

ONE PIECE IN REAL LIFE INDONESIAN HISTORY

Hasan Ashari¹, Rino Andreas²
{hasan.uns@staff.uns.ac.id, rinoandreas@staff.uns.ac.id}

History education, Fakultas of Teacher Training and Education, sebelas Meret University, Applied
Communication, Faculty of Vocational Studies, Sebelas Maret University

Abstract. One Piece, a 1998 Japanese anime series by Eiichiro Oda, chronicles the adventures of Monkey D. Luffy and the Straw Hat Pirates. This inquiry analyzes the congruence of core narratives between One Piece, which delineates "pirates" as agents of liberation against an oppressive global hegemonic authority, and the maritime history of the Indonesian Archipelago (Nusantara). This study is fundamentally premised on the hypothesis that the label "pirate" in Indonesian history, particularly during the colonial era, was a pejorative construct imposed by the incumbent (colonial) regimes upon resistance groups that challenged monopoly, tyranny, and oppressive systems. Employing a qualitative comparative methodology, this article juxtaposes the fictional construction of the "pirate" in One Piece with the profiles of free seafaring groups in Makassar historically stigmatized as brigands to ascertain shared motives for challenging the unjustifiable exercise of authority. The primary aim is to critically interrogate and deconstruct the hegemonic historical discourse and demonstrate how popular culture can serve as a reflective medium for reinterpreting the agency of maritime figures within the national narrative of resistance. Its principal academic utility resides in advancing a novel interpretive framework for maritime historiography and offering a robust critique of power narratives through the lens of popular culture studies.

Keywords: one piece, pirates, Indonesia history

INTRODUCTION

Global popular fiction, in the form of the manga and anime series One Piece, created by Eiichiro Oda and first published in 1997 (as a manga), has transcended the bounds of mere entertainment to become a cultural phenomenon influencing the mindset of millions worldwide. Its core narrative centers on the protagonist, Monkey D. Luffy, and the Straw Hat Pirates crew, in their pursuit of the legendary treasure "One Piece" and the claim of ultimate freedom. The narrative power of this fiction lies in its depiction of pirates as freedom fighters challenging the tyranny of the ruling authority, which in the anime series is the World Government. This inverted role serves as a reflective mirror to replicate and critique real world power structures and the eternal struggle against oppression. In an academic context, contemporary studies indicate that popular fictional narratives possess a significant capacity to act as agents for historiographical deconstruction and to popularize counter-hegemonic narratives (Siregar, 2021; Triwiyoso, 2024). Analyzing the narrative dichotomy between "pirate" as a criminal and "pirate" as a revolutionary offers a critical perspective applicable to revisiting history from an alternative viewpoint.

The relevance of this critique is particularly pronounced in the Indonesian context. As the world's largest archipelago nation, its history is deeply shaped by maritime power and resistance. However, the history of seafaring, trade, and resistance in the Nusantara (Indonesian Archipelago) is often framed within dominant narratives derived from colonial archives, which inherently seek to justify imperial rule (Andaya, 1993). Within this colonial historiographical framework, free seafaring groups who resisted the Dutch trade monopoly were routinely labeled as "pirates" or "sea robbers" (perompak) a stigma that discursively functioned to legitimize colonial repressive actions and maintain control over strategic sea lanes (Lapian, 2009). Such labeling, evident in historical records concerning the Lanun in Gorontalo and the resistance of Sultan Hasanuddin in Makassar (Firmansyah, 2022), obscures the genuine motive of resistance against arbitrary authority, reducing it to an ethical issue rather than a geopolitical and economic one (Hasanudin, 2018).

Academically, existing research tends to operate along separate tracks. The first cluster, studies on the One Piece phenomenon, focuses primarily on sociological analysis, political semiotics, and anti-authoritarian archetypes (Al Azhar, 2025; Azis & Rahmaddin, 2023). The second cluster, maritime

historiography studies, deeply investigates the identity of Makassar seafarers, their struggles against the VOC monopoly, and critiques of the "pirate" labeling (Azis & Rahmaddin, 2023; Azis & Rahmaddin, 2023). The third cluster examines media messages and values, such as moral messages and feminist values (Sugitanata, A., Aminah, S., & Abdurrasyied, 2024; Putra, A. P & Ayuh, 2025).

