

SEEDS OF RESILIENCE

A story of a place and its people

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Resilience.Earth

ORIGEN

Once upon a time, centuries ago, there was a valley of slumbering volcanoes, whose lush vegetation contrasted with rough rocky terrain, hidden under a perpetual blanket of fog. Its people, forgotten by the rest of the world, lived humbly here, sheltered within the exuberant beauty of this land. With waterfalls carving wild shapes into limestone cliffs, wetlands nestling between evergreen oak forests, and basalt rock flowing over the landscape, making this land summarily unique in the entire Iberian peninsula.

The most sacred of peaks, known as Puigsacalm, stretches up to the sky, eternally covered by the mist drifting up from neighboring lands. Watering the valleys that stretch across the region, zigzagging around the craters scattered everywhere, transforming this into one of the most fertile lands in the region.

Welcome to La Garrotxa, a land inhabited by almost 1500 wise medicinal trees and plants, which feed and give shelter to more than 300 vertebrate species, including us, the Garrotxines. We have stewarded this territory that has nurtured and protected us for over a millennia and more, turning us into a proud and dignified culture, stubborn and, when needed, ferocious. Such as the pride of the wolf packs that kept the delicate balance of these lands, the dignity of the swallows and herons that flew over the valleys, the stubbornness of the wild boars that still rummage through our crops, and the ferocity of the bears who once reigned on the high peaks.

More than two dozen unique communities live in this region, their identities shaped over time by the land. The land helped define cultural idiosyncrasies, such as particular words or ceremonies carried out in lost temples. This land also shaped an economy that arose from their ability to transform parts of the ecosystem into culture and technology through the commons, allowing them to evolve and express themselves to their full potential.

La Garrotxa is a natural fortress, made up of the Guillerics mountain range to the south, the Transversal to the west and the Pyrenees to north. And from many of the higher mountain tops, you can catch glimpses of the Mediterranean Sea stretching out to the east. This complex labyrinth of mountains protected the people of La Garrotxa, to a certain degree,

from the scheming and fighting of the lords of the region. The people and the land became a refuge to many dissidents, even including escaped Roman slaves, who were welcomed with hospitality into our valleys, as this is how we Garrotxines treat those who arrive with honesty and integrity.

COLONIALISATION

The Roman Empire, like all empires, never had enough and ended up entering our Eden. We did not make it easy for them, as Ptolemy and Polybius wrote, our people did not kneel easily, but eventually we were overcome. We did not embrace colonisation, as the Romans created hierarchies, defined properties, built roads to extract what they called “resources”, but which for us were “our family”. They also turned a matrilineal culture into a patriarchal one, oppressing our sisters. They even stole our language, and with it the memory of a thousand-year-old oral tradition. They demonized the spirits of our forests and our waters, and they banned our language of signs and symbols, one of the oldest of the known world at that time.

The trauma of this cultural genocide deepened our amnesia, making us forget who we were and we began to act like them, like the people who attacked us. This is not to say that we didn't use violence before, but we didn't conquer and colonise before. This trauma made a part of our people greedy, controlling and opulent, the balance had been broken. From then on, we formed armies and fought against new empires. We learned to steal and attack, we colonised and reproduced the pain in other lands, amplifying the imbalance towards an increasingly turbulent world.

The loss of our customs led us to adopt feudal regimes, but on the edges of our community dignity, pride and ferocity persisted, and we rose again. This time we called ourselves the Remences, the first successful revolution in Europe against this feudalism. Thousands of peasants overtook their feudal lords, abolishing perverse customs and freeing our lands from slavery, at least for a while.

Shortly after, the Saracen conquests arrived, which again forced a part of the population to hide in the rugged crevices of the Pyrenees for many years, until the arrival of the Franks led by Charlemagne, who was the first to define our land as Catalonia and our languages as Occitan, Catalan, Valencian and Mallorcan. Our history was rewritten by ourselves and not by our conquerors, even though it was the aristocrats who had inherited the feudal order, who narrated it.

The imbalance of the world continued, and new challenges came, again from Rome as they imposed their beliefs and ways. This time they wanted to cut down what little we had left, our medicine and our worldview. With the arrival of the Inquisition came the burning of thousands of supposed witches, women who looked after the soul of our communities. The last legacy of matriarchal Iberianism died at the stake and was replaced with hierarchy and patriarchy.

EXTRACTIVISM

The years passed and the era of Enlightenment emerged, thanks to fresh knowledge and wisdom that arrived from Indigenous communities of the Americas to Europe, inspiring our despairing societies and generating several revolutions, including the Industrial Revolution.

