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***Mabedda Bola* ritual in South Sulawesi**

The relationship between handprints in traditional houses and hand stencils in prehistoric caves

R. CECEP EKA PERMANA, INGRID H.E. POJOH, AND
KARINA ARIFIN

ABSTRACT

Mabedda Bola is a ritual which has been handed down from the ancestors of the Bugis – Makassarese people in South Sulawesi. At the ceremony which is called *menre bola baru*, held as part of the ritual inauguration of a new house, the *Mabedda Bola*, handprints are made on the poles and walls of the new house. In the region in which this custom is still honoured, hand stencils on the walls of the prehistoric caves have also been found. This article examines the significance of handprints in the *Mabedda Bola* ritual which might possibly be related to the hand stencils on the walls of the prehistoric caves. Using the perspective of analogy, one of the methods of ethnoarchaeology, it has been discovered that handprints and hand stencils take more or less the same form. The similarities between them hint at the same behavioural patterns between the present day and the prehistoric period. The print of the hand palm is meant to mark the ownership of the family or group who dwell in a traditional house or it is thought in a particular cave. Moreover, it is and was to avert danger or the intrusion of bad influences from outside.

KEYWORDS

Mabedda Bola; traditional house; handprint; hand stencil; prehistoric cave; ethnoarchaeology.

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

A dwelling-place is an important part of human life. Every region or ethnic group in Indonesia has a specific form of a house. This construction, enshrining certain ethnic values and handed down from generation to generation, is called a traditional house. It is typified by its own peculiar architecture (Budihardjo 1997). Consequently, it can be said that a dwelling-place is an aspect of material culture which reflects the psyche of the society. Regional and cultural differences are given outward and visible form in the buildings constructed by people (Suprijanto 2002: 10).

It can also be assumed that the form of a traditional house is a logical consequence of a pragmatic response to the climate and the natural environment in which it is located. Nevertheless, it is impossible to discount the fact that religious factors might also have inspired the form and layout of a house. Therefore, a house represents the microcosm of the whole of that people's universe (Haryadi and Setiawan 1995: 64). As Rapoport (1969) says, the difference between one house and another depends on how the society responds its physical, social, cultural, and economic environment.

Indonesia, which consists of a large number of ethnic groups, is rich in many elaborate traditional houses. Generally speaking, all of these houses, each of which has its own idiosyncratic form, are built using local materials, like wood, bamboo, rattan and *rumbia*, or some kind of palm fronds. Almost all these edifices are constructed on poles like the *limasan* or traditional Javanese houses. The corpus of this paper is about the traditional house in South Sulawesi.

Traditional houses in South Sulawesi, like those built by the Bugis-Makassarese ethnic group, are called *bola*. The structure of the houses is that of a big assembly house constructed on poles (Picture 1). The design reflects the human understanding of the larger universe, much bigger than themselves, the macrocosm of the world in which humans live. According to the Bugis-Makassarese cosmology, a house is a replica of the macrocosm, which consists of three layers, the *Boting Langi* (the Upper World), *Ale Kawa* (the Middle World), and *Buri Liung* (the Underworld). The centre of the universe lies in *Boting Langi*, or the High Heavens, where *Dewata Seuwa-E* or *Tuhan yang Maha Esa*, 'The One Almighty God', resides (Mardanas, Rifai Abu, and Maria 1985; Sani, Supriyadi, and Rukayah 2015: 100). The way the Bugis-Makassarese represent this macrocosm in their houses is seen in the way they divide the space of the house: the *rakkeang* or *para-para* 'the loft', the *ale bola* 'the body of the house', and the *awa bola* 'the lower section of the underneath of the house'. The three divisions of this house are positioned around a centre which is called *posi bola*, the most sacred place of the house (Mardanas, Rifai Abu, and Maria 1985; Tato 2008).

The rooftop has *timpalaja/sambulayang* to enclose the front and back

¹ This paper is based on a research on "The ethno-archaeology study on the interpretation of the function and meaning of handprint in the prehistoric cave in South Sulawesi, Indonesia". A higher education priority research (PUPT) 2014, Directorate General of Higher Education and the Universitas Indonesia.

sections of the roof, but which also advertises the social status of the owner. Their social stratification divides Bugis-Makassarese society into three levels: the first is the *wija arung* 'the nobles', the second is the *sama* or to *maradeka* 'the commoners', and the third the *wija ata* 'the servants'. The houses of nobles usually have five levels of *timpalaja*, whereas the commoners only have three. The houses of the servants do not have any *timpalaja* at all (Hidayat et al. 2013; Rahmansyah and Rauf 2014: 61).

The house is also divided into three divisions horizontally, namely: (1) the veranda or *lego-lego*, which is situated at the front of the house; (2) the main house, or *watampola*, in the middle part of the house containing the family and sleeping spaces; and (3) the kitchen or *dapureng*, in the rear section. In some houses, there is an additional space on the side called, *tamping*, situated between the veranda and the kitchen, which is used as the women's room for weaving cloth, embroidery, and plaiting fibres.



Picture 1. Bugis-Makassarese traditional houses and *timpalaja/sambulayang* in Barru regency (top) and in the regency of Maros (bottom) (photograph by R. Cecep E.P., 2013).

However, this paper is not concerned about architecture, but will discuss the traditional ritual which people observe to bless their new house. It consists of the impressing of handprints on some of the poles and walls of the house. Interestingly, in the same location are caves which contain prehistoric hand stencils. Driwantoro argues that the ritual of impressing a handprint shows the continuation of a tradition of the prehistoric culture in South Sulawesi (Driwantoro 1991). This research has been confined to Soppeng but has been extended to different regions and includes houses in Maros, Barru, and Bone.

2. METHODS

The data was collected by observations and in interviews. The observations were made in houses in which the *Mabedda Bola* ritual was being held and the form, position, and process of the impressing of the handprints were noted. In-depth interviews were conducted with the owners, other family members, and the priest of the house (*sanro bola*), as well as with the head of the village.

To determine the relationship between the *Mabedda Bola* ritual and the cultural legacy of hand stencil making in the prehistoric caves, the method of ethno-archaeological analogy was chosen. Sharer and Ashmore (2003: 432) state that an analogy in archaeology assumes that traces of ancient material culture found at an archaeological site will be similar to the aspects of culture being documented in the society which has inherited the tradition. This approach can be helpful to an ethno-archaeologist who might systematically find a relationship in behaviour and material culture which makes it possible to interpret what happened in the past (Kramer 1979: 1).

