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Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage in Support to Post-war Biak Tourism

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Abstract. The Biak battle was part of World War II and fought by the United States Army and the Japanese Army in 1944. Out of the 24,000 soldiers from both sides involved in the war, 6,600 were killed; 6,100 of them were the Japanese soldiers. Remnants of war and remains of the fallen soldiers scattered in post-war Biak. The war zone then started to get visits from the Japanese for pilgrimage, remnants of war were unearthed and human remains were cremated and repatriated. The battlefield drew more tourists' interest for the dark tourism experience. Remnants of war became valuable tangible items while war history and mystical cave atmosphere became intangible items. The study aimed at exploring issues in importance and preservation of tangible and intangible in support to post-war Biak tourism. It turned out that the post-war tangible and intangible heritage in Biak require better handling and management in support to post-war Biak tourism sustainability.

Keywords. tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage, dark tourism, post-war tourism, remnants of war

Introduction

Biak Island, located in Cendrawasih bay, in Papua Province in Indonesia is recorded in history as part of the World War II within the Pacific Theater. The war of Biak was fought by United States Army and the Japanese Army from May 27, 1944 to August 17, 1944. To the US, it was part of General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific command's offensive drive to clear New Guinea in preparation for an invasion of the Philippines.

By the time the 12,000 troops of United States Army landed in Biak on May 27, 1944, Biak had been occupied by the Japanese Army since 1942 with a size of 11,800 soldiers who used caves in the island as a system of natural defenses that was considered as brilliantly effective (Johnson, 2017). Binsari cave is the largest cave. Out of the 11,800 Japanese soldiers involved in the Biak war, and out of the 6,100 who were killed in Biak, 3,000 of them were killed in the Binsari cave from the TNT bomb dropped into the cave by the United States Army. The United States Army got the victory, with only 500 soldiers killed. Remains of fallen Japanese soldiers, along with weapons and personal belongings were left there in the cave for several years.

The cave—also known as the 'Japanese cave'—is located in the city of Biak in Biak Island. The entrance to the cave is narrow and not easily visible from the outside. It has a depth of 45 meters extending some 180 meters and is connected to another cave called Lima Kamar

cave. The post-war excavation and unearthing carried out in 1980 revealed abundant war remnants such as ammunition, long-barreled weapons, grenades, hats, army uniform, drinking bottles, dog-tags and many others, and remains of fallen Japanese soldiers.

War remnants and remains of the fallen soldiers have become points of interest. In terms of tourism, this refers to war tourism or dark tourism which is defined as travel to places associated with death, disaster and destruction (Sharpley & Stone, 2009) as quoted by Keyes, 2012. This can be better explained by the fact that dark tourism involves a common frame of references of death and suffering used to understand war related sites and tourist motivation (Elliott & Milne, 2019). According to Stone (2006), tourists visits tourism places of tragedy because they are interested in finding the meaning from events that have occurred in that place.

Visits to the post-war Biak started in early 1953. A thumb stone was rigged at the entrance of the Binsari cave by a bereaved Japanese family as a way of respecting the fallen Japanese soldiers, possibly following the enactment of a resolution passed by the Japanese Lower House in June 1952 which stated that “the government will take all possible measures to recover and repatriate the bodies of fallen soldiers immediately and to maintain a cemetery for them (Nishimura, 2013). Pilgrimage visits to Biak war zone by the Japanese became more intense as Japan enjoyed period of rapid economic growth and indicated the first boom period of Japanese overseas travel during which one in a thousand was said to travel abroad (Nishimura, 2013).

It is interesting to see that according to the rules established by the Japanese Army with regards to the recovery and burial of the remains, when it was not possible to recover the whole body, a single finger bone would be sufficient (Nishimura, 2013). Remains of fallen Japanese soldiers started to be cremated and repatriated. Repatriation process started 1959. Up to 2017, 25 batches of repatriations have been recorded for 19,570 bodies from all part of Biak, and 1,098 bodies were cremated.

