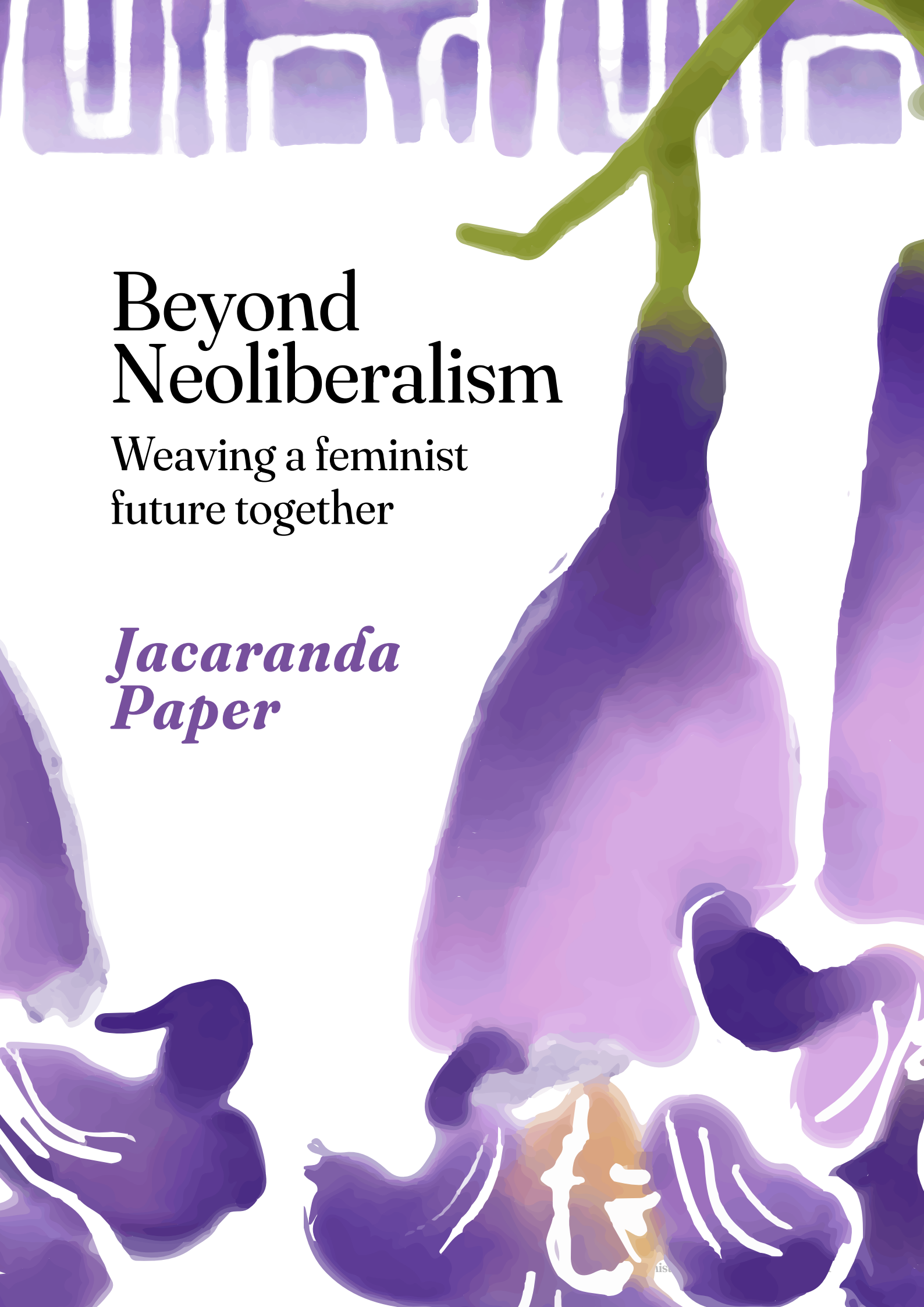




Beyond Neoliberalism

Weaving a feminist
future together

*Jacaranda
Paper*



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Beyond Neoliberalism

Pan African Feminist
Economic Conversations

Jacaranda Paper

*This paper was woven together by
Fatimah Kelleher drawing from the
rich reflections, spirited dialogues and
visionary recommendations emerging
from a convening of African feminists
in Nairobi, Kenya, 18-20 February 2025.
This convening was organized by
Akina Mama wa Afrika, The Nawi
Collective and Action Aid International.*

Introduction

There is a wealth of African feminist academic and activist research and knowledge on neoliberalism and its impacts in the majority world. Yet, this knowledge has, for the most part, been excised from conversations on neoliberalism and its ideological and policy tenets, and generally disregarded – a function and consequence of neoliberalism itself. Despite more than four decades of neoliberalism and its failures on the African continent and beyond, the myth that ‘there is no alternative’ persists outside of progressive circles. Within global spaces and within key decision-making spaces on the African continent itself, propositional offerings of trajectories that can take us beyond neoliberalism remain therefore marginalised.

Nevertheless, African feminists continue to produce new knowledge, weaving new stories away from the western gaze and challenging the ever-changing manifestations of neoliberalism and its implications both for African feminist agendas, and for pan-African futures more broadly. These offerings continue to percolate and mushroom across the continent, forged across spaces of dissent and disruption even as they seek to find entry points that will bring about the narrative and systems shifts needed to create new economic realities across the continent.

But the question remains: what is needed for this thought leadership, for these African feminist economic offerings, to gain traction? Despite its failures in delivering for Africa, neoliberal economics remains the dominant policy narrative, embedded as orthodoxy within most of our key institutions. The critical question of how Pan African feminists are able to effectively challenge this orthodoxy requires focus.

Recognising this, Akina Mama wa Afrika, The Nawi Collective, and ActionAid International are co-convening a series of conversations among African feminists challenging neoliberalism and proposing alternatives towards a collective vision for the African continent and its people. These conversations will interrogate, propose, shape and document Pan-African feminist narratives beyond neoliberalism. This is done recognising that we are building on decades’ worth of work. Our intention is to contribute to reinvigorating, documenting and amplifying thus connecting key movements, thinkers, creatives and activists.

This paper is the first step towards facilitating that discourse, following the inaugural convening held between 18 – 20 February 2025, at the Jacaranda Hotel in Nairobi. Targeted at individuals and organisations across arenas interested in advancing alternatives to neoliberalism in Africa, this paper offers a synthesis of the critical points, analysis, propositions, suggested recommendations towards influencing systems change for advancing a feminist, just future for the continent.

The presentations, questions, positions, contestations, propositions, and emerging roadmap contained in this paper have been co-created and are the collective thought leadership of the participants of the Nairobi convening: Isabella Matambanadzo, Fatimah Kelleher, Sanyu Awori, Mwanahamisi Singano, Sophie Otiende, Amara Enyia, Faith Lumonya, Lebohang Liepollo Phekho, Joanita Najjuko, Agazit Abate, Carol N'gan'ga, Elizabeth Maina, Hon. Khanyisile Litchfield Tshabalala, Jessica Mandanda, Nicole Maloba, Nanjala Nyabola, Lina Moraa, Chikumbutso Ngosi, Wangari Kinoti, Rumbidzayi Makoni, Crystal Simeoni, Joan Njoroge, Ashina Mtsumi, Njoki Njehu, Millie Akenyi, Maureen Mburu, Leonor Mabunga, Grace Arina, Memory Kachambwa, Lyla Latif, Sharon Njeri, Leah Eryenyu, Eunice Musiime, Patricia Mworozzi, Nyamal Tutdeal, Judy Oduor, Ruth Obwaya, Precious Abwooli, Nyatuwi Phiri, Avene Jongile, and Adama Fuseini. Quotes used in this paper – except for those credited with author names – are drawn from the conversations during the convening.

Problem Analysis

Why was this conversation needed?

The importance of having a conversation looking beyond neoliberalism among African feminists for the African continent cannot be understated, or indeed, overstated enough. In a world where African women's voices on the economy are consistently marginalised within institutions dominated by men, (and in the case of influential global northern institutions, white men), the need for African women's collective thought leadership has never been more imperative. The spaces we are trying to engage with are heavily masculine and colonised. As such, the absence of African women's thought leadership in spaces of power and decision making is an inherent and integral part of the problem itself. We must be vigilant in our messaging that there is no deal without African black women.

Critically, it is important to have an African feminist position offering alternative narratives beyond neoliberalism that comes from African feminists themselves working together and finding clear points of consensus. We are having a lot of similar conversations going on in different spaces, but we have yet to work constructively together on this issue, and that is the reason why this is so critical, because we know that the conversations around and beyond neoliberalism are already happening in the global North. These are sometimes called “post growth conversations” and fall into the wider degrowth/post growth/beyond growth rubric. Ultimately, all conversations on this topic without us will nonetheless have implications for us, but without our voices. So, these convenings are how we pull together our own understanding of beyond neoliberalism on our own terms and through our own framings.

African feminists must think about what it means to build habitable worlds that go beyond neoliberalism, whilst working and living within this current neoliberal structure. This is a lot of work; work that takes place on the frontlines of economic policies, because African feminists, in all our multiplicities,¹ experience neoliberalism the same way as those who sit at the coalface of the marginalisations and exploitations being explored and critiqued. As such, we must find a way to develop propositions whilst ensuring that the capitalist structure does not coopt or suppress our efforts to achieve an alternative. For this there must be found, safely and autonomously, our own framings and understandings and our own visions for the future.

¹ African feminists in the convening recognise the intersections that we occupy, including the privileges / advantages that come with those. However, we underscore the agency of our myriad experiences and positionalities as African women, both on and off the continent, and the validity of our voices to be heard in the space created by this convening.



Understanding neoliberalism in Africa

*Neoliberal capitalism absorbs and terraforms all around it.
Neoliberalism must create a world that is conducive to
its own existence.*

The roots of neoliberalism are found most clearly within the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank imposed structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s. Public sector cutbacks, deregulation, and privatisation crippled the strong state-building necessary to manage and implement progressive macroeconomic policy. SAPs had multiple impacts across the continent. Nascent industrial policies were curtailed, while emerging welfare provisioning was slashed or terminated in gestation, and cuts to state-provided health and education decimated livelihoods and wellbeing. The erosion of public services on the continent since structural adjustment has placed women on the frontlines of economic impacts and deepening inequality, with women denied access to those services, whilst also leading to a huge reduction in women's formal avenues for secure wage earning in those same sectors.² Women thus carry an unfair household and community care burden due to these policy failures.

Structural adjustment policies have continued into the 21st century through de-industrialisation, a focus on export rather than domestic markets, import dependency, and a suppression of the role of the state while promoting market-driven growth. Increased privatisation has compromised equitable access to public goods and services such as water and electricity by commodifying them, while pervasive unemployment and reduced public spending has left millions without basic services such as healthcare.³ Alongside this, the mantra of growth, or the dogma of growthism, has come to dominate developmental theory and policy prescriptions, with a fixation on Gross Domestic Product (GDP), at the centre of measurements of “progress”. But this centring of GDP is inherently flawed on several counts: it disregards the historical context of violent imperial extraction of the global south during colonisation by the global north, which is currently disguised as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and perpetuates a false doctrine of economic meritocracy. It is Eurocentric and “disregarding of the possibility of alternative civilisational possibilities”; and – perhaps most critically – it enables the logic of cuts, deregulation and subsequent privatisation in the pursuit of growth, regardless of the destructive consequences these policies have on human and planetary wellbeing, not to mention the challenge to national and continental policy-making sovereignty.

