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Gendered Agency in Spice Trade Histories: Female Stewardship of Islamic Gastronomic Traditions in the Nusantara Archipelago

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ABSTRACT
During the Sultanate era, Banten emerged as a global spice emporium, attracting international traders through its pepper-dominated 16th-century economy. Though its prominence in the spice trade has waned, historical traces persist through preserved heritage and enduring culinary traditions rooted in spice culture. This study employs qualitative methods and a cultural-historical approach within the Islam Nusantara framework to analyze women's pivotal role in sustaining Banten's spice-based culinary practices. As guardians of traditional recipes, healers, and perfumers, women preserve spiritual and health values tied to spices. Findings reveal their multifaceted contributions—from agricultural cultivation and post-harvest processing to local commerce—while embedding spices into religious rituals, spiritual healing, and cultural traditions. These activities enrich the symbolic significance of spices and reinforce community identity. Women's strategic participation not only sustains the archipelago's spice civilization but also bolsters the local economy, demonstrating how cultural stewardship aligns with Islamic principles of community welfare. This research underscores the intersection of gender, cultural preservation, and economic resilience in maintaining Indonesia's spice heritage.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Spices have constituted a cornerstone of human civilization since antiquity, evolving into globally vital commodities prized as medicinal resources and culinary additives. Their surging demand catalyzed the emergence of transcontinental spice routes—specialized trade networks that transcended mere economic exchange to facilitate cross-cultural diffusion, including the transmission of Islamic teachings adapted to local traditions. Prior to the proliferation of maritime trade networks, however, the Indonesian archipelago's spices remained peripheral to global commerce. The eventual integration of regional spices into these routes engendered *Islam Nusantara*—a syncretic Islamic tradition characterized by peaceful acculturation with indigenous wisdom rather than rigid doctrinal imposition.

The spice trade fundamentally shaped the political, social, and cultural trajectories of the archipelago. Over centuries, spices functioned as catalytic agents for interregional diplomacy and civilizational exchange, particularly under maritime kingdoms like Ternate, Makassar, and Banten (Razif, 2017). These polities leveraged spice commerce not merely for economic gain but to position the archipelago as a nexus of cultural hybridity, fostering innovations in governance, art, and socio-religious practices.

As a historical epicenter of spice commerce, Banten exemplifies this synthesis of material prosperity and cultural innovation. Its legacy persists in culinary traditions where spices remain deeply entrenched in daily praxis. Dishes like *angeun lada* (pepper stew) epitomize this gastronomic heritage, with pepper symbolizing both Banten's historical prominence as a global pepper exporter and its community's ethno-religious identity. For Bantenese Muslims, spices transcend flavor enhancement, serving as tangible links to ancestral piety and communal memory.

Within Islamic ontology, cuisine extends beyond sustenance to embody *ḥalāl ṭayyib* principles—ethical mandates prioritizing nourishment that is permissible (*ḥalāl*), wholesome (*ṭayyib*), and spiritually enriching (Sumiati et al., 2024). Archipelagic Muslim communities ritualize these values through practices like *selametan* (communal feasts) and *Maulid Nabi* (Prophet's birthday celebrations), where spices operate as mediators of bodily-spiritual equilibrium. This gastro-religious ethos aligns with Islamic imperatives to preserve health as an act of worship (*ʿibādah*), positioning culinary traditions as vehicles of both cultural continuity and theological intentionality.

Cuisine operates as a potent medium for articulating sociocultural identity, encapsulated in Brillat-Savarin's axiom: "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are" (as cited in Utami, 2018). This maxim underscores food's dual role as both sustenance and semiotic system—encoding communal histories, ethno-religious values, and collective selfhood. Culinary practices, as Utami (2018) theorizes, function as motivational catalysts, galvanizing individual and communal agency while remaining inextricably interwoven with mytho-historical narratives and spiritual paradigms.

Spices, as perennial linchpins of human biocultural heritage (Husni & Sari, 2024), occupy particular salience in Indonesia's gastro-cultural matrix. Integral to ceremonial feasts (*selametan*), life-cycle rituals, and religious observances, spiced dishes transcend gustatory functions to embody the archipelago's legacy as the historic Spice Route epicenter. Regional spice diversity has engendered culinary repertoires that mirror Indonesia's commercial ascendancy while perpetuating phytotherapeutic wisdom aligned with Islamic *ḥalāl ṭayyib* principles—food that

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nourishes ethically and physiologically.

Within this ecosystem, women emerge as custodians of culinary heritage and transmitters of ethno-religious values (Safitri et al., 2024), Despite increasing male participation in gastronomic labor, patriarchal constructs persistently frame cooking as feminine domestic praxis. Yet this gendered role transcends mere food preparation; women curate edible archives of ancestral knowledge, mediate intergenerational wisdom transfer, and ritualize Islamic ethics through commensality. Their kitchens operate as micropolitical spaces where cultural memory and religious identity are materially reproduced.

