

School of Media, Creative Arts & Social Inquiry

Passing Through: An Ethnography of Performance in Aceh's Margins

Joni Lariat

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014.

The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number: HR115/2014.

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Abstract

The small island regency of Sabang, in the long-contested province of Aceh in the Indonesian archipelago, is at a crossroads. The current push towards social conservatism and punitive shari'ah on the Acehese mainland, is informed by religious moralism and the surveillance and regulation of sexuality. Such demands for homogeneity are not easily reconciled with Sabang's unique histories and contemporary identifications with a diverse, multicultural and transient population.

Based upon four years of ethnographic fieldwork in Sabang and mainland Aceh, this research examines rich oral traditions, documented colonial and pre-colonial histories, and current socio-political trends, to understand contemporary performances of identity and belonging. The stories brought together show recurring narratives of how the islands were used to exile, punish, and contain 'problem populations', with associated themes of madness, contamination, and sanctuary still recognisable in the island's landscapes and everyday social interactions.

What began as a project about an "out-of-the-way place" (Tsing 1993, 288) and its connections with strange colonial histories, has become a deeper personal engagement with women's lived experiences and the politics of in/visibility for sexuality and gender diverse individuals and communities in present-day Aceh. As Aceh turns inwards, casting out those who transgress narrow conceptions of acceptability, I ask, what can Sabang's histories contribute to counter-arguments within Aceh for an alternative social and political trajectory for future generations?

Engaging this question as a queer researcher has drawn me to Aceh's geographical and cultural margins. This research proposes a queer embodied social research methodology, which prioritises queer lived experience, embodied knowledge, and sensory explorations of place. The practice of 'passing through' is offered as a performative ethnographic strategy for negotiating intersubjective research relationships, the vibrant changeability of public and private spaces, and the difficult task of undertaking research in places where being visibly queer is increasingly untenable. This thesis contributes to current conversations within queer anthropology, which call for acknowledgment and demonstration of queer sensibilities as viable methodological contributions to anthropological knowledge.

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Preface: *Bocor lambat* (Slow leak)

Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate,
contain, and mend,
categories always leak
(Trinh 1989, 94)



I'm watching as an elderly woman from the village runs towards two dogs fighting on the steps, a machete in one hand and a bundle of branches in the other. The commotion has distracted her from collecting the fresh new shoots from the shrubs surrounding *Pantai Iboih* (Iboih Beach), a task she completes daily to ensure a steady supply of food for her goats. She shouts as she approaches, waving the machete around above her head, trying to distract them so that she can drag her dog to safety. They ignore her and continue growling, locking their jaws deep into the fur of one another's necks.

A group of five or so small children have dropped what they were doing to form a line behind her. Their eyes crossed and tongues poking out the side of their mouths, they follow, step by step, exaggerating her walk and drawing a diagonal line across their foreheads. One of the children notices me watching and promptly embellishes her facial contortions and lurching steps. As they get close enough to her that she might feel their presence, they break step with her and fall about on the grass laughing. The rest of the children gradually become aware of me watching, appearing both elated to have this strange witness and suddenly shy and self-conscious. They run towards their mothers and curl themselves into their armpits, all the while keeping their eyes firmly locked on me. I offer a complicit smile, assuming they are worried I might tell their mothers they were imitating the woman. They gather confidence and resume their earlier performance: cross-eyed, tongues lolling from their mouths, only now, each time they finish drawing the line across their foreheads they point at me. As I turn to walk away, suddenly feeling awkward standing there watching them, I quickly return the gesture, with no way of knowing yet what it means.

(A memory of a strange moment, 2006)

Long before I arrived in Sabang in September 2013, I had already begun collating a sensory accumulation of the island's people and places. I first visited the islands as a tourist in 2004 and left just weeks before the earthquake and tsunami that devastated Banda Aceh. It happened on 26 December, Boxing Day in my part of the world, and over the coming days and weeks as news and images filtered in, I watched the coverage of the disaster on the television in my parent's lounge room in the northern suburbs of Perth, Western Australia. The dissonance between the footage and growing death-toll, and the ritualised over-eating and drinking of the holiday season, was nauseating. The image of the island I had brought home with me, of a slightly peculiar but quiet tropical paradise, was replaced in an instant with an imagined obliteration. If this was what remained of the mainland, the island had to be gone, how could it not be? I could only sit with this question: there was no way to contact friends I had made, and no media coverage in those first months to reveal what had befallen Pulau Weh.

This protracted wondering enlivened the memories I had taken back to Australia with me. Of course, my memories of calm tranquility were crafted from nostalgia more than the reality of everyday life on the island. I had conveniently relegated the very real tensions of war that pressed into that calm, punctuating the stretchiness of island time. An unlikely and not very sensible destination for a lone 22-year-old female traveler, I had gone there on a whim and a good tip from a Mexican-Canadian couple I met at a hostel on Love Lane in Penang. Their broad contented smiles; their sketchy accounts of the difficulties they faced getting a *biru buku* (blue book; travel permit) to enter Aceh during the conflict; and, their photographs of pristine underwater landscapes and quiet villages without electricity, were just the combination of experiences I had hoped to find when I set off on a one-year trip through Indonesia.

In Iboih¹, the small village where tourists visiting the island could stay, GAM (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* / Free Aceh Movement) soldiers basked in their notoriety on the balcony at Erik's, smoking joints and sleeping the days away in hammocks. After reporting to the Indonesian police upon arrival, those same officers came past daily to check on us: "For your safety", they said. In the morning they would come in plain clothes and try to sell us *ganja* (marijuana).

1 Iboih is a collection of villages on the north-west peninsula of Pulau Weh, the largest and only populated island in the regency of Sabang, which lays off the north-western coast of Aceh.

In the afternoon they would come back in uniform to again check our papers and, this time, our pockets.

Pro-separation rallies would erupt now and then in town, word making its way to Iboih: a regular update of the latest atrocities taking place on the mainland between GAM and TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia* / Indonesian National Armed Forces). I sensed a conflicting energy, though I did not really know what the tension meant, not having a clear understanding about the conflict and a general reluctance of locals to talk about it to outsiders. Yet, I could feel an electric vibrancy humming beneath the dreamlike monotony of the everyday, as though something big could happen at any moment to disrupt the quiet, to bring the island, along with me, back to the world outside. That something did come, but I had left by then. The tsunami captured the attention of the world outside; attention which the decades-long separatist conflict had not attracted. In the aftermath, and still to this day, many Acehnese question whether the tsunami was a gift in the guise of unimaginable tragedy or Allah's punishment for the moral decline that had befallen the province throughout decades of war. Either way, an agreement to end the conflict was reached the following year.

By 2006 I had saved enough money from a coffee job in Perth to return. I passed through Banda Aceh on the way to Ulee Lheue harbour, just like I had before, and took the ferry to Pulau Weh. The mainland was still in ruins as reconstruction efforts only gradually replaced stacked-up shipping container 'temporary' accommodation with rows of identical fixed cement houses. In Pulau Weh, only minor damage from the tsunami was visible, thanks to the deep-sea trenches surrounding the island, however, the dramatic opening of Aceh to foreign NGOs brought visitors in numbers greater than ever before. Quite suddenly Pulau Weh was busier and more connected than it had been since Sabang Freeport's glory days prior to Indonesian Independence in 1949.

I watched as island communities, such as Iboih and Sumur Tiga, tried to keep up with the sudden demand for accommodation for the western reconstruction and aid workers who visited Pulau Weh on weekends; the calmness and natural beauty a welcome escape from the dire situation on the mainland. The influx of foreign dollars transformed humble homestays into hotels; the ubiquitous 'tsunami shelters' (easily assembled wood and steel structures donated to house

the displaced) were dismantled on the mainland and sold to astute business minded islanders and quickly turned into accommodation. Homestay menus replaced the family-style meal of Acehese curry, its delicate balance of sweet coconut milk and the sour tang of tamarind and *sunti* (dried *bilimbing*, a type of starfruit prominent in Acehese cuisine), and fish barbecue adorned with *kecap manis* (sweet soy) and green chili sambal, with pasta and pizza. The newly essential cheese was sourced from a lone cheese-maker in Medan, while beer was smuggled in on boats, which would linger off the coast at night to be quickly off-loaded by hotel owners.

It was during that second visit that I saw the children imitating the woman on the beach, the village's most eccentric resident, on the beach. So enamoured and disarmed by that interaction, I asked around the village what the gesture of drawing a line across one's forehead meant. They explained that it was a playful way of saying that someone is *gila* (crazy). They also said that it was particularly meaningful in Sabang because it suggested that someone was a descendant of the *orang sakit jiwa* (people with a sick soul, i.e., those living with mental illness). Even more intrigued, I delved deeper, discovering from older locals that the Dutch Administration had operated an institution called *Krankzinnigengesticht Sabang* (Sabang Lunatic Asylum) from 1927. The unknown fate of the hospital's residents, when in 1942 the Japanese Army invaded and forced the sudden retreat of the Dutch, still inspires imaginative contemplation for locals in communities like Iboih. The possibility that the eccentricities of contemporary members of the community could be explained through connection to these lost residents is a constant backdrop to the humorous everyday social interactions like that described above.

The hospital grounds are now used as a navy hospital: the interconnected pavilions and colonial façade, visible from the road, are material references to the island's past, presences that are more easily recognisable than the fleeting glimpses of the island's lost inhabitants in the everyday gestures of village children. The wide European-esque boulevard, which takes you above the bustling markets and main thoroughfares of *Kota Bawah* (Below City), is flanked on one side by large foreboding colonial-era buildings. Now used as government offices, they demand attention, their white walls and vast entrances nestle uncompromisingly in the centre of wide fenced estates, their grass-lined garden beds now displaying weathered colonial relics. Jalan Diponegoro, as this boulevard is now known, is lined on both sides with towering *trembesi*

trees, introduced from Suriname by the Dutch, their long looping branches reach high over the road, meeting to form a canopy that casts dappled shadows that draw the breeze from the ocean. Stretching the length of the boulevard, a park with a meandering footpath offers an uninterrupted view of Sabang Bay and glimpses of the winding pathways of *Kota Bawah*.

The serene landscape of the park is interrupted by three or four blocked entrances to an underground tunnel system extending several kilometres in every direction from this highest point of the town. They reach out, like the branches of the trees overhead, in a network of interconnected routes, emanating from this central outpost to the coastline which wraps around the town in a wide semi-circular curve. These entrances mark the midway point between the bunkers and fortresses that adorn the coast, and the underground hospital dug deep beneath the mental hospital several kilometres inland. These remnants are such normalised material presences in the everyday lives of locals that they seem to attract little curiosity by those who stop to buy a drink from the *warung* (food stall) or to smoke a cigarette at one of the benches in the park. However, they are the only physical reminders that Japanese forces also occupied the island for three bloody and violent years, from 1942-45, leaving an indelible mark on the psyche of older Sabang residents.

These histories and their material referents have only recently attracted the attention of local government, leading to the development of a heritage organisation tasked with cataloguing colonial era buildings and undertaking archival research to map the Administration's organisation of the city's infrastructure. In 2004 and 2006, when I first explored Sabang town, the stories could only be sensed through the material traces of the city and in the oral traditions of locals who might be willing to share their family's memories with you. Now, each building is adorned with a plaque describing the buildings' functionality, centring largely on the economic success of the port. The mental hospital has similar signage, offering a simplistic account of the hospital's functionality and only a broad characterisation of the patients who had existed within its confines. The slimness of detail and the suggestion of a functional purpose belies the intricacies of its importance to contemporary Sabang identities, especially as I will show in the coming chapters, the deep-seated contestation about who those patients really were and why they were relocated to such a remote part of the archipelago.

The children's game evoked a deeper sense than I could access from the material remnants at the time. The context offered by the brief explanation of the gesture they had performed and the *orang sakit jiwa*, gave a rare glimpse at the residue that these histories have left behind; of how the island's grisly past might be weaved into the mundanity of everyday life. I became enamoured with these histories and their resonances. Over the years of this research, I scoured online archival repositories² and published travelogues of early European explorers and merchants, finding obscure and visceral mentions of the island's various inhabitants, both before and during the colonial period. I was curious to piece together a picture of this history, to make sense of how these small children had carried that history with them as they played on the beach.

The gaps and silences in my own family's inherited knowledge about the origins, migratory paths, and eventualities of my ancestors who were enslaved West Africans in the Caribbean and, later, migrants to the United Kingdom, undoubtedly influenced my interest in these half-told narratives of displacement. These interrupted family lineages, and the connections to culture and place they might have otherwise afforded, were obscured by the imprints of racism, from poor documentation detailing the movements of black and brown bodies and the framing of subsequent generations as out-of-place, in their own place of birth.

I sense these omissions in my life and fantasise about what stories lay in-between the rare fragments pieced together by my father. My white skin has often felt like a contradiction, a disqualification from forming and enacting a connection to the threads of ancestral lineage persistently surfaced by him. His brown skin, which has kept him on the edges more often than it has invited him in, in this instance is contrastingly reaffirmed by the stories of his family as they emerge, as he connects their disparate elements and sentiments, movements and denials, across time and space.

2 Materials included, photographs and manuscripts stored on KITLV's (*Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* / The Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) online inventory, especially in their archive entitled 'Aceh Books'; and, open access repositories of travelogues written from the diaries of merchant traders and explorers (for example, Marco Polo ([1903] 1993) ; Alexander Hamilton (1930) ; Charles Lockyer (1711); Thomas Bowrey (1905)).

I also was curious to know more about the woman on the beach, whom I mention in the opening anecdote, and others like her, wondering if there were more stories about the patients and their connections with current generations living in villages on the island. I can see now that I was beguiled by all of it: the idea of a crazy, insular, and isolated island, with its contained population, the hidden precolonial and colonial histories permeating local ontologies, the island as intrinsically different to the mainland because of these historical traces. An island replete with oblique half-told stories, off an island, off yet another island, each smaller than the last, in the farthest north-western corner of the vast Indonesian archipelago: it was this romantic notion, of a story waiting to be told, which brought me back seven years later, this time as a fledgling anthropologist.

Queer deviations

My formal research journey began with a failed relationship and an “unexpected encounter” (Ahmed 2017, 247) with a story that permeates everyday life in Sabang. In Pulau Weh, the weather governs the rhythms of everyday life. Iboih can be cut off from the rest of the island during the monsoon season when roads are lost to jungle landslides: Iboih itself becomes an island as Pulau Weh’s internal landscapes change shape. I learned that to do my research I would need to take my chances in between the daily downpours and flash-flooding. I also learned that it was not only these obvious environmental barriers that would affect the directions of my research. Just as I became attuned to the seasonal shifts governing movement around the village, I became aware of the subtle shifts in how my gender is interpreted as I moved through social spaces.

In Aceh and indeed throughout Indonesia, my androgynous appearance is often gendered male: my short hair and clothing more closely reflecting Indonesian masculinity. The taken-for-granted markers of queer identity I so easily deploy in Australia do not have the same register in Aceh: I cannot rely on having my identity reflected to me as I engage in social interactions or pass through social spaces. The subtle learned behaviours which ease certain situations at home do not resonate with Acehnese conceptions of gender and sexuality. At home, despite marking me as non-heterosexual and gender non-binary, my queer corporeality can ease my passage through some public spaces. If adhering to my embodied knowledge of which places

are relatively safe, my queerness permits me to pass through social spaces and interactions with less explicit moments of tension and uncomfortable propositions from men, although an alertness to the potential for hostility and homophobia I internalise is always present, as it is for all queer people, as a penalty for non-compliance. This strange mix of hyper-visibility and invisibility is a particularly queer experience: our non-membership of heterosexuality excludes us from everyday conversations and social interactions which reinscribe heteronormativity, yet we also attract a constant gaze and the implicit threat to our safety.

Contrastingly, in Aceh, heteronormativity presses up against me in unexpected ways (Ahmed 2014): queer in/visibility feels different, to which the gradual amplification of demonising rhetoric that has explicitly named homosexuality as unlawful and immoral over recent years has added a further layer to these contradictory experiences. Although my queerness often feels as though it is invisible, the difficulty in locating me in a clearly defined gender facilitates unusual inclusion in spaces clearly demarcated according to binary gender. These subtle differences in reading have been productive of a strange and unexpected purview into social spaces and interactions otherwise difficult to cultivate as a researcher.

In Aceh, for example, I have a large friendship group predominating in heterosexual cisgender women, a social network that I have never cultivated in Australia. I am also able to socialise with men in ways atypical of femme presenting western women without attracting negative attention. As I demonstrate in the latter chapters of this thesis, these unusual accesses have been central to my understandings of how heteronormativity functions in Aceh and how queerness can be felt as a fluid and contextually responsive orientation towards the subtlest of social norms. The presumption of heterosexuality in Aceh also means that I am constantly confronted with conversations about typical heteronormative life trajectories that I have learned to deflect and manage in Australia: the inclusion in social interactions centring on discourses of the family and clearly delineated binary gender roles has permitted me a queer entry into heterosexual territory previously willfully and defiantly uncharted. I did not foresee the potential insights that androgyny might ease, understanding queer identification in Aceh as something that should be hidden at all costs. These experiences, over time revealed insights into both my own queerness, and its potential displaced meanings and political implications

in an unfamiliar social and cultural context, which is itself in constant flux.

These experiences of contrasting norms contributed to a broadened capacity to sense and value 'the evidence of felt intuition', so eloquently described by the African-American cultural, gender and sexualities scholar Phillip Brian Harper (2000). Minority experience, Harper argues, is produced through a series of subtle underlying attitudes and stereotypes, which the minority subject can sense and elucidate only through a process of "speculative rumination" (2000, 643). We sense these social nuances in our bodies: the way a person avoids eye contact, the body language which tells of discomfort or disgust, presume certain ways of knowing us, accounting for us. These negative emotions are *queer* emotions and have developed as a strategy and by-product of queer survival. It is the intuitive aspect of this social language that Harper is intent on unpacking in his work. Just as he can never be sure that his encounter with a stranger on a train was provoked by his black skin, I cannot be certain that it was indeed my gender identity which catalysed the sudden divergence from a typical research narrative at the outset of my fieldwork. Yet, bodily memories of social interactions and professional situations provoked similar embodied sensory understandings of the subtle politics at play.

To undertake research in Indonesia, foreign researchers must apply to the government department in Jakarta, *Kementerian Riset dan Teknologi* (RISTEK / The Department of Research and Technology), which oversees all research in Indonesia. As part of the application, prospective researchers must provide a signed supporting letter from a local counterpart or sponsor who will facilitate the research, providing important cultural mediation between the foreign researcher and local communities. The relationship can also foster cross-cultural academic exchanges by introducing the foreign researcher to relevant scholarly communities.

I struggled for the first six months of my candidacy to find a counterpart. Finally, an Indonesian student in Perth offered the name of a colleague and they, in turn, introduced me to a mathematics academic at Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh. I contacted him by email and although my proposed research was completely outside his academic field, he seemed genuinely interested in the topic. He readily agreed to participate in the project and over the following months, we conversed frequently by email about the possibilities offered by our collaborative partnership. He suggested that he could introduce me to several important

scholars, based in Banda Aceh, specialising in Acehese history and politics. He also suggested he introduce me to a research collective operating in Banda Aceh during the first week of my arrival and then, in keeping with the protocols of our respective universities, we would go to Pulau Weh together. Even though I had contacts in Iboih, I assumed it was best-practice to organise my introductions to local community leaders through my counterpart: through his connections and understanding of local etiquette and cultural sensitivities, we would secure endorsement for the project. My path seemed laid out for me; an itinerary that would ensure an ethical and academically successful fieldwork trajectory.

All seemed to be working well prior to my arrival. We were communicating regularly, and there seemed an easy rapport developing between us. The only aspect of our communication that seemed amiss was my counterpart's persistent gendering of me as male in his emails. He would open each email with "Hello Mr Joni", despite my repeated attempts to politely correct him. Aware from previous trips to Indonesia that Joni is a masculine name, I tried ending my emails with various female titles in both English and Indonesian, but he continued to call me Mr Joni. I assumed it was either a miscommunication or an oversight and thought that when we met in person, everything would be clear. When we finally did meet, in a mall in Jakarta Selatan, I could see that I was not the researcher he had imagined during those months of back-and-forth conversation. The value of our connection rapidly declined as soon as he saw the young, female-bodied, androgynous person standing before him.

There were other ways to interpret his sudden lack of interest and change in attitude and I have puzzled over these with little resolution. Had I misunderstood the nuances of how gender might influence professional relationships in Aceh, leading me to naïve expectations that I could form a partnership with a male academic? Could his association with me have negative personal and professional implications? I could see that if it was indeed a problem of my femaleness, organising the practicalities of our research and managing the impressions our partnership might attract from his colleagues and family may have been too difficult to contemplate. I was unable to ascertain which of these possibilities ended our relationship, although the deeply unsettling feeling I had after that meeting did resurface familiar discomforts and frustrations. A sense of not quite fitting into others' expectations would become a thread woven throughout

my fieldwork, however, I would learn to utilise these moments as productive occasions of insight.

I do not go into this level of detail to voice grievance about my research counterpart. On the contrary, the experience was educative of the social and cultural contexts within which I was intending to work. Not least, it showed me that my gender identity would be a factor in both my academic and social capacity to live and work in Aceh. As researchers, who we are and how we are perceived affects the kinds of cultural, social, and academic relationships we can pursue. How we are framed and shaped by the social contexts within which these relationships are located influences, if not determines, the experiences we are directed towards, and defines those which are kept out of reach. And yet, this experience was not only a hindrance to participation. I learned to engage actively with sensory aspects of fieldwork: as a queer person, I have in my body an accumulation of lived experiences, sensory and emotional responses, which I could consider a repository of embodied knowledge with which to sense unfamiliar social landscapes. This led me to scholarship with which to engage that prioritises queer emotional landscapes (Ahmed 2006, 2014; Love 2007).

Without my counterpart's introductions, I navigated official channels with the help of friends and eventually made the trip to Sabang alone. Eva³, whom I had met years before, became my local sponsor with the immigration department and the Sabang police. Her introduction positively influenced how I was initially welcomed and, on several occasions throughout my research, led to unexpected offers of assistance from police and immigration officials to introduce me to local residents. Eva also introduced me to Iboih's *Keucik* (*Kepala desa*; village head). At the time, I did not realise how significant this was, but, had my counterpart accompanied me, my capacity to live and work in Iboih would have been negatively affected. His class and

3 I have used Eva's real name with her permission, as I have with all other named interlocutors throughout. Where I have given accounts of observations or conversations that could attract negative attention, I have taken measures to de-identify the person involved, by using pseudonyms or initials, or omitting names entirely, and altering details such as time, place, and other contextual information. These strategies, the meaning of informed consent, as well as the possible unintended consequences of identification were discussed verbally with interlocutors at the time or shortly after the conversation or observation. I revisited informed consent throughout production of this thesis, and as the political discourse and legislative contexts changed in Aceh, to ensure that consent could be withdrawn at any stage.

mainlander status would have directly interfered with my attempts to engage with locals. It was only gradually, that I came to recognise that the relationships I was permitted to foster over the next four years would never have been possible had the 'best-practice' approaches I had envisaged eventuated.

As I show throughout this thesis, deviations and disruptions offer productive sites of reflection on the embodied experiences of the researcher (Al-Mohammad 2015). The 'gender trouble' (Butler 1990) stirred up by the queer researcher also enables a critical vantage-point upon which to unpack the implicit heteronormativity of social research methodologies. As Ahmed reminds us, "A body can become a question mark" (2017, 117), not only in the destabilising effects of that body's presence, but in the information the body senses as the world creates impressions upon its surface (Ahmed 2017). It is by inhabiting a body that creates trouble that queer researchers accumulate, sharpen, and eventually, actively engage embodied knowledge to discern subtle shifts, deviations, and intensities in fieldwork contexts. This implicitly applies, such is the anti-normative stance queer theoretical frameworks have consistently held towards the academy, to the entrenched heteronormativities of social, bureaucratic, disciplinary, and methodological spaces of the institutions within which we inevitably work, as much as it does to the social spaces of 'the field'.

Reflecting on his encounter on the train, Harper defines queer theorising as intrinsically linked to the materiality of everyday life. The encounter provoked his rumination; his theorisation thus an effect of the materiality of experience. I was only beginning to understand the significance of the embodied knowledge that I carried with me as a queer researcher, of constriction, of the intrusion of heteronormativity, which allowed me to sense how my gender influenced and marked the everyday materiality of social interaction. Such knowledge is not easily described, it is a sedimentation of discomforts and an embedded alertness and awareness to social cues and spaces. Ahmed (2017) uses the analogy of a comfortable chair to describe this sensed awareness of heteronormativity. When we are in unfamiliar cultural contexts, these embodied sensitivities are sharper and more consciously realised: they prickle the skin because they are newly felt. Learning to perceive and then describe these subtle material intrusions, to understand how they then shape our perceptions of social spaces, is central to this thesis.

These descriptions are the basis of how we might then recognise the value of a queer position in contesting the norms within everyday sociality. As Harper says,

Queer critical work ... should enable us to see the fissures and inconsistencies in what conventionally appears as the wholly coherent infrastructure of normative culture. And the engine most capable of driving our novel perceptions in this vein is the very social materiality that, on first consideration, might seem to obscure our view... (2000, 655).

My practice has similarly been informed by the 'social materiality' of encounters read through the body: Conversations, utterances, casual and fleeting social interactions are replete with sensory inferences. These moments which poked through the mundanity of the everyday alerted me to instances where my body 'fielded others' difference' (Nast 1998), allowing fleeting insight into their lived experiences of continually shaping themselves to either fit in or resist the social spaces that we were 'passing through' together. This thesis then, is an account of a process of feeling my way into social spaces at the invitation of others. And of learning to hear others' expressions of self, identity, and sexuality within our social relationships. It is more interested in a process of traveling, of sensing my way through social encounters, and unpacking my own ways of knowing, than prescribing and then unproblematically arriving at an intended and clear-cut destination.

Unexpected encounters

As I described above, the failure of my relationship with my research counterpart coincided with an unexpected encounter. During our brief and only conversation, he told me of a practice engaged by Acehnese mainlanders and islanders from Sabang which connects a ubiquitous object found in every village throughout Indonesia, to the rarely mentioned aspects of Sabang's colonial past. On hearing this story, my memory of the group of children playfully imitating the elderly woman on the beach in Iboih was reignited.

Mainlanders, so the story went, when they meet someone from Sabang or when a fellow mainlander is off to the island for a holiday tell and retell an old story featuring a rattan

basket, centred on the Acehnese phrase, *cröeng ié lam raga*⁴ (taking water with the basket). The impossible task of drawing water with a basket recalls a practice imposed upon patients who had been sent to *Krankzinnigengesticht Sabang* (Sabang Lunatic Asylum). Using a basket of woven rattan, like that which occupies page two of this thesis, they were forced to draw water from a well or lake, repetitively, again and again and again.

The more I have thought about it over the years, a more lurid and insidiousness image forms. Many Sabang residents I have spoken with explain that the practice was a kind of therapy, that eventually, or so it was thought, the patient's delusional state would falter because they would see the futility of their action. As the water passed through the basket's weave, their rational mind would be released from the mental affliction that had befallen them. Yet, what sense of hopelessness, indeed of madness, would the humiliating relentlessness of such a mundane and useless task have weighed down upon these patients who, day after day, on a strange and faraway island, teetering at the edge of the archipelago, were faced with repeating it all again? And, what delusional beliefs, of one's own superiority, paternalistically enacted through this latest version of western psychiatry, could conjure and enforce such a nightmarish task upon another?

It is significant that I have never myself seen this interaction performed nor have I ever found

4 Throughout this thesis, I employ *Bahasa Aceh* (Gayo dialect) only when communicating a specific locally significant phrase or a person or place's name. I use *Bahasa Indonesia* and English to convey general ideas or when quoting from ethnographic conversations to reflect the languages spoken in my fieldwork. Most people in Aceh are comfortable speaking *Bahasa Indonesia* with outsiders despite their first language being one of the four dialects in regular use in Aceh. I am cognisant of the complications and limitations my inability to communicate in *Bahasa Aceh* poses to engaging in conversations involving complex emotions and sentiments, however, I developed various strategies for accessing and ensuring understanding, and sharpened my ability to read embodied aspects of communication. Where possible, I also utilised the assistance of friends to translate and act as mediators, especially when interviewing older Acehnese women who preferred not to speak *Bahasa Indonesia*.

In Iboih, it is typical of locals to regularly employ three (or more) languages to communicate within the various populations who live in and pass through the village. This layering and interchangeability of language is productive of an easy rhythm to communication in Iboih, and slippages in meaning that allow locals, who are uniquely positioned, given they are the only party to speak all three (or more) languages, to create private shared moments outside the 'frontstage' of everyday communication with tourists. I explore the everyday tensions between tourists and locals in Chapter Four, to further emphasise the intricacies of language in Iboih and the implications this has for how people manage identity and belonging in a place with such a diverse and transient population.

reference to it in the colonial archives, yet the story has been relayed to me by countless islander-participants of such interactions. By inferring that madness lives on in contemporary Sabang people or that the islands themselves can create temporary madness in visitors, the phrase and its surrounding performance is central to how identity is performed and contested. It is an integral part of social interaction that takes place in the 'cultural ecotones' (Gillis 2014) and geographical interstices that both separate and connect the mainland and the island, their histories, and the contemporary resonances of these histories in local and national narratives.

The most intensely uncomfortable resonances of Sabang's pasts as a site of exile and punishment are with contemporary practices of demonising and public humiliating sexual and gender minorities in mainland Aceh. Sabang identities are important vantage points for understanding how difference is rhetorically constructed in Aceh, particularly through morally-weighted discourses of contamination, impervious borders, and the concomitant demand for outward expressions of a pious and homogenous religious identity. Public caning, late-night raids, forcing performances of macho masculinity from terrified *waria* (transgender women), capturing and disseminating images of these enactments of public shaming through social and state media, although contextually specific, eerily recall practices which demonised different others in the past.

Embedded in the everyday, and so in my thesis, the basket surfaces and resurfaces as metaphor, material object, and performance, provoking my research, even redirecting it. I remain intrigued by the incommensurability of the basket's materiality with the task that was demanded it perform. This rich fragment of a much larger story of colonisation, isolation, and madness became a central thread of my research, structuring my ethnographic practice, and eventually my writing. It influenced my interactions, relationships, and conversations, accompanying me in my everyday movements around the island. It focused my attention on the everyday, where even the most ubiquitous object might hold meaning and possibility for reinterpreting 'histories from above' (Stoller 1997), such as those I would later trace in archival collections in Jakarta and Leiden. It encouraged that I look for the subtlest of gestures within intersubjective exchanges for suggestions of the social politics permeating islander and mainlander relations, as well as contemporary island inhabitant's relationships with their island's pasts. It also invoked a

reckoning with my own inevitable presence in situations that were unnerving, uncomfortable, and vulnerable, experiences and emotions which fostered connections grounded in shared and divergent experiences of marginality.

On writing as weaving

The basket is also a metaphor for how I learned to write this ethnographic account. Like the process of weaving a basket, my experiences of writing from fragments follows a process of unfolding, of form emerging from the practices of fieldwork and weaving those fragments through experience. Tim Ingold suggests that we ought to regard “making as a modality of weaving, rather than the other way around” (2000, 346). He continues, “To emphasise making is to regard the object as the expression of an idea; to emphasise weaving is to regard it as the embodiment of a rhythmic movement” (Ingold 2000, 346).

The rhythms I felt through social interaction, of my fieldwork practice’s inherent movement and performativity, has produced the shape and rhythm of this thesis. The rough edges, the partialities, the annotated reflections, and deviations from the path, have produced the form and structure. The possibility of revision permitted by ends which are deliberately left loose are reflected in the way stories can never be conclusively arranged. This is reflected in how I have revisited fieldnotes over time, allowing them space to take on the traces of other experiences and observations, to reveal the ambiguities that a sedimentation of thematic resonances have in how stories are recalled and performed in Sabang. These narratives are then woven into the text in a way that allows methodology to emerge gradually, rather than imposing fixed boundaries from the beginning. Such a structure makes visible the difficult path taken for such an arrival, or resting place, to be possible. This thesis then, is both an image of place, “the stories which make this ‘here and now’ for me” (Massey 2005, 130), and a metanarrative of how certain research practices bring those stories and their interconnectivity into view.

Writing in circular rhythms is representative of the reflexive process through which my understandings emerge, retract and re-emerge. They reflect the non-linear and incomplete way I was able to engage with Sabang’s historical traces. They did not, could not, come as fully formed narratives, excavated from rarely opened manuscripts in archival collections. Before I

could unpack those documents or understand those letters and photographs, I had to learn how to move, how to listen and how to recognise my own body as situated, as possessing its own surface against which stories and experiences are made. But I also used a fragmentary knowledge of what was absent from those stories, from my engagement with the archives to know who to ask, where to look, and how to listen. In this sense, Sabang cast itself, through my embodied and ambiguous everyday social interactions: living histories became archives as my embodied position towards them shifted and as relationships revealed fragments that could be brought together, to make the archives sing with altogether different voices. Engaging with oral histories, everyday performances, and my own experiences of intersubjective exchange, made the archives multivocal and tactile places to listen and play. They became part of a process of weaving, rather than a foundation against which contemporary life could be read. In this sense, doing fieldwork and writing from experiences captures a sense of what Ingold means about form emerging from materiality.

Part One: Strange histories

An introduction to Part One

Like many other island territories, Sabang, as though inconsequential to regional geopolitical relations, is regularly omitted from cartographic representations. Eva, realising one day that Pulau Weh was absent from the poster of the Indonesian Archipelago she herself had hung in her restaurant, quickly made a cardboard cut-out of the island and affixed it to the empty space of ocean where it ought to have been. The poster, which says: “Travel warning: Indonesia, dangerously beautiful”, now has an exaggerated Weh-shaped amendment, cumbersomely placed on the northern tip of Sumatra, making it look strangely top-heavy and unbalanced.

The islands are similarly excluded from the rich accounts of Acehnese history that abound; an omission indicative of the contradictory and uncomfortable place Sabang occupies in Aceh’s national identity. Like Eva’s hasty and defiant interjection, gaps in historical representations beckon interrogation, especially when, as I have found, Sabang’s pasts are so interwoven with the stories, the struggles, and the fierce narratives of resistance of mainland Aceh.

Acehnese historical accounts have focused exclusively on three main periods. First, the golden era of the Acehnese Kingdom throughout the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda from 1607-1636. Second, the Acehnese resistance to colonial occupation, from 1873 until Indonesian Independence in 1949. Third, the separatist conflict between *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM, Free Aceh Movement) and the central Indonesian government, which ended with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Helsinki in 2005⁵. Since 2004, analyses focusing on post-conflict and post-tsunami reconstruction efforts have predominated the literature and more recently, of course, shari’ah-focused studies have taken centre stage of Acehnese socio-political analysis. While these histories are certainly critically important, they are heavily mainland and conflict-centric and tend not to draw on cross-disciplinary approaches to facilitate nuanced understandings of how social life is practiced as a result of broader social, political, and cultural change. It is the movement between intersecting bodies of evidence, drawn from

5 For an extensive chronological mapping and analysis of the development of Sumatran, Acehnese, and Indonesian identities, see Reid (2005). For a wide range of perspectives on 20th century Acehnese political uprisings, see the edited collection ‘Verandah of Violence: The background to the Aceh Problem’ (Reid 2006). For an in-depth account of Jakarta’s policies in Aceh, see Miller (2009).

textual historical analytical methods and ethnographic practice, informed by a queer sensibility towards imaginative and creative engagement with what is silenced, undocumented, and rendered in strictly normative terms, that this thesis explores and seeks to represent. Such a contribution injects nuance and contestation to dominating representations, both of Aceh's past, its contemporary political contexts, especially the deep complexity of how gender and sexuality is lived in everyday social interaction, and to its future.

Embedded within typical historical and political accounts, and in Acehnese nationalist discourse more generally, are themes of imperviousness and resistance that negate Sabang's complex relationships with colonialism. Despite Sabang's absence in scholarly historical representations of Aceh, I began compiling strange and obscure mentions of the islands in online archival collections and in travelogues of 16th and 17th century European merchants and traders. This painted an altogether different picture of a long, convoluted, and layered history of human migration, exile, and displacement. As well as the more widely celebrated histories of holy travelers and the colonial development of Sabang's illustrious port, these more viscerally charged mentions reveal an island used by successive regimes as a container for problem populations. These omissions, if re-presented, have the potential to contribute to current contestations over Acehnese identity and confirm that contemporary practices of demonisation on the Acehnese mainland are not a recent phenomenon, but have deep roots in Aceh and Sabang's pasts.

This thesis is presented in two parts to reflect a journey from these early historical omissions towards an emplaced and embodied sensibility towards the current socio-political contexts in Aceh. These changes, specifically the implementation of punitive shari'ah and the associated regulation of sexuality through the explicit naming of male and female homosexual sex in the recently revised *Qanun Jinayat* (Penal Code), increasingly pressed into my everyday experiences in Pulau Weh and shaped my relationships with young Acehnese women. The worrying amplification of anti-LGBT sentiment throughout Indonesia during this time and the explicit violence, homophobic, and transphobic rhetoric that is particularly worrying in Aceh where the law supports such attitudes has emerged as a key context of this research. My experiences as an androgynous-presenting queer western researcher who so happened to be in Aceh during this explosive time, are foundational to my understandings of tensions between

state and *gampông*⁶ (village) governance and the emergence of fleeting acts of resistance that have flourished in the interstices of these two competing systems.

The two parts intersect in the discursive production of the other, in both past and contemporary times. More than that, they foreshadow and anticipate how difference is managed throughout Sabang's pasts and present. Queerness is offered as a lens for reading these layers of difference and how they are managed: Sabang's histories *are queer*, not in the sense of an explicit identification of them as examples of non-heterosexual or non-binary gender histories, but in the sense that they can be engaged as counter-performative histories using a queer analytic that allows entry into a discussion of how those histories are submerged through configurations of certain norms, performances, and power. The archipelagic method I introduce in Chapter One, and enact in Chapter Two, is an illustrative metaphor of both the reinscription and recirculation of histories and as a tool to connect disparate elements. Engaging with histories in such a way, I argue, is queer in that it prioritises surfacing connections and possibilities that otherwise appear and reappear through historical reinscription as uncomplicatedly normative.

Part One grapples with the difficulties of bringing fragmented and half-told histories together. I arrange these histories to form a montage rather than a linear account, where narrative emerges through the assemblage of thematic resonances that resurface in the storytelling practices of locals; the archival traces of colonial anxieties; and, the fantastical observations of explorers and merchants who described fleeting glimpses of the island and its exiled inhabitants.

Part Two focuses on the contemporary resonances of the production of place through narratives of exile, contamination, and containment, utilising my own embodied experiences and relationships in Iboih to understand how the implementation of punitive shari'ah is impacting the reproduction of local identity, especially as it is connected and enacted through gender and sexuality. The subtle influences of mainland politics on the local communities of Sabang and the re-establishing of identity against these dramatic changes to community governance and everyday social interactions provide the foundation for an investigation of how gender is negotiated in multiple spatial realms. Subversive queer performances emerge in this vibrant

⁶ *Gampông* is a regional variation of the Bahasa Indonesia term *kampung*, meaning village.

space of contestation as a way of exploring and testing the limits of shari'ah's reach.

To establish the settings of this research, Chapter One explores how islands have been represented in the western cultural imagination and how they were subsequently used to extend and expand imperialist reach. As a work principally grounded in anthropology, a recognition of the historical legacies of the discipline, particularly in how island cultures are represented as contained and endogenous life-worlds, is a fundamental theoretical basis. I reflect on my own preconceived ideas of both islands and ethnography and draw on recent propositions in island studies, which call for "thinking *with* the archipelago" (Pugh 2013, 10; italics in original), to contest limiting tropes of isolation, insularity, boundedness, and timelessness, which I saw reproduced in my own emerging fieldwork narrative.

Chapter Two brings together various narrative strands that, when woven together, surface surprising histories of human displacement and seismic separations. These stories of an island on the move give form to contemporary articulations of belonging and community, particularly through ideas of transience and *orang campur* (mixed people). The underlying motivations and anxieties of contamination and racist Eurocentric prejudices which informed colonial decision-making show that Sabang was central to Administration strategies to contain and separate so-called problem populations. It is the legacies of these strategies that permeate contemporary identity narratives and therefore the ethnographic research foregrounded throughout this thesis.

Chapter Three introduces everyday performance and living history to demonstrate the ongoing revision of these histories in contemporary islander-mainlander relationships. Through social exchanges which recall the story of the rattan basket I introduced in the preface, I ask how the story's ambiguities and the improvisational quality of the performative space provoke imaginative revision of the historical foundations of mainlander-islander relations and therefore allow for vibrant contestation of contemporary identity narratives. This re-reading has implications for Sabang's orientation towards the current push for a homogenous implementation of punitive shari'ah and constricted expressions of religious identity.

Chapter 1: Views

“Here is the mainland in the middle of the sea.”

(Pak Fir, Balohan coffee shop, Sabang, 2016)

Mainlands are ordinary, the measure of reality for which islands

in their eccentricity practice caprice.

Islands are extraordinary and therefore likely to be enchanted,

both utopias and prisons,

sea-changed bodies into something rich and strange.

None of Prospero’s magic did him much good on the mainland

(Taussig 2004, 286)



figure 2. *Perspective from inside one of many Benteng Jepang (Japanese Bunkers), located on Pulau Weh's fringes, 2015, digital photograph taken by the author.*

Ethnographic baggage

Engaging ethnographic fieldwork on an island comes with baggage. When I arrived in 2013, it was at once apparent that my luggage did not contain what I might need to survive the intensities of Pulau Weh's windy season, followed closely by the monsoonal rains that last from September until March. It took a while longer to realise that I was ill-equipped to unpack the nuances of fieldwork in Pulau Weh's island communities, having brought with me a host of pre-existing ideas about both the geographical contexts in which I intended to undertake research, and what ethnographic fieldwork itself might look like in practice and then on the page.

I imagined Pulau Weh as peripheral to the mainland; its own unique socio-cultural differences subsumed within the broader political imperatives of Banda Aceh. An idea informed by experiences of passing through Banda Aceh, from the airport to the harbour, the rules at the time stipulating that the mainland was out of bounds. Pulau Weh, as though out-of-frame, was the only place permissible for tourists to stay. The mainland felt both mysterious and terrifying, as though behind the façade of shopfronts as we rushed past and the wall of gun-toting TNI officers lining the entrance to the harbour, was an inaccessible yet quintessentially Acehnese world. The island, in contrast, felt safe and controlled, as though disconnected from the realities of war. These experiences were not the only basis for my romantic ideations: they found a welcome synthesis with a cultural imaginary that casts islands as remote oases, removed from the daily struggles of mainland centres.

I also, contradictorily, thought of Weh as a "continent in miniature" (Gillis 2014, 155), as a self-contained space, independent of the closeness, flows, and unavoidable connections that make continents thrive. Michael Taussig's rendition of islands above, as places of difference and eccentricity, is an enticingly evocative frame; the mythologies it beckons are familiar ground in representations of 'islandness' and an "island mind" (Ritchie 1977, 188) that are so often attributed to island-dwellers. Isolation, insularity, boundedness, eccentricity: these tropes are unavoidable, and delightfully so, however in the early months of my fieldwork, I struggled to separate my experiences from these ideas not least because they preceded my experiences (Fletcher 2011). I unconsciously organised my observations and the fragments I had gathered in online archives into this awaiting scaffold of ideas, as though by deploying these tropes

through the specificities of Sabang's histories and contemporary performances, an image of the island would come into focus.

Can we not make a similar argument about how ethnographers embark upon ethnographic practice in unfamiliar places? Do we not approach fieldwork with the same anticipations; the same romantic ideations of *what* and *who* awaits us and how we should represent them, ourselves, and our journeys? Despite the long-standing contestation of these distancing and exoticising ideas in anthropological theory, our practice often replicates them (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Throughout my undergraduate degree I learned to sense the reproduction of othering in ethnographic accounts, yet when I undertook fieldwork myself, I struggled with the structures of ethnographic representation. The way I could communicate my experience felt somehow pre-ordained within the oppressive narrative structures of ethnographic arrival and immersion.

My early fieldnotes are replete with ideas and inclusions that repeat and reflect these distancing tendencies. My field notebooks, both electronic and paper versions, have fleeting glimpses into a mind filled with expectation for a certain kind of 'ethnographic narrative'. Although I did not write much at first, still waiting to know what I had to say, the rare note belies the anxiety and expectation I had for my own narrative of disorientation giving way to a professed understanding; and, of ethnographic awakening, cultivated through a careful balance of "deep hanging out" (Clifford 1997, 56) and distance. I constantly conceptualised 'field' and 'home' as oppositional, mutually discreet 'locations', without recognising the separation, the spatial and temporal distancing of self and other, that they reproduced.

While there are endless accounts which deviate from this script, the script nonetheless exists, informing how we both evaluate and construct our experiences. As Jerome Bruner says, "our experience of human affairs comes to take the form of the narratives we use in telling about them" (1996, 132); in the case of ethnography, this narrative surfaces to entice its own reproduction through narrative form. The dissonance between what is imagined and how research proceeds is what Vered Amit calls "... the gap between the experience and archetype of fieldwork" (2000, 2) and it is to that gap which this chapter turns its attention.

The 'archetype of fieldwork' emerges from a series of cultural imaginaries, many of which, historically, have involved islands as both subject and metaphor for culture. I begin by exploring these prevailing constructions within western anthropological and mainstream discourse, which have enabled the use of islands as sites of exile, containment, sanctuary, and separation, both within colonial and contemporary periods. I then move on to my emerging research methodology, which deliberately interrogates the desires, so clearly evident in my fieldnotes, for firm borders, compartmentalised fieldwork and home selves, and emotional and geographical distance through my persistent cognitive and embodied separation of field and home.

This chapter establishes, in a sometimes-haphazard way, the theoretical and methodological settings of this research. Like Doreen Kondo (1990), my fieldwork has taken me on a journey *towards* methodology. The contextual and personal shifts that have come about during this research have provoked a reflexive engagement with how place emerges in ethnographic fieldwork practice and how that process can be represented; through the relationships and experiences that inform and guide the researcher into their roles, as co-participant and co-performer, as friend, and as researcher.

To move through these contextual and personal shifts I draw from recent conversations in island studies, which propose a methodology that privileges interconnectivity and movement, rather than stasis and insularity. I ask, what can these scholarly contributions mean for ethnographic practice? And especially, what might we take from them to envisage new trajectories for queer ethnography? How might we reflect on our physical and cognitive movements; social interactions; how and where we look for performances of local identity; and, finally, how our queer selves are woven into, and make, social spaces through connection with others. This chapter then, is representative of the reflexive dialogue that has been ongoing for four-years of fieldwork, through some of the most dramatic social changes to face Aceh in its post-disaster, post-conflict period.

'Islands of the mind'⁷

What is it about islands that so captivates the mainlander's imagination? Where do images of tropical, deserted islands come from and how have they remained so enticing and alluring within the western cultural imaginary? Islands are so beguiling because they are contradictorily constructed (Baldacchino 2007): they are both porous and bounded; insular yet interconnected; knowable and mysterious. These latter myths are difficult to shrug because they are so evocatively deployed in literature and film. We have seen endless revisions of the same storyline of which the island is the most significant character.

The vast repository of literary, historical and scholarly representations of islands in the West, repeatedly offers confirmation that these images have their foundations in the European colonial imagination (DeLoughrey 2001, 2007; Gillis 2003, 2007; Hay 2006; Lowenthal 2007). Although these cultural processes of defining and designating difference are not unique to western cultures, these images are amplified in the colonial need for demonstrating dominance through expansion, invasion, and conquest. The reinforcement of culture through its creative productions and historical representations only promotes the functionality and romanticism associated with these early colonial constructions. As Edmond and Smith argue, from a European imperialist standpoint, the quality of 'boundedness' has become synonymous with possession; "islands, unlike continents, *look* like property" (my emphasis, 2003, 1).

Throughout the Age of Discovery, which extended from the 15th until the 17th century, islands were front and centre. Often the first land sighted from sea, islands paved the way to continents and larger islands beyond, they were procured as strategic outposts and places to wait for the winds and tides to turn to allow free sailing. During this time, Europeans imagined islands as continents in disintegration or in a process of becoming. Indeed, what they expected they would find on these voyages was a sea of continents like their own, in reality what they found was an endless stretch of fragments (Edmond and Smith 2003).

Anthropology has both critiqued these examples of cultural production and been intertwined

7 Gillis (2003, 19).

with the ideologies of western imperialism that facilitated their enactment in the first place. Ethnology was conceived as part of the colonial apparatus which grew out of the mythologies that started in these fantastical constructions of the other as timelessly bound within clearly defined geographical territories. The island's alluring capacity to be known in its entirety, and therefore, to be possessable, reaches back to anthropology's foundational connections with empire and colonialism (Simpson 2014). The antecedents to modern anthropology cultivated the tools whereby these desires were legitimated. As Audra Simpson says,

Knowing and representing people within those places required more than military might; it required the methods and modalities of knowing – in particular, categorization, ethnological comparison, linguistic translation, and ethnography (2014, 95).

In this historical trajectory alongside and intertwined with colonialism, the island became synonymous with culture: that is, it is both the instigative object to be possessed and the subsequent container, the “metonymic prisons” (Appadurai 1988, 40), of people and their places. In this way, we can see how islands have been central to the modern anthropological project, both as subjects of ethnographic research and as metaphors for culture (Eriksen 1993). The island metaphor served to promote the idea that closed social systems could be studied and their endogenous cultures presented to readers in the digestible form of the ethnographic monograph.

The selection of sites for ethnographic study reflected this assumed bounded and fixedness, with small-scale villages and indeed islands attracting a vast repertoire of ethnographic representation (for example, Malinowski 1922; Mead 1928). In this way, islands are inseparable from anthropological reckonings with the other and present a vibrant site within which to reimagine this relationship. Part of the inseparability comes from the language used to communicate both culture and island geographies. It is common to speak of a place's ‘authentic’ culture, as though beneath the surface of multiculturalism or diasporic expressions of cultural identity, exists an untouched pristine culture that can be excavated, understood, and rendered familiar to a western audience.

Contestation of limiting and Eurocentric representations described above, has come from scholars, poets, and writers who are themselves island-dwellers. Their postcolonial critiques contest the limiting representations of islands as timeless, isolated, and out-of-the-way places, showing them instead to be vibrant and interconnected networks of commerce, cultural production, environmental connectedness, and inter-reliance (Brathwaite 1999; Glissant 1997; Hau'ofa 1994, 2005, 2008; Walcott 1986). These perspectives forge new and exciting conceptual reconfigurations of island, mainland, and oceanic relationships. They recast the world's oceans as epic centres of historical and cultural production, and most importantly challenge interdisciplinary scholarship to revisit histories and research methodologies to better encompass the variant perspectives that are on offer from those historically marginalised, both in a global-political sense and within academia.

Tongan anthropologist, Eveli Hau'ofa is perhaps the most often quoted of these scholars. Writing against the implicit colonialist rhetoric of conquest, Hau'ofa describes the intricate interconnectivities of island-dwellers' social and environmental interactions with land and sea, where spaces otherwise seen as void and empty are vibrant sites of commerce, trade and social connection. He explains that where continental dwellers see "islands in a faraway sea", island dwellers see "a sea of islands" (Hau'ofa 1994, 5); a view which recognises the outward-looking, totality of relationships, that constitute the economies and cultural continuities of archipelagic practices of interconnectedness. Mainlander-ethnographers can learn from these scholarly and literary contributions to shift their own mainland and terra-centric ways of thinking about islands and archipelagos. The more dynamic and fluid ways of thinking about boundaries and borders are also vital considerations in research that seeks an alternative approach to undertaking ethnographic research in island communities.

Throughout my research the questions that have really pressed me to think in more expansive ways have centred on the movement of stories, both within and between island geographies. How might we conceptualise interconnectivity and the production of space through the movement of stories, and how might we then think about an island's narrativity, its daily oral history about itself, in relation to other places? How might an island's histories be conceptualised as performative and always becoming through the networks of storytelling

that transcend and create borders? Such a reconfiguration demands the researcher learn to listen in direct contradiction to the habits embedded in their epistemological and ontological tendencies. I grapple with these questions later in the chapter. Before I move on to these exciting possibilities, I first explore the perpetuation of tropes of isolation, insularity, and timelessness in contemporary representations and the colonial and contemporary uses of islands as sites of exile and punishment.

Modern and contemporary articulations

Islands as produced within the European imagination have a persistent reach, evident throughout modern and contemporary representations of islands and their inhabitants. Even this week, as I revise this chapter, the story of the 'Sentinelese', a tribe who occupy a North Sentinel Island in the Indian-controlled Andaman Archipelago, who are infamous in their maintained separation from the 'outside world', has resurfaced in the news (Wiedersehn 2018). Stories of the tribe's responses to anyone who attempts to contact them fuel the western imagination stirring up a fear and intrigue that only the 'unknown' can conjure, in a world where little exists that has not been corrupted in some way by western culture. There is something comforting and reassuring about this enduring narrative, of a people lost in time. The inability to fit the tribe into a western measure of progress, through a documented and recognisable 'history', renders them timeless. In his article entitled *The Last Island of the Savages*, Adam Goodheart (2000, online) described the Sentinelese as having "somehow managed to slip through the net of history".

David Attenborough's (1971) documentary, *A Blank on the Map: A Journey in Central New Guinea*, brought another so-called 'uncontacted' tribe in the New Guinea interior into western lounge rooms. The idea of a timeless culture still practiced despite the progress of civilisation outside, is a narrative that has never and perhaps will never become old. The idea of the 'interior' is a pervasive trope used to evoke the great allure of remote, untouched places, especially islands who despite their portrayal as wild and unknown have the possibility to be known; their boundedness suggests an eventuality that the interior can be explored and conquered. As Attenborough says at the beginning of his film, "I'm in the middle of Central New Guinea, and these wonderful mountains, all around, are one of the few places on the

surface of the earth that are truly unexplored” (1971, 00:19), before he sets out to show us what exists in the interior, ‘the blank on the map’, as he describes it.

Contemporary television shows like *Survivor* (2000 – present) and *The Island with Bear Grylls* (2014 – present) have capitalised on these mythologies. The western individualist subject is tested against the natural environment and the ability of a group of competitors to work together to survive unfamiliar environments. The places chosen for these tests of endurance and sociality are invariably unnamed tropical islands in the Pacific or Papua New Guinea. In the opening sequence of *Survivor Australia* (2002 – present), amongst images of the competitors who are almost always white are shown, semi-dressed in expensive active-wear, in competition or repose in the hot bright sunshine, against the bright white sand and blue ocean. In the opening sequence, fire and darkness is punctuated by much brighter shots of the cast. Spliced into the dark frames, so quickly flashing on the screen as though some kind of subliminal messaging, are images of dark-skinned faces peering menacingly out of the jungle. The juxtaposition of the fully formed white subject against the reference to the hidden brown-skinned primitive is blatant in these representations, illustrating the pervasiveness of these images, which have been in circulation in the west since the very earliest European expeditions set out to map the world and catalogue its people, so often contained on unnamed islands in the so-called ‘middle of the sea’.

Reality television shows, such as the various European versions of *Adam looking for Eve* (2014 - present) and US show *Dating Naked* (2014 - present), use the island as a backdrop for ‘naked dating’, where, it is suggested, without the distraction of clothes, participants can connect on a more authentic level by revealing their ‘true selves’. The island setting lends itself to this narrative, represented as a timeless place that exists beyond the horizon of an increasingly fabricated and facile world. We can see the persistence of these fantasies in tourism representations of islands (Baldacchino 2012; Beer 2003). Islands offer an escape from the mundanity of everyday life in busy continental centres. The perceived timelessness of islands, as though they exist outside the exhausting temporal acceleration of modern societies, is desired and marketed as a pause in one’s life real life, where regrouping and unwinding are touted as the affordances of islands for their temporary continental visitors.

While these fantasies play out in the foreground of island getaways, island-dwellers hidden from view, or are at the very least pictured on the margins, living in the island's interior whilst tourists utilise the picturesque coastline. The island-dweller only enters this frame to provide services or to punctuate the principle activities of relaxation with a brief and staged performance of culture. In Pulau Weh, the beach represents a liminal zone; a space separated and repurposed so that it is neither here nor there. On the beach in many parts of the island, rules of dress are suspended so that western tourists can sunbathe in western-style swim-wear. The beach, which is traditionally a vibrant space of cultural production, where livelihoods are made and histories of arrival, cultural exchange, belonging and identity are performed, is separated from the villages which now must sit behind, relegated to a secondary position relative to the new primary industry of tourism. Pathways are carved between beach-front properties to provide tokenistic access for locals, but if they do arrive on these beaches it is their dress and their way of using the beach that is perceived to be out-of-place against the normalised image of western pursuits in these environments. This demarcation and appropriation of these spaces creates strange cultural encounters that invert claims of belonging, the beach in these encounters, representing the broader stage of global cultural hegemony.

Islands as containers

The western cultural imaginary of islands as bounded, surrounded by aqueous but nonetheless impervious borders is demonstrated in the tradition of using them as prisons, temporary containers for problem populations, sites of exile, quarantine stations and cemetery islands, used to prevent the spread of disease (Bashford and Strange 2003). Taussig (2004) gives us an open-ended list of 'prison islands' provoking his reader to add further examples, from their own regional locations, proving that although out of sight, these islands are never really out of mind. Although Sabang is absent from Taussig's working inventory of prison islands, its precolonial and colonial histories are replete with narratives that would make it one of the grislier examples.

The most prolific use of islands since European expansionism has been the institution of the 'remote penal colony' (Anderson 2003; Cribb 2017). The singular nation-state of Australia, New Caledonia, Mauritius, French Guiana, South Africa (Robben Island) were each 'established'

through the forced migration of convicts from the metropolises of Europe to the colonies, effectively furthering the imperialist project of invading lands that were never ceded by their original occupants (Cribb 2017). As the centres of European settlement shifted to incorporate these distant lands, the utility of islands also adapted, reconfigured as receptacles for the sick, the insane, the criminal, and the politically dangerous. As Taussig (2004, 286) notes, with tongue in cheek, “every state needs its island”: The island’s geography and peripheral location made them perfect locations for the exile of these ‘problem populations’ (Baldacchino 2010, 2017; Fleay and Hoffman 2014; Mountz 2011, 2014; Pugliese 2008).

Apart from the most obvious and infamous examples, such as Robben Island in South Africa (Deacon 2003; Edmond 2003; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004) and the cellular jail at Port Blair on Chatham Island in the Andaman archipelago (Anderson 2003; Kothari and Wilkinson 2010; Sen 2017), there are countless historical and contemporary examples of islands used to manage populations. Wadjemup (Rottneest Island) in Western Australia and Bwgcolman (contemporary Aboriginal name for Palm Island) in Queensland were both used as sites of containment for Aboriginal people. The stark contradictions between the historical use of Wadjemup as a prison labour camp for Aboriginal men and contemporary visions of the island as a weekend getaway was brought to audiences in Glen Stasiuk’s (2015a) documentary, entitled *Wadjemup: Rottneest Island as Black Prison and White Playground*, based upon his PhD thesis (Stasiuk 2015b). Joanne Watson’s (1994) PhD thesis traces the use of Palm Island for similar purposes and highlights the legacy of these practices for contemporary Palm Island communities. Others have traced the broad significance of these and other island sites in Australia to the colonialist project, which ultimately aimed to eradicate Aboriginal peoples (Finnane and McGuire 2001; Haebich 1988, 2000; C. Taylor 2009; Tedmanson 2008).

Fantome Island, in the same archipelago as the larger Palm Island, was used as quarantine site for Aboriginal leprosy patients. The documentary film, *Fantome Island* (Gilligan 2011) presents the oral history of leprosy survivor and third-generation Australian South Sea Islander, Joe Eggmolese, as he traces the physical spaces of the island where he spent his childhood. Again, the interconnectedness of racial containment, fears of contamination, and expulsion from mainland spaces to islands is clear in this example. As Joe Eggmolese recounts in his

testimony, Aboriginal people were often provided very little medical care once they were safely removed and 'out of sight'; left to survive in squalid conditions much worse than non-Aboriginal leprosy communities. Islands have also been used to house the dead. Emma Sheppard-Simms argues that 'cemetery islands', like Hart Island in New York City and Poveglia in Venice which were both used to bury those considered contaminants or deviants, are "... a symbol of the ways in which death and disorderly bodies have been exiled from normative spaces..." (2016, 1).

In Australia, utilising islands as offshore containers for the continent's traditional owners. These policies have persisted, albeit employing slightly different rhetoric, into contemporary Australian history. Numerous scholars in recent years have focused on policies of offshore detention, where asylum seekers who arrive in Australian waters are subjected to indefinite neglectful detention in facilities on Christmas Island, Nauru, and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (Fleay and Hoffman 2014; Mountz and Briskman 2012; Perera 2009; Pugliese 2008; Mountz 2011). Fleay and Hoffman (2014) argue that the geographical isolation of these island outposts reflect the long-standing perception of islands as 'out of sight' and therefore outside the realm of public conscience. Mountz (2011) echoes this point, arguing that it is the invisibility, distance, and the ambiguities of a person's status when they are detained in island detention centres, that are the attraction islands promise. Common to each of these examples is a vision of islands as natural barriers to human movement: their geographical location and boundedness can be manipulated to contain undesirable populations, prevent contamination (of ideas and disease), and keep the secrets of the state out of view from mainland populations.

The themes of quarantine, exile and punishment in these examples resonate with Sabang's pre-colonial and colonial pasts. Although rarely discussed openly or represented in heritage and historical representations, these stories are deeply connected to ideas like *orang campur* (mixed people), which I discuss further in the following chapter. These histories coincide with many accounts developed more recently in direct opposition to earlier limiting representations of islands as insular and monocultural, reveling rather in the long histories of human displacement that were tied up in European exploration and colonisation and which gave rise to the diverse, culturally rich island societies we can see in the world today (Gillis 2003, 2007; Hay 2006).

Sabang's multicultural population was the result of a protracted importation of indentured labour from across the archipelago and beyond, from Ambon to southern India and later displacements came from the relocation of patients from psychiatric institutions throughout Java and Sumatra.

From its earliest recorded histories Sabang was an important transit island for shipping routes for Chinese, European, Arab, and Indian traders. Pulau Weh's coal, fresh water supply, and location at the entrance to the Straits of Malacca, made it immeasurably important when the Suez Canal opened in 1869, allowing steam ships to refuel on their journey between Europe and the archipelago (Tagliacozzo 2005). In Chapter Two, I discuss the traces of Dutch presence in Sabang through the documented histories and stories shared within an oral tradition. These histories represent the celebrated and forgotten aspects of this past, although, as I show in Chapter Three, remnants surface in unexpected ways to disrupt dominant narrative revisioning of the islands past and present associations with difference.

Sabang was an important strategic point for Dutch expansion into the region, first allowing them greater control over trade, and then as an outpost when resistance to occupation mounted in Aceh. Earlier, the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of London in 1824 saw the Dutch withdrawal from Malacca and Singapore in exchange for the transference of Bengkulu (then Bencoolen) and the retreat of the British from other ventures into Sumatra. British interest in Sabang subsided and shifted towards Singapore, which would become one of the largest port systems in the world. Sabang, in contrast, slipped into relative insignificance. Later, in 1873, Pulau Weh was even offered by the Sultanate to the United States, in exchange for protection against the Dutch (Reid 2006). Although these possibilities never eventuated, they have stuck with Sabang: momentary glimpses at very different futures, viewed with both wonder and relief. From centre to periphery; from significance to obscurity; from heavy traffic to quiet backwater, in a historical blink of an eye.

Islands in the Indonesian cultural imaginary

Islands and archipelagos have featured differently in the Indonesian cultural imaginary, particularly since Independence. Indonesia is the largest and most densely inhabited archipelago

in the world. It is a nation of islands, interconnected and yet each with its own cultural, ecological, and historical specificities. The Dutch Colonial Administration's relationship with their aqueous colony, as containers conveniently kept separate, is very different to the narrative of interconnectivity espoused in national images of a diverse, yet unified archipelagic nation.

Of the 14,000 or more islands that make up the Indonesian archipelago, only few have documented histories of use as sites of containment and exile. It is known that the Dutch used Bangka Island, which lays off the south-eastern coast of Sumatra, as a site of exile for political prisoners in 1948, towards the end of the Indonesian Revolution. Exiled political leaders including Sukarno, Mohammad Hatta, and Haji Agus Salim were forcibly removed there in a last effort to suppress the movement (Kahin 2015). Of course, there is also the contemporary example of Nusa Kambangan, a prison island used to house and finally execute prisoners given the death sentence (Sheppard-Simms 2016). Given the veiled histories of Sabang and Pulau Rubiah in mainstream historical accounts of the Dutch East Indies, even within Indonesian, I would contend that there are still more islands whose histories are yet to be acknowledged or explored.

While the colonial influence of envisioning islands as peripheral is evident in other colonised places, in The Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) it was the archipelagic structure of the colony that befitted rule by an administration less inclined towards broad social reform than scooping the wealth using appropriative means, whilst leaving local governance, guided by the invisible seemingly beneficent hand of the Administration, in place (Gouda 1995). The separate islands, each with their own cultural practices and governance structures aligned with such a strategy. As I explore in the following chapter, colonial fears and insecurities about social contaminants that might undermine the procurement of commodities were managed by utilising the vast archipelago and its aqueous boundaries to contain disease and difference. Especially when paranoiac concern about pan-Islam surfaced, a small island in the Sabang archipelago became an instant fix, quickly developed as a quarantine station. Here, under the guise of a generously gifted strategy to maintain the general health in the broader Indies population by preventing the spread of infectious diseases like cholera and syphilis, an intricate surveillance system which could keep a close ear and eye on returned *haji* (pilgrims), was implemented.

After Independence (1949), the idea of *nusantara*⁸ (archipelago) took on a very different metaphoric value, becoming a central motif of Indonesian nationalist ideology. The song, 'Dari Sabang sampai Merauke' (From Sabang until Merauke) is one example of the *lagu wajib* (national song, compulsorily sung in schools) developed during this period. The song centres the archipelago to conjure an image of a totality made up of interconnected parts, representing the ideas of unity and diversity which are encapsulated in the ideological treatise of *Pancasila*⁹. *Persatuan Indonesia* (Unified Indonesia), a tenet within *Pancasila*, refers to the importance of striving for a united national identity that over-arches regional specificity. Ironically, the two places included in the song to represent the furthest reaches of the archipelago, Sabang in Aceh and Merauke in West Papua, are both in provinces which have been embroiled in extended and unresolved periods of unrest, defined by separatist movements against the oppression and disenfranchisement imposed by the Indonesian State.

Field and home, and other false separations

Having explored the various positioned and culturally produced ways that islands have been imagined, utilised, and represented, I want to return now to the spatial separations I spoke about at the beginning of this chapter, where a series of assumptions influenced how I initially imagined ethnographic practice. These assumptions, I soon found, shaped how I conceptualized field and home and the tasks typically associated with these spaces, which are often subtly conceived and represented as oppositional in ethnographic writing. Although themes of remoteness, boundedness, and insularity have been refuted in recent decades, they still have a presence in the anthropological imagination when we speak about fieldwork and field sites. The customary practice of going away to a remote fieldsite, far removed from the ethnographer's

8 I discuss the revision of *nusantara* in the work of Indonesian sexualities scholar, Tom Boellstorff later in this chapter and throughout the second part of this thesis. His conceptualisation of the gay archipelago to theorise the formation and expression of sexuality in Indonesia is vitally important to my own negotiation of sexuality and gender in contemporary Aceh. It has also been formative in rethinking a specifically Indonesian archipelagic perspective to counter the prevailing ideas of western cultural constructions of islands (especially so-called 'tropical islands') that permeated my childhood imagination and informed my fieldwork.

9 Developed in 1945 by future President Sukarno, *Pancasila* refers to the five principles outlining the new Indonesian State's philosophy. It was principally conceived to appeal to the interests and concerns of Indonesian's diverse ethnic and religious groups and to provide a stable and unified direction for Indonesian independence.

home town is rooted in these traditions. As Amit (2000) and Caputo (2000) have both argued, there is an authenticity associated with journeying away from home to engage in fieldwork in unfamiliar and distant places.

These separations seem emphasised when an island is selected as a fieldsite. As well as being used as containers for problem populations, islands have also been envisioned within the social sciences as empty vessels into which researchers can “pour our empirical materials” (Tsing 2010, 50). When I arrived in Pulau Weh to undertake fieldwork, I left unquestioned many of my own assumptions about what an island was and could be, perhaps expecting that I could pour my own empirical materials into an awaiting image of how islands could and should be told, as though to tell a different story would make it unintelligible. In fact, the stories I was surfacing in archival collections seemed such a perfect fit with my ideas about strange and remote islands, filled with madmen and unexplored interiors, that I did not question alternate readings of these fragments.

