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Debts and Reparations Synthesis Report

Presential Meeting of the Global Working Group Beyond Development 2023

Sept 2023
Jackson, Mississippi



¹ Storyboard made by Michaela Stith from Native Movement Alaska during the meeting

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We are daughters for freedom, we are cimarronas,
we are the Mississippi, the Cauca, the Magdalena, the Atrato...
we are happy and rebellious caribbeans, we are jungle, we are Africa, we are the
world, we are women without time, what was and what will be...
Marimba, a libertarian cry, we are mgica, fresh rain, strength and courage

Marilyn Machado

Introduction²

In September 2023, Cooperation Jackson hosted the fifth meeting of the Global Working Group Beyond Development (GWGBD). Our meeting aimed to generate collaborative, intersectional knowledge on debt and reparations from a global perspective, emphasizing multifaceted alternatives that address one or multiple structures of oppression (patriarchy, capitalism, racism, caste, colonization, imperialism and predatory relations toward non-humans)

The overarching questions of the meeting were: What are reparations, and how can they be transformative? What different structural debts exist, and how do they impact our societies? How can we grasp and demonstrate the complexity and varying scales of debts and reparations in diverse social contexts? How do we connect the different conceptualizations of debt and reparations and translate them into concrete actions? What ideas, proposals and experiences can we contribute, as a Global Working Group, to advance reparations in constructive and “worldmaking” ways, and on which grounds?

Our meeting in Jackson, Mississippi, gathered 26 activists/critical scholars from 18 countries³ who shared experiences and knowledge of different regions of the world, as well as the different epistemologies and schools of thought that exist within them, in a collaborative effort to address these politically relevant and timely questions.

The Global Working Group Beyond Development is actively generating grounded knowledge, recognizing the necessity of multiple interconnected perspectives to tackle complex questions. At the fifth meeting of the Global Working Group, the significance of race and racism in discussions on reparations was notably emphasized. The meeting's location in Jackson, Mississippi, which was the heartbeat of the fight for equality, especially in the 1960s and 1950s, heightened this emphasis. The struggles in Jackson, were documented in a book chapter co-written by two members of the GWGBD⁴. Moreover, race and racism play a pivotal role not only in discussions of reparations for historical injustices

² The present text is the result of a collective process of analysis, dialogue, and editing, based on the 5th meeting of the Global Working Group Beyond Development. The text has been edited by Mauro Castro with the support of Beatriz Rodriguez, Mary Ann Manahan, John Feffer, Elise Klein, Miriam Lang, Ulrich Brand and Raphael Hoetmer.

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⁴ See Williams, E and M'Barek, M. 2020. Black-Led Commons In The United States in Cities of Dignity. Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

like slavery and colonialism but also confronting neo-colonial practices associated with climate change. Many reparations struggles have arisen from Black and Indigenous movements.

Following the GWGBD's aim and methodology, the six-day meeting provided different spaces for reflection, knowledge production, and strategic thinking around debt and reparations, an issue that is central to the discussion on colonialism and historical and contemporary injustices. The initial panel featured Indigenous and Black activists, a deliberate choice to kick off the conversation around debts and reparations. Having Indigenous and Black voices lead this discussion served two purposes. First, it placed race at the forefront of reparations struggles, a point that this edition aimed to emphasize explicitly. Second, it provided an opportunity to critically examine and reject the colonial practice of pitting African and Indigenous communities against each other. As one participant noted - referring to Afro-American and Native American communities - this ongoing dynamic influences people's relationships with their respective states, which have historically subjected or colonized individuals and communities.

The unique opportunity of visiting the Southeastern regions of the United States also shaped our experience significantly. The first part of the meeting took place in New Orleans, Louisiana, the unceded and stolen land of the Chitimacha Nation; the second part of our meeting was held in Jackson, Mississippi, on the unceded and stolen land of the Chickasaw Nation. Colonization and slavery have shaped the region dramatically, and movements there have long been at the forefront of civil rights, Black Power, and anti-racist struggles. Underway today is a growing reparation movement addressing issues of the legacy of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and various forms of ongoing racial discrimination and exploitation in North America.

Vignette 1. Situating conversations in place: the modern reparation movements in the US

Our visit to New Orleans, Louisiana gave a very real context to our discussions on reparations. New Orleans' hidden history is made of powerful stories about the trade of enslaved African people, the active involvement of the Christian Church, African life in the French Quarter, and the Slave Revolt of 1811, an echo of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) to establish an independent Black republic.

We also learned about the victories of the reparation movement in the US, defeating controversy and elite resistance. Removing Confederate monuments, renaming streets, and installing new monuments that feature Black struggles for liberation are some of them.



Removed monument of segregationist judge in front of LA Supreme Court



Mr. Leon Water's Hidden History Tour highlights local movements' efforts to bring to light the history of the slave trade through historical markers.

A crucial objective of the meeting was to facilitate the exchange of perspectives and strategies on debt, reparations, and decolonization, particularly from Black and Indigenous movements. Black and Indigenous perspectives shed light on a critical reality: liberal democracies, founded on legacies of genocide, slavery, and colonization, frequently avoid addressing this past and its enduring effects on present-day justice, particularly in relation to reparations. Furthermore, colonization persists today, evident in the creation of new racial 'sacrifice zones' constructed through the ongoing exploitation of "natural resources" to fuel the capitalist expansionary economy.

Presently, we witness severe consequences of environmental degradation and health risks from fracking, particularly affecting Native American lands. Indigenous communities, already devastated by settlers' biological warfare like the use of smallpox to infect native populations, have further suffered displacement due to dam construction, which flooded their fertile lands and disrupted traditional lifestyles in the present. These historical injustices permeate modern society through racial capitalism, resulting in persistent forms of oppression. Racialized communities, both in the US and worldwide, bear the brunt of pollution and environmental degradation, highlighting the intersection of environmental and

racial justice movements. Moreover, women experience unique and compounded impacts of historical and ongoing colonization and imperialism. These insights compel us to confront the enduring legacies of injustices and advocate for reparative actions addressing the systemic roots of oppression.

Vignette 2. Getting land back in Jackson, Mississippi

Cooperation Jackson is an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist project based in Jackson, Mississippi that works with Black communities and grassroots networks to strengthen their political power. As the meeting host, the comrades from Cooperation Jackson intricately molded the experience of discussing debt and reparations while allowing us to witness how the process works in practice.

Rooted in the concept of reverse migration, Cooperation Jackson advocates for establishing politically engaged local economies for Black people in the southern United States. The philosophy of the movement is deeply rooted in the "land back" ideals, which are implemented through the acquisition of properties in the form of a community land trust. These properties are then utilized for various cooperative enterprises such as small-scale manufacturing, a food cooperative, and a landscaping enterprise. Thus, principles of economic self-determination and cooperativism defy the dominance of white supremacy, capitalism and colonial elites by 'freeing the land' from racial capitalist relations.



The Balagoon Center in Jackson, MS hosts several cooperative developments



The experience of Cooperation Jackson sheds light on the significance of land tenure: Why does such a radically transformative movement *buy* property as a way to access land? The importance of collective land ownership and tenure in empowering marginalized communities and securing their economic independence and stability was certainly one of the main takeaways of our visit.

While touring Jackson, we witnessed issues of ongoing colonization, white supremacy, and the legacies of slavery converging with climate change and capitalism. Both their detrimental impacts and the resilient responses of dignity, organization, and resistance were part of our observations.

A poignant symptom of these challenges has manifested through a long-standing water crisis in the city. Governmental reluctance to ensure basic necessities for Jackson's predominantly Black population led to the eventual destruction of public water infrastructures, with episodes of acute public health crisis after 2022. In face of such institutional racism that widens the racial wealth

gap, organizations such as Cooperation Jackson have assumed a pivotal role in distributing water to local residents.

Our visit to Jackson made us reexamine and reinterpret historical acts of resistance: by highlighting the filtered narrative of figures like Medgar Evers and the silenced history of the Reconstruction era in the US. The tour invited us to challenge dominant narratives, and to elevate marginalized voices in history.

Furthermore, the meeting aimed to establish connections with broader movements from around the world, encompassing advocates for climate and environmental justice as well as feminist initiatives addressing debt, decolonization, and anti-racist endeavors. Reparations are intricately linked to a multitude of global struggles and injustices. Throughout our deliberations, we explored the intersections between climate, race, gender, and economic justice movements, acknowledging the interrelated nature of these issues and seeking to address questions such as: what do reparations entail from a climate justice perspective? And how does this intersect with other struggles for reparative justice?

As on previous occasions, we decided to produce a collective text that reflects our conversations and systematizes the discussions held during this meeting in order to better disseminate content and consolidate networks. We will distribute this on our own website, on other platforms and media, and through online and face-to-face events. In this sense, it can be modified and adapted to different formats, such as a working paper or an article.

