

Emplaced, embodied, multi-sited, collaborative ethnography in Peninsular Malaysia

Diana Riboli¹ and Ivan Tacey²

Abstract

Who we are and where we are from have huge consequences on research interaction with the communities we study in the field. This article examines some of the difficulties connected to the positionality of the researcher; particularly concerning gender, sociality and collaborative fieldwork. How do these, often unavoidable, positions affect relationships with the people we work with and impact and shape our research methodologies? And how can problems associated with these positions be overcome?

Drawing upon examples from our collaborative, multi-sited ethnographic research in Peninsular Malaysia among Orang Asli communities, several aspects of contemporary ethnography and the importance of collaboration in the field are discussed.

¹ Panteion University, Athens, Greece.

² Université Lumière Lyon 2, France.

Introduction

Neither of us can remember exactly how we decided to work together. It seemed to come about 'naturally', after many e-mails and our first meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Diana had already carried out fieldwork in a variety of settings: in Nepal with the Chepang, in Benin with the Fon, in Greece on the Anastenaria ecstatic cult, and then in Peninsular Malaysia with the Batek and the Jahai. Most of Ivan's long-term fieldwork had been done in Malaysia with the Batek and Mendriq, although he had also conducted multi-sited undergraduate fieldwork exploring the emerging networks of radical environmentalists, trade-unionists and anti-globalization protesters in the UK in the late 1990s. So, when we came to the decision to visit Orang Asli villages together, our first concerns centered on how successful our collaboration would be from practical and theoretical standpoints.

Throughout the fieldwork process anthropologists spend much time trying to discover the best strategies to overcome and deal with so-called, and much-mythologized, 'Otherness'. Before leaving for our first collaborative fieldwork in the states of Pahang and Kelantan, we realized we were much more worried about the 'Otherness' which existed between ourselves than the 'Otherness' between us and the Batek and Jahai ethnic groups we planned to visit; and with whom, in any case, we were both already working with independently.

Soon we discovered the shared feeling that, no matter how dedicated we had been in our research, we were both still lacking a lot of information. In particular we recognized the difficulties for Ivan to approach Batek and Jahai women and, for Diana, men, especially during hunting activities. Furthermore, we remarked upon the many similarities of our research enquiries despite coming from very different angles. During our consequent collaborative fieldwork we got to know each other very well and came to understand the incommensurable value of collaborative work based on respect, humbleness and—why not?—sincere friendship.

From the 'Indiana Jones Complex' to Reflexive Paralysis

In the contemporary period, many reflexive, post-modern anthropologists have retreated from the supposed 'exoticism' of studying indigenous communities, as a reaction to the heaviest of 'white man's burdens', colonialism. Studying indigenous peoples in 'exotic' locations such as Amazonia, Central Africa, Malaysia or Papua New Guinea is now all too often considered as being unfashionable, outdated and smacking of exoticism stemming from a Western colonial mindset (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 19-77, MacClancy 2002). As Sultana has highlighted "over-concern about positionality and reflexivity appear to have paralyzed some scholars into avoiding fieldwork and engaging more in textual analysis", furthermore, "fears of (mis)representation and (in)authenticity have led to a general withdrawal from fieldwork in the Global South, which means that fewer scholars are engaged in research that can be politically and materially useful for the poor in the Global South." (2007: 375) This has meant a huge rise of anthropological studies in urban areas, in Europe and other 'developed' places and a correspondent decline of studies amongst indigenous or 'tribal peoples'.

We argue that this retreat from studying indigenous populations, which can be traced back to the 1980s and 90s, could not have happened at a worse time.

During this period, as the Cold War was coming to an end, huge areas of Africa, South America and Asia—the so-called ‘developing world’—were being opened up to rampant and uncontrolled ‘frontier capitalism’ (Tsing 2005, 27-50)³ through free trade agreements and structural adjustment programs pushed by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization (Steger 2003: 52, Sassen 1996: 33-52, Lewellen 2002, 25). Furthermore, in the post-colonial period (particularly following the Cold War), indigenous populations and other marginalized groups were transformed by what Olivier de Sardan labels the ‘developmentalist configuration’, an “essentially cosmopolitan world of experts, bureaucrats, NGO personnel, researchers, technicians, project chiefs and field agents, who make a living, so to speak, out of developing other people, and who, to this end, mobilize and manage a considerable amount of material and symbolic resources.” (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 25) Sadly, just when anthropologists could have been of real use documenting the rapid and often traumatic changes to indigenous peoples and their environments, caused by ‘frontier capitalism’ and the ‘developmentalist configuration’, many researchers chose to retreat back to the comforts of doing ethnography ‘at home’.

