

The Contexts of Gastronomic Traditions: An Examination of Ceremonial Foods and Their Role in Anatolian Cuisine Culture

Gastronomi Geleneklerinin Bağlamları: Törenselle Yiyeceklerin ve Anadolu Mutfak Kültüründeki Rollerinin İncelenmesi

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Abstract: Ceremonial foods, which are one of the important elements of cuisine culture, play an important role in the transfer of this culture to future generations. In this context, the research aims to analyse the ceremonial foods in Anatolian cuisine culture, which has an ancient past, and to reveal their importance for the cultural integrity of the society. An ethnographic design was used in the research. For this purpose, the data obtained from 14 participants from 7 different provinces of Türkiye were used as primary sources. In order to be able to think about the general context of Anatolian cuisine, care was taken to ensure that the 7 cities selected were from 7 geographical regions of Türkiye. The data obtained from 2 people selected from each city were analysed under different themes and categories through content analysis. In line with the data obtained, it was understood that there are 17 ceremonial foods or drinks. It was seen that the ceremonial foods and drinks in Anatolian cuisine culture consist of various types such as drinks, meals, snacks, products and desserts. The results of the research showed that many groups in Anatolia have overlapping or different ceremonial food or cuisine traditions. It was also concluded that ceremonial traditions in Anatolian cuisine culture are often symbolised by food or food-related rituals. The findings based on the statements of the participants showed that communities living in various regions of Anatolia and having different ethnic and religious origins share common feelings through the symbolisation of food.

Keywords: Ceremonial Foods, Cuisine Culture, Anatolian Cuisine, Symbolic Interactionism, Food Symbolism

JEL Classification: Z00, Z10, Q01

Öz: Törenselle yemekler, mutfak kültürünün önemli unsurlarından biri olup, bu kültürün gelecek kuşaklara aktarılmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, araştırma, köklü bir geçmişe sahip olan Anadolu mutfakı kültüründeki törenselle yemekleri incelemeyi ve bunların toplumun kültürel bütünlüğü açısından önemini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada etnografik bir tasarım kullanılmıştır. Bu amaçla, Türkiye'nin 7 farklı ilinden 14 katılımcıdan elde edilen veriler birincil kaynak olarak kullanılmıştır. Anadolu mutfakının genel bağlamını daha iyi anlayabilmek için, seçilen 7 ilin Türkiye'nin 7 coğrafi bölgesinden olmasına özen gösterilmiştir. Her ilden seçilen 2 kişiden elde edilen veriler, içerik analizi yoluyla farklı temalar ve kategoriler altında incelenmiştir. Elde edilen verilere göre, 17 törenselle yemek veya içecek olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Anadolu mutfakı kültüründeki törenselle yemek ve içeceklerin içecekler, yemekler, atıştırmalıklar, ürünler ve tatlılar gibi çeşitli türlerden oluştuğu görülmüştür. Araştırmanın sonuçları, Anadolu'daki birçok topluluğun örtüşen veya farklı törenselle yemek veya mutfak geleneklerine sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca, Anadolu mutfakı kültüründeki törenselle geleneklerin sıklıkla yemek veya yemekle ilgili ritüellerle simgelandığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Katılımcıların ifadelerine dayanan bulgular, Anadolu'nun farklı bölgelerinde yaşayan ve farklı etnik ve dini kökenlere sahip toplulukların, yemek sembolizmi yoluyla ortak duygular paylaştığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Törenselle Yemekler, Mutfak Kültürü, Anadolu Mutfakı, Sembolik Etkileşimcilik, Yemek Sembolizmi

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1. Introduction

Food and drink rituals are among the most common areas where the symbolic and communicative aspects of food are utilized. These rituals can more clearly and permanently demonstrate a society's concretized competencies regarding food, their collectively ritualized activities, and their practical understanding of food. These rituals, which are applied in national and regional special periods as well as in times such as birth, marriage and death, which are defined as transitional periods in human life, are defined as "a symbolic way of sharing social identity" (Fischler, 1988). Food rituals are often examined from the perspectives of mythology, religion, and values (Bell, 2010; Matthews, 2017).

