# TOOLBOX FOR A DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE IN UNARMED CIVILIAN PROTECTION



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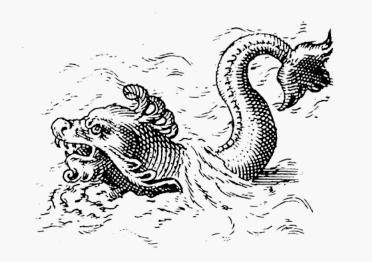
#### Our invitation

This toolbox doesn't aim to delve into the intricacies of coloniality and decolonization. Instead, it seeks to highlight key aspects that can support decolonization processes advocated by Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) practitioners. It's not a definitive or closed document, but rather a dynamic and open proposal intended to expand through discussion and exchange within our community of practice.

## What is coloniality?

In 1492, multiple conquest and colonization processes began in the Americas. Later, during the 19th and 20th centuries, these processes extended to Asia and Africa. Colonialism involved direct political dominance of certain societies, particularly European, over others. Concurrently, the ideology of modernity justified the control of some human groups over others through notions of progress and civilization. According to this concept of progress, historical development was meant to "advance" toward human achievement on a universal scale, homogenizing societies and labeling some as backward while designating others as advanced. Consequently, various human groups were tasked with achieving civilization, regardless of the consequences.

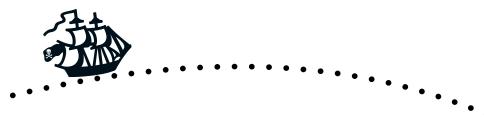
The notion of civilization is intimately linked with the idea of progress. Civilization, to a certain extent, represents how the Western world perceives itself. Western European society





employed this term to describe its unique qualities and sources of pride: advanced technology, behavior, scientific knowledge, and worldview. This implied that Western Europe believed it had progressed more than other societies, particularly towards the late 19th century.

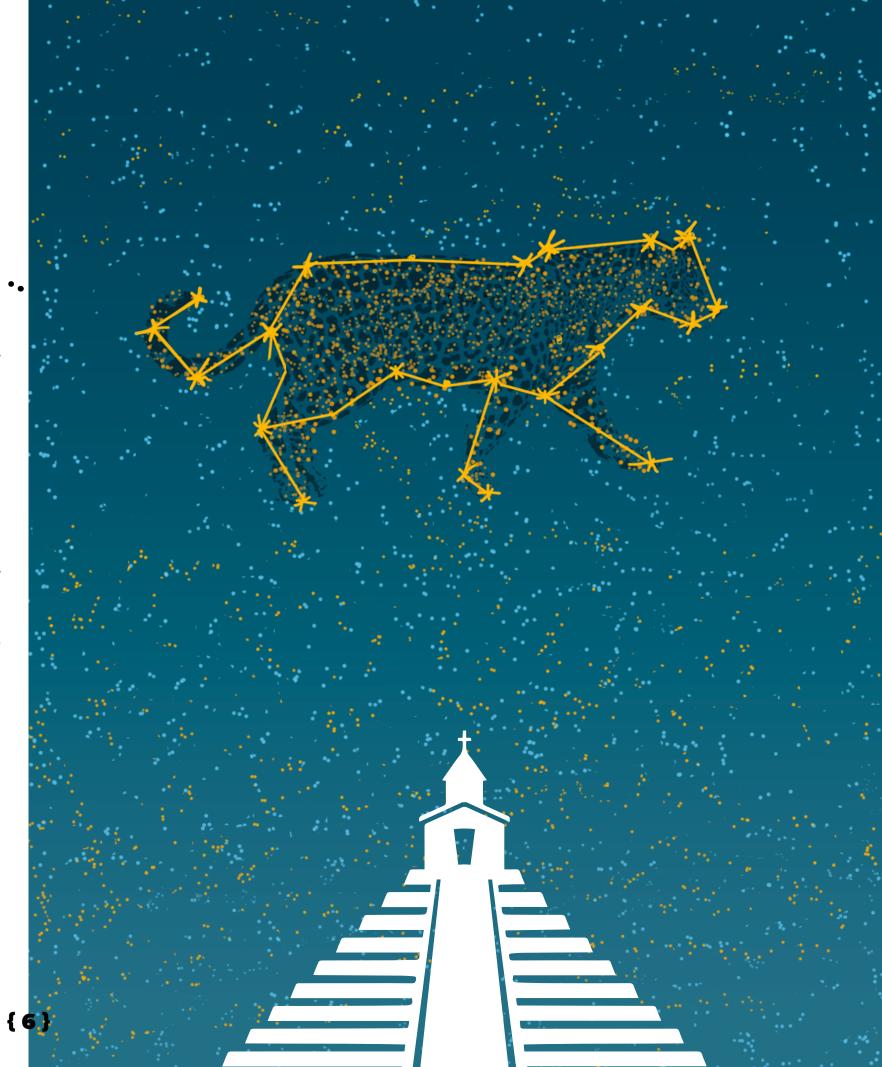
Although colonialism no longer functions as a political system, its effects still reverberate through the forms of domination established in the colonized regions. Colonial influence manifests in three dimensions: control over power, identity, and knowledge. Colonial domination in the realm of power pertains to how contemporary forms of control and exploitation persist in politics and the economy. This might be intertwined with capitalism and the imposition of a racial hierarchy that deems certain groups as superior. Furthermore, the colonial influence on knowledge is linked to the expansion of the notion that reason and the scientific method, predominantly from Europe, are the sole valid and