Growth alone does not equate to automatic equality, as we have seen with Africa's

2 Abiru, Fadekemi, (2018) 'Africa's Lost Decade: Women and the Structural Adjustment Programme', September 25th 2018 *The Republic*, accessed at: <https://www.republic.com.ng/augustseptember-2018/africas-lost-decade/>

3 *African Feminist Post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery Statement*: <https://africanfeminism.com/african-feminist-post-covid-19-economic-recovery-statement/>

growth in the last twenty years which has conversely been in tandem with the highest levels of inequality so far.⁴⁵ As Ossome articulates, “the language of ‘growth’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ as a means of lifting African women out of poverty remains as unconvincing now as it was more than three decades ago when African states began to impose the will of an unjust neoliberal doctrine upon their peoples”.⁶ Neoliberal depoliticization of economic policy has also become an accepted standard over the last thirty years, with neoliberalism successfully framing itself as an apolitical endeavour.⁷ However, neoliberalism is as much a doctrine as it is a political choice as any other economic model, and the veneer of depoliticization developed over the last forty years has concealed “the multiple dimensions of dispossession under capitalism”.⁸

Today Africa is characterised by debt and aid dependency even as her resources continue to be part of Western dependency on the global south through a neo-colonial extraction of embodied resources and labour by global Northern corporations and their host governments.⁹ This has wrought devastation on African lives and the continent's socio-economic, political, and ecological sovereignty.¹⁰ Indeed, neoliberal capitalism in itself has been a major shift away from the early post-independence gains that sought to remove the extractive political and economic relationships that had defined the continent's colonial history. Neoliberalism feeds off African, black and feminised poverty and yet Africa is arguably the wealthiest continent by far. Paradoxically what is received in aid is far less than what is lost in illicit financial flows and in debt servicing.¹¹

Despite this, the neoliberal orthodoxy remains dominant within economic decision making. And this orthodoxy has been driven by thought leadership that is rarely from the continent. Between 2005 – 2025, 75 percent of papers published in leading economics journals did not have a single African-based author.¹² Its framing has led to neoliberalism being more than just an economic system but a way of being, often

4 OECD (2015) *In it Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All*, OECD Publishing, accessed at: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/in-it-together-why-less-inequality-benefits-all_9789264235120-en#page1

5 Seery, E et al (2019) *A tale of two continents: fighting inequality in Africa*, Oxfam, accessed at: https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-tale-of-two-continents-fighting-inequality-africa-030919-en.pdf

6 Ossome, L. (2015). In Search of the State? Neoliberalism and the labour question for pan-African feminism. *Feminist Africa*, 20, 6–25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48725784>

7 Efange, S & Woodroffe, J (2020) *Macroeconomic policy and the Beijing+25 process* Gender and Development Network Briefings, January 2020, accessed at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5e2193b3ea165940538fe714/1579258810728/Macroeconomics+and+Beijing%2B25.pdf>

8 Ossome, L. (2015). In Search of the State? Neoliberalism and the labour question for pan-African feminism. *Feminist Africa*, 20, 6–25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48725784>

9 Hickel, J; Doring, C; Weiland, H; Suwandi, I; (2022) “Imperialist appropriation in the world economy: Drain from the global South through unequal exchange, 1990–2015”, *Global Environmental Change*, Volume 73, March 2022, 102467, available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S095937802200005X>

10 Mapondera, M; Reddy, T; Hargreaves, S (2020) ‘If Another World is Possible, Who is Doing the Imagining? Building an Ecofeminist Development Alternative in a Time of Deep Systemic Crisis’, *Bread and Butter Series No. 6*, AWDF, accessed here: <https://awdf.africclub.net/wp-content/uploads/If-another-world-is-possible.pdf>

11 UNCTAD (2020) *Economic Development in Africa Report 2020: Tackling Illicit Financial Flows for Sustainable Development in Africa*, UNCTAD, available at: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/aldafrica2020_en.pdf

12 Chelwa, G (2021), “Does Economics Have an ‘Africa Problem’?” *Economy and Society*, Volume 50, Issue 1: Centring the margins: Theorizing African capitalism after 50 years. Page 78 - 99

dictating how we live our lives at every level. Our very subjectivities - our sense of self, our sense of our place in the world, our hopes and dreams, our very desires - have become shaped by the logic of neoliberalism. This in turn leads to an inherent challenge of how to extricate oneself from that logic. An immediate challenge arising from this is the constant tension around the jargon of neoliberal economics/obscure words. The word “neoliberalism” itself is one such example, a term that remains rarely used by most citizens anywhere, but which is commonly wielded by economists and those involved in policy as a part of the distance created “between those who influence and make decisions on the economy and those who have to live with the consequences of those decisions”¹³

This leads to an ongoing battle within how African feminists receive, are manipulated by, and in turn use language: on the one hand these big words obscure the violences that are inherent within the policies that flow from neoliberal economics. On the other hand there is a desire to know what these big words mean to the centres of power, to the ones who imbue them with power. This leads to a series of questions for African feminists to reckon with in the quest to move beyond neoliberalism: Is it better to call out the practices of oppression for exactly what they are, to find new names, more befitting names? Or do we work with the language we have so that we can better challenge, unpack, demystify and cut them down to size? When and where to use which words? Do African feminists use the lexicon of the oppressor, or create our own? What is the implication of this? Is the oppressor any less powerful if their language/jargon is not the language of the masses?



¹³ Kelleher, F (2023) “Economics has an African women problem”, *Africa is a Country*, <https://africasacountry.com/2023/10/economics-has-an-african-women-problem>

Going beyond neoliberalism

What does it then mean to go beyond neoliberalism, when neoliberalism is so effectively terraforming all around it? How deeply is everyone locked into the neoliberal capitalist system, and what does this mean in terms of complicity (even if unintended) and the ability to successfully disrupt and transform the system? At this juncture of the neoliberal capitalist trajectory, the material conditions created by the system have been instrumental in tying people into the system. The material reality of neoliberalism in our lives has created an intense dependency. This dependency is part of a neo-colonial framework that neoliberalism needs to reproduce itself materially, dictating our choices and our time as individuals as part of society and collectives.

Nothing perhaps exemplifies this as the role that digital communication now plays in our lives, as embodied particularly in the form of the mobile phone. As of 2021, Africa’s mobile phone penetration rate was at 46%,¹⁴ and while national level characteristics of this vary greatly, the last 10 years have seen an increase in dependency on mobile technology across all aspects of life. For some countries like Kenya, where financial services have become fully integrated into mobile technology such as using *Mpesa*, that dependency also plays a critical role in the country’s macroeconomic monetary framework.

And yet the mobile phone itself is a device that is simultaneously dependent on the globalised, extractive production facilitated by neoliberal capitalism in terms of its material components and production. The mobile phone has become an intrinsic part of many people’s life, particularly in the industrial urban centres of the continent. So much so that a passive acceptance of the phone has led to a taking for granted of its very materiality and the relationship that materiality has with an economic system we are embedded within. Questions such as “can I get my phone repaired”, “is it repairable?”, “how often is my software updated, is it genuinely consensual, and am I aware of the details of that update?” are now rarely engaged with as part of our consumption. Critical questions around the material origins of our phones – “where was my phone made?”, “who made it?” and “what materials does it comprise of?” fade into the background of our dependency on the device and the role it now plays in our lives.

But these questions are central for our ability to disentangle ourselves from the unsought complicity within an extractive system. Material things cannot be viewed as inert objects but constantly thought about in terms of their relationship to us. That is what will help us ask the right questions and therefore draw theories/experiences that make sense in our contexts. How does this object mediate our social relations, what dependencies have been created, and how can those dependencies be de-linked? This allows a recognition that while the mobile phone creates freedom for some, it produces exploitation and death for others; an object’s relationality shifts depending on the socio-political and economic position of whoever is using it.

¹⁴ GSMA (2022) *The Mobile Economy: Sub Saharan Africa 2022* available at: <https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-economy/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/The-Mobile-Economy-Sub-Saharan-Africa-2022.pdf>

Neoliberalism has pushed us to ignore the material politics of all this and what goes into making the digital economy operate, making us passively complicit in the harm wrought from the crisis of material extraction in countries like the DRC. Our passive consumption fuels the ongoing crises, which in turn is part of a larger picture of neocolonial exploitation, such as the role of African countries (e.g. Ghana) as sites of e-waste that are used to create the illusion of recycling for the growing number of digital devices the world is consuming. Going beyond neoliberalism is therefore more than just about disrupting grand level discourses, as it is also about disentangling at a granular and very personal level. There is no ethical consumption under capitalism and that means there is a little bit of responsibility for each one of us.

*Africa will inevitably rise like those many heads of the hydra,
but first, it needs a decolonial break from the tether that ties its
economies to the global capitalist market Sylvia Tamale.¹⁵*

Africa and her citizens are at the centre of the material production and consumption that neoliberalism itself is dependent on. The continent is arguably the wealthiest on the planet in terms of resources and there would be no mobile phones, laptops, tablets or multiple other digital devices without Africa. And this reality exists at a time when many African countries are heavily dependent on aid, but that aid is nominal compared to what ends up exiting from the continent in terms of exploitative and unfair terms of trade¹⁶, and due to looting through illicit financial flows and unjust taxation policies that enable multinational corporations to avoid paying their fair share of tax on the continent.¹⁷

These are the realities we live with today; a reality that can seem overwhelming for its omnipresence. Arguably, neoliberalism is not simply compelling because of its ideological strength, but because it is embodied within the material structures of our lives in ways that have become very difficult to extricate ourselves from. Neoliberalism has become embedded in our ways of being and doing, right down to our understanding of relationships. Even dating has become commodified through an increasing culture of digital voyeurism, as millions tune in to watch dating shows where humiliation and grief become a part of a fabric of humiliation and spectacle that has a monetary value. The culture of voyeurism pays – we pay to watch other people and in turn we also understand that we are objects of other people’s attention through dating sites and social media posts. As we consume others’ misery and shame so too do we become products of others’ consumption as we curate our lives for others’ attention, all within

and upon digital platforms that monetise said engagement.

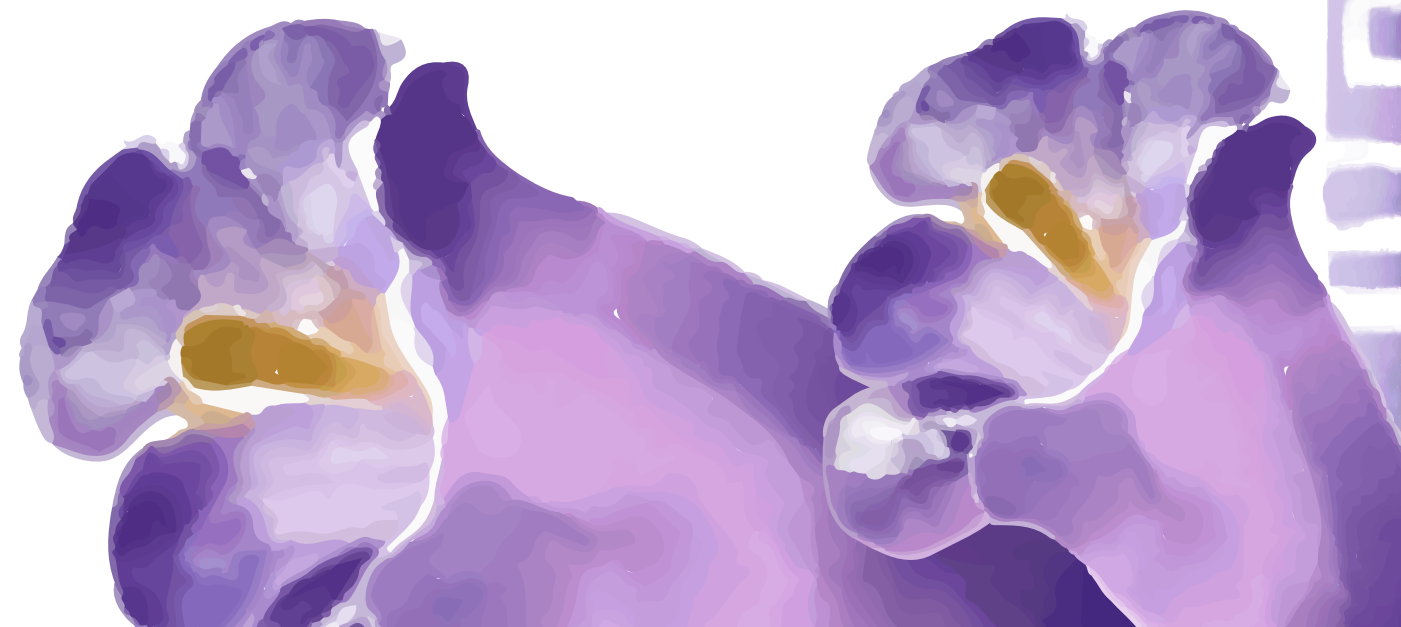
In this regard – where the neoliberal market has become a part of the meat and bones of our everyday existence, right down to our recreational and relational proclivities, the omnipresence of these daily realities can seem overwhelming and impossible to extricate from. But extrication is an essential step in achieving liberation from the all-encompassing nature of the system. That being the case, a starting point going beyond neoliberalism must be one of disruption. But what does it take to disrupt and what should be the focus of our disruption? More critically, how far does this disruption go? As asked by one participant: “do we want to change the plantation, or do we want to leave it?”.

