# The structure within

## Mónica Moreno Figueroa and Fabiola Fernández Guerra

## Guest: Sujatha Jesudason

## 07 The collective and anti-racist collaboration

In the seventh episode, Sujatha Jesudason talks with Monica and Fabiola about the difference between collaborating and working collectively, and the skills we need to develop so we don't give up when collective work gets tough.

## About the episode

In this episode, we talk with Sujatha Jesudason about the challenges and possibilities of working together for social justice. Drawing on her more than 30 years of experience in social movements, Sujatha distinguishes between the collective—where we learn, decide, and move forward together—and collaboration, which involves trusting that others will do their part even if we don't agree with the entire process.
We reflect on the skills we need to develop to sustain these collaborations: apologising, acknowledging mistakes, staying in difficult conversations, and not losing sight of the bigger picture.

We also talk about the role of structures—internal and external—that help us stay in the work, even when conflict, discomfort, or pain arise. This episode is an invitation to cultivate ways of being together that allow us to collaborate without losing ourselves, without giving up, and without ceasing to imagine more just futures.

*Mentioned in this episode:*
Hasta la Raíz - Natalia Lafourcade ([YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKmPci5VXz0) , [Spotify](https://open.spotify.com/track/3lGMtkONrZdJ8kTCg6KIFf?si=3d1e1755d58b4889))

## Podcast

**Sujatha Jesudason (guest)**:

Okay, so I'm going to tell you two little stories about this issue of collaboration and the collective. So, when I was a graduate student in California, there was an event in the South Asian community, people from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and it turned out that there was a guy who was trafficking young women to work in his businesses. So, we, a group of activists, mostly women, got together and formed a collective to do something about this case.

So we spent a lot of time trying to understand the situation and come to an agreement and consensus about what we were going to do. So for me, this was a way of working as a collective, all together, all in meetings together, learning together, moving together.

In contrast, in 2010, a friend and I were talking about the reproductive rights movement in the United States, and at that time, the anti-abortion movement had introduced about 100 bills across the country to restrict access to abortion. They failed in most cases, but they did have a 9% success rate out of the 100 bills that were passed at that time. And the movement for women's reproductive rights, at the same time, had only introduced two bills. So they introduced a thousand bills, and we introduced only two.

So my friend and I started thinking about what the movement needed, and we decided that we were going to bring together leaders from across the country, from all the organisations, to create a strategy for the next 30 years for the movement. So we got together several times and talked about the complexity of the movement, the complexity of services, laws, activism, because this movement is very complex and has many different aspects. But, working together, each of us had our own role, our own part to play, what we had to do or what we liked to do, and we were going to coordinate and complement each other's work.

But at that time, I also came to understand the problems of how racism prevents collaboration. Because, even though we were all on the same side, with the same purpose of having a 30-year strategy for the entire movement, for all the different parts of the movement, with different tastes and abilities for activism, we couldn't agree, because, even though we were a group of mostly women, very diverse, and we had the same politics, the same ideology, we had different perspectives.

And when one person said something that perhaps came across badly, another person understood it as racist, and we didn't have the capacity to continue working together. So, this issue of racism and anti-racism was what blocked us from doing what we were all already committed to doing, but we couldn't achieve it. So, for me, these are the differences between a collective and collaboration, and the role of racism in all of these things.

**Gabriela García (narrator):**

Welcome to *The Structures We Carry Within*, a podcast about how oppression, and especially racist oppression, disrupts our lives. Let's begin.

**Mónica Moreno Figueroa (host)**:

Welcome, welcome, welcome to Las estructuras que llevamos dentro (The Structures We Carry Within). Today we are here with Fabiola Fernández Guerra, accompanying me. And I am Mónica Moreno Figueroa. We are hosting this podcast, and we are very excited to welcome our guest, **Sujatha Jesudason**. Right now, we are going to tell you more about who she is and what we are going to talk about today.

Fabiola.

**Fabiola Fernández Guerra (co-host):**

Hello Monica, hello Sujatha, how are you? It's a pleasure. Today we have a specialist on a topic that we think is key, as we have been on this journey from what is oppression, internalised racism, defensiveness, resentment, childhood oppression, collective racial healing, and now we are going to talk about collaboration, collective action, how easy or difficult it is, and what elements are needed in anti-racist work to truly be able to promote the projects we want to do in this regard.

And for that, Sujatha is an expert who will be able to talk to us and guide us through these issues and also question many things. Thank you very much, Sujatha, welcome to The Structures We Carry Within.

