

Research Article

The Controversy between the Indonesian Government Policy and Manggarai's Culture Value About "Sopi" Liquor

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Abstract Sopi is the local name of a liquor that results by evaporating liquid palm sugar of Lontar trees produced by the community in East Nusa Tenggara by inheritance. Sopi liquor comes from the Dutch word *zoopje*, meaning liquid alcohol. The purpose of this study is to analyze the controversy between the government's policy on controlling and supervising Sopi beverages as liquor with the indigenous people's custom in producing and consuming Sopi as a custom-made beverage or liquor in Manggarai's community culture (East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia). This research uses a qualitative approach with the descriptive analysis method. In this study, several theories of health and culture in health communications were used. Excessive alcohol consumption causes severe liver inflammatory damage; to prevent this, the Indonesian government has issued control and supervision policy on liquor products, but not effectively applied to Sopi traditional liquor producers in Manggarai. Sopi liquor has cultural, magical, economic, and social kinship values in the life of the Manggaraian people inherited from generation to generation.

Keywords culture; customs; public health; Sopi

1. Background

The Manggarai region inhabited by 93% of Manggarai ethnic groups lies between 8° LU (North latitude), 8°.30' LS (South latitude), and 119, 30°-12, 30° BT (East longitude). It is located in the western part of the Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara, as an international tourist destination place, where there are giant monitor lizards (*Varanus komodoensis*; one of the new seven wonders in the world of the nature) and Liang Bua cave, where ancient human life started ±30,000 years BC [1].

Administratively, the Manggarai region is divided into Manggarai, West Manggarai, and East Manggarai districts with a population of 843,695 people. The source of population income is largely dependent on the agricultural sector and now it extended to the tourism sector. Manggarai's view of life always states that they are part of the ecosystem of the universe with the center of all life being "Mori Keraeng"

(The Creator of Heaven and Earth). It appears in their lives always put forward the role of the Ancestors Spirit as an intermediary of prayer, they to "Mori Keraeng." As a symbol of their obedience to their belief, they perform customary rituals by offering sacrificial animals as offerings, and Sopi (local alcohol name) as an indivisible customary drink of the event. Although all ethnic Manggarai is all Catholic, the community performs two kinds of rituals, namely: rituals of Catholic religion and custom rituals with liquor of Sopi as a part of the traditional rituals [2].

Sopi is the local name of a liquor that results by evaporating liquid palm sugar of Lontar trees, produced by the community in East Nusa Tenggara by inheritance. The word "Sopi" originates from the Dutch term *zoopje*, meaning liquid alcohol. The creation process involves burning for hours, where the evaporation settles into a liquid, called Sopi. The "moderate" Sopi liquor liquid with $\leq 30\%$ alcohol content is usually only vaporized once, whereas a good quality Sopi with alcohol content $> 30\%$ is evaporated twice [1]. Sopi is always presented as a drink that has an indigenous value in traditional ceremony of the Manggarai people. For that reason, Sopi remains immortal as a part of the local wisdom of the Manggarai community [2].

Recognizing the consequences of the excessive alcohol consumption on human health, the Indonesian government issued a Through Presidential Decree No. 3 of 1997 containing the regulation, supervision, and control of legal alcoholic beverages; however, it was cancelled by the Supreme Court's policy on the regulation and supervision of alcoholic beverages in Indonesia. In the Reformation era, Presidential Regulation No. 74 of 2013 is issued, which regulates alcoholic beverages as goods under the supervision of the authorities. In this Presidential Regulation, industrial

alcoholic beverages are categorized as beverages containing ethanol (C_2H_5OH) processed from agricultural products that contain carbohydrates by fermentation and distillation or fermentation without distillation, and there are traditional alcoholic beverages which are hereditary, produced traditionally at any time, simply packaged, and used for the needs of customs or religious ceremonies [3].

In its development, Sopi, which is distilled from the Enau tree, is increasingly being produced by rural communities in the Manggarai regency of East Nusa Tenggara without a supervision from the Indonesian government through the Manggarai Regent as the Regional Head [4]. Sopi production, as a traditional beverage, increased from time to time in line with the high demand of Sopi from consumers, both for the needs of traditional events and religious events without considering the impact of excessive consumption of Sopi on the human health [5].