*“do we want
to change the
plantation,
or do we want
to leave it?”*

¹⁵ From An Interview with Sylvia Tamale, in conversation with Sylvia Bawa and Grace Adeniyi-Ogunyankin, 28th February 2023, Antipode Online: <https://antipodeonline.org/2023/02/28/africa-will-inevitably-rise-an-interview-with-sylvia-tamale/>

¹⁶ Chaudier, J (2024) “How African states are resisting pressure from the North in trade agreements while failing to assert their priorities” Equal Times, 4 June 2024, available here: <https://www.equaltimes.org/trade-agreements-how-african?lang=en>

¹⁷ Otusanya, OJ; Liu, J; Lauwo, SG (2023) *Tax Avoidance in Developing Countries: Evidence of MNCs in Sub-Saharan Africa*, University of Lagos, University of Portsmouth, Sheffield University Management School available at: https://pure.port.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/50755732/Tax_Avoidance_in_Developing_Countries_Evidence_from_MNCs_in_Sub_Saharan_Africa_Journal_of_Financial_Crimes.pdf



Beyond Neoliberalism Strategic Disruption

Just as there is a recognition that over the last 40 years, the first 20 have largely been imposition of neoliberalism by external actors, by the time we get into the 2000s Africa's own structures and institutions – central banks, regional configurations, and the very universities that produce economic thinkers and policy makers - now perpetuate neoliberal policies quite independently. Most influential stakeholders on the continent are today thus fully committed to neoliberal dogma. A deliberate and targeted disruption of the dominant orthodox narrative – exposing its flaws in the most overt way – is therefore needed. Two areas of disruption to the neoliberal model in particular present strong pathways for disruption that should be considered: firstly, a calling out of the violence inherent within the neoliberal economic system, and secondly, a direct challenge to the atomisation that neoliberalism creates across societies, decimating the wellbeing and cohesiveness of communities and individuals.

Calling out the violence of the current system

Neoliberal capitalism is inherently violent, and this violence manifests in multiple ways across different contexts. Austerity – a key tool of neoliberalism that resets the neoliberal system through a reassertion of market dominance and undermining of public investment on the back of the periodic economic crisis that characterises the system – has been shown to consistently lead to increasing deaths as state provisioning of welfare and healthcare are hollowed-out.¹⁸ Research has shown that IMF conditioned loans within the SAPs that cut provision to child and maternal care have resulted in both increased morbidity and mortality among women and infants in Africa.¹⁹ This is violence, and a calling out of the system for its violence - fatal in the deaths it wrought - is long overdue.

“Because of the neoliberal regime, the state is no longer just an arbiter of who lives and who dies. The state has been shrunk so much the only thing it knows how to do is kill.”

- Achille Mbembe

Cameroonian thinker Achille Mbembe argues that death is not a random occurrence

18 Abed, K & Kelleher, F (2022) *The Assault of Austerity: how prevailing economic choices are a form of gender based violence*, Oxfam, available at: [bp-assault-of-austerity-prevailing-economic-choices-are-gender-based-violence-221122-en.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp-assault-of-austerity-prevailing-economic-choices-are-gender-based-violence-221122-en.pdf) (oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

19 Thomson, M., Kentikelenis, A. & Stubbs, T. “Structural adjustment programmes adversely affect vulnerable populations: a systematic narrative review of their effect on child and maternal health”. *Public Health Rev* 38, 13 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40985-017-0059-2>

but rather the result of deliberate state decisions that inevitably determine who is allowed to live and who is left to die, both physically and symbolically — a concept he terms necropolitics.²⁰ Mbembe shows how modern states actively create hierarchies of disposability based on individuals' social identities such as gender and race and how these comingle with structures of power to mark them as available for death. This power to dictate life and death is not abstract but instead manifests through concrete policies and practices that expose marginalized populations to conditions of “slow death” via poverty, inadequate healthcare, poor working conditions, malnutrition, and environmental hazards. Austerity measures that weaken public health systems are one such example, stripping essential protections and disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups.²¹ This necropolitical logic was at play in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic with some groups effectively left to die because of prohibitively high healthcare costs or because they had no choice but to put themselves in the direct path of COVID as they had to continue working because of States' inability to finance social protection systems.²²



20 Mbembe, A., 2003. Necropolitics. *Public Culture* 15, 11–40.

21 Sandset, T., 2021. The necropolitics of COVID-19: Race, class and slow death in an ongoing pandemic. *Global Public Health* 16, 1411–1423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2021.1906927>

22 Eryenyu, L. and Komusana, F. (2025) “We are going to die of hunger before this virus even kills us”: The political economy of health amidst COVID-19 for marginalised groups in Africa. *DAWN*.

Even in the global North, data consistently shows the disproportionately higher mortality of African and African descended people within health systems, and in the face of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.²³ Another instance of the state exercising its necropower is through state facilitated domestic worker programmes to the Gulf. Women migrant domestic workers from Uganda, for example, often endure extreme exploitation and abuse with little to no legal protection, even as their labour generates significant remittances. Despite the known risks, including death and lifelong injury, states continue to facilitate this labour export under the guise of legal safeguards, with the full knowledge of the limits of these protections within a sector such as domestic and care work which is socio-spatially located.²⁴ The state effectively renders these women disposable as it funnels them into this extra-legal space.

The gendered and racialised nature of neoliberal capitalism has consistently put women on the frontlines of death in cycles, from HIV to Ebola to COVID-19, whether as disproportionate victims or as those delivering care at ground zero and in the home are black African women.²⁵ ²⁶ The neoliberal state, in its push for scarcity of state responsibility for the wellbeing of the most vulnerable, consistently places African women in sites of violence while abrogating any responsibility. At the beginning of the HIV epidemic women involved in home and community-based care, were told they would be given gloves and plastic sheets to look after the ill, which was not followed through (*ref needed here to evidence the claim*). This was seen again during the COVID pandemic when women were subsidizing the lack of government intervention through the same care responsibilities, a part of their function under patriarchy.

More broadly, black and brown women's bodies have been on the frontlines of the productive exploitation needed to replicate the neoliberal capitalist system. On the one hand, this violence has existed within capitalism for hundreds of years. But with the expansion of neoliberalism, the exploitative nature of globalisation has become a marked characteristic of economic growth. This is most clearly seen on the system's dependence on a "race to the bottom" in working conditions for workers within export industries.²⁷ Here, gendered segregation of labour, with women consistently working in the more unskilled jobs, vulnerable to worker exploitation in the form of poor contracts, harassment, and widespread job precarity, underscores the pervasiveness of the gendered violence that results from globalisation.

23 Claire Brader (2023) Maternal mortality rates in the Black Community, House of Lords Library, 12 December 2024, available here: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/maternal-mortality-rates-in-the-black-community/>

24 Eryenyu, L. (2024) 'Domestic Workers as Instruments of Accumulation: Unpacking Objectifying Discourses within Uganda's Extra-territorialisation of Gendered and Racialised Labour', *Feminist Africa*

25 WHO (2020) *WHO concerned over COVID 19 impact on women, girls in Africa*, 18th June 2020 <https://www.afro.who.int/news/who-concerned-over-covid-19-impact-women-girls-africa>,

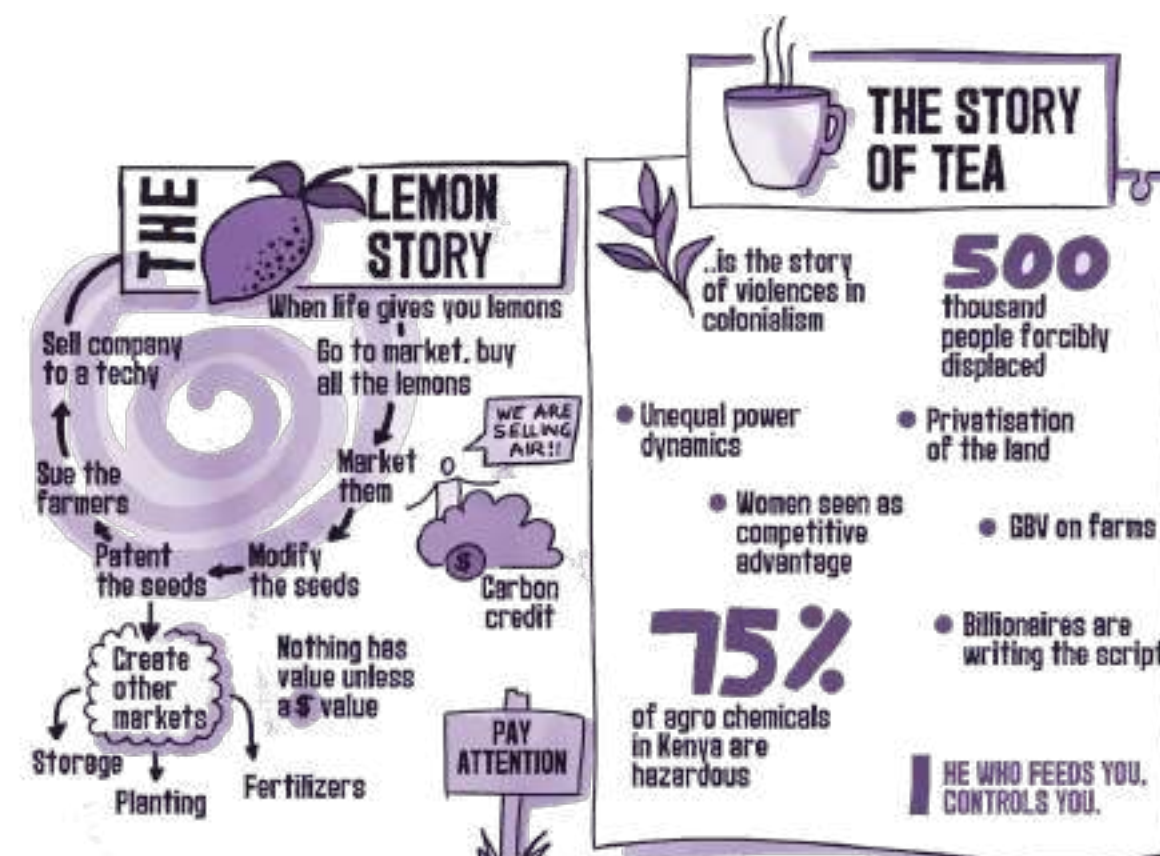
26 Bofu-Tawamba, N (ND) *African omen face Ebola triple jeopardy*, published by Al Jazeera America, https://www.uaf-africa.org/news_and_events/african-women-face-ebola-triple-jeopardy/

27 Tejani, S & Kucera, D (2014) 'Feminization, Defeminization, and Structural Change in Manufacturing', *World Development*, Volume 64, December 2014, Pages 569 – 582

Tralac (2022) Architecture of the AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade, available at: <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/factsheets/4736-afcfta-factsheet-architecture-of-the-afcfta-protocol-on-women-and-youth-in-trade-december-2022/file.html>

While some of the most visible examples of these come from the textiles industry in South Asia, in Africa the tea and floriculture industries have also exemplified many of these practices²⁸, with no indication of positive shifts in women workers' rights on the horizon. The story of tea is the story of unbridled corporate power, and the violence committed during colonisation that has continued uninterrupted. Workers on these farms report such poor conditions including those that impact at a bodily level, including the development of skeletal injuries only unique to those who work on tea plantations.²⁹ These are the poor workers that provide the "competitive advantage" offered by foreign direct investors in globalised markets; these private entities often have more money than most governments, dictating policies through undue influence in labour laws and wider macroeconomic decision making.

