



The Dilemma of cultural commodification policy of barkcloth: A study of the Kaili Community in Pandere Village, Indonesia

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Abstract

In the modern era of rapid technological development, local cultural heritage is increasingly subjected to cultural commodification. This study explores the implications of cultural commodification on bark cloth making, focusing on the Kaili community. The main objective is to analyze the cultural commodification policy surrounding bark cloth making and its transformative effects on tourism. The qualitative research methods used were in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis with the Kaili community in Pandere Village, Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The collected data were then analyzed using interactive analysis, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the Kaili community's tradition of making bark cloth is preserved traditionally for everyday use and traditional ceremonies. The bark cloth possesses a wealth of forms, meanings, and decorations that are appealing to tourists. The Kaili community has promoted this tradition through museums, exhibitions, and cultural carnivals. Additionally, the Central Sulawesi Provincial Government actively promotes bark cloth by establishing the "Bark Cloth Tourism Village." Packaging adjustments have been made to produce bark cloth to attract tourists. These findings demonstrate that the national policy framework enables a combination of considerations regarding the economic value and the tourism market. This research recommends that the government and the Kaili community ensure that cultural management and marketing practices involve active community participation, respect existing cultural values, and provide fair benefits to the community.

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Introduction

Today, around the world, there are approximately 5,000 to 6,000 diverse cultures. More than 80–90 percent of these belong to indigenous peoples (Cravioto & Mosqueda, 2021). This is reflected in Indonesia, an archipelago with abundant cultural richness. Each of its 38 provinces has a unique cultural identity, distinct patterns of human activity, and symbolic structures that show how important human behavior is (Rahayu et al., 2020; Yuliastuti & Sukmawati, 2020). However, in the midst of rapid change, some local cultures are experiencing cultural commodification by those who want to promote and profit through the culture-based tourism sector (Irianto & Laksono, 2017). Economic benefits are gained by the communities involved, such as providing food, parking, and other fee-based facilities. While cultural commodification can provide profits, accelerate economic development, and increase foreign investment, it also has the potential to eliminate local identities and values attached to their indigenous traditions and cultures (Jakae, 2021).

Through commercial repackaging for international tourism consumption, for example, such indigenous values may be eroded by the needs of tourism, and local communities may lose the right to control and maintain their unique cultural heritage (Jakae, 2021). As a result, forms of local traditions and wisdom are adapted into a more profane culture and treated as tourism commodities to fulfill people's economic needs. Chen and Kong (2021) attribute the growing popularity of community festivals and special events in recent years to the need to promote tourism and boost the economy. In some cases, festivals have been used to promote specific cultural discourses and foster community image, pride, and identity (Mokgachane et al., 2021). Festival policies are also part of the host community's cultural and social organization process (Pratum et al., 2022). Through festival policies, destinations can raise their cultural profile and encourage the development of a spirit of tolerance and inclusion, as well as cultural understanding and diversity (Camozzi, 2021). In addition, the increasing popularity of festivals is also due to the fact that festivals often require minimal investment and utilize the volunteerism of local communities.

Many types of research have shown that there has been significant cultural commodification in various regions around the world over time, and Indonesia is no exception, such as research on the cultural heritage value of modified traditional foods (Mardatillah et al., 2019; Nomnian & Pillai, 2022), music that is increasingly hybridized and involved in the customization of the leisure market system (Benvenga, 2022; Hare, 2017), or local ceremonial traditions that are starting to shift

from their authenticity (Blakely, 2015; Rahayu et al., 2020; Takwa et al., 2022). Other studies have described community festivals (Camozzi, 2021; Johan & Hamzah, 2019) as well as the impact of festivals and special events (Aterianus-Owanga, 2020; Mokgachane et al., 2021; Nomnian & Pillai, 2022). This article provides reinforcement to the research that has been done on issues of cultural commodification. However, our research focuses on the cultural commodification policy related to bark cloth making and its transformation for the benefit of tourism commodities. This article starts from the premise that cultural commodification policies stem from active local cultural life and provide opportunities for locals and visitors to participate in the preservation process (Aricindy et al., 2023; Saefudin et al., 2023). This research continues from previous researchers, who have examined the relationship between the commodification of local culture for tourism purposes.

