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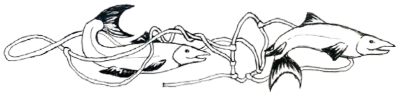

INDIGENOUS
INTERNATIONALISMS
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Kidnapped Water and Living Otherwise in a World of Drought, Fires, and Floods

Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez *

This essay considers how the production of water as a resource that can be extracted and commodified is situated at the core of colonial capitalist economies. Water has become a volatile means to secure economic growth under conditions of accelerated aridification and scarcity. The focus of the analysis is the struggle of the United Front of Nahua Communities in Puebla, Mexico against the water bottling company Danone Bonafont. Like other Indigenous struggles, the significance of this case goes beyond water rights and environmental justice. Shifting the focus to relationships of water—the interactions between the human and non-human worlds, this paper demonstrates that conflicts over water, the life, and energy it represents reflects not only different value systems but also a disconnect about the place of humans in the wider world and in the current context of climate catastrophes, fires, and droughts. I develop a "confluence of plural bodies" approach to explore how "water as life" may offer us the language to envision alternative understandings of liberation.[1]

> *We will navigate, we will walk to tell the Earth that, in the world we feel in our collective hearth, there is place for ALL. Simply because that world can only be possible if we ALL struggle to bring it back*
>
> *— Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés 2020*

In March, 2021, on International Water Day, the United Front of Nahua Communities of the Cholulteca and Volcano Regions surrounded and prevented access to the Danone Bonafont water bottling plant located in Puebla, Mexico (Acosta 2021). These communities claimed that the company had kidnapped water for over 20 years. They demanded a dialogue with the Puebla state and federal governments, the Water National Commission, and the Institute for Indigenous Development. They patiently waited for almost five months for a response that did not come. On August 8th, on the 142nd anniversary of revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata's birthday, the communities decided to take over the water plant to liberate water (Castillo 2021). Enacting their own Indigenous laws and articulating "water as life", women, children, elders, and youth took over the water plant. They denounced Danone Bonafont for extracting 1.64 million liters of water daily and drying out water springs and their domestic water wells on their territories (Pueblos Unidos et al. 2021). Danone Bonafont is the second most profitable water bottle company worldwide and these profits increased

* **Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez**, Binizaá from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico (PhD), Professor, Canada Research Chair in Comparative Indigenous Feminist Studies, Department of Political Science, University of Alberta.

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in 2021 during the pandemic (Villanueva 2022). The United Front of Nahua Communities contested the Mexican government's authority to grant water licenses to transnational corporations. This organization argued that water is a living entity, not a resource that the government can dispose of.

In recent years, water has come to assume a distinctive role in Indigenous movements, driving them to articulate political responses to water theft and contamination by resource extraction. The slogan "water is life" has become ubiquitous; heard at protests and gatherings around the world, the phrase is central to Indigenous movements that refuse industrial resource extraction and exclusionary enclosures. Lakota historian Nick Estes argues that Indigenous movements bring into focus the ontological roots of Indigenous peoples' critique of the dispossession of land and water (2019). Lenape scholar Joanne Barker contends that focusing on water as an analytic is useful in foregrounding both movements and relationships. Barker asks, how does water bring people together and why does it matter (2019, 2)? Building on Barker's work, I propose a confluence mode of analysis to examine colonial capitalist contours of aquapolitics alongside Indigenous contestations through water as life. Relationality has been at the center of Indigenous theorizing (TallBear 2019; Yazie & Baldy 2019; Simpson 2018; Stark 2010). I contribute to this discussion through an analytic that not only focuses the human and non-human relations that enable life but also the political practices that center Indigenous life worlds at the confluence of plural bodies, struggles, and ontologies. This analytic excavates the overlapping and accumulated histories of colonization and capitalist violence while foregrounding relations of water and struggles for life. I show that struggles to defend water and the life-energy it represents reveal not only differing value systems but also a disconnect about the place of humans on Earth. *Water as life* is not just a political strategy to recover much needed water but a philosophical standpoint that challenges colonial capitalist enclosures by highlighting the relational confluence of plural bodies as a precondition of life.

