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Indigenous Australians and Muslims

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INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS AND MUSLIMS: A HISTORY OF MICRO AND MESO DIALOGUE PRIOR TO THE 20TH CENTURY

David Sneddon*

Note: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware this article may contain the names of people who are deceased.

Abstract: For many years, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had a long history of contact with the regions to the north of Australia. This preceded European contact by many years and led to fruitful dialogue and levels of social cohesion between Muslims from the Macassan and Malay region and the Indigenous people of Arnhem Land and beyond. The area of contact was widespread, encompassing around 3,000km of Australia's northern coastline. Initial contact was most likely with the people known as the Baijini, referred to as "followers of Allah," followed by the Macassans. This article has two fundamental arguments concerning the nature and level of dialogue between Muslims and Indigenous Australians prior to the 20th century. First, there are established links that dialogue occurred in this era, as is evident by the linguistic traces, syncretic absorption of rituals and beliefs, and transference of technology. Second, while the primary objective of the interaction and dialogue was trade focussed, some of the Baijini and Macassans used this contact and trade as a vehicle for *da'wah* (proselytising or invitation to Islam). The syncretic nature of this dialogue has left a lasting legacy with many Indigenous peoples in Arnhem Land, including ceremonies and rituals reflecting concepts or ideas from Islam and other Macassan beliefs. Ultimately, this long-term dialogue declined following the ban of Macassan trepang fleets in 1906, however, the legacy remains to this day.

Keywords: *Islam, Dreaming, Indigenous Australia, dialogue, Macassans, Baijini*

INTRODUCTION

This paper builds on initial research¹ into dialogue and pre-colonial Indigenous Australia to show the true depth of dialogue surrounding contact between the Muslim communities of

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¹ David Sneddon, "The Early History of Micro and Meso Dialogue between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Australia," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 3 (2018).

Macassar, the Malaysian Archipelago and others with the Indigenous Australian nations of Arnhem Land. There are several theories as to how Islam arrived in the Indonesian Archipelago; however, between the 9th and 16th centuries, most of the area, including sailors, explorers and traders from the region, converted to Islam, often under the influence of Sufism.²

The seas to the north of Arnhem Land are surrounded by a range of communities, including the early Indonesians, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea and the islands of the Torres Straits, all of whom have some commonality, often through the maritime nature of their communities and lifestyles. This commonality and close regional proximity meant contact and interaction was probably inevitable at some time in history. The fact contemporary Indigenous memories focus on the Macassans and Bajini highlights the importance of this contact and ensuing multi-level dialogue.

Over the last 40 years, a significant body of work has developed around these pre-colonial contacts with a focus on the trepang trade period that occurred in the Arnhem Land region of the Northern Territory. Much of the past research is in the academic domain; however, recent documentaries, books and cultural exchanges have provided additional primary sources from descendants of Indigenous Australians as well as the Macassans and Malays. Many of these studies have been anthropological in nature and, while discussing the nature and influence of the contact, the issue of the differing sociological levels of inter-religious dialogue has not been the driving reason behind the research. These sociological levels or groupings begin with the individual, usually referred to as the micro level, including families or small groups. As interactions develop, they proceed through a middle or meso stage, often involving community relationships. Once interactions have become developed, they can shift to the macro, national or global level.³

This article has two fundamental arguments concerning the nature and level of dialogue between Muslims and Indigenous Australians prior to the 20th century. First, there are previously established links that micro and meso level dialogue occurred in this era, as is evident by the linguistic traces, syncretic absorption of rituals and beliefs, and transference of technology. Second, while the primary objective of the interaction and dialogue was trade focussed, some of the Bajini and Macassans used this contact and trade as a vehicle for *da'wah* (proselytising or invitation to Islam).⁴ Given the role of traders and Sufis in the Islamisation of the Indonesian archipelago and Malay peninsula, this hypothesis may be plausible. However, evidence seems to show this was not the primary aim of their contact and needs further research to be verified.

2 For a complete discussion, see Carool Kersten, *A History of Islam in Indonesia: Unity in Diversity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

3 See Hubert M. Blalock, *Social Statistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 169-75.

4 Oxford Islamic Studies Online, s.v. "Dawah," accessed November 19, 2019, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/opr/t125/e511>.

THE EARLY CONTACTS AND DIALOGUE

Islam has had a presence in Australia that precedes colonialism. The history of this contact recently been the subject of volumes of research and suitably documented. Australia's indigenous people have inhabited the continent for somewhere in the vicinity of 60-70,000 years and contact between the northern groups and sailors from South East Asia and beyond would have probably existed over that period. There are reports of early contact in the 15th century with the Chinese fleet of Admiral Zheng He in 1491; however, given the records of his explorations were destroyed, this is a difficult claim to prove.⁵ McCarthy's claims were not a recent finding. In 1953, C. P. Fitzgerald discussed the possibility of early Chinese contact based on the discovery of "a jade image of the god Shou Lao discovered in Darwin during 1879."⁶ While Fitzgerald was cautious about linking the archaeological find to a confirmed period of contact, it raises the issue of Northern Australia's proximity to Asia and the fact a range of seafaring cultures from the north could not have ignored or missed the 'Great South Land' during their expeditions. The discovery during World War II of "five copper coins from the once prominent Swahili port of Kilwa in modern-day Tanzania"⁷ in Arnhem Land, dated as being "between 700 and 900 years old,"⁸ may also add some weight to earlier exploration, contact and dialogue, although timing and provenance has not been definitively established. Given similar coins have been found in Oman, this may also support suggestions that Muslim sailors from Oman may have explored the northern coast of Australia "as early as the 8th century," based on an interpretation of maps compiled by al-Khwarizmi in 820.⁹ Others claim this contact occurred in the 10th century.¹⁰ If this was the case, then there may be an argument for an extra-long contact model that involves an Islamic presence and dialogue in Australia for a far longer period than previously thought. All these claims will also need further research and evidence to completely establish the veracity and validity of any extra-long contact model. Regardless, there is evidence of a people known as the Baijini,¹¹ who seem to have brought Islam to Australia sometime in our distant past.

