

# MAKING A FEMINIST INTERNET: MOVEMENT BUILDING IN A DIGITAL AGE IN AFRICA

28-31 October 2019  
South Africa

Report by Christy Zinn and Gorata Chengeta



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## 1 . INTRODUCTION

From 28 to 31 October 2019, 54 feminists from 19 countries, including Association for Progressive Communications (APC) staff members, came together in Muldersdrift, South Africa, to discuss “Making a Feminist Internet: Movement building in a digital age in Africa.” The purpose of the convening, abbreviated as #MFIAfrica, was to deepen the understanding of how the digital landscape has affected feminist, women’s rights, sexual rights and intersectional movement-building work; strengthen the capacity of feminist, women’s rights, sexual rights and digital security activists to respond to emerging challenges and threats; and engage in the creation of collaborative ideas and strategies on how to make a feminist internet that can contribute towards building strong and resilient movements.

The convening was made up of multiple facets of connection and conversation between a participant group of African feminists, diverse in geographical origin and field of work, from the continent and African diaspora. This document presents a perspective of those conversations, and is drawn up from a diversity of materials that were created throughout the meeting duration, including text notes, photographs and audio recordings. The convening was documented and continues to be reflected upon by different people through different mediums, and this report is a contribution to #MFIAfrica’s multifaceted, decentralised archive of memory.



## 2. NOTHING WITHOUT INTENTION: COLLECTIVE ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

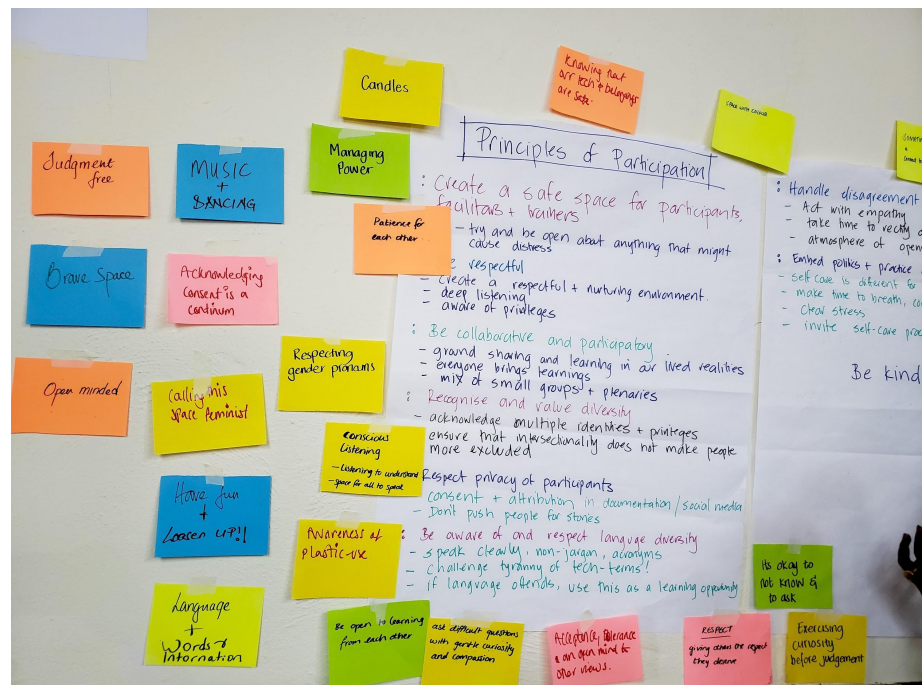
**Our location as  
individuals is always  
intimate, deeply  
personal, and political.**

In the opening session of #MFIAfrica, Shamillah Wilson (South Africa), one of the facilitators of the convening, held the space as we brought into being a shared agreement on our principles for participation. We could not take for granted that “our location as individuals is always intimate, deeply personal, and political,”<sup>1</sup> and we needed to understand the expectations of others before we started grappling with the very political and personal question of how technology is changing the way we live, love and organise in our countries. As we discussed our desires for the space, a few commonalities arose. We wanted, firstly, to be seen, through the experience of mutual respect. This included the need to respect gender pronouns, and be aware of the diversity of language proficiencies among participants. Secondly, we wanted the #MFIAfrica space to be one where we could be vulnerable enough to learn and grow. In action, this would look like putting curiosity before judgement, being open to learning, and establishing a brave space, wherein difficult questions could be compassionately addressed. Thirdly, we anticipated that in a group where there was a plurality of nationalities, experiences, skillsets and expressions of feminisms, we would disagree. Jenny Radloff (South Africa) from APC

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<sup>1</sup>Jan Moolman-Monare (South Africa), from APC, in her welcome speech on day one of the #MFIAfrica convening. The transcription of her speech is included in the [appendices to this report](#).

addressed this by suggesting some of the principles of participation developed at previous APC convenings. These included approaching disagreements, for example, by opening up rather than shutting down, and taking as much time as needed to work through the disagreement.



There was also no shying away from the political. We held that it was important to consider how our individual privileges were at play in the space, such as those pertaining to race, gender and access to information. We wanted to be explicit about the politics guiding us, and so naming #MFIafrica a “feminist” space was something suggested as a means of creating a comfortable environment. Fostering connection also emerged as a shared desire, which included the intent to have fun, loosen up, to enjoy music and dance together. Finally, the conversation reflected a common need

to feel safe. Jenny spoke on the importance of respecting privacy, and on the importance for people to not be pressured into sharing stories they were not ready to share. We also collectively acknowledged that “consent is a continuum,” and came to an agreement on a few guidelines for social media posting regarding the event.



### 3 . MAKING A FEMINIST INTERNET IN A DIGITAL AGE IN AFRICA : DAY ONE

Day one’s sessions delved into understanding that there exists a relationship between power, the internet and ourselves (our bodies). The energisers and activities throughout the day creatively wove a deeper understanding among participants of how our physical selves are impacted by the political nature of the internet, which affects our engagement both with others online, and with the internet itself. This theme was explored through thinking about what gives us pleasure and our pleasure associations online – remembering the first time we used technology and what keeps us coming back for more. It was also explored through an introduction to the Feminist Principles of the Internet (FPIs),<sup>2</sup> and taking a deeper look into how we see the principles of “access,” “expression,” “movements,” “economy” and “embodiment” play out in our own contexts.



<sup>2</sup> <https://feministinternet.org>

**A feminist internet...  
looks like a variety  
of bodies, abilities,  
capacities,  
knowledges and  
experiences It  
embodies collectivism  
and collaboration.**

During conversations, a number of tensions about the internet were raised, and accounts of criminalisation, censorship, surveillance, exploitation, and the unequal representation of voices became the drivers of conversations looking into key challenges. As these issues were addressed, the internet was also recognised as a tool for strengthening solidarity, pushing for policy change and amplifying alternative narratives.

### 3.1 REMEMBERING OUR EARLY PLEASURES

Facilitator Jac sm Kee (Malaysia) led us into the first activity of the day with a spirit of silliness. Our laughter permeated through the conference room as Jac prompted us to greet each other by winking, touching elbows and touching hips. Splitting into groups, we were then tasked with reflecting on what our earliest experiences of the internet were. This would be a starting point for thinking about our relationship with the internet. We then set about drawing avatars that illustrated that. Despite the diversity across the groups, this exercise evoked nostalgia, as it brought out similarities across location.

One of the first groups to showcase their avatar used a butterfly 🦋 to represent the early pleasures of being on the internet and the crushes we had. Another group drew Pac-Man alongside their avatar to represent the games we played 🎮👤♀ online.

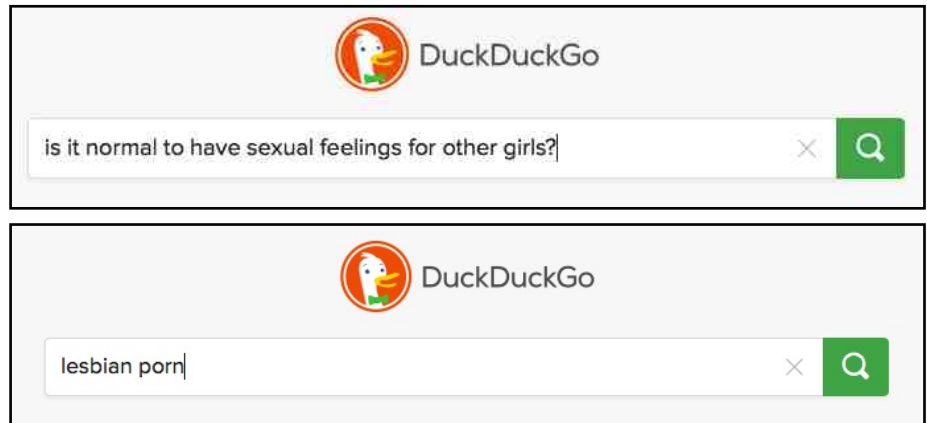
**We spoke about our first interactions on the internet and what came up was porn... We were looking for boobs!**

Another group added that the internet was a “window for freedom and power,” for “dream and escape.”

A commonality across groups was the importance of the information we found and shared through the internet. One of the groups symbolised this by drawing a book to represent the brain 🧠📖. They said, “The mind is like an endless book. It never really gets filled... We use Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to upload and download, to upload into the ‘mind’ and learn more.”

