

Entanglements on Orchid Island, Taiwan

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Abstract

Orchid Island, known to its Indigenous residents — the Yami people — as *Pongso no Tao*, is a beautiful tropical island land located off the southeastern tip of Taiwan. How do the Yami inhabit Orchid Island? With an ocean epistemology in mind, this thesis explores the various forces, materials, and peoples that flow to and from the island, entangling themselves within the Yami's lifeworlds. From one month of participant observation, engaging with all forms of island life and walking the entirety of the island road, ethnographic vignettes, anecdotes and colourful images are intertwined to form but a glimpse of the Yami people's story. As the story demonstrates, some Yami are caught in a double bind: knots of tension between conflicting forces entangled through and within the island. There are tensions between members of the community, between humans and non-humans, and between lifeworlds at work. The Yami find various strategies to respond to these double binds. From tension emerges new forms; new ways of being.

Map of Orchid Island



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First Flow: Arriving on Orchid Island

PREFACE

Before my departure for Orchid Island, I waited for the ferry at the Taitung marina in the extreme heat for what seemed like hours. I had just eaten some raw fish at an open-air restaurant just outside of the marina. I was starting to feel nauseous. I was very nervous. Not only was this my first serious fieldwork experience, but I had no idea where I was going. I had never been to Orchid Island before. I was impatient to see where I would spend the next four weeks, but incapable of accelerating the process. I felt powerless.

We were finally directed to board the boat. I was ecstatic. I waited in line with the other frantic tourists who were also eager to visit the mysterious land of the Yami people. I could tell from their matching pink shirts that most tourists aboard were part of an organized tour – I was told that Taiwanese people tend to feel safer traveling to unknown “exotic” destinations in large, guided groups.

The Taiwanese tourists were loud and agitated, which increased my anxiety. They finally calmed down when the ferry left the marina. The water was so rough that I had to close my eyes and try to sleep to avoid seasickness. Most passengers were struggling too. The ferry from Taitung to Orchid Island travels through the Kuroshio, one of the world’s strongest currents. It flows from the Philippines to the North-East and develops “into a fast (0.4–2.0 m/s), thick (< 1000 m), and wide (< 100 km) stream along the east coast of Taiwan” (Kaifu et al. 2020, 3). The Kuroshio is the western arm of the world’s largest system of rotating ocean currents: the North Pacific Gyre. This gyre, formed by a total of five ocean currents, moves in a clockwise circular pattern and within it is located the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Only a handful of people who seemed accustomed to the rough waves of this complex Pacific ecosystem, were outside on the deck enjoying the wild

ocean wind. I wish I could have engaged with them about their boated worlds, but I feared that if I opened my eyes for too long, I'd soon be seeing my lunch again before me.

Although this excursion is, for Taiwanese tourists, an exciting way to visit a new part of their country – in a patriotic way almost – I truly felt like I had left Taiwan. Indeed, getting Taiwanese to travel within their own country is a way for them to imagine their nation. It is a way to unite two different localities, the main island of Formosa and Orchid Island, under one nation. Nonetheless, I knew I was about to experience a completely different world. The hectic 3-hour trip to this far-off locality was enough to distance me from the place I was before. As the boat approached Orchid Island, I imagined a time before the ferry existed. A time when Orchid Island was more isolated, or at least more difficult to access from other geographical points. A time before colonization. A time when Taiwan was inhabited by head-hunters. A time when the Yami referred to the island I had just left as *Ilaod* instead of Taiwan. The embodied act of travelling the rough ocean waves between these two pieces of land gave me a small taste of islandness.

Islands seem to me like mysterious places. They are somewhere between freedom and constraint. On Orchid Island, you feel unrestricted by whatever held you back on the mainland. The same rules don't apply here. People ride their scooters without helmets, and most cars don't have license plates. Time is felt differently. You find yourself living according to the sunrise and the sunset rather than your clock. If you want to leave, you must wait for the ferry to arrive, or catch the next flight. Even though you are still technically within the boundaries of the nation-state we usually call Taiwan, the island feels nothing like it – it has its own identity. The people look

different. The air is fresher. The ocean is brighter. You have arrived to *Pongso no Tao*¹: the island of the Yami² people.

Islands are often romanticized. They have become known as places to go vacationing – evoking images of a warm paradise surrounded by sandy beaches, covered by lush jungle, and occupied by jolly people. However, this imagery imposed on the Yami by outsiders does not reflect the lived reality of islanders. In reality, those dreamy landscapes and their ecosystems are under pressure: be it by tourism, by capitalist development, or by climate change.

In order to grasp the lifeworlds of the Yami islanders, this thesis will pull together different pieces – images, stories, materials, forces, and living beings – which will become more obviously intertwined, like threads forming a meshwork, as the stories develop. What might at first glance seem separate or external from an organism “will, on a closer look, emerge as immanently related to the organism by some wayfaring line that meshes the apparently separate entities entwined through osmotic exchange and mutual sustenance” (Laterza, Forrester and Mususa 2013, 167). These wayfaring paths, or lines of becoming, however, “remain independent, incomplete, and infinite” (Ingersoll 2016, 27). Like a rhizome – or a wave – there is no point of origin and no end. Orchid Island is always in becoming. This project only captures a sliver of life on the island, as it was when I was there. The island has continued to evolve into something new since the minute I left.

¹ *Pongso no Tao* is the name that is given to Orchid Island by the Yami. It means “island of the humans” in the Yami’s language. For the purpose of my thesis I will refer to the island as Orchid Island.

² The Yami are also referred to as the Tao, meaning human in their language. Yami is the term that has been used by the Japanese and Republic of China governments on Taiwan; and is the ethnonym used on the website of the Council of Indigenous Peoples as one of sixteen “tribes in Taiwan.” Islanders have diverging opinions on the name they prefer to be known by. Some prefer to be called Tao since the Japanese gave them the name Yami, thus refusing to use the colonizer’s label. On the other hand, some favour the name Yami because the word “Tao” encapsulates every human on Earth. It is therefore inappropriate, they argue, to use the word narrowly as the name of an ethnic group. For the purpose of this thesis, I will use the name Yami because, during my first interaction on the island, I was told to use the word Yami. A local businesswoman explained, as we were renting a scooter from her shop, that the word Tao is really ambiguous. Hence, she informed us that we should use Yami when referring to the local people.

This project did not unfold as I had intended. First of all, I had planned to use scuba diving as part of my research method; going into the waters to interact with fish and other marine life, hopefully with Yami guides in a process of ethno-ethology (Brunois 2005). In preparation, I began my diving journey in March 2019. After writing my thesis proposal, and getting research approval, I enrolled in a five-week diving class. Every Thursday night over the course of five weeks, I went to a local community pool in Ottawa to learn scuba skills with SSI (Scuba Schools International). The classes were long and dreadful. Sometimes they went past midnight. Going back home after the diving classes in the middle of the wintery night, wet and exhausted was not something I looked forward to. I managed to get through it by telling myself it was for a greater goal: my master's research. I arranged to complete the mandatory ocean dive off the Australian coast before heading off to Taiwan. This is where things went wrong. I had a panic attack under water during my first open water dive and got carbon dioxide poisoning. I was unable to complete the course. This incident not only caused me intense pain for several weeks, but also made me question my entire research project. I left for Taiwan with absolutely no idea what my thesis angle was going to be since I could no longer follow the fish.

Second, I quickly learned that I could not observe simply one aspect of island life. I became increasingly aware during my time on Orchid Island that things do not interact as separate entities. Rather, “[h]umans, things and other forces [...] mesh, sustaining relations of contiguity and resemblance, and are constantly overlapping with each other” (Laterza, Forrester and Mususa 2013, 166) – the same way islanders are all enmeshed within a complex network of social life (everyone on the island knows someone who knows someone). Hence, I had no choice but to study all aspects of the meshwork as they emerged and made themselves noticeable. Third, although I had hoped to learn about Yami fishing practices, after my first week on the island, I realized that

people would quickly change the topic when I tried to discuss anything related to fishing. It was only when I arrived on Orchid Island and actually met the Yami people – the people who have only existed in my mind as fictional characters for the previous year – that I realized that my scuba incident may have been a blessing in disguise. The Yami whom I met were not quite the same as the ones whom I thought I knew about from the books, which meant I could explore their lifeworlds with more creativity.

The Yami, inundated by both tourists and Taiwanese students writing their theses, seem to be suffering from research fatigue. Perhaps because islanders are famously known for their traditional fishing practices as well as the nuclear waste depository located on their island, they are tired of repeating themselves to curious outsiders who always approach them with the same questions. In fact, people are so used to being questioned about their traditional customs that they have developed a habit of describing their traditional practices in the present tense, despite the fact that many of these traditions are no longer part of their daily lives today.³ Similarly, they are so often asked about their opinions on the nuclear issue that they have grown accustomed to repeating the same old arguments, even though they may now feel that it is no longer an important issue to discuss. A local woman said that researchers tend to ask the same questions to the same people – often elders since they presumably guard the bulk of Yami cultural knowledge. Consequently, a lot of research regarding traditional fishing practices has already been done by other anthropologists. Instead of asking questions that had already been answered, I realized that there are many other fascinating elements worth exploring on Orchid Island. All I had to do was to let

³ This way of presenting the Other's culture, as being from a time before colonisation, has been the norm in anthropology. It is referred to as the "ethnographic present." The Yami are doing it to themselves out of habit; they have internalized how anthropologists and outsiders have perceived them over the years. Fabian called the tendency of anthropologists to place their ethnographic subjects "in a Time other than the present" in their writing as the "denial of coevalness" (1983, 31).

the people talk and let them guide me around the island. I often agreed to follow people on their daily adventures, not really knowing what I was getting myself into. They brought me to unfamiliar places and encouraged me to participate in different activities. I often wasn't sure what I was agreeing to due to the language barrier, but I trusted that it could lead to a deeper understanding of life on the island. I followed the people and let the story unfold.

Throughout my time on the island, I asked myself: how do the Yami inhabit Orchid Island? My interest in the meshwork of island life has led me to discover the entangled lines of becoming – by this I mean the dynamic process of wayfaring lines meshing together and creating something new, yet unfinished. As I will illustrate in later chapters, different entities, materials and forces intersect, triggering different reactions and new (im)possibilities. I specifically interested myself in the reconfigurings and reworkings of life. As Tim Ingold puts it, “life is a task”; it is “an ongoing process of renewal” with the potential of generating “manifold forms” (2000, 97-98). How are the living beings experiencing ever-changing realities? How are they living within a world in becoming and what emerges from this life process? The anthropology of becoming, a concept discussed in Biehl and Locke’s *Unfinished* (2017), allowed me to better grasp the malleability of human and nonhuman life: “The anthropology of becoming is about the plastic power of people, worlds, and thought – that is, ‘the power of specifically growing out of one’s self, of making the past and the strange one body with the near and present’” (4). The concept of becoming emphasizes transformation and “the constant reworking of lives and worlds” (10). It attends to the various ways that organisms face the unknown, and reveals the potential that can emerge from the unexpected. As the authors point out, new challenges engender new subjectivities. Realities on the edge of breakdown and collapse lead to the enduring, repairing, and negotiating of new viable

forms of life. This is the case on Orchid Island. This thesis aims to explore the different ways through which the Yami and other island beings (re)negotiate their lives to these changing realities.

INTRODUCTION

Our ferry finally docked at the Kaiyuan harbour, near the town of Yayo. I waited for all the excited tourists to exit the boat before dragging out my heavy luggage. Outside, the sun was blazing hot. The humidity added a heavy weight to my shoulders. There were so many people running around, trying to find their respective rides to their hotels. My professor and I were looking for ours too, but something had happened that morning and our driver did not show up as planned. As the tourists dispersed, we climbed the steep staircase with our heavy luggage to exit the harbour. We found shelter from the sun on the front steps of the police station, which is located in front of the harbour. A friendly black dog greeted us. The word for dog in the Yami's language is *ino*. It derives from the Japanese word for dog, *inu*. This suggests that dogs were introduced to Orchid Island during the Japanese colonisation. Unlike the other Austronesian groups on Taiwan, who have many names to refer to this animal and traditionally maintain a strong hunting partnership with them (Simon 2015), dogs are a recent addition to the Yami's lifeworlds.

The inquisitive black dog had a sign hanging from his neck reading "I don't chase people" in Mandarin Chinese writing. I asked my professor what it meant – I had never seen a dog with such a get-up before. I came to learn that it is not uncommon to see dogs with blocks tied to their necks on Orchid Island. The Yami do this as a way to prevent dogs from chasing the scooters on the road – the sign hits up against his body in an uncomfortable way that stops him from running. Ironically, the people on the scooters cannot read the fine Mandarin print on the wooden block. Who is it for? Knowing that dogs cannot read, the humans who scribbled the writing on the wooden block were being playful with him. This human-dog entanglement gave me a taste of how the Yami relate to animals.



Figure 1 “Black Dog who doesn’t Chase.” Orchid Island dog greets us at the police station near Kaiyuan harbor. (photo by the author)

Our driver did not show up, and the sun was getting hotter. We decided to rent a scooter to drive to the guest house where we would spend the next month. I was skeptical as to whether two humans and two big luggage would fit on a scooter, but the people at the rental shop convinced us that they could make it work. Before giving us the keys, the woman who loaned us the scooter explained that animals are as free as humans on Orchid Island. It is not unusual for goats, pigs, cats and dogs to roam around into the middle of the road. Hence, she said it is the responsibility of drivers to watch out for those animals. Ingold’s concept of the ecology of life immediately came to mind. Here, humanity is not separate from the world; rather, all organisms live in synergy.

My time on Orchid Island allowed me to comprehend the fluidity, interconnectivity, and openness of the world. I found myself waking up with the sunrise rather than by my alarm clock. My daily schedule consisted of going with the flow; following the lines wherever they took me. I did not have any commitments, such as attending class, or going to work. I was completely free

from the hustle and bustle of my home city, free from the commitments of my busy student life, and free like those goats wandering along the island. It was difficult for me to apply Ingold's abstract ideas to my urban life. How can one adopt an ecological conscience when surrounded by concrete and steel, or overwhelmed by the daily routine? It is far too easy to internalize the dichotomy of nature and culture when space seems to be divided as such. On Orchid Island, however, the organic and the non-organic mingle. Sticks and stones merge with plastics and concrete. The human and the non-human live in dynamic synergy. Owls and fish interact closely with the Yami and inform their quotidian. One can "regain a genuine ecology of life" when replacing that dichotomy with "the synergy of organism and environment" (Ingold 2000, 9).

The month that followed involved an embodied exploration of island life. I displaced myself from my own customary habits in order to explore a seemingly alien world. I asked myself: how do the conscious beings (or becomings⁴) inhabiting Orchid Island experience the world in everyday life? How are they advancing their goals – both individual and collective? To answer these questions, I had to dig deeper into Tim Ingold's anthropology and Gregory Bateson's ecological thinking.

THEORY

In order to understand island life, I had to adopt a certain way of looking at the world. My object of analysis itself – life on Orchid Island – is not graspable as an object, but rather as a dynamic process, which is why I had to shift my logic from subject-object type to a more fluid type. I had to move away from the idea that the world is composed of places and objects and start perceiving it as constituted of lines. I had to let go of restrictive research habits, such as having

⁴ Biehl and Locke refer to living organisms as "becomings" in *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming* (2017).

strict sets of questions or being too attached to a specific research subject, and replace them with more open, fluid practices. Moreover, I had to adopt an approach that included non-human beings as I quickly learned of their importance to the Yami and to the island's ecology. Hence, I interested myself in entanglements between organisms in their surroundings. A phenomenological approach allowed me to immerse my senses, follow emerging themes, and experience the island's various lifeworlds. Ingold's concepts of lifeworlds, inspired by Jakob Johann von Uexküll's *Umwelt*, and entanglements have guided my observations and engagement during my time on Orchid Island. Ingold gave me insight on where and how to look for nodes of entanglements. Bateson's notion of the double bind informed my theoretical analysis of the islanders' complex reality.

Ingold: Lifeworlds and Entanglements

During my time on the island, I interested myself with the organisms' *lifeworld*: a world of sensuous, bodily and practical experience; of relative and perspectival truths. Lifeworld is a concept Ingold borrows from Uexküll's *Umwelt*. According to Uexküll, each species has its own *Umwelt*, or surrounding-world, in which it lives subjectively.

Ingold compares a lifeworld to a "bubble of reality" (2011, 80). Each organism floats in its own particular bubble; a world that they actively create and live subjectively. Objects only gain meaning once they enter an organism's *Umwelt* because each creature "fits the world to itself by ascribing functional qualities to the things it encounters (*Ibid.*, 80). For instance, the things that a dog might judge important to its existence differ from the things that its human companion judges important to their livelihood.⁵ For instance, the chair for the human is a surface on which one sits. For the dog, however, the chair is a place that offers a better perspective of the food left on the

⁵ Ingold invites researchers to seek *things* rather than objects, as things are knots; they are "a place where several goings on become entwined" (2010, 4).

table. Such a concept helps us ask questions like: Why do the dogs run after scooters on Orchid Island? What are they attracted to that compels them to run at the human driving the scooter? For the Yami, it is seen as an inconvenience; a real danger, which is why wooden blocks are fastened to dogs' bodies to stop them from running.

Reality is thus lived according to our sensorial disposition. Objects gain their qualities according to the organism's needs and the way through which it acts upon these needs. Action, therefore, is "intimately attuned" to perception (Ingold 2011, 79). The *Umwelt*, then, seeks to understand the ways through which organisms perceive their world and how they act upon it given their respective morphology and sensibilities. It encourages one to imagine the animal's point of view and to "[explore] meaning making beyond the purely human realm" (Schroer 2019, 2). This approach contests the hierarchy of species, which assumes that humans are at the top of the pyramid, and rather sees life as an interconnected web. Uexküll explains that organisms act based on preceptors and effectors: "All that a subject perceives becomes his perceptual world [Merkwelt] and all that he does, his effector world [Wirkwelt]. Perceptual and effector worlds together form a closed unit, the *Umwelt*" (1934/2010, 6). *Merkwelt* means that organisms' perceptual experience of the world is shaped around their respective senses. *Wirkwelt* is the circuit of actions that organisms' bodies are capable of accomplishing.

For Ingold, human beings are inseparable from the world: they exist *in* the world, rather than *out* of the world. In the phenomenological tradition, anthropologists have "[brought] the person [...] back 'down to earth', to restore it to the primary context of its engagement within an environment" (2000, 95). To understand reality, we must explore what it means to live in and among a world that is experienced uniquely by each and every one of us. We must analyse the context in

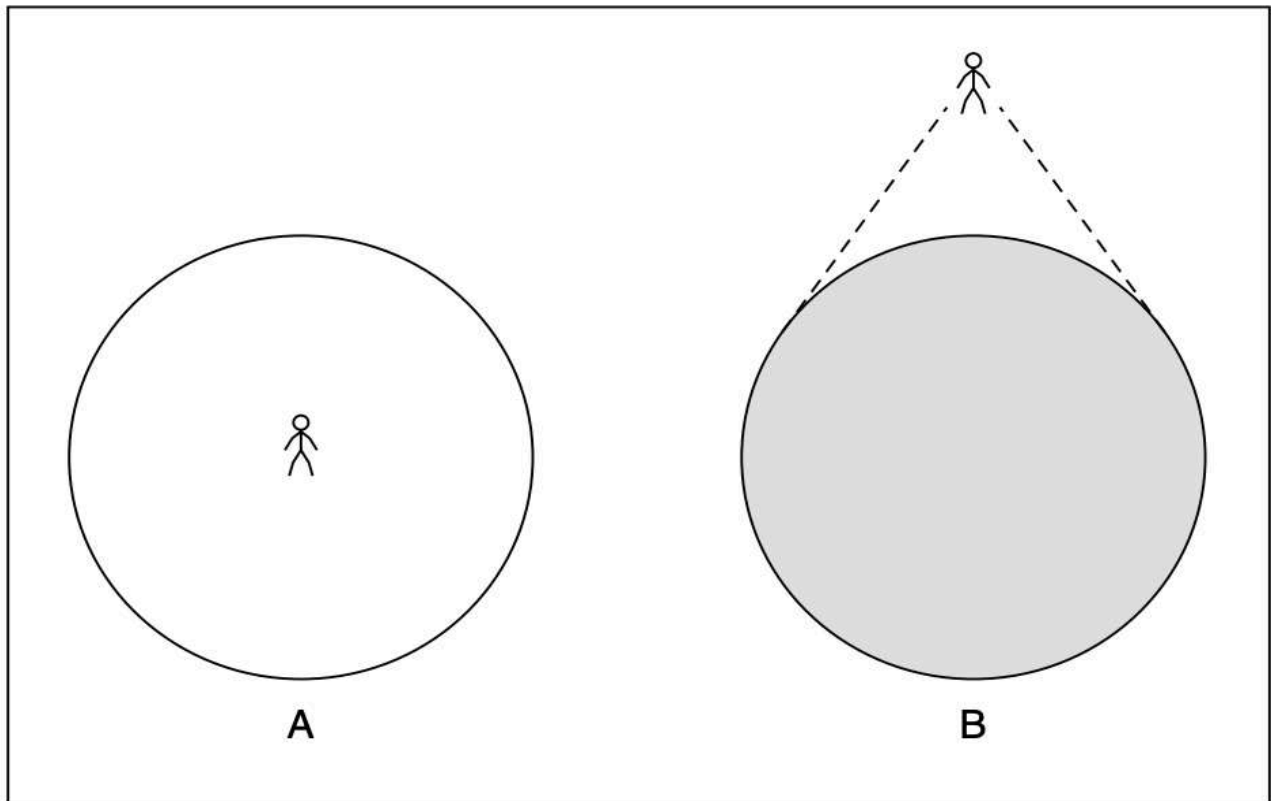


Figure 2 “Inside, Outside.” Ingold’s two views of the environment: (A) represents a lifeworld; (B) a human looking at a globe. (photo from Ingold, Tim. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment*. London: Routledge.)

which a person is situated – the whole; the bigger picture – and the individual experience; the meaningful interpretations. The lifeworld, then, is a continuous feedback loop between the “culturally imagined” and the “naturally real” (9). In short, it is a way of being-in-the-world that is unique to each organism. Ingold, as we see in Figure 2, draws the picture of a being inside a sphere – an “organism-person in an environment or lifeworld” – to contrast with a being outside of the globe looking at what appears “as an object of contemplation, detached from the domain of lived experience” (2000, 153; 210). In image A, unlike in image B, the individual is fully immersed in the world.