Nor did I think about the implications of my presence and movement in creating the field, and consequently, recreating home. As my fieldwork progressed, an emotional dimension to fieldwork opened up, challenging me to reconsider how I understood the relationship between field and home, and the tasks associated with these spaces. Karen Till recognises that researchers construct “emotional, spatial and temporal boundaries between personal and work lives, a here and there, a home and field” (2001, 46; italics in original), divisions which she says are difficult to maintain. While I certainly underestimated the difficulty in maintaining separations, I also misunderstood the active ways in which I could use the dissonance and emotional disruptions of moving between spaces that I had constructed as oppositional to understand something about the interstices of cross-cultural production. These themes became important moments throughout my research, but they arose first as a discomfort in striving to create a ‘perfect balance’ of immersion and distance.

In this section, I reflect on the bureaucratic boundaries imposed on research and a key moment during one of my regular withdrawals from ‘the field’ where I recognised my own reproduction of the limiting ideas that construct the field as contained and discreetly bounded. The island’s landscape seemed to impart a visual confirmation of the separations I had imposed on my own

engagements with people and place, as well as the documented histories that I was collecting and bringing together to make sense of contemporary socio-political contexts in between island and mainland. The image of the bounded fieldsite was difficult to shake until I failed to capture the wholeness of the island in a single view. The demand that I move my own body to see and feel differently influenced a rethinking of positionality as a fluid and responsive aspect of fieldwork. Simply withdrawing did not address the fundamental issues I was facing, which had more to do with an orientation and requirement to be cognitively and physically mobile, to actively produce the field instead of waiting for it to come into focus through the right balance of distance and closeness.

My conception of home shifted the longer I stayed in Pulau Weh. At first, due to personal responsibilities in Australia, I limited my visits to two months. In later years, my circumstances changed, meaning that I could spend longer periods of time in Aceh. I had developed friendships on the island which differed greatly to my social life in Perth: we were a transient and culturally diverse group of local Acehnese and long-time visitors of the island and I felt more comfortable, more in-tune with the rhythms of life on the island than I did at home at that time. The instability of home is rarely mentioned in ethnographic accounts, rather it is presented as a constant stable space (the researcher's home identity is also inferred in similar terms), where in contrast to the vibrancy and changeability of the field, the researcher can unproblematically resume their home life (and home self) with little complication. In contrast to this narrative, I found that I struggled to slot back into Perth's rhythms: balancing the financial pressures and time constraints of being a PhD candidate in a context of increasingly precarious, short-term academic contracts felt insurmountable. The increasingly strict time constraints placed on doctoral completion, despite the intensity and durational costs of ethnographic fieldwork meant that I had to adapt my practice to better my chances of achieving the depth that can only be achieved with time.

I decided to live in Pulau Weh consistently for a period of six months and when an opportunity arose to buy a small piece of land, I took the plunge and built a place to live. My friend Ali helped me navigate the process of buying a small plot of land, a quiet spot on the edge of the jungle, which had once been the chili garden of a local man named Pak Yasin. I worked

with local builders to construct a small bungalow, made from the steel frame and salvageable wood of a tsunami shelter purchased from a family on the mainland. This place, what has become known simply as *Kebun* (Garden), became the centre of my daily activities, my social interactions, and a sense of growing roots in the community. As well as offering experiences of Iboih that became central to my understandings of Acehnese sociality, especially the daily interactions with builders from Sabang and the mainland, this transition blurred what had once been a very clear separation of field and home. It also completely collapsed the typical scenario in ethnographic practice of 'writing up' taking place far away (spatially, temporally, and emotionally) from the sensorial spaces of the field (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

This physical move towards immersion was not the only aspect of fieldwork that destabilised what had once been a clear cognitive separation of field and home. Friendships had a way of extending the boundaries of the island beyond my initial conceptualisation. This became most apparent when two Acehnese friends who became central to this research came to Australia and visited me in my own home town. What is described as the field coming home (Pink 2000; Rasmussen 2003), effectively collapses the very idea that the field exists as a static defined and bounded place which the researcher can engage and withdraw from whenever they choose. When my friends came to Perth and Melbourne, this idea that the field stays in a timeless limbo awaiting the researcher's return was radically reconfigured. It also shaped how I understood myself differently at home. The 'field' took on new resonances, as the social contexts for our ethnographic conversations changed. Our performative engagement with one another in altogether different social landscapes shifted both our relationships and how we produced and projected imaginative and fanciful views of Aceh, which was a constant presence in our conversations. We cultivated a fragment of Aceh in Australia, in our ways of speaking and moving with one another; articulating 'the field' in radical ways through these random meetings and have continued to do so in more recent months.

The field has also transformed through online modes and networks of communication. People throughout Indonesia are more interconnected with global networks than ever before; the ubiquity of smartphones, now visible in every village, is radically transforming social life and the dimensions of the field in ethnographic research. My research has constantly incorporated

information broadcast from the island. My regular contact with people I met in Sabang and Banda Aceh, regardless of where I was or indeed, where they were, has radically altered the temporal and spatial locatedness of the field. When in Perth, Aceh is never far away, events which are represented in distant and simplified ways in Jakarta-based press are reinterpreted through local politics and then disseminated, either publicly or in private messages, at any time of day or night. This sense of the field as embedded in my everyday life, furthermore, produced through these alternate spaces beyond the boundaries imposed by geography or nation, has shaped the way I have visualised and represented 'the field' in my practice and in my writing.

Apart from these more pervasive social changes, bureaucratic restrictions, logistical, and personal factors, have also influenced my conception of field and home. As I mentioned above, I was initially unable to leave Perth for prolonged periods: I could afford a maximum of two months at a time, which effectively halved the one-year research permit I was granted by *Kementerian Riset dan Teknologi (RISTEK / The Department of Research and Technology)*. In subsequent years, I could only enter Indonesia on a social or tourist visa, which limited my research activities. Ethnographic research can blur the boundaries imposed by official guidelines and the demands of research permits. It is ludicrous to imagine leaving one's ethnographer hat at home, simply because a research permit has expired, however, I was cognisant that I ought to complete the formal aspects of my research, such as the semi-structured interviews I had organised with older members of the Sabang community during that first year. These interviews were facilitated by a young female friend from Iboih, who accompanied me and enabled me to check my understandings throughout the interview process. I also engaged in participatory activities with heritage organisations during that first year of fieldwork. For both activities, I could reassure participants that there were avenues within Indonesia should they have any concerns.

In subsequent years, my research occupied an uncomfortable and ambiguous position: while I was still governed by my Australian ethics approvals and carefully negotiated ethical

considerations with research participants and interlocutors, where RISTEK¹⁰ was concerned, my research activities had ceased when my one-year research permit expired. Finite boundaries, such as is often imposed through bureaucratic structures do not translate easily to long-term ethnographic research, even when an ethnographic methodology is described in the project description. When I returned under a tourist visa and then a social visa, I continued my participation in everyday social life, including ethnographic conversations with participants with whom I had developed strong and intimate social relationships who were aware of my project and supportive of its intentions. However, on a bureaucratic level, I was there simply as a tourist who was writing about the formal interviews and heritage research already completed. My activities then, which were merely living and writing in Iboih, which is precisely what I was doing, however, this living was continually informing my understandings.

A further layer to the ambiguous relationship between my project and the administrative boundaries placed upon it, was my awareness that the trajectory of my research was taking, towards contemporary issues of identity and sexuality, may not have been approved. Very few research permits are granted for foreign researchers interested in undertaking research in Aceh and most of them are not focused on social issues. Yet, the description of my methodology and my stipulated interests in the influences of colonial histories on contemporary identity had not changed: I was still following the stories shared with me and my direction was still guided by the social and political contexts, the relationships and experiences of social life, as intended. Although the 'field' was curtailed by administrative boundaries, the horizons of my research were expanding through my everyday social interactions, the guidance towards certain historical traces and thematic resonances between past and present, and the socio-political changes that were underway in Aceh.

What I mean to show through this account is that the separations imposed on fieldwork are inadequate to describe and account for what is entailed in ethnographic fieldwork. The practical issues and pressures that researchers navigate and the emotional, cognitive, and

10 My negotiations with RISTEK have been peculiar from the start of this research. Since obtaining approval from the department in Jakarta, I have not received any communication with them, despite sending quarterly reports (as advised) to the email address provided to me during my initial meeting.

physical journeying that are implicit in fieldwork constantly alter the shape of field and home. Connections and relationships, the emotional topographies of fieldwork, effectively show the leakiness of these contained spaces, challenging the researcher to constantly refigure their relationship with the very terms they have used to describe their personal and practical engagements: field and home become vibrant contested terms. The following account of my attempt to recuperate my boundaries by withdrawing from the field demonstrate the fallacy of such separations and the productivity of thinking in more porous ways about space and ethnographic practice.

Withdrawing

The spatial division of field and home is transmitted and reinforced in the ethnographic narrative tropes of arriving and departing, as well as the emotional narratives of the positioning of the researcher as outsider. The idea that we must maintain a balance between closeness and 'getting too close', as though there is a tipping scale of cultural immersion, is emphasised in descriptions of arrival and withdrawal from the field. I certainly attached this ethnographic narrative arc to my own descriptions of a perceived journey towards cultural understanding, as though there was a process and series of emotional challenges that I should overcome to finally articulate a cognitive arrival. As James Davies suggests, ethnographers use many strategies to negotiate the sense of needing to pull back, to reclaim one's boundaries, as one feels their sense of self is becoming "unanchored from its moorings" (2010, 83). These are all important aspects of ethnography's narrative arc; parts of the monograph that we come to expect when we read ethnography. This narrative authenticates the analytical assertions made by the author (Rapport 2000).

Home and field carry with them an assumption of the kinds of practices which happen in either place. At home we write up our findings, in the comfortable spaces of our academic institutions and at home (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). This separation is grounded in the belief that with distance comes perspective. Yet, as Fabian (2002) argues, the separation of the two aspects of ethnographic method, writing and fieldwork, into discreet moments and spatial locations, renders the subject of our representations inert and frozen in a subordinate time. The paradox of anthropology for Fabian is that while in the field we acknowledge our coevalness with

our subject, when we write we negate the intersubjective quality of fieldwork. Inadvertently perhaps, arrival and departure stories also establish the ethnographer as a mobile and multi-dimensional actor, while their 'subject' remains in place and in stasis.

I began to recognise these distancing tropes in my own practice: in how, when, and why I wrote fieldnotes, took photographs, and how the emotional topographies were woven into how I narrativised my withdrawal and arrival in 'the field'. I recall one instance with intense clarity. During a skype conversation with my supervisor, I led her towards my desired outcome: that I could return from the field without appearing to have failed. I had been in Iboih for three months and was feeling overwhelmed by the dizzying sense of being simultaneously detached from myself and what I described as being 'too close' to the people around me to have the perspective to understand anything profound about their lived experience.

My supervisor, perhaps hearing the stress in my voice, directed me to come home. While I am sure that aspects of this sentiment are indeed relevant to conceptualising the role of distance (physical and emotional) in fieldwork, when I reflect on that conversation now, I wonder how much I was performing a narrative I had heard before and had therefore expected to experience. Baldacchino says that,

... mainlanders often harbour a subconscious obsession to frame and map an island cognitively, to "take it all in", to go up to its highest point or walk around its shore, thus capturing its finite geography. He says that through this perspective one feels that they can know and therefore control the island "more thoroughly and intimately" (2007, 165).

It was this reassurance which I thought leaving would provoke. The proof of solid lines forming beneath me would allow me to recuperate my own boundaries and through this differentiation, I would have a better sense of that which I had excised: I would understand that place. Yet, as I peered through the tiny windows of the plane, searching for that comforting image of an island in its totality, I found myself struggling to hold the whole island in my view. Although the shoreline became a harder and thicker line the further we inched away, I could not keep



the looming mountains and crashing valleys, the far reaches of Iboih and the town of Sabang, within the frame of the window at the same time. Even when I changed my position, I could not hold the island in a single view: as I leaned forward to peer down upon the island, the window frame would crop the Iboih Peninsula from view, while sitting back meant that the bay of Sabang could not be held in place. "Islands are shifty entities", Gillian Beer (2003, 33) reminds us and it was this shiftiness which forced me to move my body, leading to the realisation that the completeness I was hoping to feel by leaving was not so easily manufactured.

Despite the richness of my everyday interactions, it was this view (figure 3) that I seemed preoccupied with capturing. Looking chronologically at the endless digital images made throughout fieldwork, I can map my movements through the regular appearance of a series of these images punctuating the close-up views of daily life in Sabang and Iboih. In fact, my visual archives have more images like this, than they do strangers: the relative ease of capturing the whole, rather than the pieces of everyday life is clearly evident in these earlier visual representations. I was able to capture the entire place within the frame, without the possibility of zooming in to see the complexity of things I did not understand. This archive of images is now more than a visual representation of a fieldsite growing smaller and more distant as the plane traveled away: when I read them now, they represent the partiality, the impossibility of representing the whole, and the movement of focus and perspective, that is required if we are even to try. They are fragments which demand that I move my own position to see and feel a different view or experience of what is framed before me.

Michel de Certeau describes this shift in perspective when he ruminates on the question, "what is the source of this pleasure of 'seeing the whole', of looking down on" (de Certeau 1984, 92) a place from above? He says,

His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more (1984, 92).

I recognise the comfort of feeling in command of what, from street level, feels overwhelming. In contrast, 'down there', which for de Certeau is a metaphor for everyday life, represents a complexity and closeness which transforms the viewer into an actor, inferring an integration of the self within the scenes of everyday life. This closeness inevitably ensnares the viewer in the frame. It demands a positioning; a recognition of one's situatedness (Haraway 1988). The removed, cool detachment of the god-like voyeur in this account is reflective of the long cast aside tradition in anthropology of attempting to represent the whole (Appadurai 1988), as though a contained culture could be captured through detached observation. Such an endeavour creates an expansive view of the observed that deliberately distances the observer behind a veil of objectivity. As Donna Haraway argues in her critical contribution to feminist disruptions of the masculinist mythologies of objectivity, "of course the view of infinite vision is an illusion, a god trick" (Haraway 1988, 582).

The idea of being 'a viewpoint and nothing more' is akin to the comfort associated with withdrawing from fieldwork. It is alluring, to be without the messiness of fieldwork; to step back so that our own bodies are no longer in the frame, where by implication, we can recover our own boundaries through the definition of an-other. I felt that desire to distance myself, believing that a reconstitution of boundaries would facilitate clarity. I could know more, my ideas would find their limits, the boundaries of my thinking would be easier to see, as the view of the island in its entirety took shape on the horizon. Yet as Kirsten Hastrup argues, "It does not hold that the more you zoom out, and the more the ground you cover, the more you know" (2013, 148). In reflection to her own embodied movement through the landscapes of the Arctic, Hastrup describes how her movement created "different points of perception" (148).

As I continued to move between field and home, I recognised that the spaces of betweenness I passed through were important places to sit with uncomfortable feelings and to take stock of what was visible and what was obscured by my shifting positionality. By examining these experiences of zooming in and out I could recognise my own queer betweenness as fostering a unique situated positionality. These gradual awakenings to queer corporeality as an ambiguous factor in fieldwork would become central to my reflexive methodology, where discomfort and vulnerability would guide a way of passing through social spaces.

Littoral zones and cultural ecotones

Suzanne Thomas' (2007) evocation of littoral spaces, the intertidal zone between land and sea, captures this sense of instability and uneasiness that is visible when we are up close and ethnographic. From the sky, the littoral zone is the most important, more important than either land or sea, as it gives the island definition. "The shore and the sea coexist in a shifting liminality as the tide recedes and reclaims the land" (Beer 2003, 33). The littoral zone of an island is the entire boundary of it; the very separation that makes an island, an island. Yet, up close, this zone is always 'in process', it is always becoming. The land and sea expand and retract: they quite literally make one another through a process of addition and subtraction. Rachel Carson (1955) evocatively conveys this process:

Today a little more land may belong to the sea, tomorrow a little less. Always the edge of the sea remains an elusive and indefinite boundary (quoted in Gillis 2014, 160).

There is a beach on the east side of Pulau Weh which dramatically embodies this ceaseless seasonal process of becoming. It is called Secret Beach (doesn't every tourist hotspot have a secret beach?). This beach is 'secret' for a reason other than to keep a piece of paradise for locals, hidden from the throngs of tourists who overcrowd the beaches which have been reluctantly relinquished. The reason it is secret is because it appears and disappears. I translate the English word 'secret' deliberately incorrectly, to the Indonesian word, *hilang* which means to disappear: *Pantai Hilang* (Disappearing Beach), where the seasonal changes of the direction of the wind dictates the landscape. From September until April, the soft sand is withdrawn to expose large smooth rocks.

The 'land' is shown to be in an endless process of re-shaping, in response to seismic ruptures and oceanic breaches. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Aceh, where the singular catastrophic event of the tsunami has irredeemably altered the coastline: from above the shoreline has visibly moved inland in parts, while in other areas the receding tide has left a trace of that day, where the sea breached its boundary. The impressions of duration, of tides repeatedly echoing (almost) the precise limits of its reach, over time carving an impression into the land, where

sea meets sand, where sand meets vegetation, where vegetation clears to reveal dwellings and mosques. These old impressions are still visible from above, and a new perimeter is drawn through the imparting of new patterns, of a forever changed tidal rhythm.

Coastal areas experience the daily tidal movements and the gradual changes they impart, in a durational way. These tides are woven into the everyday rhythms of the living, shaping how people pass through these spaces and how their movement then reinforces or interrupts the rhythms of the ocean. These littoral zones are important sites for observing the responsiveness of culture to environmental change, particularly as climate change intensifies and accelerates these processes.

Gillis (2014) describes these zones as ecotones. The term ecotone was first used in 1904 to indicate a space that separates two biological zones. Gillis prefers to think of them as vibrant sites of transference, where each zone intersects with one another and is creative of the other. These are the most vibrant and diverse biological zones, where more instances of heterogenous interactions occur. As a cultural metaphor these spaces too can be rich and fertile zones of cross cultural contact: cultural ecotones, like islands, are more diverse, with greater interactions between strangers and more possibility for connectivity and exposure to difference. As Bakhtin (1986) said decades ago, “the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries ...” (quoted in Conquergood 1991, 186). Florence Krall (1994) eloquently articulates a sense of how ecotones might be conceptualised as vibrant sites of production when he she says, “cultural ecotones are the pluralistic contexts out of which conflict and change emerge” (quoted in Gillis 2014, 161). They are of course, the defining feature of archipelagos, epitomising the very qualities of interconnectivity, transference, and movement so central to archipelagic networks.

The cultural ecotone is also an apt metaphor to describe the “border-zones of cultural coproduction” (B. Tedlock 2011, 336) that are so central to the intersubjectivity of ethnographic practice. Kirsten Hastrup has described this space of betweenness as the space of the ethnographic present, “a world which is of a different language, time and space to reality” (1995, 25). Hastrup (1995) goes further to explain that this space is the value of ethnography in that it is an alternate space which facilitates the sense-making of our experiences. This liberates the

field as a boundless (rather than a bounded) entity, made through the intersubjective exchanges and performativity that is so important to ethnographic fieldwork and the anthropological knowledge that it produces.

Thinking with the archipelago and ethnographic spaces of betweenness

I now turn to the specific lessons I took from my reading of key island studies scholars, who in recent years have proposed an altogether different approach to conceptualising islands. These lessons resonate with a long history in anthropology of challenging the limitations of objectivist approaches to engaging with fieldwork practice. Lessons from both intersect to offer a vibrant, reflexive, and mobile approach to engaging in this research.

An approach which prioritised immersion within a clearly defined community was not befitting of the transient communities that pass through and reside in Sabang, nor was it suitable for realising the intersubjectivity of ethnography as it was emerging in my research relationships. I needed an approach which was mobile and could follow the vast array of historical and contemporary narratives, as well as the flows and exchanges of people, products, material objects, and ideas; the sedimentation and resurgence of histories of human migration and displacement that are continuously reproducing the islands of Sabang. My methodology therefore needed to be flexible enough to move with these stories and performative reconstructions of space, to inhabit those spaces of betweenness and becoming. Throughout this thesis I continually build a reflexive methodology, drawing on ideas of performance ethnography (Conquergood 1985, 1991, 1992; Hamera 2006c; Madison 2006, 2007; Spry 2006; B. Tedlock 2009) and dialogical ethnography (D. Tedlock 1979, 1987) to put into practice the emergent ideas of betweenness (Hastrup 1995) and movement that have typified my relationships in the field and my negotiations with identity performativity, in the interconnected spaces of home and field.

Barbara Tedlock describes how many scholars working at the intersections of performance and ethnography have described performance as a “border discipline” (2009, 106). Utilising the language of performance and the sense of intersubjective exchange it infers, gives life to the ethnographic narrative form. When I write from the personal and recount ethnographic

conversations that I have held in my memory and body, I aim to cultivate a performance on the page; to give a sense of those moments of fleeting social connection, misunderstanding, movement, vulnerability, and intimacy. That is what I mean by writing with movement, allowing stories to move through the narrative form that is facilitated by a merging of performance and ethnography.

At the heart of a performative approach to ethnographic practice and writing is a dedication to contesting the distancing effects of objectivist fieldwork tendencies, which I felt emerging in how I could physically manage the emotional dimensions of fieldwork when they came up. Rather than seeking the comforts of distance, it was towards the intersubjective that I ultimately turned, where the personal and co-participatory aspects of social life facilitated understandings that could never have been fostered from the distanced and separated self that I initially attached to the correct performance of ethnographic fieldwork.

I found in the dynamic scholarly frameworks used for reconceptualising the archipelagic interconnectivity of islands, a language for rethinking my own conceptualisation and performative reproduction of the constructed spaces of field and home. It also allowed me to conceptualise the interconnective threads that I found myself following beyond the boundaries imposed on island landscapes, such as stories and performances of identity that ceaselessly produce the spaces of mainland and island through their historical and contemporary relationships. In the following chapter, these stories take shape through both a thematic, non-linear arrangement of documented histories and the retelling of intergenerationally shared stories, through the landscape. In Part Two, contemporary transient populations who live in and pass through provide the vehicle for a performative view of spatial production.

The 'spatial turn' in the social sciences has also provided a theoretical basis for this shift in perspective, by highlighting the centrality of social relationships to the production of space (Crang and Thrift 2000; D. Harvey 1990; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994, 2005). Excitingly, this scholarship has also focused on aspects of relationality beyond the spatial or geographic; recognising the importance of diverse research methodologies and modes of representation to how researchers approach fieldwork in island spaces.

Stratford et al. (2011) call for a rethinking of the archipelago as a move away from relational thinking. They propose instead, a move towards:

... new research agendas to explore alternative geographies and alternative performances, representations and experiences of islands. ... to seek to understand archipelagos: to ask how those who inhabit them or contemplate their spatialities and topological forms might view, represent, talk and write about, or otherwise experience disjuncture, connection and entanglement between and among islands (Stratford et al. 2011, 114).

This approach fosters a re-visioning of islands as inter-connectedly produced and co-constituted through the ebb and flow of shifting and contingent relationships beyond their recognised shores and demonstrates how integral methodology is to realising these aspects of islands in scholarly representation. In their call I feel myself compelled to respond through the enactment of a mobile ethnography that moves with the stories that are shared during practice, guided by the everyday performances, the rhythms that we are ensconsed in at the invitation of others, that bring place into focus. In response to Stratford et al., Pugh suggests that:

... thinking *with* the archipelago foregrounds how island movements are generative and inter-connective spaces of metamorphosis, of material practices, culture and politics (2013, 10).

For Pugh then, metamorphosis contests ideas of mimicry and imitation which are often used to understand island cultural practices. Metamorphosis is creative of something new and vibrant from a range of layered and contextual influences, rather than the reproduction of mainland or colonialist-settler cultural imports. These shifts in how to think about islands and archipelagos relate specifically to my desire for a research methodology that can negotiate the specificities of ethnographic research in island contexts, but also the idiosyncrasies of social research relationships and how researchers must necessarily approach these relationship dynamically and with an openness to shift and change direction, focus, position, through intersubjective exchange and the performances and movements of others.

How might an ethnographer *think and write* with the archipelago? This, of course, is a question of praxis. Ethnographers perform within social relationships to gain insight into the interstices of culture. If we perform social relationships, we are involved in understanding through context, the stories people tell of themselves. In this research, tracing stories has drawn threads of interconnectivity between mainland and island and amongst the islands of Sabang itself, revealing the spaces between them to be not empty oceanic voids but the nexus of the archipelago itself. These spaces, where stories 'cut across' (de Certeau 1984) are integral to networks of exchange, transference, and cultural co-production. As de Certeau says, "Stories ... traverse and organise places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories" (1984, 115).

Relationships make these stories: their storytellers guide a way of tuning in, of moving to better hear the sentiments being shared. Relationships also make new stories through their movements, through the forced and chosen routes taken to navigate the social spaces into which they are cast. In the latter sections of this thesis, I offer a concept for thinking about queer kinship as an antidote to the imposition of shame within traditional kinship formations of the family, the community, and the nation (S. Davies 2015). Queer kinships reconfigure shame through epistemic community formations who convene within and across difference to challenge limiting representation of Acehnese gendered identity and to draw attention to the incapacity of systems of surveillance and punishment to contain the sexual and gender diversity it seeks to contain.

It is also a rhythm, of living and writing, where the specificities of a place find its rhythm reflected in representations of its environments, its social interactions, its everyday rhythms of sociality. This also goes to its difficulties, the demands its geographies and environments place on movement and activity.

Scholars such as Hau'ofa and Caribbean writers and poets like Walcott, Brathwaite, and Glissant have been unquantifiable influences in this movement. Their approaches have also provoked questions around how we might represent scholarly material. Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2001) suggests that archipelagraphy offers a means for writing 'with the archipelago'. 'Archipelagraphy', DeLoughrey says, is:

... a historiography that considers chains of islands in fluctuating relationship to their surrounding seas, islands and continents, challenges the view of islands as isolated, contained and insular (2001, 23).

The way I bring fragments together can be representative of broader political implications for how islands are imagined. The content and the origins of these historical fragments is also important, a decolonising approach targets contemporary engagements with hegemonic colonialist histories which marginalise oral tradition. As I show in Chapter Three, deliberately seeking living histories, where gaps and contestations with documented histories are re-negotiated through a politics of the present, destabilise the deeply embedded assumptions of the island as peripheral, of inconsequential importance, and endogenous in its cultural production and implications.

It is important to clarify, however, that the propositions of scholars like Stratford et al. (2011) and Pugh (2013) are not completely without tension when I reflect on the understandings I have taken from my fieldwork in Sabang. While I agree that moving beyond dichotomies is productive of ever greater possibilities for engaging with islands and their archipelagos, my conversations with people in Sabang demonstrates that island dwellers themselves often depend upon these inherited dichotomies to interpret their own position in the world and those exchanges and inter-relations which continue to inform their identity. Having said that, many aspects of these theoretical contributions to rethinking how researchers approach island spaces and communities, and how representations can then contest prevailing tropes can be used in tension with local ontologies and everyday performativity's. It offers ways of describing the complexities of identity, which are inevitably located in and produced through, multiple competing and contradictory frameworks.

Both DeLoughrey and Pugh have drawn on Caribbean writer Kamau Brathwaite's (1999) preference for the concept of 'tidalectics' as a more evocative and ontologically relevant way of imagining dialectics. For Brathwaite, tidalectics far better captures the circular motion of his Caribbean home's histories of migration and diaspora, aspects of cultural identity that are woven into how the island is felt and lived. As Pugh says, Brathwaite means that "the island movement is not cyclical; rather, like the tide, it emphasizes the changing nature of material,

cultural and psychological island processes” (2013, 17). To these points, DeLoughrey adds:

... tidalectics foreground historical trajectories of dispersal and destabilize island isolation by highlighting waves of migrant landfalls into the Caribbean.

This dynamic model is an important counter-narrative to discourses of filial rootedness and narrow visions of ethnic nationalism (2007, 51).

These are important points when considering my engagement with the traces of movement, migration and cultural transformation that I have encountered in my fieldwork in Sabang’s communities and European archival collections depicting the region. Envisioning such a process of reading and writing, through Brathwaite’s non-linear, non-cyclical projection of historical sedimentation has influenced a living within the complexities of how island communities are forever in process. Adaptation and transformation allow for greater nuance than relational assumptions of causative impacts of mainland upon island, sea upon land.

An island’s physical borders, when seen as firm and impervious, shape the researcher’s intersubjective experiences; their engagement with oral traditions and documented histories; their representation of both subject and methodology; and, their emotional investments in their movements between field and home. How a researcher who chooses to work in an island community to construct a ‘here’ and ‘there’ using tropes of islands as contained, separate, and insular, and how ethnographic narratives of arrival, immersion, withdrawal, and ethnographic awakening, are used to reinforce these ideas.

In recognising the porousness of borders, both those which surround islands and those which define ethnographic relationships and practices, a more fluid, mobile, and collaborative vision of ethnographic fieldwork emerged, not only influencing my methodological approach to fieldwork but in my approach to writing and representation. Yet, in moving between I was not discarding the romantic and nostalgic imaginaries of islands I had brought with me. Rather, in moving and recognising interconnectivity and transference, these images become vital components of an understanding of place. These images are historically significant, and they are woven into the local discourses in how people understand place and how they performatively enact belonging and identity.

As I demonstrate in the final chapter of this thesis, this way of questioning ethnographic narratives of immersion permitted me to see that queer approaches which desire to remain in spaces of betweenness, and their associated discomforts, decisively refute a uni-directional move towards immersion. To move towards immersion reflects the heteronormativity implied in fieldwork accounts of methodology. For queer researchers, such an inclusion is often difficult or impossible to negotiate. I argue that embracing discomfort of not fitting into normative gender roles releases the queer researcher from some relationships whilst enabling others to flourish. It is then, in the margins, that fieldwork can be differently engaged by queer researchers, whose bodies can become places where 'others can field their difference' (Nast 1998). Spaces of betweenness can also be sites of passing through where researchers and co-performers can navigate performatively in the interstices of ever-changing categories of moral and immoral; public and private; male and female; heterosexual and homosexual.

Finally, an archipelagic approach to thinking and engaging ethnographically could not be more appropriate to engagements with the always becoming and constantly negotiated cosmologies that permeate the diverse cultural contexts of contemporary Indonesia. Executing the archipelago as a framework for understanding Indonesian ontologies is a project which has already been addressed from the productive nexus of Indonesian and queer studies by Tom Boellstorff, whose *The Gay Archipelago* (2005), utilises the imagery and metaphorical potential of the archipelago to situate his understandings of Indonesian identity formation and selfhood within broader networks of national identity. For Boellstorff (2005), the word *nusantara* (archipelago) refers more to the water which connects islands than it does to the islands themselves, reflecting the cultural production of sexual selves as part of a greater system of personal responsibility, obligation, and cultural identity. In an earlier piece, prefiguring Pugh's argument for 'thinking with the archipelago, Boellstorff suggested that metamorphosis is the flavour of sexual identity performativity in Indonesian, not imitation. Sexual identities 'dub'; they do not copy (Boellstorff 2003).

How might 'thinking with the archipelago', not as a conglomerate of disparate parts, but of an endless possibility of interconnectivity, movement, and exchange, upset Indonesian notions of *nusantara* as a constellation of islands emanating from the Jakarta centre? And, following

from Boellstorff's provocation of identity within this framework, how might such a view reflect changing manifestations of sexuality that we can see in response to punitive shari'ah on the Acehese mainland and the islands of Sabang? These questions became imperative the more I was drawn into the frame of my research, through the relationships which took me beyond the boundaries that I had unwittingly imposed on my 'being there': the forced separation of home and field selves; the queerness I tried to keep safely hidden away; and, the inward-facing stance which negated historical and contemporary connectivities between island and mainland, were each contested by the intricacies and interconnectivities, the constant oscillation between here and there that takes place in imaginative constructions of difference between mainland and island, but also between field and home.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have argued for a methodology that 'thinks with the archipelago' when studying island spaces and communities. Such an approach not only contests the limiting ways that islands have been historically imagined; it also continues the anthropological work of challenging bounded notions of culture. This methodology relishes interconnectivity as spaces of betweenness (Hastrup 1995). In the specific case of my research in Sabang, my methodology of 'passing through' as fleetingly occupying multiple and shifting spaces of betweenness, reimagines how a queer researcher might contest persistent assumptions about the self in ethnographic research; how identity is performatively managed in research relationships; and, the particularities of marginal experience in unfamiliar places.

Ethnographic fieldwork in island communities requires a methodology that can accommodate a reflexive way of acknowledging and writing against the baggage that we take with us when we do fieldwork. This begins with questioning what the field is and how we produce it in our representations, social interactions, and movements. When we do research in island communities, a recognition of how islands figure in the cultural imaginary and epistemologies of western scholarship and popular culture can inform a deliberate stance that works to contest these limiting views. To begin otherwise is only to replicate the foundational Eurocentric constructions of islands as sites of fantasy and containment.

In this chapter, I have used islands as a metaphor for the boundaries often imposed on culture in anthropological knowledge production. Rather than replace the view from outside for a view from inside, it is the movement between and the cultivation of positions of betweenness that is enacted throughout this thesis. Although fieldwork might take place in a so-called bounded territory, where physical movement within and between its archipelagic networks might be prevented by waves and weather, stories move with ease through the vibrant modes of storytelling that have long produced place and belonging. Following these stories and their performative evocation within everyday social interaction is fundamental to research which seeks to take account of a place's ways of imagining and performing itself.

Especially in Sabang, the reasons for which will become clear in the following chapter, my research methodology needed to reflect cosmologies that centre transience, *orang campur* (mixed people), and unanchored-ness, themes which emerged through stories shared with me, and which informed my pursuit of these thematic traces within everyday performance. I had to learn to follow stories and performance across borders in order to carve out different vantage points from which I could position myself to see and feel the islands of Sabang come into focus. In the following chapter, it is the performative possibilities of storytelling, coupled with the imaginative engagement with the landscapes that surround Iboih, which facilitate creative interpretations of Sabang's strange recorded and documented histories.

Chapter 2: Islands on the move

“I am the one to talk to about the old stories”

(Abang Dami, 2013)

Memory is not a thing that we can simply delimit,
but is rather a fluid process of becoming, where bits and pieces
are put together in unexpected ways,
through instances when the past comes about in momentary impulses, flashes,
and fleeting images
(Orrantia 2012, 54)



figure 4. *Pulau Rubiah from Iboih. Pulau Seulako and Batè Tokong are hidden from view, 2016, digital photograph taken by the author.*

I had only been in Sabang a few months when I met Abang Dami on the ferry. We were both on our way back to Iboih from Banda Aceh: I had been to the immigration department to complete yet another part of the convoluted process of obtaining a research permit, while Dami, I later found out, had been representing Iboih's Panglima Laot¹¹ at a marine eco-tourism forum in Banda Aceh. A quiet and unassuming man of around 45-years, Dami had sat, partly hidden behind his younger excitable male companion. He seemed disinterested in my conversation with his friend, which continued for almost the entire 45-minute journey from Ulee Lheue to Balohan, the two ports which connect Pulau Weh to the mainland.

As we drew closer to the island, I saw a hint of a smile begin to play at the corners of his mouth: the first reaction he had expressed for the entire trip. The cause of his sudden interest turned out to be my faltering attempt to explain my curiosity about the *cerita tua* (old stories) of the island. As we stood up to join the queue to disembark, Dami spoke to me for the first time. Pressing his thumb into his chest, he looked up at me and said, "I am the one to talk to about the old stories." Before I could respond he continued, stating firmly, "I will come and find you at 10, the day after tomorrow."

Two days later and there he was, already sitting on the bench in Eva's garden, just outside the front door. He appears mesmerised by a stream of ants soaking up a puddle of thick syrupy coffee congealing on a spoon on the table. I watch him from the door as he lights a fresh Gudang Garam cigarette from the wet stub of the last, the smoke swirling around his face and the sweet smell of clove fills the air, reaching me moments later. I had not expected him to come: I realised after leaving him at the port that I had not told him my name or where I was staying and so had assumed I would have to try to find him later in the week. How would I describe him to others to find out who he was and where I could find him? I could hardly ask

11 A local community governance committee which oversees activities that take place in or impact local marine and coastal environments. This includes promoting and implementing *adat* (customary law) that protect and preserve marine ecologies for the ongoing health and well-being of communities who traditionally rely on the ocean for tourism, fishing, and cultural practices. In Iboih, this council juggles competing demands of tourism and the preservation of local practices. Many local men are involved in this council in different capacities, including responding to incidents of misuse and infringement reported by community members. It is not uncommon to see young men responding to reports by intercepting boats and individuals who are engaging in unlawful behaviour, such as standing on coral reefs or fishing in protected areas.

after the slight man with a mouth full of broken cigarette-stained teeth who knows all the stories of the island. Eva and Luca, my long-time friends, were away in Italy and I was looking after their house. It was an ideal situation until a massive storm hit, flooding the village and swamping Eva's garden. The water-pump used to draw water from the well had been affected by the flooding and I had been up since day-break, first trying to fix the pump myself and then, setting out to persuade the electrician, who I found in the village to make a temporary fix.

While Dami waited I ran around the house trying to explain to the electrician in my terrible *Bahasa* the problem whilst re-enacting the electric shock I had received earlier. Disheveled and sweaty, I eventually managed to sit down. Dami looks up for the first time and without making small talk, he launches into a story about the first people of Iboih¹². As he speaks, he gradually draws the surrounding landscapes into the story, connecting the islands and rocks around the peninsula to the stories of the 44-*Aulia* (guardians in Arabic, plural of *Wali*) who first came to Pulau Weh in the 16th and 17th centuries. As he speaks I am recalling my own memories of the places he is describing, although I also have to keep checking with him that I am thinking of the correct places.

The most striking was a story about Tengku Cik, the most significant of the *Aulia* for Iboih people and whom Dami and many others call Ibrahim, and *Batè Tokong* (Temple Rocks), a rocky protrusion in the ocean between Seulako and Rubiah islands. *Batè Tokong* is known to me, as it is to most foreigners and younger generations of Iboih Acehnese, as a top-quality dive-site. Its underwater landscapes are known in immense detail: where the wall starts, where the 'bommie' rises to break the surface of the water, and how the current plays between the peaks and canyons of the rocks. I have an embodied memory of this place from the numerous dives I have made around it, the feeding station of 'Shark Plateau' to the west, the drift dive from west to east along the sharp wall of Tokong's underwater cliff-face, and the swift currents of Arus Palee.

12 Although the stories in this section focus specifically on ethnographic conversations with Iboih locals, many of the themes resonate with the stories of other *Aulia*, who lived and died in other parts of Pulau Weh and therefore hold significance for these villages.

Rubiah Tirta Divers, the oldest dive shop in Iboih, have a hand-drawn map of this underwater landscape on the wall of their shop. I remember it from my first visit, so it must be at least ten-years old. At first it looks like a rough sketch, but upon closer inspection, this sketch-like quality reveals itself to be a series of revisions, where each new visit to the site has produced a sharper line to map an ever-changing underwater landscape. Tim Ingold says of sketch maps that they “may be the conversational product of many hands... The map grows line by line as the conversation proceeds, and there is no point at which it can ever be said to be truly complete” (Ingold 2007, 85). I can feel a sense of this embodied conversation taking place in this map, where each hand adjusts and reworks sections of it: another recollection of the space superimposes as both memory and landscape change over time. You can almost see the movement of bodies in the contours of the map: as the divers work the currents with composure, learning the space as it reveals itself through them. Upon returning they mark their knowledge onto the map; an unending process where bodies actively produce space.

Tokong’s pointy rocks are just out of sight from where we sit in Eva’s garden but as Dami speaks I can picture their familiar shapes jutting out from the water in the narrow channel between Rubiah and Seulako Islands. His Tokong emerges from stories told and retold through generations. They recall a time when Iboih was a single peninsula extending into the sea, with ocean on one side and mangroves on the other, rather than the several independent islets recognisable today. Although we sat stationary, Dami’s voice curled around those landscapes I thought I had come to know so well. They were part of his performance of place, the act of telling a story was, for Dami, performative (Langellier and Peterson 2004). Storytelling is a different kind of sketch map, where in tracing the landscapes with me, he was forging a different view of place, a story that is an “intersubjective creation” (Maggio 2014, 92) made through the performative enactment of storytelling. Rather than seeing his narrative as a text to be analysed for its chronological historical ordering of the past, I could understand it as “embodied, situated, and embedded in fields of discourse” (Langellier and Peterson 2004, 2), where memory is shaped by the contemporary performativities of the present.

He told me of how when Ibrahim lived in Iboih, he would regularly walk between what are now two distinct land-masses separated by sea: the Iboih Peninsula and Seulako Island. Seulako

was his praying place and the *wali* (guardian) would stop briefly at Tokong, which at that time was only a small pool in the path from Iboih to Seulako. He would use this spot as a natural *guci* (a place to wash one's feet before prayer) before stepping up to Seulako to pray. Dami's Tokong collides with mine, where, for a moment, they both exist simultaneously in a joyful contradiction: before I can separate the two stories, I imagine Ibrahim walking on water.

My own sense, from my brief time living and diving immersed in the landscapes of Iboih, became fantastically unhinged by Dami's stories, enlivening my approach to tracing and listening to stories through landscapes and everyday performances. As I explore further throughout this chapter and again in Chapter Four, the stories also forge moral landscapes, which subtly change shape as they weave through contemporary issues facing the village. By implication, the landscapes themselves evolve through these moral inflections. When I described to Dami the sketch map of Tokong at the dive shop, he took it as indicative of what he has long argued is a devastating break in transmission of the 'true' story of Tokong.

The younger generations, he explained, do not care to listen to the stories of their elders and the elders fail in telling the full extent of the stories and their implications for their children when they are young. Perhaps Hodgkin and Radstone are right when they suggest that "... the parents who share their memories find their memories changing" (2003, 27), however, I wondered if Dami also could not hear or see in the contemporary performances of the young divers a recent articulation of the same expression of place through storytelling that he himself felt so decidedly he should perform for me. I wondered how those divers imagined the landscapes as they dived them each day, did they feel them changing, did they feel themselves changing the landscapes through their embodied relationship with them? Were these ritualised performances evidence of an ongoing practice of storytelling, and although not explicitly recounting the story of Ibrahim, his presence is, for them, imbued within their daily pilgrimages to his site of prayer?

Contemporary evocations of place were not disconnected; they offered a renewed expression of similar themes that were communicated through *cerita tua* and the often-uncomfortable fragments I was bringing together from archival collections. These fragments came to life through Dami's stories which imbued the landscapes of Iboih, shedding alternate meanings

upon everyday social interactions. Rather than seeing histories in a hierarchical order, where oral traditions of storytelling are more authentic than recorded accounts, I could see how they each enlivened and destabilised one another, their frictions and tensions offering glimpses towards other narratives, overlaid and intersecting to reveal a contingent and ever-changing sense of the past and place.

This and the following chapter explore the intersections of oral testimony, recorded histories, material landscapes and everyday performative interactions, which surfaced as I engaged in archival and ethnographic research. These different modes of storytelling came together in surprising and challenging ways, confronting my assumptions about how the past comes about within everyday understandings of the past, present, and future of a place.

Later in our conversation, Dami asked for my notebook. He was struggling to explain the complex genealogical connections of the village in a way that would make sense to me, an outsider, and so thought he would try to draw the connections for me. Perhaps he sensed my confusion: I was struggling to see how so many generations of people could fit within the relatively short time period he was describing, and this confusion must have showed upon my face. Alternatively, he thought that I desired a firmness to his stories that was absent from his evocative ways of telling, and for him, writing it down legitimised the story he was telling and therefore, his own personal belonging within the narrative he was drawing to the places around us.

At the top of the page he wrote the letters “IBR” (Ibrahim), and then went ahead to trace his genealogy alongside the other families of the village, from that single name. As he spoke, the stories produced unruly lines across the page, they weaved through one another, causing Dami to try again, to iron out the creases so that his story made sense pictorially. He tried to unpick them, but his voice, which was one step ahead, seems to be leading the pen across difficult terrain. The photograph of my notebook, below shows Dami’s struggle (figure 5): In transferring his memories to the page, he surfaces inconsistencies that did not matter when he told me the stories through the landscape.

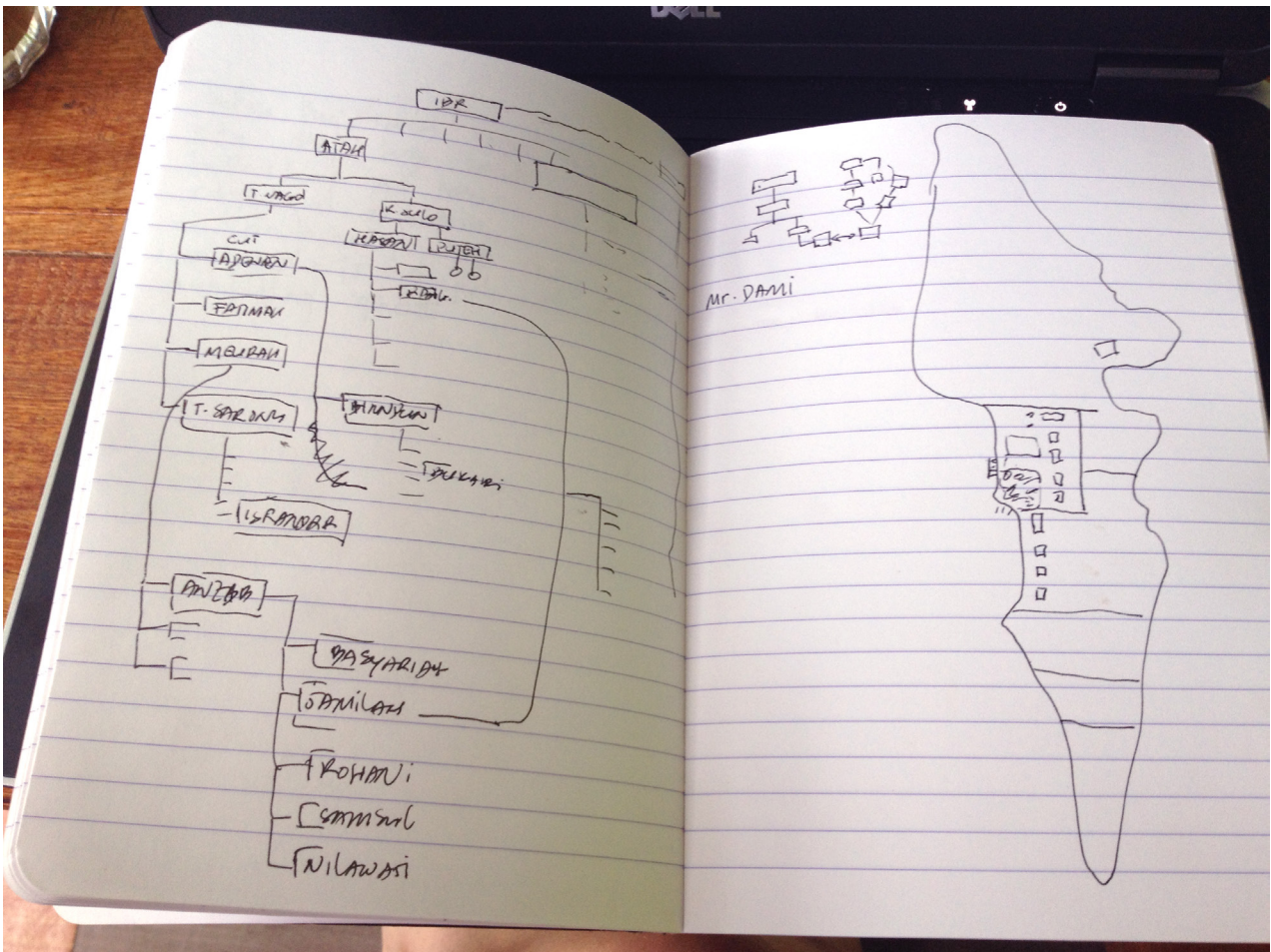


figure 5. Dami's drawings in my field notebook, 2013, digital photograph taken by the author.

As I alluded above, Dami's struggle resonated with the difficulties I encountered in ordering the fragmented mentions of Sabang in online archival collections and the published transcriptions of merchant's diaries and travelogues. In Sabang's pasts I recognised gaps and overlaps, and eerie thematic resonances, that seemed to repeat between precolonial and colonial usages of the island as a site of removal. Forging connections between these disparate fragments seemed only to dissolve their vibrancy. The animation and imaginative potential that the stories had, when Dami showed me how they moved through the landscape, was flattened by this oppressive demand for compliance with a more western approach to historicisation.

I was confronted with the question of how researchers who work with narrative in archival and ethnographic research go about representing the fragmentary nature of historical documents and the multivocal, performative and fluid changeability of oral tradition? This is an age-old problem of academic writing: somehow, the vivacity of storytelling, which is at the heart of

ethnographic inquiry, does not find the same register in academic writing. The page comes to represent a series of limitations rather than an invitation for others to engage imaginatively with the lives and social worlds depicted. How do we communicate the ambiguities and contradictions that enliven stories and memories? I learned from Dami that a story's vibrancy lies within the performance of its retelling and that ethnography then is more a process of telling a story of how stories are told (Maggio 2014), than providing a chronology of events. It is in these moments of retelling that stories move, producing space through a recasting and revisioning of the past as embodied acts of collective memory (Connerton 1989).

When I then began bringing the fragments I had collected together, I realised that the recorded histories; stories shared through oral tradition; material landscapes and colonial ruins; and, everyday performances as living history, cannot be read separately. Nor can they be juxtaposed or compared, as though one is more significant or factually correct. They each tell us something different but read together they weave a complex tapestry of how a place's past is in a constant process of revision and negotiation by those who have inherited the past and others who might pass through. Reflective of the notion of 'thinking archipelagically' about how histories can be reassembled, montage is utilised as a queer approach to historical narrativising. The connection between Sabang's 'strange histories' and queerness is woven throughout the long history of sexual perversion as rooted in pathology, primitiveness, backwardness, and strangeness. My decision to read certain historical fragments as queer, such as the removal of those deemed morally corrupt, mentally sick, and other, is based on this history and draws on historical analyses like Valerie Rohy's (2009) *Anachronism and its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* and Heather Love's (2007) *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*.

While I was engaging in the rich oral traditions of storytelling with Dami, I was also undertaking textual analysis of recorded histories, the 'half-told' stories of the archives (Steedman 2001). I was actively creating narratives within the archives, assembling and reassembling their "fragments and discontinuities" (Tamboukou 2013, 3), to bring together a coherent narrative voice. However, the moments which excited me the most were when details between Dami's stories and the archives destabilised the images and senses of place that had been taking shape for me. The moment of Ibrahim walking on water was so reformulating in this way, that I could

approach what I was subsequently reading and hearing in imaginative and creative ways. The edges of stories and fragments became the most exciting places to play, echoing the realisations I was formulating in response to the boundaries and edges of the island's physical geographies.

The task of bringing these fragments together demands a flexible and adaptive representational method, that can reflect and convey their ambiguities and the spaces these ambiguities create for imaginative interpretation. Montage offered one way of thinking about how to allow these fragments to remain full of vibrant and ambiguous meanings, to allow them to speak to one another in unexpected ways, rather than flattening or ameliorating their differences. As Willerslev and Suhr describe, "... montage is a modality of leaping between incongruent fragments that remain divided as half-open boxes" (2013, 98). It is the "gaps between voices" (Salamon 2013, 149), where fragments touch, that allow unexpected narrative threads to emerge. It conjures floating and polyvocal meaning, and, a capacity for narrative to be endlessly reorganised: disentangled and reconfigured, disentangled and reconfigured. For these reasons, montage befits a thinking through of Sabang's histories and the resonance of these histories within its landscapes.

Montage also enables conceptual distance in time, by letting voices from different epochs and milieus speak to the same phenomena, coaxing a polyvocal dialogue across time and space, without claiming synthesis. This capacity for multi-temporality and polyvocality is an essential attribute for a method that is attempting to convey multiple situated and ever-changing narrative threads that coexist across time and space. It is also intimately reflective of the ephemerality of landscapes and stories of place, told and retold in Sabang.

What this approach to organising fragments permits is a different view of time and space (history and geography); what Doreen Massey has described an "envelope of space-time" (1995, 188), where space is produced through a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (2005, 5). In this theorisation, Massey contends that space is not simply an empty expanse where events happen. It is produced through social interaction, stories, and the movements that are compelled by these social practices (Massey 2005). Rather than imposing a chronological ordering of events, what we can propose is that space holds within it a sedimentation of stories

that are being continually rewoven through a politics of the present. From this view, space and time, are in a constant process of becoming, through dialogue woven in endless configurations. I now turn to these “stories-so-far” (Massey 2005, 5) of an out-of-the-way place commonly, though not always, known as Pulau Weh.

An island on the move

How Pulau Weh appeared in its current location, according to local legend, and how it fell from the page of the most important European explorer to pass by in the 13th century, surfaces an amusing anomaly in how Pulau Weh is imagined. In many ways, it is the sense of ephemerality and transience in oral tradition, and the fallibility of archival and recorded documents that underpins many of the ensuing stories that cultivate an image of Pulau Weh.

Local stories of Pulau Weh’s arrival to its current temporary location at the intersections of the Andaman Sea and Indian Ocean are evocative of an island on the move. In its most basic translation, the word *weh*, in Acehese, means ‘go’, however, when discussed in relation to the island’s name the word reinterprets as, ‘to separate’; ‘to be removed’; or, ‘to be sent away’. In conversation with locals I have heard several, slightly different, stories telling of how the island arrived in its current location. Most cite a huge earthquake as causing the island’s separation from the mainland of Sumatra. Ulee Lheue, the place where it was once attached, also takes its name from this sudden separation: *lheue* means release. Others say that Pulau Weh was once an island in the Andaman Archipelago and that it had inexplicably floated, as though unanchored, southwards until it stopped, also inexplicably, in its current location.

In the most famous example of medieval travel writing, Marco Polo’s (1292) *Divisement du Monde* (Description of the World), widely believed written by Tuscan romance writer, Rustichello da Pisa, Pulau Weh appears merely as an absence. Yule and Cordier’s ([1903] 1993) various translations and revised editions, which began with an initial translation by Sir Henry Yule in 1871, contend as much. Polo, so excited to describe the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, simply

forgets to provide what he saw in Gauenispol¹³. A blank space follows, marking the beginning of a new frontier in Polo's journey. In the pages prior to Polo's moment of forgetfulness, he offers vivid descriptions of the sea-port kingdoms on the eastern coast of Sumatra he surveyed as he traveled up the Malacca Strait. He describes rituals of sorcery and cannibalism that he witnessed in a place he names Dragoian, as well as descriptions of "men with tails" who "live in the mountains and are a kind of wild men" (Polo, Yule and Cordier [1903] 1993, 299) at the Kingdoms of Lambri and Fansur, located in what is now present-day Aceh Besar, an area which encompasses the capital, Banda Aceh, and extends to the regencies of *Aceh Barat* (West Aceh) and Pidie to the east.

Questions linger in this absence. Did Polo forget, as Yule and Cordier contend? Or did he see nothing worthy of comment? Why would he have made mention of its name and his intention to talk in detail about what he saw if, indeed, there was nothing interesting to tell? Perhaps another possibility emerges if we imagine Pulau Weh as an island on the move, as it is collectively imagined by those who live on the island today. In this reading, Polo and Pulau Weh may have simply passed one another in the night. As Polo headed north to the Andaman Islands, Pulau Weh floated past on its journey south, simply missing one another and leaving only a 'blank on the map' within which to imagine fantastical descriptions of the island's inhabitants. We have heard of phantom islands¹⁴ but what of islands who arrived too late to form part of the European imagination?

Travel writing, of which Polo's account is perhaps the most infamous and influential of all time, is an account of a physical journey that facilitates an intellectual movement. It takes its reader to places they can only imagine. It is an act of translation which, as Duncan and Gregory argue, "means to be transported from one place to another, so that it is caught up in

13 The islands off the coast of Aceh, including the two larger islands Pulau Weh and Pulau Breueh, have had numerous names since explorers and merchants first visited the region. In earlier accounts, these two islands were named collectively, while later accounts tend to differentiate them. The name 'Gauenispol', mentioned here in Marco Polo's account, seems certainly to have been the same as the Ganispola, Gomespol or Gamispola shown on early Portuguese maps and in the descriptions of other European explorers.

14 Phantom islands are landmasses which have appeared in cartographic representations, only to be removed in subsequent renditions when evidence emerges that they do not exist (Johnson 1996).

a complex dialectic between the recognition and recuperation of difference” (1999, 4). There is a suspension that is fostered in this movement between the familiar and the unfamiliar that allows for fantasy. This was the skill and success of travel writing, and many might argue is the foundational achievements of the anthropological method, ethnography.

Given the western imperialist traditions of representing islands as strange, timeless, and insular bounded spaces, the image of Pulau Weh as an island on the move is a radical disruption. To imagine it bobbing across the ocean, somehow autonomously deciding where to rest and set its anchor, destabilises the idea that an island can be possessed or contained. The potentiality that it might spontaneously set off again, one day, evokes a raft of imaginative and amusing fantasies.

Peter Jackson (1998) argues that the disparities in the various versions of Polo’s account exist because none of them could have spurned from the original words of Polo himself. Even if we could read the original text written by Rustichello, it too would be inflected by the literary writers’ prose. Whatever the origins of Polo’s notes, we can expect that the various renditions were produced through the complicated negotiations of editor’s tastes, interpretations, as well as the audience’s expectations and desires for certain narratives. Details which the editors thought too wondrous, too unbelievable, for their audiences might have been downplayed or omitted altogether. Were Polo’s observations when he passed by Guaenispola too wondrous to be convincing to a European audience? Was his account edited from the definitive version of his travels? If not entirely believable, such a possibility ignites the imagination. Polo’s lost pages, in such an interpretation, become something more than a lapse in memory, they become a willful omission and an irresistible invitation to imagine what might have occupied those pages.

Orang campur (mixed people)

That Pulau Weh was sent violently or peacefully from somewhere else, influences more than how islanders think about geography: movement, ephemerality, and transience are central to local articulations of identity and belonging. The concept of *orang asli* (original people), often used to articulate a group’s belonging to, and presence in, a place beyond the limits of collective memory, is foreign to local discourses of belonging in Pulau Weh. What is more common in

Pulau Weh is the evocation of *orang campur* (mixed people) to describe the composition and relationships within the population, as well as the successive waves of migration that have culminated in the multi-ethnic population Sabang has today and its connections beyond its geographical boundaries. While the concept of *orang campur* has its roots in the island's layered histories of human migration, it has come to represent the evolving ontologies of the island's community. These ways of being are important sites of differentiation for islanders, as I explore over the coming pages.

A myth underlies the absence of *orang asli* and a sudden presence of *orang campur*. It is a myth that is founded on a colonialist assumption that an uninhabited island lay waiting to be filled with a fabricated society, a mixture of people to form an immediate and indentured workforce. While this indeed happened, it was not into an empty container that they were filled, but a place with a long history of migration and happenstance arrivals.

Despite the significance of these rich and textured histories of migration, they are not officially recognised and celebrated equally. Whilst the stories of the 44 *Aulia* (guardians, holy people), and their introduction of Islam to the islands are acknowledged through public commemorative displays and rituals, later waves of migration, by those exiled during the sultanate and colonial periods are left relatively unspoken. For example, I was able to hear numerous renditions of stories about the *Aulia*, as well as visit sign-posted places where local people can demonstrate the ongoing significance of these mystical figures to their villages. However, conversations about the exiled criminals of the sultanate period, and the problem populations of Dutch colonialism were difficult to engage with locals.

I only became aware of these stories by engaging with textual evidence, which I was able to find online or by traveling to archival collections in Leiden (Netherlands) and Jakarta. In these repositories I found the travelogues of merchants who visited the Acehese Kingdom in the 16th and 17th century, recording garish descriptions of criminals whose limbs were severed before being banished to the islands. I also found descriptions of plans to build two institutions for housing those within the 'native' population considered to pose a contamination threat to the Indies' Muslim population, and who were subsequently removed to the islands by the Dutch Administration. These stories are noticeably absent in contemporary resident's renditions of the

past, however, there are traces of the subjects of these stories in everyday social interactions and evocations of identity in the island's present-day communities. These performances form a kind of 'repertoire' (D. Taylor 2003) of the past and offer ways of understanding the lasting impacts of colonialism and the brutality of the Acehese Sultanate on contemporary identity.

As I mentioned above, the concept of *orang campur* underpins Sabang's histories of migration and exile, however, it tends to point to the first occupants, the 44-holy people, in support, or defense, of Sabang's multi-ethnic population. Acehese national identity typically espouses homogeneity as its strength and, in recent years has attempted to eradicate the appearance of difference through legislative moves to force all citizens to comply with shari'ah principles. In Sabang, however, *orang campur* is invoked to indicate a deep division between island and mainland attitudes towards diversity and interpersonal differences.

This term implies more than to simply describe the ethnic mix of the population: it is suggestive of the underlying values and attitudes which have developed as a result of Sabang's multiculturalism. *Orang campur*, locals like Dami and Pak Fir tell me, is indicative of islander's difference to mainland Acehese, especially in their openness to those of different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Pak Fir emphasised these differences in several conversations we shared about Sabang's original inhabitants. He described the differences as 'Sabang's secret', explaining that it was from the histories of multicultural migration and settlement on the island that equip Sabang people to live harmoniously within and across difference. Sabang, he told me, means just that: to be equal and without discrimination, qualities which differentiate Sabang from the mainland, where homogeneity and a deep distrust of outsiders predominates.

In addition to *orang campur*, themes of separation, exile, contamination, and containment, permeate these stories. They provide local, contextually relevant, lenses for reading current political conversations about how shari'ah should be implemented and where public and private life should be demarcated. In Part Two of this thesis I look closely at contemporary political discourse through these historically significant lenses. First, in this section, I show how these complex histories of human migration, both forced and otherwise, resurface in the everyday social interactions and expressions of local identity of people who live in and pass through Sabang.

Happenstance arrivals and performing connections between here and there

Pulau Weh's geographical location, where the Indian Ocean meets the Straits of Malacca, and its fresh water supply, brought travelers, missionaries and merchants from Europe, East Asia and China. Several stories of the most eccentric of these travelers carry on in the island's cultural memory, with embellished stories often shared with visitors. Italian revolutionary, Nino Bixio, is said to be buried somewhere on Pulau Weh, a story retold often in Iboih. Acehnese-Italian couple Eva and Luca named their Italian restaurant after the eccentric Italian and even include a brief historical account of him in their menu. The memoir of Dutch East Indies official, Willem Jan Maria Michielsen (1844-1926), finally published in 2015, offers a rare glimpse into the circumstance surrounding Bixio's mysterious death in the waters off the Acehnese coast. Michielsen (2015) claims that Bixio died from cholera in 1873, his body quickly buried in an iron 'kettle' to prevent the spread of the disease. However, the kettle and its contents were later exhumed and reburied in an unknown location by Acehnese robbers. The story of Bixio has been woven into contemporary narratives of migration by people like Eva and Luca who consider themselves to share similar oddities in their own personal stories and how they came to reside in Pulau Weh. Local histories also contend that Cheng Ho, a Chinese Admiral who lived during the Ming Dynasty, visited Pulau Weh between 1413-1415, while Chinese residents I spoke with in Sabang tell a story of an unnamed Chinese rebel who sought refuge on the island. These early visitors are important connections for Sabang's contemporary Chinese community, which has been heavily depleted since a series of earthquakes in the 1980s scared many into leaving the island.

The 44 *Aulia* predominate, particularly in Iboih, in how Sabang people commemorate the past. They were pilgrims from various places across the archipelago and beyond and when passing Pulau Weh on their journey towards Mecca, they were blown off course, their ships damaged on the rocks. After their ships were repaired they attempted to set sail, but again the island lured them back. The belief that the island emits a power to draw visitors back or compel them to stay is often expressed, by locals and long-time western visitors alike, in contemporary conversations about the island. I have heard numerous exchanges that suggest the island is somewhat to blame for the life-paths of western visitors in particular who have attempted to

leave Pulau Weh after several years, only to find themselves returning as though directed by an external force.

The traces of the *Aulia* presence are imbued within the landscape. Their graves are scattered about the island and these material remnants mark and remind local inhabitants of customs and superstitions specific to each area. Local particularities reflect beliefs that the *Aulia* who are buried in the area can bring great fortune or disaster to the local communities. For example, Tengku Cik, who is buried overlooking the sea at the farthest point of the Iboih Peninsula, is said to be the protector of the oceans. As a sign of respect to him and to ensure the ongoing safety of the village, swimming, fishing, and boating are forbidden on Friday mornings and on other religiously significant days. Outsiders who are unaware of the rules and who enter the water during a 'forbidden day' will be emphatically called from the water and told that they will be to blame should a calamity befall the village. The story is perpetually transmitted to new comers through such dramatic displays, however, with recent increases in tourist numbers and changes to demographics, the village decided it needed to commission several signs, written in English and Indonesian, outlining the strict rules. More recent stories of the possession and unexplained deaths of several government officials in Sabang who were involved in the removal of one of these graves, reinforce the power of these first inhabitants and their continuing presence and influence throughout the island.

Most central to Iboih's material and moral landscapes, are the interconnected stories of Tengku Cik¹⁵ of Iboih and Ummi Sarah Rubiah. How they came to live in Iboih is contested. Abang Dami told me that Tengku Cik di Iboih, also called Bapak Ibrahim, was an *ulama* (religious leader) from the village of Iboih in the regency of Pidie on the east coast of the Acehese mainland. Years after Tengku Cik left the mainland, his brother sent a convoy to Pulau Weh to find him. The search party, nearing the island, saw smoke rising from the jungle in the area now called Iboih. They approached to find a small settlement where one of the inhabitants went by the

15 The Acehese titles *Cik* and *Ummi* denotes a person's elder status (male and female respectively) within the community (similar to *Bapak* and *Ibu* in *Bahasa Indonesia*). The title *Tengku* refers to a person's position as an *ulama* (religious leader), while the similar term, *Teuku* (for example Teuku Umar whom I introduced in Chapter Three), confirms one's lineage to the Acehese Sultanate. The female equivalent *Cut* and both *Teuku* and *Tengku* are still commonly used today as markers of class, social status, and religious authority.

name Tengku Cik. To prove he had sent the convoy, Tengku Cik's brother had sent a package containing durian seeds taken from trees grown on the mainland. Tengku Cik immediately knew they were from his brother, recognising them as particular to the durian trees that grew in his village.

As is common throughout Aceh, Tengku Cik decided to boil and eat the seeds of the durian fruit however, once boiled, he chose instead to plant them in the rich soil in the clearing where he had set up his camp. By the next day, the seeds had miraculously sprouted, and they continued to grow into the towering fruit-bearing trees that can be seen in the durian grove in the jungle behind Iboih today. The trees are considered *keramat* (sacred) by the local families of Iboih and the retelling of the story is an important part of the community's connection to place and each year, when the trees fruit, the revealing of the seeds boiled appearance upon opening each durian fruit testifies to the story's validity. At the beginning of every season, the young men of the village clear the pathway through the jungle so that each family can visit the trees and collect their share of fruit. It is firmly believed that the durian taken from this grove must be shared with others: if a person tries to keep the fruit for themselves, it is well known that the flesh will turn black.

To reciprocate the gift of durian seeds, and to prove his identity, Tengku Cik gave the convoy a package wrapped in banana leaf to return to Cik's brother. The package contained several fish which Cik had cooked over an open fire. It is said that when the men returned to the mainland and gave the fish to his brother he did not eat them but placed them in a nearby lake. Upon touching the water, the fish came back to life and swam away. The presence of these fish in this small town on the mainland forms a connection to Pulau Weh through the retelling of this story. This type of fish can only be found in this location; a distinguishing mark on the sides of the fish are said to represent the impressions left on the cooked flesh by the tongs used by Tengku Cik to hold them over the fire. The enduring tradition of clearing the path to the durian field, collecting and sharing the fruit, are important collective performances of the village's pride in the story of Tengku Cik di Iboih and his long-lost brother on the mainland. It also provokes the retelling of the story of the durian and the fish to younger generations who can then vividly imagine, through the material resonances of the story, the connections and

living histories between island and mainland.

What is critical to recognise, and which allows us to see how significant the stories are for how locals articulate belonging, is that the stories surface and resurface to respond to a changing social and political landscape. Part of this is in invoking the sentiments of *orang campur*, that is, in valuing the diversity that the 44 *Aulia* brought to the islands. But it is also in recognising and reasserting local specificities of place for certain groups and not others within Sabang's ever-changing transient population. While *orang campur* celebrates difference and refutes ideas of ownership, such as is often invoked through terms like *orang asli* (original people), these stories nevertheless create hierarchies of belonging.

