

Berta Cáceres and Decolonial Feminism

Ochy Curiel

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BERTA EN LAS AGUAS (Melissa Cardoza)

BERTA IN THE WATERS

Sagrada sal de nuestras luchas

Lluvia sobre las milpas

Fresas esparcidas en todas las manos

Vida toda, Berta, compañera

Sacred salt of our struggles

Rain over the cornfields

Strawberries spread in every hand

All life, Berta, our comrade

Que sabrá el asesino de la luz de su esperanza

No podrá el cobarde asomarse a la utopía ni en palabras

Muchos siglos tendrán para pagar esta muerte

Y ojalá se les pudra el agua en la garganta

What shall your killer know of your hope and light

The coward won't be able to join the utopia not even in words

Many centuries won't be enough for them to pay for this death

And may the water rot in their throats

Alto es el río Gualcarque entre las montañas

Ruge su furia y cimbra su amenaza

Acá venimos dolientes, llorosas, heridas

Lastimadas ante lo inconcebible de sus flores marchitadas

Venimos a su cauce

Nosotras, sus hermanas rotas por la hora mala

*High Gualcarque river between the mountains
 Its rage roars, its threat bends
 Here we come, mourning, weeping, wounded
 Hurt before your inconceivably withered flowers
 We come to its waters
 We, your sisters, broken by the evil hour*

Bertica nuestra, Berta de las aguas
 El odio de los hombres que tanto nos señalan
 No pueden con tanta belleza, con tanta fuerza y gracia
 Por eso matan. Por eso matan. Por eso matan.
 No saben de esta venganza nuestra de ser libres
 Y no cambiar la rebeldía por nada
*Our Bertica, Berta from the waters
 The hate of men who mark us so much
 Is nothing to such beauty, such strength and grace
 That is why they kill. That is why they kill. That is why they kill.
 They know nothing of our revenge—being free
 And being rebel, never trading it for nothing*

Lágrimas al río
 Muchas lágrimas
 Es hora de la muerte, del duelo, la desventura
 Mal hacemos en negar la pena y su estocada
 Convocamos al fuego, a la tierra, al lamento
 Refresque el agua este manto de tristeza . . . y tanta¡¡
*Tears fall to the river
 Many tears
 It is time—for death, duel, misfortune
 We do wrong to deny sorrow and its blow
 We call fire, earth, our wailing
 May water wash this mantle of sadness . . . so much of it!!*

No perdonamos ni olvidamos Bertita
 Mire que el amor alcanza para maldecir el mal
 donde quiera que se agacha
 no escucharemos el olvido al que nos llaman

Damos la bienvenida con su nombre
 a todas las mujeres malversadas
 a los cuerpos mutilados por la misma dura mano
 que a usted la asesinara.
 Lavamos en este río las heridas de las que nos faltan
We don't forgive, we don't forget, Bertita
See, love can curse out evil
wherever it crouches
we won't listen to the forgetting to which they call us
We welcome with your name
all mistreated women
all the bodies hurt by the same hard hand
that murdered you.
In this river we wash the wounds of the women we miss

Que vengan los hipócritas de siempre
 con sus papas, sus pastores y políticos
 sus blancos derechos humanos
 y toda la comparsa
 Que hagan sus monumentos de basura
 Y muestren las sonrisas ensayadas
May the same hypocrites come
with their popes, pastors, and politicians
their white human rights
and all their troupe
May they build their filthy monuments
And show their fake smiles

Nosotras, compita, ofrecemos aquí nuestra antigua rabia
 La que venimos atesorando por siglos
 A veces llenas de fuerza, a veces desangradas.
 Nosotras mismas nos haremos justicia
 Que aquí quede su huella
 Que los llantos del mundo nos acompañen
 Desde todas las lenguas y las aldeas remotas
 Que alcanzaron a entender su prosa libertaria
Here we offer you, compita, our old rage
That we have been saving up for centuries

*At times full of strength, at times bled out.
We will bring you justice ourselves
May your path here prevail
May the cries of the world walk with us
From all the languages and remote villages
That could understand your libertarian prose*

