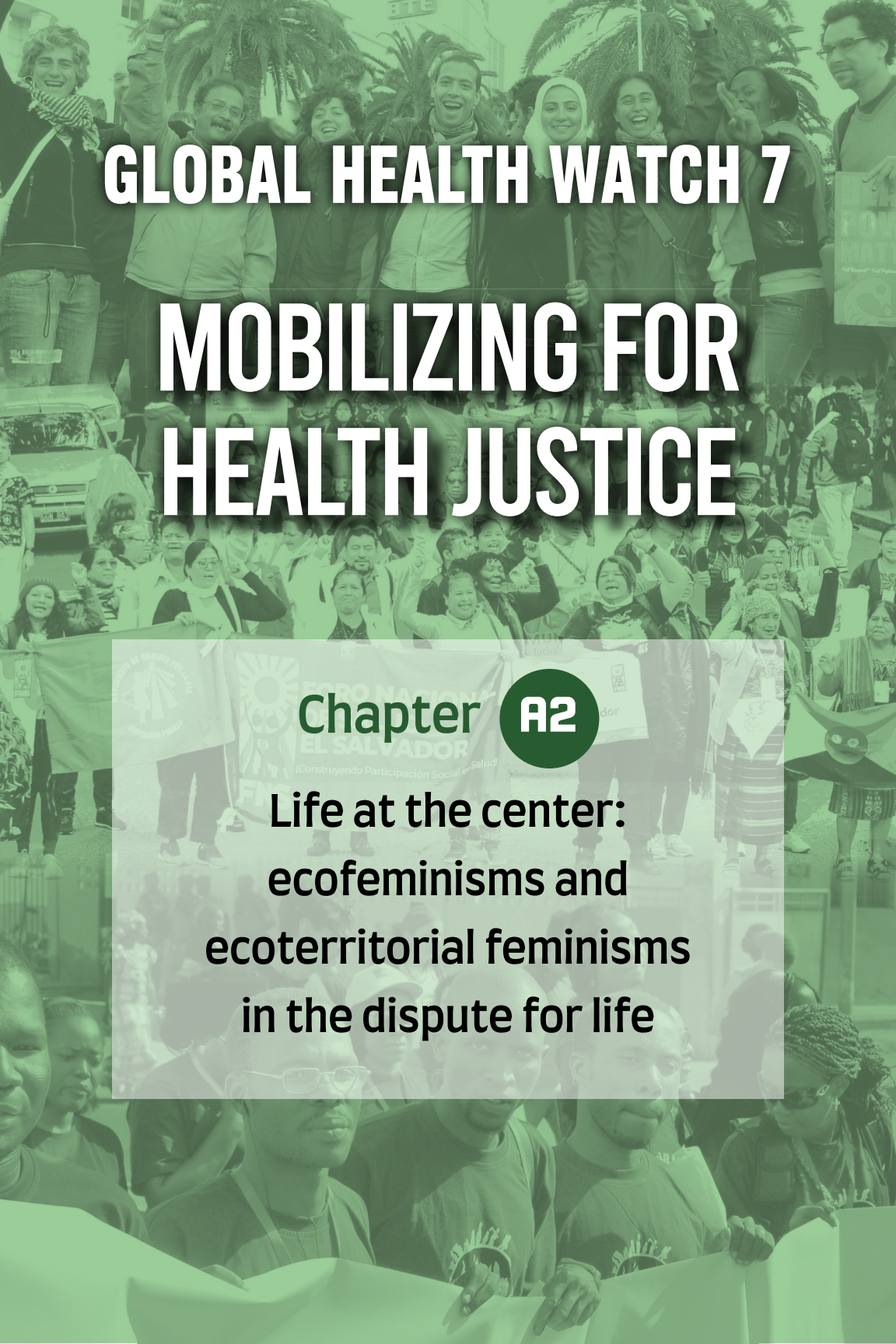




GLOBAL HEALTH WATCH 7

MOBILIZING FOR HEALTH JUSTICE

Chapter **A2**

**Life at the center:
ecofeminisms and
ecoterritorial feminisms
in the dispute for life**

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Life at the center: ecofeminisms and ecoterritorial feminisms in the dispute for life

Introduction

The world is experiencing a deepening of extreme events related to a generalized ecological and climatic crisis. Floods, fires, water and energy crises, droughts and loss of biodiversity are more frequent. All these catastrophes were already being experienced by communities, peoples and territories in areas where extractivisms (such as intensive agriculture and livestock farming, mega-mining, fracking and other types of predatory extractivisms), as well as false solutions (such as wind and photovoltaic complexes), are present. Warnings about the consequences of the climate crisis – which in recent years has become more visible to all sectors of society – have always been present, but the invisibility and sometimes denial of the experiences and opinions of Indigenous groups, peasants and affected communities did not allow the full extent of the crisis to be understood.

