

Report on Ethnographic Work at Tasik Chini

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

We were very grateful for the kind assistance of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) throughout this work and honoured to be granted visiting professorships with UKM, and to our home institution, Bournemouth University for the Fusion Investment Funding.

We also offer our grateful thanks to all those people, especially the Orang Asli of Tasik Chini, who gave so willingly of their time. It is hoped that this research will, in some small way, contribute to a more positive future.

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Key Point Summary

This ethnographic study was completed with the assistance of being granted visiting professorships and an honorarium from UKM.

The work was completed between January and April 2014. It involved seven fieldtrips and six individual interviews with non- Orang Asli stakeholders.

Our findings indicated a clash of cultures, an erosion of environment and lifestyles and perceptions of powerlessness. These findings were interpreted using sociological and anthropological theorisation highlighting potential dialogic ways forward.

The work resulted in the following 10 recommendations

Recommendations:

1. The voices of the Orang Asli, diverse as they are, should be central to any developmental initiative.
2. Social research of a robust participatory nature should be developed and supported with the Orang Asli.
3. Research activities need to be conducted with the full consent of the communities, over and above generalised consent provided by the Tok Batin. All research findings need to be shared with the communities using a variety of formats, as appropriate. Participatory co-research is strongly encouraged.
4. No socio-economic initiatives should be developed or put into place without the express agreement of the Orang Asli communities. PPTC could be instrumental in working alongside the people to identify areas for research and socio-economic development.
5. PPTC should acknowledge the anger of the people and offer ‘an olive branch’ through the provision of meaningful paid work, using the traditional skills and forest-based knowledge of the Orang Asli. Dialogue and acknowledgement of the limits of research in influencing socio-political and economic change would be helpful.
6. Respectful, open dialogue needs to be opened with the communities working at the OA ‘democratic assembly’, traditional pace, facilitated by those both parties consider to be skilled, highly respected, trusted and committed individuals.
7. Access to the PPTC area at Tasik Chini should be commonly shared with the Orang Asli communities as this area holds both sacred meaning and valuable plant resources for communities, which is unrecognised. Currently if the people try to access the site they are viewed as trespassing on their own appropriated land and ordered off by security guards. This has naturally created very bad feeling.

8. UKM/PPTC could offer scholarships to bright young Orang Asli for further study. This would need to be considered at undergraduate as well as postgraduate levels and ideally would offer joined-up pathways. For undergraduate levels this could lead to built-in postgraduate study opportunities. At postgraduate scholarship levels this could involve a PPTC/UKM 'grow-your-own' junior research assistant role as a stepping-off point from graduation, leading to the first rung on an academic career ladder.
 9. A Tasik Chini partnership, bringing together the diverse expertise of the communities, local business initiatives, the NGOs and faith groups, and HEI should be considered to move forward important campaigns to protect the ecology of the forest and lake area and traditional lifestyles. If considered this should be chaired by a local Orang Asli elected by the people.
 10. UKM could play a very important role as impartial mediators between the JHEOA and the communities in order to develop a more constructive approach towards meeting the articulated needs of what the communities actually want, as opposed to a rehearsal of top-down policies and assumptions of what the communities need.
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Orang Asli fisherwoman

Background

In 2012 the researchers met with Prof Dato' Dr Mushrifah Idris, Director of the *Pusat Penyelidikan Tasik Chini*, UKM, on her visit to Bournemouth University, UK. At that meeting, the researchers were introduced to some of the ecological issues facing the Tasik Chini area and discussed the human impact on the indigenous communities in the area. Subsequent discussions over the following year via email resulted in the researchers making an application for study leave from Bournemouth University to spend time with UKM and develop research with the communities at Tasik Chini.

The application for study leave was successful and the researchers were honoured to be invited as visiting professors of the Tasik Chini Research Centre and to be granted an honorarium to complete the research between January and April 2014.

Background to the research:

Environmental science research

There has been a great deal of important scientific research concerning issues relating to the Tasik Chini ecosystem and health of the lake, including the impact of the dam, the Sungai Chini Navigation Lock, deforestation and subsequent mining, and logging. This scientific research has highlighted problems, as residual fraction, with heavy metal concentrations, namely Cadmium, Copper and Lead, in the lake and sediment, although there is still a high level of organic content within the lakes (Ebrahimpour and Idris, 2008a). This indicates some hopefulness in respect of re-establishing the

lake's ecology and future sustainability. Further research compared mean metal concentrations in Tasik Chini with a range of water quality standards showing that the mean metals concentration in surface water were low and within the range of natural background except for iron and aluminium, with increased localized concentrations being associated with natural causes such as the monsoon season but influenced by human activities through mining. The greatest concentrations were found at three sites, Tanjung Jerangking and Melai (Shuhaimi-Othman et al., 2008). It is possible to speculate that mining activity has increased the concentrations reaching the lake during the monsoon season.

