



VIOLENCE ON THE LAND, VIOLENCE ON OUR BODIES

Building an Indigenous Response
to Environmental Violence

A partnership of Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network



Sites of Impact:

This map shows the communities or territories of the people who shared their stories with this initiative. Their stories detail the impacts of living in communities plagued by industry and the environmental violence it causes.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, Women's Earth Alliance (WEA) and Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) began a multi-year initiative to document the ways that North American Indigenous women and young people's safety and health are impacted by extractive industries. We also aimed to support their leadership in resisting environmental violence in their communities. WEA invests in training and supporting grassroots women to drive solutions to our most pressing ecological concerns—water, food, land, and climate. NYSHN is a network by and for Indigenous youth that works across issues of sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice in the United States and Canada.

This work stands upon the foundation of a movement begun by generations of Indigenous peoples who have long-recognized the intimate connection between land and body. We recognize that there are many individuals, frontline struggles and movement leaders not included here, and acknowledge that this work is not a comprehensive list of all Indigenous-led environmental defense activities. Rather, it is intended to provide examples of both the issue and community-based strategies to support a larger movement of Indigenous women and young people taking action from a specific lens of sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice.

The Problem

For Indigenous communities in North America, the links between land and body create a powerful intersection—one that, when overlooked or discounted, can threaten their very existence. Extractive industries have drilled, mined, and frackedⁱ on lands on or near resource-rich Indigenous territories for decades. Although the economic gains have been a boon to transnational corporations and the economies of the U.S. and Canada, they come at a significant cost to Indigenous communities, particularly women and young people.

Many of these communities are sites of chemical manufacturing and waste dumping, while others have seen an introduction of large encampments of men ("man camps") to work for the gas and oil industry. The devastating impacts of the environmental violence this causes ranges from sexual and domestic violence, drugs and alcohol, murders and disappearances, reproductive illnesses and toxic exposure, threats to culture and Indigenous lifeways, crime, and other social stressors.

The very health of Indigenous nations is threatened, but there has been little action by policy makers and international bodies because of a lack of formal documentation of the damages.

*“Everything from the family to the Longhouse
has been affected by industry and by the way it
operates in our territories and on our bodies.”*

– Iako’tsira:reh Amanda Lickers (Turtle Clan, Seneca)

Our Solution

The Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies initiative report and toolkit centers the experiences and resistance efforts of Indigenous women and young people in order to expose and curtail the impacts of extractive industries on their communities and lands. Together, our team traveled to some of the most heavily impacted Indigenous territories in the U.S. and Canada to listen to frontline communities. From the American Southwest to Canada’s tar sands region of Alberta, our team walked with Navajo youth across their sacred lands in New Mexico and witnessed First Nations’ women and young people bravely speaking up in defense of their land, their people, and future generations. Our goal was to detail—through community interviews and research—the environmental violence suffered by community members. We also sought to share their resistance efforts, and provide advocacy tools and strategies to support their work.

In addition to heart-breaking stories, our interviews uncovered two important nuances: 1) healing and ceremony are crucial components to the work being done to respond to environmental violence; and 2) while local, federal, and international laws and policies serve as critical tools, Indigenous peoples are also designing more immediate solutions to reducing harm, which are culturally-safe and community-based.

This report is paired with a toolkit for Indigenous communities that offers workshop templates for environmental violence teach-ins, resources for healing and land-based medicines, and a community health assessment. These and other practical tools aim to help Indigenous communities identify the connections between the way their bodies and lands are being impacted, and it also provides the means to combat the dangers of environmental violence. Most importantly, the toolkit offers both guidance and support for developing and strengthening culturally-rooted, nation-specific responses to the unrelenting traumas Indigenous communities face.

Why Now?

With natural gas and oil extraction intensifying in North America, it is important now more than ever to amplify the voices of those most impacted: the Indigenous people from communities adjacent to the contaminated soil, open-air wastewater pits, and dangerous industry workers’ camps. But, engaging a larger audience isn’t enough. This report offers the much needed documentation that policy makers and international bodies need to change the interlocking systems of oppression that make environmental violence in Indigenous communities a grim reality.



i Hydraulic fracturing by pressurized liquid, which is used to release natural gas from underground rock. A high pressure fluid, usually made up of chemicals and sand suspended in water, is injected into deep rock formations to create cracks, making vast caches of natural gas, previously trapped in buried rock, accessible.

INTRODUCTION

“The land is our Mother, so when we lose value for the land...people lose value for the women.”

— Vanessa Gray (Aamjiwnaang First Nation)

Mohawk grandmother and traditional midwife Katsi Cook teaches that, “women are the first environment.”¹ She also explains that in the Mohawk language, one word for midwife is *iewirokwas*, which means, “She’s pulling the baby out of the Earth.”² These teachings describe how the waters of the Earth and the waters of our bodies are the same; for better or for worse, there is an undeniable connection between the health of our bodies and the health of our planet. Violence that happens on the land is intimately connected to the violence that happens to our bodies.

As Iako’tsira:reh Amanda Lickers (Turtle Clan, Seneca) explained to our team, today we see that the strategies of colonization, genocide, and ecocide hinge on that very connection between Indigenous lands and bodies. As Amanda points out, **“The reason women [are] attacked is because women carry our clans and...by carrying our clans, are the ones that hold that land for the next generation. That’s where we get our identity as nations. So if you destroy the women, you destroy the nations, and then you get access to the land.”**

These links between land and body have never been more apparent than in recent years with extractive industriesⁱⁱ drilling, mining, and fracking lands on or near traditional Indigenous territories. These industries provide economic benefits to transnational corporations and national

economies, but at a cost Indigenous communities are still grappling to understand—a cost most deeply felt by women and young people.

The Seeds of This Work

In 2014, the Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies initiative—a partnership between Women’s Earth Alliance (WEA) and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN)—began formally exploring the connection between the health of Indigenous peoples’ lands and the health of their bodies in the context of extractive industries. As explained in the following chapter, this initiative (and the movement to address environmental violence) grew out of the work of generations of Indigenous knowledge holders and leaders, some—though not all—of whom we have the honor of being able to include in this report and toolkit. This partnership has also grown out of the work our organizations have been doing for many years—specifically through WEA’s efforts to ally with and support international grassroots women environmental leaders who are safeguarding their communities and the earth, and through NYSHN’s work around increasing sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice for Indigenous young people.

This work recognizes that there is still more to do to directly to support communities in

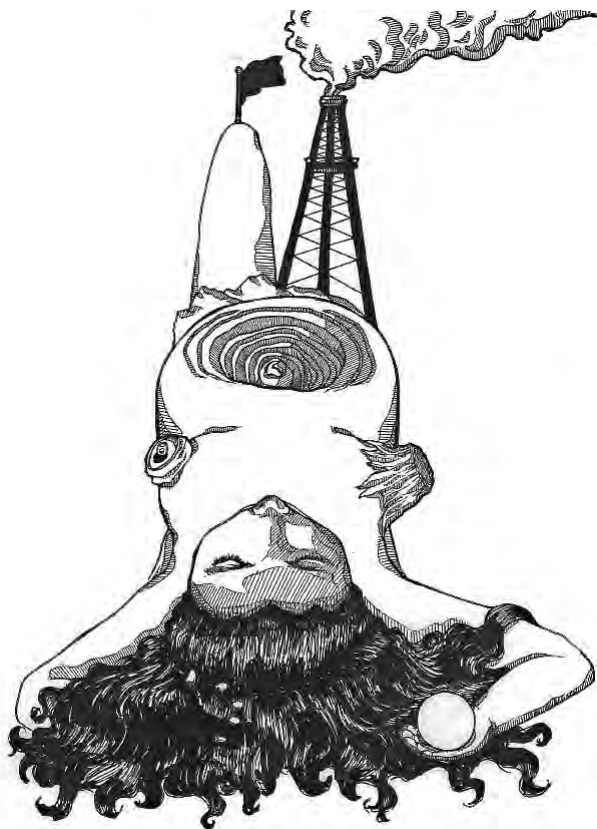
ii The companies and activities involved in removing oil, metals, coal, stone and other natural resources from the earth.

addressing environmental violence, particularly in cases where it was obvious that a lack of formal documentation on its destructive impacts often resulted in inaction by the state, industry, policy makers, and international bodies. Furthermore, although local, federal, and international laws and policies can serve as a critical tool and resource, Indigenous peoples still seek more effective, culturally-safe, and community-based ways to reduce the immediate harms they face.³ To support these efforts, the *Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies* team began traveling to impacted areas and meeting with Indigenous women and youth leaders to learn about the ways they experience trauma on their lands and bodies. Our team also listened for the ways they are healing themselves and their communities, as well as the areas in which they could use additional support.

This initiative aimed, in part, to develop this report and the accompanying toolkit. These resources bear witness to the Indigenous experience and

also support the leadership of Indigenous women and young people who are resisting environmental violence in their communities. Through key gatherings and by drawing upon the knowledge and shared networks of those who came forward to offer their stories, our team travelled to some of the most heavily impacted Indigenous nations in the U.S. and Canada to learn from and stand alongside these frontline communities.

While there are many individuals, frontline struggles and movement leaders we were unable to include here, we hope that by uplifting some of the voices of community members and sharing their experiences, we are able to engage a larger audience in a critical dialogue about the connections between violence done to the land and violence done to Indigenous peoples. We hope this report will spur dialogue in leadership councils as well as industry, government, and international bodies, and catalyze change within the interlocking systems of oppression that perpetuate this violence. We also hope that the strategies in the accompanying toolkit—including resources for healing and land-based medicines, and conducting a community-based environmental violence assessment—give community members the practical and effective tools they need to identify these land/body connections and name the environmental violence their communities face. But most importantly, we hope these tools offer communities guidance and support to develop and bolster their own culturally-safe and nation-specific responses to this violence. This work was born out of a commitment to highlight the very real and imminent human costs of energy extraction on Indigenous communities and to support the next generation of Indigenous young women and people in their efforts to safeguard their territories, peoples, and cultures—protection that will benefit all life on Earth.



Violence on our Earth | Sketch by: Katie Douglas

Adding Another Voice to the Conversation

One of the more positive shifts in recent years has been the increasing awareness and public outcry around extractive industry's assault on Indigenous lands and people. There are a growing number of Indigenous communities, frontline organizations, and grassroots efforts working around these issues, with many approaching this work from different perspectives. This initiative arrives at this work from an Indigenous reproductive justice framework—examining issues of land and body as intimately connected. We also see the solutions to violence as coming from a resurgence of self-determination and consent for people over their bodies and the lands of which they are a part.

This framework is an alternative to mainstream responses that often see the bodily impacts of environmental destruction as being solved by increased policing or criminalization, rather than community-based solutions developed by those most often impacted.

This framework seeks to move beyond a carceral approach to the violence resulting from environmental destruction. It calls on us to meet communities with humility, respect, and a commitment to deep listening. We understand that each community is unique and may have different needs and struggles. We also recognize that gender-based violence (including environmental violence) disproportionately affects Indigenous women, youth and people who are part of the Two Spirit, LGBTTIQQAⁱⁱⁱ community and those who are gender non-conforming^{iv} (GNC) and non-binary.

Through our response to environmental violence, we seek to uphold Indigenous peoples' self-determination over their bodies and support the leadership of Indigenous women, Two Spirits and young people working to resist this violence, while also decreasing the harms they face from extractive industries.^v To do this, we understand that violence is not only caused by industry, but also by the role cis-supremacy^{vi} and patriarchy play in both environmental destruction and environmental justice movements.

With the tools included in the accompanying toolkit, we hope to redirect at least part of this evolving dialogue around environmental violence away from a reliance on external resources such as the law as the only solution, and toward returning and re-centering community-based strategies and self-determination for Indigenous peoples over their bodies, lands, and nations. We also hope to share ways for Indigenous peoples to challenge the structures that often lay the foundation for continued violence.³ In short, we seek a more sustainable and culturally-safe pathway forward.

iii Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, Asexual

iv Like the waters that so many Indigenous peoples work to protect, it is important to note that gender and sexual identities are often fluid as well and that these definitions may change over time, but generally, gender non-conforming refers to people who do not fit into a gender binary or other Western categories of relationships and identities, and may not conform to mainstream ideas and assumptions of physical presentations. Gender non-conforming Indigenous people are often perceived as threats because their bodies, gender and sexual identities present in ways that are outside of Western norms. Due to this perceived threat, they often face increased amounts of violence.

v In this report, all mentions of women and young people are meant to be inclusive of Two Spirits who self-identify with these terms as well.

vi The power structure that privileges cis people (those who identify with their assigned gender/sex at birth) over trans people or people who do not comply with Western assumptions of gender.

A Dangerous Intersection

Those who live in areas rich in natural resources experience first-hand that, “the dominant global economic system is based on continuous growth and thus requires an insatiable supply of natural resources[,] and the world’s remaining and diminished resources are often located on indigenous territories.”⁴

- In the U.S. alone, some 5% of oil and 10% of gas reserves, as well as 30% of low sulfur coal reserves and 40% of privately held uranium deposits are found on Native American reservations.⁵
- The world’s biggest privately owned coal-mining company, Peabody Energy, operates a strip-mining operation on the Black Mesa plateau, located within Hopi and Navajo territories in the southwestern United States. Together, these two mines—the Black Mesa Mine (which ceased operations in 2005 after years of community advocacy around Indigenous water rights) and the Kayenta Mine (still in operation)—made up what was once the largest strip-mining operation in the U.S.
- The Fort Berthold Reservation, home to the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, has become the epicenter of oil extraction in North Dakota, where more than 35 corporations now extract natural resources.⁶
- In Alberta, Canada, in the Peace River, Cold Lake and Athabasca regions, territory



Oilsands mining | Credit: Julia Kilpatrick (Pembina Institute), Creative Commons

to numerous First Nations and Métis communities, is the Tar Sands gigaproject—the largest industrial project in history.⁷ More than 20 corporations operate out of the tar sands, wreaking havoc on the environment and First Nations communities in what is possibly the most destructive project on earth⁸.

These sites of extraction usher in drastic increases in population due to the mostly male workforce; with these men come an increase in drugs, crime, sexual assaults and more. This becomes increasingly alarming when compounded with the marginalization of Indigenous women. Available research reveals that Indigenous women already experience grossly disproportionate high levels of violence. For example, in the U.S.:

- North Dakota's crime increased roughly 18% between the start of the Bakken^{vii} oil boom in 2008 and 2013.⁹ An analysis of crime in 2012 pointed to Western North Dakota, where employment in the oil fields attracts thousands of people into the state, as a source of much of the increase.¹⁰ Assaults in Dickinson, ND rose 300%,¹¹ and the tribal police department of Fort Berthold (where the population has more than doubled with an influx of non-Indigenous oil workers) reported more murders, fatal accidents, sexual assaults, domestic disputes, drug busts, gun threats, and more than any year before.¹² Once one of the safest states in the country, North Dakota now has the eighth highest incidence of rape in the U.S.¹³
- Statistics published by the United States Department of Justice in 2004 (the last time the agency published comprehensive data on this topic) shows that Native American women are already 2.5 times more likely to experience a violent crime than any other women.¹⁴ This means that one out

of every three Native American and Alaska Native women are likely to experience some form of gender-based violence in their lifetimes.¹⁵ Furthermore, in 86% of these cases, their assailants are non-Native.¹⁶

- In 2011, only 65% of rapes reported on reservations were prosecuted by the U.S. Justice Department.¹⁷

And in Canada:

- In 2009, the tar sands region of Canada had the countries' highest rate of domestic violence,¹⁸ and in 2010, the only women's shelter in the oil sands boomtown of Fort McMurray, Alberta became so overcrowded that the shelter's director held a 3-week hunger strike to draw attention to its desperate need for greater support. As Rebecca Adamson, Indigenous economist, founder and President of First Peoples Worldwide, has written regarding the tar sands, "Because companies resist correcting their systemic operational failures to address the social risks of their operations, thousands of women and children are facing sexual assault and violence. The exploitation of women is ubiquitous."¹⁹
- According to a 2009 government survey, Indigenous women in Canada were already nearly 3 times more likely than non-Indigenous women to report being a survivor of a violent crime.²⁰
- The national homicide rate for Indigenous women in Canada is at least 7 times higher than for non-Indigenous women.²¹

Indigenous young people in the United States and Canada also face systemic and disproportionate levels of violence and trauma:

vii The Bakken region is a shale rock formation that stretches across Western North Dakota and Northeastern Montana, and straddles the Canadian border.

- In the U.S., Indigenous young people are already more likely to experience substance abuse, have higher rates of trauma (2.3%)²² and are twice as likely as youth of any other race to die before the age of 24.²³ And in Canada, in one reserve that was evacuated because of a contaminated water supply, 21 young people between the ages of 9 and 23 committed suicide in one month alone.²⁴
- Indigenous young people also have the highest per capita rate of violent victimization, and experience post-traumatic stress disorder at rates that rival that of returning war veterans.²⁵

This dangerous intersection of extractive industry, the violence that accompanies it, and a population of women and young people who are already targets of systemic violence and generational trauma, sets the stage for increased violence on the land leading to increased violence on Indigenous people.

However, despite tremendous amounts of data, the statistics above reflect only one aspect of a complex and nuanced situation. Without further information, data alone can make it appear as if the risk factors facing Indigenous communities occur in a vacuum, rather than as part of a larger system of colonization and historical trauma. Viewed alone, statistics do not tell us about the deep impact higher levels of cancers, birth defects, miscarriages, and mental illnesses have on the social fabric of Indigenous communities living near industrial developments. They do not tell the story of how the extractive industry, fueled by corporate and governmental greed, furthers colonial and patriarchal systems by eroding traditional Indigenous governance systems and the role of women in these communities.

Most importantly, the above figures do not include the narrative of this unprecedented time

in history, when Indigenous women in frontline communities are being recognized and honored for their work over decades to resist the erasure of their people. In spite of the onslaught of assaults on and disregard for their traditions, lands and people, courageous Indigenous women, Two Spirits and young people are continuing to gather, strategize and heal. Everyday, they remember a sister who went missing, an aunt who was murdered, a mother who died of cancer, or a cousin who was driven off a road. They step forward as leaders, weaving the intersecting issues of Indigenous sovereignty, environmentalism, feminism, reproductive health, youth rights, and anti-colonialism. These brave leaders are determined to transform this violence into protection and healing for all.

There is a shift growing in these communities, a spirit of resistance. As the participants of the first International Indigenous Women's Environmental and Reproductive Health Symposium (2010) stated, "We recognize that our fundamental, inherent and inalienable human rights as Indigenous Peoples are being violated, as are our spirits and life giving capacity as Indigenous women. Colonization has eroded the traditional, spiritual, and cultural teachings passed down from our ancestors, our grandmothers about our sexual and reproductive health and the connection to the protection of the environment, our sacred life-giving Mother Earth. But...many Indigenous women are reclaiming, practicing, and celebrating these teachings."²⁶

In recent years, a growing number of Indigenous young women have spoken up to government, industry and media about these correlations. They have also developed a more holistic approach within their communities for addressing these issues, which is centered around tradition, ceremony, and the leadership of women and young people.

About This Report and Toolkit

This report introduces the Indigenous women and young people from communities across Canada and the U.S. who gifted this project with their time, knowledge, and experiences. Each speaker gave permission to share their story and was given the opportunity to review this report in its entirety for accuracy of their words prior to publication. The report is grouped into sections that break down the concept, impacts, and responses to the environmental violence caused by extractive industries. Within these sections are the stories of those on the ground, the ways that they encounter industry in their communities, and

their strategies of resistance. The accompanying toolkit dives deeper into these strategies, and offers additional tools in response to the needs expressed to us during these interviews.

The community stories, research, and strategies gathered in this report serve as only one step in the journey of resisting and addressing the impacts of industry on land and people. It is a brick laid down to strengthen the foundations upon which this movement already stands—a foundation set by grandmothers, mothers, aunties, and sisters. We offer this in honor of all who have been impacted by industry, and all who have worked tirelessly to ensure a safe and healthy future for our grandchildren for seven generations to come.



Artwork by Erin Marie Koonsmo

CHAPTER ONE: Connected to Body, Connected to Land

“From a traditional perspective, the health of our peoples cannot be separated from the health of our environment, the practice of our spirituality and the expression of our inherent right to self-determination, upon which the mental, physical and social health of our communities is based.”

– International Indian Treaty Council’s Oral Intervention at the 7th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 1996²⁷

Indigenous communities have long recognized the connection between people and land. This is expressed through creation stories, ceremonies, and traditional kinship and governance systems. And while colonization, forced removal, and continued land dispossession have attempted to stifle or altogether sever this land/body connection, many women and young people continue to stand strong against this estrangement. NYSHN has been working at the intersection of the land and our bodies, particularly with Indigenous youth, for almost a decade. That work has shaped the core belief—*Connected to Body, Connected to Land*—that what happens to the land and the environment around us, whether good or bad, also happens to our bodies and to our communities.

A critical step for Indigenous land/body defense is to develop language that describes the impacts of environmental degradation on both the social and physical aspects of human life. Once people can conceptualize and articulate these impacts, then communities can discuss, build strategies, and implement change.

Advocates, leaders and organizations that have been engaged in this work for decades have begun using the term *environmental violence* to describe their experiences.

Legacies of a Movement Against Environmental Violence

We recognize that the current work to address environmental violence is built upon the legacy of a movement begun by traditional knowledge keepers and groups like White Buffalo Calf Woman Society and the Brave Heart Society. For many years these groups have done critical work to increase the safety of women, revive coming-of-age ceremonies, and share important teachings with young people about their bodies.

To this day, the women who hold this knowledge and steward these groups are on the frontlines resisting the harmful impacts of industry on lands and people. Leaders such as Katsi Cook and Faith Spotted Eagle (Ihanktonwan Band of the Dakota/Nakota/

Lakota Nation of South Dakota) engage in what Faith calls a “generational braiding,” to share their wisdom and experiences that help to guide this work. This braiding is critical to the success of our movements, for knowledge and work build upon themselves as leadership passes down from generation to generation.

In 1994 when Brave Heart Society was revived, Faith recalls how “we felt kind of sheepish

about having the audacity to think that we would know how to run a women’s society...so we had to ask for help and guidance.” They turned to the grandmothers, the knowledge holders of each generation. “We interviewed them...and asked them ‘What are the rules? What is the purpose? And how do you create leadership?’” Their answer, Faith tells us, was both simple and fundamental. “They just said, ‘You just watch your mom, and your grandma, and your aunties.’”

