

## Ethnobiological study of *tumpeng*, traditional food in Surakarta City, Central Java, Indonesia

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NURAFNI RINDIANI<sup>1</sup>, RINO A SALSABILA IZDIHAR<sup>1</sup>, AHMAD DWI SETYAWAN<sup>1,2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret. Jl. Ir. Sutami 36A Surakarta 57126, Central Java, Indonesia. Tel./fax.: +62-271-663375, \*email: volatileoils@gmail.com

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**Abstract.** *Septhia ND, Izdihar NS, Destiani NFL, Rindiani N, Izdihar RS, Setyawan AD. 2024. Ethnobiological study of tumpeng, traditional food in Surakarta City, Central Java, Indonesia. Asian J Ethnobiol 7: 61-67.* The Javanese ethnic group, which is the largest ethnic population in Indonesia, shows its cultural richness through a variety of traditional foods, one of which is *tumpeng*. This research aims to find out information about each ingredient in *tumpeng*, the meaning of *tumpeng* in various Javanese traditions or ceremonies, and the knowledge of the people in Surakarta City, Central Java, Indonesia regarding this tradition through ethnobotanical studies. The research method used was observation and interviews with the people of Surakarta City regarding the *Tumpengan* tradition. Of the 60 respondents from Baluwarti, Kauman, and Mojosoongo Villages in Surakarta City, the majority, especially 42 people, showed a "somewhat understand" level of understanding of *tumpeng*. The locals mention at least 19 plants and 3 animals often used as ingredients in *tumpeng*, such as coconut, water spinach, spinach, yardlong beans, mung bean sprouts, carrots, cucumber, cabbage, as well as chicken meats and eggs, milkfish, and anchovies. *Tumpeng* and each food element on it has a deep symbolic meaning for the community which is related to the relationship between humans and God, humans and nature, and humans and humans. For example, side dish such as chicken symbolizes gratitude and peace given by God, and cone-shaped rice shows the hope that there must always be progress and improvement in every life.

**Keywords:** Culture, ethnobiology, traditional botanical knowledge, *tumpeng*

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelagic country with the largest number of islands in the world, which has more than 300 ethnic groups and more than 5,300 types of typical food from each ethnicity or region. This is because each ethnic group inhabiting these islands generally has a variety of traditional foods (Yudhistira and Fatmawati 2020). This diversity becomes a culture's identity, symbolized through traditions, rituals, and special events found in its social group. As well as being the unique character and uniqueness of each ethnic group, both in terms of food preparation procedures, food serving, and the way of eating the food itself (Wijaya 2019).

The Javanese ethnic group is the largest ethnic population in Indonesia, with a percentage of 40.2% of the total population in Indonesia, or reaching 95.2 million people (Triwibisono and Aurachman 2021). Like other tribes, the Javanese also have various variations of traditional food as their characteristics and uniqueness. Where, one example of traditional food that can show the ethnobiological richness of the Javanese ethnic is *tumpeng*. The term *tumpeng* comes from the phrase "*Tumungkulo sing mumpeng*," which means that to achieve salvation, every human should always be diligent in worship (Ganjari 2020). However, according to Sunyoto (2016), *tumpeng* comes from the words *Tu/To* (hidden God) and *mpeng*, which is an offering (*sajen*) given by *Kapitayan* (animism-

dynamism) adherents to perform devotional worship to God (*Sanghyang Tunggal*). Based on KBBI (2023), *tumpeng* means rice served in a cone-like shape (for salvation, etc.); while *tumpengan* means a celebration by serving *tumpeng* (rice) as the main food.

Generally, *tumpeng* is made from white rice and is shaped like a cone (volcano mount shape), which depicts the stages of human life from beginning to end and is often used as an offering, namely a series of Javanese rituals in the form of advice that is symbolized physically (Pianto et al. 2022). Apart from that, *tumpeng* is also known as a Javanese cultural heritage, which has various important meanings or philosophies at every event and is not only related to the relationship between humans and God but also with fellow humans and nature (Ridzki and Achmadi 2023). One of the philosophies contained in *tumpeng* is found in the earth alms ceremony (*Sedekah bumi*), which is carried out in one of the northern coastal areas of the island of Java using the "*Tumpeng Sego Golong*" greeting as a form of respect for individuals who contributed to the founding of the village and consists of one large *tumpeng* and nine small *tumpeng* around it with the symbolic meaning of struggle originating from the Walisongo history (Rochmawati et al. 2021).

*Tumpeng* is also an important element in the *Selikuran* night tradition of the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace, which requires a thousand *tumpeng* as a symbol of the promise of reward from Allah SWT to His servants (Prophet

Muhammad SAW) who carry out worship on the night of *Lailatul Qadar* sincerely (Bakri and Muhadiyatiningsih, 2019). When viewed historically, the tradition of *Mitoni* (pregnancy ceremony) or serving *tumpeng* rice also illustrates the result of cultural acculturation from Hindu habits to the Islamic religion, which has undergone slight changes since the arrival of Islam (Nurazizah, 2022). In a historical context, it is also known that *tumpeng* is related to religious dimensions in the past, such as animism-dynamism (*Kapitayan*) and Hindu-Buddhist religion (Ngadat 2023). Based on this description, this research aims to find out information regarding the knowledge of the people around the research location regarding *tumpeng*, the ingredients used in *tumpeng* along with the philosophy or meaning contained therein, and the meaning of *tumpeng* in various Javanese traditions or traditional ceremonies in Surakarta City, Central Java Province, Indonesia.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study area

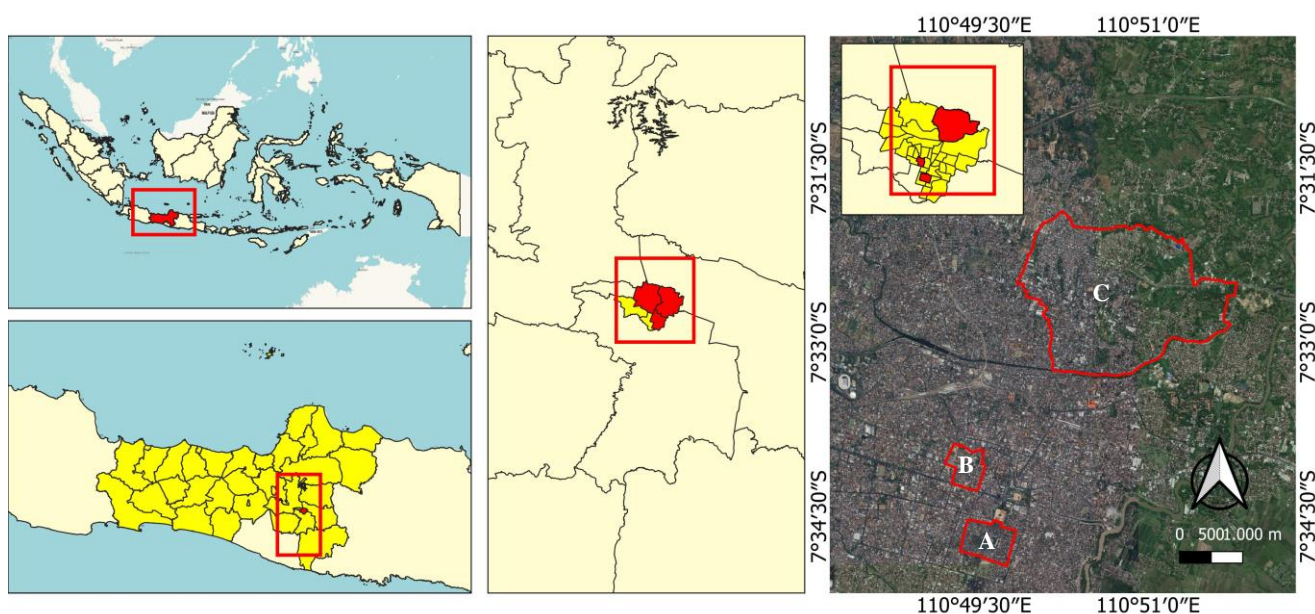
This research was carried out from November to December 2023 in three villages in Surakarta City, Central Java, Indonesia including Baluwarti Village (-7.5372, 110.8453), Kauman Village (-7.8057, 110.3619), and Mojosongo Village (-7.5374, 110.8455). Baluwarti Village has an area of around 40.70 ha. The land available is only for the use of yard land (home garden), including use for raising free-range chickens, ornamental plants/potted plants, and physical gardens. Kauman Village is an area of around 20.10 ha. Land use includes residential areas, businesses and other public buildings. These two villages are densely populated urban areas with flat topography and

an altitude of 90-95 m above sea level. Meanwhile, Mojosongo Village has an area of 532.927 ha, at an altitude of 90-130 above sea level. The topography of Mojosongo Village is hilly and is the highest plain in Surakarta. Various land uses are found in this area, including settlements, businesses, agricultural lands, forest gardens, and home gardens.

### Data collection

The respondents of this research are native residents of Baluwarti, Kauman, and Mojosongo Villages of Surakarta City. In collecting information regarding each respondent's name, age, education, and occupation, an interview process was carried out using several pre-designed questions. Before the data collection process, each respondent was informed about the purpose of the research being carried out to provide clarity and obtain approval. This consent is intended to obtain the respondent's permission and willingness to participate in the interview process and use the information they provide, which will later be published without revealing the respondent's identity.

In the data collection process, all respondents were cooperative, open, and willing to participate in this research's data collection or survey process. Not a single respondent refused to participate in the survey. There were no specific criteria for determining respondents, only that no respondents were found aged less than 15 years. This is quite strengthening the data that has been collected because the respondents interviewed can at least be said to quite easily understand the questions and be aware of the information that will be provided. Each informant was asked the same questions, using Indonesian and Javanese languages, with an interview duration of around 15 to 25 minutes.



**Figure 1.** Map of research locations in Surakarta City, Central Java, Indonesia. A. Baluwarti, B. Kauman, and C. Mojosongo Villages

Information or data on *tumpeng* or the *Tumpengan* tradition was obtained through semi-structured questionnaires and personal interviews with 60 respondents from three different villages in Surakarta City. Data collection through interviews was carried out by asking respondents questions related to the existence of the *Tumpengan* tradition for the respondent and the surrounding environment, a description of the components or contents of *tumpeng*, the types of plants and animals used, important days that require the creation or existence of *tumpeng*, and the traditional values and meaning of preparing *tumpeng* and its contents in a celebration. The side dish components obtained can be used to identify the types of plants and animals used. Strengthening the data obtained regarding this tradition was carried out by taking two key respondents, who could be said to be experts and were directly related to the *Tumpengan* tradition.

### Data analysis

The data that has been obtained is then processed by analyzing using a descriptive and qualitative approach. The data collected covers various aspects, such as the frequency of implementation of *Tumpengan*, the types of dishes served, and community participation. By combining these two approaches, the data analysis carried out will provide a more holistic understanding of the *Tumpengan* tradition. Descriptive results provide a strong quantitative view, while in-depth qualitative findings detail significant aspects that cannot be measured directly (Chatra et al. 2023). The historical sources used are quite diverse, starting from interviews with people who are perpetrators and witnesses of history, cultural figures, book sources, academic publications, theses, and dissertations, as well as other sources whose validity can be scientifically acceptable. The combination of these two approaches will produce a more comprehensive picture and reality of the situation, freedom of view, and methods with strong conclusions (Waruwu 2023) about the meaning and role of *Tumpengan* in the social dynamics of society, opening up opportunities to a deeper understanding of the cultural context and the values contained in this tradition.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Respondent demographics

Moreover, 60 respondents from three villages including Baluwarti, Kauman, and Mojosongo villages in Surakarta City, participated in this research (Table 1). Overall, 25 male and 35 female respondents aged between 15 and 66 years and over participated in this research. Respondents came from various job categories: students, farmers, housewives, traders, entrepreneurs, laborers, teachers, civil servants, etc. The highest frequency of respondents was in the 46-55 year age group, namely 19 people (31.67%). Most of the respondents in this study had a minimum high school education level, namely 22 people (36.67%). Apart from that, this research also obtained information regarding the community's knowledge of traditional ceremonies related to *tumpeng*.

**Table 1.** Demographic data of respondents participating in the research

Parameter	Specification	Freq.	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	25	41.67
	Female	35	58.33
Age	15-25	2	3.33
	26-35	8	13.33
	36-45	15	25.00
	46-55	19	31.67
	56-65	12	20.00
	>66	4	6.67
Profession	Student	2	3.33
	Housewife	27	45.00
	Merchant	7	11.67
	Laborer	6	10.00
	Civil Servant	5	8.33
	Other	13	21.67
Education	Elementary School	16	26.67
	Junior High School	18	30.00
	Senior High School	22	36.67
	University	4	6.67
Knowledge of traditional ceremonies	Very understand	0	0.00
	Somewhat understand	42	70.00
	Little/don't understand	18	30.00

There are 42 respondents out of the total number of respondents fall into the "somewhat understand" category, while the other 18 fall into the "little/don't understand" category. The respondents' understanding level of traditional ceremonies or traditions related to *tumpeng* is influenced by the respondent's knowledge and experience regarding this matter. The "somewhat understand" category consists of respondents who have consumed *tumpeng* and know about the types of traditional ceremonies that use *tumpeng* as one of the components, but have never cooked, seen, or do not know the philosophies contained therein. Meanwhile, the "little/don't understand" category consists of respondents who have only heard of or do not know about the type of traditional ceremony that uses *tumpeng* as one of its components.

### The meaning and philosophy of *tumpeng* in community traditions

*Tumpeng* is a traditional food that is familiar to everyone, including the people of Surakarta City. Until now, *tumpeng* is still used as a symbol or ritual in celebrations, thus making it a cultural heritage that must always be preserved. *Tumpeng* has its place in the lives of Javanese people because *tumpeng* is not only given and used carelessly for daily needs but can also be made and used for important rituals (Krisnadi 2020). Generally, *tumpeng* has a philosophy closely related to deep values or meanings, such as tolerance, sincerity, wealth, purity, and human gratitude to Allah SWT for all the sustenance and blessings He has given. The philosophies contained in *tumpeng* are not only related to the shape or general

philosophy. However, if observed more deeply, these philosophies are also contained in every part of every element that makes up a *tumpeng*, such as the rice color on *tumpeng*, as well as the side dishes used around it (Ridzki and Achmadi 2023).

The word *tumpeng* comes from the term "*tumapaking penguripan-tumindak alat tumuju Pangeran*," which describes the view that humans should always follow God's path. The existence of traditional Javanese beliefs related to supernatural powers outside humans can influence each community's lives. Based on this belief, every Javanese community must always maintain the relationship between themselves and the Creator to ask for safety, protection, prosperity, and blessings from Allah SWT. Apart from that, the word *tumpeng* can also be interpreted as "*Yen metu kudu mumpeng*," meaning if you want to leave, you must do it with serious enthusiasm. The meaning of leaves contained in this statement can be interpreted as an attempt to make a change. *Tumpeng* has a shape that tapers upwards or resembles a mountain. According to Javanese belief, the top tip of *tumpeng* symbolizes Mount Semeru, considered the gods' abode and the center of the world. However, according to Islamic views, the top tip of *tumpeng* is considered a symbol of Allah SWT (Chandra and Hadi 2021). The rice in *tumpeng* can be served using white or yellow rice. White *tumpeng* rice is a symbol used to interpret the Sun God found in Hinduism and is a symbol of sunlight, which means the source of life (Lindayani et al. 2020). Meanwhile, *tumpeng* rice with a yellow color is a form of symbolism carried out to honor or serve God Almighty. *Tumpeng* is also generally arranged or placed on banana leaves with a minimum number of side dishes of seven types arranged in a circle, using seven side dishes. This is based on the number seven which in Javanese is called "*pitu*," which comes from "*pitulung*," which means that fellow humans should help each other (Mahanani 2022).

Based on the results of observations and interviews conducted regarding the use and knowledge of the community regarding traditional ceremonies or traditions of *tumpeng* among respondents who live in the Surakarta area, it can be seen that the majority of respondents stated that *tumpeng*, in general, is often used in various celebrations and events, both general celebrations and special ones and related to customs that develop in society. Most respondents generally stated that *tumpeng* is often used at birthdays, competitions, and Independence Day celebrations. Meanwhile, celebrations related to the customs or traditions of Javanese society stated by respondents include celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW or referred to as *Maulid*, *Grebejan suro*, alms earth or *Bersih desa* (village cleaning), *Wetonan*, *Poso*, changing family names, as well as at events *Jumenengan* (commemoration of the king's ascension to the throne). Earth almsgiving, also known as *Bersih desa*, is a form of traditional ceremony carried out by the community as a form of handing over the natural product obtained back to nature, where in this ceremony, *tumpeng* is used to commemorate the return of Dewi Sri (rice goddess) (Masruroh et al. 2021), a belief that has

existed since prehistoric times (*Jawa kuno*) before the arrival of Hindu-Buddhist influence (Nastiti 2020).

Besides, *tumpeng* is also one of the mandatory components that must be present in the *wetonan* ceremony, which is a traditional ceremony carried out by the Javanese people to commemorate a person's birthday based on their *weton* day and as a form of respect for every caregiver or guard in every human places (Sofiah et al. 2023). Based on the interview results, it was also stated that *tumpeng* is one of the components used in the *I Suro* tradition carnival or a tradition carried out to welcome the *Hijriah* New Year (Javanese New Year). In this tradition, *tumpeng* used is large and is known as *Gunungan*, which consists of various food types, comprised of agricultural products, such as rice, fruit, and ointment, and has a philosophical meaning as a form of offering to God Almighty (Muthoharoh, 2022). There are a thousand small *tumpeng* in the *Selikuran* night tradition of the Kasunanan Palace in Surakarta. This small *tumpeng* is placed inside a *takir*, a place for rice made from banana leaves. Each *takir* contains savory rice as a small *tumpeng* accompanied by black soybeans, green chilies, *rambak*, and cucumber. A thousand *tumpeng* symbolizes the promise of Allah SWT will give a reward equivalent to a thousand months to His servants who sincerely worship on the night of *Lailatul Qodar*. However, *tumpeng* is not a typical feature of the *Selikuran* tradition because *tumpeng* is also used in *Grebeg* and other rituals. In addition, the uniqueness of the *Selikuran* tradition is that the number of *tumpeng* reaches exactly one thousand as a symbol of a thousand months (Bakri and Muhadiyatningsih 2019).

### Meaning and philosophy of plants used in *tumpeng*

*Tumpeng* rice consists of cone-shaped rice covered with a banana leaf and topped with red chilies shaped especially. The cone-shaped rice is then surrounded by vegetables called *urap*, or the people of Surakarta often call it *gudangan*. Regarding the contents of the *urap*, each region has its characteristics and styles. However, based on the results obtained from the interview and observations, the *urap* that is often found in the Surakarta area consists of various types of plants and vegetables, including coconut, water spinach, spinach, yardlong beans, mung bean sprouts, carrots, cucumber, and cabbage. Later, plants and vegetables are processed by boiling for a few minutes and only seasoned with salt without adding other spices. The spices and flavors are already found in grated coconut, previously seasoned with various herbs and spices. *Tumpeng* and its vegetables and side dishes are a unity that has a very deep meaning. Cone-shaped rice shows the hope that there must always be progress and improvement in every life, where you always try to achieve the goals and dreams you want by trying to face and overcome all existing trials (Putri et al. 2022). Some people also argue that the conical shape of *tumpeng* rice that rises upwards shows the majesty of God Almighty as the ruler of nature. White rice symbolizes purity, and based on banana leaves symbolize patience and peace (Kumaidi et al. 2023). *Tumpeng* is often served with banana leaves as a base, wrapping snacks, and other accessories. Where banana leaves themselves also have a meaning or philosophy that explains that humans are not naked (Maryani et al. 2021).

**Table 2.** List of plants and parts used in *tumpeng*

Local Name	Common Name	Scientific Name	Family	Parts Used	Philosophy/Use
<i>Pisang</i>	Banana	<i>Musa paradisiaca</i> L.	Musaceae	Leaves	Patience and peace
<i>Kedelai (tempe kering)</i>	Soya bean	<i>Glycine max</i> (L.) Merr.	Fabaceae	Seeds	Life cycle
<i>Cabai</i>	Chili	<i>Capsicum annum</i> L.	Solanaceae	Fruit	Courage
<i>Wortel</i>	Carrot	<i>Daucus carota</i> L.	Apiaceae	Tubers	Honesty, hardworking, and perseverance
<i>Kangkung</i>	Water spinach	<i>Ipomoea aquatica</i> Forssk.	Convolvulaceae	Leaves and stems	Protection
<i>Kacang panjang</i>	Yarlong beans	<i>Vigna unguiculata subsp. sesquipedalis</i> (L.) Verdc.	Fabaceae	Flesh (pods)	Health and long life
<i>Kacang hijau (tauge)</i>	Mung beans	<i>Vigna radiata</i> (L.) R.Wilczek	Fabaceae	Sprouts	Fertility
<i>Kol</i>	Cabbage	<i>Brassica oleracea subsp. capitata</i> L.	Brassicaceae	Leaves	Purity
<i>Bayam</i>	Spinach	<i>Amaranthus</i> L.	Amaranthaceae	Leaves and stems	Peace
<i>Kelapa muda</i>	Coconut	<i>Cocos mucifera</i> L.	Arecaceae	Flesh	Sincerity in living life
<i>Padi</i>	Rice	<i>Oryza sativa</i> L.	Graminae	Seeds (endosperm)	The majesty and holiness of God Almighty
<i>Seledri</i>	Celery	<i>Apium graveolens</i> L.	Apiaceae	Leaves	Triumph
<i>Labu siam</i>	Chayote	<i>Sechium edule</i> (Jacq.) Sw.	Cucurbitaceae	Seeds	Infirmity
<i>Timun</i>	Cucumber	<i>Cucumis sativus</i> L.	Cucurbitaceae	All parts	Fertility
<i>Kentang</i>	Potato	<i>Solanum tuberosum</i> L.	Solanaceae	Tubers	Life's difficult trials will always have a solution
<i>Selada</i>	Lettuce	<i>Lactuca sativa</i> L.	Asteraceae	Leaves	Fertility
<i>Tomat</i>	Tomato	<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i> L.	Solanaceae	Flesh of fruit	Honesty
<i>Daun singkong</i>	Cassava leaves	<i>Manihot esculenta</i> Crantz	Euphorbiaceae	Leaves	Humility
<i>Kemangi</i>	Basil	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L.	Lamiaceae	Leaves	Sanctity

**Table 3.** List of animals and parts used in *tumpeng*

Local name	English name	Scientific name	Family	Parts used	Philosophy/use
<i>Ayam Kampung</i>	Kampung Chicken	<i>Gallus gallus</i> f. <i>domesticus</i> Linnaeus, 1758	Phasianidae	Meat and eggs	Symbolizing gratitude and tranquility from God and eggs depict two sides of life.
<i>Ikan Bandeng</i>	Milkfish	<i>Chanos chanos</i> Forsskal, 1775	Chanidae	All parts	Abundance of fortune
<i>Ikan Teri</i>	Anchovy	<i>Stolephorus</i> Lacepède, 1803	Clupeidae	All parts	Harmony

Therefore, using various plants in *tumpeng* has meaning and philosophy for the people of Surakarta (Table 2). Like the yarrow beans in *tumpeng*, which have the philosophy that those who eat them will be blessed with health and long life; Water spinach (*kangkung*), which means "*jinakung*" or symbolizes protection; spinach, which is a symbol of peace; mung bean sprouts, which symbolize creativity and have the philosophy that everyone will always be in the process and growing; chilies on rice shoots symbolize exemplary life, a world that has many trials and obstacles, and the red color of the chilies symbolizes courage (Novarel 2022). Apart from that, mung bean sprouts are grown from germinating green bean seeds and have many nutrients good for human health. In *tumpeng*, mung bean sprouts have a philosophy or meaning of fertility (Nurmalasari and Ami 2021). Grated coconut fruit is also used in *tumpeng* as one of the complements, where generally the young coconuts contain philosophical or deep meaning if every human being at a young age should always feel sincere in dealing with various things and not have a sense of arrogance or jealousy; hence, they will be useful for others at their old age (Sulastris and Apriyani 2021). When all these ingredients are mixed, they will become ointment or *urapan*, which has its meaning and philosophy. Furthermore, the name *urap* or "*urip*" symbolizes living with various kinds of trials or, in other words, a life colored by various meanings and life struggles which are symbolized by various vegetables, which have their philosophies and meanings. Apart from that, in *tumpeng* rice, there is fried chili sauce (*sambal goreng*) consisting of potatoes, tempeh, and tofu, which means that in every living, there must be cooperation and harmony in society. Tempeh is a product made from processed soybeans, a complement or side dish in *tumpeng* cooked dry, called dried tempeh (*tempe goreng*). Dried tempeh also contains a philosophical meaning that a life cycle must make every human being feel joy and sorrow (Sari et al. 2019).

#### Meaning and philosophy of animals used in *tumpeng*

Apart from using plants, *tumpeng* is also covered with side dishes. Table 3 shows that animal types are often used as side dishes, including free-range chicken (Kampung chicken), anchovies, and milkfish. Like plants, animals and the parts they use also have their deep meaning and philosophy. The first side dish in *tumpeng* is chicken *ingkung* (full-size chicken), where the type of chicken usually used in this *tumpeng* is free-range chicken. The use of chicken as a side dish in *tumpeng* can be interpreted as a symbol of gratitude and peace given by God, as well as a prayer or hope for every human being to be able to sort out what is good and what is bad, like chickens who sort out what food is good or not to eat (Muktaruddin et al. 2021). The next part used for this animal is the egg, a symbol of the origin of life which is always present in two different ways, such as male or female, and day or night (Syam 2023). Apart from that, the egg also has two parts with different colors, where yellow symbolizes strong determination, while white symbolizes purity (Kristanti et al. 2022). The side dishes used as accompaniments to

*tumpeng* are anchovies and milkfish. According to Syam (2023), the use of milkfish or fish with many spines contains a philosophical meaning in the form of an abundance of good fortune, while anchovies can be interpreted as a value of harmony or togetherness.

In conclusion, it is known that there are 19 species of plants and 3 species of animals used in *tumpeng* with all parts contained in it, including the size, color, and type of materials used in general, have various philosophies or deep meanings related to the relationship between humans and God, humans and nature, and humans and humans. It encourages *tumpeng* to be one of the components often used and involved in various traditions or traditional ceremonies in Surakarta. In every tradition or traditional ceremony, *tumpeng* is philosophized as a form of the values of tolerance, sincerity, wealth, purity, and gratitude to God for the blessings He has given. Unfortunately, the knowledge of Surakarta people about the *Tumpengan* tradition is dominated by groups of people with the category "somewhat understand", these people only ever consume and know *tumpeng* as one of the components of a tradition and do not know the philosophy contained.

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