



Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Tradition, Gastrodiplomacy of the Sentani Papua Community

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore functions of the tradition of eating together at helai mbai hote mbai, from culinary to gastrodiplomacy in society, to understand the mission and vision of creating the helai mbai hote mbai tradition as a means of social control in society both past, present and the future and the role of local communities in building the image of local culinary in the creative economy. The method used to answer the problems in this article is qualitative. The research results show that the helai mbai hote mbai tradition was formed early as a means of diplomacy for the Sentani people of Jayapura Regency, then developed into a means of diplomacy to strengthen the legitimacy of Ondofolo's power in leading his community. And now it has become a cultural means for building solidarity, unity and community unity from the bottom up, as well as a means of diplomacy between ethnic groups with the concept of local globalization This cultural heritage must continue to be maintained and revived so that it can be passed on to future generations by making the helai mbai hote mbai tradition a vehicle for developing the creative economy in Jayapura Regency. Through the helai mbai hote mbai tradition, the younger generation can learn how to prepare traditional Sentani cuisine, which can be used as capital for expertise in the creative economy business in the tourism sector, as well as participating in efforts to preserve the sustainability of the helai mbai hote mbai cultural tradition itself. Therefore, the Regional Government of Jayapura Regency must be able to encourage the development of sustainable cultural tourism.

Keywords: *Eating together, gastrodiplomacy, Sentani*

1. INTRODUCTION

West Sumatra, Riau, South Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua are suitable areas for sago growth because they have soil with high water content. Of these areas, Papua Province has the largest sago forest. Sago plantations in Papua are mostly located in forest areas and near settlements in the form of sago gardens which are generally used by the community. Lewaherilla estimates that the area of sago forests in Papua is 980,000 hectares and the area of sago plantations is 14,000 hectares. Several areas in Papua Province such as Merauke, Sentani, Memberamo, Sarimi, Kerom and Waropen are considered to have the potential to become sago production centers.

People in the Lake Sentani area know sago as a traditional plant called "*fi*" in the Sentani language. In the Sentani language, *fi* is called "staple food" before rice is added. Also, this tree has many uses, such as its roots for

decorating walls, its leaves for making roofs, its fruit for making accessories, its trunk for seating, firewood, and processed food, namely sago starch. Additionally, they can be used and purchased, all of which greatly helps improve the lives of the Sentani people. Sago plants are very popular in Papua, especially in Jayapura Regency. The area of sago forests in Jayapura Regency is estimated at 3,302 ha, according to the 2019 Regional Development Planning Agency (BAPPEDA) annual report. This consists of six districts: Central Sentani 1,964.5 ha, East Sentani 473.0 ha, West Sentani 74.6 ha, Waibhu 138.9 ha, Unurum Guay 277.3 ha, and Demta 374.6 ha.

Apart from that, the Sentani people consider *fi* as a gift from their ancestors, which is considered a form of purity, and has magical properties that can be felt when using papeda with one strand and one hote because the purpose of eating together is to maintain ties with the ancestors.

Eating together also shows equality of social status (position, profession), because when they eat together, they are said to have come from the same womb, as history shows. Sago is considered mother (*kani*) for the Sentani people and is an important part of their lives. If the Sentani people give up Sago, they will lose their roots.

Fi is very important in Sentani community activities because of their belief in mystical things. This includes customs, such as paying the dowry, setting ondofolo, and *khoselo*. It also includes moving to a new house, reuniting families, mourning, and resolving inter-clan conflicts, as there is a tradition of eating papeda (*fi*) and (*kha*) together with one *helai* and one *hote*. The tradition of *helai mbai hote mbai* passed down from ancestors to the Sentani people in Jayapura Regency, Papua.

The aim of carrying out the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is to bond togetherness and increase harmony between residents. Usually done during traditional ceremonies. People in certain groups will sit together and form a circle. In the middle of the circle *fi* (papeda) is served along with the side dish *kha* (fish) which is served in one dish and *hote*. Next, the community will eat together, interspersed with light communication to create closeness. This tradition of eating together is also common in other tribes in Indonesia, with different terms, the people of Maluku call it Makan Patita. Eat Bajamba in West Sumatra, Megibung Tradition in Bali and Lombok, Bancaan Tradition in Java, and many more in each region. All the traditions of eating together carried out by several communities in various regions, research on eating together among ethnic groups in Papua has not received much attention from cultural researchers.