Our current work cannot afford to forget that a movement for land/body defense has been growing consistently for many years; there are tools and strategies already tried and true or discarded. The first step, then, had to be talking to and honoring the knowledge of those grandmothers, mothers, aunties, and elders who most intimately know the relationship between body, place, people, and movement. One of the key things these leaders emphasize is that, as Guatemalan activist Sandra Moran writes, “Women resist because they defend life. The extractive model kills life, impedes it, transforms it. The defense of life is in the center of resistance and as women we have always been at the center of taking care of life.”²⁸

Women’s bodies then—this miraculous source of life and all future generations—are where they both experience the impacts of violence, degradation and destruction, and find the strength to resist it.

“For women, there is no separation between production and reproduction, land and life, resistance and survival. Because of this, women taking on roles in the struggle to defend their territory and fighting gendered oppression for their own liberation are not separate, but always interconnected.”²⁹ This sentiment was

echoed by Chrissy Swain (Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation), who attended the August 2015 Anishinaabe Water Walk to oppose the Energy East Pipeline. She told us, “It’s my responsibility as an *Anishinaabe-kwe* [or Anishinaabe woman] and



Protect the Sacred | wheat paste artwork by Lyncia Begay

a mother to make sure that my children, and my future grandchildren, will *have* a future...Especially [after] my daughter was born, I felt like I needed to protect her. I need to make sure that she's going to be a strong woman because of what we have to face as Anishinaabe women—it just feels like we go through more things than the average woman.”

The relationship between Indigenous people's bodies, Indigenous territories, and the systemic disregard that allows both to be violence^{viii}, underpin the foundations of the emerging term, *environmental violence*. And though the term environmental violence is new, these women understood and articulated this concept for quite some time. The movement rising up to combat environmental violence is a continuation of a cumulative resistance led by women for generations, reinvigorated by necessity and the leadership of a new generation of young Indigenous people. ***“Indigenous women's resistance—rooted in community, future generations, and ancestral struggles for land and livelihood—is a feminist resistance, but it is also fundamentally anti-capitalist and anti-imperial, demanding respect and protection not only of women's bodies, but also of land, water, mother earth, culture, and community.”***³⁰

What is Environmental Violence?

The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) is one of the key organizations to recognize that “The disproportionate impacts of environmental contamination on Indigenous Peoples and communities of color are the basis of the now well-accepted concept ‘environmental racism’... [but the] concept of ‘gender-based environmental violence’ is not yet as common.”³¹ The IITC has become a leader in formally conceptualizing the knowledge Indigenous peoples have held around this intersection, as well as educating

Forms of Environmental Violence

Reproductive health issues (e.g. birth defects, infertility)

Cancer and other illnesses

Chronic social stressors, like:

Sexual, domestic, and family violence

Missing and murdered Indigenous women

Human trafficking for both labor and sexual exploitation

HIV and other sexually transmitted infections

Increased crime in communities

Increased rates of incarceration

Increased drug and alcohol use in communities

Alcohol-related traffic fatalities

Suicide (particularly among young people)

Land trauma and dispossession

Loss of culture and self-determination

Divisions in families and communities

Child removal

Mental health concerns

Poverty

viii This term is used in this report to describe the horrendous amounts of unspecified violence directed at a person, a group of people, or the land.

“If you’re destroying and poisoning the things that give us life, the things that shape our identity, the places that we are from and the things that sustain us, then how can you not be poisoning us? How can that not be direct violence against our bodies, whether that be respiratory illness or cancer or liver failure, or the inability to carry children.

– Iako’tsi:rareh Amanda Lickers (Turtle Clan, Seneca)

Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies Initiative partner NYSHN is proud to also partner with IITC on the International Indigenous Women’s Environmental and Reproductive Health Initiative. This initiative coordinates information-sharing and network-building among women and girls from impacted communities and builds their leadership and capacity to be informed advocates in changing the policies, practices and laws which expose them, their families and future generations to dangerous environmental toxins.

This initiative has resulted in two international symposia and declarations to date—the first in Alamo, California in 2010, and the second in Chickaloon, Alaska in 2012.

communities and international bodies around this emerging concept. Their work has brought much needed attention to the health impacts of industry, particularly the ongoing harm Indigenous women and children experience due to environmental toxins such as pesticides, and chemical manufacturing and exportation.

In recent years, IITC’s work has helped us to articulate ***environmental violence as the disproportionate and often devastating impacts that the conscious and deliberate proliferation of environmental toxins and industrial development (including extraction, production, export and release) have on Indigenous women, children and future generations, without regard from States or corporations for their severe and ongoing harm.***³²

Furthermore, since 2010, NYSHN’s work around the term has fostered recognition of the ways it has evolved to not only include the biological reproductive impacts of industry, but also the social impacts. This work has been critical in recent years, as attention paid to the threats of industry in Indigenous communities has tended to focus entirely on the biological health impacts of fracking and mining, or entirely on the sexual violence acts stemming from the male population

booms of industry workers' camps. Rarely is attention paid to both types of impacts, with recognition of their intimate connection to the land.

Following IITC and NYSHN's Joint Statement to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) in July 2013³³, the United Nations formally recorded the term *environmental violence* in recognition of the impacts of extractive industries in Indigenous communities. This statement was a result of the grassroots work of both organizations, as well as the community input they received at the first and second International Indigenous Women's Environmental and Reproductive

Health Symposia, where women participants stated, "We have seen that the introduction of extractive industries (mining, drilling, logging etc.) has resulted in increased sexual violence and sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and girls in many communities, as well as increased alcohol and drug abuse, sexually transmitted infections, divisions among our families and communities, and a range of other social and health problems."³⁴ Through these efforts as well as on the recommendation of Indigenous experts³⁵, *environmental violence*, as separate from *environmental racism* and *environmental justice*, is becoming recognized globally.³⁶

Environmental Violence: The disproportionate and often devastating impacts that the conscious and deliberate proliferation of environmental toxins and industrial development (including extraction, production, export and release) have on Indigenous women, children and future generations, without regard from States or corporations for their severe and ongoing harm.³⁷

Chronic Social Stressors: Ongoing pollution and the accompanying social stressors caused by development and industry that impact and divide communities. These include increased mental health concerns, violence against Indigenous women, children, and families, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, incarceration, child removal and suicide.³⁸

Environmental Racism: The disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color.³⁹

Environmental Justice: A grassroots response to environmental racism valuing respect, the health of our communities and the Earth, and protection from discrimination, dispossession and exploitation, etc. This is different from environmental equity, which is the governmental response to environmental racism that values "fair treatment and meaningful involvement."⁴⁰

Reproductive Justice: The right to have children or not, and to parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments. It is based on the human right to make personal decisions about one's life, and the obligation of government and society to ensure that conditions are suitable for implementing one's decisions.⁴¹

*“Cultures of consent aren’t normalized anymore,
and deep understandings of respect, humility and
honor have been abolished in a way.”*

– Iako’tsira:reh Amanda Lickers (Turtle Clan, Seneca)

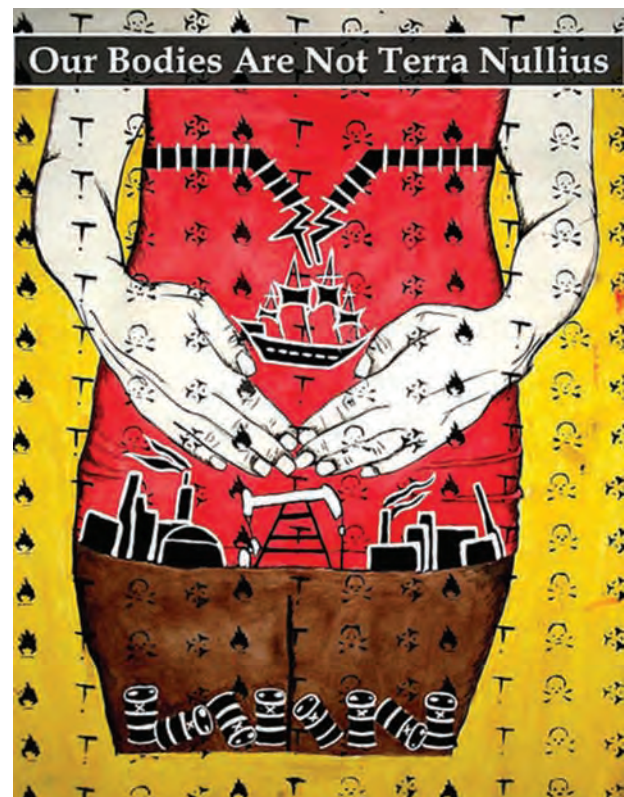
Consent Over Land and Body

Soon after our team began gathering testimonies from residents of communities impacted by extractive industry, it became apparent that it would be impossible to discuss the proliferation of environmental violence without first having an understanding of *consent*—both Indigenous peoples’ free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) over their territories, as well as their consent over their bodies. As Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of the IITC reminds us, “FPIC...means you have the right to feel fully informed...to hear the pros and cons, the right to have a waiting period if you want it, and hear about other options....”⁴² Since colonization began, the landscape of consent has changed for Indigenous people, their lands, and their bodies. As we heard from Indigenous women and youth, traditional cultures of consent have been impacted by entrenched colonial governance systems in Indigenous communities, by patriarchal and paternalistic solutions to issues around their bodies, and by the intense invasion of their lands and bodies themselves.

Many of the community members interviewed spoke about the need to utilize a framework which addressed the invasiveness of patriarchy and the disrespect for bodily autonomy and consent, even in Indigenous spaces that advocate for consent around Indigenous lands and territories. From grandmothers to the young women and Two Spirits who are stepping forward to lead the next generation, we learned about the ways in which sexual violence and the pervasiveness of rape culture^{ix} not only comes from industry,

but also from within Indigenous communities, governments, and land-based movements^x. The question often raised by these community members is *how can our men fight for our nations’ right to give or not give consent over our territories, but there’s no understanding of our people’s right to give or not give consent over our bodies?*

“You hear a lot of men nowadays saying—and it seems like they don’t understand it themselves—but they’ll say, ‘We’re created for protecting the women and children.’ But it just becomes a byline...they don’t behave accordingly,” says



Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius | by Erin Marie Komsma.

ix A term coined by feminists in the United States in the 1970’s to show the ways in which society blamed victims of sexual assault and normalized male sexual violence.

x Movements that focus on defending the rights of people to exercise self-determination within certain territories. For Indigenous communities, land-based movements can also refer to movements in defense of the rights of the earth.

Faith Spotted Eagle. She remembers a time when White Buffalo Calf Woman Society had just begun, and they were holding a training for police officers on how to advocate for women who had been violence. “They were kind of giggling and talking amongst themselves, and it really set off [one of the grandmas]. She got up from her table...and she had her cane...and she took that cane and she hit it on the table in front of those young men. And she said, ‘Is this the only thing that you understand? Is this the only thing you’ll listen to? When something is violent? You young men need to hear this...And if you don’t listen, we’re not going to *be* any more.’”

According to Faith, the attitude of the police officers, as well as the behaviors of some male Indigenous activists working within Indigenous movements for sovereignty and land defense (such as protesting the Keystone XL pipeline) are incongruous to traditional teachings. The patriarchal behaviors of those she has witnessed are because “so many of our people remain asleep to the colonization of our minds,” and this, Faith says, prevents healing. “On a whole large scale, our Native men need to really pay attention to some deconstruction so they can stand up and be those people that they talk about being in addressing their attitudes towards women. Because they always expect that we’re going to come through and take care of ourselves because we’re so strong. So they don’t even have a roadmap to standing up for the women. It’s just reflective of the rest of the environment that we live in.”

Faith and others who shared their stories emphasized that respect for consent over Indigenous lands is

not possible if that respect fails to extend to consent over peoples bodies. Furthermore, there is also a need to have conversations about trauma and provide support for survivors of violence. This is needed even (and perhaps especially) for those survivors violence by men within the environmental justice movement which, in many ways, continues to be dominated by hetero-normative patriarchy^{xi}. Now more than ever, those working at the intersection of environmental and reproductive justice need to address issues of sexual violence. In order to increase the recognition of free, prior, and informed consent over Indigenous territories we need to simultaneously build up the ways that consent is supported around people’s bodies. If discussions are taking place about violations of industry on Indigenous lands, we should also be talking about the violations of people’s bodies. We cannot have healthy families, communities, and nations on the land while people’s bodies continue to experience violence. It is through listening to survivors of violence, asking them about solutions to land violations, and building in teachings about consent that we will have healthy nations.

Mainstream anti-violence and sexual assault solutions do not address environmental violence. The only way that we will address violence on Indigenous lands and Indigenous peoples themselves is to support these two issues coming together and mobilizing responses. For this reason, we have included a section on land/body trauma as well as workshop templates on making connections between consent over the land and over bodies within the accompanying toolkit.

In order to increase the recognition of free, prior and informed consent over Indigenous territories, we need to simultaneously build up the ways that consent is supported around people’s bodies.

xi A colonial construct which creates a social norm assuming that all of our romantic or sexual relationships are heterosexual (i.e. between a woman and man), and creates a hierarchy of power in which men benefit from systems at the expense of women and Two Spirits. These dynamics often result in certain qualities, types of labor and even voices or lives being valued more than others.

Indigenous Feminist Land Defenders Speak Out:

Vanessa Gray

Fighting back from one of North America's most impacted communities

The impacts of environmental violence manifest in a number of different ways, harming both the health and social structures of communities and families. This violence is particularly visible in “frontline” communities where extractive industries operate, generate pollution and runoff, or dispose of their waste.

Vanessa Gray is a community organizer and Anishinaabe-kwe from the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. Her community, located in Sarnia on the St. Clair River in southwestern Ontario, has been called “one of the most singularly poisonous locations in North America.” Aamjiwnaang shares a fence line with Suncor Energy, a Canadian oil company specializing in processing oil sands into synthetic crude oil. The area in which Aamjiwnaang is located is known as “Chemical Valley,” because it is home to more than 60 refineries and chemical plants that produce a number of products, including synthetic rubbers and oil.

“I love my community. I love the fact that I know people in my community. But why do we all have to live in such horrid conditions?” Vanessa asked during her testimony.

The conditions she refers to are alarming and tragic. **For example, a normal birth rate in a healthy community is 1:1 female to male. However, a 2005 study commissioned by the Aamjiwnaang Environmental Committee found that the birth rate in Chemical Valley**

had reached nearly 2:1⁴³—a statistical anomaly previously seen only in animal populations living in extremely polluted areas⁴⁴. Another study conducted between 2004 and 2005 found that 39% of the women in Aamjiwnaang had suffered at least one stillbirth or miscarriage.⁴⁵

These aren't the only concerns that Vanessa's community faces. “I think there's a lot of mental health issues, where [being devalued this way] goes as far as people believing that, and then valuing themselves as much as their community values them....For a long time, I didn't value myself as an Indigenous woman...living on the rez, where you are slowly being killed from the inside out every day, and knowing there's a problem but feeling helpless because there are so many companies, so many projects going on, people can feel devalued and depressed,” she shared.

And though Vanessa's initial question about why her community has been forced to live in such polluted and life-threatening conditions may have seemed rhetorical, she still had an answer. “Patriarchy...is the reason Suncor is sharing a fence line with us,” she explained, then went on to speculate that the desperate situation Aamjiwnaang faces would probably be different today if women had been involved in the decision-making that allowed industry into their community in the first place. “I think women have that ability to keep the fact that we are talking about the lives of future generations in mind, to step back and say, ‘Hey, this is a lot of money, that's great. But what is this money going to do for our future generations

down the road when your companies are already doing things in other countries that are killing off the land and the people?” These interlocking concerns and responsibilities are also part of the traditional teachings she’s received. “[It] goes back to the connection women have with water,” she says. “Some of us who listen to our elders learn that we are the keepers of the water, we are supposed to care for it. That’s our role as women.”

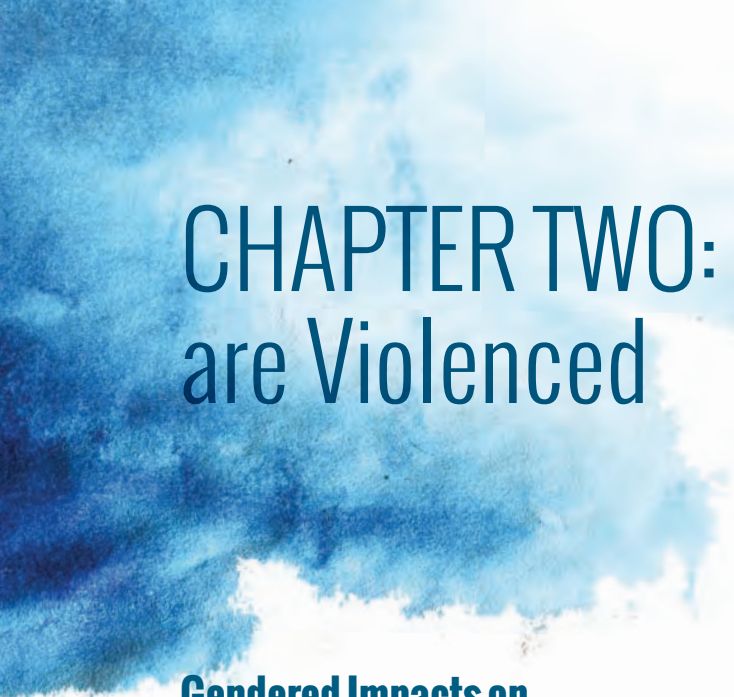
These are just some of the reasons Vanessa’s work focuses so strongly on engaging Indigenous women and youth in resisting the environmental violence their communities face, particularly through her activism with Aamjiwnaang + Sarnia Against Pipelines (ASAP). “We want, first of all, for women to have their say—and they deserve to say what they feel about what’s going on in the

community, and what’s going on in their children’s environment. And then for youth to have their say too. And we always tell the elders to come and we listen to their teachings.” The inclusion of women and young people is one of the unique features of the work Vanessa, and young Indigenous women like her, are doing as they step forward as leaders for their communities and the next generation. “It’s a space I had to create in my community, because it’s not there, and I think it’s going to feel like that for young Indigenous women to have to take matters into their own hands. Because it’s not going to happen if you don’t.”

As part of ASAP’s work, Vanessa and her sister Lindsay have also hosted “toxic tours” of Chemical Valley, so that others can experience what frontline communities do on a daily basis.



Credit: Toban B., Creative Commons



CHAPTER TWO: When Relatives are Violenced

Gendered Impacts on Indigenous Bodies

When our team began speaking to the women and young people who came forward to offer their stories to this project, one thing became abundantly clear to us: environmental violence is being experienced in a number of different ways for Indigenous community members, including impacts on their reproductive and mental health systems, the disappearances and murders of women and girls, people suffering from cancers, addictions and other illnesses, and sexual violence. One of the reasons Indigenous women have historically been the targets of violence is their ability to bring forth future generations of their people—generations that will exercise sovereignty over Indigenous lands. As Professor Inés Hernández-Avila (Nez Perce/Tejana) notes, “It is because of a Native American woman’s sex that she is hunted down and slaughtered, in fact, singled out, because she has the potential through childbirth to assure the continuation of the people.”⁴⁶

It is no wonder then that the violence of extractive industries—which require access to the resource-rich lands of Indigenous nations—predominantly impacts those who ensure those nations’ futures: the women and young people.

REPRODUCTIVE AND BODILY HEALTH

One of the most insidious ways environmental violence impacts Indigenous women is through the detrimental health effects of toxic contaminants, which often can’t be seen until years later or after prolonged unknown exposure. These impacts include high levels of toxins in breast milk, placenta cord blood, blood serum, and body fat, as well as infertility, miscarriages, premature births, premature menopause, reproductive system cancers, and an inability to produce healthy children due to compromised endocrine and immune systems while in utero, and more.⁴⁷ Katsi Cook writes, “Science tells us that our nursing infants are at the top of the food chain. Industrial chemicals like [PCBs, DDT and HCBs⁴⁸] dumped into the waters and soil move up through the food chain, through plants, fish, wildlife, and into the bodies of human beings who eat them. These contaminants resist being broken down by the body, which stores them in our fat cells.”⁴⁹ The only known way to excrete large amounts of these contaminants is 1) through pregnancy, when they cross the placenta, and 2) during lactation, when they move out of storage in fat cells and show up in breast milk. Because of this, Katsi explains, ***“each succeeding generation inherits a body burden of toxic contaminants from their mothers. In this way, we, as women, are the landfill.”***⁵⁰ This generational inheritance

of toxic contamination in turn causes severe psychological, relational, emotional, cultural, and economic damage to entire communities.

Indigenous communities shouldering the brunt of environmental violence and its effects on women's reproductive and other bodily health systems are found across North America. Many of the areas where fracking and mining occur have been called "sacrifice zones,"^{xii} which seems to imply that people and communities living within those areas are, like the land, to be sacrificed in this seemingly "reckless 'biological warfare.'"⁵¹

The Alberta tar sands region in Canada is one such example. Spanning an area roughly the size of Florida, these oil sand deposits lay buried under about 54,054 square miles (140,000 square kilometers) of boreal forest in northeastern Alberta.⁵² Canada began oil production in the tar sands in 1967, though research and development actually began in the early 1900's.⁵³ Since 2013, about 66% of the area has been leased to oil companies for development⁵⁴ (e.g. strip-mining, drilling), and there are plans to triple production in the coming years.⁵⁵

The tar sands development has been called "a form of colonization, with intersecting impacts of racism and hetero-sexism,"⁵⁶ particularly for the surrounding First Nations communities who are bearing the body burden of this resource extraction and environmental destruction, almost with little to no recourse. In the chapter, "Pipelines and Resistance Across Turtle Island" from *A Line in the Tar Sands: Struggles for*

Environmental Justice, Sâkhitowin Awâsis, a Michif (Oji-Cree Métis) poet, spoken word artist and activist, states, "If rare kinds of cancer and illness were as prevalent among predominantly white settler communities as they are among the people of Fort Chipewyan in northern Alberta... it would be considered an epidemic."⁵⁷

A 2009 study—one of many—which looked at incidences of cancer in Fort Chipewyan's 1,200 residents, the majority of whom are First Nations, found rates to be 30% higher than average for all types of cancers.⁵⁸ And, "scientific studies have linked elevated levels of these specific cancers to exposure to certain constituents in petroleum products and chemicals produced in petroleum manufacturing."⁵⁹ This is in line with concerns raised by Alberta physician Dr. John O'Connor who concludes that the startling elevated levels of disease found in reserve^{xiii} community members were "the direct consequence of steadily rising [cancer causing chemicals] in the sediments and waterways emanating from industrial activities associated with tar sands mining."⁶⁰

Much of the toxic contamination comes from tar sands tailings ponds, which are full of mining waste chemicals linked to cancers, genetic damage, birth defects, and other childbearing complications. In another 2009 study, Environmental Defense Canada found that "as much as 2.9 million gallons of water leaks from tar sands tailing ponds into the environment every day."⁶¹ Most of the development occurs near the north-flowing Athabasca River, which eventually flows into the Arctic Ocean. This means that the toxins that

"The tar sands industry treats women and gender non-conforming bodies in the same way as the earth: with violence and disregard. Pollutants that make the land infertile and the waters undrinkable are also polluting the water that carries our children in the womb."

