



Reflections and Practices for Politicized Grief

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SECTION 1

Introduction to the Politicized Grief Healing Zine

During the summer and fall of 2020, the Chicago Torture Justice Center (CTJC) began a series of Politicized Grief communal practices for the healing and justice demands of this time. Our commitment to heal coalesced in the heat of unrest and uprising, pandemic and pandemonium. Now as ever, we are awash with loss and longing. We are swimming in rage and pain. We are generating love and power amidst constant upheaval.

Building on CTJC's innovative Politicized Healing framework, our healing practices help us move through grief in a variety of ways — including through boxing, spoken word, song, gardening, and ritual. We recognize that we process grief, pain and loss in ways unique to each of us.

As an extension of our Politicized Grief Healing series, this zine highlights some of CTJC's communal healing practices and collective wisdom.

While intended for people who have experienced loss and violence of all kinds, this zine is written especially for incarcerated survivors of police torture.

We hope that this zine can support you in your resilience and healing.

SECTION 2

Framing: Grief in the Context of Politicized Healing

"In a time when so many lives are considered ungrievable (as coined by Judith Butler), grieving is a politically necessary act. [...] Vulnerability and tenderness for each other and public grievability for life itself are some of the most profound acts of community resistance."

— Harsha Walia



How does Politicized Healing take shape in this era of uprising and protest, pandemic, and pandemonium? What is needed?

What does radical, politicized care invite, as we seek to heal ourselves and our communities?

What is Politicized Healing? ¹

Politicized Healing addresses the harm — felt by individuals and communities — caused by historic and evolving systems of oppression. From our Politicized Healing lens, we heal not just to feel better but for the sake of transformation, liberation, and justice. We heal from the traumas of centuries of systemic oppression and violence. We name, challenge, and dismantle these systems. We work to create new systems of care and accountability.

How does Politicized Healing work?

Through the practice of Politicized Healing, we can:

HEAL

engage in a self-determined process of restoring ourselves and connecting to others and what we care about.

DISMANTLE

unapologetically expose and deconstruct systems of harm.

CREATE

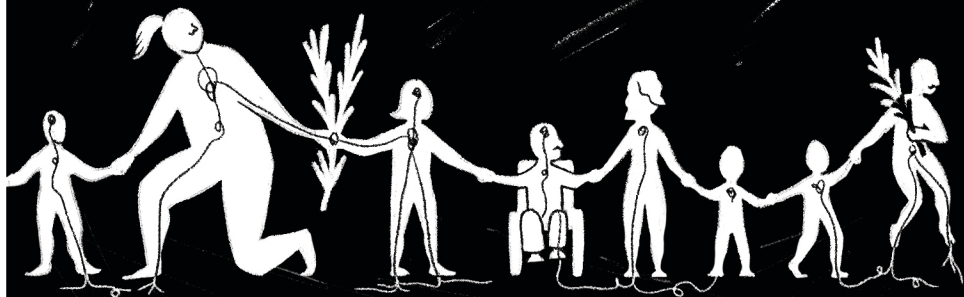
build reparative power towards new paradigms that we collectively imagine for our communities.

¹ CTJC's definition of Politicized Healing as well as the "Heal, Dismantle, Create" framework were co-created as part of a two-day workshop in October 2019 facilitated by Resilient Strategies.

What is Politicized Grief?

We know how our unrest, our pain, our loss, our trauma is deeply political. At CTJC we've begun to claim this as **Politicized Grief**. Just as our healing is political, our grief is also political. Our grief is political because in this time of global pandemic and uprising there is new grief upon old grief. New wounds upon old wounds. Wounds seen and unseen. Our grief is political because our pain, loss, and our rage extend across time and space — this grief is generational and systemic. Together rage, grief, radical care, and healing all fuel our desire and our struggle for a world in which all Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples are truly free.

Our surviving, our unapologetic truth-telling, and our power to heal reach across time, connecting past and future. Choices we make to care for ourselves and our communities, to claim our resilience and brilliance, extend across the generations as well.



And so we ground our grief healing in ancient wisdom — in the seasonal wisdom of the earth and of our bodies — yet knowing the calamity of injustice is not always as tender as the flow of the seasons. We claim the healing that is always available to us, right here right now, not from some fix that is far away or outside ourselves.

Healing can happen in a lot of different ways. Part of healing is tending to the layers of loss we have experienced individually and collectively. We experience loss not only from covid-19 and at the hands of the police, but also have endured incredible harm and loss in the courts, in the jails and carceral facilities, in our communities, and in centuries of dispossession. We seek to name and honor who and what we have lost and all that we are losing — to recognize this *as grief* — and to create and hold space for moving through grief as we nurture resilience and liberation. Grieving is part of healing.





SECTION 3

Practices for Moving Through Politicized Grief and Loss

“Grief can express itself through thoughts and feelings that seem utter contradictions.

