

Analysis of Cultural Values in Ayam Semur as Traditional Food in Ternate

SYAMSIA¹

¹INSTITUT SAINS DAN KEPENDIDIKAN KIE RAHA MALUKU UTARA

Abstract

The aim of this research is to know about the Cultural Ayam Semur as traditional food in the Ternate, Traditional food serves as an essential representation of a community's cultural identity, embodying values passed down through generations. Ayam semur, a well-known traditional dish in Ternate, holds significant cultural meanings beyond its culinary purpose. This study aims to analyze the cultural values embedded in ayam semur and its role in Ternate's social and traditional practices. The researcher use a qualitative research approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and literature reviews involving cultural experts, local elders, and community members. The findings reveal that ayam semur represents prosperity and blessings, as it is often served during traditional ceremonies, including weddings and communal gatherings. The preparation and sharing of ayam semur also reflect the values of solidarity, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and respect for elders, as it is traditionally prepared collectively and served in a hierarchical manner. Additionally, ayam semur carries spiritual and religious significance, as it is often accompanied by prayers, symbolizing gratitude and divine blessings.

Keywords: ayam semur; cultural values; traditional food.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is the entirety of a society's way of life, encompassing norms, customs, arts, language, and traditions passed down from generation to generation. Meanwhile, cultural values are principles or perspectives that a society considers important, serving as guidelines for actions and interactions. According to (B, 1871) Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (Hofstede, 1991) continue that Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others.

According to (Kluckhohn, 1951) cultural values are conceptions of the desirable that influence the way people choose among available modes, means, and ends of action. (Schwartz, 1992) say that cultural values represent shared conceptions of what is good and desirable in a society, forming the basis for social norms and guiding individual behavior. (Trompenaars, 1998) give addition that cultural values are deeply held beliefs that influence behaviors and attitudes, shaping the way people perceive and interact with the world around them. Cultural values also play a role in maintaining social harmony, teaching ethical norms, and shaping the character of a society.

Discussing cultural values is closely related to traditional food. According to (Axelson, 1986) traditional food is a type of food that has been passed down from generation to generation

and is strongly associated with cultural heritage and local identity. Each region has its own distinctive dishes that have evolved over generations, influenced by historical, environmental, and socio-cultural factors. (Sebastia, 2016) add traditional foods are those that have been prepared in a particular way over a long period, maintaining cultural significance and often linked to customs, celebrations, and religious events.

In many cultures, traditional food is an integral part of significant ceremonies, such as weddings, births, customary rituals, and religious celebrations. Its presence reflects how societies preserve their cultural identity while reinforcing social bonds among individuals.

Furthermore, traditional food also plays a role in preserving local wisdom, whether in the selection of ingredients, cooking techniques, or presentation. In Ternate, for example, one of the traditional dishes that embodies cultural values and is deeply respected by the local community is ayam semur. Ayam semur is a distinctive traditional dish of Ternate, featuring a sweet and savory flavor with a rich, spiced soy sauce broth. Although widely known in various regions, ayam semur holds a special place in Ternate's culinary culture, especially in traditional ceremonies such as weddings. According to (Gardjito M., 2016) semur is a traditional Indonesian braised dish that originated from Dutch influence but has been adapted using local spices like nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon. Ayam semur, as one of its variations, uses chicken as the main ingredient, creating a dish with a rich, sweet-savory flavor. (Owen, 2003) also said that Semur is one of Indonesia's oldest fusion dishes, combining European-style stews with the country's indigenous spices. The dish has been widely embraced across the archipelago, with variations such as ayam semur in different regions, including Ternate, where it holds cultural significance in traditional ceremonies.

For the people of Ternate, ayam semur is not merely a dish but also carries cultural values symbolizing harmony and blessings in family life. Therefore, the preservation of traditional food is essential to ensure that future generations continue to understand and appreciate the cultural heritage passed down to them.

However, with modernization and changing lifestyles, traditional foods like ayam semur are becoming increasingly marginalized by fast food and foreign cuisine. Many young generations lack an understanding of the cultural significance embedded in their traditional foods. Therefore, it is crucial to research and document the cultural values within traditional dishes like ayam semur to ensure that this culinary heritage remains preserved.

This study aims to uncover the symbolic meaning of ayam semur in Ternate's cultural context, its role in social and traditional life, and efforts to preserve it amidst changing times. By understanding the cultural values embedded in ayam semur, it is hoped that public awareness of

the importance of safeguarding local culinary heritage will increase, thereby strengthening the cultural identity of the Ternate community.

Cultural Value

According to (Rosyadi R, 1995), cultural values are something considered good and valuable by a particular community or ethnic group, but they may not necessarily be perceived the same way by other communities or ethnic groups. This is because cultural values define and provide distinct characteristics to a society and its culture. Cultural values represent the most abstract level of customs, are deeply rooted in people's minds, and are difficult to replace with other cultural values in a short period.