Thus, Indonesian cuisine constitutes a palimpsest—layered with histories of maritime trade, syncretic spirituality, and gendered cultural production. To savor *angeun lada* or *rendang* is to ingest not merely spices but the archipelago's civilizational DNA: a testament to how sustenance shapes, and is shaped by, the dialectics of faith, power, and identity.

Women's contributions to sustaining traditional culinary heritage constitute an indispensable sociocultural praxis. In Banten, female actors have perpetuated regional gastronomy through domestic culinary stewardship (preparing familial and ceremonial meals) and public gastronomic entrepreneurship (commercializing traditional foods via markets, eateries, and supermarkets). This dual engagement transforms cuisine into lived proselytization—a tangible medium for propagating *Islām Nusantara*: an Islamic ethos harmonizing spirituality with quotidian pragmatism, gentleness (*al-hilm*), and communal blessing (*barakah*). Thus, women emerge as custodians of archipelagic Islamic civilizational memory, encoding ethno-religious identity through edible traditions (Humaeni, 2015; Safitri et al., 2024).

Existing scholarship has examined women's roles in Bantenese taboo systems (Humaeni, 2015), Lampung's cultural preservation (Budiman & Ariwibowo, 2022), and coastal communities' medicinal-culinary practices (Safitri et al., 2024). However, an epistemological gap persists regarding their centrality in shaping the Islamic-spice-civilization nexus—a lacuna this study addresses by foregrounding women as agents of gastro-religious continuity.

Globally, women dominate spice economies, as evidenced by Southeast Nigerian contexts where females leverage household gardens for autonomous spice cultivation, despite systemic barriers to scaling enterprises (Peter-Onoh et al., 2014). S These cross-regional parallels underscore spices as gendered biocultural capital: tools for navigating patriarchal constraints while ensuring familial nourishment and income. In Banten, this dynamic manifests as women's culinary labor sustaining both Islamic *ḥalāl ṭayyib* principles and the archipelago's spice-route legacy.

By situating Bantenese women within transnational feminist-food studies, this research advocates for redefining culinary labor as civilizational praxis—a synthesis of cultural preservation, economic agency, and spiritual intentionality. Future studies must further interrogate how gendered spice histories inform contemporary Islamic gastro-politics in the Global South.

Sofia Cavalcanti's ecofeminist hermeneutics in The Mistress of Spices reconfigures spice-woman relations as interspecies symbiosis—a terrain of spiritual emancipation where female agency transcends patriarchal-natural exploitation (Cavalcanti, 2024). By reimagining spice stewardship through intentionality and ecological affinity, women emerge not as passive subjects but as transformative agents dismantling dual oppressions of gender and environment. This framework reorients spice narratives beyond materiality, positioning them as conduits for

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embodied spirituality and feminist liberation.

Mirroring this, Cooke (2020) ethnography of 1980s Baltimore reveals spice enterprises like Vanns Spices as nodes of female solidarity, where economic ventures double as ethico-economic networks fostering creativity and trust. Here, spices transcend commodity status to symbolize communal alchemy—mediating social cohesion and intergenerational wisdom. Such studies collectively reframe spice economies as gendered socio-spiritual architectures.

This research intervenes in the historiographical dichotomy framing spices either as colonial capital or cultural artifact. While dominant scholarship prioritizes spices' role in Eurocentric extraction politics, this study recenters their sacral-cultural valence, particularly how Bantenese women have weaponized culinary traditions to sustain *Islam Nusantara's* ethos: an Islam harmonizing spirituality with local wisdom. Simultaneously, it critiques reductive gender essentialism by showcasing women's agentive reimagining of domesticity—transforming kitchens into socio-spiritual praxis sites where spices encode *ḥalāl ṭayyib* ethics and civilizational memory.

By bridging Islamic feminism, eco-spirituality, and culinary historiography, this work addresses a critical lacuna: the absence of archipelagic women in spice-civilization discourse. It demonstrates how their gastro-religious labor—preserving recipes, ritualizing commensality—constitutes counter-hegemonic narrative against androcentric historiography. Through spices, women curate edible exegesis: transmitting adaptive Islamic values while subverting colonial-modern binaries.

This study thus advances three interdisciplinary frontiers: ecofeminist theology reclaims spices as mediators of interspecies ethics and sacred custodianship over nature, repositioning women as agents of eco-spiritual praxis; Islamic cultural studies reframes Islam Nusantara as embodied ethical systems manifest in sacralized gastro-praxis, where culinary traditions encode adaptive religiosity and civilizational memory; and decolonial historiography foregrounds women's ethno-gastronomic stewardship as counter-hegemonic resistance to epistemic erasure, recentering their labor in anticolonial narratives. Collectively, these frameworks illuminate how spices transcend materiality to operate as biocultural palimpsests—layered with histories of ecological reciprocity, gendered spirituality, and postcolonial identity formation.

