Access to Forest Resources and Effectiveness of Protected Areas in Malaysia: A Historical Perspective on the National Park and the Krau Reserve since the Colonial Era

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Seed dispersal is an important mechanism in the dynamics of ecosystems. In order to understand it clearly, many researchers in the tropics favour places where human interference is minimal to conduct their studies, like protected areas [slide 2]. In the 20th century, protected areas have become a major tool for the conservation of ecosystems. However not all of them have been successful. A number of factors affecting their efficiency have been identified: location, size, boundaries and buffers, laws and regulations enforcement, involvement of local communities (Woodley & al. 2015, Laurance & al. 2012, Bruner & al. 2001).

This paper looks on how the context and processes of the creation of two protected areas during the colonial era in Malaysia had an impact on the protection of the tropical forest ecosystems they harbour during the last 90 years.

As a historical study, this survey is mostly based on the critical analysis of historical sources [slide 3]. Like any Western bureaucracy, the British administration in Malaya filled a vast amount of paperwork, a small portion of which is dealing with the establishment of protected areas in the colony. Much has been lost when the Game Department office was destroyed during World War II. However, what remains allow us to understand the history of the conservation movement in Malaysia (Kathirithamby-Wells 2005).

Looking at the history of reserves and parks only through the colonial archives would give us a biased perspective: that of the British. Fortunately, British Malaya was not a colony but a series of protectorates. The local states, the sultanates, continued to operate alongside the British colonial administration, and some of the correspondence of the sultans with their subjects or the British made its way to the National Archives of Malaysia. Through these letters, the views of the Sultan but also of their subjects, the commoners, on the wildlife reserves emerge.

Besides, enquiries have been conducted by British members of the Malayan Civil Service who met the local communities that were affected by the proposed protected areas. These British administrators wrote reports that presented the views of the people who they met. By combining all these sources we can have a pretty clear understanding on the processes that led to the creation of the two largest protected areas in British Malaya and their management: the Krau Game Reserve, now Krau Wildlife reserve, and the Gunung Tahan Game Reserve established respectively in 1923 and in 1926 in Pahang. The latter was eventually incorporated into the King George V National Park in 1939, which became Taman Negara after Independence. The files of the Game Department, then Department of Wildlife and National Parks, allow us a glimpse on their history until today.

When in the early 20th century, conservation of the wildlife of the Empire became a concern for the British government and the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire, steps were taken in Malaya (MacKenzie 1988). Laws were drafted to protect certain species and a Game Department was set up. The main protagonist of this conservation policy was Theodore Rathbone Hubback [slide 4]. A planter and a big game hunter, Hubback was involved in the drafting of the 1921 ordinance on the protection of the fauna of Malaya. Then in 1930, he was commissioned by the King and the sultans to lead a Commission on the Wildlife of Malaya. Subsequently he became the first Chief Game Warden of Malaya. Hubback has been instrumental in the creation of the Krau Reserve and the National Park [slide 5].

Archives show that mainly two categories of people were using these forests before they were gazetted for conservation purposes. First were the Malays living at the border of the park and the reserve. They collected Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), especially rubber, like that of *jelutong* trees, cut trees for timber, hunted, fished, used meadows as grazing land for their cattle and buffaloes. Some villages also had graveyards within the proposed area of the National Park and they used pathways to cross the forest to go to Terengganu or Kelantan. Second were Aboriginal groups of Forest people who were actually living in the forest. In Krau, the Che Wong were swidden cultivators, while in the National Park the Batek were hunter-gatherers. All of them relied on NTFPs for cash or barter.

Hubback's projects were based on the "Yellowstone model" that implies to suppress all permanent human presence in the park (Wuerthner 2015, Reiger 1975). In fact, Hubback turned towards conservation after a hunting trip in Alaska where he met with American hunters some of whom were proponents of wildlife protection (Barlow 2000). The Yellowstone model that Hubback wanted to implement in Malaya affected the local populations' rights on forest use. Hubback and the British who supported the wildlife reserves saw them as sanctuaries were human presence, notably that of the natives, was undesirable. This happened at a time when land access became an issue in the peninsula, because of demographic growth and development of cash crop plantations on the West coast.

Sources show that the people affected have been able to change the rules that Hubback and his supporters wanted to enforce. They petitioned their true rulers, the Sultans [slide 6]. The Sultans, especially Sultan Abu Bakar of Pahang, and some British officials then supported the claims of the Malay villagers and of the Batek and Che Wong forest people (Guérin 2017b).

Far from being colonial diktats, the gazetting and regulation of Krau and the National Park was the result of intense negotiations between different parties within the colonial administration, the local inhabitants, the Sultans and their courts that lasted nearly four years in the case of the National Park. Proponents of the preservation of wildlife were forced to make concessions.

The Batek and some Che Wong groups living in the Park and the Krau reserve were allowed to stay and continue their way of living [slide 7]. In the eyes of all British, the presence of the Che Wong and the Batek could easily be tolerated. They were labelled as Sakais, a derogative term, and considered as wild beings, savages. Hubback once wrote that Krau was "The most valuable Reserve for *seladang* in the whole of Malaya, and a most important sanctuary for all sorts of wild life, including Sakai" (Wild Life Commission of Malaya 1932). They belonged to the world that the British wanted to preserve. They were just asked to give up hunting species that the

British wanted to protect the most like *seladang*, the local name for *bos gaurus*, or some bird species, like argus pheasant, and to report any poaching activity in the protected areas.

After having been evicted and forced to abandon any activity in the park and the reserve, the Malays of the Tembeling area were allowed a few privileges. They were permitted to travel through the National Park with the limitation that they could not carry any weapon, which actually could be a problem because of tigers and the fear they inspired. They could also collect NTFPs for their personal use but not for sale, to fall trees to build their houses if no other resources were available outside the park, and to collect fruits, knowing that they had planted many of the fruit trees.

Since the time Krau and the National Park were established, the means of the Game Department to monitor the park and the reserves under its jurisdiction have been, by far, inadequate both in terms of finance and staff (Guérin 2017a). However, the Krau Reserve and the National Park have proven quite efficient in protecting the ecosystems [slide 8]. They have not been seriously affected by World War II, despite the complete dismantling of the Game Department, or even by the years of the guerilla war during the state of emergency between 1948 and 1960.

Size and rights of the local communities that were decided when the protected areas were set up, seem to have been important factors of effectiveness. The few assessments that have been conducted tend to present them as high value conservation sites. Rhinoceroses have disappeared from the National Park, but it still harbours some of the flag species of conservation like gaur or tiger. The situation in Krau is a bit more elusive (Aiken 1994, Lynam & al. 2007). The smaller size of Krau reduced its capacity in providing adequate shelter for endangered animal and plant species in a context of forest fragmentation. However, Krau remains an important spot for lowland evergreen forest, while Taman Negara is still a stronghold for Southeast Asian biodiversity. It is very doubtful that such an achievement would have been possible had the initial project of Hubback been implemented. Hubback refused to take into account the claims of the local Malays and their interest. That led to resistance and opposition.

On the long term, the concessions that he and the other proponents of the preservation of wildlife were forced to make in the 1930s appear to have been beneficial for conservation, especially in the National Park.

In order to efficiently reproduce and implement this kind of participative model we need to be able to tell to the people living within or in the vicinity of a protected area what natural resources they can rely on, harvest of collect, without jeopardizing the whole conservation scheme. In order to do that, we need to be able to understand the dynamics of the whole ecosystem, which means understanding, among others, seeds dispersal processes [slide 9].

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