VISITS FROM OCTOPUS AND CROCODILE KIN

RETHINKING HUMAN-SEA RELATIONS THROUGH AMPHIBIOUS TWINSHIP IN INDONESIA

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INTRODUCTION: AMPHIBIOUS TWINS IN THE MASALIMA ARCHIPELAGO

> My father's name is Hamma. He was Bajau. Others call us sea people. My father was born together with an octopus. They were siblings (saudara), so the octopus is my uncle (om). (Hamma Ali, 28 March 2013, Pamantauan)

I had come to Hamma Ali's house to learn about the man's seafaring skills. It was dark outside; waves were rumbling below his house on stilts. We were on Pamantauan Island, part of the Masalima Archipelago, where the currents of the Makassar Strait converge with the Java Sea. Scattered on five tiny islands (Pamantauan, Sabaru, Saleriang, Masalima and Pamalikkan), a population of several thousand lives here, mostly from fishing and trade. As is common practice in rural Indonesia, our meeting started with an explanation of how Hamma Ali, his household and more distant kin were all related. Hamma Ali's cephalopod kin came as a bit of a surprise to me. Prompted by questions, he elaborated on how the octopus was born and cared for as a full member of the family:

> The octopus was still a baby. After he was born, my grandparents couldn't just release him in the sea right away. They first built a basin for him and filled it

> with seawater. They kept the baby for three months. Then they considered him mature enough to be brought to the sea. When they did so, they gave him provisions (*bekal*): rice cooked in coconut milk, a boiled [chicken] egg, and one cigarette. (Idem)

Although they released the octopus to the sea, the parents, brother and other close relatives actively sustained a relationship of care and acknowledgement with their sea-dwelling kin:

> Since then, this [the same provisions] is what the family prepares for the octopus to feed him. We do this at least once a year. It doesn't really matter when exactly; the important thing is that we let him know that we haven't forgotten him. If we don't do this, he comes and asks for our attention. (Idem)

Years had passed since the birth of the octopus, and Hamma [Hamma Ali's father] had already passed away. Yet to Hamma Ali, his uncle was still an important part of the family:

> He must be about a hundred years old now. He is not only my uncle, he is also our ancestor (*nenek moyang*). My father passed down his relationship with his brother to me. (Idem)

Kinship relations with sea-dwelling creatures was not my initial focus at the time, yet it triggered my interest while doing anthropological fieldwork in Masalima in 2013. As similar stories popped up in different situations, I started to take notes and follow these stories, out of curiosity. On the adjacent island Pamalikkan, I encountered a similar narrative of kinship with a sea-dwelling creature while chatting with a few Mandar women after lunch. Drinking tea, we informally exchanged stories of family and ancestry. Jumaira, an elderly woman who referred to herself as a descendent of the Mandar kingdom in Sulawesi, told me about her uncle, who happened to be a crocodile:

> Ambo Bisu was my grandfather, he was born with the crocodile. But the crocodile baby came immediately after Ambo Bisu, so they are twins (*kembar*). As soon as the crocodile was born, the family prepared a basin filled with water for him so he could grow there. As a baby, the crocodile lived and grew in the basin. When he had outgrown the basin, he had matured enough to be brought to the sea. They gave him a silver bracelet on his right leg, and they prepared him provisions: Bananas, a raw chicken's egg, one cigarette, and a betel leaf, folded twice. He took it with him to the sea. (Jumaira, 22 March 2013, Pamalikkan)

Like the octopus, Ambo Bisu's crocodile brother was also born and raised within the intimacy of the household, yet ultimately, he headed seawards with ritual provisions. From the sea, the sibling appeared again sometimes to reconnect with his kin on land. In turn, Ambo Bisu regularly went to the sea, joining his crocodile kin:

> After that, whenever Ambo Bisu went to the sea, his twin came along. He followed the boat, but usually he didn't show himself. He didn't need to, because they knew they were together. When Ambo Bisu called for help, his twin brother appeared. (Idem)

This all happened hundreds of years ago, Jumaira concluded. However, although born with Ambo Bisu, the twinship had passed on to the rest of the family and moved along with their migration overseas to Masalima:

> The twins were born on Gondengareng Island.[1] But we Mandar are seafaring people, we like to wander (*kuat merantau*), so part of the family moved here to Pamalikkan Island. But it doesn't matter where the grandchildren are. As soon as they are at sea, the crocodile is with them. (Idem)

In Masalima, twinships are common with a variety of sea-dwelling or amphibious beings, including also lizards and snakes. While kinship with lizards and crocodiles is common among the Mandar population of Masalima, the Bajau

families I spoke with had octopus kin. The crocodile and octopus twinship caught my attention because it expresses a relation to a sea-dwelling agency that is both intimate and alien: part of the intimate 'us' of family and consanguinity, while simultaneously excessive to it as the twin is also part of another world. This kind of kinship challenges distinctions between human and non-human, land-based and sea-bound, without merging them into one.

