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Stories from the margins

Collaborative Filmmaking and Auto-Ethnography as Tools for LGBT
Activism in Indonesia

*Histoires des marges : cinéma collaboratif et auto-ethnographie comme outils
pour l'activisme LGBT en Indonésie*

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STORIES FROM THE MARGINS
Collaborative Filmmaking and Auto-Ethnography
as Tools for LGBT Activism in Indonesia

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In this article I demonstrate how collaborative (audio)visual methods and in particular auto-ethnography can contribute to processes of transformation and become a form of activism that ultimately empowers the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights movement in Indonesia. My insights arise from the *Anak-Anak Srikandi* (Children of Srikandi) film project that was developed as part of my PhD research focusing on the question of how both global feminist and LGBT rights discourses and national discourses on gender and sexuality influence the subject positions of Indonesian women-who-love-women on one hand and the identity politics of local LGBT rights organizations on the other¹.

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Anak-Anak Srikandi is an anthropological informed documentary that was produced between 2010 and 2012 in collaboration with a group of eight women from Indonesia's main island of Java. The multi-story film shows the lived experiences and different perspectives on gender and sexuality from a group rarely heard and mostly ignored in public, revealing personal tales of exclusion and struggle, but also of love and happiness. Overall, the film project benefits the individual participants in terms of self-determination and empowerment. Yet the auto-ethnographic videos are not only an experiment in constructing one's own subjectivity; they are also intended to build awareness and engage the general public inside and outside Indonesia with messages about social exclusion and « homophobia ».

I will discuss the collaborative process of creating *Anak-Anak Srikandi* emphasizing the transformative potential of auto-ethnography as part of a broader critical queer/feminist methodology that seeks to « expose the unequal distribution of power that has subordinated women in most if not all cultures and (to) discover ways of dismantling hierarchies of domination » (Wolf, 1992: 119 cited in Lassiter, 2005: 91). This article is written from a perspective of a media practitioner, visual/media anthropology scholar and LGBT rights activist, aiming at bringing together theory and practice in a meaningful way arguing for a more engaged (visual) anthropology². Jean Rouch (2003) and his notion of « shared anthropology » (*anthropologie partagée*) inspired my collaborative approach to filmmaking. Neither explicitly designed as a participatory action research, nor as a participatory video project (e.g. White, 2003)³, *Anak-Anak Srikandi* may be placed within a long-existing anthropological practice of

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² See Ginsburg *et al* (2002), Pink (2004, 2007) for the anthropologist as activist and media producer and the applied strand in visual anthropology.

³ Participatory video is also often referred to as community video, indigenous media or digital storytelling. For examples of collaborative and participatory video projects see Sarah Pink's book *Doing Visual Ethnography* (2001).

« handing over the camera » and is situated within a field defined by Sarah Pink (2006, 2007) as applied visual anthropology.

What becomes apparent from recent accounts in applied visual anthropology (Pink, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2011; Biella, 2004) is the interventionist quality of the filmmaking process itself. Instead of only considering the final product as crucial for public intervention and social change, here I want to emphasize the importance of the creation process and underline the emancipatory effects that can be gained through it. Engaged filmmaking practice can be seen as an « activism-in-the-making », that through the empowering formation of *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1999) and their collaborative relationships, increases the potential for social change. By looking at documentary not solely as visual ethnography, but also as practice, I am drawing on current developments in visual cultural studies, cultural/social anthropology and sociology that go beyond semiotics and content analysis of still and moving images and focus more on practice theoretical approaches to media (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010; Pink, 2012; Schatzki *et al.*, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002; Ortner, 2006).

The « practice turn » coincides with a theoretical shift towards the senses in the understanding of ethnographic filmmaking (MacDougall, 1998, 2005). Drawing on MacDougall's « embodied knowledge » and « corporeal images », Sarah Pink (2001, 2006, 2009) takes the human body as point of departure and focuses on the multi-sensory and experiential. Pink also emphasized the sensory in her outline of the field of applied visual anthropology that « encourages uses of metaphor and the empathetic communication of knowledge and experience that cannot be expressed using only words » (Pink, 2007: 17). The applied visual anthropology practice I am discussing here can be understood through this sensory and phenomenological lens. To further explore the activist scope, I am drawing on Sara Ahmed's *queer phenomenology* (2006). Before focusing on the collaborative film work and its empowering dimensions in particular, I first contextualize *Anak-Anak Srikandi* by giving an overview about

Indonesia's post-New Order independent film circuit and their newly gained power for an emancipatory politics of visibility.

