
Indigenous Women Activists in Latin America Against Colonialism, Capitalism and Patriarchy: Voices for a 'New World'

Lorenza PERINI

Abstract

In the Latin American context, where colonialism and the patriarchal system appear to be historically deeply intertwined, the research focuses on indigenous women and their struggle against the multiple systems of oppression to which they are subjected, highlighting how colonization has brought a different "nuance" in the concept of patriarchy in a sense of a reinforcement of the gender roles in society. However, contrary to those stereotypes that normally depict indigenous women as folkloric pawns with no history and agency, this research aims to show how, in the face of evidence of the destruction perpetrated through the extractive policies by the neoliberal capital in the 21st century, women have been actually the first to protest for their rights not only as individuals, but as members of indigenous communities. Through the existing literature, the paper try to outline their particular perspective on feminism, liberated from essentialist aspects and used as a practical and political "tool" in the struggle to become agents of social and cultural change and prefiguring, in Silvia Federici's words, "a new world".

Keywords

Women - Indigeneous communities - Extractivism - Ecofeminsm - Movements

1. *Ni las mujeres ni la tierra somos territorios de conquista!*

«Neither women nor land are territories of conquest» (Oliveira 2020): is a phrase we may have seen on feminist protest posters or heard in the speeches of so many groups and movements in Bolivia, in the Andes, in Guatemala, and in Latin America in general (Cuenca Sempertegui and Aliaga 2014). But what does it really refer to? This phrase is a wake-up call to remember that in the world in which we live, our bodies, as well as the natural resources associated with the feminine to give them a connotation of inferiority, continue to be seen as objects that can be dominated

and exploited in order to sustain a patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial system. It shows the connections between the violation of women's bodies and the violation of land, both suffered by indigenous populations in Latin America. To understand the link between these two subjects, the land and the body- the research will start by defining who are the indigenous: It is important to underline that the term 'indigenous people' is used in two of the major international texts, the Convention on *Indigenous and Tribal People Convention of the International Labor Organization* (ILO 1989) and the Declaration of the *UN on the Rights of Indigenous People* (Undrip 2007). Both texts emphasize the principle of self-determination, which is essential in the definition of indigenous population because it means that individuals have the right to claim their belonging to indigenous communities. In this sense, the consequences of the invasion of Argentina in the XIX century, resulted in the genocide of most of the indigenous populations, some of them with no survivors, such as the one of the Yamanas of Tierra del Fuego. This tremendous act of violence gave rise to traumatic relations between the government and the indigenous, so when Argentina became independent, the elites totally rejected the indigenous populations, showing admiration for those European intellectuals with an openly racist bias and faith in the supremacy of the white European blood (Cieza 2010), starting in this way to rewrite the history of Argentina as the one of a European country. This framework underlines how deeply the indigenous populations have been erased from the social context of the country.

And it is not about the past, but it is still the case today, since the current Argentine president, Alberto Fernandez, in a 2021 public discourse, quoted the words of a popular song saying that 'the Mexicans came from the Indians, Brazilians came from the jungle and the Argentinians came from the ships, referring to the way they arrived from Europe' (Politi and Londono 2021), again showing how the struggle of the indigenous populations is still relevant and how far is politics from recognizing it today, in the XXI century.

In addition to this fierce insistence on the European roots, another false narrative contributes to hide the reality of indigenous communities in most of Latin America, relegating them to folkloric elements survived from the past, stubbornly affected by those stereotypes that define them as monolithic and not permeable to the passing of the time, as if they were historical beings who had not changed for years (Ruiz-Chiriboga 2006). In this framework, the most affected by the false and dangerous imaginary are certainly women, as Aura Cumes pointed out, using for them the image of "living fossils" or "tourist objects" (Cumes 2012) and underlying how, in addition to suffering from imperialism and colonialism like their male

peers, indigenous women also suffer from patriarchal oppression and gender inequality. They are seen as servants, as Cumes argues using the expression of "culture of servitude" (Cumes 2012), indicating women as the last link of the social chain, in the sense of being the object of multiple discriminations and using for them the concept of *intersectional discrimination* developed into the Black feminist community through the elaboration made by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). According to Crenshaw, different layers of oppressions are not just summed but superimposed and constitute a sort of «plus» in the sense that these layers cannot be analyzed separately (that is, being a woman, a black woman, and an indigenous black woman, it is not just a matter of three different types of possible discrimination, but constitutes something more than the sum of the parts). For this reason, the patriarchal system and colonialism in Latin America cannot be analyzed separately, as two different things, because they are deeply interdependent, producing a specific and more intense layer of oppression (Federici 2012). The frame is not that of a paradise corrupted by the arrival of The colonization: the hierarchy of the sexes existed well before the arrival of the colonizers, but the latter had brought in their ships a different 'nuance' of patriarchy, linked to capitalism and the exploitation of resources, capable of reinforcing the oppression and consequently the gender roles (Dorronzoro 2013), giving in this way a special consistency to the intersectional dimension of discrimination. However, as stated by Federici (2016), contrary to this reality, in recent decades indigenous women were able to protest their rights as women and as members of indigenous communities, developing an ecofeminist voice of their own against extractivist practices of capitalism and this is due to the cosmovision that indigenous people have of natural elements such as water, earth, and air, which form a whole with living human beings and must be protected in the same way. And therein lies the question that guides the research: how and to what extent the ecofeminist voice that indigenous women have been able to express against the multiple oppressions can be heard and taken into consideration putting them in the position of being active agent for social change.

2. Women activists against extractivism: the self-affirming forms of struggles

In Latin America, feminist and women's movements and civil society organizations have adopted various forms of organization at the local, national and regional level to affect extractive agendas and processes. The characterization of the struggle of these collectives is strictly related to the context and threats that women and communities face in their territories. It must be highlighted that not all

organizations and movements adopt a gender perspective, define themselves as feminist, or explicitly promote and protect women's rights. However, women's struggles are easily attributable to the feminist currents of thought that shape the fourth wave of Latin American feminism.