Our waterfalls, carved between the basalt and limestone cliffs, became an ideal place for aristocrats and bourgeois to build paper and textile factories, with a centralist and extractivist mentality. Our people in the mountains came down to the valleys, escaping the fire of poverty only to fall into the embers of labour exploitation.

The factories and worker housing quarters became a libertarian melting pot of anarchism. A self-managed movement from the bowels of our communities in remembrance of the all the people of this land who lived for and with freedom and dignity.

That is until the dictatorship arrived. We had a tough, bloody and fascist 20th century. In four decades, the Franco forces annihilated and expelled free thinkers from our lands, and rebuilt the pillars of oligarchy, arming themselves with structural violence so as to continue dominating us in an era of pseudo-democracy.

REGENERATION

Since then, however, we have regained our strength to fight against rampant capitalism and globalisation. In the 1980s we held environmental rights protests and were able to have a large part of our territory protected as a natural park. Soon after, we successfully blocked the construction of a high voltage power corridor, and at the turn of the century we kicked out the only McDonalds after a 6-month peaceful boycott.

But we were not able to stop the arrival of major highways, and since then, we have suffered the massification of tourism, the gentrification of housing, the exodus of our youth, the loss of farming and the growth of extractive export industries. Currently, most of the inhabitants of our land, including the 1000s of people who have arrived in recent years, fleeing drought and poverty in their homelands, work in the meat industry. We kill 12,000 pigs every day, emptying the aquifers, polluting the territory, making the community precarious, impoverishing our health and simplifying our rich culture to a culture of consumption. And those in charge have the same surnames as they did two centuries ago.

But, again, dignity is nourished at the edges of our society. Many of our young people traveled to distant lands to decolonise themselves, called by the voices of living memory hidden in Indigenous communities everywhere. This allowed us to remember that beneath all these layers of pain, suffering and violence, there lives a dignified people, proud, stubborn and when needed, fierce.

Bagpipes sound once more in our valleys, awakening some of us and drawing others to La Garrotxa, both from Catalan lands and from far beyond. Together we are beginning to weave the matrix of life anew, creating consumer cooperatives supplied by our agroecological farmer networks. We have created community centres and cultural centres such as La Greda, CNT, Mas Franch, Ishtar, Nuria Social, the Ateneu Popular Malapetja, La Dalla, the Nau de Tortellà and the Artiga cooperative supermarket.

Other projects are appearing amongst the mountains, in search of lost memories. Workers' cooperatives are being created to make pizzas, facilitate groups, educate youth, build with wood and many other forms of economy for the common good. New cooperative models of collective living are also being created, to share housing and renewable energy, or recover communal lands and farms as productive forms of collective work.

Over 80 artisans have joined together through the Iera network to collectivise their skills and share costs. We have agroecological projects such as the Cacao Patisserie, the Fogaina bakery or the vegan restaurant Primera Planta, who feed us with hope and not with guilt. There are 70 economic initiatives and cooperatives, who have banded together creating the largest network of social solidarity economy initiatives per capita than anywhere else in the country. And although we only represent 5% of La Garrotxa's financial income, we represent a truly viable way to be meaningfully employed, positively impacting our communities and environment. And even though we only number over a 1000 people, we are active agents of change, and yesterday we were less and tomorrow we will be more.

Our rural municipalities are beginning to evolve democracy, village councils are being created in which governance is direct and deliberative, transcending political colours towards a post-ideological democracy. The valleys are starting to create festivals such as the Meandre, FESS Rural, Agroforest and Iltir, to celebrate our culture and our diversity for us, and not for tourists.

LEGACY

The current model is outdated, and the old model is returning, merging and reconciling with modernity, connecting the past with the future. The mists are fading and with them our amnesia. We are beginning to remember that it has always been us, all of them were us, both the good and the bad, both the powerful and the oppressed, and now we have learned that we need to walk together, that we are all part of the same superorganism.

We are stopping our complaining and blaming and stepping up to take responsibility. We are learning to be inclusive again with all ways of being human and inhabiting the Earth.

We are flattening hierarchies and commoning private properties. We are cycling our economy to make it more social and sustainable, and democratising industry by converting

it into 4.0 artisanship. We are putting digital technologies at the service of communities to regenerate governance.

We are remembering that our kinship transcends species. And we are understanding that we won't be able to heal the trauma that unbalanced our world, if we don't do this work together. We are the generation that comes to restore equilibrium just before the collapse. We are not afraid of conflict or of falling down, we have learned to get up as many times as necessary.

We are the Hope that the world needs to reclaim our balanced place on Earth. We are the Seeds of Resilience.

This story honors the contributions of all the organisations, cooperatives and businesses of La Garrotxa who strive daily to make our region more equitable, abundant and resilient.

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