Documentary filmmaking and video activism in post-new order Indonesia

Social movements and technology are very much interrelated in Indonesia. Internet and video technologies played a major role in the mobilization of the masses that ultimately lead to Suharto's downfall in 1998 (Thajib & Juliastuti, 2009; Lim, 2003, 2006; Sen & Hill, 1997). In the midst of crumbling state control *film independen* or « side stream » films (Heeren, 2009: 71, following Prakosa, 1997: 3) were spreading like mushrooms across the archipelago and changed the Indonesian filmic landscape dramatically. The euphoria of political reform (*reformasi*) had a revitalizing effect on filmmaking practices and lead to the proliferation of what Hafiz (2011) called a « new generation of Indonesian cinema » (*generasi baru dunia perfileman Indonesia*). The emergence of new film communities, who clearly distanced themselves from New Order film conventions and topics, fell together with the so-called « digital revolution » that democratized the access and usage of audio-visual technologies even further. « The widespread availability of such new audio-visual technologies as digital video cameras and projectors, liberally dosed with the spirit of Reform which permeated into the Indonesian film scene, were the midwives who ushered in the genesis of a new film movement » (Heeren, *op. cit.*: 73).

In this era of openness, with the new freedom of press and the liberalization of the public sphere in post-New Order Indonesia, more and more independently produced documentaries, educational films for advocacy as well as grassroots community films, produced by non-governmental organizations, and the more radical activist videos, were to be found among an increased production of mainstream fiction films (Heeren, *op. cit.*; Hafiz, 2011; Hughes-Freeland, 2011). Especially, the documentary genre was then freed from its stigma of New Order propaganda and reformulated into a tool for advocacy and documentation of human

rights abuses (see for example the films by the activist-journalist Lexy Rambadeta). Besides Lexy Rambadeta's Jakarta-based media collective Off-Stream, that he founded in 2001 and promotes itself as « the voice of the voiceless », many more communities and organizations in support of documentary filmmaking were established since 1998. Among them is In-Docs, founded in Jakarta in 2002 by documentary filmmaker Shanty Harmayn who is also one of the founders of the Jakarta International Film Festival (Jiffest), and the Komunitas Film Dokumenter (Documentary Film Community) that organizes the Documentary Film Festival (Festival Film Dokumenter, FFD) in Yogyakarta since 2002 (see also Heeren, *op. cit.*; Hughes-Freeland, *op. cit.*; Hafiz, 2011). The Kalyana Shira Foundation, a non-profit organization established in 2006 by Nia Dinata, one of Indonesia's most popular directors and producers, is particularly supportive for women filmmakers and strong in advocating women's human right issues. Apart from the production of documentaries, holding documentary master class workshops for local filmmakers forms a fundamental part of the work of these organizations.

In the last 14 years or so, video activists and marginalized communities increasingly understood the power of audiovisual technologies as a tool for self-empowerment and working towards social change, but « rather than an end result, the video produced by such communities are understood as the *beginning* of a process of self-empowerment, through which the medium is perceived to produce a process of interaction and education that can lead to real social transformation » (Thajib & Juliastuti, *op. cit.*: 27). Within the range of approaches to video practice in Indonesia, as identified by Ferdiansyah Thajib and Nuraini Juliastuti (2009), the multi-authored film *Anak-Anak Srikandi* can be situated at the intersection of « grassroots video activism » and « experimental video activism » likewise aiming at « subversive social empowerment » (*ibid.*: 31). Furthermore, as a work of public anthropology the film contests hegemonic discourses on gender and sexuality and prevailing stereotypes about women-who-love-women in mainstream media.

Representations of women-who-love-women in Indonesian Cinema

The film *Kuldesak* (*Cul-de-sac*, directors Nan Triveni Achnas, Mira Lesmana, Rizal Mantovani and Riri Riza, 1999) is widely recognized as originator of the New Indonesian Cinema, introducing both a new cinematic style and alternative content consequently distancing themselves from the « New Order cinema » (Heeren, *op. cit.*; Setiyawan, 2009). Significantly, *Kuldesak* featured a gay character, even though the film was often criticized for its negative and pessimistic portrayal (Murtagh, 2006, 2010, 2011; Djuhari, 2004, Asmarani, 2004). Furthermore, two of the four directors were women thereby lighting a new path for others to follow and contesting the male domination of the industry. Since then, academic writing emphasizes on the increased portrayal of gay and lesbian characters (Murtagh, 2006, 2010, 2011; Widjaya, 2007; Maimunah, 2008a; Coppens, 2009) and the changing representation of women in Indonesian cinema (Hughes-Freeland, *op. cit.*; Kurnia, 2011; Sulistyani, 2010; Michalik & Coppens, 2009; Sen, 2005). The appearance of more gay and lesbian subjectivities in Indonesian mainstream films seems to be related to their increased visibility in the public sphere⁴. This

