11

Reconnecting with South-East Asia

Regina Ganter

The Yolngu people of eastern Arnhem Land and trepang fishers operating out of the Sulawesi port of Macassar share a transnational heritage through the trade in trepang (sea cucumber) that has lasted for generations and created family, community and cultural links between peoples. Their history of mobility interrupts the assumptions of indigenous people as fixed and local that have been so central to colonial discourses of indigeneity. This chapter, like that of Lachy Paterson's in this volume, explores an example of indigenous and non-European encounter through travel, thereby undermining assumptions that Europeans were necessarily central to indigenous travel.¹

George Windsor Earl, coiner of the term 'Indonesia' and author of *Sailing Directions for the Arafura Sea* (1839), often observed the Macassans² working with Aboriginal people in scenes not dissimilar to those drawn

1 The research on Asian–Aboriginal contact in northern Australia underpinning this chapter was generously supported by an ARC Discovery grant 1997–2000 and an ARC Future Fellowship 2011–15.

2 'Macassan' is an English-language expression used in historical documents to refer to a mixture of ethnic and religious groups participating in the trepang industry, mostly out of the port of Makassar (Macassar). The language of Makassar (Macassar), capital of Sulawesi (formerly Ujung Pandang) is called Makasar (Macasar). The language adopted through this trade by Yolngu and other north Australian peoples was a trade krio with roots in several languages from the Malay archipelago. For consistency with other chapters in this volume, the English-language spelling is used: Macassan, Macassar, Masasar.

by Emile Lasalle aboard the *Astrolabe* in 1839. Investing hope in the trepang industry, Earl threw his energies into establishing a trading port at Cobourg Peninsula in 1838, which was to be 'a second Singapore' where business could continue and expand.³ Contact was also observed by other visitors to the area including Matthew Flinders in February 1803 on the Arnhem Land coast.⁴ It was surely more than lucky coincidence that his ship, the *Investigator*, carried a Malay cook who was able to interpret the language and establish a channel for communication.⁵ The trepang fishery in Australia was reaching its zenith in the first half of the nineteenth century and several stories tell of Yolngu people travelling to and living in Macassar. However, this transnational mobility would be curtailed by government intervention on account of entrepreneurial, racial and possibly religious competition. The Macassan trepang fishery was prohibited in northern Australia in 1906, rupturing not only family connections and trade, but also deep cultural affinities. As customs officer Alfred Searcy observed, this 'must have been a great blow to the indigenous people'.⁶ The colonial administration forced the Yolngu into isolation by confining them to designated parcels of land without access to passports or international travel. Ideological, diplomatic and economic considerations forged this history, and also forged the telling of this history from an Indigenous perspective. The full history has yet to be told.

The historical reflections sparked by the Australian bicentennial celebrations in 1988 reinvigorated interest in this period of contact with the Malay Archipelago, leading to a revival of contact and greater public access to its ritual allusions. As Howard Morphy has observed, the public dances now performed at Yirrkala funerals involve flags, samurai swords, long-barrelled pipes, prayer calls to Allah and references to South-East Asian ports like Djakapura (Singapore), Djumaynga (Macassar) and Banda.⁷ After nearly eight decades without contact, the connection has been resumed in a way that both asserts and reclaims new forms of Aboriginality that are no longer premised on social isolation and racial

3 Emile Lasalle's image of the Macassan trepang camp at Raffles Bay, visited in 1839 on Dumont d'Urville's *Astrolabe* (NLA reference 20806695) is often displayed and is available online.

4 Matthew Flinders certainly misunderstood the name of the Macassan captain he renders as Pobassoo. Macknight (1969: 67) suggested Pu Basso; Thomas (2013) refers to Puang Basso.

5 There are several indications that Flinders knew what he was looking for. He spent more than five of his 10-month circumnavigation in the Macassan contact zone, and Joseph Banks had given Flinders some information from Alexander Dalrymple about the trading potentials in the archipelago.

6 Searcy 1907: 97.

7 McIntosh 2013: 95–106.

purity. The discovery and commemoration of this history is still in progress; a range of approaches continue to peel back outmoded views of Aboriginality, in the process offering new sources of cultural pride. Within the short span of a century, the contact between Malay and Yolngu people has passed from history to the brink of myth, and from myth to history.

They Have Left Their Spirit With Us

Yolngu people have begun to publicly celebrate their historical and kin connections to Sulawesi in a number of ways, including through song. The Sunrize Band's 1993 track 'Lembana Mani Mani' (the Macassan name for Maningrida) asserts that 'we commemorate and celebrate for those visitors from Macassar', and Yothu Yindi's 'Macassan Crew', released in 2000, makes reference to Dayngatjing who 'came in peace through the Ashmore Reef' and navigated by the morning star, bringing tamarind seeds with him. Dayngatjing, known as Captain Daeng⁸ Gassing in Australian customs records, was one of the last Macassans to visit Australian shores.

Another musical expression comes from Milngimbi's Wirngya Band whose song 'My Sweet Takirrina' refers to the Macassan appellation for Milngimbi that translates to 'abrus seed bay'. Like tamarind, banyan and water buffalo, 'takirrina' was a culturally important biological import from the Malay Archipelago to northern Australia. The song begins with the line 'for many years these stories were told', which alludes to the highly mythologised way in which younger generations have learned about Macassans as if they were mythical beings. The sacred wuramu figures represented them with songkok caps (a style of Muslim fez) and their apparently mythical praus⁹ were shown on rock paintings already layered with more recent inscriptions. 'My Sweet Takirrina' captures the moment during the bicentennial celebrations in 1988 when a perahu padewakang (a traditional Macassan trading vessel) arrived from Macassar. Far from being mythical, the ship was captained by a descendant of two of the best-remembered Macassan captains, Husein Dg Rangka and his brother-

8 *Daeng* derives from a royal title in the former kingdom of Gowa in Sulawesi. It is normally abbreviated as Dg (much like Mr or Dr) and has become integrated into the Macassan naming system as an address of respect. It is reflected in some Yolngu names as the prefix 'Dayn-', as in Dayngatjing mentioned earlier.

9 Prau, also spelled proa or (falsely) prow, derives from the Malay perahu for sailing boat, presumably originating from Micronesian languages.

in-law Suleiman Dg Gassing. The elders of Elcho Island off the coast of Arnhem Land embraced this young Macassan as family while local youths looked on in amazement.

The Sunrize lyrics continue: 'They left back for us only their spirit'. The same could be said about Yolngu ancestors in Macassar. Asianist Marshall Clark was present when bulldozers mowed down the best-known site of Yolngu–Macassan transnational heritage, the home of Unusu Dg Remba. Located on Jalan Maipa in the Kampung Bassi district of Macassar, the home was constructed with northern Australian ironwood more than a century prior. In its heyday, it had fishponds, a prayer house and water pump. It was a substantial two-storey building that, even in its dilapidated state, was reputedly sold for the equivalent of US\$1 million amid the luxury hotel developments that engulfed Macassar's Losari Beach. At least two Aboriginal men had lived, worked and died in the house. Nobody came to loot the valuable timber that was left lying around during the demolition, as it was considered *keramat* (sacred). Moreover, the neighbours whispered that the house had been haunted by a *hantu Marege*¹⁰—an Aboriginal ghost. The developers may have been hoping that such ghosts of the past would disappear with the rebuilding, as their public information sign read:

Mohon Doa Restu:

Lokasi ini akan dibangun Kenari Tower Hotel Unit 2

[Please offer your prayers of blessing: this location will be used to build Unit 2 of the Kenari Tower Hotel]¹¹

A banyan tree in Melville Bay, Arnhem Land, is also said to have a spirit that cries whenever it sees a prau coming into or leaving the bay. Banyan trees are often associated with Macassan burials and Melville Bay was the burial site of Sampara Dg Ruppia.¹² Anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt described Melville Bay as a Bayini place associated with deep history and links reaching beyond the Macassan trepang fishery.¹³ The Bayini stories might be best understood as a kind of Yolngu spiritual

10 'Marege' is the Macassan word for the Arnhem Land coast.

11 Clark 2013: 159–82.

12 Melville Bay, also known as Lembana Panrea, was a trepang site associated with captain Husein Dg Rangka (already mentioned) and the Aboriginal leader Dayngmangu (mentioned below). Spillett (1987) was told that Sampara Dg Rupa was buried there.

13 For a more modern treatment of the Bayini mythos, see McIntosh 2009.

assimilation of pre-British contact history. Yolngu people often remark on their connection with the Macassans: 'Similar dreamings', Joe Djalalinga Yunupingu of Yirrkala stated, while Terry Yumbulul at Galiwin'ku hinted at 'the Hindu flavour of Yolngu ways'. Pastor Joe Mowandjil Garrawirtja at Milingimbi remarked, 'we feel that we are one in spirit'.¹⁴

Stepping Out of the Myth

The former owner of the residence on Jalan Maipa, Dg Remba, was recorded by Australian customs along with the other two captains already mentioned. Dg Remba captained the *Lakarinlong* and travelled in the same fleet as Dg Gassing and Dg Rangka up to the trade prohibition in 1906, and all three have traceable family connections to Australia. Dg Rangka's daughter, Ibu Saribanong Nganne (born 1904), was interviewed in Macassar by Peter Spillett in 1985; she remembered two Aboriginal men who, until the 1930s, had lived in Dg Remba's house to guard the empang (fishponds), clean the mushollah (prayer house) and look after the water-pumping installation made from bamboo pipes.¹⁵ She also recalled the names of two (among 10 other) Aboriginal children her father had had with several Arnhem Land women.¹⁶ Ibu Saribanong implored Spillett to find her Aboriginal family for her, which he did; the following year she met Laklak Burarrwanga and her cousins from Arnhem Land.¹⁷

A group of Arnhem Land students from Batchelor College visited Sulawesi in June 1986 in the lead-up to a bicentennial project that Spillett was organising. Then Director of the Northern Territory Museum, Spillett masterminded a project to re-enact Yolngu–Macassan contact. He orchestrated the reconstruction of a traditional padewakang perahu (sailing boat), the *Hati Marege* (*Heart of Marege*), and accepted the honorific Macassan title of Dg Makulle, a Macassan alias that roughly translates to 'Mister Capability'.¹⁸

14 Ganter 2006: Chapter 2 *passim*.

15 Spillett 1987.

16 Macknight 1976: 87; Cooke 1987; Ganter 2006: 34.

17 Spillett 1987: 14.

18 Jukes 2005: 278.

The Batchelor students were amazed at what they discovered during their visit: people and places with similar names to those back home, words that echoed ones from their own language and ancient rock paintings at Sumpang Bitu adorned with hand silhouettes like their own traditions. They observed real praus and real Macassan captains, and finally realised that the stories they had been told were real histories, not legends. Although they felt awkward acknowledging family, they were the pioneers of a grand movement of reconnection.

Not only Aboriginal males, but some Yolngu women also lived in Macassar and had children there. For example, one captain from Kodingareng Island, Dg Mallewa, was said to have abducted a Yolngu woman.¹⁹ According to oral history in Macassar, all of the Aboriginal people in Macassar repatriated to Arnhem Land on the last boat in 1906 when the trepang trade was prohibited.²⁰ This contradicts the recollection of Ibu Saribanong Nganne, but, in either case, the prohibition on Macassan fishing fleets in northern Australian waters suspended more than important trade for the Yolngu, it also severed families. Presumably this is why that historical moment features so prominently in Yolngu stories of the Macassans.

