

Transglobal Culture: Hybrid Food and Cultural Identity

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Abstract

The term ‘East’ and ‘West’ cannot repudiate of binary concept on ‘local’ and ‘global’. And today, the discussion on the meeting point of these two notions particularly in cultural phenomenon becomes social premiums in Indonesia. The trends of the intermingled East-West in fashion, language, food, and other art expressions, definitely cling to the process of globalization. Exemplifying this kind of transglobal culture, the research done is focused on hybrid food. In the present-day fast moving world, one of the predominant features of Indonesian modern life style is eating fast food which of course engages in the idea of West. This opportunity is captured by small traditional restaurants, street-food sellers, and young culinary entrepreneurs. The creativity in serving food to be marketable can be explored from the ingredients used, the menus offered, and the advertisements displayed. Interestingly, the sources inspiring the culinary agents to create hybrid food are not merely derived from global-branded food such as American burger or Italian cappuccino, but also from sport, music genre to the company of entertainment. To sum up, the domain of food as a cultural product is unlimited; the borderline between East and West is fluid, and the displacement of cultural identity is ever-lasting.

Keywords: binary concept; the meeting point; hybrid food; cultural identity.

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Introduction

Cultural hybridity arises from two or more different cultures that blend and form the new one. Besides the unavoidable social interaction, this trend occurs because globalization has permeated to the whole spheres of the world. As a multi-dimensional phenomenon, globalization covers many aspects of human life, including economy, politics, technology, environment, and culture (Tomlinson, 2000). In today fast moving world, communication and information technology accelerate globalization process to link every part of the globe. A particular area cannot resist getting into a process of globalization by means of modernizing themselves. Furthermore, in the context of global culture, Friedman (1995) identified that finding of cultures in awareness of difference is to do the same things differently. Towards social interaction, it is in the form assimilation and integration. Hence, this transglobal culture is in a circle that belongs to the realm of interconnectedness.

Even though the timing of globalization lists Tomlinson's idea on cultural planetarization has started in 1960s (Pieterse, 1993); Francois Chaubet (2013) noted the middle of 13th century as an initial time of cultural globalization. This is marked by the culture - economy and politics - economy exchange amongst the great empires like Greek, Roman, Egypt, China, and Spain. Along with its historical journey, in the decade of 1980s globalization signaled the present of economic reason. This phenomenon does not only cover high culture such as ideology, religion, art science and technology, but also mass culture – including cultural food habit. The concept of transglobal itself is attached to social dynamics resulting cultural changes because culture exists only for the existence of society. Moreover, if culture is not in a static condition and global is perceived as West and modern, the ever-changing culture in East also reaches a vast area of almost all life sectors without the exception of food. As a result, the scheme of the research done is transglobal popular culture which involves structural change in Indonesian society for the intermingling process of East and West.

As reflection of cultural identity, food is one of the media to express 'the self' that can create uniqueness of certain community, even society. However, in Indonesia, cultural identity is not a single unified identity. Besides, the myriad of ethnic groups with their own cultural identities, the long-rooted influences of foreign cultures of India, China, Portuguese, Spain, Arab, British, Dutch, and so forth have colored the development of Indonesian culture. Today, the advancement of communication and information technology, which is dominated by West which signifies modernity, has been dramatically influenced the dynamics of Indonesian cultural identity construction. Therefore, this paper attempt to discuss the research findings on the meeting point between East and West based on one of the actual trends in Indonesia. They are hybrid food and how the process of cultural identity constructed.

Because it has been integrated within the today's global capitalism, as culinary product, food and drink take the dominant part in everyday life which cannot be separated from both cultural and economic interest. Many strategies have been done by business agents, regardless the marketing scale, to promote their products to meet their targeted market. On the lines of the research findings revealed, the common ways of their tricks encompass the advertisements displayed, the ingredients used, and the menus offered.

