

Eclectic Visual Narrative: Nine Paintings About Indonesian Culture of Nautical Society

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses an eclectic visual narrative of nine paintings about the Indonesian nautical culture by Arthur S. Nalan. Nautical society inhabits all the coasts of the Indonesian archipelago and relies on maritime-related livelihoods. Nautical society is rarely used as a source for artistic creation. This research uses the Practice-Based Research method edited by Craig Vear (2022), applying the theory of the Aesthetic Communication approach of Ole Thyssen (2010), which describes identity, vision, and image: initial remarks. Therefore, the nine paintings studied in this research can be understood as a mnemonic device for those who recognize, understand, and appreciate the Indonesian nautical culture. The research was carried out through the process of “analyzing” nine paintings by Arthur S. Nalan. The finding in this research is an eclectic visual narrative of the Indonesian nautical culture. This research concludes that the nine paintings present the dynamics of the Indonesian nautical culture.

KEYWORDS

eclectic visual narrative, aesthetic communication, nautical culture

Introduction

Indonesia is well-known as a country of “unity in diversity”. Geo-political and geo-cultural areas are interesting to discuss, including unlimited sources of artistic creation. Indonesia’s ocean area is larger than land, becoming part of the culture of nautical society. Unfortunately, not much research has discussed this, and not many artists have used it as inspiration for the interpretation and transformation of works of art. This research selected nine paintings by Arthur S. Nalan as material for developing the Public Arts and Culture course in the graduate program at Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung. This topic becomes teaching material for building awareness of visual culture in addition to literacy culture. Nautical culture is often forgotten, so it is brought back as a mnemonic device to show that nautical culture is actually fascinating and has great potential to be used as a source for creating any work of art, including fine art, performing art, and film art.

Two routes influencing Indonesian nautical society are the Spice route and the Cheng Ho route. These two routes opened up new cities on the coast of the Indonesian archipelago to become trading ports. They also create communication between nations as a meeting place (melting pot), where cultural interaction, cultural acculturation, enculturation, and syncretism create cultural diversity.

The Spice Route, as stated by Djoko Manhardono and Bondan Kanumoyoso (2015), triggered the emergence of port cities at the same time as the period of expansion of European

countries, especially those located in Western Europe, to all over the world. European expansion into Asia occurred at the peak of trade in the Indian Ocean. In the history of the emergence of Islam up to the 18th century, the Indian Ocean has been a meeting place for various societies and cultures. In that period, the Islamic trade network developed and dominated trading activities in the Indian Ocean. The domination of Islamic traders in trading activities in the Indian Ocean continued until the arrival of Europeans. The Islamic trade network connected all countries in Asia and the Middle East to China, where the Indian subcontinent has a strategic role [1].

Furthermore, it has been recorded that the Cheng Ho Route, taken from the name of a Chinese commander called the Great Seaman, had sailed in the *Nusantara* areas (*Nusantara* is now called Indonesia). As mentioned by Kong Yuanzhi (2015), in its seven voyages, Cheng Ho's fleet always traded to Sumatra Island and six times to Java Island; it was only on the sixth voyage they did not go to Java. During that time, several islands, regions, and kingdoms in Indonesia visited: Java Island, Palembang, Pasai (Aceh), Lamuri (Lambri), Nakur (Batak), Lide, Aru, Tamiang, Brass Island, Lingga Island, Kalimantan, Gelam Island, Karimata Island (which is located between Kalimantan and Bangka), Beliton Island, and more [2].

Why the term "nautical" (*bahari* in Indonesian) is chosen? As stated by Priyantono Umar (2023), the terms marine, maritime, and nautical have different meanings. Marine is related to cultivation, maritime deals with trade, and nautical is about culture. [3] "Nautical" is the most appropriate term to describe the eclectic characteristic, meaning choosing the best from various sources (about people, styles, or methods). The nine paintings are an eclectic visual narrative of the Indonesian nautical culture.

