

Osing People's Ritual Kitchen: An Epistemic Space of Indigenous Women at Java's Eastern Tip

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Abstract

This article examines the ritual kitchen of *Osing* people in Banyuwangi as an epistemic space of Indigenous women rather than merely a domestic sphere. Drawing on an ethnographic approach and a critical reading of *olah rasa* practices, the study positions Indigenous women as knowing subjects who actively produce, preserve, and transmit cultural, ecological, and spiritual values. The ritual kitchen is understood as a site of knowledge production that is embodied, relational, and contextual, where knowledge is transmitted through practice, bodily discipline, and adherence to ancestral mandates. Ritual culinary practices analysis reveals that *Osing* Indigenous women's knowledge plays a vital role in sustaining tradition, ensuring local food resilience, and maintaining human–nature relations. Nevertheless, Indigenous women's positions remain frequently marginalised in customary decision-making processes and development agendas, giving rise to epistemic injustice. Thus, recognising the kitchen as an epistemic space is a necessary condition for the gender-just preservation of Indigenous knowledge.

Keywords: Indigenous women, ritual kitchen, epistemic space, *olah rasa*, *Osing* people

Introduction

To date, studies of Indigenous communities have largely been dominated by a perspective that marginalises the knowledge of Indigenous women by placing it outside the category of legitimate knowledge. In academic discourse and state policy, Indigenous communities are often represented by men, such as Indigenous elders, ritual leaders and community elites, who are positioned as guardians of tradition and epistemic authorities. Consequently, the knowledge production of Indigenous women is reduced to everyday practices that are considered natural and apolitical. This creates a form of structural epistemic injustice that excludes women as subjects of Indigenous knowledge (Fricker 2007). In this context, the epistemic injustice experienced by Indigenous women can also be understood through the lens of intersectionality when their gender intersects with their status as members of Indigenous communities and as a structurally marginalised group (Crenshaw 1991).

This epistemic erasure operates through the public–domestic dichotomy, a concept that has long been the target of feminist criticism. This dichotomy not

only governs the gendered division of labour, but also functions as a mechanism of power that determines what constitutes knowledge and who is authorised to speak on behalf of Indigenous communities. The public sphere is associated with rationality, authority, and legitimacy, whereas the domestic sphere is confined to social reproduction and considered to have no epistemic value. In the context of Indigenous communities, this logic becomes intertwined with patriarchal and colonial structures that perpetuate the invisibility of women's knowledge (Harding 2004).

In feminist discourse, the kitchen often symbolises women's unpaid and unrecognised reproductive labour, naturalised as a matter of 'human nature' (Mies 1998; Federici 2012). However, this interpretation often stops at an economic and political critique, failing to recognise the kitchen as an arena for the production of knowledge. Mainstream studies of Indigenous cultures tend to overlook the kitchen, particularly the ritual kitchen, in epistemological analyses, despite it being a strategic space where Indigenous women oversee food management, ritual rhythms, and the community's cosmological relationships.

The absence of ritual kitchens in studies of Indigenous customs reveals a political gap in research on Indigenous women. Existing research tends to focus solely on demands for recognition, rights and formal representation. This approach neglects the everyday politics of knowledge production that underpin Indigenous life itself. Consequently, embodied knowledge, operating through women's bodies, senses, collective memory and culinary ritual practices, remains on the periphery of feminist analysis. However, as Haraway (1988) emphasises, knowledge is always situated and rooted in the relations between body, space, and history; it is never a neutral entity, nor detached from women's lived experiences. Consequently, the marginalised domestic sphere can become a site for the production of knowledge and resistance. As bell hooks (1990) highlights, marginal spaces are not merely sites of subordination; they can also serve as strategic spaces in which meaning and agency are produced.

The author has previously documented the practices of cultivating taste and the preparation of ritual dishes within the *Osing* Indigenous community in earlier work (Indiarti 2015; Indiarti & Nurchayati 2019). It focused on descriptions of ritual dishes, the sequence of rituals, and the symbolic meanings within *Osing* culture. Rather than repeating that discussion, this paper takes a different approach by building upon it. While previous works were descriptive and ethnographic in nature, this paper shifts the analytical focus by employing a feminist epistemological perspective to interpret the ritual kitchen as a space for producing Indigenous women's knowledge. Consequently, established practices are not merely reinterpreted as a cultural backdrop, but as an epistemic arena revealing the relationship between the body, knowledge, and women's authority in traditional *Osing* rituals.

Based on this documentation and the remaining analytical gaps, this paper focuses on the ritual kitchen of the *Osing* Indigenous community as an epistemic space for indigenous women. It examines how ritual and culinary knowledge is produced, practised, and passed down through kitchen practices overseen by women during village purification rituals. It also considers the influence of power relations within the Indigenous structure on the recognition of such knowledge. The kitchen is not merely understood as a domestic space that supports rituals; it is also considered the primary

arena for producing embodied knowledge through the bodies, senses, collective memory, and daily labour of Indigenous women. In this sense, the ritual kitchen can be understood as a 'produced space'—that is, a space shaped by social practices and power relations (Lefebvre 1991).

This paper is grounded in a feminist epistemology that rejects claims of neutral objectivity and recognises women's experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge (Haraway 1988; Harding 2004). To analyse the context of Indigenous communities, the paper also adopts a decolonial feminist perspective. This approach views Indigenous communities as dynamic living spaces characterised by negotiation. Additionally, the paper draws on Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice to illustrate how Indigenous women's knowledge is recognised in practice yet negated symbolically and structurally.

