Navigating the Field: Fieldwork Strategies in Observation in Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia[*]

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Abstract

The paper examines the kinds of fieldwork strategies in observation that can be mobilised to reduce time and secure access to the field, yet at the same time keeping depth and breadth in ethnographic research. Observation, as a research method, has been one of the 'core techniques' profoundly used by sociologists particularly in 'focused ethnography' (Knoblauch, 2005). The 'inside-outside' (Merton 1972, as cited in Laberee, 2002: 100) and 'emic-ethic' dichotomies have always been associated with observation. However, issues like 'cultural disparity' (Ezeh, 2003), 'accessibility' (Brown-Saracino, 2014); 'dual-identity' (Watts, 2011) and 'local languages' (Shtaltova and Purwaningrum, 2016) would have limited one's observation in his/her fieldwork. To date, literature on the issue of time-restriction is under-researched. Thus, the focus of this paper is two-fold; first, it examines how observation and its related fieldwork strategies were used in fieldworks conducted by the authors in two Southeast Asian countries: Tutong, Brunei Darussalam in 2014-2015 and Bekasi, Indonesia in 2010-2011. The paper also examines how observation can be utilised to gain an in-depth understanding in an emic research. Based on our study, we contend that observation holds key importance in an ethnographic research. Although a researcher has an emic standpoint, due to his or her ethnicity or nationality, accessibility is not automatic. As a method, observation needs to be used altogether with other methods, such as audio-visual, drawing being made by respondents, pictures or visuals.

Keywords: Observation, Fieldwork strategies, Ethnography, Emic Research, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia.

Introduction

The paper examines how observation and its associated fieldwork strategies can be used in an ethnographic research. What is particular about observation, as a method, is that it carries weight as it accords ethnographers an emic perspective. An emic perspective, in fact, suggests a subjective, informed and influential standpoint (Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990, as cited in Kanuha 2000). Observation has its associated fieldwork methods, which range from informal discussions (storytelling) and discussion with key informants in the field, to observation of meetings. Different methodological approaches adjusted with particular situations and issues do characterise ethnographic research (Lueders, 2002). Nonetheless, entering the field and carrying out observation are not tasks that can be executed swiftly. Access is often limited due to a multiplicity of factors, cultural disparity (Ezeh, 2003),

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construction of sexual identities (Brown-Saracino, 2014) or local languages (Shtaltovna and Purwaningrum, 2016). What are the fieldwork strategies in observation that can be mobilised to reduce time and secure access to the field, yet at the same time maintain such depth and breadth in ethnographic research? This is the main question that guides the direction of our paper. Fieldwork strategies in observation within emic research are also under-researched in social science methods and generally in sociology. Michele Lamont and Ann Swidler (2014) discussed the method of interview, including its challenges. Observation, however, remains liminal.

The paper aims to offer empirical reflection-based fieldwork conducted by the authors in two countries: Brunei Darussalam, particularly in Tutong in 2014-2015, and in Bekasi, Indonesia in 2010-2011. The authors used observation in their ethnographic fieldwork in two different countries in Southeast Asia. The two case studies presented will highlight the author's experiences with regard to observation and the kind of fieldwork strategies used to collect data that was helpful in their research. It should be noted that our paper is not a comparison: it is about how strategies in an observation are mobilised in an emic kind of research. It is emic as both researchers are 'insiders' or at least 'partial insiders' in both countries and the research itself is an ethnographic research recognising the centrality of human experience. This centrality was aptly pinpointed by Willis and Trondman (2002: 395): "Ethnography is a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms the irreducibility of human experience".

Based on our study, we argue that observation is indispensable in an ethnographic research. Although a researcher has an emic standpoint, due to his or her ethnicity or nationality, accessibility is not automatic. As a method, to fully grasp social interactions and processes of everyday interactions on-site, observation needs to be mobilised along with other methods, such as audio-visual, drawing being made by respondents, pictures or visuals. Indeed, observation is intricately linked with other ethnographic/social science research methods. The sections that follow discuss ethnographic fieldwork in the Malay world and provide a literature review of observation as a social science method. Next, strategies in fieldwork are outlined in the two countries wherein both authors conducted their ethnographic fieldwork.

Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Malay World

Our fieldwork was carried out in Southeast Asia, a region located in Asia. It consists of Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, East Timor, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Most of the countries located in Southeast Asia are members of ASEAN i.e., Association of Southeast Asian Nation. Yet this is not the only strand that unites Southeast Asia geopolitically. Linguistically, there are four major language families in Southeast Asia, namely Austronesian, Tai-Kadai, Austroasiatic and Sino-Tibetan (see Bellwood, 1985, 1995 as cited in King, 2008). One must acknowledge the diversity in the region whereby socio-cultural, linguistic and racial boundaries of Southeast Asia are blurred, shifting and permeable. However, similarity is shared, for instance, between Malay language and Indonesian language, enabling exchange of knowledge and production of knowledge on this basis. Not just similarity, but production of knowledge about Southeast Asia as an area have been going on for decades (see, for instance, Wertheim, 1993; Evers, 1980; Schulte and Visser, 1995), that makes it untenable to simply bracket Southeast Asian societies under the rubric of third world sociology (see Goldthorpe, 1975).

