

Volume 7, Issue 2, Winter 2018

Langscape

MAGAZINE



Nourishing Body & Soul:
The Biocultural
Diversity of Food

Langscape Magazine is an extension of the voice of Terralingua.
It supports our mission by educating the minds and hearts
about the importance and value of biocultural diversity.

We aim to promote a paradigm shift by illustrating biocultural diversity through
scientific and traditional knowledge, within an appealing
sensory context of articles, stories, and art.

ABOUT THE COVER PHOTOS

Front: This micaceous clay sculpture, by Natasha Smoke Santiago (Akwasasne Mohawk), holds heirloom corn. At a Great Lakes intertribal food sovereignty summit, the cobs were used to impress corn patterns into cooking and seed pots.

Photo: Mateo Hinojosa, 2018

Back: Traditional pastoralism is still very much part of life in the World Heritage listed Cultural Landscape of Maymand in Iran.

Photo: Maymand Cultural Heritage Base/ P. Karamnejad, 2009

*Terralingua thanks the Reva and David Logan Foundation
and the Kalliopeia Foundation for their generous support.*

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PRINTING: Hillside Printing

Learn about Terralingua: www.terralingua.org

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ISSN 2371-3291 (print)
ISSN 2371-3305 (digital)

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Terralingua Publication



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Repast

David Harmon

Being together, sharing food. More than any other, this needful act sets the rhythm of human life. For those of us fortunate enough to live that life free of hunger, of the all-darkening worry about where our next nourishment will come from, the repetitiveness of preparing and eating meals can all too easily obscure their deep significance. So too does the propensity, in modern life, of downing food and drink while on the run. Not just literally, but metaphorically: Can there be a sadder image than that of a family sitting around a table, each person eating distractedly while staring at a smartphone? Alone together, consuming calories.

The not-so-secret ingredients in the recipe for actually sharing a meal rather than just ingesting it are *mindfulness* and *caring*, traits that run through all the stories in this issue of *Langscape Magazine*, titled “Nourishing Body and Soul: The Biocultural Diversity of Food.” The contributors are mindful that the *casado* or *frittula* or *Haku Chhoyal* or *botvinia*—set on plates, wrapped in leaves, poured into bowls ready for human hands—are each the tasty culmination of a process that began months before with the careful raising (or hunting, or gathering) and preparing of the ingredients.

That’s why I’ve chosen the English word “repast” for the title of this editorial. It connotes something more than just a meal, I think. No matter whether we are sitting down to a “light repast” or a “sumptuous” one, the overtone is that here is something created with considerable forethought and care, not pulled ready-made from a freezer or grabbed from a drive-thru (McDonald’s sells “Happy Meals,” not joyous repasts). As you’ll see, our authors are thoughtful about every aspect of the process, and I like to think of the stories they tell as a biocultural smorgasbord, a sampler of the world’s repasts.

Over thousands of years different cultures have painstakingly fine-tuned their production of food and drink to optimize locally available gifts of the field, forest, and sea. So closely is this production tied to highly variable local environments that one of our stories rightly refers to it as “the soul of biocultural heritage.” A major theme in this issue is the challenge that traditional (especially Indigenous) foodways face from international agribusiness and its promotion of mass-produced, highly processed, seductively convenient products. Helping local and Indigenous communities maintain or regain their food traditions has implications for community health, stable land tenure, and cultural vitality, all of which are explored here.

In the “Ideas” section of this issue, we highlight **Melissa K. Nelson’s** story of the Native Seed Pod, a new podcast from The

Cultural Conservancy that truly lives up to its name. The podcast delivers insights, advice, and wisdom from Native seed keepers who emphasize the role of plants as teachers. Not the least of their lessons is the need to embrace an “abundance consciousness” that encourages us to be more grateful and compassionate.

Turning to “Reflections,” **Felipe Montoya-Greenheck** considers threats to the food traditions of Puriscal, a rural canton in Costa Rica long considered the granary that helped feed the capital, San José. Puriscal’s stable and productive agrarian landscape was undermined by the country’s push toward “modernization,” relegating subsistence farming, along with a host of Indigenous foods, to the margins. Today, there are organized efforts to rescue forgotten food uses of plants as part of a broader restoration of Puriscal’s local knowledge systems. Similarly, in the San Francisco Bay Area of California (USA), a robust traditional Indigenous economy was almost decimated in the wake of Spanish conquest. But, as **Sara Moncado** and **Maya Harjo** tell us, California Natives persevered and never forgot the acorn teachings of the oak woodlands (symbolized by the Grandmother Oak) upon which the ancestors depended.