**Sujatha:**
Well, thank you, and the pleasure is all mine.

**Monica:**
Let me tell you a little bit about Sujatha so you can get to know her better. She is an activist who has worked for over 30 years in different organisations, mainly on issues of domestic violence, migration and reproductive rights, but her focus has always been on how social movements are formed, organised and sustained. She is currently a professor of leadership at The New School, a university in New York, and her areas of interest are specifically leadership, but also how racism and anti-racism manifest themselves, gender equality, social movements, how they are created, how they are maintained, how they are renewed, innovation, design and many other things.

But I think that gives us a very good idea of why we invited Sujatha, because we think she is very relevant, and in this adventure that Fabiola told you a little about, what we wanted to do in this programme, in this project, is to talk about collaboration, about working collectively, which is fundamental. Let's continue with you, Fabiola.

**Fabiola Fernández Guerra:**

Well, Sujatha was telling us about two actions. One had more to do with working collectively, and the second with collaboration. And I think, Fabiola, that perhaps the audience listening to us may have doubts and say, well, isn't working collectively and collaborating more or less the same thing, more or less similar? Or why make a difference, why separate them, and how does that affect the work of social movements and specifically anti-racist work?

Could you explain a little bit about what those differences are and why we started with this anecdote for this podcast and this topic?

**Sujatha:**
Yes, well, for me, the interest in understanding the difference between a collective and collaboration began when I started to understand social movements. And if we think that every social movement is a set of four or so things, more or less four things.

One is political opportunity, which is a gap, an opportunity in the political system for movement or action.

There are social networks that maintain a level of solidarity, ideology, relationships, and trust.

There are messages of communication that give perspective to the issue.

And the fourth is direct actions of destruction.

So this idea of social networks of solidarity, which are the basis of social movements, really interested me, and I have participated as a volunteer, as an activist, as a worker in non-governmental organisations, and I have been part of collective groups where we all make decisions together.

I know organisations that, despite having 30, 40, or 50 workers, everyone participates in all decisions. This is part of being a collective, where everyone understands the work and everyone has a voice, but it also takes a lot of time. And when we have a political opportunity or we are taking direct action, there are times when we don't have the time for everyone to do the work together, to understand it well and to have confidence.

So these are moments of collaboration, and when I was younger, I thought that we all had to be collectives. But after 30 years, I understand that we are working in very complex systems, with a lot of information, and that we may not have the time, capacity, or interest to understand all aspects. So these are the moments when we have to have the confidence to depend on others in a collaborative effort.

So for me, collaboration sometimes takes more trust than working in a collective, because in a collective we are working together and we don't move until we all agree. But in a collaboration, you have to have enough trust to say, "You do your part, I'll do mine, and we'll trust that everyone will do their part."

**Monica:**
What you're saying is very interesting, and I really like this distinction because it helps us see that a large part of collaboration is trust and confidence that people will respond, that they will be there, that those who said they would come will come. And this requires that we work on building trust. I believe that trust is something that has been greatly eroded in our societies, in Latin America, but everywhere.

I mean, how are we going to trust and who are we going to trust, who is trustworthy and how can we give and demonstrate that the members of a collective, or the members of a group or an organisation, are trustworthy? And this ties in closely with our bigger issue, which is how collaboration intersects, in this case, with the wounds of inequality and the mistreatment that exists in society. And it is one of the great challenges we face as organisations and as individuals in any kind of space.

Being able to establish these relationships and make them last. That they can be trusted, effectively.

**Sujatha:**
Yes, indeed, and for me this issue of inequality and mistrust also has to do with the capitalist system. So, for me, this is the great paradox of capitalism, because on the one hand capitalism creates a system of competition. So, everyone is always trying to climb over each other.

But at the same time, capitalism also gives us the tools for collaboration. And collaboration, in this case, could be that I write books and you build houses. How can you and I collaborate?

Capitalism has given us some tools for that, to translate a house into a book, which are two important jobs in a very complex system. But there are tools to do this translation. At the same time, capitalism also creates competition.

So, this is what we have to work with, this contradiction of capitalism in terms of social movements or creating more equality in society. So, I don't know where I'm going with this.

**Monica:**
No, but what you say about the paradox and the tools that capitalism does offer us is very interesting. Tell us a little more.