2. METHODS

This study employs a historical methodology structured through four sequential phases: heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. During the heuristic phase, researchers gathered diverse primary and secondary written sources, including archival records, monographs, and peer-reviewed journals pertinent to the history of archipelagic spice commerce, Banten's spice route dynamics, and regional culinary traditions. Complementary oral data were acquired via semi-structured interviews with key informants—spice cultivators, culinary entrepreneurs, and traditional food practitioners—to investigate women's agency in spice-related cultural preservation. Direct field observations were conducted to document sociocultural practices, particularly women's participatory roles in sustaining spice-route legacies through gastronomic rituals.

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The verification phase entailed rigorous internal and external source criticism to authenticate data credibility and ensure empirical validation. Subsequently, the interpretation stage involved hermeneutic analysis of curated historical evidence, synthesizing selective facts into coherent analytical frameworks aligned with the research objectives. The final stage, critical historiography, systematized findings into a chrono-analytical narrative, integrating empirical data with theoretical insights to reconstruct historical trajectories of gendered spice stewardship in Banten.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Spices in Nusantara's Islamic History and Trans-civilizational Commerce

Spices, classified as aromatic phytogenetic resources, have functioned as pivotal biocultural palimpsests across human civilization. Beyond their aromatic utility, ancient societies imbued spices with sacro-ecological symbolism, as evidenced by archaeological findings such as pepper residues within the mummified remains of Pharaoh Ramses II (d. 1213 BCE), signifying their trans-civilizational commodity status (Self, 2021). Theophrastus's (372–287 BCE) treatises corroborate this ethno-pharmacological primacy, noting spices' predominant use in Hellenic medicinal and ritual practices over culinary applications—a pattern mirrored in Roman funerary rites and Chinese ceremonial traditions.

Economically, spices attained a auratic equivalence to precious metals, symbolizing socioeconomic prestige and geopolitical ascendancy. Medieval Levantine and European elites weaponized spice ownership as a performative marker of luxury and hegemony, while territorial control over trade routes—notably Egypt's monopoly on Eastern pepper, cassia, and cinnamon imports (Sulaiman, et al, 2018)—became proxies for imperial dominance.

The archipelago's preeminence as a spice epicenter was cartographically codified in Claudius Ptolemaeus's Geographike Hyphegesis (ca. 150 CE), which erroneously depicted the Indian Ocean as a landlocked basin yet crucially documented Southeast Asia's spice-producing regions. This flawed yet influential cosmography sustained Eurocentric mercantilist imaginaries until the 15th century, when empirical navigation supplanted Greco-Roman textual authority (Rahman, 2019). Ptolemaic paradoxes thus underscore the dialectic between antique textual traditions and early modern exploration—a tension that catalyzed Europe's maritime race to monopolize the Moluccas.

This trans-civilizational trajectory positions spices not merely as commodities but as semiotic currencies mediating sacrality, power, and cross-cultural encounter. Their dual roles as pharmacological agents and geopolitical instruments reveal the entangled logics of spiritual praxis and extractive capitalism that shaped Nusantara's Islamic mercantile cosmopolis

Long predating European mercantile incursions, the Islamic world and Asian polities had cultivated expansive trade nexuses. By the 10th century CE, the Sumatran entrepôt of Barus—integrated into the Sriwijaya maritime empire—functioned as a transcultural emporium attracting Arab, Persian, and Indian merchants. Arab geographer Ibn al-Faqih's 902 CE account documented Barus (termed *Fansur*) as a vital node exporting premium aromatics: camphor, sandalwood, nutmeg, and cloves (Pradjoko & Utomo, 2013). This proto-globalized trade underscores the archipelago's early centrality in Eurasian commerce.

Archaeo-textual evidence from Indian and Chinese chronicles reveals archipelagic spice

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trading activity antedating the 5th century CE. The Sriwijaya thalassocracy (Sanfoqi in Chinese annals) exercised maritime hegemony over western-to-central Nusantara from the 8th–10th centuries, monopolizing strategic straits to tax and regulate the spice-laden Indosphere-Sinosphere exchange (Rahman, 2019). Through this pax mercatoria, Sriwijaya facilitated cross-civilizational encounters that disseminated knowledge of Southeast Asia's spice ecology among Asian merchant diasporas.

Though volumetrically dwarfed by staples like rice or salt, spices commanded exponentially greater value-to-weight ratios, rendering them premium commodities in transoceanic trade. Their portability and scarcity enabled extraordinary profit margins, incentivizing traders to supplement spice purchases with ancillary goods—textiles, ceramics, metals—creating syncretic market ecosystems in Nusantara ports (Reid, 2011).

