Anti-Mainstream Culinary: The Influence of Post-Modernism on Gastronomy in Indonesian Restaurants

Tika Widari*, Aliffiati, Luthfi Riyadh Rahman, Muhammad Indra

Abstract: The culinary movement is currently undergoing interesting developments: initially, food was a basic requirement for energy and the food consumed was usually processed from nature. Consequently, processed food often characterized the identity of specific tribes, cultures, and regions. In the modern era, food has a long history (for example, the French Revolution), with ethics and rules. This shows that modern food culture is structured and even classifies social classes. Originally, food in the modern era had a concept adapted from the serving of food in palaces, with order and layout. However, this modern presentation of food was rejected by cooks who served food in different ways. For example, enjoying meals at a high altitude and serving food with unusual artistry. With this resistance to the European-style presentation of many luxury restaurants in Indonesia, this post-modernist restaurant can attract customers. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data collection technique is conducted through visual observation via social media. The findings reveal that the flow of post-modernism and post-structuralism has influenced the way food is served in several Indonesian restaurants. The full results and discussion are presented herein.

Keywords: Culinary, Gastronomy, Post-modernism.

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1. Introduction

The movement in the culinary world today is undergoing interesting developments. In the beginning, food was just a basic requirement for energy, and therefore the need for food was very limited and did not vary. Nowadays, the food we eat usually processed from their natural products. Thus the processed food can characterize the identity of specific tribes, cultures, and regions (Jackson, 2024; Kapitány & Kapitány, 2024; van Boeijen & Schifferstein, 2024). There is an interesting expression expressed by a French lawyer and politician, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, who has an interest in epicure and gastronomes, “Tell me what you eat, I'll tell you who you are” (Utami, 2018). In addition, according to Bentley (2021) asserts that “preparation, rituals, aromas, social conditions, climate change, and the context in which food is sown, gathered, arranged, and consumed are forms of cultural expression and identity”. These expressions underscore that the food consumed can describe a cultural identity.

The term “culture” originates from the Sanskrit word “buddhayah”, which is the plural form of “buddhi” which means “budi” or “akal”. Thus, Koentjaraningrat defines culture as “the power of the mind” in the form of copyright, karsa and taste, while culture is the result of this copyright, karsa, and taste (Koentjaraningrat, 2005). This view means that food can explain how the culture is adopted. Culinary in the modern era has an interesting history. Starting with the French Revolution, where the palace cooks had to face a complicated situation, they had to survive with new adaptations following the fall of the monarchy. According to Albala (2013), in 1789, at the time of the French Revolution, many aristocrats either fled the nation or executed by beheaded with a guillotine, including King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Consequently, all the professional chefs who had served the aristocracy found themselves unemployed. This is not the origin of the restaurant, but it certainly increased the number of restaurants. These chefs influenced several restaurant trends by implementing palace-style service, known as “service à la Russe”. This French-style presentation became very famous by applying ethics and rules, exemplifying a structured serving culture in the modern era that can even classify social classes.

A plate of food can explain how an ethnic group, with its various histories, evolves alongside continuously changing social conditions. The occurrence of acculturation in food offer is inevitable, which is adjusted to the creativity of the creator in infusing ideas into dishes (Meijers & Han, 2024; Yayla et al., 2024). Similar to gastronomy, Yucatecan flavors have the value of equality or egalitarianism. They highlight their cosmopolitan nature, thus affirming Yucatecan gastronomy is on a par with other haute cuisines, rather than merely an ‘ethnic’ or ‘parochia’ cooking tradition. This notion supports the concealment of the historical process by which the practices, values, and preferences of subordinated people, including immigrants and local indigenous groups, have been integrated into a single and shared Yucatecan taste (Ayora-Diaz, 2019). Food recipes are not merely a collection of spices and ingredients but also convey stories. Diana Kennedy, an ethno-gastronome, stated in an interview that every recipe has a history or story that can be immortalized through writing and images. The challenge lies in the fact that each food recipe provides a unique in taste sensation, which is difficult to capture through the sense of taste (tongue). This becomes the experience of each connoisseur (Schroeder & Kennedy, 2011).

If the presentation of a meal is a cultural construction, the deconstruction of a meal can also occurs. Initially food in the modern era followed a concept adapted from the palace presentations, characterized by careful order and layout. However, the modern presentation of dishes is challenged by cooks who began serving dishes in distinctly different way. Meals were enjoyed at high altitudes and food was served with unusual artistry. With such
resistance to the European-style presentation that widely adopted by many luxury restaurants in Indonesia, enables post-modernist restaurants to attract customers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Culinary

In his research entitled “Some Basic Aspects of Medieval Cuisine” Freedman (2007), a qualitative literature study method was employed. The findings revealed that the medieval western world did not develop a scientific culinary tradition comparable to the sophistication in Oriental, Chinese, or Islamic gastronomy. Instead, medieval cuisine was characterized by a preference for spices, a love for innovation, and a strong tendency towards sophistication, alongside distinctive ingredient processing techniques (Fais-Leutskaia, 2019; Williams, 2023; Woolgar, 2018). Furthermore, Albala (2013), in the book chapter entitled “Food: A Cultural Culinary History”, explains how the development of restaurants in the 18th century, the rise of celebrity chefs among the nobility, and how gastronomy, the science and art of eating in the 19th century, specifically in Lecture 28 (First Restaurants, Chefs, and Gastronomy). In this condition, the culinary world is strongly influenced by modernity, which prioritizes the rules that have been agreed to be the standard in the modern culinary world.

2.2. Gastronomy

The study entitled “Gastronomy and culinary arts education in Turkey: department heads’ perspective” conducted by Ekincek et al. (2017), using qualitative methods, discussed gastronomy and culinary arts in the perspective of department heads. The findings revealed the most significant concerns, followed by internship issues are courses. Subsequently, postgraduate programs are also expected to be able to educate the necessary academics in specialized institutions and experienced in the field, and later academic contests are also considered important in complementing and supporting gastronomy and culinary arts education. Further research conducted by Krstic (2017) entitled “Thinking identity with difference: Society and theory”, using a qualitative literature study method. The findings revealed a contemporary increase of interest in the identity issue in the 21st century, sparked by the differences between idealism and philosophers. This causes a dilemma for humanity at the end of time between idealism and classical philosophers. Identity seems to be the most prioritized aspect of existence. In the culinary world, it is now quite important to show identity to be more easily recognized (Fernandes et al., 2024; Güleç & Yılmaz, 2024). The culinary world is now competes to show its characteristics, by building values that are considered in accordance with the creator’s persona in creating the culinary work.

2.3. Post-modernisme

The research written by Kustiawan et al. (2023) entitled “Media dalam Pendekatan Pemikiran Postmodernisme atau Dekonstruksi”, explores the evolution of art. The order and rules of modernism have transitioned to the stage of postmodernism. The thought of Jean-Francois Lyotard, the first scholar to introduce postmodernism, explains that postmodernism is a response to the absolute truth, which is the limit to modernism (Lyotard et al., 1984; Simons, 2022). Through the ideas expressed by Lyotard, it is very relevant to the conditions of media evolution. Where at this time the media began to get out of the patterns of modernism. Through a paper, Setiawan & Sudrajat (2018) entitled “Pemikiran Postmodernisme dan Pandangannya terhadap Ilmu Pengetahuan”, discuss how science in postmodernism has a view that is not absolute. Through several postmodernism figures discussed in this paper, one of which is Derrida, who is attached to the theory of deconstruction, which is one of the doors that open postmodern thinking. Through various thoughts in the form of theories that are quite rigid, and the truth is difficult to counter, with
the idea of deconstruction put forward, Derrida tries to convey that if there is an order later there is an irregularity. This thought leads to a related understanding outside the structure formed in modernism, this can also be seen in the current reality situation.

3. Method

This data collection method employed a postmodernist approach to observe how the movement of serving dishes in some restaurants today has left the structure bound to the modern era. Through this approach, it is expected to be able to see this phenomenon taking place. According to Eagleton, postmodernism is a take on the idea of modernism by sharpening criticism and distance, since it was formed with the aim of providing solutions to the causes of social problems that occur in society, including cultural problems (Hewitt, 1997). In addition, using a visual anthropology approach, it is expected to help visually analyze this phenomenon. Ruby (1996) in study entitled “One agenda of visual anthropology is to analyze the properties of visual systems, to determine the properties of visual systems and the conditions of their interpretation and to relate the particular systems to the complexities of the social and political processes of which they are a part. A second agenda is to analyze the visual means of disseminating anthropological knowledge itself.” By using these two approaches, the study aimed to obtain more detailed and insightful data (Nurasih et al., 2023; Widari et al., 2023).

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with visual observation data collection techniques through supporting (relevant) social media platforms. Through observations on the Instagram social media account of the restaurant officials, it can be seen how the restaurant and visitor activities. In addition, seeing the assessment and response of visitors on Google Map enhances the accuracy of the gathered data. The purpose of using this method is to understand the phenomenon of trends in serving dishes that are influenced by Postmodernism. Data analysis is conducted by collecting photos on social media and visitors’ responses.

4. Result

Based on the virtual research results, it was found that there are several restaurants across various regions of Indonesia that adopted unusual concepts or known as anti-mainstream. These restaurant owners choose to leave the presentation theme that is widely applied by restaurants in general. Initially, many restaurants were inspired by aristocratic-style presentation, popularly known as modern presentation. Modern serving itself is a shift from the traditional culinary offerings of the aristocrats who served various dishes on one wide table with large portions. However, the presence of Antoine Carême, a cook for the nobles in the 18th century, brought significant changes to gastronomy at that time. Carême began to simplify food portions but with complete continence. His presentation was favored by the nobles and soon became popular across Europe.

This style of serving came to be characterized as the modern era (Palma, 2014). While restaurants initially adopted some modern standards, with European palace-like standards, this did not satisfy some people. In addition, the arrangement, rules, and other aspects that make up a modern restaurant bored some people. Changing dietary preferences are one of the factors that have motivated chefs continually with menu ideas. Evolution is evident in the Spanish culinary movement, after the end of the dictatorial political regime in 1975, creativity and economic progress began to grow, household incomes began to experience prosperity and Spanish society began to spend on food needs from the need to experience a shift to secondary needs. The creativity of art and entertainment began to appeal to all circles, from here the culinary world began to give birth
to many new variations of cuisine (Bonacho, 2021; Boz & Ozturk, 2020; Neill et al., 2024). Some culinary creations that begin to combine food with art are now not reluctant to appear. Such as Frenkenstein Laboratory Restaurant in Bali.

Figure 1. Frankenstein Laboratory Restaurant

![Image of Frankenstein Laboratory Restaurant](source)

Source: Instagram Account @frankensteinslaboratorybali

Frenkenstein Laboratory Restaurant in Bali which has a Laboratory theme collaborated with Helloween. Collaborating with the laboratory and Helloween theme, the restaurant offers a culinary experience with an atmosphere full of mystery and horror. In addition to the elaborate atmosphere, such as decorations, dim lighting, and mysterious sounds, the employees and visitors at Frenkenstein Laboratory Restaurant also wear costumes inspired by classic Helloween characters such as Frankenstein, vampires, and zombies. The activities on Frenkenstein Lab, as seen on their Instagram, involves the employees and visitors use SFX make up with various costumes.

Figure 2. Culinary serving at Frankenstein Laboratory Restaurant

![Image of culinary serving](source)

Source: Instagram.

In serving dishes, Frenkenstein lab applies a very absurd concept, such as using syringes to serve drinks, or even infusion bags. In addition, the food served, such as pizza and others, are arranged on a board with the concept of a practicum table.
Laboratory Restaurant in Bali is an antimainstream eatery that serves a unique culinary experience that is different from other typical restaurant themes. Some visitors also share their experiences on google reviews when visiting Frankenstein Laboratory Restaurant in Bali.

“This was a fun and kid friendly evening that we enjoyed. The food was so-so - portions of chips and slices small (3/5), pizza size large (4/5) parmy was decent (4/5).” MC, the visitor, who rated 4/5 star on Google review

“Plenty of western and Asian dishes on menu the cocktails are creative and fun will be back next time in Bali.” U, who rated 5/5 star on Google review.

“We wanted to experience the fun drinks that come in IV bags and syringes, and found a small section on the drinks menu of 6 "non-alcoholic" drinks that come in syringes. We ordered all 6 at the bar, and they were happy to accept. But later we were moved from the bar to the restaurant section for the show, and a waitress asked us what drinks we wanted. We asked for the same again (all 6 drinks) and the waitress refused, saying only kids could have those drinks.” PB, who rated 1/5 star on google review.

In addition to the Frenkenstein Lab, there is a unique presentation of the Lounge in The Sky restaurant. Its uniqueness offers enjoying dishes at a height of 50m. The menu offered has several variants, including non-vegan, vegan and business meals. While some visitors find the taste responses relatively ordinary, the attraction lies in the service and the sensation of enjoying a meal at a height of 50m became their choice to visit. Despite its premium pricing, Lounge in The Sky remains an attraction for the upper social class. It serves not only as dining destination but also as a place for visitors capturing moments and for celebrities to create content. The experience provided by the Lounge in The Sky theme ensures its continued existence and popularity.

**Figure 3.** Lounge in The Sky Restaurant

Source: Instagram.

“Something very impressive, you can have dinner above 50m with your family, the view is very beautiful.” SW, who rated 5/5 star on Google review

“Great experience cause its 1 and only in Jkt. Should be more entertaining. Dining at a height is one thing, but the experience when eating, hmm, feels like just eating normally. Suggestion: MC must build some exciting atmosphere, make this dining experience memorable (not just an ordinary dining), so customers are willing to dine again to feel different experience/moment.” F, who rated 3/5 star on Google review
Subsequently, there is the exciting urban restaurant Namaaz Dining. Namaaz Dining adopts a different theme every season, offering 17 menus per person with 28 diners per group. Based on the responses from the diners, they believe that dining at Namaaz Dining would reshape their opinion, especially if the food served accurately represents the flavors offered. Namaaz Dining provides a menu with a variety of shapes and far from the original form. For instance, such as noodles shaped like cables, Sate Klatak served on a wheel spoke and others. If observed from the visitors’ evaluations, they express satisfaction with the experience of enjoying unconventional culinary offerings. Despite some visitors giving unfavorable ratings in terms of taste, Namaaz Dining continues to attract a long queue. Therefore, potential customers are willing to make reservations and patiently await for each new season.

![Namaaz Dining Restaurant](source: Instagram)

An amazing experience for fine/fun dining. There are 16 or 17 menus that make you full. My favorites are the bee and, exploding, and another one I forgot the name of, the one that when you eat it, smoke comes out haha (the menu is basically fish, similar to sushi).” S, who rated 5/5 star on Google review

“A different dining experience. Around 15 unique menu variations, little by little but filling too.” BM, who rated 5/5 star on Google review

“Last gaming season, only a few of the foods were delicious. Many are cold, the klathak satay is tough, the plug-shaped noodles are very salty, there are no desserts wow, the papeda is very salty and makes your throat itchy. The food was all ready before dining so it was cold and tough. They should have pre-cooked and
heated but the taste is normal but it doesn't taste good and makes you cough. The interactive gimmick is also not enjoyable.” P, who rated 1/5 star on Google review

Culinary culture in the modern era can be observed through several restaurants that exist in Indonesia by emphasizing on unconventional concepts, known as anti-mainstream. This context is evident through the culinary culture that has started by combining food with art has become a dominant culturephenomenon. As exemplified by Frenkenstein Laboratory Restaurant in Bali, which features the theme of Laboratory collaborated with Helloween. The culinary culture has been presented by Frenkenstein Laboratory restaurant in serving dishes through very absurd concepts, and also a unique representation of Lounge in The Sky restaurant. In addition to offering anti-mainstream dining concepts, the restaurants also contribute in shaping culinary culture in the modern era by incorporating contemporary nature-themed room decorations. In other words, culinary culture in the modern era has experienced significant development in the culinary world today, initially where food served as a basic nessecity to fulfill energy, usually processed from natural ingredients.