It is significant, for example, that each community performs their identification with the specific *wali* who lived and died close to their village. The graces of the *wali* are present within the daily goings on in the village, even if it is simply as a material presence within villager's everyday movements. These relationships and the specific enactments entailed in commemorating each *wali*, differentiates island communities from one another. Tengku Cik and Ummi Sarah Rubiah's specific stories shape connections with place and guide enactments with the ocean and the jungle, as well as how locals think about their relationship with the mainland. In Iboih, the local stories have meant that large parts of the jungle and ocean are protected by *adat* (customary law), meaning that large tracts of the area have long been considered a nature conservation area. As I explore in Chapter Four, the changes in tourism and governance are putting pressure on these long-established relationships between the environment and local communities.

Sabang's contemporary population carries on the traditions of transience and happenstance arrival established by the 44 *Aulia*. Sabang attracts many, especially young men, from mainland cities such as Lhokseumawe and Meulaboh, to work in the burgeoning and lucrative building industry. This movement of people to the island is counter-balanced by an equally voluminous flood of young people leaving the island for education and employment opportunities in Banda Aceh, Medan or Jakarta. In this way, the island represents both restriction and opportunity, its watery edges either source of connectivity or preventative boundaries to mobility.

Tourism demographics have also changed in recent years, with increased domestic tourists

arriving in droves to take in Sabang's *objek wisata* (tourism sites). The everyday movements, activities, and interactions of this vibrant, transient and culturally diverse community reflect the island's earliest stories of exchange and transference, as envisioned through the presence of the durian trees and the traces of the various wayward travelers who first came upon the island. Space is made through social interaction (Massey 2005), creating what Fletcher calls, 'performative geographies' (Fletcher 2011).

It is these movements, exchanges and transferences which perpetually redefine the spaces of Sabang; producing the island through social interactions and strange feats of ingenuity to service the desires of an ever-changing population. Vannini and Taggart propose that an "island becomes such as practices of incorporation" (2013, 225) which are deeply performative. That is, that islands are the product of inhabitants' "sheer practical, creative, skillful engagement with its affordances" (225). Their focus on the practical efforts of island inhabitants to negotiate the island's spatiality, geographical position, environment, are of such obvious relevance to understanding the types of everyday activities which occupy Sabang's inhabitants. The shifting demographic of Sabang's population illustrate the necessary flexibility of these practices.

Everyday performances carry these stories across the ocean separating Ulee Lheue and Pulau Weh. I made those journeys, witnessing the intense connections of 'here' and 'there' and how each space is made and unmade through the movement of people and the objects they take with them. I was even incorporated in the procurement of certain products that are desired but unobtainable on the island: my bag each time I returned was filled with facial cleansers, chocolate, condoms, tampons, alcohol, and G-strings. I became a part of the everyday re-inscription of cultural boundaries and my movements maintained the porousness of borders that have long existed in this region. My demonstration of the relationships I have formed, by complying with demands, each one more risqué than the last, kept my place within Sabang's transient, *orang campur* (mixed people) community. The spaces of separation, of island from mainland, but also Aceh from the outside world through prohibitions and restrictions of movement, formed a performative geography. I wrote the following fieldnote one day on the ferry journey from Banda Aceh to Pulau Weh:

Heri is at the port smoking his thin *kretek* cigarettes. His key chain, a long

piece of horsehair, hangs from the back pocket of his tight jeans. He has the stance of someone who is always waiting: a well-practiced posture of patience mixed with a ready alertness to the goings on around him. He runs his *becak* (motorbike taxi) business in this way, always organising and directing customers to the *becak* drivers who are beneath him on the pecking order. He often gives the big tippers, those who are on a one-off vacation, to the others, while keeping those he thinks might keep giving or open new business ventures for himself. Today is Thursday, so he has Luca's box of cheese and yoghurt, made by Sumatra's only cheese maker, safe and cool in the air-conditioned ATM inside the waiting area of the harbour. He discovered this trick one hot day when the 10am ferry was cancelled, and he had to think quick how to save the foreign foods from the sweltering humidity. This ingenuity cemented his place in the chain of flow and exchange involved in the running of Eva and Luca's Italian restaurant in Iboih; securing him consistent work outside the inconsistent seasonal flow of tourists.

(Between Ulee Lheue and Balohan, 2014)

This story demonstrates how performance *is* place; The procurement and movement of these objects produces island spaces. As Baldacchino says:

For all their enticing self-evident geographies, islands 'become', arising out of the activities, tropes and functions thrust upon them. Islandness, in this vein, weaves in and out, gets produced, alluded to, appealed to, dismissed, accentuated or diluted, in a churn of actions (2017, 102).

The movement of things and people between places of centrality and externality constitute their boundaries. That is, in the performative negotiation of boundaries produce a sense of peripherality, of islandness. The island then is not dissociated from the mainland but is only ever a product of the performances of connection which both create and permeate boundaries of separation. A further observation, during another ferry journey:

The same journey between island and mainland is made by two deceased passengers. The first is on the 8am ferry from Sabang to Ulee Lheue. He was likely a builder working in Sabang who is now making his final journey back to his village in the Acehnese hinterlands where he will be buried. The other is making the return trip at 4pm, back to the island from the mainland, likely dying earlier that day in the hospital in Banda Aceh. They were both laid out in the thoroughfare of the ferry on a simple stretcher, covered by a thin sheet. In the morning I caught sight of a thin wisp of hair which had slipped out from beneath the sheet, having been pulled out of place by relatives who had pressed their foreheads to the dead man's forehead, staying with him until the last possible moment before the ferry sounded its parting siren.

(Between Ulee Lheue and Balohan, 2014)

These movements of people and objects between mainland and island reflect the kinds of embodied connections and performative exchanges that are productive of space. Human movement is marked in these moments, not only the most recent movement of the young man from the mainland in search of work in Sabang's building industry, or the older man's journey from home to hospital, and then back again to be laid to rest on the island. Past movements are echoed in these more recent moves: generations of human displacement, forced and otherwise, have made these same journeys. Their movements are retold in the daily movement of people and goods across that expanse of water which seems on first appearance only to divide and prohibit connectivity: It is the journeying that produces both spaces.

The exile and sanctuary of Umami Sarah Rubiah and Iboih's contemporary gender rene-gades

Tengku Cik's wife, Umami Sarah Rubiah is held within the most dynamic and contested of Iboih's *cerita tua* (old stories). Her *makam* (grave) is situated on Pulau Rubiah, an island separated from the Iboih peninsula by a deep channel, and so although she is held separate from the everyday activities of the village, she is an ever-present background.

There is much diversity in the story of how Tengku Cik and Ummi Sarah Rubiah became estranged and separated from one another. It is agreed that Tengku Cik went away, leaving Ummi Sarah Rubiah alone. In his absence, to assuage her loneliness, Rubiah became friendly with a group of dogs¹⁶ and allowed them to stay with her inside the house. When Tengku Cik returned he was disgusted by what he saw. Being an *ulama* (religious leader) he recognised that this was *haram* (forbidden) and directed his wife to remove the dogs from the house.

There are various interpretations of what proceeded. Some say that Ummi Sarah Rubiah was so ashamed of her transgression and her husband's reaction that she fled to a remote area of the peninsula. Tengku Cik pleaded with her to leave the dogs so that they could resume their life together but her refusal provoked the gods who rained violent anger down from the skies, shaking the earth and dividing the peninsula into two distinct pieces of land. Ummi Sarah Rubiah was cast away, exiled to an empty and lonely island, whilst Tengku Cik remained on the Iboih Peninsula. Others argue that Tengku Cik was so distraught by the loss of his wife that he walked away dejected, with his head dipped and his staff trailing on the ground behind him. The line carved into the earth by his staff is said to have created a line of separation: the two pieces of land were forever held apart as were Tengku Cik and Ummi Sarah Rubiah who were never reunited, each dying on their respective lands. Yet another perspective argues that Ummi Sarah Rubiah, so fearful of her husband's violence, fled to the other side of the peninsula. The gods intervened and separated Iboih and Rubiah, creating a sanctuary to protect her from him. They scattered *bula babi* (sea urchins) and *hiu* (sharks) in the deep seas surrounding her island refuge. They gave her a small bay clear of these dangerous creatures, still recognised today, where she could bathe and wash her hair.

There are generational differences in how the story is remembered. Several older women told me that after the lands had been separated, Tengku Cik had begged the gods to make the water less deep, the currents less strong and the sharks and sea urchins to disappear so that

16 The vignette with which I opened this thesis, of Macut and her dog companion, reflects the presence of Ummi Sarah Rubiah in the contemporary social practices of Iboih locals. While it is still *haram* to live with and care for dogs in Iboih, Macut is afforded a relaxation of the rules. I can only attribute this to the ongoing significance of the *cerita tua* (old stories) of Iboih, which creates a lasting cultural separation between local performances of identity and difference and broader religious and Acehese cultural norms.

Rubiah could make it across the channel to be re-united with him. However, it was not these obstacles that were holding her back. It was her shame for her sins which kept Rubiah on the island, destined to remain alone until her death. Younger women tend to reimagine Ummi Sarah Rubiah as a renegade woman, for whom gender was not an imposition to her desires for self-expression and happiness.

I have often wondered how these stories have been transmitted through generations, consistently challenging one another, challenging these notions of sanctuary and exile, at once reifying and subverting notions of gendered morality and male privilege. When I have visited Pulau Rubiah, I have felt the inertia of these competing images of Rubiah and the implications each rendition has for thinking about gender. As I pass the small beach where she once lay in the shallow waters, I can imagine this renegade woman, strong and defiant, as she chooses her own company over the rules and regulations of a life shared with her husband. At the same time, I imagine her peering out towards Iboih, fearful and only half trusting the sanctuary created for her, perhaps not realising the sea urchins and sharks that have been laid in between her sanctuary and Iboih.

In Part Two, Ummi Sarah Rubiah resurfaces in the contemporary performances of young women. Oppressive systems of surveillance and the enforcement of homogeneity and conformity, especially in relation to dress and behaviour, are provoking evasive strategies for redefining public and private space. Space is created through the movement of bodies at certain times and resonates with the landscapes of exile and sanctuary forged through Rubiah's resistance to gender norms. The dynamic possibilities for revising the story's moral undertones are enlivened through contemporary discourses of gendered and religious moralism. The ongoing telling of this story reinvigorates the archipelago as, not only a space produced through the movement of tourists to and from the island, but through the production of a space of periphery, of sanctuary for the past.

The toponymic implications of 'Weh' might not be limited to seismic or spiritual displacements. Histories of the movement of people to Weh, both free and forced, reiterate the meanings associated with a geographical displacement. What follows is a fractured account of several threads of human relocation to Pulau Weh, since the Sultanate period which preceded

colonisation until the present day. Space and practice are intimately connected and co-constituted in these stories of human exile and punishment.

Sultan Iskandar Muda's 'unfortunate wretches'

While local historians in Sabang and in Aceh more broadly repeat the narrative of Pulau Weh as an uninhabited and inconsequential island in their representations of the Acehese Sultanate period (mid-15th century-1903), early travelogues by European merchants and orientalists, including, Alexander Hamilton (~1688-~1733), Thomas Bowrey (1650-1713), William Marsden (1754-1836), Charles Lockyer (unknown) and William Dampier (1651-1715), offer a different image of an island used at various times as a site of both temporary and permanent exile for mainland criminals. Their vivid accounts paint a grisly picture of what life was like during the period, particularly under Sultan Iskandar Muda, Aceh's most formidable ruler (1607-1636), with corporal punishment and exile used as a form of public shaming and deterrence. We can imagine from these accounts that Pulau Weh existed in the minds of mainlanders as a place of horror. In the following section, I include several extended extracts from them here to conjure a sense of how this island would have captured the minds of the Acehese subject and ignited the minds of European audiences. Just as Polo's diaries from the 13th century offered an imaginative outlet for European audiences; these accounts would certainly have added further evidence that the far east was filled with barbaric kingdoms. Bowrey's account, written between 1669-1679, describes what he saw as he passed through the waters off Achin ¹⁷ Head:

It hath likewise a very Excellent Roade or bay in which there is room Enough for many hundreds of Ships and in great Safety, where they might ride in 12, 10, 8, 6, 4 fathoms depth, very cleare ground, and almost land locked with the head of Sumatra, Pullo Way, and Pullo Gomus, and 2 or 3 Small Islands and

17 The province now known as 'Aceh', which extends from the northern tip of Sumatra to the border which it shares with the province of North Sumatra, emerged from several ancient kingdoms. Samudra Pasai, which was oft-mentioned in European and Chinese texts since the 13th century, was a conglomerate of independent Muslim port-states including Barus, Daya, Lamri, Pidie, Pasai and Aru (Reid 2005), until the 1500s when they were unified under one name, *Kuta Raja* (King's Fort) to defend against Portuguese incursions in the early 1500s. It was from this conflict that the Acehese sultanate was formed in the area previously called Lambri, in the area now known as Banda Aceh (McKinnon 1988, 2006; Reid 2005).

rocks. The land is all Mountainous and woody Save where the Citty Standeth, more Especially the 2 Islands Way and Gomus, havinge noe low land about them, nor are they inhabited more than with Some banished Cripples Sent from the Citty (1905, 286-7).

Some 300 years after Polo had forgotten what he saw as he passed Pulau Weh, Bowrey offers a first glimpse of the island's inhabitants. Dampier's account, written in 1688, captures a more descriptive image. The depth of his understanding of the contexts and systems of removal suggest a lengthy time spent trading and interacting with merchants and local traders in the region:

The Laws of this Country are very strict, and offenders are punished with great severity. Neither are there any delays of Justice here; for as soon as the Offender is taken, he is immediately brought before the Magistrate, who presently hears the matter, and according as he finds it, so he either acquits, or orders punishment to be inflicted on the Party immediately. Small offenders are only whipt on the back, which sort of punishment they call Chaubuck. A Thief for his first offence, has his right hand chopt off at the Wrist: for the second offence off goes the other; and sometimes instead of one of their hands, one or both their feet are cut off; and sometimes (tho' very rarely) both hands and feet. If after the loss of one or both hands or feet, they still prove incorrigible, for they are many of them such very Rogues and so arch, that they will steal with their Toes, then they are banish'd to Pulo Way, during their Lives: and if they get thence to the City, as sometimes they do, they are commonly sent back again; tho' sometimes they get a License to stay. ... On Pulo Way there are none but this sort of Cattle: and tho' they all of them want one or both hands, yet they so order matters, that they can row very well, and do many things to admiration, whereby they are able to get a livelihood: for if they have no hands, they will get somebody or other to fasten Ropes or Withes about their Oars, so as to leave Loops wherein they may put the stamps of their Arms; and therewith they will pull an Oar lustily.

They that have one hand can do well enough: and of these you shall see a great many even in the City (Dampier 1700, 138-9).

Explorer Charles Lockyer, whose identity is unknown beyond his text *An account of the trade in India* (1711), echoed similar observations when he ventured into the region:

A thief detected, is punished with the Loss of a Member, from a Finger to an Arm, and Banish'd to some of the Islands off the Head: Pulo Gomes, and Pulo Way, are the chief Receptacles of these unfortunate Wretches, whence they often return to the City, and are common in the Streets without Hands or Arms: The greatest Badge of Infamy (1711, 38).


Alexander Hamilton's account of his knowledge of punishment in Atcheen when he visited in 1702 is more extensive:

No place in the World punishes Theft with greater Severity than Atcheen, and yet Robberies and Murders are more frequent there than in any other Place. For the first Fault, if the Theft do not amount to a Tayel Value, it is but the Loss of an Hand, or a Foot, and the Criminal may choose which he'll part with; and if caught a second Time, the same Punishment and Loss is used, but the third Time, or if they steal five Tayel in Value, that Crime entitles them to Souling, or impaling alive. When their Hand or Foot is to be cut off, they have a Block with a broad Hatchet fixt in it with the Edge upwards, on which the Limb is laid, and struck on it with a wooden Mallet, till the Amputation is made, and they have a hollow Bambow, or Indian Cane, ready to put the Stump in, and stopt about with Rags or Moss, to keep the Blood from coming out, and are set in a conspicuous Place, for Travellers to gaze on, who generally bestow a little Spittle in the Pot, being what is produced by the Mastication of Beetle, and that serves them instead of Salve to cure their Wounds.

Those who suffer the Penalty of the Law, who have no Families in the Town,

are banished to Pullo-wey, an Island about four Leagues to the North-east of Atcheen, and there they cultivate the Ground, and breed Poultry for the Use of the Town; and I have heard that there are above five hundred of those Banditti Inhabitants on it (1930, 59).

These descriptions were a shocking discovery. What was more confronting, however, was that I was reading these descriptions at the same time as I was reading and hearing about incremental changes to Aceh's penal code which was allowing punitive shari'ah to gain momentum. As I investigate more closely in Part Two, public performances of *cambuk* (caning), raids, and vigilante violence have increased in recent years, with public caning enacted before large crowds of onlookers to dissuade others from un-Islamic behaviours. These public performances and the reasoning behind them are chillingly reminiscent of the accounts of the Sultanate period described above. In these contemporary versions of public corporal punishment, the witnesses were not passing European merchants writing accounts in their personal diaries, they were young people, recording and posting videos to youtube.



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figure 6. Heri Juanda, [*public caning Banda Aceh*], 23 April 2018, digital image. Reproduced from: ABC News.

The seas of young faces and smart phones, as is captured in Heri Juanda's (2018) photograph above (figure 6) shows a new incarnation of these same methods of public humiliation. I am mesmerised by the young woman wearing yellow, standing in the front row. She is the only one gazing directly, unmediated by technology, at the condemned woman. I cannot quite interpret her expression: a mix of despondence, resignation, sadness, curiosity, even boredom. The stark contrast of her expression to what we, as viewers and consumers of this image, can only imagine is painted across the face of the woman who is publicly shamed for all the world to see, is hauntingly familiar to the descriptions above of the unwitting audience for the Sultan's unfortunate wretches.

Why these violent histories have been erased from public discussion is a curiosity which drove me to seek out moments where they poked through. In the following chapter, I show how these histories might be considered to influence contemporary identity narratives, especially as they are performatively invoked in interactions between mainlanders and islanders. And, in Chapter Four I show how they again resurface in local responses to punitive shari'ah and narrow conceptions of acceptable religious expression in the villages of Iboih.

Colonial anxieties: Water and punishment

The period in which the Dutch Trading Company (VOC) and then the Dutch East Indies Administration had a presence in Sabang introduced a new wave of human displacement. Beneath the images of a bustling port and the ebbs and flows of everyday life in the town of Sabang which predominate in visual representations of Sabang in online archival image libraries, such as KITLV's (*Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* / The Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) online image archive (J. Taylor 2011a), the islands were utilised for other, more ambiguous, purposes. At the heart of these quite intensive ventures of human movement and infrastructural development were several interconnected fears and anxieties related to how 'native uprisings', contagious disease out-breaks, and pan-Islamic influences from outside, could be held back or contained. Ann Laura Stoler (2002, 2004) has challenged the assumption within most colonial histories that rationalism and reason guided the imperialist project by revealing the sentiments and affective attachments which can be traced through personal letters included in archival collections. Sabang's less-often discussed

colonial histories as evidenced in colonial ruins around the island, offer a point at which to interject into the long-held myth of the rational and methodical colonial mind in the Dutch handling of ongoing insurgencies that were erupting sporadically in Aceh until the mid-1930s, despite Dutch claims that the Acehnese had surrendered.

These anxieties resulted in the building of two key facilities, the Sabang Mental Hospital and the Rubiah Quarantine Station. In this final section of this chapter, I connect themes already introduced, like exile and sanctuary, to the appropriative methods of the Dutch which effectively worked to contain what they saw as an unruly and unstable deviant population. The island as container and peripheral outpost is most succinctly captured within the latter period of Dutch co-optation, when Aceh was maintaining a defiant stance towards colonisation, a period well-documented in letters sent between advisors and psychiatrists in Sabang and Batavia (Jakarta). In the following chapter, it is "*the uneven temporal sedimentations*" (Stoler 2013, 2; italics in original) that I trace through everyday performances, for the relationship between colonised islanders and the coloniser which persist within contemporary relationships between islanders and mainlanders.

If we are to follow Simon Schama's (1988) assertion that water instilled a deep anxiety for the Dutch, how might we imagine the daily anxieties caused by the material realities of their archipelagic possession? At home in the Netherlands, water was a challenge to overcome, it was something that could be manipulated and held back through feats of engineering ingenuity. Perhaps, in keeping with this relationship between land and water, navigating the different challenges presented by the archipelago's topography afforded a perverse pleasure. That eventually, rather than seeing the water which encircled the thousands of islands as connective possibilities, they saw a sea of containers where populations could be kept separate and most importantly, observed, monitored and managed.

Water also features in Dutch modes of punishment, however, the imaginative ways in which it was used differed greatly at home and abroad. While in Sabang, the forced practice of 'taking water with the basket' seems to imply a gentle aspect of a broader approach to moral therapy, in the Netherlands a much more torturous measure was taken for those who were seen to deliberately (and rationally) disobey orders. The drowning cell was used in penitentiaries (known

as rasphouses) in the Netherlands from the 1600s until the early 1900s. The same Thomas Bowrey who witnessed the banished cripples struggling to row their boats with amputated limbs in Pulau Weh described what he saw when visiting one of these institutions in 1698:

Then see the Rasphouse, which is a Strong Prison and has now in it 117 Lust [sic] Young Men, who are put in, some for 25 Years, some less, as there Crimes deserve, which is for Crimes nest to what deserves Death, as Robbing &ca.

And also Idle persons who will not work, of which there is Severall Monuments hung up in the Prison Yard, as Crutches, Trusses, &ca., of Persons pretending to be Lame and soe to Beg. They are kept hard to Work to Rasp hard Wood for Dyeing, and for such as refuses to work, they are put into a Cellar into which the water runs, and there is a Pump. If they will Pump Hard, they keep the water Low; if not, it rises and Drownds them (1927, 42).

The task of repetitively drawing water from a well appears benign in comparison. Although, the madness inducing task of drawing water with a leaking basket might represent a more prolonged punishment, where the same journey towards irretrievable incapacitation is nonetheless achieved. Local ideas about the methods employed by the Dutch to control the population in Sabang suggests that performances of beneficence did not convince those subjugated to various colonialist inventions of control and manipulation. What can be understood from recorded documents, such as the letters of Dr Latumeten and the lectures of his predecessor, Dr Van Loon, is that a deep fear and anxiety about the 'eastern soul' and the threats of pan-Islam fuelled the inventions used to contain and over-see the movements and activities of those who lived in and passed through Sabang during colonial occupation.

An 'eastern soul', *Atjeh Moorden* (Aceh murders) and pan-Islam

The exile and punishment of criminals to Pulau Weh by the Acehnese Sultanate continued under Dutch rule, although this time the exiled took on a new guise: the *orang sakit jiwa* (evocatively translates as 'people with a sick soul'), who were so-named as a strategy for containing and removing those who were becoming increasingly problematic for a paranoid and

flailing Administration. It was claimed by the Administration that the 'native population' could not handle the specific challenges of the mentally ill and that medical care, following a moral therapy psychiatric model was part of the Dutch beneficent approach to colonial rule. During the 1930s, such an approach was said to require isolation, removal from the environments that had cultivated the problem, and close observation. Pulau Weh presented a perfect location for such restorative work but it also permitted these claims to beneficence to be used for the more insidious purpose of removing those suspected of anti-colonial sentiments.

The Administration were very effective in their appropriation of existing methods of social control. As Hau'ofa contends, "Europeans did not invent belittlement. In many societies, it was part and parcel of indigenous cultures" (1994, 149). Discourses which attributed the criminal's actions to a moral failing during the Sultanate period, were supplanted and replaced with the more paternalistic assertion that the child-like qualities of the Acehnese meant that European intervention was both necessary and imperative to the functionality of a broader Indies society. In her account of Dutch imperialism in Indonesia, Frances Gouda (1995) demonstrates how the Dutch Administration presented itself as bearing a moral responsibility and stewardship towards an inferior Indies population. This mix of beneficence and paternalism distinguished the more obviously coercive and restrictive strategies of British imperialism. How the Dutch imagined a beneficent role, as educators and the benefactors of civilisation demonstrates the view that they held of the 'native mind' as childlike, uncivilised, suggestible, and emotional (Pols 2007, 2018).

Dutch desires to scientifically differentiate the 'native mind' from the European psyche became a pressing concern when, years after the so-called resignation of the Acehnese to Dutch colonisation, a series of murders took place. Although the Administration had proclaimed victory multiple times between 1904 and 1914, from the Acehnese perspective the *prang sabil* (holy war) endured through new strategies to infiltrate and destabilise areas where the Dutch had control. The main method was for lone individuals to undertake random attacks upon the first *kaphe* (unbeliever) they came across. There were several spates of these types of attacks, the similarity of them attracting the name '*Atjeh-moorden*' (typical Aceh murder) from the Dutch Administration (Kloos 2014a; Siegel 1969; Sufi 2002).

Atjeh-moorden became a preoccupation for the Administration, who saw it as a very real threat to their capacity to consolidate control of the region. Existing ideas about the inferiority of the Indies psyche provided a welcome explanation for the phenomenon, whilst also providing a narrative for their continuing and hostile presence in Aceh. As David Kloos has recently argued, how the Dutch proceeded to 'manage' *Atjeh-moorden* through the use and implementation of psychiatric methods of removal and containment was "part and parcel of the construction of an Acehnese subject..." (2014a, 25). In many ways, *Atjeh-moorden* was a timely example that the Dutch could use to legitimise their presence in Aceh and to continue to consolidate their control of the region.

Kloos (2014a) has traced the progression of the campaign to build a mental hospital in Sabang and the influence that various reports and investigations into lunacy had on decisions to finally go ahead with building the facility. To briefly summarise Kloos, A.G.H van Sluys, the governor of Aceh from 1918, was the first to imply that *Atjeh-moorden* was the result of a psychological condition that was associated with the inferiority of the native psyche. The leading psychiatrists of the administration, F.H. van Loon, and the Advisor on Native Affairs, R.A Kern, were both asked to carry out investigations on the phenomenon as well as a more general assessment of the native psyche. Although their arguments took very different approaches, neither van Loon nor Kern arrived at the opinion that a causal relationship existed between *Atjeh-moorden* and mental illness. As Kloos says, "Van Loon saw many madmen, but no murdering madmen. Kern saw many murderers, but no mad murderers" (Kloos 2014a, 44).

Why then were numerous rejections of the proposal to build a mental hospital in Sabang finally abruptly overturned? The answer to this question can be found in the more pervasive beliefs of many in the Administration, including van Loon and Kern, that although *Atjeh-moorden* might not be a direct outcome of mental illness, there were qualities of the 'native mind', referred by van Loon as the "abnormalities of the eastern soul" (1927, 434) that predisposed the 'Indies native' to psychological afflictions and, more worryingly for the Administration, meant that they were more easily lead astray by others (Arab Muslims) with anti-colonial intentions.

Throughout the 1920s, van Loon was a head physician and teaching doctor at the STOVIA (*School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen / School for the Training of Native Physicians*).

The STOVIA was a school set up to train native physicians in the approaches which were popular within western psychiatry at the time. Liesbeth Hesselink (2011) has argued that a question lingers over the motivations behind training '*dokter djawa*' (Javanese/native doctors), suggesting that these doctors were considered an extension of the colonial apparatus because they could act as an intermediary, connecting the administration to insular and inaccessible communities: it was thought that by offering medical care, the administration was able to infiltrate and control the general population.

Van Loon's directives as a teacher were informed by negative assumptions based upon a skewed biological determinism regarding the differences between Europeans and non-Europeans. So-called 'culture-bound' syndromes, such as *latah* and *amok*¹⁸, were presumed a clear outcome of these differences. The following excerpt from Dr. van Loon's (1927) presentation to the STOVIA gives a rare insight into these ideas,

Of more importance however, are the causes arising from the psychic nature of the primitive Malay. One of the chief points of difference between his mind and the psychic structure of the Westerner is the readiness with which all kinds of emotional complexes, especially affects, may flood and entirely occupy his consciousness, so that all counter-motives and checks are wiped away, and the affect completely rules thought and action.

In this respect (as in many others) all primitive races resemble very much the psyche of children, the imperfect control of affects of which is familiar to all of us. The higher a people (or individual) is civilized, the better it learns to control its affective reactions. The uncivilized savages show this lack of

18 *Latah* and *amok* are psychological conditions described as typical to Malay culture. Amok refers to a sudden violent outburst, often randomly executed, towards an unknown victim. Amok shares many similarities with *Atjeh-moorden*, however, where the Dutch medical physicians drew a distinction was in the role of religion in the enactment of *Atjeh-moorden*. *Latah* refers to a series of imitative behaviours adopted by sufferers of the condition, where almost exact copying of another's way of walking, talking, and gesticulating is unconsciously performed for a short period of time. The story I shared at the outset of this thesis, where a group of small children imitated Macut, the elderly eccentric woman in Iboih village, seemed to represent a parody of this condition.

control in a very high degree—a slight provocation, fright, e.g., throwing their muscles into a cramplike stiffness, accompanied by a kind of dream-state, and paralyzing him for a considerable length of time. Although the normal Malay does not show this affect-lability as strongly as described above, yet we can trace it everywhere in his life—he is *mata-gelap*¹⁹, not only when an attack of “Amok” is coming on, but also at every fit of anger; he is “maloe”²⁰ when praised, blamed and especially when made fun of in public; and it is after all also one of the chief causes of “Lattah” ...It may be remarked all through their daily lives, everywhere and over and over again, how extraordinarily sensitive they are to suggestion—both individually and of the masses (van Loon 1927, 437-440).

In van Loon’s view, the more worrying aspect of the native’s ‘psychic nature’ was their impulsivity and susceptibility to negative influence. Colonial anxieties about *Atjeh-moorden* were filtered through these racist attitudes and their legitimisation in psychiatric discourse. Although neither van Loon nor Kern supported van Sluys’ belief that lunacy and *Atjeh-moorden* were directly linked, van Sluys persevered with the decision to build a mental asylum in Sabang, one of the most remote places in the archipelago, yet coincidentally, the closest Dutch stronghold to the anxiety-provoking unstable Acehese mainland.

Krankzinnigengesticht Sabang (Sabang Lunatic Asylum) opened in 1927. It housed as many as 1200 patients at one time, who it is said were brought from overcrowded facilities throughout the archipelago. The circumstances preceding the Administration’s sudden decision to overturn a long-standing denial of van Sluys’ proposal suggests that the heightening anxieties had an impact. The underlying influence of concerns about religious fanaticism cannot be understated,

19 The literal translation of ‘*Mata-gelap*’ is ‘black-eyed’ and refers to a darkening of the eyes when someone is experiencing rage. This phrase is used commonly in Aceh today.

20 ‘*Maloe*’ (‘*malu*’ in Bahasa Indonesia) refers to a feeling of social embarrassment. In this context, it implies a deep shame. I go into greater detail in defining the emotion of *malu* in contemporary Acehese society in Chapter Five, where I discuss contemporary practices of public humiliation which are central to state-implementation of punitive shari’ah. The connection between ‘madness’, *malu*, and the consequent management of populations has its foundations here but can be traced in contemporary manifestations of social control.

as I will show in my exploration of the subsequent building of another facility in Sabang: a quarantine station to house *haji* (pilgrims) upon their return from Mecca.

Contagion and quarantine

Dutch anxieties about religious fanaticism and its manifestation in violence towards Europeans, was heightened by the annual *haji* (pilgrimage) which had been operating between the Indies and Mecca for centuries. The fear of ideological contamination, as well as the health implications of vast numbers of traveling Indies subjects during periods of increasingly dangerous public health epidemics like cholera, syphilis, and malaria throughout the 1800s (Chastel 2007), coincided with the Dutch appropriation of existing *haji* networks (Alexanderson 2014) and the building of a quarantine station on *Pulau Rubiah* (Rubiah Island) in Sabang.

Anxieties about contagion were focused heavily on the boundaries of the archipelago; the sites most associated with cultural and ecological transference and exchange. Simon Schama's (1988) account of Dutch home cleanliness manuals for Dutch housewives provides an important consideration for how the Dutch Administration in the Indies may have thought about contamination, in relation to the porousness of the archipelago they deigned to control (referenced in J. Taylor 2011b). In these manuals, the entry points of the home were considered hot spots for invasive contagions: to be clean was to be patriotic because it signified a dedication to defend the front-line of the home, symbolic of a nationalist agenda towards protecting a clean and pure population from the threats of intrusion (Schama 1988; J. Taylor 2011b). How might this serve as a metaphor for how the Dutch extended this thinking to their management of the colonies? How was the doorstep of the Indies archipelago kept clean and defended against unsavoury intrusions? Given the anxieties caused by the *haji* at a time of heightened disease and the threat of pan-Islam, Sabang represented the dirty doorstep to the Indies. The fervour with which the Dutch Administration kept that doorstep clean increased alongside fears of pan-Islam.

Alexanderson shows the underlying Dutch anxieties regarding these movements which put Indies subjects into close contact with "dangerous passengers" such as Hadrami Arabs and Meccan sheikhs in Jeddah, which had served as a quarantine station prior to its relocation

to Pulau Rubiah (Alexanderson 2014, 1021). As described earlier, the view that the native was highly suggestible and impulsive led the Dutch to believe that any encounters with 'real Muslims' (Arab Muslims) would lead to literal interpretations of Qur'anic teachings of *jihad*, posing a threat to the managed stability of the Dutch East Indies. This essentialist view of Malay difference from European civilisation manifested in the Administration's obsession with the observation and monitoring of Indies peoples' movements. The long-history of pilgrimage from the archipelago to Mecca presented a problem, a porous border that could not be easily closed without stoking resentment amongst the population. This awareness of resentment is clear in the government's policy to allow unrestricted freedom of worship. The only means of controlling this site of contamination was to appropriate the existing transportation networks and present an up-graded Dutch-run service to Mecca as though a gift from a beneficent ruler (Alexanderson 2014).

To receive the pilgrims from the Dutch ships, facilities were established on Pulau Rubiah, a small fringing island on the northern extremity of Pulau Weh, which had previously been a site of either exile or sanctuary for Ummi Sarah Rubiah. Built in the early 1930s, Rubiah Quarantine Station, facilitated the monitoring of the pilgrims prior to their re-entry into the general population. That diseases like cholera, syphilis, and malaria were thought to be connected to the potential for lunacy, was one aspect of Dutch anxieties. Van Loon suggested that these illnesses could be the cause of the "partly hallucinatory confusions" that lead to erratic and violent behaviour precipitating *Atjeh-moorden* (van Loon 1927, 435). Dr. J. Groneman's (1904) report, *Is Sabang Gezond?* (Is Sabang Healthy?), illustrates the obsessiveness with which the Administration thought about and tried to control infectious diseases in the islands of Sabang. His report offers a detailed account of his observations of issues of public health in Sabang, specifically, the island's natural barriers to malarial infection.

Through a lengthy explanation of his bio-medical formulations regarding the transmission of malaria by mosquitoes, Groneman recognises that, in theory, an island is best able to prevent the easy transmission of the disease because of its material boundaries. He implies that a dedicated focus on managing a firm boundary between insiders and outsiders, would limit transmission amongst the population, enabling the island to become a leading example in

the quest to eradicate the disease. It could be deduced that moving the quarantine station to Pulau Rubiah may have been based upon the advice of specialists like Groneman. Concerns of contamination and moves to contain outsiders or those passing through Sabang, away from the core population who were so important to the running of the port and other economically important productions, would have been paramount for the Administration. However, these fears of physical illness clearly overlaid other concerns for the feeble-minded Indies Malays whose resistance to colonialism was clearly waged in religious terms. Those returned *hajjis* who attracted attention from Dutch and Indies over-seers of the *hajj* may never have left Pulau Rubiah.

When the Dutch Administration began construction of the quarantine station, the island turned out to be inhabited. I found a report (Burgerlijke Openbare Werken 1927) in the collections of *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia* (National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia), written by the unnamed head engineer describing in immense details the construction of the station, including the associated costs and timeline to completion. In addition to this practical information, there was a small section within one paragraph explaining a difficulty the engineer had experienced when he was faced with an unexpected presence. A man named Tengku Makmud was discovered living in a small wooden house on the island and it becomes clear from the precise language and reassuring tone used in the report that Makmud is being carefully handled to avoid any delays or tensions associated with the venture. To assuage Makmud, he is paid to move his house to make way for the project and, as the report's author casually mentions, the very same financial incentive can be used again should the facilities require expansion.

The report also includes a photograph of Makmud and two unnamed companions (figure 8). The three men are staring directly at the camera in a rare moment where the colonised are depicted outside the typical scenarios of cultural performance and subservience to the coloniser. It was only in my incidental encounter with this image, in a report dense with logistical details that I recognised the absence of representations of individuals in collections, such as KITLV's vast online image archive, which I had for so long been immersed.



figure 7. (left) *View from Pulau Rubiah towards Sabang, 1927, scanned image, accessed at Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2015.*

figure 8. (below) *Tengku Makmud (right) and two unnamed men look out from Makmud's land on Pulau Rubiah, 1927, scanned image, accessed at Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2015.*





figure 9. (above) *The main buildings of Pulau Rubiah Quarantine Station built to house haji (pilgrims) from Mecca, 1927, scanned image, accessed at Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2015.*

figure 10. (left) *Dormitories within the Pulau Rubiah Quarantine Station built to house haji (pilgrims) from Mecca, 1927, scanned image, accessed at Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2015.*

One day when Eva and I were typically lazing about at the beach, I asked her if she had ever heard the name Makmud, hoping that she might know how he was connected to Iboih's contemporary community. Once I had finished telling her about Makmud Eva recalled a common phrase, *Belanda pula labu* (the wandering Dutch pumpkin plant), used in Aceh to describe the bizarre mentality of the Dutch in their procurement of land and disenfranchisement of Acehense people. As Eva explained: "when they, the Dutch, plant the pumpkin tree, so the plant go everywhere until it passes the border of the land of the other. Then Holland people say, 'Look! This my land because my pumpkin plant arrives until here'. So the people must move off the land."

The significance of this report, beyond Eva's illuminating insight into the traces of colonialism in everyday parlance, is that it incidentally captures a presence otherwise omitted from the public record of Dutch expansion into the small archipelago of Sabang. Other than Makmud, I have found no other representations of either the quarantine station or mental hospital's inhabitants; both facilities conjuring only vague shadowy figures of those who passed through them. In contrast, Tengku Makmud is there, both in text and in image, a witness to the colonial mind, its paranoia informing policy-decisions which saw Dutch officials undertake the

most challenging engineering feats in environments which must have been intimidating at best. During my fieldwork in Sabang I made many trips to Rubiah Island to experience the environments within which the returning *haji* and Dutch overseers lived. I joined fieldtrips with 'Sabang Heritage Society' and a visiting archaeologist from Medan and observed the uncovering of the old ruins which once served as the main operating facilities of the quarantine station. The physical landscape is formidable. The oppressive heat and mosquitoes in the humid months, as well as the dense jungle and snakes, would have been a challenge for both Dutch and Indies inhabitants. Tengku Makmud's cool inquisitive stare back at the disembodied gaze of the approaching imperialist suggests a knowing, an expectation of the impending unruly reach of the pumpkin plant into his once quiet world.

Conclusion

How we arrive at an arrangement of the fragments and half-told stories of a place's past is but one of a range of possibilities. What I have attempted to show in this chapter is that Sabang's histories are constantly revised and represented in alternate, politically informed compositions; a montage of ever-changing interconnected constellations. They are performatively told, by locals who recast themselves into the *cerita tua* and the landscape, and in how documented histories surface to speak with these narratives and performances of place. Depending upon where one stands to read these historical traces, and importantly *how* one reads them, radically alters the narratives we can draw from them. This is how sanctuary so easily becomes exile; how quarantine becomes contamination; and how beneficence becomes punishment.

Sitting with ambiguity is uncomfortable for those desiring a firm position and a linear historical inventory of place. Yet, if we allow these traces and resonances to co-exist, we move away from reductive identifications which limit our capacities to make sense of present tensions and political investments. The current socio-political climate in the islands of Sabang and on the Acehese mainland, are recognisable in these *cerita tua*; the sedimentation of Sabang's past as a site of containment and sanctuary resurface in contemporary narratives of exile and demonisation. The process of envisaging these new layers of these histories within present articulations of difference will become clearer as writer and reader progress through the

coming chapters. First, in Chapter Three which follows, I revisit the stories I have arranged in this chapter, to ask how re-reading them with an ear and an eye to the performative everyday might shift the resonances of thematic repetitions, such as madness, resistance, sanctuary, and exile to speak to contemporary contestations of identity and belonging. It is this emerging discourse of contemporary identity in Sabang that then becomes a lens for understanding the intricacies of Acehese nationalist discourse and its articulation through the performative enactments of punitive shari'ah.

Chapter 3: Towards performance

“They call us crazy
because we do the thing that people do not think”
(Eva, 2014)

... concepts have teeth, and teeth that bite through time
(Simpson 2014, 100)

figure 11.(following page) *Eva removing layers of moss from a headstone in Merbabu Graveyard (Sabang’s Foreigner Cemetery), 2015, digital photograph taken by the author.*

СКО НЧАЛСЯ

20^{го} ФЕВРАЛЯ

1901 г.

УСК. БР. ПОЯТІНІ



Eva, Maarten, and I are sitting in the main room of Ali and Katie's house. I have been staying here for months now, settling into the rhythms of Ali and Katie's life, helping Ali run the guest house when Katie is away by deciphering the European guest's heavily accented *Bahasa Inggris* (English language) and strange requests. It is the middle of the rainy season and there is nothing to do but stay inside, the humid monsoonal days of endless *waktu kosong* (empty time) creating a lethargy amongst all in the village. It has now been four days of *mati lampu* (dead electric), since a tree fell on power-lines near the village, and it is really starting to grind on everyone: fridges long warm, fans standing still, water pumps idle and showers not working: All there is to do is sit as still as possible and talk.

My handy Dutch friend, Maarten, who spends half of each year in Pulau Weh, arrived around midday: we had arranged to pass the time by translating the letters I had copied in Leiden University's special collections library. Then, an hour later, Eva arrived. Bored at her house, she had taken a chance between downfalls of torrential rain to visit. A typical rhythm in Pulau Weh: conversations last for as long as the rain, while movement lasts for as long as the lull.

When Eva arrives, Maarten is translating a letter, dated 1932, written by Dr Latumeten, the Ambonese-born head physician of *Krankzinnigengesticht Sabang* (Sabang Lunatic Asylum). At that time, we had not realised Latumeten was one of the *dokter djawa* (native doctor) trained by the STOVIA²¹, and so could not understand why the letter was so peculiarly composed. Maarten is finding the whole exercise amusing, as he tries to unravel the doctor's thick convoluted prose. He is describing how a person might be misdiagnosed with a psychiatric condition and that in actuality, they might simply be responding to their environment. The implication is that resistance might be mistaken for madness. Eva and I are struggling to understand the subtleties of Maarten's translation but Latumeten's sentiments eventually do poke through.

With enough battery left on my phone, I recorded part of our conversation. What follows is a verbatim transcription of an amusing and insightful moment:

Maarten: This is really funny, the way he says it. It is hard to say if he is being

21 *School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen* / School for the Training of Native Physicians

polite or if he does not really mean what he says. You know? When someone chooses the words carefully?

Me: Ah, yes, I think I know what you mean. So, it sounds like he is saying one thing, but he could just be saying the 'right' thing? Not what he really thinks?

Maarten: Yeah, like that. But Jo, I don't know for sure. It's just something about how he uses the words, it's strange Dutch. Nobody would speak like that now.

Eva: So... I don't know what you're talking about. Can you tell me, does it mean that Aceh people *tidak gila* (not crazy) or not?

Maarten: I'm not sure. But I think he means that. He – the doctor - isn't sure if they are really crazy or if the fighting made them like that. He says here that love of your mother and love of your country are strong emotions - high level emotions - that are not characteristics of someone who is crazy.

Me: So, because the people who did *Atjeh Moorden* (typical Aceh killings) were maybe fighting to protect their country, he thinks they were not crazy?

Maarten: This is the question. I think they couldn't understand if the Aceh people were crazy or if they were really strong mentality.

Eva: Iya! This is what I want to say but I don't know in English! Eh Jo, if we talk like this it make me remember when I'm in high school we learn about Teuku Umar, he's from Meulaboh. Try to read about him. He's very clever. He go inside the Dutch, and then he turns. He stole all the things. And then the day that Dutch coming back, want to fight in the west coast, you know what they do? They take all the bum up, like this (she is bending over with her backside in the air). They make black... (Maarten and I are laughing at her performance) ... No! This serious, this my dad teach me and tell me and I

read about this great thing about Acehnese people, they do like that because between crazy and very intelligent. You know what they do? How many guys, they show the bum, they make black here and *Belanda* (Dutch) people they are coming with binoculars, “Oh fuck, they have many *meriam* (cannon)!” But it’s not true, it’s just the arse. Yeah, they put the black colour from the bottom of the pots, you know, from the fire? It’s Teuku Umar’s brain. He is our hero, Teuku Umar. Try to look this book. They call us crazy because we do the thing that people do not think.

(Excerpt from a recorded conversation with Eva and Maarten, Iboih, 2015)

This impromptu translation session significantly influenced how I would proceed to engage with documented histories and textual analysis in this research. Before I began this research, I had regarded the ‘act of translation’ merely as a practical task, the documents themselves were inert and static objects that held the details of a story whose impact was felt long ago. I had not yet grasped its performative and interactive potential; how it might be understood as a collaborative dialogical process, as ‘*acting* translation’. Eva’s presence and performative interjection highlighted instead the re-colonising effects of uncritical engagements with archival collections and offered an opportunity to radically challenge these processes by cultivating collaborative, multi-lingual, and cross-cultural engagements with documented histories.

In the previous chapter, I arranged fragmented half-told histories as a fluid and changeable composite of Sabang’s “stories-so-far” (Massey 2005, 5). In this chapter, I revisit these narratives, prioritising contemporary everyday performance that contest and add complexity to dominant interpretations of Sabang’s pasts. This approach enlivens ‘history’s texts’ (Pérez 2004), showing how the past is made and remade in the ongoing performativity of the past within contemporary social interaction.

In this chapter, contemporary performances which draw on the past can influence both how researchers engage with the traces of these histories in everyday contemporary life and how we might re-read documents beyond our initial translation. Eva’s performative disruption of Latumeten’s letter not only drew attention to the contemporary traces in everyday performance,

it demanded that documented and oral traditions be engaged continuously, in a circular process, where each informs an orientation towards the other. As Ann Laura Stoler has so cogently argued, there are “*uneven temporal sedimentations* in which imperial formations leave their marks” (2013, 2; italics in original). In Sabang, these sedimentations surface and rupture through everyday evocations of difference between mainlanders and islanders, and as such, reinvoked these imperial histories and their formations.

Before I turn to these vibrant performances and the re-reading of dominant histories that they permit, I briefly examine two key moments in my fieldwork that acted as a catalyst for recognising the complex intersections of recorded and orally transmitted histories. First, I delve deeper into the political implications of the differential access Eva, Maarten, and I had in relation to documented histories and, therefore the ethical necessity of researchers to interrupt the recolonising potential of our methods of translation. Second, I reflect on how my engagement with local heritage projects radically altered how I understood the relationship between documented histories and stories told intergenerationally through oral traditions.

Acts of translation

In the anecdote above, Eva, Maarten, and I were each positioned differently according to access and our capacities to engage with documented histories. This was clear in how we could each participate in the conversation: who relied on whom for translation and clarification; who could read the documents in their first language; who could gain access to the materials in the first place, and so on. I, an Australian student with comparatively little connection to either the Netherlands or Indonesia, could easily gain access to the archival collections in Jakarta and the Netherlands. My academic background and affiliations meant that I was regarded as having a legitimate purpose: I was doing research. Furthermore, I was supported by my university who covered the costs for me to add a detour to the Netherlands onto an existing funded academic trip to the United Kingdom as well as my principle fieldwork costs.

I easily organised a one-week visitor’s permit for *Universiteit Leiden* (Leiden University) and

whilst there, librarians assisted me, retrieving documents from KITLV²² and the library's own collections, which I could read and photograph at my leisure. Of the three of us, Maarten could read the documents in his native language, an aspect of colonialism's lingering presence in a postcolonial state's capacity to connect with, and contest representations of its pasts. He could independently form his own interpretations which he then relayed, in English, to Eva and I. Eva, on the other hand, could neither access nor read the documents independently, relying on me to retrieve the documents, trusting that I would share them with her when I returned and then having to take Maarten's translation as fact. Of the three of us, Eva, the person with the most connection to the words in those pages had the least capacity to engage with them.

Before leaving Pulau Weh for the United Kingdom and then the Netherlands, I met Eva on the beach in front of her guesthouse and restaurant. I explained the themes of the conference I was attending in Bristol and the activities I had planned for my four-day stay in Leiden. While I spoke, Eva studied my face with a look of concern. I expected her to question my project or my intentions in going to the archives but when she finally spoke she clearly had other concerns. She said, "Let me pull your eyebrow, I can't have my sis going there with eyebrows like that. They need to take you seriously over there, let me take my tool from the house and I will pull them for you, make you look more respect." As she plucked my eyebrows, she returned to the topic of my trip. Counter to my assumption that she was little interested, it was obvious she had been mulling it over in her mind, the job of running to the house to retrieve the tweezers and the arrangement of my head in her lap, a diversion of sorts.

As she plucked the hairs from between my eyes she said, "When you find our history, you will bring it back to us, won't you?" I assumed she meant that I should bring back the information that she could not access, that I would translate so I could interpret the documents in contrast with the memories conveyed in oral traditions in villages around the island. "Of course, I will make copies of the documents if I find something. Maarten can help me understand them. I hope I can find something, I only have four days." When I returned later that month with reams of photocopied documents, I had something concrete: physical materials, evidence that

22 *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* / The Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies.

stories existed. Although I had only a vague idea of what stories they held, it was only when Maarten, Eva, and I engaged collectively with those documents that I realised that what they really contained was the possibility of a reply. This possibility emerged, not through Maarten and I working to turn Dutch words into English so that I could 'tell the colonial history of Sabang', but in that moment of rupture when Eva could engage in the translation directly. It was in the speaking back: an elicitation created through contact with the ambiguities and strange slips in translation that made the documents visceral and tangible objects.

Eva's recollections of her father's oral testimony, the way she likely imitated the performative way he had told the story to her as a child, disrupted the singular voice of the archive. Maarten's nuanced reading and his inference of meanings deeply embedded in the letters, rendered Dr Latumeten's sentiments and his politics deeply ambiguous, allowing Eva's contestation to take on an even deeper significance. What we were doing was more than deciphering the words of these documents: we were performing an ethnography of the archives (Stoler 2009). We were subsequently negotiating power within our own dialogue and making visible the ongoing implications for how histories are told and retold.

The slippages in these attempts to relay information in several different languages, whilst showing the difficulties of such a process, also created strange and amusing narratives. The moments of misunderstanding would take us down unexpected paths, eliciting memories from Eva which would never come up in general conversation. I began to see the structure of such a conversation as a productive decolonising methodology. Not only was it an opportunity to see the dynamics of intersectionality playing out between us, it also elicited entirely unpredictable accounts from the people involved. Through the rambunctious and performative memorialising of people like Eva, the carefully crafted mundanity of the archives became vibrant sites of multivocality.

The most disruptive ramification of this process emerged in relation to predominating themes of Acehnese identity that I had otherwise left unquestioned. In Eva's account of her father's story, the recurring theme of Acehnese resistance resurfaced but it connected with the specific example of the orang sakit jiwa, whom otherwise appear in the histories of Sabang as one-dimensional caricatures of the 'native mind'. In Eva's performative evocation, they emerge rather

as ambiguous figures, whose ability to think “between crazy and very intelligent” question their role in anti-colonial resistance and therefore, in the foundations of contemporary Acehese national identity. These qualities are often attributed to mainland battles, especially where they involved Teuku Umar. However, as I show later in this chapter, these qualities can be read in Sabang’s histories and contemporary performances of identity through revisionary performances of the story of the rattan basket. By employing a flexible and responsive approach to engaging both documented histories and everyday performances catalysed by collective memorialising and subversive reconfiguration of local identity, these slippages in the dominant representation of island-mainlander repaltionships become accessible and vibrant sites of historical revision.

Learning to ‘mess with genies’²³

I learned similar lessons when, early in my fieldwork, I was fortunate to meet a local female heritage researcher named Trisnani Murnilawati (Nani). Nani had long been painstakingly tracing Sabang’s colonial history, research which had culminated in one major publication for the collective heritage group, Sabang Heritage Society (SHS) (Rahman 2013)²⁴. SHS, although presenting itself as an independent group, is affiliated with and funded by the local government. It also has members who concomitantly act as government representatives. The main priority of SHS, as explained by Nani and her co-workers, is to increase public knowledge and recognition of Sabang’s colonial past by promoting the conservation of surviving colonial sites. Alongside these concerns, current political interest in local heritage is rooted in the broader economic agenda which sees historical preservation as part of its tourism and marketing strategy. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Four, Aceh is increasingly marketed, nationally and internationally, as a halal tourism destination, where alongside specifically Islamic *objek wisata* (tourism sites), superficial accounts of Sabang’s colonial history are offered to cruise-ship passengers as they briefly pass through Sabang.

23 Parts of this section have been previously published. See, ‘Impasse or productive intersection?: Learning to ‘mess with genies’ in collaborative heritage research’ for a more detailed exploration of the epistemological impasses and productive intersections arising from my collaborative work with Nani (Lariat 2018).

24 Unfortunately, Nani was not credited for this work, despite undertaking all research and writing of the manuscript.

Complex counter-narratives to the standard account of the successful Dutch port, such as the role of the mental hospital and the quarantine station as systems of social control, are unnecessary deviations. However, such a glorification of Dutch influence conflicts with representations of Aceh as an impervious state of fierce anti-colonialist resistance. This uncomfortable position in relation to Acehnese identity narratives is in constant negotiation and a site of tension for Sabang residents.

Despite our shared intention to reach below the accepted narrative of Sabang's histories as limited to the port, Nani and I approached research in very different ways. We privileged different types of evidence, with Nani intent on focusing on tangible evidence in the archives and in the field-sites around Sabang, while I was more interested in engaging with locals to understand how Sabang's histories had been passed down orally through the generations. For months, I regarded these differences as a fundamental epistemological impasse in the ways we thought about research evidence. However, as time passed I began to see that we were each guided towards and away from evidence and that in our own ways were influenced by different motivations and different accesses to evidence.

During a conversation on the ferry one day, as we traveled together from Sabang to the mainland, I asked Nani why she did not want to do any interviews with living residents. I was struck by her response: it remains with me so clearly. She said: "The genie doesn't just mess with you in everyday life; they can mess with the past, they can mess with your research." This was not the first time I had heard about these strange spirits. Genies (*jinn*, *genii*) are spirits in Islamic mythology who co-exist alongside humankind and diverse accounts of how these spirits interact with humans abound throughout the Islamic world. Generally speaking, they can take the form of any living or non-living entity and can be either good or evil in their actions (Khalifa and Hardie 2005) but in Sabang, they are most often described as untrustworthy and manipulative presences who occupy abandoned or uninhabited spaces. On several occasions during my fieldwork these figures were invoked to explain the unexplainable: to account for a reluctance to travel at night, or to dissuade me from attempting to visit heritage sites abandoned to the jungle. I made assumptions that they were stories embedded in the psyche of people at a young age aimed at curtailing their movements to the safety of the village.

At first, for me, the genie had simply been a curious and sometimes frustrating obstacle to getting on with our research. There were important considerations that had to be discussed and arranged before we could visit a ruin in the jungle or the abandoned bunkers and tunnels around town. As our partnership developed, I began to realise the pervasive influence that they could have in all aspects of research. During our conversation on the ferry, Nani was trying to warn me against believing too easily the stories I heard from local people: it was possible the stories had been manipulated by genies. She suggested I retain a degree of scepticism when engaging with local stories and a process of verification between these histories and the documented accounts in the archives. It seemed to me at the time that Nani's belief in the genies and her assertion that they could influence research were intimately connected to the tensions I had felt during our discussions of methodology. It did not occur to me immediately that Nani likely felt the same frustration with my constant maneuvering away from the recorded histories in the archives towards ethnographic interview as a principal method. My initial dismissal of the genies as superstition and my uncompromising privileging of people's testimony was perhaps a curious contradiction for Nani.

Subsequent conversations throughout our collaboration destabilised my initial response that the genies could only be understood as symptomatic of deeply rooted differences in epistemology. From her descriptions of personal encounters with them in various research contexts, from the reading room of the national archives to heritage sites in the jungle, I began to imagine them as presences guiding and shaping our ways of seeing. I could visualise them as both literal and metaphorical presences, and began to recognise my own ways of seeing, and not seeing, evidence. Genies became, for me, an invitation to reposition my expectations in relation to the ontologies of the spaces in which I was both living and working.

They became a point around which I could re-configure the assumptive voice in my own practice, and from which to learn to read the contexts alongside, rather than from above, those around me. Finally, the genies came to represent the impossibility of knowing beyond the boundaries of the cultural frameworks that construct our realms of experience and understanding. The genies reminded me of the multitude of pathways we can take through a field-site, an archive collection, or, a physical or social landscape, and the ways individuals with specific yet shifting

positionalities are drawn to or away from, evidence. Nani's experience of working in the genres' midst is an example of a reflexive engagement: that pause of reflection on what it is that mediates our decisions, our attractions to evidence and to ethnographic experiences. It also seeks consideration of what types of evidence we are led towards because of a 'politics of access', dependent on the particular contexts and relationships we encounter in the field. As I show throughout the remainder of this thesis, this critical stance and reflexive process focused my attention on the contemporary everyday performativity of identity that surface in 'uneven sedimentations' (Stoler 2013) of the past.

Space, place, and performances of belonging

As I argued in the previous chapter, certain historical narratives become accepted over time. What informs this process of sedimentation? And how do we delve beneath what 'turns out' to be dominant to hear other memories and connections to place? While I have begun this task of interpretation in the previous chapter, I have yet to delve into the subtleties of everyday social interaction, and the implications for how space, place, and belonging are thought about in Sabang. There are several key scholars who work at the intersections of geography and history, to propose contesting ways of thinking about the relationship between time and space (Massey 2005; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). It is to this intersection, and the role of everyday performance as a living history that an imaginative and decolonial reading of Sabang's pasts and present come into view.

It is not happenstance that some histories are told in specific ways, but a complex political process. As Foucault argued long ago, writing a history "means writing the history of the present" ([1975] 1995, 31): history is the re-inscription of arrangements of power within the demands of the present that can only be understood genealogically, as a tracing of the imputations of present formations of power. McGranahan makes this point when she says, "the making of history is a social and political process, not a neutral rendering of what happened in the past" (2010, 3). Hodgkin and Radstone extend the politics of how histories are retold by arguing that "Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward" (Hodgkin and Radstone 2003, 1).

These political processes have implications for how we think about place (Massey 1995). While these broad processes are important considerations, it is the minutiae of everyday social performances that are evocative of tensions between island and mainland identities: the performative exchange of the story of the rattan basket is one pervasive example of how counter-histories emerge through embodied exchanges in the cultural ecotones of the harbour and passenger ships, which form the geographical and cultural interstices where identity is contested. As I show through the rearticulation of the Dutch term, *Atjeh-moorden* (Aceh murder) to the Acehnese, *Aceh pungo* (Aceh madness), cultural revision of historical narratives of madness and the 'eastern soul/native mind' contests contemporary postcolonial reinscriptions of these underlying assertions of inferiority. The performance of the basket beckons a reevaluation of numerous associated implications for how Sabang residents are orientated within broader Acehnese national identity narratives.

It is 'how' counter-narratives are told which I am most interested in exploring in this chapter. Throughout the four-year period of my fieldwork, it was in the everyday social interactions that diverse reinscription of fragmented stories of the past came up, again and again. These moments of insight into a deeper political legacy of those histories which have "turned out to be dominant" (Massey 1995, 186) enabled a renewed capacity to hear and feel the tensions around identity and belonging in Sabang. As I explained earlier, Eva provoked me to engage more critically with how I was engaging with recorded histories. She, like Dami, illustrated the centrality of embodied and performative storytelling to Acehnese identity. For Eva, the story about the *meriam* (cannons) is a constant reference point for how she understands colonisation and Acehnese responses. It also demonstrates how these histories are open to ambiguous and playful memorialising through storytelling within families and communities, allowing otherwise stagnant over-arching historical renditions to be made and remade through contemporary social relations.

Jay Emery (2018) points out that many social science conceptualisations of belonging centre their analysis on embodied memory and the everyday engagements that people have with space. This is evident in Dवेश Soneji's work, for example, which highlights how "... identity can be produced through acts of memory" (2004, 31), the impressions of which might be considered,

“living artefacts” (39). In addition to this type of collective memory work, Emery points to another more conscious enactment of belonging that is often shared within communities and which focus on “collectively shared place histories” (2018, 80). Collective memory is often based upon hardships and nostalgic memorialising through deliberate acts of memory work that surface as the “repetition of direct embodied interactions and performances with other people and space [...] how forms of everyday belonging are produced” (79).

Paul Stoller (1997) argues that histories that are expressed through the body using oral traditions, performances, and ritual, have been marginalised in processes of historicisation that privilege histories that are written down. However, it is not only the formally recognised transmission of *cerita tua* (old stories), through intergenerational storytelling or the production of demonstrations of traditional dance that offer insight into a place’s historical trajectory. As I show in this chapter, complex negotiations of the past can also be recognised in fleeting everyday interactions, where ambiguity allows a subtle contestation of those histories which are dominant in both oral tradition and documented or recorded historical accounts. It is this complexity, of contestation of all prevailing accounts, that surface through the utterance of the rattan basket, where identity is kept deliberately unstable, not by resolving conflict or ‘putting things right’ through a counter-privileging of oral tradition to find a ‘true’ version of the story.

It is to these areas of cultural and historical expression, of identity and place, that anthropologists ought to look for counter-histories and alternatives to the hegemonic scripts of history. These strategies promote a shift in power, away from sanctioned historical accounts towards groups and individuals otherwise marginalised within such accounts. Dwight Conquergood (2002) makes this point with reference to Foucault’s (1980) concept of ‘subjugated knowledges’, which refer to knowledge that is not written down: the embodied, the oral, the local, are denied legitimacy against the type of knowledge which is valued as objective, scientific, empirical. Conquergood says,

What gets squeezed out by this epistemic violence is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, covert—and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out. Dominant epistemologies that

link knowing with seeing are not attuned to meanings that are masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded, or hidden in context (2002, 146).

While these earlier alerts to embodied and subjugated knowledges have informed my turn towards everyday performance, it is Diana Taylor's (2003) conceptualising of the spaces that such performances might occupy and the disruptive potential they might offer to revisiting and re-reading recorded histories that I am most excited to explore. Taylor's (2003) explanation of how archives interact with what she calls 'the repertoire' offers insight into how everyday performance emerged, in my research, as a lens through which to engage imaginatively with counter-narratives in archival documents that I had previously passed over. Taylor explains that the archive is often falsely regarded as static and unmediated, as though the documents, maps, and recordings held within them have not been carefully selected, organised and analysed. Taylor argues that archives are *always* mediated. Their meanings are attributed by their place within collections and the complex mesh of politically informed motivations which make up the contexts of their inclusion and later analysis. She continues,

The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge (D. Taylor 2003, 20).

Taylor is not simply urging a rethinking of what might constitute evidence. She is suggesting that we recognise the archive as non-static and in continual process. Such recognition demands then that researchers occupy a space of betweenness – of mediation – where archives can be revisited through those aspects of embodied memory that can be engaged through ethnographic practice.

As Taylor argues, the archive and repertoire are not binary arrangements of contrastingly subjugated and celebrated histories. Neither are completely representative of 'truth'; such a simplistic division does not lead to a more equitable or revealing set of outcomes. What Taylor is saying is that these repositories of knowledge of the past work in concert to cultivate a narrative that we call history. Dami's stories are no less imbued with power than the Dutch records and analyses of them by contemporary scholars. There are unconscious biases which

inform how stories are told, heard and analysed. Yet, this process can be critically engaged to ask after the motivations informing the retelling, no matter whether it is oral or recorded, performative or scholarly. These repositories of historical reproduction become enmeshed and capable of being read in concert, allowing recorded documents to be enlivened by oral traditions and everyday performance. We can access alternate possibilities for a place's pasts, present and future. This is what I sensed emerging in the moment described above, where Eva interjected into the unproblematised transmission of translation: the enlivening of the ambiguous possibilities for reinterpretation not only provoked a rethinking of recorded histories, but of where and how to look and listen for similar disruptive moments.

Eva's interjection pushed me to revisit how the performance of the rattan basket might be understood, both in relation to contemporary identity and historically manifested conceptions of place. The performance does not surface two competing memories of the story: that is, the colonial record and the oral transmission of local collective memories. Rather, it calls forth multiple spatial, temporal impressions of a relationship to power which has many manifestations. These modes of historical narrativisation are entangled, both at their inception and in the present political contexts within which the phrase is uttered again.

Pérez offers a "decolonial imaginary" (2004, 124) as a strategy for enacting such a practice. In the opening passage of her article *Queering the Borderlands*, Pérez cites her frustration with history's texts and archives as pushing her to conjure her own imagined queer presences. In the absence of queer representation, Pérez is arguing for a politics of reimagining historical records, to "interpret documents differently" (2004, 124): if the hegemony of white colonialist heteronormativity actively erases non-normative presences, it is only with creative imagination that we can conjure alternate histories. Pérez actively reads historical records from her own location and although she does not explicitly acknowledge her capacity to envisage a queer presence in 'history's texts' is only possible through her own experiences and performances of identity and selfhood, it is certainly embodied knowledge that facilitates such an imaginative engagement. The past is undoubtedly reframed through contemporary configurations of desire, sexuality, and identity.

This reframing of the past is central to how Sabang residents negotiate contemporary issues

of identity. Central to this process is cultivating alternate identities for those historical figures who are both so central to contemporary stereotypes and erased from colonial records. The lunatic and their basket are reproduced through their traces and absences within the archive and the repertoire.

Everyday performance as living history

The interdisciplinary field of performance studies offers several important theoretical frames with which to understand the connections between a place's pasts and its contemporary contestations of identity. Conquergood contends that "performance is an essentially contested concept" and that it is the disagreement which is generated by attempts to define it that "is itself part of its meaning" (1995, 137). Such openness to potential uses lends itself to exciting possibilities for cross-disciplinary engagement. As such, performance has been increasingly used as both a mode of analysis and a way of conceiving of methodology by practitioners from a range of disciplines relevant to this study, including anthropology, cultural geography, island studies, queer studies and performance studies. Its openness to redefinition connects with the theoretical standpoints of many of these disciplines, but especially resonates with queer studies.

While 'living history' refers to the practice of developing theatrical representations of historical periods, I use it here to infer that performance need not be limited to stages or dramatic reproductions of the past. Performance recasts thematic traces from the past into the concerns and issues facing a community in the present. In Sabang, this is so recognisable in social interactions which establish through the reiteration of discourses grounded in narratives inherited from the past, within contemporary identity narratives.

Performance and performativity are key theoretical and methodological cornerstones of this research. While I explore the implications of these concepts throughout this thesis, in direct reference to aspects of my fieldwork relationships and the enactments of identity and belonging that I saw in Iboih and Banda Aceh, it is important to establish some key theoretical underpinnings here. Cultural production has been theorised using a performance lens in two key ways, leading to different theoretical insights (Gregson and Rose 2000; Nelson 2014).

First, anthropologists like Goffman (1959), Turner (1979), and Schechner (1977, 1986) have shown that social life is inherently performative, conceptualising the social as a stage upon which actors, somewhat consciously, perform to a defined role. Second, the poststructuralist concept of performativity, which was most critically outlined by Judith Butler through the specific example of gender. This research is heavily informed by the latter, particularly for Butler's (1990, 1993, 2004) theorisation of the unconscious discursive reproduction of gender through the unceasing citation of intelligible identity categories. Butler importantly points out that within the reproduction of norms, there is the possibility of slippage, where the performance does not completely reproduce the norm. Indeed, it cannot, which is the basis of the hegemonic category's power to coerce performances that strive to meet it.

