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INDIGENOUS LIVELIHOOD

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Introduction

It is commonly understood that food has its story. Food as appears on our plate today is constructed through a long and complex network of production, packaging, processing, and distribution, in which different agricultural commodities, foodstuffs, and ingredients combine seamlessly together. Take a bag of branded potato chips, for example, and see how the hidden network behind this product links potatoes in the Netherlands, industrial salt in Australia, and palm oil in Indonesia. Behind the scenes, various actors – farmers, traders, food industries, nutritionists, governments – play their role in the process (Carolan 2017).

What is also apparent, although less often discussed, is that food has its history. What, and how, we eat has a long story behind it. Food, in its material and symbolic senses, is formed out of a mixture of various cultural roots. Notice restaurants and food stalls across most cities in the world, and you will find a range of geographically embedded food products, from Italian espresso to Chinese noodles. So-called modern food was once traditional, indigenous food that has become assimilated to modern lifestyles, popularized, and commodified into its current state. Lind and Barham (2004) give the example of tortilla, which started out as a traditional cuisine in Mexico but is now a feature of our fast food industry.

It is therefore clear that food has both spatial and temporal dimensions. The rise (and demise) of our modern food system is the result of a wide range of economic activities built upon a long historical process that involves narratives of dominance and exploitation, migration (Mintz 1986), assimilations, and religious encounters (Aregay 1988). One of the most renowned literatures on this subject is Sidney Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power* (1986): sugar has historically been linked with the slave trade in Africa, colonial plantation in the Caribbean, and industrial revolution in London.

If learn something from the past, it is that we need to scrutinize the future and sustainability that this modern food system leads us to. Many studies have shown that the global food system is displacing local food cultures in many places, against the advice of indigenous community groups and local food movements. Western diets diminish the importance of local cuisine and have a deteriorating effect on our health through obesity, diabetes, and other non-communicable diseases (Kuhnlein and Receveur 1996). At the other end of the spectrum, globalization of food has also taken a toll on ecosystems in many
regions in the world through unsustainable practices of industrial agriculture (Altieri 2002; Norgaard 1984). Communities are detached from their local ecologies, native plants are disappearing and replaced by invasive exotic species, and deforestation in the tropics makes way for new plantations and large-scale agricultural lands.

The degenerative effects of our globalized, modern food system on both society and environment require a regenerative remedy. As this book argues, this goes beyond sustainability narratives. Critics of sustainability posit that the concept (=to sustain) necessitates that a system should be predictable and relatively stable over a course of time (Folke et al. 2002). Research on agricultural sustainability therefore focuses on the ability either to predict and model the future through various scenarios or to develop proxies that may indicate the potential impacts of a particular action in the long run (Bell and Morse 2012). However, in an already compromised and ever-complex world where disturbances occur capriciously, sustainability becomes obsolete, and thus concepts like resilience (Folke et al. 2002) and regeneration (Dahlberg 1993) come into play.

When sustainability is about maintaining a particular practice whilst allowing the system to function well in the future, then I argue that the best proven examples of sustainability are those which have been practiced consistently for generations and stood the test of time. This is exemplified by traditional food systems of many indigenous peoples. Ellis and Wang (1997) illustrate this neatly as they document a traditional rice production system in Tai Lake district in China that has been producing rice for millennia with an increasing trend of productivity. However, the article also comes with a warning – in the 1960s, while production rose rapidly due to an introduction of chemical fertilizer, the ecology began to crumble as the river became polluted. This shows that whilst indigenous agri-food systems have proven to be sustainable, it is not easy to be resilient and regenerative in the face of modern challenges. Berkes et al. (2000) demonstrate the way indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge is able to help them anticipate the changing environment through what they term ‘adaptive knowledge’.

