

Same stuff, different meaning ... same meaning, different stuff? A story of 'bread' and 'wine' in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, food and drink travelled over continents and oceans and found new 'homes' among societies with eating cultures very different from those of their places of origin. The present article takes as example two classical foodstuffs from the Mediterranean region, namely bread and wine, which finally made their way to the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. There, among the predominantly Christian Minahasa, *roti* (bread) and *anggur* (wine) have been incorporated into the local food culture although they neither *are* nor do they *mean* 'the same' as their European or Western counterparts. Guided by questions about the status and significance of foods/drinks as linked to their integration in or exclusion from different social and culinary spheres, I will explore the particular roles of *roti* and *anggur* in relation to other foods and drinks of similar kinds in Minahasa society. I will argue that besides time, place and identification, it is the labour invested in its production that plays an important role in the appropriation of certain food/drink among the rural population.

KEYWORDS: bread, wine, travelling food/drink, consumption, North Sulawesi

Introduction

'You are bread-eaters while we are rice-eaters'. This is one of the phrases I heard most often during my repeated sojourns in Indonesia when the subject of food habits and their regional particularities was raised. In the beginning I was not convinced of the accuracy of this 'observation', especially when comparing contemporary eating habits in Central Europe and Indonesia. While living in Indonesia, I normally ate rice two to three times a day as the local people did. In public understanding of 'good and healthy nutrition', rice is a fundamental and indispensable component which should ideally be the basis of each meal. A day without a rice dish is considered poor in nutrition and, therefore, a health hazard that should best be avoided. Such a diet may seem monotonous from a European perspective where doctors and dieticians recommend a varied and 'balanced' composition of different foods. Since bread is only one of many different carbohydrates regularly consumed, equating its status and consumption habits with those of rice in Indonesia does not seem justified – at least not at first glance.

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However, the current nutritional concepts and practices found in Western countries are the results of rather recent developments which have been related to changes in lifestyles generally and, more than anything else, to an increase in material wealth among large parts of the population. For centuries, cereals in general and bread in particular were the most important staples throughout most of Europe. In terms of quantity, consumption patterns reached their peak in the 17th century when in Paris, for instance, poor people supposedly ate up to 1,5 kgs of bread per capita per day (Montanari 1999: 128). The very monotonous diet, with few alternatives to bread, was not only far from healthy, but was responsible for malnutrition and diseases. The importance of cereals in agriculture and in the daily meals of most European societies, which resulted in a decrease of other staples, has also left its traces at the symbolic level. Bread has become synonymous for 'food' generally. Its symbolic value, as expressed in metaphors, proverbs, etc., has never been challenged by any other kind of food. Even maize and potatoes cannot compete with bread.

One explanation lies in the expansion of cereal growing and bread consumption in central and northern Europe tied to the expansion of Christianity. Since its early days, the Christian church has attributed special significance to bread and wine. This is unsurprising given its origin in a traditionally bread-eating and wine-drinking region. While expanding within and beyond the Roman Empire, the Church also exported the basic triad of Mediterranean food culture, namely bread, wine and olive oil. Within the Greek pantheon, Dionysus was the god of wine and Demeter the goddess of agriculture and, most specifically, the goddess of corn and harvest. As signs of their identity, Dionysus carried a vine and Demeter an ear of corn, which has become the symbol of fertility and prosperity¹.

Over the centuries, wine has 'conquered' large parts of Europe as a popular alcoholic beverage suitable for most social occasions. Although wines of very high quality – and correspondingly high prices – have reached the status of luxury products in European countries too, most citizens of the central and southern regions rely on less expensive varieties of the drink for everyday consumption.

Bread and wine have formed a classical pair in European food history and, consequently, in academic as well as in quotidian discourses. Both products have been exported to other parts of the world, for instance, to Southeast Asia. There, however, they have undergone a sometimes radical transformation, not only in material terms but also in relation to their social, economic and symbolic significance². In the following chapters I will deal with this phenomenon by looking more closely at a particular region in Indonesia, the north-eastern tip of the island of Sulawesi.

The ethnographic data on which this article is based was collected as part of a fieldwork project carried out between 2002 and 2004 in the region of Minahasa in the

¹For detailed descriptions of the history and significance of bread and wine in European food cultures see e.g. Garrier (1990); Fournier and D'Onofrio (1991); Macherel and Zeebroek (1994); Cresta and Teti (1998); Toussaint-Samat (1998: 125-199; 223-244); and Montanari (1999).

²See Cook and Crang (1996) on networks and flows of foods, people and culinary knowledge.

³The research project was generously funded by an APART fellowship from the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Province of North Sulawesi.³ Although the main focus of my research was on food habits in a rural environment in the regency (*kabupaten*) of North Minahasa among the ethnic/linguistic group of Tonssea, frequent visits to other areas and nearby cities (especially to the province capital of Manado) offered additional insights. Since its recent division into three separate *kabupaten*⁴, Minahasa is no longer an administrative and political unit, but in the public consciousness it has maintained its image as a rather 'homogeneous' territory with ethnic/cultural interconnections. In the present text I will use the term 'Minahasa' in such an encompassing understanding, disregarding actual political frontiers.