The *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is unique because the group has no social boundaries. Everyone blends into one; no matter whether they were rich or poor, high or low, white or black, they all felt like brothers and friends in the group. They sat close to each other, ate together, joked in joy, and occasionally exchanged ideas to increase the feeling of brotherhood and friendship. Based on the background of the problem above, the following problem can be formulated: what is the meaning of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition for the Sentani people in Papua and how can their cultural values be changed and revitalized to support creative economic development.

2. THEORY AND METHOD

Gastrodiplomacy theory and creative economy theory are used to solve the problems discussed in this article. Public diplomacy is very important in international relations, especially in cooperation between countries. This is because public diplomacy has the ability to bridge all differences between the people of a country. So that government diplomacy does not seem stiff, this public diplomacy incorporates nongovernment actors (Pujayanti, 2017: 41). Indonesian culinary is one of the public diplomacy methods used by Indonesia. One of the new ways used by a country to introduce its identity in a way that is pleasant and easily accepted by the international community is gastrodiplomacy. One of the methods used by countries in cultural diplomacy is

gastrodiplomacy, which involves introducing certain cultures to society. Food can function as a nonverbal communication tool that can change public perceptions about the international world (Pujayanti, 2017:38–39). Apart from that, food also functions as a marker of solidarity. Therefore, it is not surprising that food can also be used as a very important and effective tool of diplomacy (soft diplomacy) in society, both in the past and now. Soft diplomacy is very effective in reducing tension and increasing community solidarity.

The part of public diplomacy known as gastrodiplomacy has the capacity to assist the government's communication process with the general public abroad. Gastrodiplomacy uses food to increase national brand awareness by emphasizing values that define a country's culture. One way for countries to project their influence on the people of other countries is through gastrodiplomacy. Food is a very powerful tool to communicate nonverbally to change international public perception and promote a country on a global level. While there are many ways for a country to identify and visualize its identity, food is one that is very tangible. Over the past ten years, gastrodiplomacy has become a more popular method for developing countries to promote themselves at the global level. This is an example of a soft power approach. Diplomacy is now aimed at people at the international level, not just governments and countries, and has evolved into gastrodiplomacy. By turning to parties that influence policy makers in each country, such as business, media, interest groups and individuals. This type of diplomacy increases the country's "marketing power" in international forums and increases negotiating power.

Many things can happen with food. Food is a universal medium that can bring people closer together from politics, business and society. Food can also help strengthen relationships. Banquets are also a symbol of honor. Banquets can be a tool to communicate with various groups for those in power in politics or government. Of course, the goal is to negotiate smoothly to change the behavior of individuals or other political elites. From a political perspective, gastrodiplomacy functions as a mirror that allows people to understand how important figures or elites are in the eyes of the government in question. According to research conducted here (<http://www.femina.co.id/Trending-Topic/diplomasi-mejamakan>), food is a means of diplomacy that involves gentleness, strength and hospitality.

Creative economy theory, also known as creative industry, refers to new generation economic activities that utilize media, knowledge, information and socio-cultural technologies. Advertising, architecture, arts, crafts, culinary, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, publishing, software, toys, games, radio, and video games are the fields. Although this definition is not yet recognized globally, there are some people who believe that the education industry is included in the creative industry. The perpetrator is often called the cultural

industry (Hesmondhalgh 2002, 14) or the creative economy (Howkins 2001).

The art of food expertise (gastronomy) of the future is a creative industry that has intrinsic value, historical, cultural, geographical, social and economic elements. Therefore, it is part of the creative economy. Currently, the role of the creative industry in creating global economic prosperity is increasingly important. Although there are some who argue that "human creativity is the primary source of economic power" or "Twenty-first century industries will increasingly depend on the knowledge of young people through creativity and innovation" (Landry & Bianchini, 1995).

