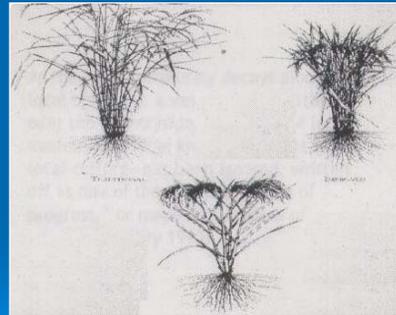


Native Perspectives in Conserving Plant Genetic Resources



Virginia D. Nazarea
University of Georgia

Traditional, Green Revolution, and Ideotype Varieties of Rice



Source: White, Peter. 1994. Rice: The Essential Harvest.
National Geographic. May 1996.



Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)

Article 8 states that signatory countries should:

regulate or manage biological resources important for the conservation of biological diversity whether within or outside protected areas, with a view to insuring their conservation and sustainable use

and

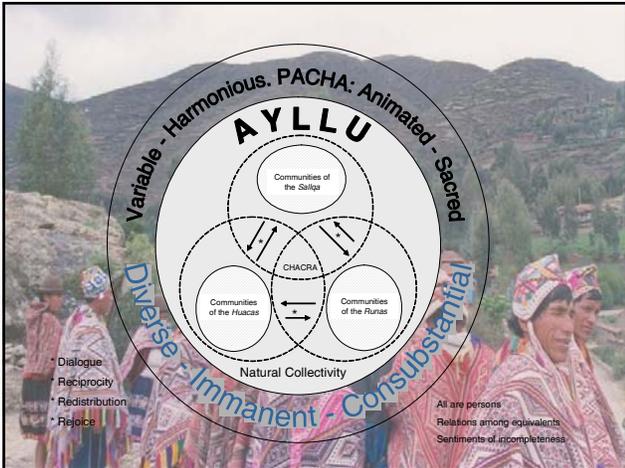
respect, preserve, and maintain knowledge, innovations, and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider applications.



Four Axes of Indigenous Conservation of Biodiversity



- Holism/Interdependence/Completion
- Sensory memory/Place/Identity
- Emotion, Meaning/ Metaphor
- Remembrance/Resistance/Resilience




“The varieties that we have in our communities are so precious that I would like to have all of them and never lose them. I would like to gather them up in the apron of my skirt. I feel like I am part of them and I need to take care of them as I take care of my children.”



"I don't have any (white cucumber), but I got the seeds. I've grown it for years. They are not that big, they are small cucumbers, and they're white. I eat and don't peel them at all. They're real good cucumber. I've been selling them since my husband died in 1979. The lady the next door who gave me the seed died at 90, that's her mother's cucumber seed."



Years ago, Earl planted two yellow and two red tomatoes, as well as a purple one, and a "pickle vine grew up around these plants". At some point he realized that he had come up with a new tomato, which he described as "a big, purple, smooth tomato". He said it had a wonderful flavor, and was low acid. He dubbed them Earl's Pearls.

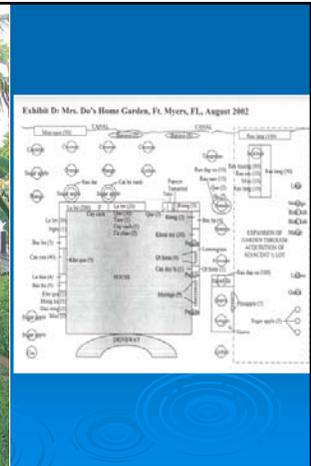
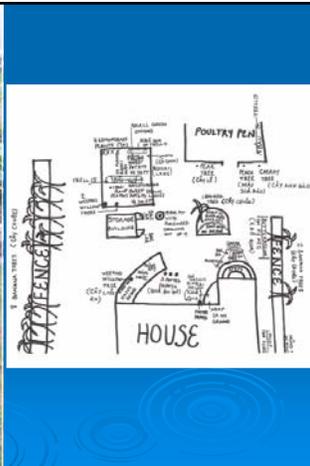
I lived for Sunday dinner. I'd start thinking about Sunday on Wednesday. Southern fried chicken, fried okra, creamed corn, powdered buttermilk biscuits, a mountain of potato salad with sweet pickles. The smell of Mom's caramelized brown onion gravy dripping off the largest roast loin of beef ever, the bowl of slow-cooked green pole beans with ham hocks that steamed my father's glasses when it was set before him. And since Dad was a Geechee in the truest sense, no meal could be served without fluffy Carolina long grain rice.

