

# The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and  
Marcos Moraes Valença

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

<https://www.e-ir.info/2022/04/25/the-xukuru-do-ororuba-vision-of-sacred-agriculture-as-a-counter-hegemonic-proposal/>

IRAN NEVES ORDONIO, CARLA LADEIRA PIMENTEL ÁGUAS AND MARCOS MORAES VALENÇA,  
APR 25 2022

**This is a pre-print excerpt from *Decolonizing Politics and Theories from the Abya Yala*. You can download the book free of charge from E-International Relations.**

The word ‘development’ is polysemic. It can be understood as economic growth, as a promise of well-being through the satisfaction of needs or it can be linked to ecological prudence, through sustainable development. Whatever the interpretation is, this concept has been criticized over time by various theoretical currents (dependency theories, post-developmental, postcolonial, decolonial theories, etc.). Currently, our crisis amplifies this questioning about the linear, modern and western idea of development, pointing to a search for other civilizing paths. One of those perspectives is the concept of *Bem Viver* (Living Well) created by Indigenous peoples. It is a counter-hegemonic conception of the world, as well as another way of relating to the environment and life itself. It respects the world’s diversity and it is inspired by the resistance of subordinate groups.

We use the decolonial conceptual framework and the concept of Bem Viver (Acosta 2016) to present the *Agricultura do Sagrado* (sacred agriculture) associated with the spirituality of the Xukuru do Ororubá Indigenous people, located in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil. Our goal is to compare the hegemonic concept of development with *Bem Viver*, based on the sacred agriculture practiced by this ethnic group, which is characterized by respect for Mother Earth, as a place of food production that leads to health, as well as a place where the *Encantados* (Enchanted) spirits live. Methodologically, from a qualitative approach, we will carry out a dense description (Geertz 1989) to think about other relationships between human beings and nature.

On the subject, it is important to note that the separation between human beings and nature is a philosophical basis of Western thought. This dichotomy is extremely important to understand our current context, which is characterized by a web of crises that challenge the very survival of humans – as well as other living species – on our planet. Marques (2018, 475 [free translations]) describes the historical course of this schism between humans and their environment starting from Greek mythology, through the myth of Prometheus: he ‘represents the ruse that steals the secrets of nature from the gods who hide them from mortals; the violence that seeks to overcome nature with the intention of improving men’s lives’. That is, the Promethean attitude reduces nature to an object belonging to the human subject. As time went by, nature became progressively alienated, until we reached the Modern Age, which turned it into quantity.

Therefore, this historical process with ancient roots generated, in the West, a ‘slow and gradual process of differentiation and distancing of the human beings from all other species and from nature in general. In this process, nature meant at the same time the non-human, what is around the human’ (Ibidem, 476–477). From this perspective, Nature becomes a natural resource, to be controlled and conquered.

As we know, this paradigm jumped from Europe and spread to other parts of the world through colonization. In this sense, colonial rule was not only conquest of territories, but also of imaginaries. With the end of the colonial regimes, as we will see below, the colonization of the imaginaries maintained its existence through the emergence of the idea

# The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and  
Marcos Moraes Valença

of development in the post-war period: The North's way of life remained an example and a goal, which continued to invisibilize other society models, other epistemologies, and logics of relationship with nature.

The consequences of this trajectory, as we see today culminates in an unprecedented environmental crisis, which is accompanied by a range of other crises – ethical, political, health crises, and so on – that challenge us to rethink the framework of modern Western civilization. More than ever, it is important to pay attention to other paradigms that have been systematically ignored or destroyed since the beginning of colonization. These 'other voices' have a lot to say about how to find new ways out of the dilemmas generated and perpetuated by the westernization of the world.

In this chapter, we bring a contribution to that discussion: after a brief analysis of different approaches about development, we counterpoise this concept to the Indigenous perspective of *Bem Viver*. Then, we finally present a living example of these other ways of relationship between human beings and nature, through the discussion about the sacred agriculture practiced by the *Xukuru do Ororubá* Indigenous people, which inspires to think about other civilizational paths that do not lead humanity to collapse.

