
Peasant and Indigenous Women in Chile: Experiences of Struggle, Resistance, and Peasant Feminism

Mujeres campesinas e indígenas en Chile: experiencias de lucha, resistencia y feminismo campesino

Mulheres camponesas e indígenas do Chile: experiências de lutas, resistências e feminismo camponês

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Abstract

This article reflects on the struggles and resistance practices of Chilean peasant and Indigenous women facing the exploitation of Natural Resources by capitalist megaprojects. The reflection is based on the author's experience with the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (Anamuri), which represents a territory of resistance for these women against the expansion of this exploitation and the impacts of climate change. The spaces for debate and resistance built by Anamuri are highlighted, demonstrating their work in defense of body-territories and Natural Resources as a countermovement to the destructive exploitation of neo-extractivism and in favor of food sovereignty, agroecology, and life. This work reaffirms that the struggle for the right to body-territory is a common struggle throughout Latin America.

Keywords: Anamuri, body-territory, agroecology.

Resumen

Este artículo reflexiona sobre las luchas y prácticas de resistencia de las mujeres campesinas e indígenas chilenas frente a la explotación de los recursos naturales por parte de los megaproyectos capitalistas. La reflexión se basa en la experiencia de la autora con la Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas (Anamuri), que representa un territorio de resistencia para estas mujeres frente a la expansión de esta explotación y los impactos del cambio climático. Se destacan los espacios de debate y resistencia construidos por Anamuri, demostrando su trabajo en defensa

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de los territorios corporales y los recursos naturales como contramovimiento a la explotación destructiva del neextractivismo y a favor de la soberanía alimentaria, la agroecología y la vida. Este trabajo reafirma que la lucha por el derecho al territorio corporal es una lucha común en toda Latinoamérica.

Palabras clave: Anamuri, territorio corporal, agroecología

Resumo

Este artigo reflete sobre as práticas de lutas e resistências de mulheres camponesas e indígenas chilenas frente à exploração dos Bens da Natureza por megaprojetos do capital. A reflexão parte do relato de experiência da autora na Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales y Indígenas (Anamuri) que representa um território de resistência dessas mulheres contra a expansão dessa exploração e dos impactos das mudanças climáticas. Aqui destaca-se os espaços de debates e resistências construídos pela Anamuri, os quais indicam sua atuação em defesa dos corpos-territórios e dos Bens da Natureza como um contra movimento à exploração destrutiva do neextractivismo e em favor da soberania alimentar, agroecologia e da vida. Com esse trabalho reafirma-se que a luta pelo direito ao corpo-território é uma luta comum em toda América Latina.

Palavras-chave: Anamuri, corpo-território, agroecologia.

Introduction

In Latin America, community struggles in defense of territories against the advance of capitalist accumulation present themselves as the material basis for the social organization of women, the guarantee of their identities, and the construction of strategies for social transformation (Federici 2017; Haesbaert 2020).

Here, too, territory is understood as an overflow of the body, the "body-territory," but a body that is collective and carries with it cultural baggage from its trajectories to confront the pressures and violence of large-scale capitalist projects (Haesbaert 2020; Miranda 2017). From this perspective, the body-territory is a political dimension of the body in struggle, giving rise to re-existences and the realization of the right to territory. It is not surprising that the main subjects who historically use the body-territory, dimensions inseparable from life, as a fundamental category of understanding, analysis, and struggle in defense of territory are Indigenous peoples and women (including Indigenous women)

(Haesbaert 2021). Indigenous peoples constantly teach us, reaffirming that the debate on territory is inseparable from the body itself; the struggle for territory is a struggle for life (Chaves 2021). In this debate, Tzul 2019 points out that the protagonism of peasant and Indigenous women in the struggle for territory is essential, since they are the ones who, historically, work in the central management of daily life using elements such as water, land, and subsistence crops as subsidies.