Not least due to the fact that North Sulawesi's two major cities, Manado and Bitung, are situated in Minahasa territory, the region is home to more than half of the province's population and plays a dominant role in local politics and economy⁵. Urbanisation has increasingly spread beyond city borders, and has favoured processes of cultural change and hybridisation throughout Minahasa. The generally pro-Western attitude has further encouraged the positive reception of goods and ideas of Western origin and, consequently, the adoption of a Westernised or 'modern' lifestyle.

Real or imagined links to the West date back to the Dutch colonial period in which the Dutch Protestant Mission Society NZG⁶ played a decisive role from the early 19th century onwards. Proselytisation was connected to a European-style formal education which offered to a small but ambitious indigenous elite access to higher positions within the colonial administration and the churches. Today 74 % of the population belong to one of the several Protestant churches among which the Protestant Evangelical Church (GMIM⁷) takes a leading role.

Since Islam is only a minority religion in Minahasa, alcoholic beverages and pork are easily available for purchase and consumption throughout the region. Despite the Minahasa people's reputation of (almost too) readily adopting or incorporating cultural elements from the West into their own local traditions, their particular food habits are recognized as markers of ethnic and cultural identity. Being able to prepare and serve 'traditional' food is still the ambition of cooks and hosts in Minahasa, although a closer look at the menu reveals foreign influences and the rather short life of some 'traditional' dishes.

As a starting point for my discussion, I will take the Indonesian terms for 'bread' and 'wine', namely *roti* and *anggur*. I will show that the terms not only signify something different for most Minahasa people than they do for Europeans, but that they are often used for quite different objects. Furthermore, and in order to present a more comprehensive picture, I will place *roti* and *anggur* in a larger social and nutritional context by comparing them with a selection of other food and drink common in the Minahasa diet.

⁴ As part of the processes to increase political autonomy at regional and local levels (*otonomisasi*), between 2003 and 2004 the former regency of Minahasa was split up into three smaller regencies (Minahasa, North Minahasa, South Minahasa). Tomohon became an autonomous city like Manado and Bitung.

⁵ According to the census of 2001 (Badan Pusat Statistik Propinsi Sulawesi Utara 2001), North Sulawesi contained approximately 2 million inhabitants with 1,3 million living in the region of Minahasa (including the cities of Manado, Bitung and Tomohon).

⁶ Nederlands Zendeling Genootschap

⁷ Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa

Bread and wine – objects of ‘luxury’

During my fieldwork in Minahasa I noticed that even in rural areas, ‘foreign’ products played a significant role in the local cuisine. Many of these products, which over the centuries had been brought from Latin America (e.g. chillies, sweet potatoes and cassava) and Europe (e.g. cabbage and carrots) or other parts of present-day Indonesia (e.g. coffee) to Minahasa, had gradually been integrated into the local diet. In some cases it happened so successfully that the local population largely forgot the foreign origin of the foodstuffs and these products, which are now locally cultivated or produced, have become ‘typical’ or even ‘traditional’ components of Minahasa cuisine. Other products that were introduced in the last few decades, many of them still largely imported from overseas, like Western-type cakes, sweets, bread and soft drinks, are well recognized as ‘foreign’ – a quality that generally increases their value in the eyes of the consumers, despite the general appreciation of local foods and culinary traditions.

Roti versus nasi

The term *roti* is of Sanskrit origin and in India (as well as in Indian restaurants abroad) it is used for a certain kind of flat unleavened bread. It is not only tasty but also quite practical for eating with meat or vegetable curries, especially when there is no cutlery, because small pieces of meat and vegetables can be scooped up together with the sauce and led to the mouth. In Indonesian language, *roti* is a generic term applied to all kinds of bread although the original Indian variant is normally missing in Indonesian food cultures.

When talking about bread in a European context, we talk about a staple that was a primary calorie provider for poor people in past centuries and that even today constitutes an indispensable element of the daily menu for the majority of the population. This differs, however, from the situation in Southeast Asian countries. In Indonesia, for instance, bread may be available and even regularly consumed but has nowhere turned into a staple and it is very unlikely that it will do so in the near future. This does not mean that cereal consumption in general is low. On the contrary: in 2001, 50-70 % of the daily calories consumed by the Indonesian population was in form of cereals, compared to 10-30% in western Europe (Millstone and Lang 2003: 78-79). However, in Indonesia like in large parts of Asia generally, it is rice, *nasi*, that forms the bulk of cereals locally grown and consumed. According to the census of 2001, the total harvest of rice in Minahasa was about 170.000 tons, only slightly more than maize with a total of 148.500 tons.