The Baijini

While much of our knowledge about early interactions concerning Islam revolves around the Macassans, there is some evidence of contact between another group of the "followers of Allah."¹² This may have predated or possibly occurred concurrently with the later visits by the Macassans. Worsley states, "the aborigines are quite categorical in their statements that the

5 Mack McCarthy, "Zheng He and the Great Southland" (paper presented at The Zheng He, down West Ocean, Chinese Overseas Discussion Forum, Fuzhou, China, 2005), 388-401.

6 Peter M. Worsley, "Early Asian Contacts with Australia," *Past & Present* 7 (1955): 1.

7 Ian S. McIntosh, "The Ancient African Coins of Arnhem Land," *Australasian Science* May (2014): 20.

8 Ibid.

9 Dzavid Haveric, *History of Islam and Muslims in Australia: Early Encounters, Settlements and Communities Prior to the 1940's* (Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2019), 10.

10 M. Ali Kettani, *Muslim Minorities in the World Today* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1986), 216.

11 Also referred to as Baiini or Bayini.

12 Ian S. McIntosh, *Between Two Worlds: Essays in Honour of the Visionary Aboriginal Elder, David Burrumarra* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2015), 101.

Macassarese were preceded another people they term the Baijini.”¹³ When talking with McIntosh about the Baijini, Yolŋu elder David Burrumarra (d. 1994) stated,

“Don’t call him a Macassan,” Burrumarra would request, for such talk immediately conjured up an image of trepangers from the latter stages of the industry when relationships had deteriorated to the point where violence was regrettably commonplace and each lived separate lives along the same coast. “He was a Yolngu. A king. A godly figure.” He was Yirritja and the living embodiment of the Dreaming Macassan.¹⁴

This emphasises the Indigenous people’s view that the Baijini were different from the later Macassans.¹⁵ There are references to their “light-coloured skin”¹⁶ and a range of “advanced technology,” such as iron forging, handlooms, agriculture and construction techniques.¹⁷ Oral histories from the region known as Dholtji (Cape Wilberforce) in north-east Arnhem Land describe large communities engaged in iron making and agriculture, visits by men in armour and, importantly for this research, discussion of “Allah, a sky-dwelling entity living high in the clouds over Cape Wilberforce and in the red clouds of the sunset.”¹⁸ McIntosh states “whilst there is some overlap in meaning between the Aboriginal Allah and the Allah of the Islamic world, the two are seen to be quite separate.”¹⁹

The dances associated with this being appear to be of Indonesian origin, as do the words of the songs, but Walitha’walitha is an Aboriginal creational entity associated with particular territories on the Australian mainland, and has always been there, consultants say. Belief in Walitha’walitha is not seen to be the same as belief in the religion of the Other. Walitha’walitha and Wurramu represent bodies of belief shared by different peoples, but the perspective of Aborigines is for Aborigines alone.²⁰

McIntosh also highlights the lack of consensus about the origins of the Baijini people. In his article exploring the artwork of the region and depictions of the Baijini he states

...speculation on the identity of the Bayini is rife. Some writers say they were Macassan, Sama-Bajau or sea nomads (Berndt 1965: 5), while others suggest they were Gudjeratis from India (Halls 1965: 4), Chinese (Levathes 1994; Worsley 1955: 2), Dutch, or even Portuguese (Mountford 1956-64: 334). In one extreme case, they were considered to be voyagers from the moon and were brought to the attention of the science fiction writer Von Daniken (E. Saffi pers. comm. 1993). It is fair to say that this question represents one of the longer standing puzzles of northern Australian history and anthropology (Capell 1965: 68).²¹

¹³ Worsley, “Early Asian Contacts with Australia,” 1-2.

¹⁴ Ian S. McIntosh, “A Treaty with the Macassans? Burrumarra and the Dholtji Ideal,” *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (2006): 146.

¹⁵ Worsley, “Early Asian Contacts with Australia,” 1-2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Ian S. McIntosh, “Pre-Macassans at Dholtji? Exploring One of North-East Arnhem Land’s Great Conundrums,” in *Strangers on the Shore: Early Coastal Contacts in Australia*, ed. Peter Veth, Peter Sutton and Margo Neale (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2008), 146.

¹⁹ Ian S. McIntosh, “Allah and the Spirit of the Dead the Hidden Legacy of Pre-Colonial Indonesian/ Aboriginal Contact in North-East Arnhem Land,” *Australian Folklore* 11 (1996): 137.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Ian S. McIntosh, “Who Are the Bayini?,” *The Beagle, Records of the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory* 12 (1995): 193.

Regardless of worldviews, what the research to date seems to show is that some form of pre-Macassan micro and meso dialogue occurred and one could posit, if they were Muslims, it may have instigated the early syncretic absorption of elements of Islamic beliefs and practices into the local Dreaming. As to whether this happened prior to the Macassan voyages or is solely the influence of the later Macassan trepang fishermen is an issue that may (or may not) be discovered with further studies and research.

Given historical evidence is mostly limited to a range of oral histories, much of the pre-Macassan contact may be viewed as contestable, given our modern insistence on documentation and evidence over oral history; however, for Indigenous peoples, this is not an issue. It is, and was, their means of accepted historiography and, for them, forms a significant part of their heritage. McIntosh highlights the fact that stories collected by W. Lloyd Warner (1920s)²², Ronald and Catherine Berndt (1940s)²³ and Charles Mountford (1950s)²⁴ correlate with those told to McIntosh by Indigenous elder David Burrumarra in 1994.²⁵ He also points to the fact the pre-Macassans left no record of trepang fishing in the stories, something that differentiates them from the later arrivals.²⁶

Berndt and Berndt's earlier investigations summarised that,

Just who these people were is not definitely known; some versions tend to suggest that the 'Baijini were of European origin, but an analysis of relevant mythology, expressed in songs, strongly implies that they were traders from the west, possibly early Malaysians. Native informants emphatically state that these 'Baijini were not Macassan, as they had lighter skin, "the golden copper color of the flying fox," being a comparison used constantly for them in the songs.²⁷

At this distance and with scant clear records, an accurate picture is difficult to construct. The evidence at this stage appears to point to a group of explorers, possibly over four waves,²⁸ having some sort of connection with the north of Australia before the Macassans. McIntosh also contends that,

...the actions of Macassans and possibly other voyagers to the Australian coast have become the basis of a sacred law relevant in contemporary Aboriginal dealings with non-Aborigines. From this perspective, I suggest that the search for a single group by the name Baijini, is misplaced. More important is it to ask, why do some people use this category, while others do not?²⁹

22 W. Lloyd Warner, "Malay Influence on the Aboriginal Cultures of North-Eastern Arnhem Land," *Oceania* 2, no. 4 (1932).

