Strangers on the Shore

Early coastal contacts in Australia

Edited by Peter Veth, Peter Sutton and Margo Neale
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Rupert Gerritsen
Chair
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1. Introduction and themes

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Europeans were not the first strangers to visit the shores of what is now Australia, but they were the first to leave a record and a chart of where they did so. These were Dutch-speaking sailors and traders who sailed to Cape York Peninsula under Willem Janszoon in 1606 from their base at Batavia, now known as Jakarta in modern Indonesia. This is the date that acted as a catalyst for the conference Strangers on the Shore held at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra in 2006, on the 400th anniversary of this important and ambivalent moment in history. This book contains papers from that conference as well as some that have been written specially.

The conference aimed to provide a series of reflections on the dynamics of first contact between outsiders and First Australians. Our first objective was to include an Indigenous storyline into the 400-year commemoration. It seemed equally important to disentangle homogenized versions of first contact which either embraced glorified versions of European discovery and conquering of a native land populated by acquisitive peoples or — as equally fallacious — narratives of unrelenting resistance to intruders by armed Aboriginesustained on beachheads. As the Berkeley-based anthropologist Kent Lightfoot (2005:284) recently noted on the legacy of colonial encounters on the California frontiers: California offers a tremendous opportunity for examining how native arrangements with missionary and mercantile colonies produced a diverse range of multicultural experiences that reverberate among Indigenous populations to this day. [emphasis ours]
9. Harvesting the memory

Open beaches in Makassar and Arnhem Land

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In twenty-first century Australia, the story of the Makassar-based trepang industry along the Arnhem Land and the Kimberley coasts during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should come as no surprise. Trepang (sea slugs or hēce-de-nor) were gathered, processed and sold for eventual consumption as an expensive ingredient in Chinese cuisine. The existence of the industry has long been known, even with recourse only to English-language sources. In 1769, Alexander Dalrymple published the information that traders from South Sulawesi, whom he called generically Bugis, had penetrated to New Holland on the south, and he notes that they describe New Holland as yet unvisited, and the native, who are Mahometans, to be well inclined to commerce (Dalrymple 1769:83). A Dalrymple manuscript, with essentially the same information and dated to 1763, is held in the British Library (Ian Caldwell, pers. comm.). In 1792 Thomas Forrest was rather better informed, probably most significantly by the captain of a local trading vessel at Redah whom he had met 10 years before. He still refers to the Bugis and gold, but specifically mentions the trepang industry, thinks the Gulf of Carpentaria is the likely area for the activity, makes the link with the annual Chinese junk exporting the trepang to Macao and, by the time of publication, can even hazard a guess that there will be contact with the newly established colony of New South Wales (Forrest 1792:83). This contact came to pass, and in the early nineteenth century Flinders and Bass had provided accounts of direct observation. They were followed by many others throughout the century. Macknight (1976) provides a detailed discussion of these sources relating to the conduct of the industry itself.

This well-defined industry, carried on by praus from Makassar and based on the collection and processing of trepang (even if other products played a minor role), came to an end when the last praus returned from the Arnhem Land coast in early 1907. The situation on the
Kimberley coast has always been more complex, both in regard to the products collected and
the home ports of the vessels involved. There have also been varied and sporadic visits to this
coast throughout the twentieth century. Crawford (2001) and Morwood and Hobbs (1997)
are recent treatments of the Western Australian material. This chapter, however, is concerned
solely with the Makassar-based industry in Arnhem Land and immediately adjacent areas —
for, of course, trepang continues to be collected and consumed in many parts of the world.

Most nineteenth-century observers of the industry in Arnhem Land noticed the interaction
between the trepangers and local Aboriginal groups, though their accounts of the consequences
of this usually reflect their own interests and concerns. Then, in the 1920s, less than 20 years
after the end of the industry, various scholarly fieldworkers began to trace the effects, as they
observed them in the field, of contact with the trepangers in the several Aboriginal societies
involved. Tindale, Jennison and Warner were the first, and in the 1940s and 1950s they were
followed by others, notably Ronald and Catherine Berndt, Worsley, Rose, Thomson, McCarthy
and Mountford. Cense and Heeren provided perceptive comments on these accounts from
their knowledge of the trepangers' background. When, in the early 1960s, Mulvaney began to
interest himself in the contact, it was initially with the aim of tracing change in the Aboriginal
past (Mulvaney 1966). Macknight (1972) exhaustively reviews the literature on this question
of the interaction between the trepangers and Aboriginal people, and the effects of the
interaction on both sides, as these matters were understood at that time.

