

## Research Article

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# Black Feminist Organizing and Caribbean Cyberfeminisms in Puerto Rico

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**Abstract:** This article centers Black feminist organizing in Puerto Rico, highlighting social media as a tool for racial and gender justice. Collaboration between Puerto Rican feminist organizations on social media platforms amplifies their on-the-ground work and demands. Mapping Caribbean Cyberfeminisms (2016) theorizes Caribbean cyberfeminisms as “knowledge-producing spaces of political thought and action” online by Caribbean feminists. I argue that through content creation and curation, reposting and sharing, commenting and captioning, broadcasting live, Black feminist collectives, organizations and projects in Puerto Rico use digital and virtual technologies to extend their Black feminist organizing and collaboration, building a Caribbean cyberfeminist network in the process.

**Keywords:** social media, Black feminism, decolonial feminism, gender-based violence

A post by Revista Étnica surfaced at the top of my Instagram feed. The photo, taken at knee level in a crowd, showed a yellow banner reading “ESTADO DE EMERGENCIA” [STATE OF EMERGENCY] (Figure 1). The end of a Puerto Rican flag displayed above the protesters holding the banner in blue surgical masks. “Estado de Emergencia en Puerto Rico:” [State of Emergency in Puerto Rico:] hovered in the right corner of the photo in white text. “¿Qué significa esto para las mujeres negras en todas sus diversidades?” *What does this mean for black women in all their diversity?* The post contextualizes the State of Emergency for gender violence in Puerto Rico, declared by the governor 3 days before on January 24, 2021. The caption declared: “We do and will do what we have to: make black women visible in all their diversity and intersectionalities. Historically we have suffered brutal violence and one of the worst is invisibility. Read our report on the declaration of a State of Emergency for Gender Violence and what it means for us, all black women. [Link in Bio].” Following the caption were the hashtags: “#EstadodeEmergencia #Afrofeminismo #NegrasyPoderosas #revistaétnica.” A small circular icon hovers in the bottom left corner on Instagram posts that “tag” other accounts. This tag acts as a link to another Instagram user’s account (Figure 2). @colectivafeministaPR @pazmujer @todaspr @colectivoile @con.sentimientospr were among the 13 accounts tagged in this post.

The tagged accounts that pop up when the picture is clicked give a glimpse into the network and collaboration between feminist organizations in Puerto Rico – particularly those that have started or have been invested in efforts to push the island government to declare a State of Emergency to address gender violence. These efforts and collaborations have been years in the making and have taken place offline – on the ground through protests, marches, live performance art, and more. Here, I am interested in the production of collaborative, organizational networks through social media features – such as tagging, reposting, sharing, and commenting. These online platforms for various organizations become spaces to amplify on-the-ground organizing and to initiate creative forms of activism across borders and boundaries, through diasporas and web space.

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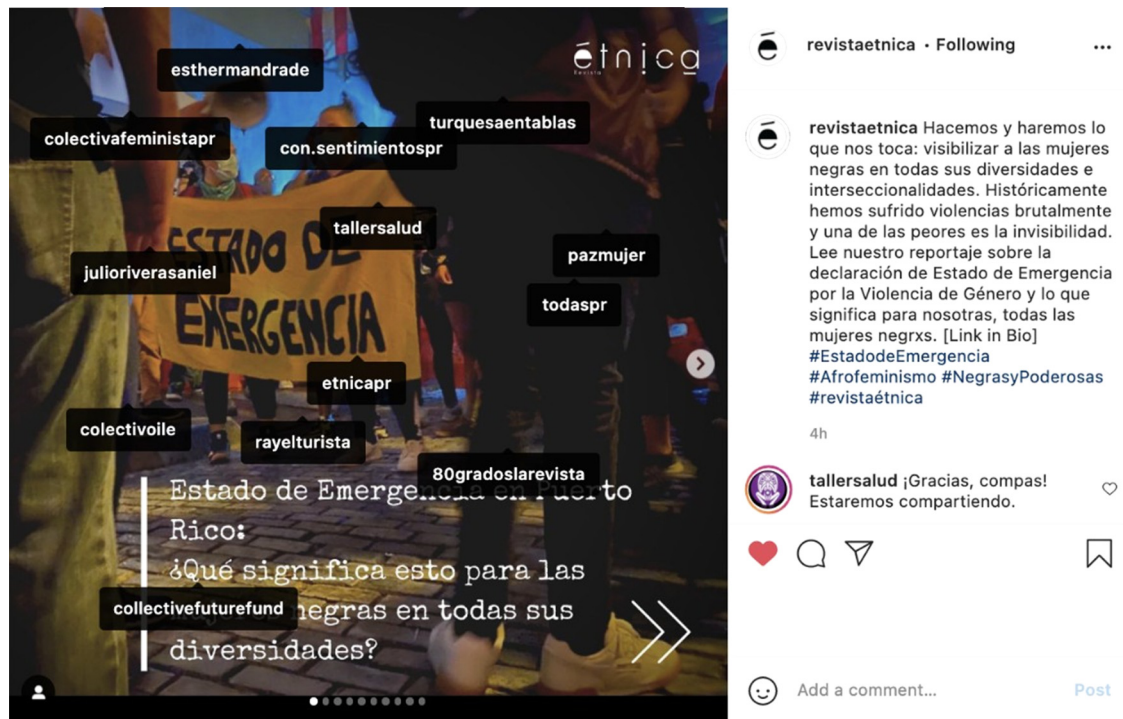


Figure 1: Screenshot from Revista Étnica Instagram Page.



Figure 2: Screenshot from Revista Étnica Instagram Page.

## Black Organizing Online

Gloriann Sacha Antonetty Lebrón, founder of *Revista Étnica*, is part of a generation of Black feminists using online platforms to educate and organize around racial and gender justice.

*Revista Étnica* is the first magazine and multimedia platform in Puerto Rico to bring visibility and empower and amplify the voices of Afro-Puerto Ricans and Afro Latin American communities. *Revista Étnica* has a print and digital magazine, as well as an online presence through their website, blog, and social media accounts such as Instagram and Facebook. Their platforms are predominantly focused on and dedicated to Black women, but also to Black and Afrodescendant men. They center LGBTQIA communities and all those marginalized by racial and gender discrimination. Their work online is a continuation of offline activism and organizing. This method of organizing has been documented and theorized more, especially in recent years after the start of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2014. In *Reclaiming Our Space: How Black Feminists Are Changing the World from the Tweets to the Streets*, Feminista Jones poses the question: “Who could have imagined that the pound sign, once valuable primarily for its use on touch-tone landline phones, would become one of the most powerful weapons for Black feminists?” (6). She argues,

Black feminist women are being heard in ways they have never been heard before. Social media networks provide platforms for conversations that we have long been having in our hair salons and our churches, by our watercoolers and in our breakrooms, and in our housing project courtyards and systematically segregated classrooms. What was once whispered or only shared in the sacred comforts of sister circles and ladies’ brunches is now on public display for all to access, learn from, and build upon. (Jones 6)

With that public display comes threats of harassment, abuse, and surveillance, however. As Moya Bailey argues: on the platforms where Black women are subjected to negative stereotypes and images that affect their mental health and well-being, they “employ these same platforms in ways that subvert negative stereotypes through processes that can be their own health-affirming practice” (11). These online strategies “provide maroon landing sites of respite” for Black women (Bailey 23). Similarly, in theorizing *Afro-Latinx Digital Connections*, Eduard Arriaga and Andrés Villar acknowledge that while digital technologies create opportunities for connection and producing knowledge, they also implement oppressive structures. However, “Black communities have understood this paradox ... it is thanks to communities’ maroon connections and resourceful intersections that they continue to create digital and analog solidarities” (Arriaga and Villar 166). As such, Black women and feminists can construct digital spaces to be both public spaces for expression and knowledge production, as well as insular spaces for community support.

