

**MAPPING THE PROCESS OF COMMODIFICATION OF THE TRADITION OF THE  
MBAI HOTE MBAI ETHNIC SENTANI PAPUA**

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**Abstract**

This study aims to describe the mapping of the commodification process of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition in Kampung Abar within the Sentani ethnic group. The study uses the conceptual framework developed by Russell Keat, which divides the mapping of the commodification process into three parts: production, distribution and marketing, and consumption. The method used in this research is qualitative. The results of this study, using a qualitative approach, explain that the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is adapted to better suit market needs and is mass-produced to meet consumer demand. The *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is promoted and sold through various marketing channels. This may involve re-packaging the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition to attract global consumers, such as turning traditional festivals into tourist attractions. The *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is distributed to a broader market, both locally and internationally. Information and communication technology often plays an important role in expanding distribution reach. Consumers purchase and use the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition. At this stage, economic value begins to replace intrinsic value, and the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition starts to be viewed as a commercial commodity.

Keywords: Commodification process, *helai mbai hote mbai*, Sentani ethnic group.

## BACKGROUND

*Helai mbai hote mbai* is an important and complex cultural practice in the life of the Kampung Abar community of the Sentani ethnic group. *Helai mbai hote mbai* (the tradition of eating sago together) has become an inseparable part of the culture of the Sentani and Papua people. Papeda has become a marker of identity, territorial boundaries, and also plays a role in rituals and customs. Papeda is always present and holds a key role in every ritual of festivals held by the lowland tribes that traditionally consume it (Arif, 2019).

Clifford Geertz views cultural practices as interpretations of cultural behavior symbols. The concept of symbols is seen as a means to carry meaning that underpins individual actions, communication, relationships, events, and so on. Geertz materialized the symbol system in religious rituals, where one can understand the beliefs, ideas, and sacred thoughts that are deeply ingrained and persist in an individual. This explains that symbols can evoke moral feelings about how the world outside the individual is perceived, and through these feelings, it can influence how they behave (Geertz, 1973).

*Helai mbai hote mbai* is understood by the Sentani people as a form of tradition rich in symbols that reflect the beliefs and sacred values of the Kampung Abar community. Through *helai mbai hote mbai*, the community strives to maintain harmonious relationships with one another and seek solutions to various life problems. The symbols within *the helai mbai hote mbai* tradition contain deep meanings that influence how the community interacts with one another. This aligns with Geertz's view that cultural symbols function as vehicles that carry meaning and shape individual actions within their social and religious contexts.

This study aims to identify the commodification process of *the helai mbai hote mbai* tradition. This process will be

analyzed by considering the factors that trigger commodification, as well as the forms of commodification that occur. With a deep understanding of this process, it is hoped that this research can provide a clear picture of the cultural dynamics in the Sentani community. The use of Russell Keat's commodification theory also becomes a focus in this analysis. This theory will help in understanding how cultural values can be transformed into commodities and how this process affects the community.

The market boundaries and the commodification of culture theory proposed by Russell Keat (1999) provide deep insights into how cultural elements can be adapted and produced to meet market needs. In this context, production and adjustment become crucial aspects, where cultural elements that were originally local and traditional, such as the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, begin to undergo transformation to meet the growing consumer demand. This process not only involves physical changes in the product but also changes in the meaning and value of the culture itself.

For example, the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, which is part of a specific cultural heritage, is typically crafted with great care and contains profound spiritual and aesthetic values. However, when this tradition is mass-produced, these aspects are often reduced. For instance, in mass production, the crafting process that originally involved hand skills and long hours is now replaced by machines and more efficient production methods. This can result in the loss of authenticity and uniqueness of the product, which in turn can affect how people perceive and value the culture.

On the other hand, the cultural adjustment to meet market needs can also be seen from a positive perspective. For example, when cultural elements are adapted for a wider market, it can bring greater awareness and appreciation for that culture. With the increasing demand for products

inspired by the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, a broader audience can come to recognize and value the beauty and the values contained within the culture. In this case, cultural commodification is not just an economic process, but can also serve as a bridge between local and global cultures.

Marketing and distribution in the context of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is an interesting phenomenon to analyze, especially when we consider how these cultural elements are adapted and promoted in an increasingly connected global world. This tradition, rich in local values and symbolism, not only becomes part of cultural identity but also functions as a commodity that can attract the attention of consumers across various parts of the world. In this discussion, we will explore the various aspects of marketing and distribution of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, as well as its impact on both local and global cultures.

One of the main ways to promote the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is through the re-packaging of existing cultural elements. This re-packaging often involves adapting traditional elements to make them more appealing to a global audience. For example, traditional festivals that feature *helai mbai hote mbai* can be transformed into broader tourist attractions. In this context, festival organizers might incorporate modern elements, such as contemporary music performances or interactive activities for visitors. Thus, the festival not only serves as a venue to celebrate tradition but also becomes an effective marketing platform to attract tourists.