Taking an ethnographic approach and a feminist epistemology as a starting point, this paper argues that the ritual kitchen of the *Osing* Indigenous community is a strategic arena in which Indigenous women play a pivotal role. They are not only responsible for 'serving' rituals, but also for producing, maintaining, and transmitting the knowledge that determines the community's sustainability. Recognising the ritual kitchen is therefore not merely symbolic; it is also a material prerequisite for achieving epistemic justice and gender-just Indigenous sustainability. This study provides a non-romanticised interpretation of Indigenous traditions by acknowledging the power relations and gender inequalities within them, while also creating space for critique and transformation from the perspective of Indigenous women.

Research Methodology

This paper employs a combination of feminist ethnography and feminist epistemology from a decolonial perspective to examine the ritual kitchen of the *Osing* Indigenous community as an epistemic space for Indigenous women. In this context, ethnography is not merely a data-collection technique; it is also a situated praxis of knowledge that recognises the life experiences, bodily labour and everyday practices of Indigenous women as legitimate sources of knowledge and arenas for the struggle for epistemic justice (Harding 2004; Smith 2012).

The research focuses on three purification rituals within the Indigenous *Osing* community: *Amin Pikin* in the Cungking neighbourhood of Mojopanggung, *Tumpeng Sewu* in Kemiren village, and *Tumpeng Songo* in the Andong hamlet of Tamansuruh village. These rituals were selected due to their consistent positioning of the ritual kitchen as the centre of Indigenous women's labour when preparing offerings, ritual food and communal logistics, all of which are integral to the continuity of the rituals. The three contexts therefore provide a comparative framework through which to analyse the production, transmission, and negotiation of knowledge relating to cultivating taste, managing ingredients, managing time, and arranging ritual offerings in different *Osing* communities.

Data was collected through long-term participatory observation (2019-2026), ethnographic conversations, and in-depth interviews with Indigenous women who were directly involved in the ritual kitchens. The observations focused not only on the culmination of the ritual, but also on other processes, particularly the daily routines leading up to and during the ritual. These included the selection of food ingredients based on the season, cooking techniques, taste refinement through bodily discipline, the division of labour based on gender and age, and the symbolic relationships between food, nature, and *Osing* cosmology. This approach enables the kitchen to be understood as a setting for practising embodied, sensory and repetitive knowledge, rather than merely as an ahistorical domestic space.

In this study, the researcher takes an insider's perspective, offering a reflective and multi-layered view. She is an *Osing* woman living in Cungking, and she serves as Chair of the *Osing* Regional Executive Committee (PHD) of the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN) for the 2022-27 term. She also works as a lecturer in the Faculty of Languages and Arts at PGRI University in Banyuwangi. She regularly participates in rituals as part of her traditional life and the community's advocacy work. This position provides in-depth access to ritual kitchen practices and enables the development of trusting relationships with Indigenous women. However, it also requires critical reflection on power relations, institutional responsibilities, and emotional closeness in the production of knowledge.

In the tradition of feminist epistemology, rather than being considered a bias to be eliminated, the

researcher's position as an Indigenous woman and local academic is viewed as a legitimate source of ethnographic knowledge, provided it is accompanied by positional transparency and critical reflection (Haraway 1988). Consequently, interviews and ethnographic conversations position Indigenous women as epistemic subjects, rather than merely as informants, to minimise the epistemic injustice of testimonialism that women often experience in research on Indigenous communities (Fricker 2007).

Data analysis is carried out in an interpretative and contextual manner by tracing how culinary ritual knowledge is produced through the body, senses, collective memory, and practices of compliance with and negotiation of ancestral wisdom (*weluri*). The concept of embodied knowledge is employed to interpret the ritual kitchen as an epistemic arena inextricably linked to reproductive labour, ecological relations, and communal ethics (Haraway 1988; Pink 2015). This analysis does not seek to generalise about *Osing* practices, but rather to understand the tensions between compliance, agency, and power relations within a specific social context.

This research was conducted in accordance with feminist and Indigenous research ethics, which emphasise mutually respectful relationships, informed consent, and the researcher's long-term responsibility towards the community. The researcher's roles as an *Osing* woman, a member of the AMAN *Osing* Executive Committee, and a local academic demanded multiple layers of reflexivity to prevent the misuse of social, institutional or cultural positions during the research process or in representing Indigenous women's knowledge.

Community consent was obtained collectively and on an ongoing basis through communication with traditional leaders, the women responsible for the ritual kitchens, and local community structures, before, during, and after the research took place. The knowledge presented in this paper is not treated as data that can be freely extracted for academic purposes, but rather as relational knowledge born of shared practice, carrying with it an ethical responsibility towards its community of origin.

This study has limitations due to its contextual nature and focus on three village purification rituals. Consequently, the findings are not intended to be

generalised to the entire *Osing* Indigenous community or any other community. Furthermore, the researcher's close ties to the community may limit analytical distance to some degree. However, this limitation is embraced as part of a feminist epistemological approach, which rejects the notion of neutral objectivity and considers transparency to be the foundation of valid knowledge.

Ritual Kitchen as an Epistemic Space Indigenous Women

The ritual kitchen is understood not merely as a domestic setting, but as an epistemic space in which *Osing* Indigenous women produce, practise and pass down their knowledge. With this in mind, discussions about the ritual kitchen focus not only on cataloguing food and the sequence of rituals, but also on practices such as taste, bodily labour, sensory relations, and the organisation of time and ingredients as carried out by Indigenous women in their daily ritual lives. Furthermore, the aim of this discussion is not to compare rituals, but to provide a cross-contextual epistemological analysis.

In the context of the *Amin Pikin* ritual in *Cungking*, the ritual kitchen showcases the practical application of Indigenous women's knowledge through flavour-related decisions based on collective experience. Their role extends beyond merely preparing ritual dishes; they also assess the suitability of ingredients, adapt the composition of offerings to seasonal conditions, and ensure harmony between taste, form, and ancestral ethics. This shows that ritual knowledge is not just a rigid set of rules, but also embodied knowledge negotiated through daily kitchen work.

In the *Amin Pikin* ritual in *Cungking*, the ritual kitchen operates within a strictly segregated and sanctified spatial configuration. This kitchen, known as the *pawon*, is situated within the *Bale Tajug* complex. This complex comprises a series of buildings with bamboo walls and thatched roofs, and serves as the centre for activities related to *Buyut Cungking* (the ancestor of the *Osing Cungking* Indigenous community). The *Bale Tajug* complex serves not only as a place for cooking, but also as an exclusive space for producing ritual knowledge, access to which is strictly restricted. These restrictions suggest that the knowledge acquired in the kitchen is not freely accessible, but is instead regulated through customary mechanisms that control the body, space, and experience.

Mbah Warik, Mbah Inik, Mbah Katuni and Mbah Ikah are responsible for preparing ritual offerings for *Buyut Cungking*. All four have undergone menopause and hold the status of *abdi dalem* to *Buyut Cungking*. Mbah Warik appears to be the leader of this group of women, as she is a direct descendant of the *Juru Kunci Petilasan Buyut Cungking* family. However, when asked, she stated, "*Teng mriku niku mboten entan hang teng ngajeng utawa teng wingking. Dadose sami mawon.*" (There is no one leading or being led there. We are all on an equal footing" (Mbah Warik, 2026, interview, 21 April). Their knowledge of ingredient selection, preparation timing, and flavours is not acquired through systematic verbal instruction, but rather through physical presence and repetition of practices. The process of preparing the *Tumpeng Serakat*, for example, does not follow standard measurements. It relies on the sensory acuity and long-standing experience of all four of them, as tested in accordance with local custom:

Original:

"Kulo sakat tasek prawan alit dijak Adon Sutri teng Tajug kangge ginaw ragen-ragen lan ndamel sandingane selametan. Nggih mboten diajari ngangge omongan kudu gedigu kudu gedigi, naming dikengken ngenget-enget mawon nopo hang dilakoni adon. Mboten angsal ditulis. Yo ndileng mawon, niru, tumut ngrasakaken. Soyo suwi yo soyo penter. Kulo temune ngertos mpun kudune kepundi serto ditinggal Adon. Ragen-ragen ya pas baen kerana wis biasa niku wau" (Mbah Wari 2026, Interview 21 April).

Translation:

"Ever since I was a child, Mbah Sutri would take me to *Bale Tajug* to teach me how to cook and prepare ritual offerings. Rather than giving me instructions, she simply asked me to observe what she was doing. I was not allowed to write anything down. It was simply a matter of watching, imitating, and experiencing it first-hand. The more time passed, the more skilled I became. I eventually knew what to do after my grandmother passed away. When cooking ritual dishes, it just felt right because I would be involved in the process from the beginning" (Mbah Wari, 2026, Interview, 21 April).

This statement suggests that knowledge of ritual practices is not passed on through explicit cognitive means. Instead, it is passed on through what Bourdieu (1977) termed the 'habitus'—that is, bodily dispositions formed through repeated practice. This knowledge exists within the bodies of Indigenous women as an archive of experience that cannot always be articulated verbally and that does not precisely determine their actions within a ritual context.

The *Amin Pikin* ritual kitchen is an example of a collective yet insular form of epistemic authority. While these four indigenous women possess knowledge vital to the continuity of the ritual, recognition of their authority remains confined to the practical realm of the kitchen, failing to translate into symbolic power or broader customary decision-making. Ultimately, the kitchen becomes an epistemic space that simultaneously marks the limits of recognition for Indigenous women's knowledge.

During the *Tumpeng Sewu* ritual performance in Kemiren, the ritual kitchen is not a separate, sacred building. Instead, it is located within the home of the *Barong* Family (the descendants of Mbah Sapuah and Mbah Tampa), who have traditionally cared for the *Barong of Kemiren*. This configuration shows that the sacredness of a ritual space is not determined by physical separation, but by customary legitimacy and practices that have been repeated across generations.

The *Tumpeng Sewu* ritual kitchen can therefore be understood as a 'produced space' that is shaped and reproduced through social practices, cosmological symbols, and customary power relations. Although it is materially a domestic space, this kitchen functions as a locus for the production and reproduction of ritual knowledge. Preparing the dishes requires not only technical skill, but also an understanding of taste, precise timing, symbolism and ethical relationships with ancestors and nature.

The *Tumpeng Sewu* ritual is not primarily about public processions. Instead, it is created through domestic kitchen work carried out in accordance with tradition. Mbah Janung, a post-menopausal woman from the *Barong Family*, prepares each *tumpeng* and its side dishes according to rules about ingredients, taste, and form that have been passed down through the generations. In this practice, the ritual kitchen functions as an arena for the articulation of meaning where cosmological values are translated into the taste, texture and composition of the dishes.

In the *Tumpeng Songo* ritual of the *Osing Andong* Indigenous community, the ritual kitchen is located in the home of the traditional *Andong* leader's family—specifically Mbah Sumiah's, who is a descendant of Mbah Supani, also known as Mbah Minhat. Although leadership in the preparation of ritual dishes has

passed from one generation to the next among the descendants of Mbah Supani—the author witnessed this transition from Mbah Sumiah to her eldest daughter, Mbah Asiyah, who lives in a different village—the location of the preparation of the ritual dishes has remained unchanged. This demonstrates that the ritual kitchen's legitimacy does not depend on any particular individual. Rather, this continuity rests on customary recognition of the space as a locus of ritual knowledge production.

The *Tumpeng Songo* ritual kitchen is a 'produced space', shaped by social practices and precise cosmological symbols. The number 'songo' (nine) is not an abstract symbol, but rather a customary principle that has been materialised through the kitchen's rigorous practices. Each *tumpeng* has specific requirements regarding its shape, composition, and serving order that cannot be altered. The success of the ritual depends not only on the prayer procession in the public space, but also on the precision with which the nine *tumpengs* are prepared in the ritual kitchen.

In this context, the kitchen serves as a centre for practical and contextual symbolic decision-making. Cosmology is also tested through taste, texture, the sequence of tasks and the harmony between dishes. Indigenous women have complete control over kitchen activities, practising ritual knowledge through bodily discipline, adherence to customary conduct, and extensive experience of ritual practice.

Ritual knowledge in *Tumpeng Songo* is passed down through physical presence, mentorship, and repetition of practices rather than solely through systematic verbal instruction. This approach recognises the legitimacy and trustworthiness of women's bodies as sites of knowledge and demonstrates that the ritual kitchen is an epistemic arena where cosmology, space, and everyday practices are intertwined.

The three ritual kitchens in *Amin Pikin* (Cungking), *Tumpeng Sewu* (Kemiren), and *Tumpeng Songo* (Andong) demonstrate a consistent epistemic pattern within the *Osing* Indigenous community. In all of these contexts, the kitchen is managed by post-menopausal women and serves as the main location for producing ritual knowledge. Rather than being written down, knowledge regarding ingredients, flavours, timing, quantities, and presentation is transmitted through

repetitive practices that are both tangible and relational. Instead, it is passed on through repetitive practices that are both tangible and relational. Through their work in the kitchen, the women's bodies act as living archives of traditional knowledge, where experience, collective memory, and ancestral wisdom (*weluri*) are intertwined.

Ritual knowledge is transmitted informally through direct involvement, mentorship, and intergenerational fellowship. In this way, the kitchen serves as a space for traditional quality control, where the suitability of rituals is assessed prior to their performance in public spaces. However, despite their central role as producers and custodians of ritual knowledge, women's epistemic authority is often not recognised within formal, traditional decision-making structures. This creates tension, positioning the ritual kitchen as both an epistemic space and an arena of epistemic injustice.

This general pattern shows that *Osing* ritual knowledge is primarily cultivated through taste. Sensory perception is not merely a skill, but also a mode of knowing that unites the body, memory, social relations, and an ethical orientation towards ancestors and nature. Through sensory perception, Indigenous women can assess the appropriateness of rituals, interpret the will of the ancestors, and maintain cosmological balance in tangible and perceptible ways.

Cultivation of Taste, Body, and Ancestral Wisdom

Examining the ritual kitchen in the context of *Osing* village purification rituals reveals that Indigenous women pass on their knowledge through repetitive, situated, and embodied practices, rather than through formal authority or symbolic codification. This knowledge is realised through the cultivation of taste, the regulation of work rhythms and situational decisions that connect women's bodies, foodstuffs and ancestral ethics. These practices demonstrate how women's bodies serve as a locus of knowledge production. According to Bourdieu (1977), this is the result of social structures being internalised into everyday practices.

Ritual kitchen practices involving ancestral wisdom (*weluri*) are not carried out as a mechanical adherence to tradition, but as an integral part of the daily lives of Indigenous women. Devotion to the ancestors is manifested not only through the repetition of symbols, but also through the assessment of the appropriateness

and suitability of ingredients, and of harmony with natural conditions. In this context, indigenous women act as guardians and interpreters of *weluri*; their authority stems from repeated experience and embodied knowledge.

Ritual kitchen practices encompass more than just food preparation; they are also ethical and spiritual acts relating to the ancestors. In this context, adhering to ancestral wisdom is not merely a form of obedience, but a means of maintaining life's balance. From an ecofeminist perspective, Dewi Candraningrum (2013) shows that women's relationship with nature and life is formed through ethical, sustainable practices based on care and interconnectedness. Consequently, the ritual kitchen can be viewed as a space where these values are embodied and passed on through daily activities. This challenges the long-held view of modern knowledge as neutral and universal, which has tended to disregard women's experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge.

In the *Osing* Indigenous community's ritual kitchen practices, the concept of cultivating taste is not just a culinary skill or a matter of sensory preference. It is also a means of understanding an embodied, situated, and relational world. Indigenous women use taste, smell, texture and the timing of rituals to assess the suitability of offerings, interpret signs of imbalance and maintain the connection between humans, ancestors, and the natural environment. This kind of knowledge is based on continual bodily experience honed through the practice of ritual kitchen work, rather than on conceptual abstraction. The cultivation of taste functions as a body-based epistemic verification mechanism rather than merely as a sensory preference. Within a feminist epistemological framework, women's bodily experience is recognised as a legitimate source of knowledge. This aligns with Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) view that women's experience is a legitimate source of knowledge.

The cultivation of taste among Indigenous women is practised through bodily discipline, shaped by repetition, mentorship and long-term involvement in kitchen work. Their bodies act as living archives, preserving collective memories of measurements, task sequences, precise timings, and customary boundaries that must not be transgressed. This knowledge is not conveyed through verbal instructions that are separate from practice, but rather through presence, observation,

and direct participation. In this context, women's bodies are epistemic sites that determine the validity of ritual practices, not merely objects of knowledge.

This understanding stems from the body, experience, and everyday relationships, and aligns with feminist epistemological criticism, which recognises women's experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge. Dewi Candraningrum (2014) asserts that "women's bodily experiences form a vital basis for the production of feminist knowledge". Similarly, Gadis Arivia (2013) emphasises that feminist philosophy draws upon women's concrete experiences to construct knowledge, whilst challenging the claims of neutrality and universality of modern knowledge.

As an embodied epistemology, the cultivation of taste is closely intertwined with ecological relationships and the sustainability of community life. The knowledge of foodstuffs, seasons, and processing techniques practised by Indigenous women is essential to maintaining local food security and achieving a balance between human activity and nature. Thus, ritual kitchen work sustains traditions and forms the ethical and ecological basis of communal life. However, ironically, this vital knowledge is often dismissed as 'natural' domestic labour, consequently failing to receive equal recognition within customary decision-making structures or development frameworks.

Interpreting the cultivation of taste as an embodied epistemology challenges the modern hierarchy of knowledge, which prioritises abstract rationality and written documentation as the primary sources of legitimacy. Within the framework of feminist epistemology and decolonial feminism, the cultivation of taste (*olah rasa*) demonstrates that *Osing* Indigenous women are epistemic subjects who actively produce and safeguard the knowledge that underpins the sustainability of cosmology, ecology, and communal life. However, this epistemic position is not always structurally recognised.

The ritual practices of the *Osing* Indigenous community, particularly the ancestral *weluri*, are often oversimplified and understood as a set of rules that must be obeyed without room for interpretation. This not only oversimplifies the tradition's complexity, but also risks romanticising Indigenous women's compliance as a form of cultural piety. This paper

offers an alternative perspective on *weluri*, presenting it as an ethical framework for living practised through contextual consideration, collective experience, and the bodily sensitivity of Indigenous women in response to social and ecological change.

In the ritual kitchen, *weluri* is brought to life through the cultivation of taste, which requires precise action rather than mere symbolic obedience. Indigenous women interpret *weluri* by considering taste, timing, the availability of ingredients, and the circumstances of the community. This demonstrates that upholding tradition does not negate agency, but rather requires the ability to discern what can and cannot be negotiated. The agency of Indigenous women operates situationally and relationally, often manifesting as practical decisions that determine the success of the ritual rather than open resistance.

The scope for women to negotiate when carrying out *weluri* is evident in the way they adapt ritual kitchen practices without violating the principles of customary appropriateness. This may involve substituting unavailable ingredients, adjusting cooking times, or streamlining preparation techniques, as long as the ritual's meaning and purpose remain intact. While these adaptations are not typically viewed as political decisions, they are practical choices rooted in experience and collective responsibility. In this context, the agency of indigenous women is situational and relational, operating within the bounds of customary law while simultaneously expanding its practical possibilities.

In the *Amin Pikin* ritual kitchen in Cungking, such negotiation is evident in the strategies relating to the provision of ylang-ylang flowers for the *ngaturi sekar* (*nyekar*) offering to the great-grandparents:

Original:

"Ngerageni sekar niku kudu ngangge Wongso. Hang diengge niku Wongso hang sampurna mboten enten cirine. Gedhi cilik hang penting wutuh. Trus mendete kudu teko wit hang enten teng Kandapan. Kudu prujukan wiji. Mboten angsal hang dugi wit cangkakan. Naming kadung mboten enten malih nggih angsal mpun ngangge wongso asile cangkak. Masio kepundi malih. Mestine Buyut nggih ngertos. Hang penting wis golet lan sing onok" (Mbah Wari 2026, Interview 21 April).

Translation:

"The flowers used for the *Ngaturi Sekar* ritual are ylang-ylang. They must be unblemished and intact. Whether

large or small, the important thing is that they remain intact. Furthermore, the ylang-ylang must come from trees growing in the vicinity of *Kandapan*. The trees must have grown from seed, not cuttings. What can we do if we really cannot find any like that? Our great-grandparents should understand. As long as we have made every effort and still cannot find any" (Mbah Wari, 2026, interview, 21 April).

The decision to replace it is considered to be in keeping with *weluri* and natural boundaries.

However, the practice of *weluri* also reveals tensions between compliance, adaptation, and resistance that are not always harmonious. Not all forms of adaptation are readily accepted, particularly when they touch upon sensitive symbolic boundaries or are perceived as disrupting the traditional order. In this context, Indigenous women often find themselves in a vulnerable position, as they are responsible for the success of rituals, yet face the risk of being blamed should any deviations occur. This shows that indigenous traditions are not free from power relations, and that Indigenous women's agency operates within a field fraught with social and symbolic risks.

Thus, the cultivation of taste within the ritual kitchen can be understood as an embodied form of epistemology that places the bodies of Indigenous women at the centre of the production, verification, and transmission of knowledge. Through repetitive and relational practices, Indigenous women ensure the continuity of rituals and nurture a cosmology that connects humans, ancestors, and nature through the practice of '*weluri*', which is continually negotiated in everyday life. However, although this knowledge is fundamental to communal life, it does not always receive equal recognition within formal customary structures or the framework of modern knowledge. The tension between this vital role and the lack of recognition highlights the fact that customary practice constitutes a sphere of life that is dynamic yet not entirely gender equitable. This paves the way for further analysis of the relationship between knowledge and power within customary structures.

Ritual Kitchen, Ecology, and Food Security

Interpreting ancestral *weluri* and traditions as a tangible epistemology reveals that the ritual kitchen practices of *Osing* Indigenous women extend beyond the purely symbolic or spiritual realms. This knowledge

is embodied through the body, senses, and collective experience, directly shaping the community's relationship with nature, its management of food resources, and its response to ecological constraints. Thus, the ritual kitchen serves as a meeting point between ancestral ethics, women's reproductive labour, and everyday ecological practices that underpin the community's sustainability.

The relationship between these practices and the management of food resources demonstrates that indigenous women's knowledge is inextricably linked to their ecological relationships with nature. This relationship affirms that the lives of Indigenous communities do not exist in isolation, but are formed through complex interconnections between humans and the environment. Anna Tsing (2015) understands this as a form of interdependence within an ever-changing landscape.

However, from an ecofeminist perspective, this situation simultaneously critiques the dominance of modern knowledge, which tends to separate humans from nature and disregard experience-based knowledge. Dewi Candraningrum (2018) emphasises that the crisis of modern knowledge is both ecological and epistemological, as it marginalises the knowledge embedded in the everyday practices of women and local communities. In this context, the ritual kitchen can be seen as a space where this knowledge is produced, nurtured, and passed down.

The ritual kitchen practices of the *Osing* Indigenous community are not based on the exploitation of nature. Rather, it is an ethical relationship involving the selection of ingredients, consideration of the seasons, and adherence to traditional prohibitions. Indigenous women play a central role in assessing food availability and determining the suitability of ingredients for rituals, ensuring that nothing is taken from nature beyond the customary legal limits. This knowledge is not formulated as an abstract ecological principle. Rather, it is put into practice through concrete, experience-based, situational kitchen decisions.

The selection of foodstuffs in the ritual kitchen always considers the origin of the ingredients, the season, and the method of procurement. Ingredients are generally sourced from gardens, fields, and the community's immediate surroundings to avoid reliance

on unfamiliar ingredients or those out of harmony with the local ecology. This careful selection relates not only to the taste and completeness of the ritual offering, but also to showing respect for nature as a source of life, which has its own limits and rhythms.

Ritual kitchen practices function as an ecological knowledge system deeply rooted in the experiences of Indigenous women. This aligns with Vandana Shiva's (1988) thinking that women are custodians of ecological knowledge through their everyday, sustainability-oriented practices. This knowledge does not take the form of formal conservation concepts; rather, it is put into practice through concrete decisions that maintain a balance between human needs and the limits of nature.

During the *Tumpeng Songo* ritual in Andong Hamlet, the ritual kitchen clearly demonstrates the intertwining of indigenous women's knowledge and local ecological relationships. The selection of ingredients, which must be sourced from the immediate vicinity of the village, such as *young gempol* leaves (*pupus*), *lucu* (*kecombrang*) and *belimbing banci* leaves, shows that cultivating taste acts as an ecological mechanism that regulates the use of natural resources. Indigenous women reject the use of foreign or out-of-season ingredients not on the basis of written rules, but through an assessment of appropriateness passed down through intergenerational kitchen practices.

Decisions made in the kitchen during this ritual are not formally debated, but rather accepted as shared knowledge that has been tested through collective experience. In this context, Indigenous women act as guardians and interpreters of ancestral ethics, linking foodstuffs, seasons, and environmental sustainability. The *Andong* ritual kitchen shows that ecological knowledge does not have to be expressed in the language of modern conservation; it can also be effectively conveyed through the practice of taste and adherence to nature's limits.

Customary prohibitions act as ecological mechanisms that restrict the exploitation of nature through ritual kitchen practices. Prohibitions against using certain ingredients, harvesting natural resources excessively or employing processing methods that violate customary norms are consistently enforced in kitchen operations. Indigenous women play a central role in translating these prohibitions into practical decisions about what

can be cooked, when, and in what quantities. While these prohibitions are not always justified in modern ecological terms, they effectively serve as a code of conduct that has been refined through the community's collective experience.

In *Amin Pikin's* ritual kitchen in Cungking, for example, the influence of Indigenous women's tastes is evident in how they adjust the composition of the vegetables in the *Tumpeng Serakat*. This draws on shared knowledge born of collective experience, as well as the authority of Indigenous women's culinary judgement. The following explanation illustrates this:

Original:

"Janganan hang dienggo kanggo Tumpeng Serakat e Buyut hing bisa pokok ulih. Kadung terong poteh, manisah poteh, lan kara poteh e ketemu taping wis hing keneng dienggo kerana alum, suwek, garing, besem, utawa cacat ya sing ulih dipokso dienggo selamatan. Trus kadung wis golet merono-merono tetep hing biso nemu janganan e iku mauko hang werna poteh ya digoletaken ganti nganggo hang wernane paling memper yaiku ejok kerana dianggep tetep cocog nyang welurine Buyut lan mulo wis digoletaken merono-merono tetep hing ulih" (Mbah Inik 2026, Interview 6 June).

Translation:

"The vegetables used in the *Tumpeng Serakat Buyut* ritual must not be chosen at random. If white aubergines, white chayotes and white koro are available but are wilted or have torn, dried-out or damaged parts, they should not be used for the ritual. However, if you have searched many places and cannot find these white vegetables, you must find similar vegetables that are a similar colour or only slightly different in colour to white. According to ancestral customs, green vegetables are still considered appropriate" (Mbah Inik, 2026, interview, 6 June).

As a space for producing local ecological knowledge, the ritual kitchen is a place where information about nature is exchanged, tested, and handed down through generations. Through collaborative work and repeated practices, indigenous women pass on their knowledge of the seasons, food quality, and the limits of natural resource use to the next generation. Thus, the kitchen functions as a practical, informal space for ecological education, where the body and senses become the primary means of learning.

This analysis confirms that the contribution of Indigenous women to environmental sustainability lies at the heart of community life, although it is rarely recognised as legitimate ecological knowledge. However, when this knowledge is not translated into

the language of policy or development, it remains vulnerable to epistemic erasure, despite the fact that it underpins food security and Indigenous sustainability in practice.

Women's Reproductive Labour and Community Sustainability

The ritual kitchen work of *Osing* Indigenous women is integral to the community's sustainability, yet it is often overlooked and viewed merely as a moral obligation or an inherent part of womanhood. It includes food preparation, maintaining social relationships, upholding customary ethics, and managing ritual rhythms, all of which are essential to ensuring the continuity of communal life. Consequently, the reproductive labour of Indigenous women cannot be understood as a private, domestic activity. Rather, it is the material and epistemological foundation of the community's sustainability.

Through ritual kitchen work, Indigenous women ensure that knowledge relating to food, the changing seasons, and the relationship between humans and nature is consistently passed down through the generations. This work is repetitive, exhausting and often invisible; however, it is essential for the success of rituals and the social cohesion of the community. In this context, the sustainability of the *Osing* Indigenous community depends on the continuity of women's reproductive labour, which is rarely recognised as knowledge work or strategic labour.

This reproductive labour is evident in the division of tasks in the ritual kitchen, which can last for days. Although women regulate the rhythm of cooking, the distribution of food, and the continuity of labour, they are not traditionally recognised as decision-makers. There is a paradox when the community's sustainability depends on women's labour, yet this is not reflected in epistemic recognition or equal representation in traditional decision-making structures. Although women are primarily responsible for safeguarding food, customary practices, and ecological relationships, their labour is often marginalised in the realms of symbolic and political authority. The naturalisation of this reproductive labour perpetuates gender inequality while simultaneously obscuring the epistemic value of Indigenous women's labour.

Within the framework of environmental feminism and feminist epistemology, the ritual kitchen practices of *Osing* Indigenous women demonstrate that sustainability arises not only from technocratic interventions, but also from collective, embodied care work. However, without epistemic justice and political recognition of this labour, the resulting sustainability is fragile and relies on women bearing an unfair workload.

Therefore, the sustainability of Indigenous communities cannot be separated from gender and epistemic justice. Recognising the reproductive labour of Indigenous women as both knowledge work and political labour is essential to ensuring that Indigenous sustainability is not based on continually reproduced inequalities. This argument provides an important foundation for the subsequent discussion, which examines epistemic injustice and the politics of recognition within Indigenous communities, the state, and the production of academic knowledge.

Epistemic Injustice and the Politics of Recognition

The purpose of this section is not to portray Indigenous culture as homogeneous or static, but rather to examine how power relations operate within the everyday knowledge practices of Indigenous women.

The unequal position of Indigenous women within knowledge and decision-making structures is inextricably linked to the long-term shaping of gender relations by power. As María Lugones (2010) emphasises, "the coloniality of gender is a key element of the colonial system of power", demonstrating that the colonial system not only controlled territories and resources, but also established gender hierarchies that determined who was recognised as a subject of knowledge. In this context, the marginalisation of Indigenous women's knowledge, including that produced through ritual kitchens, cannot be viewed as an issue that affects Indigenous peoples alone. It must also be understood as part of a colonial legacy that continues to reproduce epistemic inequalities within community life.

These inequalities are evident not only in the division of roles, but also in the ways in which knowledge is recognised or disregarded within social structures. In this context, Gadis Arivia (2016) explains that gender injustice relates not only to the distribution of resources, but also to the politics of recognition - specifically, who

is recognised as a legitimate knowledge holder and voice. When the knowledge of Indigenous women is framed as 'natural' and unreflective domestic labour, the result is not merely neglect, but also the epistemic injustice that can become deeply rooted within social and cultural structures.

A previous discussion of the ritual kitchen as a space of ecological knowledge and the reproductive labour of Indigenous women demonstrated that Indigenous communities' sustainability is underpinned by Indigenous women's embodied, relational, and repetitive knowledge and labour. Through cultivating taste, managing food, and adhering to ancestral traditions, Indigenous women ensure the continuity of rituals, social cohesion, and the balance between humans and nature.

Although Indigenous women's knowledge underpins the sustainability of rituals and community life, it often fails to receive equal recognition within customary structures, the state, or academic knowledge production. While this knowledge is recognised in practice, it is negated symbolically and politically, thereby perpetuating gender inequality in terms of authority and decision-making.

In many development policies and academic knowledge production, ritual kitchen knowledge is dismissed as non-strategic local wisdom - celebrated symbolically yet disregarded as a source of epistemological and political authority for Indigenous women. This reduction reveals that, without perspectives of gender and epistemological justice, the politics of Indigenous recognition can reproduce internal community hierarchies.

In the context of the state and academia, this epistemic erasure is reinforced by a framework of recognition that treats customary law as a policy issue rather than a multifaceted source of knowledge. Consequently, the knowledge of Indigenous women is often reduced to cultural practices, rather than being recognised as a legitimate basis for understanding sustainability, ecological justice and social transformation.

The knowledge of *Osing* Indigenous women, practised in the ritual kitchen, is vital for maintaining indigenous traditions, fostering social cohesion and upholding the community's ecological relationships. Women play a central role in ensuring the validity

of rituals, managing food resources and upholding ancestral ethics, for example through cultivating taste practices and performing reproductive labour. However, a paradox arises when this decisive knowledge is not recognised equally within traditional decision-making structures. Although women are often seen as the implementers of tradition, the formal authority to define, interpret, and determine its direction remains largely in the hands of men.