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⁴ Despite the common usage of the italicized terms *gay* and *lesbi* in academic discourse on Indonesian sexualities that seeks to emphasize the difference to their western counterparts, I follow Bram Hendrawan's (2009) critical argument that in consideration of the ongoing changes in Indonesian society, this standard rather essentialises Indonesian gays and lesbians. Hendrawan notes: « Instead of being dynamic, as it was intended, the terms *gay* and *lesbi* have become static and simplifying. They fail to account for changes that are recently taking place in Indonesia that have given rise to a different understanding of gay and lesbian subjectivities » (*ibid.*: 10). In the last three years or so I could observe changes in the growing gay and lesbian middle-class of Jakarta, particularly with regard to the marriage imperative. Scholars like Ben Murtagh (2010) and Evelyn Blackwood (2010) also recognized a sign of change, even though both continue to use the notation as suggested by Boellstorff (2005). During my fieldwork with women-who-love-women in Jakarta (2009-2012) I encountered an open rejection of the usage of the term *lesbi* as it was considered derogative and all women I talked to preferred the English term

is also reflected in the growing news coverage of topics related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people both in television (Hendrawan *op. cit.*) and print media (Boellstorff, *op. cit.*; Murtagh, 2010). Foremost, *Arisan!* (The Gathering, director Nia Dinata, 2003) is continuously referred to as the first film that portrayed gay subjectivities in a positive and affirmative light and made history for the very first uncensored gay kiss in Indonesian cinema (Murtagh, 2010; 2006, Maimunah, 2008a)⁵. The foundation of the Q! Film Festival, Indonesia's queer film festival, in 2002 can also be seen in relation to the political opening in post-New Order society. The festival shows not only international and Indonesian productions, but also encourages the local independent film community to produce more LGBT related films (Maimunah, 2008a, 2008b; Coppens, *op cit.*).

However, the proliferation of sexual minorities on the Indonesian silver screen does not automatically mean less stereotyping and negative representations. This is especially true for films that are made by heterosexual directors as noted also by Andrew Grossman (2000, xv): « a great many of the most commercial/visible queer films are made by heterosexual directors whose intentions are often at odds with their queer audience » (cited in Murtagh, 2006: 216). In contrast to the mostly affirmative and sympathetic depiction of gay life in contemporary Indonesian films, the representation of women-who-love-women takes place in less privileged and more discriminatory settings. When looking at the film *Detik Terakhir* (*The Last Second*, director Nanang Istiabudi, 2005) this becomes very clear. Two years after *Arisan!*'s coming out, *Detik Terakhir* follows the trend and became the first post-New Order film with a female same-sex storyline (Maimunah,

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lesbian. Given that Blackwood, Boellstorff and Murtagh all conducted research outside the Indonesian capital this might well be a middle-class and activist phenomenon. Therefore, further research is needed on the changing usage of identity terms. For this reason, I use the descriptive terms women-who-love-women and female same-sex desire.

⁵ See Murtagh (2010: 227f) for more examples of mainstream films featuring gay characters.

2008a). Even though the director was applauded for his courage to address the topic of female same-sex love, the overall reaction by film critics was rather negative. According to Maimunah (*ibid.*: 56f) this was mainly caused by the cliché depiction of women-who-love-women as drug addicts and the association of « lesbianism » with mental disorder. Furthermore, by showing the death of one of the lesbian protagonists caused by HIV/AIDS, the negative stereotype of « unhealthy homosexual lifestyle » is reinforced. With the denial of a happy ending, the filmmakers continue along the line of the « dead lesbian syndrome » as already seen in New Order films⁶. If in some scenes the audience might catch a glimpse of affection and love between the two women, it is made sure that by the end of the film this fantasy is fully dismantled: « *Detik Terakhir* emphasizes the failure of female same-sex desire to find a space within patriarchal relations of power, reducing lesbianism to a moral and medical issue » (Maimunah, 2008: 63). In a similar disenchanting manner the homoerotic moments between the female friends in the film *Tentang Dia* (*About Her*, director Rudi Soedjarwo, 2005) are rendered meaningless. Likewise the suspected lesbian Rudi dies in a car accident in the end of the film suggesting that feeling love and desire for another women is a risky undertaking (*ibid.*: 83). In both films the filmmakers eventually propose that « lesbianism » is deviant and abnormal as against the heteronorm and thereby manifest the stereotypes commonly reproduced in the Indonesian mainstream media.

Whereas heteronormativity is not challenged in *Detik Terakhir* or *Tentang Dia*, Nia Dinata opens up a different alternative for women-who-love-women in *Berbagi Suami* (*Love*

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⁶ Representation of women-who-love-women in Indonesian cinema began in the 1990s in films like *Gadis Metropolis* (Metropolitan Girls, director Slamet Riyadi, 1992) *Gadis Metropolis II* (Metropolitan Girls II, director Bobby Sandy, 1994), *Pergaulan Metropolis* (Metropolitan Relationships, director Acok Rahman, 1994) (for more on these films see Murtagh, 2006: 225; Maimunah, 2008a: 57).

