different villages, depending on the beneficiary's life and environment.

## Question (Q): What does the psychological recovery and dance therapy program that you oversee at the Panzi Foundation entail?

**Answer (A):** In this program, we start with psychotherapy through regular individual or group sessions. We also help patients on anxiolytics and/or antidepressants organise their traumatic memories using Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, which is a psycho-neurobiological therapy based on sensory stimulation. We alleviate patients' suffering through grounding techniques that trigger positive emotions to counter negative ones and through Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), specifically adapted to individuals with depression, reducing the risk of relapse by half within a year.

Since 2014, after conducting pre and post-psychological evaluations of our beneficiaries, we observed that those participating in therapeutic dance and movement sessions for 6 to 12 weeks experience reduced stress levels and decreased anxiety. If needed, we also employ writing therapy, known as expressive therapy through writing, where expressing feelings through writing gradually alleviates the sensation of trauma or psychological discomfort. The goal here is to find recurrences and assess whether they are positive or negative for the individual. Personal and intimate assessments allow individuals to put words to events in their lives and indirectly liberate their voice.

We help the patients in reconnecting with their bodies, regaining self-confidence, and selfesteem, addressing comorbidities, and building a strong support system through rhythmic gymnastics (RG), a sport, and dance therapy, which uses movement as a process to help an individual regain their psychosomatic unity. In dance therapy, the body becomes the key, the messenger to understand oneself better. It allows individuals to return to their bodies, soothe their agitated minds, introspect, release physical, emotional, and spiritual tension, and blockages. It fulfils the need for a non-verbal approach. In dance therapy, the body is the instrument through which one learns to feel comfortable in their own skin, move beyond their thoughts, and rediscover the energy of childhood through various movements. Through free dance, self-awareness and the release of tension and blockages imprinted in the body's memory arise.



## Question (Q): Can you tell us more about how this program started and its benefits for survivors?

**Answer (A):** The dance therapy program was born out of necessity when we received several victims of sexual violence aged between 11 and 15 who suffered from mutism. They found it difficult to verbalise the atrocities they had endured, so dance therapy was the best possibility to allow them to express themselves through body movements.

Slow and fluid dance movements help patients focus on their breathing and relax. These movements also help in releasing physical and emotional tensions accumulated in the body, reducing feelings of anxiety. They allow individuals to rediscover their anatomy, bring forth sensations, feelings, or thoughts and rehabilitate damaged psychic and/or physical abilities. It is a form of creative therapy. On a physical level, dance therapy improves blood circulation, coordination, and muscle tone, while on a mental and emotional level, it strengthens self-

assertion, revives intellectual abilities and creativity, and helps individuals cope with emotions that are sometimes difficult to express verbally, such as anger, frustration, or feelings of isolation. In group settings, dance therapy promotes social reintegration, self-awareness, spatial awareness, and the creation of emotional bonds. It also provides a sense of well-being stemming from the joy of being in a group.

At Maison Dorcas, we hold dance therapy sessions twice a week, lasting from half an hour to an hour or more, depending on the context (group or individual) and the specific needs of the beneficiaries. As a dynamic form of therapy, dance therapy sessions can be conducted individually or in a group. During the first meeting, the therapist aims to define the motives and aims of the approach, followed by the dance and movement component. Dance therapy is suitable for people of all ages and conditions, and it can be useful for promoting overall health, self-image, and self-esteem, as well as reducing stress, fears, anxiety, physical tension, and chronic pain. Here at Maison Dorcas, with adolescent victims of sexual violence, the audience often includes around 45 people. Participation follows a specific protocol from the initial assessment, including interviews and care sessions, to relaxation sessions that encompass free dance, grounding, stretching, moments of silence, followed by rhythmic gymnastics (for muscle tone), physical exercises to boost brain energy and regulate heart rate, rhythmic dance (to enhance attention and focus), choreographies (to improve coordination, boost self-esteem, and enhance mother-child attachment), and a final session (to facilitate integration, dispel negative energies, and absorb positive ones).

The program's conclusion includes acupressure sessions to restore perfect balance to the body by stimulating its entire energy flow and other psychological self-care exercises to enable the beneficiary to continue managing their emotions and psychological state once they return to their community.



## Question (Q): How many girls and women have participated in the program since its inception, and can you share some touching testimonies you have received?

**Answer (A):** Since 2014, over 600 girls and young mothers who were victims of sexual violence, aged between 11 and 25, have participated in dance therapy sessions. Among various testimonies, there is a young girl, who at the time was 14 years old and a mother of a baby boy conceived through rape, whom she did not want at all. One day, we caught her attempting to bury her baby alive. After three months of participating in the program, she began to pay special attention to her child. Thanks to the dance therapy sessions, she stopped taking psychotropic drugs and became psychologically stable. A year ago, she returned to Maison Dorcas with her son to express her gratitude and testify to the effectiveness of dance therapy. Currently, she has stable employment and has taken control of her life.