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that alcohol abuse kills more people than AIDS, tuberculosis, and violent crimes. WHO estimates that approximately 3.3 million people died in 2012 from excessive alcohol consumption. Excessive alcohol consumption increases the risk of developing more than 200 diseases, including liver cancer, other cancers, and tuberculosis. Irresponsible alcohol consumption is one of the leading causes of accidents and violent acts. The UK Public Health Agency (PHE) discloses its latest findings that more deaths occur in people who are addicted to alcohol. PHE found that a one percent increase in mortality is associated with drinking alcohol. In 2013, the number rose from 22,779 people to 22,967 people in 2014 [4]. Basic Health Research of the Ministry of Health in 2007 reported the number of teenage drinkers alcohol in Indonesia at 4.9% and based on the research of the Gerakan Nasional Anti Miras (GeNAM), the national movement of liquor resistance in Indonesia, the percentage of alcoholic teenagers jumped dramatically to 23% of the total number of Indonesian teens, currently 63 million people in total [6, 7].

Although Sopi liquor is continuously produced by the community and consumed as customary beverages in the communities of Manggarai—East Nusa Tenggara, the government has not dealt with any forced action to stop its production and consumption. This study aims to analyze the controversy between the government's policy on controlling and supervizing Sopi drinks as a liquor and the customs of indigenous peoples producing and consuming Sopi as a custom-made beverage Manggarai's community culture.

2. Method

The research type used is qualitative. The research population is Manggaraian community. The study population includes customary leaders, religious leaders, and teenagers aged 15–21 years old who are domiciled in Ruteng town,

Manggarai Regency. The research sample was collected using accidental sampling; this gathers respondents from the customary party, the religious party in custom village, and the teenagers gathered at the roadside and in the township. Total sample was 35 respondents. The primary data source is the information collected by the researcher himself as data that has never been collected previously, either in a certain way or at any given time. Primary data about traditional values of Sopi liquor for social kinship used is from in-depth interviews with religious leaders, traditional figures, random teenagers, sellers of Sopi, and teenagers who consume Sopi. The religious leaders were asked about the Catholic church's view of church rules of not consuming food or drink two hours before the ceremony is held in the church. The customary leaders were asked about Manggarai custom views of the magical value of "Sopi" in Manggarai ritual event. The teenagers were asked about their views of the value of "Sopi" for the adhesive kinship. Secondary data is collected via others through research in another district in East Nusa Tenggara. This data usually comes from other studies conducted by Central Bureau of Statistics of East Nusa Tenggara (Indonesian Statistic Center Departement) or other institutions that have an interest in liquor [8].

In the data analysis technique, the interview data obtained through a question and answer method between the researchers and informants is validated using triangulation. Furthermore, the tabulation of qualitative data uses coding data to group answers based on research objectives.

3. Result

Based on the identification results, the types of cultural ritual events and religious rituals in Manggarai regency are using animal sacrifices and liquor. Animal sacrifice, presented by animals bound by ropes, prayed as offerings during customary rituals, killed after the event, and eaten together while the ritual is going on beside drinking "Sopi" as a typical drink during the customary ceremony, is illustrated in Table 1.

4. Discussion

4.1. Sopi for customary social kinship

Indigenous peoples in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, make Sopi drinks as a kinship tool in various customary affairs. Each customary event of kinship members collects Sopi drinks as a symbol of kinship ties in their indigenous communion. Sopi drinks packed in beer bottles are delivered by kinship members to the drum house (traditional house of Manggarai people) as the center of the traditional event. Typically, customary elders record it in a register book based on *panga (sub klen)*. The number of Sopi drink bottles collected is based on the number of kinship members in one *wa'u* or *klen* based on genetic similarities. High-quality "Sopi" liquor according to Manggarai custom category is a

Table 1: Types of customary rituals and religious rituals in Manggarai East Nusa Tenggara in 2017.

