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The Lens of La Salaga: Exploring Indonesian interculturalism through artistic and literary innovation

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Abstract

The La Salaga Project is a multimedia retelling of a legend from West Sulawesi. The project includes art from Bali, the island on which part of the story takes place; innovative fonts of an Indonesian script; poetry and video. This article uses the La Salaga Project as a lens to explore interculturalism in Indonesia. It describes the milieu in which the project was created and received; the intercultural aspects of the project; and interculturalism in Indonesia more generally. In so doing, it echoes the opinion of the Balinese artist and scholar I Wayan Setem who emphasizes the importance of dialogue to interculturalism.

Keywords

Interculturalism, Indonesia, literature, painting, Bali, Sulawesi, dialogue

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Aside from its striking presence on the map of the world, one of the most extraordinary features of Indonesia is its cultural diversity. This sprawling archipelago is home to more than a thousand different ethnic groups.¹ Indonesia's diversity has been part of the daily experience of the cultural activist Louie Buana for his entire life, and part of the work of historian Kathryn Wellen for her entire career. The two of us were therefore delighted to conduct the La Salaga Project, a multi-media retelling of a legend about Sulawesi and Bali. The project brings together two of Louie's multiple "homelands" and adds an artistic element to Kathryn's research about migration from Sulawesi. Significantly, the La Salaga Project also contributes a truly intercultural story to a discourse that has often been multicultural or monolithic.

We use the word "intercultural" deliberately to describe the La Salaga Project even though we believe that "multicultural" and "intercultural" do not have different meanings to most laypeople. As Boswell, O'Shea and Tzadik have noted, just defining "interculturalism" is challenging (Boswell, O'Shea and Tzadik, 2013: x). For purposes of this paper, and influenced by social scientist such as Cantle, Meer, Mohood and Verkuyten,² we define it as policies and practices that encourage cross-cultural dialogue and a sense of unity across cultural differences and discourage the self-segregation of cultures. This differs from multiculturalism in that multiculturalism encourages respectful but segregated coexistence of different cultures. The framework of interculturalism better accommodates the blending within the La Salaga project. Arguably, interculturalism better accommodates the day-to-day existence of many Indonesians, including Louie, because it reflects the reality of day-to-day, or bottom-up, blending in Indonesia.

In this article we describe the La Salaga Project and use it as a lens to examine interculturalism in Indonesia. In so doing, we situate the project within the framework of both English and Indonesian language academic literature on interculturalism. We also describe the project and its reception in detail so as to document the innovative project, and we compare it to similar artistic endeavours so as to contextualize it. This article mentions many people, places and things that might not be familiar to readers unfamiliar with Indonesia. We believe that they are integral to our story and cannot be omitted; and we take pleasure in introducing them to the reader.

Part One: Interculturalism in Indonesia

The cultural diversity of Indonesia cannot be underestimated. Indeed, that it could and can exist as a single nation state was, and sometimes even still is, considered improbable (Pisani, 2014:2; Cribb, 2015:1). Forging this country among people speaking hundreds of languages on thousands of islands required tremendous effort. During the mid-twentieth century Indonesia's founders deliberately espoused a political philosophy for the nation that embraces different ethnicities in the former Dutch colony. They promoted the

¹ The Indonesian government enumerates 1340. (See Portal Informasi Indonesia, Suku bangsa, <https://indonesia.go.id/profil/suku-bangsa/kebudayaan/suku-bangsa> accessed July 11, 2025.)

² The debate between Ted Cantle and Tariq Modood is articulated and analyzed in a set of four short articles published in *Ethnicities*. (See Antonisch, Cantle, Modood, and Iacovino, 2013.) Interculturalism is further theorized in Verkuyten, Yogeeswaran, Mephram and Sprong (2020) who also examine its relevance to political debates and public policy. We also consider Meer and Modood's (2012) collaborative article to be particularly useful.

Indonesian language as a lingua franca and as a unifying national language among the speakers of hundreds of different languages; and the success of Indonesian as the national language has been hailed as “miraculous” (Sneddon, 2003: 5). It is also an important instrument for interethnic dialogue which, in turn, is a prerequisite for interculturalism.

There were also deliberate and earnest efforts to invent a “native” Indonesian culture (Heryanto, 2018: 609) composed of the high points of regional cultures. In practice, however, this native culture encouraged conformity (Hill, 2014: 5) and Javaneseness. Indeed, Javacentrism has been guiding in the formation of numerous political, cultural and academic discourses. As Adrian Perkasa argues, Javacentrism was a consistent element of Indonesian nationalism. He argues that numerous intellectuals and officials, including Soeharto, consistently drew inspiration from Javanese culture and history and promoted Javacentrism in both the educational system and the official national ideology (Perkasa, 2025: 217). Similarly, Ghamal Satya Mohammad traces Javacentrism in historiography back to Dutch scholars’ portrayal of Majapahit as a great empire with subordinate tributaries across the archipelago (Ghamal, 2017: 7). Defining Javacentrism as a “disproportionate and often excessive emphasis placed on Java in terms of geography history, politics, culture and the ethnic population” (Ghamal, 2017:2), Ghamal further argues that post-independence Indonesian historians used Javacentrism as an alternative to Eurocentrism.

Despite this well-documented Javacentrism, space was, and is, still accorded to other cultures in the archipelago. This space is apparent both in theory and practice.³ Indonesia’s national motto is *bhinneka tunggal ika*, most often translated as “unity in diversity.” Moreover, the unity of Indonesia (*persatuan Indonesia*) is the third pillar of government, or Panca Sila. The government put the variety of the archipelago’s cultures on display in places such as the Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Theme Park (Taman Mini Indonesia Indah) and published numerous series of books documenting and showcasing local cultures for a variety of audiences. The government also established and perpetuates a national heroes program including representatives from across the archipelago who have made remarkable contributions to the Indonesian nation. Both the park and the heroes exemplify the government’s creation of a multicultural narrative.⁴

While there has been tremendous effort to include cultures from across the archipelago in this multicultural narrative, there has been less effort to combine them in an intercultural narrative. The government has espoused a nation-region-ethnie spatial model that presents each culture within the archipelago individually (Jones, 2013:269). Accordingly the aforementioned programs present the different cultures side by side as constituent yet discrete parts of a national culture. While these endeavours may be

³ For more information about Indonesian cultural policies, see Tod Jones, *Culture, Power, and Authoritarianism in the Indonesian State: Cultural Policy across the Twentieth Century to the Reform Era*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

⁴ On Taman Mini Indonesia see Greg Acciaioli, “Pavilions and posters: Showcasing diversity and development in contemporary Indonesia,” *EIKON: A Journal of the Visual Anthropology Society of Australia* 1 (1996): 27–42. On national heroes, see Klaus H. Schreiner, “The making of national heroes: Guided Democracy to New Order, 1959–1992,” in Henk Schulte Nordholt, *Outward Appearances: Dressing State and Society in Indonesia*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997, pp. 259–290.

designed to encourage seeing an underlying Indonesianness, the distinctiveness of each culture is generally maintained (Soebadio, 1985: 22-23).⁵ That being said, this model often falls short, resulting in the misrepresentation of non-Javanese cultures. While the word "non-Javanese" sounds vaguely awkward to Kathryn's Midwestern USA ear, it seems normal to Louie who, like other Indonesians, often uses the Indonesian word "non-Jawa".⁶ Moreover, it reflects the reality on the ground for most of the country.