1. *Nasi* means ‘food’

Until the 1980s, many peasants of small and middle-size properties planted rice for their own consumption. Today most rice is grown in large paddies (*sawah*) and produced for the market. However, the local production cannot meet the demand and additional rice is imported from other regions (e.g. Bolaang-Mongondow, Gorontalo) or even from other countries (e.g. Thailand, Vietnam). Despite a continuing decrease in the varieties of rice at the market⁸, a number of differences in types and qualities still exist and most people can

tell by the smell of the uncooked grains whether it is of 'good' or 'bad' quality. Soft white rice with a light and pleasant 'perfume' (*harum*) is most highly prized. Now the leading staple, white rice has gradually replaced other, previously more common, staples like cassava or sago which, until a few decades ago, were – and for families of lower income or less access to markets still are – convenient and popular alternatives to rice. Although tubers like cassava, taro and sweet potato, as well as maize and sago, are available at markets too and normally cheaper than rice, they are purchased rather by the (semi-)urban population and rarely by peasants who still grow and harvest tubers in their own gardens. However, these staples are considered 'poor people's food' today, and when serving them to guests and at other special occasions, tubers are only side dishes and do not replace the 'compulsory' large piles of rice. Although individual taste may prefer one or the other 'alternative' food, white rice undeniably ranges at the top of the hierarchy of staples. The importance and significance of rice is reflected in the body of narratives related to rice which we find throughout Southeast Asia. According to a Minahasa myth, rice was originally the privileged food of the gods in heaven from where a man called Tumileng stole some of the precious seeds⁹. Since then, human beings have been able to plant rice on earth.

Following the dominant view in contemporary Minahasa society, white rice constitutes the ideal basis of a person's diet from which he/she would draw the majority of nutrients needed to keep strong and healthy. Since the composition of meals does not differ much throughout the day, those who can afford it eat boiled (and sometimes fried) rice, with smaller portions of fish, meat, vegetables and occasionally eggs, for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Boiled rice is such an essential and indispensable part of the diet that a meal without rice is not accepted as a proper meal at all. Rice, like bread in Europe, stands for food generally which is also expressed in the language. The syllable *kan*, which is a full noun in local Minahasa languages, e.g. in *Bahasa Tonse*, and means 'cooked rice', forms the second syllable of the noun *makanan* which means 'food' in the national Indonesian language¹⁰.

2. *Roti* means 'snack'

When we look at the position of bread at the local food sector, we find a very different situation. Like other Western goods, European-style bread was probably first introduced sometime during the colonial period but, unlike certain other goods, it has only partially made its way into the local (food) culture. This does not mean that bread is completely

⁸The homogenising of all sectors of agriculture, in response to an emphasis on modern technology and efficiency, has also affected the qualities and quantities of rice available at the local markets.

⁹For an account and interpretation of the myth see Schefold (1995).

¹⁰While rice undoubtedly is the most common staple in Southeast Asia, other foods dominate in other areas. Audrey Richards (1995), for instance, described the importance of finger millet in the nutrition of the Bemba in North Rhodesia. It is normally cooked as a kind of 'porridge' (*ubwali*) which occupies a similar place in the local diet as rice does among contemporary Minahasa: 'To the Bemba, millet porridge is not only necessary, but it is the only constituent of his diet which actually ranks as food. ... In proverb and folktale the word *ubwali* stands for food itself' (1995: 46-47).

unknown in Minahasa or unavailable at the local food market; on the contrary, certain types of bread are widely distributed and consumed today, but they nonetheless have kept their status as 'foreign' foods. In the following I will argue that there have been various obstacles to the successful assimilation of bread into local food traditions; these are related to the ingredients, consistency, and taste of bread as well as to its strong identification as a Western cultural product of distinction.

As an introductory question we may ask: what is Minahasa bread like? An observation even short-term visitors easily make is that there are fairly large quantities but only few varieties of bread for sale, especially compared to European standards, all of which have a soft, white texture. Sweet buns with fillings of palm sugar, fatty creams or chocolate chips are widely distributed throughout all food outlets and even to small *warungs*¹¹ in rather isolated rural areas. Hence, townfolk and village people alike have become familiar with the sights and tastes of these buns as the most common representatives of *roti*, although they would hardly qualify as 'bread' in Western countries. Besides, more 'luxurious' kinds of bread, with cheese toppings for instance, as well as English or Australian-style toast bread can be purchased in selected supermarkets, bakeries and cake shops¹². The soft texture and rather sweet taste are basic characteristics of all kinds of *roti* and it is therefore not surprising that bread and cakes are not only often sold together at the same outlets but that they are also consumed at similar occasions. Together with Indonesian and Western-type cakes, biscuits and other sweetmeats, as well as a few small savoury dishes, bread is considered a snack to be eaten in-between meals; it would never constitute a proper meal (*makanan*). As described above, the kinds of bread available in Minahasa are actually not suitable to accompany the usually very spicy cooked food¹³. Sandwiches (including their fillings) are not part of most people's regular diet and mainly consumed by Western expatriates or by the younger Western-oriented Indonesian middle-class¹⁴.

However, the urban middle class has adopted toast bread (mostly without toasting it) with margarine and jam for their first breakfast. With changes in work patterns and lifestyles in the cities, and increasingly in the rural areas, the traditional cooked breakfast is now often postponed until late morning. It is then served as a second breakfast or as an early lunch. The term 'first breakfast', is actually inaccurate and misleading because it would suggest that a piece of sweet bread and a cup or glass of coffee are accepted as a meal which in fact they are not. Minahasa people, like other Indonesians, would never use the expression *makan pagi* (the literal translation would be 'morning meal')¹⁵ for this kind of breakfast.

