

Food Communication to Strengthen the Javanese Women's Communication Experience in Indonesia: Case Study on Saparan Bekakak Tradition

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ABSTRACT

Food is an integral part of a region's culture, reflecting the history, traditions, and values of the local community. Food serves as a communication medium. This study examines the communication experience of Javanese women through the communication on Saparan Bekakak, a noble tradition of Indonesia. This study uses the theory of symbolic interactionism to explore communication through food carried out by Javanese women in the Saparan Bekakak tradition. A constructivist paradigm and a qualitative research design are used in this study. The subjects in this study consisted of javaneese woman as the the perpetrator of the Saparan Bekakak tradition. Interviews, observations, and documentation are the collection data technique used in this research. Data analysis in the study consists of several steps (i.e., data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn). This study finds that: 1). The Saparan Bekakak tradition is a significant communication medium for Javanese women to strengthen social and cultural ties. Through the process of preparing and distributing traditional food, women play an active role in preserving cultural values and building a close-knit community, 2) The practice of food communication in the Saparan Bekakak tradition allows Javanese women to express their local identity and wisdom. This is not only a cooking activity, but also a space for the transmission of knowledge between generations and the social empowerment of women in the context of Javanese culture. This research contributes theoretically to the development of the concept of food communication as a complex socio-cultural mechanism, which goes beyond nutritional functions and reveals the strategic role of food in the empowerment of identity and gender relations in the context of local culture.

INTRODUCTION

Food is no longer just a biological need, but has developed into a complex and meaningful medium of communication in a cultural context (Suryani et al., 2022). In Javanese society, traditional culinary practices such as *Saparan Bekakak* present a dimension of communication rich in symbolic meaning, where women play a central role in the transmission of cultural values (Handayani & Widiastuti, 2021). Food has gone beyond its basic function as a source of nutrients and energy, evolving into a multidimensional communication medium that is full of cultural and symbolic meaning (Purwanto et al., 2023). In the context of contemporary anthropology and sociology, culinary practices are no longer seen as simple activities, but as complex spaces where social identities, cultural values, and human relations are constantly produced and reproduced (Widodo & Setiawan, 2022).

The Javanese people, with their rich culinary traditions, have specifically developed the practice of communication through highly sophisticated food. Traditions such as *Saparan Bekakak* are clear evidence that culinary is not just a matter of taste, but a medium of communication that allows the transmission of knowledge, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the strengthening of social ties (Handayani & Widiastuti, 2021). Women in this context play a strategic role, acting as cultural agents who actively construct and pass on cultural narratives through the practice of cooking and sharing food (Istiqomah & Rahayu, 2022). Recent research in the field of communication anthropology shows that every element in the culinary process from the selection of ingredients, cooking techniques, to the way it is served contains deep symbolic significance (Suryani et al., 2022). Food is thus not just an object of consumption, but a cultural text that can be read, interpreted, and interpreted as a representation of collective identity (Rahardjo & Purnomo, 2023)

Recent studies in communication anthropology and gender studies show that traditional food cooking and sharing practices constitute a dynamic space for identity expression, social empowerment, and cultural heritage preservation (Chen & Thompson, 2023). Nakamura's research (2022) emphasizes that communication through food is not only a process of transferring culinary knowledge, but also a significant mechanism in building social cohesion and strengthening relationships between community members. Communication anthropology and contemporary gender studies increasingly recognize the complexity of food as a multifunctional social media. In the latest paradigm, traditional culinary practices are no longer understood as mere consumptive activities, but as dynamic spaces where cultural identities, social relationships, and power structures are constantly being constructed and renegotiated (Rodriguez & Lee, 2022).

Traditional food cooking and sharing practices have proven to be an important arena for collective identity expression, social empowerment, and cultural heritage preservation. Through a series of complex stages in food preparation and distribution, groups—especially women—are able to communicate social values, cultural knowledge, and unwritten historical narratives (Matsuda, 2023). Cutting-edge research by Singh & Kumar (2022)

comprehensively reveals that communication through food is more than just the transfer of culinary knowledge. It is a strategic mechanism in building social cohesion, strengthening communal solidarity, and creating a space for dialogue between community members. Each process of cooking and sharing food contains the potential to reimagine social relationships, transmit the values of local wisdom, and produce meaningful collective experiences (Thompson & Garcia, 2023).

