IMPERIALIST WAR AND FEMINIST RESISTANCE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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The artwork in this dossier was created by women from around the world as part of the *Anti-Imperialist Feminism to Change the World* (2021) and *Feminist (In)Security: Women against War* (2022) exhibitions organised by Capire. This media platform was created in 2021 'to echo the voices of women in movement, to publicise struggles and organisational processes from different territories, and to strengthen local and international references of anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and grassroots feminism'.[1]

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Alejandra Laprea (Venezuela), *El acuerpamiento de las mujeres es nuestra estrategia de defensa* (Women's Embodied Solidarity Is Our Defence Strategy), 2022.

> They say we are an unusual threat, and it is true. We are an unusual threat because we are politically educated, because we are conscious, because we don't want to keep being [the US's] backyard, and because we want to continue being free, sovereign, and independent.
>
> – Ayarit Rojas, spokeswoman for the Antímano Ecosocialist Revolutionary Infantry for Habitat and Housing (Infantería Revolucionaria Ecosocialista por Hábitat y Vivienda Antímano), Venezuela.

A clear reconfiguration of global power relations has been underway since the first decades of the twenty-first century, marked by the weakening of the United States' unipolar dominance. Its crisis of hegemony is as ferocious as its response: together with its allies in the political, military, and economic bloc that makes up the Global North, the US has tried to compensate for its loss of economic and technological power with militaristic domination.[2] These countries have a shared history of violence against the peoples of the Global South, such as the genocide of the indigenous peoples of the Americas in the colonial era, the transatlantic slave trade, the use of nuclear bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people.

This exercise of disciplining and subjugating entire populations takes many forms, such as territorial occupation and militarisation,

imposing Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCMs),* sanctions, and genocide. This unbridled phase of capitalism, in which cruelty is wielded as a form of control and domination, is what we have designated as hyper-imperialism.[3]

A distinctive feature of UCMs as an instrument of power is that they do not kill people directly – instead, they operate by financially, commercially, and politically isolating the targeted countries, triggering supply shortages and economic strangulation. UCMs prevent targeted countries from accessing financial resources as well as the most fundamental goods and services necessary for sustaining life, such as water, food, electricity, medicine, and medical supplies. Beyond the impact of the decreed sanctions and UCMs, there is often overcompliance by the individuals, companies, and organisations with whom impacted countries seek to establish relations, whether economic, political, or cultural. In other words, for fear of becoming the target of sanctions and UCMs themselves, these entities choose to avoid or limit their relations with the countries subject to them beyond the confines outlined by sanctions and UCMs.

* UCMs are commonly but erroneously referred to as sanctions. However, in the international arena, only measures applied by the United Nations in accordance with the UN Charter can legitimately be designated sanctions. While sanctions are nonetheless often applied in violation of the process outlined by the UN Charter, and therefore in violation of international law, UCMs are by definition illegal as they are not reflected in the charter. The UN defines UCMs as 'economic measures taken by one state to compel a change in the policy of another state', whereas its definition of sanctions alleges that they are to be used as a 'last resort when it comes to addressing massive human rights violations, curbing illegal smuggling or stopping extremism groups' (even though we know this is seldom the case in practice) and must follow a clear process for approving their application. See OHCHR, 'OHCHR and Unilateral Coercive Measures' and UN News, 'UN Sanctions: What They Are, How They Work, and Who Uses Them'.

This model of intervention has intensified exponentially as global disputes have sharpened. In the past two decades alone, sanctions have increased by 933%.[4] The United States is leading in their application, imposing over three times more sanctions than any other country or international body (15,373 as of April 2024). These measures are inflicted upon one third of all countries, including more than 60% of all low-income countries.[5] The countries with the most UCMs are Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Syria, and Venezuela.

The isolation that UCMs produce is a form of collective punishment: they are mechanisms of political control used to violently discipline and subordinate entire populations and disconnect them from global networks of commercial, financial, and political interdependence. Furthermore, UCMs are deployed alongside media campaigns aimed at stigmatising the targeted countries. In a cunning reversal, the imperialist power accuses the governments and populations affected by UCMs of being responsible for the very violence to which they are subjected. These countries are typically accused – without any evidence – of not supporting the war on drugs or fighting organised crime, of being undemocratic, etc. – and the accusation alone is enough to warrant the punishment. This reversal provides cover for the criminalisation of and discrimination against populations, leaders, and governments that do not align themselves with the interests of the hegemonic powers. These countries are targeted because they resist the neocolonial, capitalist, and patriarchal power of hyper-imperialism by working to build their own sovereignty.

UCMs are considered a strategy of 'hybrid warfare', 'asymmetric warfare', or 'unconventional warfare'. They operate on all areas of

social life – especially on the bodies, hearts, and minds of the population. They are an undeclared part of war that does not recognise borders, permeating the entirety of society and exerting control over all spheres of social reproduction and organisation.[6] All studies and reports from national and international experts and UN agencies consulted for this dossier highlight that sanctions as well as UCMs disproportionately impact the most vulnerable sectors of the population – in particular, women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ people. While the lack of employment and sources of income impact the entire population, women are disproportionately impacted by the destruction and weakening of the infrastructure of social services. This process directly affects social reproduction, especially care work, which is performed almost exclusively by women. Sanctions and UCMs clearly reinforce patriarchy and other forms of social discrimination.

In 2023, the third Dilemmas of Humanity Conference took place in South Africa. At the panel 'Feminism and Struggles against Patriarchy', the lasting impact of imperialism on the lives of women and the LGBTQIA+ people came up repeatedly. Women from the Arab Maghreb region and Palestine described the horror of imperialist territorial occupation, the difficulty of surviving in conditions of inhumanity, the permanent threat of death and sexual violence, the collapse of health services, the cutting off of water supplies, and the consequences that these conditions have on social reproduction and women's lives. Although they may not all face the constant threat of death from weapons of war, according to participants from Venezuela, Cuba, and other African and Asian countries, the UCMs imposed by the United States have a similar impact on women's

social reproduction and their ability to organise popular struggles and participate in political life in each territory. In this dossier, we analyse, from a feminist perspective, the economic and political impact of UCMs as imperialist mechanisms of subordination and control on women in some of the most targeted countries.

