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Indigenous Women and Gender Roles: Migrant Orang Asli Women in the

Klang Valley, Malaysia

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Govindran Jegatesen

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis examines the lives of indigenous Orang Asli individuals in Peninsular Malaysia who migrate from the rural regions of their settlements into Malaysia's wealthiest and most urbanised space – the Klang Valley – for paid employment; and the implications of this movement on Orang Asli gender roles and identities. Concurrently, the thesis examines the effects of Malaysia's developmental and modernisation initiatives for the Orang Asli, which is framed against the backdrop of the nation's discourse on development and indigeneity.

By first introducing the social profile of the Orang Asli through an examination of a number of socio-economic indicators – gathered from governmental and NGO bodies – to investigate issues including health, education and infrastructure among the Orang Asli and within their settlements, the thesis begins by providing an insight into some of the issues and complexities facing Orang Asli communities in contemporary Malaysia.

This study engages a participatory research approach with regards to its ethnographic undertaking and research instruments. The necessity of decolonising indigenous research and deconstructing the colonial research apparatus when working with Orang Asli communities – particularly when attempting a research model that aims to prioritise the narratives of the marginalised in an attempt to bring to the fore the varied experiences, struggles, negotiations and resistances of Orang Asli women – forms an important consideration in the thesis.

The notion of indigeneity – an issue that even at face value is a complex consideration – is discussed within the Malaysian context and framed against the administration's discourse on indigeneity and the nation's racial politics. The discussion brings to the fore the role of Islam as a primary definitive indicator of indigeneity as framed by the Malay-Muslim administration, and the positioning of the Orang Asli within this discourse by the government. Although complex, an understanding of the above prior to the discussion on the administration's modernisation and development initiatives for the nation and the Orang Asli – as discussed in the New Economic Policy and the Malaysia Plans – is essential in understanding how the two aforementioned socio-economic policies intersect with Malaysia's racial politics.

The implications of the administration's largely agricultural development and modernisation plans for rural Orang Asli communities suggest that Orang Asli economies centered on cash crop agriculture have experienced an increase in the stratification of gender roles, as well as decreased overall quality of life caused by the loss of traditional subsistence activities – findings that are buttressed by the scholarly work of contemporary Orang Asli researchers. Furthermore, the administration's extensive influence into almost every facet of contemporary Orang Asli life has contributed to a greater normalization of mainstream patriarchal heteronormatives among Orang Asli communities – particularly with regards to the role of men as leaders and decision makers.

The above observations notwithstanding, this study's purpose is to depart from conventional narratives of victimisation so often found in the discourse surrounding the Orang Asli. The study finds that rural-urban Orang Asli migration presents an interesting insight into indigenous resilience in Malaysia's urban spaces. Enduring connections are formed and maintained between migrant Orang Asli individuals at the urban space with their rural settlements through unique sociocultural connections, primarily through the three structures of i) marriage and divorce, ii) the sociality of sharing, and, iii) the role of the community as mediators. The attempts by respondents to create innovative economic networks in addition to existing sociocultural connections reflect not only their resilience as indigenous peoples in the face of a modernising Malaysia, but their view of the urban space as a source of economic opportunities – one that they engage to positively affect their own socio-economic circumstances, as well as those of their communities at the rural settlements of Peninsular Malaysia.

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Glossary of Terms

adat	custom
balai	hall
bidan	midwife
bomoh	witch doctor
cengroh	a gift from the spirit world – either through a dream or an object – that grants a Semelai individual the power to become a *puyang* or a *bomoh*
gedo semaq	the indigenous leadership structure of the Semelai responsible for the socio-cultural leadership of the community
gernhaq	the food-sharing taboo of the Semai community
halaa'	a shaman/leader from the Semai community
jahat	evil or wicked
kafir	from the Arabic *kāfir* meaning infidel or non-believer (specifically in Islam to refer to non-Muslims)
kampung	village
ketua kampung	village head or village chief
kristang	Catholic descendants of 16th century Portuguese-Malay intermarriages
lembaga adat	the indigenous leadership structure of the Hma' Meri responsible for the socio-cultural leadership of the community
Mambang Kerdor	a female spirit familiar in the world of Semelai shamanism
mati anak	Malay lexical phrase used by the Semelai to refer to the vampire spirit of a woman who died during pregnancy

mudin	a circumciser in the Semelai community
pawang	a shaman/leader from the Semai community
penghulu	Malay for a village headman
pontianak	Malay for the vampire spirit of a woman who died in pregnancy
Pribumi	the non-Orang Asli and non-Malay indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak
sakai	a derogatory term used to refer to the Orang Asli with historical connotations to slavery
batin	the (usually male) head of an Orang Asli community or village
waliq	a practice in the Semelai community where a representative is elected from both the bride and the groom's sides of the family to help resolve future marital disputes
waris	a practice in the Semai community where the kin of a person accused of a crime is called upon to speak in her/his defense

List of Abbreviations

BERNAMA	Pertubuhan Berita Nasional Malaysia (Malaysian National News Agency)
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
COAC	Center for Orang Asli Concerns
CT	Communist Terrorist
CTM	Complementary and Traditional Medicines
DBKL	Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (Kuala Lumpur City Hall)
DOSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
DWNP	Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Malaysia)
EPU	Economic Planning Unit
FELCRA	Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
FOCUSED	Foundation for Community Studies and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HOAG	Hospital Orang Asli Gombak (Gombak Orang Asli Hospital)
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
IPTA	Institut Pengajian Tinggi Awam (Public Institution of Higher Learning)
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
JAKIM	Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia)
JAKOA	Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli (Department of Orang Asli Development)
JHEOA	Jabatan Hal-Ehwal Orang Asli (Department of Orang Asli Affairs)
JKOAK	Jaringan Kampung Orang Asli Kelantan (Kelantan Orang Asli Village Network)
JOAS	Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia)
KAT	Komunitas Adat Terpencil (Geographically Isolated Customary Law Communities)
KEMAS	Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat (Department of Community Development)
KITA	Institut Kajian Etnik UKM (UKM Institute of Ethnic Studies)
KKLW	Kementerian Kemajuan Luar Bandar dan Wilayah (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development)
KLIA	Kuala Lumpur International Airport
KOMAS	Pusat Komuniti Masyarakat (Society Community Center)
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCCHR	Malaysian Centre for Constitutionalism and Human Rights
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MNLA	Malayan National Liberation Army
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOE	Ministry of Education

MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MP	Malaysia Plan
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
NCD	Non Communicable Diseases
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PDA	Positive Discourse Analysis
PKKOAP	Persatuan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Orang Asli Negeri Perak (Perak Orang Asli Arts and Cultural Association)
PLI	Poverty Line Index
POASM	Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Association)
PRA	Participatory Research Approach
RISDA	Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority
RM	Ringgit Malaysia (Malaysian Ringgit)
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
RPS	Rancangan Penempatan Semula (Resettlement Scheme) OR Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula (Regroupment Scheme)
SABOT	Semelai Association for Boating and Tourism
SPNS	Sinui Pai Nanuk Sngik
SUHAKAM	Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UN DESA	United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs

When women work in the city, most of them want to stay on in the city. Even after they are married, they still continue living in the city. Orang Asli parents tell their children ... They say, "O.K. She's now in the city … all you younger ones, go to the city … follow that big sister. She is in the city."

<div align="right">

Anggrik
(A Hma' Meri woman)

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Chapter 1: Introducing the Study

The quote preceding this chapter was from a conversation with an Orang Asli woman from the Hma' Meri community. A respondent of the study, she communicates a sentiment that – from my conversations with Orang Asli individuals – an increasing number of Orang Asli parents in the rural settlements of Peninsular Malaysia hold to be true: that the urban space is a place of opportunities. However, although there is a large body of scholarship that is available on Orang Asli communities and Orang Asli women in the rural settlements of Peninsular Malaysia, the lives of the Orang Asli who migrate to the urban areas of the Klang Valley have received considerably less ethnographic attention. Furthermore, the implication of rural-urban migration on the gender roles of the Orang Asli is an area that is little understood. To this end, the study attempts to address gaps in Malaysia's Orang Asli discourse by: (i) investigating how Malaysia's development and modernisation initiatives have impacted gender roles among the Orang Asli, and (ii) considering how the gender roles of the Orang Asli may have undergone changes through rural-urban migration to the urban areas of the Klang Valley for the purpose of paid employment. A further dimension of the study is to understand Orang Asli perception of these changes.

Through a description of a background of the study, this chapter will provide an overview of the indigenous peoples of Malaysia, and introduce the Orang Asli – the indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia who are the subject of the study. In particular, this will include an exploration of the lives of the Orang Asli community in contemporary Malaysia with respect to geography, government education initiatives, employment and socio-economic opportunities, and, medical and health services. In addition, the study will investigate non-governmental organisations (NGOs) founded by the Orang Asli, and networking initiatives that they have undertaken. Concomitantly, the chapter will lay out the significance of the study in the context of Malaysia's indigenous discourse, its aims, and the research areas that are to be the focus of the study; concluding with a brief outline of the other chapters in the thesis.

1.1. Significance and Aims of the Study

There is a large body of scholarly work on the lives of Orang Asli women and gender issues found in the rural indigenous settlements of Peninsular Malaysia. There are several studies evidencing robust scholarship that explore the histories and contemporary issues facing Orang Asli women and their communities in rural Peninsular Malaysia (e.g., *Orang Asli Women of Malaysia: Perceptions, Situations and Aspirations* (Baer, 2006), *Health, Disease and Survival: A Biomedical and Genetic Analysis of the Orang Asli of Malaysia* (Baer, 1999) – discussing the reproductive health of Orang Asli women – *Orang Asli Women of Malaysia* (Baer et al., 2006), *The Orang Asli and the Contest for Resources* (Nicholas, 2000), *Looking for Money: Capitalism and Modernity in an Orang Asli Village* (Gomes, 2004), and *Orang Asli Women and the Forest* (Nicholas, Tijah and Tiah, 2003). The importance of such scholarship cannot be over-emphasised, as it has critically contributed to the discourse on Orang Asli land rights claims, activism and governmental recognition of Orang Asli connections to their lands; the discourse has also examined the effects of regroupment, resettlement and the impacts of land dispossession on the cultures and abilities of Orang Asli communities with respect to self-sufficiency and self-governance.

As indicated above, the bulk of the research concerning Orang Asli communities has been carried out at the level of the rural settlements, which has limited contemporary discourse on the Orang Asli. It would appear that for the most part, much of the discourse concerning Orang Asli women has also focused on their lives in the rural settlements, and the changes occurring therein. The gap in the literature concerning migrant Orang Asli in urban areas offers an interesting area of study on the gender roles of urban Orang Asli migrants in Malaysia's cities. The rapid development and modernisation of the Klang Valley presents an attractive option for Orang Asli individuals from rural areas who are in search of employment, given the scarcity of socio-economic opportunities at the settlements. Furthermore, the implications of rural-urban migration on Orang Asli gender roles have yet to be studied – an area of research that may be a valuable addition to contemporary discourse on the experiences of the Orang Asli in a modernizing Malaysia. Research exploring changes in gender roles at the level of the settlements, as well as the effects of the introduction of a money economy, appear to suggest a consensus that Orang Asli communities are increasingly being stratified along gender lines. However, the connection

between rural gender stratification and the migration of Orang Asli women into urban areas is as yet unexplored, and forms a key component of this study. In so doing, this study hopes – through its investigation of Orang Asli experiences in the urban space – to contribute to the broader academic and civil discourses of indigeneity in contemporary Malaysia.

1.2. Research Questions

This ethnographic case study explores gender roles and the impact of rural-urban migration on gender roles among Orang Asli in the Klang Valley. The Klang Valley was selected as the location for this study as it is Malaysia's most developed and urbanized geographical region (Fau, Konthapane & Taillard, 2014), providing a suitable frame through which to understand the experiences of Orang Asli women and men in an urban setting. Accordingly, this study will:

i) investigate how Malaysia's development and modernisation efforts have impacted gender roles among the Orang Asli, and,

ii) consider how migration to the Klang Valley for the purpose of paid employment may have implications for the gender roles among Orang Asli today, and their perception of these changes.

The ethnographic case study method engages postcolonial feminism as its theoretical framework, and is heavily informed by the decolonisation of research methodologies as postulated by Smith (2012) and Chilisa (2012) in conducting research with indigenous peoples. Concomitantly, the Critical Discourse Analysis method was applied in examining texts and contemporary narratives that were written on the Orang Asli by non-Orang Asli in an attempt to illustrate power relations between the post-independence Malaysian administration [1] and the Orang Asli. Positive Discourse Analysis as postulated by James Martin (2004), was engaged to investigate instances of Orang Asli resistances and resilience as minority indigenous peoples within the urban space of the Klang Valley.

1.3. Outline of Chapters

This thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 lays out the background of the study, and includes an overview discussing the indigenous peoples of Malaysia, before delving into the

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[1] Administration in the entire body of the study refers to successive Malaysian governments – both past and present.

subject matter of the study – the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia. The chapter will also lay out the social profile of the Orang Asli community in a number of socio-economic areas, which will include education, employment, health, as well as the networks mobilized by the Orang Asli within their communities and with other NGOs. Chapter 1 also briefly touches on the gender roles of the Orang Asli before explaining the significance of this study and its aims. The significance of the study maps out prior Orang Asli research while underscoring the limitations of such research in Malaysia; in so doing it identifies the gaps in Orang Asli research. Following this the aims and objectives of the study – to contribute to the broader Orang Asli discourse – are described and presented.

Chapter 2 will lay out the technicalities of the study through a description of its theoretical framework and research design within the postcolonial feminism framework, and its relevance and application in the design of this study. This will be followed by an in-depth description of the ethnographic instruments utilized as well as deliberations on the studies' limitations and ethical considerations.

The construction of indigeneity in Malaysia will be discussed in chapter 3. Prior to this, a description of indigeneity in the global context will be explored, followed by the framing of indigeneity in Malaysia. The chapter will examine the early history of the Orang Asli, their interactions with the Malay and colonial powers that colonized Malaya, and colonial narratives of the Orang Asli. In addition, the chapter will explore the implications of the Communist Insurgency on the Orang Asli and the subsequent development of the Aboriginal Peoples' Act of 1954 – a document that until today is still very relevant to the discourse on the Orang Asli. This chapter will conclude by examining the Department of Orang Asli Affairs, from its inception to the present day.

Chapter 4 is concerned primarily with the modernisation and development initiatives of the Malaysian government following the nation's independence in 1957. Accordingly, this chapter will explore the Malaysia Plans – Malaysia's blueprints for development – and in so doing examine the implications of governmental cash crops and land development programmes on the Orang Asli. The chapter will also explore interactions between the Malaysian administration and Orang Asli communities – particularly with regards to land issues. Concomitantly, the active proselytisation of Islam and Christianity among Orang Asli communities, and the effects of these

initiatives on the socio-cultural fabric of Orang Asli communities, are investigated. The chapter concludes with a description of contemporary Orang Asli movements encompassing topics such as indigenous activism, and Orang Asli NGOs.

The understanding of gender roles among early Orang Asli communities, and the implications of monetization on the gender roles of the same is explored in Chapter 5. To this end, this chapter also investigates case studies of traditional leadership structures in a number of Orang Asli communities and the position of women within such structures, before exploring contemporary gender relations among urban Orang Asli migrants. In addition, the implications of JAKOA's involvement in traditional and contemporary Orang Asli leadership structures form a critical component of the chapter.

Chapter 6 starts by examining the construction of rural and urban spaces in contemporary Malaysia vis-à-vis JAKOA and the Orang Asli. This is followed by an examination of rural-urban migration patterns among the Orang Asli, the implications of mobility on gender roles, and the ways in which cultural and communal ties are maintained between urban Orang Asli migrants and their communities at the rural settlements through indigenous sociosucltural constructs such as customs and customary laws. The chapter also examines the implications of rural-urban migration on Orang Asli cultures, languages, value systems, and customs.

Finally, Chapter 7 will summarize key findings of this study, identify existing gaps in contemporary Orang Asli research and discuss the possibilities for future Orang Asli research in Malaysia.

1.4. Social Profile

1.4.1. The Indigenous Peoples of Malaysia

The indigenous populations of Malaysia comprise the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia – who are the subjects of this study – the *Pribumi* of East Malaysia (comprising the states of Sabah and Sarawak), and the Malay-Muslim community who are regarded by the Malay-Muslim administration to be the nation's definitive indigenous community. As of 2011, the Orang Asli number approximately 180,000 individuals (JAKOA, 2011); consistently making up less than

1% of Malaysia's population as seen from censuses carried out in 1980 (Roseman 1991); 1999 (Kruspe, 2004); 2003 (Heng & Baraclough) and 2004 (Gomes, 2007).