Even more than kinship, the concept of twinship effectively problematises a clear distinction between self and other (Renne and Bastian 2001). What happens if this is extended to a twinship that involves marine or amphibious selves and others? What can twinship with sea-dwelling beings or agencies teach us about the figure of the human in relation to the sea? This is a question I address in this chapter. Prompted by narratives of twinship with sea-dwelling and amphibious kin in Masalima, I revisit the figures of the human and the sea in the context of how we think about their interrelation.

Such endeavour requires careful translation, while acknowledging that all ethnographic translation involves elements of distortion. Referring to the described twinship in post-humanist terms like 'human-non-human' or 'human-animal' involves a risk of reinstating a dichotomy that the twinship stories seem to undo. I will refer instead to 'amphibious twinship', in an attempt to stay with the movement in-between, keeping divisions of land/sea, human/non-human ambiguous. More than a curious ethnographic object of study, twinship with crocodile and octopus kin provides a situated or 'native' concept that prompts a rethinking of human-sea relations. It does so by intervening in the modern figure of the human as an 'us' in relation to the sea and its agencies as environmental Other.

Drawing from ethnographic accounts in Masalima, this chapter shows how both parts of the amphibious twinship are *manusia*, translated as 'humanity' or 'personhood', which indicates an ambiguity between sameness and difference, and between the twin siblings as humans and persons. As humans of different natures, from different worlds, they move together in twinship. Local narratives describe how in dreams and bodily visits the siblings partially merge, a process that confirms a co-existence in which the twins can move as one, while resisting a reduction to each other. What, then, may this amphibious twinship teach us

about environmental alterity? Reflecting on how the twin sibling is an agency in the sea as well as an agency of the sea, I argue that the twinship expresses co-existence, but also environmental excess; a force or Other not contained in the figure of the twin sibling. Liquefying distinctions between thing and concept, figure and ground, amphibious twinship allows for thinking 'in-between' and stimulates consideration of what slips between the cracks of conceptualisation.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The insights elaborated in this chapter are primarily based on the conversations I had with people in the Masalima Archipelago in March and April 2013, yet they are embedded in a long-term engagement with seafaring people in the wider region, including an 18-month fieldwork period (2011–2013) complemented by shorter visits to the region in 2008, 2017 and 2019. This anthropological study combined ethnographic research methods with a mobile methodology of following people, stories, vessels and things across the sea. Whereas the research was not focused on a particular site or ethnic group, the majority of people figuring in it identified themselves as of Bajau or Mandar descent, or a mix. Both Mandar and Bajau are known in maritime literature for their sea-oriented livelihoods and seafaring skills (Stacey 2003; Nolde 2009; Pauwelussen 2016; Zerner 2003).

The Masalima Archipelago is well known among seafaring people in the wider maritime region in central Indonesia and beyond as a fisheries and trade hub, and a stopover for people wandering, travelling or living at sea. Although the archipelago does not show on most maps, it can be considered a cosmopolitan place – an intersection of people, things and stories on the move. From a land-based perspective, the place is remote. Without regular transport, the easiest way to get there is a 24-hour ride on the occasional boat transporting supplies from the port of Makassar.

I came to Masalima with Masrif and Amir (pseudonyms). I travelled along with them from Berau in East Kalimantan to meet their overseas kin, while also following trajectories of the fish trade. Masrif had lived in Masalima for over 30 years before moving to Berau, and he was still a respected man in the

archipelago's Mandar-speaking community. Amir was his adoptive son, born in the archipelago in a community of semi-nomadic Bajau people. While the two men could be rereferred to as 'key informants', to me they were (also) hosts, translators, teachers, travel companions, friends and – in the end – adoptive family. Their trust in me and my project has been vital to this chapter, as it brought about the necessary confidence and willingness among people to speak about what I call amphibious twinship. I have been open about my intention to publish these stories.

Interviews were held in Indonesian, sometimes mixed with the languages of Bajau and Mandar. My conversation partners generally spoke Indonesian quite well; however, their replies often mixed vernaculars, and Indonesian words sometimes carried meanings different from standard 'dictionary' Indonesian. Because my own understanding of Bajau and Mandar was basic, Amir and Masrif helped me out with the translation between Mandar, Bajau and Indonesian terminologies and meanings. Most of the conversations about twinship were recorded, with consent.

AMPHIBIOUS TWINSHIP IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Twinship with crocodiles and other amphibians has been reported as a common phenomenon in several parts of Indonesia and neighbouring island states, particularly among coastal and maritime communities (Blackwood 1932; Boomgaard 2007; Fauvel and Koch 2009; Koch and Acciaioli 2007; Kunert 2017). Still, ethnographic coverage of the phenomenon is thin, save some accounts of kinship with spirit-animals in Southeast Asia.

In a paper titled 'animal children', Alexander Krappe (1944) has chronicled stories and myths of women giving birth to animals. In some cases, which he refers to as the 'werewolf type', the mother transforms into an animal and – as animal (shape and/or spirit) – gives birth to animal babies. In another variant, mothers give birth to what the author refers to as human-animal twins. In this context, he reports that in many Indonesian Islands, women are known to deliver a child and a crocodile at the same birth:

> The midwife is believed to carry the crocodile twin carefully down to the river and to place it in the water. The family propitiate their amphibious relative by putting victuals in the river, and the human twin is bound for the rest of his life to do his duty by his crocodile brother or sister. Sickness and death would inevitably ensue, should he remiss in this obligation (Krappe 1944: 48).

