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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Batek's dilemma on indigenous tourism☆

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ABSTRACT

This article explains how a rainforest tribe in Malaysia negotiates their indigeneity, shaped on the one hand by global imaginaries held by tourists, and on the other hand by their quest for development and modernity. The Batek are traditionally hunter-gatherers and practice semi-nomadism. They face a dilemma on how to best maintain their agency while remaining 'authentic' and attractive to tourists. This paper builds on Bruner's (2005) argument that cultures and indigeneity evolve with modernity, and discusses the contemporary meanings of authenticity from the perspective of the indigenes. A conceptual model to understand the 'authenticity gap' in indigenous tourism is offered as we suggest ways in which tourism development may be harnessed, rather than rejected, to resolve this cultural dilemma.

Introduction

Global stereotyping of indigenous people and their 'primitive cultures' abound (Azarya, 2004; Smith & Ward, 2000; Theodossopoulos, 2013). As travelers continue to seek encounters with these groups, colourful depictions and exotic representations of people and their practices are bound to emerge (Craik, 1994; Scarangella, 2010; Stasch, 2014; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Tourism is often driven by human imaginaries of 'otherness' and travelling provides opportunities for people to move from self-imagination to real life encounters (Salazar & Graburn, 2014). Global imaginaries not only shape the minds of tourists but also the indigenous hosts and tourism service providers who seek opportunities to leverage on cultures and local landscapes as they cater to the tourist gaze.

Indigenous tourism is any form of travel that involves tourist encounters with an indigenous population. The discourse on difference is its *raison détre* (Bunten & Graburn, 2018) as tourists seek 'authentic' cultural encounters and indigenous hosts respond by negotiating different forms of authenticity made available to them (Cohen, 1988; Bruner, 2005). Our study stems from the premise that culture is never fixed and indigenous people have and will continue to evolve in the face of modernization and capitalism (Bruner, 2005; Theodossopoulos, 2016). Simply put, modernity and indigeneity are not opposing forces and our study examines how indigenous people like the Batek[1] negotiate its indigeneity and authenticity in the face of tourism and change.

Through ethnographic work involving the Batek community in Malaysia, the evolution of the Batek culture is explored. From traditional livelihoods as hunter-gatherers, the Batek's semi-nomadic existence based mainly in the rainforest has evolved towards one of consumerism, modernity and capitalism. Their negotiations on indigeneity are discussed through a dual focus on livelihoods

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[1] The term 'Batek' may be understood either as singular or plural. In this paper, we will use both interchangeably depending on the context and circumstance of use.

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and lifestyles, as we uncover the underlying reasons and decisions taken by the Batek in effecting socio-cultural change. We also consider how non-tourism activities such as trading and interactions with the 'external world' are prompting change. A key part of the discussion focuses on how the Batek responds to the authenticity demands of the tourism industry. Currently facing a dilemma between the desire to modernize while also maintaining cultural practices for a lucrative tourism market, an 'authenticity gap' emerges. As we shall see, in both arenas of livelihoods and lifestyles, the Batek are trying to shift tourists' demands for encounters with cultural otherness – a condition they find stressful – into a quest for 'experiential authenticity' (Bunten & Graburn, 2018) through the sale of handicrafts and environmental services (e.g. jungle homestays).

This paper is structured in six sections starting with an overview of concerns and debates in indigenous tourism. Here the key theme on negotiating indigeneity and authenticity is introduced. This is followed by brief discussions on our research methodologies and background information on the Batek community in Malaysia. The substantive findings are then discussed across two sections focused on the livelihoods and lifestyles of the Batek. The dilemmas emerging from tourism are highlighted, as are the community's agentic reactions and negotiation strategies at overcoming the authenticity gap. The discussion concludes with suggestions on solving this gap in Malaysia's Taman Negara but also more broadly for other destinations where tourism comes face to face with an evolving and dynamic indigenous community.

Indigenous tourism and negotiation of indigeneity

Indigenous tourism: issues and debates

Indigenous tourism encompasses activities in which indigenous people are involved either through the control or delivery of services in the form of performances, festivals, home-stays and guided tours to cultural villages and community spaces (Butler & Hinch, 2007). Indigenous tourism takes the form of 'aboriginal tourism' in Australia and Canada (Altman, 1989; Parker, 1993) and 'ethnic tourism' involving minority groups in China (Duan, Chan, & Marafa, 2019; Yang & Wall, 2009). The commercialization of indigenous cultures is a contentious issue, with a common argument being that tourism commodifies practices and cultural interactions, eroding traditional ways of life and collective values as a result (Azarya, 2004; Medina, 2003).

Certainly, tourism's impacts on indigenous people are both positive and negative (Snow & Wheeler, 2000); however, rampant imaginings of indigenous people as untouched, primitive and living in pristine ecosystems and traditional environments abound (Agrawal, Smith, & Li, 1997; Belsky, 1999). According to Waitt (1999), 'primitive' is referred as prehistoric hunter-gathers who lived in a simple, timeless and ecologically sustainable society without human artifacts. In tourism, the primitive-civilized dualism has been an effective marketing tool in the portrayal of indigenous people in an outback location, as tourists are promised encounter with people living harmoniously as an integral part of nature (Waitt, 1999). The 'primitive' offers an opportunity for tourists to escape from a contemporary world too modernized and globalized. In reality, indigenous people are like everyone else, living in an interconnected world with cultures and values that evolve over time either with or without the influence of tourism (Smith & Ward, 2000). Economic transactions and cultural interactions with non-indigenous groups also affect socio-cultural change, although oftentimes these are hidden beneath romanticized visions of an unchanging indigenous culture (Theodossopoulos, 2016).