The current crisis has several dimensions. It could be said that we are living an “integral crisis”, this means that we cannot think only of an environmental crisis, it is necessary to understand the crisis in its integrality in order to understand how we reached this state of collapse of the world’s functioning systems. In this sense, the economic and political crisis cannot be separated from the environmental crisis, nor can we fail to think about the ethical crisis that affects us as a civilization.

This ethical crisis is intimately related to the lack of care for the environment, the separation between human beings and Nature, and, above all, to the place given to care work within the capitalist system. It is not by chance that care systems and reproductive work, that is, work that is not directly related to the production of goods and services, occupy a secondary place in societies.

The lack of recognition of the need for care makes the central cause of the problems that affect human and non-human beings, and the environment in which they live, invisible. Recognition of the need for care is the ethic that can be found in communities that are more closely linked to the natural environment and that have an intimate relationship with the territories, as is the case of native and peasant communities (see Chapter A3). Likewise, for several decades, territorial, popular, community and peasant feminisms have been questioning the productivist logic that puts life and its sustainability in second place, and that delegates the tasks of care to women and feminized bodies.

From this shared ethic of placing life at the center of the debate, ecofeminisms propose a different approach from those that only demand economic, political, social and reproductive rights. Ecofeminisms understand the care of human life and ecosystems as inseparable entities, and propose that it is necessary to redefine the logic of civilization, understanding that human beings are part of Nature.

Such understanding is only possible if the relationship exists, that is, if we conceive of ourselves as humanity that is not alien to Nature, a link that has historically been lost in modern societies, in which Nature has been reified. Similarly, it is in colonized territories where this relationship is much clearer and is maintained, which is why the need to decolonize the imaginary is fundamental for ecofeminisms. This process of decolonization has a strong anti-racist component, since it is understood that the processes of colonization were carried out through the genocide of native peoples and afro-descendants, operating in turn as ecocide, as destruction of ecosystems.

The colonization process not only dominated peoples and territories, but also placed colonized populations and territories in a subordinate position. It is a process that is still present, and ecofeminisms understand that extractivism is one of the faces of this continuity. The enormous inequalities present in these regions of the world, as is the case in Latin America and Africa, is a consequence of this colonialist logic that condemns these populations to poverty and to live in inhuman conditions.

In this sense, intersectional feminisms, which understand the intersection between gender, class and race, are fundamental for the construction of an integral and just feminist struggle that embraces all the existing realities in the world. The cross-border dimension of feminisms, which challenges the capitalist logics of global division, is a powerful tool against what the Movement of Indigenous Women and Diversities for the Buen Vivir calls “terricide”.

Terricide is the constant assassination of territories, ways of life and imaginaries that propose a full, healthy life in harmony with Nature. For ecofeminisms, this political, communitarian and affective practice is an insistence on survival, a proposal to live in a world in crisis, and from where to think and inhabit possible ways out.

Extractivism as the coloniality of Nature and terricide

The coloniality of Nature^{1,2}, understood as the imposition of a modern imaginary where Nature is perceived as the bearer of raw materials and natural resources, reifying it, also responds to a gender coloniality³, where women have been conceived as Nature, inhabiting the wild, the irrational, the liminal, and thereby underpinning the control and disciplining of the feminized bodies of native peoples, afrodescendants, migrants, peasants and popular urban sectors. Thus, extractivism, understood as the unlimited and intensive extraction of natural elements for the generation of profits through their export and circulation in global markets, not only reflects patriarchal dynamics but also reinforces patriarchy,

in that its effects are intensified in the face of precarious lives and crossed by various axes of structural violence.⁵ This is why we speak of repatriarcalization of territories.

