

REPORT:



# A REGIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDERS SCHOOL



*Let there now be friends here!  
It is time to know our faces.  
With flowers alone our song will soar.  
We may have gone home, but our word will live on here on earth.  
We will leave our sorrow: our song.  
By this it will be known, the song will be true.  
We may have gone home, but our word will live on here on earth.*

[Fragment of Náhuatl song]<sup>1</sup>



All the knowledge shared here is the result of the presence and narratives of all those who participated in the Regional Feminist Movement Builders School, organised collaboratively by the Feminist Centre for Racial Justice (FCRJ) and Just Associates (JASS). The following is an interpretation and recounting of this shared knowledge in the practice of language justice:

***"The territory is here, where our feet are".***

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<sup>1</sup> Honouring the original communities that inhabit the meeting space of the Regional School for the Construction of Feminist Movements, Mexico City, the memory of this meeting of realities of the Latin American region begins by invoking the space with a chant from the Nahuatl tradition, culture and language of a large part of the original peoples of this Metropolis, and continues the recounting of learning with a numbering in the Mazahua language -1 d'aja, 2 yeje, 3 jñii, 4 nziyo, 5 ts'ich'a-. The Mazahua population living in Mexico City is a people that represents the point where ancestral knowledge, resistance and community sustainability thanks to the commercial activity of Mazahua women converge, as well as experiences of colonial racism, patriarchal violence, forced migration, discrimination and persecution in their place of destination, Mexico City.

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# D'AJA,

## CONTEXTS

# FEMINISM AND ANTI-RACISM AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

- The plundering of capital and assets from the countries of the Global South –hand in hand with tax evasion by large corporations operating in those countries–, extracts resources that are needed to finance public services and sustain economies centred on guaranteeing human rights and the environment.
- Feminist and gender justice movements, especially those led by young feminists, black feminists, indigenous women, women with disabilities, migrants and refugees, “informal” workers, sex workers, are driving transformative social change and have shown themselves to be leaders for social change<sup>2</sup>.
- The autonomous mobilisation of feminism has been a decisive factor in explaining policy change against violence against women at domestic and transnational levels, regardless of political parties, the actions of women in government positions and factors such as national wealth.
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-rights actors have exerted increased pressure against rights and justice, and state responses to the pandemic have also deepened the existing criminalisation of certain communities<sup>3</sup>.
- Amidst the hyper-visualisation of violence against racialised people that has taken hold in public opinion, racialised communities around the world responded with protests in solidarity with the *Black Lives Matter* movement in the United States. At the same time, “highly mediatised images of the murder of black women, men, children and transgender people have forced us to reflect on the material and immaterial factors that have created the world we live in today”<sup>4</sup>.

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2 In 2021, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) reported that 99% of foundation and development aid grants still do not go directly to feminist and women's rights organisations, and that groups working on intersectional forms of marginalisation (LGBTIQ, indigenous, young feminists and sex workers) receive even less funding.

3 Between 2013 and 2017, the anti-gender movement received more than USD 3.7 billion in funding, more than three times the amount allocated to LGBTIQ groups worldwide in that period.

4 Adam Bledsoe and Willie Jamaal Wright (2019): The anti-Blackness of global capital, Florida State University, USA.

# GENDER JUSTICE MOVEMENTS AND RACIAL JUSTICE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

- In recent years, a strong offensive of anti-rights, anti-gender and gender ideology 'movements' has been implemented in the region, financed by colonial global capital.
- The mass media with the longest trajectory and media reach in the region are part of national oligarchies, have high levels of concentration of power, with characteristics that obey the patriarchal system and conservative editorial lines. Added to this are the messages of digital *influencers* who misinform about feminist and racial justice movements.
- Latin America and the Caribbean is experiencing a relevant moment of diverse forms of communication through "alternative" feminist media that seek to vindicate the issues of women, trans women and the LGBTQ+ community in media content and public discussion.
- Public policies have started to develop in several countries in the region ("sometimes opportunistic, sometimes real, generally under-funded and under-executed"<sup>5</sup>) that add a state and legal framework that needs to be implemented and enforced.
- In some countries where there are racialised communities that escaped from slavery to form organised communities in spaces of resistance –quilombos, palenques, bateyes– such as Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, they have won some collective rights to land and culture. In other countries in the region where Afro-descendants are recognised as both ethnic and racial groups, collective rights have been won simultaneously with other rights to combat racism and discrimination, Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador. And in countries where people of African descent are not recognised as ethnic or racial groups, they have not obtained these collective rights or rights to address the effects of racial discrimination, as in Venezuela and Mexico<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Florencia Roitstein and Andrés Thompson (2022): Building the Field of Philanthropy and Gender Justice in Latin America and the Caribbean, ELLAS - Women and Philanthropy.