## Development for Whom? Views on the Concept

The polysemy of the word development allows for multiple interpretations. The concept, originally used in Biology, characterized the evolutionary processes of living beings to reach their genetic potentialities. With Darwin, the word came to express the transformation of species, from a more backward state towards a more advanced, more evolved state (Santos et al. 2012). From its varied connotations, we will characterize the concept from three approaches: development as economic growth, as satisfaction of needs, and as an element of environmental sustainability.

The first approach has its antecedents in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, originally published in London in 1776. Defending the idea that the desire for profit is naturally beneficial to society, the author created the famous idea of the invisible hand of the market as a metaphor to characterize the self-regulation generated from the tendency to balance supply and demand. Therefore, there emerges the seed of an idea, later elaborated, of development as a driving force capable of promoting the accumulation of wealth, for its subsequent distribution (Santos et al. 2012).

But the actual division between a developed and an underdeveloped world occurred years later, in 1949, during US President Harry Truman's inaugural speech. This was the first time that the word 'underdevelopment' was used to characterize a large part of our planet that suffered from various social and economic problems:

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas (Truman 1964 in Escobar 1995, 3).

Once the diagnosis was made, the solution was announced. For the US President, 'greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge' (Truman 1964 in Escobar 1995, 3). Time has shown, however, that the promise was not real: 'Quite the contrary, the gap between rich and poor countries has widened. Growth is necessary, distribution not so much' (Santos et al. 2012, 48).

The gap between developed and underdeveloped countries was a new model, intended to replace the separation between metropolises and colonies of the colonial period. According to Escobar (1995), in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the domination of the South by the North was justified by the technical and racial superiority of the European – known as the white man's burden, whose task was to exploit natural resources and help inferior populations to evolve. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new concepts have arisen in the post-war period converted 'the poor' into 'the assisted'.

These continuities between the power matrix established by the colonial period and the hierarchies of the post-independence period have been called coloniality by several Latin American intellectuals. This term, proposed by Quijano and used by the Modernity/Coloniality group draws attention to the perpetuation of the subalternity of peoples, countries, contexts, and subjectivities in different dimensions – coloniality of power, of being, of being and

# The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and Marcos Moraes Valença

nature.

For Quijano (2005), the coloniality of power refers to the economic and political control that structures the modern world-system – today divided between developed and underdeveloped countries. The coloniality of knowledge is based on Eurocentrism and does not admit the coexistence of knowledges and ways of life, in order to consider only the expert's knowledge as really valid (Restrepo and Rojas, 2010).

According to Maldonado-Torres (2008), the coloniality of being is the way the colonizing process affects subjectivities, generating effects such as racism, control over sexuality, and so on. On the other hand, the coloniality of nature, according to Walsh (2012), refers to the rupture between the biophysical, human, and spiritual dimensions, which means the exploitation and quest for control of nature, which threatens ways of life based on ancestral wisdom.

Thus, this change between the poor into the assisted, according to Leal Santos and his colleagues (2012), launched in the imaginaries a kind of 'race' between the advanced countries (in the global North) and the backward ones – those that needed help to reach the same level as their rich peers. So, underdevelopment is elaborated as a stage before development, which would consist in the final destiny of all countries, as denounced by the Modernity/Coloniality group.

Therefore, much more than semantics, this change of discourse – called by Escobar as 'poverty modernization' – meant an adjustment of new mechanisms of control and dependency. Many painful adjustments would be necessary for the achievement of a new stage for the supposed beneficiaries of development. A 1951 United Nations' publication (Escobar 1995, 4) warned that 'ancient philosophies should be scrapped, and old social institutions should be disintegrated'. In the same way, 'bonds of cast, creed and race should be burst' (Idem). All these in the name of economic progress, which required a high price.

In the Latin American context, a broad critique of these promises was developed by dependency theorists in the beginning of 1960s. Several authors, such as Gunder Frank (1983) and Theotônio dos Santos (1972) warned that the world's division between developed and underdeveloped countries became the path for the imperialist advance, composing a scenario that maintained the so-called 'Third World' as a commodities' exporter. According to this approach, the two sides were not located at different steps within an evolutionary scale; in fact, both were axes of the world economy that only brought advantage to the rich countries.

