

## Symbolic Action: Representation of Bugis-Makassar Ethnicity through Palomba Lopi-lopi in West Nusa Tenggara

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### Abstract

*This study examines Palomba Lopi-lopi, a traditional mini sailboat game from Labuhan Kertasari, NTB, as a symbolic representation of migration and Bugis-Makassar ethnic identity. Using Symbolic Action Theory and historical qualitative methods, the study finds that this game is not merely entertainment, but is rich in profound philosophical values. Lopi-lopi symbolizes independence and harmony with nature, while the sea breeze represents human-environment collaboration. The straight course and wide finish line reflect the importance of strategy and precision in achieving goals, while the use of natural materials (kapok wood) underscores local wisdom. The Palomba Lopi-lopi also serves as a historical marker of the Bugis-Makassar ethnic group's migration to Sumbawa following the Bongaya Treaty (1667) and as a form of resistance against Dutch colonialism. Through this game, the community of Labuhan Kertasari preserves their ancestral cultural identity amid the challenges of globalization. Research findings emphasize the importance of preserving this maritime cultural heritage of the Nusantara through documentation and integration into education.*

*Keywords: bugis-makassar; maritime culture; migration; symbolic action; traditional games*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji Palomba Lopi-lopi, permainan perahu layar mini tradisional dari Labuhan Kertasari, NTB, sebagai representasi simbolis migrasi dan identitas etnis Bugis-Makassar. Dengan pendekatan Teori Aksi Simbolis dan metode kualitatif historis, studi menemukan bahwa permainan ini bukan hanya hiburan, tetapi sarat nilai filosofis mendalam. Lopi-lopi melambangkan kemandirian dan harmoni dengan alam, sementara angin laut merepresentasikan kolaborasi manusia-lingkungan. Lintasan lurus dan garis finis lebar mencerminkan pentingnya strategi dan ketepatan mencapai tujuan, sedangkan penggunaan bahan alami (kayu kapuk) menegaskan kearifan lokal. Palomba Lopi-lopi juga menjadi penanda sejarah migrasi etnis Bugis-Makassar ke Sumbawa pasca Perjanjian Bongaya (1667) serta bentuk perlawanan terhadap kolonialisme Belanda. Melalui permainan ini, masyarakat Labuhan Kertasari mempertahankan identitas budaya leluhur di tengah tantangan globalisasi. Temuan penelitian menekankan pentingnya pelestarian warisan budaya maritim Nusantara ini melalui dokumentasi dan integrasi ke dalam Pendidikan.

*Kata Kunci: budaya maritim; bugis-makassar; permainan tradisional; tindakan simbolik*



### Article History:

Received: 07 Oktober 2025  
Revised: 22 Desember 2025

Accepted: 27 Desember 2025  
Published: 31 Desember 2025

## Introduction

The maritime culture of the archipelago is a civilizational heritage that contains profound philosophical values as a representation of the collective identity of coastal communities (Toni & Saraswati, 2025). As a maritime nation, Indonesia has a rich tradition of games that not only serve as entertainment, but also as a medium for transmitting cultural values and collective history that are integrated into the daily lives of coastal communities. Traditional maritime games, from a cultural anthropology perspective, serve as “living texts” that record traces of migration, ecological adaptation, and ethnic identity resilience in the face of changing times (Amir, 2024; Zubizaretta et al., 2023).

Amidst the rapid pace of globalization, this maritime cultural heritage faces serious challenges. Traditional games rich in philosophical meaning are being marginalized by the dominance of digital games, which tend to be individualistic and disconnected from local cultural roots (Handayani et al., 2021; Setiawan et al., 2013). This marginalization process has the potential to erode the collective memory of coastal communities about their migration history and the local wisdom embedded in their traditional games. The preservation of maritime culture is becoming increasingly urgent, given that traditional games are not merely entertainment, but also a medium for character education and community identity building (Ilmiawan & Sarah, 2025; Taufanto, 2023).

