

FEMINISMO COMUNITARIO DE ABYA YALA

Julieta Paredes

Mujeres Creando Comunidad

TRANSLATED BY

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PRESENTED

April 14, 2016 at 5:30 P.M.

ORIGINAL TITLE

Mujeres Creando Comunidad-Feminismo Comunitario

Editors' note: The following text is a slightly revised transcription of the original talk, translated from Spanish. We present it as such to preserve Julieta Paredes' spirit as an activist-educator.

Good afternoon, sisters and brothers.

I give thanks to the energies of struggle in these territories—to the ocean guiding us here from below. What I will express today are not my words only; though I am responsible for what I will say, these words represent the road I have shared with my sisters, comrades, and most fundamentally, my *pueblo* [people].

Why is it necessary to come to these (northern) territories and speak? Why open your ears? Why open your hearts to listen, understand, and feel? Because there is a crisis. This crisis is not just an economic crisis. It is the crisis of a system. As Lenin said in 1917, *Imperialism (is) The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.³¹ Humanity let imperial capitalism live on and cultivate neoliberalism. It let capitalism become neoliberalism and it turned socialist and communist dreams—pardon my language—into shit. All those dreams for changing the world, those dreams the young people dreamed in '68 and throughout the 1970s—those dreams died.

So many sisters and brothers who believed in the possibility of change are not here anymore. *We* are here, sisters and brothers. We owe our very presence to those nobodies: those original Indian and Indigenous communities—Aymaras, Quechuas, Guaranis, Tzeltales, Tzotziles, and the thousands of Orinary *pueblos* of this hemisphere and continent. These nobodies died at the hands of what is called colonization, colonial invasion, when the Europeans, by coincidence and not by their investigation—though of course they had visionaries who imagined the world was round; the Europeans had the power of knowledge, power of wisdom, and political, military, and economic power, yes, and yet these visionaries did not have sway, what they said was unimportant and got them burned at the stake, remember?—not by design, not by virtue of knowing or having some enlightened knowledge, “discovered us.” In reality, they invaded us. They penetrated us.

³¹ Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2010).

It is what we call, in our community's terms, "colonial penetration." This colonial penetration does not only penetrate our territories but also our bodies. And not just the bodies of women, there was also penetration of the male body. Colonial penetration invades men's thoughts and body images. We can talk about our bodies, our coloring and so on. Our skin color is neither more beautiful nor better than the other skin colors in this room. And still our bodies were disparaged. We weren't considered people; we weren't even born with souls, right?!

And so, these bodies of ours, in our territories, from our ancestral knowledge and our deep memory, in the land that is now called Bolivia, took history into our own hands. The first thing we did was to take back the natural resources. We lived under capitalism, of course, and even though we had invoked decolonization, we did not come out and simply say, "We will decolonize and we will fight." No! The first thing out of our mouths was, "Neoliberalism is attacking us. We do not have food. We do not have clothing." Debt had kicked us out of our homes. Many women and children had poisoned themselves because they could not pay their debts. They could not pay back their bank's usury or their mortgage usuries (which are alive and well in Europe also, by the way). We did not have food. Healthcare and education were a luxury—public school, for what?

Individualism tightened its grip on us. In the seventies, we unionized and formed neighborhood councils—women, children, babies—everyone organized. But in the nineties, people asked, "Why are you going to organize? That is foolishness: go dialogue with your boss; go your own way; step on your neighbor; compete with your neighbor; show your prowess—winners, everyone." It happened to us too. So our first thought as a community, sisters and brothers, was: "We need money. We need capital. We need to get those natural resources back." Immediately, within forty-five days, in October 2003, our community accomplished an accelerated process of accumulation. That is why this morning at an earlier lecture I said: "The revolution is a pedagogical process—it is a way of learning in the streets." We held rallies. We had meetings. We made radio appearances (not television). The radio played an important role in this process. We communicated in a kind

of assembly through the radio, in the ether, sending out our opinions, making reports, denouncing the status quo. Forty-five days, October 2003. We moved past saying that "natural gas must not go to Chile because Chile is a thief who stole our ocean and so much else."