<sup>6</sup> Juliet Hooker (2008): The struggles for collective rights of people of African descent in Latin America.

- Although the Latin American and Caribbean women's rights movement has been a protagonist of important social changes taking place in the region, there is a fragmentation of the struggles due to the infiltration of racism, coloniality and transphobia of the patriarchal capitalist system in the ranks of the feminist movement.

## **SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXTS OF SOME COUNTRIES IN THE REGION**

Some considerations of Latin American political history that were mentioned during the School process to situate the narratives and discussions:

- The development of public debates on the experiences of the diversity of people and communities that inhabit Brazil and the incipient institutionalisation of public entities with the aim of advancing gender issues were interrupted after the impeachment of the president in 2016. Since then, there has been a progressive dismantling of the government agenda to promote rights related to gender, diversity, ethnic and racial issues, as well as environmental and territorial issues, a situation that was further aggravated by the outcome of the 2018 presidential elections, maintaining the situation of violence in the country, where political leaders are openly assassinated.
- The 'Colombia of nobodies' is the name given to the nation whose government is administered by the first black female vice-president, hand in hand with a left-wing president, both of whom took office only in 2022.
- In 2022, Rodrigo Chaves was sworn in as president of Costa Rica, an economist with a history of harassment and an openly sexist and aggressive discourse.
- Guatemala experienced a paradoxical electoral process in 2023, which highlighted the absence of the rule of law, the failures of its electoral institutions, the fragility of its democracy and the predominant structural racism. However, for the first time in the country's history, indigenous and rural communities organised in the Movement for the Liberation of the Peoples (MLP) competed in the electoral process with the proposal of a Popular and Plurinational

Constituent Assembly (ACPP) to agree on a plurinational State for the country.

- In 2009, Honduras voted on a law banning emergency oral contraception. The then president said it was against women's sexual and reproductive rights and vetoed it. Two months later, he was overthrown in a coup d'état. Although democracy returned to the country and the current government of Xiomara Castro promised women's rights, the right to emergency contraception has still not been restored.
- In 2019, Afro-Mexican peoples and communities were constitutionally recognised in Mexico "as part of the pluricultural composition of the Nation", "in order to guarantee their self-determination, autonomy, development and social inclusion", after more than 400 years of invisibilisation and exclusion, and after the constitutions of Veracruz, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Mexico City made this recognition in their localities. But in the places where the communities are established, there is no access to services, coupled with the violence inflicted on the community by the activities of criminal groups and exploitation.
- The institution in charge of combating and eradicating discrimination in Mexico –the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (Conapred)– is headed by an indigenous woman, but this institution does not have a sufficient budget and has no influence on the actions of the state.





# **YEJE,**

## **THEORETICAL- METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE REGIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDERS SCHOOL**

Based on the interplay of experience and theory, the Regional Feminist Movement Builders School moved back and forth between the particular and the universal, the concrete and the abstract, the individual and the public, the personal and the collective, the local and the global, the national and the transnational, based on a theoretical framework that integrates the following approaches and principles:

- Intersectional Approach / Interlocking of Oppressions
- Feminisms with a Surname: Anti-colonialism and Anti-racism
- Collective Knowledge, Situated Learning and Non-Extractivism
- Transnational Vision of Thematic Focuses



# JINI, DISCUSSIONS AROUND THEMATIC FOCUSES

# SITUATED KNOWLEDGE:

## A REGIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDERS SCHOOL AND ITS PARTICIPANTS

The path of the experience of the Regional Feminist Movement Builders School began with recognising, naming and situating those who inhabited this space for five days in Mexico City.

