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Health and healing: a holistic view of the struggles of forest dependant communities

OUR VIEWPOINT

- **Cherishing community wisdom to strengthen the struggle for land and forest** **p. 2**

HEALTH AND HEALING: A HOLISTIC VIEW OF THE STRUGGLES OF FOREST DEPENDANT COMMUNITIES

- **Loss, Healing and Struggle** **p. 5**
- **From "solastalgia" to "alegremia"** **p.8**
- **Stories, identity and struggles: How local communities live with and talk about Mekong's landscape** **p. 12**
- **Endogenous knowledge, an effective weapon to combat land grabs in Africa** **p. 17**
- **The Quechua-lamas vision of medicinal plants: a lesson from the high-altitude forests of Peru** **p. 19**
- **"To enjoy full health, we want to make a difference": A woman's voice from the forests of Brazil** **p. 24**
- **Nutrition from forests: forest communities and healthy lives** **p. 26**

ACTION ALERTS

- **Protect Liberia's unique forest heritage! p.28**
- **India: The Parliament violates forest people's rights and promotes further plantations p.28**

RECOMMENDED

- **"When murder and abuse become systemic": violence and impunity across Asia p.29**
- **"Sacred Sites are living places": the voices of Custodians in Africa p.29**

OUR VIEWPOINT

Cherishing community wisdom to strengthen the struggle for land and forest

When a forest area is replaced by a eucalyptus monoculture, a dam or a mining project, the destruction is evident and in plain sight. However, what is often invisible - and therefore little understood - to those who look in from the outside - are the combined deep impacts that this destruction inflicts upon the lives of communities that have lived in that place for many generations, as well as on the forest itself and on the countless interconnections between the living beings that are part of it, including the community itself. With the forest, the community generated a set of knowledge and wisdom that helps guarantee their well-being, physical, mental and spiritual health, culture, identity and self-esteem. Because of this, the actions that seek to recover and cherish the wisdom, health and well-being of communities affected by destructive projects, are in a broad and comprehensive sense fundamental for strengthening the resistance struggles of these communities. They are also fundamental when communities seek to revert the

process of destruction, capturing and giving more strength and sense to the struggle for the recovery of their territory.

In the WRM Bulletin we have denounced several times the new "offset" mechanisms for placating the climate crisis, proposed by "specialists" from the transnationals, governments and financial institutions, as well as major NGOs. We denounce them for their lack of wisdom, for being false solutions to the climate crisis, and because, for example, REDD+ assigns value to a forest only on the basis of the carbon it stores. Simultaneously, the offset mechanism for biodiversity loss values a forest only on the basis of the presence of certain plants and animals. This vision collides directly with the views and wisdom that communities that depend on the forest have built through time. They always consider their place as something unique - for them no two places are the same. It is in this place that a community lives that it has established its connections, its stories that are told and retold, its knowledge, its collective identity and its culture. It's in that place where they find the conditions to live well, through the food and nutrition that the forest provides, be the plants, sources of water and animals, which help treat, and more importantly prevent, physical and mental illness.

This bulletin issue seeks to reflect on that broader dimension that place has for communities, without them turning to measuring certain pre-established categories, like carbon. Furthermore, in their wisdom, the communities feel they're part of the forest. That is radically different from the assumptions of those who develop policies that promise to 'save' the forests, which are being imposed today on those communities. Whereas the communities speak of their place with affection and respect, the official policies speak about the same place in terms of 'categories' like, for example, the presence or absence of 'high conservation value forests' or 'forests with high carbon value'. Under this logic, a 'high value' forest, for example, could be replaced by another with similar characteristics in terms of particular plant species, while the rest of the forest is considered of little value, that is, it can be destroyed for not being within the high-value 'category'. While communities speak of places as a whole that encompasses many beings and meanings, including themselves, the 'specialists' that develop ever more mechanisms to 'solve' the deforestation and climate crises, speak today, for example, of 'landscapes', that is, something they observe and use from a distance according to their interests, and which they do not feel a part of.

Our intention here is not to romanticize the relationship that communities have maintained with their places, with the forest. What we want is to call attention to the fact that destructive projects not only destroy forests. These invasions of community territories also put at risk and tend to destroy wisdoms and a set of customs, stories, relationships, traditions and practices that establish the link between communities and their places, and that also give form to their identity and assure their well-being. By destroying the forests, they end up destroying knowledge that is indispensable for the comprehension and conservation of these forests. But beyond the particular project that

is invading and destroying their territories, communities must also deal with other 'attacks' on their livelihoods, more focused on the sphere of their collective identity as peasants, indigenous peoples and the inhabitants of river banks. For example, the constant messages that propagate a 'monoculture' of a given consumption standard, many times with an urban vision, is dominated by major transnational corporations. Their propaganda seeks, through a process of globalization, to transform any inhabitant of the world into a 'consumer' of their products- in many cases, products that are very harmful to the health of the consumer.

All this contributes to breaking the link between communities and their place, and to destroy their wisdom, identity and culture. When this happens, it becomes very difficult to resist and maintain the struggle. In the cases in which a community recovers its devastated territory, devastated by monoculture, mining or some other destructive activity, it tends to end up bereft of reference, since it cannot simply retake its way of life because the conditions for doing so do not exist anymore. The result can be a profound crisis in the communities that manifests itself in different ways, one of the strongest of these being the phenomenon of suicides among indigenous youths in various countries.

Seeking to elaborate on these more intrinsic challenges that confront communities when they are subject to invasion and destruction of their territory and forests, we produced this issue of our bulletin. Not only do we want to show and reflect upon this more complex reality experienced by communities that depend on the forest so that these can be better understood. We also sought out some stories that are inspiring and full of strength from regions of Latin America, Africa and Asia, of how these communities resist and struggle to maintain and reencounter their sense of living and health, even in extremely adverse situations.

HEALTH AND HEALING: A HOLISTIC VIEW OF THE STRUGGLES OF COMMUNITIES THAT DEPEND ON FORESTS

Loss, Healing and Struggle

Ten years ago, the Indian writer Kiran Desai published a novel called *The Inheritance of Loss*, about the long-lived wounds and suffering connected with colonialism and globalization.

Such topics are normal territory for a novelist or poet. But what do they have to do with the World Rainforest Movement? What with never-ending pressures to respond to new outrages, the always-unique lived experience of loss is a topic that forest activists may not always dwell on very much.

Yet, as every activist knows, irrevocable pain is everywhere among those trying to defend their lives and commons from logging, extraction schemes, dam projects, toxic dumps and the like. Is it perhaps something to be concerned about when those of us who live personal lives largely outside that experience fail to give it its proper due?

The Dream of Automatic Progress

We know already, for example, the blindnesses that result when people succumb to a certain dream of automatic progress – a dream common among ruling elites the world over.

According to this dream, the future always takes care of the past. Colonial conquest and violence against living systems are eventually redeemed by capital accumulation. In the end, everybody will be OK. Sorrows will be mended by progress. What has been lost will be made good by development. People separated from their non-human fellows will someday be the better for it. Nature will find a way to recover. Even seemingly unbearable trauma will become bearable when its victims find out that the alternative would be still more horrendous. The climate crisis itself will turn out to be a mere blip smoothed out by intelligent management.

In this dream, the reality of loss, and of its causes, almost disappear. Even the losses of the future are, as it were, redeemed in advance. Ask any development expert or Minister of Industry, for example, what he or she thinks about the devastation wrought by industrial pulpwood plantations in countries such as Indonesia, South Africa and Brazil, as documented in WRM's 1996 book *Pulping the South.* The response will almost certainly be a show of puzzlement about why anyone would want to rake over that ancient history. After all, that was 20 years ago! Surely by now all sorts of new sustainable practices, corporate social responsibility programmes, "learning by doing" and the like will have set extraction of paper pulp on a secure course toward being more environmentally sensitive and socially benign.

In this way, the dream hides the reality that, two decades after *Pulping the South*, the plantation industry just goes on grabbing ever larger life spaces in Amazonia, equatorial Africa, the Mekong region, and the southeast Asian archipelagoes. According to the FAO, Asia and the Pacific are today occupied by 1.2 million square km of "planted forest" and Africa, the Caribbean, Central and South America by more than a quarter as much, with pine and eucalyptus making up the bulk of total plantation area.

The dream also conceals the persistence of another trend identified in *Pulping the South*: that, as the paper industry's land empire has kept expanding, so has its processing capacity, the size of its machines, the production/worker ratio, and global demand. Thus by the end of 2015, the capacity of the average new-built global pulp mill was two million tonnes, up from 750,000 tonnes in 1995. And with more frenetic production has come a near-doubling in market pulp demand since 1996. The 1990s vision of a paperless corporate world, once so widespread, is now forgotten. Yet lavish industry tax breaks and special state permits and licenses continue to roll in, just as they did in 1996, financing yet more toxic contamination and livelihood destruction: more and more unbearable loss.

Emptying out the Space of Loss

We social activists may think that we're immune from being taken in by the romance of automatic progress that plays such a big part in the development expert's incapacity for political analysis. We know that new pain and struggle always follows capital's efforts to solve its problems and consolidate its position – and also that creative resistance springs up in multiple forms, just as the notoriously devastated forests of the early years of European forays into Asia found ways to come back to life, although in altered configurations.

But are there perhaps other ways that we fail to grasp the significance of loss – ways that are undermining our work?

One gap in understanding opens up when we allow ourselves to treat stories of suffering or healing as "proto-political", or to bracket the space and time in which people experience loss as politically empty. Our job, we tell ourselves, is to get to work erasing pain and suffering, not to wallow in it. Surely we all know how bad things are. It's enough to understand suffering in the abstract. Why dwell on endless horror stories when we need to take comprehensive action on a higher, more political level? "Don't mourn, organize!" goes the well-known movement slogan.

So despite our best intentions, we end up putting in parentheses the concrete experiences of those who must find their own refuges, start their lives again from scratch, get incarcerated, tortured or assassinated, or otherwise withstand a series of developmentalist storms in a space and time seemingly separate from the privileged space and time of politics. We sketch out political maps of the situation, analyze life-threatening conditions, identify key institutions and other players, delineate legal circumstances and actions that need to be carried out. We deploy pet concepts like permaculture, organic food production, phyto-remediation, urban agriculture and re-commoning, despite a nagging feeling that such words may be wrongly taking possession of the life-experience of those we're talking to. Sometimes, we listen more to those accustomed to planning than those being made to suffer. And no doubt this is made easier when we find ourselves, biophysically speaking, located in the same teleconnected landscapes of death as do the planners, feeding on the same intoxicated food chain.

A Closer Kind of Attention

What if a different kind of attention to loss is needed? What if it is necessary to undertake a different kind of listening to the culturally-diverse idioms in which loss is expressed? Perhaps a more human-eye-level perspective is needed to avoid being lured into treating the experience of loss as an instrument for yet another imperial project.

Healing cannot happen in the abstract space of dreams, without confronting and working through particular senses of irrevocable loss. Nor can ordinary people's survival struggles be supported if they are viewed from above or outside, downgraded as unorganized and introverted, and treated as somehow unworthy of the name of resistance. Nor can anyone understand the different rhythms and spaces of change in crisis that political organization requires without trying to learn from concrete experiences of suffering. Without these efforts, solidarity among the various "we"s and "I"s of social movements can come to nothing more than the proverbial togetherness of potatoes in a sack.

In reality, the political circumstances in which suffering or healing take place are both collective *and* intimately personal. A grasp of both aspects is needed for any circuitry of resistance and solidarity capable of contending with the influence of dominant institutions. This understanding has nothing to do with the fashionable histrionics of abstract "empathy". What it is about, rather, is the recognition of what is too often not recognized – concrete experiences of irreparable loss – and its better incorporation into the rest of what we think of as politics.

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Further Reading

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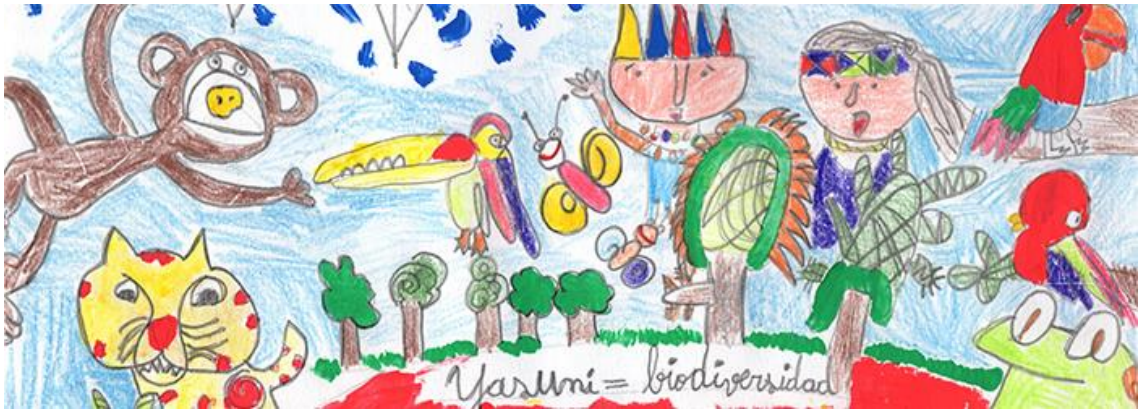

From "*solastalgia*" to "*alegremia*"

In 2003, Australian philosopher Glen Albrecht (1) coined the term "solastalgia" to define the combination of psychological disorders that afflicted native populations as a consequence of the destructive changes in their territory as a result of mining activities, desertification or climate change. The term, which means pain of the land that is inhabited ("*solas*" means land in Greek, and "*algia*" means pain), can manifest itself as an intense visceral pain and mental anguish that can result in health problems, substance abuse, physical illness and suicidal tendencies.

This term or concept is related to the one developed by Laura Trujillo (2) of the word "place", which is "a space endowed with meaning". A place is no ordinary space. For those who live in it, it is full of stories and feelings, which is why she says that "landscape", as opposed to "place", is that "space that is seen but not lived". A place, on the contrary, when given a name, is appropriated and leads to a sense of belonging. Trujillo concludes that "where the colonizers [and by extension mining, agribusinesses, oil and lumber interests...] saw a space-landscape, natives saw a place".

It is then as a consequence, that that place endowed with feelings since infancy, of beautiful experiences, of climbing trees or mountain field trips, which has received a name, when its desolation begins, causes soul pains and psychological disorders which end up leading to sadness for the loss of the place of nesting, a place which will not return. These disorders are similar to those suffered by those who have to migrate; but now they appear in those who, without moving from their territory, see their horizon disappear and with it their past and their ecological history that their descendants will not see.

Solastalgia is the first step towards a constructed sadness that leads to despair and suicide and that maybe is in the origin of the waves of suicides that afflict many indigenous communities in different parts of the world. In Ecuador in recent years there has been a spike in suicides among the Cofan and Huaorani indigenous nationalities, which endure the aggression of oil companies, and the Kichwa nationality, which

suffers the pressure of agribusiness. This tendency toward suicide is documented among all the aboriginal peoples of the world where the pressure for their lands is extraordinary. In Canada, the Cross Lake Cree community suffered in a period of two weeks six suicides and 140 suicide attempts (3). Among the native peoples of the United States, suicides in 2015 made up for 34% of deaths among males between 18 and 24 years of age (one in three) (4), which happens in 566 tribes; but the suicide figures for those under 18 are between three and ten times higher than the national average (5). This trend also seen in Australia, where aboriginal girls aged ten have dramatically increased their tendency toward suicide (6). The causes for this seem to include the reservations where they are confined to live so that the companies can act on their territories.

The path from solastalgia to suicide feeds off a sadness that finds no exit in the defense of nature. Defenders of the territories of indigenous peoples, invaded by transnational corporations and megaprojects, are murdered with impunity and with the complicity of the state (7). More than two murders a week in 2014 turn the defense of nature into one of the riskiest vocations, with Central and South America being the regions with the most murders of nature defenders reported in the world; some 40% were indigenous women and men who protested against mining, extractive, hydroelectric and agribusiness activities. 90% of the murders remain unpunished and sink those who rely on the rights of humans and nature into despair.

