

Research Article

**PSEUDO IDENTITY IN CASSAVA RICE AS A TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS IDENTITY STRUGGLE AGAINST CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

The people of Cireunde Village are known as a community group that still maintains the tradition of ancestral heritage of consuming *rasi* (cassava rice) as a staple food since 1918. This consumption process imbues *rasi* with the meaning that it is part of their culture.

This study employed a qualitative approach with a semiotic method in decoding the meaning of *rasi* among the people of Cireunde indigenous village.

The purpose of this study was to find out 1) what meaning is constructed from *rasi* as their staple food 2) and what identity is built among the Cireunde indigenous people.

The results of this study show that 1) *rasi* is a form of struggle for religious identity that has been discriminated against, namely the struggle for belief in Sunda Wiwitan as their religious identity and 2) *rasi* as a group identity is a pseudo-identity of the Cireunde indigenous people who primarily exist to maintain group beliefs in their beliefs.

**Keywords:** *Cassava rice, Collective memory, Cultural food, Pseudo identity, Semiotics*

**Introduction**

Is food a product of culture or is culture a product of food? Maybe that is how our society started. Nowadays we are driven to consume all the viral foods from social media that appear as something new. We do not really need the viral food as a primary need, but because it is viral we are compelled to consume it to satisfy our self-existence.

We also know that food is a fundamental need, not only because it ensures our survival, but also because it is a form of consumption as

well as something we refuse to consume, just like fasting, which is part of a key component of our relationship with food as an aspect of our lives, and outside of our bodies food is the most intimate interface with this aspect of our lives. It affects us as a marker of power, cultural, social capital that engages visibly with class, gender, ethnicity and religion (Parasecoli, 2022; 76).

Food in essence is a product of culture, which is shaped by environment, language, gender, and so on. For example, food in Japan is

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very varied because it follows the season there. Also in Indonesia, in the past, the most consumed foods were rice and fish (Rahmat, 2016; 31). This can be ascertained because Indonesia is an archipelago.

In this study, eating cassava is a tradition of the Sunda Wiwitan indigenous people in Cireundeu village. This is different from other indigenous peoples who usually eat rice, as is the hope of the younger generation in the Cireundeu indigenous community who are the hope of the traditions that have been passed down (Utaridah, et al; 2019).

Preserving ancestral heritage, understanding the environment as part of group life and protecting local culture so as not to starve are also part of the Cireundeu indigenous community group (S Shalihah, et al; 2019). Thus, the Cireundeu indigenous community not only offers nature, art and culture, but can introduce *rasi* as part of its gastronomic cultural identity as a form of tourism education (Kartika, T. & Fajri, K.; 2019). And, of course, the development of the era that affects life cannot be separated from the decline in understanding of traditional values as customary values and identity in indigenous peoples (Masyitoh, Iim Siti & Maesaroh, Sri; 2021).

It can be concluded from the research that so far there has been a shift in the staple food of the Cireundeu indigenous people from rice to *rasi*, because of the history that shapes their memory. Then, there is an adaptation of *rasi* into processed food as part of an effort to encourage cultural tourism as an attraction, as well as a form of preservation of history.

Rice has a long history in Indonesia, including in West Java. However, this is different from the Cireundeu traditional village which has historical reasons that believe in the mandate of the ancestors to consume *rasi* (cassava rice). *Rasi* is cassava rice which is a processed product from cassava pulp whose cassava juice has

been extracted to make tapioca flour. History also tells the story of the origin of *rasi* as their staple food.

The view of the previous research believe that this study can contribute to the understanding of *rasi* in the Cireundeu indigenous community. The statements of indigenous people that the researcher has talked to uncovered what was previously concealed, a statement of contradiction from a custom and tradition of eating *rasi*. In fact, contradictory statements emerged from several people and gave rise to the same meaning of their contradictions.

They say that *rasi* is their identity, however, for them *rasi* is not everything. It is just a taste, but the power to survive is not only from *rasi*, because everything can be their staple food except rice. This leads to the question of what meaning is contained in *rasi*, and what identity is built from *rasi*.

Food contains the essence and symbolization of religion; it is a window into how humans understand the need to obey God; food practices are linked to health outcomes; and they reflect and embed social structures and worldviews (Cohen, 2020).

From the above explanation, food is not just food, but also a medium for the Cireundeu indigenous people in understanding life. Therefore, this research used semiotic method with memory theory to understand *rasi* for Cireundeu people in understanding life.

