

Authentic/Adulterated Artifacts: Material Culture and Ethnicity in Contemporary Java and Ifugao

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ABSTRACT

The role of artifacts as ethnic markers has become particularly problematic as the world has become a realm of interconnected communities, where the constant intrusion of external forces and the almost unavoidable need to deal with the outside world could determine internal affairs and modify the contours of cultural expression. If the artifacts of a culture are not resistant to change especially in societies subjected to strong external influences, it is proper to ask how changing material culture re-constitutes the ethnicity of its makers. This article considers how the material culture of people in post-contact societies (Philippines and Indonesia) and the ethnic identity it represents are modified as these people submit to the requirements of external groups while making adjustments in their internal needs. In such instances, as I shall try to show, the representation of ethnicity is modulated both by external intervention and native complicity.

Keywords: *Ifugao sculpture, batik, wayang topeng, material culture, tourist art*

INTRODUCTION

In his examination of the origin and growth of material culture studies, Victor Buchli writes about how material culture developed as a distinct object of inquiry within 19th century social science. As he charts its history, he notes how material culture became an extraneous concern with the rise of British social anthropology, which focused on social and political institutions and suspected the usefulness of artifacts as "primary texts." Buchli adds, however, that despite having lost its status as an intellectual tool, material culture nevertheless "retained its usefulness in other ways; most notably for its ability to materialize national identity in the creation of nationhood" (Buchli 2002: 7). This connection between artifacts and identity underscores the issue of representation as associated with questions of ethnicity. How do artifacts constitute the ethnicity of their producers? If ethnicity corresponds to a people's sense of their uniqueness and solidarity,¹ how is it negotiated through the culture-specific objects they create?

Material culture consists of artifacts with socially constructed meaning ascribed to them. If material culture is the artifactual representations of the beliefs, knowledge, traditions, values, and aspirations shared by a distinct social group as contrasted to those held by others, any study of material culture will necessarily implicate notions of ethnic differentiation. "Ethnic differences," Anthony Giddens says "are wholly learned" (Giddens 1997: 210). Ethnicity is not something that is given or immanent but a sense of identity that is constantly going through a process of mediation, as a community of people comprehends its situation and defines its connection to others. Correspondingly, the status of objects as cultural expression is something that is arbitrated at various junctures, with the ascription of cultural meaning affected by numerous forms of intervention.

The role of artifacts as ethnic markers has become particularly problematic as the world has become a realm of interconnected communities, where the constant intrusion of external forces and the almost unavoidable need to deal with the outside world could determine internal affairs and modify the contours of cultural expression. If the artifacts of a culture are not resistant to change especially in societies subjected to strong external influences, it is proper to ask how changing material culture re-constitutes the ethnicity of its makers. This article considers how the material culture of people in post-contact societies and the ethnic identity it represents are modified as these people submit to the requirements of external groups while making adjustments in their internal needs. In such instances, as I shall try to show, the representation of ethnicity is modulated both by external intervention and native complicity.

POST-CONTACT CHANGES IN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

To introduce the themes that I wish to discuss, I present two cases, one from the Philippines, the other from Indonesia.

I draw my first example from instances of culture change in the towns of Banaue and Hungduan in Ifugao, Northern Philippines. One of the provinces that comprise the region often referred to as the Gran Cordillera Central, Ifugao is located in the most extensive system of mountain ranges in the Philippines which is home to an indigenous population composed of several distinct ethno-linguistic groups. Ifugao, peopled by an indigenous group of the same name, is famous for its extensive rice terraces carved on mountain sides—an unparalleled feat of engineering recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Among souvenir collectors and aficionados of tribal or ethnic art, it is also known for its wood carving, an ancient tradition that has managed to persist despite the onslaught of modern lifestyles and technology.