— Sâkhitowin Awâsis, *A Line in the Tar Sands*

xii An area so contaminated or so depleted of its natural resources that it is unlikely to be able to sustain life.

xiii Land set aside for First Nations in Canada. The equivalent in the United States is a reservation.



leach into waterways from tailing ponds are also reaching communities that may not be in close proximity to the oil fields. In many Indigenous communities, signs are now posted throughout traditional hunting and fishing grounds, warning against toxic chemicals in the fish and game.

These same warning signs are also found in the Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Southwest Ontario. Community organizer Toban Black writes that in this area, “local facilities release benzene, which causes cancer, bone marrow damage, and reduced red blood cell counts... The local air and water are contaminated with neurotoxins, carcinogens, hormone disruptors, and respiratory irritants... Given that people live around Chemical Valley [a common nickname for the Aamjiwnaang area], there are severe human tolls. Of course, toxins settle into the bodies of community members. Dramatically elevated miscarriage rates and skewed birth ratios are among the disturbing patterns that have been found by Aamjiwnaang researches.”⁶²

“And, so what they’ve done is put up these signs around Aamjiwnaang saying that the water is toxic, don’t touch it,” explains Vanessa Gray, a community organizer from the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, as she talks with our team. “And that’s as far as that process [of caring for the water has gone] because of the constant dumping that has been going on. It’s impossible to navigate where [a certain] toxin has come from, or which company has done it, or how often that’s happening.” As of September 2015, 138 drinking water advisories were in effect in 94 First Nations communities across Canada.⁶³ Unfortunately, this doesn’t seem to stop the companies, the states, or the Canadian government, which allow industry to operate; this violence is seen as an acceptable risk, and the land (and water) is considered to have only one use—profit. As Professor Carmela Murdocca wrote in her article examining water quality in First Nations’ reserves, “Contaminated water is a symptom of colonial, political, economic, and legal projects.”⁶⁴ Vanessa, her sister, and others like them are working to combat this greed-

driven destruction. “There’s got to be some value in the land... It’s not just there to make money off of. It’s a living thing that’s been alive for a long, long time. Our ancestors and their ancestors have had this land, and have cared for it up until the petrochemical industry came in.”

Just seven hours northeast of Aamjiwnaang, in the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation, Indigenous community members like Chelsea Sunday (Turtle Clan) are also dealing with the impacts industry has had on their water and, through it, their people. Akwesasne is part of the Iroquois Confederacy, or Haudenosaunee, and straddles the St. Lawrence River bordering New York State, Ontario and Quebec, Canada. As early as the 1950’s, the construction of the St. Lawrence-FDR Power Project (a hydropower generating facility, or dam) attracted a number of industries to the area that have since devastated the waters, land, air and health of the surrounding Mohawk territories. In fact, Akwesasne sits immediately adjacent to a National Priority Superfund site, with two New York State Superfund sites just upriver. “There were four or five factories just upstream and upwind from us,” says Chelsea, a mother of two who will soon be graduating with a degree in Community Health. Her Mohawk name, Taiawentonti, means, “She throws daylight this way.” “I remember hearing from an elder... that [the factories] would release air pollution only at night because they didn’t want people to know... and [my mother] remembers waking up in the morning and there would be a layer of slimy film on everything that wasn’t there [the day before].” Chelsea also tells us how the factories “used to dump all their waste [into the St. Lawrence River]—all kinds of waste, and it all comes downstream to our community.”

The impacts have been so extreme that for more than 25 years, local residents, environmental organizations and other leaders have fought the degradation caused by the dumping and widespread toxic contamination of the waterways. “There was a study done [on the impacts of the pollution] when I was just starting puberty,” Chelsea says. She remembers filling out forms

“There was a study done...It talked about all this pollution from the factories [near my community] and how the PCBs from all the dumping is in our water, our wildlife, our lands and air. Girls in our community were experiencing the onset of puberty at much earlier ages, and boys were experiencing it later. And mothers who were carrying or breastfeeding children... the PCBs could pass through their placenta and breast milk.”

– Chelsea Sunday (Turtle Clan)

about her physical development and submitting blood and urine samples when she was just nine or ten years old. Shortly after, the study was forgotten until just recently—nearly 20 years later—when she stumbled upon it while doing her own research.⁶⁵ “I was just kind of shocked because it was my story...It talked about all this pollution from the factories and how the PCBs from all the dumping is in our water, our wildlife, our lands and air. Girls in our community were

experiencing the onset of puberty at much earlier ages, and boys were experiencing it later. And mothers who were carrying or breastfeeding children...the PCBs could pass through their placenta and breast milk.” Chelsea explains how the study found that the PCBs were impacting the reproductive systems of the girls in Akwesasne through high rates of infertility and polycystic ovarian syndrome, and that there was also a correlation to high levels of hypothyroidism.



Talfourd Creek is a now-toxic creek running through the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. This sign is located near the reserve's community center. | Credit: Toban B, Creative Commons

“It made me angry because, just over the last couple of years, I’ve been diagnosed with hypothyroidism and polycystic ovarian syndrome.” Perhaps worse, and a poignant example of the generational trauma of environmental violence, is that Chelsea says she’s “starting to get nervous because I have two children and I breastfed them both, and I feel like I’m [starting to see symptoms in them both]. It affected me and I unknowingly passed it on to my children.”

Likewise, in northern Kenora in Ontario, Canada, the Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation (also known as Grassy Narrows First Nation) is still facing the legacy of mercury poisoning more than 50 years after initial exposure. The mercury originated in the 1960’s from a chemical and pulp mill in Dryden, Ontario. Mercury from the mills got into the English-Wabigoon River System, contaminating the fish—the main source of livelihood for commercial fisheries and related tourism businesses, as well as the main source of food for the Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation. To this day, mercury levels in the fish still exceed safe levels, and communities downstream from Dryden continue to experience symptoms of Minamata disease⁶⁶—even those born long after the mercury dumping had ended.⁶⁷

“With the mercury poisoning...even though it happened back in the [60’s]...our babies that are being born today are still affected, still being poisoned,” says Chrissy Swain, a mother who lives in Grassy Narrows. “It just feels like it’s something that will never go away.” And mercury contamination seems to be the tip of the iceberg for her community. “It’s what’s all around us, you know? Like the stuff that they’re spraying on the land, whatever they’re letting out of the mills, the mining...There’s probably not one person that I know that’s perfectly healthy like the way our people were before. There’s something wrong with everybody.”

Communities in the southwestern United States are also feeling the bodily health impacts of extractive industrial developments. Tribes in the Four Corners

region are severely impacted by mining, fracking, and other forms of natural resource development. In Tewa communities in northern New Mexico, mounds of mine tailings have already leached uranium—a radioactive chemical element that can lead to an increased risk of cancer, birth defects, and kidney disease among other illnesses—into drinking and groundwater.⁶⁸ Much of these tailings are left over from a time when uranium was mined to build nuclear weapons. These communities continue to be exposed to toxic and radioactive waste released from the Los Alamos National Laboratory, which was established in the 1940’s to research and develop the first atomic bomb. Environmental testing done by local nonprofits in the area found that PCB levels in Los Alamos Canyon were 25,000 times the standard for human health, and 1,000 times the standard for wildlife habitat.⁶⁹ “Everybody knows it’s an issue,” says Nathana Bird, an educator and advocate from Ohkay Owingeh, as she spoke with our team. “But nobody wants to talk about it. There’s a blindness that’s happening because...there are community members that now work for this industry, but their health is now in jeopardy.” For Nathana, that’s why it’s so important to “really [understand] the inequality that happens in communities that are downwind or downstream from Los Alamos National Lab—they’re mainly the people that are the workers, the janitorial services...and it’s mainly Hispanic, Mexican and Indigenous people that are taking these jobs.” While these jobs provide paychecks to communities experiencing the legacies of generational poverty^{xiv}, Nathana still wonders whether this relationship is sustainable given the exposure these employees might have to toxic chemicals. “You’re waiting for [disability and compensation] money to help you but what good is it going to do? How is it going to save [you] from cancer? How is it going to keep you alive?”

There’s a similar story to be told in Navajo communities. Diné mother and activist Amanda Blackhorse writes, The Diné people have been fighting corporations seeking resources-for-profit through mineral extraction on the Navajo Nation

xiv To continue to experience poverty for at least 2 generations; not having any assets to pass on to future generations.

for decades. The affected Navajo communities feel the Navajo Nation leadership, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the [Federal Indian Minerals Office] have turned their backs on them allowing these companies a 'free for all' to mine and extract minerals."⁷⁰ ***The environmental violence brought on by extractive industries in Navajo communities is dramatic. Fifty years ago, prior to the widespread uranium mining on the reservation, cancer rates were so low that a medical journal published an article about it titled, "Cancer immunity in the Navajo." But this is no longer the case. For example, today breast cancer is the second biggest killer of Navajo women.***⁷¹

Though the Navajo Nation banned uranium mining in 2005, there already exists more than 1,000 abandoned uranium mines across Navajo lands, only half of which have been reclaimed.⁷² Many of these sites are now radioactive waste piles and open tunnels and pits. These piles of dust become airborne and enter people's lungs. These pits of waste eventually fill with rainwater and are unknowingly used to water animal herds. In some cases, leftover mined materials were used to build traditional homes called hogans, where generations of families lived while the uranium in their walls and floors decayed.⁷³ "Whole generations of men [who worked in the mines] and Navajo families are dead now as a consequence of that," W.C.K. tells our team over the phone. W.C.K. is a Diné educator and community advocate who spoke with us about the work she does around environmental violence and, because of that work, asked us to not use her full name. "My grandfather's passed away, my grandmother's passed away, my father's born with a birth defect, my auntie can't have children..." For W.C.K., this hits very close to home. Data from the 1970's shows that, within the New Mexico portion of the reservation, which is where many of the mines were located, there was a 17-fold increase in childhood reproductive cancers compared to the U.S. as a whole.⁷⁴ Furthermore, those who grew up in the Four Corners developed ovarian and testicular cancers at 15 times the national average.⁷⁵

Endangering communities further, the oil and gas fracking industry has recently been rapidly expanding in Dinétah (the Navajo homelands), largely on lands now managed by the United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM). "They've been fracking and drilling in our territory in the Four Corners area, both off and on the reservation, along with San Juan Basin, for over 50 years. But with the sophistication of technology...and being able to now drill horizontally, it's created this incredible boom," explains W.C.K. "We're having these double stack flares [at drilling sites] every sixth of a mile burning off methane, and the relatives are getting sick, incredibly sick, from even just the levels of methane." Making matters worse, "all of our shale beds are incredibly uranium rich, and so everything that's coming out of this fracking process, whether it's contaminated water, contaminated silicon sand, contaminated processed water, or the gases that are coming off, all of it's radioactive." And though community members have been told that only permits for drilling wells to be used for "exploratory purposes" have been issued, according to W.C.K., "They are way passed that threshold...and are now into full-blown extraction."



The Navajo Nation still experiences the legacy of uranium mining and related disasters, such as the Church Rock uranium mill spill in 1979, which resulted in the creation of a Superfund site.
Credit: Doctress Neutopia, Creative Commons

Indigenous Feminist Land Defenders Speak Out:

April McGill

Healing our lands and bodies

One of the forms of environmental violence that hits close to home for many Indigenous communities in California is the exposure to pesticides that traditional basket weavers face when carrying out cultural activities. The U.S. Forest Service, local government agencies, and private commercial farmers spray grasses and reeds with pesticides, putting traditional weavers at risk of breathing in, absorbing, and ingesting toxins as they gather, weave, and split reeds with their teeth.⁷⁶ This is one of the newest concerns for April McGill (Yuki/Wappo/Pomo) from Northern California, a mother, daughter, niece and cancer survivor who is currently learning the traditional weaving techniques of her people.

When April McGill was young, her grandmother—a Yuki, Little Lake Pomo, and Pit River elder—taught her a great deal about her peoples’ traditions and beliefs. One of these beliefs was in the sacredness of our bodies. “Growing up, [I was taught to understand] that putting anything in your body that’s not natural...that’s not what we believe, and not what we should do,” April shared. As a result, she was always very protective of her body, even

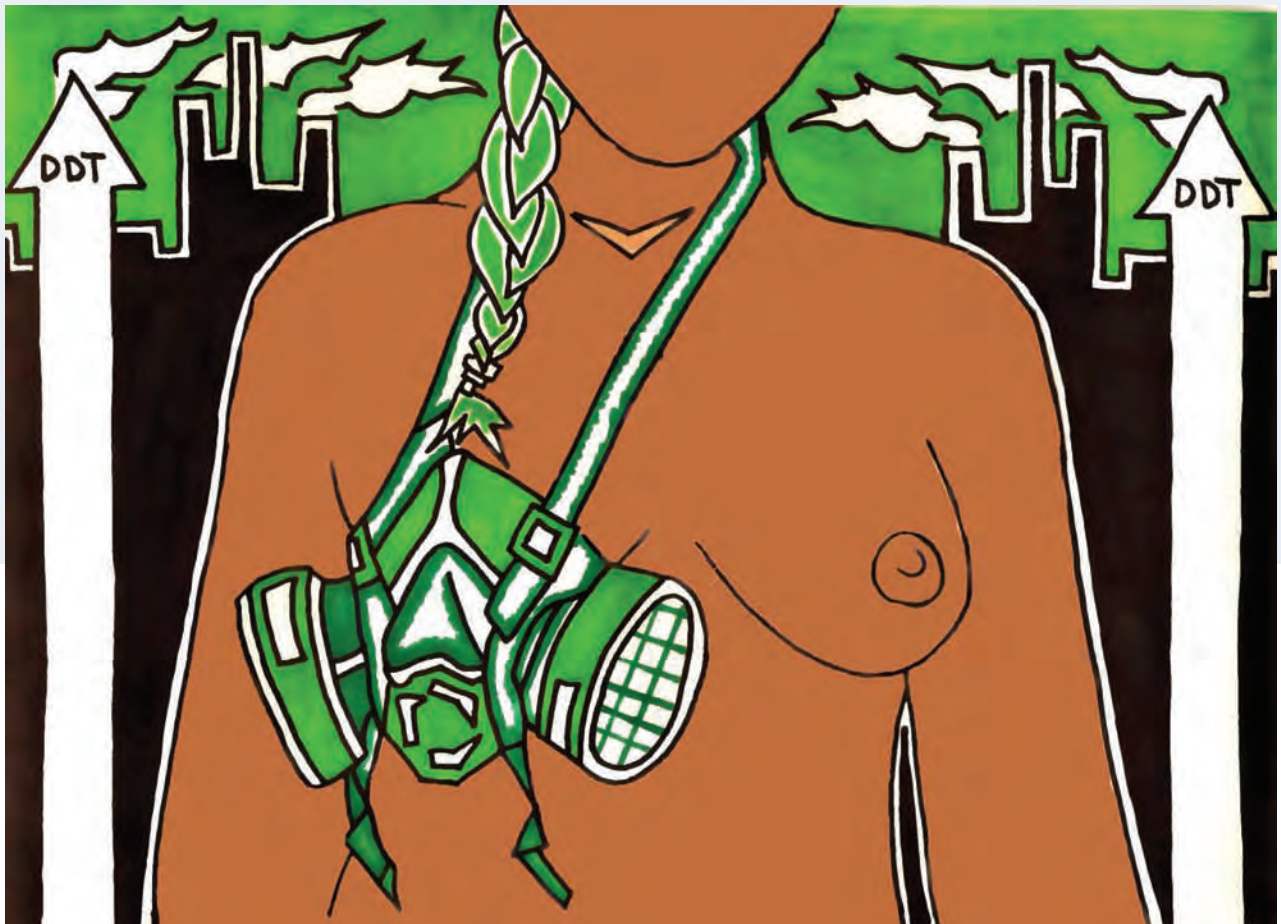
when it came to birth control. “When women were getting on birth control...I kept thinking: chemicals. I don’t want to add chemicals to my body,” and when she did eventually try to take birth control, “my body just kept rejecting it...So when I got diagnosed with breast cancer, that was one of the question [the doctors] asked me: Are you on birth control? Have you ever been on birth control?” With testing, April learned that while medical science has not directly linked birth control to cancer, it might put those who are already susceptible to the disease at an even greater risk.

For April, her body’s experience with cancer and the treatments she underwent cast into sharp relief the experiences Indigenous lands undergo as a result of environmental violence. “I think it’s important for women to understand that we’re in a time right now where we look at Mother Earth, and...she’s suffering. And because [we are of her], we’re suffering as women. We’re going through so many things with our bodies—sexual violence, environmental violence—and we’re feeling that from our Mother too.”

April draws parallels between her fight to rid her body of cancer and the way the Earth suffers, continually forced to sacrifice its “body” to drilling, mining and toxins to a

point where it will no longer be able to sustain life. “This is my ceremony...I’m sacrificing my body that’s so sacred, my reproductive system. Everything in my body is going to be compromised because of what’s going on.” As with most Western medicine methods, April’s healing from the trauma caused by the toxins in her body involved exposing herself to even more toxins—this time in the form of chemotherapy. “I remember...after it was done, how my body felt really drained. And I kept thinking about the Earth, and how she feels when we go in there and we drain her, or we’re putting things in her...and just thinking how strong our Mother is.”

“Women all over are having to put themselves on the frontline for everything—we’re fighting for clean water, we’re fighting to have food that’s not polluted and processed, and for our seeds, for the two-legged, the four-legged, the fish, everything,” including, April adds, the ability to practice traditions like basket weaving without worry about chemical exposure. “We’re all related and we’re all being affected by [environmental violence]. I think it’s so important for women to see a relationship with the environment.”



Artwork by Erin Marie Koonsmo

“You’re not alone. We all have historical trauma. If the wound has not healed, and has increased to the point it becomes an addiction, that’s another situation, and I think that we are in that situation in our communities. And the darkness that has come in, of course, is the meth.”

— Faith Spotted Eagle (Ihanktonwan Band of the Dakota/
Nakota/Lakota Nation of South Dakota)

DRUGS AND CRIME

The influx of industry workers into the resource-rich territories of Indigenous peoples also leads to drastic increases in drugs and crime. This transient workforce has little stake in, or connection to, the surrounding communities that they impact.⁷⁷ Community

members are introduced to these new addictions, which cause significant trauma within families, and these threats are only worsened by the increase of non-Indigenous people—mostly men—using and selling drugs while working for industry.

For example, in Fort McMurray, Alberta where the tar sands gigaproject operates, “crime rates were much higher than the provincial or national averages for decades,”⁷⁸ and “although they have decreased since 2008, the crime severity index remains almost 50% higher than the national average.”⁷⁹ Similarly, in North Dakota, where some towns are experiencing a doubling or tripling of population due to the employment opportunities of the oil fields, arrests for drug offenses increased by 19.5% between 2012 and 2013.⁸⁰ And, the number of criminal defendants charged in federal court in western North Dakota where the Bakken boom is taking place jumped by 31% in 2013 and has nearly doubled since 2011.⁸¹

On the Fort Berthold Reservation alone, the oil boom led to increased injuries related to alcohol

and drugs, and a rise in Hepatitis C because of drug use.⁸² In 2012, North Dakota had the highest traffic fatality rate in the nation, and 51% of those fatalities were alcohol related.⁸³ And, while heroin continues to be the damaging drug on the reservation, it is not the only drug; methamphetamine, or meth, also has destructive effects on many Indigenous communities.

Drug abuse as a form of environmental violence also impacts Indigenous communities in the Southwestern United States. “One thing I’ve learned about is the high rates of meth use amongst the [industry workers],” says Kim Howe (Diné) of Dooda Fracking, an organization raising awareness about fracking on Navajo lands. Kim is also an organizer and member of Nihígaal bee liná (Our Journey for Existence), a group of Navajo young people who are walking across Dinétah to talk with community members, offer prayers for Mother Earth, and resist environmental violence. “I met this girl,” Kim tells our team, “she used to be a water truck hauler for the industry up here. And she used to party with the men at the man camps^{xv}. She got with them...and got addicted to meth. [She] got addicted to meth, and she actually got pregnant from one of the oilrig workers. And to this day, she’s trying to stay sober, but she lost her son over meth. He got taken away from her.” And it seems everyone has a story like this to share. “We’re very well aware that these industries and their ‘man camps’ bring in high

xv Temporary employee housing for oilfield workers. Some communities have reported both documented, company-regulated camps, and undocumented camps, which often are simply unregulated tracks of land with 50-100 trailers that ranchers or farmers rent out to industry employees.

levels of methamphetamine, which is already a huge issue on our reservation,” echoes W.C.K.

Those we spoke with shared that some community members turn to drug use in part as a result of the legacies of colonization. “When you’re disconnected from your land, you’re disconnected from yourself. And so you make these decisions that you wouldn’t always make...because you’re just so desperate to feel something,” explains Vanessa Gray after seeing similar drug-related trauma in Aamjiwnaang.

We heard the same from Chelsea Sunday who is from Akwesasne First Nation on the St. Lawrence River, where her community is severely impacted by a hydropower generating facility, multiple factories, toxic waste dumping, and by the international colonial borders of the United States and Canada. “I can remember a long time ago... it was all about fishing. Growing up, the river was lined with docks and boats, and there were fishing poles, tackle, minnow traps and live wells for the

Harm Reduction As a Way of Life

Indigenous peoples have been working to keep their communities safe and reduce the harms they face long before the phrase “harm reduction” came into common usage. Harm reduction as a way of life is about reducing the many harms people and communities face—such as environmental violence (it is not limited only to substance use)—by using the tools that work best for them, without stigma or judgment. This also requires us not to define what harm may mean for other people.



Reminders of a time when fishing was a central part of the lifeway and culture of Akwesasne. In the last few decades, the river and fish have been contaminated by toxins and pollution from nearby factories, making it unsafe for community members to eat the fish their people have subsisted on for generations. | Credit: Chelsea Sunday

fish [our men would] catch everywhere,” she tells us, explaining how the river has always been what has held her culture and community together. “It’s not that way anymore. It’s not our way of life... [because] we have to make the decision between that way of life—that culture, that tradition—and our health.” That loss of connection to tradition has been devastating. “It feels like we’re really lost... specifically the men in my family just feel lost, like they have no place and they’re trying to find meaning again. You can see our men struggling, and I think the women are trying to hold it together, but it’s hard.” The result has been an effort to cope: “We’re trying to fill those voids, [replace] those things that we’re missing. And one of the ways that so many people are reaching for that is...with drinking and drugs. It’s like somebody died and we’re all trying to deal, go through that grieving process. Everybody grieves differently.”

