

Local Knowledge and Socio-Cultural Capital Reproduction during the Food Crisis

An Ethnography Study of the Peasant Life Experiences
in the Regency of Wonogiri, Central Java

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Abstract

This research focuses on the experience of Wonogiri peasants in undertaking the local knowledge internalization to solve food crisis problem. It is related to climate change phenomenon affecting to the shift of growing season, having the dramatic loss shown by increasing crop failure and even drought disaster. Moreover, peasants and family could be trapped into the condition of being undernourished, impoverished and more dependent. On the other hand, Javanese conceptualization identifies people as part of community that is full of collectiveness spirit. It delivers everyone as agent to sustain that local culture through the principle of harmony; and food crisis is assumed as a threat to the balance. Bourdieu's theory is used to analyze that the existence of value, culture and norms are meaningful capitals to be reproduced for creating safety mechanism as a negotiation when peasant community is faced with the oppression provided by food crisis risk. This paper suggests that the Javanese principle of harmony is a strong influence to develop some adaptable strategies by utilizing some chances through the cultural knowledge, power of neighborhood, potency of local organization in producing alternative solution. In individual level, harmony system also endorses people to be humble so that they could avoid consumptive habit..

Keywords : Food Crisis, Capital, Negotiation

I. Introduction

Food crisis in Indonesia is predicted will happen in coming years. It is likely related to the phenomenon of climate change, having many consequences and influencing the agriculture productivity. The finding of experimental on wheat and rice indicated the decreased crop duration (and hence yield) of wheat was a consequence of warming and reduction in yields of rice (Gregory 2005:2139). Slingo (2005:1983) also noted

that although crops grown at mid-latitudes may be less sensitive to climate variability under current climates, crop production in some of these areas will become more risky under future climates as, for example, competition for water, resources increases and the frequency of extreme temperature change. Those vulnerabilities are coupled by other Indonesia contexts, as well, including the increasing population number, gaining 1,8 percent per year while the food production growth may not enough to cover it. Besides, the agriculture land has been getting lower since it is replaced by the settlement construction.

Moreover, agriculture sector could be placed at second priority that the other sectors. It missess from the important consideration that the agriculture productivity has main contribution to Indonesia people for years from the harvest. Besides, government is also prefer to choose to import other countries harvest than to strengthen the local potency. After long deliberation, the government decided to import large amounts of rice in order to keep the budgeted stock level (Patnuru and Basri 2011:206). Badan Pusat Statistik Indonsia (Central of Bureau Statistical) noted that in 2004, Indonesia has agreed to import rice until 1,57 millions tons. While the consumption average of Indonesian people was 136 kilos and increased at 139 kilos in 2009.

On the other hand, those lack discourses tend to not be followed by the real experience of long-term famine or poverty in the context of food sufficient at the local community. For instance, the failure of development program regarding to the self sufficiency in rice is responded by the idea reproduction to return back to ordinary consumption. People, then, are endorsed to eat with the diversification system that has been exist before as ordinary like replace rice with *sego tiwul* (tiwul rice) made by cassava again in Wonogiri. It could be the one reason of what makes villagers still chose to live with agriculture activity in the middle of interest conflict among the capital owning. Furthermore, those dynamics of the consumption patterns whether as conceptual or behavior practice lead to learn more about the daily experience of peasant shaping the logic of food security and even how to solve it regarding to their local knowledge internalization.

I. Food Security : The Concept and The Real Meaning

In the commonsense perspective, food security is often defined as access to food or the mechanism to avoid the hungry feeling. However when we discuss about food as the right of everyone, it will enclose to the problem of access which is in recent, several people are hard to gain the source of food for lack of material, capability and of course the power. Hence, it is so important to underline the food security concept as the discussion of availability and utilization. Availability of food refers to the supply of food from production, imports or stocks and is not now of overriding interest, given the rising per capita global supply (Tweeten 1999). Amartya sen (cited by Tweeten 1999) described that capability of food access tended to be determined by number of economic productivity, price and sense of community. The other dimension is utilization, referring to actual metabolism of food by the body. Food that is available and accessible does not alleviate food insecurity if people do not utilize food properly because of inadequate nutrition education and food preparation, bad habit, eating disorders or poor health (Tweente 1999).