universal approaches. This marginalizes the understanding of other cultures, branding them as "inferior," "primitive," or connected to magical beliefs.

Lastly, the colonial influence on identity relates to how European culture was imposed as the universal standard. This was achieved by suppressing and controlling indigenous worldviews, manipulating their perspectives, and enforcing religious conversion.

In the subsequent section, we will explore the responsibility of UCP practitioners in the face of mechanisms of colonial exploitation and oppression. These mechanisms operate not only within us but also within our communities, the places where we work, and the individuals we assist. True peace-building requires uncovering the structural causes of violence, adopting a stance against them, and actively promoting actions that can dismantle these structures of domination, rooted in colonialist ideologies.



## Why as UCP practitioners should we be aware of the implications of coloniality?

Following World War II, humanitarian organizations relinquished their neutrality and began denouncing human rights violations, leading to UN-sanctioned military interventions. This sparked debates about whether safeguarding human rights should take precedence over state sovereignty. The UN Peacekeepers, known as blue helmets, frequently employed for military interventions, have faced criticism for their lack of local acceptance and failure to engage with communities post-deployment.

International humanitarian intervention practices, particularly military ones, bear several colonial elements. UCP organizations' work distinguishes itself from that of blue helmets and foreign armies. They offer physical accompaniment solely when requested by affected communities and employ methods that incorporate local actors through monitoring, relationship building, and capacity enhancement. Nevertheless, vigilance is necessary, as colonial logic

can inadvertently circulate and become ingrained in UCP practices due to its historical ties to humanitarian intervention and the recurring power, knowledge, and identity dynamics in a globalized world marked by persistent and evolving asymmetries.

Notably, during the 20th century, the terms "First World" and "Third World" were used to denote countries' levels of industrial development. These labels have been replaced by global North and South, reflecting a geopolitical division inherited from colonial periods when the planet was divided between metropolises and colonies. The Global South mainly comprises former colonies, while the Global North consists of nations that were once dominant empires. These categories carry underlying relations of dominance and economic, political, and social inequalities stemming from oppressive systems like capitalism and coloniality. Recognizing these elements equips UCP practitioners



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is interposition, wherein practitioners physically position themselves between conflicting groups or individuals to prevent violence. It's often believed that inconflicting parties are unwilling to harm uninvolved

sion as rescuing people in other parts of the world, particularly the Global South, from their perceived deficiencies and injustices. This phenomenon undermines the agency of non-white individuals and those living in vulnerable regions, portraying them as passive recipients of help from more

privileged others.

In recent years, UCP organizations have endeavored to dismantle the white savior image through various strategies. Notably, the principle of not intervening in a community without its request has gained prominence. Additionally, discussions about these concepts are held with brigade members and international accompaniers, greater collaboration with local individuals is sought, and efforts to bolster self-protection mechanisms are being undertaken.