The foods used in rituals not only provide symbolic information about the identity of the community (Powers & Powers, 2014) but also reinforce cultural identity when consumed (Ratcliffe et al., 2019). Therefore, food consumption ceremonies/rituals are important not only in relation to daily life but also in terms of the insights they provide regarding the role of meaning in understanding rituals. In this context, our study focuses on cuisine ceremonies where the symbolic and functional aspects of foods are more intense and on revealing the communicative transmission of the foods in these ceremonies. A review of the relevant literature reveals that studies focusing on the symbolic and communicative aspects of foods are limited (Üzülmez & Onur, 2021; Orhan et al., 2022). In addition to the scarcity of relevant literature, the lack of social theory application in food studies (Neuman, 2019) represents a significant research gap. This study aims to contribute significantly to the theoretical progression of the literature by using symbolic communication theory to reveal the symbolic and communicative aspects of foods in Anatolian cuisine rituals. Considering that ceremonial foods are the subject of symbolic interaction on some social special occasions, it can be stated that this research will contribute to the literature in terms of discussing the symbolic role of food. In this study, which was prepared with an ethnographic approach due to the nature of the research topic, data obtained from interviews conducted in various regions of Türkiye were handled with a qualitative exploratory perspective. With the help of content analysis, it was aimed to examine these data in depth and to synthesize the findings in an understandable way.

2. Theoretical Background

The research was approached with the theory of symbolic interactionism, focusing on the interactive meaning created by people within the scope of ceremonial foods and how this meaning shapes social relations (Williams, 2008). Symbolic interactionism theory analyzes

how individuals construct their world of meanings through interactions (Costa et al., 2014). In other words, symbolic interactionism studies symbols that emerge through social interactions and their effects on social life. In this respect, symbolic interactionism reveals the social connections in cuisine culture, which is seen as one of the important tools for understanding culture. In this study, it was preferred to use this theoretical framework because of the social connections that were tried to be understood through ritualistic foods. Because eating behaviors that occur during special periods enable us to discover the role of gastronomy in these processes.

The forms of interaction within a society and the rituals or traditions associated with social relationships are seen as significant elements in the emergence of meanings. These interaction patterns bring forth shared symbols and meanings within the society, enabling a better understanding of different forms of interaction in various social structures (Gökulu, 2019). For symbols to convey their intended message, they need to occur within a specific ritual context. The interpretative power of symbols can only be possible in this context. Symbols and enacted realities are shaped within a social, cultural, religious and attitudinal context (Sekhukhune, 1990).

The diversification and particularization of food culture are greatly influenced by the integration of the ecological environment, religious beliefs, cultural accumulations, social and ethnic groups, and the totality of cultural heritage with individual taste preferences. As an indication of this integration, almost every society dedicates a portion of its time to foods, often accompanied by specific rituals and ceremonies. In this sense, food also emerges as a tool for social integration and solidarity (Sağır, 2012; Sağır 2013; Sharif et al., 2013).

Food is an element that can be associated with other meaningful experiences and carries various symbolic meanings. Ceremonial cuisine traditions can be viewed as patterns of behaviour that people create when they come together for different purposes and desires (such as helping each other, celebrating, blessing and so forth) within social and interactive environments. Based on this theory, it can be stated that individuals construct a world of meaning through such social interactions within the context of traditions and that this world of meaning shapes their social, cultural, and religious ceremonial cuisine traditions, consequently influencing their social structures. Therefore, it is considered important to explore the interactive meanings that arise within the scope of ceremonial cuisine traditions among the people of the Anatolian region, which has a cultural history dating back centuries. This exploration aims to understand how these interactive meanings, with their social, cultural, and religious aspects, shape the social structure. In this context, the research was based on the

context of symbolic interactionism theory and the data obtained were examined on the basis of these contexts. In this way, the theory was provided as a basis for the research.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

A qualitative research approach was preferred in this study. Qualitative research is a method that is inquisitive, interpretive and strives to understand the problem in its natural environment (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Klenke, 2016). Qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of human facts and situations, without breaking away from their context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). In this context, the study tried to examine the symbolic communication used by the participants through the cultural ceremonial foods they used. The study also aims to explain in what contexts ceremonial foods contribute to symbolic interaction.

In this research, which aims to examine the ceremonial foods in the Anatolian cuisine culture, the ethnography design, which is one of the qualitative research designs, was used. Ethnography aims to describe and interpret the culture of a particular individual or group. In this analysis process, concepts, processes, perceptions and behaviour patterns specific to that culture are determined and discovered (Hancock et al., 2001). Ethnography-based research is defined as qualitative research that is mostly used to identify different subgroups and their relationships in the society we live in or to understand any issue or phenomenon in social life (Mertens, 2023). Ethnography involves the identification of cultural elements such as individual perceptions and behaviours, as well as societal structures and values. It encompasses an analytical process that aims to understand and interpret the cultural context of the subject under research. Therefore, the research used ethnography to explore the social and symbolic meanings of ceremonial foods on a cultural basis. Since the study was designed with an ethnographic design, it was evaluated on the basis of symbolic interactionism theory.

3.2. Sampling and Research Area

In ethnography research, people within a community that the researcher can reach are the elements of the research. Creswell (2013) recommends that the researcher continue the process with a clear approach by exploring the general situation of the community. In the ethnography design, researchers rely on judgment to select individuals within a community based on their research questions. They turn opportunities into advantages (opportunistic sampling) or establish criteria for the selection of individuals (criterion sampling) (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Taking this approach as an example, two methods were used together in the sampling process of the research. In order to reach the most ideal sample group living in various cities, Gastronomy and Culinary Arts department students from various cities in Türkiye were used. Participants were determined using the snowball sampling method among the families or relatives of 14 students at Atatürk University Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts. This data collection method was preferred in order to reach resource people who have qualities that can be seen as a cuisine enthusiast from a social perspective. Participant reached by snowball sampling method were included in the research through criterion sampling by adopting criteria such as being known for having comprehensive knowledge about the cuisine culture of the region they live in. With this approach, sensitivity is shown in selecting the most ideal sampling group.

Snowball sampling has become a frequently used sampling method in the context of obtaining research participants by providing access to hard-to-reach populations. These hard-to-reach participants may be small in number, geographically dispersed, and may need to feel confident to be a willing participant (Parker et al., 2019). The participant group of the research consisted of 14 participant (one city and 2 different participant from each geographical region) residing in 7 different geographical regions of Anatolia. Since it was thought that these participants were located in geographically dispersed areas (7 different cities in Türkiye) and that they needed to feel a sense of trust in order to participate in the interview voluntarily, they were reached by snowball sampling method.



Figure 1. Research Area

Anatolian cities where research data were collected are shown in Figure 1. The research area represents each of Türkiye's 7 geographical regions: Nevşehir (Central Anatolia Region), Şanlıurfa (Southeastern Anatolia Region), Aydın (Aegean Region), Trabzon (Black Sea Region), Erzurum (Eastern Anatolia Region), Hatay (Mediterranean Region) and Balıkesir (Marmara Region) cities. The diversity of these cities in terms of cuisine culture was the reason why they were chosen as research areas. In criterion sampling, criteria can be created

by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The criterion for determining the participants who can be included in the sample group in this research is their mastery of the cuisine culture of the regions they live in. It was expected that the participants would contribute to the research by having knowledge about the cuisine culture of the region they live in, in the context of the ceremonial foods they would express.

3.3. Data Collection and Participants' Characteristics

The data of the research were collected using the interview technique, which is one of the frequently used methods in qualitative research. The interview method is one of the data collection techniques frequently used in ethnographic research focusing on the cultural contexts of societies. Interviews require entering individuals' inner worlds and understanding their perspectives (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2013). Interviews were conducted with a structured interview form. Since the interviews were conducted by 7 students, care was taken to prepare the interview form in a structured manner. In the structured interview, also referred to as "standardized open-ended interview" by Patton (2002), a series of carefully designed and arranged questions are asked to each interviewee in the same manner. The flexibility given to the interviewer is limited in a structured interview. Therefore, the structured interview approach can be effectively used in studies involving multiple interviewers (Patton, 2002). While preparing the interview questions, literature on celebrations in Anatolia was utilized (Yalçın Çelik, 2010; Öncel, 2015; Fidan & Özcan, 2019). These studies emphasize the importance of special days, religious holidays, weddings, and cultural events like funerals in Turkish culture and society, and explain the role of these events in the formation of cultural awareness and identity.

Before collecting research data, legal permissions were obtained, taking into account ethical issues (Ref: 2022, E.88656144-000-2200173801). First, a pilot interview was conducted with two participants. Thus, the clarity of the interview questions was tested and new arrangements and updates were made on the questions. In order to conduct interviews with participants, a detailed list of potential participants was initially prepared together with the interviewers. Subsequently, each participant was contacted by phone to determine suitable dates for the interviews. The requirements of the ethnographic approach and the objectives of the research were taken into account during the participants' involvement in the research process. At the beginning of the interviews, verbal consent was obtained from the participants stating that they participated in the interview voluntarily and allowed recording. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the participants' cities, in quiet environments that

prevented external interruptions. To prevent data loss and expedite the process, audio recordings were made during the interviews. Participants were informed that only audio recordings would be made, and no video recordings would be taken under any circumstances. Before starting the interviews, each participant was informed about ethical principles (Baş & Akturan, 2017). Participants were assured about the subject and purpose of the research and the use of the recordings, and were guaranteed that no personal information other than their opinions and thoughts on the topic would be requested. Additionally, it was stated that the audio recordings and the information provided would not be shared or disclosed to the public, and that participation in the interview was voluntary. The research data was collected between July and September 2023. In May 2023, interviewers were given training on interview techniques at Atatürk University. This training provided interviewers with information focusing on the principles of conducting interviews and the interview process, ensuring the collection of qualified and ethical data. Three participants from the initial list later decided to withdraw from the research. Additionally, the responses of two participants could not be included in the research because they did not provide effective data in some parts of the interview. Instead of these five participants, other informants from the same cities were contacted, and the data collection process was completed with a total of 14 participants. The characteristics of the participants are stated in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Collection Process and Characteristics of Participants

Participant Code	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	City	Interview Date
P1	Female	72	Primary school	Unemployed	Nevşehir	15.08.2023
P2	Female	57	Middle school	Unemployed	Nevşehir	15.08.2023
P3	Female	55	Primary school	Unemployed	Şanlıurfa	04.07.2023
P4	Male	82	Primary school	Farmer	Şanlıurfa	03.07.2023
P5	Female	83	Primary school	Unemployed	Aydın	25.07.2023
P6	Female	70	Primary school	Unemployed	Aydın	12.07.2023
P7	Female	60	High school	Unemployed	Trabzon	30.09.2023
P8	Female	85	Be literate	Unemployed	Trabzon	30.09.2023
P9	Female	57	High school	Unemployed	Erzurum	12.09.2023
P10	Female	75	Primary school	Unemployed	Erzurum	26.09.2023
P11	Female	56	High school	Restaurant Owner	Hatay	17.08.2023
P12	Male	68	Primary school	Livestock/Farmer	Hatay	02.08.2023

P13	Male	79	Primary school	Retired Employee	Balıkesir	15.08.2023
P14	Female	58	Primary school	Unemployed	Balıkesir	15.08.2023

In addition to audio recordings, the details of the process were documented by taking into account the observation and research notes kept by the interviewers after each interview. These observation and field notes were also used in the data analysis. The average duration of the interviews was 78 minutes and 45 seconds. The majority of the participants in the research were women (n: 11, 78,5%) and participants' ages ranged from 55 to 85. Since food preparation is predominantly carried out by women in many regions of Anatolia (Birir, 1990; Akoğul & Aksakallı Bayraktar, 2020) female participants were in the majority. Many of the participants were housewives and were unemployed. The participants were the people who had the most in-depth knowledge of the cuisine culture in their own circles and families.

3.4. Data Analysis

Preparation of research data for analysis process were carried out by analyzing interview records and examining field records. A total of 72 pages of research data were reviewed three times. The transcription of the data was carried out together with 2 gastronomy academicians who conduct research in the relevant field and 7 students who conducted the interviews. Considering the structure and design of the research, it was deemed appropriate to use content analysis to analyse the data. Content analysis was conducted to explore the context and social meaning of ceremonial foods in Anatolian cuisine. The collected data were coded to be categorized and placed under themes. During the coding process, constant comparison of the data was conducted in terms of their similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Repetitive data were removed at this stage (Creswell, 2013). Subsequently, research findings were identified, supported by excerpts from the data, and the process of interpreting, analyzing, and relating the findings was carried out. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to support the data collected during the field research. Additionally, codes, categories and themes derived from participants' expressions were also included in the research. A three-stage coding method was used: open coding, axial coding and selective coding with constant comparison analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). During the open coding phase, the raw data was examined in depth and temporary codes were made. The data were reevaluated with axial coding and main categories were determined. In the selective coding phase, categories were integrated and themes were reached (Strauss, 1987). This process was conducted by constantly comparing data while analyzing each interview transcript. The

resulting codes were examined by the second author of the study. Thus, the similarities, differences, and suitability of the codes to categories and themes were evaluated. For the codes whose suitability was in doubt, a more academician was asked to make an evaluation within the scope of research reliability. The analysis was continued by taking into account the evaluations of this academician who has studies on food culture (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). The analyzes were carried out to understand the role of ceremonial foods in the interaction and communication of Anatolian societies.

4. Findings

4.1. Context and Symbolic Meaning of Ceremonial Foods in Ceremonies

Accordingly, the participants' evaluations of the social and cultural contexts of the food consumed in the ceremonies were examined. Participants stated that food during celebrations or special occasions (e.g. religious, cultural) is often a means of helping and sharing happiness. The data obtained from the research were coded under two themes using the thematic coding method (Table 2). The findings reveal that cuisine traditions belonging to various ethnic groups are partially or completely maintained in many regions of Anatolia. While determining the contexts of ceremonial foods, social and cultural contexts could not be separated from each other due to the complex social and ethnic structure of Anatolia (different ethnic groups and different religious groups live together). That's why the first theme was "Sociocultural". The other theme that emerged from the evaluation of codes and categories was "Religious".

Table 2. Results of Content Analysis

Themes	Categories	Sample Codes
Sociocultural	Turkish Coffee	Building good relationships with people Strengthening social ties
	Keşkek	Helping each other Being there for each other
	Abundance Foods	Increasing plentifulness Multiplying blessings
	Can Aşı	Sharing the mourning of death Standing together in grief
	Kırk Yemeği	Cooperation

		Joining forces
	Çiğ Köfte	Providing social solidarity and friendship Building networks of trust and belonging
	Nevruz Foods	Wishing good wishes for the future together
	Snacks of Kalandar	Embracing tomorrow with collective hope
	Hıdırellez Picnic Foods	
	Postpartum Sherbet	Warding off evil spirits Protecting against negative energies
	Diş Hediği	Blessing and celebrating Commemorating with happiness
Religious	İftar Meals	Worshipping together Uniting in spiritual reflection Gathering in spiritual harmony
	Eid al-Adha Meals	Sharing things dedicated to God
	Bagel of Kandil	Joining in heartfelt offerings Extending gifts in spiritual devotion
	Ashura	Togetherness and sharing for religious obligation
	Sütlaç	Sharing and bonding through sacred values
	Easter Egg	Coming together in spiritual fellowship

By analyzing the statements of the participants some codes such as "building good relationships with people, helping each other, increasing plentifulness, sharing the mourning of death and cooperation" emerged. The codes were then evaluated by placing them under the categories to which they belonged.

4.1.1. Sociocultural Contexts of Ceremonial Foods Served in Ceremonies

Social context-based ceremonial food traditions are cuisine culture practices that complement the effectiveness of people coming together for purposes of mutual assistance or celebration. These ceremonies are often organized to celebrate a special phase of human life, such as

marriage, in the presence of the community. Additionally, some traditional gatherings that arise from the desire to come together can also be explained within the social context.

Cuisine culture is influenced by various factors such as geography, climate, war, migration, among others. The culture formed by the common values of society is also an important aspect shaping cuisine traditions in celebrations. Ceremonial foods and traditions within a cultural context represent a variety of products and practices derived from the cultures of different ethnic groups, some of which are still preserved today. Food and communal eating behaviours can be interpreted both semantically and symbolically. Additionally, these concepts create opportunities to establish close connections with specific situations and functions (Counihan & Esterik, 2013). Participants' attitudes and expressions regarding ceremonial foods also suggest that food culture and social and cultural values feed each other. This symbiotic relationship between food culture and social and cultural structure is in line with the findings in the literature. The following statement of P10 can be given as an example for this finding:

In the Ask for the Girl in Marriage ceremony, only Turkish Coffee is served. Turkish Coffee is also prepared for the groom. If the girl likes the boy and wants to marry him, she makes the coffee with plenty of sugar. However, if she does not like the boy and does not want to marry him, she makes the coffee very salty, and the boy understands that he is not wanted.

In addition to these, as can be understood from the statement of the P7 participant for Turkish Coffee:

The memory of a cup of Turkish Coffee lasts for 40 years.

The tradition of drinking traditional Turkish Coffee together is believed to keep social relationships established through marriage alive for many years. In accordance with the Anatolian proverb "Let's eat sweet, talk sweet.", desserts such as Baklava from traditional Turkish cuisine are offered to the bride and groom, and it is hoped that the bride and groom will always talk about happy events and situations and not have difficult days.

We have a tradition. After the wedding, we go to the groom's house and sit around a table. The bride's family asks the groom for five trays of Baklava (traditional Turkish dessert). Baklava is a tool here for good relations.

Based on the statement of participant P8, it can be said that the groom improves his social relations by offering food, which is symbolically valued especially in rural areas, to the guests.

In Anatolian folk culture, weddings are highly valued as one of the most joyful occasions, similar to births, and are closely associated with mutual assistance and socializing. In many regions of Anatolia, wedding meals are prepared using the "İmece" method. According to Oxford Languages (2024) "İmece" is defined as "the mutual assistance of all or most families in a village to carry out certain production activities or community services, especially in rural communities." Traditional wedding dishes such as Keşkek can be considered as part of this tradition. Keşkek is a ceremonial meal usually made by Anatolian nomads. This tradition is based on communal labour and sharing.



Photo 1. Ceremonial Keşkek Tradition

References: TUTAP, 2024; Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2024a

The long process of pounding and cooking wheat and meat together by people in unison, with the meal being stirred in a collective rhythm, demonstrates the symbolic aspects of this tradition (Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2024a). Participant 6 also expressed Keşkek in a way that overlaps with the information in the literature:

We make Keşkek in cooperation, we all bring the ingredients and cook it together in big cauldrons.

Participants stated that some foods are used to wish for increased abundance and fertility:

P5: When the bride leaves her father's house, her mother or father would throw candy, nuts, or wheat over her, saying "You brought abundance and prosperity to our home, may the same abundance and prosperity continue wherever you go."



Photo 2. Throwing Wheat on the Bride's Head

Reference: Evlilik Süreci, 2024

Based on the statements of the participants, the symbols of candy, apples, and dried fruits express wishes for the bride's married life to be filled with happiness and abundance, and for her to have a prosperous life. Based on the participants' testimony, it can be observed that various behavioral patterns are used to increase fertility. These include praying to the creator, doing good deeds by distributing the meat from sacrifices to everyone, and showing respect by blessing food as a symbol of abundance. Many participants stated that these ceremonies dedicated to fertility are organized through symbols of food prepared for communal consumption. Based on the statements of the participants, it is understood that it is believed that abundance can only be achieved through responsible behaviour and adherence to cultural patterns. The idea that abundance is more likely to be achieved when certain cultural behaviours are followed seems to be widespread.

Funeral ceremonies are one of the ceremonies in Anatolia where the sense of community and solidarity is felt most strongly. In funeral ceremonies, the traditional İmece method is applied and the close relatives of the deceased person prepare various dishes and take them to the mourning ceremony at the house of the deceased person.

P12: After the death of a person, a meal called "Can Aşı" or "Kırk Yemeği" is served to the guests who come to condolence. This meal is given on the fortieth day after the death of the person and takes its name from this day. Can Aşı is served in the hope that it will touch the soul of the deceased and bring goodness. This is a common practice in our region.

P11: These meals are made in the hope of benefiting the soul of the deceased or for good purposes.

From the statements of the participants, it is seen that the meals served at funeral ceremonies symbolize the act of sharing the pain and doing good deeds on behalf of the deceased.

Traditional conversation meetings are organized by local people in various regions of Anatolia. These meetings involve different groups of men coming together for social solidarity and friendship (Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2024b). The main characteristic of traditional meetings is conversation.

At Sıra Gecesi, friends come together, we chat, this has been our tradition since the past. This tradition is important here to share daily life.

According to P4, it is understood that these gatherings have a social function. In these meetings, men come together to discuss daily life. In addition to activities such as folk music, food culture also plays an important role in these meetings.



Photo 3. Çiğ Köfte and Folk Music in Sıra Gecesi

Reference: Kürkçüoğlu, 2017

Participants also mentioned other practices that welcome spring during Nevruz. For example, in the Southeastern Anatolia region, people express their gratitude for the gifts of nature by collecting wild plants indigenous to the region in spring to celebrate the arrival of spring.

Spices found in our mountains such as Mountain Thyme, Sirmo, Mende, Kenger, Siyabo, Heliz and Sebisk are collected and dried and preserved. In this way, we give thanks for the blessings of nature, which are revitalized in the spring.

P3's statement is an example of these practices. These rituals and the collection of herbs symbolize the act of gratitude for the food that nature has bestowed on people and the celebration of the arrival of spring. Participant statements showed that new year's expectations are embodied in Kalandar through food symbols. According to the participants, the bags hung

on Kalandar and materials such as flour and salt shared are symbols of abundance and fertility. Participant 8 described this tradition as follows:

P8: We still celebrate Kalandar. The things we put in the bags bring luck to our home and our future.

P5: In order to ensure the abundance of basic foodstuffs (flour, sugar, rice, etc.) in our homes, we share some of them with those in need, our poor neighbours.

The statements of Participant 5 can be considered as an example of the practices carried out on Hıdırellez Day. P2 expresses the belief that the fortune of single girls to marry the right person will be opened on the night of Hıdırellez as follows:

That night, single girls peel an apple without breaking the peel and put it under their pillows in order to see their future husbands in their dreams.

Based on these statements, it can be said that people shape their celebration traditions through the symbolic meanings they attribute to food or the behaviours related to food. These behaviours, rooted in good wishes and expectations, have turned into ceremonial foods, products or practices.



Photo 4. Hıdırellez Picnic in Istanbul during the Ottoman Period

Reference: Kürkçüoğlu, 2020

Red-colored objects and symbols are used to prevent "Al Basması", which is seen as evil spirits harming the baby and mother after birth. This belief lies behind the fact that Postpartum Sherbet, known for its red color, is offered to visitors after birth (Boratav, 1984). In addition, since it is a difficult process, wishes for the birth to be easy are symbolized through the representation of food.

In order to facilitate the birth of puerperant women who had a difficult birth, a loaf of bread was cut into 3-4 pieces and these pieces were given to stray animals as alms, believing that it would facilitate the birth.

Based on P3's statement, it can be observed that there is a perspective of "If you do goodness, goodness will come." in these practices. P6 made the following statements about the Diş Hediği ceremony:

We celebrate the baby's first tooth, we wish strong teeth and abundant fertility. We also distribute cooked wheat to the guests to spread the abundance.



Photo 5. Baby and Hedik at the Ceremony of Diş Hediği

Reference: TRT Avaz, 2017

Wheat, a symbol of abundance and fertility, represents the wishes made for babies during the Diş Hediği ceremony. The eruption of the first tooth is considered an important change in eating habits and is a culturally valuable event cherished by Turks for many years (Erdoğan Aksu, 2017).

4.1.2. Religious Contexts of Ceremonial Foods Served in Ceremonies

There is a strong relationship between the beliefs of societies and their cuisine traditions. Indeed, cuisine cultures of societies largely diversify and take shape in accordance with their beliefs. The cuisine culture, enriched by the rituals practiced in religious ceremonies, is shaped by the meanings attributed to events and symbols. In many societies there is thought to be a close and extensive relationship between food and ideological and cosmological beliefs (Goody, 1982; Hatipoğlu & Batman, 2009)

In line with the statements of the participants, it has been concluded that the ceremonial cuisine foods in Anatolia are mainly shaped by the influence of Islam, which also affects people's worldviews. In addition, since Anatolia has been home to various civilizations for thousands of years, it has been understood that ceremonial cuisine traditions continue to exist in the context of the beliefs of different ethnic groups.

Eid al-Fitr begins after a prayer service in the mosque and is celebrated with breakfast at home with family members. On the first evening of Eid al-Fitr, a dinner is organized at the home of the eldest member of the family to reinforce unity and solidarity.

P3: After Ramadan, when Eid al-Fitr starts, we have the first breakfast as a family. The first dinner of Eid al-Fitr is also eaten at the home of the oldest member of the family so that family members can be together.

From the participants' statements, it is understood that the first breakfast and dinner on Eid al-Fitr are symbols of social unity and experiencing the blessings of fasting together.



Photo 6. Iftar Table of Anatolian Nomads during Ramadan

Reference: TRT Avaz, 2024

It has been observed that during Eid al-Adha, people express their loyalty to Allah and their interest in social solidarity through the symbol of sacrifice. Many historical practices related to sacrificing represent dedication and devotion. Based on this perspective, it is inferred that the same outlook has also influenced Anatolian communities. Participants described the sharing and consumption of sacrificial animals' meat during Eid al-Adha, as well as the distribution of meat to the poor, as an example of social solidarity.

P8: We give the meat from our sacrifice to the poor in our neighbourhood, thus earning blessings. Eid al-Adha is important; it shows that neighbours care for each other.



Photo 7. Eid al-Adha in the Ottoman Period and Modern-Day Sacrificial Sheep

References: Begüm, 2021; Şafak, 2023

Kandil Nights are characterized by requests for forgiveness and cleansing from sins. From the statements of Participant 9, it is understood that Bagel of Kandil is a symbolized means of solidarity and sharing. It is seen that people believe that they are doing a good deed in the religious and social context by baking Bagel of Kandil and offering it to their poor acquaintances.

We distribute the Bagel of Kandil especially to children, the poor and the elderly.

The symbol of Ashura commemorates the Prophet Noah's salvation from the Noah's Flood. Participants stated that cooking Ashura and sharing it with relatives is a symbol of salvation in the afterlife.

P1: Cooking and distributing Ashura brings goodness into our lives, I do it every year. Ashura also means mourning for us.



Photo 8. Women Cooking Ashura and Praying in Anatolia

Reference: TRT Haber, 2019

P11 defines this tradition, where unity, togetherness, sharing, and brotherhood feelings are experienced through the preparation and offering of Sütlaç during the Haririt Edar period, as follows:

With the belief that the current year will be brighter and better, every year on March 14th, we make Sütlaç using the first fresh milk of the day and distribute it to our neighbours. By doing so, we believe that the year will be more prosperous and fruitful. Sütlaç is white and sweet. Due to these characteristics of Sütlaç, we wish our year to be as bright as white and as happy as sweet.

It can be observed that in this tradition where Sütlaç is used as a symbol, some spiritual emotions are derived through Sütlaç. The wishes and emotions are symbolized through the whiteness and sweetness of Sütlaç.

Again, according to the statements of participant 11, in Easter celebrations in Anatolia, eggs are dyed and given as gifts to children or single girls and symbolize wishes such as happiness, good luck and joy.

Muslims do not celebrate Easter, but we do, it is a very joyful celebration. Easter Eggs bring good luck to our house, we change our eggs to share the good luck.

5. Discussion

This research examined the ceremonial cuisine traditions and dishes in Anatolian cuisine culture within the framework of symbolic interactionism theory. The results of the research evaluated 17 different ceremonial cuisine traditions under sociocultural and religious themes. These traditions regulate social interactions with their symbolic meanings within social, cultural, and religious contexts. Similarly, in research conducted by Sekhukhune (1993) in North Africa, it is mentioned that food and drink symbolism is shaped by culture-specific beliefs, values, norms, customs, and traditions. Therefore, it can be said that the themes identified in the research align with the relevant literature. Indeed, the relationships between people or objects occur through the meanings and symbols attributed to them, and these meanings/symbols find expression in specific rituals or cultural practices. Food rituals are traditions that have the potential to bring about significant positive changes in society (Ratcliffe et al., 2019). At the societal level, these rituals can be used to strengthen social bonding, create and transmit group culture, and even affect public health (Thomson & Hassenkamp, 2008; Wansink & Van Kleef, 2014; Hobson et al., 2018). In line with the literature, research has shown that these ritualistic foods contribute to many social contexts. It can be stated that ceremonial foods and the practices shaped around these foods constitute a symbolic social language and have many functions within a social and cultural framework.

With the cultural features of Anatolia, it is observed that the cuisine traditions (such as Haririt Edar) of different religious and ethnic groups continue to be preserved. However, compared to other civilizations, it is noticed that the ceremonial practices related to Turkish-Islamic traditions are predominantly upheld. The ceremonial cuisine traditions possessed by all ethnic groups manifest as expressions of material and spiritual emotions through symbols, either individually or as complements to a ceremony. The social structure was shaped through symbolic foods in various rituals such as childbirth, funerals and ceremonial traditions, and a communication language was created within the communities' own cultures. As expressed in the symbolic interactionism theory, people attribute meanings to objects in their daily lives, and around these meanings, they form social interactions (Wallace & Wolf, 1995).

Ceremonial cuisine traditions contribute to the expansion of the theory related to food and drink symbolism. With modernization and globalization, it can be said that ceremonial cuisine traditions in many regions of Anatolia are beginning to fade and change. In this context, ensuring the sustainability of these traditions is of great importance. Indeed, these traditions are significant tools that reflect the collective memory and identity of society through the preparation and presentation of symbolic foods. Ceremonial cuisine traditions strengthen the sense of solidarity and unity within the community, thus reinforcing the social structure. They play a crucial role in passing down the cultural cuisine heritage of society to future generations. The data used in our research were collected from 7 different cities in Türkiye. In addition, the source persons reached during the data collection process are people from different ethnic groups who live in Anatolia and remember or practice their traditions. These issues are considered as the strengths of the research. Obtaining data from source persons and adopting a qualitative method in the research design can be expressed as limitations of the research.

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