Research on traditional games in Indonesia has been conducted extensively, but most of it focuses on gross motor skill development (Rombot, 2017), Research on traditional games in Indonesia has been conducted extensively, but most of it focuses on gross motor skill development (Rombot, 2017) and character building. (Adi et al., 2020), or preservation as a tourist attraction (Rachman et al., 2023). Meanwhile, many studies focusing on maritime culture have also been conducted, including; Sarjito (2024) , examines the impact of Dutch colonialism on Indonesian maritime culture. The results of the study show that post-colonialism. Dutch colonial policies such as the agricultural system and cultural assimilation efforts disrupted traditional maritime practices and social structures, causing socio-economic inequality and cultural hybridization. However, Dutch colonialism also sparked resistance and solidarity among Indonesians, contributing to the formation of a unified national identity. In conclusion, this study highlights the multifaceted nature of Dutch influence on Indonesia's maritime culture and national identity, highlighting the legacy of colonialism that persists in contemporary Indonesian society. Further research was conducted by Toni & Saraswati (2025) examining the important role of Indonesian maritime culture from the era of kingdoms to the present day as a bastion of national identity in the era of globalization. From the results of his research, the maritime glory of the archipelago in the past can be used as a model for the development of national identity in the era of globalization, which poses challenges due to changes in public preferences in overcoming the decline in interest in maritime culture.

Indonesia continues to preserve and maintain its maritime culture through traditions and traditional games such as dragon boat racing or rowing competitions held on the coasts of Sumatra (Riau and Batam), Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua. These games are direct simulations of the main activities of coastal communities and boat rowing. Teamwork, agility, and strength are essential, reflecting the values of fishermen and sailors (Trida et al., 2024). Furthermore, there is the fish catching competition. Often held in ponds, rice fields, or shallow waters on the coasts of Java, Kalimantan, and Sumatra. It demonstrates basic skills in finding fish or other marine products. It emphasizes speed, precision, and the courage to touch aquatic animals, which is part of the daily life of traditional fishermen (Tantiyawati & Isnaini, 2023). The last traditional game to be contested was the decorated boat race. Decorating boats demonstrates the emotional and artistic connection between the

community and boats as a means of livelihood. The paper boat race also symbolizes the hopes and dreams of coastal children for the sea (Said et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, in-depth studies on traditional maritime games as symbolic representations of ethnic migration history and cultural resilience are still very limited, especially in the West Nusa Tenggara region. In fact, the coastal region of West Nusa Tenggara has a unique maritime cultural diversity due to the interaction of various ethnic groups, including the Bugis-Makassar community in Labuhan Kertasari who maintain their ancestral traditions. Based on this research gap, this study presents a novel approach through Symbolic Action Theory. Boesch (2001) to analyze Palomba Lopi-lopi as a symbolic representation of the migration of the Bugis-Makassar ethnic group and the resilience of cultural identity amid the pressures of globalization.

This study poses the following research question: How does Palomba Lopi-lopi represent the migration and ethnic identity of the Bugis-Makassar people in Labuhan Kertasari, West Nusa Tenggara? The aim is to reveal the symbolic meaning of Palomba Lopi-lopi as a representation of historical migration and the ethnic identity of the Bugis-Makassar people, as well as its implications for the preservation of the maritime culture of the Indonesian archipelago. This analysis is expected to contribute theoretically to the study of maritime cultural anthropology as well as provide practical implications for policies on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in Indonesia.

## Methods

This study poses the following research question: How does Palomba Lopi-lopi represent the migration and ethnic identity of the Bugis-Makassar people in Labuhan Kertasari, West Nusa Tenggara? The aim is to reveal the symbolic meaning of Palomba Lopi-lopi as a representation of historical migration and the ethnic identity of the Bugis-Makassar people, as well as its implications for the preservation of the maritime culture of the Indonesian archipelago. This analysis is expected to contribute theoretically to the study of maritime cultural anthropology as well as provide practical implications for policies on the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in Indonesia, to analyze the symbolic meaning of Palomba Lopi-lopi (Allolio-Näcke, 2018). The fourth stage involved historiography to compile a complete historical narrative based on the research findings.