Almost all of the groups commented on finding community online as a key part of their first experiences. The internet is where many first heard about “feminisms, plural” and about activism. It is where we first participated in consciousness raising 🧩🧩🧩 about the issues that are important to us. It is where we could connect to all kinds of diverse communities, and extend love ❤️ and support to one another.

Our early memories of the internet were also of being stimulated, as one group depicted by drawing loins on fire 🔥🔥🔥. “We spoke about our first interactions on the internet and what came up was porn... We were looking for boobs!” one group representative said. They explained how they used search engines to ask, “Am I normal?” seeking answers about sexuality, queer attractions and pleasure 😊🧐.





For many of us, the internet was also one of the primary spaces through which we started to value and affirm ourselves. Kim M.Reynolds (USA/South Africa), reporting back from her group’s discussion, said, “We talked about self-documentation, like taking selfies: what does it mean to look at your body and to see what’s looking back at you?” They spoke about the internet as a site where they could begin to deconstruct things like “gender, beauty, sex and whiteness.”

As the groups continued to share their reflections, themes of safety also emerged. One group had given their avatar an AK47: a reference to arming ourselves with knowledge through the internet, and also to the harm and violence we face online. Another group drew a lock and key over their avatar’s heart 🔒❤️ to show that our relationships with power and technology are “guarded,” citing the dynamics of care and control at play. They also spoke to the issue of consent and privacy, using shackles ⛔ to represent a lack of control over online data. Sheena Magenya (Kenya) from

**We must remember  
that memory is  
political.**

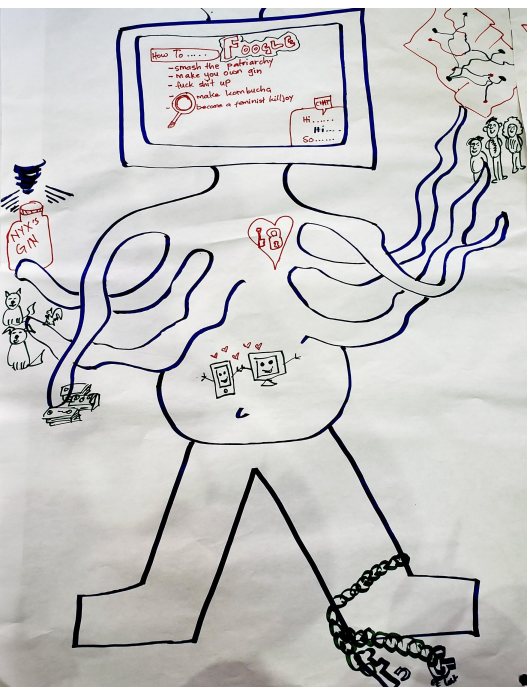
APC said, "We see the hegemony of social media, not its everyday use, as a bit of a shackle. They collect a lot of our information, and we don't know what they do with it... it feels like it's slowing us down."

While we could gain new freedoms through the internet, there were also several challenges in terms of expression. One group used a skull  to signify the experience of getting blocked, banned and censored for their expressions. It was pointed out that often censorship is gendered, that there are harsher penalties for posting images of women's nipples than there are for sending unsolicited dick pics.

Several groups touched on the issue of money and access. One group used dollar signs **\$\$\$\$** to represent the dynamic: "The internet allows me to make money, but it also costs me money." A second group referred more specifically to how money shapes who can access the internet and who cannot, and how access to the internet is a privilege. "The little stick figure [we've drawn in the corner] is isolated but looking in  [to represent those who] don't have access."

Wrapping up the exercise, Jac said, "We must remember that memory is political. Sometimes we need to just go back to a memory and ask 'What was it that gave us pleasure, that reminded us that this is something we could share, transform and leverage?'" Jac's words speak to the concept of "Pleasure Activism," which adrienne maree brown outlines in a book by the same title. Brown writes, "Pleasure





activism is the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy.”<sup>3</sup> Considering pleasure in our early experience was a helpful lens through which we could see why the internet matters to us. Seyi Akiwowo (United Kingdom) said, “It was really easy for us to talk about how bad [the internet] was, but actually, there were good times and it’s because of the good times that we stay on the internet.”

Jac outlined that a similar ethos to that of pleasure activism is what led to the “Imagine a Feminist Internet” convening in 2014. “As feminists, we’re very good at saying what we don’t like... We give ourselves less permission to imagine what we do want, to say, ‘This is the internet we want.’” It was in that meeting that the Feminist Principles of the Internet (FPIs) came about.

### 3.2 FROM IMAGINING TO MAKING: THE FPIs FROM OUR LOCATIONS

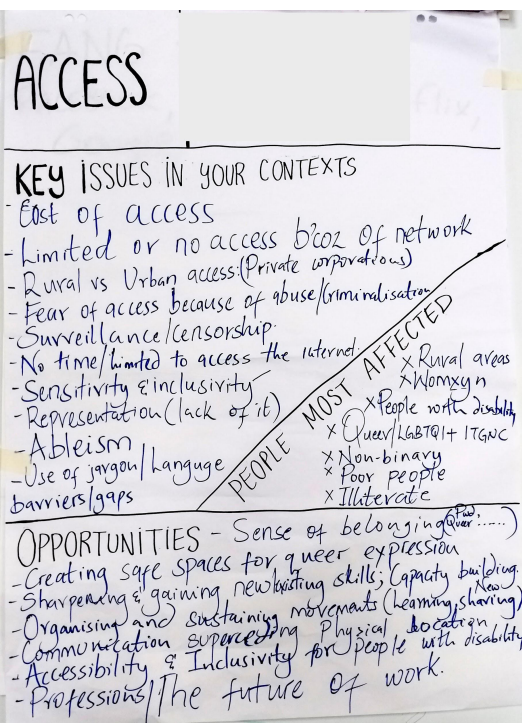
Before we could start *making* a feminist internet, we had to *imagine* what it could look like. After a panel of APC staff members introduced us to the FPIs, we were given the chance to do our own audit of how the FPIs play out in our contexts. Participants were split into different groups to discuss the principles of *access*, *economy*, *expression*, *embodiment* and *movements*.

<sup>3</sup>brown, a. m. (2019). Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good. AK Press. <https://www.akpress.org/pleasure-activism.html>

### 3.2.1 THE MANY FACETS OF ACCESS

The principle of access is multifaceted. It is not just about the cost of the internet, including the cost of data bundles, Wi-Fi connections and smartphones. As Tigist Hussen (Ethiopia) from APC mentioned, it is also about “content and applications, culture and society, and governance and decision making.” Jan added that often, the development narratives around the concept of internet access frame it as an all-encompassing solution to a myriad of social ills. Yet projects on the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have mostly reproduced these inequalities, further harming marginalised groups.

4IR (the so-called “Fourth Industrial Revolution”), for example, a trending topic in global internet governance spaces, and described by one participant as “an extension of colonialism,” has never been associated with people living in poverty, the working class, and people on the margins. While Tigist spoke about access, she noted that there are significant infrastructural challenges that persist in Africa, which means that the needs relating to access are starkly diverse in different parts of the region. Furthermore, this disparity is reproduced across the gender divide as well as across the urban-rural divide in many countries.



Access to the internet is one thing, yet access to online content is another. Without progressive legal frameworks and policies, efforts to increase access to online content are not guaranteed to widen access. And even when policies are

**The realities of precarity and exploitation in the digital economy were key issues in these discussions.**

there, poor policy implementation was noted as one of the problems. Furthermore, geo-blocking<sup>4</sup> and paywalls<sup>5</sup> restrict us from accessing certain content on the internet. We came to understand that open-access platforms and user-generated content are vital for a feminist internet in Africa. If we have the power to shape the internet, we can use it to highlight counter-narratives that speak to our locations and experiences.

Lastly, as we work towards open, unrestricted access, we need to consider what access looks like for marginalised groups. For example, one of the present challenges that queer people face is the risk of being outed online. Moreover, current conventional mechanisms for engaging with the internet perpetuate ableism. Tshego Senne (South Africa) shared her experience of often being asked by her readers, “Please don’t use these sorts of characters, because my voice reader can’t interpret this,” or, “Please make sure you put an image description on every picture so that people that have limited visibility can access it.”

### 3.2.2 THE DIGITAL ECONOMY: A HOT MESS

The realities of precarity and exploitation in the digital economy were key issues in these discussions. Contributing to this reflection were case studies of outsourcing platforms such as Uber and Airbnb, which have failed to disrupt the logic of neoliberalism. For instance, as Wilf Mwangi (Kenya) said, Uber and similar applications (apps) are marketed positively as enterprises that benefit the client and the driver

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<sup>4</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geo-blocking>

<sup>5</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paywall>

**Reimagining labour  
from a lens of solidarity  
and community.**

mutually. While the emergence of ride-sharing apps has created opportunities for employment, this has been accompanied by the erosion of socioeconomic benefits. Drivers who use ride-sharing apps are seen as contractors, not employees of the company, and therefore do not have legal protection or employee rights, and consequently have to form unions.