The initial reflection of this journey began with the enquiry into the first racial justice experience of the fifteen activists from Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and the Dominican Republic, who work for racial justice at the intersection of feminist, queer, anti-black and anti-indigenous approaches. From 1970 to 2022, experiences of racism and discrimination, next to their mothers and grandmothers, opened the eyes of activists to patriarchal and racial injustices, and sparked a political awakening by raising awareness of racialisation and the need to do something about it.

Accompanying other women and racialised people, the example of the struggles of their ancestors and participation in networks or collectives were the initial responses to the need for action, turning to the collective to make informed decisions and build identity as activists. In other words, individual struggles led to collective struggles, in participatory spaces to find answers about the nature of inequalities, where people learned to "stand up", to speak out, to express themselves through art, to recognise otherness and to find themselves in it or in relation to it.

From conversations about particular experiences as individuals, as activists, and from national histories in relation to political systems, transnational denominators of inequalities and violence emerged, leading to the realisation that activists' experiences are not isolated.



# ANTI-BLACKNESS AND GENDER IDEOLOGY

In these reflections on the commonality of particular and national experiences, the conceptualisation of **anti-blackness** and **gender ideology** were presented to delve into racialised experiences within the capitalist-colonial-heteropatriarchal system in the Latin American and Caribbean region, as strategies of organisation, control, criminalisation and elimination of otherness, with the aim of feeding and maintaining the system with the bodies, territories and resources of racialised communities and women.

Latin America and the Caribbean were described as a completely anti-black, racist place, with a civilising project built on colonial foundations, in which blackness is made invisible and erased through strategies of marginalisation and criminalisation, and in which the population seeks to approximate whiteness in order to access a sense of humanity.

It was observed that this civilising project of the region's modern states places *mestizaje* as the best option for indigenous peoples, who are identified as victims of the system and obstacles to progress in a discourse that extols interculturality while excluding diversity and autonomy, exploiting the particular identitary expressions of indigenous communities through folklorisation.

The discussion led to the detection of the apparent contradiction of the capitalist-colonial-heteropatriarchal system as it manifests itself in the different Latin American countries: On one hand, there are the tactics of assimilation, *mestizaje* and interculturality and, on the other hand, the invisibilisation of otherness and the elimination of blackness; but it was resolved, by analysing the experiences in common, that such contradiction works for the system of oppressions, by marginalising black communities and indigenous communities, while exploiting their bodies and their resources, and keeping their struggles splintered.

When talking about the intersection of gender in this context, a similar tactic of the system of exploitation of bodies, resources and expressions of identity became evident: While people and communities not obedient to the gender binary system are invisibilised, discriminated against and violated, through systematic marginalisation and criminalisation of diversity, veiled by discourses of defence of the family –“Don't mess with my children”– and gender ideology –a

derogatory term to invalidate all sexual dissidence–, gender parity and the representation of women, including gender diversity in some spaces, are also promoted at the institutional level, with the backing of states, as long as they are assimilated and adapted to the dominant political systems of capitalist-colonial-heteropatriarchal.

The discussion around the intersectionality of race and gender, and how the respective oppressions cut across the realities of black, indigenous, women, dissidences and feminist people and communities, also led to the existence of racist, colonial and gender ideological dynamics and discourses within the same communities and movements:

- There is internalised racism and patriarchy within black and indigenous communities.
- Indigenous women's leadership is challenged on the grounds that gender movements are colonising.
- There is a white feminism that manifests itself as a racist feminism, in which the gaze is centred on gender from a cis-gender perspective, and other possibilities of sexual disobedience are left out, reproducing the theory of coloniality.

# TRANSNATIONAL VISION FOR UNDERSTANDING AND CONFRONTING THE SYSTEM OF OPPRESSIONS

As they shared and listened to their experiences, questioned by the facilitators on the systemic background of the concrete experiences, the participants of the School began to glimpse the links and interconnection of actors at a global level, the borrowing of language and the similarities –intentionally or not– in the dynamics of the oppressions experienced in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

In addition to this, there was also an interaction and exchange with the community of activists in Mexico from Serapaz, the Indigenous Women Lawyers Network (*Red de Abogadas Indígenas*), Women for the Memory of Cherán (*Mujeres por la memoria de Cherán*), *Racismo Mx*, and the Observatory on Racism in Mexico and Central America (*Observatorio de Racismo en México y Centroamérica*).