Shifting from the traditional focus on rural development and poverty alleviation in indigenous tourism research, critical scholars have begun to acknowledge the agency of indigenous hosts. Stasch (2014) explains the romanticism and 'othering' of indigenous people to be ideological framings of western global primitivism, misidentifying indigenes as passive recipients rather than active authors of their own fate. In reality, as local service providers, indigenes often respond strategically to tourism opportunities, continuously negotiating between cultural preservation and tourism benefits (Bruner, 2005; Salazar & Graburn, 2014), often with dilemmas faced and key decisions to be made.

In tourism, Azarya (2004) has observed that indigenous people take advantage of new market demands to showcase and reaffirm their identities, sometimes even rejuvenating their skills in artifact-making and enactments of rituals and festivals (see also Medina, 2003; O'Gorman & Thompson, 2007). As an example, Pettersson and Viken (2007) reveal how the indigenous Sámi have rejuvenated their traditional costumes and strengthened their self-identity through global tourism attention. Bunten and Graburn (2018) argue that indigeneity must not be romanticized and its fluidity warrants critical contemplation. Whether cultural preservation is desirable or feasible is for the indigenous people to decide, but the evolution of indigeneity and the cultural dilemmas they face is deserving of scholarly attention.

Misgivings about representation are rife in indigenous tourism. Theodossopoulos (2016) observed that ambivalence towards indigeneity and authenticity emerges from observers pining for a more innocent past *vis-à-vis* a corrupted present. Imaginaries of an exotic 'other' are deeply embedded in many a traveler's minds, often shaped by a western upbringing, Orientalist novels and contemporary media (Salazar & Graburn, 2014). In giving tourists what they desire, the tourism industry is also implicated in the marketing of cultures that are divorced from time, space and history. But cultures are never static or fixed and are always dynamic and ever-evolving. Bruner's (2005) experiment in getting American tourists in Bali to reflexively think about the contemporary meanings of cultural performances and needs of the local communities revealed that tourists are simply not interested to engage in the authenticity debate but continued to hold onto their nostalgic imaginaries of indigenous people and cultures.

Rather than denounce all forms of tourism authenticities, Theodossopoulos (2016) suggests that there are different sets of authenticity in the tourism front- and backstage.[2] Modern displays of lifestyle do not necessarily mean that cultural traditions and

[2] We use 'frontstage' and 'backstage' as they are conventionally understood in the tourism literature. The former refers to an environment where

values are lost. The Emberá women in Panama may don modern attires to attend Evangelical worships in the backstage as they hope not to be perceived as 'backward' by non-indigenous neighbours, and then dress up in traditional costumes within the same day to greet tourists (Theodossopoulos, 2016). This dualism is authentic in its reflection of the fluidity of the everyday life of the Emberá. Abandoning the view that authenticity must necessarily be measured against a socially-constructed unchanging past leaves room for the concept to be re-interpreted in a more critically nuanced and contextually appropriate manner.

Key themes in negotiating indigeneity and authenticity

Two themes stand out as indigenous people negotiate their indigeneity in tourism: livelihoods and lifestyles. Firstly, the continuity of traditional livelihoods is a key element in indigenous tourism, used as a means to authenticate the cultural difference between tourists and locals (Pettersson & Viken, 2007). Scholars have written about livelihood changes resulting from tourism. Mbaiwa (2011), for example, documented how the indigenes in the Okavango Delta of Botswana have chosen to embrace new economic opportunities presented by tourism, leading to a decline in traditional activities like subsistence hunting and gathering, crop and livestock farming. In Kenya, the pastoral nomadic culture of the Massai has also declined as tribal members switch to tourism-related jobs (Azarya, 2004). Other cases of the Sámi in Sweden (Pettersson & Viken, 2007), the Inuvialuit in the Canadian Arctic (Notzke, 1999) and the Tuva in China (Wang, Yang, Chen, Yang, & Li, 2010) similarly reveal that as indigenous people shift from traditional livelihoods towards tourism and service jobs, they run the risk of altering their cultural practices that motivated tourism in the first place.

While the literature on indigenous negotiations between traditional- and tourism livelihoods abound, how livelihood changes affect negotiations on indigeneity have not been studied as much. As Bruner (2005) suggested, researchers need to take a step forward to understand how local communities may try (or not) to persuade tourists of the continued existence of their 'authentic' livelihoods. It was proposed that 'experiential authenticity' can be induced through workshops and activities that showcase traditional livelihoods; as tourists experience for themselves how to cook a meal or create a local product, they can authentically experience one aspect of indigenous living in the backstage (Bunten & Graburn, 2018).

The second theme in understanding indigeneity and authenticity concerns changing lifestyles. While livelihoods refer to the way people secure their necessities of life, lifestyle changes include modifications to consumption patterns, daily activities and the use/production of cultural artifacts. As examples, Granbom (2005) revealed how the sea-nomadic lifestyle of the Urak Lawoi has declined as tourism developments pushed them further ashore into unproductive fishing areas, while Robinson and Twynam (1996) document many indigenous Nepalese Sherpa giving up their traditional *chubas* (robes) in favor of Western style dress complete with the ubiquitous tape player and headphones, after repeated exposure to western backpackers. In China, Yang (2012) similarly observed that the Mosuo have consolidated their ethnic identity and re-configured their dress, dance and religion often to satisfy touristic desires for colour and costumery.

Tourists often criticize lifestyle changes as evidence of excessive commercialization and loss of local autonomy. Such critiques, caution Theodossopoulos (2016), harbour outdated notions of an unchanging people with a fossilized past. Explorations on how indigenous people respond to and explain (or hide) their modernizing lifestyles in the frontstage and how these affect touristic perceptions of authenticity take indigenous tourism research to a different level. Few cases have documented how semi-nomadism changes with tourism in a rainforest setting as this study sets out to do, although there are ample documentations on nomadic communities (e.g. Granbom, 2005; Tiberghien & Xie, 2018; Viken & Müller, 2006), as well as rainforest tribes (e.g. Cappucci, 2016; Theodossopoulos, 2016; Zeppel, 2002).

The dual focus on livelihood and lifestyle provides a holistic way to apprehend negotiations of indigeneity and authenticity under the influence of tourism. Conceiving indigenous cultures as dynamic helps us critically explore indigeneity rather than defend it from a preservation standpoint (Butler & Hinch, 2007). From the perspectives of exotica-seeking tourists and commercial actors, cultural change might be seen as a diminishment of authenticity. Viewed from the indigene's eyes, however, the prognosis may be quite different. In Jenkins and Romanos' (2014) research on local artists in Bali, for example, authenticity is regarded as a tourist-centric concept born from tourists' preoccupation with unique experiences and photogenic subjects. From the locals' perspective, 'well-being' is a more relevant concept as the artists are more concerned with how their work can provide their families with a better quality of life. Hearing from the indigenes is, therefore, necessary to understand what they regard as truly authentic and important, and how cultural changes are negotiated under the weight of tourism. Our study will thus focus on the insights of the Batek paying particular attention to their strategies in negotiating authenticity and identity as they embrace tourism.

Research Methodology

This study is based on qualitative data derived from participant observation and unstructured interviews in the field, supplemented by a survey of tourists (featuring open-ended questions) visiting Taman Negara, a national park in the state of Pahang, Malaysia. An ethnographic reflexive approach was adopted in conversing with and observing members of the Batek community ensure that interactions are kept as natural and non-intrusive as possible (Cole, 2005; Li, 2008; Van Donge, 2006). Unlike some indigenous groups in Malaysia such as the Penan in Sarawak, the Batek is often regarded as a highly reserved group seldom voicing

(*footnote continued*)
tourists and locals interact, while the latter is the domestic sphere of everyday life usually situated away from the tourist gaze.

their concerns directly with members beyond their community (Lye, 2004). Formal interviews and structured questionnaires were thus ruled out. In order to get to the backstage of the Batek community, beyond what a tourist would normally see/experience, it was also important to get to know members of the community and participate in their routine activities. As Whitford and Ruhanen (2016) advised for indigenous tourism research, an open and exploratory approach without predetermined agendas is desirable to better apprehend community views and lifestyles.

Data collection at Taman Negara was carried out between 2014 and 2019, with most of the unstructured interviews and onsite observations taking place over three extended periods in January and August 2017, and May 2018. Interviews were conducted in Kampong Dedari, Kampong Tesik and a temporary camp opposite Kampong Tesik. The three settlements/camps are near the main national park entrance where tourists on Orangasli Village Tours congregate. Informants include four Batek tribe leaders as well as members of the Batek community comprising both male and female adults (totaling 21 persons). The questions centered on their views on tourism development, their social system and livelihoods (e.g. what they feel towards tourists visiting their camps, how tourism has affected daily routines, frequency of hunting activities, how tourism revenues are used, etc.) Apart from interviews, multiple day-trips to the three Batek camps were also undertaken to observe their interactions with visitors and how the Batek 'prepared' for each tourist encounter. Spending time with the locals, picking up some of their languages and even accompanying them on the occasional chore (such as following them to town as well as rattan collection trips, etc.) allowed the first author to develop an 'insider' emic perspective (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999).

Apart from the Batek informants, we also interviewed 67 tourists who joined the Orangasli Village Tours. The interviews were conducted in Kuala Tahan, a small town where most of the tourists returning from the tours congregated. They were asked about their views regarding the tour and the Batek tribe they met. Apart from tourists, we also interviewed select non-Batek residents of Taman Negara, especially those with economic ties with the Batek. These include local Malay and Chinese business operators who procure jungle products from the Batek, and who could tell us more about their relations with the Batek over time. Quotes offered in this paper are either translated based on what the Batek said in *Bahasa Melayu* or verbatim in English. Tourist responses were derived from open-ended questions in the survey or through informal chats. The photographs taken have been permitted by members of the community, who were told about the research that was being undertaken.

Batek and tourism in Taman Negara: background

The Batek is one of 18 Orangasli sub-groups in Peninsular Malaysia. 'Orangasli'[3] refers to 'original people' or 'aboriginal people' in the Malay language. It is claimed that early descendants of the Orangasli were the first humans to live on the Malay Peninsula, with assemblages discovered in Hoabinhian sites dating some 16,000 and 8000 years ago (Andaya, 2001). Today most of the Batek live around the tropical rainforest of Taman Negara, a 4143 km^2 protected landmass straddling the states of Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. According to the Centre for Orangasli Concerns (COAC), the total population numbered 215,000 in 2010 (0.6% of the country's population) of which the Batek community constituted around 1900 (SyedHussain, Krishnasamy, & Hassan, 2019; field work observation).

The Batek are mainly hunter-gatherers, collecting tubers and hunting animals such as monkeys and mouse deer using blowpipes and poisoned-darts (Lye, 2004). They are also semi-nomadic and migrate to a new location whenever natural resources in a particular site have been depleted, or when someone passes away, or during times of conflict and epidemic (Faulstich, 1985; Lye, 2004). Unlike other nomads, the Batek would return to a former site when issues are resolved. The community has its own language, which belongs to the Mon Khmer linguistic group. Very different from *Bahasa Melayu* the national Malay language, it shares some similarities with those of other negrito tribes in Southeast Asia (Gutman & Avanzati, 2013). Inter-marriage with a non-Orangasli is rare because of differences in lifestyles and religious beliefs. According to a Batek leader (*duk patin*) who was interviewed, the majority of settlements are sited along the Tembeling River in Taman Negara. A few settlements remain in the jungle interiors and they would 'exchange' members with camps along the river (a point we will bring up later). As a semi-nomadic group, new settlements or temporary camps are occasionally set up for various reasons, including for festive occasions or as temporary tourism villages during the peak travel season (field work observation).

