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Reading Food as Conflict: Gastrocriticism in Indonesian and English Literary Corpora

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Abstract

The dining table is often imagined as a place of intimacy, where families share stories and preserve traditions through dishes passed down across generations. Yet behind this warmth, food also becomes an arena of conflict: taste confers social recognition, culinary heritage acquires competing values, and familiar dishes awaken memories of loss. This study offers a gastrocritical reading of Dee Lestari's Filosofi Kopi, Madre, and Aroma Karsa; alongside Donia Bijan's The Last Days of Cafe Leila and Kim Fay's Love and Saffron. A qualitative comparative approach traces the relationship between gastronomic elements, plot, characterization, and space; while attending to the narrative voices and focalization through which culinary experiences are mediated. Across Lestari's works, coffee becomes a measure of expertise that can unsettle personal worth, a bread starter brings commercial interest into tension with the responsibility to care for inherited practices, and aromatic preparations connect sensory knowledge with control over the body. In Bijan's and Fay's novels, family dishes and exchanges of recipes bring characters face to face with estrangement, grief, and the need to rebuild emotional connections. These orientations overlap. Memory and affection also shape conflict in Lestari's works, just a political pressures inform the struggle to sustain culinary traditions in Cafe Leila. Narrative voice and focalization make these conflict tangible through bodily labor, recollection, and correspondence. Food thus becomes an arena where tension are provoked and negotiated, revealing how everyday culinary practices shape struggles over authority, the care of inherited traditions, and the possibility of belonging amid ongoing social change.

Keywords: *gastrocriticism; food and conflict; comparative literature; culinary heritage; narrative mediation.*

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Introduction

In the literary traditions of both English and Asian literature, including Indonesia, traces of gastronomy can be seen in the wide and diverse food-literature discourse from the medieval era to the contemporary period. In the Anglophone tradition, food-literature can be traced back to the eras of Chaucer, Milton, Romantic literature, Victorian literature, and modernism (Coghlan, 2020). From the long historical background, the representation of gastronomy in Anglophone tradition later on was shifting especially in the form of how gastronomic components were transforming into a negotiation of identity and culture. On the other context, the presence of food in Asian literature, for example, in Shih-Li Kow's *The Sum of Our Follies*, represents communal identity through Malaysian food culture (Jaafar et al., 2022). In another work, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* portrays food as a medium for emotion, memory, and the complexities of the diaspora (Biswas & Banerjee, 2024). In Indonesian literature scope, a similar tren can be found in several novels, such as *Filosofi Kopi*, *Madre*, and *Aroma Karsa*, which present food ingredients and consumption rituals not merely as background details, but as elements connected to the conflicts, identities, and legacies that shape the characters' experiential frameworks. However, gastronomy is relatively rarely positioned as the primary focus of literary analysis, because it is considered as too material-related and closely tied to the domestik sphere that can cause the aesthetic and critical significance to be easily sidelined. Yet, gastrocriticism can be a potential alternative to approach many textual nuances to read food elements and foodways (Klitzing, 2023).

Genealogically, gastrocriticism was first introduced by Tobin (2002) who simultaneously marked the initial effort to interpret food, feasting, consumption, and culinary practices as crucial elements in the production of literary meaning. This approach, later on, was developed and formulated to be more systematic by Klitzing (2023) who stated that gastrocriticism serves as a culinary lens for analyzing food and foodways within texts and evolved into an interdisciplinary critical framework for examining food, beverages, and consumption practices in literature, film, and other texts. By applying this framework, food is not understood as a decorative detail, but rather as an element capable of fulfilling narrative, symbolic, affective, and cultural functions. Furthermore, it also can be used to examine cultural, social, and psychological significance of food in literature, and demonstrates that food can function as both a symbol and a narrative device that shapes identity, memory, emotions, power relations, and cultural integration (Biswas & Banerjee, 2024). In terms of cultural memory, food memories is a concept of intangible cultural heritage brought to life through everyday foodways (Lee, 2023), including food production through cooking and food consumption, since it deals with identity, trauma, and postmemory (Strand, 2023). This justifies the importance of gastronomy to be further examined not only because of the existence of diverse kind of foods, but also due to its ability to organize meaning through narrative, consolidate memory, negotiate identity, and connect the body with cultural history.

