Barkcloth Production in Central Sulawesi

A Vanishing Textile Technology in Outer Island Indonesia

LORRAINE V. ARAGON

Before the invention or adoption of woven textiles, barkcloth was used to clothe the human body in many, if not all, tropical regions of the world. In spite of its replacement by loomed cloth nearly everywhere else, barkcloth is still manufactured today by older women living in some remote highland communities of Central Sulawesi. Although these interior Central Sulawesi groups are no longer renowned for either artistry or technical skills, their 19th century barkcloth manufacture stands out as among the most refined barkcloth production systems ever developed (Fig. 1). The following account of the history and ideas surrounding barkcloth’s manufacture and use in Central Sulawesi emphasizes the religious role of this unusual fabric and documents its demise in the face of foreign Islamic and Christian contacts, as well as ongoing processes of modernization.

1 Early 20th century Kulawi woman wearing barkcloth clothes; her blouse is ornamented with shimmering mica flakes.

Courtesy Department of Library Services, American Museum of Natural History, neg. no. 2A 11816; photo by H.C. Raven
Outsiders' Views of Barkcloth

The unfamiliar sight of barkcloth and its production amazed early European explorers to the islands of eastern Indonesia. While unaware of barkcloth's social and religious significance, the first visitors were nevertheless intrigued by its technology and appearance.

It is in this Kingdom [Kail] where Men and Women are clad in nothing but Paper, and that not being lasting, the Women are always working at it very curiously. It is made of the Rind of a small Tree we saw there, which they beat with a Stone curiously wrought, and make it as they please, either coarse, fine or very fine. They dye it all colours, and twenty paces off it looks like fine Tabby. A great deal of it is carry'd to Manilla and Macao, where I have seen excellent bed-banings made from it; they are the best you could desire in cold Weather. When it rains, Water being the Destructive of Paper those People strip, and carry their Clothes under their Arms. (Navarrete, in Cummins 1962:110)

This comment, written by the Spanish friar Domingo Navarrete after a one-month visit to the Pala Valley in 1657, appears to be the first Western record of barkcloth in Central Sulawesi (the island then known as Celebes; Fig. 2). At the time of this 17th century observation, barkcloth was still manufactured in the coastal regions of Central Sulawesi, and had not yet been replaced by woven trade cloth. By the 20th century, however, Islamized coastal groups, including Kaili living around the Pala Valley, had adopted woven fabrics sold by Bugis and Arab traders. Yet, when Dutch colonial officials and missionaries left the coast and penetrated the mountainous interior, they saw that the highland areas still wore clothing made from processed tree bark (Fig. 3).

Not familiar with the technology of weaving, and having little contact with outside peoples, these interior migratory farming and hunting groups relied on locally produced barkcloth both for warmth and for decorative apparel. Men's traditional daily garb consisted of simple brown loincloths (pepen), while adult women wore full multilayered, finely pleated skirts (topi). Women also wore distinctive cut tunic blouses (ha-lili, Uma) that, like the skirt styles, varied slightly according to ethnic region. Rough-textured monochromatic brown clothes were replaced with much finer apparel prior to all major rituals, including those held at puberty, marriage, death, and yearly harvests. The thinner and softer white barkcloth was produced from paper mulberry trees specially cultivated for this purpose, and the resulting fine fabric was intricately painted with plant dyes to create colorful designs for men's headscarves (siga), tubeshaped body cloths (ape', or sorong in Indonesian; Fig. 4), and women's blouses. Central Sulawesi groups also manufactured barkcloth for ceremonial ponchos, shoulder bags (Figs. 4, 6), burial shrouds, and special bell-shaped cubicles in which female shamans would sit while chanting to the spirits that caused illness. Although some groups did possess small numbers of imported woven cloths (mboas or mare'), which were traded from India, Europe, or regions of South Sulawesi (Kruyt 1939, vol.4), these were kept as sacred heirloom items, not worn on a daily basis as were the barkcloth materials.