*Love that sounds like fear,
pain that sounds like joy,
doubt that sounds like faith,
arguments that sound like prayers,
prayers that sound like earthquakes,
yes that sounds like no,
and stories and dreams and dramas and songs and poems, and, and,
and...*

In the face of this, a listener can simply be overwhelmed in the way that both a breaking wave and a slow surge can flood us out.”

— W. Dow Edgerton

We hope the following practices will support you in moving through grief and loss in whatever ways are unique and right for you.

Remember that grief is not linear, nor is it one single thing.

Grief can be accumulative, building up over time; and grief can be anticipatory, such as fear or anxiety for what is about to happen.

Grief can be disenfranchised — the grief that hasn’t been permitted or safe to express.

Grief can come out as anger and rage, laughter and relief — felt both individually and collectively.

Grief can reflect how deeply we care, a form of praise for that which we deeply love.

Body Movement Practice

"Protest is rage embodied: stomping feet, pain, and grief wrapped up and catapulted towards a belief in something better. More just. More free."

— Whitney Richards-Calathes

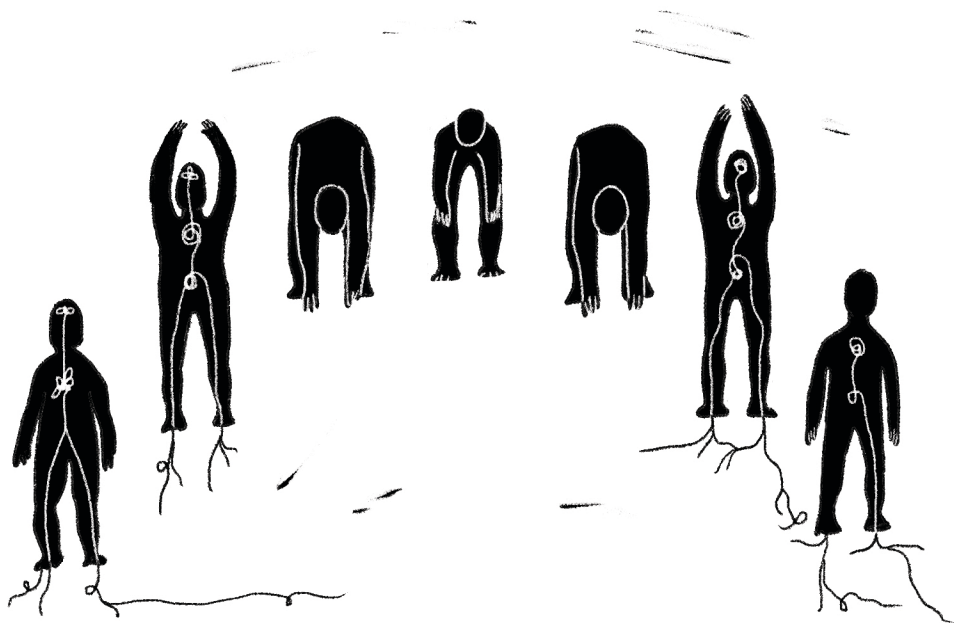
Living under current (and historic) conditions of oppression, repression, and violence can disconnect us from our feelings of aliveness. That may manifest for some folks as numbing, disassociating, overriding our emotions and sensations, a sense of sadness, or detachment from who/what we care about.

We are also constantly having to react and respond to huge amounts of incoming pressure and crisis as we navigate these various systems of harm — resulting in a feeling of loss of power or agency.

Activating our bodies is one way we can concretely feel our aliveness and generate our power. Generating power and aliveness in your body can look like many things: moving your torso, arms and/or legs while standing or sitting; walking, running, doing push-ups, stretching, practicing yoga (option on the following page). If it is difficult to move your body at all, you can invite movement simply by deepening the flow of breath through your body. Find a way to move and generate energy in whatever way is right for your body and in your setting.

Sun Salutation (modified)

The Sun Salutation is a series of postures from Yoga traditions in ancient India. There are many variations. This salutation is modified, and can be done sitting or standing.



Breathing in, raise your arms above your head and look up to the sky.

Breathing out, bend at your hips and lower your arms in front of you into a forward fold. Bend your legs slightly, gazing toward your ankles, shins or knees.

Breathing in, slide your hands up your shins and lift your chest halfway.

Breathing out, hinge at your hips and fold toward the ground.

As you repeat this cycle, try expanding your breath on each inhale. *What feels alive in your body?*

As you exhale and bend, try pushing all of the air out, forcefully from your gut, even making a grunt as the breath comes out. *What is your body releasing?*

Journaling Reflection Practice

Here are a few tools that can support deeper reflection, building upon your physical movement. *What are you feeling in your body?*

You may be feeling grief, rage, sadness, longing, hurt, despair, dissociation, joy, hope, connection, peace, frustration, overwhelm. Whatever you are feeling is okay.