The distribution process plays a crucial role in ensuring that the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is not limited to the local market. With advancements in information and communication technology, the dissemination of this cultural element can reach international markets.

Russell Keat (1999) provides profound insights into how economic values can

influence how consumers perceive and consume cultural products. In the context of consumption, consumers do not merely buy and use cultural products, such as the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, but also change their perception of the values embedded within them. This tradition, part of local cultural heritage, is often regarded as a symbol of identity and uniqueness. However, during the commodification process, the intrinsic value associated with the tradition begins to be overshadowed by the more dominant economic value. For instance, *helai mbai hote mbai*, once used in traditional ceremonies or private family spaces, is now sold as a consumer item at festivals, where price and demand become the primary factors determining its value.

In this commodification process, it can be observed how cultural products are transformed into commercial goods that can be traded. This is not merely a shift in values but also creates a new dynamic in the interaction between culture and the market. For example, when *helai mbai hote mbai* is sold to tourists, efforts are often made to package the tradition in a way that is more appealing and suited to market preferences.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This research is qualitative in nature, aiming to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, motivation, actions, and others, in a comprehensive manner through descriptive explanations using words and language in a simpler context. Sugiyono (2012) states that qualitative methods are based on post-positivist philosophy, used to study natural object conditions, where the researcher acts as a key instrument. Techniques involve triangulation, qualitative data analysis, and research results that emphasize meaning rather than generalization. The research is conducted directly in the field, observing cultural processes to obtain valid data. This approach aims to achieve accurate and accountable results.

The qualitative approach involves observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. Observation is intended to experience and then understand knowledge of a phenomenon based on prior understanding and ideas.

According to Kampersal (2017), interviews are conducted because researchers aim to gather new information directly from informants. In-depth interviews, referred to as qualitative interviews by Neuman (2000), consist of three different types of interviews as part of research instruments:

- a) Structured interviews: These use a complete research instrument with predefined answer choices for the informants.
- b) Semi-structured interviews: These include a set of key questions or guiding questions for the interview, but the questions are open-ended, allowing informants flexibility in their responses.
- c) Unstructured interviews: These provide informants with the freedom to respond and share information related to the issue or phenomenon being studied.

The methods and techniques for data collection are supported by relevant instruments, such as interview guidelines, recording devices, cameras, and note-taking tools. However, the most crucial instrument in this research is the researcher themselves, equipped with the primary tool of understanding (Ratna, 2021). The informants interviewed include *ondofolo*, tribal leaders, traditional figures in Abar Village of the Sentani ethnic group, and other relevant parties.

Documentation serves as evidence of data collection in research. According to Danandjaja (2002), data collection or inventory can be conducted in two ways: (1) gathering all the titles of writings (books and articles) previously authored on Sentani folklore; and (2) collecting folklore materials directly from the spoken words of group

members who possess the folklore, with the results then published or archived.

The data produced is broader, and the context obtained will be highly diverse (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). The research data in this study consist of direct observations of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition performed by the people of Abar Village, Ebungfau District, Jayapura Regency, Papua Province. The data sources are informants involved in the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition.

## **RESULT**

The mapping of the commodification process of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition in this research is examined from the perspectives of production, distribution, and consumption. To gain an understanding related to these aspects, the analysis uses the commodification theory.

In relation to this study, it is necessary to first explain the term "process," which refers to a sequence of changes or events in the development of something. According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (2018), "process" means a sequence of changes (events) in the development of something, a series of actions, manufacturing, or processing that results in a product. The product development referred to here is the commodification of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition into a commercial product.

Based on the explanation above, the process described in this chapter refers to a series of actions, manufacturing, or processing that produces a product related to the sequence leading to the commodification of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, including its production process, the variant forms produced by practitioners, and the marketing of the products to consumers of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition.

### **Factors Driving the Commodification of the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Tradition**

Several factors contribute to the commodification of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition in Abar Village, Ebungfau District, Jayapura Regency. These include openness,

community creativity, and economic considerations.

### **Openness**

The openness referred to in this research is the transformation of values originating from outside the local cultural context of the Sentani ethnic group, occurring through cultural contact (acculturation) with other cultures. Clearly, the desired change is progress. In this context, sociologists mention four factors driving social change: the natural environment, population changes, isolation and social contact, and the structure of a culture.

The changes occurring in the Sentani community stem from their openness to various forms of adaptation, enabling them to coexist with modern society. These adaptations are part of a long process where new and evolving ideologies in the current era of globalization permeate local culture, influencing the community's mindset to engage in actions that yield practical value. Every society undergoes transformation, meaning no society remains identical over time, whether it is a traditional or modern society (Garna, 1992). This is reflected in the statement of Marthen (43 years old), as follows.