(Kluckhohn, 1951) say that cultural value system consists of the beliefs, attitudes, and norms that define what is considered good, desirable, and morally acceptable within a society. These values guide behavior and influence social interactions. A cultural value system consists of concepts that exist in the minds of most members of a society regarding what they should consider highly valuable in life.

Therefore, a cultural value system generally functions as the highest guideline for human behavior. Based on these perspectives, it can be concluded that the cultural value system holds a central and essential position within the framework of a culture, which is abstract and can only be expressed or identified through observations of more tangible manifestations, such as behavior and material objects.

Traditional Food

Traditional food, often referred to as culinary heritage, does not only include food but also beverages. For the Indonesian people, traditional culinary wealth is highly diverse, supported by the country's geographical conditions, which consist of thousands of islands. Each region or geographical location has its own culinary products, enriching the variety of Indonesia's traditional cuisine. The diversity of food is a cultural asset of Indonesia and serves as a means to support food security. The wide range of food sources in Indonesia results in diverse flavors in Indonesian traditional foods (Wahjudi, 2015).

Traditional food can have various definitions. According to Muhilal (1995, cited in (R, 2015), traditional food refers to inherited food traditions that have become ingrained in Indonesian society. Winarno (1993, cited in (R, 2015) emphasizes that traditional food is closely tied to local traditions, while the European Communities (2007, cited in (R, 2015) describe it as food that provides a specific sensory experience and has high nutritional value.

Traditional food can also be defined as commonly consumed food passed down through generations, consisting of dishes that suit human tastes, do not contradict religious beliefs of the local community, and are made from locally available ingredients and spices (Sastroamidjojo, S.,

1995, cited in (R, 2015). Almlı et al. (2010, cited in (R, 2015) define traditional food as food products frequently consumed by ancestors and continuing to be eaten by the present generation. Meanwhile, Hadisantosa (1993, cited in (R, 2015) describes traditional food as food consumed by specific ethnic groups and regions, prepared using recipes passed down through generations. The raw materials used come from local areas, ensuring that the food produced aligns with the tastes of the local community.

Semur

Semur was introduced to Indonesia during the Dutch colonial era but later evolved with local flavors through the addition of distinctive Indonesian spices such as nutmeg, cloves, and cinnamon. Semur can be found in various regions of Indonesia with different main ingredients, such as beef, fish, or tofu. However, chicken semur has become one of the most popular variations due to its availability and widespread preference.

Chicken semur has several distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other chicken dishes, namely: Uses sweet soy sauce as a key ingredient, giving it a sweet taste and a brownish color to the sauce. Has a thick and well-absorbed sauce, achieved by slow-cooking the spices until they fully permeate the chicken. A strong aromatic spice profile, enriched by the use of nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, pepper, and shallots, which enhance the dish's flavor.

The Symbolism of Chicken Semur in Ternate Traditional Weddings

In Ternate society, traditional food holds deep symbolic meaning, especially in customary ceremonies such as weddings. One of the signature dishes often served in Ternate traditional weddings is chicken semur. This dish is not merely food but also carries cultural values and symbolism that represent various aspects of married life.

1. Symbol of Harmony in Marriage

Chicken semur combines sweet, savory, and richly spiced flavors. This blend symbolizes harmony in marriage, where husband and wife are expected to complement each other and create a balanced, loving relationship.

2. Symbol of Blessings and Prosperity

In Ternate traditions, chicken is often considered a symbol of prosperity and blessings. The tender chicken meat represents gentleness and patience in navigating married life, while the thick semur sauce symbolizes the strong bond between husband and wife, as well as the close relationships within the extended family.

3. Symbol of Leadership and Responsibility

Chicken, especially the rooster, is often associated with leadership and responsibility. In the context of marriage, chicken semur symbolizes the role of the husband as the head of the

household, who must protect, guide, and provide for his family. At the same time, the tenderness of the chicken meat signifies that leadership should be carried out with wisdom and compassion.

4. Symbol of Togetherness and Mutual Cooperation

The process of cooking chicken semur for a Ternate traditional wedding is often done collectively by the extended family and local community. This reflects the values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and support in married life. A wedding does not only unite two individuals but also strengthens the bond between two extended families.

5. Symbol of Hope for a Happy Life

The sweet and thick sauce of chicken semur represents the hope that the newlyweds will always be blessed with a life full of happiness, love, and harmony. This dish also serves as a prayer for the couple to face life's challenges with patience and unity.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach using the ethnographic method. This approach was chosen to explore in depth the cultural meanings embedded in Ternate traditional dining customs, including the symbolism of chicken semur in the community's traditions.