James Fraser (1935, in Krappe 1944) describes the village of Simbang at the mouth of the Bubui River in New Guinea, where crocodiles are kinsfolk, and where an aged crocodile known as Old Butong, born of a 'human mother', was recognised as head of the family. Fauvel and Koch's more recent account of a twinship with a monitor lizard on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi recalls the mother saying that once grown up, the twin came back, 'looking for its twin sister and parents. When the family moved to kill the monitor, it 'raised its leg and started crying' in the most moving fashion, so the family came to believe it was really a human being with the appearance of a scaly monitor' (Fauvel and Koch 2009: 78).

Likewise, a 2010 documentary shot on Sulawesi follows a Buginese household with their varanid daughter Ali Douyung. Titled *The Twins of Lake Tempé* the documentary shows the creature being cherished, fed, washed and played with as a full family member (Corillion 2010). Here, kinship to the lizard is traced to the legend of a Bugis queen who gave birth to twins, one of them a lizard. At birth, the human infant died but the lizard survived. The lizard son was taken to the edge of the water, but the king told his son to reappear in a dream if he ever wanted to come back. In a similar way, Ali Douyung came to her family's home and appeared in the father's dreams. He then knew that Ali Douyung was his son's twin sister, and the family adopted their lizard kin.

Outside academic literature, stories of twinship and kinship with octopuses and crocodiles in Indonesia feature prominently on blogs and news sites. Online news portal VIVA published a story of how in 2015 fishers from Ambon Island killed an octopus more than a meter long and took it to their village. There, they discovered the octopus's head appeared human, its body covered with something shawl-like. A street vendor from Ambon city – Wa Rukia – was

reported to have arrived in the village, crying. The octopus was his twin sister Ode Marjin, born 53 years ago from the same mother's womb. Wa Rukia recognised his sister by her shawl and blue eyes, he said to the news reporters. He then took the octopus's body to bury her like a human (VIVA 2015). Another news site reported a woman who gave birth to a human-crocodile twin (Putri 2013), showing pictures of the mother caressing a crocodile. More recently, the ButonPos news site ran a story of a grandmother's reunion with her twin sibling after decades apart. While also considered 'human', her beloved twin sibling was of a different nature: an octopus who had been living in the sea but was now in a bucket filled with water, surrounded by her family (ButonPos 2017, see also Karim 2017; Patty 2017 for recent examples).

Reports of twinship with marine spirit-animals in Southeast Asia show a tendency to document the phenomenon as merely a folkloristic curiosity. Yet native stories and concepts of environmental kinship can do more than this: they can be mobilised for conceptual reflection and inquiry and stimulate a critical rethinking of human-environment relations (Rose 2005). In this regard, narratives of twinship with crocodiles and octopuses in Masalima challenge established ways of thinking the figure of the human in relation to the marine environment. The next section shows how such 'amphibious twinship' destabilises the notion of humanity as restricted to a distinct 'human' category, instead emphasising a shared personhood with environmental others.

HUMANS OF DIFFERENT NATURES

After Jumaira told me about her crocodile uncle – the twin brother of her grandfather Ambo Bisu – I learned that new crocodile twins had been born more recently. Jumaira referred to them as the grandchildren of Ambo Bisu:

> Among his grandchildren the new crocodile twin was born. This crocodile is a different human/person (*manusia*), a different twin, but both [crocodiles] are of the same family. (Jumaira, 22 March 2013, Pamalikkan)

She also introduced me to the mother of these twins; Marsuki. Later, in her own home, Marsuki narrated:

> When I was pregnant, I didn't know I was pregnant with twins, until I gave birth. There was a lot of blood though, more than usual. I went to the seashore to wash away the blood. My son grew up to become a seaman. He went sailing. He often sailed to Mandar [West Sulawesi], and after a while he had a girlfriend over there. It was there in Mandar that my son met his twin sister for the first time. That was through the photo. He realised he was twins with the crocodile when she appeared in the photo on which he posed with his girlfriend. When they developed the photo, a crocodile stood next to him, instead of his girlfriend. (Marsuki 22, March 2013, Pamalikkan)

The twin came unexpectedly to Marsuki, though the excessive blood was probably a sign, she said. Different from Ambo Bisu's twin brother, this crocodile twin sister wasn't first cared for and brought to the sea by her mother. She appeared much later, to her brother first, and through a photograph. The miraculous appearance of the crocodile sister on a photograph was an event and story widely known and narrated in Masalima, and beyond. Later, the twin sister started visiting her twin brother on Pamalikkan, in a shape that moved between crocodile and human appearances:

> It was here in Pamalikkan that she first visited [my son], as partially woman and partially crocodile. She said: 'Bring me home'. He [her son] knew it was his twin sister and that she wanted to go back to the sea. My son prepared provisions for her: a blouse, a sarong, bananas, and sandals. These are the things a woman needs for a journey, he thought. He put the provisions in a bucket and gave them [placed it into the water]. But his sister didn't go home, she didn't leave. He then realised that something was missing: gold. As soon as he added gold to the basket, his sister went back to the sea. (Idem)

When describing the twin siblings, people in Masalima were not so much interested in the question of what these amphibious twins 'really are'. Their

discussions and explications revolved around how the twin siblings 'appear' and how they relate to their kin. When describing her crocodile great-grandfather, Jumaira said:

> The crocodile twin visits in dreams. He mostly comes in the appearance of a crocodile. He then has four fingers instead of five. From that we know he is one of us (*orang kita* – literally 'our people'). He is our family. (Jumaira, 22 March 2013, Pamalikkan).

