

oscillation

**a framework for sustainability
in social change movements
by gabes torres**

Audre Lorde:

“There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”

In the times we’re living in, we need more trauma-informed models and practices to sustain us in frontline work.

At the outset, it is important that we ground ourselves in the truth that there are no singular heroes in the revolution. We do not grow or create change in isolation.

For as long as we are in this journey, always remember:

WE ARE ALL PROTAGONISTS.

Although messy and often non-formulaic, we divest from saviorism. We choose to be flexible and malleable in saying yes to long-term responsibilities, while staying open to our varying levels of capacity and commitment which may shift from time to time. We recognize that there will be seasons when a break is necessary for us, and trust that our co-conspirators will intervene when we step back momentarily. And we do the same for them whenever it is their turn to do the same.

With all our collective might, we stay in the struggle, and may our social movements be founded in love—the kind that is sometimes tough. And soft. A love that expresses itself through honest communication, collaborative strategy, consent, and community safety. Onward, we go.

helpful resources & frameworks:

- **Social Change Ecosystem** by Deepa Iyer
- **Good Care for Good Trouble** by Gabes Torres [*pay close attention to the section Reclaim the Commons*]

mutual aid request

Here in the Global South, I have been working with various communities in co-creating grassroots support systems for human rights defenders, on-the-ground organizers, and justice-oriented artists and storytellers.

In our work, we often do unpaid and dangerous work* to protect and organize with the most vulnerable communities and most endangered ecosystems.

It is my hope and mission to offer various types of support for as many members of our community as I am able, especially while they process the trauma and suffering they've been exposed to and have absorbed.

These populations have been bearing the brunt of imperial violence and regime.

The need to address and avoid compassion fatigue and burnout is high.

The need for care is high.

*** vulnerable to and targeted by state violence**

mutual aid request

With this resource along with others I made available to the community (refer to next page), my goal is to raise at least \$5,000 for my own personal sustainability and for the peer support network itself.

I ask that in exchange for your free access to this resource, you'd support us in staying in the struggle towards collective liberation, especially in the GS.

If a range is helpful: This resource would cost at least \$100 USD with the extent of labor and research it took to complete it. If you have both capacity or willingness to give more, I will be profoundly grateful for your solidarity and generous commitment to community care.

**Donation platforms:
(Please add note: 'Oscillation')**

**Venmo & CashApp handles: @gabestorres
PayPal**

past works

grief & recreation

notes on belonging

abolition + mental health

**anti-colonial therapeutic approaches to
racial & migration trauma**

seasonal depression: a survival guide

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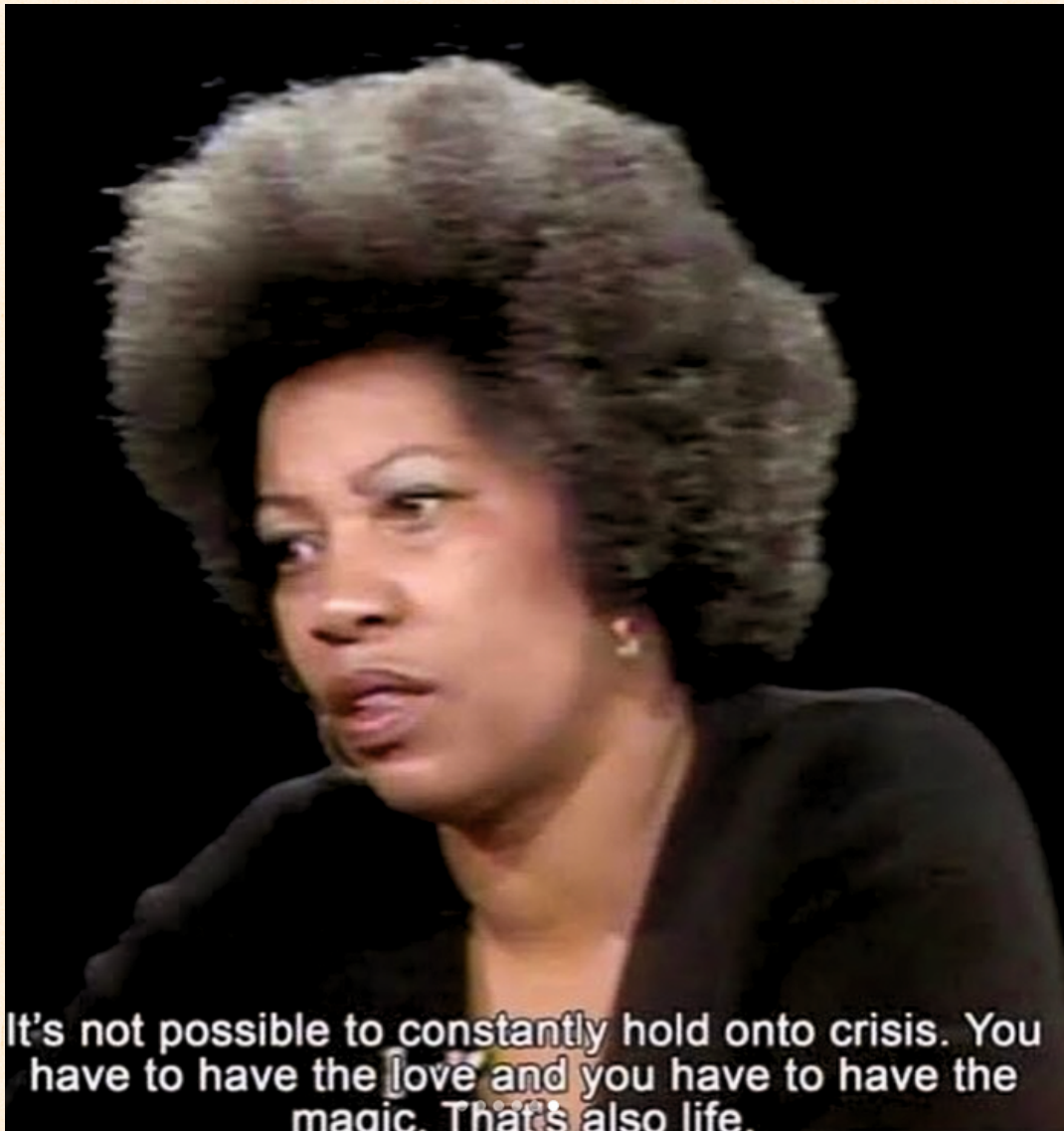
**You may also find most of my writings on
my column on **Yes! Magazine**, an independent
publisher of solutions journalism.**

