

# Territory Body - Body Territory

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Abya Yala Communitarian-Feminism<sup>2</sup> [Feminismo Comunitario in Spanish] is the organic movement born from the process of change in Bolivia in 2003, which has allowed us not only to challenge the established orders but, above all, to elaborate a methodology, a path, that allow us to produce proposals for solutions for a planet and a life trapped in a world system that is patriarchal, colonialist, and capitalist. The possible solutions undoubtedly present themselves as globally coordinated territorial liberations, which together build the release of humanity and the planet from the current situation of hopelessness and individualism, in which our world and the planet today unfolds in the midst of suffering, bewilderment, agony, and profound struggles of resistance and processes of revolutionary hopes.

It is from our bodies of indigenous women, impoverished rural and urban workers, that we speak of hopes, we speak of and propose solutions from our daily political practices, which are not necessarily theories, but rather political social practices and knowledge; which we have systematized by ourselves and now project, and from which we derive revolutionary proposals. We have developed a path, our own methodology that consists of seeking an explanation of the causes of our conditions and situations, of our pain, but from where we also draw the strength of our dreams, the persistence and historical stub-

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1 Translated from Spanish by Lívia de Souza Lima and Edith Otero Quezada.

2 Sometimes we write these words together [Communitarian-Feminism/Feminismo Comunitario] to remind that it is a concept created by Julieta Paredes Carvajal within the process of changes of the Bolivian people and it proposes the epistemic autonomy and the decolonization of the struggles of indigenous women from Abya Yala. Abya Yala Communitarian-Feminism is not a current of feminism (Paredes Carvajal 2020).

bornness of continuing to exist as communities [pueblos]<sup>3</sup>, as women of our communities who dream of a world of *Vivir Bien*<sup>4</sup>.

Undoubtedly it is not enough to explain; we have to transform and revolutionize the reality that surrounds us; that is why Bolivia and the Process of Change, as we call it, made a fundamental revolutionary imprint on Abya Yala Communitarian-Feminism, which is to strengthen the hope that another world is possible, that utopia is a word that describes what we are doing and what we can do. We can take care of the planet, take care of our lives, be happy and live well, indulging ourselves the romantic notions we had of revolution, love, happiness, and politics back when we were 18. Today, as we have matured, we still believe it is possible, but only under two preconditions:

- The first is: with, from and for women as half of every community.
- The second is: in the Community of Communities, as a way of cultivating and fostering individuality in a territorial community, not individualism.

## 1. Decolonizing Bodies from Feminism

Abya Yala Communitarian-Feminism starts from the political, philosophical, and conceptual basis that women are half of everything; it is radically opposed to what has been done so far from the hegemonic spaces of political and philo-

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3 Translators' note: the notion of "pueblo" is difficult to translate into English because it has multiple meanings. "It can refer to a village or small town, as a descriptor but also as a place related to one's identity, *mi pueblo* (my village, my place of origin); it has a more extensive sense of 'the people' [...] It also has the sense which we have sometimes adopted here of "community" in English, with the amorphous boundaries that word also connotes" (Paredes Carvajal, Julieta/Cerullo, Margaret/Carcelen-Estrada, Antonia 2015: 11).

4 Translators' note: As Paredes Carvajal, Julieta/Cerullo, Margaret/Carcelen-Estrada, Antonia (2015) explain, the notion of "vivir bien" is related to the paradigm of "Buen Vivir", which "is a moral/political paradigm opposed to the developmentalist idea of "living better" – at the expense of others" (36). We would also like to mention the complexity of doing an intercultural translation that grasps all the meanings of the concept of "Buen Vivir" since it also includes the collective, communitarian well-being and the pursuit of a harmonic relationship between the human, the non-human, and nature. This notion and others such as "the Rights of Nature" have been integrated into the political constitutions of countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia.

sophical thought, where women are seen **as a minority**<sup>5</sup> to be tutored, and not as a half that has rights. Euro-centered feminist women are complicit with this reductionism and tutelage, segmenting women into classes a, b, c; third-world women, indigenous women, lesbian, young women, elderly women, women, settlers, etc. An imaginary that naturalizes women's exploitation and creates oppression.

It is the best strategy to reduce and corner us into the conception of a “vulnerable minority”, to annul us and take away the political capacity of our demands and therefore dismiss half of the revolutionary force of peoples and organizations.