The process of engaging in dialogue with women from impacted countries involved overcoming various logistical and contextual barriers. Nonetheless, we established spaces for meaningful exchange in Venezuela, where women shared their experiences and strategies for resistance, reaffirming their commitment to sovereignty and communal life. We interviewed feminist leaders from various popular peasant and worker organisations, including the Antímano Ecosocialist Revolutionary Infantry for Habitat and Housing, the Venezuelan Housing Assembly Jorge Rodríguez Padre (Asamblea Viviendo Venezolanos Jorge Rodríguez Padre), and the Heroines Without Borders Organisation (Organización Heroínas sin Fronteras). The Simón Bolívar Institute for Peace and Solidarity among Peoples (Instituto Simón Bolívar para la Paz y Solidaridad entre los Pueblos), based in Venezuela, provided key support facilitating opportunities for connection and exchange, including in the most adverse circumstances. This process also reinforced the importance of documenting these struggles in order to advance collective resistance.

Valentina Machado and Valentina Lasalvia (Uruguay), *Untitled*, 2021.

Economic Impact: Forced Underdevelopment and Economic Decline

UCMs are usually directed against countries that attempt to affirm their sovereignty by prioritising self-sufficiency and resource nationalisation. These countries resist integration into the neocolonial economic structure that seeks to maintain Western dominance while keeping Global South countries underdeveloped and economically dependent through mechanisms such as debt, trade imbalances, and foreign control of resources. The goal is that economic decline will provoke social uprisings that facilitate regime change to governments that are friendly to imperialism.

UCMs have adverse economic impacts on targeted countries, such as by reducing per capita GDP, increasing inflation rates, and causing fluctuations in foreign direct investment, foreign aid, and financial subsidies. Income inequality rises, manufacturing sector employment drops, and household consumption declines, among other disruptions. Together, these impacts provoke economic collapse and a consequent increase in poverty. Here are some examples:

> **Cuba.** The six-decade-long US-imposed economic, commercial, and financial blockade against Cuba is structured around the longest-standing and most comprehensive UCMs in modern history. The blockade was intensified when US President Donald Trump reversed the measures implemented

by his predecessor, Barack Obama, to ease restrictions and placed the country back on the US State Department's list of supposed state sponsors of terrorism in 2021. This act of hostility continued under Joe Biden, who left Cuba on this list until his final week in office, and was again repeated on Trump's first day in office during his second term, on 20 January 2025, when Cuba was added back to the list just days after it had been removed. The blockade inflicts monthly economic damage of US $421 million and to date has cost the Cuban economy an accumulated total of $1.5 trillion. Without the blockade, it is estimated that Cuba's GDP would have grown by 8% in 2023.[7]

Venezuela. More than 1,000 UCMs and other punitive and restrictive measures have been imposed on Venezuela, which have severely impacted its oil and other productive industries as well as foreign trade since 2014.[8] In 2020–2021, the oil sector produced less than 500,000 barrels per day, compared to the 2.2–2.3 million barrels per day produced between 2008 and 2016. Losses range from 797,000 barrels per day, equivalent to $16.4 billion per year at current prices, to 1,800,000 barrels per day, equivalent to $48 billion per year at current prices.[9] In 2021, the Venezuelan government's revenues totalled 10% of those in the year that UCMs were first imposed. Hyperinflation has provoked the devaluation of the national currency, with a consequent decrease in wages, and has affected imports.[10]

Iran. From 2010 to 2015, Iran exported between 700,000 and 1.4 million barrels of oil per day. Following the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal) in 2015, this increased to 2.5 million barrels per day from 2016 to 2018. With the return of sanctions and UCMs after the US withdrew from the agreement, crude oil exports fell by 57% in 2018–2019 alone. Between 2005 and 2021, the country's estimated annual foreign exchange earnings fell by more than 62%, from $66 billion (2005–2011) to $25 billion (2019–2021).[11]

Syria. Once one of the largest oil producers in the region, with 385,000–500,000 barrels per day (of which it exported about 100,000 until 2010), the country has become a net importer of crude oil since 2011, when the conflict began. From 2000 to 2010, the Syrian economy grew an average of approximately 5% per year. In contrast, its GDP fell from $252.5 billion in 2010 to just $11 billion in 2020 – 4% of its 2010 level. The conflict has caused severe damage to and destruction of productive capacity, property, and infrastructure, with a large section of the population becoming displaced and entering refugee status. UCMs compounded the situation, causing the economy to shrink by around 90%. Between 2016–2019, the economy improved slightly, with a weak average annual growth of 0.6%. However, the intensification of UCMs and the state's inability to access a large part of its resources because they were outside the territory it controlled, along with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, caused an economic contraction of 3.9% in 2020.[12]