### **Cireundeu Traditional Village**

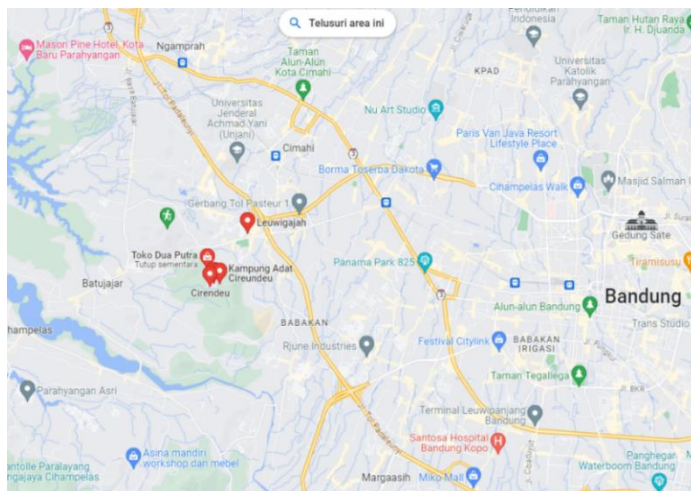
Based on data that researchers quoted from Cimahi.go.id (2023), the Cireundeu traditional village is located in Leuwigajah Subdistrict, South Cimahi Subdistrict, Cimahi City, West Java. The village is located on the border between Mount Gajah Langu and Mount Jambul to the north, Mount Puncak Salam to the east, Mount Cimenteng to the south, Pasir Panji, former landfill<sup>1</sup> and Mount Kunci to the west.

<sup>1</sup> **Authors' Note:** On February 21, 2005, there was a landslide at the Cireundeu Landfill (TPA), Leuwigajah, South Cimahi District, Cimahi City, which resulted in the death of 157 people. The 60-meter-high and 200-meter-long pile of garbage buried the scavengers in the landfill. The landslide was caused

by an explosion of garbage due to the accumulation of methane gas. The former Leuwigajah landfill has now been filled with lush grass and trees. The location of this former landfill is on the side of a cliff right in front of Mount Gajah Langu.

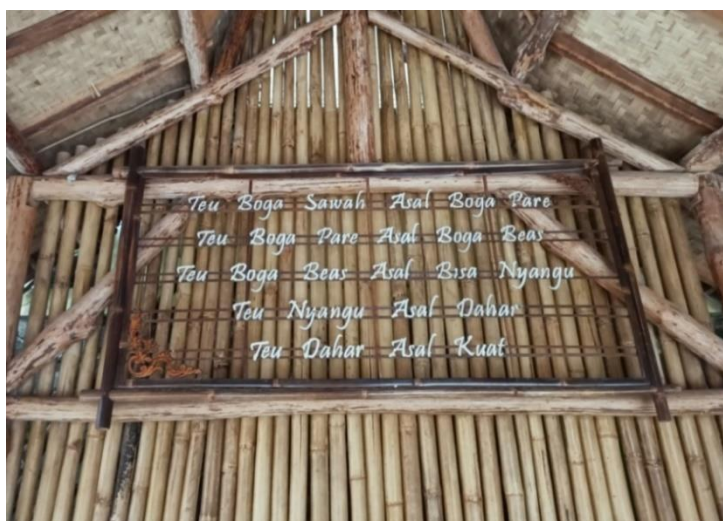
From the top of Gajah Langu Mountain, it is +/- 890 meters above sea level. Cireundeu Village is on the border between Cimahi City and West Bandung Regency, more precisely Batujajar Subdistrict. The distance from Cireundeu Village to Leuwigajah Village is +/- 3 km and from

the sub-district is 4 km and from the city or Cimahi municipality is 6 km, with flat, sloping to hilly terrain. The following is an image that the authors took from Google Earth which shows the location of the Cireundeu traditional village area.



Description: Map of Cireundeu traditional village (research location) Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/search/TPA+Cimahi+Cireundeu/>

The motto of life in the Cireundeu Traditional Village community has been displayed on a wooden carving that reads:



(Picture taken by the researchers during a prasurey on November 26, 2023)

“Teu Boga Sawah Asal Boga Pare,  
Teu Boga Pare Asal Boga Beas,  
Teu Boga Beas Asal Bisa Nyagu,  
Teu Nyagu Asal Dahar,  
Teu Dahar Asal Kuat.”

The meaning of their motto is: “You don't have rice fields but you have rice, you don't have rice but you can cook rice, you don't have rice but you eat, you don't eat but you are strong.”

