Topic 2

Anti-racism and Decolonial Perspectives

Radix

At the Escuela Radix school, we strengthen feminist and LGBTQIA+ organisations, promoting meeting spaces, horizontal community learning, and encouraging the creation of networks between organisations.

Topic 2

Anti-racism and Decolonial Perspectives

Module 1

Maps of Power: Understanding Structural Racism in Organisations

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Introduction

Objectives

Our training programme seeks to strengthen the capacity of feminist and LGBTIAQ+ organisations to integrate anti-racist and decolonial perspectives into their internal workings.

It comprises four interconnected modules that offer methodological support based on radical listening, repair and collective care.

Through participatory dynamics, accessible theoretical resources and artistic practices, the aim is to highlight the colonial and racist structures that permeate CSOs, challenge unequal power relations, acknowledge the pain and harm, and develop specific tools to transform them.

This approach places the embodied knowledge of racialised, transgender, migrant and disabled people at its heart, recognising the central role they play in building fairer and more sustainable alternatives.

Objectives

- To critically analyse the racist and colonial dynamics present within CSOs, promoting collective assessments that highlight the actual distribution of power and strengthen organisational anti-racism practices.
- To strengthen a culture of radical listening and ensure the redistribution of voice within organisations, placing historically silenced voices at the heart of the process.
- To design and implement dynamic reparations agreements that enable conflicts and inequalities to be addressed in an immediate, sustainable, and non-punitive manner.
- To promote radical imagination as a political tool for redesigning organisational structures based on care, cooperation and the diversity of historical realities, wounds, rhythms, and bodies.
- To support CSOs through individual and group mentoring sessions that provide safe, critical and creative spaces for reflection, action and mutual care, promoting sustainable change in the short, medium and long term, as well as the creation of strong anti-racist networks.

What do we set out to do? What do we aim to achieve?

- The participating organisations will carry out collective assessments of the dynamics of power, racism, and coloniality within their internal structures, allowing them to identify privileges and inequalities in a context-specific manner.
- Each CSO will have active agreements on reparations and the redistribution of power, developed through participatory processes to address conflicts and prevent the repetition of harm while strengthening coherence between discourse and practice.
- Inter-organisational networks will be promoted during online and in-person seminars, fostering anti-racist cooperation and ensuring the sustainability of these processes beyond the project.

Content-centred approach

1 Anti-racism and decoloniality

As Fanon and Mbembe note, coloniality created a realm of non-being for Black and non-European bodies. Dismantling this racist framework — as Iki Yos Piña highlights — means understanding that we do not live in a postcolonial era: the mechanisms that shape and monitor our bodies remain in place. Here, anti-racism and decoloniality will not merely be theories, but everyday practices that challenges power imbalances and potentially harmful dynamics within organisations.

2 Care at the heart of the process

Drawing inspiration from bell hooks, who speaks of love and care as political acts, and from Mia Mingus, who proposes interdependent care as a form of justice, we will place the sustainability of life at the heart of our collective work. Care will serve both as a source of support and as a strategy of resistance to challenge the systematic neglect of racialised and dissident bodies. Understanding how care work is not only feminised but also racialised will help us broaden our perspective and recognise it as an essential element that deserves to be valued and questioned.

3 The body and feeling as spaces of knowledge

In the face of epistemic racism and epistemicide, we will uphold the body and feeling as legitimate sources of knowledge. As Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa teach us, emotion and embodied experience are places of memory and critical thought, beyond the grasp of colonial logic, which prioritises abstract reason. We recognise that objectivity is not a possibility, that each of us perceives the world from a situated bodily experience, through specific memories. All of this is a political issue and worthy of attention.

4 Healing processes that begin in the present

We will not wait for a perfect future to repair the damage: reparations must begin now. Following Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who understands justice as an immediate practice, we shall focus on specific measures: redefining the discourse, acknowledging pain, naming the harm, and weaving together acts of care and dignity in the here and now. In recent times, particularly with the rise of social media, cancel culture and performative politics, reparation has come to be seen almost as synonymous with recognition. We must acknowledge what has been done and the privileges that have led to a certain situation. However, all too often this leaves the affected person or community feeling emotionally and socially deprived. What else is necessary?

5 Understanding the need for long-term processes

It will be emphasised that transformation processes are continuous: what was not built in a day cannot be dismantled in a day. As María Lugones notes, this apparatus of power has been built up over years of colonial and patriarchal history. Therefore, dismantling it is also a complex task that requires perseverance, reflection, and sustained action. We also firmly believe that complexity should not dampen our enthusiasm or deter us from embarking on this journey.

6 Responsibility rather than blame

The workshop will focus on shared responsibility, drawing on the work of Donna Haraway and Mia Mingus, to acknowledge our involvement in systems of power and actively transform them, without being paralysed by guilt, but instead mobilising ourselves through collective responsibility. As many anti-racist activists say, we shall prioritise racialised well-being over white guilt.

7 Situated intersectionality

This will not be treated as an empty concept or an academic fad. We will return to the perspective of the Combahee River Collective, which framed intersectionality as a practice of political organisation, resistance, and community support. Drawing on Crenshaw, we will emphasise that intersectionality refers to concrete experiences, not abstract checklists of oppressions.

8 Gender and race as mutually constructed categories

Emphasis will be placed on the fact that gender is always racialised, as argued by María Lugones and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí. This has real-world implications for feminism and for transgender and queer people, because the way gender categories are constructed affects who is heard, recognised, and protected within political and organisational spaces.

9 Restorative justice

Justice should not be understood merely as punishment or future redress, but as a restorative practice that addresses the harm in the here and now. Following the perspectives of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who defines justice as ‘making life liveable’, and thinkers such as Angela Davis, who challenge the punitive model. This will be a way of mending the bonds broken by colonial, racist, and cis-heteropatriarchal practices, with a focus on transforming relationships rather than perpetuating punishment.

Details of the training content

The training programme explores in depth how structural racism and colonial frameworks permeate the inner workings of social organisations. Serious questions are asked of the hegemonic frameworks that universalise white-Western experiences and ways of life, whilst marginalising other realities within the processes of struggle. Using critical and creative tools, we will encourage a situated examination of the organisational context, particularly regarding racialised, migrant, transgender, disabled, and neurodivergent bodies that form part of the collective that we belong to. All this content will help to develop a more mindful and responsible perspective on the day-to-day functioning of these spaces.

Throughout the training programme, we will closely examine the changing nature of participation and decision-making, alongside other operational aspects of organisations. We shall explore radical listening as a political practice, recognising the value of embodied experience as a legitimate source of knowledge. The dynamics that lead to certain individuals dominating the conversation will be analysed, and strategies for identifying them will be put forward. We will also study how spaces considered 'neutral' perpetuate racist, ableist, and colonial dynamics. These reflections will be accompanied by concepts that will help us understand potential forms of epistemic and practical violence.

Finally, the training content will closely examine the processes of reparation and the creation of new, fairer and more sustainable forms of organisation. We will explore the difference between guilt and responsibility, promoting practical ways to repair the damage and harm caused in the present without resorting to punishment or paralysis.

We shall also focus on radical imagination as a political tool for redesigning structures based on mutual care, cooperation, and the recognition of diverse rhythms and bodies. Through creative practices and collective imagination workshops, we will strengthen our ability to dream and build organisations that prioritise life.

Module 1

Maps of Power: Understanding Structural Racism within Organisations

What will we explore?

- Structural racism and institutional racism.
- Gender coloniality and its impact on feminist and LGBTIQA+ organisations.
- The relationship between gender and racialisation, and how this materialises in specific problems and possibilities in the Spanish context.
- The difference between symbolic and structural anti-racism.
- Hegemonic white feminism: universalisation and marginalisation of other realities.
- Queer spaces: what about racialised bodies?
- Looking beyond hegemonic types of feminism: racialised and migrant resistance.
- Beyond criticism: racialised voices proposing radical hope to build new forms of organisation.

Introduction

This module encourages us to take a long hard look at how racism shapes everyday life without anyone having to state it openly. Using specific examples, it shows how institutions (housing, schools, the police, border control) operate according to the same logic that benefits some people whilst pushing others into precarious circumstances. The key here is not to look for ‘individual culprits’, but to understand the system that leads to certain lives being treated as important and others as expendable. We also explore the idea of whiteness as a source of privilege that is often experienced unconsciously, precisely because the system is designed to make it seem normal. The cited authors help us to understand this normality not as innocence, but as part of the workings of power. The module does not seek to point fingers, but rather to show how racism masquerades as common sense, bureaucracy, neutrality, and even good manners. As the reading progresses, it becomes clear that these structures affect both those who are disadvantaged by them and those who are supported by them. Structural racism is not a historical accident, but a way of organising the world that still determines who has access to welfare today. The module provides a framework for understanding how such inequalities work. With this roadmap in hand, we can open up the possibility of transforming them through our day-to-day and organisational practices.

The module further encourages us to rethink gender from its colonial roots, demonstrating that many of the ideas now regarded as ‘natural’ were actually tools of control imposed on various peoples. When examining the experiences of racialised women, transgender people and non-Western communities, a picture emerges that challenges the notion that the male/female binary is universal. The text shows how mainstream feminism ignored these stories and shaped its agenda based on a white experience that failed to represent everyone. Rather than repeating that partial view, the text recovers voices and struggles that have expanded our understanding of body, identity, and freedom. Intersectionality is also presented not as a buzzword, but as an honest way of looking at how forms of oppression intersect in the real world. Black transgender narratives, African cosmologies and decolonial resistance shed light on the fact that there are ways of experiencing gender outside of the Western framework. Furthermore, spirituality is highlighted as a political tool that sustained entire movements when the colonial world sought to destroy any form of collective dignity – and this continues in the present day. This spiritual and communal perspective reminds us that resistance is not merely a theory: it is also about care, memory, and connection. Therefore, the module encourages us to see that transforming colonial gender structures is part of the same effort to dismantle the racism that created them. Above all, it suggests that imagining freer futures means reclaiming knowledge that has always existed, despite colonialism seeking to erase it.

1 Different types of racism

I Structural racism

Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton, in the book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, demonstrated how racism is not sustained solely by individual behaviour, but through the institutions that shape everyday life. Racist people are not even required for racism to exist: the system perpetuates it automatically. This means that racism should not be understood as an isolated phenomenon manifested solely by a group of 'bad people', but instead as a system that organises and dictates social, cultural, economic, and political life.

This institutional decision determines who has access to fundamental rights and how resources are distributed. For example, housing policies have historically segregated non-white communities into more deprived neighbourhoods, which has an impact on the quality of education, access to healthcare, and job opportunities. Similarly, within the justice system, people of colour often face disproportionately high rates of imprisonment, among other forms of institutional violence. This phenomenon creates invisible yet pervasive barriers that restrict the opportunities and access available to non-white and/or migrant people.

It must be understood that structural racism should not be reduced to the common notion that 'someone is being racist'. Although individual racism does exist, what really perpetuates this oppression is the deeply entrenched functioning of the State as a colonial system – ever since its foundation – as an entity that governs people's lives. The processes that perpetuate these inequalities do not stem solely from personal animosity or malicious intent, but arise from the hierarchical structures of the modern society that we live in. Therefore, this racial hierarchy favours white people, even in the absence of explicitly racist attitudes. This is because capitalist states reproduce exclusion, impoverishment, and discrimination across multiple domains.

This also becomes normalised through the 'neutrality' of human rights discourse. While these international rights are presented as a universal and unquestionable framework, their historical application shows that not all bodies have been regarded as equally human. The promise that 'we are all born equal' overlooks the contexts of inequality that racialised people and migrants are forced to navigate. This narrative of egalitarian universality is a form of gaslighting. Whilst inequalities persist and people of colour become aware of them, it is extremely common for their lived experiences to be dismissed. This leads people to doubt that racial discrimination actually exists, because 'we are all born equal'. Therefore, the power of this gaslighting tactic ensures that, whilst the narrative perpetuates this distorted reality, immigration, prison, labour and border policies reveal the opposite. Human rights, far from alleviating the structural harm caused by States, allow this abstract universality to keep inequalities intact under the illusion of impartiality. What is presented as a 'colourless' ethic is actually a structure that perpetuates violence. Consequently, to fully understand how the hidden strategy of structural racism works, it is essential to analyse the position of privilege underpinning it: whiteness.

II Whiteness

Whiteness, as a concept, does not merely refer to having white skin, but to a set of privileges that are constructed through white supremacy and institutionalised within the workings of modern societies. The beginnings of the theoretical unveiling of this position were developed by the Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. Fanon revealed the symbolic existence of a *realm of being* and a realm of *non-being*. Whiteness represents the *realm of being*—the humanised—whereas the non-white, the colonised, is relegated to the *realm of non-being*—the dehumanised.

White lives are more highly valued in this colonial universalist system because they have been defined as the standard of humanity. Therefore, being white confers a number of 'invisible' advantages that manifest themselves in everyday life: from preferential access to education, employment and housing, to more favourable treatment from the judicial authorities. These benefits do not depend on whether people are good or bad, but on the colonial structure itself, which normalises these privileges. Simultaneously, for whiteness to amass all this prosperity, it must do so at the constant expense of the needs of racialised people and/or migrants.

Therefore, it is interesting that, when discussing racism, it is often assumed that it is a problem exclusive to people of colour. Houria Bouteldja, spokesperson for the Party of the Indigenous of the Republic in France, confronts us with an uncomfortable truth: whiteness is not only a position of material privilege, but also a moral *comfort* zone sustained by fear, denial and historical amnesia. His reflection on 'white unease' appeals to that vague sense of awareness which knows—even if it does not want to admit it—that its well-being is built upon colonial violence and its contemporary legacy. Bouteldja lays bare the internal tension of the white subject, caught between the desire to preserve their comfort and the fear of losing it when the racial order is called into question. This fear is the psychological glue that binds structural racism together: a fear that creates distance, breeds suspicion towards non-white bodies and reinforces the need for institutional control. At its core, this discomfort (this burden) is the existential cost of inhabiting supremacy without acknowledging it. Therefore, Bouteldja calls for an ethical dismantling: the possibility for white people to take responsibility for their history, not out of guilt, but out of an active sense of conscience:

> *Some knowledge lies deep down at the bottom of your soul. In your grea est depths. This knowledge is passed on. A heritage. Otherwise, would you call it "a burden"? You know what crimes have been committed in your name, or with your complicity. It's not a memory that is immediately conscious. It is diffuse. It lies dormant. Sometimes, it opens an eye and quickly closes it again. Your eyes are wide shut. Fear is undefinable. It's the malaise of whiteness. The mind suppresses but the heart races. It recognizes in any non white face, be it in the factory at school, or in the street, a survivor of the colonial enterprise, at the same time as it recognizes the possibility of vengeance. This is why you are afraid. Must you be reassured?*
>
> *You are afraid but you hold on to your comfort. This is your dilemma. You don't want to give up on the infinite privileges of colonial domination. Your privileges are material, statutory, institutional, political, symbolic. Within the same social standing, it is always better to be white. The first of your privileges, and by far the most precious, is life. It is priceless. It is protected by your morals, your laws, your weapons. Your death is a fatality that hurts your narcissism. On an individual level, you do not exist. You are a collective power. You exist only when upheld by national or imperial powers, which guarantee your supremacy. You are the absolute, the centre, the universal. When you contemplate the world, you deplore the distance that the relative,*

> *the peripheral, and the particular must still travel to catch up with you. You know you're white when you marry a West Indian, when you share a mafe with your Senegalese friend, or when you walk around in Saint-Denis, Bamako, or Tangiers. You always know who's white. You always know who's not White. We too have the same knowledge. Paradoxically, you 'discover' that you are white when we call you White. In reality, you discover nothing. You simply recoil at being named, situated, your guilt thereby uncovered and your immunity rendered vulnerable. I will readily concede this to you: you didn't choose to be White. You're not really guilty. Just responsible.*

The emotional legacy that Bouteldja describes is evident in the everyday gestures analysed by Francisco Godoy in *Usos y costumbres de los blancos* (Customs and Habits of White People). Whereas Bouteldja sees white fear as a symptom that acknowledges the illegitimacy of white power, Godoy argues that white privilege is the habit of occupying the world without facing structural barriers and of, subtly, always being at the centre. Therefore, whilst Bouteldja focuses on the internal dimension of supremacy (fear, unease, dormant complicity), Godoy reveals its external form, its social body: free movement, ease of access and the normalisation of a white presence as something natural. The appendix to this module includes an interesting quote from the book *Usos y costumbres de los blancos* (Customs and Habits of White People). Both authors help us to understand that whiteness is both a system of victimising sensibility and a regime of access, in that it enables people to move through the world with the assurance that they will not be held to account. This intersection between the emotional and the material shows that white supremacy is sustained not only through violence, but also by the 'subtlety' of everyday life. The convergence of both analyses reveals that structural racism endures precisely because whiteness has made its privilege seem natural, rational, and morally legitimate.

