FROM THE JUNGLE

Iban performance practice, migration and identity

A practice-based PhD based on four-years of research, culminating in this thesis and a performance piece *From The Jungle* – May 2012

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I would also like to dedicate this to my grandmother, who still holds my hand and tells me stories, even though my Iban is long forgotten. She has been such an inspiration - she bravely goes into new worlds, with love.

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Abstract

This document provides an elaboration of the critical, contextual and methodological rationale for a practice-based PhD research project undertaken at London Metropolitan University 2009 – 2013.

This four-year project was an exploration in identity, space and location. It looks at the transitions, journeys and stories of migrant women. Specifically this exploration has been developed through the language of the cultural practices of Iban women. The Iban are an indigenous group of people from Borneo, predominantly living within the Malaysian state of Sarawak. Significantly the Iban practices have migrated from the jungle, to urban areas, and globally, and inevitably the identity of these practices has developed as the locations have changed, much like the women performing them.

My father is Iban and my mother white New Zealander, and I grew up in both Sarawak and New Zealand before coming to live in the UK in my 20s. My performance training has been within a Western context, both in New Zealand and the UK. This project has been a personal exploration, which has wider consequences in developing performance practice and understanding the discourses of home, belonging, migration and identity.

This has led to questions around migrating Iban performance and cultural practices to a western contemporary context. These questions have been investigated through the cultural practices of the Iban *pantun* (chapter three), the Iban *ngajat* (chapter two), Iban weaving (chapter four) and the use of space in the Iban longhouse (chapter one). This project was an interdisciplinary investigation; in each chapter I pull together performance theory from western practitioners and post-colonial feminist literature with the Iban performance practice. This project has asked the question:

> Can Iban cultural and performance practices be 'migrated' to a contemporary western performance context in order to explore experiences of women's migration?

My research question was central to the practice-based research I conducted, the methodologies developed through practice as research, and are central to all the work covered in this thesis. Within this context the practice is submitted as an outcome alongside this written narrative.
Additional details can be found on the website: www.fromthejungle.co.uk

From the jungle
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INTRODUCTION

This document provides an elaboration of the critical, contextual and methodological rationale for a practice-based PhD research project undertaken at London Metropolitan University 2009 – 2013.

This four-year project was an exploration in identity, space and location. It looks at the transitions, journeys and stories of migrant women. Specifically this exploration has been developed through the language of the cultural practices of Iban women. The Iban are an indigenous group of people from Borneo, predominantly living within the Malaysian state of Sarawak. Significantly the Iban cultural practices have migrated from the jungle, to urban areas, and globally, and inevitably the identity of these practices has developed as the locations have changed, much like the women performing them.

I am a migrant woman. I spent the first part of my childhood in Sarawak. At six I moved to New Zealand and at 20 to London to study and I am now a British citizen. My father is Iban[1] and my mother a white New Zealander. This research has been a project where my own story of migration has been at the centre, the home and the beginnings of this exploration.

This project has asked the question:

> Can Iban cultural and performance practices be 'migrated' to a contemporary western performance context in order to explore experiences of women's migration?

[1] My father is prominent politician within Sarawak, he is the head of the Parti Rakyat Sarawak. The party is one of the constituent members of the ruling Barisan Nasional party

I have chosen to focus on four distinct practices that are intrinsic to the questions of home, location, migration and identity that my work explores: the Iban longhouse, Iban weaving, and the Iban performance practices of *ajat* and *pantun*. Within this context I understand the use of space in an Iban longhouse and the Iban weaving practice as performative cultural practices, that is, as cultural practices through which specifically Iban identities are defined, performed and constituted. Through these practices, I explore the following sub-questions:

How does the process of migrating cultural performance practices impinge on the ways in which identity is represented and reconfigured?

More specifically, how can these four cultural and performance practices be drawn on to explore changing notions of identity?

How can the migration of these four practices be drawn on to interrogate notions of the identities of migrant women, and my identity as a migrant woman?

How do the visceral and visual aspects of the migrant woman's story inform and reflect the visceral and visual nature of performance?

These research questions were central to the practice-based research I conducted, the findings developed through practice as research, and are central to all the work covered in this thesis. Within this context the practice is submitted as an outcome alongside this written narrative.

Because I am asking the question of performance migration it was appropriate for me to answer this through practice and through performance. This project involved four years of research[2], which culminated in a final performance piece.

Throughout my thesis I have used the phrases 'practice-based research' and 'practice as research' as defined from the readings of Freeman (2010). I have

[2] Three years of practice-based research and literature review, one year of writing up.

also used the term 'fieldwork' to reference the work I have done within the 'field' of Sarawak. This locates the research I undertook to understand Iban performance practices within their original settings. This, the 'field work', predominantly refers to the initial interviews and workshops I conducted, which gave me a place to start.

I am using the term 'practice-based research' as a way to describe the overall methodology used within this project. Practice-based research is *one* approach to research and was an approach I chose because of its relevance to the themes and questions I was exploring.

> …[practice-based research is] a way of dealing with a particular research problem at a particular time in a particular way. It is a mind-set switched on for a specific activity or series of activities […] a selective and hopefully appropriate methodology, not a life choice (Freeman 2010:154)

This methodology combines three elements: theoretical explorations of the concepts of identity, home and belonging; a critical engagement with relevant debates in the field of performance theory; and my own practical investigations of these themes. This practice-based research methodology asks what migration experiences mean, and how migration affects the identity of the women and the performance practices, through practical investigation. Freeman discusses practice-based research as a way of investigating and presenting research - "practice-based research offers a clear challenge to conventional thinking in its premise that the practice of performance can be at once a method of investigative research and the process through which that research is disseminated" (Freeman 2010:07). Therefore I am understanding 'practice-based research' as generating new theoretical knowledge through practical investigation - this includes field work, interviews, learning performance skills, workshopping ideas of migration, migrating my story of migration through performance to different spaces and locations. This practice-based research is demonstrated through original and creative output. This creative output culminated with the performance piece *From The Jungle*.

Within this overall methodology of practice-based research, I am understanding 'practice as research' as a method that is a reflexive process of producing knowledge about performance, through the making of performance. Freeman uses the term 'practice as research' when defining a dynamic research methodology in terms of performance. And he uses it as a means of finding ways to develop performance practice.

> …a practice-as-research methodology that is dynamic is one that finds ways in which the constituent elements of performance can be usefully deployed beyond the known, it is likely that the process of discovery will evidence flexibility, awareness, responsibility, ethical consideration, creative and experimentation: these are staples rather than deviations in performance practice as research (Freeman 2010:129)

It is because of this emphasis on performance that I have chosen to utilise the term 'practise as research' as predominantly relating to furthering performance practices and ways of working within performance spaces. I have done this through the practical investigation of performance, inspired by the use of space in the longhouse, the form of the *ajat* and the *pantun*, and the use of Iban weaving. Through exploring the topics of identity, home and belonging within performance workshops, I produced new knowledge of how women performers stake claims of belonging in different and new performances spaces. This methodology, of practice as research, also relates to expanding space, the building of relationships with the audience and creating dynamic, shared spaces, which I discuss within this thesis' chapters.

This research has developed around my preoccupations in regards to form and content of storytelling and performance practices. The content and topics of investigation have been around identity and migration, and understanding ways in which home and belonging are created in diaspora spaces. In reference to form, I have developed methodologies based on my deep understanding of the importance of process and community within performance. My preoccupations have been: creating work that is accessible for people who are not usual theatre goers; to create new-ness by performing the same work in new spaces; to

perform in non-traditional western theatre spaces - places where eating, drinking and socialising can happen, where the performance space literally turns into a party space; and finally, to develop processes of rehearsing in front of audience.

My research began with fieldwork in Sarawak (research timeline: appendix p.186). In 2010 I conducted initial interviews with women in Sarawak, predominantly in the Kapit area. Kapit is the last town before the interior and is where members of my family have migrated. It also began with studied observations of the various Iban practices, in particular the *ngajat* and *pantun* in rural and formal settings, including performances at the Sarawak Cultural Village.

After the initial interviews and observations I began conducting focused practical workshops in London and Sarawak with professional performers, and performed pieces of work as performance-in-progress. I have characterised these workshops and performances as 'research projects'. These research projects are situated within the framework of practice-based research methodology (investigating theories, practically, around women's migration and migration of performance practices, through the themes of identity, home and belonging) and have used the method of practice as research (investigating performance practice influenced by Iban performance practice, through practical work).

These research projects were themed around questions of migration and investigating our (workshop participants') migration stories. Each research project addressed the four key aspects of my work: space (through the longhouse); movement (through *ngajat*); storytelling (through the *pantun*); and objects in space (through weaving), because these four aspects are interlinked.

Within the initial research projects I explored ways in which I could tell my migration story to different audiences and in different spaces. I then worked with UK performer Vera Chok; Vera and I began to look at repetition through the re-telling of our own stories, and re-telling each other's. This work developed

into two performances pieces. *Secrets, Stories and Un-Told Tales* developed the idea of trying on different identities through repetition and *Gawai* took the narrative of *Secrets, Stories and Un-Told Tales* and placed it in a community celebration space in London. I developed a methodology of unravelling personal life stories through words on post-it notes. This format developed throughout all the research projects.

With UK performers Catriona James, Grace Willis and Vera Chok, I further developed ways of discovering personal life stories and played with the idea of choice, change and repetition through the re-telling of our stories to each other. We investigated the feeling of trying on new skills, of the *ngajat* walk and the *pantun* opening cry, and explored how that felt within the space of a London rehearsal studio.

In Sarawak I worked with *ngajat* dancers from the Sarawak Cultural Village (SCV) and Madame Nyong, a professional *pantun* singer. I learnt and practiced these skills and discussed what these practices meant to the women performing them.

Further workshops in Sarawak, with both the SCV dancers and the UK performers, continued to develop ways of exploring our life stories and were a space to exchange skills and work towards creating performance practices that were based on a concept of the collective.

This thesis predominantly refers to the final performance piece, *From The Jungle*[3], an hour long performance presented at The Victorian Vaults in East London in May 2012, as this was the most complete piece of performance work, but it also references the various research projects that happened throughout the three years of the practical research.

[3] When quoting *From The Jungle* performance text or referring to *From The Jungle* I will reference where to find the relevant section by 'FTJ' and the page number within this thesis, for example: FTJ – [page number]

Practice-based research and postcolonial feminist theory: why practice-based research is particularly useful in investigating postcolonial feminist theory and women's migration

> I have come to know the body as the source of theatrical thought as well as a means of expression […] "the word is an act of the body" (Suzuki 1982,89)" (Schechner 1985:259)

It is with the quote in mind that I have approached researching migration through practice-based research. Some of the questions on migration are best investigated and answered through performance because they deal with the visceral, visual and physical notions of migration. Through performance and research based on the practical I was able to investigate and embody notions of migration.

Migration, building home and belonging are experiences that are visceral because they are about moving between spaces and locations, an action built on scent, taste, touch and nostalgia. Migration is personal, as well as social, political, academic; as Brah points out, 'my own biography is also a reminder of the collective history of South Asians in what use to be known as "British East Africa"' (Brah 1999:1). Inspired by post-colonial feminist literature, such as the work of Trinh (1989), Lugones (1987), Brah (2006), Mohanty (2003) and Narayan (1997), that place importance on life stories when investigating feminist theory, I have chosen to place myself at the centre of my research.

I have also chosen to place my migration story and myself at the centre of the research as one way to address issues of authenticity and appropriation. Practice-based research typically places self and one's own practice as central to the work. This can be complicated because 'self' can be interpreted in many different ways (by researcher, reader, participant), as Freeman (2010:155) addresses when discussing the problematic nature of practice-based and practice as research, particularly within the concept of reflective work. How I have established this concept of 'self' as centre is not to reflect solely on my life story and making it important above others but, (as I discuss in chapter three), I

have reflected and interrogated my listening, my understanding, and my positioning and preoccupations. Through doing so I am able to situate myself and question my positioning within the research and my position as a researcher. I can question and reflect on my multiple identities within the four years of research. Therefore I am also able to locate my practice within and beside other performance practices and academic literature. This can be done because of the active action of listening, telling and re-telling stories, a process that happened throughout all the research projects and within *From The Jungle*.

> Reflective research is determined by readings, writings, thoughts and actions, which are determined by their own creators' histories and influences (Freeman 2010:156)

Through looking at how my story fits into, relates to, and has been influenced by others' stories, I have been able to address my privilege within the research. I have been able to address my gaze, my interpretation, and my understanding of the stories I heard.

Practice as research and developing new performance practice

As I discuss throughout this thesis, the dialogue between the audience and the performer is ever developing and dynamic. This replicates the work that happens between migrant and native, a constant negotiation and re-negotiation of belonging and identity within diaspora spaces. Through practice as research (in the structures of my research projects) I have investigated this relationship; I have tried to find and create spaces, techniques and stories that look at, investigate and develop this relationship. *From The Jungle* demonstrated these investigations and further developed them with each new audience each night. Practice as research has given me tools to investigate the dynamic and ever-changing narratives of migrant women.

> Researchers will usually look for a methodology that allows for active dynamism throughout the period of investigation (Freeman 2010:129)

This is an investigation of personal importance, which has wider consequences in developing performance practices and understanding the world we live in and the discourses of home, belonging, migration and identity. This work sits within the context of post-colonial feminism and postdramatic theatre, where the ritual of performance and intersections of identity work together to create new ways of creating performance work.

To investigate how I have developed new performance practice I must also look at where I sit within current performance practice. This includes questions of both content and form, and is about situating myself beside those who investigate similar topics and who are interested in similar performance practices. Through positioning myself within a landscape of contemporary performance I am able to place my work in a critical and aesthetic context.

From The Jungle, both the final performance and the research projects, sit between the spaces of western performance structures and eastern community, ceremonial performance, and alongside current practitioners and companies who are looking for a place to belong in their diaspora space, along their journeys of migration.

Through performance poets, such as Warsin Shire (Young Poet Laureate of London), Malika Booker (Inaugural Poet in Residence Royal Shakespeare Company), and Nii Ayikwei Parkes, we hear the voices of migrants, we hear the stories of identities through lyrical performances and we hear the personal and the domestic and how that is important and political.

The content of the *From The Jungle* project is relevant to current trends within British theatre. Recent performances focusing on questions of migration, and identity range from the high profile play by Richard Bean, *England People Very Nice*, produced at the National Theatre in 2009 to the participatory Ice & Fire's *Asylum Monologues and Dialogues*. In 2013 a story of post colonialism, identity and nation building was presented at the Young Vic, through the story of poet and playwright Aime Cesaire's *A Season In Congo*, a play set in the Congo, performed to a Western audience in central London. This play crossed spaces

and locations to tell a story of changing identity, as did my various performance pieces in this project.

My work also sits beside that being produced by contemporary British companies - in which Talawa Theatre Company, Tara Arts and Yellow Earth Theatre are predominant - who are interested in investigating stories, voices and the faces of non-white, non-western performance, and who work towards finding a way to present "cross-cultural imaginings"[4].

It is alongside these stories that this thesis and this practical work sits, exploring a non-western space, on a western stage. It is exploring a non-western concept of identity within the western identity structures of the other and the migrant. It is exploring the visceral and visual space of the domestic on a public stage in a diaspora space. It is a project that sits beside other stories of non-western spaces and people negotiating new postcolonial identities, through storytelling.

This project also sits between the forms of performance poetry and the forms of immersive theatre[5]; for example You Me Bum Bum Train's Barbican sponsored performance in 2011, in Bethnal Green, involved audiences individually being wheeled through different sets and scenarios, where they interacted with actors to create unique scenes and performances. Immersive theatre looks to engage the audience through action, interaction and visually encompassing sets, whilst performance poetry tells a story of personal relevance, personal importance and directly communicates with its audience.

With the use of objects within my work, I have also drawn on some of the characteristics of visual art. Through the use of the loom I set up a canvas that was used to frame images. This work resonates with other visual artists that explore migration and identity through objects, such as the London-based, Mauritian artist Shiraz Bayjoo. Bayjoo features stills and film projected onto furniture. Through this presentation he has explored the identity of boys in the

[4] Taken from Tara Arts' definition of their work, from their website – "Global theatre for a local audience. Our small theatre offers a window onto a world of cross-cultural imaginings".
[5] Companies that use immersive theatre techniques include You Me Bum Bum Train, Duckie and Goat & Monkey. I discuss immersive theatre further in chapter three.

East End ('Bow Boys Archive' project at Whitechapel Art Gallery), where he weaves the past with the present, with images of political movements, such as the Brixton riots, projected on to domestic objects. He explores the postcolonial space of Mauritius in similar ways of past and present, political and personal, and the jungle weaves into the space of the domestic.

Because of my relationship to the visual arts, through objects in space, and my link to the personal and visceral through these objects, my work can be linked to performance art (as discussed in chapter 4). Throughout the research projects I have created space where objects are built and created - the loom within 'Secrets and stories and untold tales', the cooking within 'Gawai' (chapter 1, chapter 4) – and around those interactions with the objects stories have developed.

From The Jungle also draws on the historical western works of Brecht, Artaud and Schechner, who looked to the East to find ways to engage an audience. This project works with the visual notions of Lepage and Wilson to find ways of storytelling through space, light and objects. These practitioners are relevant to this project because I have studied performance in the West and have developed my work through engaging with these performance practitioners. Therefore it has been important to place myself within these western contexts to ensure that I am not simply or unproblematically appropriating the Iban culture, but can remain reflexive about how my preoccupations and training have influenced my gaze.

Through the content of the performance *From The Jungle* I have told the stories from my research, and I have investigated the interactions and intersections of identity that happen within diaspora spaces. Through the practice I have embodied some of the work that happens within diaspora spaces and found ways to develop concepts of agency for the performer/migrant and have developed an inclusive way of working and performing, through the idea of shared space. The performance environment of a shared space opens up the conversations between performer and spectator, which in turn give a sense of ownership and belonging within the performance space.

Sarawak: the backdrop to the research

Borneo is currently split into four states and three countries (appendix p.168). Sarawak and Sabah are part of Malaysia; Kalimantan is part of Indonesia; and finally there is the independent Sultanate of Brunei. Just those names evoke contrasting images that cross time and space: Brunei evokes wealth and its sultans; Kalimantan stirs a fear of the deepest darkest jungles; Sarawak with its stories of head-hunters and Sabah with its diving resorts.

Sarawak began with Kuching. It began with a deal between a Sultan and an Englishman who had a ship and cannons; a ship that promised to rid the Sultan's seaside of pirates/ the sea dayaks/ the headhunters of Borneo – now known as the Ibans. And the Englishman, James Brooke, did. He was rewarded with the area now knows as Kuching. James Brooke was so successful that eventually he gained more and more land, and thus the state of Sarawak was born and along with it the dynasty of the White Rajahs of Borneo. The Brooke family ruled Sarawak for three generations until after WWII, when Vyner Brooke handed reign over to the British Empire. In 1957, Sarawak and Sabah joined with the Federation of Malaya and became the independent country of Malaysia.

During the Brooke's reign the aim was to educate the natives, therefore missionary schools were set up throughout the region. As Sarawak was not officially part of the British Empire, the Brooke family had a certain autonomy when developing the area. This led to attention to the Iban as they were the biggest ethnic group and the most aggressive/disruptive and so demanded more attention, or so the story is to be believed, 'in modern Iban ethnohistory the White Rajas 'saved the Iban from themselves' by restoring order' (Postill 2008:210). The special task that James Brooke was given, by the Sultan of Brunei, was to stop headhunting within the Iban tradition, therefore the Iban became central to the identity of the region. With the White Rajahs came a more peaceful time, Ibans moved to areas controlled by the Rajahs for protection and peace (Royji 2007:54). The Kapit peace treaty in 1924, a much contested part of

Sarawak, brought further stability to Sarawak. Kapit is where my family is from, and is where the initial interviewees for this project were based.

'Sarawak is a multi-ethnic society in east Malaysia whose plural characteristics have been shaped and reshaped by ruling regimes and indigenous society alike' (Jeffery 2008:93). Jeffery goes on to talk about the current pluralism by first looking at the historical ethnic patterns and relationships[6]. The Chinese were primarily traders and business owners 'from the beginning of the rule, the Rajah [James Brooke] welcomed the Chinese to Sarawak, realised that a Chinese population was the surest key to economic self-sufficiency' (*ibid 2008*:96). The Malays were traditionally the traders with the indigenous tribes but this waned after the Chinese were encouraged to settle. It was through trade that inter-racial relations developed. But although the Brooke governments aimed for racial harmony they still operated a segregated ruling. Interracial marriages happened, but the Rajahs refused to recognise them (*ibid 2008*:96), citing political and legal issues and children were not recognised with "mixed-blood status" (*ibid 2008*:96)[7]. In contemporary Malaysia children follow the father's ethnicity and this is stated on the birth certificate.

Within the Brooke's regime the issue of religion became another segregating issue, and it still is. As Christians, the Brooke regime encouraged Christian missionaries, but 'he government insisted on its policy of non-interference with Muslim subjects' (*ibid*. 2008:97). This policy demonstrates the social and political status and power the Muslim 'subjects' had within Sarawak, and still have.

The Iban are still the biggest ethnic group in Sarawak and the majority of the Iban still do live in the interior. This is part of the reason they are not dominant within the current political or economic power structures. 'They [the Iban] have

[6] Jeffery's chapter in *Representation, Identity and Multiculturalism in Sarawak* is the best I've read so far in regards to giving a succinct over view of Sarawak's historical journey of becoming and is based on Jeffrey's research conducted 1998-1999 & 2000-2001. However, at times Jeffery gives a more positive impression of current relations between races and classes, which I do not entirely share. She states that "In intermarriages, the issue of religion among the non-Muslims is not significant" (2008:106). My research produced different findings; it is a delicate topic and not one that was explicit in interviews, but was gathered and expressed over time during the workshops.

[7] Anderson (1983: 14) points out that this was common within colonialism "European imperialists' preference for 'genuine' Malays, Gurkhas, and Hausas over 'half-breeds;, 'semi-educated native', 'wogs', and the like"

been marginalized from the politics of Sarawak since its formation, in 1970, of the Muslim-oriented cabinet' (Royoji 2007:23). The only tribe that converted to Islam in any significant numbers were the Melanau (which is 6% of the total population), the other tribes converted to Christianity[8]. Of the multiple indigenous tribes in Sarawak, the Iban make up 29% of the population. The Malay are not indigenous to Sarawak, they originally migrated from Sumatra; they make up 22% of the population and the second biggest racial group are the Chinese (who are mainly Buddhists), which make up 26%[9].

It is against the backdrop of Sarawak that I have developed *From The Jungle.* The Malaysian state has had multiple identities, and has shifted and changed as different rulers have staked their claims. Migration has been a constant story within its borders as tribes moved, migrated and settled. These ideas of internal migration, of links with changing identities and shifting borders have influenced my work and the reasons why I have chosen to work with the people I have.

The women involved in the project

After conducting my initial interviews in Kapit, Sarawak, I had to make decisions regarding further research. I decided that to create a rich and complex narrative I would work with other performers. As I was working with cultural practices, which are a part of the identity work of the Iban, working with performers enhanced the notions of performed identity. I felt that between performers there is a shared language, the concept of audience, and we would start from a place of equality within the research – women artists working together.

I decided that I also wanted to work with western trained performers as the west has been the basis of my training. I chose to work with three UK based performers because of the physicality in their performance style; we had worked together previously and so there were also good levels of trust between us. Because of this, I worked with these three performers for most of the time. Whether their real life stories made it into my research and/or final show was

[8] With intermarriage members of other tribes have converted to Islam. Names changed and Muslim practises are practised along side some indigenous customs, such as-.
[9] Figures from the Sarawak Tourism Board – official government agency

not important, but their life experiences added to the way they understood the topics I was investigating. Vera Chok is originally from Malaysia, from just outside Kuala Lumpur and has lived in the UK for 20 years. She is Chinese, but like many born and bred Chinese Malaysians, her languages are English and Bahasa Malay. We bonded over noodles, chicken curry and visa applications. Catriona James also has roots in Malaysia, with a Chinese Malaysian mother and a Canadian father. Like me, she straddles East and West in her identity and in the countries she has lived in. Grace Willis, a mixed-race London girl, a dancehall dance teacher, an actress, a mother of two boys and on the surface the opposite of a migrant but her story of change, home and belonging was akin to the stories I had been listening to in Sarawak. Grace also straddles multiple identities, both cultural and personal. Her migration was within the borders of a state, it was social and her space was one that was expanding. This idea of looking at migration as an expanding of space is one that I investigate in chapter one.

Whilst researching cultural and performance practices in Sarawak and migration stories of Iban women I decided to work with professional Sarawakian performers[10], this is why I chose to work with performers from the Sarawak Cultural Village (SCV) and Madame Nyong, a well-known *pantun* performer. These women had strong identities around being an artist, having a valued career through creative expression and being able to be self sufficient through their work. These were identities that I connected with and was the base to build from when developing our stories and our practice. These were identities that were shared when the UK performers met with the SCV performers and we developed a language between us of understanding and respect, as we exchanged skills and stories.

Some of the SCV performers I worked with were not Iban, but all were specialist dancers of Sarawakian indigenous dances, including the *ajat Iban*. These Sarawak women were migrants or 2nd generation migrants, all of them were

[10] My initial interviews were with women in the Kapit area, as this is where a lot of my family live and is the closest town to my family longhouse.

occupying the new space of urban Sarawak. Hamida Mohd[11] was the 'mother' of the group, a Melanau and was one of the original dancers of the SCV. She was the senior dance instructor, due to retire soon. Martina Ak Benedict Paul Jenis is of Bidayuh ethnicity; she is a senior dance instructor, had spent most of her career at the SCV. Then there was Maryline Simba Mani (Abot), who had been at the SCV for 10years, an Iban from Sarieki north of Kuching. She had not danced professionally before auditioning. Adeline Angel, also an Iban, born in Kuching, is a young mother who had been at the SCV for four years. Previously she had been a part time dancer at the SCV through her high school. The youngest was Florence Cindy, a Bidayuh from Bau a town not too far from the SCV, had started nine months prior; it had been her dream to work at the SCV since being part of a dance competition whilst at school. Abot and Flo both lived at the staff quarters, the other three commuted to SCV each day.

Mme. Nyong is a prominent figure within the professional *pantun* performance practice. She is from the same area my family are from. She travels extensively throughout Malaysia and the world with her work, her movements have agency as she moves through spaces and locations through the valued practice of *pantun*. She could be seen as a migrant Iban woman, with her home in the town of Kapit and her place of belonging in big urban cities, but she still has a strong link with her rural identity and calls herself a farmer[12].

Chapter overview

Home is many places and these women, performers from the island of Borneo to the isles of Great Britain, embodied the meaning of building and re-building, creating and re-creating. These women occupy the idea of multiple identities and work to create a place of belonging in the spaces and locations they find themselves in, developing, changing, growing and making choices everyday.

Each chapter asks particular questions, which have fed into my over arching

[11] Throughout this thesis I will be using the names of the performance artists I worked with (from the Sarawak and UK) that they requested, these are either stage names, real names or versions of their real names. They all gave permission for me to do so, and gave me their preferred names/ stage names.
[12] Interview: 3 September 2012

questions about the migration of practices. Chapter one deals with the idea of space and how the structure of the Iban longhouse influenced the way I have looked at movement through space. The key arguments within this chapter are that expanding space offers a way in which dialogue can be developed between audience and performer, and that migration is not simply leaving one space for another but that home is part of the diaspora space.

Chapter two looks at *ngajat*, the Iban dance and how a cultural practice is situated with ritual and ceremony and how that practice can migrate. I look at ideas of the exotic, of being active producers of our own identity and investigate authenticity through learning.

Through the *pantun* chapter I question how the form and content of the performed poetry of the *pantun* has affected my performance practice. This chapter investigates storytelling, and ways to re-tell others' stories. It is through listening I am able to re-tell, through the use of poetry I am able to re-tell, it is through understanding the new-ness that is created at each new re-telling and it is about the fact that I layer my story of migration on top and through others' stories.

Lastly, I examine Iban weaving, which is coined as 'women's war'. I have looked at how a skilled activity, which is connected to the spiritual, cultural and creative identity of Iban women and the Iban community, can migrate on to a performance space. I have understood the work of weaving as being the work of building home and belonging and have transformed and migrated this work on to a London stage. In the performance space the performers weave their place of belonging and home, with the help and engagement of the audience.

In summary, through my explorations of space, dance, poetry (storytelling) and weaving in the Iban performance and cultural practices I have developed a multisensory way of working that entwines domestic actions with performance, that links the visceral with the political and that forms a base from which I can continue to work, to push the boundaries of the multisensory within performance.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LONGHOUSE: crossing borders and thinking of home, a way to move through space

From The Jungle was a performance that looked at women's stories of migration. Migration is about moving through space, occupying new spaces, travelling between home and diasporic spaces and back again, building home and belonging in different locations. The space and form of the performance was as much part of the narrative as the content and the participants.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the Iban longhouse (a domestic structure that houses the whole village) has influenced my research project in general, and specifically the development of the performance *From The Jungle*.

The Iban longhouse was traditionally a structure built on stilts. Contemporary longhouses are no longer constructed in this way; they are now more permanent, as Iban are no longer a tribe that migrate together as a whole longhouse/village. Longhouses are now built with concrete and brick, but they are still communal dwellings where families live side by side. An average longhouse consists of 30 families, approximately 600ft in length. It is made up of family 'rooms', the *bileks*, lined up next to each other, with the *ruai* (covered veranda), running the length. Each *bilek* opens up on to the *ruai*. Running parallel to the *ruai* is the *tanju,* which is an outside veranda. Beyond the *tanju* is the path down to the riverside, the 'fortifications' and beyond (appendix p.169).

This set-up allows for a variety of movement through the spaces. From your *bilek* you could move out on to the *ruai*, then to the *tanju* down the stairs, to the fortifications, the riverbank and beyond. But you can also traverse the *ruai*, to visit friends and other families. You can enter the longhouse at either end of the *ruai*, as well as through doors along the *ruai*, which open up to the *tanju.* When visitors enter the longhouse for a celebration they enter on the left and walk the length of the longhouse, in single file, greeting the residents outside their *bilek*.

When they get to the end, they walk back to the centre of the *ruai*, where the welcoming ceremony usually takes place.

Within this chapter I am addressing the questions:

> How can I migrate the space of the longhouse to a performance practice and performance space?
>
> And, I am questioning concepts of home and origin; how does the rehearsal space (which is the home of performance) migrate to the performance space?

The architectural space of the longhouse affects the movement through space and creates dynamic relationships between performer and audience. Through breaking down the barrier between audience and performer and through the interaction between the two, which is seen on the *ruai* in a longhouse during a *Gawai* festival, a dynamic relationship can be created.

To investigate these questions I look at the complicated relationship migrants have with 'home', investigate ways of moving through space, and discuss how to become 'agents on the move' (Ryoji 2007:202) through the expanding of space. It is these questions of dynamisms and agency that I wanted to explore and develop through the practice of performance. The various research projects through the three years developed ways to move through space, to break down space and to cross borders into new spaces, and therefore how to tell and re-tell stories in these new locations.

In this chapter I will explore three spatial themes that I have been investigating throughout the project: 1) the limiting ways of viewing home and origin through the image of 'the mother', 2) the concept of crossing or not crossing borders, as epitomised by the experience of one of the performers at the UK border, and 3) the work that is necessary in order to create belonging in new spaces - how a story changes when taken from place to place. Through these themes and practices, we were able to break down the barriers between audience and

performer and build a new space with the assistance of the audience, as well as new ways to view 'home'. We were then able to work together to stake claims within a new space.