Traditionally the anthropologist has been cast as a heroic lone figure, surviving in the desert, jungle, tundra or similarly ‘wild’ and dangerous environment. Furthermore, he or she—but most commonly he,—especially in the early to mid twentieth century, has been characterized as working with ‘wild’, ‘savage’ or ‘primitive’ peoples. These stereotypes and clichés are what we shall refer to as the ‘Indiana Jones’ complex and are intricately connected to the anthropological process of ‘Othering’. Of course they date back to that most heroic of anthropological figures Bronislaw Malinowski who has been credited with the near-mythic creation of participant observation as a fully-formed research methodology, strengthened wholly by his absolute determination to fully understand and convey the subject’s point of view and vision of life. The role of the ethnographer according to Malinowski was “to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world” (1961: 25). The Indiana Jones complex has had an enormous impact on how anthropologists, think, act and behave in the field as well as on how they write up their ethnographies after leaving.

Despite the fact that in the last few decades the figure of the anthropologist as a ‘Malinowskian’ (Marcus 2009: 2) solitary hero as well as the ‘absolute’ truth and validity of the participant observation’s methodology has been much criticized and, at least partially, re-theorised (Clifford 1988, Asad 2003, Faubion and Marcus 2009), a certain degree of myth-making still exists, especially among students in anthropology at an undergraduate and graduate level. This perception stems in part from reading the accounts and diaries of eminent

³ Tsing states that ‘frontier capitalism’ was enabled through “Cold War militarization of the Third World and the growing power of corporate transnationalism” during which “resource frontiers grew up where entrepreneurs and armies were able to disengage nature from local ecologies and livelihoods ... ‘freeing up’ natural resources that bureaucrats and generals could offer as corporate raw materials.” This had huge consequences for indigenous peoples and rural populations as “local systems of human access and livelihood and ecological dynamics of replacement and replenishment [were replaced] with the cultural apparatus of proliferation, out-of-control interstitial capitalist expansion.” (2005: 28)

names in 'classical' anthropological studies. Most of these studies were conducted by solitary fieldworkers, the majority men, at least until the 1960s, with various degrees of involvement in colonial regimes. An example, taken from Malinowski's much-discussed diary, published after his death:

'At 1 o'clock I took a boat to Government House, where the crew of fuzzy-headed savages in government uniforms gave me very much the 'sahib' feeling' (Malinowski 1989 [1967]: 8)

Since then, many things have changed and, after many years of reflexive self-criticism and debate, ethnographers seem today to be much more conscious of their limitations (Birckhead 2004), possible mistakes (Bacigalupo 1999, Nourse 2002) and of the seminal role played by their personal feelings, emotional states (Spencer and Davies 2010, Davies and Spencer 2010) and identity (Coffey 1999) while conducting fieldwork.

From Paralysis to Dynamism

Freed from the anxiety of reaching an improbable absolute objectivity, the ethnographer's 'weakest' points, theoretical and personal concerns and doubts are no longer denied, and have been transformed from unspeakable, embarrassing secrets into effective ethnographic tools (Whitehead 2002: 11-40, McLean and Leibing 2007: 1-21). The much-feared and discussed 'Otherness', perceived for many years as a major problem to face during the anthropological encounter has, at least in part, been overcome, leaving space for more reflexive analysis of the ethnographer's role. After the fundamental acknowledgement that there are no 'Others' only 'Brothers' (Spiro 1992) and that "[t]here is no 'primitive'...[only] other men living other lives" (Rabinow 1997: 151), anthropologists were finally able to talk more openly of their experiential world and their testing of new, more intimate, research tools. As Borneman and Hammudi state:

'encounters in which experiential insights are arrived at not only through visualization and observation but also through linguistic exchanges, (mis)translations, feeling of attraction and repulsion, discussion and arguments, and fights and power tactics, as well as through the study of knowledges that societies have produced about their past and present....Fieldwork encounters...are modes of ethical engagement wherein the ethnographer is arrested in the act of perception...Fieldwork is the registering of sensory impression in a (temporal) process of mutual subject-discovery and critique...' (Borneman and Hammudi 2009:19)

We believe that—whenever possible—the 'mutual subject-discovery and critique' (Borneman and Hammudi 2009:19) can be much deeper and more effective if researchers are engaged in collaborative fieldwork. In doing so, this process is not strictly limited to the researcher and the individuals and communities he/she intends to study but also involves his/her fellow researchers. The benefits are manifold:

- access to more information and to different groups of informants
- immediate cross-checking of significant findings while still in the field
- sharing of duties which also limits the—often unavoidable—unbalanced power relations between a researcher and his/her informants

- improved psychological conditions and decrease of anxieties resulting from the fact that solutions to any possible problems can be shared.

Fieldwork is a dynamic process and the process of mutual discovery which Borneman and Hammudi refer to, necessitates continually re-evaluating our position in the field; whether we are moving into new fieldwork sites or remaining at one research location. This dynamism involves continuous re-negotiation of our relationships, clarifying our research goals with our research subjects, ensuring our research is ethical, and that our studies will not only benefit ourselves as researchers (in terms of the advancement of knowledge, and, more selfishly, our career advancement) but also that our research is politically situated and will benefit the communities we work with and the nations that host us. Research and ethical conflicts need to be continually thought through and re-negotiated with collaborators, whether these collaborators are the communities we work and live with, state actors or fellow researchers. As Sultana states:

“positioning in multiple locations meant that research ethics had to be negotiated in practice on a continual basis. Similarities and differences that emerge through the relations that are involved in the research process demonstrated the ways that alliances and collaborations can be forged, rather than an a priori agenda before the research was undertaken. Such fluidity and openness in the research process is not always easy to enact or maintain, especially when inserted into multiple scales of power relations and institutional affiliations, time/budget constraints, and distances (physical, emotional, philosophical, political).” (2007:380)

Multi-Sited, Collaborative Fieldwork in Peninsular Malaysia among the Orang Asli

Malaysia is a multiethnic country where the Orang Asli or Original People, make up approximately the 0.8% of the population. Our research is focused on Batek and Jahai populations living in the Pahang, Perak and Kelantan regions. Before conducting fieldwork together, we had both independently adopted multi-sited ethnographic approaches. Multi-sited fieldwork, propagated mostly by Marcus (1986, 1995), has gained a very important role in ethnographic methodology since the end of the twentieth century. In Hannerz’s words:

‘...what current multilocal projects have in common is that they draw on some problem, some formulation of a topic, which is significantly *translocal*, not to be confined within some single space. The sites are connected with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important for this formulation as the relationship within them; the fields are not some mere collection of local units.’ (Hannerz 2011,[2003]:362)

Multi-sited ethnography is particularly relevant to anthropological investigations since single-sited research ‘can no longer be easily located in a world system perspective’ (Marcus 1995, Marcus 1998: 82), considering the complexity of contemporary socio-cultural experiences. Since we were both already trained in multi-sited ethnography, we immediately agreed on the fundamental methodology of our research, recognizing this approach as the best option for our collaboration.

Also our research topics, traditional medicine, traditional beliefs and their encounter with biomedicine (Riboli) and knowledge, place-making and

territoriality (Tacey), while not fully overlapping, fully complemented each other, offering a wider interpretative angle for our individual and common analysis (Riboli 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, Tacey 2013a, Tacey 2013b).