Similarly, Hamma Ali said about his octopus uncle:

> If the octopus appears, he does so as a person/human being (*manusia*), sometimes in front of our eyes, at other times in our dreams. His shape is not fixed. Sometimes he is like an octopus, at other times he has more of a shape like you and me. But then only the face is human, and it is vague. When he is more like an octopus, he can be distinguished from the regular octopuses we encounter in the sea because he is white and has five arms instead of eight. (Hamma Ali, 28 March 2013, Pamantauan)

Both Hamma Ali and Jumaira referred to the twin sibling as *manusia*. In standard Indonesian language, *manusia* translates as 'humanity'. However, in Bajau and Mandar language traditions, the term is commonly used to refer to a 'personhood' that is not restricted to a distinct human category clearly distinguishable from other animals and spirits. In Masalima the term *manusia* is used both as a reference to a more exclusive humanity (excluding other animals and spirits), and as a reference to an inclusive humanity that is probably more accurately translated as 'personhood' or 'familiarity'.

Jumaira said that the twins are both *manusia* but of a different kind. As a more inclusive form of 'we', *manusia* as personhood opens up the term to include amphibious siblings, as well as (ancestral) spirits in a more general sense (Bottignolo 1995). It may also include animals, which are part of the spectrum of spirits and agencies that make up the living world. For example, Bajau fishers commonly referred to dugongs and dolphins as being 'from their

own 'humankind' or 'personhood'' (*dari manusia sendiri*), while Mandar fishers sometimes refer to fish as children (Zerner 2003, and own observations 2011–2013). Rather than saying that *manusia* includes animals and spirits in a relational notion of 'humanity', it is perhaps more accurate to state that there never really was a clear distinction between these three categories in the first place.

Manusia expresses ambiguity regarding sameness and difference between twin siblings as humans and persons. It may indicate an exclusive humanity, but it is also used to indicate an open-ended familiarity relating a spectrum of agencies into shared personhood. In this latter sense, the amphibious twin siblings constitute each other in a shared *manusia* personhood traversing the water surface. This ambiguity in the use of the *manusia* concept indicates how the sea-dwelling twin sibling is both familiar and Other. In Masalima, amphibious siblings are part of an inclusive *manusia* 'us' being born into Masalima families, through birth together with a human baby, yet they are also excessive to it. They ultimately head back to a different home underwater.

BETWEEN SELF AND OTHER

I am I,
I am not you.
I live apart.
Do you live, too,
With dreams and hopes
That are your own?
We will be two
When fully grown?

(Excerpt from 'Twindependent', Lewis and Yolen 2012: 47)

Twinship plays with the trope of a mirror between beings that are conceived together, reflect one another but are in the end not the same. In popular culture,

anthropological theory and in indigenous philosophy the concept of twinship has problematised the figure of the individual, as it is associated with fluidity or ambiguity between being same and different, more than one and less than two separate entities (Dillan 2018; Evens 2012; Renne & Bastian 2001). Likewise, narratives of amphibious twinship in Masalima express a movement between difference and sameness that becomes particularly apparent when the twins temporarily merge into one. In these events, it is said that the amphibious twin appears 'in reality' (*dalam nyata*).

After the twin sibling is released to the sea (after birth), there are two common ways in which he or she reappears to the Masalima family: in dreams, and *dalam nyata*. A twin sibling appears 'in reality' as it becomes visible, hearable or otherwise perceptible. The sibling is seen as an animal walking along the coastline or swimming along with a boat. It may also be perceived as a shimmering shape, a light, a sound, a tingling sensation, or through the heavy blooding of its mother during birth. The twin sibling's reality as an appearing *dalam nyata* is best characterised as a relational effect; it is confirmed in its affective consequences.

The twin sibling also appears in reality when it visits and takes over the body of its sibling or a close relative, the two partially and temporarily merging into one. As a Bajau *orang pintar* ('smart person', someone who communicates with spirits), Umar, said: 'Particularly at sea, spiritual presences are strong. They usually make themselves known as they enter our body' (18 February 2013, Berau). Sometimes, the events were explained to me as spirit possession ('*dirasuki*'). However, the families of amphibious twins preferred the term *dikunjungi* ('being visited') as a gentler notion of temporarily sharing one body. Hamma Ali elaborated:

> Sometimes, the twin octopus visits. He visits us by occupying my body. He did that with his twin brother, and now with me. He then becomes part of me. When he visits, he wants to be dressed in a red sarong, a red blouse, and a *topi songkok* [a traditional Muslim cap] in Bone style. He asks for these clothes, and he puts them on. We used to be looking frantically for it whenever he visited us unexpectedly, but nowadays we always have these clothes prepared just in case he wishes to spend time with us. Usually, cold

