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**Rolling Heritage:
Gulintangan as inalienable gift in Brunei Darussalam**

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Rolling Heritage: Gulintangan as inalienable gift in Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the dynamics of gulintangan inheritance in Brunei Darussalam, especially among gulintangan-owning families. We closely examine the process of maintaining this traditional musical form by bringing to light the tangible and intangible aspects of gulintangan. We argue that the family contributes significantly to maintaining this cultural heritage. Our findings suggest that the family is the musicians' source of introduction, knowledge, skills, and inspiration. The entanglement of the family with gulintangan makes it an inalienable gift for the receivers of this heritage. We gathered the data for this paper through in-depth interviews and participant observation with eight gulintangan practitioners from four gulintangan-owning families.

Keywords: Brunei; cultural heritage; family; gulintangan; traditional music

Rolling Heritage: Gulintangan as inalienable gift in Brunei Darussalam

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Introduction

The first author, Adi, vividly remembers when his grandfather gifted him the *gulintangan* musical instruments that have been part of his family for generations. ‘They are yours now,’ said his grandfather. No one else witnessed that event — a special moment Adi shared with his grandfather.

The *gulintangan* ensemble is prominent in Brunei Darussalam. Many Bruneians recognise it as part of the country’s cultural heritage. However, the production of *gulintangan* instruments has declined over the years, making them rare possessions now. Consequently, Adi’s family considers them to be valuable. Now recognised by the *gulintangan* community as the inheritor of his grandfather’s ensemble, Adi has been committed to continuing his grandfather’s legacy for over a decade. Adi did not simply inherit his grandfather’s instruments. Along with them came the obligation to protect the latter’s legacy and identity. To Adi, the moment he shared with his grandfather when the latter gifted him the *gulintangan* was an indescribable experience. One that should be *felt* to be understood. What were his grandfather’s intentions in passing down the *gulintangan* to him? Are there obligations he needs to fulfil?

This paper examines the dynamics of *gulintangan* inheritance in Brunei Darussalam, especially among families with a long history of participation in this traditional musical genre. How do these members of the *gulintangan* community negotiate the gifting process? How are the *gulintangan* instruments endowed to the receiver? What are the criteria applied in the choosing of the appropriate heir? What are the motives and expectations involved in *gulintangan* inheritance and transmission?

Marcel Mauss (2002) has shown that gifting contributes to establishing and reproducing social relationships. According to him, gifting entails obligations: to give, receive, and reciprocate. By drawing attention to the symbolic, moral, and emotional significance of gifting, he shows that gifting establishes inalienable connections between the persons and material objects involved. When gifting involves members of differing generations of a family or society, it connects the past, present, and future.

Similarly, we argue that the family contribute significantly to the gulintangan gifting and inheritance process. Many of our interlocutors share that family members introduced them to the gulintangan during their childhood by bringing them to their respective performances. Gradually, they learned to play the instruments under the guidance and encouragement of older and more experienced family members. As they become increasingly aware of their families' respective reputations in the gulintangan community, they grow into their roles as the next generation in the lineage of gulintangan practitioners who are responsible for the continuation of their families' legacies and this traditional musical form, more broadly. Consequently, gulintangan inheritance in Brunei Darussalam engenders inalienable connections between the gifters, receivers, musical instruments, and the knowledge transmitted over time.

There is some research about the origins of gulintangan and the participation of young people in this traditional musical practice (Hajah Kaipah binti Abdullah 2002). In this paper, we take a different approach by examining the dynamics of gulintangan inheritance to bring to light the tangible — musical instruments — and intangible — social relationships, knowledge, skills, and decision-making — aspects of the process involved in preserving this cultural heritage of Brunei Darussalam.

In Malay, *guling* means “to roll”, while *tangan* means “hand.” The title of this essay, “Rolling Heritage”, is derived from one of the instruments of the gulintangan ensemble — the *gulingtangan* — to symbolise the continuity of this valuable cultural heritage.