The "Spice Routes" more accurately encapsulate premodern globalization than the Eurocentric "Silk Road" paradigm. These maritime corridors—operational since the Roman era—connected the Moluccas to the Mediterranean via the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, with overland extensions through Himalayan passes (Fadillah et al., 2021). I While the northern Silk Road carried silks and porcelain, the southern Spice Routes constituted the primary arteries for aromatics, with Arab and Persian intermediaries bridging Indian Ocean and Mediterranean markets. This bifurcated system—maritime spice flows and continental silk exchanges—collectively underpinned Afro-Eurasia's commercial cosmopolis until European colonial disruptions.

In the 7th century, when Islam began to spread widely, Arab traders controlled the spice trade through the sea routes that travelled along the coasts of Africa and India. The peak of Islam's influence in this trade network took place between the 10th and 13th centuries, with the development of numerous trade centers along the route. Cities such as Constantinople and Venice acted as key links between Europe and Asia, while important ports such as Aden, Akkah, Muscat, Bandar Abbas, Hormuz, Cambai and Kalikut became distribution points for spices. In addition, other trading centers emerged in Sagaon, Malacca, Canton and Nanking. During this period, spice traders kept the original source of their goods a secret, until in the 15th century Portuguese sailors managed to find a direct route to the spice-producing islands. By the 16th century, the Portuguese controlled the spice trade and made huge profits, up to eight times their initial capital (Fadillah et al., 2021).

Trade relations between Banten and various outside regions, including China and India, existed before the establishment of the Sultanate of Banten. At that time, Banten was still under the rule of Banten Girang, part of the Sunda Kingdom. The relationship with China was more of a trading one, while that with India was more related to religious aspects. Archaeological evidence from the Banten Girang Site shows that this area was already widely known, even the Greeks called it a silver producer. Banten's strategic location on world trade routes indicates that international connections may have been established as early as the first century AD. By the 7th century, Banten had developed into an important port that was visited by traders from various regions (Fadillah et al., 2021).

Banten Harbor was the first harbor he visited because of its strategic location at the western end of Java Island (Ueda et al., 2016) . The city is described as a well-organized city with a good system. At that time, Banten was still included in the Sunda Kingdom which adhered to Hinduism. Since 1513, Banten has established trade relations with Sumatra, which can be seen from the

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frequent boat traffic between the two regions. The increasingly lively trading activities in Banten were also triggered by the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511, which caused the flow of traders to move to Banten. According to a report in 1522, Banten was already exporting around 1,000 bahars of pepper every year, with the main destination being China and Europe (Fadillah et al., 2021).

After the region came under Islamic rule, Banten developed into one of the major harbors in Java, on par with important ports such as Malacca. Since the Sultanate of Banten was founded by Maulana Hasanuddin (1552-1570), it received widespread support, not only from the local population, but also from a network of Muslim traders coming from various parts of the archipelago and abroad. This encouraged Banten to grow into a maritime power that prioritized shipping and trade activities. During the reign of Maulana Yusuf (1570-1580), agricultural activities such as rice cultivation and pepper plantations were run as a supporting sector for trade (H.Lubis, 2002).

After transforming into an Islamic kingdom, Banten opened itself to international trade by implementing an inclusive policy for traders from various regions, both from the archipelago and abroad. In Cornelis Buijsero's record in 1616, it was recorded that Banten harbor was visited by traders from Tidore, Ambon, Aceh, Java, Pariaman, Sukadana, and Europe (Herliany, 2014) . For Europeans, Banten became a major distribution center for spices, tropical forest products, and industrial products from Southeast Asia and East Asia. The sultanate not only gave freedom of trade, but also facilitated traders with permission to build lodges and occupy the houses that had been provided (K.Seta, 2021).

The open trade policy allowed Banten to grow as one of the most important international ports in the western region of the archipelago. The port traded not only pepper, but also other spices, such as sandalwood and camphor, as well as high-value commodities such as silk, porcelain, salt, cloth, coconut oil, honey, wax and sugar.

Banten's heyday as the main node of the spice route occurred under the reign of Sultan Agung Tirtayasa (1651-1684). During this period, Banten experienced rapid development in agriculture, trade and sea shipping. With the implementation of an open economic policy, the harbor became a magnet for traders from all over the world. As a result, Banten grew into a cosmopolitan city and achieved importance as the center of the Islamic global economy at that time (K.Seta, 2021).

Spices play an important role in the history of Islamic trade in the archipelago. From the 7th to the 15th century, the Indonesian archipelago was known as the world's leading producer of spices such as cloves, nutmeg, pepper and cinnamon. These commodities attracted Muslim traders from Arabia, Persia, Gujarat and India, who made the archipelago's coastal ports their trading centers and stopovers. It was through this trade that Islam began to spread peacefully and gradually in the region. Apart from being an economic commodity, spices also served as a means of cultural diplomacy and a medium for spreading Islamic values. In this process, a religious pattern of community life was formed but still based on local wisdom, as reflected in culinary traditions, celebrations, and the use of spices as part of medicine and religious rituals. Thus, the spice trade became a bridge of civilization that connected the Islamic world with the Nusantara culture and gave birth to the inclusive, adaptive and spiritually rich character of Islam Nusantara.

