



FEMALE
LOUD - PROUD - FEMINISTS

We Carried Our Mothers With US

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Foreword

A Feminist Invocation

The morning of January 28th, 2025 was cloudy,

overcast and a little chilly, with dew adorning all the trees and benches. Sao Paulo had been rattled by a harsh rainstorm in the days prior, leaving the city feeling both new and fragile, not unlike how I was feeling standing in a circle outside a hotel with 30 strangers about to take part in a collective cleansing ritual. Some of us came from conflict zones. Some from conservative heartlands. Some crossed oceans, others only borders, but all of us carried generations of memory and struggle. The meeting began not with speeches and panels, but with the burning of incense, a ritual rooted in indigenous Latin and Arab traditions.



The scent of copal or frankincense, not sure what it was but it was a comforting one, rose in dancing smoke wafts from a burner in the center of the circle; a woman dressed in beautiful indigenous clothing was gently and expertly tending to the incense inside it. We closed our eyes and took a deep breathe grounding ourselves in the sacredness of our bodies, taking in the scent and the energies of the women around us. I was taken back to my childhood when my mother would run after me with a Mabkhara (an Arab incense burner), trying to cleanse me with the scent of burning oud before Eid celebrations began. This time the ritual was not for Eid, but rather to cleanse our souls from the trauma of violence we brought with us in an effort to ready ourselves for a 3-day journey to reconnect with and reclaim our bodies. One by one, each of us approached the burner and allowed the threads of smoke to unfurl on our bodies, coiling around our arms, spiraling into our hair and curling up our legs. We offered our bodies to the embers of our ancestors rising from that incensario, we invoked our matriarchs and feminist forebearers and consented to their blessings on our skin.

We were ready.

Feminists from Palestine, El Salvador, Lebanon, Guatemala, Jordan, Mexico, Morocco, Paraguay, Egypt, Bolivia, Iraq, Brazil, Tunisia, and Honduras – had gathered not just to discuss sexual and reproductive health & rights (SRHR) but to connect our political struggles through the thread of feminism. The cleansing ritual was followed by a round of introductions in the meeting hall, sparked by a simple but powerful cue:

Present yourself through the land and the matriarchs that brought you to life.

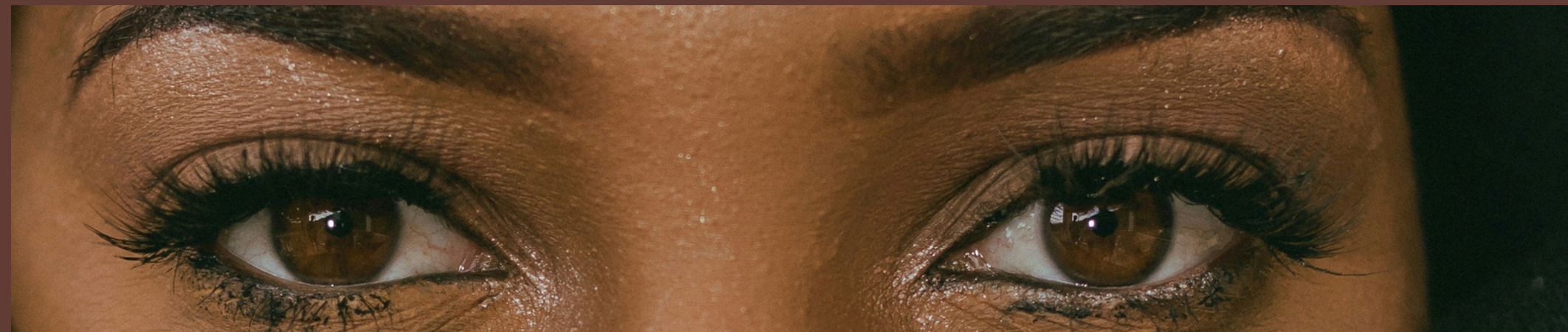


“I am Justina, from the mountains of the Levant, living in a community of fierce women who fought for me to be here”



“My name is Evette from Mexico. My grandmother is the reason I am here, although I never met her. My mother raised me on everything my grandmother taught her.”

We sat in awe as one by one, women poured their lives into the circle. No performance, no ego. Just our truth. It was my turn...



“I am Nadia, a daughter of the desert and a child of the sea. I am here for my grandmother who was a child bride and for my daughter, because I want freedom for her”

These were not just introductions; they were political declarations. Our feminism was not theoretical. It had been sewn into us by generations of survivors. We were not gathering to merely “exchange best practices”. We were here to remember, to resist, and to rebuild a feminist movement rooted in our Global South.

This publication, ‘We Carried Our Mothers With US’ is more than a report – it is a narrative tapestry woven from the voices, experiences, traumas, and dreams shared during the South X South Feminist Solidarity Meeting in Sao Paulo. We were in the care of two fierce collectives: FEMALE, a feminist organization based in Lebanon that has spent over a decade dismantling patriarchy through media activism, street protests, and survivor-led campaigns in a divided and discriminatory sectarian society; and Sukuamis, an Indigenous-rooted feminist group in Mexico whose name means “weaving life” in Tsotsil – a reflection of their commitment to intergenerational healing, ancestral memory, and radical education. Together with Oxfam’s regional teams in Brazil, SWANA, and LAC; they created a space that was sometimes uncomfortable, always unfiltered and profoundly real.

Organizing this meeting proved to be an act of political will. Between Gaza’s siege, Syria’s unrest, Lebanon’s war, Brazil’s visa processes, and the realities of caregiving and precarious employment, just getting to the same room was a form of resistance. The process began months earlier with virtual meetings and webinars, but only the in-person space allowed for the nuance, contradiction, and emotion that true solidarity demands. Translation—across Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese –was both bridge and barrier. Trilingualism was a feminist, decolonial choice, but it also reminded us how Global North fluency often shapes who gets heard. We struggled with questions of positionality. Not all participants came from grassroots movements; some were embedded in NGOs. Some had been criminalized for abortions or detentions; others were still navigating how their privilege impacted the room. And yet, through discomfort, laughter, and ritual, we found ways to speak across difference. Over three days, 35 women from 15 different countries shared stories of struggle and resistance, laughed and cried together, and forged a collective vision for change. We came from different contexts but in the end, we found common language in our feminism and our fervent hope for a just world.