We gathered the data for this paper by conducting in-depth interviews with eight interlocutors — six males and two females — who hail from four gulintangan-owning families. Adi conducted these interviews in the interlocutors' respective homes, where he could observe and participate in the individual families' gulintangan settings, activities, or rituals. Additionally, Adi had the opportunity to experience how these ensembles were at cultural events.

The interview sessions comprised two parts. The first part focused solely on the *ahli waris* [receiver/beneficiary], while the second centred around the *pewaris* [benefactor/gifter/transmitter]. During these interviews, the researcher posed open-ended questions about the respondents' personal histories, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives about *gulintangan* inheritance. Depending on the preference of the respective interlocutors, the interviews were conducted in Bruneian Malay, English, or both. Audio recordings of these interviews were made with consent from the participants. Each session lasted 30-90 minutes.

Cultural inheritance, gifting, and social relationships

Cultural inheritance is the transmission of the essence of the culture of a social group from one generation to another. (Wu 2015) These could involve cultural knowledge or objects that symbolise continuity and community. Put differently, cultural inheritance takes on tangible and intangible forms. By distinguishing between the tangible and intangible, the researcher will be able to identify the difference between the object and the process of cultural inheritance. (Wu 2015)

In his study, Ge Wu (2015) discusses how *gamelan* — the Javanese traditional music ensemble — retains its status in contemporary Indonesia through cultural inheritance. He asserts that traditional music contributes to maintaining a society's cultural and social identity in the face of rapid globalisation. Wu (2015) claims that the role of cultural inheritance in preserving the relationship between the past, present, and future permeates the daily lives of *gamelan* possessors, especially when the family becomes a conduit for transferring knowledge and skills to the younger generation. Consequently, he suggests that research on traditional music should extend beyond its physical and musical aspects.

For Janet Blake (2000), the tangible refers to cultural objects, including ethnographic items, weapons, jewellery, and musical instruments. Intangible culture includes oral poetry, musical traditions, ceremonial, or ritual traditions, and so on. This research considers the importance of tangible and intangible gifting, as Wu (2015) and Blake (2000) have suggested. By doing so, this study contributes to understanding gifting as cultural transmission and inheritance.

To explain this phenomenon, we refer to Mauss's concept of the *system of total service* (Mauss 2002) to explain why some people feel it necessary to pass down cultural objects to

future generations. His work entitled *The Gift* (Mauss 2002) is groundbreaking in understanding the impact of gifting on the reproduction of social relationships in society. Specifically, the propensity for reciprocity amongst the various actors in the gifting process intrigues him: ‘What rule of legality and self-interest, in societies of a backward or archaic type, compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?’ (Mauss 2002, 4)

Mauss (2002) thus expounds the obligation inherent in giving, receiving, and reciprocity. When a giver gifts, the intended recipient may feel obliged to accept the gift and, in turn, return the gesture to the original giver or pass on the kindness to other members of the society in the future. Wu (2015) echoes Mauss in his discussion of the obligation of inheritors of the gamelan tradition to preserve this cultural heritage and to transmit the tangible and intangible aspects of this musical practice to others, including the next generation.

Curasi et. al. (2004) discuss how inherited or gifted objects become inalienable. They suggest that such things are regarded as inalienable because they have been “contaminated” by their original owners. They use the term *positive contamination* to explain how the inheritor valorises received objects through storytelling, rituals, performances, social events, etc. As a result, inherited things become entangled with family histories and identities. Consequently, losing possession of such objects may result in some loss of identity and belonging.

Sousa et. al. (2010) argue that many families, regardless of social and cultural backgrounds, commonly adopt an informal transmission strategy when passing down heirlooms to the next generation. According to them, *altruism* and *exchange* are the most common motivations for leaving an inheritance. In the altruism model, the transmitter passes on property without expecting compensation. In contrast, transmitters use property to persuade their heirs to provide for them in their old age in the exchange model. However, Sousa et. al. (2010) concede that the motivation for leaving a material inheritance is much more complex. We may place each family's approach on a continuum between conditional and unconditional donation. This exploratory study also examines ‘the motivations involved in transmitting material inheritance and the patterns of family interaction attached to these motivations.’ (Sousa et al. 2010, 6)

Gulintangan, Family, and *Darah Seni*

Adi's grandfather often reminded him about the importance of cherishing the family gulintangan: '*Yang penting, kitani hargai dan dalami*' [what is more important, we cherish them]. Think of it this way: When you are given a gift, it becomes part of your belonging. You invest it with meanings and values and begin to feel attached to it. Memories are made, and relationships between the giver and receiver are cherished. The gift is then perceived as inalienable owing to the relationship established during the exchange. The term *hargai* [cherishing] is understood in the context of kinship ties.

