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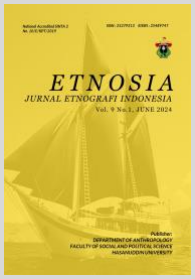

Sacred Sounds in Transit: The Transformation of Indonesian Ritual Music as a Creative Economy Commodities

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ABSTRACT

This critical ethnographic study examines the Indonesian ritual music transformation into creative economy commodities, revealing complex negotiations between cultural preservation and market logic. Its primary contribution is a multi-actor governance model that reveals how Indonesian ritual music is strategically managed within a competitive ecosystem of power. Through multi-sited fieldwork, this study examines how Indonesian ritual music is reconfigured for tourism, negotiating between spiritual authenticity and commercial viability. Employing a mixed-method approach that combines critical reanalysis of existing ethnographic documentation with targeted primary fieldwork, the study traces power dynamics underlying commodification processes through multi-temporal perspectives. The research engaged a diverse range of informants, including traditional practitioners, PINKAN officials, government representatives, and multi-general artist to ground this analysis. Intensive participant observation during UNESCO recognition processes was supplemented by validation fieldwork across all three sites to capture contemporary transformations. Findings reveal that ritual music's market transit generates stratified outcomes where local communities, state agencies, and global markets compete for definitional authority over cultural meaning. While creative economy initiatives provide economic incentives for cultural transmission, they simultaneously restructure traditional authority, privileging market-oriented aesthetics over cosmological meanings. Traditional leaders function as "ritual CEOs" managing bifurcated musical practices, aristocratic families rebrand ancestral ceremonies as exclusive tourism products, while practitioners navigate UNESCO standardization processes that potentially rigidify living traditions. The research demonstrates that commodification operates through nuanced community strategies maintaining

ritual integrity while engaging market opportunities, including "contextual competence" and subversive tactics redirecting revenues toward non-commercial ritual activities. However, technological mediation creates "sonic schizophrenia" where recorded versions exist independently from spatially embedded practices, potentially disconnecting techniques from cosmological foundations. These findings contribute to ethnomusicological understanding by challenging preservation versus commercialization binaries and demonstrating adaptive strategies for cultural sustainability. The study advocates for equitable models centering community agency while preserving cosmological foundations essential to ritual music's cultural vitality.

1. Introduction

My interest in the transformation of ritual into tourism packages began when I encountered Shinji Yamashita's critical analysis of the *Puang Mengkendek* death ceremony in Toraja, Sulawesi. In his work, Yamashita reveals how sacred traditional rituals—such as *dirapa'i,* the highest funeral ceremony involving the sacrifice of dozens of buffalo—were staged as spectacles for Japanese television and international tourists. The involvement of foreign media, paid contract negotiations, and ritual adaptations to meet global audiences' expectations of 'primitivism' demonstrate the inevitable commodification of culture within late capitalism. This phenomenon not only shifts the sacred meaning of tradition into exoticized spectacle, but also exposes the power dynamics behind it: local elites like Sampe, the deceased's son, exploit ritual to promote their hotel business, while the Indonesian government incorporates Torajan ceremonies into the official national tourism calendar.

Picard's study of Bali reinforces awareness that similar practices have become widespread. He illustrates how Hindu-Balinese religious rites are reconstructed as cultural performances to satisfy the "tourist gaze," while the government mainstreams regional culture as part of nationalism projects through programs like 'Visit Indonesia Year'. However, this transformation is not without controversy: on one hand, it preserves traditions threatened with extinction; on the other, it sparks debates about authenticity, exploitation of sacred symbols, and fragmentation of cultural meaning.

In Toraja, market logic transforms sacred chronology. Rambu Solo, which should be held according to lunar calculations and agrarian cycles, is now scheduled according to European tourist seasons. In 2022, aristocratic families in Kete' Kesu advanced their ancestors' burial ceremony three months early to coincide with a National Geographic crew visit—a decision that sparked protests from to *minaa* (traditional priests). "Souls can become lost if the procession is forced," remarked one to *minaa*, pointing to tau-tau (ancestral statues) whose eyes were now fitted with GoPro camera lenses for documentary purposes.

In Minahasa, Kolintang commodification has created new hierarchies. The Pesta Pinasten competition funded by Bekraf rewards music groups with the "most

innovative" arrangements, yet judges often prioritize Western harmony over traditional *tumetenden* rhythmic patterns (spirit-summoning rhythms). A 72-year-old Kolintang master in Tomohon grumbled: "They call this preservation, but what's happening is gradual murder. Kolintang for ancestors doesn't need electric drums!" Meanwhile, younger generations—tempted by 2 million rupiah per performance—prefer memorizing pop Minahasa songs adapted for Kolintang rather than learning ritual repertoires.

The government, through creative economy schemes, often becomes a contradictory actor. On one hand, Bekraf grant funding saves traditional music from extinction by financing youth training programs. On the other hand, standardization of "cultural tourism packages" by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy forces communities to follow market-preferred scenarios: rituals are shortened, costumes made more colorful, and mythical narratives simplified to be "easily digestible for tourists."

This ethnography reveals that commodification is not merely a neutral process—it is a battlefield of power. Local elites, the state, tourism industry, and younger generations compete for authority over the meaning of ritual music. In Bali, Traditional Leaders now function as "ritual CEOs," allocating 30% of performance revenue for temple maintenance while 70% goes to village funds for tourism infrastructure. In Toraja, aristocratic families like descendants of Puang Mengkendek—who once led ceremonies—have become cultural "brand ambassadors," selling exclusive access to their ancestral rituals through tour packages worth 15 million rupiah per person.