Studies on Southeast Asia also contribute theoretically to conceptualisation of social processes in societies without having to make reference to social science theories developed

in the West (Said, 1985). We refer to the phenomenon of shared poverty where resources are split into miniscule pieces to keep in line a sort of harmony (see Geertz, 1957; Geertz, 1963) in Javanese society. A similar inference can be drawn nowadays of such sharing of poverty whereby research funds are being distributed into small piecemeal as along as most universities receive funding (see Nugroho, 2012). Such sharing of poverty took place six to seven decades ago in Java in the agricultural sector and it may well still exist in the Indonesian science system (see Purwaningrum, 2016). Concept can travel through time via empirical engagements from and in the field.

Methodology (or method) in Southeast Asia was recently discussed by King (2014). He states that 'there were (and are) significant differences between American and European perspectives on and approaches to the study of Southeast Asia' (2014: 50). For instance, there are also key differences within Europe itself. As a consequence, these have methodological implications. King specifies, as an example, 'the post-war British emphasis on modern social science studies and its associated data-gathering methods and the strong French tendency to focus on classical studies, archaeology, prehistory and early history, and language and literature with the importance given to textual analysis and the use of archival and other written sources' (King 2014: 50-51. See also King, 2001, 2010, 2011).

The fieldwork was carried out in two countries located in the Malay world and in Southeast Asia; namely, Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia. Brunei Darussalam is located in the North West coast of Borneo Island. It comprises four districts; the Brunei-Muara district, Tutong district, Belait district and Temburong district. Its capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, situates itself in the Brunei-Muara district, a centre of government and business. With a total population of 406,000, Brunei Darussalam has embraced the Malay Islamic Monarchy as its national philosophy (BEDB, no date). Seven indigenous groups rest under the same umbrella as the native Malays. This encapsulates the *Melayu Brunei*, *Melayu Tutong*, *Melayu Belait*, *Kedayan*, *Dusun*, *Bisaya* and *Murut*. It is the practice of Malay language, culture and customs, Islam as the official religion and having the monarchy system in the sultanate (Hj Md Zain, 1998). The fieldwork Fakhri conducted was located in Tutong district. Tutong district is the third largest district in Brunei, with an area of 1,166-square kilometers (Borneo Bulletin, 2014). It is a 'home to indigenous groups like Malay Tutong, Kedayan, Dusun and Iban' (*ibid*). The practice of major religions (predominantly Islam and Christianity) can be found amongst the district's inhabitants: a small percentage of them are animists, including the Dusuns who still practice the belief and practices of their ancestors.

Indonesia is a country located in Southeast Asia. It has 250 million people speaking over 700 languages (The Economist, 2016). A process of decentralisation is ongoing in Indonesia. With internal territorial fission referred to as 'Pemekaran' in the Indonesian language, several provinces broke apart, while there are hundreds of districts in Indonesia separated from existing districts (Arifin et al., 2015). Such fission is predominant outside Java. In 2010, there were 497 districts in the population census. In 2014, the number increased to 514 districts (Arifin et al., 2015). One element that remains the same is that more than half of the country's population lives on the densely inhabited and comparatively wealthy island of Java, with more than one-tenth in Jakarta Metropolitan Region (The Economist, 2016). The research is located in Bekasi, a part of the Jakarta Metropolitan Region. Jakarta itself is the capital of Indonesia. Jakarta also faces rapid urbanisation, which is an issue in Indonesia. With 53% of the population living in urban areas in 2010 (Menko-Perekonomian, 2011), by 2025, it is predicted that those inhabiting urban areas will reach 65%.

Restrictions, Types of Observation and Insider-Outsider Elements in Observation: A Literature Review

We provide a literature review in this section on types of observation, insider-outsider elements and various restrictions encountered in using observation as a method in ethnographic research. In recent years, qualitative methods of data collection have been used and included under the term 'ethnographic methods' (Kawulich, 2005). These qualitative methods include interviews and observations. The latter, observation, has been a 'hallmark of both anthropological and sociological studies' (Kawulich, 2005). Marshall and Rossman (1989) defined observation as 'the systematic description of events, behaviours and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study' (as cited in Kawulich, 2005). Observation consists of two different types. First, participant observation is 'learning the activities of the people in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities' (Kawulich, 2005; Whyte, 1979: 56). Second, non-participant observation is where the researcher distances himself from the 'researched' and does not participate in the activities of the 'researched'. Mulhall (2003: 307) used the terms 'unstructured observation' to describe the former and 'structured observation' for the latter.

However, observation as a research method is heavily linked to the issue of time restriction. In particular, participant observation used in focused ethnography is characterised by 'short-term field visits' which focus on 'small elements of one's own society' (Knoblauch, 2005). It should be noted that although the researcher conducted the research in a limited time, the data collected is typically intensive (Knoblauch, 2005). In a sense, the data produced by participant observation in focused ethnography is rich, detailed and relatively huge due to the utilisation of various recording devices, which also means that it requires an intensive data-analysis (Knoblauch, 2005).