Throughout this research, I am drawn to the instances where you can see both the re-inscription of normative discursive categories and the disruptive moments, both conscious and unconscious, where hegemonic categories are revealed as unstable. This thread runs through this thesis, both through the reproduction of historically embedded identity narratives, and in later chapters, in the contemporary reproduction of gender relations. In these latter explorations, it is the agency of young women that I am dedicated to revealing, through the everyday negotiations they make between what is expected and what is desired. Performance is also recognised throughout, in the intimate spaces cultivated in research relationships. These spaces produce a strange reconfiguration of performance, that is dialogical and often-exceedingly exaggerated, as though it is taking place on a stage. In this way, Goffman's dramaturgy is an important reference point.

Dwight Conquergood (1985, 1991, 1992, 1995, 2002) is perhaps the best-known advocate for performance as a method of ethnographic engagement, whereby interlocutors or participants are invited to engage in re-enactments of ethnographic material gleaned by the researcher. Tami Spry (2006) has also proposed a theoretical basis for the potential of performance to be a space of empathic communication within ethnographic practice. While I am inspired by the potential of performance as a method for ethnographic engagement and representation, what resonates with my ethnographic observations in Sabang, is how everyday performance might be utilised as a 'living' space of conjecture to the assumed authenticity of a place's histories.

Judith Hamera points to performance's importance within "contemporary views of culture as

enacted, rhetorical, contested, and embodied. It functions as an organizing trope for examining a wide range of social practices” (2006c, 2). She goes on to say, “Culture is embodied. It is set in motion, put into play, resisted, and embraced by material bodies rooted in specific histories and social exigencies” (7). This recognition of how culture is produced through material processes is of integral import to understanding how Sabang’s pasts are re-written through the performative engagement of bodies sharing a temporal and spatial location. As these bodies pass one another, both identities and spatialities are constructed through reference to a temporal space that is always in a process of becoming.

Judith Hamera summarises the role of performance studies approaches to unpacking the reproduction of histories and counter-histories in everyday life,

A performance studies approach engages this banal and beautiful work of culture, and the names, voices, and hands that accomplish it, from what Dwight Conquergood (2002, 146) characterizes as “the ground level” of daily practices, in the embodied “thick of things” (Hamera 2006b, 13).

The performance theory of Conquergood, Madison, Hamera (2006) and Spry utilises Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of dialogism to visualise the subversive potential of how envisaging the social as the orchestration of simultaneous performative and multivocal positionalities, permits more pragmatic and vibrant conceptualisations of social interaction in research. It captures and enables a sense of the multiplicity, the ambiguities, the embodied simultaneity of the social. Dialogism, contrary to monological thinking, has a capacity for multiplicity and polyvocality, for an in-betweenness, for more than an either/or approach to understanding the potential of the utterance. In this way, dialogism captures the vibrant multiplicity of everyday life; it has the capacity for an utterance, an action, a performative exchange, to be attesting the multiple sentiments, to multiple interests or desires, allegiances and selves, simultaneously. Hamera says, dialogism,

... emphasizes the embodied, contestory nature of the utterance, the communicative prima material of everyday life. Interlocutors, each from their unique corporeal, sociocultural addresses, forge conversational turns

that live 'in between': between one another, between what can and cannot be said, between individual meanings and collectively sanctioned structures, between centripetal forces of cultural cohesion and centrifugal forces of cultural stratification (Hamera 2006b, 13)

In everyday performance we can see the subtle negotiation of sensitive aspects of social interaction that have their roots in hegemonic narratives of place. Della Pollock talks about oral history and performance as a "*living history*" (Pollock 2005, 1; italics in original) to highlight the reflective and transformative potential of it as a method of research. Throughout my fieldwork, I informally engaged in open-ended conversations which elicited such a space of remembering for participants. Their oral histories often focused on ambiguous moments that could easily be considered performative. Indeed, the performative aspects of those memories are re-enacted within present-day social interactions.

The story of the rattan basket

I began to recognise the performative exchange of the story of the rattan basket between islanders and mainlanders as an example of Sabang's 'living history'. The story and its performative evocations within contemporary social exchanges makes material those power relations of coloniser/colonised within the present context of mainlander/islander relations, creating a dynamic space where these legacies can be contested.

As I outlined above, the phrase, *cröeng ié lam raga* (taking water with the basket) is often uttered when a mainlander meets an islander from Sabang. It is also used playfully in interactions between mainlanders when a friend or family member goes to Sabang for a holiday. The phrase itself seems playful and benign, yet in its enactment, its intonation, it suggests a long-standing belief that there exist fundamental differences in character between islanders and mainlanders. These assumptions are evident in other aspects of sociality, yet in the iterative moment of the performance, it focuses upon the idea that Sabang was simply a container for the archipelago's native *orang sakit jiwa* (people with a sick soul).

The dominant belief that Sabang was a community made through the forced relocation of people from across the archipelago, whilst the mainland, a stable and homogenous population

who, through their collective resistance, never ceded to Dutch occupation, also informs the deep cultural division between mainland and island. The island and its inhabitants were, in effect a fabricated society; a society without a centre, without *orang asli* (indigenous people) could not be considered a true part of the Acehese Province. The performance of the rattan basket prods at these prevailing narratives; the image of the compliant mental patient dunking their basket, as ordered, in direct tension with nationalist images of Acehese rebellion and resistance.

In recent years, rapid increases in tourism has complicated Sabang's peripheral position relative to national identity. The islands are now central to Acehese tourism promotional campaigns and this is raising issues for Sabang residents who now find themselves at the forefront of the conservative push towards homogenous expression of Acehese Islam, especially in tourism towns like Iboih, which represent the frontstage where these performances take place. I explore these tensions in greater detail in Part Two of this thesis, but for now, it is important to point out that the peripheral position of Sabang implied by some historical references, is not static and unchanging.

The performance re-inscribes long-standing cultural divisions with each articulation. The performance is embodied, relational, reciprocal, mutual and coproduced: it is sensuous and evokes cultural memories (Stoller 1997). Yet, it also permits a possibility of another, contestant narrative; of engaging with alternate contemporary identities through reinterpretation and contestation of the past. It keeps the stories alive, as a living history which is reproduced through its enactment. Bryant Keith Alexander contends that "... cultural performance is socialized embodied practice, influenced both in the specific moment of its engagement and in the wake of histories that narrate the life scripts of those involved in the encounter" (Alexander 2006, 53). It is this movement between the 'specific moment' and the historical references that the performance takes as its context, which is so recognisable in the performance of the rattan basket.

The phrase 'taking water with the basket' has several variations, ranging from jovial and light-hearted to a much deeper insinuation of difference. To a person who is going to Sabang for a holiday, a mainlander might say to their work colleague, "Bring me back a basket from

Sabang!”, referencing the custom of bringing *oleh-oleh* (souvenirs) for friends and relatives when holidaying. That Sabang has a rattan-product manufacturing industry only adds to the mystique surrounding the object and its associated histories. The subtext being that the person visiting the island might bring a little bit of ‘Sabang madness’ with them when they return. Another comment might be, “Oh, you’re going to take water with the basket?!”, suggesting that the other person is hoping to go ‘crazy’ for a while. A similar more general phrase that is used throughout Indonesia is *‘bocor lambat’* (slow leak), which is used to infer that a person’s head is leaking, and they are therefore losing their sanity or intellect. *Cröeng ié lam raga*, may be a direct reference to madness or the state of ‘*amok*’ which I introduced in the previous chapter. It may also be a subtle way of saying that the person going to Sabang is going to engage in behaviours forbidden on the mainland, given the long-held suggestion that Sabang exists outside the moral centre of Aceh.

When a mainlander utters the phrase to a person who was born in Sabang, it likely carries a very different weight than these light-hearted usages, for it seems to imply that the islander has an intrinsic connection to madness, a way of being in the world that is not simply entered for a moment of relief or a weekend of fun that can be cast off upon return to the mainland. For older Sabang people, the presence of the *orang sakit jiwa* still pervades their recollections of the past. An elderly woman I interviewed with Nani (I will refer to her as Nenek, grandmother), told us about how the *orang sakit jiwa* had always had a presence in her childhood, although she remember them only in the distance, as a continuous background to the everyday activities of her village. During our conversation, she recalled the ordinariness of seeing them in the distance. They were always there, huddled up in lines along the edges of the village well, lowering and pulling up their baskets, as though they held the image of a normal day in their bodies, making each day just like any other.

Another elderly woman, eighty years of age, recalled the painful experience of her family’s unkind remarks towards her prospective husband. When she told her family that she planned to marry a man from Sabang, they were dismissive of him and their marriage, claiming that if he was from Sabang, he was likely *gila* (crazy). She explained the deep hurt this had caused her and how it had persisted as a rift in her family for many years; her family rarely visiting

her or welcoming her husband into their family. The stigma associated with being from Sabang, it would seem, could not only be about the use of the island as a site of punishment for the morally corrupt and mentally ill. The strong response seems to imply a deep and unassailable cultural divide that persists in the lives and identities of contemporary islanders. Part of this attitude is rooted in the assumption that the society which has formed in Sabang is a fabricated one; created by a colonialist need for labour. The presumption of an island uninhabited and free to be filled informed this process, suggesting that the island itself had no moral centre before or after Dutch settlement. Sabang's histories tell us otherwise, as I showed in the previous chapter, and it is this counter-narrative which leaks through the performance of the basket.

The ubiquity of the basket itself in *gampông* (villages) throughout Aceh, indeed throughout Indonesia, connects the performative utterance of the basket with a collective bodily memory. However, the practice of drawing water from a well by the *orang sakit jiwa* produces an incongruous moment in the performative enactment. The body of the performer recalls in that moment the comfortable feeling of holding a basket by both handles, hugging its curved and forgiving material into one's hip as they walk, but meets a feeling of strange dissonance when they ponder the useless task for which it was used by the *orang sakit jiwa*. A bodily response is produced in that moment between that which is said of Sabang identity and the cultural memories that are carried in the body.

I started to carry my own real basket on these journeys about town. It was a bright green basket woven from those plastic strips often seen binding cardboard boxes. I could wedge it between my knees on the motorbike and could take quite a heavy load, handling the long and hilly journey back to Iboih from Sabang. The basket's handles were of such a strong weave of these plastic straps that I could pull one taught and attach it to the handy hook on the right hand-side beneath the ignition. I could feel confident in this system that I would not drop anything on the windy roads and the monkeys would be less likely to see the brightly coloured fruit inside, as my bike strained and slowed to make it up 'monkey hill'. The basket attracted attention from locals who would see me riding my old Suzuki Smash motorcycle into Sabang to go shopping. The well-worn basket indicated that I had been around a long time and that I cooked my own food, separating me from the tourists and backpackers.

I learned with the basket how to perform a subtle familiarity. Locals rarely use this kind of basket, preferring the easy option of using plastic bags and even having their shopping delivered by truck to the other side of the island. Younger generations, particularly, chose the ease of such methods. Only much older women would use these baskets and so most people thought it highly amusing to see a young foreigner choosing to carry their vegetables in this way. Amusement and difference is often a conversation starter and the image I presented became a perfect segue to enquiries about the story of the rattan basket: this modern version of the traditional rattan type led to many conversations about how times have changed, how useful the basket is compared to the extreme wastefulness of single-use plastic bags, and of course, that other contrastingly impractical practice of taking water with basket.

Every person I asked knew of the story and its contemporary performance. As Stoller contends, “the power of collective memory does not merely devolve from textual inscriptions. It stems from stories (the oral tradition)” (1997, 61). In the case of this story, it only stems from stories given there are no textual accounts of it, or any clear representation (beyond numbers of inmates) of who the *orang sakit jiwa* were, or why they were sent to Pulau Weh in the first place. The backdrop of an extensive campaign to resist and confront colonialism on the mainland only heightens the likelihood that these patients were not the recipients of Dutch beneficence. These absences of textual references only compound the ambiguities which make contemporary performative interpretations even more significant.

Importantly, the insinuation that Sabang people are mad, is not necessarily received negatively by Sabang people. Rather, I have sensed in the numerous conversations I have had with locals, that being slightly different than the image of the good citizen projected from the mainland is indeed extremely positive. Sabang sociality embodies these ideas of difference and heterogeneity. The concept of *orang campur* (mixed people), which I introduced in the previous chapter, surfaces in these moments, implying a tradition of meeting and connecting across difference. It refutes the perceived conservative agenda in mainstream politics, and within communities on the mainland, which support moves to impose homogeneity and the erasure or expulsion of difference through compulsory rules of dress. I explore these contemporary issues in greater detail in Chapter Five, but it is critical to recognise the historical rootedness of these identifications with difference and diversity.

Once drawn to the ways the performative exchange offered space to contemporary revision, I could sense the impression of the *orang sakit jiwa* (people with a sick soul), perceptible within the rhythms of everyday sociality in Sabang. The most significant of these impressions is, paradoxically, marked by an absence: the regular exodus of bodies and activities from the high streets of Sabang, where each day, at midday, shop-owners and market stall holders, as though actors in a flash-mob, vacate the town in a flurry. The main road of Sabang is completely empty within minutes, apart from a few bewildered tourists who, having woken late, arrive unaware of this strange ritual. The shops and markets remain closed until late afternoon, when the city comes alive again, with food stalls wheeled out into the street to serve a bustling evening trade.

Curious as to the origins of this strange tradition, which I had never witnessed in other parts of Aceh or Sumatra, I asked various people I met around town. Many assumed that it was to promote the afternoon prayer and to allow families time to do everyday chores, to spend time together before the busy evening trade begins. But then Bapak Beni, a café owner on the high street with whom I had enjoyed many long conversations about Sabang's history, told me a different story. This tradition began, Beni said, during colonial occupation, when the mental asylum would open its doors at midday to allow the patients a few hours to roam free. The patients would run down the hill to the busy high streets, causing havoc as they went, grabbing the goods hanging in front of the Chinese-run shops. To handle this everyday inconvenience, consensus grew that it was easier to simply shut up shop until the patients were safely locked away again.

This dramatic absence of the usual practices which constitute Sabang's community represents an ongoing ritualised recognition of the lasting presence of the *orang sakit jiwa* in everyday life. Although many people are unaware of the tradition's possible origins, the patient's unruly presence can be felt in those quiet streets each day. The streetscape, with its sudden sensory deprivations, become emblematic of the trace of Sabang's forgotten inhabitants; the problem populations of the mainland are felt presences in the quiet abandoned streets.

KEDAI

SOLO

JL. PERDAGANGAN No.89

SABANG

UMAHKU JASA CARO
2011



figure 12.(previous page) *Shopfronts on Jalan Perdagangan in Sabang, at midday, 2015*, digital photograph taken by the author.

figure 13. (above) *Shopfronts on Jalan Perdagangan in Sabang, at midday, 2015*, digital photograph taken by the author.

***Aceh Pungo* (Aceh Madness)**

Aceh Pungo is a common phrase heard throughout Aceh. Prominent Acehnese scholar and historian, Rusdi Sufi, who sadly passed away recently (28/11/2018), wrote extensively on the topic of *Atjeh-moorden*, which he reclaims using the Acehnese phrase '*Aceh pungo*' (Sufi 2002). While it translates from Acehnese to mean, 'Aceh madness', the specific implications within the phrase in its social and political contexts are not immediately clear to an outsider. I heard the phrase many times, thrown around casually between friends. I remember one time I said the phrase amongst friends and was at once hushed by a friend who was also non-Acehnese. As a Batak from North Sumatra, he was already firmly positioned on the fringes of the group. I often heard the local men, making fun of him, citing the Batak's inclusion of *babi* (pig) in their diet; the contested belief that they historically practiced head-hunting and cannibalism; and, the Batak majority's Christian faith. On this occasion, he quickly hushed me so as not to draw any further unwanted attention. From his perspective as a Batak, this phrase, *Aceh pungo*, was equivalent to the stereotypical ways in which the young men would tease him.

Despite these negative associations, I also sensed a more empowered articulation of this phrase. When I connected the ambiguous identity of the *orang sakit jiwa*, this revised meaning of *Aceh pungo* took on an even greater resonance and subversive possibility. Through contestation of islander identity, as made possible in the performance of the rattan basket, the *orang sakit jiwa*, and *Aceh pungo* is powerfully recast as a resistance fighter. Dutch beneficence is undone by a decolonial reading which permits agency in the *orang sakit jiwa* through the image of *Aceh pungo*. Just as Camus' Sisyphus has his own moment of respite as he makes his return journey to the bottom of the hill to retrieve his rock, the inner space, what Dami calls "the heart of the people", cannot be denied of the mental patient as he repeatedly lowers his basket into the well. This is the space that Eva refers to as "between crazy and very intelligent"; a decolonial space that represents an alternate reading of madness as resistance or performed compliance.

This possibility for creative revision of historical documents can be seen in a small segment of one of the Ambonese Head Psychiatrist, Dr Latumeten's letters, where he casually mentions an incident with one of his patients. It seemed non-sensical to me at first, a strange anecdote which did not appear to have any relevance. Yet, when I read it again after years of ethnographic

research through which I had begun to question the stereotypes embedded in stories such as the rattan basket, I could hear something else playing out in Latumeten's account. He is describing an interaction he had with a patient in the grounds of the Mental Hospital, using the incident to illustrate his perception that the phenomenon of Acehese madness was a response to colonisation. I have translated²⁵ the relevant section as follows:

The Atjeher turned around, looking agitated in my direction and asked "Apa orang Aceh?" (Is it Aceh people?) I gave up to be amicable: "Boekan, tar oelah itoe batoe." (No, it is a rock). A large stone whizzed past me the next moment (Latumeten 1933, 17).

At first, the account seems nothing more than a doctor's note, recording a strange interaction with a patient: the doctor possesses a strong rational mind whilst the patient speaks nonsense and acts in an impulsive and violent manner. However, if we understand from the various ambiguities offered by contemporary Sabang's myriad ways of recollecting, contesting and reworking dominant histories of colonisation, compliance and madness, perhaps another possible interpretation emerges. In this interpretation, the Acehese inmate is performing a parody of madness whilst asking a fundamental question about his own identity. The action of throwing the rock at the doctor, whilst saying "No, it is a rock", suggests that the Acehese patient is declaring his unwavering commitment to allowing himself to become a weapon. In reading this scenario alongside a philosophy of jihad, which we can glean from the literature which has studied the phenomenon (Kloos 2014a; Siegel 1969; Sufi 2002), the rock (ie, the Acehese) *becomes* a weapon, not by its own volition, but as an effect of the energetic force of the faith which propels it.

The cultural chasm that madness and resilience invoke in these actions and the interpretation of them is stark in this example. The colonial Administration's view is one of anxious trepidation in the face of resistance. Madness turns to resistance on this point. The patient, rather than

25 The original text reads: De Atjeher draaide zich om, keek k alm een geenszins geagiteerd in myn righting en vroeg: "Apa orang Atjeh?" Ik gaf tot be Scheid: "Boekan, tar oelah itoe batoe". Een groote steen suisde het volgende oogenblik langs me (Latumeten 1933, 17)..

being a compliant and colonised subject, is the enduring spirit of Acehnese resistance. That these stoic figures are the ancestors of contemporary Sabang residents, as inferred by the enactment of the performance of the rattan basket, reconfigures Sabang's perpetual exile from configurations of Acehnese historical narrativization and identity.

An island on the move, again

How does this reimagining of Sabang's histories of exile and containment relocate Sabang within broader projections of Acehnese nationalism? The everyday performances of the basket destabilise the positioning of Sabang as peripheral to Acehnese identity narratives of resistance, imperviousness, and deep divisions based upon cultural difference. Rather than accepting the singular narrative of Weh as cast off, separated, and the enduring legacy of this narrative through subsequent stories of colonisation, I have asked these historical fragments to speak to contemporary issues of identity, belonging and place. Such a request produces an altogether different set of stories and imaginative connections with the island's pasts and its forgotten inhabitants.

I return here to the origin stories of Pulau Weh that imagine an island on the move. Stories are both productive of space and produced through their retelling through time. Just as the story of the island moving to its current location produces a spatial relation between island and mainland, it forges ongoing relations and ontologies through the retelling of the story, both for those on the mainland and those who live in and pass through the island. Yet, how do other stories intersect to keep this space in tension?

The decolonial reading inspired by the ambiguity of that long-lost figure of the lunatic and their basket implies an ongoing spatial construction through practice. Mainlanders and islanders are in continual negotiation of identity through the spatial dichotomies enlivened through a myriad simultaneity of performances of difference. This is what Massey means when she talks about "envelopes of space-time" (1995, 188). It is not only the body of water which separates island from mainland, but the stories that cut across cohesive Acehnese identity narratives and the compression of these stories to make the here and now for those who inherit the stories and their legacies. As Steve Pile says,

... power *seems* to be everywhere, but wherever we look, power is open to gaps, tears, inconsistencies, ambivalences, possibilities for inversion, mimicry, parody and so on; open, that is, to more than one geography of resistance ... At the heart of questions of resistance lie the questions of spatiality - the politics of lived space (Pile [1997] 2009, 27; italics in original).

This 'lived space' is in perpetual renegotiation through performative interaction. Social interaction, which is inherently performative is productive of space: it is made and unmade in an unending process of social production (Massey 2005). Especially in Iboih, where tourism demands drive the practices of locals and the remoteness adds difficulty to obtaining basic goods and services, the ingenuity of residents is often mind-blowing. Hindrances such as extreme weather, intermittent power and over-crowding which has placed resources (such as water) under duress, not only require lateral thinking and inventive action, they shape perceptions of community and a relationship towards the environment. Space, in this sense, is created through the practices and social relationships which result from the island's specific geographies, global position and the desires and needs that emanate from its ever-changing population. Such a view enables a rethinking of how locals in Iboih and Sabang engage with and produce space through the traces of past presences that is felt in and through a physical/embodied relation to the landscape.

To be disenfranchised from documented histories does not deny access and connection to place through creative and imaginative being in, and producer of, space through social relations. Such a view radically reconfigures the position or limited location of colonised subjects and the relics or material remnants of occupation. On one field trip with Nani and Eva to Rubiah Island, we stopped to rest atop the ruins of the Dutch water container, used to supply water to the Haji Quarantine Station. While we sat, catching our breath, Eva and Nani were talking about how monstrous this object was, somehow constructed in the dank humidity of the jungle. We all joked about who was going to be brave enough to go inside but peering into the darkness and realising the danger of the rusty ladder breaking and the likelihood of snakes living inside, we all decided against it. In a lull in conversation, Eva leaned forward so that her face was about a foot away from the entrance of the huge cement container. As she spoke, and then

began to sing, her voice echoed and swelled, reaching into the empty cavernous space, until it bounced against its internal walls and up to us outside. The sound of Eva's voice, now drawing in the mournful lyrics of an old Acehnese song, traced the edges and internal landscapes of the building and the spaces around it. In a way, it felt that the unknown, the mysteries of this strange colonial relic, became known through her voice's ability to reach inside and touch its surfaces. Through Eva's storytelling, the container's surfaces became something else, albeit momentarily through her performative intrusion into its secret dark spaces.



figure 14. *Eva singing into the empty Dutch water container in Pulau Rubiah, 2016*, still taken from a digital video taken by the author.

Conclusion

Performance can either reinforce conventions or disrupt them. Just as Eva's voice reconfigures the material remnants of colonialism, the performance of the rattan basket disrupts the reinscription of historically embedded islander/mainlander relations. "'Doing' is an embodied utterance" (Hamera 2006a, 77) and by 'doing differently', as a deviation from the expected script, performance has the capacity to destabilise what appears natural and inevitable. Not only is the relationship between mainlander and islander contested, so too are the historical foundations upon which the relationship is structured and the spatial metaphors which have

carried and reinforced that relationship. Suddenly, in the suspension of the narrative of madness and the proposition of resistance, space itself is re-organised. Then island, rather than peripheral geography and historically insignificant, is resituated through an everyday exchange.

If we refocus on everyday performance then, we become alert to the multitude of contingent narratives that lay beneath the surface of those obscuring histories. My question remains focused on Massey's statement that certain histories 'turn out' to be dominant. If we take a performative geographies approach, we ought to be able to see the ways power is woven into the repetition of narratives of place and the ongoing production of dominant ideas of islandness as told through that repetition.

Using the existing trope of island as strange, residents play with ideas of marginality to contest prevailing assumptions of Sabang's historical positioning as of marginal importance to ideas of national identity, such as resistance and impervious borders, which have long remained unquestioned on the mainland. By recasting the ambiguous figure of the lunatic as rebel and resistance fighter, Sabang communities implicitly question the idea that Sabang is an annexation of Aceh, resituating it and the ancestors who have come from those rebels, as central to Acehnese nationalist discourse. In this way of thinking (with the archipelago) the island is moved (again it is unanchored) from margin to centre of Acehnese nationalistic rhetoric. Resistance and autonomy are recast as central to Sabang identity.

Stories and everyday performances 'cut across' spatial demarcations in wild and unruly patterns. Such a foundation of space emerging from stories of the past can be read in ongoing formations of present occupation and human movement. Histories are bound up with the performative every day through which they are constantly reformulated. A decolonial imaginary, which re-reads history's texts for its absences, re-shapes a view of islands as peripheral, marginal, and insular and changes the ways we experience island spaces and the practices which take place in the everyday lives of those who live in and pass through them.

An end to Part One

Where the stories brought together throughout this first part of the thesis have taken me so far, is to question how 'history's texts' can be read differently, with a view to deliberately and politically imagine history's lost and marginalised. By moving between various fragmented traces of Sabang's past, from documented histories, oral storytelling, and material landscapes, the figures of the *orang sakit jiwa* and the banished cripples have taken on an altogether different shape, and a different place in Sabang's historical trajectory. The islands of Sabang represent a complex and constantly reproduced "envelope of space-time" (Massey 1995, 188) through these revisions and the ongoing relevance and significance of these figures to local identity narratives.

Over the duration of my fieldwork, the socio-political landscape in Aceh and increasingly in Pulau Weh, has been gradually and worryingly changing. While early in my fieldwork, in 2013 and 2014, the physical distance and cultural separation of island and mainland felt insurmountable, in recent years, I have wondered if these separations can hold. During the early years, I focused my attention on textual analysis; accompanying Nani and her team on heritage surveying fieldwork trips to the jungle or the underground hospital; and, engaging ethnographic conversations with locals, to bring together a rich tapestry of Sabang's colonial past. What I did not realise until later was the significance of those earlier stories of marginality and difference to what I was experiencing in my everyday interactions and my own strange sense of being both visible and unacknowledged as queer in Aceh.

Over subsequent years, I came to realise that I was living in a place where to be queer was becoming increasingly hostile and dangerous. It was also forcing a response in me, despite my attempt to keep these personal details and concerns out of my immediate research. This had a strange effect of drawing my research in two seemingly different directions. In fact, as I felt more tension, I tried even harder to maintain the separation of these two aspects of my life.

I knew that the current political climate and the local responses I could feel surfacing in Iboih and Sabang were interconnected with the past and with the kinds of concerns I was addressing in my research, about identity and belonging, but I refused to draw those connections to my

personal sense of doing research in a place where, each day, I was faced with thinking about how to perform a different self, for my own safety and to enable the research to continue. In the second part of this thesis, these two aspects of my research and my lived experience as a queer, androgynous, white, western researcher, come together.

Part Two:
Contemporary performances of difference

As we fly closer to Aceh, I can feel the nervousness creeping up my body, a panicky sweat is breaking out across my chest. I have decided already that I will wear the scarf that I have tucked into the side pocket of my backpack. There is a trendy-looking woman sitting across from me. She is not wearing a *jilbab* (*hijab*; Muslim veil) and I start to second guess myself: should I not wear it? My mind tosses and turns: I will wear it because I am a researcher, I will not wear it because it feels ingenuine. I am just another *bule* (western) tourist who does not understand the culture, I can get away with not wearing it. I decide on the former: I will wear it because I *am* a researcher, not a tourist. I will wear it because I have read that I should: it is the respectful thing to do.

Before I left Perth, I played around with several styles, even finding a web-site which gave instructions on how to wear a *jilbab* in a 'tomboy style' that is sporty and less feminine. In the end, I chose a simple scarf that is easy enough to put on over my short hair, keen to avoid a protracted attempt to arrange the garment or need pins to fasten it into place. As I start to put it on, on the plane, the men sitting in the rows nearby smile approvingly. The woman sitting opposite seems to wait until the last moment before she languidly pulls the scarf she has had draped around her shoulders, up and over her hair. She then puts on a large pair of sunglasses, rests her head on the window and promptly falls back asleep until we hit the tarmac. I, on the other hand, sit restlessly squirming in my seat, my sweaty clammy hands resisting the urge to readjust the fabric that feels so unfamiliar and irritating against my skin.

When the plane lands I realise quickly that I have made the wrong choice: the scarf keeps slipping down, with nothing to hold it in place. I hold it with one hand whilst trying to retrieve my bags from the overhead compartment, drawing attention from the other passengers. My cheeks burning and sweat dripping down the inside of my clothes, I watch the women on the plane move seamlessly, retrieving their bags and moving towards the exit without any concern for their clothing. The shiny ornate fasteners adorning their *jilbab*, clearly just as functional as aesthetic.

It was months later before I could bring myself to describe the scene to my friends on the island. Expecting them to laugh at my inability to wear the veil properly, I tell them about how I persisted because I thought it was the respectful thing to do. My surprise then when they

said in chorus, “No! You don’t need to wear it! You are Western!” “We don’t expect you to wear it unless you are Muslim. It is our thing to wear it because we are Muslim and even us, we don’t always wear it.” This sentiment, of western strangeness, would re-emerge throughout the remainder of my fieldwork, establishing a constantly shifting boundary separating and connecting me to the social environments that I was living in and passing through. The in/visibility it would afford, a catalyst for the subversive performances of gender and sexuality of those who opened their social and sexual lives to me, as friend and complicit co-performer.

In Part One, I introduced performance as an approach to recognising historical narrative traces within everyday social interactions. To conclude Chapter Three, I argued that an everyday performance which recalls an old story about a rattan basket is one example of a ‘history from below’ (Stoller 1997). This performative evocation of the past disrupts otherwise unchallenged narratives which reify a simplistically understood relationship between coloniser and colonised, upon which contemporary islander/mainlander relations are based.

Part Two of this thesis takes us, both writer and reader, in unexpectedly queer directions. I trace the performative within my research relationships and ask how the intersubjectivity of fieldwork both makes and unmakes the researcher in different social contexts. My own performances, my own crafting of my fieldwork selves comes into focus through my social relationships, which were growing in intimacy and intensity the longer I stayed. While, in Part One, the ubiquitous material object of the rattan basket guided this tracing of strange and fragmented histories, in Part Two, the *jilbab* (*hijab*, Muslim veil) serves as a continuous thread. It was the *jilbab* which regularly surfaced, guiding an ethnographic engagement with how gender and religious identity is negotiated in contemporary Aceh.

The reader might initially find that these following chapters are arranged in a way which is counter-intuitive. I originally structured Chapters Four and Five to flow in the opposite order, with the broad contexts of Indonesian and Acehnese conservatism explained prior to my exploration of the localised experiences of change, as described and performatively evoked by people living in and passing through the village of Iboih. However, while writing I realised that change is felt, not through dislocated over-arching ideological narratives, but rather, in the everyday activities and social interactions. As Pak Fir said to me early in my fieldwork, a

sentiment that came up time and again in my conversations with locals, “Here is the mainland in the middle of the sea.” The island of Weh is the epicentre of everyday life of people who live there. While the local and elsewhere are indeed connected, ideologically, economically, and culturally, these connections are felt locally through specifically local manifestations before they are recognised as over-arching structures or national drives towards ideological change.

It is in the minutiae of social life where frictions, responses and reactions, explicit contestation and the subtle assertion of identity, is most visible. Change is far more pervasive, far more incrementally felt within the everyday social interactions of insiders and outsiders, far more fundamentally local, than can be described in a top-down, approach. Ethnographic fieldwork facilitates the slow emergence of recognition of the importance of these details, to broader understandings of socio-political life and even perhaps, to challenging the assumed realities that other representations purport to convey.

Chapter Four explores the various situated perspectives of those living in the rapidly changing environments of Iboih, a small bustling tourist village in Pulau Weh. I use ethnographic observation and conversation, and reflections on my own embodied experiences of living in Iboih, to reach beneath simplistic understandings the various pressures facing the village.

Chapter Five introduces the various social and political contexts shaping contemporary Aceh. Public performances of punitive shari’ah, such as sweeps and raids by *Wilayatul Hisbah* (shari’ah/morality police) and, the shaming of those cast as immoral in public caning events, are shown to be informing a current push towards a homogenous and prescriptive view of the ‘good Acehnese subject’. Building on existing scholarship focusing on the regulation of sexuality in Indonesia (S. Davies 2015; Davies and Bennett 2015; Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018; Wieringa 2015), the remainder of the thesis contributes ethnographic accounts exploring how young women in particular found ways to speak back to the everyday intrusions of intra-community surveillance and the casting of aspersions and suspicions in their lives. Diverting shame by inviting inaccurate accusations from neighbours was one such method that they utilised, and my participation as a queer decoy offered amusing and telling insights into how these enactments both contest and produce shari’ah in different ways.

Chapter Six introduces the recurrence of queer moments within my fieldwork relationships. I describe how I crafted my identity differently depending on context and how others read my androgynous appearance. I also offer several anecdotes depicting humorous and dangerous incidents where my friends utilised my presence to contest the surveillance operating within their everyday lives.

Together, these chapters make a case for a queer embodied ethnographic research methodology for engaging with the rapidly changing social contexts of contemporary Aceh. Such an approach might seem out of place in a cultural context that is increasingly vilifying queer people, however, it is the idiosyncrasies of how Aceh is managing sexual and gender minorities that permits a queer embodied methodology the scope for exploring the intensely complex and contradictory spaces occupied by LGBT people in contemporary Aceh. The paradox of queer invisibility and intense surveillance makes the western queer ethnographer a strange figure who is both object of attention and strangely ignored, a space of betweenness that offers a unique ability to 'pass through' intensely surveilled social spaces, with and alongside others. Chapter Seven reflects on queer sensibilities towards ethnographic research, arguing that queer embodied knowledge offers 'ways of knowing' that positions queer researchers to read social interactions differently. A queer critique of narratives of 'successful ethnographic fieldwork', which privilege ideas of immersion and embeddedness, showed me that 'queer failure' equips queer researchers with skills for engaging empathically with differentially marginalised others, across difference.

A note on literature and the limits of my ethnographic inquiry

Before I proceed with Part Two, I include the following caveat on literature and the limits of my ethnographic inquiry in relation to the belief and practices of Islam in Aceh. My positionality undoubtedly produces a distorted perception of the political and historical trajectories of Islam, specifically shari'ah principles, in Aceh. Issues of access are at play here in similar ways as I have described in relation to archival collections in previous chapters. As Smith and Woodward (2014) argue, the difficulties faced by non-Muslim researchers to access the worlds of the *pesantran* (Islamic boarding schools) prohibit first-hand experiences regarding the complexities of Islamic teachings and the everyday implementation of these teachings in Aceh.

I am also keenly aware of my limitations in discussing religion, morality, faith and the connections and deviations between *adat* (customary law), shari'ah principles and punitive shari'ah with learned Acehnese community members. The complexity of these issues, my language barriers, my identity as a non-Muslim, queer, western, academic and temporary visitor to the community mean that deep understanding is difficult, if not impossible. This does not mean that I cannot have a perception but that I must remain reflexively aware of my situated knowledge and limited location (Haraway 1988).

To inform my understandings, I have relied heavily on the revealing conversations I shared with my friends and acquaintances in Sabang and, of course, my observations of how identity is differently performed in common public spaces over a period where many people are clearly navigating dramatic social change. Most significantly, I have drawn on the embodied experiences of moving between different spaces. My ambiguous gender identity, as it is perceived in Aceh, became my most effective methodological tool. As I unravel over the coming chapters, my sense of the subtle shifts in public and private space and identity performance came from my own physical experience of moving through these spaces. As I moved increasingly to the mainland, the norms and local practices of the island came into focus, while my inward-facing view whilst on the island as well as my intermittent mainland experiences, reinforced assumptions I had made about the mainland. As is typical of ethnographic inquiry, the observations and connections I make in the following chapters are but fleeting senses which would likely be differently understood and observed by another.

To develop my understandings of Aceh's historical foundations and contemporary practices of Islam, I have been deliberately selective in the texts I have used. In the field of Indonesian Studies, there has been, until recently, a predominance of texts written by western male academics. This was due to the pervasiveness and hegemony of written English as the only viable form of scholarship, to the exception of others, and the concomitant lack of scholarly writing by Indonesians in English.

In more recent years, a more diverse cohort of emerging academics are finding their ways into collections aimed at contesting this homogeneity of voices on Indonesian contemporary politics, history, sexualities, and human rights. As Tom Boellstorff says in a co-authored chapter with

Dédé Oetomo (2015), these scholars have been writing and working in these areas for decades but had not perhaps been recognised widely in western academia. There is a “strengthening global community of researchers” (Boellstorff and Oetomo 2015, 309), with which to engage that brings together a richness of perspectives for understanding local practices and global influences.

I have limited my reference to historical texts written by western men to shift the tone of how Acehese history has been told. While the historical and political accounts by western male academics (Aspinall 2009; Feener 2011, 2013; Reid 2005, 2006) offer great overviews and are undoubtedly rigorously researched on issues of Indonesian politics and Acehese history, they reinforce a view of history which marginalises diverse voices, particularly cisgender women and those of diverse gender and sexuality who are largely absent in their accounts.

I have therefore focused primarily on texts written by Indonesian scholars. Specifically, those who are straight cisgender women or LGBT; those who focus on the lived experiences of women and minorities; and, those who take a gendered perspective of contemporary politics. I have also prioritised works by contemporary cross-disciplinary researchers of diverse backgrounds working in Indonesia. Smith and Woodward’s (2014) collection brings together many such voices and perspectives, as does the edited collection by Feener et al. (2015), which presents a mix of Indonesian and Western scholars working ethnographically in Indonesia on issues of human rights, the increase in political conservatism and the concurrent demonisation of sexual, gender and religious minorities.

Davies and Bennett’s (2015) edited collection also prioritises the voices and perspectives of Indonesian researchers or researchers who have lived and worked in Indonesia for considerable time. I have also surveyed the work of scholars working in other parts of Indonesia or who take a broader national view of these issues have permitted a contextualisation of my ethnographic evidence and Aceh-focused literature, not to facilitate a comparative approach but to recognise the diverse historical and contemporary traditions of Indonesian politics within which Acehese contemporary experiences are located.

These decisions are based upon an awareness and acknowledge that many western writers,

myself included, and Indonesian scholars educated in the west, will come to the current situation in Aceh with a perspective heavily influenced by western liberal values. These values might skew local reasons for valuing certain aspects or interpretations of shari'ah. To balance my understandings of the complexity of opinions on shari'ah I have sought Acehnese female scholars, living and working in Aceh, who offer women's perspectives on the positive influences of shari'ah on social issues within Aceh (Afrianty 2015b; Srimulyani 2013, 2012; Afrianty 2015a; Husin 2015).

Conversely, the academic background of these scholars and the position within which they write influences the views that they can share. While domestic Indonesian writing (in *Bahasa Indonesia*) is undoubtedly a valuable resource, I am aware that this writing is constrained by domestic policy and prevailing hegemonic discourses surrounding the relationship between religion, politics and national identity in Indonesia. This is true of any academic pursuit anywhere in the world, however, in contemporary Indonesia the issues which I am concerned with are of such intense scrutiny, that relying on these texts gives a distorted view. Freedoms to research and offer academic opinion is curtailed by domestic politics. For example, an acquaintance who writes for the *Jakarta Post* explained to me that she receives regular death threats due to her involvement in LGBT rights and her publications on the topic (anonymous, personal correspondence, 2017).

Many western-based news and current affairs outlets, such as *The Guardian* (and to a lesser extent, *The Jakarta Post* which often has a western orientation), *The Conversation*, and several online university-based publications (*Indonesia at Melbourne* at the University of Melbourne) offer a space outside of Indonesian geographical borders for the opinions of Indonesians studying or writing on broad issues related to human rights. In these spaces, writers can communicate more explicitly their concerns, in English, to an international audience. Although their references may not be as rigorously overseen by a peer-review system, their opinions and perspectives are valid and critical to my understandings of how young educated people view the current national political landscape. As several of these writers identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans, their insights are more critical to my research than approved scholars who do not have a personal interest or first-hand experience in what is currently happening in Indonesia

and Aceh. Again, these texts require much discernment given the historical construction of images of Aceh created by the Jakarta press and some global representations of gender in Muslim-majority nations.

The most valuable resource I have used since my interest in Indonesia began is *Inside Indonesia*, a not-for-profit online resource which was set up in 1983 in Melbourne by the *Indonesian Resources Information Program (IRIP)*. It was established to remedy the absence of Indonesian content in Australian media and to show the wealth of activism and critical commentary which was taking place during the Suharto period. It has continued to offer a platform to a range of contributors who offer perspectives on topical issues in Indonesia. It is peer-reviewed and often publishes the writing of academics in an accessible way. I have utilised *Inside Indonesian* articles discerningly as a way of gaining a sense of the issues of major concern, particularly around human rights, over the period of its publication. It is a valuable resource for this longitudinal view of Indonesian politics and activism.

Chapter 4: Views from Iboih

So many of us,
this generation,
are growing up without any memory of anything different.

We were not born before it was this way.

(Q, *Pantai Sumur Tiga*, 2018)



figure 15. *Mama checking her fishing spots, Teupin Layeu, 2017*, digital photograph taken by the author.

On Mondays and Tuesdays in Teupin Layeu²⁶, the seaside village in Iboih, there is time for the old everyday. The local tourists have gone back on the morning ferry, leaving a quiet calm, and piles of rubbish littering the beach. I sit in the *kedai kopi* (coffee shop), watching Mama²⁷ walking back from the beach. She has a fish, a 2-kilogram trevally, in her right hand and an old worn basket in her left. As she strolls she lets the fish hang loosely at her side: it is a slow deliberate walk. The young men lazing in each *kedai*, smoking cigarettes and drinking thick syrupy coffee, look up trying not to stare at her catch. A slight hint of a smile plays at the corners of her mouth as she feels their gaze.

Climbing the stairs to the *kedai*, she pauses on each step, catching her breath and drawing out her arrival. As she drags her foot up to the final step, she thumps the fish down on the nearest table. Settling into her usual spot opposite me, Mama shouts her order to the young man inside: tea, with only a little sugar. In a quieter voice she mutters her usual complaint that she must be careful of her diabetes. I gesture to the fish which lays glistening in the early morning sun, "*Besar sekali Mama. Enak, ikan itu*" (It's a big one Mama. That fish is delicious). So that the men at the next table can hear, she says dismissively, "*kecil saja*" (only small), the smile which still plays across her face giving away how much she is relishing the moment. Her hair is free this morning, just like it was when I first met her all those years ago. "I couldn't find you to ask you to come", she says to me. "Next time".

Mama and I did go fishing together, many times, after that day. A Monday or Tuesday is the

26 Teupin Layeu is one of two villages in the district of Iboih (the other smaller village is called Gapang). Teupin Layeu was originally a small seaside fishing village, however, in 1997 a village relocation program was carried out by the Sabang government. It was said that the reasons for relocating the village was to protect younger generations from the western influences brought to the area through tourism. It also made space to develop Teupin Layeu's tourism infrastructure. A new village, named Lamnibong, was constructed three kilometres inland and houses the majority of Iboih's families. Yet, some families refused the offers of free housing offered by the government, choosing to remain in Teupin Layeu. Mama explained that she chose to stay because she prefers to be close to the ocean where she grew up and where she goes fishing nearly every day.

27 In Aceh, it is standard practice to refer to women who are mothers using the Indonesian term, 'Mamak' (or the shortened 'Mak'/'Ma'), with a differentiating suffix taken from the name of their eldest child. My spelling of 'Mama' comes from my initial westernised visualisation of how I heard Mama's daughters calling her, and how I eventually addressed her as I spent more time with her family. The name felt familiar and intimate and I recalled feelings of familial connection for me. I have maintained my spelling of Mama for this reason, and because my Australian accent likely omits the correct glottal stop inflected by the letter 'k' at the end of the word.

best time because Mama has money from selling *lontong* (steamed rice cakes) and *nasi gurih* (fragrant rice) to the weekend tourists so can take the mornings off. We would build a day around it, setting off on foot to find a spot where we can see the fish, their shimmering blues and blacks, on the surface of the water. If we can manage it, we go along with one of the boats taking supplies over to Rubiah Island, Mama's preferred fishing spot because the fish are not frightened away by the sound of boat engines and tourists. The local joke is that the tourists are the only fish left in the channel, their fluorescent orange life jackets bobbing around in the equally unbelievable turquoise of the ocean.

As soon as we land on the jetty at Rubiah, Mama gets to work. She settles at one end of the jetty with her fishing basket, which is just like the one I take to the markets. Hers is red and blue and is filled with fishhooks, reels and, quite often, donuts which she uses as bait to catch the small fish that often gather around the jetty. She casts her line and waits but a few seconds before the line goes taught and she reels in another. When she first pulls them out, they look like the tropical fish people back home keep in tanks. After expertly dislodging the hook from the fish's mouth, she throws them behind her, leaving the fish flapping around on the hot pavement until the colour has drained from their scales. Later, if there are one or two that are still alive, she will use them as live bait, piercing the hook through the side of the fish and casting it whole into the water, its injury attracting bigger fish. If Mama is lucky these fish will help her catch a grouper or trevally. Once I watched her take a small fish from her hook, push a piece of donut into the fish's gasping mouth, kiss it and throw it back into the water. Turning to me, with a glint in her eyes, she explained "next time, more fat".

I have given up casting myself, preferring to watch Mama's slow rhythmic style. This time I had the foresight to bring my mask and fins with me, so I can amuse myself, knowing that Mama can keep fishing long after I have lost interest. When I jump in, Mama immediately sees the potential of my new underwater view. "*Ada? Ada? Bisa lihat?*" (Are there any? Can you see?) I duck down and swim around between the rocks. Straight away, as though by fortune, I see a huge grouper nestled in-between two rocks, its head poking out and its mouth open waiting for passing prey. It is camouflaged well to the rocks and the dappled light, but its open mouth makes it immediately recognisable. I come up quickly for air, careful to make a

note of a landmark above water so I can find it again, the current quickly pulling me along the coastline. “*Iya! Yang besar sekali mama!*” (Yes! A very big one, Mama!). “*Kasih mata kail*” (Give the hook) she says, making the shape of a hook with her forefinger and the stump of her thumb which is missing from the second knuckle. She has her mouth slightly open and her hook-finger wildly gesturing as though to snag her own cheek.

I swim against the current and duck down, catching a glint of light playing off her line which is snagged on a piece of coral not far from the grouper. I dive down and take the hook, coming up for another gulp of air before I can swim back down to place the hook near the fish. Floating on the surface above, kicking furiously to stay above the fish, I watch it. Suddenly alert from the smell of the bait, it moves towards Mama’s hook. Mama feels the pull of the line before I can get the words out that the grouper has taken the bait. She jumps up, winding the line onto the reel. Looking down I can see the grouper is heavy, struggling and straining to stay in its rocky crevice, its mouth opening and closing around the hook. I worry that it will get free, so I take a quick gulp of air and duck dive down to help Mama by pulling on the line. Our collective pulling is too much for the grouper and it seems to give up its thrashing as we get it to the surface. Mama grins as she sees the size of it, reeling frantically now, even though I have the weight of it in my hand. We manage to get the fish up onto the rocks and Mama swiftly cuts the line with her machete, throwing the fish gently between two rocks. Smiling, Mama sets to rethreading another big hook onto her line. Before I have caught my breath, she is ready to go again. “*Cari lagi, Jo*” (Find again, Jo).

This chapter is guided by the deceptively simple question of how it is that an Acehnese *gampông* (village) woman and a younger Australian queer ethnographer can spend a day together fishing. This may seem an inconsequential question, given the seriousness of recent reports of corporal punishment and public humiliation of individuals on the mainland, however, this relationship offers a possibility to explore the local specificities of Iboih and to understand the village’s vastly different responses to issues that they perceive are facing their community. The kinds of cross-cultural connection shared between Mama and I are common in Iboih and I came to understand that it is through these social interactions that Iboih people enact local identity and belonging *with* those who are temporarily or repetitively ‘passing through’.

Relationships such as these, which I developed with a small number of Iboih locals, gave me great insight into Iboih's local particularities and the resonances of those histories I had been tracing within contemporary articulations of identity and belonging. Sharing time and learning the rhythms of the day with another person, has been central to my research methodology, as it has evolved through the acceptance and strengthening of relationships with Iboih locals. Michael Jackson says, in his discussion of radical empiricism,

ethnographic fieldwork brings us into direct dialogue *with* others, affording us opportunities to explore knowledge not as something that grasps inherent and hidden truths but as an intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground (Michael Jackson 1996, 8; italics in original).

It was this kind of exchange, of rhythms and daily activities, that I could experience how local identity and belonging is performed in Iboih. Mama taught me, through the embodied everyday practices of going fishing, cooking fish on an open fire outside her small wooden house behind the masjid, and sharing that fish amongst friends, how she defiantly performs the rhythms of the day that are so central to her sense of '*gampông-ness*' (village-ness).

To focus on the intersubjective is to recognise the significance of material everyday realities to broader global processes. Of this relationship, Anna Tsing chooses to focus on the "friction: the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (Tsing 2005, 4) rather than typical studies of globalisation which prioritise a seemingly unproblematic profusion of goods, ideas and people. This global interconnectivity manifests itself within the intersubjective, shaping how place is understood and in turn, influencing more expansive projections beyond perceived boundaries of the local.

In Chapter One, I introduced the concepts of cultural ecotones and littoral zones as spaces of intense exchange which lead to diverse and complex processes of cultural production. These processes are similarly fractious and unstable, demanding from me as a researcher a recognition of the politics imbued within my observations; my participation in social life; and, how my writing both contributes to and negates aspects of these witnessed and enacted social

processes. It also requires a recognition of emplaced experience and locality as performed against a *perception* of change. What I mean by this is that for people who live in island communities like Iboih, there may be a concern with the effects of faraway changes, but how those changes may manifest locally in unexpected conflicts and tensions. I was often surprised to realise that my expectations for how change on the mainland would impact Iboih, would be very different when framed by the day-to-day concerns of the village.

What I needed then was a methodology that could take in the particularities of local responses and a way of engaging with the broader social processes which did not create a cause and effect binary relationship. While I could see that looking at local responses as endogenous limited the scope of my analysis, I could also see that prioritising mainland politics diminished the specificities and particularities of the responses that were so central to everyday sociality in Iboih. Reading between and recognising the dialogical production of place through perceived change and localised response produces a far more nuanced and responsive account of how people respond to perceived change through the daily shifts and changes of global flows and demands for certain performances of the local.

The local then is absolutely bound to the perceived infringements and transgressions of spatial boundaries. Yet, rather than seeing these boundaries as only static and non-porous borders, we can rather see them as deliberately and contextually managed, so that they are made to leak to welcome some changes and hardened into impervious boundaries to resist others. Interconnectivity and insularity are performative enactments of connection and disconnection, of the local and its elsewhere, depending on who and what is perceived to be pushing in. The local then, is performatively enacted through the shifting permeability of boundaries, continuously making and remaking place, difference, and hierarchies of belonging, through various articulations of the local.

Ideas such as *gampông* (village) authenticity are discussed through embodied enactment of everyday activities that recall times past. However, amongst these everyday articulations of local identity, young women, who are situated at the intersections of local claims to autonomy and self-definition through tightening sexual surveillance and the intensification of religious norms driven from the mainland, are engaging their own performative responses that draw

on contemporary derivations of past narratives of gender autonomy.

Gampông-ness finds new expression against the more recent inter-relations of urban middle-class Indonesian tourists who are increasingly visiting Iboih and therefore meeting Iboih's local community. Strikingly contrasting values, especially in relation to the environment and diversity, as exemplified by the local concept of *orang campur*, provide a ready script for how locals in Iboih articulate local specificity and resist the demand for homogeneity that is gaining momentum on the mainland.

Relationships such as I have been able to engage with Mama and Dami became central to my growing understanding of the complexities of identity and belonging in Iboih, and how everyday social interactions and activities enable performances that convey differential connections to place within this context of recent changes. It also forged a position from which to expand my understandings of how I am positioned to understand marginal experiences. This latter point is pursued in greater depth in the following chapters, but the path towards these understandings began with relationships such as those I describe in this chapter.

The stories I heard early in my fieldwork, which conjured long-lost figures of Sabang's early inhabitants, seemed to resurface in my everyday interactions, taking on greater resonance as a way of feeling through the current challenges facing the island's communities. Religion is a context of this contestation however, it is not the primary issue or concern, as might be expected given how Aceh is often represented in the mainstream Jakarta-based press. Rather, concerns for village autonomy and protecting the village's reputation is the catalyst for hard-line village responses to both visitor's and local behaviours, while young people are reacting to the impact these tightening regulations are having in their private and public lives. The desire for a homogenous religious expression is resisted because of the impact it will have on the village's capacity to self-govern and self-express, not a divide in faith or national belonging.

As I show throughout this chapter, Iboih's vibrant histories of human migration, seismic separation, and gender non-conformity resurface as ways of reclaiming local specificity and to articulate ideas of identity and belonging, as well as resistance and refusal of broad sweeping changes that demand homogeneity and compliance with narrow views of Acehnese identity.

Halal tourism, AirBnB, and punitive shari'ah

Since the destructive event of the 2004 earthquake and tsunami, and the ensuing influx of NGO reconstruction personnel, Iboih's tourism demographics have changed considerably. In addition, relaxed policies governing western tourism; the supplanting of backpacker on a shoestring approaches to travel with an AirBnB-style expectation for pre-booked, all-inclusive, short-stay accommodation; a burgeoning urban Indonesian middle-class; the proliferation of low-cost airlines; increased interest in halal tourism destinations from Muslims throughout the Middle-East, Gulf states and South-East Asia (news article); international cruise-ship operators' successful application to add Sabang Port to their itinerary; and finally, the worrying trend of '*cambuk* tourism', where Muslims from neighbouring Malaysia are traveling to Aceh to watch public caning (Zamzami 2017), have only amplified these changes. Within these new and expanding markets are competing social and infrastructural demands which are producing conflicting agendas within communities.

The competing demands of Iboih's long-standing connection with hosting western tourists and the more recent promotion of halal tourism is creating tension between whether Sabang continues to be more open than the mainland, or whether it presents an image of conservative Islam to entice this halal market. The desire for a consistent image of Islam is central to this push. The increasing numbers of Muslim tourists and their relative spending capacity, as compared to the flattening western tourism market, suggests that the market will pull Sabang towards halal tourism which will lead to pressures to comply with conservative expression of religious identity.

Halal tourism itself simply refers to the provision of tourism services and products which conform to Islamic principles (Mohsin, Ramli and Alkhulayfi 2016). At its most basic, halal tourism is the consideration of aspects of the tourism experience which relate to the availability of halal foods; ease of access to places of worship; suitable accommodations; and, the accessibility of Islamic financial institutions (El-Gohary 2016). However, as it is promoted in recent campaigns, halal tourism also promotes a cultural experience that is consistent with religious values, implying that communities will meet these expectations in how they embody those principles in their everyday lives. The diversity amongst villages presents a problem to what is promoted

as a harmonious and homogenous display of a singular, globally recognisable, Islamic identity.

The most confronting trend associated with the changing tourism demographics is that of 'cambuk tourism'. In 2017, *Kompas News* reported that there had been a considerable increase in Malaysian tourists visiting Aceh to witness public canings (Zamzami 2017). In 2007, the Head of Aceh Tourism, Cipta Hunai, had predicted this eventuality when he suggested that public caning could become a tourist attraction. In an interview with the *South China Morning Post* he said,

The good, clean, safe and peaceful environment we have here thanks to sharia, is something tourists appreciate,' he said. 'Also, here tourists can visit the many beautiful mosques we have, see people wearing Muslim clothes and appreciate what life is like in an Islamic community based on the Koran. They can even see how sharia law is applied (Scarpello 2007).

Ten years later and what seemed to be a strange prophecy has become a reality. Dr Johari Bin Mat, a man interviewed by *Kompas News* (Zamzami 2017), stated that he was excited to have an opportunity to watch the punishments because in Malaysia they are only carried out in private. Until his trip to Banda Aceh the only option he had to watch public canings was on youtube. While this is an extreme version of religiously inspired tourism: most Muslim tourists come to Aceh to engage comfortably in the local environments, to visit the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque and the Tsunami Museum, whilst being able to easily access places of worship and eat halal food. While it is not easy to see the explicit influence that punitive shari'ah and 'cambuk tourism' on the mainland are having on the local community of Iboih, it can certainly be established that, broadly speaking, the demand for homogenous and conservative performances of religious identity would serve the Iboih community well within the tourism sector. Several older village members in Iboih described the sense of *pusing* (dizziness) they feel due to competing demands for multiple simultaneous performances of who they are. For example, the new market of halal tourism demands a certain performance of religious identity, whilst concerns for village autonomy and Iboih's identity as a cultural ecotone, elicit another. It is within the everyday social interactions of tourists and locals that demonstrates how these

ideological processes shape intersubjective relations and local identity.

At the current social and political moment, Iboih's transient population can be divided into four loose categories, each with their own internal diversity of age and claims to belonging. *Iboih Lokal* (those who were born in Iboih), long-timers (pre-tsunami western tourists), *Turis Lokal* (domestic Indonesian tourists) and *Bule* (post-tsunami western tourists). *Bule* are interchangeably referred to as *Belanda Goreng* (Fried Hollander), a humorous reference to how quickly their skin turns pink, making them easily identifiable as new arrivals. *Belanda goreng* has its roots in Indonesia's colonial past: the derogatory label echoing the anti-colonial view that the Dutch Administration were out of place in the tropics.

Despite long-timers and *bule* tending to share common western cultural backgrounds, and *Iboih lokal* and *turis lokal* both sharing an Indonesian national identity, the connections and impasses you might expect do not play out in everyday social interaction. Rather, western long-timers and local Iboih residents tend to share common values in relation to environmental and social issues, as well as an underlying nostalgia and way of memorialising the past which many laments are being lost in recent shifts in tourism. *Bule* and *turis lokal*, on the other hand, represent this change and are perceived by locals and long-timers as lacking in a real understanding and appreciation of the character of Iboih and, therefore, what differentiates it from other places.

Turis lokal are a relatively new phenomenon in Iboih. They come from urban centres such as Banda Aceh, Medan, Surabaya and Jakarta and are representative of an emerging middle-class in Indonesia. Competitive low-cost airlines and increased economic wealth is allowing greater mobility and domestic tourism than ever before. This burgeoning market is perhaps the most significant factor influencing the way tourism is being promoted and managed and the impact it is having on village life. It could be assumed that this Indonesian tourism base, with its common religion, national identity, and language, would not cause issues with host communities. Yet in Iboih, fundamental differences in values in relation to environmental, cultural, and social norms, as well as starkly evident class differences, has proven to be a site of tension.

I recall one Saturday early in my fieldwork sitting with a group of locals watching the steady

stream of tourists entering the village. Amongst the running commentary of their observations, Mama and Eva were guessing the origins of each group. Confused, I asked them to explain what gave them this insight. They provided an intensely detailed account of the physical, stylistic, linguistic and attitudinal markers of each group, explaining how they could immediately discern a family who comes from Banda Aceh from a family from Medan; the specificities of how young men from Jakarta walk and dress differently to Acehnese men; and, the subtle differences between an urban Banda Acehnese and a Lhokseumawean. Attached to these categories were quite clear assumptions about the person's values and attitudes. For example, one of the most common indicators that a person under scrutiny is middle-class and from Jakarta or Medan is visible clothing brands and an accompanying performance of wealth. These markers automatically led Mama and Eva to assume the person's lack of care for the environment and a disregard for the *gampông* (village). The negative aspects of tourism, such as the waste which litters public areas and the feeling that spaces traditionally used for village activities is being overwhelmed by traffic, is immediately attributed to these individuals, simply through these inferences. I return to the idea of '*gampông* values' later in this chapter to unpack how locals, like Mama, perceive social change and their position within it. The simultaneous contradictory emotional responses to ideas associated with living a *gampông* lifestyle surface in response to competing perceptions and desires for progress and authentic Acehnese identity.

These subtleties were beyond my perception but were clearly of great importance to those Iboih locals whose livelihood depended upon providing services to these tourists. Once they had let me in on this local knowledge, I could read social interactions with greater nuance. I could see how locals engaged differently with visitors and how qualities such as fussiness, spending capacity and social standing influenced the tone and register of social interaction. Prices for accommodation and services and the level of energy and deference locals would contribute to maintaining a good relationship with guests would vary once this initial appraisal had been made.

The current idea of what constitutes a *bule* is harder to discern, making it difficult to know when and why someone transcends this category to become a long-timer. Longevity is not the only requirement for such a move towards acceptance within the local community but rather a

shift in attitude towards aspects of social interaction that are important to Iboih villagers. For example, even people who have lived in Iboih for many years, who have started businesses and families, might still attract the derogatory term *bule* because they are deemed *sombong* (arrogance) by locals. *Sombong* suggests a belief in one's superiority and conflicts with the ideas of *orang campur* (mixed people) valued in the village. To be called *sombong* or *bule*, signifies an insurmountable difference and is indicative of an irreparable relationship with the local community. The importance of community acceptance becomes apparent when those designated *sombong* or *bule* become increasingly isolated and finally find their businesses failing through their lack of connections and access to the structures and supports that are necessary to overcome issues such as water precarity and conflict resolution. Reciprocity is a long game in Iboih, but failure to recognise and perform understanding of local values inevitably eventuates in the withdrawal of support and community.

Although western short-term visitors are over-prepared for the tropics, they are concomitantly culturally unprepared, in how they interact with locals. Their suspicion of locals is evident in their expectations of being short-changed with every transaction or negotiation. It was particularly telling when I would be asked if the price for a service or product was real or if the local person they were talking to was trying to extort money from them, often directly in front of the person with whom they were negotiating. Their sunburnt skin and inappropriate clothing would be mocked as a way of alleviating the tension unwittingly created by these tourists as they tried to get the best deal from locals, who had no intention of bartering or deceiving them in the first place.

As far as I know, there is not a widely accepted local name for those westerners who have, for one reason or another, decided to live in Iboih or who have returned and continued to visit Iboih over many years. I have called them 'long-timers' here, referencing an article by Kasinitz and Hillyard (1995) whose informants used the term 'old-timers' to differentiate themselves from more recent arrivals to their community. Historically significant moments discern degrees of belonging for these people and they mark these differences through linguistic temporal descriptors. Similar subtle performances and linguistic plays are woven into social interactions in Iboih between 'long-timers' and recent arrivals. Perhaps the most significant temporal marker

in Sabang, is a connection to place which precedes the tsunami. In conversation, especially when meeting someone for the first time, the phrase 'before the tsunami' is often used to infer a series of values and recognitions about how that event has shaped the social and cultural rhythms of the island.

In contemporary memorialising of these times it is the simplicity and close-knit feeling that is recalled by both long-timers and the families who hosted them. Recurrent themes within this remembering include the lack of permanent electricity (candles and lanterns); family-style dinners; the unsealed road which effectively separated Iboih from Sabang; and, the scarcity of tourists. While *mati lampu* (dead electric) is still a regular occurrence, these earlier times are fondly remembered. Now, when power goes out for several days, tensions are high as locals deal with endless complaints from tourists about the lack of internet connectivity and the need to revert to the *mandi* (scoop shower) to wash when water pumps are not working.

The night of my arrival in 2013 I joined a long table of westerners and locals at a popular restaurant. I could see that the tourists had been on the island for some time. Many were scuba diving instructors and they had the look of seasoned backpackers. Their bodies did not have the residual marks of office jobs: that is, the stiff awkward posture and sweaty pasty skin of those who spend their days sitting in cushioned-chair air-conditioning. Their rhythms and banter suggested a familiarity with the pace of the island and their tans gave away the hours spent in the sea and the hammocks which adorn the bungalow balconies of Teupin Layeu guesthouses.

My posture was contrastingly awkward. The tension in my body of preparing to leave Perth and the two weeks of hassle in Jakarta organising permits seemed to leak out of every movement I made to get comfortable in my low reclining beach chair. At some point in the evening, when only a handful of these young bronzed and tattooed tourists remained, the lights suddenly cut out, causing them to make noises of surprise and annoyance. Suddenly cloaked in darkness, I hear Eva say, "Like this always before ya, Jo? No lights, always like this." I instantly recall, years ago when electricity only ran for two hours in the evening and we would sit on the beach, long into the night, watching the bioluminescence light up the shoreline with each wave hitting the sand, each fish thrashing about in the water, their tails flicking up clouds of sparkling light.

After a long time in the darkness, Eva says, “Who wants to buy that island? We go there now, ya?” She points to the faint outline of Pulau Seleuko in the distance, an uninhabited island one kilometre away. “We buy it? 10,000, 20,000, 30,000 *rupiah*? We move there. Start again, make it like here before.”

I recognised nostalgic reminiscing like this often amongst those locals, like Eva and Mama, who had remained in Teupin Layeu after the village relocation program, choosing not to accept the government’s offer of a free home in the new village. By staying, however, they were faced with the question of how to cultivate moments where the past that they tried to emulate in their everyday lives could be felt and shared. For Eva, starting again was something she had already done: she had already bought land on the stretch of beach around the other side of the peninsula from Teupin Layeu, before the road had been built and it was possible to recreate a sense of the old Teupin Layeu, which she was dedicated to sharing with her guests.

She explained this to me one day when we were, again, lamenting the busyness of the village whilst sitting on the quiet stretch of beach in front of her three-bungalow guesthouse. “We only have *mandi* Jo, no shower. We want to keep it simple, like before, we don’t want to have internet, everyone on their phones. We want to spend time with them. I will take the nice ones around, we go to Rubiah. I don’t charge them, we just enjoy, spend time. But with internet you see everyone just sitting with their phones, not talking to each other. That’s why we decide no internet here.” The carefully cultivated experience that Eva is intent on creating offers a glimpse of the past, but with the changing demands of tourists who visit, it is a constant struggle to maintain it whilst still making a living. Spaces just beyond the shores of Pulau Weh, or just around the next corner of the island’s convoluted coastline, offer an unending potential to keep ahead of change: as though the past is around the next corner, or on the next island.

Contemporary visions of *orang campur* (mixed people)

Histories of Sabang’s multiculturalism and ever-changing transient populations resurface as strategies for managing the tensions and demands arising from contemporary changes in tourism and the gradual national shifts that can be felt in everyday sociality on the island. As I explored in Chapter Two, the phrase *orang campur* (mixed people) is commonly referenced

as a way of encompassing the attitudes and values that people throughout Sabang associate with having a population of mixed origin in the absence of *orang asli* (original people) on the island. Identifying with the concept of *orang campur* enables locals of Iboih to both situate change within a broader understanding of belonging *as* mutuality; that is, that belonging can never be total or exclusive, that there is not one dominating group who precede the arrival of other inhabitants. Belonging then is always a shared and collaboratively enacted feeling of mutual co-habitation. In this sense, *orang campur* also acts as a means of defining islanders from mainland communities, whom they perceive as less accommodating of difference and welcoming of outsiders. These tensions around identity and belonging are at the heart of current struggles over how Iboih is perceived by outsiders and the demand for certain performances of heightened surveillance and monitoring of both visitors and locals.

Dami expressed these complex sentiments and responses during one of our many long conversations in Teupin Layeu:

Dami: *Kalau ada, kasih untuk orang lain.* (If you have, give to another). Like you see now. We don't see you as a foreigner, we don't see you as a different nation, we don't see you as a different religion. Whatever you are, you are a human, the same like us. The different is only the religion. You can have your belief. Only thing for special we are separate: you are in your place, me in my place. You can't come to my mosque, this is the only thing that makes us different. After we are going back home, you can come to my home. Sometimes people only focus on the different, not the same. Here we focus on the same.

Me: Do you think it is like this in other places in Aceh? That people focus on the same and not the different?

Dami: Ah, yeah but uh, this is difference between people who live on the island, like us, and the people who live on mainland. They are more orthodox.

Me: Do you think that is coming to Sabang?

Dami: ah, no, no. They are not able. Because we have a different philosophy. Like in Sabang, you see here, we have multi-ethnic, but we can live together,

we never fight each other. Never fight with Java, with Manado, with Ambon, with Batak, with Chinese, with Nias, with any other ethnic here. If fighting, it's just individual, not ethnic, not religious.

Me: Is that because here has always been *campur* (mixed)?

Dami: Iya

Me: I hope the philosophy stays like this. That the mainland ideas are not coming here.

Dami: Ya, if they come here, they are watching something different. For them, we are not good. We stay together with tourists, with Christians, with Catholics, with Chinese Buddhists, Hindus. So that's why for them, we are no good. So, I sometimes fight when I'm in the forum on the mainland because if they say we are not good, I ask them, why are we not good? Normally they have no argue.