In addition to this emotional and material dimension of structural racism, there is the distinction put forward by Andrea Rea between structural and symbolic forms of racism – an important nuance for understanding how racial hierarchies become normalised in Europe. Rea shows that structural racism operates through policies, laws, and institutional mechanisms that categorise, distribute, and restrict people's lives, ensuring that certain individuals are treated as 'foreigners' even when born and raised on European soil. The stereotypes or consciousness that legitimise this inequality, by associating certain groups with threats, backwardness or cultural incompatibility, and turning these narratives into common sense. This combination creates a paradox: whilst institutions claim to uphold equality and human rights, they create legal categories and cultural representations that systematically exclude those who do not fit the mould of the 'legitimate European'. As Rea notes, these two layers—the material and the symbolic—feed into one another: the law creates the categories that are subsequently stigmatised by racial stereotypes, and these stigmatising stereotypes justify the tightening of the law. Therefore, contemporary European racism no longer needs to talk about 'races' to create inequality: it is enough simply to turn culture into a boundary and difference into a deficiency. Within this framework, human rights serve as a universalist rhetoric that masks their selective application, as they continue to function as a privilege for some and an unfulfilled promise for others. It is precisely in this dual layer—the structure that excludes and the symbol that normalises—that we can understand how the contemporary matrix of racial privilege operates.

Thus, full belonging is still associated with whiteness, not with citizenship. It is not a coincidence that the latter is referred to as 'nationality' and that the concept of a nation is closely associated with a particular racial group, language, customs and way of life. It is in this tension — between what the law promises and what the social gaze allows — that it becomes clear how the distinction is still maintained between those who can move through the world with ease and those who must constantly justify their existence.

Table 1 in the annex reveals how whiteness not only allocates resources, but also shapes social expectations regarding what is considered a ‘right’ or an ‘opportunity’. What amounts to struggle and resistance for people of colour is seen as normal by white people. This structural imbalance can only be reversed if we commit to dismantling racism by deconstructing whiteness as the central pillar of humanity. Social organisations, particularly those seeking to bring together anti-racist, feminist, and class-based struggles, must understand that it is not enough simply to denounce exclusion: we must work towards actively recognising the privileges that create it. Godoy’s critique calls for precisely that: to politicise white privilege, to make it visible, and to treat it as a symptom of the system. Herein lies the potential for change, because once privilege is no longer invisible, it can begin to be challenged collectively. The ethical and political challenge is to turn this awareness into action: into community-based practices that disrupt the perpetuation of the privileges that uphold the racial hierarchy. Only then can a truly equitable society be imagined a society in which justice does not depend on inherited privilege and *comfort*.

2 Gender as a colonial construct

I Racialised people and the hidden side of gender

Gender did not exist universally before colonisation. It was a complementary 'cistem' to the colonial project, imposed in tandem with racism, to classify bodies and justify the domination of some over others. In her article *Coloniality and Gender*, María Lugones explains how gender cannot be conceived of as an autonomous category separate from race. Her core thesis is that the cisgender binary (man/woman as opposing and mutually exclusive categories) was imposed as a tool of the colonial system to establish the behaviours of white bodies as cultural norms against which modern societies were measured. Therefore, Lugones identifies a visible side of gender, which encompasses the well-known gender roles (civilised behaviour) for white bodies, and, on the other hand, a hidden aspect, which once again relegates racialised bodies to dehumanisation. **Table 2, included in the appendix** to this module, explains the distinction between these areas, which are similar to the 'realm of being and non-being' that Fanon first identified.

When Lugones discusses gender coloniality, she emphasises that it is not simply a matter of adding 'gender' to race and class analysis. Gender and race were constructed together within the same modern-colonial project. This implies that any attempt to conceive gender as a universal system arises from a colonial perspective, rooted in the assumption that whiteness is synonymous with intelligibility. From this perspective, the binary gender system (man/woman) is not simply a system of roles, but a colonial device that distributes humanity: it determines who is considered a fully recognised 'man' or 'woman', and who is excluded from that recognition, placed in the zone of non-being as 'primitive', 'hypersexual', 'servile', 'morally deficient', or even 'dangerous'.

One of the social movements to perpetuate this racism the most has been hegemonic feminism. Since its inception, white experiences have been posited as universal. Speaking on behalf of 'all women' is a political stance that fails to take gender coloniality into consideration. The problem with this is that, consequently, only the experiences of white, middle-class women (as human beings) are validated, and therefore, political demands and agendas are aligned with them. This alleged universality masks racial violence and legitimises an interpretation of gender that functions as a colonial boundary. Thus, the coloniality of gender is not merely oppression directed at women and racialised 'females' (who are situated outside humanity and closer to animality), but an entire framework where whiteness determines which behaviours are deemed civilised and proper, and which lives are structurally excluded from compassion and humanisation.

II Feminism and intersectionality

We have already explored how hegemonic feminism emerged as a political movement that denounced the inequalities arising in the visible sphere of gender. Namely, a critique of the constraints and restrictions that affect white women. However, this perspective never questioned what was happening in the non-visible realm of gender, where racialised bodies were not recognised as 'women' or 'men' in Western terms, but rather as labour force, exoticism, servitude, or a threat. Classical feminism was able to advance its agenda precisely because there was a racial infrastructure underpinning its progress: while white women demanded education, citizenship or access to the labour market, those very jobs that were ‘freed up’ were shifted onto Black, Indigenous, brown and migrant women. In other words, the emancipation of some women is built on the ongoing exploitation of others. Bouteldja poses another question that challenges conventional colonial logic: 'Can we be feminists without perpetuating racism?', noting that white feminism not only ignores the coloniality of gender, but also benefits from it. This criticism is not just symbolic: it affects resources, decision-making, and the distribution of power within feminist organisations, where women of colour have historically been treated as labour rather than as political actors.

Sojourner Truth, with her memorable speech *‘Ain’t I a woman?’*, denounced the racism inherent in feminism as early as 1851 by demonstrating how the experiences of Black women fell radically outside the parameters of fragility, purity, and femininity that white feminism employed. Her speech was not a moral appeal. It was an early political statement that gender could not be understood without race, and that colonial hierarchies shaped the lives of Black women in ways that mainstream feminism refused to acknowledge. Decades later, the *Combahee River Collective* took up this struggle and argued that these forms of oppression were not cumulative but simultaneous, insisting that their liberation as Black lesbian women necessarily entailed the abolition of racism, capitalism, and the patriarchy. Its 1977 political statement introduced a profoundly materialist understanding of the interdependence between systems of power and asserted that '*until Black women are free, none of us will be* free', because their position embodied the point of greatest tension within the web of oppression.

Kimberlé Crenshaw later theorised this collective understanding under the term ‘intersectionality’, demonstrating how the law and institutions caused specific harm when the interplay between race and gender was ignored. However, as many Black and Global South female scholars have pointed out, intersectionality was quickly co-opted by white academia and turned into a descriptive framework that rarely brought about any real transformation of the hierarchies within the movements. This co-option allowed many organisations to adopt the language of intersectionality without changing who made the decisions, who received the resources, or which bodies remained central and which were marginalised. Nowadays, there is a critical consensus within the anti-racist community: without a redistribution of power, intersectionality becomes an aesthetic tool that masks the colonial nature of gender rather than dismantling it. Recognising this history is essential to understanding that intersectionality emerged as a practice within the struggles of the Black community, not as a corporate or academic concept.

Given this history, it is worth asking: shouldn’t we abandon the idea that feminism can liberate all of us equally? Moving forward, how should we approach this framework, which was largely constructed on the basis of whiteness and colonialism? Mikaellah Drullard argues that mainstream feminism has become a language of progress that acknowledges blame, but does not redistribute power. Perhaps part of the problem lies in their very understanding of time: this narrative of ‘waves’ that progresses linearly, as if each stage were always better than the last, reflects a deeply modern and colonial logic. From this perspective, Black, migrant, transgender, Indigenous, and disabled experiences always appear 'out of time' — as if they did not belong to the story. But what if the problem is not the diversity of these experiences, but rather the framework that attempts to organise them? Unlike this progressive, binary view, transgender and non-binary experiences offer a cyclical understanding of gender, one not rooted in the colonial essentialism that requires a division between 'women' and 'men' in order to exist. Maybe the challenge is not to fix feminism, but to make room for other political languages that can capture the complexity of our bodies and our stories.

III The proximity of Blackness, the transgender, and the non-binary

Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's work helps us to understand that we were not always 'men' or 'women', and that this broader gender spectrum actually really existed. In *The Invention of Woman*, what she uncovers completely overturns what we take for granted: gender was not always the organising principle of life, nor is it a universally applicable category. Contrary to the stereotype, there were communities on the African continent – particularly among the Yoruba communities studied by the author – where no one was treated as inferior or superior simply for being a 'man' or a 'woman', because those categories were not central to understanding who was who. What really mattered in this world were things like age, lineage, whether you were older or younger than someone else, your role within the family or in rituals, but not your sexual body. Oyěwùmí reveals that the Yoruba word for 'person' (*ẹ̀nìyàn*) does not denote gender, and that even clothing, tasks, and everyday language were not divided into 'masculine' and 'feminine' categories. No one thought that a person menstruated or gestated simply because 'she was a woman'; it was simply a physical characteristic, not a social identity. What came with colonisation was the idea that the genitals were the centre of everything, and that depending on which ones you were born with, you were assigned a specific place within the family and in society.

Coloniality continues to inflict profound intergenerational trauma on racialised bodies today. C. In *Black on Both Sides*, Riley Snorton demonstrates that the relationship between Blackness and transgender identity is not merely an identity overlap, but a shared history of dispossession, surveillance, and the struggle to escape them. For Snorton, transgender identity becomes Black because transgender identity (as it is understood in the West today) was constructed on the basis of medical and colonial ideas that had already been tested on enslaved Black bodies: bodies turned into objects, turned into experiments, turned into frontiers. The lives of Black transgender women thus emerge within a system that first invented race and gender as means of regulation, resulting in a dual exclusion that is both an act of violence and an opportunity for reinvention based on ancestral worldviews. Alok Vaid-Menon's poetry (shared in the module appendix) sheds light on the emotional side of this experience, showing how gender dysphoria and diaspora are two wounds that constantly intersect: feeling like a stranger in one's own body, feeling like a visitor in the country where one lives, and feeling displaced even in the language one speaks. In *Identity Blues*, Alok writes that diaspora and dysphoria 'have always made us feel like strangers in our own bodies', reminding us that the question 'where are you from?' is also a question about gender, belonging and, above all, humanity.

Alok's prose reveals that a racialised transgender body is, first and foremost, a displaced body: a body that learns to inhabit itself from a place of vulnerability, rootlessness and suspicion. That sense of alienation is not merely emotional, but historical: it is the same feeling that has permeated the bodies of Black people in the diaspora, who have become 'guests' in their own bodies following centuries of dispossession, the severing of family lineages, and colonial control. In this sense, the connection between Black and transgender identities is not a mere coincidence, but a shared history of being excluded from the framework of humanity that the West considers legitimate. This is where Akwaeke Emezi offers a perspective that escapes the colonial framework responsible for this deeply painful feeling. In *Freshwater*, Emezi depicts a body that is neither stable nor binary, but plural, spiritual and multifaceted, inhabited by *ogbanje* forces that challenge the Western notion of a coherent, unified self. For the author, identity is not defined by gender but by presence: ‘I am a spirit, and spirits have no gender’ – a statement that completely dismantles the notion that transgender identity must be explained within the European biomedical framework. From this perspective, the Black body is not a glitch in the system, but a realm of cosmologies that have survived in the face of colonial violence. Thus, what Alok refers to as ‘foreignness’ finds an alternative interpretation in Emezi's work: we are not foreigners because we fail to be ‘normal’, but because we were never part of the Western categories designed to exclude us.

When we look more closely, it becomes clear that the connection between Black and transgender identities lies not only in the violence these bodies endure, but also in the potential to transcend the colonial gender framework. Alok notes that the question ‘Where are you from?’ is also a question about gender, because both categories (origin and gender) were imposed as boundaries to control racialised bodies. In another post, Emezi reveals that outside the Western framework, there are forms of non-binary subjectivity that do not need to be explained through suffering, medical transition, or dysphoria, but rather through spiritual, ancestral, and community-based connections. These perspectives reveal that Black transgender identity is not a deviation of the Global South, but the living continuity of knowledges that were violently suppressed in order to fabricate the colonial order.

What we now call non-binary identity is not a postmodern innovation, but rather a historical legacy from several communities that lived out fluid roles without needing to label them as exceptions or individual identities. Therefore, when people talk today about ‘returning’ to non-binary identity, for many communities in the Global South this is not about innovation, but about remembering a world that existed before colonial imposition. Comprehending this genealogy transforms non-binarism into a political instrument for recovering the relational logics that colonisation interrupted. From this perspective, non-binary identity ceases to be merely an identity label and becomes an act of ontological decolonisation.

3 Looking beyond feminism: racialised and migrant resistance

I Transgender resistance

Transgender resistance, particularly when emerging from racialised and marginalised communities, has a complex, deep-rooted history, shaped not only by visible acts of struggle, but also by survival strategies that challenge the power structures that have sought to marginalise them. The stories of transgender people have consistently been erased and stigmatised, both within LGBTIQ+ movements dominated by white, upper-middle-class voices and within the broader context of social resistance. However, transgender struggles have been, and continue to be, vital in challenging and dismantling colonial gender structures. One pivotal moment in the history of transgender resistance was the founding of STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) by Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, key figures who fought for the rights of transgender people while also becoming advocates for sex workers and people of colour in New York during the 1960s and 1970s. What Sylvia and Marsha did was more than a demand for visibility. It was a radical claim to dignity in a system that stripped them of their fundamental rights, pushed them to the margins, and subjected them to daily violence.

Sylvia Rivera's story, like that of so many other transgender people of colour, is one of resistance and survival in the shadows. As she herself recounted in a quote included in the appendix to this module, transgender and non-binary people are forced to live on the margins of 'normal' society, turning to sex work out of necessity (sex work is work!). This left them doubly vulnerable: on the one hand, racism and transphobia excluded them from mainstream spaces, and on the other, abolitionist laws criminalising sex workers exposed them to systematic abuse by the police. Despite this, the transgender resistance was not confined to public demonstrations, but was expressed consistently through the mutual care and solidarity that spaces such as STAR encapsulated.

This model of transgender resistance, rooted in collective care, reveals that the struggle for transgender liberation was a civil rights issue, and that learning how to create havens of resistance on the margins turns love and care into acts of subversion. The refuge that STAR provided was not just a physical shelter, but also emotional and symbolic, where transgender people could find sustenance and acceptance of their complex and diverse identities. This kind of resilience can be seen in other key figures such as Marsha P. Johnson, whose activism demonstrates how Black transgender people, in particular, faced the brutality of a system that dehumanised them on the basis of both their race and their gender.

One of the most radical aspects of Sylvia and Marsha's struggle was their constant challenge to an LGBTI+ movement which, at the time, was too focused on the struggles of middle-class white people. Although many of the demands made by transgender people were ignored or down-played by gay rights movements, they refused to accept a perspective that failed to acknowledge the intersection between racism, poverty and transphobia. The slogan ‘true liberation will not be achieved until all of us are free’ became not only a transgender rallying cry, but also a call for racial and class justice – a demand that remains relevant in today’s transgender movements.

The history of transgender resistance is not only a history of confronting violence and exclusion, but also a history of reinvention. Over the decades, transgender people have succeeded in transforming narratives about gender, the body, and identity in ways that challenge the binary and normative logics imposed by gender coloniality. In this sense, transgender resistance is simply a struggle for inclusion. It is an act of constant creation: the creation of new potential worlds where gender is not defined by conformity, but by desire, fluidity and bodily autonomy. The transgender struggle is a struggle for a radical rethinking of our notions of humanity, for a world where gender is not a category imposed from outside, but one that arises from the unique realities of each body, each story, and each individual. In this way, transgender resistance—particularly from racialised and marginalised people—continues to pave the way for decolonisation, enabling us to imagine a better future.

II Spirituality as an organisational tool

Another alternative way of confronting coloniality is through ‘witchcraft’. The Haitian Revolution is one of the finest examples of how spirituality can become a deeply political tool for organisation. While France was celebrating the ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen’ (a text that proclaimed universal equality whilst continuing to enslave Black people), the anti-racist revolution of the era was taking shape in Haiti. It was at the Vodou ceremony in Bois Caïman in 1791 that the priestess Cécile Fatiman and the priest Dutty Boukman gathered hundreds of slaves to spiritually seal their commitment to rise up against the French Empire. Fatiman performed a ritual that represented a unifying framework, a common language and a sense of dignity that colonial policy would never have granted them. Vodou was not a folkloric adornment; it was a strategic system of clandestine communication, of alliances between plantations, of military coordination, and of radical imagination. This ritual led to the uprising that made Haiti the first nation in the world to abolish slavery and the first free Black republic. In the face of universal rights that excluded Black bodies, Haitian spirituality forged its own universal values: where freedom was collective or there was no freedom at all.