Women in the world share the same body, forming an existential, biogenetic, historical, spiritual, sexual, and political unit. In other words, our bodies naturally express the varieties of nature, skin tones, size, thickness, and other characteristics of the bodies in the different territories. In nature – where there are no hierarchies of colors or sizes – all are important, unrepeatable, and indispensable. Throughout history, human action has built **conditions and situations** in which hierarchies and dominations have been created as a result of this systemic construction.

Hierarchies among women, then, are not natural, but rather created by political and economic interests; we – Communitarian-Feminists – denaturalize the hierarchies of class and race among women, the relations of power, usufruct, exploitation, discrimination, and oppression among women, to position them in the place of responsibilities and complicities. Women and our bodies are in the midst of power relations in which we participate as accomplices, victims, objects, and subjects. Therefore, certain women can be exploiters and oppressors of other women, men, and nature.

For the most part, Eurocentric feminists in institutions, NGOs, international organizations, and political parties act as accomplices of these colonialist and capitalist hierarchies. It is essential to unveil these relationships between women to better situate both the de-patriarchalizing [*despatriarcalización*] and decolonizing analysis of Abya Yala Communitarian-Feminism, and thus understand what the Community of Communities is claiming and proposing to the world.

European and North American feminists took better advantage of the neoliberal readjustment than we did, to the point that women doctors, sociologists, and engineers from Latin America migrated to those countries to clean

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5 All emphases and capitalizations in the text are by the author, Julieta Paredes Carvajal.

their toilets and pick up their garbage. Why did they functionalize the women of our peoples to the ambitions of patriarchy, colonialism, and neoliberalism? It would be important to hear an answer.

What we propose from our struggles as Communitarian-Feminists is a political discussion on how to continue fighting against the patriarchal system by those of us who want to continue fighting.

## 2. Decolonizing Concepts

### 2.1 What is Patriarchy According to Abya Yala Communitarian-Feminism?

For feminists of different stripes, patriarchy is the relationship of oppression or domination of men towards women, either as a system of oppression or as a relationship of oppression of men towards women, which can be extended to feminized bodies. We, Communitarian-Feminists, understand “patriarchy” as:

The system of all oppressions and dominations, all exploitations, all violences, and discriminations that humanity (men, women, intersex people) and nature experience. A system of domination, oppression, structural violence and death, historically built on women’s biogenetic, historical, spiritual, sexual, and political existential body (Paredes Carvajal 2016: 32).

This conception of the patriarchal system is helpful for our struggles because we affirm that women experience all the forms of oppression that men experience. Still, there is an oppression that is only geared towards our bodies as women, as defined before. In other words, being a woman constitutes, as such, another form of oppression and, at the same time, aggravates the forms of oppression we share with men. In other words, being a woman is the basis on which oppressions are built and invented (Paredes Carvajal 2016).

Women’s bodies have been and are the first material basis on which the domination and subordination of history are structured. On it rests the system of all forms of oppression, and even today, it continues to be the base system of domination: The most powerful and enduring system of inequality, in short, is the *system of domination*. It is not the superficiality of pitting all women against all men; our alliances depend on the revolutionary struggles that bind us.

## 2.2 What is the Ancestral Patriarchy?

It means neither natural nor original, much less original. To our indigenous brothers, the Spanish colonial invasion was what brought and imported *machismo* to our lands, which completely ignores all the data that tells us about the existence of what we call pre-colonial or ancestral patriarchy and that added to the patriarchy of the Spanish invaders, producing Interlocking Phallocentric Patriarchies. In our book *Hilando Fino, desde el feminismo comunitario* [Spinning with Care: Perspectives from Communitarian Feminism], we called it Interlocking Patriarchies [Entroque Patriarcal]<sup>6</sup> (Paredes Carvajal 2009: 24). That is to say that, in the colonial event of 1492, although our indigenous grandfathers experienced colonial oppression in their bodies, the indigenous grandmothers experienced it twofold.

To use the term patriarchy exclusively to designate the social structure that invaded our territories, that is, the colony, is to disregard our own forms of domination before the Spanish colonial invasion; not recognizing the power that the Inca had over the women of his empire, managing the *acllas*, also called virgins of the sun, as an instrument of lubrication of the political and economic apparatus of his empire.

