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The Moves of a Bajau Middlewoman: Understanding the Disparity between Trade Networks and Marine Conservation

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Abstract

At the interface of Indonesia and Malaysia, border-crossing maritime trade appears to elude attempts to conserve marine resources. In Berau district (East Kalimantan) attempts to protect coastal waters from illegal fishing and trade fail to correspond with mobile trade networks. In this article I describe how a female Bajau trader acts out her (illegal) trade network in practice. The article draws on eighteen months of ethnographic research, during which I joined the trader along her travels through the coastal zone of northeastern Kalimantan. Using a performative network approach, I explore the trader's network as a continuously generated effect of practice and movement. Following her trading practices, I show that the

performance of her network requires the ceaseless movement of people and things, in traveling (mobility) as well as in the reshaping of relations (fluidity). The trader's network is enmeshed in historically grown relations of kinship, ethnicity and patron-client associations across the sea. These socially and spatially mobile associations are at odds with conservationists' preoccupation with a spatial fixation of people, places and borders. By showing how relations of loyalty, debt and affiliation systematically transgress these borders, I demonstrate the significance of a relational approach to marine conservation that takes into account the mobility and interdependency of maritime networks. Such an approach may help to redress the hegemony of place-based approaches in marine conservation.

Keywords: Trade Networks; Mobility; Marine Conservation; Bajau; Kalimantan

Introduction¹

[[‘There she was: dressed in thick golden jewellery and a jumble of brightly coloured cloths waving around her stocky figure. A purple headscarf shaded her eyes from the scorching tropical sun. She called out to me; “Come here, you” and pointed to the rusty boat anchored besides her. “You want to go to Sarang Island? I chartered a boat, so you come with me.” Her name was Langkah and she didn’t take no for an answer. And so I came along. As the boat left the tiny village harbour, Langkah told me she came from elsewhere, a day’s trip by boat to the North. She went to Sarang Island frequently. “For business”, she added quickly, followed by a mischievous giggle. Soon our conversation drowned in the pumping noise of the boat’s engine.

When we arrived at the pier of Sarang Island, it was rush hour on the water – wooden boats coming from all directions to the island, unloading fish, ice, boxes and passengers. Right off the boat I followed Langkah along sandy pathways whirling between stilt houses, clotheslines and palm trees, until we reached the house of *nenek* (granny) Juhaira, one of her relatives. I saw a graceful old woman in a green silk dress standing on the veranda. Langkah said: “*Nenek*, this is my adopted daughter, she travels with me”, which was all the information granny Juhaira needed to welcome me with a bright smile, and hurry me inside.’]]

(Fieldnotes, Sarang, 23 January 2012)

When I met Langkah for the first time, at the pier of an Indonesian coastal village, I had just started my fieldwork. I knew that the small island to which we went – off the coast of Berau (East Kalimantan) – was a reputed hub of illegal fishing and trade – a thorn in the side of conservation agencies in the region. However, I did not know about Langkah’s role in these activities yet. Over the course of the fieldwork I came to know her as a highly mobile and energetic businesswoman involved in the international trade of marine products, including protected marine species and ingredients to make (illegal) fish bombs. According to my informants in several coastal villages and islands, Langkah was one of the most successful maritime traders in the region at that time, sustaining an extensive network of family and patron-client relationships in and beyond the coastal waters of Berau. Langkah guided me away from the island as fieldwork site, to an exploration of a contingent and mobile web of relations across the sea.

