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**ROOTING LEGAL EMPOWERMENT  
MOVEMENTS IN**

**PARTICIPATORY  
ACTION  
RESEARCH**

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**A CONNECT AND  
WALKALONGSIDEBOOK**

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BERNSTEIN INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

# OUR FLOW

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# SO GOOD TO MEET YOU!



## **Our community of practice**

We hope this encounter will feel like a conversation among friends. We hope to learn from you as much as you will learn from our community. This connect-walkalongside-book captures the flow of the Legal Empowerment Learning Lab that met starting November 2022. This connect-walkalongside-book captures the 12 monthly co-learning sessions we had over the course of a year. Our community is made up of activists and organizers, academics, practitioners, lawyers, community members, and researchers from throughout the world. In how we gather, we hope to practice collective liberation. For us, this has meant distributing power when we gather and allowing for the design of our time together to be responsive and dynamic.

## **How to move through the text**

These pages are an invitation to practice learning in community with us, and with others you lean on. You can move through this text in a group, and you can enter this space knowing that you are never alone, with your voice joining the chorus of our voices. Throughout the text you will find opportunities for you to excavate your experiences, values, and fears as well as opportunities to dream about radical possibilities.

# Constructing collective values

By taking time to articulate the core values that unite us, we strengthen the foundations of our community. Collective values allow us to support one another through challenging times, collaborate across borders and backgrounds, and speak with a consistent moral voice. They remind us of the ideals that called us to this work and can sustain us through the inevitable challenges, contradictions, and disappointments.



## Relationality

We will remember that we are accountable to one another.



## Flexibility of mind and curiosity

We will delight in opportunities to explore our own views and peek at the perspectives of others.



## Openness of outcome

We will practice letting go of rigid expectations of what the aim of this process is.



## Allow ourselves to be changed

We will soften our grip on how we think everything should be and ways we may limit ourselves.



## Presence

We will strive to gift ourselves space to be here, with our thoughts, our ideas.



## Unease and ambiguity

We will sit with unease and welcome ambiguity because we know this is necessary for decolonizing knowledge and uprooting white supremacy.



value:

what it means and looks like:



value:

what it means and looks like:



value:

what it means and looks like:

Add as many intentions and values as you would like. You can add more pages or make notes anywhere on this document.

BEFORE WE BEGIN TO WALK THIS PATH TOGETHER

# How can you embody these values?

**What is the infrastructure of care in your approach?**

The policies and everyday practices that shape our work animates our values - stated or unstated. In your work, what kinds of opportunities have you created or could you create to give life to the values you just named?

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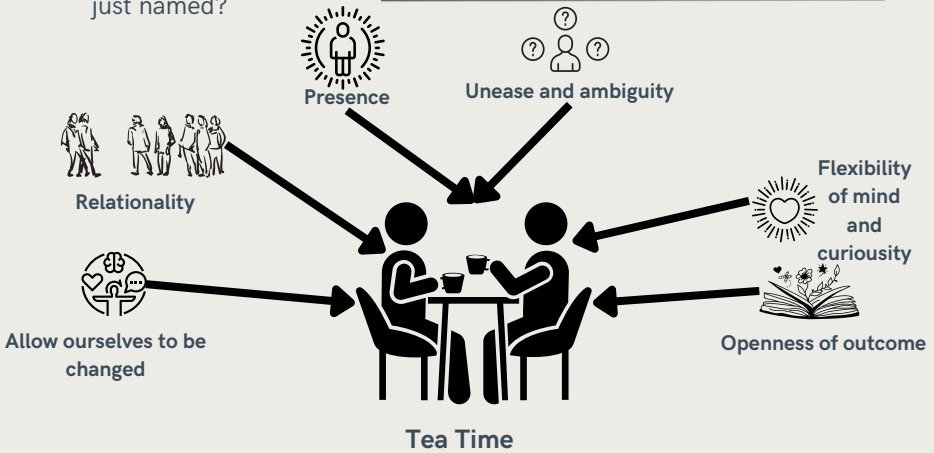
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We gather as a community monthly in co-learning sessions that are co-constructed. In addition to that, Mela and Emese accompany each person and connect to walk alongside as is easeful for each participant. Additionally, monthly we have a virtual tea time. These are open spaces that are there should anyone in the lab find themselves available, curious, or interested. We have no agenda at all. It is simply to share time together. We can talk about anything on our minds and our hearts. We allow the conversation to meander, to go to unexpected places, to be playful or to veer toward unexpected collaborations! There are no rules. It is a place to just hold us as a community. We found that possibilities spark at every one of these gatherings - we have published articles and learned new skills unexpectedly. These spaces allow us to build connections that sustain our ethic of care and celebrate the gifts we each bring into the community.

# CHAPTER 1: BUILDING THE BRIDGES AS WE WALK THEM

**How have the movements/spaces of activism you have been a part of made you confront the powerlines that run through you?**

Before we entered in conversation with each other, we will spend some time engaging with Powerlines. Like working in movements, Participatory action requires us to untangle and understand the powerlines that run through us. This is not a task that can be done once but rather work that we continually have to engage with. These prompts invite us to explore layers of power, in our work and in ourselves. These reflections will allow you to unearth deep questions and connections with the following chapters supporting this process.

**What are some ethical knots you have encountered in your legal empowerment work?**

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**What obstacles have you found to engaging and centering the communities you are accountable to?**

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**How have the movements you are part of made you reflect on privilege?**

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# INVITING AN ENCOUNTER TO ACKNOWLEDGE OUR HUMANITY

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LEGAL EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH ALLOW US TO IMAGINE WAYS THAT OUR LIVES CAN NOT ONLY ILLUMINATE SYSTEMS BUT RESHAPE AND REBUILD ENTIRE WORLDS. TO HOLD A SPACE FOR THIS CONVERSATION, FOR THESE POSSIBILITIES TO BECOME VISIBLE AND TO BE FELT, WE FIRST HAVE TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS WHERE EACH OF US CAN **FEEL** AND EACH OF US CAN **TRUST** AND EACH OF US CAN **HOLD** SPACE FOR OTHERS.

Decolonizing spaces, methodologies, and approaches to gathering requires the courage of presence, with ourselves and it requires the courage to feel the world around us. Many critical conversations, in the human rights sector as well as in academia, focus on addressing structural violence and neglect the recognition of affective embodiment, that is our bodies and the feelings we experience. This neglect – we feel- can lead to the perpetuation of violent systems and dynamics. Disembodiment within academia and within human rights spaces can implicitly encourage and condone dehumanization, of self and others. Separating ourselves from our own humanity sustains white supremacy, racism, classicism, and dehumanization. This separation also leads to exhaustion and harm to ourselves as well as our communities. With this in mind, our first gathering at the Legal Empowerment Lab gently and playfully invites each of us to feel and connect.

When we first gather, we cultivate the conditions that can hold each of our complexity, that can invite our courage and tenderness. Each session that allows us to gather, reiterates this commitment to curiosity and play. At our very first encounter, we invest significant time in quite literally pulling each person into the space and visualizing the way our individual perspectives are being woven into a fabric of community.

## **Reflexivity and Positionality**

Embodiment is required for reflexivity and positionality. To understanding power in relationships, we must understand the stories we carry, the narratives we purposefully and inadvertently reinforce.

## **Investigating Power by Centering Ethic of Care**

Rather than ice-breakers, which implies harsh force, we do not invite breaking but – infused with an ethic of care – we invite the making visible of connections, the reinforcing of our inherent intertwined natures, and the celebration of our interdependence and relationality. Investing energy and time in these experiences demonstrates the role that relationships have in movements. It is not enough to talk about the importance of values but we hope to enact and animate these values of care through these deliberate decisions.

## **Many weavers, many strands, one collective textile**

As a community, for our first gathering, each of our individual selves becomes a strand in the fabric of our togetherness. The activity is seemingly simple, one that many communities have practiced as a way of learning each other's names. It begins with one person introducing themselves, saying their name and whatever pertinent information they want to share about their identity in this new community. Everyone is invited to remember that they hold multiple selves and to not limit themselves to their professional roles. Following the person who speaks, the second person now introduces themselves and additionally reiterates the presence of the previous speaker. Following that, the third person once again brings themselves into the community however they wish and this time, shares information about the person who just spoke as well as the previous speaker.

Each of our voices, carries, holds, and encounters the presence of each person in our community. We do not have a single weaver with passive strands of spun wool, but we are each weavers and we are each these complex strands. We are individuals, and we are a community. Both hold true and both are viscerally felt by all of us deeply listening and laughing at the challenge of this task.