A great advantage, from both practical and theoretical points of view, was the long-term experience we had already individually accumulated during previous fieldwork periods in the country. We were both familiar with the long bureaucratic formalities and procedures required to conduct research in Peninsular Malaysia, as well as with the other possible obstacles and unexpected events which can undermine the success of fieldwork. We had also both established networks of friends and contacts among Batek, Mendriq and Jahai communities throughout Pahang, Kelantan and Perak. Due to Ivan's multi-sited approach including work with environmental and human rights associations, lawyers and NGOs in Kuala Lumpur we also had extensive contacts with other individuals working on Orang Asli issues. Furthermore, we had both already worked independently with Kamal Solheimi and Professor Juli Edo, anthropologists from the University of Malaya.

On gender and egalitarianism

Batek hunter and gatherers as well as sedentary Batek and Jahai maintain, at least in part, an egalitarian social organization based on a lack of centralized political power, access of all members of the communities to the same resources and information, and equality between the sexes (Endicott Kirk 1979:11, Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker 1997: 26-27, Lye 2005: 13-14, Endicott Kirk & Endicott Karen 2008: 7-10). This does not mean there exist no differences between the worlds of men and women but rather these two realms are complementary and neither dominates the other. Gender equality doesn't mean gender indifferentiation. Despite a lack of institutionalized rules, the gendered division of labor is quite evident. As in many other hunter-gatherer groups across the world, women are mostly in charge of gathering while men are more dedicated to hunting. Certain economic and social activities are shared between both men and women including childcare, collecting rattan, cooking, constructing lean-tos (although men normally build the frames whilst women construct the roofs) and fruit harvesting. Both men and women enter the forest with their *parangs* (knives), men carrying blowpipes and quivers filled with poison darts, women with digging sticks. At a certain level the knife can be seen to represent social equality, while the blowpipes and digging sticks—to which women and men, often jokingly, attribute sexual signification—the separation between the worlds of men and women.

Despite the fact that gender egalitarianism in hunter and gatherer societies in general has been idealized by—mostly Western—researchers, the high level of social and political equality in many immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies is undeniable (Woodburn 1979, 1980, 1982, Endicott 1979, Morris 1982). As stated by Kirk and Karen Endicott:

‘There was no area of Batek culture or social life in which men controlled women or subjected them to asymmetrical systems of evaluation. Batek concepts of males and females recognized the physical differences between the sexes without imposing evaluative or symbolic significance on them’ (2008: 147).

As in any other society, regardless of the complexity of social and economic organization, religion and degrees of equality and inequality, different perceptions, feelings and attitudes are related to gender. In Batek and Jahai camps and villages, despite the fact that small children's games are very rarely gender bounded, during adolescence the male and female worlds separate. Unmarried girls and boys seldom sit and chat or take part in the same social and recreational activities together. Even at an older age, women and men usually prefer to walk in the forest or to share their time with people of the same gender discussing 'female' or 'male' topics respectively. Of course, common discussions regularly take place, but women—with a few exceptions often related to age—tend to be shyer and more reserved than men. As also noted by Kirk and Karen Endicott (2008:25), the Batek and Jahai do not have hierarchical conceptions or perceptions of the male and female spheres: Batek and Jahai (as well as Orang Asli in general) cultures consider men and women as being equal, but different.

Irrefutable gender-bounded differentiations are also evident among researchers. In one of the rare studies dedicated entirely to this topic, Wiener starts from the important consideration that 'our bodies affect how and what we have been socialized to see and experience as well as how other people respond to us', and follows by highlighting that 'because we are embodied, male and female anthropologists may have different experiences despite [having] shared theories, disciplinary norms, and expectations' (Wiener 1999: 101). Similarly, Coffey, analyzing the 'embodied field' and the 'embodied fieldworker', notes that 'there is no doubt that the body is a key characteristic of our field notes and relationship' (Coffey 1999: 72-75).

The researcher's embodied experiences are often of intrinsic importance for building closer relationships with people of his/her gender. This is evident when talking of gender-bounded experiences linked with states that cross social, cultural and biological lines, like menstruation, pregnancy, delivery, motherhood, ejaculation and paternity, as well as gender-bounded experiences such as the division of labor, recreational activities, courtship, perception and confrontation of risk. This does not mean that a female or male anthropologist can only communicate to informants sharing their gender, although he/she will have 'privileged' access to them.

