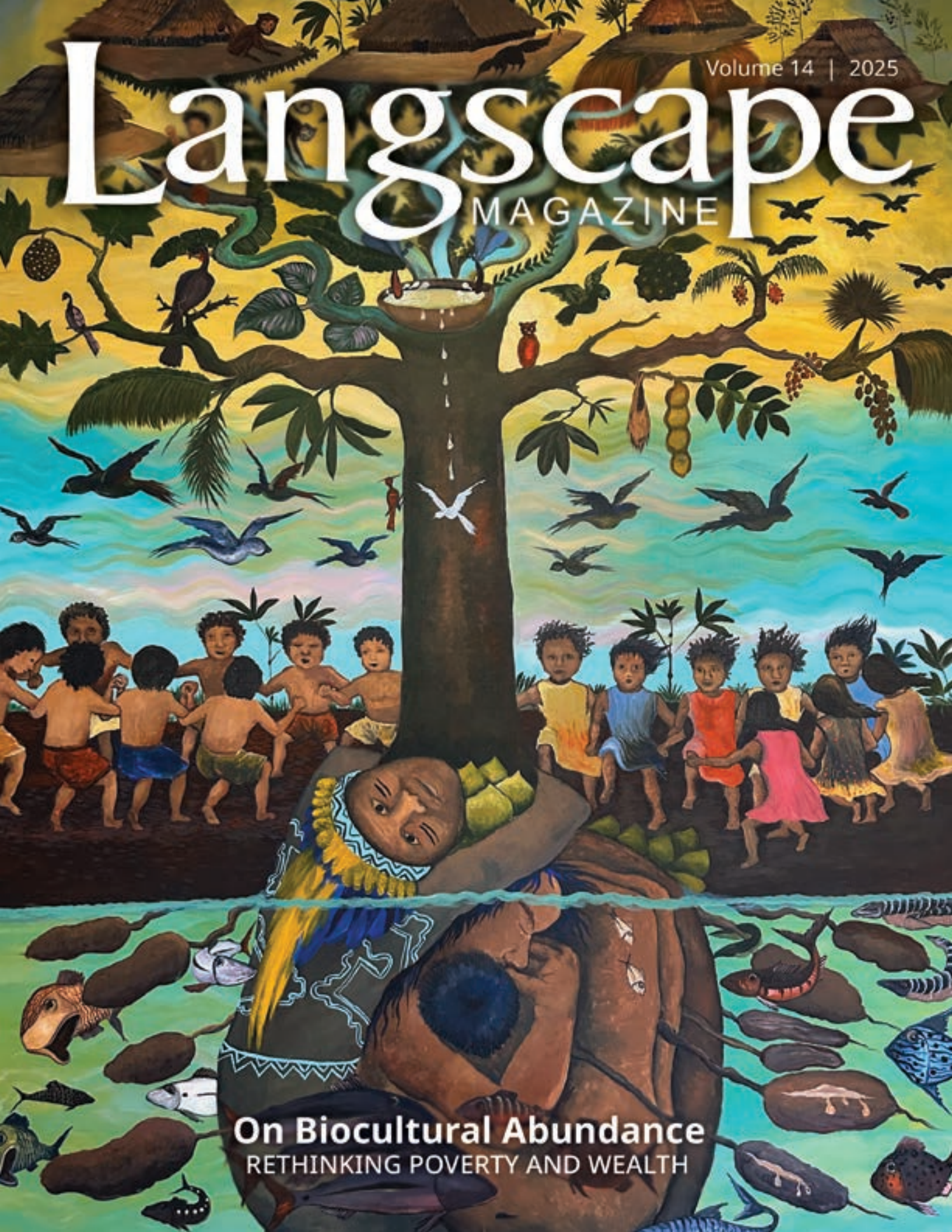




Volume 14 | 2025

Langscape

MAGAZINE

On Biocultural Abundance
RETHINKING POVERTY AND WEALTH

Langscape Magazine is an extension of the voice of Terralingua. Through the power of stories, images, and art, it supports our mission to educate minds and hearts about the vital value of biocultural diversity for the thriving of all life on earth.

ABOUT THE COVER PHOTOS

Front: *Flourishing Diversity*, acrylic on canvas. The branches of this tree of life lead to different communities, all of which contribute to the flourishing of life. Children dance in celebration. Representing the creative force of life, a young mother with her baby are the roots of the tree, the source of life. A shaman protects it all from collapse. Art: Bruce Rubio Churay

Back: Salome Gatumi and Brennie Muthoni walk through a field. For the Tharaka community of Mount Kenya, reviving traditional agricultural practices has increased abundance and autonomy over nutritional security. Photo: Andrew Pilsbury

Terralingua thanks the Reva and David Logan Foundation, the Swift Foundation, Lush Charity Pot, the MakeWay Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, the New England Biolabs Foundation, and a major anonymous donor for generously supporting Langscape Magazine.