This work is not new, but the mechanism for extending the conversation has changed. Studies on social media as a site for activism and organizing have responded to Jürgen Habermas’ concept of the “public sphere” (1962) and argued the existence of social media and internet spaces as “counterpublics,” a place where marginalized people could engage in counter discourse pertinent to their experiences. Bonilla and Rosa argue that social media cannot be seen as an unproblematized public sphere, but that digital activism has an important role in that it allows people to counter misrepresentation of themselves, such as the case with waves of protests in Ferguson, MO (2015). As social media platforms have allowed for people who have been silenced to represent themselves, it also allows for easier connection and collaboration with others across terrains.

Focusing on Twitter, Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles write in *Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* about “the importance of the digital labor of raced and gendered counterpublics,” explaining how “ordinary African Americans, women, transgender people, and others aligned with racial justice and feminist causes have long been excluded from elite media spaces yet have repurposed Twitter in particular to make identity-based cultural and political demands, and in doing so have forever changed national consciousness” (xxv). Jackson, Bailey, and Welles reject the notion that there is less need for these counterpublics now that formerly ostracized voices have been included more into US institutions as “such narratives perpetuate the invisibility of members of counterpublics who, despite increasing token inclusion and celebration as objects of consumption, are still vastly underrepresented and misrepresented in contemporary politics” (xxvii). The authors argue that these spaces, or

counterpublics, which offer up perspectives counter to popular, mainstream beliefs, respond to “under-representation and misrepresentation, along with efforts toward solidarity and community building ... using media technologies available to them” (Jackson et al. xxviii). Further, these counterpublics “push the mainstream public sphere on issues of social progress in ways more powerful and visible than possibly ever before” (Jackson et al. xxviii).

Caribbean scholar Tonya Haynes conceptualizes a notion *Caribbean cyberfeminisms* as “knowledge-producing spaces of political thought and action” online by Caribbean feminists (2016); Caribbean cyberfeminisms are “diverse, heterogeneous, and polyvocal” networks creating online communities linked to offline action and organizing (Mapping Caribbean Cyberfeminisms 2016). Haynes identifies the particular strategies of Caribbean feminists online who become part of a larger network of cyber feminists: “through practices of media creation, curating, reblogging, retweeting, sharing, and commenting across multiple social media platforms, Caribbean feminists knit together online communities that are often linked to on-the-ground organizing and action” (Mapping Caribbean Cyberfeminisms 2016). In an interview with the Institute for Gender & Development Studies at The University of the West Indies St. Augustine, Haynes warns “not to see what is happening online as somehow special or new or different, but to see the continuities with histories and legacies of feminist organizing” (Mapping Caribbean Cyberfeminisms 2016).

Through content creation and curation, reposting and sharing, commenting and captioning, and, more recently, broadcasting live, Black feminist collectives, organizations, and projects in Puerto Rico use digital and virtual technologies to extend their feminist, antiracist organizing, and collaboration, building Caribbean cyberfeminist network in the process. I follow Revista Étnica into this Caribbean cyberfeminist network to understand how this knitting together of online community amplifies their work for racial and gender justice on the island. As Haynes underlines, this work is not new – rather, it is operating within a longer legacy of decolonial, antiracist, feminist activism on the island. I analyze the online strategies within this framework: using social media platforms as a tool for holding the state accountable in demands for justice and as a site of community building to support people’s needs due to rampant bureaucratic mismanagement and the colonial debt crisis.

## Black Feminist Organizing in Puerto Rico’s Cultural and Political Context

Black feminist organizations on and offline in Puerto Rico have called attention to the paradox of antiblack racism on the island. The paradox of antiblack racism in Puerto Rico lies in claims that racism is not an issue, while relying on ideologies of racial mixture as evidence.

Puerto Rican cultural and racial identity is widely regarded as a racial mixture of African, Caribbean Indigenous, and European roots. However, the lived experiences of Black – especially dark-skinned – Puerto Ricans proves otherwise. “*Todos somos mezclados*,” or “we are all mixed,” is often repeated, when someone brings up Black identity or points out antiblack discrimination. *Mestizaje* – racial mixture as a cultural phenomenon symbolizing progress and national modernity – acknowledges African roots and influence while minimizing or erasing people and communities of African descent as part of the Puerto Rican cultural imaginary.

Institutionalized, dominant cultural narratives about Puerto Rico represent the island as a racially mixed nation, made up of Indigenous, African, and European ancestry. However, as scholars of the region and island have pointed to, Black Puerto Rican identity has been relegated to certain places and towns along the coast out of a desire to distance “blackness” from the image of the nation (Torres 288; Godreau 5). African ancestry is often spoken of as remnants of enslavement, especially regarding foods and musical tempos from the African continent. This temporalizes African identity as a fixture of the past that has some lasting influence on the island’s culture instead of recognizing the living Black communities today.



Black feminist organizing in Puerto Rico is particular as organizers and activists articulate and address the material impacts of antiblackness for Black Puerto Ricans, organizing with the knowledge that “if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since [their] freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (The Combahee River 1977). La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, also known as *La Cole*, is a Puerto Rican, feminist collective fueled by the work and politic of the Combahee River Collective (CRC). On an Instagram post reconveying how the CRC’s statement has been a theoretical pillar for their organization, they highlight a few excerpts from the Collective’s 1977 statement, translated into Spanish: “our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else’s but because of our needs as human persons for autonomy” (Combahee River Collective 1977). Included in this Instagram post is the CRC’s statement on destructing systemic oppressions: “we realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy.” These tenets align with Haynes’ analysis of Caribbean cyberfeminisms, as she argues that “Caribbean cyberfeminists express concern about governance, the masculinism of state power, corruption, and holding state managers accountable” (Mapping Caribbean Cyberfeminisms 2016). Puerto Rican activists, theorists, and scholars have already noted the emphasis on questioning coloniality within contemporary movements on the island and in the diaspora (Maldonado-Torres 339, Figueroa-Vasquez, Zambrana).

Focusing on “political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism” has been a key point of this organizing. Puerto Rico has a public debt of over US\$72 billion. The island’s economy has been in decline since its phasing out of tax incentives for foreign companies over the last two decades. As a result, foreign companies left the island to find new opportunities with less regulations. Unemployment on the island increased, and many residents left for the United States to find more economic stability (Bonilla and Lebrón 4). Puerto Rican officials turned to Wall Street for investment to address the economic crisis since corporate companies left.

However, they were overcome with more debt while trying to get temporary economic relief to avoid total collapse. As a territory of the United States, Puerto Rico’s economy “is mainly controlled by US corporations, which generate a tremendous amount of profit that is not reinvested and does not create economic growth.” Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol Lebrón point out the imperial nature of the US economic influence on the island territory noting the exploitative “financial apparatus of Puerto Rican bonds. In addition to having repayment guaranteed in the constitution, bonds issued by the Puerto Rican government also have the unique and singular quality (unavailable within any of the fifty states) of being triple tax-exempt – free of tax obligations at the state, federal, or local level” (6).