Unexpectedly there are also shifts that happen. Our identities may travel through the voices of our community members in ways that we did not intend. This invites a sense of joy in the unexpected and an acknowledgment that we may present ourselves a certain way but others may hear something different.



## **Access and Disability justice**

Before we move away from this collective weaving encounter, we will process by allowing our bodies to seek what they might need. Halfway through our two-hour session we will always take a brief break, shepherded by music. The music is an offering, gives glimpses into one of our histories, gives glimpses into movements that we are connected to, and reminds us that joy is necessary for survival and transformation.

These pauses give permission for us to pay attention to our needs, to take care of ourselves, to remember that when we make room for this kind of awareness of our bodies we are refusing to uphold systems of extraction. Many of us engaged in movements tolerate discomfort in our bodies, many of us willingly stifle our own needs because we have been conditioned to separate ourselves from our own bodies. Sometimes these behaviors were significantly by the very systems that thrive when we fragment ourselves.

Inviting these breaks, inviting joy through music, and inviting different ways of knowing and telling stories, interrupts these numbing patterns.

## **Visualizing where we need to go based on where we each have been**

During this first encounter as a community, we begin to collectively map out where we will move as a community based on the needs and curiosities we will each map out with the prompts you reflected on at the start of this chapter. In our community, we will be discussing how legal empowerment and participatory action research can come together. Each of us who are entering this conversation have faced ethical knots that have allowed us to confront our privileges and roles in the community-based work. Lifting these at this point will give us a sense of the issues that we can untangle together going forward.

*On the following page, we will share the broad themes that emerged during our individual and collective excavations of ethical knots.*

*Review your answers above and see if there are any themes missing and circle the ones that showed up for you as well.*

# WHAT IS JUSTICE?

WHO DETERMINES THIS?

# ACCOUNTABILITY

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THOSE IN POWER CONTINUES TO DICTATE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY.

# OUTCOMES AND TENSIONS

# PRIVILEGE

MANY OF US ARE PAID WHILE THE COMMUNITIES WE WORK WITH LOSE PAY WHEN THEY PARTICIPATE (BECAUSE THEY TAKE TIME FROM WORK)

# POWER

FUNDING AND THE TENSIONS WITH THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE. IS IT TRULY POSSIBLE TO COLLABORATE WHEN POWER IS A FACTOR?

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS AND HOW ARE THEY IN TENSION WITH IDEAS AROUND PRODUCTIVITY?

# IS NEGOTIATING WITH POWER EVER SUCCESSFUL?

INCLUDING WITH OURSELVES. DO WE SIMPLY REINFORCE OPPRESSIVE POWER STRUCTURES WHEN WE HOLD DISPROPORTIONATE POWER IN RELATIONSHIP WITH COMMUNITIES?

# LIBERATORY METHODOLOGIES

HOW CAN DATA COLLECTION NOT INHERENTLY LEAD TO THOSE WITH POWER SPEAKING OVER OTHERS.

# COOPTATION OF COMMUNITY POWER

# RISKS

RISKS ARE REAL WHEN COMMUNITIES ARE INVITED INTO PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

# ACTION IN COMMUNITY VS ACTION AT OTHER LEVELS

# URGENCY VS TRUE PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

HOW CAN DATA COLLECTION NOT INHERENTLY LEAD TO THOSE WITH POWER SPEAKING OVER OTHERS.

# WELLBEING

COMMUNITY WORK IS FILLED WITH EMOTIONAL DEMANDS. RISKS OF BURNOUT.

# THE LIMITS OF PAR

REFLECTING ON WHETHER WE ARE DOING THE RIGHT THING.

# CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

**Before we can begin to build bridges toward participatory processes in our work, we have to excavate the stories we hold about what legitimate knowledge may be.**

For these invitations, take a moment to trace what shape your relationship to research takes on an everyday basis. You will find that allowing yourself some time to reflect will lead you down surprising connections. Try not to answer just from your mind, or from a place of having a "right" answer, instead dip into the practice of your everyday work and see where research as an idea or a process may show up.

**What is research?**

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**How do you understand research in your life?**

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**How does research show up in your work?**

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## CHAPTER 2

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# YOUR VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS OFFER RADICAL POSSIBILITIES FOR COLLABORATION AND CO- CONSTRUCTION.

### **Meeting online**

Globally we were thrown into online meetings at the start of the pandemic. At that time, we were uncertain of this new medium, feeling a sense of grief for what we are losing, feeling a sense of disappointment for what many feared would be a depleted sense of togetherness. However, over the course of these three years, especially in a space like the Legal Empowerment Learning Lab, we have come to appreciate the radical access these virtual gatherings provide. This time spent together, whether at the start of our day for those of us in North or South America, or at the end of the day for those of us in India and Africa, we know that our willingness to show up is already extending an invaluable amount of generosity. This time is carved out of our day, away from our families, away from our obligations, away from the needs of those around us, and we do not take this offering and presence lightly. That is the dominant feeling with which we enter every space.

Our sessions often begin with music. We invite histories and different ways of knowing by starting each conversation with music. Someone in the community suggests the song - each song is both personal but also political, as is any other decision we ever make. By beginning with music we acknowledge we are more than the performances that we are often accustomed to providing at professional encounters. We are not just the words that we carefully curate to speak about our work, we are also joy and playfulness, memories and hopes. Music allows us to enter spaces that words may be too rigid for. This too is an enactment of our ethic of care - making space for different ways of knowing and being.

As everyone enters the virtual space, as soon as they are able to hear the audio, we welcome them by name. This simple practice allows the presence of each person to be celebrated and felt by everyone else.

**How we define knowledge matters**

Often, we move toward important conversations related to human rights without interrogating the assumptions that undergird our encounters. To really delve into the opportunities for legal empowerment and social justice work to be led by communities, we have to excavate our attitudes about what counts as legitimate knowledge.

Many of us exist within structures that uphold Western knowledge systems. Many of us do our liberatory work within these same systems. Without addressing these deeper connections to white supremacy and colonialism, we may be reinforcing these structures of violence.

Especially when we consider knowledge construction, it is essential to reflect on what types of knowledge we may be valuing over others, whether implicit or explicit. Western knowledge systems have over-emphasized certain representations, such as seeking to quantify complex human experience and naming this as more valid or rigorous than how communities may narrate and represent their own realities.

It can be helpful to explore how the ways we represent knowledge, in our

work, may only legitimate Western knowledge systems. What kinds of foundations do the approaches we deploy hold? Are they rooted in colonial and white supremacist logics? For instance, are we striving to gather as many data points as possible before we represent research? Are we doing this because we believe it will produce more objective knowledge? Is this erasing or minimizing input from communities? Questions like these are likely ones that most academics, community organizers, practitioners, and lawyers grapple with because our knowledge systems continue to be dominated by these colonial priorities.

To dismantle systems of power and privilege that perpetuate inequalities in knowledge production, we need to center the voices and perspectives of those who are most impacted by these unjust systems. Participatory action research is one such tool of ensuring that knowledge production is led by those who are closest to the issues. Before we can think critically about ethical engagement with communities, we need to peel back our own relationship to power and the ways we may be upholding them in our work.

On the following page, we'll invite you to return to your responses on page 12 and peel back the layers of power that may be rooted in colonial approaches.

## Questions we can ask ourselves to explore whether our approach to knowledge rooted in colonial and white supremacist ideas



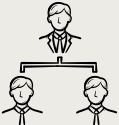
WHO CREATED THE DOCUMENTS THAT YOU FEEL HAVE AUTHORITY IN YOUR WORK?



WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE APPROACH YOU ARE WORKING WITH? FOR INSTANCE, MOST SOCIAL SCIENCES WERE DEVELOPED TO MAINTAIN THE SUPREMACY OF WHITE PEOPLE.



ARE THE METHODOLOGIES/DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES USED INACCESSIBLE TO THE COMMUNITY? HOW ABOUT DATA DISSEMINATION? WHO IS THE PRIMARY AUDIENCE AND WHY?



WHAT ARE THE POWER DYNAMICS AT PLAY WHEN YOU ARE ENGAGING IN YOUR PARTICIPATORY WORK? FOR EXAMPLE: ARE THERE PAID MEMBERS AND UN-PAID MEMBERS? ARE THERE PEOPLE WITH ACCESS TO CERTAIN TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES?



ARE YOU USING LANGUAGE THAT IS AVAILABLE TO THE COMMUNITY? WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE THERE CAN BE TRUE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ISSUES IN TERMS OF BUILDING A SHARED VOCABULARY?