"The transformation of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition into a festival cannot be separated from cultural acculturation and the desire of the Sentani people to develop *helai mbai hote mbai* as a performance. It is no longer viewed solely as a sacred tradition but can also be presented as a cultural show, turning it into an activity of value. This is also an act of cultural preservation and a platform to promote Sentani culture to a wider audience, enabling it to stand on par with cultural attractions from other regions." (Interview, June 7, 2024).

The statement above indicates that the shift of the sacred *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition toward a more secular form is inseparable from cultural acculturation and the desire of the Sentani cultural community

to align themselves with other cultures. This change is carried out with rational awareness to achieve the aspirations of the Sentani ethnic community.

With these rational actions, the community engages in various efforts to meet their needs, including producing, consuming, and distributing goods or services derived from the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition for various purposes. Such practices create the potential for commodification within the culture. Commodification is not solely driven by economic actors; local communities also have the potential, as they possess the right to engage in it (Ardika, 2008).

### **Community Creativity**

Creativity is the ability to create something new (Ratna, 2005). Creativity can be developed through modification or by altering and adding to what already exists. In this research, community creativity refers to the ability of the Sentani ethnic community to create something new by modifying or adding to the structure or form of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, transforming it into an artistic performance that appeals to consumers, with the hope of gaining profit.

Creativity or creative thinking is often equated with innovative thinking, one of the intellectual abilities of humans, which many cognitive psychologists associate with the thinking process, problem-solving skills, and efforts to discover or create new and useful ideas or things (Suharnan, 2005). The emergence of creativity has driven the development of Sentani ethnic culture, particularly the advancement of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition. The development of this tradition through the exploration of its rituals fosters cultural understanding, awareness, self-confidence, and cultural consciousness.

In psychological terms, something is considered new or original if the idea or creation feels novel to the thinker, even if something similar exists elsewhere without the thinker's knowledge. From a cultural

perspective, creativity is deemed new or original if it has never existed within the cultural environment of the community, even if similar creations unknowingly exist elsewhere. New creativity can also develop from modification or alteration, adding to what previously existed. Ideally, creative outcomes from modification should meet one or both criteria: novelty and usefulness (Suharman, 2005).

The commodification of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition in its development is inseparable from human creativity (of the Sentani people) in fulfilling their needs. This creativity is reflected in the thoughts of the Sentani community from past to present, culminating in its expression as a festival. As Cornelis (74 years old) stated:

"The current appearance of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition is different from the past, thanks to the creativity of the Sentani people and their desire to present something more beautiful by incorporating new elements for artistic fulfillment. The distinct presentation attracts viewers while still retaining Sentani cultural elements." (Interview, June 6, 2024).

The statement above indicates that in practicing traditions, expression and creativity are integral aspects for the Sentani people to create something more, aiming to achieve higher aesthetic value. However, freedom of expression and creativity must also contain a level of subconscious value within the spirit of Sentani culture. As Alberth (65 years old) explained:

"When the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition was presented at the festival, we slightly modified the traditional menu, adapting it with flavors that suit modern tastes. This combination brought a fresh touch to the *helai mbai hote mbai* festival. Without these changes, the food might seem less appealing, as traditional dishes in the past were not very flavorful." (Interview, September 30, 2024)

The above statement clearly shows that indigenous communities are capable of creating diverse culinary flavors. However, the originality and philosophy of the tradition must remain alive to preserve its authentic essence. Over time, the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition has undergone changes in form and meaning as a result of the global influence of consumer preferences. This trend has led to a uniformity in traditional artistic forms, inspiring new ideas and initiatives to meet emerging needs. The traditional art of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition among the Sentani ethnic group appears to have evolved in terms of form, function, and meaning, influenced by artists with high creative potential. Various creative ideas have emerged through collaboration between the Sentani indigenous community and traditional healers, who are the custodians of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, to introduce new elements in presentation that appeal to consumers.

#### **Economy**

One manifestation of globalization is capitalism, which places a strong emphasis on the economy. The discourse on globalization contributes to new complexities in cultural changes that are multidimensionally interconnected with the economy, technology, politics, and identity (Barker, 2005). The influence of global cultural flows has led to the practice of cultural capitalism, where cultural forms follow market ideologies. Initially, the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition was not a cultural product created with commercial intentions.

Globalization's impact on human life inevitably steers people's thinking toward capitalism, where leveraging and empowering traditional and ancestral cultural strengths can elevate and improve the economic status of local communities. Specifically, among the Sentani ethnic group, artists and traditional healers involved in the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition have turned rituals into commodities that can enhance their family's

economic well-being. By harnessing creative ideas with a high artistic spirit, many aspects of tradition can be utilized for economic benefit.

The economic impact of globalization has drawn people into a new realm of social interaction never previously imagined. Today's global communication models have transformed people's character, lifestyle, and behavior, making them more critical and sensitive. This condition demands increased competition in every sector with minimal costs. Therefore, strategies are needed to promote the development of a creative economy.

