

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

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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 “reposts” 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



Making *Haku Chhoyala*

Sheetal Vaidya,
Manju Maharjan,
and Prakash Khadgi



FOOD BRINGS A NEPALESE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY TOGETHER

EVOLUTIONARY STUDIES OF THE HUMAN BRAIN conclude that intelligence is directly linked to meat consumption—not because of its nutritional qualities but because of the cognitive abilities that are needed for the strategic sharing of meat within groups. The intellectual capacity needed for such sharing is believed to be one of the factors behind the expansion of human brain size. Another meat-related development of major evolutionary importance is the domestication of large herbivorous animals, which changed both the course of human history and the evolution of the biosphere. Livestock—when traditionally raised—has been an integral part of environment-friendly agriculture.

Meat eating is a part of human evolutionary heritage, creating social bonding in many cultures. This is very true of the culture of the Newar community, which is one of the oldest Indigenous communities of Nepal. The Newar are a linguistically and culturally unique group. The Newar speak several languages, divided between the Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman language families, and practice both Hinduism and Buddhism. Out of the total population of Nepal, only five percent are Newars, mostly confined to Kathmandu Valley since prehistoric times. The valley, a scraggly, bowl-shaped terrain at the foothills of Himalayas, is roughly 1,400 m above sea level.

Above: Elderly Newar men enjoy a leisurely morning outside their residence. Although a minority of the people living in the Kathmandu Valley, Newars are highly important contributors to the area's biocultural diversity. Photo: Sheetal Vaidya, 2018



Newar women in their home-woven characteristic attire participate in a special ritual called *Mattya*, or the Light Walk Festival, by walking around shrines in the city. They pray for departed relatives to follow the footsteps of Buddha, who is considered the light of Asia. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018



Among the Newar, men are in charge of cooking elaborate dishes, including *Haku Chhoyala*, for special occasions. Women are responsible for cooking everyday meals. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018



Using dried straw for the fire to roast the meat is considered healthy as it does not leave behind residues on the meat. It does leave behind ash, but that is supposed to be good for digestion in this part of the world. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018



The meat is roasted until it is black outside. *Haku* literally means “black” in Newari and *Chhoyala* means “roasted meat.” *Haku Chhoyala* tastes best when only the muscles from the animal are used, whereas the other parts, such as skin and fat, contribute to other special meat preparations. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018



Community members chop the roasted meat into manageable portions of bite-sized pieces. Usually consumed as a protein supplement along with plant-based items, only a couple of pieces of meat are served on a plate during the feast. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018



During Mattya, portions of beaten rice, potato, and Haku Chhoyala are placed as offerings for the deceased. Haku Chhoyala is the first item to be offered on this huge plate sewn from Shaal tree leaves. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018



The plate is full of various foodstuffs, consisting of sweets, vegetables, and biscuits along with Haku Chhoyala, as well as some money. The plate is deliberately made full to ensure the departed souls have plenty of everything in the afterlife. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018



At a feast, family members and invited guests sit down in a row on traditional mats woven with dried rice straw, using leaf plates made from the *shaal* tree (*Shorea robusta*). During such feasts, the hosts serve food following a definite pattern. As a rule, *Haku Chhoyala* is served right after a course of rice and before other vegetable dishes. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018

Covering an area of 570 km², the valley is dominated by three major cities: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur. The valley was granted the status of a World Heritage Site by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) in 1979. Newars are the creators of the valley's historic civilization, and their rich knowledge of agriculture has influenced the culinary tradition of Nepal. Regardless of their being a small minority, they

still define the culture, arts, crafts, and the overall aesthetics of the three cities.

Newars observe special rituals and festivals from birth to death. All of these occasions involve gatherings of family members. Roasted meat salad, called *Haku Chhoyala* ("dark roasted meat"), is one of many distinctive dishes that Newars share during such celebrations. For certain rituals and festivals, it is considered indispensable.



The meat is first marinated with ginger paste and then tossed with salt, red chili powder, traditional rice beer, and fresh mustard oil. Greens such as garlic and coriander leaves are added for texture and flavor. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018



Curries of beans, cauliflower, potato, and meat are some other dishes served during the feast. Meat dishes are regarded as the symbols of prestige and affluence among the Newar. Photo: Manju Maharjan, 2018



An elder community member and the head chef, Dharma Bhakta Maharjan, shares the recipe for Haku Chhoyala and recounts the cultural significance it carries. According to him, sons-in-law of the family participate in the roasting process, which is essential for the cordial relationship between the families. Photo: Sheetal Vaidya, 2018

The source of the meat for Haku Chhoyala is surplus male buffaloes (*Bubalus bubalis*), which have been domesticated in India and the warmer parts of Nepal by the crop-growing population. Since eating beef is prohibited in Nepal because of the religious importance of cows, buffalo meat is used as the source of a high-calorie protein diet. The traditional way of roasting the fresh meat is over burning rice and wheat straws, and it's then tossed into a salad while adding distinctive ingredients such as ginger paste, rice beer, salt, red chili powder, garlic leaves, and mustard oil. The ginger paste and rice beer provide moisture and tenderness to the meat, while salt, chili, and garlic add spice. The freshly pressed mustard oil helps to maintain the taste of the meat salad for a longer period.