The narrative around the violence of neoliberalism in Africa has yet to be fully developed in a manner that overtly exposes the mortality that results from its self-reproduction. A major challenge here is a lack of the large data sets needed that can support the realities being seen every day on the continent. However, despite this, as can be seen, there are clear entry points for exposing the narrative clearly enough to sow the seeds of disruption, activating the shifts needed in perception. These must be clearly identified and unpacked at national, regional and continental levels.



28 Waweru, E (2022) "The dark side of the flower sector: the growing exploitation of women in Kenya", *Anti-Slavery International*, Thursday 3rd November, available at: <https://www.antislavery.org/latest/flower-sector-exploitation-of-women-in-kenya/>

29 Kairi TK, Dey S (2022) Prevalence of work-related musculoskeletal symptoms among tea garden workers in Bangladesh: a cross-sectional study *BMJ Open* 2022;12: e061305. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2022-061305

Challenging the atomisation and individualism that neoliberalism consistently creates across societies

Capitalism has had a history of atomising society into ever smaller units, with the industrialisation process that pulled workers from across communal rural livelihoods into urban industrial hubs severing kinship ties and the collective organising around production both inside and outside of the home.³⁰ This process not only severed extended families and communities, but severed models of custodianship and common ownership of land and resources, separating people from the means of production and reproduction, and concentrating those means into the hands of the few.³¹ The heteronormative nuclear family – where husbands and sons are the dominant kin – has been the core social unit at the centre of the capitalist idea of the world. The singularity of this model contrasts and conflicts with the multiplicities of African familial systems that do not fit this mold, including consanguineal family systems – where ancestral ties determine relations – that offer more complex power centres.³² The rise of an unapologetic individualism has come to strongly define and characterise neoliberal societies, underpinned and bolstered by an increasing reliance on productive material worth and value. That which cannot be easily counted, which cannot be quantified in service to economic productivity and ultimately, growth, thus finds no value within the system. As such, the nuclear family – patriarchal in its hierarchy as men's labour becomes valorised and women's labour becomes invisible within the system – becomes a site of silent exploitation, for within it, the delivery of unrecognised and unpaid care is at the core of the social reproduction needed for capitalist society to function. It is a critical form of extraction that neoliberalism is dependent on as part of its DNA for its own reproduction, making women the unrecognised “creditors of the nation” through this work. Care work that had been done more collectively as a communal practice even within the frameworks of gendered alignments is now fully rendered as a heavily individualised experience within those atomised units.

This is one of the many mismatches between the neoliberal ideology and our theorising as African feminists, but it is also our starting point for the rejection of the neoliberal premise of atomised and individualistic societies in favour of the creation of alternative pathways. A starting point for this work is the mutuality inherent within the concept of *ubuntu*, a concept found across many African societies that underpins communal togetherness, of “holding each other”. It is not simply an acknowledgement of the collective, but a celebration of it. Of the communality of resources through gifting

and sharing, of the existence of abundance within the many versus the scarcity that exists within the reality of the isolated individual. Of our attention to health, even when someone is ailing a little, and of the way communities – especially women – rally together during periods of struggle and challenge.³³

Maintaining and reclaiming familial, kinship, and wider community ties is one part of this process, and this can only exist by finding ways to challenge neoliberal atomisation within Africa's economic development trajectory. Africa overall as a continent is still in the earlier stages of a process of atomisation (even while recognising the variances between and within countries), and this is evident in the continued existence of strong relational ties between individuals and their communities even as they move and migrate within and between countries. What is sometimes referred to as the “black tax” – where successful African and African diaspora individuals take on the role of subsidising extended family members still struggling under the failures of the economic system – is one example of this. The story of African diaspora remittances shows us how strong this is, as individuals who in some cases reside for decades outside of the continent and who, despite their entry into more individualistic lifestyles in their new homes, still carry the responsibility that comes with familial ties on the continent. Research indicates that African diaspora remittances sent by women in particular – who send a higher proportion of their income despite earning less than men – are significant sources of income and social stability.³⁴ Once again, we see a subsidising, a crediting, by African women, of what the state has abrogated in its responsibility as part of the citizen-state compact.

Black tax does not carry pain for me, it carries honour. But it is also a reminder to interrogate why I am the only one after 20 years who had graduated and can help [the family/community]. What are the macroeconomic policy failings that are ensuring that more of us are remaining in poverty?

While these experiences demonstrate the resilience of *ubuntu* within and outside of Africa, neoliberalism's atomised individualism can also corrupt the original premise of it, placing unjust onus on individuals in the face of neoliberalism's macroeconomic failures over the last 40 years. That which is considered an honour, that which helps build us and ours, can also be so burdensome that it is reframed as a “black tax”, especially given the paucity of generational wealth among African descended / African communities in multiple global contexts due to systemic racism within the economy.³⁵

30 Desai, A. R. “Urbanization and Social Stratification.” *Sociological Bulletin* 9, no. 2 (1960): 7–14. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42864567>.

31 University of Oxford (2022) *Enclosing the English Commons: Property, Productivity, and the Making of Modern Capitalism*, November 2022, Global History of Capitalism Project, Case Study 26

32 Nzegqu. Nkiru, (2012) *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture*, State University of New York Press

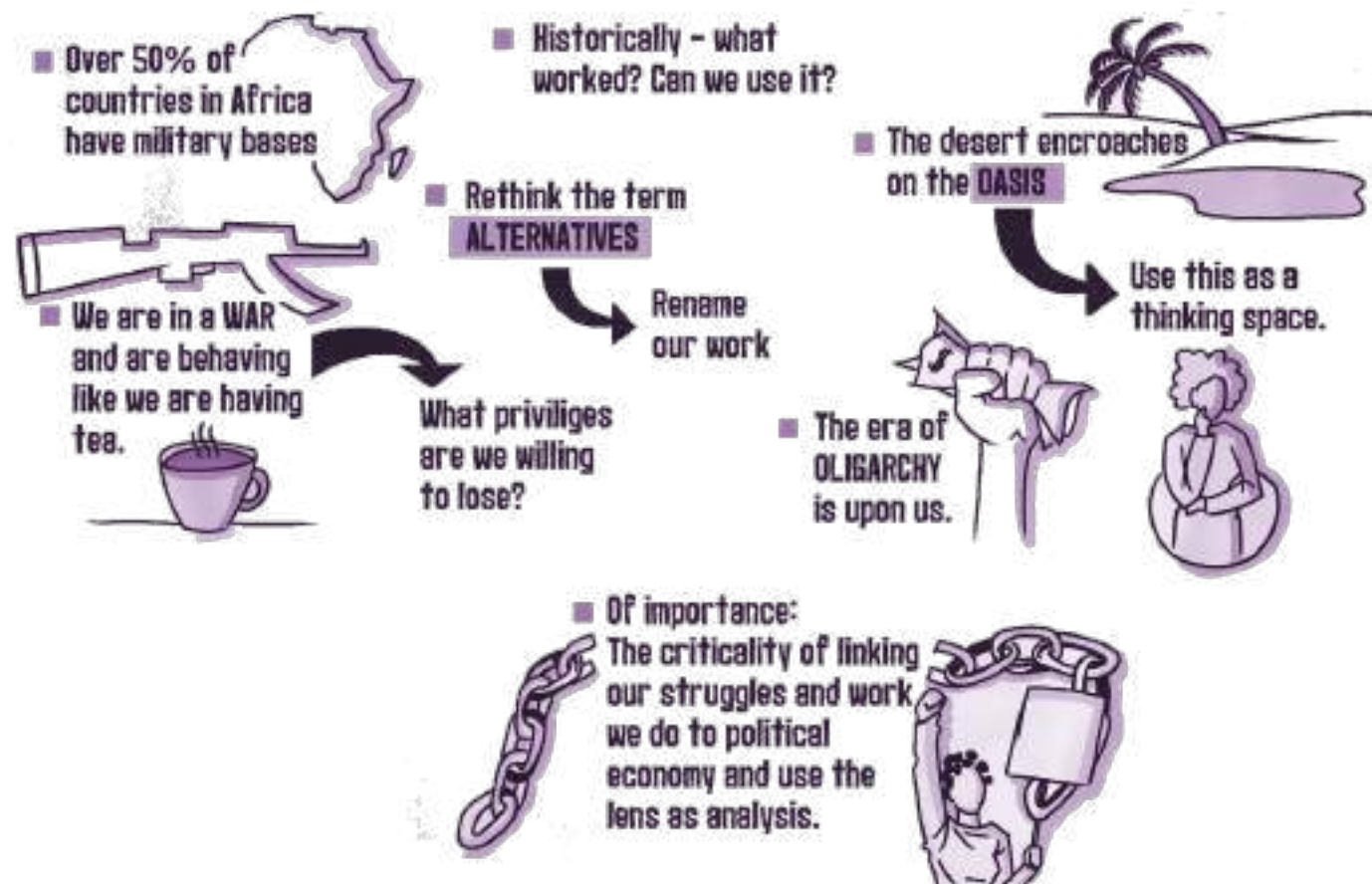
33 Kinoti, W (2023) *Weaving Our Fabric: Framing African Feminist Public Services Agenda*, Nawi Afrifem Macroeconomics Collective, FEMNET, available at: <https://www.nawi.africa/weaving-our-fabric-framing-an-african-feminist-public-services-agenda/>

34 IOM (ND) *Gender, Migration, and Remittances*, International Organisation for Migration <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd12616/files/2018-07/Gender-migration-remittances-infosheet.pdf#:~:text=At%20the%20global%20level%2C%20female,greater%20responsibility%20for%20money%20transfers>

35 Pfeffer, F. T., & Killewald, A. (2019). Intergenerational Wealth Mobility and Racial Inequality. *Socius*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023119831799> (Original work published 2019)

This “burden” is financial, but also viscerally felt, as African women’s bodies become sites of both exploitation and resilience to maintain the system. And even when that resilience fades, when bodies break, the system finds, initiates and conditions others to replace them.

Reclaiming and transforming our communality into models that challenge and call out neoliberal atomisation is the disruption we must therefore engineer. Part of this will require shifting who is at the centre of our thinking and well as shifting the way we think about gender relations and the purpose of the economy itself. For example, a valorisation of the role of the extended family in social reproduction allows us to reframe the purpose of the economy and disrupts the neoliberal reliance on the heteronormative nuclear family. Critical “aunthood” studies for example, bring forth a gender relationality that is not predicated on birthing or motherhood as the only unit of value. The questions that need pursuing in this area therefore include: how can this disruption be activated? What are the tactics needed to engineer new economic realities that upend and replace the trajectory of neoliberal capitalist production and the atomisation it creates?



Beyond Neoliberalism Strategic World Building

*Any effective movement has at its core processes of theorising, critique and knowledge making to form consciousness. But the imperative for movement is to apply it, to do, to make of ideas the momentum for and practice of revolutionary action. Praxis.*³⁶

- Jessica Horn

While disruption of the false neoliberal narrative currently deemed as inevitable, apolitical, neutral, and ultimately harmless is an essential first step, the process of strategic world building by African feminists is critical if we are to go beyond neoliberalism. Across the continent there are multiple movements constantly struggling on the frontlines of neoliberalism in one capacity or other. These sometimes come in cycles (such as in response to specific and periodic economic crises), while others are consistently in place. These lines of resistance are often the first stage of alternative world building; by presenting an antagonistic position to the harms of the orthodoxy, they signpost both a hope and an expectation of a different future. Embedding within many movements are visions, solution sets, and sometimes pathways or even roadmaps to those future worlds. These provide the critique of the now and the theoretical underpinnings for emancipatory futures. As we move beyond neoliberalism, a key question for strategic world building is how do we harness those movements and how do we keep momentum in the aftermath of the cycles they sometimes emerge from?

Building Solidarity and Creating Critical Mass

*We are the ones we
have been waiting for.*

If the Kenyan uprisings of 2024 against the IMF conditioned Finance Bill demonstrated anything, it is that change will never be simply handed over, but will need to be struggled for, and sometimes on the frontlines of resistance. Recognition is growing that engagement with the international finance institutions and multilaterals is not delivering, and indeed, is often reinforcing the status quo as feminist and other progressive engagements become corrupted and coopted into rationalising the orthodoxy.

36 Horn, J (2025) *African Feminist Praxis: Cartographies of Liberatory Worldmaking*, Sage Publications Ltd

But there is a backlash that comes from this struggle – both the overt violence met on the frontlines and the covert violence of dismissiveness and invisibilisation that comes when you try to engage and are consistently relegated to the margins. This manifests in spaces where some women are allowed to participate but others are not, dividing, isolating, and aiming to conquer attempts at solidarity in the process.

Part of the covert backlash is an inherent part of the system already discussed above – the reassertion of atomisation. There, the neoliberal system works hard to convince us that we are entirely on our own. That we are unable to confront the power of a system that is so pervasive, so broad and so deep and that there is nothing any of us can do to resist it. That we are not citizens, but consumers. That we are not communities, but internally focused, (and ever smaller) households. Coloniality, patriarchy and neoliberalism have been extremely successful at dividing us across multiple lines – nation states, gender, ethnicity, colourism, rural/urban, class, and beyond.

*We will come after you
in all our differences.*

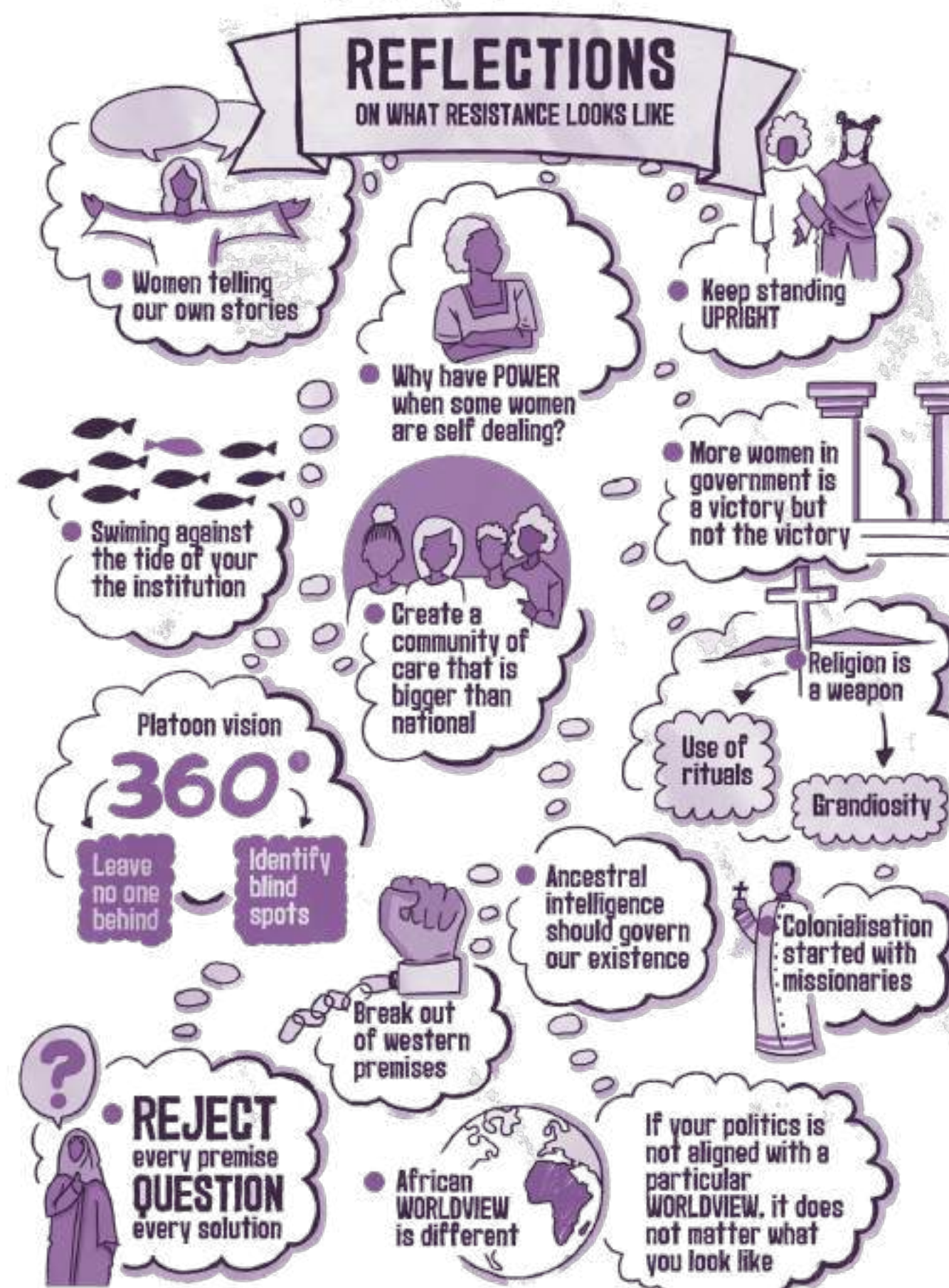
Going beyond neoliberalism will mean taking on hegemonies but the coherent strategy of promoting individualism convinces people that they have no power. When many people look around and they see the problems they are facing today, they feel like they are fighting those problems on their own, underpinning the feeling of powerlessness. But this is not an irrevocable truth. Solidarity, collaboration, and finding commonality and unity beyond our differences, indeed, with all the strengths of our multiplicities, are needed if we are to connect the dots across countries and across the continent, to create the critical mass needed. This can be done by creating spaces of common understanding, spaces of unity on key issues, and by agreeing our collective red lines. Nothing will change until we strategize differently. This has become even more critical in the context of increasing challenges to funding and civic space at national, continental, and global levels.

On the continent today there are multiple touch points and frontlines of resistance that can potentially form rallying points and cross continental networks for building solidarity and creating the critical mass needed. Today, the continent has multinational corporations operating on it that have larger revenue than the GDP of many African countries.³⁷ This leads to a dictating of agendas, and as the system produces greater wealth inequalities, the cycle of mandates that are beholden to the needs of capital, reproduces and perpetuates itself.

For example, currently Africa is in a battle for the sovereignty of its food systems, which in turn is embedded within a wider postcolonial battle for national and regional sovereignty in policy decisions since structural adjustment.³⁸ Farmers across various countries are

37 Oxfam (2024) *Inequality Inc: how corporate power divides our world and the need for a new era of public action*, available at: <https://nigeria.oxfam.org/latest/press-release/seven-richest-africans-have-more-wealth-poorest-half-continents-population>

38 Moyo, S (2010). *Rebuilding African peasantries: Inalienability of land rights and collective food sovereignty in Southern Africa* https://our-global-u.org/oguorg/en/wpfb-file/sam-moyo_rebuilding-peasantries-pdf/



facing criminalisation of centuries-old traditions in the storing and sharing of indigenous seeds within and between communities.³⁹ This comes on the back of an agro-industrial agenda that has been growing under the auspices of frameworks such as the Alliance for a Green Revolution on Africa (AGRA), which promotes commercial agriculture and the needs of multinational corporations and their agricultural inputs, from hybrid seeds to fertiliser to chemicals.⁴⁰ Organisations such as Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) have also conducted significant research to demonstrate the failures of AGRA in delivering the food security it promised, having rather consistently undermined food sovereignty.⁴¹

Nonetheless AGRA today is a heavily endorsed lobby group by multilateral bodies and the backing of prominent individuals such as Bill Gates, whose influence on the issues presents a reality check on the strain the continent is under from external agendas.⁴² This is a reality check on the behemoths that Africa faces on these issues. But solitary voices are more easily suppressed. In 2022, African civil society and faith leaders came together to challenge AGRA in a statement of solidarity against its undermining of food sovereignty on the continent⁴³. Multiple farmer collectives and activists on the continent working to challenge the agro-commercial MNCs and to promote investment in agroecological approaches, present a significant opportunity for broad continental solidarity on the issues that need greater focus and amplification for the creation of a critical mass.

Here, the question of what is possible in the face of those behemoths becomes critical. For example, since the 1970s, the MNC Nestle has faced the consequences of powerful public campaigns challenging its false assertions around the nutritional value of baby milk formula and its attempts to undermine breast feeding across some of the poorest countries. Consensus and consistent advocacy ended those attempts at that time, also creating a template for activism against the multinational in the decades that followed each time they contravened the advertising regulations subsequently put into place by the WHO in the 1980s.

39 La Via Campesina/GRAIN (2015) *Seed laws that criminalise farmers: resistance and fight back*, March 2015 available at: <https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/04/2015-Seed%20laws%20booklet%20EN.pdf>

40 Kelleher, F (2019) 'Why the World needs and African ecofeminist future African Arguments', African Arguments accessed at: <https://africanarguments.org/2019/03/12/why-world-needs-african-ecofeminist-future/>

41 Abdallah Ramadhani Mkindi, Anne Maina, Jan Urhahn, Josephine Koch, Lena Bassermann, Mamadou Goïta, Mutinta Nketani, Roman Herre, Stig Tanzmann, Timothy A. Wise, Melissa Gordon, Rachel Gilbert (2020) *False Promises: The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)*, available at: https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Studien/False_Promises_AGRA_en.pdf

42 Malkan, S (2024) 'Critiques of Gates Foundations agricultural interventions in Africa', *U.S. Right to Know*, September 4, 2024, available at: <https://usrtk.org/bill-gates/critiques-of-gates-foundation/>

43 AFSA (2022) 'African Civil Society and Faith Leaders Say Rebranding The Green Revolution Is No Solution: We Need Agroecology for Food and Climate Action', October 25, 2022, available at: <https://afsafrika.org/african-civil-society-and-faith-leaders-say-rebranding-the-green-revolution-is-no-solution-we-need-agroecology-for-food-and-climate-action/#:~:text=Donors%20should%20pull%20the%20plug,now%20is%20a%20Green%20Restoration.>

While such examples provide some hope, one of the questions that arise out of this is arguably an unspoken elephant in the room: is it time that we stopped “playing nicely”? The Nestle campaign was characterised by unequivocal anger and rage at their lack of ethics; “Fuck Nestle” became a mantra of the campaign, replicated across the multimedia of the time, and garnering the global attention needed to curtail the enormous Nestle machine. This created attention and ultimately the traction needed. The question of whether “playing nicely” is detrimental to the aims of going beyond neoliberalism is something that African feminists must reconcile together, as this can only be successful in unison, in solidarity, and en masse.

Fighting for (and in) the present, while engineering the future

We need to understand how we also plot in the background for this struggle, because others are plotting whole worlds in the background for us.

The process of world building beyond neoliberalism, including the building of solidarity and critical mass, takes time. The significant neoliberal ideological policy norms within institutions at national, regional, and global level are challenging at multiple levels, often relegating feminist economic propositions – even when viable, evidenced, and exemplified by realities already in play (from both within and outside of the continent) - to the margins of consideration. Challenging this significant barrier will require working on multiple fronts, and with both a visionary praxis towards the feminist futures being created for the longer term, as well as engagement with the emerging issues on what is currently unfolding – sometimes extremely rapidly – on the many frontlines of neoliberal entrenchment on the continent.

African feminists have already made significant investments in the creation of feminist economic education and schools/academies, and these are a critical part of the worldmaking that needs to take place. But there is a need to scale up these initiatives on the one hand, and to leverage new spaces where both feminist economic theory and praxis can be more broadly shared and can start to shift the narrative on Africa's economic future beyond neoliberalism. For example, what strategic opportunities can be leveraged for African feminist curricular in academic halls across the continent, in the very spaces where economic theory and neoliberal dogma is first fostered and entrenched among those who will internalise and go on to play critical roles in the creation of neoliberal policy? There also needs to be a strategic understanding of how language is used and abused, and where the gaps are in the knowledge being created and shared.

Across the continent, there are multiple frontlines in the battle against neoliberal policy entrenchment. From deepening financialisation - where financial motives,

institutions, and actors drive policy, leading to a greater role for financial markets and instruments - to the future of labour (formal, informal, paid, unpaid), to Africa's critical role in the geopolitics of the climate agenda, strategic world building beyond neoliberalism requires an understanding, positioning, propositioning, and engineering around critical, current agendas.