Based on this literature review, a significant methodological and thematic gap is identified: there is no existing study that explicitly utilizes the "pirate" narrative dichotomy in *One Piece* (as a freedom fighter) as a trans media comparative analytical framework to scrutinize and deconstruct the colonial narrative concerning maritime resistance groups in the Nusantara. This gap creates an urgency to develop a trans disciplinary approach capable of deconstructing historical narratives dominated by the perspective of power. Therefore, this paper offers a new perspective on trans media comparative historiography, leveraging a global fictional character archetype to revitalize and offer a reinterpretation of the identity of maritime resistance fighters in Indonesia. Thus, the main objectives of this paper are to (1) compare the construction of the "pirate" character in the *One Piece* series with the profile of free seafaring groups in Makassar who were labeled as pirates during the colonial era, and (2) deconstruct the dominant historical narrative to offer a reinterpretation of the role of maritime figures in the history of Indonesian resistance.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach utilizing a trans-media comparative strategy. The selection of the qualitative method is based on the necessity of deeply investigating the meaning, motives, and social constructions inherent in the label "pirate" within the context of global fiction (*One Piece*) and Indonesian colonial maritime historiography. This specific trans-media comparative approach is underpinned by Jenkins, (2006) Trans media theory, which focuses on the expansion and reinterpretation of narrative elements across diverse platforms (fiction and history). The strategy is designed to compare the narrative construction of the freedom fighter archetype (the Straw Hat Pirates) with the profiles of free Nusantara seafarers who were systematically stigmatized as brigands, with the overarching aim of deconstructing the dominant historical narrative. Primary data are categorized into two sources: Fictional Primary Data (key *One Piece* manga chapters/anime episodes, such as the Alabasta and Enies Lobby Arcs, used to analyze dialogue, world building, and the symbolism of resistance against the World Government) and Historical Primary Data (archival materials and colonial records). Data collection is executed through comprehensive Literature Review and Text/Document Analysis. The analysis process proceeds through three integrated stages: First, Narrative and Semiotic Analysis, applying Barthes, (1972) theory to the *One Piece* text to deconstruct resistance motifs and the characterization of the tyrannical power. Second, Critical Historiographical Analysis, utilizing Foucault, (1977) theory on historical texts to reveal how the term "pirate" functioned as an instrument of colonial stigmatization and to uncover the agency of Makassar seafarers. The final stage is the Trans Media Comparison, employing Thematic Comparative Coding Saldana, (2016) and subsequent Pattern Matching (Yin, 2018). This final step systematically compares shared thematic patterns specifically the opposition to tyranny/monopoly and the pursuit of autonomy across both fictional and historical domains, leading to the ultimate formulation of the deconstruction of the dominant historical narrative.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The manga and anime series *One Piece* has significantly surpassed its primary function as entertainment, transforming into a global cultural phenomenon that acts as an agent of social critique. This shift in role is evident from the recent widespread use of its attributes, particularly the *One Piece* flag, in various protest actions across Indonesia and several other countries throughout 2025. Such attributes are utilized as a symbolic expression of resistance and social critique against authoritarian structures. Academically, this phenomenon demonstrates the capacity of popular fiction to house and popularize counter-hegemonic narratives. Intriguingly, the core narrative of *One*

Piece possesses significant structural and thematic congruity with the maritime history of the Nusantara archipelago, particularly in the Makassar region. To substantiate and thoroughly analyze this narrative congruence, this research adopts a transmedia comparative strategy. This strategy is highly relevant as it systematically integrates the narrative analysis of the fiction (One Piece) with the historiographical critique of the Nusantara maritime past, thereby enabling the deconstruction and reinterpretation of the label of resistance within national history.

1.1 The Representation of Pirates as Agents of Anti-Authority in One Piece

To establish the comparative interpretive lens, an analysis of the construction of the Straw Hat Pirates within the One Piece narrative as agents of counter-authority is essential. Through semiotic and narrative analysis (Barthes, 1972), findings are presented to demonstrate that the motives of the One Piece fictional characters are driven by absolute freedom and resistance to hegemonic power, rather than traditional criminality.