National representations of local cultures is the subject of Greg Acciaoli's study "Pavilions and Posters." With reference to provincial costumes and displays in Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, he points out how the further an area is from the Javanese center, the more it is expected to conform to a generic model based on Javanese ideas of appropriateness (Acciaoli, 1996: 35). He further argues that such impositions constitute an inversion of Anderson's cone of power metaphor. This famous metaphor compares Java's influence on outlying areas to a reflector lamp radiating to from the center and fading in the peripheries (Anderson, 1972: 22, 35). Acciaoli suggests that inverted, Anderson's metaphor represents how the influence of the modern Indonesian state is felt more strongly at the peripheries than in the center as exemplified by the replacement of Papuan netbags with Javanese cloth.

Anderson's metaphor for Javanese power, and Acciaoli's inversion of it, brings us to the importance of power dynamics in interculturalism. The relationship between the Indonesian national government and the provinces is not equal. The centrality of Javanese culture and the force with which it is projected across the archipelago is illustrated by the case of Papua batik. Batik is a Javanese form of art. Highly marketable, it has been exported across the archipelago resulting in variants such as Papua batik and Makassar batik. When Indonesia received funding from the United Nations Development Program in 1985, it used it for cultural empowerment in Papua. Instead of encouraging the development of Papuan art, such as woven bags known as *noken*,⁷ the national government sent batik artists to train the Papuans in this Javanese art. They encouraged the Papuans to develop new batik motifs that represented their own culture. One might consider this to be a case of interculturalism because it blends Javanese techniques with Papuan motifs. However, it is an extremely imbalanced one, because Java sets the standards of batik production and all but obliges other areas to follow suit. Therefore, the blending does not entail the dialogue required by I Wayan Setem's definition of interculturalism. We will return to the example of batik in Part Three.

The Balinese artist and scholar's I Wayan Setem's views on interculturalism provide an important counterpoint to those of well known social scientists like Cattle, Meer, Mohood

⁵ Interestingly this nationalist framework has been replicated on the provincial level. R. Anderson Sutton points out how Taman Miniatur Sulawesi in Benteng Sombaopu puts the diverse cultures of South Sulawesi on display side by side. See R. Anderson Sutton, *Calling Back the Spirit: Music, Dance, and Cultural Politics in Lowland South Sulawesi*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁶ For instance, an Indonesian Party Leader uses "Non-Jawa" in his interview:

<https://www.antaranews.com/berita/3137265/agung-laksono-wni-jawa-atau-non-jawa-memiliki-hak-sama-menjadi-capres> accessed 28 June 2025.

⁷ On the cultural significance and uses of *noken* bags, see Avelinus Lefaan, "Pemaknaan, Sosialisasi, dan Internalisasi Filsafat *Noken* dalam Komunikasi Pembangunan Masyarakat Kota Jayapura," *Jurnal komunikasi* (Online) (Yogyakarta), 17, 2, p.137-154.

and Verkuyten. I Wayan Setem emphasizes the importance of cultural blending (*silang budaya*). He argues that the terms transculturalism and multiculturalism do not seem to clearly reflect processes of cultural interaction. Furthermore, both terms might incorporate numerous cultures but they fail to convey the idea of a genuine blending or fusion of diverse cultural elements. In contrast to the terms transculturalism and multiculturalism, interculturalism addresses the realities of diversity and cross-cultural dynamics in Kamasan painting, which is the object of his study, as well as in the daily life across Indonesia communities (Wayan Setem, 21). Similar to the way Verkuyten et al describe the Council of Europe's preference for the term interculturalism because of its emphasis on dialogue and the belief that interaction is critical in plural societies (Verkuyten 505, 507), I Wayan Setem prefers the same term because it appears more appropriate to describe dialectical exchange between cultures. And whereas Verkuyten tries to measure intercultural attitudes, I Wayan Setem outlines various ways to achieve interculturalism.

I Wayan Setem uses the term interculturalism to refer to processes of collaboration interaction and intersection between cultural groups. He outlines seven different strategies of interculturalism: reinterpretation, transaesthetics, cultural dialogism, critical openness, knowledge differentiation, lifestyle, and product semantics. His third strategy, cultural dialogism, is especially relevant here. Cultural dialogism involves recognizing that the encounter between two cultures entails complex bilateral processes of selection, exchange and influence that can be positive, constructive and productive for the development of both cultures. Concomitant to this cultural dialogism are processes of filtering, organizing, separating, selecting and deciding all within the framework of a productive intercultural encounter (I Wayan Setem, 42). I Wayan Setem specifies that this exchange involves mutual learning, planning and competing activities that are framed by specific rules of the game so as to avoid negative conflict. I Wayan Setem uses Kamasan painting as an example. He describes the manner in which Kamasan painting has to change to follow modern culture to continue to thrive as a living tradition. These necessary changes pertain to both the content and the form. In terms of content, the subject matter of Kamasan painting has broadened beyond its traditional corpus of Balinese epics to include more common themes such as village life. In terms of form, the two-dimensional paintings are used for other physical objects such as fans and t-shirts.

Having examined several theories of interculturalism, we turn now to the La Salaga project. The La Salaga Project combines the cultures and history of Bali and Sulawesi within an intercultural setting.

Part Two: The Project

The Legend of La Salaga

The story of La Salaga hails from Mamuju and Pamboang in West Sulawesi, Indonesia, which is home to some of Louie's ancestors as well. It has been recorded in the Mandar language which can be considered the literary language of the immediate vicinity. There are rich oral traditions in the Mamuju language, but they were not traditionally recorded in *lontaraq*, the category of manuscripts from South and West Sulawesi that have been

recorded with indigenous Indic-based syllabaries. The word *lontaraq* stems from the type of leaf on which these manuscripts were traditionally written but is now used more generally to describe manuscript traditions from the peninsula. Some of these, including the story of La Salaga, have been Romanized, translated into Dutch, Indonesian or English, and published.

The story of La Salaga recounts the legendary family relations between Mamuju in West Sulawesi and Badung in South Bali, the island on which Louie attended secondary school. This relationship is said to have commenced with the marriage between Puatta Mamuju and Mera'ara Puang who become the parents of the cultural hero La Salaga. In a nutshell, this story relates how the Balinese royal Puang Bali arrived in Mamuju with his beautiful daughter, Mera'ara Puang. His vessel entered the land through the river and Puatta Mamuju, the local ruler, welcomed them. Puatta Mamuju then fell in love with Mera'ara Puang and asked his ministers to prevent her from leaving Mamuju. Mamuju soldiers secretly dammed the river where Puang Bali's vessel was docked. When Puang Bali was about to bid farewell to Puatta Mamuju, he was surprised that the river mouth was completely sealed by sands and it was impossible for the Balinese ship to leave. Understanding the subtle reason behind this action, Puang Bali acquiesced, remained longer in Mamuju, and married his daughter to Puatta Mamuju. As Kathryn's earlier research shows, marriage was a prime means of assimilation for migrants from Sulawesi (Wellen, 2014:88-89).

After the marriage, Mera'ara Puang became pregnant. She craved oysters and fruits. The Mandarese were puzzled, because they were not previously accustomed to eating oysters. But they obliged her request and soon started eating oysters themselves. Later during her pregnancy, Mera'ara Puang was terribly homesick. She wanted to return to Bali to see her family. Puatta Mamuju then allowed her to go with her followers. Several weeks after her arrival in Bali, she gave birth to twins: a boy and a *kobiq* (traditional machete).⁸ She named the boy La Salaga or I Salarang and raised him on Bali.

