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Ensuring the Longevity of *Caci* Tradition: Addressing Distortions and Promoting Authenticity

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Abstract

Caci is a traditional whip-fighting game played in some parts of Indonesia, particularly within the Manggarai community on Flores Island. As a significant cultural heritage, it is crucial to preserve and promote the authenticity of this tradition. However, Caci faces several challenges, including potential distortions that arise due to various factors. This paper aims to explore how stakeholders can collaborate to ensure the longevity of the Caci tradition while addressing these potential distortions. We have identified various factors that could lead to the distortion of the Caci tradition, such as commercialization, modernization, and lack of awareness. To tackle these issues, we propose a comprehensive strategy involving all stakeholders in a dialogue. This strategy includes the development of educational programs, the establishment of a certification system, and the utilization of digital media to promote the authenticity of the Caci tradition. The proposed strategy aims to ensure the preservation and promotion of the Caci tradition as a sacred and authentic cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords: Authenticity; Caci Tradition; Distortions

I. Introduction

Caci tradition is an important cultural heritage of the Manggarai community in Flores, Indonesia (Talu et al., 2021; Hariastuti el al., 2021). The practice of Caci has been passed down from generation to generation, and it plays a vital role in the community's social, cultural, and spiritual life. Caci is not just a martial art and dance; it is a way of life that embodies the values, beliefs, and aspirations of the Manggarai people (Danal et al., 2021). However, Caci tradition is facing several challenges that threaten its longevity and authenticity. One of the most significant challenges is the distortion of its practice and meaning due to internal and external factors. Internal factors include changes in the community's socioeconomic and cultural context, such as the erosion of traditional values, the migration of youth to urban areas, and the marginalization of traditional practices. External factors include globalization, tourism, and the influence of other cultures that can distort the practice of Caci.

To ensure the longevity and authenticity of *Caci* tradition, it is crucial to address these challenges by involving all stakeholders in a dialogue, developing comprehensive strategies, and promoting the authenticity of *Caci* tradition. Involving all stakeholders in a dialogue means engaging with the

community members, *Caci* practitioners, scholars, policymakers, and other relevant actors to understand their perspectives, aspirations, and concerns. This dialogue can help to identify the challenges facing the preservation and promotion of *Caci* tradition, as well as the opportunities and strengths that can be leveraged.

Developing comprehensive strategies requires a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing *Caci* tradition. These strategies should be designed to address the root causes of the challenges and to leverage the strengths and opportunities. For example, strategies could include improving access to training and resources for *Caci* practitioners, promoting the cultural and spiritual value of *Caci* to the wider community, and engaging with tourists and other stakeholders to ensure that *Caci* is practiced and presented in an authentic and respectful manner.

Promoting the authenticity of *Caci* tradition is also crucial. This means preserving the essential elements of the practice, such as its music, dance, and rituals, while adapting to changing social, economic, and cultural contexts. Promoting authenticity also means educating the wider community, tourists, and other stakeholders about the cultural significance and value of *Caci*. This education can help to counteract any negative influences or misunderstandings about the practice of *Caci*. The next section of this paper will explore the how can stakeholders work together to preserve and promote the authenticity of *Caci* tradition, while addressing potential distortions that arise due to internal and external factors.

II. Research Methods

To address the research question of how stakeholders can work together to preserve and promote the authenticity of *Caci* tradition while addressing potential distortions, we propose a qualitative methods approach. The approach involves qualitative (Beeh, 2017; Nggoro & Samekto, 2019; Jama et al., 2020; Setiawati, 2023).

Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, such as *Caci* practitioners (Emzir, 2012; Yuliantari, 2022), community leaders, cultural experts, the wider Manggarai community (Moon, 2021; Aninda & Sihombing, 2022; Manafe & Jelahut, 2022). The interviews will explore the challenges and potential distortions facing *Caci* tradition, as well as the strategies that stakeholders are currently employing to address these issues.

The data collected from the interviews (Aninda & Sihombing, 2022) will be analyzed using of content analysis. The content analysis will involve identifying and categorizing themes and patterns from the interview data, analysis will involve descriptive (Trimandala & Kiskenda, 2022).

Overall, the qualitative methods approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential distortions facing *Caci* tradition and the strategies that stakeholders can employ to ensure its longevity and authenticity.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Caci Traditional Performance

The Caci traditional performance isn't always a pristine folk art festival, sacred and authentic. Various issues contribute to distortions in Caci, whether intentionally or unintentionally perpetrated by the Caci performers, their institutions, and other parties or interests, such as those from the tourism industry. Therefore, there are several factors that cause distortions in the Caci tradition.