In 1905 two scholarly Dutch missionaries who had spent almost a decade studying local cultures and languages in Indonesia concluded that barkcloth was undoubtedly the original clothing material of the entire Indonesian archipelago (Adriani and Kruyt 1905). Moreover, all of the regions where barkcloth was known to be produced and used for either clothing or paper, the interior of Central Sulawesi was described as the source of the most elaborate creations of this unusual fabric technology (Adriani and Kruyt 1905; Raven 1932; Kootijinan 1963). Nineteenth century Central Sulawesi barkcloth was exported to other islands for use as clothing material and paper (Adriani and Kruyt 1905), and Covarrubias even describes its use as an imported "canva" for traditional Balinese painting (1986:192).

Such praise and attention to what is now an almost extinct process of clothing manufacture has rarely been uttered by either foreign scholars of Indonesian material culture, or by 20th century Indonesians themselves. Major
books concerning Indonesian textiles (e.g., Langewis and Wagner 1964, Gittinger 1970) usually focus on the splendid ikat (tied and dyed) weavings or the more recently invented batik (wax-resist dyed) fabrics of the archipelago. They thereby only briefly discuss or overlook entirely the more humble existence of barkcloth (also called tapa), which is indeed a felted material rather than a woven textile.

The following description of barkcloth manufacture is based largely on ethnographic field work undertaken by the author between 1986 and 1989 in the Uma-speaking Tobaku region of Central Sulawesi. Although interior Central Sulawesi groups such as the Tobaku are often referred to as "Toraj" in both historical and recent Western writing, locals themselves see the term as applying instead to the culturally different people (even by present observers' standards) living in the Sa'dan valley of South Sulawesi. The highland Tobaku practice shifting cultivation of rice, corn, and tubers, raise livestock such as pigs and chickens, and hunt with traps and spears. They now usually supplement their subsistence economy with cash crops such as coffee or cloves.

**Barkcloth Manufacture: The Process**

Barkcloth manufacture begins with the identification of suitable trees in the forest. Women who cultivate certain plots of land will notice trees of suitable types and ages growing within reach of the forest paths. Some species, such as *Antiaris toxicaria* (see box with botanical information), can only be cut when young because toxic resins make bark from older trees too poisonous to handle (Adriani and Kruyt 1905:3). In the Tobaku region, *Ficus* trees, which are most preferred for current barkcloth manufacture, are considered to be owned corporately by the descendants of the first ancestor to clear the land. Thus, women who wish to make barkcloth from a tree growing on land owned by others will request permission to cut the tree. Permission generally will be granted if the owning family has no plans of its own to use the tree.

To harvest the bark of a *Ficus* tree in the Tobaku region, either the entire trunk is felled, or else the work party simply climbs the tree and cuts off as many branches as are needed, using machetes. Straight branches that are four to six inches in diameter are cut into uniform lengths of about six feet each. The outer bark of these selected limbs is then scored lengthwise with a knife into equally spaced parallel incisions about three inches apart. This facilitates the subsequent bark stripping to produce pieces of uniform width and length.

For some species such as *Ficus annulata*, *Artocarpus*, and *Antiaris*, the intact branches are vigorously beaten for several minutes before stripping in order to loosen the outer bark from the inner wood. The inner layer is separated from the stripped bark pieces with the aid of a knife. Strips of this inner layer are then carried back to the village to make the barkcloth. The tougher exterior bark is discarded, as is the heartwood. The amount of barkcloth strips that one woman can carry on her back to the village is sufficient for one or two blankets.

A painted tree bark cloth is cooked with water in a large pot, traditionally a locally produced clay pot, either in the house kitchen or on an outdoor fire if large amounts of barkcloth are being made. The raw bark strips are always daubed with fireplace ashes before they are mixed in the pot, perhaps neutralizing the acidity of the bark juices. Local women say that barkcloth cannot be produced successfully without the ash application. The ash-covered bark strips are boiled for fifteen minutes to one hour depending on the species/type of bark utilized (Fig. 7). The cooked strips are removed from the water, unscaled so that they do not stick together.