In the *bilek*: home, mother and the space of nostalgia

> *"My mother cooks curry in a sarong and shower cap.*
> *My mother has both my daughters.*
> *My mother is strong, caring, violent and beautiful*
> *My mother makes the best ice cream"* (FTJ – 148)

In the *bilek* the fire is burning, faint sounds of children sleeping, the smell of food cooking; this is the space of home, permeating through memories, stable, consistent and familiar. The shadowy figure of mother always present in the imagined place of home, permanently positioned within the space of nostalgia, perpetually stuck in one timeframe.

It is with this sensibility of the *bilek* that I am viewing the idea of home, and linking it with the idea of 'mother'. Throughout this project I have looked at the voice of 'mother' because an idea of mother that I have utilised can be of home and origin. This 'mother', within my performances, was often represented through a disembodied voice

> "you can go" (FTJ – 140);
>
> "would you like another cup of tea" "Close the door there's a draft coming in" (FTJ – 144/5);
>
> "how about your baby goes back with me to Sarikei" (FTJ – 147).

This positions the 'mother' as a place of origin, which in the diaspora space is a disembodied and imagined place. The space of home is one that gets defined in opposition to the diaspora (present) space, 'diaspora refers to a "dispersion from". Hence the word embodies a notion of a centre, a locus, a "home" from

where the dispersion occurs' (Brah 1996:181). Home and mother become a place of origin, a place of stability to move out and away from.

This idea of home gets utilised within postcolonial spaces; it gets used to define a nation, evoking a stable, static past. 'The fixing of the identity of places is a matter always of power and contestation rather than of actually existing authenticity… "the past was no more static that the present"' (Massey 2005:123). Within the space of colonialism the 'native' population could have felt visitors in their own land, governed by foreign laws, dominated by an outside culture and overseen by an unknown queen. Therefore Malaysia[13] was throwing off the yoke of colonialism and defining itself as new/different/ independent and unrelated to the empire. The new nation becomes the homeland, the motherland, that people can come back to, where they can be anchored to; a space that they can feel secure and safe within the boundaries of. It is 'their' space. The nostalgic motherland is created, looking back at a time before colonialism, when things were 'good', were theirs: 'nationalism is an important and dangerous manifestation of this temptation, in romanticizing "homeland"' (Young 2005:150).

Home becomes a place that is static in time and space, in opposition to the forward moving diaspora space. But this created place of origin is limiting and ultimately disappointing because it is neither static nor perfect. The act of migrating and leaving 'home' is linked with moving forward in opposition to 'going back home' (Massey 2005:124), which not only places the 'mother' as static, but also backwards, the past and the familiar. You are able to migrate and adventure because there is a base to 'go back to' when/if things don't go well. There is safety in travelling because there is a known 'home space'. But what happens when you go home and your 'mother' is not there. ("*Mum, can you hear me?! I shouldn't need to be here!"* FTJ - 145). Is it because she was never there in the first place? The disappointment of the mother/home not being the place you remember makes unstable the diaspora spaces you have ventured into.

[13] Peninsular Malaysia gained independence from the UK in 1957, the new nation was called the Federation of Malaya. In 1963 Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah joined with the Federation and a new country was created, and was named Malaysia. Two years later Singapore left to become a separate country.

Placing 'mother' in a static space, and constructing home as a place of stability and tradition, takes away the real life-ness of mothers. The mother becomes a monolithic identity, within which she has no agency to change and develop. Through the performance, I wanted to investigate the problematic notion of viewing mother through the frame of nostalgia, because as Massey points out in her story of disappointment of her mother making a new cake (Massey 2005:124), it can be done without thinking, without realising the damaging nature of the action.

> Nostalgia constitutively plays with notions of space and time… when nostalgia articulates space and time in such a way that it robs others of their histories (their stories), then indeed we need to rework nostalgia (Massey 2005:124).

To bring home and 'the mother' into a space of the present and diaspora, it is not about changing spaces but rather looking at the different voices of home, the different voices of the mother that occupy all the spaces within which the migrant travels.

Through the story of a daughter returning to her mother (FTJ -145) we see the disappointment when she realises that her idea of home is no longer where her mother is. The daughter returns to her mother for comfort, because her diaspora home has collapsed with the end of a marriage. The protagonist goes back to her mother expecting her to perform the home of the protagonist's childhood. But her mother has moved and is not willing or does not realise that she is expected to perform those rituals and patterns. And so, the protagonist's space of 'home' no longer exists, time has changed. This leads to disappointment and anger. The protagonist feels her mother is not listening to her, not being a 'good' mother by refusing to replicate her imagined idea of mother/home.

Within workshops we wrote letters to our mothers. We also brainstormed what 'mother' meant to us and discovered the many different ideas of mother -- mother as a dangerous entity, mothering as a beloved role, mothering as an undesired role, mother as a comfort, mother as home. I wanted to investigate

the different ideas of mother, including the uncomfortable, less common images of mother and home. The images of home that are not safe, and the ideas of being faced with a decision and choice you hadn't planned or anticipated rather than desiring to be a mother and making choices in life to lead you to that ("I want to step out of your cycle, familiarity is not safety to me" FTJ- 139; "and so I chose you" FTJ- 152). And, finding love, identity and a space to be an individual within those unconventional concepts. This helps break down the monolithic notion of mothering and the simplistic identity of mother. It allows for a full bodied, fleshed-out identity of a woman. It lets the notion of woman-ness not just be tied to mothering.

My nostalgia seeped into this project; my notion of home was stamped through the words spoken by others across the years of research. Through cooking I wafted my link of home across the performance space into the audience. Curries and apple crumbles made it into the mouths of different audiences, in various performance spaces. The names of foods, the detailing of particular dishes and drinks of comfort, and stories focused on eating - food was the poetry of my nostalgia, and space of home and belonging. Through food I found the different ways to look at home and 'mother' – my mother who occupies both the spaces of New Zealand and Sarawak through cooking, who despite her western location, built a *bilek* of East and West.

On the *ruai*: the meeting of borders and Abot's story

> *"I was too scared and had tension cause I don't know why they don't believe me. I just want to get out from that room and want to hug someone so I can cry."* (FTJ – 158)

The *ruai* is the border of the private world of the Iban; it is where a village meets with guests from the outside world. In this space the outside world is welcomed; it has been invited. But what happens when the visitor is not welcome?

My original plan was to have one Iban performer in the final performance*, From The Jungle*. Maryline Simba Mani (known as Abot) travelled from Malaysia but was turned

back at Heathrow by the UKBA. Through the deporting of Abot, at the UK border, I want to look at how migration is about the spaces you are not allowed to enter, as much as it is about the spaces that you are, and how identity is read at borders. At the UK border Abot met with resistance, she was not invited on to 'the *ruai*', but turned away at the door. Her identity was perceived as that of someone who needed to be questioned. She was deemed as outside the norm and therefore problematic. This incident was then included in the *From The Jungle* performance.

Through looking at Abot's encounter at the UK border we can understand what happens to the post-colonial body outside of the post-colonial state. Abot's story began with the complicated identity of being a dancer and what that meant. This incident has to be looked at through the meeting of space and time and the concepts of the foreigner, the dancer, the woman: the 'other'.

When writing *From The Jungle* it became clear that a lot of Abot's stories resonated with me. They addressed concepts I had been investigating around home, belonging and negotiating the intersections of various identities within a diaspora space, such as meeting new people, different customs and cultures. It therefore felt appropriate that she became part of the rehearsals, the devising and performance processes of *From The Jungle*. I had begun to work on the idea of featuring an *ajat* (see chapter two for details of the *ajat*) within the piece and as none of the UK performers are trained *ajat* performers it would have been inappropriate for us to dance it. I couldn't afford to fly all the SCV dancers over, but I felt that, due to her level of English and her desire to travel, asking Abot to come to London would be a good idea, beneficial and exciting for both of us. Abot was thrilled and the SCV worked with her to organise the details at their end. Malaysians do not need a visa to enter the UK and as she was not here to work, but rather volunteering to help a friend[14], it had been recommended that she would not need a visa. After hours of questioning Abot and myself, the decision came down to the UKBA officer not believing in our friendship. This assessment was gained from how often we had interacted, how we met and the project itself[15]. The questions asked investigated the difference in social class between us, the concepts of 'artist' and

[14] We had agreed that I would pay her living expenses whilst here and that SCV would continue to pay her weekly wages, as they felt the experience would benefit her as a performer.
[15] My website explaining my research was deemed "too professional" to be something that was not 'professional'. A website I built myself, via iWeb.

dancer, and the meaning of truth and friendship. What was on trial was, firstly, how we could have crossed our social class borders to gain friendship and, secondly, how could a friendship be gained through artistic workshops? The truths of the UKBA were not mine, nor Abot's truths, but our truths were not important in that space and time.

The feminine, post-colonial, non-white body is not constructed around the idea of agency and movement. Abot's identity as a tourist with limited funds, limited English, unrecognisable points of identity (what type of dancer?), proved too much for the UKBA to read and understand within the language that they were trading in. These did not fit into a western concept of an independent, professional, working woman, which is an identity Abot associates with herself, and which is how I was addressing her by inviting her to come to London. Instead, she was read simply as a 'third-world woman'. Her body was not seen as subject, but rather she can be read as a victim.

> …a cross-cultural singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy, or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of what I call the 'third-world difference' – that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries" (Mohanty 1988:65)

I chose to tell Abot's story of the UK border through her words. I asked Abot to tell me her story of the journey, starting with "I took two planes". She chose to predominantly write about how the meeting at the border made her feel. I chose to have the audience read out her words, verbatim. I wanted to highlight the otherness she had felt. The audience members read out words that were not familiar to them, in a syntax that was not their own. This created a stilted, difficult performance. It reflected the uncomfortable-ness Abot felt in the space of the border. This was then contrasted against the rhythmical, easy voice of the UKBA officer;

> *"Welcome to the UK. So, I see you are a dancer? | How exotic! | A dancer? | A dancer | From Malaysia | Malaysia | How exotic! | A dancer? | A dancer | From Malaysia? | Malaysia | How exotic!"* (FTJ – 158)

Lugones articulates the idea of the norm as spaces within which you are at ease, 'by being a fluent speaker in that "world"' (Lugone 1987:397). Abot was in a world where she was not fluent in the language. She was in a space where her voice became stilted and so she was sitting outside the norm and being constructed as Other - dangerous in her unknown-ness.

Within the performance space of *From The Jungle* it was important to show Abot's presence; she became an absent presence. It became a space in which Abot's presence was welcome, even if her physical self was not there. Migration is also about acknowledging those that are not there; the family left at home are also a part of the diaspora space.

I placed a sarong on stage, in a spotlight, to acknowledge Abot's continued presence in the development of the piece, as well as the presence of others who had helped create the *From the Jungle* journey. In her article on the migration of Moroccan women, Salih discusses how two homes (Italy and Morocco) are represented in one space through objects and food: 'women articulate and give meaning to the spaces they inhabit through the objects they bring back and forth' (Salih 2001:667). The sarong is a representation of my Iban-ness that I take backwards and forwards, and around the world, wherever I go. It is also the costume of Abot on stage and part of her physical identity as a dancer. Therefore I am articulating meaning, of absence and of home, through the use of the sarong.

Due to changing lighting states this sarong was not always obvious, it became 'hidden in plain sight', and to some of the audience it was not visible at all. This was an important and deliberate point, as migrants are often the hidden faces and voices in diasporic spaces (the idea of hidden faces is discussed further in chapter 4). Abot's voice was not heard; it was hidden by the UKBA officer as he perceived/created her identity and then dismissed her. This was done in a calm tone, to be understood as 'being reasonable' and 'just following the law'; this takes away the ability and the voice to protest and be angry, because you would be deemed as unreasonable. The UKBA officer was following a law that constructs identity through a western eye and space, and does not relate or allow for an alternative non-western construction of identity.

In another part of the performance which I had wanted Abot to be part of[16] (FTJ- 4), I gave Abot's lines to the audience, while the performers shared the other lines. This became an inclusive performance in which the performers and the audience shared a space. The lines were exchanged on either side of the performance/spectator line. The audience, in their role of surrogacy, reflected my desire to have Abot as part of the creative side of the final piece of my project. Together we (audience and performers) worked to create a story, and each night it was different, depending on who read the lines, and how. Sometimes an audience member forgot, and a member of the production team would read the lines. This sense of surprise and uncertainty as to what might happen is one which the performers were familiar with, as play and anticipation had been a central part of the process throughout the rehearsals and workshops. It was a moment of missing Abot from the space of our rehearsals; a moment of us creating an imagined *ruai*, within which Abot was there too.

From the *tanju*: agents on the move, creating belonging in new spaces

> "*My eyes are so dark, but my skin is so white, that really, I could be anything. If only I spoke something other than English; Arabic, Italian, Spanish with a Mexican accent! Or even my native tongue. Then I could really disappear, be a complete chameleon*…" (FTJ – 161)

From the *tanju* I walk, I run, I dance into the beyond. I am an agent on the move. Moving through spaces, places and picking up pieces of me as I go, creating pockets of home in every new location. I expand my space, simultaneously occupying Sarawak, New Zealand and London. In my privilege of being from nowhere and everywhere I crisscross borders, get questioned but ultimately accepted. In painful contrast to Abot's journey, I am read as different but similar, holding a passport with cultural capital, an accent of a recognised place, an education in understanding border nuances.

[16] This was not one of her personal stories, but I had wanted to develop it with her, and possibly incorporate Iban and Malay into the re-telling.

Like Anzaldua ('as a mestizo I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover'), I too have points in my identity that are recognisable and places I can belong (Anzaldua 1987:80). I am open to construction (Lugones 1987:395) for whichever world I am standing in. The UK border agent looks at my passport and tells me how beautiful he/she found New Zealand and how like their hometown in Wales it is. A group of Iban women in Kapit named all the features of my face that were Iban and proclaim my Iban-ness, regardless of my lack of the language. I can stand and wait to be constructed and I can construct my identity to what works best for me in that particular space – to be different or to be recognisable.

> Arriving in a new place means joining up with, somehow linking into, the collections of interwoven stories of what that place is made. (Massey 2005:119)

Like my Iban forebears, I am a migrant who adapts to the environment; building, planting, nurturing and then moving on to begin again. Like my Iban cousins I am a migrant who calls more than one place home. My story becomes interwoven with each location, and each location becomes a part of my identity. I also bring past spaces into new locations. Memories and identities that were created and developed in previous situations get utilised in different ways and/or get expressed in new ways. These are intersections of my identity that are articulated for each new audience, and I have a choice in how they get presented. A recurring theme within my project was therefore to explore this interaction between choice and identity. One such exploration involved wheeling a loom through East London to see how we and/or observers reacted to weaving in the different places (streets, cafes, church gardens) (discussed further in chapter four) Another involved the process of choosing what names we wanted to use in workshops and within our journeys on stage for *From The Jungle* (FTJ -159).

The theme of multiple, intersecting identities was also written into the script, as stories I had heard came back to ideas of identities articulated differently

depending on space. One story tells of an Iban woman who converts to another religion when marrying and the complications that followed when later divorcing with children (FTJ- 155). Another story is about a dancer making life choices: be with a man from another culture and be disowned *or* chose what's best for her child, which she understood as being with her family (FTJ - 152); this is where the private matter of family becomes a social matter as old traditions meet these new choices. We see (FT - 154) a grandmother who does the work of looking after family and home as well as bringing in income - a common scenario with parents working away (or longer hours) and childcare being too expensive for the average urban family.

These stories all show women working within intersections of different identities. This can create an unstable identity but as these scenes show, these are moments of choice. They also articulate the power and agency of the women. An Iban woman may publicly identify as being Muslim, so that her children may live with her after the divorce, but will return to her parents' longhouse at *Gawai* to celebrate the harvest festival in and amongst Iban rituals. Her identity as a Muslim gives her power and control within the location of the law, but her identity as an Iban ensures her belonging within the location of the longhouse. Through the constructions of these public and private spaces and negotiations of these identities, we are able to see individual agency – 'how these signifiers slide into one another in the articulation of power' (Brah 1996: 185).

From my initial interviews it was clear that Iban women did not self-identify as being migrants. Both their urban household and their longhouses were considered 'home'. This echoes Ryoji's findings and I have become attached to his expression 'agent on the move' (Ryoji 2007:202) when describing Iban and migration. It would be easy to see the contemporary Iban as victims: of a modern world where they are continuously framed as rural, 'warriors' (see chapter two), an indigenous jungle tribe, relegated to second-class natives through the *bumiputera* policy (Ryoji 2007:23)[17] and therefore ill equipped to

[17] This policy was created to benefit the native people after colonialism. *Bumiputera* translates literally as 'son of the soil'. This phrase defines the idea of 'native' as one that is built on people who are linked to the land. This excludes any idea that Chinese and Indian are native to Malaysia, regardless of place of birth; identity gets linked to origin and ancestry. Within West Malaysia this means the Malay and Orang Asli people, within Sarawak this includes the non-

deal with a fast moving, contemporary Sarawak. Instead the phrase 'agents on the move' highlights the agency of moving, the agency in adapting, the agency in creating multiple homes and re-creating home and identity in new spaces. Ryoji explains the Iban's sense of migration as not one of leaving one space for another, but rather of expanding space. It is a sense of including different spaces and different identities. This opens up the ability of developing a dialogue with those already in the spaces you move into, and of having the ability to choose how your identity is constructed in these new spaces. This means that you never really step off the *tanju*; you can always be on the outside veranda of home.

Dynamic flow: the performer moves through the *ruai*

Drawing on from Ryoji's idea of agents on the move and expanding space is the concept of 'dynamic flow', a performance methodology I developed in response to the Iban's sense of migration, home and belonging.

'Dynamic flow' refers to the ideas of a shared space between audience and performer. Each expands their space into the other so that the line between them is blurred and crossable. Massey (2005) explores the ideas of space being a trajectory of stories, where different stories meet each other in new spaces. When trajectories are crossed, the stories are exchanged and shared. When experiencing multiple trajectories, space and mobility become multifaceted, where no one direction is favoured or normalised and multiple paths are acknowledged.

By expanding, sharing space and stories, you give agency to the voices and bodies that move through the space. This means that both audience and performer have agency, a dialogue can happen and therefore there is room for something new to be created at each new performance. Expanding of space allows for non-linear mobility: the ability to return, re-trace, re-build and re-tell stories. This is a multifaceted way of moving that supports an idea of fluid, continuous and dynamic engagements with space. Repetition and re-telling was

Muslim indigenous groups as well, such as the Iban. As West Malaysia is the place of power and central government, this translates in practical terms as the non-Muslim indigenous tribes of Sarawak being "relegated to second-class *bumiputera* status" (Ryoji 23:2007).

central to my project, culminating in the performance of *From The Jungle*, where recurring sentences, themes, images appear – images projected on different looms, stories in different parts of the space, told to different members of the audience, and by different performers. I have termed this way of moving through space, acknowledging the trajectories in play and the idea of expanding space, as 'dynamic flow'.

Through practice as research, through setting up workshops around the idea of expanding space, I was able to develop the idea of dynamic flow for performance. In the workshops in Sarawak we developed ways of telling our life stories through points in space; each new point was a location where we had lived. Moving through these locations across the floor (appendix p.167) physically showed our spatial journeys. When we could move through these points without using the post-it notes to remind us, we added statements about ourselves and our lives – "I am the head of the family", "I love my dad's cooking" (FTJ – 146). In the workshop we moved through the space on these 'location journeys' and when we crossed paths we acknowledged each other, through eye contact, smiles and saying our names. This provided moments of laughter and connection between the performers. I used these statements as ways to interject a change of pace and path within *From The Jungle*. I used these statements gathered from various, similar workshop exercises to create moments in the piece in which the performers communicated with each other and the audience directly (FTJ – 146,148,155). Watching the performers move through space, negotiate themselves around each other, and the physicality of repeating the locational journeys (FTJ – 159) over and over again, was amusing and gave the performers an opportunity to acknowledge and share laughter as they projected the lines/places/statements/ names out to the spectators. Each time was different and told a different story.

Space is ever changing 'where flows and territories are conditions of each other' (Massey 2005:99). As a performer moves through a space they are met with different boundaries and territories - the audiences' space, the back stage, front of house – and they meet with each other. I wanted to create moments in the piece that broke with the structures of individual stories to create a new

trajectory for the performers, the narratives and the audience. These moments increased as the show went on, culminating in the shared curry.

Creating non-linear narratives reflected the non-linear way in which you can move through the *ruai.* The *ruai* has multiple entry points, at each end and across the front. The *ruai* can be traversed and crossed; you can move through it, or stop, pause, take a seat and have a chat with your neighbour. It is a space where guests/audience and longhouse members/performers cross paths and circle around each other. Moving through the *ruai* space is also reflective of the migratory space and trajectories the Iban take – to and from urban and rural, circling back, pausing and traversing, meeting people on the way.

Govan, Nicholson & Normington (2007:153) argue that the complex relationships audience and performers have with space and place are cultural, aesthetic and personal. In this way, through dynamic flow, expanding space and creating non-linear narratives I am opening up the space to be transformative and changeable, reacting to individual audience and performers.

From The Jungle told individual stories in various locations of the performance space. The order of the stories told within *From The Jungle* was arranged to slowly break down this concept of linear storytelling and gently surprise the audience so that by the time we had reached the section to share curry with our audience, they would feel welcomed to join us and not feel forced into the participation of it. The aim was to turn them into our guests and not simply an 'audience'.

The audience (guest's) engagement in the space

The set up of the Victorian Vaults, the venue for *From The Jungle*, reflects the different areas of the Iban longhouse. I wanted to achieve the following distinctive spaces for the audience to experience different ways of engaging, behaving and enacting identities, related to the different spaces of the longhouse. These three spaces were:

- Pre-show space (riverside to the *tanju*): welcoming area

- Show (*ruai*): formal seating arrangement
- Party (moving between *ruai* and *bilek*): informal, sharing, entertainment, eating

Audience members walked off a busy street in central east London, just on the outskirts of the City. Through a nondescript black door, on the side of an office building, into a scruffy corridor, where they were greeted by a smiling front-of-house person. They walked down the stairs along white painted brick walls in need of another coat of paint. There was a printed sign on the wall saying "illegal drugs are not tolerated in this venue"[18]. The stairs led into a room with bare brick walls, long and narrow, with alcoves. Front-of-house staff welcomed them into our *tanju*; there were nibbles, sweets and jugs of Pimms, candles, cushions and draped muslin, to make the place feel warm. But there was also a feeling of imprisonment – a darkened room, unfamiliar surroundings, a closed space, a holding area? I wanted this duality so that the audience never quite felt safe or relaxed and would be constantly assessing and re-assessing the space they were in; this would also accentuate the familiarity of the performance space when they entered it. The audience knew they were coming to a performance, but this wasn't a normal theatre foyer or bar area. The front-of-house staff announced the performance was about to start and the audience walked through an alcove onto our *ruai*. Here Vera and I, dressed in formal Malaysian attire, greeted them. We conversed and took curry spices that some audience members had brought, and those that hadn't, we handed them ribbons to write on later. It was with relief that some of audience members noticed chairs when they walked through the alcove - a clearly marked performance area/stage, with performers on stage. This was a space they recognised, a space they *knew* how to behave in.

I wanted the audience to feel able to enjoy the stories unfolding in front of them.

> The performer-audience relationship represents a continual process of negotiation and mapping a sense of location and dislocation. Spatial practice are, therefore, often reconfigured and unfixed in performance,

[18] This space is usually used for rave parties.

> and how place is conceived, lived and perceived becomes redefined. (Govan, Nicholson & Normington 2007:153)

Therefore it was important for me that there were points of familiarity about the space. My relationship with Sarawak is multifaceted - touch, taste, smell and strong visuals. I wanted the audience to *see* 'my Sarawak'; therefore they needed to be still, facing a stage to view projections. By setting up the space in this familiar way we were able to break down the barriers, territories and borders by slowly opening up and expanding the space. This happened through lighting, such as lighting the audience, encompassing the stage and the audience, spotlights to exclude performers and/or audience. It happened through the interaction between performers and audience, with Vera offering rice wine, all of us dishing up curry and rice. The smell of cooking curry wafting through the space, growing stronger as the show went on and the voice overs that went across the space. The space felt interactive and alive with plants and a fish on the audience tables, and eventually the audience could taste the curry and touch the looms. The space became more and more familiar to the audience members, evident by the fact that they chose to eat the curry and engage with the looms. They were invited into our space and not forced into an unfamiliar space.

At none of the performances did the audience need to be persuaded to join the performers on stage to share food, whilst the storytelling continued around them. Nor did they need encouragement to weave their stories into the 'Blue Loom' (see chapter 4). This was emphasised by the fact that some audience members felt comfortable enough to stay in their seats. They were able to choose how and when to interact and engage with others and the surrounding. As Lehmann discusses postdramatic theatre, he explores ways in which theatre can transform and how audience are part of the imagining and re-imaging of the performance space. Lehmann references Robert Wilson's work and describes Wilson as leading the audience through the 'stage space'. He explains that Wilson does this through dividing his space into strips, with action taking place in 'different depths' (Lehmann 2006:79). This provides agency to the audience as they are left to construct and imagine whether they are 'existing within a shared context' (*ibid* 2006:78). By creating different spaces that become

available to the audience as they progress through the show, from front of house to eating food, I developed this idea of offering 'strips' of space, and created a dynamic to the flow and movement through the space. The audience members were meeting new intersections of people and patterns in new ways, and were able to navigate their relationship with these.

This idea of 'opening the space' through the use of 'strips' is something I have explored through my practice. For example in a version of my monologue (FTJ - 160) I performed in April 2010, I progressed across the performance space towards to the audience, as I did the lighting opened up the stage, in strips. When the lighting lit the entire performance space, spilling on to the audience, I was able to improvise and addressed the audience, developing the performance depending on their reaction. It felt like we had slowly been introduced to each other and so there was a sense of familiarity and connection.

The longhouse is also divided into strips of space. Longhouse dwellers move out from the 'strip' of the private/*bilek*, to the strip of *ruai*, where the outside world meets the village and intermingles, to the *tanju* and beyond. Guests move in the opposite direction. This creates moments and places to cross, meet and interact, expanding the space into each other

When looking at how space is divided we also begin to understand how the movement through the divided spaces affects relationships. With the front-of-house offering drinks and nibbles and then leading the audience through to the performance space I am setting the spectators up as being guests and therefore outsiders. But this is in opposition to the content of the show; the content was about performers telling stories of migration and identity. By seating the audience members at tables, I am creating the audience as a static mass, against the moving performers. I am framing the audience as the norm, the 'constant' and the 'native', to the performers' outsider, fluid, migrant identity. The identity of the audience as visitors at the beginning, when they occupy the pre-show (*tanju*) space, changes once they sit in the show (*ruai*) space. This creates the borders between performer/migrant and spectator/native as constant and static. The performers move through space and are policed by the inactive

spectators, who have the choice to accept, acknowledge and engage with the performer, or to reject what they see. It is the performer who has to do the work to convince them (Hall 2004:05). The performer is viewed as the other, vulnerable in the spotlight. Because of the ability to move through space, the performer is on the periphery, the minority opposite the mass of the audience.

Within the longhouse, guests are encouraged to move freely through the different spaces; they are the spectators to the *Gawai* festivities. But, they are also the 'other' within a family/village environment. When looking at the audience at the SCV it was similar to that of a guest at *Gawai* - they always changed, but the performers stayed the same. The performers look out on to a migrant community, moving through their space and on. Audiences are a community, there for a brief period of time. They feel the right to be there as they have been invited, through the money they paid at an entrance or a booking office (the border into this imagined world of the theatre or the SCV). And so the two groups meet in a space and stake a claim to belong. Within my Victorian Vaults longhouse, the audience were both migrant community, invited in for a night to share our space, *and* they were the norm and the constant against which the stories were told.

These contradictions and changing relationships are reflective of a diaspora space, where a sense of belonging gets created and re-created, and where accepting and inviting play a part in creating a shared space. By looking at diaspora spaces as expanding spaces, there is room to build relationships and a sense of belonging and difference for multiple parties. There is a dynamic relationship with the space and the bodies within them. The different ways in which it is possible to move through the longhouse, such as the ways in which the guests on the longhouse *ruai* and the audience of the SCV moved, all influenced my use of performance space. It was my desire to find a way to break down space and borders, to find a way for the space to expand. By focusing on the ability to move through space, both groups - performers and audience - were able to stake claim and agency and cross borders.

Placing my story of migration: from the *bilek*, to the *ruai*, the *tanju* and beyond

Stories of migration are wrapped up in many places and locations. It was important for me to develop a process of telling these stories that also involved movement. Stories are a collection of happenings situated in time and space, a sphere of a multiple trajectories (Massey 2005:119). As I discussed in the section 'From the *tanju*', when migrating to a new space you bring your narrative to and combine it with the stories of that location that are already established. The idea of movement within the longhouse, from the *bilek* and into the outside world, crosses many borders and crosses other people's paths. This pattern of weaving through space, taking your story with you, was replicated throughout this project.

I placed myself at the centre of the research to experience and embody the ideas of migration through my migration story (FTJ – 160). I was able to investigate the vulnerability of migration; I could embody the work of building home and belonging in different spaces and locations. As mentioned, this research began with a monologue - my journey of migration from Sarawak, to New Zealand and London. I took my story into different spaces, with different audiences, and investigated how the story changed with each new location. This monologue was the 'home' for this project, and I had to find ways for it to belong in new spaces.

I originally performed this monologue in 2007 in a crowded back room of an east London bar, on a Saturday afternoon. The audience were a mix of friends, members of the public who were interested in seeing theatre, and the party crowd who were still up from the night before. It was a tough audience, a dark room, minimal lighting, I stood on a chair in the middle of the audience and delivered this piece.

I performed it in a studio, in 2010, at my university, as a dance piece with voice-over and especially composed music based on the *ngajat* rhythms. I have performed sections of it at two conferences in 2011 (at a feminist conference at

the University of Edinburgh and at London Metropolitan University's postgraduate conference). I have performed it within a performance entitled 'Secrets, stories and untold tales', at Bethnal Green Working Man's Club, and of course in *From The Jungle*. This piece has become my story that I re-tell along my trajectories through space. I take it wherever I go, to re-do in each new space I find myself in, to find a place to belong within the different performance spaces. The performance of the piece changes with each new rendition. It moves and travels alongside me, "*well, you never know where you could wake up tomorrow morning*" (FTJ -162).

In each new space I had to develop a different way of engaging each new audience. The first performance of that monologue was in a space where people were unsure what to expect. Those who had arrived knowing it was 'theatre', mainly supportive family and friends, recognised that it was an unusual space for performance to happen. Those who had happened upon the event were neutral but open to an experience. Then there were those who walked in to the bar, expecting the space to be a certain (party) environment. This space might be equated to the 'outside' spaces of the longhouse, the borders of an 'Iban space', and a national and international place. It might be like the space from the *tanju*, down to the riverside, into the towns, on to the stage of the Sarawak Cultural Village and beyond. On the *tanju* at *Gawai*, guests come from many places - fellow Ibans from neighbouring longhouses, family members returning, and non-Ibans, invited via multiple routes. Each has different expectations.

Within the east London bar space, I wanted to experiment with storytelling in a space where there were multiple expectations, where there was no line between performance space and audience space. This challenged the way I told my story, which parts I emphasised, such as what I chose to wear (black hot pants, a t-shirt and boots) reflected the space, so that I could engage the audience through a familiarity of dress.