EDITOR: Luisa Maffi
EDITORIAL COORDINATOR: Jadwiga Akshara Sangiorgio
LAYOUT: Coreen Boucher
DESIGN: Ruby Arnold (Ruby Makes Things)
PRINTING: Digital Direct
COMMS & MARKETING: Gia Querubin
BLOG EDITOR: Chang Liu
CUSTOMER CARE: Elena Oslopova

Learn about Terralingua: terralingua.org
Visit *Langscape Magazine* and read articles:
terralingua.org/langscape-home
Purchase single copies or subscribe:
terralingua.org/shop

ISSN 2371-3291 (print)
ISSN 2371-3305 (digital)

© Terralingua 2025

Langscape Magazine
is a
Terralingua Publication



Terralingua
Unity in Biocultural Diversity

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

IN PRAISE OF TRUE WEALTH

Luisa Maffi 5

VALUES

FROM SHARING TO HOARDING, FROM ABUNDANCE TO SCARCITY

An egalitarian community in Central Africa that has been sharing its forest's bounty for millennia faces change as outsiders view the forest as a scarce commodity.

Jerome Lewis 8

THE TRUE WEALTH OF THE ZAPOTECOS

Inspired by Oaxaca's biocultural diversity, a Mexican researcher realizes that only through community can we achieve prosperity.

Alex Ventimilla 15

MOUNTAINS, RITUAL SHARING, AND CLAN BONDS

In the Eastern Himalayas, sharing among people, with deities, and with other living beings has been a way of maintaining social and ecological abundance.

Vanessa Cholez 21

REVISITING ABANDONED FOOTPATHS AND VALUES OF SHARING

A quest to document the Feast of Merit in her homeland leads a young Naga woman to rediscover a cornerstone of her people's worldview.

Küvethilü Thülüo 28

WALKING THROUGH BIOCULTURAL ABUNDANCE

An arduous hike along ancient trails in Greenland reveals a wealth of long-term relationships between people and the land.

M. Cecilia Porter and Chris Lundy 34

WHAT WE NEED IS *BUEN VIVIR*

For farmers in Costa Rica, wealth resides in quality of life, well-being, and connection to land, not in economic growth.

Felipe Montoya-Greenheck and Ana María Martínez 42

GLASS HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL?

Reflecting on life's journey through an Ojibway cultural lens reveals that living with good values and gratitude creates abundance and balance on earth.

Darryl Whetung 49

ACTIONS

WEAVING ABUNDANCE AND RESISTANCE IN THE TERRITORY

Indigenous peoples in Southwest Colombia defend their threatened agricultural system as a repository of collective biocultural heritage, wisdom, and wealth.

Rowan Glass 50

A JOURNEY TOWARD HEALING, ROOTED IN ABUNDANCE

Against the onslaught of Western exploitation, the Shipibo people in the Peruvian Amazon strive to retain the wealth of their spiritual and healing traditions.

Tanya Kammonen 57

ON BIOCULTURAL ABUNDANCE AND ANCESTRAL RESILIENCE

An ethnobotanist's African ancestors survived and thrived in Barbados through a wealth of plant resources and traditional knowledge.

Sonia Peter 63

REGENERATING ABUNDANCE WITH PERMACULTURE

Learning from both ancient traditions and contemporary approaches, a farmer cultivates biocultural abundance by following nature's processes.

Peppi Gauci 70

REVIVING TRADITION FOR FUTURE ABUNDANCE

The Tharaka community of Mount Kenya is reclaiming its biocultural wealth by revitalizing traditional knowledge.

Simon Mitambo with Rory Sheldon 76

MILLET AND THE WEALTH OF TIME

In the mountains of Japan, a researcher learns how communities reclaim both ancestral millet cultivation and the treasure of time.

Saori Ogura 84

CULTIVATING (BIO)CULTURE WITH FIRE

In California, the North Fork Mono Tribe hosts cultural burns to promote biocultural abundance.

Annabelle Law 92

REFLECTIONS

NATURE IS ABUNDANCE, AND WE ARE NATURE

Art that celebrates nature's abundance and invites us to reconnect with, respect, and revere the existing natural balance.

Hobbs and Borton..... 99

OF PLANTS, HEALTH, AND WEALTH

In a biocultural hotspot in the Indian Himalayas, local communities offer an alternative view of abundance, rooted in interdependence with nature.

Shriya Malhotra..... 106

LEARNING FROM FLOWERS

With nature as his teacher, a scholar pauses to appreciate the abundance surrounding him.

Mark Turin..... 114

ALL OUR RELATIONS

Living a childhood dream, a Japanese woman weaves into her baskets the biocultural abundance of her adopted First Nation home.

Hiroko Takaya..... 116

FELTING ABUNDANCE TOGETHER

Healing her matriline through the ancient craft of dollmaking, a wool artist discovers that abundance is a feeling of belonging and connection.

Coreen Boucher123

WINTER COAT

A very small intruder leaves a very big impression in this poetic meditation on abundance and scarcity.

Chang Liu (劉長亭)..... 130

FOR A WORLD OF ABUNDANCE

WHAT IS A GOOD LIFE?

Gift economies and biocultural abundance offer hope for a future of solidarity, reciprocity, and sacred relationships with the living world.