Similarly, lifeworld is conceived in Michael Jackson’s existential anthropology as a world of intersubjective relationships (both harmonious and disharmonious). Intersubjectivity shifts our

focus from the stable self to the “subjective experience as we interact with one another” (Jackson 2012, 5). Jackson reminds us that “[l]ifeworlds are open, complex, and never self-contained, and an anthropologist enters a lifeworlds as a participant as well as an observer” (2017, xii). Indeed, our understanding of others’ lifeworlds is contingent on the ways we engage and interact with them, and we cannot do so solely through observation; one must also participate bodily. It is the anthropologist’s task to “engage with others in their worlds,” to imitate – without eclipsing one’s own sense of self – and to deepen personal ties (Jackson 2018, 318). Jackson writes that people “reveal themselves in relation to us, just as we disclose ourselves in the ways we relate to them” (*Ibid.*, 324). Jackson, however, only has human lifeworlds in mind. Inspired by Ingold and Uexküll, I took interest in non-human lifeworlds, as well as the material things that become entangled with the organisms. By going along and following human and non-human paths of becoming, they will reveal themselves to us with time.

Thinking of lifeworlds, instead of “culture” or “society,” allows us to imagine the world as full of threads, or lines, that are dynamic, emergent, and binding. According to Ingold, each “line is tantamount to a way of life” (2016, 82). When enough lines – or ways of life – intertwine, they form a meshwork of intersubjectivity. A line “reflects idiosyncratic desires; it is inevitably entangled with the lifelines of others; it is beset by oedipal and sibling fault lines, complexes, knots, and double binds” (Jackson 2018, 321). On Orchid Island, lifelines of island dwellers – goats, dogs, crabs, fish, and people – are entangled with those of others, forming knots and double binds.

In order to explore this flow intersubjective relationships, I let multiple trajectories tie themselves *within* and *through* me instead of being detached from the world I was supposed to observe. I was interested in the ways through which the Yami and other beings live together and

inhabit their ever-changing world. Hence, instead of being an outsider looking onto a foreign world that would otherwise exist without me, I involved myself, albeit for a short period of time, and threaded my own path through the existing meshwork. I began to see the environment, no longer as a container, but as a “domain of entanglement” where lines become interlaced with one another to form knots (Ingold 2011, 71). Ingold describes an entanglement as “a meshwork of interwoven lines of growth and movement” (2010, 3). For Ian Hodder entanglement “seeks to capture the ways in which humans and things entrap each other [and] the ways in which a continual and exponentially increasing dynamism lies at the heart of the human experience” (2014, 20).

The concept of entanglement allowed me to think about the complexity and heterogeneity of the world because it pushed me to understand the multiple “processes of genesis and growth” rather than the finished forms; the final products (Ingold 2010, 2). A kite that may seem like a simple passive object when lying flat on the table suddenly becomes a kite in motion once taken outdoors and animated by the wind (Ingold 2010). It is the process of interaction between the flyer, the kite and the weathered world that puts the thing in existence. Hence, Ingold invites us to seek the animating forces that enliven materials and beings and give rise to forms. It was my mission to find those forces on Orchid Island.

In order to follow those lines of life, Ingold asserts that we must take interest in fluxes, flows, trajectories, movements, transformations, ruptures, and obstacles. Moreover, we must study the weathering of the world, through walking, weaving, observing, singing, storytelling and writing, while also paying attention to materials, time, mood, sound, and colour. I immersed my senses and reflected on how my body experienced the world. I studied the beings’ and objects’ trajectories as they became interwoven with each other. By following the lines, I discovered various nodes of

entanglements, where a multitude of organisms and materials come into contact in different contexts to create a form.

The mighty waves of the Pacific Ocean wash plastic bottles from China and elsewhere onto the rocky shores of Orchid Island. There, these plastic bottles will encounter similar bottles brought onto the island by Taiwanese tourists to form a littered seashore. The result is a colorful mess of plastic deriving from different parts of the globe. These plastics are then given a new life when reinterpreted and reworked by the organisms on Orchid Island. What I am interested in is the processes that give life to such forms, which in turn, prompt a whole new pathway of becoming – and then give rise to a whole new form. As I will continue to explore in this paper, things follow different trajectories as they are animated by the currents and forces of the world and become entangled with other things as they move along, forming something new from their encounter. It was my task to trace these connections and make them visible.

In *Waves of Knowing* (2016), Ingersoll explores Native Hawai'ian identity by thinking *with* and *through* the ocean – an alternative to land-centric theoretical frameworks. She investigates the role of the ocean in forming the Pacific islanders' lifeworlds. The ocean's elements would have the ability to organize “events and thoughts according to how they move and interact, while emphasizing the importance of knowing one's roots, one's center, and where one is located inside this constant movement” (6). She develops a “seascape epistemology”; a way of knowing the world that emerges from the Pacific people's embodied and emotional literacy of the ocean – both historic and contemporary. She explores this connection by analyzing her own experience as a surfer, but also by investigating stories, art and other oceanic activities. This connection, according to Ingersoll, has been crucial to negotiating Kanaka Maoli existence with the forces of colonialism, militarism, and tourism. Along similar lines, I attempted to enter the lifeworlds of Austronesian

islanders through participation in island life and observation of the wind, the waves, the currents, but also the sun, the earth and the streams. Is there a Yami epistemology? How do the Yami *know* the world?

Thinking through lifeworlds is a good way to begin re-interpreting ethnic identities in “Taiwan,” for which the work of Melissa Brown is also relevant. In her book, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, Brown (2004) discusses the fluidity of Han ethnic identity. While Han identity is often conflated with Chinese identity, she demonstrates that ancestry does not actually equate to ethnic and national identity; “culture and ancestry are *not* what ultimately unite an ethnic group or nation” (2). Rather, she argues, identity is a matter of politics; it is formed through common social, economic and political experience. Along similar lines, Ingold (2000) demonstrates that ancestry, conceived within a Western-centric genealogical model, does not take into account the movements and open-endedness of the world. Hence, he proposes a relational model which is not based on lines of descent but rather on people “continually coming into being [...] in the course of life itself” (2010, 142). In other words, one’s identity does not stem from lineal descent or bloodline but from his or her *experience* of the world; from “the process of life” (*Ibid.*). Yami identity, and by extension epistemology, stems from this process. By inhabiting Orchid Island, a land mass located within the North Pacific Gyre and under Taiwan’s sovereignty, one “incorporates the essence of a locality into his or her own being, even to the extent of substantial identity” (141).

From individual experiences of a shared time and space emerges a collective imaginary, or an imagined community (Anderson 2006). The Yami, for instance, imagine communal bonds with their ancestral cousins across the Luzon strait, even though many of them have never met nor set foot on each other’s islands. Although they do not share close genealogical ties, they are united nonetheless through a shared experience of being ocean peoples who have succumbed to a larger

colonial project. As we will explore in this thesis, the Yami's ocean community is entangled within another nation's imaginary – Taiwan. A key difference between human and non-human lifeworlds is the creation of symbols (Kohn 2013, 66). Only humans create nations and symbols of nations which they incorporate into their lifeworlds in ways that are very real to them.

Finally, by adopting a local consciousness, and by focusing on participatory, perceptual, and practical engagement, I let myself be transported within and through Yami lifeworld. I discovered an Orchid Island way of thinking and being – one that is not only centered on the sea, as in Ingersoll's book, but also on the land and in the sky. As this thesis will illustrate, this way of knowing informs how the island's organisms encounter and respond to entangled forces, such as the presence of radioactive waste, the movements of trash and the circulation of tourists.

Gregory Bateson: The Double Bind

To my surprise, Bateson's research on schizophrenic communication became increasingly relevant to my experience on Orchid Island and consequently, inspired my theoretical framework. As I was conducting fieldwork, I realized that the islanders are caught in double binds; knots of tension between conflicting forces entangled through and within the island. As I will demonstrate through my stories, there are tensions between members of the community, between humans and non-humans, and between lifeworlds at work. On Orchid Island, there are dynamic tensions between conflicting political views, between the organic and the inorganic, between the local and the foreign, and between various ways of living. Organisms have to do this constant back and forth between "what is deemed necessary for the common weal and what every individual requires for his or her personal fulfilment" (Jackson 2017, x). This tension is by no means solely negative; it is in fact also productive. From tension emerges new forms; new ways of being.

Bateson theorizes the double bind in the context of communication between parents and their schizophrenic child (1972, 212-216). The child, according to Bateson, is stigmatized for either accurately or inaccurately distinguishing conflicting messages conveyed to him simultaneously by his parents. The parents, usually the mother, fear intimacy with the child, but at the same time simulate loving behavior. These incongruent messages – the mother who both rejects affection while simultaneously demanding affection – are confusing to the child. If the child interprets that his mother does not love him, he will be reprimanded for coming to this realization. If the child accepts his mother’s love as real, she may become hostile and reject him, resulting in the child’s withdrawal. The child then gets punished for his inhibition. In both situations, the child ends up being punished for his behavior. It is argued that a child who grows up within such a dilemma would begin dissociating verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as divorcing the literal and the figurative, often resulting in nonsequitur responses.

Although Bateson’s theory focuses on schizophrenic communication among parents and children, it can be applied to many other situations. In Bateson’s words, the double bind is “a situation in which no matter what a person does, he ‘can’t win’” (1972, 201). Essentially, the double bind is a dilemma in which individuals are subjected to two contradictory situations, one annihilating the other. This theory states that a successful response to one situation causes the inability to respond to the other. In this case, individuals are prisoners and therefore condemned to always make a failed decision, whatever the response to their dilemma. Bateson said that an individual “caught in the double bind may develop schizophrenic symptoms” (1972, 201). It is important to note that Bateson used this concept to describe individual experience. For the purpose of this thesis, I also use this concept at the community level because it is precisely the meshwork of intersubjective relationships that interests me. As I will illustrate, some people on Orchid Island

are stuck in a double bind. Unlike Bateson's postulate, however, I will demonstrate that the tension within organisms on Orchid Island is far from triggering schizophrenic behaviour. Rather, organisms are always developing ways to negotiate their livelihoods with the tensions they encounter.

Hodder's understanding of the double bind, then, becomes useful. In his analysis of entanglements of humans and things, Hodder understands the double bind as a dialectical struggle between dependence ("rely[ing] on things to achieve goals"; it is enabling) and dependency ("when humans and things cannot manage without each other"; it is constraining) (2014, 20). He argues that "our relations with things are often asymmetrical, leading to entrapments in particular pathways from which it is difficult to escape" (19). This tension between negative and positive forces both "produce and constrain human [and non-human] action and lead [them] into entanglements from which it becomes difficult to become detached" (20).

It is worthwhile to note in my theoretical section the work of anthropologist Jackson Hu (2007). Hu did extensive fieldwork with the Yami people, specifically on the changing meanings of sacred plant and animal species on Orchid Island. Although his theoretical framework is both Marxist and modernist, his analysis of *anito* – malicious evil spirits with the ability to affect life – and the nature of their entanglements will be useful for my research. *Anito* tend to live in the mountains and can become incarnate in animals. After doing extensive ethnographic work among the Yami people, Hu describes *anito* as a set of traditional knowledge that "runs against scientific explanation but is still practiced in a cryptic form in their daily lives" (2007, 42). The Yami are constantly concerned with *anito* and try to pacify them by respecting a set of norms and taboos.

Unlike the gods, who are far away in the Otherland, the evil spirits roam in the same land as the Yami.

In his piece, Hu explains that the way in which the Yami know *anito* has transformed with the introduction of “scientific philosophy and advanced technology” which “manipulate the use and understanding of local biological species so they, in effect, become productive capital” (2007, 20). Inspired by Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism, Hu explores how “traditional” Yami fetishism of species interacts with their “modern” fetishism. Before the introduction of these “modern” ideologies, the Yami would have had “their own practical understandings about the material objects that served as a powerful means to meet the needs of everyday life” (25). Yami social relationships would be ordered and re-ordered through the innate divine significance of these species, from flying fish to scops owls. Now, according to Hu, this fetishism “has been interrupted by the concepts of commodities” (27). The traditional use-values of animals and plants would now be overshadowed by their newly acquired exchange-values. This transformation in value, according to Hu, would result in the alienation of both “human beings and their social relationships” (*Ibid.*).

What is important to retain from Hu’s analysis, is that the Yami’s changing reality also changes the way they know and interact with each other and other beings. Similarly, to Ingersoll’s Kanaka epistemology, Yami epistemology is situated within historic and contemporary interactions between Orchid Islanders and the things, ideas and people transported there by the ocean. Yami epistemology is defined by flows, entanglements and double binds.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Orchid Island is small in size and in population, with 1857 households and approximately 5,000 people inhabiting this 48 square kilometer piece of land (Taitung Township Office, 2019). According to most recent statistics from the Council of Indigenous Peoples (2019), the majority of the island's population is Indigenous, with just a little over 4,000 inhabitants being Yami – there are approximately 4,654 Yami people living in Taiwan altogether (CIP, 2019). These statistics may be slightly skewed since some Yami keep their household registration on the island despite living elsewhere, and some of the people living on the island keep their household registration on Formosa. Among the Yami residing on the island, they are scattered in six different villages, or *ili*: Iraraley, Iranmeylek, Ivarino, Imorod, Iratay, Yayo. Each *ili* is a tight-knit community, like a small nation, or even a world in itself.

Property on Orchid Island can only be owned by local Indigenous people since it is considered Indigenous reserve land – property administered by thirty “mountain townships,” in which the magistrate, by law, must be Indigenous (Simon 2010, 1). According to a local man, the advantage of reserve land is that it stays within the community. Yami people cannot legally sell their land to non-Indigenous Taiwanese. One disadvantage, however, is that the Yami cannot sell their land if or when they decide to move elsewhere. Hence, many keep their permanent address on the island when they leave. This is one of the reasons why population statistics may be inaccurate: although many Yami appear to be living on Orchid Island on the household registry, some may actually be working and living on Formosa. This is noticeable because there are not many young people living on the island. Even though the registry infers that approximately 600 Yami live on the Taiwanese mainland, I noticed that, for the number of households, there are not many teenagers and young adults. As Arrigo noted, “[m]ostly elders and children under their

care—still reside on the island, while the young adults are away working on Taiwan” (Arrigo 2002).

The Yami have had a different colonial experience from the other Indigenous communities on Formosa⁶ and, due to their geographical remoteness and the strong Kuroshio current making travel between islands very dangerous, they have been able to maintain their way of life differently than their Indigenous cousins on the Taiwanese mainland. The Yami also have a different conception of Taiwan than the other Indigenous groups. In fact, the Yami people is the country’s only Indigenous group that is not located on the island of Formosa. Consequently, they are the only Indigenous group to have a name for Taiwan – *Ilaod*. By seeing the island of Formosa across



Figure 3 “Ilaod.” Looking westward from Orchid Island, one can spot the mountainous island of Formosa in the distance and the strong waves of the Kuroshio current. (photo by author)

⁶ Unlike Formosa, which was colonized by the Dutch, Spanish, Koxinga, Manchurian Qing, Japanese and (arguably) the ROC, Orchid Island only came into the picture when the Japanese arrived.

the ocean, the Yami had reason to name that mountainous piece of land “over there.” Separated by a deadly ocean current, initiating contact between Formosa and Orchid Island was deemed a challenging endeavor. Since the current travels from south to north, brave voyageurs would have had to cut across the powerful waves to reach the neighboring island.

For the reasons mentioned above, the Yami have woven Taiwan into their lifeworld differently than the other Indigenous groups located on Formosa. The Yami have their own “island way” of doing things. What is more, they associate themselves less with Taiwan or its Indigenous peoples than they do with their distant cousins: the Ivatan people of Batanes, Philippines. As we will see, both groups share cultural practices, diets, and a language.

When I speak of my research among the Indigenous communities in Taiwan at conferences across Canada, I am always stunned that many academics in my home country are unaware that Taiwan is home to sixteen different Indigenous groups. In March 2020, I presented my research on Orchid Island at a conference in Toronto, giving a brief history of Taiwan’s Indigenous population. As per usual, at the end of my presentation, a few students expressed that they were surprised to learn that there are Indigenous peoples in Taiwan. However, one comment stood out. A Chinese man raised his hand during the question period and explained that the Indigenous peoples I was referring to during my presentation are actually Chinese people who immigrated to Taiwan hundreds of years ago from Fujian province, and consequently, my statements on the sinicisation of Taiwan’s Indigenous groups were false. I was caught by surprise and failed to give an appropriate response to his comment. I later reflected on this remark, and concluded that, just like in Canada, the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan are misrepresented, and sometimes even erased from the history books. In fact, it is worth thinking about what makes the Yami Indigenous and what makes Orchid Island Taiwanese.

Indigeneity is a concept strategically employed by states to distinguish the “natives”⁷ – the people belonging to a specific locality – from “others” (Merlan 2009). In other words, “Indigenous peoples” are attributed this label not by specific characteristics that define them but by things they are not. They are especially distinguished by their relations with the state: “indigeneness, independently of biological or cultural continuity, frequently is the outcome of governmental policies imposed from above and from the outside” (Stavenhagen 1994, 14-15, cited in Muehlebach 2003, 244). By distinguishing Indigenous peoples from non-indigenous others, the state can better manage these minorities. This, according to James C. Scott, is the result of the modern state’s desire for *legibility*. Modern states, according to Scott, have followed a pattern of governance in which they render resources, land and their constituents legible so that they can yield maximum potential. Through the sedentarization of minorities and populations living non-mainstream lives, the state can extend its control over all people living within its borders. In other words, by homogenizing, simplifying, and categorizing, the state can acquire “a detailed ‘map’ of its terrain and its people,” hence rendering them more manageable (Scott 1999, 2). The Yami do not fundamentally consider themselves to be Indigenous. Rather, they are ocean peoples; islanders. They have only recently begun to consider themselves as Indigenous because the Taiwanese state, along with previous colonial regimes, have labelled them as such. This label does not stem from a specific characteristic they share with other Indigenous groups in Taiwan, but from their relationship to the same state.

Various legal categories were imposed on them in various ways by the Japanese, and the Kuomintang (KMT). In the Japanese period, the new rulers first used the labels used by the Qing – *shengfan* (raw savages) and *shoufan* (cooked savages) – and then switched to *takasagazoko*,

⁷ This is not to be confused with “Native Taiwanese.” Here I am referring to the broader sense of the term “Native,” meaning as someone belonging from a place.

which is based on an ancient Japanese word for the island. It bears positive connotations of brave, high mountain warriors. Then, the KMT called them *shandi tongbao* (mountain compatriot), and later classified them further into *shandi shandi tongbao* (mountain compatriot) and *pingdi shandi tongbao* (plains compatriots). According to Simon, the Republic of China made ideological claims “that all of these people ultimately came from China, distinguished only in terms of earlier and later arrivals” (2011, 20). In the 1990’s, political activists based in networks of the Presbyterian Church – long associated with the Taiwanese Indigenous rights movement – created a term equivalent to “Indigenous” in Mandarin (*yuanzhu min*, 原住民, meaning “original inhabitant”) (Simon 2012, 85). In 1994, the term *yuanzhumin* (Indigenous people in singular form) emerged to replace *shandi tongbao* in the Constitution; and since 1997, revised with the term *yuanzhuminzu* (Indigenous peoples in plural form). This latter term was chosen by Indigenous people themselves in the “return our name” social movement and is now the basis of Indigenous rights in Republic of China (Taiwan) law.

