

Es increíble pensar que somos personas,  
siendo la mitad del mundo,  
en minoría nos transforman,  
si la violencia es tan normal bajo sus normas,  
no queremos sus derechos  
¡exigimos los de nosotras!<sup>1</sup>  
—Mare Advertencia Lirika, “Incómoda (Manifiesto Feminista)”

## INDIGENOUS FEMINIST HIP HOP: Invoking the Maíz Diviner to Denounce Agribusiness in Mexico

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**Abstract:** *This paper is an analysis of the song and music video “Mujer Maíz” (Maize Woman) by the Zapotec hip hop artist, Mare Advertencia Lirika. Mare makes a forceful anti-capitalist statement merging spirituality and ecofeminism to denounce the effects of neoliberalism on maize cultivation in Mexico in “Mujer Maíz.” The song points to the impact of free trade agreements between the US and Mexico, its harmful effects on maize farmers due to the massive importation of US corn, alongside transgenic contamination of maize—a process that has inevitably affected the lives of women in the state of Oaxaca. I argue that “Mujer Maíz” makes the following interventions: 1) it uses the trope of maize to highlight the intersections between the devastation of the earth’s resources and violence against women; 2) it underscores the effectiveness of Indigenous feminist hip hop as a vehicle to make an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchal critique; 3), it recovers the spiritual dimensions of ecofeminism via the corn diviner in the video who represents the central role that Indigenous female healers played in restoring balance, in this case, due to violence against women’s bodies and the earth. This article hopes to raise awareness about the interconnectedness between the well-being of the earth and the well-being of women. If women are honored, the whole community thrives.*

**Key Words:** *Indigenous feminist hip hop, maize, territorio cuerpo, Mare Advertencia Lirika*

These potent lyrics in the song “Incómoda (Manifiesto Feminista)” by Zapotec/ben’zaa<sup>2</sup> rapper, Mare Advertencia Lirika (2016), illuminate her electrifying contribution to the Latin American hip hop feminist scene. With her powerful lyrics that denounce social inequity in Mexico, government corruption, the unjust treatment of Indigenous peoples and especially gender disparities, Mare is one of few Indigenous female MCs in Mexico—noteworthy in a patriarchal country that privileges whiteness and relegates Indigenous people to second-class citizens.

Born and raised in Oaxaca City, Mare formed the first female hip hop group of its kind in 2004. Called Advertencia Lirika [Lyrical Warning] the group consisted of Mare, Luna, and Itza. In 2009 the group disbanded, and Mare has released three solo albums since; she continues to be the only female rapper in Oaxaca. Mare is also a grassroots activist who works with various organizations that center on social justice issues in Mexico and across the world. She won the Maria Sabina award in 2013 for defending women’s rights through music. That same year she toured twelve US cities where she performed and led workshops with immigrant groups in Latina/o communities. Mare, like other hip hop feminists, aims to undo the stereotypes and the patriarchal gender roles imposed on women and uses hip hop as a platform to disseminate her message. As one of few Indigenous female rappers in all of Latin America, she brings her experience as an Indigenous woman to the forefront. Although she advocates for the rights of all women, she incorporates an Indigenous epistemology into her music, making Mare not solely a hip hop feminist, but also an Indigenous hip hop feminist.

In this essay, I examine Mare’s work and more specifically her song and music video, “Mujer Maíz” [“Maize Woman”]<sup>3</sup> precisely because it exemplifies an

Indigenous hip hop feminism in Abiyala, the Kuna word for the American continent before the arrival of Columbus.<sup>4</sup> The song is grounded in *feminismo comunitario*, and more specifically *territorio cuerpo* (Cabnal 2010).<sup>5</sup> It is a song that critiques agribusiness and transgenetic contamination of maize in Mexico, the abuse of the land due to capitalism, and the ongoing neoliberal economic policies that lead to the oppression of the people who work the land. The song illustrates the material realities of Indigenous women in Mexico in the struggle against neoliberal regimes and global capital, strategies that began under colonialism and continue today. Mare's call on the female figure, maize woman, in the song illustrates that women are central to the fight against this violence because they are also the ones being disproportionately affected by this economic restructuring. The visual component of this piece centers on the maize woman who plants, grows and harvests maize while also symbolizing the land, the earth, and mother nature. Additionally, she is depicted as a maize diviner, what I call a *bruja-healer*, illustrating maize rituals and ceremonies, and more specifically the role that women play in these rituals.<sup>6</sup> I claim that this figure is challenging a colonial Christian framework that respecting the land is pagan, that rituals of celebrating the earth are *brujería*, and that women and the land are disposable. She represents the many Indigenous women who refuse to let their own *territorio cuerpo* be colonized but also speaks to the spiritual dimensions of *territorio cuerpo*—the understanding that all life forms are sacred. Mare's Indigenous hip hop feminism as it is reflected in "Mujer Maíz" is a reminder that women are part of the network of life and thus are sacred too, making Mare's work a crucial addition to the world of hip hop feminism in the Americas.

In what follows, I will situate my study in the existing scholarship of hip hop, beginning with the origins of hip hop feminism and Indigenous hip hop feminism, and more specifically the emergence of Oaxacan *xip xop* (as the Oaxacan youth in the hip hop movement spell it), and how it began in the

throes of global restructuring and its effects on women.<sup>7</sup> I will then offer my analysis of the video that is informed by *feminismo comunitario* and *territorio cuerpo*. I highlight the importance of maize to Indigenous people, focusing on the disruption NAFTA has wrought on Indigenous peoples' agricultural traditions. In particular, I look at how the transgenetic contamination of maize brings larger risks to its cultivation in Mexico in order to understand Mare's lyrics and imagery. I will then end by discussing the bruja-healer/maize diviner's role as symbolic of the spiritual component of the message Mare expresses in her activist art.

### **Hip Hop Feminism—From the United States to Latin America**

Hip hop feminism is a sociocultural movement that uses hip hop as a platform to advocate for women's rights and gender equality. Female rappers raise awareness about patriarchy, misogyny, capitalism, homophobia, sexism and racism's effects on women, and use hip hop to advocate for the liberation of women in all of its forms. As understood by Aisha Durham, hip hop feminism is

. . . a sociocultural, intellectual, and political movement grounded in the situated knowledge of women of color from the broader hip hop or the US post-civil rights generation who recognize culture as a pivotal site for political intervention to challenge, resist, and mobilize collectives to dismantle systems of exploitation (2014, 3).

Conceptualized in the 1990s by women of color from the post-civil rights generation, hip hop feminism builds on intersectional approaches developed by Black feminists, and thus much of the work by hip hop feminist scholars centers on Black women's experiences.<sup>8</sup> However, Durham's definition can be expanded to include colonization and environmental degradation as part of

systems of exploitation that especially affect Indigenous women and can be applied outside of a US context to discuss women's experiences in other parts of the world, as well.