When developing this monologue in 2010, I rehearsed in a dance studio and I came to the point of undressing. As I re-visited the piece I became interested in the parts of the monologue that were about creating and re-creating my identity

in new spaces, *"And so I donned my loincloth like they all do. Vintage boots and top shop jewellery"* (FTJ-161). This felt like undressing and re-dressing, and about feelings of vulnerability. I was able to address notions of vulnerability because I knew that I was going to be performing the piece in the dance studio I had been rehearsing in, which was a space of 'home'. This studio was one I had known for eight years. It was familiar. It was the *belik,* the family space - a relaxed, comfortable, 'inside' place. Through combining music, rehearsals and performance in a dance space, and knowing who my audience were going to be (invited guests, university students, friends and family), I was able to develop the piece in this way.

Each space has its own personality, its own depth. I felt the need to emphasis different parts of my monologue within each space, such as "drums, smoke, sex and sweat" in the east London bar, and the desire to establish my difference/exotic-ness in the Working Men's Club, with *Gawai*[19] festivities as a backdrop. 'Equating space with depthless instantaneity deprives it of any dynamic' (Massey 2005:99). It is this idea of dynamic space that allows the performance to change, transform and develop. Each space has a history within which I am weaving in my history.

When repeating this monologue at the Feminist Futures conference in Edinburgh in the summer of 2011, I undressed again, but when performing it at the London Met postgraduate conference in November 2011, I chose, in a split second, not to disrobe. The combination of the cold concrete walls of the seminar room, the November chill in the air, the quizzical, almost hostile, response from the audience all made for a space that I, as a performer, felt uncomfortable in. This ability to decide how a space felt, from the interactions with audience and the specificity of the day was carried over into *From The Jungle* – 'the actor transformed himself in the presence of his audience who experience this transformation simultaneously with the actor' (Mike Alfred interview with Peter Hulton 1979). Vera chose who to share her rice wine with, Catriona chose where and how to sit during the curry sections, and Grace chose

[19] I framed the performance as a *Gawai*, as it was *Gawai* season. I invited friends to 'our house'. See appendix p. 174 for invitation to the event.

what to write on her post-it notes each night at the beginning of the show, depending on how she felt that day and her surroundings.

Conclusion

When investigating the space of the longhouse and understanding the ways in which to move through space and how to occupy diaspora spaces, it became about the people in the space. To understand space is to understand how people interact within the place and location. It is to understand how stories and identities intersect and build on each other.

Through the investigation of expanding space and creating inclusive ways to occupy space, we were able to build relationships and connections across the borders of audience and performer. This creates the idea of communities and collectives working together to create meaning. But, as we move through space it was also important to discover when we couldn't move through it. Discovering the structure and boundaries of spaces, and negotiating that relationship was also part of the performance work - deciding when to have a border between audience and performer and when to break those borders.

Understanding space and the structure of place was also about needing to find times to stop moving through it. My full monologue (FTJ – 160) became a moment of stillness after all the action of the locational journeys; a moment for me to specifically connect with the audience and firmly place myself at the centre of the piece, and the centre of the research. The stage lighting grew as the monologue went on; eventually including the whole playing stage and audience. The monologue's narrative journey ended in present time and the diaspora space of London, where my multiple identities collided. And so time and space come together to be in the present, which opened the space up for:

"My mother makes curry in a shower cap and a sarong.

Curry time!" (FTJ – 162)

CHAPTER TWO

TO NGAJAT: a body in space

You dance, light, feet soft.
Even though you are now on a stage, with bright lights in your eyes.
Take the bamboo house with you. (FTJ – 150)

Ajat (noun) dance. Ajat Iban - the Iban dance
Ngajat (verb) to dance. No past, future, present tense. I/They/We/You dance - I/They/We/You ngajat. I am dancing - I ngajat.

The *ajat Iban* is the traditional dance of the Iban people. It has very particular stylistic features, it feels grounded, the feet are flexed and the arms and hands move through spaces lightly. The movements are circular. The hands and arms move in circular motions around the body, the feet are turned out, ready to take the dancer around. The space the *ajat Iban* occupies is often small, so that the dance can be performed in any space, such as amongst a large group of people, on a crowded *ruai* at *Gawai*.

The *ajat Iban* came out of ceremony and rituals, the most important is *Gawai*, the rice harvest festival. Rice farming is a way of life, a ritual activity and the rice is an animated "spirit" (Davidson & Sutlive 1991:161), therefore to work within the performing arts of the Iban is to incorporate the idea of rice farming and the rituals associated with it.

'Rice is associated with women as "custodians of fertility" (Sather 1980:77) through language and rituals' (Mashman 1991:259). Iban women were historically responsible for maintaining the farm (Sutlive 1991; Freeman 1970; Mashman 1991) and for carrying out the repetitive tasks of planting, gardening and weeding. Therefore rice planting is feminised, and the *ngajat* and its cyclical style are representative of the cyclical nature of the farming calendar. These cyclical and repetitive themes are of interest to me because of their ability to create new-ness in repetition. With each new farming cycle a new harvest of rice

is produced, nurtured and coaxed into life by the Iban woman to sustain her family. Through this idea of the farming cycle I created a structure for the final performance piece *From The Jungle*, and through the *ajat Iban*, I found a way to move within this cycle.

To *ngajat* feels different from the contemporary western dance practices I have been trained in (jazz ballet, contemporary), fewer elevations and long lines, and more grounded and compact. I enjoyed the feeling of *ngajat* in my body, learning the steps that seemed familiar to my childhood. The music and movements occupy a nostalgic place in my mind and take me back to being a child in Sarawak. Through my migration I can relate to these seemingly different dance practices but in different ways, through training and skill, and through cultural connections.

Through the *ajat* I have explored the following research questions:

> Is it possible to migrate a cultural practice, such as the *ajat Iban*, to a performance practice?
>
> How does this effect and possibly give meaning to a contemporary western performance practice?
>
> And, how does the cultural practice of the *ajat* work with the notions of performed identity?

The *ajat Iban* migrates from the cultural practice of the Iban, situated in ceremony and ritual within the spaces of the longhouse, to a performance practice at the Sarawak Cultural Village; I then migrate this practice to a western performance space.

This chapter addresses the possibility of migrating a cultural practice but highlights the fact that we must investigate the issues around authenticity and what is being read within the different spaces – exotic, normal, celebratory or formal. Within certain spaces, such as the SCV, the dance becomes codified.

Because I was not trained within the codified *ngajat* practice and therefore could not reproduce the a*jat Iban* on a London stage, my aim was to bring the celebratory elements of the *ajat* into the performance *From The Jungle*. Therefore, my research projects involved finding ritualistic ways of investigating the *ajat* as opposed to becoming skilled *ajat* performers.

To *ngajat* is a multi sensory action, it is about hearing the music, feeling the rhythm up through your feet, seeing the images of the other performers decked out in their ceremonial finery, smelling the heat of Sarawak, and tasting the *tuak* (rice wine). The *ajat Iban* is not just about a dance, it is part of what it means to be an Iban woman, to be part of a collective, to be part of a tradition; it is a performance of identity, an identity that changes over time and gets repeated in new spaces. And so, along with performance as celebration, it was the sense of collective performance that I migrated to the London performance space.

The image of an Iban dancer, an Iban woman doing *ngajat* is a very specific image sketched into my nostalgia and my memory of Sarawak. The image is of a young woman dressed in Iban finery; beaded yoke, woven sarong, and silver jewellery – belt dripping with coins, headdress balancing on her head.

Within festivals, such as *Gawai*, guests are welcomed by a (usually young/unmarried) woman dressed in ceremonial dress offering a sip of *tuak*. Then the guests are led through the longhouse to greet the hosts, either by a lone woman or man *ngajat*.

With this image of the *ajat*, one of ceremony and finery in mind, I approach the concepts of *ngajat* and investigate how researching the *ajat Iban* has led me to look at cultural identity, intersections of modern life and traditional rituals and the idea of the 'exotic'.

Although the *ajat* features in many ways throughout my performance work and during my research, to begin with I want to look at one story from *From The Jungle*, to investigate key points that interested me about *ngajat*. This story links the Iban costume (visual identity) with the practice. It tells the story of an Iban

woman migrating from longhouse to an urban diaspora space and explores the joy and accomplishment of becoming a dancer and artist.

Vera Chok performed this story (FTJ – 140) and as she did, she slowly put on the Iban costume to finally become "Iban" and a traditional dancer. But this story doesn't just stop when the words stop. The focus moves away to another story, but Vera continues, through movement, to perform the story of this dancer, who is now learning to *ngajat* on a new stage. And slowly through her movements she becomes Vera The Performer, who went to Sarawak and was taught to *ngajat* by the protagonist of the story.

The ceremonial sarong: a dance transforming, melding together traditional ideas with a contemporary identity

In this story of a woman's audition at the SCV, Vera puts on a traditional, specifically Iban costume and takes off the contemporary, modern Malaysian dress (sarong and kebaya). The first part of the story is listening to the radio, in the rural setting of the longhouse. The first action of the performer is pulling on the Iban sarong, a sarong that was made for me by my great grandmother. Vera pulls up the Iban sarong under the modern sarong. The Iban sarong comes to the knees whereas the modern sarong is floor length; for a while the audience sees both materials on Vera; the modern sarong scrunched up around her waist. I used this image and action of putting on an Iban sarong as a way to express, to embody, the relationship of traditional values and modern concerns; it is not always a simple chronological sequence, where the modern (sarong) replaces the traditional (sarong), but often a simultaneous action and a complicated toing and froing. The story's protagonist leaves her rural space and modern sales girl's job for the city and a job as a 'traditional' dancer.

The story's protagonist auditions for the SCV, a 'living museum' that was opened in 1990 where tourists, local and international, can come and learn, experience and see the various cultural lives of Sarawakian and their performance practices. The SCV itself reflects the entanglement of tradition and modernity worked through in this story. Placing different cultures in one space works

towards creating a canon of what is 'Sarawak', it begins to define each of the groups represented, through what is presented and performed. In designing the SCV, decisions had to be made about what images to show, which dances to dance, whose costumes to create. Within one tribe there are variations of costume, houses, performance practices but these are simplified within the SCV village creating a static homogeneous version of 'tradition'. Therefore it is this entanglement of tradition and modernity in the apparently paradoxical spaces reflected at the SCV that I wanted to explore in my storytelling.

Historically there were more variations in the way the *ajat Iban* was danced. Different groups of Iban developed different rituals and ceremonies, depending on the needs of that area and circumstance. The Iban in the Kapit area [20] put more value on the *gawai amat* (Masing vol 1 1997:32), a ceremony to aid successful warfare, because they migrated into areas populated by other tribes. The Iban in the Saribas-Skrnag area give more importance to the *gawai antu*, which is a ceremony associated with death, because there was less opposition when settling into the area, and so the need for warfare rituals subsided. This demonstrates the idea that multiple identities exist within one group of people, these identities and traditions have grown and developed over time.

Within postcolonial states there is often a need to find, look back at, and nostalgically recall 'a traditional way.' As Narayan argues in the South Asian context, '[s]hared "national traditions" had to exist in order to assert a national identity that was politically cast not merely as prospective but as a "recovery" of a past nationhood "lost" to colonial rule' (Narayan 1997:67). By doing this, ideas of traditions developing out of changing circumstances get forgotten and certain practices get defined as the only concept of 'tradition', as 'the truth', the real Iban and the only Sarawak. The relationship with the everyday and the ritual gets lost, which in turn affects the constantly changing process of performance.

The concept of tradition becomes a contemporary creation, one that darts back to the longhouse and looks forward to the future. Within diaspora and post-

[20] Where my research began

colonial spaces the idea of tradition is idealised, tradition is the perfect past, to be used to reflect an independent aspirational future.

This conceptualization of tradition is one that is static. The harking back to days of old demonstrates an idea that nothing has changed and nothing can change. However, as Narayan demonstrates in her discussion of cross-generational reproductions of tradition in the Indian context (1997), how tradition is enacted changes with each generation, is different in the different locations of one country and shifts with different religions.

Within the Iban and other indigenous Sarawak communities we see generational changes in migration patterns. Kedit (1993) talks about the *bejalai*; this is an Iban male tradition where men travel/migrate for periods of time to gain wealth and experience, whereas Iban women were at 'risk of losing reputation' (Harris 2008:61) if they participated in this masculine tradition. A woman's place was seen as looking after the children, the home, the farm. Within contemporary Sarawak it is acceptable for women to migrate, but still within the framework of family and childcare. Hew (2003) demonstrates this through accounts of Sarawak mothers expressing their desire to move to urban areas for educational purpose *for* their children, and young women migrating to work in the cities to send remittances home to their parents in the village. The mother's role is to look after the well-being of the children and the home, and ensuring the children are educated is an extension and repetition of that responsibility. Wealth, education and living in urban surroundings are seen as ideal, which is why the audition story's protagonist's mother allows her to audition for a professional job in the city. The protagonist's mother is engaging with a modern concept of letting her daughter migrate to the city, whilst exercising her traditional role of mothering and supporting her children to gain a better future for themselves. This is why it was important to have the mother's voice within the story.

When performing the *ajat* in diaspora spaces, on international stages at touristic expos, the women dancing are evoking the traditional, whilst selling the contemporary notion of tourism and travel. Therefore the art of performing

'tradition' becomes political, as Adams discusses in her book on the Toraja identity and tourism. The narrative of the *ajat Iban* at the SCV is one of re-telling a history and linking nostalgia, exoticism, mysticism and reality, and in doing so constructs an identity *for* the observer, the outside eye, the tourist (Adams 2006:49).

The *ajat Iban* becomes a concept, the practice seen at the SCV is one that has never existed, but rather was created for a contemporary audience. As *ngajat* becomes canonised, these versions travel *back* to the longhouse and are performed on the *ruai* for *Gawai*. Therefore, even though the *ajat Iban* has been defined within spaces such as the SCV, it is still a growing and changing practice, as spaces and locations change, The *ajat Iban* and women performing it within contemporary Sarawak are, like [Vera] the performer, wearing two sarongs sometimes simultaneously, sometimes slipping between the two.

Silver belts and glittering jewellery: Women's role in producing cultural identity and belonging in contemporary, diaspora spaces

The second part of the audition story is the protagonist stepping into the audition, her thoughts, her excitement and her realisation that this is important to her. She contemplates that every move she makes matters, is watched. This section of the story was performed with a poetical quality - the rhythm of the text changed, was no longer conversational - to emphasis the concept of "artistry" that *ngajat* dancers felt when performing[21].

The protagonist's preparing to perform Iban-ness through her audition, references the work post-colonial women do in supporting and being active producers of contemporary cultural identities. This work can represent agency and empowerment for women, but also assigns them the responsibility of being the symbol of cultural identity for the nation. Mohanty discusses how women find a place within public spaces and spheres through their public role as symbols of the nation; these actions give them a certain public status, but always

[21] Through out my interviews and workshops with performers at the SCV, the women identified as being artists, they proudly proclaimed their artistic qualities. To be an artist was linked to status.

within specific constraints (Mohanty 2003:68). The role of the female dancers at the SCV are to therefore produce ideas of tradition to a, predominantly, 'outside' audience; they are the 'raw materials' (*ibid* 2003:65) on the production line of the Malaysian and Sarawakian identity. Through the *ajat Iban*, women performers support an identity that is Eastern, exotic and warrior-like. The dancers are watched, what they perform matters.

The Iban, within the SCV, are presented through *ngajat* and the Iban longhouse which tourists can walk through, touch the bamboo walls, watch weavers, smell the smoke from the hearth. Within an ever changing, contemporary Sarawak, there is a desire to hold on to your identity, to keep home with you and to create belonging in the new spaces and the diaspora places.

One way to do this is to demonstrate your cultural identity, to perform and see performed, practices from your childhood, from your longhouse. By seeing, supporting, performing *ngajat* an Iban is placing importance on her heritage, her sense of home and her identity. Evoking a sense of home that is different from a colonial heritage, she reclaims an identity that was denied, made murky and/or viewed as less important than the imperial Western identity. As mentioned in chapter one, in relation to Young (2005:150), when establishing a post-colonial identity, nations tap into these ideas of home and belonging that look back to a past before colonial influence, an idea of 'tradition' that exists in memory and nostalgia.

The *ajat* performed on the SCV stage evokes a sense of spirituality, mysticism and tradition that is in opposition to the touristic audience, who have flown to Malaysia on the latest Airbus and snap photos of dancers with digital cameras; this opposition, Narayan explains, is an important part of post-colonial states' identity -- the 'dichotomy between the material West and the spiritual East' (Narayan 1997:19).

The action to accompany the second part of the monologue was putting on the silver belt. Within *From The Jungle* we used a simple silver Iban belt (appendix p.173), but this represented the full silver jewellery worn by Iban women; silver

belts with hanging silver coins, silver bangles on wrists and ankles and finally a silver headdress. The jewellery differentiates her from the men in a way that a sarong does not, as men also wear sarongs (although not within ceremonial circumstances). The weight of the jewellery, the act of balancing the headdress, affect the way an Iban woman moves, carefully, delicately; and with the glitter and shine of the silver in the sun or under theatre lanterns on the SCV stage, the jewellery acts as clear markings of femininity. It is this femininity as backdrop that lets the masculine, warrior, Iban identity be seen and be dominant.

Within the SCV the choreography dates back to its opening and little has been changed since. The *ajat Iban* performed at the SCV is based on the *Ajat Lesong,* 'a form of warrior-magic for and by man [which] is done vigorously. This category of *ajat* is highly symbolic [...] the dancer will wear full war-dress' (Bawin 1997:07), the male dancer shows off his strength and special talent through lifting a heavy mortar with his teeth. Throughout this display of masculinity the women dance as a group, in unison around and behind the singular man.

Bawin talks about the need to preserve traditions and that tradition is a record of 'past changes that members of a society deem important to remember' (Bawin 1997:03), practices that are cultural codes that are *needed* to present "cultural coherence". Through the work of the SCV the cultural practices are presented as a cohesive identity, a sameness that is in opposition to the West. The SCV is the body that deems what is and isn't important by narrowing its presentations of certain dances and tribes and develops coherence through the images of identical women performers. To accentuate this sameness the practice within the SCV is for all performers to be able to dance all dances; indigeneity is interchangeable.

Through the *Ajat Lesong* choreography Iban women are represented in a supportive role. The Iban identity is presented as centering on the masculine and the Iban woman is seen not as a singular individual but is recognised through her sameness with other Iban women. This sameness sets a standard against which a masculine identity can be defined. Bawin describes the women's version of the *ajat* as an 'opportunity to exhibit their womanly attributes of

grace, pose and beauty' (Bawin 1997:04). The men are encouraged to scream, make 'random stamps and jumps' (Bawin 1997:09), whereas the women are to 'refrain' from such movements and sounds. The Iban women provide the gentle, nurturing and accessible backdrop against which the strong Iban warrior can be easily seen.

As mentioned in the previous section, the SCV made decisions that confined tribes to a limited set of identities. The identities created through the SCV are ones that emphasize the difference between East and West, male and female. It is an identity that works with ideas of tradition, exoticism and with the visual. This identity prioritises the audience's experience, an audience that are predominantly tourists (national and international).

The costumes and choreography are designed to be eye-catching and attention grabbing (Kim 112:2008) and the SCV are using ethnicity for tourism and the cultural traits chosen should be understood in this context. Therefore two concepts of sameness are at work on the SCV stage, the homogeneity of the indigenous and the simplification of Iban women. The audience see the same woman, in chorus formation, defining what it means to be an Iban woman in a simplistic visual of 'grace, pose and beauty'. But I do not want to define Iban women through one lens, 'simply in terms of their victim status' (Mohanty 2003:67); it is also important to note the women performing are not passive and their engaged activity as skilled dancers, working as a collective has strength and agency.

Within classical western theatre the female chorus provided a balance to the masculine 'I' (Lehmann 2006:131), and therefore the individual is never separate from the collective. Lehmann discusses the strength of a chorus and the interdependence between the collective and the individual. The women on stage are performing together, to represent the mass, the tangible, physical presence of a community. Their presence on stage is representative of the work that happens off stage to create the seamless choral work of group choreography, the creative nature of rehearsals; movements repeated and

practiced over and over again in a rehearsal studio until it becomes something new – a singular movement of multiple bodies in space, moving as one.

> The choral voice means the manifestation of a not-just-individual sound of a vocal plurality and, at the same time, the unification of individual bodies in a crowd as a 'force' (Lehmann 2006:130).

Therefore to look simply at the Iban women on stage at SCV as passive would be denying their agency in the creative process of developing cultural identity and the connection between the singular man and the female chorus. The warrior doesn't exist without the community work of the Iban women, who keep house, family, children – home – running and working.

It is this theory of chorus and the collective and therefore the ability to read the SCV dancers as agents in their own right, that led me to devise workshops and research projects investigating moving and performing as a group, telling our individual stories within a collective. A prominent feature in the majority of the research projects was building ways to work together in a performance space, whether that was through weaving looms side by side, traversing through the studio intersecting each other or trying on the movements of the *ajat Iban*. Through performing our stories we are being active producers of our identity and together we were building a narrative of migration.

The women I met at the SCV were a force of strength, humour, talent and community. They wore their silver belts and headpieces with pride and they all shared their own auditions stories over the course of the workshops, with similar sense of excitement, nervousness and joy. Their audition stories were a part of their journey/migration to being dancers at the SCV.

And lastly the yoke: exoticising the body and the practice

The last item of clothing to go on was the beaded yoke, one that was made for me by my grandmother 25 years ago. The beaded yoke is a distinctly Iban piece of costume. This one has geometric designs laid out in a circular pattern around

the chest and shoulders. The final lines of the monologue have the protagonist proclaiming that out of 50 others, she was the only one chosen for a position as a dancer. This leads into the performer, Vera, 'trying on' *ngajat* movements, whilst another story takes place in the centre of the stage.

Watching the performer get dressed accentuates her physical presence, and the audience watch as she transforms herself into a new character, one of distinct dress, someone from somewhere else, with materials not familiar in London. As the performer finishes donning this new attire, she finishes speaking, the performer becomes for a moment, an exotic body in the space.

Within the SCV performance the *ajat* dancers are silent bodies in space, moving and turning, dressed in glittering silver and colourful beaded yokes, inviting the audience to look upon them. The body of the exotic, it is less real, because it is on stage for the audience to gaze upon, to look at, to learn from, to be titillated by. Mulvey discusses the idea of the male gaze within film as a look that projects a fantasy, that the role of women in film are 'simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact' (Mulvey 1989:19). Within the performance of the *ajat* the gaze of the foreign audience is similar to that of Mulvey's male gaze, with the silent women's bodies on display. Creating this audience gaze was part of re-creating this audition story in London.

The audience become the active, the performer the passive, where the audience share an experience of watching the unfamiliar and define themselves by their difference to the exotic visual on stage, 'policing and patrolling of the boundaries that separate the self and its other' (Holledge & Tompkins 2000:119). Through defining the exotic, which I am reading as the 'other', the concept of the norm is understood; because of the performer performing something unfamiliar to a London audience, the spectators are able to define themselves together, in opposition, as an audience.

Throughout various performances during this research I have utilised this idea of the exotic body, within the western diaspora space of London. It has been

important to reclaim and re-define being othered. On each new occasion that I am asked "where are you from?" I am being asked to explain how I am different from the person asking the question. When I respond "from New Zealand" I see the disappointment and confusion. New Zealand is never exotic enough. The question is not about location, nationality, or birthplace, it is a question based on the visual, the body in space, it is based on difference. By choosing to make the exotic central to my work I have given myself and the performers, ownership over our differences. I have chosen to be "from the jungle". I chose to be read by the audience as non-western. I decided to, with tongue in cheek, succumb to the expectations, exoticism and identity that the physical creates.

This particular section of *From The Jungle* was about a story of an Iban dancer but built on previous performance work, which featured Vera and myself. In previous work we played with the visual idea of 'exotic dancing girls'; from the flyer/invitation to the '*Gawai*' performance at Bethnal Green Working Man's Club, July 2011 (appendix p.174), through to dressing the same (similar hair, similar costumes of Malaysian sarongs) and dancing/moving in unison, we wanted to create a homogenous image of 'non-west'. The dynamics between the exotic and the norm are to do with who is constructing an identity, who is defining the stereotype within which the 'world traveller' (Lugones 1987) is supposed to be acting. Within the construction of identity, within a world that you are not fully at ease in, there may be a construction of you that you do not recognise as yourself – 'there may be "worlds" that construct me in ways that I do not even understand or I may not accept the construction as an account of myself […] yet, I may be *animating* such a construction…' (Lugones 1987:396).

Through the work of the 'exotic dancing girl' I was trying to find a way of addressing those constructions, attempting to place the power of constructing not *just* through the eyes of an audience. Through humour, a smile and a wink at the audience I am making the exotic body real, by not being passive under their gaze. By dressing the same I am highlighting the constructing, by Vera standing still at the end of her monologues she is allowing the construction. Playfully and with awareness I wanted to be part of the construction of the 'exotic', this way I had some control over the constructions and our differences.

Within the performances at the SCV the gaze is somewhat defused because of the chorus choreography. Through this defused gaze the performer can have a degree of freedom, she is not completely scrutinized and therefore has the ability to be an autonomous part of a collective. Her thoughts and her body are not individually interrogated. Through a defused gaze the individuals might avoid complete objectification, but the practice itself becomes objectified. The audience sees a practice as an object, through the multiple bodies. The multiple bodies create a mass to be gazed upon. Through investigating the gaze I am also able to look at how the gaze works on the practice and not just the performer. Holledge & Tompkins ask the question 'where does the performing body begin and the body of the performer end?' (2000:111), when discussing intercultural performance. Within *ngajat*, on a longhouse *ruai* during *Gawai*, the body of the performer is part of the ritual and identity of Iban-ness. Within the context of *Gawai* the performer is Iban and is not simply demonstrating an identity.

The work of 'traditional' dances on a touristic stage is the work of intercultural performance as you are inviting audiences from different backgrounds to view a performance that has been taken out of its original context. Without the longhouse, the ceremonial atmosphere, the tight spaces within which the performer turns and moves amongst the audience (an audience who are both spectator and active ceremonial participants), the *ajat Iban* becomes representative of an idea. It signifies a practice but no longer embodies a culture. The dancing body becomes a performer of an identity. By taking away the context of *ngajat*, the dance practice becomes exoticized; it becomes objectified. The dance is made up of movements in space to please the audience, to look pretty, to tell a narrative without the subject of a ritual environment.

This identity of a warring tribe, on the national and international stage of the SCV, is confined because it is out of the context of ceremony and ritual. This concept creates an unthreatening identity of the Iban. By viewing the Iban as exotic, displaying the *ajat Iban* in a confined theatrical space, it limits the Iban as a passive community in contemporary Sarawak. It limits the idea that the Iban community is able to have an active part of contemporary Malaysia.

Through this audition story I wanted to engage the audience in the gaze. I wanted to acknowledge the gaze and I wanted to lay bare the workings behind the visual and the physicality of a dancer on stage, a body in space. By actively undressing and re-dressing in front of an audience, the performer, Vera, is inviting the gaze and therefore it is a gaze that she is able to meet square on. The action of dressing and re-dressing during the story, makes the performer and the protagonist a subject, someone who chooses to don the traditional attire to perform an identity they identify with.

Once the performer is fully dressed as 'an Iban', there is a moment, a pause, that lets the audience see and read the image of an exotic dancer -- the Iban beaded yoke on display for the audience to admire.

This is acknowledging the discourse of orientalism and exoticism within the western space that creates this exotic gaze. The audience then sees the learning, and the 'trying' on of a cultural and performance practice. The protagonist is not simply able to step into the *ajat* steps, simply because she is Iban, she too must learn and practice to become the SCV version of the *ajat Iban* dancer. And as the performance continues we see the performer, Vera, emerge; also trying on these new movements and her journey as a performer becomes part of the story.

A body in space: developing a sense of chorus and collective through the *ajat*

If we situate *ngajat* within performance knowledge we can look at the 'doing' that happens within *ngajat*. Schechner looks historically at Western performance as an act that became based on communication and drama, and is detached from the doing (1973 & 1985:22). Schechner goes on to discuss the relationship between teacher-student, the passing down of knowledge, and places importance on the body as a way of transmitting meaning and knowledge within performance. Through 'doing', we are able to move away from creating symbolic movement. Through 'doing' we can investigate the performance and the practice within an environment and create a performance that isn't an

imitation. The learning of the *ajat* is about learning how the body works and moves within the elements of its environment.

As I was taking a practice from the tropical Borneo environment it had developed in, I needed to see and understand how it worked within that environment and how, and what aspects, of the *ajat* could migrate to a London stage. I was not aiming to become or create professional *ajat* dancers, I wanted to use the influence of the *ajat* to find ways of moving through space. Through the *ajat* I wanted to find a way of creating elements of ritual within the work, so that the stories we would tell, ones of domesticity, private spaces, home and belonging would feel important, be tied to ceremony and celebration, be stories to tell gods and therefore show that the private, the domestic and ideas of home really matter.

To *ngajat* is to think about *where* the *ajat* dancer is dancing, *why* the *ajat* dancer is dancing and *how* the *ajat* dancer is dancing. The ceremonial space on a *ruai* creates small spaces within which the dancers must move, creating small tight turns. The heat of the tropical sun means sustained, fast, vigorous movement is not easy. The heavy headdress is balanced on top of the head, so quick, fast movements with the head are uncomfortable and may dislodge the head dress, as will dipping the head in any way. The coined belts are heavy, making fast movement difficult. The sarong is tight around the legs, creating small, delicate steps. And yet, despite, or perhaps because of these constraints the *ajat* reflects the environment it developed from and echoes the constrained agency within which Iban women's role as cultural reproducers operates, within historical and contemporary contexts. The dance is for ceremonies, it is part of a collective identity, it is part of special occasions and ones that the gods are invited to, so beautiful costumes are important and so is a celebratory mood. The *ajat* is a joyful performance, for gods, guests and family alike. This is a dance born from and for a specific cultural context and environment.

Within *From The Jungle* I re-told a story of the *ajat* dance teacher (FTJ - 150), who talks about taking the bamboo house with you when you dance *ngaja*t on the SCV stage. To *ngajat* in London, we must also take the bamboo house with

us. It became important for any performers involved in my show to learn *ngajat* in Sarawak, to learn in the heat of the tropics, to see the longhouses, to taste *tuak,* and to hear the music live. Through these elements, Schechner's 'patterns of doing' (1985:22) are investigated. These 'patterns of doing' are the 'doing' that arrives from the environment, the passing down of knowledge through the body.

Before we went to Sarawak I introduced the UK based performers to *ngajat*. In London workshops I played *ngajat* music and we watched a film of me learning basic steps of the *ajat*. We all watched my teacher's steps, and tried out the basic step, in unison with the filmed teacher's feet. We always wore sarongs when 'trying on' these movements, so as to feel the restriction of the fabric around our legs. I wanted to focus on one thing and see how that affected us as performers, which is why I took the *ngajat* walk. This walk is mainly reliant on the music, and is the first step into learning the *ajat*.

We spent hours moving our feet to the rhythm and incorporating the movement through our bodies. The feet are very grounded, the steps are small and the whole body reacts to that by not moving fast, by keeping the energy in your lower back. We got to a point of almost trance, the repetitive movement and the concentration on one part of the body meant that we were able to create an intensity that was not climactic, but powerful nevertheless – 'the accumulation-repetition lifts performers, and often spectators too, into ecstatic trance' (Schechner 1985:11). I didn't want to use this trance- like state in any performances because it didn't add to the narratives I was building around the ideas of home, identity and belonging. But, we were able to come back to this exercise throughout the rehearsal period as a memory and to find a way to get back into synch with each other, back into chorus and a collective group of performers.