¹¹The Indonesian term *warung* is widely used for small stores that sell groceries (usually packaged but sometimes also fresh foods) and other inexpensive things like household utensils, basic toilet articles etc. Additionally they may serve hot food to their clients. Other *warungs* act exclusively as inexpensive 'restaurants'.

¹²There is a large and very popular bakery in the Manado city centre which offers a wide range of freshly made breads, buns, cakes and biscuits. Most other outlets, however, do not bake their breads themselves.

¹³As indicated above, the Indian-type *roti* has never become part of Minahasa food culture.

¹⁴Cold meat, cheeses, spreads etc. for sandwiches are available in Western-style supermarkets only.

When two or more people meet, whether at a formal or informal occasion, the question most commonly and immediately asked after the exchange of greetings and before the conversation really gets started, is whether the other person/s has/have already eaten: *sudah makan*? It is up to the one being asked to interpret, depending on the time of the day, which meal the other may be referring to. However, the point of reference would always be a proper meal, and today necessarily a rice dish. No matter how many bread buns I may have eaten since I got up in the morning, I would certainly answer '*belum*' (not yet) if I have not had yet at least one plate of rice (and perhaps other cooked food) that day.

Although Minahasa people do by no means accept the soft, sweet and cake-like bread as 'serious food' for themselves, many of them are convinced that this is the primary staple for Europeans who would feed upon it at every meal and in large quantities – comparable to their own consumption of rice. Only those with travelling experience to Western countries are normally aware of the varieties of bread (colour, texture and taste) available overseas and its different meanings in the nutritional patterns of Western people. As a Western person myself, I was expected to miss the regular consumption of large quantities of bread while living in Indonesia and, therefore, whenever there was an opportunity I was offered the plastic-wrapped buns that were sold at kiosks and small stores.

As I have tried to explain, bread - even in its 'indigenised' version as *roti* - is remembered and recognized as primarily a Western staple which is not adapted to Indonesian meals. The Minahasa discourse about the significance of bread in different food cultures and nutrition patterns reveals and reinforces local perceptions about existing fundamental differences between Indonesia (or Southeast Asia) and the West expressed in their respective and continuous food traditions with rice and bread as primary markers.

Its association with Western food is a relevant albeit not the only criterion for classifying bread as foreign food. Origin and labour are other important variables in the successful integration of a food product. Indonesian bread, for instance, is normally industrially produced. It is therefore always bought at shops and never baked at home despite the ready availability of flour. Hence, there is a fundamental difference between bread and European-type cakes/biscuits (*kue* or *kukis*¹⁶): the latter are often home-made. Although such cakes/biscuits are offered in large quantities and various qualities for sale in grocery shops and supermarkets, women do not mind the effort to bake their own cakes and biscuits. This is not only a matter of pride but also of money because ready-made cakes are not affordable for everybody. Baking her own cake offers gratification to the baker because the quality of a cake or biscuits and, hence, the skills of the baker are evaluated and discussed by the consumers as it is the case with other kinds of food.

¹⁵In *Bahasa Manado*, a Malay dialect with many loan-words from Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese which serves as *lingua franca* in the region, the usual term for breakfast is *smokol*.

¹⁶The Indonesian term *kue* (*kukis* in *Bahasa Manado*) refers to all kinds of cakes, or rather sweetened snacks, no matter where they originally came from. There is no generic term for 'European-style cake' but each kind of cake is called by its specific name (one is even called *cake*) as are Indonesian cakes.



Photo no. 1: Baking cakes for a feast – a woman's job (Photo by G. Weichart)

Their foreign origin has not prevented European-style cakes, and to a lesser degree biscuits, from being included in the official menus of 'traditional' feasts and other important social events. They have got a place in the local food culture and even in the food 'tradition'. An obstacle to the complete integration and amalgamation with 'authentic' local foods is the 'mystery' of the cakes' main ingredient, wheat flour. It can be bought packaged at supermarkets or by the litre at grocery stores but not many people would know about the origin of the 'white powder'. The fact that wheat is a cereal whose grains are ground into flour that form the basis for cakes, bread and other similar foods is not common knowledge and hardly anyone would have seen a wheat field in his/her life. While this information may not be indispensable for acquiring a taste for bread and cakes,

it becomes relevant when asking about food traditions and their authenticity and about links between ethnic or local identities and food habits.

People in their sixties or older recall that as young people in rural Minahasa they ate mostly food that was locally produced. Thus, local identity was linked to an active participation in the production of one's own food. This required an intimate knowledge of the food and its production process. Despite the growing tendency among consumers to purchase more and more of the daily foodstuffs and produce less and less in private gardens, this kind of knowledge and occupation is still a source of pride and identity among the peasant population. Staples like maize and different kinds of tubers made their way into local food traditions because they are suited for the local soil and climate and thus they have been planted in large quantities. This is not the case with wheat and other types of cereals used for Western-style breads and cakes.

