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Adams/Art as Politics

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NB: Illustrations have been deleted to decrease file size.
Some researchers are lured by distant, palm-fringed island beach communities; others are enticed by bustling urban centers; but in my case it was the high tropical mountains of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, homeland of an ethnic group known as the Sa’dan Toraja. (See Map 1.) Ever since my first undergraduate literary encounters with Sa’dan Toraja “death cults” and ornately carved Toraja houses, I had been captivated by this Christian enclave ensconced in a predominantly Muslim nation. I soon discovered that I was not the only one intrigued by the Sa’dan Toraja, for after only a cursory review of the anthropological literature I learned that a dozen anthropologists and thousands of European tourists had preceded me to this once-remote region. Wondering how this outsider attention had affected Sa’dan Toraja self-conceptions, I set off for Tana Toraja Regency in April of 1984 as a young graduate student on a Fulbright Fellowship. My intention was to spend twenty months studying ethnic and artistic change among the Sa’dan Toraja, especially in the context of Christian conversion, modernization, and tourism. I did not realize at the time that those twenty months would extend into two decades of visits and research on topics ranging from Toraja carving and “touristification,” to local engagements with nationalism, to current-day Toraja responses to the ongoing threat of religious and ethnic violence.

Prior to my first voyage to Indonesia, I had spent my early years of graduate school immersed in the anthropological literature on the Toraja and their Indonesian neighbors. From several months of anticipatory map-gazing, I knew that the Sa’dan Toraja were an Indonesian hinterland group, based in the rugged mountains near the center of the orchid-shaped island of Sulawesi, about 900 miles from Indonesia’s Java-based capital of Jakarta. Of the hundreds of ethnic groups comprising the world’s fourth largest nation, the Sa’dan Toraja were a relatively small minority group, number-
ing just over 338,000. Their neighboring ethnic groups, the Bugis and Makassarese, were much larger and had long ago developed powerful Muslim kingdoms in the lowlands of southern Sulawesi. The Bugis were celebrated seafarers, with satellite settlements along the shores of many eastern Indonesian islands. In contrast, the landlocked Toraja resided in isolated mountaintop hamlets and were only fully unified in the twentieth century, following the arrival of Dutch colonial administration. In the months prior to my departure for Indonesia, I voraciously consumed anthropological, historical, and popular accounts of the Sa’dan Toraja and was anxious to begin my own study of Toraja transformations in the age of tourism and artistic commodification.

I had also devoted several years to learning Indonesian. In the summer of 1983, I made my first trip to Indonesia to study advanced Indonesian at a university on the island of Java. That experience offered me initial glimpses of how other Indonesians imagined the Sa’dan Toraja. My Javanese hosts and acquaintances frequently questioned me about my intentions to conduct research in Tana Toraja—as an anthropologist, didn’t I know that there wasn’t any culture (kebudayaan, BI) there? If I was truly interested in culture, these Javanese acquaintances advised me, I should stay on Java or go to Bali. Toraja was a backwards land of black magic and head-hunters. Rather than rerouting me, however, their comments made me all the more curious about this denigrated “hinterland” people.

When I finally arrived in the South Sulawesi capital of Makassar the following year, I was equipped with a thick bundle of research clearance letters, a portable typewriter (laptops were still virtually unknown), and a suitcase weighted with a few classic ethnographies and the token escapist novel recommended by one of my graduate advisors. Informally billed as the “Gateway to Torajaland” by English-language guidebooks, Makassar was, in 1984, a bustling, predominantly Muslim port city with an ever-growing core of modern government buildings and luxury hotels. Even in the narrow, dusty seaside streets of the old town, where one could momentarily imagine being transported back a hundred years to the days of Dutch colonialism, the contrast between the old and the new, between impoverishment and affluence, was palpable. As rickety bicycle bells chimed and car horns wailed, sweaty, bare-chested pedicab drivers threaded their way between polished black BMWs and exhaust-spewing Kijang minivans stuffed with passengers. Eighteenth-century buildings, crumbling and shuttered, abutted the marble facades of boutiques selling knock-off
Gucci shoes and handbags. Glittering gold necklaces and enormous gem-encrusted rings beckoned from the windows of the largely Chinese-run jewelry shops. In the quieter late afternoons and evenings, beneath these barricaded windows a few lepers and tattered homeless families could be found dozing on cardboard boxes.

During the midday bustle, however, the uneven edges of the dusty streets and alleyways hosted a cross section of humanity: uniformed schoolgirls strolling arm in arm, harried-looking businessmen in starched batik shirts, young boys zipping between doorways, wizened Malay men in frayed black-velvet pici (skull caps), and bespectacled Chinese grandmothers perched on wooden stools in front of family-run shops. Occasionally, the smell of frying fish and the beat of Indonesian pop music drifted from the residential second-story windows, while laundry fluttered on bamboo poles extended from balconies overhead. At certain street corners, pedestrians wove around clusters of vibrantly painted pedicabs that cradled slumbering drivers. At other intersections, makeshift vending stands displayed cigarettes, Indomie-brand instant noodles, small bundles of tea, sugar, MSG packets, and other daily necessities. Periodically, shouted greetings of “Hello, Mister!” would punctuate the hum of motorcycle engines and cassette music, announcing the emergence of foreign tourists from one of the dusty artifact shops or wandering through the tangle of cars, coconut vendors, bicycles, and motorcycles. In these earlier days, however, tourists exploring old-town Makassar were still somewhat of a rarity: most foreign travelers arrived in town on late afternoon flights, stayed the night at an outlying hotel, and boarded the bus to the Toraja highlands early the next morning, never venturing down to the bustling port and the older section of town.

Although dominated by Makassarese and Bugis, by 1984 Makassar already hosted a sizable and growing population of Toraja immigrants. Toraja adolescents and younger adults had come to pursue higher education or seek employment as domestic help, carpenters, drivers, and hotel workers. A variety of business and bureaucratic posts in Makassar were also held by more established Torajas. While waiting for local research clearance, I spent my first week in Makassar interviewing urban Toraja scholars, chatting with teenaged Toraja maids in my hotel, and savoring every haphazard contact I made with these uplanders. After years of graduate school in drizzly Seattle, I also struggled to adjust to the exhausting and exhaust-filled equatorial heat and dust of Makassar. I quickly came to relish the Indone-
sian tradition of afternoon naps and took daily refuge under the creaking fan in my darkened budget hotel room. While fending off the persistent fleets of mosquitoes hovering overhead, I indulged in the luxury of escaping to the relatively familiar eighteenth-century English world of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. For that hour each afternoon, I reveled in not having to think and speak in Indonesian, ultimately emerging from my cinder-block room replenished and ready to face my late afternoon and early evening errands.

After siesta time, as the sinking sun began to cast scarlet streaks, and as the dusk air grew heavy with the smell of smoldering household trash, Makassar gradually awoke. While the chanting of the evening call to prayer echoed from mosque loudspeakers, seaside food vendors set up their tented carts, complete with wooden benches and tables. Slowly, the hum of traffic and urban life began to pick up again. Motorcycles (some bearing entire families) roared down the dusty main boulevards; pedicab drivers hauling passengers, packages, and crying infants navigated the side alleys; and groups of teenaged boys ambled arm in arm by the city’s seaside esplanade, or gathered around the food vendors’ benches, where they savored steaming bowls of *coto Makassar* (a soup made of cow stomach innards, considered a local specialty), chicken soup, and desserts of hand-ground ice drenched in magenta syrup and jade green tapioca balls.