No.	Types of rituals	Meaning of ritual value	Duration of celebration	Types of sacrificial animals	Types of liquors used
1	Penti Weki Peso Beo	The turn of the customary year between the harvest season and the growing season in one calendar year	2–3 days	Chickens, chicken eggs, pigs, and goats	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
2	Kélasemes (buffalo sacrifice) Kélascoe (pig sacrifice)	Farewell to a family member who has passed away	1–2 days	Chicken, chicken eggs, buffalos, pigs, and goats	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
3	Tambung Watu, Cécé Cocok	Inauguration of indigenous village	2–3 days	Chicken, chicken eggs, buffalos, pigs, and goats	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
4	Wagal	Customary marriage of brides and grooms	2–3 days	Chicken, chicken eggs, buffalos, pigs, and goats	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
5	Podo	Delivering the bride to the indigenous village of the groom	1–2 days	Chickens, chicken eggs, pigs, and goats	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
6	CongkoLokap	Inauguration of traditional house (drum house) in one wa'u (klen)	1–2 days	Chicken, chicken eggs, buffalos, pigs, and goats	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
7	Hang Wojaatau Hang Rani	Start paddy harvesting	1–2 days	Chickens, chicken eggs, pigs, and goats	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
8	Céar Cumpe/Ratung Wuwung	Giving a custom name for a newborn	1 day	Chickens, chicken eggs, pigs, and goats	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
9	Permandian	A family's thanksgiving because a baby has received the sacrament of baptism (Baptist being a Catholic)	1 day	Chicken, chicken eggs, and pork	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
10	Komuni Pertama	Family gratitude party for a child who has received the Eucharistic Sacrament according to Catholic Church teachings	1–2 days	Chicken, chicken eggs, and pork	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
11	Tabhisan Imam Baru	Family gratitude for a person who has received the sacrament according to the Catholic Church's teaching (become pastour)	1–2 days	Chicken, chicken eggs, cows, and pigs	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
12	Pesta Perak	Family gratitude party for husband/wife who have received a twenty-five-year-old Sacrament or a Pastor/Nun who has received a 25-year Priesthood or a nun who gets a 25-year chastity	1–2 days	Chicken, chicken eggs, cows, and pigs	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
13	Wisuda	Family gratitude party for a person who has completed higher education (Pastor)	1–2 days	Chickens, chicken eggs, pigs, and goats	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer
14	Wuat Wai	A customary release for someone going to school or to a new assignment place for wishing being safe on the way or living in a new residence	1 day	Chicken, chicken eggs, and pork	Sopi, Tuak (undistilled wine), and beer

beverage containing C₂H₅OH (ethanol) content if burnt with matches it can be lit. At every event that has been structured according to the type of traditional event inherited by their ancestors, Sopi drinks are served to the event participants until they are drunk. During the traditional event, participants engage in the singing of traditional songs and dancing, accompanied by the sounds of gongs and drums. The crowd indicator is seen from the number of people that get drunk. The crowd's customary ceremony is measured by the number of people dancing, singing, and getting drunk [9].

Some drink Sopi as a trigger of inspiration and mastery of words of incantation for a Torok interpreter (chanter of traditional incantation) shaman in Terep village, Cibal District. A dukun named Klitus Dorus says that he can say a spell prayer to his ancestors if he first drinks a good

quality of Sopi, more specifically, one or two glasses. When asked, "how about not drinking Sopi before the prayer is pronounced?" the answer was "the words of prayer cannot be spoken."

Sopi drinks are also magical. Before the customary prayers are spoken by Torok interpreters, their ancestors serve Sopi drink in a glass provided by the number of ancestors who mediated their prayers to "Mori Keraeng" (Heaven and Earth Creator according to Manggarai beliefs).