The financialisation cycle

When life gives you lemons...you go to the market and buy as many lemons as possible. Then launch a massive campaign that roses are out, lemons are in! You NEED lemons for life to be 'lifying.' Then start a range of conflict free lemons, climate lemons, indigenous seeds lemons, murder-free lemons. Then don't forget the important part – patent it! If you want to be a billionaire, get researchers and GMO engineers to grow funky lemons. Patent it! Then sue other farmers for growing their lemons. Then sell the company - maybe to a tech guy - and make billions...

Financialisation has grown and come to dominate the global economy, bringing with it widening wealth inequality and increased economic instability.⁴⁴ Financialisation has created a system where anything can be a product to be bought or sold, and this can ultimately lead to a diminishing need to originate and create within the economy. Commodities are identified and can be anything, from coffee, to debt, to clean air, and prices are attached, sometimes arbitrarily. This has led to a distortion in the way economies are typically organised (around creativity), and money starts to generate revenue rather than a medium of exchange. The needs of those who produce ultimately become devalued, while the needs of those who own shares become conversely paramount.

Just as seed sovereignty is under attack through corporate commodification, so too are almost all areas of productive life increasingly perceived as worthless unless there is a dollar value attached to it, with a profit and capital accumulating imperative. "Virgin land" is considered without value unless it starts to generate profit. Even storing a harvest must be done in a way that makes sense within a commodified and corporatised paradigm. The commodification of air is also underway in the form of carbon credits, turning the climate crisis into a space of climate colonialism. Today, Africa faces the reality of extraction 2.0 as the building blocks of a just transition become dependent on transition and critical minerals; Africa is home to just under a thirds of the world's transition minerals (and more than half of critical minerals such

as cobalt)⁴⁵, making her a clear target of even greater extraction in the coming years as the decarbonisation agenda gains ground. Meanwhile, this is increasingly becoming a driver of resource nationalism and geopolitical competition in certain African mining markets that are home to large deposits,⁴⁶ increasing the prospects of continental fragmentations along state lines, and undermining the solidarity needed to deliver.

Other emerging critical areas also need direct and considered engagement. The future of gendered labour is arguably at a critical juncture on various fronts. The rise of the digital economy continues to present what are sometimes blurred lines between opportunities and challenges, and the speed of change within this sector requires a commitment and diligence to the issues as they unfold. For example, the rise of big data – currently driven by global Northern corporate power structures who are increasingly controlling all aspects of the digital cloud landscape – needs to be addressed by actively opposing what is clearly a rise in data colonialism.⁴⁷ Similarly, large initiatives on the continent, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) are gearing up for what is supposed to lead to the expansion of formal labour on the tail of African industrialisation. Among many other considerations on the AfCFTA,⁴⁸ the question of what that labour will look like, how fair and just it will be, and how women will fare within the creation of jobs, remains largely unanswered. But fair jobs, economically just employment, and decent wages are all critical to delinking from Africa's dependency on aid (and loans) and the challenges to sovereignty inherent within that dependency.⁴⁹ At the same time, there must also be a drawing down on the inspirations from women in the informal sector who are challenging the system, taking whatever lessons can be drawn from that for macroeconomic world-building.

Liberation does not come without imagination, it means some people have to dream that another world is possible, that another world is urgent.

It is critical that this engagement with this multitude of areas consistently in motion is fully fledged and present; everything that is happening will continue with or without feminist engagement, nonetheless, creating bigger challenges down the line in the absence of that engagement. Opportunities to critique and present alternatives in the now cannot be lost, and the possibilities of moments will be gone. But there

45 Igwe, U (2025) Value addition to minerals can improve Africa's stake in energy transition, LSE Blogs <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/02/07/value-addition-to-minerals-can-improve-africas-stake-in-energy-transition/#:~:text=Africa%20holds%20a%20significant%20share,of%20its%20aluminium%20and%20copper.>

46 Vines, A (2023) "Africa in 2023: continuing political and economic vulnerability, Chatham House, 9th January 2023", available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/01/africa-2023-continuing-political-and-economic-volatility?gclid=CjwKCAiAlp2fBhBPEiwA2Q10D-LqIx_ZdRDJIYtC7QKkWmh2zNzGwmkLgCtd6mP03KAP15rGMSIYNBoCQjMQAvD_BwE

47 Pheko, LL (forthcoming) *The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and new Colonialism*, unpublished

48 See Nawi's feminist analysis series on the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA): <https://www.nawicollective.org/written-resources>

49 Tandon, Y (2008) *Ending Aid Dependence*, Fahamu Books, 2nd Edition

44 Shaxson, N (2019) *The Finance Curse: How Global Finance Is Making Us All Poorer*, Grove Atlantic

must also be a challenge to the very frameworks that those issues leverage on and are facilitated by, rebuilding those frameworks into new ideas of possible futures. For example, the very conceptualisation of labour – laborious, burdensome, in many ways tangential to who we really are – aligns with the needs of the capitalist system itself. African feminists’ world-making must explore how we reimagine and reframe labour – as care, as communion, as offering – even as we simultaneously engage with and challenge the neoliberal deregulations that undermine decent and dignified jobs for women. If we don’t world-build and think radically enough to move away from those very frameworks we are trying to transform, the likelihood of African feminist agendas being coopted into the system remains high, derailing efforts through instrumentalisation, a situation which is in evidence already.

For example, the momentum of the climate agenda is currently undeniable, but with it has come a fixation on emissions, arguably at the detriment of a wider environmental agenda that looks more holistically at planetary boundaries, including areas of feminist resistance such as biodiversity. The importance of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) international meeting focusing on climate, also known as Conference of the Parties (COP) on the global agenda drives this, and this itself has fallen under corporate capture, with the decisions being made there used to further the neoliberal agenda on the continent. All of which tie into the trap of an incrementalism that “tranquilises”⁵⁰ the original objectives of the African feminist futures being designed and engineered.

A critical navigation of working on the now while simultaneously world building towards a more radical future (and a part of the disruption that is needed), requires a critical evaluation of the ecosystems African feminists find themselves in – international NGOs (INGOs), think tanks, donors. As one convening participant articulated “they have forgotten we are in a war, and we have to remind them of that”. This leads to the question of how African feminists should be organising on the sidelines of these spaces if needed, and what privileges are we willing to lose in the process?

⁵⁰ This is in reference to a quote by Martin Luther King Jr, taken from his famous “I have a dream” speech: “This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.”

Organising beyond neoliberalism through reparative justice

“We are not the children of Africa nor its grandchildren. Because Africa is a colonial construct. We are the parents of the Africa we need, and we will give birth to it”

- Chinua Achebe

Organising beyond neoliberalism means organising a space that is anti-neoliberal in its essence. As already noted, capitalism absorbs and terraforms all around it, and over the last 40 years neoliberalism has done the same - it must create a world that is conducive to its existence. Understanding this is central to our understanding of reparative justice. And this raises the question of what kind of a framework of engagement will provide African feminist world making with the necessary tools to effectively do so. Reparative justice, as a concept, a call to action, and a process of liberatory world making, focuses on repairing harm caused by injustices, through restitution (restoring), compensation (what must be paid), rehabilitation (support for victims’ recovery), satisfaction (what it takes to feel that justice has been served), and cessation of the harm (guarantees of non-repetition/harm has to stop). This provides a framework to address the historical wrongs of colonialism, the human rights abuses of colonial and ongoing post-independence neo-coloniality, and the systemic inequalities that not only persist but continue to be deepened by neoliberalism as a late-stage capitalist manifestation of that trajectory of harm. This framework must be embedded with a pan-African polity, a pan-African policy of solidarity, if it is ever to be successful. How we think about reparations is a process of reclamation for us. Looking at African traditions, the concept of repair is very common; drawing on those strands in all their multiplicities but underpinned by a collective solidarity is critical.

Taking reparative justice in its holistic whole is an important part of the process; as a movement there must be an understanding that we must go beyond just the compensation aspect of the frame – reparations are more than just the monetary redress. The conversation must go beyond the wounds on physical bodies, the theft and abuse of resources, the devastation to community and environment. Recognising the erasure that has also taken place as violence is essential, including the erasure of the African/Black woman, and how that links to the exploitation and the dependence on the black woman for neoliberal capitalism to continue perpetuating itself. Repairing from that erasure is also part of a collective memorialisation, for harm to the individual is harmful to the community. Individual wounds have an impact on community because the targeting of the individual was meant to harm the community. If we look at the coloniality of power embedded within the institutions that today produce and dictate neoliberal policies, memory becomes a necessary tool of struggle in targeting how the economic system reproduces racial and political outcomes independently.

Therefore, there is a need in the first instance to recognise that institutions like the IFIs perpetuate neo-coloniality, supported by African governments who are complicit in the process either through genuine ideological alignments or an inability to consider heterodox economic positions due to those very strictures of geopolitical power the conditionalities bring. In the second, there is a need to acknowledge that these institutions are committing crimes on behalf of those countries that first laid the foundations for this violent, oppressive, and exploitative system. This acknowledgement must underpin calls for reparative justice that seeks to redress for the past, for without it, the process will be incomplete – the harm will not stop, if anything it may be exacerbated, there will be no satisfaction, and ultimately justice will not have been served.

Climate reparations arguably present the clearest entry point for action, but this needs to be worked-through diligently via a pan-African framing to ensure that the agendas on the global stage neither patronise, pacify nor dismiss the magnitude of Africa's claims. The focus on loss and damage that has come out of the COP process in recent years is one that must be fully interrogated on multiple fronts. There are legitimate fears that loss and damage will not only be insufficient, but also neither comparable with nor adequate to satisfy the demand for compensation or reparations.⁵¹ The chances that it will be framed as a matter of greater capacity, international solidarity, charity, and humanitarian relief rather than moral responsibility born out of a history of colonialism and excessive resource exploitation appear high, thus undermining the need for reparative justice. A series of questions will need to be collectively answered, in solidarity with a reparative justice mandate: What does the loss and damage agenda ultimately mean for Africa in the longer-term? Is this the agenda we need to be focusing on right now, or is the singular focus a disservice to the magnitude of what needs to be addressed, and a potential distraction? What are our own, sovereign positions on the agenda, outside of the noise of northern organisations allegedly advocating on our behalf?

The accusation of myopia within the loss and damage agenda can be linked back to the question of global Northern accountability, or a persistent lack thereof, on the part of countries that have historically reaped the benefits of colonialism for their own development over the last 500 years and their subsequent pre-eminence today in the geopolitical order. The accusation of there being very minimal accountability built into the loss and damage agenda is therefore a legitimate one. Other aspects of reparative justice are distracted from, even within the climate agenda itself, focusing on how the north benefitted from coloniality, and how they continue to benefit from coloniality today.

The success of a pan-African reparative justice movement will also be dependent on thinking broadly and beyond divides. A reparative justice movement must also be transnational as this is not just about the African continent, but also about those of African descent in other parts of the world. Capitalism emerged out of the exploitation of black bodies in the Americas through the transatlantic slave trade, then solidified its

ascendancy with the colonial capture of global Southern resources across continents, with Africa at the epicentre of the resource extraction. European countries and their colonial settler states (the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand) needed to achieve developmental primacy. This is an opportunity to link the historiographies of African descended peoples together and pull together a movement that really can challenge the enormity of the geopolitical order that refuses to acknowledge and take accountability of what has happened in the last 500 years. That lack of recognition is the current battle ground, and it is a shared one.

Once again, this pathway raises a series of questions that require enquiry embedded with a solidarity consciousness: What does restitution look like from multiple African and African descended vantage points and terms, while maintaining a collective spirit of reparation? What are our parameters when we seek redress for land, for intellectual property, for the resources that continue to be ripped from the continent in real time? And this latter point also illuminates the challenge of timing. When should reparative justice be sought? What does it mean to seek reparative justice within the neoliberal system we are all so complicitly embedded within? Or can reparative justice only be truly effective, once neoliberalism has been dismantled, or at the very least, at a critical stage of that dismantling? Is it possible to receive reparations while the harm perpetuates? Would this prevent all the characteristics of reparation being met, creating a zero-sum scenario in the longer term, leading to more distractive and “tranquillising” incrementalism? These are among the many questions that we must urgently explore and find the answers to.