The termination of this trade occurred amid ethnic tensions and political shifts in Australia. It was occasioned by entrepreneurial competition between the Macassan trepang fishers and the Australian officers who were placed into positions of policing them and who themselves engaged in the same fishery, competing with the Macassans for Aboriginal labour and maritime resources. This was in the lead-up to the Australian Government assuming responsibility for the Northern Territory in 1911, and in the context of federal insistence (since 1901) on a 'White Australia', even in the poly-ethnic north.²¹ In 1906, French missionaries of the Sacred Heart took on the Catholic ministry of the Northern Territory. In the expectation of increasing levels of support from the federal government, they projected their intentions into territories hitherto frequented by

19 Ganter 2006: 36; Cooke 1987: 45.

20 The recollection that the Yolngu people were taken back to Marege stems from Dg Remba's son, Manggellai Dg Maro, speaking to Spillett. The trade was prohibited in 1906, but Husein Dg Rangka set out on a final journey with a letter from Puddu Dg Tombo and gifts for the customs collector, to ascertain whether the prohibition was really going to be enforced, and perhaps also to repatriate Aboriginal people from Macassar. Dg Tompo's letter reads: 'When my proas were at your port, nothing was known about this new regulation. I cannot believe it is really true, but for prudential reasons, now send only one prow, to see how matters lay and I will feel very much obliged to you for instructing my people how they are to act'. Macknight 1976: 16.

21 Ganter 2006: Chapter 2.

Muslim Macassans and established their first mission on the Tiwi Islands in 1911, after which much of the prior Muslim contact histories became ‘turned in’, to borrow an eloquent phrase from Ian McIntosh.²²

I Baptise You in the Name of ...

The stories of the last visits of the Macassans emphasise the bestowal of Macassan names on Aboriginal people—a symbolic affirmation of kinship and deep connection. This gesture is not unlike the symbolic conferral of a baptismal name—the first initiation into the Christian church and adoption as a ‘son of God’, a practice that also derives from a polygamous traditional society, albeit in the Middle East.²³ One such story told by Djäwa, as remembered from his youth at Elcho Island, was that during the Macassans’ last visit, Captain Dg Gassing gave him the name of Mangalay. Mangalai is a recurring name in the genealogies of the three Macassan captains mentioned above. Djäwa described how his uncle witnessed this naming, much like a godparent witnessing a baptism.²⁴

A similar story is that of Elcho Islander Ganimbirrgnu, an Aboriginal leader at Melville Bay who died around 1925. In some Yolngu stories, this leader has become a Macassan figure represented with a songkok;²⁵ however, in Macassan stories he is a Yolngu figure. According to oral history, Captain Husein Dg Rangka gave Ganimbirrgnu the Macassan honorific title of Daeng on his last visit, presumably around 1906–07, after which he was referred to as Dg Mangu or Dayngmangung in the two respective languages.²⁶ One of the Macassan captains remembered Dg Mangu as the ‘rajah’ of Lembana Panrea, referring to Melville Bay on Yolngu country with a Macassan name. Dayngmangung gave one of his wives to Dg Rangka as an expression of family relationship between the men. Their final farewell involved a ceremonial exchange of gifts that included a mast and a white calico flag ‘as a sign that each had an agreement and

22 ‘Turned in’ is an expression used by McIntosh for memories of contact that were suppressed from public knowledge. It derives from the concept of protected ‘inside’ knowledge in traditional society. For the intentions of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in the Northern Territory see Ganter ‘Gsell, Francis Xavier, Ep.’ in *German Missionaries in Australia*, missionaries.griffith.edu.au.

23 *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm, accessed 26 July 2013.

24 *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm, accessed 26 July 2013.

25 Spillett 1987: 14.

26 The language of Macassar is referred to as Macasar (or Makasar), and the various Yolngu dialects are collectively called Yolngumatha.

were friends and would remember each other'.²⁷ Presumably, Dg Rangka and Dayngmangung had a shared sense of paternity for Dg Rangka's Aboriginal children in Macassar and Arnhem Land.²⁸

According to Dayngmangung's son, David Burrumarra, the naming practice became a tradition; it was carried on by his grandson, Terichini, who was named after Turije'ne, the collective name by which the maritime nomads of Sulawesi, also known as Sama Bajo, refer to themselves.²⁹ There are other hints at connections with the Sama Bajo, who were often recruited for the trepang journeys to northern Australia. For example, Galiwin'ku elder Mattjuwi Burarrwanga named his son Lilai Latung after Lilai Island, the home of many Sama Bajo people. Sama Bajo people also settled at Kodingareng, an island in the Spermonde Archipelago, two hours by boat from the port of Macassar; its name is reflected at Gunyangarra, a sacred site otherwise known as Ski Beach at Yirrkala.³⁰ A Yolngu myth about the turtle hunter Dhurritjini may be another veiled reference to the Turije'ne.³¹ Such hints suggest that alongside the relations the Yolngu established with the Muslim Macassan captains, there were also networks of connections with indigenous people crewing the boats. These connections are commemorated in stories and in placenames, and are honoured with the names given to children. While Yolngu people are forthcoming with information about their Macassan links,³² Ian McIntosh has traced fine-grained rules about the proximity that various people can claim; more recently, Nigel Lendon has commented on the political force of such disclosures.³³

David Burrumarra is best known in the literature, but others have also offered disclosures about Macassan contact. For example, Wili Walalipa, the son of a Macassan, stated that when his descendant from Elcho Island visited Kampung Maluku and Lilai Island in the 1990s, he was treated like a long lost family member.³⁴ Another descendant from this contact, a Yirrkala elder, drew on his Macassan pipe while he told a story peppered

27 McIntosh 1994: 18, 22. This description of gifts may be a veiled reference to the morning star poles of Elcho Island.

28 Ganter 2006: 39.

29 Interview with Terry Yumbulul at Galiwin'ku, June 1995.

30 Ganter 2006: 38ff.

31 Dhurritjini is briefly mentioned in Cooke 1987: 56–58.

32 Janson 2001; Palmer 2007.

33 McIntosh 1992; Lendon 2014.

34 Interview with Willie Danjati Gunderra, June 1995 at Galiwin'ku. Presumably he was also a descendant of Husein Dg Rangka, because he and Terry Yumbulul identified as cousins.