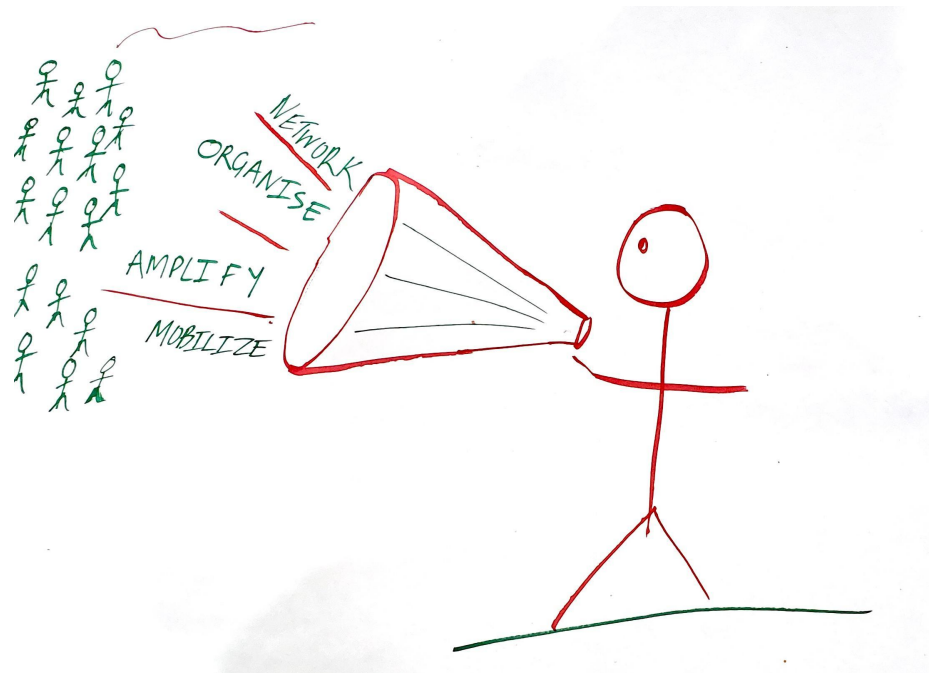
Another primary concern was the commodification of data, and the sale of users' online data to advertisers, without express consent. Kim and Sally AlHaq highlighted cases across the globe where social media platform owners and health-tracking app developers were profiting from user data by selling it to third parties. Further concerns were also raised around the ownership and regulation of mobile money platforms. These services enjoy widespread use, but are vulnerable to regulation and remain under the control of mobile network company oligarchies. In Zimbabwe, for example, the government can ban certain amounts from being transferred through the Ecocash<sup>6</sup> mobile money platform. Strategies for confronting these challenges included transnational advocacy and investing in alternative, transparent apps and platforms. Wilf said there was an opportunity for "reimagining labour from a lens of solidarity and community."



<sup>6</sup> <https://twitter.com/EcoCashZW>

### 3.2.3 THE BATTLE OVER EXPRESSION

Our capacity to express ourselves online is the backbone of our activism. The online space allows many of us to express ourselves in ways we cannot in offline spaces. At the same time, the online landscape of expression is undivorceable from the offline cultural contexts. Feminist activists who are vocal and push back against patriarchal structures often face harassment and other attempts of silencing, including criminalisation. There is also a culture of self-censorship in many online communities where there exists “sensitivity around what should be said, what should not be said, and how things should be said,” Seyi suggested.



In terms of sexual expression, there are an array of African countries in which any kind of love that is not heterosexual is illegal to express, and such expression often incites violence. Organisations and individuals participating in the campaign to repeal Section 162<sup>7</sup> of Kenya's penal code, for example, were met with violent backlash online by anti-gay communities. LGBTQ persons living in countries with anti-gay laws end up curating their online presence in ways that protect themselves and their communities from violence. One participant, for example, mentioned that cases in Senegal have been reported of LGBTQ persons being arrested and demanded by police to show the contact list on their phones, in order for this information to be used to target other members of the LGBTQ community.

The case of Ugandan activist Stella Nyanzi<sup>8</sup> was brought forward as an example of how Uganda is cracking down on political expression online. She was convicted and imprisoned under the country's Computer Misuse Act (2011), a law which Amnesty International says "has been used



<sup>7</sup>Collison, C. (2019, 24 May). Kenya high court will not repeal anti-LGBT law. Mail & Guardian. <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-05-24-kenya-high-court-will-not-repeal-anti-lgbt-law/> See also #repeal162 on Twitter.

<sup>8</sup>Dr. Stella Nyanzi is a Ugandan university lecturer who was jailed on charges of "cyber harassment" and "offensive communication" for a poem she wrote about Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. In an effort to keep the case in the public eye, activists from across the region continue to organise and show their solidarity to Nyanzi through the #freestellanyanzi campaign. The poem in question is included in the appendices to this report. For more information, see The Observer. (2017, 10 April). Nyanzi charged after calling Museveni 'a pair of buttocks'. <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/52240-nyanzi-charged-with-calling-museveni-a-pair-of-buttocks>

systematically to harass, intimidate and stifle government critics.”<sup>9</sup> Given the extent to which social media platforms create space for expression, it is alarming that Uganda has also proposed a tax on the use of social media, which was considered by one of the Ugandan participants as a way of curtailing expression.

Furthermore, defamation charges are also being increasingly used as a tool to criminalise women and queer persons naming their perpetrators. We witnessed the case of Kenyan writer Shailja Patel<sup>10</sup> and her co-accused, who received a court order to pay USD 87,000 in damages to her perpetrator, who she named on Twitter, and who subsequently laid defamation charges against her. In South Africa, a number of anonymous Twitter accounts were created in response to the #AmINext movement, which emerged from heightened civil anxiety and unrest sparked by the rape and murder of university student Uyinene Mrwetyana.<sup>11</sup> These accounts offered a space of recourse for survivors to direct message (DM) their stories, the content of which would in turn be posted in public anonymously. However, the creators of these accounts were then threatened with legal action on the grounds of defamation.

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<sup>9</sup>Amnesty International. (2019, 2 August). Uganda: Freedom of expression takes a knock as Stella Nyanzi found guilty of cyber harassment. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/uganda-freedom-of-expression-takes-a-knock-as-stella-nyanzi-found-guilty-of-cyber-harassment>

<sup>10</sup>Griffin, T. (2019, 5 September). She Was Ordered To Pay Damages And Apologize To The Man Who Allegedly Assaulted Her — So She Left The Country. BuzzFeed. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tamerragriffin/shailja-patel-defamation-sexual-assault-kenya-exile>

<sup>11</sup>For more information on the case of Uyinene Mrwetyana, and the subsequent creation of anonymous Twitter accounts, see Karrim, A. (2019, 4 September). Twitter users name and shame alleged rapists, but experts issue stern warning. News24. <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/twitter-users-name-and-shame-alleged-rapists-but-experts-issue-stern-warning->



To circumvent attempts of silencing, opportunities were identified in using alternative platforms for expression, such as user-generated blog pages and podcasts. Art as a tool for sexual expression was identified as well. Also recognised was the need to support and amplify the work of existing platforms that provide alternative narratives, such as HOLAA!<sup>12</sup> and Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women.<sup>13</sup>



<sup>12</sup><http://holaafrica.org>

<sup>13</sup><https://adventuresfrom.com>



### 3.2.4 EMBODIMENT: OUR RIGHTS TO AUTONOMY, CONSENT AND MEMORY<sup>14</sup>

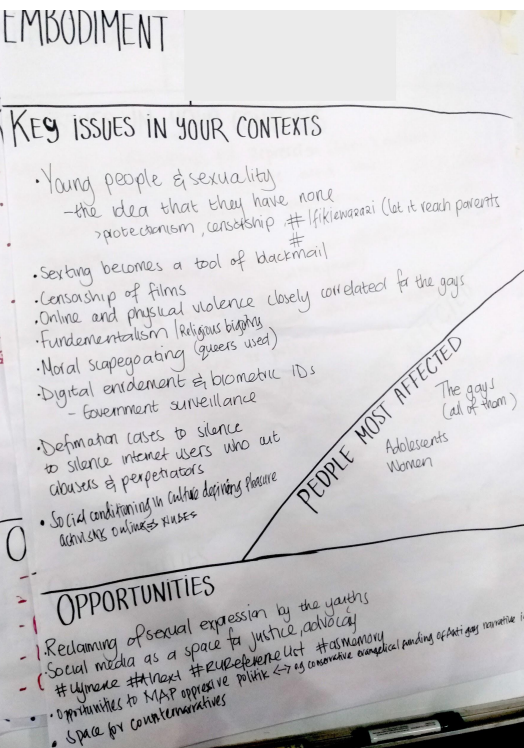
The challenges to acquiring our rights to autonomy, consent and memory online are shaped by what happens offline. Various societal groups eagerly take up their self-acclaimed responsibility of policing our bodies, and include groups such as national media authorities, independent organisations and citizens themselves. Kenyan participants spoke of the recent online campaign, #ifikiewazazi,<sup>15</sup> where Kenyan citizens were using the hashtag to share posts and shame teenagers taking pictures of themselves with their lovers, with the idea that, if the posts are shared widely enough, they will eventually reach the parents. Independent Islamic non-governmental organisation (NGO) Jamra, based in Senegal, self-identifies as a “moral keeper” of the country. They call out “immoral” behaviour, and, as Claire Ba (Senegal) noted, “often cherry pick ‘scandalous’ content, thus distracting public attention from pressing social issues.”

