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(<https://www.jandiwata.com/>)

from: <https://www.jandiwata.com/2020/04/29/decolonizing-the-cacao-ceremony/>



# DECOLONIZING THE CACAO CEREMONY

You may have heard of Cacao Ceremonies offered at festivals and places where a lot of spiritual communities gather. I find Cacao to be a beautiful plant teacher that connects you to the earth, heart, and voice.

The first time I shared a Cacao Ceremony was at Bahay Kalipay in Palawan, Philippines. There, I experienced that steps must be taken to give up hold more reverence to the Spirit of the Cacao and protect it from Neo-colonization. This is how I held space to decolonize the Cacao Ceremony.

## Holding Space for Cacao in Palawan

The request to hold space for a Cacao Ceremony came from guests at Bahay Kalipay when I was volunteering there as a yoga teacher and innerdance facilitator. It was going to be full moon on the night when innerdance was already on the regular schedule and the guests wanted to celebrate the Hunter Moon with cacao.

Although I never lead a Cacao Ceremony before, I agreed to their request with one day notice and informed the staff at Bahay Kalipay that we would do the ceremony that evening.

Even though Bahay Kalipay is a raw food retreat, we didn't have enough time to buy raw cacao nibs for the ceremony. So Beny (<http://www.bijasphere.com/>) and I offered to use our stash of pure *Tablea de Palawan Cacao*.



Xocoalt PH | Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/326094278088738/photos/a.326119248086241/457353611629470/?type=3&theater>)

### Pure Tablea de Palawan Cacao by Xocoalt PH

Tablea is a way that cacao is prepared in the Philippines. The cacao is roasted and pressed into discs of about two inches. Sometimes *muscobado* (coconut sugar) is mixed into it, but it can also be pure cacao. This disc, or tablet (hence the name Tablea) can be melted into a hot drink, used for baking, or even melted over hot sticky rice.

I researched about the Maya on the internet to prepare for the ceremony. I didn't feel it was right merely to offer a blessing to spirits and energies I was unfamiliar with and share the cacao in a generic ritual. I felt strongly that the Spirit needed to be honoured through stories of its origin.

On the eve of the Full Hunter Moon Cacao Ceremony, I made a sacred space for the cacao. Presented it on a banana leaf with candles around it. And, very importantly for me, set aside a wooden bowl with rice and one of the Cacao Tablea in it.

This bowl was the evening's offering to the Diwata and no one was allowed to eat the Cacao or rice from here.

(Later on, I learned from our Babaylan friend that I had intuitively prepared a ceremony called a *Handog* which gives thanks for the abundance and blessings given by the Diwata.)

When the guests came to sit in the circle, I shared the story of Cacao. How this sacred Teacher came from the Mayans on the other side of the world and how it came to the Philippines via the Spanish who colonized us for 300 years.

After the story was shared, we partook of the Cacao. I couldn't help but notice that the Tablea looked like the communion "bread" we eat at the end of Catholic Mass which we were taught was the Body of Christ.

The parallel of this Resurrection story with that of the story of Cacao was too significant for me not to use in the Ritual. So rather than melting the Tablea and making a drink like a conventional Cacao Ceremony, I invited the guests to come forward to take their share of the ceremonial dose of Cacao from the banana leaf like we were sharing a meal together.

The innerdance that evening was heart-opening and musical. Celebratory purging happened with ecstatic screaming, bodily shaking that connected with the earth, and releasing of what needed to be released with the full moon. I had to formally close the circle on schedule but many of the guests stayed in the space and I was told the next day that they stayed up to dance and sing until 3am the next day.

## The Need to Decolonize Cacao

The feedback given about the Cacao Ceremony was positive. There was one sharing that stuck with me and it boosted my resolve to continue holding space in the way that is intuitive and feels authentic to me – in a way that decolonizes and brings back the sacredness to Spirit and the Diwata.

One of the volunteers at Bahay Kalipay from Germany who lived in Asia for some time shared that he had been to Cacao Ceremonies before but never heard the Maya story of Cacao before. He said that the way I held the space was different because for him, the opening circle didn't feel like a party but more like a lecture.

I accept that I can definitely tweak my story telling ability – I believe that it takes skill to tell a good story and through stories we can share our greatest gifts and lessons. But I know that it was right for me not to hold a superficial ceremony that would feel more like a party just to experience "bliss" without meaning or value to our interconnectedness through time.