**Botanical Identifications of Some Trees Used for Barkcloth in Central Sulawesi**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin Name</th>
<th>English Name</th>
<th>PAMONA UMA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Broussonetia papyrifera</em></td>
<td>paper mulberry</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Ficus infectoria</em></td>
<td>ficus</td>
<td>nulu</td>
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<td><em>Ficus annulata</em></td>
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<td><em>Ficus variegata</em></td>
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<td><em>Artocarpus</em></td>
<td>wild breadfruit</td>
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<td><em>Antiaris</em></td>
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<td><em>Antiaris toxicaria</em></td>
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A painted paper mulberry tube-shaped garment (sang) for men or women collected from the Bada Region in 1918 by H.C. Racem. W. 63.3 cm.

A traditional-style shoulder bag with white and yellow-dyed paper mulberry barkcloth applied onto brown Ficus barkcloth, made by Tina Ilo of Gunu Village, Pipkoro Region. W. 27.5 cm.

Tina Duut's strips of Ficus bark (numu lewou) from a cooking pot after boiling. The cooled strips will be washed and wrapped in leaves for several days to ferment. Doda village, Tobaku region.

Tina Metto and Tina Nori' carrying cooked Ficus bark to the river for washing. Afterwards the strips will be wrapped in leaves to ferment and later beaten to produce a reddish-brown tube-shaped blanket. Turosul Village, Tobaku Region.
together, and left out to cool, usually overnight.

After the pulp is cooled, it is rinsed in river water (Fig. 8) and then wrapped in leaves to keep it moist while fermenting. The bark strips used for brown barkcloth in Tobaku and Pipikoro are allowed to ferment either three, five, or seven days depending on the species, while the paper mulberry for white barkcloth requires only three days of fermentation. Informants insist that timing is crucial to obtain a satisfactory product. However, numerological considerations also appear to be relevant since all recipes specify an odd number of days, paralleling the duration periods of traditional ritual ceremonies. Barkcloth makers say that during the fermentation process the leaf-wrapped bundles of pulp should not be jiggled or disturbed in any way. It is particularly taboo for the barkcloth pulp to come into contact with human or animal urine. This is not so unlikely as it may sound since, unless guarded, dogs and infants may urinate on the veranda or inside the house.

By the end of the fermentation period, all tools are readied, including a six-foot-long beating board (hu’a) that has been carved out of a robust hardwood (Lagerstromia esculenta or Wollar in the Lake Poso area, poso in Uma). This polished board rests atop two segments of resilient banana trunks or trapezoidal wood blocks that increase the vibration of the board when beaten. Formerly every house- hold possessed at least one full set of barkcloth beaters (called ike in all Central Sulawesi dialects, as well as many Polynesian languages; Fig. 9). However, now tools often must be borrowed from the few families who still possess an inherited set, or who have the skill and enthusiasm to carve new ones. A complete set of beaters consists of two different carved wood beaters and a graded-size set of three or more carved stone beaters halved to bent rattan, or rattan and wood handles (Fig. 10).

When the Ficus pulp is judged to be sufficiently fermented and sticky, one half of the strips are arranged in layers and laid out lengthwise along the board. The barkcloth maker sits on the floor, or stands facing the beating board, and holds the beater with both hands. With the first large grooved beater (polo’o), Tobaku; pomboboyu, Pamona; carved from wood of the palm tree (Artocarpus altilis), the strips are beaten together to fuse the sticky layers. When the mash is sufficiently cohesive, the product is turned at a right angle and beaten so that the length runs across the board. After the piece is beaten along its entire top surface, the fused layer is flipped over and beaten again. The above process is repeated with the other half of the strips while the first batch is stored back in the leaf wrapping temporarily. The large grooves of the first matel; round ridges in the woody fibers that help to keep the soft moist fabric from falling apart. Water is sprinkled on the cloth when necessary to prevent premature drying.

The make beaters very precisely back and forth, left to right, and back again towards her body in careful rows. When the cloth becomes larger than the beating board, it must be rotated frequently along the board’s surface. With the aid of a bamboo pole lifter, the pulp is shifted gently over the board away from the worker’s body into a new position. Edges are frequently straightened with the fingertips. After every complete round of beating, the cloth is folded along its length, the two outside edges being folded in to meet at the middle. Then the two layers are felted together by further beating. The cloth gradually expands in size as it is beaten progressively thinner. Small holes are that accidentally punctured during the process; removed by the folding process where thin layers are beaten together; thus strengthening the over-all ridged texture.