You can use these prompts to continue processing your feelings. You may wish to respond by writing in the blank space or in a journal, drawing, singing, or making art.

Each of the three reflection prompts, written by Valerie Papillon, are themed around CTJC's Politicized Healing principles of: heal, dismantle, create. Each theme offers a poem by writer and poet Nayyirah Waheed.



*in our own ways
we all break.
it is okay
to hold your heart outside of your body
for
days.
months.
years.
at a time.*

— heal

Healing is difficult work. It is lifelong work. Systems of oppression like racism, policing, and prisons create additional barriers to healing for Black folks and folks of color. So, we affirm that we deserve to heal. We are worthy of healing. Though healing feels impossible at times, we affirm healing is possible for ourselves and our communities.

Fortunately, we can begin or deepen the process of healing by simply giving ourselves space to heal. A little can go a long way.

1. Think of a small example of healing you've experienced in your life. *What does it feel like to remember that you can heal?*

2. So often, healing can feel impossible because we beat ourselves up mentally for not being where we believe we "should" be. Think about your healing journey. *How might it be different if you give yourself permission to 'break' as Nayyirah Waheed says in the poem above?*

3. *What are one or two things you are healing from?*



dismantle

*when you remove them from your
nucleus.
your being is then
allowed
to
focus
its power
on
turning your life.
into.
your soul's work.
you become yours.
again.*

—decolonization | center

1. *What thoughts came up for you as you read the poem? Did it resonate with you at all?*
2. *How would your life be different without oppression? What does your "soul work" look like to you?*
3. *Think about Nayyirah Waheed's phrase "you become yours". What does this mean to you? Do you feel like you are yours? Why or why not?*

*you will find your
way.
it is
in the
same place
as
your love.*

—seek

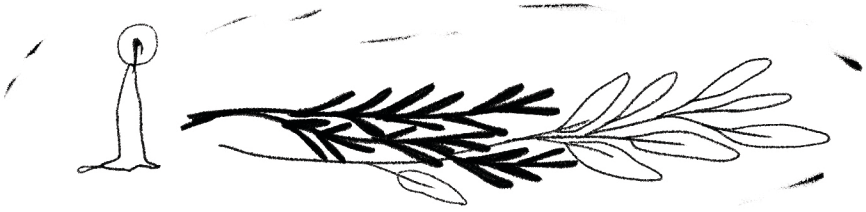


1. *What, if anything, stands out to you in this poem? What inspiration does it raise for you?*

2. Repeat the first line of the poem to yourself 3-5 times (or however many times feels right to you). *How does it feel to say that to yourself? Does it feel true? Does it feel phony?*

3. In the spirit of the poem, answer this question: *where is your love? What are you seeking to create in your life?* Dream into that for the next 10 minutes. Revisit it as often as you need to and allow it to be a grounding force of hope and inspiration for you.

Ritual Practice for Mourning and Remembering



"It is not merely OK to grieve. It is wholly necessary if we are to remain connected to our collective power, truly invested in our liberation, and whole enough to sustain ourselves in struggle. We need to grieve for those we have lost, for ourselves, for our bodies, for the land, for our families and our ancestors.

Let grief be part of the movement-building process for which we allow hallowed space, and let it build within us the compassion, wisdom, and rage that propel us into new battles."

— Benji Hart

Too often we do not have space, time, or permission to mourn. We may get messages that to grieve and to mourn is to be weak, or that it is a distraction from the things that we are fighting for. But allowing ourselves really to feel and name grief and loss helps us build "compassion, wisdom and rage that propel us into new battles." Grief can be like fuel, sustenance for our ongoing resilience and survival.

Many cultures throughout time and history have had distinct practices for public mourning and memorial. Our ancestors and spiritual teachers knew the importance of creating and holding sacred space for honoring what has been lost — those whose lives have gone before us, lands and homes taken from us, ways of life disappeared, control imposed upon us.

Through ritual and remembrance, we continue relationships

with people, places, and cultures, even when they are physically gone. We help the memory of who and what we have loved to continue living.

You can use the following ritual to honor someone(s) you have lost. They may or may not be someone you knew personally. Or instead of a person, you may wish to honor something else that you have lost — a sense of freedom, a way of life, a job, a place that was special, home, etc.

As well, this can be a ritual to help hold the collective sense of grief and loss that many of us carry, even if we do not have specific words to name it.



Identify an object that symbolizes grief or loss in your life.

This could be a photo or drawing of someone, some place, or something you love; a book or special memento from someone who is gone or separated from you; a poem or even a few words you write on a piece of paper.

Spend some time with your special object.

What is your relationship with the person, place or thing it represents?

How has that relationship changed?

