Rotting Indomie Working Paper No 1

Keywords: Indomie, wheat flour dependency, corruption, green revolution

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Indomie:
Indonesian Umami Theory

Indomie as situated knowledge

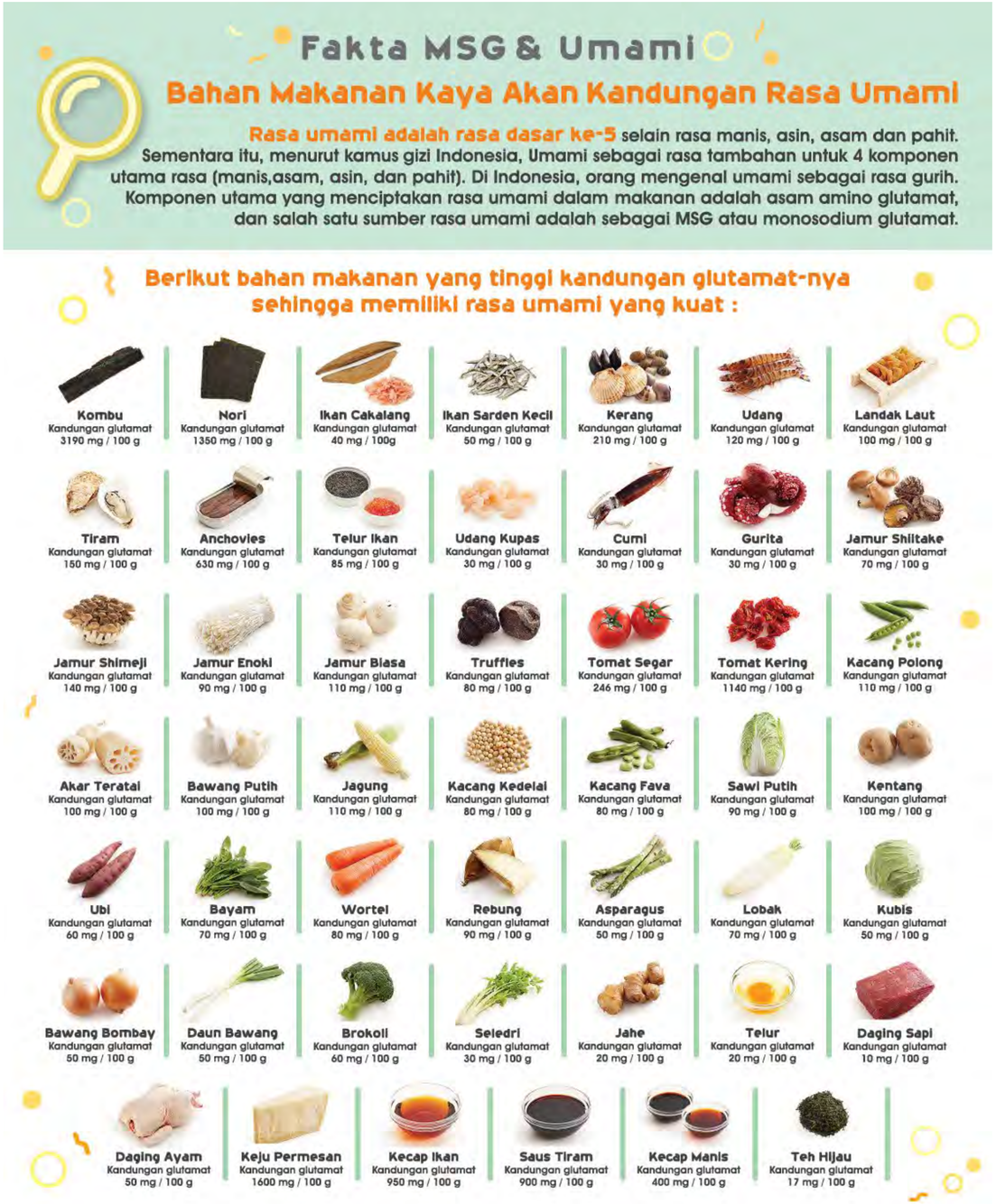
What do we know about Indomie, apart from its established existence as ubiquitous instant noodle? For many, Indomie performs as a fast track to obtain a budget decent meal. The decency value of Indomie can be adjusted according to various needs and a particular health ambition. The preference for Indomie is usually taken in favour of instantaneous, efficiency and economical values over the actual nutritional values contained in each noodle package. Eating is never not just about a matter of filling the fuel for our body-machines.

I follow Annemarie Mol's suggestion to consider 'situations of eating' when researching about eating matters. To think about 'situations of eating' means to emphasise 'being, knowing, doing and relating' (Mol 2021: 25). I bring this thinking and connect it with Donna Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledge.' Haraway proposes the notion of 'mobile positioning' (Haraway 1988: 585) to oppose the static violence in the dominant epistemologies. The positioning proposes to think about knowledge as a situated product, with localised and universal claims attached, to inform the subjugated and dominant positions in the formation of knowledge. I contextualise materialities of Indomie within historical contexts. I develop various connections among various matters which are not usually associated with Indomie.