At first I ventured out to enjoy the refreshing nightly sea breezes and local delicacies in the lantern-lit food stalls by the bay, but soon found myself overwhelmed by the attention I was attracting as a Western female by herself. Thereafter, I whiled away my remaining nights in Makassar at my economy hotel, installed at one of the rattan tables in the palm-filled central courtyard, catching up in my journal or scribbling postcards depicting weathered Bugis sailing vessels to my anxious family in California. In a region where many people consider solitude a misfortune, it soon became apparent that the hotel staff pitied me. When other Toraja-bound tourists stopped at the hotel, they herded them towards my wobbly table, suggesting that they join me for some syrupy tea. Conveniently, these impromptu teas resulted in my first set of tourist interviews. On slower evenings, some of the younger Toraja staff would loiter at my table in between their rounds of depositing acrid mosquito coils in front of each of the occupied guest rooms. We bantered about boyfriends, exchanged English and Toraja vocabulary words, and they indulgently fielded my endless questions about Toraja carving villages.
After procuring the necessary permits and introductory letters from provincial government, museum, and university officials, I was finally able to depart for upland South Sulawesi. Having spent almost two weeks in Makassar, I was impatient to begin my research in earnest. Early one morning I boarded a Toraja bus and began the eight-and-a-half-hour journey to the highlands. As the bus bounced northward along the coast, I surveyed my surroundings. In front of me, dangling from the driver's rearview mirror was a miniature carving of a traditional Toraja ancestral house (*tongkonan*). About two inches tall, the three-dimensional wooden carving of a house on stilts was sloppily painted in black, red, yellow, and white and appeared to be a mass-produced tourist trinket. Even so, the trinket immediately brought to mind the photographs I had seen of Toraja houses embellished with elaborate geometric motifs and arched, sweeping roofs of layered bamboo. My eyes then wandered to the stickers that adorned the windshield. Most prominent was a palm-sized one of a fair-skinned Jesus Christ, arms extended around a cutaway rectangle displaying a faded black-and-white photograph of the driver. The image of Christ cradling the driver’s portrait floated on a sky-blue background and the Indonesian

**Figure 1.** A Toraja bus with a miniature carved *tongkonan* in the windshield.
inscription at the bottom of the sticker read “My life is in your hands, Jesus” (Hidupku di tanganmu Yesus, BI). Next to it a sticker displayed the bold letters “CHiPs” over a grinning photograph of Hollywood actor Eric Estrada.8

As I was to learn, these three embellishments mirrored three enduring themes in contemporary Toraja identity—themes that form the core of this book. The miniature carving of the tongkonan embodies the first aspect of Toraja identity: Toraja traditions, ritual, descent, and rank generally center on the ancestral home. Moreover, the term tongkonan alludes not only to a physical structure, but to the entire kinship group tied to the building’s founding ancestor. In recent years images of the tongkonan have been replicated in guidebooks, postcards, and trinkets, and the structure has been heralded as the quintessential symbol of Toraja ethnicity. Given the current-day propagation of tongkonan imagery, I tend, for the sake of simplicity, to use the term tongkonan to refer to this sort of architectural structure, rather than as an exclusive term for a traditional edifice inseparable from a kin group. However, as we shall see, even in its newer forms, the tongkonan is fundamentally linked to Toraja identity and, in the context of the dramatic changes that have transpired over the past two decades, the tongkonan has become a focal point for new statements about their place in the region and the world at large.

The Jesus sticker evokes the second key aspect of contemporary Toraja identity: Christianity. The Dutch Gereformeerde Zendingsbond, an independent missionary society within the Protestant Church,9 began proselytizing activities in the Sa’dan Toraja region in 1913. As Hetty Nooy-Palm observed, “[a]lthough in 1950 less than 10% of the population had become Christians, the influence of the mission, because of its leading role in education and health services, was far in excess of what this statistic might suggest” (1979:9). Despite a slow conversion rate initially, the number of Torajas embracing Christianity jumped in the 1940s and again in the 1960s.10 By 1983, when I was planning my first trip to Tana Toraja, roughly 80 percent of the Toraja residing in Tana Toraja Regency identified themselves as Christians.11 For many, Christian ideology and idiom form an integral dimension of Toraja identity. Moreover, Torajas’ reputation as a Christian enclave in a predominantly Muslim country is firmly engraved in the minds of most Indonesians.12 With almost 90 percent of Indonesia’s population identifying with the Islamic faith, and in the wake of recent Muslim-Christian violence in the nearby Poso region as well as church bombings
in Makassar, most Torajas are conscious of their vulnerability as a Christian minority.

Finally, the CHiPs sticker suggests the third major theme in Toraja identity: a growing orientation towards the national and international world. Since the 1960s, as the Sa’dan Toraja population grew and the land available for farming dwindled, the lack of economic opportunities in the highlands began to drive some Torajas to seek wage labor away from the homeland, a process known in Indonesia as merantau (BI). Widespread in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, merantau involves temporarily leaving one’s homeland to seek fortune and prestige in new locales. Merantau is perhaps the most vital fact of contemporary life in Toraja villages. Today, many Torajas work for multinational mining, lumber, and oil companies in Kalimantan, West Papua, and Malaysia. Especially for poorer, lower-status Toraja migrants, the possibility of transforming cash wages earned in these distant locales into new status in the homeland has been particularly alluring. Returning periodically to the homeland for funerals and prolonged visits, these migrant Torajas often invest their wages in ritual displays, consumer goods, and refurbished homes that will bolster their local prestige. Moreover, they also bring home tastes, values, and experiences from the wider world.

Rural electrification programs, begun in the 1980s, in tandem with money from out-migration, cash cropping, and tourism, have made television sets commonplace in Toraja villages. Most nights, in 1984 and 1985, as dusk settled on the rural rice-farming and carving hamlet in which I lived, villagers crowded my Toraja host family’s living room floor in front of the only TV in the hamlet, to watch national Indonesian programming and American shows, such as the then-popular CHiPs, Little House on the Prairie, and The Brady Bunch. By the mid-1990s, most village households had their own television sets and my occasional evening walks along country roads in Tana Toraja were illuminated by the distinctive blue glow flickering through the slatted windows of rural homes. While much government programming was designed to reinforce nationalist sensibilities, television shows prompted a variety of reflections and conversations among the audience. Unlike most U.S. citizens, who watch American-made programming almost exclusively, Toraja families were offered ample visions of foreign cultures via the imported dramas and situation comedies. American and Australian shows depicting “modern” urban family life, Indonesian cultural programs showcasing the dances and traditions of different ethnic
groups, MTV, and nightly news reports of religious and ethnic tensions in and beyond Indonesia further nourished Torajas’ ongoing reflections on their ethnic, national, religious, rank, and class identities, as we shall see in future chapters.

Growing numbers of young Torajas also became increasingly exposed to national Indonesian values as a result of Indonesia’s growing emphasis on compulsory education in the 1980s and 1990s. Required curriculum in citizenship and Indonesian history actively reinforced the already sturdy allegiance of Toraja youth to the nation. Younger school-aged village children I knew also looked forward to periodic scouting events. These events featured weekend athletic activities, community development service projects, and various educational and character-building events. Although part of the international scouting movement, the mission of the Indonesian scouting organization is explicitly oriented towards nation-building: scouting education is “directed towards a new, just, peaceful and prosperous Indonesian community based on the National ideology.”

Torajas’ ongoing reassessments of their relations to the nation and the world were fueled not only by television, classroom lessons, and scouting exercises, but also through direct encounters with foreign tourists. In the 1980s and 1990s, mounting numbers of foreign tourists arrived in Tana Toraja Regency, toting not only tour books and cameras, but images of who the Toraja were supposed to be. Those Toraja who worked in the tourist sector or resided in the more frequently visited areas of the Sa’dan River valley were increasingly obliged to grapple with these tourism-based images of their identity, images which did not always mesh with their own self-conceptions.

INVESTIGATING IDENTITY

This book is broadly concerned with the ways in which the Toraja have been negotiating three dimensions of identity (drawn from indigenous traditions, derived from Christianity, and culled from increasing engagement with the national and international worlds) over the past two decades, both for themselves and for outsiders. The book will explore the dynamics of Toraja identity and the place of artistic imagery in conveying different conceptions of that identity. I am interested in examining the ways in which Toraja individuals and groups draw on their artistic objects in order to proj-
pect particular dimensions of their identity. I am further interested in how various Toraja individuals draw on these artistic objects, and narratives about them, to navigate their relationships with others. Such relationships, as I will illustrate, are often enmeshed in social inequalities. Central to Toraja discussions and articulations of meanings of their artistic symbols are ideas about interpersonal relationships, be they between humans and the divine, humans and the environment, elite Torajas and descendants of slaves, Christian Torajas and their Muslim neighbors, or relationships between hinterland Toraja and their nation. In short, this book explores how art is entwined with what some have termed “identity politics,” and with how art objects can constitute sites for the articulation and negotiation of various hierarchical identities and relations. My emphasis here is not so much on art objects and the marketplace as it is on the exercise of meaning. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how different groups attempt to exercise control over the shifting significance of key objects in Toraja culture.