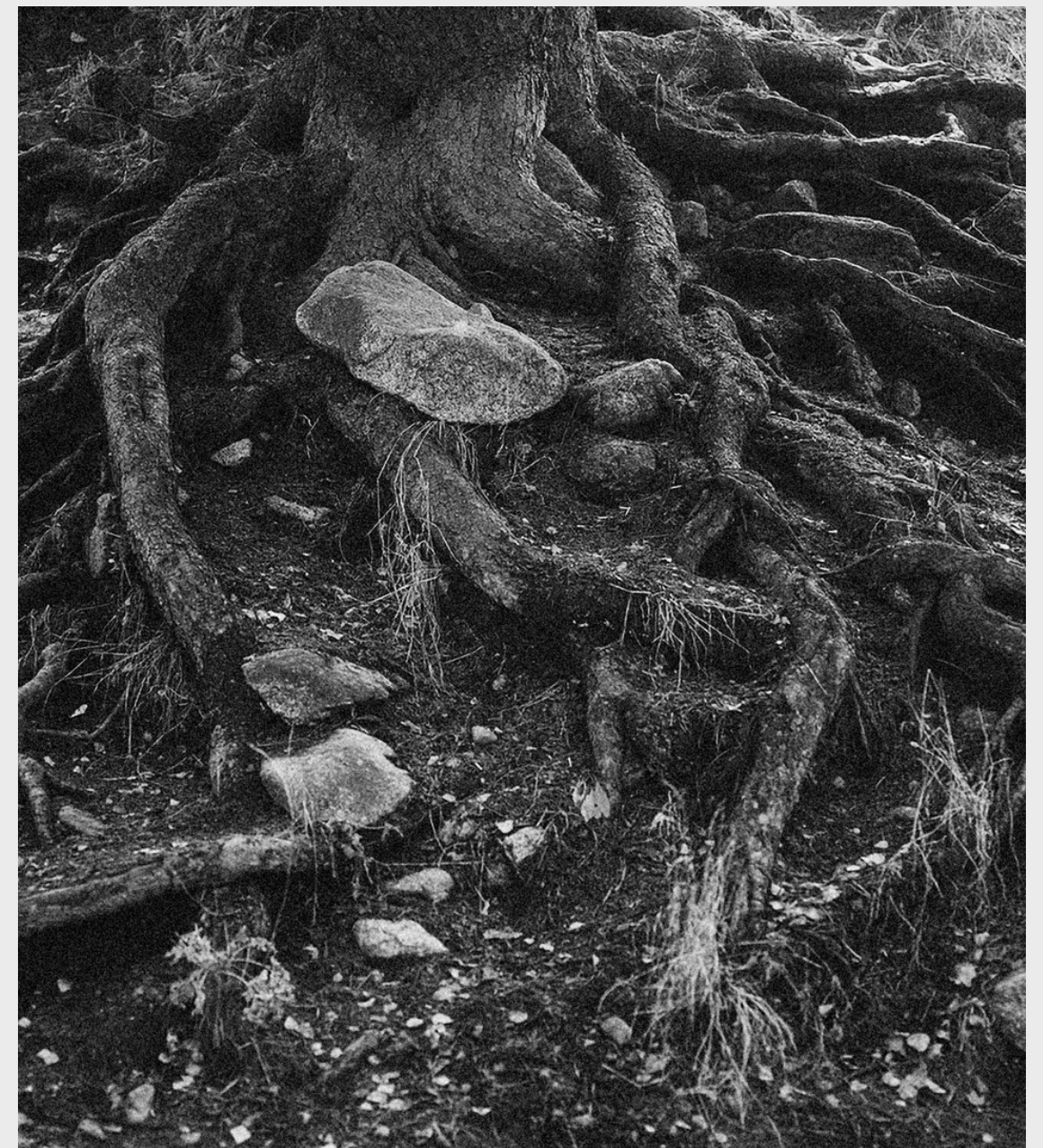


In the pages that follow, we trace the arc of this gathering in ten parts. We begin with Roots and Resistance, where we lay bare the SRHR realities in our regions – not just the harm, but the courageous acts of defiance. In We Were Planting Seeds, we offer stories of strategies already blooming across our communities, from clandestine health networks to feminist midwifery, mapping out what works when the state fails us. We then widen the frame in The Geopolitics of Our Bodies, recognizing the larger forces – colonialism, militarism, neoliberalism – that shape our most intimate decisions. From there, we step into A Ritual of Resistance, a vivid narrative of how our gathering unfolded in São Paulo: not through presentations, but through art, laughter, and ancestral offerings.

We then explore The Personal is Political is Transcontinental, a reflection on how our private battles are mirrored in one another – turning isolation into solidarity. That solidarity deepens in Across Generations, Across Continents, a conversation between myself and a young Paraguayan feminist named Alice, where we confront the weight of generational difference and imagine what feminist inheritance might look like. With Principles in Practice, we articulate the values that guided our gathering – decoloniality, collective care, linguistic justice – not as ideals, but as lived practice.

Next, in We Are Making Maps, we share what was dreamt together: a future of sister-city exchanges, shared governance of resources, and a movement that moves at the speed of trust. And finally, in From Gathering to Movement, we offer a roadmap – not a blueprint, but a living commitment – to continue this work beyond São Paulo.

This publication a collective offering. A story we wrote together with our words, our bodies, our grief, and our fire. I invite you to join us in this story, to feel the strength of our sisterhood as daughters of the South, and to carry the struggles of our mothers with you as well.