In fact, hip hop feminism has become an international phenomenon, and scholars are calling for more examination of this growing movement in a transnational context. For instance, Tanya Saunders, who writes on transnational hip hop feminism in the African Diaspora, has called on hip hop feminist scholars to look beyond US borders and examine the work of female MCs in the Americas, partly because there is a history of uneven power relations between the United States and many of these countries that have adversely affected the people (2016). She asserts, "The limited critical engagement in the US of the issues being addressed by non-English speaking hip hop feminists, not living within US borders, limits recognition of how what happens in the US is firmly interconnected with transnational systems of power that are foundational to the Americas, and by extension to the west" (2016, 185). Indeed, many Latin American hip hop feminists like Mare are rapping about the effects of US economic policies abroad and how they have increased gender inequities and violence against women. Responding to Saunders's call, I analyze the work of a hip hop feminist in Mexico who raps in Spanish, one who critiques misogyny and gender violence in Latin American countries, but who also makes clear that this violence is partly due to living under a neoliberal regime. My discussion of Mare's work adds another dimension to Saunders' work, one that includes the voice of an Indigenous woman living in the twenty-first century in the Americas—a necessary perspective that is often ignored, even in the world of hip hop feminism.<sup>9</sup>

In analyzing Mare's work, I also respond to calls for more consideration of Indigenous rappers in the fields of hip hop studies. Kyle T. Mays, for instance,

argues that there is an Indigenous erasure problem in the field (2018). Among other things, he asks for more positive representation and coverage of contemporary Indigenous people in all of their complexities, “without reproducing ideas of Indianness that feed into settler fantasies about what being an Indigenous person looks like or means” (2018, 130).

While Indigenous hip hop feminism has not been fully explored within the field of hip hop feminist studies, Mays dedicates a section to it in his book *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes*, titled “Indigenous Masculinity in Hip Hop Culture: Or, How Indigenous Feminism Can Reform Indigenous Manhood” (2018). Though it is not exhaustive and focuses only on North American Cree rapper Eekwol, he creates much needed space for Indigenous women’s participation in hip hop, highlighting the fact that Indigenous women are often omitted from gender studies and hip hop studies discourse. Mays defines Indigenous hip hop feminism as “rooted *first* in the experiences of Indigenous women and how they actually live their lives” (2018, 81). He draws from Indigenous feminist Cree/Metis Kim Anderson who argues that “Indigenous feminism is about honoring creation in all its forms while also fostering the kind of critical thinking that allow us to stay true to our traditional reverence of life” (as cited in Mays 2018, 81). This Indigenous feminist epistemology is combined with the notion that Indigenous hip hop feminism is “fundamentally about decolonization,” as Mays claims. He maintains that an Indigenous hip hop feminist framework centers on “colonialism but is in a constant state of reaction to it, constantly challenging it and dealing with the outcome of colonialism” (2018, 80). Indeed, reverence for all life, Indigenous women’s experiences, and decolonization should be integral to a hip hop feminist framework. In the spirit of broadening the discussion on Indigenous hip hop in general, and Indigenous hip hop feminism in particular, this work contributes to and intersects with various fields, including hip hop studies, black feminist hip hop studies, decolonial

studies, and Indigenous feminisms. In exploring the work of Mare, one of the few Indigenous female MCs in the region and a contemporary urban rapper who upends stereotypes of Indigenous people as backwards, uneducated, rural, and technologically inept, I maintain that this type of hip hop is unique in that it reflects urban Indigenous experiences. My work advances conversations about Indigenous hip hop feminism to combat the Indigenous erasure Mays alludes to. Specifically, I expand Mays' work by calling for an Indigenous hip hop feminism that is transnational, one that is rooted in the experiences and feminist theories of Indigenous women in Abiyala—a community-centered feminist theory and praxis that advocates for the rights of all living forms: the earth, animals and people, as part of a sacred network of life.

### **Feminismo Comunitario—Indigenous Feminism in Abiyala**

Feminismo comunitario or communitarian feminism is a framework and sociopolitical movement conceived by Indigenous women in Latin America, mainly attributed to Bolivian-Aymaran activist, Julieta Paredes and her book *Hilando fino desde el feminismo comunitario* (2014). Similar to Anderson's assertion above that Indigenous feminism is about "honoring creation in all of its forms," this ideology is also grounded in the notion that all life should be honored. However, feministas comunitarias expand on this idea by emphasizing that because women are a critical part of their communities, it is of utmost importance that they are not mistreated, denied resources, exploited and seen as inferior—for this would have a negative impact on the community as a whole because all members of a community need to thrive in order for the whole community to thrive. Furthermore, as Paredes (2013) reminds us, women are also the ones who birth all members of the community.<sup>10</sup> Because women are so central to the well-being of a community, a great imbalance—*una desarmonización*—occurs if women are harmed, one that will have negative effects on everyone. The current manifestation of

patriarchy, which Paredes calls “patriarcado colonial-neoliberal,” is at the root of this imbalance (Paredes 2013, 62, 70–71).<sup>11</sup> Thus, to regain equilibrium and well-being of all living things in a community, the dismantling of patriarchy and the capitalist neoliberal system that sustains it is needed for the whole community to thrive.

But balance is not limited to humans; it also includes plants, animals, and the cosmos as a whole. Feministas comunitarias believe humans are connected to all forms of life and so if the earth is exploited, then that also creates an imbalance that has a negative effect on all humans, but especially women. Lorena Cabnal, a Maya-Xinca feminista comunitaria, expands this idea with the concept *territorio cuerpo*, or body landscape. *Territorio cuerpo* is an Indigenous ecofeminist theory that “alludes to a cosmological interpretation and a politic that acknowledges how bodies have a relation and being in the network of all life” (Sweet and Ortiz 2016, 2). Cabnal argues that the acts of violence against the land and women are elemental to the same patriarchal, colonial-capitalist system that views women and the earth as exploitable and available for the taking (2010). The massive extraction of natural goods from Indigenous lands, she states, is commensurate with the attack against Indigenous women because the well-being of the land is in direct relationship with the well-being of women’s body (Cabnal 2010, 23). Thus, *feminismo comunitario* is a framework that can tackle the issues that traditional hip hop feminism engages with, such as patriarchy, racism and capitalism, while speaking out against decolonization, as Mays suggests, and can also advocate for the rights of the earth as part and parcel of women’s rights. As Cabnal asserts, “No tiene sostenibilidad política una propuesta feminista que no traiga la dimensión de la tierra” (2017).<sup>12</sup>

As an Indigenous woman who is a staunch defender of women’s rights and Indigenous peoples’ rights and who acknowledges the importance of the land

and its resources, I maintain that Mare's Indigenous hip hop feminism is grounded in *feminismo comunitario*, especially evident in her song "Mujer Maíz." This makes Mare's contribution to the world of hip hop in Latin America and Indigenous hip hop in Abiyala noteworthy. She disrupts the male dominated Indigenous hip hop scene in Latin America by bringing a female perspective that calls attention to the "patriarcado colonial-neoliberal" that is sustained by the current global neoliberal regime that is waging an economic war on ordinary people and falls more intensely on Indigenous people, poor people and women. In fact, hip hop indígena in Latin America is a phenomenon that was born during a time period where many countries experienced the privatization of public institutions, the decimation of labor laws to attract more foreign investments and the dismantling of the welfare state and programs against poverty. The next section explores Indigenous hip hop in Latin America and the Oaxacan hip hop movement more specifically—the place where Mare began her career as a rapera—and discusses how marginalized youth use hip hop to provide commentary to economic and political oppression.

### **From Hip Hop to Xip Xop—Globalization from Below**

From the time hip hop hit the airwaves in Latin America, Indigenous youth identified with it, embraced it, and produced their own music with their own regional flavor and sounds, sometimes in their own language. Hip hop groups like Los Nin (Kichwa from Ecuador), Bro MC (Guaraní-Kaiowá from Brazil), Slajem K'op (Maya Tsotsil from Mexico), and numerous others across the Americas record CDs, release YouTube videos, perform, and promote their work on social media. They show the world that Indigenous people are not static but rather globalized and in constant motion, challenging the notion that Indigenous communities are far removed from modernity. Certainly not all Indigenous hip hop artists are the same, just as not all Indigenous people are the same. Political agendas, worldviews, life experiences, and artistic vision may differ. However, the tendency among Indigenous hip hop artists

in Abiyala is that most exhibit hip hop's rebellious spirit. They challenge the status quo, denounce racism, speak out against the injustices their communities face, and celebrate their ancestry and culture.