The foreign origin of cakes and biscuits made of wheat flour cannot be denied but the local labour invested in their production gives them a certain 'sense of belonging' among the urban as much as the rural population. Since Minahasa identity is partly built on its differentiation from other Indonesian ethnic groups and particularly from other religious groups, 'European' cakes can support such notions as long as they confirm Minahasa 'otherness' and have not been spread equally throughout Indonesia. Bread, however, is neither home-made nor does it show any particular regional characteristics. The same varieties of bread – and there are indeed not that many – are found all over Indonesia. It would therefore be difficult to identify 'Minahasa bread' as a 'local speciality'.

I would argue that the lack of identification is to a certain extent responsible for the fact that, contrary to cakes and biscuits, bread has not (yet) made its way into festive foods. However, this does not mean that bread has a low status in the local food hierarchy. While industrial production prevents access to 'tradition', it opens the doors to 'modernity'. The individual cellophane wrappings highlight the buns' image as commercial, instead of home-made, products and add a 'modern touch'. Plastic articles and industrial production are associated with 'development' and a 'modern lifestyle' which again, in a very general sense, are associated with an easier and better life. Until a few decades ago, sugar was an expensive and precious good. Today, sweet foods and drinks are available at moderate prices in every small village but they have continued to range as desirable goods of fairly high status on the food scale, notwithstanding the fact that many adults 'secretly' admit their personal preference for home-made savoury food when explicitly asked about it. Hence, the success of bread lies at least partly in its ability to evoke notions of foreign superiority, modernity and sweet luxury, which helps to overcome its rather bland and often stale taste.

Anggur versus saguer

1. *Anggur* – wine without grapes

Anggur is the Indonesian term for grape and also for its liquid product, namely wine. Like *roti*, it is a very broad term and its application is therefore not always consistent with equivalent expressions in European languages. With few exceptions, grapes do not grow in Indonesia and wine production has started only quite recently in Bali, mainly as a

response to Western consumption habits which are increasingly adopted by a pro-Western Indonesian elite. Apart from the rather few varieties and small quantities of domestic products, most wines are imported from Australia. While nowadays they are quite easily available at the cosmopolitan centres of Java and Bali, they can hardly be found at the outer islands. Even among the urban middle-class in Manado, the capital of North Sulawesi, it is exceptional (and in most cases linked to previous overseas travelling experiences) to have ever tasted 'real' *anggur*, (wine). Two years ago I saw the first bottles appear in a newly opened modern supermarket that caters to wealthy clients with 'exotic', that is, Western, taste. They were sold at exorbitant prices starting at ten euro each, which is about the equivalence of a week's salary for public servants in junior positions. A dramatic increase in the local consumption of wine is therefore not to be expected in the near future. Due to its foreign origin, scarcity, high exchange value and, as a consumer good, its restriction to a small and wealthy minority with socio-cultural links to the West, wine is a classic example of a luxury product in the local food/drink sector. While knowledge of the ingredients of bread and the recipes for baking it may not be widespread among the Minahasa population, wine remains an even greater mystery. In fact, less cosmopolitan Indonesians, especially in rural areas, are often completely unaware of its existence.

However, bottles containing a liquid labelled as '*Anggur*' can be found all over North Sulawesi. This is often surprising and even misleading for the average Western tourist or newcomer to the country. After the first hearty sip, the surprise may even be bigger because the alcoholic drink swallowed has no resemblance whatsoever with wine, i.e. with fermented grape juice. It is a strong, sweet, and liqueur-like beverage made of a locally produced brandy, with palm sugar, spices and artificial aromas added. Like beer, *anggur* is industrially produced and sold bottled in most grocery shops, from supermarkets to small corner shops and *warungs*. The exact recipe is unclear to the average consumer but we can at least be reassured that not a single grape has found its way into such a bottle. *Anggur* is not only a popular but also a prestigious beverage. It is, in fact, one of the most versatile drinks available in North Sulawesi and its consumption is socially appropriate for all kinds of occasions, from very informal and intimate gatherings among family members and close friends to public or semi-public events of official or at least very formal character.

2. *Saguer* and *cap tikus* – at the heart of tradition

As a liqueur drunk in small glasses and preferably in small quantities only, *anggur* finds itself in competition with other spirits, the most famous and popular being *cap tikus*. This is the brandy distilled from palm wine which is taken as basic ingredient for the production of *anggur*. It contains a high concentration of alcohol (45-55 %). Its characteristic strong and rather 'tasteless' taste is sometimes modified by stuffing a mixture of herbs, roots, barks and spices into a bottle and then filling it up with the liquor. There is no general recipe for these mixtures, but since most of their ingredients are said to have medicinal qualities, they add to the image of *cap tikus* being a health-preserving as well as a health-restoring liquid. It is considered primarily suitable as 'first aid' for minor ailments such as colds and digestive disorders. Its potential to cure disorders of different kinds is associ-

ated with the drink's 'purity', a quality supposedly provoked by its high alcohol content (which is believed to be purifying) as well as by its production process.

Contrary to *anggur*, which today is a commercial product¹⁷, *cap tikus* still belongs to the category of preferably 'home-made' products. While only a small minority of people actually produce the brandy itself, many villages have at least one privately owned and run factory in the neighbourhood that guarantees a local supply. Nonetheless, the incentive for establishing a factory is normally to sell the product, to make a profit and perhaps even a living from it. The choice of factory or outlet for the purchase of *cap tikus* for personal consumption and guests is a matter of preference which may be guided by personal relations (e.g. when family members, friends or neighbours are the producers) and/or by individual tastes. Qualities obviously vary from factory to factory, depending for instance on the tree where the sap comes from, the type of stove used, the length and height of the bamboo construction, etc. As is common when taste is involved, there is no unanimous agreement about the qualities of a particular product. Competition between the factories therefore exists and becomes most evident in areas with a high density of production sites.

The technology applied at those little factories is simple but efficient and their main tools are metal stoves and bamboo tubes. While the production of *cap tikus* is rather inexpensive, it certainly is labour intensive. The raw material is the sap extracted twice a day from the locally growing sugar palm which, in the tropical climate, quickly ferments into palm wine (called *saguer*). It is a refreshing drink that tastes slightly similar to fermented grape juice or 'young wine'. Ideally, either direct consumption or the processing of *saguer* to *cap tikus* should happen on the day of harvest and certainly before it turns into vinegar. Distillation is done by heating the palm wine in the stove. The evaporating fumes rise through the bamboo tubes and when cooling down through more tubes they condense into a highly concentrated transparent liquid, the *cap tikus*. One explanation about the rather strange name of this drink, which literally means 'rat's print', is that when the liquid pours down from the bamboo tube into the bottle it is shaped like a rat's tail¹⁸. The distillation process takes several hours each time and has to be supervised. Thus, when the sap is harvested, there is a full day's work for one person¹⁹. Climbing the trees and harvesting the sap, keeping the fire going, carrying home the jerry cans full of *saguer* and the bottles full of *cap tikus* involves physically hard work but there is also pride, not only in owning a factory, but also in performing the traditional skills of *cap tikus* production.

¹⁷The industrial production of *anggur* is a rather recent phenomenon; elderly people still remember when it was home-made.

¹⁸There are several other, equally not very convincing explanations about the origin of the term. One of it is that rats like to gather around the *cap tikus* factories. However, they are probably attracted less by the *cap tikus* itself than by the high sugar content of *saguer*.

¹⁹Five litres of *saguer* produce approx. one litre of *cap tikus*.

Saguer and *cap tikus* are both very popular drinks that can be found all over the Minahasa region. Being extracted from one of the area's most useful trees, the sugar palm²⁰, they are considered natural products but also fundamental elements of the traditional local diet. Although the same or similar kinds of drink are consumed (under different names²¹) in large parts of South and Southeast Asia, and certainly in many other regions of Indonesia, *saguer* and *cap tikus* are claimed as typical beverages for the Minahasa area and its people and, hence, as representatives of their ethnic/cultural identity. It is a living



Photo no. 2: Collecting saguer from the sugar palm – a man's job
(Photo by G. Weichart)

²⁰ The sugar palm (Lat.: *arenga pinnata*; Manado Malay: *pohon aren*) is common all over Southeast Asia and well known for being a very useful plant. The different parts of the tree (like leaves, stem, pith and fruits) serve as food, drink and tools. Its common name originates from the brown sugar (or 'red sugar' as Minahasa people call it: *gula merah*) which is extracted from *saguer* and is used for sweetening drinks as well as for cooking.

²¹ As so often, here too, language seems to play a key role in the demarcation of boundaries. The regional differences in terminology applied to the palm wine and the liquor have certainly facilitated processes of appropriation and claims of uniqueness.

cultural tradition and in rural areas *saguer* as well as *cap tikus* are probably the most regularly consumed alcoholic beverages. All three drinks, *anggur* included, not only share a relationship to tradition; they have a lot more in common: *saguer* is the basis, the common origin, *cap tikus* is a transformation of *saguer* and *anggur* a derivative of *cap tikus*. However, there are also substantial distinctions, as I will show in the following chapter.

3. Alcoholic drinks compared

Let us start by summarising the most obvious differences in quality between the three alcoholic beverages in question. *Saguer* is an almost entirely natural product which undergoes no artificial transformation. The only human interference, which however is a fundamental one, is the tapping of the sap from the palmtree. Once this is done, *saguer* is immediately ready for consumption, but for a very short time only. The alcohol content is low but, being enjoyed in large quantities, it can still have its effects on the consumer. *Cap tikus*, on the other hand, is an intentionally transformed product with an extremely high content of alcohol which allows it to keep for many years (if it does not get drunk before). *Anggur* is the most 'artificial' product, although because its primary ingredient is *cap tikus* it also derives from the sugar palm. Regarding the percentage of alcohol contained, *anggur* finds itself between *saguer* and *cap tikus*, although with an inclination towards the latter. Its rather sweet taste, however, brings it closer again to *saguer*. All three beverages are thought to have different medicinal qualities.

It is evident that these differences in quality have also created different drinking modes and led these beverages to occupy different positions in the hierarchy of drinks in Minahasa society. From an economic point of view, *saguer* is undoubtedly the least valuable. Its short 'life expectancy' is probably responsible for its successful escape from commodification. Thus, *saguer* is kept for personal consumption and given to family, friends, and neighbours, sometimes for a very low price as a kind of 'symbolic' payment, but mostly for free. The same goes for *cap tikus* at the village level, but the main aim of its production is to sell the liquor to commercial factories and outlets. *Anggur* is no longer home-manufactured and, therefore, always has to be bought. On the scale of commodification, *saguer* would range as 'gift', *cap tikus* as 'semi-commodity' and *anggur* as 'full commodity'.