from "Grace at the Table"



Some Findings: Southern Seed Legacy

- ❖ Seedsaving and comfort food are effective means of connection and re-entrenchment.
- ❖ As meals are shared by family and friends, so seeds are passed along in a memory-laden traffic of all that is treasured and protected.
- ❖ Seeds persist when stories about them persist, thus rendering biodiversity conservation relevant and meaningful.
- ❖ Globalization provokes re-territorialization as much as de-territorialization.





Some Findings: Vietnamese Germplasm Project

- ❖ Vietnamese immigrants garden even if they have access to only a small patch of land.
- ❖ They garden even though their customary food is available in Asian stores and even if they do not have any gardening experience.
- ❖ Food remains the center of celebrations and rituals. Younger generations retain knowledge of plants through food and commensality.
- ❖ Gardens and kitchens are sovereign spaces where memory and identity are anchored by plants from the homeland.



The Circle of Elders for Repatriation Priorities

foregrounds local perspectives pertaining to "lost" and "found" germplasm. It focuses on recollections about plants and their uses as well as changes that have precipitated genetic erosion.

These "memory registers" will be transmitted to:

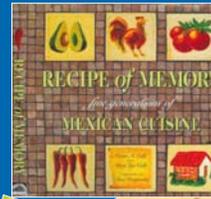
- The youth to reinforce their their cultural and biological legacy
- Scientists and policy makers to guide repatriation and in situ conservation initiatives

"Before, when I was a girl, there were a lot of native potatoes and there were no imported potatoes. So my mother and father always worked with native potatoes... There were some for making soup, others for boiling, and others for frying; that's how potatoes were then."



Factors identified to account for loss of diversity:

- Introduction of new varieties
- Irregularity of rain and frost
- Spread of worms and diseases
- Lack of water

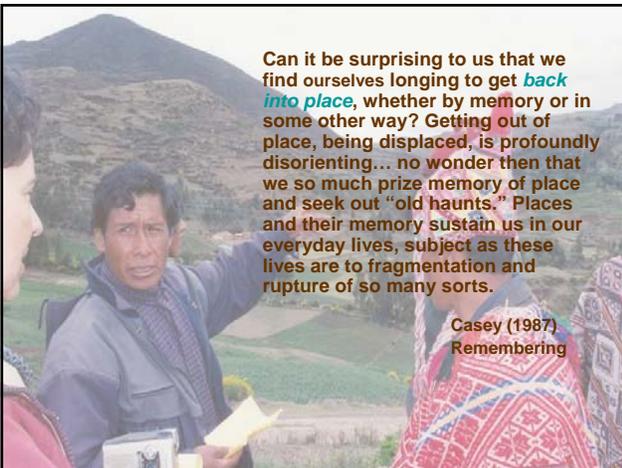


The feast began with a blur of wings... I must have been at least eight years old when I looked up into the tall coop and the feather-tufted plywood boxes. Inside them squirmed plump young birds, which to me looked like wrinkled old men. Delfina (my grandmother) understood that the meals she served and the recipes she taught my mother constituted a language unto itself. With these magic formulas she sharpened my senses; with these written words she created memories strong enough to last until I was ready to ask where they'd come from.

from "Recipe of Memory"

Can it be surprising to us that we find ourselves longing to get **back into place**, whether by memory or in some other way? Getting out of place, being displaced, is profoundly disorienting... no wonder then that we so much prize memory of place and seek out "old haunts." Places and their memory sustain us in our everyday lives, subject as these lives are to fragmentation and rupture of so many sorts.

Casey (1987)
Remembering



The Promise of Resilience



- Conservation as a way of life
- Conservation beyond design
- Conservation at the margins
- Conservation in place