This transformation reflects Foucaultian questions: Who has the right to transform ritual into commodity? Does it become a tool of economic emancipation or a new form of cultural colonialism? This research offers no simplistic answers but opens space to hear marginalized voices in the creative economy's bustle—voices of to *minaa* losing authority, elderly artists feeling betrayed, and younger generations caught between cultural pride and modernity's temptations. Here ethnography becomes crucial: it records not only what is heard, but also what is 'lost' in sacred music's transit to global markets.

Indonesia's cultural landscape is intricately woven with ritual music that functions as a spiritual bridge between society and the divine dimension. With more than 1,300 ethnic groups, the archipelago possesses diverse ritual traditions. Balinese gamelan in Hindu-Balinese ceremonies such as *Odalan* or *Ngaben,* Kolintang (wooden xylophone ensemble) of the Minahasa people in North Sulawesi used in ancestral veneration rituals, and Torajan bamboo *pa'pompangan* ensemble in Rambu Solo death rites represent this wealth.

These musical forms are not merely artistic expressions, but are laden with cosmological meaning, social cohesion functions, and ancestral veneration. Initial field observations show that Balinese gamelan is considered sacred, with instruments often consecrated in temple ceremonies (Harnish, 2021). Similarly yet in different contexts, Minahasa Kolintang traditionally accompanies rituals to

seek blessings and communicate with ancestral spirits Kartomi (1994), while *Torajan pa'pompangan* music symbolizes the soul's journey to the afterlife.

Nevertheless, these ritual practices face existential threats. During preliminary research in three different locations—Bali, Minahasa, and Toraja—I witnessed first-hand how modernization, urbanization, and religious dynamics have transformed the ritual cultural landscape. Younger generations increasingly prioritize global lifestyles, while digital media reshapes cultural consumption patterns. In Bali, *gamelan selonding*—sacred iron ensembles played only in temples—is rarely taught, with fewer craftsmen capable of making the instruments. I found that in Minahasa, Kolintang transmission has shrunk due to contemporary Christian music practices' dominance, with only 15 documented master practitioners in North Sulawesi.

Urban migration further exacerbates communal ritual participation fragmentation. During three months of intensive observation in a Central Java village, I witnessed how *wayang kulit* ritual now attracts only smaller, aging audiences (Sumarsam, 2003). This erosion reflects broader Southeast Asian trends where 60% of traditional rituals have experienced decreased frequency since 2000 (UNESCO, 2022).

Yet amid these challenges, Indonesia's rapidly developing creative economy—contributing 7.4% to national GDP (BPS, 2023)—offers a paradoxical yet promising path for preservation. Through participant observation in various communities, I discovered intriguing phenomena where ritual music is repackaged as commodified performances, workshops, or digital content. Thus, communities utilize economic incentives to maintain their traditions.

Bali exemplifies this shift: Kecak dance, originally a *sanghyang* trance ritual, has evolved as tourist spectacle generating village revenue (Picard, 2008). Similarly, Minahasa Kolintang has been rebranded through competitions and cultural festivals like *Pesta Pinasten* (Minahasa Cultural Festival), attracting national attention. Meanwhile, Torajan Rambu Soloritual is marketed as "cultural tourism," offering curated death music and dance experiences to visitors (Adams, 2005).

Government initiatives, such as Bekraf (Creative Economy Agency), actively promote ritual arts through grants and digital platforms, combining preservation with profit. In-depth interviews with policymakers, artists, and community leaders reveal complex power dynamics in this commodification process.

This research poses three fundamental questions: *First,* how is Indonesian ritual music transformed into creative economy commodities? *Second*, what tensions emerge between commercialization and spiritual authenticity? *Third*, can creative economy strategies meaningfully contribute to preservation?

Through critical ethnographic approach, this research not only documents ritual music transformation, but also explores power relations and interests underlying commodification processes. By living with communities for several months in three different regions, I directly observed how negotiations between sacred and

economic values occur in daily practice. Participant observation in original rituals and their commodified versions provides deep understanding of changes in musical meaning, function, and form.

Academically, this research bridges ethnomusicology and cultural economics, offering critical perspectives on globalization's impact on intangible heritage. Practically, it informs policymakers and communities about balancing economic viability with ethical stewardship.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive-critical approach, combining critical secondary analysis of existing ethnographic works with primary fieldwork to examine the dialectics between cultural preservation and market logic. The epistemological framework pivots on an interpretive constructivist paradigm, viewing ritual music commodification as a product of continuously shifting meaning negotiations, reinforced by a critical emancipatory lens (Madison, 2005). This enables excavation of power structures concealed beneath creative economy narratives while centering marginalized voices.

Following Marcus's (1995) multi-sited ethnographic principles, the research establishes three locations as "nodes in the cultural commodification network": Bali, Minahasa, and Toraja. However, rather than conducting entirely original fieldwork across all sites, this employs qualitative triangulation integrating critical reanalysis of existing ethnographic documentation (Yamashita's Torajan death ceremony observations); Aryandari's Balinese gamelan transformation analysis) (Aryandari, 2021; Yamashita, 1994); focused primary fieldwork in Minahasa, capturing contemporary UNESCO recognition processes and PINKAN activities; and supplementary validation across all three sites to verify and update previous findings

This design functions as a temporal-analytical strategy: examining long-term commodification processes in Bali and Toraja through established scholarship while capturing real-time transformation dynamics in Minahasa through direct observation. Site selection deliberately explores differing ethno-religious contexts (Hindu-Balinese, Christian Minahasa, *Aluk Todolo* Toraja) to trace patterns of local adaptation across different historical moments and institutional frameworks.