*\*The history and example of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Mexico was present in the discussions throughout the week.*

Narratives of struggles from each community and in the different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean revealed the need for a systemic and transnational understanding of what activists face in the region:

- Some discourses of the system romanticise the communities and, on the other hand, the mass media describe them as savage and violent when referring to the struggles for autonomy and self-determination.
- The exploitation of bodies and the extraction of resources, as well as the violent practices of police, army and criminal groups, cause forced internal displacement of indigenous and black communities.
- Governments and companies, in complicity, offer discourses of – false– development to enter communities with the aim of

dispossessing them of resources and/or exploiting their territories and bodies.

- Megaprojects are fed with the territories, natural resources and bodies of communities.
- The capitalist system, protected by State policies, profits from the illness of communities.
- Laws and public policies, elaborated without the people who represent the peoples and communities, become instruments of exploitation and dispossession, with promises and discourses that offer development and inclusion.
- Racism is not named and by not naming it, communities are rendered invisible.
- When laws and public policies come to recognise black and/or indigenous communities, in practice the violation of rights and lack of accessibility is maintained.
- To gain access, some people are forced to leave their communities and face criminalisation of the livelihoods they find outside.
- The capitalist-colonial-heteropatriarchal political system offers quotas of participation (race, gender, class) without allowing for the transformation of the system, and indigenous, black and women's communities are competing for rights to be made visible, recognised and prioritised.

However, there were also some glimpses of the achievements of the gender justice and racial justice movements:

- Organisations in the region have accompanied communities in their struggles through litigation, mediation, dialogue, advocacy and capacity building for negotiation.
- Collective work on diagnoses and strategic planning for communication and visibility, international advocacy and popular education for the construction and strengthening of the movement.
- The collective struggles of indigenous communities in the region, such as EZLN and the Cherán community in Mexico, have succeeded in defending territory, and in exercising autonomy and self-determination for the people, becoming references and examples of movement building.
- Through alternative media, media issues and trends are discussed in order to name and combat racism and gender ideology discourses.



- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a phenomenon began to appear that brought racism and the global solidarity of the diaspora into discussion, starting with the mobilisations in the USA, and racism began to be talked about insistently in different spaces.

Once installed in this transnational vision, those who participated in the Regional Feminist Movement Builders School conceptually constructed the system they face and the articulated actions needed to resist, fight and transform it:

## THE HOUSE OF OPPRESSIONS

In multiple exercises to get to know 'the beast': the capitalist-colonial-heteropatriarchal system, the analogy of 'the house of oppressions' was approached based on the intersections of race, gender and class, to explain its foundations –capitalism, heteropatriarchy, colonialism and white supremacy–, what its structure is –institutions: family, culture, state, religion, media–, how it is sustained –laws, public policies, judicial structure–, and what its strategies are –narratives, ideologies, movements–.

Based on this analysis, it was concluded that today, after centuries of explicit narratives about white supremacy, *mestizaje*, interculturality and the unification of Latin American nations, there is a different exercise of power and oppression, built on diversity and inclusion, but with the ownership of bodies, territories and resources of racialised people, which manifests itself in an institutionalised anti-racism with a staging that folklorises, exoticises and instrumentalises indigenous and black communities, women and dissidences, while extracting resources and dismantling autonomy and self-determination.

It also led to a discussion on the assimilation of such a house and the sense of contradiction it provokes in being part of it and at the same time being activists struggling to leave and transform it, having been born and having constructed identities within this system of oppressions. Looking inwards, within communities and movements, features of this racist, colonial and heteropatriarchal capitalism can be identified.

# VISIBLE POWER, HIDDEN POWER AND INVISIBLE POWER

The exercise of power was analysed in its four expressions: visible power –governments, courts, police–, hidden power –capital and its political and economic interests–, invisible power –cultures and beliefs–, and systemic power –capitalist-colonial-heteropatriarchal-racist system–.