Taman Negara is the second most popular eco-tourism destination in Malaysia receiving around 90,000 tourists each year, with half of them being foreigners (Samdin, Aziz, Radam, & Yacob, 2013). Tourists primarily visit Taman Negara for jungle trekking and canopy walks, but paying for a cultural tour to visit the Batek has become increasingly popular in recent years. Today, an 'Orangasli village' tour may be arranged by an agent for around RM40 per person (around US$10). The tourist survey indicates that almost half of the tourists polled joined such a tour. The tour often includes a boat ride to a Batek settlement and visiting a traditional hut where the guide (usually an ethnic Malay) would talk about the Batek's culture and lifestyle. After the talk, tour groups would see the Batek men in action making a fire and hunting with a blowpipe. Tourists are often encouraged to participate in the activities too. Tourists are also free to walk around the village for photographs and a chance to purchase mini-blowpipe gifts handcrafted by the Batek (Figs. 1 and 2; all photos by the first author).

On average, approximately 150 visitors per day visit the Batek camps combined, with the number varying between peak and non-peak seasons. In 1991, the camp at Kampong Dedari was designated by the government as the official 'Orangasli village' for tourism. At the time of research, there were two other camps (i.e. Kampong Tesik and a temporary camp opposite it) which also received tourists. Our research was undertaken primarily at Kampong Tesik as a Batek interviewee told us Kampong Dedari was too big and

[3] This term is sometimes spelt 'Orang Asli', both of which are acceptable and understood in Malaysia.

Fig. 1. An Orangasli Batek woman and her children (24 January 2017).

Fig. 2. Demonstrations during an Orangasli Village Tour (19th January 2017).

was unsuited to host any long-term visitor. For every visitor to the camps, the Batek community receives RM5 'donation' on top of income derived from the sale of handicrafts. The tour guides often tell tourists that the Batek practice collectivism and whatever income they derive would be shared between villagers for food and other supplies.

The two-fold discussion to follow will explore tourism's effects on the Batek in terms of their livelihoods and lifestyle. Based on interviews with and personal observations of the Batek, along with tourist survey findings, we consider the extent to which tourism has had any effect on the community, the Batek's responses to tourists' expectations and the evolvement of their indigeneity.

Livelihood: between hunting-gathering, trade and tourism

Tourism and beyond

As earlier noted, the Batek are traditionally hunter-gatherers who subsist on tubers, fruits and hunting small animals (Faulstich,

1985; Lye, 2004). Increasingly, however, more are relying on foods purchased from beyond the forest. When asked about hunting-gathering and the food they eat, a Batek interviewee explained:

> No, we don't really rely on hunting nowadays and that other Batek also are similar. We buy food from Kuala Tahan (a small town in Taman Negara) and we eat canned foods because it is easier, hunting was hard and unnecessary. My family has been eating sardines for the last 30 years.
>
> (Translated from Bahasa Melayu; personal interview, 19 January 2017)

Many of the Batek women frequent towns like Kuala Tahan and Kuala Tembeling to shop for rice, canned food (of sardines, squids and baked beans), coffee, tea and Milo. A Batek man explained that canned sardines are preferred to *sugai ikan* (river fish) because of the taste and convenience, even if less economical. He further noted that some 80 years ago, the Batek would hunt *utan babi* (wild boars) but have since stopped the practice in deference to the dominant Malay Muslim community (personal interview, 11 August 2017). The Batek living in the jungle interiors occasionally kill monkeys but this is becoming less common too. It is likely that the hunt and consumption of wild animals persist, but more for leisure rather than as a reliable source of everyday subsistence.

For the Batek who persist in hunting-gathering, the underlying reason for doing so has also changed. Instead of consumption, many profess an interest in trading. It is well documented that the Batek have always harvested and traded *Tulang* honey and rattan (Tuck-Po, 2000) as well as aromatic woods with outsiders (Andaya, 2002). In recent years, sandalwood (*gaharu*) has become a priority due to the surge in demand and prices in the global market. *Gaharu* is often used for incense and perfume (Wyn & Anak, 2010), and demand from the Middle East and China is increasing. Although the Protection of Wildlife Act 1972 bans the trade of forest products from protected areas (Ibrahim & Hassan, 2011), the sandalwood business is an 'open secret' in Taman Negara. According to a local tour agent, the best quality can sell up to RM30,000 per kilogram. It is noted that the Batek have their own extensive connections for the sale of *gaharu*, something that the local Malay and Chinese lack (field work observation, 20 December 2017). A Batek tour guide proudly explained his *gaharu* business during a jungle trekking tour:

> Look, this one costs RM 13,000, another one was RM40,000 … I do guiding nowadays but I keep searching for sandalwood. Personally, I don't like selling animals but it is ok to cut a tree. After the tour with you guys, I will take a day break and then go to search for sandalwood again.
>
> (Personal interview, 17 June 2016)

Non-Batek locals in Taman Negara also note that the Batek would often sell animals such as wild goat, golden porcupines and pangolins. In particular, the Batek are relied upon to procure the 'porcupine bezoar stone', an expensive Chinese medicinal source with proclaimed anti-cancer properties. A local Malaysian Chinese business operator explained what a porcupine bezoar stone is and how the Batek are involved:

> The logic is that the porcupines know what herbs to eat to cure their own sickness, so the stomach of such herb-eating porcupine forms some bezoar stones that must also contain some anti-cancer substance that can reduce or control human cancer cells. They are very expensive to get and cost around RM10,000–20,000 for one because it is very hard to find. Then it is dried and made into powder and can be eaten to cure human cancer. Sometimes these stones are sold by the Orangasli, but because of the very high price now, the Orangasli occasionally also fake the buyer by selling replicas or mixed products.
>
> (Translated from Mandarin; personal interview, 18 August 2015)