The relationship between gulintangan and each family is distinctive in each case. When asked to share their stories, we observed the informants' inclination to refer to their family's involvement or history in gulintangan, perhaps to justify their position in the *warisan* [inheritance] order. For example, some recounted the memories of their late grandfather's performances in their *kampong* [village] or how their fathers brought them out to wedding performances when they were little. They were not simply recalling memories. When memories are cherished and remembered, the gulintangan is revered. Both transmitters and receivers opted to share stories about gulintangan in the past to explain how these objects became significant in the present.

When Adi interviewed Haji Johari and his grandson, Azwan, he had the chance to participate in the family's business selling gulintangan ensembles and other antiques in a weekly event called "Bandar Ku Ceria".¹ They also performed various songs during his visit. Both men credited the family with their early exposure to gulintangan.

According to Haji Johari, aged sixty-nine, his family had already been involved in performing gulintangan when he was still a child. His late grandfather gifted the instruments to him once he started participating in village events:

¹ Some streets leading into centre of Brunei's capital of Bandar Seri Begawan is closed off to motor vehicles every Sunday morning to make way for a street event called *Bandarku Ceria*. This event transforms the streets of the city into a space for people to engage in exercise activities such as jogging, cycling, skating, and even group workouts such as Zumba. Some people also take the opportunity to set up booths to sell food, antiques, second-hand items, and showcase aspects of Bruneian culture and traditions such as wood carving and gulintangan.

Since childhood, my interest in music has always been there. But I did not know how to play then, so I only watched the people of my *kampong* perform for the wedding events. The performers were amongst *orang-orang tua kami* [our elderly] and my relatives. They asked me to join and perform with them whenever they needed an extra player. My grandfather gave me the instruments when I started learning them, so he gifted it to me because of that.

Like his grandfather, Azwan points out that his family has been practitioners of *gulintangan* for several generations:

When I was seven, my grandfather usually brought us to join his *gulintangan* performances for wedding events. His group comprised family members, so he dragged us young people along. So, that's how I was exposed to *gulintangan*. Honestly, it has probably been in the family before I was even born.



Figure 1: Haji Johari and his grandchild, Azwan, at their family booth in the weekly Bandarku Ceria



Figure 2: Haji Johari and Azwan perform *gulintangan* with a few other musicians for the public.

Ammar, thirty-eight years old, perceives *gulintangan* as a “family thing” and kept reminding Adi of his family’s involvement throughout the interview. He connected his late grandparents’ participation during the past to his [and his son’s] involvement throughout the years. Aside from being *gulintangan* musicians, Ammar’s family also produced instruments in the past. His late grandfather was the provider and the caretaker of the instruments before he passed away. Ammar shared a sense of regret when he recounted the family *gulintangan*:

The interest has always been there since I was five years old. This is from watching and listening to my grandparents playing songs on the gulintangan. I come from a family who did not only play the gulintangan but also manufactured most of the family instruments. So, I would like to have this as a main thing for our family. My grandfather passed away too soon, so I would like to produce gulintangan perhaps one day, just like he did ... to continue the family tradition.

Ammar started exposing his son Abqary, aged eleven, to various gulintangan events when he was five. The narrative provided about Abqary's experiences by his father illustrates how gulintangan is maintained in the family throughout the years: 'My children are now involved as early as 5-6 years old. My eldest son, Abqary, is now eleven and has been playing at school and wedding functions whenever I can bring him to perform for the past few years.'