cite

If you are to use any of the contents of this resource for an academic or professional project, please cite Gabes Torres.

You are welcome to post about this material and/or your reflections and findings on social media. If you do so, please tag @gabestorres

Please **reach out to me if you will be using this material for a class or speaking engagement.**



Toni Morrison's conversation with John Callaway in 1977

“It's not possible to constantly hold onto crisis. You have to have the love, and you have to have the magic. That's also life.”

oscillation

Oscillation is the nonlinear swing, the circular dance, a dynamic spectrum, or the back-and-forth movement of:

- processing and digesting collective trauma, grief, and exposure to violence and suffering,
- to taking a step back from it,
- and returning to collective, direct action.



oscillation

In this model, we are mindful of two things:

OUR BODIES ARE POWERFUL.

They have a high ability to store, remember, and externalize other people's pain and stress. This is also known as vicarious secondary stress, and if left unattended, could result in vicarious trauma.

OUR BODIES HAVE LIMITS.

It is not sustainable for us to be exposed to pain or stay in crisis for long periods of time or in high frequency.

When we choose to be trauma-informed, we are mindful of both the capacities and limitations of the human body. We recognize the need to shift (or dance) around phases without casting judgment when we or one of our community members is fatigued, activated, or burnt out: **Rest. Digest. Process. Resist.**

oscillation

In oscillation, we allow ourselves to feel what's true and what's present.

We choose to stay present with settler occupation, racism, capitalism, global imperialism, and how these larger systems of oppression stifle, harm, and even kill some of us all over the world, especially in the Global South.

At the same time, we choose to stay present with our bodies: the heaviness of our chest, the warmth of our tears, the lack of motivation to get up in the morning, the lethargy, the need to take slower breaths, etc. We confront these sensations and experiences.

But if we expose ourselves to collective pain or grief for too long, we might get too overwhelmed or overcome by the unattended stress. This has the potential to debilitate us or cause physiological ailments, inflammation, or mental health conditions that may have longterm impact.

At the same time, we avoid overstaying on the other side of the spectrum of disconnecting from the collective struggle, to the point of desensitization and inaction.

With oscillation, we choose to honor our inborn capacities and limitations as a way to sustain ourselves in liberatory movements and community-care practices.

Reflective Questions:

- How are you feeling as you begin this guide?
- How did your innermost being feel when you read or learned that we are *all* protagonists?
- How did your body feel? Where did your mind or imagination take you?
- How does stepping back from collective trauma momentarily look like, while also choosing not to turn away from the atrocities of oppression? Is there a difference? How do I sit with or even reconcile this ‘paradox’ for myself? *Tip: Engage with your proximity to power in the context of social identities, like race, class, gender, ability, etc. while thinking about these questions.*
- If you are based in the West, what did the stories and resistances in the Global South teach you in the last few months? If you can’t answer this question, reflect on why that is the case.

recommended resources:

breathe [meditation] / Alexis Pauline Gumbs & Toshi Reagon

All We Can Do Is.. Everything We Can / @artofexisting

reimagining community support beyond
“Let me know if there’s anything you need..” / Gabes Torres

rest

The practice of Rest is beautifully subjective, as the pursuit of Rest varies per person and their bodily needs. To stay in the struggle is to honor those needs.