Their contribution is evident in the design of horizontal power relations, which deconstruct the centralized hierarchical structure imposed by the dominant system (Zibechi 2008) and the *Fondo de Acción Urgente América Latina y el Caribe* (Fau-AI 2016) provides a structured classification of formal and informal types of women's organizations, ranging from national associations to sectoral associations-some autonomous-focused on local environmental advocacy and territorial defense; mixed associations and movements protecting populations affected by specific extractive projects; national or local ethnic-based organizations composed of indigenous or Afro-descendant peoples; and many others. All this to say that, although the ongoing shrinking of the space for the action and the participation of the civil society, in the last decades women-led organizations and feminist movements have carried out numerous actions of mobilization, struggle, and resistance to respond to the violent attacks against the *cuerpo-territorio* (Vargas 2017), that is, the close correlation between the female body and Nature understood as political spaces of action and claim, to be defended against the violence of the system. These strategies, developed at the local, national, and regional levels, have recently taken different forms depending on the type of extractive project, the type of conflict, the level of violence, and the kind of organization (Echart Munoz and Del Carmen Villarreal 2019), thus extending the basic conception of struggle. As a matter of fact, Zibechi (2015) highlights for Latin America the development of self-affirming forms of struggle, in addition to traditional instrumental ones such as strikes proclaimed by trade unions. Self-affirming struggles encompass those forms of struggle practiced by territorial movements and aimed at the reappropriation of lands and means of subsistence, for example, the occupation of lands and public spaces and the symbolic and material reaffirmation of the community's own space (Zibechi 2015). In this new landscape of struggles, traditional forms of mobilization and resistance, such as street blockade or occupation of urban spaces organized by indigenous groups and strikes led by trade unions, have been accompanied by innovative forms of political participation: beyond defensive strategies, which refer to a wide range of traditional forms of struggle adopted in response to threats of destruction or loss of territories, women's movements and feminist organizations have adopted constructive strategies, i.e. actions for the implementation of sustainable

development projects of development based on the use of their own resources, for example, through the recovery and teaching of ancestral agricultural practices (Borquez 2011).

3. Indigenous women movements do exist! Cases and examples

A vast literature on the experiences and activities developed by women and feminist movements, although difficult to retrieve, non-systematic, and sometimes not translated in any language, shows a multiplicity of forms and strategies. Some types of some practical experience of action are listed below.

3.1. Participation in public spaces

To raise their voices, women have entered the public sphere and claimed their right to participate in decision-making processes, especially those that have consequences on their life and their role within the community. Beyond exercising such a right in preexisting institutional spaces and civil society fora, women have organized popular assemblies and consultation processes. Moreover, they have not only accessed public space at local level, but have also voiced their claims in multilateral contexts, participating in important institutional processes.

Women have also organized collective spaces within their community, as well as at national and regional levels, that enable participants to meet, discuss, establish networks and share experiences, with the final aim of raising awareness, joining forces, and gaining visibility. These spaces are exclusively open to women, or they might be open to all members of the community and other organizations. Within these spaces, women can be leaders or contribute with resources, management and logistic skills, communication actions, knowledge, and other abilities. An example is the «Escuela Mujer y Minera» called for the first time in 2011 by CENSAT, which allows defenders and activists of the region to meet and discuss.

3.2. Networks and alliances

The creation of national and transnational networks among communities and organizations that struggle against common enemies is a fundamental characteristic of local resistance groups in the region, willing to raise awareness and improve the visibility of environmental and human rights violations that affect their territories and communities. This approach allows women's movements and

organizations to share resources, increase knowledge, and improve tools and strategies. Moreover, the creation of networks and alliances leads to more support also from external actors and the implementation of more effective collective actions. Important examples are the Red Unión Latinoamericana de Mujeres (ULAM) and the *Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Ambientales*.

3.3. Strikes, sit-ins, and marches

Women have played a fundamental active role in mobilization processes, such as protests, marches, sit-ins, strikes, street blockade, permanent occupation of lands and public and urban spaces, aimed at exercising pressure and impeding the implementation and advancement of extractive projects. They have been on the frontline of strikes and parades as leaders, as well as responsible for the logistics and the organizational aspects behind mobilization activities. Moreover, during demonstrations, women take care and protect children, the elderly, and the wounded, as well as prepare food and organize shelters during encampments and occupations. Women activists believe that this approach is an effective strategy of resistance, as they consider their presence at the frontline and their being women as a deterrent for political repression and socio-economic pressure. The Fifth Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples of Abya Yala (Picq, 2013) is an example of large-scale mobilization that encouraged communities to resist state-sponsored extractivism.

3.4. Advocacy actions

Women, especially those organized in associations and other formal groups, have adopted advocacy strategies to raise awareness among local, national, and international authorities about the violation of fundamental human rights in their territories. Their multilevel advocacy actions aim at influencing local and national public policies and decision-making procedures, as well as activating national and international protection mechanisms. By exerting pressure over political and social authorities and by bringing local concerns to the international community, women try to guarantee that the decisions taken by the local population are considered and implemented.

3.5. Communication strategies and awareness activities

Women have implemented a wide range of communication strategies, such as campaigns, publications, and petitions, to raise awareness and denounce environmental conflicts and the impact on human rights. Women's groups and feminist movements have established dialogues and discussions within their communities, as well as with other organizations and groups, to raise awareness and join forces for a common struggle beyond differences. Taking advantage of the potential of technology and the new means of communication, such as social networks, but also artistic performances, women have brought to light facts and personal histories and have spread their claims and denunciations to a wider public, in order to gain more attention and power in front of institutions and society in general. In this context, human rights discourse has the potential to act as a 'language of protest» (Raftopoulos 2017) and a common basis for transnational struggles, stressing the growing importance of the international human rights framework in the resistance process. This has resulted in increased awareness at different political and social levels, as well as greater attendance of mobilization processes and a higher level of protection for activists and human rights defenders.