> shivers announce the visit of my uncle. When he visits, he is very emotional, he cries and cries. He misses his family; he wants to touch his grandchildren; he wants to see the new baby. The family comes together in the house when the octopus visits, to be with him while he crawls about the room. Only if he has seen and touched all his relatives does he feel better and go home. When I come to my senses again, I am surprised! All these people in the room!' (Hamma Ali, 28 March 2013, Pamantauan)

Whether one can call on the twin sibling for a visit depends on the relationship one sustains with him or her and is ultimately up to the twin sibling. He or she cannot be employed, as Amir (Hamma Ali's nephew) said:

> My uncle [Hamma Ali] and his younger sister, they are able to feed (*kasih makan*) the octopus. For them, the octopus is willing to come. But with another, it may not work. All the children know how to feed the octopus, but it is always up to the octopus whom he visits. Until now, the octopus has only visited Hamma Ali and his sister. (Amir, 28 March 2013, Pamantauan)

Jumaira's husband explained what happens when his family is visited by their crocodile grandfather:

> If he is not given attention, he will visit his grandchildren, he misses them. The spirit (*roh*) will pervade/possess (*merasuki*) them. He [the human and crocodile becoming together] then appears crawling like the crocodile. He will act and move as the crocodile. If this happens, if one of the grandchildren is visited, the following is to be done: we offer the crocodile [now in, or part of, the grandchild] a raw egg. He sucks and empties the egg without breaking the shell. As soon as he wants to go home and leave the visited kin, he crawls towards the sea. He wants to go back home. He does not need help to go to the sea, he knows his way. As soon as he is soaked, he leaves the human body. The visited now feels one again. (Jumaira's husband, 22 March 2013, Pamalikkan)

Note the similarity with how Marsuki's son is visited by his crocodile twin sister:

> Nowadays, he is very close to his sister, and he can call her now, asking her to visit him. Here, in this house, he will let her visit him. They then move together like a crocodile. (Marsuki, 22 March 2013, Pamalikkan)

Although twins from the sea cannot be called or employed by just anyone, they do appear sometimes to people who are not kin:

> It is possible we unexpectedly deal with a sea twin of another family. It's a matter of recognising them and dealing with them respectfully. For example, the other day I saw a snake coming out of the water. A snake with scales, of a kind I had never seen before. As soon as it left the water, it had legs. It crossed its legs and just stayed there quietly. I was there with an uncle, who said to me: 'Leave it, don't bother it, because I suspect that it is the twin sibling of someone else'. (Ibu Susy, 22 March 2013, Pamalikkan)

The crocodile and octopus twins are not just an abstract category of spiritual beings. As relatives, they have their own personality, mood swings and preferences. As family, they are treasured, and their visits welcome yet not always convenient. The personalities of the twin siblings – being people and part of *manusia* – shows in how they all have different wants and wishes when they visit their kin, while there are also differences in how often they want their family's attention, and when. Some wish to be remembered once a year, while others show up uninvited when they feel neglected. Jumaira's crocodile grandfather, for example, was known as a creature of habit, demanding on his visits what was given to him when he was released to the sea for the first time: a raw egg, a cigarette, a banana and betel leaf. 'Once a year we offer this to the crocodile. There is no fixed day to do this, but it is important that it is done'. (Jumaira, 22 March 2013, Pamalikkan). The narratives of visiting twin siblings express the obligations that the twinship entails. They also express the affection and longing that the twins have to be reunited, to become part of the other, albeit momentarily.

While the previous section showed how the twin sibling from the sea moves between human and animal shape, in the narratives above the 'human' sibling shifts between human and animal shapes too, moving like a crocodile or octopus. As family reunions, the visits reconfirm twinship by the temporary becoming-one of the siblings or their nearest kin. Again, the twinship expresses a productive ambiguity here of being similar and different. Both are humans of different kinds, with different homes, but through twinship they move together *dalam nyata* – in reality. In dreams and bodily visits, the twins temporarily and partially merge to acknowledge and vitalise their co-existence while resisting reduction to each other. They express a difference that is not pure 'otherness', but rather a becoming-with of sea-bound agencies not contained in themselves but neither yet safely Other (after Haraway 2016: 98). Amphibious twinship thus emerges here as a transformative force that challenges distinctions between human, animal and spirit, as well as between self and other.

Still, while amphibious twinship expresses a moral and affective linkage between different worlds, it also embodies a certain eeriness and capriciousness of the sea, which lies beyond human conception and control – an environmental excess channelled through the familiar/strange relationship between the twins. Although created together, born from the same womb, amphibious twins never completely map onto each other as they proceed to live different lives in different worlds that only partially flow into one another. What then does amphibious twinship in Masalima tell us about environmental otherness?

