Crafting Place:
Globalization and the Handicrafts Market of Tegallalang

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Abstrak


Dengan demikian, industri kerajinan tangan menciptakan sebuah tempat baru bagi pemilik toko, seniman dan buruh seni untuk mengimajinasikan 'kebudayaan-kebudayaan' lain sekalipun mereka tidak atau sedikit sekali mengalami kontak langsung.

Para pembeli dari Barat melihat seni etnis atas sifat 'otentik'. Namun, di tempat-tempat seperti Tegallalang apakah para seniman dan penjual melihat hubungan antara obyek dan tempat asal barang seni dengan cara yang sama seperti halnya konsumen dari Barat? Tulisan ini menyajikan wacana estetika dan budaya di kalangan seniman dan pemilik toko yang melihat gagasan kebudayaan lainnya (the others).

Introduction

For the tourist, souvenir handicrafts serve as tangible evidence of having seen and experienced a culture, an aesthetic tradition and a people distinct from one’s own. In contrast to souvenir T-shirts, mugs and key-chains simply emblazoned with the name of the tourist destination, handicrafts symbolize a closer interaction with, or at least a glimpse of, the everyday lives and material cultures of ‘the Other’. Handicrafts such as baskets, textiles and wood-carvings are marketed for their authenticity; commodities which bear ‘traditional’ motifs/designs and are still used among locals in everyday contexts are highly desired and highly valued among consumers. This is especially true for handicrafts produced by politically and socially underrepresented ethnic minorities whose aesthetic traditions, modes of production and material culture stand in stark contrast with those found in the industrialized West. The souvenir handicraft, in other words, bridges both the psychological and geographic dissonances between consumers and producers in an era of late-global capitalism, in which consumers constitute ‘traditional’ worlds of tribal cultures and artists (Clifford 1988:200).

More than ever before, however, handicrafts are available in Western retail markets, such that tourism is no longer the only means
through which consumers can purchase tangible artifacts from these underrepresented groups. Handicrafts such as Guatemalan baskets, Indonesian woodcarvings, African masks and Native American clothing are available for immediate purchase in a variety of venues, in a variety of price ranges: from specialty retail shops, online and mail-order catalogues to department stores. Not only this, but reproductions of antique items, high-end accessories and furniture are produced at lower costs, and thus available to more consumers. Thus, the objets d’art that once graced the living rooms of only the well-traveled and wealthy are available to a wider demographic, although consumers cannot always guarantee the authenticity of these mass-produced items. Because the demand for handicrafts is so high and production output is expected over shorter turnover times, we are now faced with a market in which handicrafts are not always produced by the same people and through the same modes of production to which the object is indigenous. How has the mass consumption of handicrafts altered the ways in which we analyze commodity and cultural production in an age of globalization? Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the village of Tegallalang, Bali, the goal of this article is to present a few examples of the social and economic exchanges that take place among handicrafts producers and consumers, and to present the ‘social life of things’ (Appadurai 1986) in order to understand the changing face and changing place of the global handicrafts market.

Bali imagined

Bali’s positionality as both producer and object of cultural imaginings can be traced long before the development of the tourism industry. Although it is often marketed as a ‘last paradise’ of ancient traditions that have withstood the test of time, Bali is home to a long history of cross-cultural influence, intellectual exchange and creative experimentation. Dynastic chronicles show that this island had already been integrated into the Hindu-Javanese kingdom by the 14th century (Picard 1996:17), and by the 16th century, had become a refuge for Hindu royalty and literati fleeing the advance of Islamic conversion throughout the archipelago. The first Dutch explorers arrived in Bali in 1597, though it was not until the late 19th-early 20th centuries, that it became integrated under Dutch political, economic and military control.

