



Dynamics of Cultural Change among the Toraja of Sulawesi

The Commoditization of Tradition

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Abstract. – In the last few years an increasing number of studies have focused on Toraja culture, in particular on cultural changes brought about by tourist intrusion. Both processes of cultural objectification and transformations of Toraja ethnic identity have been stressed. However, important aspects of cultural, social, and economic change have been overlooked. In this article I argue that not only foreign tourists but also several local subjects (native travel agencies, Christian churches, and state agencies) are deeply involved in the dynamics of Toraja cultural change, in particular in the transformation of the processes of social distribution which take place during funeral ceremonies. [*Sulawesi, Toraja, ethnic identity, funeral ceremonies, tourism, globalization*]

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Over the past two decades a number of issues concerning the Toraja have been widely discussed, and in particular the way Toraja identity has been deeply transformed as a consequence of ethnic tourism.¹ Some anthropologists (Volkman) have suggested that tourist development causes a loss of identity and engenders “museumification.” Increasing contacts with Western tourists bring about not only a transformation of the local economy but also a “staged authenticity,” since traditions are “staged” for cultural consumption. Other scholars (Adams) maintain that traditions, customs, and

ritual practices are not only staged while divorced from their original cultural meanings, but are reinterpreted and negotiated. The tourist gaze does not entail a complete loss of identity, however, because the Toraja are engaged in strategies of adjusting and remoulding both their self-representation and their ethnic identity.

While I partially agree with these analyses (Toraja culture is both staged and recreated), I contend that other aspects of the local social dynamics have been overlooked, particularly the “commoditization” of Toraja culture, the involvement of Christian churches, and the local state agencies in the cultural changes. In this article both processes are highlighted: as a consequence of increasing tourist intrusion, many aspects and items of Toraja culture are turning into commodities for tourist consumption. Yet tourist intrusion is not the only factor of change; Christian churches, state organizations, and agencies contribute to modifying local traditions as they transform the process of social distribution of wealth which takes place during funeral ceremonies.

The commoditization of Toraja culture, as that of many other peripheral and “exotic” cultures all over the world, must be framed in the wider context of globalization, which fosters “streams” of people (emigrants, tourists, refugees) and commodities across countries and continents. Western commodities “flow” toward peripheral countries

1 Volkman 1987, 1990; Crystal 1977, 1994; Adams 1984, 1997, 1998.

where their consumption is shaped by the local web of symbols; therefore, in non-Western contexts commodities acquire new meanings and are consumed as “signs,” not as objects.

The transformation of commodities into culture is one consequence of globalization; another consequence is the commoditization of cultures and the consumption of exoticism by Western tourists. Transformation of commodities into culture and transformation of culture into commodity are opposite and symmetrical processes. In Toraja highlands the commoditization of local culture, prompted by the international tourism industry, is intertwined with the strategies of other local and nonlocal agencies: Christian churches and the Indonesian state, which impinge on indigenous traditions and practices, especially funeral ceremonies, and remould them.

Toraja Culture in Precolonial Times

The Toraja live in the highlands of south Sulawesi (whose former name was Célebes), in scattered hamlets consisting of a few households (*tongkonan*); a web of ritual and marriage exchanges links the *tongkonan*. Unlike the neighbouring Bugis and Makassarese living on the coast of south Sulawesi, the Toraja never attained high levels of political integration; in precolonial times, however, their society was stratified in three layers: a noble élite, commoners, and slaves. The Islamic tide which swept over the southern coasts of Sulawesi never reached the Toraja homeland; while Bugis and Makassarese were quickly converted, Toraja remained faithful to *aluk to dolo*, ancestor worship.

The Islamization of Bugis and Makassarese led to the foundation of powerful sultanates which did not succeed in subduing the Toraja but frequently raided their territory in search of slaves. Bugis and Makassarese despised Toraja because they were “pagans,” pork-eaters and headhunters. Pacification took place only after the Dutch conquest in 1906, followed in the span of a few years by the arrival of the first missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church, which began to make converts in the 1920s.

The *tongkonan*, traditional Toraja house, has a pivotal role in social organization as it is identified with a cognatic descent group, the *marapuan* (whose members do not live in the ancestral *tongkonan* because the segmentation process leads to the establishment of new households scattered over the territory). The *tongkonan* is an impressive and complex structure; it is a wide, rectangular

building standing on solid posts and covered with a bamboo roof forming a swooping curve with rising tips on the front and backsides. Constructed without nails, the creation of such a building requires skill and enormous resources.

The most imposing *tongkonan* belong to noble *marapuan*, who enjoy the privilege of covering the outer walls of their houses with carvings and bright paintings. The house façade is decorated with the horns of buffalo sacrificed during funeral rituals. Every house has its own name and owns material and nonmaterial goods (rice fields, emblems, a name) (see also Nooy-Palm 1979: 22). The link between a *tongkonan* and a *marapuan* dates back to the founding ancestors who built it; consequently the *tongkonan* is the symbol of the continuity of the cognatic group and of the bond between the living and the dead. This bond is also marked by the burial of the umbilical cords of newborn members of the kin group on the eastern side of the house (this side is associated with life while the western side is associated with death).

The common descent, which is the founding principle of the cohesion of the *marapuan*, is expressed by a biological metaphor referring to the most important elements of the human body for the Toraja: kin members are *sang rara*, *sang buku* (same blood, same bones). The unity of kin is expressed also in terms of the flora: descent from a common ancestor is defined *sang rapu* (*rapu* is the root of the term *marapuan*); *rapu* means a clump of bamboo or coconut trees, that is a group of plants “growing together as if from a common root but with each tree branching separately” (Volkman 1985: 46).