Because Rest is subjective, it takes knowing who we are and being attuned to our bodies to consider the format or practices that bring us ease, revitalization, and a wider capacity for breath (the Tagalog word for Rest is 'pahinga,' which is derived from the word 'hinga' which translates to 'to breathe/inhale.')

To Rest is also a call to be mindful, and in some cases, to be critical. It's one thing to access the tools and resources for Rest, but it's another to consider where they came from or how they've been processed and sourced. Did you do enough research about the retreat space you're headed to, and their relationship to the land and locals? Have you considered the companies from which your items for Rest came from?

Rest is political.

We also consider that certain people can access Rest more than others. Workers, parents, healthcare practitioners, etc. are up against considerable delays and hindrances before taking much-needed breaks.

Reflective Questions:

- **What feels restful to you? If this question is hard for you to answer, explore your history or your earliest relationship with Rest.**
- **What did rest mean for your family or earliest social environment/s?**
- **When was the last time you felt truly rested? What were the conditions in place or who were the people involved that made Rest possible at the time?**
- **How can you access Rest in a way that isn't over-indulgent, over-consumptive, hyper-individualistic, or harmful to communities and ecosystems?**
- **Depending on your proximity to power and resources, how can you make Rest more tangibly possible for your community members who have limited access and capacity?**

recommended resources:

The Overview: Meditations on Nature for a World in Transition / Peter M. Murray & Atmos

The Pursuit of Rest Under Capitalism / Gabes Torres

生长 / dagou

digest

Dictionary.com: *to obtain information, ideas, or principles from; assimilate mentally; to arrange methodically in the mind; think over*

Cambridge: *to change food in your stomach into substances that your body can use*

Britannica: *to change (food that you have eaten) by a biological process into simpler forms that can be used by the body*

In this framework, Digestion is the intentional process of reviewing and (re)interpreting the events and experiences you went through or are continuing to go through, including but not limited to painful or traumatic ones.

This phase of oscillation is about metabolizing the information you have internalized or absorbed in your body.

You can Digest in solitude or with trusted loved ones, community members, or a therapist. In this phase, we bear witness and acknowledge the emotions, information, and images we've taken in, with or without our consent.

We also courageously recognize that we don't always have to make sense of certain circumstances. There are a number of times when we just need to let the senseless be senseless.

digest

In this phase of oscillation, you can journal or draw. You can create an **Emotions Body Map** in relation to specific memories and experiences.

Physiological digestion enzymatically breaks down the food we eat into nutrients that sustain and energize our bodies. Similarly in this framework, Digestion can be a mental and emotional procedure that breaks down and metabolizes our internalized experiences of pain and trauma into:

**memories that have been processed enough
to become more tolerable and
less disorienting/activating over time,**

**and/or a life force or regenerative energy that can
be used when we shift into Resisting**

These processes are only doable in the context of self-compassion, patience, and co-regulation (on this physical plane and beyond).

digest

In Digestion, we unveil and listen altogether.

We *unveil* or *bring into light* the events and things we saw, heard, tasted, or felt. We also *listen* to our bodies and how they respond to such events and things.

As best we can, we Digest without judgment and rigid expectations. We go easy.

although I refuse to over-rely on institutions for community care, here are clinical modalities adjacent to this phase of digestion:

titration, Bion's beta and alpha elements, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, narrative-based trauma therapy

Reflective Questions

- In this framework of oscillation, Digestion is a form of capacity-building. How is this process applicable and even beneficial to social-change movements?
- Look to your figures and teachers of influence in past and present revolutions. Do you notice the ways they (re)interpret and engage the current and historical states of our ever-evolving, tumultuous world? How do you think they Digested?
- What is the role of hope in this phase of oscillation?

recommended resource:

Mia Birdsong audio excerpt from *Finding Our Way* podcast episode with Prentis Hemphill [with transcript]:
“the Earth can hold every single ounce of human suffering...”

process or express!

Processing is about external expression in the forms of embodiment, creativity, spiritual practice, and storytelling.

This is a liminal space or the creative distance we intentionally and temporarily set from ongoing crisis.

Open your heart. Call in your people. Bring out your tools of art-making and spell-casting, but always remember to play within the terms and parameters of community safety and accountability.

With the intent to embody hope and express gratitude to our nervous systems, to Process is a way of (re)integrating your body, mind, and spirit — a revitalizing expression of your wholeness.