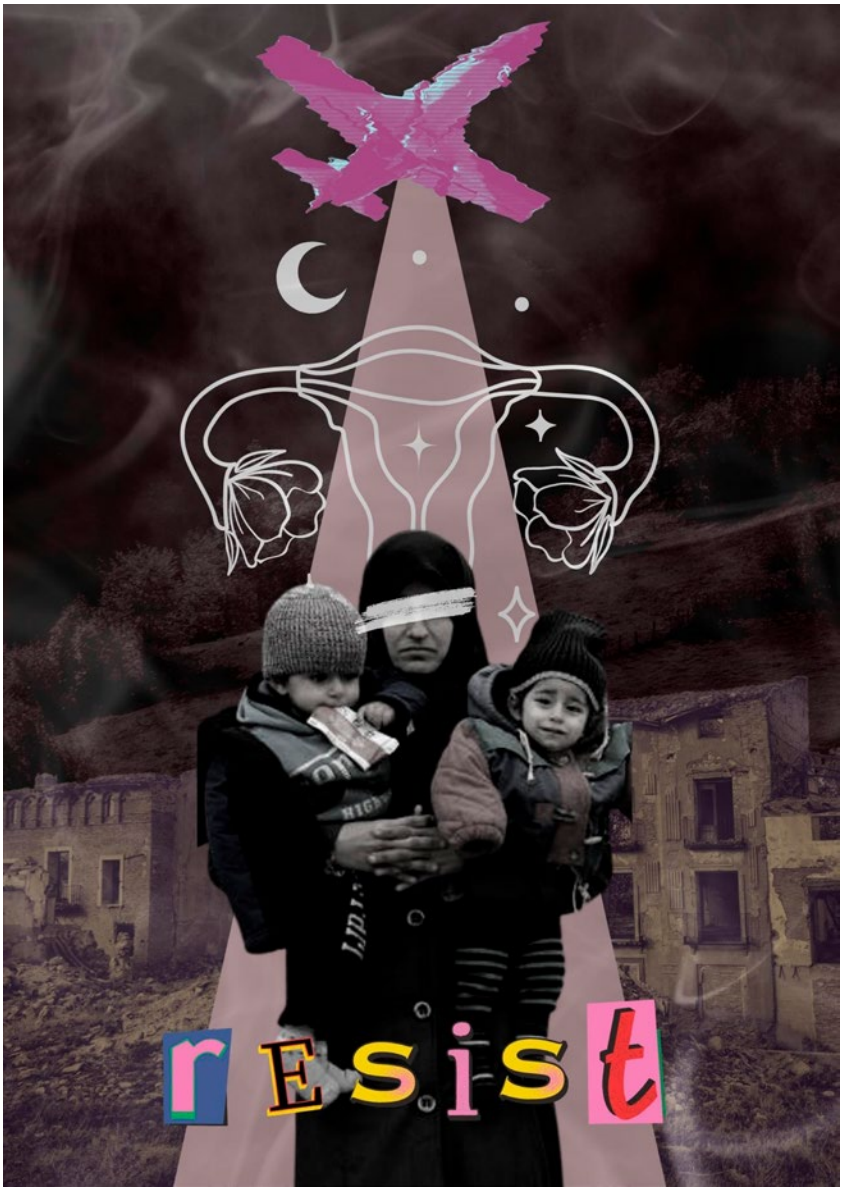
UCMs were eased once a pro-Western government came into power in Damascus at the end of 2024.

Zimbabwe. Since 2001, the country has faced UCMs imposed by the US and its allies directed at key sectors of the productive economy such as mining, manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture. In 2000, the country registered a trade surplus of $155 billion (around 74% of GDP), with an increase of 1.44% in overall production. In 2010, following the imposition of additional UCMs and other measures, the country's trade balance fell to less than 23.8% and has remained in the negative ever since. The deindustrialisation caused by UCMs has resulted in severe economic contraction (from –3.1% in 2000 to –17.7% in 2008). The economic collapse has provoked acute unemployment, a drop in per capita income, and the loss of skilled professionals (currently, vacancy rates range between 30%–50% in different sectors). Furthermore, company closures and worker layoffs affected more than 610,000 people between 2005 and 2020. In 2008, inflation soared from 56 percent to over 230 million percent, causing the public system to collapse and rendering the government incapable of providing essential services, from healthcare and transportation to electricity and education.[13]

Export disruptions caused by UCMs severely impact women's livelihoods because women in targeted countries in the Global South are overrepresented in both precarious and formal work in export-oriented industries such as textiles, garment production, leather goods, and electronics assembly.[14] When UCMs create economic hardship,

women are the first to be laid off from their jobs, which increases their dependence on family members for financial support and thereby restricts their autonomy.[15]

The growing economic crises faced by targeted countries force many people to emigrate in search of better working conditions. Through this process, women, children, and gender-diverse populations are at risk of becoming targets of human trafficking, illegal exploitation, organised crime, xenophobia, and gender-based violence.[16] The refugee and migrant population is relegated to informal, unskilled, and low-paid jobs where, due to discriminatory hiring practices, women are again disproportionately affected.[17]



Luana Fernandes (Brazil), *Mujeres resistentes* (Resistant Women), 2022.

Induced Shortages and Food Insecurity

> From the moment Comandante Chávez died, the onslaught began to intensify with an economic war against the national currency that caused hyperinflation, and everything became more expensive and then grew scarce. All of this rearranged the social dynamics. ... As women who were at the forefront of the Bolivarian Revolution… we had to withdraw from the community struggle, the social struggle, from our own organisations, from our own dynamics of regular meetings, assemblies and everything, to go wait in long lines to be able to buy food. … Lines of three or four hours in the sun, waiting to see if they'll sell me flour, sugar, oil, or whatever was available at the moment.
>
> – Laura Franco, Simón Bolívar Institute, Venezuela.

Restrictions caused by UCMs also impact food production, in many cases imposing bans on the import of farm machinery, fertilisers, and seeds and leading to shortages in fuel and water for irrigation. These factors result in higher food prices, increased inflation, the creation of parallel markets, and a profound food crisis that disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable sectors of the population. UCMs also include extortion mechanisms, such as restrictions imposed on private food providers, the criminalisation of businesses,

and confiscation by the international financial system of money intended to pay food suppliers.

