

# STORIES FROM MUJERES DEL SUR

15 YEARS  
REINFORCING  
FEMINISMS

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Fondo de Mujeres del Sur is a feminist foundation that works to advance the activism of diverse women, identities and sexualities. We mobilise resources and provide support to feminist and diversity organisations and movements as protagonists of social change.

For 15 years we have been doing this in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. And since 2017, through the Leading from the South programme, we have been doing it in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Throughout this decade and a half, we have mobilised 13,992,494 million dollars towards activism and movements, supported 406 organisations and 10,185 activists. These are significant numbers which imply a lot of responsibility and bring us extreme joy.

But what is even more significant is what is moved and what is built behind those numbers. What are more significant are the lives, the actions that are made possible, the imaginations that are sparked and that are reinforced by activism. What are more significant are the freedoms and rights, the collective construction that takes place in feminist networks and becomes sovereign experiences.

That's why we wanted to tell these stories, the individual and collective stories of what is transformed when feminisms are reinforced. Thanks to MxM, Diversidad Valiente Santiagueña, Rebeldes del Sur, Somos Negras y Q???, Ovejas Negras and Grupo de Mujeres de Yvopey Renda for making it possible.

# RIGHT TO THE FUTURE

LAWS AS TRANSFORMATIONAL TOOLS IS THE PATH FORWARD FOR MXM, FROM TUCUMÁN, ARGENTINA. HAVING FOUND THIS TRUE NORTH, SOLEDAD DEZA WANTS HER ORGANISATION TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF SOCIETY TOWARDS A FUTURE THAT IS MORE EQUAL, JUST AND RESPECTFUL OF RIGHTS.





"Belén", a young woman who had a spontaneous abortion and was held prisoner by the penal system for 29 months; "Lucía", a girl forced into a forced pregnancy; and Paola Tacacho, a victim of femicide who had filed 14 reports against her harasser without any response. These are all evidence that Tucumán is a province where there is much to be done. These cases are included as part of the debate about the dysfunctional judicial system. Grassroots mobilisation was key to getting the discussion on the table: Justice often fails and when it does, women suffer more.

"Taking into consideration a gender perspective is no longer just about talking about women, but rather talking about power relations," says Soledad Deza, MxM President, at the awareness raising training days. As she explains, she is continually smiling and making gestures, making it clear that her characteristic driving force is part of her activist work. She is a lawyer and she knows without a doubt that society uses a hierarchy by sex in which everything associated with the feminine and sexual diversities is subordinate to the masculine. This feminist organisation that brings together women of all ages and professions has taken on the task of breaking that structure – especially when it comes to laws.

LIBERTAD A BELÉN

LIBERTAD PARA BELÉN

The image reads as follows: "Freedom for Belén".

Criminalisation and institutional violence often have the face of women and sexual dissidents. In light of this, MxM — which, in Tucumán has used green, even before green was a mass symbol of the struggle for the legalisation of abortion — takes existing laws and promotes changes that allow the population to suffer less and live together better.

Achieving this is the objective of the Legal Clinic, an alternative space for teaching law and for the practice of Law. They work to train professionals to have a critical point of view, a gender perspective and feminist ethics. They believe the new ways of fighting trials are those that bring about social transformations.

Spreading knowledge of the laws widely and "embodying them" — as Sole says — is their guiding principle. It is evident in the Youth Volunteer programme — a year-long opportunity for activism —, the Feminist Campus — a virtual platform to think freely — and Women for Women Networks, which articulates work on strategic litigation with political advocacy and territorial impact. Disseminating rights and providing training for people is what they propose with legal literacy. They want to add different perspectives and ways of dealing with conflicts, to make the fight for access to justice and comprehensive health relevant to us all.



Closing ranks to take a stand against patriarchy, MxM keeps its doors open. What started in the broom closet of a law firm moved to “The Witches’ Lair” the organisation’s headquarters. Anyone who wants to contribute with their knowledge, their actions and their thoughts is welcome.

There is always a desk available to work on, a discussion to take part in, a space free of discrimination and violence to work in. The coven comes together to continue nourishing themselves, to include new material and resources, because its members believe in what they do and do what they believe. With that spirit, it becomes an oasis, a machine that does not stop doing things as it grows.