In addition, government and private surveillance is increasingly threatening citizens’ rights to privacy and anonymity. The Kenyan government, for example, has recently requested all Kenyan citizens to register themselves onto a national integrated identity management system in order to acquire a

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<sup>14</sup> The term “embodiment” is used to describe one of the FPI clusters. During a break-out group session, participants expressed surprise about the use of this term. “I’ve never heard it used in this context,” said one participant from Senegal. “The term embodiment is so removed. It feels like the first time I am hearing it,” said one participant from Kenya. The conversation progressed to describe how the word “embodiment” is usually used, in both countries, in a spiritual context, such as when “a spirit is taking over you.”

<sup>15</sup> Translated to, “Let it reach the parents.”



personalised “Huduma Namba,”<sup>16</sup> through which all documentation of an individual citizen can be accessed. What was of concern was that there is no law currently protecting the privacy of personal data in Kenya, and citizens are being threatened with loss of access to all public services should they not comply.<sup>17</sup>

Thinking about how we can resist breaches of consent and confront different forms of violence, one participant noted that we should commit to stopping the circulation of so-called “revenge porn.” Ayak Chol Deng Alak (South Sudan) shared an experience she had of changing the narrative around non-consensually distributed explicit content. During an instance of leaked pornographic content in South Sudan, feminists within the country changed the narrative by directing the shame away from the woman in the video and redirecting it towards the man. The effect was a drastic slowing down of the circulation of the video. At the same time, we need to continue taking steps at a systemic level towards ending the violence altogether. As Vivian Ouya (Kenya) interjected, “What happens if you don’t want to reclaim your nudes?”

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.hudumanamba.go.ke>

<sup>17</sup> Mungai, C. (2019, 6 August). Kenya's Huduma: Data commodification and government tyranny. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/kenya-huduma-data-commodification-government-tyranny->

### 3.2.5 CONFRONTING ERASURE AND OTHER CHALLENGES TO OUR POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

In discussions around movement building, the lack of representation of voices was a regularly mentioned concern. The erasure of activist labour, especially online activist labour, was brought to the fore. Not recognising activism as work can often be a form of exploitation by more powerful, transnational organisations, who appropriate grassroots activism. In addition, we discussed the lack of representation of voices from the diaspora in conversations about movement building on the continent, while at the same time, recognising that more work can be done by the diaspora to visibilise and amplify work happening on the continent.

### 3.3 CONCLUDING DAY ONE

The first day brought home the idea that the internet is political, and furthermore, that the political is gendered, as opportunity was given to consider how the internet is linked to power through a feminist lens. Conversations around government censorship, the criminalisation of sexual expression, defamation, surveillance and exploitation of labour raised many examples of African women and queer persons being affected by these silencing mechanisms. Through in-depth conversations around the FPI clusters of access, economy, expression, embodiment and movements in our contexts, the opportunities that the internet provides us in enhancing our ability to organise, find solidarity and build alternative narratives were also recognised.



## 4. MAKING A FEMINIST INTERNET IN AFRICA: DAY TWO

**How do we acknowledge the ways in which the internet is for us, recognising that even though it wasn't created for us, and won't be aligning with our political agenda, it is meant for us to be in it?**

Day two set out to explore the notion of movement building in a digital age. It also gave us the opportunity to place ourselves, our organisations, as well as others, in our movements' histories, in terms of our roles and impact, through the creation of an interactive timeline. With concepts of building solidarity and accountability in feminist leadership setting the undertones for conversations throughout the day, questions of power distribution and the internal infrastructure of our organisations presented strong tensions in discussions around privilege and access, organisational leadership, and the aspects of our work that cause solidarity ties to untether. A key theme that emerged from these conversations was the distribution of power within movements – who holds more power, how we can harness the power of those around us, and how we can use our own power to amplify voices that are otherwise marginalised.

### 4.1 THE QUESTIONS ON OUR MIND ABOUT... THE INTERNET

On the morning of day two, participants were asked to think of a topic they wanted to discuss, frame it as a question, and then write it on a piece of paper. The questions

**“It’s like you’ve entered this house to live and there are these beams and structures and you don’t question why those beams and structures are there. We just wanted to get in.”**

were then read out and all members of the convening had a chance to vote for the topics they thought should be discussed.<sup>18</sup> Among the questions chosen were the following:

#### **4.1.1. HOW DO WE HOLD OURSELVES AND OUR COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTABLE IN ONLINE SPACES?**

This discussion raised the concern of reproducing the violent logics of patriarchy, white supremacy and other oppressive systems in the ways we hold each other to account. We witnessed the case of student protests in South Africa, in which certain individuals and political factions claimed leadership and decision-making power by dismissing the validity and voices of others. One participant from Algeria shared her experience of working in movements that revolve around a singular person as a leader, which kindles the feeling that “if that person is absent, the movement sleeps.” One participant from the African diaspora suggested that, even within feminist movements, we look for saviourism, we want to have feminist heroes that we look up to. As a result, we breed the culture of “cancelling” other feminists for the things they say online, instead of giving them the space to walk their journey. We hold each other accountable in unkind ways. Without kindness, it is difficult to foster an environment where feminists have room to make mistakes and grow from them.



<sup>18</sup> We called this methodology of establishing which topics to discuss an “open space” event.



Illustration by Sonaksha Iyengar via Twitter

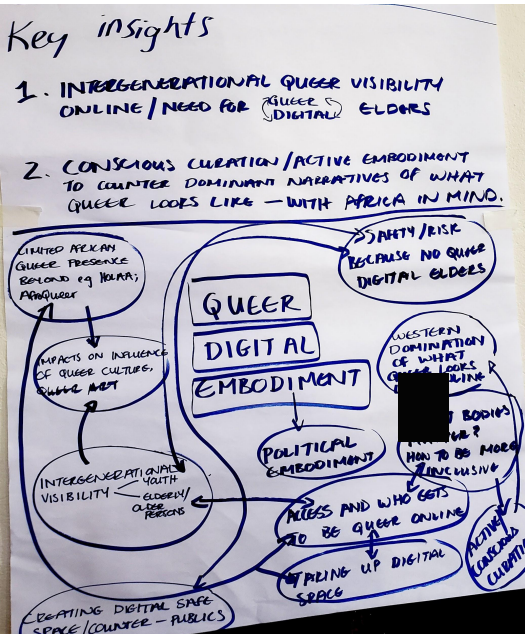
#### 4.1.2 WHAT DOES QUEER DIGITAL EMBODIMENT LOOK LIKE?

This group discussed the politics of the online space when it comes to queer visibility, questioning whose bodies are most visible online. The group cited the dominance of Western queer representation online. One of the insights from this discussion was that there needs to be queer visibility that centres Africans in the online space. Visibility needs to be inclusive of queer people across generations, and needs to counter homogenising narratives of what African queer-ness looks like.

#### 4.1.3 HOW DO WE ORGANISE AROUND SHARED STRUGGLES ACROSS THE CONTINENT AND TACKLE DISPARITIES OF VISIBILITY BETWEEN ONLINE MOVEMENTS?

The underrepresentation of certain voices in our movements happens along lines of gender, religion and culture, affecting people who live in conflict areas or rural areas





most. These disparities are perpetuated due to the role of NGO (and other) funders, whose agendas may lead to unequal distribution of resources.

This systematises the unequal access to power among citizens, as well as among activist communities who consider themselves part of a national social justice movement. While participants made it very clear that there are “no ifs, no buts”<sup>19</sup> where it comes to our responsibilities as feminists, it was simultaneously apparent that our so-called feminist organisations and collaborations are still housed in patriarchal organisational infrastructure that jeopardises our feminist commitments to inclusion and the redistribution of power.

## 4.2 CONNECTING THE DOTS: BUILDING OUR COLLECTIVE STORY

After the open space event, Jenny brought us to the front of the conference room where a long line of poster paper was pinned across the wall. The APC team had created a physical timeline, marking important dates, key moments and people in the global history of technology, the internet and human rights developments. Jenny explained APC’s role in bringing women’s rights issues to the table in international decision making spaces about internet governance and human rights, and showed us when technology started to be included as a necessary consideration in human rights decision making at the global level.

<sup>19</sup> Another participant would phrase the same concept one day later as, “Feminism is not an a la carte menu.” These were just some of the many versions of the notion “feminist practice must include...”, which was a notion reiterated throughout the convening.

**In the early to mid-2000s, where feminists were insisting on the idea that technology is political and crucial for human development, actively driving the agenda for a feminist internet.**

Post-it notes of different colours were used to mark global points, particular movements in African activism, and the influence of APC's Women's Rights Programme. One of the first things we noticed was how women and gender diverse people had often been written out of the history of technology. The timeline was an opportunity to write individuals back in, by actively writing their name and placing it on the timeline. The timeline also revealed how the development of certain institutions had brought about alternative online platforms on the African continent to counter the barriers to access of those institutions. For example, we could see how the start of online banking facilities in Africa and infrastructural and social barriers to access led to the development of M-pesa.<sup>20</sup>

The timeline awakened memories for some of the feminists in the room that were around at the time of the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, where APC had a tent at the conference for participants to learn about email. Stories were shared about global convenings such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the launch of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in the early to mid-2000s, where feminists were insisting on the idea that technology is political and crucial for human development, actively driving the agenda for a feminist internet. We acknowledged organisations such as Women'sNet, founded in 1998, and the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), founded in 2000, which were among the first organisations in Africa to start including technology as a part of their women's rights work.