In this context, this study focuses on analyzing the cultural commodification policy related to making bark cloth and its transformation changes for the benefit of tourism commodities in the Kaili community in Pandere Village, Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The structure of this paper consists of a general introduction followed by a review of relevant literature and an explanation of key concepts used in this research. Next, the data collection process used is outlined before presenting the research results and conducting a discussion that is concluded at the end of the paper.

Literature Review

Cultural Commodification and Authenticity

Cultural commodification is a term used to describe a process in which certain cultural elements are packaged and sold to tourists (Blakely, 2015; Shepherd, 2002). This includes activities, productions, artifacts, and other things considered distinctive to the culture. Through this packaging and selling process, the market value of these elements is given, which they may not have had before. Mardatillah et al. (2019) explain that these elements essentially serve as objects of trade that have value because they can be valued in the form of market prices. Previous research has discussed the positive and negative impacts of commodification on culture (see Azkarraga, 2022; Camozzi, 2021; Chen & Kong, 2021; Garrido & Raposo, 2020; Irianto & Laksono, 2017; Mokgachane et al., 2021; Pratum et al., 2022).

In tourism literature, there is another concept that is often associated with cultural commodification, namely, authenticity. However, Chen and Kong (2021) state that

although cultural commodification and authenticity are often discussed together, they do not necessarily represent two opposing sides, as commodification does not necessarily undermine the value of indigenous culture for locals or visitors. Recent research shows that a number of scholars have participated in the debate over the use of the term authenticity in cultural commodification, focusing on its current value and relevance or lack thereof (see Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016; Stock & Schmiz, 2019; Su, 2018; Tiberghien & Xie, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Given that various perspectives can be used in this context, the researcher believes that authenticity still has relevance in cultural commodification. Therefore, we chose to use the cultural commodification perspective in analyzing the impact of cultural commodification policies on bark cloth in Pandere Village, Indonesia.

Cultural Festival Policy as a Form of Tourism

Previously, it has been stated that the policy of organizing cultural festivals provides an opportunity for tourists to interact with locals and experience authentic culture (Aricindy et al., 2023; Sonjai et al., 2018). According to Tiberghien and Xie (2018), cultural festivals are used to differentiate themselves from competitors. Through cultural festivals, communities seek to showcase what makes them intrinsically unique. Therefore, a cultural festival must create uniqueness, quality, and an attractive atmosphere to survive in tourism competition with other destinations. Although cultural festivals have the power and benefit of promoting and enhancing the richness of cultural communities, some argue that turning aspects of local culture into consumable commodities can undermine their intrinsic value to society (Pratum et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2019).

Therefore, as cultural festivals enable the meeting of tourism needs with authentic cultural expressions, they can have a negative impact on local cultures through such contact or encounters. For example, Irianto and Laksono (2017) warn about the possibility of cultural festivals becoming “rat runs” where authenticity is eroded or lost, and issues of overcrowding and commercialization take over, especially if the cultural festival is organized solely for economic gain. As Cravioto and Mosqueda (2021) mentioned, an overemphasis on economic goals can potentially undermine the essence of cultural tourism. For local communities in tourist destinations, this can be a major concern. In the case of indigenous cultural festivals, the impact can be particularly severe as their essence is based on highly significant spiritual and cultural values (Camozzi, 2021; Johan & Hamzah, 2019).

Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is a descriptive-analytical approach utilizing a qualitative perspective. The study outlines several stages as follows:

Participants

This research was conducted among the Kaili Community in Pandere Village, Gumbasa Sub-district, Sigi District, Central Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. This Kaili community has a unique tradition of making bark cloth and a legacy of cultural knowledge rituals still passed down. The focus of this research is qualitative data consisting of information obtained from key informants, namely, ten key actors directly involved in the life of the Pandere Village community. Therefore, the indigenous people of Pandere Village, who preserve the tradition, act as the main participants, and five government figures and local historians who focus on the study of bark cloth act as supporting informants. The sample in this study was selected using the purposive sampling method based on the selection criteria set based on the research objectives. The research instrumentation was collected using an Interview Form. This form is a semi-structured interview instrument that has been pre-designed with predetermined questions. Informants were invited to speak and respond to the questions posed in the form. Meanwhile, the interviewer made audio recordings, took written notes, and took photographs during the interview process. The questions in the interview form covered various aspects, such as the process of making barkcloth, current living conditions, culture, and local heritage traditions that are still practiced. The informants were expected to provide relevant stories and information on these matters according to the questions asked. Audio recordings, written notes, and photographs were used to document the interviews and support subsequent data analysis.

Data Collection

The researcher used a combination to collect in-depth and accurate data. To ensure the validity of the information obtained, a source triangulation method was used where multiple sources were used to check the validity of the data. The data collection procedure consists of three methods, namely, in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The following are the data collection procedures used in this study: (1) In-depth interviews with Kaili elders and communities regarding the process of making bark cloth and the inheritance of knowledge of Kaili cultural rituals living in Pandere Village

(10 informants were interviewed from July 2019 to October 2019); (2) Observation of the ritual use of bark cloth at traditional ritual events and cultural festivals held by the local government (5 informants were interviewed from the government and local historians from October 2019 to December 2019); and (3) Document analysis was conducted from circulating historical documents, especially those stored at the Central Sulawesi Museum.

Data Analysis

This research uses descriptive analysis and an inductive data analysis approach using the interactive analysis method, which includes various procedures, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). The interactive analysis model links the three activities in an iterative cycle, where they complement each other and cannot be done separately. This model enables a structured and systematic data analysis process, resulting in reliable and accurate findings. The data description raised statements submitted by informants accompanied by empirical evidence in various forms of presentation in a descriptive format. To protect the rights of informants, the researchers tightened procedures and processes to prevent violating participants' privacy rights.

Results

The results of this research are divided into three parts: (1) the tradition of making bark cloth in the Kaili community; (2) the richness of forms, meanings, decorations, and rituals as tourism promotion; and (3) cultural commodification policies related to the tradition of bark making.

The Tradition of Making Bark Cloth in Kaili Community

The culture in the Central Sulawesi region is believed to be derived from Austronesian culture. Much evidence of Austronesian cultural heritage, such as human cave settlements from the Neolithic era, various megalithic sites, and traditional architecture, can be found. Most of the relics are kept in the Central Sulawesi Museum. One of the surviving traditions of the Austronesian tradition that is still being practiced today is the making of bark cloth. This can be seen as follows:

“Found bark beater or commonly called Ike Stone, at archaeological sites in Poso and Donggala districts. Until now, the community has

developed bark cloth as a basic material for daily clothing and ritual traditions. This ritual tradition developed among people who live in the mountains, one of which is in the Kaili Community in Pandere Village.”

(50 Central Sulawesi Museum Officer).

The Kaili people who live in Pandere Village are one of the groups that still preserve the tradition of making bark cloth to this day. At first, bark cloth was made as a basic human need to protect the body, but then humans began to realize the potential of bark as a fabric material that could be used in various forms. The process of making bark cloth developed from simple to more advanced, resulting in better, stronger, and more flexible bark cloth. According to informants from the indigenous Kaili people:

“This tradition has been carried out by the Kaili community in Pandere Village from generation to generation. However, there are not many active bark cloth craftsmen because most of them have switched professions. Therefore, making barkcloth is only done when there is an order.”

(56 Kaili Community Member).