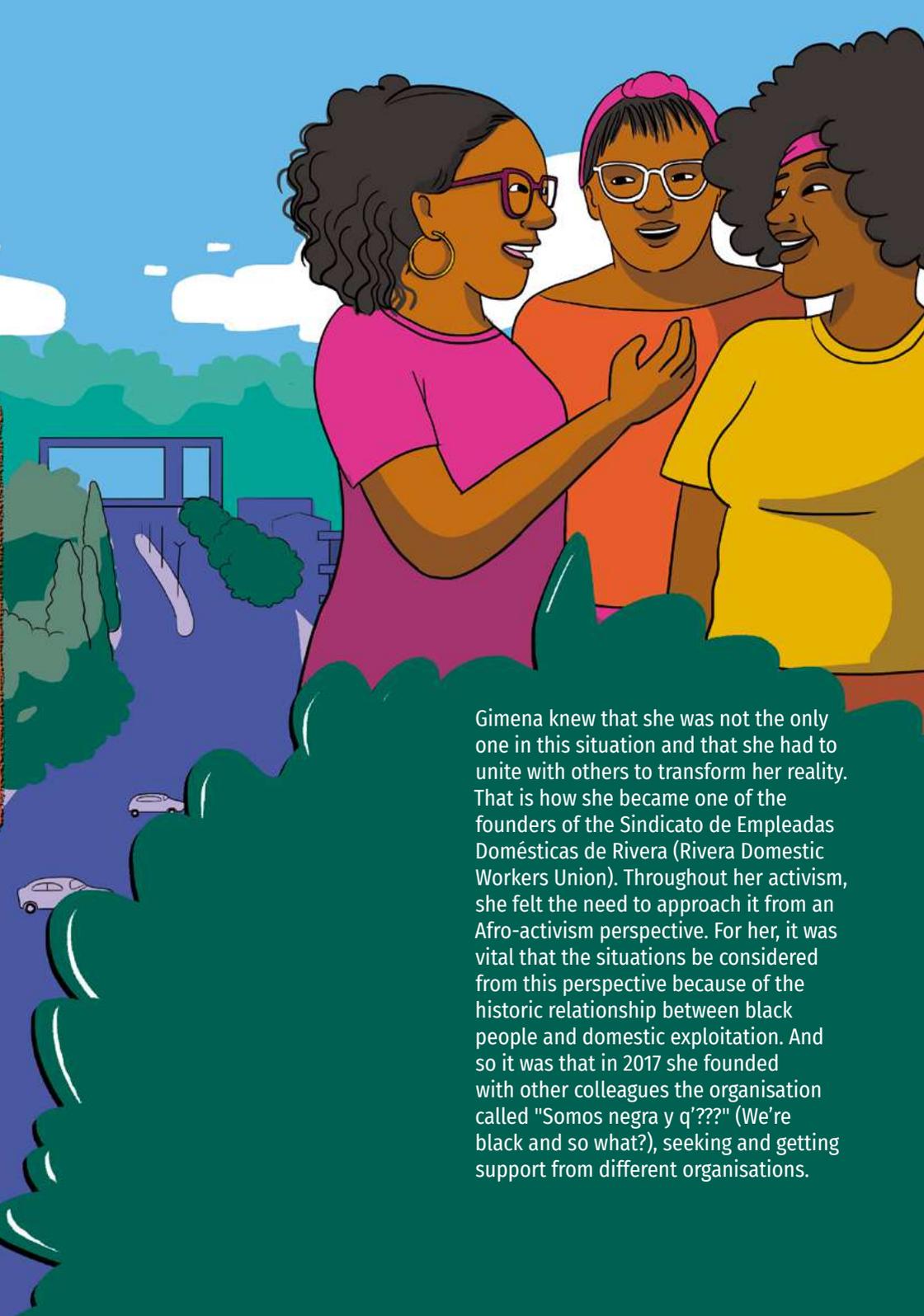
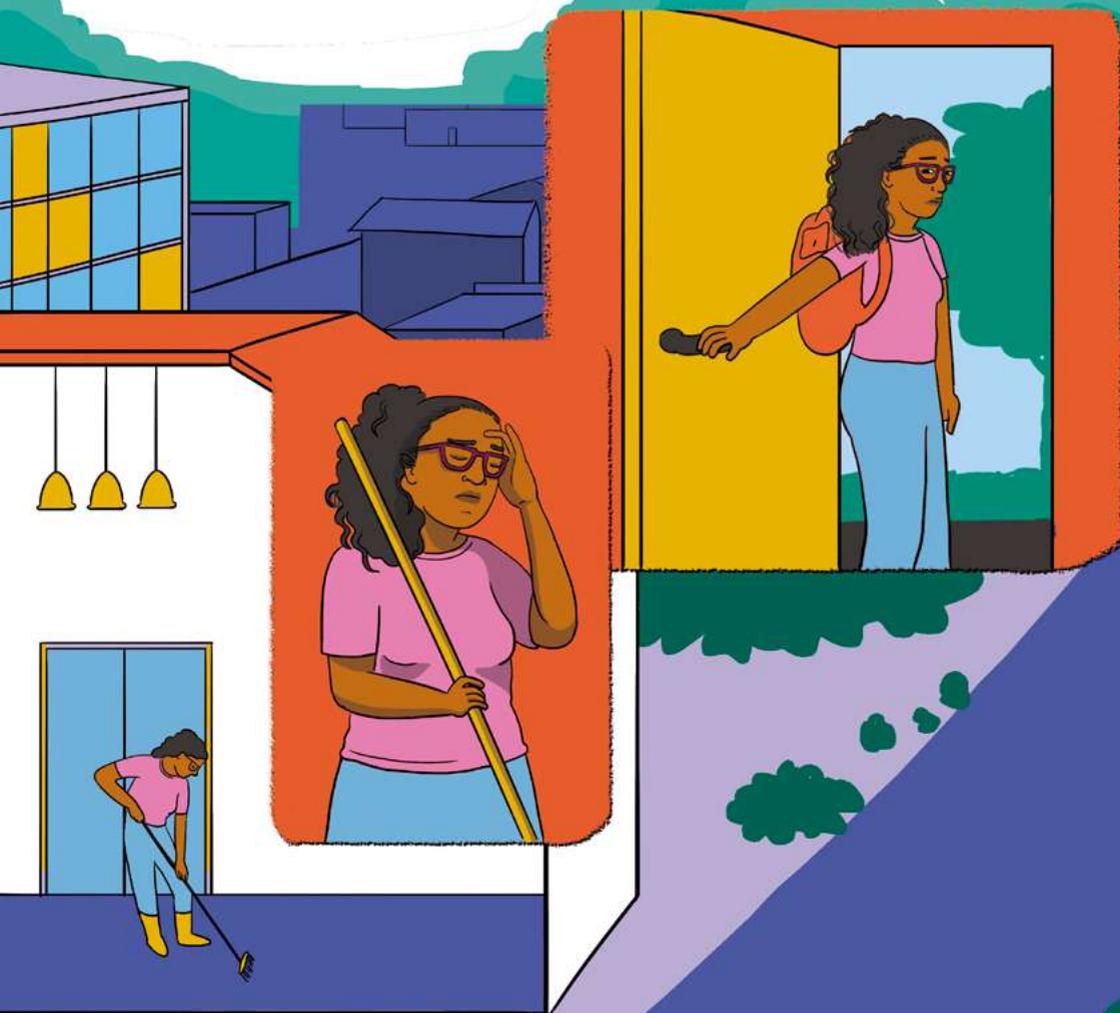