One reality within the aesthetic spaces of Caci is the involvement of external actors meddling with internal actors. The internal actors accept the intervention of external actors with sincerity and

innocence, without suspicion. Additionally, the Caci performers themselves contribute to the distortion by attempting to stray from the aesthetic and philosophical values of the Caci tradition.

It seems that the *Caci* traditional performance is influenced by political and tourism industry interests. During *Caci* performances, legislative candidates are often present, sending a political message with the aim of gaining support in the legislative election. Although these legislative candidates may not engage in direct campaigning during the *Caci* performance, their presence and the act of giving gifts to some *Caci* performers are perceived as a form of covert campaigning.

The presence of candidates in the traditional *Caci* performance is accepted as a normal thing by the traditional institution. The attitude of openness and delayed meaning of the traditional institution's cultural approach. The use of cultural messages and methods by the legislative candidates makes the traditional institution hegemonic. The traditional institution is powerless to reject it directly. Rejecting cultural methods and cultural messages by the traditional institution is difficult to do. Another condition exists because of the presence of interests by bringing a "gift" in the form of a donation. The donation given is in the form of money that is handed over through the traditional ritual process and after the *Caci* performance. In the *Caci* traditional performance, the tourists who attend also feel the sensation of being guided by guides. Tourists enter through the cultural door in the form of giving condolence money and offerings. Tourist involvement is a source of pride in the context of cultural promotion. On the other hand, the disturbance of the *Caci* tradition is part of cultural tourism promotion. One side is attractive as a performance of meaning in the *Caci* tradition.

The presence of external actors in *Caci* signifies the traditional institution's vulnerability to political and cultural industry pressures. This leads to the delegitimization of the traditional institution by external actors and the desacralization of culture. This delegitimization is subtly felt through the manipulation of cultural symbols. The involvement of external actors in *Caci*, symbolized by their entrance into cultural spaces, serves as a performed cultural symbol. *Caci* tradition loses its original essence of gratitude and becomes exploited for alternative interests by external actors. The subtle manipulation of cultural symbols and institutional influence contribute to the delegitimization of the traditional institution. The involvement of vested interests in the sacred *Caci* performance further exacerbates its desacralization. *Caci* is reduced to a mere artistic performance devoid of its ritualistic essence, serving solely as entertainment. Another distortion in *Caci* performances is the government's intervention in conducting *capu kalus* ceremonies.

Capu kalus should occur when the leader of two groups performs the opening ceremony. However, to honor the presence of government officials, government agencies are given the opportunity to perform capu kalus. This is when the government hands over money to the Caci performers who receives the blow. The act of handing over money during Capu kalus has become a tradition and source of pride, as seen from the expressions of the Caci performers This culture has become a habit for the government or tourists who enter the Caci tradition space. Several times during the Caci performance, traditional elders hand over money to the Caci performers after performing Capu kalus or cako lalor (oath blow).

Distortions within the Caci tradition also arise from within the tradition itself. These distortions manifest in the aesthetic presentation of Caci and in the understanding of ritual space. Some Caci performers disregard the sanctity of the ritual space. The *Caci* performers group that falls into this category is called *pokang*. This group appears in *Caci* performances at certain times, usually at 1 p.m. and more often on the second day of the *Caci* performance. Some reasons for their presence include the urge to release the tension in their bodies upon hearing the sound of the *meka landang* gong. Secondly, seeing their opponents in *Caci* because they have not yet retaliated against the wounds they have suffered. Although this group is not very large, it has implications for the sacred value of the *Caci* performance. The *Caci* performers in this group attend without following any group or personal rituals. They are the ones who often suffer injuries to their faces or other parts of their bodies as a result of violating the myths in *Caci*.

The aesthetic performance of *Caci* has undergone a shift in aesthetic form, such as the costumes worn by *Caci* performers. Costumes have their own values and meanings in their space. The length of the average sarong is parallel to the knee, but there are some *Caci* performers who wear sarongs above their knees. Technically, the length of the sarong down to below the knee is to protect the waist down. This part should not be hit. Sometimes, it can be seen that *Caci* performers complain of pain when they are hit on the lower part of their waist. The expression of pain indicates that the lower part of the waist is a weak part of the *Caci* performers body. This is always heard in the call during every *Caci* performance not to hit the waist down, which is covered.