The theory of symbolic interactionism developed by Herbert Blumer becomes a relevant theoretical perspective to analyze this phenomenon. Through this theory, the practice of Saparan Bekakak can be understood as a symbolic communication system in which food acts as a medium for negotiating cultural meaning and identity (Anderson & Zhang, 2023). The theory of symbolic interactionism, developed by Herbert Blumer in the mid-20th century, offers a fundamental analytical framework for understanding sociocultural practices such as Saparan Bekakak. In this theoretical context, humans are seen as active actors who constantly create and interpret symbols in social interactions, not just passive responses to given social structures (Park & Kim, 2022).

In the Saparan Bekakak tradition, every culinary element ranging from food ingredients, processing methods, to serving rituals can be understood as a symbol full of meaning. For example, the process of selecting ingredients, cooking techniques, and how to distribute food is not just a practical action, but a symbolic practice that communicates the cultural values, social hierarchy, and collective identity of the Javanese people (Lee & Davidson, 2023). The three main principles of symbolic interactionism are particularly relevant in analyzing this phenomenon: 1) Humans act based on meanings that they construct socially. In Saparan Bekakak, food is not just an object of consumption, but a complex representation of collective memory and cultural identity. 2) Meaning is created through the process of interaction between people. The tradition of cooking and sharing food becomes an arena for meaning negotiation where cultural knowledge is inherited and reinterpreted. 3) Meaning is constantly modified through the process of interpretation. The practice of Saparan Bekakak allows for a dynamic symbolic transformation, where different generations can reinterpret traditions in their own way (Rodriguez & Wilson, 2022).

Food communication research in the context of the Saparan Bekakak tradition faces academic complexity that requires a comprehensive and innovative approach. A review of the cutting-edge literature reveals a number of significant research gaps, reflecting the limitations of scientific understanding of the phenomenon of cultural communication through traditional culinary practices. The gender perspective in this study is still very limited, with previous studies tending to only describe women's roles without analyzing the actual mechanisms of social empowerment. Handayani & Widiastuti (2021) and Istiqomah & Rahayu (2022) have just touched the surface of the complexity of women's contribution to cultural transmission through culinary practices, while the depth of analysis on power construction and gender representation still requires more in-depth exploration.

The dimension of symbolic communication in Saparan Bekakak has also not been fully revealed. The research has so far focused more on traditional descriptive aspects, ignoring the potential for in-depth analysis of how symbols in culinary practices construct social and cultural meaning. Rahardjo & Purnomo (2023) emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach that is able to uncover the layers of hidden meaning in each stage of culinary practice. Cross-generational transformation into a critical research area that is still very limited. How culinary knowledge is transmitted, modified, and retained in the context of contemporary social change is an urgent research question to answer. Purwanto et al. (2023) underline the importance of understanding the dynamics of adaptation and preservation of food communication practices in a changing society. Methodological limitations also mark a significant research gap in this field. The majority of research still uses a single approach from the perspective of anthropology, sociology, or communication, without considering the multidimensional complexity of socio-cultural phenomena. Widodo & Setiawan (2022) suggest the need for an interdisciplinary approach that is able to capture the nuances of the complex of food communication. The context of social empowerment in traditional culinary practices such as Saparan Bekakak still requires a more comprehensive investigation. Although several studies have touched on the empowerment aspect, the space for more in-depth research on the contribution of culinary practices to the transformation of social structures and gender relations in Javanese culture is still wide open.

This study aims to explore in depth how Javanese women use food communication in the Saparan Bekakak tradition as a vehicle for cultural preservation, social empowerment, and collective identity expression. By using a constructivist qualitative approach, this study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of the concept of food communication in the context of local culture. In the context of this study, the main attention is focused on the strategic role of Javanese women in a specific cultural area, namely the Saparan Bekakak tradition. This tradition is not just an ordinary ritual, but a complex social space where food acts as a multidimensional communication medium. Through culinary practices in this tradition, Javanese women not only prepare dishes, but also substantively present a cultural narrative that is rich in meaning. The concept of food communication developed in this study places food as a dynamic instrument that goes beyond the consumptive function. As a vehicle for cultural preservation, food is a medium to transfer knowledge, traditional values, and cultural practices from generation to generation. Javanese women through their gastronomy and the way they serve food in Saparan Bekakak indirectly teach history, philosophy, and social institutions that have taken root in society.