The Japanese cave is one of dark tourism that attracts both domestic and foreign tourists for the fact that it represents the historical battlefield, and for the fact that related remnants, relics and remains of fallen soldiers are there in abundance. Together with other remnants and remains found around the Biak Island, it is clear that such remnants and remains can be regarded as cultural heritage; both tangible and intangible. Apart from bones, skulls and skeletons, the Biak battlefield also has a lot of collection left behind by soldiers from the two armies. They are small, middle-sized and heavy weapons such as pistols, long barrel guns, swords, bayonets, mortars, grenades, bombs and tanks; life support equipment like water canteen, jerry-can, bottles, drums, kettles; vehicles such as jeeps, boats, planes; personal protective equipment such as helmets, clothes and uniforms, dog-tags; and communications and lighting equipment. They are all scattered in the Biak war zones. Some of them have been secured and collected in a makeshift mini museum organized by a local, some have been missing or looted, some are still there deep in the ground, while others may still be there in the deep see or caves.

In view of the nature of cultural heritage, the two interrelated terms are discussed: the tangible cultural heritage and the intangible cultural heritage. Tangible heritage refers in general to all the material traces such as archaeological sites, historical monuments, artifacts, and objects that are significant to a community, a nation, or/and humanity (‘material’ archaeological and historical elements of heritage). Intangible heritage refers to practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated with living communities (Hasan, 2014). The term “artifact” comes in both tangible and intangible heritage as the word can mean (1) a usually simple object (such as a tool or ornament) showing human workmanship or modification as distinguished from a natural object, especially an object remaining from a particular period; and (2) something characteristics of or resulting from a particular human institution, period, trend or individual (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Fallen soldier remains, wreck of jeeps, airplanes, tanks, mortars, guns, grenades, water containers, helmets or dog-tags discovered in the war zone may be tangible heritage, but when the values of such items are much higher than their intrinsic values, they must be well protected. Looting of such items for the mere economic benefit of looters is a shame and therefore protection of such invaluable items is a must. They must be there as authentic witness of war. Visitors certainly come to the war site not for the replica of human bones or war remnants.

In view of the national policy of protection of such tangible and intangible heritages in Indonesia, it refers to Government Degree No 10/1993 on Explanation of Law no. 5/1992 on Cultural Protection of Object which confirms that reducing, extending, changing, removing and polluting a protected heritage is not allowed (Tahir, n.d.).

The study aimed to identify the tangible and intangible cultural heritages that support the Biak battlefield as a spot for post-war or dark tourism and how the prevailing tangible and intangible cultural heritage can be managed in a more sustainable way.

Research Method

The study used case study approach which is qualitative in nature. As stated by Raco (2010), case study is a part of qualitative research methods which tries to go deep into a certain case in a more comprehensive way by collecting many sources of information. In view of Cresswell (in Raco, 2010), a case study is an exploration of bounded systems out of a case while Patton (2002) in Raco (2010) argues that a case study helps in comprehending issues in individuals, groups, program, organizations, culture, regions and even nations. This would help kame better understanding of a certain issue. The research was performed by means of observation and in-depth interviews with some informants who were pilgrims and the local people responsible for taking care of the remnants of war in Biak. Data were also derived in the form of artifacts such as documents, photographs and drawings.

Tangible and Intangible Heritage in Biak Battlefield.

The Binsari cave in Sumberker Village, Biak, Papua is large big and deep. It is packed by coconut trees grown from the bottom of the cave. The highest crown of its young leaf reaches the ceiling of the cave. To go into the cave, visitors can use an added permanent staircase with iron railings leading from the mouth of the cave downward to feel the silence of the cave that was once a defense system that housed 3,000 Japanese soldiers, that later on also became their cemetery as the United States Army used massive explosive to attack the Japanese Army cave defense on June 7, 1944. There is no available on hand information on how much war remnants and body remains had been excavated, unearthed or removed from the cave, but clearly the mystical atmosphere is there to give visitors an imagination of how the Japanese soldiers suffered during the war and their stay at the cave.