The aesthetic visualization of sarongs that are too short raises the perception of suitability and unsuitability. It appears more open and contrary to the aesthetic principles of traditional *Caci*, which are called *di'a ba weki and di'a selek, mese bekek penong cenggong*. A short sarong looks "mini", meaning small or of small dimensions (triviality). Small dimensions contradict the prayer projection in the *mese bekek penong cenggong* when the ritual is offering to the ancestors. Wearing a short sarong can also be interpreted as representing wearing a mini skirt for women. If so, then the value of unity in preserving women's bodies is violated and exploited in the aesthetics of *Caci*.

In addition to short sarongs, young *Caci* performers often show their backsides. A *ba leso* elder from the *Cumbi* village immediately rebuked the *Caci* performers who wore such a costume. All costumes have aesthetic meanings and philosophies for achieving the highest goals. Costumes are significant and visionary in spirit and the hope of achieving a good quality of life. The scarf that wraps around the waist not only displays aesthetic value but also ethical values in life. The navel is a vital organ in the human body. The importance of maintaining the navel in the human body is marked by the ritual of cutting the umbilical cord (*lampek lima*) at birth. In addition to maintaining etiquette, the navel is the starting point of life for humans. Food is delivered through the umbilical cord, so it must be protected. This is done by covering it with a scarf or slepe that circles the waist. Nowadays, *Caci* performers almost never cover this area.

Criticism of the way of dressing by some traditional and *Caci* figures is correlated with expressions in sacred rituals, such as *neka cumang dungka para ranga*. This prayer or request is reduced or even delegitimized by the way *Caci* performers dress, which brings them closer to death. This prayer or request is related to the way of warding off. The current way of warding off is known as *taang gaya*. This way of dressing contradicts the meaning of the prayer, which means not to expose oneself directly to the face, but now this is what *Caci* performers do, although not all of them do it.

In almost every *Caci* tradition performance, there is always a reminder to pay attention to the position of the shield when warding off. Although there are cases where *Caci* performers go beyond the ethical and aesthetic format of "classical" *Caci*. The *agang* position in front and the *nggiling* position behind the back are considered inappropriate. *Nggiling*, as a protector for some *Caci* performers, must be treated well, because this shield is what protects them from the *cemeti* threat. Other *Caci* performers use the shield as a mother and father who protect them at all times. *Ine rinding wie Ame rinding mane*, this expression lexically means "Mother protector at night and Father protector in the afternoon". It is important and meaningful to treat the shield appropriately.

The *kemah* for *meka landang* is made of bamboo and coconut leaves or *aren* palm leaves (*tuak*). The roof is made of coconut leaves or *enau* tree leaves. The bed is made slightly high like a stage. The base of the bed is made of chopped bamboo (*lencar*) and is covered with a mat and a final layer of *tikar*.

Distortion of the meaning of *kemah* occurs in some traditional *Caci* events. *Meka landang* stays overnight at houses that are not yet occupied by the owner, stays in school buildings, in permanent tents, or *terop*. Even the *kemah*, which was originally natural and full of brotherhood because it was done together, has become simple, practical, and modern. There are several traditional *Caci* performance venues where some performers sing songs with a dangdut style, such as "let's wiggle two fingers" and "feeling love for you" in Indonesian, and some groups of musicians in a village sing national struggle

songs and play music without adhering to the original *Caci* rhythm. The committee has criticized these expressions for deviating from the ancestral heritage (mbate dise ame serong dise empo).

Some *Caci* performers sing songs that are supposed to be sung by the *Anak Wina* group to the *Anak Rona* group. The song "lambu ko toe" is sung to win the heart of the first daughter, but it is sung by the Anak Rona group to the Anak Wina group. In one village in the center of *Langke* Rembong subdistrict, the Anak Rona group immediately warned against singing the song upon hearing it.

As previously mentioned, *Caci* involves direct physical contact and has the potential for conflict. There were three incidents of violence at three *Caci* performance venues. The first incident was caused by a *Caci* performer blocking the hitter with their back while the blocker was not ready to block. Not accepting this, the hitter retaliated by hitting the blocker with an *agang*, causing a fight.