3. THE RITUAL OF *MABEDDA BOLA*

The ritual impressing of a handprint in traditional Bugis-Makassarese houses is called *Mabedda Bola*. This ritual is still practised in the regencies of Barru, Maros, Soppeng, and Bone and it is usually conducted at the time a house is inaugurated. It is called *menre bola baru*.

The origins of the tradition of *Mabedda Bola* lie in animism, despite the fact that the Bugis-Makassarese are Muslim. The ritual is a form of veneration of the wooden poles or *ajuara*, which they believe a dwelling-place of God, the Creator of the Earth, or *Dewata Seuwa-E*. By occupying this medium (the wooden poles) God is thought to turn away disastrous natural phenomena and evil spirits, in short all which might be considered malevolent (Driwantoro 1991: 194).

The term *Mabedda Bola* means 'to give powder to the house'. This is done by impressing the palm of the hand coated with a white powder which has been made into a paste with water on significant poles and walls of the house. Some informants say:

Mabedda Bola is a way the owner of the house expresses his gratitude to "Allah Subhana Wa "Ta-ala" or God Almighty for the completion of the house and the

right to reside there (Muhammad Tang, 66, Lalangnge village, Liliriaja district, Soppeng regency).

Mabedda Bola is the legacy handed down by our ancestors which we must preserve. [It is] to avert danger and to ensure that the owner of the house continues to remain healthy and safe under the protection of God (Nuhera, 59, Lompo Maja hamlet, Lompo Riaja village, Tanete Riaja district, Barru regency).

The ritual of *Mabedda Bola* is conducted by a traditional priest called *sanro* or *sangro bola* in the Bugis language and *panre* or *pangrita bola* in Makassarese language. The priest is the medium between the owner of the house and the spirits² who will grant safety. The ritual can be held in the late afternoon or in the cool of the morning. The priest is equipped with the requisite ceremonial implements, especially the ingredients for making the handprints and the sacrificial food for the offering to the main pole, or *possi bola*. During the ceremony, the priest reads traditional chants accompanied by Islamic prayers or simply recites the latter (see Picture 2).



Picture 2. The priest, the woman, and the owner of the house are in the middle of the ritual by the main pole of the house, or *possi bola* (photograph by Ingrid H.E. Pojoh, 2014).

The observations and interviews shown that there is a difference in the way the *Mabedda Bola* ritual is practised in Lompo Maja hamlet, Lompo Riaja village, Tanete Riaja district, Barru regency. Here, the ritual is performed after the *maghrib salat* prayers, that is the prayer at dusk when the day turns

² Nowadays, it is God who grants peace and security.

into evening. *Mabedda Bola* marks the moment of entering the new house, ensuring the avoidance of evil and the aversion of danger and asking God’s protection for the owner of the house and that God grant the owner good health. The ingredients for the paste for the handprint are rice flour or *tampung tawarra*, turmeric, brown sugar, cinnamon, coconut milk, and water. The ingredients are crushed into a paste. In this particular ritual, only the virgin female members of the family are allowed to participate in the making of the handprint (see Picture 3). Besides being impressed on the main pole of the house or the *possi bola*, the prints are also placed on the poles underneath the floor of the house and on the poles in the family room and sleeping spaces, as well as on some of the vertical poles in the lowest part of the house or the *patolo* and on the stairs. Those making the impressions walk through the house in a clockwise direction, stamping the print of the palm of the hand from *possi bola* in the lowest part of the house before proceeding to the poles in the interior of the house.



Picture 3. A girl places her handprint on the poles of the house in the ritual of *Mabedda Bola* (photograph by Inggrid H.E. Pojoh, 2014).

In Bainangga’e hamlet, Ma’do village, Tanete Rilau district, Barru regency, the *Mabedda Bola* ritual is performed on a Friday after the early morning prayer. Friday is chosen because it is considered to be the most auspicious day of the week in Islam. The procession of impressing the handprints begins from the main pole, or the *possi bola*, the lowest part of the house and then proceeds to the other house poles in a clockwise direction. Apart from these places, the handprint is also impressed on the left and right sides of the stairs, or *pipi tangga*, and the uppermost part of the poles inside the house proper,

commencing from the poles on the veranda and then other poles in the interior of the house.

In other places in the Barru regency, in Mattirowalie village, Tanete Riaja district, for instance, the handprint was made by the cousin of the house-owner, a seventeen-year-old male. The handprint was of the full hand, impressed on the wall of the front part of the house surrounding the entrance door and on the seventeen *patolo* poles underneath the house. There was only one handprint on each *patolo*, with the exception of the two *patolo* which had two handprints impressed on them. The handprints were also made on the *patolo* in the front part of the house, on the right side and on the rear and left sides of the house. No handprints were made in the house proper.

The *Mabedda Bola* ritual in Lalangnge village, Liliriaja district, Soppeng regency was performed after the *maghrib salat*. Its purpose was to express a feeling of blessedness, thanking "Allah Subhana Wa Ta'ala", or God Almighty, for the completion of the house and the opportunity to reside in it. The ceremony was to ensure the safety of the owner and the family who would dwell in the house, in the hope that they could live in the house in peace and harmony. The participants believed that the ceremony would protect them from danger. The ingredients used for making the handprint were a mix of watery powder, or *bedda dinging* or *bedda rica*, which consisted of rice flour, turmeric, galangal, and water. The handprints were impressed on the *possi bola* and on the other poles in the house. Before the ceremony was conducted, the house had to be empty. The first person to enter the house at the time of the initiation was the priest, *sanro bola*, followed by the head of the family who was then joined by the rest of the family members. They all imprinted the palms of their hands on the house poles. In the ceremony diverged slightly different from that held in Marioriwawo, Soppeng regency, where the first person to enter the house was the wife of the house-owner, because the house was dedicated to the wife. She was followed by the priest and the other members of the family.

The ritual of making the handprints in Kacimpang hamlet, Timusu village, Liliriaja district, Soppeng regency, can be held in the evening after the *maghrib* or the *isya* prayer. In this instance, the handprints were impressed only in the poles in the house, beginning with the *possi bola*, by maidens who had not begun their menstrual cycle. The imprints were of the right hand only because people believe that using the right hand is the right and proper thing to do. The palm of the right hand was soaked in a soothing powder-based mixture, or *bedda dinging*. The hands smeared with this was then placed on a pole and pushed upwards leaving an impression of an elongated palm and attenuated fingers (see Picture 4).