Another individual with epilepsy was able, through the exercises, to increase brain energy, reducing fainting episodes without continuous use of antiepileptic drugs. Most of the young female beneficiaries have stopped taking psychotropic drugs thanks to dance therapy, regained their mental health, and taken control of their lives. The majority of the girls who participated in these sessions are now in households and have successfully integrated their children conceived through rape into their homes. At the Centre, we have observed a decrease in physical and mental illness rates among the girls who participate in therapeutic sessions, rhythmic gymnastics, and other forms of sports organised in addition to psychotherapeutic sessions.

#### Question (Q): Do you have any advice for feminist movements?

**Answer (A):** I believe feminist spaces can integrate these activities by organising art therapy and dance therapy training workshops to support activists in their healing processes.



## Woman

((

Oh you, mother, Earth, or should I rather say WOMAN. Isn't it evident that I am the mother of all humanity!

Aren't I this sphere of positive energies and good vibrations upon which the human race relies?

But why then?

Why, human race, do you persist in assigning me the role of second?

Why replace the punching bag with my body?

Why must I wrestle for rights that are fundamentally basic Human rights?

Ah, yes! I forgot, it's a matter of power dynamics or "Misikili" (muscle)?

Ah, woman, or should I say Mother Earth, for it is my responsibility to endure...

Despite these hints of inciting wills and desires to wither my femininity when it is 'My Femininity' that makes humanity bloom.

Oh heavens, for my power and strength are unprecedented.

Or perhaps I should tremble, Me, Mother Earth, for a fraction of a second to legitimise my power at the risk of their lives. To show them that I am the epitome of power!

Or should I make it rain with fire?

What am I saying?

## They know.

Oh yes, they know it!

They know perfectly well that in the blink of an eye, I will dethrone, destroy, or even exterminate this human race, mother of injustice.

But they are lucky because I am nothing but love.

That's just me, a bubble of benevolence and good faith.

I am a woman!

I am humanity. It exists because I exist.

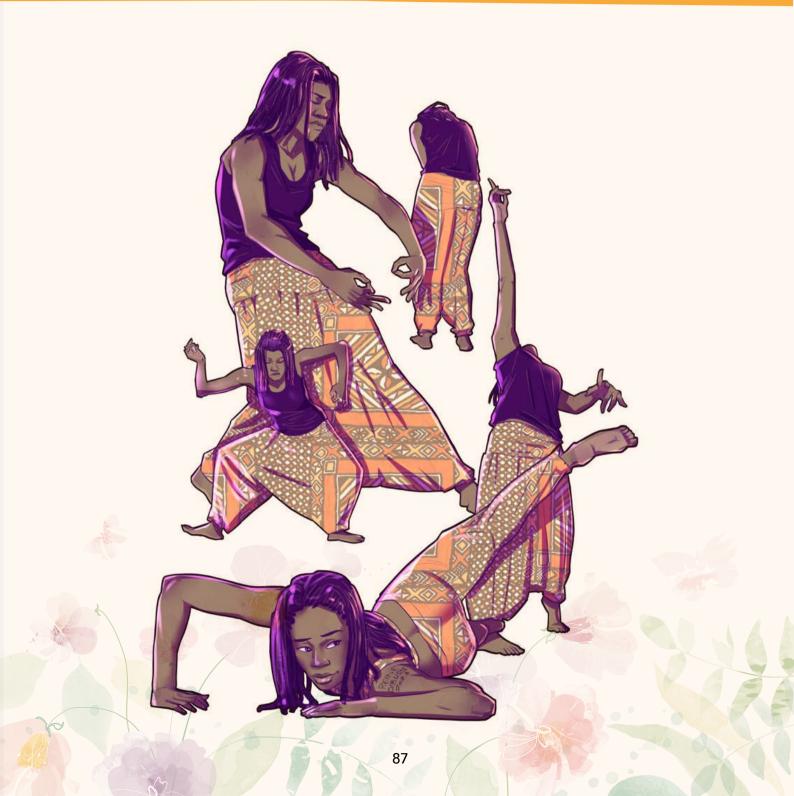
So no, no, no, I refuse to let it define me. Instead, I grasp it and define it in my image.

Through this sensitivity I demonstrate, through the morality within me, through the humanism that is my honour, through this courage synonymous with being a woman.

I am a woman, and my rights are purely and simply human rights...

Mariam Dembele

# Some Tips and Advice for Defenders





## As Feminists, We Are All "Close Caregivers". Let Us Take Care of OURSELVES!

By Awa Fall Diop

The term "close caregiver" refers to anyone who provides unpaid support to someone in need, including family members and/or others. In the face of the relative disarray of African peoples, in addition to contextual factors such as fundamentalisms, the adverse effects of climate change on women's lives, the lingering impact of COVID-19, the increase in our anxiety and fears, our feminist activism takes on superhuman dimensions.

We have lost many of our sisters by blood, our sisters in the struggle, and we must tirelessly continue to show even more resistance, more strength. For this, we need to carve out time and space to take care of ourselves! **If we want to continue to be effective, we must prioritise our well-being.** 

We must schedule moments during which we will take care of ourselves, to gain more strength, have a more fulfilling relationship within our movements, possess a wide range of resources that help us stay in shape, and support each other. Here, we propose some moments, significant moments of play and relaxation.

