

**RESEARCHING
SOCIETY AND
SOCIAL RELATIONS IN
SARAWAK**

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AS	<i>Amerika Syarikat</i>
CBR	Community Based Rehabilitation
CSSR	Colonial Social Science Research Council
CU	Cultural Unit
DFID	Department For International Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICA	Immigrations & Checkpoints Authority Of Singapore
IDS	Institute Of Development Studies
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
JAKIM	<i>Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia</i>
JARING	Joint Advanced Integrated Networking
JKM	<i>Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat</i>
KPM	<i>Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia</i>
MBKS	<i>Majlis Bandaraya Kuching Selatan</i>
MCA	Malaysia Chinese Association
MIMOS	Malaysian Institute Of Microelectronic Systems
NCL	Native Customary Land
NCR	Native Customary Right
NEP	New Economic Policy
PITWITS	<i>Persatuan Ibu Tunggal Wilayah Tengah Sarawak</i>
PL	Provisional License
PWD	People With Disability
RTM	Radio Television Malaysia
STB	<i>Sekolah Tunas Bakti</i>
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific And Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nation Convention Of The Right Of A Child
UNIMAS	<i>Universiti Malaysia Sarawak</i>
WHO	World Health Organisation

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INTRODUCTION

Kamsiah Ali and Sharifah S. Ahmad

INTRODUCTION

Social research constitutes the most visible value of practicality of social science. Since social science was conceived in the middle half of the 18th century, the discipline has been in all intent and purposes *practical* that seeks to raise problems in society and offer solutions to the problems. The problems identified at the outset of the Industrial Revolution such as labour, housing, health, unemployment, security, environment and social illness continue to be the topics for researchers in the current times.

While the problems remained true today, their concepts differ as one may perceived at the level of epistemology and method, namely the nature of the problem and the ways of investigating them. At the level of episteme, social research has witnessed varying degree of adaptation and competition, between positive approach of explanation (*eklaren*) and the interpretive approach of understanding (*verstehen*) or the combination of both. The philosophy underlines the different approaches pertaining to the limit of knowledge, in other words, the extent that knowledge can be accepted as true and objective. While Durkheimian school argued that society can only be studied as observable facts,

Weberian proponents would be more sympathetic to the role of motivation, desires and value-system as driving forces in society. What these differences amounted to points to the existence of different paradigm in thinking and seeing problem in society. To illustrate, in *Suicide*, Emile Durkheim found that not one action however personal that might be, can be completely free from social relations. What he saw as a problem was not the suicide *per se*, but the misrecognition of suicide as private matter that detached individual from its society. From Durkheim's study, one can send a message to the policy-makers to investigate the factors and conditions that may lead to the problem, thereby eliminating the root-causes *in lieu* of the problem. From his analysis, one detects a causality principle underpinned his observation. The causal relations between external factors and individual actions provide powerful explanatory tools that appeal to the logic and observation of the investigator. Such thinking and method continue to dominate social research today.

While Durkheim study had sent ripple effects to the social science in the continent, there was a critical reception on the value of observation as the only reliable source of knowledge. What about individual intention, needs, spirits? Aren't they too creating actions that have social significance? Here, Max Weber tried to demonstrate the role of religious spirit in creating a condition for successful entrepreneurship. Religious spirit fostered by Protestantism in the minds and hearts of its subscribers proved important to the flourishing of industry and merchants in certain parts of the Continent and the United States. By guaranteeing its members that industriousness would bring one closer to spiritual fulfilment became a motivation for a Protestant to strive for successful worldly activities as tokens for their journey to the hereafter. His study shows the value of depth to enrich analysis of

society, and not simply relying on the sophistication of patterns, trends and statistics as explanatory tools. Nevertheless, both Durkheim and Weber are committed to the vision of social science as practical science of society, with applied research as the bedrock for achieving such aim.

While the positivist and interpretivist orientation continue to dominate the orientation of social research, a recent paradigm has garnered considerable attention, followers and critiques too. The paradigm can be traced to the social and political upheavals in the 1960s that has witnessed new form of oppositional and anti-hegemonic cherished on the ideals of difference, indeterminacy and subjectivity. The politics and the intellectual tendency in the new paradigm is encapsulated in a term deconstructivism.

