

Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research  
Vol. 5, No. 2 (Summer 2019)

**For a Just Economy, Let's Take Back the Future!**  
**Dammeh Cooperative's manifesto for alternative economies**

Dammeh Cooperative

Dammeh is a cooperative for women, trans\*, and gender non-conforming people that seeks to create an alternative, self-sustaining space for organizing in Beirut, Lebanon. The cooperative is built on values of social, economic, environmental, and gender justice and works to translate these values into practice in its structure, governance, and activities. Dammeh is also a member of the Feminist Bloc, a budding network of local groups fighting the patriarchy, each in our own special way.

A first version of the below manifesto was printed in Dammeh's 2019 calendar<sup>1</sup> as part of the feminist cooperative's ongoing reflections on capitalism and its mutual relation with patriarchy and other systems of oppression. As a cooperative, Dammeh functions without funding, and survives on its own self-sustainable economic model that relies on members' contributions and various events and activities that take place in the space, as well as the calendar's sales.

*We strive to build an alternative model for organizing that isn't dependent on funding from donors, as we've seen enough damage created by cycles of grant and donations: it creates dependency, it bends our political agendas, and it measures our success on the basis of reporting and applications that take up too much of our time. We were inspired by the cooperatives model built on economic justice, the recognition of everyone's labor, and democratic governance.*

*For us, it is evident that feminism contains this aspiration for a just economy that respects nature, ecosystems, workers, bodies, labor, genders, and that can bring forth transformative propositions for alternative models of valuing labor and (re)production, as we've seen in feminists' defense of paid housework or the recognition of sex workers as workers. We hope to have more conversations with other feminists about building alternative economies in our region and in the global south. We hope that eventually, these conversations will result in more feminist cooperatives, more solidarity, more resistance – loudly and unapologetically. We want to build connections with other collectives. We want to inspire and to be inspired, and we hope this manifesto can be one starting point.*

Imagine a world where we have reclaimed our bodies, communities, and resources. A world in which we can shape our neighborhoods and villages and streets intentionally and collectively. We can come together in ways that defy the rigid molds created to limit us. We have the freedom to determine and define our friendships, families, and partnerships. Food, shelter, health, and play are not luxuries to afford but guaranteed rights in a world built on care.

Today, we wake up to a world bent on erasing us, our lands, our histories, our languages, our hopes, even crushing the tools we use to cope. Forced to find cracks in the walls built around us, we struggle to grow and flourish. Those who can speak are policed. Those who cannot are exploited, though some speak anyway and are killed.

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<sup>1</sup> You can find the calendar at the following link: <https://etsy.me/2QFW9bi>

In capitalism, the few elite ensure their own survival at the expense of people, the earth, and its resources. We wake up every day to a market that sees us as tools and commodities, renders us disposable, and deems us ungrateful and flawed when we break – a system that deems poverty to be the poor’s fault and demonizes those exploited by cheap labour after it has left them no choice. Meanwhile, our care labour sustains this market and yet remains invisible, undervalued, unpaid, although none of this could exist without it.

What would we do all day if we didn’t have to work for a salary? In a world outside capitalism, we would put our labour where we feel – and know we’re useful – to build around us what we need. Caring for life would be at the center of valued labour. Sex work would be decriminalized and respected; domestic labour would be recognized, shared, visible, paid, and valued; emotional labour would be acknowledged, cherished, and offered back.

Who decides what’s worth what? Who decides what is productive or not? Let us own the products of our labour. Let us decide for ourselves the conditions of our work. Replace corporations with cooperatives! Replace managers with democratic workers’ councils! Replace competition with solidarity!

Under the guise of corporate social responsibility, we are deceived by the claim that capitalism can be green and reduce the exhaustion of natural resources. But over-extraction, deforestation, and resource wars have led to climate change, extinction of wildlife, and destruction of ecosystems. Today, there are environmental refugees all around the world, while CEOs and politicians shelter themselves in mountain palaces and air-conditioned cars.

Ecological justice and human justice are tightly connected. We aim for a holistic ecosystem where all living beings and natural bodies are left in peace to nurture one another, and where natural resources are protected and put to use only for genuine need. Nothing truly lives well until everything lives well.

When we give nature enough space to regenerate, it will never waste its plentiful gifts. We want a decolonized nature so that none of it is exploited and everything fits in. Permaculture provides us with a model where we put equal access to resources at the center of our society, where nothing is wasted, nothing is marginalized, nothing is exploited, and everything is returned. Everything is given the space it needs to grow, and everything finds a home.

Our homes are made to keep us warm and protected. Kitchens are made for us to cook and gather. Bedrooms are for us to do whatever we feel like, and to rest, and love our bodies. These are not tools for real-estate speculation. Why is having a roof over our heads dependent on how much money we have? Our homes are not for sale! So let us organize and form housing cooperatives!

Building coops and communities is about helping each other grow, about sharing our knowledge and skills, about sustaining our communities, and about building our collective power. Patriarchy wants to keep us reactive; our task is to transcend seasonal activism and create long-lasting, ever-growing bonds and movements.

Imagine this world, where individual well-being and community uplift each other, where whom you choose to be and what you choose to look like is valued by the collective, and contributes to it. We want to dress to express and be free to move our bodies through the streets as we please, to dance with joy, both personal and shared.

There isn't one way that society or family or community should be. Let us dispose of coercive heteronormative parenting. Let us raise children with free and radical love! What have you unlearned, and what are you going to teach them? When we change the way we teach, the future will follow.

We're taking back the future, and no one will steal it from us!