

CONTINUING CONNECTION: ROLES OF MAKASSAN¹ ARTISTS IN RETELLING A SHARED HISTORY BETWEEN TREPANGERS AND INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

MENYAMBUNG HUBUNGAN: PERAN SENIMAN MAKASSAR SEBAGAI PENUTUR SEJARAH PENCARI TERIPANG MAKASSAR DI AUSTRALIA UTARA

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ABSTRACT

The historical relationships between Makassans and Aboriginal people that took place as early as the 17th century until the early 20th century through the trepang industry in the northern coast, North Australia, is still unknown to many people in Makassar, South Sulawesi. There are various factors involved in the lack of information about the shared history, including the absence of the story of trepangers as part of Indonesian maritime heritage history in school textbooks and the insufficient materials and narratives on this topic in provincial and city museums. This paper examines the potential roles of Makassan artists and cultural activists to tell the story after engaging with ancient trepang industry-related cultural and art projects. It also investigates their changed perceptions about Australia and Indonesia both culturally and historically after their participation in art and cultural projects.

ABSTRAKSI

Hubungan bersejarah antara orang-orang Makassar dan Aborijin yang berlangsung sejak awal abad ke-17 hingga awal abad ke-20 melalui industri teripang di perairan utara Australia Utara masih belum diketahui oleh banyak orang di Makassar, Sulawesi Selatan. Ada beragam faktor dari kurangnya informasi tentang sejarah bersama ini, termasuk ketiadaan cerita para pencari teripang sebagai bagian dari sejarah warisan maritim bangsa Indonesia di teks-teks buku sekolah dan ketidakcukupan materi dan narasi mengenai topik ini di museum-museum provinsi dan kota. Tulisan ini meneliti peran-peran potensial para seniman dan pegiat seni-budaya dari Makassar dalam menceritakan sejarah tersebut setelah terlibat dalam proyek-proyek kebudayaan dan kesenian terkait industri teripang di masa lampau. Tulisan ini juga mencari tahu perubahan persepsi-persepsi mereka tentang Australia dan Indonesia baik secara kultural dan historis setelah partisipasi mereka di proyek-proyek kesenian dan kebudayaan tersebut.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous Australia, Makassar, cultural relations, trepang, storytelling, education, maritime heritage

INTRODUCTION

Relationships between trepangers from Makassar and Indigenous communities in Australia in northeast Arnhem Land, North Australia, took place for more than three hundred years, from the 17th century to the early 20th century and have become a focus of academic research for many years, from the seminal work of Campbell

Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege* (1976), to more recent studies that investigated the impact of the trepang trade on indigenous communities (McIntosh, 2000; Ganter, 2006; Stephenson, 2007). The interactions between the trepangers with Aboriginal people have been associated with changes in the economy as well as social

1 *Macassan* or *Macassans* is a common term used in academic literature about the trepang sail written by English-speaking researchers to refer to the people from Makassar who voyaged to northern Australia. Some also wrote it as "Makassan" which we chose to apply in this paper as it is the closest to its original word in Indonesian "Makassar".

activities and material culture (Clarke, 2013). The shared history has also inspired artistic expressions from paintings, songs, literary works, and performances. For instance, in 1994, Australian writer Allan Baillie published a novel entitled *Songman* that told of an adventure of two Yolngu men in Makassar during the trepang industry period. The older man decided to remain in Makassar and married a local woman named Farida. Meanwhile, the younger Yolngu man returned to Arnhem Land with a wealth of knowledge that he could share with his community. Later, he became a ‘songman’ who narrated the stories of Makassar and its people (Baillie, 1994). Australian Indigenous artists have also expressed strong connections with Makassans through their arts. Family stories from past generations about the historical contacts are still alive today and have become the primary inspiration for Indigenous Australian artists (Morphy, 1991; Stubbs, 2019). Makassan people and objects associated with the trepang trade have become characteristics of many artworks in the Yolngu community, from Makassan prau, trepang processing camps, dugout canoes, and daggers.

