

## CULTURE, FOOD & FORESTS

An Anthropological Perspective on Food Security Among the Ata Manobo

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## INTENTION & OBJECTIVES

- Broad intention
  - To contribute to the raging discourse on food security by providing an anthropological view at the community level
    - revisiting my 2003 GTZamuco Prof Chair Lecture
    - reflecting on first-hand encounters with forest communities
    - provoking diverse ideas on the complex issue of food security

### ○ Specific objectives

- to present an anthropological framework based on variations in food-getting & their associated features;
- to examine the frequent food shortages among the Ata Manobo, an indigenous forest-based group in Mindanao; and
- to provide reasons for the marginalization of forests & forestry in food security discourses

## NOTION OF "SECURITY"

- "Security" concerns –ubiquitous in human existence in diverse time-&-space locations
- Wide variation in everyday usage – Security= assurance, carelessness, safety, confidence, safety
- "the state of being secure; specially from danger, risk, care, poverty or apprehension" (Webster's)

- "Security" applied in domains of peace & order, ecological balance, global trade, sustainable dev =are interrelated!
- Even origins of religion – linked to feelings of insecurity arising from uncertainties of human existence

## Contemporary interest in food is

*...not confined to pleasure in consumption, but extends in every direction: to its economic importance, the semiotics of food taste, the dangers of food additives and the politics of food security... The conventional approach to the food system is to concentrate on its component parts: geographical, cultural and conceptual. We possess, as a consequence, a rich literature on agricultural development, technology, food policy (both national and international) and diet. Since the 1970s we have also seen a burgeoning literature on farming, "organic" and chemically-based, and on biotechnology... It is difficult to talk about food... without also talking about the environment (Goodman & Redclift 1991: xi-xii).*

## DOMINANT DISCOURSES ON FOOD SECURITY

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- Food security is a current major concern of international agencies, states, local governments, NGOs, communities, & individuals
- Without food, no human creations like music, science, & technologies because there would be NO HUMANS!

- Proliferation of explanatory approaches:
  - Discipline- or sector-based: e.g., economic, or nutritional adequacy of diets, or human rights, or poverty
  - Not merely explanatory but represent worldviews or ideologies = +evaluative, orientative & programmatic functions

- DOMINANT approaches:
  - articulated & advocated by international bodies, primarily the UN-FAO, convener of the World Food Summit 1996
  - embedded in World Declaration & Global Plan of Action for Nutrition 1992 & Rome Declaration on World Food Security & Plan of Action 1996

- Food security: "access by all people at all times to adequate, nutritious, and safe food to maintain a healthy and active life."
- Household food security: "Ability of a household to secure, either from its own production or through purchases, adequate food for meeting the dietary needs of its members."

## ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE cultural context of food security

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- **Anthropology**: well known for
  - looking at food as a symbol with different meanings in diverse cultures
  - examining patterns in which food consumption practices structure human relations
- **Anthropology**: does not provide direct explanations of "food security" but is recognized for its expertise on the origins of food production & sedentarism; offers explanations of diverse kinds of **cultural adaptations** to different environments.

- Food security issues not new, but basic concern throughout human prehistory and history. Food – central focus around which economies, religions, social organizations including the military, & other cultural features have been woven
- 90-99% of the 2-5 million years of human existence: hunted, fished and gathered food from nature in sustainable way
- Agriculture: recent phenomenon; Neolithic period (10,000 years ago)= Neolithic Revolution; mechanized agric (only a century ago, with invention of internal combustion engines & emergence of oil industry)

- Anthropologists define food-getting activities as central considerations in classifying & analyzing cultures (food is most essential in human survival!)
- Cultures = adaptive or subsistence strategies (to meet human NEEDS).
- E.g., Cohen (1974): typology of cultures based on correlations between economies & social characteristics. 6 adaptive strategies:
  - Foraging
  - Horticulture
  - Agriculture
  - Pastoralism
  - Merchantilism
  - Industrialism

- For my Objective 1, I analyze a typology of patterns of food-getting (i.e., **food collection & food production**) & their associated general features constructed by Ember, Ember & Peregrine (2002) shown in Tables 1&2. I re-interpret the features associated with **food shortages**.
- Tables do not imply unilinear evolutionary sequence; IDEAL types, in reality a society may practice several strategies simultaneously. E.g., IFUGAO intensive rice terraces + shifting cultivators (horticulturists) + hunters & gatherers (foragers)

- **FOOD COLLECTION** – subsistence strategy by which food is obtained from naturally occurring resources, i.e., wild plants & animals.
- In general, even if foragers live in different ecosystems & employ different techniques for hunting and gathering food, they share particular cultural features (Table 1).