This collective text reflects the essence of our discussions. We have deliberately excluded references to individual group members and refrained from including extensive bibliographic references in the text. We are aware of the considerable differences in our theoretical and political points of view, as well as in the practical demands that arise from the different contexts in which we find ourselves. We had diverging positions and analyses, particularly on the nature and role of the state in addressing debts and demands for reparations. Nevertheless, these divergences can be a source of enrichment that generates fresh insights and perspectives beyond our individual perspectives. In essence, this final document is a tapestry that intricately weaves together our diverse expressions and feelings.

This synthesis report is divided into four parts. The first part teases out the multi-layered and multi-dimensional aspects of debt and debt movements. This involves understanding the various aspects of debt, including campaigns related to sovereign debt, social reproduction debt highlighted by the feminist Marxist and ecofeminist movements and ecological and climate debt.

The second section explores the various dimensions of reparation, emphasizing the current realities of what reparations have been or are. We recognize that discussions of loss and damage caused by global warming, alongside transitional justice frameworks rooted in human rights principles, largely dominate the current discourse surrounding reparations.

However, during the workshop, our focus shifted towards envisioning the transformative potential of reparations. It explores transformative approaches to reparations beyond mere compensation, emphasizing processes that advocate for structural change, truth-telling, and collective restoration.

The third chapter delves into strategic considerations for achieving transformative and just reparations beyond monetary approaches, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach encompassing material transactions, repatriation of peoples and goods, land restitution, educational initiatives, and policy changes; it critiques the use of capitalist measures to repair crimes of capitalism (eg. plantation slavery, colonisation, genocide, and climate injustice), challenges traditional notions of state-centered mechanisms for reparations, explores grassroots and community-driven solutions, examines the complexities of the state and its historical context, questions the welfare state as a colonial institution, and debates the possibilities and critiques of reforming international financial institutions.

The final section reflects on how to build a transnational campaign that looks at the multiple dimensions of reparations.

Diving into the multifaceted realm of debt

Throughout our discussions, participants underscored the multifaceted nature of debt across history, appearing in diverse forms and types (racial plunder, colonialism, capitalist debt, climate debt), each carrying its own set of implications and complexities. However, debt consistently operates as a social tool used by those in power to perpetuate relationships of inequality, submission, appropriation, and enslavement. Debt is far from neutral; it actively exploits social differences in tangible and contextualized manners, reinforcing existing asymmetries and patterns of domination. For a significant period, feminist, post-development, and decolonial scholars have challenged the notion of debt's neutrality and abstraction often espoused in the world of finance.

The colonial roots of global south debt

The first idea highlighted was the colonial roots of debt and the concept of colonial debt. In essence, these are the debts owed by former colonial powers to the countries they colonized for the exploitation and destruction inflicted on both people and the environment. As the Jubilee South movement in the 2000s has demonstrated, foreign and financial debts are linked to the historical plunder of resources in the Global South. European colonizers plundered their former colonies' rich resources, and extracted timber, minerals and other valuable commodities to fuel their industrial growth back home. The local economies, which were once self-sustaining and thriving, were methodically dismantled by colonial powers

and put under the subjection of global capitalism. As political independence dawned, the newly formed governments inherited a weakened economy stripped of its natural wealth and productive capacity. Struggling to rebuild and develop, the newly independent countries found themselves trapped in a web of debt owed to global North creditors who continue to profit from the exploitation of formerly colonized countries in the form of continued extraction, colonial debt revenue and uneven exchange.

This colonial debt stands as an early illustration of odious debt, a concept describing debt accrued by autocratic rulers without the consent of the people, often for oppressive agendas or personal enrichment. This phenomenon has sparked significant waves of mobilization and activism. One notable case discussed was Haiti, the world's first Black postcolonial republic, established after a successful slave revolution in 1804. Despite achieving independence, Haiti was coerced into paying compensation to former colonial powers, particularly France, as a condition for the recognition of its sovereignty. This compensation amounted to a staggering sum, equivalent to US\$21 billion in today's terms. To fulfill these payments, Haiti resorted to borrowing from various banks, resulting in substantial financial losses due to fees and interest. Despite these payments, Haiti continued to face marginalization, with recognition and support withheld by former colonial powers. The struggle for restitution persists, with ongoing protests demanding acknowledgment and repayment for colonial injustices. The case of Haiti starkly reminds us that former colonial powers remain indebted for the destruction and harm they inflicted during colonialism. Yet, those in authority often disregard this debt despite persistent calls for reparations.

Debt crisis as a neo-colonial tool

But debt is not only related to the colonial past. It is also a neo-colonial instrument wielded by global North governments, institutions, and corporations to further plunder the wealth of and exert control over global south nations and communities. Unequal treaties such as free trade agreements (FTAs), bilateral investment agreements, etc., which reinforce not only unequal global power relations between the North and the South, but also have been a tool of extraction and exploitation, keeping global South countries indebted to the global North. It is in this sense that we talk about the idea of the “debt crisis”. Global North creditors have been reported to irresponsibly lend money to global South countries which led to unsustainable debt levels, which then triggered a global debt crisis in the 1980s (in Latin America, it was known as “the Lost Decade”). Despite presenting loans as acts of generosity, the significant rise in debt levels across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Southern Europe is part of a neo-colonial toolbox for global North entities to exploit and dominate global South nations and communities.

In our discussions, participants underscored the multiple ways in which debt operates as a potent instrument within societies to perpetuate exploitation and oppression. One is through the cycle of dependency. Debt creates a cycle of dependency, where countries in

the global South become reliant on loans from the global North creditors to meet basic needs or finance through so-called development projects. This dependency has led to a loss of economic sovereignty and perpetuated a system where the global South remains indebted to the global North, reinforcing global power imbalances. The role of structural adjustment programs or SAPS was highlighted. In exchange for loans and aid, global financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and regional development banks have imposed SAPS that require countries to implement austerity measures, privatize public services and deregulate markets. These conditionalities have exacerbated inequalities, weakened social safety nets, and prioritized debt repayment over investments in healthcare, education, and social services that further marginalize vulnerable populations. According to one of the participants, due to SAPs, an unborn child already has debts to be repaid to global North creditors and financial institutions. These lead to a phenomenon called debt traps. With high levels of debt, often accrued through predatory lending practices or unsustainable borrowing, countries are trapped in a cycle of debt repayment, which diverts precious resources away from critical social programs and perpetuates economic hardships of peoples.

The Greek context allows us to talk about the relationship between neo-colonial practices and public debt cancellation understood as reparation. Greece experienced three bailout programs from the Troika (an informal alliance between the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund - IMF) between 2010 and 2015, accompanied by harsh austerity measures and privatization. So, different social movements and struggles came together to build a national campaign for reparation. These movements demanded bringing back public infrastructure, social services and protection(s) that had been totally destroyed due to the austerity programs. There seems to be a line that connects different demands made by social movements, that has to do with bringing back the “public”: Public land that has been privatized, public infrastructure that has been destroyed, public money that has been stolen, public services that have been eliminated due to austerity.

But debt is not only affecting countries in the global South but also families. In that sense, the workshop discussions revealed how neoliberal financialization has made debt ubiquitous in the social fabric, altering the architecture of capitalist accumulation and the very form of class relations. Millions of people have been drawn into the financial circuits of debt and are now themselves indebted to banks, which have come to replace informal, solidarity-based lending among the poor who once used to help each other out in times of need. The privatization and financialization of health care, education, and even housing reinforced this indebtedness. Privatization, in creating more debt, has destroyed the social fabric and the possibilities of multidimensional transformation. Women, in particular, bear a disproportionate burden of debt, both due to their roles in reproduction and the historical exploitation of unpaid labor. This is where the gendered aspect of debt becomes visible, where women, disproportionately represented in the sphere of unpaid care, are expected to fill in the gaps, and also because women have been targeted by microcredit lenders.

Families have been forced to respond to mounting household debt, with some communities creating savings groups outside the financial system as a collective strategy against debt.

From debt crisis to climate crisis

Social reproduction also extends beyond human labor to encompass the reproductive work of nature. It comprises the unpaid ecological contributions that capitalism exploits, creating a global debt in which capitalism benefits from natural resources without fully acknowledging or compensating for the environmental costs. In that sense, the debt crisis and the climate crisis are interconnected, tracing their origins back to colonization. The climate crisis, primarily caused by the global North's Industrial Revolution fueled by the exploitation of global South's wealth, resources, and labor, disproportionately impacts global South countries and communities, despite their minimal contribution to it. Rich countries (and their elites), which have historically contributed the most to climate change through their greenhouse gas emissions, owe a debt to the peripheral countries that are disproportionately affected by its impacts.

The first panel, featuring Indigenous and Black activists, tackled a broad spectrum of issues. These included the challenges faced by Black women in Colombia, the disproportionate rates of incarceration of Black and Indigenous individuals in the United States and Australia, and the intertwining struggles of Black and Indigenous communities around climate debt. Additionally, the panel addressed the impacts of climate change on Senegal, the broader African continent, and local indigenous communities in Alaska. Throughout the discussion, there was a focus on the pervasive violence and oppression directed at marginalized communities, particularly people of color, underpinned by global white supremacy systems. This violence, experienced by Black and Indigenous communities, is complex and intergenerational, taking various forms such as psychological, structural, and gradual, with trauma transmitted across generations. Furthermore, the panel highlighted how techno-fixes to the climate crisis exacerbate existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting historically marginalized groups.