<sup>20</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M-Pesa>



We heard about the projects APC initiated, such as Take Back the Tech!<sup>21</sup> in 2006, as a way of pushing back against the misunderstanding that technology development is coming from the global North. As Jac said, “These are important pieces of history that we must claim.” Development was not only coming from the “nipple” that is the United States and Western Europe. Many initiatives at the intersection of “art, tech, activism and feminism” were coming from the global South.

The conversation led us through the first link made between technology and sexual harassment in South Africa in 2009, to increasingly stronger connections being made between experiences of sexual and gender-based violence and the rise of social media.<sup>22</sup> We also looked into how introducing a queer lens to the intersection of technology and human rights in 2008 influenced its development. Queering decision making spaces meant that conversations had to consider how sexuality, sex work and sexual and reproductive health and rights are affected. While other lenses tended to lean towards the idea of shutting down freedoms for the sake of “safety” and “protection,” queer activists would insist on the importance of opening it up and keeping freedoms available for all.

We collectively listened and contributed to the stories about our movements, as we worked our way through the timeline to the present, and to #MFIAfrica. At this critical moment, the APC team invited participants to add their own organisations and moments of activism to the timeline. Some participants added key points in their region’s history of human rights development. Some participants included moments of

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.takebackthetech.net>

<sup>22</sup> For example, the Facebook Rape Campaign that started in 2011. See also #FBRape on Twitter.

change, such as the first internet shutdown in their country, or an influential law that was passed in their country. Others took a story about a moment in their activism that led them to contribute to the movement in the way that they do, and added it to the timeline.

The activity led to powerful acts of writing our history, and placing ourselves and those we know in our socio-political contexts. It also gave way to knowledge exchange through storytelling, and helped us to understand how our struggles interlink.



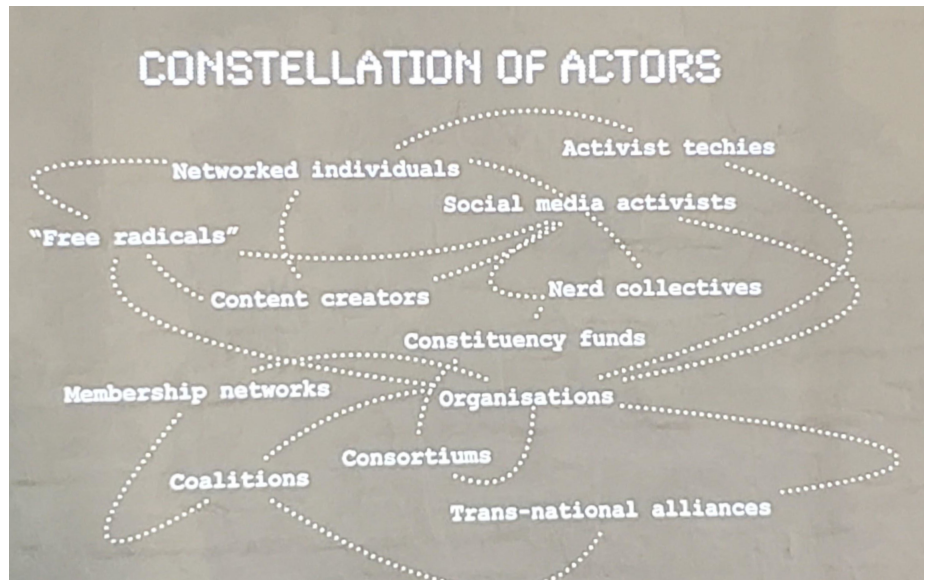
## 4.3 MOVEMENT BUILDING IN A DIGITAL AGE IN AFRICA

The timeline exercise set the scene for Jac's presentation on movement building in a digital age, and what this looks like on the continent. The internet has already facilitated multitudes of African-led campaigns for social change: despite challenges, the internet space is being used to mobilise and fuel public participation in the political sphere. Ayak shared one example from her context, explaining how activists in South Sudan used "e-delegates" participating in one particular peacemaking process to feed information about what was happening in the room to activists on the ground. By creating this feedback loop, activists were able to build pressure in real time to bring the warring parties to a ceasefire agreement.

**The internet has already facilitated multitudes of African-led campaigns for social change.**

A movement has different components, and so building one that sustainably agitates for political change needs to give space to these. Being outraged, building community, developing political vision and taking collaborative action, as Jac outlined, are a few of the essential ingredients in the recipe for online activism. It is also vital to have strong offline support structures, to be able to withstand the backlash that comes with political resistance.

Aside from giving space for action, it is also important to recognise the various players within a political movement, all of which need structures for accountability, support and care.



Jac gave the example of a network of Malaysian feminists who mobilised against trolls attacking a young activist following her participation in an International Women's Day campaign. Feminists came together and were able to identify ways to support an actor whose visibility was heightened. At the same time, not all actors in social movements are always visible. For instance, alongside activists, organisations and content creators, there are translators, techies and "free radicals," who move in and out of activist spaces. How do we build support structures that can reach all of these actors as well?

One of the key issues arising in the discussion after Jac's presentation related to building trust. Yara said, "In some movements I work with, [there's] one person leading. This creates a conflict relationship rather than a trust relationship.

**“The major problem is that the decision making bodies are promoting normality instead of diversity. In our countries, we are not the norm.”**

How can we move to relationships of trust rather than talking about ‘horizontal organising’?”

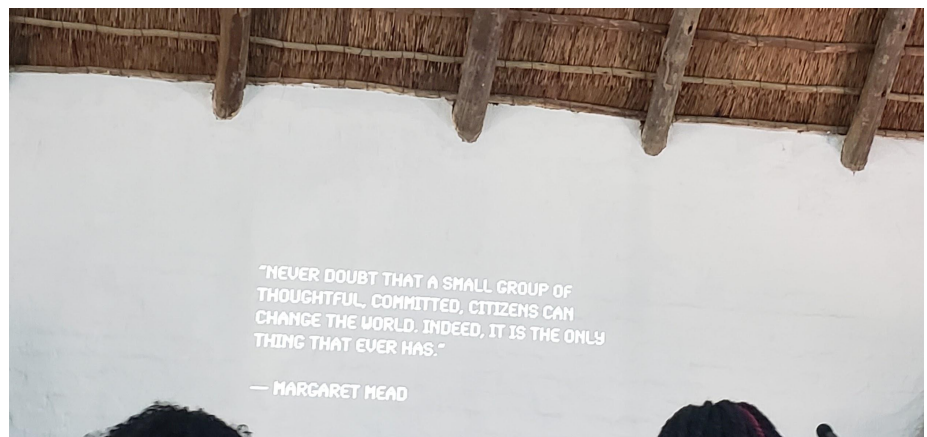
For Vivian Ouya and Miriam Obara, the challenge was building trust and relationships across differences. Vivian said she was struggling particularly with forming alliances with organisations that are reluctant to embrace feminist ideals. She said that some women’s rights organisations in Kenya are “literally scared of engaging the conversation around body politics, sexuality, abortion and things like that.”

The difficulty of organising across differences was echoed by Sally AlHaq, who reflected on feeling isolated in her country. She said, “I find myself where we are in tiny groups of people agreeing with each other, but I cannot by any means connect with the idea of a national movement in my country. I feel that [connection] more internationally.” She continued, “It makes me think, ‘If I do not have the luxury to connect [internationally], what is my feminist root in my country? What strengthens me to want to go back home and change the reality?’”

This resonated with Yara Rim Menia (Algeria), who responded, “I think I have more in common with her than with my neighbour in my country.” Yara added, “The major problem is that the decision-making bodies are promoting normality instead of diversity. In our countries, we are not the norm.”

Ayak brought up the difficulty of sustaining activism and avoiding burnout when one is involved in multiple nodes of

activism: “You find yourself squeezed but also [you’re] misunderstood – the expectations are too much – but somehow you have this crucial link, because you can go all the way to the rural village and speak in local dialect and then go to New York and speak at a UN Peace and Security Council [meeting].” She asked, “How do you sustain nodes but also capacitate others?” Ayak also cautioned, “We need to be conscious of the fact that the activism in conflict areas and the security threats are different. Sustaining activism in that space is more difficult.”



Nyx McLean (South Africa) prompted us to think of more sustainable models for creating community. They said, “We sometimes might push to craft community and we hold onto it very tightly.” This way of forming community can be unsustainable, as it does not give people time to recuperate. Nyx proposed the alternative concept of “wispy community.”<sup>23</sup> “It allows for sustainability because you know you’re coming together [at certain points] and then returning into your spaces to rest and recover,” Nyx said.

<sup>23</sup> Fine, G. A., & van den Scott, L.-J. (2011). Wispy Communities: Transient Gatherings and Imagined Micro-Communities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(10), 1319-1335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211409379>

#### 4.4 CONCLUDING DAY TWO

Defining movement building as relationship building opened up conversations around the distribution of power, accountability mechanisms and strategies towards strengthening solidarity within our movements. Despite our feminist intentions, the pervasiveness of patriarchal leadership structures became clear as we discussed our experiences of organisational work. Siloed campaigning, fractures in the movement due to in-fighting, and burnout were some of the key threats to feminist movements across the continent. Through discussions around trust and strengthening solidarity, coalition leadership structures, cross-border and cross-campaign collaboration and allied support were considered essential for advocacy.