with Malay words.³⁵ He told of Djaladjari Matullo (who he referred to as father), who worked on the Macassan boats around Caledon Bay, Milingimbi, Goulburn Island, Croker Island and eventually Macassar, where he settled down and had three sons. Djaladjari returned to Yirrkala (presumably around the turn of the century), formed another family and became a bunggawa (or 'headman') because he spoke both Yolŋumatha and Macassar.³⁶

Masters and Servants

Djaladjari's story has often been cited for its convincing portrayal of a substantial expatriate Aboriginal community in Macassar.³⁷ Djaladjari enumerated several Aboriginal men in Macassar who had been brought as boys and had married Macassan women and had 'many children'; he could recall four men by their names and tribal affiliations, and referred to 'many others as well'.³⁸ Djaladjari's story offers a glimpse into the potentially exploitative relationship that existed between the trepang captains and the young boys they recruited along the journey. This aspect of contact has been 'turned in'—perhaps almost forgotten—in some recollections. Djaladjari's name is sometimes rendered as Charley-Charley Sitdown after a lame leg, which he said resulted from physical punishment received on the prau. He was only a boy when he and some companions signed on with the praus and eventually arrived in Macassar. When they finally returned, they became so 'wild with joy' at their first sight of the northern Australian coastline that their captain's cap was lost overboard; the beating that Djaladjari subsequently received permanently crippled his leg.

Djaladjari also mentioned that he did not go to Macassar of his own choosing. At the end of the trepang season, his captain, 'Jadjung', planned to leave him stranded at Port Essington. This sparked an argument with another captain in the same fleet that ended with the two threatening each other with knives. After paying-off Djaladjari (in kind), Jadjung handed him over to the other captain, skipper of the *Patti Jawaya*.³⁹ It is

35 Interview with Bawurr Munyarrun, July 1995, at Yirrkala. He referred, for example, to travelling 'selatang' (south-east), which is similar to 'selatan' for south in Indonesian.

36 Interview Bawurr Munyarrun, July 1995, at Yirrkala.

37 Djaladari's story as rendered by Berndt and Berndt (1954) has been variously cited by Langton (2011) and Stephenson (2007).

38 Berndt and Berndt 1954: 56.

39 Berndt and Berndt 1954: 56.

possible that 'Jadjung' was in fact Husein Dg Ranka, captain of the Patti Jawaya, also known as Jago or Ayam Jantan, a popular nickname meaning 'fighting cock'.⁴⁰

The three captains, Dg Gassing, Dg Rangka and Dg Remba, all worked for Abdulrazak Puddu Dg Tombo, a bunggawa who also financed their journeys in the inner-city district of Kampung Maluku in Macassar.⁴¹ Dg Tombo owned much of the real estate around the main mosque (Mesjid Ansar) at the southern end of present-day Chinatown and presumably he helped to finance the mosque, as this is where his remains are kept.⁴² Evidently, he was a man of some social and economic magnitude. This Muslim merchant also appears in Djaladjari's story as the bunggawa who took charge of both the cargo and the Aboriginal boys.⁴³

Ibu Saribanong's recollection of the two Aboriginal men serving in Dg Remba's house and Djaladjari's insistence that the Aboriginal men at Macassar were just 'boys' when they first arrived, suggest that ethnic class stratifications operated in a similar manner to those adopted in the poly-ethnic townships of northern Australia. Macassar had 'Kampung Cina' for the Chinese, 'Kampung Malaya' for the Malays, 'Kampung Dadi' for the Japanese and Timorese—as well as various other districts, like the aforementioned Kampung Maluku.⁴⁴ These socio-spatial denominations mirror the conventions that underwrote distinctions of social hierarchy circumscribed by class and ethnicity in the northern Australian townships that had 'Chinatowns' and 'Japtowns'.

Mau Ke Mana? (Where Are You Going?)

In view of the extended contact between Aboriginal people and Macassans, it is little wonder that Aboriginal men addressed the European explorers who came to the northern coast in the nineteenth century in a form of Malay. Alfred Searcy, who became sub-collector of customs at Port Darwin in 1882, made many references to this peculiar display of bilingualism.⁴⁵

40 Macknight 1976.

41 Macknight 1976.

42 Thomas 2013: 69–94.

43 Berndt and Berndt 1954: 56.

44 Macknight 1976: *passim*.

45 Searcy 1907: 46.

Yolngu languages are also deeply infused with words and expressions of South-East Asian origin.⁴⁶ The typical greeting used by children who ask ‘where are you going?’ (‘*mau ke mana?*’) has been observed in Indonesia and northern Australia.⁴⁷

According to some linguists, Macassan pidgin extended over the northern coast of Australia from the 1750s to the 1940s.⁴⁸ When Father Angelo Confalonieri was at Port Essington (1846–49), much of the vocabulary he collected had Malay roots. Linguist Nicholas Evans used this and other sources to examine Macassan loan words at Cobourg Peninsula and found that the Iwaidja language was the ‘linguistic equivalent of a well-stratified archaeological language site’.⁴⁹ Evans identified four distinct layers of linguistic adaptation; however, because they could not be dated from linguistic analysis alone, he called them early and late adaptations of Malay loan words. Confalonieri’s records clearly indicated that such linguistic mutations had occurred by the 1840s, and Evans concluded that the older layer of adaptations must have occurred before the split between Mawng and Iwaidja languages, over a millenium ago. This conclusion explodes the historic framework of contact provided by historical records and rock art analysis, which dates first contact at around the 1750s.⁵⁰

Equally surprising is Edward Robinson’s account of meeting an Aboriginal man in 1875 at Blue Mud Bay who had been to Singapore and spoke ‘passable English’.⁵¹ Robinson had been to Macassar to recruit divers for a pearling venture and was quite familiar with its traffic; however, Aboriginal visitors to Singapore were still unexpected, even to him. There are many indications of contact yet to be discovered. The butcher paper drawings produced in 1947 by Mawulan Marika for Ronald and Catherine Berndt are one example; guarded by cultural protocols in the Berndt Museum of Anthropology in Perth, they are practically inaccessible for research.⁵² Mawulan rendered 43 specialised expressions in relation to work on the Macassan boats, including 15 terms for parts of the ship, 14 terms relating to food and cooking, and six relating to firearms.