You surely have other exercises, practices, and tips, so share them through the Dzuwa Magazine! Together, let's reinforce our clearly expressed intention to take care of our individual and collective well-being. As feminists, we are all "close caregivers", let us take care of OURSELVES!

In this issue of Dzuwa, playful exercises allow us to reconnect with ourselves, to centre ourselves on our inner being... And we simply come alive to the essential... and we surrender to better open ourselves to the original sources of the African land, its peaceful strength, its eternal energy...

The dance movements and the sounds of the music converse, extending each other in slow, neverrepeated motions, and the mind and body merge, the external and the internal become one. Nothing is separate anymore. The entity comes into place. A lived entirety is offered, a complete experience.

#### Music, musica

#### The Effects of Music

Music carries meaning. It should be coherent with your universe, amplify it, and strengthen it. It should provide an "emotional cocktail" that will give you a memorable experience, in the truest sense of the term.

African music (traditional or contemporary) has positive and enveloping melodies, and its tempo is not complex.

It warms and elevates the moment. The tempo and volume should evolve according to the moment (relaxation or active 2 phase). It has:

**Psychological effects**: rhythms adapt to those of the music, slowing their intensity. The body releases dopamine. Music is a natural antidepressant. It reduces stress.

**Physiological effects**: Heart rate is regulated. Muscle tensions are eased.

**Spiritual effects**: Traditional, tribal, and sacred music have the capacity to stretch time and space, guiding us towards meditation, contemplation, or trance. The repeated frequency of drums at a range of 0.5 to 13 Hertz plunges the listener into a state ranging from relaxation to deep sleep. It is a gentle journey into the unconscious. That is why they are conducive to spiritual awakening.

**Effects on our intellectual capacities**: Music enhances our imagination, creativity, ease of concentration, and memorisation abilities.

#### Musicality: Listening to the Music of Your body

The ability to stay attuned to the music even when you are focused on your body, being able to sense with your body, to feel the music even while dancing precise steps - this requires letting go and leaving behind that pesky mind that always catches up with us! Choose a moderately paced music that you enjoy. Take the time to listen to it and feel what it inspires you to do in terms of movements, without performing them. Then listen to it again and this time, dance. Be attentive, physically, to the variety of the music: the atmosphere, the rhythm, its dynamics, its character, the emotion it might evoke in you, the markers you find in it, the accents. Transcribe them into your body in your own way. You will see; it is incredibly enriching!

#### **Mini Dance Exercises**

Movement dance allows you to connect with your body and emotions in a non-verbal way. Dance is particularly effective in releasing repressed emotions and feeling better in your skin. Here are simple yet powerful exercises to help you bring positivity to your emotions.

**Exercise 1**: Anger Dance. This dance is designed to help you release repressed anger. Play energetic music and start dancing while expressing your anger through your movements. Let your body move freely and do not hold back. You can scream, cry, or even stomp the ground if you feel the need. Continue dancing until you feel liberated.

**Exercise 2**: Sadness Dance. This dance is designed to release repressed sadness. Play soft music and start dancing while expressing your sadness through your movements. Let your tears flow if needed. You can also embrace yourself and sway gently. Dance until you feel liberated.

**Exercise 3**: Joy Dance. This dance helps you cultivate joy and positivity. Play uplifting music and start dancing while expressing your joy through your movements. Let your body move freely and smile as much as possible. You can even invite a friend to dance with you and share your joy. Keep dancing until you feel filled with joy.

#### Perineal Movements: An Intimate Dance

In a quiet place, lie comfortably on your back with your legs bent and your feet flat on the floor. Your bladder should be empty. Breathe gently and slowly.

- 1. Inhale while expanding your chest.
- 2. Exhale while contracting your perineum as much as possible, as if holding back urine. Imagine pulling in your belly as if putting on tight jeans. Also, ensure you relax your buttocks and abdomen while holding the contraction for 3 to 5 seconds.
- 3. Release the perineal contraction during inhalation for at least 5 seconds.
- 4. Repeat the contraction-relaxation sequence 30 to 50 times per day. As you progress, the contraction time can be increased by 3 to 5 seconds, and you can contract the perineum for up to 10 seconds, with a relaxation period of at least the same duration. Simply put, think about contracting the muscles (the ones you use to hold in urine) every day, whenever you remember. Once you have mastered the exercise, you can do it while sitting, standing, or even during daily activities, synchronised with music you enjoy (commuting to work, school, work tasks, phone conversations, etc.). The goal is for it to become automatic and contribute to a healthy lifestyle, bringing you joy and well-being.