Since the 1970s, feminist anthropologists have highlighted how classical works by male anthropologists often erased or omitted female points of view. This was not only due to gender bias on the part of male researchers, and the institutionalized sexism that characterized the period, but also because of the difficulties for a male researcher to approach women, without being considered a threat by other men (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974, Golde 1986).

Our collaborative ethnographic fieldwork has allowed us a better and deeper understanding not only of male and female points of view, but also how these sometimes quite different viewpoints are related. Moreover, entering Batek and Jahai settlements together, contributes to a more balanced approach to the communities since we are perceived as a lesser threat than an individual anthropologist would be in these societies where individuals are always embedded in social relationships, principally via kinship. The presence of a lone researcher—female or male—can create situations of imbalance and anxiety.

The nuances of this aspect of the collaborative advantage are difficult to fully delineate but it seems likely that arriving at settlements together helped situate us for the communities as a pre-existent, self-contained, gender balanced unit, as opposed to a solitary individual seeking a—potentially disruptive—place within the community. Furthermore, it can simply be difficult to approach people of the opposite gender, without arousing the suspicion that his/her interest is of a sexual nature.

Despite the fact we always immediately explain we are colleagues and friends and not husband and wife, it is more understandable for the Batek and Jahai that we are working as a couple, since solitude is very uncommon and quite puzzling in their social and ethical world. The idea of an anthropologist entering the field alone is a strange concept indeed for many peoples who often have particularly strong senses of community and family life. Of course the people we study are curious about who we are; if we are married, if we have children, and if so, where are our families. Allowing the people we work with to get to know about our families does not just fulfill cross-cultural expectations but can also lead to interesting research discoveries. When one Batek group discovered Ivan's wife was pregnant they explained he now carried his wife's odour into the forest which could anger elephants and other animals and result in possible injury or death.

When in settlements we don't rigidly divide our research on a gender basis. On many occasions we sit and talk together with men, women or mixed groups, whilst on other occasions we separate: Ivan following the men on their hunting or trading activities and Diana the women on their shorter journeys in the forest to collect wild tubers for food and flowers to adorn their bodies. However, we always follow the local etiquette concerning gender norms, according to which there are common as well as distinct moments when men and women decide to share, or not to share, with individuals of the other sex.

Cross-checking our ethnographic notes, we discovered women tend to chat about more intimate and private matters than men. Gathering, fishing or collecting flowers in the forest, represent pleasant social activities during which women feel totally relaxed and comfortable. Shy and reserved when in the settlement, even young girls and old women enjoy singing and laughing together, mostly talking about past and present, real or fantastic, love-stories. Occasionally young men will boast of their sexual exploits in private discussions and since the introduction of mobile phones young Batek men spend a considerable amount of time texting lovers or potential lovers in other Orang Asli communities.

During journeys in the forest or other private moments (bathing, during discussions about intimate gender specific topics, etc.) men and women respectively shared with us on the basis of belonging to the same gender. On several occasions we had the chance to observe and experience situations related to risk and fear from male and female perspectives. One of our major research interests concerns perceptions and representations of violence, risk and threat among these populations. Many sedentary Batek and Jahai, most of whom live below the national poverty line, feel threatened by the world outside of their communities and the forest (Riboli 2010: 100, Tacey 2013: 252, Riboli 2013: 137). Often when *gob* (strangers) enter the settlements the women close

themselves inside their houses with small children or run away to nearby plantations or forest, while the men stay in the village and deal with the outsiders. Whilst Diana is generally asked to hide with the women, Ivan is often invited to remain with the men. These events have given us a particularly balanced overview of the major concerns and causes of stress affecting male and female perceptions of violence and risk. Whilst women mostly fear sexual harassment, rape, kidnapping and physical violence in general, men are more worried about the rise of problems and consequent quarrels related to land rights and exploitation. It would have been much more difficult or even impossible to have a global view of such important topics working alone. Having the chance to document female and male reactions to threatening situations allowed us a deeper understanding of the different roles of men and women in egalitarian societies. Obviously, to record only female or male perceptions would have led to incomplete and therefore inaccurate results.