Most important, Indigenous hip hop in Abiyala came into being as the effects of neoliberal doctrines were being felt throughout the continent. For those living in the periphery, the high rates of unemployment, privatization of public institutions, and the implementation of austerity measures intensified their already precarious situation. Spensy Pimentel, in his article on the Guaraní-Kaiowá hip hop group Bro MC, explains that when hip hop went mainstream in the United States in the 1990s and began spreading throughout Latin America,

“América Latina . . . estaba en una difícil situación por causa de las políticas económicas difundidas por el llamado Consenso de Washington, propagadas por organismos supuestamente multilaterales y dominados por el *establishment* financiero estadounidense, como el Fondo Monetario Internacional y el Banco Mundial. Eran los tiempos dorados de la doctrina neoliberal: privatizaciones en masa, recorte en el presupuesto, creciente endeudamiento de los gobiernos a causa de los procesos forzados de apertura económica. En las periferias de las grandes ciudades latinoamericanas . . . la juventud negra y mestiza vivía una realidad de desempleo, violencia y desesperanza (2014, 227).<sup>13</sup>

The circumstances in which hip hop originated in the United States were strikingly similar to those in Latin America, and in fact, are interconnected. Hip hop in the United States was born in the late 1970s among the devastation of African-American, Caribbean, and Latina/o communities in the South Bronx. Deindustrialization in the area led to the loss of thousands of jobs, while government neglect led to an end to social services and educational opportunities. There was an increase in crime coupled with the crumbling

and burning down of buildings and overall urban decay that devastated Black and brown communities. The same capitalist forces that caused economic divestment in the South Bronx were integral to a global economic restructuring project that would also affect the economies of Latin America in the upcoming decades. In both regions, the youth whose voices were neither heard nor valued found in hip hop a way to resist their marginalization, providing commentary on their political and economic oppression. Who would have thought that the culture of politically abandoned youth would become a global phenomenon called hip hop? Hip hop culture now represents what Jeff Chang calls “globalization from below.” He explains, “As hip hop grows ever more popular, it becomes squeezed in the uneasy space between commercial and economic globalization from above and borderless, cultural grassroots globalization from below” (2007, 64).

Hip hop in Mexico followed a similar trajectory as that seen in the rest of Latin America, becoming popular in the 1990s mostly as a result of increased migratory flows due to the displacement that the neoliberal economy caused. In Oaxaca, however, xip xop became more popular in the early 2000s, with an overt political agenda, as it became tightly linked to popular movements in the state of Oaxaca. It is spelled with an “x” as a way to identify Oaxacan hip hop specifically because of the “x” in Oaxaca. As the second poorest state in Mexico with a large Indigenous population, Oaxaca suffered greatly from austerity measures that had worsened after the signing of NAFTA. Among the most notable results of this were the cuts in education that resulted in the 2006 teachers’ strike, after demands for school uniforms, scholarships and an increased budget for school buildings were not met. The governor, Ulises Ruíz Ortiz, responded with a violent attack against the protestors, sending in riot police, which consequently generated a huge counter-movement from below with thousands coming out to protest, demanding his resignation.

Oaxacan youth took to the streets in solidarity with the teachers, while the xip xop scene—which was just beginning to flourish in the city—became a political platform from which to speak out against government repression. The youth used xip xop to disseminate a political message through rap and graffiti art to provide commentary on state violence. In fact, graffiti art played a crucial role for young people to express their political opinions, as the media were not representing the truths from below.<sup>14</sup> Mare's introduction to hip hop culture had already begun at this point, starting with graffiti art.<sup>15</sup> At sixteen she began rapping, and at eighteen, in 2003, she joined OCG Crew; she then went on to form Advertencia Lirika in 2004. Mare's lyrics reflect the influence of social movements from her home state of Oaxaca, one with a long history of resistance. It is no surprise that these politics surface in her music and her grassroots activism.

### **Mare's Indigenous Hip Hop Feminismo**

Mare's Indigenous hip hop feminism is reflected in her advocacy for all people, not just Indigenous people, and all women, not just Indigenous women. This is central to the principles of feminismo comunitario, that denying the rights of one part of the community is curtailing the potential of the whole community. In other words, no one is free unless we are all free, as many feminists of color in the United States have also argued.<sup>16</sup> Paredes asserts, "La negación de una de las partes en la sumisión y el sometimiento, es atentar también contra la existencia de la otra" (2014, 87).<sup>17</sup> In songs like "Bienvenidxs" ["Welcome"], Mare conveys these principles. She raps, "Sigo buscando el bienestar y no lo veo/solo veo las huellas de la explotación y el saqueo/El desempleo crece a diario y no es mentira/que los de abajo somos quienes estamos en la mira" (2016).<sup>18</sup> As a young person growing up in the twenty-first century in Mexico, Mare has witnessed the quality of life deteriorate under the neoliberal regime. As De Regil asserts, NAFTA

transformed Mexico “into a net producer of the poor” (2004, 12). The wealth disparities that worsened under NAFTA have inevitably been followed by an increase in violence against women, an issue that Mare fervently denounces. In songs like “Y tú qué esperas?” [What Are You Waiting For?] (2010) and “Vivas y Libres” [Alive and Free] (2016), she urges women to step forward and speak their truth, condemning the violence women experience in their daily lives. Indeed, violence against women in Mexico is an urgent problem that the government has been slow to address. The high rate of femicides is striking, with 50,000 killings of women since 1985, and little has been done to resolve this (*The Guardian* 2017). Likewise, in 2017 Oaxaca had the second highest rate of gender violence and homicide against women in the nation (Jimenez 2018). For feministas comunitarias, everything is related in the network of life. If women are dying due to violence, this has negative consequences for everyone, because all life is connected. Cabnal affirms in her discussion of territorio cuerpo, “Todos es relacional en la red de la vida. Si se acaban los cuerpos por el femicidio de las mujeres en países como en Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, México, se acaba la vida”<sup>19</sup> (2017). Mare denounces this injustice in her music, making visible that women’s lives have value; that they matter, and encourages them to stand up for this injustice.

Furthermore, the commodification of agricultural goods like maize has also had detrimental effects on women. NAFTA devastated the livelihood of many rural Indigenous who depend on cultivating and selling their crops for survival, creating a crisis and pushing many to migrate. According to Rogers, “Young men are the number one group leaving rural Oaxacan villages, leaving behind elderly men, women, and children” (2008, 162). Out-migration<sup>20</sup> has left many women behind to fend for themselves, run the household and bring in an income to support the family while their husbands work abroad (McEvoy 2008). Some are forced to migrate themselves, working for low wages in the

cities, sometimes having to rely on sex work to survive, making them vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Mies and Shiva articulate that economic policies that lead to commodification of food and water lead to gender violence. They state, “An economics of the deregulation of commerce and of the privatization and commodification of seeds and food, land and water, and women and children degrades social values, deepens patriarchy and intensifies violence against women” (2014, 1). Mare’s “Mujer Maíz” brings these issues to the forefront, particularly the detriments of NAFTA on maize cultivation in Mexico. By connecting women to the maize plant, the concept of *territorio cuerpo* is exposed—the body is metaphor for the land; violence upon the land is also violence upon women.