Certain parts of Alaska, for example, have witnessed an alarming 8-degree increase in temperatures, posing significant challenges for the local population. The melting ice, once a crucial resource, now jeopardizes people's ability to provide for their families. The visible effects of climate change are striking, with tropical storms hitting Alaska due to the diminishing ice. Infrastructure is collapsing into the ocean, prompting small organizations to gather funds for grants to those who have lost essential facilities. The Arctic region, with its diversity of 270 peoples and nine different language groups, holds a rich cultural tapestry. Evidence suggests that people have been hunting in these areas for over 30,000 years, a timespan dwarfing that of the Chinese Wall or Easter Island. Whale hunting, a sustained practice, faced a turning point with Western mass hunting and Russian colonization, which introduced slavery. The color-coded allocation of land—green for federal, purple for state,

yellow for corporate, and indigenous land—reveals the intricate role of corporations. Behind closed doors, the US Congress created Alaska Native Corporations tasked with drilling, logging, and other extractive activities. A few tribes were granted land. Additionally, 2000 acres of land are being sold for farming development.

Africa is another territory grappling with a severe climate crisis, with eight out of the ten most affected countries by climate change located on the continent. The Horn of Africa faces challenges such as water scarcity and coastal erosion, particularly in the Bani Talon delta, causing significant land loss for agriculture. Ironically, despite Africa contributing only 3% of global CO2 emissions, it bears disproportionate vulnerabilities to climate change impacts. In Senegal, for example, the impact of climate change is vividly felt along the 700 km of coastal areas, affecting fishing communities and leading to erosion that jeopardizes livelihoods.

Debt also plays a significant role in driving the climate crisis, further worsening the already unfair debt crisis in Global South countries. Debt acts as the catalyst, compelling countries to adopt extractive practices as they aim to generate the foreign currency required to repay the debt. Also, Global North creditors like the IMF compel indebted nations to exploit fossil resources such as gas and oil, transform agriculture into cash-crop agribusiness, and engage in deforestation.

Many advocate for climate or ecological debt as a basis for reparations due by wealthy nations, institutions, and corporations responsible for the crisis. However, the global North's reluctance to address this debt and provide reparations has left global South countries trapped in a cycle of climate-debt, facing high debt burdens, fossil fuel exploitation, and inadequate climate finance. The impact of climate change on Senegal's fisheries and coastal communities was mentioned, as well as the inadequate financial support given by wealthier nations for mitigation and adaptation, often amounting to less than US\$5 per person per year.

Spaces of debt resistance

Despite the significant power exercised through debt, presentations during our meeting show that there's also a rich history of resistance to unjust debts, ranging from fighting privatizations enforced via loans, collective refusals to pay, to demands for justice rooted in colonial, environmental, or climate debt.

Here are some examples that were presented during the meeting: the movement for the reversal of privatization in Greece; The struggle of the Platform for People Affected by Mortgage (PAH) in Spain, that shows how a housing rights movement can turn individual debt into a collective struggle; The Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development, which has long been active in the fight for the cancellation of unjust and burdensome debt,

and was instrumental in the creation of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27; Let's not forget the global Jubilee Campaign, which has succeeded in canceling hundreds of billions of dollars of debt; Or the Yasuni case in Ecuador, which aims at an ecological and integral restoration of a part of the Amazon after the end of fossil fuel extraction imposed via referendum, in August 2023.

In Latin America, exemplified by the Yasuní case, there's a significant push for debt cancellation to advance environmental and climate justice, known as the ecological debt of the Global North. This concept, embraced by ecologists and climate justice movements, compares financial claims of international creditors with those arising from the exploitation of Southern countries. The climate justice movement advocates for the Global North to cancel these debts as part of reparations for colonial resource plundering, excessive fossil fuel usage during industrialization, and recent mineral extraction. The Yasuní case highlights how international compensation for the conservation of the Amazon could serve as a reparative mechanism, prompting a broader call for debt cancellation and recognition of ecological debt's magnitude over financial debt. This case also challenges conventional notions of debtors and creditors, reshaping their meaning.

In that sense, the reparation of the ecological debt is not only about money but must be linked to stopping what is causing the ecological debt: fossil fuel and other forms of extraction. That leads to an important reflection to end this section. The meeting aimed to create a political forum for forging links between debt justice and reparations movements. Reparation means compensating, amending and avoiding repetition. In that sense, calls for reparations and debt justice intersect because they both address systemic injustices and historical inequalities, like colonialism and enslavement, while preventing future oppression through the creation of a fair and equitable society. For example, achieving debt justice involves recognizing the colonial roots of global South debt. And also, create the elements to avoid repetition, as we see in the demands to end economic conditionalities tied to loans or reduce reliance on external loans, regulate creditors to prevent predatory lending, or democratize decision-making processes in global institutions, to name a few mentioned during the meeting.

The Politics of Reparations

An overarching question during the meeting was: “What are reparations exactly and how can we make them deeply transformative?” “What are the different forms of reparations?” What are the different perspectives about reparations, especially those emerging from communities or from below? And more importantly, “why do we want them?”.

The call for reparations holds profound importance and has echoed across the ages, underscoring their enduring significance. Throughout history, there have been cases where

reparations were given to address the effects of injustices of all kinds, like colonization, slavery, and genocide.

For example, after World War Two, Germany had to pay reparations both to countries it had invaded and to different groups of survivors of the Holocaust. The US Civil Liberties Act of 1988 provided financial compensation to Japanese-American survivors in recognition of civil liberties violations and redress for their unjust wartime incarceration. In the case of slavery, a notable example is Britain's compensation to slaveholders involving staggering sums, the repercussions of which lingered in the British economy for generations. Only recently did the final payments come to a close. In 2003, the British government also paid reparations to survivors of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya. In 2023, Germany agreed to pay reparations to Namibia for the Genocide perpetrated against the Herero and Nama between 1904 and 1908. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that reparations, once obtained by a group of victims, will be used to forward human rights, which the case of Israel, who obtained reparations from Germany and engaged in a constant war against Palestinians, shows in a dramatic way.

In recent years in the United States, reparations have been proposed by city, county, state, and national governments or private institutions. Universities like Georgetown University have made institutional payments to descendants of slaves to acknowledge the historical injustices of slavery and address the lasting impacts of systemic racism and exploitation. About a dozen cities and the state of California have reparations programmes for Black Americans, and there is an open debate in US society about the possibility of a national reparations policy reparations for slavery. As we could see in Jackson, Mississippi, a region shaped by the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land and the enslavement of Black Africans, recent debates about reparations are well underway. These demands follow the argument that slavery, and the racist policies since, have robbed Black Americans of generations of wealth and prosperity, the effects of which are still being felt today.

In Latin America, there is a notable demand for debt cancellation to promote environmental and climate justice. Indigenous peoples and their territories are gaining prominence in the sustainability debate, with 80% of the remaining biodiversity located in Indigenous territories globally. In some European countries, discussions center on colonial crimes and the plunder of cultural heritage, particularly concerning African countries. These discussions explore the implications of redress, compensation, and transitional or restitutive justice. Valuable insights from countries like South Africa and Guatemala who went through processes of transitional justice regarding crimes during Apartheid or dictatorship, experiences that also contribute significantly to the conversation about reparations. In Australia, reparations have consistently been a significant demand, crucial to the Indigenous pursuit of self-determination, land rights, justice, and sovereignty.

Global efforts to advocate for reparations have gained momentum following the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban. The conference addressed a range of issues,

including reparations for slavery and colonization, and strategies to combat racial discrimination. The resulting Durban Declaration reflected the consensus among oppressed communities on the importance of acknowledging and redressing historical harm, implementing prevention measures, and upholding self-determination for those marginalized by the G20. However, the original draft, which called for reparations for colonization and slavery and emphasized the urgent need to dismantle perpetuating structures of marginalization, was altered by governments. The final declaration omitted these reparations demands but retained measures to address discrimination.

While these examples provide important precedents and acknowledgement of historical injustices, many reparations claims remain unresolved. Despite advocacy spanning centuries, demands for reparations are frequently dismissed by governments, corporations, and institutions in the global North, who fear that fulfilling these obligations would threaten their wealth and power and simply use the existing power imbalances to their advantage. Moreover, the conventional approach to reparations, which typically involves compensatory payments, as well as transitional justice frameworks rooted in human rights, often fall short of addressing the underlying issues effectively.

The claim for reparations has largely been diverted into commitments from Western nations to provide increased development assistance and aid. Here, the important difference is that reparations would entail an acknowledgement of historical injustices by their perpetrators, while development aid comes about as a generous deed of these same actors. For example, in 2023, Germany, instead of agreeing to pay reparations to Namibia for the Genocide perpetrated against the Herero and Nama between 1904 and 1908, committed to increase development cooperation through projects that were largely rejected by the Herero and Nama.