The *tongkonan* is the spatial symbol of the unity of *marapuan* members, who are linked by ties of solidarity. Even if only a small minority of them live in this house, as the cognatic group may include hundreds of people, their ties with their ancestral *tongkonan* are the most important element in the social identity of all *marapuan* members. The link between *tongkonan* and social identity stems also from its etymology: “*tongkonan* derives from the verb *tongkon* which means to sit” (Nooy-Palm 1979: 231). If we take into account that the place where a person sits, both in the house and in the public space, marks his status and rank, it is clear that the *tongkonan* is not only the residence of the ancestors but also the locus which defines the social “place” of an individual.

Not every Toraja house is a *tongkonan*, that is a building endowed with a name and identified with a social unit. Ordinary houses (*banua*) differ from *tongkonan* not only because they are smaller and

lacking in decoration but also because they are not associated with symbolic meanings or a spiritual identity. A house is deemed to be a *tongkonan* only if complex architectural norms are observed in the building process and an inauguration ritual has been performed. Furthermore, *tongkonan* belonging to noble *marapuan* differ from *tongkonan* belonging to commoners because their surfaces are covered with paintings and carvings. At the apex of the façade there is usually a painting of a cock – symbol of life – and the rising sun. Under the cock may be found “a carved pattern of betel leaves” used in traditional rituals as offerings to gods and a medium of contact with them (Adams 1998: 332). The middle section of the outer walls often contains drawings of buffaloes and banyan trees, symbols of the status and rank of the *marapuan*. In the lower section plants and animals predominate, alluding “to the activities of peasants and slaves” (332).

The link between living and dead symbolized by the *tongkonan* is also expressed by complex funeral rituals which have a basic function in the construction of the Toraja social identity. Funeral ceremonies are important both socially and symbolically because they are the arenas wherein conflict or solidarity are acted out.

Funeral rituals, which last several days and are attended by hundreds of guests, consist of many different acts. Most significant are: a) the transfer of the corpse from the house (where it may remain for many months while kin assemble the resources necessary for the organization of the funeral) to the rice barn; b) the procession which transports the corpse from the rice barn to a specially constructed platform in the ritual field (*rante*). The core of the ritual process is the distribution of the meat of several slaughtered buffaloes to the guests; the distribution, which takes place the day before the transfer of the corpse from the *rante* to the grave, is both the arena where guests' status and rank are displayed and the symbolic device for strengthening ties of affinity, consanguinity, and any other kind of social relationship as gifts of meat ritually express “patterns of reciprocity (between villages, *tongkonan*, family members, friends, acquaintances, and so on)” (Nooy-Palm 1979: 199).

Funeral rituals mark out the symbolic space wherein “status and personal place in the social hierarchy” (including three levels: nobles, commoners, and slaves) are defined because tradition determines role, behavior, and position of any individual attending the funeral: “who poured palm wine, who wrapped the corpse and prepared offerings, where each person could or could not sit . . .

what piece of meat would constitute one's share and in which order it would be offered” (Volkman 1984: 155). As the number and quality of buffaloes slaughtered by each relative of the dead person define the portion of inheritance the relative is entitled to, the slaughter of these animals stimulates controlled competition between members of the *marapuan*, which emphasizes hidden conflicts.

Even though funeral rituals represent a pivotal element of Toraja social organization wherein cohesion, reciprocity, hierarchy, and conflict are displayed, in precolonial times they were just a part of a more complex ritual system which also included fertility rituals. Ritual practices were dominated by two pairs of cosmological oppositions, “one between upperworld and underworld, and the other between East and West” (Nooy-Palm 1979: 109). In the ritual context the double cosmological dichotomy led to the division between fertility rites, associated with heavenly gods and the northeast and funeral rituals, associated with death and the southwest (Nooy-Palm 1979: 112); the former were performed in the morning, before noon and were labelled ‘climbing smoke,’ the latter were performed in the afternoon, toward sunset and were defined ‘laying smoke’” (112).

Missionaries, who began to work in the Toraja highlands in the 1920s, after the Dutch conquest (1906), soon realized that “a wholesale condemnation of ritual practices would not yield many converts” (Volkman 1984: 156) and that only tolerance would make conversion easier. Therefore, they engaged themselves in the task of separating ritual practices incompatible with the Christian religion from ritual behaviors which they deemed to be “bearable”: the Toraja were allowed to perform the latter, that is funeral rituals, while the former (fertility ceremonies) were strictly forbidden. Even funeral rituals were modified so they could fit in with the Christian faith: converted Toraja were allowed to slaughter buffaloes and distribute their meat but offerings of meat to spirits were banned, as was the worship of dead effigies (*tau tau*) (Volkman 1990: 92).