The fact that he, a white man living in the East, joined Cacao Ceremonies before and never heard of the story of Cacao, felt to me that he and perhaps others like him, were benefiting from the gifts of Cacao, without honouring the millennia of culture and even bloodshed that occurred to bring Cacao and its Spirit all over the world.

So I will continue this way of decolonizing the Cacao Ceremony through story. And this is the story I share with you now.

## The Story of Cacao

Cacao is a plant indigenous to Central and South America. The Mayans knew of the Spirit of Cacao and used it in ceremony, sometimes even mixed it with psilocybin (<http://www.dosetherapy.com/>), to connect with that Spirit and other Plant Teachers.

The mythology of the Cacao plant is a heroic tale of brothers who entered the Underworld to avenge their father. And through that story, the method for processing cacao was passed down through generations.

The story begins with the Mountain of Sustenance prior to the creation of humankind. Cacao was one of the food items to emerge along with maize to nourish the earth.

These are the two most important crops in Mayan economy. A ceremonial drink was made from them prepared only by the eldest female elder of the village. This is representative of the drinks made from the Mountain of Sustenance that is the source of strength, vigor, and life for the newly created humans.

Hun Hunahpu is a Mayan deity who is linked with maize and the agrarian cycle. He was decapitated by Xibalbá, Lord of the Underworld, when he and his brother were defeated there. His head regrew as a cacao pod (other theories say a calabaza).



Ángel M. Felicísimo | Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/elgolem/46786462015/in/photolist-2ehmR9c>)

### The story of Hun Hunahpu's Resurrection

Traditionally, cacao was drunk from cups made from calabash gourds – a symbolic drink from the skull of Hun Hunahpu.

It is said that wherever the head of Hun Hunahpu was planted – even on barren land – trees will start to bear strange fruit. The Lords of Death marked this fruit as forbidden – but rumors of their sweetness began to spread.

The maiden Xkik', or Lady Blood, was the daughter of Kuchuma kik', an underworld lord who was the primary foe of Hun Hunahpu. She approached the tree and its fruit in secret.

The head of Hun Hunahpu began to speak to her and she told him of her desire to pick the forbidden sweet fruit. As she raised her hand to take the pod, Hun Hunahpu spat on her and thus was able to plant his seed in her.

He told her that she will bear his twin sons and that she must leave the Underworld. Owls helped her escape because once it was discovered that she was pregnant, the enraged lords of the underworld wanted to sacrifice her.

She gave birth to the twins Hunahpu and Xbalanque on earth.

They became known as the Hero Twins.

When the Twins came of age, they discovered the ball game of their deceased father and uncle. And, mirroring their fate, angered the Lords of Death because they were playing so loudly.

Wanting to fool the Twins, the Lords of Death invited them to play a game in underworld. But the boys were smart and fearless because they were endowed with magical powers. The Lords put them through many tests but they could not defeat the Hero Twins.

Since the Lords of Death could not defeat them through games, they plotted to kill them by inviting them to a drinking celebration. Their plan was to burn the Twins in an oven disguised as a vat used to prepare a fermented, sweet, intoxicating drink called ki'.

The Lords of Death told the Twins to jump over the drink, with the intention of pushing them into the fire. But the Twins, seeing through their plan, sacrificed themselves instead and jumped straight into the flames.

So, just like their father, the Hero Twins were burned and their bones were ground into a powder.

Their powdered bones were spilled into a river where they resurrected into fish-men. (The Mayan glyph for cacao resembles a cat-fish.)

This story actually tells how to process cacao pods for consumption. First, the flesh of the fruit is removed and may be turned into a sweet wine, then the seeds are thrown into the fire to roast and ground into a powder.

## Across the Oceans From Maya to Ma-i

The story of the Hero Twins, now fish-men, goes on. But this is where I diverged from the traditional Mayan tale and continued to share how Cacao came to the Philippines.

One of the pre-colonial names of the Philippines was Ma-i. The space in Bahay Kalipay where innerdance is held is named after this ancient name for the islands.

When the Spaniards colonized us for 300 years, they renamed the land in honour of King Philip II, then still a prince (hence, the name Philippines), and brought with them Christianity. Many of the ancient traditional spiritual systems of the kingdoms and tribes were lost or masked into pseudo-Catholic ritual.

Spanish friars who held much power at that time entertained Spanish elite who would visit the Philippines with cacao drinks – then enjoyed by wealthy Europeans as an aphrodisiac.

So, Cacao came across the ocean via Mexico through the Manila Galleon Trade. Our direct link to the Maya through oceans and millenia.