Another example of diverting from reparations occurred during the final preparatory session for the World Conference Against Racism in Geneva in 1978, the US diplomats worked to eliminate mentions of reparations from the final draft. They utilized the promise of increased aid to African countries as leverage in their negotiations, ultimately succeeding in removing these references. More recently, concerns about climate and environmental justice are becoming part of capitalism's workings (Green Capitalism), with nature being turned into a commodity and methods like cap and trade, carbon markets, and compensation having become a part of the system. Also, it must be mentioned that the reparations debate is also being influenced by both the far right and liberal groups, who see it as a way to shape the world according to their own views, for example, in terms of organizing the world - and reparations - according to genetic lineages.

With these considerations in mind, a critical question arises: How can we effectively confront and dismantle all these perverse usages and twisted manipulations of reparations?

Building a transformative framework for reparations

During our discussions, we grappled with questions aimed at fostering transformative and holistic approaches to reparations, pondering how they could serve as catalysts for profound societal change. Clarity regarding the concept of reparations is essential, taking in consideration the existence of different frameworks for reparations, including debt cancellation, repatriation, land restitution, compensation, self-determination, and addressing climate finance and loss and damage.

A 'transformative' approach to reparations

By embracing these principles, reparations can become a catalyst for lasting change, prioritizing the well-being and empowerment of affected communities over monetary compensation:

- **Reparation as a process:** not just compensation but a focus on systemic change. True reparations must extend beyond individual compensation to encompass structural transformation, addressing the systemic conditions that breed injustice.
- **Collective rather than individual reparations**
- **"Truth Telling":** healing through acknowledging historical wrongs, revealing hidden histories, and disrupting colonizing subjectivities, anchored in memory, history, and education.
- **Unsettling the structures that allow expropriation.** Reclaim land, redistribute wealth and empower communities.
- **Achieve self-determination.** Providing possibilities for people to determine their own wellbeing, including other alternative economies.

Reparation as a process: beyond compensation, a structural change

The core principle of transformative reparations, as discussed, aims to tackle the fundamental conditions that led to injustice, prioritizing systemic change over mere compensation and restituting the well-being and empowerment of affected communities.

The focus then shifts from financial transactions (normally seen as one-time payments) to a transformative and ongoing process that addresses historical harms at their roots. Rather than focusing solely on monetary remedies, the reparation process should delve into the deeper, systemic roots of historical and ongoing injustices, addressing issues such as

expropriation, colonization, genocide, slavery, and contemporary concerns like climate and gender justice.

This approach to reparations emphasizes structural and institutional changes to prevent harm from recurring and ensure non-repetition. It advocates for a holistic approach addressing various harms across material, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. While reparations can be seen as repaying a debt owed, it's crucial to acknowledge that the impacts of colonization and slavery go way beyond financial deprivation. These systems involved social, political, and affective dimensions, necessitating a comprehensive reparations framework that addresses the resulting systemic inequalities and acknowledges cultural and emotional trauma alongside material restitution.

In that sense, we can differentiate the demands of reparation as compensation from those that aim at structural change. But, we need to have a clear definition of what structural change means. In Ecuador, for example, the goal of reparation is the idea of “leaving the oil in the soil” (no mining, no oil exploitation). “Yasunizar” aims to propagate the notion that phasing out fossil fuels is achievable and viable. So, the view on structural change here means a post-oil, post-extractivist, post-growth future for Ecuador and challenging the mainstream beliefs on development. Opening this up, a new set of questions emerges: how can reparations be transformative beyond capitalist solutions? What does structural transformation mean when most of the crimes reparations are claimed for are crimes of capitalism? Can you use capital (reparations money) to transform without reproducing more crimes of capitalism? How do we think about reparations in both monetary and non-monetary terms as a restitution of other modes of living that have been aggressed or eradicated?

Towards collective reparations: advancing beyond individual compensation

Reparations have to go beyond individual compensation if their aim is to address the underlying structural inequalities. Individual compensation involves addressing personal harm through restitution or reparations, such as financial compensation, while collective restoration focuses on healing broader societal or community-level harms caused by systemic injustices through initiatives like community development projects and policy changes that might include various levels. As we have seen with the Yasuni case, a process which enables conversations and actions around (collective) reparations beyond material terms: a success story that can inspire other struggles.

In the Western, liberal, individualistic legal system, the difficulty with implementing collective reparations lies in the emphasis on individual rights and accountability, which often makes it challenging to legally address systemic injustices that affect entire communities.

An additional critique of individual compensation is how individual reparations can deploy an exclusionary politics, e.g. through DNA testing/blood/eugenics. For example, in the California reparations bill, only African Americans who can trace their genealogy as descendants of enslaved persons are included as target groups. Another issue raised by some participants was that in the context of armed conflicts, the wealthiest populations affected tend to receive greater benefits from reparations. In this sense, we should interrogate how capital can consolidate reparations in their interest and how racial and climate reparations can be hijacked by the right.

Healing through acknowledging historical wrongs and “truth-telling”

Acknowledging historical wrongs and addressing their consequences is deemed "step one of any reparation process," implying the notions of restitution and non-repetition.

This means that the first stage is to acknowledge the damages done by colonization (and the continued colonization), as a prerequisite for creating systemic change and moving forward. Drawing parallels with practices that have proven effective globally, it is common to cite the memorialization of abuses in Bristol, UK, and the “Rhodes Must Fall” protest movement in South Africa as examples. These instances underscore the sense of accomplishment and achievement derived from acknowledging historical wrongs.

This truth-telling process is a way to provoke the populations of the global North, the middle classes, but also the elite, into a conversation about the ongoing process of dispossession and a more general everyday questioning of the status quo. An example illustrating this concept is the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, a significant social movement in Australia that emerged in the 1970s and has persisted for over 50 years as a symbol of indigenous resistance. Advocating for reparations, they proposed that payments should be linked to a percentage of GDP. This approach aims to remind colonizers of their ongoing role in colonization and to highlight the truth of dispossession, a form of ongoing truth telling of the contemporary settler colonial project.

Rather than only financial “solutions”, reparations are also about recognition of intergenerational trauma and healing. We need reparations to tell the truth, so people understand the structure of power, and create spaces for dialogue and trauma healing as a fundamental element of reconciliation processes. Without trauma resolution, the question of reparations cannot be substantively, completely, and thus transformatively addressed. The goal is transforming societies by healing trauma and strengthening the self-determinations of peoples and countries. All this is understood as an ongoing process of transformative justice.

The process of truth-telling intersects with issues of memory and history, emphasizing that historical narratives are not just about the past, but are crucial for understanding and shaping the present and future of society. Western Europe's parochial history, presented as universal, erases significant events like the Black revolution in Haiti, challenging colonial and white supremacist narratives. In the United States, resistance to acknowledging hidden histories, particularly regarding critical race theory – banned from schools in many states now – highlights the need for decolonization and counter-narratives in education. Integrating hidden histories into reparations processes involves making them public and addressing ongoing injustices, such as fracking and the Dakota Pipeline, which perpetuate colonial violence. Reparations serve to challenge colonial mindsets, restore dignity, and foster internal and external liberation from the legacies of colonization and enslavement, requiring holistic healing across various dimensions of society.

To sum up, the hidden histories need to be brought out of the darkness, told, and talked about. There can be no serious reparations discussions without this: emphasizing the significance of creating counter-narratives, the idea of rewriting history, as well as amplifying diverse voices in the question of justice. It's then an issue of education and awareness. Educating the public about the root causes and consequences of historical injustices is essential for building support for reparations. This includes teaching accurate history, promoting critical thinking, and challenging dominant narratives. Our meeting made clear that movement building and exchanges between climate struggles, debt, women, Black, and Indigenous peoples' struggles are essential on the pathway toward reparation. Such movement building covers education campaigns across multiple scales; making important links and opportunities for synergies. For instance, we spoke about the necessity of launching an extensive educational campaign advocating for reparations, spearheaded by Black movements, and seeking support from non-Black allies to bolster these educational initiatives.

Unsettling the structures that allow expropriation

A transformative, reparative way of thinking is concerned with challenging unfair structures of expropriation, addressing colonization, genocide, slavery and more recently, climate and gender justice. One prominent example is the Indigenous "land back" movement, a collective demand to push back against expropriated capital, as an important reparative act, considering that the land is such a fundamental aspect of ongoing colonization.

Vignette 3. Learning from concrete cases: “Land Back” Movement and the demand of self-determination of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA)

The “Land Back” Movement exemplifies the demand for the return of stolen territories, advocating for the restoration of ancestral lands to Indigenous communities. This movement seeks to address issues of dispossession and displacement while reclaiming sovereignty over natural resources. By

challenging the expropriation of capital and returning land to its rightful owners, this collective demand aims to disrupt the entrenched ideologies of capitalism, liberalism, and state sovereignty deeply rooted in ongoing colonization. Organizations that advocate for financial compensation for the descendants of former slaves in the United States, like the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) make land claims as a central part of their demands for reparations.

In the case of Cooperation Jackson, we have seen that land ownership was considered as part of a long-term project that will not depend on renting and/or the will of the property owners. Property in the hands of the movements can be a powerful instrument for community building and resisting gentrification.