Previous research has predominantly positioned gastronomy as a complex instrument in the formation and representation of identity, both at the personal and communal levels. In this context, food operates as a boundary marker distinguishing one culture from another, while also serving as a foundation in the formation of national identity (Alvanita et al., 2025; Fontefrancesco, 2022; Pagani, 2024). In marginal and transnational spheres, gastronomy plays a role in negotiating the evolution of diaspora identity that represents the desires and sense of belonging of immigrants, and is even used as an instrument of xenophobia to emphasize contrasts between groups (Anjali & Chaudhary, 2026; Inyabri & Olaoye, 2025; Wei, 2024). At micro level, culinary elements are synthesized as a reflection of social stratification (Khan, 2023; Wulandari & Desiningrum, 2019) and an instrument of gender equality (Rajabi, 2025).

Gastronomy also plays a crucial role as a medium for preserving collective memory, such as bridging spatial and temporal distances especially for diaspora members separated

from their homeland to remain connected to ancestral memory (Cormier, 2023) and preserves culture and religious rituals across generations (Wachidah et al., 2025; Yadav et al., 2025). Moreover, gastronomy is also utilized in the construction of large-scale historical narratives, such as the formation of heroic myths that later bring up the spirit of nation's unity (Baztán, 2021; Yao et al., 2024). Beyond that, gastronomy extends into domains involving the interplay of power, the economy, and education as a site of power (Gutiérrez, 2024; Zhu & Jin, 2025), diplomacy (Cabral et al., 2025; Cheng, 2025; Diem & Nguyen, 2025), and health literacy campaign (Permatasari et al., 2023).

According to the previous studies, it can be concluded that gastronomy plays various roles from different scope of studies. However, within the realm of literary studies, research trends generally still treat gastronomy as a static setting, narrative decoration, or merely an accessory to identity representation, such as a device of realism in framing the setting and character by placing food as supporting element to indicate certain setting and character (Cooke & Moyer, 2017) and cultural-national identity shown through culinary practices (Anantama & Suryanto, 2020). This situation indicates that there must be a new way of reading literary works, and it can be done through examining the food elements that trigger tension among characters and drives the plot, while simultaneously serving as the meaning-making way that constitutes thematic coherence within the text. Moreover, i tis insufficient to only read food and its other gastronomic components through one lense of culture or nation. Therefore, in order to gain bigger picture about the food landscape and how the gastronomy-related issues intersects among cultures, this study presents a transnational comparative approach that brings culinary narratives from the Indonesian and English literature together.

This study aims to explain how gastronomy functions as a narrative and cultural device in both corpora, how it articulates identity, memory or heritage, conflict, and the negotiation of cultural values, and how these differing orientations shape the character of gastronomic representation in Indonesian and English literature. In order to answer that, there will be three research questions; 1) How does gastronomy function within the narrative structure of the works under study; 2) How does gastronomy mediate identity, memory or heritage, conflict, and cultural negotiation; and 3) How can the differences in the orientation of gastronomic meaning between the Indonesian literary corpus and the English literary corpus be explained comparatively. This study argues that gastronomy in literature serves as a narrative and cultural medium that organizes meaning within the text through food, drink, recipes, aromas, and consumption rituals that contains various issues, such as identity construction, memory activation, revealing hidden conflicts, and value negotiation. This study will contribute to the diversifying the interpretation of gastronomy in literary works, shifting the focus beyond merely the structural function of narrative construction to a transnasional and transcultural comparative analysis through gastronomic elements.

Methodology

This study is qualitative research which employs descriptive-interpretive approach. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research data consists of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narratives, and scenes containing gastronomic elements within literary texts. This research will also utilize comparative approach to compare Indonesian and English literature within gastronomy framework. An interpretive approach is used to explain the function and meaning of gastronomic elements, rather than merely describing their occurrence. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the relationship between culinary elements, text structure, and its interpretation related to identity, memory, trauma, heritage, class, affect, and cultural hybridity.