Observation is both an active and passive engagement in the field. As a method, it carries weight as it accords ethnographers an etic perspective, which in fact suggests a subjective, informed and influential standpoint (Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990, as cited in Kanuha, 2000). As opposed to emic, the notion of etic could be defined as a perspective that is more 'objective, distant, logical and removed from one's project', which appears to be a critical aspect of being a native researcher (*ibid*: 442). In its simplest form, the notion of 'insider' is frequently related to emic in which the data and information from the participants are very important for the researcher and thus, theories and concepts may emerge from this (Headland et al., 1990). On the contrary, 'outsider' is inherently attached on the etic where theories and concepts related to the study are being utilised to ascertain whether they are applicable to the study or otherwise (*ibid*).

Restrictions are not unforeseen in ethnographic research. They can range from time and funding to access to the field. Rather than 'predominant metaphors in anthropological research' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), participant observation has been one of the 'core techniques' used by most sociologists in sociological ethnography, better known as 'focused ethnography' (Knoblauch, 2005). As such, the data gain from focused ethnography is intensive as it typically involves short-term field visits and the use of audiovisual devices, such as camera and tape recorder to support the observation (Knoblauch, 2005). Participant observation has been used to 'describe and understand the patterns of life in different parts of the society using non- obtrusive methods' (Tesch, 1990) from which will be developed the 'regular presence by the researcher amongst the group which…led him to being as familiar as a piece of furniture' (Punch, 1993: 190).

In theoretical perspectives, in cultural anthropology, participant observation has been the propeller of several theoretical developments. There are several expectations tied with this

mode of observation. First, the researcher can learn from observation: in this regard, he or she is a part of what is being observed; second, being actively involved in people's lives enables the researcher to be closer to understanding the participants' perspectives; third, gaining a point whereby the researcher is able to understand people and their actions is likely (Dewalt et al., 1998: 261). It is, as acknowledged by Dewalt et al. (1998), a highly individualistic process of data collection in ethnographic research. This is reified in the researchers' grasp of 'outside' and 'inside' social events.

According to Clifford, participant observation serves as a way for 'continuous tacking between the "inside" and "outside" of the events' (Clifford, 1988: 34). In this sense, the 'inside' is the idea of 'grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically' whilst 'outside' involves the 'stepping back to situate' the meanings in wider contexts (*ibid*). It was suggested that observation is a two-way process where, on the one hand, it is a 'first-hand experience'; that is, the notions of 'finding our feet' and 'being there', while on the other hand, there is a need for the researcher to 'distance himself/herself from the account' in order to 'safeguard scientific objectivity' (*ibid*).

Interestingly, the insider-outsider relationship has been debated and defined differently by scholars. Merton (1972) has identified the insider-outsider position as an 'epistemological principle centred on the issue of access' (as cited in Laberee, 2002: 100). Indeed, the insider-outsider relationship is related to the question of the ease of access for the researcher to be accepted by the 'researched'. According to Labaree (2002), an insider is defined as an 'individual who possesses intimate knowledge of the community and its members' due to 'previous and ongoing association' with them. On the other hand, an outsider is an individual who is a 'professional stranger' (Merton, in *ibid*) who is 'detached from the commitments of the group' and does not have an 'intimate knowledge [of the community and researched]' (Labaree, 2002). Because of the detachment from the subject of research, it is more likely for the outsider to acquire objectivity than the insiders and to have doubts and 'raise questions unlikely to be raised by insiders' (Kauffman, 1994).

Corbetta (2003: 246, as cited in Tjora, 2006) identifies different elements that can be incorporated in an observation. Initially, the physical setting: the ability of a researcher to scrutinise the physical settings and correlate the relationship between the physical setting and social characteristics. In this sense, it implies how the physical setting affects and 'helps in conditioning the social behaviour' (Corbetta, 2003: 247). Secondly, the participants and their roles and tasks include human social characteristics and behaviour. Briefly, this is where the researcher describes the participants' traits, or elements (*ibid*). Thirdly, formal interactions that take place at the institutional level are observed, including local institutions and organisations. Corbetta (2003: 448) exemplifies how the study of the decision-making process within the institution has to be taken into account as it encompasses formal communication; for instance, consultation. Next, informal interactions encapsulate a 'multitude of different situations' (Corbetta, 2003: 448). Arguably, this element implies the interactions that are mundane or taking place every day. Finally, there are the social actors' own interpretations (by informal conversation and formal interviews). Observation has its associated fieldwork methods, which range from distant or passive observation, informal discussions (storytelling) and discussions with key informants in the field, to participant observation of meetings.