Scientific research has also examined the presence and impact of heavy metals within different fish species at the lake, finding that there was (rain and dry) seasonal and species variation in the amounts of cadmium, copper and lead found within the fish (Ebrahimpour and Idris, 2010). Ahmad and Shuhaimi-Othman (2010) found, in their study, that heavy metal concentrations were below the upper safety limits for eating and that fairly low levels of metal concentration in sediment and in fish suggest no significant anthropogenic metal inputs to the lake. They concluded that:

(a)ccording to Malaysian Interim Water Quality Standards, Lake Chini can be classified between classes I to III which is suitable for aquatic organisms growth. Heavy metal concentrations in sediment's non-residual fraction ascertain that Lake Chini is free from metal contaminants, although Pb, Cd and Zn were exhibits (sic) slightly high concentration. Fishes are safe to be taken for daily diet some all metals detected in fishes were below the permissible limit suggested by the Malaysian Food Act (1983). (Ahmad and Shuhaimi-Othamn, 2010: 99)

This study was undertaken in December and perhaps requires further longitudinal study given the seasonal variation found in their studies. However, Shuhaimi-Othman et al.'s (2008) three-month study found similar levels of safety including that for bodily contact with the water. It is an interesting study that perhaps exemplifies a necessary point for science and everyday human life to intersect.

The ways in which metal concentrations has affected the aquatic plant life has been the focus of further research from the Tasik Chini Research Centre (Ebrahimpour and Idris, 2008b). Five aquatic plant species were examined at 15 separate sites around the lake for the presence of cadmium, copper and lead. Whilst there were higher concentrations of lead than copper and cadmium, these differed according to plant species and according to location within each plant.

The scientific research is equivocal in respect of the dangers of the levels of pollution due to heavy metal concentration and the anthropogenic causes of such. Also the research cited here was undertaken some five to seven years ago and mining activity and attendant deforestation has increased significantly during that time, suggesting perhaps that increased sediment and metal concentration in the lake is possible. However, taken together the research suggests that the impact of human activity through deforestation and mining in particular may have resulted in differing concentrations of heavy metals within the ecosystem of the lake, something which the communities living around and living from the resources of the lake are likely to find extremely disturbing and potentially hazardous. As Mustafa and Nilgum (2006)

observe high concentrations of heavy metals are potentially dangerous to aquatic ecosystems and to humans living off such systems. There is no evidence to suggest that human health and wellbeing or perceptions of the communities around Tasik Chini have been considered in the expansion of mining into these areas, or their daily sensory and emotional experiences of living from the lake resources. These perceptions and the problematic of science and evidence in everyday life will be explored further in the discussion.

Socioeconomic research

There has also been significant socio-economic baseline data collected for the East Coast Economic Region Strategic Implementation Plan conducted by the Tasik Chini Research Centre but not yet considered and acted upon by the ECER (Omar, 2014).

The report details data for the years 2010-12, and covers all three communities around the Tasik Chini area: the Orang Asli, the Malay Kampung and the FELDA (Federal Land Development Agency) community. The Orang Asli community comprises five key villages of which Gumum and Ulu Gumum includes 80% of the people. Around 88% of the Orang Asli are Jakun, but there are also some Semai people within the villages.

There are 79 Orang Asli households, comprising 429 people who mostly live in nuclear family structures. Families have a mean of 4.4 birth children. The mean age of people within the community is 23 years and not many survive after 60 years of age.

In terms of the socioeconomic profile of the Orang Asli communities, educational attainment remains low. Many of the villagers have not attended school or have only completed primary education. About 50% of the Orang Asli population at Tasik Chini are able to read and write, and only a few speak basic English. The Orang Asli in the Kampung are mainly farmers, and forest resource collectors. Unemployment is high and average incomes are low at a mean of 527RM a month, which is below the Malaysian poverty line. (Also, not everyone is receiving the RM500 per month guaranteed for those who have accepted a small palm oil plantation from which income can be received). This analysis runs somewhat counter to that of Habibah et al. (2010) who suggest that whilst traditional forest resource practices are important for the Jakun Orang Asli around Tasik Chini, they have benefited from the oil palm plantations and from eco-tourism. The latter may relate to previous tourism potential and actuality that other observations indicate has declined significantly with resultant loss of income for the local people.

The local community have a number of skills and potential for future economic activity. Fifty per cent of the community have handicraft skills, sewing, and farming skills. These present opportunities for the future but, in terms of tourism very few have food preparation skills and worrying for the preservation of cultural life, only a few retain knowledge of the forest and lake and its resources and how to live from it and these are mainly older people within the community; for instance, only 17% of the people have knowledge of traditional medicine. There are a number of small scale businesses in which 11% of the people are involved, including some motorcycle repairs etc. Tour guides comprise 10% of the people. The skills and positive attributes of the community can be used to move forward and, according to Omar (2014), includes employment as boatmen for the lake, and assisting with knowledge of the

local flora/fauna. The central issue is how to engage people in these activities, and this involves a complex socio-political situation in which the Orang Asli must be allowed to define working areas for themselves and not be reliant on what has been determined by others, whether than be NGOs, State or Federal Government or HEIs. There also needs to be cooperation with the communities, the Jaringan Orang Asli and the Center for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC) for this to work.

