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Alcohol consumption as an anti-structural manifestation among the Sentani people in Papua, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines alcohol consumption among the Sentani people in Papua as a manifestation of anti-structure within socio-cultural life. The research aims to analyze how structural pressures from customary leadership systems and social transformation influence alcohol consumption behavior among the Sentani community. This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study approach using anthropological perspectives. Data were collected through literature review, observation, and in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that alcohol consumption among the Sentani people is closely related to cultural crises, social marginalization, globalization, and rigid customary structures represented by the Ondofolo leadership system. Alcohol consumption functions not only as a social activity but also as a medium of protest, self-expression, solidarity, and social bonding among marginalized groups experiencing liminality. The study concludes that alcoholism among the Sentani people cannot merely be understood as an individual behavioral problem but rather as a socio-cultural phenomenon associated with structural violence, cultural transformation, and changing social relations in Papua.

Keywords: Alcoholism; Sentani people; Anti-structure; Papua; Cultural crisis; Anthropology

1. Introduction

The Sentani people inhabit the coastal areas surrounding Lake Sentani in Jayapura Regency, Papua, Indonesia. The Sentani community is part of the broader Tabi cultural region, which includes several ethnic groups such as Kayu Pulo, Kayu Batu, Tobati, Enggros, Nafri, Skow, Tabla, Genyem, Ormu, and Muris. One of the dominant characteristics of the Tabi cultural system is the Ondofolo customary leadership structure, which regulates social, economic, political, and religious life.

Traditionally, the Ondofolo system organizes social relations through hereditary leadership, authority over land ownership, control of natural resources, and regulation of customary rituals. Although the system historically maintained social order, contemporary social transformations have altered community perceptions of customary authority. Younger generations increasingly perceive the customary structure as restrictive, particularly regarding freedom of expression, land rights, and participation in decision-making.

The penetration of globalization, modernization, and interactions with foreign cultures has significantly transformed Sentani society. Social fragmentation emerged between educated and economically established groups and marginalized groups unable to compete within modern socio-economic systems. These transformations have

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contributed to cultural crises characterized by social jealousy, identity conflicts, weakening customary values, and increased alcohol consumption.

Alcohol consumption among the Sentani people has evolved from traditional ritual practices into a lifestyle associated with social gatherings, entertainment, protest, and resistance against social structures. Traditional alcoholic beverages such as khew phuw were once consumed within customary ceremonies and social rituals, but modern factory-produced alcoholic beverages are now widely consumed among youth and adults.

Previous studies have shown that alcohol consumption functions not only as a physiological need but also as a social and cultural mechanism. Horton (1936) explained that alcohol consumption in many societies is associated with rituals, social ceremonies, hospitality, and social interaction. Studies by Spicer (1977), Petrios and Perry (2010), and Etkin (2006) further demonstrated that alcohol consumption contributes to social bonding and group integration.

However, limited studies have specifically analyzed alcohol consumption among the Sentani people within the framework of anti-structure and liminality. Therefore, this study aims to analyze alcohol consumption among the Sentani people as a manifestation of anti-structure within socio-cultural transformation in Papua.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study approach using anthropological perspectives. The case study method was selected to explore the socio-cultural dimensions of alcohol consumption among the Sentani people in depth.

2.2. Study site

The research was conducted in several Sentani communities located around Lake Sentani, Jayapura Regency, Papua, Indonesia.

2.3. Data collection

- Data were collected through:
- Literature review;
- Participant observation;

In-depth interviews with customary leaders, community members, alcohol consumers, and local informants.

2.4. Data analysis

Data analysis involved data reduction, classification, interpretation, and qualitative descriptive analysis. The analysis focused on understanding alcohol consumption as a socio-cultural phenomenon related to customary structures, social crises, and liminality.

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4. Results and discussion

This section presents the findings of the study concerning the socio-cultural transformation of the Sentani people and the role of alcohol consumption as a manifestation of anti-structure. The discussion integrates anthropological perspectives, theories of liminality, social bonding, and cultural crisis to explain the increasing prevalence of alcohol consumption within Sentani society.

The findings indicate that alcohol consumption among the Sentani people cannot be separated from historical transformation, weakening customary institutions, globalization, structural violence, and changing socio-economic relations. Alcohol has become embedded in everyday social life and increasingly functions as a medium for expressing frustration, resistance, identity, and solidarity among marginalized groups.

4.1. Historical interconnection and alcohol consumption among the Sentani people

Historical interactions between the Sentani people and external communities have occurred for centuries. Archaeological evidence, such as pottery fragments, glass bracelets, tattoo traditions, and Austronesian cultural influences, demonstrates long-standing cultural exchanges with neighboring regions, including Papua New Guinea.