The focus of my analysis is the struggle of the United Front of Nahua Communities in Puebla, Mexico, which is situated within the ongoing colonial capitalist aquapolitics of Puebla city and the Nahua communities of the valley adjacent to the active volcano Popocatepetl. This is a peri-urban region, or a zone of transition from rural to urban areas. These communities have been exposed to the constant demand for water from the urban and industrialized areas of this region. Refusing to let go of their water, Nahua communities insist on centering the web of relationships that water binds together and that constitutes their territories. It is this standpoint and the conceptual scaffolding of the altepetl that I am interested in as the basis of Indigenous political practices.

Water and the Confluence of Multiple Bodies

In Indigenous Mesoamerican worldviews, water and land are inextricably connected. In Nahuatl, for example, the word altepetl is formed by the words *alt* (water) and *tepetl* (mountain). Thus, altepetl means water mountain, which is considered the origin of life on earth. It is also a sociopolitical unit, a home/territory that can only be understood in reference to the relationships of interdependence between the human and non-human worlds. A variant image of the altepetl is that of an island surrounded by sea water, which is transformed into fresh water through its movement from inside the land, making life possible. Water manifests in clouds, rain, mists, oceans, steam, and so forth. The Mexica glyph that represents the altepetl is a mountain from whose base a cave opens and from which water flows (Christlieb 2003). Another idea/image of the altepetl is a waterscape surrounded by mountains from which water flows through lakes, rivers, creeks, and water springs. In all these images, different bodies of water and land enter into relationships.

Federico Fernández Christlieb notes that the altepetl can be described as a metaphor for the interactions that Indigenous peoples maintain with the non-human beings that constitute their ecosystems. He defines the altepetl as a socio-spatially organized community who is closely connected to the land through its legal order. He identifies three attributes of the altepetl: 1) an organized community; 2) an Indigenous legal order that includes rotating systems of communal services and authority; and 3) a socio-spatial relation with a specific territory based on the idea of a mountain full of water, seed, animals, or all that is necessary for life (Christlieb 2015). From this perspective, Indigenous territories and Indigenous communities come into being through their interactions with the more than human world and are bound by a legal order and life-making practices. In the notion of the altepetl there is no land without water, there is no water without land, and there is no life without water and land. Water and land together create mud, which is considered the prime material for life. Water connects different bodies of land, animals, and plants, transforming itself through its movement from one body to another.

Earth, territory, and all of life are only possible through the fluidity of water. These interspecies and inter-elemental relations of interdependence embody a particular way of being on and with the Earth. They are central to how Indigenous peoples understand and give meaning to place. Indigenous communities enter into relationships with these entities and forces through the kinetics of their bodies and intentional actions. Such relationships create the conditions of possibility for both the human and non-human worlds through mutual causation. Anishinaabe scholar Heidi Stark argues that for such

relationships to function, they need to be grounded on respect, responsibility, and renewal. These principles are foundational to Indigenous political thought and the treaties established first between the Anishinaabe and the non-human world and later with other Indigenous nations and European settlers (Stark 2010).

Among the Nahuas and other Indigenous peoples in Mexico, practices such as invoking, dreaming of, speaking to, celebrating, and feasting for entities of the non-human world bring human and non-human beings together to act collectively and make something happen. Through these practices the non-human world is encouraged to act in pursuing a common goal. Negotiation and agreement are part of the process of acting together. The idea of communal work is not only of vital importance to the collective wellbeing of humans but also of non-human beings. It reflects the subjectification of both human and non-human beings and a relational affinity among plural bodies. It is through reciprocal relations with elements, entities, and diverse species that humans come into completion. This understanding of subjectification is not only more fluid but also more expansive by including plural selves.

To the Nahua communities of the volcano Popocatepetl region, this relational ethos and principle of communal work is central to their governance institutions and everyday life. Relationality is reflected, for example, in how they address the volcano; they call it Don Goyo (Mr. Goyo). To these communities, the volcano, like water and mountains, has agency and hearth-feelings. It is capable of expressing its desires and its will to act. The Popocatepetl is considered to be the guardian of water. The rituals for water and Tlaloc, the Mexica god of rain and water, are mediated by graniceros or weather workers (Glockner 2019). Graniceros are individuals who were struck by lightning and survived, thereafter carrying the obligation to serve the weather spirits (Albores & Broda 1997). Graniceros' work is to communicate with the spirits of the mountains, the volcano, and water in order to regulate the weather. Life among the Nahuas develops in a continuous process of communication with these entities in order to understand their generosity and life-enabling gift. The mountains, the volcano, water, and spirits support the communal work and social life of Nahuas, and in exchange these communities have the responsibility to reciprocate by feasting for, thanking, and celebrating these entities. This way of understanding inter-elemental and interspecies relations shapes the social, legal, political, and economic arrangements and institutions that govern Nahua communal life. These relationships of interdependence are inextricably bound to a way of seeing the world that gives intentionality, respect, and accountability to the more than human world.