The paradigm urged for a rethinking of grand theories and designs in social sciences such as that of positivism and interpretivism. The problem with these grand designs was their unwavering faith in the rationality and individuality of subject. Individual is not an abstraction, and possess neither self-knowledge nor independent will. Rationality is imposed, so does our knowledge about it. They are part of the Enlightenment values created by European *philosophes* that announced a break from the theological-mystical orientation in politics, knowledge and society of the *ancien régime*. The values were explicit objection to the previous way of knowing and authority, making them far from being objective or value-free. By masquerading these values as scientific, the Enlightenment tradition found themselves in relentless contradiction, for example between their value for emancipation and the reality of exploitation and the value of progress and the reality of underdevelopment. This puts social science in an awkward position, being inextricably bound up with the history and visionary of the Enlightenment promoters.

The tradition of rationalism in social science was put under scrutiny, while grand theories that promote evolutionary progress such as modernisation thesis was dissected to lay bare its Eurocentric values.

As a result to the deconstructivist juggernaut, social research takes a form of revisionism. The early studies, especially done with the confidence of positive knowledge, are re-examined and recast in the light of the new episteme of difference while hybrids of tools from various fields and disciplines are appropriated to enrich understanding and appreciation of society in multi-faceted characters. Research becomes multi-disciplinary, with neo-, post- and critical-, become appendage to the existing paradigms used to reflect the revisionist orientation.

The new development has its positive outcomes. It opens up the exploration of new identities, new histories, new agencies and new voices that are unrecognised, unfitted or unadmissible under the previous episteme. A prime example of a study that reveals a new form of subjectivity is by Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. In this work, Foucault explored the system of punishment in the modern nation-state that predicated on the belief that individuals with criminal behaviour can be regulated and reformed. Therefore, prison system was designed with the most comprehensive surveillance technology that aimed for inmates to self-regulate their behaviour under the 'all-seeing eyes'. The system regulated the behaviour to the precision of time, activity and movement as expected in all inmates. What his analysis tries to show is with the increasing knowledge of technology and human behaviour resulted in the more successful ways of prescribing, monitoring and controlling individual and social action. In this sense, knowledge becomes less about solving problem than about enforcing more and more control in the most effective manners.

Foucault's study offers a compelling critique to the liberal tradition in social science and has influenced certain chapters in the current volume.

Social Science Research in Malaysia

Of late, social science research in Malaysia is typically informed by policy-making imperative. This is not surprising, as most of the available and attainable research grants are offered by the government agencies. This does not mean that social researches are not fundamental in terms of generating theory and original contribution to the corpus of knowledge. However, most of social researchers of fundamental nature are typically a product of PhD studies that are done in a period between 3 – 5 years, while a funded project takes a maximum of two years followed by a possible publication. Given the difference in time-frame has imposed foreseeable limit to researchers to allow adequate attention to reflect on epistemological discussion that characterised fundamental research. As a result, social research becomes result-oriented, more generative than substantive in nature.

There are researches done in the early 1970s and 1980s that were remained classics to this day, as they continue to illuminate crucial and persistent issue in society. Syed Husin Ali (1975) *Malay Peasant Society and Leadership* introduced the concept of class to the understanding of Malaysian society in the village and urban areas. The triple-structures of leadership consisted of landlord, party official and government machinery have further widen the income inequality in the village and until the web of leadership pattern is disentangle, the situation is most likely to remain. Another study further reinforced some of the observation earlier. Shamsul Amri's

From British to Bumiputera Rule (1986) showed the continuing role of party-government machineries in a Malay village. Through the New Economic Policy (NEP), the role became elaborated and systematic. The party-government machineries are playing roles in dispensing subsidies and contracts in exchange for political support. Thus, they foster a network of patronage that brings an ever-increasing dependency for government supports and rewards.

In Sarawak, according to most cited version, social science research began in 1950 Colonial Social Science Research Council (CSSR) published a report about the prospect for social science research in Sarawak. The report was based on a reconnaissance survey carried out for a period of four months from early June to the end of October 1948. The survey aimed at exploring the potential areas and topics for future socio-economic research in Sarawak. The Council appointed Edmund R. Leach, a social anthropologist, a student and an associate of Raymond Firth (the first secretary of CSSR), to carry out a field survey in Sarawak. The objectives of the survey were twofold. First, was to provide instruction for planners and administrators about the functioning of economy, education, agriculture, health and local government. Leach presented the planners with a complex picture of society under the rule of foreign power, stating with urgency the need to explore the changes involved in the imposition of modern economic and political domination to the multi-racial native/traditional communities. The current contexts must therefore be studied in conjunction with the traditional values and practices, some of which were yet to be radically affected by the western contacts and encounters.