Indomie as umami

Indomie is a massive comfort food. It explains the popularity of Indomie. This mixture of deliciousness which induces comfort sometimes cannot be defined clearly. My mother often conveyed her surprised feelings on knowing that I did not always stock Indomie in the pantry. According to my mother, Indomie is an important element in the everyday food provision. Here we faced with a case of the incomparable deliciousness of Indomie. Though she also admitted her confusion on how to define such deliciousness in words. “Indomie always tastes very good to me. What kind of essence that actually contain in the package?”

The deliciousness that is difficult to pin down is called ‘umami’ — a Japanese word which literally means ‘deliciousness.’ Umami represents the fifth taste of the existing vocabulary of four tastes — sweet, salty, sour, bitter. Indonesian does not have the word ‘umami.’ According to the Ajinomoto website — a renowned Ajinomoto seasoning producer states that umami is might be close to what Indonesians perceive as ‘gurih.’ A scientist Kikunae Ikeda identified umami from the mixed extracts of Japanese seaweed (nori) and *kombu* (a laminarian kelp usually used in the Japanese cooking). The taste of umami, gurih, can be found in various food ingredients. The identification varies according to specific cultural and culinary history contexts.



Examples of various umami sources

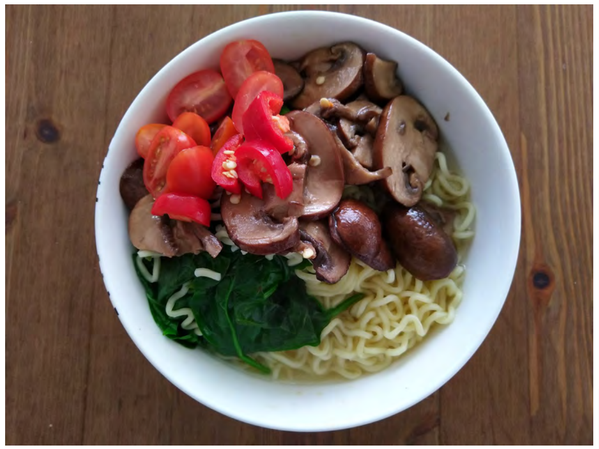
I propose Indomie to be included as a strong umami producer. The umami level contains in Indomie is able to multiply according to particular health standards or the desires to indulge on special food. Indomie is like a canvas. As canvas, it is available to be added with various elements to fulfil a certain expectation of food consumption. Indomie serves with various vegetable cuts toppings would leverage instant noodles image as a decent meal. But when it is sprinkled with other umami maker — cheese, nori, sausages, meatballs — Indomie is ready to indulge cravings for comfort and naughty food.
















Instant Noodles
Mi goreng
Fried Noodles
Nouilles Sautées
Gebakken Noedels
DRY NOODLES


SATÉ
GOOD
NOODLES






Vegan Baby!
Mie Goreng
Vegan Baby!
Mie Goreng


TUGU
Bakmi Djawa
GODHOG
PETUNJUK PENYAJIAN
Prod. 09/07/21
TUGU
Bakmi Djawa
GORENG
PETUNJUK PENYAJIAN
Prod. 08/07/21
BAKMI GORENG
BERCITA RASA KHAS JOGJA



Various *umami* ideas from my friends



















Even after my parents are gone, Indomie keeps appearing in various activities to keep them in our memories.



Supermi Garlic Chicken and
Indomie Soto Mie
in a box distributed
to extended families and neighbours
during the 7th days
of My Mother's passing ceremony.
Surabaya, 14 July 2019





Indomie Mi Goreng in boxes distributed
to extended families and neighbours during ‘nyadran’
to commemorate my father’s passing this year,
7 April 2022

Nyadran is the Javanese tradition of paying respects to the spirits of the dead through cleaning the tombs. Nyadran is practiced in the beginning of Ramadan month.

We should not only depend on wheat flour

Bogasari historical overview: Flour cartel, New Order corruption

- I see the popularity of Indomie as a form of dependency on wheat flour. Indomie is one of the products produced by Indofood. Indofood is a key player in the production of noodles, pasta, snacks, seasonings, beverages, dairy, oils in Indonesia. Indofood depends on Bogasari Flour Mills to access the wheat flour as the main ingredients for their products.
- Bogasari and Indofood are parts of Salim Group, a conglomerate and multinational company owned by Liem Sioe Liong (Sudono Salim) family. The scope of Salim Group's companies is wide and covers food, media, financial services, banking, automotive. Bogasari was established in 1969, and it was one of the earliest companies established in the group.
- More than just a matter of umami taste, the ubiquitous Indomie is shaped by the power of Bogasari as the flour cartel and its position as 'capitalist oligarch' (see more about capitalist oligarch in Indonesian context in Robison & Hadiz 2004). It demonstrates the emergence of conglomerates, the New Rich, which grew along with the growing power of the New Order. the In his influential book, *Indonesia: The Rise of Capital,* Richard Robison asserts that the rise of Salim Group provides insights into "the mechanics of capital accumulation" of the local Chinese capitalists, networks and political networks provided by New Order regime (Robison 1986: 277). Robison's analysis is still relevant to reconsider to examine the relations between domestic bourgeois, state, and oligarch during Joko Widodo presidency.