Observation and other different methodological approaches adjusted with particular situations and issues do characterise ethnographic research (Lueders, 2002). Yet, entering the field and carrying out observation are not easy tasks. Access is often limited due to a

multiplicity of factors, such as cultural disparity (Ezeh, 2003), the sensitive nature of the study (Brown-Saracino, 2014) and local languages (Shtaltovna and Purwaningrum, 2016).

Firstly, there is the issue of cultural disparity between the researcher and the participants (Ezeh, 2003). The study by Ezeh was particularly based on the minority ethnic group in Nigeria, called the Orring. As he is from a different community, called Igbo, Ezeh had situated himself into the Orring community and employed participant observation in his study. He then argues that the practical problem of access goes hand-in-hand with cultural disparity. In this sense, such a problem arises due to cultural differences and this should be taken into account, albeit that the national identities of the researcher and participants of the study are similar (Ezeh, 2003: 195). Some of the problems restricting Ezeh's access to the Orring community included the issue of trust (where Ezeh was accused of being an undercover police officer); he had been given the nickname as the 'mad scholar' by them and even the accusation of having a love affair and trysts with an Orring woman had been directed at him (Ezeh, 2003: 197-201). In other words, this implies that cultural disparity could manifest within one's local environment and country.

In carrying out observation as a research method, the practical problem of accessibility is and always has been a problem, especially when the nature of study is thought to be sensitive. An example is Brown-Saracino's ethnographic study in three small cities in the United States on the construction of sexual identities. It was suggested that the issue of accessibility to three different groups, namely, lesbians, bisexual and queer-identified women, could be questioned. Brown-Saracino argues that there have been disparities in her findings due to the difficulties, particularly the practical issue of access, when she undertook the said study (2014: 43). The issue of sensitivity may also feature in her research. In relation to these issues, Brown-Saracino offers three different mechanisms that could potentially have influence on the sexual identities of the communities in question. These mechanisms include 'the informants' self-identity, their (closely-related) community practices and networks, as well as the character of the local organisations and institutions serving the lesbians, bisexual and queer...populations (Brown-Saracino, 2014: 44).

Apart from that, the 'issue of dual identity' (Watts, 2011: 308) is also the practical challenge of observation, particularly in participant observation. Here, there is a problem when the researcher adopts dual identity while in the field. Watts (*ibid*) was working as a researcher at a cancer drop-in centre and at the same time, a volunteer where he spent most of his time with other volunteers. The real challenge for Watts was that, as he spent most of his time volunteering at the centre, he had to 'migrate' from an overt researcher to covert researcher and hence, indirectly conduct a 'disguised observation' (Erikson 1967, as cited in Watts, 2011: 309). Delamont (1992: 34) points out that the researcher's active commitment with the participants is called 'going native': that is, '...over-identifying with the respondents and losing the researcher's twin perspective of her own culture and more importantly, of her research and outlook' (as cited in Denscombe, 2014: 221; May, 2014: 187). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to draw the line between when he or she has dual identity as a researcher and as a participant in the study.

When the context of study involves a local and small-scale setting, the issue of lack of external validity has always been associated with participant observation (May, 2014: 187). Here, lack of *external validity* is where the notions of 'local, specific and not-generalisable' co-exist (May, 2014: 187). This might be true, in the sense that it would be difficult to generalise the findings of the study with other societies if the study is local. This particular issue might be related to when the researcher studies his or her own community and

society, for example in Ezeh's and Azizi Fakhri's studies. Perhaps, it could also be due to the fact that observation - particularly participant observation - often involves spending time with those who are being observed in small-scale settings in order to 'understand fully the social milieu which they inhabit' (May, 2014: 188).

Local languages would have the capacity to limit the researcher's access to the field (Shtaltovna and Purwaningrum, 2016). It has been noted that as language is seen as an asset, some research has proved that Russian, for instance, is considered as a 'language associated with the elites' and consequently, it has limited access for a researcher to gain reliable data from the informants (Veldwish, 2008; Oberkircher, 2011; Wall, 2006, as cited in Shtaltovna and Purwaningrum, 2016). Nevertheless, it would not be a problem if the researcher is fluent in speaking the local languages with the informants. As such, this can be seen in the studies conducted by Shtaltovna and Purwaningrum (2016). The former, who conducted her studies in Central Asia, proved the opposite, in that she found it easy to interact with the informants speaking the local language used by the people, including Russian and Turkish (Shtaltovna and Purwaningrum, 2016: 12, see as well: Mandler, Shtaltovna and Hornidge forthcoming).

In the following sections, the two aforementioned types of observation will be discussed, regarding how they were being used in two fieldworks completed by Farah Purwaningrum in her fieldwork based in Bekasi, Indonesia and the other by Azizi Fakhri who was based in Tutong, Brunei Darussalam. Both fieldworks are emic ethnographic research wherein fieldwork strategies pertaining to observation are used.

Observation in Indonesia

Observation can be of use for an ethnographic research in that it allows the researcher to place himself/herself in the social processes in the field whilst maintaining his/her position. Position, in this context, is meant either as an insider or outsider. Purwaningrum is an Indonesian national who spoke fluent English, Indonesian and conversational German during her fieldwork. She was completing her fieldwork for her PhD in Bonn.

