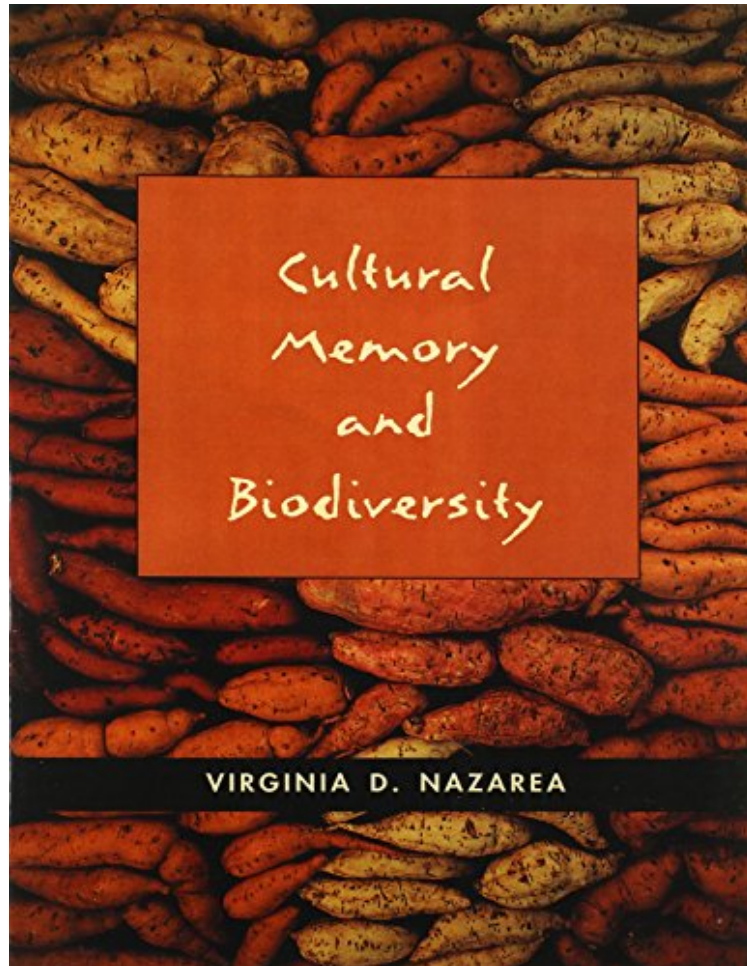


(Ebook free) Cultural Memory and Biodiversity

Cultural Memory and Biodiversity

Virginia D. Nazarea

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Virginia D. Nazarea : Cultural Memory and Biodiversity before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cultural Memory and Biodiversity:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Solid, practical, beautiful, AND tops in methodologyBy CFAccording to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN, some 1.4 billion people live in farm families that are largely self-provisioning in terms of seeds. In recent years, the skill and knowledge applied to the management and improvement of farmer-varieties has become more fully appreciated. Farmers have been found to employ taxonomic systems, encourage introgression, use selection and breeding techniques, multiply seeds, field test, record data, and name their varieties. It was not so long ago that these farmer-varieties were referred to, in scientific literature, as "primitive" or even "Stone-Age" varieties. They are still referred to by the rather disembodied term, "landraces."The concerted collection of these materials for conservation and use in modern plant breeding preceeded by some decades any efforts to conserve or use the knowledge farmers had about their materials. Virginia Nazarea's book is at once a