Men in the Inca empire felt honored when the Inca paid for their loyalty with women. Male fathers – in this case Aymara, but not only – felt honored when the Inca's emissary chose their child daughter to become an *aclla* and take her to the *aclla wasi*, the house where the *acllas* lived, where this girl would be raised to be used in various ways. Given to Inca warrior chiefs for sexual purposes, killed in sacrifices, or exploited in lifelong servitude for the benefit of the ruling caste (Silverblatt 1996).

And this male father – in this case, Aymara – felt proud when his daughter was taken as yet another of the Inca's wives, that is, as the Inca's mistress. What does this data reveal, if not the coincidence – although in different ways – of using women as sexual booty, practiced by the Spaniards and the indigenous alike? We indigenous people are “neither better nor worse”. As any human be-

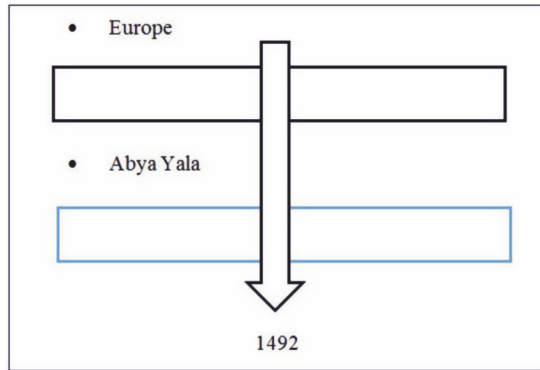
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6 Translators' note: As Paredes Carvajal, Julieta/Cerullo, Margaret/Carcelen-Estrada, Antonia (2015) explain, Julieta Paredes Carvajal' concept of “entronque patriarcal” could be translated as “interlocking patriarchies’ [which] is a metaphorical image drawn from the construction of fences by joining tree trunks on top of one another to create a strong – phallicized – structure” (26).

ing, we have made ethical decisions throughout our history, unless we are not considered human.

### 3. Decolonizing Time

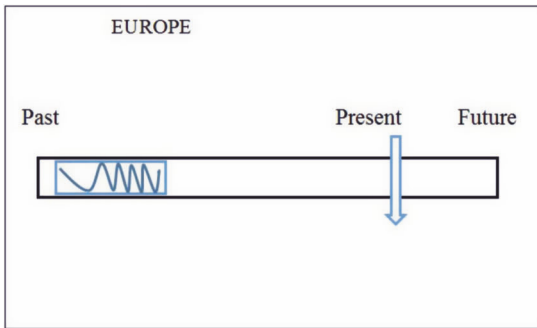
*Fig. 1: Parallelisms and contemporaneity of the times*



Source: Paredes Carvajal 2020: 37

The colonial view of feminists and Eurocentric thought affirms that the patriarchy in our territories is derived from the European patriarchy, or an underdeveloped, backward form of patriarchy with respect to Europe. We affirm the need to decolonize time and the concept of contemporaneity in order to speak of historical simultaneities that occurred in parallel timelines and were unknown to and ignorant of each other before 1492. It is crucial to decolonize time to understand that our time and our existences were not built based on Europe or that they cannot just be subsumed under Europe's timelines, which claim to define the time of the whole world and, even more arrogantly, situate us in their savage past.

Fig. 2: *Europe wanted to eat our time*



Source: Paredes Carvajal 2020: 37

Despite these two independent timelines, with the colonial fact of 1492 and a reductionist mentality, they try to swallow up or absorb our times, territories, lives, culture, and history and label us as uncivilized, backward savages according to the parameters of their culture. They also maintain the ironic claim to have civilized us, to have driven our development, while “thanks” (or “no thanks”) to our “backwardness”, “savagery”, “lack of civilization”, the western world was able to develop, civilize, and technologize. It is essential to decolonize our time, to reclaim our time, our memory, our dignity, and our knowledge.

Europe does not understand who we are; in their ignorance about our world, our people, our lives, and societies, they compress and reduce us according to their concepts and ways of life, interpret us. Having thus diminished our time, lives, and territories, they place us into their own past, compressed and shriveled by their ignorance, to alleviate their existential dread of finding someone who is equal but different, unknown, and unexpected. This is the colonialist form of how Europe understands us to the present day.