Two seminal works undergo deconstructive reading (Spivak, 1988): Shinji Yamashita's documentation of Torajan death ceremony commodification and Citra Aryandari's analysis of Balinese gamelan transformation in "Performing vs Recording: The Sound of Modern Bali" (Aryandari, 2023). This treats existing ethnographies as dialogical partners in ongoing analytical conversation rather than static data sources, identifying gaps, silences, and power dynamics unexplored in original contexts.

Intensive ethnographic work concentrated in Minahasa (six months, 2023-2024) during the critical period surrounding Kolintang's UNESCO recognition. Through purposive sampling, 25 key informants were recruited including

traditional practitioners, PINKAN officials, government representatives, and multi-generational artists. Snowball sampling traced networks from institutional gatekeepers to marginalized voices.

Supplementary fieldwork in Bali and Toraja (three weeks each) served dual purposes: validating/updating findings from Yamashita's and Aryandari's work while documenting contemporary developments. Brief but intensive observation periods focused on critical moments (temple ceremonies vs tourist performances in Bali; traditional vs commercial death rituals in Toraja).

Data integration occurs through multi-temporal qualitative triangulation, treating historical ethnographic accounts as foundational narratives requiring contemporary verification and extension. Analysis employs three interpretive lenses based on Foucault's power/knowledge theory: Historical Trajectory Analysis (Tracing power shifts documented in Yamashita's and Aryandari's work forward to present contexts); Contemporary Validation (By comparing historical observations with current practices to identify continuities and ruptures); and Emergent Pattern Recognition (by identifying new commodification forms not captured in earlier studies (digital platforms, UNESCO frameworks, social media marketing).

Examines how commodification narratives have evolved across temporal periods. Member-checking with contemporary practitioners validates historical interpretations and reveals ongoing transformations, recognizing cultural commodification as an evolving dialectic requiring both historical depth and contemporary insight.

This multi-temporal, multi-sited qualitative ethnography with source triangulation design addresses research question complexity through strategic integration of established scholarship with contemporary observation. Power relations in commodification emerge through comparing historical documentation (Yamashita's elite-controlled Torajan ceremonies) with current institutional dynamics (PINKAN's UNESCO processes). Temporal trajectories become visible through tracing Aryandari's gamelan bifurcation forward to contemporary digital recording practices. Local-global dialectics are captured through examining how international frameworks (UNESCO, tourism policies) interact differently across sites and historical periods.

This multi-temporal, multi-sited design necessitated a reflexive and differentiated ethical protocol. Primary fieldwork in Minahasa adhered to standard informed consent procedures, with particular attention to the power dynamics inherent in researching state-led UNESCO processes and community negotiations. For the critical reanalysis of existing ethnographic works, ethical engagement involved a commitment to dialogical accountability—treating the subjects and authors of earlier studies as interlocutors whose representations are analyzed not as definitive truth but as situated accounts. This approach required careful contextualization to avoid anachronistic judgment while ethically examining historical power imbalances the original works may contain. Across all sites, the study prioritized beneficence and reciprocity, ensuring findings

were member-checked with contemporary communities and, where appropriate, shared in accessible formats to contribute back to the cultural sustainability dialogues from which they emerged.

3. Result and Discussion

- **Commodification Mechanism in Three Ethnographic Sites.**

This section presents findings from three ethnographic sites, each revealing distinct commodification mechanisms shaped by local power structures, religious contexts, and institutional frameworks. The three cases are organized to answer specific research questions: Toraja illuminates elite-controlled commodification where traditional aristocratic families convert ceremonial authority into cultural entrepreneurship, revealing power dynamics in spectacle production and the marginalization of traditional religious authorities. Minahasa demonstrates institution-mediated commodification through UNESCO recognition processes, exposing tensions between global standardization frameworks and local cultural variation, particularly through PINKAN's organizational role. Bali exhibits practitioner-negotiated commodification through sophisticated bifurcation strategies, showing how musicians maintain sacred authenticity while engaging commercial opportunities through contextual competence

Toraja: Death Spectacle through Yamashita's Lens

Elite Appropriation and Spectacle Production: The Transformation of Death into Commodity Shinji Yamashita's anthropological documentation of Puang Mengkendek's death ceremony fundamentally reveals how Torajan ritual music undergoes commodification through aristocratic family control. The *dirapa'i*—the highest funeral ceremony traditionally involving dozens of buffalo sacrifices accompanied by *pa'pompangan* bamboo ensemble music—transformed into international television spectacle through calculated negotiations between local elites and global media networks.

Sampe, son of the deceased Puang Mengkendek, functioned not merely as ritual coordinator but as cultural entrepreneur. Yamashita's field documentation reveals that Sampe signed paid contracts with Japanese television networks, scheduled buffalo sacrifices according to camera crew requirements, and modified ceremonial sequences to satisfy global audiences' expectations of "primitive exoticism.

The *pa'pompangan* ensemble—traditionally performing continuous rhythmic patterns believed to guide ancestral souls to puya (the afterlife)—was instructed to pause performances for optimal filming angles and repeat sections for multiple camera takes. Musicians reported being directed to "play louder" or "hold that note longer" to accommodate soundtrack recording needs, fundamentally altering the ritual music's temporal and spiritual structure.