Literary Review and Research Method

Culinary is cultural element of social integration of which the product, food and drink, is definitely suitable to the taste of the members of certain community, even society, and the condition wherein the food created. According to Bentley (2007), foods are believed to be symbol of cultural identity which built up the barriers and differences between cultures. Each group of society chooses food depending upon their own desires and the conditions of their area they live in. Food is not merely basic biological need to make people survive, but interconnects with people's social and cultural need in their community or society as well. Accordingly, besides as basic need, food serves two important domains in human life, namely cultural expression and identity. This is in the same way as the saying says 'we are what we eat' and 'we are what we don't eat'.

In relation to culinary, Kittler, Sucher, and Nahikian-Nelms (2011) defined globalization as the integration of local, regional, and national phenomena into unrestricted worldwide organization. The parallel change in cultural food habits is consumerization, the transition of society from producers of indigenous foods to consumers of mass-produced food. The social dynamics of modernization encompasses new technologies and the socio-economic shifts that results the rise of the cultural phenomena displacing cultural beliefs, values, and behavior.

Therefore, to dismantle the influence of West upon the forming of Indonesian new identity through food, the 3-month field research was done. The location chosen is the area surrounding Universitas Brawijaya, Malang – East Java, Indonesia. The data obtained comprise the advertisements displayed, the menus offered, and the ingredients used in terms of hybrid food and drink along the streets of this campus' premise. Besides the many small traditional restaurants called *warung*¹ and street-food stalls selling hybrid food, this place is an area where education remains the priority in which most of the consumers are students. Additionally, interviews are also executed to explore how the concept of West (global) food hybridizes with Indonesian (local) especially Javanese food and influences the formation of cultural identity.

In this activity, there are two considerations of selecting the ones interviewed. First, the interview was held with the owners of the *warung* and the street-food sellers to dig out the background of their innovations in creating hybrid food especially in correlating with economy law: supply and demand. This reason is a crucial point in selling and buying activities of globalized products, even though on the smallest scale, because "in economics, globalization refers to economic internalization and the spread of capitalist market relation" (Pieterse, 1993:1). Second, 78 students who consume the hybrid food sold around campus were interviewed to explore the process cultural identity formation. They are chosen randomly without seeing the disciplines taken. All the questions are structured to guide them in response to the concept of hybrid food of their everyday. Theoretically students by the age of 18 to 20 years can be classified as salient group – in adolescence and emerging adults (Jensen, et.al., 2011: 287) who are easily interfered by globalization along with all its aspects carrying significant effect to their identity. Within their age, this group is being in

¹ *Warung* is an Indonesian word, originally loaned from Javanese, to label a small traditional restaurant serving various kinds of local food and drink of which the ingredient are rich of spices.

time of curiosity and popular things. For this reason, the dynamic identity formation process leads to an assertion that “identities are never univocal, stable, or innocent. They are always in an accomplished and ceaseless project” (Mendeita in Alcoff, 2002: 414).

This fact leads to an understanding that as culture is being proved to be constructed by globalization, food habit representing one of the cultural expressions can also be constructed by innovations and forms hybridity. As culinary product, food is a different cultural medium compared to the rest of the cultural expressions because it is a daily need of everybody. It is not surprising, therefore, that people are generally not aware of cultural hybridization process taking place in their everyday life.

Result and Discussion

Field observation discovered that food, of course together with drink, sold around Brawijaya campus are the mingling of global-branded food and the traditional one – but without leaving the local traits particularly of Javanese cuisine. To promote the food and drink offered, this blended concept is used both in the advertisement and the ingredient of the hybridization. In addition, this sort of intermingled product is attractive not only because of the local taste which is familiar for Indonesians but also the use of the marketable ‘West’ advertisement.