**“Mujer Maíz” and the Struggle Against Agribusiness in Mexico**

“Mujer Maíz” conveys the harm the environmental, economic, and cultural impacts of neoliberal doctrines like NAFTA. One of the main themes of the song is the denouncement of genetically modified corn and its effects on farmers, the land and agricultural traditions. For instance, in the following stanza Mare raps:

Nuestra cultura muere en manos del invasor  
 La paciencia se acaba  
 Solo existe la agresión  
 Ahora juegan con la genética  
 terminan con la ética  
 Pensando en algo grande  
 Esa mierda por donde se hace expande  
 Quitándole al campesino su dinero  
 Violando y asesinando a nuestro suelo<sup>21</sup>

The results of genetic engineering of maize are part of the “invasion” Mare consistently addresses in the song, the invaders are the corporations but, in this case, also the invading transgenetic seeds. These seeds are symbolic of the colonizing project as whole: foreign invaders taking over people’s land is similar to the invaders introducing foreign genes into maize. Mies and Shiva suggest that this process is akin to the colonization of women’s bodies: “Colonization of the seed reflects the patterns of colonization of women’s bodies. Profits and power become intimately linked to invasion into all biological organisms,” illustrating that women will be affected the most as a result of the biological manipulation made by agribusiness (1993, 29).

Additionally, the importation of genetically modified corn entering the country and contaminating the maize plant in Mexico is a major concern, putting maize in danger. Biotech companies like Monsanto, for instance, want to import genetically modified maize seeds for human consumption. While they have imported GMO seeds to grow yellow corn, mostly used for animal feed, studies suggest that maize contaminated with transgenes has reached fields in several states, including Oaxaca (Greenpeace 2003). Government regulators speculate that contamination occurred “when farmers planted transgenic maize that was imported from the more than 5 million tons of maize that is imported annually from the United States” (Greenpeace 2003, 1). If contamination increases, more than sixty varieties of maize are in danger.

Predictably, research confirms that transnational corporations (TNCs) and NAFTA have perpetuated the contamination of maize. A 2002 report by Greenpeace concluded that transnational corporations and NAFTA—along with the Mexican government’s failure to protect its farmers and consumers—all play a role in the ongoing case of contamination (Greenpeace 2003). They found that a small number of transnational corporations controlled the market

for seeds and for pesticides and that they denied farmers the right to save seeds. The report states,

Genetic engineering is a proprietary technology monopolized by a very small number of TNCs. Most of the seed and pesticide market is already in the hands of just four giants: Monsanto, Syngenta, . . . Bayer, . . . and DuPont. The TNCs that produce GE [genetically engineered] maize are these same companies. One commercial strategy of these companies is to deny farmers their ancient right to save, exchange and replant seed, as GE seeds are patented and cannot legally be replanted (Greenpeace 2003, 3).

Not only that, but according to Rogers' research, monopolizing seeds has deeper environmental implications. She states, "a benefit of biodiversity and non-GMO is that the seeds . . . are better equipped to produce crops and resist environmental problems," contradicting the argument that transgenic corn is better equipped to resist environmental challenges (2008, 4).

Mare recognizes the environmental impact of globalization and holds corporations responsible as the culprit for the damage done. She rhymes:

Lugares sucios por la globalización  
 No encontramos solución  
 Grandes capitales  
 Se extiende la invasión<sup>22</sup>

As the "invasion" of more foreign investment in Mexico disrupts ancient food systems, it will not only be detrimental economically, it will be detrimental to the health of the land alongside the ancestral traditions of the people, as maize cultivation is deeply woven into the identity of Indigenous communities.

In fact, maize is so crucial to the lives of Indigenous people in Mexico that disrupting their relationship to this plant—which is what executive agreements like NAFTA attempt to do—is utterly violent. As Rincon Rubio et. al. state, maize is so important that it can also be a resource used for political, economic and social control (2017, 1074). This sacred plant, maize, has been so central to the lives of Indigenous peoples for centuries throughout Mesoamerica that it has been credited for the creation of grand civilizations.<sup>23</sup> Maize has shaped the identity of what some call “maize-based” cultures, cultures “that . . . are politically, socially, culturally, and ceremonially organized around maíz” (Rodriguez 2014, 4). Capitalism has now transformed the process by which people have access to maize, how it has been distributed, and how it has been viewed. Reduced to a commodity, maize is now something to buy and sell. Mare acknowledges that for her ancestors the violence under capitalism is a continuation of colonialism. The expropriation of maize is just another form of stripping people of their culture, a continuation of the violence and exploitation of colonialism. She sings,

Una historia injusta  
 La que se escribe en nuestros campos  
 No queremos mas explotación (estamos hartos)  
 Nos han quitado tantas cosas a través de tanto tiempo  
 Nuestras raíz y escritora  
 Nuestra y de nuestros ancestros  
 Cambiara muchas cosas pero no lo que llevamos dentro  
 Somos hijas del maíz y lo llevamos en los huesos<sup>24</sup>

Mare reminds her audience of the sacredness of maize, that it is much more than a market product, and of the refusal to allow these outside forces to take away maize, that which is deeply woven into her and her people’s “bones,” as she declares here.

Aside from disrupting cultural traditions, the material conditions of Indigenous people are deeply affected by policies like NAFTA which allow transnational corporations to profit from importing maize to its birthplace (Mexico), increasing the rate of poverty among rural farmers, many of whom are Indigenous. Heavily subsidized US corn imports have made it virtually impossible for maize farmers to compete and thus they cannot survive off the land by continuing their agricultural traditions.<sup>25</sup> The price of maize fell to one quarter of its value during the 1990s and some two million farmers have been forced to leave their lands (Gonzalez 2015, 128). According to a report by the Interhemispheric Resource Center, since the implementation of NAFTA, there was an increase in rural poverty, an increase in out-migration, an increase in the price of tortillas, international and national decreases in corn prices, and heterogeneity of impact among farmers, meaning that large-scale farmers are affected the least and subsistence farmers, many of whom are Indigenous, are affected the most (Henriquez and Patel 2004, 4). As a result, the rate of poverty among subsistence farmers has reached crisis proportions, with an increase from 54 percent in 1989 to 64 percent in 1998 (Henriquez and Patel 2004, 2). The Rincón Rubio et. al study on Matlatzinca women in the community of San Francisco Oxtotilpan in the state of Mexico found that Indigenous women are central to the cultivation and preservation of maize biodiversity and depend on maize to feed their families, and thus are most affected by neoliberal economic policies (2017). Furthermore, the study found that among the Maztlatzincas, women were the safe-keepers of the maize seed, creating a direct correlation between the appropriation of the maize seeds and women's livelihoods and consequently their right to self-determination. Mare's Indigenous hip hop feminism grounded in territorio cuerpo is palpable in "Mujer Maíz" because she feminizes the cultivation of maize and feminizes the plant and the rituals centered around it, making a direct connection between the land and women's body.

### **“Mujer Maíz” in Defense of Territorio Cuerpo**

While the perpetuator of violence in “Mujer Maíz” is agribusiness and the victim is the land, which is personified as a woman, the resistance is also female. If the repercussion of controlling maize falls unevenly on Indigenous women who depend on it, it is the women then who are the agents of change. The strong female presence in the lyrics and images in “Mujer Maíz” sends an anticolonial feminist message of resistance that critiques the violence imposed by capitalist, neoliberal and neocolonial powers that disrupt the livelihood of Indigenous peoples, especially women. Mare ties the struggles for land, the right to grow food, and the right to sustain their ancestor’s ways, placing the female entity as the agents of change. She writes:

Mujer maíz que puedes hacer cuando ves a tus hijos repartiéndose el poder  
Aniquilando tu legado  
Dejando atrás nuestro pasado  
Aquello que con esmero haz cuidado  
Madre naturaleza  
Despierta con tu furia  
Destaca ya tu fuerza<sup>26</sup>

Madre naturaleza (the earth) is synonymous with the maize woman and it is her that is called upon to wake her fury to fight back against the power disparities, the theft of land, resources and the annihilation of ancestral traditions. Shiva and Mies, in a study on the degradation of the environment and its impact on women, found that that the “impact on women of ecological disasters and deterioration was harder than on men, and also, that everywhere, women were the first to protest against environmental destruction” (1993, 2–3). It is not surprising then that Mare calls on madre naturaleza, a female figure, to wake up and fight back.

