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## Communitarian Feminism in Latin America

To celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Praktyka Teoretyczna* journal, we have invited our long-lasting collaborators and comrades to reflect once again on the concept of the common and its possible futures by posing the following questions: a) what is the most important aspect of the current struggles for the common?; b) what are the biggest challenges for the commonist politics of the future?; and c) where in the ongoing struggles do you see a potential for scaling-up and spreading organisation based on the common? In his reply, Luis Martinez Andrade situates his answer in the Latin American context by drawing our attention to the contemporary struggles of communitarian feminists and indigenous movements.

Keywords: the common, feminism, Latin America, indigenous movements, accumulation by dispossession

Since the sixteenth century in Latin America and the Caribbean, we can observe the existence of three mechanisms that have configured “the coloniality of power” as the formation of a dependant capitalism. They are 1) land concentration by the landowners; 2) the practice of monoculture, aiming to satisfy the demand of the external markets (once also represented in the plantation regime), and 3) mining (expressed in the gold or silver cycles and, currently, in the raw material extractivism). As a result of these practices, we can observe a despoilment of natural resources, causing terrible levels of inequality and social exclusion, but also an unprecedented environmental deterioration. Furthermore, the modern/colonial dynamics of capitalism installed indigenous and Afro-descendant populations at the lowest level of the socio-economic pyramid.

For Breny Mendoza, the Honduran political scientist, the transition to neoliberal democracy implied more a continuity than a break with the ancient structures of exploitation, resulting in the configuration of the *coloniality of democracy* (Mendoza 2014, 249). Indeed, the transition to democracy sharpened the process of NGOization in the region and accelerated the process of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005), creating the conditions – objective as well as subjective – for commoner riots, popular uprisings and ethnic/class revolts. If the *Caracazo* of 1989, the indigenous mobilizations of 1990, the Zapatista uprising of 1994 and the Cochabamba Water War in 2000, had already expressed a rejection of the policies of the *Washington consensus* applied by neoliberal governments, during the decade 2000–2010, popular movements continued to confront the extractivist logic imposed in Latin America. In this context, specifically in Bolivia and Guatemala, the proposal of *communitarian feminism* emerged at the end of the decade.

Founded in the city of La Paz in 1992, the anarchist collective *Creating Women* has been one of the main organisations responsible not only for the *decolonization of feminism*, but also for the emergence of *communitarian feminism*. From the public provocation, through the slogans (graffiti) painted on the walls of Bolivian streets (“Take your rosaries out of our ovaries”, “There is nothing more similar to a right-wing macho than a left-wing macho”, “The land is not for sale, the land will be defended”, “Disobedience, because of you I will be happy” or “Because Evo does not know how to be a father, he does not understand what it is to be a mother” (Cúneo & Cascó 2013, 108-111), to the production of their own theory – which de-patriarchates the forms of social organization, some militants of this group, each in their own way,

have denounced the dire consequences of “the technocracy of gender”. Although some of them took different paths in 2002, their criticisms and approaches continued to confront the ideological and historical bases of patriarchal violence.

Distancing herself from the supposed theory of harmonic complementarity between men and women that reigned in pre-Columbian societies, Julieta Paredes argues that a “patriarchal connection” occurred during the colonization of the Americas, when white men established a sort of a *masculine pact* with indigenous men to subdue the women of their respective communities, and thus exclude them from the political arena. In 2010, the Bolivian Aymara feminist Julieta Paredes, in her work *Hilando Fino. From communitarian feminism*, made not only an epistemological break with Western feminism, but also demystified of the notion of chacha-warmi, through a reconceptualization of the complementary couple. In this regard she writes that: “The community is made up of women and men as two essential, complementary, non-hierarchical, reciprocal and autonomous from each other halves. Which does not necessarily mean compulsory heterosexuality, because we are not talking about a couple, but about political representation, we are not talking about family, but about community” (Paredes 2013, 87). Without falling into simplistic oppositions, I consider that Julieta Paredes’ proposal is fundamental for avoiding the *essentialisms* of some political perspectives.

It is important to mention that in Julieta Paredes’ text the question of social interventions from the body is central both for the de-patriarchalization of social relations and for the defence of the conditions of social reproduction. Indeed, the theme of corporality (and its care) is closely linked to the issue of defending the territory. Hence, it is not fortuitous that in the struggles of popular and liberation movements in Latin America and the Caribbean, the body/territory link occupies a privileged place. From the city of Esquel, located in Argentinian province of Chubut, to the sacred territory of Wirikuta (Mexican state of San Luis Potosí), passing through the Peruvian city of Cajamarca and San José del Golfo in Guatemala, we can observe that conflicts over mining projects have increased in recent years. However, we also observe a relationship between socio-environmental and feminist struggles. In that sense, Lorena Cabnal recognizes that: “the defence of the territory-land so that it is free from mining is very generalized, but within it live the bodies of women, which are experiencing oppression and violence. Hence the approach to recovery and defence of the very first territory; territory-body” (quoted in: Cúneo & Cascó 2013, 363).

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It was precisely during those years that the mining consortiums increased their presence in the region, and by 2009 the conflict between the government and the communities had become unavoidable. In this way, the slogan “recovery and defence of the territory”, central in the fight against mining projects, also became the basis of community feminism.

The Mayan communitarian feminist Lorena Cabnal, after having studied psychology at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala, in 2002 made the decision to go to the mountain of Xalapán. Two years later, with other colleagues, she founded Amixmasaj (association of indigenous women of Santa María de Xalapán), an autonomous organization that under the idea of “defense of the land-body territory” carried out a very important awareness-raising work in the Guatemalan department of Jalapa. It was precisely during those years that the mining consortiums increased their presence in the region, and by 2009 the conflict between the government and the communities had become unavoidable. In this way, the slogan “recovery and defence of the territory”, central in the fight against mining projects, also became the basis of community feminism. Although Julieta Paredes and Lorena Cabnal agreed and exchanged views on patriarchal domination during the celebration of the VIII Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Lesbian Meeting organized from October 2010 in Guatemala City, it was not until 2012 that they began to share common ideas focused on communitarian feminism (see. Falquet 2014).

For his part, David Harvey proposes that the new dynamics of capital should be understood through the notion of “accumulation by dispossession”, where the *enclosure of the commons* and the liberalization of markets become the main features of neoliberalism. The violent character of capital is expressed through the expropriation of land and knowledge of indigenous and peasant communities. According to Harvey, the general expansionist logic of the capitalist system tends to take refuge in new territories or spaces, in order to continue the incessant search for profit. That is why the struggles in defence of the territory – or even of common goods - represent a moment of rupture with the system. It is not coincidental that Harvey identifies the 1994 uprising of the indigenous Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico with the fight against the privatization of the commons.

In Guatemala, for more than five years now, the National Movement of Weavers, led by the *Asociación Femenina para el Desarrollo de Sacatepéquez* (AFEDDES), has fought for the recognition of the collective property of indigenous peoples against the merchandising of the Mayan culture and of textile art and, therefore, faces the logic of privatization of the neoliberal model. One can also mention the Mayan indigenous movement that opposes the process of “accumulation by dispossession” expressed in the “Renace Hydroelectric Complex”, which was built by a Spanish emporium and pollutes the Cahabón River. It goes without saying that the ecological and feminist dimension is present in these

struggles. In this sense, the defence of the commons by communitarian feminism is important not only for the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles in this new millennium, but it is also a key piece in the design of an *eco-socialist project* which, paraphrasing the Marxist thinker José Carlos Mariátegui, will be a *heroic creation*.

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**Abstrakt:** Z okazji 10 urodzin *Praktyki Teoretycznej* zaprosiliśmy naszych wieloletnich współpracowników i towarzyszy do wspólnego rozważenia przyszłości tego, co wspólne. Poprosiliśmy ich o zmierzenie się z następującymi pytaniami: a) co jest najważniejszym aspektem współczesnych walk o to, co wspólne?; b) jakie największe wyzwania stoją w przyszłości przed polityką tego, co wspólne?; c) gdzie w ramach toczonych walk wiedzieć potencjał na rozwijanie i poszerzanie organizacji opartej na tym, co wspólne? Luis Martinez Andrade umieszcza swoją odpowiedź na powyższe pytania w kontekście Ameryki Łacińskiej, zwracając uwagę na współczesne walki ruchów feministycznych i rdzennej ludności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** to, co wspólne; feminizm, Ameryka Łacińska, akumulacja przez wyłączenie