(Direct transcript of recorded conversation, Teupin Layeu, Iboih, 2015)

Dami's view of the ontological differences which separate island and mainland are common evocations amongst both older and younger Iboih residents. The idea of giving to another if they are in need is commonly evident in coffee shop owners or *warung* stalls gifting meals to those who are struggling with income or poor mental health. The latter points Dami makes, about the misunderstanding that is often expressed when mainlanders who witness the co-existence of different ethnic groups in Iboih is central to the claims of local villagers who are feeling pressure to conform to a homogenous expression of Acehese Islam. This conflict of interests is what Kloos describes is emblematic of state-authority and local village governance structures throughout Aceh in recent years; where local leaders feel conflicted about "their role in protecting the moral spaces connected to the idea – and centrality in Acehese social and cultural life – of 'village community'" (Kloos 2014b, 61).

Where these two generational groups within Iboih's population diverge, however, is in both the expectations for certain responses and performances and in their modes of resistance and refusal for compliance with these narrow images of national identity. While centralised governance structures are manipulating local *adat* (customary law) to enforce punitive shari'ah

through intra-community surveillance and vigilantism, *adat* also comes into play as a key site of resistance to these pressures. In present-day Aceh, *adat* is regarded as “a symbol of local autonomy” (UNDP 2007, 49). This is certainly recognisable in how locals are practicing and talking about current pressures in Iboih. In their subtle and overt responses to changing tourism demographics and the pressure to abide by conservative interpretations of Islam, *adat* has felt to become increasingly performative in its display.

Huge diversity exists in the ways *adat* is practised, reflective of the complex ethnic and religious influences that have become integrated over centuries throughout Indonesia. In Aceh *adat* is informed by Islamic principles but the way it is implemented differs between villages (UNDP 2007). The local community of Iboih has always managed the relationships of community members according to *adat* traditions, whilst accommodating the particularities and nuances of the village’s internal politics. Punishment, compensation, and the dissemination of gossip about incidents of moral transgression differ depending upon which individual has been accused or caught and the relative positions of the families involved.

Throughout my fieldwork I became aware of several raids and punishments taking place in the village. At first, I conflated local practices of *adat*, like *membersihkan*²⁸ (cleansing) and physical violence (punching or slapping), with mainland punitive shari’ah practices, assuming that this amplification was part of the same trend. However, this interpretation did not encompass the complexity of the situation or how these practices were spoken about by locals like Dami. While I was indeed hearing virtually identical acts of punishment carried out on the mainland by the shari’ah police and in the village of Iboih by village leaders (such as late-night raids and various manifestations of public shaming), there was a simultaneous conversation taking place which seemed to resist the notion that a centralised authority informed village practices. Dami, explained to me that village leaders in Iboih have no choice but to increase their monitoring of the relationships of both locals and the young people who are increasingly finding their way to the tourist areas of his village from the mainland. In 2015 he explained,

... if sometimes we catch people in the room, in the bungalow, who are not

28 *Membersihkan* (cleansing) is when dirty water is thrown on someone as punishment for breaking local rules.

married, they stay together, we catch them, we bring them to the village. This is not people here – these people are from the mainland. They have a different idea about here. They all do it, but they don't realise. They come here, doing bad things and then they blame us

(Direct transcript of recorded conversation, Teupin Layeu, Iboih, 2015).

The need to protect the reputation of the village was of utmost importance to Dami and other elders of the community. The 'they' that he speaks of is clearly anyone from outside who casts aspersions on Iboih. Ironically, for Dami the people accusing Iboih of being lax are likely to come from the same places as the young offenders²⁹.

As Dami explained these complexities to me I could hear resonances of the story of the rattan basket. Mainlanders pre-empt the motivations of those who visit the island through performative references to the story, establishing a script that is then fulfilled through stories of illicit activity upon return. The idea that the island is outside the moral norms of the mainland is re-inscribed through these enactments and force village leaders to take a more hard-line approach. I also sensed from my conversations with several people in Iboih that controlling the ways outsiders saw and then utilised the village meant that the behaviours of local young people also needed to be tightly monitored. Presenting an image of compliance and moral virtue within the village as well as a stricter approach to outsiders would mediate the appearance that Iboih is amoral.

How raids are enacted is also important in diffusing the negative appearance of the village to outsiders. When outsiders are caught engaging in *khalwat* (seclusion) they are expediently removed from the village. The story is circulated throughout the village so that the news can be spread to surrounding villages: details of how the couple are caught and who is involved in the raid, what the young couple were doing when they were caught (this is recounted in graphic detail), where they were from and how they were handled. Contrastingly, local cases of *khalwat* are much more carefully and quietly managed. Details which are circulated tend

²⁹ The young offenders to whom Dami refers are Acehnese young people, often from the mainland, who have been accused of moral infraction. It is important to clarify that they are never western outsiders, who are rarely, if ever, accused or punished for sexual misconduct.

to be those aspects which demonstrate that the village has re-established order and control, such as the expedient marriage of the young offenders and the fines that their families have paid to the village, rather than salacious details of their affair.

Within this context of increased concern for the village's reputation, young people are faced with two competing systems of governance. Firstly, *adat*, which already exists and the other more recent idea of state-sanctioned and punitively enforced shari'ah, which is imagined. How young people navigate these shifting social landscapes offers important insights into how local and regional governance structures are arising as sites of tension within local communities. In my day-to-day interactions with a group of young Acehnese women, I recognised how young women creatively navigated this shifting landscape by deploying strategic acts of resistance and refusal. They could utilise the discourses that are used to argue for village autonomy to make a case for their own bodily autonomy. They also mobilised existing communication networks, what I call 'island news', to disrupt surveillance of their movements or to draw attention to their occupation of peripheral spaces surrounding the village. It is to these examples of everyday acts of resistance to which I now turn.

'Island news' and resisting surveillance

Central to young people's ability to evade surveillance is their knowing participation in village gossip. While it is widely agreed in the literature that gossip serves many social functions (Einat and Chen 2012; Goodwin 1980; Van Vleet 2003), how it might be used *against* systems of surveillance is under-theorised. John Berger describes gossip as a form of "close, oral, daily history" (Berger 1979, 9) and the village as a "living portrait of itself: a communal portrait, in that everybody is portrayed, and everybody portrays. ... And it is a continuous portrait; work on it never stops" (9). As Connerton (1989) says, this understanding of gossip and village identities needs to be regarded with some caution, given the inference embedded within it that villages are no longer seen as insular and cut off from the world in which they are located. However, the sense that Berger implies is resonant of how it feels to live in a village community, regardless of its emplaced-ness in the world.

The gossip economies of Iboih were an aspect of village life which I found extremely difficult to

acclimatise to throughout my fieldwork. At first, I felt overwhelmed, both by the fear of being the subject of gossip, but also in having to participate in daily conversations about other people in the village. However, over time I better understood the function of gossip in the community, especially in the subtle manoeuvring of young people around an ever-changing landscape of rules and regulations. What is evident in the current heightening of the monitoring of young people in Iboih, is the way surveillance which uses existing networks of communication to disseminate gossip, to disrupt the sense of the pervasiveness that surveillance relies on for its power to instil fear and self-policing (Foucault 1980).

In Iboih, the community's autonomy is legitimised through the degradation of state forms of surveillance. To accomplish this, local police are intertwined with local systems of information dissemination, the allegiance of individual officers is demonstrably to the village rather than to the state. Within minutes of the Sabang Police planning a raid on the village's businesses or individual homes in search of contraband (alcohol and drugs), key figures within the village are notified. I have witnessed this swift transmission of information along well-orchestrated lines of communication: mobile phones light up, passing this information along until the whole village is executing pre-planned strategies to clean up their homes and businesses. By the time the police arrive, the village is clean and the police, having ensured that this will be the case, enjoy coffee and cigarettes with locals rather than performing the search they had intended.

Gossip also allows village leaders to be continually informed of the private lives of young people. Of course, those with power are protected from aspersions, despite their often-blatant infractions. For Iboih's younger generations, this is a topic of intense frustration. Aware of village leaders' hypocrisy (their illegal and corrupt behaviour is often public knowledge), young people deliberately mobilise local gossip economies for their own purposes. Not only do they utilise these systems to warn one another of late night raids, but they also use them to disseminate accounts of their performative acts of rebellion. As I argue in the coming pages, by using these systems of communication to disseminate stories of infraction, young people are demonstrating the incapacity of either the village or the state to completely control their desires, intimacies, and sexual identities.

Inter-generational storytelling and the refusal of historical erasure

I was fortunate, early in my fieldwork, that my friend's mother, Ibu J, asked to share her personal photograph collection with me. As I had become close with my friend, I had also spent many occasions with her mother and father. As with many of my most important ethnographic relationships, the possibility of seeing Ibu J's photographs came from the familiarity and trust which we developed through reciprocal sharing over multiple conversations. This was a recurrent theme in my relationships with older women, where a sense of my politics was critically important for them to discern prior to revealing their own. Having endured a conflict which spanned most of her life, I could understand the reservations women of Ibu J's generation had towards sharing any views that were vaguely political. During the conflict, speaking about politics, even privately, was dangerous, such was the level of suspicion that anybody could be coerced to work for the government against the separatist movement.

After several impromptu conversations when I had visited my friend, Ibu J asked me if I would like to meet her to see her photographs; we arranged to meet in a café the following day. I remember how, when she arrived, she quickly removed her *jilbab*: It was a hot and humid day and, while she took it off, she complained that to travel the short distance between her home to the café, she had to wear a long dress and a *jilbab* which she otherwise preferred not to wear. Finally, with her sleeves rolled up and the fan turned to high, she took several photo albums out of her bag. As she spoke, I realised why Ibu J had wanted to meet me: she was adamant that I must not unquestioningly repeat the mythologies I would undoubtedly hear from others, that Aceh had always been as conservative as it is today. She stressed the freedoms of self-expression she had as a young woman, emphatically pointing to the photographs as evidence of her memories.

I remember especially, a moment where Ibu J recalled a photograph in the collection (figure 17), where she is at the beach with her friends. The image must have communicated exactly the feeling she wished to impart. Pointing at the smiling young woman in the middle, she repeated several times, with incredulity, "I was wearing hotpants!" In the other photos (figure 18), she is attending a cinema and an evening dance event where young people could socialise; activities that have been forbidden in recent years because they encourage *khalwat*. During

the interview she pointed out to me the ways life in Sabang and throughout Aceh was *seperti mana-mana* (just like anywhere else); that young people could flirt and interact in public, that they could wear a *jilbab*, or not, if they chose and that religion was a personal relationship that could not be enforced by the state.

Inter-generational storytelling is an important site of refusal for older women who feel that their past is erased from selective national and local representations of Acehnese history. That

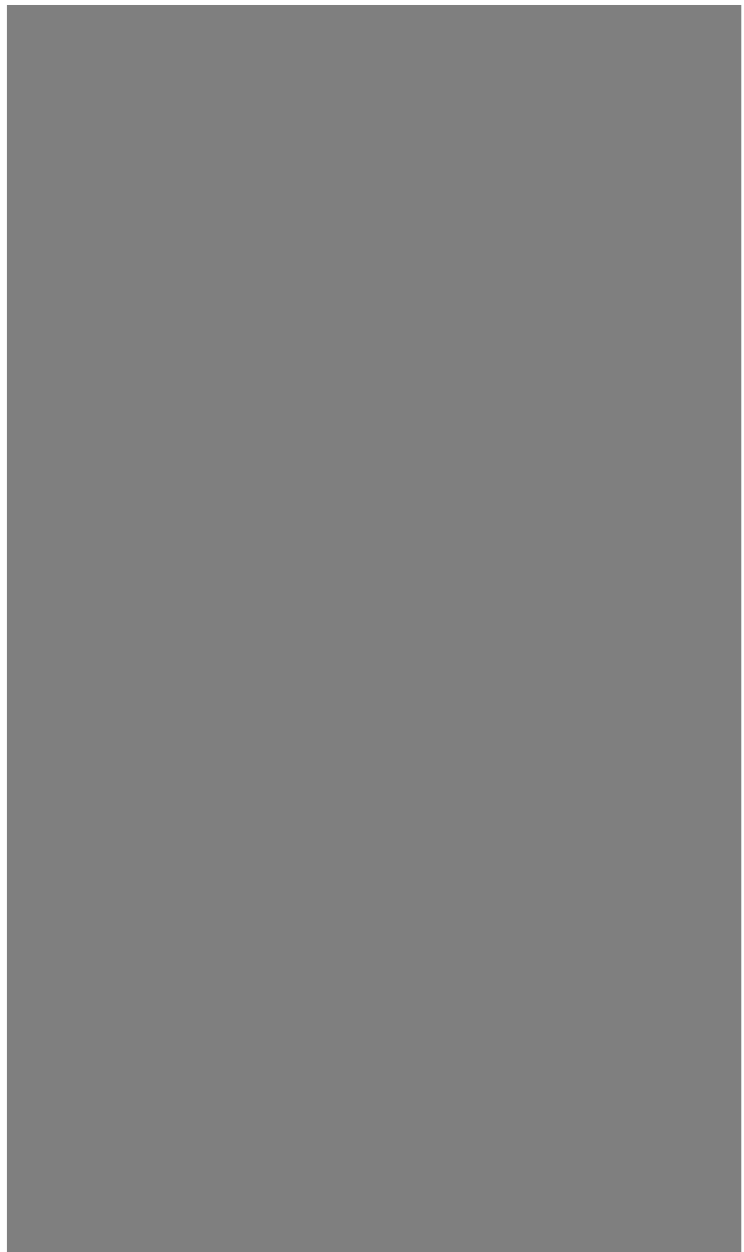


figure 16. *Ibu J during a recorded interview, 2015, still taken from digital video taken by the author.*



figure 17. (top image) *Ibu J (right) and a friend in Sabang, circa 1980.* (bottom image) *Ibu J (centre) wearing hotpants at the beach in Sabang, circa 1980,* images reproduced with permission, Scanned image.



figure 18. (top image) *An evening dance event for Sabang youth, circa 1980*, (bottom image) *Sabang cinema, circa 1980*, images reproduced with permission, Scanned image.

this erasure is contributing to a false image of the relationship between gender and religion is a great source of frustration for women like Ibu J, who have experienced what it is to express religion without conflating sexual morality with religious and national identity. The image of a uniform and religiously conservative Aceh is not reflective of the past that these women remember, and they persist in challenging these narrow images through storytelling.

In 2017, my friend explained to me “So many of us, this generation, are growing up without any memory of anything different. We were not born before it was this way.” However, it is from the stories young women inherit through their maternal lines, that they form their own relationships, both with their faith and the systems that are insisting specific expressions of that faith. The practice of storytelling I was lucky enough to experience with Ibu J is a practice that my friend has engaged in with her mother since she was a young woman. It is a practice that I have seen many older women share with their daughters in Iboih and Sabang.

***Cerita tua* (old stories) and occupying peripheral spaces**

In Chapter Two I introduced numerous stories that are significant for relationships with the physical and moral landscapes of Iboih. The stories of Ummi Sarah Rubiah and Tengku Cik di Iboih in particular, are important references for locals, both to the past which inheres a sense of belonging, but also in the present, where moral lessons are woven into negotiations with social norms, and their gradual adjustment to changing national social and political norms and their specific manifestations in Iboih. The regulation and control of sexuality and gender is one of the most vibrant sites of contestation in recent years, and it is through the story of Ummi Sarah Rubiah, and the impressions her actions have inscribed within the landscape that these contestations draw their rhetorical strength.

As I suggested in Chapter Two, the story of Ummi Sarah Rubiah has several strikingly different gendered interpretations, each producing contrasting moral lessons. The separation of the Iboih Peninsula into two distinct pieces of land, the reader will recall, was brought about by Ummi Sarah Rubiah’s refusal to stop living with a pack of dogs. Separation, in this story, turns on how the intention of the gods is interpreted: were they protecting her from her husband, or where they punishing her for disobeying her husband and the rules of Islam? The relationship

between gender and shame, therefore is communicated in the story through narrative tropes of exile and sanctuary, where Rubiah's actions are either seen as positive affirmations female empowerment and autonomy or deviance and immorality.

The figure of Ummi Sarah Rubiah and the landscapes of Iboih which convey her story, have become important in my own understandings of how young women are negotiating public space. The renegade woman is recognisable, to me, in the subtle contestations and outright refusals that young women enact in response to the specifically gendered demands that are expected of them. *Cerita tua* (old stories) then, are an important presence in the embodied actions of young people who are often faced with intense surveillance and the increasingly prescriptive moral code, especially in terms of dress and movement through public space. In this section, I look at the various ways that space is conceptualised through the old stories of the area and how peripheral spaces take on significance for young people as sites of subversive potential through the backdrop of these stories.

Islands, as spaces outside the normative practices of the 'mainland' (which changes depending on which island we are talking about), offer a refuge for young people. This is recognisable both in how young people from the Acehnese mainland utilise Pulau Weh, and how Iboih locals, who feel their own village's rules becoming more restrictive, utilise the peripheral spaces of the village. Young mainlanders cohere with the romanticised image of the island as periphery. The phrase, 'taking water with the basket', marks this spatial separation between island and mainland: 'taking water with the basket' aligns islandness with an idea of freedom from the moral burdens of normative society. This image lends itself to mainlanders' attempts to evade the increasing surveillance of shari'ah in their everyday lives.

Khalwat (seclusion; unlawful interactions between unrelated and unmarried man and woman in isolation) is inherently social and spatial. The offense suggests a deliberate attempt to evade detection and to engage in forbidden sexual interactions. Sabang's historical marginality and its geographical separation from the mainland make it an attractive place for enacting *khalwat*. Local couples also have their ways of avoiding the village's detection. Reminiscent of Linda Bennett's observations of young people developing creative strategies to engage in *pacaran backstreet* (secret courtship) (Bennett 2004, 51), I was enamoured with the endlessly

determined ways young people in Iboih navigate spaces they know are under surveillance. I was also surprised how defiant they are at times, not only to find ways to explore intimacy and desire, but to push back against the intrusion of surveillance. A case which enlivened ‘island news’ for weeks, centred on a young couple who ‘eloped’ to live in one of the many abandoned *benteng Jepang* (Japanese bunkers) that can be found on Pulau Weh’s shoreline.

Stéphane Tonnelat describes how once functional places might be used temporarily as a margin, where “improvised modes of action developed by diverse people in order to use the interstice” can be observed (2008, 291). This is evocative of how young people repurpose the bunkers, beaches, and jungle spaces around Pulau Weh to convey a deeply political intention. They ‘use the interstice’ to draw the gaze of the village back out towards public spaces that are ‘out of the frame’ of the village. The gossip instigated by the young couple who occupied the abandoned bunkers turned the island’s geographical and cultural periphery into a talking point. Through their actions, the island’s edges once again become a cultural ecotone, where the ruins of past systems of surveillance became a lens for looking back at the village. Defiantly



figure 19. *Young people near Benteng Jepang (Japanese Bunker), Anoi Hitam, Sabang. 2015, digital photograph taken by the author.*

occupying these spaces demands the village recognise the young people's autonomy, echoing village leader's demands for autonomy from the state.

Passing through

This strategic use of space is also reflected in how young people negotiate the unavoidable movement through the village. These movements deliberately use margins and peripheral spaces to carefully pass through the centre of the village at clearly demarcated times. These movements are orchestrated to avoid surveillance whilst drawing attention to the village's own religious and moral shortcomings. As the following account shows, the orientation of the village around a single road is both a restriction and a point of subversive play for the young couple in question. They use the village's orientation to subvert the very systems that are in place to monitor their movements through the village.

We sit and wait until *Maghrib* begins, the familiar sounds of the *iman* echoing from the centre of the village. It is dark, and the mosquitoes are out in full force. His bungalow is hidden away in the jungle, out of sight of the village and the tourist areas. The specificity of timing seems so out of place, where time seems otherwise unobserved. The idea is to go when all eyes ought to be closed in prayer, when the gaze over the streets is momentarily paused, when the street can keep the secret of our passing by, our passing through. And if it is not, if somebody sees us, then they cannot pronounce lest they be known to have skipped *Maghrib*. It is a clever plan.

It is their tension, but I can feel it bleeding into me, a subtle nervousness, as though I too am at risk of being caught. I can also feel the strange anxiety of not quite knowing exactly what is going on, as plans change as the waiting time is extended for one reason or another. The details of where the spatial boundaries begin and end, where the spaces become dangerous, is known to them: through experience, through trial and error. They know the spaces as a series of restrictions and unavoidable transgressions. By sharing this tension, I come to know something of these boundaries. And yet where we sit, hidden

from view, is perhaps the most dangerous place of all, if gossip starts to circulate that this is where the young couple spend time together. And so, we wait there, hidden but exposed, until the time is right and the way through the village is clear.

(Gapang, Iboih 2015)

Their deliberate choice to move through the village at the time of Maghreb, when all villagers ought to be at the *masjid* in prayer, draws attention to the open secret in Iboih: that not all people are as pious as they might claim to be. To accuse this young couple would be to draw attention to the lack of substance within one's own performance of faith. The young couple take a gamble: accusation, whilst a dangerous game, can cast a reflection of the village back upon itself.

These themes of 'passing through', sexual surveillance, and the performance of identity to reconfigure public space were surfacing within my research relationships with increasing regularity. They emerged as strategies for communicating with me issues and experiences which the young people with whom I was socialising found difficult to convey with words. Direct questions about how the changes were affecting them would often be met with an uncomfortable silence, an awkwardness to communicate such complex emotional responses. Furthermore, the social landscapes were changing so often that they themselves were discovering these boundaries through their movements; they did not stand on solid ground and so communicating reflectively was impossible. What I realised from experiences such as that described above, was that young people addressed these questions in embodied ways, by showing me rather than telling me how it feels. I was increasingly implicated in their movements and transgressions, which both allowed me to demonstrate my loyalty and political position, whilst they allowed me entrance into their complex negotiations with identity and the intrusion of surveillance into their lives. In Chapters Six and Seven, I show how these co-performative moments allowed me to realise a research methodology that is responsive to the vibrant and contested social spaces that I was passing through alongside others.

Online spaces

Physical spaces are not the only spaces outside the watchful eyes of the village used by young people to navigate strict rules governing pre-marital intimacies. Online spaces also offer imaginative spaces for engaging in forbidden intimacies between young people, both within communities and across village, region and national borders. The seasonal shifts in tourism and periods of *waktu kosong* (empty time), where monsoonal rain prevents engaging in activities beyond one's home, make online imaginative play an enticing activity. Contrary to even ten years ago, most young people in Iboih now have their own mobile phone. Selfie culture has a global reach and communication applications such as Whatsapp, Wechat and Facebook Messenger are commonly used by young people. While public space is easily monitored, these online spaces are impossible to restrict.

There have been several important studies of how Indonesian Muslim women are utilising social media to perform identity and navigate non-online social landscapes. For example, Hanny Savitri Hartono (2018) writes against the idea that Facebook is immoral and leads to the corruption of young women by demonstrating how women tend to use the social media tool to express religious piety. Eva Nisa's (2018) recent study looks at the role of social media sites, such as Instagram, in the dissemination of ideas about Muslim identities in Indonesia, while Simon Slama has argued that youth engagements with social media chat-sites employ "various forms of agency" (Slama 2010, 316). Slama also points out that private spaces are forged in young peoples' participation in chat rooms, which is central to why young Acehnese see online spaces as an attractive strategy for managing their desires for privacy against the pervasive intrusion of surveillance within both public and private 'non-online' spaces.

It is important to recognise however, that these spaces are not waiting for young people to enter, just as material space is not an empty stage awaiting performers; rather, online spaces are made temporarily through fleeting relationships with strangers. This is a deliberate strategy used to avoid the surveillance of well-known online platforms like WhatsApp, which the government has threatened to block in recent years (Silviana and Paresh 2017). Just as young people deploy fleeting performances in public spaces (as I show in depth in Chapter Six), they use online spaces in similarly elusive ways. Their flirtation with a stranger might only last a few

minutes, or it may last for several weeks, either way the use of temporary online connections on instant messenger applications allows for these relationships to avoid surveillance. They also permit women to re-create themselves within the patriarchies which predominate in these relationships, claiming agency in how and when they connect and disconnect, how they express themselves, and how they might explore their sexuality.

Of course, the pleasure of online spaces for many young people is that evasion from detection is not necessary. The screen offering a glimpse into other worlds without the need for physically moving oneself out of view. The beach, the café, the home, all become physically internal and normative spaces subversively occupied to partake in illicit behaviours from chatting to flirting and sexting. The recipient of these intimacies can be anyone, from someone in the same village to men in India and the Middle East. Interestingly, the young women I was able to engage in discussions about these activities regarded religious belief to be an important inclusion in the content of the conversations and in how the men saw them. Despite many of these women not wearing the *jilbab* in their day-to-day lives, they would often stage photographs, both selfies and full-length photographs taken by their friends, wearing the garment whilst making seductive pouts of their lips. They also valued that they could stop the interaction whenever they chose, allowing them to establish where their limits were at any given time with different men. In the absence of permitted ways of pre-marital interaction, imagination plays a significant role in facilitating young people's sexual experimentation.

Village autonomy is women's bodily autonomy

Village autonomy is a public discourse which is consistently appropriated by young women in Iboih to draw attention to the hypocrisy that they feel is embedded in the heightening of surveillance directed towards them, especially when it comes to the mounting of suspicion based upon morally inflected attitudes around dress and how a woman interacts with men.

One young Acehnese woman who works as a dive instructor described to me a tense moment where she spoke back to rumours in the village that her virginity was in question by village leaders. She had been dating a western man for several years and they had both been open about their intention to wait until they were married to have sex. She is a devout Muslim and

during their relationship and his time living in Aceh, he had gradually moved towards Islam and planned to convert, as is expected, prior to their marriage. As this was so atypical of western-Acehnese relationships, nobody believed the couple and the wide speculation provided endless sport for the community. Finally, the young woman demanded that a physical examination be conducted to bring the speculation to an end.

The usual punishment for premarital sex in Iboih is that two goats be paid to the village by each offending party's family and so the young woman demanded that if she was in fact still a virgin, the village should compensate her according to the same logic. For the humiliation of undergoing the physical examination and to demonstrate a public concession that they were wrong to doubt her word, the young woman argued that a fair price would be one cow, a considerable amount of money anywhere in Indonesia. She had made her point: the village leaders decided not to undertake the examination and subsequently, the gossip stopped.

Not only had the young woman called the village's bluff; she had demanded that the same respect for autonomy be extended to her as the villagers were demanding the state show towards the village. As it has been explained to me by older women such as Ibu Safura (introduced above), prior to punitive shari'ah becoming instituted on the mainland, the role of the state and the village in evaluating women's religious expression was far more diminished, allowing women to decide how they expressed their religious identity. Of course, there were norms and guidance from religious authorities within the governance structures of each village and a broad consensus on certain standards, especially in public engagements, but within that there was flexibility. The general attitude was that religion was considered a much more a private issue and the judgment of others was anathema to how people thought about the role of religion in individual and collective social practices. In the new system, women are faced with overwhelming judgment and evaluation by others, within a very narrow conception of what constitutes acceptable female behaviour and dress.

The young woman in the example above was deliberately recalling these earlier times, which coincide with a time when the village had autonomy from the state and could resolve issues according to their own internal logic. To equate the two struggles, as she eloquently does, is to show the interconnectedness of women's capacity to engage in social and religious life and

the success of the village to maintain trusting and civil relations amongst its members without outside interference.

Using marriage as a tactic

A strategy for managing situations where young people are caught breaking rules designed to prevent pre-marital sex is to quickly marry the two individuals. Often this is done the very night the couple are caught so that the offence is rectified before the rumours of scandal are circulated. Marriage, in this sense, is a social arrangement that can be useful for village leaders as a strategy for recuperating the appearance of morality and normalcy within the village. What is not immediately apparent, however, is that young people utilise this practice to facilitate their non-compliance with rules around pre-marital sex and dating. Divorce is also used to disband marriages which are not contributing to the reproduction of the village, both in terms of creating normative families and in reproducing the moral values of the village. My friends explained that women had to prove their husband is not meeting his obligations or is infringing Islamic principles to be granted the right to divorce.

I recall one conversation with a young woman which demonstrated how young people could exploit common practices of marriage and divorce in maintaining normalcy. She and her boyfriend had been reprimanded by the village leaders for spending time alone. She had been slapped across the face and he had been punched when they were discovered together on the beach. She was quite jovial in recounting the tale and when I asked her if she was scared about getting caught again, she said, "It's ok, if we get caught again we can just get married. Then later, we can easily get divorced and I can still marry a good husband." She was aware of the inconsistencies in local rules that would permit her to have the kinds of sexual and intimate experiences that she wanted whilst complying with the village's concern that 'things look right'. Marriage was a social arrangement that could facilitate such a compromise. Her suggestion that she could still find a good husband later suggests that the young adult experiences that she desired were separate from the sexual experiences she would likely have with a 'good husband'.

Maria Platt's (2017) account of what she calls the 'marriage continuum' in Lombok offers important and relevant considerations of the social function of marriage within Indonesian

cultures. The marriage continuum refers to how changing marital practices can be observed “across the lifespan of women’s lives” (Platt 2017, 5) in accordance with gender and religious ideals which change shape over time. Platt’s analysis demonstrates how marriage is socially and culturally produced and the fluidity with which individuals think about and utilise marriage. Similarly, in Aceh, marriage and divorce is conceptualised by young women as a structure that can be utilised to navigate the tightening restrictions which are currently imposed on their capacity to engage in sexual, non-platonic relationships outside marriage. Marriage and divorce are fluid and, as Platt says, dynamic and non-linear, responding to divergent needs and desires throughout a woman’s life.

While it might seem that using marriage and divorce as strategies for maintaining an appearance of morality would delegitimise their value, it rather reinforces the centrality of family and marriage to living a good life in Aceh. Despite the obvious omission that sex is happening outside marriage for such strategies to exist, it reinforces that the only space within which sexuality is sanctioned and legitimised is marriage, so it remains vital to how the village portrays itself to itself. I would argue too that marriage means different things to women in Aceh depending on their age and circumstances. This means then that it can be utilised differently to navigate increasingly strict regulations and surveillance. This does not render marriage insignificant. On the contrary, it becomes more important as a method of maintaining an appearance of morality by containing human sexuality within accepted configurations.

Recuperating local rhythms

In Chapter Three I spoke about how the recorded narratives of colonial archives and European explorer’s travelogues took on deeper and more nuanced resonances when I could re-engage with them through an embodied understanding of place. During my most intense periods of ethnographic fieldwork in Iboih, a similar sensorial understanding guided my interest and investigation of how identity and belonging was negotiated against a rising tide of change. That is, a similar methodological process unfolded when I attempted to understand what I could only see on the surface as a broad-stroke conservative trend washing over Aceh. I could not recognise the specific responses and the underlying pressures and tensions in Iboih until I learned how to listen to the rhythm of local ways.

I learned too that my visions of enacting ethnographic methods, such as photo elicitation and walking ethnography, were very different in practice. Moving myself from the centre of these engagements allowed me to see how unexpected details could be evoked by giving over space and re-learning what it means to listen. I became guided by questions of what it means to feel 'gampông-ness' within this context of social change, rather than my attempts to compare before and after, local and outsider, mainland and island.

How can such an embodied sense of place be described? I have struggled to organise the following experiences into a coherent narrative. The understandings I was fortunate to learn from Mama and Dami was a slow and cyclical sedimentation. They were reinforced over time, each conversation and interaction slowly building until a sense of rhythm was instilled within me, as a way of being and moving. I can only describe it as a bodily sensibility and attuning with, that in turn permitted me to see: that is, to develop my own language for this altogether new sensory awareness. I offer two intersecting narrative threads to bring these ideas together. In the first, Mama's engagement with an old photo album becomes a vehicle for social connection and interaction in the village, facilitating acts of memorialising and retemporalising. She takes a group of onlookers on a journey of her complex emotional topography relative to aspects of social change affecting her place in the village. In the next, Dami takes me on his own walking ethnography. Our literal journey over uneven ground demanded a physical slowing down which created an emotional and embodied sense of the rhythms which dwell beneath the new everyday in Iboih.

Mama

Mama brings her book of photographs to the coffee shop in Teupin Layeu. The shady wide road which runs through the village is filled with motorbikes and cars, as though this open common space was intended as a carpark. The noise is at a constant hum: the rev of motorbike engines; the dive shop next door filled with divers lazing about, drinking coffee and waiting to dive, while the hiss of tanks being filled and dragged across the floor, carries on in the background; in every corner of the village, the din of a hundred conversations taking place at once.

I asked Mama if I could photograph the album after she showed it to me at her house a few

weeks before. I did not have a decent camera the first time I visited Iboih and was struck by how many of the incidental details of the village I had forgotten. Mama's photos had enlivened my memory. I could feel the heat of the dirt road and remember the details of the wooden houses that lined the main road. I could hear the kids running around bare-foot and recall memories of playing football with the children on the beach during the World Cup while we waited for the generator to be set up so the only television in the village could be turned on. I could see again, Mama's face as she would descend the stairs upon returning from town with a massive tuna in her hand. I had even forgotten that the coffee shops and Mama's house used to be on the sea-side of the road, where you could sit at a coffee shop or on her steps all day and look out towards Sabang without the clutter of motorbikes and tourists disturbing your view.

Mama says to meet her in the village the following morning to see the album again. When I arrive, she is already waiting in the coffee shop, the album wrapped inside a plastic zip-lock bag on the table in front of her. She hands it to me and repeats the story about how it was given to her by a western woman who had stayed in Iboih back before the tsunami. Despite its plastic home and Mama's obvious care for it, a dampness has built up over consecutive humid wet and dry seasons: the book has mould sprouting from the red material cover, deep in the folds and creases of the spine. I take the album out and begin by opening the cover. The photographs are computer-printed copies of original film prints which the woman has carefully and painstakingly scanned and arranged onto the page.

As I turn to the final page, pausing yet again to photograph it with my iPhone, Mama reaches for the book. She has been waiting patiently for me to arrive at the end. This time, with the book facing her, she slowly turns the pages, recalling the names of each person in the photographs and now pointing to the places where they were taken. I can see what Berger (1992) calls the "onrush of memory" (quoted in D. Harper 2002, 13) that a photograph can elicit in Mama's embodied interactions with the images: her finger hovers, dancing, over the photographs. As the memories flood in, she allows her finger to lightly touch the surface of the page.

In her observations watching people engage with photographs, Elizabeth Edwards (2005, 422) describes how they so often have the urge to "touch, even stroke, the image ... the viewer



figure 20.(left) Mama's book of photographs, image reproduced with permission.

figure 21.(below) The entrance to Teupin Layeu, circa 1990, image reproduced with permission.



figure 22.(left) Mama walking through the village, circa 1990, image reproduced with permission.



figure 23.(top) *Looking towards the village of Teupin Layeu, with Mama's house in the centre of the frame, circa 1990, image reproduced with permission.*

figure 24. *Everyday activities in Teupin Layeu, circa 1990, image reproduced with permission.*

figure 25.(left) *Mama's daughter in the rain outside the masjid in the village, circa 1990, image reproduced with permission.*

figure 26.(above) *Typical wooden houses lining the only road in the village, circa 1990, image reproduced with permission.*

figure 27.(below) *Pantai Iboih (Iboih Beach) and everyday scenes in Teupin Layeu, circa 1990, image reproduced with permission.*



is brought into bodily contact with the trace of the remembered.” Mama’s lips mouth the words before she says them out loud, sure that her recollection is right, her finger leaves the page and points towards where the photograph was taken, never looking up from the image. I could see the photographs becoming part of the space around her, her here and now. Those spaces were not gone, they were how she saw them, through her memories and through the awakening of the spaces through the photographs and through the shared remembering that was instigated by looking collectively at the photographs. Edwards captures this process in the following quote,

...the album retemporalizes, it constructs a narrative of history not merely in the juxtaposition of separate images but in the way that the viewer activates the temporality and narrative through the physical action of holding the object and turning the pages (Edwards 2005, 423).

As Mama continues to turn the pages, people are coming into the *kedai* to peer over her shoulder. A newly arrived person demands another full look at the album, until I am sure we have seen the same photos at least five times, each time recalling different details from the growing crowd of onlookers. Edwards points out that looking at photo albums is often a shared experience, where collective remembering takes place through a group’s physical interaction with the images which are organised into relationships with one another. Watching Mama and the other locals engaging with the photos, I can see how the village is revised, as though it reconfigured through memory and contestation. As each person argues over minor details, gesturing to this or that shop, this or that area of the village, recalling what was once there, as though it was plain to see their memories in the busy scenes of the village in front of us. Mama, who is control of the album and has a firm claim through her connection with it reasserts her version of events, her own vision of how each face is connected, each place configured.

Once the group has gradually dispersed and it is only a small group of women remaining, Mama focuses on a photograph of herself taken ten years earlier. She looks at the photograph for a

long time. I cannot put words to her smile, it is both *malu*³⁰ and filled with nostalgic fondness. Finally, she says with a hint of dismissiveness, “*Seperti orang Papua*” (like Papuan people), “*kulit hitam, lebih primitif*” (black skin, more primitive), before turning to the last page (figure 28).

Mama’s daughter, who has joined us from another table, laughs as she looks down at a photograph of herself standing shivering cold and wet outside the masjid. “Everyone was always naked then, Jo”, she says, despite the people in the photographs, including herself, all wearing clothes. Pointing to Mama’s house in the photograph, she continues, “now this kind of house is for the chicken, back then it was for people!”

This conversation was emblematic of many times spent with Mama over the four-year period of my research in Iboih. Although these conversations had a different kind of importance for me since I had returned specifically to undertake ethnographic research, they were continuations of conversations begun a long time ago. I have known Mama since my first visit to the island in 2004 and have developed a close personal relationship with her and her daughters over the years.

Although I did not orchestrate the use of photographs, as is typical of the photo elicitation method in social science research, the fortuitous inclusion of photographs within this conversation undoubtedly produced different material (D. Harper 2002). Samuels (2004) used the ‘auto-driven’ photo elicitation method, where he encouraged his participants to take their own photographs, rather than providing his own. His participants engaged more easily on an emotional level and were more likely to offer their own meanings to the images.

Photo elicitation not only facilitates remembering: it is a material practice that creates place through the performativity of social relations. Witnessing and participating in an engagement with Mama’s photographs enabled me far greater insight into her life, how she remembers the past and how she feels about the future than if I had shared my own photographs or formulated

30 *Malu* is a difficult emotion to translate. As I show in the following chapter, it implies a collective experience of, at its mildest, embarrassment or, at its most intense, shame. In this sense, families and communities experience the shame associated with one member’s infraction. This is described as “kinships of shame” by Sharyn Graham Davies (2015, 33), the implications of which I explore in relation to the Acehnese context of punitive shari’ah, for LGBT communities in the current socio-political climate, where living as LGBT is increasingly dangerous.

my own series of questions for her to answer. The album itself had its own sentimental story: it was a gift which Mama saw as evidence of the western woman's connection to place. Beyond what was evident in the photographs and the stories they told, the very fact of the album's existence testified to the strength of connection and relationship between place and people, and to the concept of *orang campur* which facilitates such multiple and lasting connections. This album marked a journey: a planned return. It was clear that the process of making it was not easy and was composed of many steps. The developing of the film, the scanning of each image, the arrangement of the pages, followed by printing, binding, and covering the book.

This interaction, with the album, was a performance that recalled a collective construction of an Iboih that is no longer clearly visible, although as Mama has shown me countless times through our sharing of everyday activities like fishing, it certainly is still accessible. It enabled a momentary disruption of the visual clutter of the village, every available space, so open and empty in the photographs, now filled with motorbikes, tourists and fluorescent life jackets. As well as enabling me an insight into how Mama and many of the other villagers who participated in the interaction with the photographs memorialise their pasts, the occasion offered far deeper insight into two aspects of contemporary social politics which I had not been expecting.

'Gampông-ness' (Village-ness)

Mama's reference to her much darker skin in the photograph of herself was a comment which lingered with me well beyond that day. So too, her daughter's observation that the houses in the photographs were no longer considered fit for human habitation, despite many people, including her mother, remaining in this type of housing. Both comments offer insight into complex social values in relation to class and gender in contemporary Iboih. They also have broad application beyond this local context to have relevance to many rural villages throughout Indonesia who feel the pull towards modernisation and an increasingly global connectivity.

At the heart of the two comments is the village's conflicting attitudes towards the concept of 'gampông-ness' (village-ness). In the context of contemporary manifestations of *orang campur* (through changes in tourism demographics) and the influence of economic developments on local values and desires for certain markers of wealth, *gampông-ness* conjures conflicting

responses, evoking both nostalgia and derision. It signifies the charms and simplicity of pre-modernisation, while resurfacing ideas of being undeveloped and uncivilised. These latter ideas come from confrontations with representations of urban-ness, both through contact with domestic tourists and in online or televisual media.

In Iboih, older women, especially widows like Mama, have largely been left out of the vast economic gains, made predominantly by families with established businesses and who have the money to invest in tourism. While many of these families can now afford to choose their occupation, moving away from subsistence activities like fishing and small-scale farming towards the highly profitable tourism industry, people like Mama rely on minimal profit ventures like selling food to tourists and cleaning the main thoroughfares of the village. Due to limitations on how much food she can make with only modest facilities, limited time and physical strength, and money with which to invest in supplies, increasing tourism numbers means little for her overall economic standing. In a sense, while the village develops, people like Mama stand still, watching as others profit. They are also often the people most impacted by the negative impacts of tourism. This is clear in how Mama's capacity to catch her own fish to sell is impacted by depleted fish numbers close to shore. Increased tourism has led to high levels of pollution and noise in the waters that she has traditionally had easy access. Now, Mama is often compelled to buy fish from fishermen who have the ability to go further to catch the larger fish which were once available closer to shore. These impacts are often forgotten when those with an interest in tourism expansion discuss the positive impacts of tourism on the village.

Mama's reference to her darker skin is, in part, expresses these frustrations. Throughout Indonesia, darker skin is regarded as a symbol of lower socio-economic social status: Dark skin implies working outdoors, a person's existence depends upon their physical labour. Such modes of existence are associated with a more basic rural way of life, while light skin represents an urban indoors existence. In this way, throughout Indonesia, a village lifestyle is placed at the beginning of a perceived continuum towards progress, where subsistence marks the past and the accumulation of wealth represents the future.

When Mama says "*Seperti orang Papua, kulit hitam, lebih primitif*" (Like a Papuan, black skin, more primitive) she is pointing directly to the assignation of her and the village in the

photographs to 'the past', as though the village we are looking at in the photographs is trapped in a state of timelessness. However, she is expressing mixed emotions in this evocation of a lost past. Mama was both *malu* and in deep nostalgic contemplation when she said this. This is the tension between urban/*gampông* (village) that is consistently pressing in. It provokes a reclaiming of what differentiates *gampông* life from an ascription of urban-ness as having lost these values.

This idea of timelessness recalls an early association of islands as timeless through their disconnection and separation from mainland centres. While I am not sure whether Mama would perceive the timelessness of primitive societies, for she herself holds a very different view of islands, time, history and cultural difference than I, when I heard her words I immediately recalled the ways islands are often described as places that do not change, that stay the same, that are simple. Now that Pulau Weh is so connected and dependent upon these connections to maintain lifestyle, how are these ideas of separation and slow time thought about by people like Mama? Do they perceive a different tempo and rhythm; do they feel that life is changing, and that only other places that are primitive have that quality of timelessness?

The idea of the *gampông* as the centre of Acehnese social and cultural life (Kloos 2014) surfaces in Mama's statement. There is a deeply moral contestation here, where the village is recognised as the heart of Acehnese social and cultural life. She is also saying that there is a trace of that *gampông*-ness that remains if one does not ride the wave, that time permits connection to place which is otherwise lost when one is busy. Accumulation of wealth is a new phenomenon in Iboih, a new way of conducting one's life and livelihood. When Mama goes fishing on Mondays, because she has enough money from the weekend, she is enacting a defiant move against this new way of thinking. She is enacting the old philosophy that has not left her way of seeing the world. She is enacting '*gampông*-ness'.

Mama's recognition of her lighter skin in the photograph creates a dissonance between how she positions herself and the influence that change has had in her capacity to live *gampông*-ness. The lightening of her skin is not due to being less active in the maintenance of her own survival (she still fishes every day to make ends meet), rather, it is the imposition of the veil which both shades her skin and cultivates an image of Acehnese Muslim women as more

advanced (less of the village). The mixture of derision and longing in Mama's voice shows the conflict she experiences, and which is most clear to me when we go fishing. While many women cover up and use skin whitening creams to lighten their skin, Mama takes off her veil and goes fishing. Inviting darkened skin by choosing to engage in the typical subsistence activities and practices of the *gampông* woman, is a defiant act which produces the village and its memory in everyday activity.

There is a tension here because what the village represents is not only a relic of the past. It is paradoxically regarded as quintessentially Acehnese, and more broadly, Indonesian: the village is the site of authentic Acehnese identity and so highlights a tension between modernisation and traditional sociality. The immensely popular Acehnese slap-stick comedy series, entitled, *Eumpang Breuh* (Abeudo 2006), which has been running since 2006, plays with these tensions. Released only on DVD, the series is played in coffee shops and homes throughout Aceh. Through the trials and tribulations of the main character, Bang Joni³¹, and his love interest, Yusniar, *Eumpang Breuh* (which, coincidentally means 'rice basket') is a heartening portrayal of village life.

Bang Joni is an unemployed happy-go-lucky villager. His character is charmingly unsophisticated, fortuitous and funny, mystical and backwards, as he attempts new and inventive ways to attract Yusniar, who has only recently moved back to the village from the city. Daniel Birchok (2010) likens the series to an "Acehnese mash-up of Romeo and Juliet and The Three Stooges". There is a genuineness to Bang Joni and his propensity to good fortune endears him to audiences despite his backwardness. Through its caricature of village life, the series enables Acehnese people, both urban and rural, to laugh at themselves whilst recognising and valuing the qualities of authentic Acehnese identity as embedded in the village (Birchok 2010).

The domestic tourists who frequent Iboih, and whom Mama regularly engages through her food stall, do not, as Mama says, come from the *gampông* (village). These urban dwellers seek out the authenticity of the village in places like Iboih. Iboih becomes a site of cross-cultural

31 The coincidence of my sharing of the TV character's name, and the humorous performances which it has sparked amongst my friends, is discussed in Chapter Six.

collision, where cultural values of the urban, middle-class interact with the local values of the *gampông*. These interactions surface complex emotions, which I did not understand until I witnessed and experienced social interactions between mainlanders and islanders within my personal friendships. I unknowingly pushed such an interaction upon Mama when we returned from our fishing trip and made plans to cook the grouper for dinner the following evening. I had two female friends arriving from Banda Aceh the next day, I assumed that it would not be a problem to bring them along: such a casual and inclusive approach to socialising and sharing food is typical in Aceh. It is so deeply embedded in how people interact that I had struggled to readjust my expectations and needs for routine, personal space and knowing what is going on since I had lived in Aceh. I explained the situation to Mama and she said that of course we could all eat together. Despite her quick agreement, Mama was unusually inquisitive about my friends, asking numerous questions about where they were from, how well I knew them and what they did in Banda Aceh.

When I saw Mama in the village the next morning she suggested that we cook the grouper on the beach later in the evening, after *Maghrib*. At first, I did not connect the addition of my guests to Mama's decision to move her whole operation to the beach. To cook our magnificent catch on the beach seemed a wonderful idea: it would be just like the old days, when we would make a temporary fire and cook *cumi* (squid) that we had just pulled from the ocean. We would remove the ink sac and throw the squid on the fire while it was still moving, quickly make a spicy green chili and sweet *kecap sambal*.

It was only when I arrived at her house later to find her preparing to walk up and down the long windy path from her house to the beach with the entire contents of her kitchen that I realised something was wrong. I asked her why we did not cook the fish in the barbecue spot outside her house, like we have so many times in the past. She struggled as she explained that she felt embarrassed to invite strangers into her house. She explained that the pieces of the wooden floor inside were broken and that if we sat outside, we will have to sit and eat in the dark because she did not have a light. I can see by how she confides in me that it is not me but my mainlander friends that Mama is concerned to invite into her home.

The off-hand comment that the wooden houses which used to be so emblematic of the small

sea-side village of Iboih are now only used for chickens, is suggestive of the complicated relationship locals have with the past and attitudes towards current economic developments. Alaida seems to imply that how families lived prior to the current period of tourism and economic development, reflects more simple and under-developed times. On face-value Mama's house is breaking down, worn by time and use. To many, including her neighbours and presumably the urban tourists to whom she sells rice in the village, her home is out of style and in need of an upgrade. New houses in Iboih mark the dramatic increase in wealth of many in the village: they are cement, enclosed, strong and imposing two-story houses. However, there is something denied by these solid structures that can be seen in how people live in old houses like Mama's. The 'chicken house' holds within it an everyday functionality, a way of orientating members of a family physically towards one another. They symbolise aspects of everyday living, which are in danger of being lost in the new fast economy. The tensions of class and the distinctions between what it means to live a *gampông* life, as opposed to moving towards an urban lifestyle, are again emphasised through the materiality of everyday life. Below, I describe an experience where began to I understand these subtleties through spending time with Mama.

Chicken houses and the between spaces of family

It was an unremarkable day, sunny and hot. I had not seen Mama in the village for several days and went looking for her. She would usually be in the village, sweeping and picking up rubbish for which she was paid a small wage from the village. She used to do it without any consideration of being paid, but in recent years the rubbish has become such a problem that her activities have been formalised. I did not see her in the village, so I continued along the path to Dede's place, a western-food restaurant on the beach. They suggest that I try Mama's house back in the village. When I arrive, 'Rambo 3' is playing on the television in the corner of the room. Three young men are watching the television and chatting, while Mama is laying on the floor half-asleep. I join the semi-circle the men have made in front of the tv and they immediately reposition the ashtray in the centre of the floor in front of us.

The film shows a scene where Rambo is fighting another bulky figure in a pulsating ring of shouting onlookers. The crowd are Thai and are caught up in the heat and sweat of the fight.

They are clutching money or betting slips, their faces and bodies unrestrained, calling for a fight to death. Rambo, on the other hand is restrained and precise in his movements. The line between the crowd and the fighters fluctuates, as the crowd moves in, the tension rises. The crowd call on Rambo to finish the other guy, but he pauses, holding the crowd in suspense, before pulling himself back and claiming the win.

Woken by the crescendo of the fight, Mama gets up, frowns at the television screen and shakes her head before going to the kitchen to prepare tea. The young men chatter while only half watching the spectacle unfolding on the television screen. As the fight reaches its crescendo, they laugh at the overly performative displays of masculinity and the way the crowd seems to be out of control.

As time passes, I realise that they have come to Mama's house to check on Mama's *tante* (aunt), whom everyone calls *Nenek* (Grandmother) who sleeps beneath us in a low room constructed under the broken slats of the floor. One young man who I recognise as a worker from the dive shop in Iboih takes a candle and descends the rickety steps outside, ducking under the stilted-house, so he can half crawl into the narrow room that has been constructed underneath the house where *Nenek* rests. I cannot be sure that they are all related to her but they each carry such respect and care in their movements, in their hushed tones and fresh clean clothes. Throughout the afternoon, they each spend time under the house and while they await their turn, they share their *bubur* (rice porridge) with me, pouring the thick sweet dessert into teacups. I can see the flickering candlelight and hear the hushed sounds of whispering chatter filtering up through the broken floor slats.

At first, I felt uncomfortable and saddened that she was stowed away under the house, out of sight. I wondered why Mama had not made her comfortable in the bedroom or even in front of the television, so she could be a part of the family, even if it was just to half watch Rambo amidst the chatter of her grandkids. But, as the evening went on I could see that her removal from the busy spaces of the main house meant that time spent with her had a more profound meaning; crawling into the space beneath the house to sit with her, made a more profound gesture. The boys were demonstrating her importance, her ongoing centrality to her family and the house facilitated such an enactment of her importance. She could hear and perhaps see

the world which was carrying on above her through the permeable materiality of the house, which so clearly differs from the new concrete homes sprouting up around Mama's house.

Dami

After Dami shared his stories of Teuku Cik, Ummi Sarah Rubiah and the durian garden with me, I attempted to orchestrate a 'walking ethnography' (Carpiano 2009; Evans and Jones 2011; Kusenbach 2003) with him. I thought that if I could organise a time for us to walk together, perhaps to the sacred durian field or to Rubiah Island, I could observe him remembering and engaging with place in the ways it is often described in research method literature. I imagined watching him engage with his memories differently, provoked by the surroundings within which I had cleverly placed him. Unsurprisingly, this never eventuated. Looking back, I am embarrassed imagining the annoyance I must have stirred in him: an outsider suggesting where the significant places of his community were and how he could best remember his own stories. He wanted to teach me, not by telling me those stories but by showing me how to hear what he had already told me: the fact of me asking for more was evidence enough that I had not heard what he had already tried to instil.

Dami was not easy to find. He was often busy with his duties for *Panglima Laot*, which involved representing the interests of the village in Sabang and Banda Aceh. It was always a welcome surprise to see him in the village and I would try to make the most of every opportunity to talk to him because I did not know when I would get another chance. One of these chance meetings I recall so well. I wrote the following account of our day together. Although I felt the significance of the occasion to write this account, how I have engaged with it, and what it meant for my understandings of Iboih have changed over time. This account has therefore been a significant resting place where my thoughts have returned over the years.

And there he is. Abang Dami is standing at the foot of the stairs leading up to the coffee shop where I am headed to have breakfast. He is wearing an oversized wide-brimmed fisherman's hat, which looks so big on his small frame. He seems to be waiting for someone and in my current frame of mind, I feel like he is waiting for me. The village gossip had become overwhelming

in recent days and I was wondering if I should escape for a break. He asks what I am doing, and I reply vaguely, gesturing to the coffee shop, but he has already moved on, looking past me as I speak. "Let's go there for a few hours", he says, starting immediately to move in the direction of the jetty, without waiting for an answer. We take his fishing boat the few hundred metres to Rubiah Island and I immediately feel calmer. As we walk away from the jetty and the small shops fringing the bay I try to offer an apology for my mood but Dami is already hopping across the rocks.

I struggle to keep up: my balance is not as good as his and my backpack keeps getting caught on the low branches of the trees which hang down from the jungle over the rocky coastline. After a while I gain confidence and can move more quickly, though Dami is still way ahead. I can feel the rhythm of my steps carrying me along the uneven rocks, my momentum allowing me to find a sharpness of mind to make quicker decisions.

On the way back, we are close enough to talk. He has slowed down, and I am not so clumsy as I was on the way. "Do you know why I took you on the rocks and not on the path?" Dami asked. I look up to the overgrown path above us, barely discernible since sections of it have eroded and fallen into the sea below. The path is an old trace of the Dutch presence on Rubiah; they had built a path with a curb-like edge running from one end of Rubiah, from the water container, past the Dutch quarters and already eroded wooden pavilions the haji stayed in, to the end of the island closest to Iboih where there was once an unmarked pilgrim cemetery. I state the obvious, "Because the path is broken?" Dami smiles, expecting such a response. "No, I took you on the rocks because you need to make your feet stronger", he says, grinning. His eyes are squinting from the sun beneath his wide-brimmed hat as he looks up at me. More seriously he adds, "I come over here when I need to get away from there; to remember where I am from."

(From Iboih to Pulau Rubiah and back again, 2014)

When I listen back to our earlier recorded conversations now, I can hear the naïve and presumptive way I approached our time together. I predicted his intentions by interrupting and did not allow the rhythm of the conversation to flow by relinquishing the space for deep listening. That day on Rubiah, Dami was showing me how to reconnect with myself and what I was doing. He was teaching me to allow that rhythm to shape my ways of being there, to find my rhythm.

This was also where I felt an awareness of my body. Where I began to sense how my body communicated the field and the importance of sensory perceptions in fieldwork relationships. Physical movement was a way of communicating with me, for me to understand through activities. How it feels to move across rocks, to be centred in your body, both to be able to journey across uneven terrain, but also so that you must physically slow down and notice each step, how it feels to move, to be going at your own pace, but also the pace of that rhythm which an uneven path demands. If you rely solely on your own pace, you are likely to fumble your feet, while if you allow the rhythm of the path to assist you, you can move *with* rather than against that rhythm.

Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, I asked how it was that an older village woman and a western queer researcher can spend a day together fishing. To respond to this question, the sensory explorations of place I have introduced throughout this chapter give some sense of the local specificities of Iboih and its people, both those who are ‘permanent’ residents and those who are passing through.

This chapter has explored the tensions arising in Iboih, resulting from shifts in tourism demographics and the subtle changes it is having on the rhythms of everyday sociality. The broader contexts of conflict between local systems of governance and an increasingly overbearing state are recognisable in these localised responses. As life in Iboih is impacted by expectations for both a specific image of Acehnese religious identity and ever-more profitable tourism outcomes, locals find ways in which to access their conception of the local through historical

narratives that resonate through place, and enactments of local identity against those who are arriving, by cruise-ship or tour bus, to their villages and beaches. In the following chapter I trace the emergence of punitive shari'ah in Aceh and set a foundation for the performances of queer moments which surfaced with increasing regularity in my relationships with young Acehnese women, as we moved between mainland and island.

Chapter 5: Shari'ah, *cambuk* (caning), and public shame

Saya seorang Aceh.

Seorang perempuan.

Jangan lihat saya dari sisi objektif.

Saya berhak menentukan pilihan saya selama tidak mengganggu

I am Acehnese.

I am a woman.

Do not look at me as an object.

I reserve the right to determine my path so long as I do not disturb others.

(Post on social media, 2015)



figure 29. *On the ferry to start a girls' shopping day-trip to Banda Aceh, 2015, digital photograph taken by the author.*

Scarf draped about her neck, ready to be pulled up quickly over her loosely tied hair, my friend and I are in Heri's *becak* (motorbike taxi) making our way from the harbour at Ulee Lheue to Banda Aceh. We draw attention as we pass by: her, for her visible hair and me, for my olive skin and short wavy sun-bleached hair.

As we slow down to meet the merging of traffic approaching the central market, a droning sound in the distance gets louder: a woman's voice, muffled, as though a microphone is held too close. Heri is smiling. I can see through the side of his sunglasses that his eyes are crinkling at their corners as he struggles to maintain composure: he has played this game before and unlike me, knows exactly what is coming. He manoeuvres the *becak* through the traffic jam, deliberately keeping himself in between us and the sound. The approaching low dense drone consumes the banter of the market, swallowing the space around it. A khaki-green pick-up truck moves towards us and I realise the sound is coming from a megaphone attached to the front of the vehicle. It moves slowly, pushing its way through the crowded street, crumpling the edges of market stalls laid out on the floor at the edge of the road.

As the truck turns, I see the words '*Wilayatul Hisbah*' written along the length of the tray. Sitting above these words, back-to-back along two benches facing out to the road, are eight or ten women dressed in stiff army green uniforms. They are just metres away from our *becak* when the women, collectively scanning the crowds, focus in on us. I can feel her stiffen next to me as though she is holding her breath. She waits. And waits. Until the precise moment where she can feel that they have seen her. Heri somehow moves the *becak* into the sea of motorbikes turning and swerving in every direction to get around them. One more second holding this space, holding their gaze, and she pulls her scarf up over her hair. Heri is openly grinning now, whilst maintaining a steady gaze at the road ahead, not needing to look to know precisely the script that has played out to his left. None of us say a word or dare to look at one another until we feel the truck recede. Once the sound has lessened and we can speak again, my friend turns towards me and states in a clear and unquestioning tone, "This is very strange for you". And then, as she turns her head back towards the way we have come, she says, "for us too".

This was the first time I saw the shari'ah police. I had seen plenty of images of them in news

articles over the years, but this was the first time I saw them first-hand. I was in Banda Aceh for one reason or another: early in my fieldwork I often visited the mainland, mostly dealing with visa issues at *Kantor Imigrasi* (Immigration Office), and on one occasion visiting *Pusat Dokumentasi Aceh* (Aceh Documentation Center) to meet a historian tasked with cataloguing and housing documents and manuscripts which had survived the tsunami. I also had to pass through Banda Aceh intermittently on my way to the airport if I was returning to Perth or flying to Penang or Kuala Lumpur to renew my visa. At first, I would stay alone in a hotel in Peunayong, the old Chinese district in Banda Aceh, where there are plenty of hotels and restaurants and the atmosphere is more gritty and alive. Eventually though, friends I had made on the island who lived in Banda Aceh would invite me to stay at their houses in the more residential areas of Banda Aceh. I looked forward to these trips. Walking the busy streets, I felt the relief of anonymity and a welcome distance from the overwhelming closeness of everyday life on the island. I was able to experience what constitutes a typical evening for these young women and gained incredible insight into the shifting social landscapes of contemporary Banda Aceh.

The above incident was, in my mind, in stark contrast to how *adat* (customary law) was enacted on the island. Back then, I framed what was happening in Banda Aceh through a lens which reified a separation between mainland and island. The narratives and histories I had immersed myself in on the island put the mainland and its problems out of reach. It also meant that I did not have to confront my own fears that my sexuality and gender would become more visible. As I explore in the following chapter, there was a strange separation between how I perceived my queer³² identity and how people in Sabang responded to my gender ambiguity. I felt both ‘overlooked’ (S. Davies 2015) and extremely visible, which was cause for some amusing situations and intriguing insights into local understandings of gender and sexuality. However, as same-sex sexual activity and gender non-conformity was targeted on the mainland, I felt a heightened sense of vulnerability and concern that what had been previously ignored,

32 I use the term ‘queer’ as indicative of both my non-normative sexual and gender identity, as well as to reflect a ‘queer analytic’ (Weiss 2016) or ‘queer sensibility’ towards normative social practices, embodiments, and epistemological and methodological disciplinary norms. I discuss these orientations further in Chapters Six and Seven.

might become an insurmountable problem, for me, my friendships, and my research.

Early in my fieldwork, punitive shari'ah was a phenomenon that I could willingly think about when I went to the mainland. Safely back on the island, I could conveniently forget about what was happening because it did not affect what I saw as the odd peculiarities and familiarities of island life. People in Iboih and Sabang reinforced this assumption, reassuring me (and themselves) that the sweep of conservatism would never reach the island: those were mainland problems, they would say, when I asked them what they thought of the news of recent incidents of public caning and raids that filtered through to the village.

But then something happened in Pulau Weh that shattered this separation, even seeming to diminish the physical distance I had felt was symbolic of the cultural differences between island and mainland. On New Year's Eve in 2014, almost two years after I had begun fieldwork on the island, a young woman from Banda Aceh, who regularly visited Pulau Weh on weekends, was the victim of a vigilante attack on a popular tourist beach, *Pantai Sumur Tiga* (Three Springs Beach) in Sabang (RyanTraveller 2015; Simanjuntak 2015a). I was in Perth at the time of the incident, having returned home in between fieldtrips. However, I heard detailed accounts from friends on social media the following day. The field was never far away, even when I was on my university's campus writing, I was invariably involved in several simultaneous conversations on social media.

N, who was present, told me that the local government had responded to pressure from religious leaders by explicitly prohibiting the celebration of the non-Muslim holiday. Resorts and guesthouses with plans to offer live music respectfully, though reluctantly, cancelled the events. As an alternative, a group of western tourists who were staying at a popular resort decided to quietly celebrate on the beach. A group of twenty or so tourists and locals congregated on the beach and at midnight they released paper lanterns with candles inside into the night sky. Shortly after, a group of young men from the nearby village approached the group. They were carrying tasers and shouting at the group. As the group frantically dispersed, a young Acehnese woman was tasered by one of the men.

At first, I assumed that the attack meant that the effects of punitive shari'ah on the mainland

had arrived on the island. Although this incident did not involve the infamous *Wilayatul Hisbah* (WH, pronounced 'way-ha') whom I had seen on the mainland (Sabang does not have its own division of the morality brigade), the hallmarks of shari'ah in its current permutation, were all there: the vigilante group acted with impunity; the violent aggression was directed towards a young woman who was instantly labelled as non-compliant due to the absence of a *jilbab* (veil); and, in the aftermath, local police and religious leaders deliberately obfuscated the issue, producing a variety of explanations that did not reflect what the young Acehnese who were present understood was the group's motive for the attack. It seemed eerily reminiscent of similar practices that I had heard and read about which had taken place on the mainland.

Separating island and mainland is not so easy. Ideology travels. While local responses to change have their own particularities, as I described in the previous chapter, the impact that broader discourses are having on villages throughout Aceh are visible in incidents such as I describe above. There is a push towards a more prescriptive homogenous appearance of Acehnese Islam and vigilante violence is being promoted by the state. As I became more mobile, allowing my view to take in both the close daily activities and concerns of Iboih, and the broader national discourses that are influencing ideas of national identity, I could recognise that these conflicts between local identity and national belonging are not easily resolved. There is not one homogenous view of punitive shari'ah in Sabang, just as there are myriad of responses to it on the mainland.

In mainland Aceh this trend is finding expression in increased state and intra-community surveillance, performative and widely disseminated acts of corporal punishment, and the state-sanctioning of vigilante violence. These are worrying times in Aceh: the target of these highly intrusive and punitive measures can be anyone, and privacy of all citizens is affected by these changes. However, the incitement to vilify LGBT individuals and force their compliance with sanctioned forms of heterosexuality and normative gender is seeing the most garish and intrusive acts by the state against Acehnese *waria* (transgender), lesbians and gay men.

The insights of the previous chapter, despite seeming removed from the harsh realities of punitive shari'ah on the mainland, facilitate an important historically informed critique of the current situation that is gaining momentum on the mainland and threatening to become

normalised in Sabang. The historical narratives surrounding the islands' use as a receptacle for populations deemed dangerous, sick, or criminal as a site of exile and sanctuary shed light on current demonising rhetoric aimed at sexuality and gender diverse people in Aceh. It is my assertion that using these insights to read between the lines of this rhetoric is crucial to contesting what threatens to be a devastating move against diversity in Aceh. It is to this end that I contribute the following analysis.

My intention in this chapter is to first give a brief overview of how punitive shari'ah has taken shape in contemporary Aceh. I look to scholars who have traced the emergence of morally charged rhetoric, informing state surveillance and regulation of sexuality, throughout Indonesia since the *Reformasi* period. I then take a focused look at the idiosyncrasies of the Acehnese context, where punitive shari'ah has been realised to manage the perceived threat that these groups pose to Acehnese identity, currently promoted through a very narrow conceptualisation of the 'moral Muslim citizen'.

In this sense, this chapter contributes to broader conversations about the trajectory of the Indonesian State, in terms of similar conservative rhetoric aimed at containing and regulating sexuality through discourses of morality, the family, and the state (Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018). It is also significant in pointing to historically significant ideas such as contamination, anti-colonialism, anti-western imperialism, and impervious borders, that have been used to stoke a moral panic about LGBT people in Aceh, with the intention of effecting a contemporary version of exile and closed borders that has pervaded nationalistic discourse in Aceh throughout consecutive periods of conflict. The key difference in the current context is that the enemy has been constructed within Acehnese borders, and the notion of contamination and therefore the cleansing of the state is to take place through forcing difference out rather than preventing difference from entering.

Background

In recent years, Aceh has become well-known for its strict enforcement of shari'ah principles. While the iconic image of Baiturrahman Grand Mosque standing, unscathed, amidst the debris of the tsunami predominated in representations of Aceh throughout the reconstruction period,

it has been replaced by the image of the ominous hooded figure of the *Algojo* (Executioner). In this image, the *Algojo* stands tall, his rattan cane mid-flight, aimed at the kneeling figure of the condemned below them. In this image a crowd of onlookers can be seen in the background, filming the proceedings on their smart-phones. Aceh's sobriquet, *Serambi Mekkah* (Verandah of Mecca), so given to acknowledge the entry-point of Islam to the archipelago and the enduring epicentre of Indonesian Islam in the province (Riddell 2006), is taking on a more worrying tone as it gradually turns towards conservative and punitive interpretations of shari'ah principles.

Although news reports and casual conversation regarding Indonesia's conservative turn in recent years will inevitably cite Aceh as an extreme example, similar trends are visible throughout Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Indeed, the 'Aceh case' seems to render any lurches to the conservative side of social politics in Jakarta pale in comparison. Several studies have illuminated these gradual trends in Indonesia since the period of reform following the fall of Suharto (Blackwood 2007; Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018). Reviewing the Indonesian political context assists in understanding the idiosyncrasies of the Acehnese trends towards punitive shari'ah.