It should be no surprise that among the strategies of political repression described by philosopher and social psychologist Edgar Barrero (8), the construction of fear goes first through altering the horizon, through making the presence of the state repression apparatus visible, with the clear intent of having its presence act upon the consciousness of those who resist their intervention as "persuasive action". The next stage, if the defenders of nature do not desist of their protest, is entering their homes, make them see their helplessness and thus make it a "suggestive action" on the subconscious, on the emotions and risks suffered by the family, which will be compelled to get them out of the struggle. This second stage passes through removing the population from its place, through constructing the nostalgia (the pain caused by the distance from the place), through getting the people who struggle to leave or quit. Finally, if none of the preceding options accomplishes this, the construction of fear goes through "compulsive action", through entering the bodies of those who resist, through hurting them so that instinct takes action and calls out "run for your life"; through disappearing them from the place, by taking their lives or jailing them. The destruction of the landscape goes accompanied by the destruction of people's health, the community fabric and their wellbeing.

The concept of health of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas (Mexico) was defined in their 1997 Moisés Gandhi declaration as "health is dignity and behind each illness there is always a cause of humiliation". The destruction of the environment, leaving complete

desolation in its wake, not only is an aberration per se, but also a humiliation for those who inhabit those places endowed with feelings; because the memories are in the texture of the trees, in a horizon whose vision welcomes and integrates them, in the nightly music of the forests, in the smells of its seasons, in the flavors of its seasonal fruit, in its harvests, in the tasks of care of nature from which they obtain not only food but also dreams and aspirations for the future.

The recording of forest sounds by Bernie Krause in the Sugarloaf Ridge park in the United States, from 2004 to 2015, shows the accelerated loss of sounds in barely eleven years, offering a sample of the accelerated deterioration of our jungles and forests and the dire situation of species loss.

How to recover from this constructed solastalgia, from the nostalgia of home, from the destruction that leads to sadness and from there to a fear that leads even to despair and mourning?

There are no formulas, but there is a need to do it. For some years now Julio Montalvo advocates in Argentina what he has called alegremia (10), the "joy in the blood" or the quest to infuse joy into the veins, a proposal that seeks to reconstruct and recover better health.

In Ecuador, where this current arrived thanks to the celebration of the 2nd World Assembly for Peoples' Health, we have initiated processes of alegremia in the communities affected by the aerial sprayings of Plan Colombia - fumigations carried out by Colombia supposedly to eradicate illicit crops and that penetrate into Ecuador because of their closeness to the border and the wind. For five years we have also been holding festivals that encourage the encounter between the affected communities, between children and their parents, and of persons with themselves, in an attempt to recover the aesthetics of place, the work ethic, and the coherence of the persons who seek and build a better world (11).

The aim is to take a stand for health and from the recovery of places. For recovering the soils depressed by pollution and monoculture, for the life that flows in rivers and hides in the jungles, for the plants that dare give us their properties when we approach them with tenderness, like the Kichwa indigenous people who before taking them for their infusions they tell them "*kawsari, kawsari*" (awaken, awaken), so that they give all their healing potential, or when they domesticate them, taking them to their houses so that upon knowing them they feel befriended and give all their properties. We are recovering the history that brought thousands of people to a wonderful jungle that was knifed by the oil industry and murderous companies like Texaco and deceitful ones like Chevron, which filled soils, rivers, plants, animals and families with death.

We have to make the path of return, recovery and repair, of reconstruction of life from joy, from history, from games and art, and from those traditions that were loaded with truth and we were told that they were not scientifically sound. We have to overcome this neoliberal maxim from the United States of the 1980's, which boasted that "a pessimist is a well informed optimist". We cannot afford the luxury of pessimism, we have to recover the alegremia at any price, and our places in nature.

It is not strange that it is a philosopher who has had to call attention to the new illness, solastalgia. Also, Richard Louv, a US journalist, described in 2005 "nature deficit disorder", referring to those anomalous behaviors in children that lead them to obesity or sadness. Louv is convinced that for a truly healthy childhood, direct exposure to nature is a must; as well as for the emotional and physical development and wellbeing of adults. What's curious in both cases is that none of those who described theses illnesses is a doctor, because we spend our time applying protocols of intervention, accusing those who engage in traditional medical practices, or pretending to climb up in hospital centers, or lost in the chemical paradigm, but far from nature.

Welcome all those puppeteers, artists, animators, healers, shamans and herbalists, artists and singers, theater makers of alegremia, crusaders in defense of life, firebreathers, fortune tellers and jugglers, clowns, storytellers and humorists, guardians of places and defenders of nature, because you more than anyone are needed to construct health. We cannot permit it to be trapped, confined in the hands of doctors. Let them cure disease, but among us all let's construct that health which is founded on joy.

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Stories, identity and struggles: How local communities live with and talk about Mekong's landscape

Different words, different sides

When asked what this picture is about, you are likely to answer, "An atomic bomb" in English. Most Japanese would say, "*Genshi bakudan*," a direct translation of the English term in Japanese. The survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, however, may use the expression "*Pikadon*". "*Pika*" refers to the bright flash of the explosion and "*don*" to the following thunderous boom in Japanese. The expression thus encapsulates the victims' experience with the devastation which took place in August 1945 (1). As such, as American poet Arthur Binard points out, the term "*Pikadon*" can take us to stand inside the atomic clouds and imagine how it would have been like being there (2). The expression "Atomic bomb", in contrast, lacks such a capacity, keeping us safely outside the atrocity.

Though not as dramatically, views towards the Mekong river basin also differ between the local communities who live there and those who come from the outside. Expressions such as "development" and "sustainability", routinely used in talking about the Mekong region, especially among outsiders, may have the same limiting effect as "atomic bomb" in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki context. These terms fall short of capturing and appreciating the communities' experiences with the Mekong, the region covered by the 4,800 kilometer-long Mekong river originating from the Tibetan Plateaus and flowing through six countries.

Peoples' stories such as legends and folktales reveal how the local communities in Mekong have made sense of the region's landscape. People's stories embody a process through which the local communities accommodate and/or resist events that take place in the Mekong region. In these respects, people's stories, like trees, rivers and land, are "commons" that the local communities rely on for their life.

Peoples' stories in Mekong: Two examples

The stories presented below were recently collected in northeast Thailand or "*Esan*"- as popularly known to people who live in Thailand (3).

Phadaeng and Nang Ai (4)

> *Nang Ai was the daughter of Khita Nakhon's king. Her beauty was widely known. Phadaeng, a young man, travelled to Khita Nakhon, sneaked into Nang Ai's room and had an affair with her. Phangkhi, the son of King Naga who ruled the underground kingdom, also learned about Nang Ai (5). He was doomed to meet her because the two had been married in their previous life. Phangkhi transformed himself into a white squirrel and visited Nang Ai's terrace. Nang Ai noticed the squirrel, wanted it and told her servant to catch it. But the squirrel escaped into a "suan mon", or mulberry garden, which today is the Suan Mon Village. The squirrel passed a forest to get to a "jan" tree on Um Jan Hill, which today is the Um Jan Village. The hunter tried to shoot the squirrel with a bow but the string or "sai" broke. He found a new one and carried it to what today is the Khon Sai Village. The hunter finally shot the squirrel to death. He sliced the meat, which multiplied and filled up one thousand carts. Everyone in Khita Nakhon, including Nang Ai, ate the meat. King Naga became furious, as his son had been killed and eaten. He sent his army and destroyed Khita Nakhon. Phadaeng tried to save Nang Ai, but she sank with Khita Nakhon. Only a lake full of water remained. This was how the Nong Han Lake today was created.*

This story mentions the names of existing local villages, i.e. Suan Mon, Um Jan and Khon Sai. The act of locating physical landmarks and naming them is one of the steps through which the local community makes sense of and relates to the surrounding environment. Explaining the origin of the place names in association with the spatial objects, i.e. a mulberry garden and a "*jan*" tree, gives justification not only to the names but to the entities (i.e. the villages) they signify. Also, by putting the individual names together as components of one legend, the Phadaeng and Nang Ai story offers coherent scripts, to which the local community can more easily relate.

In other words, local place names are not simply an index to physical locations, as they may appear to indifferent outsiders. Place names can conjure up personal and collective memories of the local life and history as well as the people's feelings of attachments to the surroundings. Naming landmarks, giving them a legitimate profile and incorporating them into their experiences, the local community can strengthen their identity as a group and identify with the environment. This way, the community comes to care about trees, rivers and land in Mekong and passes this on to future generations.