Artistic creativity stems from human ideas and thoughts. It is built upon creative ideas, talent, and skills that must be nurtured and developed. However, this does not mean that humans (Indonesians) have absolute freedom to express creativity as they wish. Creativity must adhere to rules, values, and responsibilities. The results of creativity will be encountered and enjoyed by society, which has its own set of values, rules, and responsibilities toward its environment, culture, and nation.

The *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, which has become profane in cultural festivals in Jayapura Regency, Papua Province, cannot be separated from the influence of economic globalization. Eliade (1957) stated that human experiences in the world are divided into two main categories: the sacred and the profane. The sacred refers to the transcendent, divine, and spiritually significant, while the profane pertains to ordinary, mundane aspects of life without spiritual meaning. It appears that Sentani society's mindset has been influenced by capitalist ideas, seeking to maximize profits through the use of local culture.

With increasing consumer demand related to traditional arts, the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition has strengthened its presence. Commodification of this tradition involves changes aimed at giving it economic value,

prompting the development of new management strategies for production, service delivery, and market adaptation. This commodification process has gained traction due to economic needs. Community leaders, such as the *ondofolo* and tribal chiefs, have begun to engage with the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition as an activity that can improve welfare. Consequently, the Sentani community has started packaging and redesigning elements of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition to serve as marketable commodities.

Naftali (64 years old), who was originally only a tribal chief, now also serves as a cultural practitioner. Initially, when organizing a *papeda* communal meal, he started with a modest capital of IDR 4,000,000, intended solely for the residents of Abar Village. News of the communal meal event spread to neighboring villages, attracting public interest. What began as a simple communal *papeda* meal evolved into the *helai mbai hote mbai* festival (interview, June 6, 2024).

In the commodification of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, a division of labor and a profit-sharing system have already been established. This division of labor and profit-sharing system has also influenced the work patterns of its members. For example, the *papeda* makers and pottery artisans featured in the *helai mbai hote mbai* festival show great enthusiasm because of the substantial profits they earn. According to Piliang (2010), commodification is characterized by a division of labor in the process of producing a commodity. A commodity is anything produced and exchanged for something else, usually money, to gain profit or added value.

Economic factors have become a driving force behind the commercialization of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition, leading to both support and opposition within its cultural community. However, given the strong influence of economic motivations among the local people, the commodification of the *helai*

*mbai hote mbai* tradition has grown stronger. This sentiment was expressed by Cornelis (74 years old):

“Because of tourism, the economy in Abar Village has progressed, especially with the arrival of visitors to our village. We frequently hold communal papeda-eating festivals, which allows food vendors and craft artisans to sell their goods, and they are purchased by those who come” (interview, June 6, 2024).

In reality, the presence of tourism in Jayapura Regency, particularly since the villages around Lake Sentani became tourist attractions with their unique culture, provided an opportunity that was not wasted to gain economic benefits from tourism itself. The community should recognize that the business world, including resources related to commerce, is an integral part of economic activity. Trade and money cannot be separated, as they complement one another.

#### **Production Procees**

The production of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition in this research refers to a series of activities or processes involved in creating or producing a product, whether goods or services. A product is defined as a good, object, or service which, in a capitalist society, is considered a commodity that not only possesses utility value but, more importantly, has exchange value.

The products generated in the production process of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition take the form of goods or objects, designs, and services. These represent the first variable in marketing and are deemed significant because they influence consumer satisfaction levels. Historically, the development of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition began naturally, much like other ritual practices in Jayapura Regency. The Sentani ethnic community traditionally practiced *helai mbai hote mbai* in a conventional manner as an expression of communal life and togetherness.

This research will explore the production of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition from the perspective of its transformation into a festival product.

#### **Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Festival**

The Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Festival is held annually from September 28 to 30 in Abar Village, Ebungfau District, Jayapura Regency. This three-day festival represents the commodification of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition.

The first day of the festival features activities involving the process of pottery making, which includes the creation of *helai*, *hele*, *ebe hele*, *hote*, and *mauka*. The second day focuses on the preparation of sago and the making of *papeda*. The third and final day is the highlight of the festival: a communal meal where papeda is served and shared from a single large container.

#### **First Day of the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Festival**

The Papeda Meal Festival using earthenware containers is held in Abar Village, Ebungfau District, Jayapura Regency. This festival spans three days, from September 28 to 30 each year. On the first day, visitors are invited to observe and participate in the pottery-making process. The finished pottery is prepared by local residents for the papeda feast on the final day of the festival.

The Head of the Abar Village Pottery Artisans, Naftali Felle, mentioned that preparations by the pottery makers had been ongoing for the past two months. "The spirit of the feast lies in the *sempe* (pottery)," he said.

During the opening event, an exhibition showcases handcrafted items and culinary products made from sago, including roasted sago, wrapped papeda, sago molds, and more. Visitors have the opportunity to enjoy papeda served in earthenware bowls (*helai*) and take the pottery home for free.