Extractivism corresponds to the way in which capitalism operated and continues to operate in continents such as the American continent, Abya Yala, the name given by the native Kuna communities of Panama to refer to this territoriality, and which allows what authors will call the original accumulation, which is sustained through an accumulation of lands and subjects, by dispossession⁶, through the exploitation of enslaved and precarious labor and Nature itself. Thus, the ideology of development and the consolidation of central economies of the Global North have been at the cost of coloniality and the dispossession of bodies, peoples and territories of the Global South. As Brand and Wissen (2021) said, the imperial way of life of modern societies is based on the exploitation and degradation of the so-called “others” where, in order to sustain their standards of living, people in modern societies need to perpetuate the structural precariousness of sacrificial peoples, who were conceived as Third World.⁷

Extractivism has generated diverse processes of deterritorialization, displacement and migration in a current context of deepening ecocide, putting at risk the very existence of humanity, of diverse species and of Nature. This is why, as pointed out in the introduction, the Indigenous Women’s Movement for Buen Vivir of Puelmapu (Mapuche territory in Argentina) has chosen to speak of terricide.

Terricide refers to the murder not only of tangible ecosystems and the people who inhabit them, but also to the murder of all the forces that regulate life on earth, what we call the perceptible ecosystem. We understand that terricide is a consequence of the dominant civilizational model, which is putting our future on the planet at risk and which today manifests itself through climate change and its consequences.⁸

Ecoterritorial feminisms in Abya Yala

In the last decade, ecofeminist perspectives have been positioning themselves as ecoterritorial feminisms⁹ from the territorial defense and the organization, resistance and collective imagination of women, ‘dissidences’* and feminisms, around diverse socio-environmental conflicts, and (re)creating alternatives to extractivism from experiences of community water management, food and energy sovereignty and self-determination in both urban and rural territories, as well as through the consolidation of short circuits of territorial economies.¹⁰

Thus, we find experiences such as the Assembly of Women and Dissidences of the Movement for Water and Territories in Chile (MAT), Women and the Sixth in Mexico, which have developed proposals for community water management,

*Identities, cultural practices, social and political movements that question heterosexuality as a hegemonic social norm.

considering basin and sub-basin management, integrating ancestral knowledge, where women play roles and their work is publicly recognized, both in the administration and care of the various bodies of water.

We speak of feminist and environmentalist political experiences in different parts of Latin America, also called Abya Yala, in the context of an ecological and climate crisis that call into question our own existence, from the growing process of feminization and decolonization of the struggles in the continent around the defense of bodies, land and territory, the struggle against the matrix of colonial oppression of race, sex, class.

Eco-territorial feminisms are positioned from other worldviews that are not anthropocentric, in which the mountain, the river, the animals are part of a network of relationships, of the fabric of life, contrary to the logic of capitalist dispossession.¹¹

One of the points to highlight in these feminisms is the vindication of a restorative justice (see Chapters B4 and E2), both of ecosystems and of a justice for and from the peoples, from the experience of ethical, popular and feminist judgments, in view of the need for another justice, feminist, communitarian, plurinational, in defense of women, dissidences, Nature, from anti-racist and anti-extractivist practices that demonstrate the plots of injustices.¹²

Extractivism is also patriarchy

Ecoterritorial feminisms seek to make visible the link between extractivism and patriarchy, making visible the structural violence associated with the exploitation and degradation of territories and its impact on the bodies that inhabit them, where, for example, women have been the most affected by ecological and climatic violence. This is why we can say that socio-environmental problems are also structural gender violence.¹³ For example, the impacts of the situation of water scarcity and water contamination are more severe on women, children and dissidences, since they are the ones who most fulfill roles associated with the cultivation and care of crops. Women are the ones who carry out the most irrigation work, and the ones most closely linked to the land and the productivity of its various cycles, and likewise those who play the role of water reproduction. For the same reason, they see crop monoculture as a direct threat to their bodies, due to the application of agro-toxins and pesticides, as well as environmental degradation.

Extractivist activities impact women's lives, territories and their own self-care dynamics. When talking about water scarcity, women who are menstruating, those who are breastfeeding and those who need water all the time as a way of managing their care and that of other people, in addition to the farm and animals, are made invisible, relegated to care and domestic work due to the intensification of the precariousness of their lives generated by the installation and perpetuation of extractivism.¹⁴

Negotiations and resolution of socio-environmental conflicts are also captured by patriarchal logics. When extractive companies enter, if they inform about

their activities, it is mostly men from the affected localities or territories who are notified. The same happens when negotiations are held to stop a project or reduce its socio-environmental impacts. Women are reduced to the private sphere and to permanent disinformation, while the men in their organizations are the ones who negotiate. In the same way, several mobilized women in Abya Yala point out that, in their own mixed organizations, their presence is made invisible, with the majority being men who impose decisions, courses of action and times, without considering other ways of organizing life. For this reason, today there is not only a dispute over exiting from extractivist projects, but also over the importance of recognizing the work of women in territorial defense.