On Sociality, Friendship, Feelings, Senses and Emotions

Anthropologists working with hunter-gatherers and other societies which maintain salient aspects of this lifestyle, must quickly learn how to deal, even for their daily needs, with a system far removed from industrial and capitalist societies which they studied in books and essays. From a practical point of view, things can become quite difficult especially regarding the sharing of food and medicine. Both of us being '*orang putih*' ('white people') coming from Europe, meant that many Batek and Jahai believed us to be wealthy and skilled in many matters, particularly concerned with finding solutions to sickness and disease. We only bring basic medical kits to the field and only distribute medicines in case of need, such as painkillers, skin disinfectants, and bandages to treat superficial wounds. For more serious cases, we have often accompanied sick individuals and their family members to hospitals and clinics. In such situations what is principally shared is not medicine but emotions and feelings through the act of being involved in their anxiety and sorrow; a basis for emotional participation.

A vast anthropological literature focuses on the importance of sharing in what anthropologists term immediate-return hunter-gatherer cultures. In these societies sharing is the most important value and pillar on which sociality, relationships, alliances and friendship are built. Whilst many Batek and Jahai groups have now been forcibly settled, they still maintain much of this ethos of sharing, as do the Batek and Jahai groups who have been able to continue their nomadic way of life. Often underemphasized by many anthropologists, but of equal importance to the sharing of food in these societies, is the sharing of time, places, stories, memories, information and friendship. The following remarks from Guenther, an anthropologist working with hunter-gatherer groups from Botswana and South Africa, are quite applicable to the Batek:

"Individualism and egalitarianism are manifested, not negated, through the communalist values of sharing and reciprocity; to follow the dictates of one set of values is to be true to those of the other. Exchange, too, is an expression of these two communalist values, in part because of its generalized nature, in part because much of what is exchanged is not things but ideas. A person gives up the former—a knife or a flashlight—when he exchanges it with another, but retains the latter—a song or a trance curing routine—in his or her head after the exchange. Both

giver and receiver continue to have the exchanges idea; by default, the exchange becomes an instance of sharing.” (Guenther 1999: 55)

Food sharing between researcher and the communities he/she works with is a complicated issue. Whenever possible, especially in settlements we can reach by car, we do not bring large amounts of food, preferring to visit the nearby markets together with our Batek and Jahai friends, buying what we can reasonably afford for them and ourselves on a regular basis. We always share meals with the people we work with whether these are foods gathered in the forest, bought in the market or a combination of the two. This is essential as meals represent important moments during which people do not just share food but also tastes, odours, feelings, information, sociality and friendship. It is a time in which, again, embodied experience allows the researcher to overcome differences and otherness. Rappaport, talking about what he called ‘cosmopolitan morality’ (2010:5) observes that ‘...anthropologists should not make a fetish of culture’, working instead ‘toward the formulation of a morality which is equally beyond local community and the particularities of any culture in its social validity and reach’. During fieldwork, the anthropologist comes ‘face-to-face with self and other’, experiencing ‘the universality of human embodiment’:

‘Difference (of age, gender, nationality, religion, caste or class) dissolves into bodies mutually distinct, distant and discrete, but mutually able to approach one another intuitively, empathetically, introspectively.’ (Rappaport 2010: 5)

Full-bodied ethnography (Poewe 1999, Markowitz 2006) makes the anthropologist a ‘significant participant, insider to the social processes by which practices are developed and gain meaning’ (Turner 2000: 55).

Sharing, among the Batek and Jahai themselves, or between them and outsiders such as anthropologists, is not only a matter related to material objects like rice, sugar, tobacco, wild tubers, fish, paracetamol pills, herbal medicines and plasters. It always represents an embodied experience which transcends materiality and involves the (universal) spheres of emotions and senses. Objects and goods are only the visible aspect of a much deeper reality, related to human existence and consciousness. Anthropologists and the individuals and communities studied during fieldwork, share spaces, time, environment, smells, tastes, friendship, emotions and much more.

