

**WHAT TIME IS IT ON
THE CLOCK OF THE
WORLD? POWER.
MOVEMENTS.
CHANGE.**



WHAT TIME IS IT ON THE CLOCK OF THE WORLD? POWER. MOVEMENTS. CHANGE.

Locating ourselves in time – in specific and evolving historical and political contexts – is an organizing precept that’s easily forgotten in the rush to respond to constant crisis. As JASS, we took the question: **What time is it on the clock of the world?**

To members of our community of feminist thinkers and movement builders in a two-part dialogue held May 3 and 9, 2023 that looked through three lenses: Bodies, Resources and Political Space. This text presents key highlights from this conversation.

We live in a time of great complexity. The global capitalist system is reconfiguring to squeeze out the most from labor and increasingly scarce natural resources – for the benefit of the few. Varying forms of displacement, exclusion, extermination, persecution and discrimination are intensifying, depending on the place and the body one inhabits. Fundamentalist, rightwing political/religious/social forces are on the rise, reinforcing racialized and patriarchal structures of social control that subordinate women and children, Black, Brown and indigenous peoples, sexual diversities, migrants and refugees, trans and queer bodies, land defenders, political dissidents—those whose autonomy would threaten the dominating system.

The State in most places has limited or abandoned its role in mitigating the destabilizing impacts of capitalism, cutting regulation, social programs, and safety nets, limiting democratic participation and access to justice, and adopting more openly authoritarian and pro-business stances that actively contribute to inequality, repression and planetary destruction. The pandemic revealed even more starkly that States are failing to meet the basic needs and expectations of their populations.

All this takes place against the backdrop of climate change. The overwhelming evidence of the planet’s limits to sustaining life under capitalism, instead of leading to restraint or a new model of sustainability, has led to intensified extraction and competition for what’s left in the time that remains. This imposes a new urgency and set of considerations to our organizing, but also gives us a common platform to act from.

Bodies have become a key battlefield in the struggle for who survives in this uncertain future. A reactionary backlash targets certain bodies through punitive laws, incarceration, forced reproduction, hate crimes, assassination and genocide campaigns, tapping into historic prejudices and contemporary fears and insecurities. Resource grabs by extractivist industries destroy the planet and those who defend it, with women community leaders often on the front line of risk and resistance.



AHA! Moment

There is a deep connection between how bodies are conceived and the construction of hierarchy and inequality by authoritarian, conservative and powerful economic forces. To sustain an unequal and unjust system, these forces need to constantly impose differentiated roles on different bodies by asserting the fundamental inferiority and lack of worth of the vast majority of human beings.

The battle for resources

- “It’s not about leaving no one behind anymore. It’s about leaving no land unextracted, leaving no country unintruded” **Zeph**
- “We’re very close to the point where our ability to maximize extraction is limited by the earth’s capacity to receive it.” **Tamara**
- Corporations have known the impact of their fossil fuel extraction for years and years, and they’ve paid millions of dollars to cover up the reality that we will all come to the point where we all have to endure the catastrophic impact of the climate crisis. All of us will have a taste of what it would look like, but women, particularly in the global South will have to bear most of its impacts... So, when we talk about climate crisis. It’s not just talking about the science of it, or the weather, or the rain, or the drought. It’s about politics, and we always have to interrogate the power behind it. **Zeph**

In response, rather than defending the populace, political systems are closing ranks around the privileged. In all our regions, authoritarianism is on the rise, often advanced by far-right social movements. Contemporary models of authoritarianism can be characterized as: 1) the closing of democratic spaces and the restriction of freedoms; 2) repression of journalists, activists, social justice movements, political opposition, minority, religions,

internally colonized populations defined as enemies; and 3) enforcement of hierarchies of power rooted in male supremacy, white supremacy, capitalism and militarism, which are typically presented as “natural, moral, inevitable, and right.”