Method

This research uses the Practice-Based Research method book edited by Craig Vear (2022), especially Judith Mottram's writing (page 356) on Practice-Based Research in the Visual Arts: Exploring the systems of practice and the practice of research [17]. Mottram emphasizes that "*a creator's focus is on these artifacts, drawing attention to artistic intentions, and how innovation is recognized; we will return later to the thorny issue of the influence of the field on the reception and understanding of art.*"

Discussion

1. Literature Review

There are several articles providing information about the origin of nautical society, one of which is *Maritime Culture and Traditions of the Indonesian Maritime Community (Budaya Bahari dan Tradisi Masyarakat Maritim Nusantara)* by Adinda Maharani (2020), which explains the differences and characteristics in various regions in Indonesia [4]. The concepts and models of nautical society life are divided into 5: (1) Social Nautical Category (2) Economic Business Category, (3) External Social Groups, (4) Personal Characteristics Category, and (5) Nautical Dynamic Development. This article provides an overview of a holistic view of the Indonesian nautical society. *Maritime Culture in the Short Story the Curse of Pirate Descendants by Bagus Sulistio as an Introductory Material to BIPA culture (Budaya Maritim dalam cerpen kutukan keturunan Bajak Laut karya Bagus Sulistio sebagai materi pengenalan budaya BIPA)* written by Fatma Anggita Putri (2022) discussing an overview of diversity proves that Indonesia has diverse and heterogeneous ethnicities [5]. With this background, local Indonesian culture is also very diverse, where culture emerged due to various habits found in the social patterns of ancient people, namely language, ways of survival, traditions, important events, etc.

Thus, ethnic diversity in Indonesia produces a rich, abundant, and diverse culture. Another more specific article about nautical cultural heritage was written by Roby Ardiwidjaja (2016) [6] entitled *Preserving Maritime Cultural Heritage: The Attraction of Traditional Ships as Tourist Ships (Pelestarian warisan budaya Bahari: Daya Tarik Kapal Tradisional sebagai Kapal Wisata)*. This article provides an alternative solution to the problem of preserving the nation's nautical culture by utilizing the potential of traditional wooden ships as traditional cruise ships. *Fulfillment of children's rights in the families of cage fishermen in the Pahandut Seberang Sub-district, Palangkaraya City (Pemenuhan hak anak dalam keluarga Nelayan Keramba di aliran sungai kelurahan Pahandut Seberang Kota Palangkaraya)* written by Kartika Ananda (2022) discusses that it is important to understand together the child protection law which has fifteen pointers, in relation to the importance of strengthening image number 1 about the joy of fishermen's children [7]. *The Development of Independent Learning Materials with local content based on the Nautical Environment-Based Local Content for Fishermen's Children in the Tukangbesi Islands in Wakatobi Regency (Pengembangan Bahan Belajar Mandiri Mulok Berbasis Lingkungan Pesisir Anak-Anak Nelayan di Kepulauan Tukangbesi, Kabupaten Wakatobi)* written by Wa Ode Hijrah (2014) provides specific information about independent learning through local content as part of the education for fishermen's children in that place [8].

In relation to Figure 2 about sea kids seeking knowledge, *the Dual Role of Fishing Women in the Village of Muara Gading Mas, East Lampung (Peran Ganda Perempuan Nelayan di Desa Muara Gading Mas Lampung Timur)* written by Ani Ristiyati (2018) provides thoughts about the position, role, and function of women in fishing communities in the environment where they live and have families. To support Figure 3 regarding Sea Women [9], the article entitled "Ocean Grabbing": *Deprivation of Fishermen's Rights or Nautical Resource Management Rights ("Ocean Grabbing": Perampasan Hak-hak Nelayan atau Hak-hak Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Pesisir dan Kelautan)* written by Manik and Wirazilmustaan (2021) provides an overview of the nautical resources often controlled by external parties. To strengthen Figure 4 regarding livelihood from the sea [10], the article entitled *Indonesia, Emerald of Diversity (Indonesia Zamrud Keragaman)* written by Ahmad Zikri (2020) reveals the diversity of ethnic and sub-ethnic cultures. To strengthen Figure 5 about celebrating diversity, [11] the article entitled *Spirituality and Islamic Art according to Sayed Hossein Nasr (Spiritualitas dan Seni Islam Menurut Sayed Hossein Nasr)* written by Siti Binti A.Z (2005) shows that Sayed Hossein Nasr's thoughts on Islamic art are used as a medium for understanding spirituality in Indonesian culture, including nautical culture [12]. To strengthen Figure 6 regarding the spirit of Islam, the article entitled *Suluk Literature of Coastal Java in Indonesianness (Sastra Suluk Jawa Pesisiran dalam Keindonesiaan)* written by Toha Machsum (2009) shows suluk as a spoken and written literature that thrives along the North Coast of Java developed as a medium for preaching by the wali, then inherited as a legacy of oral and written traditions among Islamic boarding schools [13].

