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## THE TRANSFORMATION OF TORAJA ORNAMENT'S MEANING ON DHARMAWANGSA SQUARE TATOR CAFÉ APPLYING HERMENEUTIC THEORY

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the transformation of the meaning of Toraja ornament, particularly, Pa' Barre Allo motive, using Jakarta Dharmawangsa Tator café Square as the primary data. This study employs Hermeneutics theory by Paul Ricoeur stating that it explains about the rules of the interpretation of texts, signs, and symbols. Moreover, this research discusses about how the traditional Toraja ornament is applied in modern commercial space. Toraja ornament, having sacred meaning traditionally, shifts its meaning as it is implemented in café interior elements of the public spaces. It means that the ornament does not only function as aesthetic elements, but it also has great values, representing the sensibility of Toraja culture on commercial interior design. Furthermore, this study reveals about the application of Pa' Barre Allo motive on café Tator transforming its sacred meaning to aesthetic elements in order to strengthen the attraction and brand identity of the space of the café. The results of this research are expected to enhance the comprehension of the transformation of the cultural values in commercial interior design. Finally, they can contribute to the preservation of Indonesian history and culture.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A café is a significant part of contemporary urban culture, closely tied to the modern lifestyle. In major cities like Jakarta, cafés are the primary choice for urban communities as alternative spaces to relax, socialize, or carry out various daily activities. This phenomenon has become one of the main drivers behind the rapid growth of cafés in Jakarta. Intense competition in the café industry encourages business owners to create unique attractions, one of which is through interior design that blends traditional cultural elements with modern aesthetics. Creating an appealing interior atmosphere has become a critical factor for attracting customers, as exemplified by Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square in Jakarta, which incorporates traditional decorative motifs into its design.

Decorative motifs not only serve as decorative elements in a room but also act as aesthetic elements that strengthen identity. At Tator Café, traditional Toraja ornaments are incorporated into the interior design, showcasing distinctiveness and uniqueness through the study of form and color. This research explores how the meaning of Toraja decorative motifs, which were originally sacred, undergoes a transformation in meaning after being applied to the interior design of Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square.

This study employs Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach to examine how the symbols within Toraja decorative motifs undergo a transformation in meaning, including uncovering new meanings that emerge in alignment with the context of time and place where they are applied. The objective of this research is to explain the transformation and

phenomenon of Toraja ornaments as their meaning evolves—from their original sacred significance in their place of origin to the new meanings they acquire when integrated into the interior design of Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square.

The research aims to provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it contributes to understanding how cultural symbols adapt and evolve in different contexts. Practically, it offers insights into how traditional decorative elements can be reinterpreted in modern spaces to create unique identities while respecting their cultural heritage.

This research employs a qualitative methodology with data collected through in-depth interviews with the owner of Tator Café, the interior designer, and café visitors. Additionally, a literature review was conducted using various sources, such as books, magazines, journals, and discographies, to support the analysis. The study focuses on Tator Café, located at Jl. Dharmawangsa Square, using Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological theory. The analysis centers on the Pa' Barre Allo (basic carving) motifs originating from the traditional Tongkonan houses of Toraja.

The application of decorative patterns, shapes, and colors in a café can create new meanings for the visitors coming to the cafe. These meanings are formed through the individual's interpretation of the "text," which in this context refers to the decorative patterns. The hermeneutic approach, as part of philosophy and a method of thinking, is used to explore the meaning embedded in these decorative patterns. Hermeneutics functions as a tool or method to read and understand the meaning of a text, whether in the form of symbols or writing, while considering the ever-evolving and changing social and cultural context.

Paul Ricoeur defines hermeneutics not only as the interpretation of symbols but also expands it to include texts. In Paul Ricoeur's thinking, hermeneutics is a theory about the rules of interpretation, namely the interpretation of a specific text, sign, or symbol that is regarded as a text (Ricoeur, trans. Syukri, 2006:57). What we say or write holds more than one meaning when connected to different contexts with distinct characteristics. This is what Paul Ricoeur refers to as "polysemy."

According to Paul Ricoeur, the main task of hermeneutics is, on one hand, to seek the internal dynamics that structure the work within a text, and on the other hand, to explore the power that the text's work has to project itself outward and allow its "thing" to surface (Sumaryono, 1999:107). For this purpose, hermeneutics encompasses various disciplines related to interpretation and understanding.

The entire philosophy is an interpretation of interpretation; therefore, philosophy is essentially a hermeneutic, which is an exploration of the hidden meanings within a text that appears to contain meaning. Every interpretation is an effort to uncover the meanings embedded within literary meanings (Sumaryono, 2003:105).