The conceptual framework, coming from Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) provides four dimensions of food security such as the ability to improve and maintain the level of acquirement, the ability to cope with shocks, the ability to improve and maintain the level of utilization and the ability to cope with shocks to the utilization (Krishnaraj 2007:5378). In other words, the food security need the strong connection between the knowledge or deep understanding about what the important resources owned and the skill to utilize them as the capital.

For Indonesia's people, the crisis experience at colonial period remains about how long period of rice consumption, had been done. Besides, the food crisis, happened to transition period among 1946-1965, our society would remind the meaningful value of rice consumption that was at previous time people knew the *genjer* as alternative vegetable, meaning not only as a food but also as ideology symbol then.

Structurally, new order era was even to solve the food insecurity, President of Soeharto, had chance to publish the President's instruction, was Inpres No 14 1974 and Inpres No 20 1979 regulating about Diversification as the control mechanism of food disaster. This era delivered to produce the various of alternative main foods such as *Beras Tekad*, ingrediented by cassava, peanut and corn (Manuwoto and Martianto

2010:77). Unfortunately, because of the bad improvement, many people tended to not consume as the ideal program.

The failure of the structural conceptual is not followed by the existence of slump community. By the participation observation, it was found that Wonogiri's people especially at the agriculture area still had the capacity to survive the 'normal' life regarding to the basic need fulfillment system. Mostly, they did not the difficultness to flow the food supply although the economic resource was limited even for the peasant people, that had experience with crop failure and poverty.

Those conditions, for Bourdieu, are explained as the dynamic of subject negotiation by utilizing the social system when the economic structures do not have any support. Bourdieu (cited by Ritzer 2005) underlined that the economic capital was not the main determination to create the safety mechanism. Bourdieu described the theory from the conceptualization of habitus. The concept of Habitus emphasizes the position of subject (as an actor) and the structure (Swartz 1997). By focusing the dialectic of objective structure and subjective phenomenon, Bourdieu gave the briefly description about the position of individual in the yard (Ritzer 2005). As a subject, individuals have the capability to choose and articulate their agencies. They do according to the habit that is internalized in daily life. Habitus becomes the basic to feel, understand, and aware the social life, as well. It is supported by the possibility of individual capability to produce capitals in facing the yard competition. Hence, this theory could be used in explaining peasant position as a subject that can produce the internalization of cultural and social values in behavior level. In this concept, internalization matter can be from local knowledge and community engagement. Related to the food security, the availability to access the food supply is possible to be developed by the power community engagement despite it is hard to be obtained, economically. As Bourdieu concept, the transfer knowledge based on the cultural value and the habit of living with the communal principal could be the valuable capital to influence the skill of utilization of local resources toward the food security survival.

II. Ethic of Subsistence as Local Knowledge

In the culture of Javanese is found the term of *wong Jawa ilang pekarangane* (Javanese people has been lost the private field), is an important prediction to know the cause of lack of Javanese people when they don't have the yard itself anymore. It has two meanings, are explicit meaning that does not need the more interpretation and the implicit argument that needs the redefining process. In explicit meaning, it is clear that Javanese people will experience the unbalance condition for the absent of the field. Otherwise in the implicit argument, the yard will determine people ability in utilizing their capital or not. According to Scott (1981) Javanese people as peasant community have the anxiousness of the lack condition of food sufficient so that they tend to have the ethic of subsistence.

This subsistence concept forces every people to fulfill all necessary with all they possess. So it is not surprise when Javanese fence house has double functions, are to border and the location of growing plant. This condition is what Bourdieu called as cultural capital reproduction. The knowledge and information access become important cultural capital for individual in determining the 'truth' of position (Bourdieu cited by Ritzer 2004). This owning of cultural capital in employing of natural potency is created by peasant to keep the survival mechanism. They would not give up with the structure that may close to the threat of food crisis to stay in the bordered spaces. However, by using the local knowledge, they develop defend system that even has become a part of daily life.