Valiana Aguilar, Samar Awaad, Ysa Calderón, Brijlal Chaudhari, Joanne Cheung, Kamasa Dorothy, Mai Thin Yu Mon, and Dawn Morrison.....132

SEED ECONOMICS

Learning from seeds, the kernels of life, we can reimagine an economy founded on abundance and reciprocity.

Sinéad Fortune with Amber Hayward138

SHARING ABUNDANCE THROUGH INDIGENOUS-LED PHILANTHROPY

Indigenous practices of gifting can be modeled in the philanthropic space.

First Peoples' Cultural Foundation and Kw'umut Lelum Foundation 145

FLOURISHING DIVERSITY FOR AN ABUNDANCE OF LIFE

Only a diversity of place-based solutions can restore biocultural abundance on earth.

Jerome Lewis, Ameyali Ramos, and Jessica Sweidan 152



In Praise of True Wealth

Luisa Maffi

In *Mother of Many Children*, renowned Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin's first documentary (1977), Sally Skead, a young Ojibway woman, recalls growing up on the land. Wearing moccasins for shoes and rabbit skins for socks, she followed her grandparents, who would take her with them wherever they went—"fishing, trapping, everywhere." Hard on her? Not a bit. "It was a good life," she avers. "I never felt like I was poor. I was just happy."

Those simple yet profound words strikingly resonate with me. No, I didn't grow up wearing moccasins and rabbit-skin socks—although, had I been born a couple of generations earlier, I might have been wearing wooden clogs fashioned by my clogmaker great-grandfather, Francesco, in his home village of San Zenone in the Po Valley of northern Italy. Born in Rome in the early post-WWII era, I wore "regular" Western shoes instead, and my childhood wilderness (to which I did take with a passion) was merely the garden in the back of the house, where the grass, which my parents left uncut, was almost as tall as I was! I never "fished" more than a few frogs out of a nearby marsh to see them hop or "trapped" more than a few lizards to study their dinosaur-like features. Like Sally, though, I was happy and never wished for more.

That's why I can deeply relate to the sense of both "enoughness" and "plenty" that Sally's statement poignantly conveys: enoughness because you just don't need or wish for more, and plenty because "just enough" is in fact a lot! It's the plenitude that comes from a sense of connectedness—of being one with your family, your human community, and the larger community of all your non-human relations. It's a miraculous abundance that never gets depleted no matter how much you share it—in fact, the more you share it, the more abundant it becomes.

Since coming across Sally's words, I noticed many more similar statements made by members of Indigenous and other place-based communities around the world. Again and again, the gist seemed to be: if you are intimately connected to people and place, and if you recognize the wealth of nature as a priceless gift to be cared for and shared—so that everybody has enough while also nurturing natural abundance itself—then your life is rich and fulfilled in a way that no material wealth could provide.

I started thinking of the meaning of "poverty" and "wealth" a lot—indeed, *rethinking* the meaning of "poverty" and "wealth" altogether. And the idea of "biocultural abundance" as true wealth began to

emerge—along with the question: given how good a bioculturally abundant life can be and is, how did so many of us go wrong, choosing a disconnected, impoverished material quest for more?

Indeed, in our increasingly materialistic, profit-oriented world, being "wealthy" has become inextricably associated with having an abundance of money and material goods. Lured by this chimera—you are what you own—more and more people around the globe define themselves by their ability to acquire ever more material wealth. The voracious accumulation of that kind of "abundance" by the few dramatically depletes the world's richness in nature and culture, leading to scarcity for the many. And ironically, this often does not even result in happiness and contentment for the "haves" but instead in a sort of acute "accumulation anxiety." Arguably, this dominant yet unsustainable and inequitable idea of a "good life," rooted in capitalistic systems of various stripes, is a fundamental driver of the social and ecological predicament we face globally today. What hope, if any, is there of seeing the world change course from the current destructive (and ultimately self-destructive) trajectory?

The answer, I believe, largely depends on whether we—meaning "we in the Western[ized] world"—can make a radical shift in how we perceive ourselves and the relationship between economy and ecology. That is, it depends on whether we can stop seeing ourselves as apart from and dominant over nature and quit treating the web of life as a mere pool of resources to be scavenged in the service of an almighty economy that self-perpetuates by creating endless wants; and whether we can instead begin to view ourselves as a part of and totally dependent on nature and start reimagining the economy as a tool for meeting basic human needs while also serving the thriving of all life.

Again, such alternative ways of thinking do exist, enshrined in the worldviews of many communities around the globe, both Indigenous and not, who define a "good life" in terms of collectively sharing the abundance of nature within a context of flourishing social and cultural relationships. So, what if we all shifted toward those other ways of thinking about abundance and replaced "more and more for the few" with "just enough for the many," fulfilling everyone's needs without undermining our world's biocultural wealth? How might life on the planet be different if a biocultural abundance outlook were embraced by all? This issue of *Langscape Magazine* delves into these momentous questions.