# REBEL RHYTHMS

CANDOMBE IS PLAYING ON THE RADIO AND THE RHYTHM CONNECTS GIMENA RAMOS WITH HER FEMALE ANCESTORS. SHE TURNS UP THE VOLUME, GETS HER HIPS MOVING AND HER IDEAS. LIFE HAS ALWAYS KEPT HER IN MOTION: SHE IS A DANCER, COMMUNITY AGENT, SHE WAS A FIREFIGHTER AND SHE IS ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF **SOMOS NEGRA Y Q???**, AN ORGANISATION OF AFRO-DENDANTS INFORMAL DOMESTIC WORKERS IN RIVERA, URUGUAY.



Gimena Ramos lives in the Uruguayan city called Rivera, on the border with Brazil. It is known to be part of "the forgotten interior", because the struggles won for rights many times remain in the capital. Working as a domestic worker, Gimena literally felt it in her skin: her work situation was informal and she was not paid what she was entitled to. In addition, she felt discrimination for being a black woman.



Gimena knew that she was not the only one in this situation and that she had to unite with others to transform her reality. That is how she became one of the founders of the Sindicato de Empleadas Domésticas de Rivera (Rivera Domestic Workers Union). Throughout her activism, she felt the need to approach it from an Afro-activism perspective. For her, it was vital that the situations be considered from this perspective because of the historic relationship between black people and domestic exploitation. And so it was that in 2017 she founded with other colleagues the organisation called "Somos negra y q'???" (We're black and so what?), seeking and getting support from different organisations.