On the other side of the world from California, another resilient Indigenous group, the Newar of Nepal’s Kathmandu Valley, carry on with one of their most cherished traditions: the preparation of a special salad featuring roasted buffalo meat that is served on festive occasions. A photo essay by **Sheetal Vaidya**, **Manju Maharjan**, and **Prakash Khadgi** steps us through the preparation, explains the sociocultural context of the dish, and, in an interesting twist—one we will see again—relates how the salad has now found its way onto the menus of popular restaurants in nearby cities. Next we pause for an interlude: a short poem by **Carrie Ann Barton** that connects the mouth-watering aromas of good food with a sense of togetherness and belonging.

Returning to contemporary challenges to food traditions, **Felix Kwabena Donkor** and **Kevin Mearns** make incisive connections between global food-related issues with on-the-ground realities in Mpakeni, a South African village. There, young people are loath to master the knowledge needed to farm and cook the area’s traditional foods. That is dismaying to elderly community members, casting doubt in their minds on the future of the community, and the authors call for an all-out effort to encourage the appreciation of biocultural food heritage among all ages. Back in North America, one response to the perennial challenge of sustaining food traditions across generations is the emergence of organized seed stewardship

networks. In a photo essay, **Mateo Hinojosa** spotlights some of the tribal people leading the movement, many of whom campaign for “rematriating” seeds: ensuring that Indigenous varieties held by private collectors and in academic institutions are brought back to their communities of origin so they can once again flourish “at home.”

This issue’s “Dispatches” come to us from Latin America, Southeast Asia, India, and Mediterranean Europe. **Antonia Barreau, Sonia Aliante, Jesús Sánchez, Rosario Valdivieso, and Susannah McCandless** examine the push-and-pull of traditional Mapuche cuisine within today’s Chilean foodscape. On the one hand, longtime residents still gather wild edibles in abundance, but they prefer to sell them at market, where they are now trendy gourmet fare for both lifestyle migrants to the countryside and famous chefs in Chile’s cities. The authors share details of their multidisciplinary, not-for-profit research and action project that places wild foods at the center of biocultural conservation.

A poignant reminder of what’s at stake is offered by **Lina A. Karolin**, a young Indigenous person from the Ot Danum community of Indonesia. She relates happy memories of making a special rice dish with her family and friends to celebrate the first harvest of the season. But now, like many of her generation, she has moved to a distant city for employment and laments that “for so many reasons I feel I have lost the life that I used to know and live.” From a different part of Asia, the Nicobar Islands of India, **Rakhi Kumari** shares the recipe for another special dish: a cake that is still part of many celebrations of the Indigenous people of Teressa.

Acquiring food is the oldest form of human work, and in their article **Rebecca Wolff, Francesco D’Angelo, Gonzalo Urbina, and Malena Martínez** explore different perceptions of that process within a Quechua community in Peru. The authors gave villagers cameras and asked them to take pictures of anything they considered to represent “food” or “work”; revealing differences were found between age groups and genders. Another set of cultural dynamics is center stage in **Vincenzo Di Giorgi**’s story about the street foods of Palermo in Sicilian Italy. He traces how these dishes reinforce local men’s sense of masculinity and self-worth and how that tradition is clashing with new market-driven pressures to turn the serving of this humble fare into curbside performances for tourists.

The continuing importance of maize in the Native food cultures of southern Mexico takes center stage in an article by **Constanza Monterrubio Solís**. She probes how women’s traditional roles in food production, and the economic decision making that goes along with it, are beginning to change in one community in Chiapas. In turn, **Kanna K. Siripurapu and Sabyasachi Das** explore the cultural significance of India’s native poultry. They take us to the hill country of Andhra Pradesh to delve into the many ways native breeds of chicken are used by rural communities in ceremonies and healing.

Leading the “Action” stories in this issue is another story about the value of maize in southern Mexico. Working with two communities in Oaxaca, **Flor Rivera López** helped start conversations between young and older members of the community on how to conserve native maize—discussions that revealed more agreement between the two groups than either had thought existed.

A new form of food-focused inspiration is underway in Russia, where **Mariia Ermilova and Tatiana Ilinich** organize a festival that uses time-honored tea-making techniques and associated rituals as the point of entry for reviving people’s interest in a wide range of cultural traditions.