Que brinque el duende feliz
y canten las niñas lencas al gozo
con su desnudo cuerpo entre las aguas
No es para la envidia, la burla, la desgracia
Que ha de levantarse en cada arroyo y quebrada
la memoria de sus pasos
*May the happy duende play
and may the Lenca girls sing with joy
with their naked bodies in the waters
It is not for envy, mockery, and disgrace
That the memory of your steps
Shall rise in every brook and creek*

Desgracia es tener tanta luz
En territorios poblados de avaricia y maña
Nacer entre tanto rufián, esa es desgracia
*Such a disgrace to have so much light
In lands where greed and deception thrive
To be born among so many ruffians, what a disgrace*

No vamos a mirar de nuevo el fresco brote del agua en sus pupilas
Berta, hermana,
No encontraremos más su bolso con papeles
la llamada urgente, el mandadito, las largas manejadas
*We shall not see the fresh spring of water in your pupils again
Berta, sister,
We shall not again find your bag full of papers
urgent calls, errands, long drives*

Las noches ahora son extensas desde la terrible madrugada
pero un día encontraremos el consuelo, compita,

para saber que esto de la muerte es pura papada
que lo nuestro es la vida sin permisos, sin negocios, sin pajas
*The nights are now long since that terrible one
but one day we will find the solace, dear comrade,
to know that this death thing is bullshit
and that our life needs no permits, businesses, nonsense*

Un día nos hemos de juntar en algún antiguo sitio de la magia
para empezar de nuevo, Bertica, porque esto está perro
pero y cómo, ni que tuviéramos en vez de sangre, horchata
*One day we shall meet in some old magic place
to begin again, Bertica, because this is hard
very much so, even if we had horchata instead of blood in our veins*

En este marzo de sangre, impunidad y lágrimas
hermana del alma, déjenos hacerle este canto plañidero
entre las piedras frescas del río que amaba
la madre tierra con usted en su cálido vientre
cuánto y cuan fuerte nos jala
acá estamos su pueblo, y la tarea inconclusa
acá, y para todos los tiempos su enérgica llamada
*In this March of blood, impunity, and tears
soul sister, let us sing you this mourning song
between the fresh rocks of the river you loved
the mother earth with you in her warm womb
how much and how strongly it compels us
here we are, your people, and the unfinished task
here, and for all time, your powerful call*

Marzo nefasto de este triste 2016
Hideous March of this sad 2016

Writing about Berta Cáceres reminds me of this poem by Melissa Cardoza, writer, feminist, Honduran, fighter, friend of Berta, and my sister/accomplice of times. It was through her that I met Berta Cáceres. Melissa spoke to me many times about that woman of strengths and convictions that I should get to know one day.

The first time I listened to her was in front of a massive audience. She was declaring herself a feminist who fights against capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. The ways that beautiful and powerful Lenca woman calmly but fiercely uttered every word, gave every look, and expressed her thoughts and her proposal for social transformation just blew my mind.

Then, at a conference in Guatemala that we organized as the Latin American Group of Study, Formation, and Feminist Action (GLEFAS), in which activists and thinkers from different countries participated in talking about racism, territorial dispossession, decoloniality, and defining our political struggles, I was able to be closer to Berta, understand the situation in Honduras better, and learn more about the actions that different social movements were taking against dispossession and repression. From then on, Berta Cáceres became an important reference for me, for her political proposal coincided with many of my positions as a decolonial feminist.

It is not my intention to define Berta Cáceres as a decolonial feminist, since she has never defined herself as such; however, as one of the principles of this point of view is to recover individual and collective knowledge, experiences, proposals, and practices that challenge the historical hierarchies produced by systems of oppression and domination whether they define themselves as feminists or not, I propose in this text to recount some of Berta Cáceres's stances and practices that coincide with key postulates of decolonial feminism that explain why her legacy is so important for many of us today.

The Point of View

Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso, in her text *Del por qué es necesario un feminismo decolonial* [*Why We Need Decolonial Feminism: Differentiation and Co-Constitutional Domination in Western Modernity*], already characterized what decolonial feminism is in Abya Yala. According to the author, it is a turning point and a bifurcation in the path that many of us have gone through in the most crucial critiques which have questioned the universalization of women's experiences based on sex/gender located in Northern geopolitics, speaking from a place of race and class privileges.

