



Food Culture, Food Security and the Harmonization of Interethnic Groups: A Case Study of Karta Village in the Transmigration Area of Lampung Province, Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper presents a study on the Tulang Bawang society who lives along the river Tulang Bawang, relying on the river and land crops for daily sustenance. This study reviewed how this society handled food security within the context of a changing environment. Based on ecological anthropology, this study used qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach. The informants in this study consisted of Lampung ethnic, both Lampung and Javanese ethnic, and others, whose lives depend on the river and the land (agriculture) in Kampung Karta. The study findings showed that with regards to food culture and food security, the two key factors which facilitated the interethnic relations are the social organization and kinship that exists within the society, and the local knowledge and technology (ethno sciences).

Keywords: Ecological Anthropology, Food Culture, Food Security, Interethnic Relations, Transmigration

Introduction

Currently food security is an issue in Indonesia. Various tools and techniques are used to fix it, but the results still fall far short of expectations. A change in the natural environment due to disruption of the natural balance (resulting from the violation of the food supply) is happening in the rural communities that rely heavily on natural resources for daily food needs. Pollution or environmental contamination that has occurred has affected the survival of the community. Tulang Bawang society who live along the river Tulang Bawang, rely on rivers and fish production, namely land and crops. However, these days the river and land productivity decline due to pollution.

From the pre-survey interviews, the pollution was caused by pollution from factories, agricultural fertilizers, and human behaviour in catching fish. Karta Village is a village in Tulang Bawang that consists of various ethnicities. Besides the Lampung ethnic, most of the populations are Javanese ethnic transmigrants. The relationship amongst the people of Lampung and Java in this area has long existed; the arrival of Java to Lampung since the days of colonization by the Dutch, legal transmigration by the

government of Indonesia and spontaneous transmigration. They created variety of cultural interaction between the indigenous peoples and the migrants.

Food availability is highly dependent on the food culture of the community, and what are commonly eaten. Food availability associated with the behaviour of production, distribution and consumption is influenced by culture. It can be argued that food contributes to a culture that encompasses elements of trust, beliefs, tastes, habits, values, superstitions and myths.

Theory

This study is influenced by the three approaches in ecological anthropology, developed by Benjamin Orlove (1980:235-273 in Saifudin 2005). The first approach is dominated by the ideas of Julian Steward and Leslie White on how cultures interact with the environment and how the culture adapts the environment, through the use of tools, technology and knowledge. Culture is like a "gene" that must pass the natural selection; when the culture is not able to adapt, the culture will be extinct. Therefore, the culture must adapt to the environment through a ritual, and adjustments, to this environment requires a long time. What appeared is a map of knowledge (cognition), food beliefs, food habits, social structure, and rituals associated with food. The type, shape and type of food were determined by culture. The researchers focused on this area reveal the basic construction in human thinking about food.

The second approach is the idea of ecological anthropology of neo-functionalism and neo-evolutionism. This approach is interested in the origins of something, such as the origins of agriculture and society. Culture is seen as something which needs to adapt to the environment and cultural stability ensues. This means that culture adapts with the environment, and culture tries to stabilize the environment. According to Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution* (1963) is a basic study on ecological anthropology. Geertz emphasizes that cultural ecology is based on the concept of the system. The system is "a set of objects together with relationships among objects and the attributes" (Hall and Fagan 1856: 18 in Saifuddin, 2005). Other studies that developed from the basic idea of this research can be found in from Rappaport (1967). Saifudin (2005) found that the ritual sacrifice of pigs hamstrung in Tsembaga Maring, show regulates the relationship between man and man, humans and pigs, and humans with plants and forest products. Ritual self-regulation (called kaiko) ceremony was performed at when the pig population grows to a certain level. When the population of pigs have exceeded capacity and disturbed the neighbour's garden, so some hedge needed to be built to avoid conflict.