As a consequence of this distinction, fertility rituals declined while funeral rituals survived and developed. Missionary action, supported by colonial Dutch authority, aimed at splitting the traditional ritual system (*aluk to dolo*): missionaries accepted customs deemed to be bearable and rejected other customs as offensive, pagan behaviors. The part of *aluk* “revolving around gods and spirits” and consequently branded as “animism” was refused while “neutral” traditional practices were accepted and labelled with the Indonesian word *adat* (Volkman

1984: 157). Converted Toraja were encouraged to drop beliefs and rituals branded as *aluk* and to maintain practices included in *adat*. Therefore, funeral ceremonies survived but were deprived of beliefs which represented their cognitive framework. In 1975 60% of Toraja were converted; by 2000 the percentage was about 90%; for people who became Protestant (the majority) or Catholic “*aluk* [beliefs] no longer represented an inalienable ancestral legacy but had come instead to represent a backwardness, a lack” (Volkman 1984: 157). The precolonial way of life is usually labelled (not only by the Toraja but almost everywhere in the Indonesian archipelago) *belum agama*, which means “before religion,” when people lived without the “true” faith.

However, funerals based on tradition still “occupy a central place in Toraja life” (Volkman 1984: 157) as they have a basic function in the process of reproduction of the system of social relations. Nonetheless the social network is radically different in comparison with precolonial times because missionary work, colonial administration, and, since independence, widespread education and economic mobility have eradicated traditional social hierarchy.

Emigrants and Tourists

The bewildering development of out-migration since the 1970s has led to a deep cultural change in the Toraja highlands. During the late 1960s, the new anti-Communist and pro-American government of President Suharto, who came to power through a bloody coup d'état in 1965, opened Indonesia to Western investments. Multinational corporations began to exploit the main resources of the archipelago: offshore oil and Kalimantan forest timber. Job opportunities arose and many Toraja migrated to Ujung Pandang (the capital of Sulawesi), Kalimantan, Jakarta, Surabaya, and Irian Jaya mainly as workers, miners, woodcutters, waiters, lorry drivers but, in some cases, also as teachers or civil servants. In 1985, Toraja emigrants were estimated at 230,000 (Volkman 1990: 93).

Emigrants were mainly poor or low-status young Toraja, attracted by the potential to convert cash into high status at home (Volkman 1984: 159). Therefore, they sent relatives money to be invested in the erection of *tongkonan* and organization of impressive funeral ceremonies. In fact, rank, honor (*siri* for Toraja), and social prestige are displayed through the size of the *tongkonan*, the amount and quality of decorations, carvings and paintings,

number of slaughtered buffaloes, and amount of meat distributed during funerals. Cash sent home by emigrants has led in Toraja communities to an unprecedented development of funeral rituals (159).

In the last three decades the wealth acquired by emigrants has enabled many low-status families to organize funeral ceremonies far more sumptuous than ceremonies sponsored in the past: Volkman remarks that before the 1970s a slave family could at most slaughter just one buffalo; today such a family may sacrifice dozens, and of a high quality (1984: 159). Even if it is not always true, traditional stratification has undergone a radical change, and ceremonies sponsored by commoners and slaves are no longer submitted to severe restrictions. The very organization, by low-status Toraja, of impressive funerals with many buffaloes slaughtered as well as the building of a huge *tongkonan* would have been a “complete transgression” of the traditions in precolonial times (159), yet today this behavior is no longer perceived as outrageous or an infringement of *adat* (tradition, customary law). Cash sent by emigrants have made such behaviors possible, while the spread of the Christian faith with its emphasis on egalitarian principles and the postindependence expansion of primary education, bringing together aristocratic and low-status children, have made them bearable.

The conversion of the Toraja to Christianity was a consequence of sociopolitical changes in their world during the 20th century, acceptance of the new faith being largely a reaction to raids by the Muslim coastal people, Bugis and Makassarese, who plundered Toraja villages in postindependence years. Moreover, after the coup d'état in 1965, Suharto's regime forced all Indonesian citizens to join one of the three “national” religions: Islam, Christianity, or Balinese Hinduism, which caused people to become converts.

The change of the Toraja social and cultural world has been brought about also by tourist intrusion which has effected profound transformations, moulding the construction of a new pan-Toraja ethnic identity. The tourist gaze has influenced the way the Toraja think of and represent their own culture. The stream of visitors has aroused the interest of the tourist industry which “added Toraja to their itineraries” (Volkman 1984: 163); the mass media have helped to spread a superficial knowledge of local culture as the epitome of exoticism. Since the 1970s, imposing funeral ceremonies financed by cash sent home by emigrants have attracted a rapidly growing number of foreign tourists: Europeans, Japanese, Australians, North Americans.

As Volkman remarks, paradoxically tourist agencies stress the traditional aspects of rituals which are financed and sponsored by Toraja who have embraced Christianity and modernity. Foreign visitors are offered an exciting raid on “otherness” but the “show” they attend is the result of an increasing integration of Toraja people in the market economy. It is indeed a paradox that tourism in Tana Toraja flourishes because visitors are attracted by the exoticism of the native culture and – at the same time – an increasing number of Toraja reject the traditional way of life and adopt Western social and cultural patterns. The intrusion of Western visitors reverberates in the fabric of the native culture; the tourist gaze alters the self-representation of Toraja because natives realize that their own rituals are interesting for “rich” people coming from afar, from the powerful and almost unknown West which not long ago ruled Indonesia.

Visitors’ interest in funeral rituals increases the importance of ancestor worship; seemingly meanings and values of the *aluk to dolo* (the way of ancestors, the traditional religion), almost lost after conversion, have come back to the fore. But does tourism really resurrect *aluk to dolo*? The real aim of the revitalization of traditions is not to retrieve the old religion but to construct an exciting image of exoticism to be sold to the outer world.