23 R. M. Berndt and C. H. Berndt, "Secular Figures of Northeast Arnhem Land," *American Anthropologist* 51, no. 2 (1949).

24 C. P. Mountford, *Records of the American – Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land: Volume One, Art, Myth, and Symbolism* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1956-1964).

25 McIntosh, "Pre-Macassans at Dholtji?," 147.

26 Ibid.

27 Berndt and Berndt, "Secular Figures of Northeast Arnhem Land," 219.

28 McIntosh, "Who Are the Baijini?," 194.

29 Ibid.

As discussed above, just who these people were is still an issue of conjecture. “Some versions imply that they were possibly of European origin, but most of the relevant mythology suggests that they were early traders from the East Indies.”³⁰ Regardless, they seem to have initiated positive micro and meso-level dialogue at a very early stage.

This relationship has been represented in contemporary times by the late Yolŋu musician Dr G. Yunupingu in his song “Bayini,” released in 2011.

The words in the song refer to many families sitting together on the beach looking to waves and sea, the horizon, contemplating. Long ago from over the horizon, the Bayini came to Yolngu country.³¹

Having been written hundreds of years after the interactions, Yunupingu’s lyrics symbolise the strength of the dialogue that formed positive relationships, as well as the long memory of fruitful interaction involving the Indigenous peoples of Arnhem Land and the people we have come to call the Baijini. Although of minor historical significance, the lyrics and meaning in the song demonstrate a long memory of the dialogue, as well as a yearning for and respect towards the Baijini. As to whether they came from Indonesia, were travellers from further afield or part of the spiritual Dreaming world, again this is an area of research that is yet to be confirmed from the contemporary historiographical perspective.

Indigenous protocols require that visitors wait at the boundary to gain access to the territory of others. Somehow, the pre-Macassans negotiated this barrier to establish dialogue. Again, regardless as to whether the Baijini were Macassans, Malays, Europeans or part of the various Middle Eastern caliphates or sultanates, this early pre-Macassan dialogue would have necessarily commenced at the micro-level, with small groups of sailors negotiating these protocols in order to rest, recuperate, trade or inhabit. If McIntosh’s discussion with Burrumarra are correct, and these pre-Macassan visitors were Muslims or “followers of Allah,”³² this may represent one of the initial connections and early dialogue between Islam and Indigenous Australians.

If the oral tradition of “hundreds of houses stretching along the Cape [with] vibrant settlements where Yolgnu and Balanda men practise iron-making”³³ has any historical support, the dialogue developed to a meso-level. Additionally, if the term Balanda is an accurate representation, it may be that these people were in fact from the other side of the world. Whoever they were, over time, they apparently negotiated protocols to allow visitation rights to the various Indigenous nations’ lands and resources.

Taking the definition of macro-level dialogue as “national,” it is possible the early contacts and interactions that occurred with various Indigenous people of Arnhem Land may represent the highest level of social interaction at the time or possibly since. According to McIntosh, this

³⁰ R. M. Berndt and C. H. Berndt, *Arnhem Land: Its History and Its People* (Melbourne, Vic.: Chesire, 1954), 34.

³¹ Music News, “Gurrumul to Release ‘Bayini’ Featuring Sarah Blasko,” accessed September 1, 2019, <https://www.music-news.com/news/UK/51804/Read>.

³² McIntosh, *Between Two Worlds*, 101.

³³ McIntosh, “Pre-Macassans at Dholtji?,” 145.

pre-Macassan dialogue represented a “high water mark” in terms of coexistence.³⁴ This pre-Macassan period is best demonstrated by Burrumarra, who told Ian Macintosh that the,

message of the past was wrapped within a vision of partnership called “membership and remembrance,” by which he meant the peaceful coexistence of “blacks” in a “white” world and “whites” in a “black” world. When each party respected and honoured that which was most sacred to the other, and recognised that strength lay in unity, we have a mental image of what Dholtji represented in the Warramiri worldview.³⁵

This respect, coexistence and peaceful dialogue seemed to flow over to the following Macassan period during the initial stages; however, by the time of Mathew Flinders’ voyage in 1802, it appears relationships may have sunk below previous peaceful levels, effectively dissolving the positive micro and meso levels of dialogue.

DIALOGUE WITH THE MACASSANS, MALAYS AND OTHERS

Regardless of the existence of any pre-Macassan Muslim contact, what has been established is, before the commencement of the colony of New South Wales in 1788, relationships and dialogue existed between Muslim Macassan fishermen³⁶ and the Yolŋu peoples, one of the many Indigenous nations of North-Eastern Arnhem land. Australia’s Indigenous peoples have strict protocols surrounding access to country, often treating uninvited strangers as trespassers and liable to summary justice.³⁷ Ian McIntosh raises the prospect that a treaty was in place and Macassans may have “perhaps only briefly, at the very beginning of the trade, at places like Dholtji...live(d) according to the principles of Aboriginal law.”³⁸ The starting date for this contact has been debated, but general consensus appears to indicate a favourable trading relationship was established sometime between the 1720s and 1740s,³⁹ with the first European reports of the Australian trepang trade being recorded in 1754 in Batavia.⁴⁰

At no stage did the Macassan, or other groups such as the Malays or Bugis ever make serious land grabs in Arnhem Land. The regional micro and meso level dialogue seems to have been peaceful and mutually beneficial, as indicated by the long period of historical connections and interactions outlined below. It seems it was only the coming of the European colonists that changed this outlook. There were localised outbreaks of violence, often as payback or retribution and may have been carried out in fulfilment of breaches of Indigenous law. None of the research available to date demonstrates a sustained level of negative interactions between

³⁴ Ian S. McIntosh, “Unbirri’s Pre-Macassan Legacy, or How the Yolŋu Became Black,” *Macassan Heritage and History*, ed. Marshall Clark and Sally K. May (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2013), 96.

³⁵ McIntosh, “A Treaty with the Macassans?,” 169.