The corpus consists of five literary works. Three novels were selected in the Indonesian literature, titled *Filosofi Kopi, Madre,* and *Aroma Karsa* by Dee Lestari. Meanwhile, there were two novels in the English literature corpus, titled *The Last Days of Cafe Leila* by Donia Bijan and *Love and Saffron* by Kim Fay. These works were selected purposively

according to two criteria. The literary works must put gastronomy as the central of the narrative which are measured by the appearance of gastronomy components in the setting, plot, characterization, or conflict, and it must be comparable in the kind of gastronomic elements that they present in the forms of food, drink, scent, and culinary practice diversity while differing in cultural and literary context.

After collection, the data were classified by the form of gastronomy presence in each text, then coded according to five parameters; narrative voice, gastronomic form, narrative function, conflict type, and thematic orientation. The coded data were grouped by work and then by corpus, so that the patterns in each text and accross texts became more visible. In order to make it easier to be identified and set as the basis of analysis, the categorization were provided in the form of table.

The data analysis were conducted in four stages. First, an intertextual analysis examined the function of gastronomy in plot, characterization, conflict, and setting within each work. The analysis of narrative structure will utilize narratological approach by Gennette (1980), especially the concept of focalization, the narrator's relation to the story, narrative levels, and duration. Second, a cultural interpretation related to the findings to frameworks on food and identity, heritage, sensory, trauma and memory were used to explain what gastronomy means in each text. Third, a comparative analysis across the corpus set the findings for each parameter in Indonesian and English novels to identify similarity, differences, and the distinctive characteristics of each. The last step was synthesizing and formulating conclusion that answer research questions.

Results and Discussion

1. The Narrative Configuration of Gastronomy in Dee Lestari's Corpus

Gastronomy in selected works of Dee Lestari operates under the question of who is observing and from which position the sensory experiences are mediated, so that the readings of coffee, bread, and aroma are never neutral. This aligns with the concept of focalization which is used as the limitation of narrative information through the experiences and knowledge of a specific subject (Niederhoff, 2011). In *Filosofi Kopi*, the internal focalization through Jody ensures that coffee appears as a world filtered by the observer-participant. His presence is not entirely at the center of the ideological struggle, but since he is a homodiegetic narrator and not as fatalistic as Ben, the reader perceives a critical distance between the ritual of brewing coffee and the myths built. In *Madre*, Tansen's position as an autodiegetic narrator transforms gastronomy into an intimate bodily experience through hunger, disgust, awe, fermentation process, and the touch of the starter dough which marks the character's entry to a heritage network that was initially strange to him. Meanwhile, *Aroma Karsa* employs shifting internal focalization with a heterodiegetic narrator to ensure that scent is not confined to a single consciousness but spreads as a regime of perception linking the body, memory, and social environment. The differing narrative positions cause gastronomic objects such as coffee, bread/starter, and aroma/herbal mixtures to function as text that regulates the reader's access to experience, affect, and value. Consequently, gastronomy within this corpus serves as a catalyst for conflict, not only as an act of consumption.

Food practices are always tied to identity, social cohesion, and claims to cultural heritage (Di Giovine & Brulotte, 2014; Quintero-Angel et al., 2019). In *Filosofi Kopi*, coffee drives a clash between obsession, prestige, and honesty. Ben's Perfecto embodies the fantasy of perfection, while Tiwus coffee peels back layers of ego, class, and authenticity. In *Madre*, the conflict centers not merely on the taste of the bread, but on Madre's status as a living heritage demanding care, debating not only its market value but also the moral legitimacy of treating heritage as a commodity. In *Aroma Karsa*, gastronomy becomes a tool for examining identity and power through herbal and traditional remedies, also sensory compositions that operate as a social language mapping class while also serving as a technology that has capability in influencing

the body and the will. Therefore, it is no longer about deliciousness, but authority over self-definition, the continuity of heritage, and control over the human body.

a. *Filosofi Kopi*: Coffee, Identity, and the Ethics of Taste

In *Filosofi Kopi*, the cafe functions as a venue for beverage transactions and a social space where identity is produced, read, and exchanged. It is designed as a communal space where people share stories, discuss, and discover themselves, while the entire concept rests on the idea that every cup of coffee reflects the drinker's character through the jargon "Temukan Diri Anda di Sini" (Find Yourself Here), which affirms that the beverage serves as an instrument for interpreting oneself and others. Within this framework, coffee functions like a cultural language that connects tastes, lifestyles, and social recognition, because what is consumed is no longer neutral since it contains symbolic codes that places individual within a specific network of meaning to be later internalized as part of self-formation both the biological with the symbolic factor (Fischler, 1988). In this novel, coffee serves as a medium for self-image construction, a marker of taste, and a creator of an affective community centered around the act of drinking.