A century later and on a different continent, the anti-colonial resistance also took on a spiritual dimension that was inseparable from the political realm. Yaa Asantewaa, Queen Mother of the Ashanti people (now Ghana), not only led the War of the Golden Stool against the British Empire in 1900, but did so by invoking and actively upholding the Akan spirituality that gave meaning to community life. For the Akan people, the *sunsum* (spirit), the *ntoro* (spiritual lineage) and the *abusua* (matrilineal family) were key elements that bound the community together and defined the ethical obligations between members. Yaa Asantewaa used this cosmology to rally warriors, forge alliances between clans, and boost morale in the face of a militarily superior enemy. The preparatory rituals, the ancestral chants, consultations with spiritual leaders, and the shared belief in the Golden Stool as a symbol of the Ashanti people's soul turned the war into a spiritual as well as a political defence. In Akan logic, it was not a territory that was being defended: it was a lineage, a memory, and an ancestral responsibility, and this collective understanding of the spirit enabled them to resist the British invasion for months. Spirituality served as the organisational backbone underpinning the rebellion.

Spirituality is not some ‘exotic’ trend to be consumed. It is a deeply political act of resistance. In many communities across the Global South, spirituality has been the thread that held people together when everything around them sought to tear them apart: the songs that provided strength before an uprising, the offerings that remembered those who came before, the ceremonies that upheld dignity amid colonial terror, the rituals that wove courage where there was no guarantee of survival... These practices were political strategies that protected memory, connection, and collective energy at a time when weapons, laws, and racist discourses sought to erase any trace of a different world.

A spiritual approach can create spaces where people feel seen beyond their roles, where grief and mourning receive support, and where bodies can breathe freely without having to justify their existence. It can help us connect with energies that the Western framework has never been able to fully articulate, but which have historically driven entire processes of liberation. Including this dimension means recognising that there can be no profound social change without nurturing what underpins our collective strength: our roots, our bonds, our ancestors, and the stories that came before us, which shape the worlds we dream of.

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Appendix 1

Practical activity: Autoethnographic map of my position in the world

The objective of the first practical activity is to develop a sensitive understanding of what each body is experiencing, as a starting point for the following modules. Anyone who takes part in this activity will be able to explore and reflect on the intersections of their identity (race, gender, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, etc.) and how these experiences of privilege and/or oppression manifest themselves in their lives. The activity involves creating a poetic map that combines visual and literary elements to help participants express and deepen their personal understanding of the concepts explored in this module.

Materials

A blank sheet of paper, a pen, a pencil or coloured markers.

Step by step

1 Preparation and initial reflection

Sit down in a quiet spot where you can reflect. Take a few minutes to think about the different aspects of your identity. Write a short paragraph or make a list of the most important points that come to mind during this reflection. Consider the following questions:

- **In what ways has my identity granted me privileges?** (***For example:*** *being part of a dominant race, belonging to the upper-middle class, having a hegemonic sexual orientation, being healthy, etc.*).
- **Which aspects of my identity have resulted in me being subjected to oppression or marginalisation?** (***e.g.*** *being transgender, a person of colour, neurodivergent, plus-size, etc.*).
- **How do these aspects of my identity intersect in my daily life?** Consider how the different aspects of your identity intertwine to shape your unique experience of the world.

2 Creation of the poetic-visual map

- **Draw your being:** On the blank sheet of paper, draw a symbolic representation of yourself. It doesn't need to be a lifelike portrait. It can be an abstract or stylised figure (for example, a body, a silhouette or a symbol). The idea is that it should be a visual representation of who you are.
- **Identify your intersections:** As you draw, think about the different aspects of your identity that you reflected on in the previous step. For each area or part of your drawing, assign an aspect of your identity (e.g., a circle in the heart could symbolise your gender identity, a line crossing your head could represent your social class, etc.). Each area should be labelled with a keyword or a short phrase to describe it.

  Examples:
  Head: 'Colonised thoughts, privileged education'.
  Heart: 'Fight for visibility, hidden love.'
  Hands: 'Unseen work, service to others.'
- **Highlight the interactions between privilege and oppression:** Connect these areas symbolically using lines, colours or shapes that represent how your different identities intersect. Some connections may feel smooth, whereas others may feel strained, reflecting the contradictions or complexities of your experience.

3 Write the literary poem

Now, use your visual map as a basis for writing a literary map that puts into words the tensions, intersections and connections between the different aspects of your identity. The idea is to create a poetic work combining the visual with the literary, to express how privilege and oppression manifest themselves in your life. The following guide may be helpful:

Start with a key sentence: Pick one of the areas on your map and begin your poem with a sentence that describes that experience. It can be something straightforward or metaphorical.

Example: 'I carry an invisible wall within me, a barrier built from silences.'

- **Develop the interactions:** Link the different aspects of your identity through the poem, using the connections drawn on your map. Use metaphors or sensory images to describe how these tensions or conflicts feel.

  Example: *'My body in the classroom is filled with unspoken words.' 'Others can't see me, but they can hear me.'*
- **The poem invites reflection:** When writing, let the poem become a space where you question, reflect on, or challenge power structures. Think about how your identity affects you in your daily life, and how it relates to other people's experiences.

4 Review and final reflections

Once you've finished the poem, read what you've written aloud. Consider the following questions:

- **What feelings does this poem evoke in you? Has it helped you to better understand the complexities of your identity?**
- **What unexpected connections did you find between your experiences of privilege and oppression?**
- **How has the creative process helped you to see your identity in a different light?**

If you feel comfortable, share the poem with someone you trust or write a brief final reflection on how this activity has expanded your understanding of yourself and the interactions between the different dimensions of your identity.

A2 Appendix 2
Tables

Table 1. Areas affected by structural and symbolic racism

Factor	Structural racism	Symbolic racism	White privilege
Education	Racialised people systematically face barriers in accessing and obtaining quality formal education.	Racialised people are perceived as 'less suited' to academic success. There is a suspicion that they do not try hard enough, and there is discourse that normalises their 'cultural disconnect' from school.	White people routinely have access to higher-quality formal education
Labour market	Racialised people are more likely to face discrimination in job interviews and in the workplace, and have fewer promotion opportunities. Unrealistic expectations of 'hard' work.	The portrayal of racialised workers as less reliable, less professional or culturally incompatible with positions of responsibility; discourse that justifies their exclusion on the grounds of a 'lack of merit' or 'little integration'.	White people have access to a wider range of job opportunities and senior management positions.
Housing	Ethnic/racial discrimination when looking for accommodation, segregated communities, limited access to areas with better institutional care and support.	A symbolic association between racialised neighbourhoods and danger; discourse that portrays racialised presence as a deterioration of the local environment; narratives that justify segregationist practices under the guise of 'defending the neighbourhood'.	White people have preferential access to residential areas with better institutional care and support.
State justice system	Disproportionate use of police violence and the imprisonment of racialised people.	The portrayal of certain groups as 'potentially criminal'; preventive suspicion; the automatic association between racial background and a threat to public order; the symbolic justification of heavy-handed police control.	White people are given the benefit of the doubt – or are presumed innocent until proven guilty – and receive more favourable treatment from the police.

Table 1. Areas affected by structural and symbolic racism (cont.)

Factor	Structural racism	Symbolic racism	White privilege
Healthcare system	The presumption that racialised people 'can endure more pain' and race/ethnicity-biased diagnoses.	Cultural representations that portray certain bodies as ‘stronger’, ‘less sensitive’ or ‘exotic’, thus normalising neglect; stereotypes regarding ‘irrational’ or ‘backward’ health practices.	Automatic humanisation of white bodies and everything this entails.
Social visibility	Racialised people are largely overlooked and/or stereotyped in the mainstream media and cinema.	Media content that associates racialised people with threats, backwardness, hypersexualisation, or cultural dependency; narratives that portray white people as the standard of humanity and non-whites as ‘cultural others’.	White people are portrayed positively and seen as the ‘norm’ in the mainstream media and cinema.
Public perception	Racialised people are stigmatised and treated as suspects and as inferior.	Discourses that moralise differences and portray them as a social problem; the symbolic construction of racialised people as ‘unintegrated’ or ‘uncivilised’; the cultural attribution of structural failings.	White people are perceived as trustworthy and socially legitimate.
Policies and laws	The rights of migrants and/or racialised people are systematically hanging by a thread.	Discursive legitimisation of restrictive policies as a means of defending national identity; narratives around ‘invasion’, ‘chaos’ or ‘cultural threat’ that justify tougher legislation.	White people and citizens enjoy greater protection of their civil and political rights.

Table 2. The visible and hidden sides of gender

Scope	**The visible side of gender** (standards for white bodies recognised as human)	**The hidden side of gender** (binary dehumanisations when portraying racialised bodies)
Humanity	Gender is presented as a universal category applying equally to 'all women' and 'all men'.	Racialised people are placed outside the realm of gender (Fanon: the realm of non-being).
Woman	Women are portrayed as delicate, modest, moral, the ideal mother, kind, caring, and respectable members of society.	Racialised women are constructed as excessive — hypersexual, overly fertile for servile bodies, aggressive, and submissive — while simultaneously being seen as lacking femininity. A woman's body receives no social, legal or emotional protection.
Man	Man as a rational provider, hard-working, the head of the family, an exemplary citizen.	Men of colour portrayed as a threat: hypersexual, violent, unproductive, or incapable of self-control.
Family roles	The white heterosexual family is depicted as the universal model (and now as 'inclusive' – alongside the white same-sex family – through *pinkwashing*).	Racialised families are inherently dysfunctional, male-dominated, backward or incapable of raising children properly; a colonial justification for intervention, control, and criminalisation.
Sexuality	White (cisnormative) sexuality is seen as controlled, normal and respectable.	Racialised sexualities are exoticised, pathologised, or criminalised. Cisgender women and transgender people are portrayed as hypersexualised; men are seen as predators.
Work	White women's labour is framed as empowerment, breaking the glass ceiling, and similar achievements.	For racialised people: the 'normalisation' of hard, menial or hyper-exploited labour justifies 'picking up the shards' of that shattered glass ceiling; suspicion of a lack of professionalism, or moral failings.

Table 2. The visible and hidden sides of gender (cont.)

Scope	**The visible side of gender** (standards for white bodies recognised as human)	**The hidden side of gender** (binary dehumanisations when portraying racialised bodies)
Violence	Gender-based violence is recognised when it mainly affects white women.	Violence against racialised bodies is normalised, made invisible or justified.
Political agenda	White feminism is viewed as a universal project for progress.	The demands of racialised communities are dismissed as backward and 'in need of salvation', which justifies paternalistic attitudes.
Transgender bodies	A cis-centred transition aligned with white, middle-class medical standards is validated.	Transgender people from racialised backgrounds are subject to excessive surveillance, pathologised, or criminalised; many migrants do not even have access to medical services to support their transition.

A2

Appendix 3
Poems and writings

Usos y costumbres de los blancos (Customs and Habits of White People) (Pancho Godoy)

'White is not a colour,' according to the Afro-Portuguese artist Grada Kilomba. 'Whiteness' is instead a political position that represents the historical privileges enjoyed by white people of colonial descent. Indeed, 'white is not a colour' (even in colour theory, white is not considered a colour because it is the absence of colour). However, it is a colour — one through which that historical and contemporary privilege materialises every day in the comfort of white bodies. White people—whether white Europeans, white Latin Americans or white Africans of European descent—cross borders, access services, visit museums, go to the theatre and restaurants, all thanks to the privilege afforded by their skin colour and/or Western features. By contrast, non-whites, even when we hold European passports, will always be viewed with suspicion. Whiteness thus becomes a disembodied body, because it is never named or pointed to. Therefore, white people suffer from the 'white innocence' described by the Afro-Dutch thinker Gloria Wekker – namely, the systematic forgetting of their privileges – or even experience what is known as 'white fragility', which is the defensive and violent reaction of white people whenever racism is discussed or they are accused of it.

Questions for reflection:

- In what ways do I see this white fragility showing up in myself, or how do I notice it in the people around me?
- How does this affect the people around me?
- What does it mean to stop thinking of white simply as a colour?

Identity Blues (Alok Vaid-Menon)

today i realized how similar 'diaspora'
and 'dysphoria' look on a page:
we have always been made to feel
foreign in our own bodies—
a guest overstaying welcome,
a resident of a place that we
are constantly
reminded that we don't belong to
isn't diaspora its own form of dysphoria?
asking about gender is another
way of asking:
Where are you from?
Sometimes, when I answer
tears well up
in my eyes.

Questions for reflection:

- What feelings does this poem evoke in me?
- Have I ever found myself considering these questions, either asking or being asked them?

Speech (by Sylvia Rivera)

I left home at age 10. in 1961. I hustled on 42nd Street, living on the streets, learning to survive. We were girls and young women who had been cast out from our families, our schools, from everything. We became sex workers, not because it was a choice made freely, but because it was the only way to keep ourselves alive. The early 60s was not a good time for drag queens, effeminate boys or boys that wore makeup like we did. Back then we were beat up by the police, by everybody. And yet, we resisted.

In 1969, on the night of Stonewall, exhaustion turned to fire. The bar was packed, the air was muggy, and suddenly the lights came on: the police had arrived. Another raid, another humiliation. The cops pushed us up against the grates and the fences, but this time we didn't stay silent. Someone threw a coin, then a bottle, and then a Molotov cocktail. Stonewall burned, and with it, fear burned away. For the first time, they ran away from us. We had them cornered for forty-five minutes. That night we said: 'Enough. No more.'

We – the women on the streets, the drag queens, the sex workers – had been involved in every struggle: the women's movement, the peace movement, and the civil rights movement. But we were always the forgotten ones, the ones left out when it came to the photo or the nice speech. This is why we founded STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries). Marsha and I managed to find a house on 2nd Street. That's where the homeless transgender women lived, the girls who worked on the streets, the ones nobody wanted. We fed, clothed, and looked after our own. We paid the rent through our own sex work, because we weren't going to let the younger girls go back to the streets if we could avoid it. That house was a home, a refuge, and a promise. There was laughter, food, political discussions, and songs. STAR wasn't just a refuge: it was a daily revolution.

We—transgender women, sex workers, the women on the streets—were also driven out of gay and lesbian spaces. In bars, during demonstrations, and at gatherings, we were told that we were a disgrace — that our clothing, our bodies, and our lives were a hindrance to their notion of 'respect'. Radical lesbians didn't want to see drag queens at their events; gay men in suits and ties asked us to stay at the back, not to speak, and not to tarnish their normal image. We, the ones who had fought at Stonewall, the ones who had felt the blows, were erased from the very movement we helped to ignite. They wanted freedom, but only for some. We were still seen as the disruptive and hyper-visible ones — unable to conceal ourselves behind a tie or a middle-class white narrative. And yet, we carried on.

Because whilst they were fighting for their rights, we were fighting for survival. While they debated in assemblies, we were burying our sisters. We built the first house, provided food, offered shelter, and gave love. They had rooms. We had the street. And from the streets we proclaimed that liberation will not be complete until we are all free—transgender people, transvestites, sex workers, the poor, people of colour—all those whom the world has sought to erase.

Questions for reflection:

- What lesser-known areas of Sylvia Rivera's life does this text shed light on?
- How can we align it with the reality of today's queer spaces?
- And what about the way the community fights for its rights?

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Glossary

1 **Gaslighting**
A psychological phenomenon in which a person or group manipulates another person's reality in such a way that they begin to doubt their own perception, memory, or judgement, creating confusion and insecurity. In the context of racism, this results in the experiences of inequality faced by people of colour being dismissed.

2 **Global Souths**
A reference to the experiences, perspectives and resistance movements emerging from the countries and communities of the Global South, a term used to describe those historically colonised and impoverished global regions (such as Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean).

3 **Ethnocentrism**
The attitude of regarding one's own culture, ethnicity or group as superior to others, judging the practices, beliefs or customs of other cultures on the basis of one's own values.

4 **Ontological**
The branch of philosophy that studies the nature of being, of entities and of their relationships. In the context of decolonial resistance, the term 'ontological' refers to how we understand and exist in the world, affecting our very perception of our being and identity.

5 **Diaspora**
The forced displacement of a people from their homeland, accompanied by feelings of rootlessness, memory, grief and adaptation. It also describes the experience of feeling out of place, even within one's own country.

6 **Dysphoria**
A feeling of discomfort, unease, or emotional pain connected to the gender assigned at birth, societal expectations, or the way others perceive and interpret one's body.

7 **Intersectionality**
A way of understanding how various forms of oppression (such as racism, sexism, classism, or transphobia) operate simultaneously and intersect in a person's life, giving rise to specific experiences of inequality and resistance.

8 **Co-option**
A process whereby radical ideas or practices are co-opted by oppressive institutions or groups, losing their original political meaning, and becoming superficial or hollowed-out versions.

9 **Cisgender**

A person whose gender identity matches the gender assigned to them at birth based on their physical sex/body. This is the standard considered ‘normal’ in Western societies.

10 **Postmodern**

A philosophical, cultural and artistic movement that emerged as a reaction against the ideas and values of modernism. It is characterised by a questioning of grand universal narratives, objective certainties and fixed structures, and embraces plurality, relativism and deconstruction.

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Topic 2

Anti-racism and Decolonial Perspectives

Module 2

A Culture of Radical Listening and the Redistribution of Voice

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What will we explore?