The *Pribumi* of East Malaysia are a highly diverse group and are ethno-culturally unrelated to the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia. The exonym *Pribumi* literally means "first of the soil," and is a closely related term to the Sanskrit *bumiputera*. The term however, is used exclusively to refer only to the indigenous peoples of East Malaysia. The *Pribumi* are substantially larger than the Orang Asli in numbers – approximately 1.7 million strong in Sabah, and 1.2 million in Sarawak (IWGIA, 2014, p. 276) – comprising 39 and 40 ethnocultural groups respectively. Unlike the ethnic minority position of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia, the *Pribumi* of Sabah and Sarawak collectively form the majority of East Malaysia's population. Despite the ethnocultural divide, it would appear that the issues faced by both the Orang Asli and the *Pribumi* share a number of commonalities – primary of which is the issue of land loss and its implications on their cultural identities and subsistence capabilities. Discounting the Malays, both the Orang Asli and the *Pribumi* groups of East Malaysia collectively identify by the autonym "Orang Asal" (Nicholas, 2000, p. 204). Collectively with the Malays however, they are known as Malaysia's *bumiputra* community (a term sometimes used to also include the smaller Portuguese-Malaysian *kristang* and Thai-Malaysian groups). Both *asal* and *asli* are cognates indicating "original"; Carey (1976, p. 3) suggests that the word *asal* is derived from the Arabic *asali* meaning "original" or "wellborn." The Malaysian government decided against using the word *asal* to refer to the Orang Asli due to the coinage of the term by the Communists in referring to the Orang Asli community during the Malayan Emergency (Nicholas, 2000), between 1948-1960.

Part of the region that makes up the Klang Valley today (and the focus area of this study) is home to the Temuan people (Lee & Yeoh, 2006) – one of the 18 ethno-linguistic Orang Asli groups recognized by the administration as part of the Orang Asli peoples of Peninsular Malaysia. Another group with historic presence within the Klang Valley are the the Hma' Meri – also known as Hma' Btsisi (Reita, 2007) or Mah Meri – who inhabit the estuaries where the Klang and Selangor rivers converge into the Straits of Malacca, which indicates the end of the Klang Valley region. An arguably more recent indigenous presence in the Klang Valley are Orang Asli migrants from rural regions who have moved to the urban areas of the Klang Valley

in search of employment. Historically, it appeared that the mobility of the Orang Asli was determined largely by motivation for subsistence that was *"spread over a wide geographic range allow[ing] unrestricted movements"* (Fix, 1999, pp. 187-189). This would include travelling to areas where tropical fruits were in season, seeking new regions for swiddening, and visiting trading posts at the peripheries of the forest or other Orang Asli communities to trade forest products for household commodities, in what appeared to be "extensive networks of trade [existing] long before the current round of 'globalization'" (Lee & Yeoh, 2006, p. 168). It appears that this movement has taken on a new dynamic today in the form of the rural-urban migration of Orang Asli individuals from the rural localities of the Peninsula into the Klang Valley region in search of employment.

1.4.2. The Klang Valley

The Klang Valley is an area that comprises Kuala Lumpur (the federal capital) and its suburbs, as well as a number of cities and townships in the state of Selangor in Peninsular Malaysia (Ooi, 2010); which collectively form the core of Malaysia's commercial and industrial sectors. For the purpose of this study, Klang Valley refers to the major cities and townships within the Klang-Langat conurbation[2] and not the peripheries of the smaller rural townships where Orang Asli settlements are often located. The Klang Valley is geographically delineated by the Titiwangsa Mountains (*Banjaran Titiwangsa*) to the north and east of the Peninsula, and the Straits of Malacca to the west. The region takes its name after the Klang River, which is the principal river flowing through the valley (Thompson, 2007), and which was closely linked to the development of a number of tin-mining townships during British rule (Ooi, 2010). Originally a small tin-mining town at the confluence of the Klang River and the Gombak River, Kuala Lumpur's growth and expansion began in the late nineteenth-century through the joint efforts of the Chinese tin-mining *kapitan* Yap Ah Loy and a British officer by the name of Frank Swettenham (Chan, 2013). As the heartland of Malaysia's commerce and industry, the Klang Valley has a history of rural-urban migration (Shirley & Neill, 2013) that continues to this day. The geospatial perimeters of this study will be explored in further detail in Chapter 6.

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[2] The federal territories of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya, and the districts of Gombak, Klang, Petaling, Hulu Langat, Kuala Langat and Sepang, and excluding the Selangor districts of Sabak Bernam, Kuala Selangor and Hulu Selangor.

1.4.3. The Orang Asli

The term Orang Asli meaning 'original people' (Tap 1990, p. 31; Nobuta, 2007, p. 481) was coined by the post-independence Malaysian administration and refers exclusively to the indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia, and does not include the Malay-Muslim population, nor the *Pribumi* of Sabah and Sarawak. Historically the majority of Malaysia's Orang Asli groups inhabited the contiguous forest networks at the base of the Titiwangsa range in the central regions of Peninsular Malaysia (Tarmiji, Masami & Norhasimah, 2013). The Orang Asli have a historic presence in Peninsular Malaysia that predates the establishment of the first Malay settlements by migrants from the Indonesian archipelago and the establishment of the ancient Hindu-Buddhist Malay kingdoms. Of the three Orang Asli ethnic groups – Semang (also widely known as Negrito), Senoi and the Aboriginal-Malay (also widely known as Proto Malay) – the Semang are generally considered by researchers to be the group with the longest continued presence in Peninsular Malaysia. While estimates vary, researchers generally place the arrival of the Semang into Peninsular Malaysia to approximately 30,000-50,000 years ago (Frazee, 2002; Glover, 2004). Ancient Semang archaeological sites have been found in the state of Perak, as well as cave paintings such as those in Gua Tambun, Perak, that date back almost 25,000 years. For a number of decades, anthropologists suggested that the Semang were ethnically related to the other 'Negrito' groups in the central and northern regions of the Philippines, the Andamanese peoples of the Andaman Islands and the Manik of southern Thailand (Tarling, 1999, p. 74) based on "their supposedly very distinctive set of features (shared with Andaman Islanders and some Philippine groups)" (Fix, 2016, p. 115). However, as noted by Fix through his observation of current genetic studies – including *Phylogeography and Ethnogenesis of Aboriginal Southeast Asians* (Hills et al. 2006), and *Evolutionary History of Continental Southeast Asians: "Early Train" Hypothesis based on Genetic Analysis of Mitochondrial and Autosomal DNA Data* (Jinam et al., 2012) – of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) collected from Semang communities and other Southeast Asian 'Negrito' populations, this theory has been refuted by scientists in recent years (Fix, 2016). Nevertheless, most evolutionary scientists studying early human movements seem to agree that the Semang are the descendants of one of the earliest human arrivals into Southeast Asia (Fix, p. 109), and that the genetic material from these ancient humans is especially well-represented among the Semang (Bulbeck, 2011).

Members of a particular Orang Asli community inhabiting a specific geographic location within the Peninsula may not necessarily regard other Orang Asli communities speaking a closely-related language and practising similar customs (which might ordinarily suggest ethnolinguistic relations) in another location as being related to them – or as even being Orang Asli at all. This outlook is even more pronounced when considering Orang Asli communities that are completely unrelated both linguistically and culturally. In his introduction to *Malaysia's Original People: Past, Present and Future of the Orang Asli,* Endicott discusses Dentan's experience with the Semai, whereby the "lowland-dwelling west Semai in Perak told Dentan that the upland-dwelling east Semai in Pahang were not Semai at all, claiming that they were Temiar, while the east Semai called the west Semai 'Malays'" (Endicott, 2016, p. 5). He further describes the linguistically diverse Batek communities that include "at least three distinct language groups – Batek De', Batek Tanum and Batek Nong" whom the Malaysian administration regards as a single ethnolinguistic community, and the Temoq, whom the government has "folded … into the larger Semelai group for administrative purposes" (Endicott, 2016, p. 5). Endicott (2016, p. 5) contends that prior to governmental interference, the various orang Asli communities "did not concern themselves with larger categories of similar peoples, much less with the constructed category, Orang Asli." Although today there is an increased understanding among various Orang Asli communities of the shared experiences of land loss as well as recent collective indigenous mobilization efforts towards land rights claims which transcend ethnolinguistic divisions, the observation made by Endicott appears to still hold some truth. During a fieldwork trip to the Semelai community in Tasik Bera in September 2016, I had asked the sisters of my key informant Zaitun if they had met individuals from the Semang communities in the Peninsula's northern states. Below is a translated excerpt from the original Malay:

> *The Kensiu aren't that many… Perhaps 200? More or less…*

> Sister 3: Where are the Kensiu?

> *In Baling, Kedah.*

> Sister 3: They are?

> *Yes, I lived with them.*

Sister 3: In Kedah?

Yes. In Kedah… for three months. There aren't many of them… About 220?

Sister 3: Are they only in Kedah? Nowhere else?

Kedah and Thailand.

Sister 3: They are not Malaysian!

Yes, they are… they are Orang Asli.

Sister 3: Malaysian Asli? Or Thai Asli?

Malaysian Asli… There are maybe 200 here and 200 in Thailand.

Sister 3: Are they close to the border?

Yes they are, and they are Malaysian too.

(Italicised sentences belong to the researcher)

I had encountered a similar sentiment regarding the Kensiu when speaking to a Semai individual at a seminar in Kuala Lumpur in 2015. This individual came from a family of Orang Asli activists and was himself politically active and a university graduate. Yet he did not consider the Kensiu to be 'truly' Orang Asli; in fact, many of my respondents had never heard of the Kensiu, or of the Kintak or Lanoh (other smaller Semang Orang Asli groups numbering less than 200). It would appear that the small size of these communities, coupled with their relative isolation from urbanized areas may potential reasons as to why they have little presence in the public (or broader Orang Asli) consciousness – unlike the much larger Semai, Jakun and Temuan communities who number in the tens of thousands, and are situated closer to the urbanized regions of Peninsular Malaysia. Prior to the 1960s, the ethnonym 'Orang Asli' as a collective category for the indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia had yet to be coined (Nicholas, 2002), as indicated by the usage of the term 'aborigines' by the colonial administration to refer to the various non-Malay indigenous communities of colonial Malaya. While the three Orang Asli ethnic groups were defined and then differentiated by the colonial administration into approximately 18 sub-ethnic groups on the basis of their supposed ethnocultural differences (or

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similarities) – which included language, customs and physical appearance – it was the Malaysian administration that coined the term 'Orang Asli' as a meta-exonym encompassing all Orang Asli groups. As noted by Endicott (2006) some of the exonyms by which certain Orang Asli communities are known today (such as Che Wong and Semaq Beri) are corruptions of the names of colonial administrative staff or generalized indigenous terms for 'forest people.' Among the Orang Asli – who have their respective endonyms to refer to the community they belong to – differences between various Orang Asli communities were drawn along the lines of each group's particular geography, as noted by Nicholas (2002, p. 119):

> They do not see themselves as a homogeneous group nor did they consciously adopt common ethnic markers to differentiate themselves from the dominant population. Instead they derived their micro-identity spatially, identifying with the specific geographical space they lived in. Their cultural distinctiveness was relative only to other Orang Asli communities, and these perceived differences were great enough for each group to regard itself as distinct and different from the other.

The ethnonym 'Orang Asli' which was coined – and continues to be used today – by the Malaysian government is not necessarily reflective of how the broader Orang Asli communities view themselves. It is a category of governmental administration, which like other administered identities carries significant weight in the lives of people thus categorised, even if they may not necessarily identify with the category as a primary description of their identity. So, despite governmental grouping of the many indigenous communities of Peninsular Malaysia into the convenient singular ethnonym Orang Asli for administrative purposes, this point of view is not shared by the various Orang Asli communities themselves – within which a plethora of languages, dialects, cultures and varied cosmologies exist. This study, while fully recognizing the plurality of Orang Asli cultures, and the prerogative and rights of various 'administratively-subsumed' Orang Asli groups to self-identification, engages the 18 ethnolinguistic classification system utilized by the Malaysian government in its operationalization of Orang Asli ethnic groups. The reason for this being that with the exception of a very small handful of scholars – including Peter Laird's work with the Temoq (Laird, 2016) – governmental classification of the 18 ethnolinguistic groups has influenced almost all scholarship concerning the Orang Asli in contemporary Malaysia – including those carried out by Orang Asli NGOs, Orang Asli

academics, and Orang Asli activists, as well as the broader Malaysian discourse on indigeneity. This study makes use of the data and related administrative narratives from mainstream and administrative discourse on the Orang Asli, and may not represent the views of the various Orang Asli communities about themselves.

As seen in Table 1, Orang Asli communities within the Semang (Kensiu, Batek, Jahai, Kintaq, Lanoh and Menraq) and Senoi (Semai, Temiar, Che Wong, Jah Hut, Hma' Meri and Semoq Beri) groups speak Aslian languages – a subdivision of languages belonging to the Austroasiatic (also known as Mon-Khmer) language family (Secombe & Sellato, 2008) – while Aboriginal-Malays (Orang Kuala, Orang Seletar, Temuan, Orang Kanaq, Semelai and Jakun) who inhabit the lower reaches of the Peninsular, speak Malayo-Polynesian languages belonging to the Austronesian language family – with the exception of Semelai, which appears to be Senoic (Nicholas, Jenita & Teh, 2010). As can be seen, the Orang Asli "are not a homogenous people – although shared socio-economic indicators and social histories can justify their treatment as one" (Nicholas, 2000, p. 3). Image 1 (below) illustrates the distribution of the various Orang Asli groups across the Peninsula, and Table 2 reflects the number of Orang Asli villages by state and their corresponding populations. It would appear that as with many indigenous groups in the developing world, the Orang Asli of Malaysia are an underprivileged group, as described by Rachagan (1990, p. 110):

> The Orang Asli clearly occupy a unique and disadvantaged status in Malaysian society. Despite being an indigenous people they are not accorded any of the binding privileges that are provided in the constitution to the other indigenous people – the Malays, and the native peoples[3] of Sabah and Sarawak.

Little has changed in the last 25 years with regards to the socio-economic conditions of the Orang Asli. Although Malaysia's GDP has seen steady growth over the decades with the national poverty rate at now 5.6%, the poverty rate for the Orang Asli is still at a high 76.9 % (Tarjimi, Masami & Norhasimah, 2013) meaning almost three quarters of all Orang Asli still live below the poverty line. Furthermore, the number of Orang Asli within the 'hardcore poor' category is 25 times the national average of 1.4% (Tarjimi, Masami & Norhasimah, 2013), translating to

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[3] The *Pribumi.*

35.2% of the population. The Poverty Line Index (PLI) for West Malaysia is defined as RM 720 per month (USD 194), whereas Hardcore PLI is defined as households with 60% (or less) of the PLI (Ninth Malaysia Plan, 2006). In 2000, while the national average life expectancy was 73 years, Orang Asli life expectancy was 53, with the infant mortality rate at 51 per 1000 birth, as opposed to the national infant mortality rate of 8.9 out of every 1000 live births (Nicholas, 2000). Nicholas contends that governmental education initiatives for the Orang Asli have not met with much success, noting that "almost half (49.2%) of the Orang Asli are illiterate while the remainder (38.5%) have mainly primary education [and] about 62% of Orang Asli school children drop out of school each year while 94.4% do not go beyond secondary level" (2000, p. 320).

Table 1:

Major Orang Asli Ethnolinguistic Groupings and their Languages.

MAJOR ETHNOLINGUISTIC GROUPINGS & THEIR PERCENTAGE WITHIN THE OVERALL ORANG ASLI POPULATION

SEMANG[4] (3%)	SENOI (54%)	ABORIGINAL MALAY[5] (43%)
RESPECTIVE SUB GROUPS		
KENSIU *(Kedah)*	SEMAI *(Main Range of Perak/Kelantan/ Pahang)*	TEMUAN *(Selangor/Negri Sembilan)*
BATEK *(Northeast Pahang/Southern Kelantan)*	TEMIAR *(Main Range of Perak/Kelantan/ Pahang)*	SEMELAI *(Central Pahang/East Negri Sembilan)*
JAHAI *(Northeast Perak/West Kelantan)*	CHE WONG *(Central Pahang)*	JAKUN *(South Pahang/North Johor)*
KINTAQ *(Kedah/Perak)*	JAH HUT *(Central Pahang)*	ORANG KUALA *(West/Central Coast of Johor)*
LANOH *(North-central Perak)*	HMA' MERI *(Coastal Selangor)*	ORANG SELETAR *(West/Central Coast of Johor)*
MENRAQ[6] *(Southeast Kelantan)*	SEMOQ BERI *(South-central Pahang)*	ORANG KANAQ *(East Johor)*

RESPECTIVE LANGUAGE FAMILIES

ASLIAN LANGUAGES (AUSTROASIATIC/MON-KHMER)	MALAYO-POLYNESIAN[7] (AUSTRONESIAN)

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[4] Also widely known as Negrito.

[5] Also widely known as Proto-Malay.

[6] Also known as Mendriq.