My perspective on the intersections between art, identity, and the rise and decline of tourism in Tana Toraja is grounded in many years of field research in the highlands. During my initial twenty-month research period (1984–1985) and on subsequent visits (in 1987, 1989, 1991, 1995, 1996, and 1998) I resided with a Toraja family and drew on the traditional anthropological technique of participant observation. I apprenticed myself to a respected carver, attended and documented Toraja rituals, local government and tourism planning meetings, Toraja Church functions, tourist presentations, and local guide training sessions. I also conducted open-ended interviews with carvers, souvenir sellers, local community leaders, church officials, tourism industry figures, hoteliers, guides, and tourists.

During the earlier phases of my research, my primary language of inquiry was Indonesian. In Tana Toraja, I studied the Sa’dan Toraja language with a patient Rantepao high school teacher who had previously tutored various foreign missionaries. My Toraja host father also offered me tips and translations of basa to minaa, the high Toraja form of speech used by aluk to dolo (Toraja traditional religion) priests in their rites. Despite these language lessons, my fluency was greater in Indonesian. Although my later interviews were peppered with Sa’dan Toraja phrases and expressions, I still favored the national language. Fortunately, with the exception of the very elderly, by the 1980s most Torajas were bilingual. Moreover, Torajas tended to use the Indonesian language in more formal settings, such as
government meetings, church planning gatherings, and when members of other ethnic groups were present. Since the realms I was researching (tourism, church and government planning, interethnic encounters, etc.) involved spending time in these kinds of settings, interactions were generally in Indonesian. All italicized terms in the book are Sa’dan Toraja, unless they are followed by the abbreviation “BI,” designating Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language).

Between participant observation and the tireless efforts of my Toraja friends and teachers (who for twenty years have attempted to school me in what it means to be Sa’dan Toraja in contemporary Indonesia), the images I originally had of Toraja identity gradually eroded. These preconceptions were replaced by an appreciation of the complexity and diversity of the “Sa’dan Toraja.” A Toraja saying underscores this theme of local cultural diversity: “Each village has its own ritual, each has its way of tearing the banana leaf” (Pantan tondok pantan aluk, pantan senga’ serekan bane). As this adage conveys, Toraja ritual and behavioral practices are far from uniform. Taking this diversity of Toraja experiences and lifeways into account, I chose to focus on the heavily touristed valley regions of subdistricts Sanggalangi’ and Rantepao in the 1980s and 1990s (see Map 2), an area that had been studied prior to the advent of tourism by the Dutch anthropologist Hetty Nooy-Palm. This area was a logical choice, as I was particularly interested in those Toraja who constitute what Andrew Causey (2003) has termed “tourates,” local peoples whose lives are touched by or entwined with tourism. With the exception of a few articles exploring tourism and its ramifications in the Toraja highlands (cf. K. M. Adams 1993, 1995; Crystal 1977; Volkman 1990; Yamashita 1994), Toraja tourates have not yet received focused attention. As these people are frequently involved in projecting to outsiders the imagery of what constitutes the broader category of “the Toraja,” they merit closer attention.

Moreover, despite an array of scholarly publications on various dimensions of Sa’dan Toraja life and beliefs, the interrelations between Toraja material culture and identity politics remain underexplored. This book addresses how, with the rise and fall of tourism and in the current shadow of interreligious violence, Toraja art has operated as a vehicle for articulating and navigating both internal and external relationships. My point of departure in this book is Robert Plant Armstrong’s (1971) conception of art as an “affecting presence.” As Armstrong observed, through the stories they embody, by way of their repeated appearances at significant events, or via
their associations with particular cultural codes, certain material objects become imbued with emotive force. I suggest here that precisely because they are “affecting presences,” these objects (and I would broaden this to cultural displays) become important to people’s identities. Not only do people from different ethnic, rank, class, or national backgrounds imbue the same object or cultural display with different meanings, but members of the same group can also “appreciate” the same object in varied ways. Art objects, therefore, can be ambiguous and multivalent: they are capable of carrying different meanings for different people. Furthermore, as peoples’ material circumstances and aspirations shift, or as new political and cultural scenarios emerge, the meanings of and peoples’ sensibilities to these objects shift as well. Often, as this book illustrates, these emotionally charged art objects and cultural displays become sites of struggle, with different groups attempting to exercise control over their changing meanings. I argue that by their very ability to maintain ambiguity and carry multiple meanings, the arts are central to intergroup sensibilities and struggles, and may surreptitiously effect changes in intergroup perceptions.

I will revisit these themes, but let me first return to that bus journey to the Sulawesi highlands, when I first got a glimpse of Toraja sensibilities concerning their relationships to others, and of how the presence of those “others” sparked new reflections on what constitutes Toraja identity.

MAP 2. Tana Toraja and Upland South Sulawesi. Map drawn by C. Thresher.
IMAGES OF OUTSIDERS’ IDENTITIES

The lurching Toraja bus continued its journey north, crossing fertile lowland rice fields dotted with wooden Bugis houses raised on stilts. At Pare Pare, a tin-roofed Bugis harbor town, the bus left the coast and began its winding climb inland towards the highlands. We roared through scorched grassy foothills, past picturesque villages and scattered rice fields, palm groves, and plots planted with corn and tapioca. All along the road, bananas, papaya, and jackfruit grew in luxuriant profusion. At various points, wooden stalls piled with fruit and vegetables lined the thoroughfare, where travelers stopped to buy treats for the families they were visiting. We were soon traversing an inland plain, where I caught glimpses of women sitting in the shade under Bugis platform houses, weaving silken sarongs on backstrap looms. Our bus passed through two larger Bugis towns, Rappang and Enrekang, where small shops, mosques, and pesantrens (BI; Islamic religious schools) fringed tidy tree-lined streets.

As we left Enrekang, the road narrowed and the bus began to slowly wind its way upward into the mountains. Following the twists and turns of the Salu Mataallo River, we bounced through potholes and inched past muddy stretches of the road where the wet-season rains had swept away much of the pavement. We climbed higher into the limestone cliffs, still following the river, now racing with whitewater in the canyon far beneath us. Periodically, the bus stopped to deposit passengers near clusters of weathered wooden houses that seemed to cling to the cliff sides, just inches from the sheer ravine. In some of these villages, sturdy, sarong-clad women bearing bananas or baskets of palm-sugar sweets and sticky rice treats flocked to the bus, making speedy transactions through the open windows. At other villages, primary school children smartly turned out in starched blue-and-white uniforms waved to our bus from narrow cliffside footpaths above us. As we wound our way ever upward, alongside wind-whipped precipices that seemed inhospitable to anything but mountain goats, I felt as though I were turning the pages of a book of Chinese paintings—around each bend was a view even more spectacular than the last.24

As the terrain grew more rugged and the air cooled, the Toraja passengers became livelier. Ever since our departure from Makassar, I could decode murmurings about “that young white turis who, poor thing, is traveling alone.” Behind me, a dignified-looking Toraja man was explaining to his elderly, betel-nut chewing companion why it was that tourists came to
Tana Toraja: “They come to see our traditions. Tana Toraja is not the same as their area—we have aluk (Toraja traditional religion), something they don’t have.” To this someone added, “Yes, we’re known abroad because of our traditions (adat, BI^{25}), graves, and houses. They say our countryside is pretty, too, eh?” A gregarious middle-aged Toraja woman offered her opinion: “Also because we’re good-hearted people. Toraja is safe—if tourists walk around, we don’t pester them. But if they go to Bugis lands, they’re sure to be bothered.” I couldn’t help smiling at this last comment, reflecting on my evenings of self-imposed confinement in my Makassar hotel.

Eavesdropping on these speculations about the touristic appeal of their homeland, I was struck by how the Toraja had hit upon many of the reasons that Tana Toraja had appealed to me as a research site.^{26} Although I had many scholarly motives for selecting the Tana Toraja highlands, I, too, was drawn by the spectacular tour book imagery of artfully constructed traditional houses embellished with intricate geometric motifs. The photographs I had seen of limestone cliffs studded with tombs and balconies bearing haunting carved effigies of the dead had intrigued me, as had ethnographic reports describing elaborate, pageantry-filled funeral rituals which entailed months and even years of planning. Coming from a culture that avoided the topic of death, I was enchanted by the prospect of living in a place where people apparently recognized and accepted death as yet another phase of life, to be embraced and even celebrated. The postcard images of the Toraja highland’s spectacular scenery, rugged and majestic mountains with lushly terraced wet rice fields and bamboo groves, and the image of Tana Toraja as a relatively safe destination for a female anthropologist working alone, were the icing on the cake for me. Like the tourists who were drawn to Tana Toraja, I, too, had been at least partially mobilized by a set of place images already well on their way to being commodified. Unlike the tourists, however, I was interested not only in understanding the Sa’dan Toraja, but also in studying tourists (just as the Torajas on my bus appeared to be doing).