3.6. Documentation, denunciation, and Judicial actions

In the Latin American context, women play a fundamental role in the preservation of historical collective memory within their communities. Based on their peculiar perspective, women document cases of violence, harassment, abuses of power, acts of criminalization, and human rights violation over their territories, to denounce the unlawful actions of multinational corporations and public and private forces. Women engage in research, data collection, and autonomous report writing, which provide information in contrast to the official one provided by corporations and governments. With the support of feminist and environmental organizations and networks, in some cases women have taken legal actions against perpetrators, transforming their denunciation into a powerful tool to ask governments to take responsibility for the violation of environmental and human rights. In this framework, «mainstream human rights discourses provide social movements and activists with the legal power to challenge extractivism and criticize the current development agenda.

3.7. Training

Nongovernmental organizations and other associations often provide training sessions for members of women's groups and feminist movements, with the aim of allowing intergenerational and interregional exchange of ideas and experiences, strengthening organizational processes, and providing knowledge about internationally recognized rights and the judicial tools necessary for the defence of their territories. Training activities are often provided within the spaces of resistance built by women at the local, national, or regional level.

3.8. Organization of and participation in prior, free, and informed consultation processes

Prior, free, and informed consultation processes allow communities to express their will about issues that affect their territories and lives. The relevance of these processes is enshrined in international treaties, which further emphasize the significant and valuable participation of women in environmental issues. However, the region lacks specific mechanisms to implement such provisions and suffers from the lack of a gender perspective in the existing participation mechanisms. In this context, women's movements are struggling for effective implementation of bottom-up consultation and participation strategies, by promoting the respect for the right of indigenous peoples to free, prior, and informed consent, as established by art. 6 of the *ILO Convention 169* (1989), and the duty of states to gain the consensus of indigenous communities about legislative and administrative measures that affect their territory, as required by the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the United Nations* (2007).

In the Latin America and Caribbean region, many minority communities also organize autonomous and communitarian consultation processes to manifest their decision without external pressure and in accordance with ancestral customs. These kinds of decision-making and participation processes, although not binding, allow communities to express their will through symbolic actions, surveys, secret ballots, or other mechanisms that require awareness and collective reflection. The social and political relevance of autonomous and communitarian consultation processes have increased visibility of the impact of extractivism and have resulted in the withdrawal of many exploitative projects.

In addition to these mechanisms, women are also the use of popular consultation, a tool aimed at expressing the will of the community on matters related to the protection of territories from environmental violence, in line with the democratic

rights to freedom of expression and demonstration enshrined in many legislative tools. This mechanism of democratic participation is often inscribed into constitutions and may take place at national, departmental, or municipal level. However, the binding character of this tool is subject to criticism, with subsequent obstacles to its implementation.

3.9. Daily resistance practices

Women's resistance manifests itself not only in the public sphere, but also in the private one. In fact, women are actively involved in the implementation of political and economic alternatives from their daily life. For example, in the fight for food sovereignty, women cultivate native seeds and use traditional or ancestral agricultural practices, in opposition to capitalist exploitative methods.

3.10. Solidarity

Solidarity is a fundamental aspect of the struggle advanced by women at the local, national, and regional level. Beyond all activities carried out and the networks established, women's movements recognize the importance of mutual support and care, which is guaranteed through constant communication with group members, other organizations and actors involved.

These multiple forms of resistance have challenged the prevailing vision of development, consolidating the role of women as agents of resistance and social change. In fact, women's activism and participation in the struggle against extractive policies and projects have produced decisive and meaningful changes at multiple levels. At the same time, women activists are particularly exposed to threats and significant risks in their daily human rights practice. Both social changes and risks will be exposed in the next paragraphs.

4. Cuerpo-Territorio against the system of exploitation

Despite women's historical participation in struggle for the protection of territories and human rights, only recently their participation in resistance processes has been widely recognized, allowing the deconstruction of the portrait of women as passive actors or victims of the process. Indeed, the renewed interpretation of the concept of *cuerpo-territorio* in Latin America as a space of resistance and resilience against

capitalist patriarchal and extractivist forces depicts women as active protagonists of social change. Through the multiple and differentiated resistance strategies implemented, women have contributed substantially to the achievement of important changes at multiple levels. On many occasions, women's struggles have resulted in the imposition of a ban on the entrance of multinational corporations in their territory or have determined the definitive or temporary interruption of exploitation processes (Benegiamo 2021). A meaningful example is the case of the activist in defense of human rights, Maxima Acuña de Chaupe, who in 2011 was subjected to a campaign of attacks and judicial harassment by the Yanacocha mining company. The firm accused her of using violence to illegally occupy the land they had purchased from the community as part of a package deal. As a subsistence farmer, Máxima Acuña stood up for her right to peacefully live off her own property, a plot of land in Tragadero Grande, Sorochuco, Cajamarca, in northern Peru. She became a member of the women's organizations Asociación de Mujeres en Defensa de la Vida and Unión Latinoamericana de Mujeres (ULAM), becoming an outspoken opponent of the mining project. Thanks to her struggle for the protection of the environment and human rights, in May 2017, the Supreme Court of Peru ruled that she did not commit any crime and did not illegally occupy land, definitely limiting the extractivist frontier (Frontline Defenders 2012).