On the second and successive days, carved stone beaters (unateike) are employed, progressing from those with coarse grooves to those with increasingly fine surfaces. The stone beaters are named according to the size of the grooves on the face of the matel. Some matel have two faces, and thus two names, while other matel are carved only on one side. The special whitish stone used by all Ku- lawi peoples for the matel heads is obtained in mountain tributaries of the Lariang River, located at the west border of the Tobaku region. Outside of Central Sulawesi, almost all known barkcloth beaters are made of wood. The only exceptions to this rule are some prehistoric finds of stone beaters located in Malayai, the Philippines (Koskinen 1972), and South and Central America (Tolstoy 1963; see box on Prehistory of Barkcloth).

With the first stone matel (pontina, Tobaku) the cloth is beaten very carefully in small sections for many hours. As the cloth gradually becomes wider than the length of the board, the right or left side is cramped to the side of the board while the remainder is being beaten. When the cloth must be packed away for the night after a day’s work, it is first beaten with the grooves on a twenty-five de- gree angle, or else with a specially made beater with grooves carved at such an angle. This process helps prevent the cloth from sticking to itself when it is folded up for overnight storage.

On the second or third day of beating, the two batches of pulp are fused and the long ends of the cloth are connected to form the tube-shaped saron that is the basis for all blankets and skirts. In one method, the two half batches of cloth that until now have been separately beaten are overlapped around the board. The two pieces are then fused into one tube-shaped saron, the four end edges being beaten together to make one strong seam (Fig. 11). Alternatively, the two separate pieces are fused end to end first, and the saron tube made later by wrapping the long cloth in a spiral around the board, thus creating a double-layered tube. In either case, the barkcloth becomes a double thickness tube around the board.
that is fused into one by subsequent beating. It continues to be beaten carefully both right-side and inside out with successively finer stone beaters (bare and pombo, Tobaku). The tube-shaped cloth can be carefully turned inside out, when necessary, while it is still loosely encircling the asvil board.

As a final step, the cloth is removed from around the board and placed at a right angle on the top surface so that the nap is beaten in the perpendicular direction (Fig. 12). For this the smallest stone beater (pomho'ame, Uma) is used. During this process the cloth is continually rotated and, if necessary, dampened, so that the thin layer does not stick to the beating board.

Each kind of beater makes a distinctive resonating sound as it strikes the bark-covered board. From a far distance residents can easily identify the stage of production in which a barkcloth maker is engaged, since the later mallets are beaten with increasingly faster rhythms. When more than one woman begins to beat the cloth they will always hit at alternating beats, never disturbing each other's rhythmic pattern. This beat rhythmic alternation is the same as that of two women pounding rice. With the final wooden mallets, a faster double rhythm is beaten, one that Tobaku women say matches the drumbeat for songs played by hereditary drumming specialists for the traditional shamans' ceremonies (mataro).

After two to four days of energetic beating with the stone mallets, the finished Ficus barkcloth tube is hung up on a pole to dry in the wind.

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Then it is beaten again with a smooth wooden beater (pompo, Tobaku) to flatten the nap before a preservative fluid is applied. Adriani and Kriyit describe how the Poro region groups applied the sap of a bitter fruit called ulu (Diospyros inerme or peregrina) with a brush to strengthen the outer surface of a garment (1905). Besides knowing the use of the same fruit, Pipikoro and Tobaku people make ulu' infusions from the bark of different trees as well. Pipikoro people use the finely chopped and soaked bark of a tree called ulinuiru (probably Weimannia deschampsiae) to make a preservative fluid. Tobaku people generally use the bark of a tree called mopopo (possibly Shorea species) to make a preservative bath in which the garment is soaked thoroughly before drying in the sun. The mopopo bark is chopped fine, covered with fireplace ashes, and boiled to release a deep red dye. The dyeing and drying process may be repeated up to four times to insure that the clothes can withstand rainstorms without tearing easily. Worn clothes and blankets made from Ficus species may be renovated by additional ʻulu treatments. This preserving and dying process is never used for the finer white barkcloth that traditionally was painted for ceremonial purposes.

