

Usbek & Rica (France)

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<https://usbeketrica.com/fr/article/peuples-autochtones-la-solastalgie-a-permis-de-mettre-un-mot-sur-la-souffrance-que-nous-ressentons>

Usbek & Rica

Solastalgia, this suffering that eats away at indigenous peoples

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Devastated territories, transformed landscapes... Global warming as well as human activities are disrupting the environment of indigenous peoples, who are highly exposed to solastalgia. A devastating feeling witnessed by two women from indigenous communities, in Uganda and Brazil, in the columns of Usbek & Rica.



Emilie Echaroux

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" *Revolt* ", " *indignation* ", " *depression* ". Solastalgia, or nostalgia for landscapes, is synonymous with a deep " *ill-being* " for certain indigenous communities, who see their daily environment evolve in step with human activities and global warming. climatic. Defined by the philosopher [Glenn Albrecht](#) as a feeling of desolation caused by the devastation of a habitat or a territory, this state of mind particularly affects populations living closest to the Earth, like indigenous communities. " *These sentinel populations, who have a cultural, historical or culinary connection to [nature], are more susceptible to solastalgia* ", confirms Alice Desbiolles, doctor specializing in environmental health.

If anyone can become solastalgic, rural populations tend to be more affected by this state of mind, confirms anthropologist Hedda Askland. " *People who live outside of cities are much closer to the [environmental] changes that are happening* ," says the researcher, author of a [study](#) on the solastalgia felt by rural populations in Australia. *In the cities, we are already expecting everything to change, with road works, the construction of new buildings and new towers,...* "

The transformation of an ancestral landscape is therefore all the more difficult for indigenous communities, who protect 22% of the planet's land and 80% of its biodiversity, according to the [World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#). While their lifestyles are among the most threatened in the world, Usbek & Rica spoke with two women from indigenous communities to report on their daily lives, affected by solastalgia. Here is their testimony.

Sylvia Kokunda, from the Batwa tribe in Uganda, member of the Action for Batwa Empowerment Group

" The Batwa community once lived in the forests of Echuya and Bwindi, Uganda. In the 1990s, the Batwa were expelled by the government from their ancestral lands in the name of wildlife conservation. Their forests were eventually turned into national parks, protected by NGOs.

I was about 4 or 5 when we were kicked out of our house. The memories, I hold them from my parents and my grandparents, who told me how they lived in harmony with our land. We had honey, meat and medicinal herbs available. Today, we have to pay for it. But many Batwa cannot afford it. We miss this life in harmony with nature very much. We find it difficult to survive outside our ancestral lands, within a new community that sees us as strangers. Some suffer so much from this remoteness that they try to return to our forests, despite the ban imposed by the Ugandan government and the presence of soldiers on site. Batwa have died trying to get there. >>

" Following the eviction, we also faced extreme discrimination. I saw how my parents were treated in our new community and how they had to struggle to survive. Heavy work was entrusted to them. The children themselves could not all go to school. Personally, I thought that by studying, we would no longer be treated differently. But even while going to school, we continued to be discriminated against. Subsequently, and despite our level of qualification, we did not have access to the same jobs and the same opportunities as the others.

We are considered pariahs by society. The government doesn't even consider us a subject. He values animals more than us. Yet we just want the discrimination to stop. We want the Batwa to have the same rights as everyone else in Uganda: the right to go to school, to have a decent job, etc. And, above all, we want to return home. >>

"Our relationship to the landscape is stronger than anything else. Nature is our home >>

Sylvia Kokunda, from the Batwa tribe in Uganda



" Solastalgia has put a word on the suffering we feel. Our relationship to the landscape is stronger than anything else. Nature is our home. He is a being in his own right with whom we live in harmony. In our culture, we do not separate body, mind and soul. They are one. It is the same for our earth: it is one with our body and our soul. When we separate them from each other, we suffer. The Batwa themselves tell us about this malaise and their depression. They confide in me, in our association Action for Batwa Empowerment Group or in the organization Land Body Ecologies of which I am a member [and which conducts research on solastalgia, nldr]. They tell us how much they miss the forest and how their spiritual connection to the land is hampered. Despite the solastalgia, we will always have these memories of our land. Our traditions and our connection with the forest will never fade. >>

Vandria Borari, indigenous from Alter do Chão, Amazonia, activist, ceramist and member of the international organization Corporate Accountability

" I was born in the Amazon and grew up on the banks of the Tapajós River, in the village of Alter do Chão. With the advance of deforestation and the sale of land in my area, the village has changed a lot. The places where we used to walk freely are now fenced off. We can no longer drink directly from the source of the Lago Verde, since the streams that feed it are blocked by the construction of artificial basins, also harming the fish. In addition to deforestation, many lands are invaded and squatted. Illegal constructions are erected, causing the loss of our green forest. With the growth of tourism, a lot of rubbish litters the beaches. Even if the inhabitants clean it, the number of rubbish does not decrease. By invading our lands, our lives, our culture and our way of life are affected.

My relationship with the territory is one of respect and care. For us, every place has a protector. We have to ask permission in order to enter the forest or the river. It is therefore painful to see these

"I feel solastalgic, especially when I'm in a place that reminds me of my childhood. Before, silence reigned in our village. We could hear the chirping of birds and the sound of water. There were more fish in the river, more fruit on the trees, less pollution and less violence than today. I miss the Alter do Chão that I knew as a child. I miss the peace. I miss seeing the locals bathing in the river, instead of the tourists who are more and more numerous on the beaches. I miss going to these beaches to fish and grill – an old custom that is slowly being lost –. I miss the elders of my people who kept our culture alive. »

:"Illegal mining in the Amazon is
| polluting our river,
| contaminating our fish and our
| people"

Vandria Borari, indigenous from Borari Alter do Chão, Amazonia



" I do not feel represented by the government of Jair Bolsonaro, which is carrying out a genocide against us, indigenous peoples. Indeed, deforestation has increased under his [mandate]. He liberalized the use of firearms, leading to the assassination of many native leaders. Moreover, illegal mining in the Amazon pollutes our river, contaminates our fish and our people. This government wants to erase our history. It is a threat to us, indigenous peoples, to the environment and to the planet.

I feel revolt and indignation. But, at the same time, as an indigenous woman with a law degree, I try, with other women, to denounce and confront these problems that affect our territory. We fight for the guarantee of our rights and the delimitation of our territory. We want our lands to be protected, since we represent 5% of the world's population and in turn protect 80% of the planet's biodiversity. »

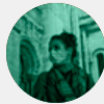
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