WHOSE PRIORITIES ARE BEING ADDRESSSED BY THE RESEARCH QUESTION? IS IT THE PRIORITY OF THE FUNDER? IS IT GENERATED BY THE COMMUNITY?

Decolonizing knowledge is a continuous process. These questions – among others – are important to bring in conversation with our work, no matter what our role is within this struggle toward collective liberation.

# CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY LEGAL EMPOWERMENT?

**In this space, we are going to spend some time reflecting on legal empowerment.**

Like knowledge, another taken-for-granted concept within our work is the concept of justice. We implicitly assume that systems like the justice system are built on benevolent intentions and that they have everyone's best interests in mind. Yet, reflecting on who historically has dictated what is justice and how this has shaped the legal system today, will reveal an erasure of the community's perspective, needs, and desires.

**Who in your work/community seems to be in a position to define what is justice?**

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**How does the community you are a part of have access to knowledge about the law?**

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**How does the community you are a part of work to shape the law?**

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## CHAPTER 3

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# PARTICIPATORY STRATEGIES FOR LEGAL EMPOWERMENT: KNOW THE LAW. USE THE LAW. SHAPE THE LAW.

Empowerment has a potentially confusing or even oppressive connotation. It seems to imply that communities need to be given power. Critical legal empowerment and participatory legal empowerment are rooted in the view that communities hold the power, and institutions that have not recognized that fact need to be shaped by the communities - based on their needs, experiences, and expertise.

Traditional legal interventions have focused narrowly on providing capacity building to individuals so that they had the tools to navigate existing legal structures. Critical legal empowerment and participatory legal empowerment flip the gaze, instead of a damage-centered lens that looks at what communities are lacking, it focuses on the legal structures to challenge the inherent injustices and power balances that are embedded within the law and its application.

For all of us engaged in work with communities, it is important to interrogate whether the community has had an opportunity to define justice on their own terms. Otherwise, we run the risk of reinforcing existing systems in a way that benefit those who hold power. When communities are able to lead conversations, able to name their priorities, and shed light on the nuances of their everyday experiences of injustice as well as of resistance, we can begin to not only refuse to perpetuate oppression and marginalization but also begin to imagine how systems can be reshaped.

Participatory legal empowerment invites everyone impacted to critically examine laws and generate just solutions and responses. It is not about providing supports for individuals to survive injustices but to ensure communities have the opportunities to build systems that enable collective liberation.



## How Barefoot Law in Uganda integrated participatory strategies into their excellent legal empowerment work.

"In Uganda, more people represent themselves in court than have lawyers. In some instances, Judicial officers estimate that upwards of 80% of the cases they handle are unrepresented litigants. This often isn't by choice, most people can't afford lawyers and also most of Uganda's lawyers operate within the capital and major cities while those who are unaffordable are a for the average citizen. At Barefoot law, we are working to get legal information and guidance to the most underserved people.



This often isn't by choice. Most people can't afford lawyers, and most of Uganda's lawyers operate within the capital and major cities.



We learned that most people who represent themselves are terrified of the court, the judicial officer they appear before, among others.

We learned that most people who represent themselves are terrified of the court, the judicial officer they appear before, everything. In fact, many feel like just having to go to court is a sign they have already lost. We learned that the judicial officers end up having to spend a lot more time explaining to self-representing litigants what they need to do, and how they need to do it and still don't, for the most part, get the results they would like.

Our presumption was that litigants who appear in court unrepresented are unlikely to be equipped with the resources necessary to manage their court case on their own. We resisted the natural urge to find ways to assist unrepresented persons in court and instead looked to test our presumption that this was a problem in the first place.

We realized we had to ask the people who deal with self-representation on a daily basis, what they think about it. We sought out judges, magistrates, people who have represented themselves in courts before among others, to get a deeper insight into the situation.

## CHAPTER 3



We listened to people list the support they need, from financial, to representative and we heard with clarity, that nothing is more helpful than having knowledge. Knowledge of what is going to happen before it happens, what the court will ask of the parties to a case and what they are allowed to do in court.

We learnt with renewed respect that all people need is to know and understand the laws and procedure surrounding their case. This would enable them to more confidently pursue their case.

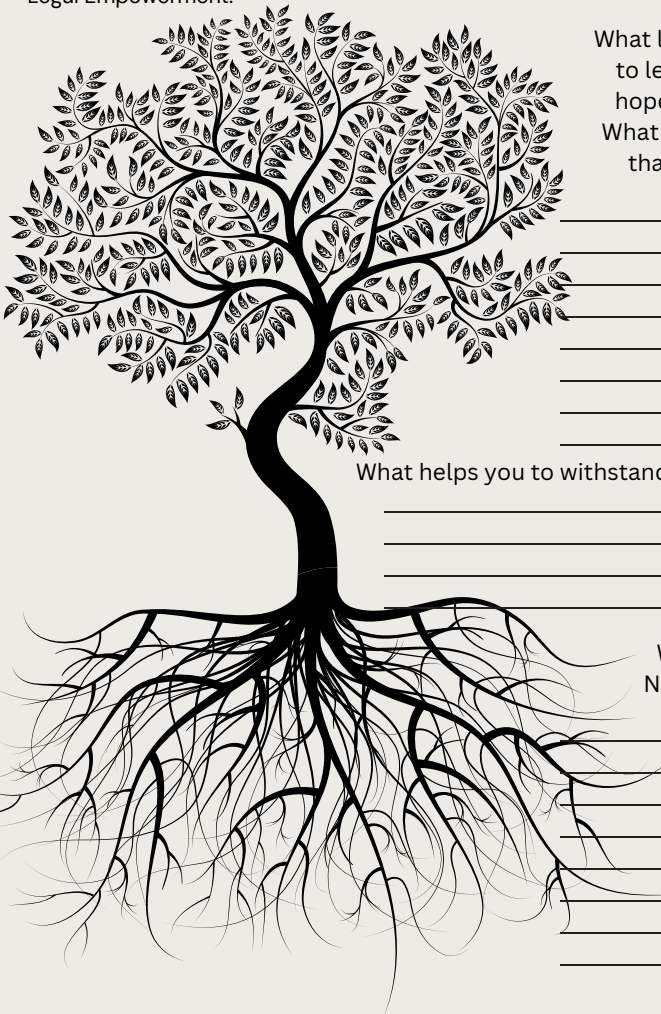
Armed with the above learned information, we plan to work with the pilot courts to provide information and guidance to people representing themselves through the use of our online and offline channels."



# CHAPTER 4: ETHICS AND TRUST IN PARTICIPATORY LEGAL EMPOWERMENT

**Ethical relationships require us to know ourselves, and to know how to allow the unease in our bodies.**

Authentic relationality – required for trust– asks us to be vulnerable and engage across differences in identities, experiences, and worldviews. This can generate unease as we confront our own biases and privileges. Relationality requires reflexivity to unpack our assumptions, which can be unsettling. Especially for those who benefit from oppressive systems, discomfort may arise when building solidarity because it means confronting ways we have perpetuated the structures of violence. This exercise invites you to know yourself. You have to know yourself before you can ethically engage a community in Participatory Legal Empowerment.



What legacies do you wish to leave? What do you hope to be known for? What will be an evidence that you were here?

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What helps you to withstand life's storms?

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What grounds you? Nourishes your roots?

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## CHAPTER 4

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# WE CANNOT TALK ABOUT ETHICS WITHOUT REFLECTING ON POWER AND WAYS WE OURSELVES MAY BE COMPLICIT IN OPPRESSION.

Discussions in legal empowerment and participatory action research can run the risk of being limited by institutional frameworks. Often, in academia, institutional review boards dictate whether a particular engagement with a community is considered ethical. These institutional actors consider whether the benefits outweigh the risks, whether participants received informed consent, whether people's privacy and confidentiality are being preserved, and other metrics. Developed out of the well known atrocities documenting ways scientists misled, exploited, and abused vulnerable populations, these metrics today also serve to protect the institution from any liability. Ethics go beyond those set by institutional frameworks in participatory legal empowerment- centering the vision of justice held by the community.

Everyone in the participatory process must take individual responsibility to excavate assumptions, fears, the

impact of privileges. This work of excavating powerlines that run through everyone is also a collective process, work that must happen in relationship with one another. It is not something that can be checked off prior to starting a project. It is not something that is accomplished and then moved past to get into the work that matters. Cultivating an environment of trust and vulnerability, where we can continually hold the tensions that inevitably arise anytime we come together, is integrated throughout the life of any community process.