The last approach is processual, which emphasizes the human consciousness in choosing and making decisions; its mean that when humans perform an action, they are aware this decision. This approach was pioneered by Orlove (1980), as a reaction to the functional ecology that ignores the choices that made by humans. In processual, these choices are taken based on awareness: an actor oriented analysis concept. (Barlett 1980:8). Processual review can be divided into two types: (1) naturalistic or cognitive model, and (2) micro-economic model. The first models try to describe the cognitive psychological processes of decision-making by placing a number of alternatives and procedures for selecting, while the micro economic model analyse decision-making by using micro-economic analysis. In this study nuanced cognitive approach explained the concept of knowledge society (Lampung) with regards to the natural environment and how they used that knowledge to make choices about issues of food security while conserving the natural environment.

The third approach is influenced by the anthropological study of food in a famous ecological model of Jerome, Kandel, and Pelto (1980), which was then further developed by many other experts such as Weiss, (1980); Shack, Grivetti and Dewey, (1980). Cultural ecology model shows that while the need for food is the center of the system, and the type, shape, and type of food is determined by the environment

that places the environment as the determining factor of cultural change. Ecology-oriented model can be seen in the chart below:

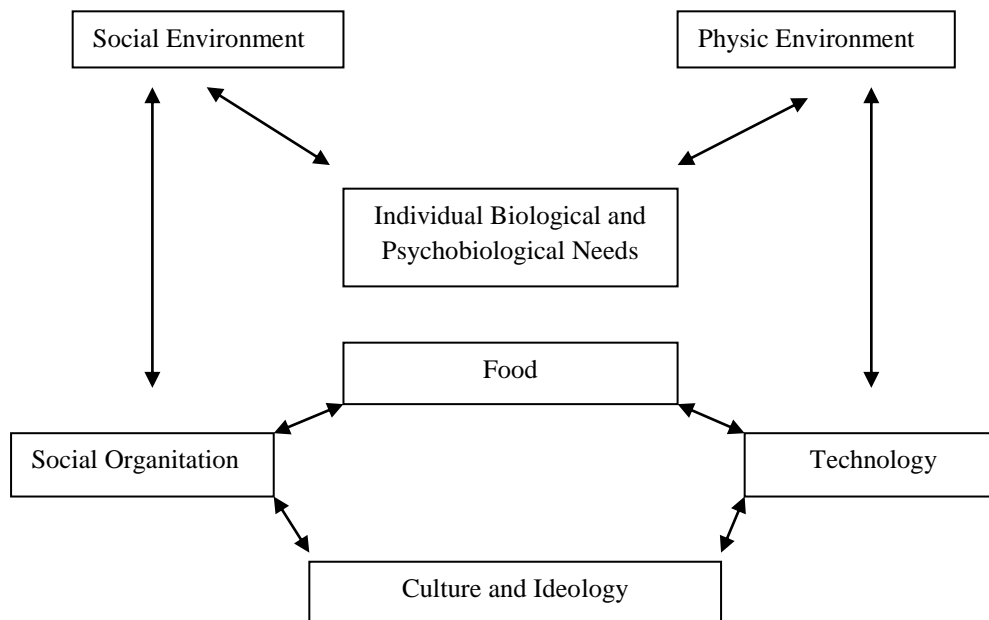


Fig. 1 Ecological Model in Anthropology Study of Food

Source: Jerome, Pelto & Kandel. 1980. "An Ecological Approach to Nutritional Anthropology." USA: Redgrave Publishing Company.

Methodology

This study utilised the qualitative method with an ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Akitson, 1983). Data retrieval techniques are used in depth interviews and observation. The informants in this study were the Lampung ethnic, both Lampung and Javanese ethnic, and others who depend on the river and the land (agriculture) in Kampung Karta. This research was conducted within 10 months.