Images of Helai Displayed and Sold at the Festival

Source: Researcher's Documentation

Naftali stated that they received financial support of IDR 40,000,000 from the village government. Additional funding came from donors, including the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) through the Papua Department of Tourism and Culture, and the Jayapura Regency Government. During the making of *sempe* (pottery), a portion of the funds was distributed to the women involved in crafting the pottery. The community also invited all stakeholders, including government and private sectors, to participate in the festival. Families prepared their own sago for making *papeda*.

The pottery-making process in Abar Village, Sentani, Papua, is a tradition passed down through generations. The general steps include: Clay Collection; Clay is gathered from the village area and refined to remove impurities and stones, shaping; The purified clay is shaped into various forms, Drying; The shaped pottery is left to dry in the sun to strengthen its structure, Firing; The dried pottery is fired in a traditional kiln, Coloring; Unique to Abar pottery is the use of natural colors derived from red, yellow, and black clay. These organic pigments are often extracted from leaves and other natural materials, Decorating; Once dry and painted, pottery is adorned with nature-inspired motifs, including plants and animals, adding aesthetic and spiritual value (Qui, 2018).

The types of pottery showcased at the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Festival typically include *helai*, *hele*, *ebe hele*, *hote*, and *mauka*.

### Implementation of the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Festival: Day Two

The second day of the festival features activities centered around processing sago and making *papeda*. Festival visitors are invited to observe the sago-making process, beginning with the selection of sago trees ready for harvest. According to Ohee et al. (2022), the characteristics of mature sago can be identified by observing the morphological traits of the plant, categorized into three stages of ripeness: early ripeness, full ripeness, and over-ripeness.

In the early ripeness stage, young or top sago fronds become shorter, and some older fronds begin to open. Additionally, the spines on the fronds start to diminish until they disappear entirely. For certain sago types, such as *para* and *rondo*, spines are still present but sparse, while in *yepha* and *follo* sago, the fronds are clean with no spines. The spines on sago plants are located only at the base of the frond where it attaches to the trunk.



Image of Sago Tree

Source: Researcher's Documentation

Naftali (2024), a traditional leader from Abar Village, explained that the initial process of harvesting sago begins with selecting sago trees that are mature and ready for harvest, typically at 15 years of age. After selecting the appropriate tree, the next step involves clearing the trunk and surrounding area of any remaining fronds or other plants growing nearby. The sago tree is then cut down, and its bark is peeled away to reveal the fibrous core (pith) inside, which contains sago starch. The core is extracted for

processing into sago flour. The process of removing the pith is called "tokok" in the local Abar language, referring to the traditional method of separating the fibrous core from the tree trunk. During this process, a pressing station is constructed to hold the extracted pith. The fibers are placed into the pressing station, mixed with water, and kneaded to separate the sago starch from the pith.



*Image of squeezing sago pith*

*Source: Researcher's documentation*

The separated sago starch is carried by water into a prepared container and left to settle. The sedimented starch in the container is then collected to become sago flour, ready to be processed into the staple food of the local people of Kampung Abar. Naftali explained that the local wisdom in sago processing in Kampung Abar lies in the division of labor. He noted that processing sago involves tasks typically divided between men and women. Men are responsible for felling the tree and extracting the pith, while women handle the squeezing process to obtain the starch.

After the sago processing, the next step is making papeda. Visitors are invited and taught how to prepare papeda. The process is simple: mixing sago flour with hot water and stirring it until it becomes papeda. Although it seems straightforward and relatively easy, there are critical aspects that can lead to failure for those unfamiliar with making papeda. For instance, if too much water is added, the papeda becomes too watery and inedible. Conversely, if there is too little water, the mixture will be too hard. Additionally, using water that is not hot enough can also result in a failed attempt. Once cooked, papeda is typically served with

additional dishes, such as fish cooked in a turmeric-based broth known as "yellow sauce," named for its distinct yellow color from the turmeric.



*Papeda in a clay pot (helai)*

*Source: Researcher's documentation*

Papeda is served with flavorful fish broth and spices, with the distinctive tangy and spicy taste of lime enhancing its flavor. The combination of vegetables and fish perfectly complements its taste.



*Picture of Black Snakehead Fish (Kayou)*

*Source: Astuti, 2006*



*Picture of Red Snakehead Fish (Kahe)*

*Source: Astuti, 2006*

For papeda side dishes, you can use any type of fish. However, the Sentani people usually prepare papeda with black snakehead fish (kayou, *Oxyeolotris lineolatus*) and red snakehead fish (kahe, *Ophiocara aporos*) (Ohee, 2018). Likely due to their delicious taste, most Sentani people prefer these two types of fish. The flavor of papeda is influenced by the spices used to cook the fish. The Sentani people have a unique way of eating papeda: the sago that has been turned into papeda is placed in a clay container called *helai*. Meanwhile, *hote*, usually made of wood, is used to hold the cooked fish. *Hiloi*

is a three-pronged fork made of wood used to scoop the papeda.