In the first section, we contemplate the enduring and changing values of “abundance” and the tensions between worldviews centered on abundance and those that, in contrast, foster scarcity. **Jerome Lewis** eloquently lays the groundwork with his opening story about the BaYaka hunter-gatherers, living in the forests of Central Africa. For millennia, the BaYaka, a highly egalitarian people, have been sharing their forest’s bounty according to strict moral principles, thus maintaining abundance for all. They now face an existential threat, however, from outsiders—be they loggers or conservationists—who view the forest as a valuable resource to be fenced off and hoarded. This creates scarcity and disconnects the original inhabitants from the wealth of the forest and therefore from their entire way of life, leaving the BaYaka with an uncertain future.

Around the globe, many communities have similarly upheld values of caring for and sharing biocultural wealth for generations, thereby ensuring ecological abundance and social prosperity, but today confront outside pressures that threaten their ability to sustain the thriving of life in nature and culture. In the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, **Alex Ventimilla** tells us, the Bën za (Zapotec) people have managed to maintain self-governance, communal land tenure, and a worldview of responsibility and care that, together, have allowed them to preserve their biocultural prosperity to this day. Likewise, the Bugun people of the Eastern Himalayas, among whom **Vanessa Cholez** has lived and worked, have retained social and ecological abundance through cultural practices centered on sharing among people, with deities, and with other living beings. In both cases, however, market forces are knocking at the door, leading the authors to wonder how long those resilient communities will be able to resist the encroachment.

In some cases, those enduring biocultural values may be somewhat hidden from view, yet if you scratch the surface, their traces can still be found. In her Northeast India homeland, **Küvethilü Thülüo**, a young Naga woman, follows ancient paths in search of the menhirs (upright stones) that stand as witnesses to her people’s tradition of “radical giving,” or sharing of wealth. Suppressed by colonizers, who saw it as “wasteful” and promoted “sensible hoarding” instead, sharing is making a comeback, although Elders worry that its spirit may no longer be the same. It is now up to the younger generations to raise awareness and help revive ancestral values.

In turn, archeologist **Cecilia Porter** and her husband **Chris Lundy** trek along ancient paths in Greenland, dispelling common misinterpretations of that vast land as a barren and empty mass of rock and ice. Quite to the contrary, they find themselves walking through unmistakable signs of biocultural abundance past and present, born out of millennia of interdependence between the territory’s hardy Kalaallit (Inuit) inhabitants and its surprisingly rich flora and fauna—a shared abundance that Greenlanders proudly hold on to in the face of outside threats.

Proudly holding on to shared abundance is just what campesinos (farmers) in the Brunca Region of southern Costa Rica do, as well. In **Felipe Montoya-Greenheck’s** and **Ana María Martínez’s** story, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous farmers in the region emphasize that wealth does not reside in economic growth and material accumulation; it resides in quality of life, well-being, and connection to land. That’s their idea of *Buen Vivir* (a good life)—and there’s nothing they would exchange it for!

Darryl Whetung’s “glass half empty or half full?” musings wrap up this section. How we perceive life, he reminds us, depends on our perspectives and choices. Reflecting on life’s journey through an Ojibway cultural lens, guided by Mother Earth’s teachings, reveals that living with good values and gratitude—never taking too much, always leaving enough for others—creates abundance and balance among people and within the natural world.

When ways of life that foster abundance and balance are put at risk, or when abundance and balance have already been compromised, people and communities worldwide take defensive or restorative action. That’s the topic of the next section. **Rowan Glass** introduces us to the Kamëntšá and Inga Indigenous peoples in Colombia, who strive to defend their threatened agricultural system as a repository of collective biocultural heritage, wisdom, and wealth. Living among the Shipibo people in the Peruvian Amazon, **Tanya Kammonen** witnesses their struggle to protect the wealth of their spiritual and healing traditions, which sustain true abundance: the connections between environmental, social, and individual well-being. Forcibly transported to Barbados during the slave trade, **Sonia Peter’s** African ancestors were wrenched away from their rich biocultural heritage, yet drew from both traditional and newly acquired knowledge to learn how to survive and thrive in an unfamiliar land thanks to a wealth of food and medicinal plants found there.

In places as different as southern Europe, Kenya, Japan, and California, community activists are rebuilding biocultural abundance through farming and other land-based practices. **Peppi Gauci**, a permaculture expert from Malta, recounts his life’s journey as he learns from both ancient traditions and contemporary approaches how to regenerate abundance by following nature’s processes. **Simon Mitambo**, along with **Rory Sheldon**, tells the story of how his Tharaka people, a community of farmers living on the slopes of Mount Kenya, are reclaiming their biocultural wealth by revitalizing their traditional knowledge, earth-centered wisdom, spiritual beliefs, and governance systems. **Saori Ogura** returns to her native Japan to learn how farming communities are consciously bringing back ancestral millet cultivation and, in the process, rediscovering the wealth of time. Finally, in northern California, **Annabelle Law** takes part in and learns from the North Fork Mono Tribe’s efforts to reintroduce the ancestral knowledge and practice of cultural burns as a way of promoting biocultural abundance—that is, not only ecological

regeneration through fire but also social and cultural regeneration through “community work, sharing, and joy.”

