

**SYMBOLISM AND IDENTITY IN THE BURNING STONE TRADITION:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN MOUNTAIN AND COASTAL
COMMUNITIES OF MANOKWARI, PAPUA**



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Abstract

The tradition of stone burning is a cultural ritual that has a deep meaning and has long been attached to the community in Papua. This study compares the symbolism and intention of the ritual in building cultural identity between mountainous (Dani Tribe) in Manokwari and coastal (Doreri Tribe) communities in Manokwari, Papua. A qualitative method with a comparative case study approach was used to analyze the differences in practices, symbolic meanings, and contributions of the stone-burning tradition in shaping cultural identity in the two groups. Findings revealed significant variations in implementing and interpreting the ritual's meaning, reflecting adaptations to different natural and social environments. Even so, the value of tradition as a social glue and reinforcement of cultural identity is still maintained in both groups. This result strengthens the theory of cultural adaptation and demonstrates the flexibility of ritual practice in preserving its emblematic nature. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of local culture's dynamics and tradition's function in contemporary society. Practical implications include the development of cultural preservation and tourism strategies that are more responsive to regional diversity. Further research is recommended to expand the scope of the communities studied and conduct long-term studies to understand changes in traditional practices over time.

Keywords: Stone Burning, Papua, Cultural Comparison, Symbolism, Identity

INTRODUCTION

Papua, as one of the regions in the country that is rich in cultural diversity, holds a variety of distinctive traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. Among the various cultural practices that exist, the Burning Stone culture emerges as one of the most meaningful traditions. More than just a traditional way of cooking, Bakar Batu is a form of deep cultural identity and serves as a means to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood among Papuans (Tabuni, 2023).

Bakar Batu, also known as '*barapen*' in Papua, involves the process of cooking food using rocks heated in a fire. However, the value of this tradition is not just culinary. It has complex symbolic meanings, encompassing spiritual, social, and cultural values that give Papuans their identity (Abu Muslim, 2019).

As a tradition, Bakar Batu has attracted the interest of researchers and scholars from various disciplines. Previous studies have examined that this ceremony is not just a way of cooking, but also a complex value system related to oral heritage and has special meaning for the Papuan people. Bakar Batu has profound economic, religious, political, and social implications, which serve to strengthen social unity and cohesion among Papuans, especially in the central highlands (Tabuni, 2023).

One interesting aspect of the Bakar Batu custom is its role as a medium of social mobility. The ceremony functions not only as a culinary activity but also as a means of reconciliation and the realization of basic values such as mutual help, tolerance, and shared prosperity. In this context, Bakar Batu is an important medium for preserving and expressing cultural values in Papua (Abu Muslim, 2019).

Although the tradition of stone burning has long been practiced in Papua, the implementation of this ceremony shows differences between communities. Previous studies have revealed differences in the way the event is conducted between inland and coastal communities, reflecting adjustments to their respective natural and social environments (Nipur et al., 2022). This diversity is not only limited to aspects of ceremonial practice but also to symbolic meanings and functions of cultural identity.

In the interior, for example, the Burning Stone Tradition is often carried out on a large scale involving the entire tribe and lasts longer. The cooking process using large rocks and

large fires reflects the availability of abundant natural resources there. The event is also often accompanied by more complex traditional ceremonies, demonstrating its central role in the social and spiritual lives of inland communities.

In contrast to the situation in the hinterland, stone-burning practices in coastal areas tend to be simpler and shorter. Cooking pits are usually shallower, depending on the soil conditions on the coast. The food that is grilled is also different and uses more seafood than the pork that is commonly cooked in inland stone-burning events. These differences reflect adaptations to the physical environment and different lifestyles between inland and coastal communities.

The diversity in the implementation of bakar batu is worthy of further research as it can provide valuable insights into how cultural traditions adapt and survive in different environmental and social contexts. This is in line with ecological cultural adaptation theory which emphasises that cultural practices develop in response to the physical environment.