Now we understand that Chile was not the problem—it was our neo-liberal government, our president (Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada), who now lives in Miami. He lives right here, spending the riches he stole.³² This assassin, this genocidal maniac, lives here in the United States, in this land as we speak, right here in this very city. This murderer killed more than sixty-seven of our brothers during those forty-five days, pilfered our country's riches and gave our country and our natural resources away. Imagine! I will give you an example. For every hundred cubic meters [of gas], eighty to ninety went toward transnational wealth. How could this not have impoverished us, sisters and brothers? So, first we needed to take back the natural resources. However, at that time it was not the Chileans, it was our president! Yet, who elected that president? We did! (For the record, I did not vote.) In any case, the people had elected this president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, which is precisely the reason for the constitutional assembly. Our project became founding our country anew. Thus, began a journey.

I am the granddaughter of Natividad Peredo Camacho. These last names are Castilian. They are not our own. They were given to us by the foremen. My grandmother graduated from second grade. I remember her handwriting, it was very large and shaky. She concentrated so hard [*performs her grandmother's movements*] writing an "a," concentrating, drawing the "t." She is my heritage. I am the only one in my family who went to university. My grandfather told me: "Go, Julieta, go." (He used to call me Negrita.) "Negrita, go. Go and learn and then serve your community."

Let me ask you a question. Who do you think opened our primary and secondary schools back in the 1920s and 1930s? Who started

³² Bolivian President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada offered his resignation on October 17, 2003, following a series of violent confrontations between citizens and the Bolivian government, in what came to be known as the Bolivian gas conflict, or "Gas War." De Lozada retreated to the United States shortly after his resignation. See, e.g., Larry Rohter, "Bolivian Leader Resigns and His Vice President Steps in," *The New York Times*, October 18, 2003.

the Ayllu school Warisata?³³ It was grandfather Avelino Siñani. Avelino Siñani, an Indian. An Indian from Tiahuanaco, from Warisata, in the Omasuyus province. Imagine a school where Indigenous Aymara children—people who were prohibited from attending school—could learn to read and write. Indians invented the Ayllu school. Ayllu does not mean community. It means *comunidad*. The Spanish word is different than the English word. Community is not the same thing as *comunidad*. I will tell you why. You will see.

So this grandfather founded the Ayllu school and the Aymara boys and girls learned to read and write. Why? For what? To become doctors? To wear suits and ties and carry briefcases? It is not terrible to wear a suit and tie, of course. People dress how they like. But why did these children go to school? To defend themselves. To read and explain why they were stealing our lands. These symbols, these little worms, these little bugs on the page—the children learned to decipher them and understand them so that they could tell us why the white man had suddenly appropriated those lands from communal ownership. That is why we learned to read and write. I come from that *pueblo*. And that is why we ponder the role of knowledge in the people's struggle.

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That is the first point I want to articulate here: the role of knowledge in the people's struggle. You will forgive me sisters and brothers for not asking whether the university is necessary or not, whether to smash it or burn it. Well, the university has already been burned down. Our mothers and grandmothers did it in the sixties and seventies. We burned down the universities, took them over, and kicked out the professors. That has been done. Should this be done once more? Well, the problem is not actually whether we burn the universities or not. We ourselves are the problem. All of this, look at all the material things around us as we speak—the question is: How do we use the resources available to us?

33 See Manuel Valdivia Rodríguez, "La escuela boliviana de Ayllu de Warisata," Bolivia.com. <http://www.educando.edu.do/articulos/docente/la-escuela-boliviana-de-ayllu-de-warisata/> (accessed March 5, 2018).

Thus far, we have not. Are we going to take over something, again? We all saw Occupy Wall Street. We must analyze this. What was it? And I'm not disqualifying what was done in those movements. Rather, let us look at this in order to understand it. Let us think about our collective efforts. That is, with you over there (in The United States) and with us here (in Latin America). What are we going to do? What happened with Occupy? Where did Occupy go? Is it not around anymore? So what happened? And what is happening right now?

Let us get back to the role of knowledge in the people's struggle. One of our initial theoretical propositions is: "Everything is useful." Everything is useful! Well, everything that has to do with knowledge. Capitalism is not useful to us. Knowledge is completely different, it allows us to unveil the system and its accomplices.

Why are we not fighting? Sisters and brothers, the history of humanity—a humanity that perceives and feels that we must transform the world in which we live, the world we no longer want, the world we are not happy living in—we intuit that we ourselves can change it (of course, we do not always know how). This path that forms from revolution to revolution. Slavery, for instance. I am thinking of the movie *Spartacus*. There has been a path that humanity has walked for the freedom of slaves, other struggles as well. This much we know: In these lands right here under our feet, there have been struggles too. Right here in the Abya Yala territories there have been dominations, there have been wars.