## 5. MAKING A FEMINIST INTERNET IN A DIGITAL AGE IN AFRICA: DAY THREE

How identities, including racial identities, are named and represented affects the way we organise and find community. Conversations arising during day three problematised the notion of inclusion in feminist work, confronting the tension that certain actors exist and identify themselves as being a part of our movements, when simultaneously we do not acknowledge or seek to visibilise their struggles. The notion of inclusion deeply informed conversations arising from the open space event, and was further addressed in exercises such as the ecosystem dialogue. Sessions created space to speak about tensions of exclusion even in the room, while also affirming participants' place in the African and global digital rights and feminist movements through the sharing of our stories around artefacts that represent for us personally tangible points of connection between ourselves and our movements.

**Feminism is not an a  
*la carte* menu.**



## 5.1 THE QUESTIONS ON OUR MIND ABOUT... MOVEMENT BUILDING

The third day started with a spitting, beating bang as Caroline Kouassiaman opened the floor with an original piece of spoken word, titled “On the ‘M’ Word,”<sup>24</sup> inspired by our sessions on movements the previous day. Following the high-spirited cheering that resounded enthusiastically across the room for her performance, we spent the rest of the morning in another dynamic open space session. The topics focused on movement building, and were chosen by the APC team based on the previous day’s discussion. Some of them were:

### 5.1.1 BEYOND LABELS AND IDENTITY POLITICS: STRATEGIES FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

In this discussion, the merits and faults of organising through identity politics frameworks were unpacked. The group found that identity politics is needed to open up conversations about power and privilege, but cannot be the only thing we look to in order to drive change, due to its narrow framework. In order to drive structural change, we need to move beyond considering single issues.



<sup>24</sup> See the appendices for a full transcription.

### 5.1.2 WEAVING ONLINE AND OFFLINE ORGANISING IN AFRICA

This group spoke about how to merge offline and online movements in the region, for the benefit of all. In thinking through the financial challenges experienced by collectives, the group proposed moving away from the competitive mentality that organisations so often have about one another, and instead, sharing resources, ideas and skills across organisations.

In addition, the group highlighted the opportunity to strengthen our resistance efforts by examining strategies of resistance that have historically been successful in other contexts. We considered the examples of #internetfreedomAfrica and #keepiton as African movements that consisted of scattered collaborations across the continent. How can we unwrap the layers of messaging under the hashtags and approach the conversation from different angles?

### 5.1.3 SUSTAINING OUR MOVEMENTS AND HEALING FROM RUPTURES: TRUST, CONFLICT, GROWTH AND CARE

The difficulty we have with allowing ourselves time to rest is a challenge we face in our movements. As Ayak and others discussed in previous days, burnout is a common phenomenon that threatens our capacity to organise. One of the ideas suggested to combat this was considering rest as a pathway to decolonisation. The group also included believing

**Organising is intimate.** survivors as a core value for facilitating healing, so as not to perpetuate the cycle of harm we inherit from dominant structures such as white supremacy and (cishetero) patriarchy.

#### 5.1.4 FRIENDSHIP, LOVE AND SEX: WHAT DO THESE HAVE TO DO WITH FEMINIST ORGANISING?

Love, sex and friendships fuel movement building, yet raise relevant questions around power and accountability. Friendships and love relationships are political, because they cause boundaries to blur across organisational structures. The social capital gained from dating someone with organisational power, for example, can make it difficult for other members of the movement or organisation to critique that person. In imagining what accountability could look like, one participant suggested revisiting the values that brought the community together, and remembering the “why” that drives the movement when there is conflict.

#### 5.1.5 WORKING ACROSS GENERATIONS: LEARNING, LEADERSHIP AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

In many African societal systems, our grandmothers are teachers. How can we bring that notion into our movements and heal from the trauma that intergenerational relations in our movements hold? Experiences of resistance from both young people and movement elders in opening up conversations that answer this question were shared. Young people often experience conflicts of values with older generations

**"As feminists, we have this guilt. Like we can't take leave; like we can't be listening to music, [like we're] supposed to be changing the world all the time."**

of feminists around the kinds of rights that young women should be fighting for. At the same time, one participant who has been active in the LGBTQ movement in Kenya since 2007 shared her experience of many people falling away as they experienced burnout. She feels they should be training younger people to take over, but the younger generation in the movement want to start their own organisations.

Seyi shared how she has seen how younger generations of feminist activists that are met with large amounts of publicity for their work are not prepared for media questions, and do not know how to handle backlash. This is where older generations of feminists can provide support through motions of solidarity and by offering a feminist lens on questions of accountability. How do we preserve the memory of a movement in a way that, as gatekeepers transition out, younger people are able to continue the work strongly with the resources that exist? The #Shayisfuba intergenerational womxn's assembly<sup>25</sup> that took place in Cape Town earlier in the year was noted as an example of the kinds of spaces we need, to open up conversation around intergenerational organising.

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<sup>25</sup> Ebrahim, S. (2019, 29 April). #Shayisfuba: Feminist Collective Demands Feminist Government. The Daily Vox. <https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/shayisfuba-feminist-collective-demands-feminist-government-shaazia->

## 5.2 SURFACING THE TENSIONS WITHIN OUR MOVEMENTS

The open space dialogue prompted more questions. Yara asked about the parameters of support and solidarity. Should we support feminist movements when we have strong disagreements with them, or their work is not aligned with your values? Maimuna Jeng (The Gambia) responded to Yara, saying that it depends on what the values in misalignment are. She said, “Me being feminist but going against LGBT [rights], because they go against my culture or religion, is inauthentic because I am going against the same thing I’m fighting for.” In this, she reiterated the interconnectedness of many different struggles, that all fit under the umbrella of feminism and social justice.

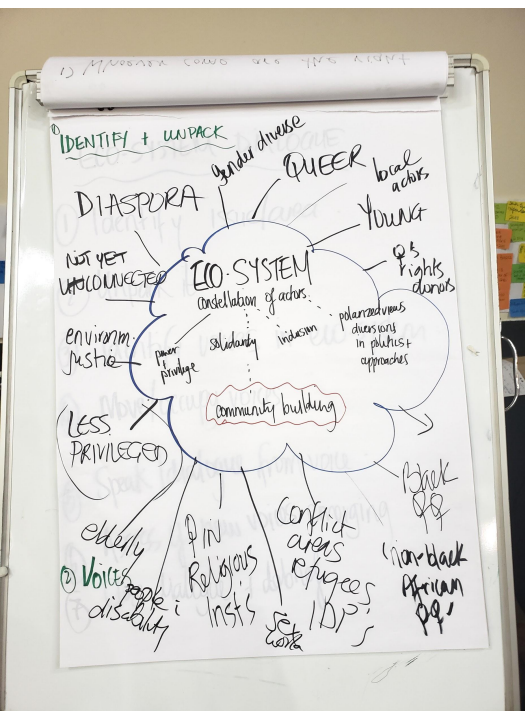
Ayak said, “Feminism is not an a la carte menu. If you identify as a feminist, you’re a feminist for all feminist issues, irrespective. The good thing about feminist spaces is that it allows for disagreements, because disagreements allow for dialogue and resolutions. Even feminism as a concept keeps evolving, and that’s alright.” Tigist added, “If you are a feminist there are no ifs and buts.” When it comes to forming alliances, we may not always be friends, “but sometimes there is a bigger cause that we need to work together for.” The difficulties are more about power. In alliances, we need to recognise power differences, and acknowledge each other’s struggles.

Speaking to the difficulties of working in alliances, Seyi gave an example of the Black Asian Minority Ethnic group (BAME), a collective organised around political Blackness. “We are at a crisis point in the diaspora movement,” she said, explaining that while BAME came together on the basis of rooting for Blackness, this does not guarantee unity. “Your politics as a Black person could still be pushing colonialism, or neoliberalism – this idea of being closer to white power. I don’t know what the answer is but that’s why I think we need to move away from identity politics.”

Jac rounded off the conversation, saying, “There are a lot of things we put up here that we don’t really know what to do with yet. For example, we talked about sexual harassment in the movement, and how it can be complicated to deal with it, and that there is a culture of violence in our own communities and practices.” While this is a daunting realisation, Jac pointed out the opportunity that comes with awareness, “It’s an emerging area... which means that we can be so creative in making shit up, coming up with things and seeing if it works.”

### 5.3 ECOSYSTEM DIALOGUE: HOW DO WE BUILD A MOVEMENT WHEN WE HAVE POLARISED VIEWS?

Shamillah introduced the next activity, the ecosystem dialogue, an exercise that could facilitate a difficult but necessary conversation around some of the disagreements that were emerging in the room. She emphasised that this process is



not about finding solutions, but rather about naming and surfacing the tensions. For the exercise, we collectively decided on the constellation of actors that make up our feminist movements, namely women, queer people, non-Black African women, young people, people in religious institutions, people in conflict areas, refugees, gender diverse people, black women, donor organisations, people living on the continent, African diaspora, people without internet access, people with disabilities, environmental justice activists, sex workers and older people.