In closing this section, consider: Why else should UCP practitioners identify the implications of colonialism? How might this awareness enhance our work and the connections we establish with people across the globe? What other forms of coloniality can you recognize? In the following segment, we will present a possible starting point for decolonial work.

## What is decolonization?

Decolonization involves acknowledging how the colonial past continues to impact the present. In the context of knowledge, decolonization aims to make knowledge more equitable and unrestricted. Effective decolonization entails cross-cultural communication and the sharing of experiences, transcending the imposition of ideas by a select few. For decolonial feminism, knowledge is a collective construction achieved through social movements. It involves stepping out into the world, driving change, and engaging with diverse cultures.

An illustration of colonial power's operation lies in the relationship between global North and South countries in terms of development cooperation. Previously, countries could shape their policies, but since the 1990s, the neoliberal economy has eroded their autonomy, rendering them increasingly reliant on foreign aid. This has led to neocolonial relationships between North and South countries, where the

latter require financial aid for projects. Within the realm of UCP, this raises concerns about alliances and donors, as financial connections can influence actions.

Just as coloniality manifests in multifaceted ways, the paths to decolonization are diverse and can be approached from various angles. As UCP practitioners, it's our responsibility to reflect on our work, foster more egalitarian relationships with those around us, and dismantle the colonial and oppressive mechanisms that impact us and the societies we inhabit. In the subsequent section, we'll present different perspectives for initiating decolonial efforts.

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## Prospects for decolonial work

The intersectional view

Intersectionality, used in social studies as a methodological tool, helps us understand how multiple systems of oppression (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) intersect to differentially affect specific groups or individuals, particularly minorities. However, intersectionality is also a deconstructive pathway requiring a profound ethical commitment. Applied in daily life, it compels self-analysis of assimilated violent behaviors, recognition of privileges tied to factors like race, gender, and class, and a commitment to unlearning harmful behaviors.

In other words, intersectionality generates the need for personal reflection, involving a deep analysis of one's biography and the influences of multiple systems of oppression, dominance, and privilege. It calls for disengagement from violent behaviors and attitudes. This stance prompts individuals to evaluate their position vis-à-vis others, understand their privileges, recognize their vulnerabilities, and foster empathy.



Societal position, social class, and group membership endow individuals with privileges and often shield them from others' hardships. Thus, regardless of our circumstances, it's incumbent upon us to question the advantages we possess due to our position. In this order of ideas, we propose some exercises that will help us to reflect on the privileges we enjoy.



#### Exercise 1.

#### Life trajectory

The purpose of this exercise is to contemplate our life journey and how factors such as our birthplace, socioeconomic status, occupation, and other variables bestow certain advantages.



Were those years characterized by war or peace?

Did you experience abundance or scarcity during that time?

Where did you come into the world?

Where did you grow up?

Do you reside in a country situated in the global North or South?

Is your current environment marked by tranquility or conflict?

Who were your caregivers?

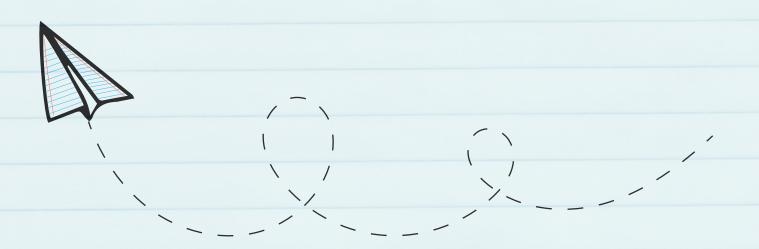
Were you granted access to life's essentials?

Did you receive healthcare and education?

Do you hold a job?

If so, what does your occupation entail?

Do you have a family?



Does the State ensure certain fundamental rights for you and your family?

Does the prevailing circumstance in your surroundings hinder your fundamental rights?

Can you envisage your life a decade or two from now?

Are you able to strategize for the future, or does your present situation demand exclusive focus?

Have you encountered discrimination based on your gender identity or sexual orientation within your community?

What advantages do you associate with your ethnicity, age, gender, or social class?

Do you believe that certain privileges elude you due to these attributes?