To strengthen Figure 7 regarding Suluk Pesisiran, the article entitled *Whale Fishing Traditions in the Lamalera Fishing Community in Lembata Regency of East Nusa Tenggara (Tradisi Penangkapan Ikan Paus pada Masyarakat Nelayan Lamalera di Kabupaten Lembata of Nusa Tenggara Timur)* written by Barnabas Boli (2018) reveals the uniqueness of whale fishing as a form of local wisdom and cultural heritage by the Lamarera fishing community in Flores. To strengthen Figure 8 regarding the Lamalera Song [14], the article entitled *Conservation of Mangrove Forests on Coastal Coasts in Ternate City Integrated with the School Curriculum (Konservasi Hutan Mangrove di Pesisir Pantai di Kota Ternate Terintegrasi dengan Kurikulum Sekolah)* written by Ilham Majid (2016) reveals that mangroves as an important part of fishing communities are being eroded due to deviant human behavior that struggles to fulfil their necessity. Through education, awareness of the importance of mangroves is integrated into the school curriculum. To strengthen Figure 9 regarding the last Mangrove, an article written by M. Krausz (2009) entitled *Interpretation and Transformation: Explanation in Art and the Self* shows that basically creators carry out two actions in their creative work, namely interpretation

and transformation, resulting in personal identity. Furthermore, the book *Aesthetic Creation* by Nick Zangwill (2007) is used to strengthen Arthur S. Nalan's painting works emphasizing aesthetic creations from the Indonesian nautical culture eclectically [15]. An important reference as a theory used is *Aesthetic Communication* by Ole Thysen (2010), which emphasizes awareness that art basically needs to be communicated so the artists' identity, vision, and imagination become clear as an opening for initial comments on research and art critics [16].

2. Results and Discussion

Nautical culture has a "great opportunity" to be a "source for the creation" of works of art, which can be in the form of fine arts, performing arts, film arts, and even collaborative arts (combining various arts to create a unique artistic identity). However, before discussing more specifically the nine paintings by Arthur S. Nalan, which can be considered artifacts as stated by Mottram, it is necessary to raise awareness of the concepts and life, as written by Adinda Maharani, which essentially provide a picture of socio-economic life and nautical dynamics. This is an interesting topic since it is the "setting" of nautical life, which is "rarely touched" as a dynamic world. It is also important to understand the cultural inheritance of nautical society in the development as stated by Roby Ardiwidjaja (2016) that the development in question will certainly not be realized if there are no efforts to preserve and restore the culture of Indonesian nautical culture, which is currently almost extinct [6]. Therefore, one of the efforts to preserve the culture of the nautical society to support Indonesia's program as the world's maritime axis is nautical attraction-based tourism development approach. The discussion is provided as follows:

Nick Zangwill (2007) stated that:

"Let us start with the production of art. According to the Aesthetic Creation Theory of art, we try to achieve substantive aesthetic effects when we make a work of art, and in doing that, we try to make something of aesthetic value. Art is the creation or construction of aesthetic value. Just as a joke is something created with the intention that it will be funny and funny in a certain way, so a work of art is something created with the intention that it will have aesthetic value in virtue of a specific aesthetic character⁴ It would not be very inaccurate to state the Aesthetic Creation Theory by saying that a work of art is something made to be beautiful, so long as 'beauty' is construed to amount to no more than having 'aesthetic value' [15]."

It is true that the production of works of art always tries to achieve substantive aesthetic effects. Whoever the artist is, and from whatever artistic discipline, they want to achieve aesthetic value in creating their work. As we know, art is a creation that constructs aesthetic values.

a) Nine Paintings as A Pneumonic Device of Nautical Society

Michael Krausz (2007) stated:

"My painting is instrumental to my self-transformation, and my self-transformation issues in my painting. My self-transformation and my production of art objects are integrally related. I value both painting and self-transformation as ends. Artistic production motivates my self-transformation, and my self-transformation motivates my artistic production. At the same time, these two ends are symbiotically related, and while painting is a proximate aim, self-transformation is my ultimate aim" [18]."