Dutch colonialists, scholars, visiting artists, and Indonesian nationalists sought to preserve and publicly showcase what they considered a ‘living museum’. By the early 20th century, Bali had become a model project for Orientalists seeking to foster and maintain a paradisiacal myth of an island in which nature and culture blended seamlessly together, forming idyllic images for the Western gaze (Vickers 1989:98–99). In the 1920s, the Dutch implemented a policy of Baliseering (‘Balinization’), which encouraged the island’s youth to take part in the intensive study of the Bali-Hindu traditional arts, crafts, language and literature. This campaign placed an emphasis on the ancient and the traditional—but simultaneously, contributed to ahistorical, paradisiacal narratives of the island, despite the everyday realities of colonialism, Japanese occupation and later, the struggle for national independence. Nevertheless, these romantic narratives flourished, enforced by testimonies from expatriate artists and anthropologists who flocked to the island in subsequent decades.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that upon further development of the tourism industry in post World War 2 Indonesia, Bali was often referred to as the ‘island of artists’. In order to maintain this trope, terms such as ‘authentic’, ‘antique’, ‘primitive’, and ‘traditional’ were integrated into the discourse of the tourism industry and has now made its way into public
discourse. Cultural Tourism became the primary doctrine for developing the tourist economy during the New Order (Picard 1996:164)—highlighting ancient religious and artistic traditions, albeit regulated by the state. By the 1970s, tourism exceeded the value of the island’s exports, and by the 1990s, tourism-related industries such as clothing and handicrafts manufacturing had flourished.

**Tegallalang: a case study in local production for global consumption**

Directly northeast of Ubud, Bali, lies a stretch of road which begins in the village of Andong and continues approximately 20 kilometers north towards Mount Kintamani. Along this road, hundreds of art shops specialize in the wholesale, retail and individual sale of *kerajinan tangan* (handicrafts). Made on premises, in outlying villages or other islands such as Java and Lombok, handicrafts of various types are sold from showrooms or what are commonly known as ‘art shops’. The art shop has clearly become the area’s main industry: twenty years ago, one would have traveled up the road, taking in views of Balinese family compounds and scattered rice fields. Today however, the compounds’ stone walls are hardly visible behind continuous rows of shops and kiosks added to compound’s façade (Figure A). Views of rice fields are often interrupted by art shops, cargo agents and three to four-story high galleries. Since the mid-1980s, many locals have invested in carving knives, paint brushes, storefronts, and calculators—in hopes of pursuing the seemingly quick money offered by the handicrafts business. Other aspiring entrepreneurs from neighboring villages have come to set up shop here, and make the daily commute to their rented art shops, while a number of non-Balinese from Java and Lombok have established businesses here and rented out living quarters in the area. Investing their savings or taking out loans, these entrepreneurs have become increasingly dependent on the art shop as their primary source of income.

Over the course of fourteen months, I conducted research in a concentrated, 8-kilometer section of Jalan Raya Tegallalang, located in the village of Tegallalang. Here, the art shops are most densely concentrated and regularly

Figure A:
A newly-constructed art shop kiosk in front of a household compound (Tegallalang)
trafficked by foreign buyers from Japan, Australia, North America and Europe. Jalan Raya Tegallalang is quite different from the art shops and souvenir kiosks typically found on the streets of Ubud, Sanur or Kuta. Despite its close proximity to Ubud, tourists rarely make a casual trip up this street as pedestrian walkways are either poorly maintained or are nonexistent. The narrow road gradually ascends north, toward the famed Tegallalang rice paddies that are the subject of many tourist photographs and picture postcards. The street itself, however, is only well known among foreign buyers, who frequent this one-stop shopping village for retail and wholesale handicrafts. In fact, art shop merchants in Tegallalang have become so accustomed to dealing with wholesale/retail buyers that they comfortably turn away tourists interested in purchasing only one or two items. When a tourist inquires about the price of a particular woodcarving, a common reply among the art shop vendors is, ‘Is this for business?’ in order to discern whether an ensuing bargaining-session is worth their time.