The motto is essentially a summary of the history of cassava consumption that has been processed into *rasi* among the people of Cireundeu village. It is very interesting to see their tradition which are very different from the general traditions of Sundanese people, who still maintain rice as their staple food. However, the researchers see a problem that is exactly the opposite of the efforts fought by the Cireundeu indigenous village community.

In the customs of the Cireundeu community, seen from the historiographic point of view of the existence of *rasi* or cassava rice in their lives, *rasi* replaced rice so that this becomes a *pamali* or taboo for them to consume rice. Their motto is "*Nunda kersa Nyai*" or not eating rice given by Dewi Sri. In their view, rice is a worldly food given its delicious taste and aroma, which has the potential to lead to overeating.

The history of the Cireundeu traditional village community meeting began in 1918, when the Cireundeu village experienced a food crisis due to the drying up of rice fields. In addition, the Dutch also confiscated foodstuffs produced by the Cireundeu village community. Driven by the suffering of this food crisis, the leading figure of Cireundeu village at that time, Abah Haji Ali, went looking for a solution to the problem to Cigugur, Kuningan.

There, Abah Haji Ali met a figure who gave him enlightenment, which came from an advice that had long been known to the Cireundeu community. They include: "*Teu nanaon teu boga huma ge asal boga pare. Teu nanaon teu boga pare ge asal boga beas. Teu nanaon teu boga beas ge asal bisa ngejo. Teu nanaon teu bisa ngejo ge asal bisa nyatu. Teu nanaon teu bisa nyatu ge asal bisa hirup.*" It means: "It's okay not to have a field, as long as you have rice. It's okay not to have rice, as long as you have rice. It's okay not to have rice, as long as you can cook rice. It's okay not to be able to cook rice, as long as you can eat. It's okay not to eat, as long as you can survive."

The exploration and contemplation of the old advice has given strength and thought and spiritual strength to Abah Haji Ali and the Cireundeu community, that the essence of life is to be able to survive any difficult situation without depending on other parties. This

understanding builds awareness to survive in any situation even when there is no food or rice. Then Abah Haji Ali also studied agricultural land in dry hilly areas with the intention of turning rice fields into cassava gardens. This is intended so that the Cireundeu community is able to get out of the food crisis problem without relying on rice.

Abah Haji Ali hopes to get out of this food crisis for the sake of independence of the people of Cireundeu village. Freedom in this case is free from Dutch colonization and also free from food crisis and being able to produce food for their own efforts in utilizing the environment and nature as well as possible.

Abah Haji Ali gave understanding to the people of Cireundeu village not to consume rice. As an alternative, Abah Haji Ali suggested the people of Cireundeu village to switch to consuming cassava or other types of tubers. The shift to non-rice food began to bear fruit, where in 1924, Mrs. Omah Asnamah, who is a descendant of Abah Haji Ali, discovered the technique of processing cassava into *rasi* (cassava rice), which was then taught to the Cireundeu community for generations.

Looking at the early history of the emergence of *rasi* as a solution to colonization, *rasi* still survives as the staple food of the Cireundeu indigenous people. However, over time, now the Cireundeu indigenous people who still consume *rasi* consider it as their identity. Although not all indigenous people consume *rasi*, the separation of identity becomes a distinction from the early history of *rasi* as a method of survival from colonization that seized their food.

Since 1965, all Indonesian citizens are obliged to follow the state's religion at that time, namely, Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Khong Cu (Confucius). The situation cornered the Sunda Wiwitan faith into a traditional faith, and to fulfill the bureaucratic obligations of citizenship, they embraced Islam. The law is felt to this day as a form of violence against the Sunda Wiwitan religion from contemporary religions (Syafi'ie, M; 2016).

## Theoretical Framework

### Symbols and memory

This approach in the Cireundeu traditional village community sees the exchange of object values, namely at the producer level, namely the community, traditional leaders or certain elders in the Cireundeu traditional village who produce *rasi*. *Rasi* as the object of study and the “users”—the people of Cireundeu traditional

village—themselves who consume it (Gottdiener, 1985).

Gottdiener himself sees three steps in producers producing *rasi* for their value exchange, while “users” of *rasi* desire use value. Use value is embedded in cultural life, which means the system that moves the semiosis stage related to the culture formed from *rasi* in the Cireundeu traditional village community.