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3.2. Spices as Islamic Heritage of the Archipelago: The Case of Banten Papper

Pepper (*Piper nigrum*), a principal spice originating from India, emerged as a vital commodity in the Indonesian Archipelago during antiquity. Historical records indicate its introduction to Java by Indian merchants between the 2nd–7th centuries BCE, with initial cultivation centered in Banten. From this epicenter, pepper cultivation disseminated to West Java, Central Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi (Sulaiman et al, 2018). By the early 15th century, Ma Huan's accounts documented established pepper production in Sumatra, likely propagated through Javanese or Indian migrant communities (Marihandono & Kanumoyoso, 2023).

During the Hindu-Buddhist period, Banten gained renown as a premier pepper-producing polity. Following the 10th-century eastward migration of the Mataram Kingdom's population, dissident groups established the Banten Girang Kingdom under Srivijayan patronage. This Shiva-Hindu polity evolved into a regional economic hub sustained by premium pepper production. Its strategic position controlling the Sunda Strait—a critical nexus linking the Malacca Strait, South China Sea, and Java Sea—spurred rivalry between the Majapahit and Srivijayan empires for territorial dominance. Control over Banten Girang conferred not only spice resources but also command over a vital maritime corridor active in global trade since the 1st century CE (K.Seta, 2021). Under the Banten Sultanate, cultivation shifted to upland areas, with pepper exports sourced from tributary regions including Lampung, Palembang, and Bengkulu via Banten's port infrastructure (Solehat, 2019).

The Islamization of the Archipelago, particularly Banten's transformation into a sultanate, catalyzed new dimensions in spice-driven commerce. As Java's western Islamic trade nexus, Banten leveraged pepper and spices to attract merchants across Afro-Eurasian networks, from the Middle East to East Asia (Reid, 2011).

Though Banten's preeminence as a spice entrepôt has diminished, its botanical legacy persists. Markets, gardens, and forests continue to host diverse spice varieties—a testament to centuries of cultural exchange with migrant communities. This enduring biodiversity, cultivated through adaptive practices, ensures the living preservation of Banten's spice heritage.

A 2020 archaeological survey by BPCB Banten Province identified historical pepper cultivation sites, including Babakan (Serang Regency), Gunung Pulosari, Panimbang, and Cigeulis (Pandeglang Regency) (Fadillah et al., 2021). Complementary archival evidence from Dutch colonial records (1805–1807) at Indonesia's National Archives (Archive 29, VOC Catalogue 9 [1674–1891]) documents extensive pepper plantations in *Bantamsche Bovenlanden* and coastal Lampung, with production centers in Lebak's Sampora, Pasir Peuteuy, Maja, Mandala, and Sajira villages (Fadillah et al., 2021).

While no longer a staple export, spice cultivation persists across Banten's agricultural landscape. Pandeglang's Cadasari, Pulosari, Mandalawangi, Cigeulis, and Carita districts remain cultivation hubs, producing cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum*), cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*), cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*), and indigenous rhizomes like turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) and galangal (*Alpinia galanga*). Since 1983, clove production has dominated Kaduengang Village (Cadasari), supported by government seed distribution programs targeting cloves and nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*). Farmers utilize private and forest-derived lands, with clove byproducts (leaves, stalks) processed into topical oils like GPU oil, while flowers supply both culinary and tobacco industries (H. Nurhadi, 2022).

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Cloves have surpassed pepper (*Piper nigrum*) as the preferred crop due to higher profitability and lower agronomic demands, particularly in Pandeglang. In Serang's Ciomas region—historically significant per Dutch colonial spice maps—farmer Ubaedi S. employs intercropping on 1.5 hectares to cultivate cardamom, nutmeg, vanilla (*Vanilla planifolia*), and pepper. Harvests are typically sold through local intermediaries (U. S, . 2022).

Despite local production, Banten's spice consumption remains dependent on external sources. Traders at Serang City's Rau Market report substantial imports from Kalimantan, Papua, Medan, and Tangerang, valued for quality and standardization. These spices serve dual purposes: seasoning traditional dishes (*soto, rabeg, samin rice*) and preparing *jamu* herbal remedies, reflecting persistent demand exceeding regional supply capacity.

Within the framework of *Islam Nusantara*—characterized by cultural acculturation and moderation—spice commerce transcends economics, serving as a vehicle for socio-cultural exchange between Archipelago Muslims and global trading communities (Muntoha et al., 2023). This commodity symbiosis sustains culinary traditions integral to Islamic cultural identity while perpetuating historical networks of botanical prosperity.