The Sentani people traditionally produced alcoholic beverages from coconut and palm sap known as khew phuw. Initially, these beverages were consumed in ritual ceremonies, marriage celebrations, and social gatherings among adult men. Alcohol consumption functioned to strengthen social solidarity and communal interaction.

Following colonial contact with the Dutch, American, and Japanese influences, factory-produced alcoholic beverages were introduced into Sentani society. Gradually, traditional alcohol consumption patterns transformed into broader lifestyle practices involving youth, women, and even adolescents.

4.2. Ondofolo customary structure and social control

The Ondofolo customary system represents a hierarchical social structure regulating social, economic, political, and religious activities within Sentani society. Leadership positions are hereditary, and customary authority extends over land ownership, conflict resolution, religious rituals, and social norms.

Traditionally, the Ondofolo held strong authority, and community members were expected to obey customary decisions. However, modernization and social change have weakened customary authority. Younger generations increasingly challenge customary restrictions related to land rights, social participation, and freedom of expression.

As customary authority weakens, conflicts related to land ownership, leadership legitimacy, and social relations have intensified. Community disputes are increasingly resolved through formal state institutions rather than customary mechanisms.

4.3. Cultural crisis in Sentani society

The study identified several forms of cultural crisis experienced by the Sentani people:

4.3.1. Crisis of social institutions

Traditional social institutions such as customary leadership systems and kinship structures have weakened. Cooperation, collective labor, and customary obligations are gradually disappearing under the pressure of economic forces and individualistic values.

4.3.2. Crisis of production systems

Traditional production systems such as canoe-making, hunting, fishing, and sago processing have experienced transformation. Economic motivations increasingly replace communal solidarity, and alcohol consumption often accompanies labor activities.

4.3.3. Agrarian crisis

Land ownership conflicts have intensified due to commercialization, inheritance disputes, and changing perceptions of customary land rights. The Sentani philosophy that "land is life" contributes to intense social conflicts over territorial boundaries.

4.3.4. Crisis of age and socialization

Traditional rites of passage and collective ceremonies have shifted toward modern celebrations involving alcohol consumption, music, and entertainment. Youth are increasingly introduced to alcohol consumption through social gatherings.

4.3.5. Crisis of time and social regulation

Traditional systems regulating communal activities, rituals, and customary obligations have weakened. Social control mechanisms that once regulated behavior are no longer fully effective.

4.4. Alcohol consumption as an anti-structure manifestation

Alcohol consumption among the Sentani people reflects forms of resistance against rigid customary structures and socio-economic marginalization. Following Victor Turner's theory of liminality and anti-structure, alcohol consumers experience ambiguous social positions between traditional structures and modern social realities.

Individuals experiencing marginalization often use alcohol consumption as a mechanism for self-expression, emotional release, social protest, and identity formation. Alcohol consumption creates temporary spaces where social hierarchies are weakened, and individuals feel empowered to challenge authority and express dissatisfaction.

In this liminal condition, alcohol consumption becomes associated with violence, conflict, and deviant behavior, including domestic violence, intergroup fighting, and criminal activities. Nevertheless, within consumer groups, alcohol also strengthens solidarity and social bonding.

4.5. Social bonding and liminality among alcohol consumers

Alcohol consumption among the Sentani people also functions as a mechanism of social bonding. Relationships among alcohol consumers create forms of solidarity referred to as "drinking friends" or communal drinking groups.

Using Hirschi's social bond theory, these groups demonstrate attachment, commitment, involvement, and shared belief systems. Members develop strong emotional connections and collective identities through shared drinking activities.

Simultaneously, these groups occupy liminal positions within society. They are neither fully integrated into traditional structures nor fully accepted within modern socio-economic systems. Consequently, alcohol consumption becomes both a coping mechanism and a symbolic form of anti-structure.

5. Conclusion

Alcohol consumption among the Sentani people reflects broader socio-cultural transformations occurring within Papuan society. Alcohol functions not only as a consumptive product but also as a medium of social bonding, protest, identity expression, and resistance against rigid customary structures.

The emergence of alcoholism among marginalized groups is closely related to cultural crises, globalization, weakening customary institutions, socio-economic inequality, and structural violence. The phenomenon demonstrates how individuals experiencing liminality create anti-structural spaces through alcohol consumption.

Therefore, addressing alcoholism in Papua requires holistic approaches that consider socio-cultural, economic, political, and anthropological dimensions rather than merely focusing on legal or medical interventions.

Recommendations

- Strengthening cultural revitalization programs within Sentani communities.
- Developing youth empowerment and educational programs.
- Improving socio-economic opportunities for marginalized groups.
- Enhancing community-based alcohol control policies.
- Encouraging collaboration between customary leaders, churches, government institutions, and local communities.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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