*Hiloi image*

Source: Researcher's documentation



*Yanggalu image*

Source: Researcher's documentation

### **Implementation of the Third Day of the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Festival**

On the third day of the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Festival, the main event is the communal eating of papeda from a single container. Before the festival begins, the organizing committee constructs a venue for the communal meal. The stage serves as a platform where the event or activity takes place, deliberately built for a specific purpose. In this context, the stage is related to the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai tradition, representing the space where the festival is conducted. Traditionally, Helai Mbai Hote Mbai is held in a resident's home. Sentani ethnic houses are built on the lake's surface, designed as stilt houses made of wood and planks with roofs of palm leaves (sago leaves) or coconut leaves.

Cornelis (74 years old) explained: "For the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai tradition, there is

no permanent stage, so we build a structure without walls, with a roof made of sago leaves, 21 meters long and 7 meters wide. On both the left and right sides, platforms are made for placing *helai* (sago containers) and *hote* (fish containers)." (interview, June 6, 2024).



Image of Communal Dining Area

Source: Researcher's Documentation



*Image of Para-Para (Platform for Placing Food)*

Source: Researcher's Documentation

The statement above indicates that in the context of the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai tradition performance, the festival venue is specially designed to mimic a house or follow consumer preferences. This suggests that in the commodification process of the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai tradition, there has been an act of identity or symbol falsification. In this case, the objects presented do not align with the essence of the original Helai Mbai Hote Mbai tradition. This is a result of adapting local cultural elements into the mass cultural industry. As Piliang (2011) stated, mass culture is a category of culture created for a broad audience, which Adorno tends to view as a form of culture that produces mass or lower tastes.

The communal papeda-eating event using a single container is held on a large scale and involves many participants. Papeda and its side dishes are served in large quantities, allowing one *helai* (papeda container) and one *hote* (fish container) to be shared and enjoyed by four to six people.



*Image of Eating Papeda Together*  
*Source: Researcher's Documentation*

### **Marketing and Distribution**

Distribution in this study is an effort to distribute in the sense of introducing, promoting the tradition of *helai mbai hote mbai*, so that it can be known by the general public, including local and foreign tourists. By introducing or promoting the tradition of *helai mbai hote mbai* to the wider community, it will invite interest and desire to know more closely and even consume it.

In this study, the distribution of the tradition of *helai mbai hote mbai* is not only limited to how the tradition of *helai mbai hote mbai* can reach consumers or be enjoyed by consumers but is related to efforts on how the tradition of *helai mbai hote mbai* can be recognized by the wider community who do not see or enjoy it directly. The function of distribution, according to Yoeti (1996), is as a liaison between producers and consumers or users. In addition, in distribution, it is not only limited to distributing service/goods products to consumers but there is a distribution of ideology and power, namely marketing and promotion of the ideology behind these products (Burton, 1999). In this sense, people who consume the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition also consume the beliefs that are of

interest to people who previously consumed the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition in the sense that this is a prestige itself that is achieved. The process of distributing the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition in this study is divided into two things, namely, mass media and oral communication.

#### **Mass Media**

Mass media in this study is related to a communication container/channel that provides information widely to the public, in this case mass media is used as a means of distributing traditional *helai mbai hote mbai* products/services. Mass media is divided into two, namely electronic media and print media. Electronic media is a means of disseminating news and information to the wider public, both locally, nationally, and internationally. This is in line with the function of mass media as a broadcasting institution that is interested in the dissemination of information and business as well as efforts to influence international public opinion (Shoelhi, 2009).

In the distribution of traditional *helai mbai hote mbai* service/goods products, it can be done through advertising either via the internet, radio, newspapers, brochures, television, so that what is generally labeled the cultural industry has developed. Advertising in the mass media is no longer a complementary element of the industrialization and capitalism system but has become one of the most vital instruments. It is said so because advertising has been proven to have tremendous power to persuade consumers' desires and passions for goods or services through a series of ideological associations of the image it builds (Kebayantini, 2013).

Advertisements as an intermediary media are quite effective in being consumed by the public, especially the cultural products of the *helai mbai hote mbai* tradition. So far, only in tourism advertisements carried out by the Jayapura Regency Tourism Office on television and the internet to provide

information on tourism services and to socialize the cultural potential owned by Jayapura Regency so that the public understands and participates in consuming, preserving and developing local cultural products. As stated by Andreas (38) as follows.

"For now, what I know is that the helai mbai hote mbai tradition has been known to the wider community. At that time I saw the Jayapura tourism advertisement on social media and the internet so that we were also proud and even wanted to do more to preserve and develop Sentani culture, especially the helai mbai hote mbai tradition" (interview September 28, 2023).

Andreas' statement illustrates that the role of advertising carried out by the government and observers of tradition is very helpful in efforts to preserve and provide information as well as introduce Sentani culture to the wider community, which ultimately makes people or tourists want and are interested in seeing Sentani culture in Jayapura Regency. The statement is as in the picture below.