Coffee constructs marker of identity shifts into a battleground of conflicting values when the narrative brings Ben's obsession and Jody's pragmatism together. The central conflict is reflected in the character of Ben, who pursues the meaning and perfection of coffee, while Jody focuses on profit, revenue, and business sustainability which is a dynamic that gives rise to Ben's Perfecto, driven by the ambition to serve coffee with a superior blend while also serving as a symbol of the modern fantasy of total, refined, and flawless success. Here, coffee functions as a distinction, indicating that taste is never purely a matter of sensory preference but is tied to prestige, class, and symbolic power. Ben's Perfecto becomes a form of symbolic capital that affirms both the superiority of taste and the superiority of the self, transforming coffee from a medium of togetherness into a medium of competition and ego-affirmation. As the narrative lingers on aroma, temperature, the sequence of steps, and the sip, the tasting ritual enhances the taste of coffee and polishes the exclusivity that underpins myth of perfection.

A turning point in *Filosofi Kopi* emerges when Tiwus coffee enters this field of meaning. Tiwus coffee, originating from simple and nearly marginal spaces which is described as small street stalls, cheap fried snacks, and "pay as you wish" coffee, highly contrast to Ben's Perfecto's persona which is identical with urban cafes and upper-middle-class prestige. By contrasting simple and marginal coffee as a more authentic and composed from honest material, the text basically tries to criticize the cosmopolitan logic that oftentimes associate quality with prestige. Meanwhile, in food culture studies, the discourse of authenticity often operates ambivalently. On one hand, it can serve as a moral claim regarding the authenticity, but it can also be used to correct the commodification of taste (Johnston & Baumann, 2014). Through this reading, *Filosofi Kopi* presents Tiwus coffee not as a romanticized pure tradition, but as an epistemic disruption that exposes the falsity of taste standards overly subservient to urban-global prestige.

b. *Madre:* Living Heritage, Kitchen, and Communal Affection

In *Madre*, gastronomy is not treated as a consumable goods, but rather as a living heritage that must be continuously nurtured to remain alive in daily life. The focus of gastronomy in this novel is the ecology of bread brought to life through starters, techniques, fermentation, ovens, flavor, and the transmission of skills. The most recurring ritual is the scene of feeding the Madre, breaking it apart, waiting for fermentation, and monitoring the baking results. The work of transmission unfolds through the kitchen as a space for the initiation of identity. Tansen appears as an autodiegetic character who is initially awkward and hungry, then gradually enters it through bodily experiences such as drinking coffee, eating soup, kneading, tasting, sharing breakfast, and eventually helping manage production. This transformation is significant because the identity formation occurs through material engagement in the

work process. Tansen is not depicted not as a recipient of the legacy, but as someone trained to become a worthy heir. Artisanal identity is formed through experience, repetition, and practice, as practical skills are elevated to craft through work performed repeatedly (Lewis, 2021). This perspective explains why the Tan de Bakker kitchen functions as an arena of becoming, alongside Tansen's transformation from a heir into a subject who identifies himself through gastronomic labor, until he gains de Bakker as his last name, indicating that there is a leverage gained. Furthermore, foodways as a form of intangible heritage are enacted and ritualized in daily practice, not merely preserved as relics of the past (Lee, 2023). Foodways can also be understood as heritage when they encompass the social processes, skills, and collective expressions associated with food (Bortolotto & Ubertazzi, 2018). From this perspective, Madre, as a starter dough, aligns more closely with immaterial heritage that links lineage, manual labor, memory, and the duty to care for the past in the present than with ordinary family property.

