

## **THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOP SAUDARA CULINARY CULTURAL IDENTITY: FORMED AND INTERPRETED BY THE PANGKEP COMMUNITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explain how the construction of Sop Saudara's culinary cultural identity is formed and interpreted by the people of Pangkajene and Kepulauan (Pangkep) Regency. This study used a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collection methods including in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Research subjects included culinary entrepreneurs, pioneering families, cultural figures, regional officials, and local consumers. The results show that Sop Saudara is positioned not only as a regional specialty but also as a symbol of collective identity representing family history, kinship solidarity, and the pride of the Pangkep community. This identity construction is formed through a narrative of the origins of Sop Saudara, involving the figure of H. Dollahi, the strengthening of family values within business networks among family members, and social recognition in various cultural spaces such as traditional events, regional promotions, and local media. The process of transmission of meaning also occurs from generation to generation and is reinforced through consumption practices rich in symbolic meaning. These findings confirm that culinary delights are not merely objects of consumption but also a medium of cultural representation that shapes and reproduces a community's cultural identity. This research contributes to the development of cultural studies, particularly in understanding the relationship between food, symbolic meaning, and the construction of local identity.

**Keywords:** cultural identity, Sop Saudara, Pangkep community, culinary symbols, consumption practices, cultural studies

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Traditional food plays a crucial role in shaping a community's cultural identity. It serves not only as a means of consumption but also as a social symbol containing historical values, cultural representations, and power relations (Mintz, 1985; Barthes, 1979). In the context of Cultural Studies, food is understood as a cultural practice rich in meaning, which can reflect social structures, class differences, and even a society's ideological positions (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013; Wilk, 2006). Cultural identity itself is not a fixed entity, but rather a construct formed through a process of representation and difference (Hall, 1996:4). Hall states that "identities are never unified and... are subject to a radical historicization" (Hall, 1996:4). Therefore, food can be an important medium in the articulation of group identity, both in local

and national contexts (Ichijo & Ranta, 2016). In Indonesia, local food not only plays a role in strengthening regional identity but also serves as a symbolic political arena in contesting claims to cultural heritage (Parasecoli, 2022; Sébastia, 2016). One example is Sop Saudara, a South Sulawesi specialty popular in Makassar, but actively represented as a cultural identity of the people of Pangkajene and the Islands Regency (Pangkep).

However, most academic studies on local food in Indonesia still focus on aspects of the creative economy, culinary tourism, or popular historical documentation, without in-depth examination of the dimensions of identity and power relations (Nugraha, 2019; Saraswati, 2021). This creates a gap in cultural studies, particularly in understanding how food acts as an instrument of cultural hegemony. Within the framework of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, culture is seen not merely as a symbolic expression but as a field of negotiation between the dominant class and civil society (Gramsci in Tami et al., 2021:18). Rosmah Tami et al. emphasize that cultural products can form consensus through voluntarily accepted representations, including through culinary arts. Thus, Sop Saudara can be understood not simply as a food product, but as a field for the articulation and legitimization of identity involving local actors, the government, communities, and media discourse. Unfortunately, no research has specifically examined how Sop Saudara's cultural identity is constructed through intertwined narratives, symbols, and institutional interventions.

This research aims to examine the construction of Sop Saudara's cultural identity as part of the cultural practices of the Pangkep Regency community. Using a qualitative approach and case study method, this research analyzes the narrative of origins, cultural symbolism, social practices, and hegemonic strategies employed by business actors, cultural figures, consumers, and local government institutions. The primary issue examined is how this food is represented as the collective property of the Pangkep community amidst the dynamics of history, economics, and symbolic politics. The theoretical framework used includes cultural identity theory (Hall, 1996), cultural narrative (Rutherford, 1990), and cultural hegemony (Gramsci in Tami et al., 2021), which allows for a critical reading of culinary arts as a form of meaning construction and domination. This research is expected to contribute to the development of science in the fields of Cultural Studies, Food Anthropology, and Intangible Cultural Heritage Studies, as well as provide practical implications for cultural preservation strategies based on local narratives.

## **II. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach with an interpretative-cultural framework to understand the processes of meaning-making, representation, and articulation of identity inherent in Sop Saudara culinary as a cultural symbol of the people of Pangkajene and the Islands Regency (Pangkep). This approach was chosen because it allows for a deep and contextual exploration of the complexity of social meanings within cultural practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The research method used is a single embedded case study, focusing on a single phenomenon: the construction of Sop Saudara's cultural identity. This case study allows for a detailed analysis of the social and discursive dynamics that shape cultural representations (Yin, 2018: 15).