However, I agree with Appadurai (1988) that a rigid 'compartmentalisation' of objects and their modes of exchange would be too simplistic and misleading. As Kopytoff (1988) has convincingly argued, things can change their 'identities' and move between different states, e.g. from gift to commodity or vice versa or they may move out of the sphere of exchange altogether. Being a gift or a commodity, or none at all, is therefore a state or phase in its 'lifecycle' rather than an inherent quality of an object. By treating gift exchange as a particular form of commodity circulation in which, however, the temporal dimension plays a key role, we are less tempted to uphold a romanticised interpretation of gift-giving as a non-calculative and disinterested form of reciprocal donation which focuses on sociability instead of profit (cf. Appadurai 1988: 11-13).

In the case of the alcoholic beverages described above, we can conclude that each of them can be a gift at one time and a commodity at another, or simply a drink to be

enjoyed with family or friends at home. Large social events like weddings, where several hundred people are involved in the organisation and execution as guests, workers, and some as hosts, are occasions where the offering and consumption of all three beverages can be witnessed²². As it would be expected, such alcoholic drinks are offered by the hosts to their guests during the wedding party²³. However, substantial quantities of those drinks, if not the whole supply, may have been part of the guests' own contribution to the wedding. Gift-giving at weddings is not a spontaneous action but follows rules of reciprocity in which a gift should be repaid with a counter-gift of at least the same value. Commodities like *anggur*, beer or soft drinks, which are sold in bottles and can be almost 'indefinitely' stored, are multifunctional and useful gifts for most donors as well as for the receivers. Contrary to *cap tikus* and *saguer*, which are usually donated by the producers themselves, *anggur* can be traded and bought by anyone. A further advantage of commercial beverages is that the donation is not necessarily linked to the actual needs at a particular feast. Any surplus of bottles of *anggur* can be sold, be reused as gifts for other people, or even be given back to the original donor at another occasion, without losing any value. There are fewer such opportunities for *cap tikus*, which does not keep as long, and virtually none for *saguer* which must be consumed almost immediately. We can conclude that its quality as a perfect commodity makes *anggur* the most suitable gift, among alcoholic drinks, to circulate within the *mapalus* system of delayed reciprocity²⁴.

When we look at different patterns of consumption, we find – and it is an almost logical consequence – that in private households in everyday life people more readily drink *saguer* and *cap tikus* than *anggur*. Since bottles of *anggur* can be used as a 'commodity', they would normally not be opened 'for no particular reason' at home²⁵. *Saguer* is a typically informal drink that may be consumed alone or with family and friends, in the fields (often at the production site itself) or at home. Despite its fairly low prestige in comparison to other beverages, we find *saguer* at semi-formal or even formal events too. This is due to its popularity among all social classes and its link to Minahasa drinking

²² Wedding parties of this kind are typical for rural areas where the bride's and/or groom's nuclear families take care of the whole organisation. They differ markedly from urban wedding receptions normally held at a restaurant, hotel or at a public hall.

²³ The workers receive the same kinds of drinks at their own lunches and parties which are held before, during (in the kitchen and backyard) and after the official celebration.

²⁴ *Mapalus*, as it is called in Minahasa, is comparable to what has been described for other Indonesian societies by using the Javanese term *gotong royong*. It is an exchange system of mutual assistance through cooperation and material means and is characterised by a strong egalitarian focus. It comes into play in all kinds of situations and events, whether harvest, house building or weddings. In the latter case, the wedding gifts, for instance, that are given as part of the *mapalus* exchange, are not personal presents for the newlyweds but useful contributions to the wedding party, mainly for the benefit of the hosts (usually the bride's or groom's parents). However, gifts demand repayment of equivalents. If someone gives twenty-four bottles of Coca-Cola, for instance, he/she can expect the same quality and quantity of repayment when needed (see Lundström-Burghoorn 1981: 163-178).

²⁵ There are the occasional exceptions, of course, like young men's drinking parties where various bottles of *anggur* are bought, opened and drunk within a relatively short time.

traditions. At such occasions, however, *saguer* is offered as a 'side-drink' only and ranges 'below' the more prestigious soft drinks and beer. When we look at the consumption patterns of *cap tikus*, we notice many parallels with *saguer*. It is also served at different kinds of occasions and events, from informal to very formal ones. Since it is a spirit, it normally is drunk as aperitif before a meal, and sometimes between meals, whereas *saguer* is often consumed like water with a meal. The status of *cap tikus* is higher than that of *saguer* but certainly lower than the status of commercially traded spirits, although it is the liquor most people, and especially men, would prefer. Our third example, *anggur*, enjoys the highest prestige. Although its field of consumption is very vast too, it is less frequently found in small intimate social circles. *Anggur*, for instance, is not normally consumed at work in the garden or in the field, and is drunk at home only when guests arrive or when a bottle has already been opened and needs to be finished. It is served at occasions that are very formal and are claimed to be typical social representations of traditional culture. Several of these events are linked to weddings, like the ceremony called *penyerahan* (or *acara antar harta nikah*) which takes place a week before the wedding and celebrates the handing-over of the bride-price from the groom's to the bride's family. There, in accordance with fixed rules, the engaged couple offers *anggur* and Western-type biscuits to their parents and other honourable persons involved. Although there is general consensus among the village population that this ceremony is one of the hallmarks of local traditions, it would be unthinkable to serve *saguer*, and even *cap tikus* would not meet the requirements.



