

## **From the jungle Iban performance practice, migration and identity**

### **INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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

This project has asked the question:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>2</sup> Three years of practice-based research and literature review, one year of writing up.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This research has developed around my preoccupations in regards to form and content of storytelling and performance practices. The content and topics of investigation have been around identity and migration, and understanding ways in which home and belonging are created in diaspora spaces. In reference to form, I have developed methodologies based on my deep understanding of the importance of process and community within performance. My preoccupations

have been: creating work that is accessible for people who are not usual theatre goers; to create new-ness by performing the same work in new spaces; to perform in non-traditional western theatre spaces - places where eating, drinking and socialising can happen, where the performance space literally turns into a party space; and finally, to develop processes of rehearsing in front of audience.

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

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

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

Within the initial research projects I explored ways in which I could tell my migration story to different audiences and in different spaces. I then worked

with UK performer Vera Chok; Vera and I began to look at repetition through the re-telling of our own stories, and re-telling each other's. This work developed into two performances pieces. *Secrets, Stories and Un-Told Tales* developed the idea of trying on different identities through repetition and *Gawai* took the narrative of *Secrets, Stories and Un-Told Tales* and placed it in a community celebration space in London. I developed a methodology of unravelling personal life stories through words on post-it notes. This format developed throughout all the research projects.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I have also chosen to place my migration story and myself at the centre of the research as one way to address issues of authenticity and appropriation. Practice-based research typically places self and one's own practice as central to the work. This can be complicated because ‘self’ can be interpreted in many different ways (by researcher, reader, participant), as Freeman (2010:155) addresses when discussing the problematic nature of practice-based and practice as research, particularly within the concept of reflective work. How I

have established this concept of 'self' as centre is not to reflect solely on my life story and making it important above others but, (as I discuss in chapter three), I have reflected and interrogated my listening, my understanding, and my positioning and preoccupations. Through doing so I am able to situate myself and question my positioning within the research and my position as a researcher. I can question and reflect on my multiple identities within the four years of research. Therefore I am also able to locate my practice within and beside other performance practices and academic literature. This can be done because of the active action of listening, telling and re-telling stories, a process that happened throughout all the research projects and within *From The Jungle*.

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

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

### **Practice as research and developing new performance practice**

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



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

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

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

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

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

The content of the *From The Jungle* project is relevant to current trends within British theatre. Recent performances focusing on questions of migration, and identity range from the high profile play by Richard Bean, *England People Are Very Nice*, produced at the National Theatre in 2009 to the participatory *Fire &*

*Ice's Asylum Monologues and Dialogues*. In 2013 a story of post colonialism, identity and nation building was presented at the Young Vic, through the story of poet and playwright Aime Cesaire's *A Season In Congo*, a play set in the Congo, performed to a Western audience in central London. This play crossed spaces and locations to tell a story of changing identity, as did my various performance pieces in this project.

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

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

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

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from Tara Arts' definition of their work, from their website – "Global theatre for a local audience. Our small theatre offers a window onto a world of cross-cultural imaginings".

<sup>5</sup> Companies that use immersive theatre techniques include *You, Me and the Bum Bum Train*, *Duckie* and *Goat & Monkey*. I discuss immersive theatre further in chapter three.

With the use of objects within my work, I have also drawn on some of the characteristics of visual art. Through the use of the loom I set up a canvas that was used to frame images. This work resonates with other visual artists that explore migration and identity through objects, such as the London-based, Mauritian artist Shiraz Bayjoo. Bayjoo features stills and film projected onto furniture. Through this presentation he has explored the identity of boys in the East End ('Bow Boys Archive' project at Whitechapel Art Gallery), where he weaves the past with the present, with images of political movements, such as the Brixton riots, projected on to domestic objects. He explores the postcolonial space of Mauritius in similar ways of past and present, political and personal, and the jungle weaves into the space of the domestic.

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

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

Through the content of the performance *From The Jungle* I have told the stories from my research, and I have investigated the interactions and intersections of

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

### **Sarawak: the backdrop to the research**

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

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

During the Brooke's reign the aim was to educate the natives, therefore missionary schools were set up throughout the region. As Sarawak was not officially part of the British Empire, the Brooke family had a certain autonomy when developing the area. This led to attention to the Iban as they were the biggest ethnic group and the most aggressive/disruptive and so demanded more

attention, or so the story is to be believed, 'in modern Iban ethnohistory the White Rajas 'saved the Iban from themselves' by restoring order' (Postill 2008:210). The special task that James Brooke was given, by the Sultan of Brunei, was to stop headhunting within the Iban tradition, therefore the Iban became central to the identity of the region. With the White Rajahs came a more peaceful time, Ibans moved to areas controlled by the Rajahs for protection and peace (Royji 2007:54). The Kapit peace treaty in 1924, a much contested part of Sarawak, brought further stability to Sarawak. Kapit is where my family is from, and is where the initial interviewees for this project were based.