*Promotional Image of Helai Mbai Hote Mbai Festival via internet*  
source: *Tribun-Papua.com*

The image above shows that the tradition of helai mbai hote mbai in its distribution uses the internet media in advertising it. The internet is used as a tool to support the marketing of Sentani ethnic

cultural products so that the wider community can recognize and of course there is a desire to get to know the tradition of helai mbai hote mbai more closely. Advertising is part of communication techniques. Advertising not only uses language as a tool, but also other communication tools such as images with moving images (motion pictures), colors and sounds that have an overall blend will produce effective advertising communication (Mulyana, 2007).

Advertisements design various signs that contain meaning so that people are willing and want to consume signs through the media. In line with what Piliang (2003) said that in the post-industrial era the media is involved in influencing the meaning contained in art objects through the communication process. The media is even referred to as part of the power that determines the production-consumption process of aesthetic objects. Art objects that are part of material culture that are produced and consumed are then used as tools to convey the meanings and social interests behind them.

Media, especially electronic media, cannot be separated from the interests behind the media. In the development of modern media, there is one main interest behind the media, namely economic interest. Advertisements have been proven to have tremendous power to persuade consumer desire for products through a series of image ideologies that they build. In line with Kasiyan (in Kebayantini, 2010)

Advertisements are understood as activities to convey visual messages to the audience with the intention of informing or influencing them to buy products and services that are reproduced. Advertisements are designed as a message delivery to persuade certain audiences to accept product offers by spending money.

Television advertisements are attractive to consumers because of their

advantage of presenting audio and visuals simultaneously. Television as an advertising medium is one of the easiest media to promote products and services to the public. In advertisements, there are many signs that must be interpreted in the process so that the signs have meanings that are easily understood by the public. In this case, the commodification of the tradition of helai mbai hote mbai is packaged in advertisements full of signs in promoting it.

Advertisements as a process of exchanging signs and meanings are a system of signs organized according to codes that reflect certain values, attitudes and also certain beliefs. Each message in an advertisement has two levels of meaning that are stated explicitly on the surface and the meaning that is implicitly stated behind the surface of the advertisement. Thus, semiotics becomes an appropriate method to find out the construction of meaning that occurs in advertisements by emphasizing the role of the sign system with the construction of reality, so that through semiotics the ideologies behind advertisements can be dismantled.

Advertisement in its development in the post-modernism era is not just a light announcement, dissemination of information, and promotion of goods and services but advertisement is used as a business organization for capitalists. In any country, the presence and role of advertisement has dominated all layers of communication in the mass media so that both cannot live without advertisement. By controlling the media and engineering the image through advertisement, someone who is close to the mass media will be able to easily enter the market.

Through advertisement through the mass media, the capitalist power will easily introduce the products of goods/services they produce to the market, depicting a promise or advantage of a good/service that is often contrary to reality but this is where

the power of advertisement actually lies. In accordance with Kasiyan's opinion (in Suyanto, 2013) advertisements not only present a function (use value), but also emphasize the promise of value.

In addition to the mass media used in the distribution of the tradition of helai mbai hote mbai, print media is also used which prioritizes visual messages, and generally this media is in the form of sheets of paper with a number of words, pictures, or photos of interesting parts of the product. This type of print media is mainly in the form of newspapers, brochures, and leaflets as in the following picture.



*Festival brochure image*

Source: Kampung Abar Office 2019



*Brochure image in the distribution of the tradition of helai mbai hote mbai*

Source instagram

[.com/info\\_sentani/p/Cx2jmkYvJeQ/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/info_sentani/p/Cx2jmkYvJeQ/?img_index=1)

Media as a discourse cannot actually be separated from the interrelationship between the language used in it, the knowledge that underlies it, and the forms of interests that operate behind it. In other words, media cannot be separated from the ideology that forms it, which ultimately

influences the language used and the knowledge produced (Piliang, 2011).

In the context of media, simulation is the creation of a media reality that no longer refers to realities in the real world as its reference, so that it becomes a kind of second reality whose reference is itself, which is called simulacra. Simulacra appears like real reality, in fact it is an artificial reality, namely reality created through simulation technology, so that at a certain level this media reality is believed to be more real than real reality (Piliang, 2011).

The tradition of helai mbai hote mbai as a cultural product is promoted through print mass media. This clarifies that on the other hand the influence of modernization has a positive impact on the continuity and development of local culture that is increasingly marginalized or threatened with extinction. This kind of media promotion is quite effective to use considering that humans have limitations in promoting it. This is in accordance with Piliang's opinion (2011) that art objects in modern and postmodern culture are from material culture. Art products are not only produced, consumed but also distributed through the media, especially in the form of advertisements or newspapers.

If through mass media the tradition of helai mbai hote mbai is able to become an art product besides having a selling value, it can also be a fortress for maintaining a tradition that is almost extinct, through documentation, hopefully the younger generation who continue the tradition, especially the Sentani community, are able to inherit and understand the values that have been built by their ancestors. This is where the parts of the relationship between traditional culture and modern culture synergize, complement each other and need each other. Local traditions can be developed into the scope of modern culture with various creativity in producing, designing or developing them so that they can become a

source of value both economically and in preserving culture in the context of the globalization era.