The house fences at Wuryantoro village Wonogiri tend to be used in growing the plants of *petai and lamtoro*.. This plant could be the main ingredient of *bothok mlanding or oblok-oblik*. The cooking process is enough to be mixed by the coconut and other seasonings. For that first material could be wrapped by banana's leave and the other is only cooked in pan. The coconut can be found at yards well, growthed at the corner or the back part of field. All long the house, fence will be full of other useful plants such as *mbayung, kacang panjang, and umbi-umbian*. Those are to supply the vegetable necessary and additional food for people.

"If we want to cook vegetable salad with spicy sauce (gudangan/pecel), we don't need to buy at grocery or supermarket. It is easy to pick the plats up of the fence. We just must find the seasons from the small shop in this village surrounding," said Dirjo (50s)

By looking the yard structure owned by Dirjo's house, could be identified the existence of various big trees such as *nangka* (jackfruits), *belimbing* (starfruit), *mlijnjo*, *mangga* (mango) and *jambu air*. Although it seems to be same with the other neighborhood constructions, but the character of the trees is chosen through detail consideration. For Dirjo, all big trees in his yard have benefits such as for daily consumption or market product. The exchange between yard harvest and other materials at traditional market is the way to add income, done by Dirjo until now.

If unripe jackfruit still could be cooked, and then the ripe one could be eat directly. When lucky, the jackfruits from the garden will be sold but it is possible to be shared freely to my grandchildren. Actually, the leaf and even the flower of gonium is often used in the vegetable cook as well. I seldom to cook gonium itself and it is more often to be shared to neighbors having the gonium crackers business" said Dirjo (50s).

In the back garden, Dirjo also has many kinds of trees such as teak, mangos and especially banana. According to Dirjo, mostly people in village have bananas trees located in garden. It is, since despite the fruit itself, other components of flower or usually called as banana's heart (*jantung*) of this tree are important too for being alternative source of daily consumption. Besides, beat plants are dominant enough to be part of the garden such as *garut* (arrowroot, *Maranta arundinaceae*), *bengkoang* (yam), *ubi jalar* (sweet potatoes), *suweg* (stink lilly), *gembili* (*Dioscorea esculenta*), *ketela pohon* (cassava), *gadung* (*Dioscorea hispida*), etc. Although they are not always employed in daily need fulfillment, yet sometimes they are useful as alternative food, as well. *Ubi jalar* and *ketela pohon* can replace as carbohydrate source and *garut* can be proceeded to be flour.

The bamboo material of fence construction is interesting too, since bamboo also easy to cook as vegetable food. Therefore, those stories detail about the potency of Javanese people, is not only in appearing the alternative way of crisis situation but also a part of creativity in utilizing the resources as food diversification attempt. The embedded relation among people as peasant and environment dynamic then appearance the term of *sabuk galengan*, meaning that people orientate to the result of farmland or yard to strengthen life (Wibowo dan Priyono 2006, 76).

III. The Power of Neighborhood

In the setting of overall house construction, Javanese people tend to not use the concept of fence as border. It is, since this understanding come from the idea of land owning in the period of *cultuurstelsel* system in which the individual land owning shifted to be communal belonging, was together with the core of village people land and fragmented to be given to descendant. So the fence is not claimed as a border but still as an engagement. Moreover, people is possible to take cassava leaf from the neighbor fence directly and legal. Again, it is natural when people cross away the land, has been lined by the others.

The conceptualization of fence building is more for the protection and security interest than the possession border. This is related to the previous story as Polo (52nd) illustration below :

“History of Moslem Mataram Kingdom, for example, told about Panembahan Senopati, the founder of the Mataram did not build the fence in his new area. Then, Sunan Kalijaga suggested to built the fence as the protection system. However, Senopati did answer with the challenging question “who had a brave to come in my area?” In real, Sunan Kalijaga was disappointed so that gave Senopati the advise “Don’t too feel too arrogant since that unawareness will enclose to the disaster”.