Research data were collected through three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were conducted directly at Sop Saudara restaurants in Pangkep and Makassar to capture cultural expressions and social symbolism in food consumption practices. In-

depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight key informants, including the heirs of the Sop Saudara pioneering family (Hj. Dahlia and Syawal Aidul), the Head of the Indonesian Social and Cultural Organization (APSOS) (H. Ancu), a local cultural figure (Farid Makkulau), local government officials (Akmaluddin from the Education and Culture Office, Maliati from the Pangkep Tourism Office, and Irwin from the Makassar Creative Economy Office), and several consumers. Documentation included historical archives, media narratives, tourism promotional materials, and institutional documents such as those from APSOS and the Tourism Office. This technique was chosen because it is flexible, emic, and reflective of field dynamics (Alaslan et al., 2023: 125–160).

This research was conducted from March to May 2025, primarily located in Pangkep Regency, the cultural region of origin of Sop Saudara, and Makassar City as a space for the expansion and contestation of this culinary identity. Informants were selected purposively and through a snowball technique, taking into account their active involvement in the cultural practices, economy, and narratives of Sop Saudara's identity.

Data analysis was conducted inductively using a thematic approach. The analysis process included data reduction, open coding, categorization, and interpretation of meaning based on the observed social and cultural context. The researchers used the analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) to formulate key themes and patterns of identity representation. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of techniques and sources, as well as reconfirmation of findings with informants as a form of interpretative validity testing.

This study also adhered to the ethical principles of qualitative research, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining the confidentiality of informants' identities, and respecting voluntary participation in the interview and observation process. The relationship between the researcher and participants was built empathetically and reflectively so that the research results could authentically represent the subjects' perspectives (Alaslan et al., 2023: 28–29).

### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Symbolic Meaning**

The research results show that Sop Saudara culinary has strong historical roots in the migrant community from Sanrangan, Minasatene District, Pangkajene and Kepulauan (Pangkep) Regency. The central figure in the creation of this menu is Haji Abdullah, better known as H. Dollahi. He was born and raised in Sanrangan before moving to Makassar in the early 1950s. During his time abroad, he worked at Warung Sop Sentral. The name "Sop Saudara" was inspired by a popular coto stall at the time, Coto Paraikatte—in Makassarese, paraikatte means "our fellow citizens" or "brothers." From this, H. Dollahi chose a name that represents the values of family and solidarity: "Sop Saudara."

In constructing the cultural identity of Sop Saudara as part of Pangkep's cultural practices, the symbolic meanings inherent in it reflect social values, family history, and expressions of community pride. Sop Saudara is not merely seen as a culinary dish, but as an intersubjective symbol that signifies social bonds and traditional values passed down across generations.

H. Abdullah, also known as H. Dollahi, the culinary pioneer of Sop Saudara, who started his business in the early 1960s, emphasized that the idea for the name "Sop Saudara" arose from a desire to instill a sense of family in the relationship between vendor and customer. In a live interview, he stated: "I named it Sop Saudara because I consider the people who eat at my place to be like brothers. There's no distance; everyone is equal. That's the meaning I've held from the beginning" (H. Abdullah, interview, June 18, 2024).

Hj. Dahlia, H. Dollahi's daughter, also emphasized that Sop Saudara is not just a recipe, but "a marker of family identity and origins" rooted in her father's long journey developing the business from Sanrangan to Makassar. He stated: "The name 'saudara' itself embodies the philosophy of brotherhood that is highly valued in Bugis-Makassar culture, especially between sellers and buyers" (Hj. Dahlia, interview, June 20, 2024). In this sense, restaurants become a kind of cultural space that allows for the renegotiation of traditional identities through culinary practices.

As Rutherford (1990: 22–23) explains, spaces like restaurants can function as a "symbolic home" for communities rebuilding their identities outside their home region:

"Home is no longer simply a place of familiarity and belonging, but is always infused with the imaginary and the symbolic. Home is a space where the self may be reconstructed through memory, history, and identity. In this sense, home is not merely a physical location, but a symbolic space in which cultural identity is performed and negotiated." (Rutherford, 1990: 22–23)

In his quote, Jonathan Rutherford states that "home is no longer simply a place of familiarity and belonging, but is always infused with the imaginary and the symbolic." The meaning of "home" in this context is not limited to a fixed and personal physical place, but rather a symbolic space imbued with cultural, historical, and identity meanings. Home becomes a place where the self is formed and negotiated through collective memory, historical narratives, and cultural practices.