From one vantage point, one can sense the importance of Ifugao traditional carvings in the widely held opinion that they represent the quintessence of Philippine "primitive art." This is a reputation established and repeatedly affirmed by various articles in foreign periodicals,² and by gallery shows and museum exhibitions in the Philippines and elsewhere, which all participate in the process of reconfiguring these cultural objects, previously treated as artifacts of a barbaric culture, into objects of art fit for display in civilised places.³ Of these Ifugao artifacts, the *bul-ul* carvings, anthropomorphic figures consecrated and used in rituals, are often cited as the most remarkable. *Bul-ul* figures from Hapao village in Hungduan, for instance, are described by an arbiter of *bul-ul* carving as sculpture distinguished "by a marked delicacy, fullness and sensuality of volume, beauty of proportion, and a roundness and fluidity of anatomy" (Palencia 1998: 59). Wooden food vessels with carved designs (*kinnahu*) and figural spoons from Hapao and Banaue, especially those assigned to ceremonial use, have also received appreciative attention from local and foreign collectors who see in them an aesthetic value not usually found in the more banal pieces done in other parts of the Cordillera. In addition to traditional objects, Banaue and Hungduan carvers (including those who have settled elsewhere) also produce tourist-oriented wood carvings which are generally better executed than the shoddy uninspired Cordillera souvenir items sold in Manila, the national capital, and in the resort city of Baguio, the gateway to the northern highlands.

Banaue and Hapao still hum with the activity of their wood carvers, and the wood carving enterprise is perhaps even livelier now than before, but the traditional forms are gradually disappearing or being altered in various ways. Even when these traditional forms persist, they are in many instances dissociated from their original, organic role in the community. Such is what we see in the unconsecrated *bul-ul* figures or in the exquisitely carved *kinnahu* which are no longer produced as ritual paraphernalia but as objects meant for trade.

Post-World War II developments in the Philippine Cordillera, particularly the introduction of new technology and ideas of modernity as the Ifugao came into greater contact with the dominant and highly Westernised culture of Philippine lowland society, are often considered as the primary explanation for the disintegration of traditional societies in the region and the ensuing transformation of their culture. But the decline of traditional wood carving in Ifugao has a longer history, and may be traced back to the moment of contact with the American occupation forces who tried to pacify the area in the early part of the 20th century. That pivotal moment signifies the start not only of the natives' political servitude but also the reconstitution of their consciousness. The political and administrative reorganisation of the Cordillera paved the way for the evangelising crusade of Christian missionaries and the establishment of public and mission schools under American tutelage.⁴ This development, in turn, initiated the progressive reduction of traditional culture into an anachronism. It is not difficult to see how this turn of events eventually impinged on Cordillera carving traditions rooted in ritual life and socio-economic beliefs. As Christianity took the place of traditional religious beliefs, ritual life was diminished and its correlative paraphernalia became obsolete. As the natives were remolded according to the image of the outsider, many began to see their customs as a thing of the past, without a place in the new order of things.

There is another factor that explains the decline of traditional wood carving. Like the rest of the Cordillera, the opening of Ifugao to outsiders led to its integration into a mercantile economy which introduced new notions of property and modes of economic transaction. With the Ifugao's discovery of artifacts as commodity, the carving of *bul-ul* and other objects for ritual and domestic use was gradually displaced by the profitable production of carvings for souvenir-hunters and importers of tribal curiosities. Today, not only are traditional objects being recast as curios or items of tourist art, but introduced commercial items like wooden phallic ashtrays and massive sculptures of American Indians, Mickey Mouse, and Laughing Buddhas, are also being produced in great quantity, as local contractors and foreign traders in

exotica exploit the wood carving expertise (and cheap labour) of the Ifugao. This, it is said, will ensure the survival of the wood carving industry in the province. Nevertheless, it is not entirely inappropriate to ask what the effect of this commercialisation could be on the skill and sensibility of the native carver who is obliged to adopt the disposition and preferences of outsiders. As local heritage proponents would argue, it is with some anxiety that one must contemplate the hazards of such accommodation.

A different case may be seen in the forms of cultural production that one encounters in the city of Yogyakarta in Central Java. Known as the cultural and artistic center of Indonesia, Yogyakarta is known for its ancient arts—*batik*, daggers, masks and puppets for Javanese plays—as well as for time-honoured crafts such as furniture, leatherwork, pottery, silver, basketry, glass paintings and traditional umbrellas. As a popular book on the arts and crafts of Indonesia puts it, "Nowhere in the country is there such a prodigious output of arts and crafts so *distinctively Indonesian*" (Brown 1992: 178). My underscoring in this statement is meant not only to point out how these traditional arts and crafts are regarded as ethnic markers, but also to suggest how they continue to dominate cultural production in Java. This being the case, do we then have in this instance a society that has to a large extent managed to resist change, where the material culture provides indices to an unadulterated ethnic identity? I will cite changes in two cultural forms to show that contemporary cultural production in Yogyakarta demonstrates a variation of the same theme of cultural change that we see in Ifugao.