Today, there are still two legally recognized categories of Indigenous peoples in Taiwan: the plains Indigenous (*Pingdi Yuanzhuminzu*) and the mountain Indigenous (*Shandi Yuanzhumin*). These two categories are distinguished by land rights and representation in national legislative elections. The Yami people are part of the mountain Indigenous group. This is a legal classification imposed by the state in efforts to make them legible and not necessarily how the Yami imagine themselves. In fact, they consider themselves to be ocean Indigenous – they feel closer to the Ivatan people of Batanes than to the Truku people of the Taroko mountains, for instance, or any other Indigenous groups from mainland Taiwan. The fact that the Yami are the only Indigenous group that has a word for Formosa demonstrates that they have a different experience of Taiwan and may not identify with the same way as the other Indigenous groups on the Formosan mainland.

Nonetheless, although the Yami share but a few characteristics with other Indigenous communities in Taiwan, the state still classifies them within that legible category (CIP 2020).

In order to better understand how the Yami people are conceived by Taiwan, we must also understand what *is* Taiwan. To be clear, Taiwan is many things. First and foremost, it is an island – the island of Formosa. In the 16th century, Portuguese explorers encountered the island of Taiwan and named it “*Ilha Formosa*,” meaning “beautiful island.” In this paper, I use the term Formosa to distinguish the island of Taiwan (mainland) from the other smaller islands in the vicinity, such as Orchid Island and Green Island, because at the time of Portuguese discovery, they were not yet in the picture. Taiwan is not just a beautiful island; however, it is also occupied by the institutions of a state, known as the Republic of China (ROC). These smaller islands in the vicinity are now a part of this state. Finally, Taiwan is also a people; Taiwanese society. It is the emerging “imagined community” (Anderson 2006), which may or may not include Orchid Island, depending on who is doing the imagining.

Taiwan has had a complex history and several migration waves, which can lead to the misrepresentation or misunderstanding of certain ethnic groups. In the 17th century, there was a wave of Hoklo-speaking immigrants from Fujian to Taiwan. Today, they represent 72% of the population (Simon 2010, 727). A second migration wave of Hakka Chinese from Guangdong came in the 18th and 19th centuries, and now represents 13% of Taiwan’s population. These older settlers now identify as “Native Taiwanese,” distinguishing themselves from the later Chinese migrants arriving with Chiang Kai-shek after the Second World War in 1945 (*Ibid.*). All of these peoples with origins in China can be called Han.⁸ The Hoklo and Hakka, or “Native Taiwanese,” should

⁸ It is important to note that the meaning of Han differs between China and Taiwan. According to Brown, in China, Han corresponds to a unified group embodying Confucian civilization, or “the Middle Kingdom that stood between Heaven and the barbarian non-Han” (2004, 7). This unifying narrative allowed the Han to maintain political and

not be conflated with the Austronesian Indigenous peoples that have inhabited the island for over 6,000 years (*Ibid.*). Unfortunately, and to my surprise, these two ethnic groups are still being confused as the man demonstrated during my abovementioned presentation in Toronto.

When the Japanese won the First Sino-Japanese War, the Qing dynasty ceded Taiwan Province to the Japanese in the Treaty of Shimonoseki. Consequently, Japan ruled over Taiwan from 1895 to 1945, contributing to the Taiwanese mainland's economic development. Today, Taiwanese nationalists portray Japanese colonial rule in their national imaginary as "a golden age by highlighting education and infrastructure developments brought by the Japanese, and underplaying their alleged atrocities" (Morais et al. 2010, 280).⁹ The Japanese considered the Yami to be the most primitive group under their jurisdiction and intentionally preserved Orchid Island as an ethnographic laboratory and did not permit Han Taiwanese to settle there (Enn 2015, 96). After 50 years of colonial rule, the Japanese left Taiwan following their defeat in the Second World War. The Republic of China with its KMT party ruler, Chiang Kai-Shek, took over the country. The new government opened up Orchid Island that was closed off to the public by the Japanese, treating it as "an untamed periphery area" (Hu 2007, 21).

This complex history informs us that Orchid Island is different from the other Indigenous communities on Formosa. First, it is different because it did not have the early waves of Hoklo and Hakka settlers. Moreover, the Yami people of Orchid Island were not administered by the same government until after the Japanese arrived in 1895; and, because of Japan's isolationist policy toward the island, they did not have frequent or close contact with the other groups until the ROC

demographic dominance in China. In Taiwan, however, "there is no evidence of unity among the Han" as exemplified by Han intermarriage with Aborigine and feuds among the Han when competing interests are at stake (*Ibid.*).

⁹ Nevertheless, there are still Chinese nationalists in Taiwan who portray the Japanese period as authoritarian and focus instead on war-time atrocities (e.g., Nanking Massacre, comfort women) as part of their Chinese nationalism (Simon 2003, 111-112).

came into power. Indeed, when the Japanese acquired Orchid Island in 1895, it was occupied exclusively by the Yami.

I first had the opportunity to learn more about Taiwan's history and its Indigenous population in 2017, when I visited National Dong Hwa University in Hualien for a field research course as an undergraduate student. In that course, we learned that the ROC classifies Indigenous peoples into 16 officially recognized groups. We also learned that the Indigenous peoples may contest these classifications. As Brown suggests, identity is fluid and much more affected by the process of "being-in-the-world" than we believe it to be: "although group identity is claimed in terms of ancestry and/or culture, it is ultimately held together by common sociopolitical experience" (2004, 11). At the time of my undergraduate fieldwork, I also learned about Taiwanese politics. I learned that Taiwanese too, struggled with questions of identity, meaning that Indigenous peoples in Taiwan are misunderstood nations living within a larger misunderstood nation.

Ever since the ROC settled on Taiwan and some surrounding islands, it has struggled to gain legitimacy on both the national and international stage. For the People's Republic of China, Taiwan's Han ancestry justifies their "one country, two systems" proposals and their eventual reunification. Internationally, Taiwan's ROC ceased to be recognized as the legitimate government of China by the United States in 1979, a label they had maintained in the context of the Cold War, and was expelled from the United Nations in response to an ascending Communist China. Taiwan has had to reinvent a collective imaginary in order to ensure its survival. In order to rebuild a stronger national imagination, a nationalist movement emerged in the 1980's from Taiwan's elite, which focuses attention on the diverse Indigenous groups of Taiwan instead of Chinese ethnicity (Rudolph 2004, 87). The emergence of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 1986 and their

nationalist policies fostered the formation of a Taiwanese national identity based on ethnic diversity to contrast with China's predominantly Han ancestry. Even though Taiwan acknowledges its Chinese heritage, it claims not to be Chinese "on the basis of Aborigine contributions to Taiwanese culture and ancestry" (Brown 2004, 2). Inciting tourism within Taiwan and displaying Indigenous art in public institutions is one way that Taiwan's government has fashioned this imaginary. Brown argues that both China's and Taiwan's nationalist strategies confound ethnic identity with national status. Thus, Taiwan, she argues, does not challenge China's claim to Taiwan because it is also rooted in a Han-centered framework.

Anderson (2006) discusses how such imagined communities foster a sense of belonging. They form a bond between individuals who may never meet each other. The nation is imagined within delineated borders which clearly separates one group from the others outside these lines. Moreover, Anderson states that nations are imagined as sovereign; as independent from other nations. They are believed to have the ability for self-determination, self-organisation and democracy. Through democratization, through opposition to China, and through the building of an "authentically" Taiwanese identity, Taiwan has successfully built an imagined community, detached from Chinese influences, which has allowed Taiwan to claim independence and self-determination.

If Taiwanese people feel misunderstood, and the Indigenous people on the mainland suffer from invisibility, imagine how the Yami must feel! Huang (2011) discusses the link between the small Pacific islands' physical invisibility and their nonexistence in academic writing. When looking eastward from the island of Formosa, all you can see is "the stretch of an open ocean" which shows "few signs of cultural activities" (Huang 2011, 8). Hence, that maritime region east of Taiwan bears no name and little anthropological work has been done there. This region,

however, is a rich ocean world. It is home to three island groups: the Miyako and Yaeyama islands in the north, Green Island and Orchid Island below them, and the Batanes Islands in the south. Although these islands have much in common, they are separated by international borders and belong to three different “modern” nations, namely Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines. Because these three “island groups are located at the margins (literally and figuratively) of their respective countries,” they often remain misunderstood (*Ibid.*, 19). Huang (2017) urges us to think of these regions as interrelated within a larger ecosystem – the Pacific Ocean. She argues that we must take “the Pacific Ocean itself as a distinct space of cultural production, rather than as a mere gap or empty expanse between landmasses” (Huang 2017, 97). Such transpacific literacy allows us to understand that from the ocean, an extranational space bound together by currents, emerges an array of oceanic epistemologies that have been shaped across generations.

The island inhabited by the Yami is known as *Lanyu* by the Taiwanese (meaning quite literally “Orchid Island” in Mandarin) but is called *Pongso no Tao* by its Indigenous residents (meaning “island of the humans” in Yami language). Ironically, I only spotted one wild orchid during my time on the island. I have heard many contradicting stories from locals and tourists as to why the island was named Orchid Island by the Japanese settlers. Some say it was named after a beautiful flower due to the island’s splendor. Others say that there used to be many wild orchids on the island, but they have been harvested to near extinction. Each narrative represents a different lifeworld; a different way of conceiving and understanding the island’s history.

With or without orchids, the island is beautiful. It is lusciously green and mountainous, surrounded by turquoise water crashing into the island’s sharp, rocky shores. The strong Kuroshio current, generating powerful waves, makes finding silence in any place on the island impossible. The stars shine bright in the night sky as there is barely any light pollution taking away from their

luster. Animals roam freely along Orchid Island. It is a peaceful place. It is a mysterious place. Its reputation; however, has led to increased traffic. Each year, more and more tourists flow in and out of Orchid Island to have a taste of its mystery and beauty.

The island's residents gave me the impression that each village is like a country, or a small independent nation. Village identities emerged over time. Each *ili* has its own traditions, its own version of Yami myths and stories, its own norms and taboos, and even its own flag. Villagers have distinctive accents and physical features which can inform others about which *ili* they are from. Each village even has its own representative taro and sweet potato. These distinct communities; however, are less recognized by outsiders. The government divided Lanyu Township into four distinct administrative villages and gave them Mandarin names: Yeyou, Langdao, Hongtou, and Dongqing. Nonetheless, the way the local people live this landscape is quite different – the six different settlements, or *ili*, still exist in the eyes of the Yami people. For the purpose of this thesis, I will refer to the *ili* using their Yami names rather than their Mandarin colonial classifications.

In terms of politics, the Yami are considered by anthropologists to be what Huang Ying-kuei calls a Type A society: a quasi-horde society – a society with no central government (Simon 2012, 43). Traditionally and still today, there is no central authority among the Yami people: “they are the most egalitarian and least stratified of the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan, recognizing no chiefs or religious specialists” (Arrigo 2002). Small, egalitarian societies avoid concentrated power – this form of political organisation greatly influences their lifeworlds. Since each family is autonomous and runs its own state of affairs, there is no need to create permanent political positions in their community. Social order is maintained through myths and taboos established by ancestors and beyond-human entities rather than laws formulated by human leaders.

While the Taiwanese think of Orchid Island as part of their country, the Yami conceive of themselves as distinct. They do not speak of their people and their land as part of Taiwan, at least not culturally and geographically – rather, they think of themselves as being closer to the Ivatan people of the Batanes Islands. It is interesting to note, however, that in 2001, near the beginning of the Chen Shui-Bian presidency (2000-2008), the Yami had the opportunity to become an autonomous region. As people told me during field work, the Council of Indigenous Peoples (established in 1996) tried to introduce the idea of converting Orchid Island into an autonomous region with an autonomous government. According to a local elder, the young people were opposed to this idea because they thought it might mean that they would no longer be a part of Taiwan. Although many locals do not consider themselves Taiwanese culturally, he explained, they still enjoy the benefits of being a part of the country for economic reasons.

As mentioned, the Yami share cultural and linguistic similarities with the Ivatan people of Batanes. They also share “the same ocean currents, climate and ecology” (Huang 2011, 17). The Yami explain that they immigrated to Orchid Island from the northern archipelago of the Philippines over 800 years ago (Lien 2008). This migration from South to North would have been made easier by following the flow of the Kuroshio. In any event, the relationship between Orchid Island and the Batanes has been “proven virtually beyond doubt” (Huang 2011, 18). The Yami people love to talk about their distant cousins 42 nautical miles south. They stress that the Ivatan are closer to them culturally than people of Chinese descent, who had claimed Orchid Island as part of the Qing dynasty’s territory in 1877. Many are proud to have visited the Philippines. The two groups have been separated since the Japanese took control of Orchid Island after the first Sino-Japan War in 1895 (Treaty of Shimonoseki) and turned the island into a living cultural museum. Although the islands in the East Taiwan Sea region have been intersecting and mixing

for generations, colonization and modern legislation of international boundaries has made it increasingly difficult for the two island communities to visit each other by sea. Although travelling to the Batanes from Orchid Island via boat is today a short two-hour trip, the Yami must lengthen their journey because of strict border restrictions. Nautical travelers must comply with these regulations and pass through customs before their arrival into the country. Since there are no major ports in the Batanes or on Orchid Island, if the Yami people wish to go visit the neighboring country, they must take a ferry to Taitung, Taiwan, take a train to Taipei, an MRT ride to the International Airport, board a 2-hour plane ride to Manila, and finally, another hour flight to reach the Batanes. This involves over a day of travelling, when it would only take a few hours by boat (Arrigo 2002). Older locals wistfully reminisce on the good old days when they could visit their cousins by boat. Today, fewer Yami can afford visiting the Batanes due to the added costs and time of travelling by plane.

Although the island was not colonized until later in the 19th century, and opened to the public until the middle of the 20th century, it has modernized rapidly. Hu explains that the resources of Orchid Island's tropical forest are what attracted the KMT government to the Yami's territory and thus led to "dramatic land use changes" since the late 1950's (2007, 23). Hu identifies five projects that have influenced the island's landscape: the building of the road in 1958 which has favored economic development, village relocation and re-housing in 1966, the establishment of military camps and a prison on the island from 1958 to 1979, forest management from 1973 to 1984, and lastly tourist-focused projects since 1967. The introduction of "modern" land development projects has not only transformed the way the island's landscape and seascape are managed but it has also brought "social change to Yami society," as well as to the Yami lifeworld (*Ibid.*, 24).

Another development project initiated by the KMT government which has been a notable breach of human rights in the unlawful construction of a nuclear waste facility. From 1982 to 1996, the Taiwanese government sent its nuclear waste to the island. This radioactive waste was produced by three different nuclear plants on the Taiwanese mainland. The small island was chosen due to its geography; there are no human settlements within a 5 kilometers radius, and the radioactive waste barrels can be easily transported by boat (Marsh et al. 1993). It is argued that this location was also chosen because the “local population was remarkably unlikely to offer strong political opposition [...] they didn't know what nuclear waste was” (*Ibid.*). The Yami, being an Indigenous community living on the periphery – consequently, considered politically and economically weak – and unaware of “the matter and technology of nuclear power and its toxic waste production,” made them less prepared to reject such a project (Enn n.d., 5). During this era of Chiang Kai-shek’s martial law (1949-1987), the Yami suffered from several other injustices and human rights violations: forced assimilation, destruction of traditional houses, environmental exploitation, and discrimination against their ethnic identity to name but a few (*Ibid.*). Like many Indigenous peoples across the globe, the Yami have been victims of state violence – although as we will see, not every Yami sees themselves as such.

Whether the Yami knew of nuclear waste or not, they were tricked into approving the project. In the 1980s, government officials approached the district commissioner of Orchid Island and proposed to build a fish cannery on site (Marsh et al. 1993; Enn n.d.). This project would have created job opportunities and the fishermen could have sold their fish surplus to the company. This would have allowed the Yami people to continue practicing their fishing traditions while simultaneously making profits. Moreover, the canning factory “was promoted as an inalienable source of income that may bring better technologies and increased infrastructure to the island”

(Enn n.d., 5). The commissioner signed the deal based on what he was told. It wasn't until the publication of an article in the Daily News in 1980 that the community realized they had been played: they "were tricked into believing that the new site would be something which would benefit their economy" (Marsh et al. 1993). The Yami used *anito* to refer to nuclear waste as there was no word for radioactivity in the Yami's language (Enn n.d., 6).

In 2016, after years of protest, President Tsai Ing-Wen launched a formal investigation into the company's fraudulent plans. In November 2019, the investigation found that the "community was not notified that the government was planning to establish the facility" (Chung 2019). The government came to an agreement with the island community: the Yami were to be compensated a total of NT\$2.55 billion (US\$83.6 million) in annual installments of NT\$25 million. The election of Tsai Ing-Wen's DPP government appeared to be a beacon of hope for the Yami, along with other Indigenous groups in Taiwan. On August 1, 2016, shortly after her election to office, she offered an apology to the nation's Indigenous peoples for the historical injustices they have suffered. During fieldwork, I had the chance to meet Capen Nganaen on several occasions; the Yami who represented his community at Tsai's apology, where he proudly wore his tribe's traditional blue and white loincloth (Presidential Office Indigenous Historical Justice and Transitional Justice Committee n.d.). In 2016, after accepting the apology, he became a presidential adviser representing the Yami people (Chia-nan 2019). Over the years, Capen Nganaen has been politically active and very vocal about the nuclear waste on the island. He is particularly critical of the government's compensations offered to the Yami in response to the nuclear waste facility: "We will not take a penny of the compensation, as we can catch fish and grow sweet potatoes to feed ourselves" (Capen Nganaen quoted in Chia-nan 2019). During her apology, Tsai Ing-wen made specific reference to the Yami people of Orchid Island, and explicitly

apologized for the fact that a radioactive waste depository was constructed on their territory without their knowledge or approval. However, to this day, no concrete action has been taken to remove the waste material from the island – some 90,000 barrels, each weighing 50 kg, remain buried underground. Many Yami I encountered grew skeptical of the DPP government.

Finally, the Yami are a part of the region's rich and complex history. They have been under the control of the Japanese, then the KMT, and today the Taiwanese. They have been labelled Indigenous, along with 15 other communities on Formosa. This indigenization of the Yami is a consequence of colonial efforts to modernize the land and its people; to render the Yami legible. Colonial governments have made the Yami legible either by studying them within a microcosm; a living cultural museum, or by relocating them to four villages that each have a Mandarin name. They have been made economically legible by transitioning the island from barter to market economy. They are also made legible through standardized education offered by teachers from the mainland. Beyond these concrete policies, however, the Yami have also been made legible in the state's imaginary by reshaping their identity. Nonetheless, the Yami retain their own identity. They imagine themselves as closer to the Ivatan people. As we will discover, they have their own stories, their own politics, their own conception of Taiwan, and their own perspectives on regional history.

METHODOLOGY

During my time on the island, I was reading Biehl and Locke's *Anthropology of Becoming* (2017). It influenced my way of thinking and writing. According to them, it is the anthropologist's task to notice, think, and write about the movements and the lines that make up social worlds. The

anthropologist must pay attention to the creative strategies and skills¹⁰ that individuals develop in order to rework their lives according to new conditions of existence.

The anthropology of becoming has three dimensions (5-7). The first acknowledges the plastic and volatile nature of humans and non-humans. Bodies, power, and things are unstable and always subject to manipulation. The second dimension recognizes that there are no temporal and spatial boundaries. One's becoming is not confined to time and space; "people inhabit multiple temporalities at once" (6). Finally, the anthropology of becoming is attentive to the unknown; it remains open and lets itself be taken by surprise. The anthropology of becoming invites the researcher to disentangle himself from what he knows as true and natural. It is by unraveling himself from the familiar that he can begin to let himself become entangled in another world foreign to him. In short, fieldwork allows the anthropologist to move away from rooted categories and expand his perspectives. I cultivated this approach when I started fieldwork. I immersed myself in the lifeworlds of my subjects; into "the vivid rhythms, dynamics, and pulses of world making" (Schroer 2019, 4).

I spent the month of June 2019 on Orchid Island where I did participant observation. I stayed at a guest house in the village of Iratay, where I had daily contact with the family who owned and managed the business. This allowed me to learn from them as I observed their day-to-day movements. They were my unofficial guides during my time on the island. I asked them many questions about Yami life, traditions, as well as their land and the creatures that dwell in it. They sometimes invited me to join them on family dinners, late night hangouts, and community activities. I really felt like I became a part of the family. Upon my arrival at the guest house on the first day, the owner told me: "You are part of our family for the month that you are here."

¹⁰ Ingold uses the term "skills" to encompass "the capabilities of action and perception of the whole organic being (indissolubly mind and body) situated in a richly structured environment" (5).

Since I was only doing research on Orchid Island for a month, I tried to experience as much as I could in order to get a well-rounded perspective of life on the island. I noticed early on that there was a clear divide between the lifeworlds of the island inhabitants and those of short-term tourists. I interested myself in both worlds as they are actually entangled and inform each other like a feedback loop. I participated in activities attended by Yami people while also making time to participate in activities for tourists. For instance, I attended church every Sunday with the locals, while also participating in guided tours around the island and doing some sightseeing with other tourists. I analyzed how the locals and tourists interrelated with and conceived of each other. I observed how they discussed the island and how they embodied themselves within the landscape. I took note of the similarities and differences between their narratives.