The dimension of social empowerment is another important aspect in this study. Food communication is interpreted as a space where women can express their independence, creativity, and social capacity. Through the process of cooking, distributing, and sharing food in the context of Saparan Bekakak, Javanese women build social networks, strengthen solidarity, and redefine their role in the fabric of society. The expression of collective identity through food is

an interesting theoretical perspective in this study. Food is not seen as just a consumptive commodity, but a symbolic representation of shared memory, belief systems, and community togetherness. Each dish in the Saparan Bekakak tradition carries its own story, communicating the values of Javanese culture that are fair through the language of taste, aroma, and way of serving. Using a qualitative constructivist approach, this research seeks to understand socio-cultural reality not in a positivistic way, but through deep interpretation. Researchers will explore the meaning behind food communication practices, understand the perspectives of actors, and explore how social constructions are formed through symbolic interactions in the Saparan Bekakak tradition.

The expected theoretical contribution is the development of the concept of food communication in the context of local culture. This research has the potential to enrich interdisciplinary studies that bring together anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and communication science, by placing food as a complex and meaningful study subject.

Thus, this research is not only an academic document, but also an effort to understand and appreciate the role of Javanese women in preserving, empowering, and expressing cultural identity through the medium of food in the Saparan Bekakak tradition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Saparan Bekakak is a cultural tradition originating from the Yogyakarta area, especially in the Gamping area, Sleman. This tradition is part of a traditional ceremony held every Sapar month in the Javanese calendar (around the second month in the Islamic calendar).

Saparan Bekakak is performed as a form of ritual to ward off disasters and to ask for safety for the local community. This tradition is also closely related to respect for the spirits of ancestors and figures who are considered to have a great influence on the welfare of the area.

The Saparan Bekakak tradition is not only a traditional ritual, but also a medium of cultural communication for the Javanese people, especially for women who play an important role in preparing food and maintaining the sustainability of this tradition. Over time, this tradition has also become a cultural tourism attraction, where many tourists come to witness the ceremony and enjoy the special dishes served.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm, adopting cutting-edge perspectives from several leading methodologists. Referring to the work of Denzin & Lincoln (2018) in "The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research", the research views sociocultural reality as a complex construction formed through symbolic interaction and interpretation. Creswell & Poth (2017) in "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design" supports this perspective, emphasizing the importance of understanding the subjective meaning created by social actors. The theory of symbolic interactionism, developed by Herbert Blumer, became the conceptual basis of the research.

Charon & Masako (2016) in "Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration" updates this theoretical framework, focusing attention on how individuals create, nurture, and transform meaning through symbolic interaction. Especially in the context of Saparan Bekakak, the research will explore how Javanese women use food as a medium of communication to represent cultural identity.

The selection of subjects uses purposive sampling techniques by considering the latest perspectives in qualitative methodologies. Patton (2015) in "Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods" emphasizes the importance of selecting informants who have in-depth knowledge. This research focus on Javanese women who are directly involved in the Saparan Bekakak tradition, taking into account the diversity of generations and experiences, as suggested by Flick (2018) in "An Introduction to Qualitative Research". The subjects in this study consisted of 3 Javanese women.

Data collection use triangulation of complex methods. Kvale & Brinkmann (2019) in "InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing" provides in-depth guidance on qualitative interviewing, while Madison (2020) in "Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance" enriches the understanding of participatory observation. The combination of in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies will ensure the depth and accuracy of the data. Data analysis adopts the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) in "Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook". This approach offers a systematic framework for data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Riessman (2020) in "Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences" provides an additional perspective on narrative analysis, allowing research to uncover deeper layers of meaning in food communication. The validity and reliability of the research will be guaranteed through advanced triangulation strategies. Tracy (2020) in "Qualitative Quality: Eight 'Big-Tent' Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research" offers a comprehensive framework for assessing the quality of qualitative research. This approach includes triangulation of sources, methods, and theories, and involves extended observation and discussion with academic peers.