Since the 1970s, the subject of the industry itself and more particularly the effects of
the trepangers on Aboriginal societies and cultures have continued to attract attention from
many sides. Various matters have been studied in detail, and some refinements introduced to
previous understandings. Macknight (1986) surveys work done up to the mid-1980s, but more
has been done since. For example, Pegras (2000) has explored the patron–client relationship in
South Sulawesi societies that is hinted at in many other sources on the industry. Similarly,
we can assume that Ammarell's account (1999) of navigational knowledge and practice in a closely
comparable context gives us a good idea of the skills of prau captains coming to Arnhem Land.
There has been much research on the details of the praus themselves, especially in relation to
the design and construction of the replica, *Hati Mage* . Rock art pictures of praus have even
provided useful information (Burningham 1987, 1988, 1994, 2000).

More thorough study and publication of previously known sources have yielded fresh
details, such as the mention of a trepanging captain with leprosy in Collet Barker's journal
from 1829 (Mulvaney & Green 1992:159). Barker also confirms many Makasar placenames
for the Australian coast. In a 1839 document from the Port Essington settlement, there is also
the earliest unequivocal reference to Aboriginal people themselves manufacturing dug-out
canoes (Cameron 1999:55). I am now persuaded that a photograph, taken by Paul Foelsche at
the settlement site in Port Essington on 26 March 1875, shows 'Malays' from Makassar who
Kimberley coast has always been more complex, both in regard to the products collected and the home ports of the vessels involved. There have also been varied and sporadic visits to this coast throughout the twentieth century. Crawford (2002) and Morwood and Hobbs (1997) are recent treatments of the Western Australian material. This chapter, however, is concerned solely with the Makassar-based industry in Arnhem Land and immediately adjacent areas — for, of course, trepang continues to be collected and consumed in many parts of the world.

Most nineteenth-century observers of the industry in Arnhem Land noticed the interaction between the trepangers and local Aboriginal groups, though their accounts of the consequences of this usually reflect their own interests and concerns. Thus, in the 1920s, less than 20 years after the end of the industry, various scholarly fieldworkers began to trace the effects, as they observed them in the field, of contact with the trepangers in the several Aboriginal societies involved. Thindale, Jennings and Warner were the first, and in the 1940s and 1950s they were followed by others, notably Ronald and Catharine Birdsell, Worsley, Ross, Thomson, McCarthy and Mountford. Cense and Hooen provided perceptive comments on these accounts from their knowledge of the trepangers’ background. When, in the early 1960s, Mulvaney began to interest himself in the contact, it was initially with the aim of tracing change in the Aboriginal past (Mulvaney 1966). Macknight (1972) exhaustively reviews the literature on this question of the interaction between the trepangers and Aboriginal people, and the effects of the interaction on both sides, as these matters were understood at that time.

Since the 1970s, the subject of the industry itself and more particularly the effects of the trepangers on Aboriginal societies and cultures has continued to attract attention from many sides. Various matters have been studied in detail, and some refinements introduced to previous understanding. Macknight (1980) surveys work done up to the mid-1980s, but much has been done since. For example, Pelsers (2000) has explored the patron-client relationship in South Sumbawa societies that is hinted at in many other sources on the industry. Similarly, we can assume that Anjumani’s account (1999) of navigational knowledge and practice in a closely comparable context gives us a good idea of the skills of the trepangers coming to Arnhem Land. There has been much research on the details of the trepang industry, especially in relation to the design and construction of the scuppers, the use of art pictures of trepang and many other matters. Efforts to provide useful information (Burby 1987, 1988, 1994, 2000).

More thorough study and publication of previously known sources have yielded fresh details, such as the mention of a trepang capital with trepang in Collet Barker’s journal from 1829 (Mulvaney & Green 1992:159). Barker also confirms many Makassar placenames for the Australian coast. In a 1859 document from the Port Essington settlement, there is also an earliest unequivocal reference to Aboriginal people themselves manufacturing dug-out canoes (Cameron 1899:55). I am now persuaded that a photograph, taken by Paul Pieloch at the settlement site in Port Essington on 26 March 1879, shows ‘Malays’ from Makassar who had come to visit Sinclair and Robinson’s trepang operation there (Figure 9.1). Even with expert advice from these visitors, the business collapsed (Macknight 1972:102, 290, 251; Northern Territory Times, 24 April 1879).

The archaeological evidence of the industry continues to attract attention. As discussed below, Anna Clarke has worked on Groote Eylandt, as well as later in Blue Mud Bay, and Scott Mitchell on the Cobourg Peninsula. Still, artefacts occasionally turn up, but it is often difficult to show that they relate to the visits of trepangers from Makassar. A welcome development has been the interest in conserving sites, especially the stone picture site near Yirrkala and possibly some preparation sites. Richard Baker’s unpublished survey in the Sir Edward Pellew Group of islands significantly extended the range of known sites. In relation to the actual operation of the industry, however, this new archaeological evidence has consistently confirmed the earlier picture.