Based on this conception of decolonized time, let us compare some contemporaneous realities around 1492 to show the arrogance of western thought.

Table 1: Comparative Charts

Ancestor Patriarchy of Abya Yala	European Colonial Patriarchy
All women owned land	Women in Europe did not have the right to land
Women had knowledge and wisdom and were valued for it. For example, medical knowledge of their bodies and children's bodies.	Women did not have access to knowledge and were persecuted and burned as witches.
Women managed and had access to the rituals of the communities.	Women did not have access to or perform community rituals.; these rites were institutionally controlled by the Catholic Church, managed by men.
Women had command and political power, as can be seen in the indigenous uprising of 1871 in what is now La Paz, Bolivia. Bartolina Sisa had under her command an indigenous army as well as the logistics of the uprising.	Women had no political command; if there were any queens, they were puppets of power struggles between men.

Source: (Paredes Carvajal 2020: 74)

#### 4. Colonial Penetration and Interlocking Patriarchies [Entroque Patriarcal]

As a concept, Colonial Penetration<sup>7</sup> presents penetration as the action of introducing one element into another; penetration evokes a notion of domination with sexual undertones that, although it starts with the bodies, is then projected onto territories and life. I did not choose this word for this concept by chance or exhibitionism. I feel that colonial penetration explains well what we mean when we talk about the colonial invasion of 1492. We can start by saying that it was the violation of our territories, bodies, culture, and life.

The colonial invasion, then, not only penetrated the territories of what is now called Bolivia Abya Yala, the colony invaded the bodies of the women and

7 Title of the Julieta Paredes Carvajal' presentation at the University of Pittsburgh in 2010, published in *Cartografías queer* (2011): sexualidades y activismo LGBT en América Latina, Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, University of Pittsburgh, pp. 217–230.



men who lived in this land, consolidating Interlocking Patriarchies [Entroque Patriarcal] that strengthened the system of oppressions, now corrected and increased, which we call the Patriarchal World System [Sistema Mundo Patriarcal].

Despite all this penetration that tried to annul our strength, here we are today, reinventing ourselves, remaking ourselves, feeling, and filling with meaning our bodies, our desires, pleasures, and proposals for Living Well. They are realities here and now that we build in permanent resistance on the part of our communities [pueblos] and of Communitarian-Feminists. These resistances and rebellions necessarily pass through the de-patriarchalization and decolonization of our women's bodies, of our communities, societies, cultures, and spiritualities. So, what is colonization for women?

The way our indigenous brothers see colonization is partial and complicit since they only see it as power relations exercised by the invading masters. Since our brothers' reflections on decolonization and de-patriarchalization center on the reflection of coloniality, they are only the tip of the iceberg. Therefore, their political actions fundamentally focus on the high places of this power, such as the State, the Government, and its institutions.

This has a dehumanizing and complicit consequence, because it understands us indigenous people as pure, as the good savage, and this is complicity with the colonialist paternalists who exercise their racism from the place of the superior who can protect us. It is complicity with the universalizing and Manichean thinking of evil and good. Indigenous men and women make ethical decisions, just as all humanity does at all times and in all communities around the world, men and women of the Abya Yala indigenous peoples are human beings, we make our own decisions, there is no "a priori purity". The political consequences of this paternalistic purism are that our brothers believe it and are tempted to replace White Eurocentrism with purist and indigenous egocentrism.

What is called coloniality, for us, is essentially Interlocking Patriarchies [Entroque Patriarcal]; it is the systemic form of readjusting patriarchy. When these two patriarchies become intertwined, pacts are created between men that will later mean that the bodies of indigenous women, our grandmothers and those of our brothers, will bear the total weight of the new patriarchy with its violence and violation of women's bodies three- and fourfold. If we do not understand this analysis that we propose from Communitarian-Feminism, it will be impossible for our transformation processes to make even the slightest

revolutionary changes, not only for women but all our male brothers, intersex people, and nature.

#### 4.1 Interlocking Patriarchies [Entroque Patriarcal]

The word “entronque” was used in Bolivia in the 1980s to define the incursion of the left into Bolivian nationalism; for us, it meant the betrayal of a particular left to the struggles of the people<sup>8</sup>, an alliance to betray the hopes and strengthen the system of oppression with discourses and experiences that we had built in our resistance to the dictatorships. From there, we, the Communitarian-Feminists, seized the right to speak and projected it to our definition of the moment in which another social reality was created, from the colonial invasion of 1492 (Paredes Carvajal 2009).