The study was conducted in Ternate, North Maluku, particularly in communities that still practice traditional dining rituals. The main informants included traditional leaders, community elders, cultural experts, and family members involved in the traditional dining process.

Data collection techniques the researcher used: In-depth Interviews conducted with traditional leaders and community members who understand the philosophy and cultural values behind Ternate's traditional dining customs. Participant observation the researcher directly participated in the traditional dining rituals to observe the symbolism of chicken semur and the social interactions within this tradition. And Documentation like collection of photos, videos, and field notes related to the implementation of the dining ritual and the use of chicken semur in these ceremonies.

To analyze the collected data, the researcher followed several steps: firstly, Data reduction selecting and summarizing relevant information. Secondly, categorization, the researcher grouping findings based on themes such as the values of mutual cooperation, religiosity, or kinship in traditional dining customs. And the last step was interpretation analyzing the symbolic meaning of chicken semur within the cultural context of Ternate society.

FINDINGS

The research results and analysis were conducted based on data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation.

The Symbolic Meaning of Ayam Semur in Ternate Traditional Dining

Ayam semur in Ternate traditional dining is not merely a dish but holds deep symbolic meaning for the community. The following are some key symbolic meanings of ayam semur in the cultural and traditional context:

1. Symbol of Prosperity and Wealth

In Ternate culture, chicken symbolizes fortune and blessings. The serving of ayam semur in traditional ceremonies signifies the hope that the host and attendees will receive a better life. The brownish color of the dish is also often associated with resilience and warmth within the family.

2. Symbol of Unity and Togetherness

The process of cooking ayam semur is carried out collectively, reflecting the values of togetherness and solidarity within the community. Sharing a meal during traditional events emphasizes that food is not merely for sustenance but also serves as a means to strengthen social relationships.

3. Symbol of Respect for Elders and Leaders

In traditional dining ceremonies, food is served according to social hierarchy. Ayam semur is often presented first to the elders as a form of respect for ancestors and traditional leaders.

4. Symbol of Tradition and Cultural Heritage

Ayam semur is a traditional dish passed down through generations and has become part of Ternate's cultural identity. The recipe and cooking methods are carefully preserved by the older generation as a way of safeguarding local cultural heritage.

5. Symbol of Religiosity and Gratitude

Before the traditional meal begins, a communal prayer is usually held as an expression of gratitude to God. Chicken, as the main ingredient, also carries a meaning of purity and blessing, as in many cultures, it is often associated with rituals and offerings to ancestors.

Thus, ayam semur in Ternate traditional dining is not merely a dish but also carries symbolic values related to prosperity, unity, respect, tradition, and religiosity. This tradition teaches the importance of honoring ancestral heritage and maintaining social relationships within the community.

ANALYSIS

Based on research on the symbolic meaning of ayam semur in Ternate traditional dining, it can be concluded that this dish is not just food but part of a cultural system with strong social, spiritual, and cultural identity values. Ayam semur in Ternate traditional dining reflects various aspects of community life, including prosperity, togetherness, respect, cultural identity, and religiosity.

1. Ayam Semur as a Symbol of Prosperity and Wealth

Ayam semur in traditional dining represents prosperity and wealth for those who serve it. In Ternate tradition, food is not merely seen as a means to fulfill physical needs but also as a symbol of blessings and abundant fortune. Chicken, as the main ingredient in semur, symbolizes fertility and continuous life. Continued, as chicken is known as an animal that breeds easily and is often associated with continuous sustenance.

Moreover, the process of cooking ayam semur, which involves various traditional spices, showcases the rich natural resources and culinary heritage of Ternate, influenced by the spice trade since the era of the Sultanate of Ternate. The golden-brown color of the spice-rich semur sauce also symbolizes warmth, stability, and hope for a harmonious life. Thus, ayam semur is not only a special dish in traditional dining but also represents a wish for prosperity and well-being for all family and community members involved in the event.

2. Ayam Semur as a Symbol of Togetherness and Mutual Cooperation

Traditional dining in Ternate is a communal event involving many people, and ayam semur, as one of the main dishes, plays a role in strengthening the values of togetherness and mutual cooperation. The preparation of food for traditional events is not an individual task but is carried out collectively by family and community members. This tradition highlights the importance of cooperation and solidarity within the Ternate society.

Additionally, during the traditional dining ceremony, ayam semur is usually served in large portions to be shared among everyone. This reflects the value of brotherhood, regardless of social status, as all participants dine together in the same space. This concept reinforces the idea that food is not just for physical nourishment but also serves as a medium to strengthen social relationships and maintain harmony within the community.