In respect of home ownership, this is quite high with around 98% of households owning their own houses. Some of these have been provided by the Government. Most are built of brick or are more traditional wooden structures. Twenty-two per cent of people own their own oil palm plantation which is managed by RISDA (Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Association) or MIUP (*Majlis Ugama Islam Dan Adat Resam Melayu Pahang*). Whilst this seems constructive this also represents a fragmented and confusing picture. Many of the people 'owning' a plot do not know which plot is theirs and will not visit it or farm it themselves often because of fear of trespassing. Also, there appears to be no trust from the palm oil contractors to recruit Orang Asli people in the area to work on the oil palm production. There is a built-in dependency culture to these activities that offer a small grant to those giving up their traditional land claims for a small plot in oil palm production, but does not involve the management and resource exploitation of that land, an almost welfare-benefit payment for not working. This also constitutes effectively a poverty trap for individuals as they are not able to capitalise or expand on these holdings, and will have given up claims to other land that they could have been used productively for the benefit of themselves and their communities.

The future for the Orang Asli communities, according to Omar (2014), lies in collaborating across all NGOs, community groups and organisations to work together with the local community to clean up the lake, and stop deforestation that threatens their lands. Past reliance on JHEOA (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli) has not led to improvements or protection. JHEOA represent a body at State rather than Federal level and therefore claim they do not have the power to influence land, forests, and water disputes. Also, many of the officials remain untrained. The conclusion from Omar (2014) was that not too much can be expected from them.

Eco-tourism

Habibah et al. (2013) reflect on previous eco-tourism initiatives and the opportunities offered by the UN Biosphere Reserve status being granted in 2009. The history of eco-tourism was considered as top-down in development and the involvement of all stakeholders is crucial to its further development in the future. Habibah et al. adopt a 'place-making' approach that seeks to combine development with sustainable eco-tourism that is supported, not only by government, but also by people living around the lakes.

Eco-tourism has been important to the region in the 1990s and early 2000s, with villages developing handicrafts for sale and shows of their lifestyles. However, developments around the lake led to misguided attempts to bolster and grow the industry such as the development of the Sungei Chini dam which has led to significant ecological changes to the lifecycle of Tasik Chini and, paradoxically, the decline of the tourism industry.



Abandoned tourist embarkment stage, Sungei Chini

NGOs, activism and the 'Save Tasik Chini' campaign

Tasik Chini, the second largest fresh water lake in Malaysia is the land of *Jakun* tribe of the Orang Asli. The Jakun community remains highly dependent on the local ecosystem and the twelve lakes or *lauts* of the Tasik Chini for their livelihood and for the maintenance of their culture. The mainstay of the community's economy has been mainly lake- and forest-based activities, including fishing, hunting and gathering of forest products including herbs, although modern business developments have had an impact on these traditional livelihoods and on everyday practices amongst the Jakun.

The development of tourism, mining and logging resulted in a substantial depletion of natural and cultural resources. This resulted in an urgent nomination for and granting of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status to ensure that conservation and restoration plans are put into place. However, this does not appear to have resulted in engagement from those wielding large economic power, with claims that organisation and agencies are powerless in the face of national and global capital.

The 'Save Tasik Chini' campaign of 2012 drew together diverse NGOs working with the Orang Asli and with the Malay Kampung in the area. The research of the Tasik Chini Research Centre was instrumental in highlighting some of the issues facing the lake and the people. However, political conflicts were rife and the campaign was derailed with no-one to continue the cohesive approach originally promoted by Transparency International.

A submission was made to the Human Rights Commission Malaysia, which led to the airing of some challenges to the work of PPTC as not having the positive impact

expected to the region; to some extent a misunderstanding of the power of universities and scientific research. However, this commission highlighted some of the growing anger and diversity of opinions concerning the area and its future. The strength of the 'Save Tasik Chini' campaign in drawing together diverse interest groups around common concerns was lost.

A memorandum was written and sent to the Prime Minister and a Taskforce was set up to consider land rights and claims which is due to report later in 2014.

It is in this context of anger, dissent and turbulence that our study was undertaken.

Background summary

A great deal of research has been conducted in the area. However, the gap we have identified in the research and literature pertains to what we would refer to as the 'voice' of the communities. This is surprising and concerning given that many of the people indicate that they have been researched as an 'interesting' phenomenon and asked to describe their thoughts and perceptions about what is happening to Tasik Chini as well as about their lives and culture but that nothing concrete – usually expressed in terms of removal of the dam, stopping deforestation, logging and mining, returning their traditional land rights - has resulted.

Methodology

Principles:

It was important for us to consider some of the developments in indigenous research methodologies and knowledge creation, usually developed in postcolonial settings, which could be explored in relation to marginalised and disadvantaged groups such as the Orang Asli communities at Tasik Chini.