Therefore, the threat of loss of territory translates as a direct threat to their existence. What we call body-territory also encompasses studying the power relations that threaten territories by imposing rules and values on subalternized bodies exploited by hegemonic groups (Miranda 2017; Muñoz & Villarreal 2019). With this understanding of body-territory, women from the countryside, waterways, and forests organize and challenge power relations, building counter-hegemony and resistance. This organization is essential for confronting the power relations that dispute natural resources and subject different forms of life, more specifically, the body-territory, to socio-environmental disasters and the power of death (Penido 2018).

The same power relations that drive the colonization of bodies and territories are also responsible for the exploitation and expropriation of nature (Limón 2021; Miranda & Barroso 2023). As a result of this exploitation, we have increasingly experienced the impacts of climate change, which exacerbate social inequalities and make the inseparability of society and nature and the co-evolution between the two more explicit (Giraldo 2022). Climate change is an element that determines territorial relations and is the result of a certain form of production and political choices in which not everyone is equally responsible for these problems (Muñoz & Villarreal 2019; Limón 2021). Furthermore, the impacts of climate change do not reach all subjects equally; in this imbalance, peasant, quilombola, and Indigenous women are the most affected on a daily basis (Miranda & Barroso 2023). These women depend more on collective natural resources and are the most vulnerable due to precarious work. In addition, they face an intensified workload due to caring

for their own lives, managing private spaces, and performing reproductive work, which requires them to address sources of pollution and poisoning, as well as situations of scarcity of productive resources (Antonio et al. 2020; Miranda & Barroso 2023).

Even though they experience the impacts of climate change more intensely and privately, women currently represent the main force of resistance against predatory activities that serve the interests of agribusiness, the commodification of nature, and the colonization of bodies-territories (Ulloa 2016; Capitani 2022). In this scenario of inequalities and consequent struggles and resistance, women across Latin America are pointing the way towards collective construction through mobilization and organization in collectives and social movements of resistance and survival against the advances of neo-extractivism and the impacts of climate change (Miranda & Barroso 2023; Articulación de Mujeres de La CLOC/LVC 2024). Within these paths, Agroecology, with its strong connotation of territory experienced as a body, has proven to be a fundamental tool for maintaining and strengthening this resistance and survival (Eduardo 2016).

Agroecology has the potential to open up space for confronting the inequalities and oppression suffered by rural women by reconfiguring the power relations in society that define hegemonic social relations (Articulación de Mujeres de La CLOC/LVC 2024). Thus, Agroecology becomes a key element in consolidating a feminist approach to the struggle of rural women. A feminist perspective on agroecology focuses on giving visibility, recognizing, and valuing the knowledge and productive and reproductive work of rural women, as well as their struggles. It is in this direction that, for example, the Anamuri (National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women) collective in Chile works to promote agroecology and defend and organize Chilean peasant and indigenous women nationwide by uniting and strengthening their interests and demands in the face of the exploitation of nature's resources by mining and agribusiness megaprojects that follow the logic of capital.

This text is based on the author's account of her inspiring experience with Anamuri. Therefore, the objective of this work was to share experiences, impressions, and reflections that address Anamuri's practices of organization, mobilization, action, and resistance to the expansion of mining, agribusiness, and state violence.

Anamuri – peasant feminism, body-territory and agroecology

This report presents an experience resulting from Rabello's Training License at the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (Anamuri) in Chile, from August 26 to November 23, 2024. This report is based on her experience, observation, participation, and listening to women in the sociopolitical training and struggle spaces established by Anamuri.

Anamuri is a self-organized movement solely and exclusively by and for women, active throughout Chile, with its leadership headquarters in Santiago. It is part of CLOC-Via Campesina, an international movement that connects rural peoples and social organizations. Most of the activities experienced with Anamuri were carried out at the Instituto Agroecológico Latinoamericano (IALA) Sembradoras de Esperanzas. IALA Sembradoras de Esperanzas is an initiative of Anamuri, launched in 2014, and located in Ourilla de Auquenco, a commune in Chépica south of Santiago, a rural community that was the birthplace of agrarian reform in Chile.