Ethics and trust in participatory work also means learning how to allow tensions to appear without it derailing the process, without it leading to anyone removing themselves from the work. Unease lets us know we are in spaces of not knowing, signals that norms and practices are being challenged in favor of more just relations. Learning to be constructively uncomfortable expands our capacity for connection and responsibility to each other.

In mainstream research, ethics are often determined by researchers, who are closely linked with institutions of power. In participatory action research, the process begins with the community and determining what ethical guidelines already exist within the community. In PAR, community members are co-researchers who are leading the work.



If there are meaningful experiences of solidarity grown from care-filled conversations that have blossomed into authentic non-extractive relationships, there is a chance to learn what the community requires for an ethical process. As Aakanksha Badkur, lawyer and researchers from Nazdeek shared, researchers/lawyers should not be in a position to determine what risks the community should take on, instead, power needs to be shifted to the community who can reflect and decide what risks they are willing to take.

These conversations about ethics are an opportunity to name the conflicting interests that may be present in the community. The conflicts that may arise are an opportunity to respond in a way that centers the community rather than the aim of research or the goals of funders. No matter how thoughtful a process, it is likely that the protocol will shift as the context and relationships shift. Having a dynamic responsive ethics protocol is an embodiment of a commitment to collective wellbeing.

If you would like to read more about ethics and participatory action research, you may enjoy this article:  
Brabeck, K., Lykes, M. B., Sibley, E., & Kene, P. (2015). Ethical ambiguities in participatory action research with unauthorized migrants. *Ethics & Behavior*, 25(1), 21-36.

**It is not always easy to reflect on ways we have fallen short of our values in the past, but it is an important practice. Acknowledging mistakes we have made or perhaps ways that our privileged perspectives have shaped interactions is in part a decolonizing practice. We aim to fold each other into the collective movement toward liberation. We aim to refuse the politics of purity and recognize that we are constantly growing from every interaction.**

**Write about a time when you experienced an ethical dilemma in your work.**

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**Who was all involved in that ethical dilemma? Reflect here on their relationship to different levels of power.**

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**How did you navigate through that dilemma? What would you do differently now?**

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# CHAPTER 5

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## HUMANIZING INSTITUTIONS MAY BE A STRATEGY TO HELP US MOVE TOWARD JUSTICE.

Large governmental bodies and international institutions along with local structures often operate in a way that dehumanizes communities, especially those who are most impacted by oppression. By making people into abstractions, these institutions reinforce their own dominance and continue to drive narratives that impact communities. To interrupt these patterns of dehumanization and injustice, one strategy to consider may be to humanize the institutions themselves. By doing so, we may be refusing to adopt the same pattern of violence as these systems are defined by. By humanizing institutions, we may be infusing our engagement with these structures with an ethic of care that can destabilize injustice and reimagine ethical relationships.

Constructing knowledge, such as through research, can be another place

where communities are further dehumanized by being made into subjects. When we refuse dehumanization - whether it is in PAR or whether it is in engaging institutions - we are refusing to uphold the same white supremacist, colonial, and Western projects that have been at the root of the violence we struggle against.

Humanization, however, does not mean a lack of accountability. By identifying allies and building relationships, we can begin to invite transparency, build accountability mechanisms, and ensure power within these structures is held by the community. Institutions will need to incorporate transformative justice practices to name and respond to harms through reconciliations and reparations.

Ethic of care, central to participatory legal empowerment, can shift the way institutions relate to our communities.



**Recommendations for institutions of power to enable a more ethical relationship with communities.**



Institutions should consider whether the language used to communicate - written and spoken - are accessible to the community members.



To address complex needs, those with power (such as lawyers and government officials) need to consider effective division of labor/collaboration with community members. Without this collaborative spirit, the result is unlikely to address the needs.



Where is the funding being allocated? Is there substantial funding for communities to do their justice work or is the majority of the funding going to lawyers and stakeholders with power?



Do not impose top-down solutions. These will be less likely to be successful in addressing the root cases of the issues and are less likely to be sustained in the long term. Instead listen to the community members, and follow their lead - in asking the questions and in seeking the right responses.



What does accountability look like? How are the promises for equity being made tracked? How is it measured? How are they reported? Accountability mechanisms themselves should also be led by the community otherwise the risk is a mechanism of erasure.



Your ideas:





### The Morris Justice Project

**Now that you have considered what you would do to respond to the violence of over-policing in black and brown neighborhoods in NYC, we'd love to share what strategies this research collaborative deployed.**

The Morris Justice Project was a multi-year participatory action research project focused on examining and responding to aggressive "stop and frisk" policing practices in a South Bronx neighborhood in New York City in the early 2010s.



It brought together university researchers, community members (including mothers and young people), lawyers, and others outraged by massive numbers of unjustified police stops targeting black and brown residents. The project goal was to deepen understanding of residents' experiences with stop and frisk policing and provide community-driven data to counter the police department's justifications and challenge the racism behind the practices.





The research collaborative created and conducted door-to-door surveys, mapping where stops occurred, and documenting residents' experiences and perspectives on policing. The survey design process was highly collaborative as was the analysis. Everyone was involved in categorizing responses and making interpretations.

"Sidewalk science" installations invited further community input on survey findings in public spaces. Creative ways of representing findings like posters and projections shared data to raise awareness and mobilize the community.



The Morris Justice Project is a powerful example of participatory action research privileging community voices and lived experiences. The community-led data collection and meaning-making processes successfully challenged dominant narratives about discriminatory policing practices.



# CHAPTER 7

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## Body mapping: an overview

Body mapping is an arts-based research method that involves creating visual representations of individuals' lived experiences, stories, and perspectives related to their bodies. Community members create life-size tracings of their body outline on large sheets of paper. They then visually illustrate their embodied experiences, emotions, identities, relationships, struggles, resilience etc. by adding symbols, images, colors, and text on the body outline.



The body maps are created in a workshop setting guided by prompts from the facilitator. Questions elicit reflections on topics like community, safety, identity. Community members have artistic freedom in answering prompts visually. The artmaking process is accompanied by storytelling, witnessing, discussion, and reflection.

Body mapping centers individual and community knowledge. The method aims to understand multifaceted lived experiences through creative expression. It provides an alternative to traditional research approaches, especially for systemically minoritized and historically underrepresented groups. Body mapping can have therapeutic benefits as well. The visual data and narratives generated provide rich qualitative data. The participatory, collaborative process itself can build community and capacity.

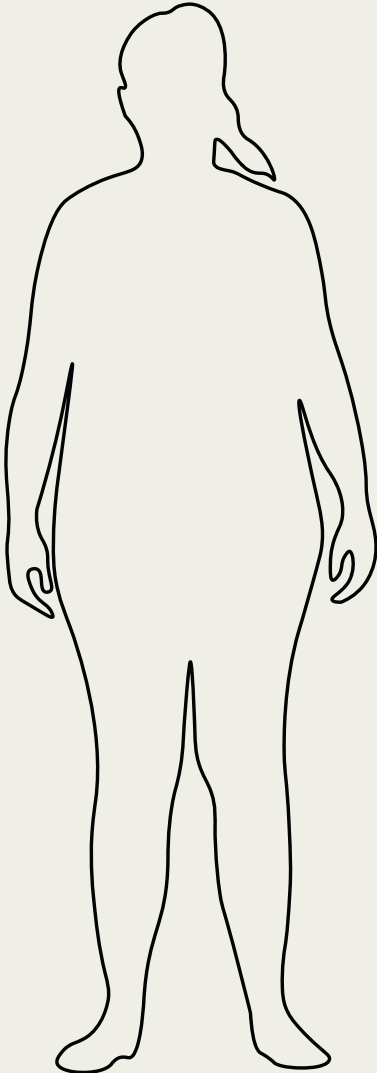
Body mapping is a flexible, embodied research method valuing experiential knowledge and using individual and group artmaking for storytelling, empowerment, and inquiry. It highlights creative, visual modes of expression and foregrounds participants' authority over representing their experiences.



1. If you would like to learn more about body mapping, you may enjoy this article: [Santarossa, S., Redding, A., & Murphy, D. \(2023\). Pioneering Virtual Body Mapping: A Methodological Guide for Researchers Using a Health-Affected Population as an Example. American Journal of Qualitative Research, 7\(2\), 73-88.](#)

CHAPTER 7

**You can try this methodology yourself, or try this in community. If you are together, you can try finding large sheets of paper to allow you to trace bodies on them. If you cannot do that, feel free to use a smaller paper and draw a body that fits on whatever paper you have available. Gather as many art supplies as you can for this, such as markers, crayons, paint, stickers, glitter, pastels, and more.**



Where do you feel your identity?