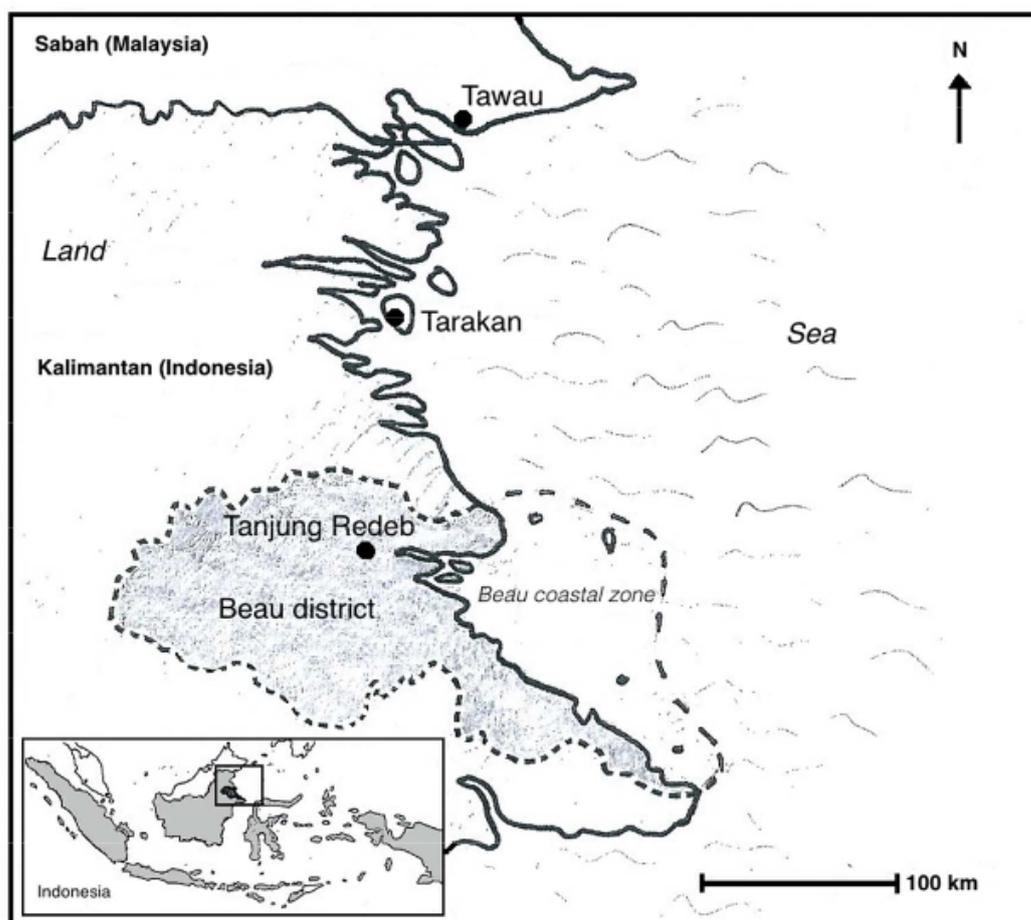


Figure 1: Map of Fieldwork Area

Earlier studies have documented various attempts to regulate marine resource exploitation in Berau, such as the creation of a marine protected area (MPA) and patrolling and monitoring to stop illegal fishing and trade in endangered species (Gunawan and Visser 2012; Kusumawati and Visser 2014). Reports that have been used as a basis for the planning of the Berau MPA recommend active community participation in conservation management (Studi Rencana Zonasi 2009; Wirjawan, Khazali and Knight 2005). However, in practice, engaging local communities has remained difficult (Pauwelussen, in press), particularly on the islands where the majority of the population identifies with Bajau ethnicity. The lifeworlds of Bajau and other semi-nomadic maritime groups have often been at odds with conservation plans because of their mobile lifestyle, contrasting belief systems and common association with illegal fishing (Clifton and Majors 2012). This article focuses on one crucial and understudied dimension of the disparity: the mobility of maritime trade networks vs. the spatial fixation of these mobile networks in marine conservation discourse. The primary purpose of exploring the disparity between Bajau practices and relations at sea and the practices of international environmental NGOs is to make the latter more inclusive of the former.

Maritime studies often use frameworks that privilege social, legal and institutional boundaries over more fluid ways to describe maritime reality. The spatial fixation is evident particularly in the field of marine conservation, which relies on a division of the social into separate local communities defined by spatial or administrative boundaries (Cinner, Fuentes and Randriamahazo 2009; Elliott *et al.* 2001; Pinkerton 2009). While a focus on such communities can generate valuable insights in how local dynamics affect marine conservation and resource management (Christie *et al.* 2009; Fabinyi, Knudsen and Segi 2010), one should not assume *a-priori* that maritime social cohesion is land- (or island-) based and restricted to a local scale (St Martin and Hall-Arber 2008). Recurrent emphasis on villages and islands as the locus of maritime society comes at the expense of revealing the dynamic networks of family, trade and inter-island exchanges beyond these place-based notions of communal life.

Anthropological and historical studies of the maritime realm have shown that sea-spanning networks of kinship and maritime trade are a constant feature of maritime life in Southeast Asia. Seafaring peoples of South Sulawesi – Makassarese, Bugis, and Mandar – are renowned for sustaining extensive, sea-based networks of commerce and exchange (Butcher 2004; Pelras 1997; Schwerdtner Mánéz and Ferse 2010). Bajau traders have had a crucial role

in the historical development of centres of maritime commerce (Sather 2002; Warren 2007). Bajau women have been active participants in marine resource trade and exploitation, although their role has been generally overlooked (Schwerdtner Máñez and Pauwelussen, in press). Together with the Orang Laut (Chou 2003) and the Moken (Ivanoff 1997), the Bajau are known for their mobile, sea-based livelihoods (Nolde 2009; Sather 1997), creating 'trans-oceanic' geographies (Tagliacozzo 2009: 98) and social networks covering expanses of space with no fixed geographical borders (Chou 2003). Bajau mobile networks of fishing and trade may traverse national borders, as well as conservation areas, generating discussions of their legality and legitimacy (Adhuri 2013; Adhuri and Visser 2007; Stacey 2007).

A recurring theme in literature on maritime trade is the convergence of economic relations with networks of kinship and patronage that span across seas. Patron-client networks create long-standing relations of mutual expectation and dependency in Indonesia's coastal areas (Fabinyi 2013; Meereboer 1998; Pelras 2000), and enable, but are also an effect of, geographical and social-political mobility (Acciaioli 2000). Through such trans-local and asymmetric networks of resource extraction and trade, local maritime livelihoods are linked to distant markets (Ferse *et al.* 2012; Fabinyi 2013; Gaynor 2013; Stacey 2007). Among Indonesia's maritime peoples, affinity and loyalty follow translocal relations of kinship, credit and debt rather than the borders of a village or island (Kusumawati, Bush and Visser 2013; Pauwelussen, in press).

Considering the rich body of literature indicating the mobility and translocality of maritime relations, it is striking that so little has been written about how these relate to conservation measures (but see Ferse *et al.* 2012; Gunawan and Visser 2012). One reason for this may be, as Lowe (2003: 114) points out, that conservation 'requires fixity of people in place'. This, together with Moore's (2012) observation that current maritime anthropology has increasingly become an applied, policy-oriented endeavour, may account for the propensity to once again conceptualise maritime communities as 'contained' in geographic places (St. Martin and Hall-Arber 2008). This way, conservation discourse renders invisible and intangible actual networks of interest, affinity and collaboration that traverse spatial and land-based definitions of community.

This article focuses on such a network through an ethnographic account of a female Bajau intermediate marketer's trade network as it was enacted in 2011-2013. Following Langkah

along her travels, it sheds light on the practices and movements entailed in enacting and maintaining an informal trade network and how, in its enactment, relations of business and family converge. Langkah's movements illustrate the disparity between the mobility and fluidity of maritime trade networks, on the one hand, and the spatial fixation of people, places and borders in conservation discourses on the other. The case of Langkah's trade network is particularly relevant in relation to marine conservation in Berau because it crosses the boundary between legal and illegal fishing and trade.

In the following section I explain my methodological approach. We will then take a ride with Langkah, follow her doing business and performing her network on Sarang Island and on her way into different spatial and social directions along the coast of northeastern Kalimantan. Next, I discuss marine conservation outreach in Berau and how it is at odds with mobile trade networks such as Langkah's, followed by a conclusion.