For Indigenous communities, one of the compounding issues around the increase of drugs and alcohol in their territories is that there fails to be a simultaneous increase in culturally safe harm reduction interventions and responses. Public health policies and mainstream models of harm reduction all too often fail to intervene in ways that support sovereignty over people’s bodies and their lands. Harm reduction has been a critical area of work for NSYHN over the years, and refers not only to the practice of keeping one another safe while using substances or having sex, but also to the efforts of community members to reduce the everyday risks and harms they face while trying to create safety in unsafe situations. This can apply to individual encounters, but also to the systems, structures, and realities Indigenous people face like racism and colonialism that make their lives less safe on a daily basis.

Culturally safe harm reduction shows that intervening in drug and alcohol use is not enough. There is a great need to reduce the harms of colonialism, imperialism, and

environmental violence in a way that focuses on the self-determination of Indigenous bodies and Indigenous territories. For examples of this, please see the references at the end of this report⁸⁴, as well as the accompanying toolkit.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND MMIWG2S

Man Camps / Workers’ Camps: *Temporary housing facilities often operated by industry to house their transient workforce. A given facility may house as many as a thousand or more workers. There are generally two types of man camps, documented and undocumented. Documented camps are operated by corporations or their agents. Undocumented camps consist of 50-100 trailers that a rancher or farmer has set up on his land to rent out. These undocumented camps often do not exist on a map or have addresses⁸⁵.*

As mentioned previously, the introduction of industry into the areas surrounding Indigenous lands and communities has often meant an increase in population. Additional workers are needed at extraction sites to monitor and process the natural resources being mined, fracked, drilled, manufactured, or transported. These workers, many of who are men from all over the country—and sometimes the world—are attracted by the jobs and large paychecks, and are housed in temporary accommodations typically referred to as “man camps.” With such a concentration of men, money, drugs, and isolation, the rates of sexual violence have risen in many of these industry-impacted communities.

For example, in the neighborhoods of Fort McMurray, the ratio of men to women is two to one, intensifying an already patriarchal culture which is the result of an ongoing colonial legacy that has normalized violence against Indigenous bodies and lands.⁸⁶ “These [attacks on our bodies] are one feature of an increase in rates of sexual, domestic, family, homophobic, and transphobic violence in northern Alberta, where the male-

xvi Individuals who own parcels of land on Native American reservations, which is held in trust by the United States government.

dominated industry has the strongest foothold.”⁸⁷ Alberta has some of the highest numbers of both sexual violence and also rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Between 1980-2012, there were 206 Indigenous women and girls murdered in this province alone.⁸⁸

“We continue to see the principles of patriarchy embedded in old colonial values, which play out in Canadian society today,” says Melina Laboucan-Massimo, who is from Little Buffalo in northern Alberta and is a member of the Lubicon Cree First Nation. Melina has worked as an advocate for Indigenous rights for the past 12 years. In the last 8 years, she has specifically worked against unabated tar sands extraction and expansion in Alberta and has seen the impact it has had on the sexual health and safety of women. “The industrial system of resource extraction in Canada is predicated on systems of power and domination. This system is based on the raping and pillaging of Mother Earth as well as violence against women. The two are inextricably linked. With the expansion of extractive industries, not only do we see desecration of the land, we see an increase in violence against women. Rampant sexual violence against women and a variety of social ills result from the influx of transient workers in and around workers’ camps.”

Similarly, in the now-widely cited article, “Firsthand Account of Man Camp in North Dakota from Local



Melina Laboucan-Massimo (Lubicon Cree) collects samples of the black water left over from an oil spill
Credit: Melina Laboucan-Massimo

“The industrial system of resource extraction in Canada is predicated on systems of power and domination. This system is based on the raping and pillaging of Mother Earth as well as violence against women. The two are inextricably linked. With the expansion of extractive industries, not only do we see desecration of the land, we see an increase in violence against women. Rampant sexual violence against women and a variety of social ills result from the influx of transient workers in and around workers’ camps.”

– Melina Laboucan-Massimo (Lubicon Cree)

“We’re...seeing an increase in murders in [the area of the Navajo reservation where allottees have leased out land to industry]...We have a higher murder rate per capita than Baltimore on our reservation.”

— W.C.K. (Diné)

Tribal Cop,” former Rosebud Sioux Tribe Police Chief Grace Her Many Horses talked about her time working with the tribal police on the Fort Berthold Reservation. “‘Everyone has heard by now of the missing school teacher that was kidnapped as she was out jogging, repeatedly sexually assaulted, and murdered near one of these Man Camps,’” Her Man Horses reported in the article. And this widely publicized case of Shelly Arnold’s abduction and murder didn’t occur in isolation. In 2013, The Atlantic reported that, “a young tribal member had been at another bar in New Town when three oil workers offered her a ride home. They drove, instead, to the reservation’s desolate center, raped her, and left her on the road. They returned several times before morning, and each time, they raped her again.”⁸⁹ Furthermore, adult women—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—are not the only targets for this type of violence; men, young people and children are also impacted by this form of environmental violence. According to the article, “Her Many Horses recalls one specific instance where ‘We found a crying, naked, four-year old girl running down one of the roads right outside of the Man Camp. She had been sexually assaulted.’”⁹⁰

With the media picking up on what’s happening in North Dakota, other industry-impacted communities are growing increasingly fearful as they watch fracking, drilling and mining industries expand in their territories. “We’re...seeing an increase in murders in [the area of the Navajo reservation where allottees^{xvi} have leased out land to industry]...We have a higher murder rate per capita than Baltimore on our reservation,” W.C.K. (Diné) revealed to our team. And when members of our team went to New Mexico to walk with

Nihígaal bee liná (Our Journey for Existence), a youth-led group that organized a 1,000+ mile walk across Navajo territory to protest and talk about environmental violence—the group shared with us the realities of how the region is continuing to change with the influx of industry. For example, the Walkers reported on their experience when visiting Farmington, New Mexico last year, “and almost every hotel was completely booked by oil industry workers. And they were everywhere... It’s just men *everywhere*. That was scary. Even just walking to our rooms, they were out there and they’re just staring. Just eyes everywhere.” What seems to be most frightening is that the violence is so frequent that it has become a normal occurrence. “Within the past year, you see a lot of pictures of missing people, but no one is panicking, [or saying] ‘Oh my God, let’s get a search party together!’ It’s just these flyers that go up and that’s it. It’s so normalized. It’s so awful.”

The concern in the community is that some of those who go missing are being picked up and violence by oil workers. “I have this friend,” began Kim Howe, “she worked at Taco Bell in [Shiprock, New Mexico], and we’re impacted there...women are missing left and right. And... this man, he approached her and he had his son with him. So he sat with her, and you know, she was just having her lunch...and he was trying to pick her up. He was saying, ‘You can leave your job here and now. We’re going to provide for you, we’re going to pay your way, we’re going to travel and have fun.’ And they could just leave. And we’ve [worked] with several girls from [Gallop, New Mexico], you know, we got them home safe. And I just told her, that’s trafficking.”

In Canada, the last quarter century has in fact seen a growing movement and memorial for the countless Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirits (MMIWG2S) that families and communities have lost. According to a study conducted by Canada's own Royal Canadian Mounted Police, utilizing information from reported cases and the Native Women's Association of Canada's Sisters in Spirit Initiative and Maryanne Pearce, between 1980-2012 there were 1,181 police-reported, unresolved incidents of MMIWG2S.⁹¹ These incredible tragedies—such as the suspicious death of Melina's younger sister Bella Laboucan-McLean on July 20, 2013, whose case remains unsolved to this day—continue to happen at horrifying rates. For Melina, who has been vocal on the issue of MMIWG2S since her family's loss, it has become another call for justice for Indigenous women.

Across Canada and the U.S., these missing and murdered women, girls and Two Spirits represent a legacy of colonization, state violence, oppression, and patriarchy. "Violence against Indigenous women is structural, not coincidental,"⁹² and solutions must include a deep and honest analysis of the ways in which the violence upon Indigenous peoples is mirrored by the violence done upon the land. Scholarship around these issues has shown that, ***"there are links between the presence of the tar sands industry and heightened rates of missing and murdered Indigenous Two Spirits, women and girls."***⁹³ ***These are tragic links, whether it's the disappearance of those community members from families that have been the most outspoken against industry, or simply as a result of the freedom with which industry seems to operate within Indigenous territories.***



Nihigaał bee Iiná Walkers | Credit: Kim Smith

Indigenous Feminist Land Defenders Speak Out:

W.C.K.

They Bring the Naayéé

One of the United States' most heavily resource-extracted areas is the Four Corners region in the Southwest. This area, one of the largest and richest natural resource corridors in the country, is considered by some to be a "National Sacrifice Zone." It is also home to the Navajo Nation. W.C.K.—who asked us not to use her full name—is a Diné advocate who, along with her Diné sisters, is raising awareness in their communities about how extractive industries like fracking, drilling, and mining are bringing violence to the reservation and surrounding areas. "There's every form of resource exploitation you can think of here," W.C.K. told our team. That exploitation is visible across Dinétah, including in Table Mesa in New Mexico, where W.C.K.'s family is from. "[The elders] talk about how...back in the day, during our great-grandparents time, the grass was as high as a horse's belly. But now, you go out [to the homesteads] and there's no vegetation." The land has been so polluted, and so drained of water and the rich minerals that sustained a people since time immemorial, that "nothing grows there now."

And where fracking and other industries exist, workers' camps and violence follows. ***Like many other rural Indigenous communities that have seen a recent boom in resource extraction (e.g. those in the Bakken region), "there's not the infrastructural support to regulate or to even try to handle any of this insurgence of non-Native men onto our land who bring what we***

call naayéé, or monsters, or things that bring chaos and dysfunction into our communities.

So it's kind of a free-for-all out there right

now." The workers' camps—or man camps—are everywhere, W.C.K. says. "Because they didn't lay pipelines in, they're burning off the methane [through] double-stack flares. But they're also having to run these drilling sites, these wells, 24/7. And every single one of the wells out there has a man camp at the base of them."

The large spike in non-Native populations within the boundaries of the reservation makes a community already struggling with the social stressors caused by generational poverty, historical trauma and abuse of many forms even more dangerous for Navajo women and young people. ***"We have high, high, high levels of sexual violence, especially in checkerboard areas. Which is why the Eastern Agency [where much of the present-day oil boom is taking place] is so vulnerable, because...the jurisdiction is so convoluted that when a relative is violence, it's very difficult—especially if it's by a non-Native—to determine whose jurisdiction this issue belongs to. And most often the cases are just dropped."*** The result is that many instances of violence are simply not reported, both because there's only a small likelihood that the case will be heard, and because, "if you report it, you risk retaliation from other families. And you risk retaliation from systems that don't give a shit about you."

W.C.K. and others feel these harms have reached

a critical mass. “What I’m finding is that more and more Navajo girls are going missing,” W.C.K. shares. “There’s talk of girls being trafficked through tunnels...And these tunnel systems cannot be created by anything other than the type of mining machinery that they use back home.” While she tells us that she’s unable to give the actual names of those involved over the phone because it’s just too dangerous, she says, “it’s shocking to know...which people and which entities and which collectives [are involved in the underground trafficking of our girls]. And it’s absolutely, directly tied to resource extraction.”

For W.C.K., this work is extremely personal, not only as a Diné woman, but as someone who grew up in the highly racialized and industrialized border towns of the Navajo Nation and the Southwest. She has had relatives go missing and has seen the injustice of the settler state that calls these countless disappearances and murders “suicides” because the victims may fall within certain stereotypes and are therefore considered expendable. “These [colonial nation and state] borders have enriched my life,” W.C.K. says. “But they’ve also kind of entangled me in my community in all these different ways that have created this social, emotional, and spiritual paralysis.”



W.C.K. looks out over Diné lands. | *Credit: W.C.K.*

CHAPTER THREE: The Health of Indigenous Nations

“That violence upon the peak is violence upon our children—their cultural identity, who they are. And our cultural identity is what has allowed us to survive this long, to survive 500 years of genocide.”

– Lyncia Begay (Diné)

As we have already witnessed in previous chapters, environmental violence and the ways in which it is experienced by Indigenous communities is multilayered and interconnected. To honor the lived experiences of those most impacted, we must stretch our ways of thinking beyond traditional boundaries and allegiances. As we have seen, we must understand that environmental violence does not respect the artificial silos of social justice movements, academic disciplines, or nation states. Similarly, for women and young people, the safety of their bodies and the safety of their lands goes beyond biology, physiology, and sexual health. It is crucial to examine the role patriarchy and capitalism play in the struggle to rid Indigenous lands and bodies of destructive and predatory industries.

This recognition must span back through our mired histories and the continued legacy of settler-colonial relations in North America, since it is there that we most often find the inception of this type of violence. As scholar and advocate Jacqueline Actuga explained in her chapter in *Sharing our Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence*, “In response to the imposition of foreign governments, Indian nations were forced to dismantle or modify their systems of

governance. This disruption included a breaking down of customary law and tribal lifeways that safeguarded Native women from crimes of physical and sexual abuse. The legalization and cultural acceptance of violence perpetrated against Native women as populations began with the conquest of Indian nations by colonial governments...”⁹⁴ Our conversations with community members from industry-impacted regions have shown that this conquest continued with the introduction of industry into Indigenous territories.

Impacts on Self-Determination and Governance

Colonization is not a thing of the past; rather, it remains visible through the introduction, proliferation, and support of systems of government that blatantly disregard the traditional leadership roles of women in Indigenous nations. These male-dominated systems were prerequisites for recognition as sovereign nations at the time of contact, and that legacy has continued in many communities today. In her article, “Globalization as Racialized Sexual Violence,” Rauna Kuokkanen (Sámi) states that, “Besides endangering harvesting rights and

cultural practices of the community, increased pressures on the land” the result of governments’ neo-liberal, corporate agenda—displace women from their roles and positions in their societies.”⁹⁵ She goes on to explain that, “this in turn may imply a shift in gender dynamics and a disruption of the social fabric. When it is no longer possible for women to fulfill their important and valued roles in a community, their social status may also diminish, thus making them more vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. Changing roles and dynamics affect men also, and growing economic and social insecurity and instability often manifests in growing rates of violence against women both within families and in society at large.”⁹⁶

As scholars point out, attacks on the traditional roles and status of Indigenous women within nations are attacks on the sovereignty of the nations themselves, and this in turn is one of the more subversive ways that industry and environmental violence undermine people’s ability to function as healthy communities. In our conversation with Iako’tsira:reh Amanda Lickers (Turtle Clan, Seneca) who currently lives in Tionni’tiotiah:ke (Montreal), she offered her thoughts on one of the ways that Indigenous nations can resist the negative impacts of hetero-normative patriarchy—particularly in cases where it is not part of their traditional governance or kinship models. With regards to the continued disrespect and violencing of women: “[Men who are leaders in their communities are] in a position to normalize how we treat women, and I hope they do, because they have to. And you’re not really a warrior if you don’t, you know?”

Yet another way communities are harmed by the complex web of environmental violence is through the generational poverty they continue to experience. Industry and government regularly and systematically gain access to Indigenous lands for development. So, why do Indigenous communities, which are home to both the most resource-rich territories in North America and the greatest extractive industrial development, remain

some of the most impoverished? According to W.C.K. (Diné), “When you grow up in a territory that has every type of industry you can think of, even for myself, it’s so highly normalized you don’t question them anymore. In fact, you have an allegiance to these industries. And you don’t think twice about how they are keeping us in poverty.” This is the reality for Indigenous communities that are economic hostages within the systems on which they depend. It often ends up being the families and community members working for industry in order to survive, thereby making it difficult to break out of the cycles of participation.

This tension is a constant struggle for Indigenous community members who often find themselves torn. “We support these companies,” said Nathana Bird, whose community—Ohkay Owingeh—has been impacted by sand and gravel industries as well as logging. “Whether it’s just buying a couple of 4x4’s or a wrench from a [certain] store...you’re supporting something that is totally destroying the environment. And you fight these bigger [environmental justice battles], but there’s also the stuff within your community. So how do you bring that back home? How do you bring awareness to people without giving them an alternative?” Furthermore, how does change happen when many tribal governments are entrenched in systems that perpetrate



The Anishinaabe Water Walk to oppose the Energy East Pipeline in August 2015.

“You inject even just a little bit of money into these communities that are generationally poor, these are going to be some of the reactions to it—particularly when that money is injected into communities in a violent way...through violence on the land that then reflects the violence that we are inflicting upon our bodies, and that’s being inflicted on us by outside sources.”

– W.C.K (Diné)

environmental violence and environmental racism? “We don’t really know what our tribe is doing, and the negotiations they’re making,” Nathana tells us. “And these are the people that are supposed to be representing you, keeping you safe, keeping you together. But at the same time, they’re feeding themselves through the greed,” which in turn pushes them to continue to marginalize voices like Nathana’s as they demand accountability and environmental justice. “I think they’re put in a place where they don’t ever want to [talk about the environmental violence and injustice that’s happening] because they get funding from these [industries] and who knows what would happen if they spoke out on some of these issues?”

In this way, the economic systems which support industry and government become yet another form of force and duress. Is it possible for communities to consent to fracking or mining or drilling—even while those industries employ members of these communities, or while these members receive nominal payouts from land leases—when that consent is given under duress?

For example, in the Eastern Agency of the Navajo Reservation where many families continue to experience poverty on a widespread scale, the money offered by industry for land leases and resource extraction—which may be less than the actual monetary worth of the land—will hold a certain appeal (e.g. security) that it wouldn’t necessarily hold for other communities. “[Industry] comes in and tells these relatives without fully explaining to them all the processes and details,

‘If you sign this, you’re going to make \$18,000, \$30,000, \$100,000. And the industry is safe, we’re going to take care of you, this is just like the old drilling you’ve grown up with all your life...In fact, it’s safer because now we drill sideways,’” begins W.C.K., whose own family—and many others in the Eastern Agency, where much of the current boom is happening—does not have adequate plumbing, clean water, or electricity, and whose homes still have dirt floors. “And when we experience generational poverty, the way we view money is very different than the way somebody who has had generational amounts of assets available to them does. In our mind, everything with money has to do with moment-to-moment survival. And so when someone knocks on your door and tells you they’re going to give you \$100,000 or \$30,000, that sounds really good and that’s worth...whatever you need to do to get that money so you won’t have a dirt floor, [or] so you can have your roof fixed that’s been leaking and is going to cave in on you and your family of ten.”

But, W.C.K. tells us, in most of these cases, none of the details are explained to these allottees. They do not know they will now be living at ground zero of an industrial development site, or be exposed to scarring health and social impacts. Allottees are not always told that the money they received by signing away their lands will be taxed and that whatever is left over will be divided amongst all land holders in that particular allotment, which can sometimes be up to 100 families. So, the question remains, can there really be consent in situations like these?

Iako'tsira:reh Amanda Lickers believes that "everything from the family to the Longhouse [her peoples traditional governance system] has been affected by industry and affected by the way industry operates in our territories and operates on our bodies." In most cases, it can be argued that the consent given by these communities for industry to operate was, at best, given under duress, and at worst, never given at all because of the lack of transparency and truth behind the deals. But, as Amanda points out, we also need to remember, "that moment of consent isn't stagnant. It's a fluid consent, as all forms of consent are," and therefore people ought to be able to retract that consent when they see the

true impacts. After all, "self-determination and sovereignty is not about being on the terms of your colonizer and your occupier," she reminds us. These rights are enshrined in international declarations that occupying nation states have agreed are the norms and aspirations under which they govern. The participants of the second International Indigenous Women's Environmental and Reproductive Health Symposium re-presentation and demand recognition of these rights in their own declaration, boldly stating that, "The right to self-determination for Indigenous Peoples includes our Indigenous identities, our sexualities and our reproductive health for the future of our Nations."⁹⁷

Indigenous Feminist Land Defenders Speak Out:

Iako'tsi:rareh Amanda Lickers

The heart of our nations

Iako'tsi:rareh Amanda Lickers, an Onondowa'ga (Seneca) Haudenosaunee anti-colonial land defense organizer from the Turtle Clan, currently lives in Tionni'tioh'tia:ke—or what today is known as Montreal, part of occupied Kanien'kehá:ka territories. While her family is from Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation, Amanda grew up just outside of Tyendinaga Mohawk territory in Southeastern Ontario, Canada, a First Nations reserve on the Bay of Quinte. Amanda's work deals in large part with the defense and rebuilding of Indigenous territories and nations in the face of the continued colonization and industrialization of these lands. For Amanda, the connection between

environmental degradation and the loss of culture, health and nationhood, is very much intertwined.

Her earliest experiences with the impacts of environmental violence were felt in her own home during her childhood. "My dad was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic with psychotic tendencies when I was 4, although he is in remission now. And where he grew up, just near the Bay of Quinte area, is an area that has high arsenic levels in the water, which has been linked to high levels of schizophrenia in those populations." The Bay of Quinte on the north shores of Lake Ontario on the U.S. and Canadian border is the endpoint for many of the rivers that flow through the area, including the Moira River. Following the Moira River upstream would lead to both the highly toxic Deloro

Mine as well as the Marmora Mine, and while both mines are no longer operational, Amanda reports that their arsenic tailings pond is separated from the Moira River by a mere chain link fence. Amanda considers a number of things to have impacted her father's development of schizophrenia, but she's certain that his disease was influenced by exposure to high levels of arsenic, specifically arsenic that flowed downstream from the mines into the Bay of Quinte and beyond.⁹⁸ "I feel like people don't talk about mental health and impacts from industry... but there are total neurological and psycho-physical conditions that result from toxic exposure."

Amanda is committed to breaking the silence on the myriad ways industries have damaged communities and lives. "I was living for a while in Nogojiwanong [Peterborough, Canada] in the Kawartha Regions, which is mostly Mississaugas/Anishinaabe territory on the north shore of Rice Lake, and there's a tritium processing facility and GE Electric Hitachi Canada which has been there since the 50's," she says. "And people think because they don't smell pollution or taste it in the water [that it isn't there]. But, for example, uranium poisoning is invisible. It's tasteless, it's scentless, and people don't talk about that...It gets so deeply normalized."

Amanda has also spoken up about the ways in which patriarchy has impacted Indigenous cultures, and the insidious influence that it has had on Indigenous rights, women's rights and environmental justice. "The warrior society shift... it's so extreme," she says, referring to the largely male responses to resource extraction that perpetuate stereotypes of Indigenous masculinity. "There's a lot of talk about, 'Women are our backbone; we need to protect the women and honor the women and respect the women.' But

when it comes down to it, you see men talking over women, undermining women, not even asking women, or coming into a space and saying, 'I'm here to talk with the brothers.' And you shouldn't be here if you're coming to talk with the brothers," she tells us, reminding us that Indigenous women have historically been the heart of our nations and movements, "because [if you are,] then you're coming to talk to the wrong people."