This chapter aims to explore traditional/indigenous practices in the agri-food systems and illustrate the way in which traditional/indigenous livelihoods can help us learn to move towards more sustainable and regenerative food systems. This chapter is structured as follows. The second part talks about the definition and scope of indigenous food systems, through two bodies of literature that extensively discuss this topic. In the third part, I will use an empirical case study of an indigenous community group in Indonesia to show how their sustainable and regenerative practices offer a solution for many of the problems we are facing. The last part of this chapter will conclude with a reflection on ways to create compatibility between traditional practices and modern values, with a few questions to move forward.

**Indigeneity and sustainability**

Traditional, indigenous, native, and local food systems are often used interchangeably to address systems of food provisioning that have its roots in the local or native people. The International Labor Organization (ILO) is best known to be an international organization that has particular concern for the rights of indigenous peoples in terms of labor conditions specifically and broader issues of identity, customs, and land in general. The ILO Convention No. 169/1989 provides subjective and objective criteria that define indigenous people. Subjectively, indigenous people are people who identify as belonging to the group. Objectively, indigenous people:
descend from populations, who inhabited the country or geographical region at the
time of conquest, colonisation or establishment of present state boundaries. They
retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions,
irrespective of their legal status.

(ILO 1989, Article 2)

Traditional or indigenous food systems, consequently, endeavor ‘to identify all food within
a particular culture available from local natural resources and culturally accepted’ (Kuhnlein
and Receveur 1996: 418). An indigenous food system is a cultural product of indigenous
people through their interaction with their local ecology.

Viergever (1999) distinguishes between indigenous and local in the way in which the
former seem to be able to maintain their own distinct cultures despite a strong pressure to
integrate with the larger society. In contrast, local communities may not have a cultural
identity that sets them apart from the larger society. To illustrate, a local food system may
resist globalization of food through its own production, distribution, and marketing system,
but the type of food produced, the method of production, and the market mechanism may
not be substantially different from the modern food system elsewhere. An indigenous food
system, on the other hand, has distinct practices (e.g. hunting and gathering, swidden
cultivation or traditional pasture) as well as products (titi bird in New Zealand; Moller et al.
2004). Traditional and indigenous, on the other hand, are more often closely related, with
traditional implying a temporal dimension, i.e. demonstrating practices that are constructed
and perpetuated over generations, whereas indigenous implies a spatial one.

In the literature, there are at least two schools of thought that extensively discuss
indigenous agri-food systems. One substantial body of literatures on indigenous/
traditional food systems is that of Harriet Kuhnlein and her colleagues in the Centre for
Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment (CINE) (Kuhnlein 2003; Kuhnlein et al.
2009; Turner and Turner 2007), which focuses on the consumption and nutrition side of
indigenous peoples’ food systems. Another body of literatures on traditional agricultural
knowledge focuses on the production side of the food system (Altieri 2002; Norgaard
1984), advocating sustainable practices that promote conservation, restore ecological
balance, and build up soil quality in the long run. Although these two bodies of
literatures intersect in many aspects, the emphases and challenges are put differently. This
chapter will discuss each in more detail and follow with an empirical case study that
combines both frameworks.

On the nutrition side of the systems, Kuhnlein and her network document the way in
which many indigenous groups across the developing world have in fact provided
alternatives to the unhealthy foods we eat in our modern setting. This starts from utilizing
what is available at the indigenous peoples’ local ecologies through their traditional food
system. For many, this can range from 35 species/varieties of plants and animals in Maasai,
Kenya to 387 species/varieties in Karen, Thailand (Kuhnlein et al. 2009). These species
provide rich nutritional values, even to the level of micronutrients (Kuhnlein 2003).
Compare this with our daily modern diet that uses fewer than 20 species of animals/plants
as food. In addition, this food diversity also reduces the community’s dependency on
a particular food product, and so increases their resilience towards hazards that may inhibit
their access to that particular food (Kuhnlein and Receveur 1996).