Women usually do the making of barkcloth, and the process is still very traditional. The making is usually done after planting rice until waiting for harvest time. Bark cloth is a type of cloth that resembles paper (the process of making bark cloth is presented in Figure (1)). In Pandere Village, only two types of trees are used as raw materials: Ivo and Malo. The outline of the manufacturing process can be seen from the following description:



Figure 1 Barkcloth manufacturing process; (A) Malo Tree, For Raw Materials; (B) Ivo Tree, for Raw Materials; (C) Beating Wood with the main source of Ike Stone; (D) Sample Shirt in Barkcloth; (E) Finished Barkcloth; and (F) Beating Wood with the main source of Ike Stone
Source: Researcher documentation (2019)

“Tree stalks measuring 110–130 cm are taken, and the fibers are removed between the inner bone and the outer skin. After that, it is cooked, fractionated, and then beaten until evenly distributed using an ike stone. The coloring of the bark cloth is taken from natural materials such as soaking in mud to produce a brown color. In addition, the fabric is also soaked with flowers and various plants to produce other colors.”

(59 Kaili Community Member).

The bark cloth produced consists of two types: Ivo or Vuya, which is white and rectangular without decoration and commonly used as a blanket or sarong. Bark cloth can also be made into various shapes, such as curtains (Kumpe), shorts (Vevo), negligees (Siga), blouses (Halili), skirts (Topi Nunu), and others. However, they also accept orders to make other models, such as women's clothes, scarves, bags, and men's clothes made of bark cloth combined with other modern motifs. Apart from daily clothing, bark cloth is also used for traditional ceremonies. The bark clothing used in daily life is generally simpler than that used in traditional ceremonies. This can be seen from the description:

“The bark clothing used daily for work, both in the rice fields and in the fields, is a little coarser and simpler than that used in traditional ceremonies. Everyone, both women and men, use these bark clothes.”

(59 Kaili Community Member).

The bark clothing used as everyday clothing for men are shirts that do not have round collars and do not have decorations, and Vevo (pants), which are in the form of trousers but only down to the knee and having no decorations. Bark clothing for women is called Topi Nunu (skirt), used to protect part of the body from the sun and rain.

The Wealth of Form, Meaning, Decorative Variety, and Ritual as Tourism Promotion

As explained earlier, barkcloth is not only used as daily clothing but also as part of traditional ceremonies. Barkcloth has three symbols and meanings: sacred, semi-sacred, and ordinary. There are some notes on the differences between women's and men's clothing:

“Barkcloth, from the collection of materials to clothing, has a deep meaning for the community, especially for women's clothing (skirts and blouses), while men's clothing (shirts and pants) does not have much meaning.”

(67 Traditional Chiefs of the Kaili Community).

Even so, there are several meanings of each form, color, and makeup variety found in bark clothing, namely: (1) The shapes of the crafted garments are not very important, especially on the blouse (Halili), but they are very influential on the shape of the skirt. A three-tiered skirt, for example, has a meaning about lineage (social status). The first row means or symbolizes *Maradika* or Nobility. The second arrangement symbolizes *Tatua Ngata* or community leaders, and the third arrangement symbolizes *Todea* or ordinary people; (2) The colors on the bark clothing give meaning which are real symbols in the Kaili community in Pandere Village, namely, yellow symbolizes greatness, green symbolizes the fertility of the natural environment, red symbolizes courage or heroism, black symbolizes grief or mourning, and white symbolizes purity; and (3) The meaning of the decorative variety found on bark clothing, namely: *Gampiri* makeup symbolizes or has the meaning of the wealth of agricultural products in the area, buffalo head makeup symbolizes or has the meaning of the heroism of the colonialism period carried out by the Kaili community in Pandere Village; *Taiganja* decoration symbolizes or gives the meaning of the fertility of agricultural areas in the Kaili community area in Pandere Village, tumpal decoration symbolizes or gives the meaning of the greatness of the Kaili community in Pandere Village in its lineage. Bark cloth also has various types of motifs, such as horns, flowers, and rhombuses. These motifs signify courage, nobility, hospitality, and unity.

For ritual ceremonies, the use of bark clothing in traditional ceremonies includes (1) the Balia ceremony, where bark clothing is used as a *Siga* (dastar) to protect or cover the head. The Balia ceremony is the mother of traditional disease healing ceremonies related to the beliefs of the Kaili people. There are three levels of Balia ceremony: *Balia Bone Biasa*, which is a healing ceremony carried out by *Todea* (the general public or many people), *Balia Bone Moso*, which is a healing ceremony carried out by noble people; and *Balia Tampilangi*, which is a healing ceremony carried out in relation to the Kaili community.