In Cuba, in 2019–2020, fuel shortages prevented 12,399 hectares of rice from being planted, causing the production of this staple good to fall by more than 30,000 tonnes. Similarly, the lack of fuel affected transport, impeding the production of 2 million litres of milk and 481 tonnes of meat, compromising the country's basic food supply.[18] Furthermore, the absence of fertilisers and pesticides has led to a 40% drop in the historical yield of various crops, leading to a 81%, 61%, and 49% decrease in the production of rice, eggs, and milk respectively since 2019.[19]

In countries impacted by UCMs, food insecurity is also intensified because of restrictions on the import of food and the collapse of direct investment in the sector. In Venezuela, there has been a severe drop in food imports since 2014, from $10 billion that year to less than $1 billion in 2019 – a decrease of more than 90%.[20] Cuba reports paying 76% more for the same amount of food imports in 2024 compared to 2019.[21]

According to UNICEF, between 2016 and 2022, restrictions on food imports in Venezuela caused a steady increase in malnutrition, with over 2.5 million people facing acute food insecurity.[22] In 2019, there was a sharp decline in food imports of almost 90%, resulting in widespread undernourishment.[23] In 2017, the US financial system blocked the shipment of 18 million boxes of subsidised food to Venezuela from the Local Food Production and Provision Committees programme (Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción,

CLAP), a programme launched in 2016 in response to the food shortages caused by the economic war. The same year, a total of 23 Venezuelan financial operations intended for the purchase of food, basic supplies, and medicine were suspended by international banks.[24] Food supply has been further compromised by the operational collapse of state-owned enterprises, the agricultural sector's lack of access to intermediate products, fuel shortages that impede both production and the distribution of finished products to markets, and a drop in workers' purchasing power.

Under UCMs, Syria also confronted a severe food crisis. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 12 million Syrians – over half of the population – experienced food insecurity in 2021, up 51% from 2019. As part of her report on Syria, the UN special rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena F. Douhan, revealed that between 2020 and 2021, there was a 48% increase in malnutrition among children under five years of age while over 10% of pregnant and breastfeeding women were malnourished.[25]

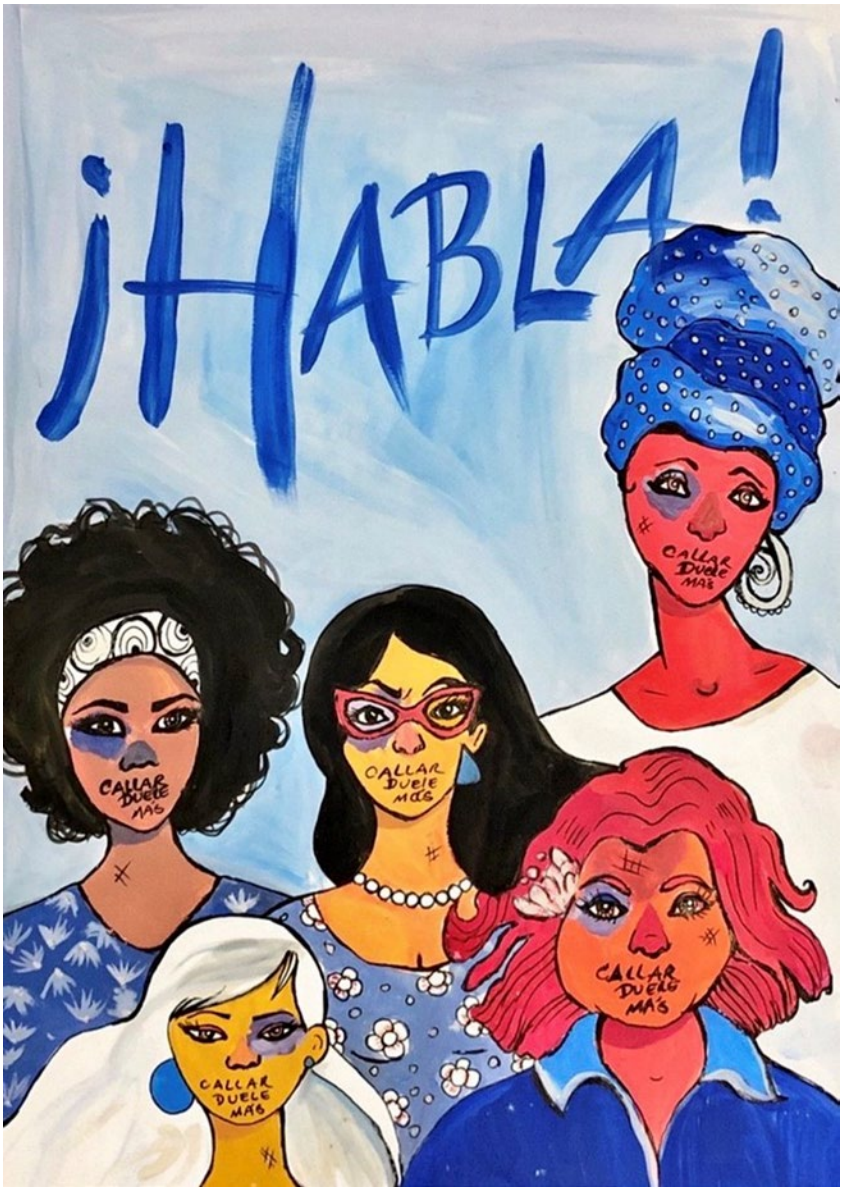
The food crisis has also been a key concern in Zimbabwe since 2001, both in terms of accessibility and affordability, with a 29% increase in the proportion of the population experiencing food insecurity from 1995 to 2003. The situation was even worse by the end of 2020, reaching over 60% of the population. By 2017, 30% of the rural population required food assistance.[26]

Food insecurity hits the most vulnerable sectors hardest, where women are overrepresented. In Venezuela, 65% of poor households

are monoparental, with single mothers as the head of the household.[27] In these homes, access to food is largely dependent on women, a task to which they dedicate a large amount of time and effort and is the cause of significant stress. Thus, the impact on access to food also results in a differential impact based on gender.

In these situations, food distribution policies are extremely relevant. As of 2020, 88% of Venezuelan households (7.5 million families) were receiving food supplements provided by CLAP.[28] In addition to food distribution and supply policies to address food insecurity, in some of these countries government policy to ensure food and agricultural self-sufficiency have become a priority. In Iran, food self-sufficiency rates ranged from 53–82% between 2000 and 2012 according to the WFP. Currently, the country is still dependent on food imports, with a self-sufficiency rate of approximately 85%.[29] However, the reimposition of UCMs in 2018, together with trade and financial restrictions by foreign banks, has significantly disrupted the supply of seeds, fertilisers, and agricultural equipment needed for production.