From Kenya comes an inspiring account of how a school garden is helping bring better nutrition, and increased self-esteem, to disabled Kenyan students. **Eliot Gee** tells us about the Mundika Special School, where the pupils—many of whom are considered a burden to their families—have helped plant local species such as African nightshade and cowpea that are harvested for the school canteen, making unused plots of land at the school productive and at the same time boosting students’ confidence.

The last story in our print edition focuses on the capacity of the World Heritage Convention to promote traditional food production in cultural landscapes. **Mechtild Rössler, Akane Nakamura, and Roland Chih-Hung Lin** share the story of how a prize bestowed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) encouraged the residents of a village in Iran to see their local culture, and its interactions with the surrounding landscape, in a new, more positive light.

We are fortunate to have had a feast of good submissions for this edition of *Langscape Magazine*, and so we offer you two additional digital stories, available online, to round out the issue.

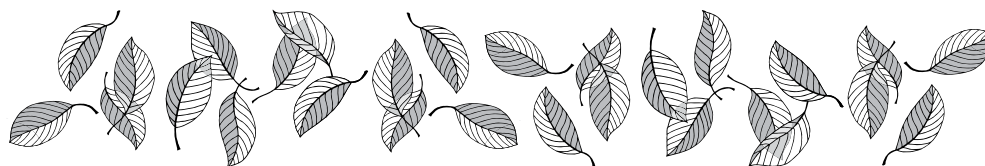
In a photo-and-video essay **Viveca Mellegård** brings us along for a journey into the foodscape of an Ethiopian Indigenous village grappling with an influx of newcomers and incipient environmental change.

In her story, **Aruna Tirkey** takes us back to India and relates her own journey to define a role for herself as a food entrepreneur working to revive local and Indigenous cuisine in her area.

I hope you enjoy this collection of “repasts” that our authors have set out for you. I think you’ll agree that their experiences and stories show us many ways to truly be together, sharing food, with mindfulness and caring.

Bioculturally yours,

David Harmon
Guest Editor, *Langscape Magazine*
Co-Founder, Terralingua





Ita

Lina A. Karolin

A SPECIAL FOOD FOR A SPECIAL TIME IN AN INDONESIAN COMMUNITY

I CAREFULLY CUT THE RICE STALKS in front of me. “Make sure you do not leave any stalk behind,” said Grandma Kader, my great-grandmother. “If you leave a sprig, the rice will cry and won’t come back again, which is why the next harvest will not be good,” she said with a serious face. I tried my best to pick all the rice. It was hard work to harvest the rice with the sun above your head and the stumps and rice leaves that would scratch your skin. But at the end of the day, there would always come a happy time, whereby all the family will gather and have supper together from the harvest: *bojah bohua* (“new rice”—that which comes from the first harvest). It will be cooked with pandan leaves, eaten with fish from the river and vegetables from the field. The elders will tell the story of the harvest or other folk stories from the ancestors, and the children will gather around to listen.

Harvest time was the most enjoyable time of the year. If the harvest was good, then it would be a time of abundance. If the harvest was not as good as expected, there was still something to celebrate: at least we could keep seed for the next planting, and we could still enjoy the food we were able to harvest, *bojah bohua* and

ita. Ita, made of young, glutinous rice, can be eaten mixed with sugar, grated coconut, pork oil, or other foods. Ita is available only once a year, making it very special and valuable. It is thought that each family member should eat it to avoid peril or distress.

Our family gathered in the field to harvest all the rice, and often we worked together with other villagers to do it, taking turns to harvest by going from one field to another.

Our family gathered in the field to harvest all the rice, and often we worked together with other villagers to do it, taking turns to harvest by going from one field to another. That was helpful because the work would be done faster by doing it together.

At night we gathered in the hut yard in the fields, lit a torch, and then began to work processing the harvest and talk about the harvest season. It was here that we made ita. The young, green, glutinous rice would be roasted on a big griddle, then pounded using a mortar made

Above: The rice was ground with an ironwood mortar and pestle. Photo: Ranu Welum Media, 2017



Farmers planting rice. When it was time for the first harvest of the season, families would gather to celebrate. Photo: Pinarsita Juliana, 2017

of ironwood. Many people helped do it, taking turns to finish while talking late into the night and drinking hot coffee. It was a time when togetherness felt so strong, with all the people helping to accomplish the work.