**Table 1. General features of food collectors** Adapted from Ember, Ember & Peregrine 2002:272

POPULATION DENSITY	Lowest
MAXIMUM COMMUNITY SIZE	Small
NOMADISM/PERMANENCE OF SETTLEMENT	Generally nomadic or semi-nomadic
<b>FOOD SHORTAGES</b>	<b>Infrequent</b>
TRADE	Minimal
FULL-TIME CRAFT SPECIALISTS	None
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN WEALTH	Generally none
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP	Informal

- Table 2 lists general features of 2 kinds of food producers: **horticulturists** and **intensive agriculturists**. [I have excluded the 3<sup>rd</sup> kind, pastoralists.]
- With domestication of plants & animals, food producers could control natural processes such as breeding and seeding.
- **Horticulturists** –people who grow a variety of crops using relatively simple tools like hoe & dibble stick. The shifting cultivator grows crops on land that is periodically fallowed (rested) for long periods. Mix crop cultivation with hunting & fishing =produce more food than foragers, and can support more people.

- **Intensive agriculturists** cultivate permanent fields with the use of complex technologies such as soil enhancement technologies & irrigation, employing plows or mechanized equipment.

**Table 2. General features of food producers** Adapted from Ember, Ember & Peregrine 2002:272

	HORTICULTURISTS	INTENSIVE AGRICULTURISTS
POPULATION DENSITY	Low-moderate	Highest
MAXIMUM COMMUNITY SIZE	Small-moderate	Large (towns and cities)
NOMADISM/ PERMANENCE	More sedentary; communities may move	Permanent communities
<b>FOOD SHORTAGES</b>	<b>Infrequent</b>	<b>Frequent</b>
TRADE	Minimal	Very important
FULL-TIME CRAFT SPECIALISTS	None or few	Many (high degree of craft specialization)
INDIVIDUAL WEALTH DIFFERENCES	Generally minimal	Considerable
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP	Some part-time political officials	Many full-time political officials

**Anomaly: food shortages among the Ata Manobo forager-horticulturists?**

CADC No.	Recipient IP	Location	Area (has)
R-11-CADC-015	B'laan	Matanao, Davao del Sur	7,028
R-13-CADC-017	Tagakaolo	Malita, Davao del Sur	33,731
R-11-CADC-059	Tagakaolo/ Kalagan	Malungon, Sarangani	37,752
R-11-CADC-060	B'laan	Malungon, Sarangani	43,877
R-10-CADC-161	Bukid'non/ Higao-onon	Malaybalay, Bukidnon	27,025
R-11-CADC-102	<b>Ata-Manobo</b> , Talaingod, Langilan, Kaylawan	Talaingod, Davao del Norte	65,000

- **Ata Manobo** –least acculturated IPs; found in more remote & interior areas relatively isolated from mainstream society; their indigenous culture relatively intact
- These IPs are among the most deprived in terms of 4 dimensions of poverty: income, living standards, empowerment & participation, and governance. They suffer from discrimination, insurgency, in-migration, & intensive plantations. Characterized by **food insecurity**.

- **Ata Manobo** depend largely on **forest resources** (hunt with bow & arrows made from bamboo & rattan (*lu'way*), arrow container made from tree bark (*hul'ag*); tattooed women weave baskets & containers from bamboo & rattan. Also plant with dibble stick (*gu'ad*): corn, camote, cassava, taro, banana, etc.
- **Food insecurity** of Ata Manobo can be seen from ADB results, among others: 1) economic needs (increase volume of current crop production, & additional income sources); and 2) low volume of crop production (low yield of corn; rice & banana in small quantities; abaca infested by disease)

- *It is hard for the LGU to determine the income per family due to very minimal, if any job opportunities. Talaingod, being a "native municipality" lies below the poverty line. "Natives live by way of primitive farming, fishing, and wildlife hunting"; income derived from these cannot be determined. "What they got today is only good for today's needs" due to primitive farming and their nomadic character. There is lack of knowledge about sedentary farming.* Municipality of Talaingod Comprehensive Development Plan 1996-2006

- Ata Manobo have vast CADC, low population density, small clusters of communities. "Get a headache" when they live in big settlement – so they are nomadic. Among ordinary Ata Manobo: no individual differences in wealth but tribal chiefs and their families are set apart from the poor by their relatively better economic status. Traditional political leadership has incorporated state structures = tribal chief is also municipal mayor (at time of my visit).

So, why are they food insecure?  
Complex question, no easy answers

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- DEFORESTATION. Parts of the forest that provided *tanan-tanan* have been lost to logging by outsiders. Shocked. Lowlanders call they lazy but Ata Manobo assume that forests are god-given: humans do not plant forest trees!

trade: no fair exchange

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*Major factor in economic struggle is lack of education. "The LGU finds it hard to make them understand what is their role as constituents of the municipality." Small-scale businessmen and investors are able to abuse them because of their illiteracy "which became a big reason for natives to establish a barrier, thinking that there is discrimination between them and Christians." Municipal Dev Plan.*

insurgency

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*Due to lack of education, the people can be easily convinced to join anti-government movement where they are given arms ... Insurgency results in economic dislocation, low production, social disintegration traumas, environmental disturbances and destruction, depletion of government resources and loss of properties and lives.*