Since 2016, there has been a dedicated effort to ramp up the demonisation of LGBT people using moralising, heteronormative rhetoric for quick-return political gain (Harsono, Knight and Nanwani 2018; Knight et al. 2016; Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018; Yulius 2017b). Human rights groups and academics have been documenting this trend over recent years, both within a specifically Indonesian context and more broadly throughout Southeast Asia (Harsono 2018; Harsono, Knight and Nanwani 2018; Knight 2018; Knight et al. 2016; Wilkinson et al. 2017). They show that domestic politics is influencing a spike in divisive rhetoric and intolerant public responses towards religious minorities (such as Buddhist, Christian, Shiite/Shia, Sufi Muslims, Ahmadiyya Muslims and those of various animist faiths) and individuals who identify as *lesbi* (lesbian), *gay*, *biseks* (bisexual) and *waria* (transgender) (LGBT hereafter). This rise in dangerous anti-minority rhetoric can be attributed both to the growing influence of neo-Salafist Islam throughout Indonesia (Wieringa 2015), and the forthcoming regional and Presidential elections (Lindsey and Pausacker 2016; Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018).

In late 2016, midway through this research, there were attempts to reignite long-standing

tensions between the Muslim majority and minority Chinese Indonesians by aggressively scapegoating the Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (popularly known as Ahok) (Lamb 2016). However, whilst personally devastating for the Governor and temporarily destabilising, with protests erupting in Jakarta and throughout Muslim-majority cities, it did not create the lasting divisions that religious agitators had expected. Almost immediately, the rhetoric aimed at LGBT people intensified as a new public enemy was manufactured. This was not reflected in any localised changes in Iboih village, nonetheless I was conscious of the conversation that was taking place in the mainstream news and could feel increased tensions on the mainland.

These antagonisms have their roots in the moralistic tone used to regulate sexuality since the *Reformasi* period (from 1998). The *Reformasi* era was a time of vibrant public discourse demanding change from the authoritarianism, nepotism, corruption, and human rights abuses of Suharto's New Order regime (1966-1998). This period of unrest surfaced long suppressed public dialogue centring on the role of religion and morality in the future directions of the nation (Davies and Bennett 2015; Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018). The eventual collapse of the Suharto government meant that the opportunity to reimagine the political and social landscapes of Indonesia was more possible than ever, however, this period was both a time of progressive social politics and the intensification of religious conservatism, especially aimed at winding back progressive policies and programs addressing women's sexual rights (Wieringa 2015).

Islam was integral to visions for a more morally accountable future. *Reformasi* became synonymous with moral introspection, where Indonesians questioned religious identity and a more conservative observation of Islamic faith was encouraged. As Platt, Davies and Bennett (2018) have argued, this led to increasingly public displays of religious piety and surveillance of religious practices. While a more standardised expression of religious identity was promoted, considerable progress was made in areas of human rights, including the development of women's sexual equality and empowerment programs (Davies and Bennett 2015; Wieringa 2015). Wieringa (2015) describes how the role of women has been differently constructed throughout the New Order, *Reformasi*, and post-*Reformasi* periods, where issues of procreation, social and political involvement, and the regulation and control of sexuality have been used to

both limit and facilitate women's involvement in public and private life.

Conflict has arisen as a result of these opposing views concerning the role of women in public life, especially in areas of sexual morality, with human rights proponents pushing for further women's and LGBT rights and religious conservatives pushing for more power to define and restrict sexual rights. As I explained above, this has produced an intensification of negative and damaging rhetoric from religious conservative leaders, political leaders and, increasingly, in the mainstream. Central to these arguments is the use of morally loaded rhetoric which creates an opposition between the family as "a vehicle for nation building" (Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018, 2) and western-influenced agenda for LGBT rights. LGBT emerges through these discourses as antithetical to the importance and centrality of the family, which can only be imagined in terms of normative heterosexual sexual relationships and are therefore a direct threat to the nation itself. The early progress made under the *Reformasi* towards democratic principles and human rights discourses which promoted women's and LGBT rights has, in recent years been represented in mainstream public discourse as a "moral panic" (Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018, 6). The clearest execution of this moral panic has been aimed directly at sexual and gender minorities, especially through the association of these groups with western LGBT rights discourse.

In Indonesia the acronym 'LGBT' was not widely recognised prior to 2016. Although activist groups used it to connect local experiences with international human rights discourse, it was not articulated within mainstream political discourse in Indonesia until January 2016 when Minister of Higher Education Muhammad Nasir made a statement calling for a ban on LGBT student organisations in universities (Knight et al. 2016). This comment provoked a wave of anti-LGBT sentiment, fuelled by misinformation that exploited the ignorance of the general population on issues of sexual and gender diversity. As Baden Offord (2003) predicted, the movement of LGBT rights in Indonesia, through the heightened visibility and public discourse has led to the naming of what was otherwise conveniently unimagined, causing the current standoff where human rights are actively denied.

As Yulius (2017a) argues, because "the term 'LGBT' sounds foreign to many members of the public and can mean almost anything, conservative groups have used it to spread moral panic

and solicit public support.” Anti-LGBT rhetoric has flooded the media, with several high-profile public figures, including politicians and religious leaders, making ridiculous claims regarding the origins of homosexuality in Indonesia (Harsono, Knight and Nanwani 2018). Non-sensical propositions about the causes of homosexuality have included instant noodles and formula milk³³ (Kine 2016; Yulius 2017a), while Indonesian Defence Minister, Ryamizard Ryacudu, suggested that the emergent Indonesian LGBT rights movement was a ‘proxy-war’ by western nations, more dangerous than nuclear war (Kine 2016). As Harsono, Knight and Nanwani detail in their report for Human Rights Watch,

Since early 2016, many senior government officials had made that four-letter acronym a toxic symbol, the focus of an unprecedented rhetorical attack on Indonesian sexual and gender minorities. Officials used the letters to signal a group of societal outsiders; some even construed the visibility of ‘LGBT’ as a threat to the Indonesian nation itself (2018, 1).

This climate of ‘moral panic’ (Yulius 2017b) and fear has ignited a period of explicit danger for LGBT citizens. The intentional aligning of LGBT people with an imminent threat to the nation has successfully stirred up widespread support for the dehumanising treatment of LGBT people, with numerous incidents taking place throughout the archipelago since these remarks in 2016. It cannot be underestimated the threat that this poses to the physical safety and mental health of LGBT individuals (Harsono, Knight and Nanwani 2018; Knight et al. 2016). A most worrying trend reported in December 2018, has been the increase in ‘gay conversion’ exorcisms, broadcast on television show ‘Ruqyah’. Footage shows a young man undergoing the exorcism in Padang, an Imam reads verses of the Koran to free the young terrified and ashamed man from the demons said to be inhabiting his body (Stayner 2018).

33 The symbolism of this particular claim in the Indonesian context becomes apparent when we take into account the criticism levelled at Suharto when he, as the self-proclaimed Father of the nation, failed his main task of “providing milk for the nation’s babies” (Wieringa 2015, 32). The insinuation that ‘fake milk’ in the form of instant formula is not only a failure of the mother to feed their baby naturally but would in fact ruin the family and the nation through the creation of a homosexual child is a direct implication of this statement. These symbolic political statements have salience in Indonesia by tapping into the national conscience, especially considering the political power that past alignments of the state and the family have had in securing and destroying political power.

In May 2017, A Jakarta gym and sauna named Atlantis was raided by police and 141 men accused of same-sex sexual activity were arrested (Harsono, Knight and Nanwani 2018). Ten of these men were charged under Indonesia's pornography laws. In the same month, two men who were caught engaging in consensual homosexual sex were publicly caned 83 times in Banda Aceh in front of a crowd of onlookers. This was the first time the shari'ah courts enforced the punishment for use as a sentence for same-sex sexual acts (Harsono, Knight and Nanwani 2018; Varagur 2017). It is estimated that "at least 300 LGBT people" have been apprehended by police in 2017 alone in various locations throughout the archipelago (Harsono, Knight and Nanwani 2018, 20).

This worrying trend reached new heights in January 2018, when twelve *waria* (transgender women) were arrested as part of *Operasi Penyakit Masyarakat* (Operation Community Disease) in North Aceh. The hair salons where they worked were raided and they were taken into custody. North Aceh Police Chief Untung Sangaji said of the raids: "Our *Ulama* (Muslim scholars) disagree with this disease. (This disease) is spreading. It's inhumane if Untung Sangaji is to tolerate these sissy garbage" (translated in Harsono 2018). Over the days following the raid, visual images of the actions perpetrated against the women were made public, both on social media and in the mainstream press. The police cut the women's hair, forced them to wear masculine clothing whilst roll around in the grass chanting 'macho' nationalist slogans. This, Sangaji asserted, was a gender re-education program aimed to restore their masculinity; a necessary protection measure by the police to prevent groups like the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI, Islamic Defenders Front) from harming the women (Adam Harvey and Guilianno 2018). The collaborative efforts of police and FPI, and the ineffectiveness of the police against an increasingly powerful FPI, has been well-documented (S. Davies 2015; Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018; Wieringa 2015). The anti-colonial sentiment woven into Indonesian Nationalist rhetoric, has its roots in the Acehnese resistance to colonial occupation. Religion is deeply connected to this resistance because resistance was waged within the specific religious discourses of *prang sabil* (holy war).

Sangaji also made another curious claim. He said that prior to Dutch incursions into Aceh, homosexuality did not exist in the province, echoing rhetoric emanating from Jakarta since

2016 that homosexuality is a foreign disease introduced through colonisation and western imperialism. He went on to argue that evidence for this assertion can be found in the *Koran* which only has a prayer for 'men' and 'women', not for *waria* (transgender). Explicitly connecting anti-LGBT rhetoric with Islam and anti-western sentiments has been a recurrent trend in this recent wave of division throughout Indonesia, despite the rich evidence of the continuous existence of sexual and gender diverse people throughout the hundreds of culturally distinct regions of the Indonesian archipelago (for in-depth explorations of pre-colonial examples see, S. Davies 2010; Blackwood 2007; Offord 2003; Peletz 2006, 2009, 2011). Wieringa provides an important critique of the political processes she calls "postcolonial amnesia" (2009, 205), where same-sex sexual practices and gender diversity, that were otherwise unremarked upon prior to and during colonialism, are subsequently suppressed and 'forgotten' in postcolonial political contexts (Wieringa 2009). This leads to the kinds of moral panics we are seeing in Indonesia in the current period (Wieringa 2009).

Academic scholarship has included ethnographic studies of *waria* (transgender women) individuals, communities, and histories throughout Indonesia (Oetomo 2000; Peletz 2006); *lesbi* and gay identities in several locations in Indonesia (Blackwood 1995; Boellstorff 2003, 2005; Blackwood 1998); *calalai* (female men), *calabai* (male women) and *bissu* (transgender priests) in Sulawesi (S. Davies 2010); and, female same-sex attracted communities and female-masculine gender expression in Indonesia (Blackwood and Wieringa 2007; S. Davies 2007). These histories are vehemently denied and erased from public awareness to permit the ongoing morally inflected vilification of LGBT people. The attribution of LGBT to a contaminant of colonialism and contemporary western imperialism is being used to assuage religious conservatives who desire a more insular and nationalistic orientation towards global connectivity. In response to the claims that LGBT people are anathema to Indonesian societies, past and present, Sharyn Graham Davies (2018) points out the irony of religious leaders citing the non-existence of gender plurality or same-sex attraction prior to colonisation, given the example of the *bissu* (transgender women) in Sulawesi whose prominent place in social and political life influenced the broader acceptance of Islam over Christianity.

These histories are important inclusions in scholarship that is responding to the current

situation facing LGBT people throughout Indonesia. Although the histories I have explored in the first part of this thesis are not specifically focused on same-sex attracted or gender diverse subjects, the impression they have left on how Acehese politics manages undesirable populations is another important narrative that needs to be recognised as shaping current punitive measures waged against sexual and gender minorities. There are recurrent themes between these historical practices and the current vilification and expulsion of difference that, I believe, offer important opportunities for critical reflection. These histories destabilise the totalising rhetoric of Acehese religious leaders who have considerable influence over political decision-making and demonstrate the circular way in which discourses surface and subside.

The move towards punitive shari'ah in the *Qanun Jinayat* (Penal Code)

In the wake of the tsunami which devastated Aceh in 2004, the disruption of traditional governance structures; the loss of multiple generations and the subsequent interruption of the oral transmission of stories that connect people to place and culture; the destruction of libraries and archival collections rich with cultural artefacts and historical documents; the concerted efforts to destabilise the region from within by the central government; the exploitation of religious explanations for the disaster on an under-educated and fearful population; and, the ever-present fear that a return to war or disaster could be imminent, have intersected to provide fertile ground for religious conservatism to flourish in Aceh. While there have been opponents to aspects of proposed shari'ah legislation, the overwhelming pressure of religious leaders who hold significant influence in politics have been difficult to withstand. Certain extreme measures have indeed been withheld, however, the incremental movement towards punitive shari'ah has been virtually guaranteed since the early 2000s.

There are many accounts documenting the separatist conflict which give a more expansive and detailed critical analysis of the political exchanges between Aceh and Jakarta and the underlying motivations of both GAM (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*: Free Aceh Movement) and the central government (Feener 2011, 2013; Kingsbury 2006, 2007; Miller 2009; Reid 2006). For the purposes of this chapter, a key argument made by subsequent Indonesian scholars like Ichwan (2013) and Idria (2013), and supported by Miller (2009) and Missbach (2015), is that the autonomy to implement shari'ah was not a demand of the separatists but was rather a

strategy of the Jakarta government to create internal conflict in Aceh.

As Idria (2013) argues, the current manifestation of shari'ah cannot be understood without first taking account of the political climate during this time, where a decentralisation agenda predominated in the wake of the fall of the Suharto New Order regime. The passing of Law No.44/1999 on the 'Special Status of the Province of Aceh Special Region' recognised Aceh as holding a unique position within the nation, and therefore requiring its own regulatory frameworks (Fanani 2011; Miller 2009). This legislation opened the possibility of shari'ah principles to be added to existing regional legal structures. These laws meant that a standardised structure of village governance, using a Javanese model, was imposed across Indonesia, fracturing the specificities of traditional village hierarchies (Idria 2013). Both the negotiations with separatists and the broader decentralisation project aimed to erode political resistance from within Aceh (Idria 2013) by undermining the strength of *adat* (customary law) within Acehese governance structures.

Subsequent contestation over what this special status might look like persisted for several years, with many feeling that the intentions behind the notion of special status was detracting from pressing concerns about resolving outstanding issues from the separatist conflict, especially retributions (Miller 2009). A strong push for Islamic Law from the Jakarta centre deliberately obfuscated these other issues until, under President Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-2004) the government finally ratified *Law no. 18 of 2001 on Special Autonomy for the Province of Aceh Special Region* as the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam'. The law endorsed Aceh with the authority to develop its own Islamic legal system and formalised a new name for the region, *Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam* (NAD, State of Aceh, Abode of Peace).

As Miller (2009) argues, while the granting of autonomy in the areas of Islamic law may have appealed to some religious leaders, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM, who became *Partai Aceh*) had far more political influence and support because the war had shifted concerns and values in the broader Acehese community away from religious issues towards independence. Of course, many within Aceh's religious structures celebrated the possibility of legal implementation of shari'ah and in subsequent years Aceh's provincial legislative assembly passed various regulations pertaining to the prohibition of consuming alcohol, gambling, prostitution and lewd

acts (Siregar 2008a, 2008b). By 2004 the framework for Islamic law was already put in place by the Jakarta government; while GAM leaders did not endorse the proposal, they had no jurisdiction to stop the passing of laws into Aceh's legal structures (Idria 2013). Indeed, Irwandi Yusuf, the leader of GAM only marginally prevented a directive from the Jakarta government to introduce a by-law permitting public stoning (Idria 2013).

When the earthquake and tsunami devastated the coastal regions of Aceh, killing upwards of 170,000 people, it forced GAM to concede on many of their demands. The fighting had to stop to gain vital international aid and to allow disaster relief workers to enter the hardest hit areas on the west coast. On August 15th, 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in Helsinki between GAM and the Indonesian national government. Interestingly, as Idria (2013) argues, referencing Damien Kingsbury (2006) who witnessed and participated in the discussions first-hand, there were no discussions about shari'ah implementation in the development of the peace agreement. The widespread belief of Acehnese survivors of the tsunami was that the disaster had been sent by god as punishment in response to the degradation of the social and moral fabric of Acehnese society during the conflict. This belief is espoused today and has been exploited by those with an agenda to increase religious influence in political matters (Idria 2010), as I discuss further below.

The popular post-tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation slogan 'Build Back Better' meant more than replacing infrastructure damaged by the tsunami. It was a broad and ambitious project aimed at addressing the social and cultural elements of Acehnese sociality which had been devastated by both the war and the tsunami (Jauhola 2010, 2013). This was an opportunity to rebuild Acehnese social life in a way which would deter any further uprisings. Democratic values would surely be the focus of any other such situation, however, in Aceh the Jakarta government saw their chance to deter further uprisings by shaping the Acehnese populace from within. Community-based projects in post-conflict states often address issues of social and political inequality to foster empowerment and democratic engagement within the population, thereby keeping politicians in check and hastening a lasting potential for peace. However, in Aceh, an empowered polity was exactly what the central government feared the most: it was, after all, the broad support base for the separatist movement which kept the

war going for so long.

Jakarta actively produced and promoted the legislative frameworks whereby shari'ah could be instituted as a means of social control (Ichwan 2013; Idria 2013; Miller 2009; Missbach 2015). This, they thought, in a region so frayed from both war and natural disaster, as well as having a reputation for widespread resistance and a penchant for violent uprisings, would turn the people against the newly endorsed government, *Partai Aceh* (Aceh Party) which was a rebranding of GAM into a political group with widespread support.

Qanun Jinayat (Penal Code) and Wilayatul Hisbah (Shari'ah Police)

Since Aceh was granted autonomy to establish its own penal code in 2001, the process of developing and ratifying by-laws into legislation has been slow. However, it is precisely the gradual nature of these changes which makes them so easily absorbed into the everyday functionality of social life. In addition to the first moves of Aceh's Legislative Assembly to institute laws governing the sale and consumption of alcohol, the payment of tithes, prohibition of gambling and prostitution, in recent years the *Qanun Jinayat* has been comprehensively reformed to include a clarification pertaining to a range of mostly sexuality related laws.

This conservative push has not come out of nowhere; Aceh has been a religiously conservative province throughout its history. However, the responsibility to oversee the implementation of shari'ah was bestowed upon local villages or *mukim* (administrative division). The reports of caning and vigilante attacks are not a sudden unexpected occurrence: prior to the legislative changes in 2014, punks were routinely rounded up and forced to undergo 're-education' (Jauhola and Bolong 2017); sexuality was heavily regulated, with women in particular punished in cases of adultery; and, canings were even administered against those accused of adultery, gambling, and consuming alcohol. However, punishments were handled internally according to *adat* (customary law), without cause for a state-controlled governance structure to manage these affairs.

In September 2014 the Aceh provincial administration and legislative council approved revisions to the existing *Qanun Jinayat* which is applicable to all citizens, regardless of intra-community governance practices, although the village must invite the enforcement of the laws. In addition

to existing by-laws governing, *khamar* (selling or consuming alcohol); *maisir* (gambling); and, *khalwat* (illicit relations between a man and a woman in seclusion), the Code would now include comprehensive definitions and punishments for, *ikhtilath* (mixing between men and women); *zina* (adultery); *qadzaf* (sexual harassment, rape, false charges of adultery); *liwath* (sodomy); and, *musahaqah* (female same-sex activity) (Ichwan 2013; Simanjuntak 2015b). Associated punishments were also clarified. Under the revised Penal Code, punishments would range from 30 lashes with the cane, 300 grams of gold or twelve months in prison for gambling, through to 100 lashes of the cane, 1000 grams of gold or 100 months in prison for both male and female homosexual sex acts (Gade 2015). In September 2015, these amendments passed into legislation.

In anticipation of these broad changes, the *Wilayatul Hisbah* (WH, shari'ah police) were ordered to undertake a period of soft 'sweeping'. WH's formative role, which was first outlined in the Qanun No. 11/2002, as providing a "warning, guiding and advising" role to educate the community about the correct pathways to living within shari'ah guidelines (Otto and Otto 2015, 192), was to become more focused on communicating the changes to the *Qanun Jinayat*. This was so that any future cases brought before the shari'ah courts could be regarded as having followed due process, with the accused having full awareness of the law and the implications of their behaviour. The WH transitioned from being an ineffectual moral guide, to embodying the change that was coming: their random traffic stops became intrusive and worrying, especially for young women.

Yulius (2015) points to several anomalies in the changes to the *Qanun Jinayat*, specifically in relation to the ways sexual practices are conflated with sexual orientation. While sexual acts have punishments ascribed to them, the law is silent when it comes to sexual orientation. For example, anal sex is forbidden despite its presence within heterosexual relationships and it not necessarily being engaged by all homosexual men. Similarly, genital rubbing between women is also forbidden while other intimate or sexual acts between women are not mentioned. This sentiment was captured by then mayor of Banda Aceh, Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal, when she said, "We don't hate them as people, what we hate is what they do" (Henschke 2017). It seems, from the explicit focus in the law on sex acts and the notion that the sex act does not define

an orientation, that homosexual orientation is not a problem. These anomalies are important contexts for the performances I explore in Chapter Six.

As I suggested earlier, between 2013 and 2014 I visited Banda Aceh sporadically to organise various visa documents and research permits. During these visits I had opportunity to witness WH in action and to learn from new friends and acquaintances what it was like to live in Banda Aceh at a time of social change. WH typically targeted young couples suspected of *khalwat* and young women who infringe rules of appropriate dress, specifically by failing to wear a *jilbab* or by wearing clothes deemed too revealing. Most often young offenders were ordered to return home to change their attire. Sometimes they would be given a long skirt by the police which they were instructed to wear over their jeans. Repeat offenders were taken to police facilities to take part in Islamic re-education programs.

As is indicative in the opening vignette, the limited power of WH meant that young women saw them as a mild inconvenience. Several friends, including the young woman I described in that story, likened their interactions with the shari'ah police to entertainment or a fun pastime, describing the ways they would dress provocatively and deliberately seek out the army green vehicles on their motorbikes, to draw them into a game of cat and mouse around the city streets.

Surveillance has already shifted from WH's explicit sweeping of the streets and beaches to the more insidious covert surveillance that takes place between neighbours. In the following chapter, I detail several incidents where I was able to feel the eyes of neighbours watching my female friend and I when we were assumed to be a heterosexual couple engaging in *khalwat*. This was one of many times when my ambiguous gender led to amusing and terrifying instances of surveillance and offered new ways for my friends to invite accusation from those we could already feel watching us.

In more recent years, it seems that WH are even less present in public areas than they were during those years prior to the legislative changes. However, with the increase in *cambuk* (public caning) and *razia* (raids), which I discuss in the coming pages, it seems that the WH officer's role has changed. The increasingly performative way in which both raids and caning

is conducted demonstrates the intended consequence of shari'ah, that is, to disseminate both the threat of shame and the intrusion of moralising rhetoric to the village level. The increasing prevalence of *cambuk* and raids is indicative of WH's growing influence and their power to enact raids alongside regular police, and a public who are more willing to invite the shari'ah and regular police into their jurisdiction to handle cases of moral infringement. It could also be because the underlying agenda is working: people are more keenly aware of one another's private lives and suspicion is rife within communities.

Critiques of this trend towards punitive shari'ah, particularly in terms of its impact upon women, religious and sexual minorities, locate the current interpretation of Islam in a historical context, pointing out that the Sufist origins of Acehese Islam are being eroded and replaced by a more dogmatic and socially prescriptive approach (Ichwan 2013; Idria 2013). Indonesian Islam's Sufist origins are said to be the reason for the moderate forms of Islam which permeate Indonesian society (Laffan 2011). This is most recognisable in the role and lived experiences of women in Indonesia as contrasted to women in countries which follow stricter versions of Islam. However, as Bianca Smith argues, "... the rich and diverse worlds of women, gender and Sufism in Indonesia remain largely unexplored by feminist ethnographers of Islam" (Bianca J. Smith 2014, 83). Having said that, the most important ethnographic study of gender and Islam in Aceh, by Jacqueline Siapno, shows the influence Aceh's Sufist origins have had on women's social position, and how religion and gender interrelate in Aceh.

Siapno (2002, 52) suggests that the Sufist influence in Acehese interpretations of Islam "emphasizes a direct relationship with God unmediated by religious institutions and rituals". Individual religious expression, whilst adhering to certain non-negotiable tenets, is not externally monitored or enforced within this moderate and mystical tradition. The state or a centralised religious body has no right to intrude into the more private spaces of the village, the masjid or the home, reflecting the traditional governance structures of *adat* in the ways social life is organised. It is this organisation of faith that has dramatically changed under the new system and women's bodies which are the focus of enactments of control over religious expression.

An increasingly homogenous and narrowly conceived standard of religious expression is blurring lines between public and private life, with the most obvious impact in how women

are expected to dress and behave, and most recently, how they can use public space. In 2015, curfews were introduced in Aceh province prohibiting women from working in or attending entertainment venues, including coffee shops, internet cafes and sports facilities, after 11pm. The reason offered by the government was to protect women from sexual harassment. Banda Aceh's female mayor at that time, Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal, said in a statement regarding the new legislation: "Women in Aceh are vulnerable to sexual harassment so we want to protect them from untoward incidents" ("Indonesia's Aceh Province Introduces Curfew Banning" 2015). Head of the Shari'ah Council in Aceh, Syahrizal Abbas, echoed this protectionist stance when in 2015 he claimed that as women are weaker than men, "they need more protection" (Morris 2015).

Reclaiming public space has become an important form of protest for young women in Aceh in response to these laws. One example of how this is being achieved is the in the re-articulation of *kupi culture* (coffee culture), which has a strong political tradition in Aceh, by young female activists. Banda Acehese academic and feminist activist, Vida Asrina (2014a, 2014b) contends that the coffee shop has a long history of serving as a meeting place and a space for vibrant political conversation and debate, especially for educated men. During the conflict, coffee shops were a place where history and politics were discussed covertly using a traditional form of poetry called *hikayat*.

During the anti-colonial conflict, poetry with a religious and nationalistic basis, was used to inspire the masses to join the war effort. In more recent years, with the changing socio-political landscape making public space less easily engaged by women, feminist groups have appropriated this masculine tradition to voice their own concerns. In an interview on the ABC (*Australian Broadcasting Company*) *Life Matters* program, Asrina discusses her project *Kupi Culture Project*, which she developed with Australian researcher Joanna Taylor, to encourage young people to engage these traditions to discuss contemporary issues (Mitchell 2015). *Malam Puisi Aceh* (Aceh Night Poetry), an event organised by M, the young woman attacked on the beach in Sabang, is an example of the kinds of programs supported in these efforts to reclaim public space. It has been a regular evening event for young women to share their concerns whilst physically occupying spaces usually dominated by men.

Another restriction that has limited women's ability to engage in public life has been the banning of traveling by motorbike with a man who is not your husband or male relative. To navigate this restriction, a women-run company has recently been launched which uses female driven *ojek* (motorbike taxi) to service their female clientele ("Koala, Ojek Online" 2018). Interestingly, the company has been marketed to reflect the dominant rhetoric espoused by the government to garner support for the restrictions on women's movement. By using the argument that women need a ride-share option to 'protect them from the dangers of society', these women are performing compliance whilst resisting the underlying intention of the government, which is clearly to limit women's movement.

The contested meanings of the *jilbab* (*hijab*; Muslim veil) in contemporary Aceh

As the ethnographic vignette at the beginning of this chapter shows, the *jilbab* has become both a site of social control and a symbol of resistance. Physically occupying public space during curfew and the absence of the veil have become common strategies for challenging WH and punitive shari'ah. The focus upon women's dress, especially in the 'sweeping period' of the WH, where women were randomly stopped and forced to change their clothing has been a sore point for many women who feel unfairly discriminated against in Aceh.

At the heart of women's frustration is the changing meanings of the *jilbab* and the interference of the state in what used to be a very personal decision and relationship with faith through religious expression. It recalls long-standing issues that hark back to the peace talks at the end of the conflict and to reconstruction talks, both in which women were under-represented (Großman 2011; Großmann 2015; Jauhola 2010, 2013). To many women, punitive shari'ah feels to be unfairly discriminatory: they are targeted now that it is in its implementation stage but were actively excluded during its development phase. As women activists argued in Kristina Großman's study, what is widely desired by women is a "just and gender-sensitive Islam" (Großman 2011, 97). The relationship women therefore have with the *jilbab* itself is complexly interwoven with issues of political disenfranchisement. Many younger women in Sabang and Banda Aceh expressed to me that what they are contesting is the removal of *their choice* to wear the *jilbab*; they are not making a statement about their faith. Paradoxically, under this

new regime of enforced dress standards, many are choosing *not* to wear the *jilbab* as an act of refusal.

It is not possible nor desirable to apply a western feminism model in Indonesian, given the particularities of the position of religion, gender relations, kinships within both the immediate family and the broader society and the overall perception of how the individual is situated relative to society as a whole. Consequently, a women's rights agenda in Indonesia cannot be disentangled from religion, but rather is formulated through principles which promote harmony between these aspects of identity. Women's activist groups draw on religious doctrine itself to demonstrate these values (Srimulyani 2012; Van Doorn-Harder 2008).

In her qualitative study which engaged female university students who follow the Salafi Islamic tradition, Eva Nisa (2012) confronts the common perception that the purist Islamic ideology upon which it is based, frames Salafi Islam as oppressive to women. Nisa shows that the considerations of women who choose to wear the *cadar* (*niqāb*, veil with full-face covering) are far more complex and nuanced than stereotypical representations of Islam permit. The role of agency, just as it has been argued by scholars like Lila Abu-Lughod (1993, 1996), is clouded by a focus on the outward appearance of Islamic dress and a lack of first-hand qualitative engagement with those women who have adopted the tradition. What is revealed through Nisa's interviews with educated university students is that meaning, social connectivity through religious identification, personal development and seeking meaning through a cultivation of self, as well as belonging through connection with those who share a concern for a greater ontological purpose, are part of the attraction towards the principles of which wearing the *cadar* is but one part.

As Nisa's (2012) research shows, many Indonesian women argue that their decisions to wear the veil are not rooted in oppression or coercion but arise from a complex arrangement of considerations. This is certainly reflective of the conversations I shared with young women in Aceh: they often attested to the myriad meanings and importance that the *jilbab* had in their lives, including the social currency it had for them in commercial and social situations. However, where these women perceived an increasingly prescriptive demand that they wear the *jilbab*, it emerged as a symbolic tool of resistance and refusal, extending the importance

of it to their identities as Muslim.

I found that although they used the *jilbab* to challenge state attempts to force them to wear the *jilbab*, this did not mean that they were not religious or observant of their faith. Rather, they were opposing the state's interference with their religious expression. They were also drawing attention to the denial of Acehnese history which is replete with narratives, often shared with them by their mothers and grandmothers, of strong female leaders; lenient standards of dress; and, little state involvement in issues of personal religious relationships. Using the *jilbab* to subtly to draw attention and invite accusation, highlights the surveillance that is *already* sensed by these women. These performative evocations of spatial constriction are explored more thoroughly in the following chapters.

Several other accounts (Husin 2015; Otto and Otto 2015) present ethnographic evidence which echo my conversations with young women, particularly those living in Banda Aceh. There is a common belief that shari'ah is set up to unfairly focus on women's behaviour and dress, while WH officers and those with social status avoid scrutiny for their own illegal or immoral behaviour. It is this hypocrisy that attracts negative reactions from women, not the rules themselves. In Husin's (2015) account many women expressed their support for a legal system which explicitly embodies shari'ah principles. In relation to issues such as gambling, drinking alcohol, and adultery they saw the laws as of great benefit to women who have long felt that secular laws do not adequately address social issues affecting women and children. However, due to poor consultation and corruption, the implementation of shari'ah fails women by unfairly focusing on women's behaviour. The widespread corruption of government and religious leaders delegitimises the efforts to enforce a moral order in Aceh.

As a participant in Husin's study of women's responses to shari'ah in contemporary Aceh stated, many young people feel that there is a certain irony in the way shari'ah is enforced (Husin 2015). Rich and powerful people are not interrogated regarding their blatant corruption, whilst Islamic principles are broken to catch others, despite their innocence. Many also argue that the methods employed by WH, such as peeping on those suspected of *khalwat* contradict the teachings of the Prophet regarding privacy (Husin 2015). A further criticism is that there was a lack of consultation with women's advocacy groups in the development of the *qanuns* (by-laws).



figure 30. Dresses hanging in a storefront in Sabang, 2015, digital photograph taken by the author.

The image above (figure 30) conveys the sentiments of many women when it comes to how force is used to demand compliance with rules of dress, especially wearing the *jilbab*. The dress, which was hanging in the entrance to a women's clothing store in Sabang, has the statement, written in English, "Hijab, my right, my choice, my life", printed across the front. It deploys a surprisingly western individual rights discourse to reclaim the choice to wear the *jilbab*. At first, I was shocked to see this dress for sale so openly in Aceh: I could not imagine a young woman being allowed to make such a blatant claim of self-definition. However, what becomes clear is that the intention behind the dress is not to begin a revolution of young women refusing to wear a *jilbab*, but to reclaim control of the right to *choose* to wear it free of coercion. What is being demanded here is not to choose *not* to wear the *jilbab*, but to be seen to be in command of one's choice to wear it. The pink garment behind it says "Hijab: Stay cool and look pretty", inferring that the *jilbab* is more than religious expression, it is also

fashionable and part of a complete look for young Muslim women.

The *jilbab* can also become a means of negotiating competing demands for those working in industries which typically exploit female sexuality for commercial gain. A young woman who works as a sales representative for a national automobile company explained to me how she used the *jilbab* both to protect herself from unwanted sexual advances whilst satisfying the demands for her job, which has a commissions-based salary. She could draw easily on Aceh's ultra-conservative reputation by wearing the *jilbab* to work even though she did not usually wear it. This would allow her to feign ignorance when men made flirtatious advances during her sales pitch.

As our conversation went on, she suggested that there was another game which could be played if she needed to increase her monthly sales. She described how she would combine the *jilbab* with tight-fitting clothing to amplify the elicited nature of flirtation. Men who found flirting with women in Medan or Jakarta a standard transaction would travel to Banda Aceh for this more risqué interaction. The performance of demure sexy, what this young woman called "playing polite", gave young women in Banda Aceh an edge over sales representatives in other parts of the country. This practice was endorsed by the company who did not seem to enforce locally specific uniforms for their Aceh outlet, despite local laws. It seems that economic outcome over-rides local laws in many cases.

The long rich tradition of Acehnese women's centrality to political, cultural, and economic life has become obscured by a more fundamentalist interpretation of Islam in recent years. These tensions and the question of how women are keeping these stories of women's influence alive are delved into in greater detail in the following chapters. These criticisms highlight the shifting place of women in society under these contrasting factions (Ichwan 2013). It is this kind of erasure which is of utmost concern to many Acehnese women and which is central to the tradition of intergenerational storytelling between women. This transmission of histories which attest to alternate gender normativities to the current homogenisation has become amplified in recent times.

In December 2016, Bank Indonesia in conjunction with the national government released a

redesigned national currency. One of Aceh's most revered female warriors, Cut Meutia, was chosen to feature on the 1000 rupiah note. Cut Meutia was an *Inöng Balèe*³⁴: her husband, Ampon Cik Tunoeng, had perished in the war and as was custom Cut Meutia took up the fight against the Dutch. Controversially, the selected image shows Cut Meutia not wearing a *jilbab*. Some within Aceh argued that the image chosen had been fabricated or digitally manipulated to show her without a head covering ("Gambar Cut Meutia Bukan Foto Asli" 2016). Asrizal H Asnawi, a member of Aceh's House of Representatives, responded by issuing a lawsuit against the bank, arguing that all Acehnese female heroes should be shown in correct religious attire. The case attracted passionate public discussion, especially on social media. Many Acehnese people agreed that Acehnese women should not be shown without a head covering, arguing that the central government had aimed to humiliate the Acehnese people by deliberately digitally manipulating the images.

Many women I spoke with argued that this representation conflicted with what they knew of Acehnese history from their mothers and grandmothers. Cut Meutia and many of the other *Inöng Balèe* did not wear the *jilbab*, as is clear in the many paintings and photographs displayed in government departments and history books. They suggested that the erasure of Cut Meutia's style, which was common for Acehnese women until only recently, is reminiscent of how religious leaders in their own villages obfuscate the more lenient rules governing women's dress and behaviour of the past. Several young women described conversations they had shared with their mothers who described recollections of their youth which were at odds with how religious leaders describe Aceh's past.

Nationalist narratives, such as *Serambi Mekkah* (Verandah of Mekkah), preclude any possibility that Islamic identity could be expressed in the moderate and individual ways described by many older generations of Acehnese women. That this stirred up such a vocal and passionate public debate is testament to how fiercely contested narratives which depict alternative historical representations of gender are in the current climate in Aceh.

34 *Inöng Balèe* is a term typically used to refer to women who became widows during war and who continued the legacy of their husbands by taking up arms after their death (Clavé-Çelik 2008).

This resonates with the conversation I shared with Ibu Safura (detailed in the previous chapter), where she showed me photographs depicting the more relaxed and socially progressive times of her childhood. The *jilbab* functioned in her stories as a site of contestation, not just about how wearing it used to be optional, but to challenge the erasure of these histories and ultimately deceiving younger generations who are told that the current conservative status quo is true to Acehnese identity of the past. Just as the images of Cut Meutia illustrate an alternative to this narrative of authentic Acehnese Islam as expressed through homogenous conservative dress, Ibu J shares her photographs with younger generations to demonstrate the fallacy of claims that erase her past. Defending the absence Cut Meutia's *jilbab*, and Ibu J's dedication to showing herself wearing hot-pants are important insertions into these histories.

***Cambuk* (caning), public shaming, and the 'good Acehnese subject'**

I turn now to focus specifically on the role of public shame in the regulation of sexuality in Aceh. Although the regulation of sexual lives has long been executed through discourses of morality, the family, and the nation throughout Indonesia (Blackwood 2007; S. Davies 2015; Davies and Bennett 2015; Platt, Davies and Bennett 2018), the explicit surveillance, public humiliation, and vigilante violence in Aceh, which has intensified since 2014, is taking Indonesia into uncharted territory. This suggests that a study of the specific cultural contexts of contemporary Aceh are important for future critical engagements with broader Indonesian trends towards religiously-informed conservative agendas. Regulatory frameworks currently utilised in Aceh, such as surveillance and corporal punishment, cultivate a climate of fear, shame, and suspicion which works to coerce compliance with a narrow vision of what constitutes the 'good Muslim subject'. The centrality of sexuality to this image has become amplified in recent years, as described above.

Coupled with public humiliation enacted through the performative displays of *cambuk* (caning), *razia* (raids), and the perpetual threat of vigilante violence, surveillance uses shame to affect a pervasive and effective internalisation of moral discourses that then surface in self-policing and intra-community surveillance. The intended consequence of this approach is to eventually render the explicit use of force and violence by the state superfluous, if not completely unnecessary. This section shows precisely why this objective is so successful

in Aceh. The rhetorical construction of the 'good Muslim subject' is represented as the quintessential antithesis to identities constructed through discourses of 'societal sickness' and 'community contamination'. The proposed management of populations dehumanised within these constructions echo earlier historical narratives of moral ineptitude, impervious borders, and the expulsion of difference. I propose that the historical counter-narratives I offered in Chapter Three, which resituates Sabang from periphery to centre of Acehnese narratives of resistance and impervious borders, offers a way of countering the singular narrative of religious homogeneity and widely endorsed punitive shari'ah that is being broadcast in Aceh during the current rush towards conservative Islam. These ideas become more fruitful in the following chapters, where I demonstrate everyday acts of resistance which deliberately utilise queer visibility to challenge heteronormativity and the intrusive surveillance strategies that are redefining public and private space in the lives of young Acehnese women.

Since the revised *Qanun Jinayat* came into effect in 2015, public caning has been taken up enthusiastically in Aceh, taking place in the grounds of mosques in the suburbs of Banda Aceh and in regional towns such as Lhokseumawe, Takengon and Meulaboh. Although *cambuk* (caning) has been practiced in Aceh intermittently since 2006, it has only recently attracted international attention (Idria 2013). This is not coincidental, but a deliberate strategy to utilise social and mainstream media to disseminate images of public humiliation to influence compliance throughout the community.

To heighten the impact of public shaming, the WH and local mosques attract crowds of mostly young onlookers, who they know will broadcast proceedings through their social media networks. To these ends, the events have become increasingly performative. We can imagine the experience of a young person attending their first caning. Firstly, the broadcasting of the MC's voice over loudspeakers, might draw them in from a nearby area. When they arrive, they will see a huge stage upon which the caning will play out, a crowd forming around each side. They will take in the garish costumes worn by the several *Algojo* (executioner) waiting at the side of the stage. Finally, when a large enough crowd has formed, they will see the accused person led out from the mosque, wearing a white gown, their head lowered in shame. Once positioned on their knees or standing in the centre of the stage, the onlooker will hear the

cane make contact before they see it, the crowd so dense that it blocks the view of the stage. The MC's voice will boom over the crowd, counting the *Algojo* in, keeping a running tally of the lashes so the crowd can feel the mounting tension and anguish of that solitary figure crouched in pain. They might sense a pause in proceedings as one *Algojo* is substituted in, the first becoming tired and the lashes losing their impact. Finding a gap in the crowd, the curious onlooker might catch a glimpse of that person as they fall forward, hiding their face. The WH officers, who have been waiting on the side-lines, swoop in and offer comforting arms before carrying the figure away. The entire scene is perhaps both entrancing and terrifying.

Cambuk, as is clear in this description, is a public spectacle which serves an ideological function (Foucault 1980, [1975] 1995). They are the more explicitly recognisable disciplinary strategies used by the state to enact surveillance. This approach to governance works to instill self-surveillance, or what Foucault described as the 'disciplining of subjects' through an internalisation of discourses of the good or moral citizen, which he began to conceptualise in his genealogical study of the prison and then extended through his theories of governmentality and biopolitics (Foucault 1980, [1975] 1995). However, is this the whole story? As I argued in the previous chapter, conflict between village and state-level governance structures, specifically over issues of village autonomy, is manifesting in increased regulations at both levels and it is in the contradictions over what constitutes the moral subject that resistance finds spaces through performative public enactment. This is a tension that has been explored in mainland communities in Aceh by David Kloos (2014), who found similar tensions between the state and local governance apparatuses.

The process whereby shari'ah principles are enacted, at both village and state levels, can be understood as a 'social drama' (Turner 1980), a concept which centres the performative enactment of moral discourse as a narrative a society tells itself, about itself. There is not a script for how punitive shari'ah should be enacted, beyond the basic guidelines outlined in the punishment itself (i.e, 100 lashes of the cane); rather, it is produced through the performative enactment: the aesthetics of the event become the image of shari'ah and what we can see currently is that the cultural and political contexts of contemporary Aceh are manifesting in the garish displays detailed above.

'Social drama' refers to the process which follows a conflict or breach of normative social relations (Turner 1980). Turner (1980) identifies four main phases of public action: breach, crisis, redressive, and finally, reintegration, whereby social order is recuperated. The processes of accusation and punishment in Aceh follow this trajectory, with religious moralism informing the specific rhetoric associated with each phase. Initially, suspicion marks the beginning of the social drama, followed by *razia* (raid), where at least four people must witness the transgression. To recuperate order, a punishment is carried out. In traditional enactments of this process, the scale and duration of the social drama assured the possibility of reintegration. The main form of punishment, *membersihkan* (cleansing; the practice of dousing offenders with dirty water), is typically enacted quietly within the village to permit the recuperation of moral order within a fairly localised and temporally finite context. The main operative in these processes is shame, which as Davies and Bennett point out, "is a key regulatory mechanism operating in Indonesia, shaping all aspects of behaviour, not least sexuality" (2015, 13). Davies (2015) continues along this line of inquiry in her chapter of the same collection, arguing that shame manifests in specific formations within Indonesian kinship systems. Using the phrase, "kinships of shame" (2015, 33), Davies suggests that shame is felt beyond the individual who is judged to have transgressed normative boundaries, implicating the direct and extended family, the village community, and even work colleagues and the state.

In my research I found it difficult to translate the emotion '*malu*' into a western framework because of its cultural specificity. I asked numerous friends to explain what the emotion was, yet when I tried to relate their explanations to my own western understandings of shame, which focus heavily on individualistic experiences of emotions, fell short in accommodating the weightiness of the term as they described it. As Davies (2015) has said, '*malu*' reflects the pervasive extension of individual shame that encompasses a person's familial networks. As we can see, these are powerful cultural mechanisms that can be used as divisive or unifying tools, depending upon the context in which it is used. As I suggest above, the mechanism of shame can be used to reintegrate a person in the community after a punishment has been endured, however, in the more prolonged humiliation of public caning by the state, makes reintegration much more difficult. The shame endured by the individual, their family, and the wider community is far more pervasive and enduring.

This new form of punishment threatens to further destabilise local governance processes, which permit reintegration, if villages feel compelled to invite the shari'ah police to intervene in local matters, an occurrence which has been documented and widely publicised several times in recent years. As Kloos (2013, 2014b) has argued, the recent changes subtly encourage intra-community surveillance and vigilante violence, where the state's apparatus of social control extends to the interpersonal spaces of homes and communities. Of the relationship between the *Qanun Jinayat* and vigilante violence, Kloos says,

According to human rights advocates, the Islamic penal code (which was introduced in the early 2000s) has encouraged local communities to police public morality in their own villages and neighborhoods, spy on their neighbors' activities, and carry out violent punishment of alleged violators of *syariah*-based norms (2014b, 60).

While *adat* regulations often lead to acts of violence or public humiliation, state-sanctioned social surveillance permits a break from traditional processes of governance, where accusation, proof, and negotiated punishments mean that at least a modicum of fairness is possible. With state impunity over vigilante violence and a moral panic raging about sinful sexual behaviour, these processes are rushed or ignored. The ability to fabricate ambiguous images and disseminate them quickly through social media creates further dangers. Unfounded accusations and public trials waged before the accused have a chance of reply are a particularly worrying trend, especially for sexual and gender minorities.

As I argue above, social and state media are increasingly used to heighten the impact of shame experienced by those accused of immoral behaviour. Police and onlookers have videotaped raids and public canings which are then shared on state and social media. For example, the young couple caught and subsequently caned in 2017 were videotaped engaging in consensual gay sex in their home when members of the village where the men lived followed up suspicions they held about the men and secretly filmed them through a gap in the curtains. This video was then disseminated through state and social media. Then, the public caning of these men was also shared widely, the entire narrative of their capture and punishment existing in perpetuity.

The repercussions for these men cannot be understated; the possibility of reintegration is made virtually impossible by the sheer scale of the shaming and the potential for those video images to resurface at any time.

Watching these videos is so difficult. Often included in media accounts without blurring the faces to deidentify the accused, I feel as though I am a participant in the grotesque click-bait-driven media cycle, another number in the growing virtual audience watching and contributing to a stranger's humiliation. The grotesque invasion of privacy and the performative way the police parade those arrested before the cameras whilst belittling and insulting them feels even more perverse in a social context that is so seemingly afraid of sexuality. It feels as though you are a part of the raid: the smart-phone camera zooms in and out, losing focus, as it follows the figures of those arrested; the police shine lights on the arrested, so the camera can pick up their faces, which they try to hide behind clothes, the eerie darkness adding to the sense that you are watching something you should not see: this voyeuristic quality to the videos, a strange juxtaposition to the performed piety you see everywhere in the light of day.

In November 2018, ten women were targeted by police and accused of engaging in lesbian sexual behaviours after a Facebook post was brought to the attention of authorities (Knight 2018). The police traced photographs uploaded by one of the young women which depicted two women kissing and hugging and subsequently detained them for questioning. In the previous chapter, I discussed the use of social media as a means of navigating the intense scrutiny of young people in non-online social spaces, yet this example shows how certain platforms are just as dangerous for LGBT people to be 'publicly' visible. The arrest of twelve transgender women in early 2018 mentioned above, also utilised the media to dramatic effect.

As Yulius (2018) argues, citizens have filmed people whom they suspect are homosexual and the ensuing victimisation that plays out when the video goes viral on social media has had damaging effects on both those accused of homosexuality and others who fear similar retribution. These are the most worrying impacts of shari'ah. A Human Rights Watch complaint, submitted on behalf of Acehnese LGBT people stated that "... community enforcement standards encourage widespread harassment of LGBT people in Aceh, creating a climate of pervasive fear" (HRW 2016), demonstrating that the once private lives of LGBT people are no longer safe. The

sanctioning of violence and harassment is investing anyone with a camera phone and enough friends to force their way into the homes of LGBT people an inordinate power to ruin the lives of LGBT people completely and irredeemably.

As I suggested at the outset, the construction of LGBT people as a social contaminant and disease contracted through contact with western cultures, draws on long-standing ideas of Acehese impervious and resistance to incursions from outsiders. The silent threat which is persistently present in public discourse about moral contamination and impervious borders is the collective memory of the tsunami, which is never far from public consciousness. Religious leaders exploit the widely held belief that the tsunami was punishment for the moral failure of the Acehese people throughout the separatist conflict. The sheer scale of death and destruction caused by that event is used to argue that further slips into immorality will lead to further disasters. The implication is that the scourge of immorality can impact the entire community, and that it is therefore upon the entire community to prevent the spread of immoral behaviour. In the current context of vilification of sexuality and gender minorities, the perceived threat is within Aceh's borders, leading to a renewed idea of social cleansing. This time, however, the contaminant must be purged from within, rather than held back, leading to the erasure of LGBT from public view, either by individuals leaving Aceh or hiding their identity if they cannot leave.

Throughout the remainder of this thesis, I explore how ideas of kinship is perhaps in a process of redefinition amongst a younger generation of Acehese who have left the province in recent years, either willingly or as a result of targeted hostility. This growing diaspora of exiled Acehese are forming community beyond the traditional meanings of kinship which infer familial connections and a bounded geographical location. Since I began this research, the social group I engaged, consisting mostly of women in their 20s and 30s, have gradually moved, now living in-between Sabang and Europe, or in other parts of Indonesia. This transience, transnational, diasporic movement, has fostered a vibrant revisioning of ideas of kinship and community. The notion of 'chosen family', which has a queer genealogy, is recognisable in how these friends talk about their new configurations of support, intimacy, political activism, family, and community: as they often describe themselves, they are the *Inong Aceh di luar* (outside

Acehnese women). They persist in enacting resistance within these networks to reimagine the province from outside its increasingly restrictive borders. Shame in this articulation is recast as resistance. When collectively experienced and shared through these reconfigured kinship networks, shame and resistance can become an important tool for rethinking a politics of disruption from Aceh's periphery. I explore these ideas in the following chapters through the understandings I developed as a result of the research relationships that flourished later in my fieldwork.

Conclusion

To return to the incident I described in the opening pages of this chapter, the vigilante attack directed at the young woman on the beach New Year's Eve. The day following the attack, the young woman, made a public statement on social media to defend herself against the assumptions which she saw as the catalyst for the attack. Her post on social media, which is included in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, is recalled here,

*Saya seorang Aceh. Seorang perempuan. Jangan lihat saya dari sisi objektif.
Saya berhak menentukan pilihan saya selama tidak mengganggu.*

(I am Acehnese. I am a woman. Do not look at me as an object. I reserve the right to determine my path so long as I do not disturb others) (2015).

It was clear that she was responding to more than the incident at hand. The last part of her statement, "I reserve the right to determine my path, so long as I do not disturb others", reflects a sentiment shared by many women throughout Aceh that there is a deep contradiction between how shari'ah is currently being implemented and how it is traditionally practiced through *adat*. The defiance in this statement captured my attention as soon as I read it, reposted by other friends on Facebook.

It was not until several months later that I would meet this young woman on the same beach where the attack against her had taken place. At first, I did not realise she was the woman whose words I had read on social media. We spent the afternoon talking and I began to understand more about the everyday negotiations she is forced to make as a young woman who chooses not to comply completely with restrictive regulations. Our friendship became

a central relationship in the latter part of my fieldwork. I was permitted unparalleled insight into women's experiences of surveillance on the Acehese mainland as we moved through public spaces together, on the mainland, in Sabang and eventually in Melbourne (Australia). I tentatively tried to make connection with LGBT people through these new friendships and on several occasions had firm arrangements to meet individuals involved in Violet Grey, a LGBT advocacy group in Banda Aceh, to hear from them their experiences of the current situation. I was intent on following these possibilities; sensing that the story of the rattan basket was leading me from the island to the contemporary articulations of its sentiments. However, none of these arrangements eventuated, such was the fear of LGBT people to meet a stranger, especially an outsider, in the current climate. Violet Grey members disbanded and even destroyed their documents out of fear of raids and none of the members were willing to meet.

During these trips to the mainland, where M and I would spend afternoons in coffee shops, meeting her friends and talking, I began to feel my way into the social spaces of the mainland. Although I did not formally interview any LGBT activists, the incidental meeting of a diverse community of gender diverse young people and cisgender women who held radically oppositional views to the political discourse that was gaining momentum, gave such tremendous insight. I also, unexpectedly, became both witness and unaware participant in M's performative acts of resistance and it was my queer identity that was the fodder for many of these disruptive moments. The intersections of queer in/visibility and heterosexual surveillance was the central paradox of these moments and through embodied experience of in/visibility, I engaged a sensory engagement with Acehese public and private spaces. It is to the strange emergence of these moments in my fieldwork that I turn in the following chapter; the understandings gleaned from these experiential and sensory engagements that fostered a gradual conceptualisation of a queer embodied research methodology.

Chapter 6: What do queer performances want from queer researchers?

I swear I saw this.

(Taussig 2011, 1)

The anthropologist, as we already know, does not find things;
s/he makes them. And makes them up.

(Trinh 1989, 141)

Our pickup truck passes through an island of light cast down from a single street lamp on the side of the road. From where I sit, perched uncomfortably on a spare tyre opposite, I catch a glimpse of the young couple sitting together in the shadow of the truck's frame. As we drive closer to town through the cold dank jungle, they inch closer to one another, until they are so close I can barely see where one body ends and the other begins. Even as I return to this moment now, almost four years later from this silent, air-conditioned room at my university in Perth, I can still recall the feeling of warm air whipping between us as we built up speed between the villages of Iboih and Gapang and then, how that warm air turned shockingly cold as the truck heaved its way into the dark jungle separating Iboih from Sabang.

I am transfixed by the couple as we slow to join the congestion of cars and motorbikes entering town. There is light now, as we move towards the main shopping strip of Sabang, where temporary *warung* (food stalls) have been set up in the road. Motorbikes expertly weave between the traffic, their passengers casting casual fleeting glances at us. The couple sense this gaze and begin to move out of the shadows, allowing a space to grow between them. She pulls her scarf from around her neck as though she is going to fasten it into place over her hair. Instead, she leans back into him and drapes the scarf around his head. She pulls him in, enveloping him with the scarf. From where I sit, they appear to be two women embracing, one with covered hair, the other's hair freely whipping between them in the wind.

This moment has been provocative of endless reflections on methodology and fieldwork methods, of writing and ruminating on how gender and sexuality are negotiated in contemporary Aceh, especially in the latter periods of this research. I remember the urgency I felt when I returned to my room later that night, the image of those two bodies curled into one another, firmly etched in my mind. Finally, alone, I dug out my fieldnote book and wrote the phrase: 'queer moment' and underneath, as a reminder, the names of my two companions on the truck. It seemed, looking back, that it was all I needed to write to recall the mesmerising image of what I had seen fleetingly in the half-light. Over time, and through subsequent emotionally



figure 31. *Young women relaxing on repurposed colonial-era cannons, Sabang Fair, 2015, digital photograph taken by the author.*

and affectively charged moments that jugged out ³⁵ and caught my attention, I have crafted the above account into its current formation. I kept playing with this moment until I could not recognise whether I had seen it, or simply imagined it, raising the question of how much I was involved in actively influencing, if not producing, ethnographic moments in my fieldwork. It drew me to the relationship between ethnography and performance as a central theoretical and experiential aspect of my fieldwork practice, where the dialogical within my research relationships fostered a vibrant site of subversive potential for communicating about sensitive and complex social issues and across positions and experiences of marginality. What became more important than whether it really happened, or I imagined it, were the relationships which created a space within which it was possible.

Michael Taussig's (2011, 1) claim to ethnographic authenticity, "I swear I saw this", comes to mind. He made this written proclamation underneath a hastily scribbled note in his field notebook, later drawing a picture of what had passed through his field of vision as he travelled by car, through a Colombian city at night. His drawing, depicting two figures huddled together at the entrance to a freeway tunnel, demanded authenticity to experience, as though it was his inscription which made the experience real. A clever play, this example raises questions about processes of ethnographic representation. For the purposes of my argument in this chapter, the inscription of both drawing and proclamation, point to the multiple temporalities of ethnography. While there is a lag between experience and representation³⁶, the ambiguities of fleeting observations have a density that makes them an excess to what can be written,

35 My alertness to these moments and my evocation of them in writing is informed by Kathleen Stewart's (2003, 2007) articulation of affect, specifically, the uneasy recurrence of queer moments in the everyday, as described throughout this chapter, reflects the strange potential of affect, which comes as a "... promise, or threat, that something is happening – something new, emergent, and capable of impact" (Stewart 2003, 431).

36 See Kirsten Hastrup's *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory* (1995) for an extensive account of the complexities of ethnographic representation. Hastrup argues, in opposition to Fabian's critique of the allochronism of anthropology, that ethnography exists in a unique temporality, which she calls the 'ethnographic present'. The ethnographic present allows a space of representation to transcend the limits of the temporality of fieldwork and writing, where a creative and unending reimagining of critical moments can be portrayed in the present tense. This framework has empowered me to give life to 'queer moments' beyond their initial rupture. I am also influenced by Anna Tsing's (1993) deliberately ambiguous rendering of temporality in the presentation of fieldnotes; whereby tense is consciously destabilised to draw attention to the vibrancy and 'betweenness' of ethnographic practices of intersubjective fieldwork and writing.

drawn, or photographed. It also forced a reflection on how much I created queer presences in my fieldwork. For Taussig to make the proclamation infers the potentiality that he had not seen what he thought he saw. There is a moment of suspension in that moment of inscription, where his image (i.e. his recollection) was not what he saw at all, but a reflection of himself in the window that framed his view of the worlds he was passing by and passing through.

Recording fieldnotes felt strained during the first two years of my fieldwork. I only used my notebook and the notes application on my phone to jot simple phrases, more as a reminder than to inscribe any detail or sensory resonances. I struggled to understand what I was looking for and, therefore, what I should make note of in these spaces which seemed perpetually waiting to be filled with observations: instead, clean white pages reflected to me that I had little to say. This absence echoed the deep uncomfortable feeling I was carrying with me that I was not the right person to write anything about this place.

The moment on the back of the truck, was the first of many queer presences I witnessed and participated in making throughout my fieldwork. It was not until later that the brief note I had made about that moment on the truck began to feel like something about which I could write with confidence and insight; it began to take on a life of its own as I recognised its resonances with other queer ruptures to my otherwise extremely heteronormative days in Aceh. The eventual rendition of that moment on the truck has traces of these other observations and sensory experiences within it; a sedimentation and steady accumulation of queer moments and fleeting feelings, where suddenly seeing a queer reflection in a context where I initially felt so invisible, punctuates the usual flow of the day. These moments tugged sharply on my 'queer feelings' (Ahmed 2014), but in peculiar and unexpected ways given the very different cultural contexts that I was coming up against. Queer embodied knowledge would surface in those moments, allowing me to engage imaginatively with what was not permitted and with configurations of the social that cannot otherwise be seen.

I have also pondered, self-consciously, the likelihood that the impression Taussig made on me as an undergraduate student materialised, unimaginatively, in the form of my own two ambiguous figures. Our academic predilections and the impressions made on us during our training inevitably accompany us on our fieldwork journeys, influencing how people and places

can reveal themselves to us. As a queer researcher, I wondered if, out of my own sense of being out-of-place and a desire to be reflected in others, I had grasped for this image of a fleeting queer presence. Had I conjured a queer intimacy between the two figures, attempting to rescue them (and therefore myself) from obscurity? Was I summoning queer in its absence? And in so doing, was I guilty then of doing precisely what I had set out *not* to do: that is, transposing my western interpretation of queer onto a set of cultural and social realities and flattening the potential for localised understandings of sexuality, gender, and identity performance to be accessible to me. Was I, in my slightly adapted rendition of Morgensen's words, "seek[ing] globally systematized knowledge about those whom [I] perceive to be [my] others, or even [my] own self?" (2016, 610)

This is a direct acknowledgment of the critical interjection into early gay and lesbian anthropology that what might resemble a configuration of same-sex desire from a western perspective, carries a range of culturally specific meanings that may not include same-sex desire or a derivative version of western-queer politics (Blackwood 1995; Boellstorff 2005; Weston 1993). Reading these moments through contexts of widespread social surveillance showed me diverse ways of thinking through queer, both as a practice and as a theoretical lens for understanding social interaction in a context where western theorisations of sexuality and identity may not be relevant.

As I suggested above, this chapter is concerned principally with the emergence within my fieldwork of moments which each played with the contradictions of queer invisibility and the hyper surveillance of heterosexual intimacies in contemporary Acehnese social life. It is also about the emergence of a research methodology informed by experiencing the cross-cultural contradictions of sexual and gender performativity, from the grounded and experiential perspective of a queer researcher attempting to form social connections in a place which is increasingly hostile to sexual and gender diverse minorities.

Early in my analysis and writing, I reached for Muñoz's 'Queer Utopia' (2009), because for me, these performative queer ruptures served as imaginative and desiring projections for an alternate world, both for me and for those performatively enacting fleeting queer representations. These are important frameworks and certainly had an influence on how I have understood the kinds

of performances that I witnessed and participated within, yet these performative interactions illustrated more than young people's desire for a different future: They were situational responses to social change that gradually creeps into one's everyday experience, altering the boundaries of private and public lives; they utilised emergent discourses of sexual morality and deviance to draw attention to contradiction and the inadequacy of systems of surveillance and social control to contain sexual diversity; and, they also cultivated a means of conversing about sensitive issues and difficult to verbalise emotions and sensory experiences of space.

They also allowed me to reflect on my own practices, by emphasising the similarly constructed performances of self I had crafted in other everyday contexts, showing queer selves to be equally constructed and situationally intelligible; they allowed me to understand my co-performers experiences of constriction, and to witness with empathy, their acts of resistance which drew attention to the inherent contradictions of shari'ah and its inability to contain sexuality and gender expression; and, they highlighted the false dichotomy of public and private, by creating situations where privacy is easily denied through the mechanisms of suspicion and accusation.

Beyond these important disruptions, refusals, and resistances, they were a means of communicating and learning through reciprocal embodied sharing the continuity of experiences of marginality and difference using an emergent discourse, of LGBT as a threat to normative society, so present in Aceh in the current political climate. They were dialogical performative *embodied* conversations within fieldwork relationships that facilitated cross-cultural understanding. How these moments showed me the changing landscapes of sexual surveillance and the control of populations and how I also understood the dynamic spaces of research relationships as drawing on queer and performance as a means of articulating mutual and alternate experiences of marginality and difference.

My body became both a space for others to 'field difference' (Nast 1998) and negotiate the prescriptive regulations controlling and containing gender and sexuality, where they could explore and disrupt these aspects of identity which are constantly changing in the current social and political climate. But my body also became a necessary inclusion in my repertoire for engaging ethnographic fieldwork: I realised that with me I carried a collection of queer sensibilities that allowed me to recognise the subtleties of surveillance and everyday negotiation,

and to connect with those who are faced with the realities of these incursion in their lives.

In the rest of this thesis then, I delve beneath my initial interpretations of these moments as 'queer performance' or a place for me to 'queer' social interactions, as though they were social texts, to reveal dynamics that are more complex than a transgression/deviance model or an anti-heteronormative performative lens permits.

I delve into the myriad ways in which I cultivated identity performances for different contexts, social interactions, and within my closer friendships. I also introduce the concept of 'dialogic performance' (Conquergood 1985; Madison 2006) to describe the ways performance manifested in my research relationships, where both parties drew on aspects of the other's identity to wage disruptive interactions into normative social practices and to engage empathically with one another's lived experiences as marginal subjects. In these instances, the control over performances of self are destabilised, allowing something unexpected to emerge in the spaces between bodies.

Crafting (queer) fieldwork selves

Fieldwork, like gender, is inevitably and irrevocably performative. As researchers, we learn to perform multiple selves in response to the specific demands of the fields within which we are living and working (Coffey 1999). Coffey calls this "impression management" (Coffey 1999, 65); describing the identity work that researchers undertake to facilitate successful research relationships; to gain access to 'informants'; and, to enable a process of immersion within the community. These aspects of fieldwork practice have been critiqued, both by feminist anthropologists (Coffey 1999; Okely 2002) and, more recently, by gay and lesbian social researchers (Blackwood 1995; Lewin and Leap 1996; Rooke 2009).

Julieta Vartabedian (2015) recently demonstrated the complicated assumptions researchers make when attempting to forge trusting relationships with research participants. Her identity as cisgender, highly educated, upper-middle class and a European resident positioned her as different to her Brazilian *travestis* (transgender) participants, despite her attempts to ameliorate these differences by promoting tenuous similarities (such as their mutual performativity of femininity and her Latin American roots). It was through her acceptance of these differences

and engaging in the playful interactions instigated by her informants that she was able to gain insight into her informant's views of gender. Vartabedian calls this position, the 'imperfect' anthropologist, to capture a sense of how she appeared to both her informants and to herself. Her informants regarded her as an imperfect woman, whilst Vartabedian eventually realised that such a position of difference was productive of important anthropological knowledge. Vartabedian's journey towards an 'imperfect' social research methodology resonates with my experiences of fieldwork.

Throughout my fieldwork I have occupied a range of titles to many different people. I have been *kakak* (older sister), *abang* (older brother), *tante* (aunt) and *om* (uncle). *Abang* and *sayang* (sweetheart) *boh hate* (boyfriend) are also a form of address for a boyfriend, both of which have been used to address me. I have been both boyfriend *and* girlfriend, sometimes simultaneously. These titles are markers of social relationships. They are everyday courtesies, forms of address and deferential inclusions within familial relationships, signifying feelings of intimacy, friendship, and familiarity. They are also playful jokes used to illustrate an acceptance of and delight in my gender ambiguity.

These interactions became strategies for shifting between alternate corporeal relations: our bodies would unconsciously take on subtle markers of recognised social relationships. We would interact physically in imitation of the roles we were pretending to occupy. For example, a young female friend who alternates between addressing me as *abang* (older brother or boyfriend) and *kakak*³⁷ (older sister), accordingly switches between typical sisterly ways of interacting, such as casual touching and holding hands, and the forbidden physical contact of a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. By slipping between *kakak* and *abang*, my young female friends would revel in the physical proximity that both titles afford. The title of *kakak* permitting a moment where an imagined transgression could take place. On the other hand, I was called *kakak* by many younger people as a sign of respect and familiarity. I was invited into real and imagined families through this inclusive form of address, a relationship which was realised most emphatically when, throughout one friend's pregnancy my title changed from *kakak* (older

37 Although *kakak* is not a gendered term in other parts of Indonesia, in Aceh it is most commonly used to refer to older women.

sister) to *om* (uncle), in anticipation of my relationship to her unborn child.

This felt to be a recasting of heteronormative language to encompass and incorporate me, reminiscent of Evelyn Blackwood's (2014) and Tom Boellstorff's (2003) descriptions of linguistic plays which have flourished in Indonesian queer communities, where language is recast, hybridised and dubbed to encompass constantly emerging sexualities and identities (Blackwood 2014; Boellstorff 2003). In my relationships, normative familial connections were appropriated to incorporate my non-normative positionality within their families, yet they also queered those categories because I could engage the roles and duties of those positions in ways that are increasingly regulated. Through our social interactions, we cast these relationships in drastically different arrangements of desire, intimacy, and emotionality.

During the early phases of my fieldwork, I did not see this 'gender trouble' (Butler 1990) as anything more than a hindrance to successful research. It was a playful and enjoyable social side of my research, which was primarily focused on the oral traditions of the area. It felt as though my presence created a diversion from other avenues of inquiry: conversations became about me, and the gentle rhythms of everyday life were disrupted. How could I understand anything about this place if we were talking about my gender? It took me a long time to realise that in aspiring to such a position outside of the social interaction, I was perpetuating the myth of the silent, distanced observer that I had long denounced in theory. These disruptions were important. They were not prohibitive of insight, rather, they were facilitative of certain insights that were specific to my experiences and, as such, were profoundly revealing of otherwise unexamined social processes.

I could also recognise my own performances of gender. I could sense, in the moments where my performance was not received as intended, or in moments of misunderstanding, the citationality of my own performances of gender and the subtle ways I was adapting those performances to my perception of the boundaries governing sexual and gender identity in Aceh. They also showed the norms of social interaction in relation to perceived gender. On several occasions, when I was gendered male, I was unable to form connections with women, although at the time I did not understand the reasons for this disconnection.