At Anamuri, Popular Peasant Feminism is built through the daily experiences of peasant and Indigenous women, such as agroecological practices, and through resistance through the organization and participation in political and cultural activities, seminars, agroecological and sociopolitical training workshops, and the encouragement of women affiliated with Anamuri to apply for a position. Anamuri develops activities with women from diverse agroecological contexts (from the Atacama Desert to Patagonia; from the sea to the Andes Mountains—

hence Tierra de los Cuatro Cantos), enriching the diversity of debates and actions based on different realities, but also on common realities.

Chilean indigenous women and the body-territory perspective

At Anamuri, the fluid union of the peasant women's movement with that of Indigenous women deepens the layer of politicization in the relationship with and defense of their bodies-territories. It was clear that the historic anti-colonial struggles of Chilean Indigenous women, faced with territorial conflicts, have the power to illuminate other possible paths of confrontation and resistance.

In the case of Anamuri, the board of directors and activities in general are marked by the central role of older women, which seemed to reflect the constant and strong presence of Indigenous women in the association since its conception and founding. I believe that Indigenous women bring a dynamic to the association that values the experience of elders (whether Indigenous or not), their creative processes of food production, and their collective struggles for their territories, bodies, and ways of life. This seemed reinforced when the older peasant and Indigenous women shared, at the beginning of the activities, how and why they faced the problems that affected them; It was from the struggles in the countryside and on the streets against the repression and violence imposed by the Pinochet dictatorship, neo-extractivism, and neoliberalism (even during the redemocratization process). In other words, they illuminated a peasant feminism based on this place of experience, of daily life. In a country like Chile, with a long and strong neoliberal experience—a system that prioritizes productive, young bodies, and individuality—reclaiming, valuing, and empowering elders and the always collective experience is a powerful act of resistance.

For the Chilean Indigenous women linked to Anamuri, the pillars of body-territory, biodiversity, and autonomy are the underlying forces for the struggle against the advance of mining, agribusiness, and state violence. To organize and strengthen these struggles, in September 2024, Anamuri organized the National

Assembly of Indigenous Women's Front, with the presence of Indigenous women from the Licanantay, Aymara, Coya, Mapuche, and Mapuche-Huilliche peoples (panel 1).

Panel 1 - National Assembly of Indigenous Women's Front in Chile, 2024.



Source: Fieldwork photo Ananza Rabello September 2024.

Indigenous women primarily reported experiencing racism in the healthcare system, which fails to respect their knowledge and customs, fails to provide adequate treatment, and fails to hire professionals who represent Indigenous peoples. Their stories and demands reflect a healthcare system that fails to articulate its policies and practices based on the vulnerable territories of Indigenous women. They also face challenges with the Ministry of Agriculture, which considers them rural women rather than Indigenous women, denying Chile's ethnic and sociocultural diversity. Another problem they face is that the Ministry itself attempts to appropriate their territories by monitoring the seedlings they deliver; forestry technicians make periodic visits to verify that the seedlings were actually planted and how the harvest is proceeding.

Chilean peasant and indigenous women denounce water scarcity and the impacts of climate change

A common concern raised by peasant and Indigenous women from Anamuri during the activities of the National Assembly of Indigenous Women's Front (September 24), the International Day of Rural Women (October 24), the IALA Centro Conference (October 24), the Radicalizing Democracy Meeting (November 24), and the Producers' Assembly (November 24) was the impacts of climate change

and the future of peasant seeds in this scenario. Some of the impacts of climate change they have already felt directly include the challenge of planting on sandier land, the emergence of animals that previously did not exist on their properties (e.g., rats, spiders), seasonal changes with a decrease in average temperatures, and a reduction in water supply in nearby reservoirs, forcing them to walk long distances.