3.3. Traditional Cuisine as Cultural Artifact on the Spice Trade Route

Derived from the Latin *culinarius* (pertaining to the kitchen) and later anglicized as "culinary," the term encompasses all dimensions of food production, consumption, and cultural signification. This includes culinary techniques, complementary dishes, confectioneries, and beverages. Culinary practice transcends mere ingredient processing, encapsulating cultural processes that engender regionally distinctive flavors. As such, gastronomy constitutes a vital component of societal identity, reflecting historical trajectories, ecological contexts, and inherited traditions (Utami, 2018; Tihami, 2016). Traditional cuisine represents an edible heritage that codifies communal taste preferences and dietary customs (Abror et al., 2024). In Indonesia, these gastronomic traditions gain added significance through their reliance on natural ingredients and spice-rich formulations, valued for both nutritional and cultural properties. Embedded in socio-cultural systems, traditional foods feature prominently in ritual ceremonies and communal celebrations, serving as markers of localized identity. Their enduring popularity persists even among diasporic communities, demonstrating cuisine's role as a portable cultural anchor (Utami, 2018).

Indonesia's culinary diversity, rooted in ancient traditions, manifests through flavor profiles shaped by locally sourced ingredients. Epigraphic evidence from 8th–10th century Java and Sumatra references *boga* – a concept framing food as artistic expression and sensory pleasure. The archipelago's gastronomic variety mirrors Indonesia's ecological and cultural plurality, positioning cuisine as an integral component of intangible cultural heritage (Rahmawati, 2021).

From a gastronomic perspective, food systems maintain profound cultural connections. Gastronomy – the scientific study of food culture – examines how culinary practices materialize collective identities. As an environmental expression, it traces flavor profiles, aromas, and visual presentations to their geographic origins, thereby documenting humanity's agricultural evolution (Rahmawati, 2021).

Spices constitute Indonesia's culinary and cultural cornerstone (Rohman, 2024), imbuing traditional foods with distinctive flavors and ritual significance. Their historical abundance along the global spice routes facilitated the development of internationally recognized cuisines. Beyond

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gustatory value, spices symbolize Indonesia's bio-cultural wealth, combining perceived health benefits with deep cultural meaning (Wiwik Swastiwi, 2021).

Within *Islam Nusantara* philosophy, traditional cuisine transcends cultural preservation, functioning as a medium for religious expression. This interpretive framework emphasizes Islam's harmonious integration with indigenous traditions while maintaining theological integrity. Spice-laden dishes and communal cooking practices embody Islamic principles of *taʿāruf* (mutual understanding), *ukhuwah* (fraternity), and *barakah* (divine blessing). Rituals like the *selametan* communal feast demonstrate culinary diplomacy, merging religious observance with local wisdom. The meticulous selection of *halal* (permissible) and *tayyib* (wholesome) ingredients further exemplifies the synthesis of Islamic jurisprudence with Archipelagic culinary identity. Thus, through *Islam Nusantara*'s lens, cuisine becomes both physical sustenance and a vehicle for perpetuating inclusive, peace-oriented Islamic values through cultural rootedness.

3.4. Spices, Arab Cultural Exchange, and Islamic Identity Formation in Banten's Culinary Traditions

Spices functioned as both an economic catalyst for coastal polities and a conduit for cross-cultural exchange in the Archipelago. Banten's historical role as a strategic entrepôt facilitated the convergence of global influences, with culinary practices serving as a primary medium for synthesizing indigenous traditions and external inputs. This intercultural dialogue proved instrumental in shaping *Islam Nusantara*—a distinctive Indonesian Islamic identity emerging from spice route interactions (Feener, 2021).

Arab cultural influence in Banten traces to pre-Islamic trade networks, wherein South Arabian merchants dominated Indian Ocean commerce as early as the 1st millennium BCE. Hellenic and Roman civilizations, reliant on Arab intermediaries for Abyssinian and Indian commodities, maintained this perception of Arabian mercantile exclusivity until the Roman Empire's ascendancy in maritime commerce (K.Hitti, 2008). The Islamic Golden Age revitalized Arab cultural outreach, with trade and religious propagation becoming inextricably linked.

In Banten, prolonged mercantile interactions enabled gradual socio-religious assimilation of Arab elements. The adoption of Islam as the majority faith catalyzed deeper acculturation, manifesting in linguistic borrowings, culinary practices, and ritual observances. This synthesis extended beyond economic spheres, influencing folk narratives and communal identity formation (Fitriani et al., 2023).

Culinary artifacts exemplify this hybridity. *Nasi samin*—a seasoned rice dish—demonstrates gastronomic syncretism, blending Arabian *bukhari* and Indian *biryani* traditions with local adaptations. Similarly, *nasi kebuli* and *nasi gonjleng* reflect the Islamization of Javanese foodways, where previously unseasoned rice (*nasi putih*) acquired spice-infused preparations for religious commemorations and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) communal meals.