Regardless of the veracity of the claim above, the Batek are certainly no newcomers to trade and commercialism. For some time now, they have adapted to the cash economy through trade with outsiders. It would thus be inaccurate to say that this shift came about since formal tourism was introduced to Taman Negara or when Kampong Dedari was established as an Orangasli tourism village in 1991. This is consistent with the findings of local anthropologist Lye (2004) who explained that the Batek is not a closed group and would do whatever it takes to benefit their community. While Batek trading is not new, the surging prices of *gaharu* and wild animals like the porcupines have given them greater economic impetus. In contrast to UNESCO's concerns around indigenous marginalization (UNESCO, 2018), the Batek actively seek diverse livelihood options to sustain incomes and promote their quality of life. Indeed as part of the zeal to 'upgrade' and also enjoy the better things in life, the change in their consumption habits to rely on purchased foods rather than to hunt and gather must be viewed as part of the effects of improved economic status through trading and tourism.

Negotiating the authenticity of traditional livelihoods

In interviews with the Batek, many repeatedly said that they are open to increased tourism citing the economic benefits and gifts they receive from visitors. Without much hesitation, an assistant chief in Kampong Tesik explained his favorable attitude towards tourism in the following manner:

> It is really good for us, as tourists would give us things when they visit our village, we like the tourists coming here.
>
> (Translated from Bahasa Melayu; personal interview, 19 January 2017)

Two other informants proudly shared about the money they earn through the sale of handicrafts and personal tips. A recent survey by Endicott, Tuck-Po, Zahari, and Rudge (2016) concluded that 93% of the 70 Batek interviewees (both men and women) appreciated the opportunity to make money through tourism. Before mass tourism began in the 1990s, the Batek were the only available jungle guides for the rare adventurers or researchers visiting Taman Negara. This explains why a few were able to speak a smattering of

Fig. 3. Hunting-set handicrafts for sale at Kampong Dedari.

English. As the tourism sector was institutionalized in the early 1990s, local Malay and Chinese have taken over most of the operations especially in Kuala Tahan. The Malays took over as tour guides and the Batek's participation in tourism switched from guiding to the sale of handicrafts, procurement of raw materials or simply 'waiting for the tourists to visit' during the Orangasli Village Tour. Since 2006, some young Batek men have also started working as boatmen for tour agents, but very few work as guides possibly due to language barrier and requirements of an official guiding license.

Despite the reduction in subsistence hunting, the skills of making blowpipes and arrows have not been lost. Around the clock, Batek women work tirelessly producing mini blowpipes and non-poisonous arrows for sale as souvenirs (Fig. 3). In Kampong Tesik, a Batek woman proudly shared that she sells about 300 sets in a good month (personal interview, 12 August 2017). A British tourist even procured a full-size traditional blowpipe from the Batek, showing the economic potential to be derived from tourism (field work observation, 22 August 2015). During the Orangasli Village Tours, Batek men also show off their hunting and blow-piping skills not by aiming at monkeys but a small doll attached to a bamboo stick. Tourists are also encouraged to participate in arrow making and blowpipe shooting, creating opportunities for experiential authenticity.

Many tourists we interviewed persist in thinking that the Batek hunt monkeys for food, even if they have not witnessed any evidence on-tour. One tourist asked vehemently in a post-visit interview: "why do they need to eat monkeys? Monkeys are close to humans." (personal interview, 18 June 2016). We surmise it is the 'primitive' setting and geographical isolation of the Batek camps, as well as stories tourists might have heard that perpetuate this myth. To be fair, the Batek also keep mum whenever they are asked this question, so as not to lose their primal and 'exotic' appeal. It is interesting to note that the Batek also has an agreement with tourism service providers on how they wish to present themselves to tourists, preferring that the guides not say too much about their lives (field observations). Indeed, the forest-dependent livelihoods of the Batek yield an interesting contrast to the comparatively more routine lives of the tourists, and the Batek are ready to leverage on this difference in their encounters.

In January 2018, the Batek opened a new jungle homestay featuring six guestrooms of bamboo huts (built by the Batek) near Kampong Dedari in collaboration with a few Malay tour guides. The homestay is a ten minute-walk from the Batek camp, the separation of which minimizing potential interaction between the Batek and tourists. Located at the turn of the mighty Tembiling River surrounded by scenic foliage (Fig. 4), guests can spend a night with an English-speaking 'manager' and an assistant (with no Batek in sight). The manager explained that the community in Kampong Dedari sometimes feels stressed when "there are too many tourists visiting the camp" (personal interview, 30 April 2018). Although the Batek want to be more involved in tourism for economic reasons, they also wish to avoid excessive intimacy through direct contact. By shifting tourists' attention from 'exotic' cultural encounters and interactions, into an appreciation of their cultural artifacts and natural habitat the Batek are in effect trying to benefit

Fig. 4. A view of the rainforest from the Batek's new 'jungle homestay' (2 May 2018).

economically from tourism while mitigating its social and cultural effects.

In livelihood terms, the Batek have embraced opportunities in tourism in as much the same way as they have embraced capitalism through trading and interactions with non-indigenous communities. Their adaptation to tourism should not be seen as diminishing their traditional livelihoods but represents instead a strategic widening of opportunities to evolve and improve their lives. The continuity with which the Batek approach livelihoods choices shows us that willingness to change is part of their culture and survival strategy, an authentic dimension of their life. The same attitude towards lifestyle change is also evident and it is this to which we turn our attention to.

Lifestyle: primitive semi-nomads or a life of modernity?