The novel's central conflict is reflected in the tension between commodification and care. The core issue is not merely whether the shop will survive, but whether Madre can be sold, exchanged, and treated as an ordinary economic asset, even though it embodies family history, intergenerational skills, and unresolved human relationships. At this point, *Madre* intersects with a crucial debate in culinary heritage studies. When traditional cuisine can enter modern markets, the potential of being commodified always carries the risk of lowering the exchange value since it is considered detached from the historical background. *Madre*'s communal dimension is strengthened because this heritage does not rest on claims of purity, but on hybridity and a sense of togetherness that is constantly negotiated. Indian influences through the character Lakshmi, Chinese through Tan, Sundanese represented by Tasik, Manado, urban Jakarta, and European through colonial bread, alongside scenes of eating together, cooking together, feeding Madre, and sharing bread, build a chosen family that brings together Tansen, Pak Hadi, and Mei. This pattern relates to a hybrid culinary heritage that endures not merely through recipes, but because traditional knowledge is transmitted through mothers, celebrations, and the involvement of younger generations in collective events (Mohd Fikri et al., 2021). Through shared dining practices, the individualistic tendencies of modern life can be mitigated through social connections (Smith & Harvey, 2021). *Madre* rejects nostalgia that freezes heritage as museum artifacts, yet also rejects modernity that severs heritage from communal affection. Thus, Tan de Bakker's revitalization through branding, brochures, tours, and social media does not appear as a betrayal, but rather as a form of heritage rearticulation that remains rooted in collective labor, cross-cultural memory, and the practice of sharing bread as the foundation of community. This demonstrates that culinary heritage can compete in the global era without losing its authentic value only if it remains understood as cultural identity, not merely a commercial product (Mardatillah et al., 2019). Narratives of authenticity are often used to both protect and market food culture amidst global consumption. This novel positions morality precisely within that gap, that the market is not rejected, but subjected to the ethics of care, so that what is tested is not merely business viability, but the legitimacy of buying and selling something that is still alive.

c. *Aroma Karsa*: Bodily Knowledge and Sensory Power

In *Aroma Karsa*, gastronomy undergoes the most radical expansion of meaning compared to the two previous novels, as it is no longer confined to food and drink as objects of consumption but extends to aroma, herbal remedies, *mangir*, concoctions, flowers, and the body as surfaces where meaning is read. Taste, scent, and the body emerge as dominant forms, while the strongest repetitions occur in herbal remedies, concoctions, and daily consumption laden with meaning. Scent in this work serves as an epistemological tool explaining how the world is understood, remembered, and categorized through olfaction, simultaneously positioning the body as the primary arena of interpretation. The scenes most frequently slowed down are not the cooking process, but the descriptions of scent and bodily responses. Although situated

outside the experience, the third-person narrator is constantly granted access to the characters' inner sensations, especially when the world is absorbed through Jati's sense of smell. Aromas are not merely presented as realistic details but position the body as a sensory medium, evidence, and a field of experience that blurs the boundaries between inner and outer, private and public, individual and collective (Sutton, 2010). *Aroma Karsa* illustrates that inhaled aromas transform into knowledge about others, spaces, memories, and even threats. This is significant given that scent often serves as a language linking bodily sensibility to social anxiety and modern antagonism (Corbin, 1986). The sense of smell is not viewed merely as a biological function but as a cognitive system that societies use to classify values, identities, and social order (Classen et al., 2002), while also serving as a rich cognitive and linguistic domain (Majid, 2021).