Furthermore, she uses metaphors that make parallels between violence against the land and violence against women by using words like “rape” and “murder” when referring to the land. She says, “quitándole al campesino su dinero/ Violando y asesinando a nuestro suelo,” [“Stealing money from peasants/Raping and murdering our land”], connecting the oppression of those who work the land (Indigenous people) with land exploitation, which unavoidably leads to the oppression of women. For example, Rogers (2008) found that women saw the defense of land as an essential women’s rights issue. In an interview Rogers (2008) conducted, Maria, a Oaxacan activist in the group *Coordinadoras de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas 1 de agosto (COMO)*, said “Well, for Indigenous women we consider that one (of the primary concerns) is land, the defense of the land, the defense of water, as it is one of the most prized treasures of all because the women say that they will never sell the land to anyone, not to any foreigner, not to any business, because the land is the thing that gives life and sustains us all, the children, and the women” (2008, 167).<sup>27</sup> This illustrates Cabnal’s notion of *territorio cuerpo* as “un territorio en disputa por los patriarcados, para asegurar su sostenibilidad desde y sobre el cuerpo de la mujeres” [“a territory in dispute by the patriarchy to ensure it preserves its power of and over women’s bodies”] (2010, 22). Because women’s material conditions are directly affected by land theft, contamination, and exploitation, there is a power disparity that becomes palpable with the extraction of the earth’s resources and the appropriation of Indigenous land. This is why these acts inevitably affect Indigenous women more intensely than they do men and thus, defending the earth against violence is defending women against violence.

Consequently, to deny women of their right to land and its resources is to eliminate the people’s ancestral relationship with the land, with their food systems and with their traditions, imposing another form of violence against them. Cabnal explains that for *feministas comunitarias* the relationship between

the body and all the elements of the earth is a vital part of living life abundantly. A refusal to recognize this is inhumane. She asserts:

Cuando nosotras empezamos a construir planteamientos de recuperación y defensa del territorio, cuerpo y tierra, primero reconocemos que el cuerpo de las mujeres ha sido expropiado históricamente y que es primordial para nosotras como principio feminista de mujeres comunitarias la recuperación de este primer territorio de energía vital que es el cuerpo. Segundo. Donde va vivir tu cuerpo? En el agua, en el aire? No, viven en relación con todos los elementos de la naturaleza y del cosmos, y para que tu tengas un cuerpo en relación con el agua, con las piedras, con el árbol, con el sol, con las montañas, tu cuerpo tiene que tener paridad de condiciones con este entorno, y un entorno sano y armónico para que se manifieste la plenitud de la vida (as cited in Gargallo Celentani 2015, 209).<sup>28</sup>

Cabnal advocates for a balance between the body and the earth, which exhibits the *feminismo comunitario* notion that life in all its forms should be honored for all living things to thrive, including humans. Yet Cabnal's assessment also reveals an anticolonial framework that challenges the belief that the earth is not alive, that it should not be revered, and is only a commodity—a perception brought by Christian European colonizers and forcefully imposed on Indigenous people. Prohibiting the deification of the land, the wind, the clouds and many geographical features because it was idolatrous worked in conjunction with the plunder of the earth. According to Starhawk, once a Christian framework was imposed on people, the idea that the land was not sacred upheld the capitalist project that the earth is a commodity. Quoting historian Lynn White, she writes that when:

‘The spirits in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated’ under the influence of Christianity, ‘man’s effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed, and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled.’ No longer were the groves and forests sacred. The concept of a sacred grove, of a spirit embodied in nature, was considered idolatrous. But when nature is empty of spirit, forest and trees became merely timber, something to be measured in board feet, valued only for its profitability, not for its being, its beauty, or even its part in the larger ecosystem (1982, 6).

Indeed, numerous examples show the disastrous results of the lack of reverence for the earth. Extracting its resources for profit has led to the devastating effects of climate change. And while the maize plant is held sacred to Indigenous peoples throughout Mesoamerica, for agribusiness the only sacred thing about it is the profits that are made from its sale. Bonfil Batalla argues that viewing maize merely as a product in the market does not serve the interest of the people. He writes,

Frente al proyecto popular, abiertamente opuesto a él, se yergue otra manera de concebir el maíz. . . . Éste pretende desligar al maíz de su contexto histórico y cultural, para manejarlo exclusivamente en términos de mercancía y en función de intereses que no son los de los sectores populares. Hace del maíz un valor sustituible, intercambiable y aún prescindible. Porque excluye, precisamente, la opinión y el interés de los sectores populares (as cited in Esteva 2003, 12).<sup>29</sup>

Mare echoes this assertion, reiterating in the song the significance and sacredness of maize for the people. She sings,

Es la fuerza que nos une la que viene de la tierra  
El maíz es mi semilla por la que gente pelea  
La injusticia de los hombres solo trae más violencia<sup>30</sup>

Mare reiterates an Indigenous hip hop feminism, one that understands colonization as part and parcel of a capitalist system that is rooted in patriarchy. Here she conveys that while the earth gives strength and unites, the colonizers of yesterday and the capitalists of today bring violence. They do not see the land, the plants and the people as sacred, because they are not profitable and because maize is just another product to buy and sell. They have “conquered” the maize plant through genetic engineering and the massive importations of maize into Mexico similar to the ways the colonizers conquered the people, and subsequently have conquered women.

Thus, part of the process of decolonization is to change the way that we perceive the earth and subsequently our bodies. Feministas comunitarias argue that the earth, like the human body, is “un cuerpo viviente que siente,” a living body that feels, and therefore a sacred entity (Cabnal 2017). There is a spiritual element to this notion of the sacredness of the earth and our bodies, which Paredes (2014) asserts is part of the process of decolonizing the notion of the body. She argues, “Para descolonizar el concepto y el sentimiento del cuerpo, hay que descolonizar de esa concepción escindida y esquizofrenica del alma por un lado y cuerpo por otro; es lo que ha planteado la colonia” (Paredes 2014, 100).<sup>31</sup> The bruja-healer figure in the video for “Mujer Maíz” disrupts the divorcing of the spiritual from the physical and challenges the notion that the earth is not a living and breathing body, which is why it should be seen as a sacred entity, an important aspect of territorio cuerpo. As Shiva and Mies suggest, “the ecological relevance of this emphasis on ‘spirituality’ lies in the rediscovery of the sacredness of life, according to which life on Earth can be

preserved only if people again begin to perceive all life forms as sacred and respect them as such” (1993, 18).

### **The Bruja-Healer/ Maize Diviner in “Mujer Maíz”**

As discussed, the lyrics in “Mujer Maíz” convey an anticapitalist, anti-neoliberal, and anticolonial message that condemns the interruption of “maíz-based cultures” by agribusiness, yet, the visuals in the video add a spiritual dimension to the song’s message. It conveys Cabnal’s understanding that *territorio cuerpo* is about viewing the earth as a beautiful landscape “que convive para proveer energía vital en la red de la vida. Y la red de la vida es el todo del todo”<sup>32</sup> (2017). In “Mujer Maíz,” this sacredness is celebrated in the form of ritual, as is representative of the bruja-healer who is the maize diviner in the video. In this way, she is honoring those women, deemed “witches” by the colonizers, who were persecuted and killed and their “knowledge, wisdom and close relationship with nature . . . destroyed” (Shiva and Mies 1993, 17). Maize is not just a commodity to buy and sell, but also a mediator of magic.