Research with Aboriginal communities has, by contrast, filled out understanding of the effects of contact with the trepangers in important ways. Walker and Zoc (1981) offers a thorough survey of language borrowing in one area and demonstrates the value of systematic work.
Evans (1992, 1997) takes this up more broadly and suggests that some words were borrowed earlier than others. An intriguing, if tragic, case is the likely derivation from a trepanger ancestor of the hereditary Machado-Joseph disease in four families on Groote Eylandt (Burt et al. 1993). No one has done more than the late Peter Spillett to enliven the memory of the contact between Aboriginal groups and trepangers, especially through his work in tracing family connections at both ends. His papers and many unpublished reports will continue to provide useful data. Building in part on the basis laid by Spillett, there have now been many visits in both directions, some of which are discussed further below. The personal impact of such visiting is evident in Michael Cooke's account (1987) of taking 10 students from Batchelor College to Makassar in 1986.

Four new insights are of major significance; the first two relate to the industry itself and the others to its effect in Australia. The most important is new confidence about when the industry began. Knaap and Sutherland's study of the extraordinarily detailed trade data for Makassar in the eighteenth century makes it clear that, in their words (2004:101), in the 1720s 'the trepang trade in Makassar was still in its infancy'. By 1754, we hear that the Australian coast was 'made now and then from Timor and Makassar, but produces so far [as] we know nothing but trepang ... and wax' (Macknight 1976:95, following Leupe 1868:206–7). The first trepanging voyages to Australia must lie somewhere between those dates. As we have seen above, Dallymple independently confirms knowledge of the Australian coast: among South Sulawesi seamen less than a decade after the latter date. It is not knowledge of the coast that matters, however, and one can show that a good outline of the Australian coast had been available to indigenous authorities in Makassar since the 1650s (Keuning 1933). The point on which Knaap and Sutherland's work is so precise and helpful is that it gives the earliest date for any significant trepanging in the whole area of eastern Indonesia. Any claim for trepanging in Australian waters before 1720, at the very earliest, is now unsustainable, though this is a matter to which we will return below.

As Macknight (1986:69–70) explains, the eighteenth-century sources do not give a reliable indication of the ultimate source of the trepang being brought to Makassar for sale. It is the steady growth in the trepang trade, which by the 1780s had become substantial, that, together with the comments already mentioned, suggests the Australian coast. As Knaap and Sutherland (2004:101) observe, 'it seems as if in the course of the century it came necessary to seek trepang in ever more distant fishing grounds'. It is worth noting, however, that, among the eighteenth-century comments, only Forrest suggests the Arnhem Land coast and his information is late and not based on direct observation. Given that the 1754 comment arose from a report by the Dutch representative in Kupang, one could suggest that it is more likely to refer to contact with the Kimberley coast than further east. The incident that gave rise to the comment was not contact with 'the large sand-plate beyond Rotti', but rather the coast further south (Macknight
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Evans (1957, 1967) takes this up more broadly and suggests that some words were borrowed earlier than others. An intriguing, if tragic, case is the likely derivation from a treponemal ancestor of the hereditary Maligna-Joseph disease in four families on Granite Island (Burr et al. 1993). No one has done more than the late Peter Spillett to examine the memory of the contact between Aboriginal groups and treponemal, especially through his work in tracing family connections at both ends. His papers and many unpublished reports will continue to provide useful data. Building in part on the basis laid by Spillett, there have now been many visits in both directions, some of which are discussed further below. The personal impact of such visiting is evident in Michael Cooke's account (1967) of taking 10 students from Batchelor College to Makassar in 1986.

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It is a pity he did not specify whether 'the coast of New Holland' he meant the Arnhem Land coast of which he had such recent experience or the Western Australian coast which he knows only from Dutch charting.

In the light of this evidence (and somewhat at variance with my earlier view), I am not now so ready to dismiss Pabassao's comments when he met Flinders in February 1803 that he was 'one of the first who came' to the Arnhem Land coast (Flinders 1814:2:251), or in Robert Brown's even more direct version, apparently written at the meeting itself, that Pabassao 'had been employed in this trade for 20 years [and] according to himself was the first person sent from Macassar to this service' (quoted in Macknight 1976:162, n.19). Granted that the industry began elsewhere in eastern Indonesia early in the eighteenth century and that there was activity somewhere on the Australian coast by the middle of the century, there is no evidence from any reliable source to suggest that Pabassao's information was accurate.