Several thematic elements in the One Piece series critique authoritarianism, or the concept of "Absolute Justice" enforced by the World Government and the Marines. In the series, the World Government and the Marines are not depicted as forces of good, but rather as an authoritarian system rigidly adhering to the doctrine of "Absolute Justice". This doctrine, while ostensibly aimed at maintaining order, frequently justifies cruel and oppressive acts to preserve the status quo and conceal their own transgressions.

Monkey D. Luffy and the Straw Hat crew function as agents of liberation who prioritize individual freedom and conscience-based justice over structural and oppressive justice. They represent civil resistance against a regime that abuses power for its own vested interests. The research examines three crucial story arcs (arc) that illustrate this resistance against authoritarian rule: the Alabasta arc (episodes 92-130), the Enies Lobby arc (episodes 263-312), and the Dressrosa arc (episodes 629-746). These three arcs explicitly portray the Straw Hat Pirates as freedom fighters who reject oppressive structural justice. Roland Barthes' semiotics is employed to deconstruct how this fictional narrative transforms the label "Pirate" from a stigma of criminality into a Myth of Counter-Authoritarian Resistance.

First, the Alabasta Arc narrates how the governing authority constructed a myth of national stability by legalizing state-protected criminality. This arc details the Straw Hats' resistance against the criminal organization Baroque Works, led by the Shichibukai (a term for state-sanctioned and protected criminals) known as Crocodile (Shimizu, H., Sugi, Y., Kōno, K., & Sakurada, 2001). Under his Shichibukai status, Crocodile secretly manipulated a civil war in the Alabasta Kingdom to seize power. The oppressive force here is crime protected by the official authoritarian system. Crocodile possessed legitimacy as a supposed enforcer of order while creating a myth of legitimate criminality, where crime was institutionalized and authorized by the government. Luffy and the Straw Hat crew rejected and fought against this legally sanctioned act. Following a fierce conflict, the Straw Hat crew successfully halted the civil war and restored peace. This event demonstrates that the Pirates, though labeled as criminals, are superior enforcers of truth and moral upholders.

Second, the Enies Lobby Arc showcases the most explicit act of resistance against oppressive authority. The World Government, through the Marine armed forces and the CP9 special agency, criminalized Nico Robin, a member of the Straw Hat crew. Robin was apprehended under charges of threatening the government due to fears that she would expose secrets from the past. As a historian and archaeologist capable of deciphering ancient texts, the World Government feared that the revelation of past governmental atrocities would erode their legitimacy and trigger a rebellion. The capture of Nico Robin by the ruling power was executed via a Buster Call, an action that literally annihilates a region and its history, creating a myth of absolute justice where the authority has the right to erase anything deemed a threat to them (Shimizu, H., Sugi, Y., Kōno, K., & Sakurada, 2001). The Buster Call prompted Luffy and the Straw Hat crew to resist the government's actions. In political semiotics, the Straw Hat Pirates here assume the role of the Revolutionary Subject, championing the rights of an individual (Nico Robin) whose arrest lacked clear legal basis. They use the label "Pirate" no longer as a stigma, but as a symbol of political resistance.

Third, the Dressrosa Arc illustrates how the World Government granted legality to a criminal to commit offenses under governmental protection, again with the title of Shichibukai. Doflamingo,

the Shichibukai of Dressrosa, abused the legitimate structure provided by the World Government to engage in slavery, massive natural resource exploitation, and illicit weapons production, with these weapons often serving the government's own needs. As a Shichibukai, Doflamingo created a myth of legitimate criminality, where crime was institutionalized and concealed behind legality (Shimizu, H., Sugî, Y., Kôno, K., & Sakurada, 2001). Doflamingo represented a political-economic tyranny protected by the system. In response to these practices, Luffy resisted and defeated Doflamingo, subsequently dismantling the puppet system created by the government itself. This action was not based on structural law but on justice rooted in empathy for the oppressed populace. In this context, the Straw Hat Pirates, who are legally criminals, function as a moral force that restores social justice, fully inverting the denotative meaning and confirming the Myth of the Pirate as a genuine seeker of freedom.