The Venezuelan government has made significant efforts to reverse its dependence on food imports. According to the National Superintendency for Agrofood Management (Superintendencia Nacional de Gestión Agroalimentaria), in just a few years Venezuela went from importing 85% of food for domestic consumption to producing 97% of the food that the Venezuelan people take home every day.[30]



Daily Guerrero Hernández (Cuba), *Habla, callar duele más* (Speak Up; Staying Quiet Hurts More), 2021.

The Dismantling of Social Infrastructure

Beyond impeding the transport of people and goods like food, the lack of fuel and inability to obtain parts for strategic areas of production and infrastructure affect the sustainability of hydrocarbon, energy, and drinking water production and distribution systems. This process has a critical impact on the population's access to essential services.

Special Rapporteur Alena Douhan noted that UCMs prevent targeted countries from acquiring parts to maintain infrastructure vital for everyday life. In acts of overcompliance, foreign companies and financial institutions refuse to supply construction materials, replacement parts, and software for power plants, refineries, and water pumping stations – or they block financial transactions for the purchase of such goods and services.[31] As a result, due to their inability to provide maintenance and improvements to distribution plants and infrastructure, these countries face severe shortages of electricity, fuel, and drinking water, leading to frequent power outages.

In Syria, electricity is available between two and four hours per day on average.[32] In Cuba, the energy crisis has worsened, and in 2024, days were recorded in which over 50% of the island was without power. In both countries, the outages are mainly due to a shortage of fuel, resulting from the lack of foreign currency to import it;

frequent breakdowns in the country's thermoelectric power plants; and a chronic lack of investment. In recent months, Cuba has received solidarity aid from the People's Republic of China, which donated 69 tonnes of radiators, motors, parts, and other accessories to support the recovery of the island's electrical system.[33]

Trade and financial restrictions resulting from UCMs also create challenges for acquiring mechanical and electrical equipment for water and sewage projects, which affects populations' access to water and sanitation. In Venezuela, though an estimated 90% of households are connected to the national water system, there are frequent disruptions to the electricity supply. According to Douhan's 2021 report, the minister responsible for water services disclosed that 52% of the technology used in the water distribution system was from the US, while 29% was from Germany and Switzerland. Because of the increasing difficulty of procuring replacement parts and carrying out maintenance work, only 50% of distribution stations were operational. This meant that water had to be rationed in order to ensure that it reached everyone.

In Syria, only 50% of the country's water and sanitation systems work properly due to the destruction and lack of maintenance of the power system and reduced electricity generation capacity. In 2022, Douhan visited the country and observed that, in addition to having only two hours of electricity per day, primary and secondary schools serving hundreds of students in the rural city of Homs have no running water. Drinking water allocation has been reduced to 30–40 litres per day, compared to 130 litres per day prior to 2011.[34]

In Zimbabwe, water scarcity also has severe consequences. Reports indicate that in 2019, 77.1% of households lacked access to improved sources of clean water, with disparities between rural (67.9%) and urban (97.3%) areas. The water shortage has aggravated epidemics such as cholera and typhoid fever (especially in 2008 and 2018), with a combined death toll of more than 3,000 people, while putting more than 100,000 others at risk.[35]

Paulina Veloso (Chile), *Untitled*, 2021.

The Precarisation of Health

UCMs reduce states' capacity to sustain public services that are essential for their most vulnerable populations. Their right to health is hindered because of restricted access to electricity, water, food, personal hygiene products, diapers, sanitary pads, medicine, health clinics, and more – all of which are necessary for a healthy life.

In Venezuela, for instance, the ban on imports of supplies and replacement parts affects the operation of medical equipment, currently only 20% of which is in optimal working order. Another consequence was the shortage of vaccines against measles, yellow fever, and malaria in 2017–2018.[36] Furthermore, UCMs impeded the operation of the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security's High-Cost Medication programme (Medicamentos de Alto Costo): while in 2014 the programme distributed 535,071 medications, in 2020 it provided a mere 64,078 – an almost 90% reduction in coverage.[37] Yirley Rodríguez, a Venezuelan social worker, popular feminist, mother, and caregiver, told us how, while she was pregnant, she worried about 'not being able to get things needed for the birth and the baby. … I couldn't get all the food I needed, [and there were] medicines I couldn't find'. Douhan reports similar conditions in Syria.[38]

CITGO, a US-based subsidiary of Venezuela's national oil company, financially supported key social programmes to vulnerable populations, such as making treatment available to persons with disabilities – especially for complex medical and surgical procedures outside the country. When it was usurped as part of the UCMs imposed on the

country, this had a particularly harsh impact not only on vulnerable populations but also on their predominantly female caregivers.[39]

In the face of these difficulties, one solution has been to turn to natural medicine to alleviate some of the harmful effects of the blockade. Marta of the All Hands on the Harvest Programme (Programa Todas las Manos a la Siembra) described the importance of using plants to treat illnesses, without denying the importance of conventional medicine: 'Scientific, technical, ancestral, and popular knowledge should go hand in hand, always working in conjunction to obtain better results'.