There is no life without this web of relations. This confluence of human and non-human bodies challenges the boundaries between species and elements as well as the colonial anthropocentric, gendered, and racialized hierarchies. Confluence is literally about rivers flowing together to form a mightier current. I understand relational confluence as the practice of bringing plural bodies, human and otherwise, along with communities, ontologies, and struggles together to refuse the death of Indigenous life. This concept invites us to think about the interdependent conditions that bind our human existence to that of the other-than-human world as well as the conscious actions that make such conditions possible. As the entity that makes the conditions for life possible on Earth, water reveals the unilateral violence of colonial capitalist resource extraction and its death-producing force.

Water and the Nahua Communities in the Colonial Capitalist Context

While the confluence of plural bodies in interdependent relations enable life, the colonial capitalist convergence of violence, dispossession, and ecological destruction threatens freedom and the web of relationships that constitutes Indigenous life. This loss of freedom manifests in the loss of the capacity of Indigenous peoples to self-constitute themselves in relation to that life-enabling web of relations. Colonial and capitalist imperatives aim at extracting, damning, containing, controlling, and commodifying water. The commodification of land, water, bodies, and resources is at the core of colonial capitalist economies. In the colonial worldview, water is a means to transport goods and people; it facilitates extraction and has value as a resource. Situated in a broad historical perspective, resource extraction and the ecological effects it produces are constitutive of ongoing colonialism. Dina Gilio-Whitaker writes that colonization is not just a process of invasion and domination of Indigenous peoples by European colonizers but a structure of violence that operates ecologically, politically, socially, culturally, and ontologically (2019, 171). As such, colonialism is bound with ecological destruction and the dramatic transformations of Indigenous landscapes. Indigenous land dispossession, extractivism, erasure, unrecognized rights, and colonial green conservation have all obstructed Indigenous peoples' access to their lands, sacred spaces, traditional food, water sources, and medicine. Movements for environmental justice often fail to connect contemporary struggles to a longer colonial history. However, the construction of colonial cities, railroads, mines, aqueducts, and other infrastructures have had a massive impact on Indigenous nations and the landscapes they inhabit.

As a mode of relationship, violence is structured by hierarchical and anthropocentric conceptions of humanity, life, race, gender, and sexuality. Violence (gendered, sexualized, ecological, and racialized) is not an unfortunate consequence of colonialism and capitalist accumulation. Rather, violence is constitutive of such processes. Colonialism continues to shape the global economic system and what landscapes and resources are rendered extractable. Traci Voyles writes that "wastelanding", the process of seeing landscapes as a waste, is a racial signifier that "renders the environment and the bodies that inhabit it pollutable" (2015, 45). Wasteland is a transferable signifier that materializes in disparate landscapes, impacting racialized human populations. Wastelanding and racialization manifest in everyday forms of devaluation, exploitation, and disposability. Over time, they produce what Byrd et al. call "economies of dispossession", which are constituted by multiple and interconnected genealogies of racialized dispossession, subjection, and expropriation through which both colonialism and capitalism take form (2018). These circuits of production, distribution, consumption, and reproduction have created a topography of co-constituted processes whose effects are cumulative.

Nahua communities have a history of resistance against different waves of land dispossession. They inhabit both the urban core of San Andrés Cholula and the peri-urban volcano area. Cholula is the oldest living city in the Americas with more than three thousand years of continuous history. Located in the Puebla–Tlaxcala Valley, the city is flanked to the west by the snow-covered peaks of the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl. Several perennial water streams converge with the Atoyac River, creating a wetland to the north and east of the urban center. Cholula was an important pre-Hispanic city; it was a center for the education of Nahua spiritual leaders. This ancient city was modeled as an altepetl, a socio-spatial territory established on a "mountain full of water", a place where the confluence of water, seeds, animals, and land enables life. The pyramids that constituted the city were erected in carefully selected locations as a physical representation of the altepetl and as the basis of the local rotational socio-religious political system (Florescano 2006). Besides being a centre for learning and pilgrimage, Cholula also boasted a vibrant tianquiztli or market where long-distance merchants exchanged goods.