The author refers to the fact that some of the sources that nurture this line of critique are the theories, analyses, and proposals of Black feminism, feminism of color, and third world feminism in the United States, as well as those of feminist, Black, and Indigenous women from Abya Yala in her critique

of the classic feminist position focused only on gender, and her proposal to consider the interweaving of class, race, gender, and sexuality oppressions.

Besides, the author points out that decolonial feminism is also nourished by the autonomous Latin American feminist movements that emerged in the 1990s, which denounced the institutionalization of feminism responsible for producing the interference of developmental policies in the so-called third world countries, which led to a global agenda of development and rights, policies that obeyed neocolonial interests from the Global North, among other important sources. Espinosa calls attention to the fact that decolonial feminism reinterprets history as a critical key to modernity, “not only because of its androcentrism and misogyny, as classical feminist epistemology has reproduced, but also because of its intrinsically racist and Eurocentric character” (Espinosa 2016, 144).

Contributing to the arguments of this author, with whom we have shared the construction of this political perspective, I would like to add that, unlike many of those who today define themselves as decolonial feminists and who are limited to an academic and theoretical exercise, most of us who are positioned in this genealogical line have been activists of these critical political perspectives as Black people, Indigenous peoples, lesbians, migrants. Therefore, the theorizations and analyses that we develop have been built from collective political practices according to these places of enunciation that produce particular points of view.

As Patricia Hill Collins (1990) has analyzed in the case of African American women, the point of view has two fundamental components: political-economic-social experiences that offer a particular perspective, and the consciousness that is created from those experiences, which make it possible to understand how a matrix of oppression is experienced, problematized and acted upon.

I also place Berta Cáceres’s point of view in this dialectical relationship from her particular experience and her awareness of social injustices, which, according to her own words, she got from her mother:

Crecí en un ambiente de lucha, que viene de mi madre, que igual es una luchadora, una defensora, que le tocó vivir contextos de dictadura, dentro del contexto de la guerra fría en Centroamérica y se convirtió en una persona muy activa, además rompiendo todo lo impuesto... todo el poder militar, patriarcal, rompiendo esquemas, se convirtió también en una líder política ... apoyando a los refugiados salvadoreños... desde asistir los partos a las refugiadas, que era un delito, porque mi mamá es partera. Su trabajo de

salud siempre fue con las mujeres lencas. Realmente creo que de ahí viene mi construcción de la conciencia de luchar, del sentido de la justicia. (Berta Cáceres quoted in IM-Defensoras 2019, 0'10"–1'45")

I grew up in an environment of struggle with my mother, who is also a fighter, a defender, who had to live in dictatorship contexts, within the context of the Cold War in Central America. She became a very active person, who challenged every imposition . . . —all the military and patriarchal power—breaking schemes, she also became a political leader . . . supporting Salvadoran refugees . . . she assisted the childbirth of refugee women—which was a crime—because my mother is a midwife. Her health work was always with Lenca women. I do believe that this is where my construction of the consciousness to fight comes from, i.e., from the sense of justice.

Berta Cáceres understood how racism, sexism, and classism are interwoven with the new neocolonial policies from a situated and embodied point of view, given her experience as a woman who was part of a Lenca community located in a Central American country lacking class and racial privileges, and from this place, she promoted her political practices.

From Coloniality to *Coloniaje* (Colonialism)

An important framework of analysis for decolonial feminism has been the proposals of the modernity/coloniality duo, which have made it possible to understand the historical conditions that originated a social organization that was a product of colonialism, plagued by race, sex, sexuality, national, and geopolitical social hierarchies and sustained throughout the history of this continent, whose main victims have been Indigenous and Black peoples.

From this proposal, the concept of *colonialidad* [coloniality] defined by Aníbal Quijano (2000) is important for us. He defines it as a “pattern of power” that emerges from colonialism, but which lasts until our times, and which has been sustained based on the exploitation of labor—that has promoted and legitimized a type of knowledge defined through a white and Eurocentric rationality—which affects even intersubjective relationships. All of this has sustained the global capitalist market and the idea of race was quintessential for it.