Some of the presumptions and principles on which our research work was to be conducted are included below:

- The Orang Asli represent a marginalised and disadvantaged group of tribes.
- The voice of the Orang Asli is paramount to the success of social research initiatives that claim to be transformatory and this equally applies to the Jakun of Tasik Chini.
- Participatory ethnographic research is an iterative and exploratory process in which it was important for us to make explicit the positions of both ourselves as external researchers as well as that of participants within the research.
- Ethnographic research may result in unexpected findings and we should be open to that.
- Externally sponsored research may have different agendas to the Orang Asli communities and keeping this in mind was crucial.
- Research with the Orang Asli should be participatory, seek to equalise power relations, promote the voices and seek the perspectives of those groups and individuals participating.
- As researchers we needed to beware of potential 'collusion with power', of not accepting received positions and knowledge but questioning all and highlighting marginalised positions.

- Self-reflection/reflexivity – critiquing our own positions vis-a-vis those of people within the communities – was central to the approach of the researchers.

The principles on which the research is based were designed to offer participatory perspectives that can assist in helping participants to engage with and actively contribute to, even lead, research concerning their lives, lifestyles and cultures. It is designed to change and develop those communities according to the wants and wishes of people therein rather than to adapt communities to a dominant, and potentially marginalising, but accepted paradigm of social and economic development.

Our work comprised a modern day ethnography that did not allow for immersion in the lives of the community over an extended period of time, but rather intensive, shorter periods of fieldwork between January and April 2014.

Because of our short time scale we did not have the potential for in-depth protracted immersion and relied in our short intensives fieldwork on focus groups, in-depth interviews with the Orang Asli at the villages around Tasik Chini, with academics working in the area, with NGOs, and others (see Appendix I for examples of the questions considered, and Appendix II for a breakdown of the visits and interviews undertaken). These intensive fieldtrips and data gathering activities were supplemented by observations and immersion within the literature over the period.

Our ethnographies focused on the perceptions of modern life and the impact of external changes, considering a clash of civilisations, cultures and peoples. In focus it began with two foci comprising a broader ethnographic study and one that considered how clashes and conflicts are resolved.



Destruction of sacred Bukit Ketaya

Findings

- There exists a wealth of ethnographic work on Orang Asli communities but little concerning Tasik Chini.
- This study rebalances the scientific understanding of what is taking place with a focus on the impact and repercussions on human experience and daily lives.
- The people's struggles for recognition of their needs and human rights are eclipsed.
- They are aware of the massive irony that the international status of the area does not protect the environment and people whatsoever.
- General lack of awareness of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People or what this could mean for the communities.
- Clear awareness of the problems besetting the lake and the impact on the well-being and livelihood of the communities but equally that what they have to say to politicians, media, UKM and other stakeholders is dismissed/ignored.
- A sense of harmful mixed messages being given to politicians that do not serve the best interest of the community or the ecological well-being of the area.

- Livelihoods are being significantly damaged by the situation with much wasted human potential as a repercussion. Former livelihoods based on the natural forest and lake environment have been significantly eroded. Attempts to find new livelihoods are jeopardised by similar factors of damage to the environment as well as having to compete at a disadvantage in the global economy (for instance, local vs. global Tongkat Ali production).
- Poverty – the ability of the communities to be self-sufficient is being substantially eroded by cumulative environmental damage. The option to take the 500RM for palm oil holdings is no real solution to poverty as they are unable to manage the crops themselves or expand their holdings and control the intensity of crop production. People are being pushed into poverty traps that erode autonomy and independence and cultivate dependence – leading to poverty cycles that may prove to be replicated down generations.
- The people are no longer able to earn a living through fishing or to supplement their diet easily through fish catches due to the drop in fish stocks, the marked deterioration in flavour of the fish – repeatedly described as ‘disgusting’/ ‘bad’, the awareness of parasites and diseases in fish stocks. This combined with loss of agricultural lands is a serious problem in terms of nutrition.
- The people are no longer able to use swidden-farming techniques for *padi* cultivation as this is very likely to lead to a Court summons with the penalty of 10,000 RM fine or 1 year’s imprisonment as traditional lands are regarded as State property. People are therefore obliged to buy rice. This is complicated by poverty issues leading to less balanced diets and the danger of malnutrition¹.
- The people can no longer use the lake water for washing, bathing or drinking without concern. At Kampung Ulu Melai they have been obliged to pay for piped water from the mining companies that are culpable for the environmental damage in the first place, adding to a local sense of grievance and injury.
- The people complain that their health is being damaged by the contaminants from mining and logging. They inform us that skin problems and respiratory diseases are more common across all age groups now, as are stomach problems and bloating, sore throats and headaches. In late December 2013 a health crisis occurred at Kampung Gumum where 21 fainted on the same day and were taken to the health clinic. The Tok Batin’s otherwise apparently healthy son suddenly died and the day before that the Tok Batin’s daughter-in-law (who was in poor health) also died. This is seen as a very significant and worrying event by the community.
- The people’s anger, frustration and grief about the damage to the lake is felt to be suppressed and ignored. They are hugely conscious of the destruction of a

¹ Malnutrition is a serious problem among Orang Asli communities where it is regarded as caused or exacerbated severely by loss of traditional lands and access to varied sources of food (Nicholas, 2000)

uniquely beautiful environment, over and above what the lake areas meant to them as traditional lands and in terms of livelihood.

