



## Social imaginaries of subsea cables: Recovering connections between Broome and Banyuwangi

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Journal:         | <i>Media International Australia</i>  |
| Manuscript ID    | MIA-20-0144.R1  |
| Manuscript Type: | Original Article  |
| Keywords:        | cable, telegraph, Indian Ocean, Broome, Banyuwangi, social imaginaries, Java, Western Australia, memory, Indigenous   |
| Abstract:        | <p>As most data travels through subsea cables, this article investigates social imaginaries of the cable laid in 1889 from Banyuwangi in south-eastern Java to Broome in north-western Australia. Through collaborative fieldwork in Broome and Banyuwangi, radically different representations are identified at either end of the cable. In Broome, the cable telegraph station is memorialized for introducing colonial sophistication to a town where Java is celebrated for facilitating communication with Britain. In Banyuwangi, there is no mention of Broome and little mention of the undersea cable. Instead, there are mythical and haunted representations of a decrepit British Hostel occasionally associated with telegraph operations. Despite some similarities in Indigenous perspectives and entrepreneurial desire to realize tourism income from cable heritage, an ocean-size gulf was identified between the social imaginaries that enabled the cable to be dug up and normalized as a cultural attraction in Broome while remaining buried, almost forgotten, in Banyuwangi.</p> |
|                  |   |

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

## **Social imaginaries of subsea cables: Recovering connections between Broome and Banyuwangi**

When a 4,600km subsea cable from Perth to Singapore via Indonesia was completed in 2018, Australia's Communication Minister declared, 'Although many people probably don't know it, almost all of the internet traffic from Australia to the world goes by subsea cables' (Vocus Communications, 2018). As substantial investments are being made in subsea cables, this article addresses the question of how public knowledge has sedimented around some of the earliest landing sites for undersea cables connecting 'Australia to the world'. It describes an investigation into representations of the 1,650-kilometre-long submarine cable laid in 1889 from Banyuwangi in the colonized lands of the Blambangan people at the eastern tip of Java, to Broome in Yawuru country on the north-western coast of Australia. Fieldwork and archival research for this article was conducted by both researchers in Broome in November and Banyuwangi in December 2019, followed by textual analysis and desk research in the first half of 2020. The investigations' locally informed analysis of available texts indicates radically different social imaginaries of subsea cable heritage in Broome and Banyuwangi. The cable has been memorialized and put on display in Broome but remains buried and, largely, forgotten in Banyuwangi. The old telegraph technology is remembered, publicly, in Broome as a marvel of the world-wide-communications infrastructure of British Empire. Remnants of the subsea cable operations have been normalized as national heritage, functioning state infrastructure and as tourist attractions celebrating British sophistication in Broome, yet in Banyuwangi the only publicly available representations of cable heritage were associated with a haunted, semi-inhabited complex of buildings that the local government intends to reclaim from the army for a commercial heritage development targeting international tourists. The variance in representations of cable heritage suggest substantial differences in social imaginaries dominating the two sites. However, similarities could also be

1  
2 identified in how Indigenous heritage leaders at both sites supported the collection of archives  
3  
4 to understand how subsea cable operations had impacted on their peoples within contexts of  
5  
6 substantially older Indian Ocean rim communications. Finally, the article reflects on how on-  
7  
8 site collaborative research brings out and may intervene in the social imaginaries of  
9  
10 communities at either end of subsea cables.  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15

### 16 **Eastern telegraph cables: disrupting and producing communities**

17  
18 In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the resources, security and spatial organization of  
19  
20 Indigenous peoples were radically disrupted by installation of the British telegraph system  
21  
22 within today's geographies of Indonesia and Australia (Owen, 2016: 298-299; Martinez,  
23  
24 2017: 230-231). Submarine telegraph cables were laid from Darwin to Banyuwangi in 1871  
25  
26 and from Banyuwangi to Broome in 1889 to link the relatively new telegraph networks in  
27  
28 Australia and Southeast Asia. The cables and cable stations were constructed and operated as  
29  
30 part of the world-wide cable cartel led by a British merchant, John Pender (Headrick &  
31  
32 Griset, 2001; Thomas, 2019). In 1869, Pender founded companies to build cable networks  
33  
34 from Madras (Chennai) in India to Singapore, from Singapore to Hong Kong and from  
35  
36 Singapore to Darwin (Headrick & Griset, 2001: 561). In 1873 these companies were merged  
37  
38 into the Eastern Extension Australasia and China Telegraph Company, which became part of  
39  
40 Eastern and Associated Telegraph Companies which then connected England to Brazil,  
41  
42 America's west coast, Africa and the Caribbean. In quick succession all the continents were  
43  
44 connected in a single network, supervised from a building in London, through which 'passed  
45  
46 over half the world's international news dispatches, commercial messages and diplomatic  
47  
48 telegrams' (Headrick & Griset, 2001: 561-562). A telegraphic system around the world was  
49  
50 established in British control, dominating East and Southeast Asia until the 1930s when it was  
51  
52 challenged by the procurement and development of telecommunications networks by  
53  
54 Japanese military, government and commercial enterprises (Yang, 2010: 20). In 1904, the  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 Dutch government mistakenly thought it had liberated communications with its East Indies  
3  
4 Colonial territory from the British telegraph system by operating a German-Dutch undersea  
5  
6 cable from Sulawesi to Shanghai and Guam. The connecting cables from Shanghai to Europe  
7  
8 and from Guam to America were owned by Danish and American companies but these, in  
9  
10 turn, were owned secretly by Pender's cartel (Headrick & Griset, 2001: 567). In 1937, a  
11  
12 leading Japanese telecommunications engineer reported that the Dutch East Indies had  
13  
14 become the centre of telecommunications in the East, producing equipment locally in case  
15  
16 supplies from Europe were cut (Yang, 2010: 197). From a British colonial perspective too,  
17  
18 Java was the 'intermediary link, passing messages between Australia and London' (Martinez,  
19  
20 2017: 230). The telegraph network supported an 'Indian Ocean colonial culture' (2017: 227) –  
21  
22 and 'the right to rule' (Rizvi, 2017: 316) – that endured after Australia's federation in 1901.  
23  
24 This culture's demand for subordinate Asian staff in the northern regions was in friction with  
25  
26 white Australian nationalist calls for restriction of Asian migration. By World War 1, the  
27  
28 direct undersea cable link between Java and Australia had become commercially redundant  
29  
30 because of the installation of newer cables across the Indian Ocean to Australia. Then, in  
31  
32 World War 2, all undersea cable connections to Australia from Southeast Asia were severed  
33  
34 as Japanese Forces occupied the region (Yang, 2010). Despite this break and the slow  
35  
36 collapse of British empire, the cultural, commercial and political legacies of its infrastructure  
37  
38 in former Indian Ocean colonies can still be identified (Kerr, 2012; Martinez, 2017; Thomas,  
39  
40 2019).  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