For over three hundred years, trepangers from Makassar sailed to the northern coast of Australia to collect sea cucumbers or locally known as *trepang* or *teripang* in Indonesian. In the monsoon season at the end of the year, the Makassans sailed to Northeast Arnhem Land, set up their camps, and stayed for around six months to collect and process the sea cucumbers. Trades then took place in the busy port of Makassar where Chinese merchants would be waiting for the trepangs. The commodity connected Australia, Indonesia, and China for two generations and trepang was the first export commodity for Australia. Contacts between the trepangers and the Indigenous communities ended when the South Australian Government banned the Makassans from entering the Australian territory in 1906/1907 (see Macknight, 1967 & Bilous, 2015)

Despite the extensive attention given to the Makassar-Indigenous people contacts, both in Australia’s academic research and creative expressions within the Indigenous and non-

Indigenous Australian artists, in Makassar and Indonesia in general, the history is still mostly unknown. There are various factors involved in the lack of information about the shared history, including the absence of the story of trepangers as part of Indonesian maritime heritage in school textbooks and the insufficient materials and narratives on this topic in provincial and city museums.

Our observations in mid-2020 at La Galigo Museum in Makassar suggested that the history of trepangers who established the industry left no trace at all. We did find some information at Makassar City Museum, but the objects were poorly curated. There were several scanned photographs printed in big-sized papers on the walls without a coherent narrative about what was being told from those pieces, thus they just provided information but did not provide contextual narratives.

The main reason this history is still foreign to the majority of Makassans and Indonesians is that it is barely or even never mentioned and heard in our everyday lives and through mainstream educational media such as museum collections and school textbooks there are a few of academic literatures can be found on the internet but what those are not the mainstream educational media such as school text books taught in public and private schools and public museums. We just added the word “mainstream” in bold to the sentence to make it clearer. This statement was shared by our interviewees whose observations and experiences are presented and analyzed in this paper. Our interviewees consist of four artists participating in three different art projects conducted in Makassar and Northern Australia: (Nurabdiansyah, Muhammad Rais, Syarifuddin Daeng Tutu, and Safira Devi Amorita) and one project officer (Febrianty Hasanah). We also interviewed a cultural figure (Mansyur Muhayang) whose profession is not an artist but once participated as a lead in a Trepang Opera, that is why we included him here as well as part of the “storytellers” from Makassar.

To reinforce our analysis, we refer to Rebecca H. Bilous (2015) as our main foundational analysis. In her article, *Making connections:*



Source: Russel, 2004

Hearing and sharing Macassan-Yolŋu stories (2015), Bilous explored the impact that hearing stories about the Makassans² from one Yolŋu family's tourism business had on a group of Australian Indonesian language teachers visiting Yirrkala, northeast Arnhem Land as part of an Endeavour Language Teaching Fellowship. Bilous offered an idea that storytelling or using stories is a way to connect Makassar and Yolŋu, Indonesia and Australia, past and present, as well as the future. Thus, our main research question to analyze our interviews is: *how are the roles of the artists as storytellers essential for continuing the connection between Indonesia and Australia?*

To answer our research question above, we will firstly present each individual impression from their own experience meeting and working with Indigenous Australians. Secondly, we will discuss what impacts have these experiences had on themselves. Thirdly, we will then analyze the roles of storytellers for the culture and history preservation in which we will discuss the determining factors to become storytellers about the shared history and eventually why their stories

can enrich the conversation about the history of the two nations, Indonesia and Australia.

RECONNECTING WITH THE UNKNOWN HISTORY

Stories of trepangers in the northern part of Australia have inspired art and cultural projects with both Australian and Indonesian artists and producers involved. To mention a few, a musical collaboration entitled *The Voyage to Marege*³ presented by renowned Indonesian composer Ananda Sukarlan and Australian Indigenous musicians Djakapurra Munyarryun and Kevin Yunupingu on 31 August 2017 at Theater Jakarta, Taman Ismail Marzuki and *Budjung Exhibition* that featured works by artists from Yirrkala, Australia on earthen pots made by artists from Takalar, South Sulawesi in July 2017 at Makassar City Museum. (information about Ananda Sukarlan's show was found here <https://indonesiatatler.com/arts-culture/arts/ananda-sukarlan-and-the-voyage-to-marege> and information on Budjung Exhibition was found here <https://makassar.antaranews.com/berita/83989/konjen-australia-gelar-pameran-budjung-di-makassar>

