

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Archiving Food Heritage Towards Championing Food Security: A Case Study of Lokalpedia

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Abstract

Key anthropologists have previously looked into the potential of using “geographical indications” to protect localities and their products, but little has been said about the role food heritage could play in championing food security. This paper looks into the open access archive of local and endemic food stuff, Lokalpedia, that is at the forefront of championing ingredients endemic to the Philippines and advocating for their preservation, and, in extension, the livelihood of farmers, fisherfolk, and market vendors. Through social media content analysis and literature review, this paper explores and builds the case for the potential of archiving and understanding local and traditional food ingredients and local produce toward a more holistic and meaningful approach to ameliorating food insecurity. By rendering these local food products visible in both the local and global arena, it attunes communities to foodstuff available in their localities and entices culture-savvy consumers to support local food producers.

Keywords: food archiving, lokalpedia, social media, globalization, food security

I. Introduction

In November 1974, following the longstanding famine in Bangladesh at the time, global leaders convened in Geneva to discuss

the pressing issue of world food problems. The product of the convention, aptly titled the World Food Convention, was the Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition. Proceedings of the conference enunciated the goal of tackling food security, stating that the food crisis distressing developing countries “acutely jeopardizes the most fundamental principles and values associated with the right to life and human dignity.” It also stressed that “every man, woman, and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition to develop their physical and mental faculties” (UNGA, 1974). The goals were promising: eradicate hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition within the next decade. The declaration reads:

“For a lasting solution to the food problem, all efforts should be made to eliminate the widening gaps which today separate developed and developing countries and to bring about a new international economic order. It should be possible for all countries to participate actively and effectively in the new international economic relations by the establishment of suitable international systems, where appropriate, capable of producing adequate action to establish just and equitable relations in international economic cooperation.”

The goals may be ambitious, but the global community failed to achieve them. When governments reconvened in 1996 for the World Food Summit to reiterate their



goals, about 800 million people faced hunger and malnutrition (Paul et al., 2003). At the summit, which served as a conference of non-binding commitments, solutions involving genetic engineering were continuously put forward, which many non-governmental organizations criticized. In the years leading up to 2002, genetically engineered food was being aggressively pushed on the market with US biotechnology companies at the forefront. In response to Monsanto, one of their vocal proponents, African delegates from the Food and Agriculture Organisation called corporations to “Let Nature’s Harvest Continue” (qtd. Maathai, 1988):

“We strongly object that the image of the poor and hungry from our countries is being used by giant multinational corporations to push a technology that is neither safe, environment friendly, nor economically beneficial to us... We do not believe that such companies or gene technologies will help our farmers produce the food needed in the 21st century. On the contrary, we think it will destroy the diversity, the local knowledge, and the sustainable agricultural systems that our farmers have developed for millennia and that it will thus undermine our capacity to feed ourselves.”

Yet in 2002, the United Nations hosted another World Food Summit in which biotechnology was finally formally pushed as the solution to world hunger, much to the dismay of many participants amidst questions on biosafety, among other concerns. This response failed to consider other factors that

are inextricably linked to food insecurity beyond agro-technical concerns: poverty, lack of access to land, and different forms of inequalities. As experts often argue, the world’s food supply is abundant and sufficient to feed everyone. Biotechnologist Kaiser Jamil (2012) argued that the dilemma lies not in production but in distribution, stating that the real reason for hunger is “poverty, which often strikes women--the nutritional gatekeepers in many families--the hardest.”

The use of biotechnology to optimize food production without focusing on distribution and accessibility is one of how globalization has rendered vulnerable populations food insecure, not just in terms of access but nutritional aspects as well. According to Black (2016), globalization has “fostered greater variety and access to food in many places,” but noted that global disparities have made access to healthy and affordable food varied. The scholar elaborated that urbanization brought about the ubiquity of transnational food corporations, leading to increased availability, affordability, and consumption of processed food that, on the negative side, can diminish food security, food sovereignty, and the presence of healthy food. As Shridhar et al. (2015) contended, there has been an upward trend when it comes to the consumption of unhealthy junk food, processed food, and high-fat calories. According to the group of researchers, these are some of the notable factors contributing to various ailments.