In the context of Sop Saudara, this quote is relevant because the restaurant founded by H. Dollahi is not just a place to eat, but also a kind of "symbolic home"—a space where family identity, family values, and cultural origins are displayed and maintained. By referring to his customers as "brothers," H. Dollahi creates a familial atmosphere that transcends ordinary buying and selling relationships. This demonstrates that culinary spaces function as arenas for negotiating deeper cultural identities, as Rutherford explains.

## 2. Cultural Practices

Research results indicate that the culinary practice of Sop Saudara is not merely an economic activity, but rather a cultural practice that embodies local social values, such as solidarity, respect for ancestors, and community identity. The production, presentation, and consumption of Sop Saudara contain symbolic meanings rooted in the kinship values of the Sanrangan community in Pangkep.

In its production practices, Sop Saudara is prepared based on a special recipe passed down from H. Abdullah (H. Dollahi) to his descendants. The presentation of this dish also follows traditional patterns that emphasize hospitality, precision, and authenticity of flavor. Consuming Sop Saudara, both at food stalls and at social events, becomes a social space where family relationships and collective values are reinterpreted.

As explained by Hj. For Dahlia, H. Dollahi's daughter, the inheritance encompasses not only cooking techniques but also service ethics and a sense of family:

"My father always said: this soup isn't just about taste, but also about respecting the guest. The meat must be tender, the broth must be thick, and it must be served with care. That's what he's taught his grandchildren now." (Hj. Dahlia, interview, June 20, 2024)

The inheritance system used by H. Dollahi's family is not based on a formal business like a franchise, but rather through kinship networks and intergenerational cultural transmission. This aligns with the concept of cultural transmission proposed by Clifford Geertz (1973), namely the process of passing on cultural meaning through interactions within the community, rather than through formal institutions. Alaslan et al. (2023: 128) add that this transmission creates cultural continuity as well as flexibility in responding to new contexts.

"I only make one. But because some family members want to start a business, I teach them. It's not a franchise, but the whole family." (H. Abdullah, interview, June 18, 2024)

An interview with Akmaluddin, Cultural Officer at the Pangkep Education and Culture Office, also confirmed that the spread of Sop Saudara reflects the values of siri' na pacce and the principle of sipakatau, Bugis-Makassar social ethics that emphasize respect for dignity and solidarity among kin:

"When someone successfully opens a business, they are obliged to invite family from their hometown. This is what causes it to spread rapidly through strong kinship networks." (Akmaluddin, interview, April 22, 2025)

Within the framework of Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of cultural identity, this pattern of inheritance can be read as a form of articulation of collective identity. Each Sop Saudara stall not only sells food but also represents the identity of origin, family values, and heritage of the Pangkep migrant community. This identity is formed not in a fixed manner, but through repeated practices—in this case: cooking, serving, and eating Sop Saudara.

Muh. Farid Wajdi Makkulau, a cultural figure and culinary researcher from South Sulawesi, calls kinship networks the "lifeblood of Sop Saudara's sustainability":

"I see that Sop Saudara doesn't stand alone. It spreads through the strength of bonds. If they're not family, they're students. If they're not students, they're part of a very strong social bond. It's a legacy, not just a commodity." (Muh. Farid Wajdi Makkulau, interview, April 22, 2025)

Thus, the culinary practice of Sop Saudara is an active form of cultural practice: it not only reproduces flavors but also instills values, connects collective memories, and strengthens social bonds. In the context of cultural studies, this embodies the concept of cultural identity as becoming—an identity that is continuously shaped through social practices and cultural spaces.

### 3. Media and Public Representation

Research results show that Sop Saudara, a culinary heritage from Pangkajene and Kepulauan (Pangkep) Regency, has spread widely to various regions, primarily through family migration and migrant networks. During this spread, regional variations have emerged to suit local consumer tastes, yet the distinctive flavor and presentation remain a hallmark of authenticity for the local community.



Authentic Sop Saudara from Pangkep generally has a distinctive and consistent flavor structure: clear broth with beef broth, tender slices of beef, rice noodles, boiled eggs, and red chili sauce. Another distinctive feature is the custom of eating Sop Saudara with rice and grilled milkfish, a flavor combination unique to the Pangkep community. This package is widely known as the "Sop Saudara with milkfish package," and is considered a representation of regional flavors by local residents.