2 Bilous wrote as "Macassan" but we still use "Makassan" in our sentences.

In 2018, a cultural project named *Makassar-Yirrkala Artist Exchange Program* run by The Wilin Centre for Indigenous Art and Cultural Development, the University of Melbourne with support from the Australia-Indonesia Centre in Australia facilitated three Makassar artists and a project officer to visit Darwin and Yirrkala in Northeast Arnhem Land (from interviews with the participating artists: Abi and Rais). The breakthrough cultural project provided a platform for cultural exchange between Makassar and Yolngu artists both in Makassar and Yirrkala. There were three main outcomes from the exchange program including an international symposium held at Hasanuddin University, Makassar in December 2018, an art exhibition at the end of the program in June 2019, and a documentary film *Trading Cultures* premiered in Australia in November 2019 (Yulianti, 2019).

We interviewed two artists and one project officer from Makassar who participated in the program. Nurabdiansyah Ramli (Abi) and Muhammad Rais (Rais), the participating artists and Febrianty Hasanah (Febri), the project officer shared their stories and perceptions about Australia before and after joining the program. All interviews took place in Makassar in February 2019 and September 2020.

“My visit to Arnhem Land was mind-blowing. It was the first time I traced down my ancestors’ footprints, seeing the tamarind trees that they planted hundreds of years ago, listening to oral history and tales told by our Yolngu brothers and sisters, finding the remnants of clay pots brought by Makassans to Australia. The history is very old; however, through this project, we are learning new things about knowledge and technology transfers between Makassans and Yolngu people. I lost in my own history.” (interview with Abi, February 2019)

Abi viewed this project from a personal perspective as he had learned about his family members who travel to Australia with boats for fishing up until today. “I feel the connection, however, I have never had opportunities to further explore the history as the information I have received from Australia is mainly about higher education and contemporary arts. Australia is

the top destination for education. Many young Indonesians study in Australian major cities, but this project has led us to a very different direction because our first encounter with Australians was with the Yolngu people, the very owners of this part of the continent. Not Australians that we have seen in popular tourist destinations in Bali or in popular media. That is the beauty of this project. Art serves as an effective way to learn about our shared history”.

After studying more about the history, Abi found out that one of the most monumental moments in celebrating the contacts was the launch of the *Hati Marege* boat led by a Darwin-based historian, Peter Spillet, in December 1987. *Hati Marege* (literally means the heart of Arnhem Land) was a replica of the 19th-century traditional boat of *Padewakkang* used by the trepangers. The commemorative voyage was launched as a part of the Australian Bicentennial celebration. Abi also recalled his first encounter with Aboriginal people that took place in Makassar in 1998 as he accidentally saw an Aboriginal man in the city and learned from other passersby that the man was an Indigenous person from Australia.

Abi believed the more we dug into this history, the more we would discover the visual arts and others such as linguistics and religions as some researchers have written, such as Alan Walker (1998) and Regina Ganter (2013), just to name a few.

Similar to Abi’s initial impression, Rais thought that the program was just like any other exchange program. However, what kept him curious was his objective that in every exchange, the interactions were always interesting, especially in this program, there was an opportunity to trace back the interactions of the people in the past.

Prior to his participation in the Makassar-Yirrkala artist exchange 2018, Rais admitted he did not have enough knowledge about the history of Indigenous Australians and Makassans, which inspired him to conduct his own online research. His interest grew as he wondered how these people from Makassar could reach that far to Arnhem Land, which made it possible to sail all the distance.