### 51 **Approaching the cable stations**

52  
53 To identify legacies of the undersea cable operations, the authors conducted fieldwork  
54  
55 together in Broome in November and Banyuwangi in December 2019. Fieldwork was  
56  
57 approached with an ethnographic sensibility towards people making meanings – inscribed in  
58  
59 their representations of infrastructure in expected and unexpected forms (Von Schnitzler,  
60

1  
2  
3 2013) – based on their circumstances (Star, 1999) away from the urban sociality (Rizvi, 2017)  
4  
5 of provincial capital cities. Informed by Kusno’s (2000) investigations of colonial and  
6  
7 postcolonial entanglements in representations of built environments, this approach was  
8  
9 sensitive to indications of ‘remembrance and amnesia’ (2000: 16) in the two towns. In  
10  
11 Broome, we met nine informants working in heritage, media, archival and arts services; and  
12  
13 had internet or telephone conversations with two other informants who have contributed  
14  
15 substantially to Indigenous and colonial heritage in Broome. Prior Internet research and the  
16  
17 meetings with informants focussed our fieldwork on Cable Beach, Broome Historical Society  
18  
19 & Museum and Broome Courthouse. Photographs of texts at these sites were subject to  
20  
21 textual analysis by close reading along with sections of relevant books suggested by staff in  
22  
23 Broome’s public library and local bookstores, and video documentaries given to us by the  
24  
25 television station in Broome, Goolarri Media Enterprises. In Banyuwangi, we arranged a  
26  
27 meeting to discuss cable heritage with the Regent, Abdullah Azwar Anas. The Banyuwangi  
28  
29 Regent was accompanied by local government staff and journalists that he invited to follow  
30  
31 the meeting and interview us afterwards. The Regent also provided his recently released book,  
32  
33 *Anti-Mainstream Marketing: 20 Ways Changing Banyuwangi* (Anas, 2019). In this book on  
34  
35 the development of Banyuwangi city during his leadership, Anas describes current plans to  
36  
37 revitalise heritage buildings in the city including an old colonial building complex, known  
38  
39 locally as *Asrama Inggris* (British Hostel). Later, we were joined in a tour of the complex  
40  
41 by local archaeologist Bayu Ari Wibowo, who subsequently confirmed that the 19th century  
42  
43 complex had contained housing for telegraph station employees (personal communication,  
44  
45 2019). We visited the empty, decaying office that had been used to transmit telegrams to and  
46  
47 from Australia, via Broome. Other buildings had become home to Indonesian soldiers and  
48  
49 their families in the vast complex that looks out across Banyuwangi’s town square towards  
50  
51 Boom Beach and the harbour from which the cables were laid under the sea to Broome.  
52  
53 During our fieldtrip to Banyuwangi, we found no official plaques, brochures or posters in  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 public places referring to the telegraph station or undersea cable. Instead, we found overt and  
3  
4 implied references to British colonists in the online films, social media posts and personal  
5  
6 communications of professionals and volunteers who have produced, collected or shared  
7  
8 recordings of Banyuwangi heritage. We examined Facebook Groups where members' views  
9  
10 and experiences on the heritage 'related to their specific subjectivity' (Allmark and Wahyudi,  
11  
12 2019: 638). We also interviewed Munawir, founder and caretaker of *Banyuwangi Tempo*  
13  
14 *Doeloe* (Olden Days Banyuwangi) community, to seek more insights on how community  
15  
16 remembered the cable connection. Analysing these texts as normative utterances through the  
17  
18 lens of social imaginaries provides insights on the background structures (Steele, 2017)  
19  
20 through which the texts emerged. We utilise Cornelius Castoriadis' notion on social  
21  
22 imaginary as '... the creation of each historical period, its singular manner of living, of seeing  
23  
24 and of conducting its own existence' (1987: 145). We approached each text as 'an  
25  
26 engagement with the languages and practices of the social imaginary' (Steele, 2017: 1063) of  
27  
28 the person or organization uttering the text. Our findings are presented below by location then  
29  
30 in connection to one another.  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38

### 39 **Maintaining Broome Cable Station and Cable Beach in Yawuru Country**

40  
41 Arriving in Broome airport on 9 November 2019, the Shuttle Service sign offers visitors two  
42  
43 directions, to 'TOWN' or 'CABLE BEACH'. Adjacent to this sign is an advertisement for  
44  
45 Cable Beach Club Resort and Spa endorsed with a, plausibly, colonial East Asian stamp over  
46  
47 an eclectic image visualizing outdoor fine dining under white umbrellas, overlooking camels  
48  
49 passing between well-watered lawns under palm trees backgrounded by sea. The *destination*  
50  
51 *Broome map* (2019) suggests that 'Cable Beach', 'Dampier Creek' and 'Broome' are the three  
52  
53 most significant areas to visit. The first item of trivia adjacent to the map explains that  
54  
55  
56  
57 Australia's top beach was named in 1889 after the telegraph cable that 'runs between Java and  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 Broome'. Amongst the brochures and visitors guides, is a small fold-out guide welcoming  
3  
4 visitors to Broome as 'Country of the Yawuru people':  
5