In this phase: Create. Evoke. Lie on grass. Cook. Feast. Toast to life. Make love. Sing. Dance. Shout. Draw cards. Press record. Embrace. Replenish the altar. Run. Stretch.

process or express!

invitations:

play a punk, rock, jazz, or dance song from your teenage years that you know your body will remember! mine were paramore, stevie wonder, and erasureheads!

move through it! be messy! don't forget to warm up and cool down. honor the sacred catharsis. let out the inner mammal. shake that root chakra.

a key point in this phase of oscillation:

as said earlier on page 4, “we avoid overstaying on the other side of the spectrum of disconnecting from the collective struggle, to the point of desensitization and inaction.”

so, as much as you can, create boundaries and even set a timeframe for how long and how hard you play. and remember: time is nonlinear, expansive, and deep—even while navigating in Western chronos time, [to go deeper, look into Kairos].

process or express!

suggested songs if song/s in first prompt is inaccessible:

'i'm confident that i'm insecure' [live acoustic-ish]- Lawrence

'Rise & Decolonize' - Sista Hailstorm & Julie-C

'Gaya' - Michaël Brun, Lakou Mizik, & J Perry

'CROWN' - CHIKA

'Still the One' (live cover) - Lake Street Dive

'Free' - Cat Burns

'Light On' (live) - Maggie Rogers

'Breathe It In' - Beautiful Chorus

recommended resources:

Poetry is not a luxury/ Audre Lorde

Eros and the Revolution: Why Activism Needs Pleasure

/ Gabes Torres

the harmony of particular phases in oscillation:

the Process and Resist phases can share similar practices, like protests, marches, rallies, and among other expressive tactics (more in Resist phase)

resist

Consider this phase as one of numerous templates or blueprints for resistance work. Just remember that it's of utmost importance to work within your local community and specific jurisdiction.

I won't expand on the following elements of social change movements as extensively as I usually do in workshops and strategy meetings. There is already an abundance of resources from generous organizing communities, and they will be cited here.

Consider this a map or the groundwork of resistance movements, especially if you're new to it:

root-cause analysis (or situational analysis):

A root-cause analysis is a collective analysis of the problem/s at hand; its root causes; and its underlying, immediate, and long-term effects. This includes the factors that benefit and hinder you from achieving objectives:

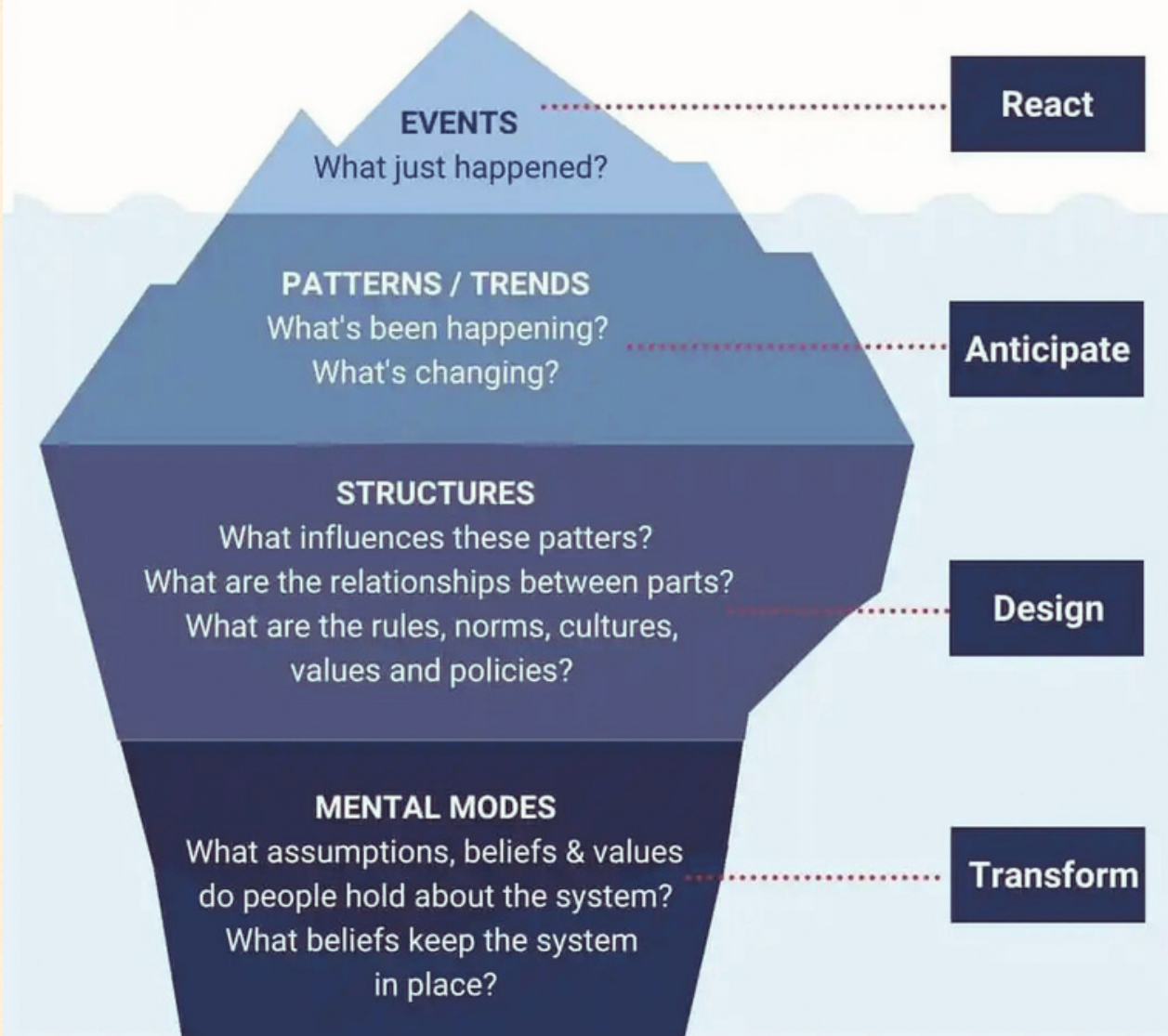
Who/what contributes to the problems?