The study that Purwaningrum completed was an ethnographic fieldwork at a meso level in Cikarang, Indonesia. She lived in a residential area in the Jababeka Industrial Cluster, enabling her to interact with her respondents. Several of the key informants live in an area close to where she resided. By living in this quartier, she gained insights from her view as a 'temporal insider'. During this ethnographic work, she distanced herself from the norm of positive science. She was involved in the social life of the workers in the organisations where she did her internship. For example, she helped the breakfasting (*buka puasa*) event organisation. Thus, she was intervening (Burawoy, 1998) in social situations and interactions.

Two types of observation were used and documented in the field notes. The non-participant or passive observations were carried out intermittently during interview sessions and during various meetings and seminars. In total, she attended 27 meetings/seminars. She observed the meetings, seeing who talked to whom and how one reacted to a certain proposition brought by another participant. It was the numerous informal conversations with individuals during coffee breaks, or during lunch, that presented significant data sources. Participant observation was carried out in a more systematic manner in three organisations; a Japanese transplant company for a week, President University for three months (18th of August 2010 - 15th of November 2010), ATMI Polytechnic for three months (16th of November 2010 - 17th of February 2011). In this paper, she focuses on observation in ATMI Polytechnic in Cikarang.

The Karya Bakti Foundation built Cikarang ATMI polytechnic in 2001 (Triatmoko: 2009, Purwaningrum 2016). The Karya Bakti Foundation is a catholic-based organisation with membership from the Indonesian Jesuits (Triatmoko: 2009). *Romo Casutt* played a decisive role in ATMI Polytechnic Cikarang in that he helped the polytechnic during its first critical years and mentored its vice-directors. The polytechnic was built with the explicit consciousness of its founders to set up Indonesia's vocational school, modelled on a Swiss dual-occupation training model; one that incorporates 70 per cent practice, 30 per cent theory. This is termed as a 'production-based academic training system' (PBET). In this system, teaching is supported mainly through production activity; i.e. by accepting job orders from manufacturing industries. This is reflected in the fact that third year students are fully involved in the process of production. There are two directorates in the polytechnic, pivotal to the functioning of PBET. They are namely the Directorate for Production and Industrial Cooperation and the Directorate of Teaching. Being located in Jababeka Industrial Cluster, one of the largest industrial clusters in Indonesia to support manufacturing training and academia for the workers in Jakarta and Bekasi (Triatmoko, 2009), the polytechnic was established with a locational consciousness of the cluster.

Several strategies were of use during Purwaningrum's fieldwork. Accessibility was attained by approval from the director of ATMI Polytechnic in 2010. She did this by means of interview on 17 June 2010. When there was a change of director, she asked again for approval from the new director on 8 October 2010. She asked for an internship and in return, she was given verbal approval. Before the internship started however, she sent a letter asking for a formal approval. Approval was indeed given, albeit verbally, which she found to be helpful to her in her first days of internship. Both directors are Jesuit members: they are *Romo* (Catholic priests). She explained herself to both directors; i.e. she is a practicing Sunni Muslim. These formal face-to-face meetings and verbal acquiescence were tremendously helpful in gaining accessibility. Purwaningrum also found a 'space of commonality' to share with the directors and respondents in the Polytechnic, in that she had studied in Sanata Dharma Catholic University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, whereby she enjoyed the lessons with a Romo (a Catholic priest) in her English literature classes. Being born in Solo, she also speaks Javanese, despite not having fluency in the highest '*Kromo Inggil*'. Moreover, several mid-level engineers in the Polytechnic spoke fluent German with an Austrian accent. She was able to tap into their conversations when they wanted to talk about higher education in Europe. Language skills proved to be helpful in understanding conversations in the Polytechnic canteen. Everyday conversations were mostly in Indonesian and sometimes they were in Javanese.

Another strategy Purwaningrum found to be helpful was participating in after-office sessions, such as outings and dinner. By sharing in these sessions, she managed to meet the Polytechnic employees, instructors and lecturers. They mostly lived in the same residential complex in Cikarang. It was as if it were a Javanese village (kampong) being recreated in a region where Sundanese ethnic group live in West Java Province. The fieldwork, after all, was conducted in Indonesia, a country with 360 ethnic groups (The Economist 2014)[†]; Javanese is a major ethnic group and in the ATMI Polytechnic, Javanese is the second language. Being a Javanese herself, in terms of ancestral links, she was able to understand as an insider and through participation in informal gatherings or dinner.

In addition, Purwaningrum used a small diary to document her observations. Conversations would flow with topic that was not restrained, as opposed to what would be encountered in

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[†]   http://www.economist.com/news/books-and-arts/21604528-decoding-nation-13466-islands-360-ethnic-groups-and-719-languages-road-ahead

an interview. She could ask about daily production and how products were being manufactured or vice versa, how vocational education/higher education is in Germany/Austria. Indeed, it was through observation and numerous informal conversations in the canteen, or in the halls, that routines were captured and documented in a small notebook. This practice has successfully given her a *tukang kredit* (or moneylender). A moneylender in the *kampung*/rural area setting would write down the liability of the person owing a sum of money and the symbolic ownership of capital that the person might have. This nickname helped to thaw conversations as respondents would joke about Purwaningrum being a moneylender. It was during lunchtime, or when she came back to her office space, that she could write down her observations in a small field diary.