Although Berta Cáceres did not use the concept of coloniality, she considered colonialism as the historical condition that generated hierarchical structures of oppression. She emphasized that all the suffering in Honduras (and beyond this territory), the poverty, looting, racism, and violence, was due to the continuity of what she called *el coloniaje*:

Es lo mismo. Se cambian los nombres, pero es lo mismo. Es el coloniaje, el mismo coloniaje de hace 500 años y ahora vemos una embestida del capitalismo de manera más agresiva en los pueblos indígenas. Estamos en un punto que tenemos que luchar por la sobrevivencia de los pueblos indígenas. Estamos en un punto en que si no lo hacemos vamos a desaparecer en poco tiempo. (Berta Cáceres quoted in Olivé and Bilbao 2012, 26'44"–27'28")
It is the same thing. The names change, but it's the same. It is colonialism, the same colonialism from five hundred years ago, and now we see an even more aggressive capitalist onslaught on Indigenous peoples. We got to a point where we have to fight for the survival of Indigenous peoples. We got to a point where, if we do not fight, we will disappear in a short time.

For Berta, the continuity of what she called *coloniaje* meant understanding that the violence against Indigenous and Black peoples, their cultures, their natural assets, their autonomy and self-determination, had an origin, and that was namely colonialism. However, she analyzed how there is an imperial hegemonic reconfiguration today that invades the territories and peoples through annexation projects, military bases, monopolies, cultural and media invasion, and counterrevolutionary plans that were supported by the white and rich elites of the North and also the Creoles of Latin America (Korol 2018, 62–63). We could say that Berta Cáceres's *coloniaje* is another way of calling a pattern of power that has implied extractivism, the economic dependence of countries of the South on those of the North, based on the exploitation of some groups and the unequal distribution of wealth at a global level, but also within the countries of the South, all of which has caused the material, social, and spiritual dehumanization of certain groups that have been historically placed in the lowest social hierarchies, such as Indigenous peoples, Black people, and farmworkers.

The Nonfragmented Commitment of the Struggles against Oppressions

One of the key contributions that decolonial feminism retrieves from Black feminism is the proposal of not breaking the analysis of social realities into pieces, since racism, classism, and heterosexism overlap in the lives of Black women. Several concepts explain this political proposal: interlocking systems of oppression (Combahee River Collective 1977), matrix of oppression (Hill Collins 1990), intersectionality (Crenshaw 1993), and co-constitution of oppressions (Lugones 2008). Starting from these contributions and making it more complex with an analysis

of coloniality, decolonial feminists understand that one of the effects of the modern/colonial system has been to generate the “colonial difference” (Mignolo 2007), the product of a classification that marked difference as inferiority to justify exploitation, dispossession, and violence. Indigenous and Black peoples, as well as lesbians, homosexual people, transgender people, impoverished people, women, etc., all have been categories, social places, individual and collective experiences, and products of the social hierarchy produced by colonialism that have endured in coloniality, which—added to the impact of liberal multiculturalism, which reinforces identity politics—has resulted in the fragmentation of political struggles and worldviews. The proposals formulated by Black feminists explain that it is not theoretically or analytically possible to understand the systems of domination separately, much less to undertake a political struggle that prioritizes some struggles over others. In that sense, like Black feminists, Berta Cáceres always proposed a feminism that fights against all forms of domination:

No vamos a ser ingenuas. Nosotras estamos demandando un feminismo que realmente desmonte todas las formas de dominación, no el maquillaje o el discurso demagógico, sino que lo desmonte en concreto, y que enfrente a esas formas de dominación de diversas maneras (Berta Cáceres quoted in Korol 2018, 104–105).

Let us not be naive. We are demanding a feminism that actually dismantles all forms of domination, instead of disguising it or producing demagogic discourse. One that dismantles them specifically, and that confronts these forms of domination in different ways.

For Berta, these forms of domination were essentially capitalism, racism, and patriarchy themselves (Kinorama 2016). This position of understanding and acting on and against all systems of oppression has moved us toward problematizing the separatism that had been an option and a path for so many of us, learned from white hegemonic feminism that assumed that the sex/gender system (Rubin 1975) was the common base of the oppression of all women, and therefore, that all men were our natural enemies. However, understanding that a decolonial commitment to social change cannot be limited to the struggle against violence against women, but should also take into account racist, heterosexist, neoliberal, genocidal violence, which does not only affect women but entire communities, including men and sex-dissident/gender-nonconforming people, implies the comprehension that the struggles must involve multiple subjects. In this sense, we are

committed to recovering the community, not only concerning territory, nor only promoting integrated struggles, but also the historical resistances that have been made throughout Abya Yala.