⁵¹ Toussaint P. (2024) Loss and Damage, Climate Victims, and International Climate Law: Looking Back, Looking Forward. *Transnational Environmental Law*. 2024;13(1):134-159. doi:10.1017/S2047102523000237

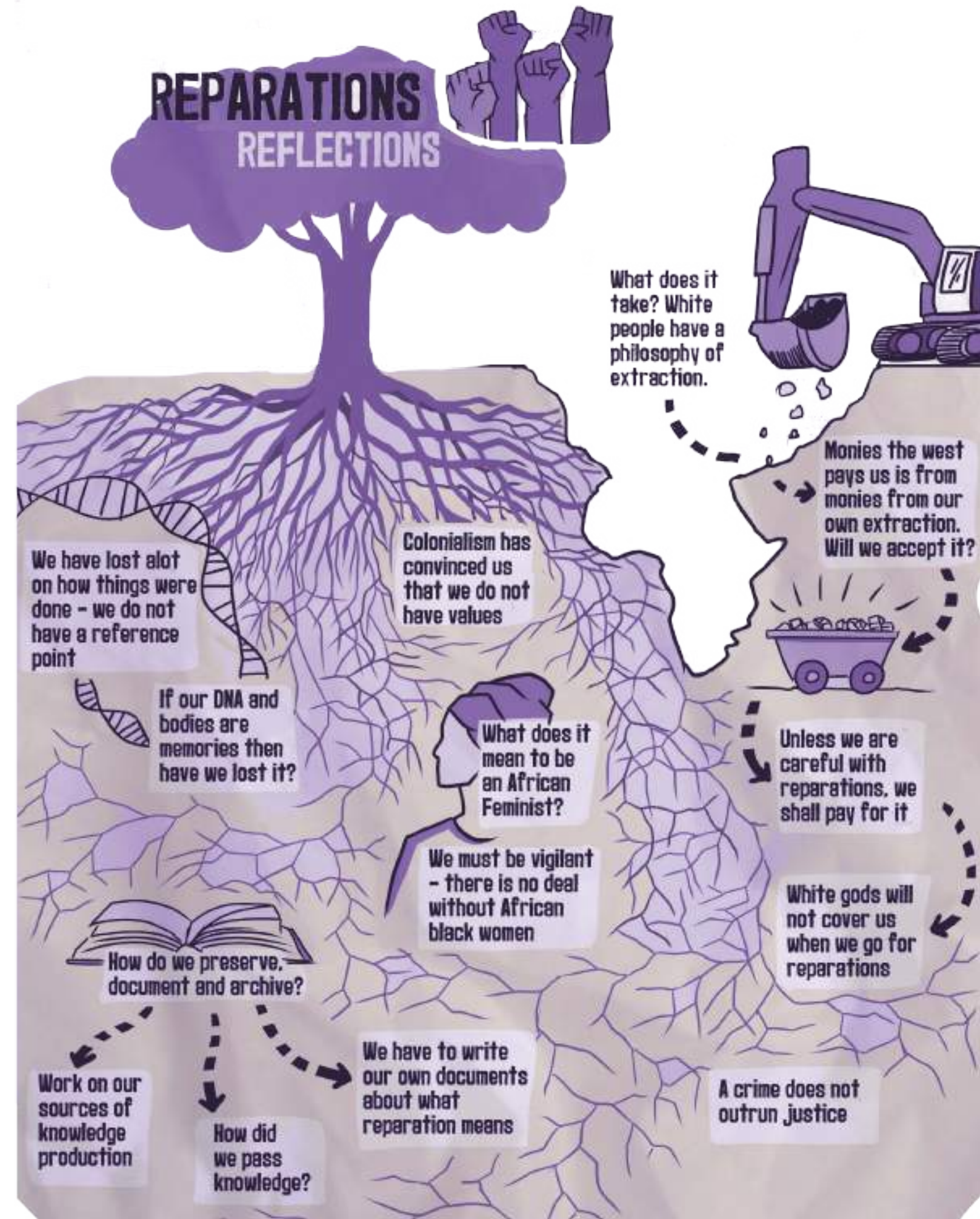
Conclusions And Some Suggested Next Steps And Actions

“The decolonisation of the imagination is the most dangerous and subversive form there is: for it is where all forms of decolonisation are born. Once the imagination is unshackled, liberation is limitless.”
- Adrienne Maree Brown

This convening is the first step in a continuous exploration and organising for action and movement building process. Our strategic disruption and world building is a first step in a much longer process of engagement that starts now, and as we move forward with these strategies, the time has come to start thinking about tactics. While strategy outlines the long-term goals and the overall approach to achieve them, tactics are the specific actions and methods used to implement them.

The propositions for strategic disruption and strategic world building that have emanated from this convening must now go to a different level; the “how”. The first step of world building is a visionary endeavour, quickly followed by an architectural one, where the plans and designs of the dream to be built are developed, fine-tuned, and laid out. As African feminists, we are already in the process of developing what these are in different spaces (although there are more to come). What is needed now however is an *engineering* plan for those worlds. Engineering/engineers are tasked with creating the plans that will deliver the tangible realisation of the architectural vision. These are the nuts-and-bolts decisions, the mathematical calculations so buildings don’t collapse, and floors and walls remain solid, the measurements needed for what, where, who, why, and what for, so that light can flood a space where bodies can be nourished and air can thus circulate. These are the decisions to build the beyond neoliberal world that is being dreamed into existence. This world building must also be imbued with indigenous value systems from the African continent. All pre-colonial African societies – myriad in organisational manifestation – had fully developed and sophisticated value systems that governed them. Part of our work is to exterminate the shame attached to our indigenous knowledge and structures, to reclaim them, and to remodel and reengineer them as needed for where we are today. This process must be both passion-driven, strategic, and tactical.

The following suggested next steps and actions are offered as a starting point for moving this paper forward by following through and building on the conversation captured in this paper. These are split into three broad areas: next steps for the convenings to come, some strategic approaches that should be woven throughout the work being undertaken, and some practical actions towards strategic world building that aims to start to translate this paper’s theoretical grounding into time-bound strategies.



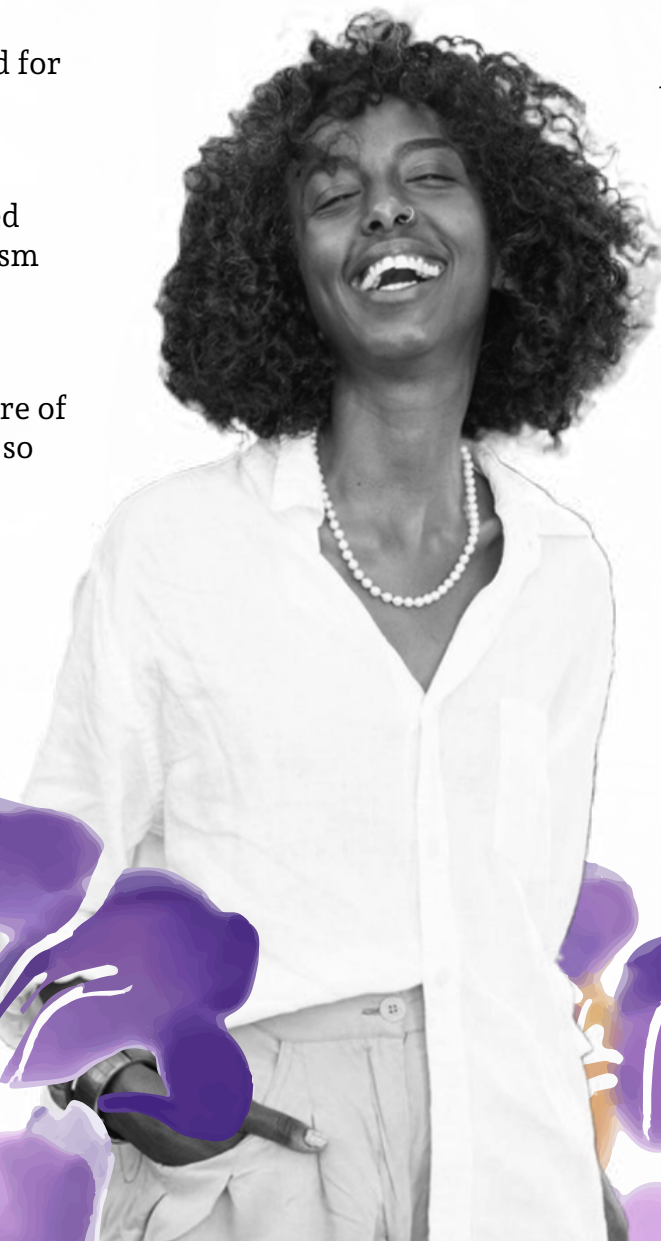
Next steps for the Beyond Neoliberalism series emerging from this paper

In the coming sessions to be convened as part of the series, the following suggestions are offered:

1. **Identify dominant areas for strategic disruption and worldbuilding to create focus and generate consensus:** The next convening in this series of *Beyond Neoliberalism* could pick up the dominant areas of strategic disruption and world building emerging from this first convening and ensure that the questions raised but which remain unanswered are revisited and fully explored and agreements reached (where possible) collectively. Points of consensus need to be reached on these, along with shared red lines. Initiate a process of the “how” of these architectural plans, with a view on how they can be engineered from the points we find ourselves within now. These could have national, regional, and continental implications. Key questions will need to be posed and answered within each of the areas to be engineered, including: what else needs disruption? How far must we dismantle? What is the process of dismantlement? What are the foundations needed for the building blocks? What mitigations are needed?
2. **Plan the “how” of disruption: exposing and evidencing:** We need powerful narratives that can expose the harms of neoliberalism and debunk the fallacy of a “common sense” neutrality that neoliberalism currently trades on. The narratives should be consistent and unified, and supported by empirical evidence wherever possible, primarily from the continent, but exposure of how neoliberalism continues its violence in high income and so called “developed” country context is also important. The latter is critical because the mythology of those countries as an ideal capitalist “endgame” needs exploding especially under current geopolitical context.

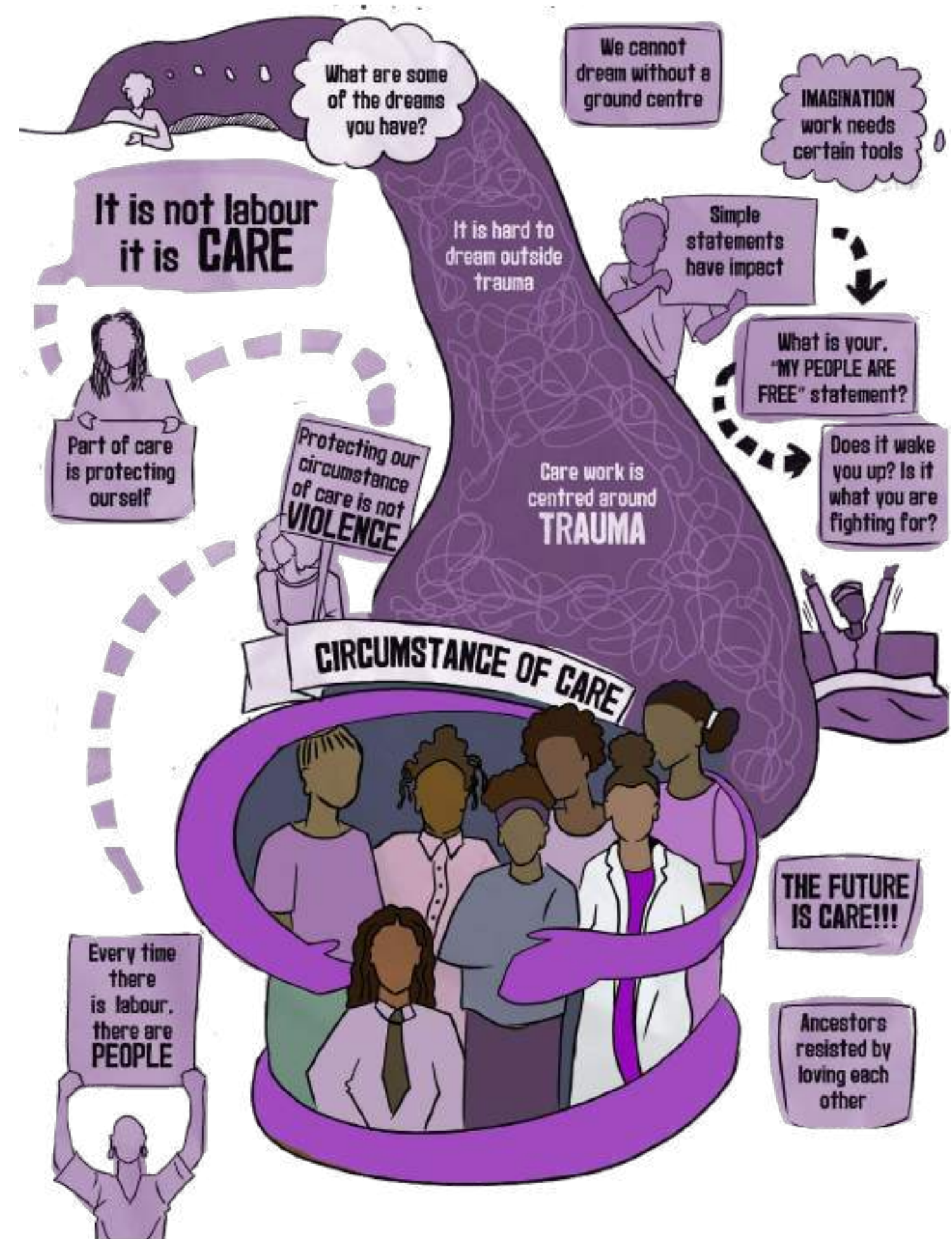
Strategic approaches to be woven throughout the work ahead