This exercise did influence the journeys section of the *From The Jungle* (FTJ - 159). In *From The Jungle* there were projections, on loop, of our rehearsal journeys, alongside the live performance of our journeys. Therefore, visually there were repetitions, layering of repetitions, based from the techniques of the

ajat Iban walk through space. Through the repetition of these movements, walking through space to the repetitive Iban music, new journeys were re-created at each workshop through to performance (appendix p.167).

Before we started our workshops in Sarawak, we went up river for a few days to stay at a longhouse and saw the space within which an *ajat* would be performed in ceremonies. We travelled on a longboat up river, arrived like guests would to a *Gawai*, walking up the riverbank to the dwellings, and experienced the heat on our limbs that slowed our movements through space.

The learning process in Sarawak, was within a group, where five of the nine participants were professional *ngajat* dancers and they surrounded the four UK performers. As we twisted and turned we were able to see, to copy and learn off the SCV dancers. Lehman discuss how the use of choral work acts as a 'mirror and partner of the audience' (Lehmann 2006:130), he is looking at how a collective can work together to create a dynamic conversation across spaces. Through rehearsing as a chorus we were building up a relationship with each other, a way to share space and learning that still had traces when put on to a performance space in London. Through the use of the choral speaking/performing, Lehmann points out, that it doesn't take much for the audience to read the idea of mass. To develop the idea of mass and collectiveness worked towards presenting the idea that this research project had multiple voices, multiple possibilities. 'The chorus raises a voice in whose sound waves the individual voice does not disappear entirely' (Lehmann 2006:130).

These exercises focused on the physical learning and how the body moves in response to different elements. Therefore we created an environment of learning that was choral, that was based on repetitive copying and doing. These patterns of doing happened in rehearsals and through to the performances. Each night we were re-creating patterns of doing on stage, learning and responding to each other and the audience.

Through the learning and the workshopping of the *ajat* we developed ways of rehearsing and performing together, we learnt how to move through different locations as a collective of performers. The UK based performers were bringing with them the memory of Sarawak based performers, to the performance space of a London stage. The traces of this collective served as a memory on our limbs as we moved in subtle unison with the Iban rhythm throughout *From The Jungle*.

Dancing each other's dance: a look at authenticity through a process of exchange

Within the earlier section 'The ceremonial sarong' I look at how the idea of tradition gets defined. When investigating this idea of tradition and how practices develop across time and space it brought up questions about how I can use certain Iban practices in my own work. Questions of authenticity must be addressed, particularly as I am also taking the *ajat* out of its place of origin. Am I stealing a performance practice for my own gain and use?

As part of a wider discussion on cultural tourism and borrowing ideas Schechner states that 'individual artists, on all sides of this question, steal' (Pavis 1996:45). Therefore maybe the question is "how do you steal?" I have looked at this question of authenticity from a concept of exchange. We exchanged ideas, we learnt from each other and we developed multiple voices. Through this exchange we developed and embody the intersections of identity that happen within diaspora spaces.

I am not claiming to be producing an 'authentic' reproduction of the *ajat*. Instead I am taking an idea and making it mine. This is an ethical problem because I am taking something that was not mine to take. When I take these practices I will reap rewards from them (a thesis, a show that gets applause). I am accountable to these stories, to the idea that they are told with as much truth and reality as when I heard them. These are problematic issues as I am reproducing stories through my own preoccupations and within a space that I have constructed. These are ethical issues because I have asked women to exchange their skills and stories with me, in good faith that I will re-tell them

faithfully. Therefore, what I was working towards was to re-create them in an environment that echoed the environment that the stories and practices I heard were developed in. It was a space of sharing and exchange, a space where many different identities intersected.

As I was working with women from various backgrounds, races, tribes and performance training I wanted to explore how we could use our differences to tell the many stories, to interrogate the tensions, the sameness and the personal relationships of diaspora narratives. Schechner discusses the use of blind casting as a way to explore these issues (Schechner 1993:18) and I am interpreting this as discovering and expanding on our differences within the performance and rehearsal spaces.

Within our workshops we exchanged our stories in various ways. Within the *pantun* chapter I will discuss in more details the methodologies I developed through post-it notes and how to re-tell through listening, within this section I want to discuss the physical exchange of stories, how we learnt to dance each other's dance. Schechner refers to Cunningham's claims of dance, 'that dance can be anything […] beginning with walking' (Schechner 1985:245). And I chose to take this claim literally, as discussed in the previous section, we began the London workshops with the *ajat* walk. In the Sarawak workshops we built on this idea by walking through our life – throughout the space we placed post-it notes of the various homes we had lived at and moved chronologically through our journeys. We repeated the movements over and over again so that our journeys became an extension of our own bodies, they became a physical presence within the space. We worked with the same partners throughout the workshops, and the next stage was telling our partners our journey. First we talked them through the locations we felt were home, describing, re-telling, explaining what each place was like and why we moved. As we exchanged our stories we discovered differences, similarities and explored each other's lives. This exchange became a physical exchange as we walked through each other's journeys and watched our own journeys mapped out on another's body.

Part of exploring each other's stories was developing a relationship between us. This was between partners, but also as a workshop group. We performed our journeys to the group as a whole and we performed our journeys amongst each other, crossing paths, navigating other bodies in space. Pauses, speeding up, slowing down – at each repetition our journeys changed with the interaction with each other. Grotowski discusses the relationship between audience and performer as being dynamic, that theatre is about impulses and human interaction (Grotowski 1968:58). Within workshops the fellow participants are audience and performer, and at times simultaneously as our journeys intersected each other in space. When thinking about our physical journeys as interactions and impulses with each other we can see how these relationships grow over a period of time. The physicality of performing and exchanging stories with each other developed over the weeks of workshops and the connections between the participants, so that friendships grew between us all.

It is important to note that Grotowski looks at working with various cultural performance practices through an idea of the 'transcultural', to look 'above differences of nationality' (Schechner 1985:254), which Schechner rightly points out as problematic. I believe this is because Grotowski looks at performance from a male normative perspective ('what are man's capacities […] what is creative in man…' as quoted by Schechner 1985:254). Grotowski is looking for a 'norm' within the performer's body. In contrast, in my workshops it was important to *not* look for a norm, to work with women from a variety of different performance backgrounds. This included the women from Sarawak and the UK, who although all professional performance artists, were at various stages of their career and had entered into the profession from a number of different ways. There was no physical 'norm' within the workshops.

The idea of dynamic relationships was something I wanted to bring on to the performance space. Through creating relationships with the audience that could grow over the period of the show we were able to come together at the end of the show to share the performance space. Through the relationship with the performer the audience can be part of the transitions that happen on stage. If the audience are able to connect and identify the journey of a performer they

can see as she changes from an Iban woman learning to *ngajat* to a UK performer trying on the journey of an Iban woman.

The journey work we did within the workshops culminated in FTJ – 159, where the UK performers took back their personal journeys. This section tied together our own stories and the physical exploration of the *ajat* walk. We layered our journeys through our personal homes with the rhythms and movements of the newly learnt skill of *ngajat*.

As I have discussed above, the SCV *ngajat* has evolved to being a practice that gets presented to the audience. Within the workshops in SCV we learnt an *ajat* choreographed by one of the senior teachers. An important aspect of this *ajat* was to acknowledge the audience, look directly at the audience. This feels an appropriate development as, although within a *Gawai* in a ruai the *ajat* dancer may not look directly at the audience, she is acknowledging the audience, she is considering them as they are as much a part of the festival as she is.

This direct address that the SCV dancers uses, lends itself naturally to the ideas of storytelling. Through the rhythm of the *ajat*, words, sentences and stories work well, the off beats combined with the regular patterns felt like poetry. Watching the women in the Sarawak workshops move then pause to say their names, or the locations of home echoed the pauses and positions of the *ajat Iban*. The pauses, the rhythms and the audience address all translate into a way to tell other kinds of stories.

Through the work of exchanging our stories, physically and verbally, I was able to write a show that expressed the multiplicity of narratives, that changing, meeting and re-creating of narratives in new spaces, of multiple voices and varying perspectives, 'a true intercultural perspective is actually a multiplicity of perspectives' (Schechner 1985:14). The narrative of the performance is able to be 'a truth' and not 'the truth'. And so *From The Jungle* opens with a section describing the multiple stories that have been heard and the multiple identities of just nine women …

The artist, the mother, the daughter, the traveller, the wife.
The stories of many women
Where nine
Go by 79 names (FTJ –138)

Performing *ngajat*, 'trying on' a new skill

It would have been inappropriate and inauthentic for myself or the other UK trained performers to dance a full *ajat Iban*. I wanted to develop a way in which we could incorporate aspects of the SCV *ajat* into the show, but without the years of training we would simply be mimicking, and in the context of a London show this could be read by the audience as 'truth'.

Therefore, I chose to explore further the idea of learning. I chose to display the layers of performance that begin in the rehearsal room. I chose to express the notions of creating, re-creating and showing imperfections. As mentioned earlier, I projected film of rehearsals on the looms, I also incorporated places of adlibbing and moments of change, where the performers could play with words and sentences and each other's stories. I have referred to this idea as 'trying on' – throughout workshops, rehearsals and on to the various performance spaces we, as performers, played with trying on our new skills, of trying on each other's stories and of literally trying on clothes (trying on clothing was particularly explored research project, the performance piece *Secrets, Stories and Untold Tales* – March 2011).

Why learning is so important is because teaching is important, learning and teaching are actions that are never really complete or perfected. And it is through the desire to teach and to learn that we can develop, not wanting to perfectly represent the other. We are travelling lovingly to each other's worlds (Lugones 1987:401). We do not want to occupy her space, we do not want to be in the audition room, auditioning her audition, but we want to hear about the space, we want to listen lovingly to her experience. When teaching, you are passing on skill. You are sharing knowledge, opening up boundaries, and letting others cross into your realm of expertise. Teaching is a repetition that is created

and re-created at each new learning. Through learning and teaching transformations are happening, and there is pleasure in this transforming of knowledge. Lehmann talks about a pleasure of transformation within drama, 'it suddenly becomes strange when seen from "elsewhere"' (Lehmann 2006:77). The metamorphosis of a skill as it passes from one person to another is a way of re-seeing an act. This re-seeing develops ideas of difference, where something is seen through a new perspective. At the beginning of the Sarawak workshops, one of the UK trained performers stated that suddenly all her knowledge and understanding of performance seemed irrelevant "what I have done all that training for?" Seen through new eyes, and in a different context, a familiar set of skills seemed so strange.

Throughout the workshop periods the exchange of knowledge and skills – *ngajat* and clowning exercise, *ajat* choreography and Grace's dance hall classes – and the swapping of stories meant that we saw our own skills and stories through different eyes and felt the joy of 'trying on' each other's. Teaching, learning and rehearsing becomes a creative process. It is a repetitive and cyclical experience. Through the pleasure of learning we created a dynamic and engaged performance. We were sharing our learning with the audience.

Therefore I took aspects of the *ajat Iban* to influence various sections of the show. I broke down the movements, as we did when learning *ngajat* in workshops, to accentuate themes or narratives. In the Washing scene (FTJ – 153), we started off with small *ngajat* movements, just a hand gesture; as the story continued we built up to bigger movements and sequences. Each section building on the last, until we reached the point of a full turn; this echoed the building up of a washing machine cycle but it also reflected how we learnt the *ajat*, step by step. We were transforming our new skills into a narrative about washing and the cycle of skill exchange, we were demonstrating how our learning developed and grew.

Within the voiceover monologue (FTJ – 146) Grace and I incorporated *ngajat* movements into our dance sections, echoing the music, which took the *ajat* rhythm and transformed into a nightclub dance track, telling the story of my

journey of migration from childhood in Sarawak to adulthood in London. I was seeing my movements of the *ajat*, with my western dance sensibilities and nostalgic cultural ties through new eyes; I was combining the celebratory notions I connected with *ngajat*, with the chaotic fun of a familiar space of the nightclub. The audience could have read, see and re-see this sequence as the codified dance moves, learnt in both Grace's and my past dance training and the codified dance training at the SCV, descending into personal, fun expression.

Throughout this project a constant question and concern was that of authenticity, of examining how, why and what right do I have to investigate the practices of Iban women and to tell stories of other migrant women. The ethics of research into a culture that is not quite my own is problematic. This was a culture that was once familiar, but whose language I had now lost. And although I went back to Sarawak at regular, annual, intervals, I went back as a tourist, even within my father's house. There on holiday, to consume the food, the arts, the heat, the shopping, the specific objects that meant 'Sarawak' *to me*, that represented a nostalgic idea of childhood and home. I devoured enough to fill me up for another year.

And then I returned, this time as a researcher, wanting to understand my journey from childhood and home to that of tourist. This time with a different sense of devouring, I was consuming with my eyes and body as I learnt and observed the physical movements of the *ajat*. I am also selfishly questioning - could I return to the beginning where I was once a 'native'? But of course, there is no beginning, no ultimate truth to go back to. The Sarawak I knew was one of a particular set of circumstances, of time and space and of course my age.

As I have discussed within this chapter, when looking at SCV, the ideas of authenticity are problematic, to look backwards at a set of 'things' to represent a true identity is an impossibility and instead what happens is a look at 'a truth' through a specific set of eyes or agendas. Therefore the question is about whose truth? The construction of authenticity is based on power relations and preoccupations. I am appropriating the *ajat* and framing it in my own preoccupations of migration, identity, home and belonging. I have come into the

space of Sarawak with the perceived power of a western postgraduate education, and with the cultural capital of an educated westerner. I entered workshops as the workshop leader, and took on the responsibilities of leading exercises and having the power to decide what happens and what gets shared within the rehearsal space. I also come in with the power relations of a father in the higher echelons of Sarawak politics and the class status that that brings. These positionings provided me access and means within which I had to negotiate the research through a constant checking of my ethics, my privilege and my ability to travel across spaces.

In conclusion

I am arguing that there is no such as thing as the one authentic *ajat*, but this is not to say that authenticity is a completely fluid concept so that anyone can come and observe the *ajat* and appropriate it in any way they want. If there is no simple access to an unproblematised authenticity, then I as a performer have to be accountable for my appropriations of the *ajat*. This involves acknowledging the work of exchanging ideas and skills that occurred during workshops. It also means acknowledging my own nostalgic associations of the *ajat* with my childhood. But it also reflects an attempt to take seriously and to understand the specific context within which the *ajat* was developed, which I am reading as a place of sharing and community, a place of celebration and articulation of identity. It is these aspects of *ngajat* that I have attempted to bring into the work of *From The Jungle* and performance work leading up to it.

The work of authenticity is one that is bound up with many voices and I have chosen a specific set of voices to listen to. I did not show a complete *ajat* so that the audience would not have the opportunity to gaze upon the practice, and because the learning is not finished. My appropriation of the *ajat* is imperfect and is not intended to be encompassing.

As discussed in chapter one, in relation to Abot's experience at the UK border, Lugones uses the phrase 'being at ease' when discussing the idea of norm. The world you are in, where you feel at ease is where you are placed within the

norm – 'being at ease in a particular "world" is by being a fluent speaker of that world' (Lugones 1987:397). Abot was made to feel unease, to feel othered; I am privileged in many ways, one being that I am not often made to feel this unease, I am welcomed into spaces where I could be othered. But I wanted to continuously feel the unease, I wanted to keep my anxiety close, as I 'world'-travelled to and from Sarawak and the UK. By always being aware of my outside-ness within the world of *ajat* dancers I was able to question my work, my place within the research and interrogate the decisions and the conflicts that this project brought up. This was a continuous and cyclical questioning and learning, repeating and re-trying, never perfect and always self critical.

The cyclical nature of the *ajat* influenced the way we moved round the performance space, within all my performance pieces. The cyclical nature of *ngajat* influenced the content of my performance. Our show began with the planting season, with Grace and her post-it notes and ended with the *Gawai* party, with curry and stories. And then we began the cycle again, the next night.

CHAPTER THREE

PANTUN: poetry and storytelling, narratives in new spaces

This third chapter discusses how the Iban performance practice, the *pantun*, influenced my research. The *pantun*, a practice that has derived from a long tradition of oral storytelling in the Iban culture, is a poem, a chant; it is a storytelling device that weaves life stories with references to the gods and ritual. The *pantun* provided me with the tools to investigate other's stories, it provided me with a way to look at cyclical and repetitive processes of performance and to explore moving through spaces and facing new audiences. These processes addressed notions of agency, identity, home and belonging. Through the *pantun* I gained the words that danced alongside the physical and visual journey from the jungle.

The *pantun* is a song, or chant, of praise, it can ask gods for help, tell a story, bring comfort and entertain. The *pantun*, like Iban music and the *ajat Iban*, is very rhythmical and repetitive. The *pantun* is descriptive, metaphoric, and often uses words more for the purpose of rhyme than for meaning. It uses esoteric Iban, which the Iban refer to as 'deep Iban'.

A *pantun* is traditionally adlibbed, but in contemporary Sarawak it is usually a mix of pre-written and adlibbed sections. It changes every time it is performed, depending on the individuals and the situation. *Pantun* is performed, seated on the floor, in close proximity to the audience and can be directed at someone specific. Although the language is very formal and lyrical, the performance of this practice is not.

Pantun, and other songs/chants are performed by both men and women, and are sung at all stages of an Iban's life; for entertainment, for love, and for ceremonies (Donald 1998:85). The *pantun* is performed between the sexes, a male *pantun* singer might address a female audience and vice versa. The *pantun* has many narratives and agendas; it is an ever-changing practice. The *pantun* and other Iban songs are forms of storytelling, within which daily lives are

woven into song. Through song and storytelling 'how to be an Iban' is learned, explained and taught, and how to and what to sing and story-tell is gathered from daily life as an Iban.

In this chapter I am asking:

> How did the form and content of the *pantun* affect my performance practice and the storytelling within my work?
>
> And, how did the form of the *pantun* migrate to a western performance practice?

I have investigated the *pantun's* ability to connect and share, and tell stories amongst the audience, not in opposition to the audience. Through the *pantun* I found a methodology to tell the stories I had heard throughout the three years of research. I constructed workshops that looked at telling and re-tellings stories, our own and each others. This sense of re-telling informed the way I approached performances.

Through the *pantun's* content and form I was able to find a way to create/write a narrative that addressed my preoccupations. These preoccupations have been around themes of migration and identity and practice around the concepts of performance space being a social community space, leading to a dynamic engagement between performer and audience.

The form of *pantun* that influenced me the most was the 'VIP' form. This type of *pantun* is often performed when politicians visit a community, for example during the official state *Gawai* celebration in Kapit or when campaigning before an election. This is the form that I have witnessed the most, particularly with the political audience.

This form of the *pantun* directly addresses an audience who are in a position of power, on behalf of a community. The positioning of 'community voice' that the *pantun* singer takes, the stance of moving forward, embracing change and

addressing the outside world were inspirations I took when writing *From The Jungle*. I wanted to focus on the idea of choice, of addressing the outside world unashamedly and showing where 'we' had come from, and where 'we' wanted to go. The VIP *pantun* does not position the community as victims, at the mercy of the VIPs to change their situation, but rather asks for help and assistance in exchange for 'blessings'. It is a negotiation, exchanging powers and collaborating - "we want change and you can help us get there" is the message and (hopefully) the effect.

I investigated the performance style of the *pantun* because I felt that it gave the performer agency and from there, there was possibility of power. I wanted to recognize the decision-making that happens within the performance of the *pantun*.

These narratives are part of the identity-work of the Iban and therefore it is appropriate to investigate the poetic and performance forms of the *pantun* to explore the experiences of migrant Iban women within diaspora spaces. The link between performance and daily life, and the cyclical and repetitive nature of performing identity and performing stories, demonstrates its relevance in writing the stories I heard within my research, and to have them performed to an audience. This cyclical and repetitive nature of the *pantun* also resonates with Schechner's ideas of restored behaviour (185:35), which I will discuss in relation to the rehearsal process.

To demonstrate how telling and re-telling stories in new spaces and to new audiences allowed me to explore different aspects of migration, I will look in particular at the section in *From The Jungle* about washing (FTJ – 153).

The Washing: Madame Nyong and the art of re-telling

> *Her body moves in the familiar movement - reach, bend, pull, reach, bend, pull… Arms, fingers, back.*

To understand the *pantun* I worked closely with Madame Nyong, one of the few female *pantun* singers left. She is a renowned, professional *pantun* singer. Mme. Nyong is from the Kapit area, which is where my family is from and where I began my research with initial interviews.

I have seen Mme. Nyong perform often over the last ten years. I workshopped with her in Kuching, I used her live recordings to work from when conducting workshops in London with non-*pantun* trained, UK based performers, and used a live recording of her *pantun* in *From The Jungle*. Mme Nyong has become a celebrated voice within Iban ceremonies throughout Sarawak[22]. Her *pantuns* are heard at many ceremonies, from state events to village based occasions.

Mme. Nyong writes her *pantuns* by re-writing her audience's story. If you tell her your life story, she will re-write it as a *pantun*, sing it back to bless you and give you luck for your endeavour, such as starting a new job, a marriage, or for your birthday[23]. She can also re-tell a community's life story and sing a *pantun* to "tell the community how bad they are, and how to be better"[24]. Within the VIP *pantun* she re-tells a community's life story to a politician and explains how the community could grow with the help and input of that politician.

As Mme. Nyong told me why she enjoyed performing the *pantun*, she talked about her life. She spoke about how her life had changed and developed, from working as a shop helper, raising her four children as a single mother, to teaching herself to sing *pantun.* She talked about how choosing to learn the *pantun,* to discover an art that she excelled at, gave her a new career, expertise and a new identity. She told me that she enjoys singing *pantun* because her story is part of all the stories she tells, it is what brought her to be there singing. Trinh looks at this idea of 'self' in storytelling and talks of pleasure and responsibility:

[22] All *pantun* singers I have met are in their 40s and above, the younger generations are not learning to *pantun*. This is because of a variety of reasons, the esoteric language is hard to learn and few understand it, the skill needed to sing and adlib is not easily learnt, changes in taste of music and celebrations, ceremonies and entertainment – families no longer gather on the *ruai* to tell stories, but rather watch TV in their *bileks*. The *pantun* used to be passed down, but most families are living more permanently in urban areas and not communal longhouses, the chance to learn and listen to an extended family member *pantun* is not possible and the spaces and places of practicing and experimenting are no longer as available.

[23] Mme. Nyong was my *pantun* singer, representative at my wedding, where she welcomed my husband's 'tribe' telling them about my community and myself.

[24] Interview with Mme. Nyong 3 September 2012, translated by Joseph Pendi. Joseph likened this type of *pantun*, a 'sorrow' *pantun*, to Orwell's Animal Farm, told through metaphor and imagery.

> The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring. Pleasure in the copy, the pleasure in the reproduction. No repetition can ever be identical, but my story carries with it their stores, their history, and our story repeats itself… (Trinh 1989:122).

This joy Mme. Nyong talks about is a pleasure in layering your stories, beside and intersected with others' stories, indulging in the creative process of repetition – something new being created at each telling; this is what makes the role of storyteller and scribe so engaging for the teller. The process of transferring information from one person to another opens up the idea of new beginnings, looking forward and creating a new narrative. Through others' stories I wove my memories of home and of the "*cool run of the river tickling* [my] *feet, as they stood in the water"* (FTJ – 154).

Performance is never a finished product; even in front of an audience it is still a rehearsal for the next performance. The practice of the *pantun* is one that is a process that with each new performance, the singer is creating material for the next *pantun*. This echoes Schechner's idea of performance never being 'new'; 'Performance means: never for the first time… [it] is "twice-behaved behaviour"' (Schechner 1986:36). All new work is work that has happened before, in other places and spaces under difference guises, for different purposes. *From The Jungle* was a performance built on many stories told previously, repeated through workshops, formally re-recorded on camera, informally told in coffee shops and living rooms, and repeated and reworked in my performances building up to *From The Jungle*. The pleasure of reproduction and re-telling, is a reflection of what both I, the writer, and the *pantun* singer have heard. The performance is the joy in this twice-behaved behaviour. I am the listener, re-telling what I hear. Trinh (1989:23) refers to writing as a 'reflection of other mirrors'. When writing, she says:

> I see myself seeing "myself"[…] the play of mirrors that defers to infinity the real subject and subverts the notion of an original "I" (Trinh 1989:22)

I, as a performer/ writer, the *pantun* singer as a performer/writer, tell stories that are heard, she/I reflects what we have seen, understood and through listening to the world around us reflect back stories that the audience will find meaning in. I am, as Schechner says

> "me behaving as if I am someone else" or "as if I am 'beside myself' or 'not myself'"[…] as if there are multiple "me's" (Schechner 1986:37)

I am writing mirror reflections upon reflections. The repetitions of these tellings are the process and reflections of future tellings, where each new space and new telling reflects something a little different. This is where Trinh's concepts of mirror writing links with Schechner's restored behaviour, where the original 'truth' may be lost or hidden (Schechner 1986:35), creating something new at each new reflection and re-telling. Therefore the practice of this storytelling is one where the teller of the stories (the performer) is, by the nature of the story telling, inflecting the work/story, and been given permission to do so, with their own story. This key point of the *pantun* is a distinguishing aspect of my work.

The *pantun* singer is a writer of culture and community, she is esteemed for her talent, and the position she holds is important to the Iban community, she is responsible for her community's narrative. By placing my 'self' as central to *From The Jungle*, I was not presuming to be 'the' voice, but 'A' voice. I chose to tell others' stories as a 'listener', how I understood the stories, and how they linked to my memories. My responsibility was to tell what I had heard and not to be what I heard.

"Shakespeare?!" [Brecht] said "he was a thief too…" [25]

But I must acknowledge that I have stolen, claimed and appropriated the ideas of the *pantun* for my own means. I have used the status of the performance of

[25] quoted by Willet 1977:124

poetry within the Iban culture to give a platform for my voice, my writing, my artistic vision to be seen, heard and shared. Through the stories of others I have collaborated to create a *pantun* of my own imagining, showing the layers of difference that I have encountered on this journey of learning, from the island of Borneo to the isles of the UK. With permission I have crafted a *pantun* of reminiscences, of motivation, of memories and most of all a song of the future and the choices we have made to get us to this present.

In my words, through my visions I have acted, as part of a community, part of the many communities I identify with – as an artist, a migrant, a woman, a daughter, a sister, an Iban, an academic, a Londoner.

And so I weave my presence through the words of others, and to show the audience the many faces of those whose stories I have heard, layered on top and through each other. The individual's identity is an axis and intersection of various identities and labels. Through my *pantun,* through storytelling, through performance, I have intersected various stories and identities to create one story, *From The Jungle*. As mentioned in the previous chapter when discussing authenticity, my appropriation of the *pantun* requires me to be responsible for how I tell the stories of others and allows me to engage with a performance practice that itself problematises notions of the authentic and 'original'. Re-telling is moving in familiar movements, reach, bend, pull, but never exactly the same movements; this reinforces that repetition is not only about same-ness but in fact also about creating new-ness.

Out on the washing line: the storyteller's place of agency and choices

> *"With eyes closed she feels her childhood through her feet. She tastes her adulthood through her nostrils. Her body still, light amongst the moving pieces of material. She could be anywhere. Be anything. Be complicit in her present"*

Identity, migration and storytelling are visceral experiences because they involve people, they involve spaces and they involve audience, all interacting

together. When looking at the *pantun* it is not just the words and the story that need to be thought about. It is the air within which the words are chanted, the heat that the words are heard in and through the visuals of ritual that the narratives come alive. Because of this I wanted to develop a style of writing that was a confidential moment of confession between audience and performer where the private, the personal and the domestic could take centre stage. I chose language that was visceral. Trinh talks about how women writers need to give importance to, and to write through, their bodies; 'Touch me and let me touch you, for the private is political' (Trinh 1989:37), and:

> The world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women. Patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand. In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched. (Trinh 1989:121)

By physically engaging with the ideas of meeting new audiences, through performing, re-telling stories in new space and by placing myself and my personal experiences at the centre, I am embodying the ideas of creating home, belonging and identity, and I was able to engage with the more visceral elements of home. Sara Ahmed explains that 'Nostalgia plays a crucial part in [this] imagining'; so my nostalgia is the heat, the smells, the jungle at 8am from a longboat on the river. It was from this starting point that I wrote, drawing on the senses to unravel the stories I heard, and to relate them to my memory as well as to all the other narratives.

By placing the visceral at the centre of this imagining, this narrative of migration and belonging that *From The Jungle* was becoming, I was able to write in moments of choice, I was able to reflect the agency the *pantun* performer has when performing. She has the ability to change the story and encourage those listening (her community and the politicians). The performers in *From The Jungle* were not able to change the text, but, as discussed in the Longhouse chapter, I wanted to include moments of choice. Within chapter one I discussed choice in relation to occupying space, here I am discussing the choice in relation

to story and space. Grace and I could choose each night how far to get undressed in the dance section (FTJ -146), Vera and I played with our conversation section (FTJ – 156), the statements were not pre-assigned (FTJ – 155). But most importantly we brought through to performance, the concept of choosing to be in the space, the agency of engaging the audience and fluidity of performance as a narrative that grows and changes.

The *pantun* singer's strength also comes from her ability to put her voice into the stories of the *pantuns* she sings. The female *pantun* singer, on stage, is able to re-produce narratives, her power lies in her individuality to speak through her own words, she is Trinh's 'committed writer'; "such definitions naturally place the committed writer in a position of power" (Trinh 1989: 11). The female *pantun* singer is doing important work in defining the women's place of citizenship; she is not binding 'women to a particular version of "home"' (Gedalof 2003:96). She is able to break through the barriers of private and public and through her the stories of individuals and/or communities get heard. She makes the private important.

As Gedalof says 'fixed notions of ethnic or community belonging won't yield to a more mobile model of citizenship unless the very gendered definition of the citizen is also challenged' (2003: 96). It is with this quote in mind that I discuss further the role of a female *pantun* singer within the Iban ceremonial, ritual and performance practice and understand how her role relates to the notions of gender within the Iban society. The privileged position of the *pantun* singer voicing concerns of the community's problems and individual's sorrow and success through her *pantuns* means she is able to place herself outside of the 'private' sphere, but her place is still one that is constrained. She still needs to negotiate a sense of citizenship that remains gendered.

As Iban have migrated into urban space and back again, as they move between spaces of diaspora, they become more and more intertwined with the larger Sarawak community. Therefore the *pantun* has 'migrated' from a practice within a localised Iban ceremony, developed through ritualized communications and storytelling, to a practice that connects the Iban longhouse community to a

wider (political space of) Sarawak and sense of belonging within the notion of 'nation'. This has evolved and been sustained through the VIP *pantun* and because of the connection with the longhouse (as explained in chapter one) the Iban have, where the past 'traditional' space of home is part of the contemporary 'modern' diaspora space.

At the Kapit *Gawai* in May 2010 Mme Ngyong sang about the community needing roads connecting longhouses and villages, she asked the politicians to find a way of helping this to happen. Her voice requesting, directly addressing and urging politicians to do something useful and positive for the community, was seen as less 'political' and dangerous than a male *pantun* singer. This characterization of the feminized voice as less potentially dangerous and political is why it is always a female *pantun* singer who performs the VIP *pantun*. Through performing the *pantun* women have a place of belonging in the public, political sphere, they are part of the creating of the Iban identity and sense of community. She is, as Trinh defines, 'like any other cultural worker, like any other member of the community […] to put her/his skills in the service of the community' (1989:09 Trinh). But much like the *ngajat* dancer at the SCV, although she is a woman with agency over the stories she tells, she is an agent of change, but doesn't have power to make all the changes herself, or to radically change the broader gendered context within which she operates. This presents a notion that [Iban] women have a place of belonging in the public sphere, but only if she behaves in a certain way.