Even in 1984, tourists were hardly foreign to the Toraja. Both international and domestic tourism to Tana Toraja had begun in earnest a few decades prior to my arrival. Tourism in South Sulawesi cannot be disentangled from the history of ethnic and religious relations on the island. During the 1950s and 1960s, tourists were rare in the Sulawesi highlands: Bugis-Makassarese Muslim rebellions in South Sulawesi, coupled with poor roads, made travel to the Christianized Sa’dan Toraja region challeng-
ing and sometimes dangerous. It was not until the late 1960s, after the South Sulawesi Muslim insurgencies were quashed, that the first adventurer-tourists began to travel to Tana Toraja (Crystal 1977). Hiring cars and drivers in Makassar, these intrepid travelers embarked on twelve- to fourteen-hour journeys to the highlands in search of people who had been described by Bugis and Makassarese hired drivers as “pagans” who “celebrate death” with “funeral parties.”

The trickle of visitors swelled in the early 1970s when Toraja entrepreneurs, exposed to Bali’s touristic success, began to recognize the potential of their homeland. Several of these local entrepreneurs were soon producing articles and guidebooks about Sa’dan Toraja culture (for example, Marampa’ 1974 [1970], Salombe’ 1972). Highlighting the Toraja traditional houses, rice barns, funeral rituals, and carved wooden effigies of the dead, as well as the area’s spectacular natural beauty, these modest booklets quickly found an audience. By 1972 the Indonesian Directorate General of Tourism issued a master plan for developing the Indonesian tourist industry, citing Tana Toraja as one of the major target areas. The following year a European TV broadcast of a documentary produced by Ringo Starr featured a Toraja aristocrat’s funeral ritual and drew the attention of still more off-the-beaten-track tourists.

By 1974 the Indonesian government issued its Second Five Year Plan, which actively advocated the promotion of outer island destinations, and its implementation ultimately prompted still more travel to the Toraja highlands. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, a growing body of touristic and anthropological literature about the Sa’dan Toraja further increased the flow of tourists. Tana Toraja fully blossomed in the national (and international) touristic consciousness in 1984, while I was conducting my fieldwork. At this time, Joop Ave, then Indonesia’s director general of tourism, declared Tana Toraja as the “touristic primadona of South Sulawesi” and Makassar the “Gateway to Tana Toraja.” These declarations came just a few years after an image of traditional Toraja architecture appeared on Indonesia’s commonly used 5,000-rupiah banknote. For many Torajas I encountered, these events were sources of tremendous ethnic pride, signaling a long-awaited boost in their cultural currency.

In the mid-1980s, when mass tourism was thriving, many Torajas had begun to construct elaborate and often quite insightful explanations for the tourist pilgrimages to their land. Intrinsic to these explanations were reassessments of their own culture’s merits vis-à-vis the cultures of out-
A number of the local elders I spoke with surmised that foreigners came to Toraja seeking traditions (adat, BI) that were somehow lacking in their own cultures. For some rural Torajas I encountered in the 1980s, the fact that European voyagers traveled thousands of miles to see their culture suggested that they might have something Europeans envy, something worthy of pride. As one well-traveled Rantepao intellectual told me:

I can see now that Tana Toraja is a Shangri-la, although I didn’t know this when I was younger. I just wanted to get out, to go to Europe and become a man of the world. But now the Europeans are coming here. They have heard that our culture and land are like no others.

Another Toraja elder proudly observed, “Tourists are discovering the truth of the Toraja saying ‘Once you have drunk the waters of the Sa’dan River, no other water satisfies you.’”

In these comments we glimpse how camera-clicking European audiences at Toraja rituals not only provided Toraja individuals with a new framework for viewing and evaluating their own way of life, but also stimulated them to rediscover their own cultural riches. After years of being denigrated by other Indonesian ethnic groups as primitive and lacking in culture, politically savvy Toraja began embracing tourist interest in them, using touristic celebrations of their culture to validate their ethnicity and to combat negative Indonesian representations. They hoped their efforts would ultimately reposition their group in the national hierarchy of ethnic groups. As Javanese, Sumatrans, and other Indonesians also began flocking to Tana Toraja in the 1980s and 1990s, Toraja ethnic pride flourished.

By the 1990s Tana Toraja’s status as Sulawesi’s touristic primadona was undeniable. Whereas in 1972 only 650 foreigners journeyed to Tana Toraja Regency, by the mid-1990s over 230,000 tourists were traveling to Tana Toraja annually. (See Table 1.) However, in 1998, when Indonesia plunged into a period of political and economic unrest, only 24,626 foreign tourists and 38,187 domestic tourists visited the region. In the post–September 11th world, ongoing Muslim-Christian violence in certain areas of Indonesia and the infamous October 2002 Bali discotheque bombing took a further toll on Toraja tourism.

The plummet in tourist visits has been potentially ruinous for the many Torajas tethered to tourism. In the 1980s and 1990s, livelihoods as tourist trinket carvers, tour bus drivers, waiters, and chambermaids seemed secure and enabled growing numbers of younger Torajas to remain in their
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Note: The data varied between offices. Domestic figures may be inflated due to inclusion of Torajas returning for ritual events.
homeland, but today this is no longer the case. Some Torajas are now beginning a new outward wave of migration, seeking employment in the mining and transport industries on distant islands, while others are turning their energies to local markets, attempting to revitalize domestic tourism, carving functional items for Indonesian consumers, and re-embarking on subsistence farming. For those tourism entrepreneurs remaining in the once tourist-dominated main Toraja town of Rantepao in the early 2000s, where shuttered hotels, abandoned Internet cafes, and dusty tourist shops recall more prosperous days, the return of tourist swarms remains a vibrant fantasy that continues to animate local actors and fuel relationships with outsiders. The remaining hoteliers in Rantepao routinely urge their guests to publicize Tana Toraja when back in their homelands, and some of the once-active local guides relay periodic messages to me and others with ties to Tana Toraja, notifying us that Toraja is “safe” and gently entreating us to send them customers.

Much of the early literature on tourism tended to make global generalizations about tourism’s impact, hailing it as a positive force or deriding it as a destructive industry prone to producing sociocultural and environmental devastation (Greenwood 1978; Nash 1978). Indeed, a visitor might point to the Toraja dance performers and shoddily crafted tongkonan trinkets at the Makassar Golden Hotel and bemoan the touristic commercialization of traditional culture. But another visitor might cite Tana Toraja’s paved roads and enhanced telecommunications as evidence of tourism’s benefits. However, as researchers have more recently emphasized, tourism is neither uniformly a blessing nor blight. Rather, it is a complex and capricious industry, part and parcel of globalization, with multiple ramifications and widely variable implications for different members of the same community. Moreover, in approaching tourism as an outside force striking a culture, earlier researchers tended to overlook the ways in which tourism had become a part of the local culture. In keeping with these concerns, rather than spotlighting the “good,” the “bad,” or the “ugly” impacts of tourism, this book explores the ways in which tourism and tourist arts are entwined with cultural identity and with the crafting of new sensibilities about a local community’s place in the world.

In addition to tourists, the Bugis and Makassarese comprise categories of outsiders with whom Torajas frequently contrast themselves. For centuries Toraja identity has been juxtaposed with that of their lowland Muslim Bugis and Makassarese neighbors. Toraja mythology and history embody
a great deal of ambivalence towards these peoples. While occasional cooperation, intermarriage, and trade occurred between highland and lowland elites, there were also terrifying periods of Bugis-Makassarese slave raiding and invasion. Bigalke (1981, 1983, 2005) is careful to underscore that the relationship between these groups was much more subtle than one of lowlander exploitation of highlanders, demonstrating that the coffee and slave trades were often based on a collaboration between lowland and highland elites. Many contemporary Torajas, however, view Muslim lowlander groups as the historic raiders and themselves as the prey. Such conceptualizations were probably cemented in the early years of Indonesian independence when a Muslim rebellion was waged in South Sulawesi between 1952 and 1965. The resulting violence and unrest in the province, as well as rumors of forced conversions to Islam in nearby areas, greatly intensified Christian Torajas’ fear and suspicion of all lowlander Muslims.