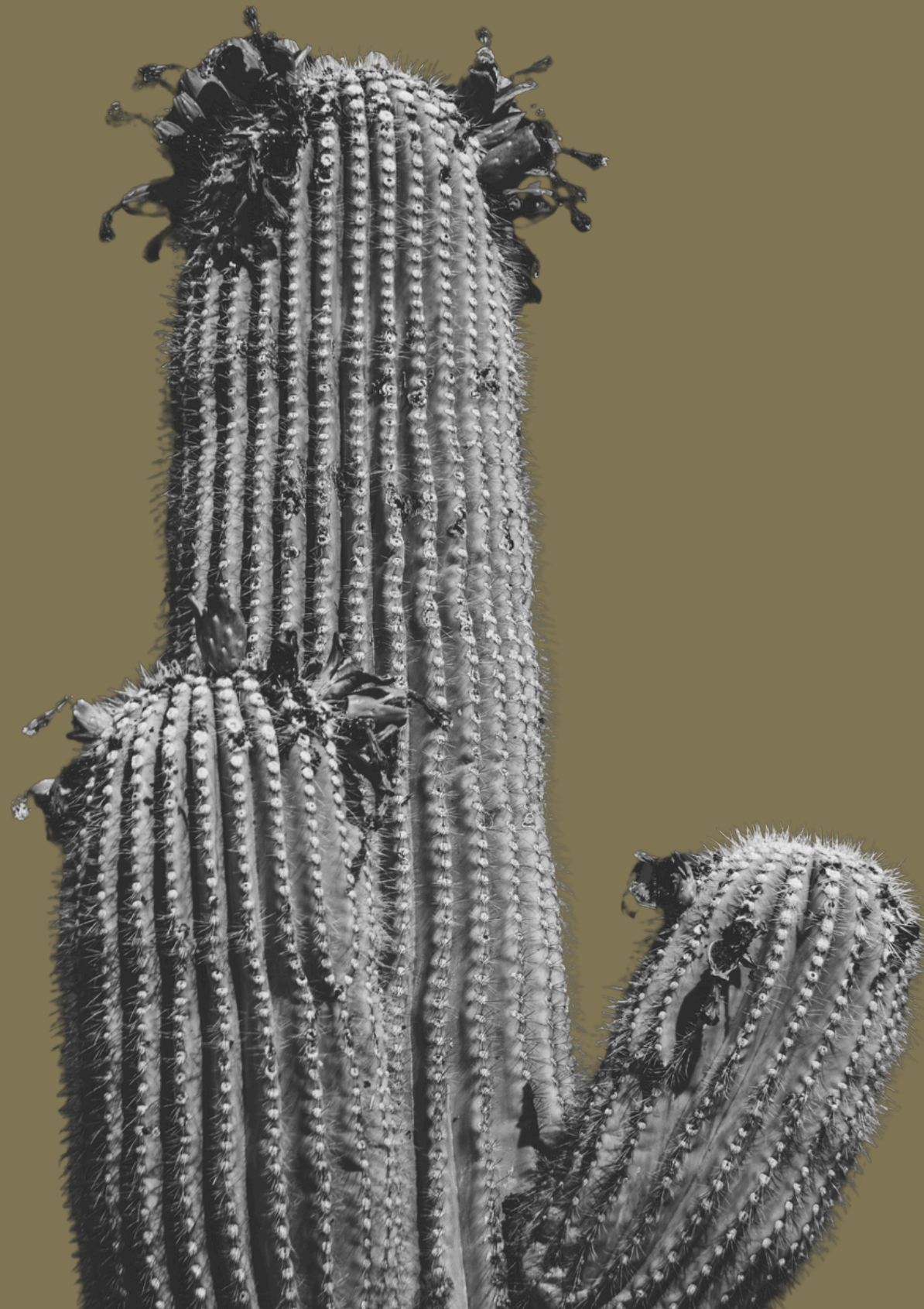
Roots & Resistance

SRHR Realities in Our Regions

During the opening sessions, participants took turns laying bare the sexual and reproductive health and rights realities in their home communities. Though our regions span different languages and cultures, common themes quickly emerged. Across the SWANA, women often face restrictive laws and deep-rooted patriarchal norms that govern their bodies. In many SWANA countries, access to safe abortion is highly restricted or outright banned, and taboos shroud topics like contraception, sexuality, and gender-based violence. Meanwhile, across Latin America and the Caribbean, feminist movements have confronted similarly steep challenges: from countries where abortion remains criminalized, to communities battling epidemics of gender-based violence and femicide.

We listened intently as each woman spoke, realizing that the roots of our oppression – and our resistance – had much in common. Many of us are navigating systems where law, religion, and patriarchy form an unholy trinity. Misogynistic violence running rampant and unchecked. LGBTQ+ lives systemically erased from state discourse. Reproductive health framed as moral failure. I know this terrain well – I came to this gathering from Lebanon, where personal status laws treat women as minors under perpetual male guardianship. Where I, a mother, was imprisoned for protecting my child from an abusive father. Where the courts are less about justice and more about disciplining women who dare to resist violence.

But I also came with fire in my chest — and so did the women beside me.



Lina from Palestine reminded us, “All Palestinian women who chose to fight against settler colonialism are the reason I’m here. The feminist struggle cannot be separated from the political one.”

In Palestine,

the struggle for sexual and reproductive health and rights is inseparable from the broader context of Israel’s fascist occupation. Checkpoints, military raids, and restrictions on movement severely hinder access to hospitals and clinics, especially for pregnant women in the West Bank and Gaza. The healthcare system is actively being viciously attacked and essential services — including maternal care, contraception, and psychosocial support — are inaccessible. Geopolitics directly shapes Palestinian women’s bodies: reproductive health is compromised by settler violence, economic deprivation, and the systematic dismantling of infrastructure. In this context, feminist resistance becomes both medical and political — an act of survival against a settler colonial regime. To demand SRHR in Palestine is to demand liberation.

Across the ocean, LAC sisters echoed parallel realities. They spoke of decades-long struggles to legalize abortion and combat domestic violence, often against the tide of powerful right-wing and religious institutions. **“In my country, I’ve had to help women who needed to get an abortion through a secret, underground network”** shared Lennie from El Salvador.

In El Salvador,

SRHR is heavily restricted and deeply politicized, with one of the world’s most extreme abortion bans — criminalizing the procedure under all circumstances, including rape, incest, and threats to the mother’s life. Women have been imprisoned for decades for obstetric emergencies, and reproductive health services are limited, especially for rural and low-income communities. Geopolitically, the country’s alignment with conservative, religious, and authoritarian agendas — often influenced by U.S.-backed policies and international anti-rights networks — has intensified the rollback of women’s rights. Feminist activists in El Salvador are not only fighting for healthcare, but for freedom from criminalization and surveillance that targets their very capacity to choose. Leslie described networks of *compañeras* who accompany women seeking safe abortions, embodying solidarity even where the law or healthcare systems fall short. These accounts underscored that progress remains fragile and uneven — for every law changed, there are attitudes to transform and services to deliver on the ground.





Feminist bodies of the Global South are in constant negotiation with power.

Geopolitical violence—from occupation and sanctions to extractivist economies and authoritarian rule—restricts not only our freedoms, but our ability to live, give birth, or choose not to. In São Paulo, we came not just with slogans but with scars—each one a record of our entangled oppression...



In Iraq,

decades of war, occupation, and sectarian instability have devastated the health infrastructure, leaving women and girls with severely limited access to SRHR services. Public hospitals are under-resourced, and reproductive care is often unavailable, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas. Abortion is criminalized except when the mother's life is at risk, and discussions around sexuality remain deeply stigmatized. The presence of foreign military forces and reliance on international aid have contributed to a fragmented healthcare system, where services are uneven and politically entangled. For many Iraqi women, particularly displaced and minority women, geopolitics doesn't just shape policy – it determines whether they survive childbirth or access contraception at all.

In Jordan,

sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are shaped by a web of conservative cultural norms, restrictive laws, and donor-driven development agendas. While family planning services are relatively accessible in urban areas, comprehensive sexual education remains taboo, and abortion is only permitted to save a woman's life. Refugee women face heightened barriers – from lack of documentation to discriminatory healthcare practices. The country's geopolitical position as a host for multiple waves of displacement has created a fragmented health system where international donors often dictate priorities, leaving SRHR for adolescent girls and marginalized communities underfunded and under-addressed. In this context, feminist activists must navigate not only social stigma but also the politics of aid.





In Lebanon,

the ongoing Zionist aggression, and the collapse of the economy and public institutions have devastated the health sector. Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is marked by deep structural inequality. While private healthcare offers SRHR services for those who can afford it, public services are underfunded and often inaccessible, particularly for Syrian and Palestinian refugees. The war intensified period poverty among girls and women across the country, leaving them vulnerable to infection and disease. Geopolitical crises – including occupation, financial dependency on donor aid, and the enduring influence of religious institutions over personal status laws – have left women and girls caught between humanitarian neglect and patriarchal governance. Sectarian personal status laws deny women custody, divorce rights, and inheritance; I myself have suffered – and continue to suffer – under sectarian laws as it pertains to custody of my daughter.

**“My name is Sara...
The women of the south who are fighting Zionist aggression and occupation with their live flesh...
they represent my resistance.”**

In Syria,

the ongoing instability has displaced millions and eroded healthcare access, including for reproductive services. Early marriage, sexual violence, and maternal mortality have increased dramatically. Sanctions further restrict aid and contraceptive imports.

