

# MUTUAL NURTURING: RE-WEAVING COMMUNITY WITH OUR ELDERS PHOTO ESSAY

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## *DIGGING IN: FACILITATING DIALOGUE AND ACTION*

### KEY THEMES AND TERMS

*Crianza mutua*, elders, thinking/feeling, creation stories, rituals, four directions, UniTierra, Zapatistas, cycles, grandmothers and grandfathers, individualism, autonomy, milpa, compost, *alux* and *sakab*, henequen hacienda.

### CATALYZING CONNECTIONS

#### DECODING QUESTIONS

- *Description*: What stories are told? How did you feel reading them?
- *Personal Connection*: How can you connect this story to your personal experience or stories in your family?
- *Common Themes*: What social issues/themes are raised in these stories? Is there a common issue shared across contexts?
- *Social Analysis*: What are the historical and social processes that created this situation?
- *Planning for Action*: What can be done? How does this inspire me to change my actions?

#### SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- Discuss the key concept this photo essay introduces: *crianza mutua* (in Spanish), which we roughly translate as “mutual nurturing”. Ángel and Valiana suggest that “everything is nurtured: human beings and Mother Earth have an interrelationship that allows us to exist and survive.” In what ways is that relationship explored in the essay?
- The notion of *crianza mutua* challenges western notions that we exist as individuals and that we are separate from nature. Consider how the following quote from Valiana challenges a western world view: “Don Toño (would be) working in the milpa and telling us: ‘We have to add nutrients to the soil to heal it!’ And if the soil needs healing, why shouldn’t we heal ourselves too? If the milpa is described as an ‘us’, why do we continue to think only as individuals?”
- What are some of the Mayan rituals described in the essay, which reinforce this relationship of respect between humans and other elements of nature? For example, the quote below suggests a ritual of asking permission for human use of the land and other beings. “We use a large bucket to dissolve

the dough in water and add honey, which is then offered in gourds in four directions. To the heart of the sky and the earth, to the winds, to the animals we ask permission to work the land with no problems and so the harvest can grow". What worldview and values are reflected in this ritual?

- In what ways is the "milpa" a way of life for Ángel and Valiana?
- How is the corporate food system a threat to the Mayan way of life?
- How is the idea of autonomy explored in the photo essay?

## **INTERGENERATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE**

This essay emphasizes learning from our elders, yet "mutual nurturing" implies that they can also learn from us. Can you identify any examples of that kind of reciprocal intergenerational relationship that you've observed or experienced?

The authors suggest that "Our elders are not telling us what we have to do... they move us by their example and not through their discourse, like often happens in universities." What are the values of this approach to teaching and learning? How does it compare with pedagogies in schools or universities you have seen or attended?

In working for food sovereignty at the level of practice, what kinds of things have Ángel and Valiana learned from Doña Yolanda and Don Toño? What kinds of things have they learned from Gustavo and Nicole? Compare the different strategies of survival of Don Toño and Doña Yolanda, on the one hand, and Gustavo and Nicole, on the other.

Discuss this quote: "For many Indigenous Peoples sharing food with family is the most sacred, it's what makes us siblings." Also see photo essay "Cooking and Eating Together" for more on the social aspect of sharing food.

Compare the Mayan perspectives on reciprocity with Navajo Tom B.K. Goldtooth's notion of our [sacred responsibility to protect the earth](#).

## **INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Ángel and Valiana are critical of the individualism of western culture which they describe as "a blindfold that forces us to keep depending on a system that sickens us, that invalidates us, that makes us dependents, that makes us deaf, that prevents us from mutual nurturing."

Don Toño and Doña Yolanda, the campesino elders who have taught Ángel and Valiana about closed loop farming, "have resisted their whole lives and have refused to depend on an employer. They are autonomous. What they call "work" is actually a way of life they are passionate about." What aspects of this work are they passionate about? What pressures are there on subsistence farmers like them to change?

How is the patio or garden seen as a pharmacy in the communities described here? What natural medicines can you buy in your area? What do you get from the pharmacy in your neighbourhood that you might be able to grow yourself?

On the 10th of September 2003, while protesting outside the WTO ministerial in Cancun, Mexico, farmer Lee Kyung Hae sacrificed his life by stabbing himself. That tragic incident exposed the destructive effects of WTO on the lives of millions of peasants globally. In memory of farmer Lee and the continuing struggles of peasants in resisting the neo-liberal agenda of WTO, La Via Campesina marks September 10 as the International Day Against WTO and Free Trade Agreements. How can Ángel, Valiana, Don Toño, Doña Yolanda, Nicole and Gustavo seem to be part of this international peasant movement?

## **CONNECTING TO OTHER PHOTO & VIDEO ESSAYS**

- [La Comida](#)
- [Language and Food](#)

# *DIGGING DEEPER: RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND ACTION*

## **BOOKS & ARTICLES**

Teamy, Kelly. (2013, February 13). *Development - Cosmovision and Crianza... Learning from Pratec*. Enlivened Learning.

UN General Assembly. (2018). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas*.

## **ORGANIZATIONS & WEBSITES**

- [La Via Campesina](#)