Traditional food system knowledge and practice not only delves into the type of food
the indigenous peoples eat, but also the way they acquire, process, and consume them. In
a case of the Desana indigenous group in the Amazon, foods are acquired seasonally from
nature, and so the diet of Desana varies from month to month (Cotton and Wilkie 1996). The extraction of forest resources relies on cues provided by local indicators. So, for instance, after seasonal heavy rains and the peach palm blooms, Desana people begin to collect certain fruits, collect mushrooms, and set fish traps. Food preparation also becomes an important aspect of traditional food systems. In Hopi indigenous people in North America (Kuhnlein and Receveur 1996), households combine various foods through more than 70 ways of preparations. This is meant not only for the palate, but also because some forms of food source need to be processed in a particular manner to retain nutrients or remove toxins from the food.

The other body of literature deals with traditional agricultural knowledge, which attempts to maintain balance between crop production and local ecological functions while also eliminating dependency on mechanization and external inputs typical of modern agriculture. Traditional agriculture is practiced in about one quarter of the world’s population, largely in resource-poor areas such as in the tropical regions (Cotton and Wilkie 1996). In many indigenous communities, methods like terraces, polycultures, and agroforests have contributed to a rich repository of multifunctional agricultural practices that not only produce sufficient food for the community, but also conserve soil, biodiversity, and ecosystem integrity (Altieri 2002; Gliessman 2006). These practices are what Stephen Gliessman (2006) and Miguel Altieri (2002) termed agroecology; a concept that has begun to have pertinence in alternative farming systems all around the world. In his book, Gliessman (2006) notes how traditional agriculture shares a lot of similarities with its local natural ecosystem, as he said:

The greater the structural and functional similarity of an agroecosystem to the natural ecosystems in its biogeographic region, the greater the likelihood that the agroecosystem will be sustainable

(Gliessman 2006, 288)

Agronomists and ecologists take a particular interest in traditional agriculture systems (as compared to other traditional means of acquiring food), because of their compatibility and contribution to providing an alternative means of producing food. Consequently, new forms of agriculture such as organic, permaculture, System of Rice Intensification (SRI), agroforest, and natural farming are likely inspired by traditional agriculture practices.

As well as the discussions of traditional agri-food systems in the two bodies of literature factors are identified that contribute to the degradation of traditional knowledge and indigenous people. Turner and Turner (2007) identifies two major factors that play a part in this demise, one on the production side and the other on the consumption side. The first relates to the peoples’ loss and limitation of access to land and natural resources. While access may not necessarily be lost, traditional management practices may be disappearing due to their incompatibility with the modern value system. For instance, slash-and-burn and swidden cultivation are prohibited in some forest areas because it is seen as a threat to conservation, despite the fact that these practices are not the main reason behind land degradation and transformation (Sunderlin and Resosudarmo 1996).

At the consumption end, introduction of new foods as well as globalization and domination of mainstream food systems contribute to the dietary change of indigenous people. Kuhnlein and Receveur (1996) document this change in diets among indigenous people across the world and identifies some of the non-communicable diseases that follow, such as obesity, anemia, cancer, alcoholism, and cases of malnourishment. In one case in
Papua New Guinea, diets consisting of various staple roots and fish were replaced with imported rice and tinned meat. Not only did this affect the community’s lifestyle and health, but also increased their dependence on external source of diets that are subject to uncontrollable price fluctuations. In another case in Botswana, the community’s nomadic life that could provide hundreds of dietary variations was replaced with a sedentary life in settlements and diets consisting mainly of maize. Ironically, many of these changes were also pushed by government programs aiming to achieve national food security by promoting a single national staple food and one way of producing it, as exemplified in the case of Indonesia (see also Dwiartama et al. 2016). This is how the story goes.

**Empirical case study: rice-based indigenous community in West Java, Indonesia**

With a population of about 261 million people, Indonesia positions itself as the fourth largest country in the world, owing to its economic growth and agricultural intensification in the 1970s that resulted in a rapid increase of its population in the past half century. From this total population, 54 percent inhabits the island of Java, an area of only 6 percent of the total landmass of the country. Indonesia’s agricultural sector contributes to around 13 percent of the GDP and 34.3 percent of the total labor force, with a total of 24 million households working in mostly small-scale agriculture, based on the 2013 country’s agriculture census. There are over 300 distinct native ethnic groups, but the two major groups by far are Javanese (those originating from the central and eastern part of Java, but currently inhabiting almost all part of Indonesia due to transmigration program) and Sundanese (a group mainly inhabiting the western part of Java), differentiated mainly on the basis of their dialects. In terms of cultural practices, however, the major ethnic groups have become modernized in such a way that they no longer possess any distinct traits that would identify them as indigenous people.