Figure 3: Adi [in green] performing at a wedding with Ammar's family

The stories highlight the social significance of gifting. A gifted object acquires greater value when cherished and transmitted across generations of a family. We may observe the gifts' connections with the past through these informants' accounts. The family plays a critical role in maintaining the cultural values and symbolic meanings associated with the gulintangan. Indeed, the family functions as a "cultural school" (Wu 2015).

On the one hand, informants' stories revolve around individual experiences. On the other hand, other members of their respective families figure prominently in them. They show how much the relationships between members of the gulintangan family are cherished and vital to the musical practice's transmission. These memories are shared and remembered collectively.

The stories and memories of the informants underline the inalienability of the gulintangan as a gift and identity. Each family is obliged to pass down and continue the family tradition due to their intimate connection with the gulintangan. What enhances the gift is the ‘psychic energy’ or power instilled within, especially when the family cherishes and invests their attention in these gifts (Grayson and Shulman 2000; Mauss 2002).

Haji Yusri, aged fifty-three, firmly believes in the term *darah seni* [artistic blood]. Living amidst fellow villagers [*bersama orang kampung*] intensified his interest in gulintangan. He claims to have inherited his late father’s artistic blood. He is enthusiastic about passing the gulintangan on to the future generation:

My mother told us my late father used to play the violin when they still lived in Kampong Ayer. He usually played in the *pantaran* [veranda]. Perhaps the *darah seni* went down to us. *Darah seni* may flow from the parents to their children and the next generation. Hopefully.

His daughter, Hanis, aged twenty-one, shared how she was selected to join a gulintangan club because of her family’s relationship with gulintangan. According to Hanis, her father’s enthusiasm and activeness in gulintangan and his identity as a practitioner motivated her to continue the family legacy. Like him, she believes in the influence of inherited genes:

The gulintangan members asked me to join their club because they said I am a gulintangan person [*orang gulintangan*]. I feel like I have acquired that musical soul in me. I can quickly get the tempo and rhythm right, and I can easily identify the songs. It’s in the genes, I guess.

Similarly, Haji Johari self-identifies as part of the ‘people of the arts’ [*orang seni*]. He believes that gifting is a symbol of continuity and represents Brunei’s indigenous identity: ‘It has to be passed down. We are *orang seni*. People say if our kind is uncultured, no one would recognise us. Through gulintangan, people can identify our identity as Bruneians, *orang asli* [natives].’

When asked if gulintangan was part of a family identity, he said: ‘Yes. Of course. The people know me by two names — *Haji Johari Gambous* or *Haji Johari Gulintangan*.’ His grandson, Azwan, claims to have inherited his grandfather’s talents throughout the years of involvement: ‘When I started accompanying my grandfather with his business in Bandarku

Ceria, I began playing around with it and the musical patterns he had shown me. That's when I started to, I guess, inherit his talents.'

Ammar's devotion to gulintangan is also inspired by his late grandfather's position in the community. During the interview, he shares the tendency to mention his grandfather's influence, especially his position as a renowned member of the gulintangan community. Like other inheritors of this musical practice, Ammar expresses the sense of responsibility he has to preserve his grandfather's legacy:

Maybe I should mention that my late grandfather is Haji Ibrahim bin Tahir. If you are researching gulintangan, I am sure you would have seen him in the books as one of the key informants about the various aspects of gulintangan. They [the gulintangan practitioners] always associate me with him. So, indirectly, he did help me in the journey ... Back in 2001, I wanted to quit. But if I did not continue this, I would eliminate our traditional music. In a way, we will lose our identity. So for me, I continued because of that.

According to Marsha Richins (1994), a cherished possession upholds the value of representing and expressing the self. All the interlocutors mentioned thus far emphasise the importance of the family in gulintangan gifting. The belief in *darah seni*, *orang seni*, and other references to identity helps to preserve gulintangan to the present day. Parents use music as an identity marker, representing the self in the first instance before developing into a family identity when the practice is shared with their children (Reeves 2015).