Another element that can effectively tackle systemic inequalities and economic injustices is to enact policies aimed at redistributing wealth and resources. The welfare state could be used as a distribution tool of reparative justice by using taxes taken from corporations and elites to redistribute them. Within the reparations platform articulated by the Black Lives Matter Movement, proposals such as the implementation of a Universal Basic Income Plus are put forth alongside various other reparative actions. Everyone could have a universal basic income, but ensuring that people with extra needs get more. People of color would get extra as a reparative kind of justice, to acknowledge that they've contributed more fundamentally to the establishment of the American economy or the state economy because of plantation slavery; and as a way of addressing ongoing patterns of disinvestment, discrimination, and exploitation targeting the Black communities. Another example could be the Black Manifesto reparation proposal - basically using the funds to push back against neo-colonisation elsewhere and support Black workers rights through resistance in the US. Robin DG Kelley writes about this in Freedom Dreams.

Achieve self-determination. Providing possibilities for other alternative economies to thrive

Reparations can also serve as a catalyst for transformative change by supporting alternative lifestyles and thriving communities. This involves fostering diverse economies to make them flourish, not only acknowledging the importance of challenging unfair structures and attitudes, but also creating spaces for different modes of living and prospering. Using the concept of pluriverse - a concept that has been used and worked on by many of the participants in the GWGBD - we need “a world where many worlds fit”, a worldview that embraces diversity and acknowledges multiple ways of living as a way to challenge the universalization and globalization of Western modernity.

In this context, we must reconsider the implications of reparations payments and explore how communities can redefine value to transcend the limitations of capitalism. For instance, the people behind the Black Manifesto allocated a large part of its reparations demands to Black communities. Instead of just giving individuals money, they aimed to rebuild and empower Black cultural, political, and economic institutions. This included setting aside money for cooperative farms, publishing houses to counter biased media, TV networks, a

research center, skills training, and even a Black university. These initiatives were about creating spaces where African Americans could thrive together, focusing on collective needs rather than just individual gain.

The CARICOM Reparations Committee (CRC) has outlined a 10-point plan for addressing the historical injustices of European slavery and colonization in the Caribbean. Their calls for reparative justice consist of initiatives aimed at cultural and social resurgence, including an African knowledge program.

In Australia, the Pay the Rent campaign, while not explicitly framed as reparations, is viewed as an essential step toward justice, truth, equality, and liberation for Indigenous peoples. This campaign is seen as part of a broader process in which non-Indigenous people must engage to support First Nations communities. By contributing to projects aimed at cultural resurgence and the re-establishment of traditional governance, through treaty agreements for example, Pay the Rent serves as a means to support these efforts

Not one-size-fits-all

While the concept of "reparations" holds significant potential, its interpretation and applicability vary widely and require nuanced considerations. Reparations take on diverse forms, strategies, and approaches. They are shaped by historical, contextual, territorial, and socio-political factors. There is no singular blueprint for reparations, as evidenced by the diverse cases presented during our meeting. The efficacy of reparations campaigns hinges on specific contexts and struggles, needing a careful assessment of when and where the concept can yield meaningful political impact. As discussed in this document, reparations encompass various frameworks, ranging from financial measures like debt cancellation and compensation, addressing climate change impacts through initiatives such as climate finance or loss and damage mechanisms, to more structural measures like restoring land, repatriating displaced communities, or reclaiming cultural artifacts, all while supporting self-determination.

The workshop participants unanimously agreed that there is no need for a singular, standardized definition of reparations. While acknowledging the absence of a one-size-fits-all approach, they emphasized the importance of identifying common criteria between different movements which push for reparations. As one participant aptly put it, "we don't all need to be on the same plate, but we need to be in the same ballpark at the very least." This sentiment underscored the necessity of establishing shared points of reference to guide reparative efforts. To achieve this, there was a concerted effort to concretely delineate the debts and oppressions requiring redress. Participants recognized the imperative of gaining a deeper understanding of each other's contexts, leveraging this knowledge to learn from diverse struggles worldwide, as evidenced by the discussions during the meeting.

Charting paths: strategic challenges for transformative Reparations in practice

In this section, we introduce various ongoing questions we have for achieving a transformative and Just Reparations in Practice.

How can we think of reparations beyond monetary approaches?

The group delved into the complexities of enabling transformative processes beyond material realms. There was general agreement that money transfers are often needed. But, a holistic approach to reparations means that reparations are not only about material transactions. In the context of the slave trade for example, according to some participants, reparation could also include repatriation of peoples, stolen money and goods and spoils of war. If people were to be repatriated, this would require ensuring their access to livelihoods and land in host countries, as well as their social integration and non-discrimination. In the context of settler colonialism, land back, educational initiatives and policy changes would be required to right the wrongs of the past. So, money is only one part of the reparations process.

In that sense, the risk of using capitalist measures to “repair” the crimes of capitalism was discussed. We have not overcome the tendency to quantify everything, nor the growth imperative. Money is, without doubt, the currency of the capitalist world, and if the goal is the restitution of the conditions necessary for other modes of living, other ways of being in the world from a “pluriversal” perspective, money might not be the best vehicle to achieve that. We can not use a “capitalist solution” to redress problems caused by Capitalism. Monetary payments would always leave those structural asymmetries untouched which have built up historically and structurally secure privilege and inequalities.

Another element of debate was: who is eligible to receive reparations and how can the amount of reparations be determined - if monetary? Measuring trauma and assessing the impact of historical injustices is indeed challenging, and often these assessments are subject to judgments influenced by the perspectives of those in power (the oppressors). As we have seen with the ongoing struggles in Burkina Faso, the proliferation of gold mining has disrupted the lives of the people. The community faced significant challenges, including the loss of land for agriculture, long journeys to school, and water scarcity, and the financial compensation frameworks were put in question. Establishing fair and comprehensive frameworks for evaluating the extent of harm and determining appropriate reparative measures requires careful consideration of historical context and more importantly, the

community's input: the victims have to democratically define the harms they have experienced and their needs.

Also, regarding the claims for Loss and Damage in the context of global warming, the official debate at the level of international climate change negotiations revolves around the logic of money, the monetization of politics, the claim for money.

Money plays a central role in liberal and left-liberal ideologies. In Africa, many climate mitigation projects are government-led rather than driven by the affected communities and activists. For instance, carbon markets are often cited as a dubious solution. In Senegal, for example, climate mitigation and adaptation projects frequently rely on external funding, which can be prone to corruption. Instead of depending on external actors and financial incentives to restore ecosystems, there is a need for self-determination, emphasizing the importance of local control in tackling ecological challenges. Climate finance also paves the way to new indebtedness when it is given out as loans, often with conditionalities, instead of unconditional grants. Issues of accountability and transparency are also of paramount importance here.

Vignette 4. Learning from concrete cases: The protection of the Yasuni National Park

Ecuador voted to ban oil projects in Yasuní National Park. Approximately 60% of voters supported protecting the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve from oil exploitation, despite the initial rejection of the results by the Minister of Energy and Mines.

A demonstration of direct democracy that underscored the power of the popular voice in shaping policy. A key strategy is deploying the “right to say no”, as we have seen in the Yasuní case or which has been used by local communities in South Africa for example against the extractive industry. The government eventually affirmed its commitment to respect the decision, highlighting the significance of grassroots activism in shaping environmental policy.

The victory in protecting Yasuní reflects a long history of Indigenous activism in Ecuador, driven by the imperative to defend their territories and the natural world. Initiated in 2005 during a biodiversity convention, the case advocated for a moratorium on oil activities and a transition toward a post-extractive economy. The proposal, introduced in 2007, aimed to secure compensation from the international community for leaving 900 million barrels of oil untapped in the Yasuni National Park's ITT block.

This case not only underscores the concept of Ecological debt owed by the Global North but also highlights the demand for collective compensations as structural forms of reparation. By seeking acknowledgment for the conservation of the Amazon and compensation for the real historical impacts and violence inflicted upon nature and indigenous peoples, the Yasuní case emphasizes the need for meaningful reparations.

However, challenges persist, including threats from oil drilling, narcotrafficking, and illegal mining. Sustainable economic alternatives and recognition of Indigenous rights are crucial to addressing these challenges and safeguarding the region's future.



Poster of the "Sí al Yasuní" campaign

How can reparations work beyond state-centered mechanisms?

In our debates, we found that the State tends to be more a part of the problem than the solution. We agreed that there is not much to expect from the state, being aware of its exploitative, destructive, and dehumanizing character. But also, we are aware that the demands for reparations or debt cancellation are often directed to the state and to a much lesser extent to corporations that caused exploitation and destruction. In the past, attempts at reparations have mainly been an issue of state policies. State actors dominate this reparation conversation, at least in the current world order. Currently, there is little progress regarding pathways toward the reparations of environmental injustices within the realm of state policies at whatever scale. Rather, we can observe how the issues of climate and environmental justice are systematically sucked into the dynamic of commodification of nature, compensation logics, carbon markets and so on, facilitated by the State.