By unpacking some of the national histories presented as case studies, in Brazil, Guatemala and Mexico, light was shed on the intersections and the intervention of these powers, their dynamics and strategies.

## VISIBLE POWER

Governments, corporations and regulatory agencies in complicity, acting through affirmative action to protect the interests of capital by maintaining the established order. Government authorities at the federal and local levels, and actors with a presence in both the private and public spheres of power.

## HIDDEN POWER

*Sicariato* (hired assassination), macro-criminal or parastatal powers. Global actors –businessmen and developers– seeking to maintain their economic power. Media as an arm of the systemic power of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism.

## INVISIBLE POWER

Systemic cis-generic context, cis-patriarchy. Developmentalism, productivism, extensionism, media narratives and pedagogy of cruelty.

## SYSTEMIC POWER

Capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, extractivism, utilitarianism and exploitation of nature, systems that dispose and exterminate. Dehumanising and dominant hierarchy and its manifestations: transphobia, patriarchy and heteronorm.

From this analysis of power dynamics based on the case studies presented, the participants observed other powers of resistance, opposition and struggles against the powers of the capitalist-colonial-heteropatriarchal system. Calling it 'positive power', the power of community leaders, activists, civil society organisations, researchers and academics who break with the institutionalised and state-protected powers were mentioned.

And when asked about the ways in which communities and organisations organised themselves to make themselves heard, resist, promote their interests or challenge the dominant power in each of their areas, they underlined the success of organising for collective denunciation, and the defence of the territory and spirituality of the communities, with the help of tools for consultation, participation, information and alternative communication to the mass media that respond to the hegemonic power.

However, questions were also raised about the challenges faced in these struggles, such as the disconnection of the struggles of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, the lack of dialogue and exchange between peoples and territories, the visibility of points of conflict at the intersections of race and gender, and the fragmentation of struggles.

The participants concluded that it is important to work in a network, which allows the complaints to be made visible in a transnational way, and that these articulations need to be sustained and transcended through common agendas.

## **TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENT-BUILDING STRATEGIES**

Understanding that a movement cannot be built on solid foundations without understanding power and how it operates on bodies, communities, assets and territories, participants were challenged by FCRJ and JASS facilitators to reflect on the framework of transformative power and collective power building to dismantle the house of oppressions and transform the system.

From their role as experts on movement building –*referring to the staging of the talk show as one of the methodologies for discussion, and the exchange of individual and collective knowledge that was manifested throughout the week*– they remembered and acknowledged those who have inspired them, those who have gone

before them in the struggles and movements for racial and gender justice.

This reflection, together with the recognition of the work of the ancestors, what they shared about their experiences, and the discussions about oppressions and the system that inflicts them, contributed to the group's conviction of the need to articulate themselves transnationally, and they began to plan the next steps and the movement-building strategies they want to implement. The strategies they named were:

- ★ Self-knowledge of people, communities and movements, learning from each other, situating knowledge and recognising both intersecting identities and oppressions.
- ★ Documentation of the system, its strategies and actors, but also of struggles and movements.
- ★ Organisation for short-, medium- and long-term mobilisation at different levels, strengthening of multiple leaderships that renew themselves and mechanisms for resolving internal conflicts.
- ★ Building transformative collective power to resist, challenge and transform the system.
- ★ Long-term common agenda, based on common intersectional analysis, shared objectives and policy project(s).
- ★ Creating safe spaces for all and networks that allow for articulations and generation of concrete strategies: Working inside the 'house of oppressions' and creating spaces outside of it.
- ★ Strategic communication within the movement and outside, to break down racist, patriarchal and colonial taboos and ideologies.
- ★ Generating alliances with people and strategic actors in different spaces.
- ★ Collective coordination for the elaboration of risk analysis, and security, protection and self-defence measures as a political and collective care strategy.
- ★ Self-care and collective care at the heart of struggles and movements, dialogue, setting limits and starting to take care of bodies, minds and spirits in the face of capitalist demands for productivity, understanding that rest and celebration are spaces of collective healing and containment.





***"How do we make revolution while loving each other?"***