Educated, Christianized, and wealthy Toraja who support revitalization are proprietors of hotels, guest-houses, and travel agencies and are interested in the increase in the stream of tourists. Hotels built on the outskirts of the chief Toraja town Rantepao are shaped like *tongkonan*. Churches and local government headquarters have also been remodelled to resemble *tongkonan*. The “Torajization” of the architectural style has reached Ujung Pandang, the Sulawesi capital, where hotels and banks are designed with *tongkonan* façades. The traditional architectural style has thus turned into an ethnic emblem for the Toraja as well as into an object of aesthetic consumption for Indonesians and Western people.

Government and church policies have contributed to this process. During the first two decades after Independence, the Indonesian government, imbued with the ideology of “progress” which was typical of all political elites in African and Asian postcolonial states, despised the “backwardness” of Toraja as well as of other peripheral cultures of Indonesian archipelago: local traditions, *tongkonan*, and funeral ceremonies were deemed to be a hindrance to modernization. In the 1960s, the Toraja were urged by the government to erect modern houses. Local Protestant churches

also disdained *tongkonan*, deemed to be dangerous emblems of *aluk to dolo*, the traditional “pagan” religion (Adams 1998: 337).

During the 1970s and 1980s the government’s attitude underwent a radical change due to the new political and economic strategies of the Western-oriented military elite which seized the power after the 1965 coup d’état. The Suharto government decided to promote the tourist industry: the Toraja highlands as well as many other areas which were remarkable for their beautiful landscapes and exotic culture (Bali, Lake Toba) were promoted as international tourist resorts. Suharto opened Indonesia to the political influence of the United States and to Western capitals. Tourism became one of the main sources of profit; local cultures, their traditions, ceremonies, and architecture were revalued as a national resource.

However, as Indonesia is a patchwork of ethnic groups, languages, and religions, local identities represent a potential danger for the state because they may foster claims to regional self-government, if not secession. In the first years after independence Indonesia was on the verge of political collapse and breakdown under the threat of armed secessionist movements. Therefore, the central government adopted a political strategy of repression of minorities. In the 1970s the government policy changed radically which led to a celebration of regional and local diversities. However, as the legitimation of customs and traditions could turn into political consciousness, diversities were neutralized and subsumed into the regime’s ideology (the national slogan is “unity in diversity”).

As a consequence of the increasing contacts of the Toraja society with the outer world, the out-migration of thousands of young people to Ujung Pandang, Kalimantan, Irian Jaya, and Java and the arrival of thousands of Western and national tourists in the Toraja homeland, Toraja identity has undergone a radical transformation. Formerly the identity was forged through opposition between the Self and the Other; boundaries were traced out between households, between village communities, and between Toraja and Muslim people living on the coast of Sulawesi; today the construction of the Toraja ethnic identity (as well as the identities of many other peripheral societies of Indonesia) does not depend on the delimitation of their boundaries but on the definition of their contents.

In a context of increasingly rapid change, the Toraja have to cope both with the task of forging meanings for their new individual and collective conditions and with the need to mould an image of their cultural heritage which is fading away.

The action of nonlocal agencies (Indonesian State, protestant churches), out-migration, tourist intrusion, the spreading of Western commodities have helped to widen the boundaries of the native world and to create new arenas where the Toraja interact with the outer world. Through the fusion of new and traditional values Toraja people create a new ethnic identity fit for the new context they live in, a context which encompasses not only their homeland but also Indonesian society and the outer world.

As the tourist invasion has promoted the revival of funeral ceremonies, some anthropologists maintain that globalization is helping to retrieve a cultural heritage which was fading away. It is not true. What is happening is not a retrieval of the past but the creation of a new identity because the tourist gaze has altered the Toraja's representation of their own past: traditional values and categories have been replaced by new cognitive frames. The tourist gaze compels the Toraja to look at their own traditions through alien eyes and enhances their consciousness of their own cultural heritage.

The outcome of the interaction between the Toraja and foreign tourists is not only the transformation of the native way of life but also the commoditization of Toraja material culture (*tongkonan* and *tau tau*, the wooden effigies of ancestors) wherein traditional values and symbols were embedded. *Tongkonan* and *tau tau* have become objects of aesthetic consumption; they are photographed, reproduced, sold. Deprived of their former function as material framework of the cognitive categories, which mould the process of social reproduction, the remains of Toraja material culture have been transformed into antiques and souvenirs.

Ethnic Identity and Cultural Reification

The commoditization of Toraja culture brought about by the tourist invasion is the main factor in the process of transformation of the native self-representations which leads to the development of a new ethnic identity. The "new" ethnic identity is also the outcome of other factors such as government policy. In the last few decades traditional emblems of nobility (magnificent funeral ceremonies, wooden effigies of ancestors, imposing *tongkonan*) have turned into symbols of a shared native identity irrespective of status and rank. The government has contributed to this ethnogenesis process promoting local traditions and, in 1957, created the administration district of Tana Toraja (Toraja land).

In precolonial and colonial times a Toraja was first of all a member both of a cognatic group (*marapuan*) and of a *tongkonan* but the creation of Tana Toraja has fostered a new feeling of shared identity which has blurred the former kin-based identities.

However, the reification of the local culture has certainly been the main stimulus in the ethnogenesis process. What is the link between the process of commoditization of the native material culture and the creation of a new ethnic identity? The commoditization of the native culture has been stimulated by tourist intrusion, which has fostered a flourishing industry of souvenirs (small-scale reproductions of *tongkonan*, jewellery, brochures, postcards, T-shirts, carvings inspired by *tongkonan* motifs).