- Epistemic racism and the validation of embodied knowledge through authors such as Fanon and Houria Bouteldja.
- Life experience as a source of knowledge, drawing inspiration from the work of writers such as Audre Lorde, Alice Wong and Alanis Bello.
- The relationship between gender and racialisation, and how this materialises in specific problems and possibilities in the Spanish context.
- The reproduction of colonial dynamics in meetings and assemblies considered ‘neutral’.
- Strategies for redefining discourse around, and recognising, non-white and queer communities (among other intersections).
- Criticism of the concentration of privilege amongst cisgender white voices with academic credentials.

Introduction

In this module, we aim to examine, critically and in a context-sensitive manner, the various mechanisms through which epistemic racism and the coloniality of knowledge continue to shape our experiences, our relationships and the ways in which we create knowledge. We begin by acknowledging how these forms of violence manifest themselves in everyday life: in the way voices and knowledge are ranked, in how the tone and presence of certain bodies are controlled, and in the logic of tokenism that turns diversity into a manageable resource rather than actual change. We also examine the power of hegemonic narratives that define who can speak legitimately, which discourses are considered ‘serious’ or ‘universal’, and how these categories serve to uphold racial, ableist and colonial privileges.

This provides the basis for examining how these dynamics are reproduced in academia, in activist circles and in our collective practices, even striving for the opposite. This concerns the systematic exclusion of embodied and community-based knowledge; the scrutiny directed at bodies that do not conform to the norm; and the tensions that arise when we try to create fairer spaces without challenging the structures underpinning them. We also explore the responses emerging from political and aesthetic projects that resist these logics: from Afrofuturist practices that imagine futures for bodies that have historically been denied, to the contributions of Black disability politics that reshape the relationship between body, power and community.

Our studies aim not only to highlight the ways in which coloniality continues to operate, but also to raise questions about how we can transform the ways in which we come together, organise ourselves and produce knowledge, striving for a future where dignity, interdependence and epistemic justice are the norm rather than the exception.

1 Epistemic racism and the coloniality of knowledge, What are we talking about?

An analysis of epistemic racism and the coloniality of knowledge requires looking beyond traditional historical categories. Epistemic racism is not merely a set of intellectual prejudices, but a deep-seated power structure that shapes global relationships between what is considered legitimate knowledge and what is devalued. Understanding this dynamic means realising that colonisation was not merely territorial. It also enforced a specific epistemology and worldview.

Decolonial theory distinguishes between colonialism, understood as territorial occupation, and coloniality, conceived as a matrix of power that remains alive in ways of thinking, in institutions, and in the collective imagination. Coloniality does not end with political independence – although even this independence is questionable – but continues in the belief that some peoples are knowledgeable whilst others are not. Europe proclaimed itself the centre of reason and progress, constructing an 'other' that was irrational or primitive to justify its own superiority. This epistemic hierarchy denies the humanity of certain individuals and thus the validity of their knowledge. Epistemic freedom therefore becomes an essential form of cognitive justice and liberation.

Ontological violence, understood as the denial of humanity, precedes and underpins epistemic violence, which is the devaluation of knowledge. Decolonising knowledge is a process that involves exploring our forms of knowledge, de-provincialising the Global Souths and provincialising Europe, thus decentralising what was claimed to be universal.

Institutions have been vehicles for cultural dispossession and epistemicide. The processes of evangelisation and schooling imposed new forms of morality, family life, the body and rationality, as well as a gender hierarchy underpinned by a single truth. School played a central role: it suppressed local languages, disparaged traditional knowledge, and fostered intellectual dependence among the colonised peoples. A divide was created between the formal educational system and the community sphere, displacing and delegitimising ancestral knowledges. The suppression and denigration of local languages also took place. Additionally, physicality was subjected to a colonial interpretation that transformed clothing—which had previously served as a ritual and an expression of belonging—into symbols of backwardness, replacing them with Western attire and aesthetic standards. Community knowledge associated with care and healing practices was relegated to the category of folklore, despite its enduring presence and central importance for the collective well-being. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o said:

> *'Berlin of 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the slate. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom. But where the former was visibly brutal, the latter was visibly gentle.'*

In contemporary academia, the coloniality of knowledge can be seen in the asymmetry of knowledge production. Europe and North America continue to dominate theoretical discourse, whereas the Global South is reduced to a source of anthropological data or an exotic setting for study. This extractivist logic transforms local knowledge into raw material for universal theories that are then attributed to authors from outside the region. Epistemic hegemony is sustained by seemingly neutral criteria of excellence, which confer value and legitimacy only when the voice of the South passes through the filter of the North.

Coloniality is also reproduced in activist and organisational spaces. What happens on a small scale reflects global hierarchies, especially when dealing with mixed spaces. In these spaces, the concept of a ‘safe space’ often becomes synonymous with control. How can we redefine the concept of safety, given that for many people it means surveillance? Instead, we advocate for honesty and intentionality within our spaces, through exercises aimed at recognising our mistakes and the ways in which the most marginalised bodies are devalued. Perhaps one of the most common forms of organisation in Spain is the assembly, understood as a democratic forum. But in what way does the use of language and positioning within internal power matrices turn this figure into something that can reproduce the logics of the coloniality of knowledge?

Another expression of this is tone policing. There is a tendency to favour a calm, academic tone, whereas the expression of anger or pain is dismissed as illegitimate. When an emotion is regarded as irrational, uncomfortable or aggressive, the insight it offers—drawn from lived experience—is dismissed. What is actually being said is obscured and dismissed as irrelevant because of the tone used. ‘White fragility’, as discussed in Module 1, shifts the focus away from structural racism and onto the discomfort of its perpetuators, turning the victim into the aggressor and diverting the political conversation. It is exacerbated when combined with other forms of oppression, such as transphobia or ableism, reducing racialised persons to stereotypes that ignore their complexity and humanity. This dynamic forces subordinates to translate their experiences into the dominant language in order to be accepted. This forced translation constitutes an act of self-alienation and self-destruction that perpetuates structural violence under a guise of neutrality.

Another common tactic is tokenism: a person from an ethnic minority is brought in as a token gesture to give an appearance of diversity, without actually changing the distribution of power, resources or decision-making processes. This symbolic presence prevents or postpones important conversations about structural racism, leaving the racialised individual to shoulder the emotional burden and face impossible expectations: representing an entire group, articulating their experience, and educating everyone else.

Manifestations of epistemic violence in activist circles.

Colonial dynamics	An evasion strategy / Invisible violence	Consequences and the impact on individuals
The hierarchy of language and rationality	Tone policing: an expectation of remaining calm in the face of pain or anger.	The invalidation of emotional knowledge and creation of a standard of communication accessible only to those who have not experienced violence.
False neutrality	Racial colour-blindness: The ‘I don’t see race’ tactic, used to shirk responsibility and shift the focus onto the white person’s feelings.	The affected people tend to leave the space, and the processes of change and healing never take place.
Shifting focus	‘White tears’ (fragility and uncomfortable questioning).	The racialised individual who speaks out against violence is labelled ‘aggressive’. The entire focus shifts to the visible, emotionally affected white person.
The intersectionality of violence	Labelling and reductionist categorisation.	People’s lives are viewed through a very narrow lens, which reinforces stereotypes and discrimination, and turns them into ‘experts’ on an entire collective and complex identity.
Tokenism	The use of a person from an ethnic minority as a synonym for diversity and anti-racism in a specific setting.	Assuming that this is enough, and placing an unfair burden on the person in question.

These forms of violence become more visible when we examine community alternatives that organise participation not through competition for the right to speak, but through listening and the creation of genuine bonds. The practices of affective consensus documented by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui in Indigenous communities in Peru reveal a different form of decision making: one where the collective body is in harmony, time is stretched, and affection guides the agreement rather than rhetoric. For many in these communities, participating isn’t about ‘speaking well’, but about feeling a sense of togetherness. It isn’t about persuading, but about connecting.

Despite the enduring colonial framework, spaces of possibility arise from community-based and everyday experiences. Resistance to the colonial nature of knowledge does not seek purity. It instead champions hybridity as a resilient form of knowledge. Non-hegemonic worldviews have survived dispossession, evolving into borderline forms of knowledge that combine diverse elements from here and there, from the past and present, without losing their roots.

This knowledge is expressed through practices of healing, care and remembrance that challenge the dominant medical, relational, and academic systems. The connection with our ancestors and the collective memory constitutes a political act honouring a history predating domination and proposes a more interdependent and decentralised form of organisation.

Overcoming the legacy of colonialism requires adopting an approach consistent with these principles. Drawing inspiration from the wisdom of nature —from the patterns that emerge from simple interactions— allows us to build movements based on cooperation, adaptability, and genuine relationships. Social transformation does not depend on centralised control, but on critical connections between individuals and communities.

Epistemic freedom is the right to think, theorise and write without the constraints of Eurocentrism: to open up academia and activist spaces to diversity, to recognise community-based knowledge, and to relocate the production of knowledge. Beyond the stagnation in critical discourse, the aim is to create new worlds in which the Global Souths, and their diaspora, are recognised as legitimate in their thinking.

The struggle for humanity and dignity is inseparable from the struggle for the validity of knowledge. The coloniality of knowledge cannot exist without the coloniality of power, i.e. the coloniality of structural racism. We believe that epistemic freedom ultimately forms the basis of all political, economic, and cultural liberation. Decolonising knowledge means affirming all people’s ability to define themselves, to reclaim their history, and to imagine a more just present and future.

2 Manifestations of coloniality

Coloniality, as mentioned above, continues to shape global relations and determine what is regarded as legitimate knowledge, and what is dismissed as mere superstition or backwardness. The political decolonisation of the twentieth century was incomplete in many ways, but perhaps one of the most significant aspects is that it failed to address the underlying ideological infrastructure. The persistence of this framework elevates the contemporary decolonial struggle to a battle for consciousness and the legitimacy of speech, listening and memory.

Epistemic racism is rooted in the origins of modernity and in Europe's imposition of the ideals of reason and progress. Through a rigid binary logic, an 'other' was systematically invented and constructed — the opposite of Western rationality, portrayed as infantilised, irrational, and primitive. If a person is relegated to the 'realm of non-being', as Fanon explained, their experience and knowledge lose all value and epistemic merit. Epistemic racism goes beyond the mere exclusion of content: it involves the devaluation of the human lives of non-European individuals and the legitimisation of a monopoly on knowledge to justify the exercise of power.

Dimensions of coloniality.

Dimension of coloniality	Key concept	Impact
Coloniality of Power	Control over authority and the economy.	The global hierarchy of populations and capitalist exploitation.
Coloniality of Being	Denial of humanity.	The creation of the 'other' (irrational, primitive, childish); its placement in the 'realm of non-being'.
Coloniality of Knowledge	A monopoly on reason.	The legitimisation of Western science as the only valid approach; the devaluation of non-European worldviews.

3 Embodied knowledge as a way to break epistemic hegemony

Various theoretical traditions have explored lived experience as a legitimate source of knowledge. Drawing on Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins conveys the concept of the epistemologies of experience. Collins believes that the experiences of Black women, situated at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression (race, class, gender), provide a necessary and critical perspective on the system.

Collins challenges the Cartesian dualism (mind *versus* body, reason *versus* emotion) that posits objectivity as a possibility. She argues that the body, memory, and affectivity should not be seen as obstacles to knowledge, but as its living archives and laboratories. Therefore, the value of knowledge is measured by its ability to improve people's lives and strengthen community resilience.

One of the key quotes cited in this review is:

> *'The assertion that only rational thought matters in the pursuit of truth [...] denies the role of the spirit in the production of knowledge and undermines the legitimacy of emotions as a valid path to truth.'*

This embodied knowledge is not merely what is known, but how that knowledge is inscribed within us through history, trauma, joy, encounters, and everyday actions. For communities, this may mean that the most important information is found in what arises directly from the struggle for survival.

In a similar vein, sociologist and activist Amina Mama offers a crucial critique of the way in which theory is co-opted by hegemonic structures. In *Beyond the Masks* (1995), Mama advocates for embodied, community-based research that is inextricably linked to life and the care of bodies. Her approach calls for methodological autonomy:

> *"We need research that is an organic part of our struggles, embedded in our history, and focused on the liberation of our bodies and minds."*

This forces organisations to shift their focus: the community is not an object to be studied and analysed, but instead the active agent that defines the questions, the methods and, crucially, the political and practical purpose of knowledge. Research should directly benefit communities, supporting their livelihoods and well-being.

The seminal anthology *This Bridge Called My Back, 1981*, edited by women of colour (including Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Ana Castillo), encapsulates the urgent need to turn our attention to the women who at that time described themselves as ‘Third World’. The title, drawn from a poem by Kate Rushin, reflects the weariness of occupying the position of the 'condemned bridge' between one’s own community and hegemonic feminisms.

> *‘We are bridges / bearing all your baggage / and you never see it.’*

For collective organisations, reclaiming embodied knowledge is a roadmap to epistemic sovereignty that can involve several steps:

- **Demystifying communication:** how can we review our language to ensure that theory and language are accessible, understandable and useful in the daily lives of non-academics, thus making knowledge a tool for everyday use?
- **Assessing emotion:** how can we redefine discourses in spaces that do not demand emotional neutrality? How can we allow ourselves to feel anger, hope, and pain?
- **Recognition of ancestral knowledge:** the ongoing effort to restore the value of practical worldviews that colonialism has demonised.

4 Identities, intersections and the need for flexible partnerships

While identities have been critical tools for claiming rights and making structural violence visible, their use must be thoroughly questioned in order to avoid falling into essentialism and political fragmentation.

The decolonial feminist philosopher Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso warns of the dangers of 'rigid boxes' by asking*: 'How far do identities extend?'* Miñoso criticises how identity politics, by focusing on rigid categories, can lead to the fragmentation of political action, hinder the formation of strong alliances and, paradoxically, foster essentialist views that obscure the vast diversity and internal differences within the groups themselves. She believes it is crucial to prevent identity from becoming an end in itself, thus diverting attention away from the structures of domination and the need for a broader anti-colonial and anti-capitalist political project. She posits that identity must be a strategic tool and not a form of ontological imprisonment.

The complexity of the real world requires us to move beyond simplistic labels, recognising that the experience of oppression and privilege is deeply intersectional and constantly evolves. It is in this space of intersection where the most radical frameworks for action emerge — frameworks centred not only on exposing injustices, but also on structural repair.

Meanwhile, writers and activists such as Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Alice Wong have developed the concepts of healing justice and disability justice.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* calls for care to be viewed not as an afterthought or a secondary activity, but as a structural and indispensable part of the political struggle. Social justice, as seen through the eyes of this queer, racialised author, is based on the conviction that neurodivergent and/or unwell bodies and minds are valuable, and that it is the capitalist, white supremacist system that is broken, not the people. Within this framework, healing is not understood as an individual task that each person must tackle privately, nor as a linear goal, but rather as a collective, profound and interdependent process. Her work is a rallying cry for organisations to reject the imposed logic of productivity and efficiency, and to create spaces where mutual care is the norm. Alice Wong reinforces this view by placing activism and healing at the heart of community life. She insists that the struggle for racial justice is always also a struggle for justice for disabled people, illustrating this through the experiences of police violence that disproportionately affect racialised and Black disabled people.

These proposals invite us to envision and create anti-racist organisations that position vulnerability as a powerful starting point for building political solidarity.

5 Some strategies for transforming organisations

In *Emergent Strategy*, Adrienne Maree Brown outlines a highly valuable approach that suggests that major changes are built through small, relational, everyday practices. Structural transformation starts with the way we talk to each other, the way we listen to each other, and the way we show up for one another. It is based on the idea that change is neither linear nor predictable, but instead arises from recurring patterns in interactions, much like fractals in nature.

Here are some insights drawn from Emergent Strategy:

- **Recognising patterns of interdependence:** acknowledging that we are inherently interconnected and that collective intelligence is superior to individual intelligence. The most effective change comes from maximising this connection and building deep trust. This translates into prioritising facilitation and deep listening in decision-making spaces, instead of hierarchy or singular (visible or invisible) leadership.
- **Adaptability and flexibility:** inspired by the adaptability of living systems in nature, this principle calls for letting go of rigidity and the need for control. This means that we should avoid clinging to rigid long-term plans, keeping the ultimate goal in mind whilst remaining flexible in our approach.
- **Viewing activism as a practice of shaping the future:** the author invites us to engage in collective writing or visualisation exercises to imagine futures together. Therefore, we can transform criticism and analysis into a practical, tangible vision of how we see everyday life in that desired future, unleashing creativity for action in the present.

As part of our ongoing invitation to reflect on how we interact, how we organise our spaces, and where we generate a shared sense of meaning, we would like to share some potential approaches with you (all designed to be tailored to your specific context and explored in further detail):

- **Mapping the distribution of power within our groups.** Asking ourselves who occupies the centre, who is pushed to the margins, and who does the invisible work helps to dispel the illusion of neutrality.
- **Review the language to make it accessible.** Not everyone has an academic background, and that shouldn't be a prerequisite for taking part. Using language that is inclusive rather than exclusionary is a concrete practice of epistemic justice, that is, justice in the realm of knowledge.
- **Slow down decision-making processes.** Speed often reinforces a productivity-driven mindset that sees us act in ways we 'already know'. This often involves learned racism that is unintentionally perpetuated. When we slow things down, we make room for intention, care and the possibility of transforming the way we live together.