I like to think of this as the Hero Twins, as fish, swimming across the ocean, and reaching the Philippines.

In time, the cacao plant also became significant to Filipinos (*indios* as we were called then because the word "Filipino" was reserved for those of Spanish blood born in the Philippines) and a Diwata was even associated with it. She was named **Maria Cacao**.

Many Diwata were given the name Maria after Spanish colonization since the Virgin Mary was a figure that could be associated in many cultures as a representation of the Divine Feminine.

It is said that Maria Cacao is constantly trying to reach the river. She brings floods when she passes and rejoices once she reunites with the sea.

I see this as a metaphor of the Spirit of Cacao wanting to return to the ocean in order to return to the land where it came from. Somehow, through some sort of divine connectedness, Filipinos knew the link of the Diwata of the Cacao Plant with fish and water.

Bridging this with Hun Hunahpu and his Hero Twins being deities of agriculture for the Mayans, Diwata Maria Cacao, who brings floods, also helps plants grow in the Philippines which are abundant after the monsoon season.

## Re-membering as a Path to Decolonization and Purification from the Past

The Mayan civilization was lost long before Latin America was invaded by colonizers from Spain, Portugal, and other European Nations. But fragments of this ancient culture still survive. The history of colonizers and conquistadors ravaging the land and its people and robbing them of their culture, language, and stories must never be forgotten.

As a colonized nation, the people of the Philippines also share this culture of internalized shame and is healing from the wounds that mark us consciously and unconsciously.

At the same time, colonizing cultures with their internalized guilt, should also share and remember these and their own stories and histories, to begin their healing process too.

I believe this is and should be an important part of the ceremonies and rituals we share, especially in mixed cultural settings. No spiritual bypassing or continuation of shame and guilt through neo-colonization. Just acknowledgement and reverence of the past and therefore "healing" to finally release our karmic bonds from it.

## Cacao Ceremony as a Celebration of the Diwata

By partaking in a Cacao Ceremony, we must honour the death and resurrection stories of Hun Hunahpu and his Hero Twins, and how their Spirits came to Ma-i – the Philippines – and transformed into Maria Cacao, who yearns to return to the river and oceans to go back home.



Yes, Cacao has many blessings to give – physical health benefits, heart openings, connections and activations, etc.. – but to truly understand the enormity of these gifts, we need to remember and honour our ancestors (by blood and by Spirit) who gave us these stories and the lessons they contain.

There are many space holders who honour the history, culture, origin, and sacredness of Cacao. They hold beautiful Cacao Ceremonies that reflect that integrity.



Jason Barles | Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jasonbarles/34771128501/in/photolist-UYB86x>)

### Traditional Cacao Ceremony in Mexico

Unfortunately, there are also many who do not. We must discern and use our own intelligence and wisdom to surround ourselves with those who give Cacao and other Plant Medicine and Earth Teachers the respect and reverence they deserve.

Cacao Ceremonies are not just parties to drink spiced hot chocolate and play rainbow songs all night. They are rituals to connect to Spirit and indeed, the Mountain of Sustenance described by the Mayans, that was a gift from the gods – the Diwata – to nourish all humanity.

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The story of Hun Hunahpu, the Hero Twins, is described in the paper: *The Recipe for Rebirth: Cacao as Fish in the Mythology and Symbolism of the Ancient Maya*

([https://www.academia.edu/3906244/The\\_Recipe\\_for\\_Rebirth\\_Cacao\\_as\\_Fish\\_in\\_the\\_Mythology\\_and\\_Symbolism\\_of\\_the\\_Ancient\\_Maya](https://www.academia.edu/3906244/The_Recipe_for_Rebirth_Cacao_as_Fish_in_the_Mythology_and_Symbolism_of_the_Ancient_Maya))

by Michael J. Grofe, Ph.D. September 23, 2007

For Tablea de Cacao in Palawan, I highly recommend the home made Tablea made by our friend Davi at Tayuksidi Garden in Puerto Princessa City. Find him on Facebook: Xocoalt PH (<https://www.facebook.com/Xocoalt-ph-326094278088738/>)

Please EMAIL ME (<mailto:jddizon@gmail.com>) for bookings to hold space through story and intuitive process like innerdance (<https://www.jandiwata.com/offerings/innerdance>) to decolonize spirituality and use sharing circles to heal and purify from the shame and guilt stories of our ancestors through ritual and re-membering.

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