The commodification process systematically marginalized traditional religious authorities. *To minaa* (traditional priests) who once controlled ritual timing according to lunar cycles and cosmological calculations found their spiritual

authority displaced by media production schedules. Yamashita documented one *to minaa* confiding: "Souls can become lost if processions are forced. The *pa'pompangan* rhythms must follow the soul's journey, not the camera's needs." The physical transformation of sacred objects illustrates this displacement.

Traditional musical leadership structures also underwent disruption. Historically, elder musicians determined performance sequences based on ritual phases and spiritual communications. Under commodified conditions, media directors and tourism coordinators assumed this authority. An elderly *pa'pompangan* player reported: "They told us when to start, when to stop. We could no longer feel the ritual's flow. We became like machines playing for cameras, not souls journeying to ancestors."

The transformation also affected ritual music's social function within Torajan society. Traditionally, *pa'pompangan* performances involved communal participation across class boundaries, with musicians drawn from multiple *tongkonan* levels creating social cohesion through collective mourning. Children learned by observing and gradually participating, with knowledge transmission occurring through embodied practice within ritual contexts. The transformation reveals that the economic rewards of commodified performances create powerful incentives prioritizing commercial over traditional participation.

Minahasa: Institutional Preservation and Community Tensions

The transformation of Kolintang in Minahasa reflects complex negotiations between institutional preservation efforts and grassroots cultural practices. Unlike Toraja's elite-controlled commodification, Minahasan transformation operates primarily through institutional frameworks that mediate between local communities, state agencies, and international preservation regimes.

The PINKAN (Persatuan Insan Kolintang Nasional)—a national organization encompassing craftspeople, trainers, performers, and cultural enthusiasts designated as their "Four Pillars"—has pursued ambitious goals for Kolintang recognition and preservation. PINKAN successfully advocated for Kolintang's recognition as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2024, a process requiring five years of documentation, lobbying, and standardization efforts. This achievement brought international prestige and increased government funding but simultaneously introduced bureaucratic requirements fundamentally altering how Kolintang knowledge is transmitted and validated.

Traditional Kolintang practices vary significantly across Minahasan subregions, reflecting diverse ethnic Minahasan groups (Tombulu, Tontemboan, Toulour, Tonsea, Tonsawang) each maintaining distinct musical traditions. PINKAN coordinators worked with government cultural agencies (Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya, Kemendikbud) to produce standardized descriptions of Kolintang construction techniques, tuning systems, performance practices, and ritual contexts. This documentation process necessitated difficult choices about which regional variations to privilege as authentic and which to classify as derivative or contemporary adaptations. Post-UNESCO recognition, government regulations codified specific performance standards that became prerequisites

for accessing state funding, participating in official cultural festivals, and representing Indonesia internationally.

The standardized "official" Kolintang tuning system—based primarily on Tondano regional practices—now receives institutional legitimacy, while other regional tuning systems risk marginalization. Schools in North Sulawesi teaching Kolintang increasingly use standardized curricula developed by PINKAN in collaboration with provincial education authorities, further entrenching particular practices as normative while rendering others obsolete.

Creative Economy Competitions and Aesthetic Hierarchies: the annual Pesta Pinasten festival exemplifies how institutional commodification generates new aesthetic hierarchies privileging certain musical values over others. Competition judging criteria explicitly prioritize Western harmonic principles, rhythmic precision measurable through metronomic standards, and visual presentation elements over traditional Minahasan musical logic rooted in spiritual efficacy and communal participation.

A traditional ensemble leader from Kawangkoan reported: "*Judges said our tumetenden patterns were 'less harmonious' according to Western music theory. They wanted clear major and minor chords. But our ancestors didn't use Western harmony. The judges don't understand that our 'dissonance' has spiritual purpose.*" His group scored poorly in regional competitions despite being recognized by village elders as maintaining authentic traditional practices. Groups that modify traditional practices toward judge-preferred standards consistently win, while those maintaining inherited practices struggle to compete. This economic structure effectively penalizes cultural authenticity while rewarding market-oriented innovation.

Commodification increasingly separates Kolintang performance from its original ritual contexts, fundamentally altering the music's social and spiritual functions. Traditionally, Kolintang accompanied mapalus (communal work ceremonies where villagers collectively harvest rice or build houses), tulude (harvest thanksgiving ceremonies honoring Opo Witu Watu creator deity), and awaya (ancestor veneration rituals maintaining relationships with deceased family members). In these contexts, music functioned as spiritual technology facilitating communication with opo, with performance timing, tuning, and repertoire selection following ritual requirements determined by community elders (*tonaas*) through dream interpretation and ancestral guidance. A traditional practitioner stated:

> When we play for tourists at cultural festivals, they clap enthusiastically after three minutes. But traditional *awaya* rituals require playing continuously until the *opo* acknowledge their presence—sometimes this takes six hours of patient performance. You cannot make ancestors work on tourist schedules. The music sounds similar, but its function has completely changed.

Bali: The Sonic Schizophrenia of Sacred and Commercial Soundscapes

The transformation of Balinese gamelan reveals a fundamental split between "performing" and "recording" contexts in her analysis of modern Balinese musical practices. Aryandari's research in Ubud demonstrates how *sekaa gong* (gamelan ensembles) have developed what she terms "sonic schizophrenia"—the capacity to operate within two distinct musical paradigms depending on context and audience

In temple *(pura)* contexts, gamelan maintains its sacred dimensions with unwavering adherence to traditional tuning systems *(pelog and slendro),* ritual timing, and ceremonial protocols. These performances preserve the cosmological function of gamelan as spiritual technology, where microtonal intervals and spatial acoustics create what practitioners believe to be divine communication pathways. The instruments themselves undergo consecration ceremonies, and their performance follows ancestral prescriptions that cannot be modified without compromising spiritual efficacy.

Conversely, Aryandari documents how the same musicians adapt their practice for recording and tourism contexts through systematic modifications. A *dalang* (shadow puppet master) and gamelan leader explains this contextual flexibility: "Gamelan for performing is sacred and cannot be changed. But gamelan for recording must be adjusted to market tastes. Tourists unfamiliar with microtonal intervals need harmony that sounds pleasant to them." This pragmatic bifurcation demonstrates practitioners' sophisticated navigation between preservation and innovation.

Aryandari's analysis reveals that recording technology fundamentally alters gamelan's ontological status. Traditional gamelan exists as spatially embedded ritual practice, where acoustic vibrations fill sacred architecture to invite devata(deities). In recorded form, gamelan becomes what she describes as a "consumable object," stripped of its temporal and spatial ritual dimensions. Studio recordings often employ digital processing to "correct" traditional tuning toward Western temperament standards, creating what one producer described as making pelog "less out of tune for global ears."

The economic implications are profound. A gamelan craftsman interviewed by Aryandari noted shifting demand patterns: "Orders for temple gamelan are declining, replaced by requests for recording and hotel instruments. Temple gamelan requires spiritual perfection—materials, construction timing, purification rituals. Commercial gamelan prioritizes good sound and competitive pricing." This transformation reflects broader tensions between sacred craft traditions and market economics.

Aryandari's findings suggest that rather than simple displacement, Balinese musicians have developed what she terms "contextual competence"—the ability to switch between sacred microtonal systems and commercial harmonic frameworks within minutes, depending on performance context. This adaptive strategy enables communities to maintain ritual integrity while accessing

economic opportunities, though it requires continuous negotiation about the boundaries between sacred and secular musical expression.

The emergence of recording studios in Denpasar that specialize in "world music" versions of gamelan represents the institutionalization of this sonic bifurcation. These facilities employ software to standardize traditional tuning systems, creating commercially viable products while traditional temple practice continues unchanged. Aryandari's work demonstrates how technological mediation creates parallel musical universes that serve different community needs and economic imperatives without necessarily negating each other.

The annual Pesta Pinasten competitions have become sites where these tensions manifest. Traditional groups performing according to inherited practices sometimes find themselves evaluated against criteria that privilege certain aesthetic standards. A leader of a traditional Kolintang group from Kawangkoan noted: "They said our approach was 'less harmonious' according to Western music theory." These dynamics reflect broader questions about how cultural preservation initiatives navigate between maintaining authenticity and meeting contemporary institutional standards.

A 24-year-old music group leader articulates the generational perspective: "We're proud Kolintang gained world recognition, but sometimes it feels different from our Kolintang." Her group participated in PINKAN workshops to obtain "UNESCO-compliant" certification for international festival performances, illustrating how young artists navigate between traditional knowledge and institutional requirements.

These developments raise important questions about the relationship between international recognition and local cultural vitality. The case demonstrates how preservation efforts, while well-intentioned, involve complex negotiations between global standards and local practices, requiring ongoing dialogue between institutions and communities to ensure sustainable cultural transmission.

- **Contested Meanings in the Arena of Commodification**

The commodification of Indonesian ritual music cannot be understood merely as an economic phenomenon, but rather as an arena of political-cultural contestation involving fundamental restructuring of power relations. Following Gramsci's framework of cultural hegemony, the transformation of ritual into commodity reflects how capitalist logic achieves consensus through the "common sense" of creative economy discourse. The narrative of "preservation through commercialization" becomes hegemonic precisely because it offers pragmatic solutions to the threat of cultural extinction while masking underlying power dynamics.

In Toraja, the transformation of aristocratic families into cultural "brand ambassadors" demonstrates how traditional elites convert symbolic capital (customary status) into economic capital (tourism packages). This conversion is not neutral—it generates new hierarchies where access to ancestral rituals

becomes commercial privilege. When death ceremonies are priced at 15 million rupiah per person, ritual no longer functions as communal property but becomes excludable private goods subject to market logic.

Similar processes occur in Bali, though through more subtle mechanisms. The system of "ritual CEOs" allocating 30% of performance revenue for temple maintenance creates moral justification for commercialization. Traditional leaders do not merely sell gamelan performances; they "rescue tradition." This narrative obscures how market logic increasingly determines which aspects of ritual are deemed economically valuable and which are discarded as commercially unviable.

The state apparatus, through creative economy agencies, operates as what Althusser would term an "ideological state apparatus," promoting commodification through seemingly neutral cultural preservation programs. Government standardization of "cultural tourism packages" forces communities to conform to market-preferred scenarios: rituals are abbreviated, costumes made more visually striking, mythical narratives simplified for tourist consumption. This represents cultural violence disguised as preservation policy.

The documented "sonic schizophrenia" of Balinese gamelan reveals deeper ontological dimensions of commodification processes. Recording technology does not merely document ritual music; it creates alternative versions with independent existence. Gamelan recorded in studios with digital "tuning corrections" becomes a fundamentally different entity from gamelan performed within temple contexts.