The second new insight is the context of the whole trepang industry in island south-east Asia in the expanding economic power of eighteenth-century China. This boom applied both to internal trade (Rowe 1998) and, of direct relevance here, to trade and other contacts with south-east Asia (Blussé 1989). The possibility of trade with China was in the minds of many concerned with the European settlement of Australia (Ganter 2001). While I long ago wrote some effort to place the trepang industry, which has always been focused on Makassar, in the context of supplying China (Macknight 1976:6–8), much new information is now available. Thus, for example, Knaap and Sutherland (2004:148, 166) show that the trepang export from Makassar to Amoy roughly doubled in both volume and value between the 1770s and the 1780s, though still making up over 70 per cent of the total value of exports to Amoy.
The annual average trepang export to Amoy in the 1780s was 6000 pikuls, worth 147,000 t'ien dollars. The demand these figures imply helps to explain the extension of the area being harvested to Arnhem Land, as suggested above.

Some rather less reliable figures suggest that the demand continued into the early nineteenth century. Flinders’ information implies a catch from Arnhem Land alone of 6000 pikuls in 1803 (Flinders 1814:2:230–1). In 1824, Governor-General van der Capellen (1855:375) reports that the trepang export from Makassar to China was worth about 350,000 gilders, still about 88 per cent of the value in the 1780s. By the 1840s the trade had fallen away considerably. A newly discovered source in the Jakarta archives gives detailed information on Makassar’s trade from 1840 to 1842. In 1842, for example, 43 vessels with a total capacity of 445.5 lasten (893 tons) brought trepang worth 31,907 gilders from Marege, but this was only 47 per cent of the value of the total trepang imported. The total trepang export worth 114,867.50 gilders was still the largest item of export, comprising nearly 15 per cent of the value of total exports, but this was worth only about 29 per cent of the figure from the 1780s (ANRI Mak. 354.3, 4, 5). (See also Macknight 1976 for other statistics on the industry.)

The third new insight concerns the effect of the contact between trepangers and Aboriginal groups. There is now no serious doubt that the several smallpox epidemics that affected Aboriginal Australia between the 1780s and the 1870s arose from inadvertent introduction of the infection through contacts with the Indonesian archipelago. While there is still room for debate as to the scale of death and disruption, even at a minimal estimate this must rate as the most significant and far-reaching effect of the contact (Campbell 2002).

The fourth insight, or issue, also concerns Aboriginal society; in accounting for observed changes, there has been considerable debate on the question of agency. With some very elegant archaeology, Mitchell (1994, 1995, 1996) has demonstrated changes in Aboriginal economy, technology and settlement patterns, particularly on the Cobourg Peninsula, as a consequence of the trepangers’ presence. Clarke (1994, 2000) has also addressed similar issues on Groote Eylandt. While Mitchell does not address the matter of agency directly — though his detail makes it clear that he assumes Aboriginal agency — Clarke (2000:333) is explicit in her wish to assign agency to Aboriginal groups. She seeks to give due weight to ‘indigenous agency in the processes of cultural change in the recent past’. It is, therefore, somewhat poignant that she insists on the possibility of an impossibly early date for the beginning of the trepang industry, a later date actually gives greater credit to indigenous adaptability to reach the level of influence about which there is general agreement.

The question of agency arises also in Tony Swain’s attempt to link the Mother cult of northern Australia with Bugis and Toraja models. It is important to appreciate the subtlety of Swain’s argument (1993:181):
The annual average trenggong export to Amoy in the 1780s was 6,000 pikul, worth 147,000 rix-dollars. The demand these figures imply helps to explain the extension of the area being harvested to Arnhem Land, as suggested above.

Some rather less reliable figures suggest that the demand continued into the early nineteenth century. Smith's information implies a catch from Arnhem Land alone of 6,000 pikul in 1802 (Flinders 1814:2:230–3). In 1804, Governor-General van der Capellen (1855:375) reports that the trenggong export from Makassar to China was worth about 350,000 guilders, still about 88 per cent of the value in the 1780s. By the 1840s the trade had fallen away considerably. A newly discovered source in the Jakarta archives gives detailed information on Makassar's trade from 1849 to 1842. In 1842, for example, 43 vessels with a total capacity of 446.56 tons (890 tons) brought trenggong worth 31,097 guilders from Maroeg, but this was only 47 per cent of the value of the total trenggong imported. The total trenggong export worth 114,867.50 guilders was still the largest item of export, comprising nearly 15 per cent of the value of total exports, but this was worth only about 25 per cent of the figure from the 1780s (AHRI Mak. 304, 4, 5). (See also Macknight 1976 for other statistics on the industry.)