It's important to note that unlike totalitarianism, authoritarianism maintains a pretense of democracy that has to be unmasked to expose the real nature of the system.

Changes in visible power (restrictive laws, criminalization) and hidden and invisible power (fraud, persecution, imposition of repressive norms, media control) reduce people's and movements' ability to defend rights and challenge power in formal political spaces. While many sectors have historically been exempted from these kinds of attacks, now broader segments of the population confront barriers and repression. On the one hand, this can cause movements to become narrowly focused, or “siloeed” on their own issues and survival; on the other it creates a broader basis for making common cause with sectors not previously allied. This is a critical time to defend democracy because the alternative is extreme, brutal and profoundly threatening to our movements.



AHA! Moment

Authoritarian models vary, but they share key aspects:

- 1) patriarchal religious movements create a political base, based on narratives of that present feminists, homosexuals, “gender ideology” as threats to civilization,
- 2) they often invoke racial and ethnic nationalisms,
- 3) autocratic leaders draw diverse sometimes even contradictory factions into coalition,
- 4) when liberal democracies fall apart, they often descend into authoritarianism.

The strength of grassroots rightwing movements requires rethinking strategies and the assumption that the poor and oppressed are the natural constituency exclusively of the anti-capitalist left. An important historic paradigm of the left, progressive and feminist movements has been the idea of the people versus the elite. But the mobilization of grassroots and working-class rightwing movements complicates that story. This in turn complicates our movements' strategies-- how we see ourselves and work together.

It also confronts us with revamped, highly resourced and globally orchestrated campaigns against women's and LGBTQ rights that aim to consolidate the right and demonize and isolate feminist and human rights movements. With these threats highly connected structurally and organizationally, people who work on democracy, sexual rights, land rights, labor rights etc., must also recognize the need to come together.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FEMINIST MOVEMENT STRATEGIES

The deep dive into contexts and tendencies laid the groundwork for focusing on implications for women activists, movements and movement strategies

Among the main movement-building takeaways are:

1. We face a particularly complex and perilous moment in the history of feminist movement building. We must not only recognize that, but use it.


This complex and perilous context means that movements are confronting power dynamics that are difficult to understand and to process, while facing repression from conservative, fundamentalist forces. Laws and the democratic state are used to persecute movement leaders, which drains energy and resources. There is an active attempt to manipulate how people interpret their own realities, meaning that our movements have to counteract negative narratives, especially around women. Climate change, increased poverty, lack of basic services and violence can lead to individualism in the struggle to survive.

Dealing with the complexity requires deep analysis of the present, in specific contexts and from the point of view of diverse actors. It also requires going back to knowledge produced in the past by movements, activists, and organizers before us. This knowledge and experience can nourish us, but much of it has been suppressed and invisibilized precisely because it contains powerful anti-systemic lessons.

The upside to this complexity is that facing multiple problems pushes us to see them through a more systemic lens and to identify parallels that bring us together globally. We can identify common problems and see that the problems that movements face in one place are similar to those in another and require concerted action.

2. We need to go slow, analyze complexities, not force solutions and embrace tensions

Instead of trying to resolve complex problems at once, we need to absorb the complexities, understand the dimensions of the crises, generate knowledge, create a common language, set conditions for processing, reflect collectively from different standpoints, identify the silos and obstacles that limit our action, and share tools for transformation. This means taking our time. Remember, we're in this for the long haul.



One way of organizing in diversity and complexity is to see it in terms of alignment around key challenges, rather than one-size solutions that focus on getting everyone to do the same thing. We align both to interrupt the advance of authoritarianism and destruction, and to build something new—“the notion of block, build, transform, and making sure that we are dedicating our human capacity towards all of those kinds of activities”, Tarso explained.

We also need to accept that contradictions are the source of dialectical transformation. Tensions can be creative when handled with respect and patience, and doorways to deeper analysis of larger issues.