If so, which ones?

Have you, or your community, confronted bias due to your beliefs?

Exercise 2.

## Questions about white privileges

Do security personnel at stores or malls tend to closely monitor your movements? Have you ever experienced offensive remarks or slurs based on your skin color while walking down the street?

Have you been subjected to racist comments?

When you're out in public, does the fear of being a target of hate crimes cross your mind?

Have you ever felt apprehensive around the police due to your skin color? Have you encountered harassment or faced arbitrary arrests by the police because of your skin color?

When you envision society's prevailing standards of beauty, what skin color comes to mind?

As an illustration, if you search for "facial beauty" in Google Images, what images appear?

How are individuals of non-white backgrounds portrayed on television in your region?

What roles do they typically assume?

How do they feature in advertisements and commercials?

What do these portrayals convey to you?

Do you believe that your skin color has influenced your position in the societal hierarchy?

Do you think that skin color can serve as a vulnerability in the face of poverty?

Do you think that racial prejudices have hindered your job opportunities?

Have your abilities and competencies ever been doubted due to your skin color?

Have you been made to feel inferior or "lesser" because of your skin color?

Have you ever been denied entry to a place based on your skin color?

Is there an association in your area between non-white groups and criminal activity?

In the case that you have curly hair, have you encountered insinuations that your natural hair is unkempt?

Have you ever felt pressured to undergo chemical treatments to straighten your hair to appear "more professional" or feel at ease with yourself?

Is the history of Afro, indigenous, or other non-white groups taught in your country's education system?

Do you believe that the history taught in schools accurately represents the world's diversity, or is it predominantly centered around white history?

Do you think that global history is synonymous with European history?

Do you think that racist language exists?

What instances of racially insensitive language in everyday speech are you familiar with?

Do you perceive equal access to justice for white and non-white individuals in your nation?

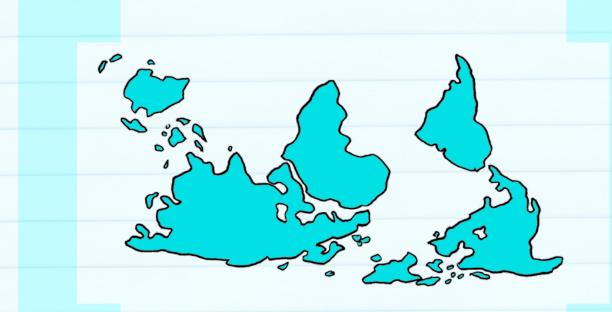
How do non-white communities in your country live?

Can they satisfy their necessities?

Does the State safeguard their fundamental rights?

Do they reside in regions marked by violence or peace?

Are they situated in central or marginalized areas?



Exercise 3.

## Questions about male privileges

Have you personally experienced harassment on the street?

Have you been subjected to offensive comments of a sexual nature that made you uncomfortable?

Have you noticed people giving you lecherous or inappropriate looks in public?

Have you altered your clothing choices before going out due to a fear of harassment?

Do you feel overwhelmed by caregiving responsibilities at home?

Do you perceive yourself as the sole bearer of caregiving duties?

Do you believe your needs are acknowledged within your household?

Have your capabilities ever been doubted because of your gender?

Are there assumptions that you lack certain skills or suitability for certain roles based on your gender?

Have you encountered instances of workplace bullying?

Have you experienced gender-based harassment from teachers in academic or professional settings?

Have you been subject to unwelcome advances or comments about your appearance or attire?

If you've chosen not to have children, has your masculinity or femininity been called into question?

If you're a parent, do you anticipate that not giving your children enough attention might lead to your masculinity or femininity being challenged?

Do you think that pursuing a career instead of staying home could lead to your role as a father or mother being questioned?

Could the decision to have or not have a family hinder your job prospects?

In a family with a spouse and children, who bears the brunt of caregiving responsibilities?

Is it an equitable distribution or an uneven one?

What roles does each family member undertake? How are traditional masculine and feminine roles depicted?

If you come from a family with multiple siblings, do you think being male led your parents to favor you over your sisters?

Are caregiving tasks solely designated to women?

Do you feel your opinions are given more weight because you're male or less because you're female?