“Our understanding about Australia before the visit was focused on Australia as a white country as well as a land of hope for migrants, a country with a world-class education because many of our friends have studied, are studying, or are planning to study in Australia. However, through this research-based art project, we have entered the pre-European period, and that our ancestors played a very significant role during this period. We did not learn this at school. Our Yolŋu friends in Yirrkala and Bawaka were enthusiastic about sharing their stories of Makassan influence in their ceremonies, songs, dances and artworks, meanwhile we, as the Makassans, came to Northern Australia with almost zero knowledge about the relationship.” (Interview with Rais, February 2019)

Febri, the project officer for the artist exchange, shared similar thoughts. It was her first interaction with Indigenous Australians. Before participating in the program, she only knew very basic knowledge about Indigenous Australians, that they are the native people of Australia, they have occupied the continent before the White Europeans came, and their weapon is called boomerang. She learned about these facts from a children’s song entitled *Katanya* by Trio Kwek-Kwek, a very popular musical child group in the 1990s when she was still in elementary

school. Initially, she had always thought that the Indigenous Australians were similar to the Indians in the USA and that she never heard or learned about Indigenous Australia at school.

On the more specific subject about the historical links between Indigenous Australians and Makassans, Febri gained the knowledge from reading *The Voyage to Marege* written by C.C. Macknight as the participants were required to read it before the artist exchange program commenced. After that, she thought this history was not just interesting but also important to pass on to the next generations. She elaborated, “First, as now I know that our ancestors participated in the trepang expedition, who knows my great-great-grandfather or yours could be one of them so you or I could be having relatives now in Australia. Also, I read from the book (*The Voyage to Marege*) that there was this person from Bawaka stranded in Makassar, and no one knows their whereabouts until now. He could be my or your family too. One of the community leaders and artists in Yirrkala, Timmy ‘Djawa’, also told us, our informant that his great grandparent was a Makassan. Second, the more people know about this history, the more opportunities for students exchange programs can be more available; for example, for university students who are studying literature at Hasanuddin University, this



From left to right: Muhammad Rais, Arian Pearson, Febrianty Hasanah and Nurabdiansyah Ramli at Bawaka Beach, Northeast Arnhem Land, December 2019. Source: Trading Cultures, 2019

could be their research subject. There would be more bilateral relationships between Indonesia and Australia. Three, we Makassans have this tendency to take our history for granted and be forgetful. Historic buildings have been destroyed and changed into new modern architectures for businesses and commercial purposes, such as shopping malls. There used to be tram lines in front of Hasanuddin University in the colonial era, but now they are gone, and funnily enough, we are excited to get on trams and take pictures when we are traveling abroad.”

Another artist we interviewed was Syarifuddin Daeng Tutu (Daeng Tutu). He was a prominent folklore artist called *pasinrili*’ from Gowa, South Sulawesi³. *Sinrili*’ is a storytelling act performed by a single artist telling stories and singing songs played with a local instrument like a cello called *keso keso*, and *pasinrili*’ is the artist who performs *sinrili*’. Daeng Tutu’s first meeting with Indigenous Australians was in 1996 when he joined a trip to Elcho Island for an intercultural performance called *Trepang Opera*, initiated and directed by Andrish Saint-Clare (Arena, 2000).

At Elcho Island, they worked on two rituals or performances; the first performance demonstrated how the Makassans in the trepang days prepared to sail, and the second one portrayed how the Indigenous people welcomed them on the shore. Daeng Tutu then suggested naming the shore as “*soreang*”, which in Makassar language means “the harboring spot”, and making a flag with a boomerang picture combined with *badik* (machete) on it. However, it never happened until they left the country and Daeng Tutu never knew whether the Indigenous Australians made it after they left.

Daeng Tutu still clearly remembered his first impression of Marege⁴ and its people. Daeng Tutu came by an invitation and the plane the organizer rented landed on an acacia forest, and Daeng Tutu saw a group of dark-skinned people wearing Makassan clothes walking towards them led by their community leader. This view scared him to the bones as he told himself in the head,