The village of Tegallalang is located in the district of Gianyar, southern Bali. It lies directly north of the popular tourist destination of Ubud which, in contrast, draws hundreds of tourists daily. The area, therefore is frequented by tourists who, in referring to their guidebooks or the advice of seasoned travelers, seek refuge from the crowded beaches of the southern coast, in favor of ‘greater cultural authenticity’ (Errington 1998:125). This discourse, in turn, has made its way to surrounding communities such as Tegallalang. A sizeable expatriate community resides in Ubud and its surrounding areas, which includes a large group of artists, businesspeople and retirees. For many Tegallalang locals, Ubud provides jobs in the hotel and restaurant industry, is the site of a large bemo terminal, and offers a diverse produce, meat and dry goods market that the smaller village markets may not offer. For Tegallalang art shop entrepreneurs, Ubud is an especially important resource as its many cargo agents, buying agents, Internet cafes, fax/copier machines and banks to help facilitate business transactions.

Crafting place: representations of cultural aesthetics

While traveling through Bali in September 2000, I befriended two Americans, a father and son, who were frequent visitors to Indonesia—purchasing furniture, textiles and silver to sell in boutiques and galleries in the southeastern United States. They were interested in my research project on representations of ethnicity in the arts, and invited me to accompany them on their buying excursions throughout the island. It was during one of these shopping trips that I came to know Tegallalang. We often traveled to the village, marveling at the diversity of woodcarvings and crafts the showrooms had to offer. Neighboring towns such as Mas, Sukawati and Batubulan have their own thriving wood carving industries, but Tegallalang offered a wider array of arts and crafts. According to several informants, Tegallalang had always been well known for its woodcarvings—especially for its Garuda statues—yet today, the range of products have diversified to suit the tastes of the larger global market. Mosaic adorned mirrors, fish mobiles, Native American dreamcatchers, Australian Aboriginal dijereedoos and African-style masks have clearly outnumbered the Garuda statues and traditional topeng of Tegallalang. Foreign buyers visit this village on a regular basis; negotiating contracts with local artisans for mass-produced handicrafts and furniture. A few economically successful businesses have had long-standing contracts with overseas clientele, but a large majority of the art shops in
Tegallalang still rely on actual visits from buyers, browsing the village’s many art shops for new products.

During one of these shopping excursions, ‘Vince’ one of the buyers whom I befriended, came across a shop which sold small Moroccan-style tables (a small, octagonal-shaped side table, ornately painted with vivid colors). After purchasing several tables for approximately $13 USD each, the Balinese producer wanted to know why Vince had bought just a few of the many other tables she had to offer. He took quite a while examining her entire line of Moroccan tables, looking them over for production and aesthetic quality. Vince explained to the woman (as I served as translator) that he did not want to purchase all her tables because some did not conform to the ‘traditional’ color combinations found on Moroccan designs. Upon hearing Vince’s explanation, the producer understood. She immediately asked me to find out what those traditional color combinations were, hoping that perhaps she would get them right next time. According to Vince, the neon colors the woman had used needed to be toned down/minimized in order to ‘look Moroccan’; her choice of paints were a bit too garish for his taste. He also recommended a specific set of color combinations (purples with pinks, blues with yellows) which would lend themselves to a more authentic Moroccan style. The woman thanked him, and noted his advice accordingly. I would later find these similar Moroccan tables sold in a US furniture gallery for approximately $175 USD (Figure B). The gallery marketed these tables as ‘Moroccan’, although when I asked the storeowner where the tables were produced, he sheepishly admitted that they were from Bali.