From scent, gastronomy moves into the realm of power struggles. The novel's central conflict is the struggle over Puspa Karsa, which raises the question of who has the right to control others' knowledge, bodies, and desires through scent. The most pivotal gastronomic scenes are not even reconciliatory feasts, but rather moments when taste is used to test, suppress, expose, or punish—or when herbal medicine becomes a medium of power. In other words, potions and scents concern not merely taste or healing, but the right to bodily agency and vulnerability, as the senses serve as both gateways to knowledge and instruments of power, revealing that an aroma regime can empower or, conversely, disempower an individual (Classen et al., 2002). *Aroma Karsa* transforms gastronomy into a biopolitical narrative by introducing knowledge of flora, recipes, and sensory compositions positioned as sources of domination; thus, what is at stake is not merely the authenticity of tradition, but control over the subjects who inhale, drink, or are touched by these formulations. This sensory power is always intertwined with class and social identity. This narrative conflict presents a stark contrast between the presence of street food, coffee, tea, Indomie, and rice—which mark the daily lives of the working class and the marginality associated with Bantar Gebang—and curated feasts, formulas, perfumes, cosmetics, and the world of Kemara, which signify prestige and elite consumption, thereby making gastronomy function as a social language. Aroma Karsa processes this mechanism in a highly modern way, ensuring that the local-traditional—herbal remedies, spices, *mangir*, and court knowledge—are not erased by modernity, but rather reclaimed, repackaged, and elevated to a level of prestige through the cosmetics and perfume industries. The characters Jati, Raras, Eyang Putri, Janirah, and Banaspati are each defined by distinct sensory relationships with the world, so that gastronomy no longer functions merely as a character trait but as a social fingerprint marking the body's position within networks of power, heritage, and class mobility.

2. *The Days of Cafe Leila*: The Dynamics of Trauma, Memory Archives, and Domestic Space

In *The Last Days of Cafe Leila,* gastronomy actively functions as a medium to trigger the characters' traumatic memory through the sensory role of food. This can be seen through through a heterodiegetic narrator who employs internal focalization to filter culinary reality through the subjective consciousness of the characters Noor and Zod. Descriptions of food elements such as aromas and kitchen routines that at the beginning appear as regular daily activity become the medium for unveiling the dark stories of the past. The author employs descriptive pauses to put more emphasis on describing the color of saffron and the aroma of a Persian dish, which allows the reader to enter the character's memory crisis. When Noor and Zod smell a Persian dish and observe the color change of certain spice, they are carried back to the memory of their mother's death. At this point, the narrative moves from intradiegetic level of the cafe kitchen to the metadiegetic level when recipes are narrated as part of painful family history fragments. Therefore, narrative position regulates the reader's access to memory and affect, which also happen to Tansen in *Madre.* The difference is that Tansen's voice shows bodily initiation, where Noor and Zod's focalization shows recollection. What happened to Noor and Zod can be read from the perspective of

postmemory, where family trauma is often passed down through domestic objects and daily routines that carry the affective traces of the past (Hirsch, 2008).

Food in *The Last Days of Cafe Leila* is also tied to identity and cultural heritage under political circumstance rather than commercial pressure. In the context of the sociopolitical repression in Iran, the dining table and kitchen transform into arenas of cultural negotiation and resistance to preserve cultural identity against the regime's threat of homogenization, since food defines the boundaries of a nation's distinctiveness. Therefore, preserving traditional recipes under an oppressive political regime is also a political act, not only for nutritional fulfillment. The resistance is shown by Zod by persistently serving authentic Persian cuisines such as fesenjoon, crispy rice (*tadig*), and saffron tea. These dining scenes are presented as concrete moments that engage the reader in the character's cultural acts of resistance. In Middle Eastern gastronomy, the Iranian kitchen served as the heart of Persian civilization by employing intricate cooking techniques and exotic spices as a form of resistance against the erasure of collective memory (Batmanglij, 2024). The cafe resembles the cafe in *Filosofi Kopi* in being a space where identity is produced and exchanged. However, Cafe Leila's identity work protects memory against erasure, where *Filosofi Kopi's* cafe becomes a place where taste functions as distinction. Likewise, as in *Madre*, culinary knowledge is transmitted through the body. Moreover, Madre's heritage is threatened by the market, Leila's cafe is threatened by political threat.

Culinary practices in this text function as a medium for articulating the hidden conflicts and psychological alienation which is rarely expressed directly by subjects suffering from trauma. Instead, it manifests through a sense of disconnection from the surrounding material culture, particularly when the character was being confronted by food traditions they had left behind. This can be seen when Noor returned from the United States and carried a cultural identity filled with confusion and awkwardness when faced with local cooking ingredients in an Iranian kitchen. In this case, traumatic wounds demand recognition through mediums that cause disorientation in the subject's daily life, since it is often difficult to explain through language (Caruth, 2016). It can be seen when Noor's interaction with local culinary elements intensifies her internal conflict and exposes the diaspora's failure to rediscover its original roots of identity. This contrasts to *Filosofi Kopi, Madre,* and *Aroma Karsa* where food sharpens market and class conflict.