In Egypt,

the state heavily surveils feminist movements. Abortion is criminalized except in rare circumstances, and sexual harassment is rampant despite legal reforms. SRHR education is lacking in schools, and social stigma deters women from seeking care. In Morocco and Tunisia, while often viewed as “progressive” in the region, abortion remains illegal **in Morocco and only partially legal in Tunisia**. In both, rural and poor women lack access to reproductive healthcare. LGBTQ+ communities face criminalization and public vilification.

**“I am Alexandra...
My mother lost her life to domestic violence. I fight
for her, my daughter and every woman suffering.”**



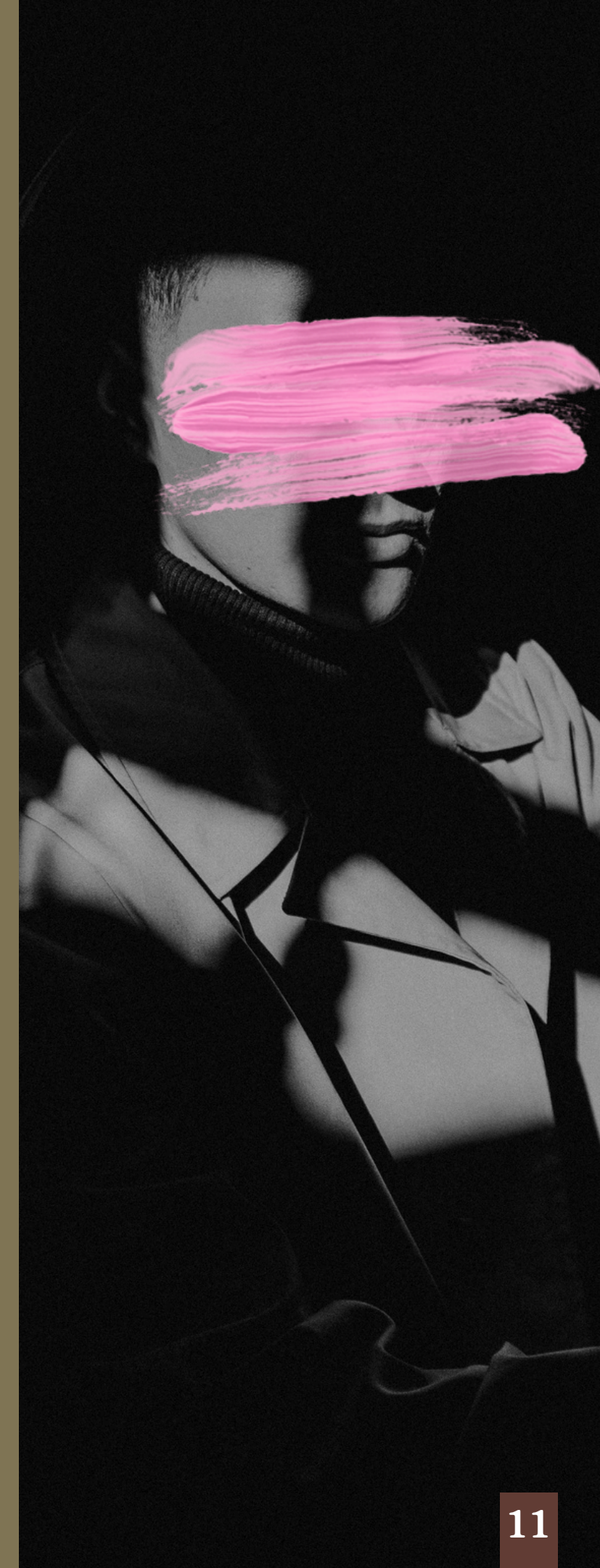


In Mexico,

SRHR exist in a complex landscape marked by both progressive legal reforms and persistent inequalities. While the Supreme Court decriminalized abortion at the federal level in 2021, access remains uneven across the country, with many states maintaining restrictive laws and limited services. Indigenous and rural women, in particular, face significant barriers to SRHR services due to geographic isolation, language differences, and systemic discrimination. Militarization and the war on drugs have destabilized entire regions, affecting healthcare access and increasing gender-based violence. Geopolitical factors, such as the influence of conservative religious groups and international policies like the U.S.'s Mexico City Policy, further complicate the provision of comprehensive reproductive healthcare. The Mexico City Policy is particularly telling of how American foreign policy is designed. Often referred to as the Global Gag Rule, it is a U.S. government policy that bars foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from receiving U.S. global health funding if they provide, promote, or even discuss abortion as a method of family planning – even if they do so with their own, non-U.S. funds. Despite these challenges, feminist collectives and grassroots organizations continue to advocate for equitable access to SRHR, striving to bridge the gap between legal rights and lived realities.

In Honduras,

similar to El Salvador, SRHR are severely restricted by one of the most stringent legal frameworks in the world. Abortion is completely banned under any and all circumstances – including threats to the mother's life—and is enshrined in the constitution, making reform extraordinarily difficult. Emergency contraception is also prohibited, and women who experience miscarriages risk criminal prosecution. These policies disproportionately harm poor, rural, and Indigenous women, many of whom lack access to basic healthcare. Honduras's alignment with conservative religious forces and its dependence on international aid have entrenched patriarchal policies, sidelining women's rights in favor of political expediency. Feminist activists continue to resist, but they do so in a context where reproductive autonomy is criminalized and dissent is often met with state repression.





In Paraguay and Bolivia,

Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities face severe barriers to SRHR. Lack of culturally sensitive services, poverty, and religious conservatism curtail bodily autonomy, with feminist movements being criminalized under “anti-terrorism” laws.

In Guatemala,

Indigenous women face systemic discrimination in healthcare. Forced sterilization, lack of access to contraceptives, and sexual violence are widespread—especially in rural and post-conflict areas. Between 2018 and 2024, over 14,000 girls under the age of 15 gave birth, many as a result of sexual violence, often perpetrated by family members. Despite this, justice remains elusive, with only a small fraction of cases resulting in convictions and vocal activists facing threats from corporate and state actors linked to extractive industries.

In Brazil,

despite having one of the largest public health systems in the world (SUS), suffers from racialized health disparities. Black and Indigenous women face the highest rates of maternal mortality. Brazilian conservative lawmakers have pushed back against abortion rights and comprehensive sex education.

“I’m Nay from São Paulo... I am the only woman in my family to complete my education. I hope my daughter will also one day meet women from around the world like this.”



Our Shared Landscape of Struggle

Though the systems of oppression manifest differently –occupation, dictatorship, colonial violence, neoliberalism, religious fundamentalism– the result is the same: a denial of bodily sovereignty. These geopolitical and patriarchal forces create a patchwork of fragmented rights, where access to healthcare is determined by class, location, and political alignment. We knew that no government or multilateral body would deliver liberation for us. It had to be built by the hands of women who have resisted war, fed children through sanctions, marched against cartels, stitched banners from grief, and stood firm at border crossings. This is why our gathering was so urgent.

Despite the pain in these testimonies – stories of lives lost to unsafe abortions and the lack of access to SRHR services, of young women forced into motherhood, of mothers escaping domestic abuse, of LGBTQ+ folks denied basic rights – there was also profound power.

Each participant spoke not as a victim, but as an agent of change in her context.