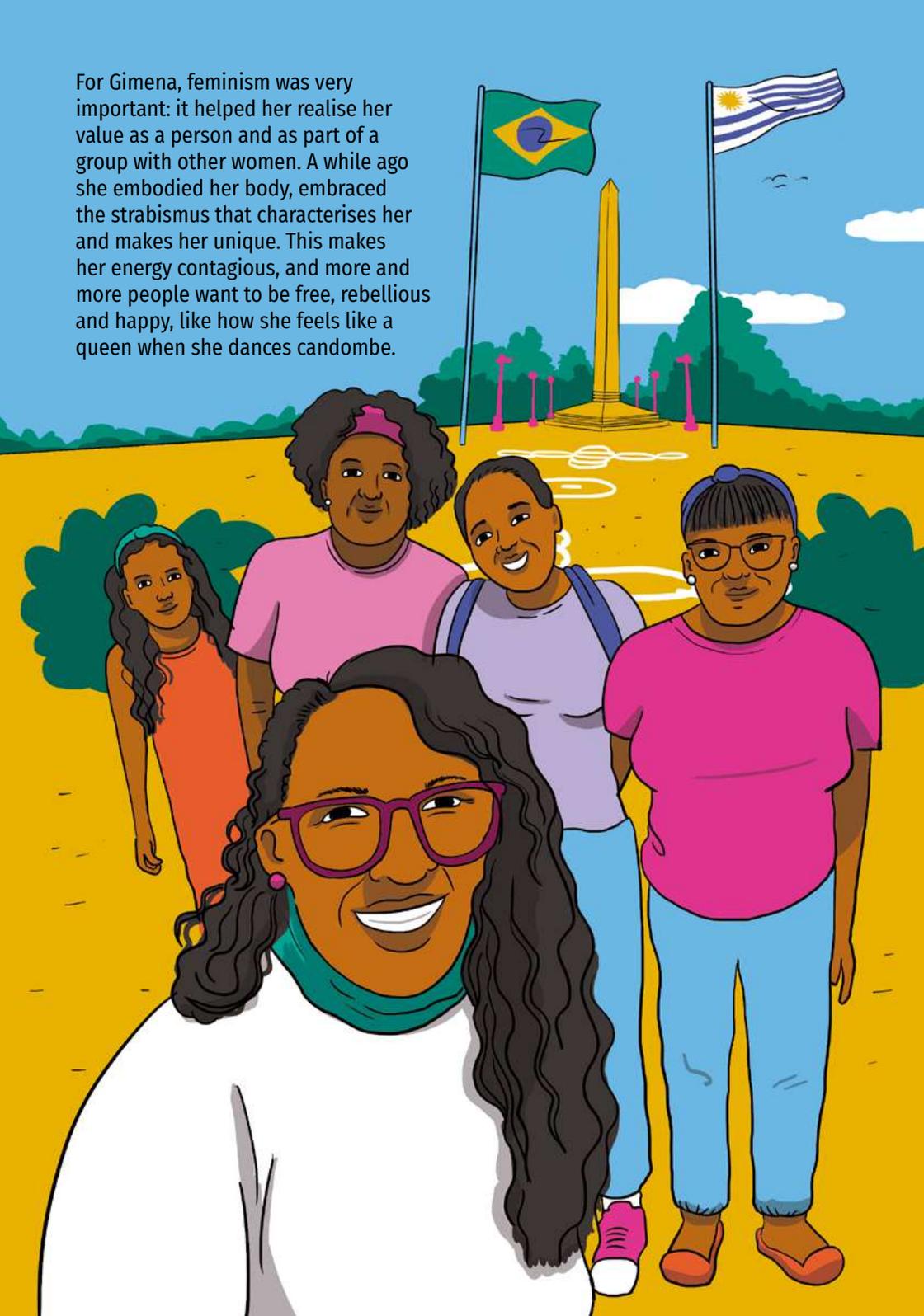


Gimena and her colleagues are strategic: they seek to go to places where machismo culture is stronger. For example, they elaborated projects that benefit rural women, such as the cooperative workshop for the sale of products from their community gardens, or workshops for the prevention of suicide and gender violence. They also created the Network of Community Agents. These are circles of trust and support, where the seeds of feminism are planted.

While forming the group they started getting to know each other and sharing their stories. Rivera is a critical area for violence against women and girls. Years ago, Gimena was one of those women and that is why today she seeks with her colleagues to help others and help prevent them from going through the same thing.

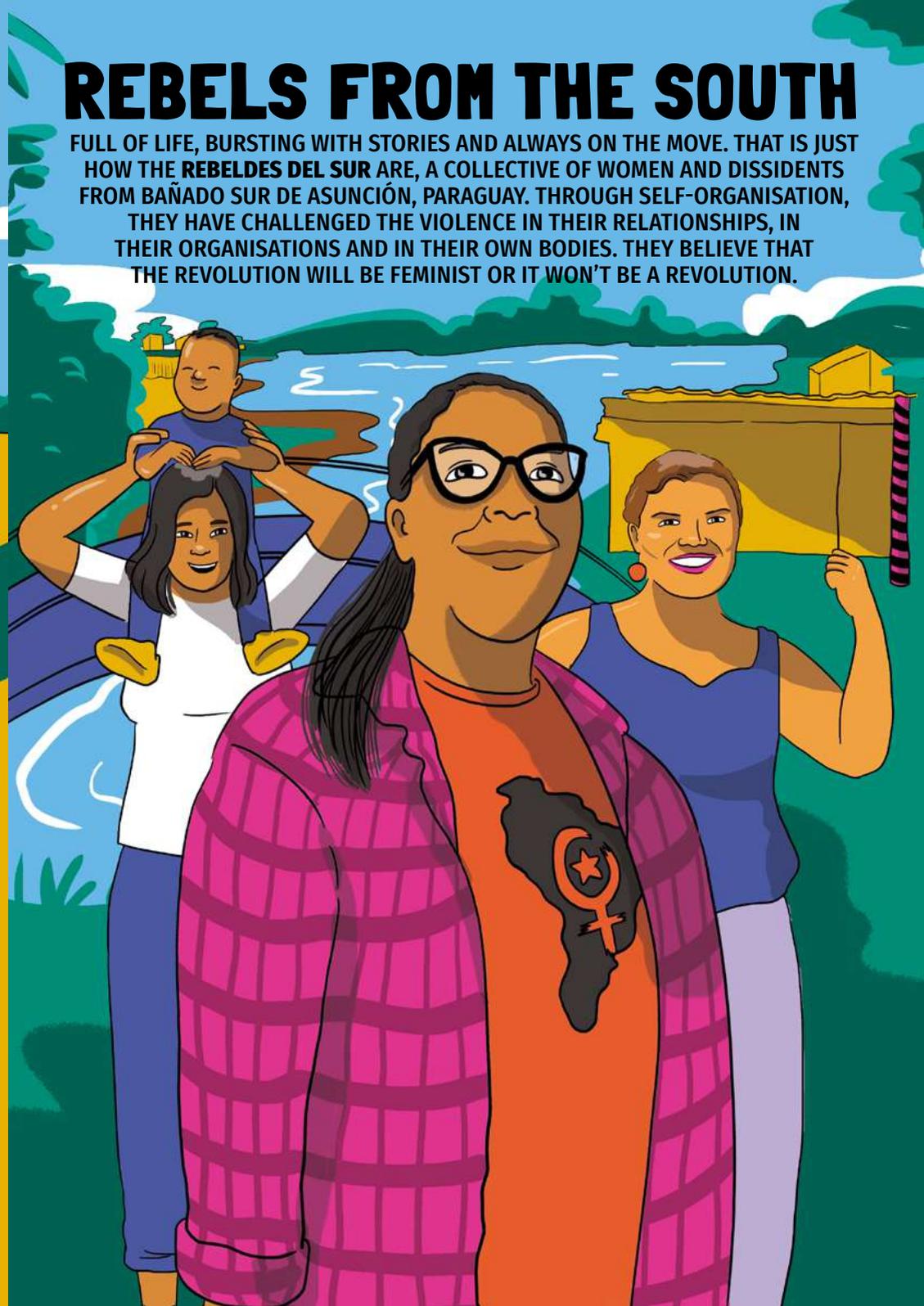
Weaving networks with the State was essential, because that way they could organise activities in schools, access training workshops for the prevention of domestic violence and ensure that the statistics specify the number of Afro women affected, which will contribute to future sociological research in which they are collaborating. In addition, there is direct communication with the police to warn about cases of violence.