6  
7 Country created by the Bugarrigarra – the Creation force of songlines and stories  
8  
9 enriching the lives of Yawuru people whose world has been shaped and  
10  
11 influenced as well by the many Asian and European people who were lured to  
12  
13 Broome by the lustre and allure of pearling. (Yawuru Country, n.d)  
14  
15  
16  
17

18 The guide folds out to a page summarizing Aboriginal contributions and perspectives on  
19  
20 seven tourist sites in the town. These summaries of place histories gently introduce racial  
21  
22 segregation laws of the 20<sup>th</sup> century including the Aborigines Act 1905 which 'dictated where  
23  
24 they lived, where they worked, who they married and where the kids stayed.' The opening  
25  
26 and closing summaries provide a cosmopolitan picture of Broome's Chinatown and a camp  
27  
28 where many 'Asian and Aboriginal workers lived... building and repairing luggers that lined  
29  
30 the foreshore'. Images on the back of the guide suggest that Cable Beach and the Japanese  
31  
32 Cemetery are key places to visit when discovering Broome.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38

39 Cable Beach is remembered affectionately as a place of leisure and fun for young people in a  
40  
41 pristine environment in texts produced (Cochrane, 2012) and published (Bin Demin, 2007) by  
42  
43

44 Broome's substantial indigenous media companies:

45  
46 Sometimes we would head out to the white stretch of coast known as Cable  
47  
48 Beach—it got its name from the communication cable that ran from Broome to  
49  
50 Java in Indonesia. We would make a day camp just below the cliff edge that  
51  
52 gently fell away down to the beach, and take a big canvas sheet and hang it from  
53  
54 long poles for shade. We usually had the whole fourteen miles of pristine, white  
55  
56 sand and glistening, turquoise water to ourselves. (Bin Demin, 2007: 23)  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 Indigenous references in the main public tourist area of Cable Beach were difficult to identify,  
3  
4 and a new master plan for the area has been designed for the Shire of Broome (Close, 2017)  
5  
6 partly to address this deficit. The *Cable Beach Foreshore Master Plan* is aimed at ensuring  
7  
8 that Yawuru people and their protocols are applied in protecting the area known to them as  
9  
10 Walmanyjun. Yawuru people should be involved in future planning, in construction projects  
11  
12 and in developing themes, locations, artworks, interpretation and signage. This participation  
13  
14 may enable visitors to the foreshore to encounter indigenous stories of Walmanyjun and the  
15  
16 broader region of Minyirr (Close, 2017). Otherwise, visitors can find them described on  
17  
18 storyboards at Gantheaume Point seven kilometres away at the southern end of the beach; or  
19  
20 they can travel 1.5 kilometres inland to the Nyamba Buru Yawuru office, established on  
21  
22 Cable Beach Road after the Western Australian Government accepted a 2006 Federal Court  
23  
24 ruling that it recognize the native title rights of Yawuru people (Yawuru Corporate Group,  
25  
26 2013). Meanwhile, the foreshore master plan calls for better access, commercial opportunities  
27  
28 and place activation with continuation of key events such as horse polo and the Shinju  
29  
30 Matsuri multi-cultural festival. The 47-page masterplan includes a new 'Cable Beach Plaza'  
31  
32 and an improved 'Cable Beach Park' but makes no mention of the actual undersea cable that  
33  
34 landed on the beach or its associated telegraph network. History of the telegraph network has  
35  
36 been reduced to name only in public representation at the Cable Beach foreshore. From time  
37  
38 to time, in recent years, this history has been brought to light. One of our informants, Chris  
39  
40 Maher, provided a photograph of how he had addressed this history through an art installation  
41  
42 for *A View to Asia* sculpture festival on the foreshore at the 2017 Shinju Matsuri festival. The  
43  
44 sign attached to the installation, a large role of contemporary telecommunications cable,  
45  
46 suggests that little has changed in the language promoting high-speed networks in Australia  
47  
48 since 1889 when the project was approved by the British Secretary of State of the Colonies  
49  
50 and endorsed by the Governor of Western Australia, Sir Frederick Napier Broome: "We are  
51  
52 building a communication network for the future... to achieve the fastest possible Telegraph  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2 speeds". Also, local ABC radio journalist Vanessa Mills provided photographs showing  
3  
4 another informant, heritage activist Clive Johnson, finding a section of the cable buried  
5  
6 beneath a meter of sand on the beach. For more information and cable artefacts, the richest  
7  
8 archive is a six-kilometre drive across Minyirr peninsular to the Broome Museum.  
9  
10

11  
12  
13 The Broome Historical Society and Museum offers glimpses of the rich multicultural histories  
14  
15 in the area mostly after the colonial town was proclaimed in 1883. Compared to the authors'  
16  
17 experiences of walking through other museums in Western Australia, the contributions of  
18  
19 Aboriginal and Asian people to the town are more apparent here in the displayed images,  
20  
21 artefacts and texts. They include representations of people defying the White Australia Policy  
22  
23 and the Immigration Restriction Act, enacted with the federation of Australia in 1901 when,  
24  
25 in Broome, 'there were 1,358 Asians working in the pearling industry and only 132  
26  
27 Europeans'. After using kidnapped Aboriginal labour in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,  
28  
29 the 'divers, their tender and deck crews were for the most part indentured men from the Dutch  
30  
31 East Indies (Koepangers), Southeast Asia, the Philippines, China and Japan,' reads a display.  
32  
33 Apparently, it was dangerous work. Two years before the undersea cable was drawn across  
34  
35 the sea, more than 140 men drowned when a storm slammed into the pearling fleets.  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43

44 A long narrow corner of a section in the museum is dedicated to the technologies of empire  
45  
46 and those resisting or preceding it. On approach, the left side shows horrific chains used to  
47  
48 incarcerate Aboriginal peoples as well as rifles including some used in policing the 1920s  
49  
50 racial conflict between Broome residents of Malay and Japanese heritage. The right side of  
51  
52 the room has displays of invention, art and communication technologies: firstly, a collection  
53  
54 of pre-colonial artefacts, black-and-white photographs of Aboriginal gatherings, technologies  
55  
56 and artistic performances in the region as well as contemporary texts and artefacts, such as  
57  
58 carved boab nuts and a stone axe created by Aboriginal artists. Next to this display, we  
59  
60