In choosing some of these labels, there was some contestation among participants around language, especially around race and gender. Yara, who suggested the label “non-Black African women,” explained, “When we talk about African women, there is this terminology of ‘Black women.’ I don’t consider myself Black nor white. I am a person of colour. In my community in North Africa, there are many people who consider themselves white. Every time I find this terminology of Black activists, Black women [to mean] African, I don’t fit in. It excludes me.” Jan responded, “Language is very complex... As a South African, when I hear non-Black, I think white. We need to interrogate the language that we use. The place from which you speak is often the place from which you define how you engage in this space.” Also responding to Yara’s comment was Sheena, who pointed out that Blackness is not a political identity that everybody carries in East Africa.

Nyx added an expansion on how we could think about gender and queerness. They said, “There are different levels of queer

and when we speak about queer in predominantly cis-women spaces, we speak about the 'L' and the 'G' and not always about trans or people who are gender diverse." They continued to say that it's important that we take note of this so that we do not "leave out gender diverse people, and are inclusive in how we imagine this."

The dialogue stirred up a lot of emotion and reflection. Eva N'cho (Ivory Coast) shared that by having to speak for voices apart from her own, she became aware of injustices. She asked herself, "What am I doing about it? Are we doing enough to ensure those voices are raised?" In many ways, the dialogue showed us how our assumptions influence how we organise. One participant said, "We make lots of assumptions, about who we are, and what we do and how we can change things and it stifles our ability to question. We need to be more curious and eager to learn to understand what everyone's contribution to the movement is."

Amanda Hodgeson added, "It is a lot easier to point out what people are doing wrong... Our organisations would be better if we could see something and point it out with love and offer how we can change it." Tshego emphasised the importance of being intentional about how we distribute information and resources: "We should definitely make a more conscious effort to make sure that you're not just putting something on the internet, but you are directing it to the specific people you know are underrepresented."



The dialogue also revealed how deeply entrenched toxic frameworks are. Seyi said, "It felt really easy to get into 'oppression Olympics' and see who was oppressed the most, yet everyone's anger was valid. Everyone felt like they were being erased. We spoke for the last two days about being kinder and more understanding, but when we are in there, we are tested." One participant agreed, saying, "What I saw was 'divide and conquer' playing out here... We subscribe to that in a lot of what we do. Instead of forging alliances, we push potential partners further away from the work that we are doing." Jac added, "It's funny to see how we ended up with an old school constellation... we just reverted back to a familiar form and structure. It would be nice to play this in a different iteration, that expands it to a different imaginative form and structure."

While we did not find the solutions to the issues that had surfaced, Shamillah prompted us to stay aware of what the discomfort had revealed. She asked, "What does it mean to think about power and privilege? What does it mean to think about inclusion, and really challenge ourselves? What questions are we not asking? Who are we not even thinking about?... We can challenge each other, gently, compassionately, but we must do the challenging, because nothing will shift without it."

## 5.4 CONCLUDING DAY THREE

Coding inclusion into our feminist practice, as individuals and as collectives, requires acknowledging the ways in which our identities shift depending on the contexts in which we find ourselves. Secondly, the love, sex and friendships that fuel our movements affect power dynamics through the blurring of boundaries, and raise questions around accountability. The politics of preserving memory through intergenerational healing and learning in our movements was another key issue raised. The day brought about an appreciation for online spaces and the opportunities that online activism presents for the sustainability of our mobilisation efforts.



## 6. MAKING A FEMINIST INTERNET IN A DIGITAL AGE IN AFRICA: DAY FOUR

Day four gave us the opportunity to delve into conversations around collaboration: from an overview of the work of the APC Women's Rights Programme, embedded in partnership and trusted relationships, to a curated "Marketplace," where participants were given the space to speak about personal and organisational projects and invite collaboration from those who were interested around them. The day concluded with a conversation inviting quick "popcorn" responses to the question, "What does it take to make a feminist internet in Africa?", which closed the convening.

### 6.1 DOCUMENTING A SHARED HISTORY

**APC is a weird animal.  
It is an organisation  
and also a network.**

The APC team took us through the organisation's history and projects, including the #TakeBackTheTech campaign,<sup>26</sup> GenderIT,<sup>27</sup> the Feminist Internet Research Network (FIRN),<sup>28</sup> EROTICS,<sup>29</sup> the Feminist Tech eXchange (FTX)<sup>30</sup> and the Digital Stories platform.<sup>31</sup> This conversation set the tone for the day, emphasising the necessarily collaborative nature of mobilising around the issues in which we invest our time,

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.takebackthetech.net>

<sup>27</sup> <https://genderit.org>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.apc.org/en/project/firn-feminist-internet-research-network>

<sup>29</sup> <https://erotics.apc.org>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.apc.org/en/project/feminist-tech-exchange>

<sup>31</sup> <https://stories.apc.org>

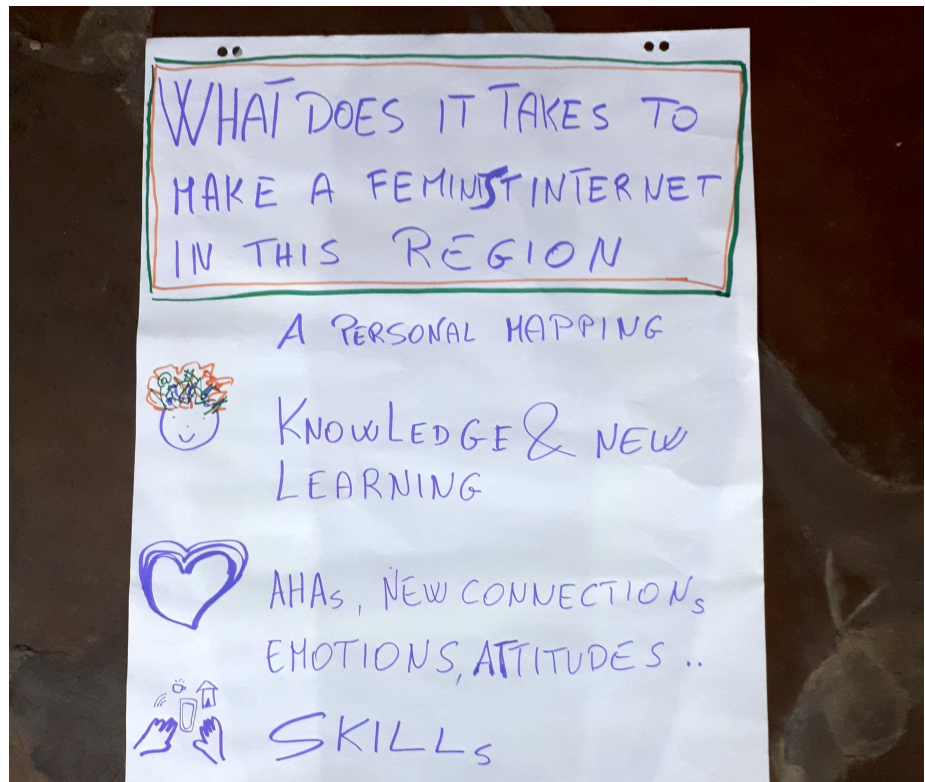
emotions and energy. Later in the day, participants were invited to meditate on key events in their own lives that had impacted their activism, and to share these stories with each other.

The self-reflective storytelling exercise broke open new understandings of what storytelling is for. One participant expressed her discovery that storytelling is about healing, and not about having a “polished” story that can be marketed. Another participant loved learning about the methodology of using storytelling to open up deeper conversations about how we experience our movements.

## 6.2 CONCLUSION OF #MFIAFRICA

In the closing minutes of the final day, the plenary sought to remind us of some of the key insights that had been shared over the convening period, and also opened the floor for “popcorn” responses to the question, “What does it take to make a feminist internet in Africa?”

Firstly, it was important for us to be informed about how our engagement with technology and the internet is political. Across the continent we experience severe violations of our right to internet access through government-authorised internet shutdowns. We also see the increasing use of biometric identification systems as access points to basic services. Such government behaviour has strong implications for our



senses of agency and autonomy. Furthermore, understanding more about how our bodies are the connecting point between our physical world and the digital gives us insight into the reality of silencing and online violence. Having an in-depth understanding of how violence is enacted in relation to digital technologies empowers us to act.

The intentional inclusion of and collaboration with actors across the constellation of our movements was also recognised as a necessary element to making a feminist internet in Africa. Integrating the work of feminist “techies” and tech-related rights activists into our movements on the

**[The movement] has  
so many faces, so  
many bodies.**

**Collectives.**

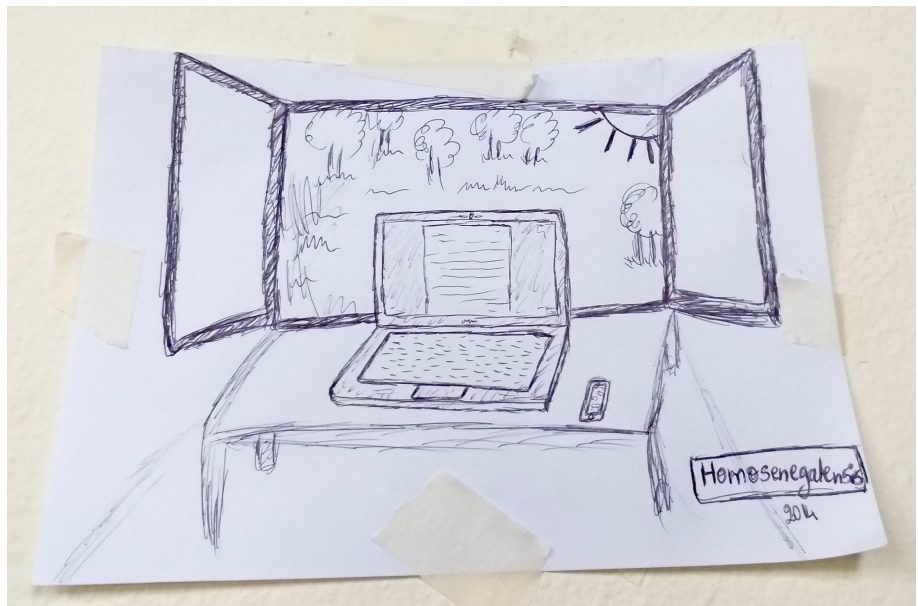
**Institutions. Free  
nodes. You cannot  
avoid working with  
different actors.**

continent was noted as important. Cross-campaign collaboration between grassroots and transnational organisations, as well as creating spaces for intergenerational learning, were also considered crucial. One participant took a moment to vocalise her appreciation for and recognition of all the work that has been done before us, and emphasised the importance of “valuing the backs we step on.”