Philippine foodways, in many ways, are informed by a multitude of forces—some of which are connected but not limited to its



unique geographical position, vast history of trade that both predates and is maintained by colonialism and the process by which its people have “indigenized” foreign influences. In Doreen Fernandez’s *Colonizing the Cuisine: The Politics of Philippine Foodways*, the late food writer and scholar argued that the unique location of the archipelago “has made it possible... far more than its neighbors in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, to ‘drink from the fount of three physical and cultural worlds’” (1990). Thus, it is a rather curious case that, despite this abundance of natural resources, food scarcity remains an issue; 12.2 percent of Filipinos reported experiencing moderate to severe levels of hunger (PIDS, 2022). Additionally, a study by the World Food Program (2022) revealed that one in ten Filipino households suffer from food insecurity, and families involved in agriculture are more susceptible to hunger.

One can argue that colonialism persists through neocolonial globalization and is one of the many culprits contributing to the persisting food insecurity through the prioritization of high-yield cash crops, a practice that emerged as a consequence of mass land conversion during the late Spanish colonial period (Amano et al., 2020), which has been further strengthened under the Americans, and sustained by neoliberalist agricultural policies (Maenen, 2016).

Indeed, globalization is now one of the defining factors driving food production and consumption, as it influences the supply chain through the alteration of quantity, type, cost, and desirability of food (Hawkes, 2018). Globalization also tends to flatten out the

diverse cultural identities found, especially in less powerful countries. Many critical anthropologists have looked into this phenomenon, including Fernando Zialcita (2019), who argues that a labeling system that enunciates the products’ geographic origins can not only help address the indelible impact of globalization in cementing food insecurity but also protect biodiversity, combat climate change, and create sustainable employment in the more rural parts of the Philippines.

This paper aims to contribute to the vast body of literature on how food security can be addressed through the lens of archiving food heritage and argues for its potential in ameliorating food insecurity as well as in bolstering cultural identity among regions. Lokalpedia is one such attempt. What started as a small passion project continues to grow as a sprawling collection of photos and descriptions, presenting not just ingredients endemic to the Philippines but also food products and proofs of culinary craftsmanship, like artisanal salt (Limos, 2023). As of writing, it has an online following of more than 57,000 who actively engage with its posts. Lokalpedia has also been featured in many media outlets, such as Manila Bulletin, NOLISOLI, and Esquire Philippines, among others. The fanfare the project has been receiving is indicative of a growing interest in local produce and ingredients, which this paper attempts to unpack.

II. Methodology

Through a critical analysis of Lokalpedia, the case study, this article is an attempt to explore the potential of archiving



and understanding local and traditional food ingredients and local produce towards a more holistic and meaningful approach to ameliorating food insecurity. Based on the interview with the person behind the case study and social media content analysis, I have determined specific practices that could be modeled, supplemented by a cursory review of related literature. Three points of discussion are highlighted: a) social media as an archive and tool towards social change, b) food archiving as recognition of food terroir, and c) limits and potentials of individual interventions and the need for systemic policy reforms.

This article concludes that food archiving helps address the issue by emphasizing how globalization pushes local ingredients into peripheries. Not only does it champion a site-specific approach in addressing food access, but it also champions the livelihood of food producers behind these produce and products. This approach also bolsters the cultural identity of respective communities as a defiance against cultural flattening in the age of globalization.

III. Discussions

Britwum and Demont (2022) argues that cultural heritage and food security are inextricably linked but discussions are largely nascent. As defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1989), cultural heritage refers to the “entire corpus of material signs - either artistic or symbolic - handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind,” the influence of which shape foodways, from production to preference for

consumption. Although recognition of food as being classified as part and parcel of cultural heritage is only as recent as 2010, it is necessary to frame food systems as being embedded in economic systems and is beyond just a cultural identifier (Britwum and Demont, 2022). In this regard, I make a case on how the interaction of cultural heritage and food systems and how understanding of both can potentially address food insecurity, especially in the Global South through five pathways: (i) preservation of genetic resources, (ii) valorization, (iii) traditional food processing, (iv) preference matching, and (v) agritourism (Britwum and Demont, 2022). Moreover, as Brulotte and Di Giovine (2016) writes, meanings associated with food are in constant flux as shaped by “class, gender or taste; or how traditions are invented for the revitalization of a community during a period of cultural pressure.” Food heritage then could be succinctly described as culinary traditions that are shaped by personal and collective identities, which has greater implication on food security than imagined as state and global level policies overlook the cultural dimension of food (Kapelari et al, 2020).

a. Social Media as an Archive and Tool Towards Social Change

A portmanteau of “lokal,” meaning local in Filipino, and “encyclopedia,” Lokalpedia, an online page that actively archives food items from across the Philippine archipelago, actually began under a different intention. It was originally a companion work for another culinary endeavor of the cultural heritage advocate John Sherwin Felix, wherein it was supposed to merely illustrate



characteristics of ingredients used in Filipino cuisine. However, Felix explained that it has since opened wider discourse for efforts toward not only the preservation of endemic food items but also the variegated and nuanced cultural heritage of the islands across different regions, as well as socio-political causes related to sustainability and environmentalism. With a huge follower base and active involvement in food circuits, Felix has become a key figure in Philippine gastronomy. He continues to influence Philippine food circles and even popular culture, such as the Netflix limited series “Finding Chef Chico,” released in 2023, which featured some of the obscure food items Lokalpedia has archived in its collection, following the straightforward format of its entries’ descriptions.