Throughout my journey on the island, I kept a daily journal where I documented with great detail daily events and anecdotes, along with my personal thoughts and feelings. I kept another



Figure 4 “A Beer Can and a Sandal.” Like an old shoe that got lost one day and eroded in the ocean, organisms live unpredictably: drifting, transforming, and finding new meaning. (photo by author)

digital journal in which I took note of the main themes that emerged from my observations and experiences on the island. I also carried a pocket journal with me at all times to jot down spontaneous ideas, images, quotes, poems, and details from the activities I attended. I never left my room without my camera – photography and video-recording techniques can capture what words cannot. In order to answer my research question – how do organisms inhabit Orchid Island? – I first had to deepen my understanding of islandness. I did so by exploring the fields, the ocean, the mountains, the dumps, the shops, the restaurants, and private homes. I let things emerge organically. On slow and uneventful days, I worried that a month of fieldwork would pass, and I would have to leave with no interesting ideas to report – indeed, that is the risk of not planning formal interviews. I did not want to assume that I already knew the important questions. What I did do; however, was follow the lines as they became clearer to me, join the life-giving processes and actively be a part of the goings-on.

Ingold's thoughts on lines and knots have informed my research methodology. Inspired by *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot* (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008), I decided to walk along the 40 kilometers road looping the island on my last day in order to engage my body in the exploring of the island. The authors argue that walking involves physical, cognitive, and social practices. While walking has often been a method for exploring urban life, this embodied practice can be utilized in order to explore any kind of geography. Indeed, during this 12-hour walk, all my senses were in play. My body was attuned to the weathering of the world, thus inspiring me to follow the lines. Echoing Debord's *dérive*. I let myself "be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters" I found (Debord in Andreotti and Costa 1996, 2).

By engaging my whole body in this affective process, I sensitized myself to the rhythms that weave together island life. Since this walk took place on my last day, I had a month's worth

of knowledge to reflect upon while I was moving along. By then, I already knew the island well, yet the pace at which I moved by foot allowed me to notice things I hadn't noticed while travelling by scooter. The ordinary, the "everyday-ness" of life on Orchid Island, suddenly became fascinating. I had the same walking speed and the same height as some of the animals who, too, were wandering along the road. Strangers were intrigued by my passage by foot and approached me with more ease and curiosity. Like a wayfarer, or a *flâneur*, I engaged with whatever interpellated me and paid great "attention to the experiences of tactile, feet-first, engagement with the world" (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008, 3). Along the way, I observed, listened, felt, touched, and smelled. I scanned the landscapes, waded near the shores, and made some friends. I let other beings transform me.

Walking offered me "insights to the multiple splices of time-space narratives" (Yi'En 2013, 2). This adventure helped me connect the dots between stories from the past, happenings of the present, and possibilities for the future. This walk was so insightful that this thesis is composed of ethnographic vignettes entangled within one line of becoming.



Figure 5 “Ethnography on Foot.” Leaving Iratay to begin our walk around the island. Heidi, the guesthouse dog, follows us. (photo by author)

Second Flow: A Walk Along the Island. Ethnography on Foot

Taiwan, or *Ilaod*, has always loomed on the horizons of the Yami. Seeing the mountainous island from afar, and now being able to travel back and forth regularly by boat or by plane, the Yami people have a different experience of Taiwan than the Taiwanese and the other Indigenous groups who live on the mainland. The phenomenological experience of travelling between the two islands has made it very tangible for the Yami that Orchid Island is *not* Taiwan, despite the state's efforts to integrate their remote locality into the national imaginary. In fact, island life is defined by a distinct spatiality and the unique entanglements that arise from this geographical context. I was about to discover that the Yami share a sense of "islandness." Philip Conkling defines islandness as "a metaphysical sensation that derives from the heightened experience that accompanies physical isolation" which sets islanders apart from those on the mainland (2007, 200). On the contrary, I found that Orchid Island is not at all isolated; it is actually quite connected to other places. As I have explained earlier, the Yami share a strong connection to the Batanes. Moreover, they exchange goods, humans, ideas, and capital with Taiwan on a daily basis. Orchid Island is also located within the largest ecosystem on Earth – the North Pacific Gyre – which connects them to other peoples and localities within the Pacific Ocean and beyond. Islandness, then, can be understood as an entanglement between land and sea; between "here" and "there." This constant flow between Orchid Island and other localities, either via water or by air, is what constitutes islandness. It is not a thing but a process.

I got a taste of islandness during my short visit to Orchid Island. Two sets of experiences in particular allowed me to encounter islandness: one before arriving on the island and the other before leaving. One took place on water, while the other happened on land. One took place on a

boat, where my movements were restrained, and the other took place on the open road, allowing for complete freedom of movement.

I first experienced islandness through the act of travelling to the island on the tumultuous ferry ride, but I continued to explore islandness every day I spent on Orchid Island. I noticed that islanders maintain close connections with each other and the land and sea that they share. Indeed, being surrounded by water has a profound effect on islanders and that shared metaphysical sensation and self-consciousness brings them together. American writer George Putz (1984) compares islands to aquaria: islands “are capable of self-maintenance, but like an aquarium, their functional components lack diversity, and are continuously stressed. Compared to a continental community, there are less eco-options or strategies by which an island community can adjust to changes” (Putz 1984, 27). Whether or not it is true that islands have fewer strategies to adjust to change, the following pages will demonstrate the extent to which the islanders I met were creative with regard to negotiating their lives with change.

I interested myself in how this island community adjusted to transformations; to a world in becoming. During fieldwork, I became aware of the Yami’s changing reality and chose to explore the ways through which they adjusted and continue to adjust to their transforming lifeworld. Islanders and tourists alike enjoyed talking about the past; how things *used to be* on Orchid Island. I understood that many lines have traversed and knotted with and through the island, reworking it into the place it is today. Three waves of colonization, the introduction of the market economy, the forces of globalization, and the state’s interest in including Indigenous peoples in democratic politics are among the elements that have contributed to the island’s transformation in a relatively short period of time. From these entanglements emerge tensions: tensions between opinions, wants and needs; tensions between the collective good and emotional impulses. Each person responds to

tensions that may arise according to their lifeworld. The double bind, that tension between two seemingly conflicting messages, brings about a new form; a new way of life that is nonetheless rooted in the past.

By conversing with people, I got to feel just how their individual *and* collective worlds have transformed. The local Yami people enjoyed reminiscing about the past and discussing traditions – sometimes talking about them in the present tense as if they were still practiced in the quotidian. Through their stories, they painted a picture of the island they knew in their youth, allowing me to imagine how island life used to be. The tourists also enjoyed talking about their first time visiting Orchid Island. They reminisced about childhood memories, remarking that the island has changed considerably over the years. They commented on the island’s rapid modernization – from rapid village expansion to a growing economy built around tourism – in parallel with vanishing cultural traditions.

After visiting the Lanyu Cultural Museum in Iratay one afternoon, I realized the extent to which Yami life has changed. As eager anthropologists, my professor and I could not pass up the opportunity to visit the only museum on the island. We arrived at the museum with Heidi (“hei” meaning black and “di” meaning little brother), the guest house dog, following us. He tried to enter the museum as we opened the doors. The women who worked there were terrified of him and chased him out, yelping, with a broom. Although they managed to keep him out, he did not stray far. After we finished our tour of the museum, I noticed that Heidi was waiting outside for us. He cheerfully followed us to visit the traditional Yami underground house on display behind the museum. The house was in perfect condition, making it obvious that it has never been inhabited.

The museum is like a time capsule of traditional Yami life, showcasing an array of objects and customs that I had not witnessed beyond the museum’s four walls. The Lanyu Cultural Museum

showcases fishing tools, ritualistic artifacts, and Yami art. Old black and white photos of Yami men dressed in tin armour – a material they acquired through trade – and women wearing shell necklaces. The items in the museum were dusty. My professor and I were the only visitors that day. I got the impression that most tourists skip over it entirely.



Figure 6 "Heidi Underground." The curious guest house dog wanders in the model house. (photo by author)

Unlike the perception of the island, held by Yami and tourists alike, as a place of vanishing cultural traditions due to its modernizing economy, I found that Yami way of life is still alive – now, however, it is entangled with and through other ways of living. Wooden boats, fishing and farming tools, spiritual artifacts... all of these things are still a part of Yami life. If not in daily practice, they are alive in stories and in ritual ceremonies. They may also look different today. The same objects are now made out of new materials. Wood, rocks, and shells have been replaced by

metals and plastics. Manual tools have been replaced by their motorized counterparts. Despite the dusty things found in the Lanyu Cultural Museum suggesting Yami traditions as dead, upon closer scrutiny, one realizes that the same practices and things portrayed in that time capsule are simply being reinterpreted and reworked to better suit the time.

Anito, for instance, still have a powerful effect within the lifeworlds of some Yami people even though other Yami may think their importance is weakening, or simply ignore them entirely. Many nocturnal animal kinds are still associated with ghosts and demons. Owls, for example, are considered *pahedpahed no anito* (spirit of evil) or *lamlamsoey* (devil's servant) in Yami mythology (Siaman Misiva and Cheng 2015, 42). They are seen as the devil's incarnation and a "symbol of possible disaster" (*Ibid.*, 43). Every family has their own explanation as to why the owl embodies evil. For some, the owl is associated with death because it imitates the mourning sound ("to to") that people make at funerals. Owls are also said to hang out around cemeteries, and since death is feared by the Yami, the owl, being tied to death, becomes an evil creature. Others explain the owls' evilness by the fact that they do not make nests like other bird species, or because, like ghosts, they do not make noise when they fly. For some, owls are frightening because when they are angry, they stick up their ears, resembling the devil's horns. Whatever the reason for the owl's association to *anito*, this animal affects social life. Parents, for instance, have been using the stories about the owls to scare their children from going out at night and causing mischief. Siaman Misiva argues this disciplinary method was a "good way to purify minds," although it has lost its efficiency today (2012, 171). According to him, elements of traditional stories "have disappeared gradually in this era" resulting in the emergence of bad manners, "becoming a serious problem that needs to be considered and reflected upon" (*Ibid.*).

My final day on Orchid Island was my last attempt to deepen my sense of islandness. Since my first day on Orchid Island, I wondered if I could walk around the entire island in one day. I figured it would be a great way to live as many experiences as possible before I returned to my home in Ottawa – a place that now seemed so foreign to me after spending one month on a remote tropical island. I wanted to learn as much as I could about Yami life in the remaining 24 hours; anything I did not already learn during the previous month. To do so, I began to walk. After all, “walking comprises a suite of bodily performances that include observing, monitoring, remembering, listening, touching, crouching and climbing” and it is through these engaged actions that we learn best (Ingold and Vergunst 2008, 5). There is one major road that runs along the shoreline, circling the entirety of the island. This road is approximately 40 kilometers long. That single path travels along many diverse landscapes, six *ili*, two 7-Eleven’s, and countless taro fields. I knew that travelling along this road would immerse me in the essence of life on Orchid Island.

The next chapters follow my walk around the island. Each chapter reminisces on the beings I encountered, the things I saw, and the stories I was told. They are structured around nodes of entanglement; places where lines intersect to form a dense meshwork. The intention of writing this way is to stop at each node of entanglement and reflect on what I learned there during my month of fieldwork. What kind of lines go through these places? What kind of beings inhabit these places and how do they interact with their surrounding world?



Figure 7 “Lanyu Cultural Museum.” Ornamental fish carved out of wood are hung, along with millet, on the ceiling of the museum in Iratay. (photo by author)

I. IRATAY AND IMOWROD: DOG, GOATS AND NUCLEAR WASTE

My professor and I set off on the walk early in the morning before the sun became too hot. I packed a few snacks, some sunscreen, and lots of water. Once again, the guest house dog, Heidi, an old black dog with a clingy but endearing personality, followed us. The town of Iratay is quite small, and is located just a few kilometers away from Imowrod, so we planned to have a big breakfast at our favorite spot, a small café on the side of the road. We went there often for *dan bing* (Taiwanese breakfast crepe), taro and sweet potato pastries, and juice made from pandanus tectorius, a large spiky orange fruit that grows like weeds all across the island. The family who owns that little café were very friendly. They often gave us the treats that they did not sell at the end of the breakfast shift.



Figure 8 “Orange Fruit.” This orange fruit grows on short palm tree-like bushes. You can see them everywhere on the island. (photo by author)

We gobbled up our breakfast. Heidi begged for a few scraps. The sun was only getting warmer and we had to continue our walk. I suddenly felt so small, standing between the tall mountains and the vast ocean. I felt the “contrast between what can be seen at once and what remains, beyond the shore, hidden” (Fowles 1978, 56). The contrast between the hues of green and blue; between land and water; between cars and boats, was overwhelming me. It is indeed that very juxtaposition of land and water that defines islandness.

I walked down the same road that I drove on multiple times a day over the previous month. Yet, I noticed many things that hadn't caught my attention before. My pace was slowed and allowed for my senses to be completely immersed in my surroundings. Walking is a great research method; you are attuned to so much more. Like the goats on the island, I travelled along the landscape, attentive to what surrounded me. When travelling on a scooter or in a car, it is too easy to overlook the things between the point of origin and the destination. By foot, however, I became a part of the weathering world. I could not ignore the elements in between, above, and below. The sounds became so clear that I could trace them back to their source. The smells were so intense that they mixed with my own scent. The wind crashed against my body, affecting my movements and my mood. I let myself become “immersed in the fluxes of the medium, in the incessant movements of the wind and the weather” (Ingold 2008, 1804). Animals were not afraid of me as I did not pose the same threat as does a machine. The goats and the birds tend to flee quickly when a scooter passes them as they attempt to avoid a collision. I suddenly remembered that the owner of the rental shop advised us to drive slowly because there are many animals on the road. She said: “You are free but the goats are also free.” By foot, I did not have to worry about hitting animals on the road. I could get much closer to the non-human without interrupting their activities.

Some kilometers outside of Imowrod, Heidi started to get antsy. He was running after the goats, which was unusual for him – he is a lazy dog, I never saw him run like this before. Animals roam freely on the island, so we let him run without trying to constrain him. It almost appeared as though Heidi was being playful; perhaps trying to get our attention. At first, I thought the goats would be safe. It was too late when we realized Heidi was trying to catch a prey. The goats were too fast for over-excited Heidi. They also had an advantage: the ability to climb on cliffs. But Heidi seemed to be hungry. I had a good laugh, until Heidi suddenly disappeared, and I started to worry.

As I was looking for Heidi in the distance, I spotted the nuclear waste facility. As we approached, we found Heidi in a drainage ditch. I was shocked. Heidi was eating a small goat while another small goat was trying to fend him off. Blood was dripping from the dog’s mouth. Heidi probably realized he couldn’t catch an adult goat, so he preyed on a young one instead.



Figure 9 “Goats on the Road.” Goats roam freely on the island road to forage the island’s goods. (photo by author)

He was panting heavily. His eyes were wide open. He looked up at us, almost as if he were proud of his catch. I immediately ran down into the ditch to try to save the goat even though I knew it was too late. I was trying to pull Heidi away, but he was stronger than me. It felt as though he was in hunting mode. Do dogs get adrenaline rushes? It was bewildering to see Heidi act this way. Over the past month of knowing him, he was always kind and laidback, almost frail at times. Suddenly, he became a strong, dominant creature. I was scared. If he could go from sweet to terrifying, what else could he do? What else could he become? Was I in danger?

We finally separated Heidi from the goat. My professor stopped a passing scooter and asked for a ride back to Iratay in order to get a scooter to bring the rabid dog back home. In the meantime, I waited on a bench, holding Heidi by the collar with all my strength – he frantically wanted to go back to his catch. The only distraction from this unpleasant situation was the nuclear waste facility. An LED sign displaying the message “Low-level Radioactive Waste” was scrolling on repeat. I stared at the sign, almost hypnotized, as I felt guilt for what had just happened. After all, it was my idea to walk around the island, and Heidi followed us. I should have brought food for him. I could still hear the baby goat, just a few meters away, crying over its dying sibling.

Inspired by Uexküll’s *Umwelt*, I wondered how the world must look like through the eyes of the goats and the dogs. Do the goats look like walking pieces of meat to the dogs; ready to be taken when the humans do not feed them sufficiently? Do the goats actively fear the dogs, knowing that attack is a possible outcome? It did not appear so before I witnessed Heidi attack the goat. This incident made me question the organisms’ intersubjective relations which I took for granted before. I suddenly realized that the reason I had not seen these two animals fight in the past was due to the fact that I had not seen them interact at all. The goats tend to inhabit the outskirts of towns while dogs live within human settlements where they can feed on scraps. Goats, on the other hand, feed

on anything from weeds to grain to tree bark. They like to wander throughout the island in order to sample the variety of food it has to offer. Consequently, it is probably very seldom that goats and dogs interact, reducing the opportunities for agonistic behaviour. Whether they interact or not, the goats and dogs, along with all other organisms, act according to their *Merkwelt* (perceptual experience of the world) and *Wirkwelt* (set of bodily capabilities). The goats, sensing that a hungry dog is chasing them, will climb on the rocky shores to make themselves unreachable. The dog on the other hand, responds to the goats' action by chasing after smaller goats who may not be as agile as the adults. For the human walking the road, it may appear funny at first, to see the dog chasing the goats, until it is too late, and the constraints on human bodily abilities prevent intervention. In any event, this interaction demonstrates that there is no objective world through which dogs, goats and humans walk alike; rather there is an entanglement of different lifeworlds.



Figure 10 "Taiwan's Nuclear Waste." Stone gate around the nuclear waste facility with a LED sign informing passersby that it is a "Low-level Radioactive Waste" facility. (photo by author)

Taipower

As I was sitting on the bench for what felt like hours, I thought back to my visit to the nuclear waste storage facility, one of the many tourist attractions on Orchid Island. After long having been a focal point of public protest, the nuclear facility has piqued the curiosity of many Taiwanese visitors, myself included. Some visiting the island for a short holiday will make sure to stop by for a tour of the legendary facility. Indeed, Taipower allows people to visit the nuclear waste storage facility free of charge.¹¹ It is a clever strategy to let people see for themselves that the facility is not dangerous, or at least, that it doesn't seem to be.

I decided to visit the facility on my last week on the island. Upon my arrival on the premises, I was greeted by a Taipower employee in a little booth. He asked for my ID, then asked me to join the Taiwanese tourists who had already arrived. He directed us towards the main building where a young Yami woman welcomed us to the nuclear waste facility – she was the only Yami employee I noticed on site. I quickly realized that it wasn't a tour; rather, it was a carefully tailored, entertaining demonstration. I was escorted, along with the other curious tourists, into a small room with a television. The well-dressed Yami woman pressed on a button and a video started to play on a television screen. The video was, quite obviously to me, a soft power propaganda tool. I did not need to understand Mandarin to grasp what message was being conveyed. The film told the story of two young Taiwanese falling in love on the island. A tourist from the mainland meets a handsome Taipower employee over the course of her holiday. He guides her around the island, exploring local food and culture. The video captures the two actors enjoying different attractions. Only a few minutes were actually dedicated to information about the nuclear waste facility – and this information was sandwiched in between the beginning and the end of the distracting love

¹¹ Taipower is a state-owned power company.

affair. Hence, the information about the radioactive waste was conveyed in a positive tone to match the fluffy romance theme. The film’s narrator quickly explained that 100,000 barrels are stored at this facility, stressing that 10% of that waste comes from medical use. He followed by listing the safety measures taken by Taipower to reduce risk. The narrator also did not fail to mention that no one lives within a 5 kilometers radius of the facility. I couldn’t help but think, what about the animals? So many goats graze near the facility, and one of the most popular diving spots is right in front of the site! The film concluded by demonstrating the many ways Taipower contributes to the local community, however, the Yami were absent from the video. The film ends with the two lovers parting ways as the young woman embarks on a boat to return to Taiwan. The video left me confused. I came in expecting a tour of the facility and an overwhelming number of scientific facts about how it functions. Instead, I watched a cheesy movie that made me feel... good?



Figure 11 “Foraging Goats.” Goats seem to enjoy the grass in front of the nuclear waste facility. The small shelter in the distance with the painting of three Yami women practicing their traditional dance is where I waited with Haiti, holding him with all my strength. (photo by author)

At the end of the visit, the Yami woman escorted us out of the television room and distributed postcards showcasing a beautiful picture of Orchid Island. I thought maybe there would be a real guided tour of the facility after the video, but no. Indeed, it was not so much a tour but an exercise in brainwashing. The whole experience felt very jolly and relaxed, as if it was designed to entice support from the general public. Visitors leave feeling positive about Taipower and their controversial projects, pacifying those who question or criticize the company's legitimacy. In a report published by Taipower in 2007, it is said that over 500,000 people visited the company's different facilities across Taiwan. In response to criticism, Taipower established a "mechanism for the handling of complaints" (Taipower Report 2007, 19). This strategy encourages visits in hopes of educating the public about its operation:

In 2006, a total of 561,871 visits were made to Taipower by visitors from government organizations, civil representatives, schools of various levels, civil groups and foreign guests visited the various Taipower power plants, transformer stations, engineering stations and the Display Hall of 2nd Nuclear Power Station, the Taiwan Electricity Museum and the Lanyu Storage Plant. Visitors were received warmly by the colleagues at Taipower and were given a deeper understanding of the electric power industry in Taiwan. Information about the company was also made more available and transparent to the public. (*Ibid.*, 19)

I question the transparency of the information conveyed to the public. In the statement above, Taipower highlights its efforts in giving "a deeper understanding of the electric power industry in Taiwan" to its guests. However, if the visitors are given the same presentation at other Taipower power plants across the country, I doubt they leave with any real "understanding" of how nuclear power works and how the company operates. The romantic story completely distracted me, as well as the other visitors, from the initial subject matter. We exited the TV room smiling and laughing. The other tourists seemed impressed and proud of the Taiwanese electricity company. We exited the facility and walked around the building to take a few pictures.