[7] With the exception of the Semelai language, which appears to be linguistically Senoic. *Encyclopaedia Malaysiana*, Volume 12, pp. 20-21.
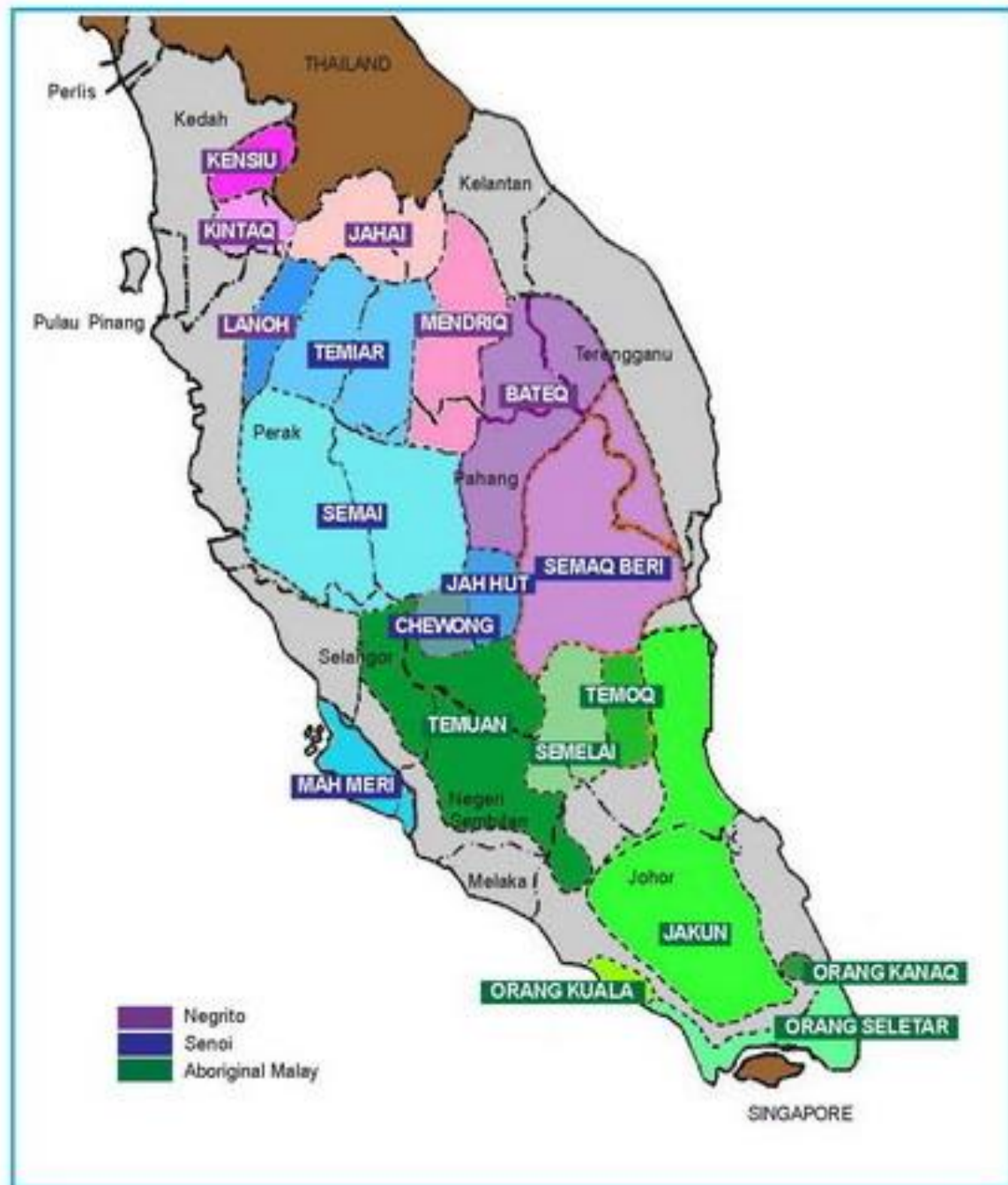
Image 1. Distribution of Orang Asli Ethnolinguistic Groups in Peninsular Malaysia *(COAC, 2016.)*

Table 2

Orang Asli Villages According to State and Their Inhabitants (JAKOA, 2014).

State	Number of Villages	Inhabitants		
		Male	Female	Total
Pahang	262	35, 323	32, 183	67, 506
Perak	255	27, 716	25, 583	53, 299
Selangor	74	9, 254	8, 333	17, 587
Kelantan	118	7, 140	6, 317	13, 457
Johor	58	6, 702	6, 437	13, 139
Negeri Sembilan	68	5, 461	5, 070	10, 531
Malacca	14	778	737	1, 515
Terengganu	3	474	419	893
Kedah	1	155	115	270
Total	**853**	**93, 003**	**85, 194**	**178, 197**

1.4.4. Education

Education initiatives for Orang Asli communities are placed under the purview of the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (*Kementerian Kemajuan Luar Bandar dan Wilayah*). However, the ministry also works closely with other governmental organisations including the Ministry of Education, the Department of Community Development (Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat or KEMAS) and the Department of Social Welfare in providing educational support and facilities. The department under the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development that is responsible for the academic initiatives for the Orang Asli is known as 'The Division of Mind and Education Development' which is divided into the 'Education Section,' and the 'Mind Development Section." The Education Section is further divided into the 'Higher Education Unit' and the 'Schooling and Non-Formal Education Unit.' The administration's education goal for the Orang Asli is assimilation into the mainstream Malaysian economy (Kamarulzaman &

Osman, 2008; JAKOA, 2013). In the 2011 Department of Orang Asli Affairs' annual report, the department's educational goal for the Orang Asli community stated the department's aim to,

> Improve Orang Asli children starting from kindergarten to the higher level and assist the Orang Asli students that study in Public Higher Learning Institution (IPTA) and overseas… (by) improving mind development, skills, confidence and positive values in oneself by exposing the Orang Asli community through courses, job and skill trainings to instill paradigm shift in line with the National development flow. (JAKOA, 2011)

In 2000, Nicholas observed that "almost half (49.2%) of the Orang Asli are illiterate while the remainder (38.5%) have mainly primary education [and] about 62% of Orang Asli school children drop out of school each year while 94.4% do not go beyond secondary level…" (2000, p. 320). Eight years later, Kamarulzaman & Osman made the observation "that for every 100 Orang Asli children entering Primary 1, only about 6 will be expected to reach Form 5 eleven years later" (2008, p. 88) which translates to a dropout rate of 94%. It seems therefore that there are still substantial issues with regard to the dropout rate among Orang Asli children despite almost a decade of governmental intervention. Shidah, a Semai respondent in her mid 30s who completed her tertiary education at a local university, suggested that one of the reasons was that unlike other ethnic groups, Orang Asli parents do not pressure their children to attend school:

> I do see it happening and sometimes it's not just because of the children. Sometimes when the children don't go to school, the parents don't force them to school as well. I mean you know, children of other races also don't feel like going to school but their parents would make sure that they go. The thing about Orang Asli parents is that they tend to give [in] because that's their way of showing their love for their children. Which is not to force their children to do what they don't wanna [sic] do, so I feel that that could be a contributing factor lah of... of many children ... who drop out unnecessarily.

While the enrollment of Orang Asli students at the pre-school, primary and secondary levels has seen increases over the decades following independence (largely due to ongoing governmental intervention and incentives) studies indicate that the dropout rate among Orang Asli children at all three levels are still significantly higher in comparison to the national average (Nicholas, 2005). Wazir and Mohd. Razha (2016) observe that in northern Peninsular Malaysia, the Kintak

Bong of Ulu Perak appear to have an education level that "is possibly the lowest in Peninsular Malaysia, with more than 80 per cent dropping out after primary schooling" (Endicott, 2016, p. 315). In attempting to address this issue, the Ministry of Education has introduced a three-tiered educational programme that attempts to 'prepare' Orang Asli children for formal education. According to Kamarulzaman & Osman (2008, p. 87), the programme consists of the following three steps:

(i) during the first three years, children are sent to village schools taught by JAKOA field staff comprising Malay and Orang Asli instructors,

(ii) students who have completed the three years are sent to central primary schools in larger Orang Asli communities where they are able to continue through to primary six,

(iii) students who successfully complete their exams at the end of sixth grade are streamed into public secondary schools in nearby rural or urban areas.

However, as pointed out by Kamarulzaman & Osman (2008), this programme is supplementary in nature and does not address the deeper issues facing Orang Asli children within the formal Malaysian schooling system. While it seems that the Ministry of Education recognizes Orang Asli children as being "at-risk" within the Malaysian education system (Kamarulzaman & Osman, 2008), governmental measures to address the education dilemma among Orang Asli children appear to have taken a largely systemic approach. This was carried out through the introduction of policies to address what were perceived to be problematic issues encountered by mainstream Malaysian children within the education system. These policies included agricultural assistance to children's families, food assistance programmes, and transportation allowances. In investigating the high dropout rate among primary and secondary students, researchers have suggested a number of reasons, including linguistic limitations: Orang Asli children are unfamiliar with the Malay vernacular (Bemen & Christopher, 2012; Endicott, 2016); bullying and teasing by non-Orang Asli children (Nicholas, 2006); teaching staff of poor calibre (Endicott, 2016); indifference by the teaching staff to the problems faced by Orang Asli children; Orang Asli children's unfamiliarity with the formal mainstream education system (Juli, 1991); Orang Asli children's aversion to corporal punishment (Endicott, 2016); lack of awareness among some Orang Asli parents on the need for education (Kamarulzaman & Osman, 2008); the

disparity between mainstream education and the cultural worldview of Orang Asli children – which include issues with "language, and pedagogical and experiential problems" (Nicholas, 2006, p. 7) – and governmental educational initiatives that do not support Orang Asli "cultures, spiritualities and languages" (Nicholas, Jenita & Teh, 2010, p. 97). Despite overwhelming evidence of systemic shortcomings in the national education system vis-à-vis Orang Asli children, government officials insist that Orang Asli parents and children are responsible for the high dropout rate seen amongst Orang Asli children (Endicott, 2016). In referencing the scholarship of Nadchatram (2007) and Nicholas (2010), Shanthi, Zanisah and Rusaslina (2016) contend that such attitudes by the administration have far-reaching implications for Orang Asli children, leading to "poor educational results, which have limited social and economic mobility, thus causing the Orang Asli to remain the poorest segment of the Malaysian population" (Endicott, 2016, p. 449). I spoke to Higak (pronounced Hee-gaq), one of my key respondents regarding the issue of school dropouts amongst Orang Asli children. In his 50s and a member of the Semai community, Higak has conducted substantial research with the Orang Asli, and many Orang Asli individuals hold him in high regard for his advocacy and intellectual work with various Orang Asli communities over the past decades. Higak suggests that the problem appears to lie within the syllabus content taught to Orang Asli children:

When you're talking about the [national education] system, you know, to serve for the majority, the minority will suffer. Because they cannot follow. They must have a special programme. But if you still want to corperate [incorporate] them as part of the national system, this won't work. First it is disconnect, second is because ... because they are you know? They exist among their own community, surround[ed] by their traditional culture you know? And all examples [given in school] are very urban examples you know? Talking about apple in the [Malaysian] jungle you know? [laughs]. So this is the thing ... but it takes a long time ... a longer time ... to change the approach, and have to consider special policy.

Some respondents have indicated that bullying is a major factor as well, an observation also noted by Nicholas (2006) and Shanthi, Zanisah & Rusaslina (2016). 28 year-old Irfan, a soldier, desribes his experience:

They tease you, and they lower your self-esteem. Sometimes Malay kids say, 'eeee weeeii these Orang Asli consume pork,' and things like that. But the Chinese also do [consume pork]

and no one says anything about it. This lowers the morale for some Orang Asli kids. But for kids who fight back like me, I just punch them (laughs). But seven of my Orang Asli friends gradually stopped showing up for school.

My conversation with respondents indicate that the Orang Asli are fully aware of the importance of an education. Many of them expressed hope that younger individuals from their communities would continue to stay in school, such as indicated by Supian in the following statement:

I think the most important thing for my community is education. It is the most important thing if you want to advance. You must advance a people through education. With education, comes awareness, and that is enough for you to assist your people.

It appears that there may be other factors complicating school attendance for Orang Asli children – primary of which are economic limitations. In some communities, Orang Asli parents regularly send their children to kindergarten as lunch is generally provided thus lessening the economic burden on the family (Plate 1). However, the meal service is not provided at the primary school level, which, when coupled with other factors such as bullying, may further contribute to the decrease in attendance. According to a report prepared by Nicholas in 2006 for the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), poverty appears to be the largest contributing factor to the ability of Orang Asli children to stay in school. As presented in Table 3, the dropout rate in 1980 was 71.6%, and with consistent government financial aid and educational subsidies, the rate of dropouts among Orang Asli children steadily reduced over the next 14 years to 15.1% in 1994. However when education subsidies were ceased in 1994, the dropout rate jumped to 42.9% in 1995 – indicating that governmental educational subsidies play a crucial role in the ability of Orang Asli children to stay in school (Nicholas, 2006).

Plate 1. Kensiu Children at a Kindergarten in Baling, Kedah. *Note lunch plates (chicken and rice) on table at center right of image.*

Table 3

Dropout Rate among Orang Asli Students from Primary 1 to Primary 6, 1980-1995.

Year of Admission	No. of Registered Students in Primary 1	No. of Students Completing Primary 6	No. of Students Dropping Out	Dropout Rate (%)
1980	2304	654	1650	**71.6**
1981	2416	783	1633	**67.6**
1982	2729	944	1785	**65.4**
1983	2868	1000	1868	**65.1**
1984	2651	1052	1599	**60.3**
1985	2879	1124	1755	**60.9**
1986	2942	1031	1911	**64.9**
1987	2988	1217	1771	**59.2**
1988	2881	1255	1626	**56.4**
1989	2970	1466	1404	**48.9**
1990	3078	1699	1379	**44.8**
1991	3248	1679	1569	**48.3**
1992	3202	1825	1377	**43.0**
1993	3379	2264	1115	**33.0**
1994	3128	2574	472	**15.1**
1995	5505	3144	2361	**42.9**

Note: Adapted from Nicholas (2006).

At the tertiary level, government statistics indicate a steady increase in the number of Orang Asli students enrolling at local universities (Table 4). In 2008, 395 Orang Asli students were documented to have successfully completed tertiary education (Kamarulzaman & Osman, 2008). JAKOA's annual report in 2013 states that while there were only 6 students enrolled in pre-diploma courses and 165 in diploma courses at public universities in 2011, these figures have jumped to 33 and 323 respectively in 2013 (JAKOA, 2013). This may be due to a number of governmental incentives aimed at increasing university enrolment among Orang Asli high-school leavers which include scholarships, laptop donations, and "Higher Learning Carnivals," organised by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE). In 2013, JAKOA stated that it awarded RM 4.63 million in scholarships to 1064 Orang Asli students at public tertiary institutions across the country (JAKOA, 2013), and to 22 Orang Asli students in universities outside Malaysia – seven of whom were in Australia.

Table 4

Number of OA Students in Institutions of Higher Education 2010-2014, (JAKOA, 2015)

Education Level	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Matriculation	3	2	19	20	25
Certificate	7	28	18	37	25
Pre-Diploma	-	6	6	33	61
Diploma	130	165	210	323	395
Degree	226	207	224	269	232
Total	**367**	**408**	**477**	**682**	**738**

1.4.5. Employment Opportunities and Income

In early Orang Asli communities, and prior to Malaysian independence and the introduction of cash crops through government agricultural programmes, the Orang Asli's primary subsistence activities were a blend of foraging, hunting-gathering, swidden agriculture and the collection of forest products for barter and/or trade with neighboring Orang Asli communities, and their Malay neighbors. While the trade in forest products – particularly *gaharu* (a highly-sought after

fungus-infected wood used in the making of frankincense and perfumes), medicinal plants and seasonal fruits, remain important contributors to many Orang Asli communities, it would seem that the trade in forest products today also carries with it implications for the gender relations among certain Orang Asli communities. During her work with the Che Wong community in Kuala Gandah in the state of Pahang, Howell (1983) noted that the trade in *gaharu* and Malacca cane – two forest products that fetch high prices on the global market for perfume and furniture making respectively, largely excluded the participation of Che Wong women due to the relative difficulty in obtaining these products from the forest.

It would seem that the cash crop agricultural sector introduced by the Malaysian administration employs the largest number of able-bodied Orang Asli individuals today. Toshihiro (2009, p. 149) contends that the present day economy of Orang Asli communities appear to be the "predominance of the cash economy and the marginalization of the subsistence economy" brought about through the introduction of cash crops. In his work, Toshihiro makes reference to the work conducted by Kato (1991) in the state of Negeri Sembilan, who observed that the introduction of rubber has resulted in the decline in subsistence practices such as wet rice cultivation. In describing the livelihood of an Orang Asli community in Kampung Durian Tawar, in the state of Pahang, Toshihiro notes that the community's livelihood opportunities comprised eight sectors: agriculture centered around rubber-tapping and fruit tree cultivation, gathering forest products, hunting wild animals, day/manual labour, factory and seasonal work, cultivating cassava, and finally rearing fish and livestock provided by the government. During his work with the Menraq community in Rual in the state of Kelantan, Gomes (2007, p. 115) observed that governmental policy for including the Menraq into the nation's economic modernisation "took the form of projects designed to transform the Menraq economy from subsistence foraging to primary commodity production." It would seem therefore, that among various Orang Asli communities, cash crops have largely replaced traditional subsistence economies.