Furtado (1974, 79) said that 'the accumulation process tends to widen the gap between a center in increasing homogenization and a constellation of peripheral economies, whose disparities keep growing more and more. In his turn, Marini (2017) analyzes, through the concept of dialectic of dependency, the idea that the dependent economy is a necessary condition for world capitalism, and not an accidental phenomenon of its formation. Thus, the super-exploitation of labor is a central aspect and a foundation of dependency in the Latin American context.

Other perspectives have added to the dependency theorists' critique, such as Arturo Escobar. Influenced by postcolonial and post-structuralist studies, he warns that the idea of development is a discursive formation based on forms of knowledge, systems of power, and forms of subjectivity:

I propose to speak of development as a historically singular experience, the creation of a domain of thought and action, by analyzing the characteristics and interrelations of the three axes that define it: the forms of knowledge that refer to it and through which it comes into being and is elaborated into objects, concepts, theories, and the like; the system of power that regulates its practice; and the forms of subjectivity fostered by this discourse, those through which people come to recognize themselves as developed or underdeveloped. The ensemble of forms found along these axes constitutes development as a discursive formation, giving rise to an efficient apparatus that systematically relates forms of knowledge and techniques of power (Escobar 1995, 10).

The second approach to be discussed here links development to the idea of welfare. This perspective goes beyond the discourse of economic development to think about the importance of the achievement of citizen protection systems. In this way, the principle of growth and accumulation of wealth based on the GDP is replaced by the

# **The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal**

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and  
Marcos Moraes Valença

principle of basic needs, linked to the welfare state. Therefore, the use of social indicators emerges as an important tool for measuring life quality.

The main exponent of this line of thought is the Indian economist Amartya Sen, author of *Development as Freedom* (Sen 2000) and winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998. From his perspective, development should be understood as the expansion of freedoms: instead of taking the Gross Domestic Product as a reference, the country development should be measured by a complex set of aspects linked to citizenship, such as access to education, health, civil rights, and so on. Despite Sen's great influence in several areas, this approach is criticized, especially regarding the liberal character of his theory.

According to Brum (2013, 92), this conception of freedom presupposes a model of rational agent that can enjoy it, which makes it inadequate for a broader concept of justice: 'By insisting on a foundation of justice based on individual rationality, the author denies such justice to groups devoid of it, which renders it blind at the theoretical level and thus unable to provide effective protection to such groups at the practical level'. In her turn, Fraser (2005, 70) underlines the transformations that globalization causes in the concept of justice, arguing that 'many observe that the social processes shaping their lives routinely overflow territorial borders. They note, for example, that decisions taken in one territorial state often have an impact on the lives of those outside it, as do the actions of transnational corporations, international currency speculators, and large institutional investors'. The result is a new sense of vulnerability to transnational forces.

The third approach to the concept of development discussed here focuses on the environmental dimension, *i.e.*, it criticizes the idea of infinite accumulation of wealth, alerting to the limits imposed by nature itself in view of the exploitation of resources. Thus emerges, especially from the 1960s/70s, the Eco-development approach, advocated by natural scientists or non-governmental organizations and based on the 'zero-growth' model, to freeze the expansion of population as well as capital (Santos et al. 2012). From a Marxist perspective, Löwy (2009, 50) warns that the economic and ecological crises of our times signify a civilizational crisis, based on the 'commodification of everything'. Therefore, he defends the concept of ecosocialism as a critique of commodity fetishism and as an argument for the predominance of use value over exchange value.

Environmental concern has also led to the concept of sustainable development, a kind of middle way in which economic growth is permitted and desirable, as long as it is accompanied by ecological prudence. The concept was first published in the document 'Our Common Future' – better known as the Brundtland Report. Sustainable development was defined there as a kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations (Comissão Mundial sobre Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento, 1988).

For Sachs (2007), sustainable development is an ambiguous concept, which can have a strictly ecological interpretation, as well as ethical, social, economic and so on. This term bets on preventive actions, depolluting technologies, alternative energies, among other paths, to find spaces of conciliation between economic growth and life sustainability. However, quoting Kothari, Sachs warns that, in the absence of an ethical imperative, environmentalism risks being reduced to a technological formula laced in the hands of technocratic businessmen.