In various laws and regulations, the Indonesian government has made a clear definition of who indigenous people are. In the Law No. 32/2009 on the protection and management of natural environments, an indigenous group is defined as a group of people that inhabits a particular geographical region for generations, are bound to their place, exhibit a strong tie with their ecology, and possess a value system that regulates the economic, political, and social aspects of their internal life. In theory, the government has indeed attempted to protect the existence of indigenous people through instruments such as the Agrarian Law (No. 5/1960) and Forestry Law (No. 41/1999), particularly creating a clear delimitation of indigenous lands and establishing indigenous formal institutions.

This notwithstanding, the rights of many small indigenous community groups across the vast archipelago are still left unprotected. This leads to the establishment of Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN), a national alliance of indigenous people, which claims to represent more than 2,000 indigenous community groups that cover around 12 million people in Indonesia. Some, for instance in the depth of Papua and Borneo, are almost untouched by economic development and live in a very traditional manner. Others, on the other hand, such those living in the island of Java, interact closely with modern life to the extent that the latter provides strong pressures on the very existence of these community groups. This chapter seeks to show how these indigenous people are able to adapt and be resilient to those pressures while still thriving so as to offer regenerative agriculture and food practices as an example for the surrounding modern communities.
The case of Kasepuhan Ciptagelar

I use a case study of Kasepuhan Ciptagelar (kasepuhan is a Sundanese term that literally means ‘place of the elders’), a Sundanese cultural enclave located remotely inside a nature reserve area, the Halimun-Salak National Park (Dwiartama 2014; Dwiartama et al. 2016). The area is 180 km south of Jakarta, Indonesia’s capital city. The community group consists of around 30,000 individuals living in 568 scattered villages around Mount Halimun, at elevations between 700 and 1,200 meters above sea level (Soemarwoto 2007). They are mainly farmers, practicing rice agriculture for subsistence, although they do not label themselves as such because, in their perspective, rice growing is an obligation of all members of the society regardless of their main professions. Indeed, in addition to rice farming that is the backbone of the community’s social life, many work in a range of employment sectors, from school teachers, government officials, traders, to commercial farmers (the main commodities of this region are palm sugar, cardamom, and cloves).

It is difficult to estimate the total area of Kasepuhan, as the practices of swidden agriculture provide the community with a flexible land base through opening of new forest areas, although documents show that the area that this indigenous group lives in covers around 5,000 hectares of land. The community faces challenges as their cultural space is located within a national park that has strict rules of forest access. Due to this, their practice of swidden agriculture (huma, or dryland rice farming) has been reduced significantly and replaced by sawah (wetland rice agriculture). Thus, to this point, we can still witness two types of rice farming system in Kasepuhan, with sawah dominating paddy fields at the lower altitude and huma dominating fields in the highlands. The area is practically inaccessible by normal means of transport due to the tropical montane forest surrounding the area. This inaccessibility is perhaps one of the reasons why they can still maintain their culture undisturbed.

Rice is undoubtedly central to the lives of the Kasepuhan people. Kasepuhan’s traditional agri-food system centered on rice production and consumption has contributed to the community resilience and food security for generations (Dwiartama 2014). For them rice is irreplaceable, saying that ‘without rice, we could not live’. Within their cosmology, life is seen as a cycle – a metaphor that is also represented in their rice agricultural activities, from preparation to planting, harvesting, consuming, and preparing for the next year in an annual cycle. At the final stage of the rituals, they have what is called seren taun, a ceremony open to all members of the community (and even to outsiders as a tourism event) to celebrate the achievement of their harvests and to plan for the coming year. Rice is personified by Nyai Pohaci Sanghyang Asri, the goddess of rice and fertility, somewhat similar to the depiction of Ceres in the Roman mythology.