From the indigenous communities in the Andes fighting for maternal healthcare, to refugee camps in the Levant where women form support circles for survivors of violence, the message was clear: our regions are rich with resistance. We carry forward the work of our mothers and movement elders, and draw inspiration from our young sisters and daughters, planting new seeds of freedom even in hostile soil. By sharing these roots and realities with one another, the group began to see the outlines of a shared struggle. The South-South dialogue was illuminating – what was once a solitary fight in Honduras or Lebanon was now understood as part of a transregional tapestry of feminist resistance. Armed with this knowledge, the meeting was ready to delve deeper into why these realities persist, and how global forces shape the personal battles we fight every day.

We Were Planting Seeds

Lessons From Our SRHR Struggles



After the gravity of our opening discussions – when we named the harms and traced the violence – something shifted. It was as if, having exposed the roots of patriarchy and repression in our contexts, we needed to remind ourselves that we are not only survivors. We are gardeners of resistance. Seed bearers. Builders of what still can be. So we began to share what we had already sown. From each country represented in our circle, stories emerged – not of theory, but of tactics. Not aspirations, but actions already unfolding, sometimes quietly, often bravely, in corners where the state has retreated and patriarchy reigns. These were not polished programs with neat logframes. They were acts of survival made sacred. I remember listening to Lisa from Honduras speak about accompaniment work – how feminist collectives risk prison and persecution to protect women seeking abortions in a country where the practice is absolutely banned. In her voice was no self-congratulation. Just clarity.

“We do what must be done,” she said, “because the law was never written for us.”

In Mexico, Sukuamis shared how they are reclaiming Indigenous knowledge systems through midwifery and community-led healing – offering not just reproductive care, but a spiritual and cultural re-rooting for girls and women cut off from ancestral wisdom. In Bolivia and Guatemala, compañeras described how radio shows, zines, and murals have become tools of SRHR education – slipping past censors and reaching remote communities with messages of autonomy, pleasure, and safety.

I was moved by the work coming out of Iraq – feminist doctors forming peer-to-peer training circles in post-conflict zones, ensuring that care is not dependent on foreign NGOs but rooted in local networks. And in Egypt, underground sex education sessions are taking place in kitchens and coffee shops – quiet, careful, but deeply radical. Palestinian activists shared digital tools designed to educate youth about consent and bodily rights despite surveillance and occupation. A woman from Tunisia spoke of rewriting curricula with teachers willing to defy the state’s silence on sexuality. From Lebanon, I shared how during the war we helped distribute dignity kits for women experiencing period poverty with FEMALE, and organized survivor circles in spaces where the government has completely vanished.

In Paraguay, feminists have challenged adultcentrismo – the structural silencing of youth voices – by ensuring girls and young women are decision-makers in SRHR advocacy. In Brazil, obstetric violence is now being named and documented through grassroots efforts led by Black and Indigenous women. And in El Salvador, brave lawyers fight case by case to free women imprisoned for obstetric emergencies, often at great personal risk.

What struck me most was how often these strategies relied on community, not institutions. The formal systems had failed us. So we built informal ones – systems held together by WhatsApp threads, by trust, by intergenerational memory. That was the beauty of this gathering. It wasn’t a training. It was a remembering. A laying down of tools at each other’s feet. What worked in Beirut might inspire a shift in La Paz. What bloomed in San Salvador might offer new soil to Baghdad. We weren’t starting from scratch. We were standing on fertile ground. Someone said, “We need a map of what we’re already doing.”

**And I remember thinking:
this is that map.**



The Geopolitics of Our Bodies

The conversations soon zoomed out to examine the larger forces at play – we began unpacking the geopolitics that govern our bodies. Participants from both SWANA and LAC spoke to how history, politics, and economics have a direct say in the intimate realms of our lives. We acknowledged how colonialism’s legacy still courses through our laws and shapes our governance, and how its violence still ravages our land and bodies. For some of us, decades after independence, our nations still grapple with power structures imposed from abroad, now reinforced by home-grown patriarchy. For others, occupation and settler colonialism is a lived reality that affects every aspect of women’s lives. In the SWANA, Western foreign policy designed to divide us, compounds the challenges – as Salma from Palestine noted:

“Settler Colonialism doesn’t only take our land; it infiltrates our homes and bodies, dictating if and how we access healthcare, safety, freedom.”

Her words reminded everyone that oppression often manifests in the most personal of ways. We have seen it all livestreamed on our phones during our daily doom-scrolls; children targeted by sniper bullets, pregnant women shot dead in streets, mothers mourning newly born twins, rape justified as a weapon of war.

There was a weight in the air after Salma’s vulnerable share, a pause – an acknowledgement of an ongoing barbaric genocide.

I carried Salma’s words and immediately thought of my 4-year-old child back in Lebanon whom I had just survived a war with. I saw flashbacks in my head; us escaping our home in Beirut, how she got sick and I didn’t have access to her doctor or to reliable medication, the sadness on her face when she saw the state of displaced children in shelters during our aid visits, how her father went out of his way to make us feel even more unsafe. In that moment I realized I have more in common with Salma than I would like; war and occupation were becoming me and my daughter’s lived reality too, over and above the domestic violence that was informing our every move.

The weaponization of our motherhood was being used on a micro and macro scale, domestic violence mirrored colonial violence in its control, surveillance and impunity; both underscored and driven by patriarchy.

I dialed back into the conversation to find the women from LAC brought their own receipts on colonial violence. In Honduras, the total abortion ban is not just a local policy; it’s enforced through police and courts aligned with authoritarian regimes – some of which are backed by U.S. security aid. In Guatemala and El Salvador, U.S.-funded “pro-life” organizations work in tandem with local governments to roll back women’s rights. In Paraguay, indigenous women face the dangers of American exploitation through extractive industries that poison their water and shrink their land – with direct consequences for maternal health and environmental justice. Someone reminded us how every few years, when a new U.S. administration changes hands, funding for women’s health around the world is switched on and off like a lightbulb, depending on whether or not an organization mentions abortion. In Mexico, a feminist compañera shared how a clinic she worked with had to shut down because it wouldn’t comply with the policy.

“They want to gag us in exchange for medicine,” she said.

In country after country, our bodies have become battlegrounds for larger ideological wars. Yet amidst this heavy analysis, we recognized our agency too: by understanding these geopolitical currents, we can better navigate and resist them. The deeper we went, the more we realized: What happens to our bodies is not a coincidence. It is by design. It is colonial residue and global capital and patriarchal statecraft.

In some places, they criminalize abortion.

In others, they bomb clinics.

In some, they flood us with aid but only if we behave.

In others, they disappear our leaders.

And yet — in every context, we resist.

**“They try to control our bodies as they control our lands
– but we are reclaiming both,”**

Lisa asserted firmly during one discussion. In her life as a feminist organizer, she has seen how solidarity can counteract isolation. She described how, when a restrictive abortion ban in one country is struck down, it sends ripples of hope to others. I remember her saying:

“When they try to silence one of us, we must all raise our voices.”

She wasn’t speaking in metaphor. She had lived it – organizing protests in Honduras for women sentenced to 30 years for miscarriage, while watching her own family turn away from her activism. Lisa’s insight captured the essence of why we had convened: to link arms across borders so that a victory in one place becomes a victory for all, and a threat to one is met with collective defense. We looked at one another, across the circle. We were from different places and different contexts. But the control of our bodies was always connected to something larger – political control, resource extraction, settler expansion, border enforcement.