It's these styles of male leadership that Amanda has seen co-opt and corrupt movements for land defense and sovereignty. "People just sort of fetishize the warrior way. But where are they in their communities?" Amanda asks. "Are they going to their Longhouse? Are they responsible to their Clan Mothers? I don't know." The Longhouse structure in particular is one that has valued women, as well as placed men in the position of clan spokespersons—but not without guiding principles. "In the Longhouse structure, we would select spokespeople. And they were often men—that was the role of men in the Longhouse. And their job was not to speak for themselves; they were an empty vessel by which the views of the Longhouse, of their clan, were supposed to come through," she explains. "Basically, [its] internalizing the concept of Kahsatstenhsera, which...the way I've been taught, is that it more directly translates to your inner strength, my inner strength, and our strength together."

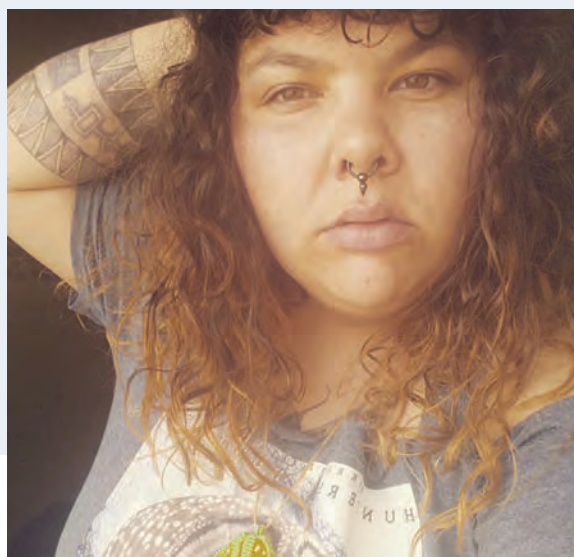
This is just one of the reasons Amanda says it's been so frustrating to see that there are Indigenous men who are perpetrators of violence against women while simultaneously posing as leaders or spokespeople within these movements for women, or land rights, or treaty rights and sovereignty. "I've been in reclamation spaces—spaces [where we've said,] 'We're reclaiming our

territory. We're claiming sovereign territory in the face of industry,'" Amanda shares. "And I've seen it happen where women are being disrespected, where women didn't feel heard, didn't feel valued." To Amanda and many women, this illustrates how patriarchy has permeated Indigenous nations, and how patriarchy and colonization continue to support environmental destruction and, specifically, violence on Indigenous women's bodies. "I understand when it's Indigenous people, there's this internalized colonization and that's probably learned behavior inter-generationally somewhere along the line, but that still can't be an excuse for what we're letting men do in our communities and the example that's setting," she says, and goes to acknowledge, "It was a really clever thing, for the colonizers to start to talk to the men."

In light of this, we asked Amanda what it meant to her to protect both the environment of people's bodies, and the environment—or body—of Mother Earth. "If we were to stop [all the individual movements around these issues] and teach people about consent, and focus on having strong and supported women in our communities, and having men who are down to support that and learn from all of this pain and shit, there'd be a lot more people on the frontline of our struggles. We would have a healthier nation." And in terms of her own

personal bodily health, "it probably means trying not to get too much bitumen in my body...It's all harm reduction at this point, you know? With the toxic environment, Mother Earth is contaminated. That's just the realness. But our bodies do replenish and cleanse themselves every so often. So I guess it's just the idea of doing things to try to minimize the impacts of contamination on your reproductive system and your physical self. And it's not just about the womb, but being able to survive the womb into the future. So, doing things to try not to die, in general." Because the truth is, for Amanda and for many other Indigenous peoples, "there's really nowhere I could move in our territories that would be free from environmental [destruction]."

But Amanda also has hope: "Mother Earth is so resilient. And going to the tar sands and seeing chickaree and cattails, and little medicines—medicines that heal the land there—was powerful. We're not in this alone," Amanda reminds us. "And so as much as, yes, the environmental violence that's being physically experienced and that is a direct threat to our communities is something that we always have to deal with...the land is so resilient. We can afford 365 rotations around Elder Brother to be able to focus on the heart of our nations. If we can't do that, then what are we doing, really?"



Credit: Iako'tsira:reh Amanda Lickers

“I thought...we’ll never get past [this trauma]. It’s like a monster; it’s bigger than me...But then I started addressing it slowly, and soon people were listening... And it’s because of the k’e we have for one another.”

— Lyncia Begay (Diné)

Impacts on Families and Communities

Not only does environmental violence surface on a micro level—through crime, health disparities and violence—it also has deep and lasting impacts on families and communities. Industries operating with entrenched colonial and racist practices harm Indigenous territories and people in myriad ways. We see the effects of this mistreatment in the changing community relations—for instance community members from impacted areas pitted against each other.

“It’s hard because sometimes you’re put in these places where you have family members that work [for the industry],” explains Nathana Bird. “And then you go to a protest and they see you on the news, and they’re like, ‘What are you doing? Why are you trying to shut down my job? I earn money and I work hard; you shouldn’t be doing that.’” W.C.K. tells us that she’s also seen these types of conflicts on the Navajo Reservation. “The drilling industry [is] exacerbating the already accumulated trauma that exists in these areas, and so we’re seeing more and more families having a lot of infighting, where even fathers are disowning their grown daughters over money.”

Nathana also reports that this isn’t an issue simply faced by adults; industry inserts itself into the education systems and institutions as well. “Within my community [Ohkay Owingeh in New Mexico], there’s a lot of [students] who

are going into chemical engineering, IT work, security work, working at [Los Alamos National Laboratory] to do accounting or finance stuff, and your choice of major really sets you apart from somebody who’s doing education, who’s doing community justice work, who’s doing social justice work.” Nathana chose to forgo scholarship opportunities offered by the Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation for the community justice track. Those funds, she tells us, came with a gag order: No one can speak negatively about Los Alamos National Lab. “I have friends that I used to be friends with, but now they work at Los Alamos National Lab, and I work for a very hardcore women’s organization that challenges everything in our community, [and] we can’t even come together. Our viewpoints are totally different on what we think a world should look like.”

These familial and community divisions cause trauma within nations—a trauma that only begins to heal through education and community support. “It’s an incredibly painful process,” W.C.K. says of her own experience and journey of “dismantling this normalization of industry on our territory, and beginning to wake up and realize...what’s going on.” That’s why she finds strength in the resistance efforts of her sisters and the elders who are willing to offer their knowledge and mentorship. “When you’re a young woman fighting these industries and then having to come up against your own people who are absolutely loyal to these industries—who themselves are part of this normalization of these industries all around us as well as the internalization of patriarchy—it

can be very, very lonely," she admits. "So it's very important when young women work together that they take care of each other and take care of themselves." For W.C.K., one of the ways this has happened is through a small sisters' collective, which helps her to both learn and practice traditional Diné ways, but also to do important work around building up her community. "It's not just looking to elders to mentor us, but how do we look to one another to heal each other through this process? Because one of the things I've come to intimately understand is that this work is incredibly painful. And it will take you down if you do not take care of yourself and if you do not take care of each other," she tells us. "So the ability and belief

from a strength-based perspective that we already have everything we need amongst ourselves and within ourselves to heal is very important."

Not only does this divisiveness hold families and communities back from healing, it also diminishes their collective power. There is often resistance within impacted communities to acknowledging the damage and trauma caused by environmental violence. "Those are the nicks that keep cutting you. How can you heal?" asked Lyncia Begay (Diné), who is involved with Indigenous media justice and is training to mentor other young people in this work. For her, addressing the trauma of violence in her own family has been difficult, but rewarding. "I



The Nihígaal bee Iiná Walkers uplift one another and the leadership of women as they resist environmental violence across Diné lands. | Credit: Erin Marie Komsmo.

thought...this will never happen—we'll never get past this. It's like a monster; it's bigger than me," she remembers. "But then I started addressing it slowly, and soon people were listening, and they're paying attention to their behavior, and really understanding. And it's because of the *k'e* [or sense of kinship we have] for one another."

"You have to go through a grieving process that most people aren't prepared for, [that] they don't expect," W.C.K. explains. "I went through it for months and months, and my sisters...I see my sisters go down because we love our land, we love where we're from, we love our people... ***It's incredibly painful, especially when you finally wake the fuck up and you realize that this has been going on around you your whole life, and the shame that comes with that realization... the shame of not knowing that your auntie's water is bad and that she has cancer, and you just never asked the right questions to find***

that out." That's why, for these young women, standing up against industry in their territories is so important. When we asked Lyncia what words of advice she would give to other young resisters, she said, "speak up when you feel like it's necessary, when you feel like someone should say something and no one is saying anything. And don't be afraid." This is exactly what she continues to do. "When I speak, I speak because I'm concerned it's going to continue forever," she says, before going on. "It's not just me and my generation, but the younger ones."

This process of learning, educating, speaking, standing up and resisting the abuse is the spark behind the grassroots movements protecting Indigenous lands, bodies, and communities. "I felt like a load was lifted off me, just from sharing my story," April McGill (Yuki/Wappo/Pomo from Northern California) shared when we concluded our conversation. "I felt at peace."

Indigenous Feminist Land Defenders Speak Out:

Nathana Bird

Sex as Ceremony

Nathana Bird is an educator and advocate from Ohkay Owingeh in the Española Valley—the Tewa homelands of northern New Mexico. New Mexico has seen advocacy around and resistance to various industries and operations, such as the Sandia National Laboratories, which tests components of nuclear weapons, the Waste Isolation Power Plant (WIPP)—the world's third repository to permanently house transuranic radioactive waste, and other smaller industrial entities. In Nathana's community, much of the work has centered around challenging sand and

gravel companies, lumber industries, and the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Established during the Manhattan Project in the early- to mid- 1940's as a facility to research and develop the first atomic bomb, the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) continues to be involved in nuclear science technology, counter-terrorism, advanced materials and computing, and climate research. The Lab also has stewardship over the United States' nuclear weapons stockpile. More than 21 million cubic feet of toxic waste was buried near LANL beginning in 1943. Radioactive *liquid* waste was disposed of in the canyons

surrounding the Lab, and even after formal cleanup activities, residual contaminants still remain in the waters and soils of the area. In a dry, arid region where concerns over water—or lack thereof—are already significant, LANL poses an unacceptable threat. Hazardous chemicals, mainly tritium, are found in surface waters and aquifers beneath the Lab. Due to groundwater contamination, surface water runoff and erosion also threatens the surrounding environment.⁹⁹

“They’re on a freaking ancestral mesa,” Nathana points out, and while she’s lived in the area her whole life and intimately knows the social systems at play which consider such practices an “acceptable risk” to impacted communities, her voice is still filled with disbelief. “The whole area around [LANL] is filled with old pottery, old bones, old caves, all this stuff. But they don’t see that, they don’t understand that.” And now there’s frustration behind her words. **“They’re just like, ‘We’re going to set this [nuclear laboratory] up in the middle of nowhere where there’s nobody around.’ But really, there was a whole heart of an Indigenous peoples there already.”**

Furthermore, a 2006 study which looked at the effects of LANL on the surrounding communities found that dust and other biological materials gathered off-site were a source of radiation exposure to residents downwind and downstream from the Lab. Seven out of eight samples of the highest radiation levels were found inside homes and offices, posing a greater threat to human health because of the ease with which dust in these places accumulates and is then inhaled. The study concluded that, “if a person were exposed to this dust 200 days per year for 8 hours per day, it translated into an annual exposure of just over 48 millirems per year. That is 5 times the annual off-site dose permitted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.”¹⁰⁰ And that’s *per year*.

And it’s not just the severe environmental degradation or serious health impacts that threatens the area. “There’s also a disruption that happens around our traditional lifestyles,” Nathana explains, referring to the traditional fishing and hunting Indigenous communities in the area can no longer safely do. Now, there are stories of poisoned fish and animals found dead for no apparent reason. Nathana explains that on one of the reservations in the area, shortly after a family had hunted some game and were at home, employees from LANL came to retrieve the deer they’d caught. The deer had a tracker on it, as many of the animals living within the boundaries of the Lab have so that their movements can be monitored to ensure that they stay within the property. This deer had clearly strayed. Unfortunately, by the time the family had been told that the deer they caught was from the Lab area, they had already processed the meat. “It’s kind of scary because...these people didn’t know what was happening. They took the deer home and who knows who got exposed to what...And it makes you wonder about the stuff that goes on up [at the Lab].”

This uncertainty over the toxins that have invaded people’s traditional food supply gives many community members reason to hesitate before hunting and fishing. “It’s scary,” Nathana says, “that we can’t even eat the fish no more!” She goes on to explain that this has more than just immediate repercussions. **“I think a lot of young people don’t get to experience those things our ancestors or our grandmothers and parents did as young people, because we have such tainted land now.” And this inability to practice one’s culture, this inability to pass it on to the next living generation to ensure that that culture survives, is yet another form of environmental violence.**

Ensuring the cultural survival of Tewa

communities ties Nathana deeply her work with Tewa Women's United's (TWU) A'Gin Healthy Sexuality and Body Sovereignty Project. TWU is a collective intertribal women's voice in the Tewa homelands that provides safe spaces for Indigenous women to uncover their inherent power, strength and skills in order to become positive forces for social changes in their families and communities. Through this work, Nathana educates and supports communities—largely young people and women—as they learn about their cultural identities, and how to respect and exercise sovereignty over their bodies and lands. As an example of this reclamation of power, Nathana and others teach about the now widely known government-sanctioned sterilization Indigenous women experienced in the United States during the 1970's.¹⁰¹ Nathana herself is still learning just how deeply this impacted her own family. And while forced sterilization is not something people hear much about anymore, some argue that the high rates of miscarriages in Indigenous women as a result of toxic exposure are a modern form of sterilization.

The A'Gin Healthy Sexuality and Body Sovereignty project is based on a concept that, while more complex, loosely translates to *respect*. “Part of our work is to look at the body as the land, and taking care of your body by really being aware of what toxins [you are exposed to],” Nathana says. “And not even just physically, but spiritually, mentally, emotionally, the relationships you go into, how you communicate with people, how you approach sex.” Nathana's work asks women and young people to consider sex as sacred, or “sex as ceremony...Because there's a whole spiritual

connection that happens behind having sex.” Rather than approaching education around sex and sexuality from a fear-based perspective, TWU works from a culturally-based lens to help their communities understand “what does it mean for our Tewa people to have sex, and to really embody this Indigenous view of our bodies?” This has necessarily touched on issues of sexual abuse and domestic violence, gender equality, sexism, non-violent communication, mentoring and advocacy—all of which are linked to how women understand, protect and connect to their lands as well.

And as many of the other Indigenous land defenders and advocates who offered their testimony shared, healing the impacts of generational trauma and environmental violence—as well as all its related social stressors—begins with acknowledging within their own families what's happening to and around them. “I think we need to come to a place where families can actually do the work themselves to really get through that shit, because it's a lot of digging, but at the same time you want to open up all that to release it,” Nathana explains. It's a difficult process, as are all anti-trauma, anti-oppression, and anti-colonial struggles, and environmental violence causes and resurfaces all of those traumas. Nathana's work is to support this process. ***“I think we're so afraid of sitting with our fears that we don't ever want to go there...We carry these burdens, we carry these stories—everything—with us as young people. And I think when we allow young people to actually face those situations and sit with that hurt, I think that's when the breakthrough moments happen.”***

CHAPTER FOUR: Responding to Environmental Violence

“It’s crucial that whatever we do be parallel to our belief systems... because people otherwise get mixed up on strategies that are not aligned with who we are as Nakota people, or whoever we come from.”

— Faith Spotted Eagle (Ihanktonwan Band of the Dakota/
Nakota/Lakota Nation of South Dakota)

When our team set out to talk with Indigenous women and young people about their experiences and leadership around environmental violence, we knew it would be deeply painful to bear witness to such unjust and insidious assaults on people’s bodies and lands. We also knew we’d hear about ways these community members are healing, fighting back, and forging ahead. These responses and remedies—many of which are included in the accompanying toolkit—all centered around two themes. The first is that healing is an absolute essential precursor to the process of defending one’s body and lands. The second is that legal remedies are not as central to land/body defense as one might anticipate.

The Importance of Healing

Three of the places where our team gathered were at the final Tar Sands Healing Walk in Fort McMurray in June 2014, with Nihígaal bee liná (Our Journey for Existence) on their walk across Navajo territory in January 2015, and at the Anishinaabe Water Walk to oppose the Energy East Pipeline in August 2015. It’s no surprise then that discussions about environmental violence led to discussions about healing. However, this isn’t always the

case. The media and mainstream narrative around environmental justice rarely emphasizes the need for healing of lands, bodies and spirits. As Iako’tsira:reh Amanda Lickers asked when she spoke with our team during the weekend of the Healing Walk, “**What does personal healing and land healing look like? What does healing both the environment of your body and the environment of your territory look like?**”



Giving thanks to onaman (Red Ochre paint) and the land.
Credit: Erin Marie Konsmo

Below is the guidance that women we spoke with felt was important to share:

Ground yourself in your people's long-term cumulative resistance: Indigenous nations hold within them a painful history of colonization, and the wounds of that trauma are still felt today. But just as visible are people's traditions of resistance. W.C.K. recalls how incredible it was to meet and be mentored by Navajo women who, for the past 40 years, have resisted being forcibly removed from their home territory in Arizona to make room for coal strip-mining. These Resisters were elders at the time the police and industry first came to their homesteads to try to remove them, and because of their brave defiance, their families still remain on the lands where they lived and died for generations. So, an important part of healing the mind, body, and land is to look at the resiliency that defines Indigenous peoples' history. Particularly, W.C.K. says, "when we get overwhelmed by these political entities that seem so much bigger than us...we can find strength in our long-term cumulative resistance."

Find strength in Spirit: "The way our movements are going to be incredibly successful—increasingly *more* successful—is when we really ground ourselves in Spirit and really begin to become hyper-aware of the spiritual warfare that is an extension of, or even the creators of, these industries, and engage it in that regard," W.C.K. shares. Her elders and sisters have taught her that in both fighting for and healing their lands and bodies, it's important to remember traditions that teach, "in this war against the entities that are hurting our land and hurting our people, there is a spirit." And that ***it's critical to "not fight evil the way it fights us. Instead, fight from a higher perspective. It's up to each community to decide what that higher perspective looks like, but a big part of that is prayer, and understanding that we are doing this for our great-grandchildren's great-grandchildren."***

Honor the teachings of traditions: One of the critical things Iako'tsira:reh Amanda Lickers has learned from the traditional knowledge passed to her is about "Life-giver teachings," which many consider to be the medicines that sustain life, help heal and that may make sense of the destruction happening to traditional lands. For Amanda, putting these teachings into practice for healing means grounding herself in the knowledge that we are not disconnected from the land. "Pay attention to your dreams, put tobacco under your pillow if you can remember it—if you can't, it's totally okay. But bring tobacco to water, or corn husk, or even your own saliva, or ashes from smudging if you have access to that—if not, just go there and bring your own self and just have the space where you can be able to chill with a tree, or a really powerful looking strawberry bush, or a big tall maple or a river...anything that is calling you to it. Just chill there for a while, and let them know what you're trying to do, and hopefully, you'll get feelings about it. Follow them."

Faith Spotted Eagle affirms this sentiment, and teaches that, "We pattern ourselves as Native people after Nature. The animals, the birds, all of them—they were our teachers. So that's us. And we get that from Mother Earth. ***You know, Mother Earth has a sound. And she has a mothering sound. And if you're real quiet you can hear that. Everything on the land is a teacher.***"



Environmental Violence and Environmental Growth (2015) | artwork by Megan Kanerahtenbáwi Whyte

Practice ceremony: Many of the women we spoke with emphasized the importance of practicing ceremony as an avenue toward healing and a doorway of teaching for the younger generations. Through these ceremonies, people are reminded of the sacredness of their bodies (which in turn offers them a deeper understanding of the sacredness of their lands). For April McGill, the rite of passage marking her coming of age as a woman instilled a life-long understanding about the need to safeguard her body, as well as its sacred connection to the Earth. ***“I think it’s really important for young women to have that ceremony, that rite of passage within their family...just showing our daughters and our sisters and nieces that it’s important, and that having your period and your time is so beautiful, and it’s special, and how sacred it is—your body is so sacred—and to protect it.”*** This rites of passage is also incredibly important for Indigenous men. “I think about how I try to teach [my son] to value women, be respectful of women,” April shares. “And I think that when it’s time for him to have that coming of age ceremony, he’ll be able to be that because he’s raised with strong women and strong men in his life, so he’ll be able to understand that.”

Whether done individually or collectively, these ceremonies provide the strength from which to draw. “What comes first is ceremony,” Chrissy Swain tells us during the Anishinaabe Water Walk, which she attends with her children. “That’s always the first thing. That tobacco...that’s where everything begins.”

Indigenous Feminist Land Defenders Speak Out:

Nihígaal bee Iiná Walkers

Our Journey for Existence

January 2014 marked the 150th anniversary of The Long Walk, when over 9,500 Diné were marched at gunpoint for hundreds of miles into Bosque Redondo, or *Hwééldi* (The Place of Suffering)—an internment camp near Fort Sumner, New Mexico, where they would be confined, and where many would die, until their return to Dinétah four years later. In tribute to that walk, a group of young Diné gathered and embarked upon Nihígaal bee Iiná, or “Our Journey For Existence” in early 2015. The journey, split into four walks over the course of the year, focused on women’s leadership, and the environmental violence Navajo communities experience from extractive industries like fracking, mining and pipelines. When part of our team joined the Walkers during their first 225-mile walk from *Dził Naa’oodilii* (Huerfano Mountain) to *Tsoodzil* (Mount Taylor) in January, they shared with us more about the trauma in their territories as well as the significance of their walk.

“[I remember] my experiences as a child, from growing up, being in school...being cornered and boys feeling me up,” Laura Red Elk from Pueblo Pintado shared. “And now I look at [our lands]...and it’s the same thing with industry coming in. They’re just taking advantage of the land.” The trauma of colonization, patriarchy, and now industry isn’t difficult to experience on the walk. These young people journey past a school that was shut down due to water contamination from surrounding oil wells, as well as idling cars held up by a gas tank explosion. They also talk to community members who have had family members murdered and are then offered money by the oil industry. But these personal experiences, like sexual violence or abuse, are rarely discussed. “There’s this saying in our community, *doo ajinída*. That means, ‘you don’t talk about it,’” explained Kim Smith from St. Michaels, Arizona.