The debate on the relevance of a sensorial approach in the ethnographic process is probably one of the most interesting in contemporary anthropology (Stoller 1989, Geurts 2002, Crapanzano 2004, Howes 2005, Pink 2009). Senses play a pivotal role in the emerging of emotions, sensations, feelings and memory. They are powerful means of knowledge and social interaction. Senses—olfaction in particular—are particularly important in Batek and Jahai cultures and many taboos are connected to them (Endicott 1979, Tacey 2013, Riboli 2011, 2013, Lye 2005, Burenhult and Majid 2011)

If anthropologists conducting long-term fieldwork in other countries and cultures somehow walk a tightrope between two worlds—the one they belong to and the one they study—they are also caught between two sensorial worlds in the way that they have to deal with different, sometimes unknown, sensorial stimuli, elaborations and codes. Walking in the forest, Batek and Jahai hunters are able to smell and hear the presence or passage of wild animals and they are

baffled by our inability to do the same. After much effort and amusing mistakes, normally one day the researcher is able—if not to recognize animals from their smell alone—at least to make some accurate sensorial distinctions; for instance to distinguish the cry of a monkey from that of a hornbill. On that particular day, both his/her self-confidence, as well as Batek and Jahai friends' esteem for him or her, will probably increase. From another point of view, sensorial perceptions—a particular color, smell, sound, or taste—will often generate what we could call 'out of context' feelings in the researcher, redolent of past experience and life, usually related to the place where the researcher grew up or normally lives. This sensorial seesaw between the familiar and unfamiliar makes the ethnographer a kind of tightrope walker. Their learning processes are first of all sensorial: a self-training of the senses to catch, balance and interpret stimuli—adding and using different codes to those learnt in the culture to which he/she normally belongs.

Certain anthropologists have suggested the need to move from embodied ethnography to emplaced ethnography (Howes 2005, Pink 2010: 25). The difference being that the paradigm of emplacement materially, sensorially and sensuously links body and mind to environment or place (Howes 2005, Pinker 2010). This means taking into account the corporeal and sensorial links people have with their environments, as well as how we as ethnographers relate to these environments. Hunting, gathering and collecting activities are prime examples of how the body, senses, and embodied knowledge are all firmly connected to environments. The knowledge necessary for hunting, gathering, climbing, and even walking (Lye 2008) are incrementally accrued by hunter-gatherers and anthropologists through movement, practice and learning from more experienced teachers. Being able to distinguish between the call of a hornbill and a monkey (to use the above example) is not something which comes 'naturally' to the Batek. Instead it arises from the repeated experience of being in a particular environment with particular people. Good sensory ethnography (Roseman 1993, Feld 1983) comes from spending long periods (sometimes decades) in the field with local experts. Many rainforests sounds have particular socio-cultural meanings: a particular flower [*Mimosa pudica*] which closes when we brush past it is said to do so because in the past the flower was a shy Batek girl who was transformed into the flower⁴; the appearance of groups of owls is said to signify the arrival of a weretiger (a tiger which can either entirely transform into a human form or into the form of a human body with a tiger's head); and the presence of peacocks [*Polyprecton Malacense*] at the edges of forest accompanied by their screams at the night signify an imminent earthquake.

Origin stories, historical events and myths illustrating the infraction of certain taboos in the past are often embedded in landscapes. In this way, embodied/emplaced ethnography articulates the links between bodies and environments with history and cosmogony. Being able to translate this local knowledge into ethnographic texts requires solid knowledge of these local environments. Rainforests are amongst the most biologically diverse places on the planet and the forests where the Batek and Jahai live can be seen as palimpsests with layers of socio-cultural knowledge continually being overlaid,

⁴ Interestingly the Latin *pudica* translates as 'shy, bashful or shrinking'. In Malay the plant is known as *pokok semalu* (shy plant).

modified and inscribed onto the environment. Ethnographers need detailed ecological, linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge of these places as well as in-depth knowledge of the socio-cultural and political links that are articulated between them and the wider environment at multiple scales (regional, national and international). Collaboration between ethnographers in (and out of the field) and the sharing of information is one way of reducing the long periods necessary for accumulating such in-depth knowledge. Not all ethnographers can devote decades to working in particular fieldwork locations.