Methodological Approach

The ethnography of Langkah's trade network is based on a performative notion of network. This means seeing a network as a contingent and dynamic web of associations between heterogeneous elements that needs to be continuously enacted (performed) in order to subsist (Latour 2005). In this way, in actor-network theory (ANT), the concept of network has been used to explore the dynamics and heterogeneity of network performances (Latour 1996; Law and Hassard 1999).

A performative notion of network differs from the common use of the network concept in maritime studies (Marín and Berkes 2010; Janssen *et al.* 2006) in which the lines of the networks connect – in an unilinear way – places, people or things that are already established and spatially determined. Such conceptualisation fits the common tendency to predefine and fixate the social as a reality outside of, and preceding, practice.

In contrast, Latour's ontology of the social considers social reality a relational effect, enacted in practice (Latour 2005). A performative network approach thus traces the constant enactment of the network as a contingent and dynamic web of associations. By following practices, one can trace how the social (i.e. networks, communities) is enacted in different sites and situations, and who and what participates. Such approach fits an explorative and

emic anthropological methodology because it allows for following informants along their world-making practices, instead of defining for them what their world looks like.

However, according to Ingold, ANT studies have generally overlooked an element essential to world-making: the continuous generation of the world in and by movement (Ingold 2011: 85-6, 149-152). Latour (and ANT literature in general) has been less concerned with movement as a generative practice and the description thereof in ethnography. Ingold has given the practice of spatial movement a more prominent role in his conceptualisation of network as a 'web of life,' as lines along which life is lived in movement (Ingold 2011):

[['[I]magine a world of incessant movement and becoming, one that is never complete but continually under construction, woven from the countless lifelines of its manifold human and non-human constituents as they thread their ways through the tangle of relationships in which they are comprehensively enmeshed. In such a world, persons and things do not so much exist as occur, and are identified not by any fixed, essential attributes laid down in advance or transmitted ready-made from the past, but by the very pathways (or trajectories or stories) along which they have previously come and are presently going. ']] (Ingold 2011: 141)

Combining Ingold's and Latour's approaches, I see networks as heterogeneous and continuously evolving webs of relations enacted in practice and movement. Langkah's network is thus not a self-contained structure, but an open-ended performance. Exploring the performance of Langkah's network in practice sheds light on the multiple dynamics and movements of the relations she assembles. Langkah's networking practice shows her as a roving woman mediating a wide array of relations extending into different spatial and social directions. Langkah's network is not enacted in a vacuum, but along a hinterland of relations already performed and experienced and paths trodden by journeys already made. Tracing empirically what it takes to associate webs of relations, how they keep together (or disassemble), allows me to show coherence and durability of the network as conditional accomplishments. Crucial is that the temporary stabilisation of Langkah's network does not mean it stops moving. On the contrary, making the network cohere *requires* movement.

The article is based on eighteen months of ethnographic research (2011-2013). I joined Langkah along her journeys in and beyond the coastal waters of northeastern Kalimantan, observing and experiencing the work involved in sustaining her profitable web of trade,

involving an extensive network of family and patron-client relations. The research on which the article is based was conducted as a mobile ethnography: following actors along their journeys and associations. Insights were obtained from multiple (mostly informal) conversations with Langkah and others, and the documentation of observations and reflections in writing. Participant observation and documentation were conducted with the informed consent of the key informants involved in the research. Most importantly, Langkah herself invited me to join her on her travels and learn about her practices, and I have been clear to her and others involved in the research about my intention to write about this for an academic public.

All names are pseudonyms, and I have also changed the names of some of the places.

Doing Business

This section describes the daily practice of enacting a maritime trade network. It takes as an example a ‘day of doing business’ from Sarang Island. In 2012, Langkah came to the island once or twice a month, staying for three to five days. During these days she moved from one house to the other, talking and drinking tea for hours with (old or new) trading partners. Our visit to one of her main trading partners was typical of the way she worked.

[[‘Langkah prods me and exclaims excitedly: “Come on! Let’s go and do business!” (“*Ayo! Kita berbisnis!*”). While I grab my notebook, she already walks ahead. She doesn’t like waiting. “Susi has export fish for me, which needs to go to Tawau [Sabah, Malaysia] quickly.” This is urgent, she explains: “Part of the fish has turned mushy. Part of it has already been cut to sun-dry. That’s a shame. I’ll go bankrupt!” As we stride forward, the path turns into sand. We approach a quarter inhabited mostly by Bajau people from the island of Sulawesi. It consists of shaggy stilt houses built over the shoreline. One house stands out, looking slightly better. The wooden walls are painted blue. We walk around the back, over a plank that leads us to the wooden platform at the back of the house. The platform is partly covered by racks with fish on it, their bodies slit open and drying in the sun. Four women are bent over the fish, turning them over to let the other side dry. “Hey, come here!” Susi calls us from the house above. We climb up the stairs to sit with her on the terrace, overlooking the women working.

Langkah takes mangoes from her bag; she bought them earlier on the mainland, for Susi's children. She always brings them a small present. We sit down, and Langkah and Susi start talking. "My husband just sailed out this morning, with his crew", says Susi. "They took enough rice with them to stay out on the reef for one week, but they may come back earlier, 'cause we're low on fertiliser." For a moment, I think they get to the point directly (Langkah supplies Susi with fertiliser, used to make fish bombs), but I am mistaken. Langkah talks at length about her sons' educational achievements, and how busy she has been with renovating her house. The fertiliser issue will be dealt with later. She demands more updates first about the education of Susi's daughter.

After the wellbeing and whereabouts of direct relatives have been discussed, the women discuss the latest news about others (friend or foe) in the fish trade business: Who is selling what to whom and for what price? While talking, a woman drops by, to "borrow" sugar and kerosene from Susi. When she's gone, Susi tells me: "The women on this island like to borrow. They are all indebted". I know Susi is no exception to this herself, as she is indebted to Langkah. Langkah just paid two million IDR for her daughter's school tuition fee.