For Gimena, feminism was very important: it helped her realise her value as a person and as part of a group with other women. A while ago she embodied her body, embraced the strabismus that characterises her and makes her unique. This makes her energy contagious, and more and more people want to be free, rebellious and happy, like how she feels like a queen when she dances candombe.



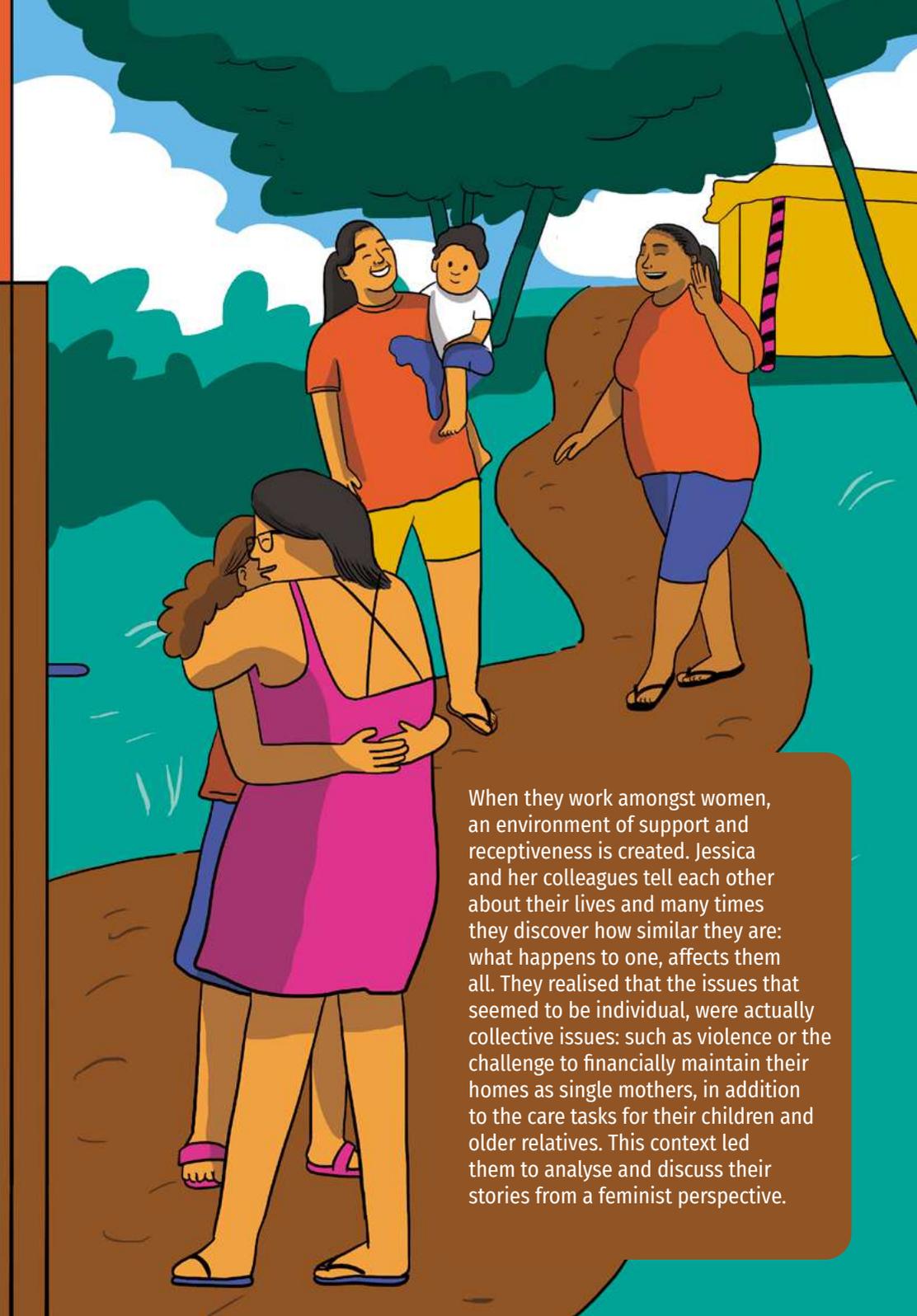
## REBELS FROM THE SOUTH

FULL OF LIFE, BURSTING WITH STORIES AND ALWAYS ON THE MOVE. THAT IS JUST HOW THE **REBELDES DEL SUR** ARE, A COLLECTIVE OF WOMEN AND DISSIDENTS FROM BAÑADO SUR DE ASUNCIÓN, PARAGUAY. THROUGH SELF-ORGANISATION, THEY HAVE CHALLENGED THE VIOLENCE IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS, IN THEIR ORGANISATIONS AND IN THEIR OWN BODIES. THEY BELIEVE THAT THE REVOLUTION WILL BE FEMINIST OR IT WON'T BE A REVOLUTION.



Jessica's alarm clock goes off very early in the morning. Sleepily, she puts on her glasses and gets up, she wakes her son and daughter up and prepares them breakfast. As they get dressed, she does housekeeping chores and checks in with her neighbours to find out where they need her.

Watching her, at home her children are learning characteristics that are rooted deeply in the culture of the Bañado area, such as solidarity and the ability to be self-organised in the absence of the State. Community bonds are strengthened on these work days.



When they work amongst women, an environment of support and receptiveness is created. Jessica and her colleagues tell each other about their lives and many times they discover how similar they are: what happens to one, affects them all. They realised that the issues that seemed to be individual, were actually collective issues: such as violence or the challenge to financially maintain their homes as single mothers, in addition to the care tasks for their children and older relatives. This context led them to analyse and discuss their stories from a feminist perspective.

El Bañado is a historically rebellious territory, which is why several of them were already activists when they discovered feminism, which then brought significant changes to their lives and ways of self-organising. Many of these women were able to get out of violent relationships, in addition to becoming part of a support network where they can rely on others and know that they are not alone.

Maintaining the community kitchens and fostering collective child raising in community is something that they bring to their respective activism groups. They want a revolution that takes families into consideration and involves them through well-being. They demand that the State guarantees their rights.



This desire increased their drive to strengthen women and dissidents, which is why Jessica and her colleagues founded Las Rebeldes del Sur (The Rebels from the South). They want to transform dissatisfaction and pain into power, organise their claims and demands and continue to take care of each other as a priority.