A lot of examples showed that hybrid food spreading along the streets of the campus’ premise refers to the meeting point of East and West. Global branded-food like burger, which is always attached to the conception of West or American, becomes an inspiring source in motivating the food sellers to express their creativity. It is not difficult to find the burger label given to local food. For example, there are *Burger Tahu* and *Kara*² *Burger* of which the raw materials and the taste are very local. The first is made from fried *tahu* (= tofu), whereas that of the second one is re-cooked form from the left-over *nasi* (cooked rice) which is dried and fried. The cooking process is blending the dried left-over *nasi* with certain spices to preserve the local taste; but the performance is modified to resemble the globally known burger. Similarly, the global dessert ice cream that is commonly consumed as drink in Indonesia is transformed. And to meet its need, this kind of drink is hybridized. In promoting the drink, the intermingled terms are used. One of the banners in front of the ice cream stall makes its trade-mark *Van der Mot*. It is not clear enough whether the seller adopts the name of the famous film star Van der Mott or the misspelling ‘mot’ refers to Javanese word meaning sipping slowly to feel the taste.

Nonetheless, the inspiration driving the innovation is not limited on branded food or drink resembling Western concept. The popular things sound West, like music genre and sport also participate in shaping creativity. *Rock n’ Roll* is highlighted to advertise very traditional dish named *bacem*. It is a unique Javanese dish made from tofu and *tempe*³. Both raw materials are cooked with the blend of spice and coconut sugar so the taste is sweet. However, because this kind of dish is generally eaten with abundance of chili so the taste becomes hot: a sensation; as hot as rock and roll music.

² *Kara*’ is stylized word that is actually derived from the Javanese ‘karak’. It is the left-over cooked rice which is exposed into sunlight until dry then mixed with certain ingredient before being fried.

³ *Tempe* is traditional food made from fermented soybean. Because the high content of nutrition and non-saturated fat, it is commonly used for various Javanese dishes to replace meat..

The fact that young generations are familiar with popular media stimulates a promising opportunity for the owners of the *warung* to promote their goods. Adopting the West concept and merging it with the local is an innovation to earn money. The logo of the entertainment company *WB*, the abbreviation of *Warner Bros (Picture)*, is used as an acronym of traditional small restaurant to be marketable. The meaning conveyed, of course, is different. *W* stands for *Warung* and *B* stands for *Barokah* which means blessedness. The foods, both the ingredient and the taste, are very local but the drinks are varied from traditional coffee or tea to global labels such as coca cola, sprite, and the other soda drinks.

The following data also exemplify how the process hybridization impacts to the cultural food habits of the consumers which build new cultural identity. Picture 1 below depicts the process of hybridization. The football club Liverpool logo inspires the food sellers to create hybridized advertisement of food offered.



Picture 1: clockwise.

The original logo of football club, the adaptation, local food: Pecel and Nasi Rawon

Examined further, Liverpool label is changed to be *Laperpool*⁴ indicating that the advertisement is promoting food and drink. Compared to the original logo of Liverpool football club with the slogan “You’ll never walk alone” which is taken from the fans’ song (above: left side), the new form of the slipped logo hits its consumers (above: right side) by changing the slogan to be “You’ll never eat alone”. On one side the football club was established “since 1892”, the *warung* was established “since 2011”. Under the label of the establishment year, there are five stars signifying that the menus offered are qualified. Surely, this notion is inspired by the international standard for five-star-hotels. The food and drink served also represent the integration between East and West composing *Pecel*, *Nasi Rawon*⁵ & Coffee (below: left and right side). Though the English word coffee is used instead of Indonesian word *kopi*, the coffee served actually is traditional drink called *kopi*

⁴ *Laperpool* actually local phrase consisting two words: *laper* means hungry and *pool*, sometimes also spelled *pol*, means extremely or very.

⁵ Based on the Ancient Inscription, *Pecel* and *Rawon* are classic-local cuisine listed within the group of the old Javanese food (Fadly Rahman, 2016).

*tubruk*⁶. *Pecel, nasi rawon* for food and ‘coffee’ for drink are very local cultural product in contrast to the advertisement which sounds very global.