³⁶ Macassar, a (Muslim) region in South Sulawesi, Indonesia.

³⁷ Lindy Allen, “Message Sticks and Indigenous Diplomacy,” in *Conciliation on Colonial Frontiers: Conflict, Performance and Commemoration in Australia and the Pacific Rim*, ed. K. Darien-Smith and P. Edmonds (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 113-31.

³⁸ McIntosh, “A Treaty with the Macassans?,” 169.

³⁹ Regina Ganter, “Muslim Australians: The Deep Histories of Contact,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 32, no. 4 (2008): 483.

⁴⁰ Campbell Macknight, “Studying Trepangers,” in *Macassan History and Heritage*, ed. Marshall Clark and Sally K. May (Canberra: ANU Press, 2013), 21.

the various groups, all of whom had inhabited this maritime region in South East Asia for a long period. Indeed, the worst cases of violence and conflict seem to have been between certain groups on the Tiwi Islands and a range of other Indigenous peoples.⁴¹ Macknight⁴² outlines a number of these localised events and attributes the causation of hostilities to both groups over a range of different reasons; some instigated by the Macassans, other outbreaks initiated by the Indigenous peoples. One of the big problems in analysing the relationships and dialogue between the two groups is the “major difficulty in estimating the amount of conflict that took place is the tendency for dramatic stories to be remembered at the expense of more normal experience.”⁴³

It has also been suggested that many of the Macassan fishermen were Sufis,⁴⁴ some of whom were members of the Khalwati order,⁴⁵ and they would have brought this alternative approach to Islam with them on their journeys. Dzavid Haveric takes the viewpoint that in doing so, and “by respecting the continuation of Aboriginal uniqueness, Islam embraced their ancient, isolated life, but did so by introducing a new age of prosperity and tranquil orderliness, keeping alive such values that would be mutually cherished.”⁴⁶ This ‘embrace’ relied on acceptable and durable levels of dialogue, fuelled by some form of common language or patois.

Linguistic Evidence of Dialogue

Meaningful dialogue requires some form of common language. During the periods of first contact between the Macassans and Indigenous Australians, this would have been the first issue to be overcome prior to peaceful negotiations. In 1846, trader and navigator George Windsor Earl (1813-1865) pointed to the fact “that nearly all the words the natives use when speaking to us are Macassarese” and the Australians had “considerable proficiency in their language.”⁴⁷ This degree of acceptance of the Macassans and their language was best demonstrated when Earl arrived on the Coburg Peninsula, stating,

On our first arrival, the natives from having been long accustomed to address strangers in this language, used it when conversing with us, and the consequence was, that some vocabularies were collected which consisted almost entirely of this patois under the supposition that it was the language of the Aborigines.⁴⁸

An early European missionary, Les Perriman, who was active on Groote Eylandt in the early 1920s noted, “the native people can pick up the language of another tribe quickly, having no

⁴¹ Regina Ganter, “Reconnecting with South-East Asia,” in *Indigenous Mobilities*, ed. Rachel Standfield (Canberra, ACT: ANU Press, 2018), 267.

⁴² Campbell Macknight, “Macassans and Aborigines,” *Oceania* 42, no. 4 (1972): 288-90.

⁴³ Campbell Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege* (Melbourne, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1976), 88.

⁴⁴ Abu Bakr Sirajuddin Cook, “Tasawwuf ‘Usturaliya Prolegomena to a History of Sufism in Australia,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 3 (2018): 61-62.

⁴⁵ Dzavid Haveric, *Muslims Making Australia Home. Immigration and Community Building*. (Melbourne, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2019), 226.

⁴⁶ Haveric, *History of Islam and Muslims in Australia*, 37.

⁴⁷ James Urry and Michael Walsh, “The Lost Macassar Language of Northern Australia,” *Aboriginal History* 5, no. 2 (1981): 92.

⁴⁸ G. Windsor Earl, “On the Aboriginal Tribes of the Northern Coast of Australia,” *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 16 (1846): 244.

written language of their own.”⁴⁹ Given the diversity of languages that abound, across the region and the Australian continent, this linguistic agility would have been necessary for daily interactions with the Indigenous nations.

Looking at the current research, it appears some 300 or so loanwords exist, linking the Macassans to the Indigenous Australians from the era prior to European settlement.⁵⁰ One of the clearest examples of loanwords is used for money, a concept that did not exist prior to first contact. The Yolŋu⁵¹ word for money is *rrupiya*,⁵² a derivation of the Sanskrit word *rupyah*, meaning wrought silver.⁵³ Somehow this word travelled from India to Arnhem Land, theoretically over hundreds of years, probably via the Indonesian Archipelago.⁵⁴ Another word in common usage across Arnhem Land is *balanda*, possibly originating in Macassar from *hollander*, a term used for the European colonisers.⁵⁵

In 1846, Earl observed that,

A very considerable portion of the coast natives have, from frequent intercourse with the Macassar trepang fishers, acquired considerable proficiency in their language, which is a dialect of the Polynesian. They never, indeed, speak it correctly, from their inability to pronounce the letter S, which occurs rather frequently in the Macassar language. Thus *berasa* becomes “*bereja*,” *trusaan*; “*turulan*,” *salat* “*jala*,” &c. They, however, contrive to make themselves well understood, not only by the Macassars but by the people of tribes with whose peculiar dialect they may not be familiar.⁵⁶

Earl’s inclusion of the word *salat* is interesting. This appears to indicate a loanword from Arabic, representing the second pillar of Islam, the five daily prayers that pious Muslims must observe. Indigenous Australians would have heard and observed these prayers over a long time and been taught the practice by the Baijini or Macassans.

Most of the established loanwords across the region concern the mundane: items of clothing, food and preparation, along with the business of the Macassans, including nautical terms relating to boats and building.⁵⁷ A number of the loanwords deal with concepts or objects that would have been unknown or different to those used by the Indigenous Australians. These include words for axe (*bingal*), rice (*berita*) and needle (*djarung*) as well as the concept of a ‘man in charge’ or foreman (*bunggawa*).⁵⁸ Additionally, several terms with nautical themes and applications are also evident. Given the technology the Macassans brought with them, such as lateen sails, dugout canoes and rudders, coastal dwelling Australians would probably have

⁴⁹ Kerin Coulehan, Interview with Les Perriman, *Typed Transcripts of Oral History Interviews with ‘TS’ prefix*, no. TS 102/1 (N.T. Archives Services, 1979).