But in response to the increasing violence in their homeland, Nihígaal bee Iiná is challenging this silence. According to Kim, “As a Navajo woman, you’re taught how much of an honor it is to be a woman—we’re a matrilineal society. But on the flipside, we’re not having conversations about really holding yourself as sacred... But I feel like there’s this spark growing of women really being empowered.” This spark is what began the journey

for these Walkers, and it has only grown the leadership of the young women participating. “How I’ve been able to progress in terms of what it means to be a Native women is from my sisters—learning from them, and teaching them and going through it together.”

This support system is critical as the Walkers witness the impact of industry on their lands. “[The industry’s] using our people,” says Laura. “They’re using our women and men [like] they’re just expendable. They’ll use them and then they’ll be gone. They’ll take advantage of them, and then they’ll leave.” This sentiment is based not only on what the Walkers have seen on their journey through impacted communities, but on a history of exploitation of Navajo workers by the uranium mining industry. The Walkers also spoke to a growing threat: “Our biggest concern here is when the man camps come in and the oil drillers come in,” Laura shares, particularly because, as Theresa Blair said, already “A lot of...young girls don’t feel safe in their own communities.”

Not only do the Walkers travel through these communities to listen to people’s stories, but they also hold community meetings to talk about the purpose of their walk and the concept of environmental violence. One teen that shared her experiences with the Walkers explained how in both Cuba, New Mexico where she goes to school and her home in Counselor, New Mexico, things have significantly changed. These days, when she waits at the local McDonalds or a gas station near her school for her mother, industry workers try to pick her up. At home, where she once did a lot of hiking in her people’s territories, which are now riddled with industry, she refuses to go out walking alone because she doesn’t feel safe. “And these are fifteen year-old girls,” Theresa shared. “It’s not that I’m shocked, but it was scary to actually hear that. And that they’re so young! They’re so young and they’re having to experience this. And they have no choice in it; they have no choice in whether this is going to happen or not.”

The lack of choice, or consent, or empowerment—is a form of violence in and of itself, and it serves as a key motivator for Nihígaal bee Iiná. “I feel like a lot of times, we don’t have a voice anymore. And ***I think creating space for [women and young people] to have that voice, what we did [during our Walk]—we said, come***



Nihigaal bee Iiná Walkers on part of their journey for their existence. | Credit: Nihigaal bee Iiná.

by, tell us what you're going through, tell us the things that are affecting you—and you could just tell, [these girls] were able to be heard,” said Theresa. “And I think a lot of the times people just want to be heard, and people just need to have those safe places for them to voice their voice, you know?”

For this group of walkers, this journey not only honors their history, but it strengthens their connections to their experiences, to each other, and to the land they work to defend. “We’re really trying to invoke in our young people that, yeah, we do have this connection to the land, and these are the ways that we do, and these are the prayers that were laid down, and then the prayers...

it strengthens,” Kim tells us. In the February 2015 press release issued by the Walkers after completing their first journey, Kim stated, “We are saying no more of this connected violence. Our land is being violenced and that violence is reflected upon our bodies. Whether it’s through sexual abuse due to increased man camps, contamination of breast milk due to toxins, spontaneous miscarriages, children born with developmental delays, those are all ways that violence upon the land directly impacts native women’s bodies...May as many women as possible walk with us and receive healing for whatever trauma they may carry, may they be restored simultaneously as our land heals because when we heal, our mother heals and when she heals, we heal.”

“We say Mother Earth...is our mother, and we are the children, and everything between us and earth is our umbilical cord. So...if we violate the earth, we violate those things...we poison ourselves”

— Laura Red Elk (Pueblo Pintado)

Legal Tools and Land/Body Defense

When discussing strategies to address environmental violence, many community members interviewed for this report emphasized the need to move away from circular responses to violence—meaning responses that, in their attempt to alleviate harm, end up causing more harm. Legal tools, while useful in many cases, can also be one of these unknowingly harmful responses. While we acknowledge that there are communities that feel differently, none of the community members we spoke to for this initiative requested that we focus this work on legal solutions to environmental violence. Therefore, for this report,

Transformative Resurgence and Environmental Violence:

In this context, transformative resurgence refers to efforts to create more options for justice—not simply the criminal justice system—through community-based organizing which supports Indigenous peoples directly impacted by colonial and state violence. This resurgence recognizes original teachings and cultural knowledge as spaces for transforming how Indigenous communities respond to violence (including state and environmental violence), while also supporting peer-led initiatives.

we aimed to focus on uplifting community-based leadership and successful advocacy strategies that offer immediate, accessible and holistic approaches to environmental violence.

One of the key reasons the law continues to be problematic as a legal tool in this instance is that rather than addressing the root causes of environmental violence, such as entrenched colonialism and patriarchy, legal and carceral responses serve as only a Band-Aid solution and may even go so far as to reify these systems of oppression. Furthermore, the law currently fails to recognize environmental violence as a cause of action. In other words, laws that aim to stop environmental destruction remain separate from laws aiming to stop violence on the bodies of Indigenous women and young people, making it difficult to effectively address what is a completely intersecting crisis. Perhaps the deepest challenge is that the tools available within the legal system require that Indigenous nations fit their responses to violence upon their lands, bodies and communities within frameworks imposed by colonial nation states, further denying their self-determination and sovereignty.¹⁰²

However, due to the attention legal and carceral approaches have had as well as the significant impacts it has on Indigenous communities, we briefly outline below both useful and problematic legal tools pertaining to environmental violence and extractive industry.¹⁰³

Strategy	What it offers	Problems that may arise
Developing Tribal/First Nation Policies ¹⁰⁴ (U.S. and Canada)	Allows communities to create their own culturally-based policies governing the actions of community-members within their territories. Gives communities an opportunity to recognize and codify environmental violence issues, as well as non-carceral responses to environmental violence.	Ability to govern the actions of non-community members or industry within tribal/First Nations territories may be limited by national laws and policies. There is a funding hurdle, as communities will need to have infrastructure in place to develop and carry out these policies. In the U.S., all tribal codes must be approved by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, which may reinforce oppressive, colonial relationships and frameworks.
Treaty Rights (U.S. and Canada)	Tribes/First Nations may have certain rights enumerated in their treaties or other agreements, which they can use to bring suit against the government for failure to protect those rights. Mostly used to protect the environment through rights to hunt, trap, or fish, which may protect human health by default.	May be problematic when tribes/First Nations allow industry onto their lands. There is a funding hurdle, as communities must secure legal counsel. Does not address environmental violence, such as sexual health impacts happening on people's bodies.
Anti-Human Trafficking Laws and Policies (U.S. and Canada)	May provide increased policing for communities impacted by human trafficking as a result of industry and workers' camps. May provide additional services for survivors of violence. Tribes/First Nations are able to develop/enforce their own policies.	Carceral approaches may foster circular responses to violence. Current models don't address environmental violence or its root causes, namely the way violence on people's bodies is connected to/exacerbated by violence on people's lands. There is a funding hurdle, as communities will need to have infrastructure in place to develop and carry out these policies. Policing of Indigenous women's bodies and labeling of their experiences may reinforce oppressive, colonial relationships and frameworks.

Strategy	What it offers	Problems that may arise
Criminal Jurisdiction ¹⁰⁵ (U.S.)	Brought by the tribe or federal government against an individual for violation of a criminal law. When a non-Native person commits a crime against a Native person, the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction over the crime unless it falls under Special Domestic Violence criminal jurisdiction (VAWA). When a Native person commits certain major crimes against a Native person, the federal government (and most likely, the tribe) has jurisdiction. If the crime is not considered a major crime, the tribe has jurisdiction. ¹⁰⁶	In the U.S., tribal criminal jurisdiction is extremely complicated and limited. ¹⁰⁷ Carceral approaches may foster circular responses to violence. To exercise jurisdiction, communities need infrastructure in place that mimics and may reify oppressive, colonial relationships and frameworks. Doesn't address environmental violence or its root causes, namely the way violence on people's bodies is connected to/ exacerbated by violence on people's lands. Lack of appropriate response from justice system when violence is reported. Burden is on survivor. Responsive, rather than preventative.
Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) 2013 ¹⁰⁸ (U.S.)	When the U.S. Congress reauthorized VAWA in 2013, it included a restoration of tribal criminal jurisdiction over non-tribal members in cases of domestic violence, dating violence, and criminal violations of orders of protection. Beginning March 7, 2015, any tribe may exercise this jurisdiction if they meet certain requirements.	Doesn't cover sexual assaults outside of intimate relationships. May not apply to youth or elders outside of specific circumstances. Carceral approaches may foster circular responses to violence. To exercise jurisdiction, communities need to have infrastructure in place that mimics and may reinforce oppressive, colonial relationships and frameworks. Doesn't address environmental violence or its root causes, namely the way violence on people's bodies is connected to/ exacerbated by violence on people's lands. Responsive, rather than preventative.
Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples ¹⁰⁹ (U.S. and Canada)	"Emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to live in dignity, to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their self-determined development, in keeping with their own needs and aspirations." ¹¹⁰ States that Indigenous peoples have the right to free, prior and informed consent on decisions impacting Indigenous communities and lifeways.	While an important inroad and tool in furthering the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous peoples, countries face little threat of repercussions if they do not abide by this non-legally binding declaration. Does not expressly name or address environmental violence.

Could policy change help to alleviate some of the issues arising from these legal responses to environmental violence? Significant changes would need to be made, not least of which is for colonial nation states to begin truly respecting the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous nations. This change often appears to be an insurmountable challenge, as entire legal frameworks have been built upon the subjugation of these very rights. True transformation will happen when all communities begin honoring both the traditional and new leadership roles of Indigenous women and young people, who are often best positioned to identify and develop solutions to the issues they, and their families, face. Furthermore, to avoid circular responses to violence, communities might choose to focus their approaches more on developing and supporting culturally appropriate community-building strategies that encourage harm reduction and healing practices, and less on creating broad policies of criminalization.

For more on these community-based advocacy strategies aimed at supporting young Indigenous women leaders resisting environmental violence, see our accompanying Toolkit.

There also needs to be a formal recognition of *environmental violence* as a concept, as well as the incorporation of environmental violence language and responses into all governing legal systems that aim to address these harms. As previously discussed, through the advocacy efforts of organizations such as the International Indian Treaty Council and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, the United Nations has already formally recognized this term and the interconnectedness of the issues that impact Indigenous women in industry-impacted communities. Advocacy can and should be done to urge the United States and Canada to follow suit, and begin to consider these impacts when promoting and green-lighting any natural resource development projects on public lands near Indigenous territories.

Indigenous Feminist Land Defenders Speak Out:

Naomi Sayers

The Colonial Agenda, Resource Extraction, and the Policing of Indigenous Bodies

Throughout the work of this initiative, we witnessed a widespread concern and legitimate fear for the continued exploitation of Indigenous women and girls in areas impacted by extractive industries such as fracking. Unfortunately, many of the anti-trafficking laws developed as a response to a desperate situation are shortsighted in that they have yet to address the connection between the exploitation of Indigenous lands and bodies, as well as the ways increased policing of Indigenous bodies

can ignore an individual's right to self-determination and, in some cases, breed more violence for those already made most vulnerable to harm.

Naomi Sayers is an Indigenous Feminist, activist, law student, and former sex worker from the Garden River First Nation, just east of Sault Ste Marie, Ontario. She is also the author of the blog *Kwe Today*, a safe space on the Internet for Naomi and others to share their thoughts and experiences on a diverse range of topics, but particularly those that impact women. The word *Kwe* means "woman" in Naomi's language, Anishinabemowin.

Naomi's writing and activism around sex worker rights, extractive industries, and other issues impacting Indigenous women, Two Spirits and young people offers a critical perspective to the topic of environmental violence. We are honored to include her voice on the colonial agenda of states, resource extraction and the policing of Indigenous bodies in the following essay.

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In Afua Cooper's *The Hanging of Angelique*, Cooper provides a succinct definition for slavery within a Canadian context. Cooper writes,

*A useful definition of slavery is the robbery of one's freedom and labour by another, usually a more powerful person. Violence and coercion are used to carry out the theft and to keep the slave captive in the condition of bondage and servitude. This definition applies to slavery in Canada. Laws were enacted and institutions created to rob persons of their freedom and labour and keep them in perpetual servitude (emphasis added). In the earliest era of colonial rule in Canada, both Aboriginal people and Africans and their descendants were enslaved (Aboriginal slaves were colloquially termed 'Panis'). From 1428 to 1833, slavery was a legal and acceptable institution in both French and British Canada was vigorously practised.*¹¹¹

I emphasize Cooper's words in the above definition because it is important to remember how laws and institutions continue to rob Indigenous peoples of their own freedom and labour, and keep Indigenous peoples in perpetual servitude, within both Canada and the United States.

There exists a heightened concern for the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls on both sides of our colonial borders and rightfully so. Far too

often do we hear or read about another Indigenous woman or girl going missing and sometimes being found murdered near sites of increased resource extraction. The collective response to this social issue tends to be increased policing and increased criminalization of Indigenous sexualities and bodies, as if Indigenous sexualities and bodies are part of the problem. But when have Indigenous sexualities or bodies ever been the source of the problem? We have only been the problem inasmuch as colonialism has been our problem.

If we begin to turn our attention to the social and economic factors which surround the realities of Indigenous peoples living near or around sites of increased resource extraction, we begin to see a different picture: laws are enacted and institutions are created to rob Indigenous peoples of their freedom and labour, and keep them in perpetual servitude. Further, in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith recognizes the challenge of focusing solely on the "'indigenous' (or its substitutes)" as the "problem...rather than with other social or structural issues"¹¹² especially as it pertains to settlers' responses to social issues, like missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two Spirit folks. The settler response to these social issues only solidify and validate their own institutions, like the criminal justice system, instead of validating or (at minimum) even acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty over body and land.

We see settler responses manifesting itself through the definition of human trafficking (or often termed, labour or sex trafficking) which focuses on the movement and control of bodies. Instead of focusing on the increased movement of settlers to our traditional territories to mine and extract resources from Mother Earth, we see an increased

focus on Indigenous bodies and sexualities. What about the violence to the land? By continuing to focus on the movement of the bodies that surround these sites of violence, without acknowledging the increased movement of bodies to the actual sites, we ignore how violence is created and maintained especially through the creation of laws and institutions that rob Indigenous peoples of their freedom and labour.

In *I am Woman*, Lee Maracle highlights the aims of the colonial agenda from an Indigenous woman's perspective. Lee Maracle writes, "the aims of the colonizer are to break up communities and families, and to destroy the sense of nationhood and the spirit of co-operation among the colonized."¹¹³ Maracle reminds us of the colonial agenda in relation to the increasing concern over trafficking in Indigenous women and girls. The colonial agenda persists through the conceptualization of trafficking victims, increased criminalization of same and increased policing of our communities. Anti-prostitution and anti-human trafficking legislation continues to police Indigenous bodies and sexuality, and allows for the increasing exploitation of Indigenous lands for economic profit by ignoring the injustices that Indigenous people experience due to [Canada and the United States'] colonial agenda. In order to address the continued exploitation of Indigenous women and girls, there needs to be connections drawn between the colonial agenda and the policing of Indigenous bodies, either as victims or perpetrators.

To help alleviate the issue of relying on the criminal justice system to protect Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit folks, I have thought about ways that communities can respond to the social issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two Spirit people immediately.

First, we can create safer spaces for Indigenous people who work in the sex trade, regardless of their status (trafficked victim vs. consenting worker). These safer spaces can include space to sleep, change, shower, check in after working or going to a call—all without judgment or fear of being arrested. Second, we can offer to be a safe call for when someone goes out to a party or when someone who works in the sex trade visits a client. Third, we can help keep track of the "bad clients" of those who work in the sex trade, instead of focusing on the actions of the sex trade worker themselves, or we can keep track of the descriptions of those who perpetuate sexual assaults and gender-based violence. Communities can create a response team that does not include law enforcement, but engages with law enforcement only when necessary.

When people ask for help, ask them what that help looks like for that person in both the short and long term. Communities should acknowledge that sex trade workers have a solid understanding of how exploitation takes place, and sex trade workers usually build connections to help keep themselves safe when working alone or in groups. Also, communities can include sex trade workers in building community responses surrounding man camps.

Communities should understand that not all offers to help are genuine and that help should take place on the terms—without judgment—of the person who needs help. People are their own experts. Finally, in the end, we must also look at how the laws that are enacted purportedly to offer real and tangible support or protection in fact fail to do so, and we should work to end the criminalization of Indigenous peoples resulting from the exploitation of their lands and bodies.

CONCLUSION

“Women are the first environment. We are privileged to be the doorway to life. At the breast of women, the generations are nourished and sustained. From the bodies of women flow the relationship of these generations both to society and to the natural world. In this way is the earth our mother, the old people said. In this way, we as women are earth.”

– Katsi Cook (Mohawk)¹¹⁴

The lived experiences and deep impacts of environmental violence we heard about during our year of testimony gathering and community visits lay out the difficult and dangerous reality Indigenous women and young people face on a daily basis. At this moment in time, the story goes like this: industries are often allowed to extract resources from Indigenous lands with very little regard for people’s safety and well-being. **As some of those who offered their testimonies shared, the end goal of colonization has always been the erasure of Indigenous peoples in order to gain access to their lands and territories. This is why women and young people—those who carry forward life and create the next generation—have been, and continue to be, those most heavily impacted by the processes of patriarchy, land dispossession and violence.**

We’ve borne witness to the health disparities that communities face—from cancers, to mental health issues, to birth ratio abnormalities, to toxins in women’s breast milk. We’ve learned about the increase in chronic social stressors in boomtowns, where the numbers of non-Native peoples are increasing exponentially (without an increase in cultural competency education, social services, or protections for Indigenous

populations). We know that addictions among community members are rising, and that there is an epidemic of women and young people who are experiencing sexual violence, going missing, or being murdered. All this is irreparably damaging the social fabric of these communities. And we’re also reminded of the ways industries support, and are supported by, oppressive and colonial systems that dismantle traditional knowledge, cultures and governance systems, and divide Indigenous communities and families.

There is no question that resisting environmental violence is an uphill battle. The systems that support extractive industries while simultaneously failing to support Indigenous communities are entrenched in every economic, governmental and regulatory process that exists—and the same story plays out around the world. Indeed, in 2014, the U.S. was reaffirmed as the world’s largest oil producer—with 12.4 million barrels per day—after overtaking Saudi Arabia and Russia.¹¹⁵ The U.S. is also the world’s largest oil consumer.¹¹⁶ According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), U.S. oil output “will surge to 13.1 million barrels a day in 2019 and plateau thereafter... The country will lose its top-producer ranking at the start of the 2030’s.”¹¹⁷ Canada was also

named the world's fifth largest oil producer, with an output of 4.3 million barrels per day.¹¹⁸ Major multinational oil companies such as ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips and Chevron remain among North America's most lucrative corporations. And in politics, much of the rhetoric surrounding job growth and climate stability extols the virtues of "natural gas" as clean energy and our lack of reliance on foreign oil as the end goal. Some of the available literature also claims that, on a broad level, the future is looking bright for petroleum-refining industries, at least in the U.S.¹¹⁹

But people, organizations, agencies and international bodies—even those that support natural resource development—also recognize the violence that resource extraction causes. The United Nations Development Program has recognized that the risks related to "natural resource wealth" include: volatile economic growth; limited job creation; violent conflicts; corruption; environmental degradation; gender violence; and the spread of HIV and AIDS among communities impacted by extraction activities.¹²⁰ Furthermore, as we have seen with recent successes such as the anti-Keystone XL movements—communities are rising up to resist

dirty development and the trauma it causes. Talking with these environmental violence resisters, and witnessing their individual and collective resiliency, strengthens our conviction that supporting these efforts in any way we can is the most important step to take. Our conviction has led us to publishing this report and the testimonies it includes. We document and share the experiences of Indigenous community members in an attempt to offer firsthand accounts from those on the frontlines. We do this to support international, national, local, and tribal/First Nations advocacy efforts to curtail extractive industry, uplift land/body defense efforts, educate the public, and amplify the voices of our most impacted communities. These communities are too often invisibilized by colonization, race, systematic disenfranchisement, and gender-based violence.

But, we also recognize that sharing these experiences places only one brick in the wall of our cumulative resistance. So, in response to the needs expressed by the women and young people interviewed over the course of this initiative, our team developed a toolkit that grassroots communities can use to bolster their advocacy strategies. Some of these community-based



Credit: Jen Castro, Creative Commons

tools are successful strategies that have been shared with us by community members, while others have been developed by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. The toolkit is meant to be a practical resource that can be implemented by communities to immediately and effectively reduce the harm they are experiencing because of environmental violence. In this way, we hope that the *Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies* report will raise awareness and, above all else, respond effectively to the needs of our relatives living in impacted territories across Turtle Island^{xvii}.

Environmental violence is a new concept, not yet fully rooted in the public lexicon. Indigenous women have largely led the movement to recognize this term, as it speaks to the interconnectedness of movements—plagued by artificial barriers erected to maintain focus and momentum—but mostly of very real human experience. Indigenous communities are not experiencing one trauma at a time. The injustices that happen to Indigenous women often happen

because they are women *and* Indigenous. Likewise, the trauma Indigenous women’s bodies experience because of environmental destruction happens because they are women, because they are Indigenous, because of the colonial legacies with which their communities live, and because the environment is considered an inexhaustible resource to be sold, purchased and exploited. The intersections are endless, and so, if our work is to be effective, our responsibility is to meet this trauma at these intersections. This is what resisting environmental violence looks like.

The people you have met in this report are working and living at the frontlines of impacted communities. There are also many other organizations supporting critical efforts to defend our lands and bodies. We urge you to learn about these organizations, and the ways in which you can engage to support the leadership of young Indigenous women who are resisting environmental violence in all its forms. **Everything connected to the land is connected to our bodies.**



Credit: Nibígaal bee Iná.

^{xvii} The name Indigenous nations such as the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe use to refer to the region of the world now known as North America. The name Turtle Island comes down through traditional creation stories.

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Tan'si and Aloha:

This initiative would not be possible without so many people. Therefore, it is offered up with the deepest respect and gratitude to our relatives whose lands and bodies have been, and continue to be, impacted by the destruction and violence of extractive industries.

To our dear sisters who have shared their experiences with us, we give thanks for your strength, for your spirits of resistance, and for gifting this work with your voices: Lyncia Begay, Nathana Bird, Vanessa Gray, Kim Howe, W.C.K., Iako'tsi:rareh Amanda Lickers, April McGill, the Nihígaal béé Íina Walkers, Faith and Brook Spotted Eagle, Chelsea Sunday, Melina Laboucan-Massimo, Naomi Sayers and Chrissy Swain, thank you.

We send love to all those who fight for consent and self-determination over our bodies as Indigenous peoples, as this intimate fight is also a fight for the land, waters and all of creation. To those who break down the binaries/boundaries of the spaces of land/body, we support you.