#### **Oral Communication**

Oral or verbal communication or also called "the word of mouth" expressed by Kasiyan (in Kebayantini, 2010) is one way to help smooth buying and selling in a society that is still very simple. However, until now this method has apparently survived and is still often used both intentionally and unintentionally. Oral communication is still quite effective as a way of conveying or informing the tradition of helai mbai hote mbai that is produced so that it is known by the public in general. Oral communication can occur intentionally or unintentionally and can occur between producers and members of the community or between members of the community.

In relation to the distribution of the helai mbai hote mbai tradition, the usual steps taken by producers or consumers are by meeting directly and each doing various ways so that the desires of both parties are mutually beneficial. Usually, the producers previously conducted verbal socialization with the Sentani community themselves about the values and functions of the helai mbai hote mbai tradition. The Sentani community who understand the benefits and importance of the helai mbai hote mbai tradition do the same to other people, relatives, family or wherever they are with the intention that Sentani culture is known to many people and understands the essence of the helai mbai hote mbai tradition itself. This information is obtained by word of mouth so that curiosity about its truth makes people want to see and even consume the helai mbai hote mbai tradition for various purposes. As expressed by Romi (26 years old) as follows.

I am Amber (not Sentani) who found out about the Helai Mbai Hote Mbai festival from friends close to home. They said that in Abar Village there was a papeda eating event and a pottery exhibition that we could visit. I

was curious so I tried to come to the village with my friends. It turned out that the festival was very lively and we could eat for free and take home pottery for free too (interview, September 30, 2023)

The expression illustrates that oral communication conducted by word of mouth has a major influence on the dissemination of information to the community. Through oral communication conducted by the shaman to the patient, it provides a new understanding of the values of the helai mbai hote mbai tradition. Consumers who understand and feel it is important to be known by many people will then conduct oral communication to other consumers.

### **Consumption**

The essence of consumption is not only an object of individual satisfaction and pleasure, but the entire arena of everyday human life (Baudrillard, 2009). Consumption is related to individual or collective desires or desires for an object as Ritzer comments on Baudrillard's views on consumption. For Baudrillard, consumption is not just a desire to buy various commodities, a function of pleasure, an individual function, liberation of needs, self-satisfaction, wealth or consumption of objects. Consumption is in one order of meaning in one object panoply, one system, or code, sign, "one order of sign manipulation", manipulation of objects as signs, one communication system (such as language) one exchange system (such as primitive kinship) one morality, namely one ideological exchange system, production of differences, one generalization of the fashion process in a combinative way", creating isolation and individualizing, one unconscious restraint, both from the sign system and from the socio-economic-political system and one social logic.

The practice of consumption in this study means that the tradition of helai mbai hote mbai as a tourism performance. Consumption of the helai mbai hote mbai tradition is seen in how the helai mbai hote

mbai tradition is consumed by its consumers in an entertainment for tourists (foreign, domestic) who consume the helai mbai hote mbai tradition in general for the purpose of entertainment needs and to get pleasure. This change is in accordance with Piliang's opinion (Safarudin, 2010) that global capitalism has preyed on anything (meaning making anything a commodity) starting from entertainment, sports, education, information, health, to fitness, personality, starting from the body, mind, power to illusion, hallucination, and fantasy for the sake of the continuity of capital circulation, for the sake of capital inflation.



*Image of visitors from various regions of Papua enjoying papeda*

*Source: personal documentation*

Consumption during implementation is no longer intended only as an activity aimed at spending a good/service to meet needs and satisfaction directly, but also contains a certain meaning, namely the act of using symbols to mark a certain social position (Piliang, 2003) which Douglas & Isherwood (Abdullah, 2006) refer to as an identity marker. Related to this are consumers who consume the tradition of helai mbai hote mbai. The characteristics of consumers are very diverse, both in terms of their area of origin/village, education, traditional social status, and socio-economic status.



*Picture of foreign tourists enjoying papeda*  
*Source: personal documentation*

Consumerism culture is a propaganda of the capitalists. This is in line with what Adorno said that culture is also organized and controlled by the industrial administration system. Karl Marx's explanation of how capitalism builds false consciousness in consuming goods is emphasized by Fairclough (1995) that the consumption process concerns how goods are distributed and consumed. Capitalists no longer seek profit from the utility value of an item but from its exchange value.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of research conducted in the Abar Village of the Sentani ethnic group using Russell Keat's view of mapping the commodification process of the helai mbai hote mbai tradition, it has provided deep insight into the interaction between culture and economy. By understanding these aspects, we can better appreciate the complexity and dynamics that occur in society, and consider steps that can be taken to protect and maintain cultural heritage from the negative impacts of excessive commodification.

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