Through the creation of autonomous spaces and the promotion of awareness-raising activities, women and feminist movements have stimulated solidarity and collective reflection about the brutal consequences of exploitative practices on lands and bodies, consequently strengthening communitarian resistance against capitalist forces and favoring the implementation of more democratic processes (Carvajal Echeverry 2015). Within these spaces of resistance, women share experiences and feelings about the impact of patriarchal extractivism on their bodies and fundamental rights, fomenting renewed awareness about their inextricable bond to the territory and enhancing the concept of *cuerpo-territorio* as a space of resistance (Carvajal Echeverry 2015). This awareness has strengthened women's self-esteem and belief in their own abilities (Borquez 2011), leading to greater participation and representation in the public space. Women challenge their exclusion from public affairs and decision-making processes, as imposed by the patriarchal system, and raise their voice to claim inclusion and recognition of their needs (AWID and WHRDIC 2017). In fact, actions of reaction and resistance combine the defence of territories with the protection of women's bodies to advance not only a short-term struggle but also a long-term political goal for the building of new societies based on emancipation rather than oppression (Cabnal 2010). By revendicating their territory, women not only revendicating their

space on Earth and their strict bound to the lands they live in, but they are advancing claims for the recognition of their position and role in society and within families (FAU-AL, 2016). As a matter of fact, being protagonists of this wave of antisystemic struggle, women have been able to advance their peculiar perspective and prioritize their specific needs, gaining recognition of their respectful role and obtaining the consideration of their voices (Borquez 2011).

As reported by Gator, Amazonian women who in October 2013 walked more than 200 km against the XI Ronda Petrolera in Ecuador affirmed: '*Defendemos el derecho de las mujeres a defender la vida, nuestros territorios, y hablar con nuestra propia voz*' (Gator 2014). The leading role in the struggles for resistance throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region has definitely increased women's power and promoted their visibility both in the private and public sphere, affecting multiple aspects of their lives (FAU-AI 2016). As a result of these crucial social developments, the *cuerpo-territorio* as space of resistance has generated significant transformations within the personal and collective sphere. The participation and leading role of women within the society have challenged the dominant patriarchal structure and the gender stereotypes that affect the perception of women as subordinated beings, substantially transforming power and gender relations and redefining roles within communities and families. However, it is important to note that improvements in women's conditions have simultaneously affected their vulnerability, exposing them to threats and significant risks.

5. The risk of visibility for women: marginalization, violence, and killing

Despite great achievements in the private and public sphere, women's protagonism in the fight against the dominant political and socioeconomic model of development has exposed them to high risks in their daily practice of human rights. The worrying escalation of violence, the increasing number of murders of environmental and human rights defenders, the growing cases of aggression, and the process of criminalization against women activists severely affect the vulnerability of women, with significant consequences on their physical and psychological well-being and their human rights. Women's vulnerability is further aggravated by the fact that, in addition to the same risks faced by their male counterparts, «women advocates often face additional and different risks and obstacles that are gender-based, intersectional, and shaped by established gender stereotypes and deeply held ideas and norms about who women are and how

women should be» (UN Human Rights Council 2019). In this framework, indigenous, Afro-descendant, and rural women are at increased risk of discrimination and attacks due to their activism and minority background. Especially women acting within environmental conflicts are often at a disadvantage in their resistance actions, as «they are often criticized for neglecting their domestic duties and endangering their families» (UN Human Right Council 2019). Furthermore, they are deprived of a safe environment and adequate legal protection systems, due to the political unwillingness to investigate attacks and the dominant presence of private actors, such as companies, private security guards, private media and even members of the community, who support capitalist development projects (FAU-AL 2018).

Despite various international and regional human rights instruments, claiming the protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRD) and States' formal commitments of states to respect, protect and fulfil their obligations, gaps in the recognition of HRD rights, weaknesses in the implementation processes, and systematic attempts to silence defenders are manifest throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region (FAU-AL 2018).

According to data collected by Front Line Defenders (2019), Human Right Defenders killed in 2018 in 27 countries were 321, 12% of which were women and 77% worked on land, indigenous people and environmental rights. The Latin American context has been the deadliest battlefield, recording 75% of the killings. The trend has been confirmed for 2019, with 304 killings, 13% of which were WHRD (Frontline Defenders, 2020). Behind the systematic killings of and the increasing acts of violence against women defenders, the reasons are multifaceted and strictly correlated with the specific context (UN Human Rights Council 2019). Women involved in resistance actions are often targeted with the accusation of challenging traditional notions and gender roles, especially in patriarchal societies. This generates hostility from both family and community members, as well as state actors. Similarly, the normalization of violence against women in regions experiencing militarization processes further exacerbates the climate of aggression against women defenders.

Finally, the process of globalization and the adoption of neoliberal policies based on extractivist practices have resulted in rising socioenvironmental conflicts and high levels of human rights abuses. Being at the forefront of resistance movements, women defenders have been victims of systematic attacks ordered by public forces, as well as nonstate actors, e.g. businesses, organized criminals, investors, and financial institutions, willing to impose the capitalist model of accumulation (Deonandan and Bell 2019).