And it's not only whole communities that are reclaiming and recreating biocultural abundance. Reacting to the widespread sense of disconnect and perceived scarcity that afflicts contemporary society, more and more individuals from all walks of life are engaging in healing and transformative reflections on interconnectedness and true wealth. Several such reflections, expressed through art and poetry that celebrate abundance, grace the next section.

The South African creative duo of **Hobbs and Borton** showcases the riotous diversity and abundance of fungi in their “artwork with a message”: we should stop trying to [artificially] *make* abundance and start recognizing and embracing the natural abundance of which we are a part. In her ancestral homeland in the Indian Himalayas, artist and researcher **Shriya Malhotra** finds health, solace, and artistic inspiration in the “principle of abundance” and the habit of sharing that have traditionally governed every aspect of her maternal community's life. Scholar **Mark Turin** takes a pause from a busy life of thinking and doing and, opening to feeling and being, expresses in poetry his learnings from the “abundant dignity and glory” of nature.

Having moved from Japan to the interior of British Columbia, Canada, **Hiroko Takaya** realizes her childhood dream of living off the land—and weaves into her baskets the biocultural abundance of her adopted First Nation home. Through the ancient art of wool dollmaking, **Coreen Boucher** reclaims her maternal Scottish ancestry while rooting herself in the biocultural history of her place of birth, British Columbia, and in so doing discovers that abundance is a feeling of belonging and connection. Lastly, in a poetic meditation on abundance and scarcity inspired by a humble mouse, **Chang Liu** proves that no creature is too small or insignificant to convey the deep teachings of nature.

Together, the wealth of stories I have introduced so far should more than begin to answer the question I posed earlier: what hope is there to see the world change course, shifting away from a self-destructive worldview of scarcity and back to a life-giving one of abundance? Our last set of stories delves deeper into the question.

A multicultural group of grassroots storytellers—**Valiana Aguilar, Samar Awaad, Ysa Calderón, Brijlal Chaudhari, Joanne Cheung, Kamasa Dorothy, Mai Thin Yu Mon, and Dawn Morrison**—contemplates the meaning of a “good life.” From their diverse perspectives, they decry the colonial mindset that has disconnected human beings from the living world and has created the false dichotomy of poverty and wealth and suggest that returning to gift economies offers hope for a future of solidarity, reciprocity, and biocultural abundance. **Sinéad Fortune**, writing with **Amber Hayward**, offers a similar view, focusing on the recovery of “seed economics”: an economy of gifting and sharing that embraces the

intrinsic generosity of nature and teaches us to “reciprocate through a system that serves life.” The lessons of Indigenous practices of gifting and wealth redistribution, argue members of the **First Peoples' Cultural Foundation** and the **Kw'umut Lelum Foundation**, can be successfully applied to domains such as philanthropy, shifting away from a “competition for money” mindset that creates and reproduces scarcity and toward a perspective in which the purpose of gifting is to “acknowledge and demonstrate responsibility for a shared mutual existence.” Also operating in a philanthropic space, **Jerome Lewis, Ameyali Ramos, and Jessica Sweidan** point out that “biocultural diversity is not just a sign of a thriving world; it is a fundamental requirement for one,” and issue an urgent call for cultivating a “flourishing diversity” of place-based solutions as the only way to restore biocultural abundance on earth.

As the respected Tla-o-qui-aht Elder and master carver Joe Martin puts it, what we need is not “sustainability”—which, he thinks, only amounts to keeping things on a lifeline for as long as we have a use for them. Instead, we need “abundability”: a way of being and acting in the world that ensures abundance for all for generations to come. Arduous and challenging as the path toward abundability may be, individuals and communities around the world are hard at work to bring about that change from the ground up. And that is where hope lies.

Bioculturally yours,
Luisa Maffi



FROM SHARING TO HOARDING, FROM ABUNDANCE TO SCARCITY

An egalitarian community in Central Africa that has been sharing its forest's bounty for millennia faces change as outsiders view the forest as a scarce commodity.

WORDS AND IMAGES Jerome Lewis

While living with BaYaka hunters-gatherers in the northern forests of the Republic of Congo during the 1990s, I was struck by an apparent paradox: the BaYaka did not make a distinction between expatriate conservationists and logging company staff. Seeing people in both groups as greedy and fat, they called them all *bangwila* (red river hogs)—a pointy critique of folks from industrialized countries who value forests because of their perceived scarcity and so hoard them, whether by fencing them off or by logging them away. In contrast, BaYaka value forests because of the abundance of resources, and so focus on maintaining this abundance by proper sharing.

BaYaka hunter-gatherers see themselves (and are considered by their farming neighbors, the Bilo) as the first inhabitants of Congo's forests. Each BaYaka associates with a hunting and gathering territory called "our forest," where they visit ancestral campsites to gather, fish, hunt, and cut honey from wild beehives. Though many of them occasionally work for wages or make small farms, they value forest activities and foods as superior. Small camps of quickly yet skillfully built leaf-and-liana huts expand or contract easily in response to changing social and ecological conditions. As an egalitarian society where differences in power, wealth, and authority

Above: A Bayaka forest camp is quickly set up in just a couple of hours using leaves and lianas found throughout the forest. Men clear the forest floor, and women build geodesic huts.