Mare speaks back to the violence on the earth and women by making the maize woman symbolic of a bruja, a witch, who aims to reclaim her *territorio cuerpo* through the main character in the video. She is depicted as a woman hunched over with a white cloth draped over her body. Her face and body are turned away from the camera; all that is visible is the cloth over her body as if she were a mountain. Slowly she turns towards the camera and takes off the cloth, underneath we see the face of a young Indigenous woman wearing a long white skirt and a green blouse. In the background is a painted beige concrete wall and a graffiti art mural featuring the face of a young Indigenous woman painted with black aerosol; the word “Territorio” is written underneath, pointing to the importance of land to women. The woman stretches the white cloth on the ground, sits on it, as though her body is now part of the land.

She takes a handful of purple corn seeds in her hands and she lets them flow through her fingers onto the white cloth, symbolic of the earth. This image loops over and over throughout the video, interwoven with images of an elderly woman plowing the milpa [cornfield] or a younger woman shucking corn on top of a tin roof. We often see an image of an old-school outdoor horn speaker placed high on a post in a basketball court. These visuals convey that agricultural labor performed by Indigenous women in the maize cultivation process is prevalent and vital in all the stages of maize farming. It also feminizes agricultural labor, which is often invisible in the media, as maize farmers tend to be represented as male. Yet it also reflects the realities faced by many women in Oaxaca due to the out-migration of the men in their family—that they are left alone to care for the milpas. The horn speaker signifies women's voices speaking out in public spaces, emphasizing that their voices need to be heard and recognized. The video honors women and honors the land where the women cultivate their food. As Cabnal suggests, the relationship with the land and with the body is vital, “because I do not conceive this body of a woman without a space on Earth that dignifies my existence, and promotes my life in plentitude” (2010, 23).<sup>33</sup>

The woman letting the corn kernels run through her fingers in the video is symbolic of the earth and female maize farmers, as mentioned above, but she also signifies a bruja-healer. This mystical figure holds the maize seeds in her hand, ritualistically alluding to the practice of divination by tossing the maize kernels, a common practice amongst Ben'zaa women and many other Indigenous peoples throughout Mesoamerica since precolonial times. In fact, divining with objects such as seashells, coconut, and coffee grains is common in many cultures across the world. Among Afro-Cuban Santeros, for instance, throwing coconut pieces or “darle coco al santo [offering coconut to the saints]” is one form of divination. They discern the messages depending

on where and what side of the coconut the pieces fall, which is similar for Indigenous diviners in Mexico.

In anthropological and archeological studies there is also evidence of maize divination rituals by Ben'zaa women more specifically. In *Women's Rituals in Formative Oaxaca* by Joyce Marcus, she found that Ben'zaa women in the sixteenth century practiced tiniyaaya niça (1998). This was the process of divination by casting maize kernels onto the surface of a water-filled basin, then noting the number of kernels that remained in the surface. Other women would cast kernels onto the surface of a mat and others would blow air on the kernels that they cupped in their hands before casting them. Some would blacken the kernels over a comal [griddle] and then toss the kernels, deciphering the message depending on the number of kernels landing on the blackened side. According to Marcus, much of the divination “was conducted by male professionals in the context of state religion” in the sixteenth century Ben'zaa community (1998, 12). It was done to “answer questions about the well-being of the ruler, the elite, and the community as a whole, and it was carried out in the context of temples by men called bigaña (priests) or colaniy (diviners)” (Marcus 1998, 12). Marcus states however, that Ben'zaa women conducted divination in their homes or dooryards. It was oriented toward the affairs of the family, finding the cause of illness affecting someone, selecting the name for a newborn baby, predicting the outcome of a pregnancy or marriage, or deciding whether a given day was favorable for a family activity (1998). Marcus found that women continued to divine using corn throughout the twentieth century, perhaps because they could practice it in the privacy of their own home, unbeknownst to the Spanish colonizers.

In reality, the diviner is not a bruja at all, but she would be considered one by Spanish colonizers because divining was deemed brujería. Some Spanish

theologians believed that demons instructed Indigenous healers and herbalists and that divination paved the way for demonic intervention (Pardo 1999, 175). The Spanish persecuted and tortured many healers to stop them from practicing their craft. According to Pardo, “healers and diviners . . . had to be dealt with by means of coercion because of their stubborn resistance to revealing the nature of their trade to the Spanish priests and authorities,” which exposes the violence imposed on Indigenous people who practiced this profession (1999, 175). It also shows the fierce resistance to the colonizers’ indoctrination.

By including a representation of a bruja diviner, Mare exposes the violence of colonialism and patriarchy and makes a strong anticolonial feminist statement by honoring the oppressed female ancestors who survived centuries of inequities and challenged the status quo. According to Lara, the bruja “symbolizes power outside of patriarchy’s control that potentially challenges the sexist status quo” (2005, 12). She explains that women’s spiritual and healing knowledge has often been attributed to superstition and considered diabolical and primitive and adds that the demonization of Indigenous women who were spiritually and sexually powerful “justified the legacy of physical and psychological violence against women in las Américas” by European colonizers (2005, 14). Mare challenges this discourse in “Mujer Maíz” by putting the bruja who is concurrently the maize woman and Mother Nature, at the center. She takes back the power that has been forcefully removed from the land and women because of the legacy of colonialism and now capitalism.

Additionally, using a bruja diviner in the video illustrates Mare’s understanding of the power of women as healers and views them as the key to restoring a balance that has been lost. According to Gonzalez Torres, healers toss maize not only to identify the causes of illness but also to find the causes and how to heal *susto* (2014, 225). *Susto* refers to soul loss and is rooted in Mesoamerican

epistemology. It is attributed to a frightening event that can cause the soul to leave the body temporarily. In Indigenous tradition, the soul is an integral part of the body. When *susto* occurs, it means that an imbalance or trauma such as an injury or violation has occurred and the body needs to be recalibrated. The late Elena Avila, a renowned Chicana curandera who wrote the book, *Women Who Glow in the Dark*, claims that for our ancestors, *susto* resulted from the “cultural destruction, enslavement, and rape that occurred during the Spanish Conquest of the Americas” (1999, 28). In Mare’s work, the maize woman is the bruja diviner that heals *susto*, the trauma caused by colonialism, capitalism and neoliberalism and the harm it has done to the people and the land. The bruja diviner tosses maize because she is seeking a message of healing, one that will restore equilibrium to the earth which has been plundered by global capital, set askew by genetically modified seeds, agro-chemicals and other technology that is detrimental to the planet and affects the cultivation of maize, ultimately resulting in violence against women. If, as Mies and Shiva argue, “the rape of the Earth and the rape of women are intimately linked—both metaphorically, in shaping world-views, and materially, in shaping women’s everyday lives,” then inevitably putting power in a female healer’s hands who will find the cause and the remedy through the divination process to heal *susto* is meaningful (2014, 10).