Placing life at the center of the body/territory

One of the emblematic slogans of feminisms in Abya Yala has been to place life at the center, which also includes the consideration of non-human lives, such as plants, animals, spirits and the dead, who are considered part of the web of life, as Lolita Chávez, member of the Council of K'iche's Peoples for the Defense of Life, Mother Nature, Land and Territory (CPK) pointed out.

It is within this framework of existence that women, who have historically been linked to the care and reproduction of life, will be the first to experience the effects of extractivism, this being the starting point of Latin American eco-territorial feminisms, "the defense of living conditions against the threat of pollution and/or the denunciation of impacts on health, air and the environment".¹⁵

Women and dissidences from different peoples and territories will be interwoven around community networks¹⁶, as a space of care and solidarity, to face the conditions of precariousness and structural violence brought about by extractivist activities, being at the same time the first to protest and organize themselves in the face of the installation and expansion of these projects. These community networks not only give account of a collective subjectivity but also make possible the material and symbolic reproduction of collective life and their own conditions of existence over time.

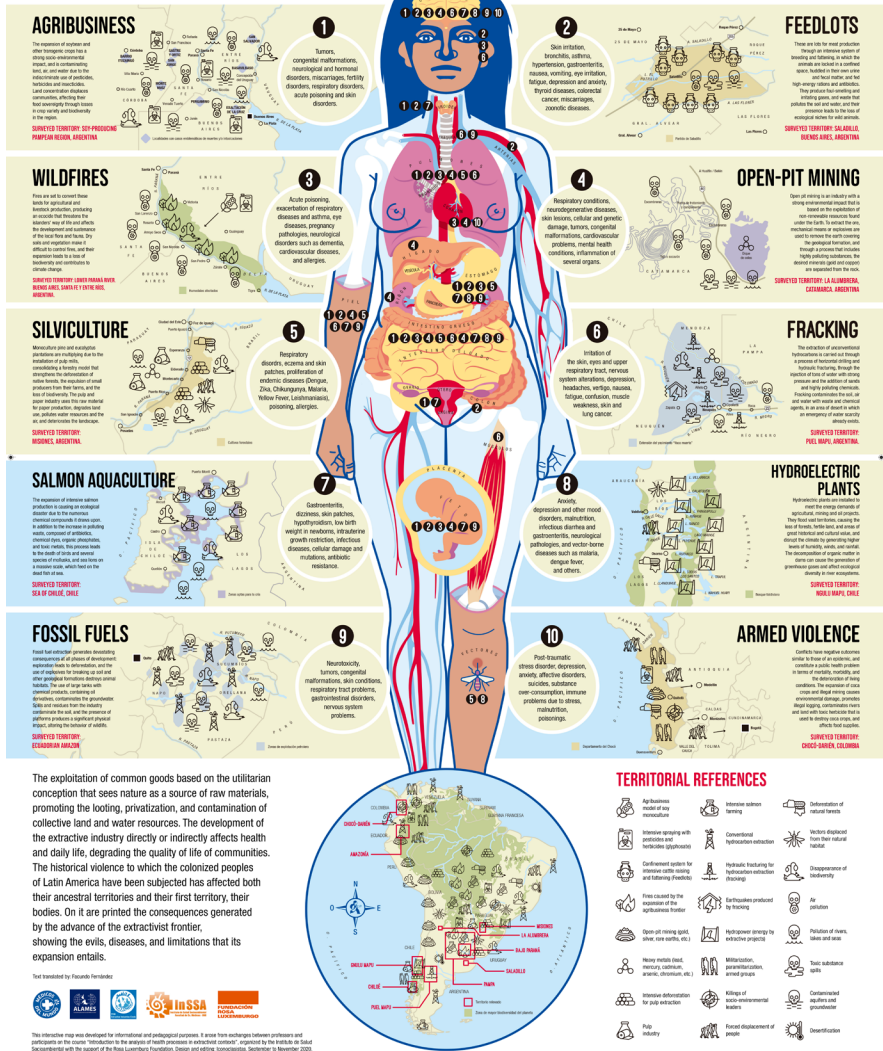
The community becomes the political force from which resistance and organization for life are built, through the conformation of a body that transcends the order of the individual, becoming a community body¹⁷, constituted by collective knowledge and tasks, which is also political, which has been named and constructed from discourses that have justified its oppression, exploitation and alienation. Today the bodies of women, girls and dissidences become bodies/territories with history, memory and knowledge to inhabit by intertwining the emotional, spiritual and rational dimensions.¹⁸