As my Toraja bus companions’ comments indicated, tourism in the 1980s and 1990s constituted a new arena for this age-old ethnic rivalry. Whereas in the past the sought-after resources were Toraja coffee and slaves, today they are tourists. For centuries the Bugis dominated the coastal areas, controlling Toraja access to the outside world. Tourism, however, brought with it the potential to shift this balance of power. Torajas’ newfound touristic celebrity appeared to be earning them an esteemed position in the Indonesian hierarchy of ethnic groups. As my Toraja friends noted gleefully in 1984 and 1985, the word Toraja (not Bugis or Makassarese) was now emblazoned on tourist maps of the region. Moreover, their designation as South Sulawesi’s touristic primadona symbolically demoted the Bugis-Makassarese city of Makassar to the status of a doorway. Most important of all, the outside world was snubbing their Muslim rivals, preferring to visit the Toraja highlands. Likewise, my bus companions proudly declared that foreign tourists appreciate that Torajas, in contrast to Bugis and Makassarese, are not “harassers,” which suggests emergent sensibilities about ethnicity. Implicit in this claim is the novel idea that an apt new yardstick for measuring ethnic superiority is the host groups’ behavior vis-à-vis tourists.

Themes of rivalry between Torajas and their Bugis and Makassarese neighbors emerge not only in the context of tourism but also in various Toraja interpretations and manipulations of the recent anthropological fascination with their culture. As I soon discovered, anthropologists (like tourists, missionaries, and Bugineses) have their own place in the Toraja typology of outsiders. That anthropologists constitute another category of
outsiders became clear to me on that first jostling bus, when I finally began to engage in conversation with my fellow passengers. I had been eavesdropping for some time as several older men mercilessly teased the quiet Toraja student sitting next to me about his “tourist girlfriend” and the “long-nosed” children we would produce. As he squirmed and the old men chortled, I realized it was time to reveal that I was neither a “turis” nor a girlfriend, but a graduate student coming to conduct research on Toraja culture. Nervously clearing my throat, I caught the attention of the men across the aisle and chirped in an awkward mixture of Indonesian and Torajan, “I’m not here for romance or relaxation. I’m here to study Toraja traditions.”

After an awkward moment of recovery, one older Toraja man buoyantly declared, “Oh, she’s an anthropologist!” Another woman called out to those sitting nearby, “She can understand us . . . .” The aisle next to me suddenly filled with people offering clove cigarettes and commentary. “You anthropologists are wise to come here instead of staying with the Bugis. Their culture is not so interesting, and besides, they’re not to be trusted. . . . There is a lot of culture in Tana Toraja—it is good you came here.”

This flood of comments soon had me musing about anthropologists as a prestige commodity in Tana Toraja. These passing thoughts were interrupted by a woman who began to tell me about the anthropologist who had once lived in her village. Was I going to study Toraja language, generously distribute gifts, take pages of notes at funeral rituals, and ask lots of questions about whether she could marry her mother’s brother’s son, as he had done? Was I going to go home afterwards and write a book? Would they be able to read it? This triggered additional tales of anthropologists who had lived in the ancestral villages of other passengers on the bus. It was evident that many had had either direct or indirect encounters with anthropologists. For these Toraja, “anthropologists” (antropolog or abli antropologi, BI) constituted a well-elaborated category of outsiders with a specific set of interests. Just as anthropologists had been studying Torajas, it seemed that Torajas had been studying anthropologists.

That Torajas also study the anthropological images of themselves was underscored by the query of the serious-faced college student sitting next to me. Ignoring the banter about the misadventures, escapades, and accomplishments of various anthropologists in Tana Toraja, he asked me intently, “Why are there so many anthropologists coming here? Anthropologists study primitive people, don’t they? Are we Toraja primitive?” I shifted awk-
wardly in my seat as it dawned on me that the various images sculpted and perpetuated by anthropologists helped to construct some of the most potent and enduring portraits of Toraja ethnic identity. Anthropologists’ audiences (and critics) are not only colleagues and students in distant universities, but also the people whose communities we study. Our images and the stereotypes surrounding our professional concerns are invariably consumed, digested, reworked, and at times rejected by those whose lives we strive to understand.45

Years later the image of that student still reverberates in my mind, especially in those moments when I find myself staring blankly at my keyboard, worrying over how to portray my Toraja friends and teachers in a fashion that they will find accurate. As chroniclers, translators, and interpreters of culture, anthropologists strive to offer nuanced, sensitive portrayals of the people with whom we have worked. Yet our experiences are invariably limited: our personal identities, as well as relationships, rivalries, and politics, can all color the portraits we paint.46 Ultimately, as my bus companion’s comment suggests, the images anthropologists craft have the potential to communicate and reverberate in perplexing and unanticipated ways.

In the late afternoon our dusty bus careened through the gateway arch that marked the entrance to Tana Toraja Regency. Atop the archway I was astonished to spy a replica of a carved tongkonan house, with the Indonesian inscription “Selamat Datang di Daerah Tana Toraja” (BI; Welcome to Tana Toraja Area). It seemed the iconization of the tongkonan was well under way. I was elated to be arriving in the land I had so long imagined and craned my neck to try to catch my first glimpse of a “real” tongkonan. I had somehow expected that once over the regency border, tongkonans would be popping up like mushrooms. But we bounced along a hilly plateau for another forty minutes, passing clove plantations, pine forests, and lush rice fields, without sighting a single tongkonan. I began to wonder—was the elaborately carved tongkonan replicated in anthropology books and tourist brochures an exaggeration? Instead of hundreds of tongkonans, did only a few carved tongkonans exist in the region? Both tourism and anthropology, after all, thrive on exotic imagery. Finally, I spotted my first tongkonan, an unassuming structure nestled at the edge of a verdant mountain valley. Following the now lazily flowing Sa’dan River, we passed boys bathing their water buffalos and men washing their trucks in the pebbly shallows of the river.
As the bus charged along, past corrugated tin-roofed villages, bamboo glens, and limestone outcroppings, I caught glimpses of still more tongkonans, and settled back into my seat feeling reassured.

Nearing dusk, our bus roared into its destination, the main Toraja town of Rantepao. Rantepao at that time was a dusty, hinterland town that initially conjured up images of the American Wild West, with its long wide main street and drifting tumbleweed plastic bags. Prominently situated in the center of Rantepao’s primary intersection, I spotted yet another tribute to the tongkonan: an aging, weed-choked, wooden statue of a carved tongkonan house poised atop a gigantic, elevated ceremonial feeding dish. The statue’s disrepair suggested that it predated tourism, and I made a mental note to find out about the impetus for its construction. Finally, just past the statue, we lurched to a stop, kitty-corner from the central market. Through my window I could see a cluster of younger men wearing denim jeans and T-shirts. They were loitering at the entrance to the marketplace, hoisting their plaid sarongs (BI; long rectangles of cloth sewn in a tube and worn by many rural Indonesians) up over their shoulders to keep off the early evening chill. Mountain villagers, balancing bamboo tubes of unsold palm wine, were beginning the trudge homeward towards the rugged hills that frame the Rantepao valley. A hand-painted banner advertising an Indian movie fluttered from the market’s second-story balcony. Beneath it, a man toting a bamboo six-pack of squealing piglets was pausing to chat with a friend.

On the bus the remaining Toraja passengers pulled on their sweaters, straightened their clothes, and began gathering up their belongings. As my neighboring seatmates unloaded their gift bundles of rice sweets and snake-skinneed salak fruit, I remained anchored to my seat. Now that I was finally in Tana Toraja, I was unsure where to head for the night and anxiously scanned my notebook, searching for the addresses of the two inexpensive losmen (BI; small inns) that had been recommended to me. My frenzied page-flipping was interrupted by a fellow passenger, who offered to lead me to the “losmen where all the anthropologists have stayed.” Relieved and intrigued, I dutifully followed him down Rantepao’s main thoroughfare, past the marketplace where the evening peanut vendors were laying out tidy stacks of peanuts on their rattan mats and where pancake vendors were setting up their lantern-lit carts. We passed clusters of young men sharing conversation and clove-scented cigarettes, eventually arriving at Losmen
Lina, a modest storefront inn. After several rings of the buzzer, the hotelier, a buoyant, balding man in his fifties, flung open the door and greeted my companion warmly. When he learned of my research plans, he raced to his bookshelf. Scooping up a copy of Terry Bigalke’s (1981) dissertation on Toraja history, he waved it in the air, proudly declaring that Bigalke always stayed at his inn. In fact, his son had accompanied Bigalke on his interviews and learned all about Toraja history, “a history he would never have learned, had it not been for Bigalke.” Smiling broadly, my host noted that he, too, had contributed to this “fine book” and showed me where his name appeared in the dissertation.