1.2 Deconstruction of the Pirate Stigma in the Maritime Historiography of the Indonesian Archipelago

Maritime historiography of the Nusantara archipelago has often been framed negatively by colonial writers, who frequently labeled local seafarers as "pirates," accusing them of disrupting trade routes and threatening maritime security. This narrative is essentially the product of a colonial knowledge construction favoring the interests of European powers, particularly the Dutch through the VOC. Within the deconstructive framework of Foucault's theory, (1977), knowledge is never neutral but always intertwined with power. Through the concept of power/knowledge, Foucault asserts that power possesses the capacity to produce truth, define what is legitimate, and determine who has the right to speak. In this context, the term "pirate" is not an objective fact, but a discursive product created by colonialism to legitimize economic and political dominance over the Nusantara seas.

This colonial-centric historical writing significantly shaped the global perspective on Nusantara's maritime history. However, after independence, many scholars and historians emerged to critique colonial-centric history and challenge previously constructed narratives, such as the initial portrayal of Prince Diponegoro as a rebel, whereas he was a fighter against colonial tyranny (Carey, 2019). Similar colonial narratives exist regarding the maritime historiography of Makassar. Seafarers from Makassar and Bugis were frequently labeled as "pirates" by the Dutch, particularly the VOC. Yet, with the rise of critical historiography, a method that re-examines how history is written, Indonesian historians have found that this label was not a pure criminal description but a political and economic tool. Makassan and Bugis seafarers were free navigators who refused to submit to the regulations imposed by the VOC. They were traders, sailors, and sovereignty fighters who struggled to defend their right to trade freely (Lapian, 2009).

The "Pirate" labeling by the VOC served as a strategic political tool: by labeling their opponents as criminals, the VOC could legitimize total military intervention, blockades, and ship seizures without having to acknowledge them as equal political entities. Tarling, (1999) explains that the "pirate" label was a political term coined to criminalize leaders who resisted Dutch hegemony while simultaneously justifying the VOC's military expenditures. The Dutch historian Hägerdal, (2021) also asserts that while Makassan and Bugis seafarers were deemed criminals by the VOC for not adhering to their regulations, such as taxes, trade monopolies, and sailing permits, they were, in fact, seafarers defending their rights. Furthermore, Lapian, (2009) notes that the distinction between free traders and "pirates" became extremely blurred in the VOC narrative, indicating that the label was a tool of control, not an accurate description. Thus, the deconstruction of this stigma is vital to restore the agency of Makassan and Bugis seafarers as rational historical actors, shifting the narrative from criminal anarchy to a struggle for the preservation of rights and maritime sovereignty.

From these various narratives, it is understood that a deconstructive approach in historical writing is necessary to help reverse the binary oppositions created by colonialism, such as "guardians of maritime law" versus "pirates" or "civilized" versus "savage." Viewed from the perspective of the local maritime community, Bugis and Makassan seafarers were, in fact, autonomous economic actors who maintained freedom of navigation and economic sovereignty at sea. Their activities were not criminal but a form of resistance against the oppression of trade monopoly. Leonard, (2014) affirms that Bugis seafarers possessed extensive interregional trade networks founded on social solidarity and a strong maritime belief system. In this context, the term "pirate" is merely a discourse

that functions to solidify the colonial position as law enforcers and negate the agency of the Nusantara people at sea.

By rereading the colonial narrative through the lens of deconstruction, it can be understood that Nusantara maritime history is not just about sailing and trade, but also about the discursive struggle for sovereignty. The term "pirate" needs to be reconstructed into a symbol of resistance against colonial economic hegemony. Through this inversion of meaning, Bugis, Makassan, and other maritime nations can be understood as active historical subjects, not objects of colonial criminalization. Deconstruction opens up space for building a fairer maritime historiography that sides with the nation's own experience, where the sea is not merely a transit route but a space of sovereignty, economy, and cultural identity. Thus, the removal of the pirate stigma through a Foucaultian perspective is not only intellectual work but also part of the effort of decolonization of knowledge, freeing history from oppressive power and restoring the meaning of the sea as the space of Nusantara freedom.

Transmedia Comparative Synthesis and Narrative Deconstruction

The transmedia comparative approach opens up a space for cross-medium and cross-epoch analysis to understand how discourses of power and resistance are reproduced and transformed through various forms of cultural representation. Jenkins, (2006), in his theory of transmedia storytelling, explains that in the modern cultural ecosystem, narratives are no longer contained within a single medium but "spread across various platforms, with each making a distinctive contribution to the overall understanding." Within this framework, the historical accounts of Makassan seafarers in colonial archives and the fictional pirate narratives in the One Piece anime can be treated as two texts operating within a resonant system of meaning, functioning not merely as an analogy but as a dialogue between discourses that transcends media, time, and space.