In addition to differences in the way it is performed, the symbolic meaning of the bakar batu tradition also indicates differences between hilly and coastal communities. In the mountains, the focus of rituals is generally more on spiritual aspects and connections with past ancestors, reflecting a strong traditional cosmology. Food cooked during the practice of bakar batu is usually addressed to the spirits of past ancestors, signaling the belief that the supernatural and tangible worlds are closely intertwined. This is in line with the concept of 'cosmological continuity', which refers to the strong interconnection between aspects of the spiritual and real worlds in traditional societies.

In coastal areas, the symbolic meaning of stone burning focuses more on the relationship with nature and the celebration of marine products. This reflects the direct dependence of coastal communities on natural resources, especially the sea, in their daily lives. This difference shows the flexibility of cultural symbolic meaning and how it can adapt to different ecological and economic realities.

Diversity in symbolic signs is also worthy of further research, as it can provide a deeper understanding of how cultural symbols can have different interpretations depending on the context. As Victor Turner says, ritual symbols are always open to interpretation and can change from meaning as people experience them.

Although there are variations in the implementation and symbolic signs, the bakar batu tradition still has an important role in shaping and maintaining cultural identity in both communities. This is in line with social identity theory, which explains the important function of cultural practices in determining and preserving group identity.

In mountainous areas, the spiritual focus and close connection to ancestors passed down from generation to generation strengthens community identity by referring to ancestral heritage. A deep historical connection to cultural roots is considered an important part of ethnic identity, which is preserved through these traditional rituals. On the coast, community identity is more influenced by daily interactions with the natural environment on the coast. This shows how tribal culture can be influenced by a close relationship with the environment.

In addition to its important role in identity formation, the Bakar Batu ritual is also useful in strengthening social unity and handling conflicts among Papuans. Several studies have revealed how this ritual is often used as a forum for dialogue and finding solutions together to solve problems. The sense of togetherness created during the ceremony opens up space to talk to each other and find solutions together peacefully (Jiharudin, 2022).

Furthermore, the Bakar Batu tradition also plays a role in connecting religious and ethnic differences in Papua. Although participants in the ritual come from diverse faith backgrounds, they feel that this traditional event can unite various aspects of their identity (Dute, 2022). This shows how traditional culture can serve to bring people closer together and instill tolerance between different groups.

A deeper understanding of the Burning Stone tradition implies a variety of meanings, but the practice is also challenged by changing times. Modern lifestyles, widespread urbanization, and the influence of globalization have influenced the way the ritual is performed and the way people understand it, such as shortening the time of the ritual to adapt to the demands of today's life.

On the other hand, efforts to preserve and revitalize the culture are also ongoing. Some communities have utilized the practice as part of cultural tourism programs, while others have sought to document and transmit the tradition to younger generations. However, these preservation efforts are not free from challenges, especially in maintaining the meaning of the bakar batu tradition.

In this context, further research into the differences and customization of the bakar batu rite is crucial. A deeper understanding of how the tradition has adapted in various environments can provide valuable insights into effective cultural preservation strategies that take local diversity into account. Furthermore, the study of the Bakar Batu tradition can also contribute to understanding cultural dynamics in general. How is a tradition able to maintain its symbolic meaning while adapting to environmental changes? How do cultural practices play a role in the formation and preservation of identity in the midst of accelerating social change? These questions are not only relevant for understanding the Bakar Batu tradition but can also provide valuable insights into the dynamics of culture and identity in the era of globalization.

This research aims to further explore variation and adaptation in the Bakar Batu tradition, with a particular focus on the Dani people in the Manokwari Highlands and the Doreri people in the coastal areas of Manokwari Regency. Through comparative analysis, this study seeks to understand how geographical and socio-cultural differences affect the practices, symbolic meanings, and identity functions of the Bakar Batu tradition in the two communities.