The reproductive health of both women and sexually diverse populations is particularly affected by UCMs in a number of ways, such as by limiting access to Pap tests, thereby making the early detection of cervical and breast cancer difficult for thousands of women and in many cases resulting in their deaths, and impeding the acquisition and free distribution of antiretroviral therapy for treating HIV. Similarly, the free and mass distribution of oral contraceptives, condoms, intrauterine devices, and other forms of family planning and STI prevention have been hindered, increasing the chances of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.[40]

Venezuela's maternal mortality rate, which had been decreasing until 2014, started to rise again after the application of UCMs and only returned to previous levels after the pandemic.[41] In Zimbabwe,*

* As stated in the special rapporteur's report, up-to-date data is no longer being collected directly – only estimates.

where health indicators have declined to critical levels since the imposition of UCMs, the maternal mortality rate was 614 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2014 and may have reached as high as 314 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2020 according to World Bank model estimates, still among the highest in the world. The infant mortality rate is also very high: 29 per 1,000 live births.[42]

Cuba's free and universal healthcare system, one of the pillars of the revolutionary process, has also been devastated by the embargo. However, even after the COVID-19 crisis, the country maintains an elevated life expectancy of 73.7 years, similar to the average for the Americas and higher than the world average.[43] Because of the excellent training of Cuban healthcare workers, 71% of whom are women, healthcare services account for 71% of the country's total exports. Cuba's medical missions reached sixty countries during the pandemic but had to withdraw from some because of the 'sustained smear campaign by the Trump administration', as a 2021 OXFAM report stated.[44]

UCMs severely affect access to medicine in Cuba, where 51% of the 651 medicines included on the country's National List of Essential Medicines (Lista Nacional de Medicamentos Esenciales) are not available. There is also a scarcity of contraceptives, condoms, medicines for pregnant women, diagnostic tools, pregnancy tests, and tests for sexually transmitted diseases.[45] As Indira Pino describes, 'We suffer because of medicine shortages. The pharmacies are empty because it's hard for our country to get the raw materials. For example, the materials used to make sanitary napkins aren't good quality, and that causes problems for women during their menstrual cycles'.[46]

28

Though Iran produces around 95% of its medications and basic vaccines as a measure to alleviate the impact of UCMs, like Venezuela it suffers from a lack of access to life-saving medicines, supplies, and equipment for more rare or complex diseases.[47] Meanwhile, in Zimbabwe, 70% of essential medication depends on imports, and there is an alarming shortage of healthcare workers, with an 89% vacancy rates for midwives, 64% for doctors in the public healthcare sector, and 49% for clinical nursing instructors.[48] Syria's pre-war pharmaceutical production exceeded 87% of the country's needs and provided exports to seventy-three countries, but today it suffers from a significant shortage of medical equipment and a severe deterioration of the public healthcare system. This forces people to turn to the private system, which the most vulnerable populations, including women, cannot afford.[49]

The genocidal intentions of the blockade became clearer when, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, additional UCMs were imposed on Cuba – including banning the import of ventilators and oxygen – making it more difficult to obtain test kits and personal protective equipment.[50] Venezuela and Iran experienced similar difficulties.[51]

The Added Burden of Care Work

> The burden of domestic, caregiving and work-related tasks has, of course, increased. First, we women go out to work all day with two or three jobs, then at night when we get back we have to do domestic work, not just washing, scrubbing, cooking, but also we have to study with our children… if we have parents or grandparents at home, we have to take care of them; they are our responsibility. That takes a toll, and, well, lastly, we must also be wives to our husbands.
>
> – Commune resident and peasant leader (44 years old).[52]

Imperialist war, in its hybrid form, has a significant impact on daily life and the ability to balance work, care, leisure, and political participation. This silent war has reaffirmed the sexual division of labour, impacting how time is used and lengthening women's unpaid working hours as they take on a greater burden of care.[53]

This situation has a profound impact on women, who absorb part of the crisis through unpaid work. Women's responsibility to manage the needs of the household demands more and more time as the crisis deepens, to the detriment of time spent on paid work and other activities. This is evidenced, for instance, in the day-to-day difficulties caused by water shortages. Women are generally responsible for obtaining and managing drinking water for their families,

which can be much more demanding when water is scarce. As Yirley Rodríguez told us in the case of Venezuela:

> The lack of water disrupts our daily lives, and much more time is needed for care work because getting water has become very different. It has become very difficult to balance our responsibilities as mothers with the time spent working at our jobs and the time doing political work – it's a mess. Because the priority is water, when the water arrives you have to go out and wash and store [what's left], regardless of what time it is. This has a negative impact on our ability to organise and balance our time and leads to an overload of care work.

Elsa Rakoto (France/ Sawtche Afro-feminist Collective), *Todas las feministas en lucha contra el imperialismo* (All Feminists in Struggle against Imperialism), 2021.

Women at the Forefront of Social Organisation

Indeed, in the face of adversity caused by sanctions and UCMs, women become a safety net, providing collective solutions within the framework of community organisation and ensuring the sustainability of life within their territories. When life becomes difficult, women step up to organise the provision of healthcare in their communities as well as distributing food and handling problem-solving. In so doing, they demonstrate resistance, reinvention, and resiliency in myriad forms.

In the most difficult moments of the economic war against Venezuela, women who lead processes of community organisation became key in the implementation of state food distribution policies throughout the country. For instance, in 2016, the CLAP programme was created to replace private food distribution networks. This new public distribution mechanism incorporated community participation with a novel component of popular oversight. By promoting the delivery of food baskets directly to households without the private sector as an intermediary, this programme helped build social and familial organisation, especially among women, who are still largely responsible for the unpaid tasks linked to social and domestic reproduction. It is not a coincidence that women anchor the front line that, through the CLAP programme, ensures food distribution to communities in the city and the countryside. Furthermore, over 70% of the people who participate in communes (*comunas*) and communal

councils (*consejos comunales*)* are women, who have a leading role in resisting imperialist aggression and patriarchy. [54]

The All Hands on the Harvest Programme (Programa Todas las Manos a la Siembra) was created by the Ministry of Popular Power for Education in 2009 during Venezuela's oil crisis to increase knowledge in schools about food sovereignty, sustainable production, and environmental issues. It was also created to support local food production processes and projects. Marta, a member of the All Hands on the Harvest Programme, told us that during the worst moment of the economic war, with the support of the Sovereign Country Markets (Ferias del Campo Soberano) programme, agroecology schools organised local popular markets where they sold food at lower prices. This programme ended up being an important strategy to alleviate the inflation crisis and food shortages. This programme, which ended up being an important strategy to alleviate