But, the *pantun* singer on the floor, eyes closed, is lost in her world, her art; she is like the grandmother by the washing line. Out at the washing line she is in a space that is *hers*. The *pantun* singer is complicit in her present, addressing the *pantun* to a person/god. She is also in the past – recalling old *pantuns*, re-telling stories/myths from the past. She is able to put herself first, stop mid stanza and ask for water. She is moving through time and space and she is in control of her narrative, and that *is* important. This idea of citizenship is therefore gendered, where women can be agents of their 'world', and they are not victims, but their citizenship is constrained.

After the washing: agency in transformation and time and space

"She picks up her grandchild, soothes his cry, resting him on her hip as she switches the machine on again for another cycle. Before leaving for work."

The identity of the protagonist is not established as 'grandmother' until these last few lines. This story in *From The Jungle* occupies multiple time frames and locations (rural and urban) and the protagonist's identity changes for the audience as the poem develops. She starts as a woman washing, she's maybe a mother, definitely a sister. The notion of mothering and domesticity travels with time, taking on a different identity (a riverside activity to an urban machine based activity) and then lastly another identity is revealed – a grandmother. So like this grandmother and like the washing, the activity and the identity of the *pantun* travels through time and space, telling the narrative of home and belonging, as well as an intersection of multiple identities. The *pantun* narratives often cross times and dimensions, the gods, the past, the future; it tells of communities and individuals, and all are wrapped up together to tell a particular narrative. The *pantun* singer and the *pantun* poem move to meet its audiences. Through movement comes transformation.

Performance is also a process of movement (rehearsal space to performance space), transformation and reinvention that relies on active repetitions in different spaces and through different forms of communication. Schechner talks about restored behaviour as being 'symbolic and reflexive' (Schechner 1985:36), the *pantun* is a story that reflects the Iban identity, that creates an Iban identity and that works with the performer and the audience to establish symbolic meaning out of the restored, repeated behaviour of performing.

Creating belonging and identity through language and stories and within a rapidly changing Sarawak has been a concern since the 1960s. In the 1960s The Borneo Literature Bureau was set up to publish literature in the various languages spoken in Sarawak. The need to write down the oral stories of the Iban coincided with the need to develop a national identity outside of the colonial identity. This identity work through the printing of Iban stories can

create a static concept of identity and tradition. The multiple identities and locations that the Iban woman/washing protagonist operates in, can be lost.

With both written and oral media (radio), particularly relevant in South East Asian states, there is a concern that these 'media products' are being controlled by the governments or the 'urban elites' (Postill 2008:197). This creates a very specific narrative of identity and discourse of nation that rural communities must fall into or identify with. There were two trends of fiction that were published in Iban. There were the morality novellas, which described rural communities struggling with the new modern way of life, and how they could overcome these struggles. These stories were set in a familiar environment and the structures were based on traditional stories and folk tales. The other strand was to protect the old way of life, to 'employ a new media technology to save (selected) "old knowledge"' (Postill*:* 2008:205).

These writers and publishers held a huge power over the development of the identity of the 'modern' Iban. They were dictating how the Iban were to adapt to the emerging new, modern world. These works were being written predominantly by missionary educated men, from the Saribas region. Women had little opportunity to be educated and most forms of story-telling were a male practice. Therefore all the stories came from a Christian-male-centric point of view and were aimed to uniting the fragmented identity of the Iban, and indeed the other indigenous tribes.

But technology and the use of media doesn't have to be static. Part of the movement of the *pantun*, in contemporary Sarawak, is through the use of technology. Mme. Nyong's *pantuns* are now available on CD. Through media the *pantun* can travel further afield and without the accompanying ceremonies. Through books and CD stories are continuously meeting their diaspora audience. The audience can actively choose which story or storytelling device they identify with. At each new playing of the CD the audience hears something different, re-hears familiar narratives and can re-create home and longhouse in a cityscape. The identity of being an Iban can be recreated outside the location of the jungle.

The stories I used crossed times and spaces, and I travelled these stories across the globe. Through the use of projections (film and photos), recorded music, voiceovers and verbatim theatre style performance, alongside live performance of pre-written poetry, I created new meanings and narratives of migration, identity, home and belonging. I have told a story, a *pantun* that demonstrates the many voices I have heard, to present the possibilities of many identities. Like Mme. Nyong, through technology I have created a space for multiple faces to be seen and for multiple ears to listen.

Therefore with the growing access of technology and media more voices can become heard. Through movement, both physical and electronic the ability for repetition, and transformation within those repetitions, is possible. After the washing is hung, the audience have agency, in transforming the words they have heard into meaning for themselves, the audience have the ability to hear their own stories in what they have seen and transform the narratives of the performer/*pantun* singer/ migrant into something they can identify and connect with. The next section will discuss how this happens as a performance practice.

> Truth in theatre is always on the move (Brook reprint 1990:157).

Audience and performer: developing dynamic storytelling through sharing

One of the key elements within the *pantun* practice is the relationship between performer and audience. This relationship begins from the rehearsal space and is therefore as much a part of the practice as the words of the poem. The physicality of the *pantun* is one characteristic that creates a dynamic relationship between audience and performer. Another is the direct address of the *pantun* singer. Each *pantun* is directed at someone, it is for someone and in aid of someone (community, individual). Both these characteristics work together to create inclusivity and also a dialogue and a dynamic between each other.

I have called this style of performance as dynamic storytelling, which I define as incorporating: inclusive address; moving through space, between 'moments'; and multi-directional telling.

When I saw the rehearsal for the official Kapit Gawai celebrations in May 2010, which featured Mme. Nyong, I was struck by the process of rehearsal, which involved performing/practicing in front of a room full of people, drinking beer and eating. The *Timang*[26] and the female *pantun* were rehearsed through a process of performing, doing and re-doing. The adjustments were made from the reaction of the audience and suggestions from the audience. Each time the chants were repeated they changed slightly. The importance was placed on the intentions of the story and not the detail of movement and position of the body in space.

This idea of performed rehearsals, where the audience was part of the rehearsal process, influenced the way I approached the rehearsal and workshop periods. It was difficult to introduce an 'outside' audience into the workshops as we were experimenting with personal stories and it needed to be a safe place for people to share. But we continuously replayed movements and the stories we developed in front of each other, and so developed a style of performing that was inclusive of the audience.

The physicality of the *pantun* is intimate. She reaches out to her audience through her words, so that the audience nods along in agreement and encouragement. Seated cross-legged on the floor she is on the same level, sharing the same space. Because of this sharing of space the performance becomes an inclusive experience. With the *pantun* the line between listener/spectator and storyteller is blurred, there is no spotlight or stage lighting on the performer, audience and performer share a space. This style is similar to the direct address of Brecht and Epic theatre.

[26] Another important Iban chant is the *Timang,* it is an invocatory chant/poem, it is sung by a male bard, a *lemambang*, with assistant bards during the *Gawai* festival and is identical in rhythm and stanza structure to the *pantuns.*

I evoke Brecht, and notions of Brechtian theatre here, because ceremonial performances, like the *pantun*, aim to represent the community, to represent an [Iban] identity, to understand and reflect the human life of [Iban] society. Through ceremonial performance the audience learns about their identity, their community and how they are a part of the social structures. Brecht looked to the past and drew on ceremonial forms of theatre, practices like the *pantun*, and chose to use theatre to represent 'human happenings' (Mumford 2009:46). And I am also drawing on these forms, and on Brecht's practice, but looking forward. Part of why *pantun* is inclusive and dynamic is because it is part of a ceremony that the community/audience have a stake in; it is about them, for them. The intention of the teller is one of informing the spectator; the *pantun* singer predicts, for example, a better future for the listener, a promotion for the politician if he helps the community. The techniques of dynamic storytelling that I developed have their roots in Brechtian theatre insomuch as I, like other post-dramatic/post-modern theatre practitioners, look at the process of representation, investigate addressing and engaging an audience but leave behind the political views and style (Lehmann 2006:33). Instead I am looking at the specifics of the domestic and the personal, which is how *From The Jungle* (and previous performance pieces) become relevant and connect with a London-based audience; the [London] audience has a stake in the performance because they feel connected with the stories they hear.

One of the most interesting 'human happenings' within my performance work, was that the sharing nature of our workshops came through in performance and the concept of inclusive address meant that audience members wanted to share their stories. This happened from the very first performances, in university studios. Audience members approached me to tell me how the stories I was telling reminded them of their life. In *From The Jungle* we handed out ribbons to audience members so that they could write their stories, to be woven into our 'blue loom' (see chapter 4). By sharing stories our audiences wanted to share theirs.

On reflection, the audience's responses were more involved and active than I had anticipated. The audience felt able to be very honest and open, in their

ribbon stories and also in their reflection of the performance to us performers. Not only did they approach us to share their stories face to face, but were very keen to express their opinions on how certain parts of the show worked or didn't. Govan, Nicholson & Normington discuss the autobiographical narrative and how it blends both truth and fiction, 'autobiographical text may trouble the binary opposition of truth and fiction through inhabiting a creative space in-between' (Govan, Nicholson, Normington 2007:60). It is this blending, this troubling, that creates a 'creative space', letting the audience be creative, encourages them to want to input, to share their life and thoughts. Through the autobiographical text the audience are viewing the work through their own nostalgia and memory, and so they become active, not passive viewers. And so the audience become part the 'process of creation', through their 'process of reception' (*ibid* 2007:60).

This raises a question for me to investigate in future work – how much are audience a creative part of the performance event? And, where does the event end? I wanted to create an event that invited the audience into the performance and stories and want to share the performance space, but we were still the stories tellers and they the ones being told the stories. Did the fact that their stories were not reflected back into the performances (the ribbons were left to be read by others, but not retold into the performance) mean that audience felt free to share? Or could we have used the ribbon stories to create new work each night?

The *pantun* singer directs her *pantun* at someone specific. We worked with finding ways to include audience into our performance spaces. This involved going into their space, having the audience perform sections, opening up the stage lights to include the audience and directing lines at specific audience members. We created a sense of multiple directions; although the staging was 'end-on', I did not prioritise that direction of address/performance and placed some scenes at the back, almost hidden, so that some audience could just hear the words drifting through the space. The audience was in front of us and beside us, we literally brought the audience on to the stage and shared curry, and we incorporated fellow performers as part of the audience to whom we addressed

our words and actions. I chose to move through space and have movements of pause, so that the audience were not trying to catch up, but could relish the scene, the words, and the story; they had time to connect. Because of this, dynamic storytelling becomes reflective of the personal and the specific. As Brook explains, the connection between audience and performer is what makes the repetitive practice of performance have meaning, performance is a visceral experience;

> The assistance of eyes and focus and desires and enjoyment and concentration, repetition turns into representation. Then the word representation no longer separates actor and audience, show and public: it envelops them (Brook 1990:156)

The work developed during this project has similar aims as Robert Lepage's work, which Sas Dundjerovic (ed. Harive & Lavender 2010:161) explains as having the audience central to the development process, this relationship means the audience is part of the creative process. Sas Dundjerovic goes on to explain that within Lepage's work these relationships help to create a transformative space, they help to develop a playfulness of the performers. This transformative nature works well with the themes of the transformative nature of migration, as discussed in the previous section.

It is important to situate myself with western practitioners, such as Lepage and akin to immersive theatre, because it is essential to see where my work has come from, why I read Iban performance practice from a particular standpoint and to understand my positioning within the western practice I have been trained in and am familiar with. Without doing this there is a danger that my work can be read as 'from Sarawak'; as discussed earlier, I am not making claims of authenticity through the influence of the *pantun*.

My work is also similar to immersive theatre[27], where importance is placed on environment. But it is important to define inclusive-ness as different to immersive. Govan, Nicholson and Normington describe Alfreds and storytelling, with reference to Shared Experience's work, as sharing with the audience – 'a sense the story has been carved to share with the audience […] through this process a relationship between the teller and told is evolved' (Goven, Nicholson & Normington (93:2007). Storytelling is not immersive, because the space is not static to be moved through, the space transforms as the story unravels and the experience is shared; therefore storytelling is inclusive because the listening of the audience is included in the performance – it is an active listening, the audience reacts – they laugh, they frown, they can walk out. Immersive theatre doesn't need the audience to listen, but needs the bodies of the audience to be within the environment/performance space. It is this shared experience, between groups of people that the *pantun* is set in, and it is the experience of telling and actively listening, that the *pantun* is set in. The 'immersive theatres' audience have agency, but are treated as a mass, to be moved through static spaces. I am situating my work beside, but separate, from 'immersive theatre', in the liminal space between immersive theatre and inclusive theatre; through the influence of the *pantun* my practice has made important the shared aspects of performance and environment.

At the beginning of this chapter I discussed the theory of re-telling and Schechner's 'twice-behaved behaviour'. I now want to show how this idea was reflected within rehearsals and workshops.

> By his sheer strength of belief alone the actor can transform not only himself but the space around him […] through the creative will of the actor and the imaginative complicity of the audience (Alfreds 1979 interview with Peter Hulton).

This quote of Alfreds' interests me because of the words 'complicity of the audience', for me this means allowing the audience to work, to use their

[27] 'Immersive theatre' is a performance practice that has developed over the past decade and aims to immerse the audience in an environment, as demonstrated by companies like You Me and the Bum Bum Train, Duckie and Goat & Monkey.

imagination, to place themselves as active agents within the performance a relationship builds. Alfreds continues to talk about storytelling as a practice that strips the stage bare, without the need for a complicated and 'realistic' set – 'being so exposed to the audience seems to give them the courage to take that leap' (Alfreds 1979 interview with Peter Hulton). The audience and the performer work together to create narrative and meaning and the repeated engagement over the course of the performance, across the run, lets audience and performers create and re-create a connection and shared experience. Within the performance of *pantun*, the audience encourages and the performer plays up to that encouragement. The laughter at a funny *pantun* can encourage the performer to be more sexually explicit in their storytelling.

Therefore, through the influence of Brook and Lepage's audience and performer relationship, Alfreds' storytelling and sharing, through thinking about environment, and through the work of the *pantun*, I have developed a piece of work in which performers have the ability to choose and change. The performer has a space of belonging in front of the ear. The audience in return hears their story told back to them, or hears others' stories and as the performer acknowledges and communicates with the audience she is accepting them into the space of performance. They are including each other in their personal spaces.

A process of rehearsal through telling and re-telling our migration stories

At the beginning of this chapter I discussed the theory of re-telling and Schechner's 'twice-behaved behaviour'. I now want to show how this idea was reflected within rehearsals and workshops. The *pantun* was a reflective and sharing process, one that helped develop the idea of dynamic storytelling. I want to look further at this process of rehearsal, which is reflected again in performance, and see how the repetitive process of performance is a continuation of the repetitive process of rehearsal. For Lepage the text is the final point of a creative process and is a recording of a process rather than a playtext. This creates a fixed performance once the story has been established, which is reflective of the work of the *pantun*. Once the person/community's

story has been established the *pantun* singer creates a fixed *pantun*, based on previous work, recycling and repeating past performances and rehearsals to establish a solid storyline.

Migration is both about moving between spaces and the specific diaspora spaces of settlement. I began to develop the idea of telling our stories through post-it notes across a space to physically engage with the idea of migration and bodies moving through space, incorporating movement with stillness and pause.

We explored different journeys through language exploring what certain words meant to each performer. In London workshops we looked at words that related to ideas of home, comfort, belonging, mother and other themes that had come up from my initial field work and literature review. This was a way to investigate the emotional journeys around home and migration, without delving into difficult life stories, through details, and therefore feeling emotionally vulnerable.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in Sarawak we looked more closely at specific journeys through space and wrote on the post-it notes all the places we had lived; in this chapter I want to discuss how this exercise developed ways to tap into telling our stories and sharing our stories.

Each person, depending on how they identified with location, interpreted "places where you lived" differently. For example one performer was the daughter of a diplomat, and her locations related to larger spaces - countries and cities. But the various 'lived in' spaces were all seen as unique, separate, and difference spaces – from a longhouse to the SVC cultural village, an inner city hostel to her own family home, or an Asian country to a cold Canadian city.

We placed the post-it notes on the floor, and then walked through that journey, point by point, saying the words written on the post-it notes. This allowed us to break down the story of the journey into specific moments. These moments were spoken out loud to the audience (the performers in the workshop).

By exploring stories through points in space we were able to stop and announce the word at each post-it note. This announcement style of address took out the emotion and sense of connection with the location or emotive word written down. As audience (workshop members) we were able to gauge the complete sense of the journey without being caught up in the detail.

It was productive to use this process at the beginning of workshops, particularly in Sarawak[28], as it was a place to start to get to know each other, and a place from which we could build up trust over the time we spent together – we didn't have to go into detail about our lives on the first day. As we got familiar with our own journeys, this gave us a freedom to discuss in more depth sections of the story, when/if we felt comfortable to do so. In Kuching we broke into pairs, and in London the group was small enough to share all together, and we went through and learnt each other's stories. We walked through each other's stories; trying them on and listening to each other tell 'our' journeys. By telling stories through space our journeys became active and we felt in control of our stories. I use the term 'dynamic storytelling' to describe our workshops, as it was active and energetic and the telling was multi-directional as the 'audience' was all around the teller. We were reforming our identity at each repetition and finding a place for our story to belong within the performance space. This dynamic storytelling reflects the *pantun* singer and her practice within a ceremony, on the *ruai*, with audience all around her, creating and re-creating as she goes, mixing pre-written stanzas with adlibbed additions.

The development of this methodology, through sharing stories on post-it notes allowed for individuals to feel comfortable and in control. Because of this the fact that I wanted to interpret, re-write and re-tell the stories I had heard within a London based performance space was met with positivity and encouragement. The sense of control and sharing and 'trying on' each other's stories created a positive, joyful workshop experience. Throughout the process I constantly re-iterated what I would be doing with the work we were creating. I explained that workshop participants were "allowed to lie", or rather, I would not question what they shared as being the 'truth', and that I did not want to define what

[28] Those in the London workshops had worked together previously and therefore knew each other to a certain extent.

'truth' was, but that it was up the participants to define that for themselves. It was their life they were telling, their narrative, their identity, their choices, to relay the stories as they saw relevant[29].

Developing collective performance through ritual

I have spoken about the sharing of stories, the re-telling and transformation of stories across space and time, and how through workshops we developed these ideas. I have explained the physicality of the *pantun*, how this facilitates the sharing of stories. One of the final aspects about the *pantun* that inspired my performance practice was the sense of community. Although a solo performer, a *pantun* singer is at times performing alongside others, within a collective ceremonial context and as part of a community. I wanted to take this idea on to the stage and develop work that encouraged the performers to perform as part of an active collective.

I felt that by exploring the physicality of the *pantun* sounds we could respond to the practice from a physical perspective, listen to our bodies' response, and not just mimic the practice. Through physical exploration we would become more aware of our bodies in space and who else we shared that space with.

We took the beginning sound and sentence structure, which opens as a long cry. By repeating this over and over again we developed an emotional connection, as with the *ngajat*. The action of opening up your vocal chords and lungs, and experimenting with the sound to find your own natural octave, so as to be able to hold the sound long enough, opened up the body and mind. By adding our own words, our life story, our desires and experiences, we created a very emotional element to the action. It became too much at times, and some of the performers found they couldn't continue with the exercise. This was surprising,

[29] Within the workshop period of *From The Jungle*, the UK based performers were able to be in control of what was being told, how their stories filtered through to performance, or not. Some parts were taken out, then put back in as the performer re-thought, re-wrote and found different ways to perform it, or asked others to perform certain bits. I sent scripts to the women in the Sarawak and asked for feedback and permission to post their interviews online. These were all met with positive responses. When showing the film of the final performance to the women in the SCV the general consensus was enjoyment and some laughed as they recognised parts of their story and how I re-imagined it. One woman turned to me afterwards and said, "that was so creative!" These responses made me feel that workshops were successful and I achieved what I wanted to.

for all of us. To have physical action effect so much on an emotional, mental and spiritual level created a dangerous, vulnerable element to the process.

This was exciting to watch and experience, but one I had to be aware of and make sure that the workshop was safe for the performers to continue in and I chose to stop the session early because of this. It was a moment of connecting the concept of Artaud's 'scream', with theatre and performance and ritual. Artaud was concerned with creating theatre that connected the physical to the emotional, that woke up the audience – 'wakes us up heart and nerve' (Artaud reprint 1999:64) - theatre that was direct and violent; and this should be obtained by any means necessary – 'or whether real blood is needed right now to reveal this cruelty' (Artaud reprint 1999:67). This exercise connected the ritual elements of the *pantun,* I began to understand the position of the *pantun* within ceremony and not just as a form of entertainment. The physicality needed to perform just that one note gave me insight into the strength a *pantun* singer has. Unlike Artaud's connection with cruelty and ritual theatre, the *pantun* is not necessarily about 'pain' or 'violence', but the physicality of singing the *pantun*, the creative energy to write the *pantun* and the responsibility of being a 'voice' for a community or an individual means that the *pantun* singer puts her 'self' into her performance, she is continuously offering herself up for and in place of others – she is the "real blood" needed "to reveal" certain truths and stories.

The audience watches a body in space move and speak. By creating performance based on the ideas and structures of 'ritual theatre', a relationship between the emotional, mental and physical develops within one performer. By connecting the internal struggle of a performer, with a practice and the external activity of a spectator, 'watching', we can build a language and communication between the two. Artaud saw the engagement of audience as a key to developing theatre practice;

> We have lost the idea of theatre. And in as much as theatre restricts itself to probing the intimacy of a few puppets, thereby

> transform the audience into Peeping Toms… (Artaud reprint 1999:64).

Artuad looks at the idea of restoring theatre to ritual as being the ideal – 'To link theatre with expressive form potential, with everything in the way of gestures, sound, colours, movement, is to return it to its original purpose, to restore it to a religious, metaphysical position, to reconcile it with the universe' (Artaud reprint 1999:51). I argue that it is essential to link performance with expressive form to bring out the visceral journey of performance and storytelling, but by bringing in elements of ritual and ceremony we are not 'returning' but rather creating connections and engagement and building on an idea of community and collectiveness that is not just between performers, but also with audience.

Within the workshop on the *pantun* opening note we were 'performing' together, but also as individuals; to sustain the length of time we were performing the actions, we had to find our own natural octaves and rhythms. This sense of working together, but developing our own style continued through to *From The Jungle*, through the way we moved through space, to the chorus parts in "If I scream in an empty room, will you hear me?" (FTJ - 149) and when developing the 'Favourite Things' (FTJ -157) we started as a chorus and changed into individuals, competing to be the last one 'singing'. By having fun with the endnote of our 'Favourite Things' song, we were able to poke fun at ourselves, let the audience laugh at and with us. We were able to not be self indulgent in the many personal and emotive stories that had been told. We set up a sense of mockery that was then disrupted with the line "For those who don't have words, how does a moan become a scream?" This allowed for individual interpretations and characters to come through in the stories.

In conclusion

I hadn't planned to write poetry. When I began investigating the *pantun* it was the relationship with the audience and the strong imagery it evoked that I wanted to create on stage. But through investigating *ngajat* and storytelling

through space, I began to connect the performance practice of the *pantun* with its language form.

Through placing our stories beside the *ajat* rhythm the stories were forming rhythms and structures that were poetical and lyrical. The *pantun*, with its poetical language and rhythmical narrative, was reflective of *and* part of the production of the ceremonial space in the Iban longhouse. Within Iban ceremonies, beside the *ajat*, the music and food, set in dramatic landscape of the jungle, poetry was a natural form to use. Through finding ways to re-tell others' stories, with its blurring of fact and fiction, myth and reality, poetry became the appropriate form to use. Therefore *From The Jungle* became a performance of poetry, where the autobiographical stories could take on artistic and evocative ideas.

With this work I have deconstructed the *pantun*. Like the *ajat Iban*, I have taken aspects of the practice to influence the way in which I performed and created performance. I was not trying to re-enact the practice, I did not want to present an 'authentic' *pantun* on a London stage. Instead I have taken key aspects of the *pantun* – the relationship between audience and performer, the storytelling (how to work with other's life stories), and the use of poetry within performance and storytelling. I have explored the visceral and the emotional, and the layers of my life and stories that intersect within the narrative of migration. I have used a performance practice that actively moves through spaces and meets new audiences and investigated how that movement through space and time transforms and creates new-ness at each repetition.

When Brecht saw Chinese actor Mei Lanfang perform a female role in Moscow in 1935 he felt that Mei's aim was not 'to "become" his female character but rather to 'quote' her' (Mumford 2009:61). I wanted to explore this idea of 'quoting', which was then carried forward into how I approached writing the text for *From The Jungle* and how I approached telling stories which were not our own.

I wanted to be a scribe, I wanted to be a scribe that could listen and respond and engage. I wanted to be a scribe that allowed others to re-write my story so that

they could tell their stories through mine. I wanted to develop a style of *pantun* that allowed for changing stories and multiple interpretations.

CHAPTER FOUR

WEAVING: women's war, building home in new spaces

Weaving is an important part of the Iban culture and being a skilled weaver raises a woman's status. Iban women's weaving is a parallel prestige system to the male Iban's warring prestige system. It is also built around the idea of women's stillness, in opposition to the movement of men (Drake 1991).

Iban women weave blankets, which are known as *pua*, ceremonial outfits and clothing. In contemporary Sarawak the only weaving that gets worn is for ceremonial occasions and Iban blankets are now displayed as wall hangings (appendix p.175). The time for weaving is in the evening, after the farming, whilst sitting on the *ruai*. Weaving is done during the time of storytelling, which adds to its relevance to my project.

The Iban use three colours, red, blue and white (un-dyed thread). The designs they weave are symbolic, and the stories within the design are not linear narratives but rather representative of spiritual connections. Iban textiles are believed to hold mystical qualities (Mashman 1991:245). The weaver features in myths; it is not just her product that is important, but herself and her actions as a weaver that are referenced:

> *"With care she presses against the backstrap of the loom, She knows her shuttle like a fish darting through still waters"* (Masing vol.2[30] 1997:275).

> "*For we have keen and knowing eyes; and have clever hands and fingers"* (Masing 1997 vol. 2 1997:397)

The cloths she weaves are described as fit for the gods, and hold protective qualities (Mashman 1991 referencing Masing 1981 & Rubenstein 1973i).

[30] Translation of a *Timang*, which is an invocatory chant/poem, it is sung by a male bard, a *lemambang*, with assistant bards during the *Gawai* festival

Within this chapter I have asked the question:

> How can a skilled practical activity, which is connected to the spiritual, cultural and creative identity of Iban women and the Iban community, be migrated to a western performance space?

I have looked at the object of the loom and the work of weaving and read and represented them as being objects and acts of reproducing home and creating belonging within a diaspora space. I have then transformed and migrated this work on to a London stage. Through this object of 'home' I have created structures on stage that can present the 'home' of the project[31].

Like weaving the activity of performance is an activity that is skilled and happens between people through space and objects. Through multiple research projects I worked with performers on the action of weaving on oversized looms to develop the idea of bringing these two seemingly different practices, weaving and performance, together.

Through looking at the work of weaving I investigated the sense of the collective in the performance space, I was able to build on the idea of the physical work that happens in creating a space of home and belonging on a London stage. The physical presence of the looms on stage made real the sense of the physical work that is involved in building home and in building narratives, stories and performance.

> The act of weaving is likened to the act of the *ngajat* within a contemporary Iban society; it is respected and valued, but always defined in relation to practices by men. The warring practice of Iban men is constructed as being central to Iban identity, with the woman's weaving practice constructed as separate but in support of this activity. The space of warring (outside) is also defined by the space of weaving (inside).

[31] The projections on to the looms were of the artists that could not be there (the beginning inspirations of the content), images of Sarawak (my home) and workshops/rehearsals (the projects 'home')

Creating the space of home supports the activity of travel and war, as discussed in the first chapter when looking at concepts of home, mother and nostalgia.

I used three looms within the performance *From The Jungle*. These looms were at different stages of completeness; the White Loom was completed very early on in the show, the Red Loom was completed over the course of the show and the Blue was completed over the course of the show's run. I used the looms to lengthen the performance space, to try and evoke the shape of a *ruai*, with the White Loom placed beyond the pillars. I used the looms as focus points to perform around, this meant that centre stage was not necessarily seen as the dominant performance space, as each loom became an important place of performance. I used the looms as a way to divide the space, as places to hide behind and to appear from (images of the set: appendix p.176).

The decision to incorporate ideas around weaving and Iban weavers also grew from the practical needs of performance. I wanted to use projections within my performances as a way of expressing multiple spaces in one (performance) space. Looms offered me a structure on which to do this. Through my research on Iban costume, textiles and weaving at the Tun Jugah Textile Museum and Gallery I came across a set of antique looms beautifully displayed, next to each other and from this image grew the idea of using looms to break up space and as objects of purpose within the performance.

The image of these looms, the white thread stretched across wooden structures, like screens, that were simultaneously opaque and translucent was a strong visual inspiration and one I used on the flyer of *From The Jungle*. Whilst researching Iban weaving at the Textile museum I was introduced to the women who were weaving *pau* (Iban blankets), at the museum. The women were weaving together in a big airy room in the centre of downtown Kuching. They sat on the floor, weaving Iban *pua*, on traditional styled looms. I was able to speak with the women as they wove and watch their craft unfold in front of me, these looms and blankets I was so familiar seeing as a child, came to life.

Weaving provided me with a set, it provided me with a way of investigating collective working, and it offered me a structure to build the stories around.

In this chapter I look at the importance and agency in staying put, of grounding and re-grounding and the work that is done to create home and belonging. Within the chapter on the Longhouse, agency is framed in terms of movement, but, as Gedalof discusses, much 'Western thought associates movement and travel with self-actualisation and agency' (Gedalof 2009:91) and it is important to also see agency in staying put and to revalue the practices within which stability is created.

I will discuss these theoretical notions of home, belonging and groundedness through the utilisation of the three looms in *From The Jungle*. I will then discuss how these concepts and the use of weaving influenced my performance practice, how I approached workshops and the performance elements in the project.

The White Loom: hidden, blurred and visible

On the White Loom projections of women who had been involved in the project plus spaces and places from the research journey come into focus and fade out again. These images included filmed interviews (without sound), talking heads, of the women from the workshops in Sarawak, there were films of going up river on a longboat and photos of my family. These images were masked by the bright lights of the stage, enhanced by darkness or blurred by the twisted fabric through the loom. As the audience walk in they glimpse a women behind the White Loom cooking. Some of the audience were encouraged to approach her directly with their spices. As the show progressed the silhouette of a woman, sometimes two, are seen behind the loom cooking and a waft of spice and curry builds up over the course of the show. These shadowy figures produce an exotic aroma.

The activity in and around the White Loom places the performance space as an inside space, a home space, and the audience is welcomed into this space as guests by the performers. This space does change throughout the piece, for

different stories, as mentioned in earlier chapters, but ultimately the performers are inviting the audience in to their home to celebrate *Gawai*.

Across all the looms were projections of the people and spaces involved with this project, but on the White Loom you were able to make out clearer images, the scenes are sharper because of the loom's colour. Therefore it is through these projections and the action around the White Loom that I discuss the question of the visibility of migrant women within diaspora spaces. Like the projections on the loom, sometimes she is visible and sometimes she is hidden or blurred.