Darah [blood] is used to symbolise how musical talent flows in the families. They believe that the notion of *darah seni* becomes real through the devotion, mastery, and achievements of the gulintangan inheritors in their *seni* [art] in each generation. The gifted gulintangan then acquires sacrosanctity within the family. The gift 'hold[s] and remind[s] members of their social identity' (Curasi, Price, and Arnould 2004, 615) as it acts as 'repositories of family histories' (Curasi, Price, and Arnould 2004, 613).

At the beginning of the interview with Haji Khaleq, he stated that he had purchased the gulintangan solely to expand his collection of antiques. He claims the instrument was out of tune and thus not suitable for performances.



Figure 4: Haji Khaleq's gulingtangan

Later in the interview, he revealed that his family used to own gulingtangan instruments and participated actively in gulingtangan performances in the past [c. 1960-1970]. However, those instruments and musical knowledge were passed down to other family members and not Haji Khaleq because he showed a lack of interest in them and did not participate in their practices and performances. His daughter, Adria, aged twenty-one, says she was unaware of her family's previous involvement in gulingtangan. Nevertheless, she claims to feel an unexplained connection with gulingtangan whenever she encounters or hears gulingtangan being performed:

I don't know where the exact inspiration came from, but I have seen gulingtangan in a movie. And when my family visited Langkawi, gulingtangan was played in The Mahsuri Village. I was mesmerised by it. When I started going to UBD [Universiti Brunei Darussalam], I heard the gulingtangan being played. So, I was like, 'I have to go there.' The sound was calling for me.

Adria's experience reconnecting with gulingtangan is rather remarkable. Her family's history with gulingtangan was unknown to her. Nevertheless, she claims to be drawn to the sounds of the ensemble's instruments whenever she hears them. Perhaps this is pure coincidence, although our interlocutors might assert that the *darah seni* flows in her despite her family's years of inactivity in the gulingtangan scene. To them, gulingtangan — its instruments, knowledge, and skills — is gifted from one generation of their respective families to another. Some intuitively inherit the sense of responsibility and commitment to preserving

this musical genre and their families' positions in the gulintangan community. Others, like Adria, developed an interest when the ensemble's sounds caressed their eardrums. Imagined or not, their families' entanglements with gulintangan are cited as central to preserving this Bruneian cultural heritage.

Tangible and intangible gifting: Gulintangan inheritance as process

The gulintangan inheritance moment shared with his grandfather was an exceptional lived experience for Adi. It was moving and permanently etched in his memory. Nevertheless, the simplicity and informality of the exchange are remarkable and somewhat curious. How can an event significant to preserving his family's legacy be so spontaneous and fleeting? During the encounter, Adi's grandfather did not physically hand over the instruments to him. Nor was the inheritance formalised in the presence of others.

The spontaneity of gulintangan inheritance we observe between Adi and his grandfather is not uncommon. Most of our informants have not gifted or bequeathed their musical instruments to *ahli waris*. This does not imply that the gifting process has not begun.

Earlier, we distinguished between the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural inheritance and gifting. Among the gulintangan community in Brunei, intangible inheritance and gifting often precedes the cross generational transfer of the ownership of the gulintangan ensembles and instruments. Many of our interlocutors are aware of this phenomenon. They believe these instruments will be gifted to the appropriate *ahli waris* who are identified based on skills and commitment through practice and performances.

Haji Johari has not gifted any of the instruments to any of his children or grandchildren. He believes that *warisan* will occur organically when he passes on: 'I have not gifted the instruments to any of them. *Warisan gulintangan* will come naturally. The gulintangan will automatically be passed down when I am no longer here. Maybe then they can pass down these instruments.'

His grandson, Azwan, believes that the gulintangan will likely be gifted to him when the time comes. Azwan claims that gifting will depend on the consensus of the family as well as the death of his grandfather:

It has not been passed down to me yet. The reason is obvious. He is still around. I am confident that all my uncles will agree to pass the instruments to me. I am pretty sure it is in my grandfather's head that he will pass it down to me.