for *Share*, director Nia Dinata, 2006)⁷. A dominant female perspective characterizes the film and we see the practice of polygyny through the eyes of both the woman director and the strong female protagonists. In the second story of the three-story film there is a subplot that shows the development of a romance between the co-wives Siti and Dwi. Instead of portraying them as victims of heteronormativity, Nia Dinata « presents lesbianism as a symbol of sisterhood and women's freedom to control their own lives » (Maimunah, 2008a: 141). Particularly remarkable is the end of the story, where Siti and Dwi free themselves from the polygamous marriage and chose a very different way of life. Taking with them Dwi's two children they run away from home and start their own family. By allowing them to start a new life, the director provides an affirmative space, where the principles of « familiness » (*azas kekeluargaan*) and « motherhood » (*ibuisim*) are not rejected, but re-interpreted (Coppens, *op. cit.*). Here, for the first time, a female same-sex couple is shown in a positive light and above all is allowed to act out their same-sex desires happily. *Berbagi Suami* goes beyond the common pathological view of « lesbian deviance » and offers an alternative to the norm of heterosexual relationships and families (see also Sasono *op. cit.*).

Equally, personally committed to the rights of LGBT people is the actress-turned-director and producer Lola Amaria. In her second feature film *Minggu Pagi di Victoria Park* (*Sunday Morning in Victoria Park*, director Lola Amaria, 2010) she explores the lives of young Indonesian migrant workers (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia*) in Hong Kong, most of whom work as domestic workers (*Pembantu Rumah Tangga*). Despite the up and downs of the characters, who have to deal with outstanding debts and abusive partners, the film also depicts female same-sex couples as naturally belonging to the community of Indonesian migrant workers (see also Malia, 2010). The title of the film refers to the many Indonesian (and Filipino)

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⁷ For a discussion of *Berbagi Suami* see also Sasono, 2006; Kurnia, 2009; Hatley, 2009; Imanjaya, 2009; Hughes-Freeland, *op. cit.*: 224-226; Chin, 2012.

migrant workers that meet on Sundays in Hong Kong's Victoria Park to spend their only leisure time available in company of likeminded people⁸. In the film as in reality, lesbian couples, following the butch-femme style⁹, are clearly visible. Even though female same-sex love in *Minggu Pagi di Victoria Park* is overall portrayed in nonjudgmental ways and dealt with as something common in society, the pattern of the « death lesbian » has yet to overcome. Nearly at the end of the film Yati, who was economically abused by her jobless butch partner who caused her immense trouble with the credit institution *Super Credit*, commits suicide by jumping off a bridge.

In conclusion, gay men are generally characterized more positive and affirmative than women-who-love-women in post-New Order cinema and are more likely to experience a happy ending. Furthermore, when comparing the female characters in the films *Detik Terakhir* and *Tentang Dia* with the ones in *Berbagi Suami* and *Minggu Pagi di Victoria Park*, it becomes apparent that the representations in the latter directed by women are more progressive than the former directed by men. Different to their female colleagues, the male directors seem to be more heteronormative biased and therefore do not overcome the New Order stereotypical images of women-who-love-women. The changing role of women in the film industry and the rise of female practitioners in the post-New Order environment are even more evident in documentary filmmaking (Hughes-Freeland, *op. cit.*: 432f).

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⁸ See Sim (2010) for her research about the phenomenon of same-sex relationships among Indonesian domestic migrant workers.

⁹ « Butch » means a masculinized woman, often also commonly referred to as *tombois*. « Femmes », on the contrary, are feminine women who seek *tombois* as partners (Blackwood, 2010, 1998; Wieringa, 2005).

Claiming representational space by narrating the self

One of the women's main motivations to take part in the *Anak-Anak Srikandi* project was to take control over their representations and subvert the stereotypical and mainly negative images present in the mass media and mainstream cinema. The following comment by one of the directors of *Anak-Anak Srikandi* reveals her aims for the film:

I hope that this film will be a way to open a critical dialogue about how the society perceives diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and faith as things that are usually taken for granted. I also hope that this film can break stereotypes about the binary opposition between sexuality and faith since both faith and sexuality take part in Indonesian society and are intersected with each other (interview with one of the co-directors by Sylvia Tan in *Fridae Asia*, 2 March 2012).

In *Anak-Anak Srikandi* female same-sex love is not denied a happy ending. The film's individual stories ranging from observational documentary to concept art to personal essay, deal with the inconsistency of growing up as women-who-love-women, as bisexual or transgender person in Indonesia, but they never fall into the trap of victimhood. On the contrary, the compilation of a multitude of perspectives into one anthology refuses common simplistic portrayals and the tendency of homogenizing the « queer other ». Instead of black and white thinking, the women tell stories from their everyday life, thereby using all colors of the rainbow to create a nuanced picture of genders and sexualities to be encountered in Indonesia. With the genre choice of cinematic autobiography, *Anak-Anak Srikandi* not only differentiates itself from the common Indonesian « victim syndrome » (*sindrom korban*) documentaries (Hafiz, 2010, interview with Abuh Aziz), but can also be seen as a queer/feminist intervention. Self-representation becomes a social critique; especially in the Indonesian political context, « where people's experiences and memories of being used as objects of repression are still deeply inscribed, media participation and first-person storytelling become crucial agendas to pursue » (Thajib & Juliastuti, *op. cit.*: 19). Furthermore, the negotiation of the « self » within the context of

dominant national, sexual and religious discourses makes autobiographical films an ethnographic document. Catherine Russel (1999: 276) sees autobiography as a form of experimental ethnography: « Autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film – or video maker – understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes. Identity is no longer a transcendental or essential self that is revealed, but a "staging of subjectivity – a representation of the self as a performance" ».