- In relation to the above, they have made huge attempts to draw attention to their plight (such as the ‘Save Tasik Chini’ campaign and writing a memorandum to the Prime Minister as well as trying to draw media attention). Many have shown great resourcefulness - but to no avail. This has resulted in a sense of ‘learned helplessness’: that nothing they can do will make any difference.
- The people wish the Authorities to tackle the environmental problems in a robust, constructive, cooperative and proactive manner. They do not wish the reputation of Malaysia to be damaged by having the Biosphere Reserve status accorded to the area removed by UNESCO in due course, as seems almost inevitable, looking at what previously happened at Tasik Bera, if the continuing damage is not reversed.
- The people are fearful of malicious repercussions towards them by more powerful groups when they protest against damage to the lake. They are therefore caught in an impossible no-win situation: to protest or not to protest. This is creating dissent and despair within the communities.
- The people, and their external friends, have noticed that they are receiving a lot of research attention from many groups, in addition to PPT. Such attempts to study them are often viewed as intrusive and unwelcome, especially where the fruits or benefits of such research are not shared with them in a transparent, respectful and constructive manner – which is essential for good working relationships.
- ‘Anomie’ is experienced by the external demolition of social and cultural values and the importance these played in terms of community meanings and social cohesion. The damage to the environment, to livelihoods and lives is compounded by the increasing internalised sense of a loss of a viable future for all members of the community, but particularly the young people. The threatened loss of traditional values, beliefs, mores and rituals are not replaced by the so-called ‘advantages’ and values of modern capitalist society.
- Religious and cultural marginalisation relates to the above, where the people are aware of the *dakwah* drive towards Islamisation, as being viewed as integral to ‘development’, such as is promoted by the JHEOA. Resistance to cultural erosion explains the tenacity by which many cling to their own spiritual beliefs in animism (although a small group have converted to Christianity, although many resist strongly too). It is probable that they are also aware of the low status accorded to animism in Malaysia, despite the fact that there is strong global interest in animism as a counter philosophy to unsustainable exploitation of natural resources.
- External educational concerns regarding young people are often framed as lack of parental concern, lack of educational aptitude, lack of discipline and aggravated by poverty. However, findings seem to indicate that parents are

concerned about education as offering an alternative future to their children. Children speak of the bullying and belittlement of Orang Asli children at mixed ethnic schools. There is also the strong sense of a very uncertain future regardless of education, as several intelligent young people in the community still eke out a very precarious living in the community and have not obviously prospered. Two people have applied to the JHEOA for jobs but were turned down.

- Gender issues – the communities appear to be democratic and relatively equal in terms of gender. Many strong women leaders can be found here. This is important to note and work with in order to avoid reinforcing the notion of patriarchal authoritiveness – unfamiliar in Orang Asli culture - where the voices and presence of women are excluded or marginalised.
- The voices and views of the people need to be captured and projected outwards to an international audience: this conforms with the strongly articulated wishes of the people.
- Views of the OA as backward, uneducated and uninformed are challenged by their organisation, eloquence (and education), use of social media, connections to NGOs and shrewd understandings of vested interests and unspoken agendas. Their struggle to keep ahead through traditional livelihoods and new entrepreneurship is constantly eroded by the damage to the environment and by big business and is again interpreted as a sign of their ineptness rather than macro and structural in nature.
- Their traditional knowledge in application to current situations is underestimated and belittled. They are fully aware that it is not they who has damaged the environment and are outraged by the attempt to criminalise their normal, traditional activities; or other attempts (deliberate or not) to make them seem almost equally complicit in the environmental damage taking place².
- There is real anger towards UKM expressed and apparently much damage to community relations has occurred. The communities refer to promises perceived to be unkept in regards to land preservation and land use, agricultural initiatives (related to land use), jobs and employment, along with perceived mixed messages regarding the state of the lake – which is particularly regarded as serving to undermine their people's statements and experiences of it.
- The loss of the tourist industry has not been properly addressed at all. The communities have no difficulty making the link between the ecological disaster taking place and the loss of tourism. This was one of their main sources of income and so this represents a very serious loss to them. Any such

² This kind of easy scapegoating of indigenous/traditional groups in relation to wide-scale damage to the environment by others can be seen in other countries e.g. the Hill Tribes of Thailand or the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh (see *Trading for Gold*)

proposals to resuscitate or recreate eco-tourism would need to directly tackle these points in order to be seen as viable and relevant by the communities.

- The issue of control over lands and representation – State vs federal governments, JHEOA etc. The Tok Batin is aware of the power of the JHEOA in the appointment of his successor and this is a source of real concern, although how far that concern is shared in the communities is as yet unknown. The role of the Tok Batin is more complex and culturally nuanced than solely community representation/leadership and appears to involve the embodiment of community cultural capital. The potential usurpation of chosen representation of the Tok Batin (while not a new phenomenon is now being underlined by the JHEOA in demanding formal qualifications of candidates). This development may therefore have wide implications in terms of further erosion of community autonomy and ‘voice’. This situation should be monitored.
- Ethno-philosophy – the dragon mythology, local names of plants and trees are central to the cultural capital of the people – the loss of these represent the forfeiture of cultural capital of enormous value not only to the people but also to the nation and, no doubt, globally.
- Mutuality and reciprocity in research engagement – the people value respectful research encounters where relationships are carefully constructed. They value the exercise of equal power relations and attempts to develop co-constructed knowledge. They dislike and distrust top-down, non-participatory approaches. In discussion they have shown a good understanding about the potential and the limitations of research and the constraints and power of the academic role. This, however, needs to be reiterated by PPTC.