The third new insight concerns the effect of the contact between trenggong and Aboriginal groups. There is now no serious doubt that the smallpox epidemics that affected Aboriginal Australia between the 1780s and the 1870s arose from inadvertent introduction of the infection through contacts with the Indonesian archipelago. While there is still room for debate as to the scale of death and disruption, even at a minimal estimate this must rate as the most significant and far-reaching effect of the contact (Campbell 2002).

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The question of agency arises also in Tony Swain’s attempt to link the ‘Mother cult’ of northern Australia with Bugis and Toraja models. It is important to appreciate the subtlety of Swain’s argument (1999:181):

I see no evidence suggesting a wholesale adoption of the rituals of Sulawesi. The ceremonies are indeed authentically ‘Aboriginal’. Nonetheless this does not obviate the possibility that something in the visitors’ beliefs and practices ignited a fire of ceremonial creativity in this region. My view is that the Makassans’ ‘Mother’ explained much about this agricultural people’s relationship to land and it was precisely for this reason that Aborigines sought to incorporate it into their own order.

The problem with this argument is that Swain actually has no relevant evidence at all on the ‘beliefs and practices’ of the trenggong either in Australia or at home in Makassar and its environs — other than some well-curated Islam, of course. In the reality of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sulawesi, it is quite a long way from the Bugis Sanggani Serri (KooLoo of 1399:373–4; Pulice 1874:358–60) to the Makassan’s ‘Mother’ — whatever that might mean — and still further from the mountains of the Toraja. What Swain does seem to think necessary, however, to ignite ‘a fire of ceremonial creativity’ in Aboriginal society is some external influence and this is consistently argued throughout the book.

An even stranger case of assumed agency is presented in the work of Noel Butlin, especially his book Our Original Aggression (1992). Butlin is determined to prove that the smallpox epidemics that affected Aboriginal people in south-east Australia (in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) were the result of infection from European sources, even in the face of overwhelming contradictory evidence. As mentioned above, the trenggong were the very probable source of the widespread epidemics. The insistence that all agency must remain European, which is encapsulated in the title of his book, seems to be related to a need to assign blame. This position then has consequences in contemporary cultural politics.

As suggested at the outset of this chapter, the existence of the trenggong industry in northern Australia and some of its effects on Aboriginal societies have long been known, at least to those who cared to look. Let us now turn to a wider review of these purposes of those who have looked at the industry and its effects over recent decades. How have the memory of the trenggong industry and its awareness of the industry’s consequences been made to serve particular interests? There is, of course, nothing wrong or unusual about such political use of the past; history is always in someone’s interest at some level. It is convenient to distinguish these areas within which these interests have been expressed: the national, the regional and the Aboriginal.

In modern Australia, there is an understandable — and welcome — desire to expand the scope of the nation’s history beyond the narrative of British settlement and the development of that society in its many aspects. Reference to the trenggong industry meets that desire in several ways: it was essentially non-British; it was Asian, with specific links to Indonesia and
China; it involved Aboriginal people; it was carried on in areas remote from modern cities, even by the standards of northern Australia; and it appears to predate Captain Cook — though, as suggested above, this may not be the case in respect of Arnhem Land. The contemporary enthusiasm for this approach is very evident in Stephenson’s juxtaposition of examples of interaction between diverse groups throughout Australia’s history and the memory of such relationships. Stephenson (2007) devotes considerable attention to the trepangers and gives further detail on some of the material discussed below. Many instances of such concern can be found over recent decades. Take, for example, Allan Baillie’s well-researched novel for young people, Songman (1994), that tells the story of a boy and his uncle from eastern Arnhem Land who visit Makassar in the last phase of the industry. This excellent attempt to enlarge the popular imagination meets almost all the concerns mentioned above. Greeves (2005), to whom I am indebted for drawing my attention to Songman and other material, provides a good example of the interest the subject provokes among students. Most journalists focus on the trepangers’ connection with Aboriginal society as, for instance, in Souter’s (1987) well-informed, but hypothetical, musings on the effects of more prolonged contact. Another common book is Islam; in a feature article in the Weekend Australian on Islam in modern Australia, the trepangers and camel men of the Centre are trotted out to give historical depth (Brown 2000). There is a very common tendency to push back the origins of the industry, usually with phrases that clearly remove the matter from British settlement and its consequences. For example, a current caption in the National Museum of Australia tells visitors, under the heading ‘cultural exchange’, that:

Macassans (that is, trepangers) have visited north-eastern Arnhem Land over the last 400 years. The Yolngu have adopted many Macassan words, ideas and skills. Macassan influence is also apparent in Yolngu ceremonies and art. Today, some Yolngu have both Aboriginal and Macassan ancestry.

