

The Future is Female: Image-Maker in Residence: Ángela Camacho

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Jumne

A phrase coined by the feminist movement in 1975 has in recent times become popular again: "The future is female." Originally formulated as part of the fight for gender equality, the phrase has now taken on much broader connotations. Today, "The future is female" refers to the turn that humanity is taking, and that it must continue to take, so that we can safeguard life on Earth, our only planet, which for many cultures of the world, is female: our Mother Earth. In that future, which is already part of our present, women have become the key to sustaining life.

Attacked globally by a pandemic and the increasingly certain threat of a planetary environmental crisis, humanity is finally waking up. We are realizing that we must seriously change the patterns of behaviour that govern relationships between human beings and nature: competition, force, patriarchy and authoritarianism, to communitarianism, collaboration and solidarity, all of which may allow us to put social justice, equity and respect for nature at the centre of life. In other words, we urgently need to extend the philosophy and life principles of care, intrinsic in women, to every dimension of social life.

In many corners of the world women are mobilising to make this happen. Throughout Latin America in particular, women are increasingly at the forefront of socio-environmental conflicts, battling for the future of our children to no longer be at stake. In the form of non-violent resistance, awareness raising, solidarity, sisterhood, commitment and cooperation, women from different backgrounds are demonstrating their agency and transformative power to create new collective identities that can allow us to dream and put into practice a different future for ourselves, our children, families and communities.

To me this is what Angela Camacho is trying to show us in **MUJERXS of my ABYA YALA**, but from a specific place of enunciation, for her choice of words is not fortuitous. Abya Yala is the name that the Kuna-Tule people (of the lands now known as Panama and Colombia) gave to the "Americas" before the colonial invasion. As the Ecuadorian decolonial thinker Catherine Walsh (2018) reminds us, it signifies "land of vital blood". Its present-day use began in 1992 when indigenous peoples throughout the continent started using it again, marking 500 years of the European invasion and formulating alternatives for a better life, in harmony with Nature and Human Dignity. This marked the beginning of a new political moment of decolonial resistance and shift in the continent that calls for a rupture with the model of world power that we now refer to as modernity/coloniality. Thus, by invoking Abya Yala, Angela Camacho is telling us that for the future to be female, it must be decolonial. A future where other knowledges, values, principles and cosmogonies - that have been hidden, submerged and silenced by modernity and coloniality, and which are key for humanity to reconnect with the "land of vital blood" - can effectively play role imagining and crafting alternatives for a better life.

This is why her images represent, in particular, the struggles of sub-altern Latin American women (indigenous, afrodescendants, campesinas, rural) across the continent. Women that, from Mexico to Tierra del Fuego in Argentina, are taking the lead fighting for a world, as the Zapatista Liberation Army once said, where many worlds are possible. This also explains why she writes MUJERXS (women) with an “X”; from a place of diversity, plurality.

In her images, I can tell Angela’s sense of pride representing Maxima Acuna, Nemonte Nemquino and Francia Marquez; iconic Latin America women who against all odds have been successful stopping and confronting the imposition of extractivism, neoliberalism, capitalism and patriarchy in their homelands. They have done this by articulating an interwoven discourse and politics of territorial sovereignty and autonomy in the continent. Yet, I can also hear her telling us that the battle is far from being over. By representing Moira Millan, Machupe Warrior and member of the “*Ni una Menos*” feminist movement, she is reminding us that Abya Yala is the second most violent continent towards women: fourteen of the twenty-five countries with the highest femicide rates are in Latin America. Such gender violence often spills over their battles for an alternative future. Bertha Caceres, who for more than a decade fought against hydroelectric dams in Honduras, became in 2016 one of such victims. She was assassinated in her home by armed intruders after years of threats against her life. Thus, by representing her, Angela is also telling us, that for the future to be female, their battle must be everyone’s battle.

Art, as Angela shows here, can play an important part helping to amplify the voice of our *Muxers of Abya Yala*, as do initiatives like the Goldman Prize and the Times most influential person nominations, which many of the women that she presents have received. But I sense, that by engaging with the academic community, Angela is also telling us that as social researchers, we also can and must take a stance supporting their struggles. We can do this by committing to developing a decolonial praxis where research is seen as a vehicle to transform power asymmetries in the dominant paradigm of development and knowledge production. This entails changing the terms of conversation with our traditional “objects of research” and developing a politics of knowledge that helps strengthen women’s agendas of political reaffirmation, cultural revitalization and knowledge production. This way, our *Muxers of Abya Yala* will be more effective guiding us to the necessary reconnection with our “land of vital blood” and helping us ensure that our “future is female”.

Reference:

Walsh, C (2018) Decoloniality in/as praxis, in: Mignolo, W. and C. Walsh (Eds) *On decoloniality. Concepts, analytics, praxis*. Duke University Press: USA.