After several years, Puatta Mamuju died. The *adat* council or the elders of Mamuju decided to seek the crown prince in Bali. They sailed to Badung and asked for La Salaga. To their displeasure, the *adat* council of Bali rejected this request. The emissaries from Mamuju thus returned home empty-handed. The situation in Mamuju was chaotic without the rightful heir to rule the land and there was a long drought. According to local belief in Sulawesi, the absence of a rightful ruler or the presence of an unjust one can cause crop failures, epidemics, and natural disaster (Mattulada: 1985, 142-161). Therefore, the *adat* council of Mamuju decided to try again, and this time they hatched a plan. When they sailed to Bali they brought with them a Mandarese master ironsmith named Sakkaq Manarang. The emissaries from Mamuju asked if La Salaga could stay on board of their ship just for a night and sleep with his family. The *adat* council of Bali agreed. In the middle of the night, Sakkaq Manarang sneaked out to the harbor and drilled holes in all the

⁸ It is interesting to note that there is considerable regional folklore regarding twin births, sometimes involving a crocodile or monitor lizard as the twin. (See Andre Koch Andre and Greg Acciaioli, "The Monitor Twins: A Bugis and Makassarese Tradition from SW Sulawesi, Indonesia." *Biawak: Journal of Varanid Biology and Husbandry* 1, 2 (2007): 77-82.) La Salaga's twin is the only example of an inanimate object being a twin known to the authors.

Balinese ships with his staff iron to sink them. This allowed the Mamuju contingent to kidnap La Salaga and take him to Sulawesi.

In Mamuju, the child La Salaga was unhappy and homesick. He did not adapt well to his new surroundings. Very sad, he asked the *adat* council of Mamuju to take him back to Bali. Like marriage as a means of assimilation, this element of the story also has historical parallels. Kathryn's book on Bugis migrants, *The Open Door*, highlights the homesickness that plagued migrants (Wellen, 2014:103). The members of the *adat* council of Mamuju were moved by this request and, out of pity for the young boy, they sailed back to Bali and returned him.

On Bali, La Salaga grew up to be a brave warrior. He fought against the Sasak kingdom on Lombok and his reputation grew. One day, he went to Gowa in South Sulawesi. When the people of Mamuju heard about his arrival on Sulawesi, they went to Gowa and asked the now grown-up La Salaga to rule in Mamuju. La Salaga agreed; he then went to Mamuju with them.

An audacious and capable leader, La Salaga united Mamuju. He conquered the kingdom of Kuri-Kuri and made a peace treaty with Kalumpang. He extended Mamuju's region as far as the land of Kaili on the north and bordering with the land of Luwu on the east. Later on, he married princess Puatta Boqdi from Pamboang and co-ruled with her as Tomatindo Diagamana in Pamboang. They received the Muslim teacher Sayyid Zakaria Al-Maghribi (a.k.a. Puang Disomba) and converted to Islam, thereby becoming one of the earliest rulers in Mandar to embrace the new faith.

The La Salaga Project

The La Salaga Project both created an intercultural version of this tale from West Sulawesi and brought it to new audiences. We commissioned a painting to relate the legend of La Salaga using a traditional Balinese style known as *Kamasan*. We then used the painting to illustrate a children's book containing this legend in Mandar with poetic interpretations we wrote in Indonesian and English. We also used it for a children's video narrating the legend, and a second video documenting the project. These results, including a downloadable version of the book, are available on the website of KITLV as well as that of the Lontara Project, an initiative promoting the literature of Indonesia general and Sulawesi in particular.

KITLV funded the La Salaga Project during the Covid-19 pandemic. Like the pandemic itself, the unexpectedly available funds and KITLV's call for special projects was unprecedented. In response to this call, Kathryn contacted Louie, who shares her interests both in diaspora groups from Sulawesi and in Bali, and who just happened to be reading Mandarese folklore at the time. Louie is also a founder of Lontara Project, a youth community that was established in 2011 to promote South Sulawesi cultural heritage through new media for Indonesian young generations. Together with young Indonesian artists, musicians and illustrators, he has been passionately retelling the epic *La Galigo* and traditional stories from South Sulawesi in the form of popular reading (see www.lontaraproject.com), comics, songs and even musical drama performance. He has more than a decade of experience bringing traditional Indonesian literature to new

audiences. In contrast, Kathryn came to the La Salaga project as an ivory tower academic with limited experience bringing history to a wide-ranging public. Since the La Salaga Project, however, her interest in public history has developed markedly. She created an art installation entitled “The Library of Karaeng Pattingalloang: A Lost Heirloom” which is curated by the Karaeng Pattingalloang Museum in Makassar.⁹ She also published a popular comparative history of Amsterdam and Makassar in the daily newspaper *Fajar*¹⁰ and is actively seeking collaborators and funding to convert this story into an art exhibit. Together Louie and Kathryn fleshed out the details of the La Salaga project and Kathryn submitted an application for funding with Louie as project partner.

The Painting

Once funding was secured, Louie contacted the Balinese painter I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana via Instagram. It was possible to agree upon the most basic aspects of the painting via electronic communication, but the details required a face-to-face meeting. On 14 June 2021, Louie traveled to Kamasan¹¹ to meet the artist.

In Kamasan Louie met Pak¹² Made and his wife Ni Wayan Sri Wedari, the daughter of the famous painter Nyoman Mandra. Both Nyoman Mandra and Ni Wayan Sri Wedari are known for their exploration of new themes using traditional styles (Vickers, 2012: 91). Pak Made also comes from a family of accomplished artists and started learning from his grandfather I Ketut Rabeg before studying with Nyoman Mandra in 1978. Quickly it became clear to Louie that Pak Made was the right person to translate the story of La Salaga from a written text into a visual masterpiece.

The meeting between Louie and Pak Made exemplifies the sort of dialogue required for interculturalism according to I Wayan Setem. While in Kamasan, Louie discussed the project and the artistic elements of the assignment with Pak Made. They reviewed the legend of La Salaga at length. Louie presented Pak Made with a story board describing nine scenes from the legend of La Salaga as well as visual guidance about the material culture of West Sulawesi. This guidance included information about Mamuju styles of clothing, *pakur* and *sandeq* ships typical of Mandar, houses on stilts known as *rumah panggung*, the machete born with La Salaga that constitutes part of the royal regalia in Mamuju, and a Mandarese stone monument used for the ceremony of *assitaliang*, the

⁹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kp5R4lvr1vU>

¹⁰ Kathryn Wellen, ‘Globalisasi Amsterdam dan Makassar’, *Fajar*, 9 December 2023.

<https://harian.fajar.co.id/2023/12/10/globalisasi-amsterdam-dan-makassar/>

¹¹ Kamasan is a village in Klungkung about forty kilometers northeast of Denpasar. Its organization reflects its history as an artistic community under royal patronage. There are different wards that are specialized according to the services that the artists once provided to the court such as painting and goldsmithing (Campbell, 2014: 252-53). Historically, Balinese art has experienced development on its understanding about culture and traditionalism to the modern world. In the 19th century, Balinese artists were innovating in art (Vickers, 2011: 35-36). The arrival of Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet at Ubud led to innovative movement of the 1930’s, where they taught local artists on technical tricks to improve local paintings and to give lessons of how to market painting. The influence of Spies and Bonnet inspired local artists such as Ida Bagus Made Poleng to move “from traditional wayang-based art to a more modern style” which in turn gave birth to “a modern style of distinctly Balinese art” (Vickers, 2019: 257). After the disastrous 1906’s battle against the Dutch military expedition, Kamasan, which was once the centre of Balinese classical culture entered a period of stagnation. The rise of Ubud’s art scene helped trigger the return of Kamasan art (Vickers, 2019: 254).