## Results and Discussion

### *Historical Data on Bugis-Makassar Ethnic Migration to Sumbawa Island*

Research findings indicate that the migration of the Bugis-Makassar ethnic group to Sumbawa Island was a historical consequence of the Bongaya Treaty signed by Sultan Hasanuddin on November 18, 1667. Based on KITLV archival documents and in-depth interviews with traditional leaders in Labuhan Kertasari (February 2025), this treaty was not merely an acknowledgment of the Gowa Kingdom's defeat by the VOC, but also triggered a massive wave of migration as a form of resistance against colonial domination. An analysis of the contents of the treaty reveals that the VOC imposed a trade monopoly, the surrender of territory and defensive forts, the payment of war compensation, and the recognition of Bone's sovereignty under Arung Palakka. These conditions created political, economic, and social dislocation that drove the Bugis-Makassar people to leave their homeland. Archival data shows two main waves of migration: the first wave (1600-1700) was marked by the exile of Gowa warriors, as recorded in the Batu Tering Inscription, which mentions the arrival of Daeng Mangappa in 1675. while the second wave (1700-1800) was dominated by the migration of Bugis traders who built communities in various regions of Nusa Tenggara, including Labuhan Kertasari.

### ***Verification and Validation of Historical Sources***

Data verification was conducted using a dual historical criticism approach. External criticism assessed the validity of sources by comparing KITLV archival documents, NTB regional government records, and oral narratives from the Labuhan Kertasari community. Analysis showed consistency between the Batu Tering Inscription, which mentions the arrival of Makassar in 1675, and oral records that have been passed down from generation to generation. Internal criticism assesses the credibility of the content through source triangulation, in which the narrative of migration as a form of resistance against the VOC is reinforced by findings from Dutch colonial archives that record attempts to pursue the Gowa refugee group. The results of this verification reinforce the validity of the findings that Labuhan Kertasari was founded by the Bugis-Makassar community who refused to submit to the Bongaya Agreement.

### ***Bugis-Makassar Ethnic Migration to Sumbawa Island***

The Treaty of Bongaya was a turning point in the Bugis-Makassar migration to Sumbawa Island. The treaty, which Sultan Hasanuddin signed in the Bongaya region on November 18, 1667. Was an agreement between the Kingdom of Gowa and the VOC, represented by Admiral Cornelis Speelman (Boink, P.A. Leupe, 2024). The following are the contents of the agreement.

Based on various historical studies, the 1667 Treaty of Bongaya marked a bitter end to the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Gowa. This treaty was signed as an acknowledgment of Gowa's defeat by the VOC, after a long war triggered by Dutch ambitions for trade monopoly and political rivalry with the Kingdom of Bone. Despite Sultan Hasanuddin's desperate struggle, Gowa's courage was ultimately defeated by the Dutch's cunning tactics and the far greater strength of the VOC's allies. This defeat marked the end of Makassar's glory as an independent maritime kingdom and the beginning of VOC domination in South Sulawesi (Reid, 1993). One of the harshest clauses was the granting of absolute trade monopoly rights to the VOC, whereby the Port of Makassar was closed to other foreign traders such as the Portuguese, British, and Danes. Territorially, Gowa was forced to surrender the Ujung Pandang Fort to the VOC and destroy its own defensive forts. The kingdom was also burdened with the obligation to pay enormous war reparations in the form of gold, crops, and slaves.

The profound political impact was seen in the recognition of Bone's sovereignty under Arung Palakka, which was declared free from Gowa's influence. This clause also included the surrender of prisoners and the release of slaves. To consolidate its power, the VOC obtained the right to establish lodges, trading posts, and forts in Makassar, thereby shifting the center of effective power into their hands. Thus, the Bongaya Treaty was not merely a peace agreement, but an instrument of total subjugation that changed the political and economic map of eastern Indonesia (Bulbeck, 2021; Ricklefs, 1983).