THE SEA AS INTIMATE AND OTHER

Stories of amphibious twinship are frequently accompanied by references to the sea as dangerous, intimately present, yet ultimately beyond what can be controlled or understood. The sea's mood and rhythm conditions almost every aspect of daily life on and off the islands and is subject to repeated discussion and ritualised practices. In Masalima, Mandar fishers engage in open sea fishing, braving dangerously stormy seas to search for the eggs of flying fish. Many of the Bajau fishers engage in risky work underwater, by hookah diving for sea

cucumber and reef fishes (Pauwelussen, 2021). Situated in a convergence of strong sea currents, the Masalima Archipelago and adjacent waters are also known for their strong spirit presences, particularly during the monsoon season. As elaborated below, amphibious twinship involves relations with agencies *in* the sea, but the sea-dwelling twin may also be an extension *of* the sea – diffusing a division between figure and ground. The twinship thereby speaks to relationality and the limits thereof in human-sea relations.

As agencies *in* the sea, the crocodile and octopus twins are situated in a spectrum of agencies known to dwell and move in marine and intertidal spaces. Although the spirit worlds of the Bajau and Mandar do not neatly map onto each other, both are constituted by a plethora of spiritual, material and animal beings and forces that shift shape, scale, direction, intensity and perceptibility (Bottignolo 1995; Lowe 2006). Some are considered as an extension of the familiar – as 'allies' or 'kin', while others are feared as malevolent beings. Some can be manipulated to do good or harm. Others still are other-worldly and utterly unpredictable, up to the point that they are unknown, accepted absences in understanding and of relating.

As I have elaborated elsewhere (Pauwelussen 2017: 39–67), making and sustaining a living in this vibrant world requires a kind of cognitive and affective navigation that resembles dialogue between seafarers and the multiple and shifting moves, rhythms and agencies of and in the sea. In Masalima, amphibious twins are also discussed in relation to such affective engagement, in which the twinship relation mobilises practices and sentiments of mutual care and moral responsibility from both sides. Many of the stories of amphibious twinship that I documented express intimacy and caring relations. The mother-in law of an octopus twin said:

> At the beginning... we knew there would be twins because there was a lot of blood in the sarong. We were upset. Why is there so much blood? Maybe there are twins? But we saw only one baby; that was Rijal. After that, the mother who gave birth had a dream. In it, an octopus was clinging to her. It was her baby in the form of an octopus. A couple of years later, her husband Hajar [the father of the twins] went to the sea to fish. He caught an octopus

> and he pulled the octopus to his canoe (*sampan*). The octopus didn't die, and he then realised that it was his son. He released his son back into the water. But the octopus didn't leave. Instead, he clung to the boat. He hugged and caressed the boat, and only after a while doing that did the octopus leave and go down. (Marlina, 29 March 2013, Pamantauan)

Among the Bajau families I consulted, twinship with an octopus involves a taboo against catching and eating it. It also involves a family obligation of care and remembering, feeding, releasing and protecting. This relation of obligation and care goes in both directions. Just as the human family extends its care to the octopus beyond the individual twin sibling, the octopus also extends its affection and care beyond its twin sibling to the wider family. The octopus's father (who first identified his son at sea) was particularly explicit in how his [octopus] son, now 15 years old, just like his other son, helps him at sea:

> I am often at sea alone, but with my son. I have had accidents, but I have been lucky every time. Once, when my boat capsized, he helped me. The boat was upside down. Normally, it is impossible to turn back the boat, but I managed to do it, so I surely received help with that. Another time, I went fishing, but my boat capsized again. I was drifting for one day and one night. People here were worried, they went looking for me. I tried to swim, but I was tired, hungry. I held on to the boat, but I almost collapsed. That's when I saw the dolphins swimming around me, checking in on me. They stayed with me, they kept me company. Finally, my people from here found me. They pulled me onto their boat. Just when they did that, the two dolphins appeared from the water, they put their heads on the boat too, they splashed around a bit and then they left, back to the sea. The octopus, he helped by calling the dolphins. (29 March 2013, Pamantauan)

Similarly, Hamma Ali's octopus uncle helped him when Hamma experienced misfortune at sea:

> Years can go by without him [his octopus uncle] visiting us. But in some years, he comes several times. This is when we need each other. Once, a couple of years ago, I was stung by a big stingray. It was a dangerous situation, I was very ill, and I probably wouldn't have made it without the strength of the octopus. He also helped me when I once sailed from Pamantauan to the West coast of Sulawesi. The weather was bad, the waves dangerously high. At night, I saw the octopus below in the sea. His white shape spread light below the water surface. I knew it was my uncle. His shape had five arms. He stayed close to the boat until I had reached safe waters. (Hamma Ali, 28 March 2013, Pamantauan)

Hamma Ali said he was a dive-fisher, collecting sea cucumbers from the sea floor. He explained that although his uncle doesn't usually show himself, he is always present during dives, ready to support his nephew. Once, Hamma Ali's engine broke down, leaving him at the mercy of the strong currents of the Makassar Strait. His uncle pulled his boat to the land: 'My engine didn't work anymore, and still my boat moved in the right direction. I know it was the octopus'.