Discussion and Recommendations

How we understand what is happening to the people around Tasik Chini as a consequence of political, entrepreneurial and environmental change is central to working with the communities to effect the changes they wish to make, and for interested outsiders to those communities to be able to enjoy and work with the forest and lake areas. A degree of theorisation is necessary here.

There are a number of binary themes emanating from the work so far. Although such a structuralist approach, based around Claude Levi-Strauss’ anthropological analysis, may not allow for the complex deep interactions of modern social life which is much more nuanced, they present valuable insights into our understanding of some of the conflicts faced by the Orang Asli of Tasik Chini. The binaries include:

1. Modernisation vs. Tradition (ideological isomorphism vs plurivocality)
2. David and Goliath – the voice of the individual vs the voice of received power.
3. Autonomy and self-reliance vs. dependency cultures and ‘speaking for’
4. Perceptions of science vs. perceptions of everyday life

Modernisation vs traditional lifestyles is seen in a number of contemporary practices. The policy of integration of all ethnic groups and peoples into one Malaysian society may be perceived by some as carrying potential dangers as well as benefits in terms of the erosion of lifestyles that may be considered incompatible with that aim. Modernisation also reflects engagement with global capitalism and the market economy, which may again challenge traditional cooperative socio-economic practices. The modernisation perspective represents a social isomorph seeking to develop across all peoples and settings but in the same way. An emphasis on traditional lifestyles would rather emphasise the many perspectives that jostle for a hearing.

The power of size – *the voice of the individual vs the voice of received power* is shown in big farming (e.g., FELDA – Federal Land Development Authority/MUIP - Majlis Ugama Islam Dan Adat Resam Melayu Pahang), mining, logging in contrast to local small rubber plantation, localised clearing, fishing, small production. Unfortunately, it seems that the rationale for big business and received power is not subject to critique or questioning and the small, individual efforts often reflecting the traditional approaches of the Orang Asli are castigated. David has not yet developed his slingshot to defeat Goliath!

Autonomy and self-reliance vs. dependency cultures and 'speaking for' this is demonstrated through the wide-scale and apparently inexorable erosion of what was probably a hard but self-sufficient life to one where the people are being asked to give up their independence to live a life of effectively welfare-dependency. The paradox facing the people is that their plight is also used as a way of demonstrating their backwardness and inability to participate more effectively in the global market economy. This leaves them more vulnerable to discourses relating to their need for 'development', organisation and representation by other more powerful groups.

Perceptions of science vs. perceptions from everyday life shows the disjuncture that can occur when science is perceived to hold all the answers to human problems of living rather than answering some of the questions that human and social complexity raises. Science can identify some of the problems affecting the eco-system of the lake and the surrounding area and can offer solutions, but it does so from particular standpoints building on paradigms that may not be shared by all people. Some of the disagreements between UKM and the Orang Asli at Tasik Chini, of which we have been told, appear to reflect a misunderstanding of the power of science to effect changes and a specific position that does not reflect the central concerns of the people.

At a surface level there also appears to be a funnelled effect from modern-day life on the people of Tasik Chini that leads from brand conceptions of globalisation and the primacy of market economies to modernisation, in a post-Merdeka Malaysian context, to a sense of individual anomie and learned helplessness amongst the people at Kampung level.

Understanding of the ways the Orang Asli around Tasik Chini are experiencing the present situation can also be seen as being in a state of liminality, in which the people are neither in their traditional position in respect of the land and its use and neither fully part of contemporary Malaysian society, they are 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1969; van Gennep, 1906; Parker et al. 2012). Ritual, in this understanding, can be

performed in two ways. The first comprises those rituals that are officially sanctioned; and the second comprises of those traditional rites that have accrued specific meaning. So, in a sense, the Orang Asli are part of a wider officially sanctioned ritual to integrate them into mainstream society with practices and meanings associated with that at a political level. This carries with it the possibility of eroded the differences between Malays and the Orang Asli so all can be welcomed as Orang Asli, the indigenous people. However, this can only be achieved by eroding the identity and culture of the Orang Asli as inferior to that of the dominant group. Thus, the Orang Asli are placed in a strict and subordinate hierarchical ordering of ethnic groups in Malaysia, which has clearly been an important factor to their physical, cultural and social dispossession. The politically useful rhetoric of development illuminates our understanding of this process.

The second form of ritual acknowledges the special connection with the land and the lake and forest areas of Tasik Chini, and the practices of swiddening, clearing and planting and spiritual rituals that mark out people as indigenous groups; something that is increasingly problematised by politico-legal change and by the influence of big business.