The migrant woman is hidden in plain sight. It is not because of her insignificance that she is not seen by those around her, but rather her difference that creates her invisibility. She becomes part of an undifferentiated group, one part of the collective Other. In her 1999 article "The Scent of Memory" Avtar Brah considers ways in which the migrant woman's presence is viewed as a problem, this is investigated through the question 'where have they come from?' (Brah 1999:7). Through this question Brah looks at how a migrant is highly visible by taking up space; through bringing new-ness 'they' are invading the space – new food, new smells, foreign objects, add to the visual difference of a migrant, making her something that takes up more than the space of a physical person, 'they have taken over Southall […] the smell of their food gets down your throat' (Brah 11:1999). Through the connections and interactions with the community, the resources and with each other, the migrant woman can be seen as taking up time and facilities that are utilised by the native (white) community, these resources and facilities can been seen as limited, and therefore being taken away from the white residents. These ways of looking at space makes migrants invisible by not being individuals and subjects in their own right but rather a group, defined by ethnicity 'the "they" in this locution signified "Asians".' (*ibid* 11:1999).

In the 100th issue of *Feminist Review* (2012) Brah's 1999 article is revisited as is the question "where have they come from?". Aisha Phoenix and Ann Phoenix investigate this question through concepts of mothering in Tower Hamlets. A

white mother, Catherine, is interviewed in 2005; she belongs to a different generation than Brah's research participants in the late 70s, living within an established multicultural London and yet she still articulates the migrant (Bangladeshi mother) as Other. She groups these women as one, she defines them by perceiving they all have one culture ('one woman who didn't feed her daughter properly, because it was a baby girl […] they prefer boys, because you have to provide a dowry don't you?' (Phoenix & Phoenix 55:2012)). Catherine is generalising the Bangladeshi mothers and in doing so is asserting her individual subjectivity. 'Catherine can be said to be self-racialising as well as othering Bangladeshi mothers by position herself as clearly very different from them' (*ibid* 56:2012). Gedalof's investigation on "where have they come from" looks more closely at the idea of mothers and the 'mass'; their taking up of space with 'buggies, smelly food, loud voices' (85:2012). For me it seems that this idea of the 'mass' and generalisation keeps coming back to the concepts of building a sense of space and belonging, the fundamental work of the migrant woman/mother.

It is this idea of 'they', the other, that keeps the migrant woman/mother hidden within the bustle of diaspora spaces. The migrant is a 'they' and not a 'her' and she loses her status as an individual and becomes part of the many non-native others.

Through the staging of *"If I scream in an empty room"* (FTJ -149) with a confined figure, in stark light, against the White Loom, we see the hidden migrant women battling with the idea of being invisible in and amongst people as they "whirl and whirl about me". The chorus acts as a kind of enveloping cloth, weaving (layering) voices around her, protecting her and shielding her from "all this newness". In this monologue we can understand the instability of invisibility and of being Othered, how it takes away a sense of self and we can see what actions those feelings lead to. The migrant woman seeks to weave a cloth of protection, a sense of self within a new space.

She (the protagonist of this story) hides behind her otherness and wants to create a space reminiscent of home. She wants to build up walls to ground

herself, and to confine herself to a space that feels comfortable, she wants to build a homeplace that gives her liberation from the identity of Other. This story also tells of the physicality of a space to belong in, the need to have *"floor solid under my feet, something to grip on to"* (FTJ - 149). A space to hide away in and a space to stand up in; not be pushed against a wall hidden in plain sight. This space that she wants to build is akin to hooks' notion of homeplace as a 'site of resistance and liberation' (hooks 1991:43). hooks looks at the homeplace as being a place of safety from oppression and quotes Vietnamese Buddist monk Thich Nhat Hahn in explaining that resistance as a place where you can re-establish self.

On the White Loom the projections at times were clearly visible, there were individual faces, the colours of other spaces and yet, it was difficult to make out the details because of the textured loom. Through the action of building a space to exist in to feel safe and grounded, the migrant woman continues to blur the lines of visibility and invisibility. Her space is clearly marked out; her home is created within dwellings, where scents and colours seep out into the diaspora space flagging her presence and masking the specifics about her as a subject.

Because of this, her presence gets constructed, simplified by the 'native audience'. This is part of the work of othering and colonializing of the migrant woman. Lugones discusses the concept of racism where White/Anglo women define women of colour, simplifying and stereotyping to render the migrant woman invisible. 'This behaviour is exhibited *while we are in their midst*' (Lugones 1987:394). Lugones explains that this rendering is a way to not identify with and to keep the migrant woman isolated and separate, which keeps migrant women out of the field of vision. Through travelling to each other's 'worlds' this separation and invisibility will change.

The audience of *From The Jungle* and the previous UK performances were Western (predominantly white) spectators. Therefore I must acknowledge the limited view the audience has of migrant women performers (on stage and projected) and challenge this, by emphasising the lack of visibility (through projection) and revealing other 'worlds' (through live performance and cooking

and sharing food). 'Travelling to each other's worlds enables us to *be* through *loving* each other.' (Lugones 1987:394).

The White Loom was essentially completed before the audience arrived, but each night just as the audience were walking in a little more white was added, or re-woven. This was done to reflect that within every 'home' space, work has been done behind closed doors, away from the guests that come to visit, but even within the private spaces of the home there is work always happening, home is being woven and re-woven as new items are bought, new people become part of your life and the new outside space establishes itself within the personal spaces, something I explore more fully in the next section.

Part of creating a sense of visibility and place within a new space and for different audiences is through the visceral. Memories become tangible through taste, touch and smell and through creating these memories the migrant woman is able to develop a sense of self that can help alleviate the painful feelings of loneliness, can deepen the sense of rootedness and develop a visibility through senses. The cooking of curry within *From The Jungle* (and at earlier performances) was bringing my taste of home (Sarawak) and adding new ingredients, ingredients bought in London, and brought by the audience. Influences from the new space are mixed in a cooking pot with old techniques. Through these different influences a new identity is created that binds the family together and creates a sense of collective belonging. Binding the new communities with the old communities.

The loneliness of being in a new place, before and during the beginning work of creating a new home and belonging, is often repeated through the *From The Jungle* stories. Can the migrant woman exist outside of the collective? One of the ways I have looked at this idea of being seen as an individual within the diaspora space is through asserting difference, of proclaiming exoticness. There is a sense of reclaiming and redefining the 'exotic' label, a label that has already been pinned to her in the context of migration. I have chosen stories that talk about choosing the exotic label to assert visibility. For example - "where are you from? Me? From the jungle!" (FTJ -148) is a section of *From The Jungle* that is

tongue and cheek, playing up to the expected identity of the 'exotic'; and the use of Malaysian costumes/dress, which is long sarong skirt with a matching long sleeved top. The skirt is very tight so you can only move through space with small steps. Vera and I greeted each audience member wearing this attire, placing ourselves as different to the western dressed audience.

The articulation of difference is part of the work of belonging within diaspora space and is part of the messy work of migration where sameness and difference are woven together. By asserting her difference the migrant women is not looking at the sameness within her identity of those native, or already established, in the space. This assertion is work that looks back to her origins and roots, to establish and ground those different qualities within this space. Trinh talks about 'roots' being 'the fount of my strength' (Trinh 1989:89), which reinforces this image of grounding, of stabilising and places importance in the work that is being done in staying put. This work of finding an individual voice amongst the collective identity, to assert and ground yourself in the present, in the new space influenced the way I worked with the performers in Sarawak, as I will discuss later in the chapter, in the section 'Performance as a collective'.

The Red Loom: in the real world, repetition and staying put

Weaving the soft cloth and fabric through the taut lines of the loom, we are creating the furnishings of home. The soft cloth brings warmth and comfort to the encasing structures of home. The soft cloth brings 'home' into the house. Within the space of home it is the work of women that reproduces concepts of home. Within the diaspora space these reproductions of home are important to create a sense of belonging to a new space.

The Red Loom was half complete as the audience walked in. This was completed over the course of the performance and un-woven after the audience left. Performance is more than just what one audience sees, even if each audience are not aware of this. Each night a different combination of the same lines of red cloth were woven. Re-doing. Re-producing. Re-working. Together four women worked to weave a new piece.

Through the demonstration of weaving in front of an audience we are prioritising this work of creating home. We are emphasising the creative nature of reproducing home. Through the static nature of sitting and weaving, we are showing that agency and empowerment within migration is not only achieved through the ability to move through space. Agency is also about those that stay put, those that weave stability in a space because stability is not necessarily about sameness (Gedalof 2009:88). In recognising the dynamism of weaving we recognise the complexities of creating home and belonging, in the structures that are 'home' and the many spaces that can be and become home.

The very nature of weaving is stable. The still body with busy fingers, working with a static loom. The space for weaving is indoors, sheltered, it is not typically thought of as an activity that can be moved or occupy multiple spaces. The weaver sits, alone or with others and works backwards and forwards across the wooden structure. Grounded to the floor the (Iban) woman sits, from this position she cannot move in a hurry, nor is the work of weaving a fleeting activity but one that has to be attended to for hours at a time. But of course, this static repetitive movement does/can travel, with physical effort and purpose as investigated later in this chapter when looking at the task of taking a loom on a walk, in the section 'Objects: the physicality of time'. Creating home in diaspora space is about the 'messy and dynamic entanglements' (Gedalof 2009:88) of change, development, movement and stability.

Through the work of women within home spaces a sense of belonging and a place of rootedness is established. Through weaving we are able to see the work and creativity involved in creating spaces and asserting ownership. With each layer of thread woven into the loom a weaver works towards creating fabric to clothe the family, material to sleep on, and tapestry to decorate the walls of the home. Through the threads she softens the structures of a new space to make it hers, her family's and she reinvents the notions of home and belonging in a new space. She is in charge of the transformation of the space, with each dip of her shuttle across the loom.

What can be seen as endless repetition and a display of prescribed gender roles can be re-conceptualised as strength and skill being utilised to create the important space of home. Within the movements of migration home/s hold fast, as places to go between. Within the Iban's sense of migration, this emphasis on stability is highly important, but as Gedalof has argued (2009:85) stability is not necessarily in conflict with change in the context of migration; rather stability and change can be seen as part of the same process. As foregrounded in the earlier chapter on the Iban longhouse, both the rural home and the urban home hold equal, but different, importance in the lives of the migrant Iban community, to establish two separate and yet stable, rooted spaces, allows for this movement back and forth.

In *From The Jungle* (FTJ - 147) we hear the story of a mother whose baby cries and cries at night. The story is of a mother who nurtures the child, takes her to doctors and shaman and who seeks her own mother's advice on how to quell the repetitive cries of her child. Her child only stops crying when back at the longhouse with its grandmother. Through this story the audience sees a picture of two homes, a complicated weaving that takes place, combining oppositions - the spiritual witch and the scientific doctor, the past (the longhouse) and the future (the urban city)- it is a story of two mothers working together to create spaces for the child to be safe and stable. Here again, stability can require change rather than being opposed to it.

Iban weaving is also resonant of other ways to reconfigure notions of the homely or the domestic. While the activity of weaving is often seen as 'merely' domestic and as a largely passive action, the Iban's relationship with the act of weaving sees it as a meeting and binding of the spiritual world with the real world. The process of weaving doesn't just begin at the point of thread across thread in a loom, but begins from the decision of what pattern to weave. Iban women often come to weaving and designing their patterns through a dream. The process of dying the threads is called *kayau indu* 'woman's war', because it deals with the supernatural world, which is dangerous work.

The skill involved in dying thread is reserved for a specialist, particularly in the dying of the red thread. The process of dying the thread has many rituals and prayers (Freeman 1957, Howell 1912, Richards 1981); what is important is the repeated links with the spirit world, the guarding of the weaver from harmful effects of the spirit and the blessing of the cloth-to-be. The rituals highlight the importance of the weaver's job. Her skill is performed and confirmed at each stage of the dying and weaving process.

A weaver is 'chosen' to be one by her dreams (Drake 1991:276); she must be blessed by a spirit in a dream to take on the role as a weaver. The spiritual world is a part of the weaving process and the cloth that is made from these looms cover everyday use to ritual ceremonies. Each piece of fabric created, no matter how plain or complex the pattern, has been created through the spirit world and is considered a charm, the Iban 'are literally clothed in prayers' (Haddon & Start 1936:146).

> She speaks of birth and rootedness, rather than death and adventure (Cavarero 1995:22).

This more complicated view of the feminised practice of weaving is resonant of Cavarero's work to rethink the feminine in the context of masculinist Western philosophy. Cavarero (1995) revisits the story of Penelope and Odysseus in Greek myth, and talks about Penelope's weaving as an act of tying the soul to the body and the 'real' world. Through the reading of Plato's *Phaedo*, where thinking and philosophy are what "unties" the soul from the mortal body/world (1995:23), this untying can be seen as pure and masculine as it is to do with the act of thinking, with death offering the philosopher a release, untying the treads of life so the soul can float away. The use of the mind is in opposition to the woman's physical actions of weaving, and it is this purity and release of the soul that is the ultimate goal for the philosopher. Penelope's act of tying and re-tying, weaving and re-weaving, grounds the body in the mortal world. She is re-tying, reiterating and reinforcing the connection with the body (reality) and the soul.

Through this binding, tying and weaving, Penelope weaves a thread and creates a physical earthly home, an abode for the body to reside in. The Iban woman weaver also weaves a home for her family, weaving charms to keep them safe, secure and rooted in the real world, protected from the harmful influence of the spirits.

These notions of spirituality, of linking the weaving and un-weaving of thread to create spaces of home, return us to the story of the two daughters who live with their grandmother. The grandmother ties, and re-ties black thread round the youngest daughter's wrists, to keep her safe from spirits, particularly when she goes to stay with her mother in town, where the spirits "are not good" (FTJ - 147). The grandmother keeps the child in the real world through her tying of thread. The granddaughter takes it off and the grandmother re-ties it. Eventually the amulet becomes a gold bangle, echoing what is around her mother's wrists. By letting her daughters go (to live with their grandmother) a mother is creating stability.

The Blue Loom: weaving together, the past, the future and the present

> Knitting together yesterday and today in ways that involve an ongoing rematerializing of identities (Gedalof 2009:96)

The Blue Loom was built over the five night run of *From The Jungle* and the audience collaborated in creating it. Each night the audience were asked to bring a story and/or spice for the curry. The stories were written on white ribbon and woven into the Blue Loom after the show had finished. This created a space for interaction, for the audience to talk to each other, to read the stories from the day before and ask questions of the performers[32], and to add their own stories of migration.

This Blue Loom offered a place for the different groups of people involved in the show to congregate - audience, performers, production team and front of house.

[32] As discussed in previous chapters, little encouragement was needed, the audience were really happy to write and weave themselves into the loom, it was more of a case of telling them they could do it now, and where to weave the stories.

All groups over the course of the week added stories to the loom and were all eager to read other's stories. This created a meeting of trajectories where stories were exchanged. The stories that were written down were in reaction to the stories they heard during the performance, what was read on the loom and/or what was exchanged with other people there. The stories told knitted together their own journeys and the journeys they were witnessing. The white ribbons offered tangible ways for identities to be expressed through stories of journeys and ideas of belonging.

This combination of sharing, exchanging and presenting identity on and through an object helped create a safe way to exchange identities with new people. Ahmed (2004:1) discusses the idea of stability not being fixed and mobility as not necessarily about being adrift. Through the interaction with the Blue Loom we can see the way objects can help ground a transient community and also mobilise a stable community.

The audience are transient, a new group in the space each night. But their stories are left for others to read, a permanent object of a white ribbon anchors their presence in the space. The performers and production team come each night to perform, but through their stories woven into the loom they tell of past journeys and bring their outside life into the home space of the performance arena.

Gedalof (2009:96) argues that, in the context of migration, gaps of time and shifts in space mean that performing the 'same' rituals of making home can take on new meanings. The Blue Loom marks time through the week of performances and although the ritual of weaving, blue cotton and white ribbon, doesn't change, the space changes. The loom is no longer empty and fills in the space, the performers need to use chairs to reach the top heights and the audience weaves white ribbon into the blue cloth.

Second generation migrants may be much more ingrained within the urban culture, but still have around them objects and stories from their parents' migration and the family rituals and objects take on new meanings as the space

has changed around them. Food is a common topic within the stories being told and through food and drink we see the meaning of objects. How food is prepared – the image of a mother cooking curry in a sarong and a shower cap reiterates the strong smells of the mother's childhood for her western daughter (FTJ – 144). The mother arranging food for a family that has now left, which she is no longer hungry to eat (FTJ - 157). The stories of 'Stripey the towel' along with a mug of Milo that meant so much in the space of the daughter's childhood that, in the mother's new space, doesn't have any meaning. All these notions of objects are arranged around the women as time, space and generations move forward and the past and present exist at the same time, weaving through each other as memory and objects work together.

The arranging of objects in space creates a sense of home and belonging as each new generation moves, adjusts and even discards objects that have held meaning in past times. And when moving to a new space, the objects that are taken with you represent a particular notion of home for individuals, 'home is not simply the things, however, but their arrangement in space in a way that supports the body habits and routines of those who dwell there' (Young 2005:139). Young explains that home is personal and objects express the activities and the events that matter and add to personal narratives. This idea helped develop a practice, which I will discuss in the next section of this chapter.

And so, as time is marked and the past and present are woven together to create new futures I am reminded of the rivers that snake across Sarawak, bringing together communities, allowing travel to and fro, and that are also a constant yet changing dynamic. It is these images of weaving rivers and woven thread that I used to end *From The Jungle*:

> *From the jungle we come, in the jungle we stay.*
> *Carrying home with us in a handful of water;*
> *The river that takes us, returns us and moves us.*
> *My story, your story, our story, bound together from the same beginning, changing as time and space moves us apart.*
> *I'll tell you my story and you tell me yours.*

And we'll sit together and talk of days I don't remember and you can't forget…
You tell me how it all used to be and ask why it had to change.
Where did you go? And why did you leave?
You ask again and again.
At least you returned, no matter the time,
At least you returned, my child, my sister, my friend. (FTJ – 164)

Objects: the physicality of time

The practice of weaving is one that is developed over time; it is a skill that is passed down through generations and one that takes years to master and weeks to create a single piece of cloth. I did not have years to accomplish specific performance practices, but I set up workshops where we took time to investigate how, as individual performers, we related and connected to various practices. In London we spend hours walking around the room in the *ngajat* step, thinking about how that movement affected our individual bodies. We moved altogether, to find ways to weave through each other in space, with the same rhythm, in step with each other.

I set up various workshops that were based on building oversized looms, weaving, un-weaving and re-weaving the looms. Vera and I spent days sitting in front of a loom, listening to music, weaving, and re-weaving. We experimented with colours, textures and taking the time to sit and work. The sense of rhythm that gets developed as two people sit beside each other, move around each other and work towards the same goal was taken into the final performance.

It became important to me to perform time and to perform work. It was important to take the time to create something real, to not represent time passing, but to have actual time pass and be seen to pass. Therefore the timing of the show needed to be long enough for physical creation. It had to be long enough for a vegetable curry and rice to cook. It had to be long enough for us to build half the Red Loom and the Blue Loom needed to be big enough to take five shows to build, but small enough for us to do it, without cheating.

This also meant that as performers we had to master the art of weaving in those oversized looms so that we could achieve weaving them. I had to weave the stories and design the staging of the show so that there was someone available to stir the curry at the necessary intervals. What we were creating on stage was happening in real time. What we were investigating in workshops was the realness of time and stories.

What also came out of those sessions of weaving between Vera and me was conversation. The conversation of two people who know each other well, the conversation of workers; the half finished sentences, open ended questions and the pauses and grunts as the physicality of the work enter the rhythm of speech. These qualities became one of the styles I wrote with. The friendship that grew between us as we focused our hands and bodies on the task was something that I wanted to hold on to when writing. It was also something that I wanted to keep within other workshops. A sense of creating something as a collective, we were all working together, sharing and building.

Goodman discusses the performance *Quilts,* a show that looks at AIDS through the craft/art form of quilting, another skill often associated with 'women's work' (Goodman 1996:204). Through looking at this piece she discusses how AIDS is a 'community problem and a loss of individual lives'. It is through the ideas of quilting that ideas of community, creating and individuality are combined and Goodman frames this as 'performing life'. For her, 'performance art [is] where 'real life and 'drama' can overlap in powerful ways' (Goodman 1996:207). The art of quilting and developing stories around the process of quilting provide a framework of celebration in which positivity was created. Similarly, my mobilising of the physical work of weaving, the companionship of working, and also the concept of weaving as an art form, were aimed at combining real life and drama in order to foreground women's work on and off the stage.

There is physicality to stories and time has a physical presence - over time a piece of cloth has been woven. The *ngajat* and the *pantun* are performance practices that are based on the body of the performer, they are practices that

can be mobile. The Longhouse is a space, both imagined and real that influences the way Iban move through space both in the rural setting and the urban. But the loom and the cloth are physical objects. The loom is not so easily mobile, it facilitates stability as the weaver sits grounded on the floor weaving, but the finished product is mobile, the cloth becomes clothing, a wall hanging or blanket. The weaver works with objects of both stability and mobility. Therefore objects gave me a way to investigate life stories and investigate the duality of stability and mobility. Through time and space, objects are carried around whilst simultaneously used to ground and create home in a new space.

In London I asked the performers to bring with them four objects that meant something to them, that resonated with the idea of 'home', this was in relation to the points in the 'Blue Loom' section when discussing Young. Not only did the objects have meanings and stories attached to them, but how they were arranged and re-arranged in the space told different stories. The relationship the objects had to each other was also part of the story. For some there was a chronological relationship, others a more emotional. What these objects meant to the individual were ideas of stability, notions of home, something that they took from one place to the next, and some were new objects that expressed home in the present. But stability and home can also be dangerous and uncomfortable places and for some it was difficult to express out loud the meaning of the objects. The objects included soft toys, photos of children, award trophies and a ukulele.

We placed the objects in the space, and each of us moved from one object to the next, looking, observing, re-telling the meaning of it to ourselves. We repeated the journey until the movement between objects was as familiar as the objects themselves. For some the objects were just an object, for others they were a complex story. Because it was not easy for all to talk about the objects in-depth I worked with the objects in a more physical way. We developed individual sequences where we expressed our relationship with the object through a movement.

The taking of objects from place to place can be an easy way of taking home from place to place. Portable pieces of home, grounding each new space. But sometimes an object is not enough to create home and we must physically build, create new objects. This is, metaphorically, taking the loom with us as we travel and migrate, working hard to create and recreate new objects from old patterns. To embody this task of building through old patterns and previous skills we took a portable loom through the streets of East London stopping and weaving at various points. We investigated the complicated nature of taking a static activity on a journey. The physicality of weaving in different spaces meant taking bags of cloth, of battling the elements (it was a rainy, cold winter day in February), of pushing, pulling and manoeuvring the loom on to buses, into cafes for shelter and then finding a spot where we could sit comfortably for a decent period of time to weave something substantial into the loom. It took time, it took hard work and the results were haphazard, sections of beautifully woven colours and sections of crammed together mess. This activity expressed the work that is involved in creating a grounding and stability in different spaces. It shows the physicality in uprooting and re-grounding.

This activity was also in direct contrast to the idea of the passive, still, stable loom. There is something radical about moving something that is supposed to be stationary. This journey and its movement problematized and highlighted the contradictions in the static notions of building home. Although the looms in the final piece, *From The Jungle*, were static, there were traces of this movement, of the journey these looms took to get to the form they were in on the stage. The looms were constantly changing, they were a platform for the different spaces this project had inhabited (via projection) and their journey stretched beyond one night as new audiences saw and interacted with them.

The use of objects did not carry into the shows in the way they were utilised within the workshop, because objects carry such personal relationships and we were telling the stories of many women. But the importance of objects in creating a narrative and establishing 'home' within a space was projected into the set. Every item within the set, both on and off the performance space, had

meaning and worked towards creating a sense of home, a home that was familiar to me and one that was familiar to the origins of the stories I had heard.

Performance as a collective: a shared skill, but still an individual

The women that I worked with in Sarawak, particularly the dancers from the SCV, can be seen as important people within the urban space of Kuching. Their skill and talent are an important part of the urban landscape, they are part of developing the identity of Sarawak and Malaysia. They can be seen as the 'right' kind of migrant. Because of this they came into the workshop room with a sense of belonging. Not only was it their rehearsal room and their home, but they came with a set of skills that they knew I did not have. As a group (UK performers and Sarawakian performers) we were able to start from a place of comfort, a place of confidence – the UK performers had worked with me previously and the Sarawakian performers knew the space. From that place of confidence we were able to discuss the physicality of migration, which led to in-depth stories of being in the new spaces.

Working in applied theatre Jeffers is concerned with how to tell the stories of others and the position she plays within this process as a theatre maker and creator. She is concerned with the multiple layers, trajectories and entanglements of working with life stories. Part of this relates to who are the research group and how does the researcher fit into the dynamics of the group. Jeffers (2012:02) discusses the idea of the deliberate manufacturing of research situations and highlights this in relation to the role of the researcher. To work with a research group I also had to interrogate my role within the group and decide what that role would be and how I would interact. I too have 'manufactured' rather than 'encountered' research groups and have done so with attention to what my role, as workshop leader, interviewer, scribe/writer, image-maker and protagonist, means. In chapter three on *pantun* I discuss this from the perspective of listening and with particular reference to Trinh. In this chapter I want to look at this dynamic through the idea of a collective. The collective nature of weaving is based on the concept of skill; it is created through

shared, common knowledge and a mutual understanding of a practice that manifests itself in different designs on cloth.

The collective practice of performance replicates ideas from the collective practice of weaving. Although Iban weaving is done solo, one woman on one loom, the practice of it embodies a collective knowledge shared down generations. It is usually done in the 'public' space of the *ruai*, with other weavers and as part of the village's evening activities, much like a stage shared with other performers. My role within the collective of performers developed through drawing on the familiar and shared performance structures of director, choreographer, writer and performer. Therefore it felt right to engage with performers as my primary research group and to 'manufacture' that group.

In Iban weaving, a sense of individuality remains within this collective working. Designs are often kept within the family and/ or each woman has her own set of designs that she uses and keeps coming back to (Mashman 1991:245). In the past the skill of a weaver was related to her status, therefore she might even hide her working until a new design was complete. Each design is copyrighted to the designer, although she may sell her designs, which would mean she would lose her copyright.

This sense of ownership over creative design, a creative control when weaving items of ritual importance and of everyday use, expresses a sense of individuality within a collective community of weavers. It is this dual sense of the practice that I explored within my workshops.

This development of individuality within a collective played out in various ways. In London it was spending time, working together on physical movement. In Sarawak it was telling and re-telling our migration stories to each other through movement through space. As we learnt to move through and around each other, weaving our journeys over and over, backwards and forwards, we began to divulge small details about why and how we came to be. We were creating strips of behaviour, to be woven and re-woven in various way, creating a score that could be separate from the performer "doing" the 'behaviour'/movement. We

were finding ways to transmit our stories to each other, similar to Schechner's restored behaviour (1986:36). Restored behaviour involves choices, the individual is involved in choosing to restore a story that becomes part of a group narrative– 'fixed behaviour that everyone participating agrees to do' (Schechner 1986:37).

In the earlier section of this chapter I spoke about migrant women hiding in plain sight. In the performance practice that is used within touristic spaces, the women performing are doing so for an audience but they are seen as a collective, representative of a culture. Performers on stage are seen as displaying, demonstrating, telling stories, but the individual with all her particularities is hidden behind these generic or generalising narratives. Performers relish and enjoy playing other people and telling stories different from their own. But it became important to me to create moments when we could break this barrier and disrupt the structure; where we could un-weave the stories that we had woven. The personal statements that were revealed in the Sarawak workshops became a pause, a breath and a grunt of the physical work of performance. These statements became part of the final piece and were moments of individuals popping their heads up and claiming individuality before continuing on, weaving through each other to create a group performance.

In conclusion

> Thinking about the possibilities of the repetition that undoes (Gedalof 2009:95)

Within *From The Jungle* the looms became active sites of negotiation (Gedalof 2009:93) of the domestic that is entangled with notions of home and belonging, where the origin meets with the diaspora and decisions are made about what is displayed, hidden, blurred or forgotten. Like the development of non-linear narrative through looking at the dynamic flow within the space of the longhouse, a narrative and flow that repeats, re-tells and circles, and undoes a structure it set up to create new-ness, the weaver builds structure and physical

presence through thread and loom whilst simultaneous creating bonds with the non-physical world.

The ideas behind Iban weaving helped me develop themes, which created the structure for the final show. As discussed in the chapter on *ngajat*, the *ajat Iban* developed out of ceremonies linked with the Iban identity, in particular *Gawai*, as did the importance of weaving. The place weaving holds within the Iban culture is of great importance; it is part of the cycle of life and is important in maintaining and reiterating what it means to be Iban. The skill of weaving makes weavers an important element of the community, they are spiritual guardians and connect the real world with the spiritual world. Through this connection and binding of worlds they support and facilitate the rice farming cycle, the most important aspect of the Iban.

This concept of a cycle, a repeated sequence, that on each repetition reveals newness, is replicated within the structure of *From The Jungle*. The show begins with Grace 'planting seeds' of thought around the idea of journeys. The show grows to become a *Gawai* (harvest) festival, celebrating what has been and what is to become, looking into the future. It focuses on choice and agency. Each night the process starts up again, Grace's words are slightly different, the looms get woven differently or are added to, and with each repetition newness is created.

> *"We wove from morning until the last sounds of padi pounding;*
> *Together we three, myself, Nangi and Ensikok, beat down with our weaving sword;*
> *Together we tied and embroidered as we worked the cloth;*
> *Towards morning, before the pounding of padi had begun;*
> *The weaving of the war jacket was completed"*
> (Masing vol.2 1997:397)

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

"New Zealand, Malaysia, New Zealand, Malaysia, New Zealand, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, New Zealand, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London" (FTJ - 160)

And so my story goes, East to West, West to East, told in hops, turns and jumps until I exhaustedly collapse on the floor. The occupying and traveling between multiple locations, different cultures and wanting, needing, and trying to claim belonging, find home and establish an identity was my journey from the jungle and back again. I was looking back, to find a way forward.

And through this work, through this personal investigation I found other stories of migration, I sought out other journeys of identity, from women who had crossed space, moved through different locations and experienced multiple cultures. These intersections of identities and trajectories of narratives worked their way into my words and through my stories to become a *pantun* of finding belonging in new spaces. I have placed myself and my preoccupations at the centre of these stories, and I have heard stories of migration through the lens of my nostalgia and my desire to find belonging in multiple places, to find home in spaces I once knew and spaces I wanted to know.

I have worked collectively to find ways through the problematic issues of authenticity and truth. I have embraced repetition and found creativity in doing and re-doing, and through the expanding of space I have found dynamism in these repetitions. It is through expanding spaces, engaging audiences and understanding my place within this research that I have been able to investigate how identity changes when space and location change.

This project has asked the question 'Can Iban cultural and performance practices be 'migrated' to a contemporary western performance context in

order to explore experiences of women's migration?' This thesis demonstrated and investigated how to do this migration with empathy, with responsibility, with understanding, and with ethical integrity.

Migration is meeting new audiences

This PhD research has mapped women's migration on to performance migration. Migration is meeting new audiences, with each new meeting a new identity gets forged, negotiated, created and re-created. I am arguing that through repetition there is new-ness and through meeting new audiences new narratives and new identities are created.