To the mothers, grandmothers and aunties whose wisdom has guided not only this report, but this movement, we honor you.

To the four-legged, the water, the land, the air, and the fish, we give thanks for your strength, and the sustenance and medicines you give to us so that we can live.

To all those who gave their time and energy to ensure that these stories came to light, we give thanks that you recognized the urgent need to get this information out, and believed in our ability to do so. To our teams at Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Women's Earth Alliance—staff, youth leaders, interns, volunteers and friends—and to Professor Sarah Deer, and law students Ella Phillips and Emily Parks, thank you for your support, skill and expertise.

And to the funders and supporters who believed in this vision from its' birth and gave your resources so that we could bring it to life, we thank you.

All our relations,

Erin Marie Konsmo (Métis/Cree)
Co-Author
Native Youth Sexual Health Network

A.M. Kahealani Pacheco (Kanaka Maoli)
Co-Author
Women's Earth Alliance

GLOSSARY + RELATED TERMS

Allottees: Individuals who own parcels of land on Native American reservations, which is held in trust by the United States government.

Chronic social stressors: Ongoing pollution and the accompanying social stressors caused by development and industry that impact and divide communities. These include increased mental health concerns, violence against Indigenous women, children and families, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, incarceration, child removal and suicide.

Cis: Person who identifies with their assigned gender/sex at birth.

Cis-sexism/Cis-supremacy: The power structure that privileges cis people over trans people or people who do not comply with Western assumptions of gender.

Environmental justice: A grassroots response to environmental racism valuing respect, the health of our communities and the Earth, and protection from discrimination, dispossession and exploitation, etc. This is different from environmental equity, which is the governmental response to environmental racism that values “fair treatment and meaningful involvement.”

Environmental racism: The disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color.

Environmental violence: The disproportionate and often devastating impacts that the conscious and deliberate proliferation of environmental toxins and industrial development (including extraction, production, export and release) have on Indigenous women, children and future generations, without regard from States or corporations for their severe and ongoing harm.

Extractive Industry: The companies and activities involved in removing oil, metals, coal, stone and other natural resources from the earth.

Fracking: Hydraulic fracturing by pressurized liquid, which is used to release natural gas from underground rock. A high pressure fluid, usually made up of chemicals and sand suspended in water, is injected into deep rock formations to create cracks, making vast caches of natural gas, previously trapped in buried rock, accessible.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent: An internationally accepted principle that recognizes Indigenous peoples’ inherent and prior rights to their lands and resources and respects their legitimate authority to require that third parties enter into an equal and respectful relationship with them, based on the principle of informed consent.

Generational poverty: To continue to experience poverty for at least 2 generations; not having any assets to pass on to future generations.

Hetero-normative patriarchy: A colonial construct which creates a social norm assuming that all of our romantic or sexual relationships are heterosexual (i.e. between a woman and man), and creates a hierarchy of power in which men benefit from systems at the expense of women and Two Spirits. These dynamics often result in certain qualities, types of labor and even voices or lives being valued more than others.

Land-based movements: Movements that focus on defending the rights of people to exercise self-determination within certain territories. For Indigenous communities, land-based movements can also refer to movements in defense of the rights of the earth.

Land trauma: Embodied feelings of breeched consent over lands and bodies; the emotional and spiritual suffering experienced by Indigenous peoples as a result of physical attacks on their lands and waters; a term that speaks to the emotional and spiritual experiences of loss of land and identity. This also includes feelings of loss as Indigenous peoples witness other living things (such as buffalo, wild rice, salmon, etc.) suffer or disappear as a result of these attacks. Can also refer to feelings of grief and pain that have been inferred or absorbed through Indigenous lands and waters. Land trauma is different for each person, as Indigenous Nations have different histories of contamination and displacement, and the severity can vary depending on which part of one's heritage/identity has been violated (i.e. desecration of an origin place).

LGBTTIQQA: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, Asexual

Man camp / Workers camp: Temporary employee housing for oilfield workers. Some communities have reported both documented, company-regulated camps, and undocumented camps, which often are simply unregulated tracks of land with 50-100 trailers that ranchers or farmers rent out to industry employees.

National Sacrifice Zone: An area so contaminated or so depleted of its natural resources that it is unlikely to be able to sustain life.

Precautionary Principle: The principle that when an activity is reasonably expected to cause some threat or harm to the public or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken or it should be avoided altogether.

Rape culture: A term coined by feminists in the United States in the 1970's to show the ways in which society blamed victims of sexual assault and normalized male sexual violence.

Reproductive justice: The right to have children or not, and to parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments. It is based on the

human right to make personal decisions about one's life, and the obligation of government and society to ensure that the conditions are suitable for implementing one's decisions.

Risk (future generations): Risk assessment is often used for deciding what is an acceptable risk in regards to industry and development. Many Indigenous people/communities have argued that current risk assessment measures do not take into account the impacts on future generations.

Rites of Passage: Rites of passage are ceremonies and/or a series of events that mark transitions within a person's life.

Self-determination: The support for Indigenous peoples to make decisions for themselves based on their own lived experiences and within the context of their different cultures and communities.

Terra Nullius: A Latin expression meaning 'nobody's land'; refers to a legal concept colonial nation states used to justify the conquering of Indigenous lands. This concept is still used today as justification for resource extraction.

Turtle Island: The name Indigenous nations such as the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe use to refer to the region of the world now known as North America. The name Turtle Island comes down through traditional creation stories.

Two Spirit: An umbrella term for Indigenous people who identify as LGBTTIQQA, gender non-conforming, gender queer and/or non-binary.

Violenced: Term used in this report to describe the horrendous amounts of unspecified violence directed at a person, a group of people, or the land.

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VIOLENCE ON THE LAND, VIOLENCE ON OUR BODIES

Building an Indigenous Response
to Environmental Violence

A toolkit by Native Youth Sexual Health
Network and Women's Earth Alliance





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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

Connected to Body, Connected to Land

The concept of environmental violence is embodied in the phrase *Connected to Body, Connected to Land*, which means that whatever happens to the land and the environment(s) around us (either for good or bad) also happens to our bodies and our communities.

In order to support communities in talking about and working more from an understanding of these connections, Indigenous women, youth and Two Spirit people suggested that our team develop a toolkit. They also recommended that this toolkit include workshop activities, resources on how to care for our bodies while doing frontline land defense work, strategies for addressing rape culture and land trauma, and a tool to document environmental violence.

These practical tools aim to help Indigenous communities identify the connections between the way their bodies and lands are being impacted, and provide the means to combat the dangers of environmental violence. Most importantly, this toolkit offers both guidance and support for developing and strengthening culturally-rooted, nation-specific responses to the unrelenting land/body traumas Indigenous communities face.

This toolkit accompanies a longer collection of community stories produced by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Women's Earth Alliance, which includes the experiences of Indigenous women, youth and Two Spirit/gender diverse people who are experiencing and resisting environmental violence.

What is Environmental Violence?

Environmental violence: The disproportionate and often devastating impacts that the conscious and deliberate proliferation of environmental toxins and industrial development (including extraction, production, export and release) have on Indigenous women, children and future generations, without regard from States or corporations for their severe and ongoing harm.

Chronic Social Stressors: Ongoing social stressors caused by development and industry that impact and divide communities. These include increased mental health concerns, violence against Indigenous women, children, and families, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, incarceration, child removal, and suicide. Chronic social stresses are examples of environmental violence.

Forms of Environmental Violence

Reproductive health issues (e.g. birth defects, infertility)

Cancer and other illnesses

Chronic social stressors, like:

Sexual, domestic and family violence

Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls & Two Spirits

HIV and other sexually transmitted infections

Increased crime in communities

Increased rates of incarceration

Increased drug and alcohol use in communities

Suicide (particularly among young people)

Land trauma and dispossession

Loss of culture and self-determination

Divisions in families and communities

Child removal

Mental health concerns

Poverty

Using this Toolkit

The activities and community stories that follow can be used for developing conversations about environmental violence. Included are activity instructions, their purpose and goals, and the supplies or templates you will need.

The overarching goal is to create a space in which your community can discuss the nation- and community-specific impacts of environmental violence in your area, as well as how to address them. It is critical to make workshop activities or land-based conversations nation- and community-specific. While the following activities are focused on building community-based solutions, legal and policy strategies can also be used.

We've also included one 8-page mini-zine as a resource that can be photocopied and replicated for workshops, teach-ins and an example of what you can create on your own to share information with community members. There is also a glossary at the end to help build vocabulary about environmental violence.

Important note: *These activities/exercises will have you and your participants moving through the land/body trauma you all may be experiencing. As you work through this toolkit, it is important to have nation-specific medicines, such as cedar tea, available to help with feelings of grief and pain that participants may experience. For this reason, a section on medicines for our bodies is included to provide examples of this type of support. Be sure to also provide time and space for participants to process these feelings, and bear witness for one another. As we name violence, we begin to find ways to heal from it.*

ACTIVITIES, WORKSHOPS + ICEBREAKERS

Activity 1: Gender/Sexual Identity and the Land (Not Your Land Binary)

Connecting with the land, defending the land and our relationship to the land as nations should not reinforce violent binaries in which certain people are left out of our communities. Within land-based work we must remember that there are more than two genders (female/male) that exist on the land, otherwise we often exclude Two Spirit, gender non-conforming and non-binary people.

Reminders about gender/sexuality and land:

- **Part of the diversity of creation (land/water/four-legged) is that non-binary life exists and is critical to the survival of our nations and communities.**
- **While on the land we can support different forms of gender/sexualities.**

As Alex Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree Nation) shared with us in a personal communication on July 8, 2015:

“We call the moon grandmother and the earth mother in English but in Cree that isn’t the case. What is important is the relational aspect acknowledging some kind of kinship. In Cree, the land (aski) is not gendered... Same for water. It’s not gendered but it has a spirit of life and it’s fluid.”



Water and manoomin (wild rice) along the Treaty 3 Anishinaabe Water Walk.

Instructions:

This activity is best done out on the land.

Have participants pick something out about their surrounding environment (land/water/etc.). Then have them talk about the element that they've chosen and their relationship to it without gendering the element or that relationship.

Example: This is river. It is made up of water. The river provides us with water to drink. My relationship to water is....

The key messages of this activity are:

- **We all have a relationship to creation (land/water/four legged, etc.).**
- **The relationships that we have to creation are not tied to certain body parts. Our relationships to creation are fluid, just like some peoples' genders.**
- **Support Two Spirit, Queer, LGBTTQQIA people to choose how they relate to the land (i.e. If they want to protect/care for the water).**
- **Creating life comes in many forms (not just inside the womb).**
- **We don't need to gender the land/water/etc. in order to be able to have a relationship with it.**

Many thanks to Alex Wilson, Sarah Hunt & Iako'tsi:rareh Amanda Lickers for their guidance/mentorship.

Activity 2: Our Bodies and Lands are Not Empty (Terra Nullius)

Materials needed:

“Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius” image
(print or photocopy enough for all participants or for break out groups)

Paper (for notes)

Markers (for note-taking)

Time: **30-45 mins**

Instructions:

Provide participants with a definition of *terra nullius*.

Terra Nullius: a Latin expression meaning ‘nobody’s land,’ which was a legal concept used as justification that lands were empty and therefore open for colonization, conquering and resources extraction. This legal concept has also been used as justification that Indigenous bodies are empty and open for conquering.

Share the “Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius” image with participants and have them describe what they see in the image and what those elements might mean.

Have participants answer the questions:

- **How are Indigenous territories (water and land) considered to be empty?**
- **How are Indigenous bodies considered to be empty?**

For further discussion, have participants strategize about how we can resist the assumption that our bodies/territories are empty.

Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius



"Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius" Image for Activity 2

Activity 3: Connect it!

Materials needed:

Post-It notes (3 different colors)

Markers

Flipchart paper

Time: **30-40 mins**

Instructions:

Divide participants into even groups. Ask them to either appoint a writer, or to ensure everyone tells each other what they are writing. Pass out the Post-It notes so that each group has three different colours.

On one colour of Post-It note, have participants write down all the words they can think of relating to “environment” (one word per Post-It note).

Do the same for the words “resource extraction” and the word “gender” using the other two colours of Post-It notes.

Ask participants to form word combinations (3 words in each combination, using one word from each colour) by identifying connections between the words. Finish by having representatives from each group present what they did to the larger group.

Examples of Word Combinations:

- **Environment, Resource Extraction, Gender**
- **Environment, Resource Extraction, Sexual or Reproductive Health**
- **Environment, Youth, Health**

Note: Different words can be used in different contexts.

Activity 4: Building Cultures of Consent for our Bodies and Lands

Time: 45 mins - 1 hour

Instructions:

Over-arching question:

For Indigenous peoples, consent is often talked about as relating to both our bodies and land. There are many nation-specific understandings of consent in our communities. How do these nation-specific consent processes look in relation to our bodies and lands?

Break participants up into groups and have them work with one of the following quotes:

“Cultures of consent aren’t normalized anymore, and deep understandings of respect, humility and honor have been abolished in a way. Everything from the family to the Longhouse—our traditional governance system—has been affected by industry and affected by the way industry operates in our territories and operates on our bodies.”

– Iako’tsi:raeh Amanda Lickers (Turtle Clan, Seneca)

“We continue to see the principles of patriarchy embedded in old colonial values, which play out in Canadian society today. The industrial system of resource extraction in Canada is predicated on systems of power and domination. This system is based on the raping and pillaging of Mother Earth as well as violence against women. The two are inextricably linked. With the expansion of extractive industries, not only do we see desecration of the land, we see an increase in violence against women. Rampant sexual violence against women and a variety of social ills result from the influx of transient workers in and around workers’ camps.”

– Melina Laboucan-Massimo (Lubicon Cree Nation)

Have groups come back and discuss/debrief the quotes that they were given.

Have participants create their own definition of land/body consent based off of these larger conversations.

Activity 5: Comparing Free Prior and Informed Consent for Land/Body

Time: 30 - 45 mins

Instructions:

Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a process that is applicable to both Indigenous lands and bodies. The goal of this activity is to have participants apply FPIC to an example that combines both aspects. Have participants work in groups.

Define and explain FPIC:

Free Prior and Informed Consent: An internationally accepted principle that recognizes Indigenous peoples’ inherent and prior rights to their lands and resources, and respects their legitimate authority to require that third parties enter into an equal and respectful relationship with them, based on the principle of informed consent.

Free: Consent is freely given without intimidation, coercion, etc.

Prior: Consent is given prior to a project/procedure/action, etc.

Informed: Information about the project/procedure/action, including options/alternatives, are shared in a way that is culturally safe.

Consent: Consensual ongoing agreement about a project/procedure/action on the land or your body.

Share the following example:

An Indigenous woman goes into a hospital to receive emergency services around a miscarriage. When she goes to the hospital she is clearly under duress and in pain. She also goes to the hospital with 4 of her children. While waiting for care in the emergency room, she hears a nurse say, “Someone should teach these Indians how to use birth control and they wouldn’t be having these problems”. While waiting for care, the woman’s condition worsens and she is rushed into surgery during which time someone requests she sign a paper. When she wakes up and is told about the procedure, she finds out that during the operation they had completed a permanent sterilization.

Have participants talk about the issues of FPIC in this case and what could have been done to achieve FPIC.

Share the following information after working through the above example:

.....

A study conducted between 2004 and 2005 found that 39% of the women in Aamjiwnaang, a community with high levels of chemical processing, had suffered at least one stillbirth or miscarriage. This environmental violence is a form of sterilization that is often not discussed. Given the historical legacies of sterilization of Indigenous people, we need to also be talking about the ways in which this is extended by violence on the land.

.....

After participants have worked through each of these examples, have them discuss how FPIC is connected to issues concerning Indigenous bodies and the land.

Additional question: What are strategies of resistance that can uphold FPIC for both Indigenous bodies and lands?



Activity 6: Building a Process of Consent

Materials needed:

Land and Body Consent process sheets
(print or photocopy enough for all participants)

Markers

Instructions:

It is important to talk about nation-specific processes of consent for both our bodies and the land. When we have processes of consent drawn out for both our bodies and the land (and how they are related) we are more easily able to identify when that consent is violated. Working on a process of consent for our bodies also helps us to understand what that looks like for each of us personally in relation to our sexual health.

Have participants fill out the **land consent process sheet** by instructing them to create a path for what they believe the consent process should look like for a resource-related industry trying to gain access to their communities. The numbers on the sheet represent the various steps of their process.

Have participants fill out the same consent process sheet (they can use the opposite side of the sheet) for their bodies.

If you have access to outside/pavement:

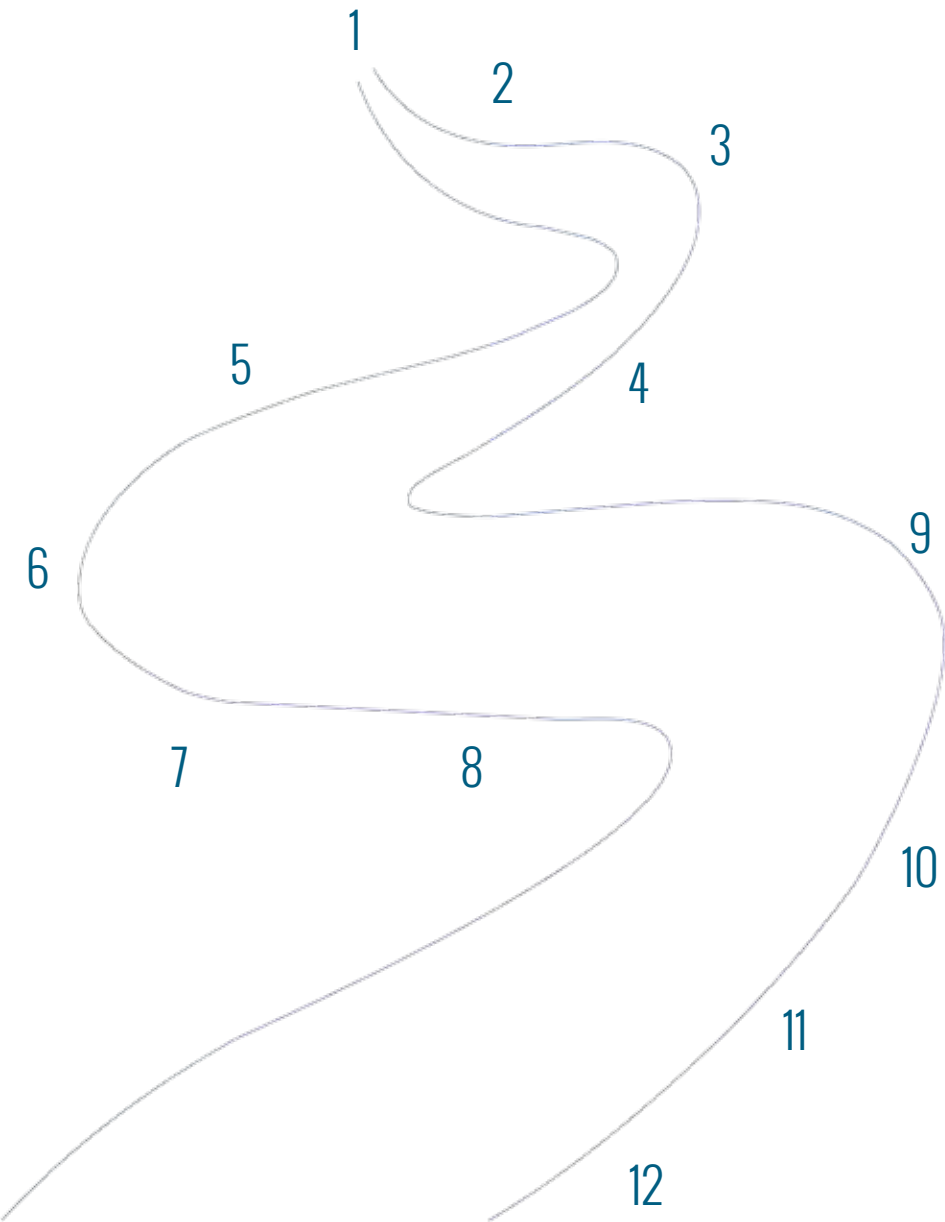
Sidewalk chalk can be used to draw out what the consent processes should look like. You can also use rocks/sticks/etc. then have people write each of the steps of their consent process down on sheets of paper. This makes the activity land-based and more interactive.

Debrief the consent processes they outline for both.

Key messages people are working towards:

- **Consent is a process and spectrum (more than YES/NO)**
- **Consent on the land and consent on our bodies can intersect**
- **Consent on the land and our bodies are similar/different**
- **Consent for our bodies and lands does not happen in isolation of each other.**

Land and Body Consent Process Sheet for Activity 6



Activity 7: Moon Time Bracelets and Environmental Health

This activity is adapted from the Sacred Sistas Project

Materials needed:

Green beads

Black beads

White beads

Blue beads

String

Scissors

Time: **Approximately 1 hour**

Instructions:

The goals of this activity are to create a beaded menstrual cycle (moon time) bracelet, have participants talk about moon time, and to discuss reproductive health, the health of our bodies and the health of the land. We've included this activity as a way to renew teachings about our bodies and simultaneously talk about how they are impacted by industry.

For example, young people in communities such as Akwesasne have seen the impacts of environmental violence on their moon time cycles and puberty. Studies have shown that in Akwesasne, toxins like PCBs—which were introduced into the lands and waters of their territories by industry—have been linked to an early-onset of moon time in girls, among other bodily health impacts.

One of the steps communities—young women and people on their moon time—can take is to be aware of their moon time cycles, and these bracelets can support that. This activity is a reminder that as we come of age, our bodies are connected to the land.

GREEN BEADS [Represent menstruation days]

Discuss the quote on the next page about the land and our bodies, from Chelsea Sunday (Turtle Clan). This quote can help teach people to be aware of how industry can impact young people while in early stages of their development.

BLACK BEADS [Represent regular days]

BLUE BEADS [Represent fertile days]

Discuss the quote on the next page about the water and our bodies, from Alexa Lesperance (Naotkamegwanning First Nation). This quote reminds us that “water is life” and that we all start in water (the womb) before joining this earth.

WHITE BEADS [Represent ovulation]

Discuss the quotes while stringing beads of the corresponding colors onto the bracelet.

Begin by stringing 5 green beads, symbolic of a persons menstrual or “period” days, followed by 8 black beads representing regular days, then 3 blue beads representing potential fertile days. Next will come one white pearly bead that represents the ovulation day and then one more blue bead. Finally, add 10 black beads to represent the regular days of a cycle.

Tie the end of the string to the beginning to form a bracelet.