Who/what benefits when these problem/s are maintained?

go deeper with **Mobilisation Lab**:

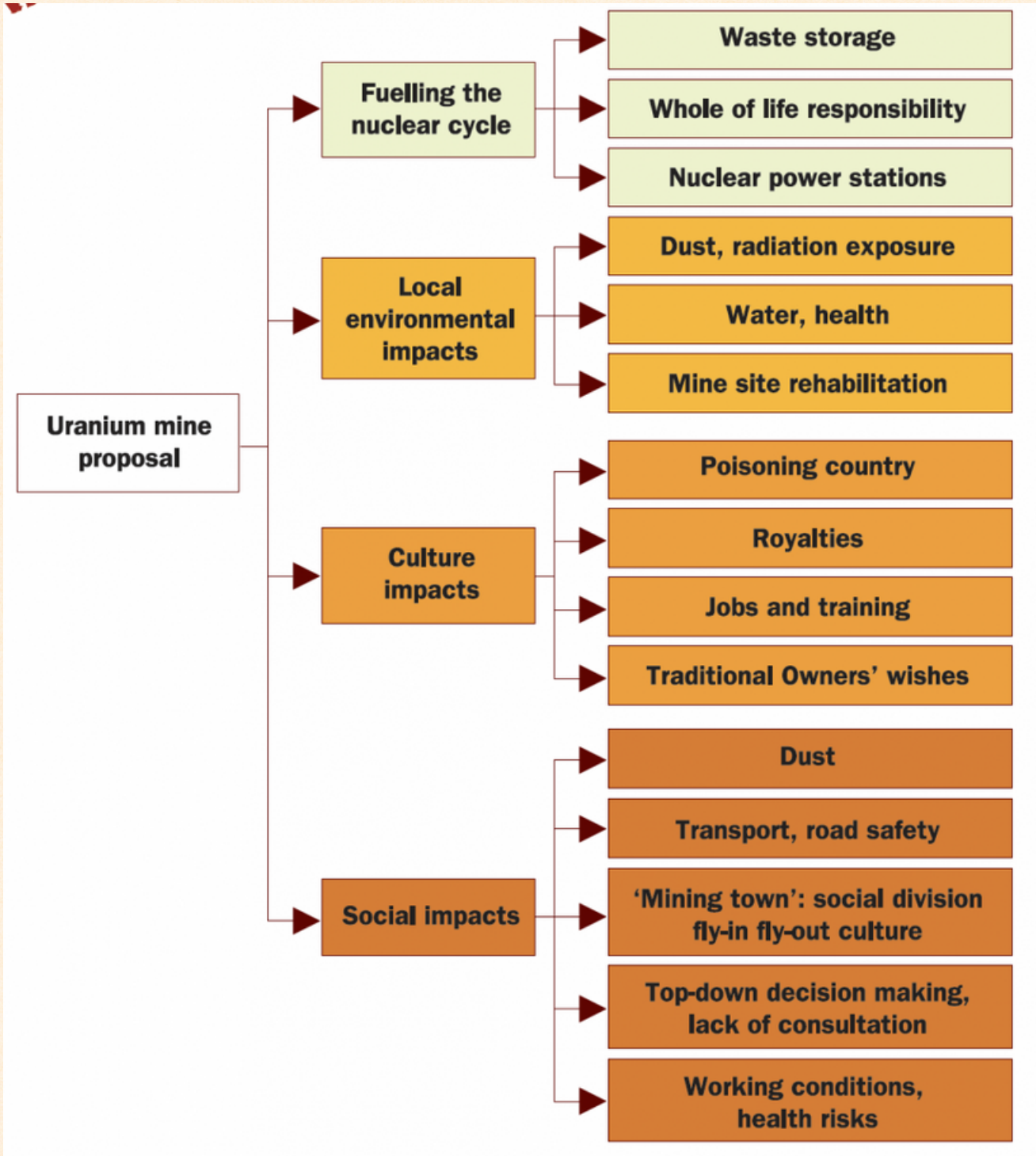
- **Iceberg Worksheet: What's the root cause of the problem?**
- **7 tools for defining your campaign problem**