“We are going to die”. The leader’s name was Macui, but he was sure it should be Mansyur in Makassar language. Macui then asked them, “Makassarak?” and right after they confirmed it, these Indigenous Australians came forward and hugged them, which created such an emotional feeling for Daeng Tutu. He was still scared, but at the same level, he was also feeling emotional. They all then walked further into the village while yelling and chanting words that Daeng Tutu was sure the meaning was “*Makassar sudah datang!*” or “*The Makassans have come!*”. Macui, in his speech and also mentioned by other community leaders, said that “The first people who came to Australia were the Makassans. The *balanda* (Europeans) came later only to steal from them”. Daeng Tutu also retold what Macui said about why Indigenous Australians in the north highly respected the Makassans and even considered them as their ancestors. Daeng Tutu quoted Macui, “It is because the Makassans came here without any intentions to explore and occupy our land, not like *the balanda*. They came here only to collect trepangs and then went back home when the wind was blowing in the right directions.”

According to Daeng Tutu, it was the first visit after the last Makassan trepangers visited Marege in 1907. After the new law was introduced, contacts and friendships vanished. For so long, the Makassans only lived in the minds of the Aboriginal people and were preserved in stories passed through generation after generation, and as per Daeng Tutu’s information from communicating with them, it was almost impossible for both parties to be reconnected. Therefore, it was a special reunion, especially for the people in Marege, as Daeng Tutu observed.

After meeting and socializing with the Indigenous Australians for forty days in their land, Daeng Tutu felt comfortable and so honored because they still highly valued the Makassans as their ancestors. This unique experience left a special impression on Daeng Tutu about the Marege and its people. “They were stubborn, reckless, not easy to organize, annoying, but they were also hilarious and fun,” Daeng Tutu described. A young storyteller, Safira Devi Amorita, whom Daeng Tutu met and worked with along with a visiting Indigenous Australian

3 Daeng Tutu passed away in early August 2021 after we finished the first draft of this paper.

4 Marege was a term used by the Makassan trepangers to call Northern Territory of Australia (see Macknight, 1976: 2).

storyteller Larry Brandy on a storytelling event in 2016, also told us in a separate interview that she knew this shared history of trepang industry



Syarifuddin Daeng Tutu playing local Indigenous Australian's instrument didgeridoo, Elcho Island 1996. Source: Daeng Tutu's photo collection.

from Daeng Tutu when she came to his house to practice days prior to the performing day.

STORY OF MANSYUR

Mansyur Muhayang is a first-generation grandson of Husein Daeng Rangka, the most prominent name from the last trepang sail to northern Australia in 1906-1907 before the ban to fish on Australian waters by Australian government took place in 1907 (Bilous, 2015). Husein Daeng Rangka was also known as Captain Ucing as he was the captain of the sail. He married several times with Makassan and Aboriginal women. Mansyur is the son of Saribanong, Captain Ucing's daughter from his marriage with a Makassan woman named Maulida Daeng Tanang. Mansyur is not an artist but he has some interesting stories that had never been written in mass media or in academic literature and were very Indonesian flavored composed with superstition as well as spiritual and religious matters. One of his stories

was from his participation in an art performance as a leading role at the *Trepang Opera* in 1997 which is why his name is also included here.

There were two separate interviews with Mansyur, first in December 2020 and second in March 2021. Mansyur's first travel to Australia was in 1987 on the launch of *Hati Marege Padewakkang prau* for the reconstruction of the historical sail of Makassan trepangers to Australia as part of Australia's bicentennial project funded and organized by the Australian federal government of Northern Territory supported by the Indonesian government (Pedoman Rakyat, 14 December 1987). Peter Spillet initiated and led this project. He was a historian from Australia who had been living in Makassar for 10 years, 1977-1987 as Mansyur could remember, for his research about the links between Makassan trepangers and Indigenous Australians in northeast Arnhem Land. The main purpose of this sail to Darwin was to meet Husein Daeng Rangka's Makassan family represented by Mansyur with his relatives living in Marege.

Mansyur recalled there were 12 men participating in this sail, six of them were Makassan fishers and Peter Spillet was the only foreign/white person on board. The first place their prau was anchored was the Gove Peninsula which Mansyur thought the name was derived from the word "Gowa", a district (*kabupaten*) located around 50 km from Makassar city where Mansyur currently lives. He was once involved in a debate with a researcher whose name he could not remember about the naming of Gove Peninsula. While Mansyur was sure it was taken from "Gowa", the researcher kept asking him and offered some money if he could prove it. "I could not prove it because I was not a researcher but the Makassans who came there a long time ago were from Gowa so I'm sure of it".