- **Developing context-specific commitments to community care.** We need tools that are not based on punishment, but on treating each situation as something unique. We also know that care is not an infinite resource: it requires structure, honesty, and mutual commitment.
- **Validating embodied knowledge.** Knowledge that springs from the body, from experience and from emotion need not conform to any particular form of expression. Let us dare to exist in all our complexity, pain, joy, anger, etc.
- **Disrupting extractivist dynamics.** The knowledge produced by oppressed communities cannot continue to be appropriated, translated or exploited without recognition. A clear example can be seen in how the term 'intersectionality' has been stripped of its meaning.
- **Letting go of the illusion of safe spaces.** Relationships are human and complex, and within them we will misunderstand one another, we will make mistakes, and sometimes we will hurt each other. The key lies in asking ourselves from what perspective we seek to resolve issues, and how we understand our place within the social fabric.

Although colonial structures are incredibly powerful, there are also cracks through which unexpected possibilities emerge. What steps and actions must we take to identify these cracks and rebuild epistemic dignity?

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Appendix 1

Practical activity: Rethinking how we share our voices in collective spaces

This activity explores, through visual and physical means, how speaking time is distributed within our groups, what dynamics underpin this distribution, and what changes we need to make to move towards more equitable forms of participation. We will use collage, drawing and group discussion to identify layers that are sometimes overlooked in everyday conversation.

Materials

Large sheets of paper, magazines and clippings, paints, glue, scissors and any small objects that can be used for sound effects (stones, fabric, paper, etc.). We'll also need tables or a large open space to work in.

Step by step

1 Creating a space through listening (10–15 mins)

We invite the group to form a circle. The process is simple: each person takes one or two minutes to share a lived experience related to their involvement in the collective. While each person speaks, the others simply listen. No interruptions, no verbal responses.

Listeners can respond only with subtle gestures, body language, or by placing a small object in the centre of the circle – something that conveys an emotional or physical response. When everyone who wishes to speak has had their say, we hold a discussion:

- **Who spoke the most and who spoke the least?**
- **What do we feel when we cannot put something into words?**
- **How does this experience relate to our usual patterns?**

This initial exercise will help us attune to one another and observe the group's dynamics of voice from a new perspective. It is important to remember that we are not looking for the person who speaks the most in terms of who expresses themselves more or less fluently. This could lead to ableist thinking. The aim is to be able to establish a presence in the space through spoken language.

2 Discourse map with collage (20–30 mins)

Each person is given a large sheet of paper and asked to draw a circle to represent the organisation or group. In this circle, we will use cut-outs, colours and symbols to represent how our voices and feelings are distributed.

In the centre of the map, we will place the people or profiles who usually speak the most, make most of the decisions, interrupt others, or receive greater legitimacy due to privileges related to gender, race, class, academic capital, or cisheteronormativity.

On the margins, we will place those who tend to remain invisible, silent, or overburdened with care work.

The group will decide whether to name specific individuals or to work solely with profiles, to ensure the exercise is handled with sensitivity.

Once the collage-map is finished, we gather in small groups to discuss:

- **What possibilities are available to the people who appear closer to the centre?**
- **What barriers push others to the fringes?**
- **What is our relationship with the language, the pace and rhythm of our meetings, the interruptions, and the fears that are present in the space?**
- **How does our body feel when sharing orally? And now? Have we been able to build the map-collage from a place of radical honesty?**

This map acts as a mirror: although each space may look different, taken together they can help us uncover underlying patterns.

3 Visualise the desired map (20–30 mins)

With the initial map now visible, we will transform it. In pairs or small groups, we invite you to imagine what this space would look like if the word and speaking time were shared more fairly. We can move elements of the collage, add new ones, and reposition colours, symbols and people. The idea is to create a desired map — a possible version of our organisation.

When this is done, we will move on to defining specific actions that will help us move closer to this vision. Some examples may include:

- **More carefully crafted debates.**
- **Rotating facilitation roles.**
- **Agreements to use accessible language and provide translations where necessary.**
- **Pauses to slow down, breathe and reconnect with your body.**
- **A fair division of care and support responsibilities.**
- **Participatory mechanisms that go beyond or supplement verbal communication.**

Let's examine all the creations together: **What patterns are recurring? What actions are urgent? What measures can we put in place right away?**

4 Conclude with a focus on mutual care and support (10 mins)

To finish, we will present a short adaptation inspired by Mia Mingus's proposal (*pod mapping*) for support networks. We're not going to create a comprehensive *roadmap*, but instead ask ourselves collectively how we can ensure that care and change are a shared responsibility.

Each person writes on a post-it note one or two names, roles, or profiles within the collective that represent support, listening, or accompaniment. We stick these notes around the maps and observe:

- **Who is carrying the greater emotional or relational burden?**
- **Who needs support to participate more effectively?**
- **Do certain roles always go to the same people?
  What can be done to change this?**

This conclusion reminds us that we cannot redistribute voice without also redistributing care. All collective change requires support and organisation to avoid repeating harmful patterns.

A2

Appendix 2
Poems and writings

Below, we share some poems along with related questions that can support us in the processes of addressing epistemic racism, exploring identities, and fostering collective transformation around these issues.

The Sea (Travis Alabanza)

Sometimes I stand by the edge of where the ocean meets the beach,
and look out into the sea,
so I can see something that does not have an end.
I often get asked what my gender feels like, and I want to say:
it is more like, what I wish it could feel like?
I wish it could feel like this moment.
Like it does not have a beginning or an end.
That you cannot see where it starts or stops.
That it just continues to exist, or not exist.
That it is a vast space of nothingness in one wave,
and holds so much in the next.
That it is like the moment where the sea feels endless.
Sometimes I stand by the edge
of where the ocean meets the beach,
and look out into the sea,
so I can feel like something that does not have an end.

Questions for reflection:

- What does it mean to view identities with the fluidity of the sea?
- Which feelings, regarding our relationship with ourselves or with others, are difficult to put into words?
- How can we collectively embrace the feeling of 'not having an end'?

Left Second Molar (Lucía Calderas) in ***Our Glory Lies In The Rubble (Nuestra gloria los escombros)***

A territory is essentially shaped by the people who live there, even if they do not appear on the map. There are maps of water, of birds, of plants, but there are no maps of tears, of cooing, or of a hummingbird's fluttering wings (the truly essential things).

That's right: — THE LAND BELONGS TO THOSE WHO WALK IT —

Maps draw borders. Whoever said that limits come before understanding was lying. Drawing a map means creating a way of experiencing space. A map is an emotional code, a relational framework for understanding the environment.

Create a map, and you will create a body. Create a body, and you will create identities.

If you can build identities, you will have an empire.

Behind every representation lies a discourse. No discourse is innocent. I am not separate from space. I am a consequence of how it has been represented. Topography of silence.

Yes, you can run away. Years may go by. You may leave a place ('forever'), but that place will never leave your body.

Questions for reflection:

- What maps inhabit our bodies?
- How do they influence the way we think and feel about ourselves in relation to the wider community?
- What would we like to map as part of our spaces 'that really matters'?

Decolonising Knowledge (Grada Kilomba, 2016)

'When they speak, it is scientific; when we speak, it is baseless;'
When they speak, it is universal; when we speak, it is specific;
When they speak, it is objective; when we speak, it is subjective;
When they speak, it is neutral; when we speak, it is personal;
When they speak, it is rational; when we speak, it is emotional;
When they speak, they are impartial; when we speak, we are biased;
They have facts, we have opinions; they have knowledge, we have experiences.
These are not just innocent semantic categories; they are imbued with power.
This is not a peaceful coexistence of words, but a violent hierarchy that determines who gets to speak
and who is allowed to produce knowledge.

Questions for reflection:

- What do you think Grada means when she talks about 'them' and 'us'?
- How does this translate in our context?
- How can we redefine this violent hierarchy so that the definition of 'who gets to speak and who is allowed to produce knowledge' is different?

References

Glossary

1 **Ontological violence**
Violence that denies or distorts the very existence of certain people or communities. This does not just affect rights and resources, but also who is regarded as fully human.

2 **Epistemic violence**
The negation, silencing, or delegitimisation of knowledges produced by certain groups.

3 **Coloniality**
Ways in which colonial logics continue to shape North-South relations and the ways these relations operate today. Coloniality shapes modernity and produces inequalities that affect every area of life.

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Topic 2
Anti-racism and Decolonial Perspectives

Module 3
Reparations in the Present: Living Commitments to Responsibility

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What will we explore?

- The difference between guilt and accountability (Mia Mingus). White guilt leads to paralysis and centres the conversation on the privileged, while shared responsibility opens the door to concrete, reparative action.
- Transformative justice as an everyday practice. Drawing inspiration from Mariama Kaba's body of work, we will explore the paradigms of disposability and how they disproportionately affect people of colour, reparation as a living process, and hope as a discipline, amongst other topics.
- Strategies for achieving lasting reparations, taking into account the emotional burden borne by racialised bodies and preventing impunity, as well as the recurrence of damage and harm.

1 Moving from guilt to political accountability

The emotional dynamics underpinning our political and personal relationships are not random. They have been deeply shaped by contemporary anti-racist and feminist struggles. In this context, redefining our relationship with guilt and responsibility becomes key to driving collective change. The difference between them lies not merely in words, but in attitude, willingness and political outlook. Distinguishing between them is particularly important in situations where different forms of oppression intersect, such as racism, gender, class, or colonial legacies, as this encourages us to shift the focus away from the privileged subject and to concentrate on redress and structural change.

Guilt tends to be self-centred in nature. When raising awareness of structural racism, we can cite the existence of 'white guilt', characterised by a focus on the privileged individual and how they feel when confronted with the recognition of their own privilege or when it is called out. It usually leads to political paralysis and diverts energy away from building relationships that should prioritise the experiences, feelings, and well-being of racialised communities. The ethical unease caused by guilt—the feeling that one is not acting in accordance with one's own values—leads some people to want to 'repair' their image through isolated gestures that fail to address the underlying structure. Many people make a one-off donation to a call for mutual support, share a post denouncing something online, or attend a demonstration without reflecting or questioning beyond that. All of these are important actions, but they remain superficial when it comes to genuine involvement. How can we go further and truly get involved, putting our privilege to good use? With the prevalence of the previous logics, the idea of repair ends up functioning more as a moral consolation than as a real change.

Blame pinpoints individual actions and exaggerates personal discomfort, hindering a systemic analysis of how structural privileges create inequality and harm. Whilst the focus is on how white people feel, their discomfort and their processes of deconstruction, the perspective on the power relations that underpin oppression is pushed aside.

Pancho Godoy, in *Ustedes los blancos (You White People)*, talks about practicing 'whiteness studies' — of shifting the gaze onto collective white attitudes and inverting the direction of the gaze. The 'White gaze,' as the author puts it, is abstract, superior, and omnipresent. The experiences of white people are always placed at the centre: they are both protagonists and judges, whilst racialised bodies are cast to the periphery, fragmented, and interpreted by that central 'other'. What does it mean to tackle the root causes?

Responsibility creates space for us. It does not seek to suppress shame or guilt, but instead to transform them into sustained action. Responsibility entails a conscious commitment to challenge the structures that cause harm, to look at the person affected and declare:

‘I can see you, I can see the harm done, I acknowledge my mistakes and I choose to act differently.’ This is not a moral burden, but an ethical and political practice that requires openness, humility, listening, and care. Whereas guilt leads to isolation and paralysis, responsibility fosters a sense of community and continuity.

Psychosocial research confirms that guilt has limited scope. White guilt does not lead to actions requiring a more sustained commitment. The aim of transformative justice is to change the structural conditions that cause harm. Therefore, assigning blame is not effective. In fact, the opposite is true. It only activates emotional energy when the self or the privileged group stands to gain something — such as not being cancelled or called out — particularly when their social capital is at risk because they are being perceived as racist. The modern-linear and Christo-centric culture, which organises reality in terms of beginning and end, demands resolution, the closing of stages, and the recovery of innocence — the original place where one can say 'I was not racist.' This stands in opposition to the nature of responsibility, which is sustained in discomfort and recognises that processes of repair are not linear; they can be long and involve profound changes.

Creating processes that foster responsibility requires moving beyond the punitive mindset that directly equates responsibility with punishment. Far from being a space of mere calling-out, accepting responsibility for racist violence involves assuming the need for deep transformation, decentring whiteness, and allowing oneself to be vulnerable. It is not an exercise in seeking perfection or definitive answers, but rather one of constant practice, learning to view mistakes—and therefore the processes of deconstruction—as something inevitable that can be hugely enriching when handled properly. But this deconstruction must not come at the expense of the well-being of racialised individuals and communities, which often happens through the expectation of free education, tokenism as a form of learning, a lack of emotional support when a racialised or Black person leaves a group after experiencing abuse, the expectation of infinite understanding in deconstruction processes, and much more. What tools and collective steps are required to do things differently?

The ethics of responsibility are put into practice when anti-racist and social justice movements move from reflection into relational and community-based action. Abstract theorising is not enough, because responsibility is exercised through the body, in interpersonal encounters, and in spaces of social interaction. Unlike guilt, which is reactive, responsibility is proactive and preventive. It represents an act of emotional resistance.

Responsibility, as an ongoing commitment, follows a structured process that goes beyond a simple apology. Self-reflection involves confronting uncomfortable feelings and understanding the impact of one’s own actions. A genuine apology acknowledges the harm caused, its impact, and a commitment to changing one’s behaviour. Reparations aim to restore trust and address the needs of the person who has been harmed, whilst behavioural change ensures that the harm is not repeated through consistent practice and community support. This approach ensures that responsibility is more than just words, and is translated into specific, continuous action. We can draw on the ideas of Mia Mingus to examine how we shape ourselves within our organisations. She brings together all the steps described under the term ‘accountability’:

> *Most of us have been taught to fear accountability. We find it hard to conceive of it as anything other than punishment or revenge. Accountability does not have to be scary, although it will never be easy or comfortable. And it should not be comfortable.*

> *Genuine accountability, by its very nature, should spur us on to grow and change, to transform ourselves. We must not idealise transformation or take it lightly. Let us remember that true transformation requires a death and a rebirth, an end and a new beginning. Genuine accountability requires vulnerability and courage, two qualities that we are not readily encouraged to practise in our society.*

What must we let go of collectively to make room for the growth of other forms, imaginations and relationships? What difficult or uncomfortable processes are we avoiding? How can we support each other through this discomfort?

2 Transformative Justice and policies of disposability

Transformative Justice (TJ) is an ethical framework and a set of practices designed to address harm and violence without resorting to external punitive systems such as the state or the police. It does not seek to portray specific harm as exceptional or a moral failing, but to understand it as a normal consequence of oppressive systems. Mariame Kaba, an organiser and leading abolitionist, believes that restorative justice is essentially a world-building practice that eliminates the need for punishment and isolation, instead prioritising community accountability and healing. The following quote provides a better understanding of this perspective:

> *'We must ask ourselves whether we are putting as much effort into developing alternatives to punishment as we do into cancel or exclusion culture.' If we are using the same punitive tools as the state, we are merely shifting who holds the power. We are not creating a new world. Our aim cannot simply be to punish or exclude people to feel morally superior. Our aim must be to address the underlying causes of damage and harm in the first place, and this requires building lasting relationships and complex support networks. 'Transformative justice, at its core, is a practice of community-building.'*

Kaba discusses disposability as an ideology and structural practice through which the capitalist state identifies and treats certain groups as inherently dispensable to social and economic well-being, thus justifying their control, confinement and, ultimately, their social elimination. This ideology disproportionately affects people of colour, particularly Black communities, who have historically been placed at the forefront of perceived threats and therefore suffer systemic exclusion.

In fact, when categorising Black bodies, we consider it essential to draw on Fanon and his division of the world into the realms of Being and Non-Being. In this colonial world division, those inhabiting the 'Being' realm and therefore considered human (white people) enjoy human rights, valuable languages and knowledge, visibility, racial privilege, peace, and security. However, those in the realm of Non-Being are closer to animality. Therefore, violence against their bodies is normalised and their belief systems are marginalised. Kaba argues that history directly associates the Black body with danger, savagery, brutality and illiteracy; what does all this mean when considering processes of justice?

Here, we can see that practices of cancellation and exclusion within our movements are neither new nor coincidental, nor is our perception of racialised and Black bodies. On the contrary, these are approaches that perpetuate the policing practices and structures we are already familiar with these internal logics replicate prison system structures, which operate on the basis of a strong moral framework of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, and use punishment as a means of correction. In a social or political setting, this punishment amounts to isolation and social ostracism. What does this expulsion mean for bodies/peoples who are socially marginalised on a daily basis?