Regina Ganter has provided much scholarly weight to this wider view of Australian history. In the opening sentences of her recent book, which begins with a section on the trepang industry, she picks up many of these themes (2006:1):

This book approaches Australian history from the north, where it properly begins. Long before any British interest in Australia, its northern shores were enmeshed in a trading network that linked it to China.

In Indonesia too, there has been occasional mention of the industry at a national level. In 1983, a prominent Jakarta news magazine published a long insert rather alarmingly entitled ‘Koloni Makassar di Benua Selatan [Makasar colony in the southern continent]’ (Tempo 1983).
China; it involved Aboriginal people; it was carried on in areas remote from modern cities, even by the standards of northern Australia; and it appears to predate Captain Cook — though, as suggested above, this may not be the case in respect of Arnhem Land. The contemporary enthusiasm for this approach is very evident in Stephensons's juxtaposition of examples of interaction between diverse groups throughout Australia's history and the memory of such relationships. Stephensons (2007) devotes considerable attention to the trepangers and gives further detail on some of the material discussed below. Many instances of such concern can be found over recent decades. Take, for example, Allan Baillie's well-researched novel for young people, Songman (1994), that tells the story of a boy and his uncle from eastern Arnhem Land who visit Makassar in the last phase of the industry. This excellent attempt to enlarge the popular imagination meets almost all the concerns mentioned above. Groves (2005), to whom I am indebted for drawing my attention to Songman and other material, provides a good example of the interest the subject provokes among students. Most journalists focus on the trepangers' connection with Aboriginal society as, for instance, in Souter's (1987) well-informed, but hypothetical, writings on the effects of more prolonged contact. Another common book is Islam, in a feature article in the Weekend Australian on Islam in modern Australia, the trepangers and carved men of the Centre are treated out to give historical depth (Brown 2000). There is a very common tendency to push back the origins of the industry, usually with phrases that clearly matter the removal from British settlement and its consequences. For example, a current caption in the National Museum of Australia tells visitors, under the heading 'natural exchange', that:

Makassan (that is, trepanger) have visited north-eastern Arnhem Land over the last 400 years. The Yolngu have adopted many Makassan words, ideas and skills. Makassan influence is also apparent in Yolngu ceremonies and art. Today, some Yolngu have both Aboriginal and Makassan ancestry.

Regina Ganter has provided much scholarly weight to this wider view of Australian history. In the opening sentences of her recent book, which begins with a section on the trepang industry, she picks up many of these themes (2006:1):

This book approaches Australian history from the north, where it properly begins. Long before any British interest in Australia, its northern shores were enmeshed in a trading network that linked it to China.

In Indonesia too, there has been occasional mention of the industry at a national level. In 1983, a prominent Jakarta news magazine published a long insert rather alarmingly entitled 'Kolonial Makassar di Senus Selatan (Makassar colony in the southern continent)' (Tempo 1983).

The text and illustrations were drawn almost exclusively from Macknight (1976) and there was no suggestion of permanent settlement.

Interest at the regional level on both sides has been more sustained. Much of this has been directed to the creation and maintenance of regional identity. This is most obvious in the task of showing that north Australia has a distinctive history. The Northern Territory Department of Education has, over the years, put out teaching resources materials to provide the context for this claim in Territory schools. Among much else, I note a set of slides, a cassette and cards dealing exclusively with 'The Makassans' (NT Department of Education 1985). An even better example, not least because of its irony, was the Australian Biennial project to build, sell and preserve the High Range, a replica ship now a key exhibit in the boat collection of the Northern Territory Museum and Art Gallery (Barrington 1986). Whatever the level of awareness in the rest of Australia, knowledge of the trepang industry and its effects is now pervasive in Darwin and especially in Aboriginal communities around the Arnhem Land coast. For example, the term 'tobana' for any non-Aboriginal person, derived through the Makassar from the Dutch 'hollander', is now widely used throughout the Top End. The story of the industry is seen as part of local distinctiveness.

There are even a few examples of the memory of the industry being used to support local identity in South Sulawesi where, of course, its existence is well known to scholars and historians. At least that is the interpretation I put on the map at the back of the standard local history of the state of Gorontalo, which is the indigenous state around the city of Makassar (Abdurrahman 1967). This shows the power of Gorontalo extending to various parts of the Indonesian archipelago in the course of the first half of the seventeenth century; the Top End of the Northern Territory is included with a date of c1640 in the first edition of the work in 1967, but is removed in the second edition of 1983. A more soundly based version of the power of Gorontalo in the 1600s is now available elsewhere (Sutherland 2004:44). A display on the industry currently features in the excellent Museum Kota Makassar (Makassar City Museum), with much material being supplied through contacts with Australian colleagues.