As Adams remarks (1998), this new industry, which has spread Toraja symbols even in Ujung Pandang, the capital city of Sulawesi, has political implications in the arena of interethnic relationships. The widespread use of their emblems is used by the Toraja to claim a role on the national stage, to strengthen their ethnic identity and to modify ethnic hierarchies shifting the balance of power among themselves, Bugis and Makassarese (Adams 1998: 344). For centuries coastal Muslim people exerted supremacy over highland Toraja. In the last few years the Toraja have been using handiworks as ethnic symbols and emblems to resist domination by Bugis and Makassarese. The Toraja are aiming to free themselves from an age-old marginal condition caused by demographic, geographic, and religious factors. They are demographically marginal because they are a small group, geographically marginal because of their peripheral location in Sulawesi, and a religious minority as they are Christians in a Muslim country.

For centuries the Toraja have suffered the political, economic, and military supremacy of the Bugis and Makassarese but in the last few years they have begun to affect the coastal towns with their culture: the Torajization of Ujung Pandang is in process. The best example of this process is the most imposing building in the capital city, the Golden Makassar Hotel, built on the seafront; the roof of the hotel restaurant is shaped to resemble a couple of oversized *tongkonan* roofs. Recently built government headquarters and banks have *tongkonan* façades or are covered with Toraja motifs. Ujung Pandang airport, where thousands of American, Australian, European, and Japanese tourists land every year, bound for Tana Toraja, is decorated with Toraja motifs; moreover a three-meter-high *tongkonan* has been implanted on the edge of the landing strip (see also Adams 1998).

Traditional Toraja architecture, art, and rituals arouse a huge interest abroad, particularly in Western countries, and every year attract thousands of tourists (and a large amount of foreign currency). As a consequence of the development of this ethnic tourism in their country, the Toraja have gained importance on the national stage. Today Sulawesi is identified with Toraja culture, even if the Bugis and Makassarese are more numerous and powerful.

Yet although the Toraja have succeeded in affirming their cultural hegemony and wiped out the old-aged supremacy of the coastal people, the economic balance of power is almost unchanged. In Rantepao, the chief town of Tana Toraja district, “hotels, Chinese restaurants, and souvenirs shops are clearly expanding”; however “the impact of this development of the local economy appears to be minimal” (Volkman 1990: 94). Most of the owners of the Rantepao luxury hotels are not Toraja; the few hotels in Toraja hands belong to a small affluent élite. The choice of hotels to buy supplies outside Tana Toraja, mainly in Ujung Pandang, does not support the development of the local production; “most hotel employees are Toraja, but several hundred young people do not constitute a major drop in the economic bucket in a population of 330,000” (94). Furthermore, most of the organized tours are controlled by foreign agencies.

However, as I realized during my fieldwork in 2000, the Toraja are striving hard to join the tourist business. Up to the 1990s, Toraja-owned travel agencies recruited learned Bugis as local guides as they spoke English, French, or German; in the last few years many young Toraja have entered Ujung Pandang University and many travel agencies (even non-Toraja-owned agencies) prefer them as local guides because their knowledge of Toraja customs and traditions is obviously better. The development of tourism has fostered social mobility among the Toraja: many young people seek a job in the tourist business (as hotel employee or guide) and attend training workshops for aspiring local guides. After a training as tourist guide, more enterprising Toraja ask for a bank loan at interest and open their own travel agency with a small office in Ujung Pandang airport where tourists may be easily captured. In 2000 there were thirteen Toraja-owned travel agencies with a central government licence and four had a Tana Toraja Kabupaten licence.

The construction of a new Toraja identity is intertwined both with tourism and the commoditization of many basic elements in the native culture: *tongkonan*, wooden effigies of ancestors (*tau tau*),

funeral ceremonies. The images of *tongkonan* proliferate everywhere: not only in Toraja highlands but also in Ujung Pandang. A gateway surmounted by the reproduction of a *tongkonan* welcomes travellers coming from Ujung Pandang at the entrance of Tana Toraja district; after crossing this boundary, the traveller may see other small-scale reproductions at every junction. Local government headquarters in every town have been shaped to resemble a *tongkonan*.

As Adams (1998: 338) remarks, in 1985 Tana Toraja government “required that new homes along the main roads be embellished with ‘typical Toraja motifs’”; paradoxically, low-state families “who were previously barred by custom from incorporating *tongkonan* motifs into their architecture were suddenly being ordered to do so by the government.” A similar statute ordered them “to use layered bamboo roofs instead of the locally preferred and cheaper corrugated tin ones. . . , especially if houses are visible from the main road” (Volkman 1990: 96).

The proliferation of the image of the *tongkonan* goes along with its industrial reproduction: carved and painted wood and small-scale bamboo *tongkonan* are sold everywhere: in souvenir shops in Rantepao as well as in duty-free shops in Ujung Pandang airport; pictures of *tongkonan* are reproduced on T-shirts, postcards, gold jewelry, and even on the Indonesian 5000-rupiah bill (Volkman 1990: 95). It is noteworthy that traditional houses from Bawomataluo village, located in the southern district of Nias island, are portrayed on 1000-rupiah bills: a case of national currency being used as a tourist promotion device. The Toraja house, formerly a symbol of local aristocracy, has not only been transformed into an emblem of a shared identity irrespective of status and rank but has recently undergone a further transformation into the trademark of an “exotic” culture to be sold to tourists.