The massacre of Cholula people inaugurated Spanish colonization in the region, even though colonial rule was not institutionalized until the early 1530s with the arrival of missionaries. Cholula's colonial history developed in concert with that of Puebla, the quintessential Spanish city. Land dispossessed from Cholula and neighbouring Nahua communities served to create Puebla as a settler city or Spanish Republic. Cholula, on the other hand, became a pueblo de indios or Indian Republic, providing resources and forced labour to Spanish settlers through the encomienda system. Spaniards razed the numerous ancient Nahua teocallis or temples and replaced them with Christian churches, changing the landscape of the city (McCafferty 2001). Forced Indigenous labourers recycled sacred stones as they built the new structures on the same site of their temples. As Puebla continued to grow, demand for more Indigenous land and forced labour put enormous pressure on Nahua communities. However, the narrative of a triumphant Spanish conquest that eradicated Indigenous traditions remains a myth. The expansion of the colonial frontier was met with Indigenous resistance, which resulted in an area of tension between the imposed colonial order and the persistence of Indigenous legal traditions. Indigenous refusal to disappear manifested in the rejection of imposed governance systems. For example, although the municipal authority eventually became a third level of government, the mayordomías—the Indigenous communal system of posts, services, and governance—continues to coexist with the municipal government, safeguarding the interests of the community's vis-a-vis non-Indigenous government (Schumacher et al. 2023).

As Puebla city continued to expand, it began to reach the edges of Indigenous communally controlled lands, which became the target of real estate investors, land speculators, and the political elite. However, the Mexican Constitution of 1917 protected these lands until the early 1990s. In 1991, in the context of the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Article 27 of the Constitution was modified to open up Indigenous lands to the market. This change triggered a massive process of expropriation and urbanization of Indigenous lands. For example, the government of the state of Puebla expropriated 1,082 hectares of Nahua land to create the Atlixcayotl Territorial Reserve. While the expropriation was justified under the argument of creating social housing, this area became rather gentrified (Schumacher et al. 2023). In this newly open land market, Cholula and surrounding areas became part of an ambitious urban plan for attracting industries and real estate development. The aggressive regional development plan focused on modernizing Puebla's metropolitan area in order to uphold NAFTA's commitments (Cabrera Becerra & Tenorio Tellez 2006). Like in other regions of Mexico, in Puebla the current wave of natural resource extraction manifests in the widening and deepening of the structure and infrastructure to facilitate the exploitation and control of a wide range of resources; the expansion of transnational agroindustry and the exclusion of subsistence economic practices; and the reorganization of territories and financialization. Together, these strategies have accelerated environmental destruction. To attract investors, industries were granted unlimited access to water. To that end, deep-water wells were drilled in the Indigenous communities of San Buenaventura Nealtican, Santa María Acuexcomac, Nealtican, and Acuexcomac. Overexploitation of the deep-water wells was soon noticed by these communities. They denounced the government of Puebla for failing to monitor water levels and overexploitation. They also engaged in direct action to protect water. For years, they faced government repression and co-optation tactics, which ended up dividing communities and facilitating the development of an additional hydric project.

As urban and industrial demand for water grew, in 2006 the government proposed the construction of a new deep-water well in San Francisco Ocotlán. However, it was unsuccessful thanks to the community's mobilization and the support of neighbouring communities and organizations (Campos & Ramírez 2009, 263–265). At that time, Nahua communities created the Organization for the Defense of Water and the Environment in San Pedro Cholula. With the slogan "Water is life, do not let it go", this organization drew attention to the illegal exploitation of water by industries (Hernández 2007). These communities also resorted to legal action by demanding the recognition of their rights as "pueblos originarios" or First Peoples, which are protected in Article 2 of the Constitution. In their Writ of Amparo, they asserted that as the original peoples of the territory they possess a socio-spatial organization inherited from the ancient Mesoamerican altepetl, which is the foundation of their legal traditions. They also claimed that their territory had been a fertile area that included rivers, creeks, and many water springs. The automotive and steel industries, the disorganized expansion of the city of Puebla, and the irresponsible overexploitation of water had produced dramatic changes in a short period of time (Schumacher et al. 2023).