Langkah moves on to the gossip-session, an integral part of every business meeting she conducts. "Oh Susi, listen... last time Mr Zainal said he sold me 600 kilos of fish, and I just had to believe him, right? But in Tawau, I found 20 kilos missing. Has my captain eaten the fish or what? [Laughs]. I told Zainal: "We're together in the business. We're both trying to make a living (*kita sama-sama cari makan*). We have to help each other out. I have no other means than my trust (*kepercayaan*). But he's not Bajau like us, you know, and he drinks too much. It's better to do business with your own kind of people." Susi nods and mentions how Zainal approached her to share fertiliser, which Langkah definitely thinks is a bad idea. "Please don't do that, Susi. I know him. He may play you. It is better you arrange those things through me.""] (Fieldnotes, Sarang, 19 June 2012)

The informality of the setting shows 'doing business' as part of engaging with the other in a purposeful way, associating relations of work, marriage alliances, weather, ethnic affiliations. Although Langkah often framed her business in a state of urgency, she took considerable time to conduct it in an intimate and informal way, smoothening and arranging her relationship with stories, jokes and gossip.

The informal conduct entails more than creating a relaxed sphere before ‘getting to business’. The interactive practice of sitting together and talking is what ‘doing business’ is all about. By discussing the situation of relatives, allies and rivals, Langkah kept herself informed about the constantly moving associations in her world of fishing and maritime trade. She also applied her skills to move associations herself, illustrated by her gossip about the untrustworthiness of another fish patron, Zainal, who actually was her other long-term trading partner on the island. In her conversation with Susi she applied her ‘divide and rule politics’: keeping two of her main allies on the island apart and reinforcing her own role as middlewoman and her position as provider of fishing supplies.

Langkah’s world of maritime trade relations is a dynamic one, and she has mastered the skills of engaging in this flexibility and turning it to her advantage. But this flexibility does not mean that ‘anything goes’. Langkah’s exchanges with Susi are guided by patron-client relations. Although debt relations were crucial in sustaining Langkah’s commercial network, so was the fulfilment of more traditional obligations associated with the role of a patron, such as sponsorship of life-cycle rites of her clients, and other non-calculated financial contributions in times of need, as well as protection from law enforcement. In return, she expected loyalty. For example, supporting Susi by paying her daughter’s tuition, Langkah expected Susi’s export quality fish to be reserved for her. Although prices for fish and fertiliser were carefully calculated, such ‘loans’ were not expected to be (fully) paid back. In another case, Langkah paid the fine for her captain, keeping him out of jail, without expecting to be reimbursed. When he then tried to work with another patron, she felt severely betrayed.

Unlike the Lindu case (Acciaioli 2000: 224), Bajau traders in Berau did not clearly differentiate between the primarily economic character of their relationships and their social interdependencies. Also, in most business exchanges, when not speaking Bajau, they used the general term *bos* for (male/female) the Bajau or Mandar assuming patron roles, not making the clear distinction between *bos* and patron (or *punggawa*) as observed in southern Sulawesi societies (Acciaioli 2000; Pelras 2000).

Evidently, patron-client relations may shape exchanges, but they do not fixate people and things in particular places or positions. While Susi is a client to Langkah, she also acts as a *bos* to her own clients (*anak buah*) on the island. Similarly, Langkah is patron and *bos*, but also a client to her Chinese-Malaysian patron (*tauke*) in Tawau. The relational character of

patron-client partnerships shows it as a dynamic association of mobile and shifting social-material relations across the sea. As the following fragment illustrates, such an association better resembles a performative notion of network than the static notion of network connecting pre-defined and spatially fixed people and things:

[[‘Langkah inspects the iceboxes filled with fish in ice water. Langkah is interested in the species and sizes fit for export to Tawau, provided they are not too damaged from the blast. I can see she is not happy. While she pokes in the belly of a fish, she says: “Susi... there are two kinds of ice: Wet ice (*es air*) and dry ice (*es kering*). My fish needs dry ice. This is important, Susi. The wet ice makes the flesh go bad. My *tauke* will not accept it. Tomorrow morning my captain will take this fish and bring it to Tawau. But I’ll send him to Lengan first to get new ice blocks. Now, the fertiliser... I’ve sent Rifal [her other captain] to Malaysia to get ignition fuses and 35 bags of fertiliser. He called me this morning. If weather allows it, he will be here tomorrow afternoon. I’ve reserved twenty bags for you, okay? You can sell part of it and make a nice profit yourself.”]] (Fieldnotes, Sarang, 19 June 2012)

The ‘local’ scene above is overrun by relations with others elsewhere: captains, ice, weather and the *tauke*’s fish valuation. As a middlewoman, Langkah mediates a diverse set of mobile and shifting relations. Keeping them productive and in line with her interests requires on-going practice of association and mediation: instructing Susi on caring for the fish, translating distant market values, and mobilising her captains to move around the fish, ice and fertiliser.

Patron-client arrangements are commonly seen as ways in which the volatility of maritime trade networks is stabilised – relations of debt, loyalty and mutual expectations make for durable trade arrangements. But their relational character begs for continuous enactment. Moreover, once relationally stabilised, the network does not stop moving. On the contrary, the forming and temporary stabilisation of Langkah’s network-as-association requires continuous movement – her mobilisation of other people as well as her own mobility. This shows in the mundane practical necessity of moving around the island to engage in face-to-face interactions and exchanges – crucial to sustain relations of trust and reciprocity. Also, by moving around, Langkah assembles information, orders, and tries to lure new trade partners into her network. This is shown in the next fragment:

[[‘Langkah proceeds on her round on Sarang Island: she takes every chance to ask people for news and fish. She talks with two women who just came back gleaning a nearby reef for giant clams (*kima*). Langkah wants to buy their *kima* to sell in Tawau. The women hesitate; they also had an offer from another trader. Langkah urges them to drop by at granny Juhaira’s house later. “I brought dresses from Malaysia”, she adds.