The facility looks "modest at first glance" as the main office building is only two stories tall (Arrigo 2002). However, on the ocean-facing side of the building, one can see rows of green metal



Figure 12 “Hazard.” Hazard symbol for radiation displayed at the nuclear storage facility. (photo by author)

boxes demarcated by an orange gate. The metal hatches contain the nuclear waste. Locals who saw its construction claim that “the storage space is excavated to a depth of three stories” (Arrigo 2002). Hazard symbols which reveal potential radiation danger are displayed on the orange fence blocking access to the nuclear waste containers. Unlike other forms of waste, toxicants such as radioactivity are invisible. In fact, its presence is made visible only through the visible symbols displayed by Taipower. I saw a family of pigeons flying over the orange fence that blocks access to the nuclear waste barrels. Unlike humans, animals do not have language so they cannot read the symbols on the panel that delineates the radioactive area. I was quickly reminded of the film’s narrator reassuring spectators that no one lives within a 5 kilometers radius – he obviously did not take into account the non-human beings who live near and around the facility! The pigeons flew away, and I left the facility.

I was still waiting for my professor to come back on a scooter to bring the agitated dog back to the guest house. I was far away from the villages; well, as far away as “far” can be on this small island. It is true that the nuclear waste facility is far away from island settlements. This is probably a reason why the nuclear waste has become unimportant for most Yami. They know it’s potentially dangerous, and all of them are aware that it represents a breach of their human rights, but it is not of interest to the local people, at least not anymore. It could also be because it is not overtly dangerous. Although some claim that the nuclear waste is linked to biological anomalies, such as growing rates and severity of cancers and malformation in newborns, according to a 2018 report on leading causes of death, cancer is the 5th cause of death on the island, the first being car accidents (Ministry of Health and Welfare 2019).

I was surprised to discover that the nuclear waste facility has become trivial to most islanders because prior to fieldwork, I read a lot about the anti-nuclear activist movement when searching Orchid Island on the internet. I learned that there have been many protests held against Taipower over the years, which is why I expected the Yami to be more engaged in conversations regarding the depository. Following the lifting of martial law in 1987, some people began to organize street protests and demonstrations which were “useful or even necessary since they captured media attention and made the case known to the Taiwanese public” (Enn, n.d., 5). In 2002, nearly 2,000 protesters, many Yami, staged a sit-in in front of the storage plant, demanding that Taipower remove its nuclear waste from the island. They were also protesting against the government's failure to keep its promise to remove the containers of nuclear material from their territory by the end of 2002. Another protest was held in 2017, organised by the Orchid Island Youth Movement Alliance. Youths raised flags on the island, asserting that the islanders do not accept President Tsai-Ing Wen’s apology and demand a clear deadline for the removal of the

nuclear waste: “We are not interested in empty promises or in talking things over,” one campaigner said (Tsun-wei 2017). The youth alliance also revealed that the facility is now occupying the land illegally since the land lease expired in 2014 – the township did not allow Taipower to extend the lease since.

I learned from a woman in Iraraley that the movement against nuclear waste on Orchid Island did not emerge from people suffering from illness due to the presence of radioactive waste. The protests against the nuclear storage facility started through the Presbyterian Church (PCT) network. The PCT provides financial support and resources to the Yami, and even helped mobilize Indigenous supporters to take part in the anti-nuclear protests (Enn n.d., 6). In fact, the PCT has played a crucial role in the Indigenous’ rights movement all throughout Taiwan, empowering Indigenous peoples to fight harmful government policies (*Ibid.*). As mentioned above, activists related to the PCT were responsible for creating a term equivalent to “Indigenous” in Mandarin. In parallel with the PCT, the anti-nuclear movement emerged from students learning the dangers of radioactivity on the mainland and returning to Orchid Island to inform their community of the potential risks of the facility. In any event, while some Yami are more engaged on this matter, others are not opposed to the facility, or have grown to accept that it is now a part of the island’s landscape. Some Yami mentioned that they enjoy receiving subsidized electricity along with the other benefits offered by Taipower in exchange for lending their land to the Taiwanese government.¹² Another Yami mentioned that sunscreen causes coral bleaching, so taking tourists snorkelling causes more direct ecological damage than the nuclear waste site.

¹² As stipulated under Article 14 of the Offshore Islands Development Act, each resident receives a compensation of NT\$2000 per year, along with other benefits, such as scholarships, housing, subsidized transportation to the mainland, and free electricity. Taipower also hosts an annual singing competition which “brings together the Tao community across the different villages” (Hsu 2016).

The nuclear waste facility is a node of entanglement in which there are many lines in tension, each pulling in a different direction. Not only is it a point of tension between Taiwan and the Yami, but it is also a point of contention within the community itself. Each islander has his or her own perspective and opinion on the nuclear waste facility depending on his or her lifeworld. People have different interests, different values and ethics. Some Yami, like Capen Nganaen, are against the facility and participate in protests. Others believe that there are more pressing ecological issues to deal with. Some want free electricity, so they may not oppose it. Some benefit from the controversy by drawing the attention of tourists to their shops by putting up anti-nuke signs, so they may be falsely advertising their discontent with the facility. Others, at the township office for instance, may see more direct gains from their support. Thus, the community is not able to reach a collective decision on the matter. This is why I was confused when I learned that many Yami have diverging opinions on the matter; after reading the literature and the news articles, I had the impression that the Yami had collectively decided to fight against the presence of nuclear waste on their territory. That is simply not the lived reality. While some feel neutral, or even uninvested, others are more vocal about the fact that they opposed it.

The Yami find themselves caught in a double bind. While they know that the radioactive barrels are potentially harmful and that the nuclear depository represents a breach of their human rights, they cannot omit the various benefits they gain from its presence. So what are they to do? This position of ambivalence explains the diverging opinions: each individual assesses what they are willing to win and lose, while simultaneously taking into account the collective imperative, to some extent.

I recall Echo, a businesswoman and anti-nuclear activist near Iranmeylek, whose restaurant attracted me because of the anti-nuclear posters displayed prominently on the walls. She explained

that many Yami have become greedy and are easily persuaded by Taipower's benefits. It saddens her that her people, once custodians of the island, now participate in its destruction. Echo continued to reveal the various bad habits in some Yami that have emerged through the island's modernization. She said that before the arrival of plastic and other man-made materials to Orchid Island, the Yami people made their own products – utensils, plates, bags, etc. – out of organic materials. Banana leaves, for instance, are still used to wrap food. Hence, they are accustomed to disposing of their unwanted items outside, in the surrounding landscape, as they would simply decompose. She noticed that her fellow islanders still maintain this habit, treating non-organic items the same way – many do not dispose of their plastic waste in recycle bins or garbage cans. Along the same lines, some islanders have a bad habit of leaving the lights and the air-conditioning on when they are not in their homes. Since electricity is free of charge, many people engage in



Figure 13 “Anti-nuclear Café.” Echo, a timid and humble woman, adorned her shop outside Iranmeylek with anti-nuclear posters, like the one that reads “Nuclear waste get out of Lanyu.” (photo by author)

excessive consumption.¹³ This wasteful energy consumption has real effects. On the night of June 7th, the electricity went out on the entire island. The tourists were startled but the locals were unfazed. The guest house owner assured me not to worry because this is not unusual, especially during tourist season. These blackouts are caused by an over-usage of electricity which puts stress on the power plant.

Like in their politics, the Yami have conflicting values and priorities. While some islanders are very vocal about environmental issues, like the owner of the “anti-nuclear” café, others are more focused on their economic interests, or simply not interested in the debate. These diverging attitudes make reaching a consensus on ecological decisions difficult. Community members who oppose projects financed by and serving those beyond the island are often trumped by other community members who defend the interests of those outside the island.

¹³ In 2011 the average annual electricity consumption per household on Orchid Island was twice the Taiwanese average (Sapa-dpa 2012). In 2002, Taipower provided NT\$6.35 million worth of electricity to the Yami. This amount rose to NT\$24.39 million in 2011 (Kao 2012). In 2012, members of the Control Yuan called for an investigation into the electricity subsidy due to a suspected abuse (*Ibid.*).

II. IVALINO: A STORY ABOUT TRASH

My professor arrived and took Heidi back home. I wondered what kind of chastising he was going to get from the woman who ran the guest house for having killed a goat. Since goats travel through the borders of neighboring villages, goats are marked on the ear so that their owners can distinguish them. I wondered if the owner of the baby goat that Heidi attacked would be upset upon learning what had happened.

I resumed my walk, this time alone. I walked towards Ivalino, the next town on my way. I was getting hungry, just like Heidi, and I already ate all my snacks. I was looking forward to buying lunch at the 7/11 in Iranmeylek, which was still roughly 8 kilometers away. Just before reaching Ivalino, I got caught in pouring rain. I had to stop. I took shelter in a gazebo-style pavilion until the rain ceased. These humble shelters are built all around the island. They are places where people gather, socialize and relax. They shield from both the sun and the rain. Traditionally, each homestead would have one. This is where the Yami eat and drink.

An older Yami woman travelling from the direction of Imowrod by scooter noticed I was stranded and wet. She stopped her ride to give me a yellow disposable poncho and a bottle of water. We (tried) to exchange a few words. We laughed and I thanked her for her generosity. She got back on her scooter and went on her way. I never really knew what she tried to tell me, but it wasn't important. She reminded me once again of the islanders' generosity and openness to help others. Perhaps living on an island obliges compassion and altruism. Perhaps this is islandness.

I laid on my back and closed my eyes to feel the pouring rain – it was really coming down! I could hear every drop hitting the ground like a pin. It was a magical sensation to hear this loud noise all around me and to feel its vibration but not feel a single drop of water on my body. I stayed under that gazebo with my eyes shut for a few minutes, almost meditating. I thought about the rain

flowing through the mountain streams and collecting in the taro fields, nourishing various habitats. I thought about the village dogs who were probably trying to seek shelter under a shop overhang. I thought about the humans on their scooters, suddenly having to halt their drive in the nearest town – there was almost no one on the road since the rain had started pouring. When I was ready to open my eyes, I noticed I was close to *Kasiboan*. It is a building that looks very different from all others on the island. It is made of cement and plastic bottles. The exterior is painted with traditional Yami colors: red, white and black. The roof is covered with a patch of grass, like the Scandinavian houses, almost making the structure blend with the mountain. This place became very special to me over the course of my fieldwork.

Kasiboan

The first week of fieldwork, I discovered through a network of young Taiwanese and local activists that an interesting initiative was taking place on the island – an eco-activist group mobilizing to reduce the waste collecting on the island. It all began with A-Wen, a local shop owner who, appalled by the increasing amount of waste on the island, started the initiative to recycle waste oil and PET bottles. A-Wen, who happens to be the son of Capen Nganaen, purchased and distributed large green bags in each village to collect plastic bottles and metal cans. He then gathered the recycled waste and, with the help of a machine, compressed the bottles into cubes that he could then easily send back to Taiwan by boat. As Echo, the anti-nuclear waste activist, mentioned to me when visiting her café, locals had little knowledge about recycling and seldom were aware of its benefits, which is why they had the habit of throwing away non-organic materials in the fields. A-Wen's campaign helped educate islanders about recycling and reuse, as well as sensitize the community to the potential consequences of accumulated waste on island



Figure 14 “Kasiboan.” This is event center and eco-activist hub is built from recycled PET bottles. (photo by author)

ecology. In order to incentivize community members to participate in his project, he explained that the recycled waste can generate a profit if the Yami sell it to recycling centers on the mainland.

After years of running this initiative alone, he gave up on collecting the green bags from individual households. The people of his community did not seem interested in offering a helping hand. He focused his energy on founding the “Lanyu Environmental Education Association” to attack the problem from a different angle. Instead of doing the work that should be the entire community’s responsibility, he now dedicates his time to educating the public on environmental issues and promoting sustainable development. He travels around Taiwan, as well as other countries, to tell Orchid Island’s story. In 2016, for instance, A-Wen travelled to Hong Kong to take part in a conference organised by MaD Asia, a Hong Kong based non-profit organisation focused on finding innovative solutions to social and ecological challenges. There, he presented

the Yami people's ecological challenges as well as his initiative aimed at responding to those challenges. On a Facebook post summarizing A-Wen's presentation the Lanyu Environmental Education Association writes:

On top of the nuclear waste dump controversy over the past 30 years, the influx of tourism and ever-increasing infrastructure have posed a serious threat to Lanyu's environment and ecosystem. Pollution is further worsened by the provincial government's lack of awareness in education and the absence of a garbage recycling mechanism. Don't Waste Lanyu strives to contribute to the environmental betterment of the island and hopes to set up a recycling system for collecting, categorising, compressing and distributing recyclable waste to Taiwan for further treatment. (文人之島, 環保之道 2016).

Part of his initiative involves a gathering space on the island where he can educate the public on his own land. In 2011, he began the construction of a gathering space for his NGO called *Kasiboan*, meaning "place to gather garbage" in Yami language. The center was constructed using recycled PET bottles, showing others the possibilities of recycling. Although *Kasiboan* was completed in 2016, volunteers informed me that it is always a work in progress. In fact, it looks unfinished; as if there is always something else to add or fix. While I was there, volunteers were building a bathroom on the premises.

Kasiboan is used as a venue for different activities, such as workshops, craft fairs, and fundraisers. The intent of this initiative is to sensitize locals and tourists alike to the consequences linked to increased human traffic and the accumulation of waste on the island. Since the idea of trash itself is relatively new on Orchid Island, this project aims to educate people on the impact of trash, teach sustainable practices, and promote traditional ecological knowledge. The project has even become a tourist attraction. Many students and young activists travel to Orchid Island with the sole purpose of volunteering with the NGO.

In fact, the volunteers at *Kasiboan* encouraged me to participate in an event that they had been planning for weeks before my arrival. They had been organising a fundraiser for the Lanyu Environmental Education Association. Over the course of one week, they hosted a variety of

activities at *Kasiboan*, such as workshops, presentations, sustainable markets and craft shows. One day, a volunteer saw me play the Ukulele in front of the guest house and invited me to perform at the small concert and talent show that was taking place on the last night of the week-long fair. Performing in public is not my forte, but I decided to overcome my stage fright because I did not want to disappoint the volunteers. The concert was planned in conjunction with the arrival of the Dragon Boat arriving on Orchid Island. A crew of 18 people (14 from Hong Kong and four Taiwanese) sailed an 18-meter-long dragon boat from mainland Taiwan to Orchid Island to “raise awareness of conservation and environmental education in Taiwan and abroad” (DeAeth 2019). The crowd at the concert was especially cheerful because, unlike the previous year, the dragon boat successfully arrived at its destination. The strong Kuroshio current between Taiwan and Orchid Island does not make for a smooth ride – the previous year, the dragon boat was capsized by a big wave.

At the event, I noticed there were not many Yami people. The attendees were mainly tourists, as well as the people from the Hong Kong dragon boat team and their peers. On their Facebook page, the Lanyu Environmental Education Association writes: “A-Wen confesses that his action is not recognised by other indigenous people who care more about the current standard of living. A-Wen brought his story to Hong Kong, in the hope of drawing some inspiration as to how to make his villagers better understand the importance of sustainable development” (文人之島, 環保之道 2016). I was told by various community members that the Yami, being an egalitarian society, are wary of these kinds of events because they suspect the organiser to be running for township office, or to be seeking some form of power within the community. Their lack of participation is not necessarily due to the fact that they do not care about the pollution. They are stuck in a double bind between protecting Orchid Island’s ecosystems, which means

accepting some kind of local political leadership, and remaining faithful to their habits of rejecting individuals who hope to emerge as strong leaders. Perhaps some think they can protect the ecosystem without necessarily getting involved with *Kasiboan*, but individual efforts would probably not bring about the same results as collective and organised participation, leading to a new sort of tension. Everyone I met who was involved in sustainable activities on the island was connected to *Kasiboan*. The double bind is not about choices. Rather, it is the simultaneous existence of entanglements, or nodes of entanglement, that pull them in different directions. Individuals may not even be aware of their double binds. They act according to their lifeworlds; to the “ready-at-hand” potentialities “that come into play strategically, opportunistically, and variously as [their] interests shift and [their] situation alters” (Jackson 2018, 324). A-Wen was brought up in a more traditional household. His father is a well-known activist who fights for Indigenous rights at the national level and criticizes the presence of nuclear waste on Orchid Island. These things are not coincidences. Each person’s subjective reality leads to a specific response attuned to this reality. Each of them lives the tension between entangled lines differently. For some, like A-Wen, that tension is tighter and requires more active and careful attention. For others, it is looser and allows for a more flexible response.

According to A-Wen, these kinds of educational events are necessary to raise awareness about the potential threats of increased amounts of waste. Like many other Pacific Islands, Orchid Island is accumulating trash rapidly. Due to its geography and ocean current, Orchid Island intercepts rubbish from different places, leading to piles of non-biodegradable waste collecting on the shores. For instance, I found numerous plastic water bottles from China on the island’s beaches. I also spotted flotsam and jetsam – gear thrown off large commercial fishing vessels, such as fish nets and buoys of all shapes and sizes – that floated their way towards the island. In fact, there are

so many abandoned buoys on Orchid Island that local artists collect them to transform them into art installations or souvenirs. These larger materials are all visible objects, but if one pays close attention, microplastics can be found in the sand; blending in almost naturally with the other sediments. These microplastics drift in the ocean and make their way onto the island's shores, adding to the amount of rubbish.

Things from “There”, Things from “Here”

This issue is not unique to Orchid Island; other islands within the Pacific are also collecting large amounts of waste. As Orchid Island is situated on the periphery of a much larger system – the North Pacific Gyre – it is only one of the many islands that intercept both organic and man-made marine debris from the rotation of ocean currents. Kamilo Beach, a fifteen-hundred-foot shore located on the southeast coast of Hawai'i's Big Island, has become a famous case-study of the accumulation of man-made debris on islands. With 90% of the debris being plastic, this infamous beach has been dubbed “plastic beach.” Kamilo Beach, whose Indigenous name means “the twisting of ocean currents,” is the world's dirtiest beach because it is located near the eastern part of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (Clark 2002, 158). Today, scientists, activists and volunteers flock to this beach to tend to its plastic. But Kamilo Beach is not only known for its plastic graveyard. It is also where geologists found the first “plastiglomerate”: a plastic-rock hybrid. Organic materials now meld with plastic debris, forming a new material. This discovery “marks the materialization of the Anthropocene” (Huang 2017, 96).¹⁴

I think of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch as a node of entanglement. It is the “confluence of currents” from which things from all around the Pacific meet (Huang 2017, 101). There, their

¹⁴ The Anthropocene was popularized in 2000 by Paul J. Crutzen and biologist Eugene F. Stoermer. It signifies a new geological era in which humans have a “significant and lasting impacts on the planet's landscape and atmosphere” (Russo 2014).

stories and particles merge to create a new form. The gyre's motion sucks the floating debris into a large garbage patch where they slowly ground into smaller particles that the fish and zooplankton may feed on. But some debris manage to escape and make their way along to another island's shores, reminding us that plastic can never really be thrown away. The ocean then, is a dynamic and reactive entity. Its currents are constantly "heaving things up and hurling them back" resisting "its role as the passive repository for all that humans think we have "tossed overboard or left behind" (*Ibid.*, 102-103). In a world constituted of flows, one person's garbage eventually becomes another's pollution. The ocean reminds us that matter can never really be discarded and forgotten.

Although Kamilo Beach and Orchid Island are thousands of kilometers apart, they are both entangled within the same ocean system that informs them on Pacific ecology and the powerful forces of the ocean itself (its ability to carry objects, air, animals and people). This "transpacific ecology" (Huang 2017) or "seascape epistemology" (Ingersoll 2016) informs Yami lifeworlds. The Yami are attuned to the ocean's movements. They conduct their daily activities according to the climate created by the warm ocean air. They have learned to live with typhoons. They have also learned to feed themselves according to the movement of the fish in the ocean. Their shores are constantly invaded by foreign materials that could potentially be given a new life: sticks, shells, seeds, and today, colorful man-made debris. Like the other things that make their way to Orchid Island, the garbage that travels along the ocean currents is entangled with their lifeworlds.