Through texts (both language and symbols), humans can discover viewpoints and explanations about all forms of reality, which can often be dangerous if not approached correctly and wisely. For this purpose, the symbols present in the life we participate in, such as science, thought, religion, mythology, customs, art, and literature, must be reinterpreted to obtain new and fresher meanings. Without fresh interpretation and understanding, symbols and culture will undergo a process of shallowing and narrowing of meaning.

Therefore, Paul Ricoeur states that true hermeneutics is the interpretation that uncovers the inner meaning of symbols by transcending their outward or formal meaning (Hadi W.M., 2014:60). Sacred objects and activities will always appear in a different order than everyday reality. Humans become aware of this because everything sacred manifests itself differently from the profane, through everyday objects surrounding them, as well as extraordinary events and miracles (Wijayanti in Eliade, 1959: 11).

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Traditional Toraja Decorative Patterns*

Decorative patterns or ornaments play a significant role, as can be seen through their application in various aspects of human life, both physical and spiritual. For example, their use in toys and souvenir items, which are among the media frequently associated with their manifestation. Therefore, various forms and motifs have emerged, with all their variations, in accordance with the development and demands of the times (Gustami, 1980: 2).

Decorative patterns or ornaments consist of various types of motifs used to adorn something we wish to decorate. Therefore, a motif serves as the foundation for embellishing an ornament. An ornament is intended to decorate a surface or object, making it beautiful, as seen in decorations on book covers, certificates, batik cloth, flower vases, and other items. Initially, these ornaments were made up of lines such as straight lines, broken lines, slanted lines, parallel lines, curved lines, circles, and others, which then developed into various shapes with diverse patterns (Soeprapto, 2000: 11).

The use of ornaments can involve a single motif, two motifs, or more, and may also involve the repetition of shapes through the stylization of the desired form. Motifs consist of geometric patterns such as straight lines, broken lines, parallel lines, circles, and so on, as well as naturalistic motifs depicting plants, animals, and other elements. According to Soeroto (2003), for the Toraja people, the art of carving emerged alongside the development of



civilization. Originally, the decorative patterns were simple, but the influence of Hindu-Javanese art led to the innovation of beautifully carved decorative patterns on the bodies of *tongkonan* houses and *alang* (traditional Toraja structures).

Carvings and colors are applied before installation, and the motifs and patterns of the carvings have never changed since they were first created. Although Hindu-Javanese decorative patterns influenced Toraja art centuries ago, they did not alter the types of carvings on traditional houses. Initially, the Toraja people only recognized four types of original Toraja carvings, namely:

(1) **Goronto Passura'** The four basic carvings represent symbols of the Toraja people's wisdom and way of life. These carvings consist of: *Pa' Barre Allo* (carving resembling the sun); *Pa' Tedong* (carving resembling a buffalo head); *Pa' Manuk Londong* (carving resembling a rooster); *Pa' Sussuk* (carving resembling straight lines); (2) **Passura' Todolo**: The ancient carvings symbolize the rituals of offerings to ancestors; (3) **Passura' Malolle'**: The carvings symbolize the social interactions and progress of the community; (4) **Passura Pa' Borean**: The carvings symbolize joy and happiness. Because all of life's problems must be faced with joy and happiness, even though they are heavy and full of challenges.

#### Types of Toraja Decorative Patterns Based on Their Classification:

Based on the data above regarding decorative patterns, it can be understood that most of the motifs are derived from natural elements, namely flora (plants) and fauna (animals). The flora and fauna decorative patterns are named according to the shape of the carvings. Below is the classification of Toraja decorative patterns based on their meaning.

**Table 1. Classification of Toraja Decorative Patterns Based on Their Meaning**

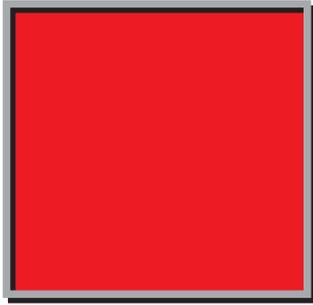
NO	MEANING/SYMBOL	DECORATIVE PATTERN
1	Happiness/Well-being	<i>Pa' Tedong, Pa' Sekong Kandaure, Pa' Kosik, Pa' Buatina, Ne' Limbongan, Pa' Bulitanong Siteba, Pa' Kapu Baka, Pa' Bombo Uai I.</i>
2	Greatness and Pride	<i>Pa' Pollo Songkang, Pa' Katik, Ne' Limbongan, Pa' Boko Komba Kalua, Pa' Ara Dena. Pa' Barre Allo, Pa' Sulan Sangbua, Pa' Tangki Pattung.</i>
3	Life/Social Norms	<i>Pa' Manik-manik, Pa' Papan Kandaure, Pa' Sekog Anak, Pa' Kangkung, Pa' Barra- Bara, Pa' Tangke Lumu, Pa' Donbolo Sangbua Pa' Tanduk Re' Pe, Pa' Ulu Gayang, Pa' Kollong Bu'Ku, Pa' Sekong Sala, Pa' Sempa, Pa' Lolo Tabang, Pa' Bunga Kaliki.</i>
4	Death/Sadness	<i>Pa' Doti Siuang I, Pa' Doti Siluang II, Pa' Polo Gayang, Pa' Bombo Uai, Pa' erong.</i>
5	Harmony	<i>Pa' Repo Sangbua, Pa' Ulu Gayang</i>