This story is only one piece of memory from my childhood about fifteen years ago. Today, it is only that—a sweet memory. Since I moved to Palangka Raya, the capital of Central Kalimantan (Central Borneo, Indonesia), I have almost never set foot in the fields

again, especially during the harvest season, and did not eat ita again for a long time. The distance from the city to my village, Tumbang Habangoi, is about seven hours by car. That, and the fact that my parents no longer live in the village, have made it hard for me to go back. For many reasons, sometimes I feel like I am no longer part of the tradition that I used to be involved with in the past. Although I now feel like I am separated from my roots and land, this memory of harvesting rice and making ita will always be a treasure for me.



The rice is dried before being ground. Photo: Ranu Welum Media, 2017



Ita was not just food: it was a symbol of the traditions commonly practiced by the Ot Danum community—an opportunity to gather and share with friends, family, and neighborhood. It is not only distance that has made me and many other young Ot Danum people who have moved to the city no longer able to enjoy the atmosphere of the harvest season or eat ita with our families. Another reason is that many people are no longer farming like before. The focus of the community is no longer just farming, but on how to survive in a modern economy, earn money, and send their children to schools that are far from the village. It is hard to continue living lives in traditional ways with so many changes occurring. Ita is no longer considered a food that must be eaten by all family members, as in the past—so much so that, for those of us who live in a distant place, families in the village would send it. Now that is no longer the case.

Ita was not just food: it was a symbol of the traditions commonly practiced by the Ot Danum community.

Government policies also affect our traditions and separated me and my fellow generation from our roots. The Ot Danum community was accustomed to using shifting cultivation in which new fields were cleared and fertilized by burning because the soil is not very fertile. This practice not only met the daily needs of our community, but it also became our tradition.

Due to frequent land fires and haze in Kalimantan, however, the government has issued a policy that no one can burn land, including to create shifting fields for cultivation, with serious penalties for violations. With no other solution in sight to tackle the problem, there is no rice cultivation. No cultivation means no harvest, and no ita or any of the traditions associated with it.

For so many reasons, I feel I have lost the life that I used to know and live. I worry that we will not only lose the harvest and never eat ita again, but also lose our identity, our history, and our roots.

Lina in her grandmother's rice field.



Lina's grandmother usually kept the harvested rice and saved seed in her hut in Tumbang Habangoi village. Photo: Ranu Welum Media, 2017

Lina Anastasia Karolin is an Indigenous youth from the Ot Danum tribe in Central Kalimantan (Borneo) Indonesia. She now works as an elementary school teacher in Palangka Raya, the capital of Central Kalimantan.

Further Reading

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LANGSCAPE MAGAZINE VOLUME 8, ISSUE 1, SUMMER 2019

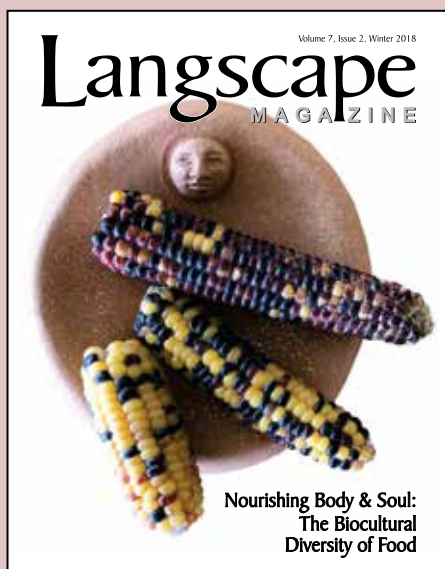
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Terralingua

Unity in Biocultural Diversity

Terralingua *n* 1: the languages of the Earth, the many voices of the world's diverse peoples. 2: the language of the Earth, the voice of Mother Nature. 3: an international non-governmental organization (NGO) that works to sustain the **biocultural diversity of life** – a precious heritage to be cherished, protected, and nurtured for generations to come. ¶ From Italian *terra* 'earth' and *lingua* 'language'

"Food is arguably the simplest and yet most tangible product to associate with biocultural heritage."

—Felix Kwabena Donkor and Kevin Mearns

"It's like putting things back together, taking all of these pieces of story and seeds and lineage and culture, and through our devotion and through our creativity and through our inspiration, stitching them back together."

—Rowen White, as quoted by Mateo Hinojosa