A wave of Japanese pilgrimage to the cave and battlefield around Biak started in 1970. They mostly spent a lot of time in the cave doing some religious rituals as stated by an informant as follows:

“Japanese pilgrims started to visit the cave in 1970. They usually come in groups. The Japanese pilgrims are mostly those who have close relations with the soldiers killed in the battle zone; they could be a son, a daughter, a grandson, granddaughter, a niece or nephew. They have come to the battle zone for sentimental reasons, and with the wish to perform cultural ritual for respecting their beloved ancestor”. (Informant 1)

Pilgrimage visits to war zones can be considered as an act of tourism. Elliott & Milne (2019) quoted Urry & Larson (2011) who defined tourism as a temporary “departure,” both in

a physical and metaphorical manner, from one's everyday surroundings and practices which commonly involves movement through spaces to a new place or places, and a period of stay there. Tourist's visit to the war zone can therefore be well understood. Studies on tourism view this as post-war tourism. For the tourists, post-war tourist destination functions as landscape remembrance that refers to integration and education for tourists about the events that transpired during the recent conflict (Wise, 2012). Landscape remembrance forms reflections of war by envisioning the past as sometimes the landscapes are left untouched. Wise (2012) further argues that scenes conveying war-torn landscapes allow future travellers to reminisce past imaginations of a particular place.

War-tourism also refers to 'dark tourism'. Foote (2003), as quoted by Wise (2012) stated that dark tourism features the remembrance of tragic events first hand which involve the significance of constructed monuments, places with stories or manifested memorials as part of the narrative. It is well understood why the Japanese visitors were engaged in a lot of related activities during the pilgrimage to the cave battlefield. They built a World War Monument, they made offerings and gave ceremonies in commemoration of the dead, they put some photographs, made banners with comforting wishes writings to the dead on it and aired prayers. Soldiers who lost their lives in a military conflict to the honor of the country is a matter of pride. An informant, a Japanese man, the son of one of the fallen Japanese soldiers, who has made more than ten visits with his group to Biak battlefield has his words:

"I'd like the Japanese to know their historical roots, to know what happened to their ancestors and to get the understanding that this war was should have not happened. The next generation do not need to experience what we have experienced" (Informant 2)

The Binsari cave with its remnants of war and remains of the fallen soldiers and relics of war and other items related to the Biak war can be considered as cultural heritage to the area. Cultural heritages come in two types: intangible and intangible heritages. As defined by UNESCO (2003), Tangible Cultural Heritage refers to the physical artifacts produced, maintained and transmitted inter-generationally in a society. It includes artistic creations, built heritage such as building and monuments, and other physical or tangible products of human creativity that are invested with cultural significance in a society. Intangible Cultural Heritage indicates the practice, representation, expression, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, object artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their Cultural Heritage. Examples of Intangible Cultural Heritage are oral traditions, performing arts, local knowledge and traditional skills.

The existence of the intangible heritages pieces other than the cave in Biak is characterized by remnants from mostly the Japanese Army. Informant 3 is a local man who serves as the caretaker of the Binsari cave. He has been collecting the war relics left by both the Allies and the Japanese troops around and inside the cave, including skeletons and bones, and he is aware that tourists are interested in taking a look at the war remnants. In 1980, Informant 3 was asked by the local Authority for Education and Culture to officially make necessary preservation of the area around his house. Yusuf lives in a house at the left side of gate to the cave complex. At the terrace to the side of his house are racks full of old drinking bottles and other items. The bottles left by the Japanese troops had been exposed to the sun and rain for years and years, some of them are broken, with holes in them and filled with water. Informant 3 has a mini museum in his guest room. Remnants of personal belongings of the Japanese troops ranging from wristwatches, medicine, pistols, up to samurai sword are neatly kept in two glass cabinets. Photos and posters about wars are posted on the wall. Here is how he collected all those pieces:

“Apart from years and years of hunting for the relics of war, I bought remnants from iron scavengers at the city’s Old Market. I paid in a range from Rp 150,000 (US\$ 10) to Rp 500,000 (US\$ 34) to recover each of the items such as helmets or canteens” (Informant 3).

