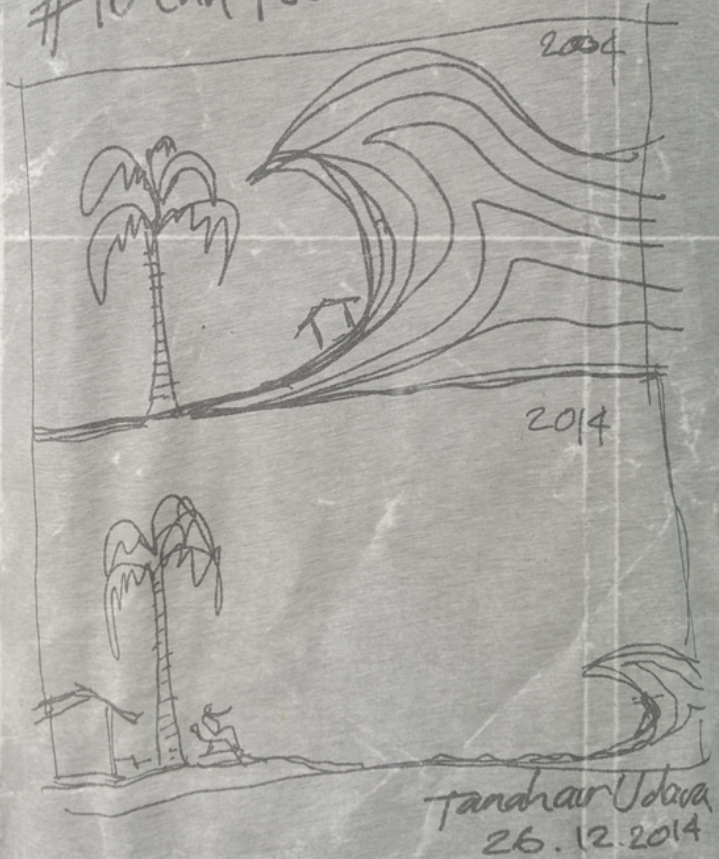


Kami tak pernah
membenci Laut.
#10thnTsunami -



ombak



Photo in cover page:
"We never hate the sea"
Taken in Lampuuk, Aceh, 2021

why do we dream of
a southern pastiche?



Provincializing PhD

In Wageningen, I managed to observe and notice a little about how doing PhD looks like. I knew and befriended many PhDs, studying various topics, from neoliberal conservation to food processing. Through talking with them, little by little I grasp a glimpse of doing PhD. My strongest impression: doing PhD is a very lonely process. You are you with your research. No classes, no classmates. Less group parties.

Since very early, I already knew that if (or when?) I do a PhD, then I have to marry first. Although I don't have the clearest idea about how marriage is, I just happened to know that I want to do PhD with the loved one(s). Perhaps, it's because what concerns me most is not the PhD itself, but the loneliness it generates.

Then, I got married.

Then, I started my PhD.

Then, I got a kid.

Priorities are changing fast when you become a parent. Suddenly life is not same anymore. Having a baby, like losing a father, restructures (my) life. The baby naturally becomes the priority number one; instantly becomes the essence of my being.

[I pause the writing here. Lelani woke up from her nap.]

[I continue few days later.]

Often I asked myself whether doing PhD and being a father/parent are compatible to each other. Some people said yes. I doubt it still. Is it a question of methodology, then? Did I choose a wrong topic, hence a wrong methodology, in a context of being a father-researcher? Does becoming a father only suit certain methodologies and not the others? I often imagined, what if I do philosophical armchair research or studying secondary data or doing online interview/observation? Wouldn't it be suitable to my current positionalities? Christal once pondered, "Is there an ethnographer who is also a parent?" It seems like a rhetorical question, but we were/are actually and seriously demand answers.

In such existential-practical struggle, I only need to look at Lelani's face to find the right answer. It, at best, is a matter of prioritizing. The answer is clear: Lelani. Christal. Family. PhD. In that order. My PhD suddenly/naturally becomes provincialized, and perhaps it should be like that since the beginning; (decentered).