¹² Pak is an Indonesian title used for adult males.

tying of ropes for unity. These served as inspiration for Pak Made's own creation to which he brought his own culture and his many years of experience.

The La Salaga commission entailed significant challenges in terms of iconography. Most often Kamasan paintings depict scenes from the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and Balinese local folklore with numerous images on one canvas to relate consecutive scenes within the stories. Other painters, including Pak Made's own father-in-law, have experimented with different themes. For example, Kamasan artists have depicted scenes from the *Malat*, a Balinese story that relates the adventures of Prince Panji, as well as with the story of the Brayut family that depicts peasant life (Vickers, 2012: 57-61). Nevertheless, until Pak Made painted the legend of La Salaga, there had never been a major Kamasan work depicting a story from outside the Balinese literary cannon (Adrian Vickers personal communication, 27 September 2021). Accordingly, the La Salaga commission entailed iconographic challenges. Pak Made gave considerable thought to how he would depict the story of La Salaga. The information we had provided him offered some visual guidance but Pak Made still found himself dreaming about how he would depict all the characters and the scenes. In the end he demonstrated tremendous ingenuity.¹³

Pak Made's genius can be seen in various aspects of the painting. The sarongs worn by people from Mandar are checkered as is common in southern and western Sulawesi but the sarongs of most of the Balinese people in the story are batik. Similarly, there are also differences in the headdresses worn by the characters of different ethnicities. The characters from Sulawesi have circular headbands known as *songkok to Boné* or *songkok pamiring* whereas the characters from Bali have more extensive head coverings known as *udeng*. The female characters from Sulawesi are depicted with traditional *baju pokko* blouses and wear their hairs in typical Mandarese buns. On the first two scenes, Mera'ara Puang who just arrived in Mamuju is depicted in Balinese traditional *kemben* (torso wrap) but once the story moves on to the scene where she already settled down, her dress changed to traditional Mandarese blouse. However, when she returned back to Bali to give birth to La Salaga, her dress changes again to Balinese style. This particular attention to detail that Pak Made shows in his work makes the painting not just as a visualization of the story but also an object worthy of study in its own right.

¹³ Pak Made says this himself at minute 08.23 of the The Journey of La Salaga video:

Made: "The interesting thing (from the La Salaga Project) is the challenge to paint a rumah panggung (traditional house on stilts in Sulawesi). I asked myself "How to paint it?" In the process, I started painting from the easiest scenes (and then progressed) to the hard ones. I already plotted 9 scenes, dividing each scene with these karang-karangan (rock ornaments).

Louie: Why does the painting start from there (bottom left side)?

Made: The beginning starts from the bottom, then continues (to the right) and goes further up, the upper part is the climax of the story, the upper right is the end."



Figure 1 The La Salaga Painting by I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana photographed by Agit Primaswara, 2021.

These specific ethnographic details were missed by the commentator Mohammad Aditia Gilang Romadhon from Institusi Seni Indonesia in Surakarta in his article “A Visual Deconstruction” but they are apparent to viewers with a knowledge of the cultures of Bali and Sulawesi.

Despite the unprecedented storyline, the oeuvre is still a Kamasan painting, albeit an intercultural one. Pak Made followed the traditional color scheme for Kamasan paintings, and drew inspiration for the face of La Salaga from Arjuna, a hero from the *Mahabharata* who is a figure of masculine perfection in Balinese art. Similarly, the face of Mera’ara Puang is inspired by the heavenly nymph Suprabha, another character from this great Hindu epic. They are both portrayed in a refined (*alus*) manner as is appropriate for princes and princesses in Balinese painting. In contrast, malevolent characters are often painted with bulging eyes in Kamasan painting. Accordingly, the ironsmith’s eyes are a little bit bulging as he drills holes in the Balinese boats; but the bulging is not extreme. This degree of bulging is appropriate because he is a conspirator but there is no real villain in the legend of La Salaga. Made’s use of Balinese symbolism to illustrate the story from West Sulawesi is but one of many intercultural elements in the project.

The Text

After the commission of the painting was definite, we began working on the Indonesian and English poetry for the book. The book is written in three languages. This trilingualism is multicultural in that the languages are presented side by side. Prominent on each page is the legend in Mandarese script subtitled in Romanized Mandarese; this constitutes an

intercultural element because of the blending. The text is from *Lontar Mandar*, a manuscript found in Balanipa, West Sulawesi. We used a transliterated and translated version edited by A. M. Mandra, and published by the Department of Education and Culture in 1992. Based on the information mentioned inside this publication, it is from a copy made in 1814 of an older manuscript. This book is representative of the Indonesian government's multicultural efforts to promote individual local cultures as constituent elements of the national culture. Below the text in Mandar are our Indonesian and English versions of the story. They are not direct translations of the Mandar original but rather poetic interpretations. In writing the poetry we tried to convey the story in understandable, beautiful Indonesian and English. It must be emphasized that the legend of La Salaga hails from Mamuju where people speak their own language known as Mamuju. However, Mandarese was traditionally used for writing and until now no *lontaraq* manuscripts have been found in the Mamuju language. The texts in the book are also intercultural in the sense that they narrate Kamasan painting.

The use of Mandar language in the book and video is a significant aspect of the La Salaga Project's interculturalism. Pak Made's gorgeous Balinese-style painting is extremely prominent in the book, as this outstanding work of art should be. Yet the project is intended as a blending of cultures from Sulawesi and Bali, representative of the marriage of Puatta Mamuju and Mera'ara Puang. Were it not for the large Mandar font, the visual presentation of the book would be overwhelmingly Balinese. With the Mandar text featured prominently throughout the book, the cultural impressions are visually balanced. The book's intercultural character is readily apparent in this Balinese-Mamuju mix.¹⁴

To achieve the desired visual balance, we engaged the talented designer Aditya Bayu Perdana. A lecturer at Telkom University in Bandung, Bayu is also a typographer of traditional Indonesian scripts. He has designed more fonts than he can remember, many for Indonesian languages such as Javanese, Balinese and Batak. An aficionado of language, history and culture, he regrets that language revitalization efforts often neglect the visual diversity of the scripts. He uses his talents to enrich the esthetics in hopes of making Indonesian scripts appealing to younger generations. One might well imagine that the increased emphasis on local genius post-Suharto has offered Bayu increased opportunities to work for hotels and other institutions wishing to emphasize their local roots. As he was born in 1997, however, such opportunities have always been available to him.

For the La Salaga Project, Bayu invented two fonts. Both have been featured in a book on typography by Surianto Rustan (Rustan, 2023, Vol. 2: 135). The font on the cover used for the title of the book represents a radical break from existing fonts for languages from Sulawesi. Its elongated shapes flow. Positioned under the boat on the cover and title page, it looks like waves. Even to the trained eye of *lontaraq* readers such as Kathryn and Louie, at first glance it looks like part of the illustration. This font is an artistic achievement in and of itself.