The first has to do with the *batik*, Indonesian cloth decorated through the wax-resist method of dyeing and imprinting design on textile. In the past, *batik* had strong royal and ritual connections. Some *batik* styles were for the exclusive use of Javanese aristocrats and worn only on ceremonial occasions. Others figured in community rituals where they assumed various functions, e.g., to heal the sick or to serve as talisman (Kerlogue 2004: 11–12). The patterns found in traditional *batik*, which consist of plant and animal motifs as well as

geometric forms, have symbolic meanings and associations. These motifs allude to Hindu epics, creatures of the natural world, even melodies from gamelan music. In some areas, the colours used may represent stages in a woman's life cycle (Richter 1994: 90–91). In the past, in Central Java, *batik* patterns also indicated distinctions of social rank (Jessup 1990: 140). Thus, the symbolic load of the traditional *batik* clearly declares its link to history, mythology and social practices.

This cultural association is largely lost today, according to Kerlogue, who claims that "Many Javanese have no knowledge of the significance of *batik* patterns" and "those who do will interpret them in different ways, and will probably refer to a pattern's character rather than its meaning" (Kerlogue 2004: 76). Kerlogue attributes this to a development in *batik* production which began way back in the middle of the 19th century when the use of a copper stamp known as *cap* was introduced as a more efficient way to apply the wax to the cloth. This new technology led to the rise of *batik* factories, established mostly by Chinese and Arab entrepreneurs, where men assumed the principal role in production. Before this innovation, *batik* was waxed by hand with an implement called *canting*, and *batik* production was an almost exclusive preserve of women who worked on it at home. With the displacement of this traditional context of production by a new mode of manufacture, the ritual and symbolic weight of the *batik* began to diminish.

Another and more recent development may be cited to illustrate a new dimension in Indonesian *batik*. Today, around the *kraton* (sultan's palace) of Yogyakarta, there is a thriving colony of artists who produce *lukisan batik*, which are meant to be framed and displayed on walls. Done in the traditional manner of handpainted *batik* (*batik tulis*), many of them employ designs and images obviously or primarily meant for the consumption of foreigners. Pictures of pleasant landscapes or rural scenes, idealised native portraits, and modernistic sketches verging on abstraction dominate, with many of the pieces embellished with glitters

intended to maximise commercial appeal.⁵ Painting styles learned from exposure to Western art are evident. Many of the works now also carry the signature of their makers, betraying a Western predilection for art or craftwork of known provenance. In these paintings, the ancient and often esoteric associations of *batik* often give way to the instant recognition permitted by images that conform to the taste of outsiders, who are usually concerned only with the decorative and who thus refuse to be encumbered with the demands of the unfamiliar.

The second Indonesian cultural form that I would like to cite is the *topeng* (mask), used in the *wayang topeng* or Javanese masked dances revolving around the lives of ancient Javanese royalty. Many of these focus on the prince Panji and how he regains power and reclaims his lost beloved. Others are based on historical narratives drawn from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the classical Hindu epics whose tales continue to serve as fodder to the native artistic imagination (Fischer 1994: 18–20; Richter 1994: 136; Wagner 1959: 168). Given the wide range of personages that figure in these dance dramas—incarnations of gods and goddesses, royalties, demons, animals, and an assortment of stock characters—the *wayang topeng* boasts of a large inventory of masks. Some old specimens have taken on mythical proportions. There are masks known to induce trances, and some are revered like idols.

Like the *batik*, and also like the very popular *wayang kulit*, Indonesian shadow plays, the *wayang topeng* is an ancient tradition. We also see in it a close association between cultural form, history, social values, and religious beliefs. Despite the popularity and pervasiveness of cinema and teledramas, these masked performances have remained.⁶ Yet, there are signs that the *wayang topeng*, like many aspects of traditional culture, is an endangered form. Though they are still held in the *kraton* of Yogyakarta and in villages elsewhere in Java, where the spectators could somehow still identify with the tales that they depict, these masked dramas are on the decline, and are more and more frequently associated with tourist spectacles, performed in spaces designed for the display of native exotica.