Likewise, the nine paintings by Arthur S. Nalan painted around 2021, have the theme of humans and the culture of nautical society. "Once, a friend from the theater asked, "Why are you painting now?" My answer is that writing, for me, is part of my transformation into reading

human life and the culture of nautical society. Why? As a teacher, I really need a variety of creativity, especially in the arts. The Public Arts and Culture course in the graduate program at the ISBI Bandung is the main reason for my creative process, in addition to writing dramas and novels”.

The following is a description and explanation of the nine paintings of Arthur S. Nalan used as a mnemonic device about nautical society. The approach used is based on the opinion of Ole Thyssen regarding Aesthetic Communication (2010), who stated that:

“When someone says ‘identity’, you have to ask who is observing and how, so identity becomes a picture, an image, in a person or group [7]. And when someone says ‘image’, you have to ask who is observing the organization and who is observing others’ observation of the organization - for example, customers, and what effect such an image has on the organization’s auto-poiesis, that is, its identity. Different images contribute to the organization’s identity, and a description of the organization’s identity contributes to its image. Since identity is only accessible by observation, that is, by creating a simplified text, and since all observations and texts can affect the organization’s autopoiesis, the concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘image’ run in an infinite loop over each other. They are not simple oppositions, and you cannot therefore consider identity as the constant and enduring, or image as the variable and transient. If you take one, you get the other in the bargain, so there is not one identity and many images but many of both. Therefore, we must look more closely at the relationship between identity and image” [16].



Figure 1. Sea Kids Share Happiness
[Collection of Arthur S. Nalan; Photo taken by Herfan Rosando, 2022]

The first painting is a frame for an eclectic narrative event, and the painting is entitled *Sea Kids Share Happiness*. It is rare to find works of art that pay attention to the lives of sea kids playing with their world, water. Water as a source of life is an eclectic part of the painting. Cheerful faces show their nautical identity.

This is strengthened by Indonesian Law No. 23 of 2002 concerning child protection, especially point eight, which was cited by Kartika Ananda (2022): *“Every child has the right to rest and use their free time, socialize with children of the same age, play, enjoy recreation, and be creative according to their interests, talents, and level of intelligence for self-development” [7].*



Figure 2. Sea Kids Are Seeking Knowledge
[Collection of Arthur S. Nalan; Photo taken by Herfan Rosando, 2022]

The second painting is a frame for an eclectic narrative event, and the painting is entitled *Sea Kids Are Seeking Knowledge*. This is a rare and dramatic event since the painting shows fishermen's children are heading to school on a simple boat to seek knowledge. Likewise, the teachers assigned to teach the nautical people have great dedication. Even though the salary is small, they still smile.

The interpretation of the figure is strengthened by the opinion of Wa Ode Hijrah (2014): "An interesting analysis of the independent learning model is the flexibility of learning acquisition that does not require procedures, time, rules, shoes, uniforms, ties, caps, and so on" [8]. Through this mode, it is hoped that fishermen's children can learn naturally by directing themselves (self-directed learning), so the role of parents is important in providing motivation, supervising, and guiding so that fishermen's children can make the best use of their time without abandoning their routine. The targets of these three educational pathways are cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. However, not all students achieve these targets due to various obstacles.



Figure 3. Sea Woman
[Collection of Arthur S. Nalan; Photo taken by Herfan Rosando, 2022]

The third painting is a frame for events showing women's activities in the nautical culture. In addition to making salted fish, they repair fishing nets, and some look for lice in their free time. Daily events show the position of women in the nautical culture who play an important role, apart from taking care of their children.

The interpretation of this figure is supported by the opinion of Ani Rostiyati (2018): The time spent on economic activities carried out by makers of fish floss, fish meatballs, fish crackers, and salted fish is approximately 6 hours, since during the processing and cooking of the foods, they can join domestic activities. Meanwhile, the time required for knitting nets is less than 4 hours and usually done midday to evening since orders for nets depend on the fishing season [9].



Figure 4. Livelihood from the Sea
[Collection of Arthur S. Nalan; Photo taken by Herfan Rosando, 2022]

The fourth painting is a frame of human events in the nautical culture, such as catching fish in the sea, trying to get big fish, and selling the fish at auction centers. That is the livelihood from the sea for the nautical people.

The interpretation of the figure is supported by the opinion of Manik and Wirazilmustaan (2021): In terms of the relationship between humans and their environment, and even between humans and their creator, the activities of traditional fishermen utilizing fisheries resources are also related to culture. Maintaining the independence and ability of traditional fishermen is closely related to providing subsidies and monitoring their territory. The following aspects need to be considered to explore equity factors to protect traditional fishermen: poverty level, utilization access, market access, and access to management opportunities [10].