The agriculture side of the system

The regenerative character of Kasepuhan’s agri-food system comes from both sides of the chain. Kasepuhan’s agricultural system that utilizes hundreds of local javanica rice varieties has been around the community for centuries and is able to fulfil the staple need of its people. Rice production is treated in reverential manner to the extent that it should be kept traditional (and organic), with prohibitions on the use modern technology such as tractors, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and high-yielding rice varieties. There are three factors at the production end that keep this regenerative system effective: land use system, synchronous planting, and rice landrace diversity.
The first factor is the community’s conception of land ownership and landscape management. Agricultural land in Kasepuhan is not privately owned (in fact, a proportion of their land belongs to the state in the form of a national park). Farmland can be exchanged between community members, but not bought and sold. This communal ownership enables a more flexible way of managing their landscape. In their traditional value, Kasepuhan assigns half of the 5,000 hectares of land as a bequest forest (hutan titipan) that cannot be touched whatsoever. This is similar to the state’s designation of conservation forest. Another large proportion of the area (30 percent) is dedicated as cover forest (hutan tutupan), an area that must be kept forested, and can only be utilized in a limited manner, such as with the non-timber forest products. Lastly, the open landscape (hutan bukan) covers 20 percent of the total area, which functions as gardens, settlements, and importantly rice terraces (both dry and wetland) that account for half of the total open landscape. This shows the importance of rice agriculture in the community life.

Rice agriculture in Kasepuhan is practiced over a strict protocol. Each year, Abah (literally means father), the community leader, along with his counsellors, decides for the whole community when the beginning of the planting season is, particularly through their reading of astronomic signs.

We see stars, there are two: kidang and kerti. They become our reference point. When the two lines up with our position, we can start the planting period. The stars, in one year, only pass us three to four times.

(Abah, community leader, from an interview in a short documentary about Kasepuhan; Laksono 2015)

Synchronous planting does not necessarily mean planting at the same time. In fact, with a wide region varying in altitude and ecological characteristics, planting is not simultaneous. During every harvest festival (seren taun), Abah and his counsellors make recommendations about which varieties of rice should be planted in which locations in the next season, taking into considerations the varieties’ traits, climate, and the ecology. This is done in such a way that, although planting period differs from place to place within the region, harvest will still be simultaneous. This is critical because pest outbreaks will then be prevented.

What makes [our paddy fields] safe from pests is that we harvest rice simultaneously. … Here, when we grow rice, of course there are pests, but there won’t be any outbreak, because after our harvest, there will be no more resources to eat and automatically the number will lower again.

(Abah, ibid.)

Rice diversity is the third of the key factors. The rice production protocol in Kasepuhan is made so that genetic diversity can still be maintained in the region through an in-situ conservation process (Soemarwoto 2007). This study has recorded that, by 2014, the community had around 500 landraces (or varieties) of rice, classified on the basis of their relative sacredness and characteristics of the grain (buhun, ancient; biasa, regular; or ketan, glutinous), their affinity with a water-soil regime (in sawah or huma), and the elevation at which they are planted. On each patch of land, every individual is obliged to plant more than one rice variety in combination, one of which should be an ancient type. They believe that this acknowledges their ancestors and cultural identity. As it turns out, keeping this genetic diversity enables the community to produce new landraces from cross-pollination.
People identify these new landraces from the people’s use of a finger-knife (etem) to cut off the rice stalk during harvest. As opposed to a sickle (or combine harvesting machine) that can cut stalks efficiently, a finger-knife requires the farmer to cut each stalk individually – a painstaking effort but it comes with a benefit of ‘feeling’ each stalk and noticing new traits that emerge (e.g. thicker hairs, harder stalk, taller stature). A new rice landrace is usually identified in the field and brought and announced during the harvest festival under a new landrace name, if the elders agree.