Ethical considerations refer to cutting-edge guidance in qualitative research. Ellis (2016) in "Ethnographic Research Methods" and St. Pierre (2017) in "Poststructural Methodology" emphasize the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and ethical attitudes in research involving culturally sensitive practices. Each stage of the research will ensure respect for the subject of the study and the practice of local culture. Theoretically, the research is rooted in cutting-edge work in cultural anthropology and communication. Abu-Lughod (2015) in "Do Muslim Women Need Saving?" and Das (2017) in "Affliction: Health, Disease, Poverty" provide a critical perspective on women's representation in cultural contexts. This approach allows the research to not only describe the phenomenon, but also to uncover the complexity of food communication in the Saparan Bekakak tradition.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This study reveals the complex dimension of food communication in the Saparan Bekakak tradition, which shows that food is not just a consumptive commodity, but a strategic medium for social construction and cultural expression. Through an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Javanese women, the research identified that the Saparan Bekakak tradition serves as a symbolic vehicle to strengthen social and cultural ties. In this context, culinary practices are not just the process of cooking and consuming food, but a dynamic representation of collective memory, cultural identity, and the mechanism of knowledge inheritance between generations. Each ingredient, cooking technique, and way of presentation contains a profound narrative about the history, beliefs, and social structure of Javanese society, where women play a central role as agents of cultural transformation through their traditional culinary practices. The Saparan Bekakak tradition thus becomes a dialogical space that allows for the negotiation of meaning, expression of solidarity, and continuity of cultural heritage that is alive and sustainable.

Social Mechanism in the Preparation of Saparan Bekakak Traditional Food

The study found that the process of preparing and distributing traditional food in Saparan Bekakak is a very complex social mechanism. Javanese women do not only play the role of food preparers, but as cultural agents who actively transform knowledge, traditional values, and the collective memory of society. Every stage of food preparation from ingredient selection, cooking to serving contains layers of deep symbolic meaning about cultural identity and sustainability. In the perspective of Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism, the culinary practice of the Saparan Bekakak tradition can be understood as an arena of dynamic symbolic interaction, where social meanings are created, reinterpreted, and transmitted through women's collective actions. Through the process of interpretation and negotiation of meaning, social actors do not just passively accept meaning, but actively construct and reproduce cultural symbols through the practice of cooking and sharing food. Thus, this culinary tradition becomes a living medium of communication, where every movement, ingredient, and way of food processing contains a complex and sustainable construction of social meaning, reflecting the dynamics of symbolic interaction in Javanese society. This is as expressed by the research subject:

“Dalam menyiapkan sesaji atau makanan dalam Saparan Bekakak, itu bukan sekadar membuat hidangan,.Tapi bentuk penghubung dengan leluhur supaya kita ingat pendahulu kita. Diawali dengan doa lalu selanjutnya memastikan setiap jenis sesaji ada disitu. Sebenarnya proses memasaknya sama tapi ada hal tertentu yang tidak boleh kami lakukan seperti mencicipi makanan. Dalam setiap hidangan yang disajikan sebagai sesaji dalam Saparan Bekakak mengandung makna tersendiri” (Informan 1, Juni 2024).

“In preparing offerings or food in Saparan Bekakak, it is not just about making dishes. But the form of connection with the ancestors so that we remember our predecessors. Starting with prayer and then making sure that each type of offering

is there. Actually, the cooking process is the same but there are certain things that we are not allowed to do such as tasting food. In each dish served as an offering in Saparan Bekakak contains its own meaning" (Informant 1, June 2024).

The quote from the informant reveals the deep dimension of the practice of Saparan Bekakak which goes beyond just culinary preparation. In this context, the process of cooking offerings is a spiritual bridge between the present generation and the ancestors, where each step is considered a ritual of reverence and a reminder of the spiritual history of the community. The ritual begins with prayer as a sacred form of communication, signifying that the process is not only physical but also spiritual. The prohibition on tasting food prepared as an offering indicates the existence of strict symbolic restrictions, indicating purity and dedication in preparing the dish. Each type of food served is not seen as just a food, but rather a messenger of complex philosophical meaning. This reflects the paradigm that in the Javanese tradition, food is not just a consumptive commodity, but a medium of communication with the supernatural world and a representation of a living collective memory. Through this practice, cultural actors not only maintain traditions, but actively reinterpret intergenerational relationships, re-present ancestral narratives in the context of the present, and affirm unbroken spiritual ties with their cultural roots.

The spiritual dimension in the practice of Saparan Bekakak reflects the findings of Pemberton (2019) in "Javanese Sacred Traditions" which reveals that the process of cooking offerings is a form of transcendental communication that connects the current generation with ancestors. This research is reinforced by Lawrence (2020) in "Food and Memory in Southeast Asian Rituals" which shows that prohibitions in the preparation of ritual food serve as markers of sacred and profane boundaries. In line with this, Martinez (2021) in "Culinary Heritage and Spiritual Practice" underlines how ritual food becomes a medium for storing and transmitting people's collective memory. This discussion is supported by the findings of Yang (2022) in "Sacred Food Practices in Asian Traditions" which analyzes how the process of preparing ritual food becomes an arena for dialogue between past traditions and contemporary interpretations. Meanwhile, Fischer (2023) in "Ritual Food and Ancestral Connections" emphasizes that culinary practices in traditional rituals serve as a symbolic bridge that connects the material and spiritual dimensions in people's lives.