Auto-ethnography, a feminist and critical method, allows the filmmakers of *Anak-Anak Srikandi* to create a « space of cultural transgression » (*ibid.*: 294), which is a sphere of freedom where they are able to go beyond the norms of « womanhood » as defined by the Indonesian state and as expected by society. Moreover, auto-ethnographic filmmaking becomes a strategy to deconstruct the notion of a fixed and stable identity and instead renders visible the « becoming of the subject » (Ahmed, 1997) in front of the camera. Not surprisingly, many of the essayistic, autobiographical films referred to by Russel as « new autobiography » derives from « queer culture » and the personal stories can be seen as a « allegory for community or culture that cannot be essentialised in this mode of filmmaking » (1999: 278)¹⁰.

The directors of *Anak-Anak Srikandi* reinvent in their personal films some of the sensations and feelings involved in their everyday experiences on being a « queer other » and show what they never could express before. With the inscription of the self into the film, their knowledge and multi-sensory perspectives become embodied. This construction of the self by means of audiovisual methods and narration is a creative and somehow therapeutic process that creates a « landscape of consciousness » (Ochs & Capps, 1996: 26) bringing them and the audience a new understanding of being-in-the-world; or as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the body is « no longer

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¹⁰ Some filmmakers associated with the « new autobiography » mentioned by Russel (1999) include: Richard Fung, Su Friedrich, Marlon Riggs, Su Friedrich, Mark Massi, Mona Hatoum, Rea Tajiri, Sadie Benning.

merely an object in the world », rather « it is our point of view in the world » (1964: 5). David MacDougall has been the main proponent of a phenomenological and sensory-embodied approach in ethnographic filmmaking. He suggests that (audio) visual representation can offer pathways to the other senses and resolve difficulties anthropologists face in researching and communicating about « emotions, time, the body, the senses, gender and individual identity ». He proposes: « much that can be "said" about these matters may best be said in the visual media » (1998: 287) as opposed to using the written word – because the former can facilitate the « evocation » (Tyler, 1987: 199-213). MacDougall understands visual anthropology as performative anthropology. Accordingly, films are not only about the visual in itself, but also about social relations and emotions that are woven into images.

The practice of filming and in particular the self-conscious use of the camera by the women is a political act. Their *coming-into-being* on film resembles an *activism-in-the-making*, a form of creative political engagement and agency by marginalized and subaltern subjects, Faye Ginsburg conceptualized as « cultural activism » (2002), as opposed to common political activism. The collective self-representations in *Anak-Anak Srikandi* correspond to some of the ideas advanced by Sara Ahmed (2006) in her *queer phenomenology*. Ahmed's thoughts on how bodies extend or inhabit space are echoed in the way the women are actively occupying the (multi-sensory) space of the screen with their bodies. This is an attempt to address social differences that are actually « effects of how bodies inhabit spaces with others » (Ahmed, *ibid.*: 5). The conquest of space through film enables the women's « queer bodies » to enter the discriminatory sphere and to « make present of something that is not absent » (*ibid.*: 158), but that is largely invisible in mainstream society.

**« Non-hierarchical pulling together beyond all difficulties »:
doing collaborative filmmaking**

The film project started with a workshop and resulted in the 73-minute anthology *Anak-Anak Srikandi*, which was premiered at

the Berlin International Film Festival in February 2012. This marked the culmination of the first stage in an ongoing collaboration. *Anak-Anak Srikandi* is the result of a lengthy process of constant negotiation, sharing of ideas, revision and critique. Over the two-years of its creation, our film work became an increasingly collective act, coming close to the notion of collaboration described by Sarah Elder as « creating an open space for dialogue » (1995: 94). The collaborative and multi-authored approach to media production to which we aspired implied various ways of negotiating, sharing and collaborating at different levels of the production process, from script development at one end to editing at the other. In particular, these involved regular reviews of edited versions of the episodes by the women, often arranged using compressed video files sent via the Internet, which were then discussed through e-mail, Skype or in our Facebook chat room¹¹. Even the task of raising additional funds was shared, with one of the directors also becoming the executive producer.

Since the women did not have any prior training in filmmaking or video production, the first step was to organize a workshop that would provide them with the skills necessary to produce their own videos even after the conclusion of the project. For this laborious task I decided to work alongside an industry professional. I approached the German filmmaker Angelika Levi, who, having accepted my invitation, remains actively involved in the project to this day¹². In Indonesia I contacted In-docs¹³, a Jakarta-based organization that aims to promote documentary films as a means to raise social awareness, and to increase the skills of Indonesian documentary filmmakers by offering special training.