Among some Orang Asli communities, the introduction of cash crops was initially met with little success – the primary reason being cultural differences in agricultural practices between these Orang Asli communities and the government's commodity-oriented agricultural system. While hunter-gatherer or foraging Orang Asli's lifestyles provided them with relatively immediate returns, it would seem that the maturation period needed for commodity crops such as rubber

trees were less suited to such Orang Asli agricultural practices (Mohd. Tap, 1990). In describing the hunter-forager economy of the Menraq community in Kelantan, Gomes (2007, p. 96) uses the term "immediate-return system," which is defined by "the lack of future orientation and lack of desire (or ability) to accumulate" – both traits that he contends "are inimical to a 'modern' economy based on the production of commodities". Rubber trees for instance, need a period of 5-10 years before they are ready for tapping – a substantially longer period compared to the seasonal cycle of fruit trees and swidden agriculture that form a major component of traditional Orang Asli agricultural systems. As a result, in the early decades of cash crop introduction, many of the rubber plantations introduced by development agencies to Orang Asli communities across the Peninsula were neglected and subsequently abandoned due to a lack of cultural familiarity by governmental development agencies on the agricultural practices of the Orang Asli.

However, there are variations in Orang Asli attitudes to cash crop agriculture. For instance, almost all Orang Asli communities in Negeri Sembilan have been involved in rubber planting intiatives since the 1930s (Nicholas, 2010). Over the decades, it appears that an increasing number of Orang Asli communities are becoming more involved with the government's rubber and oil palm initiatives, as noted by Reita (2007) in her work with the Hma' Meri people of Port Klang and Carey Island. Similarly, Gomes (2007, p. 109) notes that in Kelantan, a large number of Menraq men are "mostly employed as agricultural labourers in Malay owned rubber and oil palm plantations, taking up tasks such as weeding, applying fertilizers and pesticides, and harvesting" for which the usual wage is approximately RM 10 (USD 2.60) per day. Smallholder ownership of rubber and oil palm estates are also not uncommon among Orang Asli individuals. However, unlike other smallholders who manage their own plantations, many Orang Asli smallholders – due to the absence of proper documentation to support their land ownership claims – are compelled to contract out the management of their rubber and oil palm smallholdings. Thus, while other smallholders "have been earning in excess of RM1000 per month (some as high as RM3000 per month) … when commodity prices were high, the Orang Asli smallholders were tied down to management contracts that gave them only RM200-RM400 per month" (Nicholas, 2010, p. 79), which has direct implications for the prevalent poverty experienced by the community.

It is not surprising then that labour wages at the rural agricultural areas of the Peninsula where

almost 70% of Orang Asli communities (The Star, 2015) are located, are arguably low. Table 5 depicts the populations of Orang Asli communities from the various states in Peninsular Malaysia by ethnolinguistic groups. As shown, the states with the largest Orang Asli populations are Pahang and Perak – both of which are states that derive the largest portions of their GDPs from agricultural and mining activities (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013, p. 22). Table 6 shows a comparison between the 2012 GDPs of Pahang, Perak, Selangor and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Both Selangor and Kuala Lumpur have substantially higher GDPs in comparison to Pahang and Perak, with the GDP of both states reliant on a number of identical sectors, which include manufacturing, construction, finance and retail (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013). Understandably, the cities and townships in the Klang Valley (shared between the states of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur) may thus prove to be potentially attractive options to rural Orang Asli youth seeking higher wage employment.

It would seem that perceived better employment opportunities in urban areas might also be partly responsible for the high dropout rate among Orang Asli children at the secondary level. In 2006, the Minister of the Department of Rural and Regional Development stated that the "dropout rate among Orang Asli children was more than 50 percent in secondary schools" (U.S. Department of State, 2007), an occurrence, according to the same U.S. report, that village chiefs claimed were largely due to the luring of Orang Asli teenagers – particularly young women – by people from outside the community who promise them lucrative jobs in Malaysia's urban areas. There have been suspicions by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs that some of these young women may have been kidnapped. In 2008, Irene Fernandez, the executive director of Tenaganita – a Malaysian non-profit organisation that works with marginalised women to promote and protect the rights of women workers and migrant workers – stated that the "trafficking of tribal people is on the rise across the Southeast Asian region" (IPS, 2008) with Orang Asli groups among the communities singled out by outsiders for trafficking and exploitation "to work in brothels and massage parlors" (IPS, 2008). As contended by Tijah Yak Chopil – a prominent Orang Asli activist and a member of the Semai community – a number of Orang Asli women have resorted to prostitution due to the unavailability of jobs resulting from the influx of foreign workers who are willing to work for lower wages (Malaysian Review, 2015).

Table 5

Distribution of Orang Asli Ethnolinguistic groups by State, (JAKOA, 2014).

	Major Groups			
States	**Negrito**	**Senoi**	**Malay-Proto**	**Total**
Pahang	925	29,439	37,140	67,506
Perak	2,413	50281	605	53,299
Kedah	251	19	0	270
Selangor	3	5,073	12,512	17,587
Kelantan	1,381	12,047	29	13,457
Terengganu	34	818	41	893
Negeri Sembilan	0	96	10,435	10,531
Melaka	1	28	1,486	1,515
Johor	1	55	13,084	13,139
Total	**5,009**	**97,856**	**75,332**	**178,197**

Table 6

GDP of the States of Perak, Pahang, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013).

State	GDP (RM Million)
Pahang	30,750
Perak	39,627
Selangor	176,239
Kuala Lumpur	114,106

A number of Orang Asli individuals (some with the involvement of their communities) have embarked on entrepreneurial activities centering on the sale of indigenous crafts, carvings and weavings (Hickson, 2005; The Star, 2010; BERNAMA, 2015) through the setting up of booths around the Klang Valley and neighboring areas. Others have taken advantage of the natural environment closer to their ancestral territories to promote tourism-related activities through the formation of Orang Asli managed tourism such as the Semelai Association for Boating and Tourism (SABOT) which, according to their website, is "fully owned and managed by the Semelai … [to] ensure that tourism at Tasek Bera[8] will benefit the Semelai and that income will be equally shared within the community" (Hickson, 2005).

1.4.6. Orang Asli Health and Medical Services

In 1957, the first Orang Asli hospital – the Gombak Orang Asli Hospital or *Hospital Orang Asli Gombak* (HOAG) – was built in Gombak, a district in the north of the Klang Valley, and its first medical director was a Dr. J. Malcolm Bolton (Nicholas & Baer, 2004). In referring to his writing (Bolton, 1968), Lillegraven states that the hospital's "medical program was built up from below, and Dr. Bolton attributed the success of the service to the involvement of the Orang Asli themselves" (Lillegraven, 2006, p. 98). She contends however that because there has been "no recruitment of Orang Asli paramedics or health providers since the early 90s" (Lillegraven, 2006, p. 98) – with the hospital now being run by the Ministry of Health – that the hospital's standard of service to the Orang Asli community has suffered considerably. At the time of Lilligraven's writing in 2006, the Gombak Orang Asli Hospital fell under the purview of the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JAKOA). In 2012, it was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health. Statistics on Orang Asli health consistently place the Orang Asli community as one of Malaysia's most vulnerable populations (Tarmiji, Masami & Norhasimah, 2013). In referring to government statistics for the Orang Asli in 1999, Nicholas (2000) noted that the Orang Asli community records the highest infant mortality rate in the country at 51.7 per 1000 live births, and that more than half of Malaysia's maternal deaths occurred within the Orang Asli community. A 2015 article in the Star – a local English medium newspaper – found that while this number has lowered to 16 per 1000 births, it was still higher than the national average of 6.8 per 1000 live births (The Star, 2015).

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[8] Bera Lake is a freshwater lake system protected under the Ramsar Convention located within the state of Pahang.

Orang Asli health services now fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health (MOH) –
prior to which it was under the jurisdiction of JAKOA. In addition to mobile hospitals that serve
Orang Asli communities across various settlements throughout the Peninsula, there are also
"inland medical posts situated in interior villages" and Orang Asli clinics (Lillegraven, 2006).
During her stay with the Che Wong community in Pahang, Lillegraven noted that such medical
facilities tend to be "relatively irregular and coincidental" which she suggests may be due to
"structural and political inadequacies" (2006, p. 97). In 2000, Nicholas noted that despite
improvements in Malaysia's healthcare system, the life expectancy of an Orang Asli individual
was still 16-20 years shorter than the national average. Table 7 shows the government's 2013
health allocation of approximately RM 4 million toward Orang Asli health and medical services,
which were distributed among the various JAKOA branches across the Peninsula.

Table 7

2013 Government Allocations for Orang Asli Health and Medical Services by State

State	Allocation (RM)
Pahang	256,567.35
Perak & Kedah	2,099,240.00
Selangor	243,296.60
Johor	115,531.60
Kelantan & Terengganu	584,322.10
Melaka & Negeri Sembilan	N.A.
TOTAL	**3,298,957.65**

Despite these allocations by the Ministry of Health, researchers have suggested that much of the
health problems afflicting Orang Asli communities appear to stem from easily-remediable
factors such as a lack of potable water, poverty, inadequate nutrition, and unsanitary living
conditions due to cramped government resettlement schemes (Baer, 1999; Lillegraven, 2006).

Dr. Amar Singh, a senior consultant community pediatrician, noted that "when they [the Orang Asli] are resettled, they lose access to the rivers and forests, because the resettlement areas are surrounded by logged forests" (The Star, 2015) which appears to have significant implications for malnutrition among the community. A study conducted by Norhayati et al. in 1998 found that almost half the Orang Asli community in Perak suffered from liver diseases (particularly enlargement of the liver), and that one-fifth of the population showed symptoms indicating protein deficiency. The authors also found that vitamin A deficiency was the most common nutritional deficiency – afflicting almost 38.4% of the community – an issue that the authors found did not occur among Malay children (Norhayati et al., 1995). In an interview with The Star, Nicholas noted "the number of Orang Asli with communicable diseases such as leprosy is on the rise… [and] that many of these illnesses are made worse, or caused, by malnutrition" (The Star, 2015). In the same article, Dr. Nurul Fadzillah from the Gombak Orang Asli Hospital, contended that malnutrition is a critical factor in the wellbeing of Orang Asli health as "they [the Orang Asli] do not have enough calorie intake, so they are more susceptible to diseases" (The Star, 2015). According to the only Orang Asli doctor at the same hospital, Dr. Izandis Sayed, the government has attempted to address the problem of malnutrition among Orang Asli communities through the establishment of "25 community feeding centers … [and] … since 2012, 1,752 Orang Asli children have been receiving food baskets" (The Star, 2015).

Access to potable water appears to be another important factor in the health of Orang Asli communities. A study in 2000 found that only about 48% of Orang Asli households had access to piped water, while others relied "on rivers, streams and wells for their water needs" (Nicholas, 2000, p. 30). In 2011, JAKOA claimed that the government had allocated a total of RM 5 million toward water treatment projects and facilities among 362 Orang Asli communities across the Peninsula. In its 2013 report, JAKOA stated that the government has invested RM 25, 651,968.09 toward implementing water treatment facilities for Orang Asli communities in the states of Perak and Pahang. Despite this, at a United Nations meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2011, Nicholas, in his speech, contended that governmental claims of having spent RM 200 million over the years to build 209 village water filtration systems among Orang Asli villages seem to have made little difference to the Orang Asli community, as most of these systems appear not to work and many Orang Asli communities still have no access to clean water (Nicholas, 2011).

Resettlement appears to have had negative repercussions for the health of various Orang Asli communities. In 1979, the government proposed to invest RM 260 million toward clearing large areas of forested Orang Asli lands to facilitate Orang Asli sedentarization through cash crop farming and settlement schemes. In referring to the Menraq people of Kelantan, Gomes (2007) contends that as opportunistic foragers, the clearing of large tracts of forest area for settlement schemes and monocrop plantations has considerable implications for the subsistence needs of Orang Asli communities due to the decline in fishing and hunting opportunities. Researchers contend that such large scale clearing of forest areas for monocrop agriculture have deprived the Orang Asli of their traditional hunting-foraging opportunities, and this would appear to have contributed to malnutrition among a number of Orang Asli communities. It would seem that despite advancements in the health of the mainstream population, with the "overall morbidity and mortality patterns of Malaysia hav[ing] changed from communicable to non-communicable diseases" (Norhayati et al., 1998, p. 61), adding that the disease patterns of Orang Asli communities in Peninsular Malaysia appear to not have "undergone any significant change."

There appears to be a substantial gap among medical practitioners practicing in Orang Asli healthcare and their knowledge of the different ways in which various Orang Asli cultures approach and respond to diseases afflicting their communities. The importance of Orang Asli cultural knowledge among medical practitioners who work with Orang Asli communities is depicted in the *serawan* incident of 2015. In November 2015, reports started appearing in the media of an unknown illness that was killing children in the remote Jahai settlement in Royal Belum State Park. It was reported by the media that the disease, known as *serawan* among the Jahai, manifested as white spots in a child's mouth, killing the child in a matter of days (The Star, 2015). The disease became known nationally as *serawan* and received wide coverage in the Malaysian media, with much speculation as to its cause. The Jahai community in Royal Belum State Park is located in a remote settlement situated one hour away from the closest medical station in Kampung Sg. Tiang. As there are no hospitals or clinics within this one-hour radius, they receive a visit from a mobile team once every two months, which meant that in the event of an emergency, members of the community are largely left to fend for themselves. In December 2015, I communicated with a field contact of mine, Dr. Sraj Rafee, regarding this mystery illness. Rafee is a medical doctor in his early 40s who has worked with various Orang Asli communities for many years, and has travelled deep into the most remote parts of the Peninsula

as part of the government's medical outreach programme to Orang Asli communities. Rafee explained to me that the *serawan* incident was a result of cultural misunderstanding.

> Last week I met with the people there [the Jahai in Royal Belum]. You see, for the Jahai, any kind of disease is referred to as *serawan*. Whether it's oral thrush, whether it's a headache … it's called *serawan*. For them, *serawan* is a disease. They can't diagnosis IT but they call it *serawan*. So I think there was some miscommunication between the interviewer and the press.

Rafee informed me that the mystery disease was finally identified as *herpangina*, a self-limiting disease that often strikes infants and young children. Although rarely fatal, Rafee explained that the state of malnutrition experienced by the Jahai children at Royal Belum exacerbated the condition in them – resulting in the deaths reported. He further stressed the importance of understanding the various Orang Asli cultures by describing how communities like the Jahai practise certain taboos when a child is sick,

> We have to investigate. Because you see the Jahai people, they believe in their culture … and they have a few taboos. O.K.? If the child is having an ulcer ... the child cannot go outside, mix, mingle [and] are unable to take oral. So this could probably give rise to complications plus dehydration which can contribute to ... to their deaths?

From the above narrative, it is possible that there might be a disparity among healthcare professionals working with Orang Asli communities and their knowledge of different Orang Asli cultural taboos toward the treatment of diseases. Rafee in discussing health risks facing the Orang Asli community today, has suggested three major 'burdens of health' that need addressing: i) safe motherhood, ii) malnutrition among children, and iii) infectious diseases like leprosy and tuberculosis. He further added that the Orang Asli are now also at elevated risk for non-communicable diseases (NCD) including diabetes mellitus and hypertension – resulting from the shift in dietary habits due to relocation and resettlement.

1.4.7. JAKOA

The Department of Orang Asli Development (Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli) or JAKOA – previously known as the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (Jabatan Hal-Ehwal Orang Asli) or JHEOA – is the organisation that has maintained the longest and arguably most ubiquitous

presence within the Orang Asli community. From its beginnings in the early 1950s, this governmental department (which is now under the purview of the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development) oversees virtually every aspect of Orang Asli life (Nicholas, 2000; Gomes, 2007) – and is the instrument through which the government implements its administrative, economic, and socio-cultural policies for the Orang Asli community. As indicated under heading 3.4.3 in Chapter 3, the Orang Asli appear to have become largely disenfranchised with the Orang Asli Affairs Department – despite the department's 60-odd year history with various Orang Asli communities.

Duncan contends that Orang Asli communities feel "ruled by a Malay department acting for Malay interests" (2008, p. 33) and in issues such as land rights claims and encroachment of Malays into Orang Asli lands, JAKOA takes the "side of government agencies and Malays in disputes between Orang Asli and others" (Dean & Levi, 2003, p. 55). Governmental policy for civil servants mandates that "four of every five bureaucrats must be Malay" (Duncan, 2008, p. 33) – a practice which is also extended to JAKOA. In 2007, only one Orang Asli individual was appointed at the managerial position in the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (U.S. Department of State, 2007). As noted by the U.S. Department of State in its 2007 annual report, "indigenous people in Peninsular Malaysia had very little ability to participate in decisions that affected them" (U.S. Department of State, 2007), a statement that still holds true today. In a recent flood incident in Kelantan, the Orang Ali community noted their dissatisfaction with JAKOA to The Sun – a local English language newspaper – at what they perceived as unsatisfactory response to the 18,000 Orang Asli individuals affected by the floods. The secretary of the Kelantan Village Orang Asli Network (known in Malay as Jaringan Kampung Orang Asli Kelantan – JKOAK) stated that most assistance received was from "concerned Malaysians and non-governmental organisations" (The Sun, 2015). JAKOA's administration policies and its effect on various aspects of Orang Asli life will be discussed further in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Essentially, the chapter presented the two research questions: i) how have Malaysia's development and modernisation efforts impacted gender roles among the Orang Asli, and ii) has migration to the Klang Valley for the purpose of paid employment had any implications for the gender roles among Orang Asli today, and what, further, are their perceptions of these changes?