"In Pangkep, Sop Saudara is always eaten with milkfish. No one eats it on its own. Because Pangkep people are accustomed to eating milkfish. It's been that way for a long time."  
(Amirullah, Sop Saudara entrepreneur in Pangkep, interview, March 20, 2025)

Pangkep cultural expert, Muh. Farid Makkulau, explained that Sop Saudara's authenticity is still maintained by 78% of the stalls, which are inherited from the first generation. However, 65% of the stalls have also begun to innovate in flavor and presentation, such as healthy and instant variants, and menu collaborations with grilled milkfish, sourced from partnerships with local fish farmers. This represents a form of cultural and economic adaptation. This innovation is also driven by broader market demands, particularly from younger consumers who are more flexible in their food preferences.

In contrast, in Makassar and the surrounding area, variations in presentation have emerged—for example, the use of fried lungs, duck eggs, beef empal (beef jerky), or adjustments to the chili sauce. Some stalls also offer additional fillings such as chicken feet or tripe, depending on customer preference. However, many of these stalls still display the "Sop Saudara Asal Pangkep" label as a form of affirmation of origin and guarantee of quality taste. This identity is often used strategically in promotional narratives, whether on social media, billboards, or business signs, to attract the sympathy of consumers who are looking for authentic taste and traditional values.

Local and national media also represent Sop Saudara in narratives that strengthen Pangkep's local identity. Articles from DetikSulsel, IDNTimes, and SINDOnews, for example, frequently position Sop Saudara as a South Sulawesi culinary icon, citing its association with pioneering figures like H. Dollahi and the Pangkep tradition of pairing soup with grilled milkfish. Social media also serves as a space for the articulation of this identity, where promotional accounts for Sop Saudara stalls—both owned by the family heirs and the new generation—present narratives of authenticity, family values, and references to Pangkep's origins in their visual and textual content.

In a cultural approach, taste is understood not simply as a result of tongue perception, but as a social and symbolic experience closely linked to identity, history, and group affiliation. According to Parasecoli (2022):

"Taste is not only a personal or physiological experience—it is a socially situated practice. Especially in the case of traditional foods, taste becomes a site where authenticity is claimed, communities are imagined, and cultural boundaries are negotiated." (Parasecoli, 2022: 84–85)

Parasecoli explains that "taste" is not simply a result of the sense of taste or individual experience, but rather a social practice situated culturally and historically. In the context of traditional foods like Sop Saudara, taste becomes an arena where authenticity is affirmed, community identity is formed or imagined, and cultural boundaries are negotiated. In other words, taste is not just about what the tongue perceives, but also about symbolic value, collective memory, and a group's social position within the cultural space.

The application of this concept to the case of Sop Saudara emphasizes that claims to the "authentic taste of Pangkep" are not solely based on ingredients or cooking techniques, but also on the Pangkep community's collective recognition of elements of taste and presentation they deem authentic. Taste serves as a marker of identity and a tool for resistance to change, as well as a flexible space for negotiation between preservation and innovation.

The representation of Sop Saudara in the media and public sphere serves not only as a means of culinary promotion but also as an arena for contesting the meaning and legitimacy of origins. In this context, government institutions, creative industry players, and online media play a role in shaping the public narrative about this culinary identity. Image strategies implemented through digital promotions, film documentation, and culinary festivals demonstrate that Sop Saudara is associated not only with taste and recipes, but also with claims to territory and cultural authority.

The local government is also actively involved in supporting the preservation and promotion of this culinary tradition. Maliati, the Functional Head of the Tourism and Creative Economy Division of the Pangkep Tourism Office, explained that her office has mapped local culinary potential and incorporated Sop Saudara into regional branding and gastronomic destination promotion programs.

"We encourage Sop Saudara to be known not just as a food, but as a regional identity. At every event, festival, or promotional media, we always carry that narrative: that Sop Saudara originates from Pangkep, not anywhere else." (Maliati, Pangkep Tourism and Youth Office, interview, March 20, 2025)

This statement emphasizes that the narrative of origin is an important tool in building the region's cultural and tourism image. In other regions, particularly Makassar and its surroundings, variations on Sop Saudara's presentation have emerged—for example, using fried lungs, duck eggs, beef empal, or adjusting the chili sauce. Some stalls also offer additional fillings such as chicken feet or tripe, depending on customer preference. However, many of these stalls still display the "Sop Saudara Asal Pangkep" designation as a form of affirmation of origin and guarantee of quality taste.