warm and loving tribute to farmer-innovators, and a practical guide to the study of "indigenous" knowledge of farming systems and farmer-managed biodiversity. She connects plants to people in ways readers will find difficult to forget, and shows that the existence of diversity in crops is linked with the health and diversity of human cultures. In a sense, they have co-evolved with each other. Nazarea's field research focused on how people farm sweet potatoes in Bukidnon, Philippines. In the course of this research she was able to collect 89 sweet potato varieties. Her book offers a detailed account of these varieties and their management. One particularly interesting table provides a compendium of indigenous cultural management beliefs and practices, and comments on each by a plant pathologist, entomologist, agronomist, plant breeder and plant physiologist. The result is fascinating and revealing. In response to the observation that Holy water is mixed with some cuttings so God will watch over and protect the crop, the plant pathologist replies, "purely fanatic," while the plant breeder comments that "water will be good for the cuttings." Most important, the field research was a test of methodology. This is where the book shines. Nazarea offers a well-conceived, practical, step-by-step guide to researchers who wish to examine the interaction between traditional farmers and their crops. Though Nazarea is an anthropologist by training, this guide, interestingly and uniquely, will be equally valuable to social scientists, ethnobiologists, and agricultural scientists (particularly plant collectors and breeders). Nazarea is clearly sensitive both to the local needs and feelings of farmers as well as to aspirations and needs of researchers. The result is highly useful. In one light volume, the researcher has a complete and rigorous methodology laid out, from the types of questions to ask, to how to ask them and to whom. With slight modification to suit particular circumstances, most researchers may need little else to undertake work in this particular field. Nazarea's "big" thesis is that "preserving local knowledge pertaining to traditional varieties of crops is complementary, and in many respects indispensable, to the maintenance of the genetic diversity of these crops." Some may argue that she falls a little short in proving its indispensability. Nevertheless, she is on solid ground, genetically and socially, when she demonstrates the importance of on-farm management and what she calls "memory banking" of indigenous knowledge. Equally, she is convincing in arguing that *ex situ* (genebank) and *in situ* (on-farm) conservation and management of genetic resources are complementary strategies. Nazarea's contribution is to the latter, both by providing a methodology for research, and an engaging, delightfully-written case study of its application. This is a book without peers in its field. 14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. The loss of biodiversity is a loss of cultural dimensions. By zolvinski.1@osu.edu Literature on indigenous knowledge tends to be long on trendiness and idealism, but short on solid method and results. Nazarea's book is a refreshing corrective by offering a distinct operational program. Nazarea lays out a program for conserving cultural knowledge, step-by-step, with practical examples from one who has been in the trenches. The staggering loss of biodiversity is not just a biological loss, but a loss of human and cultural proportions. Nazarea makes the critical link between nature and culture: when plants go extinct, so does cultural memory. Not only does the world lose an inventory of plant materials, but it also loses a storehouse of knowledge for growing and using plants. The implication is that attempts to store genetic materials in seed banks is a sterile and half-hearted exercise, because the loss of the cultural, adaptive knowledge has grave consequences for the future of the human species. Nazarea goes to the people at the margins for answers, and in the process, she turns science on its head, proclaiming that "diversity is actually the natural state of things." In that regard Nazarea's work is destined to become an anthropological classic, pointing the direction for the discipline for the next century. Nazarea breaks new ground in decision-making theory by showing the pitfalls of microeconomic models that assume farmers make either-or choices when selecting a course to follow. Instead, farmers use multiple criteria in making cropping decisions in order to spread out the risk against uncertainties of the growing season. This is a sophisticated decision-making process that defies the neat formulations of formalized economic models. In the end, Nazarea documents that women are the best safeguards of indigenous knowledge through camaraderie and sharing. An experimental *in situ* conservation program run by the male hierarchy collapsed, but spouses and female relatives took up the work to maintain the plots. If Nazarea's book is a defense of fuzziness, as she puts it, then less-defined, less-formalized structures of women may also be the best hope for preserving indigenous knowledge.

Seed and gene banks have made great strides in preserving the biological diversity of traditional agricultural plant species, but they have tended to ignore a serious component: the knowledge about those crops and methods of farming held by the people who have long raised them. Virginia Nazarea now makes a case for preserving cultural memory along with biodiversity. By exploring how indigenous people farm sweet potatoes in Bukidnon, Philippines, she discovers specific ways in which the conservation of genetic resources and the conservation of culture can support each other. Interweaving a wealth of ecological and cognitive data with oral history, Nazarea details a "memory banking" protocol for collecting and conserving cultural information to complement the genetic, agronomic, and biochemical characterization of important crops. She shows that memory banking offers significant benefits for local populations not only the preservation of traditional knowledge but also the maintenance of alternatives to large-scale agricultural development and commercialization. She also compares alternative forms of germplasm conservation conducted by a male-dominated hierarchy with those of an informal network of migrant women. Cultural Memory and Biodiversity establishes valuable guidelines for people who aspire to support community-based *in situ* conservation of

local varieties. Perhaps more important, it shows that the traditional methods of local farmers are often as important as the "advanced" methods encouraged by advocates of modernization.

"Contains information that will be of value to anyone interested in starting community-based conservation, no matter where in the world they are located. It is a valuable tool for those who believe that the traditional knowledge of local farmers is as important as the 'advanced' knowledge embodied in modernized agricultural techniques." From the Inside Flap Seed and gene banks have made great strides in preserving the biological diversity of traditional agricultural plant species, but they have tended to ignore a serious component: the knowledge about those crops and methods of farming held by the people who have long raised them. Virginia Nazarea now makes a case for preserving cultural memory along with biodiversity. By exploring how indigenous people farm sweet potatoes in Bukidnon, Philippines, she discovers specific ways in which the conservation of genetic resources and the conservation of culture can support each other. Interweaving a wealth of ecological and cognitive data with oral history, Nazarea details a "memory banking" protocol for collecting and conserving cultural information to complement the genetic, agronomic, and biochemical characterization of important crops. She shows that memory banking offers significant benefits for local populations--not only the preservation of traditional knowledge but also the maintenance of alternatives to large-scale agricultural development and commercialization. She also compares alternative forms of germplasm conservation conducted by a male-dominated hierarchy with those of an informal network of migrant women. "Cultural Memory and Biodiversity" establishes valuable guidelines for people who aspire to support community-based in "situ" conservation of local varieties. Perhaps more important, it shows that the traditional methods of local farmers are often as important as the "advanced" methods encouraged by advocates of modernization. About the Author Virginia D. Nazarea is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Georgia.