White elephant path (6)

> *Phya Thaen, who had created the earth, made the first humans from his scurf. They were Grandpa Sang Ka Sa and Grandma Sang Ka Si. When the two came down to the earth, they were blown apart by a strong wind and separated on both sides of a big river. They built a bridge across the river with gourd vines and finally met each other. Sang Ka Sa asked Sang Ka Si to marry him. However, Sang Ka Si said, "Only if you can answer my riddle". The riddle was "What is dark and light in this world?" Sang Ka Sa had to travel to find the right answer. After ten thousand years, he found the answer with Phya Thaen's help. The answer was "It is the human mind. When it is dark, the world will not*

proceed. When it is light, the world will prosper". Sang Ka Sa went back and married Sang Ka Si. They lived together and had many children. The two also worked on a farm and had rice, fish and gourds to eat. However, they were not tasty and nutritious. So the children were very thin, weak and not smart. Phya Thaen was worried and transformed himself into a white elephant. The white elephant urinated over Sang Ka Sa and Sang Ka Si's land. The white elephant's urine became salt. Sang Ka Sa and Sang Ka Si used the salt to make "pla daek" or fermented fish. Pla daek made food tasty and Sang Ka Sa and Sang Ka Si's children became stronger and healthier.

This story is full of transformations. Phya Thaen's scurf became the first human couple. Phya Thaen changed himself into a white elephant and the elephant's urine became salt. We can see the same in the Phadaeng and Nang Ai story when Phangkhi transformed himself into a white squirrel. In these stories, animals, humans, spirits and even objects like salt and scurf seemed able to change it/themselves into one another.

Such transformations may suggest that local communities in Mekong can recognize the ubiquitous life in their surroundings. This attitude towards the world is in sharp contrast with the one in which humans alone were created to rule the world. When framed in the latter perspective, "development" can often become centered on the human beings only, separated from a hostile "nature" that needs to be controlled or even conquered.

People's stories may offer alternative views in which the world may be more horizontally organized, and life can traverse across different forms without placing one over the other. This interpretation of the world enables the local community to find more harmonious ways to live with the environment and sustainable ways to utilize natural resources.

The role of stories in current struggles: Some recent anecdotes

When collecting people's stories in the Mekong region, the authors often encountered village elderlies who regretted that they found increasingly fewer opportunities to tell stories within the daily life of their community. While sharing their lament, however, the authors would like to believe that the act of making sense of life through stories is rather deep-seated at Mekong's local communities and will not disappear easily. The following two anecdotes suggest that people's stories are not a thing of the past but are created anew.

The first anecdote is from a campaign launched by a local community in central Thailand against building a huge wastewater treatment plant. In the late 1990s, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded the Thai government to construct a large-scale facility to process industrial wastewater in a community called Klong Dan in Samut Prakarn province. The project proponents claimed that the discharge of the so-called treated water into the coastal area would not damage the environment. They actually argued that the project could improve the already deteriorated natural environment in Klong Dan.

The Klong Dan community thus had to counter the proponents' claim by showing how rich the local environment was. In fact, mangrove grew extensively along a network of "*klong*" (a word for "canal" in Thai). Klong Dan was also well known for its productive

mussel-shell farming. Neither ADB nor the Thai government, however, would acknowledge this. The community actively engaged in public debates and staged a number of fierce protests. The project was eventually cancelled due to corruption scandals.

Interestingly and throughout their campaign, the Klong Dan community insistently called the project "Klong Dan Wastewater Management Plant", as opposed to "Samut Prakarn Wastewater Management Project", the "official" name of the project and to which ADB officials (as well as international NGOs which supported the community´s fight) always referred. The community's choice was understandable because the plant was physically located in Klong Dan. It was also possible, however, that "Klong Dan" came to represent far more than just the location to the local community. To them, the name symbolized the entire environment, life and history, which they had to defend. Calling the project with its "official" name might have appeared to the Klong Dan community a denial of their identity.

The second anecdote is from the Mun river basin in *Esan*. Mun is one of the major tributaries of the Mekong. In the early 1990s, the World Bank funded the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) to build a hydroelectric dam near the confluent of Mun and Mekong's mainstream. The project was called the Pak Mun dam ("*pak*" means "mouth" in Thai). Scientists, environmental NGOs and the local community warned that the dam would block fish migration and irreversibly damage the Mun river's ecology. The community whose livelihood heavily relied on the environment opposed the project.

Unfortunately, the local community's protest could not stop the project. Rapids along the Mun river, which were important feeding and spawning grounds for migratory fish, had to be removed with dynamite to make way for the project. The authors later heard and read the Pak Mun villagers' testimonies. They said that they had heard the rapids cry when they were being blasted. This could have been the community's metaphorically speaking of the noise of the explosion. It was possible, however, that the community sensed life in the rapids and actually heard them cry. Or maybe, the rapids did cry.

The same sensitivity to life across the environment is also captured in the following lines from "*lumlong*", a song recently composed in the traditional *Esan*-style by a local artist. (7) This song depicts animals, plants and other little creatures living in the Seaw river, a Mun tributary, who are vocal about the hardship of being affected by salt water discharge from the industry into the river. (8)

> *…A frog said to his friend, a snail, "You are lucky to be born with a hard shell, which enables you to tolerate the salt water. Poor me, a creature who has been painfully suffering from the skin disease". The snail replied, "I can't stand it any longer. It's so sad to leave my dear friends in the Seaw river. But I have no choice. It is so salty and kills us all."*
>
> *A periwinkle also complained, "I can't live in the salt water like this. My friend, a freshwater crab, has carapace and is stronger than I." A freshwater shrimp spoke up, "Why does the river smell so bad with the toxic salinity? It may be just*

a tilapia fish who can survive"…All little voices talking aloud about the salt-contaminated discharge from salt-making plants into the river…

Stories, identity and resistance

In the Mekong basin, where people's livelihoods are deeply rooted in the natural world of rivers and forests, many legends, tales and narratives that revolve around nature have been created and handed down from generation to generation. These stories have played an important role in protecting nature by avoiding the over-exploitation of natural resources. Folktales, legends and other people's stories in the region reveal how the local communities have tried to make sense of Mekong's landscape. These stories can help form their identity as a community member and identify with environment. By means of stories, the communities search for ways to accommodate and/or resist changes that are taking place in the Mekong river basin.

Last year, the authors together with a team of researchers collected more than 100 stories in five locations in rural Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand, in different languages. These stories cover a wide range of topics, including community's history and genealogy, traditions and customs and knowledge on plants and herbs. Quite a few describe the origin of place names, spiritual beliefs and livelihoods. The stories very clearly indicate linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity as well as complex natural configurations of the Mekong river basin. People's stories, trees, rivers, spirits and land, can be valued as "commons" that the communities depend on for their survival. For outsiders, these stories can open a window through which they can view the people's experiences with the Mekong region. For those who face similar challenges elsewhere, people's stories in Mekong can be a source of inspiration to strengthen their own struggles.

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(3) For more people's stories, see Doi, Toshiyuki. (ed.) 2015. *Plants, animals, salt and spirits: How people live with and talk about the environment in rural Cambodia, Laos and Thailand*. Tokyo: Mekong Watch. http://www.mekongwatch.org/PDF/Booklet_PeopleStory.pdf Last viewed 7 July 2016.
(4) The story was told by Mr. Thawon Manosin at Huay Sam Phad Sub-district, Prajak Silapakhom District in Udonthani Province on 9 November 2014. See Doi (2015), pp. 100-107. The illustration is by Amarit Muadthong.
(5) King Naga or Phaya Naga is a mythical creature with a serpent-like figure. Local people believe that King Naga lives in the Mekong river and rules the underground world.
(6) The story was told by Mr. Thongsin Thonkannya in Tha Yiam Village, Wang Luang Sub-district, Selaphum District in Roiet Province on 25 October 2014. See Doi (2015), pp. 91-99. The illustration is by Worajak Maneewong.
(7) Boonyung Kannong. 2006. Creatures talk about salinity in the Seaw river. Manuscript in Thai.
(8) A salinity crisis occurred in *Esan* in 1980s. The local community protested and had the Thai cabinet issue an order to stop the salt industry in the Saew river basin. The industry, however, has moved to other *Esan* provinces. The problem not only remains unsolved but also has spread across *Esan*.

Endogenous knowledge, an effective weapon to combat land grabs in Africa

"This small family, the father, the mother and their two children, enters the sacred forest in order to find solutions to the illnesses and various problems that afflict them."