⁵⁰ Nicholas Evans, “Macassan Loanwords in Top End Languages,” *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 12, no. 1 (1992).

⁵¹ Traditional language group from East Arnhem Land

⁵² Beluah Lowe, *Yolgnu English Dictionary* (Winnellie, NT: ARDS Inc, 2004), 163.

⁵³ Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “Ruppee (n).” Online Etymology Dictionary. accessed October 10, 2018, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=rupee>.

⁵⁴ Evans, “Macassan Loanwords in Top End Languages.”

⁵⁵ Macknight, “Macassans and Aborigines,” 296.

⁵⁶ Earl, “On the Aboriginal Tribes of the Northern Coast of Australia,” 244.

⁵⁷ Evans, “Macassan Loanwords in Top End Languages,” 69.

⁵⁸ Macknight, “Macassans and Aborigines,” 295-96.

been intrigued. While there are eight words under the category of ‘weapons,’ the bulk of the contact vocabulary surrounds the dialogue of life, which is needed for daily communications, or the language of micro level dialogue. As the contact and language spread, the dialogue seems to have become regional, or meso-level, with common vocabulary used to ease communication.

Additionally, Evans points to apparent loanwords of Austronesian origin existing in the local languages that are not Macassan or Malay. This may link to earlier or later periods of contact and, as Evans highlights, could possibly be erroneous given some of the sources.⁵⁹ It would also appear some Arabic language influence is present. In her work on the issue of language and contact, Sarah Thomason points to the issue that, “Muslims all over the world learn at least a little Classical Arabic for religious purposes, even if they never meet a native speaker of any modern dialect of Arabic.”⁶⁰ Regionally, it has been noted the Macassans speak some “Arabic (the language of religion, as the vast majority of Makasar speakers are Muslims.”⁶¹ It is not clear if the loanwords came directly from an Arabic source, or as is more likely, the Arabic source provided the loan to Macassan or Malay, who in turn passed it on to the Indigenous Australians. Regardless, from a review of Evans study, several key loanwords appear to have some linguistic base in Arabic.

Arnhem Land language groups have a term for visiting a grave, *jiriah*, a loanword from Malay.⁶² This shows links to religious practices via Arabic, probably imported into Indonesia with the early Sufi pioneers. In the South Asian Islamic context, *ziarah* refers to formal visits to a revered person (such as a distinguished *kyai*) or a sacred place (tomb or relics of *wali* or holy men) implying a hope for *barakah* [blessing] (*ngalap berkah*).⁶³ Also included in the Indigenous lexicon is a derivation of the Arabic word for soap, *sabun* becoming *jabu*,⁶⁴ with the initial S sound becoming a J, again a reflection of the lack of the S sound in local dialects.⁶⁵

All of this suggests the Indigenous people of Northern Australia had a long association of positive dialogue, including the absorption of loanwords to facilitate communication with the Macassans as well as the possibility of other pre-Macassan contacts. This common language-driven dialogue led to a knowledge transfer that included technology, ritual and beliefs and narratives of Indigenous Australians making the journey to Macassar. Most of these loanwords relate to the mundane with limited examples that link to religious practices. Many of the loanwords were needed to deal with everyday Macassan items and concepts such as soap and books that had no equivalent in the local languages.

⁵⁹ Evans, “Macassan Loanwords in Top End Languages,” 86.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Marija Tabain and Anthony Jukes, “Makasar,” *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 46, no. 1 (2016): 100.

⁶² Evans, “Macassan Loanwords in Top End Languages,” 69.

⁶³ A. G. Muhaimin, “The Veneration of Wali and Holy Men: Visits to the Shrines,” in *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon. Ibadat and Adat among Javanese Muslims* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2006), 176.

⁶⁴ Evans, “Macassan Loanwords in Top End Languages,” 30.

⁶⁵ Earl, “On the Aboriginal Tribes of the Northern Coast of Australia,” 77.

Beliefs and Rituals

Indigenous Australian spirituality, also referred to as the Dreaming, is a vastly different concept to the Abrahamic faiths.⁶⁶ At times it operates outside the duality of heaven and hell, and similar to Islam, is more of a way of life and makes no distinction between the secular and the sacred.⁶⁷ As Bill Edwards states, “the Dreaming ancestors provided the model for life. They established a pattern for the daily round of economic, social, political, cultural and ritual activities.”⁶⁸

Additionally, the Dreaming appears to have been syncretic as Muslim and Macassan influences have also been found in Indigenous rituals and ceremonies in Arnhem Land. Berndt and Berndt also commented that, “the Aborigines have always been keen observers; and Baijini customs and activity provided them with much material for discussion, which inspired the many stories extant today and served as a basis for the traditional Baijini song cycle.”⁶⁹

This ability to mimic and copy what they observed seems to have been incorporated into at least one of the Arnhem Land peoples rituals, that of the Mast Ceremony. Warner provided a detailed description of many of the rituals he observed between 1926 and 1929, including the Mast Ceremony, one of the final steps in the mortuary ceremonies in Arnhem Land.⁷⁰ Described as a new song cycle, called the ‘*Wurramu*’,⁷¹ it appears to reflect the raising of a mast, as would have been observed when the Macassans erected their masts to return home at the end of the trepang season.

During his time in Arnhem Land, Warner observed the ceremony alongside his informant and guide, Mahkarolla (d 1957), who provided a running commentary. As the community members arrive, a “chorus sings ‘*Oh-a-ha-la!!*’, while the mast is laid down. When it is picked up again they sing; *O-o-o-o-a-ha-la! A-ha-la!! A-ha-la!!*”⁷² The phonetic similarity between sections of this phrase and the Arabic word for God, *Allah*, is apparent, as is the possibility this represents a version of Islam’s initial statement of faith, the *shahadah* – *lā `ilāha `illā llāh* (there is no god but God) – and was taught or demonstrated as a form of *dhikr* by the Sufi Macassans. Warner was also advised the Macassan fisherman, “sang out when he raised a mast and when he did that all of us black men ran from our camps to see him go away because all of us knew then that the Macassar was ready to go away.”⁷³ Warner’s informant also noted, “this is all the same as that dead man because he is ready to go away.”⁷⁴ Following the initial

⁶⁶ See W. E. H. Stanner, introduction to *On Aboriginal Religion* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2014) for more on this concept.