*Factors that contribute to this...turmoil: a) rugged terrain and deep-forest cover of remote areas are advantageous to rebels; b) lack of political educative measures to counter communist propaganda and lessen mass-based sympathizers; c) absence of integrated anti-insurgency program like peace-talk initiatives; d) existence of Industrial Forest Management Agreement (IFMA) has been used by the rebels as a case of land grabbing citing the following: the LGU cannot undertake any development...because IFMA is purely reforestation: IFMA is guarded by concession guards with high-powered guns; restricted areas were penetrated without knowledge of tribal leaders that lead to disunity. Municipal Dev. Plan*

- **Food security** is a major magnet for the Ata Manobo to join the insurgents who reportedly have very productive farms in the interior of the forests (link between food security & other forms of security!)
- Trend: forager-horticulturists become intensive agriculturists = more risk in food shortages, despite higher productivity. **WHY?**

- Their criterion for crop selection is now high yield rather than resistance to drought, pests and diseases
- They now monocrop, & so face the risk of crop failure due to pests, diseases & changes in weather
- They are now at the mercy of market demands. When these demands fall, prices fall, & they do not have sufficient cash to purchase their food.

MARGINALIZATION OF FORESTS & FORESTRY IN FOOD SECURITY DISCOURSES

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- Forests & forestry are still relatively marginal; agriculture is at the center because its major role is to produce food.
- Forestry needs to locate itself strategically at the heart of the food security discourse.
  - agricultural expansion for increased food production has taken place at the expense of the forests
  - environmental constraints to intensive agriculture: soil erosion, waterlogging & salinization; loss of genetic diversity; deforestation; release of greenhouse gases; excessive use of mineral fertilizers & pesticides (Identified by the World Food Summit)

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- In 1989: "It is only in recent years that the role of forestry in food security has been receiving attention as a result of the increasing realization of the dependence of rural people on trees and forests to meet their important needs like food and income" (FAO).
  - In 1996: "forests are veritable storehouses of biological diversity, and forests products are the mainstay of households worldwide. As living systems, forests have a vital role in maintaining the ecological base for food security. Even so, it is common to find that public and private planners 'fail to see the forest for the trees,' underestimating or ignoring the value of these resources" (World Food Summit 1996).

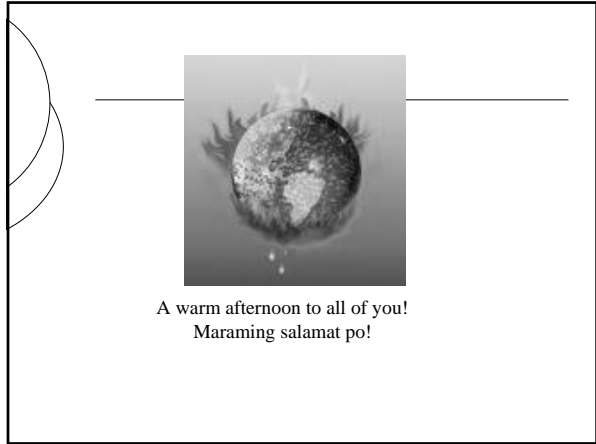
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- "Trees and forests contribute in many ways to improving diets and combating hunger in local communities and rural households. They not only provide food and medicines; indirectly they increase incomes and improve agricultural production, thereby improving access to food. Hunger and malnutrition would be significantly worse if it were not for the contribution of trees and forests to household food security" WFood Summit.

- ### Why marginal?
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- Lack of deep understanding of fundamental role of trees & forests in food production – **WATER** produced by watersheds; but also:
    - **Ecological balance** – *"trees help to control water and wind erosion and they recycle vital nutrients...back into the soil. Trees also grow where agricultural crops may fail, allowing production on marginal lands. Trees absorb and store carbon dioxide."*
    - **Biodiversity** – *"Forests are among the most important genebanks on earth. Many of the foods we consume today originated as wild crops in the forests...Uncontrolled deforestation could be the single greatest cause of species loss over the next 50 years."* WFood Summit

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- Foresters themselves have not effectively communicated the importance of their profession in matters related to food security: *"For many foresters, household food security may seem to be a concern that goes far beyond the bounds of their profession. Yet, the problem of household food security is not simply one of agricultural output, but encompasses all factors affecting a household's access to an adequate year round supply of food" (FAO 1989).*

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- Forestry's unique identity is lost, whether because it is subsumed under, or combined with, agriculture in organizations and programs. E.g., SEARCA = SEAMEO Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture: does not mention forestry but does forestry. Marginalizes forestry!

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- A food production strategy must incorporate food from the forests, agroforests and home gardens.
  - The supportive function of forests in protecting and enhancing the productive capacity of conventional agricultural lands must be highlighted.
  - Food security of indigenous forest-based peoples like the Ata Manobo is a complex issue that we need to address.



A warm afternoon to all of you!  
Maraming salamat po!