The transformations of African societies copied from imported models and the imposition of government systems of industrialized societies lead us to think that there still are numerous elements to examine before reaching a clear and coherent understanding of the African methods of access to medical care. Indeed, the observer of the African medical "scene" is often disconcerted at the extraordinary diversity of possibilities offered by natural resources (forests and sacred spaces, water, air and land) and endogenous African knowledge. It has been necessary to turn to the much criticized "traditional authority" in order to better comprehend our cultures' hidden potentialities, that allow us to safeguard the veneration of diverse divinities, the knowledge and use of plants and incantations, as well as exchanges between generations.

The imported medicine, here referred to as "modern medicine", has often demonstrated its limitations. The application of a true strategy of healing and soul liberation is not based solely on the excessive administration of pills, but rather implies controlling the endogenous causes of illness; that is what determines the "*fâ*" (1) consultation. In these places, when medicine has shown its limits, the forest has provided conclusive answers.

It is evident that the current proliferation of pharmacopoeia promoters and their relation to ancestral rites and customs cannot be prohibited, for that would be contrary to the functioning logic of a normal society that seeks to defend its identity. However, it is regrettable that the plurality of methods does not automatically guarantee the absence of disturbing deviations of conduct, even more when considering that the influence of imported religions begets other forms of social order and commitment, and whose influence on natural resources, especially forests, has been widely demonstrated.

Africans are rediscovering the need to protect their patrimony, especially their forests, for it represents for them healing and heritage from ancestors. In Benin and many other countries of the continent, 80% of the population turns to pharmacopoeia for healing.

The *Gbèvozoun* forest of the Bonou commune in Benin is a clear example of the resistance of communities against savage land grabs by national and foreign industrialists. With the *Gbèvonon* (2) and the king of Bonou in the lead, local communities have maintained their ancestors' tradition, thus succeeding in keeping away the vultures of the land.

"Miracle water extracted from the spring after ceremonies to treat disease and cure curses."

But this does not take into account the power of money, which manifests itself in the sale of consciences, corruption and violation of use and custom due to acculturation and uncontrolled fractioning of space.

On the other hand, one can see a resurgence of traditional authority, increasingly praised and newly revaluated. Effectively, given that public institutions have not been able to offer the population with affordable quality medical care, the resurgence of traditions presents itself as more of an opportunity than as an alternative. In this context, traditional authorities, formerly accused of obscurantism and feudalism, now count with the particular attention of part of the communities, which rediscover them and ceaselessly turn to them for the restitution of the social order.

In spite of the frameworks imposed on African societies and the artificial partition of the continent, the multiple ideologies of the continent keep exerting a major influence on the orientation of community customs. Fortunately, in spite of the differences among traditions and the persistent intrusion of exogenous forces, the impact of endogenous beliefs remains strong. Endogenous knowledge has provided, in many cases, conclusive results.

On the other hand, the forms of governance implemented by public institutions, copied from other models, have not been able to truly respond to the fundamental demands of traditional African societies, nor do they enjoy the legitimacy of the institutions established by ancestors, to which the communities keep turning.

Conclusion

Regarding the treatment of illnesses and the community traditions in this respect, one of the most shared values nowadays is represented by nature, which integrates, apart from conventional knowledge, beliefs, rites and rituals, sacrifices and prayers. For the sake of responding to a basic need, endogenous African knowledge deserves to be valued,

erected in norm, organized and framed but without denaturing it, by incorporating qualitative and quantitative changes.

Individuals should acquire conscience for self-realization through their culture and identity, starting by reinforcing the vision of a broader education on their patrimony, or *jowamon* (3). Such is the function fulfilled by the "*Graine Future*" [Seeds of the future] experiential environmental education program, developed by GRABE–BENIN and Nature Tropicale, especially aimed at African youths. (4)

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(1) Which serves as a transmission corridor between the visible and invisible worlds, with the purpose of accessing the spiritual and ancestral dimension of the realities that escape our understanding and for which we humans have no answer.
(2) Spiritual leader of the forest.
(3) In the local Benin language, *jowamon* means heritage or patrimony.
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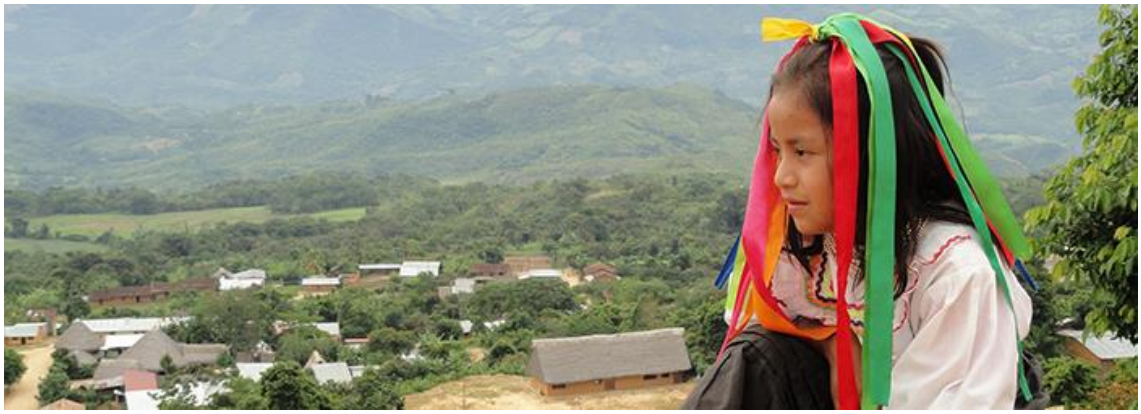

The Quechua-lamas vision of medicinal plants: a lesson from the high-altitude forests of Peru (1)

Modern people usually refer to medicinal plants as resources at the service of humans. This way of referring to them does not seem to be universal. The Quechua-lamas of the Amazon foothills regard plants as people, even more, they treat them as if they were a living community. With a resource there is a relationship of domination and exploitation, but with a person that tie is more like a conversation, a friendship. When native families use a plant, the intimate dialogue between plant and human acquires the harmony of the rite; a deep union not only between plant and human, but between deities, humans and nature takes place in such a way that in the ceremonial ingestion of the plant, it is difficult to establish identity boundaries to define who is who. Human is nature and nature is human. This profound communion enables Quechua-lamas indigenous communities to renew their relationship with the forest and its spirits, which

in turn are pleased by their human creator's ability to regenerate the primordial life and wellbeing of the Amazon Forest.

Medicinal plants have a soul

The native understanding of the living does not only encapsulates what is known as the living part of the body, regardless of whether it is a plant, a human or an animal. Quechua-lamas believe that all beings, and plants in particular, have a soul (*ánima* they call it), and that some of them (which they call *animeras*) nurture souls. The natives call those "strong purgatives". The *ánima*, in the native vision, is not something nonmaterial, invisible and supernatural like the christian soul. The *ánimas* are also living beings with multiple visible forms, which the natives and even the peasants of non-native origin but with a long co-existence with the forest, commonly appreciate, be it in their homes, fields, or on the mountains.

"Each purgative has its *ánima* – says the Quechua-lama Custodio Cachique – when we are not prepared we do not see it." Depending on the context, this *ánima* can be given different names: mother, owner, spirit, *shapshico*, *yachay*, *virote*, devil, etc. And those names acquire meaning according to the situation in which they are lived. For example, for the children of *Bajo Pucallpa* – a Quechua indigenous community – the *ánima* of the sacred ayahuasca plant is the *chullachaqui* (2), while for others it is a bird or an insect. These *ánimas* appear as guardians of the mountain, teaching medicinal secrets, healing and curing the *runas* (human), and at times, helping them hunt.

For the native community, there is no life form without a family. For them, the *ánima* is part of the tree family. Nazario Sangama, from the community of Aviación says: "Each tree is a living being, therefore it has to have family, someone to protect it, a mother. *Muquicho* (a variety of banana) for example, screams from its trunk when it rains; that is his mother, it sounds like a creature being born".