#### The River of My Life

Every life, especially that of a feminist, is far from being a calm river flowing happily, joyfully, without turbulence, without ripples. Nevertheless, the river of our life also includes serene spaces, calm breaths, waterfalls of joy that sing a refreshing melody, banks where we can lounge. Its winding course follows unexpected movements and produces meanders that, in their dancing curves, sometimes get lost in the distance of the lands or join and swell, supporting other streams, or other flows come to strengthen us. But all of us valiantly and energetically plunge into the magnificent ocean of our struggles, our victories. Drawing the river of your life, whether alone or in a group, is beneficial! On a large piece of paper, draw the river of your life with its important twists, characters, and places, the significant lessons. Sharing phase if done in a group:

- 1. Display, exhibit the different drawings.
- 2. Share an important sentence with the group, a moment, a person, a date.
- 3. What shared experiences do you have?
- 4. If there is turbulence, how did you overcome it?
- 5. How did you use the waterfalls and their melodies?
- 6. How did you feel while lounging on the calm shores?
- 7. Which of its arms did the river of your life lose? Which arms came to strengthen it?
- 8. What do you do to enjoy moments of serenity?

## Dzuwa III: Edition Quiz



Question 1: When and where did the 2<sup>nd</sup> Feminist Republik take place?

**Question 2:** What is the name of the womn's refuge created by Awa Fall Diop in Thiès, Senegal?

**Question 3:** What is the title of Fatoumata Bagayoko's dance performance created by which delves into the subject of female genital mutilation?

**Question 4:** What part of the body is involved in the El Hal dance developed by Saida Nait-Bouda?

**Question 5:** Name the two traditional dances from Togo that Rachidatou Tahirou teaches to womn in her workshops.

**Question 6:** Which Pan-African feminist organisation do Solange A. M. Kibibi and Nataka Gmakagni work for?

**Question 7:** What is the name of the traditional instrument from Burkina Faso played by musician Kalam?

**Question 8:** What is the name of the project developed by Oumou Sy's organisation which brings forth the pains and words of women on stage, in 60-second chronicles and in the language of their choice?

**Question 9:** Since 2014, how many girls and women have taken part in the dance therapy sessions initiated by Amina Alice Lusambo at Maison Dorcas within the Panzi Hospital?

**Question 10:** How many African countries were represented in Dzuwa III this year?

Send us your correct answers along with your name, country, and a few words on what you appreciated the most in Dzuwa III. Drop your answers and information to feministrepublik@uaf-africa.org or click here to answer the quiz.

# **Contributors Page**



#### **Oumou SY** (Mauritania)



An economist by training, Oumou Sy is a young Mauritanian musician born in Rosso in the Trarza region on the Mauritanian-Senegalese border. Innate leadership is undoubtedly what characterises Oumou, a social entrepreneur and cultural operator since childhood. As a young pupil, she was already initiating various clubs and projects around education, art and solidarity actions. After obtaining a degree in economics at the University of Nouakchott, Oumou dreamed of working for a financial institution, but she could not see herself sitting in an office between four walls all day. So she decided to follow her passion for music and development at the Nouakchott Music Action (NMA) music school, where she has initiated several women-

centred projects, including the Festival Culture Métisse, for which she oversees programming. For her, music is not just a passion, but a means of expression and a resource for development.

#### Saida NAIT-BOUDA (Algeria)



Saïda Naït-Bouda is a dancer and dance researcher, and the creator of the El hâl method. Born in France of Algerian parents, Saïda's quest for her own identity led her on a journey of initiation that focused on the dancing body in the land of her origins. Her research is based on long journeys to the heart of therapeutic rituals in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

She was invited to give a carte blanche to the Centre National de la Danse as part of the "Djazair 2003" Year of Algeria. She was awarded the "2008 Year of Culture" label for her interdisciplinary project "Nous sommes tous des Made In Taiwan". Saïda has worked with a wide range of institutions,

including the Institut du Monde Arabe, the Palais de Tokyo, the Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerrané (Mucem), the Institut des cultures d'Islam, the Conservatoire Georges Bizet, the Folie Musique (now the Philharmonique de Paris) and the Rencontres photographiques de Bamako. After years of research, she is now offering a professional training course for people who want to acquire her method as part of their work in women's support and well-being.

#### LYNE DES MOTS (Côte d'Ivoire)



Lyne is an Ivorian poet, slammer, lyricist, member of the Collectif au nom du Slam Côte d'Ivoire, radio podcast host, ambassador for the international Accord Parfait association, second prize winner of the 2015 reality show Ecole des poètes and Champion of the international Slam Rose competition for the fight against breast cancer. She is committed to conscious love between human beings and to the emancipation and effective freedom of women in African society and everywhere else.

#### Immaculate MUGO (Kenya)



Immaculate is a pan-African, queer intersectional feminist who is passionate about sustainability, gender inclusivity, availability of and access to affirming services, justice and resourcing movements. She belives that each person has the right to self-determination. Immaculate is a content developer and sits within the Transformative Partnerships & Philanthropy portfolio at Urgent Action Fund-Africa.