Observation started with being involved in daily office routines. Purwaningrum was given a desk and a working space in the same room as the vice-director, purchasing manager and an expert who used to work in the Yamaha company in the polytechnic. Travelling to the office at 7.30 in the morning and staying until 5 in the evening enabled her to build ties of friendship with some of her respondents. A qualitative method observation is particularly useful in a polytechnic that is manufacturing-oriented, like ATMI Polytechnic in Cikarang. Several reasons serve as rationales. As a vocational education, it has an oral tradition. It has a tendency to function more like industry. A vice director told her this:

 "In ATMI, you will grasp less of a nuance of teaching: it is more like an industry" (Informal discussion, 28.01.2011).

In a manufacturing industry, most orders and production occur through visualisation and face-to-face meetings. Oral transmission of information is key to the process of production. There is a limit to what one can verbalise. In this regard, observation can capture action and behaviours. This limit of verbalisation arose when Purwaningrum asked why there were faulty parts being produced. She was informed that the students in the third year had a lack of briefing. In an informal conversation with an instructor, he explained why. "The parts are more urgent and we do not have much time. Orders for parts would emanate from PPIC (Purchasing and UBM). For function and tolerance in scale, there is standard and testing" (Informal discussion, 01.02. 2011). She then observed the students and employees in the assembling/workshop. She took note of what unfolded, in terms of production as practiced:

"They often inferred that in producing parts and using scale and tolerance, feeling needs to be used. In the assembling, boundaries are blurred between students and employees of the Polytechnic" (Observation note 01.02. 2011).

This oral tradition and limit of verbalisation as evinced in daily actions can only be captured through observation.

Next, observation aided the researcher in understanding and capturing routines. There is a daily routine that was explicit in office hours. Routines of production, for instance, were a predominant feature of the Polytechnic. First year students would be asked to be accustomed to the production process as part and parcel of their learning. They were wearing a black top outfit as their uniform. Their routines in the assembly room are visible in Figure 1.

(Figure 1: Author's Fieldwork Photo)

Nonetheless, there were also routines that make up the hierarchy and exclusionary processes of lifeworld of the polytechnic. The term 'lifeworld' is taken from a phenomenological approach, one often used in psychological or sociological research. As an approach, it seeks to understand the subjective and objective meaning of daily actions (see amongst Schuetz and Luckmann 1989). In the polytechnic, Purwaningrum observed monthly meetings, termed as 'mon-mon' by respondents. This is a meeting attended by ATMI Polytechnic employees, instructors and lecturers. She meticulously documented the monthly talks, conversations and seating arrangement. From one meeting to the next, she took note of repeated patterns. She agreed to requests from the Polytechnic on what to use and what not to use for her research. In terms of seating, she observed that those sitting in the front would be the director and vice directors. They were the people most critical to cost-saving, directing questions to division heads of the polytechnic or to each other. This is shown in Purwaningrum's following observation notes.

Researcher's field note: This is a presentation from vice director of academic directorate.

Presentation by Vice Director of Academic Directorate: "There was a visit from ATMI Polytechnic in Solo for academic assistance for instructors."

Remark by Director: "Maybe we can see what ATMI Polytehnic in Solo has done in terms of academic assistance. Please contact (ATMI Polytehnic) in Solo."

Remark by Vice Director of Production Directorate: "This academic assistance stopped for some time after this Romo (inaudible name pronounced) is no longer there.

Researcher's field note: The topic then moved to IGI Company, a subsidiary company of ATMI

Polytechnic. (Field note, Cikarang, 25.11.2010).

'Mon-mon' routines were documented extensively through observation as a participant. They reified hierarchy in an organisation whereby in a manufacturing orientation, the directors were those taking a lead in terms of decision-making. However, there were processes of exclusion and inclusion in these daily actions. Such processes were tied not in monthly meetings activities. They were visible in sites. The first site was the canteen. Meetings held in the canteen would be labelled as 'Yudas' in character. It was in this canteen that meetings with suppliers took place with ATMI Polytechnic's Production Planning and Inventory Centre.

"Today I saw another meeting between PPIC members in the canteen. Pak E (initial), and Pak T (initial) and two more persons were meeting in the canteen." (Observation, 17.12.2010).

That time, Purwaningrum hesitated to greet PPIC members. Most meetings were attended by men. Being a female researcher, she was able only to conduct distant observation. She did try on one occasion when there was a similar meeting.

"Today I saw a meeting of production in canteen. I asked one of the participants (Pak A/Initial) as to why the director was not present. In turn, I received a cold reply: Mbak, this is an internal meeting."