It is this mother that raises the tree, while also being raised by it. Hence, **the forest, according to this native experience, is a living community, protected and guarded by a community of *ánimas***. These *ánimas* present themselves particularly in healing sessions, when the person ingests the cooked or uncooked plant extract, or its resin, etc. The *ánimas* come when the healer sings their *ícaros* (sacred songs) in healing sessions with ayahuasca (sacred plant of various cultures of the Amazon). Each *ánima*, the healers say, has its song. "My grandfather told me that every tree has its *ánima* – says Jonás Ramirez. When they invite the bark of the *ishtapi caspi*, they call him by chanting to its *ánima*. That makes you dream, while the *ánima* presents itself."

Healing with medicinal plants

When a member of the human community feels out of tune, unbalanced, they seek out the plant to recover harmony. The resin, extract or juice of a plant is taken for different purposes. The *Uchu Sanango*, for example, not only gives strength but it also strengthens the aim of the hunter. It also cures rheumatism, makes you brave, awake and not *shegue* (lazy) or fainthearted to do things.

In harmonizing, both the plant and its own vigour play an important role. There are secrets to each plant. As Don Miguel Tapullima Sangama says: "Medicinal plants

cannot be picked just anywhere; you pick them up where the sun rises or where it sets. Nor should you collect them when you slept poorly or late. They must be picked very early, when the moon is mature (full moon), then they are stronger." Most healers agree that the resins must be extracted in *"macllak"* (fasting and without washing the mouth). An important aspect of healing is how the plant is prepared. The mixture, the dosage, the way you cook it and the moon in which you invite the potion are other issues to take into consideration.

To call the one preparing the plant a healer means that it is this persons role – besides being a *chacarero* (someone who lives in a *chácara*, a farm) – to take care of the health of humans. His/her body has to be in tune with nature. A healer must also have what is called a "healing hand". A healer is a carer of the community, and a condition to heal is that he or she is also healthy, that is to say keeping proper diets, abstains from sexual relations before healing, etc.

Even collecting the plants from the fields or the mountain requires a healing hand. A sick hand can cause damage or even death to a plant. Not everyone can invite a plant, says Jonás Ramirez: "The person has to know its *ánima*, only the one who has learned can give, otherwise s/he will make us err". To err is to lose the way of healing. You err when you do not follow the requirements associated with the diet that a plant demands. When this happens, illnesses may occur to those who take them, and if not cured in time, even death.

Don Ruperto Sajami emphasises the role of the *ánimas*. He says: "The *ánimas* of the plants will heal" and adds: "The *Manchinga* is a strong wood, it is used to strengthen bones and its mother is the *supay* (devil). When you take its resin, it heals you. But you must take it as part of a diet, otherwise its *ánimas* will leave. When you take it, it makes you dream, and in your dreams it tells you everything." For many diseases, in the native view, knowledge is not derived from the healer's know-how. As explained by Don Miguel Tapullima Sinarahua: "Those same trees teach us which ones can be used as purgatives and which ones cannot. Sometimes they present themselves in dreams. That is how the *vegetalistas* (plant healers) know they can use them and how to use them to heal the sick".

It also happens that in the case of some illnesses, such as poisoning caused by the bite of a poisonous snake, it is not only poison that can kill a person, but also the *ánima* of the snake, introduced at the time of the bite. In the native vision it is not enough to remove the poison or take the respective remedy against the bite – as the antiophidic serum may be – the *ánima* of the snake must also be removed – what they call the *"virote"* (which can be translated as poisonous dart) – for the patient to heal. As indicated by Don Miguel Tapullima: "The *virote* cannot be removed in the hospital, only the one who knows can remove it. That is the *ánima*, the *supay* (devil) of the snake. The poison is returned to the snake, and its *ánima*, once freed, heals the sick."

Healers say, "if the *ánima* loves you, it heals you." It is not a matter of taking a plant and waiting for the healing to occur. The *ánima* of the plant has to come together with the *ánima* or *ánimas* of the human. **It is the fondness, the affection that heals**, but also the harmony between the temperatures of the body and that of the plants.

Healing is the reunion, the healthy reincorporation of the human in nature from

which it originates. That is why the purgatives should be done in a healthy forest. "Our body, when we take the purgative and follow the diet, is a forest. Our body goes into a forest. No animal can see you because you are a forest", says Purificación Cachique. The distinction between humans and nature fades away, giving way to a relationship where everyone is nature. To do this, the diet is a key aspect in healing. About the diet, Rodriguez and Bartra (3) say the following:

The term diet does not only refer to the practice of a special eating plan, but may also involve reducing physical effort (not to hunt, fish, build houses, etc.), isolation (non-participation in community work, festivities, assemblies, etc.), sexual abstinence and certain strict exercises (special baths). The diet can also mean not eating salt, nor sweets, butter or chilli. The only permitted foods are plant products, some bush meat and fish without fat, steamed, smoked or roasted in a *bijao* leaf. The dieter must leave his/her family home and stay in a *tambito* (guesthouse), isolated from the community and accompanied only by the healer. In general, during the diet, roasted bananas and boiled yuca (*pango*), without seasoning or dressing are consumed.

Growing medicinal plants

The medicines, as the Quechua lamas call them, fall into two groups. Some are mild medicines and others are so-called strong purgatives. They are grown differently. While the mild can be grown in the vicinity of the house and on the fields, and can be seen by friends and strangers, the strong ones are grown hidden in the dense forest. They cannot be seen but by the owners of the fields or the healers. There are also other groups. For example, there are water medicines and mountain medicines, each requiring particular care and use by the human community. The same plant can be regarded from both angles and its application depends on the source of the sickness.

Whether growing the so-called mild medications or the ones with strong purgative qualities, empathy must exist between the cycles of the *runa*s (humans) and plants. It is known that when women are menstruating, they are at a moment of renewing life, and in those circumstances, they do not take strong purgatives nor do they have contact with these plants. Everyone raises and is raised by the corresponding plant. The growing of medicinal plants that cumulates in their use in ritual is an act of profound equivalence and a return to nature by the human being.

The health of human communities, the forest and souls

Jonah Ramirez, *chacarer*o of Lamas says: "The *ánimas* care for the trees. When they are cut or sliced their souls weep, and crying they depart. The village close by loses strength. **When trees are felled, souls leave and people get sick more ofte**n. If we sowed, replanted, the souls would remain."

In this local view **healing is holisti**c. A human community can hardly be healthy if nature is weakened, and the presence of the *ánimas* is reduced. The harmony of one is inseparable from keeping the whole in harmony. Conversely, if one of the elements *(runa*s, mountain or forest and *ánimas*) is sick, balance is weakened and eventually destroyed, causing illness to the group.

For the native Quechua-lamas, their entire microcosm revolves around healing. All

communities are part of the wellbeing of each person. Separated, healing is not worth it. *Ánimas* must also be healthy. The *ánimas* are healthy and present when the mountain, the forest is healthy. A community without a forest or a mountain is a sick community, a community without *ánimas*. For healing to take place, three communities must be in tune and caring for each other*: sach*a (forest or mountain), *runa*s (human) and *ánimas*. This encounter between these three communities gives birth to the ritual of ingesting medicinal plants that is usually conducted by *vegetalista*s or plant healers.

In this sense, the territory of the Quechua-lamas, at least the one located in the province of Lamas, does not enjoy good health. The mountain has been the subject of a pitiless vexation, an ongoing situation. It is estimated that each year 4,543 hectares of primary forest are destroyed in the province of Lamas. Along with the forest and its diversity, the livelihood base of humans and animals disappears too. Consequently, as argued by Jonah, the Quechua-lamas people lose vigour, strength and stamina.

There are reactions, such as that of Doña Cerfina Isuiza, who believes that, "Much of the forest was taken down for cotton but we quickly realized that we could not have everything. It is not our interest to have a big field; a small one is enough to care for with joy, and it gives you everything." For Doña Cerfina, a significant and diverse production depends on the love and affection with which the field is cared for rather than its size. However, the market has won over the mentality of many people. And that is where the forest difficulties begin. **Successive campaigns to plant monocultures have had a devastating effect on mountains, forests, *ánimas* and the same human communit**y who did not find the wealth that its promoters offered.

Many know the teachings of Omer Ruiz, for whom "Without the forest, the field suffers." The complete field does not have to be seen as antagonistic to the forest, but as a complement. A traditional Quechua-lamas field has always been a recreation of the architecture of the forest. The breakdown occurs with specialized agriculture oriented exclusively towards the market. This agriculture sees the forest as an enemy to overcome. Subsequently, acute deforestation will continue to occur until all the forested area is occupied by monocultures. The teachings of Doña Cerfina prevail: recover the love for the forest to regenerate the lost harmony.