The Iban practices, *ngajat*, *pantun* and weaving, have a common thread of repetition, the repetitive motion of hands weaving backwards and forwards across a loom, the repetitive rhythm of the *ajat Iban*, with its turns and circles and the repetitive process of the *pantun*, with each new *pantun* built on a previous *pantun*. As these practices move from rural to urban setting they meet new and different audiences, and the meaning and identity of these practices change. These performance practices are rooted in village-based ceremonial festivals, they had an identity that was connected to being part of a community, they were practices that shared space and included the audience, but they have also become codified points of an Iban identity within the cultural politics of Sarawak and Malaysia.

The *ajat Iban* gets performed on the global stage of a tourist destination and the Iban weavers make cloth in a museum, to be sold for thousands of pounds. The identity of the weaving and the *ajat* become based more on their visual appeal than their use to a community, and work in these contexts to capture the attention of an outside eye.

The *pantun* has become a ritual within a political space where politicians meet with Iban communities. The *pantun* is a practice that is used to, and works with, changing in front of new audiences because that is the nature of the practice. But within contemporary Malaysia its performance space has expanded on to a

national platform, where the *pantun* singer cannot so easily include all her audience in her performance, unlike on the *ruai* at a longhouse. Therefore the *pantun* and the *pantun* singer's identity of being the voice of the community is accentuated and she stands alone without the support of her community surrounding her and the VIP.

The identities of the women performing these practices change along with the practice. They become experts, they become professionals and they become producers of cultural identity. They have agency over their practice and performance, they have found a home and an important place of belonging within contemporary Sarawak and Malaysia. But, they are working within constraints, their sarongs still tight around their legs, their agency is wrapped up in a particular national identity and narrative of indigenous women. This is an identity constructed through an exoticized gaze and confines Iban women to a static 'traditional' past.

Through looking at creating home in new spaces I investigated the concept of space expanding. The home space of performance (the rehearsal and workshop rooms) expands into the stage space. The repetitions of the rehearsals were performed on stage and therefore there were traces of play, moments of choice and a together-ness was achieved between performers and audience. I built up a methodology that was based on repeating, re-creating and re-doing, in front of new audiences, in new spaces. Exercises within workshops were built on finding new-ness at each repetition, at each new meeting of an audience. We became audience *and* performer, by telling each other's stories.

Investigating the relationship the Iban have with space and the longhouse was to understand the repetitive and cyclical nature of migration - leaving, returning and leaving, again and again. Because of this I am arguing that the space of home is not based on a distant origin, but is part of the spaces we travel through and stay put in and we carry them with us. I used Royji's idea of expanding space to discuss how this is made possible. The space of home expands out into the diaspora and as the space expands, it expands into and meets other spaces and audiences. The work of the domestic space is repetitive; cleaning, cooking,

feeding, repeat. The patterns stay the same, but with each repetition a space gets defined and re-defined and home gets produced, and a space to belong gets created. Therefore it was important that the content of *From The Jungle* was of the domestic; washing, cooking and family responsibilities.

> *"Carrying home with us in a handful of water; The river that takes us, returns us and moves us"* (FTJ -164)

Authenticity and appropriation: investigating the 'how' of performance migration

As Iban have migrated, their performance and cultural practices have been migrating along with them, from rural to urban spaces, for a number of years. As outlined in my overarching research question and sub-questions, my work feeds into that discourse of the migration of cultural and performance practices. And I have found it important to investigate the migration of cultural and performance practices of the Iban through my own migration story, through my nostalgic and cultural connections.

This project was an interdisciplinary investigation; I pulled together performance theory from western practitioners and post-colonial feminist literature with an eastern performance practice. I dealt with life stories and looked to re-tell those stories, through my words and to inject my self and my preoccupations with home and belonging, within these retellings.

I have done this work through practice-based research. Through various research projects, which consisted of workshops and performances I was creating moments of meetings – I was migrating practices to new spaces and new audiences and giving the practices space to be re-created and re-told. I was investigating the environment of 'home' for these practices, the rural space of the Iban longhouse, and looking to expand those spaces into the diaspora space of the London stage. Because of the nature of performance and the migration of the Iban performance practices it has been appropriate and necessary to address these questions through practice-based research, and in turn practice

as research (performance workshops and performances). Because of the visceral nature of migration and the way these questions have been explored practically, it was important to present my findings within a performance event.

The intercultural and interdisciplinary nature of the project, and the content of the performances meant that I had to address concepts of authenticity, truth, appropriation (of stories and cultures) and my responsibility to present these narratives in an empathetic, respectful and considered way. I worked in a collaborative fashion to use the concept of exchange and sharing as a way into these ideas. The participants in this research project shared their skills, expertise and stories as I shared mine. We became each other's audience and developed our identities at each new meeting. This was why it became important to work with performers, as we were able to address the idea of performing an identity in front of an audience and embody the repetitive notion of continuously meeting new audiences through the act of performing. With performers I was, at times, able to be part of the collective. I was always aware of my position as researcher, workshop leader, scribe, but as a fellow artist I had moments of being a genuine member of a community that I identified with.

As well as being part of the performers community I am also part of the Iban community, albeit at times from a distance. Therefore it was within my points of shared identities and working as part of a collective that I began to work through some of the issues of authenticity and the problematic concepts of appropriation. But this work is never finished and is a cycle of action, investigation and questioning. It was a continuous investigation into how, why and where I placed myself within the research, understanding when I was an outsider, and when I was on the inside; and it was (is still) about keeping my anxiety close, to never assume that I am a fluent speaker of any particular world (Lugones 1987). I therefore re-told the story of the Iban practices as an outsider, as a student learning; to always feel uncomfortable and outside meant I was able to continue to question my right to tell these stories.

I looked at the place that these practices came from, a place of ceremony and of sharing an environment and space, and it was this that I attempted to

appropriate and translate on to a London performance space. I was not trying to present an accurate presentation of *ajat Iban* or the *pantun*. I was not trying to build an accurate longhouse space, but rather acknowledge the way a longhouse space is broken up and how that affects audience/guests identity and their relationship with the performers. The looms within my work were crude, oversized and the 'cotton threads' were large strips of fabrics, with which we could demonstrate the concept of weaving and the repetitive action of weaving, rather than demonstrate an expertise. Therefore I was looking to create a space that the performers and the audience could share. This was a space of festival, ceremony and celebration, a space where people came together to share a moment. And within this moment of a shared space we told stories of gender and cultural identity, of home and of belonging.

Linking the chapters

Each chapter looks at a different performance practice of the Iban, in which I read the use of space within the longhouse and the weaving practice as performative cultural practices alongside the performance practices of the *ajat* and the *pantun*. In each chapter I look to answer how these practices impinge on the ways in which identity is represented and reconfigured, how they inform and feed into changing notions of identity of the migrant woman and performer, and investigate how I have mapped the visceral and visual aspects of migrant women's stories on to the visceral and visual aspects of performance.

Through exploring the way to move through the longhouse I have found a way to look at migration that has agency, that allows for belonging in new places by expanding space and including home and origin in diaspora space. This expanding of space allows for the dialogue with others already in the location, and performer/migrant and audience/native can begin to develop a relationship and are both able to stake claims of belonging through working together.

As well as finding a way to move through the space and to develop a dialogue through the understanding of space, it was important to understand how the

body can move in the space and how the body gets read. Through looking at *ngajat* and highlighting ideas of the exotic and the other I began to understand the relationship I had with 'being exotic' and how ideas of difference are articulated. This investigation into the 'other', through the physicality of an eastern dance of tribal, ritual and ceremonial beginnings, meant I had to find ways to share, exchange and build on the multiple understandings of the *ajat*, and to find a way to create a space that was reminiscent of the space in which the *ajat Iban* was developed.

It was the *pantun* that gave me a way to investigate identity through narrative and poetry. Through evoking imagery and playing with rhythm I re-told the stories I had heard. Through investigating the *pantun* I found ways to hear the stories I had encountered on my fieldwork and ways to re-tell them. The *pantun* re-tells, re-creates and re-produces stories with specific preoccupations and narrative. Through the VIP *pantun* the singer aims to tell a particular identity and a particular narrative of the community to a particular outside audience.

Within both the work of the *ajat* and the *pantun* concepts of community are created and provide a way to look at performance and ways of storytelling that are about the collective experience and the chorus. The ideas of the collective, the strength of the chorus, provide ways for women performers to stake claims of agency within the performance space.

Within these performance spaces, within the different diaspora spaces, bodies and narratives work together to create meaning. Objects in space add to these meanings and identities, and through the Iban loom and the practice of weaving I developed a way to organise my performance space. The looms provided me with structures (to project on, to interact with) and the act of weaving investigated the work of creating home. The continuous work of building home in new spaces is repetitive and cyclical, it echoes the journey of migration that goes back and forth and expands across space, the journey of migration is not one of a single straight line forward but is an entanglement of trajectories, your own and others. Through the Iban looms and the action of weaving I placed importance on the repetition of migration, the repetition of building home and

belonging in new spaces. I placed importance on the domestic.

Looking forward: ending at the beginning

The work of the performer and of the migrant woman is to create a place to belong in the spaces in which she finds herself. The performer moves through space, telling a story, playing with a narrative and she wants her audience to listen, to hear and connect with the story. Through the connection with the audience, a dialogue is created and a space is built where the performer is allowed to be, she is accepted and is able to develop, grow and create. Through migration and with the changing of space and location, the practice of the performer changes and grows with her; new meanings are created and new identities are formed through the familiar and repeated patterns of performance for different, new and familiar audiences. This migration informs changing notions of identity and feeds into the discourse of the migrant woman's identity. This notion of changing identity, this creative agency of the performer/migrant, is about belonging.

This project was a personal investigation into a world I once knew. A world that I went back to, over and over again but was no longer familiar with. It was a look at a world I wanted to understand so I could find my 'origin', my home and my place 'to go back to'. I found a shifting idea of home, I found the absence of pure or simple origins and the unreliability of a nostalgic image. I found new worlds, I found many stories and multiple identities intersecting in diaspora spaces.

I connect my work with other theatre practitioners who wanted to bring the festival, the ceremony and the ritual (back) into western theatre – Schechner, Grotowski, Artaud and Brecht. I connect my work with contemporary British theatre companies and performers who look to tell non-western stories – Tara Arts, Yellow Earth, Warsin Shire and Malika Brooker. I wanted to work with the visual and physical ideas of postdramatic theatre practitioners, Alfreds, Lepage and Wilson, to create images that evoked emotion, that told a story and that connected the London audience with a journey from East to West and back again.

Throughout this project I have kept dipping my imagination and inspiration into the Iban harvest festival, *Gawai*. I have understood the practicalities of *ngajat* and *pantun* through the ideas of the *Gawai* festival. I have interpreted the longhouse space through the interactions of a *Gawai*. I have investigated the Iban weaving through its connections with the cycle of rice farming and the links to the spiritual and ritual world that culminates with *Gawai*.

The cyclical nature of rice planting and the celebratory harvest festival of *Gawai* echo the cyclical nature of migration and performance. From seeds of ideas, to the workshop space and the rehearsal room, to the final colourful, joyful and celebratory experience of a performance in front of an audience, who are the guests to the performer's party. And like the cycle of farming, the performance work does not stop at the end of a show. The show starts again each night, in front of new faces, and at the end of the show's run the questions that are left unanswered, or the new questions that gets raised from the performance, begin a new cycle of performance work and exploration.

With each new cycle, new work gets produced. The patterns are the same, but with each repetition new-ness is created. This cycle, this repetition of planting, growing, nourishing; of creating, collaborating, sharing are embodied ideas of the work that goes into creating home and belonging in new spaces.

This thesis is the beginning of a journey into finding ways to belong in new performance spaces, of finding a way to connect and share with new audiences and of understanding the changing identities with each new performance, with each new repetition and with each new audience.

In chapter three I raised the question of the creative input of the audience. Through finding further ways in opening up performance spaces and continuing to create spaces to share with the audience, as a performer and theatre-maker I believe this sharing can develop into creative collaborations.

Through further developing methodologies around migrating performances to

new spaces and new audiences I want to continue to find ways to create and re-create new-ness in repetitions. Through the continued investigation into the cultural practices of the Iban and the continuing journey of leaving and returning home, I want to further develop festival and ceremonial space within the performances practice I make in the UK.

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TEXT: FROM THE JUNGLE

Audience walk in

Cat frying onions
Anna & Vera greet audience, accept ribbons and spices
Grace does her post-it note story

**
Anna and Vera walk to Red Loom
Grace finishes her post-it note story

GRACE
Today my journey began at… tomorrow?

ANNA
I can taste the scent of the curry houses and I'm six again at the open air markets by the riverside.

CAT
Caravan & boh tea

TEXT PROJECTED:
Anna. I'm stuck. They don't believe me

**

VERA
The artist, the mother, the daughter, the traveller, the wife.

GRACE
The stories of many women

CAT
Where nine

ANNA
Go by 79 names

**

GRACE
Around and around we go
The merry go around
From mother to daughter

Over and over again

STOP I say
I can't do this anymore
STOP I demand
I don't want this anymore

Round and round the garden
Goes these steps of mine
Following your prints
Over and over again

STOP I yell
This is my life
STOP I cry
I want to step out from under your cycle

Familiarity is not safety to me.

Round and round the garden
One step, two step,
And…

It's my garden, it's my decision, it's my home,
My familiarity.
The cycle becomes mine
With it's own, new, steps,

And it's more than just safe, it's exciting.

**

CAT

This is my third village.
My dad's in Bao and my mother's in Serian and mine here in Damai!

When I was young, my father, my mother argued.
"Flo, you must come here" then "no, you must come here"
Oh my god, I am so confused.

So they combine it together. One week in one village, one week in another.
I can speak Serian, I can speak Bao.

I have no grandfathers, two passed away.
But when I am here, I have grandfathers.
Wow.
I feel like I miss my grandfathers…

I *have* my grandmothers, but they are so far away from here.

But here, all in one!

I have all!

I have friends, I have family, I have… (deep breath)

I feel…

So, happy here.

(pause) so, my grandmother from Serian here, my grandmother from Bao, here and I am sitting in the middle

I can translate, translate, translate

**

VERA
I started 10 years ago. Around 2000.
Around… 11 April!
At the time I was resigning as a sales girl. I came back to my home and I listened to the radio.
Cat radio.

And they announced they have a vacancy at Sarawak Cultural Village and they have an open audition at Sibu hotel.

I tell my mother I wanted to get a new job.

A job as a dancer.
She says

CAT - "you can go."

So I get the bus at 6…pm, ah, am!
So come to… finally arrive at, Sibu around 7.30am.
And I am the first person to arrive.

The open interview starts at 8am,
I am the first.
It is barely light.
Already warm.
My t-shirt feels too tight, I think because I am so nervous.
I haven't eaten yet. I don't like to eat too early in the morning.
And just as I walk in my stomach starts to growl.
This is not a retail job.
This is a job where every step I make matters.
This is a job where each movement I make is watched.

Around one week they call me to tell me, I got the job. 50 auditions. But the whole of that, only I am chosen.

**

AUDIENCE- We met through my cousin.

ANNA - He was studying at the time wasn't he?

AUDIENCE - Yes. We're both from the same town. Both Iban. We *know* each other.

CAT -I understand.

AUDIENCE - I feel, I feel like I have a lot of love in my life

GRACE - I've heard someone describe you as being full of love.

AUDIENCE - My son, he, I… I just enjoy him

ANNA - Your mother supports you?

AUDIENCE - Yes. Yes.

CAT - You live with her and your husband and your son, correct?

AUDIENCE - I don't like… relying on either of them.

GRACE - Independence.

AUDIENCE - Independent is a really important word to me. It's the first word I think of…

ANNA - When you think of 'you'?

AUDIENCE – yes.

GRACE – do you think of you often?

AUDIENCE – When I have time.

CAT – And when is that??

**

GRACE
Coming 23
Tomorrow, I'm 23.

CAT
I get a job here from my friends...
Well, we both auditioned together.

GRACE
I've always danced, all through school, in many dance groups, with my aunties…
I just joined any group I could!

CAT
I came here with my friend and I was so nervous.

GRACE
I knew all the traditional dances!
Even those that aren't my 'tradition'

CAT
I can be malay, Urang Ulu, Iban… just like that [snap fingers. giggle]

GRACE
With just a change of rhythm, a foot in a different place, and new outfit. And I'm someone else.

CAT
We both got the job. We trained for a month.
Although, actually, it was only a week before I was on stage. I, because, well I'm fast to… practice, I mean learn.

GRACE
Actually this was my ambition.
When I, um, in form four… yes.
I joined the competition in here, like, a dance competition. And I wish… I wished I could work here as a dancer.

CAT
And so now, I am here!

GRACE
Thank god!

CAT
A new adventure.

GRACE
Smile

CAT
Smile to the audience

GRACE
I want the audience to think, like, she's so good.

**

ANNA
Why did you marry?

VERA
Me

ANNA
You

VERA
Why

ANNA
Yes

VERA
I don't know. Do you?

ANNA
It felt right

VERA
Yes, I believed it was forever

ANNA
I needed a visa

VERA
I needed a visa

ANNA
Yes, I believed it was forever

VERA
It felt right

ANNA
I don't know. Do you?

VERA
Yes

ANNA
Why?

VERA
You

ANNA
Me?

VERA
Why did you marry?

**

VERA
I shouldn't have. I shouldn't have come. You don't want me here. I can see that.

You said I could always come home, there would always be a place for me here. If I was ever sick, cold, hungry or in pain, to just come home. No questions would be asked, just a warm plate of food, your fingers running through my hair, soft words of love and belief to coat me.

Words to wrap me up and cover my skin; that feels so naked without the touch of the warm body I slept next to every night for so many years.

I can smell the heat in the air, although it's really the autumn leaves I smell. I can taste the salt and spices of kolo mee on my tongue, although it's really dry toast with strawberry jam that's stuck to the roof of my mouth. I breath in and search for that feeling of comfort and childhood that the heat and spices always bring. But you ask:

GRACE- "would you like another cup of tea"

NO. I want to scream at you. I want you to make me milo, to tell me how Stripey the towel went on an adventure and rescued his friends.

I shouldn't have come. I shouldn't have assumed. You have a different life now. I can see.
I can see you wanting to comfort but not being able to. I can see you tensing up whenever I move to close to you. Just brush past you as I place the dishes in the dishwasher.

You can see the pain. But you don't want to ask why. It reminds you too much of your own. That you refuse to acknowledge. That you ran away from. You left a life and returned home. Home was not where it all went wrong. For you. Home was your haven, where you could pretend the breaking never happened.

I shouldn't have come. I shouldn't be here. I shouldn't need to be here.

Mum can you hear me?! I shouldn't need to be here!

GRACE- "close the door sweetheart, a draft is coming in"

**

GRACE
I started performing in the living room, after dinner.

My parent's friends laughed.
My head was patted
Petit fours and coffee followed.

I performed inappropriate songs for a 6 year old –
Like Michael Jackson's *I'm Bad.*
I gyrated ignorantly.
I demanded attention.
Spinning out from behind the curtains.
Everyone was forced to watch.
Forced to applaud.

Look at me, I have talent.

No, Look at me, I have something to say!
…. Cos the whole world has to answer right now, just to tell you once again… who's bad?
I had something to say.

And it continued. I continued to stand up, say lines in front of people, tell stories beyond my knowledge, Sally Bowles at 16, Masha at 19.
Although, I guess I actually went to my Moscow; London

But then it became less, spring from a curtain, and more learning to draw the curtain.

Learning a way to speak.
Learning the words to speak.
Learning the lines to speak.
Learning the voice to have.

Is having the ability to speak the same as having a voice with something to say?

And then I waited.
Waited till someone was ready to watch.
Waited till an audience was ready to applaud.
And so the living room became an actual stage and I an artist in the footlights.
Treading the steps of others.
Speaking the words of well known stories.

A new person with each new costume change.
A new stage, a new adventure.
The same me.

Cos the whole world has to answer right now, just to tell you once again… who's… here…?

**

GRACE & ANNA
Music version of tattoo monologue with movement/dance segment.
Space is lopsided, Grace centre, Anna stage right, missing is Abot, who would have been stage left.

**

ALL
A different sentence each time, not over the top of each other, but almost. Playing with the way the lines are said. Light, playful. We move around the room, repeating, until Vera and Grace are standing/sitting next to each other

Saya suka berdikati / I like independence

Turmoil and heartache is very tiring

I am Head of the family

Saya ada enam belas adik beradik / I have 16 brothers and sister

Food is making you fat, and full

I broke the cycle.

I am blessed. I bless everything I have.

She just took all the shit

I love my dad's cooking

**

VERA
My youngest daughter doesn't stay here because, not quite comfortable in this environment. Because around that time… it was two months…
Ummm.
In the day she has no cry and in the evening she cries until she is tired and feels sleepy.
After she wakes up she starts to cry again.
I don't know.
Maybe stomach pain or scared.
I go to clinic, I see witch also, a shaman.
They say baby is fine.
So I tell my mother to come, to see why baby is crying in the night-time.
Only in the night-time.

My mother said my baby is ok.
But still crying, crying…

So mother, then she said to like this

ANNA- "How about your baby goes back with me to Sarikei"

So I told her.
"Oh, ok"
Two months!
Around two months old, she brings my baby back to Sarikei.

But in Sarikei, no crying!

Around 1 ½ years old I bring her back here.
Still the same thing happened again.
In the night, cry, cry, cry.
Morning doesn't cry.
Then the night, cry, cry, cry.
Then I send her back to my mother. So then, she with my mother, still now.
She is 8 years old.

GRACE
Maybe she can see ghosts. The Antu
She's different. She's very special.
Over there, my mother has a relative that has ghosts to keep an eye on them. So my daughter can see them.
Maybe she sees ghosts here too but antu that are not good. And she cries.

My mother made her an amulet, a bracelet.
Made from thread.
Black.
But she started taking the amulet off, so my mother bought her a gold bracelet, just like me. One this side, one the other side [points to each wrist]
When the bracelet turns black she will see something.
And when it is very shiny she is very happy, and healthy also.

VERA
My eldest daughter use to live with me and after divorce she tells me she doesn't want to live here anymore.
She wants to follow her sister, go to school there.
Because she feels comfortable with my mother and my father and living in the longhouse also.
That's why in June I transfer her to Sarikei.
I tell her never to leave, but she keep telling me "I want to".
So, I don't know what to do.
So, I send her there.

**

ANNA
Where do you come from? He asked.
She queried, *they* wanted to know.

Me? From the jungle!

It's so evocative, *pro*vocative.
(isn't it?)
Dangerous, different…
*In*citing. *Ex*citing.
Vague. Vacuous…?
It's a place, a space, a location that is what *you* want it to be.

Where am I from?

**

CAT
My mother cooks curry in a sarong and shower cap.

VERA
My mother has both my daughters.

GRACE
My mother is strong, caring, violent and beautiful.

ANNA
My mother makes the best ice cream.

**
TEXT PROJECTED:
I, from a jungle of grey, stone, brick and mortar
You, amongst the trees, bare feet on warm wood, fingers through wet grass.
And yet.
My story, your story, our story, bound together from a same beginning,
Changing as time and space moves us apart,
I'll tell you my story and you tell me yours.
And we'll sit and talk of days I don't remember and you can't forget.

You tell me how it all used to be and ask why it had to change.

Where did you go? And why did you leave?
You ask again and again.
At least you returned, no matter the time,
At least you returned, my child, my sister, my friend.

Aku ini / My grandma

**

CAT
If I scream in an empty room, will you hear me?

VERA, ANNA & GRACE
She asked

CAT –
Because sometimes this feels like an empty room

VERA, ANNA & GRACE
She said

CAT
When you rush past me, in your busy moments,
With colours I don't recognise,
Sounds that don't feel familiar,
And smells that itch my skin,
My toes inch forward, in slow motion, across the cobblestones,
Whilst you whirl and whirl about me.

VERA, ANNA & GRACE
She whispered

CAT
Bodies blurring into an air stream,
Around me.

VERA, ANNA & GRACE
She breathed

CAT
I want to feel walls, I want to touch the sides
Know there are boundaries,
My fingers trailing across wood, stone, brick.
Floor solid under my feet
Something I can grip on to
Something I know is mine
Something I can be enclosed in
Something to hide me from the rush of all this new-ness

VERA, ANNA & GRACE
She wailed.
But no one heard, in this new life of hers

**

GRACE

Forget that you are a Bidayuh, or whatever you are.
Forget you are you.

'Feel' Iban.
You have to put yourself in that particular community.

Understand the character.
You see, in native dancing, we take inspiration from animals, birds… and the activities of the human being.
It's like learning a language.
Understand the animal that the movement is.

I wanted to learn the traditional dances because I wanted to explore.
The more you explore, the more you can experience.
Lots of things.
Not just dancing.
You can travel.
You can journey.
You can leave.

Sometimes when you dance you have to picture the culture.
Give a picture of the culture.

Know what the festivals are.
Why they dance.
Where they dance.
You don't stomp around on a bamboo floor, or the house will fall down.
You dance, light, feet soft.
Even though you are now on a stage, with bright lights in your eyes.
Take the bamboo house with you.

**

VERA & CAT – Vera in Malay, Cat in English

VERA *(Vera decided to speak her lines in Malay)*
I'm the most interesting person anyone has ever met.

CAT
Who?

VERA
Me

CAT
You?

VERA
No, him

CAT
What?

VERA
That!

CAT
Really?

VERA
Yes

CAT
And you…?

VERA
Laughed

CAT
He said he was interesting. The most interesting person anyone ever meets.
He spoke about his home
He spoke about places far away
He spoke.
They spoke.
All talked.

Words
Whispers
Wonders
Wanderings
Watching

Watched.
Me, us, we,
Dance.

Different people, new costumes.
Same steps
Move
Turn
Walk…

…Away with me.
He said, She asked, they,
Talked.

Why not.
Just,
Walk away.
To his home.

I think he wanted to make me interesting.

**

PROJECTED TEXT:
Migration is about the borders you can't cross, the spaces you aren't allowed, as much as the ones you are.

**

CAT
My mother decided you were better for me
She decided I would *choose* you
You came into my life inconveniently
I had a different idea about my life

I had a man that loved me whole
A body that slipped through cracks and holes
Was lithe with a mind full of plans
And with a concept of love, wrapped up in someone who,
Believed in a different god
And then you,
You gave me another option

Or so others thought
You gave me another identity, another future
Another dance to dance
That was preferred to the one with that man,
My man,
The man.

And so I chose you
They chose you
My *mother* chose you

Could I have chosen both?
A daring thought…
Dare I think?
Dare I dream?
Dare I want?

She said she'd be there
She'd support
She'd care
She'd be the mother to all
But not,
If my godly allegiance changed

And so, I choose you.
And so, I choose not to live the life I wanted

My life, a dancer dancing on a stage

A body in a space
A woman of grace
And now;
It's a different costume I wear
A different beaded yoke I bear,
Across my décolletage

I break my gaze from yours
Which looks at me pleading
Your needing,
Is complete
Makes me want to leave,
To leave you helpless

Because you see,
My child, my baby
I
Hate
You

**

All women on stage, three in front, Cat at the back, so you can see that there is a missing person (Abot) in the formation.

VERA
The washing is heavy, thick with water. The sun, light on her bare arms, but already full of heat.

ANNA
Her body moves in the familiar movement - reach, bend, pull, reach, bend, pull… Arms, fingers, back.

GRACE
Shuddering, shaking. Noise takes over the house. A machine that needs replacing. A rattle on the ear drums that reverberates through the body. As the second load of clothing whirls into watery knots.

VERA
Snap! Flick of sheets crisp in the air. Pegs pinch the clothes, clinging them to the line.

ANNA
She remembers as a child. The cool run of the river tickling her feet, as they stood in the water, spine curved over the rock, sun on her back, fingers in soap and fabric. Scrubbing sarongs clean. Soap scratching cloth.

GRACE
Dip into the water. Drape across the rock. The smooth one just past the bend of the river. Broad, it was, almost square, beside the three pointy ones. Her sister

had showed her, before she left to go to school, three years prior. Dip soap, just half the bar, then quick, hard movements.

VERA
She breathed in. Amongst the layers of hanging cloth. Fresh, clean, wet, the smell is *so* good. The detergent fills the air. And the heat off the drying garments create a world, now so familiar.

ANNA
Slipping one foot out of her shoe her toes dig into the grass and she closes her eyes. Sun shines through the sheets. Dapples of light. Lines of shadow. Change as the wind turns lazily around her.

GRACE
With eyes closed she feels her childhood through her feet. She tastes her adulthood through her nostrils. Her body still, light amongst the moving pieces of material. She could be anywhere. Be anything. Be complicit in her present.

VERA
The machine has gone quiet. A child cries. Foot slips back into her shoe. Fluttering t-shirts already, almost dry, in the tropical sun, from round one.

ANNA
Smiling. She walks back to the house. Another load of washing must go on. Another wet weight into her red plastic basket and out on the taut line.

GRACE
She picks up her grandchild, soothes his cry, resting him on her hip as she switches the machine on again for another cycle. Before leaving for work.

**

CAT
Yes it was a difficult decision.
She has to stay Muslim otherwise he can take the kids.
That's his right. The kids are Muslim, so if she isn't then the law, well the law….
She would lose the children. She would lose her daughters.
A lot of people convert. Some women convert after divorce so that they can get their children.
But when getting married you're not told about the ending.
She married with the sight of permanency in mind.
But without the knowledge that the permanency was one of ideology, rituals, and tradition. Not love.

ALL *(all said on top of each other)*

We were so young.

I felt responsible

Guilty

He said – the problem with us was he was the most interesting person people ever meet!

The irony

Sex

I don't know

In retrospect

I'll be a spinster with a cat living with my sister

My thing

I would never flat with a vegetarian again.

If you add up the time we were actually in the same room

And so I left

VERA & ANNA *(adlib, to change each time performed, each person is able to start. Find a place to finish)*
1 - Why?

2- What happened?

1 - What went wrong?

2- Something must have changed?

(ask each other, responding, light hearted)

2 – Why?

1- What?

2- How?

1 - When?

2- Who?

1 - You?

2 - Me?

1 - Him?

2 - You?

1- Me?

2- Him

1- Well, it wasn't my fault!

(1&2 unison, facing the audience)
Sentences, questions, thoughts, answers, answers, answers,
Sentences, questions, thoughts, answers, answers, answers,
Sentences, questions, thoughts, answers, answers, answers…

VERA
…like neat little packages tied up with string… *(pause)*

ANNA
These are a few of your favourite things.

ALL
When the dog bites,
When the bees stings,
When I'm feeling sad,
I simply remember your favourite lines and then things don't sound
so bad.

Sound bites and reasons and gently excuses
Line after line from my lips and hand gestures
Silver white lies that melt into truth
These are a few of your favourite things

When the dog bites,
When the bees stings,
When I'm feeling sad,
I simply remember your favourite lines and then things don't sound so bad

**

ANNA
For those who don't have words, how does a moan become a scream?

**

GRACE
I was hoping when I got married it would last forever.
Now doesn't laugh anymore, I mean, *last* anymore.
After it ended,
Now he says,
"Oh, you look so beautiful"
Now "you look so sexy"

Now "can we marry again?"

I say "Ah, later, maybe later"

**

VERA
Very boring to eat all by myself
I use to eat with four of us, then three, two… now…
Sometimes though, I feel hungry, I want to cook, so I cook then the food doesn't feel good to eat.

So I just lay the food there
So boring.

What you want to eat?
Eat? Not eat?
So I decide, nothing to eat.

I like eating
I like cooking

I like very spicy food.

**
CAT
Your home is made of bamboo.
The light wood, under firm feet.
Smooth surface
Brush,
The underside of your toes
As they twist your heel.

The hard floor of a new space
Forgotten.
As your eyes close and you can feel
Breath of wind through the arch of your foot.
The warm, sun soaked wood
Of the light bamboo.
Home.