Both Volkman (1990: 94) and Adams (1998: 329) maintain that *tongkonan* have been turned into an icon of Toraja ethnic identity. However, as the notion of “icon” is a controversial and ambiguous concept, its meaning must be explained. Adams (1998: 347, fn. 1) quotes Silverstein’s (1976: 27) definition of “icon” as “signs where the perceivable properties of the sign vehicle itself have isomorphism to . . . those of the entity signaled”. Such a definition ascribes to the signaled entity “objective” perceivable properties as if they were just “natural,” not culturally codified.

I think that the definition proposed by Eco is more correct. He identifies the iconic representation of an object with the transcription of the

cultural features singled out by a culture, codified and ascribed to the object. Therefore, the icon's features are not "natural" but culturally relevant. An icon is "what people know about an object and what people learnt to know about it" (Eco 1975: 273). Industrial reproductions of *tongkonan* are icons because they are based on a representational code consistent with the identification code of Toraja culture. For a foreign observer they are not "realistic" but stylizations, because features culturally relevant for the Toraja (roof, posts) are oversized.

Processes of commoditization also involve another basic item of Toraja material culture: *tau tau*, wooden effigies of ancestors. *Tau tau* have an important role in funeral ceremonies because they are deemed to be the receptacle of the deceased's spirit; consequently they were a fundamental element in ancestor worship. Statues carved in the hard jackfruit wood are a privilege of the aristocracy; for commoners temporary images of bamboo are constructed. Traditional *tau tau* carving obeys strict stylistic rules: a roughly carved bust, arms stretching out forward, a face smoothly chiselled in a geometric style, white, round staring eyes which give the *tau tau* a blank look. The doll is sumptuously dressed in accordance with the deceased's gender with clothes, bracelets, necklaces, and headdresses (Volkman 1990: 97 f.). *Tau tau* are arranged in long rows in niches dug into limestone cliffs which are widespread in the Toraja highlands. Corpses lie in wooden coffins placed behind *tau tau*.

Since the 1970s *tau tau* have undergone a transformation from sacred ancestors' effigies into tourist attractions and valuable targets for greedy art traders. In the last few years many *tau tau* have been stolen, usually by night by the deceased's relatives. Stolen statues are sent to antique shops in Denpasar and Jakarta where they are sold to American and European art traders or to museums. Paradoxically *tau tau*, which are one of the most important attractions in Tana Toraja, are rapidly disappearing, the Western search for exoticism having come into conflict with itself. *Tau tau* have become a target of two different and contrasting forms of exploitation: tourism (which requires the preservation of the objects "consumed" by tourists) and art trade (which requires a more radical form of consumption, that is appropriation).

As Volkman remarks (1990: 100), the value of *tau tau* has increased and become "a focus of greater attention" just when the traditional beliefs these effigies were associated with were fading away. The tourist interest in *tau tau* has modified

the attitude of natives, who have realized that ancestors' effigies can be a source of profit. Many of them have been stolen and sold to art traders, others have been relocated "to lower ledges where they were more visible" (100). In the most famous sites, such as Lemo, souvenir shops and drink stalls have been opened; in some places a small admission charge is requested to visitors; local guides lead tourists to these sites where they photograph wooden dolls and buy souvenirs, postcards and small-scale *tau tau* reproductions. Toraja burial sites have been turned into open-air museums, just like the ruins of Ephesus or the Giza pyramids.

However, the transformation of native traditions concerning *tau tau* has not been caused only by the tourist invasion and the commoditization of ancestors' effigies is not the only outcome of this process. In recent years wooden effigies have undergone a stylistic change: geometric lines have been replaced by a more realistic style; the deceased's relatives may supply carvers with his or her picture and ask them to copy the features. This is possible because carving is now made easier by new, more efficient tools imported from Bali, which have replaced the traditional, local tools. The tourist invasion has also helped to raise the price of *tau tau*. Effigies are carved into jackfruit hardwood; today this wood must be imported from western territories of Sulawesi because local forests have been cut down to supply the souvenir industry with wood.

Funeral Rituals Remoulded

It is not only the *tongkonan* and *tau tau* that have undergone radical changes, but also funeral ceremonies. Three subjects are involved in this process: tourists, Christian churches, and local state agencies.

Since the first decades of the 20th century missionary strategy had aimed at splitting *aluk to dolo*, the traditional ritual system: rites of fertility were rejected as "pagan" practices while funeral ceremonies were tolerated and remoulded; converted Toraja had to end the ceremony with a divine service and a Christian burial.

Local state agencies have interfered in the distribution of the meat of slaughtered buffaloes and pigs. Buffaloes are offered to the spirit of the dead person by the deceased's relatives, pigs are offered by guests for the funeral feast. Today the funeral is divided into three parts and each of them takes a day to be performed. The funeral takes place in a special place; spaces associated with life,

like rice fields, are strictly forbidden. The ritual space (*rante*) is a yard where a temporary shelter hosts the corpse; around the yard other shelters are built for the guests. Refreshments for guests are prepared in a temporary kitchen.

The first day guests, usually hundreds, come flocking from other villages; in some cases they arrive from Ujung Pandang, Jakarta, or even from abroad. Guests arrive in groups; every group enters the yard in procession (*rombongan*): the men first, followed by the women. Every group is led to a reserved place where coffee, biscuits, cigarettes, and betel are served by black-dressed women. Guests usually bring gifts: rice baskets and pigs on bamboo carrying poles. The pigs are immediately slaughtered and cooked in the temporary kitchen and the roasted meat is served to the guests with boiled rice. The deceased's relatives are helped by neighbors: village (*patondokan*) dwellers and women who are members of PKK (Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga), a state agency for helping families.