Kaba believes that even if someone has committed a damaging or harmful act, the key question must be: how do we create the space for them to make amends, considering that no one heals in isolation? In fact, isolation has the opposite effect: it worsens mental health, erodes self-esteem and can fuel resentment, making the person ‘more dangerous’ in future relationships. It also invites us — and we invite you — to break away from the binary logics that construct victim-perpetrator narratives. This overlooks the complexity of each situation and the reality that the harm is systemic and circular. TJ forces us to recognise that people who are victimised in one context may have perpetrated violence in another, and that this is part of relationships and part of life.

For the purposes of this text, it is particularly important to consider how the information presented is interpreted within racially mixed organisational settings. Far from offering a definitive answer, we aim to highlight two key points that may encourage further discussion in each specific context:

- **White blame-shifting:** By expelling (or 'voluntary' departure of) a racialised person who has caused harm — or is perceived as problematic — the white group can feel that the issue has been “resolved” without having to examine or confront its own racist patterns and dynamics. A public manifesto is simply issued in many cases. By dismissing the presence of the ‘dangerous other’, one avoids reflecting on internal power structures, thus maintaining the illusion that the space is ethical and free from racism, and that what has happened stems from a personal conflict rather than being rooted in the organisation’s foundations.
- **Neglect is another form of exclusion:** in predominantly white spaces, there is often a lack of people from racialised backgrounds. Far from being a coincidence, it is entirely logical that if the collective prioritises its own comfort and process of deconstruction over the dignity and genuine healing of the racialised bodies present, these individuals will either not attend or will leave the space. If the victim leaves because of neglect, the group tends to view this departure as a ‘personal decision’ rather than as a direct consequence of its culture of disposability.

Practical tools that Transformative Justice provides

So, what can we do given all this talk of Transformative Justice? At the heart of TJ lies the use of circles, where the community takes on the role of facilitating the process, without outsourcing the punishment. There are several types:

- **Dialogue circles:** Facilitated and structured spaces where those affected by the harm (survivors), those who caused it (perpetrators), and the community can talk, hear about the impact of the harm, and express their needs in a safe environment, with a view to reaching agreements on reparations.
- **Support and accountability circles:** the focus here is on supporting the person who caused the harm. A small community support group (friends, allies, facilitators) is set up to help the offender(s) recognise the impact of their actions, to take responsibility and to comply with the reparations plans agreed with the harmed person. This is because TJ requires specific, agreed-upon reparations plans. These plans are designed with the victim’s needs and future prevention in mind. These may include economic reparations, educational processes, or community service aimed at giving back and rebuilding the trust that was eroded by the harm.

- **Support networks for survivors:** support groups and resources (legal, emotional and housing-related) are put in place for the victim, ensuring that their needs for safety, stability and healing are prioritised throughout the process.

It is also essential to address the process of return, recognising that exclusion may be necessary for a time but should never be a long-term goal. We therefore find the following figures:

- **Rituals of return:** Once the individual has fulfilled the terms of the reparations agreement, demonstrated a genuine change in behaviour, and the community feels ready, rituals and ceremonies are held to reintegrate the individual into a new role within the community, demonstrating that the accountability process has been successful.
- **Community witnesses:** People who are as impartial as possible within the group are appointed to oversee the process, ensure that the agreements are upheld, and offer mediation should a new conflict arise.

By applying these tools, TJ enables organisations to ask themselves transformative questions:

- Which internal power dynamics allowed this harm to occur and be repeated?
- How can we dismantle the disposability culture within our own community?
- What changes do we need to make to our organisational culture so that care and responsibility become the norm, and not the exception?

We believe there are several key points that we can learn from. There do not need to be 'serious acts of violence' (although the extent of violence is a highly subjective matter) for these measures to be applied. Creating strategies for reparations that are truly sustainable, that prevent impunity and the recurrence of harm, and that at the same time alleviate the emotional burden on racialised bodies, requires a radical commitment to political engagement and an active rejection of the logic of mere convenience (that is, coexisting in the same space without addressing the power structures). We believe that the solution cannot be found in standardised protocols. We need context-specific practices. The key points we have raised are as follows:

- The focus of reparations must be on ensuring the welfare of the person who has suffered the harm. This involves ensuring that the person does not leave the space, receives the necessary community care, and is given financial support for essential processes such as therapy.
- To prevent impunity and ensure that such events do not happen again, reparations must be specific and measurable in both the short and long term.
- It should be the victim who determines the nature and extent of the reparations. The process is not designed to make the community feel better or to allow the perpetrator to be easily absolved, but rather to restore dignity, explore the root causes, and ensure that it does not happen again.
- When racist harm occurs, do not just focus on the perpetrator and the victim. Study what silencing dynamics within the organisation enabled such behaviour to occur or go unpunished? Was it structural racism, the lack of clear protocols, or relationship dynamics?
- True reparation, the transformative goal, is to change the conditions that made that act of violence possible in the first place. Ask yourselves: what does it mean in this context? What steps can be taken to address this issue at both the macro and micro levels?
- As a community, we have a responsibility to intervene when we see harmful behaviour and before it escalates into violence. Early intervention and prevention are forms of mutual care.

3 Hope as a discipline: imagining what does not yet exist (Adrienne Maree Brown)

‘We focus on what we want to achieve, without necessarily paying attention to who we are being while we do it.’ If the change we want to see is a world of interdependence, radical kindness and deep responsibility, then are we putting that into practice on a small scale in every meeting, in every conflict, and in every relationship? We are creating a world that we have never seen before. We cannot afford to be lazy when using our imagination. Our imagination is a tool for decolonisation, for reclaiming our right to shape our own realities. ‘We need to feel in our bodies the future that we are creating.’ Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategies*.

When talking about hope, we are not talking about naive optimism. It is a disciplined practice designed to keep us on the move. It is the belief that things can be different, and that we play an active role in bringing about that change. It is the muscle that allows us to build worlds which, as Adrienne says, we have never seen before, even when systems of oppression tell us it is impossible. If we give in to despair, we feed oppression exactly what it wants: paralysis. Disciplined hope is the driving force that can spur us on to daily action and sustained resilience.

A key concept is *worldbuilding*. We consider it crucial because contemporary oppression and coloniality are themselves a construct, a world built upon narratives of scarcity, superiority, and fear. To dismantle this, we must actively build an alternative world, based on abundance and compassion. What does it mean to organise ourselves as if we had the ability to create other realities (because we do)? We call on people to move beyond criticism and 'status quo’ discourse, and instead put forward specific, context-sensitive proposals for change that are grounded not in reformism but in legitimate and necessary aspirations. We know that although we live in a racialised capitalist system, there have been times when things were very different. Therefore, we are confident that change is possible. We have seen it in the past and we will see it again in the future.

From this perspective, radical *worldbuilding* is the act of consciously designing the rules, relationships and infrastructure of a just society. It challenges us to reflect: if racism ended tomorrow, what would our meetings look like? How would we deal with conflict without the police or prisons? If we truly aspire to a racism-free society, we must practice that freedom on a small scale.

A1

Appendix 1

Practical activity: Repairing in the everyday

General objective

To encourage collective reflection and practice regarding the resolution of everyday conflicts within organisational settings, avoiding a culture of blame or punishment, and promoting shared responsibility and relational justice.

Materials required

Printed or projected excerpts from Mia Mingus and Mariame Kaba (on transformative justice and repair), large sheets of paper (kraft paper or flipchart paper), paints, sticky notes, pens, and a comfortable space for small group work.

Actors in attendance

- **Main facilitator:** guides the activity, manages the timing, and ensures a safe and respectful environment for listening.
- **Participants:** organisation or group members.
- **Process witness:** a designated person who observes how the conflict is managed in the groups — noting if tensions arise or if guilt is triggered — and who joins the collective discussion at the end.

Duration

90–120 minutes.

Activity flow

1 Introduction and overview (15 mins)

- **Introduce the aim of the exercise:** ‘to explore how we can repair and care for everyday life without guilt or punishment, from a collective perspective’.
- **Basic guidelines:** respect, confidentiality, no interruptions, speak from experience rather than theory, and avoid searching for blame or assigning guilt.
- **A brief reading of selected excerpts from Mia Mingus** (on reparation as an act of connection and accountability) **and Mariame Kaba** (on the rejection of punishment as a form of justice).
- **Short group discussion:** What key themes or ideas can be found in these texts?

2 Setting the scene (10 mins)

- **Base scenario:**
  In a planning meeting, Person A (a racialised person) suggests an idea. The idea goes unnoticed. Five minutes later, Person B (white) paraphrases the same idea and receives immediate recognition from the group.

3 Work in small groups (35–40 mins)

Split the group into teams of 2 to 4 people and hand out the guide containing three questions:

- **Analysing the situation.** What damage does this situation cause, both to the person directly affected and to the group as a whole?
- **Immediate reparation.** What could be done right away to repair this harm, without punishing Person B, but rather by activating their sense of responsibility?

  An example of action to take: *Interrupt and say: 'Thank you, [Person B], for reiterating [Person A]’s point. [Person A], could you go into more detail on what you suggested at the beginning?'*
- **Sustained agreements.** What measures could we put in place for the group to ensure this situation does not happen again? (*for example: 'Always cite the source' rule in meetings; use of support figures to ensure equitable speaking opportunities*).

4 Group discussion (20–25 mins)

- **Time to share:** Each group presents its conclusions regarding immediate strategies and their sustained commitment.
- **Application to the organisation:** The group identifies 1–2 specific examples within the organisation where this dynamic has emerged, and other similar racism-related instances. The following questions may prove helpful:

  -Where do we see similar dynamics in our own environment, and how have we been ignoring or acknowledging them?
- **Commitments:** The group chooses a short-term collective commitment (an action to be implemented next week) and a medium-term commitment (a protocol to be developed) to practise active reparations. You may want to ask yourself the following question:

  What mechanisms could we put in place or agree upon to ensure making reparations, and also preventing harm, become regular practices?

6 Conclusion (10 mins)

- **Brief Speaking Round:** what are my key takeaways from this exercise?
- **Collective agreements** for future meetings necessary to implement the changes.

Useful resources

- **Suggested texts:**
  Mia Mingus, *We Can Do Better Than Punishment* and *Reparation as a Practice of Love*.
  Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'Til We Free Us* (chapters on transformative justice).
- **Additional activities** to explore the topic in more depth: **role playing**, **discussion circles**, and **an emotions map**.

A2 Appendix 2
Poems and writings

(Adrienne Marie Brown) ***Emergent Strategy***

'We are creating a world we have never seen.' We are whispering it to each other cuddled in the dark, and we are screaming it at people who are so scared of it that they dress themselves in war regalia to turn and face us. Because of our ancestors, because of us, and because of the children we are raising, there will be a future without police and prisons… With abundance. Where each of our bodies is treated like sacred ground.'

Questions for reflection:

- What do these new worlds we are creating smell, taste, look, and feel like?
- What does it mean to treat each body as sacred ground? What role do we play, what role do children play, and what role do older people play?

PROMISE ME (Alok Vaid-Menon)

*Promise me you won't call me a man no matter what I look like.
Promise me I don't have to have been 'born this way' to matter.
Promise me I don't have to be beautiful to matter.
Promise me that I don't have to be fabulous to matter.
Promise me I don't have to take hormones to matter.
Promise me I don't have to shave to matter.
Promise me I don't have to wear a dress to matter.
Promise me I don't have to wear makeup to matter.
Promise me I don't have to look like a white woman.
Promise me I don't have to look like a cis woman.
Promise me I don't have to be a woman to matter.
Promise me that you'll see the femme in my hairy body.
Promise me that you see the femme in my brown body.
Promise me you understand that I wasn't just assigned
male at birth, I'm assigned male everyday when walking on the street.
Promise me you understand that as a form of gender violence.
Promise me you won't love me like a man, kiss me like a man,
fuck me like a man.
Promise me you won't forget when you bring me home.
Promise me you won't forget me when you are done with me.
Promise me you believe this is not a phase.
Promise me I matter when I am too tired to prove my
gender to you.
Promise me I matter when I am too scared to prove my
gender to you.
Promise me you will not bury me like a man.*

Promise me you will not bury me like a man.
(Or don't.
I'm used to it).

Questions for reflection:

- Which bodies are used to not being treated the way they deserve?
- What does it mean, emotionally and politically, to keep our promises of care?
- What rituals of healing and support are needed to break this ‘habit’?

References

Glossary

1 **Punitivism**

Punitivism is the idea that the only or primary way to resolve conflicts and inequalities is through punishment, prison, police, or the criminal justice system. It reproduces structural violence because it disproportionately punishes those who already live in conditions of vulnerability (racialised people, transgender people, impoverished people, and migrants) and fails to address the structural causes that enable harm. Consequently, far from being a form of justice, it widens and deepens inequalities.

2 **Punitive or retributive justice (current model)**

The current dominant model of justice is based on the idea of punishment as the primary response to harm. In this model, the State takes control of the conflict and isolates, labels, and locks up the people directly involved. It focuses on identifying a guilty party and imposing a penalty (which may include imprisonment, fines or criminal prosecution), without prioritising reparations for the harm caused or healing for the victims. From an anti-racist perspective, this form of justice has a strong racial dimension. Consider how certain bodies are viewed by society: the criminalisation of ways of life, persecution simply for existing, and the targeting of religious beliefs such as Islam are all too common for non-white communities. From this standpoint, punishment is applied disproportionately and with a higher level of normalised violence. Justice cannot be considered without a racial dimension. To explore this topic further, you can read authors who work from the framework known as *Critical Race Theory*. This approach argues that the punitive and legalistic model prioritises the protection of white privileges, disproportionately criminalises Black and racialised communities, and redefines violence as legitimate when it is exercised by the State (mainly through the police and prisons). This approach emphasises the lived experience of Black people as a valid source of knowledge.

3 **Restorative justice and transformative justice**

Both approaches aim to address harm without resorting to punishment, and are rooted in community-based practices historically developed by Black communities as a response to racial and state violence. Restorative justice focuses on repairing the harm caused in a specific situation, restoring relationships and promoting accountability through dialogue, active listening, and collective agreements. From this standpoint, we can ask: *what happened, who was harmed, and how can that harm be repaired?* Transformative justice goes a step further: it addresses not only the specific harm caused but also the structural conditions that made it possible (racism, inequality, patriarchy, intergenerational trauma, economic exclusion, etc.). Based on the experiences of Black organisations, transformative justice does not seek to return to a previous state that was already unjust, but rather to create new forms of safety, care and collective responsibility, generally without relying on the state, the police, or the criminal justice system.

4 **Subordinated**

It describes the position of groups or individuals who have been marginalised or subordinated.

5 **Worldbuilding**

From Afrofeminist, community-based, and anticolonial perspectives, and drawing on authors such as Octavia Butler and Walidah Imarisha, *worldbuilding* means recognising that worlds are constructed, that the world we inhabit had a beginning, and that it is not inevitable. If it was invented, it can also be changed. The key idea is that other worlds are possible, and that imagining these worlds is a political act. This is often done through Afrofuturist writing.

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Topic 2

Anti-racism and Decolonial Perspectives

Module 4

Radical Imagination: Redesigning Organisational Structures

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What will we explore?

- Radical imagination as a political tool: as Adrienne Maree Brown teaches us, imagining other worlds is not a luxury, but a political practice necessary for building structures that prioritise life, care and justice.

- Activism for pleasure: pleasure, joy and tenderness as drivers of change; justice as a joyous and expansive process.

- Politicised somatics, based on the understanding that the body is not merely the site of oppression, but also a space of strength and memory. As Patricia Hill Collins notes, embodied knowledge has historically been rendered invisible, yet it is essential for resistance. We will learn from Morénike Giwa Onaiwu, drawing on the perspective of Black neurodiversity, on the importance of recognising and valuing different bodies and rhythms as part of our organisation. Lastly, we shall study Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's work on strategies emerging from sick or disabled bodies—those who, in their daily lives, uphold practices of radical care that are, in themselves, forms of political imagination.

- Criticism of colonial organisational models: rigid hierarchies, false political neutrality, racial tokenism, and competition for resources.

- Strategies for new structures: decoloniality, mutual care, cooperation, and diversity of rhythms and ways of existing. Learning from the historical strategies of Black, Indigenous, migrant, transgender, and disabled communities to sustain life in the face of exclusion and oppression.

Introduction

In this module, we explore how organisations can transform themselves from within when they allow themselves to use tools that are not normally considered strictly ‘political’: imagination, pleasure, play, the body, and community knowledge. In the following pages, we will see why many activist organisations unwittingly reproduce colonial dynamics, and how we can begin to redesign these spaces to make them fairer and more welcoming. We will also discuss technologies that emerge from the Global South and how these practices can support us in building organisations that are more caring, flexible, and less rigid. We will further look at how movements such as Afrofuturism have used creativity to imagine futures in which Black life not only endures, but flourishes. The module also invites us to reflect: what would happen if pleasure and tenderness became the engines of our organisation, rather than sacrifice and burnout? We will study specific examples of how these ideas are already being put into practice in various social movements. Above all, we will gradually build on the idea that imagining, feeling and caring are also legitimate (and necessary) ways of engaging in politics.