It is not that we Indians are good savages, like they say, and have not ever really fought amongst ourselves, that we have never invaded or penetrated our lands, killed, or assassinated each other. Indians also know how to do it. Conquest is not a European privilege, and I say this ironically. Choosing to make ethical decisions contrary to life is not a uniquely European privilege. We make these decisions too. Indians can be scoundrels, too, because we are people. We are human. Thus, there is a path, the journey humanity has walked intuitively, knowing that change is possible. We have lived this truth and today I have seen it.

There are different concepts used in guiding the struggle. The sixties and seventies were the years of "class struggle," of conflict between "labor power" and "capital." If these concepts weren't properly used, if something was outside this mold, at that time, we ignored its

existence. We used what worked when it comes to concepts. Whatever is outside the mold we throw away in the garbage. No! This is not politically correct to say. And today, this term “decoloniality,” I believe, is attempting to substitute the concept of class struggle. (I say “believe” because I could be mistaken.)

Gender—which isn’t feminism, much less *feminismo comunitario*—gender has always been like a satellite. Right? It is always outside, like an add-on. People talk about it like this: “Let us do a class analysis,” and the revolutionaries try not to forget that we are also women and then, when they try not to forget, they do a gender analysis and think about gender equality. Now we say we are going to change the relations of coloniality. And of course, we must not forget about the women and address gender, we must focus on gender. The question of women is always approached like a satellite that we have to remember to include.

Therefore, I believe it is indispensable to critique the ways categories are used to explain, submit, and reduce, not objectivity, but reality. Reality is incommensurable. Objectivity is reducible because the subject defines the object. And, normally, it is powerful subjects that define what objectivity is in general. But reality is incommensurable. This is why I want to finish with the idea of community as a revolutionary approach.

“Unveil the system and its complicities”—this notion is an attempt to situate ourselves in a way that is not simple and “comfortable” (though the word comfortable is in quotation marks, we must also consider the role of victims and victimizers).

Easy, right? The *gringos* are tyrants. The *gringos*, as in, white males, because the *gringas* do not even exist. The *gringos* are tyrants, they are wicked people. Suddenly you go somewhere and you see them say, “I am a *gringo*.” And you wonder, what purpose does that serve us if we are not *gringos*? I mean, come on, please. What do we accomplish by positioning ourselves as victims or victimizers?

Or we come along, the Originary communities—you *gringos* have fucked us up so much already and are the ones responsible for our misfortunes—and do not recognize our own complicity and responsibilities in the oppressions that affect us. This is the moment when knowledge comes in handy. We investigate to make these distinctions. We read to parse them out. We learn other languages, learn about

technology and the internet. But this learning is not an individual and solitary act because, if reality is incommensurable, then, what can a little flea like me achieve in the face of all of this reality? We need to do it together. My community needs your community. Your community needs our community. We are indispensable to one another. We are necessary for one another.

“Unveil the system and its complicities.” Complicity, by negating our deep memory and heritage, makes us believe that the world begins at our birth and in this moment, as though we have not had sisters and brothers that have walked this path before us. We have to listen to these comrades from the past. One can critique them, and this is important to our ancestral communities. We do not see our female and male elders as gurus who will tell us great marvels. But we have to listen to them with respect. This complicity erases our memory sisters and brothers, the memory of struggles fought here in this territory, the ones your grandmother fought, your grandfather, and all the folks who lived in your neighborhood. I am not just talking about Bolivia here. I am talking about this place too: Miami.

It will not be the book, the library, or the internet that will give you that body-to-body connection, that warmth of your brother’s body. That gaze, that energy, will not come from a book. It is an instrument. This is why we must remain close and near each other, occupying spaces. This is why the system does not want us working together. This is why they make us afraid to touch one another. Do not touch him or he will contaminate you. He might desire something, they say. Complicity.

The other aspect is “self-consciousness and autonomy.” The power of knowledge in community struggle, your self-conscious and self-consciousness, is to say you are knowing yourself, you are feeling, you are becoming conscious of who we are. Identity is just one product of this process of self-consciousness. It positions us against the powerful. But it implies a political and pedagogical act: to look at oneself in the mirror, to look in the mirror and love what one is. And not in the sense that we all have to be “Black people” or “Indigenous people.” No. We are each our own.