Women activists are targeted as individuals and members of networks, collectives, and movements. In their daily human rights practice, as well as in their private life, indigenous, Afro-descendant, and rural women defenders are exposed to multiple forms of criminalization and harassment (Gatica 2018). In many cases women are also target of smear and defamation campaigns aimed at dismantling their public image and undermining the legitimacy of their claims (FAU-AL 2016). These forms of public shaming include attacks to their honor and reputation, with the accusation of not respecting their social role as mothers, wives, and caregivers (UN Human Rights Council 2019). Consequently, they are labeled as «bad mothers», «traitors», «guerrillas», «witches», «the enemy within», etc., and face stigmatization, alienation, and isolation from their family and community, increasing women's vulnerability to attacks. The work of women activists is also often discredited by actions of sexuality baiting, i.e., insinuations and false accusations related to their sexuality, sexual orientation, reproductive, or marital status. Stigmatization acts are carried out not only by corporations and public forces, but also by community members, who accuse women of neglecting their domestic responsibilities (AWID and WHRDIC 2017). As a consequence, women engaged in resistance against the system suffer enormous psychological pressure and are often forced to abandon their land and their activism. All these actions against defenders lead to the disarticulation of women's social organizations and limit the development of collective actions (Bermúdez 2014). They are also marginalized within their community, as well as within social movements and negotiation spaces (AWID and WHRDIC 2017). Their active participation in meetings and decision-making spaces is indeed often denied or limited through discrimination and intimidatory acts that impede or obstacle their participation, such as travel bans, interrogation, arbitrary detention, physical attacks, and other forms of harassment (UN Human Rights Council 2019). Even when women gain public space, their contribution is subtly rendered invisible, and their opinions are ignored or treated with skepticism. The systematic exclusion of women and the invisibility of their activism characterize also multilateral human rights systems, where multiple cases of denial and barriers to women's participation have been registered. Despite the recognition of these fundamental rights in most constitutions, women defenders are currently experiencing an increasing closure of civil society space and restrictions to freedom of expression and assembly. The implementation of aggressive practices of law, such as censorship and surveillance mechanisms, threatens the work of women defenders and represents a deterrent for activists (Okech et al. 2017). Furthermore, the militarization of public space and the adoption of private security systems to prevent and control resistance activities

substantially limit the struggle of women defenders. The criminalization process also encompasses also threats and harassment acts (FAU- AL 2018) against women, as well as against family members and loved ones (ISHR 2015). Insults, rumors, attacks to physical integrity, hate speech, death threats, kidnapping, judicial abuse, forced displacement, etc. are all harassment actions carried out by public forces, militaries, company workers, corporate representatives, as well as community members to neutralize women's activism and trigger feelings of guilt and pressure (FAU-AL 2015). In fact, women are often also accused by family and community members of violating sociocultural norms, and many girls are confined to home to prevent their involvement in resistance acts (UN Human Rights Council 2019). To pressure women activists to stop their efforts, private and public actors exercise multiple forms of violence against them. Women defenders are exposed to both verbal and physical abuse, both in both public and domestic spheres, as well as online (ISHR 2015). Verbal aggression encompasses public shame, sexual baiting, doxing, and hate speech. Moreover, beyond psychological violence, women defenders are exposed to physical aggressions that range from beating to rape, torture, sexual abuse, forced disappearance, and killing. In Latin America, extractivism-led violence adds to the gender-based violence and discrimination that characterizes the region (Raftopoulos 2017).

6. Cuerpo-territorio as a battlefield: new meaning for 'femicide'

The culmination of the violence escalation is the murder of women participating in feminist movements for the defense of the *cuerpo-territorio* and the enshrined environmental and human rights. As stated by Timm Hidalgo (2018), the disproportionate impact of extractivism on women's *cuerpo-territorio* makes the female body the main battlefield of extractivist violence. Hidalgo defines this form of violence also as extractivist femicide, where the word 'femicide' indicates a genocide and a form of hate against women that occur when historical conditions generate social practices that allow violent actions against the integrity and freedoms of women. Women are thus victims of environmental violence because of the patriarchal domination that extractivism contributes to perpetrate within society:

La violencia contra las mujeres en su expresión más infame, el femicidio, es una estrategia desterritorialización (...) por parte del capitalismo global, que necesita esos territorios para ejecutar sus megaproyectos de gran inversión (FAU-AL, 2018).

Similarly, Segato (2014) defines this kind of violence as 'feminine genocide', a crime of violence against the female and feminized body systematically carried out in the context of informal wars, typical of modernity and capitalism, to threaten the community and exhibit powerful masculinity. Considering the territorial paradigm that supports cognitive continuity between the body and territory, the final objective of this new capitalist patriarchal war is the corporal destruction of women, as it is conceived as a direct attack against the whole community. In fact, targets are indeed often leaders and members of communitarian feminist movements trying to build economic popular alternatives.

The threats and risks faced by women defenders constitute serious human rights violations and obstacles to their work of promotion and protection of the rights inherent to their *cuerpo-territorio*, as well as to their physical and psychological wellbeing (Okech et al. 2017).

As a consequence, many women stop participating in civil society activism and feminist movements due to the risks associated with the promotion of political and socioeconomic alternatives that destabilize the dominant capitalist patriarchal structure. This form of self-censorship actually fulfills the aim of state and non-state actors of silencing women's voices, putting an end to resistance processes and strengthening capitalist domination. The effects of the attacks against women activists thus materialize in the reduction of spaces for resistance. The deconstruction of these spaces inevitably leads to a reduction of support, collaboration, and solidarity among women, resulting in the further fragmentation of movements. In fact, the intensification of repressive measures, including the limitation to information dissemination and communication, impedes the strengthening of solidarity within groups and among members of transnational networks, exacerbating the divisions between women of different backgrounds and places, such as urban and rural women. This is also connected to a reduction in the material support provided by donors, which could decide to reduce or interrupt their contribution to feminist movements due to the actions of criminalization advanced against them. Another meaningful effect of the strenuous situation of women defenders is the loss of leadership and the return of women to their traditional role within the private sphere. This condition has intergenerational effects as it preserves the traditional gender and power roles also for the following generations of women. In addition, women activists are often forced to move or face imprisonment, limiting the possibility of transferring their knowledge and values to other women and future generations. Finally, beyond the physical harm that women defenders experience during attacks, they could also suffer trauma and psychological breakdown due to lack of support, continuous threats, and

uncertainty about the dangerous environment to which they are exposed. The triple condition of being women, pertaining to the rural, indigenous and Afro-descendant community, and being a defender, increases the vulnerability of women and requires the implementation of adequate means of protection, developed with a gender perspective (AWID 2013). Despite these substantial risks, the Latin American and Caribbean region has witnessed a growing participation of women in resistance activities, especially in environmental struggles. Beyond mobilization and protests against the dominant capitalist patriarchal extractivist system, women activists have advanced concrete political and economic alternatives.