Lombok as the symbolic ‘Other’

During my visits to other art shops in Tegallalang, I often met with Ari, a 22 year-old Balinese woman who works with her family in ‘Suci Artshop’, located in the center of Tegallalang. Between her household duties, and taking care of her three-year old daughter, Ari works with her husband in the art shop located in front of her family’s compound. Aside from her love of Bollywood films, she possessed a keen interest in world events, and often would ask me questions about various cultures and
religions she had heard or learned about through television or newspapers. She was familiar with the events of 9/11 in the United States, and understood its impact on her own community. Many of clients, she explained, had stopped coming to Tegallalang after 9/11. She also knew that many major companies were based at the World Trade Center building in New York City, which led to major financial setbacks in the global economy after the building’s collapse. Because her command of English was better than her husband’s, Ari is the primary salesperson in the shop—greeting foreign buyers and negotiating orders, while her husband put finishing touches on the woodcarvings, and packaged items before they were loaded onto delivery trucks destined for the cargo agent.

A large number of the carvings sold in Suci Artshop bore a dot-painting style similar to 'Dreamtime' paintings of Australian Aboriginal Pintupi. However, the woodcarvings themselves were an eclectic mix of non-Australian Aboriginal items: cats, CD holders, bookshelves and masks (Figure C). Aware of Ari’s interest in learning about other cultures, I asked her how she came to learn about dot-painting. She first explained that it was an idea suggested by her husband. After experimenting with the design and adding it to a few of the shop’s woodcarvings, the dot-painting motif proved to sell very well among their clients. I then asked Ari again where this particular dot-painting aesthetic might have originated. She clearly had not thought about it till then, but after some thought, she concluded that it was a style of painting originating from Lombok. This was an unusual reply, but her reference to Lombok was one that was not unfamiliar to me; it was a place often referenced by foreign buyers as well.

Another informant during my fieldwork was Peter, a buyer from Texas who has been coming to Indonesia for over three years. Along with his Javanese business partner, Peter frequents the islands of Java, Bali and Lombok in search of new handicrafts. A growing number of his clients in the United States request primitive, ethnic-inspired handicrafts, and Indonesia has been a steady supplier of baskets, masks and ‘primitive’ woodcarvings.

Among his growing clientele are retailers who target the African-American middle-class communities in Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma. I asked Peter to explain what sorts of handicrafts he supplies for this particular demographic. Currently, the trend among his clientele is for African-style masks carved of dark woods and adorned with mother-of-pearl shells. Although not authentically African masks, Peter has been able to find what his customers are looking for in Lombok. Every few months, Peter sends his Javanese business partner to a

Figure C:
A wooden cat carving adorned with Australian Aboriginal dot-painting motifs (Tegallalang)
supplier in Mataram, to manage the supply side of the business and to oversee quality control. When asked how a mask produced in Lombok can appeal to consumers of African-style art in the United States, Peter explained that many of his customers find the masks ‘primitive enough’ to suit their tastes for the masks of Africa. He has recently begun sending his business partner to Tegallalang, in search of ‘safari-style’ woodcarvings (elephants, tigers, giraffes, etc.).

**Imagining people and place through handicrafts**

In each of these stories above, the imagining of place and people emerges as a common theme. The market is filled with interpretations as to what could pass for a traditional Moroccan, African or Australian Aboriginal aesthetic. In other words, handicrafts are produced in accordance to the negotiated imaginings of Otherness, through a system of buyers, designers, producers and even, translators. In a strangely postmodern twist—in neither of these stories, nor in the other exchanges I’d witnessed during my research in Tegallalang—had there been an actual representative of these ethnic groups who could give their expertise on their own aesthetic traditions. The ability to imagine native aesthetics, and people, therefore, comes from a combination of personal experiences and cultural knowledge, from travel, education level, ethnic background, and class.

Vince, the American buyer who purchased the Moroccan tables, has an extensive background in fine arts. Having earned a Master’s degree in Fine Arts in painting, he not only frequents Southeast Asia for handicrafts and furniture for his business, but also, for creative inspiration. His work has been showcased in galleries throughout the U.S. His father, Will, a retired professor, works alongside him in the wholesale business. Although not as personally invested in art as his son, Will is a collector and an avid flea-market shopper. Will is known to make spontaneous trips to from the US to Paris, specifically to peruse the aisles of the city’s famed flea market. Thus, father and son come to Bali with a combined background in the arts, and their history of buying/collecting art; they use their personal experiences and knowledge to inform them of what handicrafts might appeal to their clientele, and to their particular notions of authenticity.