Geopolitical complexes are not abstract. They are not skin-deep. They are uterine.

These conversations underscored that we cannot view SRHR and gender justice in isolation. Every personal story sits within a web of policies, power relations, and global trends. It became clear that forging a transcontinental feminist front is not just aspirational – it is necessary. We left this session with a heightened awareness that while the challenges are immense and interconnected, so too is our solidarity. If patriarchal and anti-rights forces coordinate globally, so must we. And from there, we knew that our next step – our work – had to begin not with policy proposals, but with ritual.

**So we turned to the body.
To breath. To art. To rhythm.**





A Ritual of Resistance

The Sao Paulo Gathering

From the very beginning, the meeting in São Paulo was designed as a living ritual of resistance. On that first day, we gathered on the floor in a large circle. Each woman brought with her an offering from home – herbs, spices, family recipes, traditional fabrics, candles, photographs, souvenirs – small objects infused with personal meaning and heritage. One by one, we placed these items at the center of our circle, creating a rich tapestry of colors and textures, a collective altar; part marketplace, part burial ground, part kitchen table. As we did so, each participant introduced herself through the lens of the item she brought, often sharing a short anecdote about her mother or grandmother.

“I am the daughter of a woman who could not read but always had ideas,”

Nay said, holding a strand of cacao from her grandmother’s land in Brazil.

“My brother named me after a girl he once loved, so maybe I arrived on the back of a love story.”

Said Mona from Morocco. We didn’t know it yet, but that moment – that first offering – would become the gravitational center of the entire gathering. The room filled with the scent of sage and cardamom, with tearful laughter as someone held up a much-loved old shawl or a packet of seeds from her mother’s garden. This opening ritual was an invocation of gratitude and unity; we quite literally carried our mothers – their wisdom, their resilience, their memory – into the space and honored them. The act of sharing these pieces of our lives immediately broke down barriers. Though many of us had only just met, the circle became a trusting space. We listened to each other through simultaneous interpretation in Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese through headsets; though there might have been words lost in translation – the emotion and solidarity were palpable beyond language. By the time the last woman spoke, it felt as if our mothers and ancestors, though absent in person, were sitting there with us, nodding in approval at this sisterhood unfolding across borders.

This decolonized approach to convening – privileging storytelling, ritual, and embodied practice – set the tone for the days to come. Our facilitators, Perla Martinez from Mexico and Christina Kaghadou from Syria, guided us not through lectures or PowerPoints, but through dialogical sessions, art, movement, and collective reflection. The drawings and posters adorning the walls (sketched by participants to express their visions of freedom) and the many circles we formed (for dialogue, for dance, for meditation) transformed an ordinary conference room into a vibrant feminist sanctuary.

It is difficult to describe what happened in that circle without resorting to metaphor. It wasn't just a ritual; it was a reckoning. A slow undoing of the formalities we had carried in. The stiffness. The postures. The urgency to produce. They melted. The space we created was not only ceremonial. It was political. Because to gather as feminists – across languages, geographies, and traumas – and begin with breath instead of agenda, story instead of strategy, is to refuse the logic of patriarchy. The logic that says: hurry, produce, summarize, fix.

We did none of that. We danced. We painted. We laid on the ground. And yes, we talked. We asked: what is your dream? What does freedom smell like in your world? Who taught you about your body? Who took that knowledge away?

There were giant sheets of paper taped to the walls, slowly being covered in drawings: bleeding flowers, broken chains, maps of imaginary countries where abortion was free and joy was mandatory. We traced our silhouettes and filled them with visions – what our bodies carry, what they remember, what they long to release. We cried often. We laughed harder. During one break, someone handed out chocolate. During another, we sat in silence watching a storm roll across the São Paulo skyline. There were no panel discussions. No keynote speakers. Only circles. Small ones and large ones. Movement circles. Story circles. Healing circles. Conflict circles. All cyclical.

One afternoon, we ventured out together on a special tour of São Paulo's historical center, with local Afro-Brazilian feminists as our guides. Under umbrellas in a light rain, we walked the streets learning about the city's Afro-descendent resistance history – visiting landmarks of Black women's struggle and liberation. The experience was eye-opening for those of us not from Brazil; we saw how the fight against racism and the fight for gender justice are inseparable. Standing before a monument honoring enslaved women who had rebelled, we held hands in silence. Many of us were moved to tears, reflecting on how the fight for freedom has always been global – the colonization that touched Latin America also touched the SWANA, and the same capitalist and racist systems that subjugated people in one region had echoes in the other. The outing grounded our discussions in a real, lived context of São Paulo, reminding us that our feminist solidarity must be intersectional, embracing racial justice, economic justice and climate justice.

Even our breaks and evenings became opportunities to deepen connections and the theme of resistance never left us. We shared spicy snacks from Jordan, sweet dulces from Guatemala, and strong Brazilian coffee over casual conversations that often turned into strategy brainstorming or impromptu storytelling. I remember a conversation over breakfast that has not left me since.





I was sitting with Salma from Palestine and Hayat from Lebanon, so naturally it became an Arabic-speaking table, until Nat from Brazil joined us with intention. She was seeking to step out of her comfort and confront the language barrier that might impede our communication. I'm so happy she did. Salma was wearing what turned out to be a spectacular conversation-starter; a pin on her shirt so compelling, none of us could ignore it. It was a distinct and very relevant symbol of resistance. What resulted was an AI-assisted transcontinental conversation on armed resistance. Even without the translation app, we could tell how passionate Nat was in her expression of her solidarity with Palestinian armed resistance, relating it to her own lived truth as a Brazilian of Afro descent who belonged to a liberation movement that also held dear their basic human right to confront brutal systemic oppression with armed resistance. We talked of white supremacist mechanisms, like Zionism and colonialism and slavery, and we all agreed that Salma needs to send each of us a pin like hers. A pin that we can wear proudly in our hometowns to represent our solidarity with Palestinian armed resistance.

There were evenings when we turned up the music – dancing dabke and salsa and samba in turn. Laughter rang out as we tried each other's dance steps and taught lyrics in Arabic or Spanish. Sitting on hotel beds swapping stories about our daughters, our ex-lovers, our court cases, our miracles. In those moments of playfulness, language barriers and cultural differences evaporated; we were simply a group of women celebrating life and sisterhood. These informal bonding experiences were not just fun diversions – they were integral to building trust and solidarity. These were not distractions from the “real work.” They were the work. The kind of feminist work that refuses fragmentation. That holds the emotional, the political, the spiritual, and the erotic as part of the same whole. As one participant put it the next day,

“I came here feeling heavy with responsibility. But after dancing and laughing with you all, I feel lighter – I feel like we all carry the load now, together.”

Indeed, the São Paulo gathering nurtured us, giving us a taste of the liberated world we are fighting for – one where feminist solidarity is a source of strength, healing, and joy.