**Sujatha:**
Yes, despite all the problems in the societies where we live, inequality, racism, discrimination, we also live in societies that are very complex. I currently live in New York City, and during the pandemic, when everything shut down, I found it fascinating that a city of such complexity still had its systems organised to move food and healthcare, healthcare systems. Yes, of course, there were many problems, but these systems still worked, which meant that there was still a high level of trust in the system, although sometimes I feel that perhaps we don't trust people directly.

So, for me, part of collaboration is creating systems that we can trust, and this requires that there are people designing those systems, that we trust them who are designing them, but there comes a point where you can trust systems, even if you don't know the other people who are part of the system.

So, this idea that we have to build trust with each person we are working with is, for me, a little bit more about the idea of the collective, which are mostly small systems, small groups, because it is a matter of knowing people directly, but in collaboration and collaborative systems, we may be able to trust the system and we can trust the people who design the system, but we don't have to trust every person in the system.

**Fabiola:**
That's interesting what Sujatha says, and do you think this applies, that is, for collaborative systems to work, do they have to be something big, or can they also be small-scale? Or do we already have to talk about large collaborations, because generally there are many organisations that come together, but let's say that the level of collaboration they can achieve is perhaps small? I don't know if that would also fall within a collaborative system, or when we can say that a collaborative system already exists.

**Sujatha:**
Well, it all depends on the goal, because I feel that there are fantastic examples now of people working in collectives that are trying to reimagine how we can organise our systems, and you have to be at this level of detail and at this level of collectivity to redesign things. But we live in a world of three billion people, so for changes at the level of inequality that we are interested in, we have to talk about large systems, large communities, countries, global systems, because this is also our opposition.

So, we are in opposition to systems of inequality that exist at the global level, at the national level, and also at the municipal level, so we have to offer alternatives that are also at this level, because we are not seeking equality for the few, but for everyone.

**Monica:**
Sure, and this relates to the example you gave us of thinking about a 30-year strategy. I think that when you tell an organisation or a movement that they have to think 30 years ahead, it sounds like, "No, we need to act today, right now." And I think that causes despair or ideas that change has to happen — well — or that a version of change has to happen right now.

**Sujatha:**
And we also chose the idea of 30 years because we were thinking that we are creating strategies not for our generation, but for the next generation. So this also required us to work with the next generation, that we couldn't just be talking about what worked for us, but that we were planning for generations in the future.

And there are people who say that one should be planning for seven generations, which for me is a bit far off. I understand the concept and the mission, but just thinking about the next generation means that I have to be in a good relationship, I have to be in trusting relationships with the next generation of activists and leaders.

**Fabiola:**
Interesting, you would say that there should be a kind of call, a certain awareness that in activism, you have to think that, to a certain extent, you are starting a job that will not necessarily bear fruit, but that it is a job like a relay race, that is passed on to you, that your job is to receive it and project it for the time that follows, so that the work continues.

And I also think about the difficulties. You were talking about the difficulties of working collectively, we talked about the issue of trust, Monica also mentioned the issue of wounds caused by oppression, by life stories and how to work through that, and I think another point is also being able to draw strength from knowing that your work is going well, from seeing some results in your life, which is that other thing that sometimes, I don't know, I mean, my question would be, what else do yo s as elements that hinder this collaboration? And if it's very important in activism to have certain stimuli that allow you to continue with the hope of collaboration, right?

So, for you, what other things are currently hindering these processes of collaboration in activism? And if you see that there are parts of this project that are nourished by long-term collaboration, how would you see it?

**Sujatha:**
The contradictions between the collective and collaboration are part of that. So let me explain: in a collective, you feel that we are all together, we understand the same things, we have the same ideas and visions, and we are working towards this goal. In collaborations, if we have this level of understanding, but there are different people with different perspectives, and the most basic are differences in experiences of racism, then we cannot have a hundred percent understanding.

And what happens is that one person can say something with the best of intentions, but another person can take it as hurtful, as racist, as sexist. And within our collaborations and within our movements, we don't know how to work with this difference in experiences and perspectives. And this, in the best case scenario, no one is defending, but there are also times when you can't say, hey, what you said was racist, and I have compassion for you, so that you can correct what you said.

Often when someone says something racist, as a South Asian woman, I say, well, I feel hurt, so I often feel that I cannot forgive them. This creates an even greater separation. And we don't have the skills or the agreements to heal, not internally, but between ourselves.

Because there is healing that one does have to do internally, but we also don't have many opportunities to heal with each other. So, for example, I teach a class called Courageous Conversations.

Brave conversations. And one of the first things I do with my students is give them the task of giving an apology.