The concession to Danone Bonafont to exploit volcanic aquifers in 1992 reinforced the historical dispossessions of these communities. The government of Puebla manipulated elections and fraudulently imposed a municipal government that agreed to the water concession without the consent of Nahua communities, who witnessed how their traditional water wells started to dry up. In the words of one woman activist,

> Our artisanal water wells are very important to our communities. They are part of our governance traditions and the way we have always administered water. We take from the Earth, but we always make sure that it is not excessive, that we respect her. For us, water is the essence of life (Tricks & Castillo 2021).

Struggles to defend water are also contestations over what constitutes legitimate authority and processes that are used to render existing Indigenous governance invisible. Transnational companies such as Danone Bonafont, Nestle, and Coca Cola are subsidized by the Mexican government and thereby incentivized to dispossess Indigenous communities from their aquifers. In contrast, establishing and maintaining reciprocal relations with water and well as collective discussions over how water is used and who uses it is the foundation of Nahua governance. At the root of this conflict is a way of seeing the world that rests upon a hierarchical distinction between life and nonlife, or what Elizabeth Povinelli (2016) calls "geontopower". From this point of view, water is nonlife and lacks agency. Therefore, it is just a resource that can be exploited. Even in discussions regarding water justice, it is humans and their rights to safe and clean water that are centered (Fejzic 2020, 518). From Povinellis' perspective, geontopower, colonial violence, and capitalism informs human relations to natural resources. However, as Kim TallBear argues, it is not just the non-human world that is rendered nonlife but also Indigenous and Black bodies whose humanity is de-animated (2019, 25). Refusing extractivism and the destruction it produces necessarily involves a refusal of the colonial violence that is inflicted on both human and more-than-human bodies as well as on human and non-human relations (Altamirano-Jiménez 2021). Refusal demands other ontologies and alternatives that center reciprocal relations and the practices that enable life.

The United Front of Nahua Communities and Kidnapped Water

On March 22, 2021, twenty Nahua communities decided it was time to liberate water (Tecpatl 2022). Prior to this moment, people had been visiting communities and talking to each other. They found out they were all concerned about water. They decided to organize as the United Front of Nahua Communities of the Choluteca and Volcano Regions to defend water and life. Members of the organization surrounded the Danone Bonafont Water bottling plant, set up tents outside, and placed large rocks alongside the road to prevent the water distribution trucks from leaving the site. This organization claimed that Danone Bonafont had illegally "kidnapped" water for 29 years. The United Front noted that the water plant had become a jail for water (Tecpatl 2022, 11). The image of kidnapped water offers an important way to think about water's subjectivity and relations as well as the violence inflicted against human and non-human bodies in Mexico in the expansion of the extractive frontier. To erase, kill, commodify, and kidnap bodies of water, land, and human and non-human entities destroys an understanding of life that far exceeds colonial and liberal conceptions of agency, humanity, property, and animacy. As the National Indigenous Congress notes, the destruction of land, water and Indigenous life forms are not "conflicts" but rather a long war against Indigenous peoples and the Earth (in Gutiérrez Luna 2017). These life forms are expansive; they involve movement, fluidity, plurality, and multidirectionality in ways that push us to keep different ontologies in view.

Although these initial actions by the United Front halted the company's extraction of water, these Nahua communities felt it was not enough. They initiated a consultation process to decide the course of action. One woman activist noted,

> We held many communal assemblies to collectively think about what to do next. These assemblies allow us to hear everyone's voices in our communities. We listened, we debated, and put our heads together until we came to an agreement. We decided to put Danone Bonafont and the state and federal governments to trial for the destruction of

> our lands and water. We decided to enact our own justice, instead of asking for it (Tricks & Castillo 2021).