A few days later Losmen Lina’s location in the heart of Rantepao began to wear on me. Tiring of the ever-present engine roars and street noises, I moved to a quieter home-stay overlooking the rice fields at the edge of town. Relishing the relative tranquility of this out-of-the-way inn, I was taken aback when a local guide who had stopped by to visit me declared that “the great American anthropologist Eric Crystal once stayed at this very place.” From my preparatory readings, I knew that Crystal had been one of the first American anthropologists to conduct extensive research in

**Figure 2.** A tongkonan-styled statue in the middle of the main intersection in Rantepao.
Tana Toraja—in fact, I had devoured his writings but had not expected to be following so literally in his footsteps. As I spent the next few weeks registering at local governmental offices, Crystal’s name was routinely invoked. Upon discovering that I was an anthropology graduate student, one Toraja government bureaucrat’s response stood out: asking if I had ever met Dr. Crystal, he proceeded to tell me that Crystal’s writings about the Toraja had changed his life. He did not realize until he had read Crystal’s “book” how proud he should be of his Toraja ethnicity. With a broad grin, he declared, “Eric Crystal writes that ‘probably no other area mirrors the fundamentals of Southeast Asia as well as Tana Toraja.’” Later, I frequently encountered this gentleman at Regency planning meetings. When he perceived Toraja traditions to be under assault by externally introduced development proposals, he would often rise and offer the same Crystal quote as evidence for why things should be left as they were. Sometimes he invoked other Western anthropologists, occasionally supplementing Crystal’s words with a second quote drawn from Ruth Benedict’s Patterns of Culture (1934) concerning the ways in which elements of culture “intermix and intermingle.” As he would underscore, according to “anthropological wisdom,” disrupting one area of culture would invariably have repercussions for others. His persuasive argumentation often met with success. In short, my acquaintance actively drew on his knowledge of anthropological literature, astutely manipulating and displaying anthropological images, to throw up roadblocks to controversial new development policies.

A subtheme of this book thus concerns the ways in which Toraja individuals ingeniously draw on outsiders (be they anthropologists or tourists) in efforts to enhance their own local authority, prestige, or power. As this book illustrates, no longer can anthropologists and tourists imagine themselves as peripheral to local constructions of identity and power. My research findings challenge the all-too-common presumptions that tourism is imposed on passive and powerless peoples or that it invariably ushers in a loss of agency. As Amanda Stronza (2001:274) lamented in a recent review article on tourism scholarship, far too few studies of tourism have explored the idea that locals can play a role in what happens in their encounters with tourists and tourism. The artistic examples presented in this book illustrate that, in the face of tourism and anthropological celebrity, many Torajas continue to be active strategists and ingenious cultural politicians. For contemporary Toraja, not only their culture, but the
anthropologists and tourists they attract all serve as political symbols that can be drawn upon to enhance their position vis-à-vis their local adversaries. As I came to appreciate in Tana Toraja, anthropologists would do well to remember that our own positions in fieldwork situations are invariably entrenched in local discourses of tradition and power politics. Attempting to understand ethnicity in touristed locales, then, necessitates recognizing our own roles in the creation and articulation of such invariably politicized images of identity.

IDENTITY AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION

Clarification of the notions of “identity” and “identity negotiation” is important here. This book is concerned not only with individual identities, but also with rank, class, ethnic, and national identities. In the chapters that follow, I explore the ways in which these multiple dimensions of identity interact and come into play in artistic and touristic arenas. Over the past few decades anthropologists have engaged in numerous debates concerning the nature of identity. Older “primordialist” theories of ethnicity argued that ethnic identity emerges from basic and irreducible primordial inheritances and attachments. From this perspective, ethnicity is constructed in isolation and does not require contrasts with other groups. “Situationalists,” on the other hand, contended that ethnicity was not an irreducible given; rather, ethnic identity is socially created, coming into being in situations involving competition over scarce resources. More recent theorists have moved beyond the situationalist versus primordialist debate and share a concept of identity as a dynamic, ongoing process that is “politically contested and historically unfinished” (Clifford 1988:9). That is, identity is always in the process of being formulated, challenged, affirmed, rethought, and remade. Recent theories stress the dynamism of identity and the role that contrast sets—ideas about “them” versus “us”—play in shaping identities (for example, Kipp 1993; Norton 1988:9).

Recent writers such as Arjun Appadurai (1996) recognize that we/they sensibilities materialize not only when individuals and groups are pursuing economic, political, or emotional capital, but also when groups activate the symbols or “markers” of their differences to display values they attribute to themselves (as opposed to others they deem as somehow lacking in these areas). That is, the construction of group identities does not always
arise as a consequence of competition for wealth, power, or security (Appadurai 1996:14).

Much of this book highlights the ways in which various Torajas draw on their arts to articulate and navigate dimensions of ethnic, religious, rank, and national identities. In Tana Toraja in the 1980s and 1990s, people tended to frame and express their identities most often in these terms. Perhaps surprisingly for social scientists, “class” rarely emerged as an explicit theme. By class, I mean a social identity based on wealth, education, and job type, rather than on descent, an identity that links together segments of different ethnic groups across the nation. As in other parts of rural Indonesia, Torajas tend to recognize rank, ethnic, and religious differences far more easily than they do class differences.54 Rita Kipp has argued persuasively that Indonesian “class blindness” has been fostered by government policies that actively promote ethnic and religious identities, with the end result of obscuring the realities of class interests and biases in Indonesia (1993:121–122). Indonesia’s extensive government ministries devoted to religion, as well as the nation’s emphasis on ethnic arts and pageantry are, she argues, “about keeping class out of sight” (ibid.: 261).55

While class differences between Torajas certainly exist, consciousness of class identities remains rare. (There are, of course, some exceptions—urban Toraja intellectuals, a few politically oriented carvers, and certain university students schooled in the social sciences.) Moreover, broad sensibilities about shared class identities and class solidarity have yet to emerge. During the period of my fieldwork, I rarely heard the term “class” invoked in Tana Toraja. Rather, Torajas friends and acquaintances tended to frame their thoughts about differences in wealth and privilege in terms of either rank (a descent-based identity most frequently articulated by nobles) or in terms of “big people” (to kapua’) versus “ordinary people” (to biasa).56 Whereas class and rank tended to have somewhat overlapping constituencies in Tana Toraja, in recent decades opportunities for new sources of income and prestige (such as work in the tourism sector or church leadership roles) have challenged this overlay and created new tensions, as we shall see. In short, although not generally articulated as such, class issues are implicit in some of the struggles chronicled in this book. I have tried to remain faithful to Toraja terms and categories, but the theme of (obscured) class identities is important to keep in mind.

Finally, central to this book is the idea of “identity negotiation.” I use the expression “identity negotiation” to refer to the social processes whereby
various identities are articulated, asserted, challenged, suppressed, realigned, and co-opted. Clearly, identity can be negotiated and reframed via verbal means: through political oratory, pulpit sermons, and even everyday conversational exchanges. But, more subtly, identity can also be articulated, challenged, and co-opted nonverbally. Given these understandings of the concepts of identity and identity negotiation, I am arguing here that art is an underexplored yet important site for identity negotiation.