If you were to chart or mark the areas of your body that you draw strength from, where are they located?

Consider a moment where you felt safe - draw what that safety looks and feels like on your body map.

Think about your community - you can even envision them surrounding you in this moment - where in your body do you feel that community?





# CHAPTER 8

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## WHAT BARRIERS DO YOU EXPERIENCE AS YOU SEEK TO INTEGRATE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROCESSES IN YOUR WORK, AS YOU SEEK TO ENSURE THE POWER IS HELD BY THE COMMUNITY?

The language of participatory action research methodologies and community-based methods has been picked up by governments, agencies, and other institutions of power in recent years. It is not uncommon to find funders who expect grantees to articulate how they will involve the community in the process of their work. It is more and more frequent to encounter participatory grant-making. However, this comfort with the language of community does not lead to honoring the power of community. Instead, these dynamics and the spaces they create lead to epistemic injustice. The spaces that are created within this context are not spaces that the community feels comfortable engaging in. This makes the story of community engagement in most situations that involve corporate-like powers, a sham.

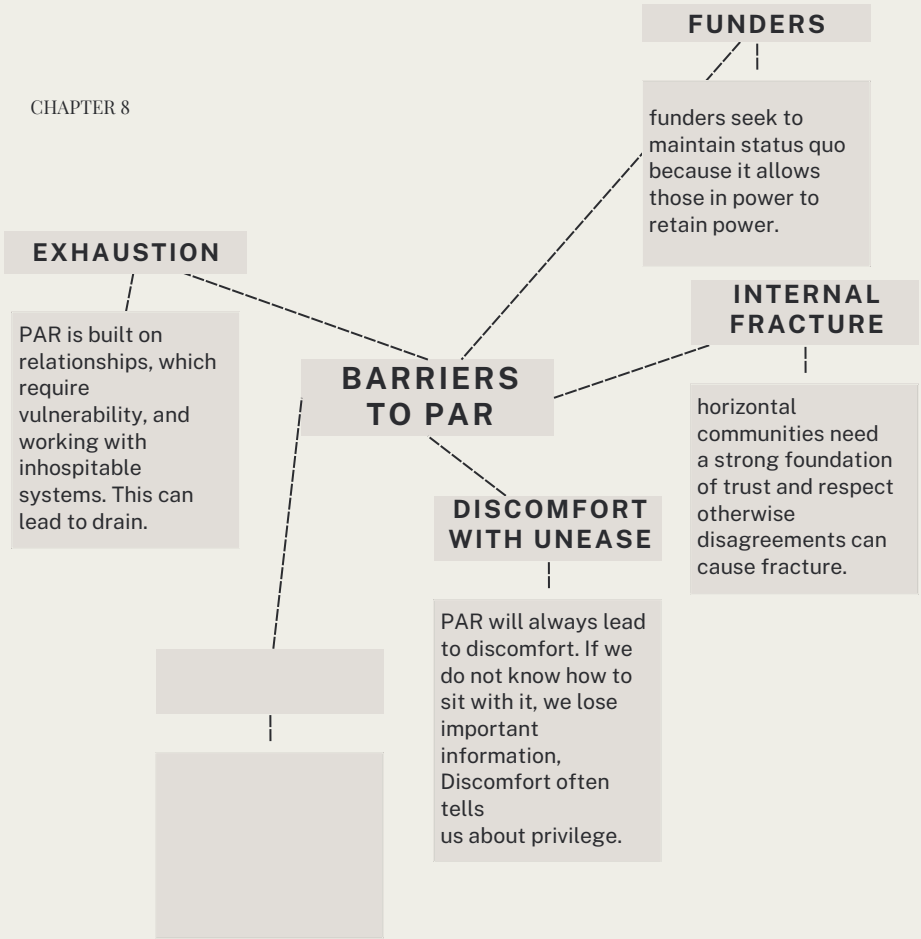
When funders requires timelines, objectives, outcomes, and theories of change they are imposing an approach that is antithetical to participatory approaches. These requirements are asserting hierarchies of knowing and implicitly identify the knowledge and power bearers in the process. Therefore this type of funding experience, despite being wrapped in the language of participatory action research, privileges certain ways of knowing and certain knowers over others.

As we have been delving into conversations about participatory action research and legal empowerment, we have wondered what avenues of feedback are provided to funders themselves. How do funders receive professional development? Do these opportunities for expansion and growth include the perspective of grantees and most important the community? We have wondered what ways the practice of funding social justice can shift, what actors need to be engaged for this process to

serve communities more effectively? Through these deliberations, we reflected on the way that lawyering itself must change in order for human rights funding to change. Simply stated, how we think about lawyering must change. Michelle Pistone, a professor of Law at Vanderbilt, has written about the need for law schools to evolve because the current model is no longer relevant, helpful, or sustainable. Lawyering, and law schools, are determined to keep power, with the Bar associations designed to preserve power, law schools to amass power. It is no surprise then that lawyers who make up most granters are also in the business of retaining power, including through the funding process.

In fact, since the number one profession within the funding space are lawyers, it is in the vested interest of lawyers to NOT fund liberatory work because it threatens their power. We are asking people in power to longer be in power when we do liberatory research that is truly led by communities. Liberatory research is therefore unlikely to be funded and in some cases, movements are exhausted by attempting to find ways to do so. Mutual aid and other creative approaches to building economic power outside of this trap have been one response to this conflict within human rights spaces. Funding is important to removing barriers to participation. We need communities to come together and strategize responses to issues everyone is facing, but we need to remove barriers to engagement – like transportation, childcare, and food. Mutual aid can be part of the response, but we need more responses.

What would a structural response look like? How can funders receive feedback in a way that can transform the work itself? How can communities provide the information that would allow this system to honor communities themselves? Questioning powerful institutions is necessary in this process, and that makes this dangerous for communities and movements. To move toward collective liberation we will need to unravel the systems that uphold existing hierarchies, which will mean rethinking the legal field altogether. We agree with Michelle Pistone that law schools need to be dismantled. The law belongs to the community. Communities need to know, use, and transform the law. We believe that is the future and we believe participatory processes can move us toward that vision of liberation.



What are some barriers you experience in your work related to participatory action research and participatory legal empowerment?

# CHAPTER 9: IMAGINING NEW FUNDING RELATIONSHIPS

**What would your work look like if you had an equitable relationship with funders who have resources to distribute to participatory work?**

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Funders play a pivotal role in movements for social change. The presence of the influence of the funder and their priorities is not something we often discuss when talk about addressing injustices through community mobilization and participatory action research. Yet, their priorities shape which efforts receive support to create more just futures, their priorities can dictate timelines, and even methodologies, as well as what we consider a successful outcome. Historically, and for many of us continuing into the present, many funders can dictate what happens from positions of power and privilege, often leading to unintended harms, resistance, silencing, and breakdowns in trust. When discussing barriers we have experienced related to participatory action research, we identified funders and funding as a significant barrier. To imagine a path forward, we created the conditions for a conversation with a funder. Together, those of us often seeking funding for community-led work and a funder who often supports the work of communities, we began an ethical, productive dialogue about values, sharing power, and liberating imaginations. In this way, we modeled what participatory action research does, brings together different perspectives and creates meaningful contact zones that can generate new realities.

With a generous visit from Mimi, a feminist funder, from Urgent Action Fund we explored possibilities for relationship-centered funding rooted in radical love, vulnerability, and mutual transformation. Our encounter was a demonstration and an exploration of the possibility that when funders and communities authentically know each other’s humanity, structural change becomes possible. By moving beyond fixed narratives and opening to discomfort, we can build connections across divides.

## CHAPTER NINE

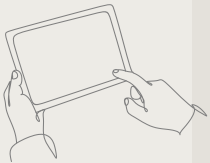
Our goal for this encounter was to model and plant seeds for alternative systems that support communities on their own terms. We made space to talk, listen, reflect, and imagine together. With compassion and perseverance, dialogue and dissent can weave the tapestry for liberation. Of course, this possibility requires willingness and trust from both funders and community advocates. It demands recognizing privilege and holding ourselves accountable, especially as funders. But transformation relies on seeing, not ignoring, each other's experiences.