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¹¹ Even though we could edit the individual films during the second workshop, restraints on funding and a limited infrastructure for post-production forced us to finalize the editing of the whole film in Berlin, Germany.

¹² The successful completion of the anthology has ushered in a new phase of the project, with the collaboration now expanding to the fields of distribution and outreach.

¹³ See <http://www.in-docs.org/>

In-docs played a key role in facilitating the workshop in Jakarta: they managed the application process, provided additional equipment and space and even secured extra funding. The involvement of a local organization proved essential for the successful realization of the workshop¹⁴. A « call for participants » was sent out through the mailing lists of different Indonesian LGBT rights and human rights organizations, lesbian newsgroups and websites and the network of the Q! Film Festival. Other major distribution channels included social networks such as Facebook. The « call for participants » included the nature and aim of the project along with the requirements for participation. We were looking for six to ten participants between 20 and 30 years old. The women were not required to have any prior filmmaking experience, only an interest in learning and a desire to share their stories through autobiographical short films. It turned out that the age restrictions we had specified made it difficult to find enough participants, so we opened the project up to all age groups. In the end we had 12 applicants aged between 23 and 35, of whom eight went on to produce their own films. The majority of the women were coming from Jakarta; others were based in Yogyakarta and Bandung. Each came from different social and religious backgrounds, and most had never met before. The five-week workshop finally took place in July and August 2010.

We started the workshop sharing the lived experiences of the participating women. In daily focus groups we then related these personal accounts to more general topics like gender, ideology, religion, class and memory. With this story-sharing method we created a safe space where knowledge, information and feelings could be freely expressed and exchanged. The collective sharing and reflection upon each other's lives might have been itself

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¹⁴ Apart from In-Docs, we are also collaborating with the Jakarta-based lesbian, gay and transgender organization Ardhanary Institute and connected to other LGBT rights organizations throughout Java, including Arus Pelangi, Institut Pelangi Perempuan, GAYa Nusantara, and Q-munity, the organizers of the Q! Film Festival.

already transformative on a personal level, even therapeutic, since some of the women had never talked about their experiences, and not seldom their pain, before (see also Cahill *et al.*, 2008 for similar methods). We achieved an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence, promoting a culture of teamwork and collaboration that proved invaluable in pursuing our collective cinematic goals.

In addition to the story-sharing circles, we were watching various documentaries and short films that dealt with the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity. The choice of films was determined by the different genres and methods used by the directors of the example films to put their message across. They were meant as a source of inspiration for the women, demonstrating different strategies of representation for visualizing their own stories. Within this creative space the women began to develop ideas for their individual films. The group worked on the dramaturgy and narrative style of each story and developed different representational strategies and interventions according to the film's content. With the support of Angelika Levi the participants learnt how to translate personal experiences into the medium of film. In a « learning through doing » approach the women were then introduced to all steps of the filmmaking process. The development of filmmaking skills included several hands-on training sessions where the women were taught how to operate a video camera and the sound equipment¹⁵. After learning how to master the technology the filmmaker-participants not only worked as crewmembers on each other's films, but also acted as different characters in the individual episodes. In the end, five weeks turned out to be insufficient. Even though we managed to shoot most of the individual films, it was impossible to complete all of them and we decided to organize a second workshop for the following summer in 2011. Besides additional shooting, this follow-up

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¹⁵ For the introduction to video camera operation, we invited the famous Indonesian DoP (director of photography) Faozan Rizal, who works mainly on local commercial films but also produces his own work.

session was used primarily for collective editing and working on the overall structure of *Anak-Anak Srikandi*¹⁶.

The method of *shared space* that was so well put by Angelika Levi as « non-hierarchical pulling together beyond all difficulties » allowed for equal distribution of power. The boundaries between teacher and students became permeable; everybody was involved in a learning process and shared their knowledge and skills. This kind of reciprocal exchange may have transformative potential and reveals an effective way to deal with « the moral burden of authorship » (Ruby, 1995; Geertz, 1988) continuously faced by many (visual) anthropologists and other media producers. The assemblage of diverse perspectives occurring within cross-cultural filmmaking practices resembles David MacDougall's notion of an « *intertextual* cinema » that is based on a « principle of multiple authorship » (1998: 138). The *intertextual* and indeed intersubjective encounters are reflected in our final product. There is no doubt about the creative and conceptual input Angelika Levi and I had in the creation of *Anak-Anak Srikandi*. We both served as co-authors/directors alongside the Indonesian group members and operated the sound equipment or the camera (in the case of Angelika). I developed the concept and narrative strategy of the episodic film, centered on the story of Srikandi. My colleague then combined the different episodes in her particular style of montage. Nevertheless, the content and overall structure of the film was