A final treatment process is used to make black clothing, often favored by local women. The otherwise completed garment is carried to a muddy river bed or water well field and soaked or painted for five to six hours with the blackest mud, before being rinsed in the river. This process is sufficient to produce a permanent rich dark color. After all resin or mud treatments are concluded, the dried finished product is beaten one more time with the flat hardwood beater (pompo) to make the cloth as soft and supple as possible.

A finished barkcloth tube of Ficus or Artocarpus species can be made into a layered skirt by tying it and folding it at the waist one or more times (Fig. 15). The skirt is then pleated, one fold at a time being hammered into the hardwood beater (Fig. 16). Afterward, the skirt is inserted into a large bamboo tube that serves both as a storage and "ironing" container.

The bark of the Antiaris tox犯ica (which is used also by certain Dayak groups of Borneo) can be used as a dyestuff for barkcloth. It is distinctive in that it is not gummy enough to stick to itself when beaten. Thus an entire cylinder of bark is cut off a tree trunk (Fig. 18) to produce a single sheet of fabric that then must be sewn to produce most clothing items, except for head- or loin clothes. The production of cloth from A. toxandra tree (ipu) is done much more quickly than the other types since no cooking or fermenting takes place. The entire bark covering of a log is incised lengthwise, removed, and beaten in one sheet. The process can be finished in one day or it can be continued for a second day, if the bark sheet is kept soaking in water overnight. As with the Ficus species, the outer rough bark is cut off (Fig. 19) and only the fine inner bark is beaten. With Antiaris, the inner bark sheet is beaten first with the flat wooden beater (pompo), then the other beaters are introduced in the usual order.

Before the introduction of imported aniline dyes (known commonly in Sulawesi as cet karumbu), the peoples knew how to make natural dyes of at least four colors. Red was made from Morinda bracciflora or Piper betel, yellow from Morinda citrifolia or Curcuma longa, blue-purple from a species of Piptadenia, and green from a plant thought to be Homalomena alba (Adriani and Kriyit 1905). Colored designs were applied to white barkcloth with bamboo sticks, leaf brushes, or carved stone stamps to create colorful least
through the remaining barkcloth-producing areas are primarily Christian. Out of respect for their present religious affiliation, Tobak women now also refrain from beating barkcloth on Sundays.

Formerly, in areas such as Tobak, special barkcloth production sheds (hau poromu) were erected to accommodate the beating activities of up to fourteen women at a time (Kaudern 1925). However, beating also could be done individually on a platform beneath the traditional rice granary, another domain regulated by women. This practice is still followed in areas like Bada where separate rice granaries remain standing. In other regions that no longer maintain traditional rice granaries, a temporary shed to provide shade is constructed off the side of the house, or an existing house veranda is used.

According to Adriani and Kruyt (1905), beating was not allowed inside the house for fear of disturbing house spirits with the pounding noises, or even worse, accidentally hitting a revengeful spirit with one’s hammer. Throughout production, offerings of betel nut were set out for the spirits, and in the Poso region elder women would formally bless the souls of the ancestral residents of the land (tumpu tanu, Pamonia) not to be angry about the pounding noise, but to wait patiently for the precious barkcloth that eventually would be shared with them (Adriani and Kruyt 1905).

Prior to Christian missionization, many more aspects of barkcloth production were regulated according to traditional religious ideas. In the Pipikoro and Tobak areas, before a tree was cut, the eldest existing house veranda is used.

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Barkcloth-making has always been an activity symbolically associated with fertility and womanhood in Central Sulawesi.

Humans or ceremonial weapons. Headhunting raids traditionally terminated mourning periods following a noble's death; the capture of enemy heads cancelled food and behavioral taboos brought into effect by the grievous event. The use of painted barkcloth head- dresses to mark men's increasing elevated warrior rank again illustrates the cloth's role in status transitions.

Prior to Christian missionization, barkcloth had many uses as a medium capable of containing and transmitting spiritual power. In some regions the noble descendants of early polities (e.g., the Bugis), who had a semi-divine status, would bless their community's agricultural activities by giving each household a strip of barkcloth. This barkcloth would be hung on poles in the fields as an effigial flag warding off evils and spirits and as a counter obligation. Every village was responsible for producing at least one day in the rice fields of the noble (Kruyt 1938).