3. The need for transnational, cross-sector organizing has never been greater

Given multi-issue, international organizing on the right and an increasingly centralized and concentrated globalized economic system, we must organize across borders, issues, identities and sectors--simultaneously.

Broadening our base and building bridges is essential, given the interconnected, global nature of actions, the centrality of resources, and the transnational nature of the economic model and political trends. As Patricia noted, “Sometimes we have to read between the lines of the movement to go beyond the local and create a much more integrated analysis to increase our ability to connect globally to fight a clearly anti-systemic struggle.” Building transnational solidarity and forming and sustaining alliances must be done carefully and consciously, and it must be done immediately.

4. Movements are made up of people—we must center care

Women defenders and activists are facing double or triple work days, attacks, trauma and stress. The movements we support have to take that into consideration through programs of self-care, collective care, safety and sensibility. They have to model the human relations we aspire to, to be an oasis in a sea of alienation. As Patricia noted, “Breaking isolation is the starting point for building collective power.”

Listening is critical to this task, listening to differing opinions and also to make sure all voices are included. Often times, it's the loudest or the closest or the most resourced who set agendas and narratives, when keys to the strategies and sustainability of our movements lie within smaller, more marginalized groups. These groups need their own safe space to define their particular ideas of liberation. The articulation of aspirations builds a broader and more inclusive strategy from the ground up.



AHA! Moment

Our movements are composed of people and the relationships between us, the heart-mind-body connections in a collective context. As we strategize and adapt, we have to remember that our movements are made up of the people who are suffering these attacks, especially in poor, working class, Black and Brown bodies. To be strong, movements need to look internally at the fractures, the tensions, the stress, the load and the many ways we must care for movements and the people in them.

5. A long-term vision requires multiple strategies.

Attention to specific political and social contexts and timing often means adopting different strategies at different times. There will be moments to engage with dominant power to make the forces against us visible, to turn their own tables against them, as Zeph expressed. “Engagement doesn’t mean legitimizing the current status quo, but to engage in the perspective that could further consolidate and strengthen movement organizing work.” Tamara pointed out that we also need to govern “because we can’t leave it to the people who don’t want us to live.”

There are other moments to confront dominant power from outside, and still others to build autonomous spaces. Oftentimes these all overlap. The important thing is that decisions be made inclusively with adequate information and analysis and a vision of where we want to end up.

6. The power of envisioning the world we want

By simply fighting for our needs and communal practices, women’s movements assume an anti-systemic stance that stems from and offers a whole different vision of the world. Throughout the dialogue, the need to dream, to imagine and to create emerged as a fundamental part of our work. Movements must simultaneously dream the world we want and move toward it with concrete strategies to defeat the forces against us.

To build power for the world we want requires daily resistance, combined with this process of envisioning a world without capitalism, without racism, without patriarchy, without white supremacy. We often get caught up in responding, reacting and resisting. We have to do all that, without losing our creativity or capacity to imagine other worlds. Envisioning another world is not only a way to keep the dream alive, it also serves as a guiding compass for transformation.

 **AHA! Moment**

We know what's bad, what we are against, what is wrong and what needs to be fixed. We need to think what is it that we--as feminists, as activists, as movement people--actually need to do, moving not only from the defensive, but also thinking: what do liberation and freedom look like as a movement strategy in this moment? **Phumi**

What are we building power for? (Phrases to nourish our spirits)

- We are building towards freedom, and freedom TO: live in joy, live in dignity, freedom to flourish, to thrive, for everybody and the planet
- To live well, to live in dignity, to build harmonic relations among human beings and nature
- A more breathable world
- The struggle for freedom is the next best thing to actually being free

Just as there are no quick answers to the complexity of today, there is no concluding paragraph to the richness of this dialogue. It is an invitation to celebrate creative tensions while building strategic consensus; to see similarities and differences side by side; to connect and contextualize; to slow down, reflect and align; to think, dream and act.