An apology to another person in their life. And I want them to do this because everyone goes around saying that they didn't do anything wrong, that it was all other people's fault, but often, as people in left-wing, social justice movements, we don't have the ability to do that. So it's very difficult for them.

And the thing I've noticed in these apologies is that people are very attached to the idea that they were right.

**Fabiola:**
Great, the first part of this podcast is really interesting. I loved the topic, the concept of brave conversations. Let's take a break, Monica, shall we?

We're listening to Las estructuras que llevamos dentro (The Structures We Carry Within) with Sujatha, who is our guest today, addressing the topic of collective action and anti-racist collaboration. We'll be right back.

**Gabriela:**
You're listening to The Structures We Carry Within Us. A podcast about how oppression, and especially racist oppression, disrupts our lives.

**Monica:**
Sujatha, tell us more about this course and your approach. So, you're talking about acknowledging our cruelties and apologising for them. And it's like, but how?

I'm a good person. Great people, as we say. And how do your students receive it?

How is the course going?

**Sujatha:**
Well, I start with the premise that none of us, neither in school nor in our families, has been taught how to apologise properly. Sometimes we apologise, not because we feel bad about what we did, but simply because we want to take the weight off our shoulders, right? We say, "I'm going to apologise and then we can move on."

Or that I don't owe you an apology, you owe me an apology. And this happens a lot, doesn't it? Because a person in the United States, a white person, says, well, first of all, I'm a good person, so I can't be racist.

And besides, you're racist because you called me racist. Right? So, if we start from this basis that we haven't learned, no one has taught us how to apologise, but we all go around expecting apologies for the hurts we've been given.

So, I think first, let's start, let's create the internal and external structures to create a culture where one can make mistakes, one can be a good person and make mistakes, and we can also correct our mistakes. So, if we live in a world like that, then are we going to make mistakes? Well, of course we're going to make mistakes, we're going to hurt other people.

The most important thing is that we can recognise it, which is also something else. We don't have much capacity; we understand very well what is happening to us, but we rarely understand what is happening to other people. So, we don't read them very well, we don't read the differences between us very well, so I can say something that I think is not a bad thing, but because I don't understand someone's identity or another person's experiences very well, then this can also come across badly. So, what we call scaffolding in English is the structure that is created outside a building to construct a building.

So, for me, those brave conversations, you need a lot of that, that figure, that support, that input, to learn how to do it. The hardest thing for my students, and I say for me too, is to think deep down that I might be wrong, that's the hardest thing to accept. So, this is the thing that prevents trusting and collaborative relationships.

And also, the other thing I say is that once you do it, you apologise, but honestly, with all your heart, this is also part of what builds trust.

**Fabiola:**
It reminds me of what we were talking about a little off-air with Sujatha, that she said the importance of talking about capabilities, that you said that for you it was more important to talk about, if I understood correctly, capabilities than about emotions. And now that I see this point you make about the agreements we need for healing between us, I think you're mentioning these capacities that are not socially, at least in Western society, positivist, I don't know what to call it, capitalist, which is the capacity to recognise mistakes, the capacity to ask for forgiveness, the capacity to also understand that we can correct those mistakes, the capacity to read others.

I don't know if there are any other abilities that... And why do you put this emphasis on abilities, because I found it really interesting to see it that way.

Thank you very much for sharing.

**Sujatha:**
Well, as I said before, I've worked in social movements for over 30 years. And during all this time I've also done my own healing work: I've been in therapy, I've done co-listening... and despite those 30 years, I still have difficulties with my emotions. So I know that I can't expect to heal all my wounds in order to create a better world.

I decided that I do have to do this emotional healing work, but that I can also create an architecture, systems of capacity, so that we can agree—as adults—to behave differently. Both jobs are important: one helps the other, but both are necessary. We cannot depend on just one. If we depend only on inner healing, the process may be more difficult or less difficult, but as adults we can choose how to behave and put effort into that.

For me, emotions... well, you feel them, they arise, I can't control them. But I can decide how to behave in relation to those emotions.

**Monica:**
And I think this is super important. Especially when we see that, in many moments within organisations, simply agreeing on something becomes very complicated, right? Precisely because all these different emotions or situations arise in which there is no capacity to stop.

What you're talking about is a moment when something is happening and you manage to stop and say, "Yes, I'm very sad about what you're telling me. But this is not the place to express that I'm sad, angry or frustrated." Breathe... and move on.