The stories they have to tell are so immense and diverse that one day they decided to make their own documentary. They filmed themselves, and with songs by artists who are part of Las Rebeldes del Sur, they told from different perspectives the history of the organisation and what it meant to each one. They wanted to encourage other women to assert their collective power.

Las Rebeldes challenge on a daily basis patriarchal violence, which intensified during the pandemic. Despite this, they found ways to stay together.

They plan to build a space for workshops, as well as a safe house for women in vulnerable situations. They explore ways of living freely and in community and, raising their Bañado voices, they are sure that the revolution will come at the hands of women and sexual dissidents.



# BUILDING PRIDE

IN CLASSROOMS, COURTS, HOSPITALS AND ON THE STREETS, THE STRUGGLE HAS A FEMINIST AND GRASSROOTS FEEL TO IT. LUISA PAZ AND HER COLLEAGUES FROM **DIVERSIDAD VALIENTE SANTIAGUEÑA (DI.VA.S)**, IN SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO, ARGENTINA, ARE ON A COMMUNITY MOBILISATION AND CONSTRUCTION MISSION.



Luisa Paz remembers when transsexuals and transvestites were targets of constant abuse because there were by-laws against a person dressing in disagreement with their biological sex. Regardless of what they were doing, they couldn't go anywhere without having the police on their tail. In 2008, with Diversidad Valiente Santiaguena (Courageous Diversity from Santiago del Estero) they decided to put a stop to this situation. They confronted conservative sectors and joined commissions to reform the Misdemeanour Code in their province. In that space they were militant to abolish articles that criminalised trans people and they managed to add sexual orientation to the Article on discrimination.



Their legal statute had not yet been presented when Di.Va.S joined forces with the Asociación de Travestis, Transexuales y Transgéneros de Argentina (Association of Transvestites, Transsexuals and Transgenders of Argentina, ATTA). Thanks to this partnership, they gained more visibility and the struggle became a party. In 2007, the first Pride March in the province was organised. Between rounds of Argentinian tea, a space for cooperation, belonging, communication and joint learning was established with tenacity. The feminist, intersectional, anti-racist and gender-sensitive foundations of the organisation began to take hold.



With all the energy they put into activism, they work to raise awareness in classrooms, homes and hospitals about diversity, comprehensive sexual education and rights. Convinced that social changes are generated by involving the community, Di.Va.S is engaging in spaces everywhere. They started debate about the Equal Marriage Law. The same thing happened when the Gender Identity Law was passed in Argentina. In an official ceremony, eight trans people received their national identity documents and Luisa was among them. As a mother and grandmother, she makes her own life a constant conquest.

