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Introduction

Recently, Mary Louise Pratt suggested that scholars "stand to gain from looking at themselves as writing inside as well as outside the discursive traditions that precede them: inside as well as outside the histories of contact on which they follow." The perceptions of all those engaged in writing about ethnographic Others have invariably been colored by earlier texts. Long before we ever encounter other peoples face-to-face, our sensitivities have been shaped by the ethnographic imagery of explorers' accounts, sea captains' logs, travellers' tales and touristic brochures. Travel literature, as a genre, is rich in ethnographic imagery. Until recently, its role in shaping our own perceptions has been largely overlooked.

This essay critically examines the shifting portrayal of an Indonesian people known as the Toraja of South Sulawesi (previously known as Celebes) (Figure 1). Specifically, in the pages that follow I delineate changes in the dominant imagery of Torajans — from nineteenth century travelers' images of Torajans as "savage headhunters," to early twentieth century Dutch colonial depiction of them as "gentle children," closing with a brief discussion of Torajans' representation as "Heavenly Kings" in today's touristic literature. While it should be noted that these characterizations are not monolithic and at any given time there are multiple images of Torajans, nevertheless, certain images are more prevalent than others. I am thus focusing on the prevailing images of Torajans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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I argue that changes in the dominant imagery of Torajans are neither arbitrary nor whimsical. Rather, they are linked to the specific missions of the early explorers, colonial administration and, later, the Indonesian state. Renato Rosaldo asserts that the portrait “civilized society” painted of indigenous peoples comprises a “rhetoric of control.” Following Rosaldo, I suggest that the various images of Torajans in these different historical periods serve to encourage and justify the imposition of new orders (colonialism and Christianity, in particular). In short, these images are more than innocuous distorted portraits. They may play a role in the genesis of powerful ethnic stereotypes about Torajans.

The Emergence of Toraja as an Ethnic Group

Toby Voikman observes that “until this century ‘Toraja’ as an ethnic group or category scarcely existed except in the minds of others.” As these Sulawesi highlanders never developed their own writing system, most early references to Torajans derive from the written records (foncara) of neighboring lowland Buginese and Makassarese kingdoms, some of which date to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Although available accounts are inconsistent as to the precise etymology of the name Toraja, there is general agreement that it comes from Buginese, probably from toraja, to meaning “people” and riaja meaning “upstream” or “above.” In the Buginese conception, then, the Toraja were the “people of the highlands.” This designation was used to refer to all of the peoples of upland South and Central Sulawesi.

The Makassarese adopted the Buginese term “Toraja” in the seventeenth century, using it to refer to the highlanders they had been raiding for coffee and slaves. Thanks to two Makassarese princes who attended the College of the Jesuits in Paris in the mid-1600s, we find the earliest European mention of the Toraja in this period. These


Another derivation suggests that the name comes from rajaq, the Buginese word meaning “wild.” The Toraja, then, are the “people of the Wild” as opposed to the Lears who are the “people of the East.” See C. H. M. Nuy-Polian, The Sa'dan Toraja: A Study of Their Social Life and Religion (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 6. Finally, a Rantejo acquisition suggests a third etymology. He claims the word may derive from rajah, a term for “laid” in Paluca (which he says is one of the original Toraja villages). The Toraja, then, were “True People” who “came from the east and walked and walked until they grew tired and settled there.” This acquisition claims no one ever refers to this etymology because it is too foreign.

Although it was only in the context of 17th-century colonization and missionary activity that the term "Portrait of the Turangian" started to be used, European descriptions of Turangian people and their culture are among the most detailed and accurate. The first European contact with the island nation was made by the Portuguese explorers in the 16th century, and these early accounts were based on limited observations and descriptions of the local population. However, it was not until the 19th century that the Dutch began to establish a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the Turangian culture and society. The Dutch were particularly interested in the island nation due to its strategic location and the potential for trade and commerce. The Dutch trade with the Turangians increased significantly in the 18th century, and this led to a closer understanding of the island nation and its people.
graphs. Although most of the photographs depict landscape, there is a moving image of a pair of thin, shackled Torajans being sold at the Palopo market.\textsuperscript{14} As Toby Volkman comments, "[T]his picture is a reminder of the turn-of-the-century turmoil that plagued even the remote highlands."\textsuperscript{15} For the most part, however, the Sarasins' imagery is that of a serene land.

Such first-hand depictions of tranquil or submissive Torajans contrast markedly with the images offered in popular writing of the period. Far more prevalent were second-hand turn-of-the-century accounts of Torajans as wild, head-hunting savages. Voluminous tomes on the exotic peoples and customs of the Dutch East Indies usually devoted a few sentimentalized pages to the Torajans. These second-hand accounts shaped many Europeans' imagery of Torajans.