Another issue of remnants hunting was revealed by Informant 4, who is a collector of war relics. Informant 4 has been collecting war remnants from forests and caves of greater Biak Numfor area.

“Sometimes I have to go further into the forest. I use machetes to clear shrubs among the thick bushes during the rainy season to reach the location of buried remnant. Outside the caves I also recovered relics from the United States soldiers. It is easy to tell the difference between United Army’s items and the Japanese Army’s item” (Informant 4)

While Informant 3 and Informant 4 hunt on land, Informant 5 works at sea. Each day Informant 5 could dive and recover one or two items from the coastal water around the island. Very often he found active explosives:

“When you dive in another place, you see fish and reef. Here you are snorkeling over active explosives sunken underwater” (Informant 5)

Intangibles of the Biak battlefield are well represented by the narrative of the historical events that originally took place in the battlefield that can be well uttered by the local people despite the fact the stories are transmitted from their elders who were witness of the war that happened some 75 years ago. This includes the narrative of how the Japanese arrived, constructed airstrips, and started occupying the island; how the United States Army landed with all the tanks, vehicles, planes and weaponry and how people can still hear voices, noises and human sounds from inside the cave. The narrative is also supported by the legend of the old lady who once lived in the cave or the stories behind the discoveries of the remnants from the area. Other things that added to structure of the intangibles are the atmosphere created from the construction of the World War II Monument in Biak and the repeated rituals for consoling the soul of the fallen soldiers.

The tangibles and intangible cultural heritage at the Biak battlefield make a tourism product that may attract even those having no relations with the war and the fallen soldiers. This is well defined by Vassiliadis (2008) which was quoted by Albaryak *et al* (2010) who urged that the most the tourism products are in the form of combination of tangibles and intangibles is also believed that although some researchers recommend a holistic approach for evaluating tourism products, its component can be separable and measurable according to their tangibility and intangibility.

Current Issues on Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Post-war Biak

In view of touristic attraction development, it is necessary to consider many possible aspects of a landscape with unique features such as Biak battlefield, in this sense, to the extent of dark tourism potentials, Pătru-Stupariu *et al* (2019) argues that that landscape research has recently shown a growing interest in questions of cultural heritage, acknowledging for example, its relevance for biodiversity, recreational potential, aesthetic and the social fulfillment of the cultural landscape. Tangibles and intangibles available in Biak may cater to the tourist social fulfillment. Both tangible and intangible heritages require different approaches for preservation and safeguarding, which has been one on the main motivations driving the conception and ratification of the 2003 UNESCO convention for safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage

as a source of cultural diversity and a driver of sustainable development. However, like anywhere else, there are major issues on preservation and safeguarding of tangibles and intangibles in post-war Biak. The absence of good handling and management of local tangibles and intangible seems to be a problem. Remnants of war are not properly taken care of and no sufficient methods of preserving and displays have been attempted. Remnants and relics of war and human remains are kept in a makeshift ‘museum’ dedicated by a local man serving as a caretaker and some others are in possession of a couple of individuals. Good management is necessary in this case as argue by Bassa and Kiss (2009) there should be essential effects of network system on heritage management which may cover all involved “things” and their characteristic that will further show various relation types in genres, heritage types, characteristic features, protection method as well as historic, social and physical qualities.

Looting has also been a problem. With regards to looting, Informant 3, the above mentioned caretaker, has a story about a piece of major intangible item that he failed to recover due to looting. One day Informant 3 saw a complete airplane wreck at an iron scrap market in Biak city which he believed was a wreck of one of eight airplanes left behind by the American soldiers. The scavenger wanted IDR 7 million (US\$ 473) for the wreck, but Informant 3 didn’t have enough cash then. He went back to the scavenger a couple of weeks later only to find out that the airplane wreck had been cut into smaller pieces of iron scraps. Informant 3 thought this was not right as he believed there should be efforts for reservation.