This module focuses on the body: how it feels, how it remembers, and how it influences the way we organise. We will explore politicised somatics to understand why neurodivergent bodies, bodies with chronic pain, and bodies with reduced mobility are not ‘problems to be adapted,’ but powerful sources of knowledge capable of transforming the whole organisation. We will look at extremely specific ways of ensuring that political spaces are responsive to the rhythms, needs and real limitations of the people involved. We will also explore how play can unlock possibilities that rigid militant structures often close off, and how simple bodily practices — moving, improvising, breathing, and creating together — can transform the entire energy of a group. Throughout this module, the aim will be to discover that political organisation does not have to be cold, harsh or exhausting: it can be a creative, sensitive, and deeply relational process.

1 Radical imagination as a political tool

I What is radical imagination?

Radical imagination is a political practice that dares to challenge oppressive realities that seem impossible to change and says: yes we can. James Baldwin made this clear when he wrote: *'Those who insist there is no hope do not merely surrender themselves: they betray us all.'* This is an urgent reminder that pessimism is a highly effective tool of oppressive power — a mechanism for deactivating our desires and cutting off the possibilities of collective organisation rooted in affection. Before a system that insists nothing can be dismantled, imagination becomes a form of ontological disobedience. We are not talking about abstract dreams. We are talking about the right to envisage a specific life where we are not exhausted, where fear is not the driving force behind everything, where decisions are made fairly, and where the community becomes a home once again—and much more. Radical imagination sometimes seems to be a luxury reserved for professional artists. What does it mean to think about it as a political muscle that every organisation needs to avoid simply repeating what already exists? A space where the future becomes tangible, where utopia ceases to be a distant concept, and becomes a genuine commitment to different ways of living and doing politics. To claim this collective right to dream means claiming the right to exist free from structural violence and guilt. It means arguing that our lives deserve to be about more than just coping with the harm the system inflicts on us. To radically imagine is, ultimately, to accept that our struggles are not meant to adapt to the world, but to change it.

The writer and activist bell hooks once noted that imagination is impossible without desire or the body. This means that imagining just futures is not only about devising strategies, but about feeling them, embodying them, and allowing pleasure to be part of the political process. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks describes eroticism as a life force and as the fuel for building justice. When talking about eroticism, we are not necessarily referring to sex. It's about enjoyment and pleasure. When applying this to the organisational realm, we realise that radical imagination is not an escape, but a return: a return to what capitalist colonialism sought to trivialise—intuition, joy, laughter, creativity, connection and living memory—. In political work, this means daring to create spaces where we can experiment with new ways of organising ourselves, without fear of making mistakes. It means accepting that seriousness is not synonymous with effectiveness, and that movements need more space to feel than to correct. Imagining through the body restores our ability to move together in ways that traditional methods do not permit. When this happens, the organisation ceases to be a place where we merely survive, and becomes a place where we can truly create. Radical imagination is therefore an everyday practice that transforms the margins into laboratories of possibility.

In social movements, this means that it is not enough simply to resist what already exists: we must also envision what does not yet exist. Workshops, assemblies, meetings and even celebrations can become spaces where we rehearse futures we have never experienced, but that we urgently need.

We imagine other styles of leadership, other ways of distributing power, other ways of looking after one another without waiting for permission from the State. This work does not take place in technical documents, but in informal conversations, songs, rituals, shared silences, and small decisions that have the power to transform. Walidah Imarisha sums up these ideas succinctly when she notes that *‘all social justice organising is science fiction’*.

II Technologies of the Souths

We are now in the 21st century, and technology is one of the tools that has most changed the way we interact with each another (both in everyday life and within organisations working for social justice). However, technological innovations are not exclusive to Silicon Valley, nor did they start with the internet. In the article *The Digital Has Been Around for a While*, Nelly Y. Pinkrah reminds us that digitality (through networking, codes and collective communication) has always existed in the Global South. Connecting technologies can take the form of drums, woven fabrics that store messages, songs that pass on information through the ages, like *Griots*, forms that have usually been dismissed as mere ‘folklore’. The South has always been digital in its relational ways: community, oral tradition and spirituality are systems of memory and data transfer. Recognising this means challenging the notion that innovation is the preserve of white Westerners, and remembering that technology has always been a matter for communities, not corporations.

Acknowledging this can help us to decolonise the notion that our use of digital technology depends exclusively on the modern-individualist paradigm. Contrary to the myth that this ‘advanced’ technology originates solely in laboratories in the North, the peoples of the South have for centuries been creating complex systems to sustain life: coordinating without rigid hierarchies, sharing resources without private property, and organising struggles through rituals, community markets or mutual support networks. These practices are political technologies, although they do not look like a computer, mobile phone or Alexa. In organisational settings, recognising this means understanding that knowledge also resides in the bodies that embrace each another after a meeting, in gestures that express what words cannot, and in the silences that allow us to breathe... Gathering under a tree, cooking together, a musical gathering or a community festival are all ways of passing on knowledge. The challenge is protecting these forms of knowledge from corporate colonisation, which seeks to co-opt everything for the sake of productivity. Calling them as technologies helps us to recognise their power.

In a hyperconnected world, the Global South is still perceived as lacking in technology. However, in reality, its relational knowledge forms the basis of global sustainability. Pinkrah suggests that we should de-Westernise the concept of the digital by imagining technologies that breathe in time with the body and the community, not with the market; technologies that create connections rather than surveillance. This is directly linked to radical imagination: dreaming of futures where digital tools are extensions of the land, of language, and of collective memory. In anti-racist, decolonial, and anti-patriarchal collectives, this vision translates into custom-made collaborative platforms, community digital archives, autonomous visual languages, and communication strategies that are independent from algorithms designed in the Global North. This means imagining that technologies can be allies rather than instruments of control, and that the digital realm can again become a space for imagination, not alienation.

Applying these technologies in an organisational setting is also beneficial for the sustainability and care of the very collective that we are organising in. Given the extractivist zeal for constant ‘innovation’, let us dare to practise nurturing connections, embracing a slower pace, and creatively reusing knowledge.

III Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism is a cultural, political, and spiritual practice that asserts that science fiction is not a luxury reserved for the Global North. It can serve as a powerful tool of hope for those who have survived dispossession, slavery, structural racism, and historical erasure. Unlike mainstream futuristic narratives (where Black or racialised people are almost never featured), Afrofuturism claims the right to a future of its own, one that is also rooted in the past and, as such, is shaped by memory. It emerges as a way of imagining futures where Black people not only exist, but thrive, dream and reshape the world from the centre. This ties in directly with what we have already explored regarding imagination as a political tool and the digital nature of the Global South, as it emphasises that the future does not belong solely to colonial projects, but to those who have never considered themselves historical agents, yet actually are. Afrofuturism invites us to consider what our organisations would be like if they stopped following the colonial script of 'overcoming' and began to dream from a place of our own wounds, desires and possible worlds. Rather than escaping from reality, it seeks to expand it through the question: 'What if we could live differently?' — an act of disobedience in itself. Whereas Western modernity denies us the future of our dreams or offers us only dystopias, Afrofuturism opens up new horizons for imagining lives that are free, interdependent and imbued with profound dignity. Therefore, it is a central tool for social movements that need to nourish not only their diagnoses of the present, but also their horizons of transformation.

Octavia Butler is one of the leading voices of Afrofuturism. She imagines futures in which Black communities form the bedrock and foundation. In novels such as *Parable of the Sower*, Butler shows us that the future may be brutal, but it can also be profoundly transformative when communities organise themselves around cooperation and mutual care. Butler envisions worlds where technologies are not instruments of state control, but become extensions of community bonds and human resilience, enabling us to adapt, heal, and rebuild ourselves. Furthermore, in *Kindred*, the author looks back at the era of slavery to show that history is not a closed chapter: understanding it is a way of changing the present and, therefore, the future. Her work reveals that science fiction can serve as an alternative archive where the silences of colonial history become narrative possibilities for imagining justice. For political organisers, Butler offers a compass: our desires are not individual but collective; imagination is not escapism, but strategy; the future does simply arrive, it is built. Her perspective strikes a direct chord with radical imagination because she argues that every political project begins as an image, an emotional hypothesis, a sense that something different is possible. Butler expands the very concept of life, proposing futures where the sensory, the spiritual and the technological intermingle without colonial hierarchies.

Additionally, Nnedi Okorafor, takes the Afrofuturist legacy and reimagines it from within Africa itself (rather than the United States), coining the term *'Africanfuturism'*. In works such as *Binti*, Okorafor imagines a young Himba woman who travels to an intergalactic university without abandoning her spiritual practices or the otjize (the red clay that protects her and connects her to her land), demonstrating that Western technology can coexist with ancestral technologies. Her narrative challenges the purist notion that modernity and the technologies of the Global South are mutually exclusive: in her stories, amulets interact with electronic circuits, spirits inhabit the space, and community knowledge guides technological decisions. Okorafor moves away from a dystopian vision of the future and instead envisions worlds where ecology, the earth and water are active agents in the narrative. These are futures that consider the health of the planet. Her work has a huge impact on organisations because it provides frameworks where community, spirituality and technology do not compete, but instead complement and enrich one another. In *Africanfuturism*, Black women protagonists are not victims of either the future or the past; they are its architects. They travel, negotiate, transform, disobey, and invent.

Envisioning different futures is not merely an intellectual exercise: it means moving the body, a shared desire, and a practice that thrives on joy and tenderness. Organisations that allow themselves to dream in this way stop operating solely based on urgency – which often leads to *burnout* and staff leaving – and begin to cultivate more mindful rhythms that foster creativity and connection. Science fiction for social justice invites us to recognise that the most profound struggles require beauty, play, intimacy, and mutual care as means of sustainability. Therefore, if we truly want organisations capable of transformation, we must resist from places that do not lead to further exhaustion and burnout — spaces where life feels possible, desirable, and truly shared. This could be a first step towards building political processes characterised by expansion, joy and vitality.

2 Pleasure, joy and tenderness as drivers of change; justice as a joyous and expansive process

I Activism for pleasure

For decades, many political organisations have built their identity around sacrifice: getting little sleep, being constantly available, carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders, and exhausting their bodies as if they were *machines*. In these environments, exhaustion becomes a sort of badge of honour: the more you suffer, the more committed you appear. But what is rarely acknowledged is that this logic is deeply colonial (a modern model that has taught us that struggle only has value if it causes pain) and that, in fact, it undermines collective processes rather than strengthening them, as it pushes our bodies, health and well-being to the limit. In response to this, pleasure-based activism boldly asserts that desire, joy, and tenderness are not deferred rewards for 'when things get better' — they are political tools for the present. Here, radical imagination again takes centre stage, because imagining a different way of organising ourselves (one less heroic, less self-flagellating) requires breaking away from the notion that revolution is nothing but discipline, pain and urgency. Adrienne Maree Brown argues that pleasure is a language of the future: a way of reminding us what a world would be like where our bodies matter and where relationships are not built on debt. Adding pleasure as a political tool is to dare to believe that we can struggle without destroying ourselves, create without burning out, and resist without giving up the life we truly want to live. Simply imagining a different way of doing politics – one that is kinder and more creative – is in itself a form of radical transformation. In organisations used to self-sacrifice, this perspective not only challenges the established structure: it opens up new possibilities for building power more inclusively.

The militant culture of self-sacrifice is not confined to rhetoric. It is embedded in our daily routines: endless, non-stop meetings; strategies that prioritise urgency over well-being; and expectations that are impossible to sustain in political work. In this context, talking about pleasure almost sounds silly, as if enjoying oneself were to undermine how serious the struggle is. We can draw on the history of the Black movements to prove the opposite. For example, the Black Panthers' soup kitchens did more than just feed children; they fostered a sense of well-being, community, public warmth, and a genuine feeling of collective power. The culinary *'marronage'* described by Tao Leigh Goffe is proof of this: the kitchen as a space to escape violence and create connections. Furthermore, if we look at other movements in the Global South, we see that pleasure has historically gone hand in hand with struggle. Eating, dancing, singing, and enjoying ourselves together are essential activities. In modern organisations, adopting such practices does not mean 'undermining commitment', but rather redirecting energy so that more can be achieved. What does it mean to act from a place that deeply recognises that when people are nourished, connected, and joyful, the imagination awakens, solutions multiply, and the struggle becomes genuinely powerful and transformative?

Adopting pleasure as a political philosophy involves transforming the way an organisation perceives its timing, its rhythms, and its priorities. Embracing a philosophy of pleasure activism means remembering that organisations are made up of the bodies that inhabit them — bodies that are often subject to the very oppressions we are fighting against. From that perspective, it is vital to recognise that we need rest and support as a foundation. When a group recognises this, it begins to interact differently: attention is paid to how we speak to each another, how we touch one another symbolically, and how we create spaces where shame or fear do not silently reign. Instead of rewarding sacrifice, vulnerability is honoured; instead of demanding total availability, honesty about one's limits is valued; instead of idealising toughness, tenderness is embraced as a mature way of supporting each another. Pleasure, when understood politically, is the ability to create moments that bring relief, that nourish, that remind us why we are together in the first place. This is what prevents the struggle from becoming a ruthless, ableist machine that ends up consuming and destroying its own members. A community that embraces pleasure consciously nurtures its bonds: it creates rituals, spaces for rest, ways to reconnect when facing conflict or cruelty from the outside world, and moments to celebrate without regret or remorse. Building pleasure activism also involves breaking free from the narratives of individual heroism in order to ask ourselves: how can we apply the desires we carry to the spaces we inhabit?

II Care as the norm

In an individualistic society where we are short on time and energy, caring for others tends to feel like a burden. In *'Care as Pleasure'*, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha reminds us that for many communities (queer, migrant, transgender) care has been a survival strategy in the face of structural neglect by the State, whilst also providing a space for joy, togetherness and desire. Within organisations, this means applying kindness to our daily interactions within the groups we work with. For someone with fibromyalgia, being able to stretch during a meeting or having a suitable chair is not a luxury. It is the result of others having designed the space with their accessibility and comfort in mind. For someone living with chronic fatigue, having a break every hour can be the difference between being able to participate or having to step back due to pain. It becomes a collective rhythm that the group willingly adjusts to, because supporting that person creates shared well-being rather than inconvenience. Even when a person with diabetes needs to eat during a meeting, it ceases to be seen as a 'special concession' when everyone else says, 'we'll pause for a moment with you', showing that inclusion is built in the body through action, not just words. Recognising care as a source of pleasure means creating times and spaces where resting or asking for help is seen as a key part of political practice. This can include offering someone a mat to lie down on during a meeting, encouraging people to stay in touch via text when they have a migraine, providing heated blankets, or accepting that not everyone has the same energy levels every day. When care involves such specific gestures, the organisation ceases to be a place that requires machine-like bodies, and becomes a space where all bodies/people can find their place.

Similarly, for neurodivergent people, self-care as a source of pleasure is vital. Organisations often do not know how to integrate their needs into their daily operations, and they end up feeling isolated or experiencing more severe *burnout* than neurotypical individuals. An activist with ADHD might need meetings with clear, focused agendas and defined time slots to avoid getting lost or feeling guilty. An autistic person may require soft lighting, reduced noise, or the freedom to use headphones without it being seen as emotional distance. A person with social anxiety might prefer to contribute in writing rather than speaking in front of the group.

Failure to understand our brains as being similar, and organising ourselves on this basis, is also a form of colonisation. For a person who experiences dissociation, having a sensory object or being able to step out for a moment without having to explain anything can be what allows them to come back into their body. Pleasure also takes shape in the conscious acceptance and celebration of these changes. Adopting these practices means creating conditions where everyone can contribute without suffering. What does it mean to collectively declare that we do not want to reproduce, inside our movement, the same harshness and brutality we are fighting against in the outside world?

III The power of play

Play may seem like something exclusive to childhood. But it is a secret door that opens up worlds that formal politics overlooks. In *'Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception'*, María Lugones argues that play is an attitude that allows us to move between worlds without breaking. *Playfulness* is a way to approach life with an open mind: accepting mistakes, allowing ourselves to be surprised, embracing vulnerability, and observing without judgement. In activist circles, where rigidity often prevails (the idea that everything must be serious, proper and urgent), this attitude becomes a political antidote. Playfulness involves exercising the imagination through physical activity with the body. Playfulness challenges relentless, stifling perfectionism, restores our ability to experiment, and creates a stimulating environment where we can test different ways of organising ourselves. Painting posters without striving for perfection, brainstorming by drawing on the floor, or letting laughter break up a tense meeting represent gestures that help rebuild the sense of community. When we reclaim playfulness, we also reclaim the ability to enter the world of the other with greater curiosity and desire, rather than with heaviness.