Those seconds — which I imagine are like that ability you recognise, "I have to wait, this isn't the right time" — but that's really difficult, those are the hardest seconds, aren't they?

So, you talk about how difficult it is to recognise, "Maybe I was wrong," but it may also be that I can hold the emotion and put it aside, right? That's also very difficult.

**Sujatha:**
For me, in those moments, external structures help. For me, a structure is remembering my vision for the world: where am I working towards? Where are we working towards together?

But maybe, and sometimes I know this doesn't work for everyone. And sometimes I think: compared to what I'm trying to achieve — a 30-year strategy, in a movement that is currently in danger in this country — or my emotions in the moment... what am I going to choose?

The second structure is being in a community of people with the same capabilities, who have learned those capabilities together, and I can see them and they remind me of what we are doing together. In those moments, I can depend on other people to refocus us on what we have committed to together.

So, it's not just about me, in isolation, changing my point of view or my emotions, but about being able to lean on these structures that are outside of me.

**Fabiola:**
So, we need to create structures of awareness so that, from a place of authenticity, we can avoid "falling asleep again." Because if you fall into that state of unconsciousness, you have to be surrounded by someone who says, "Hey, this is what's important." That was something that, I think, was worked on in many previous collectives and has gradually been lost.

But of course, this complicates the task. Because, on the one hand, the drive for social change also has to involve rethinking your internal processes; and on the other hand, you have to build a system that operates in times of crisis to allow for the pause you were talking about, Monica. That moment of saying, "I'll wait a minute."

But what happens in these collaborations when you have to trust a larger system? I was struck by your anecdote at the beginning: a group presented 100 initiatives against abortion, of which 9% were passed. Another group only pushed through two in favour. And that's where the idea comes from: if we do it alone, we're always going to lose, because there's a group that organises itself and presents 100, and even if 9% of those pass, the result is very high.

So, that also speaks to the processes of organisation. And I think that sometimes happens in social movements, where the biggest, right?

Sometimes the discussion becomes very narrow and the big picture gets lost, but that's because it's difficult. I don't know why, sometimes it's easier to organise things this way, like in the capitalist world, for big things.

I don't know if it's because that's how we've been educated. So it's easier to stick with that than to seek change with this radical imagination. But, in addition, it has to be an organised radical imagination, with agreements on how to heal conflicts.

So it requires a lot from each of us. The nice thing is that it also gives a lot, that's the other side of it, isn't it?

I think it also gives you something, it enriches you and fills your life with meaningful questions. That's why people keep doing it, isn't it?

Or how do you see it?

**Sujatha:**
Well, one of the debates among social groups and movements is whether to build trust first and then take action, right? Because we need to trust each other to take certain actions.

But also — and this is what I believe, and in the world of men, and this is an exaggeration, a stereotype — I've seen that they work together and it's at work where they develop trust. So, playing on sports teams is a way of developing trust.

It's by doing the work, and through working together more and more, that we develop trust. Some groups think that we have to develop trust first: get to know each other, tell our stories, our experiences and our wounds, talk, spend time like that before we start the work.

But you don't have to see only one side of each other. I think, for me, it's been more about seeing people under the pressure of work. That's where I learn to trust more than anything else when we're talking about trust.

So there's a way to throw ourselves into social change work and, through working together, learn about each other and learn to trust each other. And that way it's not so complicated, right? We do the work, and from there we learn, and bring a little bit of awareness, of paying attention to what we're doing.

So when there are conflicts, it's not just a matter of ignoring them, but of paying attention. But that way we can work and build that trust.

**Monica:**
And then there's also having this information, that is, learning to have this discussion. Anyone who is thinking about forming an organisation or is just starting out should not wait for conflicts to arise.

It's like: put the systems in place, build capacity, get people to work and learn as you go, right? Because sometimes it's like, well, you've been involved in organisational processes and you arrive... I don't know how much you can do when everything is already wrong, trying to solve it, and it's like...

That's why we really like having this space for dialogue. Because it's like, let's put this into practice, let's adapt it, let's integrate it into our work right now. Because it's going to happen. I mean, if it hasn't happened to you yet, it will.

**Sujatha:**
Well, one thing that fascinates me is that even though we all live in capitalist systems, I, at least, never learned anything about money and how to manage money in school. I didn't learn how to manage a savings account, a credit card, how to make a budget... These are basic things in this system.

So we are in an educational situation that does not provide us with the basic knowledge, either for the capitalist system or for collaboration. We have to learn these things and also think that we have to keep adding more and more information, more and more systems.