Similarly, Haji Yusri and his family believe gifting will occur when appropriate. Haji Yusri claimed that the *gulintangan* is the family's shared possession, although he thinks that his daughter is the apparent choice of *ahli waris* when he retires. Although shared, Haji Yusri added that his daughter would seek his permission when she wishes to use them: 'When I have retired, why not? But, all this while, I have no problems with her borrowing the instruments. She always asked for my permission whenever she wanted to use the instruments.'

His daughter's thoughts about the family's *gulintangan* mirror his own. According to Hanis, her father always permits her to borrow the *gulintangan* and even allows her to organise *gulintangan* practices at home. Thus, Hanis thinks that she might inherit the instruments when he retires:

He usually lets me borrow the *gulintangan* whenever I ask him, and even if my group and I practised here [at home], he allows it. He would even question whenever my group practices elsewhere. So, from there, I know. Maybe I will receive the *gulintangan* soon. However, I am not entirely sure about that because my father is still active.

Most of the *gulintangan* families do not openly discuss the gifting process. They assert that *gulintangan* and inheritance will occur 'when the time is right.' *Gulintangan* is passed down through an intangible process involving lessons, guidance by the gifter, and performances. The potential receiver's suitability to receive the *gulintangan* is determined by the owner of the instruments — usually the receiver's grandfather or father — who claims that the potential receiver's interest and commitment are the main criteria in consideration. Haji Yusri comments:

It is challenging to assess a person. But if there is a hint of interest, inheritance is possible. As an *indung* [parent], I will have to become their supporter behind the scenes. Indeed, if someone shows interest in this, why should it not be passed down to her? Right? Of my six children, only this daughter of mine has been showing interest. As parents, we would know if our children were interested. I suppose it is the same for the one [Adi] interviewing me, right?

When asked whether his daughter possesses the characteristics of a *darah seni*, Haji Yusri says:

Honestly, I have not seen those characteristics in her. She is still in the process of gaining experience at the moment. It is crucial for her to acquire more experience and to keep on learning. When the interest is sustained, *warisan* happens automatically.

The conversation with Haji Yusri led Adi to reflect on his relationship and interactions with his grandfather. Indeed, the potential receiver's sustained demonstration of interest is a central criterion in *gulintangan* gifting. Adi proved his suitability to inherit his grandfather's *gulintangan* through years of persistent interest in and commitment to the musical genre. The latter had always been aware. Adi's grandfather handed him a newspaper cutting one day. It was a picture of Adi when he was five years old. The photo was taken during his family's performance at the celebration of the Sultan's birthday some twenty years earlier. His grandfather had kept the newspaper cutting in his possession all these years and presented it to Adi as a gesture of appreciation for Adi's enduring commitment to *gulintangan*. Simultaneously, the photo records his family's longstanding involvement in *gulintangan* music and community.



Figure 5: Newspaper cutting of a five-year-old Adi

Ammar asserts that the knowledge transmitter must assess the receiver's willingness and readiness to learn when deciding what to teach and the intensity of each lesson lest the latter be discouraged and lose interest:

I look at his current readiness to learn. Once we find out where that zone is, I will try to teach him when he's ready. So, I always consider whenever I teach Abqary, it is not just to satisfy that need for him to pass down whatever it is, but I try to give him the right amount of music lessons that he appreciates. I try not to force any of my children to do it because it must be their own choice.

Ammar re-emphasises that a child's interest is vital if a parent wishes to transmit a family tradition. He is slightly concerned about Abqary's fluctuating interests in gulintangan. For that reason, Ammar involves his other children with gulintangan:

Abqary sees music as just a task that needs to be done. So, a little bit of passion is missing for now. But I recall one time when one of the sisters said how difficult it was to learn music and that music was not for her. Then Abqary told her, 'Why? Music is fun!' So, I hope that excitement remains, but currently, it is just work he needs to get done and out of the way. For one of my daughters, who plays the violin, I can see the passion and desire from her. So, there is a lot of hope as well.