“I really think the war remnants should be kept safe. They must be collected for their historical value and become the possession of this land. It is so sad they many people found war remnant items and sold them as iron scraps. They also used active ammunition that they found for blast fishing” (Informant 3)

It is clear that the tangible items in Biak battlefield landscape are in danger extinction due to many reasons, among others is the economic. Milcu *et al* (2014) as quoted by Pătru-Stupariu *et al* (2019) urged that cultural landscapes with high heritage value are threatened today by accelerated and drastic social-economic and environmental changes at the local and global scale.

Biak battlefield may also be a home for some war related intangible heritages: the war history narratives that were passed from older to the younger generation of the local people, the mystical atmosphere of the caves and other war zone; the unexplained noises that resemble to human activities inside the cave, and the legend of Binsari cave that once occupied by an old lady. As for the intangibles, however, not so much effort has been done elsewhere. Palang and Fry (2003) in Pătru-Stupariu *et al* (2019) stated that landscape research so far has not addressed the diversity of aspects linked to the intangible heritage adequately, as much a more intention has been given to tangible heritage [...] much less so to intangible heritage such as practice, knowledge, skills and traditions. But still, there lies an ample space for the intangible heritage potentials; the war memory itself, the ‘ugly face’ of World War II and its impact to humanity, that can be integrated to the aspects of dark tourism as Elliott and Milne (2019) argues that war memory and its (re-)shaping can be made through tourism practices and representations, including the touristification of war related sites.

The Biak battlefield’s tangibles and intangibles have the potentials to be developed and some more serious efforts should be undertaken as to make them have more economic values. This is in line with what Bassa and Kiss (2009) stated that heritage objects must be considered as integral part of economic life which means that the investments in this cultural sector are elemental parts of the value chains that absolutely require an information system as their background and therefore the settlements possessing the cultural values have a definite role in

the appropriate establishment of the values chains (Bassa and Kiss, 2009). Elementary to the issue of preserving and developing the tangibles and intangibles in Biak battlefield, what Bassa and Kiss (2009) may help shed light to what the related authority has to do, namely (1) to increase the local awareness of heritage elements – what contributes to their identity, why is it important to preserve and transmit them to the future generation, (2) to reveal the related cultural attributes (exhibition or show rooms, museum); (3) to active participate in the value chain – traditions, legends and heroes contribute to the external touristic attraction features, and (4) development of value chain coordination for sustainable tourism.

New related events can be invented such as a moment of commemoration of the fallen soldiers both from the United States and the Japanese sides organized on one related historical date; construction of well-managed and well-presented museum with interesting features of the history, remnants and remembrance items; scheduled visits to the caves and wrecks and some other attractive tour and trips packages that help boost the economic value of the intangibles and vice versa. The marketing of the Biak battlefield should also consider the uniqueness of the tangibles and intangibles. This is in line with what Xu (2009) in Albaryak *et al* (2010) argues that in terms of marketing, tourism product developers and marketers should be aware of what is normally included in a tourism product—both tangible and intangible elements.

Conclusion

The battle of Biak fought by the United States Army and the Japanese Army that took place in 1944 as a part of World War II that involved around 22,000 soldiers from both sides--6,500 of them perished-- has left the war zone with remnants of wars and remains of fallen soldiers. Visitors come to the area for pilgrimage (especially the Japanese) and to experience the dark tourism naturally made available by what is left by the war. Remnants of war and history of the war in the area are considered to have the characteristic of tangible and intangible values. However, such tangible and intangible values have not been properly taken care of with minimum method of handling and preserving the tangibles and limited source for the intangibles other than the history of war and local legend. If the post-war Biak tourism should be elevated to a more economic level, a special effort should be made to help develop the post-war area especially in terms of securing and managing the tangible heritage.

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