This research aims to fill the gap by exploring how geographical and socio-cultural differences between mountain (Dani) and coastal (Doreri) communities in Manokwari, Papua, influence the practice, symbolic meaning, and identity function of the Bakar Batu tradition. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the question: ‘How do differences in the natural and social environment between mountain and coastal communities affect the practice, symbolic meaning, and identity function of the Bakar Batu tradition in Manokwari, Papua?’

An in-depth understanding of the variations and adaptations of the Bakar Batu tradition is important not only to enrich anthropological insights into Papuan cultural dynamics but also to provide a basis for the development of cultural preservation and tourism strategies that are more responsive to local diversity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Burning Stone tradition has been the subject of numerous studies exploring the historical, symbolic, and social aspects of this practice. Elas (2019) explains that Bakar Batu has been practiced since prehistoric times and is a central aspect of Papuans' collective cultural memory. Meanwhile, Abu Muslim (2019) emphasizes that this tradition not only holds ideas about how to cook but also contains meanings of unity and oneness.

Several studies have revealed variations in the practice of Stone Burning across different Papuan communities. Nipur et al. (2022) found that practices in coastal areas tend to be simpler and related to the celebration of marine products, in contrast to more complex practices in the mountains. However, these studies have not provided a systematic comparative analysis between mountain and coastal practices.

The symbolic and spiritual aspects of Bakar Batu have also been the focus of several studies. Makatita et al. (2022) revealed that this ritual serves as a means of utilizing spirit energy to seek blessings and grace. Meanwhile, Dute (2022) examined how the tradition has adapted to Islamic practices without losing its cultural identity.

The role of Bakar Batu in social cohesion and conflict resolution has also been discussed in several studies. Jiharudin (2022) found that people often utilize this tradition as a forum for friendship and the resolution of communal problems.

Although these studies have provided valuable insights into various aspects of the Bakar Batu tradition, there are still gaps in the understanding of how geographical and socio-cultural differences affect the practice, symbolic meaning, and identity functions of this tradition. This research seeks to fill that gap by conducting a comparative study between mountain and coastal communities in Manokwari, Papua.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the research methodology was systematically designed to uncover the complexity of cultural phenomena using a qualitative approach with a comparative case study method, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the Bakar Batu tradition in two different communities: Dani tribe in the mountainous region and Doreri tribe in the coastal region of Manokwari, Papua.

The selection of research sites in Minyambouw and Manokwari Barat sub-districts represented significant geographic and cultural contrasts, providing a strong basis for comparative analysis. Research participants consisted of 20 key informants from each community, covering a broad spectrum of cultural stakeholders, from traditional leaders to community members directly involved in rituals.

The data collection process utilized a variety of methods to ensure comprehensiveness and depth of information. Participatory observation allowed researchers to gain a first-hand understanding of the dynamics of the Bakar Batu ritual. In-depth interviews with key informants provided access to emic perspectives and local interpretations of the tradition. Document analysis enriched the historical and material context, while Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) facilitated the collective elaboration of emerging themes.

Data analysis adopted an iterative thematic approach, enabling the identification of patterns and themes emerging from the empirical data. This process included data transcription and codification, identification of key themes, comparison across communities, and interpretation and synthesis of findings. Data triangulation was applied to enhance the validity of the research, ensuring the consistency of findings from multiple sources and methods.

Ethical aspects of the research were of primary concern, with the application of the principles of informed consent, protection of participants' privacy, and respect for local cultural values. Formal permission from local authorities and customary leaders was obtained as a prerequisite for conducting the research, emphasizing the commitment to the ethics and integrity of the research.

Through this comprehensive methodological design, the research aims to generate an in-depth understanding of symbolism and identity in the Bakar Batu tradition, as well as uncover nuances of differences and similarities between practices in Manokwari's mountain and coastal communities. This approach is expected to contribute significantly to anthropology's understanding of the dynamics of traditions in the context of diverse geographies and cultures in Papua.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of Stone Burning Practices

The results showed significant differences in the practice of stone burning between mountainous (Dani) and coastal (Doreri) communities in Manokwari, Papua. These differences reflect adaptations to the natural and social environment of each community.