Irwin, Head of the Creative Economy Division of the Makassar Tourism Office, further emphasized this:

"We in Makassar see Sop Saudara as one of South Sulawesi's culinary icons, entrenched in a narrative of authenticity. However, packaging it for acceptance in the urban tourism market requires a visual approach, storytelling, and adaptation. This includes collaborating with YouTube platforms or documentaries, where the narrative still cites Pangkep as its origin—because that's a unique selling point." (Irwin, interview, April 22, 2025)

This statement demonstrates that the representation of Sop Saudara in digital media is not neutral, but rather the result of a cultural communication strategy involving narrative selection, emphasizing origins, and adapting to urban market tastes. The explicit mention of "origin Pangkep" in various media distribution channels, both in documentaries and online promotions, demonstrates a mechanism of symbolic hegemony, namely how claims to a space of origin are reinforced through the media to maintain credibility and authenticity in a competitive marketplace. In his influential theorization of cultural identity, Bhabha (1996: 54) stated:

"The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural

knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force.” (Bhabha, 1996: 54)

This view is highly relevant when reading the construction of Sop Saudara's culinary identity as a process that is neither final nor singular, but rather the result of layered negotiations taking place in the “Third Space”—a meeting place between local traditions and contemporary forces such as urbanization, tourism, and cultural capitalism. As H. Ancu (Chairman of APSOS) expressed it, “We acknowledge that it originated in Pangkep, but its presence is now larger in Makassar due to the influence of the city, the number of consumers, and access to social media.” This statement demonstrates that claims of authenticity do not necessarily grant sole authority over culinary identity, as everyday practices have shaped new articulations of identity beyond its region of origin.

Furthermore, Hj. Dahlia, H. Dollahi's daughter, emphasized that “My father pioneered in Pangkep, but his fortune flourished in Makassar.” This narrative reflects the ambivalence between nostalgia for origins and contemporary realities, where Sop Saudara can no longer be fully traced to a single geographic location or community, but is continually reshaped in new contexts. This aligns with Bhabha's concept of cultural meaning as “not homogeneous” and “incomplete,” but rather always in the process of becoming and being continually renegotiated.

Therefore, the Third Space approach helps avoid essentialist readings of local culinary identity. In the case of Sop Saudara, claims of authenticity and ownership must be understood as part of an articulatory process, where cultural meaning continues to be shaped in the tension between heritage, everyday practices, and the power relations inherent in regional discourses and commercialization.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

This study aims to examine how the cultural identity of Sop Saudara is constructed as belonging to Pangkep Regency. The results show that this process occurs through the articulation of values, geographical representation, social inheritance, and strategies of cultural hegemony. Pioneering figures such as H. Dollahi successfully positioned Sop Saudara not merely as a culinary product, but as a symbol of the identity and cultural solidarity of the Pangkep community.

The name “Sop Saudara” contains an ideological dimension as a representation of Pangkep identity, reinforced through a system of recipe inheritance within kinship networks, distinctive flavor variants maintained amidst regional variations, and institutional recognition by the local government and business associations. This indicates an active and strategic articulation of identity, as explained by Stuart Hall, where cultural meaning is constructed through representation and social practice.

Furthermore, the application of a Gramscian hegemony approach suggests that Sop Saudara's success as a Pangkep culinary symbol is a form of “war of position” achieved through the context of meaning, not forced domination. The community's recognition of Pangkep's origins represents a symbolic victory for the hegemonic process driven by local actors (organic intellectuals) and widely accepted. Thus, Sop Saudara embodies a culinary identity that is not only local but also institutionalized as a representation of Pangkep culture.



## **Recommendations**

Based on these findings and limitations, this study recommends:

1. The Pangkep Regency Government should continue to strengthen the Sop Saudara identity narrative in sustainable cultural and creative economy policies.
2. Traditional culinary festivals and promotions should not be merely ceremonial, but should be directed as instruments for educating and empowering the local business community.
3. Further research is recommended to explore consumer perceptions, narrative expansion through social media, and the potential for identity articulation within the Bugis diaspora outside South Sulawesi.
4. Further studies could also expand the approach by incorporating the political economy of food and consumption practices as part of identity articulation.

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