¹⁴ This mix is perhaps less obvious in the video because most viewers will not recognize the language used to narrate the video, but the mix is still there.



Figure 2 The Bugis wave font designed by Aditya Bayu Perdana. Photographed by Agit Primaswara, 2021.

The font used for the Mandarese text of the book posed its own set of challenges. Bayu considered the well-known font used by B. F. Matthes to be too stiff, thick and angular for the project. It appears that Matthes favored angular scripts and considered rounding the V-shaped constituents of Iontaraq to be sloppy (Noorduyn, 1993: 553). Because Matthes published Bugis and Makassarese dictionaries and chrestomathies¹⁵ of enduring value, the font he used has become well-known.¹⁶ It was not, however, the only option. Bayu designed a more rounded font that is a better aesthetic match for Pak Made's art. It is intended to resemble the tendrils of young plants growing among Balinese coral.

Retrieving the painting

When the painting was completed, Louie, the videographer Agit Primaswara and his team travelled to Bali for the next phase of the project. On September 16, 2021 they went to Klungkung, where they were greeted by a gleeful and extremely hospitable Pak Made. When they arrived in his workshop, the first thing that they saw was the La Salaga painting. It was prominently displayed in the pavilion. Pak Made had sent updates, including images of the painting in progress and short videos of him working on it, but nothing could compare to the experience of seeing the completed painting. The painting was resplendent. Painted with limestone-based paints, the canvas radiates delicate shades of blue and yellow mixed with earthy tones of brown and beige. The result almost appears to be glowing from within itself, irrespective of external light. Measuring 1,5 by 3 meters long, it dominated the view in Pak Made's workshop. The painting was still fresh, rich in colours. In fact, Pak Made was still adding his last touches when the team arrived. The

¹⁵ A chrestomathy is a selection of literary texts and passages that, taken together, are useful for learning a language, showing the development of a language or studying a subject. A chrestomathy's didactic purpose distinguishes it from an anthology.

¹⁶ The history of printing in the indigenous languages of Sulawesi extends back into the eighteenth century when Radermacher published two short wordlists in Makassarese and Bugis in 1786. A Bugis code of laws was also printed in Singapore in 1832, but it was the Dutch missionary B. F. Matthes who pioneered printing in, as well as the scientific study of, these languages. During the mid-nineteenth century he printed a variety of materials in the indigenous script in Makassar. The late-nineteenth century saw increased concern for education and consequently the printing of textbooks in Bugis and Makassarese in the indigenous script. In the twentieth century, there preference was for printing in the Roman alphabet. Notable exceptions are La Side's 1971 history of Arung Palakka and the readers of Tamin Chairan (Noorduyn, 1991: 140, 168-79). In the late twentieth century a Bugis font was also developed for use on computers. Thus, Aditya Bayu Perdana did not have to start from zero.

diligence, artistry and eye for details used for this artwork were immediately obvious. Louie realized that it would serve as perfect art to illuminate the text.

The videographers quickly got to work setting up their equipment including cameras, lights and microphones. They shot footage of Pak Made describing his process, Louie and Pak Made discussing the painting, Pak Made's studio and his co-workers, and Pak Made's wife Bu¹⁷ Sri Wedari, a teacher at SMA Negeri 2 Semarang, discussing the importance of preserving this style of art for future generations. Because only half a day was available for filming, it was a challenge for the crew to obtain all the necessary footage.

The next day, Louie and the team delivered the painting to Indus restaurant. There they were greeted by Mbok Erma and Bli Abut, representatives of the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival with which Indus restaurant is associated. When Louie unfolded the La Salaga painting for them, they were awestruck. Not only were they impressed with the painting's beauty but they also recognized its intercultural innovations. Although very active in the Balinese art scene, never before had they seen such a Kamasan painting. Louie told them about the legend and the painting. He then started to describe how to care for the painting but this was not necessary. Having attended art school in Denpasar, Bli Abut was already well trained in handling Kamasan paintings. However, neither of them was previously aware of the legend of La Salaga and the connection between Badung and Mamuju.

The book

Photos of the painting completed by Agit Primaswara's team, the Indonesian and English poetry written by the two of us, and the fonts developed by Aditya Bayu Perdana, we then engaged the talented free-lance illustrator Ghina Amalia Yuhanida to design the book. Her primary interest being Indonesian culture, Ghina appreciated the challenges posed by the book's interculturalism and its trilinguality. To overcome these challenges, Ghina collaborated with Bayu. Together they succeeded in designing a book that contained the text in three languages and two scripts while still showcasing the artwork of Pak Made.¹⁸

Ghina also reworked the photographs of the painting so that the images would be appropriate for a book. This entailed examining the raw image, eliminating the superfluous parts of the image, adjusting the image so that it is appropriate for the book, and finalizing the image. This four-step process is apparent in figure 3.

¹⁷ Bu is an Indonesian title used for adult females.

¹⁸ The technical and artistic aspects of the book's design are described in greater detail in Aditya Bayu Perdana et al "Designing a Cross-Cultural Picture Book: A Glance at Legenda La Salaga". *KnE Social Sciences* 10, 1 (2025): 9-17.

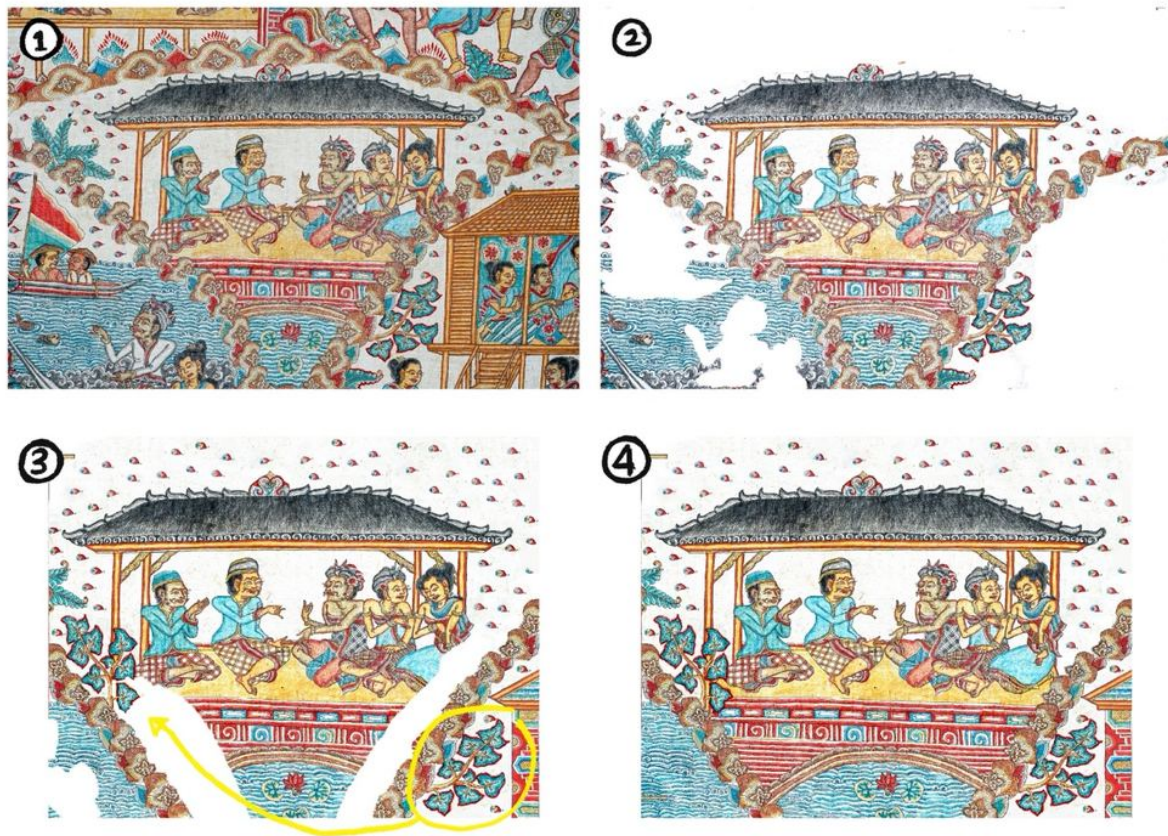


Figure 3 The patching process. Artistic assemblage by Ghina Amalia Yuhanida, 2022.