WHAT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM?



from Iceberg Worksheet by Mobilisation Lab

resist



sample process guide by
the Change Agency | 'Cutting to the issue'

resist

power structure analysis:

“Power structure analysis is the mechanism that **enables ordinary people to understand their potential power and participate meaningfully** in making strategies.” — Jane McAlevey

- **people power**

Understanding your power:

Who do I know who

- **has influence?** [social, legal, institutional, etc influence] — these folks can be neighbors who happen to be managers of industries or shops
- **have certain degrees of access to information and resources that can further our campaign?**
- **Why do I know them? How? How well?**
- **How can I reach and influence them?**

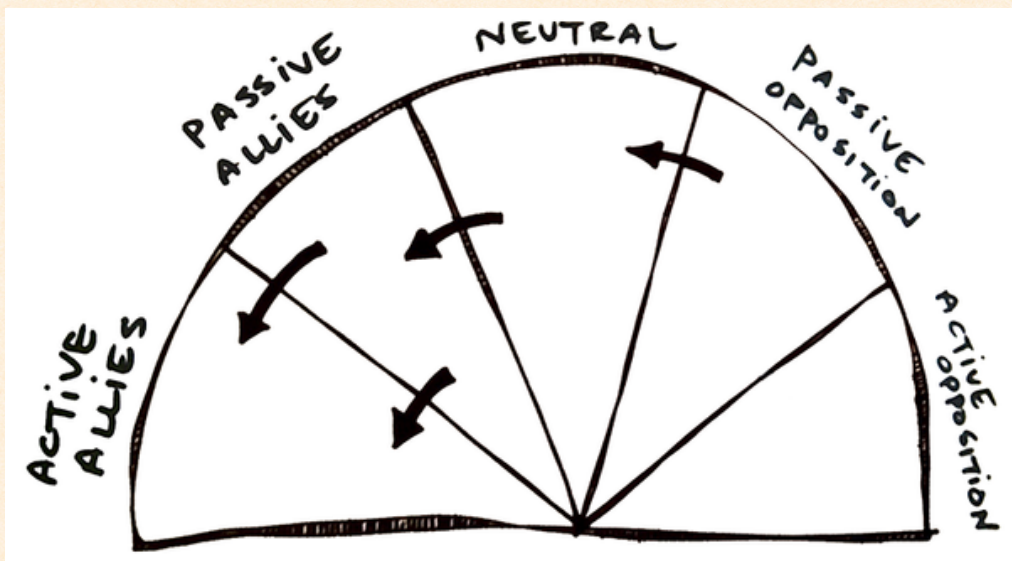
recommended resources:

page 2 of ***Study Guide for Jane McAlevey's No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age***
by the DSA Fund

resist

“Organizing is a fancy word for relationshipbuilding.”
– Mary Beth Rogers

**MAP OUT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS!
DO SOME RELATIONSHIP-CHARTING!
DETERMINE YOUR SPECTRUM OF ALLIES:**



from 350.org

Once you have a map of your relationships or social network(s), you can now determine where they land on the spectrum of allies

Beautiful Trouble: “Use a spectrum-of-allies analysis to identify the social groups (students, workers, people of color, neighbors) that are affected by your issue, and locate those groups along a spectrum, from active opposition to active allies, so you can focus your efforts on shifting those groups closer to your position.”

With a spectrum-of-allies analysis, you realize that we’re not working with binaries when we mobilize people to our position. It’s more than mere categories of “yes, they can be an ally for my campaign goal” and “no, they’re against it.” **How do we move each group just a step closer to active allyship?**

resist

cont'd power structure analysis:

- **understanding structural power: targeting**

: primary targets :

Who are the key leaders/political players who can **solve the problem, make the change we want**, and ultimately **meet campaign goals**?

This could be a legislator, a policy maker, or a CEO of a specific company. **A target has to be a person**, not city council or a board of trustees, etc.

: secondary targets :

Who keeps primary targets in their positions of power? These are stakeholders, donors, buyers and customers, board of trustees, etc.

They are pillars of support.