Karta Village: Native of Karta People and Transmigrant

Karta is the name of an old village located in the western district of Tulang Bawang Barat. Tulang Bawang Barat is the result of the expansion of the Tulang Bawang Regency legally recognized in 2009. Kampung Karta is part of the seed or Kebuayan Bulan Udik. Besides Karta, kebuayan Bulan Udik also in the area of Gunung Katun Tanjungan, Gunung Katun Malay, and Gedong Ratu. Of the four areas kebuayan, Kampung kebuayan Karta is the oldest region Bulan Udik.

Kampung Karta is the most strategic location among other kebuayan, located in the Upper River Way Kiri. Second, historically when the collapse of the government system Keratuan from Dutch colonialism, came the new form of government that was smaller, but still based on descent (customary law) called the clan, and even this area form a clan called Buay Bulan Udik (BBU) with center in Karta. In 1928 formed Pasirah (Clan Chief) who also have the staff at the Karta. Subsequently in 1942, during the region of

Japan in clan Bulan Udik establish a single command includes the staff in Karta by region until Panaragan (Marga Teagamoan). From this historical background Karta became the old village and unforgettable by kebuayan Bulan Udik.

As it is known until now, Lampung itself only covers 11% of the total population, while Javanese ethnic 40%. Interaction between two ethnic groups is very interesting; besides the cultural blend of Java and Lampung, Lampung ethnic openness towards immigrants points to the fact that in their culture, there is one concept called "mewakhi", a kind of ritual in the context of the appointment of a brother to other ethnic communities in Lampung. This is the wisdom of local communities in Lampung in maintaining inter-ethnic harmony and conflict resolution.

In Lampung ethnic group ritual ceremonies throughout life is very important point, and food is the most important part of the ritual. Food is as an important element in the local customs. In Lampung culture, food represents a status symbol, prestige, habits, pleasure and taste for family, (in the case of marriages, receiving guests, and so on).

Within the context of social environment and social organization, the Lampung people showcase a cultural life within the framework of ethnic pluralism (with Java), especially in the management of food for food security. Conflicts could appear between ethnic groups, but the harmonization arises around food. So both native Karta people, and migrants who live and work in Karta are called "Karta".

For the migrants, they are Karta, but within clan, that they are Javanese. Many of them no longer recognize his native village in Java. So, when asked about their identity, the response is Karta, but from Javanese clan.

Food Resources and Karta People

Karta people know their food sources of soil and water. For water, Karta people recognize these types of water:

- a. Geco / swamp is an area that contains of stagnant waters, that is not deep or shallow.
- b. Rawang is a basin along the river, it has a hard soil and can be an agricultural land; but if this area are flooded it can be inhabited by many species of fishes
- c. Bawang is a lebak or lebung that is similar with small lakes, (deeper than geco) and occupied by various species of fishes.
- d. Bawang is the flooding areas most populated by fish, especially at low tide. It is caused during the flood season or rainy season, (fish from rivers and other places are washed away into the Bawang and when the water has receded, a lot of fish is left in the Bawang). Generally the harvest of Bawang happens in the low tide season that normally occurs once a year.

Karta people know four types of land; they are nyapah, garden (*kebon*), and forest. The yard is utilized for ornamental plants and also for food. For example, kitchen spices, and vegetables are usually planted in the yard. Generally, they have the large yards, both front and back yard. The yard is used for daily food needs, such as chili, vegetables, herbs, fruits so that they didn't need to buy. Even if there are neighbors ask some of plants they will give it, commonly called *setolongan*. Nyapah is the land that located on the slopes of the river, usually planted with various crops such as maize, and the other various kinds of other fruits. When harvest season come, the owner of the garden or the land usually distributed to local people. This activity usually called *Ngeju'ei*. It is done by anyone, especially a close relationship or *sekelik*, so it

is difficult for them to sell and to buy, so it is more shared or given. *Sekelik* can be in its own ethnic self and also among other ethnic groups, like Java sufficient majority in Karta.

Migrants who come for indigenous map is "brother" because they have worked since her grandmother, they shared and take food each other, even shared knowledge about food usually done. Mainly, the map from original concept "*mewakhi*" is for beginners, it means that it is open for *transmigrants* to be their brother.