With the forest and its conservation, all life is regenerated. There is more water, more medicinal plants, more animals and more diversity in agriculture. In native communities such as Quechua-lamas, where fields and forest are a unit, the health of one is intrinsic to the other. Therefore, to take care of the agricultural diversity of the fields is also a way of raising the forest, and preserving the forest is another way of cultivating human life and the spiritual health of the planet.

Waman Wasi, Lamas, Peru, June 2016.
Grimaldo Rengifo Vásquez, grimaldorengifo@gmail.com
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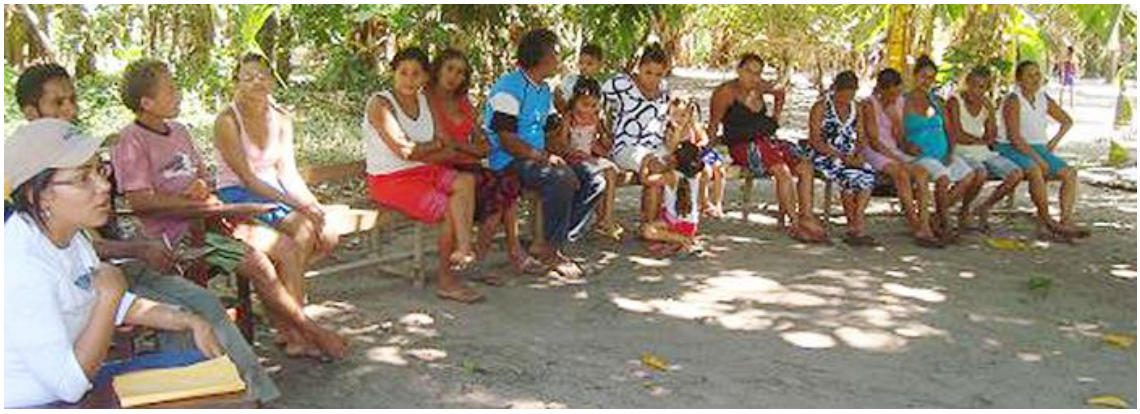
(1) This work is based mainly but not solely on testimonies from the book *Montes y Montaraces*. *Pratec. Lima, Feb. 2001*, wrote by the author of this essay together with Rider Panduro in 2001.
(2) Considered as a "forest guard", this character inspires respect and fear to locals and outsiders. It presents itself generally to those who walk alone along the forest paths.
(3) Rodriguez de la Matta, S. and Bartra Rengifo, J. Shapshico. *Supersticiones, "Creencias y Presagios. Cultura popular de San Martín*". Shuansho ediciones. Tarapoto. 1997.



"To enjoy full health, we want to make a difference": A woman's voice from the forests of Brazil

Francisca Maria is 36 years old, mother of 3 children, married for 17 years. She is also a leader in the community of São Raimundo. São Raimundo is located in the region of Baixo Parnaíba, in the Brazilian state of Maranhão. This region of fertile land and abundant water suffers constant attacks by soy and eucalyptus agribusiness, the later, represented by the company "Suzano Papel e Celulose," one of the largest producers of pulp and paper in Brazil. Suzano already succeeded in seizing various territories of traditional communities in the region. But the community of São Raimundo resists these incursions of monocultures until today. We talked with Francisca about what health means for this community that has managed to keep its territory and the *cerrado* (tropical savannah of Brazil), about how eucalyptus and agribusiness are affecting them and about the role that women play in the leadership of the community.

Can you tell us about important elements that ensure the health of the community, health understood in a comprehensive, holistic way?

Here in São Raimundo, I believe we have a little bit of everything to ensure quality of health for the community. One of the main things that we do not have here is eucalyptus, and we are clear that it does not bring health. For health is to have a preserved forest, to have the animals of the forest. Health is to have good water quality, health is to take in and see the natural beauty we have, that is health for us. Health is permanently protected vegetation along the river banks, very green, well preserved by the community. All of that is health for us. Health is our green cerrado, our blooming cerrado of pequi, of bacuri (typical fruits of the cerrado in that region of Brazil), of medicinal plants. Health is to have a group of women in leadership, leading, because they see things in a different way some men do, they try to find a better way to work with other women, to convince them, affectionately. So all of that is what represents health for us.

And what is happening here in the region that threatens the health of the community?

One of the main things that happens in our region is the growing presence of eucalyptus. In order to cultivate it, a product that pollutes the air is used. In recent times, in some communities in our region, we realized that children were coming down

with fever, flu, viral infections, diarrhoea; people and animals died. Then, over time, we began to realize that all this came from agribusiness' contamination, from those entrepreneurs who bring agribusiness here, to our community, because of the immense advance of eucalyptus.

What damage does the eucalyptus do specifically to women? Are there impacts that only affect women?

For us, if eucalyptus were present in our community, it would mainly affect women. Why? Because we have a bacuri plantation project which provides some of the community's income from December to March. It affects us a lot because men leave for the harvest, and while they are there, women remain in the cerrado. When they do not have money to buy, womengo to the cerrado and in just 30 minutes harvest bacuri, then take the fruit's pulp to the market, where they sell the pulp and then buy fish and meat; and this way they manage to feed their children. Thus, the expansion of eucalyptus would affect the community a lot. Eucalyptus taking over the cerrado that sustains the community would disturb a lot, would make us sick; , women would be unwell too, not knowing what to do.

What would you say to a community trying to cure this "disease" called eucalyptus?

I would tell them to hold on to their position of resistance, like São Raimundo does until today; to stand together in unity, to search for allies and partners, to organize. The main step is unity, and not to accept eucalyptus plantations in the communities in any way. Try to do what São Raimundo did. At first, when they tried to introduce the eucalyptus [plantations], people of São Raimundo came together, sometwo hundred people from the community: Young people, adults, children, pregnant women, and we debated and eventually concluded not to accept [the advance of eucalyptus]. We never consented to any form of eucalyptus plantations. Today São Raimundo remains an example among the communities in the municipality of Urbano Santos. São Raimundo remains the example of resistance and our position is to resist and say no to eucalyptus.

In this community that resisted the incursions of soy and eucalyptus, what difference did it make to have women in the leadership of the community?

Here in São Raimundo women make the difference because they are always in the forefront of our actions. As a woman in leadership, I have already been involved for 8 years and now there is another woman joining the leadership. We have a different way of working , different ways of motivating others, a different kind of courage, as women, as mothers. It is not easy, but for how we want to win, make a difference, men sometimes do not have that courage that women do, that willpower, so women take the lead and carry the struggle forward and encourage others. And we motivate other women. Because we notice that men are feeling tired while us women, we are not. We want more, we want to see a difference, so we carry the struggle forward. We try to convey this motivation to our compañeras, and we have courageous compañeras in our midst. I am part of a group of 8 women with whom I tend a small field. We are growing black beans and irrigation will be installed. The field was the result of a debate where we invited some men who did not want to participate, so our group of women carried this idea forward and it is working. Therefore, we are strong.

Nutrition from forests: forest communities and healthy lives

Despite the harmful consequences of the export-oriented and polluting model of the agribusiness industry for local communities, workers and consumers' health, environments and the climate, much of the international debates on the world's food supply continue to be focussed on increasing and expanding this model based on large-scale monocultures. The fact is that much of this expansion is taking place at the expense of natural diverse systems, in particular forests. It therefore also affects peasant and forest dependant peoples and populations. The alarming expansion of large-scale agribusiness in tropical forest regions threatens in turn the crucial contribution of forests to the diets and nutrition of people who directly and indirectly depend on forests around the world. At the same time, this model fuels and imposes an unhealthy homogenous and global consumption pattern at the expense of local diets and nutrition.

Most preserved forests worldwide have been used, maintained and defended for generations by the communities that directly depend on them. A fundamental reason for this is that forests and other vegetation types provide a steady supply of wild and cultivated fruit, vegetables, seeds, nuts, oils, roots, fungi, herbs, animal protein, among others. Animal proteins and fuel wood for subsistence and income generation contribute both directly and indirectly to food supply and nutrition in forest communities of sub-Saharan Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America. Apart from these direct roles, forests are a fundamental part of many interconnected cycles that are crucial for food production in these areas, such as soil formation, nutrient cycling, provision of green manure and drinkable water, pollination, biological diversity and micro-climate regulation, all of which further improve the nutrition of people who live in and with these lands. It is increasingly recognised that food from forests contributes to dietary diversity, which supports a shift away from calorific intake (quantity of food) as the primary metric for food consumption and towards a broader understanding of nutritionally-balanced diets (1).