Nowadays, Felix combs through the archipelagic country, a pursuit well-documented in both Lokalpedia and his personal account. His logs—whether of ingredients, rice cakes, viands, artisanal products, etc.—come with brief captions and a set of photos. As explained by Felix in an interview, he wants to keep the descriptions as simple as possible, recognizing that topics like science and culture are often discussed using jargon and academic speak. For Lokalpedia, he envisions a type of accessible archive that is not as intimidating as academic journals but, instead, one that allows the masses to enjoy and learn from. This, however, does not mean that Lokalpedia resorts to oversimplification; Felix strives to communicate scientific names of the food items he finds in his fieldwork and discusses pressing issues like environmental conservation and anti-mining sentiments, with

a full understanding of food as intersections of these concerns (Felix, personal communication, 2023).

b. Dood archiving as recognition of food terroir

More often than not narrative, the caption provides a background to the product or process he is documenting. His descriptions are often exhaustive in that they tackle not just the taste, source, uses, and geographical terroir but also borrow insights from the accounts of locals he interacts with, as well as historical sources, as shown in Table 1. As Catherine Orda (2022) of NOLISOLI has written of Felix: “The careful curation (and narration) is not even half the job: Felix’s one-man team takes care of everything, from research and curation to the acquisition of ingredients, from writing and fact-checking to photographing.”



Fig. 1. Lokalpedia Post on Syzygium Polycephaloides



Source: Lokalpedia (2024)

In my interview with Felix, the former chef delineated the process in which he undertakes the ambitious task of archiving Philippine endemic and unique food items and cultures, some of which are close to extinction. Recognizing the communication gaps in how Filipino food items—especially those that originate outside the metropolitan areas are talked about—he sought to use social media to communicate conservation and food concerns to the popular audience.



Fig. 2. Lokalpedia Post on *Disocorea alata*, (more famous as Ube)

Source: Lokalpedia (2024)

Felix explained that the continued neglect of local ingredients resulted in the gradual disappearance of those items in local

dishes (Felix, personal communication, 2023). Commentaries like this are pervasive in his personal account, which supplements his archival entries. More personal encounters and musings are posted publicly as well, where the exchange of information is dialogic. Much less formal than Lokalpedia, his personal account is arguably filled with people who share the same passion for food heritage. He uses this platform to solicit recommendations or suggestions about a specific region, and more recently, donation, highlighting the power of connectivity that social media offers. "The idea that some people do not see the photos of these ingredients is already a void: without visual representation, people do not know that these ingredients exist. Hence, Lokalpedia is also a visual archive," shared Felix (personal interview, 2023). Indeed, Felix's efforts have been amplified to wider audiences. Some of the photos taken by Felix are now used in Wikipedia's entries, further popularized when Nas Daily, an Israeli video content creator, used Felix's shot of asin tibuk, a formerly dying salt tradition, which earned the ire of Filipinos and had since garnered traditional media's attention (Vibal, 2024). Social media and crowdsourcing have been regarded as "important tools for solving complex problems" by scholars from different disciplines. According to Chatterjee et al. (2024), crowdsourcing leverages "the power of human intelligence cost effectively with less time," positing that, done through technologies like social media, crowdsourcing promotes social good in fields such as agriculture, tourism, education, cultural heritage and more.





Fig. 3. Lokalpedia Post on Heritage Grain Found in Certain Regions in The Philippines
Source: Lokalpedia (2023)



Fig. 4. One Of Lokalpedia Posts on Asin Tibuok.
Notes: Felix first wrote about the artisanal salt in 2021, which Esquire Philippines picked up.
Source: Lokalpedia (2023)