After they arrived at Elcho Island, 90 km west-north-west of the Gove Peninsula in the Arafura Sea, they were greeted with a sword dance which the other Makassans found scary and pressured when asked to join. The Marege people especially asked Mansyur to participate in the sword ceremony to prove if he was really Captain Ucing's offspring. Mansyur felt brave to



Mansyur Muhayang when he arrived at Elcho Island. Source: Mansyur's photo collection



The sword ceremony. Mansyur Muhayang is the dark curly-haired guy wearing a polo shirt and short pants. Source: Mansyur's photo collection.

come forward and fight even though it was his first time participating in such a dangerous game. “I did not feel scared at all, it was like something possessed me right away! I just felt like doing it and maybe because I had no doubt that I was Husein Daeng Rangka’s grandson”. He said after the fight he checked his body and he did not even find a single scar on his skin.

Mansyur also told a story on his coronation as a Gumatj member while he was there. When he arrived, there was a tree that had been dead for hundred years finally grew some shoots which made the Marege people think that Husein Daeng Rangka had come back alive. Therefore, Mansyur was also named “Ucing” like his grandfather which he still carries until now. Since then, the Marege people have perceived him as Ucing from Gumatj. “They actually wanted me to be their tribe leader but I did not want to stay and live there”.

A Chinese acupuncturist also challenged him to prove if there was really Captain Ucing’s blood running in him by healing the Marege’s group leader at Elcho Island, David Burrumara. David,

whom Mansyur referred to as “*Raja Aborijin* (The King of Aborigine) had been paralyzed for years and no doctor and medications could heal him. Mansyur just recited some prayers while holding David’s back and then he was magically cured. “At that moment I was really surprised myself. I was in the state of believing or not believing”.

THE NEW MANSYUR AFTER HIS FIRST VISIT TO MAREGE

Before the departure to Marege, Mansyur suffered from heart disease and the doctor predicted he would only have a few years left, that is why the doctor told him to resign from his work in a paper company. Mansyur was even almost sent abroad for medication. This illness inspired Mansyur to repent. Then the call to sail on *Hati Marege* came. Husein Daeng Rangka actually had two sons but both of them passed away and none of Mansyur’s other three brothers showed interest to come on board so he was the only one left. In his younger days before he was ill, he was a rebel, a lawbreaker, and once imprisoned. He said he did all of the bad things



A tapestry (left) and a necklace (right) from Mansyur’s coronation as a Gumatj member. Source: Mansyur’s photo collection.



From right to left: Macui or Matjui, Matjui's wife, Mansyur, Matjui's cousin. Mansyur forgot Matjui's wife's and cousin's names.

a naughty teenager was capable of doing so he thought it was better to join the team than to die a sinner here in Makassar.

During the voyage to Marege, he was really scared due to the storms and waves that could easily take everyone's life away so he pledged himself that if he could make it to the land alive, he would completely change as a new person and dedicate the rest of his life to Islam and Allah only. Combined with all the magical experiences he had during his times at Elcho Island, he did what he promised himself when he came back to Makassar. Currently, Mansyur lives with his wife in his house in Gowa.

Ever since his experiences before and after his sail to Marege, Mansyur has been a devoted Muslim. Every day he goes on his feet to 5 different mosques to pray in each of 5 different times, from early morning around 4:45 until the last praying time around 7:30 in the evening and he also reads Quran in between. His experience as a healer to David Burrumara at Elcho Island has made him a trusted local healer. He welcomes everyone who is sick to come to his house for

healing treatment. However, since the pandemic, he stopped this practice for safety and health reasons.

After around 10 years after his sail to Marege, in 1996 there was a trepang performance act in Gowa initiated and directed by Andrish Saint-Clare. Mansyur was appointed as the main role as Husein Daeng Rangka. Mansyur said, initially it was Sirajuddin Daeng Bantang, Daeng Tutu's older brother who was also a *pasinrili* who wanted to lead the project but Andrish refused and decided Mansyur to take the lead.