This trend underscores the dynamics of intermingling concept. There is no homogeneity, standardization or the myth of local. Borrowing Pieterse’s idea (2010) on hybridity which manifests an integration of East and West, the mixing strategy used by the seller of hybrid food and drink confirms the “cut-‘n’-mix experiences in consumption, lifestyles and identities, ordinary and everyday”. That is why, in terms of transglobal culture, food cannot be separated from the idea of global capitalism. As Ha (2006) stated that the new form, in this case hybrid food, means profit; “sells well because it is regarded as sexy”. The more attractive the promotion, the more the money earn. This explanation can also be investigated from the illustration of the following picture.



Picture 2: left, hybrid advertisement; right, modernized package

This picture is an advertisement (left side) and a modernized package (right side) of hybridized drink called *cappuccino cincau*. As an Italian coffee drink which serving style is well-known around the world, almost every restaurant in Indonesia now serves cappuccino as one of their drink menus. With the exception of its popularity among young people, this global-branded power is caught by the local drink sellers to create hybrid drink – *cappucino cincau*. This hybrid drink is combination of two different cultural habits: a meeting point of West (global), *cappucino* and East (local), *cincau*⁷. East meets West. Originally, *cincau* is a kind of traditional jelly extracted from leaves called *cincau*.

Young people are less interested in having this kind of drink on its own. However, the assembled name of *Cappuccino Cincau* removes the perception of old and traditional things towards *cincau*. If identity is an imaginary construction, the fact that young people can accept *Cappuccino Cincau* as their usual drink indicates that today is celebrating time of the ‘new’ cultural identity. *Cincau* is no more considered to be a strange drink for the young as it was combined with *cappuccino*.

The cultural scrutinization of hybrid food and drink, from the advertisement, the ingredient, and the performance, clearly uncover that in terms of marketing strategy the intermingling process between global and local is normal today. As consumers of hybrid food, students do not see any disembeddedness towards their identity as

⁶ *Kopi tubruk* is traditional coffee drink prepared by pouring boiling water directly over powdered coffee.

⁷ *Cincau* is a kind of traditional jelly extracted from leaves called *cincau*. The color of the leaves can be green or dark green/black. *Cincau* drink used to be herbal medicine to cure some diseases particularly fever and stomachache.

Indonesian. By consuming hybrid food and drink, 66% out of the 78 students interviewed affirm that the changing of cultural identity is normal, there is nothing to be worried about. Even, they believe that the authenticity of identity has never existed. 41% say that sometimes they think that they are being uprooted but it is unavoidable process; and only 3%, has no argument on the relationship between globalization and the ever-changing identity. Their point of views towards cultural identity proves that the shaping of cultural identity is fluid.

The phenomenon of this cultural food habits underlines the crucial pattern of globalization process. In the context of hybrid food observed, Javanese traditional food and drink are deeply rooted from the antecedence representing the power of history, culture, and culinary taste consciousness. However, together with the infusion of global idea, this traditional concept, which has been constructed previously, is deconstructed. Subsequently, to make it fit with the changing era the deconstruction is reconstructed to be a new cultural food habit. All the findings of this research showed that hybrid food reflects the continuous cultural evolution.

Conclusion

Since the research embraces students representing Indonesian young generation, the result confirms that the impact of globalization, which was observed through hybrid food, in Indonesia today can be seen as a prototype of ever-changing cultural identity. Their notion over hybrid food promulgates new identity by means of self-definition as Indonesian. It strongly indicates, therefore, that the saying 'we are what we eat' to identify that food is within cultural domain bringing about of identity construction is unquestionable anymore.

When identity is asserted as unconsciously built, never discovered but always constituted, constructed, imagined, projected, and finally celebrated, through their cultural food habits, Indonesian young people have involved in this process. Field research done discovers that the rapid infusion of globalization has blended the concept of local and global. The successive web of the ever-changing identity – of being constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed, is reflected from the hybrid food and drink sold. The cultural food habit has shifted identity orientation. This phenomenon corresponds to the displacement of local or national identity because of inevitable globalization process. Additionally, the food sellers who used to be the producers of traditional food transform to be the consumers of mass product.

The world is not shrinking; only the barrier between global and local is getting blurry. Transglobal popular culture has merited to point out that hybrid food takes significant role to meet East and West.

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