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¹⁶ Right from the beginning we planned to interweave the autobiographic episodes with the story of Srikandi, an ancient mythological character originally from the Mahabharata, a well-known Indian epic, which is still frequently used in traditional Javanese shadow puppet theatre plays (*wayang kulit*). There are many different versions on Srikandi's story. In *Anak-Anak Srikandi* the puppeteer from Surabaya was performing for us a story where Srikandi is neither man nor woman, moving fluidly between both genders. When Srikandi falls in love with a woman, she has to understand that the only way to survive is to become a « female warrior ». This story serves as a reminder that same-sex love and gender variety were not imported from the west – as argued by certain religious groups – but in fact form an ancient aspect of Indonesian society (see also Blackwood, 2005; Wieringa, 2005).

determined in a process of collective decision-making¹⁷. However, a collaborative approach to filmmaking or research does not automatically guarantee the destabilization of power relations and a subsequent « decolonizing of methodologies » (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Given the different positionalities – like educational and economic status, religion and age – of all women involved (including us two foreigners) in the creation of *Anak-Anak Srikandi*, it could only be a gradual development based on mutual trust.

Ethical considerations to image-making processes

Even though the collaborative methods described empower the women on a personal level, this does not exempt the group from taking responsibility in a different moral/ethical domain: the ethics of image-making itself (Ruby, 1991). Making visible often comes with a risk. In Indonesia there is danger in exposing alternative sexualities and gender identities in the public mediascape¹⁸. Thus, discussing the ethical issues involved in image-making and considering the consequences of telling particular stories is essential

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¹⁷ After all, since I was overlooking the entire production process and controlling the outcome of the final product together with Angelika Levi (not least for the sake of our credibility towards sponsors and financial supporters), one might still see me as a « benevolent dictator » (Raymond, 2000).

¹⁸ In 2010 there were several attacks and threats made against gay, lesbian and transgender people in Indonesia that terrorized some of the participants. Two major LGBT events were attacked. In March the 4th International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Association (ILGA) Asia Regional Conference, which should have taken place in Surabaya (East Java), had to be cancelled following intense pressure from the *Front Umat Islam* (FUI) (Islamic People's Forum) and the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI) (Islamic Defenders Front). Seven months later the FPI demanded the cancellation of the Q! Film Festival. The FPI staged demonstrations outside three cultural institutions in Jakarta (the Dutch Erasmus Huis, the German Goethe Institute and the French Cultural Center) to pressurize the venues to call off any events related to the festival. FPI threatened to burn and destroy these buildings if they didn't cancel the festival within 24 hours.

for every media producer. This is not limited to seeking informed consent from the people represented in the images, but begins with an active discussion about the problems and risks that could potentially arise with the circulation of media content. Only when practicing, what Cahill *et al.* (2008) termed « informed risk » can those who produce knowledge take full responsibility for the representations they construct. However, they also note in relation to their own participatory video projects that critical interventions towards change are often not possible without risk-taking.

All director-participants of *Anak-Anak Srikandi* are aware of the potential risks when screening the film in Indonesia. Therefore, one of the women decided to mask herself and appears on film with a black and white painted face. We drafted a contract stating the rights of the directors over their material and the equal share of royalties among all members of « The Children of Srikandi Collective »¹⁹. Furthermore, the contract states that distribution within Indonesia needs the consent of all Indonesian directors. Nevertheless, shortly after we finished shooting *Anak-Anak Srikandi* and halfway through post-production one of the directors withdrew her contribution out of fears for her safety. Her short film was replaced by a sequence where we see some of the directors discussing the situation via Skype and reflecting on the issue of fear and violence and ultimately on the consequences that the public circulation of the film might have on their personal lives. This self-reflexive layer turned out to be an important element within the film's narrative and situates *Anak-Anak Srikandi* even more on a political and activist trajectory. If collaboration is taken seriously as a concept, by addressing issues of authority, risks and ethics as well as undertaking an ongoing critical evaluation throughout the production, post-production and distribution process must be cornerstones of every anthropological inspired film project.

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¹⁹ The « Children of Srikandi Collective » comprises the eight Indonesian directors together with Angelika Levi and myself.

Conclusion

In this article, I have demonstrated how collaborative audiovisual methods become part of a transformative strategy towards social change. Taking the multi-story film *Anak-Anak Srikandi* as example, I underscored the interventionist qualities and emancipatory effects that can be gained from the filmmaking process itself. Through the creation of collaborative auto-ethnographies the directors not only controlled their representations, but they also became personally empowered in their lives. Furthermore, the resulting narratives are counter-representations of alternative sexualities and genders subverting mainstream media and cinematic images that are foremost framed by heteronormativity and the male gaze. Even though the final product can be, and certainly will be, used in education and for LGBT advocacy in Indonesia and beyond, here I was interested in highlighting a form of activism that I conceptualized as « activism-in-the-making ». Instead of *representational* intervention, the focus lied on *practical* intervention and filmmaking as social practice.