Further, as the amount of debt went “beyond constitutional limits,” US corporations suggested alternative forms of taxation to attract more lenders (6). When the island government declared the debt to be unpayable and tried to declare bankruptcy in 2016, they found they could not refinance nor default because of their political status as a commonwealth, as neither state nor sovereign nation. Without any financial bailout, US Congress appointed a Fiscal Control Board – with no input from the Puerto Rican government or peoples – to be in charge of managing Puerto Rico’s finances. The \$200 million a year cost is paid by Puerto Rican taxpayers (7). Bonilla and Lebrón explain, “the board has no vision for the island’s future other than restoring its ability to continue borrowing and generating profit for investors. It has focused solely on imposing structural-adjustment-style austerity measures,” reducing government budget and spending, especially in the public sector (7). This has meant cuts in public education, pensions, and salary wages. Consequently, these austerity measures have an unequal effect on people from different class, racial, gender backgrounds. This is the context in which Black feminists are organizing in Puerto Rico today.

La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, also known as *La Cole*, is a Puerto Rican feminist collective that has been at the forefront of organizing against gender violence, the colonial debt and the Fiscal Control Board, and the corrupt administration of Ricardo Rosselló during the summer of 2019. Rocío Zambrana argues that La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción uses “Black feminist tactics” which “renders the state accountable.” She theorizes their organizing as a “Black feminist decolonial methodology [which] indexes

the specific ways finance capitalism is materially actualized on populations, generating different impacts and intensities. It recognizes, names, builds power by referencing the specificity of those distinct impacts” (Zambrana). She notes that “La Colectiva underscores that it does not seek to organize communities. Communities are already organized. They are composed of knowers and agents that speak to their own conditions, needs, and desires” – instead they target the state.

I build on Zambrana’s argument, highlighting how Black feminist organizers and collaborative feminist organizations in Puerto Rico use social media as a tool to collectively push for just futures. Various anti-racists, feminist organizations, and projects – including magazines (*Revista Étnica*), health centers (*Taller Salud*), news outlets (*TodasPR*), sex-positive online projects (*Con el verbo en la piel*, *Con.Sentimientos PR*), antiracist community organizations (*Colectivo Ilé*), and anti-violence organizations (*Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres*) – have distinct projects and missions, yet work together toward a common goal of decolonial futures. This cyberfeminist network is built through: shared demands via hashtags and graphics; collaborating to provide decolonial Black feminist education; and open invitations for on-the-ground protests, marches, and caravans. In doing so, they build an online following across multiple organizations and various social media platforms to collectively put pressure on the state to address and meet their demands. While the network contributors expand across racial identities, I reiterate Zambrana’s argument of highlighting this work as a “Black feminist tactic” and also center Black Puerto Rican feminists themselves operating within this network. In what follows, I analyze these tactics used online from the end of 2018 through early 2021 to understand the impact of collective digital strategies to support on-the-ground protests, organizing, and community care led.

## #EstadodeEmergencia: Addressing Gender Violence in Puerto Rico

Social media users following one or more Puerto Rico-based organizations that have posted about gender violence in Puerto Rico will likely see the reposting, sharing, and collaboration between multiple accounts. Online campaigns – those that support offline organizing and movement through hashtags and social media posts – depend on users’ reposting and sharing for circulation and widespread recognition. Demands from organizers and activists on the ground, such as the declaration of a State of Emergency to address gender violence, especially in the past 3 years, have circulated social media platforms with support from multiple Puerto Rican feminist organizations. The demand to declare a State of Emergency is to push the local government to urgently address gender-based violence through policies that: prioritize violence prevention; provide and allocate resources for survivors and their families; and implement research and education on gender-based violence on the island. The hashtags #EstadoDeEmergencia, #EstadoDeEmergenciaYa, and #NiUnaMenos have cycled through graphics, captions, and comments. La Colectiva Feminist en Construcción has organized with the taglines “Contra La Deuda” and “Nosotras Contra la Deuda” online, on T-shirts, on banners in protests and marches. Centering the debt has been a key part of La Cole’s activism, linking the austerity measures from the debt crisis to the epidemic of gender-based violence in Puerto Rico. In a post announcing the sales of “Nosotras contra la deuda” [Us against the debt] shirts for the 2019 Women’s strike on March 8th, International Women’s Day, La Cole’s caption reads:

We recognize that “debt” has been used as a tool to implement austerity policies, which under the excuse of debt continue to impoverish us. We make the call that our lives come before any debt, that the debt is illegal and illegitimate, that WE WILL NOT PAY IT.

Gender-based violence is also the responsibility of the state and when it deprives us of quality public education, health services, decent housing, safe streets, decent jobs, essential services, and opts for fiscal adjustment plans that only benefit bondholders and the rich WE ARE GOING UP. Join the efforts. #ConstruyamosOtraVida #ColectivaFeministaEnConstrucción #LaCole #8M #8contraLaDeuda #NosotrasParamos

Additionally, they've called attention to the failures of the state on social media, documenting their organizing offline. Their social media platforms have also been a space to remember those who have been victims of gender violence, alerting the public to their reasons for offline efforts and mobilization. A list of 21 names were listed under a purple banner "Women murdered by gender violence in Puerto Rico," posted to La Cole's Instagram account. Their caption remarked,

Name them! These are the names of the women murdered by gender violence in Puerto Rico: 1. Jackeline Vega Sánchez 2. Carmen Iris Domínguez Pérez 3. Moesha Hiraldo Maldonado 4. Aida Irizarry Torres 5. Maritza De Jesús Espada 6. Shakaira Carrero García 7. Suliani Calderón Nieves 8. Marcela Montañés Rodríguez 9. Loren Figueroa Quiñones 10. Milagros Ivette Ortiz Alvarado 11. Leissin Michelle Ortiz Rivera 12. Annette García Arroyo 13. Maribel Díaz Rodríguez 14. Francheska M Miranda Sánchez 15. Dohanna Carrasquillo Rojas 16. Frances Pagán Rest 17. Marisol Ortiz Almeda 18. Rosabell Rodríguez Díaz 19. Nilda Medina Andújar 20. Ingrid García Rivera 21. Sandra Marrero Cañuelas. Five additional cases remain under investigation. Today, November 23, we took to the streets to demand that the government declare a State of National Emergency against Gender Violence. We demand to live in peace.

In the following post, they picture protest art – red paint splatters and hand prints on monuments in San Juan. They include a picture of a posted letter informing viewers of the meaning of these paintings. The top of the letter reads in capital letters: "A QUIEN PUEDA INTERESAR... LA CIUDAD ESTÁ LLENA DE LA SANGRE DE LAS MUJERES OLVIDADAS POR NUESTRO GOBIERNO." [TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: ... THE CITY IS FULL OF THE BLOOD OF WOMEN FORGOTTEN BY OUR GOVERNMENT] (Figure 3).

