

Telling and Hearing: Learning from Macassan-Yolŋu Stories of Connecting

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Abstract

This thesis is about stories that connect Macassan people from the Indonesian Island of Sulawesi, and Yolŋu, Indigenous Australians from the north coast of Australia. These stories are important because they unsettle how Australians understand their nation's histories and geographies, challenging many commonly held assumptions. Yet many Australians, if they hear these stories at all, often hear them filtered through a very limited number of academic discourses that rely on tangible objects and data, based on particular approaches to research and seeing the world.

This thesis starts by exploring the ways in which these discourses address these stories of connecting in museums and popular geographical journals. It then offers an alternative approach to telling, hearing and responding to Macassan-Yolŋu stories by listening to Yolŋu elders in north-east Arnhem Land. The thesis offers not simply a framework for engaging with these Yolŋu stories of contact with and connection to Macassan people, nor simply a critique of a dominant discourse that reduces the complex histories and geographies of connection to a rather singular 'Macassan contact', but contributes to a more reflexive and pluralist perspective on the ways in which knowledge is both created and shared. Finally, the thesis considers how these differing ways of telling and hearing Macassan-Yolŋu stories might open up a space for engaging with a multiplicity of knowledges, challenging learners and educators to change the ways in which they tell, hear, teach and learn from all stories.

Candidate's Statement

This work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

It is an original piece of research performed between 2008 and 2014, and has been written by me. All information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis. Any help and assistance I have received in my research has been appropriately acknowledged.

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (References: HE30OCT2009-D00162, 5201100555D, 5201200037 and 5201200586).

Rebecca H. Bilous

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*This thesis is **our** story.*

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