Look at these flowers on this table. Here they are, white, yellow, green, orange, light yellow. Do you see these flowers fighting? Do the

white ones look down on the orange ones for being orange? Do they ask, "How could you be orange?" Do the white flowers tell the orange flowers they must stay at the lowest part of the hierarchy of flowers? Skin color hierarchies are just like this. But the flowers do not fight. They do not have relations of power perpetrated by the white flower. The white flower is just a flower! Skin color is just like the flowers. My color. And your color. White skin is beautiful. My color is beautiful. We are all beautiful. Of course this consciousness of color is *self-consciousness* of color. Loving what you are without using what you are as a privilege, like the color of your skin. This is precisely the matter at hand. Privilege. Autonomy. *Auto-nomy*. Revealing the system and its complicities implies autonomy.

We understand this in Bolivia, which is why we are now reflecting on territorial autonomy. But territorial autonomy is connected to the autonomy of our bodies and women's autonomy as well. We could go ahead and say, "Land autonomy and women, territorial body, we do not decide who to love, how to love, when to give birth or when not to give birth. Our bodies are colonized. Our bodies are occupied. We are alienated from our own bodies." Our Indigenous brothers' bodies are neither occupied nor invaded! No! The men make their own decisions.

In the matter of sexuality, for instance, the men ejaculate whenever they want, wherever they want, how they want. Nobody prohibits them from ejaculating irresponsibly either. But we women are controlled, and so are our bodies. Like, for example, if we want to have an abortion or not, or who we choose to love or not. Autonomy should thus have something to do with the capacity and possibility to name who we are, as a community, without anyone speaking for us.

Knowledge, having knowledge, helps us say who we are. Whoever is a researcher, great. You will have your own point of view, your own opinion, about who or what we are. But it is merely *what you say* about what we say. That is why now we, our daughters, and sons, say who we are. The way Julieta, I, say who I am, influences how as a community, we will claim autonomy. Who we are, what we want, what we desire will shape this claim as well. Self-naming is a political, educational, and pedagogical process. Here I am. I have imagined how we could graffiti this (though I know you can go to jail here for graffiti).

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"The necessity and urgency to change the world now" is the second point I want to develop. The graffiti could say, "It is necessary and urgent to change the world." From 1917 to 1920, and in the twenties, there was a movement against systems of oppression, until World War II started. Another moment came roughly fifty years later. The sixties and seventies had another moment where history was alive. And now is another moment. Sisters and brothers, ours is another moment where history lives. All of us here have the energy (I do not see anyone sleeping); we have the power, the interest, the impulse.

We are a community that, like other communities in Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay, is being isolated little by little. We have this thriving political Right as well as internal errors (on the Left) of our own making, errors of process. But processes are not pure. There is no pure revolutionary process. But because of all these actions, particularly the attacks from the international Right, today, Bolivia is being isolated. We are being isolated. Yet the struggle continues through the strength of those communities who are still fighting. Sisters and brothers, today is a moment. We have an economic crisis. But it is not just an economic crisis, as I have said. There are energies and struggles that are being nourished by these hopes. So it is urgent and necessary to change the world today.

And as I said to you earlier today, "It is an act of faith to believe in the *comunidad*." Look, in my *comunidad*, we have been talking about why we have the political schools we have made. I go to the one that meets on Wednesdays, but we have several others. In the Wednesday political school they've analyzed what is necessary, and they have found that we need better salaries, not better water. Different groups of comrades have written about this. I have told them we need faith. And everyone looks at me. "Damn it," they might think, I thought this woman was a *feminista comunitaria* but now she is out here talking about the church! No, that is not what I am saying. Sisters and brothers, no; we need faith in the *comunidad*. Faith. We need to believe that it is possible to change this world. Believe, sisters. Believe. Faith.

[Begins singing “The One-eyed and the Blind” by Charly Garcia.]³⁴

*Desnuda de frío y hermosa como ayer,
Naked in the cold and as beautiful as yesterday,
tan exacta como dos y dos son tres,
As exact as two plus two is three,
ella llegó a mí,
She came to me,
apenas la pude ver,
and I could barely see her,
aprendí a disimular mi estupidez.
So I learned how to hide away my stupidity.*

*Bienvenida Cassandra,
Welcome Cassandra,
bienvenida el sol y mi niñez
Welcome the sun and my childhood
sigue y sigue bailando alrededor,
keep and keep dancing around,
aunque siempre seamos pocos
although we are always a few
los que aún te podemos ver.
we who can, still see you.*

*Les contaste un cuento
You told them a story
sabiéndolo contar,
knowing how to tell it,
y creyeron que tu alma andaba mal.
And they believed your soul was doing badly.
La mediocridad para algunos es normal,
Mediocrity is normal for some,
la locura es poder ver más allá.
Insanity is the power to see beyond.*

³⁴ Charly Garcia, *The One-eyed and the Blind* (Argentina: Sony Music, 1974).