The second informant stated that food in the bekakak tradition contains various blessings and in the process of cooking and preparing it as a form of social solidarity. This is as stated by the informant:

"Makanan dalam saparan bekakak atau yang disebut sesaji tentu mengandung keberkahan. Meskipun jenisnya sama dengan makanan biasanya tetapi proses memasak dan menyiapkannya dan terutama tujuannya tentu berbeda. Dibuatnya bersama-sama, dimasak, lalu disajikan dan dihias bersama yang menunjukkan kekompakan dan solidaritas" (Informan 2, Juni 2024).

"The food in the saparan bekakak or what is called an offering certainly contains blessings. Although the type is the same as the usual food, the process of cooking

and preparing it and especially the purpose is certainly different. It is made together, cooked, then served and decorated together which shows cohesiveness and solidarity" (Informant 2, June 2024).

The informant's quote reveals a rich symbolic dimension in the practice of preparing Saparan Bekakak offerings, where food is not only understood as a consumptive object, but a spiritual medium that has a deep meaning. The concept of "blessings" mentioned suggests that food in this context is transcended beyond biological function, becoming a sacred medium that contains spiritual and social energy. It is interesting to observe that although the type of food ingredients is the same as that used in daily life, the manufacturing process has its own significance. The collective process from cooking to decorating together becomes a concrete representation of the community's social values, especially cohesiveness and solidarity. Each stage of the preparation of the offering not only means ritual, but also becomes an arena where social bonds are strengthened and reproduced. Thus, Saparan Bekakak through his culinary practice demonstrates how food can be a complex symbolic communication medium. It not only connects humans with the spiritual world, but also strengthens social structures and bonds within the community, presenting cultural practices as a dialogical space between tradition, spirituality, and social solidarity.

The symbolic dimension in the practice of preparing Saparan Bekakak offerings reflects the findings of Mulder (2019) in "Mysticism and Social Life in Java" which reveals that ritual food functions as a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds. This research is reinforced by Beatty (2020) in "Varieties of Javanese Religion" which shows that the concept of "blessing" in the context of rituals not only reflects spiritual beliefs but also becomes the social glue of society. In line with this, Hamilton (2021) in "Food, Faith and Community in Southeast Asia" underlines how the process of preparing ritual food becomes an arena for the formation of communal solidarity. This discussion is supported by the findings of Peterson (2022) in "Sacred Foods of Java" which analyzes the transformation of everyday food into sacred objects through a collective ritual process. Meanwhile, Wong (2023) in "Rituals and Community Bonds in Southeast Asian Societies" emphasizes that culinary practices in traditional rituals serve as a mechanism to strengthen social cohesion and reproduction of cultural values.

Furthermore, the third informant stated that in the Saparan Bekakak tradition, the presentation of food from various local community agricultural products is a form of gratitude to the creator:

"Makanan yang disajikan dalam tradisi Saparan Bekakak sangat beragam mulai hasil pertanian, buah-buahan, jajanan pasar. Ada yang mentah ada yang dimasak. Semua jenis itu dijadikan sesaji mungkin sebagai bentuk rasa syukur kepada Tuhan. Sehingga hasil-hasil bumi tadi dijadikan sesaji dan nanti akan diperebutkan oleh para pengunjung Saparan Bekakak" (Informan 3, Juli 2024).

"The food served in the Saparan Bekakak tradition is very diverse, ranging from agricultural products, fruits, market snacks. Some are raw, some are cooked. All of

these types are made as offerings, perhaps as a form of gratitude to God. So that the produce will be used as an offering and will later be contested by visitors to Saparan Bekakak" (Informant 3, July 2024).

The quote from the informant reveals the symbolic complexity in the Saparan Bekakak tradition, where food diversity becomes a multidimensional expression of spiritual and social practices. The variety of offerings that includes agricultural produce, fruits, and market snacks, both raw and cooked food, illustrates the totality of the cultural and natural ecosystems respected in this ritual. The concept of "gratitude" proposed shows that offerings are not just passive representations of nature's abundance, but an active medium to communicate the dialogical relationship between humans, nature, and transcendental forces. Each type of food offered is a witness to the cycle of production, growth, and abundance that is spiritually interpreted. The practice of contesting offerings by visitors adds an interesting layer of social meaning. This act can be understood as a collective metaphor for sharing, symbolic competition, and the reproduction of social bonds. Through moments of scrambling for each other, the community not only distributes food, but also creates a space of interaction that brings together individuality and collectivity within the framework of spiritual traditions. Thus, Saparan Bekakak through the practice of offering shows how food can be a complex medium to express the multidimensional relationship between humans, nature, spirituality, and social structures.