As we navigate these discussions, we aim to shift our focus towards the concept of popular power. Ultimately, popular power forms the foundation of everything we aim to build. From a movement perspective, we seek to understand how to engage with power, its sources, and how to prioritize self-determination and community-driven solutions over external interventions. What ways of building reparations from below have we seen?

Unlike conventional civil rights frameworks, the majority of participants in the meeting viewed reparations not solely as legal or financial restitution but as a social movement stemming from the legacy of slavery. Reparations can go beyond reliance on state-centered mechanisms by adopting commoning approaches, which prioritize collective ownership and management of resources. How do we focus more on self-determination, community solutions rather than outside “solutions”? What does it mean to “repair” linked to self-determination?

Here, grassroots organizations play a vital role in this perspective, mobilizing communities, raising awareness, and advocating for policy changes. Empowering communities to lead their own reparations efforts ensures that solutions are tailored to local needs and priorities. Legal advocacy also holds governments and institutions accountable for historical injustices, utilizing litigation, class action lawsuits, and international legal mechanisms to push for reparations. The challenge lies in reconciling self-reliance and achieving self-determination and autonomy with demands made to the state.

In the context of reparations, self-determination recognizes the importance of enabling affected communities to actively participate in decision-making processes and empowering these communities to shape their own futures and fostering self-governance. As explained in the case of Senegal, self-determination is important for Senegal, as for centuries the model of development has been determined by others. The issue of natural resource

sovereignty was highlighted particularly in relation to gas extraction in Senegal, and the importance of community participation in decision-making processes. One complication is that we might have a hard time imagining what this even means after 400-500 years of colonialism aimed at eroding the very institutions of self-determination. Of course, many of those institutions are still there, and more are coming up all the time. But much needs to be recovered and re-invented. And this kind of reparation can only be achieved once oppressors' boots are first taken off the oppressed necks.

Reparations: from whom and to whom and how?

One concrete debate was the specific forms and mechanisms of reparation. From whom will the reparations come from and to whom? Government or build people power? Bottom-up process? The state? independent institutions?

Who is going to be the one in charge of reparations, who will define the meaning and the thing to be repaired? Who should be targeted to pay? "Who owes what?" Where will the resources come from? "Who's going to pay for treatments of the cancer that your fracking gave me? Who's going pay for the treatment of the ills of the land and the water that your dams gave them in the 1940s?"

An easy response to this was that the former colonizers should bear the costs of reparations. But a lot of tangles and complications immediately spring up. Land back to whom? To Native Corporations? And for what? For oil revenue? And land back from whom? Corporations, the state, the royal families, the super-rich? And land back in what form?

In order to answer these questions, we have to start deconstructing the focus of power and refocus on transformative structures and pathways towards such transformation. Identifying who the various actors are, acknowledging that there's states, corporations and private actors (families and dynasties), all of which ultimately need to be brought into account.

For example, in the context of sovereign and odious external debts, reparation demands payment for the social and environmental damages caused by loans and grants, as well as challenging the immunity of international financial institutions (IFIs). But beyond challenging the immunity of IFIs, corporations, especially fossil fuel companies, and wealthy individuals (e.g. world's billionaires) must also be targeted. These companies and individuals have contributed to the destruction of Nature and indebtedness. There was a general agreement about the importance of making polluters pay. Therefore, a reparation process must include making polluting corporations pay and stopping illicit financial flows, stopping the militarization and/or repealing military agreements, as wars also cause socio-ecological destruction, stopping geo-engineering and keeping the oil in the soil. As we have seen, climate and ecological debt are essential parts of reparations, and reparations discourse must include actions to repair Mother Earth as in the case of the Yasuni.

All this opens up other questions like: how can we build a framework to understand who are debtors and creditors in each case/scale/power constellation? How can we operationalize the dynamics unfolding around reparation in societies where boundaries between oppressed and oppressor are muddled? Or, being said differently, how do we overcome the dilemma of confronting privilege (giving up power) and building solidarity across scale and geography that is truly transformative?

The relationship between reparations and the tensions around building solidarities and confronting privilege within movements is intricate.

It involves creating spaces where discomfort is acknowledged and used as a catalyst for positive change. We might have to make people (including people in our movements) feel uncomfortable about their privilege/confront their privileges and give up power. How to build solidarities given this? And more complicatedly, how to do that in societies where the lines between the oppressed and oppressors are blurred and the exploration extends to continued processes of internal colonization?

To address these tensions, it is crucial to understand and dismantle existing power dynamics, center marginalized voices, have uncomfortable conversations about privilege, accountability measures, and a commitment to redistributing resources within movements. In that case, it was discussed at the meeting about the efforts of wealthy young white people to redistribute their wealth, gained from the exploitation of Black and Indigenous peoples, to grassroots movements. But this should not be done as charity but in the context of “relational solidarity” as the final outcome. Relational solidarity emphasizes the interconnectedness of communities and the recognition of shared responsibility for addressing historical injustices. It goes beyond a simple expression of support and implies a deeper understanding of the relationships between different groups, particularly those that have been affected by historical wrongs and those advocating for reparations.

This opened up the following strategic challenges: How can we ensure that eventual reparations to oppressed communities/groups in the global North are not carried out on the shoulders of the peoples of the global South, or enhancing environmental breakdown and global warming?

The question hinges on the assumption of reparations as financial compensation and the historical experience in the US that such financial compensation only happened during periods of economic growth, which heavily relied on extraction and uneven trade in the global South. The group does not subscribe to this. Overarching principles for reparations must be developed along lines of justice, solidarity, ‘do no harm’, non-exploitative, non-extractive vis-a-vis peoples, nature and the planet, and with no conditionalities.

Vignette 5. Learning from concrete cases: Climate reparations in the context of the official “loss and damage mechanism”

In the context of the official "loss and damage mechanism," climate reparations refer to addressing the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities and nations. This includes providing financial resources, known as climate finance, to help these regions adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. Additionally, reparations involve addressing loss and damage by providing support to communities facing severe impacts, such as extreme weather events and sea-level rise. However, debates arise over the approach to climate reparations, with discussions focusing on issues like debt-for-climate swaps, the right to pollute, and the potential for these initiatives to perpetuate existing inequalities.

Loss and damage is considered problematic as a tool for emancipatory social and ecological transformations. In our debates, discussions on debt-for-climate swaps, extractivism's role in socio-ecological well being, beneficiaries of the right to pollute, and the effectiveness of COP in addressing climate debt were identified as problematic areas.

Some criticize the concept of debt-for-climate swaps, warning against a new form of debt coloniality, while others highlight the need to denounce what is happening in conservation agencies, emphasizing the interconnectedness of ecological and financial systems. There is a growing trend of African governments jumping on the train for a debt-for-climate swap as proposed by neoliberal institutions including the IMF. The argument is premised on the proposition that debt owed by poor countries should be converted into grants to enable them to spend the liberated finance on climate-friendly projects and to adopt climate-friendly policies. This will ostensibly lead to the powering of the needed energy transition. Is debt for climate swap a form of debt relief? Faced with climate risks, would the elimination of debt distress heal peoples, territories, and nations from current traumas?. While this may sound just, the flip side is that the proponents are also claiming the "right to pollute" is justified by the right to "development". The argument is that Africa has contributed less than 3% of the greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, is not a major contributor to the climate crisis, and must not be stopped from expanding its extraction of fossil fuels.

The role of the State(s) in the struggles against debts and for reparations

One of the central debates within our group revolves around various strategies for a radical eco-social transformation, particularly examining the roles played by the State and other institutional spaces in these strategies. Our conversations in previous meetings concluded with the diagnosis that there is a quite polarized debate around the role of the State in social movements around the world. Either delivering social change through the state or supercritical positions of the state more aligned with principles of autonomy. There is one camp that is rather anti-statist and considers the State as a form of oppression. And that advocates for decentralized, grassroots initiatives, autonomous movements, and alternative forms of governance that operate outside or independently of traditional state structures. And there is another camp that sees the state as a potential source of positive change, that bets on rebuilding a state that would actually attend people, and expanding the public realm, expanding public services, like in the sense of rebuilding what in some parts of the world has been called the Welfare State for a certain period of time.

Inserted into this long standing debate within left-leaning ideologies about the question of how to address the role of the State, in this meeting we have tried to bring some complexities into the debate delving into the multifaceted nature of the state and its historical context to undermine this simplistic dichotomisation of anti-state versus state reformism when we think about reparations. The idea is to explore the complexities inherent in state structures and their impact on societal struggles. Also, our discussions seem to suggest that both perspectives and strategies are necessary, at least in the short term. So, beyond binary ways of thinking about a transformative strategy, we consider that we have to move around dual strategies. We need the radical, autonomous and confrontational strategies that build community and popular power. And we need to complement them with strategies that advocate for international and national policies as enablers for the global eco-social transformation needed. Even within the most radical community-based organized processes, there is a simultaneous acknowledgment of the state's importance, emphasizing its role in the specific contexts of reparations. The challenge is to navigate the complexities of dealing with the state while striving to combine self-reliance and autonomy. The question then is how do we redesign the institutions that fit for the sort of wider transformations we need to undertake?