About this concept, the Brazilian Indigenous intellectual Ailton Krenak asks: 'Natural resource for whom? Sustainable development for what? What needs to be sustained?' (Krenak 2019, 12). He argues that the West must rethink its civilizational foundations, in which society and nature remain apart: 'The idea of us humans detaching ourselves from the earth, living in a civilizational abstraction, is absurd. It suppresses diversity, denies the plurality of life, of existence and of habits' (Krenak 2019, 12).

## ***Bem Viver* and the World View from the Global South**

Based on the recognition of the planet's cultural, epistemological, and socio-environmental diversity, we will now discuss some fundamental aspects brought by native peoples in order to understand their cosmologies, conceptions, ways of life, relationship with nature, political and social organization, among other aspects, which are opposed to the hegemonic concept of development and its exclusionary colonialist roots.

# The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and Marcos Moraes Valença

From the Andean peoples, arises the concept of the *Bem Viver* (Living Well) – which in Quechua is called *Sumak Kawsai*. These subjects from the Global South, in particular the native peoples from Bolivia and Ecuador, represent the excluded, invisible, oppressed – in Paulo Freire's (1987) conception. They are considered people without knowledge, who remain, through the coloniality of power, being and knowledge (Quijano 2005) tied to the colonial process that hierarchizes and subordinates the *other*, classifying them as inferior beings and devoid of knowledge.

From these people from Global South, emerges this conception of life in which culture and nature merge, remaining inseparable. Human beings and non-human beings are part of nature; they don't dominate nature, they don't exploit it, they don't perceive it from an idea of domination, but from a perspective of respect and care. Ancestrality and spirituality are inseparable components in this conception. According to Acosta, the *Bem Viver* represents:

A proposal of harmony with Nature, reciprocity, relationality, complementarity and solidarity between individuals and communities. By its opposition to the concept of perpetual accumulation, by its return to use values, the *Bem Viver*, an idea under construction, free of prejudices, opens the door to the formulation of alternative visions of life (Acosta, 2016, 33).

Ailton Krenak warns that the hegemonic idea of human being – whom we call colonizer and patriarchal – does not consider himself as part of nature and so he consumes the Earth. Krenak points out that 'we are bodies that are inside this biosphere of Planet Earth. The *Bem Viver* is not the distribution of wealth. The *Bem Viver* is abundance that the Earth provides as the very expression of life' (Krenak, 2020, 17). Abundance! Nature is not seen as a resource, but as sacred. Krenak says that native people talk to rivers and mountains, also remembering that there are people who like to talk to their cars.

This materialistic relationship to the world results from the understanding that natural *resources*– raw material for a car, for example – are necessary for human domination that leads to accumulation. This conception of the world, as well as this conception of life and economy, is close to the previous discussion about (sustainable) development. From another perspective, the relationship with this sacred living organism – called *Pacha Mama* – is based on complementarity and reciprocity.

According to Acosta (2016), the *Bem Viver* is based on Human Rights and rights of nature. The principles of this conception of world and life arise from these ways of life that are far away from the mainstream, being built by people placed on inferior positions within the Eurocentric social pyramid.

We emphasize how far is communal life, based on self-sufficiency and self-management, from the accumulation of material assets. The former is the opposite of the concept that generates social, cultural, and environmental devastation through accumulation, efficiency, and maximization of wealth. Let's remember that, for the idea of development to exist, it is necessary to generate the idea of underdevelopment, just as it makes necessary the relationship between center versus periphery, civilized versus savage.

This hegemonic thinking ignores the struggle of these peoples, who bring with them the depth of their knowledge. In these Indigenous perspectives and practices – that is, with this practical knowledge – these peoples show how important education is for their ways of life, which go far beyond the scholar knowledge. The Amazonian Indigenous leader Márcia Kambeba states:

Education in the Indigenous village does not follow classroom standards. It is an unhurried learning, calm and without clock time. Teaching how to fish, how to row, how to plant, how to produce flour, how to build the house, how to weave the straw, how to prepare *pajuaru*, *caçuma*, *beijú*, how to sing, dance, how to make handicrafts, how to respect the people's cosmology, how to silence and listen to the advice of the elders persons, how to heal with herbs, how to feel the good energies coming from nature and people, and so on; these are lessons that are learned from the break of day (Kambeba 2018, 62–63).