The researcher does not completely control their own performance: they are a coproduction, with others heavily involved, if not invested, in shaping the researcher into recognisable categories of acceptable identity. My name 'Joni' was a site of such playful revision. I realised very quickly the first time I went to Indonesia that Joni is not a female name. Sharing my name with popular loveable television character Bang Joni, from the Acehnese slap-stick comedy show '*Eumpang Breuh*', which I introduced in the Chapter Four, surely did not help! My name, once told, would amplify the confusion already stirred by my ambiguous gender. People would tell me that my name was better for *laki-laki* (boys) and then proceed to call me Jo, which they assured me was an acceptable name for *perempuan* (girls). For some, this management of my name was all that was needed to set things right, while for others, it made the whole picture even more humorous.

These contextual idiosyncrasies were more than just opportunities to learn linguistic and cultural differences. I realised, over time, that the name 'Jo' influenced my gender performativity, just as the forms of address I described above elicited a different bodily comportment and spatial relationality with others. How others constructed me through the cultural norms which organise social relationships also shaped my embodied gendered practices, both in Aceh and Australia. I realised this most keenly when I met M in Melbourne (Australia), and she addressed me casually as Jo: hearing this name after such a long time, in the busy streets of Melbourne, evoked bodily memories of moving through social spaces that had specific sensorial affectations of Aceh. That moment collapsed the temporal and spatial distance, provoked by a single syllable name.

The most heavily regulated aspect of gender and sexuality in Aceh is dress. For me, navigating the shifting boundaries of acceptable dress, illuminated an unexpected confluence of western conceptions of female masculinity and Indonesian notions of piety. In Australia my more masculine style of dress is read as indicative of lesbian sexuality, while in Indonesia, it connotes modesty and respect for local religious norms. Long sleeved shirts and loose-fitting pants are my preferred style for the same reasons as they are the advisable attire of young Muslim women: they do not reveal the shape and contours of my body. However, this style of dress, coupled with my lack of a *jilbab* (hijab, veil) and short hair meant that I was often gendered

male. While many young women challenge the prescriptive demands of 'non-sexy' dress by pushing the boundaries of how tight their clothing can be before they are reprimanded³⁸, my style, although compliant with the rules, was at odds with this very feminised approach to managing wardrobe restrictions. Ironically, to be read as female I needed to accentuate the very aspects of my physicality which ought to be hidden from view, like my breasts and hips, which I do everything to hide at home.

Experiencing these contrasting social and cultural norms gave me great insight into how carefully gender is crafted in Aceh and in the familiar contexts of home. Evelyn Blackwood (1995) describes similar experiences when she conducted ethnographic research in Padang, West Sumatra. Although Blackwood found that she could cope with framing her identity in some normative ways, for example, by choosing not to correct her hosts when they assumed she was heterosexual, she could not extend this performance to the dress code which required that women wear skirts. This had ramifications for how her gender was perceived by others and the implications this had for her fieldwork.

Coffey (1999) calls the methodological approaches to presenting the self in fieldwork as 'managed strangeness', inferring that the western researcher necessarily mediates how their cultural practices appear to 'host communities'. In a place which forbids homosexuality, this means completely hiding one's desires and identifications, as well as other aspects of cultural difference. While I certainly did manage the visibility of my homosexuality, it was not so straight-forward or without unexpected beneficial outcomes. Rather, androgyny and masculine femininity was conflated with this idea of a general 'western strangeness', where differences in expressions of femininity between myself and the communities of Sabang were attributed to this general category of 'western strangeness'. This happened with regularity during my fieldwork: once my gender was ascertained, my androgynous appearance was interpreted as a difference in how western women 'do gender'. It was curious to me that my gender expression did not lead people to assume that I was lesbian or queer as they do in Australia.

38 This style has attracted the derogatory label, *jilboob* (a mix of *jilbab* and boob), a term first coined on a social media page by the same name, designed to publicly shame women by re-posting anonymously taken photographs of women in public who pair 'sexy clothing' with a *jilbab*.

Such experiences demonstrate the cultural construction of gender and sexuality. They also re-contextualise our gender performances which can fantastically destabilise the unquestioned meanings we attribute to our own and others' performances.

Several social researchers have spoken about how their gender identity and expression shaped their research relationships and influenced the trajectory of their research. Kale Fajardo's (2008) ethnographic study exploring Filipino masculinities in global shipping practices, took an unexpected turn when their participants, predominantly working-class cis-male Filipino seafarers, connected Fajardo's queer transgender tomboy masculinity to Filipino tomboys with whom they had close social relationships. Just as Fajardo's queer identity permitted connections with cismale seafarers, my androgyny created points of connection with young women who were themselves tasked with navigating a constantly changing social and gendered landscape in their everyday lives. Similarly, Alison Rooke (2009) describes her approach to developing rapport with research participants by selectively promoting or downplaying certain aspects of her identity. The way participants responded to the life story and sexual identity she offered to them, influenced the direction of her research and gave her important insights into social politics within the community.

This unclasp of gender from sexuality in my everyday interactions highlighted the subtle ways in which I was crafting my fieldwork selves to meet different expectations in my interactions. Lewin and Leap refer to this careful crafting of identity during fieldwork as "identity management" (1996, 13), arguing that while the dominant perspective within traditional anthropology has been that fieldwork is regarded as distinctly separate from everyday life, the experiences of lesbian and gay researchers shows that this view is simplistic and unrealistic. The skill of framing one's identity in the field, to best achieve successful research outcomes, is developed in fieldwork, while one's 'true' and unguarded self is resumed once the anthropologist returns to the comforts of their home town. Lewin and Leap suggest that for gay or lesbian researchers, identity management is not limited to the field, but is rather a skill first honed at home:

What personal narratives of gay men and lesbians reveal consistently is the urgency of identity management in the course of ordinary activities. We must consider, on a daily basis, how much of our personal lives to reveal, how to

create a 'role' for ourselves that will lessen the likelihood of ostracism or other hostile treatment (1996, 13).

The self, in this explanation of identity management, connects the dichotomised construction of the oppositional spaces of field and home, so that they are no longer discreet. Researchers who deviate from heteronormativity show the fallacy of a stable 'home' self and a constructed 'field' self; both situationally performed. However, what this view also suggests is that there is a continuity of self between these spaces, that an essential self can be traced between both spaces, with only differences in the 'amount' of that self revealed. This aspect of Lewin and Leap's (1996) conceptualisation of identity management can benefit from critical attention using a queer performative view of identity that recognises the constant production of multiple selves in response to situation and context.

In my experience, the selves I subsequently performed at home were changed by my experiences in Aceh, such was the radical disruption of both my 'self' and the spaces of 'home' and 'field'. Furthermore, others also managed my identity; monitoring what I shared with others and responding for me should a question arise from a passing stranger. They also utilised the confusion I created in social situations to perform their own identities, a detail I discuss in greater detail below. The messiness of these negotiations with friends demonstrated the contextuality and collaborative aspects of identity management, not only in research but in everyday social interactions.

Going along and learning the rhythms

As an ethnographic strategy, I spent most days 'going along' (Kusenbach 2003) with friends as they went about their routines. The opportunity to witness my friend's interactions motivated me to go with her whenever she went shopping in Sabang. I would especially look forward to visiting the fish markets where she would successfully secure the best produce and prices by riling up the men with her perfectly weighted sexual innuendo and hilariously shocking character assassinations. I would struggle along behind, carrying her bags and acting as her constant audience. I remember the first time we went to the market together. I did not understand the Acehnese slang she was using to converse with the stall holders as we worked our way

down the aisles, but I could sense from the mixed reactions of the women and men we passed that her running commentary was in no way polite chatter. I could understand something of Sabang sociality by the tempo; the rhythm of the interactions, the quick jibes and moving on, the volume of both voice and bodies filling the dense hot and pungent air of the markets.

The fallacy that one can simply observe others' interactions from a safe distance gave way to the recognition that I was engaging in what Barbara Tedlock calls "the observation of participation"; that is, the process whereby ethnographers "both experience and observe their own and others' coparticipation within the ethnographic encounter" (1991, 69). I was a participant in my friend's performative interactions and I could feel myself beginning to embody the tempo she cultivated in these spaces. Okely defines this bodily imitation as an "unknowing, unconscious imitation or deliberate bodily mimesis" (2007, 71), where the researcher learns others' ways of being through embodied experience. Ethnographers may, Okely explains, "empathetically pick up the mood of the other person and absorb it in a similar bodily posture"(71).

A distillation of this gradual absorption can be described through the example of learning to park a motorbike. The importance of the *kereta* (motorbike in Aceh, although it means 'train' in *Bahasa Indonesia*) to everyday life makes performances of its use central to conveying individual style and social proficiency. When arriving at a shop, disembarking from the motorbike is done in one fluid motion: the ignition stopped within moments of stopping, the rider's leg thrown over the seat, the key flicked one stop to the right. With no need to take the key or wear a helmet (unless in town where the police do helmet spot-checks), arriving and departing looks effortless. Whilst disembarking, locals often shout into the shop, announcing their arrival to the owner and listing their requirements. Then they might greet friends nearby whilst the owner, or the owner's children, fills their petrol or brings out their cigarettes. The quick, efficient, and smooth, movement to and from the bike and the seamless social interaction which ensures, communicates the ease with which locals move through physical and social spaces, as though the *kereta* is an extension of their body.

To arrive in any other way disrupts the flow of social interaction. Early in my fieldwork, my participation in these deceptively simple social interactions did just that: My reluctance to display such self-assuredness and my discomfort in shouting to get attention or to convey

demands, both products of my Anglo cultural background's feigned value for 'politeness', held me back. Instead, I would take a long time to disembark and park the bike, then I would stand awkwardly, waiting for someone to notice me. I had not understood that shop-owners have numerous tasks and obligations, other than tending the shop at the front of the house, requiring that customers proclaim their presence and work efficiently to minimise the time the owner had to spend 'out front'.

As I changed my behaviour, social interactions opened to me and I relished the new embodied language I was learning. The 'politeness' which had felt so out of place gave way to a more robust and confident public persona that set others at ease as much as it fostered my own self-confidence. I learned how to play, to have fun with people in the market, to give a smart comment to the *tempe* woman at the top of the stairs, to have the banter that might lead to a deeper understanding, or to an *Ibu* (older woman) I had not yet met. I would have the rhythm of a typical Sabang morning pass through my body, and it was this embodied sensibility, of responding to the rhythms of others, that the social became a felt and performative space.

I was not the only one to learn something from these everyday activities. Two close friends in particular, observed me and were implicated in interactions where my gender inevitably came up as a topic of conversation. At first, I was unaware of these questions because I did not yet understand local slang. I also felt like a bystander because questions were often directed to my companions. As my confidence and command of *Bahasa Indonesia* progressed, these same companions became an audience for my own performative responses. I learned to deflect questions of gender by responding with humour. Timing is everything when it comes to social interaction in Aceh: a well-timed clever reply can ignite an everyday interaction, creating the buzz upon which local gossip economies thrive and through which you can establish yourself as a regular fixture of the local scene. It is the flavour of everyday interactions and the rhythm of Sabang life, particularly in the morning, thrives on quick wit, daring quips and risqué taunts. On one occasion, an elderly man asked two young girls if I was male or female directly in front of me. We were all huddled in the doorway of a shop waiting for a sudden downpour to stop and they assumed I would not understand their conversation. I waited a moment, and then politely and sincerely replied, '*setengah/setengah*' (half/half). The girls could not hide their

amusement as they watched the old man's reaction. Eventually he too began to laugh: "fair enough, good one", his expression seemed to say.

Since that day my experiences at the markets and town were more friendly and familiar. Many of the people who work stalls at the markets as well as the male parking attendants on the street greet me and playfully utter the words 'cewek/cowok' (girl/boy) as I walk past. While it might sound confronting, and it was at first, interactions like these felt to break the ice of my strange presence in their world. Through these humorous exchanges, it felt as though a conversation had been started which acknowledged difference, not as a hindrance to connection but as an instigator of further performative interactions. Difference, in this case, is a meeting place: It offered me an opportunity to show them myself, through my own retorts and carefully timed jibes at their difference. The eruptions of laughter that follows a moment of tension after a line is delivered is something that is so difficult to describe, it is so embodied.

There is an emotional labour (McQueeney and Lavelle 2017) associated with these moments, where those who occupy the margins are required to help others to feel comfortable, thereby recuperating order when we cause a disruption (Ahmed 2014, 2017). It is an aspect of social interaction that I am familiar with from Australia. It is a reaction to potential conflict which recalls in us a way of inhabiting our bodies, so that we do not offend or draw further attention. We cast our eyes downwards, make our bodies smaller, smile over-exaggerated smiles, to dissipate negative emotions. Homan (2016) offers a startling account of her negotiation of social spaces in Nepal, where she was often taunted and sexually harassed by men. Researchers do this all the time, but I wonder if some researchers are more attuned to the labour and the politics which inform differential levels of needing to 'fit in' with hegemonic codes of intelligibility? My social interactions in Sabang were merely curious in comparison. They were never hostile. The openness and inquisitive playfulness allowed me to involve myself without worry in awkward moments to explore for myself the insights they offered.

Doing gender wrong and the pitfalls of fictionalising heterosexuality

Conversations in Sabang, especially between locals and outsiders, have a structure. The centrality of the family in Indonesia mean that enquiries about a person's marital status are often the

starting point of interpersonal conversations. Even the most fleeting of exchanges will at least establish the marriage status of the other person. While it is assumed that an Indonesian person in their 30s will be married, it is common for western travellers to be *sendiri* (alone). Still, it arouses curiosity and an expectation that one's current misfortune will eventually be overcome. It is not advisable, therefore, to respond to the question with a flat *tidak* (no), but rather the much more optimistic, *belum* (not yet). The established norms in this conversation made it impossible to navigate the conversation in a way which would allow me to maintain loyalty to my queer identification: it is so intrinsically heteronormative that I felt compelled towards fabrication because it did not permit any other responses. It was only convenient in the sense that I could avoid long-winded explanations of my circumstances.

Judith Butler's work on gender performativity is clearly relevant to this example of heteronormative production. As a queer person involved in these processes of heterosexual citationality, I could feel how the limited possibilities for intelligibility effectively squeezed me into a narrative of heterosexual reproductive normativity or at least on my way towards such an outcome. To fail in delivering these scripted lines is to remain unintelligible, and while in Australia my outward appearance has permitted a silence around conversations about marriage and procreation (these pressures are still there, ever-present within every aspect of my social, familial, and personal life, but they are rarely verbalised), in Aceh I was forced to contend with the explicit enforcement of heteronormativity in interactions with strangers.

In conversations which proceed beyond these basic formalities, and upon discovering that I am in my 30s, I had to provide further details surrounding my *sendiri* status. I was limited to three options which I employed depending upon how much patience, time, and humour I could afford the conversation. I could invent a heterosexual life back home: in this scenario I could either be married with or without children. Alternatively, I could labour through the conversation, explaining that I did not want to get married, making little sense to the questioner and perhaps negating the possibility of deeper connection. There was another option, which I used often: the narrative of the strange, non-religious, western woman who prioritises work over marriage and procreation allowed me cover for my sexuality with my identity as a researcher. This response also had an alienating effect on interlocutors, who found this focus on career to be

both strange and self-defeating.

These examples of the limiting ways of engaging in hegemonic narratives of heterosexual fulfilment bely deeper issues for queer researchers than simply negotiating the idiosyncrasies of the field whilst maintaining a sense of self. They demonstrate that many of the tools researchers have available to them, to build rapport are withheld from queer researchers. I struggled numerous times when I could not show a photograph of my partner to reciprocate an act of sharing that someone had gifted me or left a question unanswered in a moment of frustrated avoidance. However, as I suggested above, these short-comings offer opportunities to unpack social interactions through a different lens. They also direct queer researchers to form different relationships with participants, as the following anecdote illustrates.

A particularly amusing scenario played out in the *pasar sayur* (vegetable markets) in Sabang. I had become quite close with one of the younger sellers, B, in the upstairs market. Even though her vegetables were the least attractive (her tomatoes were often soft and bruised), I would always go to B's stall. She was friendly towards me and was patient with my *belum lancar* (not yet fluent) Indonesian. Over time we developed a closeness, drawing on conversations past and learning more about one another. Her two sons were often there helping her run the stall and I enjoyed talking to them about school. The conversations were always playful: I liked the way we all seemed to enjoy pointing out our differences, inevitably leaving us all in tears by the time my bag was full of things I had not planned to buy. B and her friend, the woman who sold *tempe* (fermented soy beans) at the next stall, would share their personal stories with me, with great humour and innuendo. They told me about their ex-husbands and we joked at the prospect of me bringing a selection of Australian men for them to choose new husbands. Behind this joviality, there were serious moments too: both women had experienced domestic violence, exacerbated by their husband's substance misuse and the loss of family finances to drugs and gambling, both *haram* (forbidden behaviours) and therefore grounds for divorce.

Despite the friendliness of these women, many *Ibu* in the markets were noticeably distant with me. They did not reply if I greeted them, although the transaction if I did stop to buy something was easy and polite. One day, during our usual banter, B asked me, as she always did, why I was not married. I played along, offering her my standard response, that I was too

busy. We had both enjoyed the banter of this line of questioning over several weeks, each time I would become more defiant about the reasons for my objection to marriage, having already offered western strangeness as my reason. I would tell her that men slowed you down, or that being *sendiri* was infinitely better, to which she responded with emphatic agreement. So far, the interaction was perfectly familiar. This time, however, I chose to go even further off script, asking instead if she had any photographs of local bachelors from which I could select a husband.

This new direction elated B. As we toyed with the idea of a Sabang version of 'The Bachelorette', our volume increased, rousing the *Ibu* at the tables nearby. The *Ibu* nearest asked B what the commotion was all about, to which she explained that she was going to find me an Acehnese husband. The line of women opposite looked confused as they puzzled over what B had said; eventually breaking out into a loud shouting match as they sought clarification. I realised then that they were debating my gender, suggesting that B really meant to find me a *wife*. B could barely contain herself as she tried to convince them that I was female by wildly gesticulating towards my chest.

I stood there soaking in embarrassment, two large sweat patches soaking through my t-shirt, trickling down the insides of the full-length sleeves I had dutifully selected for my trip into town. The *Ibu* leaned forward, peering at my chest, still unconvinced. Sensing that only I could end the confusion, I pulled my t-shirt tight across my chest, revealing the two lumps of flesh which I knew would silence opposition and hopefully turn their gaze away from my sweaty body and bright red face. I had learned this from N who often responded to others' subtle questioning of my gender to her by pulling my t-shirt tight from behind. In this instance, it seemed the most obvious way to resolve the confusion. A long silence ensued as the women peered forward, staring intensely, followed by a series of erupting bouts of laughter as the story was recounted down the aisle.

What happened next still perplexes me. The *Ibu*, now at least fifteen of them, came out from behind their stalls, suddenly warm and inquisitive, and competing for my attention. Having spent several years being ignored by these women, this dramatic change was unnerving. They seemed purposive now, offering their assistance to attract an Acehnese husband. One woman

was insistent that I take her phone number, so we could arrange for me to come to her house. She would help me dress more appropriately in Muslim attire. The consensus was that I was doing gender wrong (explaining my non-marital status) and through religious conversion, I could find my way back to a morally correct expression of femininity.

I felt conflicted about following them up on their offers. The researcher in me desperately wanted to jump at the opportunity. The insights I could gain from such an experience would be priceless for my research, however, when I returned to the same market weeks later, I realised that withdrawing carefully and respectfully was my only option: the women were so serious about helping me, they had arranged a procession of young men for me to meet. Driving home I realised that the forced silence I had to maintain about my sexuality meant that I could only be so familiar with those women in Sabang who did not share similar ideas, like my friends did, about gender, religion, and the regulation of sexuality and gender expression.

It also showed me how socially inappropriate it was for the *Ibu* to reciprocate my earlier attempts to build rapport. They had felt uncomfortable to show familiarity with me because it was unacceptable for older women to engage with a younger western, non-Muslim man. My unintentional passing gave me invaluable insight into this aspect of gender politics, an issue I discuss further in the following chapter. As Coffey argues, "What our body looks like, how it is perceived and used can impact upon access, field roles and field relationships" (1999, 68). In this instance, my assumed maleness had hampered my access to social interactions, however, once they realised I was female, their receptiveness changed dramatically, and they could imagine a socially respectable relationship. I even felt that a relationship with me could be even more valuable because suddenly I represented an opportunity for them to pursue their religious obligation of *da'wa* (guiding others to the correct path).

From this experience, I could better see the intersections of religion and gender: in guiding me towards religion, they were demonstrating intelligible Acehnese femininity, which allowed me to recognise the struggles my friends faced in meeting these expectations. Most confusing to me, from all of this, was that my gender ambiguity had not led the women to assume I was lesbian. Instead, they could only see that there was a deficiency in my performance of femininity. They saw that only a simple adjustment of my gender presentation, rearticulated

through Muslim femininity, was all it would take for me to access heterosexual reproductive success and spiritual fulfillment.

Kongsi

There was one place where I felt disarmingly 'seen' by Sabang locals: the village of Kongsi, opposite Sabang port. You could pass by Kongsi without realising the maze of narrow winding pathways and tightly packed two-storey terrace houses that hide inside, such is the effect of its orientation, facing inwards and away from the bustling town outside. When inside, it feels as though you have come upon an island inside an island.

When I first went to Kongsi I had no idea that such a place existed on the island. An acquaintance from Iboih invited me to go there for lunch. With an air of mystery, she had said, "Have you been to Kongsi yet?" When I looked puzzled, a strange smile crossed her face and said something like, "It is time you went there. You have been here long enough now to know about Kongsi." We drove into the village on our motorbikes, following a narrow path that served as a road and a footpath, filled with children playing and adults talking across the lane. We parked on a volleyball court in the centre of the village. There pigeons everywhere, attracted by the rice scraps thrown outside a small *warung* at the edge of the volleyball court, where I would become a regular visitor. The swathes of white and grey pigeons have set up permanent residence on the roof and in any nook or overhang where they can roost.

The *warung* is set into the verandah of a large cement home in the centre of the village. The owners, a woman of around 50 and her three daughters, each having responsibilities for parts of the family business. When we arrived, they were all sitting and talking on a bench facing out from the *warung*; the older woman facing indoors, smoking Marlboro Red cigarettes whilst filling in betting slips for the international football which, somehow, she has access to on a television set that takes pride of place in the corner of the shop. People seem to emerge from every direction, as though the *warung*, both for the food and the football, is the heart of Kongsi. The only time I saw the TV channel changed from the football was in the days following the earthquake in Pidie Jaya, the tremors of which were felt in Pulau Weh (figure 32).

Later, when I went there alone as I had come to do every time I went to Sabang to do my shopping, I experienced for the first time in Sabang, someone recognising me as queer. A middle-aged woman who lives next door to the *warung* and who was always around for a chat, one day feeling more comfortable with me said, “Hey, you should meet E. She is the only female *becak* (motorbike taxi with side car) driver in Sabang and she is like you. You would look good on the back of her bike. Not sitting on the side car but holding her from behind!” The laughter which followed was like music to my ears.

I asked her if there were any others ‘like me’ and the female *becak* driver living in Sabang, to which she told me about a *waria* (transgender woman) named B who had recently passed away. I had heard vague rumours about B from friends in Iboih and had seen her once, briefly as our paths crossed at the coffee shop in Pria Laot, the village nearby the waterfall halfway between Iboih and Sabang. When I saw her that first time, I instantly recognised her: her flowing hair as it gently met her broad bare shoulders, the sideways stare from the men in the coffee shop as she drove away, her tall strong posture and soft skin was such a contradiction for those men. I stared too, my gaze desperate for connection and then a feeling of overwhelming disappointment when she looked unseeing past me as she drove past.

Asking others in Kongsu about B opened the history of the village to me, I realised that this was the first village of Sabang, built to house the original *orang campur* (mixed people): the porters brought from across the archipelago, Ambonese, Minang, Javanese, to load and unload the Dutch trading ships. The traditions established by that first Sabang community, of smuggling contraband, of wheeling and dealing to make ends meet, continue today. One day, when I was there for a quick lunch after my regular trip to the markets, I watched as a woman wearing a long dress and *jilbab* tried to weave her motorbike through the group of women who were so often sitting around chatting outside the *warung* in the narrow lane. The women, who had been joking around with one another, turned towards this woman on her bike and deliberately closed the gaps to make her stop in the middle of path.

They playfully ask her where she is going, dressed like that. None of them were wearing the modest clothing seen on the streets of Sabang and did not seem to be heading to the mosque despite the call to prayer ringing out from the edge of the village. The woman laughed with



figure 32. *The warung in Kongsì, the day following the earthquake in Pidie Jaya, 2016, digital photograph taken by the author.*

them, finally edging past them. The other women continued their playful joking as she drove off, turning back to one another, picking up on whatever had been their focus before she arrived. One of the women in the group caught my eye and said above the noise: “*Semua anjing di sini!*” (We are all dogs in here!). As she said it she grinned and nodded towards the owner of the *warung*, who was sitting smoking a cigarette, her dress riding high on her thighs, as she squatted on the alleyway bench, half-listening to the women but with her eyes firmly fixed on the football scores flashing across the television screen, betting slip in hand. B had passed away by the time I had traced her to Kongsì, but from then on, I frequented the *warung* at its centre for the relief it brought, for being seen by these women who seem to carry the meaning of *orang campur* in their bodies.

Western women in Iboih: Gossip and queer invisibility

In Iboih, where locals interact with westerners frequently and are therefore more familiar with western idiosyncrasies, my gender non-conformity elicited different responses. I was also more familiar and recognisable to people in the village and could therefore present versions of myself



figure 33. Pigeons roosting above the warung in Kongsí, 2016, digital photograph taken by the author.

that I found difficult to express in Sabang, without causing offense or confusion. While I was recognised as female, I still represented an anomaly to the stereotypes that locals seemed to transpose onto any western woman who arrived in the village.

As I suggested in Chapter Four, gossip is central to the inner workings of the village. In Iboih, because so many tourists are continuously passing through the village, 'island news' thrives on the sexual lives of western women. Gossip about illicit sexual affairs between western women and young local men is invariably started by young men themselves, who seek to gain social capital if other men confirm their desirability to western women. It is common to hear young men arguing over the right to engage a young female new-comer. Unbeknownst to her, the men running the guesthouse where she is staying or the dive-guides where she has chosen to dive, are given priority over others. Within each guesthouse or dive shop there are established hierarchies organising the many men who work there, and which dictates who gets the first option of pursuing new arrivals. The gossip which spurred by all of this is not always based on fact; regardless of whether the western woman has engaged in sexual activity with anyone, they are invariably portrayed negatively as the story is transmitted throughout the village. The western women are often completely unaware of these behind-the scenes arrangements and the gossip which is being propagated about them. Generally, they are only in Iboih for a short time and from conversations I have had with many of them, I sense that they have their own motivations for forming relationships and playing along with these games of flirtation.

A 22-year old European woman I met in Iboih was extremely forthcoming with details of the arrangements she had made with young men during her three-month backpacking trip around Sumatra. She saw sexual relationships both as an important physical need and a strategy for traveling safely and easily. As a single independent woman, she did not want to travel with a friend or boyfriend because it would limit her capacity to engage with the local people and places where she was traveling. Also, coupling for short periods with young local men meant that she would more likely experience places and culture unimaginable without local knowledge and introduction.

Acehnese women are afforded less leniency than men when it comes to engaging in unmarried



sexual relationships and while this does not prevent relationships from occurring, they tend to quickly provoke discussions of marriage in the village. Marriage is a means of ensuring that romantic attachments can continue and while most western men I spoke with preferred not to marry, they would often comply knowing that the marriage was unrecognised outside Indonesia. For both parties then, marriage is initially a symbolic act, and while some develop into lasting relationships, many do end in divorce.

The surveillance of relationships between western men and Acehnese women is evidenced in (figure 35) which shows a billboard that appeared on the road between Sabang and Iboih in 2016. The image depicts a young Acehnese woman with her head bowed so that her face is hidden beneath her *jilbab*. Her posture suggests that she is deeply worried. The text translates: "Do you want to marry a foreigner??? No problem!! We recommend that you first consult with the 'Population and Civil Registration Agency' so that you avoid problems in the future." While the poster implies that the authorities wish to assist couples to avoid the cumbersome and expensive task of processing paperwork retrospectively, the underlying motivation is to scare women into marriage. The range of possibilities of what 'problems in the future' might entail is ambiguous for young women viewing the billboard who know that any sexual activity outside marriage will attract repercussions; better to formalise the relationship, regardless of whether it is desired long-term. That Acehnese women are pressured into marriage to become legitimate sexual beings, whilst Acehnese men are encouraged to pursue western women with abandon, is demonstrative of the double-standards of morality and sexuality in Sabang.

My own sexuality was rarely the focus of village gossip because homosexuality is not imaginable in this context of heterosexual courtship, nor do I fit the stereotype of the western woman. My androgynous appearance created an initial state of confusion for the young men of the village. Over time, this positioning outside the high-stakes game of conquest, afforded me close friendships with many of these men, who seemed to relate to me as an older sister. Western ideations of homosexuality as an identity, where 'being homosexual' is seen as a central tenet of one's identity, shaping all aspects of one's life, are not consistent with Indonesian conceptualisations of sexuality (Boellstorff 2005). I had a sense that because there was no evidence of my sex life (there were no rumours of scandalous affairs, of broken hearts, of

leading local boys astray), my sexuality was unconsidered, or it was presumed I was asexual. This was an unexpected outcome of my queerness in Aceh. While they may not have had a concept of my lesbian identity, the local men recognised that the type of relationship they might normally pursue with a western woman was not appropriate or even desirable for them in relation to me.

My homosexuality was invisible in Aceh for two reasons: first, because the subtle codes of queerness that I was accustomed to projecting in Australia were not recognised, and second, because there is a general attitude towards homosexuality that if unseen, it is left conveniently unmentioned. My sexuality was unintelligible, and my androgynous gender presentation made me undesirable within the strictly heteronormative sexual landscapes of contemporary Iboih sociality. Ironically, it was the unintelligibility of my queerness which made me appear more culturally respectful than the typical western tourist. As I did not partake in unmarried casual sex and my atypical gender meant that gossip involving me was implausible, I was seen as



figure 35. A billboard on the road to Iboih, 2016, digital photograph taken by the author.

exceedingly compliant with local rules. It was bemusing then, when I realised, that I had a glowing reputation amongst the village elders, despite my great fears that queerness would put me at a significant disadvantage in cultivating rapport.

The assumption of my asexuality also meant that I could unproblematically socialise with both men and women. In a strict gender segregated place like Aceh, to have the ability to socialise with men and women is unusual and I would contend is a space only permitted because I do not easily fit into either category. The typical response to western female tourists described above would suggest that a more feminine presenting female researcher would have difficulty engaging young Acehnese men as research participants. When I was building my house with a group of male builders, I was able to be alone there with them without attracting any critical attention. This kind of situation would not have been possible had I fit the stereotype of the western woman.

When I was in Banda Aceh, I was able to blur boundaries of gendered spaces by performing naivety to the rules. My western identity allowed this naivety, while my androgyny meant that others would not challenge my presence. I spent many rainy evenings with *becak* drivers at the pool hall in Peunayong, without attracting attention (figure 36). They enjoyed the subversive potential of this too. Again, the intersections of western strangeness and queer invisibility were exploited, both by my friends and I, to push back against the strict rules which were suffocating male/female social interaction.

Sexuality is one of the last identity vectors to be addressed in anthropological discussions of positionality. Several scholars have investigated the impact of negating the researcher's sexuality and desire in fieldwork accounts (Coffey 1999; Cupples 2002; Diprose, Thomas and Rushton 2013; Kaspar and Landolt 2016; Kulick 1995; Tweedy 2016). Coffey (1999) points out that while there has been a lack of consideration of the anthropologist's sexuality in early accounts, the sex lives of so-called primitive people have always been a fascinating topic of interest for anthropologists. In recent decades, the erotic subjectivity of the researcher has been a focal point in several important ethnographic texts (Blackwood 1995; Kulick 1995; Newton 2000), while a more embodied focus upon sexuality, desire and erotic entanglements is also taking shape (Cupples 2002; Diprose, Thomas and Rushton 2013; Tweedy 2016). Kaspar

and Landolt, for example, argue for the inclusion of “sexual performances, such as apparently harmless flirtation, into [their] reflections on data collection” (2016, 107), showing how these micro social interactions facilitate an embodied understanding of fieldwork encounters. In her ethnographic fieldwork with lesbian-identified gas station attendants, Tweedy (2016) put this into practice, using flirting specifically to form connections with potential participants and to negotiate power dynamics within these research relationships. Flirtatious moments alerted Tweedy to the deeper social and economic politics that her participants had to manage in their positions as customer service workers. As Kaspar and Landolt (2016) argue, an approach to research that plays with intersubjectivity in the research encounter, through the enactment of desire and interpersonal sexualised relationships, shows research data to be inherently co-constructed.

In my research, it was the invisibility of my sexuality and the strange sense of being unseen as queer that influenced an embodied sensibility towards the social interactions within which I was participating. While overt flirting was possible in the social contexts of the researcher’s described above, sexuality manifested in altogether unexpected ways in my research relationships, and it was my ability to pass through different gender categories (and therefore, different sexual orientation in my relation to others) that created strange fleeting gaps from which I could understand various social norms pertaining to sexuality and gender. It was also in these moments of ambiguity, as I discovered later, that others could construct me in ways that would allow them entry into sexual intimacies otherwise forbidden to them.

Liz Goodman (1996) reflects on her fieldwork in North Yorkshire where her careful ‘identity management’ (Lewin and Leap 1996) and the formation of key relationships, lead to the community around her assuming she was heterosexual. I recognise the assumed heterosexuality that sits at the centre of Goodman’s account. As well as the familiar feeling of being able to pass simply by not correcting instances of being cast within the default heterosexual category, I understand the way ‘passing’ allows insights into subject positions that are otherwise denied to you. Homosexuals must actively ‘come out’ (and often, repeatedly) to clarify these moments because heteronormativity is unquestioned. This can work well for research situations where being ‘out’ could have a negative impact on one’s ability to carry out research objectives. In



figure 36. *Becak (motorbike taxi) drivers playing snooker in Banda Aceh, 2017*, digital photograph taken by the author.

Aceh, I sensed this possibility: It would not be an exaggeration to expect that my research permit would be withdrawn if my sexual identity was known to the local community, police, and immigration.

Given these absences and omissions of my sexuality, it was perplexing to me that while public space was becoming uninhabitable for LGBT-identifying people, a public presence of queer, as performed by non-queer people, seemed to find expression around me. What was now a highly visible part of the public discourse about shari'ah became a site of public discussion and contestation, at least in the ways people were showing these spaces to me. As I demonstrated in Chapter Four, the naming of homosexuality and the moral panic surrounding the previously unrecognised acronym, LGBT, has led to the demonisation of same-sex attracted and gender diverse people in Aceh. However, this is not the only outcome of these changes; unexpectedly, the impossibility of homosexuality as a viable mode of existence within a moralistic and oppressive context, where surveillance within communities forbids queer embodiments, entanglements, and identifications, has enabled other kinds of queerness. While the explicit

naming of sexual deviance has forced individuals and activist groups to withdraw from public life, it has also, in a Foucauldian and Butlerian sense, led to the subversive performativity of queer public intimacy as a mode of resistance to pervasive systems of surveillance. My body became a site against which such performances could be waged because an intimacy and an empathic living with one another had developed over time. Queering social relationships became a strategy for exploring forbidden spaces and intimacies, sharing mutual experiences of marginality, and inviting accusation. It is to these performances that I turn in the following section and which I unpack to understand the emergence of a queer embodied social research methodology in Chapter Seven.

Exploring forbidden spaces

I have already described several explicit and amusing ways in which my identity was managed, by myself and others, during my fieldwork. My identity was also utilised in more obtuse ways by the young women with whom I interacted daily in Iboih, especially as these friendships strengthened over time. I noticed the incidental ways in which I became the subject of the identity performances of others: flirting, physical touching, and playful descriptions of my appearance usually reserved for men, were common in these interactions. My body became a site of exploration and experimentation, where aspects of sociality that are increasingly off limits to young women could be explored. These moments were confusing, given the invisibility of my sexuality in the village but I came to understand them as the strategic realisation of forbidden fantasies and desires for physical intimacy.

“Jo ganteng, mau ke mana?” (Ah handsome Jo, where are you going?) was a typical comment directed to me by the young Acehnese women working at the local café I often visited. I would often stop by and spend time with them in the kitchen while they worked, enjoying the familiarity we shared in those informal spaces. I would sit on the kitchen floor and help peel garlic or chop shallots and later we would eat together, not from the western menu but from the pot of Acehnese curry we had prepared whilst chatting. If it was quiet, we might play backgammon or lay in the hammocks on the beach gossiping about their lust for local boys. As this chatter became more rambunctious their physical interactions with me would always become more daring. They would pull my arm around them, absent-mindedly touch

my stomach, whilst gazing up the beach towards the dive shop where their crush worked. Lost in fantasy, they would suddenly withdraw, giggling and hugging one another. In the context of *khalwat*, I was a perfect decoy for these public flirtations and for the conversations amongst them, later when I had departed, about the sex, intimacy, and flirtation they had a sense of through these mild imaginative performances.

As I described earlier, I occupied an unstable position within these interactions, with my gender recast to suit different motivations. I expect that this shifting gendered positionality allowed me a very different form of access than if I conformed with gender expectations. I could access spaces and conversations typically reserved for women: spaces such as kitchens and bedrooms were open to me while a male researcher would certainly not have been welcome. But I was also a strange presence in these spaces and was used by friends and acquaintances to disrupt their heteronormativity. These interactions allowed me to engage personally in social sexual politics whilst permitting the young women space to imaginatively explore their own sexuality under the guise of performance. They could pretend to be engaging in the everyday flirtations that they felt compelled towards but could not enact.

While sexuality was a key site of performance within my research relationships the intention beneath them was not at all erotic. My response to them was often of bemusement rather than any kind of thrill or titillation. It felt as though I was simply incorporated within existing modes of social interaction within all-female friendship groups, where touching and hugging are typical ways of showing affection. I saw these moments as ethnographically significant because they were indicative of my acceptance within the group and permitted me a rare insight into female social interaction. However, in incorporating me, they also adjusted their interaction in subtle ways to produce moments of ambiguity, where my gender was playfully rendered ambiguous. In these moments I represented for them the white western male tourist who could be flirted with, as is typical, but I could also be touched.

I would also transgress expectations for female behaviours because I embodied typical traits of men, such as independence and a lack of fear of the dark peripheral spaces of the village. I would give the cook in the cafe a lift home after her shift in the late evening, unintentionally assuming the position of chauffeur typically performed by young men who have a romantic

interest in their passenger. While, for me, these gestures were simply a matter of friendship and concern for a friend's welfare, and were recognised as such by them, the physicality of these acts felt to cross into another space of gendered relations. Simple gestures, such as an arm around my waist, resonated with meaning within these frameworks which were at once, puzzling and warming, producing mixed meanings that would not have had the same resonance at home.

The deliberately queer and playful way in which the women conducted these performances paints a very different picture to how women's sexuality in Aceh has typically been represented. The image of the compliant and demure Acehnese woman widely disseminated in news reports covering the progress of shari'ah, is challenged in how the women I engaged in my research discussed, enacted, and enjoyed imaginatively playing with various manifestations of desire, intimacy, and sexuality.

Sharing mutual experiences of marginality

As I explained above, I was not the only one observing the performances of others: my everyday social interactions were witnessed by this group of friends as we undertook our daily activities. N and I would often stop at the village of Kreung Raya to buy bananas on our way back from Sabang. Over time, an easiness had developed between the *Bapak* (Mr, older man) who owned the shop and me. He had recently started calling me *Abang* (brother), which I understood as both a gesture to mark our growing familiarity and a reference to the confusion that had initially clouded our conversations. He had seen me as a young man for several months and now felt embarrassed, however, rather than pretending nothing had happened, we had somehow formed an unspoken agreement to laugh about it whenever I stopped by; the recent addition of addressing me as *Abang* a creative way of referencing our private joke.

N was bemused by my new nickname and took it up with enthusiasm, often hyper-extending the word (Abaaaaaang!) in mocking reference to the stereotype of the over-bearing wife. Several months later, I pulled up beside her on the side of the long road between Iboih and Gapang where she was walking in the early morning heat, resurrecting her fitness routine. Relieved to see me, she took little convincing to join me for breakfast. As she tried to get on

the back of my bike, her tight gym pants prohibited her from stretching her leg over the seat. Finally giving up, she decided to sit side-saddle, and once she had regained her balance in this unfamiliar position she laughed and said: “Eh Jo, we are like a good shari’ah couple! Me sitting side-saddle on the bike with your bag in-between us so we don’t touch!”

I did not register this comment as particularly revealing at the time, but it nagged at me for weeks afterwards. Initially I interpreted it as a casual reference to social interactions, such as the moment between the banana seller and I, where my gender was the topic of conversation. Yet, it also captured more than a simple recognition of how others saw me. N was reading us both within the frame of the normative: the rules governing female travel (sitting side-saddle on the motorbike and only travelling with her husband or male relative), increasingly enforced on the mainland; the disruption of this rule first by her completely unacceptable style of dress (tight gym pants) and the queering of ‘the good shari’ah couple’ by us both being female. Our impromptu parody of the devout Muslim couple celebrated our shared estrangement from the normative categories which frame both of our lives and which render us unintelligible as good moral citizens.

Prior to this moment I had not thought about N’s position within the village in great depth, accepting a simplistic assessment that her boisterous attitude inferred she was respected and could behave without fear of reprimand. However, the above experience opened alternate possibilities about her place in terms of the social norms of the village and her experiences of her community. In this fleeting moment, N was commenting on her exclusion from the idealised narrative that we were parodying: her marriage with a western man excludes her from the category of ideal Acehnese woman because ideas and assumptions regarding mixed marriages, especially in relation to religion and sexuality, keeps such an ideal out of reach. She explained to me that she feels a duty to be the “man of her house” by undertaking responsibilities typically performed by the husband. Although her presence during these activities attracts derision from men in the village, it is better than being called *sombong* (arrogant). N’s role as wife and mother are complicated by the competing demands that she must continually juggle, and it was this sense of ‘not fitting’ into normative roles that I sensed she was citing in her performance.

This moment showed me more than a fleeting queer presence or a reflection on my own presence

in this space, as I had initially understood it. It allowed me to understand N's experiences of the often-contradictory spaces that she occupies. Through our queer presence I understood alternate narratives of marginality: I recognised how public spaces are constructed as normative beyond a simple binary of hetero/homo (as I experienced it). In this moment, I could share in N's disorienting experience of being both in and out of place in her own community.

Dwight Conquergood describes the value of performance as a method of coproduction, arguing that it offers "a way of deeply sensing the other" (1985, 9). While Conquergood is speaking specifically about performance as a mode of representing ethnography to a live audience, I recognise the applicability of his sentiments to the unscripted performative moments within my research relationships. Empathy, in Conquergood's sense of performance, is not about seeing from another's perspective, but rather, developing a broadened capacity to sense another by coproducing representations which draw on both partners' experiences, permitting both to sense the world, beyond their own experience.

Against my body, N produces an image of conformity and then proceeds to subvert that image through our shared understandings of one another. As this example reflects, the direct witnessing of my queer interactions, became fodder for N's provocations in later social situations. They became methods of communicating with me, in a language I could understand, the restrictions she felt in her own life. Madison's extension of Conquergood's concept of the dialogic performative resonates here,

The dialogic performative is charged by a desire for a generative and embodied reciprocity, sometimes with pleasure and sometimes with pain. It is a mutual creation of something different and something more from the meeting of bodies in their contexts (2006, 320).

N and I represented, even if it is just for us within our own embodied conversation, an alternative to the heteronormative frames within which we must both continuously perform. For that moment, something else is visible within the frame of heteronormativity: typically, so normalised that it appears unframed, it becomes framed only through parodic performances. Madison suggests, by linking the dialogic performative with Barthes' (1981) concept of the

punctum, that performance can cause a break in what comes to be expected, that which disrupts the expected flow of sociality. Madison says,

The dialogic performative is a subversive performativity that opens to possibilities for alternative performances and citations. In the dialogical performative, the expressive and responsive frequencies of reciprocity spark disruptions in the mesmerizing effects to conform (2006, 322).

The shared vulnerability of these moments challenged me to be more aware of how emotionality is reciprocally woven into research relationships. As Madison argues, “paying attention” is a “methodological and ethical necessity” (2006, 323), fundamental to research praxis. It also allowed me to recognise the validity of assertions made by several feminist geographers that interpersonal communication within fieldwork relationships need not be separated into assumed relations of sameness and difference (Rose 1997; Valentine 2002). Such separations expect that differentially positioned actors can only connect through similar or shared experiences, while differences in experience and identity preclude shared understanding. However, as demonstrated in the above account, N and I could meet one another with a recognition of our very different experiences of marginality by sharing our understandings of one another in a moment of performative disruption. This embodied exchange did not impose understanding or ameliorate differences but formulated a conversation where further empathic exchanges might contribute to our growing knowledge and awareness of one another. In this way, difference was a vibrant space of possibilities for both parties to engage reflexively with shared and entirely different experiences of marginality.

Inviting accusation

As my research moved between mainland and island, I experienced first-hand the sense of constriction that the heightened surveillance in Banda Aceh was creating around performances of identity. Not only did I attract curious attention like I did on the island, strangers would ask explicitly and sometimes with hostility, about my gender. I found it particularly confronting that my friends were called upon to respond to these inquiries, as though a by-stander to my own interrogation. M expressed her annoyance after one long day fielding these questions:

“All day people have been asking me about you, if you are a boy or a girl. I feel angry and embarrassed about it. They are all so stupid and rude. Doesn’t it make you feel bad?” These experiences challenged and destabilised M’s familiarity with her social environments, showing aspects of gender and sexual norms and how they are enforced that she had perhaps not previously recognised. The similarities in our experiences emerged in ensuing conversations, as M described how she felt a familiar gaze upon her body when we were together. She sensed a confluence between how we were perceived together and her own prior experiences, when alone, of a hostile and intrusive gaze when she deviated from normative femininity. The potential that playing with this gaze had for disrupting M’s assignation as a marked woman is apparent on an occasion when I was staying with her in Banda Aceh, and we had just arrived at her house.

It seemed that everyone was outside: kids were playing in the street, groups of women gathered by the side of the road chatting and sorting *petai* (small green beans with a bitter flavour) or papaya flowers in wide rattan trays. It was a typical late afternoon on any suburban street in Banda Aceh. M was wearing her huge sunglasses to match her equally loud bright red lipstick and a light semi-translucent blouse that fell to her mid-thigh. We had just spent the afternoon at the beach in Lhoknga where M has been learning to surf with the young men who are always hanging around on the beach in front of Eric’s new bungalows.

M parked the motorbike outside her house and waited, holding the bike steady, while I stepped off. I took off my helmet and noticed a man on the other side of the road watching us. M had seen him too and moved assertively towards the front door after she had released her long hair from her helmet, deliberately, theatrically shaking it free. I was nervous, not wanting to cause her any trouble. I remember saying, “Maybe I should stay at a hotel. They think you have a boy staying with you.” To which she replied, “I’m not scared. Let them come and then they will see.”

(Banda Aceh, 2016)

In Chapter Five, I introduced the idea that surveillance is felt by those within Acehnese society who are assessed as not meeting the narrow expectations of what constitutes the 'moral Acehnese citizen'. In the above anecdote, the suspicious gaze of the neighbour comes to represent the pervasive reach of the state if we take the view that power works by becoming embedded in the everyday regulatory frameworks of the community and the self (Foucault 1980). Surveillance *is* felt and therefore becomes self-constituting. It also opens power to its discursive other, resistance. Surveillance has become so normalised so as to stop recognising its intrusion. In this slightly different manifestation of surveillance, M felt the sudden jolt of awareness of that gaze upon her.

In the experience above and my ensuing reflection on that moment, I felt resonances of James Scott's (1985) ethnographic account of 'everyday resistance', where he took account of the everyday subversive activities undertaken by peasants to disrupt the mechanisms of hegemonic power. M would subtly interject within those hegemonic structures that left her, an unmarried woman, without access to power or self-definition. By drawing attention to the networks of surveillance that follow her every move, M invites the possibility of an accusation not playing out as planned, that is, of the entire shari'ah apparatus failing in the eyes of those tasked with its implementation. Power is never complete: indeed, as Foucault's theorisation of power contends, through the example of gay rights discourse, while discourse is productive of power, it also creates the possibilities of its inversion (Foucault 1976). M's acts of resistance demonstrate her thorough awareness of how power works to coerce the normativising effects of self-policing, and intra-community surveillance. Through the production of discourses of homosexuality, as previously conveniently unimagined category of sexuality, a language and discursive framework for resistance and the inversion of power becomes possible. The very suggestion of an all-encompassing regime of control opens a space of resistance that is demonstrative of the limits of these very apparatuses to fully infiltrate and contain gender and sexuality.

I found out later that the neighbour I had seen watching us had confronted M the following day after I had left. He was the *keucik* (village leader) and he had arrived at her door, accompanied by five men from the village, to accuse her of spending the night with a man. M recounted

the story to me on the phone, a mixture of anxiety and triumph in her voice. She said, "They came to my house Jo! They asked me why I was having a man staying with me. I took out my phone and showed them your photo. I zoomed in on your boobs, Jo. I had to zoom in, so they could see that you are a girl. Their faces were so funny to see. They were so embarrassed." The play between a fictionalised narrative, the kernel of truth regarding my homosexuality, and her knowledge that the *Keucik* would not dare accuse her of homosexuality created a perfect combination for M. My body became an object loaded with subversive potential; a prop in her performance of carefully orchestrated transgression, where she invited accusation from those she knew were watching.

I was terrified by the gamble M waged, the potential for something to go horribly wrong. What was so different between the instances of violence and humiliation enacted against LGBT Acehnese in recent months and this occasion? Why was she so confident that they would allow her a chance to prove them wrong? These questions perplexed me.

Another friend would utilise me as a decoy for her illicit sexual activities by making it appear that she was staying with me when she came to Iboih for the weekend from Banda Aceh. She would arrive at my place directly from the ferry, get ready in my room and then leave her things scattered about before heading to her boyfriend's hidden jungle bungalow where she would stay for several nights before returning. My sexuality was a source of great amusement for her, as though her knowledge of this 'public secret' heightened the thrill of deception and transgression she felt. She would pretend in our conversations and interactions that we were an intimate couple, delighting in the irony that we could be publicly visible without any chance of repercussion. I was not so convinced that there would be no repercussions: I was extremely worried that people in the village would start talking or could even come and inquire at the house. I would either be accused of having a relationship with her, which I was not, or would have to lie about her whereabouts, neither of which would serve me well. I am still not entirely sure whether nothing happened because I am a westerner, or because they preferred not to acknowledge the possibility of homosexual sex, or because they did not hold any suspicions.

On one occasion, I recall her response to friends who had warned her of talk in the village about raiding her boyfriend's room when it became obvious that she was staying with him.

She said, "... so I said, if I can't stay there with my boyfriend, I will wait until my girlfriend comes back and stay with her. I will stay one night with my boyfriend and the second night with my girlfriend. We can stay together Jo, no one can say anything." While in an Indonesian context, two women sharing a bed is not unusual, in this case, my sexuality is an inside joke that makes the scenario appear simultaneously normative and subversively queer. The fleeting queer presence, which is unacknowledged by the stringent normativity of the village, nonetheless demands creates a moment of queer visibility for those who are "in on the joke", whilst challenging the contradictions and inconsistencies in rules governing heterosexuality.

Heidi Nast argues that in fieldwork "others often *do* set our agendas, *do* show us what is important, and *do* place us in our bodies and assign us to spaces not of our choosing" (Nast 1998, 71). This she says, "allows for reflexivity to be re-cast as an embodiment skill, a means for enabling bodily, spatial difference to register in creatively decentering, fragmentary ways" (71). I push further with Nast's theorisation of reflexivity in the following chapter where I ask how queer feelings might constitute an important and under-utilised wealth of embodied knowledge to contribute to social research methodologies. Here though, it is important to emphasise her central point that "the body is a *field* for registering and negotiating difference" (Nast 1998, 80).

During Nast's fieldwork in Nigeria, others utilised her body to enact their own subjectivities and to perform and negotiate the politics of their own social location. For Nast, reflexivity meant often enduring the "bodily jolts" (80) of those experiences, rather than, as she puts it, engaging in "mental musings" (80), which is how reflexivity is often described in the social sciences. The anecdotes I have offered here provoked an embodied reflexivity in my research. Through others' constructions of my identity, I could understand aspects of how they inhabit and perform their own identities, especially the everyday negotiations and contestations of shifting boundaries governing their gender expression, sexuality, and ability to move through public space. A playful use of my private identity, which I had carefully shared with them, and my public persona in many ways strengthened our relationship: our mutual vulnerability tested the trust and intimacy we had developed and permitted further explorations of the personal in these relationships.

Conclusion

The question I pose in the title of this chapter, “What do queer performances want from queer researchers?” highlights a tension between the witnessing and coproduction of ‘queer’ moments in ethnographic research. This chapter has not sought to answer this question, but to imagine performance as productive of multiple and often conflicting ways of engaging with both the performances of self in fieldwork encounters and the performances of others with whom researchers often forge close and empathic relationships.

The various anecdotes I have offered throughout this chapter demonstrate the subtle everyday ways that young women challenge and resist the surveillance and monitoring which is increasingly intruding upon their capacity to inhabit public and private space. In their deliberately subversive enactments, they also critique the demonisation of LGBT people who many of these women feel are facing the most extreme forms of vilification in the same system of misogyny within which they are themselves implicated. Shari’ah, which is the manifestation of social norms around gender, sexuality and morality, only exists as a series of responses to that which it dares to name. This Foucauldian reading demonstrates that shari’ah, nor the responses to it, represent a static system. My experiences with young women in Aceh demonstrate the fluidity and mutability of both sexual and gender expression, and shari’ah as a system of social control.

These subversive performances drew on silences and contradictions in the rhetorical constructions of gendered and sexual morality that were taking shape within (and between) communities and drew me into the frame of my research in unexpected ways. In the following chapter, I continue with this line of inquiry, asking how these ‘ways of knowing’ which emerged from a deeply sensory and embodied engagement with the shifting social landscapes of contemporary Aceh, might lend themselves to a queer social research methodology.

Chapter 7: Queer sensibilities and ethnographic research

My body passed into and out of my awareness like a stranger

(Jackson 1989, 119)

Anthropology has always been a little bit queer

(Margot Weiss, in conversation with Jara Carrington, 2018, 04:25)

"Lagu Aceh! Lagu Aceh!" ("Aceh songs! Aceh songs!") The request for Aceh songs always comes when the band plays on Saturday nights. They have exhausted their repertoire of Radiohead and other western mainstream songs and it is getting to that time of the night where the locals are itching to move. Tonight, a young woman fronts the band, holding the microphone close to her mouth as the opening drumming of 'Hoom', a song by the famous contemporary Acehnese singer Rafly, begins and the space in front of her fills with bodies. The music has a rhythmic, hypnotic quality: drums drawing chanting vocals from both the female lead and the bass guitarist, the drummer's body responds, moving in time with the rolling vocals.

The song builds, and the bodies in the audience begin to move closer together. They are reacting individually to the beat and rhythm, but gradually their movements fall into sync with one another. Without speaking, they form a line and each person falls to their knees. Aware now of the bodies which move to their left and right, they begin to copy one another's movements, falling into a perfect rhythm. They are moving in imitation of *Rapa'i Geleng* (a type of traditional Acehnese dance): arms crossing chests synchronously, one wrong move could be catastrophic as heads move quickly and sharply from left to right. The fluidity of the movements seems to allow a speed and harmony to build up, faster and faster. They can only sustain this pace for so long. As the beats lose their distinction and meld into one deep sound, the group begins to fall apart. Each body becomes separate from the rest; moving again to their own rhythm. The uniformity of *Rapa'i Geleng* is broken and the bodies, still in their line formation, are touching as each part moves out of rhythm with the next.

The energy shifts and they seem to pull differently towards one another, as though in their renewed singularity a space opens between them. I feel a rush of recognition as the bodies arrange themselves in configurations of desire that remind me of a club night at home. The young women seem to revel in the transgression that their bodies represent as they move against one another. A young woman standing to the side of the group begins to remove her *jilbab*, seductively unpinning it as though the final reveal in a strip-tease. Her gestures shift from demure to provocative as she removes it completely and slowly moves into the throng of bodies. Those in the centre pull her in and hysterical laughter breaks the silence which has fallen over the group. I realise then that the band have stopped playing and the stage is

almost empty. The village, which had receded, seems heavily present as the bodies recuperate their separateness, dancing in their usual style to the pop music which again blares out of the crackling stereo-speakers.

The following day, I asked N what the song 'Hoom' meant. I thought that if I knew the lyrics, I could understand the crowd's reaction. She explained that the lyrics of many contemporary Acehese songs do not have a clear literal meaning but that the rhythmic effect of the words cultivates an embodied, emotive realm of experience. When I first went to these parties, I thought of them simplistically as entertainment for tourists. They felt staged, as though the employees in the resort where the parties were often held were encouraged by the owners to act in an outrageously extroverted and sexualised manner to shock the guests, to dispel any preconceived ideas that they might have that Acehese people are conservative and sexually repressed.

Non-religious celebrations and inter-gender socialising is becoming untenable in Aceh, as evidenced by the incident on the beach. Gradually, local authorities have banned parties, closed cinemas, and recently, inexplicably prohibited the keyboard. Their suggestion that such activities contradicts Islamic principles and promotes immoral behaviour, offers little room for young people to protest these restrictions. Even traditional Acehese dance is uncommon to see outside the context of tourism promotions in Sabang leaving both a void for young people to express their cultural identity and a dire absence of social activities with which to engage. In this context, the impromptu parties in tourist venues feel urgent and necessary for young Acehese people. While local bands are invited to popular cafes, resorts, and restaurants to entertain tourists, the parties serve another purpose. Over the years I have seen how these spaces are utilised by locals to take up space; to experiment with moving their bodies by dancing and engaging in intimate interactions with one another.

Dundon and Hemer suggest that intimacy develops between performers and their audiences and that this bond may be "experienced sensually, and/or emotionally as something 'beyond words'" (2016, 7). Referencing Wood and Smith (2004), they go on to argue that the "emotional geographies"



figure 37. *The band playing on a Saturday night at Casa Nemo Resort, Pantai Sumur Tiga (Three Springs Beach), 2014, digital photograph taken by the author.*

of performances “are also about improvisation and interaction and, as such, are truly a ‘way of life in the making’ or a ‘conversation of practices’ that never is entirely complete or finished” (Dundon and Hemer 2016, 8). The improvisational aspect of the performances I witnessed enabled spaces of vibrant, subversive, political potential to be harnessed by the performers. In these temporary spaces, they could communicate emotionally through action rather than words. The rapidly changing social contexts that they were negotiating required a dynamic way of communicating: long-term reflection was inadequate for responses to the changes which are felt incrementally every day. These were more than random moments of abandonment: they were important moments of collective public performance and self-expression. I began to imagine the parties as a temporary stage (Goffman 1959) upon which complex embodied reactions to the tensions of everyday life could be explored, discussed, and critiqued.

I also puzzled over the significance of their re-articulation of traditional Acehnese dance forms: with an endless choice of Western pop culture to choose from, which at all other times is played on phones, sound systems, and portable speakers, why did they reference traditional styles of dance in these hyper-sexualised displays? *Rapa’i Geleng* (dance of the drum and head shaking) and *Tari Saman* (dance of a thousand hands) are dance styles traditionally performed throughout Aceh; bringing together Sufist teachings and pre-Islamic animist spirituality, they are performed in groups and utilise each body as an instrument in an arrangement described as ‘body percussion’ (Kartomi 2012).

Traditionally, these dances rely on intense cooperation and harmony between performers. The group, which usually consists of twelve dancers, form a single line, performing a repetition of movements and sounds whilst kneeling on the ground. Alongside the reading of religious verses³⁹, the bodies move in unison, with each individual performer utilising the spaces carved out by the performers to their left and right. That they do not collide seems remarkable but

39 These verses are often drawn from the *Hikayat Aceh* (The Story of Aceh), which tells the story of Acehnese might under Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636), when Aceh is said to have been its most powerful; the *Hikayat Perang Sabil* (The Story of Holy War), which again, promotes ideas of Acehnese greatness and resistance to repetitive Dutch incursions. That their recitation accompanies *Rapa’i Geleng* emphasises the meaning conveyed in the physical demonstration of principles of unity and cooperation (Kartomi 2012).

by adhering to a well-practiced routine, where speed and length of movement is precisely executed, the performers ensure that contact is never made. The dramatic abandonment of collective togetherness and cooperation is suggestive of underlying sentiments held by young people, especially relating to the perceived inauthenticity of religious expression in the current socio-political moment. By allowing these values to crumble into subversive disarray, the young people are drawing wider connections to how the new regime of punitive shari'ah is straying too far from traditional Acehnese Islamic values, which they see as connected more to the spiritual and mystical traditions of Sufist Islam than the orthodox strain which has gained dominance. The common criticism I have heard from young people, and which is evident in the performance above, is that while they are targeted, the corruption and hypocrisy of religious and community leaders continues unabated, making a mockery of Islamic values; by performing the dissolution and corruption of tradition, they are drawing attention to this façade. They are also rebelling against the regulation of sexuality which is so persistently intruding into their private lives.

The relationship between the band and the audience became a metaphor for understanding my relationships with young Acehnese women and the queer moments that seemed to occur with increasing frequency throughout the latter period of my research in Sabang and Banda Aceh. While the parodic moments I described in the previous chapter gave me great insight into the experiences of social surveillance and the regulation of sexuality, gender, and public space, they also awakened in me an attuning to my own embodied experiences of fieldwork. I had been living in Aceh, on and off, for three years when I began to connect the way co-performance facilitated non-verbal communication on sensitive social issues, both in my everyday interactions with young women and in collective engagements such as the parties described above. In each of these instances, the body and the senses are central to communication and required that I recognise both my embodied experiences of intersubjective exchanges in my research and the frames of reference I carried in my body to make sense of what I was experiencing.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the 'identity management' (Lewin and Leap 1996) undertaken by researchers during the initial stages of fieldwork. Through my experiences, I traced the difficulties faced by LGBTQ researchers who are limited in their capacity to offer normative

personal narratives, such as those which establish marriage and procreation as the (only) pathways to happiness (Ahmed 2010). In this chapter, I am interested in the impacts of these factors upon the ability of queer researchers to reproduce an intelligible ethnographic narrative, anchored in a unidirectional progression towards immersion within a defined community. I contend, guided by Ahmed, that traces of living a non-normative life are impressed upon queer researcher's bodies as a bodily memory that influence how we participate in research and how we interpret the social spaces through which we 'pass'. Researcher's bodies become "instruments of research", (Longhurst, Ho and Johnston 2008, 208), just like the body of the performer of *Rapa'i Geleng* becomes an instrument in a broader cultural conversation. During fieldwork, the researcher is unequivocally produced, in part, through intersubjective exchange. Embodied experiences of that process are therefore an "ethnographic 'research tool'" (Bain and Nash 2006, 99) that can be utilised to access and produce insightful anthropological knowledge. Engaging processes of reflexive and contestant research practice counters the reproduction of the default the straight, white, cisgender researcher. While race, gender, and sexuality have been problematised in many critiques in feminist and postcolonial social research, the complexities of non-binary gender, has so far been under-theorised, with androgyny, genderqueer, and non-binary identities rarely gaining visibility in accounts. By interjecting with the specific experiences of uncomfortable or failed attempts to enact tropes of ethnographic immersion, embeddedness, reciprocity with an unproblematised, non-specific conception of community, we can make space for a diversity of representations that can contribute to the ongoing relevance of anthropological theory and methods.

This chapter is heavily indebted to Sara Ahmed's theorisations of everyday feminism and, more specifically, her articulation of queer embodied knowledge. Her conceptualisation of normative space and embodied experience, especially through her unpacking of discomfort and disorientation in her books, *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) and *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2014), are finding resonance within the recent proliferation of methodology-focused studies in queer anthropology (see, for example, Adjepong 2017; Dahl 2017). It is to this conversation that this chapter contributes. This newly emerging field seeks to unleash emotions and embodied experience as productive tools for queer researchers: Ahmed's tactile and

seductive metaphorical theorisation of queer experiences of being out-of-place, discomfort, disorientation, and vulnerability make for fitting continuities with ethnographic practice, which is inevitably embodied, relational and performative.

The emotional and performative landscapes I introduced in the previous chapter offer possibilities for envisaging a queer embodied methodology that is useful for engaging ethnographic fieldwork in places where living as queer is becoming increasingly untenable, like Malaysia and Indonesia which are currently seeing a conservative trend. An embodied reflexive ethnographic practice that centres 'queer emotions' can provide critical emplaced nuanced accounts of the challenges faced by sexuality and gender diverse individuals and communities.

Rather than attempting to contain and render away discomfort or uneasiness, queer research methodologies revel in these emotions and the insights they afford. As Ahmed (2006) suggests, disorientation is an orientation. Such an orientation recognises the skills already embodied by queer researchers, instead of presuming that their difference is preventative of reciprocal sharing and rapport building with communities where queer identities are not publicly livable. Specifically, I propose a methodology centred on gender fluidity and androgyny, which employs 'passing through' as a queer strategy for negotiating discomfort and engaging in fieldwork encounters. Idiosyncrasies of the Acehnese context, where intra-community surveillance and monitoring of heterosexual couples is increasing, offer surprising reinterpretations of how marginality is typically conceived and represented in western queer traditions. The local specificities I have introduced over the preceding chapters make for an illuminating context within which to understand the reproduction of heteronormativity and the implications for how researcher can study such spaces, and for queer frameworks more broadly.

Thematic resonances traced in the first part of this thesis, such as separation, sanctuary, contamination, and containment, re-emerge in dialogue with my exploration of queer embodied reflexive ethnography. In relation to the queer researcher's embodied interactions, these themes reproduce the queer researcher within the same shifting framework as the various figures I have imaginatively drawn from documented histories and oral traditions (such as the exiled lunatic, the banished cripple, the renegade woman, and the resistance fighter). In this chapter the figure of the androgynous white researcher who is also, fleetingly, both *cewek* (girl)

and *cowok* (boy), boyfriend and girlfriend, sheds light on contemporary social spaces produced within similar discursive frameworks and the practices of exile and containment which have produced Sabang spatialities as they are configured in contemporary identity narratives.

I now turn to give a brief account and critical engagement with queer anthropological engagements with methodology, to discover how queer embodied lived experience might push these conversations in further productive directions.

A queer ethnography?

“What is *queer* in queer anthropology today?” asks Margot Weiss (2016, 628; italics in original) in her contribution to the “Openings and Retrospectives” special edition of *Cultural Anthropology*. This question comes at an important moment in queer studies’ trajectory from early accounts of gay and lesbian lives towards a more expansive and inclusive approach to research utilising a queer analytical lens. The special edition, which aimed to take stock of where queer anthropology has come from and where it might be headed, has been influential in expanding my thinking about what informs my use of queer theory in guiding, framing, and informing my ethnographic practice, analysis, and writing. It encouraged a confidence to reflect and include my experiences of fieldwork, to question the influence of my presence on intersubjective social interactions, and to critically engage with the implicit normativities embedded in ethnographic fieldwork approaches. On this last point, the queer interjection into dominant ideas reproduced through narratives of immersion and embeddedness within a clearly delineated community has been one of the most important aspects of theoretical understandings gleaned from queer theory’s antinormative stance towards disciplinary practices.

Weiss’ question is, of course, mostly rhetorical: the ongoing relevance of queer to anthropology is that such a question is near impossible to answer in any definitive sense, such is its fluid changeability and adaptive potential to context and individual political desires, investments, and disciplinary priorities. Beyond these influencing factors, queer studies has a general contingent commitment to contest norms, in how gender and sexuality is contained and regulated, and to the intellectual, epistemological and methodological norms within which we ourselves are reproduced. Such a destabilising and critically attuned orientation offers endless possibilities

for how queer might manifest in our interactions, accounts, and indeed, our lives. As I contend throughout this chapter, queer anthropology's critical edge also comes from the embodied knowledge of the queer researcher, whose mobile and intersubjective practices find intensely revealing registers in the social worlds within which they live, are temporary residents, or pass through. These queer ruptures are invaluable interjections in normative practice within both anthropology and queer studies.

Inflected with the vibrant possibilities opened by the authors included in the "Openings and Retrospectives" special edition mentioned above (Allen 2016; Lewin 2016; Manalansan 2016; Morgensen 2016; Weiss 2016) and the collection, *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, offered by Kath Browne and Catherine Nash ([2010] 2016), there have been a range of inventive and empirically grounded investigations into the queer potential of anthropological methodological traditions in recent years. The abstraction of the body in early queer work which necessarily focused on destabilising the fixedness of identity in studies of sexuality and gender has produced a range of questioning about how queer can be rearticulated using social science research methodologies grounded in lived experience and reflective of the intersubjective complexities of fieldwork. For example, there have been an assortment of studies which have included intensely intimate and emotive reflections on the researcher's experiences of intersubjectivity, the erotic dimensions of fieldwork, and the tensions around queer visibility in fieldwork.

Most noteworthy are there the two important special issues of the journal, *Gender, Place and Culture*, the first in 2016 and the other the following year, in 2017, which have featured emerging scholars throughout the social sciences who grapple with how emotions and sexuality shape fieldwork relations and the knowledge produced (De Craene 2017; Di Feliciano, Gadelha and DasGupta 2017; Kaspar and Landolt 2016; Preser 2017; Schurr and Abdo 2016; Sara Smith 2016; Wimark 2017). Sara Smith (2016) and Kaspar in Landolt (2016), in their studies of intimacy and flirting respectively, demonstrate how aspects of research relationships which are often shied away from or obscured within research findings or representations, can be engaged as formative sites where we can learn from both the field and our research methodologies.

Yet there is still room for further inclusions, more potential for demarginalising the body,

sensory experiences of social space, and the ambiguities of intersubjective exchange where queer identities are differently produced through the specific cultural and social contexts where fieldwork is undertaken. These avenues for reflection can contribute invaluable insight and should be considered vital components of queer researcher's descriptive and analytical repertoire.

These tentative steps towards including the researcher's embodied experiences might seem strange, given the centrality of reflexive methodologies in anthropological traditions, especially those informed by feminist politics, however, it is completely understandable given the political and theoretical contexts that produced queer critique. It is important to clarify the significance of pushing further in these directions, especially for queer anthropology's capacity to engage cultural contexts that are dissimilar to the United States cultural traditions from which queer theory has developed. If queer researchers are to recognise the emplaced understandings of sexuality and gender outside their own frames of intelligibility, how these frames impress upon their own queer bodies is integral to their own reflexive research practice. These frames begin with our own embodied responses to social worlds that are both familiar and unfamiliar: we feel ourselves into connection with others and their articulations of identity.

One of the most important ways towards including the bodies and experiences of queer researchers in ethnographic accounts that might be taken seriously in mainstream anthropological literature is through queer studies' antinormative stance towards academic institutions. Although the unavoidable institutionalisation of queer theory has been traced and critiqued, not without optimism for its disruptive future (Halperin 2003; Jagose 1996; Weiss 2016). The critical stance is, in itself, an important distinguishing feature of queer theory, when compared to the political aims of earlier gay and lesbian anthropological studies. Michael Warner succinctly targets this point when he says: "'queer' gets its critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual, and normal includes business in the academy" (Warner 1993, xxvi). Ryan-Flood and Rooke (2009) apply this criticality to the social sciences, arguing that queer theory needs to be taken seriously as a potential force in challenging norms in ethnographic research. They argue that these norms include the assumed "stability and coherence of the ethnographic self, and performativity of the ethnographic self in writing and doing research"

(Ryan-Flood and Rooke 2009, 118).

Anima Adjepong's (2017) recent article does just that. Their research, which challenges the assumed identity of the ethnographer by asking what happens when queer, people of colour occupy that role, is just one exciting example of where reflexive methodologies in social research can be the force that Rooke and others have argued is fundamental to queer anthropology. Using the researcher's own embodied experiences of fieldwork to contest otherwise uncritiqued disciplinary norms, has the capacity to further anthropology's oft-stated objectives of contesting and responding to the legacies of colonialism embedded in the discipline. By interrupting norms of hetero-patriarchy that undergird these legacies and lead to their reinscription, queer anthropology has an important role to play. The inclusion of the body is critical to these interventions because it is through the intersubjective, the unspoken unqualified presence of the researcher and the unchallenged impact they have on fieldwork exchanges, that these norms are so often perpetuated. Further contributions like Adjepong's can only cast more light upon normalised practices and expectations within mainstream anthropological discourse.

The turn towards a more expansive and inclusive scope for an anthropology of sexuality came through the pioneering efforts of early scholars in Gay and Lesbian Studies. While this scholarship sought important inclusions of gay, lesbian and non-binary gender expression in other (non-Western) cultural contexts, as Kath Weston (1993) argues, this work was 'ethnocartographic' in that it focused on presenting evidence of the universal existence of non-heterosexual identities to bolster gay and lesbian rights claims in the west. Any appreciation of the differences in the way that identity and sexuality is viewed in these contexts was of secondary importance. This euro-centric view was challenged by anthropologists, such as Weston (1993), Boellstorff (2005), S. Davies (2010) and Blackwood (1995), by contextualising gender diversity and sexual expression in various cultural contexts, they showed how sexuality and gender identity is constituted through the intersections of local specificities and customs, situated within but not determined by global processes. Without these contributions, which coincidentally have focused predominantly on Indonesian contexts, queer social science research would not be where it is today.

The most important inclusion in Evelyn Blackwood's (1995, 2010) ethnographic study of

sexuality and gender identity in West Sumatra was her personal reflections on the intimate relationships she formed during her fieldwork. These relationships facilitated deep insight into the formation and expression of *lesbi* identity and female masculinity in Indonesia, and also fostered reflections on ethnographic methodology. While not explicitly focused on emotions and sensory engagement in research relationships, Blackwood's is a rare example of centring personal and erotic experiences of fieldwork in queer ethnographic writing⁴⁰. She drew on her own embodied understandings of identity, desire, and intimacy to feel the subtle differences and similarities with her participants, allowing this knowledge to inform her understandings. Furthermore, these lived experiences of desire and intimacy were actively productive of the social spaces and relationships that Blackwood was able to engage; without this capacity for participation and emotional engagement, the 'field' would have looked (and felt) completely different. Blackwood's ethnography demonstrates that LGBT researchers bring a different set of skills to their practice, which ultimately facilitates the emergence of rich anthropological knowledge otherwise inaccessible within the heteronormativity of academia.

Weiss (2011) argues that queer anthropology was born out of this moment of contestation, where lesbian and gay identified researchers looked beyond same-sex desiring subjects to ask after queer ways of 'doing' social research. Where gay and lesbian anthropology had sought sameness by reading non-western contexts through western discourse, queer anthropology seeks to challenge the fixity of gender and sexuality. Queer is more a sensibility or an "analytic" (Weiss 2011, 628) informed by a politics of antinormativity and transgressive social phenomena than an attempt to seek evidence of same-sex sexual activity or non-binary gender. This argument suggests an endless possibility for queer studies beyond identity, but as Weiss (2011) says, identity has not been left behind: it continues to influence our decisions about where

40 Other notable examples are Esther Newton's seminal queer ethnographic works, in particular *Mother Camp* (1972) and *My Best Informant's Dress* ([1992] 2000) and Elisabeth Engebretsen's ethnography entitled, *Queer Women in Urban China: An Ethnography* (2014). Evelyn Blackwood's *Falling into the Lesbi World: Desire and Difference in Indonesia* (2010) provides the most relevant insights for this project and has been a guiding example of how ethnographic research can facilitate deeper understandings of sexual and gender diversity in non-western cultural contexts.

and with whom we study, as well as how we approach (and make) our subjects.

Since its early beginnings⁴¹ queer studies has taken same-sex attraction, desire and intimate and erotic entanglements, as a launching place to interrogate arrangements of power, heteronormativity: a “something else” (Weiss 2018, 14:36) that can be achieved through close theoretical and ethnographic engagement with queer lives. These works have also prompted a necessary critical engagement with how heteronormativity is embedded in academic contexts. Increasingly, although not nearly enough, this critical avenue has been explored in the reproduction of heteronormativity through the unquestioning reiteration of social research methods and methodologies (Adjepong 2017; Browne and Nash [2010] 2016; Nash [2010] 2016; Rooke [2010] 2016).

Weiss (2011) argues that a focus on desire, that is, the drives which inform our choices as social researchers and our political stance towards challenging normativity, can push queer anthropology in unexpected directions. Desire, for Weiss (2011; 2016), is about engaging possibilities for alternate futures; a lens for reimagining the world as reflecting queer stories and experience. These sentiments and political investments resonate with the late Jose Esteban Munoz’ conceptualisation of “queer utopia” as a way of “imaging alternatives to the here and now” (2009, 1), while Manalansan has argued that queer anthropology is “an aspirational field of study” (Manalansan 2016, 596). As queer social researchers, we achieve this through decisive choices in who we study and how we represent their stories, and I contend, through inclusion of reflections on cross-cultural embodied experiences of how heteronormativity is enforced and embedded in unfamiliar social and cultural contexts. Desire can be extended to the kinds of intimacies and embodied sharing suggested by a reflexive and embodied practice, where our sensory experiences and our capacities to empathically sense others are woven into research accounts. A significant and fundamental step towards enacting these desires, I

41 For a robust genealogy of queer theory and queer anthropology, see for example Boellstorff (2007); L. Edelman (2004); Halperin (2003); Wiegman and Wilson (2015); and, Weiss (2016). For foundational texts informing core principles in contemporary queer anthropology, see for example, Gayle Rubin’s *Thinking Sex* (1984); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Tendencies* (1993); Michael Warner’s edited collection, *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993); Annamarie Jagose’s *Queer Theory* (1996); Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies that Matter* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004).

believe, is including (not in an incidental or tokenistic way) our own struggles and experiences of fieldwork, especially where they shed light on how sexuality and gender is understood in diverse cultural contexts.

Building on studies of localised conceptions of sexuality, nationhood, identity, and subject formation (Blackwood 1995; Boellstorff 2005; S. Davies 2010) recent studies are increasingly engaging in discussions of positionality and in the past decade there has been a noticeable and exciting shift in queer studies towards methods and methodologies. Browne and Nash's ([2010] 2016) edited collection offers a broad selection of researchers who shift the dominant line of questioning in queer studies from what queer theory is, to how it can be done. The accounts included in this important contribution offer significant insight into the experiences of fieldwork foreground the researcher's reflexive voice and embodied experiences (Detamore [2010] 2016; Heckert [2010] 2016; Holman Jones and Adams 2016; Nash [2010] 2016; Rooke [2010] 2016).

In more recent years it seems that this trajectory has dissipated somewhat, with collections espousing the centrality of 'queer sensibilities' falling short in the kinds of reflections imagined by Browne and Nash. The conduit between western frameworks and local contexts, is the researcher themselves and for this reason, greater in-depth reflection on how the researcher's subjectivity influences social encounters, including how participants make sense of the researcher's fleeting presence within their lives, and the knowledge they bring to these encounters are critical inclusions in social research accounts. I take a more focused examination of one example of this recent scholarship, before moving on to detail my own embodied methodological contribution to this exciting and robust conversation.

Queer sensibilities, or still... queer theory?

The recent special issue of the journal *Sexualities*, entitled "Anthropology's Queer Sensibilities", offers an important case-in-hand, where we can interrogate how the move towards a more sensory queer anthropology might be engaged. While the authors promise an open exploration of side-lined aspects of research, the substantive issues covered rarely engage the researcher's own sensory experiences of the field. In the introductory paper, the authors outline the scope of the special issue, claiming to focus on,

... explorations of anthropology's queer sensibilities, that is, experimental thinking in ethnographically informed investigations of gender and sexual difference, and related connections, disjunctures and tensions in their situated and abstract dimensions (Boyce, Engebretsen and Posocco 2017, 1).

This ambiguous objective is not substantially clarified in the authors' definition of sensibility. They say sensibility "... is often understood in connection with emotions, as responsiveness to others' feelings, an insight, awareness or judgment" and that by adding "the adjective 'queer' – also known as: puzzling, unbalanced, extraordinary, kinky, strange, suspicious ... to form a composite notion of anthropology's queer sensibilities aims to provoke experimental thinking and alternative approaches in ethnography-informed investigations of gender and sexual difference in the contemporary world" (Boyce, Engebretsen and Posocco 2017, 2).

We can already see in these statements that the *sensory basis of sensibility* is gradually rendered away, as the definition gains theoretical momentum; embodied knowledge is supplanted in favour of queer theory's long-standing theoretical moorings. Just when queer felt it might finally be reunited with the body, it is abstracted to the endless horizons of 'experimental thinking and alternative approaches'. Why is it that in connecting anthropology and queer we must prioritise an abstract theory, instead of cultivate theory through the very qualities that set us apart from other researchers, that is our lived experience *as queer*?

A closer look at the articles which follow that introduction shows that there is a persistent undervaluing of the personal in queer-based anthropological work. Giametta's (2017) study, which offers an account of ethnographic fieldwork amongst asylum seekers in France and the United Kingdom, perhaps goes the furthest, however, after opening this avenue of inquiry, he very quickly withdraws from making any substantive explorations of his emotive or sensory engagements by dismissing the autobiographical as too dangerous. This concern with allowing too much personal focus to pervade anthropological writing is a persistent myth which ought to be contested: it ignores the many strides made in ethnographic methodological discussions, especially in feminist anthropology circles, which demands embodied, reflexive engagement. To deny the researcher's embodied experience is to foreclose possibilities for understanding deeply the contextual variabilities the research proclaims as their central concern.

In Spronk's (2017) ethnographic study of Kenyan and Ghanaian sex lives, her own subjectivity and the influence that she had on her participant's interactions, disclosures, and constructions of her, remain uninterrogated. Spronk's ability to envision sexuality beyond western queer and LGBT frameworks, enables alternate ways of imagining sexed and gendered lives, however, throughout the article I was curious about how her presence in the various social spaces of her fieldwork shaped how people talked about and enacted their intimate relationships. I was also interested in how she understood how her embodied sensory experiences of these relationships shaped her interpretations of the lived experiences of her participants.

My questions from these recent avenues of queer anthropological exploration, are these: In the trajectory away from gay and lesbian studies have we negated the role of the researcher's presence in fieldwork encounters? Why does queer, as a theoretical framework, so often negate or abstract the body? Is this evidence of a persistent refusal in queer theory to engage with sensory and embodied knowledge, to persist in the fiction of the disembodied researcher, the privileging of theoretical contortions over grounded embodied research?

In an interview with Esther Newton, one of the founding voices in lesbian and gay anthropology, the editors of this special issue ask Newton to elaborate on what she calls a 'gay sensibility' (Boyce et al. 2017). In her response we gain a rare insight into a genealogy of ideas that have informed the present concerns of queer anthropology and the persistent tension between theory and the body highlighted above. For Newton, her 'gay sensibility' emerges from identity, lived experience, and one's political imperatives towards the community. As a university-based, and therefore predominantly white, upper-class, United States-centric discipline, queer theory has inadvertently shifted its attention away from the concerns described by Newton. While this shift has come from queer's contestation of the idea of stable and coherent identity, it has also perhaps traded certain aspects of emplaced and lived experience in favour of a more theoretical focus.

What Newton opens for discussion in her brief response is a purposive reflection on what we actually 'do' if we venture down paths which claim to aspire to engage the messiness and embodied sensibilities of ethnographic research. To refer again to theory, is to miss an opportunity to realise the wealth of knowledge we are under-utilising, despite carrying it

everywhere we go. It is important to note that in fields which have an enduring feminist influence (such as feminist geography), emotions and embodied practice is of central concern (see the afore-mentioned special editions of *Gender, Space and Culture* and *Women's Studies Quarterly*). These offer important sites for queer exploration and can counter the perceptible contradiction in queer anthropology that while moving away from identity towards an analytical sensibility, it has also moved away from experience.

If we return to ask Weiss' (2016) question "What is *queer* in queer anthropology today?" of current queer anthropological scholarship, what variegated responses might we receive and what might that tell us about where we could be heading? If we scratch below the surface of these responses, what substance might we find which demonstrates how queer researchers know what they purport to know? We might also ask, what influences the pull towards certain knowledge and away from others in queer theory? Looking more broadly than immediate contributions to 'queer anthropology' to include cross-disciplinary approaches informed by feminist traditions of including the body, emotions, and senses to counter theory-heavy traditions within queer theory is critical if the current trajectory towards queer sensibilities is to be more than a disembodied, abstract theoretical enterprise. My experiences of fieldwork contribute a sensory, emotional, and autobiographical reflection to discussions of queer sensibilities, in the hope that such inclusions may no longer be classified as 'not yet queer enough' (Valocchi 2005). I turn to some of these cross- disciplinary examples in the following section.

Recent scholarship on emotions, senses, and space in ethnographic research

In the collection, *Emotions in the Field*, editor James Davies says the authors set out to "retrieve emotion from the methodological margins of fieldwork" (2010, 1). Emotions, he argues, have been underexamined in anthropological methodological discussions, despite the reflexive turn in the 1980s and 1990s. This turn, rather than encompassing a range of aspects of the researcher's influence, focused on identity politics and issues of academic orientation. While this may certainly be applicable to mainstream social science research, the inclusion of emotions and the affective positioning of the researcher has been central to women of colour feminism and postcolonial scholarship since the 1980s (Anzaldúa 2007; Behar 1996; Mohanty 1988; Trinh 1989).

Marginalised within the humanities along with emotions and embodiment, it is no surprise that this scholarship has taken so long to resonate with those working in the predominantly white, upper-class echelons of academia, so much so that ideas such as these are represented as new and ground-breaking as they circulate, decades later. Nonetheless, recent scholarship which is engaging emotional and sensory investigations into various social and cultural contexts make for important contributions to the task of dismantling pervasive and unspoken biases towards certain voices and perspectives within academic institutions. This scholarship can contribute greatly to queer anthropology's struggle to engage with these aspects of research practice.

There are countless examples which I could draw on here, but what is most fitting for my move towards queer embodied and emotionally reflexive social research, are those examples which focus on emotions and senses rarely discussed in social research accounts. As I show below, these emotional topographies can be considered a queer researcher's embodied knowledge; their 'queer feelings' (Ahmed 2014). These emotions, which traverse discomfort, vulnerability, frustration, and irritation, are often omitted from accounts despite the pervasiveness of them in fieldwork. Sarah Homan (2016) and Anthony Heathcote (2016), both discuss sensory and emotional aspects of their research which they found uncomfortable and anxiety provoking. Homan (2016) makes the point that gender is experienced in everyday social interactions which can create feelings of unease, vulnerability, and frustration.

Behaviours adapt in response to the sensory, emotional residue left upon one's skin. Our embodied knowledge of past experiences are reminders of how to perform gender in ways which minimise exposure to uninvited advances and physical intrusions. Homan's awareness of her emotional responses to the sensory landscapes of the field, gave her insight into some aspects of women's gendered experiences in Nepal. Understanding gendered subjectivity to the depth that she was able, was a result of the uncomfortable sensory experiences Homan endured as a single young female ethnographer. Furthermore, she realised the value of sensory awareness and emotional responses as a social research methodology.

In the same collection, Anthony Heathcote (2016), explores how his fieldwork relationships in Vietnam changed when he was forced to return home suddenly to be with his sick mother. This disruption had unexpected ramifications for his relationships: he was able to empathise

differently with his informants because of the emotional intensities in his personal life and they were able to relate to him through shared experiences of grief. As Heathcote says, researchers and informants “need not have mirroring experiences” (2016, 125) to connect emotionally and empathically. Understanding completely another person’s experiences of the world is not what is strived for in ethnographic fieldwork: Recognising one another as emotional subjects with lives beyond the research encounter fosters empathic connection and an openness to hear and feel the other person’s experiences.

In my fieldwork, emotions and sensorial knowledge was central to my ability to recognise others’ experiences of constriction and marginality. As I explored in the previous chapter, mutual sharing of individual experiences of vulnerability and trusting one another with that knowledge impacted how we navigated social spaces and encounters together. Our empathic understandings of one another’s lived experiences of marginality, of how we were both positioned as ‘gender trouble’ in our own social contexts, meant that we developed a shared language and politics for navigating the changing social landscapes in Aceh. Understanding social change in Aceh begins with the body; indeed, it is not something you can know without feeling it. There is a palpable constriction that alerts the body to one’s unconscious bodily movements and it is through the constant surfacing of bodily memories that these constrictions are recognisable.

In my experiences, in addition to discomfort and disorientation, feelings of inertia and vulnerability were critically important emotive responses to contexts and situations which arose, as well as the paradoxical relationship between sexuality and in/visibility. Experiencing in/visibility was integral to my understandings of how social spaces are produced through conflicting meanings associated with compulsory heterosexuality and intense surveillance of heterosexual relationships. My non-Acehnese, western, white, non-Muslim ‘tourist’ habitus created strange and incongruous performances from others, who I was surprised to realise did not read me as lesbian. The generic category of ‘western strangeness’ often used to account for my difference meant that my sense of being visibly queer was inaccurate, while instances of being gendered male gave me even stranger insights into heterosexual surveillance and queer invisibility.

Through this focus on the emotions and sensorial engagements in fieldwork, contemporary anthropology is inviting of diversely positioned researchers. The intricacies of identity, performativity and contextual factors make for exciting scholarship showcasing expansive experiences of social interaction, which is, after all, so central to the ethnographic method. Queer anthropology can only extend this trend towards a greater inclusivity and critical engagement with those structures within the discipline which reify prevailing hegemonic structural inequalities within the academy and within anthropological knowledge itself. Queer theory's tradition of challenging normativities across a range of identity vectors, as well as its stance towards disciplinary norms position it well to advance the need for greater representation of marginal voices and a dedication to challenging methodological and epistemological norms in anthropology.

Discomfort as queer knowledge

The emotional landscapes often negated in fieldwork accounts discussed above resonate with Sara Ahmed's evocative articulation of the "affective potential of queer" (2014, 146). Such an intersection provides a theoretical basis for the already recognisable deficiencies in queer anthropology to account for the important embodied contributions that queer researchers can make. Ahmed traces the cultural production of this embodied knowledge when she describes how heteronormativity impresses itself upon the surfaces of bodies. Ahmed says,

Heteronormativity functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape. Those spaces are lived as comfortable as they allow bodies to fit in; the surfaces of social space are already impressed upon by the shape of such bodies (like a chair that acquires its shape by the repetition of some bodies inhabiting it: we can almost see the shape of bodies as 'impressions' on the surface). Queer subjects, when faced by the 'comforts' of heterosexuality may feel uncomfortable (the body does not 'sink into' a space that has already taken its shape). Discomfort is a feeling of disorientation: one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled (2014, 149).

In Ahmed's conceptualisation, the body is central to queer knowledge. We feel the social construction of normalcy and deviance physically. We come up against it. Throughout my fieldwork, I constantly felt normativising social practices and spaces 'impressing' upon me. I felt it most keenly because I was unfamiliar with the specificities of Acehnese gendered social practices. What I began to feel was how what was familiar, that is the normalised social practices of home, became more easily recognisable as embodied experience, through the unfamiliar contexts of Aceh.

Edward Casey also coincidentally uses the example of sinking into a chair to describe what he terms "habitual body memory" ([1987] 2000, 149). He describes the sensory awareness that comes with a habitual action, for him, sitting in a familiar chair, when there is a subtle difference made to its surface. A repositioned cushion can feel suddenly alarming and unfamiliar because the action we go to make is formed through bodily memories of spaces and objects which builds up over time. Casey says of "habitual body memory", there is an "active immanence of the past in the body that informs present bodily actions in an efficacious, orienting, and regular manner" (149).

Paul Connerton also speaks about 'body practices' and the "gap between the socially legitimate body and the body which one has ... a habitual experience of the body as a condition of unease, as a perpetual source of awkwardness" (1989, 90-1). To live in an androgynous body is to move through the world with this unease and awkwardness. These experiences leave traces in the body which allow a sensibility towards these subtle impressions on others' bodies and an alertness to social spaces within which these feelings are embedded. For Ahmed too, the social and the spatial can be read through the body's surface: "In shaping one's approach to others, compulsory heterosexuality also shapes one's own body, as a *congealed history of past approaches*" (2014, 145; italics in original). For Ahmed, social spaces extend for certain bodies and not for others. For Casey, the past is embedded in the body's memory of the environments through which they move. It is at the intersection of these two spatial and embodied interconnectivities that queer embodied research takes shape. Other scholars to contribute theoretical frameworks for what Ahmed calls 'queer feelings' can be found in Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011), and Heather Love's *Feeling Backward* (2007), which discusses

of emotions like shame that are the result of living non-normative (queer) lives.

My interest is in applying this knowledge as a queer sensibility to reflexively engage unfamiliar contexts: to reveal marginal lived experiences by allowing myself to be cast by others' in their own performances of difference, and in so doing, to recognise what queer can become in and through cultural and social contexts that are not our own, that do not inform the queer political orientations or frameworks we may have brought with us. In my everyday social interactions with M and those we engaged as we moved through the social spaces of Banda Aceh, I recognised aspects of my own relationship to queer identity and politics otherwise obscured by the familiar contexts of home. Discussing constriction through shared embodied experience enabled me to recognise that context produces the slight inflections of queerness that make it such a vibrant and responsive orientation to marginalised sexualities and oppressive social structures. In this way, queer became more expansive in its possibilities for a social orientation through the constrictions that seek to contain it. M's performances of subversive sexuality against my body allowed that reorientation to become a possible modality for me; where moments that heightened constriction were invited in fleeting ways.

The anecdotes shared in the previous chapter document my embodied sensitivity to social surveillance intruding upon public and private spaces. It also facilitated an embodied empathic connection with others, where I could listen and feel for others' personal experiences of marginality. My experiences were centred on bodily discomfort, in/visibility and the strange sense of 'passing through' social categories, often without realising it. This embodied knowledge comes from experiences of public and private space, where one can instantly become the other in response to a body which does not quite fit.

The meanings attributed to spaces like public bathrooms, for example, carry significant weight in my daily routines in Perth. Since my teenage years, I have found these spaces intense areas of surveillance. The demand that gender nonconforming people be publicly assessed, and that their privacy is contingent upon these assessments is a knowledge I have gained over 36 years of living. To enter these spaces is to feel the shift in tension, as public becomes private with the threat of a sudden intrusion. Misgendering demands clarification in these spaces: not to comply with these demands can escalate responses. I am acutely aware of spaces that are gender

segregated because of these formative experiences; to live and work in a cultural context where explicit gender segregation is increasingly the norm and where implied segregations is pervasive has meant that these subtle embodied awarenesses are useful for understanding how space shifts and changes through social interaction.

As I described in the previous chapter, my queerness gained me access to spaces that are gendered as both masculine and feminine domains. I was also equipped to feel the subtle differences in how these spaces are regulated through coercive regimes of gender performativity and, in Aceh, the increasingly hostile threat of punitive measures for non-compliance. As I show below, these sensitivities and sensibilities became an important lens for envisaging how queer embodiment, and an awareness of spatially delineated gender norms are reproduced, took shape as a queer methodology for engaging with others similarly contained within systems of surveillance.

Ethnography's narrative arc

'Queer' often denotes non-participation in many of the structures of heteronormative society. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, so many of the available and expected points of connection used by social researchers to build rapport are not easily adopted by queer researchers. However, rather than seeing this as prohibitive of queer's entry into fieldwork outside explicitly queer contexts, in my experience in Aceh, the disruption of heteronormative discursive reproduction by my failure to adequately perform 'straightness', or the reading of me within frames of normative gender, enabled an altogether different research narrative to emerge.

How might a queer embodied experience of fieldwork respond to the prevailing narratives that structure ethnographic accounts? In Chapter One, I introduced the idea that ethnographic landmarks like arrival, immersion, withdrawal, and ethnographic awakening, impose a narrative arc on ethnographic writing. These unidirectional movements are rarely the experience of researchers, especially those who do not comply with the entrenched prioritising of heteronormativity within both the social spaces they might be working and in the academy. Queer researchers can interject in the reinscription of this narrative by exploring the discomforts

that these narratives produce in their intersubjective relationships.

As Coffey argues in her critique of uncomplicated fieldwork narratives, ethnography is structured as a movement from strangeness towards familiarity: “The disorientation of strangeness and unfamiliarity is a preliminary to a more sustained period of mastery” (1999, 20). But what if time and perseverance is not enough to overturn the ethnographer’s strangeness? What if strangeness produces an ongoing series of experiences that have ethnographic value beyond establishing a narrative of ethnographic arrival? During my fieldwork, established narratives of ethnographic mastery continually arose as sites of tension, however aspects of fieldwork that I was looking out for, like moving towards cultural immersion and awakening, alerted me to the specificities of my own experiences precisely because they did not proceed as expected.

James Davies argues that immersion or ‘becoming immersed’ “is at the heart of anthropological enquiry” (2010, 80) Davies points to the various names this process has attracted, citing Evans-Pritchard’s (1973, 4) “adjustment transference”; Geertz’s (1973) ‘social arrival’; and, Hastrup’s (1995) concept of ‘incorporation’, each presuming a process of gradual familiarisation and awakening to the cultural practices of the community amongst whom the ethnographer is living. While there is a romanticism associated with such a process of acculturation, accounts are often filled with details of complex emotional responses, difficulties in establishing connection, and experiences of disorientation and fragmentation (Kondo 1990). If we regard ethnography as storytelling, as I suggested in Part One, we can recognise how these recurring thematic devices create legitimacy and authenticity in the account. Despite this disruptions and tensions, the over-arching narrative of ethnographic success is maintained in these accounts. The researcher arrives at a place of cultural awakening, which re-establishes both their comforts and their legitimacy as a purveyor of cultural understanding. Discomfort is integral to this narrative towards cultural understanding, but it is not advisable to dwell too long or to desire its persistent influence in formulating research understandings (Nast 1998; Pillow 2003).

Conquergood (1991) writes of the bodily risks and discomforts endured as important moments within ethnographic writing: they are badges of honour which validate the knowledge which is produced. The ethnographer’s authority, the rigor of their research and their reputation is measured against these stories of physical and emotional hardship. Yet, there remains a

separation of ethnographer from those emotions. They do not dwell in them as sites of knowledge-making, rather, they transcend the situational hardships which are inevitably located outside of the ethnographer, they are situational, and arrive weathered and worn, at a place of cultural understanding. This knowledge, they can take away with them to undertake the more consequential task of turning those experiences into knowledge. Interestingly, as Conquergood argues, "Although ethnographic fieldwork privileges the body, published ethnographies typically have repressed bodily experience in favour of abstracted theory and analysis" (1991, 181).

It is these feelings that I want to disentangle from the persistent narrative of ethnographic immersion and embeddedness, to free these emotions from their negative associations as only ever prohibitive of 'good research', as only ever an obstacle to rapport and trust building, to argue for an engagement with the accumulation of knowledge we, as queer researchers, carry within us. In my fieldwork relationships, as I showed in the previous chapter, while I struggled to build rapport through the reproduction of heteronormative personal narratives, the disruptions I created to these discourses produced often-humorous insights into local gender norms. They also provoked emotions like discomfort and vulnerability which alerted to me the boundaries governing inter-gender social interactions. It was in these deeply emotive realms of experience that my greatest and most productive learning took place.

Michael Jackson says of ethnographic method that it is "not some arcane set of techniques we have to acquire but a commonplace body of social skills we already possess" (2009, 242). Queer ethnography deliberately reaches behind the palatable social skills of 'reciprocity' and 'hospitality' that Jackson offers as examples of these social skills, which I would contend are inflected with heteronormative resonances, to contribute the skills of navigating such practices as a person who might be portrayed as in antithesis to these social norms in many societies, including in resurgent waves, in western discourses of subjectivity. The specific skill of 'passing through', which I explore below, is one such example of how queers navigate the world and the experiential knowledge that they take into fieldwork contexts.

If ethnographic success relies on a unidirectional narrative of overcoming the disorienting discomforts of the unfamiliar, then queer ethnographic success would relish moments of failing to reproduce such a narrative and would invite a dwelling in the spaces of disorientation that

such a failure would proceed to reinforce. As Halberstam points out, “failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well” (2011, 3-4), highlighting not the limitations of such a view but the potential that failure offers to creative envisioning of how to be in the world differently. Queer failure in ethnographic research utilises embodied experiences such as discomfort to challenge normativities within anthropological theory, where specific landmarks in fieldwork narratives govern success and failure through narrow ideas of what constitutes rapport, reciprocity and immersion.

Queer anthropology destabilises the image of the ideal ethnography by desiring disorientation to persist, utilising it as a means of understanding alternate marginal experiences in unfamiliar contexts. By delving into the uncomfortable feelings of fieldwork and seeing failures in the research narrative as productive sites of investigation, queer research challenges normativities beyond sexuality and gender. Adjepong describes this as ‘invading ethnography’,

... invading ethnography strategically interrupts the ethnographic narrative to illustrate how normative assumptions about gender and sexuality not only shape the organization of social spaces, but also inform ethnographic possibilities (2017, 1).

Adjepong asks what happens when those who deviate from the expected ethnographic narrative enter spaces which await the performance of the default white straight cisgender male ethnographer? As is clear in their theoretical unpacking of this question, radical possibilities emerge from such a disruptive approach.

Discomfort and queer reflexivity

Focusing on the researcher’s body does not negate the intersubjectivity that is at the centre of ethnographic fieldwork. Rather, it awakens the researchers’ body to a range of sensory knowledge that can guide analytical engagement with and alongside others’ performances within our relationships and interactions. Becoming aware of discomfort in the researcher’s body, facilitates a broader awareness of the myriad social interactions that make up the social spaces within which we are temporarily implicated. This kind of reflexivity, which is deeply attuned to the body and to other’s constructions of the researcher, is central to discussions

waged consistently by feminist geographers and theorists since the early 1990s (Al-Hindi and Kawabata 2003; England 1994; Katz 1994; Nast 1998; Pillow 2003; Rose 1997; Valentine 2002), which have responded to a more general feminist commitment to engaging critically with positionality and the partiality of situated knowledge (Haraway 1988; Harding 1997, 2004).

Gillian Rose questions whether enacting a reflexive praxis is easily achieved, beyond theoretical arguments as to its necessity. She goes on to suggest that failure to realise the goals of reflexivity, as proposed by many feminist geographers, is not a reason to abandon the project altogether. Rather, failure can produce "... different radical strategies" (Rose 1997, 306) for theorising how knowledge is produced. Two exciting examples of robust revision and practical enactments of reflexivity in social research can be seen in the work of Wanda Pillow (2003) and Heidi Nast (1998), who each contribute to a methodology which prioritises collaborative performance and queer embodied experiences of discomfort.

Wanda Pillow (2003) critiqued dominant theorisations of reflexivity which she contends only go so far as to locate and position the researcher with the intention of legitimising the research, without necessarily displacing the researcher's comforts. To say this in another way, researchers tend to invoke reflexivity to transcend the uncomfortable aspects of research without necessarily attending to difficult issues of power in their research. By interrupting these comfortable practices of reflexivity, Pillow suggest that researchers should engage "reflexivities of discomfort" (2003, 188) which opens them to a "knowing of their selves or their subjects as uncomfortable and uncontainable" (188). Such a view attests to the complexities of research, allowing more to be made of tensions than is currently entertained.

Heidi Nast's definition of reflexivity is critical here; specifically how she redirects reflexive practice away from those "self-conscious practices" (1998, 70) typically outlined in social science research methodologies towards the body as a site for critical engagement *with* others. Reflexivity, Nast says, is about "learning to recognize others' constructions of us through their initiatives, spaces, bodies, judgment, prescriptions, proscriptions, and so on" (70). Nast's vision casts this reflexive gaze as a productive mechanism whereby we, in a bodily and relational sense, learn to engage in the dynamic life-worlds that we encounter as an active participant by "... allowing our bodies to become places which 'field' difference" (70). As Nast points out,

... we are rarely taught to locate, creatively work with, and *recognize* reflexivity in terms of what is out-of-(our)-control. We are not taught the skill of engaging with processes and materialities that draw us bodily into other worlds and that require that we 'let go' of carefully crafted objectives, agendas, and models and give our bodies/spaces over to other bodies and places (1998, 70; italics in original).

The most striking aspect of Nast's concept of fielding difference is the sense of not being in control, or as she describes it, 'giving over'. In the previous chapter, I suggested that the most illuminating moments of my fieldwork were when others actively produced me within their own frameworks. It is within these moments of intersubjectivity in fieldwork relationships that researchers can learn the specificities of context through embodied experience. In these moments we can see how others see us and manage our presence in their lives through those deeply embedded social structures that are otherwise difficult to recognise. Reflexivity, in this sense, reflects the central premise of Conquergood's (2002) concept of "dialogic performativity". Rather than simply reflecting on their ontological and epistemological basis for interpreting social life, the researcher is better positioned to recognise that they themselves are actively produced through the ethnographic interactions with others, and according to others' desires.

In terms of a queer embodied reflexivity, utilising experiences of vulnerability and discomfort in research can have multiple illuminating effects. First, it puts the researcher into conversation with marginally located others, and second, it offers critical vantage points from which to contest normative ethnographic fieldwork narratives. Both require that a sensorial and experientially informed reflexivity guides the researcher's analytical engagement, both in the field and on the page. In my work with Acehnese women, reflexively engaging with the discomforts that arose in social situations, allowed me to move beyond simply acknowledging my positionality and engaging analytically with how that position produced partial and situated knowledge. It forced me to relinquish control over the very aspects of research that I had otherwise failed to recognise as limiting a capacity to feel outside my own boundaries. To relinquish this control meant that I could sense how others performed their own identities against me. By giving up control, I allowed myself to see and feel my body differently, as a place which could 'field

difference'. Discomfort became a way into these reflections.

Utilising a queer embodied ethnographic practice of 'passing through'

Sharyn Graham Davies describes the paradoxical way in which homosexuality is both seen and "overlooked" (2015, 41) in Indonesia. Although this has changed throughout the duration of my fieldwork, the strange sense of being simultaneously visible and ignored was part of my everyday negotiation of my sexual self in Aceh. These experiences were variable between Banda Aceh and in the villages of Pulau Weh, however, there was a general perceptible shift towards visibility throughout the region. This shifting sense of in/visibility was compounded by the ambiguities surrounding my western, non-Acehnese, appearance and identity: while I often felt my queerness was recognisable, it was often revealed that it was explained through the broad category of 'western strangeness', that is the western behaviours, appearances, and values, attributed to a fundamental difference between western and Acehnese people. This vague space, which encapsulates a range of differences beyond queer, made it virtually impossible to know when queerness was seen and when it was overlooked. What this ambiguity afforded, however, was a strategic approach to negotiating sexual categories that I have come to call 'passing through'.

In an unfamiliar context, which actively refutes the existence of queerness, inhabiting queerness paradoxically presents the temporary resident a refuge. While heterosexuality offered me respite from the question of my deviation from heteronormativity, in Aceh queerness became a space that could be a sanctuary, and a space of provocation for others. This is a difficult inversion to explain, especially as this research is written with an anticipated queer academic readership, many of whom would not likely have experienced queer as a site of sanctuary from hostility. Paradoxically, this is precisely what I experienced in Aceh, a place which has explicitly outlawed homosexuality. I use the notion of 'passing through' to articulate these strange sensory experiences of being both in and out of view as queer, and how this movement between categories of heterosexuality and queerness operated within my research relationships to obscure so-called immoral behaviours, like non-marital intimacy, and to provoke reactions from those dedicated to the surveillance of others.

Sara Ahmed has utilised the concept of 'passing through', throughout her scholarly career. In her most recent book, *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), she uses the figure of the stranger to illustrate the process whereby certain bodies are stopped or impeded by normalising social structures, while others are not. Referring to an incident where she was called into question by two police officers, Ahmed (1999, 2017) shows how she was permitted to pass by, because she was able to 'pass through' a space of whiteness. Because Ahmed replied that she was 'not Aboriginal' in response to the police officer's questioning of her skin colour, an explanation was sought elsewhere. When she was then assigned to the category of 'the right kind of brown' (ie, a sun-tanned white woman), she was permitted to pass by. In explanation, Ahmed says, "Sometimes we cease to be in question by giving an explanation that is not our own" (2017, 118). This is the concept of 'passing through'. Acceptable and intelligible categories of identity within the culture can facilitate the movement of some strangers, while other categories prevent movement. Passing through is not a unidirectional movement 'into' a category, but rather "a movement through and across ... one does not come to a halt and inhabit that place" (Ahmed 1999, 94).

Ahmed is talking about how social categories can both inhibit and facilitate movement, and how seeking answers for certain bodies can inadvertently permit the movement of those who might otherwise pose a question to the culture which governs and reinforces categories and movement. But what happens when the hegemonic category is dangerous, and its deviant other represents a space of temporary shelter? How does that queer space suddenly shift to feel comfortable, rather than uncomfortable? My experiences as a white, queer, non-Acehnese researcher, in a context of heightened surveillance of all sexual practices outside heterosexual marriage sheds a queer light on 'passing through', as I explore below.

What might this mean for thinking through the kinds of performances and performativities that might temporarily inhabit acceptable categories of identity? How might this movement be harnessed strategically? Elijah Edelman's (2009) revision of the expression 'stealth' offers one vision for how we might imagine a conscious practice of 'passing through'. Stealth is a term which has complex associations for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals and communities: While it has been historically used in medical contexts to describe a desired

endpoint of gender transition, where a person 'passes into' established binary gender identity categories, Edelman argues that 'living in stealth' is not so linear or simplistic in practice. Rather, Edelman argues, stealth is "a dynamic practice of contextual disclosures and non-disclosures" (2009, 165), where revealing trans identity and experience, is dependent upon the specific contexts and emotional landscapes the trans person is negotiating.

Edelman's participants radically reconfigured early understandings of stealth by articulating a how it offered them a shifting position or possibility, allowing them to negotiate everyday situations. For example, they could choose not to clarify an instance of mis-gendering or to disclose trans identity for a range of reasons, including the simple desire to move through their daily tasks with less confusion, or to avoid the need to explain themselves or educate others. In Ahmed's terms, they would not disclose trans identity, so they could 'pass through' normative social categories. Conversely, in some situations where they felt safe and comfortable, the participants explained that they would often disclose their trans identity to create an instance of trans representation. Being able to read social interaction, especially the subtle cues which may indicate conflict, impending extraneous conversations, or even which might require energy that someone just does not have, is a skill learned through embodied experience. It is accumulated through the traces of previous social interactions and produces a specific understanding of social cues that cisgender people may not have.

In Aceh, 'passing through' offered momentary lapses in surveillance where my companions could utilise my body to 'field their own difference'; to play with queer articulations of desire and transgression, to see how it felt differently to their own existing orientation towards rules and restrictions. We tried on one another's embodied baggage, of constriction, of how spaces pushed in, or retracted, depending on what we decided in that split second to perform. Sometimes these enactments were responsive to assumptions made by others; we took their lead by either challenging or going along with how we were read within normative frames. Passing through can be strategic use of the assumed heterosexuality and cisgender that blankets all bodies. Ahmed says,

...we can consider how passing takes place through encounters with others in which there is a crisis of reading, a crisis that hesitates over the gap between

an image that is already assumed and an image that is yet to be assumed
(1999, 94).

I was confronted with the very real dangers of clarifying instances of misgendering or disclosing my sexual orientation and gender identity. N and M would often guide me in these moments, suggesting who I could “show that part” of myself. I learned how to use this ambiguity to navigate the social spaces of Aceh, which often did not recognise bodies like mine. The context facilitated my capacity to ‘pass through’. My friends could also ‘pass through’ the spaces that our ambiguity created. While transmasculine queer identity disrupted social expectations for Adjepong, whose practice of invading ethnography I explored above, my western white tourist habitus combined with my androgynous appearance permitted a ‘passing through’ of social categories. Rather than disrupting by not fitting, my betweenness allowed me to be read and performed into binary gender by my friends who could decide how to cast me in their performances.

As I described in the previous chapter, hegemonic categories, such as ‘heterosexual’ and ‘cisgender male’, were strategically utilised so that we could either ‘pass through’ without incident or to create disruption. Using local idiosyncrasies, such as the constantly changing rules governing khalwat (seclusion, isolation); the refusal to acknowledge the existence of homosexuality within the village; and, neighbourhood rumours marking my female friends as deviant and immoral, meant that we could play with how we ‘appeared’ in social spaces.

The moment where M actively invited accusation from her neighbours by flaunting the appearance of us as a heterosexual couple and therefore our potential infringement of khalwat, deliberately and knowingly crafted a crisis of reading. Heterosexuality is deliberately sabotaged in this performance, where queer actively ruins the image of heterosexuality that is so revered. In that moment represent a heterosexuality that strays from moral acceptability. When accused, my female gender and M’s knowledge of my sexuality create a subversive moment, where we are a very public representation of queerness that cannot or will not be contested. Queerness becomes a sanctuary that can be passed through because of the open secret that homosexuality will likely be overlooked or ignored by the village, lest outsiders know that the village is contaminated. This is a gamble in the recent social and political landscape, where

as described above, homosexual individuals have been reprimanded. However, M recognises also that the sudden revelation of my female sex casts my gender, not into a recognition of homosexuality, but a vague all-encompassing category of western strangeness.

We would 'pass through' the socially intelligible codes of heterosexuality to cause trouble, not to evade it. Queer then, was a safe space where we could avoid being challenged: it was a space that we could use to evade the dangers of heterosexual visibility. Queerness, in its invisibility, was a space outside social intelligibility and beyond the reach of shari'ah. We could be in public together as a heterosexual image but upon accusation revealed a queer pairing that is not imaginable. It was queerness which offered a space of refuge in a context where unsanctioned visible/public heterosexual relationships represent a danger zone. Queerness, through a refusal of everyday Acehnese to acknowledge its existence in their communities, becomes a sanctuary against accusations of heterosexual deviance, through the blind-spots afforded by my simultaneous occupation of a vague category of western strangeness. This radically challenges the idea that heterosexuality is intrinsically unproblematic.

What did these experiences of 'passing through' mean for my understandings of what ethnographic immersion could look like in *queer* research practice? The capacity for co-performative engagement across these categories and social spaces means that social interaction is always in flux, and the identities which are momentarily performatively enacted are always in a process of becoming and undoing. We do not become immersed in a gradual process of unidirectional awakening, we continually move between points of recognition and obscurity, visibility and invisibility to others, between knowing and not knowing. We can only know for that moment when we are 'passing through' and moving across.

In terms of social research methodologies, passing through and stealth point to a queer way of handling the prescribed landmarks of successful social research fieldwork narratives. Queer research does not anticipate, nor does it value, a unidirectional move towards inhabiting or dwelling in immersion. It does not expect to arrive at a place of ethnographic awakening, where we defend that a valid process towards 'understanding' has taken place. What Holman Jones and Adams argue of autoethnography, that it is, "push and pull between and among analysis and evocation, personal experience and larger social, cultural and political concerns"

(Holman Jones and Adams 2016, 198), is true of all ethnographic practice which takes seriously a critical relationship between positionality and the researcher's interpretive processes. In queer ethnography it is an ongoing dialectic (or is it, 'tidalectic', to refer back to Braithwaite's revised terminology), where the researcher acknowledges, even desires, inertia as an ongoing disorientation where we make and unmake ourselves, whilst being made and unmade by others. This process of embodied intersubjectivity should not be disregarded as simply transitory, as a movement towards 'understanding', but is a space in which the field is performatively produced. This is reminiscent of the spaces of betweenness that I discussed in Chapter One through the geographical metaphors of littoral zones and ecotones, where cross-cultural transference and exchange flourishes at points of intersection.

Misperformance and 'poetics of (queer) failure'

To return to the performative here, such a practice of passing through implies a potential for one's performance to fail. As I suggested earlier, queer failure revels in such moments where there is a 'crisis of reading', yet it is not only the performance that fails, but the very regulatory regimes that claim an all-encompassing reach and capacity to contain sexuality and gender. While there is certainly a poetics in the queer performances I describe here, there is also an orchestrated failure of the systems themselves.

Bodies produce a terrain of ideas that shari'ah seeks to contain. It is not a static system of governance and so resistance to it needs to constantly find new gaps to exploit. Naming homosexuality provides one such gap. The inconsistencies in its logic are exposed through the 'passing through' of bodies which do not neatly fit but which appear, momentarily to occupy a space of acceptability. In this way, it is not the performances of gender and sexuality that fail but the disciplinary regimes which presume to govern and contain them. Queer performance plays on this failure to show the leaky containers of shari'ah and the incapacity of its surveillance structures to reach beyond public performance to what local women have described to me as the internal landscapes of desire and resistance to codified ideas of religious obligation and gender expression. The private spaces of the home and bedroom here are guarded through inviting accusations that ultimately fail to draw attention to the incapacity of shari'ah to intrude upon the interiorities of desire. In M's case, her counter threat of humiliation through an

incorrect assignation of non-compliant heterosexuality will certainly give pause the next time suspicion arises. This is how resistance produces the disciplinary regime of shari'ah, forcing it to continually respond to real lives and bodies.

Conclusion

We come back to Massey's (2005) conceptualisation of space through the embodied experience of 'passing through'. We are doing more than passing through space, as though it is an "inert context, a barren stage waiting for actors to show up" (Hamera 2006a, 76). By passing through, in the sense I have described here, social interaction actively and dialogically produces space within and against the normative impressions that the social makes upon certain bodies. Queer spaces are momentary escapes from the definition of spaces in heteronormative terms. As Gregson and Rose have expounded from Butler's theory of performativity, spaces can never be pre-discursive. They say, "it is not only social actors that are produced by power, but the spaces in which they perform" (2000, 441). This echoes Gill Valentine's (1993) earlier point that spaces are not, by default, heterosexual. Space is produced as heterosexual through the iteration of discursive formations which hold hegemonic culture in place. However, as Butler contends, because performativity is an iterative process, slippage is always possible (Butler 1990, 1993) and this potentiality for revision and subversion extends to space.

Sara Ahmed says of 'passing through', "passing is not best understood as an event that is clearly definable in time and space" (1999, 14). Passing through then has radical implications for space: it is temporarily reconfigured by the movement of bodies, that is, through the cultural and embodied practices that issue forth from a 'crisis of reading'. If bodies can pass through space as "an-other", they inevitably reconfigure that space. What this means for space when the an-other is a fleeting configuration of queer as a site of safety poses exciting questions for how we might rethink the presumed inevitability of heteronormative space.

'Passing through' contributes a queer conceptualisation of the production of space to existing conversations and long-standing debate within feminist geography (Bell and Valentine 1995; Massey 1995, 2005). While Bain and Nash (2006) focus their reflexive attention on spaces which are explicitly queer, in that they are organised around a central objective of fostering a

space for the expression of queer desire and community, other scholars have looked to spaces where same- sex desire or expression is not expected (Adjepong 2017; Gopinath 2005; Sinnott 2009, 2013; Spronk 2017; Wilson 2004). Ara Wilson (2004, 120) calls these “generic” spaces. Sex segregated spaces, such as home living arrangements like dormitories (Sinnott 2009, 2013) or the family home (Gopinath 2005), subvert the construction of the private sphere as female and heterosexual through an exploration of homoerotic desire between women.

Passing through highlights the ephemerality and fluid changeability of queer performance, as well as its political salience beyond the specific identities of sexuality and gender diverse individuals. It was through inhabiting different multiple categories of sexual identity that both my companions and I could sense the latent associations of certain spaces towards our bodies and identifications. Our movements, our ways of easing into and out of categories, shaped space into emotional and sensory topographies. The sense of space expanding or retracting, in turn, influenced the subtle gestures of how our bodies interacted with each other and with that sensed gaze we could both feel.

It depended where we were, as to whether inhabiting queer would be sanctuary or danger. I could feel the physical comfort or discomfort through the gaze of others. I remember one evening riding back from the beach where I could feel the tightening of my t-shirt over my breasts in the cool wind. I felt the disjuncture between how I would be seen from afar, and how when coming up close, that perpetual gaze would see my gender suddenly change in the evening light. There is a gap here, that is problematic, dangerous, and exhilarating. The way a stranger’s eyes would pass over us, assuming us to be a heterosexual couple if we were in a densely crowded part of the city or on a motorbike with helmets covering our heads, our bodies appearing as two women. If we were in M’s street or at the beach, that gaze would linger, and whispers would ensue, I could then feel the rising discomfort as that space squeezed us, threatening to push up against us, to contain us in that gaze, that accusation. In these moments, for me to be read as male, for us to be read as a heterosexual couple, provided no sanctuary.

As I have shown, the transgressive performances where queer has offered a sanctuary from which to wage contestation of tightening rules governing sexuality and gender for my younger

cisgender friends, have happened at a time of great social change in Aceh. In this moment, where social space and interaction are deeply contested, there have been perceptible gaps in how shari'ah is taking shape to encompass the range of possibilities for sexual configurations that stray from acceptable heterosexuality. These gaps and contradictions were exploited when they became visible to my friends as we passed through social spaces and engaged in social interactions. This has happened at a moment of change, where boundaries are being reinforced and therefore are shown to be porous.

'Passing through', part of the title of this thesis, resonates with the local histories of Sabang and the importance of transiency to contemporary identity. Transience does not infer a lack of belonging but rather recognises the mutuality of belonging amongst the islands *orang campur* (mixed people). If, as Doreen Massey says, "space is a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (2005, 5), can we imagine then that queer space is a collection of queer stories that must be deliberately and dedicatedly surfaced through a queer embodied performative methodology, that utilises empathic sharing and 'fielding difference' as its modus operandi? If so, a montage of stories come tumbling forth in a rush of connectivity to contemporary productions of space. How will a new periphery be made if Sabang no longer represents a container for difference? Surianata's words suggest the same rhetoric will continue, waged this time, against LGBT individuals and any others who defy heteronormativity. However, where we look for fleeting queer presences and how places like Iboih continue to respond to the homogeneity of conservative and punitive Islam, will shape the capacity of marginalised identities and experiences to be seen and heard.

Conclusion: Performing queer kinship from Aceh's margins

"How can I be a rebel here?"

(M, Eddy Street, Melbourne, 2017)

In 2017, 'the field' came home: M and I met in Melbourne, a city almost the same distance away from my hometown, Perth in Western Australia, as Banda Aceh. M was in Australia on a one-year working visa and we convened in Melbourne for three days. We stayed in my friend's spare room in Brunswick East and I accompanied M on her search for a job in the CBD. In between dropping off resumes to inner city juice bars and coffee shops, we lazed around on the grass at Brunswick's public pool, eating *Za'atar Manakish* we picked up at A1 Bakery on Lygon Street on the way and talking about what we would both do next. M wanted to return to Aceh and resume her *Malam Puisi* (Poetry Nights) events, making more open and vibrant spaces for women to poetry slam their frustrations about curfews, sexual harassment, and the intrusion of 'Way-ha' in their lives. It was also an avenue for her to speak to other women about the pressures she felt from her family to marry and the altogether different visions she saw for her immediate future.

I remember a moment at the end of one of those perfect days. We were walking back from the pool and it was so hot and humid that we had stopped talking: we were focusing on each sticky step home, as though we were wading through warm soup. The heat and the slow rhythm of our walking had me thinking about our cruising about days in Aceh, how we would go for spicy *Mie Aceh Kepiting* (Aceh noodles with crab) with P and then head to Lhoknga, driving too fast in P's car, with western pop music I had never heard before blasting from the speakers. At the beach we would talk to the young surfers and drink alcohol until the sun went down.

We were quiet for the longest time, until we turned off Lygon and onto Eddy Street. The sudden dimming of sound and heat as we moved away from the trams and traffic towards the still shadiness of typical Australian suburbia, seemed to bring us both back from our thoughts. As we went further into the quiet side street, a cool breeze came out of nowhere, as though to emphasise just how still and hot it had been. M began to laugh, breaking the silence, "That felt good!" she said. "So good" I murmured in agreement. "No, it felt reeeeeeally good, I don't have underwear on," M was beaming, a look of pure naughtiness on her face. "What???" I couldn't move, I was laughing so hard. "Well, because I could. And I wanted to feel it. And my underwear was wet from the pool, so..." She was smiling so broadly, looking up at me and clearly enjoying my reaction. "And how, does it feel?" I asked. "It felt really good then, when

the wind went through my legs!” We carried on, both smiling, breaking into hysterics every time a small gust of wind passed between us.

A moment later M continued, “... but seriously, Jo, I like sometimes for it to be difficult... For life to be hard, to struggle. Because then you know you are alive.” She paused. “Yes, struggle is the right word. You feel it. Here I am so free... to be whatever, but then it is easy, too easy”, she pauses, “Is that strange? To miss Aceh because it is difficult there? Here, I can be anything, nobody gives me any trouble, even if I don’t wear underwear on the street. But how can I be a rebel here? Tell me, how can I be a rebel here?”

M’s nostalgia for the struggles of Banda Aceh saw her return a few months later when her Australian visa expired, however after only a brief time trying to resume her old life, she realised she could not stay. She had changed, her parents told her: she had become too western. For M, she was just the same, but with a confidence gained by traveling outside Indonesia for a long and challenging year. Her vision of what she could do in her future, to develop her activism by running poetry nights and working for a women’s rights organisation, did not seem possible, at this time in Banda Aceh. Her parent’s pressure to marry and have a family felt overwhelming in contrast to these expansive and exciting trajectories. After only a few days, M made her way to Jakarta and then finally to Bali where she reunited with a group of friends who, like her, have left Aceh at various times in the last decade.

At first, I struggled to understand the conflict M described that day on Eddy Street. I recognised the sense of being out-of-place, but at the time I did not connect her daily struggle in Aceh with her identity and politics. My confusion was compounded because from what I could see during our few days together, M’s experiences in Australia had not been easy. She had contracted an infection, and without health insurance, she had to pay exorbitant fees to gain access to health care; she suffered exploitation and endured terrible working conditions in several menial jobs, typical of the treatment of Asian women holding 457 visa in Australia. The combination of low-paying, inconsistent work and health costs had placed M in a precarious position; when we met, the financial stress was clearly affecting her mental and physical health. Despite these trying experiences, her words above indicate that something deeper than the practical concerns of living were missing. There was a sense of feeling confined by being invisible to the world

around her; of not drawing attention, of the possibility of freedom of self-expression, that had felt unfamiliar, uneasy, or too easy. That the gaze in Aceh, of feeling it pressing in, was familiar and in pushing back, she can find herself.

In between our brief chats on Facebook and Skype in recent months, I fancifully imagine how M's everyday rebellion is going in Bali. While I struggle to finish this thesis, I envisage vibrant conversations amongst her friends, where they cultivate a sense of what their future in Aceh might look like, if they ever decide to return. In recent months, I have been able to discern in my conversations with M, an emergent political commentary amongst her friends, especially in how they engage with political discussions online. I have sensed new formulations of their resistance, which was once waged in the streets of the city and the *gampông* (village), now taking different shapes on Aceh's periphery. M has contributed to feminist poetry events in Bali and has used social media to broadcast these into Banda Aceh, overcoming her feelings of estrangement and the associated frustrations of how to be a rebel from afar. It is not only the vibrant discussion of women's and LGBT rights that are flourishing in these locations: environmental activism is incorporated in a broader struggle against the perceived inequalities that are affecting their lives and futures.

There is a burgeoning community that extends beyond the geographical limits of Aceh, where young women like M connect with others living in Jakarta, Bali, Medan, and of course, Sabang, which still offers a space outside the normative confines of the Acehnese mainland. Kath Weston's (1991) queer revision of kinship, a cornerstone of anthropological theory, and David Eng's (2010) analysis of queer kinship in Asian diasporic communities, provide a framework for engaging with the growing constellation of individuals located in Aceh's periphery. Kinship, Eng argues is a multidimensional social practice, not characterised by "racial descent, filiation, and biological traceability, but through the lens of queerness, affiliation, and social contingency" (2010, 13). Queer kinship, in this articulation recognises that a community is not contained within an island or province's geographical boundaries, nor is it to be found within a village's undefined, fluctuating border: it is informed, like Alison Assiter's concept "epistemic community" (2000, 329), by a shared politics; it grows from mutual experiences of marginalisation, and a desire for something else.

Community in this sense is always becoming, a mobile network of cultural ecotones, reflective of the archipelago as a system of interconnected networks, spaces, and stories, where these women's engagement with diverse social and cultural discourses produces an image of Acehese identity discordant with what is currently projected from inside. The *Inong Aceh di luar* (outside Acehese women)⁴² resist containment within the narrow representations of Acehese identity by relocating, but also resist the imposition that they cannot speak from these places of exteriority. My understandings of community and kinship have been radically transformed throughout this project, not least in this most recent insight afforded by M, into her rearticulation of identity from Aceh's margins.

As I witness these conversations from a distance, I have been confronted by questions of my own personal connections with queer communities in the familiar surrounds of home. After one of the longer periods spent in Aceh for this fieldwork, I returned to Australia in the middle of the marriage equality debate, which preceded a public vote on amending the Marriage Act in the Australian Constitution to afford legal recognition of marriage between same-sex partners. An explicit homophobia and transphobia was suddenly acceptable in these political discussions which seeped into mainstream and social media, casual conversations in families, workplaces and everyday social interactions. Social spaces felt vulnerable in a way that many in the queer community had thought it was safe to forget. For others, the dangers of the streets, work, and home, became even more dangerous.

The political rhetoric felt unnervingly familiar: the far-right factions of the conservative government claimed that 'gay marriage' would be the 'slippery slope' of social morality, where bestiality and paedophilia would become acceptable; and the assertion that 'gender whisperers' would contaminate the minds of good straight students in schools, resonated with the moral

42 The rearticulation of the term *Inong* (widow) as a self-identification in this group is important and imbued with intensely political sentiments. As mentioned in Chapter Five, the *Inong Bale* (war widows) are considered national heroes due to the central roles they played in the anti-colonial resistance. To use this term here to refer to young unmarried women who are resisting the push from inside Aceh towards social control and sexual regulation is indicative of the ongoing relevance of historical narratives to contemporary conceptions of identity, gender, and the obligation of resistance to all forms of social prescription.

panic only recently waged against LGBT people, linking instant noodles and baby formula to homosexuality and gender confusion. Alongside this predictable rhetorical resurgence in Australia, there was also an amplification of homonormative discourse, promoted by the more vocal contingents of the 'Yes' campaign. To win the approval of straight society, the 'we are just like you' plea for acceptance was resurrected, and in the process, marginalised queer politics in the debate. The obfuscation of broader and more inclusive fights for equality, by a debate which lasted for years, further compounded the exclusions of those whose lives are impacted by structural ableism, racism, and transphobia. It seemed the spaces of queer possibility were being curtailed yet again, subsumed within the more vocal demands for acceptance of white, monogamous, coupled, cisgender, and able-bodied queers and the hatred and transphobic rhetoric of the far-right.

I mention this experience, to convey a sense of how it felt to move between these very different cultural imaginings of queer sexual identity and politics. Although Australia and Aceh are incomparable in terms of how LGBT people are treated by the state and in everyday social interaction, the way queer identities are variously seen and unseen as I moved through these seemingly contrasting representational fields illustrated how heteronormativity persistently pushes in, impressing itself upon queer bodies and ways of being, in all contexts. The need for revision of queer stances to resist these cyclically enacted political agendas is therefore imperative, with cross-cultural understandings of how these orientations might look and feel a relatively untapped resource.

In Aceh, queer became a disruptive political presence because of its often-contradictory visibility in Acehnese society. Learning to sense these shifting boundaries was imperative to my ability to understand the regulation and surveillance of sexuality more broadly. Now, as this particular research project draws to a close and I look forward to engaging a necessarily multi-sited, transnational approach to understanding the new formations of Acehnese rebellion, from Aceh's new peripheries, queer is finding yet further articulations. Thinking with the archipelago extends a way of thinking about how such epistemic communities might be reimagined across and between geographical and cultural boundaries. I am excited by the question of whether queer can be used to visualise a queer constellation that connects and forms community, not

only across space but across difference.

My queer politics has been influenced by seeing how it manifests differently in diverse cultural contexts, both through my own performativity and the interactions I shared with others. It feels imbued with possibilities, not only as a way of being in the world, but in how it offers me a language for unpacking my embodied experiences of unfamiliar cultural contexts and for connecting with others lived experiences of marginality. These intersubjective conversations, in turn, beckon a reflexive engagement with my own 'queer baggage', that is the assumptions I carry with me for how a queer politics might be recognised. The performances I co-created with various friends, were not inherently queer, nor did they reflect a shared sexuality or erotic subjectivity: they represented the slippages that cross-cultural interactions can foster for those similarly inclined to disrupt normative social and cultural structures. A queer embodied research approach both facilitated others' imagining of alternatives and my own capacity to listen to these fleeting capitulations of queer worlds that were, to my surprise, not a mirror reflection of my own. My perspective expanded through how others fielded their difference in embodied conversation with me, and my inevitable disruption of local norms enabled a shared language with which to speak about the unspeakable.

Since concluding fieldwork for this thesis, M and I have begun discussing collaborative projects to counter the representation of LGBT people promoted throughout Indonesia and the limiting ideas of Acehnese women as compliant and voiceless, which predominate in Indonesian and western representations. The difficulties of undertaking research using visual methods is complicated, not least in Aceh where undertaking research focusing on contemporary issues is restricted. Engaging M's constellation of *Inong Aceh* in Sabang, Jakarta, Medan, and Bali could be one pathway for engaging in research with participants who wish to share their stories. The visual method, ethnofiction (Sjöberg 2008), offers one possible avenue for how the complex ethical considerations of representing personal accounts of experiences of oppression and marginalisation might be negotiated. Like my ambiguous fieldnotes, ethnofiction creates a space of fictional possibility to obscure participant's direct connection with narratives which might be dangerous or incriminating whilst facilitating participants in their desire to speak their own stories. This method also intersects with queer concerns for methodologies that foster

shifting and fluid polyvocal narratives.

Writing this thesis has shown me how to create a written language and structure for embodied practice, but I have felt limited in my capacity to create representations that are accessible to those who have so kindly shared their experiences and reflections with me. Capturing these moments visually, whilst contributing to local discourses around LGBT and women's rights at the current moment in Aceh and Indonesia's history through positive representations can contribute to the growing movement of young people who are already destabilising this image, from inside Aceh and from its periphery.

Islands of difference

At the outset of this thesis, I posed a question, asking where Aceh might be headed if counter-arguments that imagine alternative futures are more readily engaged. I have shown that such an alternative imagining can be drawn from revisiting how stories anchored in the past are told and retold through a politics of the present. I have also shown how these counter-arguments are woven into the fabric of everyday sociality, both in Sabang and in Banda Aceh. Guided by the performative enactment of the story of the rattan basket, this research has shown me how to remain open to the inevitable deviations of fieldwork. The strange moment I observed in 2006, where a group of children humorously imitated an eccentric woman on a beach, was the catalyst for this approach to research, but it also attuned me to the textures and subtleties of everyday social interactions, where even the most fleeting and seemingly inconsequential moments can be mined for deep historical legacies and sentiments that underpin a community's sense of identity and belonging. A durational approach to ethnography in a time where short-term intensive period of fieldwork predominate, permits an attuning to the peripheral spaces and people, where alternatives to what is written down and retold, might issue forth.

Sabang's specific histories of colonial presences and human migration separate it from national rhetorical constructions of identity emanating from the mainland. The islands' peripheral location and the histories that have emerged from that geographic and cultural positioning orientate it to respond to contemporary mainland politics differently. I have argued throughout this thesis, that such a view is in dire need in Aceh during the current push towards homogeneity

and intra- community surveillance. This socio-political landscape is typified by morally charged rhetoric, which works to propagate an intense fear and suspicion of difference. My focused and sustained interrogation of the local specificities of Sabang's histories and its contemporary responses to these conservative trends permits a way into a conversation about alternative ways of imagining the future.

The centrality of difference to Sabang's past and present identities, and the possibility of re-reading its position of marginal importance to historical narratives of Acehnese imperviousness and resistance make it a powerful place to begin to revise an alternative future, where young politically engaged people can connect with different representations of the past to reimagine identity as diverse, and capable of living within and across difference. Sabang is rearticulated through the current tightening of regulations governing sexuality; its pasts resurface, as I have shown throughout this thesis, in conversation with contemporary practices of demonisation and exile. Its peripheral position to the cultural and geographical centre of Aceh, and its complex histories of transient and multi-ethnic populations are recast within contemporary articulations of *orang campur* (mixed people). A vibrant mix of tourists, locals, and wayward long-timers who live in and pass through the island's communities testify to the openness and acceptance of difference that these histories have long conveyed, as they are passed down inter-generationally.

Despite Sabang's reinvention through contemporary politics as a collection of islands where difference can navigate a way of being, I am anxious about the future of that out-of-the-way place. Its marginality once meant that it was half-forgotten to those outside: a receptacle for the out-cast and a reminder to mainlanders of what becomes of the immoral. From these histories, that out-of-the-way place has forged its own particularities, identities, and articulations of belonging. Now, with the pressures to perform within the frame of a homogenous Acehnese polity, Sabang is at a crossroads as to whether its communities will be able to continue embracing its histories of difference or conform to the narrow script within which it is being cast.

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