1  
2 encounter a half-metre restored section of cable and its description (which uses the Dutch  
3  
4 Colonial spelling of Banyuwangi):

5  
6  
7 laid in 1889 from Banjoewangie, Java coming ashore at Cable Beach linking up to  
8  
9 the Cable House – now the Courthouse. This placed the colony in direct  
10  
11 communication with the London pearling market and the outside world.  
12  
13  
14  
15

16 Directly below the cable is a posterboard, titled ‘COMMUNICATION’, which describes the  
17  
18 introduction of electric telegraph to Broome and its associated post office. The poster also  
19  
20 describes the the opening of Broome’s telephone exchange in 1908, the Coastal Wireless  
21  
22 Station in 1913 and the establishment of the Overseas Telecommunication Commission  
23  
24 (OTC) in 1946 that nationalized international telecommunications services into and  
25  
26 throughout Australia. OTC merged with the domestic service to become the company branded  
27  
28 ‘Telstra’ today. Visitors are told that the ‘cable link was the catalyst that turned what was  
29  
30 essentially a base camp for pearlers into a town’. The displays of artefacts roughly follow this  
31  
32 line of development from cable signal amplifiers to telegraph sounders and Morse jiggers, to  
33  
34 typewriters and telephone handsets, to a telegraph-exchange switchboard and 500-watt  
35  
36 transmitter operated by OTC. A poster on the transmitter describes Broome’s long association  
37  
38 with the telecommunications industry:  
39  
40  
41  
42

43  
44 dating back to the arrival of the British Empire telegraph network extension cable  
45  
46 from Banjuwangi. With the arrival of that telecommunications cable, Broome  
47  
48 became, in 1889, Australia’s gateway to the world.  
49  
50  
51  
52

53 Passing the weapon and communication displays, we approach a flat screen playing *the hello*  
54  
55 *girls* video documentary that voices women’s stories of working in Broome’s telephone  
56  
57 exchange. If not for this prominent screening of *the hello girls*, visitors may not notice the  
58  
59 diversity of skilled workers in the history of telecommunications. For example, Google  
60

1  
2 searches for ‘Broome Banyuwangi cable’ from Perth in 2020 highly ranked the Engineers  
3  
4 Australia (2006) nomination for installing memorial plaques in Broome. The nomination  
5  
6 provides detailed biographies of five British men – a lord and four knights – of wealth and  
7  
8 status who led or endorsed the project. It also provides a short biography on an inventive  
9  
10 electrical engineer involved in the project, the names of a captain and his cable-laying ship,  
11  
12 the name of a superintendent and the name of the first person to send a cable from Perth to  
13  
14 London. Everyone else involved was lost or reduced, for example, to the ‘staff, tradesmen and  
15  
16 Chinese “coolies”” who built and equipped the Cable House and Cable Station. Whereas in  
17  
18 *the hello girls* video, women staffing the telephone-exchange are named, have voices and  
19  
20 consider themselves ‘to be the important people in town’. These ‘front line people... were  
21  
22 coloured girls, they were Broome girls,’ says Doris Mathews, regarding her co-workers of  
23  
24 Aboriginal, Asian and European heritage. The video shows that in the telephone exchange  
25  
26 and their social networks in Broome, these women countered the structure of racism and  
27  
28 misogyny being reproduced in Australia in the decades after World War 2. Unfortunately, the  
29  
30 names and accounts of non-white people working for the earlier telegraph service have been  
31  
32 lost from contemporary public representation in Broome.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40

41 A photograph on the COMMUNICATION poster in the museum shows seven men standing  
42  
43 behind four people seated at tea, the caption reads: ‘Bishop Trower and the Fountain family  
44  
45 with their servants at Cable House in 1913.’ The same photograph is captioned with only  
46  
47 British names in Sickert’s (2017) book which aims to provide a more diverse social history of  
48  
49 Broome settlement’s early years: ‘The names of the rest of the men – staff and servants –  
50  
51 were not recorded’ (39). When the same photograph appears in Goolarri Media’s  
52  
53 documentary on the history of Broome’s Courthouse to show how the building was used  
54  
55 initially as a cable station, the voice of renovator Marcus Duncan is heard:  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 They were like high British society and they had their Indian servants and  
3  
4 quarters, and they had a tennis court up the back. It was like a grand house to live  
5  
6 in. (Goolarri Media Enterprises & Broome Historical Society, 2006).  
7  
8  
9

10  
11 This notion of the elegant building and grand British presence being introduced to Broome  
12  
13 with the undersea cable operations occurs consistently in coffee-table history books (Norman  
14  
15 & Norman, 2017; Sickert, 2017), posters and plaques about the cable station, no matter how  
16  
17 socially progressive or regressive these texts may appear to be. The poster locked behind  
18  
19 glass on the outside of the courthouse offers an official position on the history:  
20  
21

22  
23 This building, one of the first pre-fabricated buildings in Australia's North West,  
24  
25 was constructed in 1889... The ironwork was designed and manufactured in  
26  
27 Britain and the interior teak was imported from Singapore. The British staff who  
28  
29 occupied the building (known as "Cable House") were part of a network of people  
30  
31 who transmitted messages through the world. A submarine telegraph cable  
32  
33 connected Broome to Java, and a telegraph line ran overland to Perth.  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38

39 In the courthouse gardens, which regularly host an open market (Broome Courthouse  
40  
41 Markets, n.d.), the Historic Engineering Marker, installed in 2006, describes the 1,650-km-  
42  
43 long submarine cable from 'Banjoewangie' to Broome as increasing the security of  
44  
45 Australia's overseas communications by being the 'third link to Europe'; and names three  
46  
47 British engineers supervising the cable laying in 10 days using the *SS Seine*. Public history of  
48  
49 the undersea cable in Broome recalls the names of British supervisors, a boat and Javanese  
50  
51 places, while backgrounding and not naming the diverse workforce involved in the project.  
52  
53 Meanwhile, history scholars have begun to identify some of the staff and servants left out of  
54  
55 the Cable Station picture; such as Marjoeki, a Javanese man who worked in Broome for  
56  
57 decades (Martinez, 2017, 239-241). Marjoeki stands proudly, looking to Camera, third from  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 left among the people behind the station manager's family in the 1913 photograph. Yet, he is  
3  
4 so publicly unknowable in the texts, with this photograph, that account for telegraph  
5  
6 operations in Broome.  
7  
8  
9