*Baila y baila, Cassandra,
Dance and dance, Cassandra,
digo bien, bien, bien la pude ver
I said good, good, good I saw her
No hablo yo de fantasmas ni de Dios,
I do not speak of ghosts or God,
solo te cuento las cosas
I'm only telling you of the things
que se te suelen perder.
you tend to lose.*

They think we are coming to invade—the women and the faith we speak about in our communities. That is what sounds insane. Therefore, to change the world we proposed some elements. Academics invented this damned idea of decoloniality. Let us critique it. As communities—Aymaras, Quechuas—we are talking about “decolonization.” Colonization as an action. At the same time, academics talk about decolonization. But we are talking about actions. Not theory. And definitely not from within the university, or as a field of study. (Nowadays it is a discipline. It even has its own section in libraries. It has its own offices.) “Decoloniality, decoloniality!” proclaim the professors, all experts in decoloniality. What have they decolonized recently? They have not decolonized their lives, have they? Their university buildings? But they are experts in decoloniality! Sisters and brothers, decolonization is a revolutionary action. It happens daily, and it is something that we are doing as a community. We have to take it out of these academic places that have appropriated it.

These academics are coming to us now, they are researching us, investigating us. They look at us and they ask, “What is decoloniality?” So then we have Mignolo, Lugones, and all these other experts. Damn it! There they are, sitting in their offices and classrooms! The colonial community, imperialist, invader, occupier of territories has not only been in our territories but in Colombia as well. The DEA and CIA have been in Bolivia. Just look at everything they are doing in the Syrian community and all over the Middle East. Every day, colonialists attempt to absolve themselves by asking, “What do the decolonialists

say?” Even CNN says the magic word! They ask, “What are the experts of coloniality saying?”

These academics come to our lands and look at the baby boys and girls running around carrying their lives on their backs (crying). This is happening right now. Sisters and brothers, this is happening as we speak. Our people carry the weight of everything in their knapsacks, grasping pieces of bread to eat as they go. And these academics come and they look and look and look. But what are they doing about it? What are they doing? What is this bullshit they spew with their decoloniality? Where is the strength, the energy, the consciousness? What happened to the power of the word? Where did it go? Why do we study? Why do we fill our mouths with these disciplines and library books if it does not serve the community, if it does not solve the suffering of our sisters and brothers, if we can not even use our theories and books to drive away our own fears?

We are afraid of the possibilities within our theories and books.

Class and gender, of course, continue to be valid categories, but capitalism is alive and well. It is essential. That is why decolonization is impossible, and why reflection on how our lives and bodies are colonized is also impossible. What we see has a place. It has a place. But so does class. Capitalist relations exist. Neoliberalism exists. They are killing us.

Machismo exists, too, though. And machismo is not just in gender relations. Neoliberalism has invented a form of it with postmodernity. Postmodernity is quite virulent, sisters and brothers. I hope at some point we can talk about all the damage that postmodernity has done, everything it has appropriated from valid critiques, and how it arranged them into a single chain, tightening its grip on the chain like a horse cart driver yanking on his horse. Valid? Sure. But it was not about destroying everything and relativizing everything. We were then all oppressors and oppressed. OK, but what happened to the transnational corporations? We got lost. Where are the powers and the responsibilities? Everything is power. Nothing is power. So we will go home and let the existing system keep governing. What postmodernity did is bullshit.

Inside postmodernity is another important project it brought: the depoliticization of a concept, a political category that is just as

important as gender, and that is the one that talks about male-female relations, the one that reveals machista thoughts, conducts, and behavior. But—and this is what *feminismo comunitario* says, which is very important to us—that machismo, which is a relation between men and women, is not patriarchy. This is a distinction we make as feministas comunitarias. A difference between our feminism and other feminisms is that we do not identify patriarchy with the relations between men and women, or with the hierarchical male-female relation, or as a system and relation within a system of men and women. Other feminisms tend to talk about patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism as if each were just one thing. We disagree. And we write about this in our book. We say that patriarchy is the total system of oppressions, discriminations, and violences that humanity lives under. By “humanity” we mean men, women, and intersexuals (because we are talking about the body). We are talking about gender.