The presence of the bruja-healer in the video also challenges Western ideas of healing and magic. To outsiders, divining and magic may seem superstitious acts not based in reality. However, when one views magic not in the traditional Western framework but as the “art of changing consciousness at will” that “encompasses political action which is aimed at changing consciousness and thereby causing change,” as Starhawk defines it, the purpose of incorporating a bruja as the central figure in the video that is committing acts considered *brujeria* becomes clear (1982, 13). Mare reveals that changing consciousness will be in the hands of women. Using a female figure symbolic of a bruja to raise

awareness about issues of land rights, maize, and gender inequality challenges the dominant narrative that brujas are bad women for challenging gender roles and unapologetically owning their power. This also points to the Indigenous women activists at the forefront of political movements for social change in Oaxaca. Despite their restricted gender roles in their respective communities, Indigenous women have taken more political responsibility to push back against agribusiness and neoliberal initiatives that aim to threaten their livelihood (Rogers 2008). In a patriarchal society, their independence and assertiveness would perhaps deem these activists as brujas, too.

### **Conclusion**

Using Cabnal's notion of *territorio cuerpo* as my framework, and more broadly, *feminismo comunitario*, I argue that Mare's song and video, "Mujer Maiz," exemplifies an Indigenous hip hop feminism from Abiyala that reflects how the current fight for self-determination is tightly linked to the fight to grow maize. In this essay, I discuss how the song critiques the impact of US economic policy abroad and the uneven power relations between the US and developing countries like Mexico, how this has altered the livelihoods of Indigenous women, and how Indigenous women are central to the fight against agribusiness, hence the use of the female figure, *mujer maíz*, who is also a *bruja*-healer. Drawing on Mays' (2018) argument that Indigenous hip hop feminism is about decolonization, I expand on this and claim that Mare's hip hop feminism is an articulation that specifically speaks against *el patriarcado colonial-neoliberal* sustained by the globalization of capitalism. Specifically, I recast globalization as what Mohanty and Alexander call "capitalist recolonization," or the "racialized and gendered relations of the rule of the state—both its neocolonial and advanced capitalist incarnations" (2010, 23). For Indigenous people, globalization is a continuation of colonization, as Rauna Koukkanen affirms: "For many indigenous people, globalization

is a euphemism for colonization or neo-colonialism” (2008, 218). Victoria Tauli-Corpuz echoes this assertion, stating that globalization produces “the continuation of colonization with the use of more sophisticated methods such as the World Bank, IMF [International Monetary Fund], WTO [World Trade Organization] and NAFTA” (as cited in Koukkanen, 2008, 218).

In “Mujer Maíz,” Mare reminds us of the sacredness of women, the land, and the maize plant. As an Indigenous hip hop feminist, her anticolonial, antipatriarchal, ecofeminist message calls attention to the linkages between the violence of the land and the violence against women. Furthermore, “Mujer Maíz” is part of a long trajectory of oral narratives and cultural expressions by First Peoples in Mesoamerica where maize plays a central role—such as creation myths, maize gods and goddesses like the Ben’zaa maize god Pitao Cozobi, sculptures, engravings, paintings, songs, poetry and many other art forms. Yet Mare’s rhyme reflects her current conditions; she honors maize by using hip hop to express her resistance to neoliberalism, to advocate for women’s rights, and to display a deep desire to recover ancestral traditions. By including a representation of a bruja-healer, Mare honors the history of women healers who challenged the patriarchal status quo, those women who were persecuted for their knowledge and power. One could argue that Mare herself is a bruja of words, using hip hop to conjure consciousness and cause change, challenging patriarchy in the world of hip hop and beyond with her word magic. Ironically, it is capitalist patriarchy and agribusiness that are very much culpable for the greatest sorcery of all—a complete lack of concern and destruction of living things! These institutions have dispossessed millions of people from their land, imported maize contaminated with transgenes, extracted resources from the earth as if it were not alive, and have created intense vulnerability among women. It seems timely to say that we need more brujas in the world, now more than ever, to fight against the sorcery of the global ruling class.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. "It sounds incredible to think that we are people/we are half of the world but in a minority they transform us/if violence is normalized under your policies/we don't want your rights, we demand our own!"

<sup>2</sup> The Zapotec people call themselves ben'zaa, binnizá or bene xhon, depending on the region they are from. Their name translates to "gente de las nubes" or "cloud people." In this essay I will refer to them as ben'zaa for practical purposes since I will not be speaking about a group in a specific region. I prefer not use the name imposed on them by imperialist and colonizing powers and will refer to them by the name they call themselves. The Aztecs named the Zapotec people "Tzapotécatl," meaning "inhabitants of the place of the sapote" because of the abundant sapotes that grew in the region. The term "Zapoteco" was subsequently used by the Spanish colonizers to refer to the ben'zaa people.

<sup>3</sup> "Mujer Maíz" is performed by the trio Advertencia Lirika. This song was a demo recording, meaning that it was not part of any official album or record label. It was released in 2008 and the video was recorded in 2010. Although the song was originally produced with the two other members, I focus on Mare's work as a solo artist in this chapter because: 1) she is the founder of

the group and continues to produce music while the other women have ended their music careers. It was also very difficult to find any information about these two members. 2) Mare is involved in activism and fuses her artistic work with grassroots social justice movements in Mexico, issues that this song engages with, and 3) because she is of Zapotec/ben'zaa descent. The latter is crucial because Indigenous women in a country like Mexico are much less visible and are certainly in the minority in the music industry, which is why it is critical that Indigenous female artists receive more scholarly attention. In fact, Mare has received very little scholarly attention while other hip-hop feminist groups of color in Latin America engaging with similar themes have received much more attention from scholars.

<sup>4</sup> In Kuna, Abiyala means “sangre que corre libre,” or land of vital blood. Indigenous communities assert that using the term Abiyala (sometimes spelled Abya Yala) instead of “America” or “New World” is a step toward epistemic decolonization and the establishment of Indigenous peoples’ autonomy and self-determination. I will use this term when referring to Indigenous people in the American continent. I will use “Latin America” and “North America” when referring to those regions specifically, as the term “Abiyala” is transnational in nature and defies national borders.

<sup>5</sup> Feminismo comunitario is a concept employed by Indigenous women in Latin America to recognize that because women anchor community life, they should be treated befittingly in order for the whole community to thrive. Territorio cuerpo is another Indigenous ecofeminist theory that posits that all life forms are interconnected. Both of these are fleshed out later in the essay.

<sup>6</sup> The word bruja [witch] carries with it many negative connotations that are deeply sexist. I, like many contemporary feminists, reclaim the term bruja here to make a feminist statement that this figure symbolizes “power outside of patriarchy’s control” and not an evil and deviant woman, as she has often been represented throughout history (Lara 2005, 12). It is beyond the scope of this essay to explain the painful history behind the word “witch” and the many cases of persecution of women who were thought to be witches. I hyphenate the words “bruja” and “healer” throughout the essay (bruja-healer) when referring to brujas as healers. By healers I mean herbalists, midwives, diviners and other specialists who were often labeled as brujas by European colonizers, including church authorities. By bringing those two words together, I pay homage to the female ancestors who suffered persecution for being healers, while also reclaiming the word “bruja” from its negative connotations.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout the essay, I will spell hip hop with an “x” when referring specifically to Oaxacan hip hop. Oaxacan youth in the hip hop movement spell it with an “x” as a way to identify Oaxacan hip hop specifically because of the “x” in OaXaca. Also, because the “h” is silent in Spanish, the “x” makes the same phonetic sound that the “h” makes in English. See documentary film “Xip Xop OaXaca” (2007) by ManoVuelta Productions for more on the hip-hop movement in Oaxaca.

<sup>8</sup> The term hip-hop feminism was coined by Joan Morgan in her debut book *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost* where she embraces the contradictions and complexities of being a feminist who grew up on hip-hop, a genre that is known for its misogyny and homophobic, hypermasculine

sensibilities. She calls for a feminism “that samples and layers many voices, injects its sensibilities into the old and flips it into something new, provocative, and powerful” (1999, 62).