Photo no. 3: *Saguer, sometimes mixed with Coca-Cola, is the standard drink being served at mourning feasts (Photo by G. Weichart)*

Last, but not least, we can distinguish the beverages according to the consumers, and in particular, according to their gender. There is no general prescription nor exclusion in terms of gender; both men and women are allowed to consume all three types of beverages. However, certain gender-related conceptions and practices do exist, and it is no real surprise that *cap tikus*, the strongest beverage, is considered to be more suitable for men, while the sweetish *anggur* is rather a 'lady's drink'. *Saguer* is more neutral but since Minahasa men generally drink more often and consume larger quantities of alcohol than women, they also consume more of the *saguer*. Such gender-specific drinking behaviour can be observed at large wedding parties where the spirits are served before the meal and men would more often ask for *cap tikus* whereas *anggur* is most popular among female guests. However, women's alcohol consumption in public is watched with critical eyes and therefore, young women in particular, who are expected to keep to a female ideal of modesty and self-constraint, refrain from drinking alcohol at all at such events. It is mainly elderly women who favour *cap tikus* and dare to express this preference.

Conclusion

In the discussion about consumption habits and social/symbolic meanings related to *roti* and *anggur* in comparison to other locally consumed foods and drinks, I was guided by several questions, including: What determines the status of a certain product? What are the conditions for a 'successful integration' of foreign products into the local food culture? When do such foreign products stop being 'foreign' and become part of the food traditions of a rural population who still largely identifies with the land they own and live and work on? I have argued that, among other factors, integration is best achieved when the food or beverage is locally produced, ideally by the consumers themselves, and when the production process has become part of public knowledge. Industrial production and high prices may add prestige to the objects but at the cost of people's identification with them. Bread and wine are examples of 'foreign' products and, as such, are excluded from traditional ceremonial contexts. While *anggur*, in a local form, could successfully enter those spheres, *roti* has remained outside of them. *Roti* and *anggur* undoubtedly have a place in contemporary Minahasa food culture but neither the products themselves nor the meanings attached to them nor their consumption habits correspond to their Western counterparts. Is it only the names that have remained?

It is in the religious domain where the links to Western culture, as well as the contradictions involved, become perhaps most obvious. For many of the Christian Minahasa, the attendance of church services and religious circles are part of their weekly routine. Knowledge of the Bible and participation in the church rituals, like the Eucharist, are a social norm. There, the Protestant Minahasa pastor offers *roti* and *anggur* to the community²⁶. The fact that *anggur* and 'real wine', as it is known from Western and Mediterranean

²⁶The Catholic priest drinks 'real' wine and offers the host to the congregation, as in Catholic churches worldwide.

countries where Christianity originated, have nothing in common, does not seem to worry anybody – except perhaps the anthropologist. It is true that according to Protestant understanding, such substitutes are perfectly acceptable because they are only ‘signs’ for something else. However, I would like to close with the somewhat provocative question:

If A1 represents B1, does A2 then automatically represent B1 too ... or does it rather represent B2 or perhaps even C? In other words, when *roti* and *anggur* stand for the body and blood of Jesus Christ, what are the images thus evoked? Do such semi-luxury products represent a God for all people without discriminating; or do they not rather stand for prosperity, difference and the sweet sides of life?

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POVZETEK

Hrana in pijača že od nekdaj potujeta prek kontinentov in oceanov in vedno znova najdeta nova domovanja v družbah, kjer je prehranska kultura zelo drugačna od krajev njunega izvora. Članek analizira primer kruha in vina, dveh klasičnih sestavin iz mediteranskega okolja, ki sta pripotovali do indonezijskega otoka Sulavezi. Tam sta med pretežno krščanskim ljudstvom Minhasa *roti* (kruh) in *anggur* (vino) postala del lokalne prehranske kulture, vendar ne v enaki obliki niti v enakem pomenu kot v evropskem oziroma zahodnem okolju. Avtorica raziskuje status, pomen in vlogo *rotija* in *anggurja* v odnosu do druge podobne hrane in pijače v skupnosti Minhasa ter analizira razloge za vključenost/izključenost določenih živil v različna družbena in kulinarična področja v tej skupnosti. Avtorica zagovarja stališče, da je v sulaveškem ruralnem okolju, poleg kraja, časa in procesov identifikacije, za vključitev določenega živila v vsakdanjo prehrano, pomembno predvsem delo, ki je vloženo v njegovo pridelavo oz. pripravo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: kruh, vino, potovanje hrane/pijače, potrošnja, severni Sulavezi