Albert Bickmore's volume, Travels in the East Indian Archipelago (1869) is characteristic of this genre. Bickmore, a fellow of the Royal Geographic Society of London and member of the British and American Ethnological Societies, passed through Makassar on a shell-collecting expedition in 1865. Although he never set foot in the Toraja highlands, Bickmore writes that the people of the interior "are represented as head-hunters and even cannibals."\textsuperscript{16} While Bickmore's scientific training compelled him to qualify his depiction of the Torajans with the phrase "are represented as," his subsequent remarks reinforce the cannibalistic image of Torajans. For Bickmore immediately proceeds to note that similar observations were made about all the inhabitants of Celebes by Odoardo Balboa, a Spanish gentleman who traveled in the East in 1516. According to Bickmore,

[Balboa] says, when [Celebes Islanders] . . . came to the Moluccas to trade, they were accustomed to ask the King of those islands to kindly deliver up to them the persons he had condemned to death, that they might gratify their palates on the bodies of such unfortunates, "as if asking for a hog."\textsuperscript{17}

For the most part, the Torajans' characterization at the turn of the century is that of a savage people. Antoine Cabanon's 1911 tome on the archipelago drew heavily from the Dutch Encyclopedia of the Netherlands Indies and conveys the essence of this barbarous image of the Toraja in a single paragraph:

The Torajas of the mountains . . . are mentally much inferior to the Bugis and the Macamara. Witnessed enough to begin with, on account of their manner of life, they reduce their race still further by the arioso custom of "head-hunting" which with them, as with the Dyaks is a purely ritual ceremony, being described by adat in certain determined circumstances, such as the death of a chief, etc. . . . The Torajas of Lake Poso are not content with cutting the head, but also drink the blood of the victim, eating a portion of his flesh and brains.\textsuperscript{18}

While wandering in the cave's chambers, they discover the words "JAN VAN DUYK, Amsterdam 1554" traced in red chalk on the wall (Ibid., 300-320).

It is possible that while Laburah assumed he was in Toraja country, he was actually still in Borneo lands. His description of an arduous ten day journey away from the coast and north into the highlands, however, sounds like the route to the Toraja area. Because of these reservations, we should view his comments on the Toraja with caution.

Ibid., p. 199-200.

Ibid., p. 9.

Ibid., p. 3.

Ibid., p. 5.

Ibid., p. 9.

Ibid., p. 199-200.

Ibid., p. 3.

Ibid., p. 9.

Ibid., p. 199-200.

Ibid., p. 9.

Ibid., p. 9.
Stood in such imagery of savage Torajans, J. Brown visited Celebes in the first part of this century and writes of his disappointment at seeing only "tame and Christianized specimens" of Toraja at Lake Poso. When in Makassar, Brown related his disillusionment to the Governor who detained a steamer so that Brown could join it on its voyage up the Gulf of Bone to see his untamed Se'dan Toraja. Brown writes that the governor assured him that:

... his Toradjas, pacified only four years ago, and head-hunters up until then, were quite different from the domesticated specimens of Poso. There had been real wild men up in their mountains, with their villages perched on precipices, till the Dutch had broken the power of the Radja of Bonei over them. This potentate had sent his brigades in every year to plunder them and capture them to sell as slaves; and they had retaliated by taking the head of any stranger who entered their country. ...  

As it turned out, Brown did not have time to visit these "savage wild men", although he did encounter two Torajans when he visited the Makassar jail and noted that "crimes are the rarest thing now among these wild men, who were only three or four years ago the most persistent head-hunters..." Brown was also taken to see some models of Torajan houses at the Radja's palace, which had served as the local museum. Apparently, as far back as 1910, Makassar (Ujung Pandang) officials were museumizing the Toraja as "wild men". These officials' activities can be seen as one of the earlier precursors to today's touristic promotions. While Buginese officials probably billed Torajans as "savages" at the turn-of-the-century to distinguish themselves as "civilized," today such highlighting of " pagan Torajans" is more often motivated by touristic economics.

Why, though, were turn-of-the-century Europeans so willing to embrace and propagate these images of "headhunting" Torajans? Why do such representations overshadow the more tranquil depictions of the Toraja highlands? I believe the answers lie in the political events of the period. Such images both laid the foundation and provided a rationalization for Dutch colonial annexation of the Toraja highlands.

The Colonial Incursion and Associated Shifts in Toraja Imagery

As early twentieth century adventurers wrote of Torajan head-hunters, important political events were unfolding in South Sulawesi. Although the Dutch Admiral Speel-


[2] Dutch missionaries arrived in the Poso area in the 1880s, some thirty years earlier than in the Se'dan Toraja region.