The ritual of *Mabedda Bola* in Mattapa Bulu village, Lamuru district, Bone regency was held in the late afternoon after the *ashar* prayer. It was a symbolic gesture of gratitude to the Creator and it is considered to be the right and proper way to inaugurate a house. The purpose was to protect the owner of the house and the family members from danger and allow them to

live their lives in safety. For the ritual, the family was required to prepare a moist substance, or *bedda rica*, which was made of rice water extract, or *benni luttu*, mixed with turmeric, galangal, and water. The prints were applied on the *possi bola*, on the *patolo* and on the other house poles by the priest, or *sanro bola*, and the house-owner.



Picture 4. A regular handprint on a pole of the house (left) and an elongated fingerprint of the palm (right) (photograph by R. Cecep E.P., 2014).

In Mattapa village, the ritual was held at night because the weather is cooler. Again its purpose was to protect the house-owner and the family members from peril, to grant them peace in their new house. The ceremony was led by a priest, or *sanro bola*. It consisted of drawing a human figure on the *possi bola* using the middle finger. When this has been done, the owner of the house put his right hand on the poles of the house and the *patolo* and pushed the palm upwards. The result was an irregular handprint of five or four fingers and the heel of the palm because of the runniness of the liquid.

Importantly, when the imprinting of the palm of the hand, those who undertake the task are not supposed to adjust the movement of their palms. Just as it is required that the fingerprints at the completion of the Indonesian Identity Card, or *Kartu Tanda Penduduk* (KTP), the impression should be as original as possible. On this occasion, the handprints were placed on almost every pole on the veranda, family room, sleeping spaces, and one pole in the kitchen area. The handprints underneath the house were placed only on the *possi bola* and on the other nineteen poles in the front part of the house; none of the poles at the rear are marked.

The only participant in the *Mabedda Bola* ritual in Mamminasa'e village, Lamuru district, Bone regency was the owner of the house, and he impressed his mark only on the *possi bola* and on the other beams in the house proper. Only three fingers of the hand were used: the index, middle, and ring fingers.

The ritual of *Mabedda Bola* in Kalabbirang village, Bantimurung district, Maros regency was conducted by the forty-year-old aunt of the house-owner. Her handprint was impressed on the *possi bola* and on eighteen other poles in the interior of the house and on all the poles on the veranda and in the house proper, leaving the poles in the rear section close to the kitchen area unadorned. The handprints were made by five or four fingers which slanted

upwards.

The implementation of the ritual of *Mabedda Bola*, whether simply or on a more lavish can be deduced from the decorations used in the house, the numbers of guests invited, and the quantity and variety of the food served at supper-time. None of these subsidiary factors is a key element and is definitely subordinate to the important role of the priest who leads the ceremony, the liquid powder for making the impressions of the handprint or the family members who are involved in making the handprints.

4. THE FORM AND PLACEMENT OF HANDPRINTS IN THE HOUSE

The handprints on the house poles produced in the course of the *Mabedda Bola* ritual come in various forms, as they are impressed by a number of people of various ages and sexes who are called the *pa bedda bola* or the makers of handprints. Moreover, the poles which are marked are located in different places of the house: underneath or in the house proper. The following is a list of the forms and locations of the handprints in the houses which have been inaugurated by the *Mabedda Bola* ritual.

a. *The house of Jabir in Barru regency*

This wooden house, which has a lower space underneath the house structure, belongs to Jabir, forty-five years old, is located in Mattirowalie village, Tanete Riaja district, Barru regency. The *Mabedda Bola* ritual was held by Jabir on 3 August 2013 and the person who impressed the handprints was done by his niece, Ika, thirty years of age (see Picture 5).



Picture 5. Underneath Jabir's house and the handprints on the poles (photograph by the authors, 2014).

During the *Mabedda Bola* ritual, Ika made thirteen handprints in total: three underneath the house and ten in the house proper (see Diagrams 1a and 1b). The handprints were impressed in full, showing the palm of the hand and all five digits. The handprints which she made on the main supporting beam of the *patolo* were on the third and fifth columns. There were also five handprints on the *patolo* on the veranda, in the guest-room, the family-room, sleeping spaces and kitchen (see picture 6).

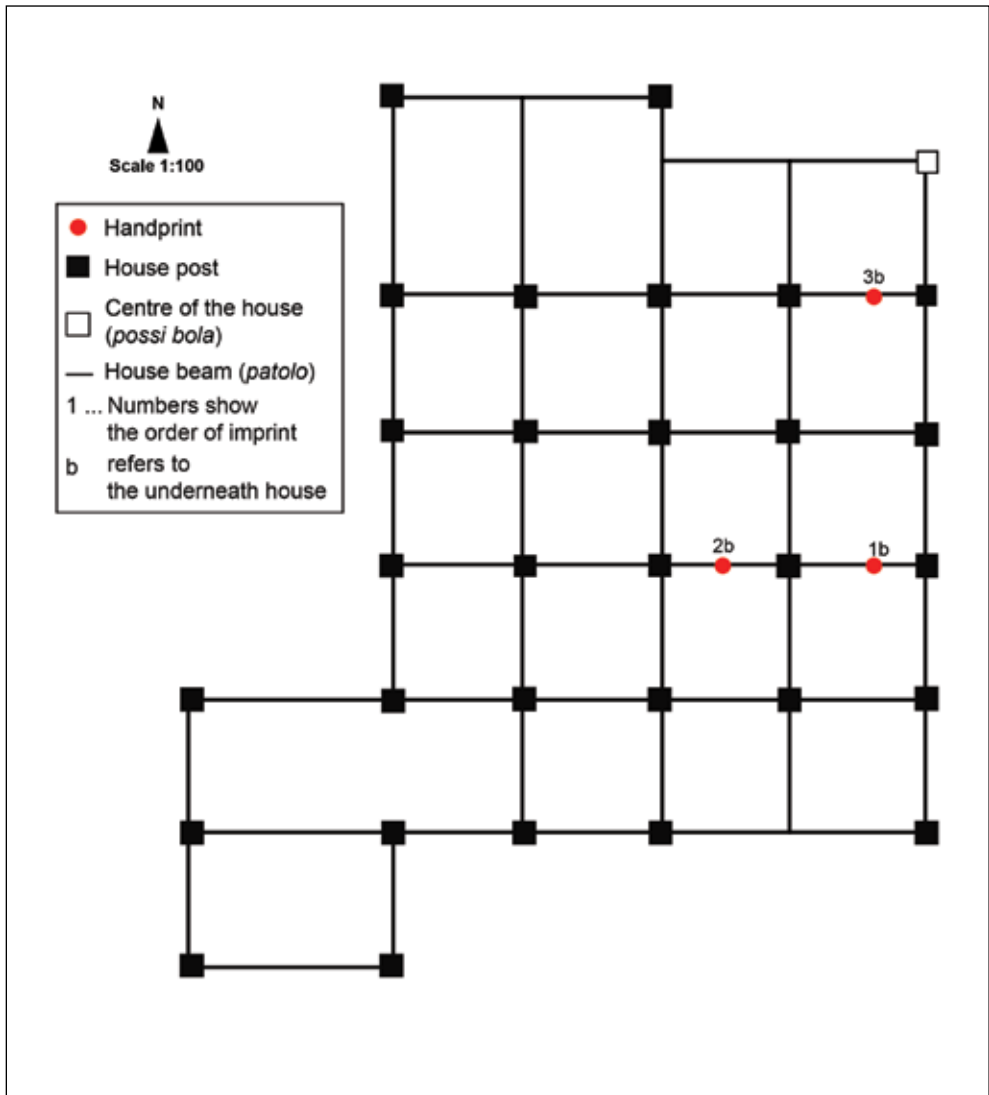


Diagram 1a. The location of the handprints underneath Jabir's house.

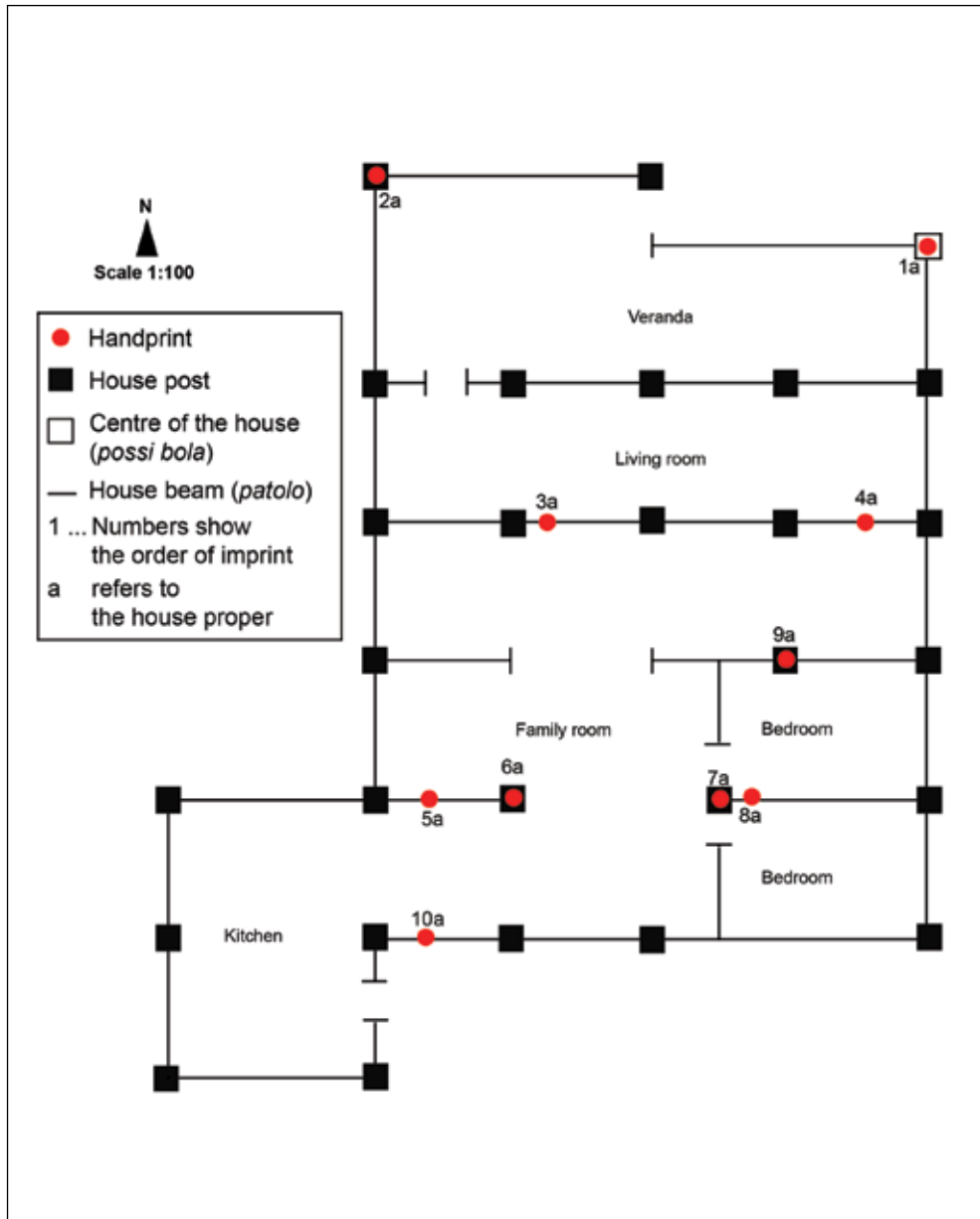


Diagram 1b. The location of the handprints in Jabir's house proper.



Picture 6. The interior Jabir's house and the handprints on the poles (photograph by the authors, 2014).

b. *The house of Hajj Nemma in Soppeng regency*

The house of Hajj Nemma, fifty-six, is located in Tettikennarae administrative area, Marioriwawo district, Soppeng regency. Hajj Nemma held the *Mabedda Bola* ritual on 21 September 2009. On this occasion, one of Hajj Nemma's relatives, Suka, thirty-seven, was entrusted with impressing the handprints. Altogether he made nine handprints on the poles on the house proper, with special emphasis on the family room and kitchen (Diagram 2). The handprints were not consistent because, after he had imprinted his palm on the pole, he pulled it upwards (see Picture 7a and 7b).



Picture 7a. The front section of HJ. Nemma's house (photograph by the authors, 2014).



Picture 7b. The interior of Hj. Nemma's house (photograph by the authors, 2014).

