



## **A Feminist View on the Permanent War Against the Peoples: Colonialism, Imperialism, and Conflict in Women's Everyday Lives**

**April 24, International Day of Feminist Solidarity**

This year we remember that, 10 years ago, more than one thousand people, mostly women, died in Rana Plaza, a garment factory complex that feeds the monster of international fashion: garment transnational corporations. For Bangladesh, fashion transnational corporations represent 20% of its Gross Domestic Product, that is, 20% of accumulation based on the exploitation of bodies, lives, and labor mostly of women and girls, who are forced to work in undignified conditions during shifts of almost 12 hours for USD 3 or less. In Rana Plaza and similar complexes throughout the world, we can see how corporations impose slave-like regimes and put profit before peoples' lives and development.

This reality is not much different from what we live in many corners of our continent, where we offer labor in precarious conditions, with no rights and no safety, to big exporting companies in several industries, such as the textile industry, but also the arms, extractive, mining, agribusiness, and technology industries. We can see how the hydra of capitalism, colonialism, racism, and patriarchy feed on the lives of women and girls.

Transnational corporations' concentration of wealth and power reached, with neoliberalism, a never-before-seen level in the history of capitalism. Corporate power goes way beyond the strictly economic power; it boosts and imposes political, cultural, and legal agendas on an international basis. Corporate power works by articulating these different domains, seeking to expand consent and legitimacy given to businesses' leading role in the organization of life.

Distinct logics and interests are combined within the economic dynamics led by transnational corporations, comprising from the States of origin to those in the ends of supply chains, and which compete against each other for investments with deregulation



agendas, especially regarding labor and taxes. Trade and investment agreements are instruments of geopolitical disputes for hegemony and control over territories, resources, and common assets. The feminist anti-capitalist body of knowledge in this agenda indicates that looking at these realities, in which exploitation and violations stand out, allows understanding where the changes boosted by neoliberalism want to take us, that is, generalization of precariousness, on one side, and impunity, on the other. And when transnational corporations encounter obstacles, put by collective actors in struggle, these corporations resort to violence, attempts of co-option, persecution, and murder of leaders. With state structures at the service of corporate elites, criminalization of poverty and of those who fight against it is spreading across the continent, particularly in countries governed by the far right.

The hydra of racist and patriarchal capitalism also grows with imperialism and strategies of political and economic submission of the peoples of the global South. As this year also marks the 200 years of the Monroe Doctrine, we want to dedicate a moment of our feminist march in the Americas to analyze how this doctrine affected the Latin American and Caribbean dependence on the United States, as well as how its consequences still affect our lives, being present in the militarization, in the exploration of common assets, and in the expropriation brought by transnational corporations to the territories of Abya Yala, Our America.

To analyze the geopolitical conjunctures, we cannot start from nothing, taking into consideration only the present time. Our continent has been subject to imperialist disputes since white European men landed in our *pacha*. And the pressure over the territories and bodies of the Americas did not stop with the victory of the 19th century independenceist movements.

### **A Trajectory of Resistance Against Belligerence**

Over the last 200 years, we, the peoples, have been subject to a permanent war, which is either open or concealed. Even when war is not openly declared, we cannot say we enjoy peace. This is so because the vision of peace built by the liberal society as absence of war tries to hide, under economic interests, numerous conflicts, disputes, and



forms of violence the peoples suffer in their territories. In addition, the mere existence and maintenance of military armies as defenders of sovereignty and order imply the imminence of war and conflict in people's everyday life. Feminists criticize precisely this understanding of "peace". There is, in fact, a *non-peace*, that is, times when there are not armed conflicts, but during which we live under threat, in States that do not guarantee human rights, that pledge our future, that sell and explore our common assets for transnational corporations supported by the United States war power.

In our analysis, we identify that this model organizes by intensifying the capital-life conflict, which keeps using the same accumulation mechanisms it has been using since the beginning: control over labor force, over bodies, and over territories, always with much violence. This is why we name it a permanent war against the peoples. It happens through armed conflicts, militarization of territories, the police structure, through control over boundaries, and criminalization of poverty. Racism, patriarchy, and persecution of gender nonconforming bodies are strongly rooted in it.

We position our critical view against the construction of militarism as a gear of the capitalist, racist, and patriarchal social structure. The pillars of militarism are discipline, hierarchy, and the establishment of a masculine superiority based on force to maintain property, elite interests, and a so-called "safety". From the point of view of militarism, social conflicts are solved with confrontation, when a different element is viewed as an enemy to be fought and eliminated, a threat to safety, to development, and to social cohesion. In this model, the men of the armed forces protect the capitalist State or private property against any threat, be it internal or external. With the dominance of transnational corporations over militarization, the safety policy becomes increasingly private, controlling territories by means of armies, the police, and the militia, which do not walk opposite paths – they are actually two sides of the same coin. Disputes over power and the situation of permanent war are engraved in women's, children's, and gender nonconforming identities' bodies, who witnessed how rape and femicide are regular practices that serve not only to discipline women and gender nonconforming people, but also as alarming messages to the rest of the population.