### 11 **Seeking the memory hub: Banyuwangi and *Asrama Inggris***

12  
13 Unlike Broome, Banyuwangi has few resources containing documentation on the 19<sup>th</sup> century  
14  
15 telegraph connection to Australia. There was also minimal documentation about *Asrama*  
16  
17 *Inggris* (British Hostel) as the prominent building that could link the town's story to  
18  
19 Australia. Interestingly, the limited written resources on *Asrama Inggris* do not reflect the  
20  
21 attention paid to it by the Banyuwangi government. In recent years, the local government has  
22  
23 recognized substantial potential in the complex as cultural heritage and as an economic  
24  
25 resource. The Banyuwangi regent (*Bupati*) has signed Bupati Decree Number 188 Year 2018  
26  
27 to formally recognise *Asrama Inggris* as cultural heritage (JDIH, 2018).  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33

34  
35 Wibowo (personal communication, 2019) said a team from Banyuwangi Tourism Board had  
36  
37 begun, in 2019, studying *Asrama Inggris* for the purpose of revitalisation. Wibowo says:  
38  
39 'the building will be revitalised by the government and utilised as a museum and hotel in  
40  
41 2020'. The building, at 5 Diponegoro Street, is located in the heart of Banyuwangi city next to  
42  
43 the *Blambangan* park. The park was known during the Dutch era as *Tegal Loji*, the recreation  
44  
45 area for colonists. The word '*loji*' is based on the English word 'lodge', associated with  
46  
47 *Asrama Inggris* that was used to lodge Dutch businessmen (Wibowo, personal  
48  
49 communication, 2019). The complex is just a kilometre from the well-known Boom beach.  
50  
51 Boom beach was used by the Dutch colonial government as a port for natural commodities  
52  
53 such as nutmeg and clove. Today, Boom beach is managed as a yacht seaport by state-owned  
54  
55 company PT Pelindo III. In this context, Regent Anas aims to showcase the historic and  
56  
57 strategic position of *Asrama Inggris* through property development for heritage tourism  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 (Anas, 2019). The plan includes acclaimed Jakarta-based architect, Yori Antar, designing a  
3  
4 new version of Asrama Inggrisan for use as a cultural centre and economic resource (Anas,  
5  
6 2019: 228 - 229).  
7  
8  
9

10  
11 Currently, Asrama Inggrisan is owned and managed by the Indonesian military body known  
12  
13 as KODIM 0825 Banyuwangi. During World War II, Japanese colonial authorities used  
14  
15 Asrama Inggrisan as an army base (Munawir, personal communication, 2020). Asrama  
16  
17 Inggrisan contains two storey buildings of, locally, unique architecture with teakwood  
18  
19 structures and 3-ply-brick walls to resist the local climate. The complex contains rooms and  
20  
21 toilets; and is surrounded by a fortress. Today, the fortress functions as a military sanctuary,  
22  
23 especially for low-ranking soldiers. Hawker carts owned by soldier families are stored in the  
24  
25 fortress's parking area. Its rooms are inhabited by Indonesian soldiers and their families.  
26  
27 Several rooms, used as prison cells during the Dutch era, have become soldiers' homes.  
28  
29 Prison bars are covered with plywood and plastic flowers. In the complex foreground, there is  
30  
31 an underground tunnel below a thick iron manhole cover inscribed with its British  
32  
33 manufacturer's title, 'Burn Brothers Rotunda Works 3 Blackfriars Road London S.E.'. The  
34  
35 tunnel is believed to house the cable that was laid from the complex to Santen island (around  
36  
37 two kilometres from Asrama Inggrisan) and extended to Australia (Wibowo, personal  
38  
39 communication, 2019). The fortress also contains a *societeit* (ballroom) building, a post office  
40  
41 and an old church. The post office is believed to have housed the telegraph operations.  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49

50 Limited public information about Asrama Inggrisan and the telegraph station in Banyuwangi  
51  
52 have motivated local people to perform independent investigations. Several groups are  
53  
54 interested in Banyuwangi history, such as KOSEBA – *Komunitas Sejarah Banyuwangi*  
55  
56 (Banyuwangi History Community) – and BTD – *Banjoewangi Tempo Doeloe* (Olden Days of  
57  
58 Banyuwangi). Yet, documentation of the Banyuwangi telegraph station is scattered and hard  
59  
60

1  
2 to find. Munawir, the founder of BTD, says his group investigates by collecting old books,  
3  
4 magazines, newspapers, documents and notes from society (personal communication, 2020).  
5  
6 He says, ‘we collect documents on Banyuwangi history, buy them with our own funding, and  
7  
8 digitally scan the documents with our own resources and place them in our community  
9  
10 library’ (personal communication, 2020). BTD members are active on social media like  
11  
12 Facebook. With 25 thousand group members on Facebook, posts on the BTD page  
13  
14 (Banjoewangi Tempo Doeloe, 2020) generates discussions and debates about the history of  
15  
16 Banyuwangi, including the existence of a telegraph station and Asrama Inggrisan.  
17  
18  
19