Within this context powerlessness is seen. The illegitimised ‘truths’ of the Kampung rear strengths through opposition, but these are curtailed through various interactions and multiple wants, needs and positions. Thus the ‘Save Tasik Chini’ campaign, the activism of NGOs and Kampung people led to a conflict that has led to a ‘hearing’ of the people’s voices. This, however, can be understood from a Marxist perspective as being defused through the Taskforce deliberations following the memorandum to the PM and Pahang State Assembly. So, the people have been listened to as a means of reducing the desire for protest but the impact, still awaited as it is, may be limited.

The ways in which Tasik Chini and the Orang Asli people are approached and dealt with can be analysed through the use of organisational sociological analysis which involves examining the ways in which societies are brought to heel through the hegemony of global isomorphic governance and practice which all nations must subscribe to in order to have a voice, a position at the table of power and influence, something important to Malaysia’s economic development plan. Big business and the power of capital must be allowed to flourish and create markets that enable Malaysia to assume its place in the global capitalist world.

The complexities of the situation for the Orang Asli, however, are overlaid by contemporary localised ecological and entrepreneurial changes around the forest and lake areas that hold multiple perspectives for all those living in the area and all stakeholder groups. This complex includes three elements:

- The personal/individual – including the Orang Asli Kampung, the FELDA settlement, the Malay Kampung
- Business and capital interests – logging, mining, mass agriculture
- Social policy and modernisation, integration and global perspectives.

If we are to make any headway in enacting ways forward that meet the needs and wants of the people all these aspects must be taken into account. It will be important not to fall victim to reductionist approaches which, in an unspoken way, condense

things to commonalities rather than allow difference and conflict to develop. Indeed, the latter can offer positive potential change. Being comfortable with dialectics may offer some opportunities as these rely upon conflict to reach a different position and this requires significant cultural and political engagement and reciprocal compromises. Without this, it does seem that there is rather an intractable problem.

Recommendations:

11. The voices of the Orang Asli, diverse as they are, should be central to any developmental initiative.
12. Social research of a robust participatory nature should be developed and supported with the Orang Asli.
13. Research activities need to be conducted with the full consent of the communities, over and above generalised consent provided by the Tok Batin. All research findings need to be shared with the communities using a variety of formats, as appropriate. Participatory co-research is strongly encouraged.
14. No socio-economic initiatives should be developed or put into place without the express agreement of the Orang Asli communities. PPTC could be instrumental in working alongside the people to identify areas for research and socio-economic development.
15. PPTC should acknowledge the anger of the people and offer ‘an olive branch’ through the provision of meaningful paid work, using the traditional skills and forest-based knowledge of the Orang Asli. Dialogue and acknowledgement of the limits of research in influencing socio-political and economic change would be helpful.
16. Respectful, open dialogue needs to be opened with the communities working at the OA ‘democratic assembly’, traditional pace, facilitated by those both parties consider to be skilled, highly respected, trusted and committed individuals.
17. Access to the PPTC area at Tasik Chini should be commonly shared with the Orang Asli communities as this area holds both sacred meaning and valuable plant resources for communities, which is unrecognised. Currently if the people try to access the site they are viewed as trespassing on their own appropriated land and ordered off by security guards. This has naturally created very bad feeling.
18. UKM/PPTC could offer scholarships to bright young Orang Asli for further study. This would need to be considered at undergraduate as well as postgraduate levels and ideally would offer joined-up pathways. For undergraduate levels this could lead to built-in postgraduate study opportunities. At postgraduate scholarship levels this could involve a PPTC/UKM ‘grow-your-own’ junior research assistant role as a stepping-off point from graduation, leading to the first rung on an academic career ladder.

19. A Tasik Chini partnership, bringing together the diverse expertise of the communities, local business initiatives, the NGOs and faith groups, and HEI should be considered to move forward important campaigns to protect the ecology of the forest and lake area and traditional lifestyles. If considered this should be chaired by a local Orang Asli elected by the people.
20. UKM could play a very important role as impartial mediators between the JHEOA and the communities in order to develop a more constructive approach towards meeting the articulated needs of what the communities actually want, as opposed to a rehearsal of top-down policies and assumptions of what the communities need.

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Appendices

Appendix I. Interview Protocols

a. Focus Group Discussions: Ethnography of Tasik Chini

Kampung:

Date:

Researcher:

Interpreter:

Participants present: sex, age groups, numbers,

1. Are there any differences in the lake and areas around it compared to the past?
Prompt: how long ago was that?
2. What are the differences?
Prompt: Are you able to use the lake and the areas in the same ways now as you have always done? In the ways that your parents did?
3. What has happened to the lake to cause these changes?
4. Who or what do you think is responsible for these changes?
Prompt: Why has this happened?
5. What are the effects for the people living in the kampungs around here?
6. Are the effects different for different people? For example, are the effects different for women and children, compared to men, or the same?
Prompt: in which ways are they same?
Prompt: in which ways different?
7. Have you got other concerns to do with life in the kampungs?
8. What have the people living here been able to do about the concerns they may have?
Prompt: Who have you spoken to about these concerns?
9. Do you think your opinions have been listened to?
10. What do you think of what has been done about the problems you face?
11. What do you think should be done about the problem?
12. How are disputes and conflicts resolved in your kampung?
Prompt: has this changed in your lifetime?