By the time we walk back to granny’s home, it is night. Inside the house are two old women sitting on the floor, chatting with granny while waiting for Langkah. They brought plastic bags filled with dried clams. The peculiar fishy smell of the clams has spread though the room, nauseating me. More women walk in, plastic bags with *kima* in hand, and soon there’s a circle of women sitting around a candle, having a thriving discussion about relatives in Malaysia. Langkah brings out for the women her collection of Malaysian silk dresses, glistening in the candlelight.’]] (Fieldnotes, Sarang, 19 June 2012)

Giant clam (*kima*, *Tridacna gigas*) is a highly valued commodity in Tawau, particularly on the Chinese-Malaysian market. Commercial trade of (wild) *kima* has been internationally banned because of the animal’s status as a threatened species (CITES red list), yet during fieldwork hundreds of kilos of dried clams were exported monthly from Berau to Malaysia. On Sarang Island, I observed increasing competition between traders to obtain giant clams from the (mostly female and Bajau) collectors. Engaging in this trade was a very lucrative business for Langkah. One kg bought for about 100,000 IDR in Sarang was sold for 180,000 IDR or more in Tawau. But the collectors were rather independent. Whatever they gleaned from the coral, they could sell for the best bid. However, they did not necessarily opt for the highest bidder. Other items than cash could be more valuable. Cash money was of limited value on Sarang Island anyway, as the informal island economy was to a large extent based on sharing and reciprocal exchanges.

Providing the women on the island with desired dresses from Malaysia was not just an economic transaction. By providing such goods, Langkah hoped they would have a bag of dried clams for her on her next visit to Sarang Island. The women did not pay for the dresses directly. For some women, Langkah reduced the price she paid for the clams with (part of) the price of the dresses, whereas for her more steady clam suppliers, such as granny Juhaira, the dresses became gifts, to be returned with continued loyalty and hospitality. Her being a

woman was an asset here, as few men would be able to buy the dresses that suited the new clothing trends in the coastal zone.

Langkah also invested in sustaining relations of mutual affinity and affection with the women. The women-only candlelight sessions, using a shared Bajau language and tracing common ancestry to overseas places, helped in creating a sphere of intimacy. Sustaining this intimacy and promising new goods were some of the practices that helped to stabilise Langkah's relations with the clam-collecting women, keeping these relations productive while she was absent. But again, this (temporary) stabilisation of her network was only realised on the condition of her constantly moving about. Keeping the women attached to her required Langkah to travel. Because promises were not enough, in the end she had to show up on the island, bringing from Malaysia a bag full of goodies.

Performing a Network

This section focuses on the practice of traveling, required for the performance of Langkah's trade network, while putting Langkah's performative pattern of movements in historical perspective. Using fieldnotes jotted down during my travels with Langkah, I take her movements through the coastal zone of northeastern Kalimantan (and into Sabah) as an example of spatial network enactment. I also show how these movements are patterned by a history of migration, trade and family relations among the Bajau.

[[‘Langkah and I left Sarang this morning by boat, heading to Tawau. According to Langkah, it is a 3-day journey. Soon after we left, Langkah changed our route, making a detour. I feel annoyed, why the delay already? Langkah said: “I have to get cash in Lenggau, and then I have to arrange orders with my partner who handles the ice. If I don't go over there myself, people are reluctant to deliver. If I want to run a good business, I have to go over there and take piles of cash with me.”]] (Fieldnotes, Lenggau, 21 June 2012)

[[‘We're on the road again, by taxi. Langkah ordered one by choosing a number from her phone book. She handles the little book with care; it contains all her phone contacts. It is one of the things always traveling with her, in her leather handbag. The bag is like an extension of Langkah, it contains all the items she needs to sustain herself while being on the move; a roll of paper money, a pencil, receipts, her passport, facial whitening cream, two sets of change

cloths and her two mobile phones (one for Indonesia and one for Malaysia). While traveling, Langkah uses these phones frequently, to order our next transport, to keep track of her load, or to arrange new business opportunities. “What’s your position?” is often the first thing she asks, followed by an update of hers:

“Salamalaikum! Listen, what’s your position? I can’t hear you... where?”

(...)

“We’re almost in Teluk Panjang, half an hour. Listen, Mr. Mandul just called me, says he has three tons of export fish for me. He can’t sell to Bontang. They increased inspection over there.”

(...)

“No, don’t pay for the fish. I don’t trust the man. He says three tons... but I’ll send my captain over to weigh it first. I need you to share some of the ice blocks, Zainal. The blocks I ordered, you’ll get tomorrow. I’m on my way to Tawau now.”]] (Fieldnotes, in a taxi, 23 June 2012)

[[‘We just made another stop at her home village. Langkah has decided to attend a ceremony held by one of her uncles. “It’s family” she says, “We can’t leave now, it’ll bring misfortune”. I adapt to this new change of plans reluctantly.’]] (Fieldnotes, Teluk Panjang, 22 June 2012)

[[‘We’re heading for Tawau again! This morning Langkah’s captain called to inform he just left from Sarang Island, taking eight tons of fish and 50 kilos of dried *kima* by boat to the jetty of the *tauke*. Langkah says she waited for his departure before moving along. Why didn’t she say so? Now she’s in a hurry, she wants to be in Tawau before the load arrives.’]] (Fieldnotes, in a taxi, 24 June 2012)

Although I initially saw the traveling as a necessary inconvenience to explore Langkah’s network, traveling itself turned out to be an insightful experience. It allowed for a reflection on what initially were different experiences of movement. During the many hours of traveling by cars, boats, ferries, my focus was on ‘getting there’ - seeing the journey as a way to get from A to B. Hence my impatience with detours and delay. For Langkah, however, traveling was a productive (and fun) mode of being, a way of life in which stops and destinations were temporary pauses in her continuous wayfaring. As she put it: ‘I like to travel, Annet, it keeps

me awake. I can't imagine myself sitting at home.' (Teluk Panjang 24 June 2012). Langkah's older sister once said:

[['[Langkah] has always been like that; always on the move, exploring opportunities. As a kid, she couldn't be kept in the house. While I was cooking, my sister was outside selling the pastries' (Teluk Panjang, 12 June 2012).]]