As a result of the contents of the Bongaya agreement, there were many negative impacts from the political, economic and social aspects of the community. Previously, Makassar was a bustling open port, but after the treaty, trade was strictly controlled by the VOC. The VOC's monopoly policy led to poverty and economic oppression of the people of Makassar and its surroundings. As a result of this domination, one of them was the occurrence of massive migration as a form of rejection of the domination of the VOC and its allies (Bone under Arung Palakka). This migration was carried out by nobles, fighters, and the people of Gowa who did not want to submit to the Dutch. Here are some Bugis-Makassar migrations to various regions. The Bugis-Makassar ethnic migration to Nusa Tenggara had two waves of migration. The first was the escape of the Gowa forces (1600-1700). This is evidenced by the Batu Tering inscription in Sumbawa recording the arrival of Makassar led

by Daeng Mangappa in 1675 (Steenbrink, 2013). Second, the migration of Bugis traders (1700-1800). This second period was a springboard for community building and acculturation, evidenced by the Bugis villages in West Sumbawa (G. Ammarell, 2002), in Sumbawa, they also assimilated through marriage with local noble families and built civilization (Haris, 2015).

One of the areas where this ethnic group migrated is Labuhan Kertasari Village. Based on oral sources from the Labuhan Kertasari village community consisting of traditional leaders, women activists and parents, the presence of this ethnic group in Labuhan Kertasari village and building civilization was motivated by their rejection of VOC domination after the Bongaya agreement, which was detrimental to the Bugis-Makassar community. The Kertasari area was chosen because it was close to the source of life, namely the sea, and became a safe hiding place from the VOC at that time. The residents of Labuhan Kertasari village continue to speak the island of Sulawesi's native tongue, and their forefathers from South Sulawesi are still deeply ingrained in the rituals and traditions that have been preserved. (Kementrian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2022). Sea rumuput farming is the primary source of income for the Bugis-Makassar ethnic group. Their physical location on Sumbawa Island's south shore lends credence to this (Kementrian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2022). Several cultures accompanying the development of science and the spread of Islam in Labuhan Kertasari Village are packaged in an annual festival, namely, Ballona Festival Kertasari as a representation of Bugis-Makassar ethnic migration in West Nusa Tenggara, including the Mbelu'pandang tradition, the Suro'mbasa tradition and including traditional games (Lintas NTB, 2023; Sarah et al., 2023).

Traditional games *Palomba Lopi-lopi* has the meaning of, "*Palomba*" means race and "*Lopi-lopi*" means Small boat. According to the locals, the *Palomba lopi-lopi* is a representation of the migration of the Bugis-Makassar ethnic group to West Nusa Tenggara. *Palomba lopi-lopi* It dates back to the 1970s and is held after Eid al-Fitr. The game is contested at sea by utilizing the sea breeze that moves ashore (Interview, 2 February 2025).



Figure 1. Lopi-lopi

*Sumber: research documentation*

The game system is a fast race to the finish with a straight track length of hundreds of meters according to the agreement of the participants. This competition is participated by 200 lopi-lopi. a lottery system is made to determine the four lopi-lopi that will compete with each other, with the provisions that two lopi-lopi qualify for the next round, the other two are eliminated. so on. four lopi-lopi are drawn and contested until they get the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th place at the end (Interview, 3 February 2025).

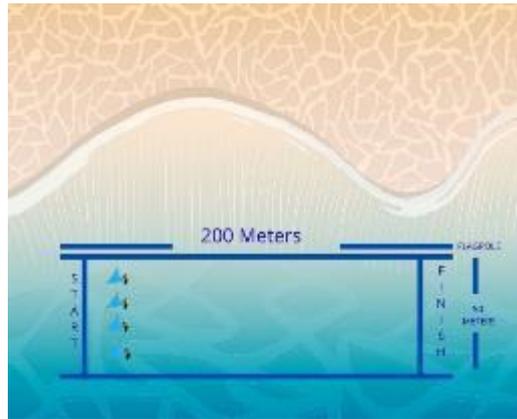


Figure 2. competition arena  
 Sumber: research documentation

In Figure 2, is the *Palomba Lopi-lopi* arena. This arena uses a track length of 200 meters, at the finish position also set the location of the finish 50 meters wide, so that not only fast yag is the determinant but the accuracy of *Lopi-lopi* when driving becomes a winning factor, this is where the strategy and ability to read the wind direction by adjusting the front and rear sail settings become the excitement felt by participants as a battle of greatness to mix strategies. Likewise, the counterweight is set to balance the weight with the size of the wind so that the *lopi-lopi* keep going well and avoid overturning due to the wind, besides that this counterweight is also a direction that will be set with the front and rear sails to achieve accuracy to the finish line (Interview, 5 Februari 2025).