Do you feel the need to continually prove yourself in the public sphere?

Do you believe that being a man affords you more sexual freedom while being a woman comes with restrictions and judgment?

How balanced is the representation of masculine roles in comparison to feminine roles?

How are these roles portrayed, and are there any notable trends?

Have you been branded as "emotional," "hysterical," or "overdramatic" when expressing your viewpoint with emotion?

Have you faced criticism for either not conforming enough to masculine norms or adhering too closely to feminine ones?

Do you support inclusive language?

Do you think everyday language adequately includes people of your gender?

Do you believe that your decision-making abilities could be questioned based on your hormonal cycles?

Do you anticipate being scrutinized about how your hormones might influence your actions?

If you adhere to a religious faith, how are the deities depicted in your religion? What roles do they embody?

In monotheistic religions, is the primary deity portrayed as male?

According to your religious teachings, what roles are designated for men and women?

Do you acknowledge the existence of male privileges?

If so, are you conscious of their impact?

Exercise 4.

#### Questions about heterosexual privileges

Have you felt compelled to hide your sexual orientation?

Have you experienced discrimination based on your sexual orientation?

Is your sexual orientation associated with a closet?

Have you had to "come out of the closet" at various stages and/or spaces of your life?

Do people treat you differently once they become aware of your sexual orientation? Have you faced physical attacks in public spaces due to your sexual orientation? Do you feel apprehensive about going out and feeling the need to adopt behaviors or appearances that align with a specific sexual orientation? For instance, altering your clothing or mannerisms to appear as a certain sexual orientation. Have you sensed that your sexual orientation significantly affects your job prospects?

Have you encountered workplace discrimination due to your sexual orientation?

Are you at ease discussing your sexual orientation?

Do people inquire about why you identify with a particular sexual orientation?

Do you feel obligated to defend or explain your sexual orientation?

Is it taken for granted, or do you find yourself needing to provide justifications?

Have you experienced stigma due to your sexual orientation?

For instance, does your sexual orientation become associated with certain illnesses or behaviors?

Do you believe that your femininity or masculinity is challenged because of your sexual orientation?

Do you perceive the need to conform to specific gender norms to avoid discrimination linked to your sexual orientation?

If you're part of a religious community, do you believe that your sexual orientation subjects you to discrimination within that community?

Have you managed to find a religious community where your sexual orientation isn't a basis for discrimination?

Exercise 5.

## Questions about age privileges

Have you experienced discrimination based on your age?

Have you ever felt left out due to your age?

Have you been excluded from decisions that could impact you because of your age?

Do you sense that your opinions are taken less seriously because of your age?

Have you ever doubted your capabilities because of your age?

Have you encountered difficulty in securing a job despite being the most qualified candidate, solely due to your age?

Have you felt infantilized based on your age?

When conversing with others, do you perceive them as adopting a paternalistic attitude because of your age?

Do you believe you're underestimated due to your age?

Have you been told phrases like: "It's because of your generation..." in a way that makes you feel inferior?

Have you ever felt compelled to appear older or younger than your actual age? What motivations drive this?

What stereotypes surround your age group?

How do you believe these stereotypes impact you?

Can age serve as a factor contributing to people's vulnerability?

What repercussions does it bring about?

What, in your view, is the prime age in a person's life?

Why do you hold that perspective?

Exercise 6.

Can you identify other privileges and conditions in your biographical trajectory?

After completing the preceding exercises, we invite you to conclude these reflections by pondering about additional privileges and/or circumstances that you may recognize in your life's journey. Additionally, we want you to think:

How do you think you can shoulder the responsibility that accompanies your privileges?

## A view from a care perspective

Care is a concept embraced by various domains of knowledge as a human action aimed at sustaining, perpetuating, or rectifying the world to enhance our quality of life within it. This encompasses our bodies, our essence, and our environment, fostering a support network for life. Integrating care into UCP involves contemplating ways to nurture both ourselves and others. This endeavor extends beyond shielding ourselves from physical perils; it entails fortifying our relationships and coexistence. Care serves as a conduit for demonstrating reciprocal interest and concern, interlinking us within a realm of intimate and respectful associations.