### Takeaways from our encounter with Mimi



#### WHO IS URGENT ACTION FUND?

- PROVIDES RAPID RESPONSE GRANTS TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS GLOBALLY. IDENTIFIES ACTIVISTS ACROSS AFRICA TO GIVE INFO ON ISSUES/AREAS NEEDING FUNDING.
- WORKING WITH GRASSROOTS ORGANIZERS ON THE GROUND TO IDENTIFY URGENT NEEDS.
- PROACTIVELY REACHING OUT TO ORGANIZATIONS.
- SUPPORTS HOLISTIC WELLBEING OF ACTIVISTS TO PREVENT BURNOUT. CONDUCTED RESEARCH SHOWING THE NEED FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT.



#### HOW CAN GRANTS BE MADE MORE ACCESSIBLE?

- MAKE GRANTS FLEXIBLE FOR UNREGISTERED GROUPS.
- USE LOCAL LANGUAGES FOR PROPOSALS.
- ACTIVISTS CAN RECORD VIDEOS EXPLAINING NEEDS.
- CONNECT WOMEN WITHOUT FORMAL EDUCATION TO ADVISORS TO HELP PUT STORIES TOGETHER. FOCUS ON GRASSROOTS GROUPS OFTEN UNTOUCHED BY OTHER FUNDERS.
- INVITE DOCUMENTATION IN A VARIETY OF WAYS, SUCH AS PICTORIAL OR THROUGH VIDEOS TO INCREASE ACCESS.



#### RELATIONSHIPS WITH GRANTING ORGANIZATIONS?

- HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED MAJOR PUSHBACK FROM INSTITUTIONAL FUNDERS ABOUT THEIR PARTICIPATORY MODEL. UNIQUE APPROACH ATTRACTS INTEREST.
- INTERFACE WITH GRANTEEES TO SHARE LESSONS AND BEST PRACTICES. THIS EDUCATES/INFLUENCES INSTITUTIONAL FUNDERS OPEN TO NEW APPROACHES.
- CHALLENGE IS GETTING FLEXIBLE CRISIS FUNDING ALIGNED WITH HUMANITARIAN WORK.

## CHAPTER NINE

### Takeaways from our encounter with Mimi continued



#### WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF URGENT ACTION FUND?

- CRITERIA TO JUDGE URGENCY AND POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMATION IN 3-6 MONTHS. ADVISORS ON THE GROUND PROVIDE QUICK ANALYSIS TO EXPEDITE DECISIONS.
- OVERWHELMING NEEDS MEAN SOME GROUPS TAKE ADVANTAGE. FOCUS ON GRASSROOTS TO REACH THOSE MOST IMPACTED.



#### GLOBAL CHANGES

- SOME INCREASED OPENNESS TO DIALOGUE WITH ACTIVISTS ABOUT PARTICIPATORY, MOVEMENT-BASED FUNDING. LEGAL EMPOWERMENT FUND EXAMPLE.
- ROOM FOR PUSHING LARGE FUNDERS TO RETHINK TRADITIONAL METRICS AND IMPROVE FLEXIBILITY. URGENT ACTION FUND MODELS ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES.
- ACTIVISTS SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN FUNDER CONVENINGS TO SHARE REALITIES AND INFLUENCE PERSPECTIVES.



#### NEXT STEPS

- POTENTIAL TO CROWDSOURCE INFORMATION ON FUNDERS ALIGNED WITH COMMUNITY-BASED MODELS. AND FOR FUNDERS TO EDUCATE EACH OTHER.
- CONTINUED SOLIDARITY NEEDED BETWEEN ACTIVISTS AND ORGANIZERS TO FURTHER THESE CONVERSATIONS.

#### WHAT ASK DO YOU HAVE OF FUNDERS?



# CHAPTER 10: CONSTRUCTING ETHICAL PROTOCOLS

## **Making room for grief allows us to hold onto our humanity as we carry injustices and inequities**

Our world is going through immense crises that can weigh heavily on our hearts and minds. From climate disasters to humanitarian conflicts, these traumas are interconnected. When we do not acknowledge this collective grief, it can harm our personal wellbeing and impede our ability to organize collectively.

As we gather together, it is important that we start by taking time to simply breathe. The simple act of breathing in unison is an act of care – for ourselves, each other, and our shared humanity. Holding space for grief and practicing ethical relations begins with how we are together.

Before diving into a discussion on creating ethical protocols, we will start by meditating together. This practice of mindfulness helps ground us in the present moment. It enables us to tend to our grief with compassion. Though we face immense challenges, we remember that we are fundamentally connected. Our collective care for one another is a radical act of hope. It is the foundation for envisioning justice and acting ethically as we build the world we want to live in.

Let us take a few minutes to breathe deeply and hold each other in gentle awareness before continuing our conversation. Below is an invitation for meditation inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Become aware of body, releasing tensions

Aware of heart, opening heart, tenderness to heart

Aware of emotions, holding in compassion, smiling, easing/releasing with breath

Notice own suffering of injustice – be aware, notice how it manifests in body, emotions,

Hold this suffering in compassion, ease suffering with breath

Be aware of this suffering as a pattern in the world– visualize how it affects many people, take in this pattern of suffering, hold in compassion, send ease, wish for relief

Notice suffering of marginalized people...what are you aware of? See specifics, feel in your body, emotions, hold in compassion, send ease and relief in your mind...

Return to awareness of breath, ease, release of tension

Notice suffering of privileged people...see specifics...guilt, disconnection, feel this energy, hold in compassion, release, ease, send relief

Share what came up with a partner – listen deeply with complete acceptance.

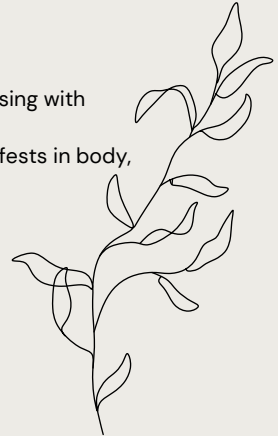
If you have the opportunity, discuss with community: what did you notice, realize?

Brief meditation/reflection:

Return to awareness of breath, body, heart

Coming from the awareness of this practice, what are your deepest intentions for addressing the suffering of injustice? What step might you take? How does this feel in your body, emotions?

Closing: what are you carrying forth from this practice?





**What has been your experience with institutional ethical protocols? How do community members who work with you consent to the collaboration?**

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**Do the protocols used in your work currently reflect community values? What gaps do you notice? If you have no protocols, what values guide your work? How are they communicated?**

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**What rituals, practices, or local expertise could be drawn upon to create protocols rooted in care?**

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**Imagine gathering people in the communities you serve to co-create an ethical protocol. Who would need to be present? What could the process look like?**

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When doing participatory work with communities, meaning not working on but with communities, it is important to create ethical protocols that are inclusive, participatory, and promote collective care. Many of us working with communities and being from communities who are mobilizing against injustice have experiences grappling with ethical complexities in our work, including potential harms to communities despite good intentions. In our work we are constantly reminded of the continual need to negotiate ethics relationally. Ethics is not a checklist we complete before a project in order to meet organizational or institutional expectations. Ethics are coconstructed on an everyday basis. An ethical protocol can be a meaningful guide that we work with as we develop the vocabulary and practices that allow everyone to feel fully connected in decision making.

Mela offered to our community the model of an "ethics basket" co-created with activists to incorporate communal rituals, storytelling approaches, and healing practices that avoid re-traumatization. This approach to an ethical protocol reflects a feminist ethic of care. We also discussed examples of indigenous protocols that uphold community values with review boards reviewing ethical standards.

Those of us who have been introduced to institutional ethical protocols have found them often one-sided and focused on protecting organizations. In contrast, participatory protocols center community voices and control. Protocols should be co-constructed, not imposed. The participatory process of creating an ethical protocol itself is an act of critical consciousness raising and resistance.

Imagining ethical protocols entails starting from community practices of care and consensus. It requires rejecting patriarchal assumptions that ethics require formalization. Protocols must remain open to renegotiation as relationships and contexts evolve. By centering the experiences of communities most impacted by injustices, protocols can be tools communities can leverage to uphold their values in research and practice and can help create spaces for collective liberation and mutual understanding.