When Haji Johari related how he introduced gulintangan to his family, he stressed the importance of interest, especially when *warisan* is concerned. Haji Johari suggests that gulintangan inheritance will not occur effectively when the *pewaris* attempts to force the potential *ahli waris* to develop interest in the musical practice:

I really like watching my grandchildren play the gulintangan since they were little. In the case of Azwan, he only just started playing recently, whereas his little brother, Shukri, started playing when he was six. So, whenever Shukri played the gulintangan, I would guide him on how to play it correctly. Whenever there are events, I will only play the gambous, and he will play the gulintangan. Azwan, on the other hand, only started playing last year. When we started our business here, he became interested in playing *dengan sendirinya* [on his own]. I did not teach him anything, but he would ask me how to play the songs properly along the way. That is when he started mastering it. The others are not that active compared to these two brothers. However, the *handal* [skilled] one [Shukri] is no longer interested in gulintangan. So, Azwan is the only one I am very hopeful for.

Only after his daughter became a gulintangan practitioner did Haji Khaleq's interest in gulintangan intensify. Before that, his lack of interest in gulintangan was the main reason why he did not acquire or receive any of the family gulintangan — tangible and intangible:

My father told me he used to be involved in gulintangan during his teenage years. Unfortunately, not up to this day. They owned some gulintangan sets, but those were not passed down to me. I think the instruments were gifted to my uncle. Even my grandfather used to perform with them.

Many informants consider the knowledge about *lagu wajib* [mandatory songs] to be *de rigueur* to gulintangan gifting. This view was prevalent across the interview sessions, especially when asked about the types of knowledge that they teach to members of the next generation of practitioners. They claim that the memorisation of these songs is as vital as the skills in playing the gulintangan instruments. According to Haji Johari, these songs are recognisable among many Bruneians and constitute a part of Bruneian identity and culture:

I have shared with them the knowledge, songs, and stories about gulintangan little by little. Especially the songs, I have *wariskan* [passed down] the essential songs to them. Brunei would not have *kesenian* [art] ... *kebudayaan* [culture] if there were no more of these songs.

Likewise, his grandson, Azwan, appreciates the importance of mastering the knowledge and songs that Haji Johari has taught him, especially *lagu wajib*:

Lagu wajib was the most challenging for me because he was very strict when teaching it. The first song he taught me when I was still a child was *Lagu Kudidi*. It was only three years ago I started mastering it. I consider the knowledge of playing the gulintangan to be more valuable than the gulintangan itself. You can get gulintangan everywhere, but knowledge can change over time, so getting it from the right person is crucial.

Azwan's assertion about requiring years to master the *lagu wajib* is not unusual. The learner could progress to these songs' advanced musical patterns after acquiring the basic ones. These, especially the advanced patterns, may be learnt from observing other gulintangan musicians of varying skill levels. Haji Yusri's words give us insights into this process: 'Whatever we learn from others is knowledge, especially when the *lagu wajib* is performed. There are the *bunga biasa* [basic musical patterns] and each performer's *bunga pemanis* [musical ornaments].'

Haji Yusri also believes that it is important for his *ahli waris*, as the next in line of the knowledge that has been transmitted within his family, to inherit his knowledge even as they learn from others:

As a parent, my job is to show her the right way to do it. Sometimes, what she learned from her friends differs from what I believe. In this case, there are clashing views or knowledge about the gulintangan. So, I hope she can internalise the knowledge I have shared.

Although gulintangan inheritance appears spontaneous at first glance, the discussions with our interlocutors show that the process is far from arbitrary. Adi's grandfather had, in fact, been monitoring his interest and commitment to learning and cherishing the gulintangan for almost two decades. Similarly, many of the gulintangan *pewaris* adopt a long-term approach in assessing who the members of the next generation deserve to be *ahli waris*. They observe, nurture, and impart the intangible aspects of the gulintangan to the various *ahli waris* who show a sustained interest in learning this traditional musical form. They place faith in the eventuality that the family will reach a consensus on the most appropriate member to inherit the ensemble.

Beyond the family: Societal expectations and gulintangan inheritance

Although most of our informants' discussions about gulintangan revolve around the family, many also cite its relationship with the broader society, the "audience." After all, gulintangan is Brunei's national tradition.

