Article

Broken Land: Climate Crisis and Displacement in Guatemala

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This documentary examines climate change as a driving force of migration from Central America to the United States

In the city of Quetzaltenango in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, a small group of local activists organize to preserve their people's basic right to make a living in the land of their birth. As suggested by the title of Jessica Marcy and Amelia Tyson's documentary, *Broken Land: Climate Crisis and Displacement in Guatemala*, that land has been torn apart by the effects of climate change, displacing unprecedented numbers of people. Farmlands have been desiccated by drought, leading to widespread hunger. In 2020, Hurricanes Eta and Iota ripped through Central America, forcing hundreds of thousands from Guatemala and neighboring countries to flee the devastation.

In addition to highlighting the climate change crisis, *Broken Land* also explores how Indigenous spirituality can help restore the land. The film shows how the organization 32 Volcanes works with local activists and community members to employ an ancient agricultural technique known as *huerto mandala,* which involves concentric, circular arrangements of crops to encourage greater nutrient and energetic transfer. This technique

is tied to a broader permacultural philosophy that encourages a harmonious relationship between living things. Renewed emphasis on Indigenous practices and philosophies is a recurring theme as different nations throughout the world struggle to address climate change. It is a concept also discussed in the 2015 conference on *Ecological Civilization* cohosted by the Pulitzer Center.

> ***The reason that now is so important is…Guatemala is central to the Biden Administration's migration policy, and in June Kamala Harris made her first international trip down to Guatemala.***
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> ***—Jessica Marcy, Pulitzer Center's "Washington Weekend 2021" conversation. Watch the full presentation in the video below.***

In the United States, mainstream news coverage continues to frame the migrant crisis in terms of American superiority, rather than as a result of climate change and the US government and major corporations have promoted obstructed actions to obstruct climate change legislation for decades. For instance, in the *New York Times* coverage of Vice President Kamala Harris's 2021 visit to Guatemala, the country is described as a "region plagued by corruption, violence, and poverty." This description echoes the Vice President's own comments about the country's current government, which is predictably compared to a more positive framing of America's political and economic system. While the problems facing the region are well-documented, this framing obscures not only the role the United States has played in destabilizing the region politically but also its role as the world's

greatest historical emitter of fossil fuels.

Broken Land runs for less than 10 minutes. That's all the time that it takes for this brief snapshot to dispel many of the most persistent myths about immigration trends in the United States. Marcy and Tyson suggest that migrants from Central and South America flock to the United States not because of its "freedoms," but rather because of a climate crisis that has destroyed economic opportunities in the migrants' places of origin.

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