The patching process was her favorite part of the project, even though it was complicated by the use of photographs rather than scans, a necessity given the large size of the painting.

For the book, printing consultant Abie Zaidannas and Louie chose a linen-look paper because it had the right balance of affordability, durability and aesthetic appeal. It also reveals the colors in the painting beautifully. Pameo Productions printed 125 copies of the book. Aside from those provided to project participants, the rest were donated to literary organizations in Indonesia and libraries. These include Akademi Sastra Banggai, the Ternate Heritage Society, Lakoatjawas Library on Timor, Salihara Community, Radio Buku Literacy Community, Gurat Institute, Oprasi Lontar Community and the libraries of Universitas Indonesia, Universitas Gajah Mada, and Universitas Udayana. Pameo productions mailed most of these directly to their destinations and sixty copies to Louie in Makassar for distribution in Sulawesi.



Figure 4 The book cover designed by Aditya Bayu Perdana. Photo by Agit Primaswara, 2021.

The videos

Technically, or perhaps traditionally, the painting and the book alone could complete the project. The videos might even be considered superfluous. This would be an underestimation of the aims of the project, however, because the videos are essential to communicating the results to wide-ranging audiences. Many more people are able to access the videos on their smart phones than will be able to locate a copy of the book in a library. This stems both from the small number of books printed and from the fact that global communications via social media are deeply embedded in Indonesia, even in rural areas (Collins, 2012).¹⁹ In terms of accessibility and distribution, therefore, the videos are an important part of the La Salaga project.

Videographer Agit Primaswara of Mari Madjoe Productions made two videos. The first is a documentary which describes the project. It contains interviews with Pak Made as well as our own perceptions of the history and the project. The second video is intended for children telling the story of La Salaga. The video is of Pak Made's painting. Louie's father Haji Muhammad Darwasir, who is a native Mandarese speaker, narrates the film which is

¹⁹ Indonesia has been nicknamed the Social Media Nation. Prior to the pandemic, 48% of the country's population is online and spent an average of 3 hours and 26 minutes per day online, with YouTube being the most popular platform (Hui, 2020:156). Social media consumption appears to have increased as a result of the pandemic. Additionally, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on traditional media consumption was immediately felt; in early March 2020 Indonesians watched three hours of television per day, and this increased by almost half an hour by the end of the month (Oxford Business Group, 2020).

subtitled in English or Indonesian according to the viewer's settings on YouTube. It may be among the first professional videos in Mandar.

The reception of the book

Even before the book was made available online, the public response to the book was greater than anticipated. It was also overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic.

On Bali, we participated in the Ubud Writers Festival via internet. We were interviewed by none other than the Balinese writer Wayan Juniartha a.k.a. Bli Jun. Bli Jun is a well-known journalist who is highly respected for his commentaries and analyses of Balinese affairs. Nevertheless, like most Balinese, he was surprised to learn of the connection between Badung and Mamuju. He was also especially curious as to how the legend had survived Islamicization in Sulawesi. During the festival we explained that many kinds of pre-Islamic literature still exist in Sulawesi. Most notable is the *La Galigo* epic, which was used as the basis of an international theatrical production and is included in UNESCO's Memory of the World. Louie also discussed the cultural thirst among his generation of Indonesians for traditional literature and its place in the modern world. After the Ubud Writers' and Readers' Festival, numerous individuals and bookstores approached us about how to purchase copies of the book. It is not yet available for sale, but an electronic copy is available for free download.²⁰

The book was equally well received in Sulawesi. Anwar Jimper Rahman of Kampung Buku Community and Innawa Publishing invited Louie to speak at the Makassar Biennale. Here people were just as surprised to learn about the connection between Bali and Mamuju as people on Bali were. There were discussions about the Sulawesi diaspora before and after the arrival of European powers in Southeast Asia, with young people with backgrounds in literature and art from different parts of Sulawesi and eastern Indonesia. Cornerstone School in Makassar also invited Louie to participate in an online event for child refugees from Afghanistan in Makassar. At this event, Louie introduced *La Salaga* and the project and read the book to the children. The Afghan children actively participated in the discussion and asked curious questions about the painting and expressed fascination with the machete. Like *La Salaga*, these children were forced to leave their homes at a young age; thus, the story of *La Salaga* resonated with them. This attests to the enduring value of literature as a mirror of the human experience.

In West Sulawesi, from where the Legend of *La Salaga* hails, the reception of the book was most complex. On 27 November 2021 Louie traveled to Mandar to present copies of the book and the painting itself to Nusa Pustaka, a literacy organization in Polewali, West Sulawesi. *Legenda La Salaga* is the first children's book ever written in Mandarese language and Pak Made's painting is also the first visual known representation of *La Salaga*, a figure who retains importance in Mamuju today. As such the book is considered a treasure by people in Mamuju (personal communication, Abdi Latiefi, 4 January 2022; personal communication Suparman Sopo, 3 December 2021. See also the introduction by the Maradika Mamuju, Bau Akram Dai, S. E., M. Si.)

²⁰ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1d0IGRMMyUWEzY8Mp5-IHyTlcATdZA1JqN/view>

Despite the overwhelmingly positive reception, Louie encountered some reservation in Polewali. There was concern about which version of the story was used for the book, whether it was really a Mamuju version and if efforts had been made to discover other versions. Louie explained that the innovative purpose of the project was to bring traditional literature to new audiences instead of to conduct philological research. There was also curiosity about why the drawings were done in Balinese style as opposed to a style from Sulawesi. This is because the intercultural project strives to integrate the cultures of Bali and Sulawesi, just like the marriage. On a national level, the book's value is augmented by this combination of cultures. Even on a local level, the use of Balinese art to illustrate a well-known story from West Sulawesi was appreciated. The testimonies received from local literary activists, educators and even the King of Mamuju himself, reflect tremendous pride. Whereas Bali frequently represents Indonesia on the (inter)national stage, Mamuju almost never does.²¹

While the painting's permanent home is at Nusa Pustaka in Polewali, where it occupies a prominent place in the library and attracts the curious eyes of visitors, it also attracted attention in Germany. In 2023 members of the Lontara Project including Louie travelled to Berlin and Dresden where they made multimedia presentations of the project including visual presentations, traditional singing and poetry declamation.²² Clearly interest in the project has spread beyond Bali and Sulawesi.

