Living and working with the Jah Hut of Peninsular Malaysia: Experiences and lessons in decolonizing fieldwork

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Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senoi</th>
<th>Proto-Malay</th>
<th>Negrito</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Che Wong</td>
<td>Kuala</td>
<td>Kensiu</td>
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<td>Mahmeri</td>
<td>Kanaq</td>
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<td>Jahut</td>
<td>Seletar</td>
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<td>Semoq Beri</td>
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<td>Semai</td>
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<td>Temiar</td>
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Oldest inhabiting ethnic minority group. Approx. 180,000 people (as of 2022) out of a population of about 32.7 million people. Marginalized, disenfranchised and left behind in terms of socio-economic development.
Jah Hut

- Senoi sub-division
- Located in and around the Krau Forest and Wildlife Reserve in Pahang
- 14 villages, a total population of about 5,500 people (as of 2022)
- Main socioeconomic activity:
  1. Small-scale subsistence farming, including shifting cultivation (hill rice)
  2. Cash crop smallholding (rubber and oil palm)
- Struggle to maintain identity and control over their lands and resources

Approaching research involving IPs as a non-indigenous researcher: Important aspects to consider

- What do I need to know about the community?
- Whom do I consult to understand the community better?
- Is the research important to the community?
- In what ways will this research benefit / harm the community?
- Who else benefits from this research?
- What is their history and how are they affected by it?
- What is their experience with past researchers?
- What is unique about their environment that I need to be aware of?
- What are their spiritual beliefs and cultural practices that I need to be aware of?
- How do they perceive themselves, the world and their place in it?
Socio-spiritual considerations involving the Jah Hut

- Puteri/ bahalak/ malaikat / bunian / semangat padi
- Jah Hut Cosmology
- Transcending physical realms and boundaries and accessing nature in a respectful manner
- Nature
- Society & culture
- Social norms, relationships, taboos and practices
- Nuanced differences (traditional vs ‘modern’) between Jah Hut communities

Framework for Conducting Fieldwork with the Jah Hut

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-data collection</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Post-data collection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Thorough research on the community</td>
<td>• Researcher conduct</td>
<td>• Presenting findings to the elders</td>
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<td>• Identifying a liaison trusted by the community</td>
<td>• Obtaining Free Prior Informed Consent</td>
<td>• Data verification with the community</td>
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<td>• Consultation with community elders</td>
<td>• Compensation and recognition</td>
<td>• Acknowledging ownership of knowledge via co-authorship</td>
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<td>• Obtaining consent from the elders</td>
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<td>• Maintaining relationships over the long term</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Obtaining consent from the ancestors</td>
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The importance of dreams for indigenous communities

Dreams
- Knowledge-building processes
- Spiritual beliefs
- Healing

Indigenous wellbeing

Land
Indigenous cosmology
Kinship
Spirit

Dreams as a research method

Elke, R (2020):
- Dreams hold a place of significance in indigenous pedagogies and research methods. They are regarded as transformative and participatory pedagogical tools that facilitate healing, connection to ancestral knowledge, and a deeper understanding of the self and the world.

- Indigenous research methods often incorporate dreams as valid sources of knowledge, weaving together personal experiences, scholarship, and traditional practices.
Dreams as a means for connecting with the ancestors

- Ancestral dreams as conduits for receiving guidance, wisdom, and messages from the past. *Fairley, N. (2003)*
- The recognition and validation of indigenous dreams and ancestral connections are important for preserving and promoting indigenous cultures, knowledge, and well-being. By normalizing and embracing dreams and visions within indigenous communities, there is a greater acknowledgment of indigenous ways of knowing and the unique heritage of indigenous peoples. *Shawanda, A. (2020)*
- The recognition of dreams in the broader society is crucial for bridging the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous worldviews, promoting cultural understanding, and combating stereotypes and misconceptions. *Bruno, A. (2020)*

Community Feasting

- Important socio-spiritual-cultural norm
- Thanksgiving practice in honour of the ancestors
- Appreciating the community
- Shared food as a means to forge close relationships
- Being recognized and accepted as a member of the community
Thank you!

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