I often work with groups that hire me to facilitate their meetings or strategic sessions. And the first thing I always do is teach them something more, something new to them. Because if they are going to do the same thing with the same information, then they are going to get the same results.

But if they want to do something different, then they have to add different information, new information, new perspectives. So I always start with a little bit of teaching, just a little bit. And this is probably because I am a teacher.

But there are people who have learned and done those things, so let's bring part of the story with us: learn from history and do things differently than we are doing right now.

**Monica:**
Well, let's learn from your song too. We're going to take a break while we listen to Natalia Lafourcade with Hasta la raíz.

**Gabriela:**
You're listening to Las estructuras que llevamos dentro, a podcast about how oppression — and especially racist oppression — disrupts our lives.

**Monica:**
Sujatha, why this song? Tell us about it.

**Sujatha:**
Well, I first heard this song on TikTok, because during graduation season here in the United States, many Latino students, children of immigrant parents, took their graduation gowns to their parents and gave them to them.

This really touched my heart, but it also reminded me of this idea that, as human beings, collaboration is central to our existence. We are born into communities, into families, and that is what is deepest in our hearts.

And even though we travel far or face mountains of difficulties, we can remember that we were born to collaborate. We just have to go back to that, remember it. For these two reasons, I love this song.

**Monica:**
And I love what you say about remembering, or reminding ourselves, to collaborate. Because it's something we know how to do, I mean, if we're left to our own devices, we can do it, right?

But what do you think made us forget that? How did we forget that it's a skill we shouldn't have to learn to put into practice as a system, to take care of?

What happened to us?

**Sujatha:**
Well, going back to capitalism, which is a competitive system, it's those competitive structures that prevent us from collaborating.

Instead of thinking that we both win through collaboration, in competition only one person wins. And all structures, from the first day at school — and I don't understand how this happens — work like this: what I gain in points is what you lose in points.

In grades or whatever, but it shouldn't be a competition. If I help you and you help me answer the questions on the test, then we both win. That's collaboration.

Yes, we live in a world that has these structures of competition and exploitation. For me, our task is to create systems and structures of collaboration, both outside and inside.

We must have the confidence to create these structures and sustain them, to make those systems alive, real and concrete as well.

**Fabiola:**
It reminds me a bit of some key words that have come up in previous podcasts: the ability to be vulnerable when you're in a group, right? That's a skill that we need to relearn and retrain ourselves in today, because I think it's one of those things you call agreements for healing each other, right?

But if there is no possibility of feeling vulnerable, of accepting yourself as vulnerable — because, as Monica rightly said, it's going to happen to all of us — whether you've felt vulnerable in an assembly, in a meeting, expressing your point of view or listening to someone else's, or it's going to happen to you... that's something that happens.

So, how can we practise feeling vulnerable and being okay with that, so that these defensive mechanisms don't kick in or resentment doesn't take over, and we can take action?

I'm talking now more specifically about anti-racist collaboration. I don't know if, from your professional practice or your experiences — which are many — you notice that there are certain elements in anti-racist collaboration that make this more complex or easier.

What positive experiences have you had with organisations that have been able to apply these internal and external structures to anti-racist work? I would love to know — I think the audience would too — if there are people who have done this and had success. It is possible, isn't it? This is the way forward.

**Sujatha:**
Geographer Ruth Gilmore—who coined the concept of racial capitalism—says that capitalism requires inequality for exploitation, and that racism is what creates that inequality. So when we work for anti-racist collaboration, we are working against this system of racial capitalism.

Every time we enter into a collaboration — whatever it may be — we have to understand that racism is present. Whether everyone in that collaboration is of African descent or everyone is white, racism is still there. We need to understand that this is the context in which we work and we have to be vigilant, because these dynamics are going to arise.

What we have to do is decide, in the moment it happens, what we are going to do: whether to stay, whether to apologise, whether to pay attention to the conflict and work to overcome it.

The truth is that it's very difficult to do. And the times I've seen it work is when the vision is so powerful that we decide to stay and do the work. Because the desire doesn't always come from within each of us: we're hurt, angry... whatever. So the desire can't depend solely on how we feel at that moment; it also has to be part of the structure of the collaboration.

That's why many collaborations start with that idea: what is the problem we are facing and what are we committing to do to solve it, or what is the vision we have and what are we committing to that vision.

Collaborations have to have a purpose. They have to have a purpose, and that purpose has to be clear.

**Monica:**
I was thinking about how, from your perspective, you would understand internalised oppression, which is something we have been discussing here.