The second objective, closely related to the first, was to establish the practical link between the sociological knowledge with the actual practice of administration. Leach tried to strike a balance between the purely academic pursuit and the practical

fruits of the serious labour as he noted in several places in the report. He argued that social studies of the natives can provide the planners with a grounded and contextualised perspective which will greatly assist in planning for a suitable form of development. Unlike the previous tendency in replicating development model from colonies elsewhere in the Empire, local studies would be able to generate fundamental data, hence increasing the possibility for a successful planning and targets.

Shortly after the report publication, a slew of anthropological researchers had taken up interest in studying Sarawak, with names like Derek Freeman (1955), William Geddes (1954), Stephen Morris (1991) and Rodney Needham (1954) exploring topics and ethnic groups of Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau and Penan, respectively, as identified in the report. It has successfully carved the agenda and direction for future academic study grounded along the ethnic lines. This is what seems to be its main contribution both in terms of scientific progress and practicality for state administrators.

From the discussion on social science research in national and Sarawak contexts, one can identified the recurring imperative for practicality and policy-informed researches. The agenda for development is common for most post-colonial nations, in which economic development is closely intertwined with the question of national independence. It was believed that through economic wealth and development, a post-colonial nation can prove their worth and to be on equal standing along with the rest of the world. Social science is to assist in the vision by clarifying what the policy-makers intended to know so as to ensure development runs on its course without hindrance. Nevertheless, as evident in the chapters of the book, there remain researches committed to the values and visions in line with the conventional and new orientation of social science paradigms.

Organisation of the Chapters

There are eleven chapters in the volume written by academics in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The volume contained recent empirical research done on the theme of social relation in Sarawak. Some of the chapters are reflective in the sense that they revisiting former studies and raised new set of questions by applying new technique and conceptual constructs. The diverse orientation of the chapters points to the ongoing exploration of society from multidimensional perspectives in social science. They too remind us of the continuation of practical research that resonates with contemporary methodology and social concerns.

As indicated earlier, social science research since the early 1980s have consistently strive towards reviving the forgotten voices at the margin. While the tradition of social science has been one that was critical and anti-hegemonic, the assumption implicit in the researches done by colonial scholars and apologists was vexing and inclined towards power interest. The task now for scholars in the post-colonial nations is to rewrite those histories. To that end, the chapters here are responses to the invitation for emphatic and critical readings of the stories and perspectives of the (to borrow post-colonial term) *muted subjects*. This is the common theme that unites all the chapters in the volume.

The first chapter deals with the trainees in the rehabilitation school in Kuching. In the eyes of the society, the trainees who were sent to the institution were problematic and troublesome. Against this background of public perception, the authors have applied method that encouraged the trainees to "*speak out*" in order to obtain their version of story. It was no guessing that most of them talked about their pain and frustration that the institution

failed to understand their need and respond to them. From the carefully conducted interview, the authors offered suggestions about ways to improve the system in order for rehabilitation to succeed. The second chapter deals with the training of hearing disability. The authors have conducted a test study to see the feasibility of music therapy as a support for the disabled youth. The research on disability has been on the rise globally, partly as an effort to provide wider and equal access to disadvantaged groups and partly as a result of the revisionist tendency in social science.

Chapter three provides a unique view of the lesser known subject in society: the HIV/AIDS caregivers. The author explores the life of the caregivers (mostly males with no blood relation as compared to traditional caregivers who are mostly female relatives) who offered voluntary care for their friends and partners with HIV/AIDS. What was thought to be a helping hand assistance turned out to be a life-time sacrifice coupled with their daily battles with public ignorance and moral willy-nilly that tells us more to be done to deal with the common ignorance relating to HIV/AIDS. Next chapter talks about the problem of skipping schools among students in Kuching. The author had interviewed the students, their parents and teachers to gain an overall picture of the situation. His study reveals that the cause of the problem was not the psychology or the attitude of the pupil per se. Rather it was a manifestation of structural breakdown in the state, schools and family structure. The author is correct to argue that the inability to recognise the root cause led to the "blaming the victim" scenario, thereby fails to deal with the issue head-on.

The subsequent chapters deal with the aspect of power play that affected the lifeworld of certain groups. Abdul Halim Ali wrote about the sentiment of the rural-urban migrant in Kuching. Their sentiment was marked with cynicism about the way life will

always be for the underprivileged. The migrants believed that system is not on their side, and therefore they would rather resort to non-institutional (although public sees it as *counter*-institutional) measures to cope with their depressing situation. The author conclude that only when the agencies responsible for the relief of the disadvantaged group extricate themselves from the state ideology that a considerable advance can be made to alleviate the situation of the squatters.