With international funding that Di.Va.S obtained in 2008, they built their own headquarters, the House of Diversity in Santiago del Estero. From that moment on, they set about advocating for similar houses to be created throughout the province. In 2012, they managed to open the Diversity office in the Municipality of La Banda. In 2013, they worked to create the Affective Sexual Diversity office as part of the province's Human Rights Secretary and, a year later, a similar office was also established in the Municipality of Frías.

Di.Va.S is active in the construction of the memory and current history of the LGBTIQ+ movement in Santiago del Estero. While they are organising the National and International Congress of Comprehensive Sexual Education and the Latin American Grassroots Feminist Forum, they continue with the Pride Day marches. Flying the rainbow flag they remember those who were in the Stonewall Riots and who marked a turning point in the fight for rights. They follow in their footsteps, demanding what belongs to them.

There are 55 trans women who are finishing high school in public schools and five more are attending university in their province. That they are studying in these educational spaces is a huge achievement. Luisa believes that this is significant and shakes her silver hair, a symbol of how her resilience and tenacity have transformed her.



## MULTIPLYING THE WORD

IN THE 1980S, INDIGENOUS WOMEN FROM **GRUPO DE MUJERES DE YVOPEY RENDA**, LOCATED IN PHILADELPHIA, IN THE PARAGUAYAN CHACO, BROKE GROUND: THEY TOOK THE FLOOR AND BEGAN TO ASSUME LEADERSHIP IN THEIR COMMUNITY'S DISCUSSION SPACES. THE AUDACITY OF VENANCIA CÁCERES AND HER COLLEAGUES CHANGED THE LIVES OF GENERATIONS TO FOLLOW.



In Yvopey Renda, decisions were discussed collectively in assembly meetings, but those who led the community were male leaders and a council of elders made up exclusively of men. Things changed when, in one of those assemblies, Venancia and her colleagues explained why it was essential that there also be women leaders: they would bring new perspectives and enrich the debate, since they were the main caregivers of families and of life. In addition, they would bring up issues that affected women such as, for example, gender violence.

This intervention was historical, since from that moment on the community had a much more egalitarian leadership.

The women leaders promoted spaces for political participation for women. Talking among themselves, they were able to identify various issues that affected them collectively and organise themselves to address them. They were brought together through discussions about the mistreatment and job insecurity they faced on a day-to-day basis and this strengthened them to fight against discrimination. Thus, they formed the first Union of Indigenous Domestic Workers.



This achievement set a precedent for everything they could achieve if they were united, that is why since 2016 they have been part of the Red de Mujeres Guaraní (Guaraní Women's Network), which brings together six towns in the Paraguayan Chaco. As part of the Network, they can express themselves, provide support for each other, discuss their communities and formulate strategies for more colleagues to join them, especially those who are not yet organised and are unaware of their rights. There are many women that still do not have their identity documents, which leaves them vulnerable to labour exploitation and constant discrimination.

With the pandemic, in addition to the social isolation, other issues were compounded for women in the community, such as the overload of care tasks at home. With their children at home, they were working double-double shifts every day. Venancia and her colleagues knew that this situation also affected other indigenous women, so they looked for a way to communicate with them despite being many kilometres apart. In addition to being active on social networks, they strengthened their use of community radio.



So that more women could contact them and join their space, the Network's activists organised to obtain electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones, and they learned to use them. They socialised learning with other women by taking courses, and thus they multiplied voices and points of view. Virtual meetings were a great tool they used to promote their participation in organisational dynamics because they were able to hold political training workshops.

Listening to each other even when they are far apart makes them feel stronger, that is why the radio is the tool they use to communicate and achieve community and political advocacy. It is essential to streamline decision-making, plan activities and propose and encourage collective projects.