Mountain Community (Dani Tribe)

In mountainous areas, the Bakar Batu ritual is conducted on a larger scale and for a longer duration. Observations show that ritual preparation can last up to several days, involving all members of the tribe. A Dani traditional leader, Pak Wenda (55 years old), explains:

‘Bakar Batu for us is not just about cooking. It is an important moment when the whole tribe gathers. We use large stones from the mountain and make a deep hole in the ground. The process can take days.’

The statement reveals that the tradition of Bakar Batu is not only a culinary function, but more than that, it is a social ritual that strengthens communal bonds. The time-consuming process and use of natural elements reflect the deep connection between the community, the environment, and their cultural heritage. The use of large stones and larger fires reflects the abundant availability of natural resources in mountainous areas. Cooked food generally consists of pork, root vegetables, and local vegetables.

Coastal Community (Doreri Tribe)

In coastal areas, the practice of Bakar Batu tends to be simpler and shorter. Ibu Mariana (48 years old), a community leader of the Doreri Tribe, explains:

‘We usually do Bakar Batu within one day. The hole we dig is not too deep because of the condition of the coastal land. We often use fish and other marine products.’

This statement illustrates the adaptation of the Bakar Batu tradition in coastal communities. The shorter duration, adjustment of digging techniques, and use of seafood reflect the influence of the coastal environment on ritual practices. This shows the flexibility of the tradition in adapting to geographical conditions and locally available resources. Observations show that coastal communities use smaller stones and shallower pits, adapting

to coastal soil conditions. The variety of food grilled uses more seafood than pork, which is prevalent inland.

Symbolism of the Burning Stone Tradition

Analysis of the interviews and FGDs revealed significant differences in the symbolic meanings of Bakar Batu between the two communities.

Mountain Community (Dani Tribe)

In the mountains, Bakar Batu has a stronger spiritual meaning, closely linked to honoring ancestors and the power of nature. Pak Kogoya (62 years old), a spiritual leader of the Dani Tribe, explains:

‘Every stone we use represents our ancestors. The fire that burns the stone is a symbol of the power of nature that brings us life. When the food is cooked, it is like a blessing from the ancestors and nature to us.’

This statement reveals the deep spiritual dimension of the Bakar Batu tradition. The symbolism of stones as a representation of ancestors and fire as a force of nature shows the integration of animistic beliefs in the ritual. The cooking process is seen as a sacred transformation, emphasizing the close connection between the community, nature, and the spiritual world of their ancestors. The ritual is also considered a way to strengthen social bonds within the tribe. Observations show that during the process of Bakar Batu, tribe members share tasks and interact intensively, strengthening the sense of community.

Coastal Community (Doreri Tribe)

In coastal communities, the symbolic meaning of Bakar Batu is more related to the community's relationship with the sea and gratitude for the catch. Mr Rumasoreng (53 years old), a fisherman and community leader of the Doreri Tribe, stated:

‘Bakar Batu for us is a way to thank the sea. The fish and shellfish we cook are gifts from the sea. By sharing this food, we hope the sea will continue to provide us with sustenance.’

This statement reflects the reciprocal relationship between coastal communities and their maritime environment. Bakar Batu functions as a ritual of gratitude and reciprocity with the sea. The practice of sharing food demonstrates communal values and the belief that the sustainability of marine resources depends on a harmonious relationship between humans

and nature. The ritual also symbolizes togetherness and mutual aid in coastal communities, especially among fishing families.

Contribution of the Burning Stone Tradition to Cultural Identity

Despite differences in practice and symbolic meaning, stone burning remains an important element in the formation and preservation of cultural identity in both communities.