### **Symbolic Action : Palomba Lopi-lopi**

The *Palomba Lopi-lopi* traditional game embodies profound symbolic meanings that reflect the Bugis-Makassar ethnic identity and their historical migration experience. At its core, the mini sailboat or *Lopi* symbolizes independence, agility, and harmony with nature. According to Turner as cited in Crews & Sène (2003), objects in traditional games often represent cultural values and human interaction with nature. In this game, players demonstrate remarkable confidence and adaptability as they skillfully control unmanned boats, requiring intimate knowledge of environmental conditions and precise timing.

Central to the game's symbolism is the *Tanja' Segitiga* (triangular sail), which serves both aerodynamic and cultural functions. Beyond its practical design, this sail represents the trilogy of *ada-siri'-pesse'* encompassing law, respect, and solidarity which forms the foundation of Bugis cultural values. This aligns with Geertz's perspective as referenced in Winter (2013), which emphasizes that folk games function as cultural "texts" containing deep social meanings that transmit collective identity across generations.

The ocean breeze in *Palomba Lopi-lopi* symbolizes nature's dynamic and unpredictable power. Players must carefully read wind direction and adjust their sails accordingly, demonstrating human collaboration with natural forces rather than domination over them. Ingold (2021) supports this view, noting how coastal communities traditionally perceive wind not as an obstacle but as a partner in maritime activities. This relationship extends to sophisticated traditional navigation techniques, where participants must adjust their strategies to local wind patterns known as "*Passimombolo' angin barat*" and "*Timoro' angin timur*." These skills reflect the rich navigational heritage documented by E.E. G. Ammarell (2002) and Tagliacozzo (2009) who describes seven levels of navigational expertise in Makassarese culture. At the highest level (*pau-pau*), master navigators could "read" the

wind without instruments, relying instead on stars, currents, and natural signs a skill that was crucial during the historical Bugis voyages across the archipelago. The straight track and wide finish line of the competition symbolize life's goals that require both speed and precision. Unlike conventional races that prioritize velocity alone, Palomba Lopi-lopi emphasizes strategic actions that determine the most efficient path to success. This philosophy resonates with Huizinga (2014) observation that traditional games often reflect societal values of competition and achievement, where wisdom and strategy often triumph over brute force.

Shipbuilding in Bugis culture embodies the philosophy of *Siri'*, expressed through two key components. The *Tajuré* (bow of the ship) symbolizes the backbone of community strength and resilience, while the *Sombala* (sail mast) represents the vertical union between humanity and the divine. As Yusuf et al. (2023) explain, these elements transform shipbuilding from a mere practical activity into a spiritual practice that connects the physical and metaphysical realms. The delicate balance between weight and sail demonstrates another profound symbolism maintaining equilibrium between natural forces and human control. Players must carefully adjust counterweights to prevent capsizing while optimizing speed, embodying what Bateson describes in Kaaronen (2020) as "homeostasis" in cultural systems, where balance becomes essential for sustainability. This principle extends beyond the game to encompass Bugis cosmology, where harmony between opposing forces ensures community wellbeing.