4.2. Sopi is economical

Sopi drinks are produced in several places in Manggarai as a home industry activity without a supervision of the Indonesian government for it has an economic value as a source of family income. A manufacturer of Sopi drinks



Figure 1: A housewife awaits the buyer of Sopi at the place of sale.

in Lungar-Satarmare subdistrict, named Michael, said that everyday, the average Sopi produced was as much as 5 to 10 liters. Sopi costs 75,000 Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) per liter. With selling Sopi, he earns revenue between 375,000 IDR and 750,000 IDR per day. With that kind of income, he built houses, bought household appliances, bought motorcycles, and paid for his two children to college; Nicolaus from the Culu Komodo District also expressed the same sentiments. Proceeds from the sale of Sopi liquor allows him to finance his family life and his children's academic expenses. Although the price of Sopi is more expensive than the price of beer or other beverages produced by the Indonesian government and licensed and sold in urban areas, the beer is not included in the custom beverage category and the Sopi drinks are served as the main drink during the implementation of the Manggarai customs. Sopi drinks are sold on the roadside or in people's homes; see Figure 1.

The housewife sells Sopi in front of her house to help increase her family's income. Liquor Sopi forms a chain of trade with the short lane, namely, producers-dealer-consumer. In the first and second chains, it is to produce profits. Figure 1 shows that a housewife in Kampung Culu, West Manggarai District, is waiting for Sopi Buyer's money, while in the last chain of beverage, Sopi only has the value of custom and social value because the drink is used as a symbol of kinship custom and social kinship in the social system of Manggarai society.

4.3. Sopi for social kinship

Teens in the town of Ruteng, East Nusa Tenggara, have known Sopi as a liquor since elementary school. They know the Sopi liquor from parents' teaching when invited to follow the traditional events in Manggarai. The habit of drinking Sopi since childhood causes the drink Sopi to tighten their kinship in their teenage years. A teenager, named Lian, when interviewed at a party place said that Sopi drinks make the body feel fresh and brave (not afraid of anyone). With Sopi drink at his home, he invited his peers to gather to play guitar, sing, and dance to release the loneliness experienced after his father died two years earlier.

The behavior of drinking Sopi together has become a habit of teenagers in East Nusa Tenggara. Teenagers in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, have known and consumed Sopi from the age of 15 to 21 years old. When they gather, the amount of Sopi drunk is between two and six bottles, depending on the number of people and the money from the joint venture. The frequency is usually 2 to 3 times a week depending on the gathering or party. It was found that the consumption of Sopi drinks was related to social relationships among teens, as well as the existence of social motives, following peers or just peer pressure to celebrate happiness together [10]. The relationship between them affects behavior, especially the behavior of alcohol consumption [11, 12]. Teens who drink Sopi will feel an increase in mood, increase in energy levels, be more energized and more confident in speaking and ready to act. One of the reasons individuals consume alcohol is to adapt to social situations. Adjustment to his references in the group is considered much more important to the teen than his personality. Otherwise, he will be evicted from his group [10].

4.4. Sopi and public health

The habit of consuming Sopi as an alcoholic beverage category C (C_2H_5OH levels over 20%) excessively for decades destroys the human organ constituents [4]. The organ most frequently damaged by alcohol consumption is liver. The role of the liver is essential in processing food, fighting infections, regulating blood flow, and removing toxic substances, including alcohol, from the body [13].

A pregnant woman who consumes high-grade alcohol affects the development of the fetus in her womb. "Alcohol is far more dangerous to developing fetuses than any other drug abuse," the International Herald Tribune reports. When a pregnant woman drinks, the child she is carrying drinks, and the toxic effects of alcohol are particularly damaging at the stage of fetal formation. Alcohol causes irreversible damage to the central nervous system. Neuron cells in the brain do not form naturally or die. This condition can lead to the development of fetal alcohol syndrome (fetal alcohol syndrome), resulting in mental retardation in infants, social dysfunction or behavioral disabilities, slow growth, hyperactivity, and in hearing and vision.

Knowledge of adverse effects of Sopi drinks for public health has not been a part of hygiene and healthy living behavior in Manggarai people.

In Figure 2, Manggarai people are eating the meat of a victim animal. According to the belief of Manggarai people, the sacrificial animal's flesh that has been offered in prayers of worship for the spirit of the ancestors should be eaten together by the customary ritual participants as it contains the magical value to gain future benefits.