BaYaka focus on maintaining abundance by proper sharing.

are systematically shunned and undermined, the BaYaka use their mobility and flexibility to resolve or avoid problems such as hunger, illness, conflict, political domination, or disputes among themselves.

Anthropologists distinguish between “immediate-return,” egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies and agricultural, herding, or capitalist “delayed-return” hierarchical societies. In delayed-return societies, including certain hunter-gatherer societies, work is invested over extended periods before a yield is produced and can be consumed. This delay between investing labor and consuming its fruits causes political inequality because it becomes necessary to establish hierarchical structures of authority to distribute work and yields and to protect vital assets as labor produces a yield. Authority

converts easily into inequality. Almost all contemporary human societies have delayed-return economies. Efforts by communist states to develop more egalitarian structures inevitably succumb to these mechanisms, reasserting new types of hierarchies and inequalities to manage the delay between labor and yield.

Immediate-return hunter-gatherers (such as the BaYaka, the Mbuti in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Kalahari San, the Hadza of Tanzania, or various groups in India and Southeast Asia) are instead strongly oriented to the present. People like to obtain a direct and immediate return for their labor, eating most of their gathered or hunted yield on the same day they obtain it. Valuing consumption over accumulation, they share their food with everyone



BaYaka women and children sing to please the forest at dawn. The forest likes to hear song and will provide abundantly when people go hunting and gathering.



BaYaka girls sharing the *mobambu* (*Chrysophyllum lacourtianu*) fruit they have collected.

present. Short of withholding vital resources, and in the absence of anyone with the authority to do so, it is hard for hierarchies to be established.

Like other immediate-return hunter-gatherers, the BaYaka strongly stress obligatory, non-reciprocal sharing as a moral principle. A person who has more of something, such as meat or honey, than they can immediately consume is under a moral obligation to share it with anyone who asks without an expectation of return. Such demand-sharing ensures that resources taken from the forest are fairly distributed among all present, making accumulation impossible. Demand-sharing leads to a high degree of economic and social equality between men and women, as well as between Elders and juniors. BaYaka actively shun claiming status or boasting about their prowess, lest it cause jealousy that would undermine their success in valued activities. Good hunters belittle their own achievements and refrain from hunting too often.

BaYaka idealize a shady forest as the perfect place for people to live. Women like to be in the forest when they give birth. Everyday conversations focus on the locations of desirable wild foods, various tricks and techniques for finding and extracting them, the intricacies

of animal behavior and plant botany, stories of past hunting, fishing, or gathering trips, and great feasts and forest spirit performances. BaYaka say that when they die, they go to the creator Komba's forest camp. Their lives and afterlives are framed by the forest. They express this dependency and intimacy in the proverb, "A BaYaka loves the forest as she loves her own body." They have an unswerving faith that abundance is the natural state and that the forest will always provide them with what they need.

The BaYaka see themselves as part of a socially interactive and generous forest that provides abundantly for all—as long as rules about sharing are respected. They assume that they should be successful in their activities because the forest is abundant. If they are not, they conclude that it is because they have ruined their *ekila* by not sharing appropriately. *Ekila* crucially links the abundance of food with people's behavior—by sharing food, sex, song, and laughter properly, the forest will always give generously of her bounty. So *ekila* rules define the sharing relations between people, between people and animals, and at their most expansive, between people and the forest. In this way, *ekila* rules regulate the BaYaka environmental and social relations. If the meat from a hunt is not shared among all present, the hunter's *ekila* is ruined, making him unsuccessful in the future.

Likewise, if a husband or wife inappropriately shares his or her sexuality outside their marriage, it is said that both partners will ruin their *ekila*. This will cause men to miss when they aim at animals and



Elder Emeka divides the hunter's meat to make sure everyone will have their share.



Logging quickly leads to urban development in areas of high biodiversity, altering the land for kilometers all around.

women to experience difficulties during childbirth. A menstruating woman is said to be *ekila*, and her scent will anger dangerous forest animals. She must share part of her menstrual blood with forest spirits so that her male relatives can continue to find food. Even laughter should be shared properly. Whereas laughter shared among people in camp during the evening makes the forest rejoice, laughing at hunted animals ruins the *ekila* of the hunter, causing him to miss in the future.

Failure or difficulties in the food quest or in procreation are discussed in relation to *ekila* rather than to inadequacies in human skill or the environment's ability to provide. For instance, a whole area of forest may become *ekila* when hunting is consistently unsuccessful, and successive misfortunes befall those who camp in or pass through it. BaYaka from the clan responsible for that area will place leaf cones stuffed with soil on all paths leading into the *ekila* forest. This warns other BaYaka that they should not attempt to find food there but should rather turn back or simply pass through quickly, allowing the forest to rest so that resources can replenish.