Is there a big difference—or little difference—between this idea of addressing internalised oppression based on the capacities that need to be built? Because I see internalised oppression as an intermediate space: on the one hand, an individual impact on my personal history; but on the other hand, that history is intertwined with the inequality and social abuse that we experience collectively.

In that space, possibilities arise: creating capacities to realise that this is happening and how it affects me, but also creating awareness to recognise that this is real.

In the last programme, we talked about collective racial healing as an effort to address these issues, but to do so together. And how, by addressing them collectively, something new is created: a positive working space that allows us to move forward.

I don't know if you see more difficulty or tension between these two ideas: on the one hand, capabilities; on the other, the emotional, which is what internalised oppressions express.

**Sujatha:**
I feel that both—healing and capabilities—are two sides of the same thing. Both have to happen.

We have to create systems and structures in our personal lives where we are doing our healing: whether it's from oppression or simply family issues or life experiences. We have to do that work at the same time as the collective work.

We can't just do the work without attending to healing, or just do healing without doing the work. They have to happen together.

And the point of solidarity for all of us is to recognise that we have all been hurt in our lives and we are all damaged by the system. In patriarchy, men are just as hurt as women, as everyone else.

That is the point of solidarity: to be able to say yes, we are all wounded. And then, what are we going to do about it, together?

Not necessarily in a collective way, but in a collaborative way. You do your healing work, I do mine, and we can work together.

The idea that one is better than the other doesn't work for us. What we need is to look for points of solidarity, of connection.

**Fabiola:**
Very interesting, thank you very much. We're now at the end of the podcast.

Let's take a break and come back with your final thoughts, Sujatha, on some of what you've shared with us. Key points — I've jotted down a few on this list — because I found the podcast and the conversation we're having today super interesting.

Let's take a break and come back with your final thoughts.

**Narration:**
You're listening to The Structures We Carry Within, a podcast about how oppression—and especially racist oppression—disorganises our lives.

**Fabiola:**
Well, when we were thinking about this podcast and what to put in the intro, Monica said: racist oppression disrupts life. And that's exactly what we're talking about, isn't it?

What possibilities do we have to develop these capacities, these agreements that allow us to simultaneously reorganise both our personal lives and the processes we are building collectively? That work between emotions and capacities.

Returning to this part of the discussion—where we will ask you, Sujatha, to share your final thoughts—I would like to mention some of the ideas you have mentioned that I find very interesting.

The first is this: our vision of why we are collaborating, what we are collaborating for, must be more powerful than our wounds and our own egos. If that vision becomes stronger than what I am feeling at this moment, then it can give us the breathing space to recapitulate why we are here and what we are here for. I find that very valuable.

Another thing you pointed out is the need to build systems of trust that are generated through capabilities.

And another thing that I think is fundamental — and that I have also seen as key in my experience in activism — is learning to play on teams, working together. I have found that by working together, relationships are built and trust is established. Indeed, by sharing a morning doing something physical, manual, building a project, putting your body into the work, these processes of trust are generated.

I think that's an important tip for organisations. As Monica said: we have to get to work.

So, what other thoughts or closing remarks would you share with us about collective action and collaboration—especially anti-racist collaboration—that you think are key?

What final thoughts would you leave us with?

**Sujatha:**
Well, two things have been key for me.

First, create communities. We can create communities in our personal lives, have these friendships—long-term friendships, lasting 20 or 30 years—because it's easy to have friends for two or three years, and when there are conflicts, the friendship disappears, right? But committing to being in relationships with each other for the long term, for decades. This is the most important thing for me, and it is in these spaces where our wounds can be worked on, because it is a little easier to be vulnerable with our friends. They are also the most serious wounds, but they happen right there, in friendships.

And also this idea of thinking about structures: creating structures that are not just based on what we want, but on agreements about how we are going to work. This is also an important part, and at the same time it feels like it has a little bit of magic and a little bit of work. It's work and magic at the same time, and this is what creates good collaborations.

And also, as Arundhati Roy says: another world is not only possible, it is already on its way. On a quiet day, I can hear it breathing.

You know what? One thing: today I was on TikTok watching all the videos of AMLO and Claudia Sheinbaum. I'm fascinated by the relationship between these two people, which is also a decades-long collaboration. Two very different people — one middle class, with European roots, and he's from the people, right? — who have learned to collaborate, to trust each other, and the impact, right?