ART AS A VEHICLE FOR REFRAMING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The bus ride vignettes illustrate the salience of outsider images in the dialectical process of Toraja identity construction. This book is concerned with images. In particular, it is concerned with images of identity in both the figurative and material sense. In the chapters that follow, I explore the ways in which artistically embellished objects are entwined with identity politics, highlighting, in particular, the role of art in negotiating unequal relations between individuals and groups, between insiders and outsiders. Traditionally, researchers concerned with material culture and identity have tended to approach art as a mirror of the social relationships in the creator culture, rather than recognizing that people actively use art to articulate or reframe such relationships. Historically, the dominant trend was to delineate art’s passive function as an ethnic marker or to trace its evolution from a set of sacred icons to ethnic or national symbols. It is only recently that some cultural anthropologists have begun to suggest that art may play a more active role in intergroup sensibilities, telegraphing shifting cultural attitudes, embodying biographical memories, and constituting rather than simply mirroring social relations (Appadurai 1986; Graburn 1976; Hoskins 1998; Marcus and Myers 1995; MacClancy 1997; Phillips and Steiner 1999; Thomas 1991). Recent work by archaeologists has also stressed the “social life of things.” Archaeologist Timothy Earle (2004) has chronicled how Neolithic changes in social organization and the emergence of social hierarchy are materialized through “new media” such as housing, graves or other built landscapes, and lavish prestige objects. Although speech may effectively communicate ideologies in small-scale societies, Earle argues that other cultural genres are needed to create organizing social principles in larger, more hierarchical societies (Earle 2004:112, also see DeMarrais,
Gosden, and Renfrew 2005). Here, material culture becomes especially important because by virtue of its very physicality “it transparently represent[s] characteristics of scarcity or commonness, of foreignness or locality, of larger or smaller labor requirements, and of highly skilled or everyday abilities” (Earle 2004:112). In short, material culture is intimately tied to the expression of identity and social hierarchy. This book expands on this family of ideas. Through ethnographic examples I make the argument that art, as an “affecting presence” imbued with emotional force, provides a particularly apt arena for negotiating, reaffirming, and at times challenging asymmetrical social identities. As I suggest, precisely because of the polysemic quality of artistic objects, their ability to carry multiple meanings and maintain ambiguity, the arts may surreptitiously effect changes in intergroup perceptions.

In stating that art is an active ingredient in identity politics, it is not my intention to suggest that power resides in art as an immanent force. Rather, I advocate an understanding of material objects as vehicles for articulating ideas concerning contrasting sets of identities—what are often termed we/they relationships. Ward Keeler (1987:17), in references to shadow puppet shows in Java, has suggested that such cultural performances constitute a series of relationships (among performers, spectators, sponsors, and other categorical groups) that permit an integration of the art form with other types of relationships among members of that culture. I believe that such an approach can be productively applied to the analysis of material culture, particularly when the relationships under consideration are expanded beyond the local arena to encompass interethnic, national, and even international relations. The last instance includes those relations that are constructed through tourist encounters with Toraja art. Through emphasizing and unpacking the relationships constituted in artistic displays, I believe we can gain a richer understanding of art’s role in negotiating, challenging, and reaffirming the often unequal dynamics of inter- and intragroup relations.

**HUMAN AGENCY AND THE “ROMANCE OF RESISTANCE”**

In suggesting that art is actively used by individuals and groups to negotiate asymmetrical social identities, a brief discussion of the concept of
Beginning in the 1960s, scholars struggled to understand the extent to which social, cultural, and political processes might be shaped by individuals, as opposed to being determined by larger economic and institutional structures. As researchers now turn their attention to the dynamics of globalization (examining global “forces” such as international tourism), it is all the more important to consider the extent to which individuals have possibilities for altering their worlds. Laura Ahearn (2001:112) suggests a provisional definition of agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act,” and cautions that human agency is not simply equivalent to free will, as it does not require intention. Nor is agency a synonym for “resistance,” as there are generally compound motivations behind human actions, motivations that cannot simplistically be reduced to resistance (cf.: Abu-Lughod 1990; Ortner 1995). In short, we can conceive of agency as human social action that involves multiple, at times contradictory, motivations.

As I mentioned, one of my objectives is to highlight the complicated and often ironic relations between material culture and human agency. Kris Hardin and Mary Jo Arnoldi have recently observed in their discussion of African material culture that surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the process whereby “objects, when coupled with human agency, become powerful allies in the construction of identity, meaning, and culture itself” (1996:16). Using the case of Toraja carvings to reflect on the interrelations between material culture, identity negotiation, and human agency, I both embrace and amend James Scott’s now classic ideas concerning the arts of resistance (Scott 1985, 1990). In some ways, a number of Toraja carvings and art objects can be conceptualized as “hidden transcripts,” surreptitiously critiquing established ethnic, colonial, or political hierarchies and operating as “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985, 1990). In other ways, these carvings also embody what Sherry Ortner has termed the “ambivalences and ambiguities of resistance itself” (1995:191).

Finally, a nuanced analysis of the complex and at times contradictory messages embodied in Toraja art objects requires being wary of what Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) has termed the “romance of resistance,” that is, overzealous celebration and projections of heroic resistance. There is an almost constant struggle over the meaning of Toraja carvings, as different actors and groups with different projects, apprehensions, memories, and yearnings create, replicate, and engage with these material images. In short, in this book I suggest a conception of Toraja carving (and sculptural form) as a
complex arena embodying contending discourses concerning identity and hierarchies of authority and power.

**SPACES AND PLACES OF RESEARCH**

During my first month in Tana Toraja Regency, while searching for an appropriate field base, I resided in the little home-stay overlooking the emerald-hued rice paddies at the edge of Rantepao. This initial period in Tana Toraja’s main tourist base gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself with the world of Toraja tourates. My late afternoons and evenings were spent idling in the town’s handful of souvenir shops and tourist restaurants, chatting with local tourism entrepreneurs and foreign tourists. I also quickly became acquainted with the aspiring local guides who haunted Rantepao’s inns and tourist cafes. These so-called wild guides (guide liar, BI) were primarily young, unemployed Toraja males who had great ambition and were well versed in local lore, but who lacked the funds for formal guide schooling in Makassar and licensing fees. For many of them, guiding represented not only an income, but also the alluring possibility of forging longer-term bonds with visitors or enjoying short-term romantic intrigues with foreigners. Several of the wild guides I knew delighted in displaying piles of business cards of various directors and company presidents who had been past clients, and others carried small bundles of snapshots of their European tourist “girlfriends.” A few lucky Toraja guides had even received all-expenses-paid trips to visit their past clients in Europe or Australia. In addition to sharing tales of their adventures and life aspirations with me, these wild guides also occasionally invited me to tag along on their tours of Tana Toraja Regency. In essence, my initial sojourn in Rantepao allowed me to see Toraja as a tourist.

When it became known that I was a researcher hunting for a suitable field base, my new Toraja acquaintances quickly indoctrinated me in the local stereotypes of different regions of Tana Toraja Regency. Sa’dan villagers, in the north, were said to be especially well educated: “There are a lot of Doctorandus (BI; Master’s degree) in Sa’dan!” declared a lively Rantepao restauranteuse. Her husband added that they were also notably ostentatious in their rituals, something that might be of interest to an anthropologist. Others told me that people in the Sesean hills were down-to-earth and relatively egalitarian when compared to valley folk. Torajas in
the southern Sangalla’ and Makale regions\textsuperscript{63} were reputed to be the most status-conscious or “feudal,” with Kesu’-area Torajas running a close second. My Rantepao acquaintances also stressed, with what seemed to be a mixture of admiration and suspicion, that Kesu’ people were avid “orang politikus” (BI; politicians).

The more I learned of the Kesu’ area, the more it captured my attention. Several carving groups and villages, as well as Tana Toraja’s first “carving school,” were all located in the Kesu’ area (in the administrative subdistrict of Sanggalangi’). Recent road-paving projects, the presence of several of the region’s oldest tourist sites, and a jointly owned Japanese-Indonesian coffee plantation, all signaled an area with accelerated outsider contact. Moreover, much of the early classic work on “traditional” Toraja culture (van der Veen 1965, 1966; Koubi 1982; Nooy-Palm 1979, 1986) was done in this region, providing a useful springboard for what I initially conceptualized as a study of change, art, and identity.

After exploratory forays into the Kesu’ area, I fixed my eye on Ke’te’ Kesu’, one of the region’s oldest and most-visited “traditional villages.” Home to some of Tana Toraja’s most adept carvers and astute elders, Ke’te’ Kesu’ is idyllically situated at the base of craggy limestone burial cliffs, overlooking a sea of wet rice paddies. At that time the hamlet was composed of a row of four stately tongkonans, a ritual plaza, numerous carved rice granaries, and a half-dozen souvenir and handicraft stands. Scattered around the fringes of the plaza were a handful of newer tin-roofed homes, some Bugis-styled houses on stilts, others of wood or bamboo, and some of concrete. A footpath behind the hamlet’s central ritual plaza wound down through a shady bamboo grove to weathered cliffside graves. At the mouths of two musty caves, cracked ancestral skulls and decaying, carved wooden sarcophagi lay scattered haphazardly. Behind them stood a regal cluster of hauntingly beautiful, carved wooden effigies of the dead. Clad in faded sarongs and cotton shirts (some equipped with old-fashioned eyeglasses and woven betel nut bags), these stylized ancestral effigies gazed out over the bamboo grove and the more recent chiseled cement tombs below them, fixing their ebony eyes on the usually tranquil hamlet of Ke’te’ Kesu’. During holiday seasons, however, Ke’te’ Kesu’’s tranquility would vanish, as bus-loads of tourists made pilgrimages to stroll the plaza of this celebrated carving village and to photograph the cliffside burial grounds.