Knowing these secondary targets is just as important as knowing your primary ones. Secondary targets have the ability and the leverage to take primary targets' power away.

recommended resources:

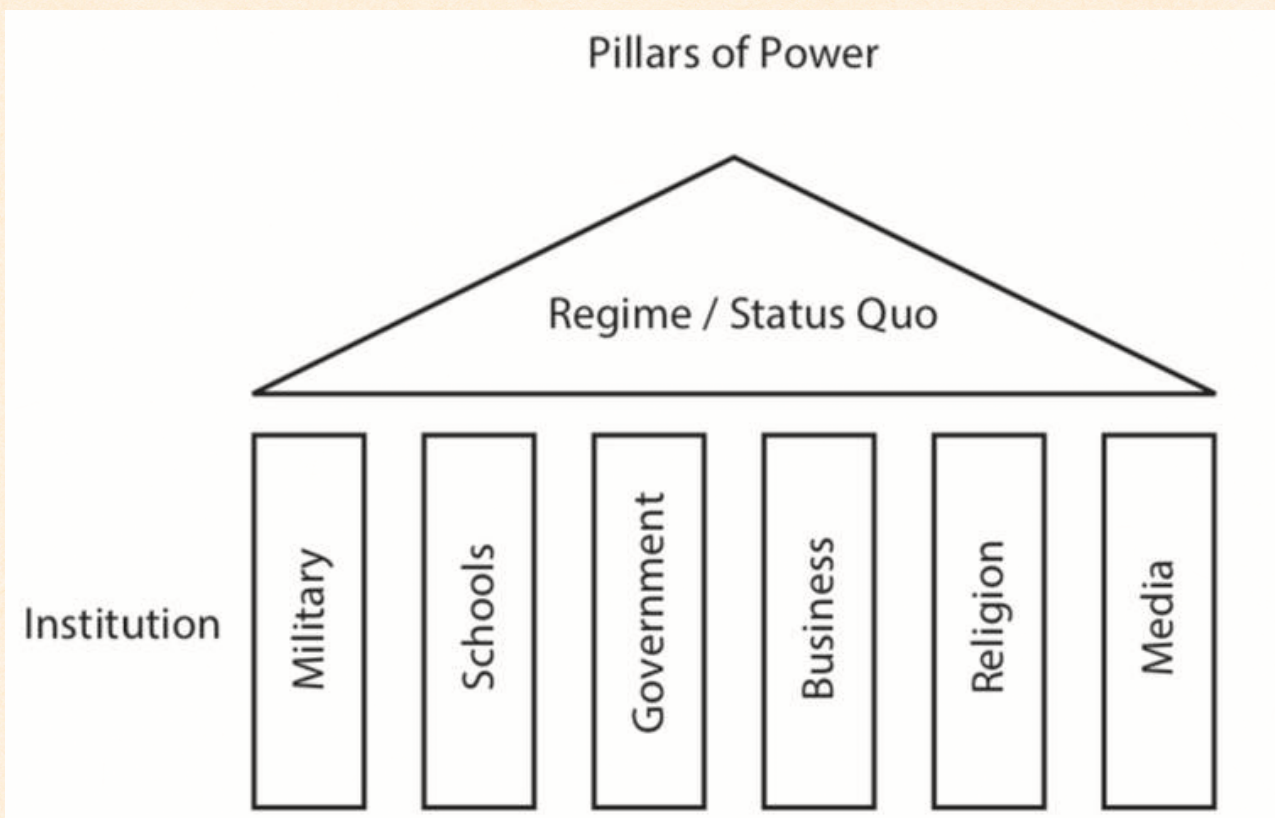
Study up on **concession costs**

Choose your target wisely / Beautiful Trouble

resist

“The most repressive mayor is powerless if citizens refuse to pay taxes. The most racist bus system cannot keep up its racist practices if its customer base refuses to ride the buses.

The cruelest warden is forced to come to the negotiating table when prisoners refuse to eat.”
—Daniel Hunter



from **Beautiful Trouble**

The pillars of support model has fueled the BDS Movement in successfully shaking the foundations of imperialist empire, like Starbucks, McDonald's, and Disney!

resist

cont'd power structure analysis:

- **understanding structural power: powermapping**

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.