Cultural Commodification Policy related to Bark Making

The bark cloth tradition has been promoted by various parties, namely, the Kaili community and the government. For marketing, currently, the Kaili community is one of the main producers of barkcloth crafts in Indonesia, along with Papua and Kalimantan Provinces. Promotion efforts continue to be carried out by the Kaili Community:

“I represented Central Sulawesi as a barkcloth artisan visiting the Textile Museum and Bentara Budaya Jakarta and promoting nationally and

internationally. In addition, a number of clothes, complete with decorations made from bark cloth, were also exhibited. Bark cloth is well known overseas for its uniqueness.”

(56 Kaili Community Member).

Apart from being carried out by the Kaili community, promotional practices are also carried out by the Central Sulawesi government. As a government authority, the Central Sulawesi Provincial Government has political influence in the community and tries to actively promote clothing made from bark cloth. In addition, the Central Sulawesi Provincial Government sees the traditions and uniqueness of local culture as a tourist attraction for local and foreign tourists. Therefore, the government routinely organizes a “cultural carnival” yearly to provide promotional space while introducing it to the younger generation (Figure 2). The cultural carnival accompanies various community entertainments, such as night markets, culinary, musical performances, children’s playgrounds, and traditional handicrafts. One of them showcases the potential of barkcloth clothing as one of the economic drivers for small businesses, home industries, and traditional craftsmen.



Figure 2 The use of bark cloth in cultural carnivals
Source: Adapted from Hamzah (2018)

In 2019, the “Indonesian Culture at the Central Sulawesi Provincial Level” cultural carnival took place, featuring various cultural attractions from 13 regencies and cities throughout Central Sulawesi Province. One of the highlights of the carnival in Buol District was the display of the traditional bark cloth-making tradition. Furthermore, the government has taken the initiative to establish the concept of the “Bark Cloth Tourism Village,” where bark cloth is provided as souvenirs for tourists visiting the villages known for producing bark cloth, including Pandere Village. While the Kaili community still requires promotional efforts to preserve their traditions, adjustments in the packaging of bark cloth are necessary to attract tourists and ensure economic viability.

Discussion

The tradition of making bark cloth in the Kaili Community is a cultural heritage that women actively preserve. Kaili women are generally important in building their society (Nuraedah, 2023). The manufacturing process remains deeply rooted in tradition, utilizing natural materials for coloring. These bark cloths have significant cultural value, being used in everyday life and traditional ceremonies and showcasing a wide range of captivating forms, meanings, and decorations that appeal to tourists. Adorned with motifs such as horns, flowers, and rhombuses, women’s clothing holds special symbolism. The Kaili community has effectively promoted its cultural heritage through museums, exhibitions, and cultural carnivals. Additionally, the Central Sulawesi Provincial Government actively promotes bark cloth by implementing the “Bark Cloth Tourism Village” concept. Adjustments in packaging during the manufacturing process are made to attract tourists.

Based on the findings of research on the policy dilemma of cultural commodification of bark cloth in the Kaili Community, it was discovered that cultural commodification leads to the transformation of previously traditional cultural values into more universally recognized commercial values (Sonjai et al., 2018; Tiberghien & Xie, 2018). Several previous studies have provided evidence that this process of cultural commodification brings about changes in social relationships among individuals in society and also has an impact on their collective identity (see Azkarraga, 2022; Camozzi, 2021; Chen & Kong, 2021; Garrido & Raposo, 2020; Irianto & Laksono, 2017; Mokgachane et al., 2021; Pratum et al., 2022). These changes can influence how cultural communities perceive and value their cultural heritage and their interactions and relationships with external cultures.