⁶⁷ Bill Edwards, “Living the Dreaming,” in *Aboriginal Australia: An Introductory Reader in Aboriginal Studies*, ed. Colin Bourke, Eleanor Bourke, and W.H. Edwards (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2003), 83.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁹ Berndt and Berndt, *Arnhem Land*, 38.

⁷⁰ W. Lloyd Warner, *A Black Civilisation. A Study of an Australian Tribe* (Chicago, IL: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 430-33.

⁷¹ Ian S. McIntosh, “Islam and Australia's Aborigines,” *The Journal of Religious History* 20, no. 1 (1996): 59.

⁷² Warner, *A Black Civilisation*, 430.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

incantation, “two men in unison say what the natives believe to be a Macassar prayer (*Djel-lawar*, Malay term); ‘*Sil-li-la-mo-ha-mo ha-mo-sil-li-li*,’”⁷⁵ which may be “very like [the Arabic] ‘*salli ala Muhammed nil murselin* ‘which [may] mean, ‘Invoke blessings on Muhammad who was sent.’”⁷⁶ The phrase was also described by Warner’s informant as “just the same as amen.”⁷⁷

This is followed by the mantra *si-li-nai-yu ma-u-lai*, “asking something in the clouds or maybe it is in the moon;” however, it may also be translated from Arabic as meaning, “blessing on us our Master (God).”⁷⁸ Then comes the phrase *ra-bin-a-la la-ha-ma-ha-ma*, which McIntosh associates with Islamic rites and “the passage of the soul of the deceased to a heavenly abode above, the abode of Allah.”⁷⁹ When sung at this stage of a funeral ceremony, it may be a replication of the recitation of the Qur’an over the sick or dead, translated as, “Our Lord [a word is missing here, or it could have become shortened or abbreviated during conversation. It could be ‘*salli*’]...upon Muhammed. Most likely it can mean ‘Our Lord have mercy on Muhammed.’”⁸⁰ After the body is placed in the grave, “everyone including men, women, and children, throws a certain amount of earth into the open grave.”⁸¹ This practice is common in Islam and other Abrahamic religions around the world in line with the concept that mankind was created from the earth, should be returned to it and will come forth at another time.⁸² Other claims surrounding the adoption of Islamic practice may include the “widespread Muslim practice of returning at the third, seventh, fortieth and one hundredth days after the burial,”⁸³ although these claims are focussed on Austronesians in general and have not been specifically recorded in Indigenous societies.⁸⁴

Given the current view, most clearly espoused by Zulkifli that, “most scholars studying the history of the spread of Islam in Indonesia agree that Sufis played a major role in the Islamisation of the Indonesian archipelago”⁸⁵ and they “have the ability to compromise or blend Islam with religious practices/beliefs rather than change local beliefs.”⁸⁶ This could indicate the repetition of the above phrase derives from the Sufi practice of *dhikr*, where a follower of Sufism chants repetitions of a short phrase, invoking the glory of God. In (Sufi) Islam,

⁷⁵ Ibid., 431.

⁷⁶ Translated by Associate Professor Salih Yucel, lecturer in Islamic studies at Australian Catholic University and Charles Sturt University

⁷⁷ Warner, *A Black Civilisation*, 431.

⁷⁸ Translated by Associate Professor Salih Yucel.

⁷⁹ McIntosh, “Islam and Australia’s Aborigines,” 53.

⁸⁰ Translated by Associate Professor Salih Yucel.

⁸¹ Warner, *A Black Civilisation*, 432.

⁸² Qur’ān 20:55 and Genesis 3:19.

⁸³ Haveric, *History of Islam and Muslims in Australia*, 42.

⁸⁴ Anthony Reid, “Continuity and Change in the Austronesian Transition to Islam and Christianity,” in *The Austronesians. Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Peter Bellwood, James J. Fox, and Darrell Tryon (Canberra: ANU Press, 2006), 341.

⁸⁵ Zulkifli, “Sufism in Java: The Role of the Pesantren in the Maintenance of Sufism in Java” (Canberra: Australian National University, 1994), 10.

⁸⁶ Dwi Afrianti, “Sufism Scholars Network in the Middle East, India, and Indonesia,” *International Journal of Nusantara Islam* 4, no. 1 (2016): 81.

the dhikr is given to a spiritual seeker on the path by the spiritual master. It is believed that the power of the remembrance of God has the unique ability to purify the heart of its flaws and connect the heart of the Muslim to God.⁸⁷

If this quasi-Arabic phrase does represent a form of *dhikr*, it demonstrates another example of syncretism between Islam and the Indigenous Dreaming of Arnhem Land and raises the possibility of *da'wah* as a secondary function of the traders. Additionally, this phrase and the inclusion of a heavenly abode in Indigenous rituals and stories seems to indicate a form of duality, showing the influence of the Muslim Macassans and importantly, the existence of micro and meso level dialogue between these two long-time trading partners. Berndt and Berndt believed “Aboriginal religion may have been influenced considerably by association with these traders, who were nominally Mohammedan but retained a great many of their [Macassan] indigenous beliefs.”⁸⁸ “McIntosh emphasizes that Yolgnu never embraced Islam as a faith, rather, they incorporated elements of what they observed from their Indonesian visitors into their own cosmology.”⁸⁹ This syncretic nature also led to McIntosh’s observations of “Yolgnu women praying to the sunset and invoking the name Allah, as is the custom at this place for this clan.”⁹⁰ This issue can be problematic as Cook and Yucel pointed out, Islamic prayer is prohibited during the rising and setting of the sun⁹¹ and “further exploration is needed to establish to what extent this represents philosophical and spiritual influence and incorporation.”⁹² This may be another representation of the Sufi *dhikr*, which can be performed at any time, including sunset or sunrise. It may also just be a misinterpretation of the nuanced timing of the Muslim prayers, especially the *maghrib salat* that occurs after sunset, and could be problematic as the length of twilight varies across the seasons. This may also be due to errors in the transmission of the practice, given the long time between constant contact in the 19th century and McIntosh’s observations in 2018.