The center of *topeng* production is Yogyakarta,⁷ where mask workshops can still be found in the vicinity of the *kraton*. Today, however, what mostly fill up the shops and souvenir stalls from Jakarta to Bali are not the traditional *topeng*, but the modern commercial *batik* masks, so called because they are distinguished by their handpainted designs which are derived from *batik* patterns. These contemporary masks, obviously designed for sale to tourists, souvenir-hunters, and interior designers are prettified versions of the traditional *topeng*. Alluding neither to history or folk mythology, and irrelevant to dramatic or dance performances, they assume a purely decorative purpose. Nevertheless, their link to antecedent forms is not entirely severed. Because they preserve certain stylistic features of the traditional mask and employ design elements borrowed from another folk form, they remain embedded in a distinctly Javanese culture.

CULTURE CHANGE AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

The cases from Ifugao and Yogyakarta that I have just described speak of culture change that takes place as one culture comes into contact with another, and as elements of modernity intrude into traditional life. In the case of Ifugao, we have an ethnic group interacting with and being acted upon by a dominant majority group within one national territory, a society further subjected to the influences and control of foreign elements either directly or in mediated form.⁸ In the case of Yogyakarta, we have a dominant majority society in possession of a rich and highly developed culture, but affected nevertheless by its past colonial experience and by present-day exposure to foreign markets and cultures.

We can now consider the nature of the various forms of culture change exemplified in the cases cited, and identify the issues in representation that they imply and how these connect to questions of ethnicity. Here I borrow some of the categories used by Nelson Graburn in his discussion of art, communication and ethnicity (Graburn 1976: 23–30), emphasising the

"movements of assimilation and resistance" that can be recognised in these forms of culture change.

I have said that the material objects that people make, acquire, or surround themselves with are expressions of their individual identity and group affiliation. Of the social identities that people assume, ethnicity is one of the most important, for it distinguishes a given community of people from others and, by so doing, provides a basis for cohesion. The material objects or cultural forms created by a people as they try to make sense of their being in this world, and re-created as they make adjustments to changing or changed circumstances, are projections of established and emerging ethnicities.

Objects represent ethnicity in varying degrees. The artifact as ethnic marker is, of course, most pronounced in what Graburn calls "the inwardly directed arts" of indigenous societies where objects made by the people for their own use have social, political and ethical functions (Graburn 1976: 4–5). The *bul-ul*, for example, is an expression of Ifugao religious belief. As a consecrated image used in agricultural and other rituals, the *bul-ul* speaks of ancestor worship or belief in supernatural intervention as this is located in a system of rituals and a complex pantheon of native divinities. It invests the Ifugao with external identity because it differentiates them not only from mainstream society but also from contiguous (and similarly minoritised) cultural communities where the *bul-ul* is either absent or where similar objects (e.g., the *tinagtagu* of the Kankana-ey, another indigenous group living in the adjacent Mountain Province) have no function equivalent to the role assumed by the *bul-ul* in Ifugao society. Similarly, the traditional Indonesian *batik* and *topeng* are indicators of external identity, for they are aspects of a cultural expression unique to the Javanese, rooted in old traditions and expressive of the values or beliefs essential to Javanese life.

An interesting aspect of these ethnic markers appears when their customary link to their society is lost or altered, or when they are appropriated for other purposes. The production of *bul-ul* figures continues to this day, but most of the carvings being done now are no longer meant for ritual purposes but for sale to tourists and collectors—a situation that is replicated in many other parts of the world.⁹ Because they are not meant to fulfill any religious function, these effigies do not have to go through the elaborate series of rituals that attend the carving and consecration of the traditional *bul-ul*. Consequently, they are completely dissociated from their original network of meanings. The *bul-ul* has also mutated. Severed from its ritual connections, the unconsecrated *bul-ul* was freed of the restrictions imposed by the stylistic canon, resulting in the appearance of benign-looking idols and ornamental features. From a free-standing sculpture, it has also become a recurrent motif that appears as a design element or decorative relief in various types of objects—*bul-ul* figures can now be found as ornamental details in commercial furniture (tables, benches, stools), home furnishings (wooden caddies, plant holders, vases, racks), and even in souvenir trinkets like pendants and key chains.¹⁰ The *bul-ul* has thus been de-sacralized and aestheticised.