According to the *Bem Viver* concept, all beings – human and non-human – exist and are considered in a relationship between subjects, what is different from a relationship between subjects and objects. Beings should live in harmony,

# The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and  
Marcos Moraes Valença

in a collective life permeated by democratic logics of community rootedness. Therefore, *Bem Viver* is complex, as a counter-hegemonic and subversive proposal that contributes to the decolonization of the world-system hegemonic paradigm. In synthesis,

If development tries to *westernize* life on the planet, the *Bem Viver* rescues diversities, as well as values and respect to the *other*. The *Bem Viver* emerges as part of a process that allows us to undertake and strengthen the struggle for the vindication of peoples and nationalities, in tune with resistance actions of broad segments of marginalized and peripheral populations. In conclusion, the *Bem Viver* is eminently subversive. It proposes decolonizing exits in all areas of human life. The *Bem Viver* is not a simple concept. It is an experience (Acosta 2016, 82).

After this discussion about development as a hegemonic conception, and *Bem Viver* as an alternative conception, we will present an example from the *Xukuru de Ororubá* Indigenous people, located in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, through their relationship with nature and with the agriculture's sacredness.

## Sacred Agriculture

The *Xukuru do Ororubá* Indigenous people live in the semiarid biome, in the Northeastern region of Brazil, in the city of Pesqueira, Agreste region of the state of Pernambuco. They have an organizational model that allowed their political articulation in the 1980s and 1990s. The Indigenous population was until then dispersed and unaware of their ethnic identity. However, the mobilizations that took place in that period allowed self-determination and the claiming of rights that occurred parallel to the processes of self-demarcation.

In addition to the *Xukuru* Association and the leadership council of the 24 communities that make up the *Xukuru* territory, the socio-political organization also presents the councils of health and education, and the collective of youth, women and agriculture. The annual *Xukuru* assembly takes place between 17–20 May, with the purpose of evaluating the *Xukuru* life project and, based on collective decision-making, to direct actions and activities for the management of the sacred land of *Ororubá*, keeping in mind the principles and values of the *Xukuru* way of life – *Limolaygo Toype*.

This organizational model enables a management that is based on collective decision-making and has the participation of children, youth, women, adults and elders in its elaboration, naturally conducted by the social dynamics that occurs through the circuits of the sacred – which also ensure the voices of the forest and the Enchanted spirits. There are also dialogues with the *Xukuru* institutions, such as the Leadership, Education, and Health Council. From the *Xukuru* sacred rituals come the guidance of the spirits through the Science of the Enchanted Ones, so that the ritual space is an arena for consensus construction. It is interesting to note that ritual time is distinct from everyday time, as signaled by Catherine Bell:

Ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane,' and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors (Bell 1992, 74).

For the (re)construction of the *Xukuru* life plan, several processes have ressignified the uses and occupation of the territory, taking into consideration principles guided by the 'culture of subtlety'. This culture implies low-impact activities based on the observation of the behavior and manifestations of nature itself, as well as on the guidance of spiritual beings.

The integration with the land is founded on intimate relations of physical and spiritual existence, based on the centrality of natural elements such as stones, water, soil and forests, considered by the *Xukuru* cosmology as homes of the Enchanted spirits. Thus, the distribution of land to live on, and agricultural and livestock production activities were preceded by the definition of sacred spaces, understood as Spiritual Power Points. It is from these points that sustainability strategies are thought out, going beyond the idea of simply distributing land among the Indigenous communities.

## The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and Marcos Moraes Valença

Complex models of relationship between production and Mother Earth have guided the processes of social organization and land use, with the necessary care for nature and the sacred. To this end, the *Xukuru* organizational strategies seek to promote, through research, experiences and reflection, practices that value the knowledge and traditions of the elders, as well as considering the relationship between the people and the sacred territory in the construction of the life plan. In this way, this people work with sustainable practices and knowledge through events, training and the building of solidarity networks that promote the traditional knowledge of care and healing, food and agro-food systems.