**To begin co-constructing an ethical protocol with communities, you may want to start with a VERY BAD rough draft. When the community initiates a participatory action research project, it can be very meaningful to begin by discussing the values that will guide the process. Sharing a bad rough draft and inviting the community to comment, make changes, to delete aspects, to qualify what is there can generate very meaningful conversations about what ethical agreements will most honor the community. On the following page you will find a very bad rough draft that can be torn apart and re-created to offer an ethical protocol to a participatory action research project that is tailored to the needs of the community.**

*Participatory Action Research Ethical Protocol*

This participatory action research project is grounded in ethical principles of justice, beneficence, and respect for persons. The following guidelines will be implemented to uphold ethics throughout the research process:

**Informed Consent**

- Participants will receive full information about the purpose, methods, intended uses of research, risks/benefits of participation, and their rights as a participant. This will be provided verbally and in writing through an informed consent form.
- Participants will be made aware that their participation is fully voluntary. They may withdraw at any time without penalty.

**Confidentiality**

- Participant identities will be protected through use of pseudonyms in any publications or reports resulting from this research. Any identifying details about the community partner organization or individuals will be removed unless consent is given.
- Data, records, and consent forms will be kept secure via encryption and password protection. Access will only be granted to lead researchers.

**Transparency**

- The research methodology will be co-designed with community partners in an open and transparent way.
- Community partners will have access to notes, recordings, transcriptions, and analysis throughout the research process to verify accuracy.
- Results will be shared back with the community in an accessible and reciprocal manner.

**Justice & Equity**

- Community partners will be equitably involved in framing research goals, designing methodology, collecting/analyzing data, interpreting results, and determining how outcomes are shared.
- This research aims to balance power differentials and make space for knowledge and voices often excluded from traditional research.
- Research practices will be adjusted based on partner feedback to enhance cultural humility and disrupt problematic power dynamics.

**Ongoing Consent**

- Researchers will check-in regularly with participants to ensure continued consent as the project evolves.
- Participants can revoke consent or modify terms of consent through an open and non-judgmental process.

# CHAPTER 11: PARTICIPATORY DATA ANALYSIS

We all have unique passions, interests, and areas of expertise that are woven from our identities and life experiences. As human rights advocates engaged in legal empowerment work, we spend much of our time focused on advancing justice within our roles as activists, organizers, advocates, researchers, and lawyers. Yet, one of the things that make us powerful in the work that we do, is that we show up as human beings.

In this spirit of recognizing our full humanity, take a few minutes to reflect on this question: *If you could teach a workshop on any topic, what would you choose?*

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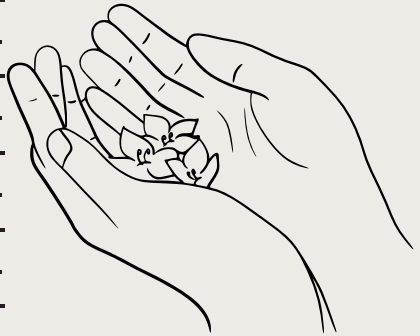
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The purpose of this exercise is not only for us to bask in the brilliance of our community, but also for each of us to recognize the multifaceted nature of our identities. As we strive toward justice, we must fuel our efforts by valuing the worth of our whole, human selves. This self-awareness prepares us to approach the communities we serve with more humility and compassion. It opens us up to unlearning assumptions about expertise as we practice deeper listening. And it helps us model the message that every person's gifts and contributions matter and are essential in composing our human community.

CHAPTER 11

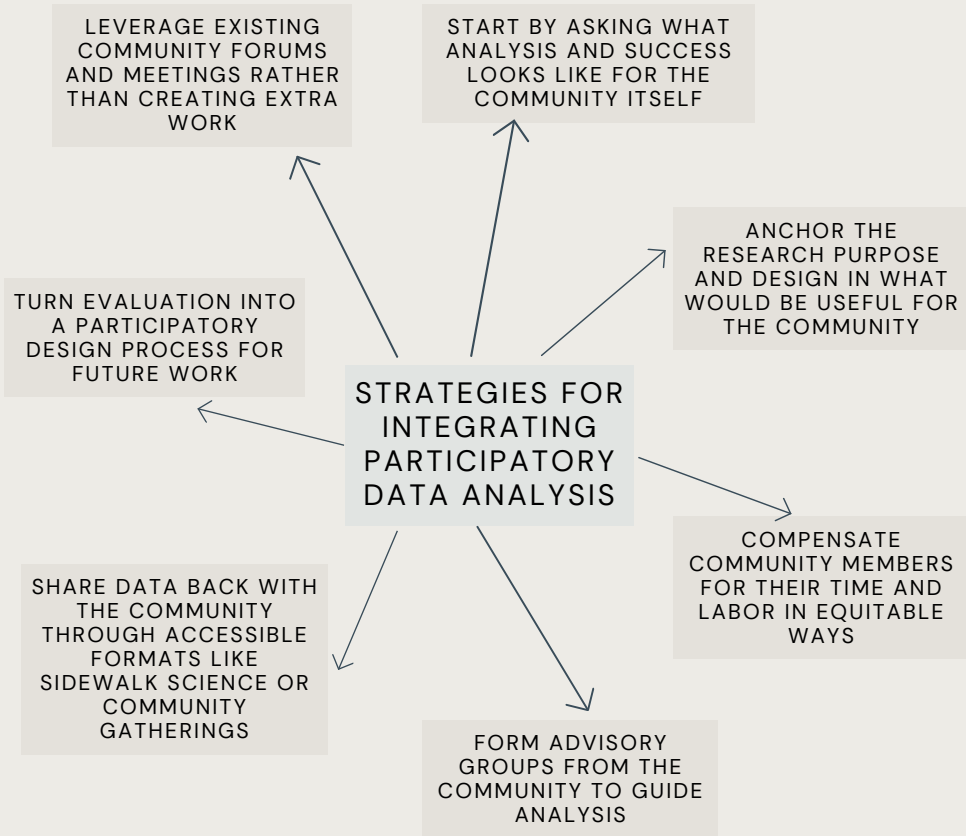
Participatory data analysis is a transformative approach that empowers those most affected by issues to actively engage in the interpretation and meaning-making of data. Like all aspects of participatory action research, this step shifts the approach away from authority to interpret data being only in the domain of experts and towards a process that recognizes the inherent power and expertise held by the community. By involving multiple perspectives – like those of community members, activists, practitioners, and researchers – in the analysis, we gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of those impacted, leading to more relevant and actionable findings. This collaborative approach not only strengthens the work but also democratizes the process of knowledge creation and decision-making. It is a vital tool for challenging power imbalances and ensuring that the perspectives and wisdom of those most affected by injustices shape our responses to them.

**Participatory data analysis is analyzing data together with the community you are working with, rather than extracting data and analyzing it separately.**

Some key aspects of participatory data analysis are:



**For many of us, we have to unlearn how we understand the concept of analysis before we can imagine this process to be collaborative. This is deeply intuitive.**



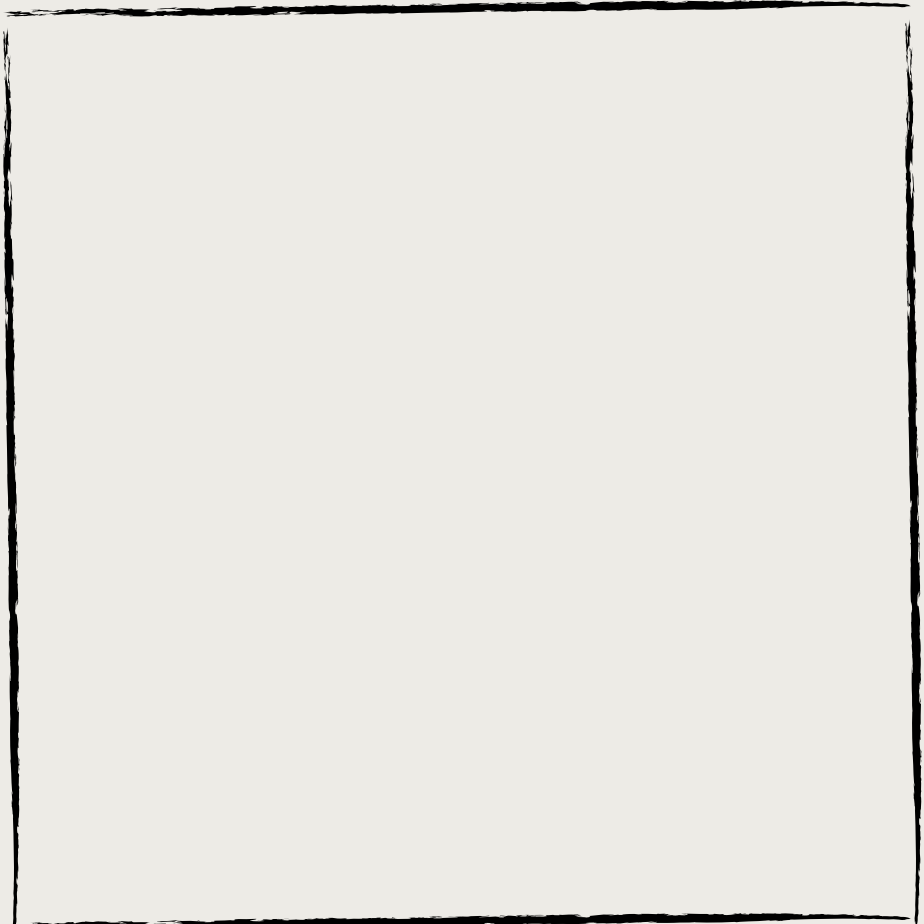


# CHAPTER 12: SAFETY

## COMING HOME TO YOURSELF

This section will create a space for conversations that weigh on all of us related to risks we face, and communities we belong to and work alongside of face, whenever power is challenged. As we enter this complicated and uneasy discussion, we'd love to invite you to think about where in nature you find replenishment during times of soul heaviness.