In the words of Russian revolutionist Clara Zetkin at the 3rd International Conference of Socialist Women, held in March 1915: "Who benefits from war? Only a



small minority in each nation does. Manufacturers of weapons and cannons, owners of shipyards, and suppliers for the Army. For the sake of their own profits, they instigated hatred between peoples; with this, they created war. (...) Workers win nothing with this war; instead, they risk losing everything they care about”. Zetkin exposes precisely how wars are in fact an industry, boosted by specific companies that produce all the material needed for conflicts to happen. Wars are organized around companies’ profit, funded by public resources. The United States are a clear portrait of that: the country that seeks to maintain an imperial domain over the world is the one that spends more with the military, which has increased over the last years. Meanwhile, its population has no access to basic rights, such as health care.

Understanding this connection between increased power of transnational corporations and expansion of wars against the peoples is key to organize our stance. The war against the peoples is expressed not only in conflicts and occupations, but also in the everyday operation of a model marked by the capital-life conflict. Most of the power and wealth generated by the capital-life conflict goes to transnational corporations. The offensive of the corporate power tramples women’s bodies, labor, and territories by using militarization as an instrument. In this regard, focusing our actions against transnational corporations’ power is crucial in the anti-war agenda.

The analysis as from a systemic point of view shows all interconnected dimensions of these processes. This is why we say that today we live a model crisis. The fact that arms companies are extremely pollutant, generating a huge impact on nature with their exploitation and havoc of territories, provides a clear view of this dimension. When analyzing the connections between wars, militarization, and the United States’ imperialist action in our region, we must observe the organization of capital and transnational corporations’ role.

In Latin America, we say that the United States, based on their Monroe Doctrine, treat the region as if it were their backyard. This analysis is anchored in the evidences that show that, with their imperial power, the United States permanently interfere in our region. It happens through imposition of debts, through the production and consumption



model, through interference in our political processes, the hybrid wars, the economic blockade against Cuba and Venezuela, and the financing of wars against insurgents.

### **Monroe Doctrine: Origin of US Imperialism**

The Monroe Doctrine was conceived in 1823 during a rearrangement of the capitalist hydra following independence processes in the Americas. At first, on paper, the doctrine focused on the need of the recently created United States to keep out of the continent colonialist powers that could pose a threat against their own sovereignty and right to self-determination. But, soon enough, it became the basis on which US governments built their eagerness to dominate and exploit the rest of the continent.

Summarized in the phrase “*America for the Americans*”, the doctrine defines any intention of European countries to extend their interests into the continent as a danger to the United States of North America’s integrity, as well as declares a supposed commitment to protect the Americas from colonialism. Soon, the “Americans” mentioned in the doctrine would be defined. For that, the fathers of the North-American nation used an old slogan that encouraged English and Scottish Calvinist settlers to cross the ocean and establish in North America: The Manifest Destiny.

“Manifest Destiny” is the idea that expresses that, due to designs of providence, some peoples are chosen and are entitled to appropriate territories. This ideology establishes the entitlement and almost the obligation of heterosexual white men, who declare themselves chosen by divine grace to possess territories and bodies and exploit them for their own benefit. By divine grace, they are possessors of assets, to reproduce, populate, and dominate the territories pointed out by divine grace in their favor. The image of the heterosexual white man, who is a provider and comes from the recent-established elites, as universal model becomes the paradigm guiding the construction of US society.

As from this experience, militarism keeps developing as a supporting ideology and a tool to guarantee and protect power, property, the heteronormative family, the racial domination, the capitalist social production and reproduction, and the domination and control over women’s bodies.



## **The Impacts of the Monroe Doctrine on Our America**

Militarization is a historical process highly spread across Latin America. The processes of colonization experienced in the continent were, in general, based on the establishment of military and capitalist production structures to dominate the territory and the Indigenous populations. Latin America became part of the world map through war and Indigenous resistance. It is also as from these conflicts and this colonialist military structure that different resistances struggling for emancipation organized, such as the independenceist elites' movements.

Even though they were supported by the grassroots mobilization for freedom, these political and economic elites were aware that it would be far more profitable to get stronger without the intermediation of the metropolis. Several policies articulating racism and patriarchy were established as mechanisms to subdue the original peoples and control bodies, particularly women's, by using forced militarization, whitening of populations, criminalization of poverty, and social organization promoted by the States and guaranteed by police and military apparatus.