Concomitantly, this introductory chapter has attempted to explore the social profile of the Orang Asli, and their position as unique indigenous peoples who are often overlooked in the larger discourse surrounding Malaysia's indigenous peoples. In so doing, the chapter highlights the lack of contemporary scholarly work on the lived experiences of the urban Orang Asli, in contrast to the proliferation of scholarship surrounding the lives of rural Orang Asli communities. The chapter further delineates the diversity among Orang Asli communities – a factor often overlooked by successive administrations in their development initiatives for them – which may have implications for the successful implementation of socio-economic programmes intended to assist Orang Asli communities. As presented in the chapter, the Orang Asli are not a homogeneous people, but consist of diverse groups speaking different languages – each group having its unique customs, subsistence activities and cosmologies. While certain Orang Asli communities – particularly those that are horticultural – may be more amenable to development initiatives revolving around cash crop agriculture, such initiatives may be less successful among nomadic Orang Asli communities for whom horticultural practices do not widely feature within their subsistence practices. In bringing to the fore the lack of success in governmental development programmes for the broader Orang Asli community, the chapter suggests that greater administrative understanding and recognition of the diverse (and differing) development needs among the various Orang Asli communities may have positive implications – and greater success – for governmental development aims targeted at the Orang Asli.

The following chapter will lay out the methodology of the study and provide a description of the theoretical frameworks that inform it as well as the application of these frameworks in the fieldwork component of the study. In so doing, it will also delve into the ethnographic considerations of the study and explain the data-gathering process in detail.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Decolonizing Indigenous Research

This chapter will discuss the theoretical framework of the study, and key theories that inform it. Concomitantly, the chapter will describe the methodology and instruments utilized in the collection of data, respondent identification, and conclude with the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Chilisa (2012) contends that centuries of Western colonial approaches to research and writing on non-European communities appear to have brought about a hierarchy in the epistemologies of indigenous knowledge. The knowledge of the marginalised "*Other*" was often viewed through the lens of what Chilisa refers to as the knowledge of the Western "knower" (pp. 190-191). To this effect, the value of the *Others'* knowledge appear to be entirely dependent on the worth assigned to it by the colonizing power. The '*Othering'* of the epistemologies of colonized peoples is largely due to the construction of the *Other's* identities (primitive, subhuman, infantile, etc.) by the colonizing power. This not only denied the colonized a space for their epistemologies, but internalized a value system that implied the colonized was "incapable of rational thought or morality" (Oliver, 2004, p. 30). Arguably, the knowledge of the colonizing knower carried with it suggestions on the rigid contrasts between the colonizer and the colonized, which gave rise to a hierarchy of military power, civilizational ascendancy and ethnic superiority that collectively contributed to the legitimization of European colonialism and its need for support (both financial and political) for their voyages.

The narratives of colonial anthropologists were instrumental in the depictions of lands that were being colonized and the peoples who inhabited these lands. Colonial knowledge of the native not only displaced the knowledge of the *Other*, but seemed to play a central role in negating the humanity of the *Other*. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest,* McClintock (1995, p. 27) illustrates how colonial cartographers utilized maps as "technologies of knowledge" that both "preceded and legitimised the conquest of territory." She argues that the recognized use of maps as a colonial scientific apparatus in the depiction of the unknown *Other* through the utilization of tropes such as "cannibal," justified acts of imperial

violence that was carried out in the conquest of the Americas and Africa and the associated subjugation of the native populaces.

At the initial publication of *Orientalism* in 1978, Said theorized that the academic study of Eastern peoples and civilizations by the West from the 19th century into the colonial era – and the knowledge generated by the machineries of Western research – were built largely on the ways in which the West essentialized Eastern communities as seemingly inert and monolithical institutions. Said (2014) further argues that the depiction of the East as an institution that was static contributed to the crystallization of the differences between the West and the East *by* the West through the *Othering* process, which solidified the differences between a seemingly more rational, dynamic and racially-superior West, against the impulsive and stagnant populations of the East, and interpreted these differences as weaknesses of the East. Although the field of Orientalism subjected both European and Asian cultures to a set of defined cultural representations, the inequality in power relations between the colonizing West and the colonized East resulted in the inability of the colonized to challenge the imperialistic assumptions and motives of the colonizing power which had political, cultural, social, and economic implications for colonized communities.

Cohn (1996) theorizes that British acquisition of knowledge on the Indian subcontinent served not only the administrative purposes of taxations and maintaining general law and order, but that more importantly, it enabled the British to control the vast socio-cultural enormity of the Indian subcontinent through a knowledge-process that Cohn refers to as "investigative modalities" (1996, p. 5). This process was a systemic and systematic undertaking that shaped British epistemology of British India and included "the process by which appropriate knowledge is gathered, it's ordering and classification, and then how it is transformed into usable forms" (Cohn, 1996, p. 5) – further shaping the various sciences during British rule in India. It could be argued that the knowledge generated by a number of colonial anthropologists during the height of colonial rule appeared to serve the same purpose: the acquisition of knowledge *on* the conquered *by* the conqueror not only as a means by which to subjugate, but to legitimise the aforementioned subjugation. It would appear that knowledge regarding its subjects played a critical role in facilitating and entrenching a colonial power's actions, and in maintaining its dominance over its colonies. Said (2014, p. 32) echoed a similar sentiment:

To have knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it. To have authority over it. And authority here means for 'us' to deny autonomy to 'it' – the Oriental country – since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it.

The synthesization of knowledge by colonial powers of their subjects appeared not only as a tool that facilitated and established imperial dominion, but also, intentionally or otherwise, negated the epistemologies of the conquered. Whitt (2009, p. 199) argues that colonial epistemologies of governance not only excluded the indigenous in their definitions of territories and jurisdiction, but "negated the values of egalitarianism and reciprocity" on which indigenous governance systems were built. It would seem that knowledge – or ways of knowing as defined and constructed by colonial powers – left lasting impressions on the epistemologies of its colonies. Arguably, much of the ethnoecentric assumptions and Judeo-Christian belief systems that formed the backbone of colonial conquests continue to survive today among postcolonial populations due in large part because "the colonized internalize the racist stereotypes and value systems created by their white oppressors" (Oliver, 2004, p. 30). In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993, p. 7), Said contends that, "Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition, [and] notions about culture were classified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected." It would seem today that colonisation was not only successful in its efforts to rearrange colonized cultures, but that the effects of this rearrangement continue to shape the cultures of formerly-colonized peoples today through the internalization of colonizer cultural value systems. These internalizations appear to be diverse, and manifest themselves across former colonies in a multitude of ways, including local attitudes toward religion, sexuality, academia, gender roles, ethnicity, language, skin colour, politics and other aspects of contemporary culture. Meinig (2004, p. 20) in engaging the conceptual theory of 'cultural cringe' argues that "for … countries in the adjacent Asian region this hierarchy of binaries is epitomized in the notion of the antipodes, the idea of the other side of the world as the opposite – and inferior – pole to European culture."

It the decades following the worldwide dismantling of the colonial machinery (from the 1940s to the 1970s), there arose a recognition among scholars of former colonies on the need to decolonize the intellectual apparatus constructed during the colonial era and enable the colonized to 'write back.' Spivak addresses this issue in her seminal work *Can the Subaltern Speak?,*

where she raises questions on the ability of the subaltern to respond to Western colonial discourse, when the subaltern is in fact bound by the restrictions of the scholarships of colonial hegemonies through the use of Western-centric intellectual apparatus of conformity. She argued – as did a number of postcolonial writers – that the permeation of Western-centric ontologies, epistemologies and philosophies, left little room for native and indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing to be heard. In the second of the four essays of his *Conceptual Decolonisation in African Philosophy* published in 1995, Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu laments the lack of a palpable philosophical movement in Africa that recognized the necessity for the conceptual decolonisation of African philosophy (1995, p. 23). The excerpt below suggests that Wiredu is well aware of the intricacies and complexities that come with the decolonisation of what he refers to as the 'modes of conceptualization' as a legacy of colonialism:

> Intellectually, we are brought up in Western-style educational institutions. What we learn in these institutions both in philosophy and general knowledge comes mostly from Western sources. More significantly still, our philosophical researches and results are propagated in one Western language or another. (Wiredu, 1995, p. 54)

However, Wiredu claims that the deconstruction of colonialism in African philosophy may be carried out by "viewing African thought materials in their true light" through the removal of "Western intellectual categories" which were imposed by colonial powers over African "thought elements" (1995, p. 58). His approach has not been without criticism; Osha (1999, p. 157), in his critique of Wiredu's work, argues that the paradigm of discarding colonial conceptual attitudes that "inform one's worldview" and of attempting to revisit one's "historical heritage" is problematized by postcolonialism's hybridity, which would make the retrieval of a culture's pre-colonial heritage particularly difficult, especially because of the fragmentation of indigenous epistemologies as a result of colonialism.

This study contends that Wiredu's problematization of the use of Western theories and language as impediments toward the decolonisation of African and non-Western theory is itself problematic. In this regard I draw from Homi Bhabha's work on hybridity and what he refers to as "the third space" (2012, pp. 53-56). Wiredu's calls to remove Western intellectual influences from the epistemologies of the colonized suggests that he regards the institution of colonialism as static, with identifiable traits that may be isolated and removed from the cultural and

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philosophical worldviews and experiences of the colonized. I argue that in so doing, Wiredu fails to recognize the emergence of new cultural forms that have developed from (and in some communities, even replaced) the pre-colonial heritage of a colonized culture due to the permeating nature of colonialism on the collective *Lebenswelt* of colonized communities. Brookfield (1972, pp. 4-5) contends that the effects of the colonial process on indigenous cultures is akin to,

> Tentacles from some remote system to contact [the] peripheral elements of a residentiary complex … imply[ing] an organization capable of projecting its activities beyond the bounds of the origin systems, and an expansionist will acting as driving force.

I contend that in his argument on the emergence of "hybrid and transitional identities" Bhabha (2012, p. 313) was referring to the product of this colonial expansionist process due to the ongoing enigma where colonialism continues to influence and transform the lives of the colonized, resulting in the emergence of a third space where both colonialism and indigeneity in the form of the 'oppressor and oppressed' collide, negotiate and relocate themselves. It is in this in-between space he argues, that the burden of the meaning of culture is carried (Bhabha, 2012). Bhabha (1994, p. 145) contends that this hybridization "reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention".

In the context of decolonizing indigenous research, this subversion manifests itself in the re-appropriation of research methodologies used by the colonizer in its subjugation of the colonized, the deconstruction of these research instruments, and its subsequent application by the colonized in "privileging indigenous values, attitudes and practices" (Smith, 2012, p. 128) which arguably challenges the colonial discourse and its assumptions of colonial hierarchy, power relations and authority.

Chilisa (2012, p. 3) states that the field of social science research "needs emancipation from hearing only the voices of Western Europe, emancipation from generations of silence, and emancipation from seeing the world in one color." She continues by criticizing what she refers to as the dominance of "Euro-Western hegemonic methodologies" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 3.) that do not grant spaces for the recognition of the diverse interrelationships between the indigenous scholar,

and the living and non-living entities of the indigenous scholar's world. Chilisa provides an example of how the confines of Western-centric research practices may present itself as an obstacle to the indigenous researcher attempting to work with indigenous communities by citing Tshireletso's (2001, p. 5) difficulty in navigating the Western viewpoint of ethics in seeking "informed consent of the researched" in order to study the construction of the notion of sacred space and the establishment of sacredness within the Mazenge cult. Tshireletso found himself constrained when conducting his research, because in order to speak to the spirit medium connected to the Mazenge cult, he could only engage the medium while she was in the state of possession. This problematizes a Western approach to ethical standards of research because in her state of possession, the medium would, from a Western approach, be unable to grant informed consent.

The limitations of a Western-centric hegemonic research approach toward understanding a non-Western populace is also illustrated by Mariappanadar (2005) in the field of human resource management in China, where he argues that the approach utilized by Western countries (particularly the United States) in attempting to understand work-related practices among developing nations, disregards the importance of emic data in preference for etic data. Etic data is characterized by broad or common models in approaching research based largely on Western-centric or outsider assumptions; this is in contrast to an emic approach, which is largely grounded on culture-specific approaches to describe the behaviour, value systems and practices according to indigenous definitions. Berry describes the emic approach as "an attempt to look at phenomena and their interrelationships (structure) through the eyes of the people native to a particular culture … [where] the researcher tries to look at the norms, values, motives, and customs of the members of a particular community in their own terms" (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 2002, p. 291). Mariappanadar's example on the utilization of Western-based research models in attempting to understand the Chinese market glazes over the distinction between imposed-etic (imported) and emic (indigenous) approaches to data collection, and the importance of understanding that basic values may differ between cultures. Mawer (2014, pp. 84-85) contends that a discursive approach toward conducting research "allows for the reflection of an emic understanding of workplace discourse and its social context … allow[ing] the researcher to use a range of data collection and analysis methods … to view it from different standpoints."

Smith (2012, p. 44) characterizes a Western approach to indigenous research as an epistemological practice that, to the indigenous, conveys "cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualisation of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power." If advocates of decolonizing research are to put forward a research model that centers on egalitarianism, it would appear that the approach in question would have to do away with the formation of hierarchies and implicit suggestions of power, which would necessitate a departure from hegemonic research approaches. Chilisa (2012, p. 46) argues that it is through the application of critical theoretical frameworks such as postcolonial indigenous and critical race theories that the decolonisation and "rupture [of] hegemonic Euro-Western methods" can begin. Arguably, much of the research methodologies, instrumentation, conceptualization and theories utilized in indigenous research are strongly reminiscent of colonial attitudes toward researching the Indigenous (Brown & Strega, 2015; Chilisa, 2012), however as Smith contends, this does not necessarily translate to the expulsion of existing research methodologies in their entirety. Smith (2012, p. 143) appears to concede to the hybridity of contemporary indigenous research methodologies when stating that:

> It is not claimed that the projects are entirely indigenous, or that they have been created by indigenous researchers. Some approaches have arisen out of social science methodologies, which in turn have arisen out of methodological issues raised by research with various oppressed groups. Some projects invite multidisciplinary research approaches. Others have arisen more directly out of indigenous practices.

Her implied acknowledgment of indigenous research's hybridity notwithstanding, Smith stresses the need that indigenous research must be emancipatory research, and that it must produce empowering discourses and knowledge for the indigenous. It appears that in so doing, she is referring to the non-dominating objective of indigenous research approaches, where unlike colonial approaches that set out to subjugate the *Other* via the research process, decolonized indigenous research attempts to situate itself *in relation* to the *Other*, in a process not of conquering, dominating or subjugating, but of situating, relating and understanding. Concomitantly, the deconstruction of colonial research mechanisms suggests a non-hierarchical space where the voice of the researcher should not obscure that of the researched.

In keeping with the arguments discussed above on the nature of non-colonizing and emancipatory research, this study has endeavoured to be sensitive to the narratives of the Orang Asli. In so doing, it attempts to understand their socially situated knowledge as a result of their various experiences as indigenous peoples in the Klang Valley, which has allowed them to recognize opportunities to transform their marginalization into a source of critical insight into the thought-processes of Malaysia's largely patriarchal urban environment. In the process, the Orang Asli appear to have identified opportunities for contestations and resistances in the urban spaces against the mainstream heteronormatives of modernizing Malaysia. In investigating notions of gender, gender roles and changes in gender roles that have occurred among the Orang Asli as rural indigenous peoples migrating into an urban Malaysia in search of employment, this study prioritises the varied experiences of the Orang Asli through their narratives, and in the course of so doing, engages postcolonial and indigenous theories toward conducting research with indigenous communities. To the best of my abilities, the instruments of research in this study have – as posited by Smith (2012, *Decolonizing Methodologies*) and Chilisa (2011, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*) in their work on emancipatory and non-colonizing research – utilized a participatory research approach where key respondents were consulted at various stages of the study – including data gathering and interpretation.

This study is informed by the egalitarian principles of Chilisa's (2011) Participatory Research Approach (PRA) in her work with marginalised and colonized indigenous communities, which values the intellectual and intuitive capacities of indigenous participants through its acknowledgement that:

> Indigenous knowledge and beliefs take shape around a culture's unique understandings of the social and physical world … [to] explain past events and predict future ones … based on one of [a] variety of different worldviews … [which] shape a culture's folklore, cosmology, rituals … and patterns of social exchange between adults … (Chilisa, 2011, p. 87).

In so doing, and whenever possible, this study has attempted to prioritise the narratives and participation of the Orang Asli in certain decision-making processes, the identification of respondents, the rich narratives that formed the pool of data and the interpretation of data. Concomitantly, Shailaja Fennell's (2009) comparison of gender education theory from Western Europe and America and those from Africa and South Asia has also informed this study.

Although this study does not investigate education theories, the themes outlined by Fennell bear resonance to the methodology of this study through its framework on the deconstruction of indigenous research and the deconstruction of universalized Western gender theory vis-à-vis the diversity of experiences among women of previously colonized and historically marginalised communities in the face of patriarchal subjugation (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2014).