A portion of the trash on Orchid Island, however, does not come from fishing boats or other countries. Islanders contribute to the issue by producing their own waste; consuming products and tossing them away when they become unwanted. In September 2014, the first 7-Eleven store on Orchid Island opened, and at the time of my research, a second had joined it, in addition to many locally owned general stores. The introduction of consumerist culture, along with the new cash

economy and – as A-Wen pointed out – the increase in tourism, have led to the multiplication of convenience stores on the island, increasing the distribution and use of packaged goods. After all, the islanders must cater to the tourists’ needs by selling them products that they want during their holiday. The tourists are ready to pay top dollar for Taiwanese comforts and familiar goods on the island, and the Yami deliver. This growing need for packaged goods; however, leads to a growing amount of waste. Increased human traffic on the island has also amplified the need for scooters and cars. Locals mentioned that there are too many cars on the island. Some tourists prefer renting cars instead of scooters, causing even greater congestion on the narrow winding roads of Orchid Island. Since it is costly to return broken cars to Formosa, they sit to decay and rust on the island, along with other rubbish. Other islands in the Pacific have the same problem. In Guam, for instance, hundreds of abandoned vehicles are decaying along the roads. Islands have limited space for disposing of unwanted objects, and over time they accumulate in unexpected places (Bocanegra 2017).



Figure 15 “Lonely Rubber.” Used tires left in a field to decay along with other used items. (photo by author)

Indeed, the combination of these consumption trends, the increase in tourist traffic, and the flow of trash from foreign places via the ocean current, has led to an increased accumulation of waste within a very small space. The human and the non-human alike must live with these new man-made materials. On Orchid Island, organisms have grown to learn how to live with the large quantities of rubbish. Rapid modernization and thorough integration into the global system of human and capital flows have introduced an attractive and convenient lifestyle to Orchid Island, the appeal of which cannot be easily dismissed. Locals enjoy the luxury of packaged goods, motorized vehicles and smartphones, and are therefore compelled to learn how to mitigate the consequences of their consumption. Animals too, have learned to benefit from the rubbish. Humans and non-humans have developed a symbiotic relationship with the waste. They have learned new skills, such as reusing and recycling. Others have learned to accept the waste's ubiquitous presence; while they are not entirely normalizing it, neither are they actively aiming for its elimination. In a few instances, I witnessed the various ways organisms live with trash.

According to Hodder (2014), humans and things co-constitute each other. Although we tend to think of things as inanimate objects – and garbage as *dead* objects – they are in fact “vibrant matter,” given life by energetic forces (Bennett 2010, 3). Things, then, are agents that participate in human events. The marine debris that collect on Orchid Island and the waste that the Yami and tourists produce demonstrate stuff's ability to have real effects on people's lives. Humans depend on things and things depend on us: “[i]f we are to rely on them, we end up responding to them; we are drawn along by them in the direction of greater entanglement with more stuff” (Hodder 2014, 30). To maintain cars from breaking, a garage filled with various tools is required. To collect plastic debris from the shores, green bags must be used. To recycle PET bottles, a compressor machine is needed. This entanglement is a sticky situation, in which humans get caught in a double

bind. Things allow humans to satisfy their needs. They allow humans to travel, socialize, eat, and live. Nevertheless, the things on which we rely on rely on us to fix, maintain, clean up, recycle, eliminate. This tension between dependence and dependency, suggests Hodder, entraps us in “particular pathways from which it is difficult to escape” (2014, 19).

I saw just how sticky this entanglement can be. One night, I came across a hermit crab that taught me how organisms on this island incorporate these human-made materials into their lifeworlds. Betty, a Taiwanese tourist I befriended during my time on the island, invited me to go walk on the beach in the middle of the night to spot sea turtles. She said it was nesting season and that turtles usually lay their eggs on the beach during the night. We set out with flashlights and our cameras eager to see the turtles. It was pitch black and the stones did not make for stable ground



Figure 16 “Not-so-lonely Rubber.” A hermit crab seen on the beach wearing a rubber lid. (photo by author)

to walk on. After walking slowly along the beach for a few minutes with flashlights eliminating the shore, we failed to see any turtles. But something else caught our attention. We spotted a hermit crab slowly making its way along the rocky beach. Something about the crab was unusual though. Its shell was not made out of the typical organic material. Instead, the crab had found a piece of black rubber within which to house itself. Hermit crabs do not develop their own shells; instead, they find shells from other organisms, such as snails or gastropods, to use as their own homes. The hermit crab Betty and I encountered that night had found a rubber object to use instead of a snail's shell. At this moment, I realized that the creature was living in symbiosis with the garbage on the beach, whether it perceived the rubbish as rightfully belonging to its lifeworld or not. This beautifully illustrates the entanglement between the organic and the non-organic – as well as the human and non-human – on Orchid Island.

With over 120,000 tourists visiting Orchid Island each year, creating 1500 tons of waste, organisms have had to find ways to live their lives with these materials (Huang 2018). As is the case with other Pacific Islands, such as Big Island and Guam, garbage seems to collect at a fast pace on Orchid Island because there is limited space for disposal. Even though the Taitung County government allocates the Yami an annual budget to transport trash to Taiwan, this budget is often exhausted within six months. As a result, the local government must do an open call for offers to finish the job. The island community will pick the best offer to have their remaining waste carried to the mainland and properly disposed of. In order to alleviate the issue, locals like A-Wen began encouraging tourists to bring their trash back to the mainland after their holiday. Local activists initiated a public awareness campaign some years ago challenging visitors to carry at least a kilogram of the garbage they produce back with them on their return home. Despite these efforts, the garbage treated every month (approx. 120 tons) has almost doubled since the launch of the new



Figure 17 “Plastic Blocks.” It is estimated that 12.7 million tons of plastic end up in our oceans each year and PET bottles have the fastest growth rate among debris, increasing at 14.7% each year since the 1980s (Kinver, 2019). From what I have seen, Polyethylene

Kenting-Lanyu-Green Island-Taitung ferry route which brings island hoppers from the mainland for a one-day trip (Huang 2018).

The same way organic materials meld with the non-organic to form “plastiglomerates,” islanders find ways to meld with the waste, creating a new form. Island life is flexible; as it becomes entangled with different lines, it forms knots which will loosen and tighten. In other words, as island life becomes entangled with different systems of production and consumption, new entanglements of life emerge. This form-in-becoming is a hybrid of organic and non-organic; of past and present; of Yami and Taiwanese; of supernatural and natural.

With this plastic ability, islanders have found ways to incorporate garbage in their lives, just like the hermit crab incorporated the rubber plug in its lifeworld. I have seen locals repurpose plastic buoys in many different ways, creating art or using them as dish bowls for dog food, for instance. Farmers use plastic bottles to scare *anito* from damaging their crops. In fact, Hu explains that, traditionally, shells of *kazab* (magic shellfish) were used by Yami women to ward off evil spirits (typically manifested in pest damage and weeds) from their taro fields (2007, 33-37). The women would collect empty shells, preferably old and broken, and would strategically place them in their wet fields. If *anito* passed through their fields, they would wonder why these “dead” objects, similar to *anito* themselves, are obstructing its path. Subsequently, the evil spirits would not interest themselves in the farmland and move on, thinking that it is dead. Hence, the crops would remain healthy and intact from *anito*’s harms. Although this practice still persists, the



Figure 18 “Mélange.” Plastics things entangle with organic materials on the island’s shores. (photo by author)

“shells of *kazab* can be replaced by modern manufactured goods” (*Ibid.*, 35). In other words, Yami women now use broken pieces of rubbish, such as plastic bottles, instead of shells. Precisely here, we see the intersection of the “traditional” and “modern” discussed by Hu, as well as the organic and non-organic. Modern manufactured commodities are now being used in traditional rituals, and they are just as effective as the organic objects used in the past. This is not the only instance of Yami “actively using manufactured goods in a new articulation of ‘traditional’ fetishism” (*Ibid.*, 37). We see this, for instance, with the motorized boats replacing traditional wooden boats in the flying fish rituals. Hu explains that the use of motorized boats, which allow fishermen to catch more fish, supports the Yami ideal that a good supply of sacred fish enhances “social standing” (*Ibid.*, 33). As one woman exclaimed: “Things change over time, but the meaning stays the same” (*Ibid.*, 35). This is what I realized after my visit at the Lanyu Cultural museum: things are



Figure 19 “Plastic in the Wind.” Iratay fisherman use single use plastic bags to deter the insects from flying fish. (photo by author)

constantly being reinterpreted and reworked to better suit the time. New commodities, according to Hu, are accepted within the Yami’s lifeworlds once they are made compatible with *anito*, the Otherland and Yami way of life (*Ibid.*, 40). In other words, the Yami find ways to make new commodities support practices of the past.

I was famished. Thankfully, the rain stopped, and I made my way towards Ivalino. I first travelled to Ivalino to visit a traditional Yami home – there are not many underground dwellings left on the island, so locals bring you here if you ask to see them. My professor and I were invited by the founder of *Kasiboan* to visit his parents’ house. It was an honor to be invited to visit Capen



Figure 20 “A Traditional Feast.” Capen Nganaen serves a meal of pork, chicken and taro in his traditional gazebo-styled pavilion. (photo by author)

Nganaen’s dwelling. He and his wife served us a traditional meal of chicken, pork and taro. It was a humble meal; no sauces and no spices were used (or needed) to add flavor. After the meal, he gave us a tour of his guest house, proud of how many people he has housed over the years. Capen Nganaen has the reputation around the island of being a traditionalist. His dwelling in a wooden underground home as is traditionally done adds to his reputation. I have also seen him proudly wear the traditional white and blue loincloth on several occasions – not many Yami still wear these clothing. Beyond his lifestyle, his political interventions are also geared towards protecting Yami traditions and way of life. For instance, he opposes the government’s bribing of the Yami people and criticizes other members of the community for prioritizing profits. I remember him being critical of one of his family members for becoming a greedy capitalist. He must be proud of his son who is now an environmental leader on Orchid Island.



Figure 21 “Traditional Yami Dwelling.” This model house is located at the Lanyu Cultural Museum to demonstrate how homes were traditionally built underground for protection against violent typhoons. (photo by author)

III. IRANMEYLEK: TOURISM AND THE ENTANGLEMENT OF LIFEWORLDS

I finally reached Iranmeylek. My stomach was growling. I was dreaming of eating comfort food from Canada, but I had to satisfy my craving with whatever I could put my hands on in this town. Iranmeylek is popular among tourists for its night market – the only one on the island. Iranmeylek also has a 7-Eleven, which is a favorite among Taiwanese tourists. That probably explains why the two 7-Elevens on the island are conveniently and strategically situated on opposite sides of the island to better provide goods to visitors and locals. Islanders have grown to enjoy the products sold at these convenient stores as they used to be “luxuries” from the mainland.

At the 7-Eleven, you won’t find Yami staples like flying fish. Rather, you will find Taiwanese staples, such as rice, noodles, tea eggs, and tofu. The introduction of rice to Orchid Island is the result of globalization and, to borrow a term from Christine Jourdan, “glocalization transformed [rice] into a local food item” (2010, 264).¹⁵ The grain widely entered the Yami diet during the Green Revolution in the 1960’s. As an attempt to modernize and render the people in the peripheries legible, the KMT promoted modern agricultural technologies, such as chemicals (herbicides and pesticides) and tools (hoes, sickles, reaping hooks), by offering these novel technologies to the Yami at no charge and setting up an “education program to reform local agriculture” on the island (Lin 1996 cited in Hu 2007, 38). The Yami were given rice varieties and learned how to irrigate their fields properly for rice agriculture. Despite this “advanced” techno-science, the new crop did not succeed on the island due to poor growing conditions. Some Yami believe that rice agriculture failed because “it had ignored the Otherland,” unlike taro farming

¹⁵ Jourdan explains glocalization as “the process by which foreign ideologies, practices, and goods are appropriated locally” (2010, 264). This has been the case with rice among the Yami people; they have incorporated rice into their traditional meals, to such an extent that some locals served me flying fish with rice when I asked them for a traditional Yami meal.

which is conceived in such a way that expels *anito* (Hu 2007, 39). Nevertheless, although rice could not be grown on the island, bags of dried rice were sent to the Yami as it remained cheap and versatile. Since then, the Yami have incorporated it into their lifeworlds.

The introduction of rice was not the first time that Yami people adopted new diets. In fact, they had been importing new varieties of root vegetables from the Batanes for centuries prior to the advent of rice. Some of Orchid Island’s softest and sweetest taro and sweet potato plants have been imported from the Batanes. Unlike taro and sweet potato, however, rice is not grown on the island – it must be purchased. Hence, the Yami must rely on the use of money to obtain this “modern” provision. While some neglect their own food traditions to indulge in Taiwanese cuisine, others – often elders – are more skeptical to make the switch. Some people blame this new diet for health issues among the Yami population. A local restaurant owner in Yayo explained that the Yami people used to be healthier. Their diets have changed since the arrival of the Taiwanese, shifting from fish, taro, and yams to fried dishes and processed foods. He noticed an increase in obesity



Figure 22 “Night Market in Iranmeylek.” Here, you can find both Yami and Taiwanese delicacies. (photo by author)

among local people, which is quite different from the slim and muscular bodies for which the Yami people were known.

Jourdan (2010) explores rice's growing presence in the Solomon Islanders' diets following contact with Europeans. Transformations in food ideologies in the Solomon Islands have led rice to displace traditional starch staples, such as cassava, sweet potatoes, yams, and taro. Similarly, on Orchid Island, although root vegetables still remain an important part of the Yami diet, rice and noodles have been thoroughly incorporated into their food repertoire as the Yami become entangled with the Taiwanese lifeworlds. Like in the Solomon Islands, these "modern" starches have been "aligned with the practices and ideologies associated with local food items and people [have] appropriate[d] it" (Jourdan 2010, 265). Rice and noodles are served at every local restaurant as the Yami people have had to cater to Taiwanese visitors' preferences. These dishes are also popular among locals. I often noticed locals order a bowl of noodles over a dish of flying fish and taro because they have adopted Taiwanese tastes and it is now, in some restaurants, more affordable than traditional food, which are marketed to tourists who desire to taste "authentic" Yami flavors.

I also interested myself in "authentic" Yami food and its production process – taro especially because of its abundance and captivating aesthetic. Taro fields run along the foot of the mountains in between the six *ili*. The taro plants grow in flooded fields, similarly to rice. On a sunny day, the sun rays reflect on the water creating a mesmerizing effect. I asked a friend that I made during fieldwork – Tracy, an older Yami woman from Iratay who spent her youth in Taipei working in a movie theatre – if she would be willing to take me to her family's taro land. This, I thought, would be an amazing opportunity to see entanglements and to feel, touch, smell, but also to offer manual help as she lamented that taro picking is arduous labour. She often invited me into her small

dwelling in Iratay, down the street from the guest house where I stayed, for a meal of rice and flying fish that was gifted to her by her brother. I took this opportunity to ask questions relating to her lifeworld; her past in Taipei, her life as a single woman in Iratay, and her daily activities. I learned that Tracy is a hard-working woman; she spends most of her time working on her business, selling various things at the night market in Iranmeylek, and working in the taro field. She often complained during our dinners that her back hurt after a long day of working out in the field – this is when I offered a hand, but she declined every time. I later learned that she was afraid to take me out of fear that I would get bitten by a tick and get sick. Ironically, because of this human-tick entanglement, I did not get to experience human-animal entanglements in the taro fields.

Although I did not have the experience of cultivating taro in the field, I experienced taro on my plate. I tasted the various kinds of taro and sweet potatoes. Peeled and boiled, they are served whole, usually to accompany a side of meat or fish. They are to be eaten by hand, like a piece of bread. They are nature's candy. Their natural sweet taste makes them great ingredients for desserts. A popular dish on the island is taro shaved ice: iced milk topped with small cubes of taro and condensed milk.

During my time on the island, I noticed that farmers were almost always elders. Older women, like Tracy, wake up early to work in their taro and yam fields before the sun gets too hot. Young Yami do not often engage in farm activities because they have either left the island, or for those still present, farming is often seen as backwards. A Yami politician – an official supporter of the KMT for his county – expressed when discussing traditionalists opposing his modern development projects: “We have people who want to go back to wearing loincloth and eating taro and sweet potato.” For this Yami politician, taro and sweet potatoes are markers of the past, while rice is a symbol of modernity. Although for some taro is archaic, others embrace it and tend to it every day.

The community is composed of people who cherish – and even protect – traditions, and people who are eager to adopt elements of other people’s lifeworlds.

I went inside the 7-Eleven to grab a bento box for lunch. I sat near the window to eat, enjoying the beautiful ocean view. The sun was shining bright, drying the rain from earlier. I watched tourists gather around the traditional Yami fishing boats near the shore to snap a few pictures. Those boats involve a great deal of craftsmanship. In order to craft one, large trees are retrieved from the island’s mountains. When venturing the mountains, Yami craftsmen select the trees best suited for boat-making and claim the trees by marking them with their family’s symbol. They monitor them occasionally, until one is large enough to cut down and carved into various pieces that are then assembled together to form a boat. This allows for the preservation of the forest’s



Figure 23 “Sitting Idle.” Traditional handmade Yami fishing boats sitting idle on the shores of Iratay. Every boat is adorned with Yami art. Circles drawn on each side of the boat create the eyes. (photo by author)

ecosystem. Once assembled, the boats are painted with Yami colors: white, red and black. They are adorned with various symbols, namely a circle that represents the “eye of the boat.” Crosses are also painted on these boats, displaying the syncretic nature of the Yami’s lifeworlds. Not many people build these traditional boats anymore as motorized vessels have proven to be more efficient.

These boats have gained some form of iconic meaning for tourists. When I travelled around the island of Formosa prior to my fieldwork on Orchid Island, I noticed that these traditional boats are used by the state to represent the Yami – in some form of Indigenous recognition.¹⁶ It is also a way for Taiwan to include the Yami, and by extension celebrate the



Figure 24 “Boat Tours for Sale.” Traditional boat tours for sale in Dongqin Bay varying from 500 to 400 NT dollars. (photo by author)

¹⁶ Dene political philosopher Glen Coulthard, when discussing neo-colonial power relations, refers to a model of “recognition and accommodation.” According to him, state power is no longer exercised through coercive means, but through politics of symbolic recognition. This model is designed to reduce confrontation and increase inclusiveness by better reconciling Indigenous wants into an ever-more firmly established colonial state structure (Coulthard 2014, 15).

country's multiculturalism, within their national imaginary. At the Taipei airport, for instance, and at the Taitung train station, these large boats are put on display to pay homage to the Yami people. A few Yami entrepreneurs have capitalised on these boats' popularity. Locals offer tours of Dongqing Bay, in Iranmeylek, in traditional fishing boats from 400 to 500NT dollars. A local man explained to me one evening while I was eating at the night market that the people offering these tours are breaking Yami ancestral law. There are strict rules regulating the usage of fishing boats. For instance, women are not supposed to ride on those boats – they are not even allowed to touch them during flying fish season. For the right price, however, women can now explore Dongqing Bay on a traditional fishing boat.

As we have seen with rice entering the Yami palette, and now with traditional boats gaining value in the eyes of the Taiwanese, life on Orchid Island is intersecting with the Taiwanese's lifeworlds. Following the various waves of colonization, now the Yami are experiencing democratic Taiwan's eagerness to include them within the national narrative. This, in turn, shapes how islanders live. The introduction of the market economy and tourism has led the Yami people to open businesses. Capitalist exchange with Taiwan has encouraged them to find creative ways to earn profit, sometimes through means that contradict traditional norms and taboos. Profits have encouraged some locals to turn cultural practices and sacred species into profitable tourist attractions. With tourism becoming such an important element of the island's economy, Yami rules have become more flexible, hence allowing boat tours in the middle of flying fish season. Within this entanglement of lifeworlds, islanders find ways to make their various needs compatible with each other, creating new entanglements.

Du-Du Wu: *Anito* Tourism?

Another good example of tourism trumping custom is avitourism and Orchid Island's famous "owl tours." In the 1970's, Taiwanese biodiversity researcher Lucia Liu Severinghaus conducted research on the island's endemic scops owl after international animal protection groups listed the species as endangered (Taiwan Today 2013). As the bird is nocturnal – it forages for insects and invertebrates at nighttime – she and her team spent many nights in the dark in order to track the ephemeral animal and to understand its mysterious lifeworld. After years of research, she published a documentary titled "Du-Du Wu: The Story of the Lanyu Scops Owl" in 1993 which aired several times on the National Geographic Channel. The film contains footage of the owl, named *Du-Du Wu* among the Yami, in its natural habitat. It also shows Severinghaus capturing the owls to take measurements and to install identification tags on their legs. For the first time, people could witness the bird nest and tend to its babies as they hatch.

Over time, the owl made its claim to fame and lost its inauspicious character (Taiwan Today 2013). At the time of her research, there were only 1,000 scops owls on the island. Now, their population has risen to 5,000 (*Ibid.*). After Orchid Island received international attention from the ornithologist and biologist communities for its endemic owl species, locals realized that there was profit to be made from this special creature. Tourists came to Orchid Island wanting to spot one of these infamous scops owls. Although Yami stories suggest that the owl is to be avoided at all costs because it is "considered something unfortunate" and is associated with *anito*, many local entrepreneurs ignore the owl's reputation, or find ways to make it work within their lifeworlds, in order to offer night tours to track the island's *Du-Du Wu* (Siaman Misiva 2012, 171). The profits to be made with the night tours seem to either overcome the fears disseminated by the traditional

myths around the *Du-Du Wu* or incentivize some Yami to make them compatible with their traditional taboos.