[4] Ibid., p. 121.

man had defeated Gia in 1668, allowing the Netherlands United East India Com-
p[22] to establish a large fort (Rotterdam) and permanent trading station at the port town of Makassar, Dutch colonial forces did not arrive in the highlands until 1905. The Dutch allegedly penetrated the highlands as a part of their new "Ethical Pol-
icy" to promote the welfare and education of local peoples. However, there were other reasons for their decision to annex upland Sulawesi. The Dutch had just concluded a long and costly war in North Sumatra with the Islamic Acehnese and were greatly concerned about the spread of Islam and its potential to jeopardize their control of the archipelago. In the eyes of the Dutch, the Sulawesi highlanders were a pagan population that could be converted to Christianity, thus providing an inland breakwater against the threatening wave of Islam.  

With colonialism and missionization, the popular imagery of Torajans as fiercely barbaric "wild men" gradually shifted: by the 1930s a new portrayal of Torajans as simple, kind and happy people began to emerge. In the popular literature of this pe-

For example, in a colorful, picture-filled 1933 book issued to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Netherlands Indies Travellers Bureau, we find the following description:

The Toraja, the oldest inhabitants of Celebes, a hardy mountain folk, are brought in contact with the world through a modern road to their former stronghold among the gorgeous mountains to the center of the Island. ... The people are heathen but their laws and customs are amusingly up-to-date and intelligent. They build their beautifully decorated clan-houses in the shape of ships, usually sited on a solitary well-fortified hilltop, from whence they look down on the surrounding country like the medieval Barons of Europe. Their funeral ceremo-

Note how "heathen" Torajans are now likened to medieval European Barons. No longer are they savages to be feared, but rather intriguing reminders of bygone days. Note also that the highly-charged word "tribe" is absent — now the Torajans are warmly described as "holy mountain folk."

The propagation of such imagery is just as politically strategic as the old imagery was. New readers are presented with a people who deserve to join the colonized, Chris-
tianized fold. With the exception of certain colorful customs, Torajans are much like the Europeans, after all.

Simultaneously tourism is born in South Celebes. Although passenger steamers brought European tourists to Bali and Java as early as the late nineteenth century,

[22] The Netherlands United East India Company, or Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), was a Dutch trading organization which eventually came to monopolize commerce to the Indonesian archipelago. By 1799, however, the VOC was bankrupt due to debts and corruption. At this point the Dutch government took over its properties.


touristic visits to the Celebes were virtually non-existent until the 1930s. Whereas the 1933 book cited above merely mentions Toraja in passing, by 1939 we find what I believe is the first detailed tourist handbook for the South Celebes. As the handbook's author, Deerenberg, states,

"[This article was meant] for the purpose of awakening the interests of those tourists, who are keen on visiting parts of the Tropics, which are as yet undiscovered by Tourist-bureaus..." As long as the hotel accommodation in the "Toraja's" is limited to the Government's resthouses only, advertising campaigns for this beautiful country on larger scale have to wait, which leaves this lovely spot a special treat to the real connoisseur, who is adverse to being mass-heroed... It can only be hoped that several travellers will partake of the opportunity of enjoying a solitary trip, before the first great tourist stampede in the Toraja country commenced."

As it turned out, the tourist stampede to the Toraja highlands did not happen as quickly as Deerenberg envisioned. Interestingly, 35 years later many travel-writers are still promoting Toraja to the same type of stampeded-shy tourists that Deerenberg sought to attract.

Like other writers of the 1930s, Deerenberg presents images of a simple, contented people, living an enviable life uncontaminated by modernization. No longer are the Torajas savage headhunters to be feared, but rather

"[a people] yet unspoilt by the touch of civilization, still unharmed by the ruses of modern life, living as their ancestors did centuries ago..." The Torajas are content... and the satisfaction in their daily life and the peace of their souls may be read from their restful and kind features."

Although Deerenberg mentions in passing that some Torajas have embraced Christianity and become bureaucrats, he emphasizes their cultural resilience, interesting architecture, "splendid unwritten laws on agricultural and economic domains," and "rock-grave versus dolls crowded with life-size dolls." He even expresses his surprise that a people with a caste system could be so democratic in their social intercourse.

Deerenberg is not so generous, however, when it comes to Torajan funeral feasts, which he claims were traditionally "repulsive."

Formerly... choruses of relations and friends were invited to a [funeral] feast, during which hundreds of buffaloes and thousands of chickens were being slaughtered on the spot, while guests who had become absolutely inaninated from swallowable gallons of "bawak" (rice wine), ran about with bloody pieces of meat, which were only very slightly roasted before being devoured. Generally this kind

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of feasts ended in bloodthirsty bacchanals at which the unmarried women became the common prey."