Purwaningrum instantly realised the query was out of the question. It was one of the questions that should never be asked. On the same day, she asked two instructors about the type of meeting in the canteen. They referred to it as "Yudas meeting room." In Christianity, Yudas was the one who betrayed Jesus. Observation allows the researcher to capture processes of exclusion in meetings held in a physically open space. Not only that, observation is indispensable in an emic research to grasp understanding of everyday interactions and it is closely linked with field-note taking.

Observation in Brunei Darussalam

This section offers the reader an analysis of how Fakhri used his fieldwork strategies in observation. He did his research in Tutong district of Brunei Darussalam. The researcher/writer is a Bruneian national who spoke Malay and Dusun language when he conducted his fieldwork. The research itself was conducted and completed for his BA degree at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). Tutong district is one of the four districts in Brunei Darussalam, situated between the Brunei-Muara district and Belait district. Being the third largest district in Brunei Darussalam, it is a home to different ethnic groups including 'Malay and non-Malay indigenes as well as a relatively large number of Chinese as well' (Sidhu, 2010: 236). More importantly, Tutong was ideally selected by the researcher because it is considered as the 'traditional homelands of the Dusun' (Asiyah az-Zahra, 2011: 13) when he conducted the research on the Dusun *lama (ba)limu*'; that is, someone who endows spiritual knowledge. Moreover, the research was concentrating on the Dusun who are animists and hence, Tutong district was selected as the area to carry out his research.

In relation to the research, the fieldwork that Fakhri completed was at a micro level in that it was concentrated solely in Tutong district, Brunei Darussalam. Being raised as a Dusun Muslim, a Sunni who is living in the Brunei-Muara district, the researcher was doing his fieldwork on his own ethnic group; that is, the Dusun who resided in Tutong district and with whom he was not acquainted. A total of three *lama (ba)limu* were recruited to be involved in the research. Of the three, there was only one *lama balimu* who was being observed by

the researcher. The time frame of the research was between December 2014 and early January 2015. The observation was conducted in late December 2014.

Non-participant observation was used in the research. It was carried out when the *lama (ba)limu,* Mrs A, performed a syncretic offering ritual called *mengibir*[‡] to the heavenly deities, *Derato*. Syncretic, in this sense, means that *mengibir* is a combination of two different religious elements; the fact that the ritual itself is based on the traditional belief of the Dusun and it is typically performed on every new month of Islamic calendar. The observation was made in late December 2014, corresponding to the new month of *Dzulhijjah* 1435 *Hijr* of the Islamic calendar. The researcher observed the said ritual, how it was performed by Mrs A and more importantly, how *mengibir* was used by her as one of the ways to cure the patients who were or were not acquainted with the *lama (ba)limu*. The non-participant observation also included a number of conversations with the practitioner, and her relatives before and after the ritual, in order to familiarise himself with them.

Fakhri used several fieldwork strategies. Accessibility has been one of the important basics in every research. The researcher initially contacted Ms K, the daughter of Mrs A, to seek approval from her, via text message. Things went smoothly as planned, as Ms K had given the permission for him to conduct his observation days before *mengibir*. The date and time of *mengibir* were set and informed by Ms K. However, the researcher encountered a problem. As the nature of his study is deemed sensitive in Brunei Darussalam, the issue of trust was a matter of concern. Although he had already gained consent from Mrs A and Ms K to use audiovisual devices, Mrs A's son asked about the researcher's intentions and why he was recording the ritual. He was suspicious of Fakhri and admitted that he was afraid that Fakhri would publicise snippets of the ritual on the Internet, through different social media platforms. Perhaps the claim made by Watts (2008) is true, that both trust and acceptance will develop between the researcher and participants when the former distances himself at some point from the latter and eventually rapport will occur between both parties (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). Also, it should be noted that the issue of trust experienced by the researcher was similar to the study by Ezeh (2003), although he is also a member of the Dusun community in Brunei Darussalam. This means insiderness does not mean access in an emic-ethnographic research.

Fakhri used extensive note-taking in his fieldwork, by way of a small diary or a piece of folded paper. Rather than taking field notes word by word, the researcher wrote certain phrases and important key words. This is in line with the claim made by Mulhall (2003: 312) that ethnographers 'merely jot down phrases or notes to remind them of key events' and will be 'further elaborated on a later date'. This was done when the ritual took place. The actions and interactions of Mrs A and attendees were 'captured' and observed as these elements are seen as important in any focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005). There were two reasons why Fakhri felt bringing a small diary to the setting was imperative and documented the observation by using key words. Firstly, it was to establish a good rapport with and respecting the participants. It has been greatly embedded in Brunei Darussalam culture that when an older man or woman is talking, the young people should be listening to them without interrupting or doing something else. He took field notes when Mrs A performed the ritual but abstained from doing so when the latter and attendees started to

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[‡] Derives from Dusun language, *mengibir* is a ritual in which the lama *(ba)limu'* makes offerings to the Dusun heavenly deities, called *derato* (Azizi, 2015; Asiyah az-Zahra, 2010). The ritual is a syncretic one where elements of Islam and Dusun's old *religion* combined together: it is usually held after the Isya' prayer on the first day of every new month of *Hijr*. It has been practiced in accordance with what has been taught by the Dusun ancestors (Azizi Fakhri, 2015). Normally, the *lama (ba)limu'* will offer three different things to the *derato*; fried egg, oil and residue of the oil (*ibid*).

interact with him. He showed his respect to them in this manner. Secondly, when he returned from the fieldwork, he had the chance to review the key words and phrases written in the small diary. This was done so that he could recall what had been documented during the observation and developed these field-notes into full text. For ethical reasons, only he would have the access to the documented field-notes.