Other platforms have taken up this demand for a State of Emergency to address gender violence. Ana Castillo, Black Puerto Rican journalist and sex coach, founder of *Con el verbo en la piel*, a sex-positive digital space, reiterated demands for a State of Emergency through an Instagram post on her project's instagram @verboypiel. The picture, featuring a Black femme figure, is faded purple with white letters on top: "Estado De Emergencia." The caption reads, "Today I wake up with the image of a pregnant woman who was doused with gasoline. Until when will we have to witness this, when will women be a priority in this country, when will [we get] education from a gender perspective, when? You hurt me, country, you hurt me." She ends with a demand: "Declare a #estadodeemergencia already. Damn, how exasperating to live like this." As the official color for Domestic Violence Awareness month, the color purple is significant here. Purple within the posts also links organizations in the ways that hashtags do – with the repetition of color being a constant reminder of the struggle, painted across social media platforms of feminist organizations within this network. Taller Salud, a feminist, antiracist grassroots women's health organization founded in 1979, has taken to social media to amplify these demands, strategically using color and graphics (Figure 4) to present resources dealing with women's health and to collaborate with other antiracist, feminist organizations to amplify demands such as #EstadodeEmergencia. In an educational post about gender violence, Taller Salud posted a series of informational graphics. The first slide declared: "Gender Violence has never been about men vs. women." The second slide informed that "gender violence is any action or aggression towards a person due to their gender status in a relationship of social power. We mostly talk about gender violence in its violent expression towards women. This violence results in physical, sexual or emotional harm, including threats." The final slide poses the demands for the declaration of a State of Emergency: "We demand the declaration of a state of emergency. We demand the taking of concrete and deliberate actions. Our proposals are still on the table." This slide tagged @protectomatria @pazmujer and @colectivafeministapr. In the caption, Taller Salud states:

Femicides are violence. Disappearances are violence. The lack of access and resources is violence. Racism and its ravages are violence. Pandemic management and how it exacerbates the gaps are violence. Government inaction is also violence. Almost two years after the requirement for a #EmergencyState was met, we have so much to go. We have not stopped working. Our proposals are still on the table. #EstadoDeEmergenciaYa #PuertoRico #NiUnaMenos #ViolenciaDeGénero #Feminismo

Comments on their post included three fire emojis from @pazmujer and a 100 emoji, fist emoji, and fire emoji from @colectivafeministapr. Taller Salud replied to @@colectivafeministapr "Las vemos!" with the eye-looking emoji. *We see you!* (Figure 5). This is the Puerto Rican cyberfeminist network.



colectivafeministap · Following ...

colectivafeministapr @colectivototo se suma a la convocatoria del Plantón Feminista contra la Violencia Machista. El colectivo realizó una instalación en varios monumentos en San Juan simbolizando la violencia contra las mujeres, responsabilizando al Gobierno y a la Policía de Puerto Rico. Por otro lado, exigen que se firme la orden ejecutiva presentada por la Colectiva Feminista en Construcción donde se establece un Plan de Emergencia Nacional contra la Violencia de Género. "Tienen las manos manchadas con nuestra sangre, la sangre de las mujeres del país"

#Plantón23N #NiUnaMenos

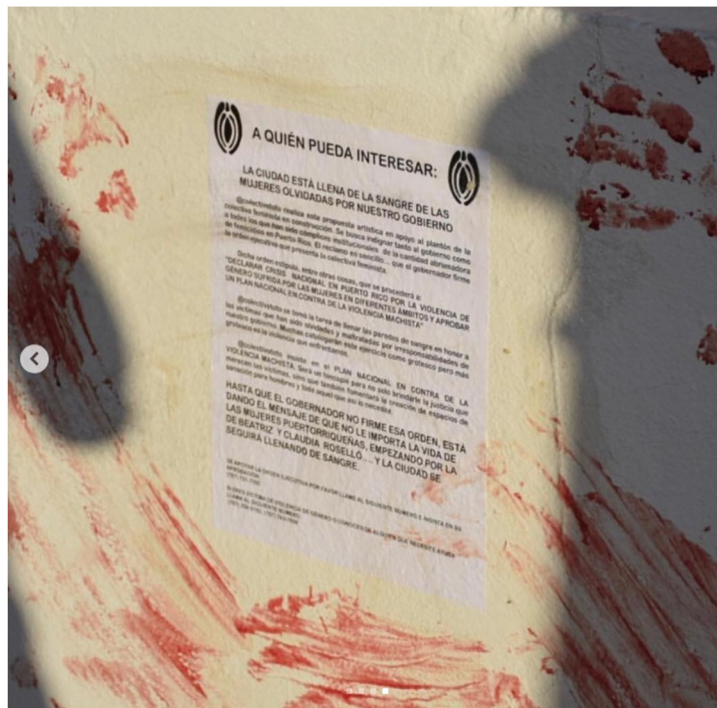


1,477 likes

NOVEMBER 23, 2018

Add a comment...

Post



colectivafeministap · Following ...

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#Plantón23N #NiUnaMenos



1,477 likes

NOVEMBER 23, 2018

Add a comment...

Post

Figure 3: Screenshot from Colectiva Feminista en Construcción Instagram Page.

## Collective Demands of #RickyRenuncia

Another method for holding the state accountable has been using social media for open invitations to on-the-ground protests, marches, and caravans. In July 2019, these invitations were centered around another specific demand – calling on the governor, Ricardo Rosselló, to resign.





Figure 4: Screenshot from Taller Salud Instagram Page.



Figure 5: Screenshot from Taller Salud Instagram Page.



Figure 6: Screenshot from Colectiva Feminista en Construcción Instagram Page.

On July 11, 2019, La Cole posted to their Instagram a photo with words scattered over a purple-tinted picture of someone holding a sign reading “Estado de Emergencia” (Figure 6). “GATITA” “CÁIGANLE ENCIMA” “ATIENDE A ESAS MUJERES” “GO F\*\*\* YOURSELF”

“CAERLE ENCIMA A ESTA PUTA” all surround the word “PUTA,” centered in the graphic.

Under these words, a banner reads: “expresiones del Gobernador Ricardo Rosselló y su gabinete” [expressions of Governor Ricardo Rosselló and his cabinet].

These are words and phrases that the governor and some of his cabinet members had used in private chats to each other which was first leaked on July 9, 2019. Initially, 11 pages of this chat were leaked, but by July 13, Puerto Rico’s *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo* published the full 889-page chat transcript. The chat implicated the governor and other government officials of various crimes. They violently mocked women, racial and gender minorities, queer people, people from low-income backgrounds, other politicians, and victims of Hurricane María. The caption of La Cole’s July 11 post calls attention to the violence of the state that fuels the inequalities they work to address in their activism, especially their calling for the island government to declare a State of Emergency to deal with the epidemic of gender-based violence. The caption on their Instagram post stated: “the gender violence that the country is experiencing does not manifest itself in a unique way in relationships. It is a reflection of social institutions, the education system, the lack of health services, the GOVERNMENT and its public policy.” The caption continues, reiterating why their work focuses on implicating the state in addressing racial, gender, and class inequalities:

our claim, as a feminist collective in construction, has focused on the state, understanding that it is the one who can facilitate the conditions to overcome the inequalities that we face. Today we wake up with the news that the country’s Head of State – Ricardo Rosselló – and his governmental cabinet have dedicated themselves to making sexist, homophobic and racist comments. Leaving in evidence the principles by which the public policy of your government is governed.