Within UCP, it becomes pivotal to acknowledge imbalanced relationships and instances of violence, thereby engendering equitable care. This recognition cultivates a comprehension of ourselves as interdependent entities, reliant on care. Simultaneously, it positions us as agents equipped to bestow care through a context-sensitive and situationally grounded approach. This situates the local and the everyday as valid sources for both UCP and self-protection.



Rethinking UCP organizations: the case of Community Peacemaker Teams (CPT) (formerly Christian Peacemaker Teams)

The CPT case can serve as an exemplary model for other organizations that implement UCP and aspire to adopt a decolonial stance against systemic oppressions. Its origins trace back to the peace churches, including the Church of the Brethren and the Religious Society of Friends—Quakers. Their commitment to pacifism and nonviolence motivated them to explore novel ways of manifesting their faith and philosophy. This led to endeavors such as providing support to communities deeply affected by the wars fueled by the United States in Central America during the late 20th century.

Around the late 1980s and early 1990s, Christian Peacemaker Teams was established. Despite not having had a missionary or confessional character, they underwent a name change in 2022, rebranding as Community Peacemaker Teams. This shift formed part of a process of organizational deconstruction and decolonization initiated in 2009. The word Community was chosen because: "it reflects the diversity of our membership [...]. Community also reflects the essence of our work. It evokes a sense of togetherness and solidarity with our partners and within CPT while highlighting the openness and accountability central to our work" (CPT, 2022).

According to Rachelle Friesen, the CPT coordinator in Canada, a Racism Audit in 2009 prompted an organizational restructuring, marking the beginning of their



deconstruction and decolonization journey. During this transformation, their philosophy shifted from "placing oneself in the midst" of violence, often associated with the concept of "white saviors", to pursuing societal transformation by dismantling various systems of oppression, including racism, coloniality, violence, sexism, transphobia, heterosexism, among others. Thus, CPT embraced a decolonial approach that emphasizes moving beyond merely opposing

oppression to actively eradicating it through ongoing efforts. Consequently, they departed from certain principles held by other UCP practicing groups, such as neutrality or abstaining from taking sides. They believe that addressing structural issues underlying violence is essential for dismantling oppressions, necessitating an engaged political stance.

### Defining *isms* and other related terms

#### Race and racism

The concept of race, originally formulated in Europe, lacks an inherent, context-independent objective reality. It finds its origins in the Iberian Peninsula in 1449, with the establishment of "blood cleansing" regulations aimed at barring individuals of Jewish descent from certain institutions. Subsequently, during the 18th century's era of colonial expansion, the notion of race began to manifest as a biological category, primarily grounded in surface-level traits such as skin color. Notably, the naturalist Linnaeus undertook the classification of human beings into distinct groups based on physical attributes, albeit influenced by prejudiced racial judgments.

This notion of race has endured through the ages and has been wielded to rationalize oppression. Racism fundamentally hinges on the assertion of some races' superiority, which in turn serves to legitimize both exploitation and societal control. However, the evolution of genetics

and the advent of civil rights movements have unveiled the absence of a biological foundation for race, revealing it to be more of a product forged by historical and social dynamics. Notwithstanding these advancements, racism endures as a structural facet within contemporary societies, necessitating substantial transformation to dismantle this deeply entrenched oppression.

#### Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism and racism are closely intertwined. Through colonization and the emergence of modernity, a paradigm took root that elevated the white, heterosexual, and northern man to the pinnacle of human idealization. This framework inherently diminishes and devalues non-white individuals and cultures, such as Afro, indigenous, or mestizo, which often fall outside the European norm. Eurocen-

trism fundamentally functions as a manifestation of racism, as it marginalizes non-European elements while exalting European ones. This phenomenon carries peril because it fosters disdain for one's cultural heritage, prioritizing exclusively European values and dismissing the wisdom and customs originating from other regions of the world.

#### **Oppression**

Social movements have embraced this term as a tool to advocate for their rights and condemn acts of violence. In contemporary discourse, oppression signifies unjust disadvantages stemming from societal and political establishments. It need not exclusively entail confrontations between opposing factions but can also arise from the routine actions of a society, disproportionately impacting marginalized groups.