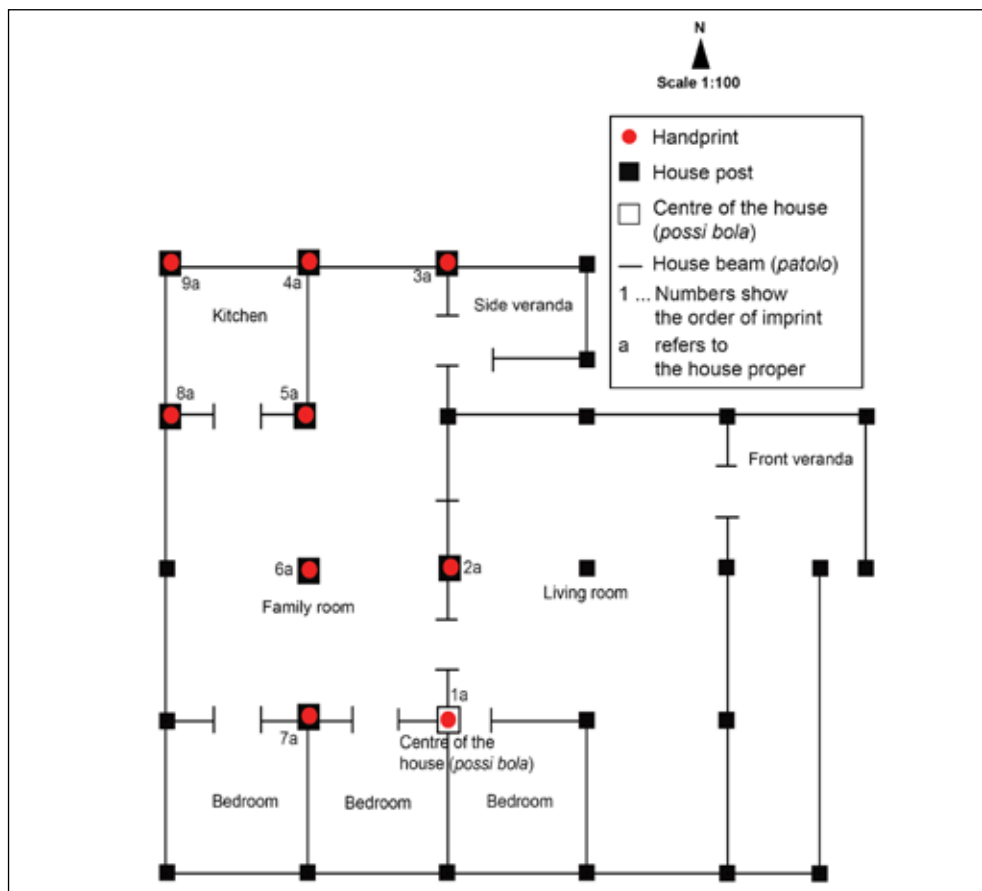


Diagram 2. The location of handprints in Hj. Nemma's house proper.

c. *The house of Latang in Bone regency*

The wooden house owned by Latang, forty-seven, has a section underneath the house. It is situated in Mattampabulu village, Lamuru district, Bone regency (see Picture 8). The ritual of *Mabedda Bola* was held on 2 June 2014. The handprints in this house were applied by Hasna, Latang’s daughter.



Picture 8. The front section of Latang’s house (top) and the interior of the house proper (bottom) (photograph by the authors, 2014).

In all, Hasna made forty handprints, twenty were impressed on the poles in the section underneath and twenty in the house proper. They were drawn

on the main pole of the house, *possi bola*, and on other poles on the veranda and in the family room (see Diagrams 3a and 3b). The forms of Hasna's prints of four or five of her digits, seem more elongated than the other handprints because she moved her hand upwards after making the initial impression (see Picture 8, bottom).

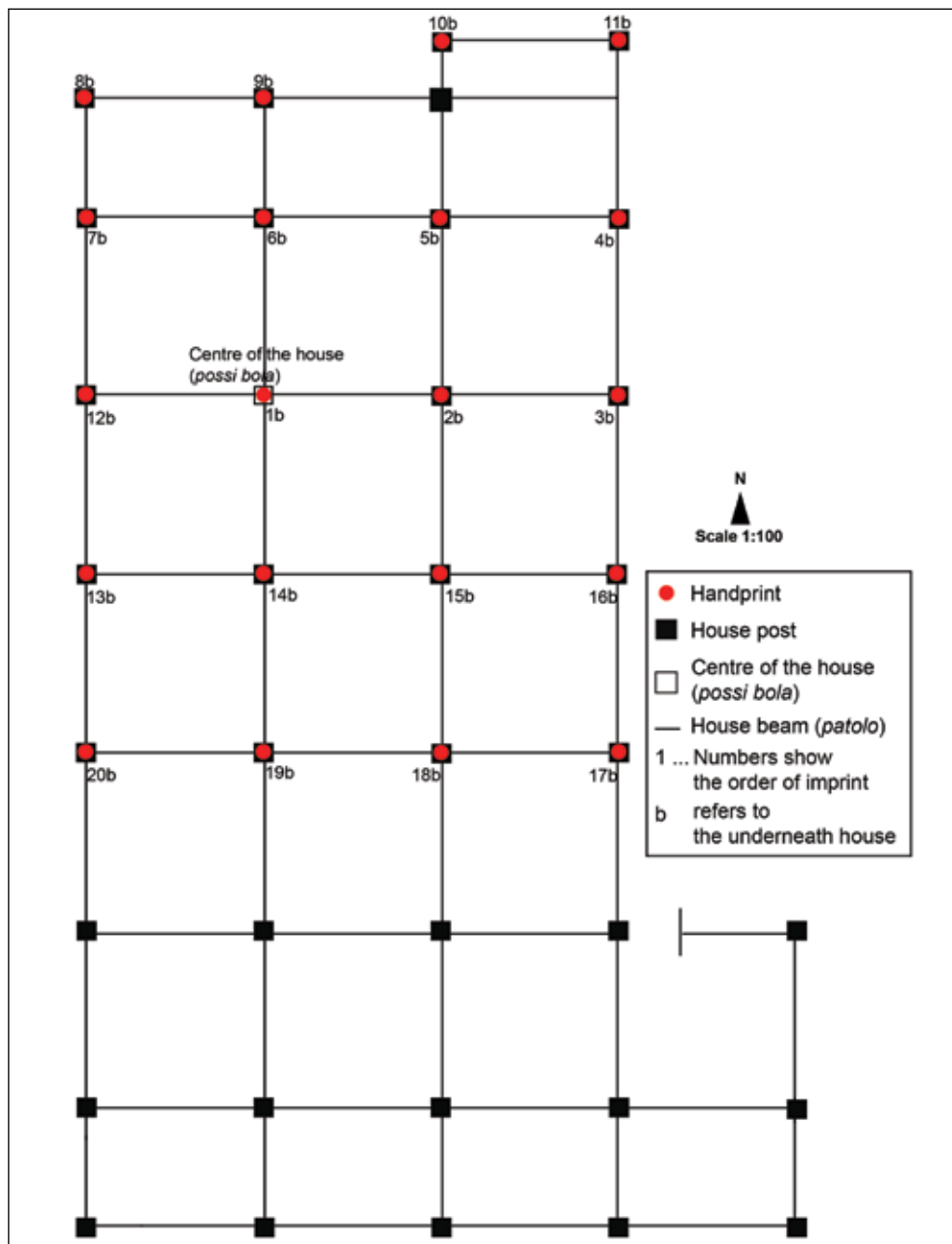


Diagram 3a. The location of the handprints on the poles underneath Latang's house.