When I approached the Sanggalangi’ district head (camat, BI) seeking permission to rent lodging in Ke’te’ Kesu’, he advised that if I wanted to
study Toraja culture, it was essential that I reside with the family of Ne’ Duma, a widely respected aristocratic Kesu’ “cultural expert.” Hoping to politely convey my ambivalence about being stationed in an elite household, I gingerly responded that I wanted to find a more ordinary household, one that would be more “typical” of rural Toraja experience. Adopting a fatherly demeanor, the district head explained that Ne’ Duma’s home was the one place in which a young female researcher such as myself would not be bothered, and the one household that he, my would-be government guardian, could sanction. He broke off suddenly, declaring that luck was with me, as Ne’ Duma himself was strolling up the path to the government office in which we sat sipping syrupy mid-morning coffee.

Ne’ Duma defied my preconceived image of an aristocratic elder. For inexplicable reasons I had expected to see a reserved and solemn personage. A spry, spirited, bespectacled man in his mid-seventies, Ne’ Duma sported a faded grey cowboy hat, a starched shirt, khaki shorts, and mud-splashed rubber boots. Strapped to his hip was a large, wooden-sheathed knife—not a fancy golden kris, but a weathered, peasant-styled knife. The district head quickly conveyed my interest in living in Ke’te’ Kesu’, and Ne’ Duma carefully inspected my papers while puffing thoughtfully on his cigarette. Finally, Ne’ Duma solemnly nodded to us and replied that he had a child exactly my age, and I could sleep with his child. The district head questioned, “Which child is that, Ne’ Duma?” “My son, of course!” Ne’ Duma replied, winking mischievously as everyone in the office chortled. I feigned shock, and he chuckled all the more, correcting himself, “Oh, did I say son? I meant to say my daughter.” He added that he’d need permission from his wife and, with a twinkle in his eye and a lift of the eyebrows, he boasted, “I’ve got a really beautiful wife!” prompting still more chuckles from everyone in the office. This was my introduction to the man who was to become my adoptive Toraja father.

Over the next nineteen months I lived in Ne’ Duma’s “elite” household, making modest monthly contributions for room and board. Much of this time, I shared a room with Ne’ Duma’s daughter (who worked for the government in Tana Toraja’s capital town) and with the family’s sixteen-year-old female household helper, as well as various visiting female kin. For many months I spent my days rooted in the vicinity of Ke’te’ Kesu’ and Rantepao, attending local rituals with my new adoptive Toraja family, studying with carvers, interviewing domestic and foreign tourists, and studiously trying to master the local language. In graduate school, I had
been schooled in a traditional, constrained, and bounded notion of what constitutes a “field site.” And yet as I lived in Ne’ Duma’s home, I gradually came to see “the field” as much more complicated and intricate. The “Toraja” mythologies and ancestral epics I had been recording meandered all over South Sulawesi. Likewise my Toraja friends and teachers were hardly anchored to my field site: Ne’ Duma and his adult children routinely left Tana Toraja Regency to visit kin and conduct business in Makassar and Jakarta. Several carvers in the village had participated in carving workshops on the island of Bali. And Ke’te’ Kesu’ vendors sold not only Toraja trinkets but Balinese tourist carvings and Sumbanese ikat textiles in their tourist stalls—souvenirs they had purchased from traders or ordered from traveling kinsfolk. In short, the boundaries of my field site were not as clear as my graduate training had suggested.

My graduate school classroom training had also not prepared me for the mental and emotional exhaustion of fieldwork. From dawn until late at night I participated in local events and gathered data. Consequently I was perennially behind in typing my field notes. Fearful of disturbing my Toraja sister and the female household helper with whom I shared a room, I took to writing my field notes in longhand by my dim and often-flickering flashlight. As the household slept, and rice paddy crickets chimed, I huddled under my warm bedcovers, scrawling in my notebooks. At 5:00 a.m. each morning, when the household awoke to the choruses of roosters and the braying of pigs, I groggily ached for just a few more hours of sleep and tranquility. More significantly, I was exhausted by the complexities of managing relationships where I was never sure of what could and could not be said, and where I constantly fretted that I might be inadvertently stepping on the toes of those who had befriended me. Although I was enjoying becoming a part of this Toraja household, fieldwork anxieties were taking their toll on me: My hair was falling out, and I was grinding my teeth in my sleep.

The short trips I took to Makassar to renew permits and supplies were not enough to relieve me of the exhaustion of fieldwork. Finally, six months after my arrival in Tana Toraja, my mother came to Indonesia for a much anticipated visit. Before bringing her to Tana Toraja, we traveled together as tourists, visiting the temples, beaches, and art shops of Bali, then traveling on to Makassar, where we explored the Provincial Museum and strolled by the seaside. Initially, this and other short-term departures from “the field” prompted great ambivalence—I constantly worried about what I
might be missing by being away from the highlands and berated myself for taking these breaks. However, these travels “away” gradually reshaped my notions of the boundaries of “the field.” As I attended Toraja dance performances in Makassar’s old Fort Rotterdam,67 stumbled on stolen and forged Toraja effigies of the dead in Balinese art galleries, and spied Bugis-crafted silver filigree *tongkonan* necklaces in Makassar jewelry shops, my narrow conceptions of “in” versus “out” of the field were challenged. Gradually, I came to re-envision “the field” as translocal, and to develop an interest in the outcroppings of Toraja imagery not only at the local, but also at the regional, national, and transnational levels.

In subsequent years my fieldwork has led me from rural Toraja carving villages to the Jakarta mini-mansions of elite Toraja (mansions prominently decorated with enormous model *tongkonans*), to Seattle tribal art galleries, and into the apartments of Toraja students and fictive kin in Chicago. Tracking Toraja-inspired architecture in Makassar, discussing televised images of Toraja singers with Bugis friends, feasting on *pa’pion*68 with Toraja migrants on the remote eastern Indonesian island of Alor, and admiring a Toraja float in the Pasadena Rose Bowl parade, have all furthered my appreciation of the complex interplay between Toraja images and identity.

Although I was unaware of it at the time, my shift in perception of the spaces and places of fieldwork paralleled shifts in the discipline of anthropology. Theoretical paradigms emerging in the late 1980s and 1990s began to chip away at the classic conceptions of “the field” as a discrete and neatly defined space. The realization that “cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locales” (Clifford 1997:7) shifted anthropological attention to cultural flows and border zones, fragmenting traditional perceptions of margin and center. Arjun Appadurai’s (1986, 1990, 1996) treatises on material and cultural flows across time and space, and the ways in which images circulate internationally, have irrevocably transformed the terrain of ethnography, as have James Clifford’s (1997) observations concerning culture-as-travel relations. Such emergent notions of the centrality of displacement and the salience of margins animate various recent Indonesian studies, such as Jill Forshee’s (2001) roving ethnography of Sumbanese textiles and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s (1993) portrait of a Kalimantan people living in an “out-of-the-way-place.”
A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

In the chapters that follow, I explore the interplay between Toraja art and identity, focusing on a variety of expressive arenas. The opening ethnographic chapter offers a collage of Toraja identities and a sampling of some of the recurrent themes that preoccupy many of today’s Torajas (Chapter Two). Next, I examine two of the most famed material icons of Toraja identity, the carved tongkonan house (Chapter Three) and tau tau effigies of the dead (Chapter Four). Chapter Five explores a variety of newer arenas in which Toraja cultural identities and memories are creatively invoked and enshrined, including public ceremonials, nationalist landmarks of remembrance, and locally run Toraja museums. I then examine the outcroppings of Toraja icons on the national and global stages, highlighting the role of Toraja design in regional interethnic relations and in national politics (Chapter Six). Chapter Seven continues to examine Toraja responses to current-day political and economic uncertainties, as Indonesia plunges into a period of economic, interethnic, and interreligious turmoil and the tourists who once helped to lend Torajas both economic and symbolic capital dwindle. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I turn to broader questions concerning the politics of material culture, in the context of nation-building and in the ebb and flow of tourism.