Berta Cáceres has always worked in the community. Ever since the Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras [Civil Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations from Honduras] (COPINH), founded in 1993, organizing more than one hundred communities, she has participated in central struggles, alongside others. Despite an awareness of the sexism reproduced by men and the violence against women perpetrated by many of them, and being herself a victim of violence by her ex-partners, she thought that the reflections on these subjects should be made collectively by the community. And based on all this, the backbone of COPINH's struggle was built: anti-capitalism, anti-patriarchy, anti-racism:

Nosotras las mujeres llevamos esa triple lucha y quisiéramos que también los hombres la llevaran para ir desmontando todas las formas de opresión. (Berta Cáceres quoted in Kinorama 2016, 1'49"–1'51")

We, women, carry on this triple struggle, and we wish men would carry it on too, to dismantle all forms of oppression.

In many occasions she has pointed out that it was not easy to carry on the anti-patriarchal struggle inside COPINH; however, for her, and for the other women within the organization, it was quintessential that everyone carried on the struggles to which they had committed themselves. And for this, she has developed processes of political formation:

En esas asambleas, por ejemplo, en la que se trataba el tema antipatriarcal, no sólo participaron mujeres, también los hombres. En el tema de la asamblea de los jóvenes, no sólo eran jóvenes, sino que también demás personas. En la mesa de pueblos indígenas igual, ha participado otra gente. Fue muy integral, porque siempre ocurre que nos vamos así, y al final el tema de la lucha antipatriarcal sólo tocamos las mujeres. Fue una integración en todos estos debates. (Berta Cáceres cited by Korol 2018, 112–13).

In those assemblies, for instance, in which we discussed anti-patriarchal issues, women were not the only ones participating—men were there too. In assemblies discussing the youth, young people were not the only ones participating—other people were there too. In the table concerning Indigenous peoples, it was the same—other peoples were there too. It was very integrated, because we always did it that way, and at the end only women would address the anti-patriarchal issue. There was an integration in all of these debates.

As decolonial feminists, we know the implications of separating political struggles. This has resulted in the majority of feminists not addressing the struggle against racism, in Indigenous and Black movements only barely addressing the struggle against violence against women and sex-dissident/gender-nonconforming people, which has developed into the reproduction of these systems of domination inside social movements. Berta saw this very clearly, and she proposed a world without any kind of oppression; for this, it was necessary for the collective struggle to carry on the task of dismantling all oppressions.

The Struggle against Accumulation through Dispossession

Berta Cáceres opposed herself to the great monster of global capitalism: the mega mining and hydroelectric projects, which are nothing but the expression of the “accumulation by dispossession,” one of the categories proposed by the Marxist geographer David Harvey (2004), which concerns the ways transnational neoliberal capitalism dispossesses communities from their waters, forests, wisdoms, knowledges, and lives. The transnational mining, agroindustry, hydroelectric, and pharmaceutical companies are responsible for it. With the consent of local governments, they accumulate capital on a global level, which takes place along with the development discourse that makes direct intervention through dispossession, affecting not only subjectivities but also cultures, societies, and entire worlds, bringing with it Western modernity’s idea of progress that has been established since colonial times (Escobar 2007).

This has been a permanent struggle by Berta Cáceres ever since COPINH was created, but it became stronger when the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular [National Front of Popular Resistance] was formed during the 2009 coup d’état against the then-president Manuel Zelaya, in which both her and the COPINH participated. The COPINH denounced a great number of megaprojects for destroying and privatizing Indigenous, Black, and farmworker communities, and the coupist government for granting 30 percent of the national territory to mining concessions. COPINH’s struggles against this capitalist monster grew in the next years. Here is one of Berta’s statements from 2013:

Desde el 1º de abril de 2013 nos encontramos en esta acción histórica de las comunidades del Sector Norte del municipio de Intibucá, en Río