La Cole names the state as the aggressor that has the power to change the reality of inequalities on the island. For the collective, this scandal publically exemplifies what they already knew about the state. They finish the Instagram post caption, linking their continued fight for recognition of gender violence on the island to this moment and calling for on-the-ground protest as response:

Governor Ricardo Rosselló has violated, not only women – which he directly insults – but the country. His aggression was not that he called us “whores”, “kittens”, or any other macho epithet, the governor’s aggression is still that he has not

declared a state of emergency against gender violence. Now we know why the governor did not address us while we were in front of Fortaleza for three days, now we know why he did not want to meet with us, now we know why they continue to murder, assault, rape, abuse, and harass women in this country with impunity; the one who runs the country is the first to violate us. Compañeras, [comrades] take the streets again. We solve this ourselves, even if it is by returning all the violence we receive from the state.

From July 11 to July 24, what became known as El Verano del 19, protesters gathered in Old San Juan to demand the resignation of Governor Rosselló. A collection of essays published in “The Decolonial Geographies of Puerto Rico’s 2019 Summer Protests: A Forum,” edited by Joaquín Villanueva and Marisol LeBrón, document both theoretical and creative responses about the crisis. In her forum essay, “Black Feminist Tactics: On La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción’s Politics without Guarantees,” Rocío Zambrana argues that the protests in Old San Juan were built on the tactics of La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción’s Black feminist, decolonial organizing – that is, tactics of “holding the state/capital accountable for the specific forms of violence produced by debt/austerity.” Through their “Black feminist, decolonial methodology... they engage the continuation of the colonial condition in the reinstallation of a race/gender/class hierarchy through debt/austerity” (Zambrana).

An Instagram post a few days later on July 14 was another call to action by La Cole (Figure 7). This graphic reads “CACEROLAZO!” at the top underneath: Miércoles, 17 Julio | 5 PM | Fortaleza. Following this invitation to protest (direct translation: “pot-banging!”) in Old San Juan, they listed their demands: “1. Renuncia del Gobernador Ricardo Rosselló y todo su gabinete; 2. Estado de Emergencia contra la violencia machista; 3. Auditoría de la deuda y toda gestión pública.” They demanded the resignation of the governor and his cabinet, a declaration of a State of Emergency against sexist violence, and an audit of the island’s debt and management. On July 16th, Collective Ilé echoed these sentiments in an Instagram post:

An organization led by black, anti-racist women, dedicated to anti-racist, decolonial and anti-oppressive work, demands the resignation of Governor Ricardo Roselló. ... We take the opportunity to object to the fiscal control board as a colonial and abusive entity that represents the interest of investors who have capitalized on the misery of the people. We demand that there be an audit of the debt and an end to the austerity measures that already strangle the people in a disproportionate way. We exhort our communities, our constituents to join the public acts in repudiation of the gang of corrupt and immoral people who hold positions they do not deserve. Let’s get together and be true to the adage: When cobwebs come together, they can bind a lion. The time to bind has arrived.

Black Puerto Rican Journalist & Sociocultural Anthropologist Bárbara Abadía-Rexach writes of the impact of social media and digital spaces in this movement; “the revolution also took place in social media.



Figure 7: Screenshot from Colectiva Feminista en Construcción Instagram Page.

Without a doubt, social media and other digital platforms played a crucial role in the political situation during the summer [of] 2019 from the telegram chat itself, to the contents of those chats being leaked online by CPI, to the organizing of various protest actions against Rosselló.” Social media platforms became an important space for this work, especially considering the amount of Puerto Ricans living within the diaspora – currently more living off of the island than on it. It also became a space for supporters within the diaspora and beyond to learn about the crisis, see the protests in the street through broadcasting live and recorded videos on various platforms;

it became a site for strategizing and adding more pressure to the island government. As Abadía-Rexach argues, the digital sphere hosted spaces for strategizing ways to fold people into the protests in order to create a broad social front against the abuses of the Rosselló administration.

Social media was essential to the protests in that it became where information was produced, circulated, and analyzed allowing for great numbers of Puerto Ricans in different geographical spaces to participate in the protests. That pressure generated by social media organizing in tandem with on-the-ground protests left no other option for Rosselló but to respect the decision of the people (Abadía-Rexach).

Within the same forum, Aurora Santiago-Ortiz and Jorell Meléndez-Badillo note the importance of social media in the protests, especially being within the diaspora, away from the island. They call attention to the “digital geographies” that “were strategically mobilized to enable the active participation of the global Puerto Rican diaspora in the protests. The virtual dimensions of the movement were so powerful that #RickyRenuncia became viral, reaching the #2 hashtag in the United States and #19 worldwide.” Santiago-Ortiz and Meléndez-Badillo recall their experience from the US diaspora, following the protests through social media and friends:

our daily lives were at a standstill as we spent most of our time looking for live feeds, updates, and in touch with friends who were on the ground. As corporate media presented videos and images, usually from behind the barricades and next to the police, we navigated the crowds through live feeds created by activists and alternative media outlets like *Bandera roja* or *El calce*. These outlets also became important to challenge media narratives about the self-defense actions that were taking place in the streets of San Juan.

As many other *diasporicans* did, Santiago Ortiz and Meléndez-Badillo traversed through digital geographies to learn about what was happening apart from official media narratives given by news outlets. Social media platforms provided a way to see the protests live from those on-the-ground, both as a form of support for the movement and for the safety of those protesting. On July 24, 2019, Rosselló announced his resignation for August 2nd after collective protests throughout the island, the diaspora, and especially the hundreds of thousands of protesters that showed up in front of the governor’s mansion in Old San Juan night after night for almost 2 weeks.

The work continues, La Cole quickly showed after the resignation announcement. Their posts following the celebration of the victory turned attention back to their demands before the chat scandal – to declare a State of Emergency for gender violence and to audit the debt. In the aftermath of #RickyRenuncia, they added a demand for zero impunity for corrupt government officials involved in the scandal and a commitment to not make any cuts to funding on pensions, public education, and labor rights. On August 2, 2019, the day of Rosselló’s official exit from office, La Cole posted a public invitation to their event “¿Y AHORA QUÉ? | Reunión Feminista” “to discuss the current situation of the country, possible strategies of fight and next steps.” The collective, along with their feminist network of collaborators on and offline, reminded everyone through posters on the streets (Figure 8), as hashtags and postable graphics, “en la lucha del Pueblo nadie se cansa. Seguimos construyendo otra vida.” *In the people’s struggle no one tires out. We continue building another life.*





Figure 8: Screenshot from Colectiva Feminista en Construcción Instagram Page.

## Power in the Collective: Declaration of a State of Emergency for Gender Violence

The declaration of a state of emergency due to gender violence reflects that this is an organized, constant struggle, with clear objectives, but above all, COLLECTIVE.

– La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción Instagram Post January 24th 2021

The State of Emergency for gender violence was declared in Puerto Rico on January 24, 2021, over 2 years after La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción began their on-the-ground organizing for this demand. The Executive Order, OE-2021-013, declares: “it is hereby maintained as a priority service of the Government of Puerto Rico to establish and implement protection, prevention, and education programs as well as protocols to access housing, health services, education, and work in order to prevent and eradicate gender-based violence” (Government of Puerto Rico, OE-2021-013). Other feminist organizations and activists have worked and organized for this demand on and offline. Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres, a coalition of organizations that focus on domestic violence and sexual assault, has been working to address gender violence since its founding in 1989. As a coalition, Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres provides resources, education, and services to organizations in Puerto Rico that serve women survivors and their families and organizations that work on gender-based violence research and mobilization to impact public policy on the island. Since using social media platforms – Facebook in 2009 and Instagram in 2014, 20 and 25 years, respectively, after its founding – Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres has continued and, in some cases, widened their collaborations and reach with feminist organizations addressing gender-based violence in Puerto Rico. They’ve created social media campaigns such as #NoEstásSolx/#NoEstásSola to address domestic and intimate partner violence during quarantine; and #AmaConSentido to educate people on partner violence and consent in relationships. The hashtags are meant to educate followers, collaborators,

and their communities as well as invite survivors to share their stories safely and help them locate resources.

Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres' November 2020 campaign, *Feminismos en Puerto Rico*, is an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Santurce, Puerto Rico, honoring 247 feminist activists through portraits. Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres' 247 portraits visually illustrate the collaboration between feminist organizations, projects, activists, and organizers. *Feminismos en Puerto Rico* is meant to

recognize the activism and praise the hard work and struggle of great women, who from different spaces fight to achieve progress towards gender equality in Puerto Rico. This exhibition is a small sample of the great collective effort of women that does not cease in the face of natural disasters, political debacles or economic crises, they are the faces of women who work day and night for the well-being of the communities to which they belong, they are the representation of people living in situations of vulnerability. (Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres Website)

The coalition launched the campaign on Facebook Live (Figure 9), posted the photos to Instagram, Facebook, and their website, in addition to the collection within, and posted outside of the museum. Featured organizations and activists posted the photos too, including Revista Étnica, who highlighted all of the Black organizers included in the project in an Instagram post. The exhibition opened on November 25th to commemorate el Día Internacional de No Más Violencia Contra La Mujer, which honors the three Mirabal sisters – Patria, Minerva, María Teresa Mirabal – who were assassinated in 1950 for their resistance to the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. As Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres writes in their artist's statement on the exhibition, these feminist organizers and activists "from different spaces fight to achieve progress towards gender equality in Puerto Rico." Through the cyberfeminist network and community that I traced here, a much smaller sample than the Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres project, each project has their own unique contribution to a larger fight against gender-based violence. For example, as a feminist news outlet, TodasPR covers a wide range of topics in their journalism and through their social media posts such as abortion rights and education throughout the Caribbean; sex education and positivity; the work of El Colectivo Trans de Puerto Rico naming the particular transphobic violence trans women face; the collective fight for a State of Emergency for gender violence. Revista Étnica, founded by Black Puerto Rican

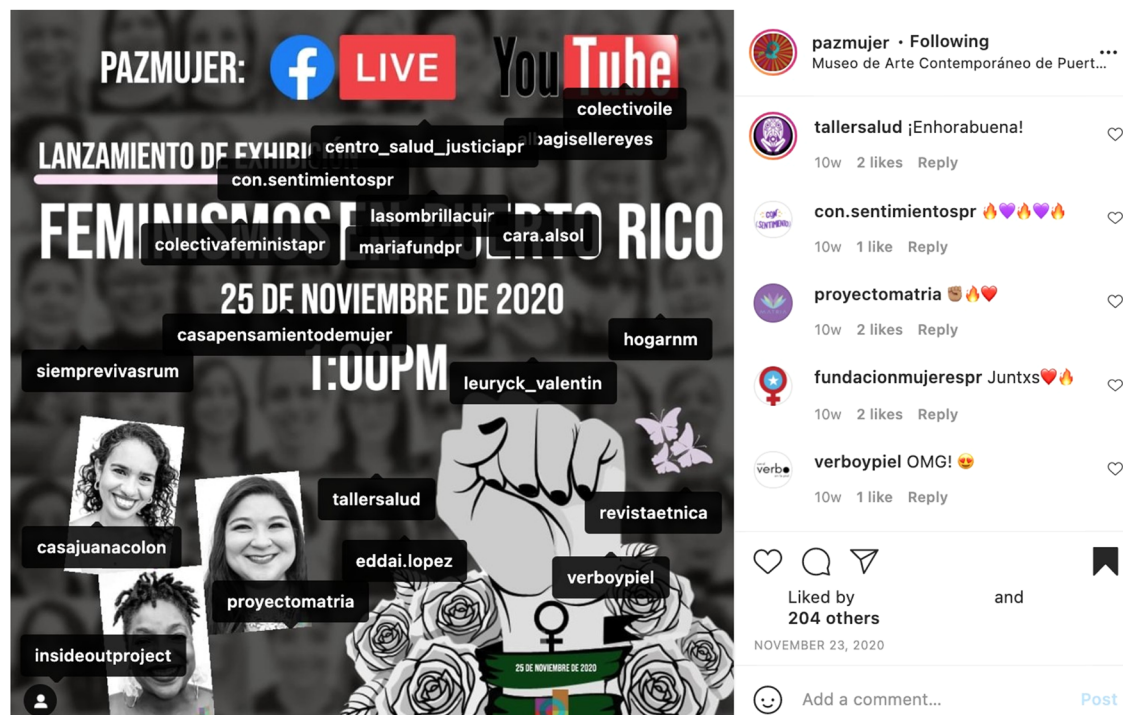


Figure 9: Screenshot from Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres Instagram Page.

writer, Gloriann Sacha Antonetty, also contributes within this network through journalism in her print and digital magazine, *Revista Étnica*, and on the magazine website's blog.

In an Instagram post on the declaration of the State of Emergency for gender violence, *Revista Étnica* poses the question “*What does this mean for black women in all their diversity?*” One of the photos in this Instagram post features a young black child holding up a sign reading “*Tengo derecho a una infancia libre de violencia.*” *I have the right to a childhood free of violence.* The child, sitting on someone's shoulders, is in a crowd marching on a street in Old San Juan. Some of the marchers are wearing violet, indicative of the feminist fight against gender violence. On top of the picture is a quote from their blog post on the statistics by the Gender Equity Observatory of the femicides in Puerto Rico during 2020: “the year 2020 closed with a total of 60 direct and indirect femicides, of which 17 are considered intimate, 6 transfeminicides and 26 cases continue to be investigated or without information.” This, they note, is an increase of 62% since 2019. This post centers the meaning of a State of Emergency for Black women and girls “*en todas sus diversidades.*” The photo series highlights quotes on this fight from Black Puerto Rican women, including Puerto Rico Senator Ana Irma Rivera Lassen, Edda López Serrano of the Puerto Rican Independence Party, La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción, trans activist Tereza Karolina, and Kimberly Figueroa Calderon of Colectivo Ilé and Ashanti Headwraps. This photo series on Instagram, which takes snippets from a longer article posted on their blog, honors the collectivity in the fight for demanding the State of Emergency. In a culture that widely negates Black identity, community, and presence, Gloriann continually centers Black women and girls, asserting their struggle, work, achievements, and being through journalism via *Revista Étnica* Instagram, blog, print, and digital magazines. The post concludes naming Black women and girls who have been victims of gender violence, demanding a full investigation of the death of Neulisa Alexa Luciano, a Black trans woman who was murdered almost a year prior.

Honoring their work that led to the State of Emergency, La Cole wrote in an Instagram caption: “WHO SAID THAT FIGHTING DOES NOT WORK? Risking, insisting, assuming militant, collective, and disciplined work IS the way to advance the struggle and get closer to other futures. And when it comes to our lives – Not a single step back. #ConstruyamosOtraVida.” *We are building another life.*

## #ConstruyamosOtraVida through Decolonial Black Feminist Education

*In this Fall of struggle and resistance, La Cole invites you to its Radical Feminist School: Politics of Escape: Maroonage and Black Feminist Activism. We call on you to come together to collectively train ourselves on the history of maroonage in our country and region, and on the various forms of resistance that have been articulated from black feminist activism*

– La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción via Instagram October 28th 2020.