Emplacement is not only associated with practical activities. Batek and Jahai socio-religious rules [*lawac*], which govern behaviour, are also prime examples of embodiment and emplacement. These rules “firmly link the Batek socially, morally and corporally to their environment ... *Lawac* ‘taboos’ link game animals, cookery, the *hala’ asal* (superhuman beings), menstruation, incest rules, blood and water through a complex set of visual, auditory, and olfactory symbols” (Tacey 2013). For example, certain animals’ blood cannot be washed in streams, certain foodstuffs cannot be cooked over the same fire and there are strict rules concerning incest and menstruation. The mixing of blood and water, tabooed bodily fluids and odours, or the odours of certain foods is said to cause the wrath of the underground rainbow snake and the storm deity who respond by causing terrifying floods, storms, tsunamis or other extreme weather (Endicott 1979). In the contemporary context of rapid environmental and socio-cultural change these supernatural beings are also said to be increasingly angered by the mixing of forest and non-forest objects, and by dangerous international events (wars, environmental destruction etc.). Evidence of their anger flows into the Batek and Jahai worlds through globally-diffused media and technology (via satellite television and DVDs) in the form of documentaries, news reports, and violent and sometimes apocalyptic Hollywood, Bollywood, Chinese and Southeast Asian film productions. The Batek and Jahai’s interpretations and indigenizations of these media imagery are particularly relevant examples of emplacement in the way they link local places, bodies and social rules with transnational environments and places through globalized flows (Riboli 2013, Tacey 2013a).

Conclusion

The multiple positions we hold as fieldworkers must be considered reflexively before, during and after fieldwork. These positions are not only hindrances to the gathering of ethnographic data but can be, as we have argued, used as valuable instruments in the anthropologist’s toolkit. Reflexive, embodied, emplaced fieldwork is a powerful methodological framework, particularly when it is collaborative and gender balanced. The concepts of emplacement and reflexive positionality, when correctly understood and incorporated into research methodology, encourage constant awareness of who we are and how we fit into, frequently complex, relations of power. The complex webs of power within and across the communities we work with, between minority ethnic groups and their more powerful neighbors, and between these communities and State actors, need to be continually renegotiated. The issues that affect communities like the Orang Asli cannot be understood only on the micro-level of individual camps and villages. Anthropologists must also be aware of the social, ethical and political issues relevant to the communities they work with at multiple scales (regional, national, international). Local issues and changes are

often fundamentally connected to national and international levels such as the demand for a certain product (eaglewood, palm oil, timber), or changing global weather conditions (perceived both locally but also via the flows of globalized media). The multiple scales which anthropologists need to work on necessitate that multi-sited fieldwork is not just a methodological choice but an imperative.

Embodied fieldwork means accepting that our own (gendered) bodies are also fieldwork sites and research tools. Powerful insights can be made through adopting a sensorial approach and conducting 'full-bodied' ethnography. These approaches mean taking smells, tastes and other sensorial signifiers seriously. We have argued that sensorial markers are not only important for activities like hunting and gathering (which are of huge importance among societies like the Batek and Jahai), but also in the domains of religious life and everyday sociality. In fact, these various domains are firmly interlinked via complex sensorial webs of signification. Within the type of full-bodied ethnography we have outlined, our bodies and senses become ethnographic tools for learning about the inter-relationships, or rather overlaps, between the domains that anthropologists frequently and all too arbitrarily divide into discrete units; for instance, the anthropology of religion, economic anthropology etc.

The practice of ethnography involves the strange conundrum of outsiders attempting to access the worlds of 'others' through participant observation. The Batek and Jahai describe themselves as 'humans' (the direct translation of the terms Batek and Jahai) and outsiders as '*gob*'. We are absolutely not advocating that ethnographers follow the arrogant colonial path of trying to 'go native' and 'become' Batek or Jahai. However, we are suggesting the self-imposed distance of the individual disembodied anthropological observer—fictional though that state is—acts as a very real barrier to bridging the gap of human contact and all the recognition of difference and similarity that a fully-embodied and emplaced positionality entails. Good collaboration encourages awareness of the fact that good fieldwork is not just head work but body work too. It is not just a case of 'two heads are better than one' but two bodies with all their related sensory potential, knowledge and abilities being fully implicated in the field together.

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