In 2015, The Lancet Global Health journal, an open-access medical journal, published an article on research from the University of Cambridge, US, which looked at food and nutrients consumption patterns in 187 countries in 1990 and then again in 2010. The aim was to determine which countries had the world's healthiest diets, according to nutrient quality of key food items and how those attend the needs of the human body(2).

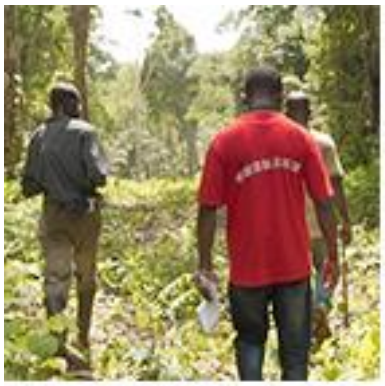
Of the ten countries with the healthiest diets in terms of their nutritional quality, according to this journal, nine are located in Africa. Paradoxically, it is exactly this continent that is very often portrayed as one in need of foreign know-how and advice on how to grow food - often with external "solutions" based on the assumption that there is something inherently wrong about African diets, crops and farming. The three countries with the very best diets are among the world's poorest according to the United Nations 2015 Human Development Index. Chad, which ranks 185th of 188 nations on the UN Index, has the world's healthiest diet. After that come Sierra Leone and Mali, respectively 181st and 179th on the same Index (3). Other African nations among the countries with the most nutritious diets are, in descending order: The Gambia, Uganda, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Somalia. All together, Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly West Africa, ranked better than other regions considered as much wealthier in North America and Europe.

The study examines nutrition only in terms of the quality of the country's diet, and does not speak about the quantity of food consumed. Nevertheless, it puts fundamental question marks about the way development agencies, institutions and donors in the food aid business with their programmes to promote "food security" affect existing rich food diets, especially when their food and development aid programmes are based on monoculture agribusiness. In the case of Africa, initiatives such as the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the G8 "New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition", which strongly promote the interests of corporate-controlled seeds, fertilizer and agro-chemicals at the expense of the rights and interests of smallholder communities, threaten local diversity and knowledge systems available for a rich and nutritional diet. Overall, the growing number of international projects on nutrition and agricultural initiatives in the Global South tend to prioritize global markets, commodity crops and foreign investment that takes control away from peasants and forest peoples and populations over their lands in order to expand an industrial agriculture model based on the heavy use of chemical inputs like agrotoxics. Moreover, transnational markets and foreign investments often promote consumption of unhealthy foods, such as snacks in Thailand and softdrinks in Mexico.

In order to respect and support healthy traditional diets – and therefore, local, peasant agriculture - there needs to be a radical change of path, very different from that prescribed by industrialized countries and corporate agribusiness, which control the industrial global food production system. We need to put an end to the dominance of export-based industrial forms of food production and respect peasant and forest communities' local control and access over their lands, forests and livelihoods. Small-scale and diversified agricultural systems ensure food sovereignty, which in turn meets the nutritional and cultural needs of local communities. Food production based on local knowledges and cultures deserves support and priority when debating the world's needs of secure food supplies, something that is still not the case for a large number of the world's population.

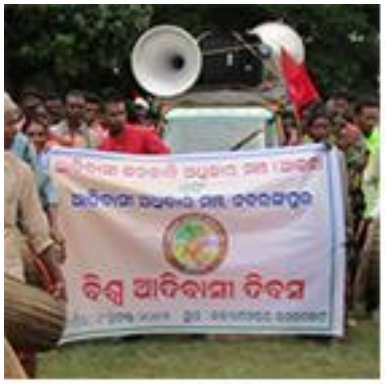
(1) Bhaskar Vira, Christoph Wildburger and Stephanie Mansourian (eds.) 2015, Forests and Food: Addressing Hunger and Nutrition Across Sustainable Landscapes, http://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/399/forests-and-food--addressing-hunger-and-nutrition-across-sustainable-landscapes
(2) Imamura, F, et al. 2015, Dietary quality among men and women in 187 countries in 1990 and 2010: a systematic assessment, The Lancet Global Health, http://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(14)70381-X/abstract
(3) http://www.joanbaxter.ca/2016/01/13/looking-for-healthy-eating-go-to-africa-2/

ACTION ALERTS



Protect Liberia's unique forest heritage!

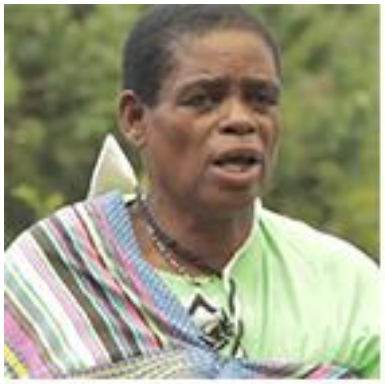
Golden Veroleum Liberia (GVL), a palm oil company, holds hundreds of thousands hectares of land as an agricultural concession. GVL is now pushing to allow logging for export in its concession. Were the government to permit the sale of timber from the legal clearing of forest for oil palm concessions, it would simplify the laundering of illegal timber and dramatically increase the pressure on Liberia's forests. Support the calling for a ban on the export of such timber to prevent the further destruction of rainforests. You can add your signature here:
http://wrm.org.uy/all-campaigns/protect-liberias-unique-forest-heritage/



India: The Parliament violates forest people's rights and promotes further plantations

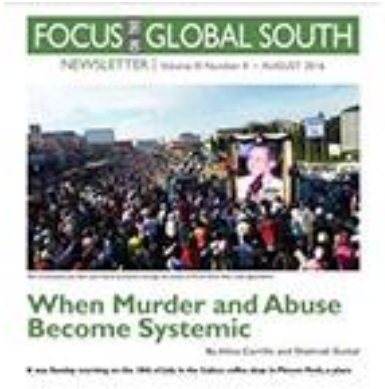
The Indian Parliament approved this July a passage from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund, better known as CAMPA Bill, which seeks to hand over large funds for promoting enormous "afforestation" plans; that is, monoculture tree plantations. Social movements and groups in India are strongly criticizing the Bill as it threatens the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, a fundamental law that recognizes the rights of forest people while empowering village institutions to govern their own forests as well as all other forests they depend on. According to the Act, community institutions can stop any project if it harms their cultural or natural heritage, and they can take steps to protect and conserve forests, wildlife and biodiversity. Read the statement in English from All India Forum of Forest Movements (AIFFM) here:
http://iphrdefenders.net/india-campa-bill-passed-forest-communities-india-today-stands-betrayed-political-class/

RECOMMENDED



"Sacred Sites are living places": the voices of Custodians in Africa

The short film "Sacred Voices", supported by the African Biodiversity Network and the Gaia Foundation, shares the messages of eight traditional Sacred Site Custodians from Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa and Uganda. Sacred Sites in Africa are being increasingly threatened by mining companies, investors, plantations, tourist developments and governments. "They do not respect our ancestral lands or our Sacred Natural Sites, which are potent healing places for maintaining vitality of our planet. It is our responsibility as Custodians to protect them". See the video (with English subtitles) at: https://vimeo.com/49006743



"When murder and abuse become systemic": violence and impunity across Asia

The recently released Newsletter from Focus on the Global South draws attention to the alarming escalation of violence against communities, criminalization of dissent, and the systemic impunity that allows this to happen. Ten articles reflect on and alert about the difficult and violent situation that land and human rights defenders in Thailand, Laos, Philippines, Cambodia and India confront. As the introductory article states: "Threats, intimidation, violence and abuse of power are not new to the majority of the people in Asia, nor is impunity a novel issue. Over the past two decades however, these have escalated to alarming levels because of a powerful nexus of political and business interests, and increasingly regressive laws that criminalise those who resist or even speak out against land grabbing, deforestation, mining, dams, human rights violations and social-economic injustice." Read the newsletter in English here: http://focusweb.org/sites/www.focusweb.org/files/FGS_Newsletter_Vol3_No4_Aug16_1.pdf

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