

PACHAMAMA'S VOICE

«Your opponents would like you to believe that there is no hope, that you have no power, that there is no reason to act, that you cannot win. Hope is a gift you don't have to give up, a power you don't have to get rid of.

(“Hope in the Dark” Rebecca Solnit)

The transnational

The lorries, the machines, the workers and the men in suits had arrived early one spring morning. They came in convoy along the road, penetrated the forest, went straight up the mountain. Feasibility studies indicated high profitability for at least thirty years. As most of the population was against the extraction of gold and silver, the executives played their cards with some of the ministers and the government eventually gave the green light to mining by decree. With this political decision, the company's share price soared and gave important dividends to shareholders, especially the majority ones.

Indigenous people

They had held several demonstrations in the three affected municipalities and a joint one which exceeded all expectations, but their voice was not heard. As they had been doing for more than five hundred years, they had come to take their resources. Nothing had changed.

The struggle was going to be a long one, so the Committee for the Defence of Land and Human Rights was created. This committee was in charge of organising and co-ordinating the actions that the community decided on by consensus in the assemblies. All of them had to be peaceful, otherwise they would be accused of fomenting rebellion. The main concern, but not the only one, was the pollution of the large volcanic lake located near the mining project. In other places where such facilities had been set up, there had been chemical leaks. Polluted water would be a direct attack on people's health and would damage not only the natural wealth but also crops and artisanal raw materials, such as pumela and tule.

David versus Goliath

Since the beginning of the mining activity, the conflict had escalated geometrically. Over the years, the indigenous community has published materials, held informative talks,

debates, sit-ins, chain-linkings, denouncements and escraches. The others effected death threats, arbitrary arrests, harassment in jail, the hiring of hitmen gunmen recruitment, frequent Internet crashes, people's defamation, etc. One year later, the Government decreed a state of siege in the three municipalities of the area, as a reaction to the protests that had developed after three demonstrators were shot and wounded by the mine's private security.

Women

The fact that indigenous and mestizo women played a fundamental role in terms of both numbers and initiatives and promoted political actions that focused on the right to a dignified life and the respectful habitability of the environment, meant a strong empowerment of women in rural areas.

A few months later, Urma, one of the most active people in the popular movement, was arrested. She was 45 years old, in charge of two of her grandchildren and had been running a business for some years, producing and selling handcraft products. A colleague, Killari, took care of her grandchildren while she was in prison. She remained there for a year without any of the crimes she was charged with being proven: assaulting the company's premises, violent confrontation with the security forces and poisoning the groundwater.

Two martyrs

After her release from prison, life was very hard for Urma. For several months, posters appeared outside her shop and around the village. "You're going to die, you slut", "You poisoned the water in the lagoon", "Dyke, where are you?", "Murderer", "Your grandchildren are beautiful. What a pity!" In the press and on the official radio, fake comments about the most significant people in popular mobilizations were frequent.

Urma suspected that something worse and definitive would follow that period of staining and defamation. Her suspect became true: one morning a peasant found the lifeless bodies of Urma and Killari lying on the path leading to the lake.

After a large mourning clustering, the Committee demanded that the state investigate what had happened in order to find the perpetrators and masterminds of these murders and, in addition, guarantee the safety and protection of their families. They also called on international organisations to condemn the events and support their demands.

Withdrawing

International Amnesty told the Committee via the Internet that they had collected two million signatures in support of their cause worldwide and were going to send them to the government as a form of pressure. The community received the news coolly, as they considered that, although it was important that their struggle was known outside the country, this fact would not change the position of the company.

A few months later, the mining company dismantled the facilities, leaving a maze of tunnels and extensive excavations, old and rusty machinery and tools, polluted water and soil and a mountain of debris, cans, drums and plastics. The trucks, machines, workers and men in suits disappeared in a silent convoy one autumn night with a full moon. The feasibility studies had not foreseen that the company would end up globally associated with pollution, violence and death, and this was something that the majority shareholders' dividends could not bear. In order to clean up its image, the company undertook to finance the arduous reclamation work to be carried out within a maximum of two years

In memoriam

Ten years later, Urma's grandchildren read a manifesto in recognition of the people who fought for the dignity of the people and succeeded in getting the mining transnational to abandon its economic activity. When silence took over the square, the audience applauded loudly, tears flowed slowly and eyes looked into the emptiness with resignation. In concentric circles, hands clasped, the exciting crowd sang at the top of their lungs the anthem played on the megaphone so that the warm voice of Pachamama reached all the corners on the planet.

“Stories without Mufflers” (2006 -)