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Interview with Julieta Paredes of Mujeres Creando

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In *Green Anarchy* #6 (Summer 2001), we ran an article on the Bolivian anarcha-feminist group Mujeres Creando, who in July of that year helped spearhead the violent takeover of a government banking agency located in the capital city of Bolivia: Due to negotiations between the Bolivian government and church groups, none of the members of *Mujeres Creando* were prosecuted for their involvement in this action. Mujeres Creando draw from their Andean heritage, from feminism, and from anarchism to fight patriarchy, power, the State and militarism. They publish the journal *Mujer Publica* (Public Woman) and have their own cafe named *Carcajada* (Laughter) where they host many activities: They also engage in an ongoing graffiti campaign all over the cities of Bolivia, making unauthorized use of public space to broadcast their revolutionary anti-patriarchy message. As a follow-up to the article that appeared in issue #6 of *GA*, we've decided to reprint this interview with a member of Mujeres Creando, which was originally posted on infoshop.org.

How did Mujeres Creando (Women Creating) come about?

What is its goal?

JP: Mujeres Creando is a “craziness” started by three women (Julieta Paredes, Maria Galindo and Monica Mendoza) from the arrogant, homophobic and totalitarian Left of Bolivia during the ‘80s, where heterosexuality was still the model and feminism was understood to be divisive. It’s not really a new design in a society such as ours. So we had already been developing this kind of criticism.

The other part of our criticism of the Left is toward what has been a constructed social practice; that is, it was unethical, dishonest and it had a double morality.

Revolutionary in the streets, revolutionary in their words, revolutionary in their talking, yet, at home, they were the dictators of their own families, with their own loved ones.

We have started to realize the original proposal of Mujeres Creando, and so we have been picking over all our experiences with the Left, as well as learning through our first time taking part in the San Bernard Conference in Argentina, which was an experience of all Latin American feminists.

From the viewpoint of Mujeres Creando, one way to move toward our goal is the concept of diversity (the other is creativity). Diversity is fundamental for us, because if you look at how other groups are made up, they’re usually of the same kind of people (barrio [neighborhood], young people, workers, lesbians, etc.). Diversity is a way to criticize these “enclosed cubicles” in society. Mujeres Creando is made up of lesbians and heterosexuals, whites and indigenous women, young and old women, divorced and married women, women from the country and from the city, etc. The system tries to keep us in the “enclosed cubicles” and to divide us so that it can control us more effectively.

What’s important is that we, through our connection with other women, are starting to observe the diversity in which Latin American feminism developed; that is, there were farmers, students, soldiers, lesbians, etc. It was beautiful and it captivated us.

cause you have to have roots in society. For this, I propose to build a space (Creando Feminism Autonomo [Creating Autonomous Feminism]) for other women and other social groups where we'd build feminism in terms of Mujeres Creando... and I think it's important to let people know about these experiences through Indymedia.

My privileged space is for women; I want to start with them. I want to start from there, to feed others and myself through the Indymedia space. I don't consider this women's space to be apart from others — I think that we can get into deeper discussion if we start with women. But I don't want it to start in Indymedia and finish with the women. It's a social proposal by women and for both women AND men.

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Afterwards we realized that it wasn't enough just to be a woman... there were deep political differences. We keep on with the feminist movement and become feminists, and immediately we see something that seems to us like empty space: it's all good and diverse, but what was our position as to (government) power?

The difference between us and those who talk about the overthrow of capitalism is that all their proposals for a new society come from the patriarchy of the left. As feminists in Mujeres Creando we want revolution, a real change of the system; we do not want just to change capitalism, nor just to change attitudes toward women, but also a change in attitude toward young people and the environment. We want to change patriarchy, in a historical and long-lasting transformation that is being created by the feminism we dream of.

In the process of constructing organization — no bosses, no hierarchy — I speak for myself and don't represent anybody... I've said it and I'll say it again that we're not anarchists by Bakunin or the CNT, but rather by our grandmothers, and that's a beautiful school of anarchism.