Being modern and indigenous

Traditionally the Batek are portrayed as a semi-nomadic tribe living an unassimilated primitive life in the jungle (Endicott, 1984; Faulstich, 1985). This is not totally unreal as the majority still live in the jungles of remote north Pahang, west Terengganu and south Kelantan states (SyedHussain et al., 2017). In Taman Negara, even those working in tourism at the entrance to the national park would always travel back to their camps in the interior at night. The geographical isolation of their settlements underscores the Batek's in-group attachment and their continued desire to be away from human civilization. An elder explained why very few Batek would choose to move to a city:

> Two men have previously left to work for a factory in a nearby town, but they then felt bored and constrained by the working conditions. After ten days, they returned to tell everyone about their bad experience and since then, no one dares to leave the jungle again.
>
> (Translated from Bahasa Melayu; personal interview, 17 January 2019)

Traditionally the Batek would migrate to a new camp or move back to a previous abandoned one every few years for reasons earlier stated. Today with government resettlement programs and tourism, this means that their camps/villages are increasingly more permanent even if it is observed that the Batek continue to 'exchange' members between camps (Tacey & Riboli, 2014). These inter-camp movements are usually undertaken for members to 'internally rotate' between tourism duties and hunting-gathering forest products. Every few months, families responsible for the tourist camps (i.e. meeting and greeting tourists on-site) would swap with those inside the jungle gathering sandalwood or hunting animals for trades. They would also sometimes go to live temporarily at other camps for family networking purposes (personal interview, 13 August 2017). Simply put, the introduction of tourism has not totally erased the semi-nomadic lifestyle even if it means a new economic livelihood has been 'added to the mix'. As Taman Negara is now a protected area, tourism has indirectly preserved the Batek indigenous rights to continue living and practicing semi-nomadism in the jungle. The Batek are now considered an integrated part of Taman Negara's tourism, with both the government and non-indigenous tourism communities wanting them to remain there as a cultural attraction.

Despite the partial maintenance of their jungle and semi-nomadic lifestyles, it would be inaccurate to describe the Batek as backward. Behind the tourist scene, many carry smart phones, listen to radios and even watch pop-music videos with digital tablets (Fig. 5). Some of the children are also familiar with songs of popular Indonesian and Korean bands. Without electricity supply, the Batek make use of disposable batteries, costing them RM11 each and which can be used to charge a phone for about twelve times (field work observation, 23 January 2017). Significant differences are also evident between Batek settlements that receive tourists and those that do not. Non-touristic settlements (for example, an unnamed camp near Merapoh, the second entrance to Taman Negara) are composed of concrete houses built by the government as well as traditional Batek huts, whereas tourist camps (such as Kampong Dedari and Kampong Tesik) would only have traditional huts and simple tents. In Kampong Tesik there are two different levels of ground, the lower ground for tourist demonstrations which is filled with traditional huts and tents, and the upper ground

Fig. 5. Using a smart phone away from the tourists (22 January 2017).

containing larger wooden houses hidden from the tourists.

In terms of mobility and worldview, many of the Batek have travelled to other towns and cities in Malaysia, with one Batek man even reporting a visit to Bangkok, Thailand. Many of them are also aware of what cities in other countries are like, and are often updated on different national and global cultures (field notes, 11 August 2017). For example, the scene of young men playing guitar and conversing on global politics is not uncommon at the upper ground of the Batek camps. Most of the Batek can also speak *Bahasa Melayu*, the national language spoken by the mainstream Malay population. As they frequently interact with outsiders in the course of trading and tourism, it is not inconceivable that many Batek are in tune with the latest in technology, market prices of goods and popular tourist trends. In many ways, therefore, the Batek do not reject modernization or interactions with non-indigenes despite living in the jungle; indeed, many are quite adept at conversing with tourists, researchers and traders. Two men share about their relationships with previous researchers from outside Taman Negara:

> Around 1994, a German researcher called Chris stayed here for three years. He was working for a magazine. He followed the Batek on hunting and he can speak also speak some Batek. I was small at that time and that's why my English is good. I know Lye Tuck Po too, she always comes here and has taught the kids English using sound recorders. There were also four or five other persons, mostly tourists, also stayed here overnight before…British, French.
>
> (Personal interview, 21 January 2017)

> I travelled to Kuala Lumpur a few times. I was once invited by a Malay guy and an Indian woman to stay in their house. They took me to Pasar Indal to see crocodiles.
>
> (Personal interview, 22 January 2017)

For the Batek therefore, being modern and indigenous is a seamless reality, in effect a reconciling of two sides of the same life coin.

Negotiating indigenous modernization in tourism representation

During the Orangasli Village Tours, it is readily observed that the Batek tend to hide their electronic gadgets in front of tourists, possibly to maintain an image of cultural 'exoticness' (Fig. 5). Before tourists arrive by boat, the adults often ask the children to put away their tablets only to bring them out after the tourists depart. It is further noted that there are 'hidden' roads behind their camps where the Batek have motorbikes to travel between camps and the commercial center of Kuala Tahan. It should be pointed out that the Orangasli Village Tours often create an impression that the Batek camps are isolated and only accessible by river transport. Guides and community members never divulge the availability of such roads.

There are, however, some aspects of modernity that the Batek do not attempt to hide from the public gaze. For example, the roofs of their huts used for tourist demonstrations are now made with plastic covers as they are waterproof and easier to maintain. At Kampong Dedari, there is a visible solar light installed by a Non-Government Organization in the middle of the settlement (field work observation, 1 May 2018). The Batek also rarely don traditional tribal wear when meeting tourists as other indigenous cultural groups might be expected to do in Malaysia or Thailand (Trupp, 2014). Instead, they prefer to wear t-shirts and modern clothing suggesting the avoidance of sartorial 'primitivity' in their displays to tourists. One Batek interviewee explains why they don modern clothing when tourists visit:

> The Malay tour guides told us to dress better in front of the tourists. Hence, we sometimes put on t-shirts when the tourists come, as to show respect. Some of these t-shirts are given by tourists.
>
> (Personal interview, 13 August 2017)

In fact, the Batek do not have any traditional costumes as some indigenous tribes in Malaysia might have. During the tourist absence, the male members wear only a sports-short while females don an ordinary sarong (Figs. 1, 2 and 3). T-shirts are sometimes worn by men during the tourist presence but not always.