This transformation reflects what Benjamin conceptualized as the loss of "aura" in mechanical reproduction, though in Indonesian ritual music, what disappears is not merely aesthetic aura but cosmological dimension. When gamelan vibrations no longer fill sacred architecture to invite divine presence (devata), music loses its spiritual function and becomes an object of aesthetic consumption. The sacred becomes secular through technological mediation.

Walter Ong's distinction between oral and literate cultures provides an additional analytical framework. Traditional ritual music exists within what Ong terms "primary orality"—embedded in living social contexts, transmitted through embodied practice, and inseparable from cosmological meaning-making. Commodification represents a shift toward "secondary orality" mediated by technology, where musical knowledge becomes detached from its original context and repackaged for consumption by audiences lacking cultural competence to decode spiritual meanings.

Paradoxically, digitalization also enables preservation and transmission possibilities unavailable in traditional formats. Streaming platforms allow diaspora Indonesian generations to access ancestral ritual music. Interactive learning applications facilitate knowledge transmission across geographical boundaries. Technology creates possibilities while simultaneously threatening traditional continuity.

Indonesian youth face complex identity dilemmas within contexts of cultural globalization. They are not merely "victims" of modernization or "betrayers" of tradition, but active agents engaging in creative negotiations between ancestral heritage and contemporary realities. Young musicians combining traditional instruments with modern genres are not rejecting tradition but seeking ways to maintain cultural relevance within digital life contexts.

This negotiation process generates what Homi Bhabha theorizes as "third space"—zones of hybridity where cultural meanings are continuously renegotiated (Bhabha, 1994). Pop-Torajan music performed in hotel venues is not traditional degradation but articulation of Torajan identity within modern economic contexts. Such hybridity challenges traditional binaries between "authentic" and "inauthentic," "sacred" and "profane."

However, hybridity also contains fragmentation risks. When young generations learn ritual music techniques without understanding cosmological contexts, disconnection occurs between practice and meaning. Music becomes an economic skill rather than a spiritual heritage. Cultural transmission reduces to technical information transfer rather than holistic knowledge embodiment.

Field observations reveal that youth are not uniformly abandoning tradition but selectively adapting elements deemed personally meaningful. A 24-year-old Kolintang group leader articulates this complexity: "We're proud our music gained world recognition, but sometimes it feels different from our grandparents' Kolintang." This statement captures the ambivalence of cultural inheritance in globalized contexts—simultaneous pride in international recognition and anxiety about transformation.

Kolintang's recognition as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage demonstrates how global preservation regimes operate through standardization and documentation requirements. UNESCO recognition processes demand fixation of cultural practices that are inherently fluid and contextual. "Living" Kolintang embedded in communal practice must be defined, bounded, and documented to meet international criteria.

This standardization creates tension with local variability. Traditional practitioners express concern that documentation will freeze practices that should remain adaptive. UNESCO recognition, while bringing prestige and protection, also contains rigidification potential contradictory to oral tradition's dynamic nature. The master craftsman's complaint—"They documented how I play, then said it needs standardization. But, Kolintang is living—each region has its own approach"—captures this fundamental tension.

The standardization imperatives embedded within UNESCO recognition processes inevitably raise critical questions about institutional positioning and beneficiary structures. PINKAN's organizational role reveals inherent tensions between its stated community representation mandate and its functional integration within the state cultural governance apparatus. Following UNESCO recognition in 2024, PINKAN increasingly operates as what Gramsci would term

a "transmission belt"—an intermediary institution translating state definitions of cultural authenticity to local practitioners while simultaneously channeling community practices into bureaucratically legible forms. Government regulation post-UNESCO has codified specific Kolintang performance standards, tuning systems, and repertoire classifications that become prerequisites for accessing state funding, festival participation, and international representation opportunities. This regulatory framework effectively creates a two-tiered system where "UNESCO-compliant" Kolintang gains institutional legitimacy and economic access, while community variations operating outside standardized parameters risk marginalization as "non-authentic" or "deviant" practices. The primary beneficiaries of this standardization are not necessarily grassroots practitioners but rather urban cultural brokers, government tourism agencies, and internationally oriented performance groups possessing resources to navigate bureaucratic requirements. PINKAN's organizational structure—dominated by educated middle-class cultural activists with connections to government ministries—positions it closer to the state apparatus than to village-based traditional communities, raising fundamental questions about whose version of "authenticity" gains authoritative status in post-UNESCO cultural governance regimes.

Furthermore, UNESCO criteria developed from Western epistemologies may not fully align with heritage concepts in Indonesian contexts. The separation between "tangible" and "intangible" heritage is foreign to cosmologies viewing material and spiritual worlds as continuum. Global standardization potentially imposes alien categories on local cultural practices, creating what postcolonial scholars term "epistemic violence."

The UNESCO framework also reflects what Anna Tsing calls "friction"—the productive tension between global flows and local specificities. While international recognition provides communities with leverage against state neglect and market exploitation, it also subjects local practices to global bureaucratic logic. Communities must translate indigenous knowledge systems into UNESCO's administrative language, potentially losing nuances untranslatable across cultural boundaries.

Beneath dominant commodification narratives exist forms of resistance not always visible to external observers. Traditional priests (to *minaa*) in Toraja who continue conducting unmodified rituals engage in what James C. Scott terms "everyday resistance"—non-confrontational but consistent opposition to hegemonic pressures. They do not openly oppose commodification but maintain alternative spaces where market logic remains inoperative.

Resistance also emerges through creative subversion. Some Balinese gamelan musicians surreptitiously incorporate spiritual elements into commercial performances, creating sacred spaces within profane contexts. Puppet masters *(dalang)* use traditional narratives to deliver social criticism during tourist performances. Such practices demonstrate that commodification does not eliminate local agency but transforms its expression modes.