Despite this, it remains as a marker of ethnicity, assuming a symbolic function within the community and without. Indeed, it is this symbolic function that is perhaps most prominent now. Although the Ifugao will not treat the commercial *bul-ul* with the kind of reverence given to the sacred, they will not consider it as something extraneous to their society. Dissociated from its aboriginal religious meaning, the commercial *bul-ul* retains an expressive value that is tied up with the Ifugao's sense of their own creativity,¹¹ at the same time that it also speaks of their contemporary self-perception and their abiding sense of their uniqueness. It is used to adorn public spaces where the projection of an ethnic spirit is considered desirable. The *bul-ul* form, as it appears in stylised form in logos and seals and in new objects like decorative tapestries, is made to function as a sign of local identity.

On this point, the results of an old research project by Filipino anthropologist Aurora Roxas-Lim are instructive. In 1966–67 Roxas-Lim conducted field work in Banaue to undertake a preliminary survey of "Ifugao art." At the time, Ifugao society was already rapidly modernising. Because of its famous rice terraces (often touted in the past as one of "wonders of the world"), Banaue became a popular travel destination and though it was not the capital of the province, it attracted the most number of visitors, both local and foreign. The growth of local tourism, in turn, led to the development of various forms of business enterprises run both by local people and by migrants from the lowlands. Thus, it became one of the most commercialised areas in the Gran Cordillera Central. The changes wrought on Ifugao life by tourism and other forms of contact with outsiders were drastic. To these changes, Roxas-Lim claims, the Ifugao "responded in a way that does not necessarily entail the erosion of Ifugao ethos" (Roxas-Lim 1973: 50). Among the more significant findings of her research on Ifugao artistic perception are the categories used by the Ifugao in referring to objects to which certain aesthetic values may be ascribed. Some of these categories imply that the Ifugao differentiate objects made to answer internal (and usually traditional) needs from objects fabricated for commercial purposes. They maintain, however, that both have a cultural value in their society. The full significance of this is not articulated in Roxas-Lim's study, but when she writes that the tourist trade not only "provides more opportunity for the Ifugao artist to experiment and widen his technical skills" but also to "extend his perception of the world at a much faster rate than if he were to keep within the traditional norms" (Roxas-Lim 1973: 67). She introduces an important theme: that in the mid-60s the Ifugao already knew that they were no longer confined to a social formation defined exclusively by the agricultural cycle and its accompanying social practices—like the world outside, their society had changed, and they must contend with its new requirements. Thus, the making of objects not associated with agrarian life signifies not only a new sphere of production but also a new way of re-shaping their identity as stipulated by new conditions within and without.

Like the Ifugao *bul-ul*, the Javanese *topeng* in its modern incarnation still fulfills the role of ethnic marker, even though it bears no essential relation to the ritual prototype. Its basic form connects it to the old masks, and its adoption of design elements from another native cultural form, the *batik*, accentuates its Indonesian character. The outsider who walks into a mall in Jakarta and sees these modern masks will have no problem recognising the ethnicity embedded in them. It is interesting to note that these modern masks in the *batik* style are taken by the native Javanese themselves as a representation of their ethnicity. Their popularity as décor in the shops of Jakarta and Yogyakarta implies that they are widely held as signs of cultural identity. In the office of an Indonesian anthropology professor at Yogyakarta's Universitas Gadjah Mada, where one would expect to find what is ordinarily considered as specimens of an "authentic ethnicity," it is not the traditional *topeng* but these *batik* masks that one discovers gracing the walls. Also arranged with these modern masks as part of the wall display are wooden shadow puppets like those used in the *wayang klitik*, except that unlike the puppets actually used in the shadow plays these decorative puppets come with the same *batik*-style ornamentation found in modern masks. Again, there is an interesting disclosure here of a signifying system that points to a notion of self-representation. Scorned and often disparaged as commercial or, worse, as "tourist" arts by connoisseurs, these decorative pieces are, nonetheless, "important in presenting to the outside world an ethnic image that must be maintained and projected as a part of the all-important boundary-defining system" (Graburn 1976: 5). Though they are divested of their symbolic sense, they are made to function on another semantic level, as signs of cultural difference and, therefore, as markers of external boundaries.