The documentary *Paris Is Burning* (1990) shows how Black queer communities turned drag into a tool for political resilience. *Voguing* and the *balls* were not merely parties: they were laboratories of possible worlds, where those who had been denied recognition as human beings—and the fulfilment that this entails—could experience abundance, beauty and recognition. Something similar happened during the summer of 2019 in Puerto Rico, the world's oldest colony. This **combative perreo** transformed the streets into a powerful collective act of disobedience against the conventional ways of occupying space and protesting. Dancing to reggaeton in front of San Juan Cathedral, during a protest against colonial-descendant power, was a gesture that shattered the narrative of activist sacrifice. Bodies from racialised communities demanded the right to play and revel amidst the largest protests in the country's modern history, sparked by discrimination and the corrupt management of resources during hurricane season. In political organisations, these examples invite us to reflect on how often we have reduced strategy purely to the realm of discourse, forgetting that bodies also think, remember, and resist through their interactions with others. When enabling choreographic creativity, movement and rhythm to enter organisational life, we open the door to forms of resistance that do not fit within traditional protocols.

The body is more than just a vessel for experiences. It is a living archive that stores, transmits and transforms memories, sensations and wisdom that are not confined to the logical and rational structures of Western language. In her project *Making Gestures*, Farah Saleh explores this idea further by treating the body as a living archive. In the field of organising, practices like slow improvisations, repeated gestures that symbolise collective agreements, or group movements that mark the beginning or end of processes are powerful ways to bring this political understanding into activist work. Playfulness enables those who cannot process information in a linear fashion, or who require alternative means of expression, to participate from a different perspective, breaking down the barriers imposed by language and accessibility.

The power of play further reminds us that justice creates cracks in the capitalist world, where everything is about urgency and productivity, and brings us back to a time of connection. In organisational life, incorporating playful activities (ranging from role-play to exploring conflicts, to spontaneous creative exercises or cooperative activities) helps to relieve tension and uncover solutions that would not have emerged in a more rigid environment. Playfulness does not trivialise politics: it frees it from the constraints of civilisation. Playfulness paves the way for what comes next. At the same time, while playfulness opens and exposes the body, pleasure fills it. While play can disarm fear, tenderness repairs it. Therefore, justice stops being an abstract goal and becomes a living, everyday, and deeply embodied practice.

3 Politicised somatics

I Embodied knowledge

Politicised somatics is the notion that our bodies are far more than just flesh and bone. When talking about politicised somatics, we are referring to how our bodies carry the history of the struggles we have experienced – as well as those of our ancestors – and how that history is reflected in our emotions and in the way we interact with the world. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung puts it succinctly when he describes the body as a slate, a sponge, and a witness. A slate, because it records everything experienced (the gestures, the pain, the dances); a sponge, because it absorbs energies and collective memories; and a witness, because it preserves the history that the official archives chose not to keep. This metaphor helps us to recognise that the body is a rebellious archive in the face of colonial oblivion. It is not just about feeling, but also about understanding how what we live in the body has a political impact.

In spaces where we fight for social change, we sometimes throw ourselves into seeking academic theories to justify our actions, and forget that the body also has a lot to say. Patricia Hill Collins believes that embodied knowledge is a tremendous source of information. Such knowledge comes from living in bodies marked by social inequalities, and this specifically goes further than theoretical knowledge. This knowledge cannot be separated from lived experience. It is embodied and it is tangible history, linked to the fact that the information it carries bears the traces of struggles, sacrifices, traumas, and the forms of resistance against these experiences. Embodied experience therefore becomes a bridge between the individual and the collective, because what happens in our bodies is both a response to power structures and a form of tangible resistance.

Staci K. Haines, in *The Politics of Trauma*, defines trauma as a collective phenomenon that affects both individuals and communities. Oppressed bodies develop survival mechanisms (flight, freeze, submission) that were once useful in contexts of danger, but which can now limit collective action in the present. Social movements also inherit these mechanisms: a fear of conflict and a reluctance to trust, amongst other limiting factors. Politicised somatics encourages us to bring this bodily legacy of trauma to light so that we can transform it. Rather than forcing the body to adapt to the rhythm of the organisation, we should adapt the organisation to the rhythm of the bodies.

Embodied experience is a fundamental source of knowledge in social movements. The bodies of those who have experienced oppression have a memory that cannot be ignored. Sex workers, for instance, who are frequently excluded from discussions on abolitionist prostitution laws, are the ones who actually possess deep knowledge about the realities, dynamics, and risks of their work. However, legislative decisions are made without taking into account their expertise or the rights they claim and deserve, thus deliberately disregarding the knowledge that can only be gained from the real-world experience of those who do this work. If the lived experiences of sex workers were taken into account, policies could be more effective and respectful, better suited to their needs and their well-being. The lived experience of sex workers — deeply marked by the body — offers us a unique insight into autonomy and the epistemic colonialism that occurs whenever embodied experience is dismissed as a valid source of knowledge.

Therefore, decolonising knowledge also involves decolonising our perception of the body: learning to interpret it as a legitimate source of political theory.

II Somatic justice: neurodiversity, chronic pain and reduced mobility

At the same time, an anti-ableist somatics recognises that not all bodies feel, perceive, or move in the same way — and that these differences must cease to be viewed as deficits. Morénike Giwa Onaiwu, a Black autistic activist, states: *'Social movements need to learn to move with our bodies, and not against them.'* Instead of insisting on rigid activism models (constant eye contact, interpreting others' emotions without asking, demanding the same form of participation from everyone, heroism, constant presence, etc.), we can open the door to more diverse forms of organisation. Neurodivergent bodies carry knowledge that traditional structures frequently dismiss: attention to detail, nuanced emotional sensitivity, profound connection with objects of interest, direct honesty, clear boundaries, and the power of slowness. In political organisations, learning from these rhythms can mean designing spaces free from excessive noise, allowing for written participation, acknowledging the need for emotional dysregulation, and accepting pauses as part of their processes. Neurodivergent bodies teach us that justice cannot come in just a single form. Instead of 'adapting' the space, somatic justice invites us to break with the norm.

Mobility impairments provide key insights into building somatic justice as part of community life. A body that moves slowly – whether in a wheelchair, with a walking stick, using a walking frame, or simply due to fatigue – is not incapable of activism: this person is highlighting the accessibility barriers that capitalism's ableist oppression imposes. Adding this perspective is not just about installing a ramp, but about rethinking time and space in a broader sense. Reduced mobility challenges the notion that 'activism happens on the streets' or 'anyone who wants to can get there'. It reminds us that not everyone can sustain the same pace of resistance, but everyone can help shape strategy if the organisation is willing to foster a culture of listening. Bodies with reduced mobility show us that justice is not about 'including' those who move differently, but about reorganising collective life so there is no single, normative model of presence.

Chronic pain and disability hold political insights that are rarely acknowledged, even though they transform the entire lives of people who experience them and those around them. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha has shown how disabled and sick people have, out of necessity, created radical care networks that sustain life where the State and other private institutions fail. These practices, which are rooted in interdependence, creativity and constant reinvention, are prime examples of political imagination in action. Bodies with reduced mobility reveal that true justice is not about 'including' people who move differently, but about fundamentally redesigning collective life so that no single model of presence is considered the norm. Sick bodies teach us the importance of anticipating what might cause pain, what might break down, and what might sustain us more effectively — wisdom that organisations deeply need if they are not to collapse. Anyone who lives with chronic pain knows when things are getting out of hand, when an environment becomes hostile, and when the group is turning a blind eye to its own well-being to remain 'productive'. From this viewpoint, illness does not stand in the way of action: it guides it. Bodies suffering from chronic pain crave spaces for rest, silence, horizontality, and emotional honesty. If an organisation learns from people who live with pain, it learns not to sacrifice life in the name of the struggle, but to make life the focus of the struggle.

A1

Appendix 1

Practical activity: Bodies that dream and love

General objective

The aim of the fourth practical activity is to creatively explore radical imagination. Through playfulness, feelings of pleasure will be evoked, seeking to stimulate the imagination regarding utopian forms of organisational life within the current context. Specifically, by transforming the collage designed in Module 2 and co-creating a visual map of hope that serves as a guide for redesigning the group's everyday practices and strengthening collective sustainability.

Duration

2½–3 hours. *(This can be adjusted depending on the group size and the organisational context.)*

Materials

- Scissors or craft knives.
- Glue sticks.
- Sheets of paper for individual note taking.
- Large sheets of paper or A3 card (one per participant).
- Magazines, newspapers, printed images, fabrics, old photographs, dried flowers, natural materials, etc.
- Markers, coloured pencils, watercolours or tempera paints, etc.
- Adhesive tape, string or pegs to hang the collages up at the end, or you can buy frames if you want to display the maps for a longer period.

(**For online activities:** ask each participant to collect beforehand images that hold emotional significance and that relate to a specific aspect of affective sustainability. They can then create their digital collages using platforms such as Canva or Shuffles.)

Step by step (in person)

1 Setting up the space (5–10 minutes)

Set up the chairs, cushions, or any other supportive materials so that everyone can sit comfortably in a circle. *Soft background music (e.g. Afro-Caribbean instrumentals or nature sounds)*.

2 Somatic opening (20 minutes)

When we begin the activity, we must bring our bodies into the centre, grounding ourselves and setting the stage for becoming fully aware of the sensations in our bodies. With your eyes closed, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Feel the air flowing in and out for about 5 minutes. You can display guiding questions on screen, or record them in advance in a calm voice, then play them on the day:

- **Which part of my body is telling me it needs attention today?**
- **Where do I feel tension?**
- **Where do I feel the urge to release tension in my body?**
- **What feelings does the word ‘future’ bring to mind?**

You are then asked to direct that feeling to a part of your body (chest, abdomen, hands) and let it settle there. Each person recalls a recent moment of joy, tenderness or calm. The facilitator invites you to bring the image of that moment into your body:

- **What was the light or colour of the scene like?**
- **What was the temperature, and how did your body react to it?**
- **What smells and sounds accompanied this scene?**

Finally, for the somatic opening, anyone who wants to can write down at least three words on a piece of paper to describe these sensations. These words can later serve as a starting point for the collage.

3 Creating a collage: Maps of Hope (70–90 minutes)

The composition is structured around three topics:

A. Subverting inverted symbols (20–25 minutes)

- Redefining the symbols you chose individually during the practical activities in Module 2, as well as the composition and arrangement of these symbols that you created with your group.
- Choose the symbols you are most excited to transform by asking yourself the following question:

  What would this symbol look like if it were used to serve life rather than for control and oppression?

B. Maps of Hope (25–35 minutes)

- Use textures, colours or words to design a sensory map of your desired future.
- Include images of diverse bodies, gestures of tenderness, open spaces, nature, or traditional technologies. The ones that best align with your radical imagination.

  Guiding question: *What would it feel like to be part of an organisation that truly cares, that listens deeply, and that breathes with you?*

C. Care technologies (20–25 mins)

- Include symbolic elements representing community practices.

  Examples:
  - Draw a community altar.
  - Write phrases that serve as collective mantras ('we support one another with kindness', 'rest is also a victory').
  - Include images of meals, hugs, naps, or accessible spaces.

  Guiding question: *What rituals are necessary to help us stay together as a group over time?*

4 Sharing and group discussion (30 to 40 minutes)

Circular breathing. Bright lights are switched off. Everyone is invited to take three breaths together, in unison. Every time you breathe out, let go of a word that sums up the experience (whispered or silently). If the group agrees, join hands to form a chain, or hold your open palms towards the centre of the circle, symbolising interdependence.

The facilitator asks each person to identify a sensation or image that they would like to hold onto. The idea is to imagine it as a seed held within the body (in the heart, in the stomach, in the throat).

Each participant briefly shares their contributions to the collage and how they interacted with the symbols chosen and arranged by others, answering these three questions:

1 Which symbols did you choose to transform, and why?

2. Which emotions or memories came to mind during the creative process?

3. Which specific practices do I hope to introduce into our organisation as a result of this exercise?

Conclude with a quote from Adrienne Maree Brown: *'Emergent strategy is based in the science of emergence – the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions.' This means that when we organise from interdependence and decentralisation, our collective strength does not rely on a single leader, but on the quality of the connections between us.*

5 Continuation and review of the 'Maps of Hope' (another session to follow, within two months at the latest).

- Scan the collages or take photos of them and create an 'Archive of Possible Futures' for the group.
- Review the commitments agreed upon at a future meeting (approximately two months later).
- Do not pressure anyone into sharing; silence speaks volumes too.
- Remember that this practice is not therapy, but political education through the body: it is training in tenderness, imagination and presence.

A2

Appendix 2
Poems and writings

I claim my right to be a monster (Susy Shock)

…Oh, poor mortal,
equidistant from everything
ID No. 20 598 061,
I, the first child of the mother I later became,
I, a former student
from this school of torment,
Amazon of my desire,
I, the bitch in heat of my red dream.

I claim my right to be a monster,
neither male nor female,
neither XXY nor H_2O*.*

I, the monster of my own desire,
the flesh of each of my brushstrokes,
the blue canvas of my body,
painter of my footsteps,
I don't want more titles to carry,
I don't want any more roles or boxes to tick,
nor the exact name that any science might give me.

I, a butterfly unaffected by modernity,
by postmodernity, by normality,

oblique, cross-eyed, wild,
artisan, a poet of barbarism.
with the rainbow of my song, and with my fluttering wings
I claim my right to be a monster
and let others be Normal.
The Normal Vatican. The Creed of God and the Perfectly Normal Virgin.
The shepherds and flocks of the School of Normal.
The Honourable Congress of Normal Laws.
The old Larousse of what is Normal.

I only wear the clothes made from my matchsticks,
the face of my gaze,
the sensation of what has been heard and the swift, fluttering gesture of kissing.
And I'll wear an obscene moon-tit — the sluttiest one — on my waist,
and the erect penis of those little whore larks.
And 7 moles, 77 moles — hell,
777 moles — of my devilish drive to create.

My beautiful monster,
my work as an inventor,
of the turtledove whore.
My being, amidst so much similarity,
in the meantime, tamed,
in the meantime, in a bit of a mess.
Another new title to adopt:
Ladies' toilet? Or the Gents?
Or new places to invent.

Me, mad trans...,
damp, foul-smelling,
the seed of the enchanted dawn,
who doesn't ask for permission
and she's rabid with Mayan lights,
No Bibles, no maps, no geography. Nothing.
Simply my fundamental right to be a monster
or whatever my name is
or whatever I say it is,
whenever the mood takes me and I fuckin' feel like it.

My right to explore myself,
to reinvent myself, to make transformation my noble pursuit.
To spend the summer, autumn and winter:
hormones, ideas, muscles, and all my soul.

Questions for reflection:

- How can we inhabit and feel-think ourselves fiercely — however it emerges, however we *fucking* feel like?
- What personal and collective changes can we embrace to seek greater well-being and justice?
- How can we break free from the binary thinking that forces us to choose between this or that?

References

Glossary

1 **Digitalisation**
Ways of connecting, transmitting memory, and communicating that do not rely solely on technology. This includes traditional practices such as oral storytelling, drumming, rituals and weaving, which serve as networks for information and social connection.

2 **Affective technologies**
Practices sustaining community life through connection and emotion: cooking together, singing, creating rituals, telling stories, hugging, and embracing silence. These are technologies because they organise memory, care, and community.

3 **Epistemology**
A way of producing and understanding knowledge. This is the question of 'how do we know what we know?' and 'who decides what knowledge is valid?'

4 **Griot**
A key figure in many West African cultures. Griots are responsible for preserving and passing on collective memory through storytelling, music, poetry, and song. They act as living archives: they preserve genealogies, stories, myths, political events, and community knowledge. Their role combines art, education, and spiritual leadership.

5 **Abya Yala**
Name used by various Indigenous peoples of the continent to refer to the territory that European colonisers called 'America'. It comes from the Guna people (Panama and Colombia) and is usually translated as 'land in full maturity' or 'land of life-giving blood'. It is used a political and decolonial act: it rejects the nomenclature imposed by colonialism and recognises the historical, spiritual, and territorial continuity of Indigenous peoples.

6 **Afrofuturism**
A cultural movement envisioning futures where Black people exist, create, and thrive. It combines science fiction, spirituality, memory, and politics to build futures where Black lives are lived with dignity and freedom.

7 **Africanfuturism**
A movement founded by Nnedi Okorafor that places the future squarely in Africa, not merely within its diaspora. It brings together technology, ecology, African spiritualities, and the continent's contemporary realities.

8 **Culinary/food marronage**
An idea that links cooking with freedom. It refers to how, historically, enslaved people and their descendants used the kitchen as a place of escape, creativity, community, and political resistance.

9 **Neurodiversity**
A way of describing minds that function differently from what is deemed ‘normal’: autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, anxiety, etc. They are not deficits, but natural variations in how humans function.

10 **Ableism**
A belief system that places higher value on bodies and minds deemed 'productive,' 'fast,' 'normal,' or 'efficient,' while discriminating against or excluding people who experience pain or live with functional differences.

11 **Somatics**
It concerns the body as a source of knowledge, memory, and emotion. Political somatics recognises that bodies feel before the mind does, and that these sensations are also important sources of information for organising ourselves.

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Radix

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We are trainers and feminists for a more just, equitable, diverse, and sustainable world, free from violence. Through training, support and other services, we are sharing our knowledge to aid transformative processes aimed at women, LGBTQIA+ people and/or professionals from the third sector and social intervention.

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