Part Three: The La Salaga Project in Comparison

Having discussed interculturalism in the first section, and having described the La Salaga project and its reception in the second section, the third section places the La Salaga project in comparative perspective. We compare the La Salaga Project with other artistic discourses as well as with historical and contemporary realities. We also discuss it in our personal, intellectual and creative lives.

Intercultural projects in a comparative perspective

As the reception of the book illustrates, both the contact between Badung and Mamuju and the interculturalism of the project surprised people. This surprise stems in part from the comparative rarity of intercultural discourses in Indonesia, especially in children's literature. While the variety of cultures within in Indonesia is showcased and emphasized in numerous children's books designed to cultivate awareness and empathy, the cultures are generally displayed individually. Strangely for such a diverse country of multilingual citizens, cultural discourses that intertwine two cultures are unusual in Indonesia. They are not, however, entirely absent. Two projects in particular contain elements resembling the La Salaga Project.

Among Indonesian artists who combine art and traditions from different parts of the archipelago, Heri Dono is the most famous. He was the first of his generation to establish

²¹ One exception is in the episode "Natural History" of the television series "Chicago Med" in which Mamuju is portrayed as a difficult to identify language, and the Mamuju-speaker is unrealistically portrayed as young but monolingual.

²² Photos and videos of the presentations in Germany are available at <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjyhK9CAF2R/> and https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn7Hpt4Pa9e/?img_index=6

an international reputation as a contemporary artist and has been hailed as “the epitome of the cosmopolitan artist” (Ingham, 2014). Heri Dono combines elements of various Indonesian cultures in innovative, intercultural ways. His puppets entitled “Raja Batak and His Wife Boru Anian” exemplify this perfectly. They are made of cardboard rather than the usual leather and they represent a story from northern Sumatra rather than a story from the Javanese literary canon, as shadow puppets generally do (National Heritage Board, undated). Similarly, his 1988 Wayang Legenda series adapts the Batak folktale “Si Tungkot Tunggal Panaluan” (Supangkat, 2014: 95). Heri Dono advocates preserving traditions in new dialogues (Wiyanto, 2004: 58), which is exactly what much of his work does. Such a hybrid, intercultural production is also what Pak Made’s achieved with his Kamasan interpretation of the legend of La Salaga.

Another example is the Yirrkala Batik Project which is also intercultural. It resembles the La Salaga project in that it also combines styles from Sulawesi and a place where people from Sulawesi travelled, specifically northern Australia. From the early seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, sailors from South Sulawesi traversed the Timor Sea in search of sea cucumbers (Macknight, 1976). This shared heritage is apparent in Macassan words in the indigenous languages of East Arnhem Land; in rock art across northern Australia; in Aboriginal oral histories (Ormond-Parker, 2020:4) and in songs and dances (Abdi Karya, n.d.). Initiated in 2014, the Yirrkala Batik Project entailed the production of Pekalongan-style²³ batik based on the designs of Nawurapa Wunungmurra, a renowned artist from Yirrkala who is descendant from both Makassarese sailors and Yirritjamoiety Australians. While Pekalongan batik is Javanese rather than Bugis or Makassarese, as the artist Abdi Karya points out, people from other parts of Indonesia besides Sulawesi also participated in this trade (Abdi Karya, nd). The portrayal of bark painting motifs in batik constitutes an intercultural dialogue combining the two traditions. Similarly, Macassan pots are produced in the village of Soreang and decorated with Yolŋu painting. Entailing extensive dialogue, both are examples of intercultural art. These intercultural projects were both initiated on the local level and therefore differ significantly from the batik Papua masterminded by the national government which continuously places Java on center stage. We the authors are aware that in Part One we used batik with non-Javanese designs as an example of a hegemonic cultural exchange that does not meet I Wayan Setem’s definition of interculturalism, and we contend that the difference lies in the power dynamics.

The historical links between Sulawesi and northern Australia are well remembered and commemorated in a variety of ways including theatrical performances and storytelling (Bilous, 2015 and Stephenson, 2008). The Makassar City Museum has a room dedicated to Makassar-Australian relations established through the sea cucumber trade in which cloth from the Yirrkala Batik Project is displayed. In contrast to the Makassar-Australia relationship which is remembered on both sides, the legend of La Salaga has been forgotten on Bali. While migrants from South Sulawesi and their descendants on Bali are aware of their heritage and have cosmopolitan attachments, the legend of La Salaga

²³ Pekalongan is a city on northern Java that has long played an important role in the batik industry.

is not part of the cultural consciousness. Hans Hagerdal recalls possibly having encountered awareness of the legend among the Sasak of Lombok, but such memories are vague and rare (Hans Hagerdal, personal communication, May 9, 2022). With the exception of Mamuju and the Bugis community on Bali, it appears that memories of contact between Makassar and Northern Australia loom larger in the conscious of the descendants than the marriage of Puatta Mamuju and Mera'ara Puang or the historical relations between Bali and Sulawesi.

Despite these innovative initiatives, the ethno-spatial model in which regional cultures are juxtapositioned and not blended prevails across Indonesia. For example, provincial governments sometimes follow a similar approach to multiculturalism. Local identities are also sometimes displayed as being distinct from one another. A good example is the Tari Empat Etnis (Dance of Four Ethnicities) from South Sulawesi created in 1975 by the local impresario Ida Joesoef from Yayasan Anging Mammiri (YAMA). This dance represents the four largest ethnicities in South Sulawesi, namely Makassar, Bugis, Mandar and Toraja. It incorporates costumes, movements and music from each ethnic group. Significantly, the cultures are displayed successively, one after the other. There are no Torajan dance steps accompanying Mandarese music or other similar blending. Moreover, the smaller ethnicities within the province such as Luwu, Enrekang, Wotu, and Selayar are excluded. In this case the national model of ethno-spatial containment has been reproduced on the provincial level. Interestingly, when the five regencies in which most of the Mandarese populations live decided to establish the province of West Sulawesi apart from South Sulawesi in 2004, a new dance called Tari Tiga Etnis (Dance of Three Ethnicities) was created in response to this political change. The new dance is basically a modification of Tari Empat Etnis, which omits part from Mandarese dance and continues only with parts from Bugis, Makassar and Toraja (Soraya, 2018).²⁴

The history behind La Salaga

The history surrounding La Salaga is inherently intercultural. La Salaga himself may be a legendary rather than a historical figure, but he is emblematic of the relationship between Bali and Sulawesi. While it is unclear exactly when this relationship may have started, it has been documented through anthropological and archaeological research. There is a Balinese folktale about the origins of the names Buleleng and Singaraja linking the greatness of these kingdoms to stranded Bugis boats on the shores of Buleleng (Khusyairi, 2017: 109). There are also similarities in styles of gravestones in South Sulawesi and southern Bali (Fadillah, 1999: 111-112). These gravestones date from the late nineteenth century and are thus from a much later period than the pre-Islamic period (in West Sulawesi) during which the Legend of La Salaga takes place. Nevertheless, folktales and gravestones suggest that there was a long-standing relationship between the two islands.

Such a relationship might have entailed more than intercultural exchange and inter-island marriages. There may have been other social, political or military aspects as well.