46 Bilous 2013.

47 Zorc 1986; Walker and Zorc 1981; Evans 1992.

48 Wurm, Mühlhäusler and Tryon 1996.

49 Evans 1997.

50 Both Macknight (2013) and Taçon (2013) hold to this timeline.

51 Cited in Macknight 1981.

52 I have attempted to access some of the drawings authored by ‘Mawulan’ in the Berndt Museum both in person and by written application and am still waiting for access four years later.

One of them is transcribed as 'gwula' (syrup), which clearly relates to the Indonesian 'gula' (sugar). Presumably, Mawulan was demonstrating his transcultural competency by supplying the specialised terms they used in the trade language.⁵³

While Yolngu have been forthcoming with stories about their Macassan contact, elsewhere the memory of that contact has been 'turned in'.⁵⁴ This 'turning in' of prior Muslim contact may owe something to the arrival of Christian missionaries soon after the prohibition of the Macassan trepang fishery in northern Australia.

Tiwi and Macassans

The first port of call when drifting below the trade winds from Timor towards Marege (the 'wild country' at the top end of Australia) would have been the Tiwi Islands. The white buffalo shooter Joe Cooper, and his Iwaidja wife, lived at Melville Island for about 20 years at the turn of

53 The terms given by Mawulan are annotated by Ronald Berndt:

1. Macassan boat. 2. Anchor, balanga. 3. Anchor rope, mundju. 4. The front prow, that is number one bag. 18. Number two rice, second grade rice, garung, which simply means a bag. 19. Baladji, the lilly-grass bag. The rice is kept in that. It is made out of the fibre and the leaves of the lilly grass. 20. Rice in the bamboo, wadji, the sweet liquid rice, a sort of honeyed rice. 21. Coconuts. 22. Banyalanda, a rope attaching a string of coconuts. 23. The pots, budjung, for drinking. 24. Two bottles, budalu, 'beer'. It is just a derivation of 'bottle'. 25. A window, djrindnga. 26. Two compasses, baduman. 27. The wall between. 28. The rudder, the gwuli. 29. The end of the boat, bugu. 30. The wheel for steering, gindjarang. 31. For rolling sail, bamyulu. 32. Gawa, pot. 33. A jug, sharing Wondjug's mother's name. They could not call it because his mother died a couple of months before and it was too early to call it, so I will have to look up her name, earlier on, as I have not got it noted here. 34. Bodalu, or garumbal, a jar made out of sand and ant-bed termite mound. 35. Badali, rifle. Note the rope joined to the trigger. (a) is the trigger, and up to (b) the hammer and the banda (c). The flintlock with tinder of coconut fibre is (d), and (e) is the powder. 36. A rifle, wanguaru. That is the same kind of rifle but wanguaru is its inside name, it is a special singing name, and rumbringu which is also a singing name, as well as djinabang. (a) is the rope for the trigger, (b) is the connection to the hammer, (c) is the pan with a stone and tinder, as above. 37. Yimbari, an iron bucket. There is hard syrup in it, gwula. 38. Budjung, water. 39. A pot on stilts containing a wari pot. It is made out of ant-bed termite mound. 40. A double-barrelled badali, rifle, shoot you, same principles as the other. 41. Coloured plates, bani, with lambang design. 42. Boxes, badi, with gunpowder inside. 43. Trepang pots, malara, for trepang and rice cooking. 44. Boxes made out of wood for tobacco, badi, with darabu marks. These are cloud marks (there are other marks too, that look as if they are pretend writing letters). Darabu is the local name for the different kinds of markings, they are really clouds in the normal Aboriginal point of view. 45. Gawa, pot for rice cooking. 46. Garandji, made out of armband tree. It is a cane tray woven from this armband tree. 47. A glass bottle, with firewater in it, that is wine or spirits.

Mawulan's drawing on butcher paper, June 1947, Berndt collection Nr. 7246, University of Western Australia, Berndt Museum of Anthropology.

54 McIntosh 2011: Chapter 17.

the twentieth century (c. 1894–1916). As a local Protector of Aborigines, Cooper had frequent contact with the Macassans who called him ‘Djon’ (Joe) and his wife ‘Daeng Te’ne’, a Macassan alias meaning ‘the lovely one’. Despite these indications of familiarity, the predominant contact narrative between Tiwi and the Macassans in the late nineteenth century is one of conflict on both sides: stealing canoes, attacking and kidnapping.⁵⁵ Only five years after the Macassan traffic was stopped, a Catholic mission opened at Bathurst Island. This probably helped to silence allusions to earlier Muslim contact, for Tiwi people have not been as forthcoming as Elcho Islanders with stories of contact.

Early anthropological accounts assumed that Tiwi had been an isolated people, and Tiwi oral history makes little reference to culture contact, though one Tiwi story recalls the prayer that Macassan shipwreck survivors sent to heaven when at the mercy of Turupla people on the Tiwi Islands—‘oh el-la, oh el-la sama ratana oh el-la, oh el-la’—which sounded like an appeal to Allah.⁵⁶ According to John Morris, the visiting Macassans learned some basic Tiwi words such as ‘pongki’, used as a greeting of peace.⁵⁷ Some of the same cultural markers observed at Elcho Island are also present on the Tiwi Islands. In the 1920s, anthropologist Charles Hart observed that the Tiwi had a ceremonial language that was not used in everyday interactions; Elcho Islanders say that their ceremonial language is a form of Malay.⁵⁸ The Tiwi shifted from bark canoes to dug-out canoes, something which the Elcho Islanders say they adopted from the Macassans (and call ‘lipa-lipa’). The distinctive morning star poles at Elcho Island, used in important ceremonies for death and mourning, have been described as reminiscent of lugger masts—an allusion to the departing Macassan fleet at the end of the season.⁵⁹ No such esoteric explanation has been given for the equally distinctive Pukumani grave poles on the Tiwi Islands.