The Personal is Political is Transcontinental



The famous feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ gained a new dimension in São Paulo. Some stories don’t translate into bullet points. They arrive in the tremble of a voice, in a shared glance across the room, in the sudden rush of tears you didn’t expect to shed. That’s how it was on the third day. We had spent the first days naming systems, laws, occupations, economies – all the external forces that shape our lives. But in this session, the spotlight shifted inward, and I felt a familiar lump rise in my throat. For me, the personal and the political are not just entwined – they are indistinguishable. I arrived in São Paulo still raw from a battle I hadn’t chosen but was forced into:

a battle for my daughter, for my dignity, for my sanity, waged against a sectarian court system in Lebanon that protected my abuser and punished me for surviving.

I spent ten days imprisoned – not because I harmed anyone, but because I tried to protect my child from a father the system refused to hold accountable. I was silenced, surveilled, gaslit. I wasn’t just a woman in court – I was a mother criminalized for care. And yet, somehow, I still believed in the power of feminist solidarity, in the possibility that somewhere across the ocean, someone would understand.

In that circle, I met her. She was from Guatemala. She too had lost custody of her child to a violent man. She too had been called unstable, too emotional, too much. And when we spoke – not across a microphone, but sitting shoulder to shoulder on the floor – we didn’t need to explain. We knew.

“They say we are unfit because we resist,” she told me. “They say we are unstable because we feel.”

In that moment, the personal became not just political – it became transcontinental. We found that our stories, though rooted in vastly different landscapes, shared the same architecture. We had been punished for choosing ourselves. We had been punished for naming violence. We had been punished for mothering differently – not as enforcers of patriarchy, but as its challengers.

Other women joined the conversation. A young woman from the SWANA spoke, with difficulty, about trying to access birth control as an unmarried student. Across the room, someone from LAC began to cry. “That could have been me,” she said. “It was me.”



I thought of Nawal El Saadawi, who wrote the truth of her own female circumcision into global feminist literature. I thought of Berta Cáceres, murdered for defending her land and her people in Honduras. Of Leila Khaled, who carried both a rifle and a cause in Palestine. I thought of Mona Al Tahawy, Rigoberta Menchu, Gloria Anzaldua – all of them carried a personal wound that became a political weapon. These women did not enter history through invitation – they crashed into it because silence was no longer an option, because their personal plight could not and would not be separated from our political landscape. I didn't come to São Paulo to be heard. I came because I wanted to remember what it felt like to be believed. And I was. Not because my story was exceptional, but because it wasn't. There is something profoundly liberating about realizing your trauma is not unique. That doesn't make it easier. But it makes it political. It makes it actionable. It means that when we speak – whether in a circle, a courtroom, a protest – we are speaking for more than just ourselves.

We made an informal pact that day. To carry each other's stories forward. To speak about El Salvador in Lebanon. To speak about Gaza in Mexico. To let no one feel alone in their struggle again. Because when the personal becomes political, and then becomes transcontinental, it transforms. It becomes legacy. It becomes strategy.

It becomes fire.

Across Generations, Across Continents

A Conversation Between Nadia and Alice



There was a moment in São Paulo that I return to often – not because it was grand or dramatic, but because it offered a kind of quiet clarity I didn’t know I was craving. I sat across from a young feminist from Paraguay, just twenty-six years old. We were invited into a conversation about intergenerational feminism, but what unfolded felt more like an intimate exchange between two women trying to meet across time.

“I want to hear from you,” I said to her, honestly. “There’s a fifteen-year gap between us. And after your generation comes my daughter’s. So I need to know — what do you see? What do you need? What do you want from your feminism that mine might not yet understand?”

Her response was cautious at first, but soon her words poured out. She spoke of adultcentrismo, a word I hadn’t heard before but recognized instantly – the structural silencing of young people’s knowledge and agency. In her organization, she said, they work to name this dynamic, to dismantle it. She told me of older feminists in her movement who still believe wisdom must come with age, while younger ones are burning with visions that are often dismissed as naïve. I told her that in my region, it was much the same – that in SWANA, political authority still lives in the hands of the old, often the male, and that young people’s rebellion is often mistaken for disrespect rather than imagination.

Then she said something that stayed with me:

“Sometimes I feel immobilized. Not because I’m lazy, but because I don’t know if my future will even arrive.”

She wasn't exaggerating. She described a generation growing up without access to healthcare, to jobs, to land, to certainty. Where older generations owned homes and pensions, hers lives paycheck to paycheck in precarious gig work. Her feminism, she said, is shaped not only by gender injustice, but by climate breakdown, capitalist collapse, and a world where the basics – water, safety, air – are increasingly unstable. I heard her. And I believed her. And I also saw her – not only as a mirror to my daughter's future, but as my own past reflected back to me. I remembered being in my twenties, marching through the streets of Cairo in 2011, shouting until I lost my voice during what we called our 'Arab Spring.' I remembered how our elders dismissed us then, too – called us impulsive, emotional, impractical. I told her that we were told we needed more time, more training, more maturity. But we didn't need more training – we needed to be trusted, to be heard.

What we arrived at, slowly and softly, was this: feminism cannot afford to be linear. It must be circular. Intergenerational. Polyphonic. My feminism cannot be complete unless it makes space for hers. And hers will not thrive unless it honors what came before.



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She told me she dreams of a world where she can live without guilt for choosing not to have children. Where public spaces are safe and joyful. Where queer love is not criminalized. Where economic justice is not a fantasy. She wants a feminism that centers healing – not the self-care kind marketed by capitalism, but the collective kind that comes from being seen and held by community. I told her I want that too. That perhaps our visions are not so far apart. And we both agreed on this: capitalism is the enemy of feminism. It isolates us. It exploits our labor and our love. It punishes care and rewards extraction. And unless we confront it – not just name it, but actively dismantle it – our feminist futures will remain performative and partial.

This conversation reminded me that the South-South feminist project is not only about crossing borders. It's about crossing time. By the end of the conversation, we weren't mapping out a five-year strategy. We were making something softer. A shared promise. That I will make space. That she will not inherit our silence. That we will learn from each other, not despite the years between us, but because of them. In her I saw the future. In me she saw a bridge. And in that exchange, transgenerational feminism wasn't an idea. It was a living, breathing bond.



Principles in Practice

A Decolonial Feminist Solidarity



In many ways, this gathering was a living embodiment of the decolonial principles we believe in as feminists. But here, we didn't just name those values – we practiced them. And in doing so, we remembered that theory is only useful when it's embodied.

We practiced collective care. That did not mean perfection or harmony. It meant checking in when someone left the room. It meant translators pausing when someone needed a break. It meant starting late so we could cry together. It meant someone quietly bringing another tea. Care wasn't on the agenda – it was in the air. I remember someone saying, **“This space makes me feel like I'm allowed to breathe all the way in.”**

We practiced anti-ableism. The room was arranged so no one was excluded. People sat on chairs, on cushions, on the floor. There was no front and no back. Interpretation was available in multiple languages, not as an afterthought but as a central feature. We practiced linguistic justice. Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, French, English – our circle was multilingual, messy, and beautifully layered. We didn't demand fluency. We slowed down. We gestured. We laughed. We translated not just words, but meaning. And when words failed, we turned to art and movement and metaphor. It wasn't perfect – but when something didn't work, we adapted. We asked. We listened. We made space.