Although gastronomy serves as a trigger for trauma and a sense of alienation that causes discomfort, at the same time, it also functions as a medium for reconciliation in a form of working through within the domestic space. When the landscape outside the domestic sphere is filled with uncertainty, violence, and political division, the kitchen offers protection and unconditional affection. In this context, the kitchen at Cafe Leila is portrayed as a narrative hub and the most intimate space where family recipes are passed down orally to revive the affection of a mother figure through the act of preparing and sharing food. This is possible because domestic spaces possess a therapeutic capacity capable of reweaving social bonds shattered by historical trauma (Holtzman, 2006). The communal ritual of tasting food in the dining room provides a symbolic antidote to political violence which also proves that reconciliation and the reclaiming of personal identity always begin with the warmth of a kitchen. The transmission of culinary skills from one generation to the next functions as a physical instrument to resist the death of collective memory. Sensory knowledge and food processing techniques create an intangible heritage that requires the human body as its repository. This can be seen in how eating rituals and cooking processes are repeatedly reenacted within the text, so that the inherited recipes transforms into bridges that connect the existence of the mother figure. Thus, the sustainable gastronomic practices at Cafe Leila are not only about the restaurant's business continuity, but also the most tangible manifestation of the refusal to forget history by making every dish a monument of resistance.

3. *Love and Saffron:* Culinary Correspondence, Hybridity, and the Mediation of Grief

In *Love and Saffron*, gastronomy is established as the foundation of the narrative through a distinct narrative position through an epistolary structure which involves Joan and Imogen that acts as the first person or autodiegetic narrator through writing letters. This structure allows the characters to actively experience, process, and bring gastronomic discourse to life through their own sensory experiences. Food that crosses geographical boundaries and initiates communication, such as when Joan sends saffron to Imogen, sets the whole sequence of correspondence. This epistolary is different from Tansen's autodiegetic narration in *Madre* since it explores private experience in sensing the saffron into shared experience. Descriptive pause when explaining the taste and aroma shift the focus of the narrative from plot to affection. Not only acting as a medium to communicate, food here also carries identity that can also be a medium of negotiation and indicating cultural hybridity. Saffron itself, historically, is an exotic kitchen commodity that connects world cuisines, eases grief, and provides comforting warmth from afar (Willard, 2002).

Since saffron appears at the extradiegetic level as a trigger for storytelling through the scene of the spice's delivery, it influences the entire narrative sequence of events, such as the exchange of cross-continental food recipes. The correspondence functions as an arena to negotiate identity that responds to social hybridity. Looking at the historical background, during 1960s in the United States, the practice of consuming food from the culture of "the Other" is an act to show flexible ethnic boundaries which enables cultural assimilation to deconstruct social suspicion in the middle of cosmopolitan dynamic. This is illustrated by Imogen's preference for safe and traditional local foods such as Camano Island clams and crabs, which gradually intersect with Joan's modern experiences through saffron which later introduced them to foreign dishes like tacos and saffron chicken. Those food combination from two distinct cultural entities creates a new hybrid space that celebrates diversity. The assimilation of flavors that occurs at these characters' dining tables represents the movement of American national identity toward such a hybrid space, proving that culinary tastes can always be negotiated alongside an open mind. As in *Madre,* heritage rests on unifying the hybridity instead of focusing on claiming purity.