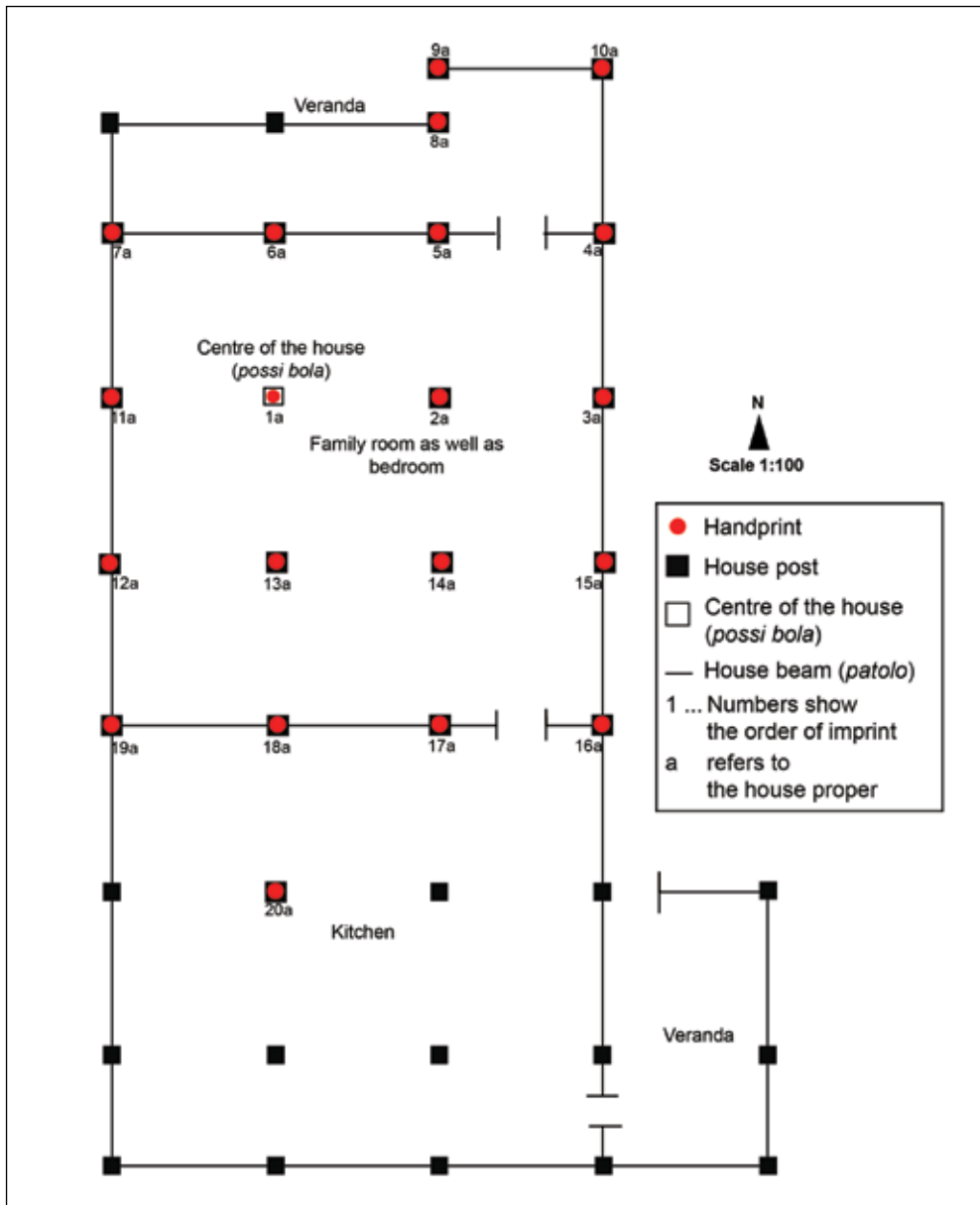


Diagram 3b. The location of the handprints in Latang's house proper.

d. *The house of Musmuliadi in Maros regency*

The house of Musmuliadi, thirty-eight, is located in Kalabbirang village, Bantimurung district, Maros regency. Unlike other Bugis houses it not stand on poles, but is set on a stone foundation. Nevertheless, Musmuliadi's house does have poles in the interior to bear the weight of the house. The roof construction does not deviate from other traditional houses in the area (see Picture 9).



Picture 9. The front part of Musmuliadi's house (top) and the interior (bottom) (photograph by the authors, 2014).

Musmuliadi had set the *Mabedda Bola* ritual for 8 December 2013. In the ceremony, his aunt, Mariama, forty-six, made the handprints on the parts of the house selected for their impression. Mariama made her five-or-four finger handprints on the slant on the veranda, in the family room, and the kitchen (Diagram 4).