There is also evidence to suggest that family connections may have existed between the Tiwi people and the Macassans. Spillett recorded a story about a woman who went to live in Macassar, and Morris recorded a story about the son of a Tiwi woman who was born there and returned

55 Crawford 1969: 208.

56 Spillett 1989: 10.

57 Morris [c. 1960].

58 Interview with Terry Yumbulul, Galiwin’ku, June 1995; see also Hart 1930.

59 Interview with Terry Yumbulul, Galiwin’ku, June 1995; see also McIntosh 1994.

to settle at Cobourg Peninsula.⁶⁰ Neither story insists that there are Tiwi people with Macassan ancestry; however, they do suggest the bearings of familial connection. Hart visited the Tiwi Islands in the 1920s and thought its residents had long been 'extremely isolated', so much so that distinctive cultural and genetic characteristics could be observed; the Tiwi were 'taller, sturdier, and better proportioned' than people on the mainland. Hart also found them highly assimilated, 'more adaptable to white conditions' and, therefore, much sought after as 'houseboys' in Darwin. He noted that the islands had a high population density, that landowning was remarkably fluid and that the Tiwi had not suffered decimation as a result of introduced diseases.⁶¹ However, contrary to Hart's opinion, rather than a long period of isolation, each of these factors suggests that Tiwi people experienced intensive contact with Malays. Mixed marriages tend to increase disease resistance and further stretch the rules of land ownership to make room for new relationships; moreover, as the Europeans had a greater predilection for the cultural and physical markers of Malay populations, they would have found mixed descendants 'better proportioned' and 'more adaptable'.

Distinctive cultural markers are generally an indication of extraneous cultural influences rather than of isolation.⁶² The material traces of Portuguese or Timorese foreigners on the Kimberley coast⁶³ sit well with scattered, early European observations about Tiwi. While in Timor in 1840, George Windsor Earl commented that the Tiwi Islands had been 'a major reservoir of slaves for Portuguese slave traders'. Alfred Searcy mentioned in the 1880s that the Macassans referred to the Tiwi as 'amba', or slaves, and Phillip Parker King in 1818 heard a Tiwi woman call out 'ven aca, ven aca', Portuguese for 'come here'. However, any such pre-colonial links that the Tiwi may have had with foreigners from the Malay Archipelago cannot really emerge unless (and until) the Tiwi people themselves and their anthropologists embrace the possibility of such histories.

60 Morris [c. 1960]; Spillett 1989: 10.

61 Hart 1930.

62 McNeill 1986.

63 Crawford 1969: 277.

Kayu Jawa: The North-East Coast of Australia

In the Kimberley there is even less tangible evidence of contact, although the Kimberley coast clearly once belonged to the trade routes of the Macassans who called it 'Kayu Jawa'. In stark contrast to Yolngu remembrances of the Macassan contact history, in the Kimberley, as on the Tiwi Islands, conflict dominates most recollections of relations. In April 1803, Flinders' competitor Nicholas Baudin on *Le Geographe* encountered Macassan fishers at Cassini Island ready to head home; they warned him that the local Aboriginal people could be aggressive.⁶⁴ Phillip Parker King in 1818 also encountered Macassans on the Kimberley Coast and was similarly warned of Aboriginal people's hostility.⁶⁵ J.J. Vosmaer observed in 1839 that the Macassan trepang camps in Kayu Jawa were fortified with earthworks, while Robert Sholl, who visited Camden Harbour (between King Sound and Admiralty Gulf) in 1865, found that the Macassans were afraid of Aboriginal people after being attacked the previous year.⁶⁶

Tamarind trees are normally an environmental indicator of former trepang camps in northern Australia, but the investigation of such sites along the north-west coast has not yielded any substantiation of cultural contact.⁶⁷ Searcy found old tamarind trees between the Daly River and Port Keats in the 1880s, but uncovered no other evidence of contact. Further south-west along the coast, the Benedictine monks found strands of tamarind trees in Napier Broome Bay when they were setting up the Drysdale River Mission in 1908. The Balanggarra people of that area were reputed to be fierce, even among the Bardi and Yawuru people, so that Father Nicholas Emo had trouble recruiting guides from Sunday Island to steer through the treacherous waters of Napier Broome Bay, which had long been avoided by the pearlers.⁶⁸ The tamarind trees on the Kimberley coast had vanished when Ian Crawford conducted archaeological work at the site dubbed Tamarinda in the 1960s. Crawford, who found no substantiation

64 Ganter 2006: 48.

65 Phillip Parker King carried letters of safe conduct in Malay and Javanese supplied by Sir Thomas Raffles, but the Macassans, who used Bugis or Lontara script, could not read either of those scripts. Thomas 2013; Ganter 2006: 48.

66 J.J. Vosmaer 1839, 'Korte beschrijving van het Z.O. Shiereiland van Celebes' and R.J. Sholl, 1865, *Journal*, cited in Crawford 1969: 103ff.

67 Searcy 1907: 189.

68 Ganter, 'Fr. Nicholas Emo', in *German Missionaries in Queensland*, missionaries.griffith.edu.au.

of contact in local mythologies, concluded that the Macassans stayed on the Kimberley for short periods, often shifted their camps and focused mainly on the offshore reefs. He believed the Macassans abandoned the Kayu Jawa coast between the 1880s and 1900,⁶⁹ as this was the period when Australian and British skippers began to fish for trepang, travelling along the same routes and using the same crews as the Macassans operating out of Timor had done.⁷⁰

The possibility of contact between Indigenous people from the Kimberley region and Macassan traders has been subject to debate and conjecture shaped by different theoretical and academic perspectives. Preconceived theories about Indigenous people produced particular interpretations of the linguistic and artistic signposts. To identify traces of South-East Asian influence in the Kimberley languages would require a methodology similar to that applied by Nicholas Evans to the work of Father Angelo Confalonieri at Port Essington.