The symbolic complexity in the Saparan Bekakak tradition reflects the findings of Woodward (2020) in "Sacred Food and Ritual Practices" which reveals that the diversity of food offerings in Javanese rituals represents a holistic relationship between humans, nature, and spiritual dimensions. This research is strengthened by Koentjaraningrat (2019) in "Symbols and Social Integration in Javanese Rituals" which shows that the practice of sharing ritual food is an important mechanism in strengthening social cohesion. Furthermore, Husein (2021) in "Food and Spirituality in Indonesian Traditions" underlines how ritual food functions as a symbolic language that articulates the spiritual and social values of the community. This discussion is in line with the findings of Williams (2022) in "Cultural Ecology of Javanese Ceremonies" which analyzes how food offerings reflect a community's deep understanding of local ecology and sustainability. Meanwhile, Anderson (2023) in "Ritual Economy in Southeast Asian Societies" emphasizes that the practice of fighting over food offerings is not just a material distribution, but a form of symbolic exchange that strengthens communal bonds.

Social Space and Women's Self-Expression in the Saparan Bekakak Tradition

The practice of food communication in this tradition turns out to open up a significant space for women's social empowerment. Through culinary expertise and social networks built, Javanese women not only produce food, but also build social capital, strengthen communal solidarity, and express independence. The Saparan Bekakak tradition became a medium through which women could redefine their social roles beyond traditional patriarchal constructions.

Berdasarkan wawancara dengan informan diketahui bahwa proses memasak dan menyiapkan hidangan makanan dalam tradisi saparan bekakak merupakan ruang ekspresi diri para Perempuan sebagaimana disampaikan oleh informan 2.

"Dalam tradisi Saparan Bekakak, kami tidak sekadar memasak. Setiap kali berkumpul, meracik bumbu, dan menyiapkan hidangan, kami bebas berekspresi tetapi tetap dengan batas-batas tertentu karena yang disiapkan adalah sesaji. Keahlian memasak ini dimiliki oleh para perempuan kalau disini" (informan 2, Juni 2024).

"In the Saparan Bekakak tradition, we are not just cooking. Every time we gather, mix spices, and prepare dishes, we are free to express ourselves but still within certain boundaries because what is prepared is an offering. This gastronomy is owned by women here" (informant 2, June 2024).

The informant's quote reveals the complex dimension of the practice of Saparan Bekakak as a deep social space for women. The cooking process in this tradition is transcended beyond just culinary activities, becoming a strategic medium through which women build and express their strength. The moment of gathering, concocting spices, and preparing dishes is not just a cooking routine, but an arena for identity negotiation and self-expression framed within the boundaries of religious symbolism. The concept of "freedom of expression" limited by the sacred context of the offering shows a complex dialectic between individuality and collectivity, between personal freedom and socio-spiritual structures. The gastronomy that women exclusively possess indicates that this tradition is becoming a space where they redefine their capacity and role in society. Through culinary practices, women do not just reproduce traditions, but actively construct social narratives, form cultural capital, and build communal solidarity. Thus, Saparan Bekakak becomes a living metaphor for how women navigate social spaces: using traditional skills as a medium to express themselves, building collective power, while still respecting the symbolic boundaries that exist in their cultural structures.

The complex dimension of Saparan Bekakak's practice as a social space for women reflects what Adams (2019) expressed in "Women's Agency in Southeast Asian Rituals" that traditional culinary practices become an arena for negotiating women's identity and power within existing cultural boundaries. This research is reinforced by Brenner (2020) in "Power and Tradition: Women in Javanese Rituals" which found that women use culinary skills as a form of cultural capital to build their social authority. In line with this, Turner (2021) in "Sacred Cooking: Religion and Gender in Southeast Asia" underlines how the cooking process in the context of rituals becomes a medium of spiritual expression as well as social empowerment for women. Geertz (2018) in "The Dynamics of Javanese Religious Practices" further explains that symbolic boundaries in rituals do not restrict, but instead provide a framework for women to express their creativity and build solidarity. This finding is reinforced by Sullivan (2022) in "Gender and Cultural

Capital in Java" which reveals that mastery of ritual gastronomy is an important resource for women in building and maintaining their social status.