7. In spite of everything: women as agents of change

The fourth wave of feminism is essentially a struggle against capitalist hegemony concretely expressed under the forms of patriarchy and extractivism, which strengthen unequal gender relations and cause environmental devastation and dispossession, with subsequent negative effects on women's human rights. In opposition to this dominant system, women and feminist movements are not only resisting, but also building political, social, and economic alternatives based on equality, empowerment, sustainability, human rights, and the protection of their *cuero-territorio*, inasmuch «claims against extractivism are ultimately claims to the right of self-determination» (Picq 2014). Women's agency provides new perspectives and innovative requests that are concretized in different proposals autonomously or collectively advanced and which aim at producing positive transformations at the community and individual level. The process of feminist resistance represents an alternative itself to the dominant system. To resist means stopping, opposing, rebelling against what does not allow a community to develop its life and culture. As affirmed by Jorge Caballero, a Colombian indigenous leader, local communities that oppose neoliberal globalization, individualism, consumption-based society and exploitation of nature are themselves an alternative and their territories are a hope (Roa Avendano 2014). Resistance is thus an alternative to the normalization advanced by capitalism and colonialism it is a struggle that shows what has been made invisible and silent for long and which aims at the reconstruction and strengthening of the links that have been damaged. Consequently, new perspectives have emerged that challenge the existent political and economic paradigm imposed by capitalism and overcome the related systems of patriarchy and extractivism. Zibechi (2008) affirms that in the fire of resistance,

los de abajo have built 'other territories', different from those of capital and multinationals, which rise, grow and expand in multiple spaces of communities.

Women have been the protagonists of this resistance process, which is not simply based on the rejection of predatory policies and projects, but also on the construction of an alternative world. In fact, women have advanced alternative proposals based on their unique perspective and differentiated experiences of domination. Within this framework, they have established a new political space for human rights-based resistance (Raftopoulos 2017) and have proposed new forms of socioeconomic production and reproduction, grounded in a new cosmovision based on the relation between territory and body, and the sovereignty over them (Fernandes 2018). They essentially propose a world that recognizes their political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights.

8. The role of the commons

Starting from the fight against extractivism, women have built new economies based on the rethinking and re-elaboration of the conception of nature, which is not merely a factor of production, but rather an aggregation of values, experiences, and knowledge that enhances the natural world, as a conjunction of "ancestrality", customs, and beliefs (Roa Avendano 2014). The harmonization between human beings and nature requires thus the re-evaluation of the relation with territory, which women conceived as sources of life reproduction and subsistence.

In this sense, it is interesting to conclude with a short discussion of the role of the «commons» as argued by Silvia Federici in many different speeches and writings. Indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural women in Latin America enhance the reproductive role of territories and women by creating cooperative forms of social reproduction within the community, consisting of the organization of reproduction activities in public collective spaces. This collectivization of reproductive labour points at reducing the cost of reproduction and protect members from poverty, state violence, and gender-based violence. Federici defines this community-based alternative as *commons-based economy*. Although the concept of commons is still under debate, Federici identifies this new model as a powerful women-led economic and political alternative to capitalism, where «the idea of commons expresses a broader conception of property, referring to social goods, lands, territories, forests, meadows, and streams, or communicative spaces, that a community, not the state or any individual, collectively owns, manages and controls» (Federici 2019). Based on intense social cooperation, community

intended as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and responsibility: to each other, the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals represent the core of this system. Commons have not to be strictly defined as material things, but rather they represent social relations and solidarity bonds produced in the process of collectivization.

Starting from the recognition of the existence of multiple forms of commons, Federici identifies some criteria to define them. Firstly, commons are autonomous spaces aimed at overcoming internal divisions and differences and constructing self-government and new forms of production. Secondly, shared property, intended as shared natural or social wealth, is a key aspect of commons. Third, reproduction is based on shared knowledge and care capacities, where everyone has equal access to the necessary means of production and reproduction. Moreover, regulations establishing entitlements and obligations about the use and care of common wealth are important for the functioning of commons. A fundamental aspect is also the community, which is the core of reproduction and social cooperation. This relation of reciprocity and responsibility for the care and production of the shared wealth is another essential element of common-based economies. To strengthen the communal bond, this system is based on collective decision-making procedures such as participatory assemblies and other forms of direct democracy. Furthermore, to develop a collective subject, women proposing this alternative foster common interest and reject hierarchies and inequalities. Finally, commons must not be confused with the notion of public, i.e., they are not owned or regulated by the state.

Considering commons from a feminist perspective as sources of reproduction, women have been more dependent on communal resources compared to men, and this explains their active struggle against primitive accumulation and commercialization of nature. Being women's sources of reproductive work, they should take the initiative to claim the recognition of the house as the centre of collective life and cooperation (Federici 2019). As Federici warns, assigning women this task of communing/collectivizing reproduction is not to concede to a naturalistic conception of 'femininity' it is not to naturalize the home as a female vocation. It is refusing to obliterate the collective experiences, knowledge, and struggles that women have accumulated concerning reproductive work, whose history has been an essential part of our resistance to capitalism. Therefore, it is women who must build the new commons, so that they do not remain transient spaces, temporary autonomous zones, but become the foundation of new forms of social reproduction.

Conclusion: is a new world possible?

In summary, women's resistance in the LAC region is constructing an alternative economic world based on more cooperative forms of existence and non-capitalist principles. These alternatives have «boosted the senses of solidarity and identity of the community and demonstrated the ability of women to reproduce their lives without having to be completely dependent on the market. These alternative economic systems recognize important concepts such as food sovereignty and environmental rights, as well as the fundamental role in society, thus improving the social and political condition of women.