Furthermore, the influence that Lokalpedia has evoked among local communities also shows the power of social media. Done in conjunction with on-the-ground engagement, social media can be effective in nudging people into epitomizing and benchmarking good practices in terms of endemic food conservation and food security movements. In the case of Lokalpedia, the archive's social media posts informed by his field engagements have influenced, for instance, a festival of endemic fruits in the biodiverse island of Palawan, accompanied by

creating their own fruit archive. Lokalpedia, in ways more than one, also influenced the resurgence of interest in artisanal regional salts across the Philippines following a catalog Felix published in 2022; these rare salts were previously discouraged following RA No. 8172 or the ASIN Law, mandating that salt intended for human consumption must contain iodine to address nutrient deficiencies (Lokalpedia, 2023).

c. Limits and potentials of Lokalpedia

It is thus interesting to point out that the ubiquity of food archives has the potential to carry out social changes in the form of increased interest in local food products that are endemic to the geographical terroir but otherwise obscured by the preference of the global food chain. As of writing, Felix has been engaging in sustainable food spaces in both academic and non-academic settings. Food archiving and/or cataloging could advocate not just the use of local ingredients but also spark a sense of cultural identity and nationalism. In 1918, Pura Villanueva Kalaw published "Condimentos indigenas," a recipe book that represented regional cuisines that are otherwise not part of the mainstream from Batangas, Iloilo, Pasig, Sorsogon, and Mindanao (Sta. Maria, 2012). According to food historian Prudente Sta. Maria (2012), Kalaw consciously promoted the use of local ingredients, proper nutrition, and sanitation at



a time when Filipino identity was being compromised¹.



Fig. 5. Felix in an Heirloom Sustainable Food Event as One of the Symposium Speakers
Source: QCSBCDPO (2024)



Fig. 6. Asia's 50 Best Restaurants 2023
Notes: Toyo Eatery collaborates with Felix for a fundraising project for Lokalpedia.
Source: Toyo Eatery (2024)



Fig. 7. Lokalpedia Merch
Source: Felix (2024)

For all the feats Felix has achieved through Lokalpedia, challenges remain, given that his practice is independently conducted and funded. Felix shared that he has had to resort to selling his personal belongings to fund earlier trips (personal communication, 2023). Now, Felix received ample, though still very little, financial support from his avid readers, often sharing the same passion for Filipino food. Moreover, Lokalpedia has partnered with local artist collectives and food enthusiasts who organize fundraising activities for Lokalpedia's cause, highlighting the need for partnership and linkages toward sustainable development. Most recent is his collaboration with Toyo Eatery, a Philippine restaurant listed as Asia's Best 50 Restaurants, which held a pop-up whose proceeds would then fund Felix's future trips (Toyo Eatery, 2024).

¹ The history of recipe catalogs in the Philippines is very much entrenched in the colonial past of the country. Cookbooks first emerged in schools in the

form of home economics textbooks (Sta. Maria, 2012).



IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

In the time of globalization and neocolonialism, when Filipino food is seen as inferior, there needs to be an intensified marketing efforts to bring back a kind of food consumption that does not rely on the capital, precisely by harvesting and consuming food items that are readily available in our immediate environment—a practice that predates colonialism, but is vanishing in part because of the manufactured reliance on cheap but unhealthy processed food brought upon by a West-centric globalization. In the face of it, food archiving made publicly available—as with Lokalpedia—presents itself as an effective way of resisting cultural flattening and championing the livelihood of farmers, fishermen, and other food producers. By bridging communication gaps between food producers and consumers, it successfully penetrates mainstream conversation on salient issues like indigenous peoples' rights, deforestation, and illegal mining, all of which are linked to food security. As Felix has stated, Lokalpedia's publicly available archive entries put focus on the local, nudging people to consume what is already available in people's environments instead of relying on industrially-produced food, thus boosting support to local food producers as well. Most importantly, food archiving has the potential to strengthen cultural identity in a similar way geographical indicators function.

Truly, food insecurity remains a pressing issue, but food archiving gleans into potential holistic ways of battling the dilemma at hand by attuning the community to existing food products in their localities, and by

rendering these food products visible in both the local and the global arena, enticing culture-savvy consumers and ultimately providing livelihood to these producers.

Consideration of food heritage in crafting food securities is thus necessary. Integration of local foodstuff underlines the importance of availability, access, utilization, and stability components of food security. Such efforts, as previously discussed, not only will create livelihood opportunities for local, especially small-time, food producers but also bolster cultural identity.

Finally, food security would not be possible without the farmers and local food producers. Building the capacities of local food producers is necessary so that these endemic ingredients do not ever falter. Hence, it is suggested that a policy incentivizing local folks to produce and consume diverse food products be considered, with emphasis on the products' terroir and geographical indicators. Institutionalized food archiving efforts in the future should actively engage and consult with them to bridge knowledge gaps for future research.

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