#### Colors of Traditional Toraja Decorative Patterns

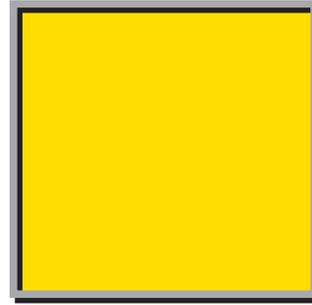
The coloring of Toraja decorative patterns has never changed since it was first created, as well as the colors used, which are red, yellow, white, and black. These four colors come from natural materials (charcoal, lime, saffron, earth), each of which holds spiritual meaning (Soeroto, 2003: 46).

According to Said (2004), the Toraja people only use four colors, and the coloring materials commonly used for decorating carvings all come from the surrounding natural environment. The colors typically used are Red (Kasumba Mararang), Yellow (Kasumba Mariri), White (Kasumba Mabusu), and Black (Kasumba Malotong). The coloring process is done traditionally: the red color is obtained from red earth or red stones that are rubbed onto a stone and mixed with water, while the yellow color is derived from yellow clay. White is made from lime mixed with *cuka balo* (a traditional Toraja palm wine), which helps it adhere, and black is created from soot (*osing*) mixed with sap and sweet potato leaves or banana stalks.

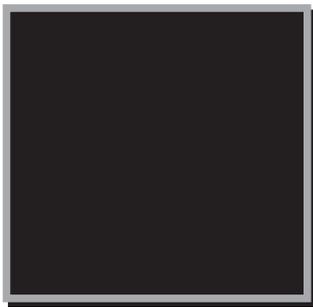
These colors carry meanings deeply related to the Toraja people's life. The colors symbolize specific events and are interpreted as representing different aspects of human life: red symbolizes blood, white represents flesh and bones, yellow signifies glory, and black signifies death.



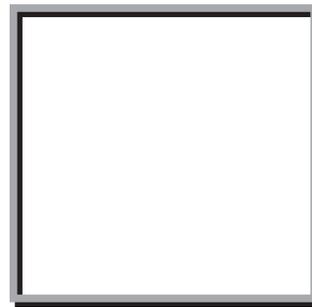
Kasumba Marang Red



Kasumba Mariri Yellow



Kasumba Malotong Black



Kasumba Mabusu White

**Figure 1. Toraja Colors**

These colors are obtained with a traditional concoction called litak, litak is a special hard clay mixed with enough water to produce red, yellow and white colors. Sacred Toraja traditional decoration is used in Toraja traditional houses which are vernacular architecture. Vernacular architecture tends to change over time to reflect the environment, culture and history of its context (Susanto, 2011: 422).

**Figure 2, Toraja Tongkonan House**

(Source: Personal Documentation, 20204)

**Figure 3, Alang**

(Source: Personal Documentation, 20204)



**Figure 4. The Atmosphere of Tongkonan and Rice Barns in Kete Kesu**  
(Source: Personal Documentation, 2024)



**Figure 5. Motif Pa' Barre Allo, on the Tongkonan house**  
(Source: <https://torjabahasa.blogspot.com/2015/09/ukiran-toraja-pa-manuk-londong.html>)

Figure 1 and Figure 2 are traditional Tongkonan Toraja houses, Figure 3 shows the atmosphere of the traditional Tongkonan house and the *Alang*. Figure 4 shows the *Pa' Barre Allo* motif on the Tongkonan house. "*Barre*" means circle or round, and "*Allo*" means sun. "*Pa' Barre Allo*" refers to a painting resembling the sun with its rays. This type of carving is found on the traditional Toraja house. Typically, above the *Pa' Barre Allo* carving is the carving of "*Pa' Manuk Londong*," meaning that knowledge and wisdom have a noble purpose, much like the sunlight that gives life to anyone. The meaning of this carving is a symbol of greatness and pride for the Toraja people.