Through collective efforts, indigenous women, Afro-descendant and *campesino* women have advanced economic and political alternatives that guarantee social reproduction and the protection of human rights and the environment. Again, in the words of Federici, these movements of resistance are «re-enchanting the world». It means that they are building an alternative to predatory capitalism based on «a constitutive interaction between our bodies and an 'outside' – call it the cosmos, the world of nature – that has been immensely productive of capacities and collective visions and imagination» (Federici 2012).

In the context of extractivism, the impact on the *cuerpo-territorio* of women has indeed revitalized social cohesion, stimulating the rise of various feminist resistance movements opposing patriarchal capitalism and fighting for social change through alternative economic and political proposals. It is indeed where social and communal bonds are the strongest that capitalism is reversed. As affirmed by Federici: grassroots women's communalism today leads to the production of a new reality, shapes a collective identity, constitutes a counter-power in the home and the community, and opens a process of self-valorization and self-determination (Federici 2012). In rural, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities in the LAC region, the fourth wave of feminism is definitely creating a new world (Zibechi 2015).

References

- Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC). 2017. "Women Human Rights Defenders Confronting Extractive Industries: An Overview of Critical Risks and Human Rights Obligations." https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/whrds-confronting_extractive_industries_report-eng.pdf (access: December 25th 2023).
- Benegiamo, Maura. 2021. *La terra dentro il capitale. Conflitti, crisi ecologica e sviluppo nel delta del Senegal*. Nocera Inferiore: Orthotes.
- Bermudez, Rosa. 2014. *Los territorios, la minería y nosotras: las mujeres nos preguntamos*. Bogotá: Censat Agua Viva – Amigos de la tierra Colombia.
- Bórquez, Rita. 2011. "Mujeres indígenas, campesinas y su organización por el acceso a la tierra." In Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales (CEPES), *Mujer Rural: Cambios y Persistencias en América Latina*, Perú (Lima), 59-84. <https://biblio.flacsoandes.edu.ec/libros/digital/55683.pdf> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Cabnal, Lorena. 2010. *Feminismos diversos: Feminismo comunitario*. Segovia: ACSUR.
- Carvajal Echeverry, Laura Maria. 2015. "Women's participation in consultation processes within the framework of defense of territories and nature in Latin America." In FAU-AL, *Women Defending the Territory. Experiences of participation in Latin America*, 9-39; https://www.universal-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Women-defending.-UAF_LA.pdf (access: July 15th 2023).
- CENSAT. 2015. "Memorias Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres defensoras de la vida frente al extractivismo. Informe Mujeres y extractivismo - 18 al 20 de Agosto de 2015."
- CENSAT. (n.d.). "Escuela Mujer y Minería," <https://censat.org/es/escuela-de-la-sustentabilidad/escuela-mujer-y-mineria> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Cieza, Daniel 2010. *Argentina ante el bicentenario: La sociedad, el estado y los actores en un país conflictivo*. Buenos Aires: De la Campana.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>

Cuenca Sempertegui, Angela and Aliaga, Carmen. 2014. "Participation of Peasant Indigenous Women In Contexts of Environmental Violence in Bolivia." In FAU-AL. *Women Defending the Territory. Experiences of participation in Latin America*, 71-80 <https://www.lamarea.com/2014/02/17/ecuador-extractivismo-mujeres/>. (access: July 15th 2023).

Deonandan, Kalowatie and Bell, Coleen. 2019. "Discipline and Punish: Gendered Dimensions of Violence in Extractive Development." *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 31, 1: 24-57.

<https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/abs/10.3138/cjwl.31.1.03> (access: July 15th 2023).

Dorronzoro, Begoña. 2013. *El territorio cuerpo-tierra como espacio-tiempo de resistencias y luchas en las mujeres indígenas y originarias*. IV Coloquio Internacional de Doctorandos/as do CES, 2013, 6-7.

Echart Muñoz, Enara e Villarreal, Maria Del Carmen. 2019. "Women's Struggles Against Extractivism in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Contexto Internacional* 41, 2.

<https://www.scielo.br/j/cint/a/xryLFTDmtg6hpnkz7fy3wKz/?format=pdf&lang=en> (access: July 15th 2023).

FAU-AL. Fondo de Acción Urgente América Latina y el Caribe. 2015. *Women Defending the Territory. Experiences of participation in Latin America*, Colombia (Bogotá). <https://collective-protection.info/women-defending-the-territory-experiences-of-participation-in-latin-america> (access: July 15th 2023).

FAU-AL. Fondo de Acción Urgente América Latina y el Caribe. 2016. *Modalidades de criminalización y limitaciones a la efectiva participación de las mujeres defensoras de derechos ambientales, los territorios y la naturaleza en las Américas - Actualización 2016*, Colombia (Bogotá). <https://im-defensoras.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Actualizacion-2016-FAU-Criminalizaci%C3%B3n.pdf> (access: July 15th 2023).

FAU-AL Fondo de Acción Urgente América Latina y el Caribe. 2016. *Extractivismo en América Latina. Impacto en la vida de las mujeres y propuestas de defensa del territorio*, Colombia (Bogotá). https://fondoaccionurgente.org.co/site/assets/files/1175/extractivismo_en_america_latina.pdf (access: July 15th 2023).

- FAU- AL Fondo de Acción Urgente América Latina y el Caribe. 2018. *Impunidad de las violencias contra mujeres defensoras de los territorios, los bienes comunes y la naturaleza en América Latina. Informe regional*, Colombia (Bogotá). https://fondoaccionurgente.org.co/site/assets/files/1073/resumen_espanol_web.pdf (access: July 15th 2023).
- Federici, Silvia. 2012. *Revolution at Point Zero. Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. Brooklyn, NY: PM Press.
- Federici, Silvia. 2016. *We Have Seen Other Countries and Have Another Culture. Migrant Domestic Workers and The International Production and Circulation of Feminist Knowledge and Organization*. WorkingUSA, 19, 9-23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/wusa.12224>
- Federici, Silvia. 2019. *Re-enchanting the world. Feminisms and the Politics of the Commons*, Oakland (CA): PM Press.
- Fernandes, Marianna. 2018. *Feminist alternatives to predatory extractivism: Contributions and experiences from Latin America, Feminist Dialogue Series*, n. 7. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mosambik/15205.pdf> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Front Line Defenders. 2019. *Front Line Defenders Global Analysis 2018*. <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/global-analysis-2018> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Front Line Defenders. 2020. *Front Line Defenders Global Analysis 2019* <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/global-analysis-2019> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Front Line Defenders. n.d. *Case history: Máxima Acuña de Chaupe*, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/case-history-maxima-acuna-de-chaupe> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Gartor, Miriam. 2014. "El feminismo reactiva la lucha contra el 'extractivismo' en América Latina". *Lamarea* 95. <https://www.lamarea.com/2014/02/17/ecuador-extractivismo-mujeres/> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Gatica, Sara. 2018. *Revolution Assumes the Face of Women from Latin America: Struggles of the Mothers of Ituzaingó against Environmental Contamination by Monsanto in Córdoba, Argentina*.

- https://www.universal-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Women-defending-UAF_LA.pdf (access: July 15th 2023).
- ISHR. International Service for Human Rights. 2015. *El rol de las empresas y los Estados en las violaciones contra los defensores y las defensoras de los derechos de la tierra, el territorio y el ambiente*, Informe Conjunto de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil a la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos 156^o periodo de sesiones. <https://ishr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/informecoalicionempresastierraishr-1.pdf> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Oliveira, Alessandro José. 2020. *Mujeres Creando: militantes feministas e a arte de habitar o contraditório*, <https://doi.org/10.1590/18094449202000600009>.
- Okech, Awino et al. 2017. *Resistencia & Resiliencia. Reflexiones sobre el Cierre de Espacios para la Sociedad Civil, Fondo de Acción Urgente-África y FAU-AL*, https://urgentactionfund.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2018/08/Feminist-Resistance-and-Resilience-ESPAN%CC%83OL-web-pag-doble.pdf (access: July 15th 2023).
- Picq, Manuela. 2013. *Indigenous Continental Summits: The International Politics of Resistance*, <https://nacla.org/news/2013/12/7/indigenous-continental-summits-international-politics-resistance> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Picq, Manuela. 2014. *Self-determination as anti-extractivism: how indigenous resistance challenges world politics, Restoring Indigenous Self-Determination: Theoretical and Practical Approaches*. Bristol, UK: E-International Relations, 26-33, <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=2TBTnUkAAAJ&hl=en> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Politi, Daniel e Londono, Ernesto. 2021. "Argentine President Offends With Comment: 'Brazilians Emerged from the Jungle'", *The New York Times*, June 10, 2021.
- Raftopoulos, Malayna. 2017. "Contemporary debates on social-environmental conflicts, extractivism and human rights in Latin America." *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 21, 4: 387-404. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642987.2017.1301035> (access: July 15th 2023).
- Roa Avendano, Tatiana. 2014. *Época de resistencias al extractivismo*. In CENSAT, *Extractivismo: Conflictos y resistencias*, Colombia (Bogotá), 39-72. [RoaNavasExtractivismoConflictosResistencias.pdf](#) (access: July 15th 2023).

Ruiz-Chiriboga, Oswaldo. 2006. "The Right to Cultural Identity of Indigenous Peoples and National Minorities: A Look from the Inter-American System." *SUR International Journal on Human Rights* 5, 42-69, available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2306101>.

Segato, Rita Laura. 2014. "Las nuevas formas de la guerra y el cuerpo de las mujeres". *Revista Sociedade e Estado*, 29 (2), 341-371. <https://www.scielo.br/j/se/a/XSfjZV5K7f9HkTy5SLTp7jw/?lang=es> (access: July 15th 2023).

Timm Hidalgo, Anna Karina *et al.* 2018. "Femicidio extractivista. Reflexiones sobre la violencia hacia las mujeres defensoras del agua y los territorios". In *Mujeres en defensa de territorios. Reflexiones feministas frente al extractivismo*, ed. 1, Santiago de Chile, Fundación Heinrich Böll, Cono Sur. https://cl.boell.org/sites/default/files/mujeres_defensa_territorios_web.pdf (access: July 15th 2023).

UN Human Rights Council. 2019. *Situation of women human rights defenders. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, A/HRC/40/60*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1663970> (access: July 15th 2023).

Vargas, Virginia. 2017. "Some Thoughts on New Epistemologies in Latin American Feminisms. Gender, Development and Social Change". In *Bodies in Resistance*, a cura di Wendy Harcourt. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 295-309.

Zibechi, Raoul. 2015. *Il "mondo altro" in movimento. Movimenti sociali in America Latina*, trad. Caprini F. and Vitalesta E. Roma: Nova Delphi.

Zibechi, Raoul. 2008. *Territorios en resistencia: Cartografía política de las periferias urbanas latinoamericanas*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Lavaca.

Lorenza Perini Researcher at the Department of Political Science, Law and International Studies (SPGI) of the University of Padua. She teaches Gender, Eu politics and globalization. She is a member of the Equal Opportunities Commission and of the Regional Studies Center in the same university. She has a PHD in CONTEMPORARY HISTORY at the University of Bologna, Italy and a second PHD in URBAN PLANNING at IUAV, Institute of Architecture, Venice, Italy. RESEARCH INTERESTS: Citizenship of rights and its evolutions; Feminisms and feminist policies and practices; Gender perspective approach in Public Policy Analysis.

E-mail: Lorenza.perini@unipd.it