The use of cottonwood and other natural materials in constructing the lopi-lopi symbolizes local wisdom and sustainable resource utilization. As Ellen highlights in Herman-Herman-Mercer et al. (2019) the deliberate selection of indigenous materials in traditional practices represents a sophisticated form of ecological adaptation that has evolved over generations. This choice reflects not merely practical considerations but a philosophical commitment to living in harmony with the environment. In Bugis culture, speed and balance function as complementary rather than opposing principles. Speed manifested as "reaching the destination quickly" is regarded as a symbol of maturity (*to ri dewata*), where successful individuals must demonstrate agility, skill, and vision. Simultaneously, balance maintains its crucial role, particularly evident in shipbuilding where dimensions are mathematically calculated through traditional and mystical knowledge known as "*piti ri weleng*" (seven bamboo segments). This balance further connects to the concepts of "*Alemu Baine*" (Mother Earth) and "*Dewata Sewwae*" (God Almighty), which together emphasize the necessary equilibrium between humans, nature, and spirituality (Pelras, 1997; Sintang, 2004). Through these interconnected symbolic elements, Palomba Lopi-lopi transcends its function as mere entertainment, becoming instead a living repository of cultural memory, philosophical wisdom, and historical identity for the Bugis-Makassar community of Labuhan Kertasari.

The traditional maritime games and practices of the Bugis community, such as Palomba Lopi-lopi and Angit Laut, are deeply rooted in cultural symbolism, reflecting a profound connection between human life, nature, and spirituality. These games are not merely forms of recreation but serve as living embodiments of philosophical values, social cohesion, and ecological wisdom. Key elements like the Lopi (mini sailboat), *Tanja' Segitiga* (triangular sail), and *Sombala* (sail mast) symbolize core principles such as independence (*siri'*), harmony with nature, and the sacred balance between humans, the divine, and the environment. The intricate design of ships, navigation techniques (e.g., *Passimombolo' angin barat*, *Timoro' angin timur*), and the emphasis on speed and balance (*piti ri weleng*) highlight the Bugis mastery of traditional knowledge, blending mathematical precision, mystical beliefs, and adaptive strategies to navigate both the sea and life's challenges (E. E. Ammarell, 1994). Concepts like *Alemu Baine* (Mother Earth) and *Dewata Sewwae* (God Almighty) further illustrate the community's holistic worldview, where sustainability and

respect for natural forces—such as wind and currents—are central to cultural identity (Pelras, 1997; Sintang, 2004).

### Implications

The results of this study have significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study enriches Maritime Anthropology and Cultural Studies by showing how Palomba Lopi-lopi functions as a living artifact that preserves the narrative of migration, colonial resistance, and the philosophy of life of the Bugis-Makassar community, while also strengthening its application. Symbolic Action Theory in a contemporary context. Practically, these findings emphasize the urgency of integrating the philosophical values of this game such as independence, harmony with nature, and local wisdom—into the educational curriculum as a concrete effort to preserve cultural heritage. Additionally, Palomba Lopi-lopi has the potential to become a pioneer in sustainable cultural tourism that empowers local communities, provided that its sacred values and environmental sustainability are preserved. For the Labuhan Kertasari community, this game is a vital medium for strengthening identity and social cohesion amidst the onslaught of globalization. Therefore, commitment and supportive policies from local and central governments are needed to provide formal recognition, comprehensive documentation, and facilitation so that this maritime heritage of the archipelago does not disappear and continues to be a source of inspiration for future generations.

### Conclusion

Palomba Lopi-lopi is a representation of the Bugis-Makassar ethnic group's relocation to Sumbawa Island following the Bongaya Treaty (1667) and their act of defiance against Dutch colonization. This game serves as an identification marker for the Bugis-Makassar enclave of Labuhan Kertasari village in NTB. Philosophical principles such as independence, natural harmony, life tactics, and ecological wisdom are embodied in every aspect of the game, including the boat, wind, trajectory, and materials. In addition to serving as a means of preserving customs in the face of globalization, the game teaches the ideals of unity, sportsmanship, and environmental adaptation. Overall, through symbolism ingrained in day-to-day activities, the Bugis-Makassar migration to Sumbawa and the cultural practice of Palomba Lopi-lopi depict ecological adaptability, identity resilience, and resistance to colonialism. In addition to being a cultural legacy, the game is a "living text" (Geertz) that teaches harmony between people, the natural world, and spirituality, as well as the balance between ambition (speed) and wisdom (balancing). Palomba Lopi-lopi must be preserved and revived as a component of Indonesia's marine cultural legacy. It should also be incorporated into the curriculum to help the next generation learn more about the past.

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