Still, it's not only in times of trouble that the octopus accompanies his kin. As Hamma Ali said:

> Sometimes, he just comes to keep his nephew company. Sometimes, he comes up to the boat and sits on my lap. Here, here he sits [Hamma Ali slaps his right knee]. He asks for a cigarette. I give him one, and usually he leaves right after receiving it [the cigarette]. He goes back to the sea. At other moments, the octopus appears – not visible to the eyes – by obstructing those who try to hurt me. Should people intend to do me harm, it is in the power of the octopus to pull their boat [in]to the sea. (Idem)

Jumaira and Marsuki narrated similar stories of their crocodile kin. Jumaira mentioned how her crocodile great grandfather warns her in her dreams when relatives are in trouble at sea. Marsuki, the mother of the crocodile that first appeared on a photo, likewise explained how the crocodile twinship informs her son:

> My son is in Kalukuan Island now, he builds boats there. He connects with her, and distance disappears. He feels what happens at other places, even those that are many nights sailing from here. If his father is ill, he knows over there in Kalukuang. He comes home, even before anyone has had the opportunity to bring him the news. [A sister adds]: 'That's his twin sister telling him'. (Marsuki, 22 March 2013, Pamalikkan)

While the twin sibling is often personified in narratives, by extension it figures as an agency *of* the sea just as it is one *in* it. This bears resemblance to the way Indonesian legends and stories have portrayed seas, oceans and major currents as kingdoms and forces personified in queens and prophets (Schlehe 1998).[2] While the sea may be an agency and a multiplicity thereof (see Pauwelussen and Verschoor 2017), in conversations people were not so much concerned with what the sea 'really is', but rather how best to relate to, and live with it, in which the 'it' never acquires a uniform nature. In this ethics of relational co-existence, the twin sibling *is* the sea as much as it is *part of* it, and the sea is therefore in the human just as the human is also in the sea, diffusing a division between figure and ground and rendering both sides of the twin-mirror ultimately amphibious, moving in-between. They were never separated, and they may constitute one another without merging into one, as one does not capture the other either as a body or a concept.

As the ethnographic excerpts above illustrate, amphibious twinship expresses an ethics of care that may involve helping each other, not eating one another, or exchanging (ritual) food and messages. The twins appear to share a moral domain of co-existence, although at the same time, as an agency of the sea, the octopus or crocodile sibling belongs to a different *dunia*, which translates into 'world', 'realm' or 'order'. When dealing with a twin sibling, one is also dealing with a force that is not contained in the figure of the twin. Perhaps this is also what Kunert's documentary *O Brother Octopus,* shot in Sabah (Malaysia) about 1200 km to the north of Masalima refers to when citing a Bajau elder:

> The mother gives birth to a child, and to the child's twin, born in the form of an octopus. It becomes our lifelong companion. We cannot eat or kill any

> octopus. If we break this rule, we need to seek forgiveness or a giant octopus will rise from the water, bringing us misfortune. (Kunert 2017)

In amphibious twinship, the Bajau and Mandar relate to the sea environment both as an intimate presence and an 'order of the Other' (after Helmreich 2009: 15). It is Other because it exceeds colonisation and eludes attempts to capture it as a body or a concept. The Bajau and Mandar 'theory of twinship' acknowledges a limitation of relationality, as one never really knows what the twin sibling – as a force in and of the sea – can do. It might rise from the water as a giant octopus.

TWINSHIP THEORY

Prompted by narratives from the Masalima Archipelago, I have discussed twinship between human and sea-dwelling kin as both a phenomenon and a concept. As a phenomenon, amphibious twinship is sustained in affective performance – whether dream, being 'visited', or the caring for a 'flesh and blood' animal in a backyard basin. As a native concept, it expresses thinking and doing human-sea relations in Masalima, while its logics may also intervene in current debates in anthropology and science and technology studies on environmental alterity.

This final section reflects on twinship with crocodiles and octopuses in Masalima as a theory or ethics of co-existence and alterity in human-sea relations. As argued, twinship speaks to ambiguity between being same and different. It plays with the trope of mirroring beings that are intimately familiar, but also of a different nature. In amphibious twinship, this ambiguity extends to the human-sea relationship. As twinship diffuses distinctions between self and other, engaging with amphibious twinship stimulates a rethinking of a human 'us' relating to a sea 'Other'. I have shown how in Masalima, both sides of this twinship are human or person (*manusia*), yet of different natures. They share a moral universe but belong to different worlds. In correspondence with Viveiros de Castro's (1998) discussion of multinaturalism in a South American context, this problematises the modern notion of 'human' as distinct from a 'non-human' Other.

The twin sibling Other is both part of the intimate 'us' of kinship and *manusia* as an extensive humanity, while also part of another order – a world considered excessive to control and comprehension. Although of different natures, the twins are born from the same womb, and share an ethical disposition of co-existence that is revitalised through mutual obligations of care and attention, affective relations and moving together as one during reuniting visits. Still, despite the re-enacted intimacy, the twins' reunion does not last. The Other remains partly elusive – one doesn't know what it can do and how it will appear.

