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Review of Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth Directed by Frauke Sandig and Eric Black

Beth Williford
Manhattanville College

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Film Review
Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth
(Corazón del Cielo, Corazón de la Tierra)
Directed by Frauke Sandig and Eric Black

Beth Williford
Manhattanville College

Bullfrog Films

Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth is a film by Frauke Sandig and Eric Black about the incongruence of indigenous Mayan worldviews with global capitalism in the Mayan lands and communities of Guatemala and southern Mexico. The filmmakers tell a powerful story of resistance by weaving together the lives and accounts of six Maya who share a determination to preserve their homelands and indigenous culture. This determination manifests itself in various forms of activism, from learning and practicing traditional healing techniques, communing at sacred sites, cultivating corn, celebrating through ritual and ceremonies, to organizing community members in local contexts and regionally with the Zapatistas in Chiapas.

The film opens with the words of the sacred Mayan text, the *Popol Vuh*. The Creation story of the Maya is used as a connecting thread, unfolding throughout the film. We learn how the Gods created the Earth from words and thoughts, to lightness and darkness. The indigenous people featured in the film explain how the Gods created different kinds of people to honor the Creators so that the Creators might be remembered on the Earth. Each of the peoples that the Gods have created, first out of earth and mud, then wood, and finally corn, have lacked an important quality resulting in their ultimate demise. Humans today are descendants of corn and it is believed that we have reached the end of our cycle, due to our neglect and disrespect of the Earth and the Gods. The indigenous explain that we will have to change our relationship to the Earth or we will be destroyed.

Two of the many aspects of indigenous struggle and resistance we learn in the film is the ongoing pain from the Guatemalan Civil War and the modern-day war in the name of global capitalism through natural resource extraction. Flori, one of the Maya (Mam Maya) recounts the pain her family experienced during the massacre of indigenous peoples in the thirty-six year Guatemalan Civil War, where more than 200,000 indigenous were killed. She explains how some of her family members were tortured because they fought for indigenous rights, while she and others fled for their lives to nearby Chiapas, Mexico. The Civil War

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ended in 1996 yet she passionately explains that the war on indigenous peoples and ways of life has not ended.

The Mayan activists draw direct connections to the role of multinational mining companies in displacing and intimidating their communities, further contributing to the destruction of territory and indigenous culture. Moreover, the mining industry is contaminating the resource-rich land with cyanide, leading to disastrous consequences for the inhabitants of the region. Sacred sites of archeological and spiritual significance are being demolished to make way for 'progress.' Monsanto and genetically modified corn is replacing the traditional varieties of corn. NAFTA has left many indigenous communities without an ability to sustain themselves economically, resulting in emigration abroad. All of these assaults to the land and community, represent yet another stage in an ongoing invasion by outsiders. From the days of the Spanish Conquest, to the US-backed Guatemalan Civil War, and the multinational corporate assault today, one thing is clear: destruction of the Earth and the murder of indigenous peoples continues unabated.

And yet indigenous resistance continues! From practicing traditional ceremonies, to organizing community meetings, there is hope for change. For example, Chepita (Tzotzil Maya) explains that teaching indigenous women how to read is also an act of social change; this act will "prepare their hearts to open a space where they might have a voice." The film implores us to consider the Mayan worldview, where humans are but one part of nature and where everything in existence is interconnected. *Heart of Sky*, *Heart of Earth* demonstrates how the indigenous fight for survival is a fight for social and environmental justice. This film helps to expand the understanding of indigenous peoples, the nature of resistance in various forms, and why we are all connected in this fight for survival. I heartily recommend this film and believe it would be excellent for classes addressing indigenous peoples, globalization, human rights, and social justice.

Beth Williford is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Manhattanville College in Purchase, NY. Her research and teaching interests include social movements, globalization, indigenous peoples, and Latin America.