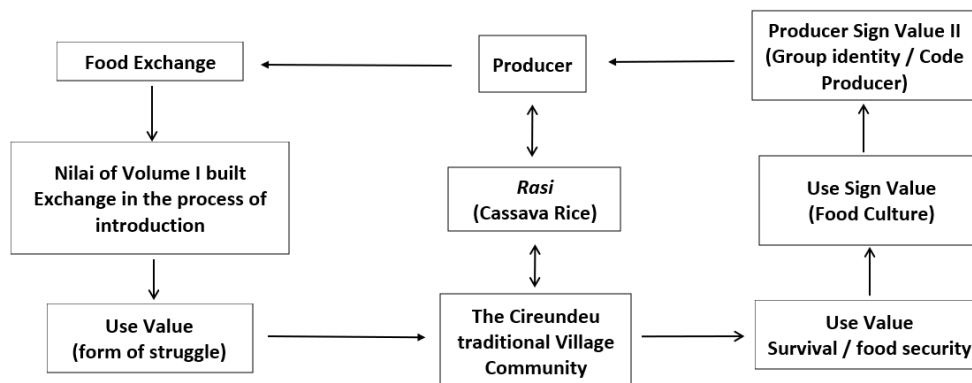


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Then the second stage involves *rasi* in the daily lives of social groups, it is used it fulfills some practical function. The use value is transacted by the user into the second stage involving the creation of culture by the user of the race. An aspect that is largely ignored in mass culture. This stage is the controlling stage associated with the ideology or mass culture of the Cireundeu indigenous village, which describes a complete model of producers, objects and relationships with users to show the circulation process and reinforce the value of transfunctionalization that is part of the culture of the Cireundeu indigenous village. This is due to the formation of meaning by the producers themselves which combines the first stage and the second stage.

Indigenous villagers have a history with colonization and cassava is an important part of it as a basic ingredient of *rasi*. Colonization is a form of suffering and is an understandable explanation for the suffering they feel, an explanation that members of their group agree with. (Halbwachs, 1952; 88-93). This in memory also allows us to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities allows us to build memory in the Cireundeu indigenous people (Assmann, Jan; 2010).

History is detached from the chronology of facts, it refers to biography rather than the space and time of history itself. The history of an event that becomes collective memory can be inaccurate, because history compiles events without regard to the location of events, and obviously this is separate from events, that is, events are considered independent of the real time in which they are located (Halbwachs, 1952; 105-106).

History greatly influences groups, not because of changing parts of that history but because of their traditions in surviving in parts of the region, province, political party class work, even family groups or with certain people. Halbwachs sees it only as conceptions and symbols (Halbwachs, 1952; 50) thus allowing this research plan to focus on symbols around *rasi* among the people of Cireundeu indigenous village.

In semiotics we try to capture the sign value of a material, everyone is a semiotician. However, we usually unconsciously try to decipher and interpret the meaning of various signs around us. Traffic signs, buildings, and so on are examples of codes, symbols and signs that we can generally find around us. Reading and interpreting (or deciphering) these signs

allows us to navigate through and understand our daily lives.

In an effort to connect the past with the present and link inevitably different spaces and generations, cultural memory takes shape locally but gradually and continuously detaches itself from the primary framework that emerges elsewhere. In analyzing cultural memory, we will be shown the dual nature of memory, overcoming the ideals of the Cireundeu indigenous village and the counterproductive dichotomous interests of memory-making as restrictions and surveillance they call “*pamali*”, which can be translated as non-coercive and subtle prohibitions that refer to the advice of “*sesepuh*” or ancestors. By utilizing cultural and interpretive semiotics, understanding semiotics as memory studies is a perspective that can be used to imagine memory making both as a movement and as a “*mise en forme*” or form of local community (Salerno, Daniele; 2021).

Therefore, we are not arguing to replace the notion of “collective memory” with “cultural memory”; for that would potentially create conflict over the existence of self within the group of the Cireundeu indigenous village. Instead, we distinguish the two forms as two *modi memorandi*, different ways of remembering individual memory in understanding the selfhood of cultural memory (Assmann, Jan; 2010).

This involves understanding memory as a system of communication as well as expression, where memory lives in transitory semiotic materializations such as texts, monuments, images, music, performances, rituals, and everyday substances (Salerno, Daniele; 2021).

### **Cultural Semiotics**

Culture can be said to be a subjective and objective element in humans who from the past have always sought to improve themselves to survive and result in satisfaction in their position in the ecology, and then spread among them so that they communicate with each other, because they have a common language and live in the same time and place (Samover, et al, 2010; 27).