What is it to be a feminist in Latin America?

JP: To be a feminist in our society means to fight against neoliberalism and its ideology; for us, being a feminist means denouncing racism, machismo/sexism (in the Left and within anarchism, as well as feminine sexism), homophobia, domestic violence, etc. It means denouncing the sexist, bureaucratized, technocratic women of this generation (for us, those women that have fallen into neoliberalism and are administrators of the murderous politics of the World Bank, IMF, etc.) Here's the difference between us and them: they use power and are within the system, and therefore they always control the forces (military, economic, social, political) against those who oppose what they say.

So, we're not interested in power, women's offices, or ministries. We are interested in the daily construction of practice and theory in the streets and in nurturing our creativity.

Our generation denounces the unjust relationship between men and women, just as the class concept has denounced the unjust relationship between the bourgeois and the proletariat.

Therefore, it should have led to a revolution, but it's changed into a concept grabbed up by the system, because the only thing that works is the description of being a man or woman today, not the denunciation of the relationship's injustice... so, the generation becomes a descriptive concept. Feminism looks for ways to recover this category, which has a descriptive aspect, but more importantly its denouncing character. We bring this character forward in our fight for the construction of our anti-patriarchal theory.

What do you think of the "lack of women" in social movements? Is it a myth or an historical reality?

JP: It seems to me like a blindfold when people ask, "where are the women?" We have been around since the beginning of revolutionary moments, always. On the other hand, in today's era, social movements (Sem-Terra, de los Deudos, Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo) are all women-led fights resisting and confronting dictatorships. What we see is a division between public and private affairs, a blindfold, an invisibility in the struggles.

How do men and women, indoctrinated into a patriarchal society, react to the goals of Mujeres Creando?

JP: Women have sympathy as well as fear. The sexist women are much more stubborn and violent than macho men. These men are careful about having sex with us; they're afraid, it's some kind of complex... but in the end they have a certain kind of respect toward us because we have been fighting for ten or eleven years.

At first, most women have sympathy, and later they're afraid because it's a demanding and radical proposal, but that's the only way to build in a place where everything is superficial and diluted. And the men that sympathize with us follow us if they're interested in everything, but they keep wanting us to be like mothers, feeding them; they're a little lazy because they don't want to accept the challenge of making their own group.

What is your vision of social change as relates to the books you [Mujeres Creando] write and the videos and graffiti you make?

JP: You can want a microphone or camera like you'd want a rifle, neither with bullets nor with audio or pictures. No, I'll say what I want to say to others.

We have given communication a high place, on the same level as creativity — that is, creativity in communication. So we have preferred to take from our roots and, by leaving them, we begin a creative communication process. In '92 we started to do graffiti. We did it in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, and other places.

And so, out of all our work that we do, the graffiti's (signed Mujeres Creando) are not anonymous — we put what we want, and everybody knows that MC is in this area, and if someone wants to put us in jail, he or she comes here and does it. Whenever we've gone out to do graffiti, we have been afraid, and we're always afraid. But we've thought about our right to do it... Coca-Cola pays and paints, Repsol pays and paints, so why can't we paint without paying? The problem isn't that the walls are painted, the problem is that it's not paid for. If we must pay for public space, then it's a big contradiction in democracy. What's public and what's private? Streets are public space, the whole city's a courtyard, not a jail hallway, where you go from the jail of your house to the jail of your office job... if it's public, then everybody can use it. But if you pay for public space it becomes private. Public space doesn't exist. Let's start this discussion. What's dirty? What's clean? "You're making my walls dirty!" Oh, so when Coca-Cola contracts a painter, it doesn't make the wall dirty? That's an aesthetic concept. It seems to me that it has made the wall dirty in a disgusting way. And what we have done, our graffiti, that's beautiful.

What are some of the next projects for Mujeres Creando? Is it possible that you will participate in IMC Bolivia?

JP: If we want Mujeres Creando to go on, it needs to question itself, and not embody a myth like "a cute group of feminists" be-