Patriarchy, the total system of oppressions in which women, men, any LGBTQ person, and even nature itself live. But this totalizing system of oppressions has been constructed, historically, upon women’s bodies. It is a system that oppresses men, women, trans people, and nature, but that here, was historically constructed upon the body of women. This conception of patriarchy has helped us, in the struggle of our community, to uncover another form of feminism: *feminismo comunitario*.³⁵ This is a reflection that has been done in Bolivia. You might ask: “Fine, sister, but if you have redefined yourselves like this, why do you still call yourselves feminists?” And we respond, “Look, sisters and brothers, you have to craft a strategy—what the academics call epistemology.”

We live in a globalized world. We can call ourselves *Jamas Guarninanac*: “the force of women.” We can call ourselves everything

³⁵ Editors’ note: Charlotte Sáenz offers some salient and helpful remarks on *feminismo comunitario* in this number’s epilogue. For example, Sáenz writes, “*Feminismo comunitario* is not about rights: it is not a feminism of equality nor a feminism of difference. Rather, it is about rebuilding a community as a body of humans, of which one or several disenfranchised parts have been negated full participation. It is also not a theory, but an organization of men and women with political tasks building greater equity and participation for Indigenous women in Bolivia and other parts of Latin America.” See the “Epilogue” for a more in-depth interpretation of the term.

we are thinking about and arguing for. We can use the definition of patriarchy I just gave you as well. *Jamas Guarninanac*. Good? So we get here and there are feminists who say, “You all come from Bolivia. What do you call your group?” *Jamas Guarninanac*. “How beautiful! Take a seat. Feminist comrades, let us keep discussing. We will give you the floor soon. What did you say you call yourself, little comrade? *Jamas Guarninanac*, comrade, we will give you the floor soon.”

Right? The philosophers do the same thing. They get together in rooms just like the one we are in right now and they say “Yes, Latin American philosophy, philosophy of this, philosophy of that...” And what is it that the Indians have? A cosmovision! Yes, yes, yes, so there are philosophers, and then there are Indigenous cosmovisions. You heard me. There is a difference, supposedly, between a philosophy and an Indigenous worldview.

And when we sit down and talk with our fellow Indigenous comrades they tell us, “But why do you want to argue if we know that our Indigenous cosmovisions are more than mere philosophy?” Let us see, brother, who knows why? And who cares about that? When we have meetings in the centers of power, the hallowed halls of knowledge, we will always be the Indians with the Indigenous cosmovision. Why can’t we call it Aymara philosophy?

My friends, philosophers, I tell you that the strategy is the same one we have chosen. The whole world recognizes feminists and you are recognized here as well. But feminists are not always as regarded as philosophers. You could be a feminist from anywhere in the world, Europe or the United States, and people look at you with malice. It is because we are famous all over the world. But at least there is some (more) prestige to being a feminist in Europe and the United States than there is to being a *Jamasa Guarninanac* feminist.

In the middle of all this, we see the academics’ strategy—which is the same as colonization—to start calling what we do “Indigenous feminism.” They use this term now and that is extremely dangerous. “Of course, Indigenous feminism, right, yes, of course.” Here we have the Indigenous *feministas comunitarias* wondering what it is. So we say, “Well, we have never heard of Indigenous feminism.” That is because

the term was invented by some academic who wrote a book for UNAM called *Indigenous Feminism*. What is more, we read that we are the ones responsible for them having to correct the name of the book. Now it is called *Feminismos desde Abya Yala*³⁶, but originally it was to be called Indigenous Feminisms. You read it though, and that is what it talks about: Indigenous feminism.

Yet *feminismo comunitario*, which is what we are doing, is epistemic autonomy. It is a reflection of the autonomy of our bodies and the novelty and creativity that our process of change expresses. It is an autonomy that we as women, who are involved in this process of change, use to tell the world our proposal for life, for humanity. A proposal for the world is what *feminismo comunitario* is trying to promote. They pretend to reduce it to something, like colonists would, by calling it Indigenous feminism. Or they try to depoliticize *feminismo comunitario* by writing about it in a book and putting it “into conversation” with some author or another. But we are an organization of sisters, and this is the second part of what I want to say.