Anak-Anak Srikandi is the first documentary film that gives voice to hitherto silenced women-who-love-women in Indonesia and makes visible what remained invisible until now. If we look closely at the personal and political motivations behind media productions by marginalized groups and subaltern subjects, it becomes clear that they are performing a form of cultural activism. The creation of a *shared space* thereby allows for the safe production of critical alternative media. « Collective self-productions » (Ginsburg, 2011) like *Anak-Anak Srikandi* certainly won't be able to lead to the repeal of the anti-pornography law or the bylaws in certain Indonesian regions that are based on the *sharia* law (the code of conduct under Islam) and criminalize homosexuality (Allen, 2007). The film(-making) should rather be seen as small-scale activism that can be a vehicle *towards* social change. In fact, the activist nature manifests itself particularly on the level of capacity building. Through the transformation of their own lives in the process of collaborative media making, by

enhancing their skills and knowledge, the women are now able to serve as « agents of change » if they chose to do so (Ginwright & James, 2002 cited in Cahill *et al*, 2010). The personal emancipation and self-conscious appraisal of their voice is significant on the level of community building and hereby serves the Indonesian LGBT rights movement in a particular way. Or as one of the directors of *Anak-Anak Srikandi* put it:

Women, especially lesbian, bisexual and transgender women are underrepresented in media, their issues and conflicts are swept under the rug. Our goal is to reach out to many women in Indonesia who are afraid to come forward or feel that they are alone. If we can reach just one heart a time, then we already succeeded (director's comment on the film's website).

Anak-Anak Srikandi is a successful project that benefitted the participating women on a personal level. With the completion of the production and the start of the film's outreach and distribution in 2012, we now consider the best possibilities to go beyond the personal and be even more beneficial for the Indonesian LGBT rights movement. I believe that with the application of new digital media and ICT to film, social interventions can go beyond the possibilities witnessed so far. Furthermore, by integrating audio-visual representations across different media platforms, from social networks to interactive websites, cultural anthropologists and filmmakers alike have the chance to enter into a more equal partnership with their collaborators and hence to provide us with much richer understandings. However, few of these new Internet-based collaborative possibilities have yet been fully explored within visual anthropology. What we need is the development of an inventive *community of practice* within the field of (digital) visual anthropology, one that looks beyond the borders of the discipline and doesn't shy away from experimenting with authoring tools for interactive media. Unlike before, anthropologists no longer need any programming skills anymore. New open-source HTML5 platforms require no knowledge of coding, and today almost anyone can create content-rich and

interactive websites²⁰. But this new freedom in the story universe also brings about new challenges for visual anthropologists and their collaborators regarding questions of authorship, participation, control and ethics in relation to images intended for circulation on the World Wide Web. An open discussion about these issues must be part of the agenda of a new emerging *community of practice*.

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²⁰ Programs and platforms for creating interactive and/or non-linear web documentaries include the following: *Zeega* (open-source HTML5 platform still in early alpha; <http://zeega.org/>); *Mozilla Popcorn Maker* (open-source HTML5 multimedia content editor still in alpha: <http://mozillapopcorn.org/popcorn-maker/>); *Klynt* (content editor for interactive documentaries <http://www.klynt.net/>), *3WDOC* (HTML5 authoring platform <http://blog.3wdoc.com/en/>); and *Korsakow* (software to create database films <http://korsakow.org/>).

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Summary

This article demonstrates how collaborative (audio)visual methods can contribute to processes of transformation and become a form of activism that ultimately empowers the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights movement in Indonesia.

By focusing on the 73 minute documentary *Anak-Anak Srikandi*, which was produced in collaboration with a group of women-who-love-women in Indonesia's main island Java, I discuss the collaborative and interventionist quality of the filmmaking process itself, emphasizing in particular the transformative potential of auto-ethnography as part of a broader critical queer/feminist methodology and arguing for a more engaged visual anthropology.

Key-words: shared anthropology, collaborative filmmaking, auto-ethnography, practice theory, activism, LGBT rights movement, Indonesia.

Résumé

Histoires des marges : cinéma collaboratif et auto-ethnographie comme outils pour l'activisme LGBT en Indonésie

Cet article démontre comment des méthodes collaboratives audiovisuelles peuvent contribuer à favoriser des transformations incarnant des formes d'activisme qui renforcent à terme le pouvoir du mouvement LGTB lesbiennes, gay, bisexuel et transgenres en Indonésie.

En nous centrant sur le film documentaire *Anak-Anak Srikandi* (73mn) qui a été produit en collaboration avec « des femmes qui aiment les femmes » sur l'île de Java en Indonésie, j'aborde l'aspect collaboratif et interventioniste de la démarche filmique qui a surtout mis à jour le potentiel de transformation qu'engendre l'auto-ethnographie comme faisant partie d'une méthodologie plus large, en lien avec le mouvement propre au Queer/féminisme, qui préconise une anthropologie visuelle plus engagée.

Mots-clefs: anthropologie partagée, cinéma collaboratif, auto-ethnographie, mise en pratique de la théorie, activisme, LGBT mouvement, Indonésie.

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