How does amphibious twinship relate to academic discussions of environmental otherness, and particularly the sea as a familiar Other? In literature and academic scholarship, the sea has often figured as the order of the Other – a zone beyond a steady and grounded self (Helmreich 2009: 15). It allows for immersion, while precluding extended human presence in it (Anderson 2012). Creatures and spirits of the sea (whales, dolphins) figured prominently in early modern literature (e.g. Shakespeare) as an expression of the uncertainty and alterity of the sea, while also articulating a 'strange kinship' to land-dwelling people – a disconcerting mirror of ourselves (Brayton 2012). While amphibious twinship shows resonances with the trope of mirroring through kinship, it decentralises and problematises the latent assumption of a distinct human category that is reflected in a water surface. Moreover, amphibious twinship involves a figure/ground collapse that destabilises the very idea of the sea as a reflection of, or background for, human action.

Here, amphibious twinship as theory relates to critical scholarship that considers the sea as inherently relational and enacted, while it also intervenes in it. This 'relational turn' has challenged the modern rendering of 'nature' and 'environment' as taken-for granted domains situated at either end of a nature/culture dichotomy (Descola and Pálsson 1996; Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2003). Instead of a background for human action, 'environment' becomes performative and affective: an ongoing interweaving of relations between agents and elements that defy clear categories of nature or culture, human or non-human (see for example Archambault 2016; Hayward 2010; Ingold 2010; Whatmore 2002).

What we are accustomed to calling the 'sea' or 'marine environment' can – in this line of thinking – be envisaged as such an interweaving of relations and material resonances. Indeed, Lambert et al. write that to understand the sea requires acknowledging its inherent relationality, and the way sea worlds are produced through the entanglement of diverse elements, such as wind, currents, water, salt, plastics, technologies, microbes and animals (Lambert et al. 2006). As such, this relational turn has also been linked to 'oceanic thinking' in which the flow and lively materiality of the sea stimulates thinking about the world as enacted, assembled – a dynamic meshwork that's always on the move (Anderson 2012; Bear 2012; Steinberg 2013; Steinberg and Peters 2015). A turn to the moves and substance of the sea may, however, conjure new reifications. Helmreich cautions that oceanic fluidity and the lively materiality of the sea may have no meaning outside human conceptions of it (Helmreich 2011: 133). Is the conceptual the end point then, or does something still escape?

Envisaging the sea as a dynamic meshwork of heterogeneous relations shows similarity to how my Bajau and Mandar interlocutors narrated the sea and their relation to it in twinship. Indeed, twinship with crocodiles and octopuses speaks to such relationality too. Yet there is also something in how people in Masalima relate to the sea that defies the idea of an ever-expanding meshwork of human-environment relationality. This is the understanding that the sea as a concept, an agency or multiplicity thereof cannot be captured. That is: relationality may be assumed, but it is not necessarily human-centred, as the sea is excessive to human modes of relating to it in kinship, as well as in conceptualisation. Through twinship, the sea dips into dreams, senses and bodies in a way that is mostly uncertain. One never knows what the sea – both agent and a multiple thereof – can and will do.

Amphibious twinship thus renders the sea an environmental otherness that partly escapes practices of enacting it. It does so by expressing a liquification of figure and ground, and concept and thing. Narratives of twinship with agencies of and in the sea allow for a figure-ground reversal (or even collapse) between humanity and the sea; *manusia* as humanity or personhood may be an environment for the sea's agency as much as the sea is an environment for *manusia*. The very juxtaposition of figure and ground is diffused as both human and sea are

already part of each other. While the sea enters human dreams, emotions and bodies, humanity is also in the sea, through twin siblings born from a human mother. As an effect, it may express an ethics in which 'human' responsibility is a response to the sea (dwelling twin) instead of a planned mastery of its behaviour, as common in environmental conservation (Pauwelussen and Verschoor 2017; also see Rose 2005 for a similar argument in a terrestrial context). We are presented here with a question of figure and ground in which the 'ground' becomes fluid, problematising any neat division between the two (see also Helmreich 2009: 169).

Moreover, amphibious twinship collapses the distinction between a material world 'out there' and conceptualisations thereof, leaving room for ambiguity and excess. At first sight, the twin Other can be seen as a conceptualisation of the sea, with the twinship narrative as a native theory of human-marine interrelation. However, in amphibious twinship, the twin sibling *is* the sea as much as it is part *of* the sea. And as it becomes real in dreams, memories and embodied encounters, it destabilises a distinction between the sea as a fluent material reality and conceptualisations thereof. At the same time, this very conceptualisation is seen to be partial, in the sense that twin and sea resist full capture. The twinship expresses a force or Other not entirely contained in the figure of the twin sibling. Without retreating to a new fluid materialism that renders the sea as a vital materiality, amphibious twinship nevertheless stimulates thought about what slips between the cracks of conceptualisation. Liquefying distinctions between thing and concept, figure and ground, amphibious twinship allows for thinking along the movement in-between.

NOTES

1 Presently, Gondengaring island is part of the village (*desa*) Ujung Tanah, part of the Makassar municipality in Southwest Sulawesi.

2 Famous in this respect is the goddess *Nyai Roro Kidul* in Javanese tradition, notorious far beyond Java as the *Ratu Laut Selatan*, literally 'queen of the South Sea' (Schlehe 1998).

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