#### Fatoumata BAGAYOKO (Mali)



Fatoumata was born in Bamako, Mali. As a child, she danced at traditional ceremonies in her neighbourhood, and her passion for dance led her to the National Arts Institute in Bamako, where she graduated in 2007. She then joined the Balla Fasseké Kouyaté Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers Multimédia in Bamako (CAMM), where she obtained a Graduate Diploma in Danse. Until 2010, she also trained in traditional dance, taking part in workshops in Mali with international choreographers. In 2012, she set up her own cultural association, Jiriladon, bringing together a group of young artists. In 2013, she took part in the Empreintes (Dé)croisées course at the École des Sables in Senegal, and in 2015, she took part in the Engagement

Féminin course in Ouagadougou and created her solo "Fatou t'as tout fait" ("Fatou you've done it all"), which denounces excision and raises awareness of the need to abandon the practice. The solo won First Prize from the Orange Mali Foundation, First Prize in the Simply the Best 2016 competition in Ankata, Burkina Faso, and the ZKB Acknowledgement Prize 2017 at the Zürcher Theater Spektakel in Switzerland.

#### Pacifique Doriane SOGNONVI (Benin)



Pacifique Doriane Sognonvi, originally from Benin, presents herself as a lesbian author and Black African feminist activist whose work focuses on the visibility and promotion of the voices and stories of LBTQ+ people. She has been a member of and collaborated with various organisations in Africa to defend the rights of French-speaking African LBTQ+ people. She created the "Sortons de l'ombre" initiative, which provides psychological support to women and girl survivors of rape. Through her poetry and slam texts published on social networks, Pacifique aims to encourage governments and corporate bodies to commit to women's rights in Africa.

#### Wapondi DJERI (Togo)



Wapondi was born in Bassar, a town in northern Togo. Her father died in 2004, and to pay tribute to her father's love of culture, she started out with rap, before moving into storytelling five years later and finally falling in love with spoken word, slam poetry in 2013. Now a slam storyteller, she has taken part in national and international festivals and workshops. She has won several slam competitions and represented Togo at major international events. Wapondi is a founding member of the World Slam Cup, ambassador for the African Slam Cup in Togo, and promoter of the Nana Benz Slam Festival. She also gives writing, stage presence and slam workshops at the

Institut français de Lomé and in associations and schools. As a committed woman, the artist carries the message of love and the conditions of children and women. She works to promote the wellbeing of people and society, particularly the emancipation of women, which is at the heart of her work. Modest, simple, and open, she loves art in its entirety.

#### Makwa JOMA (Madagascar)



Makwa JOMA was born in Tamatave, Madagascar. Born into a modest family, Makwa embarked on a cultural commitment in the field of musical poetry slam. From an early age, she made her mark on the slam scene in Madagascar. She stands out for her style, her flow and her powerful, committed lyrics. She is also an activist and defender of women's rights. As a multi-disciplinary artist, dance is a discipline that currently complements her slam poetry. Over the years, Makwa has honed her skills through training, residencies and experience at cultural events, tours and festivals, as well as winning numerous artistic awards in Madagascar and abroad.

#### Epiphanie NODJIKOUA DIONRANG (Chad)



President of the Ligue Tchadienne des droits des femmes (Chadian League for Women's Rights), Co-founder of the "Inkhaz" platform, Epiphanie is a feminist and lyricist resolutely committed to gender issues in her country, Chad, which faces many challenges in these struggles. Epiphanie is a Gender Champion for Oxfam Chad and Justicière du sahel (Justice Guardian of the Sahel) for Oxfam West Africa, Country Coordinator for the Central African Young Feminists Network, member of "Elles du Sahel", founder of Edu-Slam, women's rights activist, and communications officer at the Public Interest Law Center (PILC).

#### Mariam DEMBELE (Mali)



A lawyer by training, Mariam is a poet, novelist, scriptwriter and activist feminist writer from Mali. One of the winners of the "Plume Engagée Pour La Femme" literary prize, published in 2021 by Editions TAKABA, the collective collection of short stories entitled "Douleurs muettes de femmes", she is also the author of "Brisance du silence", a book about the role and place of women in society, as reductive as it is laudatory. Mariam is also active in community work and is President of the Association pour la Cause des Femmes (ACF- Association for Women's causes), a coach with the NGO Femmes et Droits Humains (FDH), a member of Oxfam's Comité

des Justicières du Sahel since 2019, an active member of the Feminist Movement of Mali and Country Coordinator of the Sahelian League Against Inequality. Mariam is convinced that the feminine gaze is what the world needs, hence her slogan "Oeil de Femme pour un Monde Meilleur" ("A Woman's Eye for a Better World").

#### Awa FALL-DIOP (Senegal)



Awa is a pan Africanist, anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist feminist activist and political player from Senegal. In 1997, she created the Observatory of Gender Relations in Senegal (ORGENS) for the establishment of gender equality in the education system. This led to her election as an Ashoka changemaker. Awa works for womn's rights based on an analysis that question patriarchy and seeks its eradication through different strategies, including through legal transformation. Her work as a popular educator and activist supports the building and strengthening of social transformation movements in Africa. Awa is a talented facilitator and works to build

intergenerational bridges in the feminist movement. In Thiès, Senegal, Awa is creating a space of refuge, rest and regeneration for feminists.