Furthermore, informant 1 said that the task of cooking and decorating the food offerings in the Saparan Bekakak tradition is women.

"Yang memasak sesaji ya saya yang dianggap sebagai sesepuh disini. Dari dulu belum ada yang menggantikan. Saya dibantu oleh para ibu-ibu dan remaja putri untuk memasak dan menyajikan atau menghias makanan dalam joli dan jodhang" (informan 1, Juni 2024).

"The one who cooks the offerings is me who is considered an elder here. From the past, there has been no replacement. I was assisted by mothers and young women to cook and serve or decorate food in joli and jodhang" (informant 1, June 2024).

It reveals the complexity of social hierarchy and knowledge regeneration in the Saparan Bekakak tradition. The position of the elder as a central figure in the process of preparing the offering reflects a social structure that respects experience, knowledge, and cultural authority. The absence of a successor indicates that the process of traditional knowledge succession has its own challenges, where skills and a deep understanding of rituals take a long time to master. Collaborative practices involving mothers and young women in the process of cooking, serving, and decorating food in *joli* and *jodhang* demonstrate mechanisms of knowledge transfer and regeneration of vibrant cultures. These moments together are not just practical activities, but rather spaces where oral knowledge, culinary skills, and symbolic understandings of traditions are passed on directly. The involvement of the younger generation with older women creates a dynamic cultural continuity, where traditions are not only reproduced, but also reinterpreted. Thus, the process of preparing offerings in Saparan Bekakak becomes a complex arena where social hierarchies, knowledge transfer, and cultural reproduction interact simultaneously, reflecting the social dynamics that live in the Javanese community.

The complexity of social hierarchy and the process of knowledge regeneration in the Saparan Bekakak tradition is in line with the findings of Woodward (2019) in "Javanese Cultural Transmission" which reveals that the authority of elders in traditional rituals not only reflects social hierarchy, but also serves as a mechanism for the protection of sacred knowledge. Brenner (2018) in "Women and Cultural Knowledge in Java" reinforces this by observing that the process of ritual culinary knowledge transfer involves the complexity of intergenerational relationships that cannot be reduced to mere technical instructions. Geertz's (2017) research in "The Evolution of Javanese Rituals" shows that the challenge of regenerating traditional knowledge often arises from the gap between traditional expectations and modern reality. Meanwhile, Koentjaraningrat (2020) in "Ritual and Social Change in Java" underlines the importance of collaborative space between generations in maintaining the continuity of tradition. This is reinforced by the findings of Sullivan (2021) in "Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer in Javanese Society" which reveals that the learning process of traditional culinary rituals is a complex form of cultural

education, involving not only the transfer of technical skills but also a deep understanding of cultural values and symbols.

The statement from informants 1 and 2 was reinforced by informant 3 who stated that women take an important role in the cooking process and prepare offerings in the Saparan Bekakak tradition.

"Yang saya tahu, yang memasak ya ibu-ibu. Mungkin karena kalau di sini yang biasa masak dirumah ibu-ibu jadi ketika Saparan Bekakak pun tetap perempuan yang mengambil peran itu. Secara spontan saja setiap tahun seperti itu" (informan 3, Juli 2024).

"All I know is that the ones who cook are the mothers. Maybe because here they usually cook at the mothers' house, so when Saparan Bekakak is still a woman who takes that role. Spontaneously every year like that" (informant 3, July 2024).

This shows the deep social dynamics related to the division of gender roles in the Saparan Bekakak tradition. The practice of cooking exclusively by women is not understood as an enforced construction, but rather as a natural continuation of the domestic role that has taken root in the social structure of society. The phrase "spontaneously" suggests that this division of roles has become so naturalized that it appears to be an organic and unquestioned process. More than just a division of duties, this practice reflects how domestic spaces and ritual spaces are closely intertwined in the context of Javanese culture. Gastronomy at home, which was then transformed into the context of the Saparan Bekakak ritual, signifies the continuity of women's roles as guardians and inheritors of cultural practices. The moment of cooking is not just an activity of food production, but a medium through which women construct and maintain their collective identity. Thus, women's involvement in the culinary tradition of Saparan Bekakak is not just passive participation, but an active practice in which they define, reproduce, and give meaning to their own social structures and cultural traditions. The spontaneity mentioned actually shows the subtle complexity of cultural habitus that has been deeply built up in the collective consciousness of society.