This transmedia comparative synthesis establishes a fundamental structural commonality between the resistance motifs of the Straw Hat Pirates in One Piece fiction and those of the Makassan and Bugis seafarers in Nusantara maritime history. The key comparison is that the Straw Hats' struggle against the Political Tyranny of the World Government (which monopolizes power) bears a structural resemblance to the Makassan seafarers' resistance against the Economic Tyranny of the VOC (which monopolized trade and sea routes). Both actors, the fictional pirates and the historical maritime pirates of Nusantara, operate outside the dominant authoritative system to uphold the same fundamental values: Autonomy and Freedom.

Furthermore, the representation of pirates in popular culture like One Piece can be read as a symbolic form of resistance against hegemonic power structures. The narrative of the Straw Hat Pirates' struggle against the dominance of the World Government depicts a form of resistance against a global political authority that constrains individual liberty and the right to self-determination. When this narrative is compared to the history of the Makassan and Bugis seafarers in the 17th to 18th centuries who rejected the VOC's trade monopoly, a significant structural similarity in motive emerges. Both opposed an oppressive power system to maintain the fundamental values of autonomy and freedom (Reid, 1993; Pelras, 1996). Thus, in both the fictional and historical narrative spaces, the act of "acting outside the law" is essentially an ethical expression against an unjust system of domination.

Consequently, the transmedia comparative approach reveals that resistance against the tyranny of authority emerges as a recurrent narrative archetype across cultures and media. Foucault (1977) refers to this phenomenon as "micro-resistance," meaning the small and diverse forms of resistance that emerge wherever power operates. In this regard, both Makassan seafarers and One Piece articulate an ethos of freedom challenging hegemony, albeit in different forms and contexts. While the Makassan seafarers operated in the real maritime world of the 17th century, Luffy and his crew navigate an allegorical space in the 21st century. Nevertheless, both present a universal narrative of rejecting absolute power and the monopoly over the seas.

The transmedia comparative study also affirms that each medium produces distinct effects of meaning. In the colonial archives, power works through bureaucratic language and legal morality. In the One Piece anime, power works through symbols, allegory, and visuals that evoke global reader empathy toward the struggle for freedom. Barthes (1972) refers to this process as "the death of the

author," where the reader becomes an active agent shaping the text's meaning according to their social and cultural context. Thus, when Indonesian readers interpret *One Piece* as an allegory of economic colonialism, they are essentially performing a resemantization of history, a deconstructive process that inverts the colonial stigma of the "pirate" into a symbol of freedom and alternative morality.

Epistemologically, the Transmedia Comparative theory brings together two main currents: the Foucauldian deconstruction of power and truth, and Jenkins' theory of cross-medium meaning production. Intertextuality asserts that no text stands alone; every text is a mosaic of previous texts (Kristeva, 1980). Accordingly, *One Piece* not only creates a new world but also revives old discourses about the sea, trade, and resistance that were once controlled by colonial narratives.

CONCLUSION

Narrative analysis demonstrates that the Straw Hat Pirates function as agents of counter-authority, striving for absolute freedom and opposing the World Government's concept of "Absolute Justice," rather than being driven by traditional criminality. Concurrently, critical historiographical analysis affirms that the label "pirate" attached to Makassan and Bugis seafarers by the VOC was a Foucauldian discursive instrument of power used to legitimize economic monopoly and negate indigenous agency. The Transmedia Comparative Synthesis reveals a fundamental structural and thematic commonality: the Straw Hats' resistance to Political Tyranny (the monopoly of power) mirrors the Makassan seafarers' resistance to the Economic Tyranny of the VOC (the monopoly of trade). Both actors operate outside the dominant authoritative system to uphold the same fundamental values: Autonomy and Freedom. The study concludes that the figures labeled as "pirates" in both domains represent a symbol of ethical resistance against structural oppression. Thus, the transmedia approach successfully achieved a resemantization of the colonial stigma, restoring the meaning of "pirate" as a symbol of anti-hegemonic resistance and the defense of sovereignty in the Nusantara seas.

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