Who is the State we are talking about?

In our previous discussions, we came to the point where we didn't really agree on what we really meant by the State. That it's not just a term that we use in the same way, but that there are many understandings to what we understand by the State, and we maybe have to gain clarity about that. In this sense, we agreed that there is Not one state, but STATE(S) in their different scales and expressions.

First of all, to recognize that there are many concrete forms of States in different societies and throughout history. For example, we have the division between Presidential and Parliamentary systems- each with its unique historical background and implications for governance- but also between states that have claimed to be Socialists and capitalist. Then, of course, we have the North-South (or central-peripheral) Divide, rooted in colonial histories, that add layers of complexity to our understanding of the state. The States in industrialized nations have a completely different history of how the States were built then in the former colonies. Argentinian anthropologist Rita Segato's observation was highlighted here regarding how the global South's citizens being unrecognized compared to the uniformity in the North, prompts us to reconsider conventional notions of citizenship and statehood. Sometimes, when we talk about the State, we are talking about a universal view or understanding of the state, the Western type of state that might also apply to post-colonial states.

Also, it's important to recognize its multi-scalarity. In colloquial speech, when we refer to the State, we often think of the government and not really of the State and we refer to the national level as if this was the only level of scale that was important. But then we found out that the State really starts at the local level. It can even be below the municipal level where

there are also public institutions (that brings us to the debate about the issue of the commons in Barcelona). And it goes up to the global level, where multilateral institutions do represent certain States and are like an international extension of those States. So the multi scalarity is a very important thing to have in mind when we speak about the role of the state, and maybe it would be easier to not say “The State” as it was a thing but to refer to public institutions, to state institutions, or to states in plural, to acknowledge this diversity.

At the same time, it's also important to point out that State institutions often are not aligned with each other, but that there are struggles within the States such as Ministries implementing policies that are contradictory to the policies of other ministries, because they respond to another social dynamic. In that sense, the state is composed of a concrete bureaucracy with its own logic and knowledge. Some participants comment that the state, despite its alliance with capitalism, possesses inherent cracks that can be explored for transformative purposes. Sometimes, engaging in emancipatory struggle involves bringing radical individuals into state bureaucracy to maintain radical ideas and connections to social movements. Given the state's access to various resources, including material, legal, administrative, and discursive, there are opportunities for social movements to push back against oppressive structures. Identifying forces within the state that are receptive to particular demands is crucial for advancing reparations agendas.

This is important in order not to reify the state, not to understand it as a thing, an entity but a highly heterogeneous apparatus, following the idea that has been present in lots of interventions at our meeting that the State is an outcome of past and current struggles and that societal relations are “materially condensed” in the state. The multifaceted nature of the state demands nuanced strategies that leverage its vulnerabilities for the pursuit of societal justice and equity. What are, at a general level, possible entry points for emancipatory demands? How can these cracks in capitalism be enhanced?

We also had a quite long discussion in Quito meeting about the Latin American experience with the State, with the progressive governments, the so-called “pink tide”, which was the result of two decades of intense popular struggles and uprisings against neoliberalism, which ended up creating an exceptional geopolitical situation because there was a series of countries suddenly governed by people who said they would be anti neoliberal implement social policies, and that they would use the State for eco-social transformation, and to reinvent and refound the countries as such. For example, proposing new constitutions. That generated much hope, not only in Latin America, but also abroad. But then, after some years that has vanished again and we could see that although extractivist rents had been redistributed to a certain extent in order to alleviate poverty, like the oil rent or the rent out of mining. But, the structures of inequality have not been touched and the structures of those States which have been claimed to be decolonized and also be patriarchalized by politicians had proved rather resilient to that change. And that the very innovative concepts like, “buen vivir” or “rights of nature” had rather been resignified and put to work for the

classical development, economic growth agenda, that, as we then had to acknowledge, is very deeply inscribed into those state institutions.

Vignette 6. Learning from concrete cases: Welfare state as a colonial state? Moving towards a reparative state.

Another recurring exploration throughout the meeting is the categorization of the welfare state as a colonial institution (particularly in settler colonial states) challenging the conventional narrative of the welfare state as a beacon of well-being. Here, the concept of the welfare state embodies a dichotomy that warrants examination. On one hand, Welfare states, as a legacy of leftist ideologies rooted in Western notions of progress, are often held as the jewel in Western modernity, where the inscription of workers' demands, absorbing them and returning them in the form of social protection. But, another perspective shared in our meeting, very much influenced by post development and decolonial scholarships, challenges ideas of development in the global north and defends that Welfare states are colonial states built on historical and ongoing global plunder.

From this perspective, the welfare state is funded by slavery, colonization, genocide, stealing of women's unpaid labor and ecological exploitation. All these forms of, what authors like Nancy Fraser call, expropriation, Cedric Robinson called super exploitation or Jason Moore refers as Appropriation.

In Europe, the wealth comes from colonization, plantations, slavery, and then a whole raft of neo-colonial policies extracting rents from the global South. And that underpins their ability to provide economic security. Or in the settler colonial states, they've amassed wealth from stolen countries, stolen labor and stolen lives historically, but ongoing. Colonization is not an event. It's an ongoing process. And it continues today. The history of the American state is based on perpetrating plunder and violence against Black people and bodies. Also, modern States in Latin America are born from the experience of colonial plunder and violence. And this is within the global north, including Australia, New Zealand, USA, but also places like Sweden. The states of the capitalist-imperial centers are better able to organize social compromises when there is the exploitation of other regions and the externalization of problems to them– the “imperial mode of living”. This can be summarized on that reflection: an economic expansion of more than 4% GDP growth in the USA facilitates the inclusion of Black people (by the creation of social policies that will benefit them for example). But, on whose back?

In that sense, the historical context of the welfare state in the North, built on global plunder, questions the feasibility of replicating similar models in the South without perpetuating expropriation. We have an example when, many people around the world had hope about the idea that “The pink tide” (the political wave and turn towards left-wing governments in Latin America throughout the 21st century) would create Welfare States in the global South. But then, what happened is that this hope was used just to generate new levels of extraction and plunder to feed into the global north.

From this debate, reparations become an important issue because they are concerned with expropriation or appropriation by addressing colonization, genocide, slavery and more recently climate and gender justice. Some ideas were discussed about the welfare state and whether there is a possibility for the welfare state to address some of the colonial critical perspective about issues of reparations.

In that sense, we open up a set of important questions for discussion. Can we figure out what is needed for states in the global South and global North to be reparatory? What does that mean for strategies? Are there progressive governments in history that have dealt with the question of debt

and reparations? How can we assure that potential reparations in the US or Global North, are not “paid” for by Global South communities?

Should we dispute international organizations?

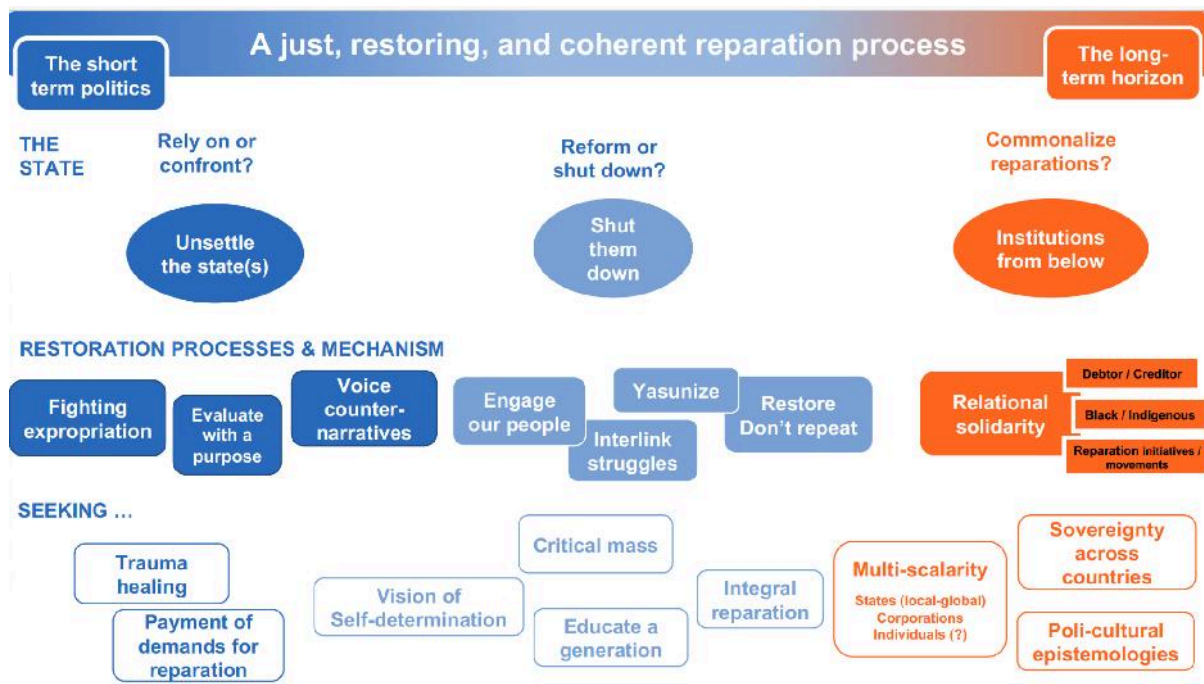
Another element of discussion was about how to rethink the question of the State not only at the national level but regarding International Financial Institutions (IFIs), which are also tools of powerful State institutions to further their interests.