As Haynes writes, the Caribbean cyberfeminist network “demonstrate[s] the subversive possibilities of digital public spheres.” Part of the work in holding the state accountable, led by La Cole's efforts, has been educating people on the particular movements and campaigns taking place in Puerto Rico, as well as providing frameworks for understanding decolonial theories and practices. In this way, the digital space can act as a site of subversion through this decolonization of education. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Black feminist organizers, activists, and projects have taken their panels and classes into the virtual sphere, too. La Cole's *Escuela Feminista Radical* in May 2020 set out to “develop and strengthen political thought through black feminist epistemologies and decolonial methodologies” online. As with many of their online and offline schools and seminars, La Cole also posts parts of the learning in class on their social media accounts with quotes from guest speakers and collective members. The classes have been low cost, around \$20 for multiple sessions. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, they've offered free classes via Zoom, such as

the November 2020 four-session Radical Feminist School entitled “Politics of Escape: Maroonage and Black Feminist Activism.”

This generosity of education goes beyond panels, seminars, and Facebook Lives – it is also reflected in journalism, blog posts, and long social media captions. An Instagram post from September 14, 2020 displayed graffiti that read “existimos porque resistimos, resistimos porque existimos.” *We exist because we resist, we resist because we exist.* La Cole posted a caption citing Peruvian decolonial theorist, Aníbal Quijano:

The Peruvian decolonial theorist Aníbal Quijano explained that there is an inherent historical impossibility in the promises of Eurocentric colonial modernity, alluding to the colonality of power that is deeply rooted and operative in all areas of our society. And he invited us to think: what can be done in the face of that? “There are not many options,” he commented. “One agrees with social relations, which are at the same time power relations, therefore with social inequality – or one does not agree. What do you do if you don’t agree? Can one be eliminated? Because outside of that, there is nowhere in the universe where you can go. ... And he continued developing: “There is nowhere to go. Here we are all together. We all live in societies where inequality and power are active all the time. They are when we sleep, they are in our dreams, they are in the unconscious.

There is nowhere to go. So, if you are not happy and in agreement, you cannot stop inhabiting that universe. You have to live here.

They continued in the caption, responding to Quijano: “We at La Cole have interpreted these ideas as a call to build. The struggle that must be articulated to end the colonality of power and all its manifestations will require much more than simply stating that one is against the system, than repudiating it, and even resisting and fighting against it.” Their hashtag #ConstruyamosOtraVida, seen online in posts and offline on banners, “implies thinking, managing, discussing, proposing, executing, making mistakes and trying again – NEW ways of relating and bonding, looking at and understanding each other, organizing ourselves and existing on this planet. Consistently.” As such, they educate their online following, their comrades, curious on-lookers, on Quijano’s decolonial work while situating their own in response to his thoughts on actively organizing against coloniality.

In an Instagram post, Revista Étnica quoted part of Guillermo A. Baralt’s book *Esclavos Rebeldes: Conspiraciones y sublevaciones de esclavos en Puerto Rico (1795–1873)*:

La cantidad de esclavos varones en la isla no se diferenciaba mucho de la cantidad de mujeres esclavas. Por ejemplo, en el año 1830, de un total de 34,374 esclavos, 17,688 eran varones y 16,686 eran mujeres. A principios del siglo XIX, el precio del varón era más alto que el de la mujer, pero a medida que se elevaron los precios de todos los esclavos, y se hizo difícil traer esclavos de África, el precio de la mujer fue más alto que el del hombre. La mujer esclava habrá de sufrir una explotación doble: la del campo y la sexual. [The number of male slaves on the island did not differ much from the number of slave women. For example, in the year 1830, out of a total of 34,374 slaves, 17,688 were male and 16,686 were female. At the beginning of the 19th century, the price of the male was higher than that of the female, but as the prices of all slaves rose, and it became difficult to bring slaves from Africa, the price of the female was higher than that of man. The slave woman will have to suffer a double exploitation: that of the field and the sexual one.]

In the caption, they write: “on the body, sweat, blood and tears of black women, the capital and wealth of many families in the slave system was built and is being built in this nation. #NosDeben [#TheyOweUs] We start the week talking about #FeminismoNegro. Read and share.” One of the hashtags they use at the bottom reads, #ContralaDeuda – against the debt.

Here, they put into conversation the debt with the enslavement of African peoples in Puerto Rico, highlighting the particular experience of Black women suffering sexual and labor exploitation.

Other Black feminist platforms and organizations that center Black community and identity of Puerto Rico also demonstrate the digital sphere’s subversive possibilities. Definitions of Puerto Rican cultural identity have widely posited the islands’ African heritage as marginal, taking up antiblack notions of racial mixture as a national identity. Colectivo Ilé – an antiracist, decolonial collective that affirms African roots and Black identity of Puerto Ricans through community organizing and education – has been invested in providing Puerto Ricans with decolonial, Black feminist education since its founding in 1992.



During Summer 2019, they started the radio show *NEGRAS*, accessible on live radio and posted online. *NEGRAS* centers the voices of Black Puerto Rican women, covering topics of race and gender in Puerto Rico. They often host guests and, many times, have centered the work of other antiracist feminist organizers and organizations in Puerto Rico. In December 2020, *NEGRAS* featured community organizers Tanisha Gaspar and Kiara Sáez and youth program participant Kathleen Manso to talk about the Taller Salud youth program called *AfroCaribeñas*. To announce the episode, as they do weekly, Colectivo Ilé posted a series of photos to Instagram of participants in the program. The photos in the series featured Black girls smiling and posing with their program leaders, Tanisha and Kiara, who were tagged in the photo. This program, as Taller Salud writes in their Instagram post announcing the program, “*AfroCaribeñas* seeks to train young Afro-Puerto Rican women as feminist leaders and social justice activists. It is a space for healing and collective learning for the development of skills for life and social organization. *AfroCaribeñas* uses art, popular education and games.” Revista Étnica also featured the work of *AfroCaribeñas* on their blog, sharing the antiracist language guide (available as a.pdf) created by the *AfroCaribeñas* participants. The blog post also shared the YouTube video created by participants called *Hablamos de Racismo* [Talking about Racism].

Another episode of *NEGRAS* featured leaders from a joint project between Colectivo Ilé and Revista Étnica called *AfroJuventudes*. *AfroJuventudes* is a “virtual anti-racist, political and training space for young Black people who identify themselves as Afro-descendants.” Colectivo Ilé and Revista Étnica share quotes from participants and program leaders on their social media accounts, one of which noted:

AfroJuventudes participants already wear anti-racist glasses. They make a commitment to name the issue in words that point out and hold the offending system accountable. They recognize the intersectionalities between race + gender + class + sexual orientation. They analyze the weight of phenotypic characteristics to achieve opportunities. They recognize the assemblage of black bodies in promoting and achieving a freedom that is cultivated within each one, by each one. We are on fertile ground, building futures that are seen to recognize the dignity of each being. – María Beatriz Serrano

Along with the scores of resources that Black and antiracist, feminist organizations are providing online – especially through the pandemic – Colectivo Ilé, Revista Étnica, and Taller Salud are all working to raise up a new generation of Black Puerto Ricans, providing political, feminist, antiracist, and decolonial education and training. Black feminist organizers and organizations are fueling Puerto Ricans on the island and throughout the diaspora (with virtual reach) with decolonial, Black feminist education.