3. **Embedding Reparative Justice:** we should institutionalise Reparative Justice across social movements, governance, and global platforms. This includes expanding the definition of reparations to encompass land, language, health, memory, and spiritual repair -while connecting African movements to global allies.
4. **Initiate and nourish Intergenerational and Cross-Movement Alliances:** These are essential to sustaining feminist resistance and building critical mass by encompassing different demographic realities. These alliances can prioritise oral history, memory studies, radical political education, and the amplification of youth voices-ensuring that movements grow deeper roots while exploring shared experiences of neoliberalism and common solutions toward a more social and gender just inclusive society.
5. **Transcontinental South-South Feminist coalition building:** We can catalyse continental and transcontinental coalitions among feminist movements in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. These coalitions can document shared resistances to neoliberalism, map anti-imperial feminist policies, and co-create strategies for decolonial economic alternatives that are plurilingual, accessible, and locally grounded. These coalitions will also be part of a process of creating the critical mass needed to deliver the disruption and solutions needed, as identified by this paper.



Practical actions towards strategic world building

6. **Map existing African feminist economic world-building:** Architectural plans beyond neoliberalism have already started being conceptualised by the collective. There is already work developed by African feminists that form the basis for African feminist world-building beyond neoliberalism, from the African feminist COVID-19 recovery statement to feminist frameworks for African universal public services, to examples of what a wellbeing economy would look like in case study countries. These are initial architectural plans of the beyond neoliberalism world building African feminists are already engaged with while we also identify the gaps within this mapping and lay down plans on when to fill these.
7. **Establishment of a Feminist Media Watch:** the proliferation of cultural imperialism - through scripted television, romantic commodification, and algorithmic shame - demands the establishment of Feminist Media Watch and Cultural Literacy Programs. These initiatives should build feminist cultural hubs, deepen critical media literacy, and engage academic and grassroots partners in recovering and broadcasting liberatory cultural narratives.
8. **Develop a Feminist Digital and Data Infrastructure:** African feminists can continue to shape the contours of digital governance. A Feminist Digital and Data Justice Infrastructure is essential to resist AI colonialism, ensure ethical data use, and reclaim technological sovereignty. This infrastructure should be community-controlled, rooted in open-source ethics, and led by feminist digital technologists and storytellers.
9. **Embed African feminist economic thought in academic curricular, governance, and policy spaces:** economic thought could aim to become embedded in curricula, governance, and policy spaces. Through the development of feminist economics curricula, integration into national budgets, implementation and accountability frameworks and the training of feminist macroeconomists, could we redirect the trajectory of fiscal and monetary policy?
10. **Develop a Feminist Observatory on Neoliberal Violence:** This could systematically track austerity's lived impacts, especially on women, excluded and marginalized communities. Consolidate and audit existing platforms. It could serve as a hub of testimony, data, and political education that informs multilateral institutions and holds them to account.



Salutation

To the African feminists our knowledge rests on

The Nairobi convening that birthed this paper was attended by a cross-section of African feminist scholars and activists working on the economy in different ways. But it is important for us to recognise that each person in the room over those three days brought a personal universe of experience and knowledge that inform each of our journeys, our knowledge. These are universes filled with the many African feminists – past and present – who form our understanding of ourselves, each other, the world around us, and the worlds we dream of creating.

African feminist macroeconomic analysis has been shaped by scholars and activists over many decades. At the core, this has been a challenge to the mainstream economic theories that not only overlook or marginalize the contributions and challenges faced by women on the continent but are oppressive and exacerbate patriarchal inequalities.

We call ourselves *African* feminist economists – whether we are in the academy or not – not just because we are *of*, or *on*, or *focused on* the continent, but because at the core we are decolonising the economy and the inherent coloniality of imperialist economic thought that drives it, challenging the dominance of Western economic frameworks that placed us within the current geopolitical order, and that keep Africa in an intricate neo-colonial bind.

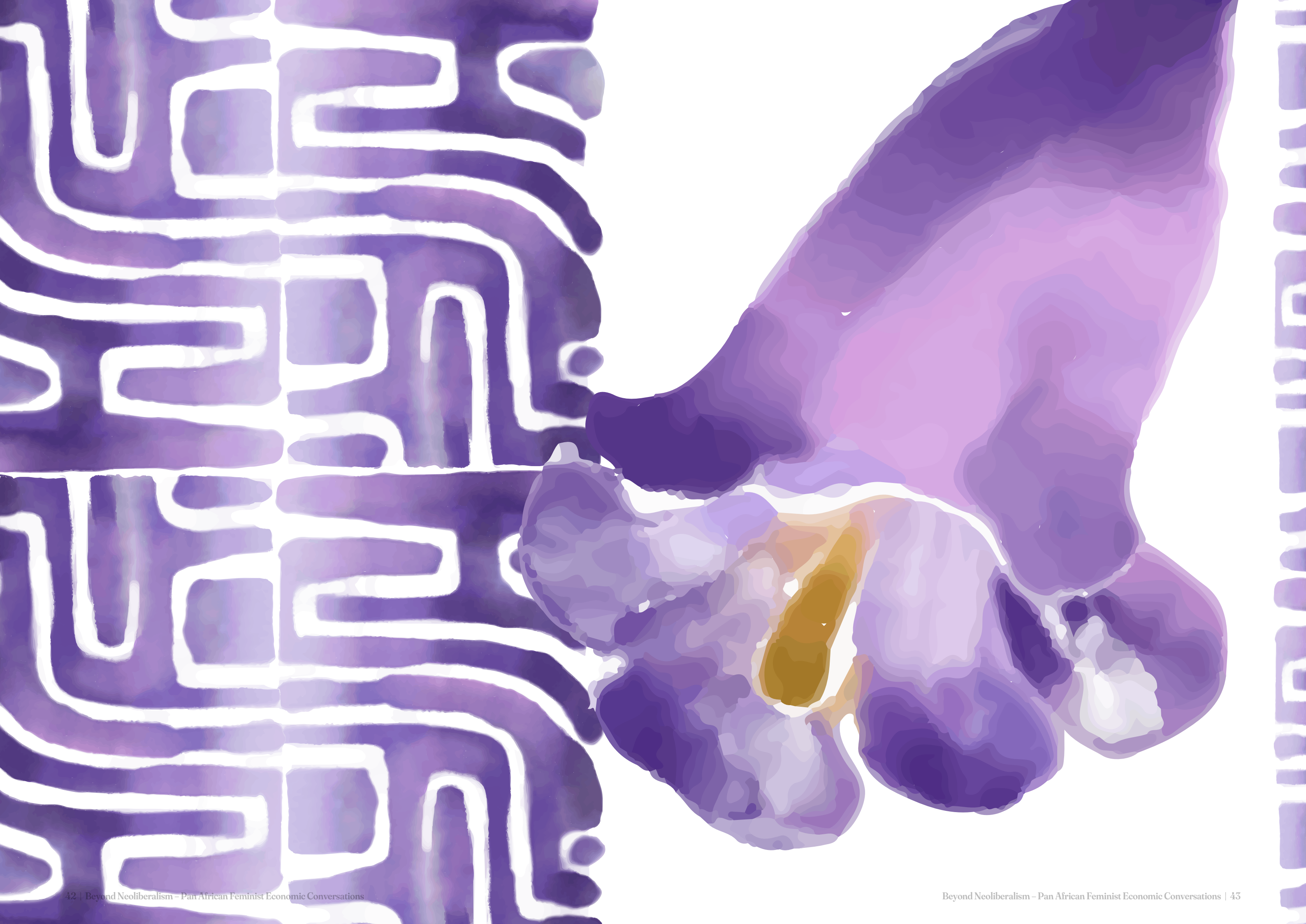
This work has been driven by African feminists in all their multiplicities over decades. From the scholarship of Dzodzi Tsikata and her seminal work on the gendered dimensions of land rights, agrarian change and rural livelihoods in Africa, to Lyn Ossome, laying down foundations on gendered labour, land and agrarian studies, and who drives much of the thought leadership on African feminist thought leadership on social reproduction. Yassine Fall, whose research has exposed the bodily violence that flows from the privatisation of public services and the commodification of food, and whose work at regional and international levels within the UN and beyond put the need for African feminist macroeconomic thought in the limelight. Patricia McFadden, who identified that Africa has become the “latest and last capitalist frontier”. These names are just a few at the start of many within the economic space.

Our journeys to this dialogue have also been fueled by a wider sisterhood of African feminist thought and activism beyond (but always foundational to) considerations on the economy. We are inspired by the thought leadership of Amina Mama, a founding editor of *Feminist Africa*, where many of us have found a space for our writing on the economy. By Ayesha Imam, whose influential work across law, militarism and development on the continent provides a crucial foundation and has informed African feminist economic analysis. By the late, great, Wangari Maathai, setting down the parameters for resistance against environmental degradation and contributing to a framework of ecological feminism. By Sylvia Tamale, who has solidified our understanding of decolonisation and Afro-Feminism.

And we must also offer salutation to the older and wider wombs we come from. *Because* our feminist economics is decolonial, *because* it is intersectional, we stand on the shoulders of African activists and creators who were putting their bodies, minds, and spirits on the frontlines for many decades before the Beijing conference of 1995. We salute the legacies of the protestors of the Aba Women’s War in 1929, fighting against the oppressions of colonial rule, and of Chief Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, the “Lioness” of women’s rights in both pre and post-independence Nigeria. We salute the fearless writing of Ama Ata Aidoo, Fatima Mernisi, and Nawal el Sadaawi, challenging patriarchal norms with the power of their prose. We salute Hajiya Gambo Sawaba “the most jailed politician in Nigeria” who championed labour rights and education for women, and we salute the Mau Mau women warriors whose legacies of struggle and justice will echo in perpetuity from the ancestral plains. We salute and are eternally grateful for the many African women whose names we don’t know but who fought and wrote and sang defiantly at the coalface of multiple oppressions, across villages and cities, dauntless in their belief that a better world is possible. Because hope is the real warrior flex, and their hope is our strength and our joy.

We name these names in humble acknowledgement that they are just a few in the myriads of universes we carry within us collectively, but that to say even those few – in the face of so much invisibilisation and erasure – is necessary. We remind ourselves to always speak as many of these names whenever we can, to solute and honour them, and to honour ourselves.





Beyond Neoliberalism

Pan African Feminist Economic Conversations

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