While they were performing, Mansyur recalled, they were praying for a storm so that the scene could really replicate the real event when his grandfather voyaged to Marege a hundred years ago. "And the storm really came through, the tents and the stage were shaken!". Once again Mansyur said that it was the magic of prayer.

This act was held twice, first in Australia in 1996 and then at Syekh Yusuf Park in Gowa in 1997 as part of Gowa's anniversary celebration. The original poster of the show in Australia was actually seen at Mansyur's house when Abi visited his house in 2019 but then it was gone when we visited again in December 2020. "I am not sure where it is now, maybe some researcher took it because they always come here and then take this and that with them but never return it".

In November 2019 when another sail was conducted by Abu Hanifah Foundation with a newly constructed *Padewakkang* prau named *Nur Al Marege*, Mansyur was asked to join but this time he refused to come on board simply because of his age. He felt he would not be as strong as he was 32 years ago to be on the ocean for months since he was already 78 years old, so he went by plane in March 2020. This project made him meet Andrish again after 24 years. Mansyur Said Andrish was already 74 years old and lived in Thailand.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES AND THE CREATION OF THE FUTURE STORYTELLERS

For the interviewees, the opportunities to visit the Indigenous lands and to establish contacts with the Indigenous communities have helped

them get a more comprehensive understanding of Makassans' advanced trade management and maritime technology as well as the capabilities of the Indigenous people to negotiate with the outsiders and to adapt with a new culture. The new knowledge that they gained from the joint-cultural projects was then disseminated to other people. Febri shared her stories with people she randomly met in a public event in Makassar. "When I shared stories about Indigenous Australians and Makassans contacts, the listeners were both surprised and interested". Daeng Tutu told his exciting experiences to another Makassan artist he worked with, meanwhile Rais shared his unique experience meeting people in Bawaka through an art installation entitled *The Conversation of the Smokes* as he found smoking ceremony and the farewell ritual among trepangers and the Yolngu people involving a moment when they smoked together. Abi has changed his approach to teaching by incorporating Aboriginal arts and designs in his lectures.

Furthermore, by retelling the shared history, Indonesians' popular perceptions about Australia as a 'White Country' have also been argued over the discoveries of Makassans and Indigenous Australians' links since the trepang industry in the 17th century. The four participants suggested that their perceptions of Australia changed after participating in the joint-cultural projects and visiting the Indigenous lands in the northern part of Australia. They contested the image of 'White Australia' and that the trepang history has created a special connection with the Indigenous people in the northern coasts of Australia, as Daeng Tutu stated, "The Indigenous people respected us because they believed that their ancestors were Makassans".

When asked in what ways we can preserve this history if it is considered important, Febri offered some solutions. "Maybe with audio-visual performances and video mapping projects because generally speaking, our people are not avid readers, they are more visually inclined. Another way but could be the most effective and efficient is just telling the story to the next person when we have a chance. There are many ways to pass these stories along, like making paintings

and digital artworks, but the easiest and cheapest one is simply telling the story to the people next to us."

Shifts in one's perspective happen slowly because of the different people, places, and experiences they are exposed to. For the interviewees, the opportunities to participate in art and cultural projects had opened access to the trepang's unheard history. Meanwhile, many Indonesians and Macassans have no access to this history as it was absent in Makassans' collective memories and educational materials. The absence of ordinary people's history in the national narratives is common because the main approach in Indonesian history writing projects focuses on prominent figures, political leaders and wars, or monument history, to build national pride and identity (Poelinggomang, 2004). Stories of trepangers provide a contested narrative about global contacts in pre-independence Indonesia as the trade was established by ordinary fishermen from Sulawesi island, with no direct involvement from the rulers, both the Dutch and the Kingdom of Gowa within this period.

Our further examinations also revealed that the impact of cultural collaborations on creating future storytellers highly depended on the participants' professions and background. For instance, a lecturer like Abi who swiftly incorporated the Indigenous Australian arts into his educational materials in research methodology and typography classes could have a higher chance of disseminating the new knowledge to hundreds of students in a formal education setting.