* Communes are a key part of the Bolivarian Revolution's vision for handing power over to the people and exercising self-governance from the Grassroots. There are roughly 3,600 registered in the country, and they are a key space for popular organisation, supported by the government's Ministry of Communes. As revolutionary leader and former President Hugo Chávez said, 'the commune must be the space where we can bring socialism forth. Socialism should not emerge from the Presidency of the Republic; it should not be decreed. It has to be created from the bases, a popular creation of the masses'. Communes bring together multiple communal councils, which are the smallest units of self-government, within a defined territory and a citizens' assembly as the highest decision-making body. Communes likewise incorporate social movements in the territory and own means of production, with the long-term goal of assuming more responsibilities and coming together into higher-level bodies, with eventually replacing the bourgeois state with a new, communal state. See Ministry of Popular Power for Communes, 'Commander Hugo Chávez. Eternal Father of the Communes'. For further reading, also see Hugo Chávez, 'Las comunas y los cinco frentes para la construcción del socialismo' [The Communes and the Five Fronts for the Construction of Socialism].

the inflation crisis and food shortages, was also the government's response in rural areas to distribute low-cost protein, fruits, and vegetables in 1,500 prioritised rural communities in which women farmers played a leading role.

Nevertheless, it is important not to romanticise these efforts. Although women are exemplary for their work sustaining life in the midst of crisis, this tendency also reinforces the sexual division of political labour. While women have an important presence and leadership role in community organising, this does not necessarily extend to other spheres of political representation and state management. Community tasks extend women's unpaid workday beyond the home. They widen the gender inequality gap in relation to work and income, with its correlate represented in the feminisation of poverty and overrepresentation in informal labour markets. Furthermore, these tasks often obstruct women's right to leisure, recreation, and a good life.[55] As the Cuban transportation organiser Yunisleydis Duvergel explains: 'It is much harder for women, as they generally have the weight of domestic responsibilities; not being able to rely on transportation generates greater stress'.[56] The blockade doesn't create gender inequalities, but it does worsen the conditions under which women must perform the domestic and care work that is traditionally assigned to them.

Conclusions: Resistance and Community

Women besieged by hyper-imperialism have developed forms of resistance and confrontation based on a return to the land and an alternative, familial, and cooperative economy. Women's work as the connective tissue of society and communal organisation has played a central role in sustaining and deepening revolutionary processes and confronting external and internal attacks that seek to create terror and discourage hope. This work has taken place in the face of great adversity. Ayarit Rojas is a spokeswoman for the Antímano Ecosocialist Revolutionary Infantry for Habitat and Housing, a Venezuelan women-led grassroots organisation that has implemented more than 1,600 projects to construct new ecosocialist communities and housing based on a system of participatory design since 2011. She tells us about the projects that the organisation has managed to complete through effort, creativity, and courage, despite the severe lack of access to imported construction materials as a result of the blockade:

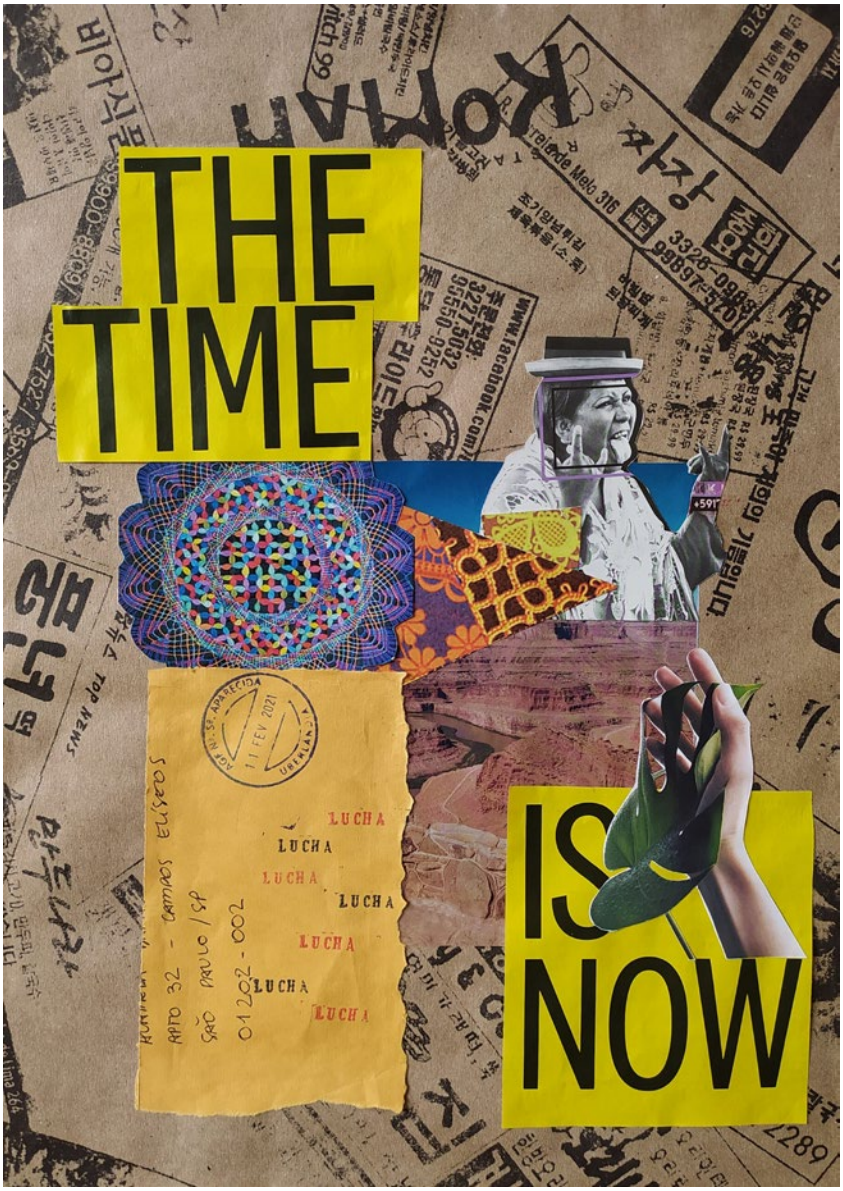
> We were classified as an unusual threat. The induced shortages, the hyperinflation, all of this, led us to become stronger every day and look for alternatives to continue moving forward. In terms of construction, the UCMs were chaotic and we as women were the ones with the triple burden of home, work, and construction duties on our shoulders – it was too much. Nevertheless, we achieved our goal: today we have our

> dignified housing and habitat thanks to this revolutionary process.