#### **Toraja Decorative Motifs as an Application of Decorative Art in the Interior of Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square**

The Tator Café, which is the subject of this research, is located at Jl. Dharmawangsa Square, South Jakarta. This location was chosen based on strategic considerations, as it is situated near the business and office district, and surrounded by various interesting culinary centers.

As the name suggests, Tator Café adopts the theme of Tana Toraja in its interior design. Upon entering the café, visitors' attention is immediately drawn to the large "*Pa' Barre Allo*" decorative motif, which serves as the focal point in the café's foyer area. This design not only creates a distinctive atmosphere but also sparks curiosity about the rich symbolism of Toraja culture.



**Figure 6. Entrance Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square,**  
 (Source: Personal Documentation, 2023)

The meaning of a symbol can change over time and space. In Toraja, the *Pa' Barre Allo* motif plays an important role in the cultural and spiritual context of the local community. This motif is usually applied to the traditional Tongkonan house as a symbol of greatness and grandeur, as well as representing knowledge, wisdom, and the giver of life. Therefore, *Pa' Barre Allo* is not applied arbitrarily but only in places considered highly revered. In the Tongkonan house, this motif is always positioned at the top, signifying that it holds a very high and revered status. Next to it, there is the *Pa' Manuk Londong* motif, which serves as a symbol of the norms and rules of life that guide the Toraja people.

Unlike the *Pa' Barre Allo* motif on the Tongkonan house in Tana Toraja, which has a sacred element, the *Pa' Barre Allo* motif when placed in a commercial space such as Tator Café no longer carries the sacred element. Instead, it undergoes a transformation in meaning, becoming more secular and functioning as a commodification of culture and economic value within a commercial space (public space).

As seen in Figures 5, the *Pa' Barre Allo* motif at Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square is applied in the foyer area, immediately visible when visitors enter the café. This placement makes the *Pa' Barre Allo* motif the center point, standing out compared to other decorative motifs. The intention behind placing this motif is to serve as a welcoming symbol for guests visiting Tator Café.

The choice of not using black in the *Pa' Barre Allo* motif at Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square is due to the fact that black would give a dark impression if applied to this decorative motif, especially since the motif is placed on the wall/window area, which typically favors brighter colors. From a psychological perspective, the selection of motifs and colors for *Pa' Barre Allo* gives a sense of grandeur. The use of bright colors on the wall elements enhances this effect. Additionally, the use of stained glass material serves not only as an aesthetic element but also provides natural lighting, especially during the daytime.

#### **Application of the Pa' Barre Allo Motif on the Top Table at Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square**

Figure 6 and figure 7 the application of the *Pa' Barre Allo* motif combined with the *Pa' Tangki Patung II* motif on the round table in the banquet area is also different from its original placement. In its original form, the ornament was placed on the top of the Tongkonan house, signifying that this position holds sacred meaning (placed above). Meanwhile, the *Pa' Barre Allo* motif on the Tator Café table is placed on the table surface, indicating that the motif no longer holds its sacredness, as it is positioned below.



**Figure 7 entertainment area of Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square, featuring the Pa' Barre Allo motif.**  
(Source: Personal Documentation, 2023)



**Figure 8 Application of Pa' Barre Allo and Pa'Tangki Patung II Motifs at Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square.**  
(Source: Personal Documentation, 2023)

The color selection is drawn from the Toraja color palette, which includes black, white, and red, while the yellow used tends to be more pastel or neutral (cream). The psychological effect observed on the top table gives a luxurious impression, achieved through the use of motifs rich in ornamentation (full color). The dining table, whose primary function is for eating or drinking, will have its ornaments covered when plates, glasses, or other utensils are placed on it.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the data analysis it can be concluded that the pattern of the application of decorative motifs at Tator Café Dharmawangsa Square incorporates traditional material elements, which also results in the transformation of the symbolic sacred meaning into a profane one. What Paul Ricoeur offers in his hermeneutics is not only an interpretation of symbols but also extends it to focus on a text. The different social contexts shape the quality of the meaning that is created.

The design choice for each form has a unity in line with the cultural context behind it. The existence of decorative motifs serves not only as an aesthetic element but also takes into account the harmonious composition of shapes and colors to create a traditional atmosphere with a modern touch. There is a utilization of Toraja ethnic

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sensitivity as a manifestation of design forms into the function of space for promotional purposes that are commercial in nature. As a result, its meaning shifts from sacred to profane for the commodification of culture and economic value/sales value in a commercial space.

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