The Agriculture Group *Xukuru do Ororubá - Jupago Kréka* has been defending the 'agriculture of enchantment/sacred agriculture', as a way of life that, in addition to planting, cultivating, harvesting and eating, promotes the culture of the Enchantment of *Ororubá*. Thus, it necessarily requires care for the processes of social and environmental regeneration. Its conception brings the Science of the Invisible as an epistemological basis that has been enabling practices through agricultural-spiritual systems that allow the management of ecological landscapes and agro-forestry with arrangements in biodiverse polycultures (Altieri 2010). The management is shared with the seed guardians, *Xukuru* men and women who are dedicated to this practice and are guided by the Enchanted Light to conduct the relationship between human beings, animals, plants, the sacred topography and the spirits.

The *Jupago Kreká* is located in the sacred complex of the Agriculture Center *Xukuru do Ororubá* (CAXO), in the Boa Vista community – *Xukuru* Indigenous Land, and fosters experiments in sacred agriculture as a promoter of the *Ororubá* culture of enchantment. With the resumption of this way of life, this group started to disseminate practices of production with care, having as its epistemological basis the Science of the Invisible, from which emerges an idea of sustainability that does not admit the development logic.

The goal of this organization is to produce care from a holistic vision of agriculture-health-education for the maintenance of the *Bem Viver* on Earth and *for* Earth itself. This implies to plant/harvest/eat/heal/celebrate with sacred nature. When practicing sacred agriculture, one cares for physical nature through the living forest, understood among the *Xukuru* as the *Greatness of Green Kingdom*. Thus, the Enchanted Nature, the world of the spirits, is present, because the trees, the stones, the soil, and the waters are the dwellings of the Enchanted Kingdoms of the *Ororubá*.

Sustainability understood from the Science of the Invisible can only be achieved through the logic of involvement. From this perspective, the people in movement involves strategies of articulation, mobilization, thought, and systematization of the traditional agricultural practices and way of life. These practices include, for example, the 'good eating' and traditional gastronomy, the manipulation of plants and the traditional system of healing, as well as the idea of reciprocity economy and social dynamics of sharing and solidarity. This vision is opposed to an agriculture that uses agrochemicals, promotes burning and deforestation, carried out by the agribusiness.

Through the *Jupago Kreká*, people dedicate themselves more intensively. This process takes place through the activities of the *Terreiro Sagrado da Boa Vista*, a space within the forest which is constituted as a set of social and religious equipments – such as the *Casa de Sementes Mãe Zenilda*, the *Barraca do Bem Viver*, the *Casa de Cura Xeker Jetí*, among other places – that promote social and sacred flows and dynamics, as well as allow the enchantment to live and materialize. These activities aim to create regeneration experiences, not only to maintain the loyalty to the old world, but also as a way of adding efforts for the common *Bem Viver*.

The resumption of ancestral ideas and practices around sacred agriculture resurfaced in the early 2000s in the framework of the discussions about *Xukuru* life project, after the reconquest of the traditional territory. The group took on the challenges of managing the territory based on the principles of *Lymolaygo Toype* (*Xukuru's Bem Viver*) and on the commitment to break up with the system of land exploitation left by the predatory cattle ranching model that dominated the territory – generating negative environmental impacts such as biodiversity loss. This scenario destabilized the *Xukuru* way of life, compromising the viability of agricultural systems, their practices and knowledge, such as traditional cuisine, ancestral medicine, healing practices, and the reciprocal economy.

# The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and Marcos Moraes Valença

*Jupago* coordinates processes that enable the identification of sustainable experiences among Indigenous families, the systematization of these practices and the socialization of the results among the Indigenous communities. Through joint and planned actions, it promotes the recovery of agrobiodiversity in degraded areas, and the valorization of practices and knowledge of a way of life connected to the ancestral world, producing as results useful goods for material and spiritual life. Soon after its creation, *Jupago* built the sacred complex CAXO da Boa Vista, as a reference area for sacred agriculture. It adopted a collective management model with the participation of *Xukuru* youth and women organizations, and with collaborative actions for the maintenance of sustainable experiences – such as biodiverse productive spaces with polyculture arrangements, planting of native seeds as a strategy for food and medicine production, as well as a strategy for the regeneration of native vegetation and control of environmental degradation factors.

