

Healing Mother Earth: Arhuaco indigenous women and the defence of their ancestral territory

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SUMMARY

The Arhuaco people are advancing in recovering their ancestral territory after being displaced during the colonial period. It is a process they have carried out as a community and have used various strategies to get closer and closer to their goal. Members of a community often have different tasks to achieve that common goal. For this reason, in this research, I aimed to answer the following question: How do Arhuaco indigenous women of the Gunmaku community engage with the defence of their ancestral territory in an ongoing land registration program? This research is framed in the following theories: property as an analytical category, the theory of access, claim-making practices, and community feminisms. I implemented qualitative research with an ethnographic and intercultural approach; in-depth interviews and participant observation were conducted. The results show that, although the women and men of the Gunmaku community make the collective struggle for ancestral territory the centre of their daily lives, a prioritization by women is observed in specific concerns regarding their territory and the expectations of the land registration project. Through their daily work at the family level, they help heal the land physically and spiritually, which is a fundamental part of conservation as a strategy for defending the territory. This makes their tasks more visible in defending the territory from within the community. Likewise, the research shows that the women of Gunmaku are a heterogeneous category, where there are women who dedicate to housework, and there are women who have teaching work at school that allows them to have more visibility in the discussions regarding the territory in the community level and with other society members. Finally, the findings demonstrate that cultural dynamics within a collective land system are complex and intertwined at the family, community, and outside community levels.

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