Blanco, compuesto por varias comunidades Lencas que por siglos y siglos han defendido la vida, el territorio, el bosque, el agua, los ríos. Esto es lo que estamos haciendo precisamente hoy, siguiendo el legado de Lempira. Hay que recordar que este proyecto fue favorecido por el golpe de Estado, otorgándoseles autorizaciones a las empresas. Toda la entrega de bienes comunes fue resuelta de manera inconsulta e irrespetuosa, violentando -en el caso de los Pueblos Originarios- el Derecho a la Consulta Plena, Libre e Informada, el Convenio 169 de la OIT sobre Pueblos Indígenas y Tribales del Mundo, la Declaración de la ONU Sobre Pueblos Indígenas, títulos antiguos y el derecho ancestral al territorio, sus culturas y espiritualidad, patrimonios económicos y comunitarios. Tenemos una acción en las inmediaciones del proyecto hidroeléctrico Agua Zarca. Las comunidades de Río Blanco tomaron la decisión de impedir que se instale ese proyecto aquí, que ha venido a privatizar el río Gualcarque por más de 20 años, dando la concesión a las empresas DESA, a SINOHYDRO, transnacional china, con la participación de FICOHSA, un banco que se ha adueñado prácticamente de gran parte de la deuda interna de este país, que jugó un papel activo en el golpe de estado, y tiene inversiones en muchos sectores, no sólo el energético, el turístico y otros, y se está favoreciendo con los fondos del BCIE (Banco Centroamericano de Integración Económica), del Banco Francés, de la USIC que son fondos del gobierno de los EE.UU. (Berta Cáceres quoted in Korol 2018, 163)

Since April 1, 2013, we have been working in this historic action of the communities from Sector Norte in the municipality of Intibucá, in Río Blanco, composed of many Lencas communities that have been defending life, land, forest, water, and rivers for centuries and centuries. This is what we are doing precisely today, following Lempira's legacy. It is necessary to remember that this project was supported by the coup d'état. The companies were granted authorizations. All the common goods were handed over disrespectfully, without any consent, violating—concerning the Pueblos Originarios [Indigenous Peoples]—the Right to Full, Free, and Informed Consent, ILO's 169 Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the World, UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, old titles and the ancestral right to the territory/land, to their cultures and spiritualities, as well as economic and community patrimonies. We have an action in the vicinity of the hydroelectric project Agua Zarca. The communities from Río Blanco have decided to stop this project from being established here. This project, which has come to privatize the Gualcarque River for over twenty years, granting the concession to the companies DESA and the Chinese transnational SINOHYDRO, with the participation of the FICOHSA bank, which has taken possession of a great part of this country's internal debt, which has played an active role in the coup d'état,

and has investments in many sectors, such as the energy sector, the tourism sector, and others, and which is being favored by the BCIE (Banco Centroamericano de Integración Económica) [Central American Bank for Economic Integration], the Banco Francés, and the USIC, funded by the US government.

Berta denounced the very names of those responsible for the dispossession, huge monopolies of financial and economic extractivism, and she was a part of the resistance actions along with the communities. Due to her participation, she was persecuted, received death threats, and was sexually harassed by representatives from the companies, police, and military officers, and other government sectors.

Her unending struggle earned her many prizes, and perhaps the most important among them was the 2015 Goldman Prize, a great recognition for environmentalist activists. Although Berta Cáceres was not only an environmentalist, nor do I believe she has defined herself as such, this prize, such as she herself said, represented recognition for the communities' resistance processes. She has also stated that, "What inspires us are not the prizes, but our principles. Here, with or without recognition, we have been fighting, and we will carry on doing that" (Berta Cáceres quoted in Archivo Vivo Paulo Freire 2018, 2'52"–2'55").

The Lenca Cosmology

We, decolonial feminists, recover the spiritualities of the peoples and communities of which many of us are part. Expressions of resistance against the Judeo-Christian imposition brought to us by colonialism, which has erased and delegitimized sacred non-Christian spiritualities, religions, and traditions. Despite the violence involved in the establishment of Judeo-Christianity, resulting in the extraordinary political strength possessed by the churches throughout Abya Yala, these "other" spiritualities have carried on and have been quintessential to the life and the struggles of the peoples.

