

THE IMAGERY OF SEEDS: Memory and Tomorrow

Ana Laura Rojas Padgett¹

"The seed was planted thousands of years ago in the heart of all the tribes on the face of the Earth, ever since gatherers first observed plants renewing themselves with each season; curiosity took its time before placing a seed in the soil and the history of humanity changed forever..." (Rojas, Story of the Organic Integration Network).

In the human imagination the seed took on meaning as the being that contains all the creative information of the universe. In the Mayan culture, the seed symbolizes the beginning of time, the regeneration of the earth and rebirth after death, just as occurs in the sacred corn cycle. For Mayan peoples, the seed represents fertility and love.

Four colours of corn: red, black, white and yellow. In ancestral knowledge these colours symbolize the skin colour of all humans that inhabit the Earth, as well as the four cardinal directions on which the universe rests. Mayan people, before planting their crops, celebrate a ceremony to bless the seeds. Thanks is given to the land, and the Creator is asked for abundant harvests so that life may continue.

Since the arrival of Europeans to Abya Yala, the imposition of western thinking has meant a rejection of the knowledge of the original peoples. The stigmatization and devaluing of ancestral knowledge has had a profound impact on the education system which has replaced the original organizing principles of complementarity, reciprocity, community and diversity with a logic of competition, domination and hierarchical control.

We are facing a situation where the final onslaught of capitalism has been institutionalized, with globalized

1. Organizations: Organic Integration Network Collective and Ija'tz Iximulew Collective.
E-mail: rio.mediosindependientesgmail.com



legislation for the control and ownership of seeds, land, water and natural resources. The logic of exploitation and the profitability of the market prevails, standardizing ways of thinking.

Human relations have been reduced to relations of utility and exploitation, driving us to an environmental situation that is progressive, degenerative and irreversible. Clearly, the need to change the model of agricultural production is not only an ideological issue but one of common sense.

Hand in hand with indigenous peoples, spiritual guides, campesinos, midwives, knowledge keepers and defenders of life, the seed of diverse resistance has been cultivated in the fields of our lands, nourishing our lives around the fire. This is how the project “Planting Seeds” came about.

Planting Seeds

We understand that breaking our connection with Mother Earth, and with our own bodies, inevitably dehumanizes us. According to UNICEF, chronic child malnutrition has affected one out of every two children in Guatemala for many years. At the same time power dynamics and land distribution place these Maya, Ga-

rifuna, Xinca and Mestizo lands among some of the most unequal in the world.

Adding to the crisis are high rates of corruption that promote private and corporate interests in order to control the means of life. They exploit Mother Earth, subjugating the people into one more piece of machinery with which to award themselves material wealth.

Through a collective effort and under consultation with grandmothers and grandfathers, guardians of the seeds from all regions of Iximulew (Guatemala) and organizations that work for food sovereignty, the “6th Gathering and Exchange of Knowledge and Seeds” of the Seeds of Freedom Network was organized in Guatemala. We promoted a process to articulate efforts where we can identify problems, generate dialogue around possible solutions and coordinate actions to strengthen a network at the national and Latin-American level.

As a collective we created a project called “Native seed banks and school gardens to strengthen food sovereignty in high-risk communities”. The proposal is to accompany efforts to guarantee the use and recovery of traditional seeds and strengthen food sovereignty, as well as to recover forests and important water sources. So, we began a process for community participation

in territorial planning with a restorative and inclusive vision in the departments of Peten, Sacatepequez, Solola and Chimaltenango.

Both the focus and our plans had to change given the occurrence of the pandemic in 2020. We focused on establishing an alternative market to solve the food shortage with local production and cooperative and family enterprises. That same year we suffered the impacts of hurricanes Eta and Iota which affected thousands of families and resulted in serious losses. The response from the government to the loss of crops was to distribute GMO seeds, many of which failed, further exacerbating the urgent need for food and sustainability. We then began to manage funds to provide food, native seeds and basic necessities to communities in the department of Peten, which is located in the largest watershed in Mesoamerica and where floods ruined crops, adding to the expansion of palm oil production that had already displaced many communities.

This initiative links us with other valuable projects being developed under similar objectives, among them: Qachuu Aloom, Senacri, Imap, La Redsag, Reisa, Colectivo Tecomates, Regeneración Internacional. Our participation in and support for projects that generate community autonomy is vital if we are to develop emotions, knowledge and practices that dismantle capitalist and colonial logic.

Establishing school gardens is a pedagogical tool with which to approach environmental issues, struggles and social issues and even mathematics. It is interdisciplinary.

Education about the human right to food must be strengthened in schools. One of our objectives is to engage schools, as well as parents, in working to improve school meals. The government should invest in culturally appropriate school meals sourced from family agriculture. Unfortunately, this principle is violated due to the interests of corrupt groups and the influence of the food industry in the central and local governments.

Working in schools with parents allows us to monitor what conditions communities are living in and



Representación de la deidad central de la cosmogonía o cosmovisión maya, el Dios del Maíz, junto a una planta del maíz.
Ajaw Winaq Jun Junajpu (Popol Vuh)

Arte elaborado por: Asuwaan ch'aba'qjaay ajtz'ib'ajaw

where there are high rates of malnutrition. We focus on and adapt to circumstances such as the pandemic, the expansion of palm oil and climate change.

In the communities in Peten, we work with valuable, well-organized groups of women who are willing to continue raising awareness and sharing knowledge, as well as sharing native and traditional seeds.

We want to make people see this as an urgent cause. We need to work together to face the complex situation we are living in Guatemala where poverty rates, inflation and forced displacement are intensifying. We have focused primarily on Peten because, being such a remote and inaccessible region, it is often forgotten. Even the United Nations, which has programs for food safety and sovereignty in various places, continues to exclude Peten despite the expansion of monoculture and loss of seeds and access to land in this region.

The invitation is open for you to join us in planting the seed of life.