The second incident was caused by a *Caci* performer who should have been in the ngara beo position but switched to *Meka* landing. Seeing this, the *tua bai leso angra beo* immediately closed the *Caci* that was not supposed to be closed (rege), causing tension between the committee and the performers. However, there is a principle that *Caci* cannot stop on the first day. Stopping *Caci* is considered a loss, implying an inability to handle the problem and the relationship with *Meka* landing being disrupted.

The third incident was caused by a misunderstanding between a *Caci* performer and the committee responsible for organizing the *Caci* game. To resolve this, a customary settlement was conducted. Apologies were sought rather than assigning blame. The problem-solving process was carried out by reviewing the chronological order of events and finding a solution to reconcile and continue the *Caci* performance.

Traditional *Caci* performances are also colored by sponsor banners. Generally, sponsors are involved to liven up the *Caci* atmosphere. However, this reality is seen as a distortion. Putting up sponsor banners signifies the involvement of external parties in *Caci* tradition for the economic interests of certain parties. This should not happen after the event is over. *Caci* is a symbol of fertility and prosperity and is related to agricultural elements. The presence of sponsors at a *Caci* event indicates a shift in values away from the essence of *Caci* as a symbol of fertility and prosperity. There is a sense of dependence or lack of independence, while *Caci* is a symbol of strength that stimulates a free and independent attitude that is not bound by various interests. *Caci* is the ethnic Manggarai way of life.

The aesthetic issue of *Caci* spreads to the form of aesthetics. *Caci* performer only takes the aesthetic concept, but does not pay attention to its aesthetic form, for example, the shape of a teapot. *Caci* performer takes the concept of the teapot, but not the aesthetic value of the rhyme form. For example, the teapot of a rose, a tent star, a service motorcycle, and many other teapot examples. The aesthetic value is different when listening to the bombing teapot of *kampas reba pongkar*, the *temba lorong reba poc*, and the *mangko bokok reba tado*. In addition to being created based on the philosophy of life, it also considers the aesthetic value of sound. This is what is called the death of aesthetics.

For example, aesthetics is the loss of aesthetic value only for entertainment purposes or simply to please listeners or viewers. In Adorno language, it means a meaning that has been distorted (Nugroho, 2021). The death of art in *Vattino's* formula is understood as the meaning of skill (*Geschicklichkeit*). This meaning emphasizes the ability to manage aesthetic concepts no longer as a special phenomenon, but has been erased by universal existence. Universal existence is related to the existence of discourse as in Foucault's style. The color of the death of art is supported by interdependent and related colors. *Caci* performer skill in managing aesthetic concepts can kill the consciousness of the death of art for its owner. The audience only experiences duplicate pleasure from the aesthetic concept.

3.2 Factors Causing the Distortions

The Caci traditional performance is a crucial aspect of cultural heritage for the Manggarai community. However, several factors contribute to distortions within the Caci tradition, leading to implications for the desacralization and delegitimization of the traditional institution. Cultural heritage theory could be useful in understanding the importance of preserving Caci tradition to maintain the cultural identity and traditions of the Manggarai community. Intercultural communication theory could help in understanding the challenges that arise when stakeholders from different backgrounds come together to work on preserving and promoting Caci tradition. Postcolonial theory could be relevant in understanding the historical and cultural context in which Caci tradition exists and the challenges it faces in the present day. Performance theory could be useful in understanding the role of Caci as a performance art and its importance in the cultural identity of the Manggarai community. The Caci traditional performance is a folk art festival in Indonesia that involves a ritualized fight using whips and shields, accompanied by music played on traditional instruments. The performance is a part of the traditional tradition and is considered sacred and authentic. Distortions within the Caci tradition stem from the influence of ideological superstructure, social structure, and material infrastructure. These factors can be understood through Sanderson's concepts of ideological superstructure, social structure, and material infrastructure (Arta, et al., 2020).

3.2.1 Ideological Superstructure

The concept of ideological superstructure refers to the values, beliefs, and ideologies that shape a community's worldview (Eatwell, 2019). In the context of the *Caci* tradition, educational ideology is not explicitly mentioned, however, there are elements of education in efforts to maintain the authenticity and reinterpret the values of the *Caci* tradition within the community. For example, efforts to educate *Caci* players and the community about the aesthetics and philosophy of the tradition are part of cultural education. Meanwhile, the *Caci* tradition as part of sacred cultural heritage indicates the presence of religious ideology. Elements such as customary rituals, prayers, and offerings to ancestors are aspects that demonstrate religious ideology. For instance, the "*Capu kalus*" ceremony involving customary rituals and monetary contributions given through a customary ritual process after the *Caci* performance. Additionally, there are several economic elements involved in the *Caci* tradition. The presence of sponsors, contributions, and involvement of the tourism industry indicate the presence of economic ideology. The placement of sponsor banners signifies the involvement of external parties in the *Caci* tradition for specific economic interests, as well as external implications in traditional *Caci* performances that bring political and tourism industry interests.