20  
21  
22  
23 If Facebook is utilised as the discussion forum for Banyuwangi history enthusiasts, then  
24  
25 Youtube is used for an urban perspective of visualising Asrama Inggrisan. Content creators  
26  
27 visit Asrama Inggrisan and perform their investigations based on what they know about the  
28  
29 place and its history. Scientific approaches are used in videos incorporating interviews, other  
30  
31 data and statistics. For example, a video by Rossalita (2019) provides a narrative and basic  
32  
33 information about the building complex. Their video has been viewed several hundred times.  
34  
35 Other creators adopt different approaches, drawing on urban legends in their videos. The IDN  
36  
37 Times (2019) account received 32 thousand views for a video of Asrama Inggrisan horror  
38  
39 stories, indicating the effectiveness of mythical and supernatural approaches in storytelling  
40  
41 around Asrama Inggrisan. The popularity of this urban legend style of visualizing Asrama  
42  
43 Inggrisan suggests that people may be aware of its role in the early days of  
44  
45 telecommunications but are more engaged by the supernatural myths surrounding the  
46  
47 complex.  
48  
49  
50  
51

52  
53  
54  
55 Banyuwangi people’s memories were limited substantially to the locality relating to ghost  
56  
57 stories or old photos taken during the colonial era. There was no indication of any social  
58  
59 imaginaries taking them across the border and thinking about the other side of the cable  
60

1  
2 connection: Broome or Australia. Also, the limited amount of public information and  
3  
4 documentation available on the cable network in Banyuwangi reflected a lack of  
5  
6 contemporary local media coverage of the historic cable network.  
7  
8  
9

10  
11 Yet, variety in available information on Asrama Inggris and the telegraph connection has  
12  
13 made different impressions on Banyuwangi society. BTD founder Munawir says he knows of  
14  
15 Asrama Inggris as Dutch colonial heritage, known as '*Rumah Pajang*' (Long House) during  
16  
17 the Dutch colonial period: 'I read from the documents that I collected, that Asrama Inggris  
18  
19 was exclusively used as the elite space for the Dutch' (personal communication, 2020).  
20  
21

22  
23 Munawir confesses that he did not know how it was then called Asrama Inggris. He thinks  
24  
25 the name probably came from Banyuwangi people who have more respect for the British.  
26  
27

28 Even though, Munawir continues, 'I understand that the Dutch in the 1870s gave permission  
29  
30 to the British-China joint-company to manage the building' (personal communication, 2020).  
31

32 Unfortunately, according to Munawir, information about Asrama Inggris as the telegraph  
33  
34 office relaying cables to Australia has been rarely discussed. He says, 'Banyuwangi people  
35  
36 just simply correlated the building with British colonialism, but gained no idea about the  
37  
38 Australian piece on the story' (personal communication, 2020).  
39  
40  
41

42  
43 History enthusiasts, such as the BTD group, are interested in the story of old Banyuwangi,  
44  
45 including the history of the monarch that controlled the area before the colonial era.  
46  
47

48 Banyuwangi was popularly known as *Blambangan* land, a kingdom dominating the southeast  
49  
50 hook of Java from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries before being devastated by Dutch-led forces by  
51  
52 the early 1800s (Margana, 2007). The Blambangan Kingdom's buildings and other heritage  
53  
54 were almost totally destroyed by the invading colonial forces. 'We do not have any history-  
55  
56 related building that correlates with Blambangan in Banyuwangi,' says Munawir (personal  
57  
58 communication, 2020).  
59  
60



1  
2  
3  
4  
5 Since the Blambangan heritage had been destroyed, Banyuwangi society – including the BTD  
6  
7 community – have placed their interest in colonial heritage (Munawir, personal  
8  
9 communication, 2020). Even though the colonial era connotes land invasion, slavery and  
10  
11 inhumane treatment by the Dutch, according to Munawir, Banyuwangi society supports the  
12  
13 preservation of old Dutch buildings. ‘These buildings are our only legacy from the past,’  
14  
15 Munawir claims (personal communication, 2020). He says the Banyuwangi government is  
16  
17 unaware or ignorant of the history of the built environment (personal communication, 2020).  
18  
19 He added:  
20  
21

22  
23 We want the government to preserve them. But we are disappointed and consider  
24  
25 them being ignorant by destroying Dutch era buildings and building a new  
26  
27 commercial area above it. Many buildings belong to individual possession and are  
28  
29 treated and sold as they like. (personal communication, 2020).  
30  
31  
32  
33

34  
35 Munawir’s memory on Asrama Inggrisan, the colonial heritage, and the telegraph cable  
36  
37 connection to Australia has contributed to the social memory articulated by the BTD  
38  
39 community. Munawir explains that the telegraph station has never been an integral part of  
40  
41 Banyuwangi society. Despite its location in the city centre, few people understand its history.  
42  
43 The telegraph operating business is colonial business. Banyuwangi locals only remember the  
44  
45 Asrama Inggrisan complex as an elite area of the Dutch colonial era. The place was  
46  
47 untouchable to locals. In recent years, the society has begun responding to history by  
48  
49 providing their own versions of the place and its history through social media. As noted by  
50  
51 Castoriadis (1987: 145), ‘no society can exist that does not organise the production of its  
52  
53 material life and its reproduction as a society’. Banyuwangi people perform their own  
54  
55 searches for values as a society. Munawir and his community have collected what they can to  
56  
57 make sense of the old buildings in Banyuwangi, including Asrama Inggrisan. On the other  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 hand, local government considers the heritage buildings as important economic assets that  
3  
4 should be exploited effectively. The intrinsic values of cultural heritage seem less important  
5  
6 to local government because many old buildings near the site have been destroyed this  
7  
8 century without community consultation. This dual approach to valuing heritage buildings  
9  
10 may impact on how people in Banyuwangi remember and manufacture their identities in  
11  
12 coming days and in the distant future.  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18

19 Like other coastal regencies in Java, Banyuwangi's development has been heavily influenced  
20  
21 by divisive dynamics around ethnic, religious and cultural diversity (Margana, 2015).  
22

