

**“There are No Seeds Here”:**

**Severing Seed Sovereignty in Mae La Camp**

Terese Gagnon

*Department of Anthropology, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, U.S.A.*

**Abstract:**

Here I illustrate the ways in which the process of becoming refugees in Mae La refugee camp in Thailand (technically a “temporary shelter”) severs Indigenous seed sovereignty and inter-generational agricultural memory for forcibly displaced Karen people. This severing occurs in the camp in large part through agricultural forgetting: the process by which linkages between people and plants are broken generationally. Along with dispossession and exile, such enforced forgetting is facilitated by the enclosure of the commons and commercialization. I argue that agricultural forgetting emerges in especially forceful ways in the camp, where the ruptures caused by displacement clear the slate for new more-than-human social arrangements. Such an account of agriculture in the camp is a necessary corrective to upbeat discourses of livelihoods programs promoting refugee “self-reliance.” This is because livelihoods programs and their discourse of self-reliance in the context of closed encampment obscure the enforced epistemological and bodily forgetting taking place. This forgetting, I suggest, takes place across generations of both people and plants in this space of exception.

**Key Words:** refugeehood; Indigenous food sovereignty; the commons; collective memory; Karen people