Some previous discussion has also been given to an Islamic influence surrounding circumcision,⁹³ a practice embraced by Abraham as part of his covenant with God and subsequently adopted by Jews and Muslims. The best evidence to date suggests this was a long-standing practice, owing more to environmental and preventative health measures as opposed to a religious rite.⁹⁴ Given the range and extent of this practice in Australia and beyond, I believe this connection can be safely discounted.

⁸⁷ Earle Waugh, “Dhikr,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard C. Martin (New York, NY: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), accessed May 31, 2020, <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy1.acu.edu.au/apps/doc/CX3403500122/GVRL?u=acuni&sid=GVRL&xid=07cfd440>.

⁸⁸ Berndt and Berndt, *Arnhem Land*, 45.

⁸⁹ Regina Ganter, “Remembering Muslim Histories of Australia,” *La Trobe Journal* 89 (2012): 59.

⁹⁰ Abu Bakr Sirajuddin Cook and Salih Yucel, “Australia’s Indigenous Peoples and Islam: Philosophical and Spiritual Convergences between Belief Structures,” *Comparative Islamic Studies* 12, no. 1-2 (2019): 179.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Haveric, *History of Islam and Muslims in Australia*, 44.

⁹⁴ John Morrison, “The Origins of the Practises of Circumcision and Subincision among the Australian Aborigines,” *The Medical Journal of Australia* 1 (1967): 125.

Warner seems to encapsulate the overlapping nature of religion, dialogue and trade succinctly, when he observed,

the Malay did not come to North Australia to establish outposts of his civilization and promote agriculture, nor had he any desire to proselytize the aborigines to worship his gods; he came to trade for highly valued articles on which the natives placed little value, and when he had accomplished his purpose he was glad to go home to Macassar, Koepang, or Timor Laut.⁹⁵

Regardless, observations by the Indigenous peoples of Muslim practices, in association with micro and meso level dialogue, seem to have led to the syncretic absorption of some aspects of Islamic practices and rituals into local customs and may demonstrate a secondary purpose of the Macassans during their visits.

Technology Transfer

This dialogue, including the exchange of language and ideas, also led to a technological transfer involving both groups. The Macassans brought a range of previously unseen goods and chattels, as well as a range of new maritime technology.⁹⁶ Warner reported, in return for trepang and sandalwood, “the natives received...dugout canoes, rice, molasses, tobacco, cloth for sarongs, belts, knives, tomahawks, gin, and pipes, as well as other articles of trade.”⁹⁷ Pottery was also included, as was the new technology of iron. Indigenous groups adapted and adopted only those that had relevance for them. Pottery seems to have had limited use, and accordingly, was never developed locally. “The most important of the more durable commodities were tools: metal knives, axes and spear-heads, which partly displaced stone artefacts, and the dugout canoe, which partly displaced the bark canoe.”⁹⁸ The Indigenous people were ingenious at adapting new technology when looking for solutions. During their 1901–02 expedition in the region, Frank Gillen and Baldwin Spencer “encountered two men holding crocodile spears they had adapted by adding prongs made from iron nails and the blade of a butcher’s knife.”⁹⁹ In return, “The Malays also bought spears and spear-throwers from the blacks, but it is likely this was done in modern times because of their interest in them as mementoes rather than as weapons.”¹⁰⁰ The Macassans also required timber for the local treatment of the trepang as well as taking some back to Macassar for use in construction.¹⁰¹ Macknight states, “it would be difficult to obtain much good timber in the face of aboriginal hostility...[which] presupposes a fairly high level of communication and trust.”¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Warner, “Malay Influence on the Aboriginal Cultures of North-Eastern Arnhem Land,” 480.

⁹⁶ Sarah G. Thomason, *Language Contact* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 21.

⁹⁷ Warner, “Malay Influence on the Aboriginal Cultures of North-Eastern Arnhem Land,” 480.

⁹⁸ Worsley, “Early Asian Contacts with Australia.”

⁹⁹ Frank. J Gillen, *Gillen’s Diary. The Camp Jottings of F. J. Gillen on the Spencer and Gillen Expedition across Australia 1901–1902* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia., 1968), 297–98.

¹⁰⁰ Warner, “Malay Influence on the Aboriginal Cultures of North-Eastern Arnhem Land,” 481.

¹⁰¹ Marshall Clark and Sally K. May, “Understanding the Macassans: A Regional Approach,” in *Macassan History and Heritage Journeys, Encounters and Influences*, ed. Marshall Clark and Sally K. May (Canberra, ACT: ANU EPress, 2013). 2.

¹⁰² Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege*, 45.

This technology transfer was enabled through dialogue. While the Indigenous people would have observed these goods, manufacturing could only have occurred with a certain level of dialogue, explaining and demonstrating the step by step process involved in creating the final product. This would not have happened if the two groups were in opposition, indicating there must have been some levels of peaceful co-operation and positive micro or meso level dialogue at the time and willingness for the Macassans to pass the knowledge on.

The memory of this positive relationship lives strong in the memory of the Indigenous people of the region. In 2008, one senior Elder described the relationship as:

...he was really emotional and he said, he was basically saying that...the difference between the contact between Macassans and whites was so startlingly different. He started crying. He was saying that when white men came they took everything. There was conflict. The Macassans didn't. They were our friends. And it was a very stark, you know, contrast that he was trying to make. (Interview 5)¹⁰³

In my view, the words of Indigenous Elder Professor Patrick Dodson (b. 1948) bring clarity to the nature of the pre-colonial dialogue in Northern Australia. He highlights the social cohesion, multi-level dialogue, mutual respect and social cohesion that took place in Northern Australia over 250 years ago between Macassan Muslims and the Indigenous people of Arnhem Land. At a 2009 Western Sydney University conference on equity and diversity, with special focus on issues concerning Islam and Australia, he stated,

Perhaps if the model of engagement established by the Muslims of Macassa and the Aboriginal people of Northern Australia had been adopted by the English when they decided to invade in 1788 then the history between us all over the past 220 years may have been a very different story.¹⁰⁴

Conversion to Islam

Although linguistic examples exist describing religious links between Islam and the Dreaming, it has been suggested the Macassans had no interest in converting the Indigenous people.¹⁰⁵ This is based on the view that the Macassans were in Arnhem Land on business; the job of collecting trepang for the Chinese markets took precedence over other activities, including *da'wah* or proselytising on behalf of Islam. Despite this view, *da'wah* may have been a secondary aim of the Macassans (and possibly the Baijini), with Indigenous Australians either picking the religious terminology up through observation or being taught the Islamic practices of *salat* (prayer). Given the evidence above, they may have been explicitly taught the first pillar and foundational statement of Islam, the *shahadah* and its opening phrase 'there is no God but God', a phrase or *dhikr* that became embedded in the rituals and practices of the Yolŋu. It is

¹⁰³ Rebecca H. Bilous, "Making Connections: Hearing and Sharing Macassan-Yolŋu Stories," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 56, no. 3 (2015): 369.