In addition, Fakhri also utilised audiovisual devices to record and 'capture' Mrs A's actions as well as the attendees' interaction. These devices included recorder and video camera. In the fieldwork, these devices were used in order to support the researcher with his field notes. When the researcher missed out key ideas during the observation, he was able to review what had been recorded in these devices. More importantly, the researcher could look thoroughly at the actions of the lama *(ba)limu* when she performed the ritual, especially when she was in a trance and possessed by *derato*. The researcher could not comprehend what she had said as the language used was *bahasa orang atas* or 'language of the unseen'. Earlier scholars documented that the language used by the *derato* is 'tongue of the *derato*' (Kershaw, 2000) or '*tuntut/basa derato*' (Bantong, 1993: 178) which means the language of the *derato*.

Fakhri made some important notes about the ritual. Rituals can be grasped through observation. They are as follows:

"This evening, I had witnessed Mrs A performing the ritual. She was wearing the (ter)asik on her head, the traditional baju kebamban and slid a ring made from silver onto one of her fingers. At first, I thought Mrs A would have made offerings to the great Dusun heavenly deities only. In fact, I was wrong. It was a healing ritual as well for those who came to seek for Mrs A's help. At the end of the ritual, Mrs A said to me, 'You can eat the offerings if you wanted to' but I just smiled. It seemed that the ritual was seen as a monthly obligation for Mrs A. Otherwise, she would have to go through the (be)pantang [restrictions] period". (Observation, 23.12.2014).

The fieldwork ended with having an informal conversation with Mrs A and the attendees, where the researcher spent almost three hours in the field conducting the observation for his research. In his fieldwork, Fakhri demonstrates that mobilising strategies for observation call for sensitivity with local culture. It also calls for skills: an ethnographer would need to master local language, note-taking and negotiation.

Conclusion

What are the fieldwork strategies in observation that can be mobilised to reduce time and secure access to the field, yet at the same time maintain such depth and breadth as ethnographic research? The paper is guided by this question based on field research conducted by Purwaningrum in Indonesia and Fakhri in Brunei Darussalam. We focused on fieldwork strategies in observation in our ethnographic work in the two countries in Southeast Asia. We started with a discussion on the Malay world as the countries are located in this region. Indonesia is a country facing intended and unintended side effects of democratisation: territorial fragmentation (*Pemekaran*) being one of them. It is also rich in terms of ethnicity as it has more than 600 ethnic groups based on the 2010 population census (Arifin et al. 2015). Brunei Darussalam embraces the Malay Islamic Monarchy as its national philosophy (BEDB, no date). Seven indigenous groups rest under the same umbrella

as the native Malays. This encapsulates the *Melayu Brunei*, *Melayu Tutong*, *Melayu Belait*, *Kedayan*, *Dusun*, *Bisaya* and *Murut*. Up to now there has not been an empirical contribution in terms of using observation from an emic standpoint for work or studies focused on Southeast Asia.

The literature review section delves into types of observation, insider-outsider elements and various restrictions encountered in using observation as a method in ethnographic research. We point out how access is frequently limited, due to several factors, such as cultural disparity (Ezeh 2003), the sensitive nature of the study (Brown-Saracino, 2014) and local languages (Shtaltovna and Purwaningrum, 2016).

Purwaningrum, who conducted her fieldwork in Indonesia, used participant and non-participant observation. She used several strategies in her observation. First was approval from the director of the organisation where she did her fieldwork. Finding and sharing 'space of commonality' with respondents also assisted her in gaining accessibility for observation to be used. She also participated in dinner and social activities during her fieldwork, which were helpful in tapping into everyday conversations. Observation was particularly useful in understanding and capturing routines, some of which functioned as exclusion of people and explained the logic of the organisation.

Fakhri was a local in the area where he carried out his fieldwork. He used non-participant observation in his research. A key person in the Dusun community in Tutong gave approval. Belonging to and coming from the Dusun community does not automatically mean that his insiderness ensures access for his fieldwork. He worked under the supervision of the Dusun community members. Another strategy he used was intensive note taking and usage of audiovisual devices.

Indeed, we contend that observation is important in an ethnographic research as it enables social and everyday life to be captured in an analysis. Having an emic standpoint is not sufficient: a researcher has to be skilled in terms of engaging in associated skills in fieldwork, such as language, usage of audio-visual, drawings or maps made by respondents.

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