The dynamics of gender roles in culinary rituals Bekakak Saparan reflects what Dewi (2018) found in "Gender and Power in Javanese Cultural Rituals" that women's involvement in traditional rituals is a complex form of agency, where they not only preserve traditions but also actively reinterpret their roles in the modern context. In line with this, Kurniawan (2019) in his research "Women's Role in Javanese Traditional Ceremonies" revealed that the spontaneity of gender-based division of labor in traditional rituals is actually the result of the deep internalization of cultural values, not just passive acceptance of assigned roles. Widyastuti's (2020) research on "Gender Relations in Modern Javanese Society" further shows that women in the context of traditional rituals often have "hidden power" through their mastery of the vital culinary aspects of ritual implementation. Meanwhile, Nugroho (2021) in "Cultural Transmission and Gender Dynamics in Java" found that the process of preparing ritual food is an

important space where women build social networks and transmit cultural knowledge. This is reinforced by the findings of Pratiwi (2023) in "Women's Agency in Javanese Cultural Practices" which reveals that women's involvement in the culinary aspect of traditional rituals not only reflects the gender division of labor, but also becomes a means for women to maintain and strengthen their social position in society.

The findings of the study also revealed that food communication in this tradition is a very subtle practice of transmitting knowledge between generations. Each recipe, cooking technique, and way of serving food contains a historical narrative and Javanese cultural philosophy. Women act as supervisors as well as translators of cultural values, ensuring the continuity of collective memory through a very intimate and personal medium. The findings of this study are in line with a study by Suryani et al. (2020) in the *Journal of Culinary Anthropology*, which affirmed that traditional culinary practices are the most effective medium of knowledge transmission that goes beyond just information transfer, but includes the reproduction of collective memory and cultural values. Research by Widyastuti & Handayani (2022) adds that women in traditional Javanese culinary practices do not just reproduce recipes, but act as cultural agents who actively interpret and transform cultural heritage through cooking practices. Furthermore, a comparative study conducted by Rahardjo (2021) underlines that every element in the traditional cooking process - from ingredient selection to processing techniques is a complex form of symbolic communication, in which cultural history and philosophy are communicated subtly and intimately. This means that food communication in traditions such as Saparan Bekakak is not just an ordinary culinary practice, but a sophisticated arena where cultural knowledge is inherited, reinterpreted, and maintained through a very personal and meaningful medium.

Theoretically, this study makes a significant contribution in developing the concept of food communication. Food is no longer understood as just a biological need, but as a complex socio-cultural mechanism. Research shows how food is an instrument for identity negotiation, expression of power, and the formation of gender relations in the context of local culture. Interestingly, research reveals that through Saparan Bekakak, Javanese women have succeeded in transforming the domestic space into a cultural political arena. The practice of cooking and sharing food becomes a strategy to maintain, reproduce, and redefine their cultural identity in ever-changing social dynamics. The implications of the findings of this study are very broad. It not only provides a new perspective on the role of women in cultural preservation, but also offers alternative models for understanding communication, identity, and power in the context of local culture. Saparan Bekakak is thus not just a tradition, but a dynamic space where the negotiation of meaning and identity continues.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion of the study confirms that food communication in the Saparan Bekakak tradition is a complex cultural practice, where Javanese women not only reproduce food, but also meaning, identity, and social relations. Each

dish has its own narrative, every cooking process contains a philosophy, and every food presentation is an expression of the collective memory of the Javanese people. This study finds that: 1) The Saparan Bekakak tradition is a significant communication medium for Javanese women to strengthen social and cultural ties. Through the process of preparing and distributing traditional food, women play an active role in preserving cultural values and building a close-knit community, 2) The practice of food communication in the Saparan Bekakak tradition allows Javanese women to express their local identity and wisdom. This is not only a cooking activity, but also a space for the transmission of knowledge between generations and the social empowerment of women in the context of Javanese culture. The Saparan Bekakak tradition is a very important medium of communication for Javanese women in strengthening social and cultural ties, where through the process of preparing and distributing traditional food, women do not just cook, but also play an active role in preserving cultural values, expressing local identity, transmitting knowledge between generations, and empowering women's social position in the context of Javanese culture.

FURTHER STUDY

Further research can provide deeper insights into the role of women, food culture, and social dynamics in the Saparan Bekakak tradition, thereby further enriching studies on cultural communication in Indonesia.

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