²⁴ Tari Kreasi 3 Etnis Bugis, Makassar dan Tanah Toraja Toraja SDN Komp. IKIP 1 Makassar, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaJ2XLoG0z0>

Perhaps Badung felt that a relationship with a polity on Sulawesi may have been militarily advantageous. Mataram long threatened to conquer or otherwise interfere in Balinese affairs. Under this threat, it would be logical to seek military alliances elsewhere. While it is commonly believed that soldiers from Sulawesi gained prominence in the archipelago following the Makassar War, research in Sundanese texts documents that soldiers from Sulawesi had a reputation for prowess as early as late 15th to early 16th century (West, 2021: 217).

La Salaga is also emblematic of migrants in early modern Asia who led transnational existences and were more common than one might realize. According to legend, La Salaga served numerous governments. He both fought against the Sasak on Lombok and agreed to rule Mamuju. Such multiple loyalties were not unheard of in early modern Asia. As Kathryn's research has revealed, historical migrants are known to have maintained multiple loyalties. For example, the eighteenth-century Bugis migrants Haji Hafiz and Daéng Mabéla both considered themselves to have two lords in different places. Haji Hafiz felt loyal both to the Wajorese²⁵ leader Daéng Matekko and the so-called five Opu Daéng who were important Bugis statesmen in the Malay world. Similarly, Daéng Mabéla claimed to be loyal to his king in Sulawesi and the Dutch company in Sumatra (Wellen, 2014: 124-26).

Such loyalties can be heart-wrenching. According to legend, La Salaga cried from homesickness for Bali while residing in Sulawesi as a child. This is very realistic and not just for a child. Seventeenth-century Bugis soldiers in the service of the English East India Company are known to have complained persistently of homesickness (Wellen, 2014: 103). While La Salaga may be a representation of how easily early modern migrants could adapt to new surroundings (Hägerdal, 2001: 77), these transitions could entail emotional costs. This holds true not only in historical situations but also contemporary situations. This is evidenced by the homesickness of the Afghani refugees residing in Makassar to whom Louie read La Salaga and his own challenges living under the grey skies of the Netherlands.

La Salaga commemorations

The way La Salaga is remembered and commemorated in Mamuju also exemplifies how interculturalism is an inherent part of Indonesia. Every two years, the royal family of the Mamuju kingdom who trace their ancestry to La Salaga hold a ceremony called *Masossor Manurung*. During this ceremony La Salaga's twin, the machete named *Maradika Tammakana-kana* is cleaned. Bearing indigenous and Islamic elements, and including Muslims from Mamuju as well as Balinese Hindus, the ceremony is undeniably intercultural. As such it has tremendous potential for promoting national unity, but it seems to serve other purposes; and these purposes seem to have changed over time.

Previously, the ritual of cleaning Maradika Tammakana-kana was used to legitimate the royal family. According to local legend in Mamuju, the ceremony started when there was a famine. At that time, the king of Mamuju ordered the *Galaggar Pitu* (the seven

²⁵ Wajo' is a Bugis polity in the Cenrana Valley in South Sulawesi.

members of *adat* council or customary leaders) to bathe Maradika Tammakana-kana. The water from the washing process of this heirloom was then distributed to gardens, rice fields, the sea, and a few days later the drought that hit Mamuju ended. While the ritual still serves to reinforce the position of the royal family, it now also boosts tourism and celebrates local culture. In 2019, the ritual was deliberately chosen to be the highlight of Festival Maradika Mamuju, a three-day event by local government to boost tourism and the creative industries. The sacred ritual has been popularized, enlivened with cultural performances involving local art communities and students from public schools. Delegations from Bali are also invited (Harahap, 2019).

Like intercultural art, intercultural commemorations that combine traditions from two different islands are not common in Indonesia but they are not unheard of, especially among diaspora communities. For example, the Bugis community in Riau and Jambi who embraces a Malay identity still preserve traditions such as *mabbarasanji* and *cemme saffareng* from South Sulawesi (Jamaluddin, 2018: 133). The descendants of Bugis migrants in Pulau Serangan (Denpasar, Bali) interchangeably use Balinese and Bugis languages in daily life, while still celebrate 'megilicik', an Islamic tradition originating from Wajo'. They also observe local *palemahan* and *pawongan* customary village administration (I Nyoman, 2018: 96, 108). The mixtures are very real, and yet cultures in Indonesia are usually put on display side by side. Even the Betawi culture which mixes Malay, Sundanese and Javanese elements usually is displayed distinctly, alongside other cultures including those that shaped it.

Conclusion

In contemporary Indonesia there are many migrants and cross-cultural encounters that do not figure prominently into the nationalist discourse. Many people are multilingual and maintain multiple attachments. There have also been many interethnic marriages producing children like Louie with multiple and hybrid ethnic identifications. Not the least of these are migrants from South Sulawesi who have established a far-flung network with members in thirty-seven provinces.²⁶

While Indonesia is an intercultural nation par excellence, the state's discourse is generally multicultural. It mostly entails the juxtapositioning of different cultures, which is multicultural. Very little of the discourse highlights the intercultural combinations that resulted from grassroots dialogue and interaction between cultures throughout time and space. This stems in part from the New Order's desire to depoliticize local cultures and contain them within a national framework. While Java figured, and figures, disproportionately in this discourse, there were, and are, efforts to counterbalance this dominance.

Under the New Order cultures from across the archipelago were promoted in a policy of "suku-ologi" designed counterbalance Javanese studies. Special attention was also paid to designing children's literature that would help children appreciate other cultures

²⁶ This is the Kerukunan Keluarga Sulawesi Selatan (Organization of Families from South Sulawesi). This is commonly known its initials KKSS which is also said to stand for "kaluku kelapa sama saja" meaning "coconut (in Bugis) coconut (in Indonesian) it's the same."

within the archipelago (Jones, 2013: 244-248). Yet like the collections of *cerita daerah*, this juvenile literature highlighted the variety of cultures within Indonesia as opposed to the many ways in which cultures have blended, and continue to blend, in Indonesia. Variations “from the established model” were discouraged (Jones, 2013: 247). Despite the significant changes of the Reform era, there has been little modification to the positioning of local cultures within the national cultural bureaucracy (Jones, 2013: 269).

While it is beyond the scope of this article to explain the rationale behind the Indonesian government’s model, it is interesting to point out the irony of interculturalism in Indonesia as it relates to La Salaga. There is much more blending than is commonly realized. Both *Legenda La Salaga* and the project as whole reveal and highlight unexplored narratives of interculturalism in Indonesian society. The story it relates is one of migration, a phenomenon with a much longer history than is commonly recognized. La Salaga is emblematic of the migrants that have always existed and of the cultural exchanges that have resulted in such migrations; as is his mother who introduced shellfish to Mamuju and Syekh Zakaria who introduced Islam. The book and the painting also exemplify this intercultural reality. Pak Madé’s painting is the first major Kamasan painting to depict scenes outside of the Balinese literary cannon. Books like *Legenda La Salaga* are extremely rare within the scope of Indonesian children’s literature. Even anthologies designed to encourage cultural awareness among children tend to present the cultures of the archipelago side by side whereas *Legenda La Salaga* truly blends the cultures of two different islands. In so doing, it reflects the long-existing but increasingly intense interculturality of Indonesia.

As I Wayan Setem points out, interculturalism enriches rather than eradicates kamasan painting (I Wayan Setem, 45). Intercultural dialogues allow kamasan painting and lontar literature to be enjoyed by more people than ever before. The authors and I Made Puja Laksana as well as Aditya Bayu Perdana and Ghina Amalia Yuhanida are proud to have contributed to their enjoyment.

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