Hu (2007) writes extensively on the correlation between transformations in Yami lifeworld and the scops owl's changing meaning. He noticed that, with the introduction of modern ideas, such as capitalism and conservationism, "traditional" Yami fetishism of such species has been reworked to accommodate "modern" fetishism. According to Hu, the colonization of Orchid Island in the late 1950's introduced scientific philosophy and new technologies, which have instigated an ideological shift in traditional Yami beliefs. He argues that the reason why islanders have adapted so well to this modern capitalist system is due to the fact that the Yami connect to the spiritual world through material species. This specific dynamic between the human world and the spirit world, according to Hu, "provides a promising gap through which commodity fetishism can penetrate, in the form of the capitalist market and conservationist regimes" (2007, 49). In other words, when the Yami saw sacred species gain cash value, they found ways to incorporate this new meaning into their traditional fetishism. Hu explains that the ones who exploited ominous species like the infamous scops owl were viewed as "modernized individuals, with a new identity defined by cash payments" and thus brave enough to capture *anito*-embodiment (*Ibid.*, 51).

Although Hu's analysis is too dichotomic, contrasting "traditional" with "modern" in a positivist fashion, his observations on the ways through which the Yami accommodate foreign things and ideas into their lifeworlds are extremely relevant. What I have attempted to demonstrate so far is that meanings intersect and mesh to create something new. Rather than thinking of Yami way of life as a linear evolution from traditional to modern, we should think of it as entanglements; of different lifeworlds interacting with each other and being negotiated within each and every Yami. The Yami are reinterpreting and reworking *anito*'s meaning as they become entangled with

different lifeworlds. For instance, conservation projects such as Severinghaus's research on Orchid Island contribute to the Yami's changing literacy of the scops owl and by extension the taboos related to *anito*. Giving an owl tour in the middle of the night, may be interpreted by some as a sign of bravery, since the guide is confronting the evil spirits. For some, *anito*'s have lost their inauspicious character and consequently do not have the same effect on people's lives as they once did. *Anito*, for instance, do not scare children from going out at night, nor do they scare people from going into the mountains. Hu argues that "local plants and animals are a busy intersection dominated by modern techno-science, instead of the premodern biota in which religious incarnation and supernatural power figure large," however, I have witnessed the owl maintain its "supernatural" meaning, in one way or another (2007, 2). It is too easy – and essentializing – to conclude that species which were once sought for their spiritual importance are suddenly only sought for their market value. On the contrary, some Yami still fear the owl. Others still discuss its evil character even though they may not let themselves be affected by it, perhaps because they have internalized the ethnographer's "denial of coevalness" (Fabian 1983, 31). In any event, *anito*'s embodiment is still alive; whether in practice, in thoughts, in stories, in stores, on information maps, or on the tourists' cameras. Everyone conceives of *anito* differently and negotiates them into their lives depending on their lifeworld.

Nonetheless, the Yami must make an active decision every day whether or not they want to risk upsetting *anito*. Tour guides are aware that they may be breaking Yami ancestral taboos, but they are also aware that they must earn a healthy income if they want to live well according to Taiwanese standards. They are caught between the demands of their ancestors and the expectations of Taiwanese life. Some manage to find symmetry better than others. Their position within the double bind prompts a negotiation; a negotiation between Yami and Taiwanese way of life. As I

have attempted to demonstrate so far by discussing the implications of the nuclear waste and the garbage, from the double bind – conflicting forces or trajectories meeting and being negotiated – emerges new ways of living and new entanglements. Every person interprets this tension respectively, based on his or her subjective experience of the world. They act according to their perceptors and effectors; their sensorial disposition. Their response, then, emerges from their needs and the way through which they choose to act upon these needs. This dynamic process, however, means that people have diverging, and sometimes conflicting, opinions. I got a sense of this throughout my time on the island. Some community members can more easily incorporate elements of Taiwanese lifeworld into theirs. They embrace the potential for the owl and the traditional fishing boats to mean something else to the tourists; they create a business that is built around it so that they can afford to live a good life on the island and have the option to send their children to post-secondary school. Others are more skeptical. Some criticize greedy community members who go against Yami norms and taboos to make a quick buck. The tension between conflicting lifeworlds tightens.

A local artist and entrepreneur near Iratay expressed his concerns about cultural loss. According to him, traditional practices and beliefs are difficult to transmit to the next generation. He explained that Yami knowledge, such as fishing and farming practices, traditions, customs, norms and taboos, is passed down to children by their parents. Fathers educate their sons while mothers educate their daughters. This knowledge is carefully guarded and often not shared outside of the family – this explains why every village has developed its own particular way of living. This cultural knowledge, according to him, is being lost because some parents no longer share this knowledge with their children. As people are busy with tourists or with other jobs, it leaves very

little time to pass down Yami knowledge to the next generation. In fact, “not having enough time” to accomplish things was a phrase I heard often on the island.

In contrast, my neighbour during my stay on Orchid Island – a former policeman who worked on the Taiwanese mainland and came back to the island after his retirement to open a guest house – seemed to be less worried of Yami culture and traditional knowledge vanishing. One day, he said something that stuck with me throughout my time on the island: “I’m just an ordinary person. All I care about is money.” He said this after my professor informed him of meeting with a well-known Yami knowledge keeper, Siaman Misiva. Siaman Misiva is the writer of two books: one about birds on Orchid Island (2012), and the second about animals in Yami culture and their meanings (2015). Returning from a nature walk with Siaman Missivan, my professor was excited to tell the former police officer about the birds he saw when he ran into him his way back home. His answer reveals a divide between Yami “traditionalists” and those who actively participate in the modern capitalist economy and Taiwanese lifestyle. I suppose anthropologists often ask to see the local knowledge keepers instead of taking an interest in “ordinary” people, leading to romanticization and misrepresentation. Nevertheless, this illustrates that, although Orchid Island is often romanticized and imagined as a place where ancient traditions are practiced and well-kept, many islanders are actually in favour of trading old ways of living for modernity and doing things the way mainlanders do. And to live this way, one must capitalize on the industries that are available to them.

Because of this romanticization, I arrived on the field with a preconceived image of life on Orchid Island. I pictured the Yami fishing in those colorful wooden boats as it is often discussed and illustrated in the literature and documentaries. Before fieldwork, I read all that I could about the Yami people, trying to get a better sense of their lifeworlds. Almost every academic piece I

read on the Yami people focused on the infamous flying fish festival, other fishing practices and *anito*. Consequently, I built my entire research proposal on this misleading, and almost essentialist, portrayal of the Yami. I had the idea that I would focus on the Yami's relationship with flying fish in the Anthropocene. I quickly learned that their reality is much more nuanced; it is constantly interacting with other realities and reworking itself.

Ironically, one of the first things that surprised me about Yami life is that many people were not enjoying the water as much as I expected them to – the literature portrays the Yami almost exclusively as an ocean people. In order to better understand the Yami's lifeworlds, I asked several locals “why aren't you in the water on this hot summer day?” I received different answers. Many replied that it was too dangerous. Some explained that they do not have time to play in the water as they have to focus on their businesses or cater to tourists. Others, like the guest house owner, explained that, although the ocean is central to Yami culture, they learn to be land-centric in schools. The Taiwanese government sends teachers from the mainland to teach on Orchid Island. Hence, Yami children learn Taiwanese values at school, leaving parents with the burden of teaching traditional Yami values and practices to their kids – many of them are already busy with their family business. This, according to him, confuses Yami youth and causes them to become disconnected with their ancestors' culture. The guest house owner explained that children learn from their Taiwanese teachers to fear water; they never do class field trips to the ocean, nor are they encouraged to partake in water activities. Taiwanese people, according to him, are very focused on land and all its benefits rather than the ocean. So, the youth are perplexed when they learn from their parents that water is central to Yami existence. They are stuck in a double bind; being taught two conflicting lifeworlds who are in contradiction with each other. Some Yami youths may prefer to engage with Taiwanese lifeworld – like the teenage girl from the guest house

who preferred eating noodles and play on her smartphone instead of eating flying fish and helping her mother clean taro – while others may choose to associate with their ancestors' way of life. Whether it is the former or the latter, it is always a complex negotiation between the two lifeworlds.

Finally, even though the Yami are less ocean-oriented and more business-oriented than they are presented in the literature, the ocean still remains a focal point of their existence – it is no surprise since their homeland is surrounded by water and their lives follow the rhythm of the Kuroshio. The ocean's importance in Yami lifeworld is particularly expressed through the flying fish rituals. In fact, the most important festival of the year celebrates flying fish season, from March to June. After eating the flying fish on several occasions, I wondered why, out of all the fish in the ocean, flying fish is such an important species for the Yami; the fish is quite boney and has very little flesh to eat. Tracy, who invited me to her home for a flying fish feast one warm evening, explained that during this festive season, the fish is so abundant that it gives itself to the fishermen – sometimes it even “flies” inside boats and fishing nets. Although flying fish do not really have the ability to fly, they can propel themselves out of the water at speeds reaching 56 km/h and glide over the surface at distances of 200 meters which certainly gives the impression that they are flying. For the Yami, the act of the fish giving itself is a sign that god is happy and is rewarding his people for their hard work. According to Hu, “flying fish is a symbolic gift from the spirit world to the living world” and a year of good flying fish and taro harvest represents “healthy interactions between the secular world and the Otherland” (2007, 27-28). Hence, the Yami people see the flying fish as a sacred object with the power to control human action.

In Yami lifeworld, the act of fishing is not just about the catch. Fishing is embedded in a complex cosmological system. This was evident when people described to me the many ritualistic details involved in the harvesting of the fish, from its catch to the dinner table. For the Yami,

fishing is a way to connect with the Otherland, or the spiritual world, as the catch is a gift from the divine. Nevertheless, flying fish is not only food from the gods. The ritualized performances involved in the harvest of flying fish not only link the sacred and the secular, but also the social and the natural.

Fishing is indeed a social act. Firstly, it mobilizes social identity because it engages the entire community to work together to yield a good harvest. Being hyper-aware of the supernatural world, the more traditionally-minded Yami concern themselves with *anito*, the evil spirits. Hence, a good harvest is reliant on the good behavior of all community members. This encourages people to obey taboos and norms, thus fostering “group cohesion and identity” (Hu 2007, 28). Moreover, fishing mediates social relationships because flying fish have the power to “heal illness and correct problems” (*Ibid.*, 28). During my time on the island, I was often gifted flying fish with taro or a bowl of rice. Fish gifting is a way for the local people to consolidate social relations; to forge



Figure 25 “The Man and the Sea.” Fisherman at work on a stormy afternoon. Every fishermen have their preferred technique and time of the day to fish.

friendships by sharing stories around a delicious meal. Nonetheless, the flying fish harvest goes beyond the social as it represents a way for the Yami to engage with the physical, natural world. The very act of fishing requires an extensive understanding of boat making, the currents, the movements of the fish, and the weather.

Preparing flying fish is labour intensive. Men are tasked with the entire process. Once caught, they remove the scales of the fish while still out in the ocean because it is too messy to do it at home. Upon their return to the island, they must clean the fish, soak it in water and hang it up to dry in the sun. This process is repeated twice. Then, salt is added to the fish and it is hung to dry in the sun for 7 to 10 days. Some Yami smoke it to give it a distinct taste. During this season, fishermen should not be fishing other types of fish. When fishermen start fishing other fish, it signals to others that flying fish season is over. This might offend fishermen that have not caught enough fish for the season. Consequently, one must ask permission from other fishermen to start fishing other fish and collective consensus must be made to determine the end of the flying fish season. This demonstrates the entanglements of Yami-fish lifeworlds.

Each *ili* has its own fishing territory. Fishermen in each village are not supposed to fish outside their respective territory. It is a conservation measure; it assures that there is enough fish for everyone. However, I learned from the guest house owner that only older people respect this rule, and more people are fishing outside of their permitted territory. She expressed with frustration that this violation of ancestral law will lead to fish depletion. The fishermen have already noticed that the fish are disappearing, and the women's fish (the best quality fish), are disappearing at a faster rate. Both the loosening of these traditional Yami fishing laws – as Yami lifeworld interacts with other lifeworlds – combined with changes in the ocean ecosystem at the planetary level, bring about such insecurities (Enn n.d., 7; Tang and Tang 2009). A local fisherman mentioned that due

to climate change, the current flows in less predictable directions every year. Since the flying fish migrate with the current, flying fish supplies are less constant than they once were. At the time of my fieldwork, there were fewer flying fish according to local fishermen. Subsequently, fishermen had to fish over a longer period of time in order to catch as many fish as they did previous years. According to Lai (2005), the number of flying fish available to islanders has dropped more than 50% from less than a decade ago. Alarmed, the islanders demanded that the government restrict offshore fishing to Yami fishers (Tang and Tang 2009, 5). By constricting a zone of five nautical miles from the island's shore to the Yami, "flying fish yield increased slightly from eight tons to 26 tons in 2007, while the nationwide yield continued dropping to a historical low of 71 tons in 2007" (*Ibid.*, 5).

This presents yet another dilemma. The Yami are seeing their ocean ecosystem change for reasons both within and beyond their control. Species extinction is often understood as "the death of the last of a kind" while it should be understood as the death of "the entangled relations that *are* a particular form of life" (Van Dooren 2014, 58). The disappearance of one single lifeform affects many other forms of life which are entangled through it. The depletion of flying fish directly disrupts an extensive body of rituals that allow the Yami to interact with the Otherland. Without this fish, their relations to god would alter. The depletion of flying fish supplies will transform the Yami's diet too. "Being Yami" takes on another meaning as time goes on.

IV. IRARALEY AND YAYO: IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

I finished my lunch at the 7-Eleven and continued my walk towards the northern part of the island. It was already the afternoon and I was barely halfway. The sun sets early on Orchid Island, so I began to accelerate my pace. The northern part of the island is the longest stretch without settlements. Once you pass Iranmeylek, it's pretty much only rocky shores and mountain cliffs that you'll find. There's only one restaurant and it's Echo's café. I recall her owner telling us she enjoyed the peacefulness of this location; it can get very hectic near the towns.

I enjoyed this stretch quite a bit. There are many interesting rock formations, like the *Ji-Panatosan*, the *Ji-Mina Manok*, and the *Ji-Mavonot*. I waded on the rocky shores to snap a few pictures of the plastic rubbish accumulating on the oceanfront. Plastic waste seems to blend in with the mangroves and within the rock formation, so it's not always noticeable from the road. I was surprised to see so much rubbish. Plastic bottles, old toys, fishing gear, broken sandals, and straws littered the shore with their colorful shapes and textures. Each piece told a story. Some objects were old and eroded by the rough sea water. Some seemed like they were only recently disposed of. I played a game: I tried to imagine the origin story of each piece of rubbish I encountered. Where did it come from? What was it used for in its previous life? What will it become?

I arrived in the next town, Iraraley, looking beat. Local fishermen spotted me walking in the distance and invited me to drink cold beer and partake in a feast of fresh oysters and crab once I reached their part of town. They were confused as to why I was travelling by foot. They asked me if my scooter broke down or if I was left stranded by a mate. I told them that I intentionally decided to walk the entire island by foot, and that I began my journey at 6 am from Iratay. They thought it was an amusing yet ridiculous idea to walk around the island, informing me that scooters have become too convenient, and that locals no longer need to walk to get to places. They were

delighted, however, to meet a foreigner that appreciated their island enough to dedicate an entire day to exploring it by foot. Before I left, they must have felt pity for me because they offered me a ride back to Iratay. I thanked them for their generosity but turned down their offer.

After I filled up on beer and raw seafood, I went on my way again. The sun was about to set. I was a bit tipsy. My feet and knees were sore. I passed the infamous caves located just outside of Iraraley. One of the three caves, called *Ji-karahem*, is adorned with red and white crosses. The cave is used as a sacred space for religious practice. There are benches outside the cave, giving the impression that masses are conducted under the grotto. This cave is believed to be the entrance to the Otherland. Hu defines the Otherland as “the source of an abstract power that controls the reproductive capacity of humans and natural beings” (2007, 25). Religion on the island is a syncretism of Yami traditional beliefs and Christianity. I attended church every Sunday in Iratay



Figure 26 “Plastic Graveyard.” Plastic trash and broken things take on a new life on the shores of Orchid Island. (photo by author)

during fieldwork in order to meet people from the village. Although I could not understand the sermon – it was being given in both Mandarin and Yami language – I paid great attention to the surroundings: aesthetics, movements, sounds, and smells. Being a Catholic myself, I noticed small differences between church in Canada and church on Orchid Island. I wondered what these differences meant about the Yami’s lifeworlds. The big wooden cross in the center front of the church, for instance, is adorned with a “Tao eye,” the same circular symbol drawn on the wooden boats. Detailing painted



Figure 27 “Entrance to the Otherland.” Church created out of a cave. Crosses are installed to demark sacred grounds. (photo by author)

in Yami colors, red, white and black, embellish the ceiling and the walls. I later read in Hu’s (2007) ethnography that “crosses present a contemporary magical entity to protect against *anito*” (41). The father of the guest house owner where I stayed was very proud of this church. In fact, he helped build it. I saw him every Sunday at mass. The guest house dog too would come to church – he followed my professor and I almost everywhere we went! But the elders did not like Heidi

attending mass. They scolded him, but he always found ways to come back in – the doors of the church were left open during mass.

In addition to churches, there are a few Buddhist and Taoist temples around the island for the Taiwanese settlers and those who have married into the community. This entanglement of lifeworlds on Orchid Island demonstrates the Yami’s plastic ability. They have taken Christianity and made it their own, building beautiful churches with Yami aesthetics and poetics. They have taken the Christian meaning of the crucifix, a “material sign against Satan,” and linked it to their own evil entity, *anito* (Hu 2007, 41). Moreover, they have allowed the construction of temples for the Hoklo Taiwanese who settle on the island. At mass, I often wondered how all these very

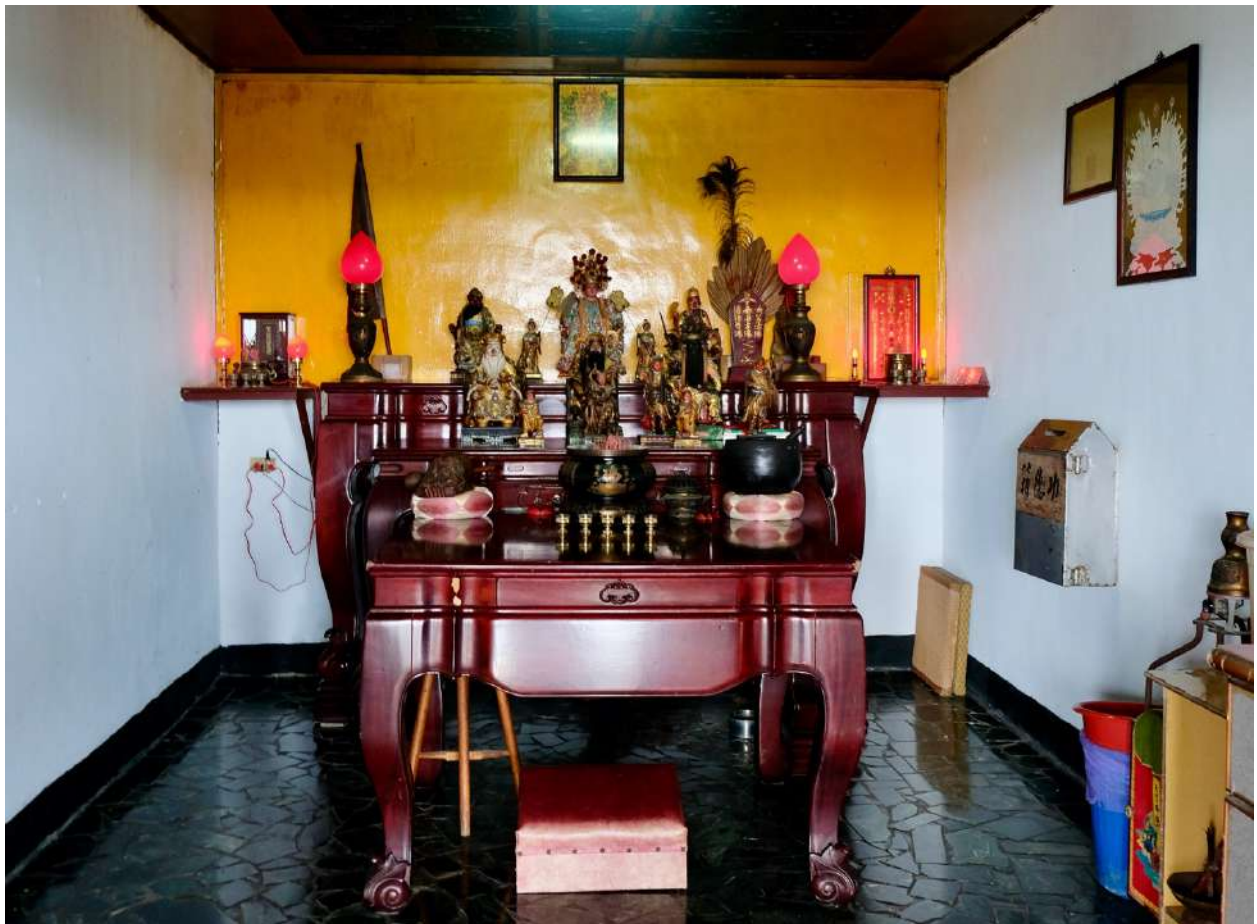


Figure 28 “Temple.” Syncretic Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian temple in Iratay. Anyone is welcomed to pray. (photo by author)

different belief systems could coexist so beautifully on one little island, when so many people in much larger countries struggle to accept one another.