The food side of the system

At the consumption end, three more factors are influential in shaping a more sustainable food system in Kasepuhan: an effective barn, a traditional milling apparatus, and a strict prohibition on selling rice. In order to maintain (rice) food security, Kasepuhan possesses 8,000 rice barns (or leuit) that guarantee the availability of rice for at least three years. There are two types of barns. In every household, a family is obliged to own an individual rice barn roughly the size of a small room. It is normally placed adjacent to the family’s house, although there are also groups of rice barns located in a separate place from the houses. The structure of each rice barn looks like a small house with high stilts. The barn is designed and maintained in a particular humidity so as to keep the stored rice grains dry. Rice is stored in tied bundles and attached to the stalks. This prevents the grains from deteriorating. The second barn is the communal one, a large house-like barn located at the center of the main village, close to Abah’s house (imah gede, literally, the large house). This communal barn is named leuit si jimat, or the sacred barn. During every harvest period, each household must give a small part of their harvest yields to the communal barn. If later anyone experiences a harvest failure, he/she could borrow rice bundles from the communal barn and pay for the same number of bundles they borrowed after the next harvest period. This helps to strengthen the social capital and to some extent achieve community food security.

The second factor is the way the indigenous people still use traditional rice milling techniques in a form of long mortar and pestle made from a certain type of timber, called lisung and halu. Using both apparatuses, women usually pound the rice bundles to detach rice grains from the stalks and remove the chaffs (outer husks) of the grains. In many modern rice agricultural areas, this practice has long been replaced by rice hullers and polishers, which can de-husk rice more efficiently and create a better taste and appearance of white rice. In Kasepuhan, machinery is not allowed, so the old practice remains. What results from this is that the indigenous people in fact consume a healthier form of rice that is richer in vitamin B, bran, and fiber due to the incomplete process of de-husking. Because this brown rice is higher in fiber and proteins, the people are more easily satiated, eat less rice, and consequently have a lower risk of diabetes and other non-communicable diseases. Not only that, their eating less rice also helps maintain their rice stocks in their barns.

Lastly, their resilient food system is also the result of their viewpoint about rice, which for them is as sacred as life itself. Their reverential relations with rice (and consequently other food as well) forbids them from throwing away left-over rice or even selling rice (in any form). Each has its own implication. First, not throwing away rice means that there is no concept of waste in Kasepuhan. People usually process left-over rice as rice crackers or mix it with other ingredients to be used as feeds for fish and poultry. Secondly, not selling rice means that they are less inclined to cash, or at least keep rice from being a market commodity. This is in stark contrast from my findings in a more modernized rice agricultural society in Java, in which farmers sell premium rice for a much higher price to
the external market so that they can purchase lower quality rice for themselves (Dwiartama 2014). One of the community elders explains:

Rice is life itself. So, when someone sells rice, it is as if he/she sells their life, and when his/her life has been sold – when we talk about life, we talk about the spirit, here, we consider this as a great sin. Someone selling rice, in any form, is as if this someone has taken away a life. Or, we can also say that it is equal to killing another being.

(Yoyo, community elder, from an interview in a short documentary about Kasepuhan; Laksono 2015)

The six factors in the whole chain of Kasepuhan’s traditional agri-food system (keeping a communal land ownership, planting and harvesting synchronously, maintaining genetic diversity, keeping a communal rice barn, retaining rice qualities through traditional processing techniques, and a respectful attitude towards rice) help the indigenous people to regenerate and sustain their social-ecological system whilst achieving a community food and nutritional security. It is, however, not to say that they are free from threats and troubles. Some of these threats come as external factors, in the form of regulatory pressures from the state, cultural commodification through tourism activities, and the introduction of modern values and practices (including a stronger inclination towards cash). This creates an internal fracture within the indigenous community, partly as more and more young people leave their traditional values in search of a better life in the cities, or more and more processed food products appearing in the villages may replace the traditional diets. This is not peculiar to Kasepuhan, as I will discuss in the last section of this chapter.