#### Floriane Klinklin ACOUETEY (Togo)



Floriane is a Togolese feminist activist and co-founder of the Girls Motion movement, of which she is currently a senator. A member of the Négresses Féministes community, whose mission is to provide a safe space for Togolese feminists, she is also co-initiator of Survivors Anonymous, a discussion group for survivors of sexual violence and harassment. Professionally, she is a gender specialist at the Togolese Ministry of the Armed Forces, a gender consultant and a conference rapporteur. Through her blog "Chez Soi", she writes about gender issues and help to deconstruct stereotypes, beyond social networks. In 2023, she became a Mandela

Washington Fellowship Alumni.

#### Melissa WAINAINA (Kenya)



Melissa Wainaina is an East African feminist artist who for over 17 years is heavily involved in strengthening African womn's rights and creative arts movements. At Urgent Action Fund – Africa, Melissa manages the Feminist Republik Platform, a one-of-a-kind platform established in 2019 dedicated to fostering cultures of care for African womn's human rights defenders as well as their groups, organisations, and movements. As an avid artivist, Melissa is interested in tapping into the power of art to support inner work and help communities be a healing presence in society. Melissa lives and co-owns an organic farm in Kenya with her partner where they both

champion agroecology and food justice.

#### Lina MENSAH (Togo)



A Togolese photographer born in Lomé, Lina specialises in portrait photography techniques and vibrant emotions. She has shown her photo series "Être vivant", "Nyonu XXI", "Abidjanaise by night", and "École au Togo" at exhibitions in Côte d'Ivoire and Togo. A member of the Fédération Africaine d'Art Photographique (FAAP)- African Federation of Photographic Arts, she trains in live performance photography and teaches photography through her Pro-photo project. A winner of the Oscars of Photography and the Afrik de Demain programme, she is recognised as a major figure in Togolese photography. In 2022, her "Afuma" series on Togolese stilt-

walkers was exhibited at the 14th Biennale des Arts in Dakar. In the same year, she exhibited two series of photos on gender-based violence in Togo and Spain. Lina is a talented and committed artist who continues to make her mark on the world of photography with her creativity and excellence.

#### Jean KEMITARE (Uganda)



Jean Kemitare is an accomplished professional with 18 years of experience in the social justice field specifically in gender justice & womn's rights, with a thematic focus on gender-based violence and economic justice. She is a Social Worker with an MA in Social Sector Planning and Management from Makerere University. As the Programmes Director at Urgent Action Fund -Africa, she leads the Programmes Team, overseeing the Fund's strategic programmes direction, quality, implementation, and compliance. She has generated a feminist integrated movement-support approach to philanthropy and highlighted concepts critical to violence prevention/

mitigation & sustaining movements including, evolving regeneration to regeneration, centering collective care and healing justice. Previously she served as the Program Manager for the GBV Prevention Network at Raising Voices, and at Development Research and Training spearheading violence prevention methodologies, highlighting the importance of primary prevention for violence, collectives & cooperative models in economic justice for womn, poverty monitoring and advocacy for a social protection policy in Uganda.

#### Amina Alice LUSAMBO (Democratic Republic of Congo)



Amina Alice Lusambo is a clinical psychologist who has been working as an art therapist at Dr Denis Mukwege's Panzi Foundation- Dorcas transit home in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2014, where she is the initiator of a psychological reconstruction and dance therapy programme. After graduating with a degree in economics and business management, she worked for four years as an accountant. As soon as she started attending the Dorcas House and becoming familiar with young girls who had been victims of sexual violence, she quickly realised that accounting was a passion; but intervening to help these pubescent and adolescent girls

regain their self-esteem, joie de vivre and psychological balance, in short to help them rebuild their lives once again, was her vocation. So, she started taking online courses in art therapy and a few years later enrolled again at university, this time to learn clinical psychology. More than 600 girls and women who have been victims of sexual violence have passed through her programme, and a multitude of success stories come from them.

#### Reyhanath TOURE MAMADOU (Togo)



A feminist activist with a strong commitment to the cause of women and young girls in her country, especially in rural areas. Reyhanath was born and raised in the central region of Togo, where women's place is generally relegated to the role of reproduction. In 2017, she organised the first meeting of feminists in Togo, and that same year she was elected Young Woman Leader at the National Women's Leadership Summit in Togo, enabling her to train young girls in self-confidence, self-esteem, responsibility for life and the development of income-generating activities. In 2019, Reyhanath initiated an annual training and coaching programme

for young girls and women, which she has named the Train Des Championnes. She is also cofounder of the Survivors Anonymous initiative, which provides a listening, legal and psychological support framework for survivors of gender-based violence and has set up and hosts the first **African feminist WebTV**, which gives a voice to survivors ready to share their stories.