In her work, Fennell explores the varied experiences, struggles, negotiations and resistances of indigenous women by utilizing a participatory approach that provides non-Western women with a space through which non-universalized feminist concepts, theories, and world views are voiced and mobilized in forming resistances against the backdrop of various patriarchal settings. Fennell (2009) contends that the usage of post-structural deconstruction methods allow for the knowing of socially situated experience-based knowledge which provides oppressed indigenous women with a platform through which they are able to identify opportunities, and alter their marginalizations into a source of critical insight of the ways in which the patriarchal institutions they are situated within are constructed. She posits that the construction of knowledge generated from these varied experiences performs a critical function in shifting gender research towards postcolonial and indigenous approaches.

In positioning myself as a male researcher in a study where gender forms a central theme, I draw from, and align myself with, literary theorist Joseph Boone's (2012) argument of the male feminist, who together with female feminists, both contend and challenge "a system of male hegemony that both excludes and defines them as *Other* … " in the " … homosocial transactions that make up patriarchy" (Marsh & Millard, 2002, p. 25).

Prior to discussing feminist movements and women of colour, I will first very briefly discuss the three waves of feminism. The first wave of feminism is broadly viewed as a movement that was intent on establishing and furthering women's political rights (Higgs & Smith, 2006, p. 40; Heywood, 2014, p. 420) as well as women's "access to education, women's social roles, their property rights, the conditions of marriage, work, and overall public sphere participation" (Nicholson & Fisher, 2014, p. 15). In this regard, the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 is widely regarded as the point at which the drive for women's suffrage began with the writing of *The Declaration of Sentiments* (Mani, 2007, p. 62; Lerner, 2009, p. 73). The women's rights campaign in the late 19th and early 20th century was most known for its demands by women in

the Euro-American spheres for women's suffrage – the right for women to vote (Wellman, 2004, pp. 230-231) – their position in the public sphere, and the "goal of establishing legal identit[ies] for women separate from their fathers and husbands" (O'Connor, 2010, p. 71). The first wave is also noteworthy for its involvement with the abolition movement in the United States (Heywood & Drake, 1997, p. 23; Moghadam, 2008, p. 8), and abolitionists such as Ida Wells and Mary Terrell sought to illustrate how the intersectionality of "sexism and racism functioned as the main means of white male dominance" (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005, p. 4). The initial movement for women's rights played a critical role in the abolishment of slavery, and witnessed the participation of noted abolitionists, including Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth and Frances E. W. Harper "who agitated for the rights of women of color" (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005, p. 4).

First wave feminism seemed to comprise a diverse range of movements across Europe and the American hemispheres centering largely on the issues of women's suffrage, including "equal-opportunities feminism" as "part of a sophisticated rhetoric of equity, developed simultaneously in Europe and in the United States, which shared the modern, Western political framework of enlightenment and liberalism, anchored in universalism" (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005, p. 4). The liberal first wave feminism movement on the other hand, saw writers such as Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey exploring areas of female sexuality, women's voice and their position in the gender relations of the time (Baumgardner, 2008, p. 63). Woolf discussed "female bisexuality and a unique woman's voice and writing … [and] Simone de Beauvoir forwarded the "notion of women's radical otherness or, rather, the cognitive and social process of '*othering'* women" (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005, p. 6). Beauvoir in particular attributed the subordinate role of women to men, and the consequent "*Othering*," as a result of women's reproductive capabilities, and "call[ed] for a socialist revolution as a necessary step toward liberation" (Webster, 1975, p. 151). There was also the rise of a Marxist/socialist branch of feminism in workers' unions in the United States, in reformist social-democratic parties in Europe, and during the rise of communism in the former Soviet Union, by feminists such as Rosa Luxemburg, Alexandra Kollontai and Emma Goldman (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005). It is argued by some that the work done by these three women was instrumental in the development of second wave feminism, particularly for "women's right to abortion, divorce … non-legislative partnerships [and] sexism" (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005, p. 4).

Generally, the period after the Second World War – particularly the late 1960s and the early 1970s – is considered to be the starting point for second wave feminism, which, continuing late into the 20th century, saw a greater diversity of issues that were being contested, and the rise of a more 'radical feminism' (Echols, 1989, pp. 3-5; Sterba, 2001, pp. 180-181). Basic to this was a woman's right to control her reproductive capabilities and sexuality, while problematizing areas such as women's rights at the work place and the position of the woman in the family (O'Connor, 2010, p. 71). Oakley (1997, p. 32) contends that at this juncture of the feminist movement, the focus had shifted to the influence of culture, to "explain why women's situation was so different from men's … [as] biological explanations of female-male differences had … wane[d] somewhat earlier in the century … contemporaneously with first wave feminism". It would appear that for the most part, second wave feminism was largely a movement powered by "middle-class white women" (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 95; Roth, 2004, p. 27; Hadley & Yancy, 2012, p. 81). It would seem that although second wave feminism saw the participation of women of colour, these women were actors from the Western hemisphere, and the varied experiences of non-Western women, was still largely unaddressed (Mohanty, 2003, p. 22; Stone, 2007, pp. 209-211; Chen, 2011, pp. 102-104). In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, Alexander and Mohanty (2013, p. xvi) contend that the brand of feminism of the time was still largely a movement powered by Euro-American middle class women whose "history and experiences … was propagated in Women's studies and gender studies," operating in the colonial legacy of a Western-centric hegemonic instrument which was problematic in "not challenging the hegemony of whiteness (and of capitalism) within academic institutions" and histories. It is through the framework of second wave feminism that the universalization of female experiences by Western feminism began to come under scrutiny.

Third wave feminism is regarded as having started at the turn of the 21st century (O'Connor, 2010, p. 71). It would appear that of the three 'recognized' feminist waves, it is perhaps the third wave of feminism that is most ambiguous in its "refusal of a singular liberal-humanist subjectivity … and emphasis on making room for contradictions" (Heywood & Drake, 1997, p. 124). The participation of women from across the globe has contributed substantially to the recognition of third wave feminism's multiculturalism (Sterba, 2001, pp. 184-186; Krolokke & Sorensen, 2005, pp. 20-21; Hewitt, 2010, p. 99). Unlike the earlier two waves, third wave feminism appears to "reject the notion of collective identity" (O'Connor, 2010, p. 71), and the

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movement contends that the oppression of women is not to be found in the siloed categories of colour, sex or gender, but at the intersectionality of a multitude of sociocultural constructs (Hewitt, 2010, pp. 102-103). Third wave feminism is also notable in its utilization of cyberspace, and "Third Wavers, often more computer literate than their Second Wave sisters, have launched a number of online resources for feminists" (Deluzio, 2009, pp. 218-219). A little more unexpectedly perhaps, are the recent developments with regards to women who utilize the Internet to distance themselves from feminist movements. The website *'womenagainstfeminism'* is perhaps one striking example of a movement powered primarily by Western women who contend that feminism – as defined by the earlier two movements – has somewhat lost its relevance to Western women of the 21st century.

As it is second wave feminism that has primarily impacted women's rights movements across the globe through the involvement of "the UN [which] came to play a role of growing importance as a transnational location in which women and feminists from different parts of the world would meet" (Ferree & Tripp, 2006, p. 279), this is the movement that will be discussed at breadth in this segment. At the mid and turn of the 20th century, contention arose among a growing number of non-white feminists on the apparent invisibility of women of colour within the feminist movement (Gluck, 2012, pp. 32-33). It was argued that the universalization of Western feminist theories shrouded the experiences of non-Western women who were not only subjected to varying gendered structures of constraint through the longstanding patriarchal traditions of their communities, but also as a result of colonialism, and have had to wrestle circumstances and complexities far different from those of their Western contemporaries. In quoting bell hooks (as she refers to herself), Oakley (1997, p. 89) stated, "the vision of sisterhood evoked by woman liberationists was based on the idea of common oppression – a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality."

In acknowledging the plurality of women's experiences through a number of varied lenses including ethnicity, class, age and socio-economic constructs, Oakley does not suggest that a deconstructionist analytical point of view is problematic with regards to the mobilization of feminist collective action. Instead, Oakley (1997) contends that the deconstruction of feminism implies not a redundancy in its function, but rather that as a movement, its approach and applications should not be held to be absolute truths. The work done by Kabeer, Khan and

Adlparvar (2011) in studying the intricacies involved in the introduction of the microfinance scheme by NGOs among Hazara women in the Afghan capital of Kabul delineates Spivak's argument. The authors examine how Hazara women, operating from within the nexus of a highly patriarchal Afghan value system, form resistances against the patriarchal framework of their community through the use of enterprise as an instrument, while still meeting the expectations of dutiful wife, attentive mother and observant Muslim as per the Hazara societal model. Although the submission of Hazara women to the authority of their husbands may appear to be antithetic to Western feminism, the authors contend that these women distanced themselves from the extremist value systems of the Taliban on the place and role of women in Afghan society, and that their resistances against institutionalized patriarchy is in itself a manifestation of local forms of resistance to the patriarchal hegemony unique to their circumstances as Hazara women, which may not necessarily indicate congruity with the value systems of Western feminism. In referencing Van Velsen's 'situational approach,' Roger's (1989, p. 20) argument on the necessity of recognizing the "discrepancy between people's beliefs and professed acceptance of certain norms on the one hand and their actual behaviour on the other, recognizing that disparate systems of beliefs co-exist, and are called into action in different social situations," suggests the need for greater plurality in the interpretation and application of feminism. Mohanty & Russo (1991, p. 304) argue the same toward "making the movement larger not smaller, and develop analyses and politics which at their base are feminist, and which address the interconnections and intricacies of racism, classism, and imperialism within the context of sexism and misogyny."

In referencing Mohanty's in *Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* and *Under Western Eyes*, Parminder Bachu in her essay *Dangerous Design: Asian Women and the New Landscape of Fashion* (1996, p. 187) contends that the "cultural politics" of feminism needs to expand to allow for the inclusion of the "agenda[s] of women of colour," expressing that the different cultural spaces occupied by women of colour vary substantially in "class, economic and cultural locations." Bachu further contends that feminism's engagement of women of colour tends to victimize them in its portrayal of their experiences through the lens of Western feminism, thus negating the subjectivity of non-Western women, and disacknowledging the varied spaces within the patriarchal and colonial landscapes of coloured women, within which they form resistances. Spivak in her writing on the Subaltern (1988), appears to contend that the very properties of the Western intellectual apparatus denies its usage to the subaltern,

and thus, the subaltern is unable to be heard, or present its ways of knowing. However, can this argument lend itself to the discourse on feminism? And if it does, could one argue that the universalization of Western feminism shrouds the ability of women of colour to write on and about themselves, bearing in mind Bachu's contention on the copiousness of Euro-American epistemologies in the construct of feminism, and the seeming *Othering* of the voices of woman of colour in feminist discourse?

Spivak's assertion on the systemic silencing of the subaltern's voice through the Western hegemonic apparatus has not been without criticism. Parry (2004), in her critique of *Can the Subaltern Speak?* argues that by virtue of being spoken of in imperialistic discourse, that the subaltern has in fact already spoken, and thus is no longer silent:

> Since the native woman is constructed within multiple social relationships and positioned as the product of different class, caste and cultural specifities, it should be possible to locate traces and testimony of women's voice on those sites where women inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists and by this to modify Spivak's model of the silent subaltern. (Parry, 2004, p. 35)

The arguably static nature attributed by Spivak to the subaltern appears to have come under scrutiny. In referencing Beauvoir's inquiry into the 'otherness and subordination category of a woman,' and Spivak's 'feminist difference and gendered subalternity,' Pandey (2011, pp. 2-4) in *Subalternity and Difference: Investigations from the North and the South*, contends that *difference* is itself a mark of the subaltern, setting it apart and against the "purported mainstream," which represents the 'standard,' or the 'normal.' In contesting this binary of subaltern and mainstream by actively "deploy[ing] the very category of difference … [and] overturning of prevailing structures of access and privilege" between them and relations of power, the subaltern appears to be an agent of change unto itself. Gajjala (2012, p. 24) in *Cyberculture and the Subaltern: Weavings of the Virtual and Real*, attempts, through the use of online and offline ethnographies, to "look at how the subaltern is produced in multiple context and discourses" in the realm of cyberspace. She posits that the voice of the subaltern is identifiable through the economic processes and spaces of cyberspace, and that "notions of empowerment and the role of women's labour in the shaping of organizations online and offline also impact and shape the presence and absence of the subaltern" (Gajjala, 2012, p. 14) through

the shape-shifting of marginalised groups in reassembling their identities in order to conform to globally-coded norms and maintain a presence on the global stage.

Returning to Parry's earlier assertion, it would appear that her argument regarding the identifiable voice of the subaltern in colonial texts does, however, raise a pertinent issue, that of representation; is the subaltern representing herself, or is she being represented by the imaginings of the researcher? This leads us to Ray Chow's critique on eliciting the voice of the subaltern from colonial discourse. Chow (1994, p. 332) argues:

> As we challenge a dominant discourse by 'resurrecting' the victimized voice/self of the native with our readings – and such is the impulse behind many 'new historical' accounts, we step, far too quickly, into the otherwise silent and invisible place of the native and turn ourselves into living agents/witnesses for her … easily becom[ing] complicitous with the dominant discourse.

Chow's statement enables us to critique the process posited by Parry – that of locating, extracting and resurrecting the subaltern's voice through its narrations within colonial texts – because such actions could make us complicit to the machinery of imperialist discourse. She argues that the appropriation, and subsequent regurgitation of the subaltern's voice to enable its palatability, through the actions of the dominant subject, is in itself an imperialistic exercise, as the subaltern now exists as the imaginings of the dominant subject's gaze, "which achieves hegemony precisely by its ability to convert, recode, make transparent and thus represent even those experiences that resist it with a stubborn opacity" (Chow, 1994, p. 332).

So what are the implications of the discourse above for feminism and its engagement with women of colour? And closer to home, what are its implications for a study that has attempted to prioritise the narratives of Orang Asli women? It seems that the primary issues contested in this section are those of construction and representation. In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Mohanty and Russo (1991, p. 3) emphasise the necessity of these arguments in a series of questions:

> Which/whose history do we draw on to chart this map of third world women's engagement with feminism? How do questions of gender, race, and nation intersect in determining feminisms in the third world? Who produces knowledge about colonized peoples and from

what space/location? What are the politics of the production of this particular knowledge? What are the disciplinary parameters of this knowledge? What are the methods used to locate and chart third world women's self and agency?

The question of who represents, or who is representing whom, appears to form an integral component in the context of indigenous feminist discourse. This creates spaces to bring forth the experiences of women of colour – or in the context of this study those of Orang Asli women – in their resistances against patriarchal institutions, thus necessitating the deconstruction of feminist universalizations as points of reference and representation. In this regard I refer again to Bachu's (1996) argument on the need for the inclusivity of the varied experiences of women of colour, which I hope has been enabled in this study through its participatory and decolonizing research approaches – informed as it is by Smith (2012) and Chilisa's (2012) work. As argued earlier, a decolonizing approach to research does not imply the rejection of the research apparatus *per se*, but calls for the decolonisation of its instruments and methodologies through the application of participatory research practices and the recognition of native or indigenous ways of knowing and indigenous relational worlds, to be discussed in the following chapters.

2.2. Critical Discourse Analyses

Advocates of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) contend that the application of CDA on various textual sources allows us insight into the construction of socio-political disparities between actors in a given micro, meso or macro level, and to investigate and reveal power relations and the distribution of power among the various actors in a given community (van Dijk, 1997; Fairclough, 2000), which it does through its "analyses [of] the language use of those in power, who are responsible for the existence in inequalities" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 9). Thus it would seem that CDA attempts to relate the analysis of language to a sociopolitical context in order to provide "critical perspective on unequal social arrangements sustained through language use, with the goals of social transformation and emancipation, [which] constitutes the cornerstone of critical discourse analysis" (Lazar, 2007, p. 1).

In describing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Luke (n.d.) contends that the method "employs interdisciplinary techniques of text analysis to look at how texts construct representations of the world, social identities, and social relationships" suggesting that as an instrument of analysis,

CDA is able to reveal how written and spoken texts shape or contribute to the formation of identities and relationships at various micro, meso and macro levels, with the individual as its most basic unit, and communities, socio-political institutions, nations and larger intergovernmental organisations at broader levels. In his description of texts as the unit of analysis in the CDA method, Luke (1997, pp. 50-56) defined texts to be:

> social actions, meaningful and coherent instances of spoken and written language use [whose] shape and form is not random or arbitrary … [but] serve conventional social uses and functions … to `do things' in social institutions with predictable ideational and material effects … [which] can be used for the assertion of power and knowledge [and] … may be used to make asymmetrical relations of power.

Although this study borrows from Luke's definition of discourse as written and spoken texts, it appears that Luke either does not include visual images, or alternatively, may have subsumed visual images, under his definition of text. Thus for purposes of clarity, this study is concurrently informed by Jørgensen & Phillips (2002, p. 61) in their inclusion of visual images "on account of the special characteristics of visual semiotics and the relationship between language and images," which is of relevance in this study due to the utilization of visual imagery by the Malaysian administration in its developmental discourse of Orang Asli communities – particularly in representing claims of Orang Asli progress.