The gardens, for the Karta people is a large land, far from the residence area, planted with various species of plants with large scale, such as cassava, rubber trees and palm oil. Usually they have a lot of garden, even more than one hectare for one person. The crops have been sold to manufacturers or contractors who need. The crops from the garden are for their revenue. Usually workers in the Lampungness' gardens are transmigrants from Java, with the daily wage system and the profit sharing results of the crops.

Forest for the Karta people, is a land without owner; so all people can utilize the forest for the daily need, provided it did not damage the environment. In the past, to open the forest, Karta people have certain rituals in the opening of garden or field. *Ngumot* is an opening of forest ritual. The procession of *ngumo* shows that actually, Lampung have special knowledge to take care of nature. They have a philosophy about how to manage and care their environment. It is not random and has special rules. *Ngumo* ritual shows how to take advantage of forest while take care of it. This local wisdom knowledge should be continuously shared.

Local Knowledge and Technology for Food Security

Food Preservation

Food preservation techniques for the Karta People include:

1. *Bekasan* or *Sesam*. *Sesam* is authentic cuisine from Lampung, especially in Karta. *Sesam* is preserved by using cold rice as fermentation.
2. *Dilan* or *Terasi* (Paste). Paste (in local language called *Dilan*) is preserved fish, processed by grinding. Usually eaten with shrimp paste sauce mixture on the spear, or with stir-fry vegetables and others. Karta seasoning is made from fish Lumo, mostly.
3. *Balur* or Salted Fish. Salted fish is a method of preserving fish. All types of fish can be made as *Balur*. *Balur* can be durable for 1 year or more if stored in a dry place.

In the past, when the transmigrant came there the rice was called bulgo rice. *Bulgo* Rice is bribe rice for transmigrant, the taste is like crap but it looks like rice. By citizens of transmigrants, *bulgo* rice sold to the Lampung people, most of the people who buy the rice are the Lampung people who less able. But there is no bulgo rice again nowadays. At the past Lampung when they have not the rice they will eat cassava called *gaplek*. But Lampungness' *gaplek* is different with the other *gaplek*, its ripped and then dried.

In Karta, caused the close of the relationship between the neighbor and the close people, if the vegetables in the garden are not for sale, as much as possible it is given. If we want to look for fish in the river but we don't have *pegahou*, we can join with the other people who have *pegahou*, it is free from price. That's all the harmonious relationship between people in the Karta.

Ngeju'ei and Nginjam

In the social life in Karta there is tradition called *ngeju'ei*, its mean they distribute the harvest or the fishes for their family and their neighbor, especially the close family. The tradition like this is still continuing. Although the harvest is little, it is still distributed. In addition, sometimes if there is food or side dishes, they are also divided. The problem is if in Karta, some people have some harvest and they do not *ngeju'ei* to the neighbours, they will be considered stingy.

In their daily life, when they really do not have any money, Karta people *nginjam* neighbours long into debt. Generally this *nginjam* each other do between citizens who are economically equal. *Nginjam* is considered as pushing onerself to the borrower, if done with more rich people above them. *Piil* or feel ashamed exists amongst Karta people.

Conclusion

From the data obtained in this study, it can be analysed that there are two important things in the life of the Karta people which could help them to ensure adequate food security (so that the food security crisis can be overcome). The first is the social organization and kinship that exists between them that with *ngeju'ei* and *nginjam*. The second is local knowledge and technology (ethno sciences) they have in managing and preserving and storing food so that they can survive and have reserves of food such as *bekasam*, shrimp paste, salted fish, and others. Karta people are also familiar with nature as the source of their food, to use it and maintain it. The first is water sources like *bawang*, *rawang* and *geco*. The system for sharing and management of ground water is governed by their customary system. For the soil, they know the *ngumo* system, which ritual in *ngumo* to show how the relationship between man and nature could exist in harmony while maintaining balance.

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