The following day the slaughtering of buffaloes offered by the deceased's relatives takes place and their meat is distributed to kin and guests. This distribution is the core of the ritual process and is traditionally regulated by important social norms,² however, in the last few decades the intrusion of local state agencies in the ritual process has radically changed these norms. Part of the buffalo meat, bought by the deceased's sons, is no longer handed over to guests but given to the local church; another part is auctioned. A share of proceeds from the sale is used for financing public works in the *desa* (local administrative unit); another share is kept by the *marapuan* (the cognatic group) and used as a fund for collective works: the construction of a new *tongkonan*, or purchase of a generator, or planks and tin roofs for temporary shelters at a forthcoming marriage or funeral.

Even the distribution of the meat of pigs offered by guests has undergone changes: formerly half of the meat was handed over to guests (who ate part of it and took the rest home) and half was for the deceased's family. Today a share of the family's meat is delivered to the *patondokan*, the neighborhood organization that auctions it; the proceeds of the sale are given to a village fund, the PASYANDU (a state agency for children's health), to the local church, to PKK (a state agency to help families), and to the local government (Kebupaten Toraja).

The third and last day the burial takes place. This phase of the funeral ceremony is today fully Christianized; after a divine service in the local church, a procession carries the corpse up to the burial place which may be either a traditional site, a niche in a limestone cliff, or a modern, *tongkonan*-shaped tomb. The conversion to Christianity did not lead to the banishment of *tau tau*; a wooden doll follows the corpse and is placed near the tomb. The survival of *tau tau* is due to the tolerance of the missionaries, who deemed wooden dolls to be a harmless ritual element, not conflicting with the Christian faith. Natives were allowed to honor *tau tau* as ancestors' effigies whereas their cult as givers of fertility was forbidden.

Since the 1970s the funeral ceremonies have become a tourist attraction. Western visitors flock to the yards where the buffaloes are slaughtered, mingle with local guests, are afforded refreshments by the deceased's relatives, and take pictures. As a consequence of the tourist invasion, like the image of the *tongkonan* and *tau tau*, the rituals too have undergone a process of commoditization. This process is not as advanced as in Bali, where tourist tours include a Rangda-Barong dance show; however, the attendance of Western and also (most recently) Indonesian tourists leads to the transformation of many aspects of the ritual.

Many of the tourist guides are Toraja and their network of kin-based relationships helps them to know where and when a funeral ceremony is going to be performed and consequently to direct the tourist stream. Usually foreign visitors are welcome because the number of guests is an index of a successful ceremony and a large audience increases the prestige of the deceased's kin. Tourists are attracted to Toraja funerals for many reasons. First of all these ceremonies are perceived as "authentic," not arranged for tourist consumption and, for this reason, more "valuable" than Balinese folk shows; tourists feel they are involved in a "real" event, quite different from usual tourist amusements. Then, for many Western visitors sensory experiences involved in a Toraja funeral are quite exciting: the dazzling colors of the tropical environment, the bright decorations on *tongkonan* walls, the bellowing of buffaloes being slaughtered, the shrieking of pigs, the smell of blood, and the taste of palm wine.

However, after the first, exciting impact, tourists perceive this exotic experience as disappointing because, while the deceased's kin regard tourists as guests, the tourists regard themselves as spectators and expect to attend a show, a series of fascinating performances. Unfortunately for the tourists, noth-

² Crystal 1974; Nooy-Palm 1979; Volkman 1984.

ing interesting happens (from their point of view): guests come with gifts, are led to their shelters, take their places, and are offered refreshments. Western visitors get bored with the slow rhythm of the ceremony and after a short time wander away. When something really happens (such as the buffalo slaughtering) many tourists regard it as a disgusting spectacle and leave.

Tourists are unable to adapt themselves to the rhythm and events of the funeral because their representation of this ceremony and their own role are shaped by Western cognitive categories unsuited to the local context. Tourists and natives skim past each other in the ritual arena but do not interact, as Western visitors are not really involved in the performance. At the same time their very presence modifies the ritual process because – as I argued – the tourist gaze influences the way the Toraja think of and represent their own culture. Nevertheless tourists are not aware of their influence, as they are blinded by the illusion they are attending a “primitive,” unchanging ceremony.

Changes concern the ritual use of time and space (Volkman 1990: 105). Formerly, the choice of the ritual spaces was based on the cosmological dichotomy which opposed fertility rituals to funeral ones but nowadays “space is becoming homogeneous, an uncharged arena.” This shift is due to the spreading of the Western vision of space to the native cognitive world. Today the choice of space for a funeral ceremony depends only on practical requirements: funerals are performed where there is room for an attendance of hundreds. Timing, too, “is determined by a host of practical factors” and a new “neutral and uniform” concept of time prevails. In the past, the ritual calendar – as well as the choice of the place for a ceremony – was based on the distinction between rituals for the gods, which were east-oriented and associated with the upperworld (*aluk rampe metallo*) and funeral rituals, west-oriented and associated with the underworld (*aluk to mate*). Fertility rituals, belonging to the first category, were performed during the season when rice plants sprout; in this time funerals were forbidden (Scarduelli 1992: 121). Today funeral ceremonies may be performed in any month; the date is adjusted to the demands of organizers or guests living in Ujung Pandang, Jakarta, or abroad. Again in the past, ritual performances were associated not only with the seasons but also with day and night: fertility rituals were associated with the rising sun and funeral ceremonies with darkness; therefore, mourning laments had to begin after sunset. Today the timing and length of ceremonies whereto important guests are invited

(ministers coming from Ujung Pandang or Jakarta) are adjusted to meet their requirements (Volkman 1990: 106).