Since the time of the Indonesian kingdom, kings have always entertained and given the best food to their guests as an expression of respect and to show their culinary riches, according to Sri Murni. Food has been shown throughout history to be an effective diplomatic tool that builds relationships between individuals, cultures, and societies. Food also gives people the opportunity to talk and share information and ideas. Therefore, local traditional food may have great potential to develop Indonesia's creative economy. The government must use thousands of traditional Indonesian foods as a tool for local, regional and global diplomacy. This is important in the efforts of all parties to transform Indonesian culinary into a creative industry.

Currently, the creative industry has begun to be involved in the development of gastrodiplomacy, also known as gastrodiplomacy, in Indonesia. So far, the art of culinary expertise in Indonesia only consists of a "culinary" work component and does not include the term "gastronomy". Although both focus on food, there are two different meanings of it. Seeking "creative leaders" from professional and self-taught chefs to train in transformational leadership is the first step toward the politics of culinary culture. The second element that must be done is to search for, highlight and combine culinary arts from each region into the national Indonesian food encyclopedia. It was then promoted nationally and internationally as an "Indonesian culinary tourism adventure".

This research uses a qualitative method, which places greater emphasis on aspects of understanding in depth the problem rather than looking at the problem in general for generalization research. Qualitative methods believe that the nature of a problem must be studied on a case by case basis. This method aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the problem rather than making generalizations.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 *The Value and Meaning of Helai Mbai Hote Mbai*

3.1.1 *Helai Mbai Hote Mbai in the Cosmology of the Sentani Society*

In their local wisdom, Sentani people eat papeda (*fi*) and fish (*kha*) with one piece and hote. Because of this, papeda (*fi*) becomes the center of attention of Sentani

people when they eat together, meaning that when they eat together, as parents, they start to tell how sago is in their lives, including the prohibitions and consequences of disobedience. This is because Sentani people believe that sago is a gift from their ancestors, so there are mystical things that happen when sago (*fi*) is treated badly by them through their words and actions. The wrong words convey the benefits, meaning and cultural value of sago (*fi*). Furthermore, bad actions towards sago (*fi*), such as stabbing sago in an emotional state (anger), and the results of the ramasan are only thrown onto the ground or water, and the sago fronds are not removed or thrown away. As a result, people can feel weak, have an upset stomach, and experience severe pain, including vomiting and a large stomach.

Because sago is considered an ancestral heritage which is considered a manifestation of the sacred from a cultural perspective, something that is considered sacred is related to relics in the form of sacred objects or plants that are places of worship for gods and ancestors. Powers that are recognized as having supernatural powers are thought to originate from ancestral spirits. However, the actions they carried out were not ordinary actions, but were part of a ritual, according to Koentjaninggrat (1979). This ritual is related to human activities or actions and shows awe and respect for the gods and ancestral spirits. As a result, the Sentani community performs rituals such as chopping sago, sending dowries and eating together. This shows an attitude of respect and reverence for the gods and ancestral spirits. In particular, when they perform ritual meals, they revisit their cosmology. They believe that the sacred, namely ancestral spirits, will be present with them and will be punished if their teachings are not in accordance with what was previously taught.

3.1.2 *Helai Mbai Hote Mbai as a Sense of Brotherhood for the Sentani Community*

The ritual of eating papeda (*fi*) and fish (*kha*) with one piece at a time reflects cultural values such as togetherness, concord, harmony, mutual cooperation and solidarity. This ritual shows the identity, identity and characteristics of the Sentani people. They can also apply these values in their lives to show appreciation for their parents and ancestors. Therefore, when families, clans, tribes, customs, social groups and congregations who need labor assistance are involved in these activities or work, because there is a strong sense of belonging between each other, they will also be involved in these activities or work.

Therefore, *fi* is very important for their lives because it is able to help and support the lives of the Sentani community, starting from the family sphere (building harmonious relationships between families), the social sphere (building social kinship relationships), and customs (helping with dowry payments, head payments, and the coronation of tribal chiefs), education (giving advice), and economic needs (food, clothing). As a result, the local wisdom of eating together, which has cultural values and meaning for the Sentani community, remains even though the community has developed along with threats from outside.

3.1.3 *Helai Mbai Hote Mbai As a Media of Peace*

Sentani people recognize that *fi* can create peace in the midst of conflicts that occur between families, clans, tribes, customs and society. Examples of conflicts that often occur between people include cutting down sago trees without the permission of the owner (family, clan or tribe), stealing other people's garden products, verbal violence between parents or siblings which causes arguments, and so on. Before hatred arises, the ritual of eating together is carried out.