Holding your object, take a breath and offer gratitude for the

love it represents.

I am grateful for _____. May the memory of _____ continue living.

You can do this as many times as you want.

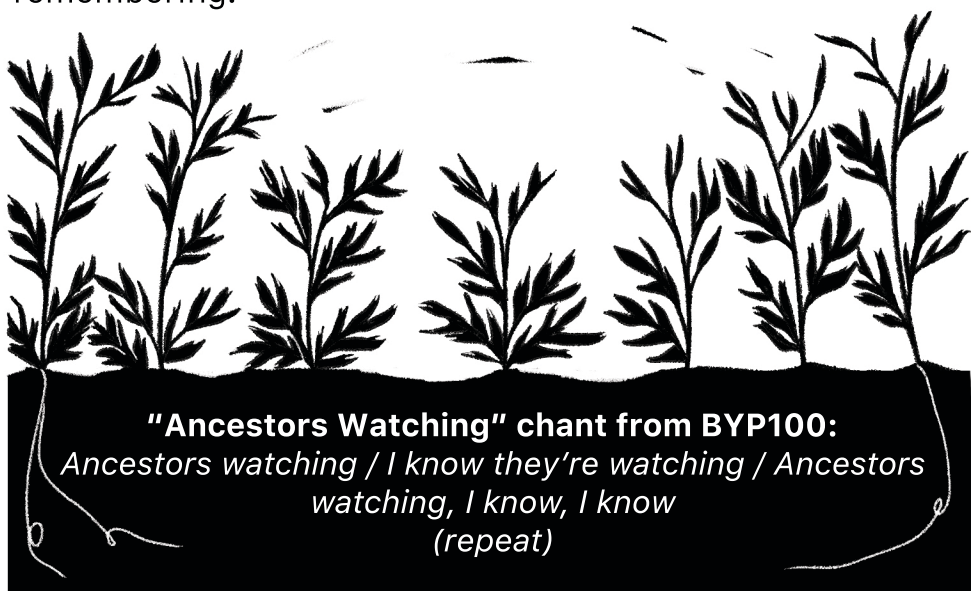
Holding your object, take a breath and name any loss or longing it represents.

I honor the loss of _____. I honor the pain of this loss. May the memory of _____ continue living.

You can do this as many times as you want.

Think of an ancestor you love who has gone before you. It can be the person represented by your special object, or someone else meaningful to you, or a public figure you admire.

Call on this ancestor to be with you in this time of remembrance. Thank them for witnessing you in the sacred act of grieving. Ask them for what you need next as you go forward. Thank yourself for bearing witness to the power of remembering.



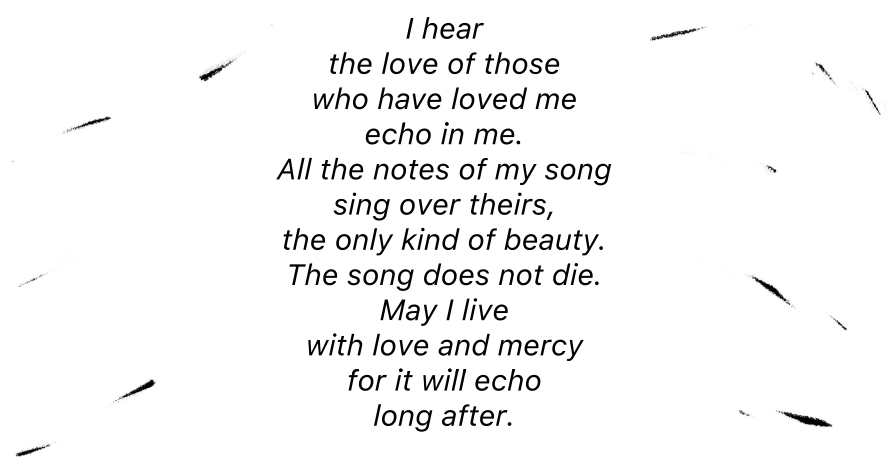
Closing Blessing for Grief Healing

Grief and healing are not a one and done. Grief Healing is ongoing and unfolding.

Grief can continue to find expression throughout our lives in new and unexpected ways. Healing is something we can continue to practice, to build, and to live into.

There may be wounds that never completely heal, just as are losses we never forget.

Healing can be the acts — big or small — that we do to remember and fight for life alongside pain and loss.



*I hear
the love of those
who have loved me
echo in me.
All the notes of my song
sing over theirs,
the only kind of beauty.
The song does not die.
May I live
with love and mercy
for it will echo
long after.*

— Steve Garnaas-Holmes

However these practices feel for you today, may you be comforted and empowered in your grief healing journey.

May the pain, loss, unrest, and rage be fuel for you in the struggle for a more just and liberated world.

Know that you are worthy of healing. You are worthy of grieving. You are not alone.

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