Gulintangan families are expected to preserve this musical form. According to Ammar, gulintangan is not simply something they can participate in and enjoy with their family members. Members of Bruneian society who are aware of the practitioners' involvement in gulintangan expect them to teach it to their children. Our informants feel the societal pressure. Ammar says:

Community pressure. Our community have this notion that if the father knows, it must be passed down to the child. If my children do not know it, people would say, 'It is a pity' or question me. Did I not teach them?

The public also assesses the gulintangan practitioners' knowledge and skills at performances. Hanis shares that she feels pressure because of her father's reputation:

Sometimes, I feel the pressure because my father is well known. I do not like it when people compare me to him. I really do not like it when people talk about my connections. People would judge my achievements based on my father's status in gulintangan. That is why I would rather learn and perform with my friends.

Azwan fears that he might not be able to perform up to the standard expected to maintain his grandfather's legacy:

I must be careful when spreading my knowledge [as a gulintangan practitioner]. Because even if my grandpa taught me correctly, I cannot guarantee that what I teach others is right. That is one thing I fear. I do not want to taint my grandpa's name because he has a very good reputation, and I don't want to affect that. I'm more worried about his status.

Haji Yusri, however, values the public's assessment of his performances. He views their positive reception as testimony of his family's history and achievements in gulintangan:

I feel the pressure sometimes. But we keep on doing our best to show the people our commitment. *Orang ramai* [the public] will assess you based on your performances. They will evaluate your journey, from your performances to participation in competitions. That is where achievements are gained. Never try to assess yourself in this field. Let the people speak for you.

Similarly, Haji Johari appreciates the opportunity to share gulintangan with other members of society through performances and teaching it to those who show interest. He employs the term *kebersamaan* [togetherness] to highlight the interconnectedness of the family gulintangan with the broader society: 'Knowing something necessitates *kebersamaan*. By that, we can think together and share this knowledge with the ones who wish to learn. So, through gulintangan, other people can identify themselves as Bruneians.'

Our interlocutors are acutely aware that gulintangan is culturally significant to the larger Bruneian society and not solely for their respective families. They understand their efforts at learning and teaching this musical form as the fulfilment of a responsibility to contribute to the preservation of the society's culture and traditions. Returning to Mauss (2002), the obligation to "give, receive, and reciprocate" the tangible and intangible aspects of gulintangan intensifies for our interlocutors who embody a sense of duty to Brunei society as a whole.

Conclusion

A renowned aspect of Bruneian culture and social life, gulintangan music and ensemble is known to most Bruneians. Many would have encountered it through museum visits and gulintangan performances at weddings and royal events such as His Majesty the Sultan's birthday celebrations. Some might have also dabbled a little into learning to play some of the

ensemble's musical instruments. Although its prominence is recognised nationally, there has been little to no research about its practitioners' relationships to the gulintangan, especially regarding its cross-generational inheritance and transmission.

This paper examined the dynamics of gulintangan inheritance and transmission through an ethnographic study of some families who have been part of the gulintangan community for several generations. Echoing other research about cultural heritage, we consider the tangible and intangible forms of gulintangan gifting. It appears intuitive for many to think of the instruments — the tangible — at the mention of gulintangan gifting. Nevertheless, this paper has shown that it is equally important to consider the intangible — knowledge, skills, social relationships.

The discussions with our interlocutors show that intangible gulintangan gifting begins long before the instruments are bequeathed. More importantly, gulintangan gifting becomes significantly more fascinating once we delve into the family histories, lineages, and relationships that imbricate with gulintangan heritage. As our interlocutors expressed, their continued participation in gulintangan means that the *darah seni* continues to flow through their veins. They understand their learning and sustained involvement in gulintangan as a nod to their connections with familial benefactors and the fulfilment of their responsibility to reciprocate the gift of gulintangan of their *pewaris* and, more broadly, the society. Such relationships and obligations make gulintangan an inalienable gift in Brunei Darussalam. To end with a cue from one of our interlocutors, Haji Johari, *warisan gulintangan* obliges *kebersamaan*.

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