One of the greatest contributions to think about the defense of waters and territories comes from an epistemological turn given from community feminisms in Bolivia and Guatemala, incorporating the notion of body-territory, and also the triad body-land-territory, being one of the major referents Lorena Cabnal, part of the Ancestral Network of Healers of Community Feminism, Tzk'at.¹⁹

Figure 1: Body-territory map

10 SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN ARGENTINA AND SOUTH AMERICA, AND THEIR HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

BODY-TERRITORY MAP



Institute of Socio-environmental Health, National University of Rosario (Argentina)

Download the Body-Territory Poster (in Spanish): <https://bit.ly/445DT2o>

For Cabnal (2010), the notion of the body-territory allows the conscious recovery of “our first body territory”, as an emancipatory political act and in feminist coherence with “the personal is political”, “what is not named does not exist”.²⁰ The body has been a territory in dispute by patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism, to exercise its dominion from and over the bodies of women, girls and dissidences, and therefore the need to subvert this mandate.

The transgressive, transformative and creative power of the dispute over bodies and territories has given rise to a possible collective healing through the spiritual recovery and the ancestral knowledge of grandmothers²¹, facilitating processes of reconnection not only with one's own corporeality but also with Nature. On the other hand, to speak of territory-land is to recognize and situate in a given space the experience, the inhabiting and the very life of the bodies, which constitute a community body, territory-land historically crossed by extractivism and today the false solutions, degrading, dispossessing and contaminating the body-territory, in addition to perpetuating structural violence.

In view of the above, we have claimed not only as a methodological tool, but also as a political tool, the realization of body mappings from which to identify the ailments and consequences of extractivism in the bodies of women and dissidences in territories in socio-environmental conflicts due to extractivist activities and false solutions – such as those that propose solutions through the financialization of Nature and other ecocapitalist and polluting projects – to then map from the same body the possibilities of building alternatives and *buen vivir* (see Chapter A3).

Many of these mappings begin with the drawing of a silhouette of a participant, where each person then places words, drawings or icons at some point on the body where they experience or express physical and mental ailments resulting from the extractive activity that afflicts them.

Towards an ethics and politics of care

Eco-territorial feminisms have been outlining an ethics and politics of care based on *buen vivir*, focusing on self-care for the defense of territories, but also mentioning how women defenders take care of ourselves, the need to think of care as collective, communal and as part of the defense of Nature.

To sustain the defense of waters and territories requires self-care of physical, mental, spiritual and nutritional health, promoting the use and care of gardens in the countryside and in the city, knowing the plants and herbs that heal and caring for animal lives, which is related to food sovereignty and self-determination, considering both the production, distribution and consumption of food, and the care of seeds.²²

Another essential element is care in a joint way, assuming the organizational work in a collective manner, seeking spaces for healing and community containment from the different forms of *buen vivir* of the peoples, promoting a tasty living -*vivir sabroso*- with our traditions and environment, assuming a

joyful rebellion (Zapatista principle) from the organization, vindicating the practices of care of the diverse peoples that inhabit and converge in this struggle, in addition to consolidating networks and short circuits of territorial economies for the production and reproduction of life beyond the practices of neoliberal capitalism, and today of green capitalism.

The care of the body-land-territory implies the deployment of traditional-ancestral knowledge and practices, such as talking with the grandmothers of the territories, ceremonies with and for the waters, and the sharing of experiences of sowing water as a mechanism to favor the reproduction of water and the life of ecosystems. But it also requires the encouragement of an equal management and management of water from a territorial, popular, peasant and indigenous feminist perspective.

This is why it becomes urgent to dispute the common meanings for the generation of processes of reexistence, from the creation of the conditions of existence of peoples and species through community (re)territorialization.

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