The earliest sustained language work in the Kimberley was conducted by Spanish and French Trappist missionaries. Their research was continued by German Pallottine fathers, including the eminent Bantu linguist Dr Hermann Nekes and his disciple Father Ernst Worms. Worms was committed to the *Kulturkreis* (cultural circles) theory promoted by the journal *Anthropos*. Its editor, Pater Wilhelm Schmidt, a Steyler missionary from the Austrian Society of the Divine Word, had produced a structure of the language families of the world, with particular emphasis on Australian languages.⁷¹ Owing to his intellectual allegiance to Schmidt, Worms consistently discounted a South-East Asian influence in the cultural repertoires of the Kimberley that had been suggested by Charles Mountford, Daniel Davidson and Ronald Berndt.⁷²

Worms looked for linguistic and cultural influences from outside the Kimberley, but only within the parameters of the Australian continental migrations compatible with Schmidt's work. He used superficial similarities between words from different Australian languages to construct

69 Crawford 1969: 287, 290, 107.

70 Ganter 2006: 48.

71 Schmidt 1919.

72 Berndt (1951) was writing about Arnhem Land and did not comment on extraneous influences in the Kimberley, but Worms (1952) identified the terms associated with the Kunapipi cultural complex as also existing in the Kimberley, and found them so deeply rooted in Aboriginal words that they 'must be endogenous'. See also Mountford 1937; Davidson 1947; Worms 1953.

historical connections. Had he been familiar with Sanskrit and Malay, he would surely have noticed the remarkable similarity of some of the terms he discussed, such as between the mythical eagle 'garidja' that brought the fire to the Bardi, 'garuda', the mythical humanoid bird in Buddhist and Hindu mythology, and the word for 'eagle' in Indonesian.⁷³ Worms also observed that male initiation involved the teaching of a ceremonial language composed of 'obsolete or foreign words for everyday objects'.⁷⁴ Among its stages he listed the grades of 'orong ganyano' and 'bungana',⁷⁵ words that strongly resemble 'bunggawa', the title of a respected leader in Macassar, and 'orang', the Indonesian word for 'man'. Such terms are hints of grander connections that remain unexplored under the weight of the idea that Australia was an 'isolated continent' prior to British colonisation.

The Kimberley–Pilbara region has two widely divergent but characteristic styles of rock art, the wandjina and gwion gwion (Bradshaw figures). Both have, at times, been ascribed to Malay influence. In 1939, Arthur Capell suggested that the wandjina had come 'from the direction of Timor' and Charles Mountford believed that the gwion gwion style had been learned from Malay pearl and trepang fishers.⁷⁶ Worms reported that the 'Gwini' people who lived nearest to the drawings had little interest in them, failed to maintain their appearance, vandalised many of them by painting over them and ascribed them to a different kind of people they called 'giro-giro'.⁷⁷ However, as noted, Worms discounted any suggestion of a South-East Asian influence. At that time, a similar debate was emerging over cultural disconnection from ancient art and the possibility of waves of migration on Easter Island (Rapa Nui). This was due to the much publicised work of Norwegian ethnographer, Thor Heyerdahl, who

73 Worms 1950b.

74 Worms 1950a.

75 These words were supplied by a Karajarri man from Cape Bossut whose name is given as Made in 1938. Later Worms referred to Gonbal Molade and Gundal Muladi as a main informant who told 25 legends to Nekes and died at about age 70 just before the 1949 publication. Worms 1938, 1940, 1949.

76 Worms 1942; Capell 1939: 391, 389, 403, 390, 403. In 1909, the Trappist Father Nicholas Emo recorded the striking giro-giro (Bradshaw figures, or gwion gwion) at Drysdale River. Emo produced an album of 40 colour drawings taken from 24 caves, most of which were only high enough to lie in. He feared that the ornithologist Gerald Hill, who was visiting the mission at the time (since 14 November 1909), would take credit for the drawings. According to Nailon, Emo's album was deposited in the New Norcia archives. Nailon 2005: 135. Presumably this is the same album as that held by the South Australian Museum in the name of Hill.

77 Following the arrival of Europeans, these sites were used to hide tjuringa imported from the Northern Territory and the Great Sandy Desert. Worms (1955) picked up an unfinished stone axe and working chips from this site.

received an Oscar for his 1951 *Kon Tiki* documentary detailing a Pacific voyage by traditional raft.⁷⁸ In that debate, too, the effect of missionaries on Easter Island since 1864 was left out of possible explanations.

Reconnecting

Much remains to be discovered about pre-colonial contact between northern Australia and South-East Asia. The mutual visits that have resumed in the last three decades may help to rediscover connections. Perhaps they will also lead to the discovery of more adoptions of Aboriginal customs in the Malay Archipelago, a much neglected question. For example, the Macassan fire dance looked to the Yolngu visitors like a scene from their own initiation ceremony, a similarity also noticed when theatre director Andrish Saint-Clare screened footage of Yolngu dances in Macassar in 1994.⁷⁹ Evans, while looking for Malay loan words in Iwaidja, also found Iwaidja loan words in Macassar.⁸⁰ On the Indonesian side, there has been renewed interest in rediscovering and celebrating connections. Australian research on pre-British Muslim connections has been frequently mentioned in the Indonesian press and on social media.⁸¹ In 1997, Hari Jadi Gowa (Macassar Foundation Day) included a trepang opera with actors from Arnhem Land and Sulawesi. In 2011, a multidisciplinary group of students from Hasanuddin University in South Sulawesi undertook a 41-day sailing journey from Macassar to Australia, visiting the traditional recruiting areas on the way.⁸²

Aboriginal people have been as surprised as researchers about the cultural affinities discovered in Sulawesi. Laklak Burarrwanga, who was shown 'a wishing stone' where the Macassans once prayed for the north-easterly

78 Heyerdahl 1990, 1958, 1961.

79 Interview with Peter Danaja of the Sunrize Band, June 1995, and Andrish Saint-Clare, pers. comm., July 2001, referring to his video screening of Yolngu dances in Macassar in 1994.