**
Light on audience, off on stage

AUDIENCE:
I took two planes, one from Kuching to Kuala Lumpur, then Kuala Lumpur to London. I got to immigration, and the man asked me why I'm in London and what the reason that make me stay in London for a long time.

So I answer him the reasons I'm here cause I'm here to help my best friend and to visit her…
So the man said that he doesn't believe me. Then he send me to a room that they put a person, that is not a good person to them. I was too scared and had tension cause I don't know why they don't believe me.
I just want to get out from that room and want to hug someone so I can cry.

ANNA
Welcome to the UK. So, I see you are a dancer?

VERA
How exotic!

CAT
A dancer?

GRACE
A dancer

VERA
From Malaysia

CAT
Malaysia

GRACE
How exotic!

VERA
A dancer?

CAT
A dancer

GRACE
From Malaysia?

VERA
Malaysia

CAT
How exotic!

Lights up on stage

CAT *(repeated three times)*
Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.
First journey at 3 weeks old, with Mum, flight from KL to Paris, France.
Dad met us with the car and we drove to Bonn, Germany, where we were living.
From Bonn moved to Ottawa, Canada.

From Canada moved to Seoul, Korea.
Seoul to New Delhi, India.
New Delhi to Canberra, Australia, only for a year.
Hopped across to Wellington, New Zealand, and we were there for 4 years and I grew comfortable and liked it...
Then back to Ottawa, Canada.
Then Toronto, Canada.
Then my first journey on my own passport, not a diplomatic one - moved to the UK.
Jumped around a bit: lived in Stratford-upon-Avon, then London, then Cardiff, where I live now

Third time:
"…. Canberra, Australia, Hey mama *[to Vera],* only for a year…."

VERA *[starts after Cat's "hey mama"]*
Herne Hill, London
Abbots Bromley, Stafforshire
Queens Park, London
Abbots Bromley, Stafforshire
Maida Vale, London
Abbots Bromley, Stafforshire ['Chinese' to Grace]
Florey Building, Oxford
Queen's COllege, Oxford,
Queen's College, Oxford
Cowley Road, Oxford
Botley Road, Oxford
Isle of Dogs, London
Old Kent Road, London
London Bridge, London
Balls Pond Road, London
Lower Clapton, London
On tour - Cumbria... Yorkshire, Cumbria...Yorkshire
Hackney, London
Isle of Dogs, London
Nottingham
On tour...
Isle of Dogs, London
Keswick, Cumbria
Isle of Dogs, London
[step out]
[step in plus movement]
Bethnal Green, London

GRACE
The bus stop
Travelling on the 207 bus to Ealing Broadway
Grace Willis *[to Anna]*
off the 207 onto the 65 bus
off at Richmond because of morning sickness

back on the 65, arriving at Kingston College.

ANNA
New Zelaand, Malaysia, New Zealand, Malaysia, New Zealand, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, New Zealand, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London, Malaysia, London

**

ANNA
Leaning against this railing I can hear the music from the bar behind me pounding out… drums… bass… sex and sweat, the sound and taste of summer…

in the city…

back of my neck getting dirty and gritty, been down isn't it a pity doesn't seem to be a shadow in the city…

So many people everywhere…
It's my own hideaway, amongst the throngs, my indulgence, running away… if I go on my tip toes I can see miles of people stretching out, moving, shaking, so many colours... The smell of last night is still on my skin, beer, smoke, perfume. I had the quickest shower getting change routine this morning before being dragged out again to… here… I love the smell of my new detergent… with my eyes closed it all mingles together with the smoke of the bbq round the corner.

God It's hot, the sweat is dripping down my stomach and my tattoo is itching from the tag in my shorts.

My dad doesn't have a tattoo; they're for rough types. That's what he got taught at school. My grandmother does. So does everyone else from her generation back. And now my generation, its like tattoos skipped a beat. I'm part of the lost generation, and the skin doesn't quite fit. Your cultural history is traced through your surname in the western world. My father chose his, ours, when the missionaries chose to call him a name from the bible.

I came to London like the missionaries went to the jungle. I came with arrogance, I came with confident, like any runway who has no idea where they are. To impart my knowledge, to change the world. Boldly go where no man has gone before. And so I donned my loincloth like they all do. Vintage boots and top shop jewelry.

My eyes are so dark, but my skin is so white, that really, I could be anything. If only I spoke something other than English; Arabic, Italian, Spanish with a Mexican accent! Or even my native tongue. Then I could really disappear, be a complete chameleon…

Why am I here? I sometimes forget. The chaos, the busy streets, the dirt and rubbish, all the grey buildings. When I close my eyes I catch a scent, the spice from the curry houses. I feel 6 again at the open air market on the riverside… it's so close, so familiar I can taste it. The salt from the sweat on my upper lip is almost as comforting. I'm thirsty. And hungry. Finally.

The salty taste on my tongue is lingering and I just want to lick my whole arm to get more. Suddenly the noise and the movement and colours all become one and blur together, its overwhelming. But something feels familiar, the smiles, the faces, the jumble of buildings, its my jungle just different shapes and colours, less green, more noise… my river is a stream of people… *[laugh]* A deep breath and I'm home, its ok again. Just relax, close your eyes and let it all seep into my skin.

But I'm pulled back into reality and from my own little space; a friend of a friend I met 10 mins ago, wants to know where I'm from, because he's confused. I talk with a slight twang, I know the history of the British royal family as if it's my own, but my eyes are so black… my answer is always the same. My version of the classic whore's statement of I'll be what you want me to be… "where am I from? That depends, where do you think?" Where do I come from, who knows… Maybe my identity is about where am I going…?

Well, you never know where you could wake up tomorrow morning

**

GRACE
My mother makes curry in a shower cap and a sarong

Curry time!

PROJECTED TEXT:
Derived from the phrase "homeward bound"

Ho-bo
n. pl. **ho·boes** or **ho·bos**
1. One who wanders from place to place without a permanent home
2. A migrant worker.
intr.v. **ho·boed**, **ho·bo·ing**, **ho·boes**
To live or wander

Walking towards home. Wandering forward in search of my space, my place, my corner of the world

**

SERVING CURRY

**

CAT
I use to tell myself a little story, about how I really married the wrong the brother. How I met the right brother too late. How if *only* I had patience, like mother told me to, I would have had the right brother and life would have been sailing off into the sunset.

But instead I saw a vision of almost perfection and, as I had taught myself to believe, perfection doesn't exist, so I grabbed with two hands this possibility of what my life would be like!

I wanted yellow and I got beige.
I wanted an apple and bit into a pear.
I was almost there.
It was almost right,
And that was enough for me to believe, to give up the fight.

I had a dream of what my life could be like,
A dream I dreamt whilst others whispered white wedding dresses and ponies to themselves in the darkness of night.

I dreamed of adventures in far off lands,
Of pursuits, of hidden treasure and intellectual hands,
Covering my body and leading me to places my mind feared to go.

I saw him hand me these dreams and I saw that he could provide them all.
But I forgot to take into consideration his terrible personality.

And so, if I had been the good daughter my mother wanted me to be, one of patience and virtue, of all the right dreams, I would have got the right brother.

And that's the little story I use to tell myself.
The story I *will* tell you. And the story I will *always* tell my mother.

But.

I wanted yellow but I *chose* beige

**

GRACE

Firstly when I come here my fashion… was, it wasn't up to date.
My fashion was simple.

Simple girl from the neighbourhood.
My hair is long.

I wear jeans and t-shirts and I wear,
And I wear very, very high heels.

Then they call me, because they have a similar artist who's fashion is just like me, they call me her name.
Because they don't know actually my name.
It's very difficult to say my name.
So the simple way, is to call me a simple name, that they already know. Until now, they've called me that name

**

VERA

Here I am very alone.
Here I have no family
All my family are far away.
So, everyone here becomes my family.
I have a shoulder to cry on,
A happy moment

Here I have,
A room.
You come inside
You see the bed,
You see the TV
You see the radio
You go outside the room and there's the toilet, kitchen.
Because we all share

**

ANNA
From the jungle we come, in the jungle we stay.
Carrying home with us in a handful of water; The river that takes us, returns us and moves us.

VERA
My story, your story, our story, bound together from the same beginning, changing as time and space moves us apart.

CAT
I'll tell you my story and you tell me yours.

GRACE
And we'll sit together and talk of days I don't remember and you can't forget…

CAT
You tell me how it all used to be and ask why it had to change.

ALL
Where did you go? And why did you leave?
You ask again and again.
At least you returned, no matter the time,
At least you returned, my child, my sister, my friend.

APPENDIX

FILMS – Disc 1

From The Jungle – performance
May 2012, London, edited from two different shows.
The aim of this edit is to show how the show changes and develops each night, which is why sometimes the actors suddenly appear in to jump from one side of the space to the other and there is inconsistency in the set etc. No text has been missed out.
https://vimeo.com/75387205

From The Jungle – Q&A
May 2012
https://vimeo.com/75387204

FILMS – Disc 2
Chapter one: Film 1
'Locational Journeys' at SCV workshops, September 2011, SCV
https://vimeo.com/74478292

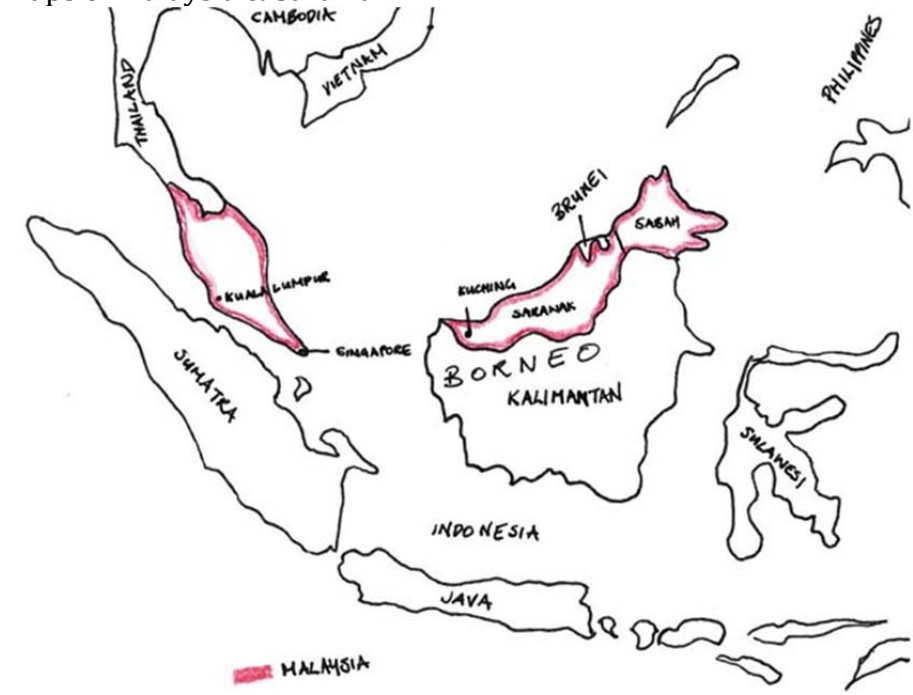
Chapter two: Film 2
Projected in From The Jungle, during the 'Journeys' section FTJ – 21
Sound on silent during performance.
From workshops in June 2011, London
https://vimeo.com/39573338

Music
Composer Alejandra Pelaez
https://soundcloud.com/longplaystar/sets/from-the-jungle

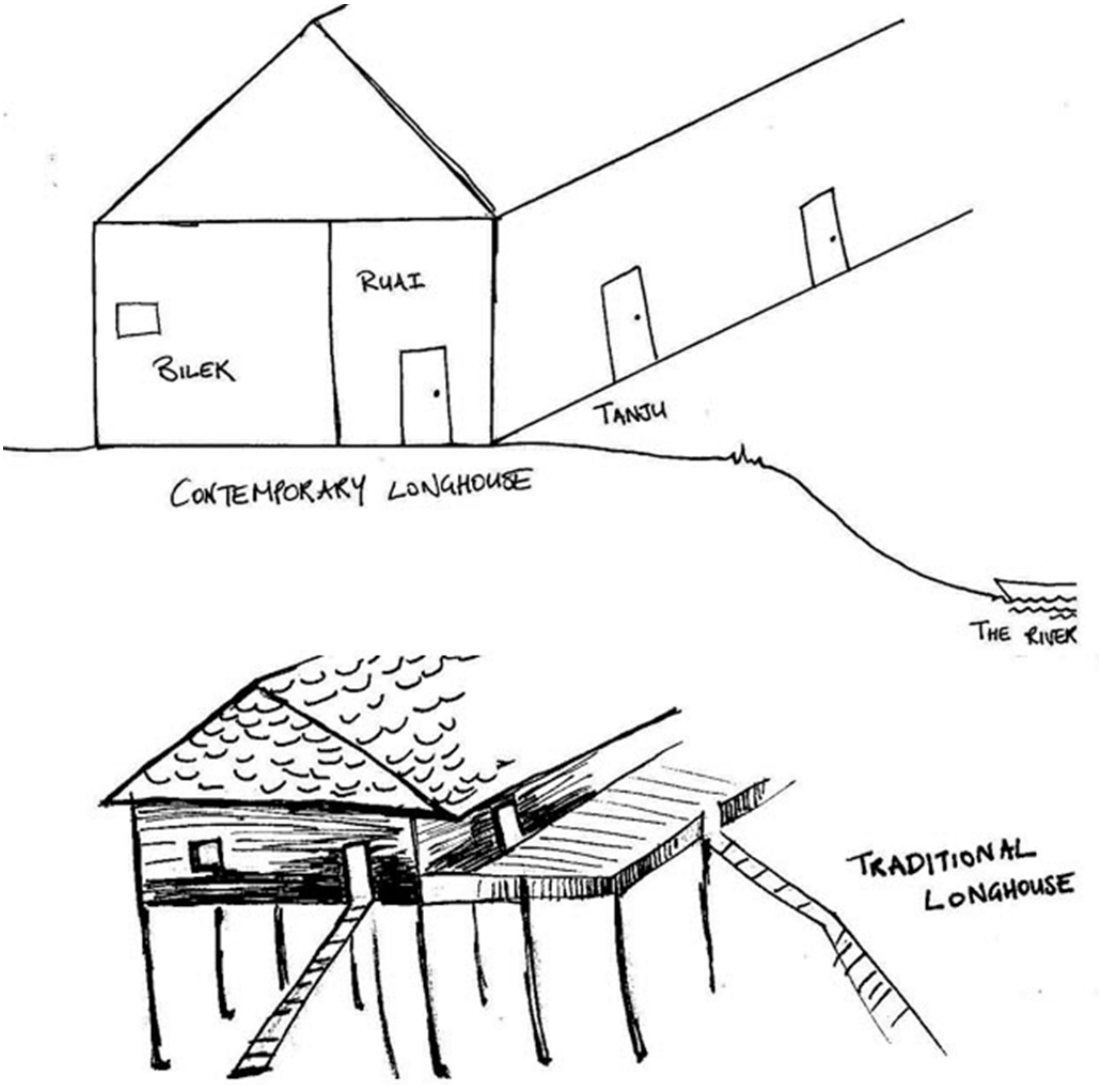
IMAGES

Introduction: Image 1

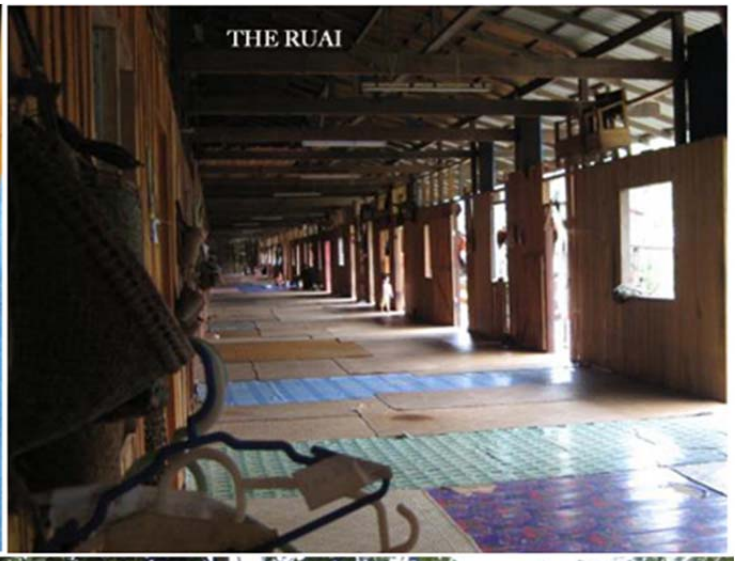
Maps of Malaysia & Sarawak



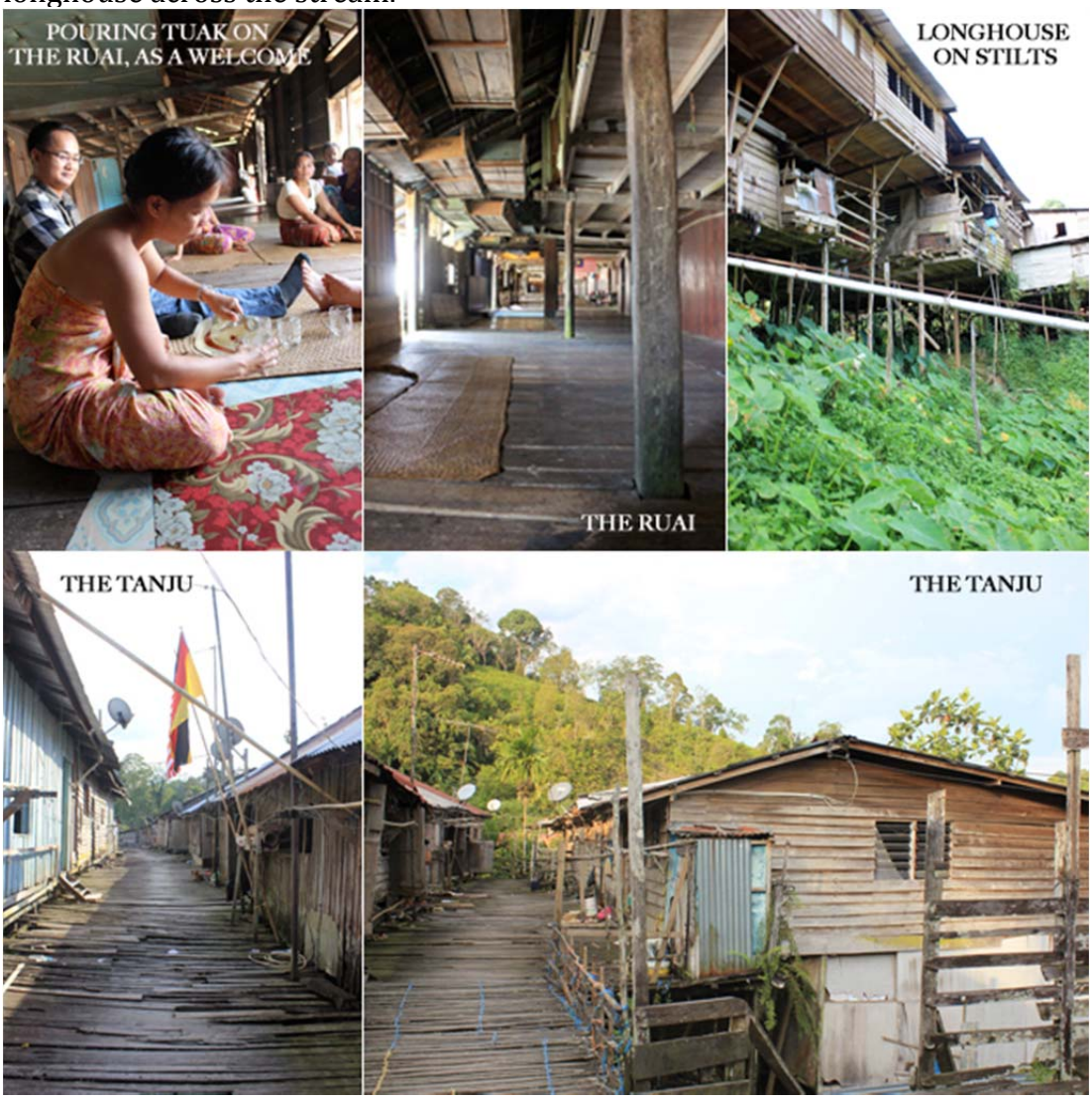
Chapter one: Image 2
Longhouses
Break down of the longhouse space:



A longhouse built in a style that is considered 'traditional'; is made from wood on stilts. In the Batang Ai area, where Vera, Cat, Grace and I stayed, September 2011



Traditional longhouse from Kapit area. They are currently building a new longhouse across the stream.



The new contemporary longhouse being, for village of the above longhouse. September 2012

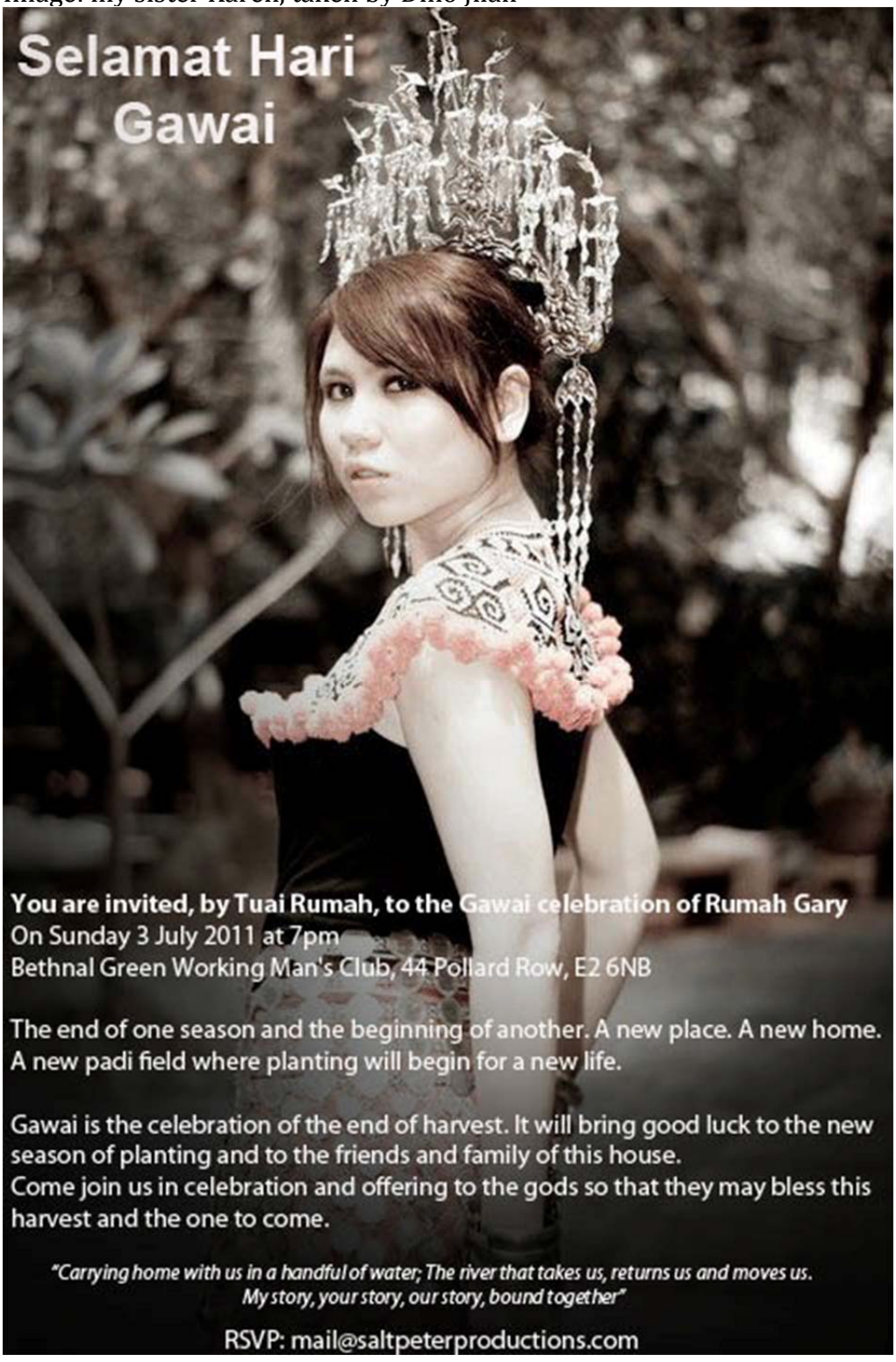
The Sarawak Cultural Village longhouse

Chapter two: Image 3
Me in Iban dress, with skirt woven by my great-grand mother and yoke beaded by my grandmother.

Chapter two: Image 4

Flyer/invitation to *Gawai: Secrets, stories and untold tales*, Bethnal Green Working Man's Club July 2011

Image: my sister Karen, taken by Dino Jilan



Flyer/invitation to *Gawai: Secrets, stories and untold tales*, Bethnal Green Working Man's Club July 2011

Image: my sister Karen, dressed for *Gawai* one year

Chapter four: Image 5

Pua hanging on a wall. Woven by my great-grandmother approx. 80 years ago.

Puas resting on a loom, in the Iban longhouse at Sarawak Cultural Village

Chapter four: Image 6
Images of looms, set, audience spaces and performance space
Front house & bathroom
Audience space
White loom & curry
Performance space
Curry time


AUDIENCE SPACE


WHITE LOOM/ CURRY COOKING


PERFORMANCE SPACE


PROJECTION ON
WHITE LOOM


CURRY TIME

Flyers for From The Jungle: Hardcopy version
Front page of the flyers

Back of flyers.

Front of flyers/invite to those people who had helped with the show/research

Electronic versions


Come to our space, our stage, our place of play and telling of stories…
FROM THE JUNGLE
Tuesday 22 May – Saturday 26 May 2012
Victorian Vaults
82 Great Eastern Street, London, EC2A 3JF
Doors open 7pm
Show starts 7.45pm
Tickets: £7 - 50 % of ticket sales go to Semembai Literacy Project | Book tickets and more details - www.fromthejungle.co.uk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Timeline of the project

Feb 2007	Wrote and performed 'Tattoo' monologue Part of *behind the bike shed,* at Café 1001
Oct 2009	Start PhD
April 2010	Performed 'Tattoo' as a dance/movement piece Dance studio at London Metropolitan University
studio	Had moments of improvisation Collaborated with composer Alejandro Pelaez
May 2010 & Nov 2010	Research trips to Sarawak Worked with: SVC dancers, learning *ajat* Madame Nyong, learning *pantun* Interviewed Dayak Cultural Foundation members Spent time at the Tuan Jugar Museum, investigating weaving and looms. May 2010 – Kapit *Gawai* celebrations Interviewed women in Kapit
Jan 2011	Workshopped with Vera Chok Investigating life stories through post-it notes Storytelling through movements and rhythm This work becomes *Secrets, Stories and Untold Tales* *Pantun* workshops Re-looked at the films from learning *pantun* in Sarawak. Began to explore the idea of *pantun* as a storytelling device and not just a way to preform, begin to think about writing stories as poetry
Feb 2011 – March 2011	Masterclass in storytelling *The Mahabharata* with Sarah Sutcliffe & Danny Scheinmann
March 2011	Performed *Secrets, Stories and Untold Tales* with Vera Chok London Metropolitan University studio
March 2011 – May 2011	Workshops on weaving and looms How to make the looms and weaving a part of the performance, not just a prop

	Real time performance How to make the looms look aesthetically beautiful How does weaving feel?
	Lighting workshops, with looms and experimenting with stage layout Creating outside space Creating architectural shapes Lights to reveal, Lights to soften space Creating interior spaces Creating inviting atmosphere 'home' How does shadow and light work?
June 2011	Workshopping with Vera Chok, Catriona James & Grace Willis Exploring life stories with post-it notes (emotional migration stories) and with objects in space The *ajat* step The *pantun*, opening sound Letters to our mothers
July 2011	*Gawai*, at Bethnal Green Working Man's Club With Vera Chok Framed as a *Gawai*, people were invited by our 'headman', Gary Merry (a friend and actor of Vera's and I) Curry cooked in kitchen, adjoining the room we performed in, cooked by my mother. Show ended with curry eating, people stayed drinking and eating for a couple of hours
Sept 2011	Research trip in Sarawak, at the SVC With Vera Chok, Grace Willis, Catriona James, Martina ak Benedict Paul Jenis, Hamidah Mohd., Adeline Angle, Maryline Simba Mani (Abot), Florence Cindy. Post-it note locational stories*, sharing stories and skills, learning *ngajat*
Oct 2011 – Dec 2011	Writing *From The Jungle*
Jan 2012	Read through of text with Vera Chok, Catriona James, Grace Willis at Tina We Salute You café, with audience sitting all around us
April & May 2012	Rehearsal workshops of *From The Jungle*, Abot was deported

May 2012 Week run of *From The Jungle*, Victorian Vaults, London

*<u>Exercises to get to the locational journeys</u>
Write down your places of home/ where you have lived. Repeat whilst burning a match.
Repeat until you can say them all before the match burns out.
Do this activity in front of everyone.

Draw one of the houses on a piece of paper and talk about the house with your partner

Create emotional journeys. Write words on a post-it note that you think of when thinking of: "mother', "home", "food", "adventure". Move on to the next word when you run out of associated words.
Pick 4 words and create shapes that encompasses that word, for you. Find away to move between each shape. Create a shape/movement sequence.

Write down on the places of home/where you lived on post-it notes and place as a journey through the studio. Walk through the journey, get familiar with the physical path through space until you don't need the post-it notes. Share and exchange with partner.

Regarding the house you drew, think of a word that that house makes you feel, when you get to that house on that journey, say the word.

Map your mother's journey on top of yours (as much as you know)

We continuously shared the journeys with our partners, swapped our journeys, found ways to intersect our journeys.

<u>Final locational Journeys, at SVC</u>
Say your name at the beginning of the journey, use a different name at each repetition of the journey
Walk the line of our journeys, the places we had lived
Acknowledge someone as their journey intersects yours.
When we meet our partner, greet them with the shapes/movement sequence of our 'emotional storyline'
Say the sentence within the sequence, to the audience (in the order we decided)

<u>Sentences</u>
These sentences came from talking about how the house we drew, made us feel, whom it made us think of.

My mother cooks curry in a sarong and a shower cap
Kecoh dan susah hati sangat meletihkan (Turmoil and heartache is very tiring)
In life I try to acknowledge that I am blessed and I bless everything that I have
Saya ada enam belas adik beradik (I have 16 brothers and sisters)
Saya ada lah ketua kebuarga (I am head of the family)

Saya suka berdikati (I like independence)
Makanan menggembukkau dan mengenyangtan (food is making you fat and full)
Saya suka masakan bapa (I love my dad's cooking)

LINKS TO VIEW OTHER DOCUMENTATION:

From The Jungle website
www.fromthejungle.co.uk

From The Jungle Facebook page
https://www.facebook.com/greenandconcretejungles

My vimeo page, which includes other works - https://vimeo.com/user2555230

Some links from my vimeo page specific to *From The Jungle* work:

Workshops

Learning *ngajat*
September 2011, SCV
https://vimeo.com/32801299

Experimenting with weaving and light
April 2011, London
https://vimeo.com/35755086

Chatting and weaving
April 2011, London
https://vimeo.com/26997238

Performance work in progress:

Gawai
July 2011, Bethnal Green Working Man's Club, London
https://vimeo.com/32808347

Secrets and stories and un-told tales
March 2011, London
https://vimeo.com/21772539

Tattoo
April 2010, London
https://vimeo.com/18626392