#### Leila HESSINI (Algeria)



Leila is a transnational and pan-African feminist leader, strategist, and advisor with over 25 years of organising, advocacy and philanthropic experience advancing human rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive rights and justice. She was born in Algeria and educated in the U.S., France, and Morocco; over her professional career, she has lived and worked in forty countries across Africa, Europe, Latin America and Asia. Leila currently serves as a Senior International Fellow at the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon and as Senior Strategist to various feminist movements,

funds and organisations. She also serves as key advisor to Urgent Action Fund-Africa and TrustAfrica on an initiative on Reimagining Feminist and Pan-African Philanthropies.

Leila holds an MPH in public health and a MA in Middle Eastern and North African Studies, studied Islamic law in Morocco and pursued doctoral studies in sociology in France. She studied Arabic and speaks French and English fluently. She is a mother of two young feminists, an avid scuba diver, mountain bike rider, skier, and outdoor enthusiast.

#### Ablavi GOKOU ADJAKA (Togo)



Ablavi is a Togolese feminist and an avid traveller who has been working for several years with organisations and movements promoting social justice and human rights around the world. She holds a Master's degree in International Law and European Law from France (Lille 2) and a Graduate Diploma in Management from Canada (HEC Montréal). Before joining Urgent Action Fund-Africa as Programme Officer in the Feminist Republik portfolio, Ablavi worked with Pathways Togo, an international organisation that promotes girls' education by providing scholarships and mentoring opportunities to disadvantaged Togolese girls and young womn. As a

Programme Officer, she led the secondary school and university programmes for over three years and saw, year after year, girls and young womn become leaders of positive social change in their communities. She is proud to have joined UAF-Africa, an organisation that embodies feminist values by encouraging its partners and friends into integrating all aspects of cultures of care and well-being into their lives and as part of their organisational cultures.

#### Reine DIBUSSI (Cameroon)



A 2D illustrator, comic strip author and co-founder of AFIRI Studio (graphic studio and publishing house), Reine Dibussi contributes to better representation of black and afro-descendant people and to feminism in French-language illustrated literature. In 2017, she created the science fiction children's comic book series MULATAKO, the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of which, scripted by Carine Bahanag, came out in 2022. A multitasking artist, Reine works in a variety of media. In 2019, she produced a *Doodle* for Google for the Women's Football World Cup; in 2020, the short feminist comic strip *"Souffles Coupés"* in the collective work *"Une saison dessinée"* for Saison

Africa 2020 and the Lyon BD Festival; in 2022, the short comic strip "Héritage" for the AFD's Tilt platform; also in 2022, she broadcast on her Youtube channel the first season of the animated webseries *Ninou mais pas trop*, for which she wrote the script. She has also written the script for the video game *Amma: Chronicles of Lost Stars*, currently in development by JoinPlay Games. Her next comic book is scheduled for release at the end of 2023, scripted by Laura Nsafou and drawn by Reine.

#### KALAM (Burkina Faso)



Kalam is a musician from Burkina Faso. She embodies the challenge of patriarchal norms, regeneration and artistic eloquence. Kalam is the only woman in her country to play the Kundé, the traditional guitar that is the preserve of men and should not be held by a woman. Resolutely committed, she plays her guitar and fights for young girls' education, the abandonment of female genital mutilation and forced or early marriage, of which she herself was a victim.

For Kalam, the kundé is a creative standard and a tool of freedom, with which she sings to break taboos and harmful traditions, to give hope and a

desire for change. Kalam draws her strength and inspiration from the potential of traditional African instruments, from which she draws haunting melodies and rhythmic rhythms rooted in African cultures. For her, their sounds are mystical, mythical and healing. She has two albums to her credit, including "**Woubri**" and "Tinbo".

#### Elsa M'béna BA (Togo)



A Togolese feminist campaigner for gender equality, Elsa runs the blog "Simple Citoyenne", where she writes about sexual/sexist violence, menstrual insecurity and the fight for gender equality. Elsa co-founded the *Négresses Féministes* community (a group of Togolese feminists), initiated the *Girls Motion movement* (an organisation of girls, by girls and for girls to create a world of gender equality and social justice) and organised the first feminist symposium in Togo in 2020; created the social enterprise 'Auréole Monde' to improve the menstrual and maternal lives of girls and women through the production and distribution of reusable (washable) sanitary

pads, particularly in rural areas; and co-founded the *Survivors Anonymous* initiative, which provides a listening, legal and psychological support framework for survivors of gender-based violence. Drawing on her experience as an activist and her work at the Academy of Gender and Social Inclusion in Lomé, Elsa now works as an independent consultant on various development projects and initiatives, always with a view to reducing inequalities between women and men.

#### Coumba TOURE (Senegal/Mali)



Born and raised between Mali and Senegal, where she is based, Coumba Toure is a writer and storyteller. She leads Falia, a creative collective of artists and educators. Coumba is the chair of the board of TrustAfrica.org and the Baobab Centre. She has extensive experience facilitating meetings internationally, engaging young people, and designing, implementing, and evaluating programs promoting human rights, particularly for women and children. She has worked with organisations such as the Institute for Popular Education in Mali, the 21st Century Youth Leadership Movement in Alabama, and the Youth for Environmental Sanity in California, Ashoka

innovators for the public. She is a member of the Per Ankh collective. Coumba has served on the Urgent Action Fund-Africa board and as co-coordinator of **Africansrising.org**. Coumba has started up **kuumbati.com**, a consultancy and production house. She is a loving mother, a sister, a daughter, and a friend to many.