When a group of travelers set out on a long journey through the forest to seek good fortune, they would carry with them a piece of white barkcloth blessed by the leading noble of their village. At each stopping point on the journey a small piece of the cloth was cut off and offered to the local spirits of the place. Upon their successful return, the group would make a feast of thanks to their ancestral spirits. A portion of any booty acquired on the journey was to be given to the noble who had blessed the barkcloth talisman, ensuring safe and prosperous travel through the empowerment of the sacred fabric (Kruyt 1938).

In many ritual contexts the coloration of barkcloth expressed a symbolic code for U ma-speaking peoples. White barkcloth (obado) would be presented with weapons to request aid from allies and deities in war, red barkcloth (dindo) would be used in spirit offerings before hunting, reddish-white barkcloth would be used in offerings to clear new land for crops, and yellow barkcloth painted with tumeric (kangs) would be worn in ceremonies petitioning for the successful ripening of corn and rice. Frequently small bits of the household's barkcloth were presented as sacrificial offerings to the spirits, or even occasionally used as a substitute for the body of the person making the offering. The ritual significance of barkcloth in Central Sulawesi extended also into the domain of traditional medicine. In Tobaku curing practices, the lost soul element (kawu) of a sick person would be called and captured inside a white barkcloth bag by the village shaman, who petitioned powerful ancestral spirits for the cure. The lost soul element would then be returned to the patient's body by the shaman, and afterwards the ill person was expected to recover quickly.

This perceived ability of barkcloth to serve as an intermediary in contacting ancestors and deities was a significant aspect of traditional beliefs in Central Sulawesi, which also has been documented in Polandia (Kooljman 1972). Clearly, the pan-Indonesian facias, deities, and tribal reverence toward ceremonial textiles did not begin with the introduction of weaving or the importation of foreign fabrics, but rather has a strong basis within the earlier barkcloth tradition.

An Uncertain Future

From 1909 to 1940, the Dutch government in conjunction with Protestant missionaries began to assume a more active presence in the highland Central Sulawesi region. Contact with European settlers and missionaries was facilitated by European encounters with the area's limited European markets. Extensive collections of intricately painted men's headscarves, sarongs, women's blouses and layered skirts were acquired by Westerners for museums, and classified with regard to prominent design motifs (Adrian and Kruyt 1912; Kruyt 1944; Kooljman 1963). Unfortunately, however, little early field research was done on the local meanings of the designs employed, and the first missionized regions were also the first interior areas to abandon the barkcloth-making and ritual painting processes. Only during two periods of textile scarcity was indigenous barkcloth production vigorously revived through necessity. During both the Kahar Muzzakkar Islamic rebellion (disturbing various regions of Sulawesi) and the civil war in Central Sulawesi (1978-1979) were the last bursts of widespread barkcloth production known to have taken place.
Origin Myths

Adriani and Kroyt (1912) re-crec a myth of the Pamona (Poso) people that says the original peoples of Sulawesi became separated one from another, each group being taught to use one of their female ancestor heroines. In Pipikoro, a town in Central Sulawesi, the first barkcloth, like the first mache, was a gift from the deities to humans. The first mallet stone for a barkcloth beater was carved naturally by a spirit in the local stream, where it was discovered by a Pipikoro ancestor. Since that time, people have evolved a way to carve the beater gouges themselves with small knives.