5. Discussion

Based on observations conducted in three distinct restaurants through social media, several remarkable aspects emerged: the concept, the visitors’ responses, and the restaurant existence. The three restaurants articulated unique concepts that served as their defining identities. These three restaurants also ellumintae culinary evolution. According to Fischler’s framework on the art of processing food, there are three processes: accommodation, transformation, and metamorphosis of raw materials, transitionin g them from nature to culture (Herlina & Setiarto, 2024; Rao et al., 2005). The statement provides valuable insights when applied to current culinary reality. Namaaz Dinning, a restaurant offering Indonesian cuisine, exemplifies a distinctive culinary identity. It is undeniable that every cuisine can reflects ethnicity or national identity. Immigrants or diasporas often bring flavors from their region or country (Diaz & Ore, 2022; Koytak, 2024; Protassova & Yelenevskaya, 2023). Those who have a taste for food that is identical to the conditions of their hometown. Having come to a global city with ethnic food, they are able to recreate the ingredients. This strategy, not always cravings for the tastes of the homeland because certain dishes are (Alfonso, 2012; Araviashvili & Ladaria, 2021; Farrer & Wang, 2021).

Namaaz Dinning, featuring cuisine of several regions in Indonesia, serves as both a remedy for nostalgia and a new experience for customers who enjoy anti-mainstream dining options. Despite the services of the three restaurants being complicated and not always offering convenient dining experience, they are successful in attracting customers. However, the creativity in combining food with a touch of art makes an impression on diners. For example, the potato, often stereotype as a food synonymous with poverty, wildness and unattractiveness, undergoes a transformation when the Irish can prepare it with a few extra spices and pair it with other foods such as meat. In the end, potatoes became a food eaten by the Royal family and had a sense of luxury (O’Connell, 2018). It is not uncommon for culinary offerings to present interesting concepts and evoke an impression of luxury in the dishes served, as exemplified by the presentations at Namaaz Dinning and Lounge-in the Sky restaurants. Some dishes are served to evoke a nostalgic atmosphere that reminding diners of moments they wish to relive. The creativity brought to the theme of food serving continues to grow, which is a critique of neoclassicalism food service that tends to be bound by inflexible and outdated rules (Landis, 2014). Departing from the old ways, where the view of dining in 18th century Britain reflected the educational level of those still attached to class status where table manners were the main aspect to respect their table (Bickham, 2008; Caronia & Colla, 2024; Farwell & Mees, 2023). However, how can table manners be relevant

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to this era, when the meal itself served in unconventionally, breaking away from patterns that are receding from traditional restaurant settings with monotonous service? This presentation of food seems to serve as a platform for chefs and consumers to channel their dissatisfaction with the structure of the culinary world.

Based on the responses documented in the rating column, most customers visit this restaurant to capture the moment and enjoy the atmosphere. Despite the flavors on the menu not meeting all customers’ expectations, they feel that they are compensated through the presented creativity, making the experience and sensation considered worthwhile for the effort and the price paid. Opinions regarding taste are very intimate, based on the sense of taste that will have its own response according to everyone’s taste. Taste, being the most personal of senses in the material world, underscores the substantial impact of ratings and reviews on potential customers (Bylund et al., 2024; Ferguson, 2011). In addition, they find that the presentation of this unique dishes enhances celebration of their special occasions.