Langkah is a quintessential wayfarer in Ingold's sense: 'continually on the move ... instantiated in the world as a line of travel, (sustaining) himself, both perceptually and materially, through an active engagement with the country that opens up along his path' (Ingold 2011: 150). The network thus emerges as a crystallisation of activity and movement in a dynamic relational field (Ingold 2011: 47). As a wayfarer, Langkah constantly adjusted to the configuration of routes and interests as they manifested in her network while traveling. She almost continuously kept track of her trading associates – her captains, the fish, the ice, the *tauke* in Tawau and fish bosses on Sarang. With phone calls and visits she also mobilised and steered her network while moving along herself.

Whereas it was sometimes hard for me to adjust to Langkah's seemingly capricious way of planning, hers was also a very adaptive and flexible way to keep business moving. Certainly, in Langkah's case there was a personal disposition to travel and enjoy this. However, this inclination to move only underlines the skills of a successful middlewoman: being able to sustain a dynamic and mobile network while and by moving, and engaging productively in a continually unfolding field of relations along the way. Again, it shows the network in the performative sense – as a tangle of lines formed and associated in practice and movement. In other words, taking network as a practice, Langkah's traveling *is* the *net-work* or 'work-net' (Latour 2005: 132).

In spite of the dynamics of movements and relations, Langkah's ways are not erratic. She is not just going anywhere, associating with anyone and anything. Her mobility – both in terms of traveling and in 'getting things forward' for business – is enmeshed in a historically grown field of relationships patterned along notions of kinship and ethnic (Bajau) affiliation. The remainder of this section shows how spatial patterns of kinship and ethnic affiliation condition the ways and routes along which Langkah performs her trade network.

Two weeks after meeting in January 2012, Langkah said:

[[‘I’ll introduce you to my family. I have family everywhere! All the way to Tawau, even in Semporna, I have cousins. We Bajau are all over the place [laughs]. Good for you you travel with me, so you don’t need to go to a hotel. We stay with family only’.]]

In the months that followed this was exactly how it turned out to be. All along the route from Sarang Island to Malaysia we stayed with those to whom Langkah referred as family. Family could be relatives by blood or affinity, but also people related by ‘fictive kinship’, a common practice among the Bajau in that region (Morrison 1993, 111-2). An example is granny Juhaira, whose ‘kinship’ relation to Langkah was based on the fact that their forefathers had come from the same Malaysian village. Whatever detour we made, we always ended up staying with family. In fact, a business trip with Langkah was as much a string of informal family get-togethers as they were visits and engagements for economic interest. Langkah’s traveling thus generated and wove together a string of ‘homes’ that were also her business ‘hotspots’.

[[‘After two hours in a speedboat we reach the jetty of Tarakan [an Indonesian coastal border town]. Two cousins of Langkah take us home by motorbike. Soon they turn off the city highway to a side road that turns out to be some kind of a wooden jetty, flanked by stilt houses. It is the Bajau quarter, and Langkah greets people left and right while we bump along until we reach her brother’s place - one of the many places Langkah calls my ‘home’ (*rumahku*). On her way to and from Tawau, she usually stays here for one night or more, meanwhile handling some business in the neighbourhood.’]] (Fieldnotes, Tarakan, 24 June 2012)

This house used to be her parental home, as Langkah narrates:

[[‘I grew up in that house. My father built it. He came from a village near Semporna [Malaysia] and had been traveling for years, to Berau, Palu, Bontang, Makassar. He was a trader. He traded logs mostly, from Berau to Tawau. For this, Tarakan was a good spot to have a home [situated in between]. He was a real Bajau man, liked to be on the move. Sometimes I was allowed to come with him. My mother comes from a poor family of fishers. Hers is a big family, spread all over the coast... however we feel close. If you compare, my

father's side, they are all doing fine and in good positions in Malaysia. They own two-story buildings'] (Informal conversation, Teluk Panjang, 11 June 2012)

This family narrative of Langkah fits earlier observations that the Bajau in Berau sustain close relations of trade and family with overseas 'homes' and kin (Pauwelussen, in press). Networks of Bajau kinship and ethnic affiliation are geographically dispersed, but made cohesive through visits and exchanges, based on and resulting in a constant flux of kin, valuables and trade partners traversing administrative boundaries. Being related by kinship and ethnicity may account for feelings of trust and loyalty and can help stabilise the volatility of trade associations. Relations of kinship and ethnic affiliation are performed and sustained in practice, such as gift exchanges, gossip, remembering children's names and attending ceremonies. Real or fictive family bonds are also performed and sustained in movement, by way of multiple visits and exchanges.

Langkah's trade route is patterned along, but not determined by, such lines of kinship and Bajau affinity. Historical trajectories of trade, travels and exchanges of family preceding her – among whom are her parents – have formed pathways for Langkah to follow and re-enact. After Langkah's parents married and built a house in Tarakan, they continued moving around, visiting family dwellings elsewhere, taking along Langkah and her siblings. Langkah grew up visiting relatives, attending ceremonies in an extensive maritime space spanning the Indonesian-Malaysian border. And this practice was still everyday business during fieldwork. She also learned and inherited from her father's trading network. Some of the people with whom she did business in the present she had known through her father in early childhood. In Langkah's network, family and business relations converge into a world in which whom you know and whom you owe are of crucial importance.

Historical accounts have documented waves of migration by Bajau families from the Southern Philippines and Sabah southwards to the coast of northeastern Kalimantan (Sather 1997; Warren 2007). Rather than a one-way movement from A to B, this Bajau migration constitutes dynamic and moving fields of interactions and exchanges across a vast marine area. When asked about the origins of her family, Langkah explained:

[[‘We Bajau often move from one place to the other, and there are many trade and family relations between Bajau in Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. So you have people

coming, going back, settling here for a while, then they go elsewhere, and have kids. And then later those kids will travel. And in the end where does one come from? The Bajau here... it's actually a hodgepodge. They're from different places, but they all came here by boat.']] (Fieldnotes, Teluk Panjang, 11 June 2012)

The historically grown network of relations based on notions of family and Bajau ethnicity motivates and mobilises loyalty and reciprocity in Langkah's network. Particularly apparent is the way she safeguards border passage for her and her valuables by maintaining productive relations with politicians, police and navy officers all along the trade route to Malaysia by appealing to a shared ancestry or ethnic background. The following account of her border crossing illustrates this:

[[‘Sometimes she crosses the Indonesian-Malaysian border along an official route, by ferry. But not too often. “Out of four times I cross the border, I take the official route once. Here’s the reason.” She shows me the inside of her passport, page after page filled with stamps. She adds: “I go to Tawau at least twice a month, that’s 24 times a year. I would need a bigger passport, there’s simply no place for all the stamps! [Laughs]. And they’ll see me coming at customs. Crossing the border so many times makes them suspicious. They asked me last time. I lied that I’m developing an Indonesian restaurant with my family over there in Malaysia.”