In the Lenca cosmology, such as in other Indigenous and Black cosmologies, there is not a separation between humans, water, mountains, animals, air, earth, and those who are dead. Everything is part of the life and collective existence which must be cared for and maintained, not only for itself, but for all of humanity:

En nuestras cosmovisiones somos seres surgidos de la tierra, el agua y el maíz. De los ríos somos custodios ancestrales, el pueblo Lenca, resguardados además por los espíritus de las niñas que nos enseñan que dar la vida de múltiples formas por la defensa de los ríos es dar la vida para el bien de la humanidad y de este planeta (Berta Cáceres quoted in the Goldman Environmental Prize Ceremony 2015, 0'23"–0'55").

In our cosmologies, we are beings that come from the earth, the water, and the corn. We, the Lenca people, are the ancestral guardians of the rivers, also protected by the spirits of the girls who teach us that giving our lives in many ways to defend the rivers is giving our lives to the greater good of humanity and of this planet.

That is why the defense of the territories is not only about the materialities that allow survival, it is about the connection of people with spiritual transcendence. In the Lenca cosmology, rivers are fundamental, not only because their waters allow the existence of life but also because the spirits of *ninās*, the guardians of waters, live in them. Therefore, Berta was a guardian of the rivers, as many others from her people. The rivers meant so much to them that, in many occasions, she said she knew they would win the fight against the installation of the hydroelectric dam in the Gualcarque River because “the river told me so.”

These spiritual strengths, the conception of the territories/land not as commodities but as communities of collective life, which questions the idea of a development that aims for dispossession and depredation, were central for Berta Cáceres:

Nuestras conciencias serán sacudidas por el hecho de solo estar contemplando la autodestrucción basada en la depredación capitalista, racista y patriarcal.

El Río Gualcarque nos ha llamado, así como los demás que están seriamente amenazados. Debemos acudir. La Madre Tierra militarizada, cercada, envenenada, donde se violan sistemáticamente los derechos elementales, nos exige actuar. Construyamos entonces sociedades capaces de coexistir de manera justa, digna y por la vida. Juntémonos y sigamos con esperanza defendiendo y cuidando la sangre de la tierra y los espíritus. (Berta Cáceres quoted in the Goldman Environmental Prize Ceremony 2015, 1'22"–2'27")

Our consciences will be shaken by the fact that we are merely watching the autodestruction based on capitalist, racist, and patriarchal depredation.

The Gualcarque River has called us, as have the others, which are seriously

endangered. We must help. The militarized, sieged, poisoned Mother Earth, where fundamental rights are systematically violated, demands our action. Let us build, then, societies that are capable to coexist with fairness and dignity, for life. Let us come together and move along with hope, defending and caring for the earth's blood and the spirits' blood.

But the depredators, capitalists, colonialists, heteropatriarchalists, and racists are not interested in these cosmologies; their goal is to accumulate at the expense of the ecological, material, spiritual, and epistemological production of the peoples, and to do so they have to eliminate those who oppose them. That is why they murdered Berta Cáceres. She represented the collective political action, the opposition to violence against women, the struggle against neocolonial politics which dispossesses and eliminates the lives of those who have been historically considered nonhuman, products of a structural racism that has been established for over five hundred years. She represented life in (the) community.

The motto that went around the world, “Berta did not die, she became many,” reflects the legacy her life and commitment left for us, and after so many of us have mourned her murder, today she lives again in our thoughts and in our decolonial feminist politics, and we want to follow her legacy because, as Melisa Cardoza said in her poem dedicated to Berta:

Nosotras, compita, ofrecemos aquí nuestra antigua rabia
 La que venimos atesorando por siglos
 A veces llenas de fuerza, a veces desangradas.
 Nosotras mismas nos haremos justicia
 Que aquí quede su huella
 Que los llantos del mundo nos acompañen
 Desde todas las lenguas y las aldeas remotas
 Que alcanzaron a entender su prosa libertaria
*Here we offer you, compita, our old rage
 That we have been saving up for centuries
 At times full of strength, at times bled out.
 We will bring you justice ourselves
 May your path here prevail
 May the cries of the world walk with us
 From all the languages and remote villages
 That could understand your libertarian prose*

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