Although couched in unfamiliar idioms, *ekila* is a theory for maintaining abundance. Adherence to these practices, and their

explanations, has established a relationship with resources that has assured BaYaka have experienced the forest as a place of abundance for the entirety of their cultural memory. Though they have a word for hunger, there is no word for famine or concept of death by starvation. *Ekila* teaches that improper sharing causes resources to become scarce, while proper sharing allows resources to always remain abundant. For the BaYaka, then, sharing is fundamental to sociality. They share even when there seems to be no need to share—for instance, during the dry season, when everyone catches large amounts of fish. And they still share, even if it means that the person sharing is left with next to nothing.

Most local Congolese also view the forest and its resources as abundant—something that conservationists confirmed in the 1990s by designating this area as one rich in biodiversity. Perceiving forest resources as abundant can lead to different relationships with those resources, as some basic divergences between the BaYaka conceptions and those held by their Bilo neighbors illustrate. Unlike the BaYaka, the Bilo rely on subsistence farming, which involves felling large trees and clearing forest for fields and villages. The forest bordering these clearings requires constant and vigorous cutting to prevent it from

reclaiming domesticated land. From this perspective, the abundant forest is a wild force to be conquered for a successful social life to occur. The Bilo often justify claims to ownership of forest areas in terms of conquest.

In turn, as the European experience attests, a conquering relationship with an abundant nature can have disastrous consequences for natural systems, especially when combined with the highly destructive power of modern industrial technology. Ironically, the growing awareness of the environmental damage caused by industrial capitalism has produced a radical shift: from conceptions of an abundant nature to estimations of the value of individual resources in terms of their scarcity and the economic demand for them. Such views place human society outside of wild nature and emphasize conquest, dominance, and control.

The forest areas I stayed in during the 1990s are considerably less abundant now than they were then. Analyzing this from within the logic of ekila suggests that outsiders coming into BaYaka forest have not understood the importance of proper sharing as the means to guarantee the continued abundance of its resources. Indeed, the opposite is happening: outsiders, such as loggers, obtain exclusive rights to resources that they systematically remove and hoard for personal enrichment.

In practical terms, for local people, this means that their forests have been converted into floral and faunal assets that the national government has traded or rented out under pressure from international lenders wishing to reclaim loans. It is this system of intensive and unsustainable exploitation of forest resources, justified



Industrial machinery removes trees from the forest for export with astonishing speed and efficiency.



This view of southwestern France shows how the land is converted to serve human needs, with only tiny portions remaining to support wild fauna and flora.

as “economic development,” that is the root cause of the severe environmental problems facing the forests of the Congo Basin. Indeed, “development” is steadily impoverishing the world’s resources for the benefit of rich nations and national elites. Modernity’s commitment to globalizing industrial capitalism ignores this at its peril.

As international capital draws more and more of the forest’s resources out of the forest, international environmentalists are seeking to isolate increasingly large areas of forest. Conservationists obtain large grants to exclude other people from areas of the forest they lay claims over in the name of protection. Their living museums of iconic species protecting fragmented ecosystems are an inadequate response to the serious environmental problems produced by industrial capitalism.

This dual occupation of the forest by loggers and conservationists has made the BaYaka victims of both the outsiders extracting resources and those “protecting” them. From BaYaka perspectives, neither group is sharing forest resources properly. Corruption ensures impunity for the biggest culprits of environmental crime. Exclusion zones and protected areas do not solve the problem; they only displace it. Meanwhile, the urgent need to ensure equitable benefit sharing, expose and condemn corruption, and develop practices that ensure sustainable resource use is neglected.

Commercial bushmeat traders and farmers go elsewhere. But for BaYaka hunter-gatherers, it is much more difficult to do so, as each zone has important seasonal wild resources that are not necessarily

Nature, when shared properly, is abundant and capable of sustaining all life.

available elsewhere in the territory where they usually live and travel. The militaristic enforcement of hunting restrictions around protected areas does not address the root causes of the bushmeat trade, which are economic and political. Local elites see lucrative opportunities for profit by combining their political immunity with modern technologies and the access to remote forests provided by loggers' infrastructure to organize intensive commercial hunting.

By isolating small areas for protection and excluding people, conservation legitimizes industrial exploitation elsewhere—the very process that underlies the problems conservation aims to remedy. Loggers and their funders divert attention from the harmful impact of their activities by pointing to efforts being made to protect conservation areas and by paying lip service to the ideals of sustainable forestry. Conservationists justify the draconian repression of local peoples' traditional rights, as well as their exclusion from vast areas of forest, by referring to the destruction caused by activities associated with logging or those that depend on the infrastructure created by loggers. As exclusion zones encompass more and more forest, logging companies use the existence of these zones to justify enlarging and accelerating their activities around the protected areas.

Both conservationists and loggers are monopolizing what they perceive as scarce resources: loggers want control over precious trees, while conservationists aim to protect rare animals and undisturbed forest areas. The perception of scarcity is the ideological bedrock of both activities and a driving force behind the industrialization and capitalization of the world's resources.