I remember what Rosalba Icaza said, in a conversation with Zuleika Bibi, "The people that you are reading for your PhD is not only for your PhD, it's for your life, within and outside academia; is people that is relevant for your politics, for your ethics... because I also have this idea that PhD journey is not just a dissertation. The PhD journey is just a tiny part of your activity, and a tiny part of all the things that you can do."

Even if one is doing a PhD without a child or a spouse, the PhD should not be her/his only centre of her/his being human. There are politics and relations around us which are outside and beyond the PhD project.

Don't let the PhD dictate your humanity:
I hear a voice inside me whispers.

Provincializing PhD then means taking care of the relations, as well as prioritizing what and who matter most. Besides, why so serious? Why bother? Is provincialization also a kind of trivialization? I am, perhaps unconsciously, making the 'serious' PhD trivial (less serious, even un-serious) in the face of what truly matters. PhD as a joke (kelakar; lelucon)? Why not? Isn't it always funny, silly, comical?

Such attempt of provincialization/trivialization might connect to the position I chose for my PhD: a writing project. In choosing to be a writer, instead of researcher, I hint at creativizing my (PhD) research. I refuse the Academic Research because it silently strips me off my humanity, i.e., my relations. My PhD becomes a more creative project, rather than an academic one. It becomes a part of my resistance toward the system that has so long ignored, silenced, and brutalized the other ways of doing research. It, suddenly, also responds to the question posed by a lecturer, during my bachelor thesis proposal seminar, concerning my writing style, "Do you want to write a novel or an academic text?"

Creativity. Refusal. Resistance.



The framing of knowledge by method is nonetheless an accounting of how stakes are organized, and this organizing tends to be delimited by existing forms of understanding of the problem at hand. This delimitation functions as **an apparatus of capture**: it diagnoses, it situates, it organizes, and ultimately it surveys, judges, and understands.

(Erin Manning, *Against Method*)



Sent on Mar 8, 2023

Hey Hazel and Adam,

Hope you are well, as always.
Another methodological reflection...

Few days ago I was somehow reminded of Walter Mignolo's epistemic disobedience. Such reminder, somehow again, made me think about what I have been doing in this fieldwork, about methods and methodologies.

What if I disobey research methods and methodologies?

In the early days at Watukarung, I thought a lot about Lhoknga and regretted my decision of still doing interviews there. Even though I had a feeling that not doing interviews would be fine, I did not have a courage to do so, to follow my gut. I was always suspicious and felt that interviews were not fit to my Lhoknga fieldwork, for several factors (my engagements with people there, local cultures of conversation and hanging out, Aceh's socio-political ambience, etc). Nonetheless I forced myself to do (formal) interviews at the end. "I was a pussy," I thought in Watukarung.

email from the field

Subject: Methodological Disobedience



Based on that reflection, I have become a bit more confident of my (different) approach here. Being accompanied by my family is one reason for that difference. Other reasons, again, are based on local contexts (style and approach of conversation, familiarity with language and localised Javanese culture, etc). For the need of baseline information, I conversely did formal interviews at the beginning. After that, I went on with my lazy-person observations and casual everyday conversations. Being with my family, strangely, I am writing field notes more diligently. That, perhaps, makes me even more confident with my methods of observation and conversations. It makes me braver, even in the last days here now, to not doing more (formal) interviews again. Lhoknga has taught me a lesson; why should I repeat it?

What if I (completely) disobey research methods and methodologies in Nemberala, starting next week? What kind of knowledge possible in disobeying methods? Where am I heading to really? A kind of 'decolonial freedom' ala Mignolo? Is this what decolonizing (methods, methodologies, research, researcher-self) feels like?

I don't know... but I feel great. It feels great to be free. I wonder what Nemberala will bring to me. I hope more feelings of freedom, more disobedient courage.

Cheers from Watukarung,
Pitor

email from the field

Subject: Methodological Disobedience

I DON'T KNOW

How can I design a research
which does not attempt to know?

Can not knowing become an epistemic stance
for a research?

How can I design a research
which does not strive for significance?

Why do we—academia—always think
that we are significant?

Isn't it a form of arrogance?
Plain stupidity?

What if
we have never been significant?

How can I design a research
that never attempt to search?

Problem statement:
are we making problems out of
nothing?

How poetic!

What if all these are
bullshits?

Can somebody save us
from the agony we create?

[Nemberala,
02-05-2023]