The water scarcity experienced by peasant and Indigenous women in northern Chile has become a very painful situation. This scarcity and the massive drought reflect not only the impacts of climate change, but also the consequences of water privatization, hoarding, speculation, and theft by megaprojects, demonstrating the worsening problems, depth, and complexity resulting from the neoliberal policies adopted in the country. Chile is the only country in the world with 100% privatized water, and small producers are directly impacted because they must "buy" water quotas and, to have a well, also pay for the amount of water used. The scarcity continues to worsen because peasant and indigenous agriculture lacks real access to water rights, a common good that has now become a market commodity. In northern Chile, for example, mining companies buy large quotas and centralize water use, resulting in a shortage for the population in many places, denying them regular access to water, and they end up relying on tanker trucks. The dispute over water has created an extreme situation for peasant and indigenous agriculture in Chile.

Popular Peasant Feminism and strategies of resistance to gender inequality in the countryside

In addition to the impacts of climate change and the scarcity of natural resources resulting from Chilean neoliberalism, the women of Anamuri also suffer from gender inequalities regarding land distribution and access, and in decision-making regarding land, territories, and their assets. On International Rural Women's Day (October 24), women from the fields, waters, and forests highlighted the urgent need to discuss public policies that favor land ownership and

government subsidies in the name of women. These women argue that the fight for equal conditions and rights between men and women must be part of the debate on food sovereignty and comprehensive and popular agrarian reform.

Understanding that peasant and Indigenous women must be represented in political spaces and that institutional action is strategically important for women's struggles, Anamuri periodically organizes, on a traveling basis, a political training school for empowerment and female leadership for public and collective policy actions, called the Itinerant Citizen Schools. The training activities at the Itinerant Citizens' School, held in September 2024, focused on the history of Chilean peasant women's struggles, systems of oppression (capitalism and patriarchy), peasant and popular feminism, resistance, and the declaration of peasant women's rights (photo 1). As this activity took place at the beginning of the municipal election campaign, the school also discussed communication and advocacy strategies, as some members were running for office. This activity reinforced the recognition of popular peasant feminism as a transformative element for peasant organizations, whether or not they are part of Anamuri. It also sparked debate about how society is structured and the origins of the struggles currently faced by peasant and Indigenous women.

Photo 1 - Training Activity, Itinerant Citizens' School, Chile, September 2024



Source: Training Activity, photo; Ananza Rabelo Sept. 2024.

Overall, I experienced that Anamuri deeply debates how agribusiness and other extractive activities have created masculinized economies, generating more violence and precariousness in the lives of peasant and Indigenous women. In this sense, the discussions hosted by Anamuri were not limited to simply questioning the injustice, inequality, and subordination suffered by peasant and Indigenous women, but also revisiting and discussing the structural axes that generate and fuel these conditions of violence and justify the current struggles for popular peasant feminism, food sovereignty with agroecology, the defense and protection of peasant seeds, and comprehensive and popular agrarian reform.

Final Considerations

The experience and daily struggles of the Anamuri women in Chile provided insights into the violent advance of mining and agribusiness exploitation into peasant and Indigenous territories in Chile, which particularly impacts women's lives. It also led to an understanding of the sociopolitical dimension of climate change, which, far from being natural, has restricted the lives of women in these territories. On the other hand, they have been combative and a fundamental element in the resistance and mobilizations of the peasant class.

Given the complexity of the struggles of Chilean peasant and Indigenous women, the fight for the right to body-territory is a common struggle throughout Latin America and denounces the expansion of neoliberalism and the extractive front into various territories and the violation of the right to life. The fight for territory is a unifying axis of the struggles within Anamuri, with body-territory as a fundamental tool in the resistance and mobilizations of Chilean Indigenous and peasant women. Thus, the fight for land, water, and nature in general is part of caring for the body and for the people, highlighting the risks that the loss of rights to and in the territory poses to biodiversity and the existence of these women.

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Data availability:
Research data is available in the body of the article.