The whole of this experience, which goes through a process of retaking sacred agriculture, understood as the basis of the *Xukuru* cosmology, is experienced throughout the 27,555 hectares of demarcated traditional territory, as well as beyond it. This process occurred due to the mobilizations for the retaking of traditional lands, that was started in 1990, and enabled a social reorganization, which, guided by spiritual forces, motivated the (re)construction of a life plan and a model for territorial and environmental management. In practice, it broke with the concentrating model that standardizes and simplifies agricultural systems and causes social disenchantment.

## Conclusions

The *Xukuru* Indigenous people, through the agricultural movement promoted by the *Jupago*, develop their conception and their practices and bring in this collective process of thinking and acting together the understanding of regeneration as the reestablishment of the balance of body, mind, spirit and care for sacred nature. This conception is guided by Enchanted Kingdoms, which teach about 'Good Eating', the *Kringó Kronengo*, as well as about the real food that nourishes body, mind, and spirit – maintaining the respect and protection to nature and to the Enchanted spirits.

Within the *Xukuru* cosmology, ethnic identity is characterized by an intimate relationship with nature, based on sacredness. It is understood that the human is nature, because everything related to Mother Earth is nature. It is also based on the idea that the human being is filled with spirit, the essence of life, and that nature, including humans, is the sacred home of the *Ororubá* Enchanted Kingdoms, understood as the world of spirits, which constitute the essence of the *Xukuru* being. Through them comes the strength and wisdom for the collective reconstruction of the *Xukuru* life plan.

This philosophy promotes practices of caring for people and other beings, as well as caring for the natural elements (soil, water, and stones), and especially for spiritual beings. It acts to reestablish the relationships, the flows, and the social and sacred dynamics that guarantee the identity of the people who, as humans, are guardians of the culture of caring for life on Earth, without compromising the care that guarantees the biological and spiritual life of Earth itself.

This enchanted and spiritual view of the world contrasts with modern Western thinking, which is rooted in the fundamental separation between human beings and nature. As we saw earlier, this perspective has an ancient history and is foundational to the currently dominant civilization, which is based on the superiority of humans and on the perception of nature as inert – it exists to serve humanity, and therefore must be controlled and conquered. This division in the philosophical field has laid the groundwork for many other dichotomies, such as the separation between body and mind, as well as the separation between sacred and profane.

This Western vision spread around the world through European colonial expansion, becoming hegemonic. With the end of the colonial system, the hegemony of the global North remained through coloniality, that is, through new mechanisms capable of maintaining power structures. In this process, the proposal of development played a central role, through the supposed existence of *advanced* and *backward* peoples, as well as through the need for infinite economic growth to achieve general well-being.

But hegemonic thinking is not the only thinking. People from different parts of the world have been alerting to the



# The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and  
Marcos Moraes Valença

need for a careful listening to the cultures defeated by the colonial process, so that it is possible to build new answers to the questions that challenge us today. In the Brazilian context, for example, Krenak (2020) calls attention to the enormous difference between welfare, a concept created by the global North – in which it is up to the economy to generate wealth to meet the infrastructure, health, and education needs of a population – and the concept of *Bem Viver* or *Sumak Kawsay*, which is not only distribution of material resources. *Bem Viver* is abundance provided by the Earth, this living organism of which each one of us is a part. This abundance, as the author states, is the very expression of life.

Sacred agriculture, as a promoter of the enchantment culture, allows to be in nature, for (re)production and guaranteeing life. The knowledge and practices of care seek to heal, through agricultural-spiritual systems, the negative environmental impacts generated by territorial invasion. It seeks to free invaded minds, avoiding practices incompatible with the *Xukuru* life plan. It also seeks to identify and promote the processes of restoration of environmental conditions, the practices and knowledge of care for the maintenance of balance between body-mind-spirit and its dimensions, for the materialization and living of the Enchantment.