Ari, the Balinese woman who painted crafts in the Australian Aboriginal style, has never traveled outside of Bali, and for her, the predominantly Muslim Lombok may be as foreign a place to her as anywhere else in the world. Perhaps this was why she attributed the dot-painting style to the neighboring Sasak. Like many handicrafts producers in Tegallalang, Ari is part of a business in which there is no direct communication between herself (the producer) and her clientele (the consumer). She learns about new designs through sketches and photos provided to her from foreign buyers or agents, or she mimics the designs which have successfully sold in neighboring art shops. However, styles change from season to season, and new designs are constantly introduced and modified. Many handicrafts producers experiment with different styles/designs of their own as well, adding to the growing variety of handicrafts that make their way in and out of the village. Throughout the many exchanges we have had about the ethnic arts market, Ari expressed a greater interest in who eventually bought these crafts, than from what cultural/ethnic group these styles originated. Perhaps because styles and trends change so often, Ari showed greater interest in the consumers of her products, rather than in the product itself. She is keenly aware of the unpredictability of the world economy, and she knows this is partly due to the ever-changing consumer habits in the West. But this is not to say she did not have an interest in the dot-paint-
ing style; I eventually explained that this was a design of the *orang asli* in Australia, to which she understood.

Peter personified the type of buyer who did not have an interest in art so much as the lucrative prospects of the business. Now both retired, Peter and his Javanese business partner have been good friends since they were both employed in a Jakarta-based company over twenty years ago. Although Peter is more familiar with life in Indonesia and has a good command of Bahasa Indonesia, he was relatively new to the wholesale handicrafts business. He follows the consumer trends in U.S. trade shows and retail shops, rather than on his own personal tastes in art. Whereas Will and Vince approach the handicrafts business more from their personal appreciation of arts and crafts, Peter saw this more as a profitable business that would supplement his retirement income, and allow him to visit his longtime friends in Indonesia.

**Commodities and globalization**

Through the consumption of handicrafts and especially, ethnic art, individuals have been able to assert their cosmopolitan identity, assert a level of distinction (Bourdieu 1984) or at least, an openness and appreciation of artistic traditions not their own. Although tourism still provides the nostalgia and alternative experience for Westerners from the alienation of industrial society, I argue that the conspicuous consumption of foreign handicrafts emerges as another arena through which this alienation is remedied, without the added expense of travel. This is done through the display of religious artifacts and masks in the home, adorning ‘ethnic’ jewelry and clothing, or growing an appreciation for music from ethnic minority groups in the Third World.

With the increasing movement of commodities from one geographic location to another, mythologies and stories about the commodity become increasingly important in order to somehow fill the physical and ideological gaps between producer and consumer, especially in globalized, Western capitalist societies. These mythologies narrow the distance between producers, distributors and consumers, who are socially ‘divorced’ from one another due to the broad, geographic expanse of global capitalism (Appadurai 1986:48). The need to know where an item is from, what its original purpose was, what rituals it was used for, or what tribal/ethnic group it originates becomes the building blocks of the mythology behind handicrafts—helping to bridge the gap between late-industrial capitalist consumers in the West, and the unknown, exotic, pre-industrial producers based in the Third World.

Yet the irony of the global handicrafts market is such that the commodities go against Western assumptions that handicrafts represent the aesthetic traditions, modes of production and socio-political systems that are unaffected by globalization. Woodcarvings, baskets, and other items are produced in such high volumes by low-wage laborers who are contracted out to produce these goods for export. Handicrafts producers such as those in Tegallalang have very little contact with those who buy their products, and so they keep abreast of consumer trends as best they can through newspapers, radio, television, and conversations with foreign buyers.