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

Within the Brooke's regime the issue of religion became another segregating issue, and it still is. As Christians, the Brooke regime encouraged Christian missionaries, but 'he government insisted on its policy of non-interference with

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

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

Muslim subjects' (*ibid.* 2008:97). This policy demonstrates the social and political status and power the Muslim 'subjects' had within Sarawak, and still have.

The Iban are still the biggest ethnic group in Sarawak and the majority of the Iban still do live in the interior. This is part of the reason they are not dominant within the current political or economic power structures. 'They [the Iban] have been marginalized from the politics of Sarawak since its formation, in 1970, of the Muslim-oriented cabinet' (Royoji 2007:23). The only tribe that converted to Islam in any significant numbers were the Melanau (which is 6% of the total population), the other tribes converted to Christianity<sup>8</sup>. Of the multiple indigenous tribes in Sarawak, the Iban make up 29% of the population. The Malay are not indigenous to Sarawak, they originally migrated from Sumatra; they make up 22% of the population and the second biggest racial group are the Chinese (who are mainly Buddhists), which make up 26%<sup>9</sup>.

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

### **The women involved in the project**

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

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<sup>8</sup> With intermarriage members of other tribes have converted to Islam. Names changed and Muslim practises are practised along side some indigenous customs, such as-

<sup>9</sup> Figures from the Sarawak Tourism Board – official government agency

I decided that I also wanted to work with western trained performers as the west has been the basis of my training. I chose to work with three UK based performers because of the physicality in their performance style; we had worked together previously and so there were also good levels of trust between us. Because of this, I worked with these three performers for most of the time. Whether their real life stories made it into my research and/or final show was not important, but their life experiences added to the way they understood the topics I was investigating. Vera Chok is originally from Malaysia, from just outside Kuala Lumpur and has lived in the UK for 20 years. She is Chinese, but like many born and bred Chinese Malaysians, her languages are English and Bahasa Malay. We bonded over noodles, chicken curry and visa applications. Catriona James also has roots in Malaysia, with a Chinese Malaysian mother and a Canadian father. Like me, she straddles East and West in her identity and in the countries she has lived in. Grace Willis, a mixed-race London girl, a dancehall dance teacher, an actress, a mother of two boys and on the surface the opposite of a migrant but her story of change, home and belonging was akin to the stories I had been listening to in Sarawak. Grace also straddles multiple identities, both cultural and personal. Her migration was within the borders of a state, it was social and her space was one that was expanding. This idea of looking at migration as an expanding of space is one that I investigate in chapter one.

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

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

a language between us of understanding and respect, as we exchanged skills and stories.

Some of the SCV performers I worked with were not Iban, but all were specialist dancers of Sarawakian indigenous dances, including the *ajat Iban*. These Sarawak women were migrants or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation migrants, all of them were occupying the new space of urban Sarawak. Hamida Mohd<sup>11</sup> was the 'mother' of the group, a Melanau and was one of the original dancers of the SCV. She was the senior dance instructor, due to retire soon. Martina Ak Benedict Paul Jenis is of Bidayuh ethnicity; she is a senior dance instructor, had spent most of her career at the SCV. Then there was Maryline Simba Mani (Abot), who had been at the SCV for 10 years, an Iban from Sarieki north of Kuching. She had not danced professionally before auditioning. Adeline Angel, also an Iban, born in Kuching, is a young mother who had been at the SCV for four years. Previously she had been a part time dancer at the SCV through her high school. The youngest was Florence Cindy, a Bidayuh from Bau a town not too far from the SCV, had started nine months prior; it had been her dream to work at the SCV since being part of a dance competition whilst at school. Abot and Flo both lived at the staff quarters, the other three commuted to SCV each day.

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

## Chapter overview

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

<sup>12</sup> Interview: 3 September 2012



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

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

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

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

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

to a London stage. In the performance space the performers weave their place of belonging and home, with the help and engagement of the audience.

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