


# Slowing the Apocalypse to a Halt: Sustainable Farming Practices

by Katherine Jemima Hamilton

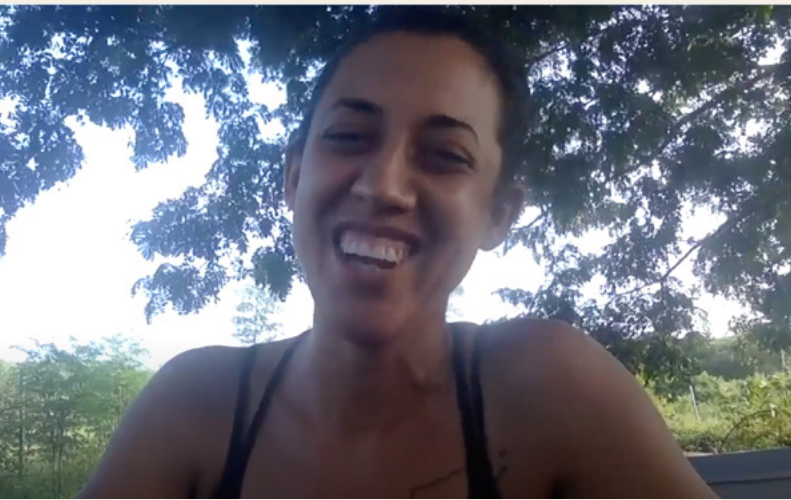




Everything is on fire, flooding, imploding, or in crisis. Navigate to any news site, and you will find a word cloud of terms like “debt crisis, election lie, escalating dispute,” to the more violent “attack, mass shooting, groping,” and of course, “death rates hit a record high.” Paired with floods and fires and an evolving sickness continuing to spread, one might expect frogs to take over the continent or the nearest water source to run red with blood.

Like many people, I feel that I have completely lost touch with reality.

But it hasn't been all bad. I've had more time to work with the earth; get my fingers in some soil. When I water my herbs in the backyard, I talk to my neighbors about their gardens and reviving an Aloe Vera I neglected. One of my neighbors is quite involved in our local Buy Nothing group, an online community dedicated to creating localized gift economies in the Bay Area. And though my doorbell often gets rung accidentally because of the frequent exchanges, it's nice to let a neighbor in and get their opinion on why my English Ivy only has three leaves.



***Ana Elisa Pérez Quintero speaking from her home in Puerto Rico***

Professor Vreni's digital gathering "In Defense of Life: Beekeeping & Sustainable Farming" on October 27th brought me a semblance of the kinds of encounters that bring me joy in a seemingly joyless world. For the gathering, Professor V brought in Metz Andrade, an activist and educator who lives and works in the Bay Area, and Ana Elisa Pérez Quintero, a farmer and activist from Puerto Rico. KJ "The Pied Piper of the Bay" provided a flute solo soundtrack for the gathering, meditating

on the sounds of collectivity found in human and non-human solidarity. Their opening flute serenade tapped into the audience's capacity for learning beyond the traditional academic lecture.

Both speakers noted that their interest in working with bees and the land for food and medicine was rooted in a family member's illness or death. Ana Elisa cited her father's death as the moment she understood how land and health were connected. Working with the earth and the medicines her ancestors used allowed her to reject the colonial powers that harmed her family in so many ways for so many generations. As she no longer had to lean on capitalist production systems for her wellbeing, she could then redistribute resources to her family and community. She became closer to her father by using traditional remedies during his passing into another world to help her grieve. When Metz's Abuelita was ill, Metz became passionate about her culture and heritage, turning to the Yerba and other medicine-giving plants to heal people in her life. Metz and Ana Elisa's interest in healing their own families became more extensive political desires to heal their communities and the land they inhabit.

Narratives and histories of colonialism were also present in the discussion around land preservation and stewardship. For Ana Elisa, stewarding land on Vieques, an island in the Puerto Rico archipelago, is challenging because the U.S. Navy occupied the land from November 1941 to 2003. The military used Vieques as a bombing range. When many of the residents fell terribly ill years later, they admitted to using heavy metals and toxic chemicals during their occupation of the island. Though the island was designated a “superfund clean-up site” after the Navy left, ecological restoration—such as clearing the land of toxins—needs to happen before people can farm as they could before military occupation. Ana Elisa emphasized how important it is for Puerto Ricans to have self-sustaining food growth operations because their dependence on external food sources is precarious. Developing a relationship with the land that honors it will strengthen the island community as residents can rely on themselves and each other for sustenance. Being able to depend on each other is beneficial not only for this generation but for the many to come.

Metz also noted that embracing her ancestors’ ways of sourcing food and medicine has helped her family interrogate the colonial values and narratives they internalized as colonized subjects. However, the ongoing external effects of colonization, such as climate change, have been more challenging to tackle. In many ways, climate change results from a system that prioritizes resource extraction over the wellbeing of not only the earth but the longevity and quality of human life. Corporations’ greed and extractive practices have destroyed animals’ natural habitats and killed pollinators, increasing food scarcity. In addition, food that once grew on land is now ravaged by floods and wildfires.




**Metz Andrade speaking from their home in the Bay Area**



On Vieques, Ana Elisa added, bee colonies also symbolize how humans need solidarity and cooperation in the face of the climate crisis. The way honeybees work together to create their own food and protect each other in a way that humans, including (but not limited to) beekeepers, can think about how we can organize to nourish and protect each other through the coming disasters. Though 85% of our world's food is dependent on pollinators, Metz added, it is also reliant on humans working together to unlearn the myths (such as our dependence on resource extraction) promulgated by colonial systems around taking care of ourselves and the earth.



Screenshot from twitter user @MohanadElshieky

A person wearing a dark jacket and a hat is sitting on the ground in a field, looking at a laptop. The background is filled with tall grass and trees, suggesting a rural or agricultural setting. The entire image has a semi-transparent pink overlay.

People like Ana Elisa and Metz give me a lot of hope about a sustainable revolution. Their intimate work with the land is not merely a job but a practice that encompasses their lineage and spirits. Early on, Ana Elisa had mentioned that, although she didn't outwardly express her farming as a spiritual practice, working with the land and the bees and witnessing their knowledge did give her a kind of spiritual connection to her work. Reconnecting to the land transcends any theorizing around anarchy, communes, or sovereignty. Digging into the soil embodies a mutually beneficial way of learning from non-human kin. Both Metz and Ana Elisa discussed how this practice that brings them sustenance isn't something they do because it's pretty or because other people think it's an exciting job: it's political, it's liberating, and it's the work that will save our lives. Organizing to fight for sovereignty from hostile and violent governments and their extractive practices is essential survival work; so is organizing to ensure everyone has food, including humans and the more-than-human. And though climate change has made these practices even more difficult to engage in and use to sustain ourselves, they're indispensable from the movement against colonial violence and for climate action.

***Katherine Jemima Hamilton*** is a curator, educator, and writer pursuing a dual-degree in MA Curatorial Practice and MA Visual and Critical Studies.