So this time, Langkah takes her regular route into Malaysia, moving “through the margins” (*lewat minggir minggir*), as she calls it. This route goes by different chartered speedboats that stay close to the shore of the mangrove forests in the delta near the Indonesian-Malaysian border. Despite the association with the margin, it is also a highway. Speedboats taking the unofficial routes to Malaysia depart from Tarakan continuously. It is also a very familiar route to Langkah. She explains: “I have lots of family living along the way, so there’s always a place to stay or someone to ask for help”. She also keeps herself familiar with some of the officials stationed along the route. “Paying for passage is something I calculate as travel expenses”, Langkah says. “And I look for the ones that are Bajau.” Some days ago she told me that soon her son will be stationed here as a customs official. “Then things will become easy”, she remarked.’]] (Fieldnotes, Tarakan, 14 June 2012)

The coastal border area between Indonesia and Malaysia is populated by Bajau and other ethnic groups. The fact that people are crossing borders this way continuously through the Indonesian-Malaysian coastal zone is an open secret. By skilfully mobilising networks of collaboration that follow or mimic kinship relations, Langkah eases her movements in the grey area of ‘illegal but licit’ practices (Gunawan and Visser 2012). This ‘twilight’ route evades formal customs, but moves along informal relations with police and customs officers, many of whom she says are related to her by kinship or ‘Bajauness’. This practice also includes the border crossings of her valuables and trade-family associates. For example, Langkah’s uncle working in the Tawau government arranged her license to import fertiliser. In fact, with this license, Langkah’s importing of Malaysian fertiliser of the brand Matahari was legal, even though the fertiliser was widely used in northeastern Kalimantan to make fish bombs. Another example: During one of our stays in Tawau, Langkah’s captain was apprehended for importing sea turtle eggs and other disputed goods from Malaysia to Indonesia. Appealing to her ethnic affinity with the Malaysian marine police officers helped to smooth the passage of captain, boat and eggs in the end.

Evidently, Langkah’s trade network involves the fusion of legal/illegal practices with formal/informal, family and business relations. It is important that in such a dynamic association, people affiliate more with transborder relations of Bajau kinship and ethnicity (and the expectations of loyalty and reciprocity that come with it) than with national borders or the rule of state law. In other words, in this apparent continuity of the seascape, national borders and the rule of law seem arbitrary (Stacey 2007). Yet, they are simultaneously present, as I illustrated with the relational practice required for illegal border crossing. Likewise, Langkah’s trade network systematically transgresses rules and borders for marine conservation. Langkah’s network as a mobile association of family and business relations goes beyond, or rather deliberately eludes, marine conservation borders and zones. The performance of the sea-oriented networks of trade and family and the continuity of the seascape described here require relational practices that are at odds with marine conservation discourse.

Marine Conservation

Since 2003, international conservation agencies have been working to protect Berau’s marine biodiversity in collaboration with the Berau district government. In 2005, these efforts

resulted in the establishment of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) of 1.27 million ha, covering the Berau waters. During my research in 2011-2013, the most prominent non-governmental organisations involved in marine conservation were WWF (World Wildlife Fund), TNC (The Nature Conservancy), and locally-based Bestari (Berau Lestari). Whereas all three organisations had been involved in the initial MPA collaboration, at the time of research only TNC explicitly oriented to the enhancement of MPA policy and practice by working towards collaboration with governmental partners and local communities. However, despite TNC's community-based conservation policy and advocacy, the implementation of the Berau MPA has not resulted in active participation of the majority of the people living on the islands and coastal villages of Berau (Gunawan 2012; Pauwelussen, in press).

During my fieldwork research, TNC was in the process of conducting outreach activities with communities in the Berau MPA region. This outreach mostly revolved around explaining the MPA zoning plan and acquiring local feedback. The zoning plan, drafted in 2011, was based on scientific data of critical habitats in need of conservation (Studi Rencana Zonasi 2009). These habitats were proposed as the conservation core zones within the MPA, to be protected from all forms of exploitation (Interview staff TNC Marine #1, 30 January 2012). TNC subsequently presented the plans at sub-district level for public consultation. The selection of the public to be consulted followed the ecological assessment of the places TNC aimed to protect (Interview staff TNC marine #2, 30 January 2012). In every sub-district that was assigned a core zone, the local community was asked to provide input regarding how conservation rules should be locally implemented. This input was focused on the specific rules and rights of local fishers and the precise location and borders of the core zone within the sub-district's administrative borders (Interview Fisheries Department officer, 19 April 2011, and own observations).

Included in the consultation were villages within the sub-district. Fishers, traders and patrons who had no formal residency in the sub-district, but were nevertheless operating directly or indirectly within the sub-district's waters, were excluded. TNC further limited its outreach to those villages receptive to conservation because they encountered a considerable difference amongst villages regarding the way the conservation plans were received (Interview staff TNC marine #2, 30 January 2012). Although in earlier years collaboration had taken place, in 2011-2013 TNC staff considered the islands as off-limits for outreach work because of strong anti-NGO sentiments among the island population. Yet, based on my observations and

interviews during that time, the islands' population was involved in most of the exploitation of the places designated as MPA core zones. Although TNC staff in Berau knew of their continued practices of bomb fishing, coral gleaning and trade in endangered species, they felt there was little they could do – considering the influence of patrons and traders operating in and beyond Berau (like Langkah) in the continuation of these practices (conversations with staff TNC Marine 2012-2013).