The most intriguing subversive strategy involves using creative economy revenues to fund non-commercial ritual activities. Tourism performance income finances traditional ceremonies generating no profit. This represents an inversion of capitalist logic—using market mechanisms to resist market penetration. A village leader explains: "Tourist money helps us maintain real ceremonies that tourists never see."

This strategy reflects what Michel de Certeau (2024) terms "the practice of everyday life"—tactical maneuvers by which the weak navigate systems of domination. Communities cannot prevent commodification but can redirect its benefits toward cultural continuity goals. Such tactics require sophisticated understanding of market dynamics while maintaining commitment to non-market values.

Research findings challenge simplistic dichotomies between preservation and commercialization that often dominate heritage discourse. Commodification is not inherently destructive, nor is preservation necessarily conservative. What occurs is complex transformation processes where cultural meanings are continuously renegotiated within shifting power contexts.

The concept of "contextual competence"—the ability to switch between sacred microtonal systems and commercial harmonic frameworks—offers more nuanced frameworks for understanding cultural adaptation. Balinese musicians' capacity to alternate between ritual and commercial performance modes demonstrates that cultural practitioners do not passively accept market dictates but actively create navigation strategies enabling them to maintain ritual integrity while accessing economic opportunities.

This framework challenges essentialist notions of cultural authenticity. Rather than viewing tradition as a fixed entity threatened by modern corruption, it recognizes culture as a dynamic process requiring continuous adaptation for survival. The question shifts from "how to preserve authentic tradition" to "how to maintain cultural vitality within changing contexts."

Such understanding aligns with recent anthropological work on "cultural sustainability" that emphasizes communities' rights to determine their own cultural futures. Indigenous scholars argue that cultures must evolve to remain meaningful to successive generations. The challenge lies in ensuring that evolution occurs on terms determined by communities themselves rather than external market forces.

The technological mediation of ritual music raises fundamental questions about musical ontology—what music "is" when divorced from its original contexts. Traditional Indonesian ritual music exists as what ethnomusicologist Feld (1996) terms "acoustemology"—ways of knowing the world through sonic experience embedded in specific cultural and environmental contexts.

Recording studios specializing in "world music" versions of gamelan represent institutionalization of what could be termed "sonic colonialism"—the subjection of indigenous musical systems to Western aesthetic and technical standards.

Software "corrections" of traditional tuning systems create commercially viable products while fundamentally altering the cosmological properties that give music spiritual efficacy. The result is sonic simulation rather than cultural continuity.

However, technological mediation also enables new forms of cultural creativity and connection. Digital platforms allow for virtual participation in ritual contexts previously accessible only through physical presence. Online gamelan communities maintain cultural connections across diaspora populations. Young Indonesians living abroad use streaming platforms to maintain relationships with ancestral traditions.

The challenge lies in developing technological approaches that support rather than substitute for embodied cultural transmission. This requires what STS scholar Arturo Escobar calls "designs for the pluriverse"—technological systems that accommodate multiple ways of knowing rather than imposing universal standards.

- **Implications for Cultural Policy: Toward Responsible Commodification**

Based on ethnographic findings, five principles emerge for developing more culturally responsible commodification models which consist of the principle of contextual differentiation, community sovereignty, cultural reciprocity, sacred safeguarding, and intergenerational equity. The principle of contextual differentiation recognizes that cultural practices have different meanings in different contexts. Sacred and commercial applications can coexist without mutual negation, provided boundaries and appropriate uses are clearly understood and maintained by cultural authorities. Principle of community sovereignty ensures that local communities function not merely as objects of commodification but as subjects determining terms and conditions. Decisions about what can be commodified and how should involve authoritative voices of traditional practitioners rather than external agencies. The principle of cultural reciprocity is based on the principle that commodification must generate benefits returning to communities in forms supporting cultural continuity. Tourism revenues should partially fund traditional knowledge transmission and ritual infrastructure maintenance rather than flowing entirely to external stakeholders. Principle of sacred safeguarding: Identifying aspects of tradition too sacred or sensitive for commodification and protecting them from market penetration. Not everything can or should become commodity, regardless of economic potential. Principle of intergenerational equity ensures that commodification strategies do not compromise future generations' ability to inherit meaningful cultural traditions. This requires balancing immediate economic benefits against long-term cultural sustainability.

These five principles depart significantly from conventional cultural preservation frameworks currently operationalized by Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and UNESCO's heritage management protocols. Dominant preservation models typically privilege institutional gatekeeping over community sovereignty—exemplified by UNESCO's requirement for state

parties to serve as primary nominators and monitors of intangible cultural heritage, effectively positioning governments as arbiters of cultural authenticity. The Ministry of Tourism's "cultural tourism package" standardization similarly operates through top-down implementation, where communities adapt practices to predetermined market formats rather than determining commodification terms themselves. In contrast, the Principle of Community Sovereignty advocated here inverts this power structure by centering traditional authorities' definitional control over cultural boundaries and commercial applications.

Furthermore, existing models tend toward what could be termed "preservation through ossification"—UNESCO's emphasis on documentation and safeguarding often implicitly treats culture as an endangered artifact requiring protection from change, rather than as a living practice requiring adaptive capacity. This approach fundamentally conflicts with the Principle of Intergenerational Equity proposed here, which recognizes that cultural vitality depends on successive generations' ability to meaningfully reinterpret traditions within contemporary contexts. The ethnographic evidence—particularly Balinese musicians' "contextual competence" and the strategic use of tourism revenues to fund non-commercial rituals—demonstrates that communities themselves have developed sophisticated bifurcation strategies that existing institutional frameworks fail to recognize or support.

This research raises methodological questions about ethnographic practice within commodified cultural contexts. When rituals become spectacles for global consumption, ethnographers no longer observe "authentic" practices but performances already mediated by market logic. This challenges classical ethnographic assumptions about access to "the real thing."

The mixed-method approach combining secondary analysis with primary fieldwork enables richer temporal perspectives. Comparing historical observations with contemporary conditions reveals commodification trajectories invisible in single ethnographic snapshots. This diachronic dimension is essential for understanding how power relations evolve and how communities develop adaptive strategies across time.

However, this methodology also raises ethical questions about research relationships. When studying commodified cultures, ethnographers risk becoming complicit in processes they critique. Tourist-ethnographer boundaries blur when researchers attend the same commodified performances they analyze. Reflexivity becomes crucial for acknowledging positionality within systems of cultural extraction.

The research also demonstrates the importance of multi-sited approaches for understanding cultural commodification as a networked phenomenon. Local transformations in Bali, Toraja, and North Sulawesi connect to national policy frameworks, international tourism circuits, and global preservation regimes. Single-site ethnography cannot capture these systemic connections.

The commodification of Indonesian ritual music represents phenomena too complex for simplistic moral judgments. It constitutes reality requiring management with wisdom, considering multiple stakeholders and competing values. The primary challenge involves developing frameworks enabling communities to benefit from economic opportunities without sacrificing cultural integrity.

This requires paradigmatic shifts from static "preservation" toward dynamic "sustainability." Culture cannot be museum-preserved but must evolve through dialogue with contemporary contexts. Our task is ensuring this evolution occurs on terms determined by communities themselves rather than external market logic.

Research findings suggest several priorities for future investigation. *First*, longitudinal studies tracking commodification impacts across generational cohorts could reveal long-term effects invisible in synchronic research. *Second*, comparative analysis across different Indonesian ethnic groups could identify factors promoting successful cultural adaptation versus those leading to cultural loss. *Third*, policy research examining regulatory frameworks in countries with similar challenges could inform Indonesian cultural governance. Fourth, technological research developing digital tools supporting rather than replacing embodied cultural transmission could bridge traditional and contemporary knowledge systems. *Finally*, participatory action research involving communities as co-researchers rather than study subjects could ensure that academic knowledge production serves community-defined goals. This approach aligns with decolonizing methodologies emphasizing research as a tool for community empowerment rather than extractive knowledge production.

4. Conclusion

This ethnographic investigation reveals that the commodification of Indonesian ritual music operates as contested terrain where multiple actors—traditional elites, state agencies, UNESCO institutions, and local practitioners—compete for definitional authority over cultural meaning. Rather than conforming to simple preservation versus commercialization binaries, the empirical evidence demonstrates that communities employ nuanced adaptive strategies that simultaneously maintain ritual integrity and engage market opportunities.

Across the three research sites, distinct yet parallel patterns emerge. In Toraja, aristocratic families convert symbolic capital into commercial tourism packages, marginalizing traditional priests *(to minaa)* while restructuring sacred chronology around tourist seasons. In Bali, gamelan practitioners develop what has been termed "contextual competence"—the documented ability to switch between sacred microtonal systems in temple contexts and commercially adapted harmonic frameworks for recording and tourism performances. In Minahasa, PINKAN's UNESCO recognition process generates standardization tensions where institutional requirements for documentation conflict with practitioners' understanding of Kolintang as regionally variable "living" tradition.

These findings challenge dominant cultural policy assumptions that treat preservation and commercialization as mutually exclusive alternatives. The research documents specific mechanisms through which communities navigate this false dichotomy: the strategic bifurcation of sacred and commercial musical practices, the subversive redirection of tourism revenues toward non-commercial ritual activities, and the development of protective boundaries differentiating commodifiable cultural elements from those requiring sacred safeguarding. These are not theoretical possibilities but observed practices documented through extended fieldwork.

However, the research also reveals substantive risks. Technological mediation creates what has been analyzed as "sonic schizophrenia"—recorded versions of ritual music exist independently from their spatially embedded cosmological contexts, potentially disconnecting performance techniques from spiritual foundations. Younger generations increasingly learn commodified versions divorced from traditional transmission contexts, raising concerns about intergenerational cultural continuity. UNESCO standardization processes, while providing international recognition, impose bureaucratic legibility requirements that may rigidify inherently fluid oral traditions.

Future research priorities include longitudinal tracking of commodification impacts across generational cohorts, comparative analysis identifying factors promoting successful adaptation versus cultural erosion, and participatory action research positioning communities as co-investigators rather than research subjects. Such approaches align with decolonizing methodologies emphasizing research as a community empowerment tool.

The central finding is that Indonesian communities demonstrate robust agency despite operating within global capitalist constraints. The observed creative strategies—from Balinese "ritual CEOs" allocating performance revenues to temple maintenance, to traditional priests maintaining unmodified ceremonies in spaces tourists never access—reveal sophisticated navigation of structural pressures. The analytical task is not preventing cultural change, which ethnographic evidence shows to be neither possible nor necessarily desirable, but ensuring transformation occurs through processes strengthening communities' capacity for self-determination. This requires policy frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and economic models that center community-defined goals rather than external market logic or bureaucratic standardization imperatives.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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