Modern elements on display in the Batek settlements, however, have led to some criticisms from tourists. Interviews with the 67 tourists who visited the Batek reveal some notes of disappointment. Amongst these participants, 16 had negative responses as they vented their frustration at excessive commercialization. A sample of these views include:

> We like the tour but anxious about how they feel…. They should ask the tourists to stop taking photos of the Orangasli. It wasn't insulting but it just felt strange people taking photos of the small cute kids who are playing.
>
> (Japanese tourist)

> Not very comfortable for me because going there is more like a zoo, tourists not there to have a connection with the people, it is not respecting their home just taking pictures, and how tourists were dealing with them makes you uncomfortable.
>
> (UK-Palestine tourist)

> I didn't enjoy that part, they live like in a museum and it is a little rude to be like that. The Orangasli tour was included in the trekking tours with the travel agent so we didn't intend to see them.
>
> (Spanish tourist; all interviews on 18 December 2017)

A travel agent also revealed that they occasionally receive complaints on the Orangasli Village Tours that the Batek are "losing their culture because of tourism", and that there is a need to "leave them alone" (personal interviews, 20 December 2017). Those with

positive responses (16) or neutral views (26) often cite “authentic life”, “beautiful culture” and “stress-free life” as their key impressions of the Batek lifestyle.

During conversations with tourists, it was explained to them that as the Batek evolve, many use smart phones and buy food from external sources. One tourist reacted with disappointment saying: “oh, then it's not really jungle life”. When explained that the Batek continues living in the jungle even if they are no longer ‘disconnected’, the respondent retorted: “Well that's what I mean, they are not different from us, so it's not really interesting then. Do you know what it was like before they were modernized? What did they eat from the jungle?” (personal interview, 26 March 2018). Mingling with tour groups as they visit the settlements, it was also not uncommon to hear the guides explain that the Batek is not a “backward community” as they adopt modern practices in order to “live a better life”. Casual conversations with tourists reveal that most regard commercialization and shreds of evidence of modern living in the Batek camps as lamentable. Ironically nobody had reflexively spoken out against tourists signing up for cultural tours as evidence of commercialization.

As tourists crave for some ‘primitive colour’, the Batek are in favor of conserving their cultural life as a tourism marketing leverage. To some tourists, the Batek village is a museum lacking in authenticity, but the Batek sees it as their way. In its earlier days when elements of their modern life were on display in the village, tourist displeasures were noted. Today the Batek purposely hide their electronics whenever visitors come around. As tourists lament the ‘museumization’ and ‘zooification’ of the community (as noted in the quotes above), none is aware that the Orangasli Village Tour is, in fact, a cultural co-production involving tourism agents, the Batek and the tourists themselves. Through their opinions on what they hope to see (and not wish to see), tourist feedback provides the essential grist for agents and Batek members to ‘re-present’ the village. What we now have today is, therefore, an amalgamation of tourist imaginaries, business savvy and a combination of Batek agency and cultural preservation.

Conclusion: the autheticity gap and potential resolutions

The Batek are no newcomers to commerce being historically involved in the trading of forest products such as rattan, sandalwood and small animals. Tourism represents a recent incursion into capitalist life, an embracement with which brings a multitude of choices and decisions to be made about culture, tradition and identity. This paper seeks to understand the Batek's negotiation of indigeneity in the face of tourism. A dual focus on Batek livelihood and lifestyle opens our understanding of the dilemmas faced and activities undertaken, and what it means to be an indigenous community in a rapidly evolving world.

The lessons on the Batek are not unlike the journeys of other indigenous people in their quest for self-development and a modern life. With tourism inserted into the mix, a dilemma on how to modernize while remaining true to one's traditions becomes particularly acute. We conceptualize this cultural dilemma through the ‘authenticity gap’ that indigenous groups encounter as they negotiate a range of choices and decisions in the tourism frontstage and backstage (Fig. 6). A number of emergent issues and challenges warrant reflection and resolution, applicable not only to the Batek but other communities in indigenous tourism as well.

Modernity and indigeneity should not be viewed as mutually exclusive (Bruner, 2005). There is no singular understanding of what Batek traditional life is, as the Batek have been evolving throughout history and they constantly adapt and accommodate whatever is beneficial to their community. The Batek support tourism as they regard it as one of many available income avenues even as they continue to measure the time-money tradeoff between other forms of commerce. As they have always been involved in capitalism, deriving tourism income is not regarded a contradiction. The study also reveals that the Batek's occasional non-participation in tourism is due entirely to their own volition, switching between tourism and non-tourism livelihoods as a risk reduction strategy. Culturally the Batek do not reject or avoid modern technologies and consumerism despite their preference to remain in the jungle.

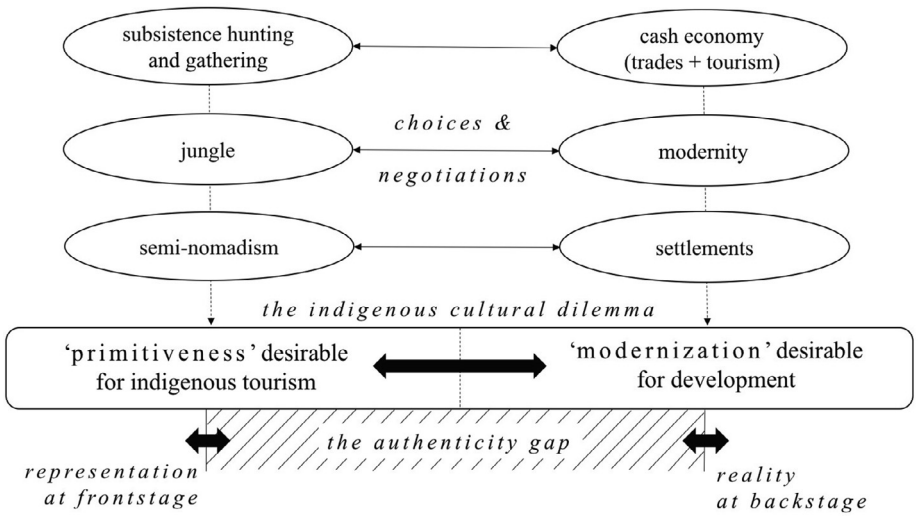

Fig. 6. The cultural dilemma and authenticity gap in indigenous tourism.