80 Evans 1997.

81 'Australia: Orang Indonesia Awali Kedatangan Islam', *Faith Freedom*, 14 January 2008; 'Orang Indonesia Awali Kedatangan Islam di Australia', *Muslim Daily Net*, 22 April 2008; 'Islam di Amerika dan Australia jauh Sebelum kedatangan Eropa', *My Quran*, 19 June 2008; 'Diperlakukan Diskriminatif, Ilmuwan Muslim Tuntut Pemerintah AS', *Dunia Pendidikan Anak Islami*, 29 June 2008; 'Orang Indonesia Awali Kedatangan Islam di Australia' *Berita Islam—Wahana Dakwah Islamiyah*, 23 March 2009; 'Orang Indonesia Awali Kedatangan Islam di Australia dan Afrika Selatan' *Syahali*, 8 September 2010; 'Orang Indonesia Awali Kedatangan Islam di Australia' (abstract), *Berita Pilihan*, February 2012; 'Orang Indonesia Awali Kedatangan Islam di Australia', *Zilzaal*, 22 February 2012.

82 Guswan Gunawan, 'Ekspedisi Pelayaran Akademis Korpala Unhas x 264' www.youtube.com/watch?v=AViiD82z8V0

wind, found 'all the poles and flags similar to home'.⁸³ (Flag dances in Arnhem Land are normally a reference to Macassans.) Ethnomusicologist Peter Toner detected traces of classical Arabic religious music in the Manikay song cycle genre of Yolngu songs.⁸⁴ While touring Sulawesi with a Maningrida dance troupe to perform an extended ceremony in 1993, Maningrida artist John Bulunbulun acquired an ancient ceramic storage pot that looked exactly the same as the ones he had been taught to paint, sight unseen.⁸⁵ This storage pot became one of the first objects housed in the Djomi Museum, one of the earliest local museums dedicated to Macassan contact. Bulunbulun subsequently produced a series of 25 paintings depicting Macassan references in the Yirrtitja song cycle, including one created for the Darwin airport.⁸⁶ Bulunbulun revealed that his clan totem, 'lunggurrma' (north wind), is a symbol of the arrival of the Macassans at the beginning of the monsoon season.

The memories that had been 'turned in' are slowly being brought out again. This process is attended on both sides—Australia and Indonesia—by politics. On the Indonesian side, the initial interest in contact history came from a nationalist history written by a former governor of Sulawesi in 1967.⁸⁷ More recently, the interest has lain in demonstrating the early spread of Muslim influence and its harmonious accommodation with Indigenous people in Australia. In Arnhem Land in 1957, Burrumarra disclosed the meanings of the flag 'rranga' as a symbol of 'adjustment' in the expected lead-up to a treaty to acknowledge and safeguard Indigenous land rights. On the contrary, in the 1990s, debates over the possible extraneous origins of the gwion gwion art in the Kimberley were effectively silenced over concerns that they may impact on native title.⁸⁸ Perhaps the Kimberley and Pilbara are still awaiting the Indigenous diplomats who will 'bring out' the hidden meanings of the past to advance a cause in the present. In any event, Marcia Langton has warned that a racialised conception of Aboriginality is unnecessary, untenable and unhelpful, and will not advance the Aboriginal cause.⁸⁹

83 Laklak Burarrwanga 2012 'Memories of my Makassan family', paper presented to Macassan History and Heritage conference, 8–9 February 2012, The Australian National University, cited in Thomas 2013.

84 Toner 2000: 22, 33–34.

85 Garde 1993.

86 Bulunbulun also collaborated with the Chinese painter Zhou Xiaoping to explore cultural affinities. Xiaoping 2006.

87 Patunru 1983 [1967].

88 Australian Archaeological Association 1996: 59.

89 Langton 2012.

Clearly, much of the contact has been forgotten or erased. Rock images of praus have been drawn over by more recent images or have disappeared under the onslaught of development; some, perhaps, have naturally withered away.⁹⁰ Father Worms commented in 1954 that the rock art galleries at Port Hedland on the limestone ridges from the town to the tidal creeks had already been partly destroyed by quarry works, buildings and the 'ubiquitous initial carvers', despite protection as a state reserve. Worms sought to achieve 'protection of the sites under UNESCO listing of historical monuments', but the world heritage list was still a new instrument and its cultural heritage at that time focused on buildings. Only since 2003 has Purnululu National Park been inscribed on the world heritage list; the Kimberley rock art achieved national heritage status in 2011. The Macassan sites in North Australia are protected under the *Northern Territory Heritage Act 2012*, but no such protection exists for sites of Australian heritage significance in Sulawesi, such as the buildings constructed with valuable 'keramat' ironwood. Paul Thomas suggested that the old trade route from Macassar to Marege is a site of significant international heritage and should be formally listed alongside other 'cultural routes'.⁹¹

The contact zone has, at times, spanned across a much larger stretch of the northern coastline than has been recovered from Indigenous sources, including stories, art, language and archaeological evidence. In the early nineteenth century, the Macassan trepang fishery ranged from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the Kimberley, and there are some indications that this particular industrial-scale fishery was preceded by other forms of contact, not focused on trepang. In north Queensland, too, the Torres Strait remains a bridge of communication with Papua, though now closely monitored by customs officers. A rupture of Indigenous international communication was brought about with British sovereignty, the outlawing of the Macassan fishery and the confinement of Aboriginal people on designated parcels of land. Indigenous people have broken out of this enforced isolation by visiting Macassar, participating in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (since the 1980s) and many other cultural

90 The beeswax image dated by Taçon and May (2013) is superimposed on the image of a prau. Worms (1954) described the destruction of much of the rock art galleries at Port Hedland as a result of the town's expansion; according to Petri (1954) the rock paintings described by Sir George Grey at Prince Regent River in 1838 have never been found.

91 Thomas 2013.

connections.⁹² Politics of diplomacy are usually at play in the construction and disclosure of such histories, but what is already known about the Macassan contact history undermines the idea of an isolated continent and the untenable notion of a once pure race of isolated people.

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92 Many of these transnational connections are canvassed in Carey and Lydon 2014.

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