Freedom of expression was described as one of the most powerful strategies and tactics used by activists over the past decade and a half. One participant shared that for her, a feminist internet means the ability to express herself with temerity and fearlessness. Another participant called for more feminist porn to be accessible online.

Integrating the feminist principle of movements into the vision of a feminist internet in Africa also has a lot to do with how we organise. A feminist internet means having strong offline support systems, as well as a consistent reflective presence to the process of our movement’s becoming. Strong movements also require from us an attention to power and privilege. How are we using our own privilege to redistribute power to others, and how are we leveraging the power existent in our networks to support those doing local work? Our governance structures also need to have accountability mechanisms in place, as well as space for creativity and experimentation to reinvent ways of working together and carrying out work that breaks away from traditional NGO-type organising and structures. Lastly, strong movements need to have a strong articulation of what our common

fight is for a feminist internet on the continent. Movements are relationships, and so, if we think collaboratively about these issues, it opens up greater possibilities to build something strong and agile.





## 7 . APPENDICES

### 7.1 TRANSCRIPTION OF JAN MOOLMAN'S WELCOME SPEECH ON "LOCATION" 28 OCTOBER 2019

I didn't sleep much last night, because I kept thinking to myself, what am I going to say to a group of people a) who know so much already, and b) who are already as politicised as most of us will ever be. I went back and forth and back and forth and woke up every 20 minutes and applied some essential oils and did some breathing and did some opening of my arms and all these things that are supposed to help calm us. I didn't get calm, no. And so, initially I thought, what is important here is to talk about the complexities of space and time and location and privilege and history, all of which are such essential components of any movement that any of us are part of. And I thought, maybe I'll start about the history of this region that often is unseen or unacknowledged, and very often not remembered. Then I thought, well, I am me, and I'm the kind of person who always has to start from myself, and I often think that what is most important in our movements that we don't think of often enough is about our location as individuals. And so, this is where I am going to start from, and this is what the next few minutes are going to be about. Because what's really



important, I think, is that the places we speak from are always intimate, they are always deeply personal, and they are always deeply political.

This is where I speak from. I speak from the location of a Black South African woman, and the accompanying identity that is read from the colour of my skin and the texture of my hair, that makes me so-called Coloured. Because in this day, and in this country, as we all know, race matters. I speak from the location of a cis-woman in a relationship with a heterosexual Black rural man, and I remember what it felt like the first time he touched me, the first time he held me, the first time he kissed me, because years before that, that touch and that kiss and that intimacy could have landed both of us in jail. I remember also that I was raised to hate this person that I love. I speak from the location of a body that knows hunger and what it feels like, that has become a body that occupies a very different space: a middle-class body, that right now, benefits from the body of another woman in my house, who is performing the reproductive labour of looking after my two-year-old, who you will meet, and she is much more interesting than I am. It is that labour that makes it possible for me to be here today.

I also speak from my location as a mother to this two-year-old, who I am teaching to occupy the world fiercely, without fear, to be wild and loud and curious. Even as her proximity to violence is so real, so in-my-face, from the moment I wake up to the moment I go to bed. When she is away from me, I wonder, who is she with, who is harming her? What is

this doing to her life? And I also wonder something else. Should I also teach her this skill to be small and invisible? This skill that all of us know so well how to perform? Would this be right? Just so that she feels safe? Whatever safe means, I don't know.

And I wonder – because really, how many locations can one occupy without completely unravelling – I also speak from the location of working in a global organisation, APC, which puts me in a closer proximity to power and resources that many of you don't have. And I want to use this, and we want to use this proximity to hopefully create a space where we can come together: to talk, to share, listen and rest, in the knowledge that at this moment, technology is changing how we learn and love and organise.

Our complexity and the simultaneous locations we occupy are also our greatest assets as we build and sustain our movements. And all of us bring into this space the rich history of our ancestors, our histories of conquest, of victory, of lands and valleys and mountains and holy spaces that colonialism and apartheid tried to erase, because I firmly believe that to remember is to resist. And to remember is to draw on the collective power of what came before us, the collective power that we have here, and the collective and individual power that we need for the future. And that's the end of the first half. [Clapping]

I've done this 75,000 times, and every time I'm as nervous as the first time. So, who is here? My name is Jan Moolman, I'm one of the co-managers of the APC Women's Rights Programme, we also have five other team members here [introduces team].

## 7.2 BIRTHDAY POEM TO PRESIDENT YOWERI MUSEVENI BY DR. STELLA NYANZI

Yoweri, they say it was your birthday yesterday.

How bitterly sad a day!

I wish the smelly and itchy cream-coloured candida festering in Esiteri's cunt had suffocated you to death during birth.

Suffocated you just like you are suffocating us with oppression, suppression and repression!

Yoweri, they say it was your birthday yesterday.

How painfully ugly a day!

I wish the lice-filled bush of dirty pubic hair overgrown all over Esiteri's unwashed chuchu had strangled you at birth.

Strangled you just like the long tentacles of corruption you sowed and watered into our bleeding economy.

Yoweri, they say it was your birthday yesterday.

How nauseatingly disgusting a day!

I wish the acidic pus flooding Esiteri's cursed vaginal canal had burnt up your unborn fetus.

Burnt you up as badly as you have corroded all morality and professionalism out of our public institutions in Uganda.

Yoweri, they say it was your birthday yesterday.

How horrifically cancerous a day!

I wish the infectious dirty-brown discharge flooding Esiteri's loose pussy had drowned you to death.

Drowned you as vilely as you have sank and murdered the dreams and aspirations of millions of youths who languish in the deep sea of massive unemployment, and under-employment in Uganda.

Yoweri, they say it was your birthday yesterday.

How traumatically wasted a day!

I wish the poisoned uterus sitting just above Esiteri's dry clitoris had prematurely miscarried a thing to be cast upon a manure pit.

Prematurely miscarried just like you prematurely aborted any semblance of democracy, good governance and rule of law.

Yoweri, they say it was your birthday yesterday!

How morbidly grave a day!

I wish that Esiteri's cursed genitals had pushed out a monstrosity greenish-bluish still-birth.

You should have died at birth, you dirty delinquent dictator...

You should have died in birth, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.

.....

If you want to beat me for my heartfelt birthday poem, come and find me at my home. Ask the bodabodamen to direct you to Mama Stella's house with a red gate. I refuse to be gagged!

7.3 "ON THE 'M' WORD" BY  
CAROLINE KOUASSIAMAN  
29 OCTOBER 2019

On the M Word

Quiet.

Quiet.

Storm brewing, sky darkening, air is heavy, go inside. Stay inside. Close your windows.

I heard they are trying to quell, trying to squash

Squash the sounds of

Stomping. Running. Jumping. Walking with a cane. Cycling.

Sliding. Jump-roping. Speedwalking. Chair-wheeling. Skipping.

Movement

Too fast / too slow / too much / too loud / too quiet

TOO... Too... too...

Too much change / too much new / too much XX chromosome /  
too much resistance / too much "what are you?" / too much  
"hmmm" / too much "I can't quite tell" / too much wet / too  
much glitter / too much colour / too much NO / too much  
OH / too much oooooohhhhhh

Feels like. Sounds like.

Running. Skipping. Flying. Swimming. Diving. Dancing.

Twirling. Stilt-walking. Catapulting. Tip-toeing. Twirling.

Kayaking. Racing.

At first – it's far, at first – it's quiet, at first it's footprints, at first it's echoes, at first it's whispers, at first it's messages written quickly, at first it's long Skype calls that never seem to end, at first it's loud bursts of laughter in a crowded cinema. At first – it's practice.

And then bursts and spurts AND squirts, and

ARMOUR. There's armour. We've got armour. Glorious armour. Umbrellas. Fast bikes. Dykes on bikes. Scarves. Data – lots of data, plenty, plenty data. Wit. Quick fingers. Effective fingers. Codes. Disruption. Claiming my time. Reclaiming my time. First aid kits. Extra bags in your bag, *au cas où* (just in case). An extra *pagne* (wrapper/lappa), *au cas où* (just in case). Unlimited data on your phone. Running shoes. Waterproof suitcases. And, plastic bags to

cover / your / hair /  
when it's raining outside.

Call your cousins. Tweet your people. Tell them It's on.