23 Collapse of the Blambangan state and the destruction of its seat of power by Dutch forces in  
24  
25 the late 18th century amid a protracted clash between Hindu and Islamic civilizations in Java  
26  
27 has supported an enduring stigmatization of Blambangese (Osing) people by outsiders in  
28  
29 historical treaties, stories, arts and performances. This divisiveness and stigmatization have  
30  
31 made it easier for them to forget particularities of Banyuwangi's heritage, and some attempts  
32  
33 at memorialization there have been met by violence (Margana, 2015). The contemporary  
34  
35 social imaginary's lack of reference to Banyuwangi as a node in the first world-wide  
36  
37 telecommunications system can also be understood through Kusno's (2000) observation that  
38  
39 the Indonesian postcolonial nation has, largely, been represented in modernist architecture  
40  
41 that ignores the colonial past: while colonists tend to excavate past architecture, nationalists  
42  
43 represent indigenous power by building new things. Recognizing these tensions enables an  
44  
45 appreciation of the complexities around the Banyuwangi government's plan to redevelop  
46  
47  
48  
49

50  
51 Asrama Inggris as a hotel and cultural centre for future tourism.  
52  
53

### 54 55 **Connecting the cable station communities**

56  
57 Social imaginaries of the old telegraph network differ substantially between Banyuwangi and  
58  
59 Broome, despite the network's cable station buildings and grounds sharing the broadly similar  
60

1  
2 fates. Both stations were taken over for military purpose in wartime: Broome in World War I,  
3  
4 and Banyuwangi in World War II. Subsequently, the buildings have been used for the internal  
5  
6 policing of their surrounding communities: Courthouse in Broome, and Military District  
7  
8 Command in Banyuwangi. Local communities used the space of their grounds for temporary  
9  
10 market commerce: outdoor markets in Broome, and hawker cart parking in Banyuwangi.  
11  
12 Despite some functional similarities, social imaginaries of the undersea cable network differ  
13  
14 radically between the towns. In Broome, the telegraph station is memorialized for introducing  
15  
16 an era of colonial sophistication that turned a pearling outpost into a town. This cultural logic  
17  
18 enables Java and Banyuwangi to be named and celebrated publicly in Broome for facilitating  
19  
20 colonial era communication between Britain and Australia. In Banyuwangi, Dutch colonial  
21  
22 time and space – within which the telegraph system operated – represents destruction of the  
23  
24 Blambangan Kingdom and enslavement of its people. Within a cultural logic that sees  
25  
26 colonization as bad and racially divisive, memories of the undersea cable connection to  
27  
28 Australia have not been sustained. In Broome, the undersea cable seems to be remembered  
29  
30 unproblematically in association with the names of British lords, knights and engineering  
31  
32 supervisors as well as nameless workers from Asia. Australia's continuing celebration of the  
33  
34 colonial period and Indonesia's distaste for it helps us to understand why 19<sup>th</sup> century  
35  
36 telegraph cables are dug up and displayed in Broome but remain buried and forgotten in  
37  
38 Banyuwangi.  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

48 There is an ocean-size gulf between the dominant social imaginaries of the undersea cable  
49  
50 network in the two towns, yet there are also similarities between some sectors of their  
51  
52 communities. Government officials, heritage volunteers and entrepreneurs in both towns have  
53  
54 come to recognize value and tourism potential in places associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century cable  
55  
56 network. Also, Indigenous heritage leaders in both towns recognize the harm of colonial  
57  
58 technologies and practices but also support the collecting of archives on the cable-network  
59  
60

1  
2 period to further understandings of what happened to their own people. Collecting and storing  
3  
4 archives on colonial era technologies falls to dedicated volunteers in both towns, while  
5  
6 government attention focusses on master planning tourist experiences of Cable Beach in  
7  
8 Broome and the commercial heritage redevelopment of *Asrama Ingris* in Banyuwangi.  
9

10  
11  
12  
13  
14 Fieldwork on the cable network drew attention in both towns. In Broome, *ABC* radio  
15  
16 requested an interview and we were invited to contribute to a future multicultural arts festival  
17  
18 on Cable Beach. In Banyuwangi, news of our research on the Banyuwangi-Broome  
19  
20 connection appeared in local and national print and online media within a day of our meeting  
21  
22 with the Regent. The news portrays the fieldwork as a breakthrough in the connection of  
23  
24 Indonesia and Australia (Winarno, 2019). Furthermore, the news could be used as a medium  
25  
26 for Banyuwangi society to imagine possibilities of connection with counterparts in Broome.  
27  
28 Yet, the news mostly circulated within national languages and within local audiences. To  
29  
30 reconnect the communities of Broome and Banyuwangi in a meaningful and ethical way  
31  
32 would require a more artful form of electronic communication that is aware of background  
33  
34 structures and engages with local ways of thinking as well as provisional possibilities (Rizvi,  
35  
36 2017). Recommendations for further research include engaging Indigenous artists in  
37  
38 constructing the communication links they would like to see between communities in the two  
39  
40 towns. Such research may challenge master narratives (Star, 1999) at the cable landing sites  
41  
42 while surfacing invisible work and insights about diverse participation in the development and  
43  
44 operation of global electronic communications networks.  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52

### 53 Acknowledgements

54 This research was supported by a Small Grant awarded by the School of Media, Creative Arts

55  
56  
57 and Social Inquiry at Curtin University and a Visiting Fellowship awarded by the

58  
59  
60 Communications Department, Faculty of Political Sciences at Universitas Airlangga.

## References

- Allmark P and Wahyudi I (2019) Travel, sexuality and female Indonesian domestic migrant workers in Hong Kong. *Continuum Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 33(5): 630–642.
- Anas AA (2019) *Anti-Mainstream Marketing: 20 Ways Changing Banyuwangi*. Jakarta: Gramedia
- Banjoewangi Tempo Doeloe (2020) Facebook. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/471315029707535> (accessed 21 July 2020).
- Bin Demin S (2007) *Once in Broome*. Broome: Magabala Books.
- Broome Courthouse Markets (n.d.) About Us. Available at: <https://www.broomemarkets.com.au/about-us/> (accessed 10 June 2020).
- Castoriadis C (1987) *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Close A (2017) Cable Beach Foreshore Master Plan Final Report, The Shire of Broome, September.
- Cochrane M (2012) *the hello girls*, DVD, Goolarri Media Enterprises.
- Destination Broome (2019) *destination broome map*, August November.
- Engineers Australia (2006) Nomination for historic engineering marker plaques and ceremony report, May. Available at: [https://portal.engineersaustralia.org.au/system/files/engineering-heritage-australia/nomination-title/Broome\\_Java\\_Nomination\\_Ceremony\\_Report.pdf](https://portal.engineersaustralia.org.au/system/files/engineering-heritage-australia/nomination-title/Broome_Java_Nomination_Ceremony_Report.pdf) (accessed 6 September 2019).
- Goolarri Media Enterprises & Broome Historical Society (2006) *Old Broome*, Broome Historical Society.
- Headrick DR and Griset, P (2001) Submarine telegraph cables: Business and politics, 1838-1939. *Business History Review* 75(3): 543–578.