Although it may not always appear as such, Ingold stresses that “we all inhabit one world” (2016, 303). I felt that on Orchid Island. After all, I was attending church every Sunday, just as I did in Canada, back when I lived with my parents. Even though I was on the other side of the planet, going to church on Sunday morning felt all too familiar. Human existence is a lifelong task in a world of limitless potentialities. Orchid Island is limitless. There is a multiplicity of possibilities; “open-ended pathways of becoming within one world of nevertheless continuous variation” (Ingold 2016, 3). The Yami are but one example of a group who find ways to negotiate and accommodate foreign lifeworlds into their own.

I finally arrived in Yayo, perhaps the busiest town on the entire island. It is the port of arrival for the ferry coming from Taitung, so there are lots of shops and restaurants. In fact, the other 7-Eleven is located here. There is a lot of traffic in Yayo. It is where tourists rent their scooters and cars before travelling across the island. This is where I began my own journey on Orchid Island, waiting for my ride on the police station’s concrete steps.

So far, I have talked a lot about materials that make their way to Orchid Island: barrels of nuclear waste from Taiwan, plastic debris from the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, waste created by the Yami and tourists, but there is another material that is important to the Yami’s lifeworlds – concrete. It is another foreign material that has recently been introduced to Orchid Island. In fact, there is a concrete manufacturing plant just outside of Yayo where large trucks come in and out of the driveway every day. Now that concrete is manufactured on the island, it is even more convenient to build structures from this material. One evening at the night market, tourists from Taipei who visit the island every year for a summer vacation talked about how they have seen the *ili* change over the years. They noted that there are a lot more amenities on the island now, which urbanites from the mainland enjoy. On the other hand, the more traditional style wooden structures are not as numerous as they used to be. From their tone, I sensed disappointment.



Figure 29 “Road Digger.” Concrete road expansion project under way. (photo by author)

More concrete houses are being built while the number of traditional Yami houses is in decline. The shift from traditional underground houses to concrete structures is generally well perceived among the locals I encountered; after all, concrete is considered the “foundation of modern development” (Watts 2019). Islanders explained that it was a necessary change as the above-ground concrete structures are more resistant to typhoons and high winds. I later read that this modernization effort was initiated in the late 1960’s by Chiang Kai-Shek, seemingly appalled by the sight of his “subjects living in underground hovels” (Arrigo 2002). Given no other option but to live in these modern houses, the Yami learned to appreciate them. Now, they represent a symbol of progress for many; an attempt to protect against and dominate the weathering of the world. Tracy often expressed envy for her brother who lives in a concrete house. During typhoon season, she will seek shelter from the high winds in her brother’s dwelling.

Nevertheless, I found that Orchid Island is becoming grey and decaying rather than green and growing. Concrete is valued for its ability to solidify, resist and decay slowly, but this material also suffocates ecosystems, destroys habitats, traps soil, disrupts the flows of rivers and prevents things from growing. Concrete now “outweighs the combined carbon mass of every tree, bush and shrub on the planet” (Watts 2019). Orchid Island is only following the global trend by integrating concrete into its landscape (and even seascape). Its integration has transformed the island’s ways of living. With a concrete production plant now on the island, the material is produced rapidly to answer every infrastructure need. Concrete stores and restaurants, concrete roads, and a concrete seawall are now a part of Orchid Island.

I am unsure if the rate at which concrete is being used would have been the same without the tourism industry. Locals seem to appreciate its sturdiness. However, many guest houses are popping up around the island, even outside of the *ili*; in the land of taro fields. Increased visitor

traffic demands more resources and infrastructure to accommodate the needs of the incoming tourists. The demand is there, so the Yami supply.

When I was visiting the island, the community was debating an expansion issue. A hotel company in Taitung, a port city on the Taiwanese mainland, proposed to organize bus tours on the island. The company would bring tourists to Orchid Island by boat, where they would be escorted to a bus that would drive them around the island to explore the scenic landscapes. After their short trip, the tourists would return to the hotel in Taitung. The roads were already in the process of being restored and expanded to accommodate these large buses. The township council, however, ended up voting against the proposal. While many were in favour, the community concluded that it would bring too many tourists to the already crowded island, cause a lot of traffic, and bring little profit to the locals. The bus tours would only stop at popular sites for tourists to take pictures and return to Taiwan after the tour.

Tourists visit for different reasons. Some come to Orchid Island to participate in outdoor activities, such as hiking, snorkeling and scuba diving. Less outdoorsy tourists come to ride a scooter around the island and stop at popular spots to snap a nice photo for their social media. Some come to volunteer at *Kasiboan*. Others come with organized tours for a short day-trip. These are referred to as “Dragon Tours” (*Yi tiao long*) by the locals because the large groups of tourists ride their scooters in one line, forming the shape of a dragon’s tail. The tourists rent scooters to do a loop around the island, stopping at a few scenic spots to take pictures. They leave the island shortly thereafter. You can hear them coming and going from miles away as they travel in a long sequence, one after the other, up and down the winding road. Islanders dislike these “Dragon Tours” because locals don’t profit much from them. These tourists visit the island in large groups for only a few hours, leaving more trash on the island than NT dollars. They may even come with

pre-packaged lunches that they bring from the mainland; hence not spending any money on food or accommodation. All profits stay with the travel agency and their partner businesses on the island.

A large number of tourists I saw during fieldwork travelled in guided tours – or *Yi tiao long* – suggesting an entire infrastructure of travel agencies organizing behind the scenes from Formosa. Piecing together the stories I heard about Taiwanese people liking to travel in groups, and about the hotel in Taitung wanting to send organized bus tours on the island, I grasped that travel agencies are an often-relied-upon source of information for Taiwanese tourists. I have never been in Taiwanese travel agencies, but I can assume that they encourage domestic trips to visit Indigenous communities. This is one way that people can imagine “Taiwan” as their multicultural nation. Morais et al. (2010) investigate the role of tourism in the Taiwanese nationalism movement, what they call “Taiwanization.” According to them, “[h]eritage tourism has become increasingly associated with nationalism because this form of tourism allows individuals to gaze and experience selected symbols of identity” (Morais et al. 2010, 279). Familiarizing oneself with other peoples’ lifeworlds, and even uniting over commonalities, promotes a bond between otherwise fragmented communities. By visiting the Yami, domestic tourists learn to think about Orchid Island as part of their Taiwanese nation. Whether or not most (or any) Yami agree with them is beside the point. They are imagining a new nation, one that was inconceivable before Formosa and *Ponso no Tao* came under the rule of the same state in the Japanese period. Nowadays, multicultural indigeneity promises to unite people of different ethnic groups and distinguishes them from China. Tourism “[turns] local residents into protectors and disseminators of the nation’s identity and [turns] the destination into a space for learning and celebration of the nation’s origin, prosperity and multiculturalism” (*Ibid.*, 289). In short, Taiwan’s promotion of domestic tourism is a strategic

attempt to forge a desinicized imagined community (*Ibid.*). States focus on memories that are aligned with their agenda (*Ibid.*). Choosing to focus on Taiwan's Indigenous peoples highlights "an independent Taiwanese history that was over six-thousand-years-old and characterized by the interactions and intermixture of a multitude of different ethnic groups and cultures [...] it was these memories, experiences and cultural condensations that were supposed to flow into the people's collective memory" (Rudolph 2004, 110).

The efforts to nationalise the ROC, or alternatively to imagine Taiwan as a nation in its own right, appear to work, to some extent, for the Han people. I recall one of the tourists on the tour of the nuclear waste facility who repeatedly referred to Taiwan as "here," implying that Orchid Island is part of Taiwan. This contrasts the many Yami who conceive of Taiwan as "that land over there." The current sense of community seems to be largely influenced by the traditional social structure, based on family unity. Subsequently, the concept of hierarchy is not a fundamental characteristic of Austronesian social organization: "there were no institutionalized positions of power and no compulsion for people to accept the leadership of others" (Simon 2010, 729). In short, the production of a Taiwanese national identity among the Yami, and perhaps other Indigenous groups, proves to be challenging as it does not fit their more egalitarian way of life.¹⁷ The idea of nationalism would therefore be a colonial concept that does not interest the majority of Indigenous peoples who, traditionally, have formed small segmental and egalitarian societies devoid of central power. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why they rejected the opportunity to have their own autonomous government back in 2001. In an egalitarian society, each small group is autonomous, or even autarkic. Hence, the idea that they would unite as the Yami or Tao of Orchid Island is just as foreign as the idea of being united as part of the ROC or as part of Taiwan.

¹⁷ Simon reminds us that the term egalitarian does not imply that there were no inequalities, "there were social distinctions based on gender, age, personal charisma, and ability" (2010, 729).

Nevertheless, if the Yami were to imagine a community, it would probably be a community of ocean peoples. Syaman Rapongan, a renown Yami writer that I had the chance to meet briefly on my first week of fieldwork, imagines a connection between the seafaring peoples of the Pacific Ocean, “thus disrupting mainstream discourse of Taiwan as a nation-state” (Huang 2014, 6). This intimate ocean connection represents a means through which one can “resist the imaginary political lines drawn by colonial powers” (*Ibid.*).

Moreover, the DPP’s idea of a multicultural nation is problematic for the Yami, as it is for many other Indigenous groups, who are more interested in “inherent sovereignty over the land and to a variety of rights that derive from that” (Simon 2011, 14). In Taiwan, the DPP’s multiculturalism is perceived by the KMT as a ploy for political gain, and by many Indigenous peoples as “a smokescreen to justify Hoklo dominance” (*Ibid.*, 22). Finally, if the Yami are already happy with the ROC and the KMT, so why follow along what appears to be a political project of the DPP?

In any event, tourism strengthens notions among Han Taiwanese that they are a part of a Taiwanese community, one that includes Orchid Island. Whether or not the Yami adhere to this, they are now entangled within the Taiwanese lifeworlds, who cherish their national imaginary. Either way, tourism on Orchid Island has been increasing in recent years. According to Taiwan Tourism Bureau, 47, 746 tourists visited Orchid Island in 2002, 63, 633 tourists in 2010, and 127, 087 in 2019. In less than 10 years, tourism rates have doubled. So how are islanders navigating this influx of people and stuff?

The trend among island communities is to sensitize tourists to the effects of their comings and goings on local ecologies. For instance, the “Palau Pledge,” adopted in December 2017, is a passport stamp which visitors must sign upon entry to the island. This 59-word oath is designed to

promote respect for Palau’s natural resources. Other tourist-filled islands, such as Iceland and Hawaii, have adopted this approach. Through tourist pledges, they hope to sensitize visitors to travel sustainably and respectfully. Inspired by how other island communities manage heightened tourist traffic, a few people are developing a similar endeavor on Orchid Island.

Along similar lines, a group of Yami activists, including A-Wen and Siaman Misiva, are in the process of developing a new form of virtual identity in order to better manage the flow of people, and consequently, the flow of waste and the rate at which the island develops. This e-identity is known as a “Tao passport.” It is a self-sovereign identifier that provides a virtual identity to the islanders. Visitors can also apply for a tourist ePassport. With this technology, the creators hope to encourage tourists and locals alike to reduce the amount of waste they create. Local business owners can reward tourists, in the form of cryptocurrency inspired by Bitcoin, for their good behavior, such as bringing their trash back to Taiwan after their holiday instead of leaving it



Figure 30 “Farewell.” Tourists departing the island at Yayo's marina. (photo by author)

on the island. According to its creators, this new technology would not only promote sustainable development but also help safeguard cultural identity: “The e-identity of the Tao people shall increase their autonomous decision-making and open a new economic model. These mechanisms are crucial to the development of ecotourism which promotes the true Tao culture” (IDGO 2018).

I did not use Taocoin myself as I was unsure how it worked. I did not meet many locals and tourists that embraced this initiative either. The project is young and full of uncertainty, hence not many business owners are willing to try it. Moreover, it requires a certain level of technological know-how, which explains why I have only seen young Taiwanese tourists use it. This technology puts the burden on the individual business owner – to spend the time and effort learning how to use it, while being willing to lose a percentage of profits to encourage good behaviour – and most business owners cannot be bothered if there is little profit incentive.

It is interesting to note whose initiative the “Tao passport” is. It is the creation of activists and knowledge keepers. When hearing about these kinds of initiatives, one might believe that the entire community is concerned with the increased flow of humans and its related consequences. However, that is not the reality I observed. Many do not know about the “Tao passport,” or others simply do not care. Others may think the creators of this virtual identity are trying to get ahead politically. Everyone has their own opinion on the potential threats of increased tourism, and therefore, will respond to it accordingly.

While tourism is great for Orchid Island’s economy, it threatens its ecology, the same way the nuclear facility is both a means for free electricity and other benefits, while also being a breach of human right and a potential toxic hazard. Nonetheless, although not always collectively, organisms find ways to negotiate these materials and forces into their lifeworlds. Yami guest house owners encourage tourists to bring a bag filled with trash back to the mainland. Animals, like the hermit

crab, repurpose pieces of trash into their lifeworld, giving them new meaning. Artists similarly recycle these man-made materials to create souvenirs for the gift shops – a cunning way to get tourists to (unconsciously) bring waste back to Taiwan!

As I was finishing my walk, I realized that this little adventure gave me a special glimpse into the lifeworlds of the different species that inhabit Orchid Island. Locals engaged with me out of curiosity and interest. As an anthropologist, it can be hard to approach research subjects, especially when so many anthropologists have come and gone from the Yami people’s lives. When people reach out to you by sheer curiosity, the interaction becomes more organic and authentic. It is a human-to-human interaction for pleasure and wonderment, rather than a subject-researcher interaction with a purpose and an objective. Finally, in one day, I got to develop a mental map of the island. I got to experience the contrasting elements of island life. I got to feel the “dynamic,



Figure 31 “Goat Walk.” Goats sunbathing on a concrete wall alongside the road. (photo by author)

pulsating, weather-beaten world that [the island’s organisms] inhabit every day” (Ingold 2016, 2). In that moment, I understood precisely what islandness is: forces – currents, materials, ideas, and beings – intercepting, entangling, and creating something new. It is a way of *knowing*, but it is also a way of becoming, epistemology as well as ontogenesis.

This multisensory walk along Orchid Island offered me not only a rich perspective of the land and ocean but also of the life forms – both human and non-human – that inhabit it. Indeed, I immersed myself in a world full of life. The rain drops, the rough wind and the humid ocean air enveloped my body. Curious things emerged in my vision, interpellating me in various directions. Dogs, cats, goats, and birds approached me as I began to seep into the surroundings. Locals, too, approached me as they were curious about my quest around the island. Seeing me walk alone in the middle of nowhere, many offered me rides, assuming I was stranded. Others offered me food and drinks. The “boundedness” of islands promotes strong friendly relationships. Although you may venture far from the *ili*, you are never really alone on the island. There is always a playful entity to encounter.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, islands are mysterious, and often misunderstood, places. Yet through my stories, photos and observations, I hope to have made Orchid Island a bit more familiar, or at least piqued your interest so you can one day discover it too. Over the month of June 2019, I explored the island in many ways: by speaking with locals, by snorkeling along the coral reefs, by hiking in the mountains and by travelling along the island road to name but a few. Walking the island was my preferred research method because it is “experimental, contingent, eventful, and becoming” (Yi’En 2013, 2). Challenging myself to walk the circumference of the island pushed me beyond my comfort zone, both mentally and physically. I saw a dog kill a goat. I soaked in the rain and struggled against the rough wind. I benefitted from people’s generosity. Pushing myself out of my comfort zone allowed me to open myself to the world. It helped me grasp islandness. I became intimately attuned to my surroundings; to the lifeworlds at work. Walking also helped me connect the temporal and the spatial; linking ancestor’s stories, realities of the present, and anecdotes from my previous month on the island to physical locations in real time. Piecing together this fragmented knowledge enabled me to imagine the potentialities of the future.

Orchid Island tells the story of many flows; flows that all converge on this small island. As we have seen, Orchid Island received the flow of Taiwan’s nuclear waste in the 1980’s. Today, its presence is a reminder of Taiwan’s colonial past. Nonetheless, it has become unimportant in the eyes of the Yami, for the most part, although some still mobilize for its removal. Orchid Island also intercepts the flow of garbage from the ocean currents. Being located within the North Pacific Gyre, it is connected to other places through the movement of the ocean. From these other places – the garbage patch, fishing vessels, islands in the Pacific – Orchid Island receives unwanted and forgotten objects that have been given a new life course through the flows of the ocean. Orchid

Island also welcomes flows of domestic and international tourists, who bring with them objects, capital and ideas. It is the convergence of these flows that constitute Orchid Island.

Orchid Island is a place where various lifeworlds become entangled. Those of the dogs, the goats, the Yami, the Taiwanese tourists, the curious students, the eager activists, and the Pacific Islanders located within the gyre. These organisms do not live as separate entities, but rather as linked within a large web of intersubjective relations. The Yami learn to negotiate their ancestors' way of life, including the norms, taboos, and myths, within today's context giving form to new possibilities. Although it is a small piece of land, Orchid Island fosters the conditions for these lifeworlds to intertwine harmoniously, and sometimes chaotically too. There are infinite possibilities of subjective *Umwelten* on Orchid Island.

It is also a place where different forces become entangled; the past and the present, the organic and the non-organic, the local and the foreign. The Yami people have had to find ways to cope with the tensions that sometimes emerge from these entanglements. These flows – nuclear waste, garbage, tourism, imaginaries – have transformed the Yami's lifeworlds. Although islands may appear to be hermeneutic bubbles where time stands still, they are in fact very much attuned to their surrounding world. As Brown (2004) suggests, identity does not come from ancestry as much as it emerges from life experience. In other words, the various ways that the Yami live Orchid Island and imagine themselves is attuned to their experiences of all the flowing lines of becoming.

Finding themselves entangled in various double binds, that is, the intersections of contradicting forces or pathways that come into tension, islanders have found ways to negotiate those tensions, either by loosening or tightening the knot. The Yami have had to make complicated decisions to get to where they are today. They have had to find ways to live with Taiwan's potentially hazardous nuclear waste, although not everyone agrees on the strategy. They have been compelled to

participate in and keep up with Taiwan's growing economy as the country's Indigenous population has become increasingly integrated into state affairs. They have developed a successful tourist industry on their island which comes with a cost. With their newfound wealth, they have been able to enjoy new luxuries, such as smartphones, televisions, air conditioning, and cars, which were, not long ago, unattainable by the Yami. They have had to negotiate their own imagined community with Taiwanese nationalism. From these struggles emerges something new; lifeworlds that have been negotiated, reworked, and reconfigured. As Jackson puts it beautifully: "Like a good-enough mother, a good enough society cannot attain perfection; rather, it is continually working, to the best of everyone's ability, to adjust individual desires to collective demands. This work is always work-in-progress. It is never ending" (Jackson 2017, xii).

Despite the fact that the nuclear storage facility, the tourism industry, and the luxuries of modernity pollute the island with various types of waste, islanders benefit from what these industries bring to them economically. If they were to stop these economic activities, many would no longer be able to continue living a prosperous life on Orchid Island and would have to find better-paid work on the Taiwanese mainland. Each organism I encountered responds to their double bind in their own way. During my time on the island, I observed the reinterpreting and repurposing of materials and meanings. I have also observed some who have learned to accept the nuclear and plastic waste as they believe that they are a necessary evil to survive within the Taiwanese way of life, like the local businessman who said, "I'm just an ordinary person. All I care about is money." Although ecologies and way of being is threatened by those entanglements, islanders are learning on their own terms how to continue living a good life on Orchid Island.

Regardless of the various transformations, the shared sense of islandness among locals remains alive; its embodied meaning, too, changes with time. Orchid Island is a beautiful place that the

Yami are proud to call home. It is not the same place that is presented in the literature. Yes, there are flying fish and wooden boats and taro fields, but there are also nuclear barrels, plastic bottles, used tires, excited tourists, concrete hotels, restaurants and churches. There are hermit crabs that inhabit rubber shells. There are pigs that eat their meals in recycled buoys. There are dogs that prey on goats if they go hungry. There are fishermen that fish in motorized boats. There are women who use plastic objects to ward off *anito* from their fields.

As I left the island, more expansion projects were already underway. It occurred to me that someday I might return to the island and say the same thing that the tourists told me: “Orchid Island has changed so much since the first time I visited.” New things might be added to the landscape, while others may disappear: new shops, bigger guest houses, larger roads, but also perhaps less green space, fewer underground homes, and fewer wooden boats. The state of the island is always in becoming – but how will the Yami choose to direct that path of becoming?



Figure 32 “Overlooking Iranmeylek.” View of Iranmeylek on a cloudy day. (photo by author)

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