<sup>9</sup> While hip-hop feminist scholars like Saunders are beginning to see the important work of feminist rappers outside of the United States, their focus is still largely on Black female rappers in the African diaspora and they often overlook mestiza rappers and Indigenous female rappers are discussed even less than their mestiza counterparts. To be fair, there are significantly less self-identified Indigenous female rappers than mestiza rappers. However, the few Indigenous female MCs that exist do not get as much attention as mestiza MCs. For instance, Chilean artist, Ana Tijoux has an enormous following throughout Latin America, the US, Canada and Europe with several Grammy nominations under her belt. On the other hand, Jaas Newen a female Mapuche rapper in Chile who raps in Mapuzungún and Spanish, has not received the same attention as Tijoux, although they rap about similar topics.

<sup>10</sup> Paredes states, “Las mujeres somos la mitad de cada pueblo, una mitad que cuida, cria, protege y va a parir a la otra mitad que son los hombres,” (2013, 39). [“Women are half of the community, the half that cares for the children and the ones that will birth the other half of the community, which are the men.”]

<sup>11</sup> Feministas comunitarias recognize that patriarchy existed before the colonizers arrived in the Americas. They refer to this as *entronque patriarcal*, roughly translated as patriarchal junction or relationship. Paredes explains, “la opresión de género no sólo vino con los colonizadores españoles, sino que también había una propia versión de la opresión de género en las culturas y sociedades precoloniales, y que cuando llegaron los españoles se juntaron ambas visiones. . . .” [“the oppression of gender did not manifest with the Spanish colonizers, there was also a version of gender oppression in pre-colonial cultures and societies, and when the Spaniards arrived, both visions came together. . . .”] (72).

<sup>12</sup> “A feminist approach that does not bring the dimension of the land does not have political sustainability.”

<sup>13</sup> “Latin America . . . was in a difficult situation because of the economic policies spread by the so-called Washington Consensus, propagated by supposedly multilateral organizations dominated by the US financial establishment, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These were the golden times of the neoliberal doctrine: mass privatizations, cuts in the budget, growing indebtedness of governments due to the forced processes of economic opening. In the peripheries of the large Latin American cities . . . the black and mestizo youth lived a reality of unemployment, violence and despair.”

<sup>14</sup> Considering that many youth came from neighborhoods with little to no resources, with no cultural centers or other forms of artistic expression, they found graffiti as a way to let their voices heard. See Elizabeth Barnett’s master’s thesis on Oaxaca street art, where she states, Oaxacan youth carve out “their own space, identity, and voice within the fabric of Oaxacan and Mexican society and politics. Art has not only become the means for youth to assert their voice in both national

and international spaces but has also become a means to empower and mobilize a silenced and oppressed generation” (2015, 3).

<sup>15</sup> Hip hop consists of four elements: MCing, DJing, graffiti, and breakdancing. Some also claim that the fifth elements of hip hop, the forgotten element, is knowledge. See Hiphopmuseum | Elements. The National Museum of Hip-Hop. Accessed November 21, 2018. <https://www.hiphopmuseum.org/elements> for additional information.

<sup>16</sup> As the famous quote by Audre Lorde demonstrates, “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.” See Audre, Lorde. (2007). *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches* by Audre Lorde. Berkeley: Crossing Press.

<sup>17</sup> “The negation of one part of the community to submission and subjugation is also threatening the existence of the other part” (2014, 87).

<sup>18</sup> “I’m still looking for well-being and I do not see it / I only see the traces of exploitation and looting / Unemployment grows daily and it’s not a lie/that those of us down here are the targets.”

<sup>19</sup> “Everything is related in the web of life. If bodies are exterminated because of feminicides in countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico—then life is also exterminated” (2014).

<sup>20</sup> Out-migration refers to the process of people moving away from their home country or region into another area.

<sup>21</sup> “Our culture dies in the hands of the invader/our patience is over/only aggression exists/now they play with genetics/ending moral ethics/thinking of something bigger/ that shit where it gets done is expanded/they take the peasant’s money/raping and killing our soil”

<sup>22</sup> “Dirty places because of globalization/we cannot find a solution/ the invasion by big capital increases”

<sup>23</sup> It is a daunting task to describe in depth the importance of maize for Indigenous communities in the Mesoamerican region because the history and the people’s relationship to the maize plant is vast. Maize is so significant to the social fabric of the people that there are many lenses and approaches one can take when researching maize. Discussing all the complexities and offering an extensive historical, ethnographic, anthropological or scientific background on maize is beyond the scope of this essay. Thus, not including this information here is not to reduce the importance of maize, but to stay focused on the issues at hand that Mare brings attention to in her song, “Mujer Maiz.”

<sup>24</sup> “An unjust story/the one written in our fields/we do not want more exploitation (we are fed up)/they have taken so many things away from us for so long/our roots and our writings/ours and our ancestors/Many things may change but not what we carry inside/we are the daughters of maize and we carry it in our bones”

<sup>25</sup> I want to note that the re-shaping of Mexican agricultural production did not start with NAFTA. It started with the so-called “Green Revolution” in Mexico between the 1940s-80s,

and was spearheaded by the United States to increase productivity in Mexico's agricultural sector because supposedly agricultural productivity after the Mexican Revolution had fallen. The US helped fund this program and partnered with the Mexican government with the intention that this program would prevent social movements and would stem unrest and the appeal for Communism, which clearly points to US imperialist endeavors in Mexico and the economic infrastructure in place to topple people's movements throughout the world. With this in mind, it is not surprising that this program benefited large-scale agribusiness not small-scale farmers for reasons too numerous to name here. However, NAFTA intensified this process and its affects have been much more detrimental on small farmers in Mexico. See Gonzalez, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> "Maize woman/what can you do when you see your children distributing the power/ annihilating your legacy/leaving our past behind/ that you have cared for fiercely/mother nature/ awaken your fury/bring forth your strength"

<sup>27</sup> The 1st of August Oaxacan Women Coordinators (COMO) is one of over 300 organizations that were part of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) that was formed during the 2006 uprising in Oaxaca to fight back against the repressive actions of the government.

<sup>28</sup> "When we began to build approaches to recover and defend territory, body and land, we first recognized that women's bodies have been historically expropriated, and it is an essential principle for us as communitarian feminists to recover this first territory of vital energy, which is the body. Second, where will your body live? In the water? In the air? No, it lives in relation to all the elements of nature and the cosmos, and for you to have a body in relationship with the water, with the stones, with the trees, with the sun, with the mountains, your body must live in balance with this environment, and a healthy and harmonious environment so that life in all of its fullness manifests."

<sup>29</sup> "In the presence of the popular movements, and openly opposed to them, there is another way to conceive maize. . . . It aims to untie maize from its historical and cultural context, to treat it solely in terms of merchandise and in terms of interests that are not those of the popular classes. It turns maize into a substitutable, exchangeable and even dispensable commodity, precisely because it excludes the opinions and interests of the popular classes."

<sup>30</sup> "The strength that unites us comes from the earth/maize is the seed that people fight for/the injustice of men only brings more violence."

<sup>31</sup> "In order to decolonize the notion and feeling of the body, we must decolonize that split and schizophrenic conception of the soul on one side and body on the other; is what the colonizers have proposed."

<sup>32</sup> "That coexists to provide vital energy in the web of life. And the web of life is the whole of everything" (2014).

<sup>33</sup> Original: "Porque no concibo este cuerpo de mujer, sin un espacio en la tierra que dignifique mi existencia, y promueva mi vida en plenitud."