Their lifestyle has evolved through their own decisions in food consumption, use of technologies as well as cultural integration with the mainstream Malaysians through trade and tourism. The Batek are therefore not passive recipients of tourism, but are strategic in their decisions to 'present' themselves through the Orangasli Village Tours. Their semi-nomadic lifestyle has not disappeared even as they embrace a tourism livelihood, with group members rotating between the tourism camps and hunting life in the jungle.

Our findings on the Batek echo Theodossopoulos' (2016) labelling of the Emberá as 'modern-and-indigenous' – a fine balance between maintaining traditions and rituals even as modern practices and livelihoods are adopted. However, unlike the Emberá and other indigenous groups who put on tribal costumes before tourists, the Batek resolutely present themselves in modern attire even as they hide their mobile phones and modern gadgets in their encounters with visitors. As the Batek adapts to modernity, the gap between backstage life and representations on the tourism frontstage continues to widen. This cultural dilemma creates an authenticity gap that poses a challenge to indigenous tourism (Fig. 6). Traditionally, subsistence hunting-gathering and semi-nomadism in the jungle define Batek's life. At the same time, the cash economy, urban living and settlements represent attributes of a modern society that are influencing the Batek as well. The dilemma is how to mix-and-match different choices as they embrace change while remaining attractive to tourists. Tourism is something the Batek are genuinely interested in and increasingly dependent upon for their livelihood. With the gradual depletion of *gaharu* and the potential illegality in trading forest products because of Malaysia's Protection of Wildlife Act 1972, tourism is expected to become even more important. A dilemma is thus presented in that while integration with the mainstream society leads to greater loss of 'primitiveness', the preservation of their lifestyles 'holds them back' in their pursuit of a more modern existence.

For indigenous tourism, the Batek case provides strong evidence that the tourists' conceptualization of authenticity affects how the indigenes choose to represent themselves in tourism. The Batek are responsive to the tourists' expectations of a 'primitive' encounter, observably by hiding modern elements away from the tourist gaze. The complexity is, however, that the tourists are aware of the authenticity gap and often persist with the criticism that tourism has commodified and diminished indigenous culture that was once 'authentic'. This is making the authentication process difficult for the Batek as they also need to mitigate the tourists' 'zooification' feeling during these cultural tours. Tourists' dual expectation of a 'primitive' but ethical encounter is pushing indigenous hosts into a psychologically complex and stressful situation with tourism, as the 'primitive' displayed on-tour is sometimes regarded as unethical. We argue that the problem lies within the tourists and the tourism industry's static conceptualization of authenticity as measured against an unchanging past. The global imaginaries on indigenous people as untouched, primitive and integrated with nature are inaccurate as they have always lived in an interconnected world like everybody else. As Theodossopoulos (2016) suggests, authenticity should be viewed from the present and indigenous people may be seen as evolving their traditions with modernity and tourism, rather than completely abandoning them. The fluidity of culture and indigenous progressiveness should be incorporated into the re-conceptualization of authenticity. How this might be communicated to tourists is a big challenge for indigenous tourism.

We suggest two possibilities that this may be achieved. One possibility is to create more opportunities for indigenous people to explain their socio-cultural evolution to tourists. Tourism in indigenous territories is often overwhelmed with cultural performances or exotic encounters in artificial settings, with few opportunities for the indigenes to communicate with the tourists on a personal level. With the Batek's excellent navigation skills in the rainforest, they can be involved more in a jungle guiding and homestay program in Taman Negara. By interacting with tourists, a greater appreciation of the Batek may be afforded as visitors get to see them as 'guides' and 'home owners' rather than the 'exotic other'. During one jungle tour attended by the first author, for example, a Batek guide spoke candidly about his *gaharu* business and how generations of his family had traded in forest products; he also taught the visitors how to identify *gaharu* in the rainforest (field work observation, 3 June 2016). For tourists getting to know the indigenes with their attendant dreams and challenges will provide opportunities for the indigenes to explain how their cultures evolve with, rather than diminished by modernity and globalization.

Another possibility is to provide the tourists more occasions for 'experiential authenticity'. Instead of passively watching performances and rituals, workshops that actively engage tourists with artifact making, foraging for food and village cooking can be explored, with the indigenous people serving as guides. Not unlike the Sarawak Cultural Village or the Rainforest World Music Festival which convey a message of cultural autonomy and indigenous progressiveness (Chan & Saidon, 2017), experiential authenticity at the very heart of indigenous habitats and quotidian lifestyles helps transition tourists from the front- to the backstage, affording a holistic appreciation of Batek life. In this way, indigenous cultures are repackaged as cultural heritages, creating experiential authenticity associated with the indigenes' preservation of skills in hunting-gathering and artifacts making. In this way, we are measuring authenticity as fluid in everyday life with indigenous cultures that evolve with tourism and globalization, with traditions remains but expressed in a contemporary form. How we can change the global nostalgic imaginaries on indigenous people is beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, the case of the Batek provides some scenarios and insights on how an indigenous community might leverage on tourism not only for economic good but as a vehicle to negotiate their culture and indigeneity in a rapidly evolving and interconnected world.

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