During the 19th century, the Monroe Doctrine served to justify more than 28 armed interventions, in addition to many other unequal economic interventions. It resulted in processes such as the neocolonization of Porto Rico, the annexation of half the Mexican territory to the United States, the intervention in Nova Granada, and the usurpation of the interoceanic canal, as well as the 36-year Banana Wars that established dictatorships throughout Central America and the Caribbean and consolidated the transnational production and export of tropical fruits.

The governments of the United States and their criminal alliance with transnational corporations and militarization entered into agreements with other imperial forces, such as the United Kingdom, to try to expropriate our American peoples from territories such as the Malvinas and the Essequibo Territory. There is no people in our continent that has not felt the weight of the US expansionism.



This history of destruction, of permanent war, also imposes itself with the same strength over the diversity of non-white peoples who live within the boundaries of the United States. As an example, we have the painful memory of the Trail of Tears (1830), a violent process of forced displacement of nearly 60 thousand American native people, a process of ethnic cleansing that is repeatedly glorified in Westerns as the conquest and civilization of West.

It is key mentioning that the emancipation from European metropolis did not guarantee the end of slavery. Enslaved Black and Indigenous populations built streets, buildings, institutions all over the continent with their blood, sweat, and life. Slavery in Brazil, for instance, officially lasted until 1888, being the last country to stop the violent exploitation of Black bodies. But this racist legacy still survives as public policy until nowadays, when the military police in Rio de Janeiro is known for being the world's second most lethal police force, behind only the military forces of Israel. Its origin can be traced back to the Empire, as the Royal Police [*Policia Real*], a police apparatus created after the arrival of the royal family in Brazil to guarantee their safety and the security of royal properties. Racism is based on the colonial mechanisms employed to form the Latin American capitalist society, which has always used the police and the military forces to guarantee its political and economic dominance and the militarist ideology to produce a controlled and disciplined society.

The 20th century was marked by the radicalization of the Monroe Doctrine.

The Roosevelt Corollary, granting to the United States of North America the right to intervene in internal affairs of any country of Latin America in the event of flagrant and persistent faults, was issued in 1904. The Big Stick policy was then launched. No territory throughout the 20th century was free from the US stick. Every military dictatorship in the continent counted on the support, including financial, of the United States, and all of them were at the service of transnational corporate interests.

In addition, the Monroe Doctrine serves as justification for the imposition of militarism in the Americas through settlement of at least 80 North-American military bases. These military bases work as mechanisms of occupation of the territory and go beyond that, as they represent an armed foreign presence imposing a series of limitations



and adaptations in production, education, consumption practices, in other words, in ways of living.

“Peace”, “safety”, and “social cohesion” imposed by militarism do not recognize the possibilities of relationship and coexistence within the diversity we may have as humans, let alone respect non-human lives.

## **Women in March Against Militarization and Transnational Corporations**

In 2010, we from the World March of Women, participated in a feminist vigil for the peoples against militarization in front of a US military base installed in the region of Santander, Colombia. We denounced the loss of sovereignty over our bodies, lives, and territories, and the increased violence against women, the prostitution, and the femicide as consequences of the imperialist territorial occupation. But we also strengthened the perspective that women are agents of the process to build peace. Our anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-colonialist feminist criticism denounces militarism as one of the bases of patriarchy.

Women have been passive subjects in this permanent war against life. We women act in resistance, we sustain the everyday life with solidarity networks that guarantee life and our cultural diversity. We place our bodies to protect territories and common assets, we denounce the consequences of this war on our peoples, and we also propose ways of organizing for production and reproduction of life in our communities. We collectively build proposals for true peace, based on justice and equity.

We do not believe in a peace defined as the absence of an officially declared war. Living in territories constantly threatened, besieged by military bases, is not living at peace. Living in blocked or sanctioned territories is not living at peace either, it is just coexisting with other types of war. We understand construction of peace as a process of radical systemic transformation based on well-being of communities, people, and nature, and not on the maintenance of militarized States and transnational economic interests – we should not coexist with these two; instead, we must dismantle them.





The so-called “safety” imposed by the United States is not for the peoples who live in their territory neither for neighboring peoples, but for the transnational corporations’ interests. In our continent, we are connected to the struggles for peace, sovereignty, and self-determination conducted by peoples from other parties of the world. We remember the victims of transnational corporations on this April 24 because we cannot stand any more massacres against women workers. We remember each victim of the Rana Plaza disaster and we are convinced that we resist to live and march to transform.

We will keep marching until we are all free!

World March of Women – Americas  
ALBA Movements

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