ACCOMMODATION AND RESISTANCE

In the preceding section, I have called attention to how contemporary *batik* art has been altered by the *batik* artists' accommodation of foreign taste or desires. The change is both stylistic and thematic. Despite this change, the modern *batik* is still recognisably Indonesian because it retains certain features, both in technique and content, that connect it to the more traditional pieces. The ethnic element is, therefore, not entirely lost. The same may be said of another specimen of contemporary Ifugao culture—the carved or ornamented house panel. In the traditional Ifugao hut (*bale*), some panels of wood are occasionally embellished with simple relief carvings, usually of traditional designs like the lizard and dancing man motifs. In recent years, however, unusual panels saturated with *bul-ul*-like figures in relief would now and then surface in the Philippine antique market. Because these pieces are made from wooden planks from dismantled houses, many buyers get the impression that they must be old and traditional. There is, however, no documentation of their rootedness in tradition. They have, as a matter of fact, a striking similarity to door panels done by virtuoso carvers of the Yoruba and other tribes of Africa. One suspects, then, that what we have here is a case of derivative art, with the Ifugao carver imitating African prototypes. The new product, however, is not a case of indiscriminate imitation. It retains a distinctly Ifugao character because although the borrowed elements are unmistakable, there are stylistic and iconographic features that keep it connected to the ethnicity of its maker.

The case I have just cited is not an isolated one. Overall, the craft of Ifugao carvers is being altered by a derivative aesthetic introduced by Manila antique dealers and interior designers who commission works copied from pictures of African or Oceanic tribal sculpture—a case of commercially induced influence.¹² *Bul-ul* sculpture has not been spared of this influence, with new works exhibiting stylistic traits not found in traditional pieces. Shops in Manila, Baguio, and even Banaue are now also selling African-inspired wooden boxes, lime containers, and

deftly carved human figures—miniature and attenuated—whose appeal lies in their refined style or in the cleverness of their construction, as opposed to the more rudimentary forms of traditional artifacts done in the so-called archaic style.

It can be said that the introduction of new techniques and stylistic devices has its positive side, inspiring local crafts people to explore other modes of artistic invention. This sometimes leads to the manufacture of new objects that could eventually take on some significance in native life. More often, traditional forms persist, with technical or formal innovations, or even assimilated imagery. Graburn contends that as "long as these changes do not seriously disturb the transmission of symbolic meaning, and hence the cultural appropriate satisfactions, they may still be called functional or contact-influenced traditional arts" (Graburn 1976: 5). It is perhaps fruitful to ask what these "cultural appropriate satisfactions" are. When the Javanese mask-makers or *batik* artists produce modern versions of the old prototypes, or when the Ifugao carvers create commercial *bul-ul* pieces that depart from the stylistic canon, what are they trying to satisfy culturally? Do we have here a betrayal of indigenous identity? Are these cases of self-misrepresentation?

Those who believe that ethnicity could only be truly embodied in uncontaminated forms would probably say yes. As Michael Rowlands puts it, "In the prison house of tradition and authenticity any change may be seen as a contamination and loss of identity" (Rowlands 2002: 120). And yet, such a position ignores the fact that ethnic identity is not a fixed construct but something that is constantly reinscribed as members of ethnic groups deal with the changing circumstances of their individual and collective lives. Such a negotiation requires new expressions, or reconfigurations of customary forms of self-representation, which assimilate elements from other cultures at the same time that they maintain what Nicholas Thomas calls "profound differences that resist fusion" (Thomas 1999: 17). This we see in the Javanese and Ifugao cultural artifacts discussed earlier, which illustrate the accommodation of influences

derived from exposure to external forces while maintaining aspects of traditional objects that preserve their link to their original cultures.