Intracultural communication includes all forms of communication between members of

an ethnic group or communication between people of the same culture (Liliweri, 2002). This communication allows the Cireundeu indigenous people to understand and uphold *rasi* until now. Understanding which is a form of community group effort to hold on to *rasi*. *Rasi* is a food produced from the historical process of the Cireundeu indigenous people, thus, the semiotics of food reveals the mechanisms used by culture in an effort to build all the meanings in the food they eat (Jurado, Alfredo Tenoch Cid.; 2016).

Semiotics helps in intercultural communication by providing a framework for interpreting the various symbols and signs expressed in different cultures. It acts as a problem solver by aiding the understanding of cultural values and norms, thus promoting effective communication between different cultural groups (Menggo S, et al; 2021).

Messages between indigenous groups and non-indigenous communities provide an opportunity for this research to understand through symbols that exist within the Cireundeu indigenous village. Symbols are seen as a good method in articulating insights to convey hidden multicultural and philosophical values, norms and messages to interlocutors, including in rituals (Menggo S, et al; 2021).

### **Research Methods**

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach that focused on a variety of methods, including interpretive and naturalistic approaches to the subject of study (Denzin & Lincoln: 2009). The subject of the study was the Cireundeu indigenous community, namely indigenous community leaders and Cireundeu indigenous residents, as representatives of the indigenous village that bears the *rasi* identity.

The semiotic analysis method was developed from Gottdiener's view in 1985. In examining mass culture, this approach in the Cireundeu traditional village community sees the exchange of values on the object, namely at the producer level, namely certain people, traditional leaders or elders who produce *rasi*. *Rasi* is the object of study and the “user” or the Cireundeu traditional village community itself consumes it.

### Discussion and Findings

The beginning of the emergence of *rasi* is a form of survival where circumstances dictate the food they consume. But with the shift of time they stated that *rasi* was their identity

from the statements of several Cireundeu traditional leaders. The researchers eventually tried to conceptualize where *rasi* were going in the Cireundeu indigenous village community.

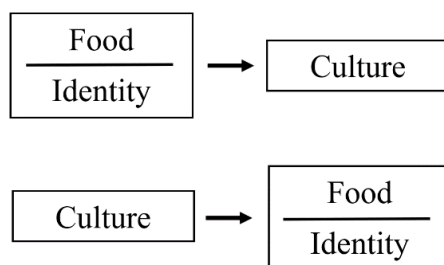


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When looking at the figure above, we wonder and consider food as identity and culture in society. Based on the indigenous people's statement about *rasi* that it is an identity, the existing culture should arise from the existence of *rasi* as an identity. The initial view of food shaping culture or culture shaping food in a sign shows the opposing values of food.

exists because it is shaped by culture. However, if culture is shaped by food, then it will lead to an interest in the use value of food which ultimately shapes the material interests of the Cireundeu indigenous people, in this case tourism will dominate the historical memory of the existence of *rasi* in the Cireundeu indigenous people.

If food is shaped by culture, this can create food diversity because food as a primitive need

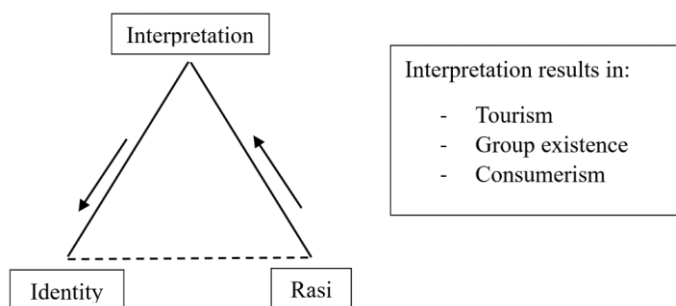


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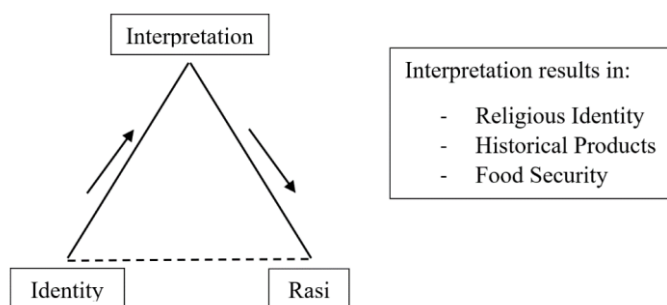


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The two-way movement of rasi values can clearly illustrate the shifts and goals of the Cireundeu community. The process of rasi becoming an identity is an identity that is formed for the sake of tourism, group existence and ultimately leads to consumerism.