- 1  
2  
3 IDN Times (2019) PM:AM Ketakutan Bang Doel Saat Berada di Rumah Inggris  
4  
5 Banyuwangi. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZhyR1\\_VBKE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZhyR1_VBKE)  
6  
7 (accessed 21 July 2020)  
8  
9  
10 JDIH (2018) Bupati Banyuwangi Decree Number 188/372/KEP/429.011/2018 on the  
11  
12 Establishment of Rumah Inggris as the Cultural Heritage Building (in Indonesian  
13  
14 language). Available at  
15  
16 [http://jdih.banyuwangikab.go.id/dokumen/keputusan\\_bupati/SK\\_NO\\_372\\_TAHUN\\_2](http://jdih.banyuwangikab.go.id/dokumen/keputusan_bupati/SK_NO_372_TAHUN_2018_CAGAR_BUDAYA_INGGRISAN.pdf)  
17  
18 [018\\_CAGAR\\_BUDAYA\\_INGGRISAN.pdf](http://jdih.banyuwangikab.go.id/dokumen/keputusan_bupati/SK_NO_372_TAHUN_2018_CAGAR_BUDAYA_INGGRISAN.pdf) (accessed 21 July 2020).  
19  
20  
21 Kerr T (2012) Reproducing temples in Fremantle. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*  
22  
23 18(1): 1–17.  
24  
25  
26 Kusno A (2000) Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures  
27  
28 in Indonesia. London: Routledge.  
29  
30 Owen C (2016) *‘Every Mother’s Son is Guilty’: Policing the Kimberley Frontier of Western*  
31  
32 *Australia 1882-1905*. Crawley: UWA Publishing.  
33  
34  
35 Margana S (2007) Java’s last frontier: the struggle for hegemony of Balambangan, c. 1763 –  
36  
37 1813. Doctoral Dissertation. Leiden University repository. Available at:  
38  
39 <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/12547> (accessed 20 July 2020).  
40  
41  
42 Margana S (2015) Outsiders and stigma: Reconstruction of local identity in Banyuwangi. In:  
43  
44 Legêne S, Purwanto B and Nordholt H (eds), *Sites, Bodies and Stories: Imagining*  
45  
46 *Indonesian History*. NUS Press, pp. 210–231.47  
48  
49 Martínez J (2017) Asian Servants for the Imperial Telegraph: Imagining North Australia as an  
50  
51 Indian Ocean Colony before 1914. *Australian Historical Studies* 48(2): 227–243.  
52  
53  
54 Munawir (2020) personal communication. 27 June 2020  
55  
56 Norman GV & Norman, JEdeB (2017) *Broome 1910*. Strathfield: Norman and Norman.  
57  
58 Nyamba Buru Yawuru (n.d.) *Yawuru Country: Broome WA*.  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 Rizvi M (2017) The moral ecology of colonial infrastructure and the vicissitudes of land  
4 rights in rural Pakistan. *History and Anthropology* 28(3): 308–325.  
5  
6  
7 Rossalita T (2019) Asrama Inggris Banyuwangi. Available at:  
8  
9 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvEo6I5ulsA> (accessed 21 July 2020).  
10  
11 Sickert S (2017) *Beyond the Lattice: Broome's Early Years*. Broome: Backroom Press.  
12  
13 Star SL (1999) The ethnography of infrastructure. *American Behavioral Scientist* 43(3): 377–  
14 391.  
15  
16  
17  
18 Steele M (2017) Social imaginaries and the theory of the normative utterance. *Philosophy &*  
19 *Social Criticism* 43(10): 1045–1071.  
20  
21  
22  
23 Thomas PN (2019) *Empire and Post-Empire Telecommunications in India: A History*. New  
24 Delhi: Oxford University Press.  
25  
26  
27  
28 Vocus Communications (2018) Vocus' infrastructure helps secure Australia's digital future.  
29 Available at: [https://www.australiasingaporecable.com/articles/vocus-infrastructure-](https://www.australiasingaporecable.com/articles/vocus-infrastructure-helps-secure-australias-digital-future/)  
30 [helps-secure-australias-digital-future/](https://www.australiasingaporecable.com/articles/vocus-infrastructure-helps-secure-australias-digital-future/) (accessed 30 March 2020).  
31  
32  
33  
34 Von Schnitzler A (2013) Traveling technologies: Infrastructure, ethical regimes, and the  
35 materiality of politics in South Africa. *Cultural Anthropology* 28(4): 670–693.  
36  
37  
38  
39 Wibowo BA (2019). Personal communication. 08 December 2020.  
40  
41  
42 Winarno HH (2019). Curtin University-Unair telusuri jejak sejarah Inggris Banyuwangi.  
43 *Merdeka*, 9 December. Available at: [https://m.merdeka.com/peristiwa/curtin-](https://m.merdeka.com/peristiwa/curtin-university-unair-telusuri-jejak-sejarah-inggris-banyuwangi.html)  
44 [university-unair-telusuri-jejak-sejarah-inggris-banyuwangi.html](https://m.merdeka.com/peristiwa/curtin-university-unair-telusuri-jejak-sejarah-inggris-banyuwangi.html) (accessed 21 July  
45 2020).  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51 Yang DY (2010) *Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in*  
52 *Asia, 1883-1945*. Cambridge, MA, & London: Harvard University Press.  
53  
54  
55  
56 Yawuru Corporate Group (2013) Yawuru Native Title Determination, February.  
57  
58  
59  
60