Martin (2004, p. 182), while recognizing that CDA "make[s] an immense contribution to studies of the interestedness of discourse, across contexts where inequalities of generation, gender, ethnicity and class disrupt humanity," concomitantly offers a critique of CDA, contending that its usage as a means of revealing "ideologically driven discrimination, with respect to gender, ethnicity, class and related social variables" (p. 179) does not necessarily translate to real-world change-generating social action, but instead implies it. Subsequently, he posits the notion of Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) as a complementary addition to CDA, which he argues is "oriented not so much to deconstruction as to constructive social action" (Martin, 2004, p. 182). Kress (2013, p. 15) in his critique of CDA's lack of constructive social action, states:

> Critical language projects have remained just that: critiques of texts and of the social practices implied by or realised in those texts, uncovering, revealing, inequitable, dehumanising and

deleterious states of affairs ... if critical language projects were to develop apt, plausible theories of this domain, they would be able to move from critical reading, from analysis, from deconstructive activity, to productive activity ... CL or CDA have not offered (productive) accounts of alternative forms of social organisation, nor of social subjects, other than by implication. (Kress, 2013, p. 15)

Martin (2004, p. 1) proposes PDA not only as a continuation of CDA, but as a means through which social action may be mobilized to "make the world a better place" thus going beyond the conventional role of CDA in deconstructing texts, but also creating spaces to reflect resistances and resilience, as well as mobilizing social actors. It appears that within Martin's dualism of deconstructive CDA and constructive PDA, PDA continues from where CDA leaves off, in that after CDA has peeled away layers in social discourse to display inequalities in power relations; PDA then has the potential to utilize this knowledge to mobilize what Kress (2013, pp. 15) refers to as "productive activity."

In referencing Martin's work, Macgilchrist (2007, p. 74) contends that PDA is "fuelled by the potential for analysis to have an effect … on the social world … [by prioritizing] positive development that could yield fruitful insights for those wishing to counter what they see as questionable dominant messages." In investigating strategies for propelling marginal discourses into the mainstream news media and in so doing contest dominant frames, Macgilchrist offers five discursive strategies for the contestation of mainstream discourse from *within* mainstream discourse. This study is informed by her "inversion through logical argument" (Macgilchrist, 2007, p. 87) strategy to expose and counter the dominant development discourse as framed by the Malaysian government and JAKOA in their developmental rhetoric for the Orang Asli by challenging often-used governmental rhetoric such as the 'anti-development' or the 'primitive' trope in referring to the Orang Asli, in order to reveal the administration's ideologically-driven practices for Orang Asli communities. Concomitantly, by engaging Martin's CDA-PDA argument, this study attempts to create spaces to allow for Orang Asli contestations and resistances to be made known, and to examine how Orang Asli communities have attempted to mobilize social change to address issues of asymmetries in power relations between their communities and the Malaysian administration through the use of indigenous narratives. Through the application of the CDA-PDA approach, it is hoped that the narratives of Orang Asli

individuals on the circumstances that have compelled them to migrate to the Klang Valley might reveal more than narratives of disadvantage, but a space through which the empowering counter-discourse of Orang Asli individuals operating within a non-indigenous urban area may be made known.

Macgilchrist (2007, p. 75) contends that "the 'counter' of counter-discourse should not be taken as a static entity; rather, this constant struggle over meaning emphasises the 'fluidity' of what is predominant and what is dissenting, leaving space for alternative representations to shift into a mainstream space." Often, the discourse on the Orang Asli in Malaysia tends to frame them as 'disadvantaged peoples' – particularly in the discourse on relations between the government and the Orang Asli – where the victimisation of the Orang Asli is framed against government development plans and modernisation. While it is not the aim of this study to modulate the experiences of the Orang Asli resulting from governmental interference into their communities and the implications of land loss, it does depart from conventional depictions of the Orang Asli as a 'victimized' or 'disadvantaged peoples' by encouraging a space where Orang Asli resilience and resistances may be identified and made known through their own narratives.

It appears that at this juncture the rather limited discourse on Orang Asli resistances in Malaysia have largely revolved around issues concerning land rights claims and resistances toward government attempts at Islamization. However, little is known of their resilience and resistances as indigenous peoples in an urban environment, and even less is known of the implications of urban spaces on the gender roles of Orang Asli migrants, as well as hybrid indigenous identity-formation processes of Orang Asli individuals as rural-urban migrants. To this end, this study – through the narratives of Orang Asli respondents and its application of CDA-PDA – attempts to reveal how such spaces are negotiated by Orang Asli individuals, and attempts to bring to the fore Orang Asli agency and resistances in contesting the hegemony of a largely non-indigenous urban Malaysia.

2.3. Ethnographic Research

This study utilizes a qualitative approach to research in investigating varied indigenous experiences, the implications of urban migration on notions of gender roles, and perceived changes in gender roles. As this study deals with the *why* of indigenous rural-urban migration

and the *what* and *how* of the implications of migration on gender roles, a qualitative approach appears more suited in comparison to a quantitative one. Because so little has been written regarding the experiences of Orang Asli individuals in Malaysia's urban areas, and given the highly oral cultures of the Orang Asli, a qualitative approach to this study in the form of in-depth interviews focusing on indigenous narratives was deemed to be suitable in generating hypotheses that may prove useful for future research on urban and migrant Orang Asli populations.

The ethnographic case study forms the key undertaking of this qualitative study and investigates how migration and urban living may have impacted gender roles of the Orang Asli in the urban areas of the Klang Valley. The Klang Valley was selected as the location for this study as it is the most developed and urbanized geographical area in Malaysia (Jamil, 2002; Fau, Konthapane & Taillard, 2014), and so provides a suitable frame through which to examine the lives of migrant Orang Asli individuals in Malaysia's most urbanized setting.

During the course of my M.A. fieldwork in 2012, I had engaged with Orang Asli women, men and youth of the Kensiu people at the Orang Asli settlement at Kampung Lubok Legong, in Baling, located in the state of Kedah, in northern Peninsular Malaysia. During my time there it was my observation that Kensiu women were more open, and willing, to speak of their experiences in comparison to male members of the community. The primary limitation during the course of my M.A. fieldwork was my inability to speak Kensiu (a Mon-Khmer language) and my dependence on an interpreter. The linguistic limitation notwithstanding, the experience gathered during the course of my fieldwork with the Kensiu continued to inform me in the course of this study. The respondents engaged in this study consisted of Orang Asli women and men who work in the Klang Valley area. As a result of urban migration and living, respondents were able to converse in Bahasa Malaysia (with some interviews also conducted in English at the respondent's request). As such, there were no linguistic limitations within the scope of this study. The fieldwork itself was divided into two periods. The initial period (consisting of in-depth interviews) took place over a period of four months in the Klang Valley from September 2015 to December 2015. At the end of the four months, I returned to Melbourne and spent two months to transcribe my interviews, and categorise emerging themes. A second shorter fieldwork component was carried out in September 2016 at Tasik Bera, Pahang, which gave me an

opportunity to consult community leaders from the Semelai indigenous leadership structure on gender roles and the position of women within the Semelai community as a case study.

2.3.1. Participant and Recruitment Method

I interviewed 15 Orang Asli women and 8 Orang Asli men who were working in the Klang Valley for this study through in-depth interview sessions lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours. Some respondents – particularly key informants – were interviewed more than once. In addition, I also interviewed a number of individuals who have spent a considerable part of their careers working with the Orang Asli, as well as a number of individuals from the Semelai community in Tasik Bera, Pahang. The Orang Asli communities in the Klang Valley comprise various ethnolinguistic groups, and although each Orang Asli group speaks a different language, most Orang Asli individuals who work and live in the Klang Valley are able to converse in Bahasa Malaysia (the local vernacular), due to their respective job requirements, education and everyday social interactions. As such, I experienced little difficulty in communicating with respondents for the purpose of this study.

Over the few months I spent in Kuala Lumpur, I managed to establish a network of professional connections with Orang Asli researchers and academics – some of whom have worked with Orang Asli communities for decades. These key individuals are well-established names in the field of Orang Asli research, as well as ethnic studies, including Professor Juli Edo – who is a member of the indigenous Semai community – Prof. Shamsul Amri Baharuddin – who heads the Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA) at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia – Assoc. Prof. Junaenah Sulehan whose area of specializations include Poverty and Indigenous Minorities as well as Women and Community Development – and Dr. Shanthi Thambiah – who has conducted extensive research in the area of gender studies, migration and identity.

As part of the interview process, I identified a number of key respondents for this study. These individuals formed not only part of my sample group, but in addition to this, are well informed on the recent developments pertaining to the Orang Asli community as a result of their personal and professional connections within the Orang Asli community. One such respondent is Zaitun, a Semelai woman in her 30s, who is studying at a local institution of higher education, and whom I first met in 2013. A committed individual who is dedicated to the Orang Asli, she has spent a

number of years working with indigenous NGOs and various local stakeholders involved with the Orang Asli community, as well as collaborated with various local and global scholars who continue to work with the Orang Asli. I ensured that potential respondents understood that their involvement with this study was completely voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any point with no consequence. Table 8 in Appendix A details the ethnicity, age group, state of origin and current place of residence, occupation and religious background of core respondents interviewed in the study.

Following the course of my initial fieldwork in the Klang Valley in 2015, I decided to conduct a minor fieldwork component at the Semelai community of Tasik Bera in interior Pahang. Key to this undertaking was the involvement and participation of my key Semelai respondent, Zaitun, who is a member of this community. This minor fieldwork was carried out in an attempt to understand the position of women within the Semelai leadership structure and Semelai religious cosmology within the rural space. The findings of this fieldwork component are interspersed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 – specifically in discussions concerning Semelai leadership and cosmology.

To the best of my ability, I have strived to recognize the rights of Orang Asli individuals to define their identities, their respective narratives, and the terms of the narratives of their lives. I engaged them through in-depth interviews, and in order to minimise inconveniences to respondents, particular consideration was given to their personal commitments and time. As it is the narratives of these individuals that form the bulk of my data, I engaged a number of them multiple times over the course of my fieldwork. As in-depth interviews are by nature discursive, this allowed the respondents and myself the latitude necessary to explore various issues within the framework of this study. I have tried, through my data gathering methods, to reflect the integral role of narratives in the formation and preservation of historical, political and cultural aspects of indigenous identities, which in this study translates as those belonging to the Orang Asli.

2.3.2. Interview Protocol, Data Collection Technique and Analysis of Data

Ptacek (2009) contends that in-depth interviews complement the way in which indigenous peoples relay information within their community – in a way not dissimilar to storytelling –

granting both the researcher and the respondent a degree of fluidity and subjectivity. As all 18 of the Orang Asli groups in Peninsular Malaysia are oral cultures, the use of in-depth interviews as an instrument was suitable in the context of this study toward obtaining data in the form of rich narratives. The in-depth interview sessions were initiated with a number of semi-structured interviews that were translated into Malay, and which provided a rudimentary framework to guide respondents' narratives. The list of preliminary questions used in the interview can be seen in Appendix F.

This study emphasises a participatory approach toward data collection and interpretation. Sessions with respondents were held at informal settings such as tea-stalls and cafes. As an ethnographic case study that is centered on the narratives of Orang Asli individuals, the in-depth interviews were conducted in a manner that facilitated the accommodation of a wide breadth of information within the framework of this study. I draw from Legard, Keegan & Ward (2003, p. 140) in that "feminist interviewing attempts to be more reflexive and interactive – taking a non-hierarchical approach which avoids objectifying the participant" which resonates with this study's theme of a postcolonial feminist and participatory approach toward research. Legard, Keegan & Ward (2003, p. 140) further posit that the interview then morphs into a process of negotiation, where "coverage, language and understanding" are reciprocated between the researcher and the respondent.

In *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, under the chapter 'Epistemological Issues of Interviewing' Kvale (2009, p. 48) suggests "two contrasting metaphors of the interviewer." The first is that of the interviewer as a 'miner'; and the second, as a 'traveler.' He delineates the difference between the two by stating that the former is a "process of knowledge collection … [where] knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal … out of a subject's pure experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions" (p. 48). In the miner metaphor, Kvale posits that knowledge is static data "waiting in the subject's interior to be collected" (p. 48), which appears to be a data collection process that is arguably more suited to a positivist approach toward research. Chilisa (2012, p. 26) contends that positivism "is based on the view that natural science is the only foundation for true knowledge" citing Western philosophers such as Aristotle, Bacon and Locke as major contributors to the approach. She further argues that positivist and its successor postpositivist

research, are more concerned with "what researchers want to know, and what knowledge and what theory they want to legitimize," (Chilisa, 2012, p. 31). In support of her argument she references Neuman (1997, p. 45) in stating that the approach serves in "legitimizing [the] ideology of dominant groups." Chilisa criticises the positivist/postpositivist paradigm as being "too technocratic" in its approach and instead forwards the "interpretive paradigm" which seeks to "understand people's experiences" (Chilisa, 2012, pp. 31-33), postulating it as being more suited to postcolonial indigenous research approaches.

In this regard I find the postmodern constructivist understanding of in-depth interviews as postulated by Kvale in his 'traveler' metaphor highly suited to this study. Kvale (2009, p. 48) contends that in this approach, the interviewer "is a traveler on a journey to a distant country that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home. The interviewer-traveler wanders through the landscape … enters into conversations with the people he or she encounters … explores the domains of the country." In the traveler metaphor, Kvale suggests that knowledge itself is not a given, and instead is the product of negotiation, and that through the course of the in-depth interviews, the interviewer will experience varying depths and periods of self-reflection. Laird (2016, p. 240) engages similar imageries to describe spiritual journeys undertaken by Temoq shamans during healing rituals:

> The Temoq mountain journey shaman is a traveller through an ever-receding cosmorama of towering mountains, blue-green vistas, and distant glowing horizons revealed by visionary sight. These vast pellucid spaces revealed by the travelling shaman's visionary in-sight and hearing belie the actual experiential nature of the shaman's imaginal journey which takes place within non-linear dimensions, and atemporal duration. (Laird, 2016, p. 240)

I have during the course of my interviews – particularly with elders at the Semelai village in Tasik Bera, Pahang – experienced narrative patterns that are best described as being non-linear. Emphasis was placed more on the event being described than the time or sequence at which they occurred, which were often referred to as "that time," or "a long time ago," with jumping of sequence being rather commonplace occurences during our interviews. At times when I pressed interviewees on the specific time period or year when an event was said to have taken place, I received responses that were largely atemporal, for example, "oh … it happened when so and so

used to live here," or "when that lake still had fish," which indicates the importance that members of the community place on an event, more than the actual date on which the said event may have happened. Informed by Kvale, and through the use of semi-structured interviews as introductory instruments, discursive narratives with respondents of this study allowed for the emergence of new insights, and the interview process often transcended that of researcher and respondent, cultivating an environment that facilitated cross-questioning between the respondents of this study and myself. I was often queried by my respondents on a wide range of topics, which included my ethnicity, religious beliefs, marital status, socio-economic background, and personal views on a wide range of issues – questions which at times challenged me to pause and reflect on my own personal belief system. In this regard, I draw from Bakhtin's (1981) work on the dialogism of information and posit the dialogism of communication. In contrast to the dialectical processes of colonial indigenous research, which establishes a hierarchy over differing paradigms, dialogical communication accepts the continuous interrelationships between differing paradigms, reflecting the non-stagnant and indeed vibrant intertextual relationship between indigenous research and indigenous epistemologies, where one is continuously informed by the other. Although I started this study with the understanding that respondent participation was crucial toward prioritizing Orang Asli narratives, it was only during the course of my interviews that I came to realize that respondents were equally interested in understanding *why* I was interested in their narratives.

While most sessions with respondents were initially reactive, in that I was initiating the questioning, respondents gradually took over the narratives, sharing rich discursive narratives that sometimes appeared to deviate from my initial line of questioning, but which I grew to understand was central to assembling an understanding of the 'greater picture' in which certain events had transpired. Interviews were recorded on an audio recording device. The interview questions were designed to be open-ended in the hope that rich data corresponding to the breadth of the research themes of this study could be brought to the surface. When necessary, follow-up interviews were arranged and conducted at a later time. A copy of questions asked in the preliminary interview is attached in Appendix F.

Data collected from interviews and other means – including Skype and Whatsapp – were transcribed and coded. Following this, coded data were categorized according to emerging themes identified in the study (i.e. open/substantive coding) (Birks & Mills, 2011).

2.4. Ethical Considerations

The study and the data-gathering methods utilized in this study were assessed by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee College (HREC) which is the RMIT body responsible for ensuring that students maintain standards of ethical research when conducting research that is 'more than low-risk,' such as those involving human participants. The Participant Information Consent Form, Participant Consent Form and HREC Ethics clearance can be found in Appendix B. I did not anticipate this study to cause distress among respondents, as it did not directly address sensitive issues or themes. As anticipated, respondents managed the interviews and no issues out of the ordinary occurred. Informed by the stand of the Malaysian government with regards to indigeneity discourse in Malaysia, the country's sedition laws, Malaysia's racial politics and the non-conducive political climate on Orang Asli research, participant anonymity is a priority in this study. Pseudonyms are used in the collection and categorization of data, and with the exception of names drawn from newspaper clippings, or government officials (permission sought beforehand), all names contained within this body of work are pseudonyms. The results of my findings, once published, will be anonymous with regard to the identity of all participants. It follows therefore, that participants will be non-identifiable. Data gathered was uploaded to my computer, which is password protected and accessible only by me. To prevent potential corruption of data and data loss, I have also stored a back-up copy of my findings on a separate external hard drive that is encrypted and kept in a locked location.