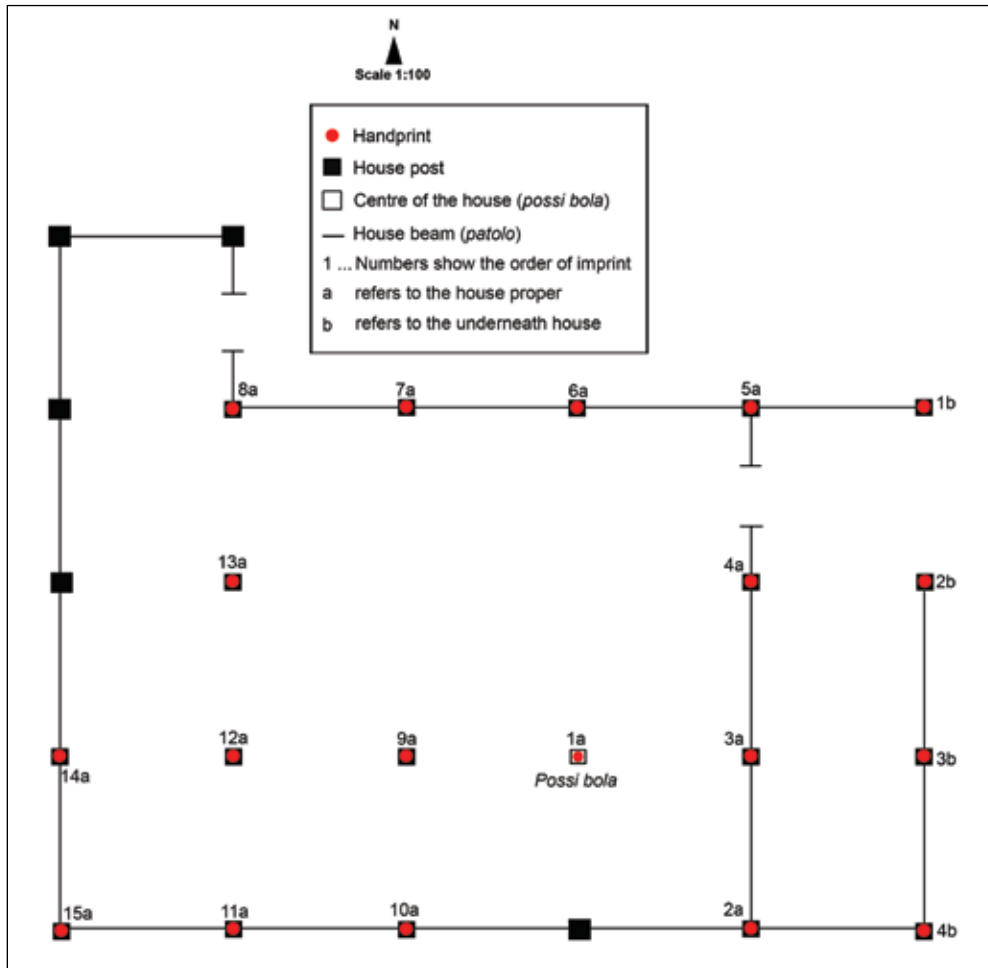
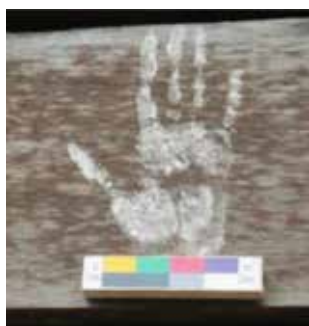


Diagram 4. The location of handprints inside Musmuliadi's house.

Examining these different descriptions, several general conclusions can be drawn. The handprints in the *Mabedda Bola* ritual, which were all made using a mixture based on rice flour, were all white. The majority of the handprints showed four fingers and a thumb in an upright position. They made by impressing the palm of the hand which had been soaked in the paste onto the selected surface. When imprinting the palm of the hand on the main pole or *patolo*, and on the wall, the body was in an upright position with the hand was held upwards.

Naturally, a handprint reproduces the size of the hand of the person who impresses it. This makes it possible to determine the age range of the people who have applied them. Small handprints might belong to children, though also to a small woman, whereas the larger palms might belong to an adult.



a



b



c



d

Picture 10. The different shapes of the handprints (photograph by the authors, 2014).

Picture 10a displays a handprint of a whole palm of the hand, but Picture 10c shows only the fingers and no palm. Picture 10d shows only the tip of some fingers. This shape was made by dipping only the fingers or finger-tips in the white paste and then applying this to the surface of the poles or some other designated part of the house. Picture 10b shows the irregularity and vagueness of the handprints. This could be a result of swiping the hand either to the right or left, upwards or downwards, as it was applied.

Taking account of the places in the house at which they are placed, the most handprints made during the *Mabedda Bola* ceremony were impressed in the family room, and then on the veranda. Only a few were found in the kitchen area. The family room, in which the main pole or *possi bola* is located, the most sacred part of the house, had the most. As the family room is considered to be the principal space in which the family members can gather, the places for people to sleep can also be located there. The veranda is also an important section of the house, as it functions as a space through which people enter the house, especially the family part. The handprints on these important sections are meant to ward off evil or to avert danger. In particular, the handprints which are visible from the entrance area have a very crucial purpose in blocking the intrusion of evil and harmful influences. In other words, this is to protect the family so that they can reside happily in safety.

5. HAND STENCILS IN PREHISTORIC CAVES

As said earlier, South Sulawesi is not only a site of caves inhabited in prehistoric times, it is also home to a specific local custom *Mabedda Bola*, the ritual impression of handprints on the poles of the house. Is this custom a legacy of the hand stencils on the walls of prehistoric caves and rock shelters? According to Forge (1991: 40), the form of handprint shows that there has been a direct transference from a hand to an evolution into object of art by applying a certain natural colour. Maynard (1977: 391-394), Clegg (1983: 94-95), and Lewis-Williams (2002: 216-218) have described how the prehistoric handprints were made by spraying a liquid consisting of certain mineral colour substances (haematite or ochre) onto an open hand which was subsequently imprinted at the surface of cave walls. The colour splash surrounding the hand palm is called the "negative hand stencil"; often referred to in short as the "hand stencil".

A hand stencil is considered to be the signature or identity mark of the cave artist. The tradition of hand stencils among prehistoric cave-dwellers using a similar form and technique is found spread all over the world, including Indonesia, (McCarthy 1979: 80-82). In Indonesia, hand stencils are found in some areas in East Kalimantan, Maluku, Papua but above all in South Sulawesi. Permana's doctoral research (2008) on the prehistoric sites in Pangkep-Maros found more than 1,000 hand stencils. Their ages are estimated to range from 3,000 (Soejono and Leirissa 2008: 187-188) to 39,900 years ago (Aubert et al. 2014: 2).

The form taken by the hand stencils in South Sulawesi (see Picture 11), particularly those from Pangkep-Maros regency, is mostly a print of the palm of a hand, as shown, for example, in Picture 11a. However there are also prints of a palm and the wrist, as shown in Picture 11c. Prints of the palm, wrist, and arm, as in Picture 11b, are the rarest. The hand stencils also display various orientations. Most of them face upwards (Picture 11a); some face right (Picture 11b) or left (Picture 11d) however none faces downwards. Most of the hand stencils show all five digits (Picture 11a-d), but some have only four (Picture 11e). The colour used for the print is predominantly red derived from minerals in the rocks, either haematite or red ochre. The majority of the hand stencils are found on one of two surfaces: the wall and the roof of the cave. However imprints of palms in the prehistoric caves can also be in different locations. The most common is at the entrance of the cave or in the vicinity of this (Permana 2008).