Example Moon Time Bracelet

Quote to use to discuss **GREEN BEADS** (the land and our bodies):

“Girls in our community were experiencing the onset of puberty at much earlier ages, and boys were experiencing it later. And mothers who were carrying or breastfeeding children...the PCBs could pass through their placenta and breast milk. [This study also found high rates of infertility and polycystic ovarian syndrome, as well as high levels of hypothyroidism].

It made me angry because, just over the last couple of years, I’ve been diagnosed with hypothyroidism and polycystic ovarian syndrome...[And I’m] starting to get nervous because I have two children and I breastfed them both, and I feel like I’m [starting to see symptoms in them both]. It affected me and I unknowingly passed it on to my children.”

– Chelsea Sunday (Turtle Clan)

Quote to use to discuss **BLUE BEADS** (the waters and our bodies):

“Water is important in rites of passage, particularly the rites of passage of birth. This water walk is an extension of rites of passage, because most people here are parents and have their children here. A large part of rites of passage and transitioning is making sure that young people have roles and responsibilities. The Water Walk is a rites of passage because you are modeling for young people what it is like to defend the land and that’s a part of the life stage.”

– Alexa Lesperance, (Naotkamegwaning First Nation),
Youth Facilitator (NYSHN)

Note: This activity is for people who are women-identified (including trans women, Two Spirit and LGBTQIA people). It is important to welcome people who may not have a uterus, but who want to be connected to moon teachings and the cycles of their bodies.

BODY CARE FOR OUR SPIRITS + THE LAND

Just as support is needed to take care of the land, support is also needed to take care of our bodies because of the intimate connection we have with the land—what happens on the land also happens to our bodies. While taking care of the land we can also learn how it can take care of our sexual and reproductive health. In this section, we share some tips and resources on taking care of our bodies, particularly while engaged in land defense, while offering enough flexibility to ensure these are useful in whatever way works or makes sense for you.

Note: Whenever you do land defense work or community organizing, remember that obtaining free, prior, informed and continuing consent—both over the land and one another’s bodies—is mandatory.

Medicines for our Bodies

If you are active on social media and are using any of these body care tips, feel free to tag your photos/messages with the following hashtags:

#ConnectedToLand #ConnectedToBody

Words of wisdom from our auntie Katsi Cook:

“Woman is the first environment. In pregnancy our bodies sustain life. At the breast of women, the generations are nourished. From the bodies of women flows the relationship of those generations both to society and the natural world. In this way, the earth is our mother, the old people said. In this way, we as women are earth.”

– Katsi Cook, Mohawk Midwife



Plantain Salves used during Treaty 3 Water Walk

While Doing Land Defense and/or Community Organizing

FOOT CARE

This can look like:

- Putting medicines like cedar and sweetgrass (whatever is local to your area) in your shoes
- Teaching acupressure and massage techniques (remember FPIC) to members of your community
- Having bandages for blisters, cuts, and scrapes, as well as wraps for ankles or knees
- Picking up donated shoes and slippers for people to wear
- Using arnica salve for sore muscles

BODY CARE

This can look like:

- **Making smudging and ceremony available**
- **Natural aromatherapy (check first for allergies and scent issues). Can come in the form of oils such as peppermint, lavender, sage, lemon, etc.**
- **Teaching acupressure and massage techniques (remember FPIC) to members of your community**
- **Making herbal tinctures (liquid extracts made from herbs that you take orally—by mouth) such as elderberry to help manage coughs and colds or to regain energy**
- **Making compresses and poultices (some suggested recipes are below)**
- **Making or purchasing salves (some suggested recipes are below)**

SAFETY TEAMS

This can look like:

People designated to support anyone who has triggers (or things which cause past or current memories of abuse, violence, or other kinds of trauma to resurface). This support can range from providing a supportive, non-judgmental listening ear, to directing people to resources and any local support available that they may consider accessing—this specifically includes non-shaming/blaming/stigmatizing support for sexual assault/violence and mental health. Consider doing community trainings on how to provide this kind of support and make sure your Safety Team is easily identifiable with a ribbon or badge—get in touch with us @NYSHN for any help with this.

Creating a **Body Care** or **Foot Care Team** in addition to a **Safety Team**, to specifically look after body support.

Recipes from Our Ancestors

The following herb recipes are shared by the team at NYSHN. However, we recognize that many of our ancestors have used these recipes since time immemorial.

Where possible, we strongly encourage you to harvest locally available medicinal ingredients, giving thanks and offerings to the land and waters for providing us with these gifts. The ingredients listed in these recipes may be replaced with local medicines and herbs that knowledge keepers have said are safe to use.*

**For this reason, our recipes only list suggested ingredients.*

We encourage you to check locally or get in touch with us on parts per recipe if you decide to make these.



Because we are so connected to the land, many of the medicines from the land can help our bodies heal, move through transitions, or support us as we resist additional harm and trauma. Here are just a few recipes for using these medicines as teas.

MOON TIME TEA



Use: can help with regulating cycle, cleansing toxins from uterine area



Ingredients: nettle, raspberry leaf and motherwort

CRAMP TEA



Use: can help ease pains during moon time



Ingredients: spearmint leaf, cramp bark, skullcap, organic marshmallow root, organic passionflower herb, and organic ginger root



PREGNANCY TEA



Use: can help strengthen uterine system during pregnancy



Ingredients: raspberry leaf, nettle, oatstraw, alfalfa, red clover blossoms, peppermint leaves, and lemon balm

PEACE AND CALM TEA



Use: can help to calm nervous system, can also be used as sleep side



Ingredients: chamomile, lemon balm, catnip, lavender

EVERYDAY NOURISHMENT TEA



Use: everyday way to energize the body



Ingredients: dried rose hips, nettle, cinnamon

MENOPAUSE - WISE WOMAN TEA



Use: for transition during this stage, and also for hot flashes/ night sweats



Ingredients: red clover, dandelion root, yellow dock



Medicines used during Treaty 3 Water Walk



FOR BIRTH TRAUMA,
OBSTETRIC VIOLENCE
AND SEXUAL/
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Use: Vaginal steams have been used by Indigenous midwives and birth workers since time immemorial to assist with healing from trauma and violence to the vulva, and vaginal and uterine areas of the body. They are useful when healing from birth trauma, obstetric violence and sexual/ domestic violence. These steams are also great ways to develop a relationship with one's body. The goal is not to "smell good", but to feel empowered in the area of our first environment.*

** Note: The following ingredients list is just a suggestion—we encourage you to find a calming blend that works for you.*



Ingredients:

Equal parts lavender, calendula, yarrow, rosemary, lemon balm



Instructions:

In a medium-sized pot containing 1-2 quarts of water, place the herbs. Boil for 10 minutes then steep for another 5-10 minutes.

You can transfer the herbs and water to a bowl or keep it in the pot. Once the steam has cooled enough so that you do not burn yourself (put your hand over the pot/bowl to test it), place the pot/bowl of water and herbs under a stool or slotted chair, or in your toilet.

Sit over the pot without underwear.

Cover yourself with a blanket from your waist down to the floor so that no air can get in.

Stay seated over your pot of herbal steam for approximately 20-30 minutes or until the steam has decreased. This is a perfect time to relax—make prayers or think quietly to yourself.

It is commonly suggested that you do this right before bed, or at another time when you're able to lay down for an hour immediately afterwards.



PLANTAIN SALVE



Use: a general salve for itchiness, rash, and overall healing for topical skin area



Ingredients:

2 cups olive oil or almond oil

1/4 cup beeswax (can be hardened bar type)

2 tbsp dried plantain leaf (herb, not banana!)



Instructions:

Infuse the herbs into the olive oil. There are two ways to do this. You can either combine the herbs and the olive oil in a jar with an airtight lid and leave for 3-4 weeks, shaking daily, OR heat the herbs and olive oil over low heat (low heat!) in a double boiler for 3 hours until the oil is very green.

Strain herbs out of the oil by pouring through a cheesecloth. Let all the oil drip out and then squeeze the herbs to get the remaining oil out.

Discard the herbs.

Heat the infused oil in a double boiler with the beeswax until melted and mixed.

Pour into small tins, glass jars or lip balm tubes and use on bites, stings, cuts, poison ivy, diaper rash or other wounds as needed.

MARSHMALLOW ROOT SALVE



Use: helps with minor cuts, scrapes, and minimal bleeding



Ingredients:

2 cups olive oil or almond oil

1/4 cup beeswax (can be hardened bar type)

1/4 cup coconut oil

2 tbsp dried marshmallow root (herb, not candy!)

1 tbsp calendula or comfrey (optional)

1 tbsp vitamin E (optional)



Instructions:

Same recipe instructions as the Plantain Salve.



Compresses can be used to treat a variety of issues, from muscle soreness to joint stiffness. You can make this from an old sock, pouch, or sew some material together and fill either with calming herbs. You can also heat or freeze the compress depending on your need.

Similar to compresses, **poultices** can be made from any of the above recipes. A poultice is basically a paste made of herbs that is wrapped in a piece of cloth and placed on the skin. Drinking tea and applying a poultice or compress is highly suggested to speed healing of an area of the body.

Any questions? Get in touch with us at nativeyouthsexualhealth@gmail.com

Supporting our Mental Health

STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING SELF-HARM/INJURY, SUICIDE, AND LAND TRAUMA:

“I think there’s a lot of mental health issues, where [being devalued this way] goes as far as people believing that, and then valuing themselves as much as their community values them....For a long time, I didn’t value myself as an Indigenous woman...living on the rez, where you are slowly being killed from the inside out every day, and knowing there’s a problem but feeling helpless because there are so many companies, so many projects going on, people can feel devalued and depressed.”

—Vanessa Gray (Anishinaabe)

“We carry these burdens, we carry these stories, everything with us as young people, and I think when we allow young people to actually face those situations and sit with that hurt, I think that’s when the breakthrough moments happen.”

—Nathana Bird (Ohkay Owingeh)

It’s critical to *“not fight evil the way it fights us. Instead, fight from a higher perspective. It’s up to each community to decide what that higher perspective looks like, but a big part of that is prayer, and understanding that we are doing this for our great-grandchildren’s great grandchildren.”*

—W.C.K. (Diné)

Ground yourself in your cultural identity, because, *“That violence upon the peak is violence upon our children—their cultural identity, who they are. And our cultural identity is what has allowed us to survive this long, to survive 500 years of genocide.”*

—Lyncia Begay (Diné)

Activity 8: Pathways to Healing

Materials needed:

Pathways to Healing Worksheet
(print or photocopy enough for all participants)

Time: **20 - 30mins**

Instructions:

Print out or copy the Pathways to Healing worksheet, and have participants fill it out.

Bring folks back into the group to debrief what their support systems are. This activity is a way to remind us that despite environmental violence, we have each other and the land for support.

Follow up questions to ask/discuss:

- **What types of support are you looking for?**
- **Where do you think you could get that support?**
- **What are the steps you can take toward making that happen?**
- **What are some of the things you can do to help you to feel healed/supported (e.g. art, music, ceremony, etc.)?**
- **What are some ways you can do the activities you listed in answer to the previous question while/by connecting with the land and your body?**

Pathways to Healing Worksheet

LIST 3 PEOPLE YOU CAN TALK TO:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

LIST 3 ACTIVITIES YOU LIKE TO DO ON THE LAND:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

LIST 3 WAYS YOU FEEL CONNECTED TO THE LAND:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

LIST 3 WAYS YOU FEEL CONNECTED TO YOUR BODY:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Rites of Passage as Resurgence for the Land and our Bodies

One of the ways of both healing as a community, and teaching our future generations about the sacredness of our bodies (which allows for a deeper understanding of the sacredness of the land), is through practicing ceremony, such as our traditional rites of passage.

For April McGill (Yuki/Wappo/Pomo), her coming of age as a woman—and the ceremony surrounding it—instilled a life-long understanding about the need to safeguard her body, as well as its sacred connection to Mother Earth:

“I think it’s really important for young women to have that ceremony, that rites of passage within their family... just showing our daughters and our sisters and nieces that it’s important, and that having your period is so beautiful, and it’s special, and how sacred it is—your body is so sacred—and to protect it”.

These rites of passage are incredibly important for our men as well, who are often looked at as the warriors and protectors in our societies:

“I think about how I try and teach [my son] to value women, be respectful of women,” April shares. “And I think that when it’s time for him to have that coming of age ceremony, he’ll be able to have that because he’s raised with strong women and strong men in his life, so he’ll be able to understand that.”

– April McGill (Yuki/Wappo/Pomo)

Learn about your rites of passage and what they looked like on the land. This knowledge can be a good space to build skills to address mental health and land trauma, and allows us to learn nation-specific teachings about our bodies, territories, and medicines.

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE ASSESSMENT / COMMUNITY ACTION

This environmental violence assessment is one tool you can use to identify the landscape of environmental violence within your community. It can also be used to facilitate discussions about perpetrators of violence, as well as harm reduction strategies or community safety plans (during the event that industry remains in your community) to address this violence.

Instructions:

PHASE 1

Develop a definition of **environmental violence** that is specific to your nations' understanding of the connection between land and body.

Discuss the role of women, youth, Two Spirit and LGBTTTQQIA people in land defense and governance on the land. What is the role of each and how are they all uniquely impacted by environmental violence?

What are words in your language that describe your relationship to land?
Is there a word or phrase in your language that can name **environmental violence**?

How has industry built patriarchy into our nations? How do we support Indigenous women, youth and Two Spirit people to address that?

PHASE 2 - ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE ASSESSMENT

Print or photocopy the **Environmental Violence Assessment** worksheet and begin documenting what environmental violence looks like in your territory.

Document both the stories/experiences of community members, as well as information about the number of people impacted (i.e. number of miscarriages or birth deformities, etc.).

PHASE 3 - CREATE/PLAN

Create community responses to reduce the harm of each form of environmental violence. Plan short and long term goals for pushing back on industry and holding industry accountable for the forms of environmental violence your community is experiencing.

Example: If your Environmental Violence Assessment shows that your community is experiencing an increase in the rates of sexually transmitted infections and HIV, one possible plan/response would be to seek/support an increase in culturally-safe harm reduction services. This may include:

- Increasing access to condoms, dams and other barrier methods
- Increasing access to clean injection materials, crack pipes, etc. (if injection drug use is common in areas of industry).

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE ASSESSMENT

AREAS OF IMPACT

SPECIFIC FORMS OF VIOLENCE/ LAND TRAUMA

Sexual Health

(i.e. sexual violence)

Reproductive Health

*(i.e. miscarriages,
reproductive cancers)*

Indigenous Governance

*(i.e. undermining leadership roles
of women, Two Spirits)*

Family Structure

*(i.e. reinforcing generational
poverty that strain familial
relations)*

Gendered Violence

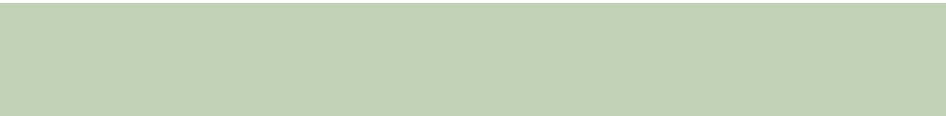
*(i.e. increased rates of missing
& murdered Indigenous women,
girls, Two Spirits)*

Drug and Alcohol Use

*(i.e. increase in drug/alcohol use,
introduction of new drugs)*

Other Chronic Social Stressors

(i.e. increased rates of suicide)



**INDUSTRY, CHEMICAL OR
PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE**

**HARM REDUCTION, RESPONSE,
ACTION STRATEGIES**

SHARE THIS WORK/RESOURCES

Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies Mini-Zine

We have included a mini-zine as an example of what you can create as a community resource to share information about environmental violence. Creating short, accessible resources about your community and the impacts of industry on it are great tools for workshops. If you are holding a teach-in or workshop, you can prepare these in advance.

Instructions:

1. Photocopy or print the zine on the following pages (or develop your own zine by using the one we've included as a template)

2. Once you have made a copy or printed it out, fold the page with the zine on it into eighths by folding along all the lines. Be sure all the lines are creased well



3. Fold the zine in half along the middle vertical line

- 4. Cut along the dotted horizontal line in the middle.**



- 5. Push pages together to make an X.**



- 6. Fold the X so that it resembles a booklet and your zine is done!**





VIOLENCE ON THE LAND, VIOLENCE ON OUR BODIES: BUILDING AN INDIGENOUS RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE

Fold along this line

SUMMARY

“Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies: Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence” is a community-based research and advocacy project aimed at documenting the experiences of Indigenous women, youth, and community members whose sexual and reproductive health and rights have been affected by gas and oil development, mining, and pesticides – something known as “environmental violence”.

This initiative is a collaboration between the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) and Women’s Earth Alliance (WEA).



nativeyouthsexualhealth.com
Twitter: @NYSHN
FB: Native Youth Sexual Health Network
Email: ekonoms@nativeyouthsexualhealth.com



ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE

Indigenous women and children bear the brunt of negative consequences of resource extraction and are suffering the detrimental, devastating, multigenerational and deadly impacts of environmental toxins and contaminants. This particular impact of environmental racism on Indigenous women and children is increasingly referred to as “environmental violence.”

Environmental violence has particular effects on the health of Indigenous, women, girls, and our generations yet unborn.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Fold along this line

As the legacy of Indigenous and women of color community organizing has taught us, it's critical to recognize the interrelatedness of issues about and surrounding our bodies (i.e. domestic violence and higher rates of incarceration for women) and that we often need justice before "choice" even becomes a possibility.

It means having free, prior, and informed consent regarding all decisions made about our bodies. This includes being fully informed about the impacts of environmental violence on our bodies.

NEEDS



EXAMPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE

High rates of:

- sexual, domestic, and family violence as well as exploitation in Indigenous communities where extractive industries are taking place, usually accompanied by large numbers of miners or other workers from outside.
- Missing and murdered Indigenous women and youth
- HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
- Miscarriages and birth deformities
- Effects of contamination including mercury, uranium, and other toxins that continue to affect Indigenous women's reproductive health, their children, and generations unborn



- 1 – identify and document the impacts of environmental toxins on Indigenous women and children as "environmental violence".
- 2 – provide community capacity-building and training linking reproductive and environmental health and human rights;
- 3 - while some research has shown that Indigenous women and youth are generally most "at risk" for sexual and reproductive violence, stories from Indigenous communities reveal a need for more information about the link between these types of violence and the rapid growth of environmentally harmful industries.

GLOSSARY + RELATED TERMS

Allottees: Individuals who own parcels of land on Native American reservations, which are held in trust by the United States government.

Chronic social stressors: Ongoing pollution and the accompanying social stressors caused by development and industry that impact and divide communities. These include increased mental health concerns, violence against Indigenous women, children, and families, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, incarceration, child removal and suicide.

Cis: Person who identifies with their assigned gender/sex at birth.

Cis-sexism/Cis-supremacy: The power structure that privileges cis people over trans people or people who do not comply with Western assumptions of gender.

Environmental justice: A grassroots response to environmental racism valuing respect, the health of our communities and the Earth, and protection from discrimination, dispossession and exploitation, etc. This is different from environmental equity, which is the governmental response to environmental racism that values “fair treatment and meaningful involvement.”

Environmental racism: The disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color and Indigenous people.

Environmental violence: The disproportionate and often devastating impacts that the conscious and deliberate proliferation of environmental toxins and industrial development (including extraction, production, export and release) have

on Indigenous women, children and future generations, without regard from States or corporations for their severe and ongoing harm.

Extractive Industry: The companies and activities involved in removing oil, metals, coal, stone and other natural resources from the earth.

Fracking: Hydraulic fracturing by pressurized liquid, which is used to release natural gas from underground rock. A high pressure fluid, usually made up of chemicals and sand suspended in water, is injected into deep rock formations to create cracks, making vast caches of natural gas, previously trapped in buried rock, accessible.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent:

An internationally accepted principle that recognizes Indigenous peoples’ inherent and prior rights to their lands and resources and respects their legitimate authority to require that third parties enter into an equal and respectful relationship with them, based on the principle of informed consent.

Generational poverty: To continue to experience poverty for at least 2 generations; not having any assets to pass on to future generations.

Hetero-normative patriarchy: A colonial construct which creates a social norm assuming that all of our romantic or sexual relationships are heterosexual (i.e. between a woman and man), and creates a hierarchy of power in which men benefit from systems at the expense of women and two-spirits. These dynamics often result in certain qualities, types of labor and even voices or lives being valued more than others.

Land trauma: Embodied feelings of breached consent over lands and bodies; the emotional and spiritual suffering experienced by Indigenous peoples as a result of physical attacks on their lands and waters; a term that speaks to the emotional and spiritual experiences of loss of land and identity. This also includes feelings of loss as Indigenous peoples witness other living things (such as buffalo, wild rice, salmon, etc.) suffer or disappear as a result of these attacks. Can also refer to feelings of grief and pain that have been inferred or absorbed through Indigenous lands and waters. Land trauma is different for each person, as Indigenous Nations have different histories of contamination and displacement, and the severity can vary depending on which part of one's heritage/identity has been violated (i.e. desecration of an origin place).

LGBTTIQQA: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, Asexual

Man camp / Workers camp: Temporary employee housing for oilfield workers. Some communities have reported both documented, company-regulated camps, and undocumented camps, which often are simply unregulated tracks of land with 50-100 trailers that ranchers or farmers rent out to industry employees.

National Sacrifice Zone: An area so contaminated or so depleted of its natural resources that it is unlikely to be able to sustain life.

Precautionary Principle: The principle that when an activity is reasonably expected to cause some threat or harm to the public or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken or it should be avoided altogether.

Rape culture: A term coined by feminists in the United States in the 1970's to show the ways in which society blamed victims of sexual assault and normalized male sexual violence.

Reproductive justice: The right to have children or not, and to parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments. It is based on the human right to make personal decisions about one's life, and the obligation of government and society to ensure that the conditions are suitable for implementing one's decisions.

Risk (future generations): Risk assessment is often used for deciding what is an acceptable risk in regards to industry and development. Many Indigenous people/communities have argued that current risk assessment measures do not take into account the impacts on future generations.

Rites of Passage: Rites of passage are ceremonies and/or a series of events that mark transitions within a person's life.

Self-determination: The support for Indigenous peoples to make decisions for themselves based on their own lived experiences and within the context of their different cultures and communities.

Terra Nullius: A Latin expression meaning 'nobody's land'; refers to a legal concept colonial nation states used to justify the conquering of Indigenous lands. This concept is still used today as justification for resource extraction.

Turtle Island: The name Indigenous nations such as the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe use to refer to the region of the world now known as North America. The name Turtle Island comes down through traditional creation stories.

Two-Spirit: An umbrella term for Indigenous people who identify as LGBTTIQQA, gender non-conforming, gender queer and/or non-binary.

Violenced: Term used in this report to describe the horrendous amounts of unspecified violence directed at a person, a group of people, or the land.

NOTES





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