Next chapter talks about the phenomenon of *bejalai* or making journey out of the village abode. What was rarely heard about was the wife that these men left behind in their journey for wealth, power and fame. These wives - known pejoratively as *indai blues*- as argued by the author rebelled against the gender expectation of the customary Iban cultural practices. They engaged in extra-marital affair and did not seem to be bothered to be discreet. This alone led to a community outcry in a moral panic mode. From her research, the author discovered the huge responsibility and the tough life experienced by the desolate women, who have to struggle not only to feed their children but also close relative and at the same time have to endure emotional separation. Such study should be able to guide policymakers in identifying appropriate support system that can respond to the economic circumstances faced by the *indai blues*.

Meanwhile in chapter seven, the author revised the prevailing view on looking at the colonial history of Sarawak. In so far that the Brooke apologists - past and present- were concerned, the Brooke era represented the good old days, especially in the late 19th and the early 20th century. The chapter wished to debunk this notion by inviting the reader to consider the ideological dimension of power represented by a concept "will to order". It is generally an exploration of a new concept that may be able to present a critical

perspective of power relations and knowledge produced in the period of colonial domination. In chapter eight, the author deals with an indigenous community of Seping which has one of the smallest surviving populations in Sarawak. It examines the reorientation of the community as a result of the land development, their livelihood strategies against the background of economic displacement and cultural survival in the ever increasing challenging socio-economic environment.

The understanding of being Malaysian among university students' is a subject of chapter nine. The author's study reveals three most characteristics perceived as important by the students, namely able to sing the national anthem, live in Malaysia and able to speak the national language. An important finding of the research was the use of national language as inter-ethnic communication shows the success of the national language policy aspired by the nationalists.

In chapter ten, the authors lead us to a media headline that borders on an issue framed by the media as sensitive and intolerance. The study examines the correlation between social media and university students' perception of tolerance and religious sensitivity. However, in the context of limited media freedom, the lacked of equal coverage of competing views made certain perspective to predominate over others, hence, deprive readers of balanced perspectives.

Chapter eleven reveals the underside of urban development through the gazes of the scavengers, recuperators and the ragpickers in Kuching suburbia. Past studies have associated scavengers, recuperators and the ragpickers as poor people who collected recycle goods as a mean to earn a living or stay survive. However, the findings from the interviews with these groups have proved that they collected recycle goods for an

additional income as they already have primary job elsewhere. This study provides an interesting comparison with other disadvantaged groups who dwelled at the city.

Altogether, the variations of issues, people and spatiality explored in the volume reflected the breath and productivity of knowledge production relating to and centred in Sarawak.

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KEPERLUAN HIDUP PESALAH KANAK-KANAK DI PUSAT PEMULIHAN

Kamsiah Ali dan Norba'iah Abdul Kadir

Pengenalan

Kajian yang dijalankan pada tahun 2000-2001 mengkaji sumbangan pengurusan sistem perundangan kanak-kanak dan peruntukan kebajikan sosial, dalam bentuk pengetahuan dan kuasa, yang mempengaruhi penghasilan pesalah kanak-kanak. Kajian dijalankan di Sekolah Tunas Bakti (STB), Kuching. Penghasilan pesalah kanak-kanak lebih diperkukuhkan terutama sekali bila sistem ini merupakan satu badan sosial yang menguruskan hal ehwal dan keperluan kanak-kanak. Kesan akan lebih dialami oleh pesalah kanak-kanak yang berlatarbelakangkan sosio-ekonomi yang miskin yang telah disabit kesalahan jenayah dan ditempatkan sebagai pelatih di pusat pemulihan ini.

Di Malaysia terdapat dua cara bagaimana kanak-kanak dihadapkan ke dalam sistem perundangan (Akta 611, Akta Kanak-kanak 2001). Pertama, kanak-kanak yang berumur 10 tahun dianggap telah mencapai umur tanggungjawab jenayah yang mungkin disabit dengan kelakuan jenayah sebagaimana

RESEARCHING SOCIETY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS IN SARAWAK

The volume comprises eleven essays on current social issues and situations in Sarawak. The issues explored in the chapters are on deviance, disability, health, urbanisation, identity, indigenous community and post-colonialism. They are studied through the engagement of social scientific paradigms that framed the question and explanation raised in the respective chapters. Interesting though is the recurring preoccupation with agenda of 'giving voice' to the less visible actors or the undersides in social relations that merely underlined the asymmetrical power, equity and opportunity available for disadvantaged groups. Researchers and students of social sciences will find the works here illuminating and relevant for understanding present state of social research on Sarawak in the contemporary context of a rethinking of modernity and representation.



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