3.2.2 Social Structure

The concept of social structure refers to the social relationships that form within a community (Fathy, 2019). The social structure within the *Caci* tradition involves various actors, both internal and external. Internal actors include the *Caci* performers who deviate from the aesthetic and philosophical values of the tradition, customary institutions that should preserve the authenticity of the tradition but be influenced by external factors, organizing committees that oversee event execution and accept sponsorship or directives from external parties, and customary elders who play a crucial role in preserving the tradition but also engage in accepting contributions. On the other hand, external actors comprise the tourism industry, which promotes *Caci* as a tourist attraction, prospective legislative candidates who use *Caci* events for covert campaigning, commercial sponsors who display banners and provide contributions, and tourists who participate in *Caci* ceremonies as part of their tourism experience.

3.2.3 Material Infrastructure

The concept of material infrastructure refers to material factors that influence a community, such as technology, economics, and physical environment (Josa & Aguado, 2019). Several aspects in the text indicate economic value associated with the *Caci* tradition. For instance, contributions and gifts given in

the form of money through customary ritual processes and after *Caci* performances reflect economic value within this tradition. Additionally, the placement of sponsor banners indicates external involvement in the *Caci* tradition for specific economic interests. The tourism industry also plays a significant role in the economic value of *Caci*, where tourist involvement is seen as a source of pride in cultural promotion. However, disruptions to the Caci tradition being part of cultural tourism promotion indicate that economic value often dominates the sacred and authentic meaning of this tradition.

In summary, various issues contribute to distortions in the traditional *Caci* performance, whether intentionally or inadvertently perpetuated by the performers, institutions, and other involved parties or interests. This ultimately leads to the delegitimization of the traditional institution and the desacralization of the culture. There is also a group of performers known as *pokang* who participate without adhering to any group or personal rituals, thereby undermining the sacred value of the performance. This deviation from the aesthetic and philosophical values of the Caci tradition by the performers themselves exacerbates the issue. In some instances, prospective members of the DPRD, the Regional People's Representative Body, have been present in performances, symbolizing the community and conveying a political message aimed at garnering support for their candidacy in legislative elections. Additionally, tourists attending the performances are often accompanied by guides and enter through designated cultural entrances, typically offering condolence money and gifts, which disrupts the integrity of the performance. Distortions in the *Caci* performance are fueled by political and tourism industry interests.

The involvement of external actors in the *Caci* tradition further contributes to the desacralization of the culture, as the performance is perceived as a mere entertainment spectacle devoid of its ritualistic elements. The government's role in conducting the capu kalus ceremony, where monetary rewards are handed over to the *Caci* performers who endure the blows, has become customary and a source of pride, further distorting the authenticity of the performance.

The *Caci* traditional performance holds significant cultural value for the Manggarai community. However, addressing the distortions within the tradition is crucial to prevent further desacralization and delegitimization of this important cultural heritage. To achieve this, it is essential to draw upon cultural heritage theory, intercultural communication theory, postcolonial theory, and performance theory. These frameworks offer valuable insights into the historical and cultural context of the tradition, the challenges in its preservation and promotion, and its role as a form of performing art. By collaboratively working to preserve and promote the *Caci* tradition, stakeholders from diverse backgrounds can contribute to safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Manggarai community and fostering intercultural understanding and communication.

Conclusion

The Caci traditional performance is a vital aspect of the cultural heritage of the Manggarai community. However, several factors contribute to distortions within the tradition, resulting in its desacralization and the delegitimization of the traditional institution. These factors include performers deviating from the aesthetic and philosophical values of the Caci tradition, as well as the influence of political and tourism industry interests, along with the involvement of external actors in the tradition.

To preserve the Caci tradition and uphold the cultural identity of the Manggarai community, it is crucial to consider theories such as cultural heritage theory, intercultural communication theory, postcolonial theory, and performance theory. By collaborating to preserve and promote the Caci tradition, stakeholders from diverse backgrounds can contribute to maintaining the cultural heritage of the Manggarai community and fostering intercultural understanding and communication.

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