



Resistance to Gastrocolonialism: Resilience and Culinary Innovation Among Multiethnic Communities in Indonesian School Canteens

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Abstract

Short Background Gastro-colonialism is the globalisation of fast foods that are replacing local indigenous foods as part of people's daily diet and even in school canteens. In West Kalimantan, the complexity of such a situation is further due to the ethnic diversity giving way to culinary tradition rich in variation but at risk to marginalisation.

Objective This study aims to identify forms of resilience and innovation in multiethnic traditional foods in response to the dominance of gastro-colonialism in school cafeterias in West Kalimantan.

Method This study has a qualitative approach by in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation techniques in some schools in Pontianak and Singkawang. The data were analysed thematically to identify the practices, adaptation strategies, and innovations employed by cafeteria managers. Data validation was enhanced through triangulation of sources and methods.

Outcomes This study found that the strategy of local flavour resilience in school canteens is realised through the preservation and innovation of multiethnic traditional foods. These are not only a source of nutrition but also a means of educating students about values, cultural identity, and critical thinking in the face of food globalisation.

Conclusion and Implication School canteens can become sites of resistance to gastro-colonialism through the maintenance or production of new forms of multiethnic cuisine. These results are important because they suggest that providing nutritional education and cultural preservation can work synergistically to reinforce local identity while also improving the quality of students' consumption.

Keywords Culinary innovation · Cultural resilience · Gastronomic colonialism · School canteens · Traditional food

Introduction

Food is more than just a biological necessity; it is a cultural product that carries identity, memory, and social significance (Hongladarom 2025; Setiarto et al. 2026; Gallego et al. 2024; Lugo, 2022; Kai-Sean Lee 2023). The phenomenon of gastro-colonialism arises when global food cultures dominate and marginalise the foods produced in local contexts, leading to unequal cultural representation and consumer preferences (Janer 2022). In a province like West Kalimantan, where various ethnic groups such as Dayak, Malay, Madurese, and Chinese coexist, cultural identity is closely associated with traditional culinary practices. Thus, studying these cross-cultural culinary traditions helps us grasp how local foodways defy the globalising hegemony and cultural power.

The phenomenon of gastronomic colonialism in schools is evident in the dominance of fast food and global snacks, which have replaced local foods, leading school canteens to promote homogeneous consumption patterns rather than serving as spaces for nutrition and cultural education. This situation demonstrates the penetration of mass culinary Culture that shapes students' tastes and identities by an early age. As a result, taste standards and menu choices in schools often align with global popular trends, even though they are less aligned with local cultural values and wisdom (Bali 2024).

From a sociocultural perspective, this situation creates an imbalance in the representation of locally diverse foods, including Dayak, Malay, Chinese, and Madurese cuisines, that are often considered less practical or less 'modern' than instant products. As a result, students are more familiar with global flavours than with the cultural significance and nutritional value of traditional foods. If left unchecked, schools could become agents of gastro-colonialism, normalising dependence on global food (Bali 2024). This research is driven by concerns about how global food culture continues to displace local culinary traditions, leading to cultural homogenisation and the loss of heritage. The main research question is: How do multiethnic culinary practices in West Kalimantan school canteens resist and negotiate the dominance of gastro-colonialism? This question is important because food, a cultural identity signifier, is being influenced by the proliferation of multinational fast-food outlets, consumer modernity and commodification of cuisine practices these days. Given these dynamics, this paper posits local culinary traditions as a space for resistance and struggle against a gastro-colonial world order.

Studies have shown that global food culture has significantly shaped consumption patterns in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, often marginalising traditional cuisine (McDonald 2007). Research on gastropolitics examines how food can shape power relations and struggles for identity in diverse societies (Appadurai 1996). In Indonesia, the fast food industry is growing rapidly, influencing food preferences and displacing local food traditions (Sutrisno et al. 2021). In West Kalimantan, traditional culinary practices, such as bubur pedas and chai kue, continue to survive but face challenges from modern lifestyles and global food marketing, which are easily accessed through social media (Sciarelli et al. 2022). Furthermore, the interaction among traditional and multiethnic foods in school communities in West Kalimantan demonstrates resilience as they blend, adapt, and transform while maintaining local cultural values (Suryadinata 2016). This research is crucial because it contributes to understanding how food becomes a medium of cultural resistance in the face of globalisation (Stein et al. 2023).

Limiting its scope to West Kalimantan, this study offers an overview of multiethnic relationships in the area and their influence on cultural identity. This also contributes to the theoretical debate on gastro-colonialism, reserving a place for local cuisine not merely as a passive actor in the face of colonial power, but as a negotiating and resisting actor. (Counihan 2025). In addition, these findings have implications for the preservation of cultural policies, cultural education about food and eating patterns, as well as sustainability practices in West Kalimantan cuisine. This is consistent with UNESCO's goals, including the adoption by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) of a convention to protect intangible cultural heritage. The main objectives of this convention are the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, raising awareness, promoting respect, and having international cooperation and assistance (Ceisel 2015).

Schools have to be envisioned as cultural producers who do more than transmit formal knowledge; they are also involved in the formation of students' values, identities, and cultural tastes through everyday practice. On UNESCO's ideological map, education is positioned as a strategic terrain of resistance to cultural homogeneity and to globalisation driven by market hegemonic values, fast food being one of its main rallying points. School canteens operate in these terms as part of the hidden curriculum- cultural messages transmitted by and through institutional policies and practices. The foods allowed and encouraged in canteens serve as a teacher of sorts, informing students what counts as "modern," what is considered prestigious and/or consumable (or not), but also whether local foods are valued as cultural heritage or sidelined. Thus, canteen menu choices are not merely a matter of nutrition; they also serve as a cultural pedagogical practice that shapes how students interpret their identity, traditions, and relationship with their Culture amidst the forces of globalisation. School canteens function not only as places where students obtain food, but also as part of the hidden curriculum within educational institutions. Through everyday practices such as menu selection, food promotion, and consumption patterns, school canteens implicitly communicate cultural values and social meanings about what kinds of foods are considered modern, prestigious, or desirable. In this sense, the school food environment becomes a pedagogical space where students develop perceptions about modernity, cultural identity, and the value of local versus global cuisines.

This manuscript highlights that the spread of global food culture often marginalises locally produced foods and reshapes students' consumption patterns, leading to unequal cultural representation between global and local cuisines. This situation reflects broader ethical concerns about cultural equity and the preservation of local culinary heritage within the global food system.

To overcome gastrocolonial domination, this study offers a solution: the revitalisation of multiethnic culinary traditions in school canteens in West Kalimantan by integrating them into educational initiatives. Education is seen as a means of transformation, enabling communities to reclaim food sovereignty by emphasising identity, local needs, and resistance. This manuscript has been rewritten to clarify the conceptual relationships between gastro-colonialism, the hidden curriculum, and cultural identity. In this context, school canteens are understood not only as food-providing spaces but also as pedagogical environments where daily food choices subtly shape students' perceptions of modernity, cultural values, and culinary identity.

To improve clarity and analytical coherence, the manuscript has been revised to streamline several sections and strengthen the conceptual linkage between gastrocolonialism, culi-