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We do not divide theory and practice. We are organized. We are organic. We have spokeswomen and political partners. We are not a group that gets together to discuss things and then afterwards gets coffee or drinks and goes home. We do political work together. We are a social organization. We have a structure. And why have a horizontal dictatorship? We are all equal. We all put in work and then two or three of those people come out in photos. No, no, not that type of horizontal dictatorship. We are not a horizontal collective critiquing hierarchy. We are not hierarchical, but we have an organizational structure.

Our spokeswoman is the person who speaks for us. And when she speaks the rest of us are silent because we chose her as our spokeswoman. We complete political tasks. As *feministas comunitarias*, we have specific things we need to do and we get them done together. You can talk about dictators, fine. We are risking our lives. Imperialism,

³⁶ Francesca Gargallo Celentani, *Feminismos desde Abya Yala* (México: Universidad Autónoma de México, 2014).

the Right, their opposition kills us. What we are doing is not a hobby. Feminism is not a hobby. And we are not the only ones. I know feminists in the North. There is one in New York I am thinking of named Margarita Cerullo, from the sixties and seventies. This morning I spoke to Angela Davis. And what did she say to me? Your committed sister is still going, still winning, still going; with her greyish hair she keeps on winning, and keeps touring. These are our sisters. We organize with them. This is the kind of organized organic feminism that convenes us.

For this last point, I would like to make our ideas more concrete to make room for discussion. What is our proposal? I want to explain why our *feminismo* is *comunitario*. It is *comunitario* because, for us, it is important that *feminismo* propose. We differentiate ourselves from our feminist sisters, whom we respect, who claim that feminism is a space to say: “Look, sisters!” (These are socialist feminists or ecofeminists.) “I have brought some small points to make for our communist and socialist comrades! Please do not forget to include this for the women. I would like to recommend that you include these few points in your platform for struggle.” *Feminismo comunitario* permits us—we owe this audacity to our communities and our grandmothers—to think about our world from our perspective, for us, for our brothers, for nature, and for the world. And what is the proposal that comes from us? We propose a world. It does not include these little points for someone’s agenda or platform for struggle. It is community itself. That is the proposal: community to break individualism; community to philosophically, conceptually, and cognitively understand that you are just one little bug in this universe; community to show you that just as much as you need others, we are also in need of nature. This relation of humanity is necessary, but always in the context of nature, since humanity does not exist without nature. Community is our proposal. We did not invent this, nor did it come from our navels. It exists in our memory. And that is why when the brother asks, “Where does it come from?” We say, “In our territories, as in the territories of Europe, community existed.”

It was not matriarchy, by the way. Matriarchy never existed. It is a myth. There has never been a system where women dominated men. There is maternity, matrilocality, which puts women in the center of things. But a system of oppression where women oppress both men

and nature has never historically existed. The idea of matriarchy is an invention because it does not exist and it never has. Patriarchy does exist. Let us talk about patriarchy.

What has patriarchy done to women’s bodies? Upon women’s bodies it has constructed a system of oppression that actively attacks them. It attacks us whether we are equal or distinct. When one body submits itself to another, our community breaks. So what we propose, based on the process of change in Bolivia, and propose to the world, is the recuperation of that memory which stretches far back into the past. Who has been able to maintain it today? Women from the First Nations communities. This is why the nobodies, with whom I began, have instincts. We can nourish humanity—if humanity wants it, of course. We can nourish women in First Nations communities because we are nourishing that deep memory and the necessity to build up our communities with it. Building with unity is necessary.

Feminismo comunitario thus uses the body, which is something we learned with our sisters from the North and Europe. We learned how to use our bodies to make politics. We explain this in our assemblies at the workshops we lead, when they give us the floor to speak. We use our bodies to explain our dream, the world we want. When we talk about community, sisters and brothers, we talk about it like a body. This eye, that hand, this foot: they are all of us: women, sisters, transgender people. And we are in community with nature. To explain, to feel, we need the body. We all have a body. Nobody here is an idea, walking around and talking. Everyone here, right now, has a body. This eye, this hand, that foot: our brothers. This eye, this hand, that foot: our sisters. Due to patriarchy and machismo, today, the community is a body walking around like this [*walks aimlessly, imitating a zombie*] without force, without energy, without vision, action, or women’s footsteps. So it is not working with women, and this is why we need the work of *feminismo comunitario*; this is the work of women in transforming community. We must open our eyes, use our hands, use our feet to create this community and create energy, force, and our authentic identities and autonomy. One hand does not ask the other hand if it can grasp something. The other hand does not give it permission. One eye does not ask the other eye for permission to see. If the community wants to see, well—and

that is why we talk about living well— it absolutely and fundamentally requires the woman's eye. That's *feminismo comunitario*.

