

Abstract

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

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

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

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

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

My research question was central to the practice-based research I conducted, the methodologies developed through practice as research, and are central to all the work covered in this thesis. Within this context the practice is submitted as an outcome alongside this written narrative.