While *nasi samin* shares foundational spices with Arabian *bukhari* and South Asian *biryani*—garlic (*Allium sativum*), cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*), cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*), ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), and turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)—its preparation exemplifies glocalization. Commercial spice blends streamline production, yet Bantenese iterations prioritize indigenous ingredients: local japonica rice substitutes basmati, while protein accompaniments reflect hyperlocal preferences—goat *rabeg* in Tanara, poultry variants in Taktakan, and buffalo

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meat in Pelamunan. These adaptations underscore *nasi samin*'s evolution beyond culinary mimicry into a culturally rooted practice.

In Kaduengang Village (Gunung Karang), *nasi kebuli* undergoes further localization. Unlike its Arabian prototype characterized by robust curry profiles, the version served during Qur'anic *khataman* ceremonies utilizes autochthonous resources: village-harvested rice, free-range native chicken (*Gallus domesticus*), and farm-sourced spices. This modification aligns with local gustatory preferences favoring subtle seasoning over intense salinity or pungency (Karim et al., 2023).

The ngagigihan technique embodies a time-honored culinary tradition that harmonizes technical precision with ecological sensibilities. This method begins with primary steaming, where rice is parboiled in an *aseupan*—a conical bamboo steamer—until achieving a pliable, semi-cooked state. The process then transitions to an infusion stage, wherein the partially hydrated grains are gradually saturated with warmed coconut milk (*Cocos nucifera*), allowing the lipid-rich liquid to permeate the starches. Final steaming occurs in tiered bamboo vessels, where controlled heat distribution yields a cohesive yet distinct grain texture prized in Sundanese gastronomic heritage.

Spice incorporation adheres to agroecological synchronicity, as exemplified by Kaduengang's *nasi kebuli*. Locally sourced aromatics—seasonal shallots (*Allium cepa var. aggregatum*), fiery cayenne (*Capsicum frutescens*), clove buds (*Syzygium aromaticum*), and citrus-infused lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*)—are ground to mirror harvest cycles, ensuring maximal phytochemical potency. Poultry undergoes a dual-stage preparation: first marinated in a turmeric-lemongrass emulsion to facilitate deep aromatic penetration, then slow-cooked and hand-shredded before being meticulously layered into the spiced rice matrix. This orchestrated interplay of technique and terroir culminates in a dish that transcends sustenance, serving as an edible archive of cultural-ecological interdependence.

The ingredients comprising *nasi kebuli* are intrinsically linked to local ecosystems, with spices such as turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum*), cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*), and lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) embodying both phytotherapeutic and cultural significance. In Kaduengang Village, these botanicals are integral to traditional wellness practices, often decocted into herbal infusions believed to enhance immunological resilience and physical endurance—a testament to their dual role in gastronomy and ethnomedicine (Suwarti, 2022).

Turmeric's golden pigmentation in *nasi kebuli* symbolizes agrarian gratitude and epistemic wisdom, while cloves and cinnamon contribute not only flavor but also thermogenic properties, the latter historically associated with hypoglycemic benefits. Lemongrass, through its volatile aromatic compounds, enhances gustatory appeal by stimulating appetite. This synthesis of sensory and symbolic elements elevates *nasi kebuli* beyond mere sustenance, positioning it as a vehicle for preserving biocultural heritage (Suwarti, 2022).

The archipelago's historical engagement with spice commerce transcends economic narratives, reflecting instead a dynamic interplay of transcultural exchange and religious acculturation. *Islam Nusantara*—a distinct Indonesian Islamic identity—emerged from centuries of dialogue between Arabic theological frameworks and Indigenous cosmologies. Dishes such as *nasi samin* and *nasi kebuli*, enriched with spice-laden symbolism, epitomize this synthesis, harmonizing ritual, flavor, and communal ethics. Thus, Indonesia's culinary traditions serve as

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living repositories of spiritual and cultural identity, uniting Muslim communities through shared gastronomic codes that bridge ecological, historical, and devotional domains.

3.5. The Role of Women in the Nusantara Islamic Trade and Culinary Industry

Women have historically occupied central roles in *Islam Nusantara* (Indonesian Archipelago Islam), extending beyond domestic spheres to shape economic and cultural landscapes. During the 15th–17th century maritime trade zenith, Southeast Asian women were recognized as adept commercial actors, often dominating regional markets—a phenomenon that confounded early European and Chinese traders accustomed to male-dominated commerce. Archival records underscore their strategic influence in key trading hubs, challenging gendered norms of economic participation (Reid, 2011).