The commodification of culture often leads to simplifying, distorting, and even diluting the original cultural meanings (Blakely, 2015; Shepherd, 2002). Previous research conducted by Camozzi (2021), Garrido and Raposo (2020), and Irianto and Laksono (2017) has highlighted the negative impacts of cultural commodification. They argue that while cultural commodification may be necessary to meet the demands of culture-based tourism, it can have detrimental effects. Chen and Kong (2021) support this view, suggesting that cultural commodification should be carried out with the aim of preserving the original culture, despite the need for certain adjustments. However, it is important to note that in this process of cultural commodification,

the rich cultural meanings and intricate nuances are often marginalized, giving way to simplified and superficial representations that do not accurately reflect the true cultural reality (Su, 2018; Tiberghien & Xie, 2018).

Regarding culture-based tourism, government policies regarding cultural commodification can generate significant economic income for communities or individuals involved in selling or commercializing their culture (Stock & Schmiz, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). Thus, with its unique cultural heritage, the Kaili community can seize this opportunity by selling or commercializing its bark cloth-making practices. Introducing their bark cloth to a broader market can attract tourists, art enthusiasts, researchers, or consumers seeking an authentic experience that cannot be replicated elsewhere. In this regard, cultural commodification can offer a sustainable source of income, promote local economic development, foster cultural preservation, and provide incentives for communities to safeguard and strengthen their cultural heritage (Aterianus-Owanga, 2020; Mokgachane et al., 2021; Nomnian & Pillai, 2022). However, it is crucial to consider the long-term social, ethical, and sustainability impacts of cultural commodification to avoid compromising cultural integrity or engaging in inappropriate exploitation. Therefore, it is essential to reassess how cultural commodification can deliver equitable benefits to communities of cultural origin and encourage practices that respect, engage, and empower them in managing and marketing their own indigenous cultures.

Linking cultural commodification policies with preserving cultural authenticity is a complex task. The findings of this study demonstrate that the tradition of bark cloth making in the Kaili community of Pandere Village is undergoing cultural commodification, facilitated by collaborative efforts between the government and the local community. Together, they are promoting the concept of a “Bark Cloth Tourism Village” that necessitates adjustments in the presentation of bark cloth to attract tourists. This illustrates the possibility, within a national policy framework, of combining various factors that contribute to a shared tourist market (Camozzi, 2021; Johan & Hamzah, 2019). When formulating these policies of cultural commodification, it becomes crucial to examine the systemic and structural aspects that specifically impact these sectors. One significant area of concern is why governments often prioritize justifying the existing state support for cultural commodification policies rather than focusing on the cultural benefits that can be derived from them.

Despite the obtained results, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The research

solely focused on the Kaili community in Pandere Village, Central Sulawesi, which warrants caution when generalizing the findings to other communities involved in bark cloth production. Furthermore, there was a lack of in-depth analysis regarding cultural commodification’s social, ethical, and long-term sustainability impacts on the Kaili people and preserving their cultural authenticity. Additionally, the study did not include tourists’ perspectives, neglecting their perceptions and responses to the commodification of bark cloth. Therefore, future researchers should address these limitations and conduct further research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This research has found that the tradition of bark cloth making in the Kaili Community has been passed down through generations. The manufacturing process is preserved authentically, following traditional methods that involve intricate dyeing using natural materials and specialized skills. Barkcloth holds significant importance in the lives of the Kaili people, particularly in ancestral ceremonies. It showcases diverse forms, meanings, and decorations, reflecting the unique and beautiful culture of the Kaili Community. With government support, the Kaili community has undertaken promotional initiatives such as museum exhibitions, cultural carnivals, and other events highlighting the artistry of bark cloth making to promote and introduce this cultural heritage to tourists. The government has also established the concept of the “Bark Cloth Tourism Village” to create an appealing destination based on this cultural heritage. Consequently, adjustments in packaging have been made to attract tourists and present an appealing image.

However, it is crucial to strike a balance between capitalizing on the economic potential and preserving the authenticity and integrity of the culture. It is essential to consider cultural commodification’s social, ethical, and long-term sustainability impacts on the Kaili people and their heritage. This research recommends that the government and the Kaili community ensure that cultural management and marketing practices involve active community participation, respect existing cultural values, and provide fair benefits to the community.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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