We practiced decoloniality. Not as rhetoric, but as ritual. We opened with offerings from our lands. We centered Indigenous knowledge. We listened to Afro-Brazilian feminists who walked us through the city's suppressed history. We honored the fact that the very act of meeting – South to South, without a Northern intermediary – was itself a rupture. We rejected extractivism. There were no external evaluators in the room, no one taking from us to write about us. We documented our own learning. We sketched, recorded, reflected together. Our experiences were not data points – they were seeds for future growth. We left with drawings, notes, poems, WhatsApp threads. We decided what stories to tell, and how to tell them.

And perhaps most powerfully:

We practiced feminist creativity. Not to impress, but to imagine. We remembered that the future is not only built through strategy – it is dreamed into being through creativity. By the end of the gathering, we didn't just talk about these principles – we had lived them. We left knowing that feminist principles are not a checklist. They are muscle memory. They are practice. And we must keep practicing – together.

We Are Making Maps



It was time to dream – not in abstraction, but in direction. We were asked:

Beyond this gathering what does transregional feminist solidarity look like in practice?

Not just in São Paulo, but next month. Next year. In Beirut and Oaxaca. In Ramallah and Asunción. And not only in moments of crisis – but in the long, quiet work of building. We began mapping. Some drew literal maps – lines connecting cities, rivers flowing through movement spaces. Others mapped the body – drawing wombs as borderless territories, hands as bridges, tongues as tunnels of translation. And some simply wrote words: cuidado, تحرير, ancestras, ruptura, earth, pleasure, no más silencio.

We drew inspiration from projects like Portal Catarinas in Brazil, which uplifts feminist journalism; Dawlaty's oral history archives in Syria, preserving the voices of war-affected women; and Bolivia's Red de Sanadoras, which integrates community healing and storytelling as acts of resistance. We referenced the Feminist Internet Manifesto, reimagining it with our own contexts, where colonization was not metaphorical but lived, and where digital resistance often begins with a basic revolutionary text broadcast on a messaging app.

And as we mapped, some ideas crystallized – not as rigid frameworks, but as paths worth walking: We imagined a feminist tech lab, led by women from both regions, to build digital safety tools for organizing under surveillance. A platform for sharing tactics – how to use encrypted apps in authoritarian regimes, how to run virtual SRHR workshops in conflict zones, how to archive testimonies without risking lives. We envisioned a secure, multilingual feminist platform co-created by SWANA and LAC feminists. Not just a website, but a living archive. Imagine uploading a zine from Bolivia and finding it filed next to chants from Lebanon, or a healing guide from Gaza resting beside Indigenous midwifery practices from Guatemala.

Others imagined a decolonial AI chatbot, one trained not on Silicon Valley datasets but on the lived realities and ancestral knowledge of feminists from the South. A digital compañera who could answer questions about safe abortion, offer trauma-informed care tips, and guide young organizers in repressive states—all while respecting privacy, rejecting surveillance, and centering language justice. "This AI wouldn't give you Western stats," someone said. "She'd give you your grandmother's wisdom, and your sister's courage." This wasn't about catching up to Western tech—it was about building tech that belonged to us.

We spoke about sister-city feminist exchanges – linking Beirut with Bogotá, Gaza with Medellín, Tunis with Tijuana – where collectives could host one another, learn from one another, break bread, and build trust. Not as study tours for donors, but as reciprocal residencies for resistance. We dreamed of a shared feminist curriculum, rooted in decolonial SRHR, written in Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, and Indigenous languages – not for university credit, but for life. Modules that draw from Palestinian feminist theory, Afro-Latino birthing practices, SWANA survivor networks, and the Green Wave’s mobilization strategies. A living syllabus authored by all of us. We spoke of a South-South feminist podcast, with rotating hosts across regions – a traveling voice weaving together oral histories, poems, reflections, music, political analysis, and questions.

A sonic bridge.

We named the need for a solidarity fund – one not governed by the Global North, but by us. One that understands flexibility, urgency, and intersectionality. One that believes in small grants, in long timelines, in dreams that don’t come with logframes. We imagined annual gatherings like this one, hosted by different collectives, held in different lands. Not scaling up, but spreading deep.

And most importantly, we would do all of this together—not as siloed projects, but as experiments in collective liberation. No deadlines. No donors dictating outcomes. Only shared values, mutual trust, and enough bandwidth to dream.



We closed as we had opened: in a circle. No podium, no applause. Just women sitting shoulder to shoulder, eyes shining with the kind of exhaustion that only comes from having told the truth for days on end. And as a poetic consummation of our solidarity, something magical happened. Someone shared to the group that the martyrdom of a renowned Palestinian resistance fighter, had been announced. A piece of news that threw several Arab women into a state of deep and emotional mourning. In a gesture of true solidarity, our LAC sisters offered us the space to mourn and in fact mourned with us; many sharing in our tears and all offering to hold each one of us in a long embrace. An impromptu wake had started to take form, at one point a powerful and impassioned chant of liberation spontaneously broke out from our Latina sisters dedicated to us and our resistance. A moment so poetically poignant and relevant that I had lost my ability to speak; I was rendered speechless as I held in the embrace of a new-found sister, tears quietly rolling down my cheek. The solidarity was forged.

We returned to the altar we had built on the first day – now overflowing with mementos, notes, drawings, bits of shared life. We gathered our things. The spices. The drawings. The notes scribbled on napkins. But we also left things behind – burdens, shame, perfectionism, loneliness. We hadn't solved anything. But we remembered. That our bodies are sacred. That our voices are plural. That feminist ritual is not a break from strategy – it is how we begin to dream strategy differently.



The São Paulo meeting ended that afternoon – but what it sparked has not. Because we did not gather to write a report. We gathered to plant a movement. And movements are not built in closing statements. They are built in voice notes sent across time zones. In mutual aid when a sister is at risk. In shared posts, shared protests, shared breath. In the decision to pick up the phone when someone goes quiet. In the refusal to let any woman's story become a footnote.



From Gathering to Movement

We left São Paulo with a set of living commitments, not policy recommendations:

We committed to keeping this transregional feminist alliance alive – to building a network that exists beyond funding cycles and beyond institutional agendas.

We committed to centering our own knowledge – to documenting in our voices, in our languages, with our metaphors. To resisting extractivism even in the realm of story.

We committed to finding moments of shared resistance, like International Women’s Day or the 16 Days of Activism, and turning them into platforms for united feminist action.

We committed to mutual learning – exchanges between health workers, youth educators, activists and artists.

We committed to demanding better from our allies – including international NGOs and donors. We asked not for charity, but for trust. Not for saviorism, but for solidarity. We demanded flexible funding, feminist governance, and resources that follow our priorities – not the other way around.

We committed to growing our circle – to making space for Afro-descendant feminists, indigenous land defenders, queer women, domestic workers, refugees, and girls. To making this movement as wide and as deep as the world we are fighting for.

And perhaps most radically, we imagined continuing to hold each other — in the quiet reassurance that someone across the ocean is whispering: you’re not alone.



**We carried
our mothers.**

**We carried
each other.**

**And now,
we carry the
movement
forward.**