Sassang Cave, Maros (a)



Petta Kere Cave, Maros (b)



Sakapao Cave, Pangkep (c)



Camingkana Cave, Pangkep (d)



JariE Cave, Maros (e)

Picture 11. The imprints of hands in prehistoric caves in South Sulawesi (photograph by R. Cecep E.P., 2006).

6. DISCUSSION

This paper presents two cultural representations of the impressions of palms of the human hand. Although the time span between the executions of these two cultural representations is enormous, they do resemble each other. The similarity between hand stencils in prehistoric caves and handprints in the traditional houses could reveal the possibility of a substantial modification.

Even though the imprints of hands are no longer made inside caves, the source the print remains the same, that is the palm of the hand.

With reference to the method of analogy used in ethnoarchaeology, the ritual of *Mabedda Bola* in present-day Bugis-Makassarese society might provide a clue to the interpretation of the "ritual" once held in the prehistoric caves. Mundardjito (1981: 2), a leading Indonesian archaeologist who has applied the same method, has interpreted the construction and usage of artefacts from the cultural practices in contemporary society in the area which might be considered a continuing agent of a past heritage. In this paper, by extrapolating on a similar use, the hypothesis has been made that a particular practice, the impression of the palm of the hand, has been used in two societies situated in time very far distant from each other. It would be a fair assumption to make that the two groups of people, both ancient and modern, have utilized a symbolization of the same object consequently that the two have used it with the same purpose in mind.

The two cultural expressions discussed here, the palms of hands, do naturally resemble each other in shape as they are of the same piece of the human anatomy; but they do differ from each other in technical aspects, including the method adopted to create them, the ingredients used in the paste and the colour. The hand stencils in the prehistoric caves were executed by spraying liquid, made of ground red ochre or haematite, over a hand splayed on the wall of the cave. However, the handprints on the walls and poles in the interior parts of present-day houses are made by soaking the palm of the hand in a liquid of varying viscosity made of the basis of white rice flour. The exact time in which the revolution in the making process occurred is unknown, so we need an extensive and comprehensive research to address this.

Muhammad Nur has proposed that the current tradition of making handprints originated from a cultural contact between the Toala communities in the Maros and Pangkep areas, who are thought to be the oldest group in South Sulawesi. These people produced stone tools and cave painting knowledge which they transferred to the ancestors of the Bugis people, who are now the majority group in South Sulawesi (Nur 2011: 39). Although this suggestion might sound far-fetched, it does carry a hint of the truth. The brothers, Paul and Fritz Sarasin, who studied prehistoric stone tools in the early twentieth century, reported that they encountered a group of Toala or Toale people who lived a very simple lifestyle. The Toala have been considered to be the last descendants of the original inhabitants of South Sulawesi who lived in caves and used stone tools (Soejono and Leirissa 2008: 145). It is thought that the prehistoric cave paintings in South Sulawesi were carried out three thousand years ago (Soejono and Leirissa 2008: 187-188), but others have proposed a much earlier date.

The historical continuation and the similarity in shape and cultural space become the important criteria if the method of analogy from the perspective of ethnoarchaeology is applied. Therefore if we compare the ritual practice of the making of handprints, or *Mabedda Bola*, with the hand stencils in prehistoric

caves, it is possible to make four hypotheses:

- (1) The tradition of making handprints in the ritual of *Mabedda Bola* among the Bugis-Makassar people is a ceremony to inaugurate a new house. Although, it has been practised from generation to generation, it has so far proved impossible to state when it began. Bearing this function in mind, it would be possible to offer the interpretation that the hand stencils on the walls of prehistoric caves were made by the cave-dwellers who decided to imprint hand stencils in the place in which they had decided to live: pragmatically to indicate ownership; spiritually to avert danger and evil influences. Of course, nowadays people build their house first and then impress handprints. In contrast, an ancient dwelling-place or the "prehistoric house" was chosen from among the natural openings in the limestone cliffs in a mountain. Consequently the decision to reside in one of those openings would have been followed by the marking of the stencils. The key similarity lies in the marking of the cave and the house as a person's habitation of choice.
- (2) The meaning of the colour choice. In the ritual of *Mabedda Bola*, the Bugis-Makassar people use rice flour as the main ingredient of the marking paste. The white colour of the rice flour signifies purity and cleanliness. It amplifies the meaning of the ritual as a substance the people use to purify and to ensure peace and harmony in their new house. Meanwhile, in their eyes, red, the colour choice of the cave-dwellers, might probably also have symbolized the courage needed to live in the harsh natural surroundings, faced with a continual struggle for existence, hunting wild animals or an enemy.
- (3) In the ritual of *Mabedda Bola*, the family members, including the children, spouse or close relatives of the house-owner, impress handprints at specific places in the traditional house. Outsiders are not supposed to participate in the ceremony, unless specifically invited to do so. Extrapolating this to the hand stencils in caves, it could be presumed that these were the signs of the collective ownership of an extended family. Those who were not related to anybody in that particular cave could not participate, or even reside in that cave. At the present time, most people live in houses not caves. The plentiful hand stencils found in caves might not have represented the actual number of family members. The hand stencils could have belonged only to those who came as one group to occupy a cave for a longer or shorter period of time. The dwellers probably came and went, occupied a cave for some time and then abandoned it. This process would later be repeated by other groups.
- (4) In the ritual of *Mabedda Bola*, the impressions of handprints on the poles and walls of houses are often located in the vicinity of the entrance space. They are meant to ward off evil or avert negative interference from outside the house. Likewise, there are the plenty of hand stencils on the walls at the mouths or in the area the prehistoric caves closest to the entrance; they were therefore probably also meant to ward off evil or negative

interferences from outside the cave. This might also be an explanation of why there are so few stencils in other parts of caves.

7. CONCLUSION

The ritual of making handprints, *Mabedda Bola*, is still practised today in Barru, Soppeng, Maros, and Bone regencies. Particularly in the area around the karst mountains, in Maros, Pangkep, and Bone, there are numerous prehistoric hand stencils found in caves. As both are based on the human hand, the handprints in the traditional houses and the stencils in the caves are of the same shape. However, there is also a similarity in the fact that they are found in the dwelling-places of both societies, the traditional house of the present-day society and caves in the prehistoric era. This particular similarity could be presumed to show that the people of South Sulawesi consider the house handprints, which play an important sacred role in their rituals, to be an inheritance from their far-distant ancestors, but more research will have to be done into their oral traditions. This paper contributes to the method of analogy by using the current ritual of *Mabedda Bola* to find a meaning for the hand stencils in ancient caves.

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