3. Ayam Semur as a Symbol of Respect for Elders and Leaders

In Ternate culture, social hierarchy is highly respected, which is reflected in the way food, is served during traditional ceremonies. The serving of ayam semur in traditional dining follows a rule where the elders or traditional leaders receive their food first. This tradition symbolizes respect for the older generation and traditional leaders who play a role in preserving cultural values.

Moreover, in various traditional ceremonies such as weddings, thanksgiving events, or religious celebrations, ayam semur is often served as a special dish for honored guests. This demonstrates that food can also be used as a means to express appreciation and respect for individuals who hold significant roles in the community.

Thus, ayam semur is not only valued for its gastronomy but also serves as a symbol of etiquette and social ethics in Ternate society. Through traditional dining ceremonies, values of politeness, respect for elders, and social customs are continuously taught to younger generations.

4. Ayam Semur as a Symbol of Cultural Identity and Heritage

Food is one of the most important aspects of culture that distinguishes one community from another. Ayam semur in Ternate traditional dining is part of the cultural identity of the people, passed down from one generation to the next.

As a cultural heritage, ayam semur is not only valued for its taste but also for its historical significance. The unique ayam semur recipe of Ternate carries influences from local traditions as well as cultural assimilation with external influences, particularly from the spice trade involving Arab, European, and Nusantara traders. Therefore, this dish also serves as evidence of how Ternate's culinary culture has evolved through global interactions.

Moreover, the process of passing down the ayam semur recipe to younger generations is not merely about teaching cooking techniques but also serves as a means of cultural preservation. Learning and understanding the symbolism of ayam semur help the community, especially the younger generation, to continue appreciating and maintaining ancestral traditions amid the growing influence of modernization.

5. Ayam Semur as a Symbol of Religiosity and Gratitude

The people of Ternate have a strong connection to spiritual and religious values, which is reflected in the traditional dining practices that involve ayam semur. Before the traditional meal begins, a communal prayer is usually held as an expression of gratitude to God for the blessings received.

In various cultures, including Ternate, chicken is often associated with purity and blessings. This dish is considered a meal that brings goodness and is frequently used in traditional rituals as a form of respect for ancestors and God.

Sharing a meal during traditional ceremonies also teaches the values of simplicity and appreciation for food as a blessing that must be respected. It serves as a reminder for the community to always be grateful and to avoid wasting what has been provided.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis of cultural values in Ternate traditional dining, particularly regarding ayam semur, it is evident that this tradition holds significance beyond its culinary aspect. It serves as a symbol of cultural identity, unity, respect, prosperity, and religiosity within the community.

Ayam semur reflects prosperity and abundance, where its presence in traditional dining acts as an expression of gratitude for the blessings received. Additionally, the communal aspect of traditional dining strengthens social solidarity through shared preparation and consumption of food, embodying the values of mutual cooperation and equality.

The serving etiquette of ayam semur also demonstrates respect for leaders and elders, reflecting social ethics and customary manners within the community. Furthermore, religiosity is evident in the tradition of prayer before meals, emphasizing that food is not only a physical necessity but also holds deep spiritual meaning.

Thus, ayam semur in Ternate traditional dining is a valuable cultural heritage that must be preserved and safeguarded for future generations. This ensures that the social, customary, and spiritual values embedded within it remain alive and relevant in modern life.

REFERENCES

- Axelson, M. L. (1986). The impact of culture on food-related behavior. *Annual Review of Nutrition*, 6(1), 345-363. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.nu.06.070186.002021>.
- Adiasih, P., & Brahmana, R. K. M. R. (2015). Persepsi terhadap makanan tradisional Jawa Timur: Studi awal terhadap mahasiswa perguruan tinggi swasta. *Kinerja*. 19(20).
- Edward, B. L., D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S. (1871). Primitive culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art, and custom (Vol. 1 & 2). *John Murray*.
- Gardjito M., H. H. (2016). *Industri jasa boga*. Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. McGraw-Hill.
- Kluckhohn. (1951). *Values and value-orientations in the theory of action: An exploration in definition and classification*. In T. Parsons & E. Shils (Eds.), *Toward a general theory of action*. Harvard University Press, 388–433.
- Owen, S. (2003). *Indonesian regional food and cookery*. Grup street.
- Rosyadi., Mintosih,S. Soeloso. (1995). *Nilai-nilai budaya dalam naskah Kaba Anggun Nan Tungga Si Magek Jabang: Episode: Ke Balai Nan Kodo Baha*. Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI.

Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 25, 1-65. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60281-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60281-6).

Sebastia, B. (2016). *Eating traditional food: Politics, identity and practices*. Routledge.

Trompenaars, F. & Turner. H. (1998). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding diversity in global business (2nd ed.)*. McGraw-Hill.

Wahjudi. (2015). *Kuliner Jawa Dalam Serat Centhini*. Jogjakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia.