



PONG PINDAN

drawing by Charles Zerner

## THE RICHES OF THE UNDERTAKER\*

Toby Volkman

The months of July and August constitute the peak funeral season in Tana Toraja, in the highlands of southern Sulawesi. After the rice has been harvested and stored, Toraja families gather to bury and honor their dead through long-awaited ceremonies: displays, affirmations, or sometimes recreations of status of both the living and their ancestors. The funeral season closes with a ritual called *ma'nene'* (*nene'* = ancestor), to honor the ancestors, and then the planting cycle begins anew.

Key actors in both *ma'nene'* and funerals are the undertakers, the *tomebalun*. In his traditional role the *tomebalun* embodies some fundamental contradictions. He is rich and he is low; he is indispensable but he is tainted by the corruption of death and decay. He is the focus of those ambivalent feelings toward death noted by Bronislaw Malinowski: the desire both to maintain the tie and to be rid of the deceased altogether.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, he is the mediator between the living and the dead, and from this role he derives his riches and his power.

This article is concerned with the way in which the rites of death in Toraja society are having their traditional meaning transformed under the impact of fundamental economic and social change. To illustrate this transformation of meaning, I will describe the customary function of a *tomebalun* and then use the example of a former practitioner, Pong Pindan, to show how one *tomebalun* abandoned his role but used the wealth he had acquired by it to transform himself into an *ambe'* (leader, lit. "father").

During the past decade scores of young people have begun to leave Toraja for islands such as Kalimantan where jobs are plentiful and lucrative. Accompanying these migrations (*rantau*) has been an increase in Christian conversions. Curiously, however, the growth in Christianity and in the numbers going on the *rantau* has led to an increase in the old rituals, especially funerals, in the homeland. But whereas in former times the ritual level was fixed in accord with status (and descent and wealth ideally corresponded as its bases), in recent years the scale of the ritual has been limited only by the financial capabilities of the sponsors. As the criterion for determining the scale of the ritual, wealth has come to overshadow birth, and the flourishing of the ceremonies now reflects shifts in economic resources, status relations, and group composition.

The community that I shall call To' Tabang is situated on the slopes of Mt. Sesean, Toraja's highest mountain, several hours' walk north of the major market town of Rantepao. Wet rice fields cascade in terraces down the mountain slope,

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\* I would like to thank Charles Zerner for his helpful comments on a version of this article.

1. See Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (New York: Garden City, 1954), pp. 47-53.

and they, together with cassava and occasional coffee trees, provide most of the villagers' subsistence needs. Chickens, pigs, and buffalo are raised and slaughtered at ritual events. Population is dense, with about 40 percent of the people now Christian, and the remainder still "feeding the ancestors" (*pa'kandean nene'*, the Toraja term for traditional religious practices, in Indonesian glossed as "animism").

Traditionally Toraja divide the world into left and right, west and east, smoke-descending and smoke-rising. Each side needs its own ritual practitioner. The *tominaa* ("the one who knows") officiates on the positive side, and is renowned for his poetic speech and wisdom. His counterpart on the left side is the *tomebalun*, literally "the one who wraps" (the corpse), although he does much more than wrap. He is also called the "tominaa of the left," as opposed to the "tominaa of the right."

Whereas the *tominaa* in theory is of high blood (though sometimes through his skills he may rise above his birth), the *tomebalun* both in theory and in fact is of low birth. In some regions, such as Sa'dan, he was formerly a slave, and a particularly low form of slave at that. On Sesean, however, he is almost outside the class structure, being neither slave nor commoner (and certainly not noble). He is simply polluted and polluting, feared and despised. Because his task is inherited, and his children's choice of marriage partner is restricted to other *tomebalun* children, all over Toraja there is a small network of related *tomebalun*.

The *tomebalun* and his family have always been subject to numerous strict taboos. Their house has to be a certain distance from other people's houses. They have their own water source and cannot use the springs used by others. They are not allowed to work in anyone's fields, although they might own small plots of land themselves, to be worked only by members of their family. They cannot set foot in other people's houses or even the yard of those houses, though sometimes they might ask for *padi* by leaving their basket on a rich person's granary, and slipping away, unseen, into the trees until the basket is filled. Other people cannot, and will not, approach the *tomebalun*'s house unless to call him in time of death. Even then his house is not entered, but rocks are thrown at it to announce the need. It was, and still is, a grave insult to call an ordinary person *tomebalun*. A thirteen-year-old boy we knew horrified the neighbors when he yelled "*tomebalun*" at his mother.

In the event of a death, one has no choice: the *tomebalun* is needed. He emerges from his house and is then free to come and go in the yard and house of the deceased, which is already contaminated by death. His tasks all relate to preparing the deceased for burial. He never speaks, but prepares small offerings of pork and palm wine for the deceased; he wraps the corpse in a long cylinder of cloths and sews them together; he later brings the body fluids, which have been gathered in a bamboo tube, to the grave, along with such provisions as the deceased's umbrella and a portion of an iron cooking pot. He begins to make the *tau tau*, or effigy of the dead person, and later feeds it and turns it to the west, the direction of death. Finally, when all is done, he is paid an ample wage. Depending on the lavishness of the funeral, he may receive a buffalo or more. Sometimes he bickers silently, refusing the wage offered him, while the family reluctantly add more coins to the pile, until at last it satisfies him. He pockets the money, and the family breathe a collective sigh of relief--the debt to death is finished, and the body, amidst shouts and gongs and chanting, is carried to its cliff-side grave.

The *tomebalun* is in an ambivalent position. Although above all polluted and despised, he is at the same time rich. His wealth reflects not his land holdings,

which are small, but his wages as a ritual specialist. He is also necessary: people always die and their survivors have to pay him; the demand for his services (until recently) was never low. He exercises a peculiar power at a funeral; as one Toraja explained, "he is the government now. Until we pay him, and he accepts our offer, life cannot resume as usual. We are in his power."

The particular power of the *tomebalun*, and the ambivalence with which he is viewed, emerge vividly in the *ma'nene'* ceremony. His central role in this rite is perhaps related to its transitional character. Just as the *tomebalun* personally bridges the living and the dead by caring for the deceased's corporeal remains and the spirit's bodily needs,<sup>2</sup> *ma'nene'* is a rite that links and separates the ritual cycles of death and regeneration. For although Toraja often divide their ritual cycle into smoke-rising rites of fertility, agriculture, and household, and smoke-descending rites of death, *ma'nene'* defies such classification. One young man suggested that it was 70 percent smoke-descending, since it came at the very end of the death-rites phase; but another thought it might be smoke-rising, since blessings are requested from the ancestors. One woman said: "It's hard to say: there is happiness; there is sadness. It's related to the ancestors, but you are not allowed to shed tears."

Usually held in August, after completion of the burials of the community's dead and before the beginning of the planting rituals, *ma'nene'* only takes place in any one region of Toraja every five to ten years. At that time, everyone who is "animist" must participate, no matter how poor. For days preceding the *ma'nene'* which occurred at To' Tabang in the summer of 1978, minibuses filled with squealing pigs drove up from Rantepao, and the *warung* were busy selling betel nut and tobacco for use in offerings.

The first notable event in the ceremony is the sacrifice of a small buffalo for those ancestors who were previously buried without such a sacrifice. If a single buffalo is cut for the whole community or *saroan* (a ritual meat-sharing group), everyone with an ancestor will contribute money to the buffalo's owner. The purpose of the money, men explained, is "so the ancestors will bless us, will give us health, *ringgit*, buffalo, rice-fields, cassava, even cleverness if we are in school. We ask and ask for everything, we say 'bless us with riches,' and we give the ancestors betel nut and bones. If you don't put down money, you don't get blessed."

The next day, the cliff graves are opened, inspected, cleaned, and repaired. If necessary, corpses are rewrapped by close family members, and if there are

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2. That the spirit does have such needs is evident from the *tomebalun's* actions. Not only does he drain the bodily fluids and wrap the corpse, but he attends to the spirit's physical processes, offering it food and drink (which he prepares), making the visual representation of the spirit (*tau tau*) and feeding it, and bringing provisions to the grave. All these acts are carried out in silence, while the *tominaa*, through a long series of recitations, ensures the spirit's safe journey to the next world. Ritual speech thus also serves to bridge the living and the dead, but the spirit's passage is untouched by the corrupting physicality of eating or decay. Words are the special province of the *tominaa*; the body is the *tomebalun's*.

The idea of a bridge between the living and the dead is also found among the Buginese, who consider the *tomeballung*, a low status woman who wraps herself in cloths and sits constantly beside the corpse, to be such a bridge. (Personal communication, Andi Anton.) In the Toraja funeral, where there are more specialists, a person called the *to balu* (usually the widow/er) performs this role.

wooden effigies these may be reclothed or freshened up. Ancestors may also be relocated at this time, if for example a gravesite is in dispute, or only "borrowed," or if the spot is plagued by bumblebees. For several days the graves remain open, and people bring offerings of betel and place them in old wooden dishes at the foot of the cliffs. Some Christian Toraja bring flowers, either real or made from paper, in unusual defiance of the objections of the Protestant church.

The climax of *ma'nene'* is *ma'pakande* (to feed), when buffalo are sacrificed for high-ranking ancestors. The buffalo meat is called *pare lapu*, "full, healthy padi," signifying, it is said, a pretty girl, happiness, or good rice. A final offering is given to the ancestors: buffalo and pork roasted in bamboo tubes, an egg, red, black, and white rice, and a slender tube filled with sticky rice. A small amount of money is included in a basket, which the *tomebalun* must stroke with his palm. As he draws his hand across the basket he scoops up the coins, a silent gesture referred to as his *imbo*, or prayer.<sup>3</sup> The remainder of the offering is taken to the grave, where the ancestors are called upon to eat, and to replace the small gift with many times more food for the living. The graves are then shut.

At midday everyone gathers at the edge of the *rante*, a field usually reserved for funerals, which is ringed with stone menhirs--monuments to important ancestors. Each family clusters on their own mat, where they prepare an offering basket for the *tomebalun*, exactly like that already given to the ancestors. The *tomebalun* moves from mat to mat across the field, a small crowd following him and pressing around to witness each transaction. Again, he must touch the basket with his palm and take the money (and the rice and meat). But he may simply refuse, sitting in stubborn silence while the family adds more money to the pile. Or he may walk away without accepting, as old people run after him to drag him back and toss in a few more coins, until at last he stuffs the money into his betel pouch or plastic shoulder bag. Rates vary: at least 1,000 rupiah for the recently deceased, but a lesser amount for those who died long ago. In spite of the fairly standard rates, however, the game of payment may be prolonged and continue for as much as half an hour at a single mat, with much joking to ease the strain.

Although eventually the *tomebalun* always accepts the money, and the family always manages to find enough extra bills tucked away, the tension between the *tomebalun's* refusal of the offering and the family's resistance to paying more seems to be an essential element in the drama. The outcome is never in doubt, but the encounter is repeatedly played out as though it were. The event replicates the ritual of paying the undertaker at funerals where, although the stakes are higher (perhaps 40,000 rupiah at a major ceremony), the structure of pay-off and resistance is the same. And at the *ma'nene'* as at the funeral the undertaker is ironically referred to as the government, the "head."

It is not surprising that the ambivalent attitude towards the undertaker surfaces in disputes over money; for wealth in Toraja is not merely useful or desirable, but is, traditionally, a sign of spiritual potency and of the gods' blessings. Ideally, wealth is associated with those who are of high status by descent. Socially and spiritually, the undertaker's wealth poses a contradiction: how can he be blessed and potent, how can he be of lofty status?

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3. The only other instance of a silent *imbo* that I know of is performed by women, who *mangimbo dapo*, "bless the kitchen," during a harvest ritual. With a feather dabbed in chicken blood each woman touches all the elements in the kitchen: pots, fire stones, serving spoons. Women in a public sense are also speechless, but in this *imbo* their essential tie to fertility, nurturing, and the household is acknowledged.



The rante or field where many of the death ceremonies take place. The stone boulders are erected in honor of important ancestors.



At the ma'nene', a tomebalun (at right) negotiates with members of a family about his payment  
(photograph: Charles Zerner)

The contradiction is particularly meaningful if we realize that the *tomebalun* embodies not only (in some sense) death, but also greed. Structurally he is forced into dependence on others: he owns little land of his own, and even what he does own is polluted. He is forced to take, not to give. This is emphasized in both the funeral and *ma'nene'* through the structure of the pay-off, where he seems to act as greed par excellence. Toraja confirm this interpretation; they often say, "He gets a lot of meat and money!" with a mixture of envy and disgust. Although wealth is desired and striven for, Toraja culture strongly condemns greed. The rich man ideally holds ceremonies and distributes his wealth (and so raises his status), but the *tomebalun*, traditionally, has no possible means of doing so. He simply accumulates riches unto himself. Thus we might imagine that the Toraja see in him some of their own basest impulses, and resist them. Through their final payment to the undertaker people acknowledge the strength of those impulses but temporarily rid themselves of their domination, while at the same time converting the potential burden of the ancestors (who may harass the living) into blessings.



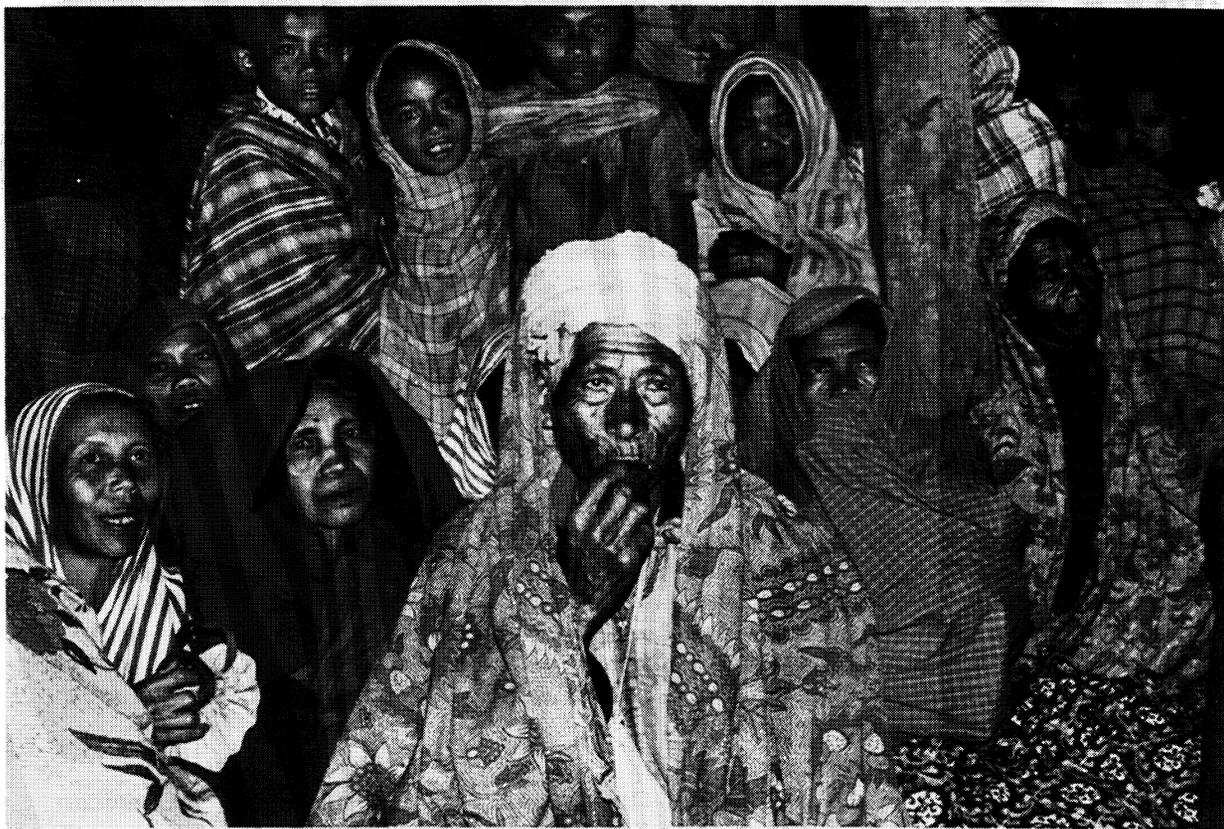
Si semba': the kickfight (photograph: Charles Zerner)

Hours later, as the *tomebalun* nears the final mats, interest in him tapers off, shifting to the center of the field where a kickfight is beginning. In this sport (*si semba'*) men and boys of all ages tear across the field in rows, holding hands, shouting, and kicking, with a great variety of named kicks, whoever lunges toward them. The idiom of the game is "heat" (*malassu*) and its gesture (aside from kicking) is *mangaru*, to hop up and down in anger or a warlike challenge. It is as though the payment to the undertaker--and to the domination of death--allows an eruption of hot feelings in the form of kicks, releasing the energy of a new phase in the ritual cycle, on the side of life and regeneration.

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The first man I ever photographed in To' Tabang, I later discovered, was the former undertaker. I should have realized that there was a strange quality to his penetrating eyes, his lined face, and his head wrapped in a kind of white turban. So strange, that everyone in the village who saw the photograph did a kind of double-take and then uttered a laugh or an amazed cry: "Why it's Pong Pindan! Just like a ghost [*bombo*]." Those who forgot said, "Why it's the *tomebalun*!" What they forgot was that several years before, this undertaker had undergone a ritual cleansing in order to sever himself from his previous state and work. In his new, purified state he could no longer be called *tomebalun*, but was Pong Pindan, a name roughly translated as Mr. Clean Plate (*pindan* is a white ceramic dish).

Clean or not, he still invariably made people think of ghosts. The photograph exaggerates this in that it was taken at night, and at a time when he was surrounded by an assortment of intense female faces, singing and chanting funeral dirges. Those women, people said, are really "*tukang ma'londe*," habitual singers of a particular form of mourning song. The whole photograph thus projected a certain ghoulis atmosphere by which people in To' Tabang seemed both attracted and repulsed.



Pong Pindan chews betel nut at a funeral

In this way I learned about the undertaker. The present Pong Pindan had been the tomebalun in To' Tabang until about seven years ago. For forty or more years he had buried people's parents, grandparents, sisters, and brothers in the area. He was, of course, from a long line of tomebalun. Born about two hours' walk over the mountain, he had married the daughter of a To' Tabang tomebalun and moved to her house. He was surely competent, in fact reputedly clairvoyant, his piercing eyes said to be capable of seeing bombo in this world. But about seven years ago, he decided to undergo ritual cleansing, and put an end to his lucrative career.

I knew that to cleanse himself Pong Pindan had performed a ceremony at which at least a pig was cut and a tominaa was present. Supposedly he was thereafter freed from the taboos of tomebalun-ship. Nonetheless, one sensed that the stigma of his previous role survived. When one morning we climbed the trail to his house, I had my doubts that this was permissible behavior, especially since, on a previous map-making walk, my guide had anxiously bypassed that trail. We were not invited to enter the house, a disappointment for my curiosity but a relief for my sense of social norms and pollution fears. We sat instead on the granary, and talked with Ne' Lapik, Pong Pindan's wife, and her son. Later a friend said with evident relief, "It's good you did not go inside the house; Lapik has tuberculosis." When she died six months later, I was told that she had beriberi.

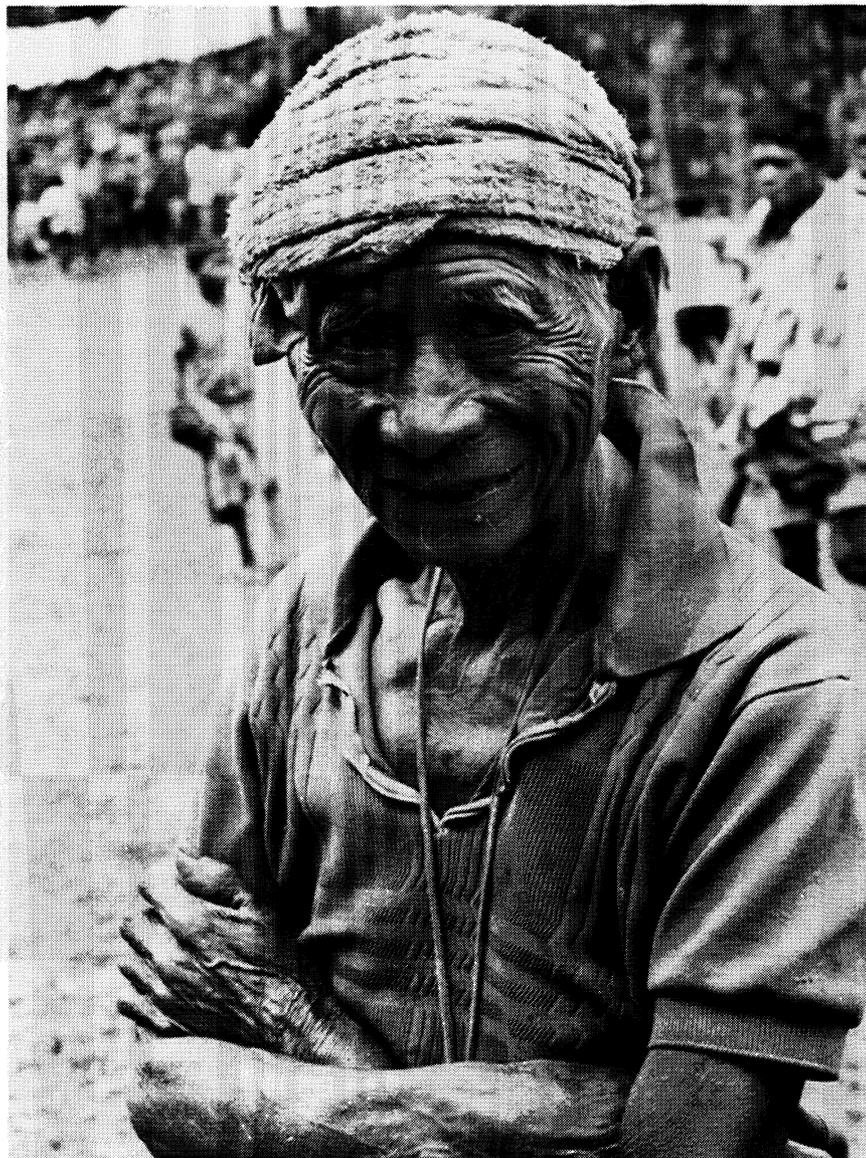
Whatever her illness, Ne' Lapid was old, thin, and reticent. She at once held out her tattered sweater and pleaded: "Pity me, I have no shirt." Later she told me of the coming of the Dutch. They would stroke the arms of little girls and say, "poor child, you have no shirt!" And for carrying things they would give her clothes, bread, and even money.

Ne' Lapik would not tell me much about her family; she simply said her ancestors were all dead. All but one of her nine children had left home, for which she felt much bitterness. And her husband's siblings' children no longer visited either. Why? "We have no rice," she said. We were sitting on her rice barn, and the pen was full of pigs, but I let the comment pass. "They just don't come," she repeated, "unless there is a need. There is a lot of rice where they live in Pangala." At no time in the conversation did she mention that one son-in-law was then a working tomebalun in the area.

Ne' Lapik died, and late in July her funeral took place. Against the background of Pong Pindan's former traditional and ambivalent role, this funeral was rather startling. Indeed it was confusing and unsettling to many people in To' Tabang; to those Toraja of high status whose wealth was waning, the event was truly distressing. Yet the funeral was conducted without a hitch. It was at least a partially effective ritual act, unlike Paidjan's funeral in Modjokuto which, according to Geertz's account, failed because its central form (the *slametan*) remained unchanged.<sup>4</sup> "Blind" to the new patterns of social insulation and integration arising in an urban setting, Paidjan's Javanese funeral, in Geertz's words, went "against the grain of social equilibrium." If the former undertaker's wife's funeral in Toraja was successful, this was because it shifted kaleidoscopically with that grain. While still maintaining its traditional form, it made clear an image of emerging social reality--an image that many Toraja would have preferred not to have seen.

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4. Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," *American Anthropologist*, 59, 1 (1957), pp. 32-54.



Pong Pindan in the limelight  
at his wife's funeral

Traditionally, when the undertaker's riches were the wages of his work with death, he was as dependent on the community as the community was upon him. Today, however, Christian funerals do not use *tomebalun*, and "unemployed" *tomebalun* are usually happy to find work, for cash, elsewhere in Sulawesi, or in Kalimantan. There they convert to Christianity, and live in relative anonymity and prosperity. "Not only do the former slaves no longer need us," lamented a woman of noble descent, "but even the *tomebalun* doesn't need us anymore." This is only partly true; even the former undertaker's children feel the need to return to Toraja for important ceremonies. "Self-worth," reflected a Toraja man, "is only there if other people see it. Through rituals it is made visible." At the funeral of Pong Pindan's wife, his family displayed their new *rantau* wealth, and sacrificed and distributed in an attempt to transform that wealth into worth.



This family portrait was requested as the corpse (the cylinder below the plaid, roof-like structure in the center) was being carried to the grave.

All the scattered children returned home. The oldest was a middle-aged woman who had married a Javanese soldier during the Japanese occupation. They now lived in an Islamic area on the southwest coast of Sulawesi. Londong, the oldest son, wore shoulder-length hair, tight jeans, and a big watch. He looked like an aging hippy, and was remarkably gruff and aggressive: he walked uninvited into our house, demanded photographs, and addressed me with the informal "you" (*iko*), something no one younger than a grandparent had ever done. Londong was truly marginal: he had joined an Islamic rebellion in Mamasa (Western Toraja), and married a Mamasa woman. When she died he sought jobs in the forests of Kalimantan, but more generally he was thought to be a wandering vagabond. One daughter lived in Manado with her husband, a carpenter. Another lived in Ujung Pandang, where her husband (also from a *tomebalun* family) was studying city planning or construction. A son came from Bone, an Islamic area, where he was stationed in the army, having previously been in Manado and East Timor. Their youngest brother, a gentle-looking man in his late twenties, came from Kalimantan (Tarakan), where he raised and sold vegetables.

Only three children had remained in Toraja: one daughter still living in her mother's house in To' Tabang; another living with a relative down the mountain; and a third having married the practicing tomebalun in a nearby village. None of these three had converted to Christianity, but all the children who had left Toraja were now Christians, with the exception of the first daughter who became a Muslim like her Javanese husband. The youngest brother was, in fact, baptized in the To' Tabang church during this visit to Toraja. For all of them, Christianity and mobility had obviously offered a way out, an escape from the lifelong stigma of being undertaker's children and from the work of death. In Bone or Kalimantan no one need know who they are. Nonetheless, they had all come back, having by no means sacrificed their Toraja identity. Through their return they attempted to recreate that identity in more acceptable, even desirable form. In providing an elaborate and expensive funeral for their mother they hoped to "make themselves big" and begin to shake off the ancient pollution which attached to their undertaker status.

In theory Pong Pindan's wife should never have had an elaborate funeral. A simple ceremony, lasting no more than a single day, would have been her due, with at most a single, plain buffalo slaughtered. But her children were now capable of great expense, thanks to their education, employment, or military careers. They decided, and the leaders of the community agreed, that the highest level of mortuary ritual could be performed, lasting several weeks and entailing the sacrifice of thirteen buffalo and dozens of pigs. Although many of the sponsors were Christian, Ne' Lapik herself still "fed the ancestors," and so the form of the ritual would follow the finely detailed structure of a traditional animist funeral.

Pong Pindan belonged to Ne' Tuyu's saroan, which as a relatively new "meat-sharing" group seemed to attract some lower status members. Over the years Pong Pindan had managed to accumulate enough wealth so that by 1978 he was already considered, by Ne' Tuyu at any rate, to be an ambe', and he was high on the priority list for meat division. In fact Ne' Tuyu liked to minimize Pong Pindan's tomebalun history to such an extent that he introduced him to me, and addressed him publicly, as Ne' Baru--a name and title which implied a good deal more respect than the appellation "Pong Pindan."

So the stage was set for Ne' Lapik to be buried in style. Whether there was disagreement among the other ambe' I do not know. There was, however, much murmuring and disapproval, and some disbelief, voiced in daily conversations. As the time approached for the funeral, people began to say, "really, this cannot be." But then they added, "these days, anything goes. Anyway, the tominaa and ambe' just want more meat to eat." It even emerged that, according to strict custom, Pong Pindan had never been thoroughly cleansed. He had, it seems, performed a lesser form of smoke-rising ritual, but he had never held the highest rite, *ma'bu'a'*. The purists argued that a tomebalun was still polluted until the *ma'bu'a'* was performed, or at least until he gave a pig to another of his houses which had held such a ritual. However, the idea that yet another tomebalun family had carried out *ma'bu'a'* seemed beyond the scope of people's wildest fantasies. In the coffee shops along the road, some Christians said in frustration: "Had the old tominaa been alive, this never could have happened."

Resigned to the event, the villagers came to the funeral, whatever their convictions. It was a bizarre conglomeration of people, for relatives of the deceased appeared from every part of Toraja, and all of them were, of course, related tomebalun. It was, for the traditionally-minded, a concentration of pollution, yet one at which the normal populace were obligingly present, where they mingled hesitantly, and received their due. As the Toraja rarely lose their sense of humor, they

dealt with what must have been unusual discomfort by joking openly about who was and was not an undertaker, and where to find someone to wrap the corpse, a task not proper for a close family member to perform.

The funeral itself was much like any other. For days and nights the intricate steps went on: cats were symbolically thrown out the window; chicks had their necks twisted; a dog was hung upside down and beaten to death. Buffalo and pigs were slaughtered along the way, and meat, as always, was divided in complex ways and argued over. As usual, the government village head demanded a "development" thigh, which everyone knew went into his own cooking pot. Several long afternoons were spent in debates about the funeral's timing (it interfered with Indonesian independence day), the penning of pigs (a "modernizing" move), and whether the rich



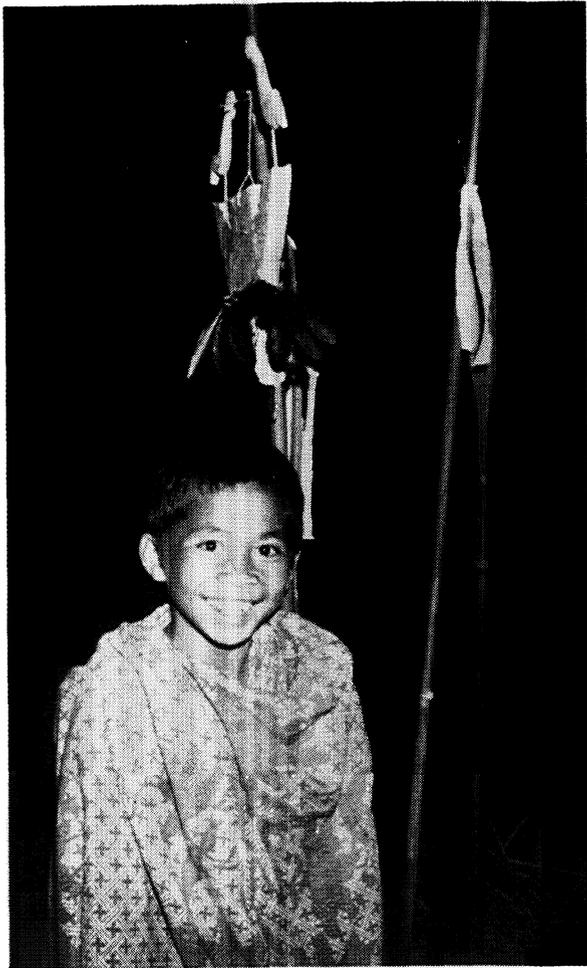
At one stage in the funeral, a dog and a chicken are muzzled, hung upside down on a bamboo post in the center of the yard, and the dog is beaten to death. This man also works on Sundays ringing church bells, and at other times as a traditional healer.

men (*to'sugi'*) from the other saroan had contributed their proper share to the new teachers' house-building. The anthropologist took photographs and was constantly asked to give them away. By night the usual chanting was overpowered by exquisite bamboo flute music, since, oddly enough, the center of this art form is also a kind of *tomebalun* center. The *tominaa* adjusted his recitation of the deceased's life story to include, in sacred language, the cleansing of Pong Pindan as he (and by implication his wife) turned from west to east.



The *tominaa* stands in the rain in Pong Pindan's houseyard, reciting Ne' Lapik's life story, including how her husband turned from west (death) to east (the rising sun), that is, how he was ritually cleansed, and how their many children have gone in search of money to such far places as Kalimantan. All this is said in formulaic "high speech."

The guest day, as might have been expected, was not a major event. Only two saroan entered in procession, bringing a few medium-sized pigs. But a substantial number of buffalo were slaughtered by the returning children, and everyone knew that no expense had been spared. All the local people, even the most reluctant, did come on this day. Even a group of about twenty French tourists found their way to this rather off-the-road spot, where they handed out Gauloises and gaped at the spectacle, little knowing what they saw.

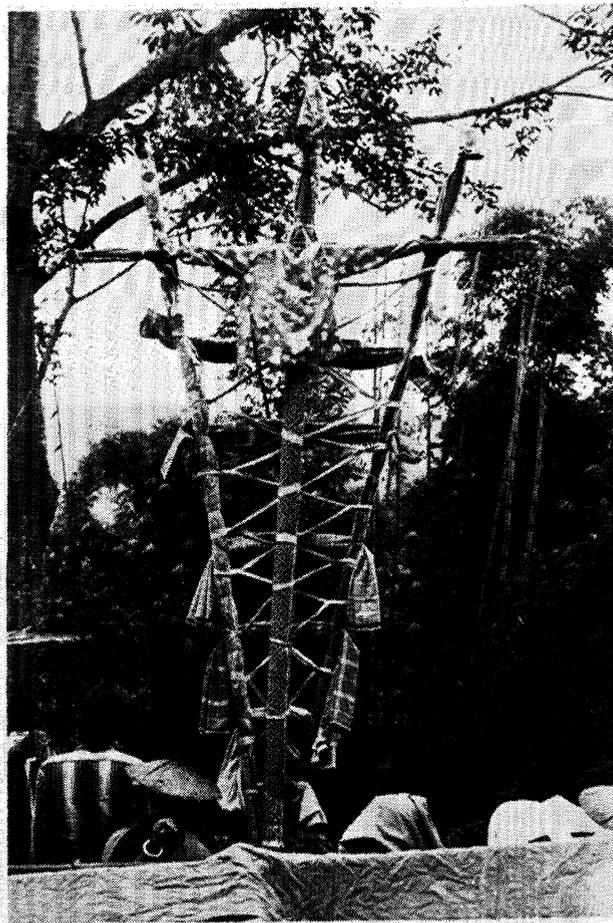


Left: A grandson of Pong Pindan. The carving behind him (*manuk manuk*) represents chickens on a boat; chicken feathers and miniature betel bags hang from the wooden form. The *manuk manuk* is eventually taken to the grave as provisions for the deceased.



Right: Grandchildren and their friends gather eagerly round Ne' Lapik's effigy for a group portrait in the houseyard.

Right: A more abstract effigy (*bandera*) is constructed on the third day of the funeral. Three bamboo poles are tied with cloths, a shirt hangs at the top, and a betel pouch (not visible here) is placed at the juncture of the bamboo poles. At ceremonies of the old nobility, the *bandera* is made with heirloom cloths said to come from the ancestors, or Java, or the gods. In this case, modern plaid and printed cottons are used.



Left: Effigies (*tau-tau*) of bamboo and cloth were formerly made only for those of noble birth. The cloths on Ne' Lapik's effigy are again rather plain (note the towel around her neck), but the white shell bracelet (*balusu*) was traditionally a sign of high status. Old Dutch coins form necklaces, and the small plate on her head signifies that she is a woman.

The funeral, then, was remarkable only for its cast of characters. There was no crisis comparable to the delay in Paidjan's Javanese burial. But to almost everyone in To' Tabang, it represented a strange turn of events. The whole community was sharing in the former undertaker's wealth and meat. And the person who, in a talkative culture, was formerly publicly speechless was now moving into the role of public talker. People often comment on the tomebalun's lack of words: he feeds the spirit and the effigy in silence, he "prays" in silence, and even his bargaining is silent. He is in striking contrast to the loquacious tominaa, who uses poetic speech to communicate with gods and spirits, and to the ambe', who uses skillful ordinary speech to move people in the everyday social world. Pong Pindan was gradually assuming the public role of ambe', although the effectiveness of his words remained to be seen.



A group of ambe' sit, awaiting their shares of meat at one of numerous distributions.

For many people this funeral represented proof that the world was not as it once was; that ceremonies did not always restore things to their proper places, or, as Malinowski thought, assure "the victory of tradition."<sup>5</sup> One could, in short, buy status. "Pong Pindan is trying to make himself big," said a woman from a noble house, her own wealth and position somewhat faded. "He is becoming a noble by buying his position. But he will not forget that he is just a 'small man.' People don't forget; their names don't disappear." Yet this same woman is painfully aware of the gradual disappearance of her own family's name, of how years ago her grandmother was honored and respected like a raja at a splendid funeral. "Now," she mused, "we no longer have value worth even half a cent. Our power, our 'umbrella-dom,' is gone."

5. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, p. 53.