During the public trial, members of each community testified to the abuse of water and the ways in which all levels of government had failed to protect water. They found Danone Bonafont guilty of illegally capturing water. Together they entered the huge water bottling plant to liberate water by shutting down the illegal deep-water well the company used to store water extracted from volcanic springs. The action of taking over the water bottling plant quickly became international news. Organizations from Canada, the United States, and several European countries manifested their solidarity with the United Front, making this an emblematic struggle in Latin America. After the Bonafont water plant was occupied, the communities decided to transform it into a communitarian space, or Altepelmecalli (House of the Peoples), which was led by Indigenous women. The Altepelmecalli became a center for the confluence of peoples and struggles against devastation, dispossession, exploitation, and oppression. Movements against mining, pipelines, large hydroelectric dams, and movements for land and water defense were given the space to share their experiences and support one another. The walls of the water plant were painted by various visual artists, including with a large mural that read, "Ni la tierra ni las mujeres somos territories de conquista" (Neither land nor women are territories of conquest) (Tricks & Castillo 2021). The United Front started projects focused on education, health, Indigenous women's rights and autonomy, and created communal radio stations and television channels. They also raised chicken and grew their own food. The organization noted that if the Altelpemecalli was to survive, it needed to be self-sufficient. Through this form of organizing, consensus, communal work, and self-sufficiency—all of which are grounded in Indigenous life—became pillars of political action. Several months after taking over the water bottling plant, the organization celebrated the return of water to the twenty Nahua communities.

The United Front organized and participated in multiple forums to articulate itself to other Indigenous struggles in Mexico and abroad. In September 2021, it participated in the webinar "The Fight against Danone in Mexico and Beyond" organized by Wellington Water Watchers and Keepers of the Water Wellington. The event brought together the United Front, the Six Nations Reserve of Grand River, Ontario—which had been fighting a Nestle water plant—and members of the Penobscot Nation in the United States. In this webinar, Indigenous activists insisted that the responsibility to defend water is not a local but a global responsibility (Pueblos Unidos de la Región Cholulteca 2022). In December of the same year, they organized the forum "Struggles for Water and for Life During the Pandemic". At that event, members of the United Front asked, "When did water, which makes life possible, become a commodity? How is that we have let it happen without a fight?" (Pueblos Unidos et al. 2021, 3). From their perspective, water defense is a human responsibility that extends beyond Indigenous communities and borders.

What these communities learned through their shared experiences is that the extraction of water does not require much land. Unlike other types of extractive infrastructure such as pipelines, which cross extensive territories, water can be extracted from specific locations. An activist explained, "From one point, corporations can suck all the water from an entire region" (La Comuna 02 T3 2022). The absence of water, however, is felt extensively as it renders spaces unintelligible as historically constituted places. In a public letter, a member of the United Front and a former political prisoner who had opposed the construction of a deep water well in the community of Nealtican wrote,

> The government said the water is for all and that everyone needs it. We all need to eat but we do not go invading other communities' lands or stealing from the supermarket. It is important to ask for something to be given, Indigenous communities are no different. Consent is needed. It is necessary to establish a relationship of reciprocity both with water and with the community from which that water comes from (Flores 2014).

Nahua communities see consent as a process that extends to the non-human world. Water, as other entities, has agency, it needs to be motivated, engaged, and cared for. During community celebrations and ceremonies, water and land are feasted with food, flowers, and music. These practices are a fundamental part of maintaining and renewing consensual relations with these entities. Kidnapping water, on the other hand, fractures its inter-corporeal relations.

Through the defense of water, Nahua women activists have also shared their concerns and aspirations. Participants in the Dialogue among Women Activists noted,

> [As women] we see that the relationship we have with water goes beyond the everyday activities. It is a deeper relationship, it is spiritual… When we see that it is threatened, we respond with all the strength we have in our hands and heart (IBERO Puebla 2023).

Nahua women's responsibility to water is also connected to the role they play in their communities' subsistence economy and the rain rituals that attend to the seasonal cycles of corn. The leadership roles that women played at the Altepelmecalli was seen as an extension of such responsibility. However, in a public meeting, both the government and industries' representatives asked that women did not speak. The United Front refused, arguing women had the same right to express themselves. A woman activist from the organization Guardians of the River, observed, "They are preventing us from speaking and no, we are not going to shut up! We are equals. We are never going to shut up again. We will say what we think, we do not want toxins in the water, we do not want water to go" (Oropeza 2019). Nahua women assume that they are part of a community in struggle. They see their bodies and that of their "compañeros" being hurt, repressed, and intimidated in different ways. Yet, they claim that resistance is a communal responsibility. As a member of the United Front observed,

> Yes, we know that as women we were educated to be silent, to stay put… Well, I guess we are also struggling against that education, against that imposition. We see our participation in the struggle as a responsibility, the defense of territory is something we must do. We are in this to defend life (IBERO Puebla 2023).