Despite facing adverse economic, productive, and social consequences, women play a decisive role in the face of the psychological war that this reality provokes. Women's participation, which on a daily basis politicises precarity and collectivises survival, is a critical factor in resisting the neoliberal pedagogy of cruelty, abandonment, and hyper-individualism. As Yirley Rodríguez told us:

> The strength to move forward in this difficult context [comes from] community relations and this common sense that still prevails in Venezuela, this great consensus for collective life, to solve problems in community, to support each other, like this great social fabric that the Bolivarian Revolution has been constructing… What gives me strength is that, here, there are political conditions to communalise life; there is a different proposal for the world, for a different society and social relations, which is to communalise [life and labour], instead of the major capitalist powers' proposal to liberalise [them]. This is what gives me strength: that there's a possibility to create, to struggle, without it costing us our lives, to engage with those who are in positions of power, of decision-making. This political and social scenario is what gives me strength to continue believing and continue supporting structural changes through popular feminism and to confront the situation we live in today in the face of economic sanctions and this psychological war that they wage against our emotionality and spirituality.

As Yirley reminds us, the strength to resist in the worst conditions comes from the conviction that it is possible to build a different world, one that is not based on exploitation or on the destruction of the social fabric, but rather on the possibility of building a life in community, that is led by the people, and where everyone can live with dignity.



Sarah de Roure (Brazil/World March of Women), *Equipo de lucha* (Tools for Struggle), 2021.

Notes

1 Capire, 'About us'. To see the 2021 and 2022 exhibits, visit Capire's 'Poster Gallery: Anti-Imperialist Feminism to Change the World' at https://capiremov.org/en/multimedia/gallery/poster-gallery-anti-imperialist-feminism-to-change-the-world/ and 'Feminist (In)Security: Women against War' at https://capiremov.org/en/multimedia/gallery/feminist-insecurity-women-against-war/.

2 Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Churning*.

3 Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *Hyper-Imperialism.*

4 Tricontinental, *Churning*, 24.

5 Stein and Cocco, 'How Four U.S. Presidents'.

6 Ceceña, 'La dominación'.

7 Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's report', 78.

8 Observatorio Venezolano Antibloqueo, 'Se elevan'.

9 Rodríguez, 'The Human Consequences', 71–72; Arellán, 'Sanctions ON'.

10 Observatorio Venezolano Antibloqueo, 'Los números', 31–32.

11 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran', 5.

12 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 5.

13 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 5.

14 Peksen and Drury, 'Coercive or corrosive'.

15 Al-Ali, 'Reconstructing Gender'.

16 Madriz Franco and Oropeza, *ABC de la Trata de Personas*.

17 Inter-Agency Plataform RV4, 'Three Quarters of Refugees'.

18 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 94.

19 Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's report', 15, 28.

20 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 94.

21 Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's report', 28.

22 Arizmendi, *Infancia bajo asedio*, 76.

23 Arizmendi, *Infancia bajo asedio*, 80.

24 Arizmendi, *Infancia bajo asedio*, 76.

25 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 9.

26 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe'.

27 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 44.

28 Arizmendi, *Infancia bajo asedio*, 75–76.

29 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran', 9.

30 SUNAGRO, 'Venezuela produce 97%'.

31 ONU, 'Unilateral Sanctions'.

32 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 7.

33 Swissinfo, 'China dona 69 toneladas'.

34 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 8.

35 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 7.

36 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 35.

37 Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 'Ninth Periodic Report', 26.

38 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 10–11.

39 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 65.

40 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 57.

41 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 58.

42 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 8.

43 WHO, 'Health Indicators 2021'.

44 OXFAM, 'Right to Live without a Blockade'.

45 Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's Report', 89.

46 OXFAM, 'Right to Live without a Blockade', 2021: 17.

47 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran', 7.

48 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to Zimbabwe', 8.

49 UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Syrian Arab Republic', 10.

50 Republic of Cuba, 'Cuba's Report', 12; OXFAM, 'Right to Live without a Blockade', 6.

51 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 38; UN Special Rapporteur, 'Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran', 8–9.

52 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 91, our translation.

53 Franco, *ABC de la Trata de Personas*, 2022.

54 Franco, *ABC de la Trata de Personas*, 2022.

55 Delgado and Ferrer, *¡Desbloqueen nuestros derechos!*, 75.

56 OXFAM, 'Right to Live without a Blockade', 2021: 2.

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Marta León, All Hands on the Harvest Programme, (Programa Todas las Manos a la Siembra), Venezuela.

Yirley Rodríguez, social worker, popular feminist, mother, and caregiver, Venezuela.

Ayarit Rojas, principal spokeswoman for the Antímano Ecosocialist Revolutionary Infantry for Habitat and Housing (Infantería Revolucionaria Ecosocialista por Hábitat y Vivienda Antímano) and of the urban development project Venezuelan Housing Assembly Jorge Rodríguez Padre (Asamblea Viviendo Venezolanos Jorge Rodríguez Padre), Venezuela.

Norma Valdés, Heroines without Borders Organisation (Organización Heroínas sin Barreras), Venezuela.

Laura Franco, Simón Bolívar Institute for Peace and Solidarity among Peoples (Instituto Simón Bolívar para la Paz y la Solidaridad entre los Pueblos), Venezuela.

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