¹⁰⁴ Patrick Dodson, "Keynote Address" (paper presented at the Equity and Diversity Conference, Western Sydney University, June 22, 2009).

¹⁰⁵ Ganter, "Remembering Muslim Histories of Australia," 59.

accepted that, “for those who were not born into Islam, stating this declaration out loud in front of witnesses is their first step in conversion to Islam.”¹⁰⁶

To be Muslim does not necessarily mean to practice everything. Many of the Macassans were Sufis, well known for their ability as “peaceful ‘bridge-builders’ with many different faith traditions and cultures,”¹⁰⁷ and a “very humanistic approach to religion and society.”¹⁰⁸ This humanist approach allowed for fluidity and adaption of practice, as required by the local communities they came in contact with. As many Indigenous males were already circumcised and given pigs were not imported into Australia until after European contact¹⁰⁹ (meaning the prohibition on eating pork was not an issue), some Indigenous people could have been seen as what Haveric calls “unfinished” converts.¹¹⁰ As this would have required the *shahadah*, possibly in a localised form, as well *salat*, the daily prayers observed by McIntosh, there is again some evidence of *da’wah*.

In her work on Indigenous mobility, Lynette Russell outlines, “Yolgnu, Yanyuwa and many other groups talk of their kin over the seas and there are familial ties between Northern Australian Aboriginal people and the inhabitants of Sulawesi and other islands.”¹¹¹ This included several Indigenous women who married and returned with their husbands to Macassar.¹¹² As Muslims are required to marry within their faith, or “people of the book,”¹¹³ this demonstrates the existence of conversion to Islam, either fully or as Haveric notes, some form of “unfinished conversion.”¹¹⁴ Again, this provides some evidence of *da’wah*.

While not the primary concern of the Macassans or Baijini, the evidence points to some form of *da’wah* practised with the Indigenous peoples of Arnhem Land. Their impact was largely localised and, in many instances, did not survive the effects of European colonisation, which brought Christianity with the First Fleet and the subsequent waves of migration. The early European settlers and pioneers paved the way for missionaries to commence evangelising and converting the Indigenous peoples to mostly Protestant Christianity, thereby reducing the impact of the previous connections, conversions and dialogue with Islam.

CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined the current evidence that indicates the existence of long periods of peaceful relationships, social harmony and ‘*proper*’ dialogue that occurred on micro and meso

¹⁰⁶ Vincent J. Cornell, *Voices of Islam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 8.

¹⁰⁷ Haveric, *Muslims Making Australia Home*, 227.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ NSW Government, Department of Primary Industries, “Feral Pig Biology and Distribution,” accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/vertebrate-pests/pest-animals-in-nsw/feral-pigs/feral-pig-biology>.

¹¹⁰ Haveric, *History of Islam and Muslims in Australia*, 39.

¹¹¹ Lynette Russell, “Looking out to Sea: Indigenous Mobility and Engagement in Australia’s Coastal Industries,” in *Indigenous Mobilities. Across and Beyond the Antipodes*, ed. Rachel Standfield (Canberra, ACT: ANU Press, 2018), 169.

¹¹² Haveric, *Muslims Making Australia Home*, 188-89.

¹¹³ Qur’an 5:5.

¹¹⁴ Haveric, *History of Islam and Muslims in Australia*, 39.

levels. Initially, the dialogue would have commenced at a micro or local level as protocols were negotiated and then moved to meso level dialogue. In excess of 250 years of interaction by the Macassan trepangers and their predecessors has left a range of positive evidence and long-lasting memories, through the range of extant oral Indigenous histories as well as the records of early European anthropologists and researchers.

Many previous studies have been done in association with the Yolŋu and other Indigenous nations of Arnhem Land and have established these connections between the Yolŋu and Macassan peoples, as well as investigating the nature of the Bajini or pre-Macassans visitors. As indicated above, this research analyses the evidence of dialogue that has embraced a range of linguistic, cultural, spiritual and archaeological domains, mostly pointing towards positive relationships and heightened levels of social cohesion, as well as a form of *da'wah* between the Baijini, Macassans and Indigenous people of Arnhem Land.

What is missing from the bulk of the current research is a viewpoint or narrative that the Muslim visitors obtained resources by force; ergo, they must have negotiated a truce or treaty, through dialogue, in order to camp for long periods on the coast, despite initial language barriers. The syncretic absorption of spiritual aspects demonstrates the ability of the Indigenous peoples to adapt and absorb new rituals as well as language into their long-standing traditions. Likewise, the use of Macassan, Malay and, in a limited form, Arabic has transferred into the local vocabulary and demonstrates sustained levels of dialogue, some of it the form of religious practice and ritual. While this paper posits the secondary purpose of the Macassans was that of *da'wah*, or spreading the reach of Islam into the north of Australia, especially when one considers the influential role of traders and Sufis in the prior spread of Islam in the Indonesian Archipelago, it is an area in need of further research.

Regardless of which of the “followers of Allah”¹¹⁵ came first, the positive impact of the micro and meso level dialogue between these early Muslim voyagers and Indigenous people of Arnhem Land stands as an example of the impact of positive relations, understanding and social cohesion that can develop between groups of differing faiths. Ultimately, this long-term dialogue declined following the banning of the Macassan trepang fleets in 1906; however, the legacy of positive dialogue remains to this day.

115 McIntosh, *Between Two Worlds*, 101.

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