A sacred ritual due to *papeda* (*fi*) as a way to take them back to the past with their parents, who had instilled good values in their lives. To remember these things, they must live in love, apologize, take responsibility as successors, and be role models for their children.

In his book *The Power of Symbols*, Diliston states that symbols refer to deep functions, meanings and values, and that humans create them as vessels to express their emotions towards the transcendent, through actions such as prostrating, sitting and eating together. Eating together, as the Sentani people do, is a symbol of peace because it contains the meaning of life associated with sago (*fi*), which is sacred. Apart from that, this is very valuable because the cultural values contained in the lives of the Sentani people have survived for a long time. So, if there is a problem, solve it immediately with the help of *khoselo*, *ondoafi*, and *abu afa*, traditional leaders.

3.2 *The Function of the Helai mbai hote mbai Tradition as Gastrodiplomacy*

The helai mbai hote mbai tradition actually comes from the habits of the people who live around Lake Sentani. This tradition of eating together has long existed in Sentani villages. It is called by another name "hamang bulau", and it shows the philosophy of life of the Sentani people about giving and helping each other, both in times of joy and sorrow. *Helai mbai hote mbai* emphasizes the importance of togetherness and democracy—sitting at the same level, but not demeaning each other. Everyone around *fi* and *kha* is the same in terms of food, regardless of caste or economic status.

This value of togetherness is a manifestation of the leadership system of the Sentani community which is led by an *ondofolo*. *Ondofolo* has a role as a traditional leader who has a very important role in maintaining the balance of life in the community he leads. The principle of social life in the Sentani community is *holei narei* (*holei* = nurturing, *narei* = feeding). *Holei narei* can literally be translated as caring, protecting, building bonds of brotherhood through constant help and attention to other people/family. Society has an obligation to always uphold brotherhood as illustrated in the following expression.

Moni maine enesenendeng joko foi eumiende

Hirong-kaya yae emihebende, rajiae maijae emikelende

Wawure blows hit bam eungekende

Wali narobu-roya yae euferende

This expression means that attention and concern for hungry people does not cause them to lose money. This expression is the idealism of the Sentani people regarding social relations. The Sentani people learned from their predecessors how to care for and provide for others. Providing food, drinks and other basic necessities to those in need is something that must be done. Implementation *holei narei* realized in the form of tradition *helai mbai hote mbai*.

The Sentani people have ethics (*mam*) in eating food. When a meal is held together, everyone invited to the event must bring a *hilo*. There is a unique term for eating *papeda* together, namely *helai mbai hote mbai*. *Strand* means a tool for placing *papeda*. There are also tools such as a three-edged cutlery called a *hilo* which is used to pick up *papeda*. *Mbai* means one. *Hote* means a bowl made of wood.

In the past, when the Sentani people were at a banquet (*helai mbai hote mbai*), the size of the *papeda* taken using *hilo* had to be adjusted to the size of our mouths. This means that when you take the *papeda* once, then dip it in the sauce, the *papeda* in the *hilo* must be finished in one bite. It is not permitted to dip *papeda* that has not been finished in *hilo* into the sauce again. This is because the sauce is a shared property at the banquet. The Sentani people consider that dipping *papeda* twice or more into sauce that is actually finished in one bite is an act of disrespect for *mam*. Children are taught from an early age how to enjoy *papeda* together. If they violate it, the children will even be expelled from the banquet.

The *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is also used by *ondofolo* to carry out soft diplomacy towards the people they lead and even towards opposing people or groups around the Lake Sentani area. *Ondofolo* uses food as a diplomatic tool to achieve certain goals. The way to do this is by hosting people who are invited to do diplomacy. Usually people who are served well on a regular basis will not refuse the host's requests. *Pepuho* (2022) also tells a similar story that in ancient times food could also be used as a tool to soften a person's heart. When a stranger comes to our house, the host will treat the guest well. Guests are treated to the best food. When he finished eating, the person said that the purpose of his visit was with bad intentions. However, because of the friendliness and kindness of the homeless person, the evil person did not continue his crime.