So, in the Javanese point of view, embedded with the term of *pager mangkok* (*the bowl fence*) has strong connectivity with mostly people in village. Simply, the meaning of *pager mangkok* comes from the analogy of the shape of bowl that can cover all material, placed under bowl itself. However it does not implicate with the real construction by developing the fence with circle form. *Pager mangkok* is the concept of take and give interaction among the society. This habit could endorse people to have caring feeling so that everyone will become the ‘security’ for others, automatically. In the food security context, the power neighborhood will drive to create food sharing as the basic need fulfillment for lack household. People can eat although in the crisis situation for the neighbor help or they will not loose the food stock in the crop failure condition. It is, since the deprivation experienced by others is worried as the threat of harmony stabilization (Geertz 1983:157). For Javanese

people, the balance means how to keep the society life without disparity. Social crisis, signed by individual crisis is believed as the serious factor to led all social structures to be in the real insecurity. It will also appear the anxious feeling, is risk to destroy the cosmology of harmony. The effort to let people go from the crisis situation (poverty) is a part of security system to save all from the deeper disaster. So *pager mangkok* aims to not only for social relation saver but also to gain and answer the crisis challenge.

Furthermore, for villagers itself, they do not know the habit of food waste or too much rice. This concept is practically attacked by the sharing behavior despite in some extents, it is sound irrational for the high quantity and intensity especially at the habit of money sharing when the neighbor has special events such as welcoming the baby born or celebrating the marriage ceremony. The individual participation of those events is important influence to measure the intimate. In this context, according to Bourdieu (2003), the social relation is included the social capital, strengthening individualal position. The theory underlines that socially, peasants have the neighborhood network as social support to avoid the food insecurity risk. So although, people are close to the lack situation leading to the food insecurity, the social security will work automatically to be savety instrument.

IV. Local Organization

In the house construction of Javanese villagers, in the back that is not too separated by the main building is usually employed as rice barn. Historically, rice barn itself was the colonial attempt to enhance the access of people bank (Volksbanken). Firstly, village rice barn was developed by rice capita, saved by local society. Then, the saving in the rice barn would be rent to the poor people and needed the credit. In new order, the roles of this rice barn was taken by government and formally institutionalized as Koperasi Unit Desa. Besides, New Order also tried to anticipate the food crisis (or undernourishment condition) by developing the *Unit Peningkatan Gizi Keluarga*. Nevertheless, these formal organizations experienced the failure because of the lack participation of lower class society. The implication was villagers tended to choose to save the harvest result in the family rice barn

In Wongiri resident, family rice barn experiences various modification coupled by the appearance of Farmer Organization. Actually, the organization is built to facilitate the economic activity and sometimes to be formal requirement to access the government charity. However, the collective rice barn has strategic role as the food stock when disaster comes.

V. Conclusion

Food crisis as the global issue goes to be a warning to every country, especially developing country, indeed. Indonesia with the huge number of population could be the one of them although has the source of agriculture products. The producer of rice is possible to be limited in fulfilling the society basic need and close to the famine risk. It could delivers the understanding that food crisis is not just talk about how to erase the hungry feeling at one time. However, food crisis relates to many dimensions discussing deeply about the resources readiness, skill and willingness to sustain and guarantee of accessing ability.

In some perspectives, the problem of food crisis is often analyzed by the economic approach, assuming that poverty reduction could be the main program to make distance with food crisis threat. Interestingly, in the Javanese culture according to the result of this research in Wonogiri resident, economic problem is not followed by the material mechanism, as always. The power of social and cultural engagement still works in answering the problem that could be caused by structural constraint. It is proven by the dynamic of the villager's life in creating the alternative way, automatically when the mainstream idealization of food habit gets lost. Thus, the conclusion touches down to the understanding that in this balancing situation, villagers, keeping the local knowledge as indigenous community capital, do not have the concept of food crisis at all.

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