#### Nataka GMAKAGNI (Togo)



Originally from Togo, Nataka has a degree in Insurance but quickly discovered a passion for social justice issues. Nataka has ten years' experience of fighting for equity and inclusion in West Africa and Cameroon. A non-binary person, feminist and pan-Africanist, Nataka has contributed to the creation and technical support of queer women's groups in Africa. Nataka believes in transformational leadership and in structuring, developing and strengthening African queer movements. One of her favourite sayings is "Use privilege to share power". Her feminist commitment is based on non-negotiable principles such as transparency, accountability,

equity, and inclusion. Having worked with Mariam Armisen, she remains her source of inspiration and reference when it comes to strategic and political decision-making. When Nataka takes a break from activism, she relaxes in front of a cartoon or devotes herself to another of her passions: snakes.

#### Masa AMIR (Egypt)

Masa Amir is an Egyptian feminist and currently the Knowledge Leadership Manager at Urgent Action Fund-Africa. She has extensive experience in research and documentation of the experiences of womn's human rights defenders (WHRDs) across Africa. She is passionate about exploring protection and collective security and care needs of WHRDs and the centrality of healing to feminist movement building. She is also interested in online gender-based violence and has led different projects at the Fund to explore the intersections of violence against womn and technology in North Africa.

Masa holds an MA in International Human Rights Law from the American University in Cairo (AUC). Her dissertation focused on the feminisation of poverty in Egypt and its connection to violations of the right to social security. She has a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations minoring in philosophy from the American University of Sharjah (AUS).

#### Rachida TAHIROU (Togo)



Rachidatou Tahirou is a performer, storyteller, percussionist, puppeteer and workshop leader for women and children. She was born in Aného, Togo. From her early teens, Rachida showed an artistic inclination for percussion before her introduction to puppetry with Adama Bacco's Troupe Féminine "Bouam" in 2004. She then developed a passion for storytelling and theatre, revealing herself at the 2012 "TASSO" Young Talent Competition, winning 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the Lomé region. Equipped by workshops and training courses in acting, storytelling and puppet-making, she set up her own company in 2014 and created "Yévi Yévi" - a puppet theatre, presented in

2014 at the Théâtre du Versant in Biarritz, France, and "Le monde perdu de Peter Pan" in 2018 with the same French structure.

#### Solange M. KIBIBI (Rwanda)



Solange is a transgender woman, feminist and pan-Africanist. Born in Rwanda, raised in Canada where she has spent much of her life, Solange felt the need to return to Africa to explore her identity and connect with her queer community. In 2016, she moved to Côte d'Ivoire, a country where her inspiration was born and where she has written six books, published under the author's name Lady S. Solange is passionate about erotica as a powerful tool for activism, believing that sexuality is universal and affects everyone. She sees self-acceptance as a woman on her home continent, despite her birth assignment, as a daily challenge. Solange loves a

challenge. In addition to her commitment as a writer, Solange is a computer scientist by training, with a degree from UQAM. She is also founder of Arc-en-ciel d'Afrique and Massimadi Montréal, co-founder of the Maison de la Culture des Diversités Humaines and initiator of the Mon Genre Mon Talent event in Côte d'Ivoire. She has been co-coordinating QAYN since 2019 and strongly believes in its values.

#### Zanele MBUGUA (Kenya)



Zanele (She/her) is an intersectional feminist who is passionate about womn's rights advocacy, with a focus on LGBTQIA+ rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). She holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Sociology from Rhodes University (South Africa) and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Gender Studies and Development at the University of Nairobi. Zanele has also gained a wealth of knowledge and experience engaging in different portfolios at Urgent Action Fund -Africa for the past three years.

She attributes her sense of feminism to her Pan-African roots having lived and schooled in South Africa and Kenya. Through her lived experiences, Zanele has always found

herself drawn towards feminist, womn's and queer spaces; and continues to discover herself and her passions through these spaces.

#### Amal Hamed (Egypt)



Amal Hamed is an Egyptian graphic designer and illustrator based in Germany. Since 2012, she has built her career by working on illustration and editorial design projects for various human and women's rights institutions both locally and internationally. Her creative art is deeply influenced by her philosophical outlook and human rights background. Hamed has gained significant recognition in multiple art competitions. In 2022, she won the second-place prize in a nationwide poster competition organized by the "German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Raw Materials and Chemical Industry". Furthermore, her work was chosen

to be part of the 100 Best Arabic Posters exhibition, which took place in Germany, Belgium, Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia in 2023. Additionally, three of her illustrations were selected for the Roznama's 8 competition for Egyptian artists, organized by Medrar for Contemporary Art. Currently, Hamed is pursuing studies in information and communication design at Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences in Germany. She is also a graduate of Cairo University, where she earned a degree in philosophy.



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