- Bogasari still depends on the wheat grains imports from various countries — India, Australia, South Korea, Vietnam, and Ukraine. The value of Bogasari wheat imports is amounted to 4.2 million ton per year. Such high level of imports is due to the insufficient local wheat production. The popularity of Indomie as well as the rising trend of eating bread, noodles, and pasta indicates the dominance of wheat within the local food consumption. The increase of wheat flour-based food in the context where local wheat production capacities is low suggests neglect of the existing diverse food ingredients.

Bogasari’s flour products

Cakra Kembar Emas Roti
Tepung Terigu
Lihat Produk



Cakra Kembar Emas Pao dan Mantao
Tepung Terigu
Lihat Produk



Cakra Kembar Emas Roti Oriental
Tepung Terigu
Lihat Produk



Naturich
Tepung Terigu
Lihat Produk



Taj Mahal
Tepung Terigu
Lihat Produk



Cakra Kembar
Tepung Terigu
Lihat Produk



Segitiga Biru
Tepung Terigu
Lihat Produk



Kunci Biru
Tepung Terigu
Lihat Produk



Lencana Merah
Tepung Terigu
Lihat Produk















The superiority of Indomie is
hard to shake by
various new instant noodles products
— which based on wheat or cassava flour
such as Mie Ayo.

Mie Ayo,
cassava-based
instant noodle

Green Revolution

The Green Revolution came as a top down farming policy which aimed to modernise farming system through industrialisation in 1975. It carried out along with Soeharto's ambitious *Swasembada Pangan*, or Food Self-Sufficiency program. The focus on the food program, tied with the growth of agricultural production, constituted the *Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun* (the Five Year Development Plan). This was implemented in the ambitious Mega Rice Project, where the state initiated to turn the swamp (which always referred to as unproductive land) in South Kalimantan into one million hectares paddy fields. Rice was, and still is, part of the dominant imagination of the source of sustenance. Joko Widodo's government inherits Soeharto's New Order policy to deal with the food crisis. In 2020, Jokowi initiated Food Estate, the creation of new paddy fields appropriating the lands in West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Maluku, and Papua. Like Mega Rice Project, Food Estate is intended to strengthen national food security and national sovereignty. It disregards the diverse reality of food culture. It puts aside the histories of ecological disaster caused by the mega project.

During the New Order regime, the implementation of the Green Revolution was accompanied with violence. To plant a certain set of quality seeds arranged by the state became compulsory. Those who showed refusal would be stigmatised as 'anti-development' and 'anti-Pancasila.' The organisation of the policy was introduced and conducted in a series of programs. They were named in militaristic style — Bimbingan Massal (Mass Guidance), Intensifikasi Massal (Mass Intensification), Intensifikasi Khusus (Special Intentification), and Operasi Khusus (Special Operation).

We should not worship the rice: Public space and the competing vision























Anna Tsing, Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection, Chapter 4 , Nature Loving, pp.152-153

country's natural resources. Tourism needs to be organized with conservation principles in mind. This could include educating tourists about the importance of natural ecosystems. He sees ecotourism, too, as a possible alternative to the natural and social destruction of most rural development projects. He told me of the horrors of the grand "One Million Hectares" development scheme that was a government showcase in 1996 in Central Kalimantan. He spent several months there, working as a community organizer advocating community-based ecotourism development. Government development plans made it difficult to get people to think in terms of small-scale alternatives. Planners had mapped out a huge tract of swampy country—one million hectares—to turn into wet-rice fields. The residents had had a profitable livelihood raising water buffaloes; the water buffaloes were all confiscated and taken away, leaving the people without resources. Meanwhile, the rice would not grow, he said. When the president came for a tour of the project, project managers took strips of sod with rice seedlings in it and laid them out, making it look as if this would be a fertile rice basket. As soon as the president left, the imported seedlings died, leaving the ground bare. Hamam sees this kind of large-scale irresponsibility as the major threat to the Indonesian environment.

Bogasari, Mustika Rasa and the death of food intellectuals

Mustika Rasa:
Indonesian Cuisine Recipes

Soekarno’s Heritage (2016)



Bogasari was born in the early period of New Order. Food crises has been a latent problem. Food crises is not new. During Sukarno's presidency, the crises was described as the result of the population growth and the minimal utilisation of diverse food resources. The existence of Bogasari, enabled through political networks of New Order suggests Soeharto's vision to tackle the food crises through a short cut — erected a flour mill, and massive imports of wheat. I contextualise Bogasari and Soeharto's vision of food production with Sukarno's vision of food resilience.

Sukarno government envisaged an innovative approach to deal with the problem. Ministry of National Development Planning and Ministry of Agriculture led a major program aimed to address the food crises through developing public consciousness to the existing food diversity. The program culminated with the publication of *Mustika Rasa: Resep Masakan Indonesia Warisan Sukarno* serving as guidance in the national family diet improvement through maximising the richness of seasonal regional ingredients. When Sukarno was stripped off power in 1967 and Soeharto's New Order began, this food resilience program was abolished.

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