In Tobaku, an even more comprehensive origin story explains the knowledge of barkcloth making. There it is said that the names and uses of all plants, animals, and creatures in the world were told to one of their ancestors by a spirit encountered near their mother village in the form of a wild boar. Since that time, all subsistence technology, including barkcloth production have been fully known.

not only the introduction of woven textiles, but also... of foreign religion propelled the collapse in production [of barkcloth].

work involved in barkcloth production and other practical uses of the fabric given the considerations of the modern world. For instance, barkcloth cannot be washed, only aired in the sun, so presumably traditional clothing became increasingly soiled and malodorous. There was also the problem of durability. Coarse brown clothes were said to have lasted only up to eight months before tearing or disintegrating in a heavy rainstorm. The fine white ceremonial cloths were even more fragile, and were expected to last for just a single feast period. Reportedly, they were received only about a week’s use before their untimely disposal (Adriani and Kroyt 1905). In point of fact, used barkcloth of the coarse red varieties can be renewed with an “Minimal soaking in preservative fluid (ifa),” but this requires considerably more effort than the washing of modern fabrics. Thus, once substitute fabrics were available, the production of barkcloth throughout Central Sulawesi was increasingly neglected in part for practical reasons.

Today, barkcloth is regularly manufactured for practical reasons only in remote interior regions of the Lore highlands, such as Mauna and Bitung. In the area south of Kluwi Valley such as Pipikoro and Tobaku. In these places, the more isolated, terraced shaped barkcloth blankets still has some currency. They are warmer than the bolts, and when the need for production involves no expenditure of money, still a precious commodity in such communities. Barkcloth blankets also double as mosquito nets, room dividers, and insulating buildings and mountain field houses that may hold up to fifteen or twenty extended family members a night during the rice harvest season.

The fact that barkcloth has survived in these Christian regions only in remote interior areas to another major force contributing to barkcloth’s decline. In assessing reasons for the continued manufacture in Polynesia, Koolman (1972) mentions that not only the introduction of woven textiles, but also the introduction of foreign religion propelled the collapse in production. In Central Sulawesi not only are imported textiles more practical, but most ritual occasions associated with specific painted barkcloth apparel and sacred objects have been eliminated by the increasingly strict Islamization of the coasts and Christianization of the interior. Most important, however, is the barkcloth observed by Atkinson (1979), an anthropologist working in the isolated region of West Sulawesi. In the items: shamans’ cloths (papelons) used to extract aggravating agents from sick individuals. Hence, according to Hippisley, the Wana area too has since been actively missionized, and traditional religious activities, both ritual and spiritual, have been increasingly discouraged by church and government authorities. The demise of barkcloth decline and occasional revival should be understood with respect to recent Indonesian government efforts to conserve, and if necessary create, exemplary local art, history, and traditional culture. (Fig. 14). Since the mid-1970s, the government has established regional offices of the Department of Education and Culture that are responsible for participating in the local cultural activities in the regions by renewing and preserving cultural activities such as tobacco, dance and traditional clothing. These cultural activities are to be carried out in a homogeneous fashion in accordance with national development goals, including the promotion of tourism (A’acciali 1985). In Kuluwi, for example, recent attempts have been made to promote barkcloth clothing, some colored tastily with magic markers, to satisfy the occasional Western traveler. The cultural efforts supported by the government are designed not to offend the prevailing images of modernization or the sensibilities of local religious leaders. Thus sometimes authentic elements of traditional arts or dress are given new meanings (or are eliminated altogether) by the time they reach the urban or national level for public display.

While the majority of urban Indonesians today are more interested in modern fashion trends, world religions, and national economic progress, for the scholar the significance of barkcloth production is a great deal of historical information concerning the region’s traditional cosmology as well as its clothing. Moreover, if government actions to revive local arts and expand tourism continue, Central Sulawesi barkcloth production may evade extinction through regional efforts that will recall, in one form or another, barkcloth’s saliency to traditional ritual authority. Barkcloth clothing, or even its designs adapted for woven cloth, easily serve as a distinctive badge of local ethnic identity for all individuals with Central Sulawesi peoples as they face increased integration into the national Indonesian culture.
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Lorraine Aragon received a B.A. in Psychology from Clark University in 1975, and an M.A. in Communications from the University of Pennsylvania in 1978. In 1977 and 1982 she assisted Dr. William H. Davenport in the Oceania Section of The University Museum, Philadelphia. She is currently a doctoral candidate in Anthropology at the University of Illinois. Her dissertation research in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, was conducted from 1986 to 1989, and her dissertation concerns cosmological traditions and social change in Christian regions of highland Central Sulawesi. She is presently assisting the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in preparing an exhibit and catalog on the artworks of Indonesia's "outer islands."