In the space below, draw your response. You are also welcome to share a few words about this place in nature, in the natural world you turn to to come home to safety, to yourself. This can be a specific plant, a specific place, a river, really, however, you understand nature is right for this prompt. Allow your imagination to be expansive.





# CHAPTER 12: SAFETY

We cannot have thoughtful discussions about participatory action research and legal empowerment without grounding every conversation in a commitment to collective care. Safety has always been central to our discussion, yet it is important to create a space for a deliberate discussion about the risks that communities face when engaging in this work. Whenever those most impacted by injustices mobilize against systems of power they may face significant risks to personal safety and wellbeing. As we challenge the status quo and shift power dynamics, we confront potentially violent forces that – when their hold on power is threatened – may react with repression. This repression can take many forms, including threats, censorship, harassment, surveillance, criminalization, infiltration, and even bodily and psychological violence. The risk to safety is real, constant, and something most who engage in critical human rights work will experience. Acknowledging this allows us to move forward, both grounded in a deep ethic of care and transparent with everyone we encounter so that they can make the choices best for them. In this section of the walkbook, we provide an overview of safety strategies and advice on building resilience to support this critical work.

## **What risks are present in the context you are embedded in?**

As we undertake this work with and in community, we first have to take the time to understand the specific threats that exist in the contexts we will navigate together. Repression varies widely – in more Global North environments tactics may focus more on legal harassment and bureaucratic obstacles, while in authoritarian contexts threats can include arrest, violence, or worse. Threats also change over time as the political situation evolves. Communities engaged in mutual aid work will often be the first ones to experience these changes. Regular communication and deliberate conversations about the threats communities are noticing will allow you to identify these shifts as they are happening.

Some key questions to explore:

*What restrictions exist for civil society and human rights defenders? What do legal practitioners see as restrictions and what restrictions do community members experience?*

*What tactics of repression have been used against similar communities as the one you are part of and work with?*

*What kinds of policies, laws, and government decisions are being made right now that may impact how you do your work?*

*What are the biggest safety concerns from the perspective of the community?*

Making visible these risks from these levels will allow the community to decide what is best for them, for everyone to decide on safety measures that can be implemented, and to make deliberate decisions about what risks everyone is willing to take.

## How can we prepare for these risks?

Entering this work with care, by naming these risks, allows everyone to take action to prepare for these risks. Once you've identified the landscape of threats to safety, we can begin to gather resources that may mitigate and be ready to respond to the possible risks. These are some strategies our community has leaned on to prepare ourselves and our communities:

HOLD TRAININGS ON  
PROTEST RIGHTS AND  
COMMON POLICE  
TACTICS



DEVELOP "KNOW YOUR  
RIGHTS" MATERIALS ON  
KEY ISSUES



SET UP  
EMERGENCY  
CONTACT  
SYSTEMS AND  
LEGAL SUPPORT



DISCUSS SCENARIOS  
AND RISK  
THRESHOLDS WITH  
COMMUNITIES



AGREE ON SAFE WAYS TO  
COMMUNICATE AND  
HANDLE INFORMATION



PRIORITIZE MENTAL  
HEALTH AND  
COMMUNITY CARE



It is vital that all these discussions center the needs and perspectives of communities who are most impacted by injustices as they will be the ones who will carry the greatest risk. The community members must be leading the discussion about the threats to safety, the risks they are willing to take on, and the safety measures that have to be considered. All those working on solidarity, including those from the community but holding more power and privilege than those most impacted, have the responsibility to follow the community, rather than dictate the conversation. It is important to work in solidarity in a way that refuses to engage in deploying any pressure toward any particular decision, instead there has to be intentional space that allows the community to choose to participate or not at any point in any action.

## Possible day to day security practices to consider

USE END-  
TO-END  
ENCRYPTED  
MESSAGING  
APPS

ANONYMIZE  
DATA WITH  
PSEUDONYMS

WORK WITH  
INTERNATIONAL  
ALLIES

HAVE  
EMERGENCY  
CONTACT  
PROTOCOLS  
AND CHECK-INS

VARY DAILY  
ROUTINES AND  
WATCH FOR  
SURVEILLANCE  
RISKS

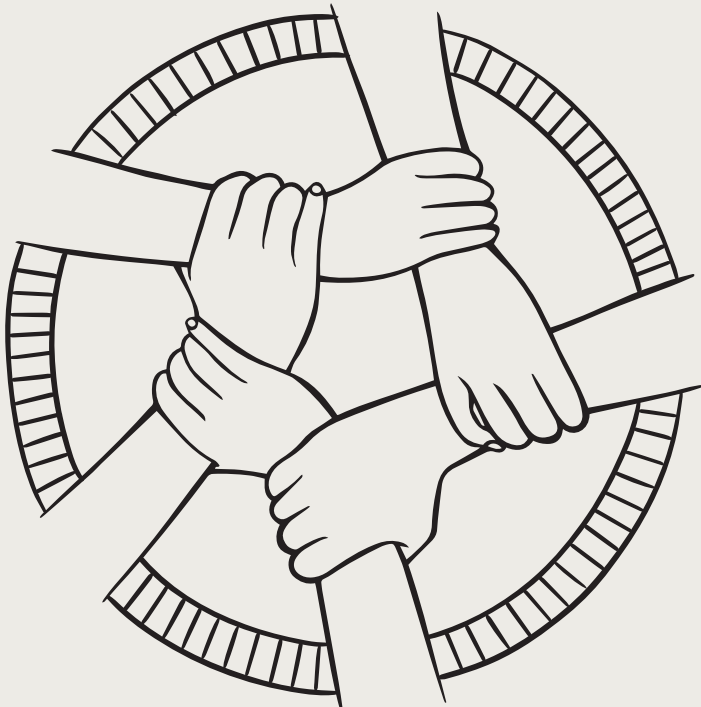
## The personal is political

Threats to individual well-being make visible the connection between the personal and the political. Our individual well-being is deeply intertwined with our collective well-being. Individual wholeness and thriving allows for collective liberation. Collective liberation, supports individual well-being.

How can we build personal resilience so that our movements can survive? How can our movements ensure that our well-being is not being sacrificed?

There are no simple answers to any of the safety concerns we face every single day in the justice work we are engaged with. These are some strategies we have found useful in building in care that can sustain our work through these risks:

- *Honest dialogue on managing stress, burnout, vicarious trauma*
- *Weaving in self and community care practices into the justice work we do, not as an afterthought, not as a nice addition, but as central to the movements*
- *Community is key to survival, building community within our neighborhoods and across international borders has been essential to our work*
- *Easeful opportunities for connection to share inspiration and hope*
- *Networks for solidarity- including international - and to mobilize a rapid response in case of a threat*



**-Does your organization have emergency protocols or legal support in place? If not, what resources or processes would be needed?**

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**In what ways are you encouraging leadership from affected groups in assessing risks and making decisions?**

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**Have you created space for dialogue on wellness and traumas associated with this work?**

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**How strong are your mutual aid networks currently? What could be done to increase solidarity and support capacity?**

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THANK YOU FOR JOINING US ON  
THIS JOURNEY IN THE LEGAL  
EMPOWERMENT LEARNING LAB.

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THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF OUR  
SHARED ADVENTURE.

Everything we experienced together on this journey continues. No part of this conversation is ever truly complete. Just as our relationship continues to evolve, continues to deepen, just as we continue to surprise one another, just as we continue to change and grow, so does every dialogue within this workbook.