In this way, Nahua women demonstrate that struggles against colonial capitalist resource extraction cannot be separated from the fight against patriarchal structures of domination. Like water that flows from one place to another, connecting different entities and forms of life, Indigenous women's political practices connect plural bodies and struggles together. It is this political practice of connecting, of enacting relations that confluence as analytic attends to. While apparently isolated and dislocated, the convergence of plural bodies and struggles challenges the speciesist and gendered colonial capitalist logic that targets both the Indigenous and non-human subjects and their interdependent relations.

The unprecedented organizing experience of the United Front drew attention to Indigenous and colonial capitalist conceptions of water. As a battle ground and a powerful political force, water disrupts exclusionary relations of property and life. A woman activist noted, "When they [the government] saw that our resistance was strong and attracting international attention, they started using repressive force, national guards, state police, and military police to evict us from this space [the Altelpemecalli]… To evict the communities that were protecting water" (IBERO Puebla 2023). Although on February 15th, 2022, almost a year later, the National Guard and state police evicted the United Front from the water bottling plant, their struggle did not end. The twenty Nahua communities that constitute this Front joined a constellation of Indigenous peoples and organizations from different regions in Mexico and beyond in the "Caravan for Water and Life: Peoples United against Capitalist Dispossession". From this perspective, the struggle for life and water is a communal and global responsibility. It connects the self to all life across space, back to our ancestors, and forward to our descendants.

Conclusion: Towards the Confluence of Struggles for Life

What does it mean to defend life? How does the confluence of struggles for life help us rethink how our liberation as humans is connected to the liberation of the plurality of life that constitutes the Earth? In 2020, in the context of the COVID global pandemic, the Zapatistas decided to close their Caracoles or organizing centers. They also called upon all of us not to abandon our struggles and to find ways to co-resist. In October of that year, the Zapatistas announced they would embark on a planetary crossing for life, noting that this struggle is global. Throughout this journey they learned of mining projects, dams, agro-industries, pipelines, railways, and other infrastructure that destroy life. They showed us a cartography of superimposed extractive projects and how the assemblage of capital expands and moves across space and borders. The Zapatistas urged us to build an Indigenous internationalism that defends life (Durán Matute 2023).

Although Indigenous struggles are place-based, the fight for water and life activates a powerful form of relationality that invites us to consider how we might come together to form a mightier convergence. Confluence practices of bringing different bodies and struggles together involves intentional actions both individual and communal, in order to make something happen. Through these relational practices, our differences can be considered in relation to the fluidity and continuity of life, allowing us to make relatives through different routes and genealogies. Coming together involves paying attention to how the gratuitous colonial capitalist violence of resource extraction affects multiple bodies and places simultaneously and identifying how our struggles may be connected in order to find relational affinity.

Indigenous women have been instrumental in the process of connecting bodies and struggles together. They have not only sustained and cared for these struggles, but through their practices they have also challenged their organizations, communities, families, and non-Indigenous feminists to consider the ways they reproduce relations of domination. The Indigenous feminist practice of bodies coming together, or "acuerpar" in Spanish, involves establishing a reciprocal relationship to support, protect, and stand with others. It is a practice that starts at the individual level but that calls upon the collective to unite our bodies, our collective indignation and experiences, our rage, and our courage to act together, resisting colonial capitalist violence and the multiple layers of oppression (Cabnal 2015). In my view, acuerpar, like confluence, is a political practice can be extended to the more than human world to weave together the multiplicity of bodies and struggles into a mightier confluence that stands from and with the Earth. To defend land, water, and the Earth is to act of knowing how to reciprocate. The very act of coming together with the Earth and all of life destabilizes the colonial binaries that constrict our individualities, corporeality, and current realities while attending to the relational practices that can help us survive a world of drought, fire, and floods while we build a future where we can live otherwise.

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Note

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