Most conservationists come from industrialized nations where the awesome power of mechanized exploitation has already devastated the original environment, transforming it into patchwork of spaces used by people in different ways, with the occasional nod to the original appearance of the land under the guise of well-managed parks. Industrialized-nation conservationists then go to non-industrialized nations like the Congo and apply the same model of development, focusing on delimiting and protecting small pockets of faunal and floral resources from local and industrial exploitation.

The enforcement and protection of protected areas becomes a military-like operation, sometimes described by field conservationists as a “war on poaching.” Since the mid-1990s, when eco-guard militias became a popular conservation tool, reports of human rights abuses against local people by eco-guards have surged. This aggressive and colonial-like imposition of protected areas on local people understandably antagonizes many. From their perspective, rich and powerful outsiders are denying poor people access to their basic needs. Locally, this is seen as a grave abuse of basic human rights.

The current dominance of the scarcity model precludes the idea of sharing. Instead, it encourages voracious hoarding. The economic interests of multinational corporations and institutions currently dominate decision making. The BaYaka worldview instead suggests that decisions should be based on the understanding that nature, when shared properly, is abundant and capable of sustaining all life.

If current activities continue in the Central African forests, the hunter-gatherers' fate will be sealed by the ongoing imposition and dominance of an ideology of scarcity. Whether forest resources



Eco-guards are accused of committing serious human rights abuses in conservation areas of the Congo Basin. Photo: Mike Goldwater/Alamy

are over-exploited and depleted by industrial capitalist extraction methods or sealed off from local people by zealous animal protectionists from rich countries, the outcome for local people is the same.

While the forest was in local people's control, it was considered—and was—abundant. Since Europeans arrived and began to perceive forest resources as scarce, desirable, and valuable, so they have become. Control over the future of the forest is now vested in the hands of people with little or no genuine long-term or generational interest in preserving it beyond their limited engagements with it.

To address our current predicament, we would do well to follow the BaYaka's lead and turn away from the thinking that has led us from abundance to scarcity. Can we collectively move away from viewing natural resources as scarce commodities to be controlled by the most powerful, and instead realize that nature can be an abundant provider and a home for all creatures if we share what we take properly and behave with consideration and respect toward each other and the other species we share spaces with?

Achieving this goal is the real challenge facing the twenty-first century.

Support the Cause: Can we focus on maintaining abundance rather than allowing the powerful to monopolize valuable resources?

Let's recognize the importance of alternative management models outside of the capitalist system. Let's support the territorial claims of Indigenous and local people against the colonization of their bioculturally rich and diverse places by commercial and conservation organizations.

Let's help them document their land use and management practices in line with their values, epistemologies, and ontologies.

Jerome Lewis teaches anthropology at University College London, is a co-founder of Flourishing Diversity, and is an adviser to Synchronicity Earth, a U.K.-based charity. He has been working with BaYaka hunter-gatherers in Congo since 1993, focusing on egalitarianism and the roles of ritual, music, and dance. His applied research supports forest peoples in securing their land and better representing themselves to outsiders through a bottom-up practice known as Extreme Citizen Science.



BaYaka women singing at dawn following an all-night music session.

· nature · language · culture ·

Langscape MAGAZINE

INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING TO THE MAGAZINE?

Sign up for Terralingua's enews and receive
the next call for stories: terralingua.org

Read *Langscape* articles online: terralingua.org/langscape-magazine
Questions? Contact us at terralingua.org or email langscape@terralingua.org



KEEP THE PRESSES ROLLING!

LANGSCAPE MAGAZINE

is an entirely not-for-profit, ad-free publication supported
by your subscriptions and purchases, as well as by your
generous donations to Terralingua

Purchase Individual Copies

terralingua.org/shop

Donate to Support *Langscape Magazine*

terralingua.org/donate-for-biocultural-diversity

Terralingua
Unity in Biocultural Diversity

Terralingua *n* 1: the languages of the Earth, the many voices of the world's diverse peoples. 2: the language of the Earth, the voice of Mother Nature. 3: an international nonprofit organization that works to sustain the **biocultural diversity of life** — a vital heritage to be valued, protected, and nurtured for generations to come.¶ From Italian *terra* 'earth' and *lingua* 'language'

Langscape Magazine is published annually by Terralingua 217 Baker Road, Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 2N6, Canada
Terralingua is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization under U.S. tax law (#38-3291259) and a registered charity in Canada (#85590 3266 RR0001)



"Wealth is so much more than money changing hands; it is all around us, and it is shared."

— First Peoples' Cultural Foundation and Kw'umut Lelum Foundation

"True wealth is found in mutual aid, collective reciprocity, and sacred relations between us and the living world."

— Valiana Aguilar, Samar Awaad, Ysa Calderón, Brijlal Chaudhari, Joanne Cheung, Kamasa Dorothy, Mai Thin Yu Mon, and Dawn Morrison

"When we commit to the flourishing of the earth, we are also committing to the flourishing of our own lives."

— Jerome Lewis, Ameyali Ramos, and Jessica Sweidan