In his study of tourist-oriented crafts produced along the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea, Silverman (1999: 51–66) speaks of the various contemporary developments in the production of handcrafted objects meant for sale. To accommodate external demand for exotic mementos of travel, the Sepik people have been encouraged to introduce changes in the manufacture of artifacts. This is seen, for example, in the large-scale production of portable handcarved objects and in the replication of ritual carvings, which must be done so that native crafts could "become relevant rather than antiquated in the context of an encroaching world system and rapid sociocultural and economic change" (Silverman 1999: 66). The accommodation, however, is tempered by internal needs. Commoditised objects must somehow retain their expressive meaning which is realised, for instance, through the use of imagery drawn from the natural environment of the Sepik River. Replicated ritual carvings, on the other hand, must be stripped of totemic significance in order not to offend native sensibilities.

Somehow, this could also be said of the reconfigurations that we see in contemporary Ifugao and Javanese material culture. Their stylistic changes, thematic explorations, or redefined purposes suggest their makers' recognition of the need to adapt to the new requirements of contemporary life, but their refusal to discard totally the logic and legacy of tradition indicates an equally important recognition of the valid pull of the past.

When contemporary Javanese artists adopt some discourses of Western art to produce new versions of *batik* art, they do so not merely to accommodate Western preferences but also to reposition themselves in the rapidly changing context of the circulation of objects. Traditional *batik* will continue to answer customary needs, but new lifestyles and demands stimulate contemporary artists to recast the traditional form into something that could express their

sense of importance as they locate themselves in a modern milieu, which is, first of all, a global environment where a mainly Western cultural perspective is entrenched, and secondly, a local society that is not insulated from its influence. This they cannot ignore if they are to participate in the larger arena of global culture and in the modernising projects of societies that do not want to be consigned to the peripheries of a new world order. Similarly, the production of *batik* masks is prompted by commercial demands but also by contemporary notions of decorative arts. New *batik* art and modern masks both represent artistic innovations that are meant to be a pragmatic response to new conditions. At the same time, they must be seen as attempts to revitalise old traditions, by people who know that they are no longer artisans working in isolation but producers in a global network of competing and intersecting desires.

In Ifugao, artisans have no compunction in duplicating ritual objects for sale to tourists and collectors, or in modifying traditional objects by assimilating new artistic idioms, for they have come to accept the production of revitalised crafts as profitable enterprises that must be pursued if they are to emancipate themselves from poverty and escape the paralysing effects of economic and cultural marginalisation. On the one hand, it is easy to say that these new products, stripped of traditional socio-cultural significance, hold little meaning to the native except as merchandise that allows them to take part in a monetarised economy. Conversely, outsiders may see these objects as material culture that has been contaminated by external values; thus, they constitute a false representation of the Ifugao's Otherness. On the other hand, it may be claimed that for the Ifugao, their contemporary crafts are not merely commodities but representations of a native culture that has changed, and this involves transformations which are inescapable. Although the process of acculturation goes unabated in contemporary Ifugao society, tradition continues to hold sway in certain spheres of native life. Old rituals and practices are still conducted, though with less frequency and sometimes in modified forms. As long as these persist, the artifacts of traditional culture will continue to make sense as signifiers of patrimony and identity. At the same time, these lingering traditions co-exist

with new practices in ever-increasing pockets of modernity, where the Ifugao refuse to be contained in predetermined images of themselves and where they feel compelled to articulate a new awareness of their value to the outside world.

Material culture, as the cases from Java and Ifugao show, is a site of contestation. The insistence that ethnicity could only be actualised in "authentic" or uncontaminated artifacts is a contention that is implicitly disputed by those who believe that identity could not be reduced to an essentialising Otherness defined by outsiders. Ethnicity is constantly being recast. As a society develops, its material culture is reconfigured according to the requirements set by new social arrangements. The changes in Javanese and Ifugao material culture represent new ways of negotiating identity in societies that hold on to some aspects of tradition while they accommodate the claims of the present.