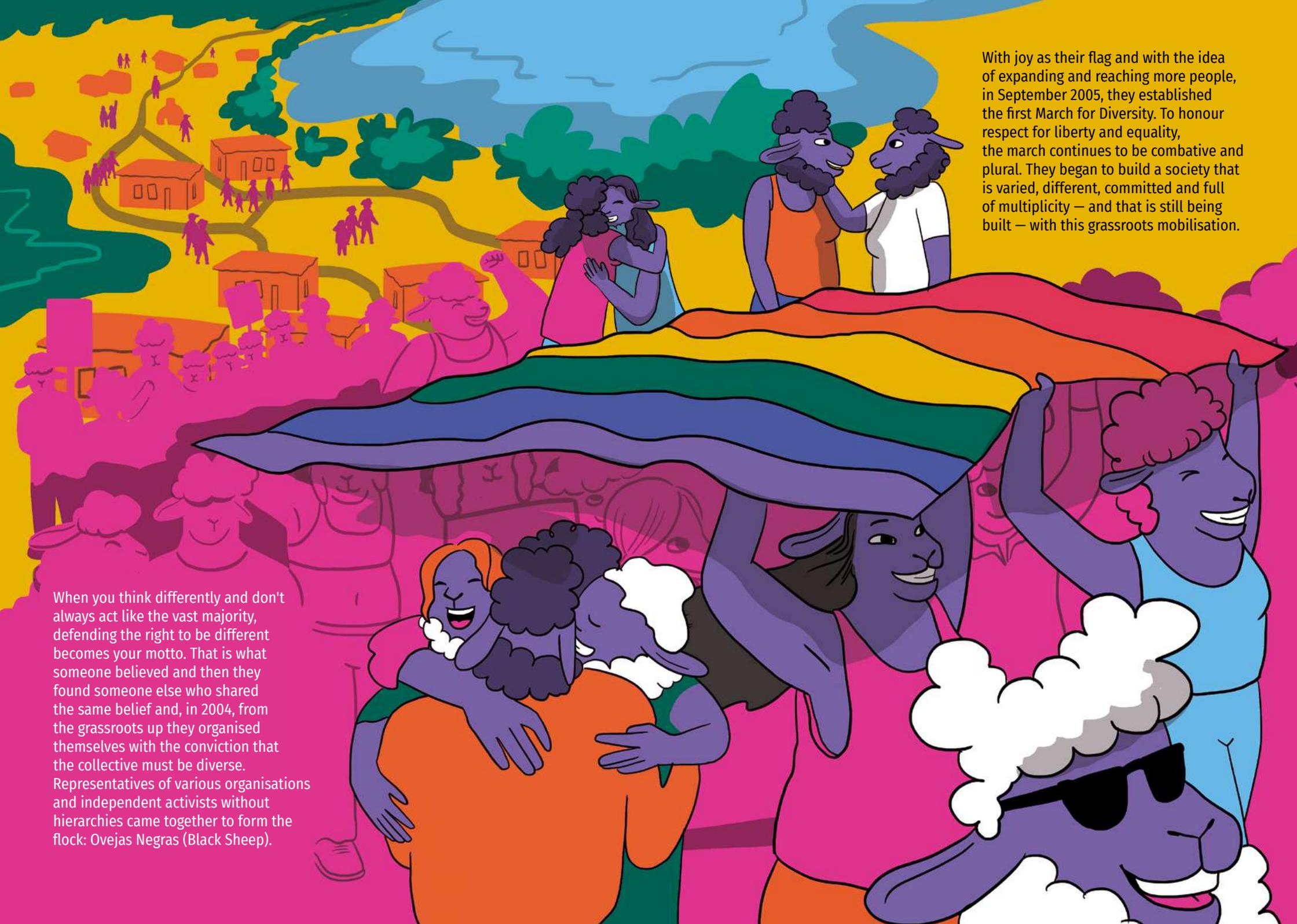
Today, many more women are participating in the debates, inspired by those who in the 80s multiplied their voices and dared to dream.



# THE DIVERSE FLOCK

A POPULAR SAYING IS THAT IF SOMEONE IS DIFFERENT THEY ARE LIKE THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FLOCK. IN MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY, THE COLLECTIVE CALLED **OVEJAS NEGRAS** CELEBRATES DIVERSITY AND RECLAIMS THE JOYFUL REBELLION OF ALWAYS FIGHTING.





With joy as their flag and with the idea of expanding and reaching more people, in September 2005, they established the first March for Diversity. To honour respect for liberty and equality, the march continues to be combative and plural. They began to build a society that is varied, different, committed and full of multiplicity – and that is still being built – with this grassroots mobilisation.

When you think differently and don't always act like the vast majority, defending the right to be different becomes your motto. That is what someone believed and then they found someone else who shared the same belief and, in 2004, from the grassroots up they organised themselves with the conviction that the collective must be diverse. Representatives of various organisations and independent activists without hierarchies came together to form the flock: Ovejas Negras (Black Sheep).

"A kiss is a kiss", was used in 2009 in a campaign that sought to raise social awareness about laws that protect against all discrimination in Uruguay, including for reasons of sexual orientation and gender identity. While the public channel broadcast the spot without restrictions, only one of the three private channels broadcast it, but not in prime time. The other channels refused to show the spot, even if they were paid.

With the censorship it was spoken about more and more. The discussion was taken to the sides of buses and hence it reached the most remote neighbourhoods. The issue of laws that protect against all kinds of discrimination was taking root in conversations, on the streets, in homes... and the members of Ovejas Negras continued working one campaign after another.

The issues they took on went beyond the concept of discrimination, they were about civil and human rights. Their greatest efforts were for emancipatory laws. In coordination with the LGBTI movement, they began with the Law on Concubinary Union, then continued with the law on name change and registered sex and then that of adoption. Each conquest encouraged them to go for another. That is why, getting the Equal Marriage Act passed was a challenge and they took it on without hesitation. They drafted the bill in 2010, the same one that, with some modifications, was approved three years later. Another milestone was the Comprehensive Law for Transgender Persons. To get it approved, Ovejas Negras, together with other organisations, collected signatures and got 60,000 across Uruguay.



The image reads as follows: "Assisted reproduction", "Equal marriage", "Trans law".

The black sheep advance towards their equal and just world. With training actions in classrooms, hospitals, on the streets, they want to make it something real. They work on alliances, access, opportunities, inclusions, on cultural transformation and everything else that they believe contributes to achieving equality and social justice. They come from many different places and are of all ages, therefore all causes are their own. And for all the causes they are still going strong.



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