On a psychological level, the narrator uses detailed descriptions of the taste and aroma of food to articulate personal emotional wounds and collective trauma that haunts their social landscape. The use of descriptive pauses provides space for the narrator to articulate taste sensations deeply, which serves to shift the focus from plot progression to the characters' affective depth. In post-war crisis and national hysteria following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, anxiety becomes more difficult to articulate. In order to cope, sensory experience of food is used, such as when Imogen was deeply mourning after her husband's death while Joan was struggling with career insecurity and societal trauma. They choose to write about food such as describing the texture of meat or the warmth of saffron broth as a medium to articulate their unspeakable grief. At this point, gastronomy emerges as a temporal deviation that provides space for the authors to describe specific food ingredients to work through past trauma and loss. However, the act of giving and receiving food creates a therapeutic communal ritual that gradually decrease the impact. In this novel, scenes related to cooking do not exacerbate conflicts between social classes, rather as an emotional healing. The recipes Joan sends to Imogen transform into an affective archive that saves them from despair. The act of cooking and sharing recipes among women often functions as an emotional support network that empowers them to break free from social marginalization and depression (Inness, 2001). This practice of culinary correspondence ultimately redefines the boundaries of safe spaces for women. Traditionally, the kitchen has often been reduced to a that isolates women within reproductive labor. However, when the kitchen is mediated through writing, it transforms into a boundless intellectual and emotional space that liberates women from the tyranny of isolation. The exchange of

letters, which consistently begins and ends with discussions about food, allows Joan, who lives in Los Angeles, and Imogen in Washington to "reside" in each other's kitchens, breaking down physical distance to create a safe, textual domestic space. Through their correspondence, it can be concluded that the gastronomy featured in their letters provides women with spatial autonomy to build solidarity, a home, and friendships that transcend geographical boundaries through empathy and sociocultural intimacy.

Conclusion

Gastronomy in the five selected works functions as narrative driver through which competing values, attachments, and claims to authority become concrete. In Dee Lestari's *Filosofi Kopi*, *Madre*, and *Aroma Karsa*, gastronomic conflict emerges through the tensions between culinary perfection and personal limitation, commercial valuation and the responsibility to care for inherited practices, and sensory domination and bodily autonomy. In *The Last Days of Cafe Leila* and *Love and Saffron*, culinary practices foreground tensions between attachment and estrangement, the preservation of memory and experiences of loss, and emotional isolation and the desire for connection. These orientations overlap; memory and affection also shape Lestari's works, while political pressures inform the struggle to preserve culinary continuity in *Cafe Leila*. The comparison therefore identifies differences of emphasis within the selected corpora. Across thes differences, food becomes a site of conflict because judgments about taste, decision about inheritance, and acts of cooking and sharing place personal identities and social relationships at stake.

This study's contribution lies in connecting gastrocritical interpretations of foodways, authenticity, culinary heritage, and memory with the narrative forms through which gastronomic conflict becomes perceptible. Jody's internal focalization in *Filosofi Kopi* mediates the tension between Ben's culinary ideals and their consequences for a shared livelihood and friendship. Tansen's autodiegetic narration in *Madre* presents inheritance through bodily participation in tasting, handling, fermenting, and caring for the starter. Through this embodied experience, culinary heritage becomes an obligation enacted through labor and relationships, making its commercial valuation a question of responsibility as well ownership. In *Aroma Karsa*, shifting internal focalization connects sensory knowledge with bodily vulnerability and control. Meanwhile, the mediation of culinary recollection in *Cafe Leila* and the epistolary exchange of recipes in *Love and Saffron* make food a means of confronting estrangement and loss. Read together, these narrative configurations show how gastronomic practices can precipitate disputes, expose existing tensions, and enable their negotiation. Reading food as conflict thus connects the material and sensory dimensions of everyday life with the struggles over value, authority, and belonging that organize the narratives.

These findings are limited to five purposively selected works and should not be generalized as defining characteristic of Indonesian and Anglophone literature. The concentration on a single Indonesian author also limits the extent to which the observed differences can be attributed to broader literary or cultural traditions. Future research could extend the comparison across author, genres, and historical contexts; including colonial food politics, while developing the connections among gastrocriticism, narratology, and trauma studies. Within its scope, this study offers cultural studies a way to examine how ordinary culinary practices make social tensions tangible—taste can authorize prestige, the treatment of inherited foodways can reveal competing understandings of ownership and care, and shared meals or recipes can sustain relationships threatened by loss and displacement. The cultural significance of reading food as conflict lies in making visible how everyday acts of preparing, valuing, consuming, and sharing food participate in struggles over whose knowledge is recognized, whose heritage is sustained, and how belonging is negotiated.

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