However, the researchers see that this theory is not as robust as the view of the Cireundeu indigenous people, which is the process of intracultural communication in the Cireundeu indigenous people. Because communication plays a role in determining and explaining identity either personally, group or a cultural identity (Samover, 2010). Statements from some indigenous people imply that *rasi* is not the essence, but rather the advice of the ancestors, indicating a preconceived belief in *rasi*.

*"Jadi kan teu boga sawah asal boga pare, teu boga pare asal boga beas, teu boga beas asal bisa nyangu, teu bisa nyangu asal dahar asal kuat itu teh ada tambahannya lagi da kakuatan teh ti na maha kuat."* (Kang Tri, 2023)

Without power humans will not understand which is stronger between forces and the all-powerful exists on this earth. The context of strength is the concept of the true human being who is God's mandate in protecting this nature, and humans are part of God who protects and humans as God's creatures, followed by a statement:

*Da kakuatan mah ti nu maha kuat, jadi kakuatan mah da ti nunmaha kuat* (Kang Tri, 2023)

Without power, we do not understand the existence of God. The point remains to bring God's existence. They carry God within themselves, rejecting rice to maintain God's existence.

"It's personal. It's just that for Cirendeudeu people it was never about *rasi* in the first place, but about the advice like *kakurukun*. So, Cirendeudeu people see it as a slogan, "*kakuruku ampe rapih sarasa sampe hirup terus ngindung ka waktu mibapa ka jaman, teu boga sawah asal boga pare,*" Now if we put it the other way, for example, even if there is no cassava, the important thing is that we can still eat, sir. (Kang Diki, 2023)

In essence:

The statement about *rasi* as an identity is a personal statement, because for Cireundeudeu residents, it was never about *rasi* in the first place, but about ancestral advice that prioritizes the values of the meaning of food, with their slogan, "*teu boga sawah asal boga pare,*" it's okay not to have rice fields, as long as you have rice or food. So, even if you don't have cassava, it doesn't matter what food you have, as long as it gives you strength.

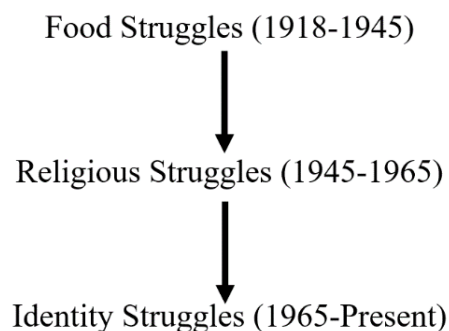


Figure: Rasi (taken by the researchers)



The pseudo-identity of *rasi* can affect the cultural memory of the Cireundeu indigenous people by influencing the form of collective identity. Perhaps it can be used as an effort to ward off things that threaten their existence, and is a guarding function of their cultural

memory. Cultural memory can play a role in the form of identity. However, the influence of pseudo-identity on cultural memory is linked to the construction of collective identity and the narratives that shape it (Assmann, J., & Czaplicka, J.; 1995).



Looking at the journey of life, the Cireundeu people refused to consume rice, and deliberately persisted in not consuming rice and instead chose *rasi*. This also deliberately shows that community groups in terms of food consumption are not necessarily homogeneous, as people have heterogeneous biographies and daily lives (Karaosmanoğlu, D; 2020). It is a form of belief in preserving ancestral beliefs in memory with a religious identity that they do not believe in.

### Findings

Examining identity with a semiotic approach can be done although it requires caution, due to the sensitivity of the identity of the objects we examine. Memory theory can at least help separate what preserves identity from the shift towards pseudo-identity. The intracultural view in looking at the Cireundeu indigenous group is an effort to show the intended value of constructing these pseudo-identity values, namely the effort to manufacture a collective memory of the eliminated identity, namely religious identity.

The religious identity they maintain is represented in their food. They abandon the much tastier rice for the unpalatable *rasi* as a staple food, in order to preserve the memory of violence against them in the past and the faith identity of the Cireundeu indigenous people.

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### Conclusions

The identity built around *rasi* is a pseudo-identity, this is because it is part of an attempt to integrate a unique relationship of beliefs, values and meanings, thus creating dependence on the group and separation from the group, which ultimately results in the separation of personal identity from the community group. *Rasi* is a historical product of the group. However, in the process of cultural communication, *rasi* is a form of identity struggle that they have not had so far, a form of religious identity that they are still fighting for, namely Sunda Wiwitan.

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