

Indigenous Women and Mother Earth

Verónica Guaján Sánchez

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Read the title and the headings; look at the photos. What do you think this article will be about?
2. The article discusses violence against women. Is there anything you might do to prepare yourselves (as a class) for sharing this sensitive topic?

The Earth is a Source of Life

As a young woman, I remember watching my grandmother cry because other people wanted to take her land. It was a small plot of land, but she cared for it and cultivated it. It was her main resource in life. She cried for her land. She felt lost without it. The land for Indigenous people is very important because it is our root, our memories, our hearth.

I am a Kichwa woman. We are the Indigenous people of the area that is now called Santa Barbara's Community. I am from Cotacachi where my mother, my grandmother, my sisters, my family,

and my community fight for our Mother Earth. We fight for the water and the land. The earth is a source of life for us.

For Indigenous people, there are three things that are essential to our survival: 1. The connection with the land; 2. The *minka* (work in the community); and 3. the *ranti-ranti* (reciprocity with the earth and with other people).

Without the care that we give to the land, we could not grow food and our lives would be in danger. When our land is taken, this is a form of violence against us. Sometimes the government of Ecuador takes control of our land and water. The government evicts the Indigenous populations in order to carry out mining and logging. These industries cause pollution and deforestation.

Violence Against Women and the Land

The Indigenous tradition is for men and women to be in harmony with each other and equal to each other, but sometimes women face violence from men. Domestic violence is connected with alcoholism. Alcoholism was never part of our culture. The Spanish conquerors introduced alcohol to our people to exploit the Indigenous population. Alco-



Indigenous leader Alicia Cawiya (center) at an International Women's Day march in Ecuador. Photo: Mike Reich. To learn more about the Indigenous struggle for land, watch a 24-minute video, "Chevron vs. The Amazon": <lab.org.uk/chevron-ecuador-and-the-extractors-curse-1>.



An Indigenous woman and girl peel maize in El Panecillo, Ecuador. Quito, the capital of Ecuador, is in the background. Photo by Diego Delso, <delso.photo>, License CC-BY-SA.

holism increases the violence inside of home.

Although Ecuador has laws to protect the environment and to prevent violence against women, these laws are not enough to put an end to the different forms of violence. We cannot fix the violence with a few laws. The violence comes from the way the government works and the way the corporations try to make more and more money from the land. These corporations are not in a state of reciprocity with the land. They take what they can get from the land, and then they go and take more from another part of the land.

Solidarity and Sisterhood

There is a large and powerful movement of Indigenous people. We have achieved recognition for our people and our nations in Ecuador's Constitution. The government recognizes Ecuador as a diverse and bilingual (Kichwa and Spanish) country. However, we still have a lot to do because the Indigenous people are disappearing and the environment is being devastated. I believe that

community work, solidarity, and sisterhood will allow us to change our situation in this society that is violent against women and Indigenous people, and where material objects are more important than people and living beings and the earth itself.

Mother Earth needs us. She is one of us in this fight. Let's work with her. When we walk on her, when we take something from her, let's give back to her. Let's protect her. As we work together, our voices will be so strong that we will win the protection of Mother Earth and all women.

Verónica Guaján Sánchez, originally from Cotacachi, Ecuador, is an ESOL student at the Carlos Rosario Public Charter School in Washington, DC. She is a sociologist and a human rights defender, and she wears her traditional dress as a statement against racism, sexism, and classism.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What connection is the author making between violence against the land and violence against women?
2. Describe in detail what you see in the photo above.