#### Social class and classism

To illustrate these concepts, one can envision society as a multi-tiered structure, resembling the floors of a building. These layers, known as social classes, emerge from factors like occupation, education, income, and more. Each social

class possesses distinct characteristics and lifestyles. In certain societies, discrimination can be aimed at individuals based on their social class, particularly when they occupy lower rungs in terms of financial resources and status.

#### Gender, sexism, and heteronormativity

Gender serves as a lens through which the treatment and perception of individuals in various cultures are shaped, depending on whether they identify as male or female. It stems not solely from biology but also from how society allocates roles and attributes based on an individual's sex. Within this context, sexism emerges when one mistreats another based on their gender, often manifesting in subtler forms, like diminishing someone's significance due to their gender. This can further extend to heteronormativity, which portrays heterosexuality as the standard and superior form of relationship, marginalizing those who deviate from this norm. Both sexism and heteronormativity serve as patriarchal mechanisms that bolster the power of men and masculine ideals within society and culture.

#### Resource guide

#### Theory and history

- Decolonizing the production of knowledge, comments by Marc Batac. Initiatives for International Dialogue, Mindanao, Philippines. (English).
- Decolonizing Civil Resistance, by Sean Chabot and Stellan Vinthagen. (English).
- African Union approaches to peacebuilding. Efforts to change the continent towards decolonial peace, by Siphamandla Zondi. (English).
- Decolonizing methodologies. Research and indigenous peoples, by Linda Tuiwai Smith. (English).
- Decolonizing Our Solidarity, by Project Accompagnement Solidarité Colombie PASC. (English).
- Time to decolonize aid: perspectives and lessons from a global consultation, by Peace Direct. (English).
- Imperialism Within: Can the Master's Tools Bring Down Empire?, by Sara Koopman (English).
- Imperialism Within: Can the Master's Tools Bring Down Empire?, by Sara Koopman (Spanishl).
- Mona, mona! Tropicality and the Imaginative Geographies of Whiteness in Colombia, by Sara Koopman (English).

- Thesis on the decolonization of history, by Boaventura de Sousa Santos. (Spanish).
- Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism and Latin America, by Aníbal Quijano. (Spanish).
- Coloniality and modernity/rationality, Aníbal Quijano. (Spanish).
- The Wretched of the Earth, by Frantz Fanon. (Spanish).
- Pedagogy of the oppressed, by Paulo Freire. (Spanish).
- What is decoloniality? By Ochy Curiel. (Spanish).
- The decolonizing turn , by Enrique Dussel. (Spanish).

#### **Building diverse governance bodies**

• Shifting Power in Humanitarian Nonprofits: A Review of the Boards of 15 NGOs, by Rose Worde and Patrick Saez.

#### **Undo any ism**

#### Resources to undo oppressions developed by CPT:

- Authentic relationships. (English)
- Becoming an ally. (English)
- Distance behaviors. (English)
- Equalizing power. (English)
- The Three Pillars. (English)

#### Resources developed by Amnesty International:

- General Terminology Against Oppression. (English)
- Mitigation plan. Balanced Scorecard. (English)
- Risks and solutions for work against oppression. (English)
- Discussion on the implementation of work against oppression. (English).
- Integrating an anti-oppression framework. (English)

#### **Undoing racism**

Resources to undo oppressions developed by CPT:

- White privilege. (English)
- White supremacist culture. (English)
- Opening Your Eyes to Wake Up and Work: Building a Culture of Racial Equity, by Equity in the Center. (English).

#### **Undoing sexism**

Resources to undo oppressions developed by CPT:

- List of male privileges. (English)
- The cage of sexism. (English)
- The White Man's System. (English)

#### Undoing heterosexism and transphobia

Resources to undo oppressions developed by CPT:

- List of cisgender privilege. (English)
- Unpacking the invisible backpack II: sexual orientation. (English)

#### Undoing colonial attitudes

Decolonizing Definitions, by Peace Direct. (English)

#### **Third Party Training Resources**

- AORTA, Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance, by CPT. (English)
- Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training, by CPT. (English)
- MeGem
- Undo Racism Training, by The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. (English)

#### Credits

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#### Contents

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