By carrying out the tradition of *helai mbai hote mbai*, *ondofolo*, he succeeded in building a strong relationship of solidarity between the community he leads and people or groups who are at odds with *ondofolo*. The success of this diplomacy can not be separated from the influence of the gastrodiplomacy power of the *helai mbai hote mbai*. *Ondofolo* also succeeded in fostering a sense of solidarity or brotherhood among the Sentani community through the symbols contained in the *strand* motif. The motif in Sentani pottery (*helai*) is called *yalu* (*tire*) which symbolizes a bond of brotherhood that unites in one family sitting together to eat together bound by ties of brotherhood.

3.3 Revitalization of the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Tradition towards a Creative Economy

Implementation of traditions *helai mbai hote mbai* has undergone changes. Serving *fi* and *kha* does not start with the process of making the food, but is already in the form of a ready-to-eat dish. When compared with tradition *helai mbai hote mbai* which was carried out in the past starting from preparing to cook food together, then creativity in implementing traditions *helai mbai hote mbai* is now lost. Education on creativity in cooking *fi* and *kha* into delicious dishes will fade, and over time the ability and expertise to cook typical Sentani dishes will fade and one day will be lost.

The enthusiasm for learning to cook from Sentani's young generation is needed as capital to pursue the world of traditional culinary arts in preparation for starting a creative industry business in the field of gastronomy. Cultural values in *helai mbai hote mbai* not only in the tradition of eating together or dining, but also in the value of education and apprenticeship. From tradition *helai mbai hote mbai* the younger generation can learn and practice how to process and cook sago into dishes *helai mbai hote mbai* according to the desired specialization, for example expert in making *papeda*, expert in making fish in yellow sauce, expert in grilling fish, expert in serving food for tourism (waiter). All of these skills can later be combined with modern marketing skills. Therefore *helai mbai hote mbai* can be a management forum for the growth of creative people in the field of traditional Sentani culinary delights.

The Indonesian government needs to immediately develop this gastronomic or gastrodiplomacy strategy as one of Indonesia's economic diplomacy efforts. To the Jayapura Regency Government which has traditions *helai mbai hote mbai* must be able to transform and revitalize traditions *helai mbai hote mbai* become a global tourism creative economy product. In transforming and revitalizing traditions *helai mbai hote mbai* It doesn't have to be identical, but it is enough to adopt values that are suitable for pioneering and managing a creative economy linked to the development of the world of tourism in Jayapura Regency. The main cultural values in tradition *helai mbai hote mbai* is the principle of togetherness and solidarity. This value can be used as initial capital to motivate the community together, working hand in hand, to revitalize culinary culture so that it can be offered to the world of international tourism. If this can be realized then this activity will be able to preserve and disseminate values *helai mbai hote mbai*. The end is that it can overcome employment problems because the young generation of Sentani is able to create jobs in the creative industry sector.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1 Conclusion

The conclusion that can be presented in this article is tradition *helai mbai hote mbai* is a tradition eating

together can provide learning and even have enormous meaning in fostering harmony in the social life of a citizen. The main function *helai mbai hote mbai* initially it was as a means to foster a sense of family in the Sentani community, then developed into a diplomatic means for consolidation carried out by *ondofolo* to achieve certain goals. Then now it has become a cultural means of building solidarity, unity of society and diplomacy through the development of a creative economy, gastronomy, tourism.

Linked to the creative economy development program in Jayapura Regency, tradition *helai mbai hote mbai* can provide internship facilities for the younger generation to use as capital for expertise in the creative economy business in the tourism sector. By learning different types of dishes for preparation *helai mbai hote mbai*, at the same time, the younger generation is also helping to preserve the continuity of traditions *helai mbai hote mbai*.

4.2 Suggestion

The Regional Government of Jayapura Regency must be able to revitalize traditional values *helai mbai hote mbai* to encourage the development of sustainable cultural tourism towards a creative economy that prioritizes professional gastronomic tourism satisfaction. In 2017 a festival was held *helai mbai hote mbai* in Abar Village, Ebungfau District, Jayapura Regency, but the festival which was planned to be held every year was stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This year it's a festival *helai mbai hote mbai* held again at the same place, but the festival did not run optimally due to lack of promotion and sponsors. Therefore, smart planning is needed for implementation in the coming years.

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