When we speak of ancestral patriarchy, Euro-Western feminists presume that all patriarchies are modeled on the patriarchy of Europe. What they are really saying is that they believe that by referring to European patriarchy, they have already discovered all forms of domination of women. Marxists follow a similar line of thought, believing that they already know how the system of exploitation works anywhere in the world just from understanding industrial Europe. **Well, no**, we are sorry to disappoint their egocentrism and self-sufficiency, our life patterns do not come from Europe, and neither are we, or have we ever been, backward societies in relation to Europe.

To understand the Interlocking Patriarchies [Entroque Patriarcal], we must start from the fact that these patriarchies had nothing to do with each other until 1492, but then would complement, articulate, and intertwine themselves in the “Entroque Patriarcal” to the great misfortune of the women of our territories, of Abya Yala, creating the Planetary System of Patriarchal domination.

### 5. The Planetary System of Patriarchal Domination

The *Entroque Patriarcal* presents us with two trunks, the ancestral patriarchy and the colonial-European patriarchy, which are connected, articulated, coordinated, and complementary, but are neither equal nor the same. This is the

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8 See footnote 4; “pueblo” here can be translated as “people” or “communities”.

transcendental historical fact of domination that endures to this day, despite attempts to defeat it.

Our concept of patriarchy (see page 4–5) helps us to analyze the conformation of territorially localized patriarchies in Europe and Abya Yala. The idea of *Entroque Patriarcal* explains the moment when this system of powers and dominations reconfigured to become the monster we face today, which we call the Planetary System of Patriarchal Domination (Paredes Carvajal 2016).

It is against this system that we Communitarian-Feminists fight and call on all of humanity: If we want to end all oppressions of humanity and nature, we must position ourselves with respect to all manifestations and instruments of it. In the *Entroque Patriarcal*, they are reconfigured in a PATRIARCHAL DOMINION SYSTEM, under the hegemonic domination of colonial Europe. Of course, taking into account that to achieve this, it is necessary to “colonize our time”. To justify its domination and the mechanisms of its hegemonic imposition, Europe had to, metaphorically speaking, eat us, eat our time, swallow it, and to locate our time in its own past. And thus not to locate its ignorance, limitations, and incapacity as a way of thinking and conception of life.

From then on, patriarchy, as a patriarchal system, has been permanently recycling itself, nourishing itself from the colonized and dominated patriarchies. Learning and rearranging itself from and in the revolutions that humanity undertakes to overthrow them, revolutions that have not necessarily faced or confronted patriarchy as a system of patriarchal domination, yet still have been giving hope to humanity, and still do. However, they are later absorbed by the system itself, for the very reason that we have not fully grasped the system's complexity.

To understand that until today, humanity has been facing the mechanisms of patriarchal domination, such as the imposition of castes or class relations or relations of dependence and colonial usufruct in the territorial or ties of racist domination. Humanity has been confronting these mechanisms but not all simultaneously, and much less with a communitarian strategy of which we women are half. We did not attack them in all their instruments, strategies, and tactics of domination and subjugation.

This is the challenge posed by the Communitarian-Feminist movement of Abya Yala that started from the Bolivian people's process of change; today, in the organic fabrics in territories of Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Peru, and Migrants in Europe, we all call on the indigenous peoples [Pueblos originarios], organizations and social movements, to build the Community of Communities, to fight against all expressions, manifestations, and instruments of the Planetary

System of Patriarchal Domination. We call upon you to define our identities of struggle based on hope and proposals, not from the ANTIS – anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, anti-imperialist – ; for that is purist, hypocritical, and not self-critical, it separates and weakens us, it drives false subjects and revolutionary vanguards. It has not done us any good as revolutionaries to be Manichean and moralistic, putting ourselves in the place of the ‘good ones’ because nobody is free from this system, and it is not honest to position ourselves as anti-anything. We are communitarian fighters; we are defined by our dreams, our utopia, and our proposal: the **Community of Communities**. We are people who recognize our contradictions and with them, and despite them, we call to build and heal the world, heal the relationships that we are living on this planet and **build the Vivir Bien [Living Well] in the Community of Communities** without borders or classes, or genders, or races.

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