Covering the salad in oil is an ancient practice of preserving food that came into use long before refrigeration. This simple yet unique method of preparation dates back centuries and the community continues to regard it as a symbol of prosperity and well-being. The preparation itself involves community bonding because the meat

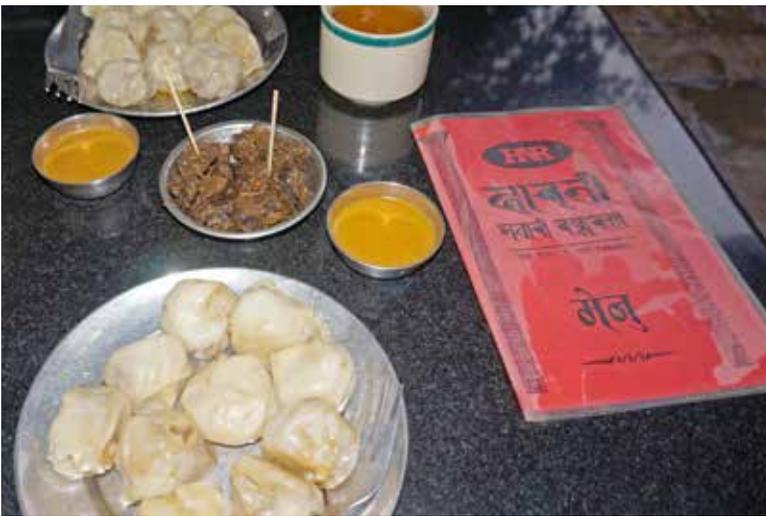
is usually roasted by the members of more than one family while performing many rituals. The aim is to keep the entire network of social relations in the Newari community strong. The salad is essentially offered during several annual rites and served in everyday meals as a side dish as well as with snacks.

The preparation itself involves community bonding because the meat is usually roasted by the members of more than one family.

Many restaurants serving Newari cuisine have opened up in the valley, which has allowed Haku Chhoyala to reach a wider population. In these eateries, the traditional method of preparation is kept alive by enthusiastic Newari chefs, and the remarkable meat salad now increasingly delights the palate of non-Newari Nepalese and foreigners alike.



Above: These days, Haku Chhoyala is also served in a number of new restaurants in Kathmandu Valley. Harati Newa Chen is one of them. Office workers gather there for afternoon snacks, and many non-Newars can be seen enjoying the unique Newari cuisine.
Photo: Sheetal Vaidya, 2018



Left: Served with popular Nepalese dumplings and a cup of hot tea, Haku Chhoyala contributes to a delicious meal. It is one of the most sought-after combinations in the local eateries.
Photo: Sheetal Vaidya, 2018

Acknowledgments. We appreciate the Newar families of Kathmandu Valley for welcoming us to their festivities, as well as their communal rites, and for sharing with us the detailed information on the recipe for and cultural references of Haku Chhoyala. We are grateful to all the Newar community members for granting permission to publish their photographs.

Sheetal Vaidya, PhD, an Associate Professor of Botany at Tribhuvan University in Nepal, has taught for more than 30 years. Her research explores plant systematics, floriculture, and biocultural diversity. She comes from a family of the Newar community residing in the city of Lalitpur in Kathmandu Valley.

Manju Maharjan graduated from Tribhuvan University with a bachelor's degree in botany. She too belongs to the Newar community of Kathmandu Valley. During her undergraduate days, she won accolades for her research on the phytocultural knowledge of her home village and is pursuing more research on the biocultural heritage of the community.

Prakash Khadgi is Associate Professor of Botany, also at Tribhuvan University, with teaching experience of over 25 years. He specializes in physiology, pathology, and biocultural diversity. He too is an Indigenous Newar of the Kathmandu Valley, actively engaged in preserving the natural heritage of the nation.

Further Reading

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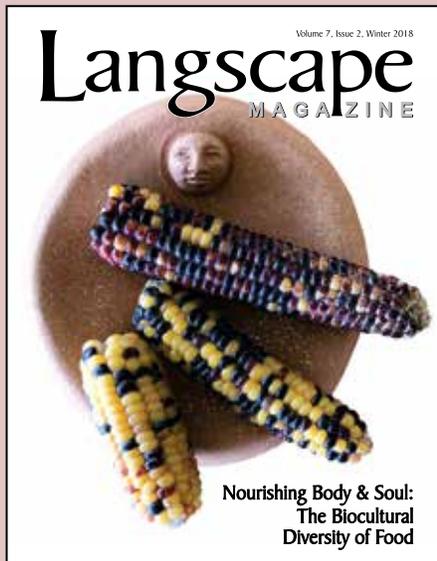
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Terralingua
Unity in Biocultural Diversity

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