THE ROLES OF STORYTELLERS FOR CULTURE AND HISTORY PRESERVATION

Based on the stories and impressions shared by our interviewees, we found there are two determinants to become storytellers of this shared history of two nations, and these determinants go in a two-way stream which is inward and outward, and they can happen at the same time. The inward stream is about how their experiences as Makassans with the outside world (Indigenous Australians) made them revisit themselves *within*

which is their local identity as Makassans and nationally as Indonesians whose ancestors made historical and cultural impacts on Indigenous Australians.

Meanwhile, the outward stream is about knowing that their ancestors had contributed a valuable chapter in world history. However, realizing that contribution has hardly been available in educational materials and facilities such as school textbooks and museums from which the contents and the delivery have been mostly Java-centric, there is a kind of bittersweet revelation or excitement. Sweet because a new fact about Indonesian history has finally unfolded in front of their eyes, bitter because it felt like it was not as important as anything else their teachers taught them at school in cultural and historical subject studies.

These storytellers had narrated the national Indonesian famous song and jargon *Nenek Moyangku Seorang Pelaut (My Ancestor Was a Sailor)* in their own way shared with the Indonesian general public through their artworks or informal conversations. Their narratives are more authentic due to direct personal encounters and more elaborated or clearer than what could be found from the museums in Makassar. There was no story found at the museums as told by Rais about the smoking ritual of Makassan trepangers which inspired the Indigenous Australians in Yirrkala to create a traditional dance that is still regularly played to date. There was no Macui's name and his respectful view towards Makassar and its people as told by Daeng Tutu ever written in or heard out of school textbooks.

From these storytellers, the saying "*nenek moyangku seorang pelaut*" has been given a new contextual approach to discuss Indonesia's maritime heritage. If the government can make *Jalur Rempah (Spice Routes)*^[5] project run by the Ministry of Education and Culture, maybe they can also start thinking about coordinating *Jalur Teripang (Trepang Routes)*? If this can happen, then it is the outward stream that continues spreading the story to not only local and national audiences, but also to international spectators. Even though Australia is geographically kilometers away from Indonesia separated by the

Arafura Sea, culturally and historically there is a proximity between the two nations that is worth sharing with the other nations worldwide.

Evidently, the outward stream has so far been done by non-governmental forces, or if it was initiated by a governmental body, it was coming from the other side of the ocean, the Australian government. Therefore, the storytelling agency and the agents of preservation thus far have been a mixed composition. *The storytelling agency* has always been the Australian government as the funding of the projects or events and *the agents of preservation* who work on the field have been individuals or non-governmental organizations from Indonesia and Australia. They have been replacing the roles of dysfunctional storytelling agencies from the Indonesian government which otherwise could have worked wonders since they have the means of production.

CONCLUSION

The relationships between Makassan trepangers and Indigenous Australians from the 17th to the early 20th century have inspired many researchers and artists in Australia. However, the ancient contacts have not been celebrated as much in Indonesia as in Australia. In Indonesia, one has to go the extra mile and put extra effort to find as much information as possible if one is willing to unravel this Indonesian maritime heritage's great history.

From the five storytellers, it is clear that Indonesia and Australia are not just neighboring countries geographically, but they are also related historically and culturally. This valuable realization has produced great excitement and a strong willingness to retell the stories to others that can be done in many ways, even as simple as sharing them verbally and casually with anyone. These storytelling processes provide a new understanding of Indonesian maritime heritage to the general public, where Makassan trepangers had significant contributions to national history. The artists' role as storytellers fills the gap in learning about Makassan trepangers-Indigenous Australians contacts.

One question remains: when the Indonesian government will start to pay more attention and put more effort to include this rich history of Indonesian maritime heritage and culture in the nation's mainstream history. There is an urgent need for the Indonesian government to shift its research, culture and history preservation strategies from the monument history approach to socio-cultural history, in which the contributions of the ordinary people, in this case, the Makassan trepangers, are acknowledged in shaping the national maritime history and pride.

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