Breaks in calendar and ritual rules, aimed at meeting the requirements of Western tourists, Toraja emigrants, or civil and military authorities, are due to the separation between the ritual and the traditional cosmology. As ritual meanings are fading away, it is easier to adjust timing and rules of ceremonies to a new social and cultural context. Since the 1970s Toraja funeral audiences have increased, becoming more heterogeneous. Formerly only the deceased’s kin, *marapuan* members, and people living in neighboring villages were invited, whereas today also educated Toraja living and working in Ujung Pandang, Jakarta, Kalimantan, Irian Jaya as teachers, bank executives, doctors, and government officials take their places in the temporary shelters surrounding the funeral yard. Next to them sit American, Japanese, Australian, European, and Indonesian tourists. Special seats are reserved for civil and military authorities, usually local government officials, though members of the regional government or the national government may attend the funerals of important persons.

The Western tourists, who are briefly informed by local guides about the meaning of the funeral rituals, obviously do not understand neither the information supplied by the speaker at the ceremony nor the official speeches (in the Toraja language), while the civil and military authorities understand just what is translated into Indonesian. How much a guest understands of the ritual meanings depends on his cultural background, level of involvement, and expectations.

For the deceased’s kin the arrival of Western tourists and government officials guarantees a successful ceremony and an increase in prestige. As Volkman remarks (1990: 107), the deceased’s family “displays” ministers, as ministerial attendance is a proof of the family’s connection with the state, but, at the same time, it displays to the ministers its “native culture.” The alleged “original” Toraja culture is, in fact, the outcome of a process of commoditization; however, this “commodity” is highly appreciated both by guests and by tourists. The sale of the local culture helps the Toraja both to strengthen their identity and to raise their status in the ethnic hierarchy in Sulawesi and Indonesia.

Local guides who take tourists to funeral ceremonies share the success of the ceremony organizers, even if they have no relationship with them, as they act as go-betweens and feel themselves as representatives of Toraja traditions. Through their work they are transforming cultural values into

professional success and profit. Government officers display themselves and radiate “the power of the state” (Volkman 1990: 107). When they deliver a speech (in Indonesian) they take on an active role in the ceremony and add a new element to it. Both the language and the content of their speeches have a political meaning: the content conveys the regime’s ideological values while the use of the Indonesian language stresses ethnical and political hierarchies and the submission of local cultures to Javanese power.

Western tourists come to the Toraja highlands in search of exoticism; their gaze is a nonmaterial consumption of places and events chosen as symbols of Otherness (Scarduelli 1998: 155–159). They are in search of a “land elsewhere” because they need it as a background for their experiences. Their basic experience is “to be there.” A trip to an exotic paradise is a social ritual for the American, European, and Japanese middle class; a long-distance trip is a status symbol which enhances social prestige. The remoteness and “authenticity” of the “otherness” are highly appreciated and give a traveller more prestige: the “trophy” brought back and displayed to friends is more valuable. Toraja funerals are deemed to be a “primitive” ceremony, a “real” event, not just a fake performance like Tahitian or Balinese dances. Tourists appreciate them because they are not a commodity for mass consumption but luxury goods.

Conclusion

One of the main facets of the globalization process is the huge increase in the stream of Western tourists flowing into non-Western countries. The vast majority of tourists are attracted by exotic paradises but ethnic tourism has also increased in the last few decades, as many travellers seek contact with “untouched” cultures. “Untouched” cultures do not exist and never did. There do still exist marginal and remote cultures, barely influenced by the West but the arrival of tourists triggers a chain reaction. The tourist gaze gives rise to processes of reshaping, remoulding, even of reinvention of local cultures because contact with alien visitors leads natives not only to recover traditions but also to reflect upon them and adapt them to the new context. As a consequence, ethnic identities are both strengthened and modified.

The recovery of the traditions often takes the form of a representation wherein ceremonies, rituals, and dances are staged for an alien audience. In this case reinvention of local cultures turns into

commoditization. Such a process involves Toraja as well as many other peripheral cultures of the Indonesian archipelago. Among the Toraja *tongkonan*, *tau tau*, and funerals are being transformed into commodities for the aesthetic consumption of Western and Indonesian tourists. I witnessed similar processes of transformation both in South Nias, especially in Bawomataluo village (1986, 1998), and in Alor (1998).

The objectification of Toraja culture has been widely discussed (see Volkman 1984, 1990; Adams 1997, 1998). However, a peculiar aspect of this process has been overlooked. I mean the involvement of Christian churches and local state agencies in the funeral ceremonies. Funerals have significant economic implications because their organization, in particular the purchase of buffaloes to be slaughtered, is very expensive. The distribution of the meat, which is of great social importance, has undergone radical changes due to the intrusion of church and state. A part of the meat is put up for auction, another part is allotted to churches and public agencies. Funerals are also a business for tourist agencies, both local and international. The Toraja dead have become a resource for many economic and political entities, each of which takes its share of real or symbolic meat.

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