Notable figures exemplify this legacy: Nyai Gede Pinatih, a 16th-century Javanese merchant-missionary, administered Gresik's port while orchestrating trade networks spanning Bali, Maluku, and Cambodia. Similarly, Lomo Tombo, consort of Sultan Hasanuddin of Makassar, spearheaded maritime ventures to Johor in the 1660s. Across Aceh, Jambi, and Indragiri, women engaged in transnational trade with parity to male counterparts, solidifying their indispensable role in the Archipelago's commercial ecosystems (Reid, 2011).

In contemporary Banten, women remain pivotal to both macro- and micro-scale economies. They drive spice commerce—particularly clove cultivation and distribution—at substantial commercial volumes, while simultaneously sustaining informal food sectors through stalls, markets, and residential enterprises. Rural women innovate agricultural processing (e.g., transforming cassava and bananas into snack commodities), whereas coastal communities leverage marine resources into value-added products like crackers and salted fish. Annual Ramadan and Eid cycles amplify their economic visibility, as demand surges for *iftar* (fast-breaking) and festive provisions (Solehat, 2019).

While culinary labor is not gender-exclusive, sociocultural perceptions frequently conflate foodways with feminized domains. In Bantenese traditions, women govern flavor architectures—curating spice ratios, cooking techniques, and ceremonial recipes. Though men may assist in physically intensive tasks (e.g., slaughtering livestock, firewood preparation), women's mastery of taste modulation cements their authority as culinary custodians. This gendered specialization perpetuates matrilineal transmission of gastronomic knowledge, ensuring the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

Women in Banten demonstrate multifaceted roles as both culinary custodians and active economic participants. In Serang City, female-led culinary enterprises preserve traditional gastronomy through establishments such as *Sate Bandeng Ibu Maryam*, *Ibu Aliyah*, and *Ibu Ameenah*—eponymous restaurants specializing in milkfish satay (*sate bandeng*), a regionally recognized delicacy (Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) Kemendikbud, 2021). Oral histories attribute the dish's invention to royal chefs during Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin's reign, who devised deboning techniques to address the Sultan's preference for milkfish (*Chanos chanos*) despite its intricate bone structure (Saepudin et al., 2024).

Beyond *sate bandeng*, matrilineal culinary stewardship sustains *rabeg*, a spiced mutton dish central to *selametan* (communal feasts) and commercial food stalls. *Rabeg* exemplifies transcultural gastronomy, combining Middle Eastern influences—evident in imported spices like star anise (*Illicium verum*) and cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*)—with indigenous ingredients

such as galangal (*Alpinia galanga*) and lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) (Pancasasti et al., 2022). Beyond *sate bandeng*, matrilineal culinary stewardship sustains *rabeg*, a spiced mutton dish central to *selametan* (communal feasts) and commercial food stalls. *Rabeg* exemplifies transcultural gastronomy, combining Middle Eastern influences—evident in imported spices like star anise (*Illicium verum*) and cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*)—with indigenous ingredients such as galangal (*Alpinia galanga*) and lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) (MoEC, 2021b).

Geographically concentrated in post-Sultanate administrative enclaves (Kaujon, Kaloran, Sukalila), *rabeg* remains popular among descendants of Banten's nobility (*Tubagus*, *Mas*, *Ayip*) (Anugraheni & Turgarini, 2023). The dish's nomenclature derives from Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin's hajj journey, during which the Red Sea port city of Rabiq inspired its naming (Umam, 2021).

Within *Islam Nusantara*—a syncretic interpretation of Islam rooted in Indonesian cultural values—women emerge as socioeconomic pillars and guardians of intangible heritage. Their dual roles as culinary innovators and microenterprise leaders reinforce communal identity while sustaining trade networks that bridge spiritual traditions and economic resilience. By curating spice-laden recipes and managing market-driven ventures, women perpetuate a gastronomic legacy emblematic of the region's Islamic-cultural synthesis.

CONCLUSION

Spices transcend their commercial utility, serving as civilizational bridges that linked Eastern and Western realms via the Archipelago's maritime corridors. While male traders from Arabia, India, China, and Europe dominated historical narratives, women's agency proved equally vital. As custodians of domestic and culinary realms, they preserved spice-based medicinal knowledge, aromatic traditions, and culinary wisdom, infusing these resources with spiritual, therapeutic, and sociocultural resonance. Their stewardship sustained a symbiotic relationship between spices' practical applications—as healing agents, culinary staples, and identity symbols—and the preservation of intergenerational knowledge.

Behind the agroeconomic prominence of polities like Srivijaya and the Banten Sultanate, women emerged as linchpins of localized economies, driving spice cultivation, processing, and distribution systems that anchored the Nusantara's global trade dominance. Within Islam Nusantara's cultural framework, they further reimagined spices as tools for ritual practices, holistic health, and communal cohesion. Formal historiography may obscure their contributions, yet women remain the foundational architects of the Archipelago's spice legacy—unsung agents who harmonized material prosperity and intangible heritage across centuries.

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