With internet access, the virtual sphere has made decolonial training and thought more accessible as well as joining in organizations, protests, and revolutionary movements. For example, clicking the link in the bio section of La Colectiva Feminista en Construcción’s Instagram account brings users to a page where they can access five more links: buying the shirt made by La Cole to support their work; their foundational manifesto, a free-access 20-page digital book; their antiracist manifesto, posted as a document on their Facebook page, which leads with an epigraph of a quote from the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977); a Google form for those who would like to collaborate with the collective, including participation in protests, in their Feminist School, and other study groups, and to be integrated into the collective; and, finally, a link to donate money.

Although not unique to this internet era, the open availability of documents, collective statements, and contact information for open exchange allows for transparency between the collective and supporters. It also allows for supporters to join in on the work collective. One of La Cole’s central tenants in their manifesto is reflexivity. Through their online platforms, their manifesto is readily available, and they encourage debate, participation, reflection by all. The opening statement introducing *La Manifesta* reads: “this document, like all political actions, is open for discussion, debate and reflection by anyone who reads it. The images used were taken from the internet as an exchange of ideas in struggle. It’s a gift. Don’t buy it, don’t sell it. Down it. Copy it. Pass it on. Let’s provoke. Let’s build together.” Their email and Facebook account is provided for more information. Within this manifesto, they declare their approach to feminism with self-reflexivity, one “that is not stagnant. The development of our work as a Collective implies a process of continuous self-reflection as a group in all aspects, not only as a mere evaluative tool, but to always keep in mind what is our approach and our direction and what are the needs and priorities working with and for women and oppressed people at all times.”

## Supporting Community Needs while Building New Futures

*While the government deprives us of our basic services, there are those who take on that job. Honoring the work they do every day @comedores.socialespr will be offering food in front of the barracks in the Manuel A. Pérez residential area for the community, protesters and others at 4:00 in the afternoon.*

– Revista Étnica Instagram Caption, April 30th 2020

While La Cole has especially focused their energies on holding the state accountable for the inequalities and violences Puerto Ricans face, they, along with other feminist, decolonial organizations, have stood in the gap to support the needs of Puerto Ricans on the island. With another crisis at hand, Puerto Ricans have again been forced to respond to the needs of their communities in the intentional absence of the state. Beginning on March 15, 2020, Puerto Ricans on the island were on a round-the-clock lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The quarantine also fueled further organizing to address gender-based violence, as lockdowns made those vulnerable to and survivors of domestic violence even more at risk. Through the pandemic, collaboration across feminist organizations online has responded to community needs, such as addressing food insecurity and sharing resources for survivors of gender-based violence.

On April 30, 2020, Revista Étnica posted to Instagram – a graphic of bread with the words “pan” [bread] scattered across and a short plea “el pueblo pide pan” [the people ask for bread]. The post notifies followers of a food drive in a neighborhood in San Juan by The Comedores Sociales of Puerto Rico. The Comedores Sociales of Puerto Rico “is a non-profit organization that seeks to eradicate hunger in Puerto Rico through strategies of collective work and socialization of resources in favor of the majority of” Puerto Ricans. They have been active against hunger and food insecurity, feeding Puerto Ricans across the island. On the same day, La Cole posted a photo of the food drive, writing in their caption “People are passing by car and bringing food to the mobile collection center of @comedores.socialespr in front of the Manuel A. Pérez barracks where we are waiting for the release of comrade Giovanni Roberto. THE PEOPLE FEED THE PEOPLE AGAIN. People are forced to take on the government’s job AGAIN.” Giovanni Roberto, part of the Comedores Sociales organization was unlawfully arrested as he led a caravan – “Caravana por la vida” – on April 30, 2020 to protest the lack of government response to the growing hunger crisis during the lockdown.

A collaboration between multiple organizations, including La Cole and Comedores Sociales, created “Brigadas por la vida,” a brigade to address the hunger crisis. They provided breakfasts, lunches, and groceries and invited other groups and collectives “to join this day of national action by carrying out actions of mutual support that at the same time demand the government’s measures from #RCC.” The RCC, which stands for “¿REAPERTURA? ¿CUÁNDO? ¿CÓMO?” [Reopening? When? How?] responded to an announcement by Governor Wanda Vázquez stating that some sectors would be reopening. Through providing for the people in the gaps where the government should be, they centered more demands to address state failures during the pandemic. La Cole asserted:

*This REOPENING IS PRESSED by the private sector that is more aware of sales losses than loss of life under a pandemic. This IRRESPONSIBLE REOPENING tries to launch us into an illusory normality, because the needs of the country have not been met. So, we ask ourselves: REOPENING? WHEN? HOW? We throw away our conditions for a reopening that prioritizes and takes responsibility for addressing the vulnerability created by public policies in service of the so-called productivity. We resist their death policies.*

Revista Étnica posted a video at the brigade’s San Juan location of organizers from La Cole and Comedores Sociales discussing economic reopening on the island.

In April 2020, a month into the pandemic lockdown, Taller Salud posted about how to engage in mutual aid. They caption the post: “as we await government efforts and social protection measures, we know that mutual support is our most effective tool to cope with this emergency. Puerto Rico is not ready for a reopening yet, but we are always ready for solidarity.” The Instagram graphic defines mutual aid as a verb: “to do, carry out, and/or organize acts of solidarity for the enjoyment of life of all people from the

individual to the collective. It is Puerto Rican survival.” They linked a petition to sign with specific demands to facilitate a safe reopening in Puerto Rico: mechanisms to feed families, providing them with food baskets; to make flexible measures for essential services that address gender violence, such as shelters; protect medical personnel and hospitals by curbing layoffs, securing PPE, and equipping hospitals with necessary resources to treat patients urgently and preventatively; to invest in mass, accurate testing, and contact tracing.

This petition calls attention to the fact that while organizations such as Taller Salud are invested in mutual aid and supporting one another outside of the State, they still make demands for the government. Anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla has written about the tension between self-reliance and self-determinations in Puerto Rico’s context, especially through the trauma of Hurricane María:

what we see in Puerto Rico is not a shock doctrine but a trauma doctrine: ... corporate and political interests taking advantage of deep-seated colonial traumas that have left the population vulnerable to exploitation, all too accustomed to abandonment and self-reliance. The much-touted resilience of Puerto Ricans thus needs to be itself understood as a form of trauma: years of abandonment by local and federal governments have forced communities to take care of themselves. (Bonilla 27)

Mutual aid and showing up for community as a tenant of Puerto Rican life and survival is the reality. The Puerto Rican cyberfeminist network of antiracist, decolonial organizers, activists, dreamers, and visionaries has worked to build new realities and new lives with radical hope. As La Cole writes in response to the declaration of the State of Emergency for gender violence that they organized for almost 3 years, “the declaration of the state of emergency is not celebrated, since this is a necessity that reflects the seriousness of sexist violence.” However, “it allows us to live the mourning for those who are not here with a little more serenity, while encouraging us to continue fighting for us who are here and for those who will come. Today our anger carries some hope. Today, as always, our hope is radical. We will not take a step back.”

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