The theme of regional identity is expressed particularly through the rhetoric of a special linkage between north Australia and South Sulawesi, or at least eastern Indonesia more generally. The concept of an Aparacel region has had some attention in political circles in Darwin, where it fits with the politics of the Northern Territory government's capacity for independent action. Such initiatives are well received in a era of regional autonomy in Indonesia. The intellectual potential of the concept is well explored in the collection of papers on material culture edited by Fredericksen and Walters (2003).

A more elaborate — and very particular — expression of this general relationship can be seen in Anvdrih St Clair's Top project, an opera-style theatrical event built around a story of relations between the trepangers and Aboriginal people. Performers from both
The Figure 9.2 was suppressed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 9.2. A scene from the opera Tjangi, as performed in Senggigi, West Nusa, in November 1997. The young girl défends her lover, Gecus, against her outraged father. (Photograph by Andi Yanto)

backgrounds were integral to the work, which was seen both in Darwin and South Sulawesi in 1997 (Figure 9.2). In terms of judging local interest in the theme of regional connection through memorialisng history, the performances in Sulawesi attracted rather more notice from the local press and official support than Australia could provide.

A comparable artistic link, but less precisely focused on the tjangi industry, was evident at the 2005 Garma Festival. Dr Haji Luthf and the famous drummer, Abdul Mune Dareng Malo, led a group of musicians and dancers from Makassar to north Australia where they were invited to perform as a re-affirmation of the past relationship (Figure 9.3). This assertion of cultural values on both sides needs also to be seen in the context of the international links between ethnomusicologists: Professor R. Anderson Sutton (2002), with his experience in Makassar, and Professor Alan Marrett and Dr Aaron Carm from the University of Sydney, with their Australian experience. The visit raises various questions. To what extent can the memory of a long-past contact serve as the peg on which to hang an ongoing relationship? In what ways were the performances of the visitors from Makassar understood at Garka in north-east Arnhem Land, where the memory of previous contacts is very clear and strong, and
Figure 9.2: A scene from the opera *Tjangi*, performed in Wagga Wagga, South Australia, in November 1997. The "Mungo girl" Anesha's first performance occurred in Cakebread. Photograph by Andrew St Clair

in Darwin, where the links are far more general. Was there any sense, especially among the visiting performers, that the very specific cultural forms from South Sulawesi related somehow to a wider regional context, or was this, ultimately, a display of cultural distance?

This regional linkage is pushed to a suggestive extreme in the recent Moon exhibition mounted in both the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra and the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2006, and in its magnificent catalogue (Bennett 2005). Groote Eylandt bark paintings and carvings from Yirrkala are included as art created in a Muslim context, however attenuated. The result, if one accepts the premise, is to link north Australia with the wider Islamic world of south-east Asia through the mediation of the tamangan. This may be pushing the argument to the limit, or even beyond, but what is striking — in this most self-conscious display of national cultural politics — is its acceptability to a contemporary Australian audience.

The third arena in which the memory of the tamangan industry has been put to use is Aboriginal cultural politics. The former presence of the visiting tamangan from Makassar in north Australia provokes, for Aboriginal thinkers, comparison and contrast with other settlers,
particularly Europeans. Many ethnographers through the twentieth century suspected an element of idealization in the accounts they heard from their Aboriginal informants of relations between the trepangers and local people. Worsley, for example, working in the early 1960s on Groote Eylandt, believed that he could detect a systematic difference between his information and the accounts of hostile relations collected by Tindale in the same area in the early 1920s (Worsley 1964:11–12). What they add here is not the reality of relations before 1907, but the subsequent memory of that contact. Indeed, there are some recent instances of quite deliberate gilding of the memory, even if only in tiny details. For example, any mention of alcohol is carefully omitted among the items introduced by the trepangers in a school text produced recently at Yirrkala (Yirrkala Community School n.d.).

There are also interests in claiming some degree of conflict. Denise Russell (2004:13) makes a case that 'in some places Aborigines did assert a right to exclude Makassan fishers'. This assertion can then be used to support sea rights claims. Whatever the justice or success of such claims, which have been tested both in the Croker Island area and in Blue Mud Bay, the cases underscore the salience of the former trepangles in the historical memory of people in these areas.