Aside from the many types of ethnic arts found in Tegallalang, antique furniture fills a significant niche in the village’s overall economy. However, buyers are hard-pressed to find original antique, European-style furniture on the island of Bali. The solution has been to order newly-crafted furniture from Java, ship it to Tegallalang, and to speed up the ‘antiquing’ process, by asking artisans to manipulate the wood finish. It is not unusual to find workers
exposing pieces of furniture to the open-flames of a blow-torch; rubbing sandpaper to once-glossy lacquers and stains, or applying Kiwi-brand shoe polish to wood surfaces in order to reproduce a look of damage or wear (Figure D). The final results are usually similar to the antique furniture found in Western furniture stores and auction houses.

The zone of hybridity

The handicrafts industry of Bali serves as an example of a zone of hybridity or Thirdspace (Soja 1996), where the relationship between space and culture is recontextualized. It does away with the fictional notion that cultures are bounded and that cultural exchange between localities is regulated within borders (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:48). Moreover, this zone of hybridity should not be considered a novel or extraordinary locale for the postmodern subject. In fact, this is a very real, very ‘normal’ space for the postcolonial, postmodern inhabitant of a globalized world (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). I would argue that despite the ‘cultural tourism’ discourse which still drives Bali’s tourism industry, it should not be considered highly unusual to find Balinese producers make a living creating Moroccan tables, Native American dream-catchers, replicas of ancient Egyptian gods and Alaskan totem poles, if one historicizes and contextualizes Bali within the context of the current global economy. In other words, the challenge is to view communities such as Tegallalang as a source of cultural production in an age of flexible accumulation.

As a means of contesting the stereotyped notions of ‘primitive’ or ‘traditional’, I argue that handicrafts producers and vendors in Tegallalang have found an space in which culture is not objectified, nor are they restrained within the boundaries of ‘Culture’ as tourism has done. By taking part in an industry which provides greater opportunities to learn about and recreate the aesthetics of cultures from around

Figure D:
A youth applies a blow-torch to a CD shelf, in order to create a worn, “antique” finish
the world, producers take part in distancing themselves from tropes which have sought to mythologize and marginalize Balinese culture. No longer obligated to showcase themselves or their skills as having been ‘frozen’ in time and space, Tegallalang is an important example of where anthropologists, tourists and others can begin to consider assertions of an identity outside of our modernist, touristic expectations.

But one must also recognize that this is at the expense of stereotyping other cultures: Native American, African, Asian and Latin American, to name a few. Because stereotyping and recreating the traditional aesthetics of other cultures is part of the handicrafts industry, there can be negative implications to this business. Is it possible for the handicrafts market to continue, without the practice of exploiting and stereotyping culture?

Conclusion

In recent decades, the demand for Third World handicrafts has grown, especially as it has become available for those who are not able to travel abroad. In order to fill the demand, communities such as Tegallalang, have become important sites for wholesale buyers seeking affordable deals on mass produced handicrafts. This village in central Bali has developed its specialty in export handicrafts due to its close proximity to Ubud—a town promoted by the tourism industry as a haven for artistic expression. By the 1990s, Tegallalang became populated with numerous art shops and kiosks, hoping to attract wholesalers with their variety of handicrafts, especially ethnic art inspired by African, Australian Aboriginal and Native American art. This has led to locals experimenting with various aesthetic traditions from around the world. Through handicrafts, producers in Tegallalang are proving themselves integral to a larger global economy in ways that differ vastly from tourism. Yet because these producers are still largely reliant on information and contracts from buying agents, cargo agents, wholesalers and other ‘middlemen’, the opportunity to fully learn about these indigenous styles are few and rare. The risk that comes with handicrafts production as a form of cultural production, is the possibility that stereotyped ideas of the ‘Other’ are reproduced—leading handicrafts producers to unconsciously utilize the same ahistorical discourses such as ‘primitive’ and ‘traditional’ which continues to fuel cultural tourism.

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