Reflections: towards regenerative food systems through indigenous practices

One of the key issues in the increasing threat to indigenous livelihood is the incompatibility between traditional values of indigenous peoples and the modern value system. Land ownership is among the recurring problems (see e.g. Chamberlin 2010 as he puts in his book title: if this is your land, where are your stories?). The case study provided has shown that collective land ownership is required not only to guarantee a sustainable and manageable rice production in the region, but also to build a sense of collective belonging within the indigenous community. Conflicts between indigenous people and the state or the private sector often take place around the issue of land tenure and boundaries of indigenous land (Li 2007). Along with the development of new frontiers for housing, plantations and industrial complexes, indigenous lands are decreasing and marginalized, which ends up being a threat against the integrity of the indigenous peoples.

Another form of incompatibility is demonstrated through what Stroma Cole (2007) discusses as cultural commodification. In her study of cultural tourism in eastern parts of Indonesia, Cole identifies that cultural commodification and loss of authenticity become an issue experienced by indigenous people aiming to improve their livelihood through economic development. What transpires from tourism is a situation whereby indigenous people, in order to maintain their attraction, begin to perceive themselves as a representative of an ethnic way of life that freezes them from any socio-economic changes and a better livelihood (although Cole also argues that cultural commodification also creates an identity that enables indigenous people to utilize their political resources for the better).
Kasepuhan Ciptagelar provides a good example of how indigenous people can build a good relationship with urban community groups without being scared of losing their traditional values or their existence. Abah, who is now 35 years old and has become the community leader since he was 21 years old, does not shrink from technological advancement. In fact, with the help of urban artists and activists, the community is able to adopt new digital technologies through the establishment of community radio stations, opening access to internet (now the central hall in the village has full broadband internet access) and even run their own television channels. They also produce their own electricity through micro-hydro-electrical machinery spread in streams around the villages. This is all done to create a balance between their traditional and modern values. School children learn about their own culture through the internet, television, and radio station. On the other hand, they are also aware of the threats that modern values pose to their culture, so they make efforts to conserve their culture in many ways. Among the most recent traditional-modern engagements in Kasepuhan is an attempt of a group of university scholars, with the permission of Abah, to decode the traditional knowledge system through an interdisciplinary approach that includes astronomy, geography, ecology, anthropology, linguistics, and art (similar to what e.g. Moller et al. 2004 worked on in the Maori in New Zealand).

This chapter agrees that indigenous people, and consequently indigenous food systems, are facing real threats to their existence. However, the solution is not to isolate them in their pockets of communities away from modern values. It is by realising what is compatible or not between the two value systems that we can then build a platform for a rural-urban linkage towards a more regenerative food system. Through this platform, we can learn to be more open to traditional practices at both ends of the agri-food system while at the same time helping indigenous people to attain their rights and safeguard them from the threats posed by the modern value system.

**Discussion questions**

1. Can you trace the historical origin behind your favorite dishes? How much do they link with traditional knowledge and practices?
2. How has our modern value system impacted the health and wellbeing of different, often marginalized, community groups all over the world?
3. Can you think of incompatibilities and compatibilities between traditional and modern value systems?
4. Do you think our society has been romanticizing indigenous communities and livelihoods too much?
5. What do you think about situating indigenous people and traditional practices as a tourist attraction?

**Notes**

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2 With this regard, Berkes et al. (2000) see indigenous knowledge as being adaptive, rather than traditional in a static/belong-to-the-past sense. For the sake of the discussion, I will use traditional and indigenous to refer to the same idea without providing any nuance to either concept.
3 From the Latin word *indigena* which bears the meaning ‘originating from a particular place’ (Merriam-Webster dictionary).
4 Javanica rice varieties differ from the modern high-yielding varieties in that they have tall plant stature, hard stalks, and low shattering of their grains from the inflorescence. This characteristic is central to the way traditional rice farming is practiced in Kasepuhan. For instance, the low shattering trait enables the community to store rice stalks in bundles within their rice barns, which are important so that rice can be stored for years without any significant deterioration in quality (see Dwiar-tama 2014).

Further reading


References

Chamberlin, J. E. (2010). *If this is your land, where are your stories? Finding common ground*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.