In a traditional ceremony at Terep, Cibal Subdistrict, named "*Paki Kaba*" (where a buffalo is killed as a sacrificial



Figure 2: Picture of the Manggarai people eating the meat of the victim while drinking Sopi.

animal), a child is found who is seriously ill from a traditional ceremony participation as he has not been treated by medical personnel because all money from his family is prioritized for donations at the ceremony. For Manggarai people, the presence and donation of Sopi money and beverages is a major obligation in their social life to neglect the right of sick children to seek treatment at the Hospital or Community Health Center in Manggarai. When his family was interviewed and asked, why did not his son go to the doctor? The answer was “prioritizing customary affairs first, sick or healthy is the will of “Mori Keraeng” (The Creator of Heaven and Earth).” If they do not follow the customary event it will be condemned by the creator or ex-communications of Manggarai customs [2]. Other findings indicate that spending patterns for customary and religious ritual costs are on average 55% of the total income in a year, while health costs for family members consume only 2% [3]. This is the indirect cause of the high prevalence of illness due to the ongoing infectious disease to the low life expectancy of 61 years on average.

4.5. Sopi and health communication that based on culture

As explained in detail about the value of Sopi in Manggarai culture, it should also be seen that the meaning of Sopi is a symbol of tightening the bonds of brotherhood. In the context of the Manggarai community by gathering while drinking Sopi, the power of intimacy is increasingly felt. This is more prevalent when gathering with relatives, friends, or colleagues who just met. From the perspective of communication, Sopi bias is studied through the concept of Cultural Theory of Communications. Culturally sensitive communication aims to develop solutions to health problems in local communities; in these theories, cultures are required as variables that modify the traditional elements of communication and persuasion [14].

Sopi’s controversy in the field of health and culture of Manggarai community invites a variety of perceptions,

both from the local community and from the side of the rules. Against this controversy, the government’s rules state that in terms of health, this Sopi can lead to unhealthy conditions of society; on the other hand, the local culture requires the community to maintain Sopi as a tradition and local wisdom in Manggarai. In response, Deborah Lupthon and Collins Airhihenbuwa issued a concept which was further developed by Mohan Dutta, a culture-centered communication concept [15].

Culture is dynamic and inherent in the local context in which cultural members negotiate the meaning of their health. Therefore, the central aspect in the changing is local context [16]. In the context of community, Sopi in construction that by drinking Sopi little by little does not affect health. There is a paradigm in the way people think like Manggarai. For those who understand health care very carefully, they do not even consume the Sopi, but the Manggarai community thinks more on the principle of social closeness than the health aspect itself. The application of cultural-based health communication is basically transformative because it tries to overcome the social structure that creates and maintains this unhealthy society. Therefore, many applications in this approach are shown to address the issue of social structure around the health experience of the cultural community.

In Manggarai, it is very difficult to pursue a cultural approach to accommodate the problem of this Sopi controversy because if we return to cultural attachment then the source of this problem is the culture of society itself; as such, this case needs mobilization from related parties and local community to create a formula for regulation and the cultures are not eroded from one another nor make up a tough debate.

5. Conclusion

The production control of alcoholic beverages has been regulated in the Presidential Regulation No. 74 of 2013 on Control and supervision policy on liquor products, but not effectively applied to traditional beverage producers of Sopi in Manggarai. The control of Sopi drinks is the responsibility of the Head of Region in Manggarai, but Sopi is continuously produced as a drink of the people by Sopi producers as a source of family income and also for the very high demand in the number of traditional ritual activities of Manggarai. Liquor Sopi has a cultural, magical, and economic value; and the social kinship adhesive in Manggarai society lives passed down from generation to generation.

Increased education and promotion of healthy living with low-alcohol consumption of Sopi is continuously done by family, formal and informal schools, churches, mosques, temples, customary institutions, and society.

It requires a synchronization of liquor control regulation acculturative with the traditional culture in Manggarai by

lowering alcohol content in Sopi so as to remain a cultural-valued beverage in indigenous communities in Manggarai.

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Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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