## References

- Acosta, Alberto. *O Bem Viver: uma oportunidade para imaginar outros mundos*. São Paulo: Autonomia Literária / Elefante, 2016.
- Altieri, Miguel. "Agroecologia, agricultura camponesa e soberania alimentar", *Revista NERA*, A. 13, n. 16, 2010: 22-32.
- Brum, Henrique. "Capabilities para quem? Uma crítica a Amartya Sen." *Diversitates*, v.5 n.1 2013: 92-108.
- Comissão Mundial sobre Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento. *Nosso futuro Comum*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 1988.
- Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering Development: the making and unmaking of the Third World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Escobar, Arturo. "O lugar da natureza e a natureza do lugar: flobalização ou pós-desenvolvimento?" In *A colonialidade do saber: eurocentrismo e ciências sociais. Perspectivas latino-americanas*, by Edgardo Landier, 63-79. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2005.
- Frank, Gunder. *Reflexões sobre a crise econômica mundial*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1983.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Reframing justice in a globalized world", *New Left Review*, n. 36, 2005: 69-88.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogia do Oprimido*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987.
- Furtado, Celso. *O mito do desenvolvimento econômico*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1996.
- Kambeba, Márcia. *O lugar do saber*. São Leopoldo: Casa Leiria, 2018.
- Krenak, Ailton. *Caminhos para a cultura do Bem Viver*. Rio de Janeiro: Escola Parque, 2020.
- . *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019.
- Lövy, Michael. "Ecosocialismo e planejamento democrático". *Crítica Marxista*, São Paulo, n. 28, 2009: 35-50.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "A topologia do Ser e a geopolítica do conhecimento. Modernidade, império e colonialidade", *Revista Crítica das Ciências Sociais*, n. 80, 2008: 71-114.

## The Xukuru Vision of Sacred Agriculture as a Counter-Hegemonic Proposal

Written by Iran Neves Ordonio, Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas and Marcos Moraes Valença

Marini, Ruy. "Dialética da Dependência". *Germinal: Marxismo e Educação em Debate*, v. 9, n. 3, 2017: 325-356.

Marques, Luiz. *Capitalismo e colapso ambiental*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2018.

Quijano, Aníbal. "Colonialidade do poder, eurocentrismo e América Latina." Em *A colonialidade do saber: eurocentrismo e ciências sociais. Perspectivas latino-americanas*, de Edgardo Lander, 117-142. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2005.

Restrepo, Eduardo; Rojas, Axel. *Inflexión decolonial: fuentes, conceptos y cuestionamientos*. Popayán: Editorial Universidad del Cauca, 2010.

Sachs, Ignacy. *Rumo à Ecosocioeconomia. Teoria e prática do desenvolvimento*. São Paulo: Cortez, 2007.

Santos, Elinaldo, Vitor Braga, Reginaldo Santos, e Alexandra Braga. "Desenvolvimento: um conceito multidimensional." *Desenvolvimento Regional em Debate*, 2012: 44-61.

Santos, Theotonio. *Dependencia y cambio social*. Santiago: CESO, 1972.

Sen, Amartya. *Desenvolvimento como liberdade*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000.

Walsh, Catherine. "Interculturalidad y (de)colonialidad: perspectivas críticas y políticas". *Revista Visão Global*, v. 15, n. 1/2, 2012: 61-74.

---

### About the author:

**Iran Neves Ordonio** is a member of Xukuru do Ororubá ethnic group (Pesqueira, Pernambuco, Brazil) and a member of the Xukuru Indigenous Agriculture Group Ororubá Jupago Kreká. He is an agronomist with a Master's degree in Soil Sciences from the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco (UFRPE) and a religious leader of the Sacred Lands of Boa Vista and leader of the Centro de Agricultura Xukuru do Ororubá-CAXO da Boa Vista religious complex.

**Carla Ladeira Pimentel Águas** is a post-doctoral research fellow (PNPD/ Capes) at the Department of Scientific and Technological Policy/Institute of Geosciences, University of Campinas (DPCT/IG/Unicamp, Brazil), with a PhD in Post-Colonialisms and Global Citizenship (University of Coimbra, Portugal).

**Marcos Moraes Valença** is a professor, researcher and extension worker at the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Pernambuco (IFPE, Brazil), with a PhD in Post-Colonialisms and Global Citizenship (University of Coimbra, Portugal).