Addressing the networks in which these anti-conservation practices were embedded was seen to lie outside their professional field of operation. Instead, conservation project guidelines required TNC staff to focus on administrative villages as local communities for capacity building and explaining conservation rules.

A TNC policy document on community outreach in Indonesian MPAs reads that the success of marine conservation depends on 'the active involvement of people and partners whose lives and livelihoods are linked to the natural systems we seek to conserve' (Soekirman *et al.* 2009: 6). The document underlines the importance of forging relationships with local people based on mutual benefit and sharing, and applying sensitivity in regard to their cultural and economic realities. Yet, such noble intentions for a relational and culturally sensitive approach are compromised by the dominant ecosystem-based conservation schemes in which they are embedded. Whereas the authors point out that 'protected areas should be integrated within a broad sustainable development system' (Soekirman *et al.* 2009: 9), in the case of Berau sustainable development has instead been integrated *ad hoc* in an already established protected area, the design of which was based on ecological, and not social, assessment criteria (Kusumawati 2014: 30-35; Wilson *et al.* 2010).

The objective stated by TNC is to 'solve the problem' of exploitative fishing practices in Berau with micro-credit schemes, by empowering women and by appointing village representatives as mediators of conservation outreach (Soekirman *et al.* 2009: 13, 26). The everyday reality of patron-client relations, entrepreneurship and mobile networks of loyalty and exchange described here thus remains beyond the horizon of TNC policy implementation. Unfortunately, their intention to be sensitive to local customs is not based on, nor does it lead to, an exploration of the kind of cultural and economic realities to which they have to be sensitive.

MPA 'solutions' are based on stereotypical perceptions of the maritime realm in which fishery is a masculine affair, loyalty follows village borders, and illegal fishing is the work of

non-resident fishers driven by poverty. Pre-defined borders are used to divide ‘rightful insiders’ from ‘intruding outsiders’, even though in practice lines of debt, loyalty and collaboration traverse these borders, as the case of Langkah’s network illustrates. In conservation management this also leads to the supposition that village- or island-based communities within conservation borders are the only stakeholders for the use and management of Berau’s marine resources, and that conservation borders need to be protected from outsiders. Such a view ignores the permeability or even arbitrariness of the boundaries of the Berau conservation area (Gunawan and Visser 2012), and it negates the crucial role of patrons and traders in this region who can ‘make or break’ conservation projects (Kusumawati 2014).

The dependency upon patrons of the coastal population in Berau is common knowledge, but so far traders and patrons have been excluded from MPA policy making in Berau (Kusumawati and Visser 2014). Roving traders like Langkah, who sustain networks that systematically cross borders and play the illegal field, are kept out of the conservation picture. To some extent they also exclude themselves, moving their practices deliberately out of view from administrators and conservationists alike. Langkah, for example, knew of conservation (the husband of one of her cousins even ran a local conservation initiative), but she chose not to be part of it. However, when the practice of middle(wo)men like Langkah is systematically precluded from conservation policy and practice, their mobile networks are rendered invisible and intangible by design. This also entails the risk of excluding part of the coastal population that depends on, or affiliates with these networks.

Conclusion

This article has described the practices and movements of Langkah, a female Bajau trader, enacting a network of maritime trade across the Indonesian-Malaysian border. Following Latour’s notion of network as associational and relational effect (Latour 2005), augmented by Ingold’s theory on (spatial) movement as a generative practice (Ingold 2011), I have used a performative approach showing Langkah’s network as a dynamic association enacted in practice and movement. Following her on her travels along the coast of northeastern Kalimantan, I have shown how she maintained her trade network as a tangle of lines constituted of and by movement. This ‘*work-net*’ (Latour 2005: 132) required her to be on the move continuously to associate with socially and spatially mobile actors and keep volatile

relations aligned with her interests. Langkah's movements were in turn enmeshed in a historically grown field of relations patterned along kinship and ethnic affiliation, as well as patron-client associations that are themselves mobile.

The enacted network is moved and motivated along historically formed lines of family, trade and ethnicity. National borders and the rule of (state) law seem arbitrary, yet they are simultaneously present in the practical organisation of crossing the border through the Indonesian-Malaysian 'twilight zone' near Tawau, where legal/illegal and business/family relations converge.

A socially and spatially mobile network such as Langkah's is at odds with conservationists' notions of fixed places, boundaries and 'local' communities. The lines along which resource exploitation and trade are mobilised in Langkah's network extend far beyond the border of the Berau district in northeastern Kalimantan, into Malaysia, and beyond the scope and influence of district-based conservation agencies. These agencies are concerned with the over-exploitation of endangered species and the widespread use of unsustainable fishing methods, but they fail to take into account the socially dynamic and spatially mobile networks in which these practices are enmeshed. It is important to understand and acknowledge how marine resource use and trade in Berau are conditioned by the mobility of these trade networks in the margins of legality and illegality, as well as the trans-local patterns of loyalty, debt and ethnic affiliation that these businesses entail. Excluding these practices and its performers from conservation discourse also makes them invisible and intangible.

The ethnography of the performance of Langkah's network improves our understanding about the ways by which resource extraction and exchange in Berau are acted out. Moreover, it illustrates the need for a relational approach to conservation outreach that takes into account the mobility and interdependency of social-material networks of maritime resource use and trade, instead of current approaches that fixate people and their maritime practices into place.

Engaging mobile maritime people like the Bajau in conservation planning will remain difficult as long as conservation is based on spatially fixed notions of social-environmental relations, and issues of morality (legality) are approached only from a land- and state-based perspective. The solution to the 'participation problem' will not lie in finding (more) ways to

incorporate Bajau (or other mobile maritime people) into conservation schemes. The shift has to take place in conservation discourse itself.

Marine conservation research needs to start thinking about how conservation can re-invent itself to better relate to the actual mobility and fluidity of maritime social networks.

Answering this question lies beyond the scope of this research. What I have tried to do is provide an empirical grounding to show the relevancy and urgency of such a paradigmatic shift in conservation thinking.

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NOTES:

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