Figure 5: Celebrating Diversity
[Collection of Arthur S. Nalan; Photo taken by Herfan Rosando, 2022]

The fifth painting is a frame for human events in the culture of a multicultural nautical society, with all its traditional heritage passed down from generation to generation, and pluralism appears to be an aesthetic communication. From sacred events to profane, nautical people always maintain them in the contextuality of the nautical culture.

The interpretation of the figure is supported by the opinion of Ahmad Zikri (2020): Indonesia is a country inhabited by multi-ethnic groups spread across various regions. Each ethnic group has its character, identity, and culture. The diversity makes this country independent, built with the strengths of this diversity [11].



Figure 6: The Spirit of Islam
[Collection of Arthur S. Nalan; Photo taken by Herfan Rosando, 2022]

The sixth painting is a frame for human events in the nautical culture closely related to spiritual culture, where acculturation is a prominent identity. This is mainly in several Islamic arts, coastal Suluk dance, mask dance, and wayang. The spirit of Islam has become a prominent identity.

The interpretation of the figure is supported by Sayid Husein Nasr in Siti Binti AZ (2005): There is no such thing called *art for art's sake*. It is not *l'art pour l'art*. For Nasr, works of art

must explore and express spiritual dimensions, as well as reflect the principles of monotheism, so that they are able to remind and guide humans to return to God [12].



Figure 7: Coastal Suluk
[Collection of Arthur S. Nalan; Photo taken by Herfan Rosando, 2022]

The seventh painting is a frame for human events in the culture of the nautical society, which is closely related to prayers, including the Coastal Suluk (*Suluk Pesisir*) that has been passed down from generation to generation by the *Wali Songo* since ancient times. Relationships with God and relationships with others become symbolic of Suluk's teachings.

The interpretation of the figure is strengthened by the opinion of Toha Machsum (2009): Suluk literature is a form of religious and cultural syncretism that can be used as the main consideration in developing pluralism. In historical events, for example, Javanese Islamic spirituality shows an attitude of tolerance in accepting the concept of the Almighty God and an accommodating attitude towards various new cultures coming later. Therefore, this cultural heritage needs to be properly appreciated due to its extraordinary success in maintaining diversity [13].



Figure 8: The Song of Lamalera
[Collection of Arthur S. Nalan; Photo taken by Herfan Rosando, 2022]

The eighth painting is a frame for human events in nautical culture, closely related to the epic of bravery in catching a whale with a simple weapon. Communication between God's creatures, fish and humans looks stunning through the spirit of cooperation. A cultural event that takes place once a year in the coastal communities of Lamarea Flores.

The interpretation of the figure is strengthened by the opinion of Barnabas Boli (2018): The boat used by fishermen to catch whales is called *peledang*. The fishermen's catch is processed into staple food and bartered with plantation products from communities in the mountain areas around Lamalera Village. Therefore, the traditional fishermen of Lamalera Village have always maintained the existing traditions as a part of nautical cultural activity. Lamalera fishermen do not just maintain traditions but also earn a living for survival [14].



Figure 9: The Last Mangrove
[Collection of Arthur S. Nalan; Photo taken by Herfan Rosando, 2022]

The ninth painting is a frame for human events in the culture of the nautical society, which is closely related to nature, including Mangrove forests, of which the number is decreasing due to economic needs. Various types of shrimp are slowly disappearing, along with the loss of mangrove forests.

The interpretation of the figure is strengthened by Ilham Majid (216), who states that the impacts of the reduction in mangrove forests are caused by human activities (anthropogenic factors), namely clear-cutting activities in the mangrove forest ecosystem, resulting in changes in the composition of mangrove plants. As a result, mangrove forests can no longer function as feeding and nurturing areas for marine biota [19].

Conclusion

The theory of aesthetic communication is essential in understanding artistic discourse by every researcher and creator in any field of art. Nautical culture opens a great opportunity as a source of inspiration as long as the creator never stops the creative process. Eclectic choices can always be narrated by every researcher who chooses nautical culture as their material subject.

In the future, the culture of nautical society, especially in Indonesia, will be a challenge to interpret and transform into works of art according to the skills of each creator. Likewise, this applies to researchers who are interested in the origin of the culture of nautical society. This research is only a small example that can be used as inspiration for those interested in the future.

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