This paradox illustrates that the distribution of knowledge does not necessarily correspond with the distribution of power. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) emphasises, groups with the closest experience of social reality are often marginalised in the production of formal knowledge. For instance, despite being the primary custodians of ritual practices and culinary knowledge, Indigenous women are frequently absent from Indigenous deliberative and normative forums. Women's knowledge is confined to the realms of practice and care, whereas symbolic and representative legitimacy is tied to the indigenous leadership structure. This pattern demonstrates how women's work is normalised as a moral and cultural obligation, rather than being recognised as a source of epistemic and political legitimacy.

Epistemic erasure also occurs when the knowledge of Indigenous women is reduced or filtered in relation to development structures and policies. For example, kitchen knowledge is only recognised if it can be translated into technocratic categories such as food security, local wisdom or the creative economy. This translation process often eliminates the ethical, relational, and critical dimensions of ritual kitchen practices whilst simultaneously separating them from women as epistemic subjects. In this context, recognition can obscure the authority of Indigenous women.

Indigenous women experience epistemic injustice not only within indigenous structures, but also in their relations with the state and academic institutions. In cultural development and management policies, ritual kitchens are rarely recognised as important spaces for producing knowledge. Instead, they are more often reduced to the domestic sphere and seen as symbols of tradition or ancillary activities. Consequently, they are not recognised as places for making ecological and social decisions.

In mainstream academic discourse, knowledge that is embodied, oral, and practice-based - such as that relating to taste cultivation and ritual kitchen work - is often treated merely as empirical data, rather than as a source of theory or conceptualisation. Consequently, *Osing* Indigenous women are portrayed as research subjects or custodians of tradition, rather than as producers of knowledge with their own epistemological framework. This pattern reproduces a knowledge hierarchy that favours abstract rationality and written documentation, marginalising Indigenous women's knowledge.

This mechanism transforms the ritual kitchen into a paradoxical space. Although it supports the sustainability of customary practices and the ecosystem, it is not recognised as a legitimate source of knowledge in policymaking or scientific research. Epistemic injustice therefore operates across scales, from local customs to global knowledge structures.

The politics of recognising Indigenous customs are often touted as a solution to the marginalisation of Indigenous communities, but they often lack a focus on gender and epistemic justice. Such recognition has the potential to perpetuate existing internal hierarchies. In the context of the *Osing* ritual kitchen, for instance, recognising Indigenous traditions could affirm the continuity of ritual practices and cultural identity. However, it simultaneously overlooks the epistemic inequalities experienced by Indigenous women, who are the primary producers of knowledge.

Recognition that does not involve the redistribution of epistemic authority risks reducing Indigenous women's knowledge to a mere source of symbolic legitimacy. While the ritual kitchen may be celebrated as cultural heritage, the labour of the women who sustain it is normalised and excluded from strategic decision-making processes. In this situation, recognition becomes a mechanism that stabilises inequalities rather than transforming them.

Closing

This article argues that the ritual kitchen in the *Osing* Indigenous community is not just a domestic space or an addition to traditional rituals. Instead, it is the primary epistemic space in which indigenous women produce, practise and pass down their knowledge.

Through practices such as cultivating taste, managing food, and adhering to ancestral wisdom in context, Indigenous women embody the knowledge that underpins the continuity of rituals, the relationship between humans and nature, and the social cohesion of the community. This knowledge operates through the body, senses, and collective memory, and is inseparable from reproductive labour, a duty that has long been considered the responsibility of women.

Adopting a feminist ethnographic approach and a feminist-decolonial epistemological framework, the paper demonstrates that *Osing* Indigenous women are active epistemic subjects rather than mere executors of tradition. However, the research findings also reveal a fundamental paradox: although Indigenous women's knowledge is vital to the sustainability of Indigenous customs and communal life, it does not receive equal recognition within indigenous authority structures, state policy, or mainstream academic knowledge production. This disparity between epistemic contribution and recognition constitutes a state of epistemic injustice.

Analysing the ritual kitchen as an epistemic space reveals that the sustainability of traditional customs and local food security depend on women's repetitive, exhausting, and frequently unseen labour. The ecological practices carried out in the ritual kitchen, such as selecting seasonal ingredients, not taking more from nature than is needed, and adhering to customary prohibitions, demonstrate that Indigenous women's knowledge has a concrete and relevant ecological dimension. However, without epistemic justice and political recognition of this labour, the resulting sustainability remains reliant on a gender-unequal burden of work borne by women.

This paper also emphasises that, without a gender justice perspective, the politics of Indigenous recognition risks reproducing inequalities within the community. Although the ritual kitchen is celebrated as cultural heritage, it is overlooked as a political space for knowledge production, meaning that women remain epistemically unrecognised as producers of knowledge. In this context, the ritual kitchen becomes a paradoxical arena, balancing the preservation of Indigenous traditions with the erasure of women's authority.

This paper contributes to the development of feminist epistemology and decolonial feminism by

positioning the ritual kitchen as the locus of analysis and asserting that epistemic justice is a prerequisite for gender-just Indigenous sustainability. Recognising Indigenous women as producers of knowledge acknowledges their bodies, experiences, and everyday practices as legitimate sources of epistemological authority. Without such recognition, Indigenous traditions risk continuing to survive through the labour of women who are not fairly recognised, whilst power structures remain unchanged.

Consequently, the ritual kitchen must be recognised as both cultural heritage and a political space of knowledge that has long been denied equal recognition. As long as the voices of Indigenous women remain marginalised, even though their knowledge underpins communal life, epistemic justice has not yet been fully realised.

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