The most complex expression of this memory is to be found in the stories from north-east Arnhem Land of *katiri*, reported initially by Mooney and the Berndts in the 1940s. Most fortunately, Ronald Berndt was able, before he died, to prepare transcriptions and annotations for all the original field recordings of the *katiri* song-cycle, so that in due course we can expect the full publication of these precious texts (Owen Stanton, pers. comm.). Meanwhile, Ian McIntosh has written extensively on the topic, especially as developed in the thought of David Burrarrarrar. This is a most remarkable and moving body of material. What McIntosh brings out so well is the cultural logic of the stories, that is, the stories explain relations between Aboriginal people and others (see McIntosh 1994, 1995, 1997; and see other publications cited in these papers). As for the origins and historicity of the *katiri* stories, I continue to see them as a re-working of Aboriginal observations on visits to Makassar and, in particular, a shift in the spatial association of the information from Sulawesi or some trepanging context to particular sites in Arnhem Land (Blacknight 1972:313, 1976:52).

It may just be a function of where research has been done, or perhaps of other developments in the area, but a tendency that would be worth watching for in the future is the emphasis on the experience of the Yolngu of north-eastern Arnhem Land as evident in some of the material discussed above. The contact with the trepangers was shared along a much more extensive stretch of the coast; can the memory of this be used as a means of drawing different groups together or does the calibration of contact by Yolngu exclude others from the memory?

Finally, one might ask what I have got out of the memory, or the story, of the trepangers from Makassar with which I have been concerned for over 40 years. Most obviously, it was a
particularly Europeans. Many ethnographers through the twentieth century suspected an element of idealization in the accounts they heard from their Aboriginal informants of relations between the trepangers and local people. Worsley, for example, working in the early 1950s on Groote Eylandt, believed that he could detect a systematic difference between his information and the accounts of hostile relations collected by Tindale in the same area in the early 1950s (Worsley 1954:11–12). What is at issue here is not the reality of relations before 1707, but the subsequent memory of that contact. Indeed, there are some recent instances of quite deliberate gilding of the memory, even if only in tiny details. For example, any mention of alcohol is carefully omitted among the items introduced by the trepangers in a school text produced, recently at Yarrkala (Yirrkala Community School n.d.).

There are also interests in claiming some degree of conflict. Denise Russell (2006:15) makes a case that 'in some places Aboriginals did assert a right to exclude Makassan fishers'. This assertion can then be used to support sea rights claims. Whatever the justice or success of such claims, which have been tested both in the Croker Island area and in Blue Mud Bay, the cases underscore the salience of the former trepangers in the historical memory of people in these areas.

The most complex expression of this memory is to be found in the stories from north-east Arnhem Land of birthing, reported initially by Mountford and the Bernhards in the 1940s. Most unfortunately, Ronald Berndt was able, before he died, to prepare transcriptions and annotations for all the original field recordings of the 'abiri song cycle, so that in due course we can expect the full publication of these precious texts (Udo Stanton, pers. comm.). Meanwhile, Ian McIntosh has written extensively on the topic, especially as developed in the thought of David Burden. This is a remarkable and moving body of material. What McIntosh brings out so well is the cultural logic of the stories, that is, the stories explain relations between Aboriginal people and others (see McIntosh 1994, 1995, 1997; see also other publications cited in these papers). As for the origin and historicity of the birthing stories, I continue to see them as a re-working of Aboriginal observations on visits to Makassar and, in particular, a shift in the spatial association of the information from Salaw努 to some trepanging context to particular sites in Arnhem Land (Meadowl 1972:313, 1976:92).

It may just be a function of where research has been done, or perhaps of other developments in the area, but a tendency that would be worth watching for in the future is the emphasis on the experience of the Yolngu of north-eastern Arnhem Land as evident in some of the material discussed above. The contact with the trepangers was shared along a much more extensive stretch of the coast, can the memory of this be used as a means of drawing different groups together or does the celebration of contact by Yolngu exclude others from the memory?

Finally, one might ask what I have got out of the memory, or the story, of the trepangers from Makassar with which I have been concerned for over 40 years. Most obviously, it was a topic for research well suited to my skills and training, and the resultant publications have, I presume, contributed to my academic prestige. More than once, I have visited the graves of the last entrepreneurs of the last century, Puddu Daeng Tompo, in a lane off Jilian Sozha Opu in Makassar, to pay my respects. But this hints at something deeper.

I am proud to be a product of that 'older' Australian society created in the south during the course of the nineteenth century. I have benefited from its institutions and support many of its values. The study of the trepanging industry, however, led me to walk the beaches of Arnhem Land and to listen carefully to its people, then I came to the streets of Makassar and learnt something of the history of that society. These new realms of imagining lie beyond the intellectual and cultural compass of my forebears, but find an easy place in the outlook of the Australia that is coming into being. I have been carried — and have tried to carry others with me — from that older, more circumscribed view of the world to broader sympathies with human experience.

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