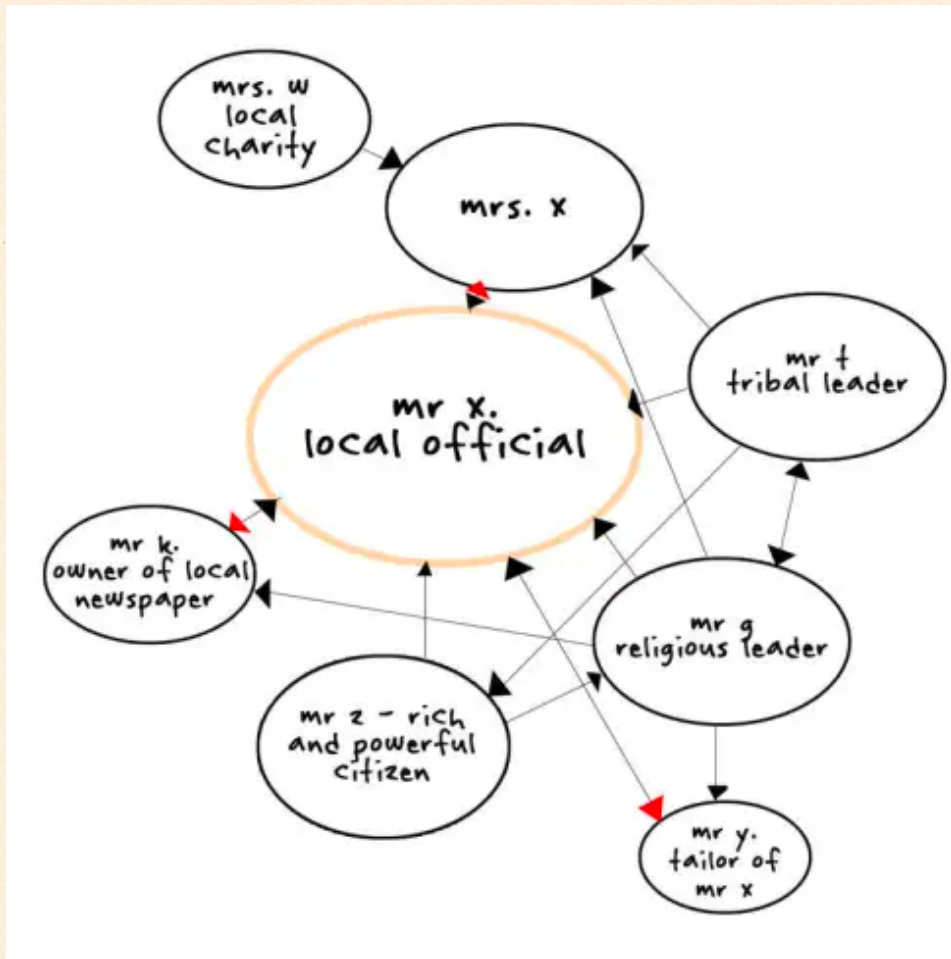
– Alice Walker

Power mapping is a tool **to identify who holds influence over your primary target**, and **how then can we influence or mobilize them towards your campaign**. This tool helps us determine which tactics to use in influencing them to back your campaign.



by **Beautiful Trouble** via **The Commons**

resist



by **Beautiful Trouble** via **The Commons**

With this tool, you map out your relationships and social groups. **Recognize how they influence your campaign whether positively or negatively.** You also determine **the degree of influence they have**, whether that's social, legal, educational, etc. influence. Do you have lawyer friends who would advocate for your campaign, or lawyers friends who you think won't?

You also map out your social groups in relation to your target. Who in your social networks does your target care about, admire, are afraid of, or benefit from?

It is imperative that you power-map in groups!

resist

building a campaign

**there are many templates for crafting campaigns! make sure to use one that aligns with your community and campaign goal!
be more fluid than rigid, but stay organized.**

CAMPAIGN GOAL = the big change we want

STRATEGY = the path to get there

OBJECTIVES = the specific achievements to get to the change we want

(objectives need to be time-bound.
role delegation needs to be clear)

TACTICS = the social action activities used to achieve your goal/s and objectives (identify the difference between expressive and instrumental tactics — diversify, diversify, diversify!)

resist

recommended resources:

Campaign Planning: How to Get Started /

Anna Collins Nham, Campaign Bootcamp

Midwest Academy Strategy Chart

S1E8: Daniel Hunter on never using the same tactic twice, undoing a “done deal” in Philadelphia /

Craft of Campaigns Podcast (Training for Change)

Campaign Evaluations: Success Indicators /

The Change Agency

Beautiful Trouble:

Choose tactics to support your strategy

Expressive and instrumental actions

**Don't expect a concrete action from
a symbolic symbol**

final notes on oscillation

I have many goals and hopes when I co-conceptualized the framework of oscillation with my clients, mentees, and students. One that I'll highlight is my enduring desire for you to stay in the struggle while staying in touch with your mind, body, spirit, and relationships.

I want you to survive, to stay true and attuned to yourself, and to remain in the fight towards our collective liberation and healing.

I trust that we have what it takes. We just need the tools and resources to believe in it and to endure.

Thank you for being here, for your receptivity, your wildness, and your love of the world.

May we all oscillate well.

**Hanggang sa tagumpay,
Gabes Torres**