Food design has a major contribution in influencing appetite, by starting to attract and later increasing, to the feeling of wanting to consume. It is also widely seen from the many variations of food that ultimately the visual appearance determines which food will be chosen for consumption (Goukens et al., 2007). Despite receiving negative responses and criticisms from customers regarding evaluations of this restaurant, particularly regarding the taste of the dishes, communication, and cleanliness, the restaurant still retains its royal customers.

Furthermore, the restaurant remains the choice of connoisseurs of culinary offerings with unconventional concepts. The existence of the restaurant still exists with the existence of social media, where many consumers share their activities when visiting the restaurant. Social media is now a new communication style that connects individuals virtually. Through sharing various activities, they can convey and exchange information (Airlangga PH et al., 2024; Fernando et al., 2023; Hakim et al., 2024; Wang, 2016). According to Ghunathan & Corfman, social media can influence consumption decisions. Watching others enjoy food can increase enjoyment which validates the imagination of the food (Bublitz et al., 2010). It is not surprising that consumers consider that the restaurant has a visual appeal that is worth sharing on the customers’ personal Instagram accounts to share their culinary sensations. The color composition of each dish captures customers’ attention. The color component presented has its own symbol, not merely presented without meaning (Vieira et al., 2023). Each color included can increase attraction, appetite, and others (Woolgar, 2018).

The advantage of the existence and good image of the restaurant is certainly inseparable from the creator or the owner of the idea of the processed cuisine, there is copyright protection in every authentic recipe they create to appreciate the work. As for the more famous dishes and restaurants have an impact on the reputation of the cook or chef, with their fame also becomes a pride. Like an artist, their works and names can be recognized by many people as a tribute (myhrvold, 2011). In addition, customers’ satisfaction and enjoyment sustain the restaurant’s continued existence.

Looking deeper into the cuisine is inseparable from its various aspects. A plate of food will depict a historical origin of the food or an event, an image of social class, gender, psychology, and philosophy (Haley, 2012). Through these three restaurants, we can illustrate the philosophy that they present in every dish and snack sensation. The values they embed inevitably create curiosity and excite customers to immediately visit these restaurants. Anthropologist Sidney Mintz reveals how the construction of sugar (candy) in 19th century decorations has a deep meaning, how in that century social classes were unequal and not all aspects were accessible to the lower classes including food. However, it was a different story with sugar, with the supply of sugar being quite easy at that time at
an affordable price, therefore the lower class could enjoy sugar-based dishes (Tebben, 2015). These restaurants also incidentally segment their potential customers base. However, there is one commonality that integrates the customers of these three restaurants is that their desire to enjoy anti-mainstream dishes that carry a modern theme.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research results and analysis of this phenomenon, it can be explained that Post-Modernism and Post-Structuralism have influenced the development of the culinary world. The presence of restaurants that adopt the concept of postmodernism as a theme in serving dishes has attracted culinary connoisseurs. Implicitly, the culinary world is experiencing deconstruction. And with this anti-mainstream food serving, it can answer the sense of dissatisfaction or restriction from the presentation of structured modern dishes. The context can be reflected through the significant findings of this study, which demonstrate that culinary creations can characterize the identity of specific ethnicities, cultures, and regions. The presentation of modern dishes has been challenged by chefs who serve dishes in unique ways. With various resistance to the European-style presentation commonly adopted by luxury restaurants in Indonesia, these restaurants following the concept of postmodernism are able to attract customers.

The findings of this study differ from previous researches. Studies that have previously discussed culinary culture in modern era tend to be normative and descriptive. However, the findings in this study show that culinary culture in modern era adapts concepts derived from the presentation of food in palaces, focusing on sequence and layout. Nevertheless, this modern dish presentation has been challenged by chefs who serve food in unconventional ways. The findings of this study are expected to provide a dialogical foundation for future studies aiming to explore cultural issues in modern culinary contexts more reflectively and empirically. However, the limitations of this study are anticipated to serve as a basis for future research, aiming to address culinary cultural issues in the modern era through intensive interviews and a more diverse range of informants.

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