Again, with all due respect—other sisters have their own paths—this feminism is different from the feminism of equality, or the feminism of difference that puts women above men. The former says, “Ah, so the men have rights—we should have equal rights!” The latter says, “I want everyone to respect my differences!” These are different from our feminism. In our feminism we want community. It is not about one being in front of the other. It is not a discussion or argument with the other. Instead, we ask, what is community? What do we make together? And this depends on the circumstance.

I am a lesbian, for instance, in love, affect, sexuality, and I have my preference. My sexual prerogatives and sexual politics are both with women. But we are a community with the men of my *pueblo*, of my community, and of the world. That is how the world is. It includes them. And it was with them that we made the October revolution happen. But they are machistas. Terrible machistas. And yet, we are going to bring about the revolution with them. When neoliberalism attacks, we fight back with them. When we build roadblocks, we build with them. For our brothers who are now looking at us: We have taken care of you since you were little, baby boys. We helped you grow, fed you, nourished and supported you. In the revolutions, we have always been there. You might not see us, but we have always been there. We bring you food, keep you warm, give you our word, hear you out. We have always done this in every revolution. Always! We have been with you. If you end up in jail, who visits you? Your fathers? One or two, maybe. It is your mothers, sisters, girlfriends, female friends. If you get sick in the hospital or when you grow old, who takes care of you? Perhaps your child, it is possible. But fundamentally it is we women who are always there. We are there from the moment we give birth to them to the moment we bury them. When, brothers? When are you the ones with us? *When?*

When will *you* be there for *us*? When will we have reciprocity? When? What revolution will we be able to talk about? How could you write such beautiful books, talk with such passion, and express so much vehemence about revolution and yet not think about your sister sitting right next to you as your equal? Why do you laugh when she speaks? Why

do you not listen to her? Do you think we are talking about absurdities? And when we are building the roadblock, when we are making that barricade, the men molest us. They grope our breasts. They rape us. Members of revolutionary organizations! They tell dirty jokes and disrespectful stories at night with their friends. Why do I say this with such venom? BECAUSE IT OFFENDS US! You there, you are of African descent. You over there, you are Indigenous. Now someone tell a racist joke with a laughing voice. Tell a joke about Black people. Tell a joke about Indians. Tell a joke to pass the time. See who laughs. This is what I am asking for, what we are trying to create. When you are with us, there is a relation between us. There is no separation, right? It is theory-practice. There are theories without practice. They are the theories you learn in universities. But also, there is no practice without theory for us. There is no such thing as a practice where we do not know what we are doing. Our practices are, and have always been, theories of livelihood, with an explanation for why we do things. But there are theories without practice. And those are what we critique.

[Singing Jaime Junaro's song “Quiero Ser Libre Contigo”³⁷]

No quiero sin tu mano caminar

I don't want to walk through life
por la vida sin razón.

senselessly without your hand.

Quiero crear un mundo de color

I want to create a world of color
entre los cielos y el mar

between the skies and sea.

Quiero sembrar en tu corazón

I want to sow in your heart
una esperanza de amor

a hope for love

No quiero ver más llanto ni dolor

37 Jaime Junaro, *Quiero ser libre contigo* (Bolivia: Discolandia Dueri & Cia, 1999)

I do not want to see more crying or pain

Quiero que tengas calor

I want you to be warm

Quiero ser libre contigo

I want to be free with you

Quiero a tu lado vivir

I want to live by your side

Quiero ser libre contigo

I want to be free with you

Quiero en tus brazos soñar

I want to dream in your arms

Quiero ser libre contigo

I want to be free with you

Quiero a tu lado crecer

I want to grow by your side

Quiero ser libre contigo

I want to be free with you

Quiero volver a creer

I want to believe once more

No quiero sin tu mano caminar

I do not want to walk without your hand

Quiero ser libre contigo

I want to be free with you

Quiero a tu lado vivir

I want to live by your side

Quiero ser libre contigo

I want to be free with you

Quiero en tus brazos soñar

I want to dream in your arms

Quiero a tu lado crecer

I want to grow by your side

Quiero entregarte mi amor

I want to give you my love

Thank you.