Mountain Community (Dani Tribe)

In the mountains, Bakar Batu reinforces an identity rooted in ancestral heritage and a connection with mountain nature. Mrs Wenda (45 years old), a teacher at the local school, explains:

‘Through Bakar Batu, our young people learn about tribal values, our way of life in the mountains, and our relationship with nature. This makes them proud to be part of the Dani Tribe.’

This statement illustrates Bakar Batu as an intergenerational cultural transmission mechanism in the Dani community. The ritual serves as a means of informal education, instilling traditional values, environmental ethics, and cultural identity. This process strengthens the younger generation's sense of pride and attachment to their cultural heritage, ensuring the sustainability of tribal traditions and identity.

Coastal Community (Doreri Tribe)

On the coast, Bakar Batu symbolizes maritime identity and the community's adaptation to life by the sea. Pak Mandacan (58 years old), a village head in the coastal area, states:

‘Bakar Batu reminds us that we are coastal people. The way we cook, the type of food we use, all reflect our relationship with the sea.’

This statement emphasizes the role of Bakar Batu as a marker of cultural identity for coastal communities. The ritual is an explicit reflection of the intimate relationship between the community and its maritime environment. The adaptation of cooking techniques and choice of food ingredients in this tradition is not only a practical representation, but also a symbolic one, which reinforces and celebrates their coastal identity. This shows how cultural practices can be an important means of maintaining and expressing a community's collective identity.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have several theoretical and practical implications:

Cultural Adaptation Theory: The research results strengthen the theory of cultural adaptation by showing how ritual practices can retain their symbolic essence while adapting to different environmental contexts.

Cultural Identity Dynamics: The research expands the understanding of how cultural identities are formed and maintained through ritual practices, even when those practices undergo adaptation.

Cultural Preservation: The findings can serve as a basis for developing cultural preservation strategies that are more sensitive to local variations, ensuring that preservation efforts honor the uniqueness of each community.

Tourism Development: An understanding of variations in the practice of stone burning can assist in designing more authentic and diverse cultural tourism experiences.

Conflict Resolution: Given the role of Bakar Batu in strengthening social ties, the practice could potentially be used as a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution between communities.

CONCLUSION

This research revealed significant variations in the Bakar Batu tradition between mountainous (Dani Tribe) and coastal (Doreri Tribe) communities in Manokwari, Papua. These differences are reflected in its practices, symbolic meanings, and contributions to cultural identity, which are influenced by differences in natural and social environments. The results show that the practice of Burning Stones in the mountains tends to be more complex and large-scale, while in the coastal areas, it is simpler and shorter. Symbolic meanings in the mountains are more related to spirituality and honoring ancestors, while those in the coastal areas focus more on the relationship with the sea and gratitude for the catch. Despite the differences, Bakar Batu remains an important element in the formation and preservation of cultural identity in both communities.

This research makes a significant contribution to the strengthening of cultural adaptation theory and broadens the understanding of the dynamics of cultural identity in the

context of geographical and ecological variations. The findings also have practical implications for the development of cultural preservation and tourism strategies that are more responsive to local diversity. However, it should be acknowledged that this study has several limitations, including the focus on two specific communities which limits the generalizability of the findings, as well as the time constraints of the study which may have affected the depth of analysis of changing traditions over time.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct a broader comparative study, involving more communities in Papua to get a more comprehensive picture of variations in the Bakar Batu tradition. In addition, a longitudinal study to observe changes in the practice and meaning of Bakar Batu over time, especially in the context of modernization and globalization, is also recommended. Further investigation into the potential of the Bakar Batu tradition as a tool for conflict resolution and the building of social cohesion between communities may also provide valuable insights.

Overall, this research confirms that the Bakar Batu tradition is not simply a culinary practice, but rather a complex reflection of Papuan identity, spirituality, and social cohesion. The findings emphasize the importance of approaches that are sensitive to local diversity in cultural preservation and development efforts. As such, this research not only contributes to the academic understanding of cultural adaptation and identity but also highlights the importance of maintaining the richness of local traditions in the face of ongoing social and environmental change.

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