13. What is your opinion about the future of the communities living around the lake?

Prompt: What are your concerns about the future?

Prompt: What are your hopes for the future?

14. What would you say to the authorities about this if they were here in this room right now and you were allowed to speak without fear?

b. Conflict interview protocol – Tasik Chini

Explore some of the ways in which your people negotiate and resolve disagreements and conflicts

- between individuals
- between parents and children
- between relatives
- between villages
- with people outside of the tribe

Have the ways in which conflicts and disagreements are resolved changed over time?

- are there traditional roles and ways in which conflicts and disagreements are dealt with
- are these still used today
- is anything different?

Identify some examples of disagreements that are particularly important at the moment

- have these changed over time
- how are these resolved
- is there anything different in these challenges?

Do you have any beliefs about how disagreements and conflicts you are experiencing at the moment could be best resolved?

Could you give a story, an example of how a disagreement was resolved, what the steps were that were involved and what the outcomes were?

c. Individual interviews with professionals: academics, NGOs, policy etc.

1. The OA have a degree of protection via the JHEOA statement of policy 1961 and through legislation 1954 (updated 74) but they are not included in Federal Constitution as bumiputera – so how does one understand this?

2. How would you express the contradictions of part protection via JHEOA but no power to enforce protection? Especially when faced with the power of capital.
3. What do you think the State Government and Malaysian Government want for the future of the OA?
4. How do you think the OA people are seen by the general public and by the Government?
5. Can the integrationist policy and protection of indigenous rights be squared?
6. What is the future for the Orang Asli communities?
7. Regarding Tasik Chini why has the UNESCO biosphere status not been sufficient to protect the environment and the communities that live there?
8. Why do you think the Save the Tasik Chini campaign not produced obvious results yet?
9. The adults fear that their indigenous knowledge and social and community values are being lost to the younger generation – do you think that is a legitimate concern?
10. Does this matter and if so, what can be done about it?
11. They are also concerned about the disengagement of young people (adolescent males in particular) from education. What would you say about this?
12. Is there anything you think we haven't asked about but should? Please comment

Appendix II – visits and interviews

Field trips

4 February. PPTC interdisciplinary fieldtrip to Tasik Chini. Kampung Gumum school visited as well as Kampung Melai, Chenahan and Tanjong Puput. Group discussion with the Headmaster of the Gumum School and with the Tok Batin, Awang Alok. Day concluded with a planning meeting at the PPTC forest laboratories.

8-9 February. Field trip to Tasik Chini area to hold discussions at Kampung Keruing, Kampung Ulu Gumum and the Temerloh Mardec rubber processing factory which processes latex produced by the Orang Asli communities via ‘middle-men’ dealers.

13-16 February. Field trip to Tasik Chini. Tok Batin interviewed. Group and individual interviews held at Kampung Melai, Kampung Ulu Gumum, Kampung Tanjong Puput, Kampung Gumum.

21-23 February. Field trip to Tasik Chini. Group and individual interviews held at Kampung Ulu Melai, Ulu Gumum and Gumum.

6-9 March. Field trip to Tasik Chini. Individual interviews held at Kampung Gumum and at Chenahan as well as at the Tasik Chini Resort. Attempt to hold Focus Group Discussions at Tanjong Puput aborted due to asset mapping exercise already underway.

25-26 March Terengganu. Fieldtrip for individual interview and interviews with the Batek-Negrito of Taman Negara for comparative purposes.

7-11 April. Fieldtrip to Tasik Chini. Focus group discussions to be held at Kampung Chenahan, Kampung Tanjong Puput, individual interviews with the Chini Health Clinic and Headmaster of Gumum School, as well as critical observation of and interviews with local people.

Projected return visit to the communities in June/July 2014 and for the PPTC Launch.

Individual professional interviews.

A number of people have been contacted for interviews. Of these the following have been conducted to-date.

4th March

Dr Dato Dennison Jayasooria, Institute of Ethnic Studies, UKM

Dr Colin Nicholas, Center for Orang Asli Concerns

7th March

Representative of the Tasik Chini Resort.

11th March

Prof Dato Hood Salleh, UKM

12th March

Onn Sein, YKPM Foundation

25th March

Dr Ramlee bin Abdullah, Assoc Prof UNIZDA

Appendix III – presentations and seminars on the Tasik Chini work

25th Feb. Ashencaen Crabtree, S. & Parker, J.. ‘Asset Mapping and Participatory Rural Appraisal’. UKM.

6th March. Ashencaen Crabtree, S. & Parker, J. ‘Modern day ethnographies of the Orang Asli of Tasik Chini’. UKM.

18th March. Parker, J. & Ashencaen Crabtree, S. ‘From Pandan to Panadol: Towards an ethnography and narrative study of modern day disadvantage amongst the Orang Asli communities of Tasik Chini’ presented on World Social Work Day at Hong Kong University.

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Boys skipping at Kampung Chenahan