

Virginia D. Nazarea, Robert E. Rhoades, and Jenna E. Andrews-Swann (eds.), *Seeds of Resistance, Seeds of Hope: Place and Agency in the Conservation of Biodiversity*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 2013. 298 pp. \$60.00. ISBN: 9780816530144.

From Chiapas to Japan to the southern United States, farmers, seed keepers, and gardeners—whose identities are often intrinsically linked with the land—are creating community that reflects their cultural identity. *Seeds of Resistance, Seeds of Hope: Place and Agency in the Conservation of Biodiversity* connects the lives of these people around the world engaged in the same loving struggle to resist homogenization and cultivate a world where diversity can flourish.

The book's central argument is that conservation is not only *possible* in conditions of marginality; it *thrives* there. Where memory is threatened—whether through the nonconsensual encroachment of genetically modified corn, the mass migration of people from one continent to another, or the long and ongoing assertion of colonial domination over indigenous peoples—memory keepers step up to preserve the cultural and biological fabric of their communities. It is unplanned and beyond design, but in the mess there is a kind of magic.

While the conservation of biological material can be complemented by preserving landraces⁴ in faraway gene banks or supporting small-scale farmers through government- or NGO-led initiatives, the heart of conservation work is happening invisibly because of local people who are committed to carrying cultural memory. Cultural memory provides people with “a sense of belonging and a feeling of broader membership in a real or imagined community” (Susannah Chapman and Tom Brown, “Apples of Their Eyes: Memory Keepers of the American South,” 54). Seeds are perfect vehicles for transporting cultural memory from one time or place to another, because they arouse in their look, smell, and texture a set of stories that can help us locate ourselves in relation to our roots, no matter where they are planted. Each of the chapters demonstrates in its own way how seeds play this role in diverse contexts.

One chapter looks at a project in Chiapas, Mexico, initiated by the Zapatistas—global leaders in self-organization and asserting self-determination. Learning that GMO corn was threatening to contaminate their corn seed provoked anger and uncertainty. “For us, the indigenous, corn is sacred. If these agrochemical companies are trying to get rid of our corn, it is like wanting to get rid of a part of our culture which we inherited from our Mayan ancestors” (Peter Brown, “Maya Mother Seeds in Resistance of Highland Chiapas in Defense of Native Corn,” 158). Corn plays a role in their cultural memory as the crop that kept them strong in all of

⁴ A landrace is a local variety of a domesticated plant or animal species that has developed largely by adaptation to the natural and cultural environment in which it lives.

their struggles. So when the corn was endangered, they stepped up to protect it as it had protected them. They engaged in extensive field-testing to determine the scope of the problem. They froze non-contaminated seed as a precaution. And they sent corn seed packages to a network of trusted seed keepers throughout the world for safekeeping and safe planting. GMO corn might take over their land, was the thought, but the seed will always be safe, and its sacredness will never be compromised.

Protecting seed is not just a matter of keeping high-yielding varieties or maintaining a connection to the past. It is about generating and regenerating identities that are rooted in place and culture. When forces attempt to marginalize those identities, the result—as in the case of the Zapatista seed keepers—is often a renewed community commitment to strengthening them again. This commitment comes not out of an angry reaction to a threat. It comes from a place of resilience. A movement born out of that kind of conviction will undoubtedly be around to stay.

Nazarea writes: “If we dismantle our rational frameworks and do away with our formulaic approaches, what are we left with? Can we imagine knowledge systems that are mutually respectful and permeable, social movements that are not primarily political and angry but sensual and celebratory? Can we spend more time in listening than in positioning, dwelling a little bit more and controlling a little bit less?” (13).

There are examples all around us of people taking paths that defy conventional norms, choosing to value diversity over convenience, identity over rationality. These paths are not motivated by anger but by a will to preserve and celebrate that which makes us who we are. They find ways to succeed regardless of the challenges that face them. What would it look like for our churches to set out on a path like that?

The stances we take (or fail to take) often come from a position of fear—of losing control, of making someone angry, of saying the wrong thing. What if we let go of that fear and surrendered to the joy in diversity that has always been our primary source of innovation as a church? What if we let voices at the margins define our actions? What if we looked for the work already being done in our communities to protect and restore our connection to place, and found ways to support it? Nurturing this kind of mindset would extend well beyond food systems and into all social justice work; we often find ourselves called to this work but are unable or unwilling to act courageously in it.

In his chapter on place and indigenous biodiversity conservation, Tirso Gonzales writes about decolonization: “For some . . . , this process will be a strengthening of their places; for others it will be a process of moving out of their ‘violent environments’ and becoming native to their places” (Tirso Gonzales, “Sense of Place and Indigenous People’s Biodiversity Conservation in the Americas,” 97). Colonialism has attempted a widespread erasure of place and the people connected to those

places. The church has played a role in this erasure. But if done right, decolonization can embrace all of us—indigenous and nonindigenous people—as we each ecologically, culturally, and spiritually strengthen the places we have come to call home. All we have to do is listen for ways that restoration of space and cultural memory is taking place around us, and jump in. The diverse voices that make up *Seeds of Diversity*, *Seeds of Hope* provide a helpful push.

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Leslie A. Robertson and the Kwaqu'ł Gixsam Clan, *Standing Up with Ga'axsta'las: Jane Constance Cook and the Politics of Memory, Church, and Custom*, UBC, Vancouver, 2012. 596 pp. \$39.95. ISBN 9780774823852.

In the summer of 1914 in 'Yalis (Alert Bay) off of northern Vancouver Island, Ga'axsta'las, or Jane Constance Cook, served as a Kwakwaka'English interpreter at the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission on the distribution of reserve lands in British Columbia. Half of the Kawkwaka'wakw applications for lands that had been used for centuries for fishing, berry picking and shellfish harvest were dismissed on the grounds that the land was already being used “productively,” predominantly by white farmers. Within weeks of Ga'axsta'las's swearing-in, my great-grandfather, newly arrived from England, received a certificate of preemption to homestead a lot less than 100 km south of 'Yalis.

One hundred years later, as I read and write about Ga'axsta'las, her descendants, my Anglican clergy colleagues, and members of the church to which we both belong, are among the survivors, family members, chiefs, elders, and witnesses attending ceremonies in Alert Bay for the demolition of St. Michael's Indian Residential School.

“Mrs. Cook” (1870–1951), in archival documents, or “Granny Cook,” to her family, was a controversial and influential woman who had a public voice and active role in Kawkwaka'wakw social and political life for decades. The dominant historical, anthropological, and community records depict her one-dimensionally as colonized and inauthentic, a half-white, missionary-raised Christian who supported the potlatch ban.

Potlatch, where the word potluck comes from, means “gift” in the Chinook trade jargon and refers to different west coast ceremonies that include a feast, dances, and gifts of food and goods to guests. Some people I know call these “give-aways,” “feasts,” or “winter dances.” More than an important ceremonial practice, potlatch is a legal, governance and economic system pertaining to land distribution for fishing and food-harvest, transfer of leadership, marriage alliances, wealth, welfare,