NOTES

1. Here I use the term ethnicity as "the awareness sensed by a group of its cultural distinctiveness in contrast to other groups." Ethnic solidarity is founded on a confluence of many factors which include oral traditions, characteristic cuisine, social and religious rituals, language and artistic idioms. See the synoptic discussion in Payne (1996: 182–183).
2. See, for example, Roll (1974: 20–29) and Gomez-Garcia (1983: 84–93). Ifugao anthropomorphic carving has also been the subject of a cover story in *Tribal Art* (Palencia 1998).
3. Elsewhere, I have discussed how the material culture of the Northern Philippine Cordillera is configured in some representative texts, from 19th century European travel writing to contemporary exhibition catalogues. See Tolentino (2001: 198–210).

4. For an account of American pacification campaigns in the Gran Cordillera Central, see Fry (1983). How American colonial authority intruded into Ifugao is treated at length in Jenista (1987).
5. *Batik* is mostly associated with clothing; thus, it has a primarily utilitarian value. *Batik* painting reconstitutes this cultural form into a piece of ornamentation or an object meant for aesthetic contemplation. While the phenomenon cited here is connected mainly with the need to meet the present-day demands of foreign consumers, the emergence of *batik* art is actually something prompted by an earlier impulse. In the 1960s, as the new republic of Indonesia tried to disengage itself from its colonial legacy, an important issue that came to the fore had to do with art and how it could be used to articulate an emerging national identity. Because the *batik* was by then firmly established as a quintessentially Indonesian craft, its use as an artistic medium to express national aspirations was a logical alternative. See Kerlogue (2004: 168–169).
6. Electronic media actually have a hand in the continuing popularity of Indonesian folk theatre. The state channel, Televisi Republic Indonesia, in Bandung used to show *wayang* performances and other programs focusing on regional culture in an effort to contravene the effects of globalisation. Private radio stations and cassette companies also contributed to this effort by playing and reproducing music from folk theatre. See Jurriens (2004: 47–76).
7. Dance and drama performances where masks are used are also frequently held in the villages of Bali where the most popular form is perhaps the *Barong*, a classic tale of the conflict between good and evil. Masks are also used in Balinese rituals where they take on a sacred dimension. See Slatum (1992).
8. Using Graburn's categories, one could say that Ifugao society falls under the category of Fourth World—"the collective name for all aboriginal or native peoples whose lands fall within the national boundaries and techno-bureaucratic administrations of the countries of the First, Second and Third Worlds. As such, they are people without countries of their own, peoples who are usually in the minority and without the power to direct the course of their collective lives" (Graburn 1976: 1). Graburn's remark on agency, or the lack of it, is of course something that now requires qualification, given the remarkable strides made by

indigenous peoples toward empowerment—a phenomenon of the last two decades or so.

9. Many accounts of similar circumstances in Africa and the Pacific have already been published. For instance, Causey (2000: 159–174) writes about how the Toba Batak wood-carvers of Samosir Island in North Sumatra, Indonesia have responded to the demands of Western tourists for souvenirs. Like the Ifugao, the Toba Batak went through a great acculturation process in the early 20th century. Upon conversion to Christianity, they lost the original motives for carving traditional objects like ancestor figures, water buffalo horn containers, and staffs used by shamans in divination rites. See Thomas (1991) for a fuller account of the various forms of "entanglements" in the Western appropriation of native artifacts.
10. Given the inventiveness of the Ifugao and the encouragement of potential sales, the *bul-ul* motif is likely to appear in a wide array of new objects meant for local use and for sale to outsiders. Sometimes, the idea for innovative uses comes from contractors who whimsically ask the Ifugao carver to embellish new products with *bul-ul* figures, but it could also come from professional product designers or from design agencies like the Design Center Philippines, a government institution.
11. Again, this recalls the case of the Toba Batak wood-carvers of North Sumatra. About them, Causey (2000: 161) writes: "These days, although it is true that only tourist, not local, interest sustains the carving tradition, it is also true that many Toba Batak are proud of their carved wood patrimony. They appreciate the pre-Christian forms not as evidence of a pagan past, but as example of their own distinct cultural aesthetic."
12. Palencia also says that "there are among the Ifugao those who prefer pieces worked with what would be, by their cultural standards, florid detail, but these are usually agents and dealers who, by the nature of their occupations, have learned to look at the rice gods the way prospective buyers would. They adopt the perspective of Western collectors who are accustomed to other artistic forms, such as those produced in Africa" (1998: 58).

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