Everything she says about her presidency, about being president, she talks about women, as much as I've never heard AMLO talk about the central role of women. But this is what's possible with a collaboration, which isn't a collective. They're not doing the same thing, but it's a collaboration.

**Mónica:**
Well, I think this exemplifies very well the difference between a collective and an organisation.

I wanted to ask you, in addition to these elements that Fabiola summarised and the ones you added, what would you say we need to be on the lookout for as signs, red flags that may be happening? In other words, what do we need to stop and observe in our flow? What are the smells, signs, vibes that indicate there is an issue in organisations, in their processes?

**Sujatha:**
Well, going back to the two sides of collaboration—structures and emotions, healing—these are the moments when we feel that something is not right. We also have to pay attention to our emotions.

I always say that emotions give us information. They are not a basis for making decisions, but they tell us that things are not working well. So, if you are in a collaboration where you don't feel comfortable, where you don't feel you can be honest, or that things are not going where you want them to go, you can talk about it, pay attention to it, without making immediate decisions based on your emotions.

So, there's information there. We have to pay attention to our emotions as well, in order to participate in collaborations with goodwill.

**Monica:**
I really like this because otherwise it would seem like we were talking about how to create your system very objectively: one, two, three, follow this, develop your capacity, and everything will be fine. As if everything were totally rational in terms of how you collaborate and how you form a collective.

But no. You've never said that. You're saying: emotions are there, but I stop and put them in their place and I stop and take the information that those feelings give me, that experience, which is part of the reality of being with others, of trying to do things with others.

I really like how you complement that. Important.

**Fabiola:**
And having brave conversations. That's the other thing.

**Sujatha:**
Because sometimes we can think that emotions are the enemy, that they are false information. This is not true.

Emotions are also of the moment. Our bodies have the wisdom to know what is happening before our minds understand it.

So, brave conversations. You have to be brave with yourself: what are the emotions, what is happening, and what should I do about it?

And be brave enough to pay attention to what's happening with other people. It's not just about you, but also about the other person.

**Monica:**
Of course.

**Fabiola:**
I'd like to pick up on something you said that I also think is important: the body.

Sometimes we think that emotions are only here and that we take very little care of our bodies. But the body is closely linked to emotions, mental processes, and the inability to collaborate.

In other words, if you don't take care of your body, if you don't understand what's going on in your body, how it reacts to circumstances — how you've been talking for four hours and you see that physically everyone is in a bad position, with their bodies completely closed, their arms crossed — then you're not paying attention to what your body needs at any given moment. I think that's another important part. Another podcast, right? About how to take care of ourselves.

**Sujatha:**
And also this part of paying attention to others.

For example, I've been watching a lot of videos of Claudia, AMLO, Kamala Harris and Tim Walz, who are in these large groups. For many people, this is what gives them energy.

For me, on the other hand, being in such large groups is my worst nightmare, but for other people that's what gives them energy. So you also have to have the perspective that there are multiple experiences of how you are connected to your body.

**Monica:**
Well, to close, Sujatha, now tell us: would you like to say anything else to the audience? Is there anything you would like to add, anything you feel you haven't said or any ideas you've left out? Thinking about these people involved in social justice, in processes that want a better world, what questions or reflections would you like to leave us with?

**Sujatha:**
To close — more than anything else, not to open another conversation — I have a friend who has told me something that I firmly believe: if you're not in a collaboration that makes you uncomfortable, you're not changing the world. You're not in the process of change, because when we're comfortable, that's when things are the way they are, when we've been trained well and we're comfortable.

So, to collaborate, to work with people, to heal, all of this requires a level of discomfort. And, at the same time, it's uncomfortable... and it's also the best work we can do in our lives.

**Monica:**
So long live discomfort, then!

**Sujatha:**
Yes!

Thank you so much, Sujatha. Thank you so much, Fabiola.

With that, and with this discomfort moving forward, we bid farewell to The Structures We Carry Within. See you on our next programme. Thank you very much.

**Sujatha:**
Thank you both.

**Gabriela:**
Thank you for listening to The Structures We Carry Within. A programme produced by the University of Cambridge, the COPERA collective and the 11.11 Social Change Communication Agency, funded by the British Academy, the UK Official Development Assistance Funds and the Kellogg Foundation.

Join us for our next episode.

***The podcast Las Estructuras que Llevamos Dentro was conceived by Mónica Moreno Figueroa and produced by Fabiola Fernández Guerra Carrillo and Arfaxad Ortiz. The voiceover is by Gabriela García.***