Such a description stands in sharp contrast to his earlier imagery of these gentle traditional peoples. Deerenberg goes on to assure us, however, that the Dutch government has outlawed such rauous rituals: "drinking-hunts on a grand scale, wholesale slaughter of cattle and conclusive ill-treating of the maidens belong to the past." Nevertheless, he proclaims, today's rituals retain some of their original flavor — "lucky the tourist, who happens to be present at such a burial feast, which will give him an experience neve to be forgotten."

Deerenberg's handbook concludes with a description of the Torajan tourist sites along the main road, as well as the clean and comfortable resthouses available to tourists. With the exception of the author's sensational account of the funeral ritual in pre-colonial times, his 1939 imagery of Torajas forebodes what one finds in contemporary tourist brochures.

Similarly, a 1940 National Geographic Magazine article entitled "The Celebes: New Man's Land of the Indies," paints a stimulating and alluring picture of the Toraja. Fusing early images of headhunters with more recent reports of Torajans charm, the author writes:

"So far as the traveler is concerned, head-hunting... is a purely academic question, for unless he portrays a sense of superiority among them, a more friendly group than the Torajas, he is not likely to find. Head-hunting, if practiced at all, is a sentimental adventure, designed to provide the lonely dead with a companion, and what kind of companion in Inferno or Paradise would an American writer be for a Toraja mountaineer?... That the Torajas are head-hunters, that the strange free-thinkers, or doubles, on their graves are mummys protected by thick paint, that a lone traveler is in danger — I had no evidence of any of these thrilling characteristics, bequeathed by gossip. But if there is more thrilling portal to any primitive region than that to mountainous Torajaland, where is it?"

Photographs accompanying the article further fuse the sensational with the charming. One scenic shot of a cluster of Torajan women wearing large plaited hats bears the caption, "Their ancestors hunted heads, these women shade them." The writer then goes on to admire the spectacular landscape and marvel over Torajan architecture and carvings. Ultimately, he declares that "magnificent scenery, a delightful climate, and exotic appeal make the mountain country of the Torajas unsurpassable in all the archipelago."

This National Geographic Magazine account and Deerenberg's guide book did not

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*Slightly earlier books, such as Van Stechow's Travellers' Handbook for the Dutch East Indies (1930), address traveling to Sulawesi but draws only a few short lines to the Toraja highlands.

*Deerenberg, quoted without title (Jakarta, 1939), p. 165.

*ibid., p. 154.


*Ibid., p. 158.


*Ibid., p. 64.

*Ibid., p. 64.
have the chance to be used by many visitors, for the Japanese invaded the highlands in 1942.

Indonesian independence finally arrived in 1949, setting off a turbulent period of Muslim rebellion in South Sulawesi. It is not until the 1970s that we start to see a florescence of travel literature on the Toraja. Interestingly, much of the contemporary travel literature continues this tradition of fusing sensationalist images of the exotic with portraits of Torajan quaintness, ignoring or down-playing the influences of modernization and Christianity. In today’s touristic brochures Torajans are hailed as “heavenly kings” who “live in a land where time stands still.”

**Conclusion**

Since their first appearance in western literature, the Toraja people have been depicted in dramatically different ways. The earliest portrayals of the Toraja as “wretched wild men” were based on images culled from the Buginese and Makassarese. Given these groups’ long history of antagonistic relations with their mountain-dwelling neighbors, such negative imagery is hardly surprising. It is initially surprising, however, that once European explorers and travelers such as Lahure and Van Rijn began to have first-hand encounters with the Torajans, the more positive reports did not replace the early images of Torajan wildness. Rather, the images of savage Torajan headhunters dominated European popular accounts at the turn of the century. Yet, when one considers Rosaldo’s observations about how the imagery created by the dominant people forms a “rhetoric of control,” this phenomenon seems less puzzling. The popular images of “savage Torajans” both laid the foundation and provided a rationalization for the Dutch colonial annexation of the Toraja highlands.

Just a few years after the colonial and missionary incursion in the Toraja highlands, the new dominant imagery of Torajans as “hardy mountain folk” and “talented carvers” with a “gentle nature” begins to emerge. Like the previous imagery, these images can also be construed as political. Not only did they assure the public that the colonial mission had been a success, but that the good-natured Torajans were worth the effort. With the subsequent development of tourism in the highlands, we eventually see a fusion of the old sensational images with the more recent portrayals of Torajan gentleness.

Through this examination of the shifting portrayals of Toraja highlanders, we find that travel imagery is more than simple frivolity. These images have a political dimension. They form, in Rosaldo’s terms, a “rhetoric of control” and can play a role in justifying the imposition of new orders, such as colonialism and Christianity.

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99In discussing the political aspects of these images, I do not wish to deny the fact that colonization and missionization precipitated real changes in the highlands. However, when these images were emerging, the majority of Torajans were still adhering to their traditional practices. Mass conversion to Christianity did not occur until the 1950s and 1960s.