The debate here turned around the critique and possibilities of reframing, reforming and rebuilding the international financial architecture based on institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), that were born out of the post-war era and that have redefined their relevance over time. The debates on reforming IFIs present two main approaches: reforming existing structures or advocating for the closure of institutions beyond reform.

Some members see very little use in processes to dispute international organizations or even international negotiations such as the COP process, due to their extreme internal contradictions, lack of ambition and structural obstacles to change. Critiques of reforming IFIs shed light on their historical evolution and their contemporary role in shaping development models. The push for market-based solutions and the lack of accountability raise concerns about the IFIs' impact on the sovereignty of nations as well as the well-being of communities and peoples who are deemed as so-called “beneficiaries” of IFI projects and policies. To sum up, participants in this camp call for reconsidering reform— instead, movements should focus on denouncing and dismantling existing structures.

Others think that all progress we can make in pushing hegemonic institutions in the direction of reparations, will create a more favorable balance of forces for movements to fight for more radical change. The call for reforms, including debt cancellation and climate debt inclusion, suggests avenues for challenging existing power structures. In discussions about reform, there is a collective call to link Multilateral Banking institutions with certain provisions, like adequate staff or size considerations; focus on regional hegemony, whether in the Global South or the North and ensuring people's voices from social movements reach these institutions, identifying power struggles within the IFIs among others.

A Mental Map Synthesizing our Debates⁵



Towards a Global Campaign on Reparations: Embracing International Solidarity

This is not a conversation we are having often enough. Often we have these conversations in COP, but we do not have the time and opportunity to understand our processes and our respective needs. We need it to happen more often, a real deep dialogue and exchange. We know this is not a local problem, but a global problem. One of the critical issues is that black communities and Indigenous communities do not talk to each other. This is a fundamental piece to start this conversation. At least, being in Jackson.

Kali Akuno

In this final section, we highlight our discussion of how to design a campaign that brings together the various reparations and debt movements. What could, in the current political context, a transnational campaign that builds solidarity across movements could look like?

⁵ A Mental Map Synthesizing our Debates, by Beatriz Rodriguez-Labajos (Universitat Pompeu Fabra), Spain.

We need to extend the focus beyond national borders, recognizing the global implications of historical injustices. Foster international solidarity to address shared challenges. Reparations involve re-establishing international links that have been lost and building new ones that are crying out to be made. Medgar Evers, a Black pioneering civil rights activist from Mississippi, for example, led people along pathways toward reparation based on his experiences in the South Korea and links with Cuba and elsewhere. What would Arctic struggles be without circumpolar exchange? West African struggles without cross-border conversation? Cooperation Jackson and many other movements would not exist without similar international experience. This is not only because colonialism, racism, patriarchy and capitalism went international themselves long ago, calling forth a solidarity that must also be international. It is also because reparations movements need ideas, and the best ideas are born from intercultural encounters. We can learn from each other, from different struggles across the world, as we have seen in this meeting.

There is an urgent need to establish stronger local, regional, national and global networks and links between these diverse struggles. But again, there are a lot of stings in the tail. Do we want to use the existing ways of “going international” that the UN is always offering us? Where do they set the agenda, choose the vocabulary, and assign us the roles that the rich want us to play? Will we participate in the “reparations” discussions that the WWF or the World Bank will shortly invite us to, if they haven’t already? Or do we have something else in mind? Like encounters and conversations, movement to movement and face to face, such as the one we had in Jackson, that we take it upon ourselves to organize for our own purposes?

Reparations and debt cancellation are just one way to build a global movement against capitalism. It requires a politicization of power relations with increasingly global scale, under capitalism. Reparations will require us to build a movement that overcomes existing -isms. A new Economic International order (IFI’s reform and dissolution) is needed. Are IFI’s and other multilaterals reformable? Do we put an importance in international mechanisms in advocating for social justice and elevating underrepresented voices on the international stage? Some participants highlighted the role of international declarations and conferences in shaping concrete struggles, and the need for a level of sophistication in utilizing these mechanisms effectively. But, as it was noted earlier, there are challenges in international cooperation, particularly in bodies where states hold significant power, and it was emphasized the need for self-care and healing within the movement. It was also emphasized the importance of bringing new voices to the table and articulating public policies that serve the interests of marginalized communities.

In the current political landscape, envisioning a transnational campaign that encompasses all facets of reparations across various scales and fosters solidarity among movements is paramount. Designing such a campaign necessitates a strategic approach: Do we augment existing initiatives or forge a new path altogether? To ensure visibility and impact, it's

imperative to plan for a large-scale, public event in the future, which necessitates meticulous preparation. Moreover, transcending our immediate circles requires offering hope and tangible reparations or repair to communities beyond our reach. Central to this endeavor is storytelling, which involves highlighting representative narratives of communities grappling with the intersections of debt, climate, slavery, and femicide. Forced migration emerges as a common thread, encompassing experiences such as climate refugees and the historical middle passage, which uproot individuals from their homes, families, and communities.

There also might be tensions around the impulse to build solidarities across movements and groups with the need for the privileged to give up power. Navigating the tension between fostering solidarity across different movements and groups while also addressing the need for privileged individuals to relinquish power presents a complex challenge. It may require creating spaces where individuals, including those within our own movements, are encouraged to confront and feel uncomfortable about their privilege, ultimately leading to a redistribution of power. Building solidarity amidst these dynamics involves fostering honest conversations about privilege, accountability, and the commitment to redistributing resources within movements. This process requires a delicate balance between acknowledging and addressing power differentials while working collaboratively towards shared goals of justice and equity.

Drawing inspiration from the Peace Boat, the concept of an "Ark of Reparations" emerges—a symbolic vessel where affected groups convene to strategize and envision the world they desire. Placing directly impacted individuals at the forefront of reparations discussions within self-organized groups is pivotal, ensuring their voices shape the trajectory of the movement. This symbolic ark serves as both a reminder of past pain and a beacon of hope, symbolizing the collective journey towards repair and justice as we navigate the tumultuous waters of societal transformation.

Final observations

The dialogue of movements on debts and reparations was not confined to a singular narrative or perspective. It was a vibrant tapestry interwoven with diverse voices, each contributing their own unique viewpoint and tactics. Within Black and Indigenous movements, discussions ranged from historical injustices to contemporary economic disparities, all tied to the broader context of decolonization. At the heart of these discussions lies the recognition of the enduring legacies of exploitation, dispossession, and systemic oppression faced by Black and Indigenous communities. Calls for reparations echoed through these conversations, demanding acknowledgment, restitution, and redress for centuries of injustice. Yet, these movements understood that their struggles were not isolated but interconnected with broader social and environmental issues.

The exchange of viewpoints extended beyond borders, seeking solidarity with movements advocating for climate and environmental justice. Recognizing the interconnectedness of

struggles, activists forged alliances and shared strategies to challenge systems of power and exploitation. From grassroots organizing to international campaigns, the dialogue on debts and reparations became a catalyst for broader social transformation, challenging historical narratives and envisioning more just and equitable futures for all.

What agreements and shared agendas do our movements have on reparations and debt cancellation? This short conclusion will reiterate our key agreements and disagreements along with questions and guideposts for the future. We are unified in the belief that reparations and debt cancellation must drive structural change, restore dignity and justice, and empower self-determination. We recognize that capitalist solutions cannot address the problems they have created. Instead, we advocate for integral reparations, where money is just part of a larger process democratically defined by the victims. This process requires transformative justice, full debt cancellation without conditionalities, and a reconfiguration of power relations on a global scale. Our shared agenda envisions a global movement against capitalism, patriarchy, and racism, which addresses debt as a tool of domination.

Despite our agreements, significant challenges and tensions remain. We need a clear definition of structural change and an understanding that not all payments of debts equate to reparations. There is a risk in using capitalist measures to address the harms caused by capitalism, and the immediate demands for reparations such as monetary compensation must be balanced with long-term transformative goals. Disagreements persist over which debts qualify, how to measure trauma, and who should be held accountable—whether corporations, wealthy individuals, or countries, and at what scale of governance. Additionally, we must navigate the refusal to acknowledge interconnected oppressions, the growth imperative, and conflicts like national sovereignty versus environmental destruction. Our guideposts, as we move forward, include clarifying our definitions and strategies, ensuring reparations are comprehensive and victim-defined, and fostering a global movement that challenges existing unequal power structures, racist and patriarchal, and capitalist frameworks. By addressing these questions and tensions, we hope that our dialogue at Jackson and beyond can help build a more just and equitable future for the people and Nature.