2.5. Limitations

Given the Malaysian government's stand on the classified nature of Orang Asli documents and developmental agendas concerning the Orang Asli – a direct result of the country's complex indigeneity and racial politics – access to Orang Asli settlements and government data on the communities is largely restricted. Malaysian researchers would require approval from the Department of Orang Asli Affairs, while researchers affiliated with foreign institutions are required to obtain clearance from the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) after the research plan is

subject to intense scrutiny and approval. Discussions on the subject of indigeneity are regarded as seditious[9] acts by the Malaysian government. The Aboriginal Peoples Act of 1954 – discussed in this thesis under subheadings The Aboriginals People Act of 1954 and The Orang Asli Affairs Department – mentions the penalties that are levied on non-Orang Asli resulting from unauthorized entry into Orang Asli settlements.

My status of relative privilege as a dominant member of Malaysian society and the power difference this suggests, and my position as an outside non-indigenous researcher attempting to understand the experiences of Orang Asli migrants in the Klang Valley informed me throughout the course of this study. Although, as discussed in my methodological approach, and as postulated by Smith (2012) and Chilisa (2012), this may not necessarily translate to a disadvantage in working with indigenous groups, it reminds me of my position as an outside researcher, attempting to work with the Orang Asli. I was continuously informed by Smith (2012) and Chilisa (2012) who both argued that participatory research approaches toward working with indigenous and disadvantaged groups play instrumental roles in the process of decolonizing research. I hope that through my attempts to apply participatory research approaches to this study, and through the active participation of Orang Asli individuals, that this study prioritises Orang Asli experiences, and contributes to the broader Orang Asli discourse, on which this study is built.

To counter dominant narratives on the Orang Asli by administrations past and present, as well as the media, this study has at different stages been opened to discussion and review to a number of key Orang Asli individuals, indigenous and non-indigenous academics working closely with indigenous communities in Malaysia, and individuals who work within the scope of indigenous rights advocacy in Malaysia – some of whom I have come to know through my connections with local indigenous advocacy movements – in order to bring to the fore Orang Asli narratives of themselves and of their lived experiences.

In summary, this chapter has attempted to lay out the methodological considerations and the theoretical frameworks informing the study. In so doing, it brings to the fore the importance of decolonizing indigenous research and the deconstruction of the colonial research apparatus in

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[9] Sedition (Amendment) Act, 1971.

working with Orang Asli communities – particularly when attempting a research model that aims to prioritise the narratives of the marginalised – in an attempt to bring to the fore the varied experiences, struggles, negotiations and resistances (Fennell, 2009) of Orang Asli women. The chapter traces the history of the colonial research apparatus surrounding the study of the *Other*, and the ways in which the voice of the *Other* has, over the centuries, been silenced through a research apparatus that prioritised the narrative of Colonial discourse. Much of the way in which the Malaysian administration views the Orang Asli, and its attempts to conduct research among them, continues to employ colonial instruments through the lens of internal colonialism. Informed by Smith's (2012) and Chilisa's (2012) participatory research with women of colour, the study's methodology, and the ethnographic instruments engaged in the study, endeavour to reach beyond colonial hierarchies surrounding the researcher and the researched, facilitating dialogical communication – through interviews that are reflexive and interactive – with the aim of shifting Orang Asli gender research towards postcolonial and indigenous approaches.

In Chapter 3, the study will introduce the framing of indigeneity – and the contentions surrounding it – within the framework of Malaysia's indigeneity discourse. The chapter will also trace the development of the Department of Orang Asli Affairs, as well as the Aboriginal Act of 1954, both of which continue to wield much influence – and power – over the Orang Asli today.

Chapter 3: Historicising Indigeneity and the Orang Asli

This chapter will explore the construction of indigeneity starting with a broad exploration of the subject, before narrowing its focus to the framing of indigeneity in Malaysia. In exploring indigeneity in Malaysia, the chapter will discuss the early history of the Orang Asli, their interactions with colonial powers and the Malay populace, and the framing of the concept of indigeneity by the Malaysian government. Following this, the chapter will explore the implications of the Communist Insurgency on the Orang Asli, and the development of the Aboriginal Peoples' Act of 1954, concluding with a discussion of the Department of Orang Asli Affairs from its inception to the present.

3.1. Indigeneity

It would appear that for the most part, discourse concerning indigenous communities almost always involves their association to their lands (Horrigan & Young, 1997; Pulitano, 2012). Etymologically, the word Indigenous finds its origins from the Latin *indigena. Indigena* in turn derives from the words *indu* (in, within) and *gen* (root) or *gignere* (beget) (Chambers Dictionary of Etymology, 1999; Merriam-Webster, 2004; Oxford, 2010). It would appear that one of the most critical criteria to an indigenous group's claim to indigeneity (and subsequent land rights) is the ability to demonstrate their continued inhabitance of a particular territory which predates that of any other group (Mountain, 2003). While this may appear to be relatively straightforward in theory, proving indigeneity is a much more complex process in practice. To start with, it appears that a universally accepted definition of indigeneity has yet to be constructed (Karlsson & Subba, 200; Hauser-Schäublin, 2013) which gives rise to often complex and politically-charged definitions of the term.

That being said, a number of intergovernmental bodies have attempted to define the term indigenous – ranging from governmental and non-governmental organisations, intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations (Pulitano 2012), International Labor Organization and the World Bank (Hauser-Schäublin 2013), as well as various grassroots activists who conduct advocacy work for indigenous movements – which has arguably resulted in a vast repertoire of interpretations and ultimately *functions* of the word, as a consequence there are as many problematizations, as there are definitions, of the word. In much of the developing

world – which happens to also be where large numbers of indigenous peoples are located – the prevailing definition of indigeneity appears still to be the prerogative of the non-indigenous (Nakata, 2001; Maaka & Andersen, 2006). Much of the successful land rights claims of indigenous peoples in these regions are contingent on their acceptance as indigenous peoples (Li, 2000) by what would appear to be the largely non-indigenous ruling population. Additionally, it would appear that there are countries that have altogether done away with the notion of indigeneity.

India has argued that the concept of "indigenous peoples and its related international framework" is inapplicable in the Indian context as there is no Indian community that fulfills the criteria, stating instead that "all Indians are indigenous" (Karlsson & Subba, 2006, p. 5). Duncan (2004, p. 91), in his description of the Indonesian government's stand on indigeneity, noted that the Indonesian government has a policy of not recognizing indigenous communities within the country, as the government maintains the stand that "almost all Indonesians [with the exception of the Chinese] are indigenous and thus entitled to the same rights" (Duncan, 2004, p. 91). Instead, the Indonesian government has the classification KAT – which stands for *Komunitas Adat Terpencil* or 'geographically isolated customary law communities' (Duncan, 2004, p. 86) which must fulfill the following criteria:

1. They are small, closed; and homogenous.
2. Social institutions are based on kinship.
3. In general they are geographically isolated and difficult to reach.
4. In general they still have a subsistence economy.
5. They have simple tools and technology.
6. Their dependence on the environment and local natural resources is relatively high.
7. They have restricted access to social, economic and political services.

(Duncan, 2004, p. 86)

Although the description above could almost be referring to an indigenous community, the Indonesian government rejects the notion of indigeneity, highlighting the crucial role of governmental recognition in the ability of indigenous peoples to define themselves (Karlsson & Subba, 2006; Altamirano-Jimenez, 2013).

There has also been some debate that indigeneity is a construction resulting from the processes of Western colonisation (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2013). Prior to the question of land ownership – a significant theme in the days of colonial conquest – the question of *who is indigenous to this land* appeared not to have been a particularly necessary one. Sissons (2005, p. 43) states that the very question of indigenous authenticity, "… has deep roots within colonial racism" which suggests that prior to the advent of colonial land appropriation, there was little need for the indigenous to define – or otherwise prove – their indigeneity. Keal (2003, p. 8) posits that contemporary indigenous peoples "define themselves and are defined by others in terms of a common experience of subjection to colonial settlement" suggesting that experiences of colonialism function as a sociocultural marker for indigeneity. On the basis of this argument, one could argue that Western colonial powers played a role in the definition of indigeneity (Smith, 2012; Fußinger, 2012) as it is generally understood today. Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin (2000, p. 3) contend that the term 'aboriginal' came into being "as early as 1667 to describe the indigenous inhabitants of places encountered by European explorers, adventurers or seamen." Writing on the colonisation of the Pacific, Rappaport (1999, p. 170) argues that prior to the 1960s, the vast majority of the literature on the peoples of the Pacific were written by non-indigenous writers and that "such writings and imaginings played a significant part in the ideological colonisation of the Pacific by the Western world" suggesting that the identification of indigeneity through the colonial lens and its associated descriptions, formed a part of the colonizing machinery, an instrument that Rappaport – in quoting Said's Orientalism (2014) – refers to as the 'Orientalizing eye/I' (Rappaport,1999, p. 170).

In demonstrating the role of colonialism in defining the indigenous peoples of the East, Kingsbury (1999, p. 340) contends that for Asian countries that have never been colonized by a Western power, "the concept of indigenous peoples is so integrally a product of the common experience of European colonial settlement as to be fundamentally inapplicable … " citing how China, as a result of the intrusion of European powers into its territories in the early and mid 19th century, "links the situation and definition of indigenous peoples to 'saltwater settler colonialism" (Kingsbury, 1999, p. 340) a particularly interesting metaphor given that as a polity, China was invaded by the Mongol empire in the 13th century, and ruled by the Japanese through the proxy Manchukuo puppet government in the early 20th century. Both the Mongol and Japanese occupation of China could be argued as a process of colonisation as per Osterhammel's

(2005, p. 4) definition of colonialism: " [a] relationship between two collectives in which all important decisions concerning the life of the 'colonised' are made by a culturally different/alien minority of colonizers … [for] external interests be they economic, political or ideological" – yet the notion of indigeneity within the Chinese consciousness appears only to have arisen following European contact.

Gupta (1998) posits that the concept of indigeneity as framed by the West was done as a point of reference, and an attempt to differentiate the colonizer from the colonized – that is, to place *itself* vis-à-vis the *other*. By so doing, the colonizer not only sets the stage for a hierarchy of power relations, but also fulfills an administrative function, where the indigenous *other* is now made convenient for the administrative functions of categorizations (Downie & Llewellyn, 2011). In referring to a number of scholars (Todorov, 1987; Quijano, 2000; Ariza, 2009) Ferrández & Kradolfer (2013, p. 98) appear to posit the same argument with regards to the colonisation of South America by the Spanish, and the colonial power's subsequent conceptualization of the category 'Indian,' arguing that the category served the purpose of "arrogat[ing] themselves the right of conquest, and [the] native Americans… the role of colonized peoples." Gupta pursues this argument by contending that through this active act of categorization, colonial powers were in fact reaffirming their differences and dissimilarities from the indigenous through constructions of a civilised Western *self*.

Concomitantly, there have been criticisms to the argument of indigeneity as serving a purely colonial purpose. While Gupta posits that it is the political-economic institution of colonialism that has defined indigeneity, Braun (2002, p. 93) contends that it is both colonialism and contemporary "cultural and ideological transformations" that are the reasons "indigeneity has such ideological and political purchase today." It would appear that such transformations in the shape of indigenous resistances form the basis of many land rights claims, which provide a powerful thrust in global indigenous cultural revivalism (Sawyer & Gomez, 2012) and indigenous pride (McGregor, 2011). Braun further criticises Gupta's theory as being too limiting in its definition of indigeneity as it denies the indigenous agency in their claims to the same (Braun, 2002). Braun argues that the indigene's claim to indigeneity also arises as a form of resistance to non-inclusive development models that do not take into account the unique needs of indigenous development. An example of this is perhaps illustrated by indigenous land rights

claims, where the construct of indigeneity is utilized by indigenous groups in the creation of alternative spatialities for social contestation and to mobilize change in power structures.

The question is *how do indigenous social movements construct indigeneity in order to mobilize change?* Feldman (2002), in writing on social movements, contends that symbols play an integral role in the construction of indigenous identities that then lends itself to indigenous social movements. In referencing Melucci (1985; 1989; 1996), she describes how the roles played by symbolic resources and movement discourses create new spaces for:

> The articulation and presencing of subaltern perspectives … and legitimize new sites of contestation, knowledge and cultural production … [shaping] alternative visions and counter-hegemonic languages … [which] are then made manifest through ongoing strategies of engagement with larger publics and institutions, ultimately giving rise to new relations and practices. (Feldman, 2002, p. 31)

It would seem that the usage of symbols is ubiquitous in all cultures – perhaps even ontologically so. Cultures that have a written language, as well as cultures that are completely oral, both engage in the use of symbols to convey meaning. The characteristics of symbols are such that "as a means of communication … symbols are images, words or behaviours that have multiple levels of meaning" (Womack, 2005, p. 1). Symbols that are native to any given indigenous culture are widely understood by members of the group as cultural constructs that hold culture-specific meanings belonging to the group. Whitehead (1985, p. 8) in his description of symbols and the attachment of meanings to symbols by the individual, states "the [individual's] mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and usages, respecting other components of its experience." Blumer (1986, pp. 2-3) refers to this process of ascribing meaning to symbols as 'symbolic interactionism' a process he posits as consisting of three basic principles:

i)   human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them,

ii)   the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interactions that one has with one's fellows, [and],

iii)   these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things encountered

In *More than Black and White: Racism and Everyday Life*, an educational kit developed to help school children in New South Wales understand the concept of Australian Aboriginal identity, Indigenous Australian authors Dewdney & Michels (1988, p. 75) state "Our identities are made from the building up of those parts of our lives which are strong and positive, from all the things we feel we belong to and belong to us." While it appears that this statement on Aboriginal identification by Dewdney & Michels is based on the construction of abstract symbols that are grounded in 'feelings,' the collective recognition of these feelings by their community through the process of social interaction and mutual identification appears to transform it into an important marker of Aboriginal identity, one in which the potential for transformative social movement arguably exists.

3.2. Indigeneity in Malaysia

Prior to embarking on a discourse on the framework of Malaysian indigeneity, the terms '*bumiputera,*' 'indigenous' and 'Orang Asli' will be defined in the context of the study:

i) The portmanteau *bumiputera* finds its origins in the Sanskrit words *bhumi* – earth – and *putra* – sons/princes – forming *bumiputera* literally *'sons of the earth'* (Fenton, 2004; Toshihiro, 2009; Holst, 2012). The term is an umbrella term that refers primarily[10] to the Malay-Muslim majority, the *Pribumi* indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, and the Orang Asli. An important legal distinction that sets the Orang Asli apart from the *Pribumi* of Sabah and Sarawak however, is that while both indigenous groups are recognized in the Malaysian constitution as being *bumiputera*, the Orang Asli are nonetheless considered a "separate legal entity" (Nah, 2004, p. 76).

ii) Indigenous: The term indigenous is not utilized by the Malaysian administration, which prefers instead to use the term *bumiputera*. The indigenous populations of Malaysia comprise the Malay-Muslim majority, the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia and the approximately 80-90

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[10] The terminology has also in certain instances included Thai-Malaysians, Indian-Muslims and the *Kristang* people of Malacca (Jarnagin 2012; Wolhuter & de Vet 2014), but only so far as their involvement in the *bumiputera*-only investment scheme – *Amanah Saham Bumiputera* (ASB).

native *Pribumi* groups of East Malaysia who are ethnically and culturally unrelated to the Orang Asli. The *Pribumi* groups of East Malaysia and the Orang Asli collectively form the autochthonous peoples of Malaysia.

iii) Orang Asli: Multiethnic autochthonous communities of approximately 180,000 individuals belonging to one of the three Orang Asli groups of Peninsular Malaysia. These three groups, their corresponding subgroups, and locales are the a) Semang (Kensiu, Batek, Jahai, Kintak, Lanoh and Menraq) who inhabit the north of the Peninsula, b) Senoi (Semai, Temiar, Che Wong, Jah Hut, Hma' Meri and Semoq Beri) in the central parts of the Peninsula and c) Proto Malays (Orang Kuala, Orang Seletar, Temuan, Orang Kanaq, Semelai and Jakun) in the central and southern reaches of the Peninsula.

The terminology *bumiputera* is intended to indicate the de facto recognition of ethnic groups that pre-date the arrival of immigrants such as the Chinese and the Indians, who were largely brought into British Malaya by the colonial administration as part of the labour workforce. Nah (2004, p. 4) argues that despite the apparent inclusivity of the term, the 'actual enjoyment' of the supposed privileges that come with being *bumiputera,* which include "socio-economic resources and social capital… preclude the involvement of certain groups such as the Orang Asli"; while Joseph (2014, p. 33) notes the existence of a "hierarchy within the bumiputera collective in terms of political power, representation and economic resources, with the Malay-Muslims being the dominant bumiputeras."

I asked Higak (an indigenous Orang Asli from the Semai community) what he thought of the Malay claim to indigeneity. In hinting at the politicization of indigeneity discourse in Malaysia, he stated:

> Well, the ... the Orang Asli [have] always claim[ed] that they are the native [and] the indigenous people of this Peninsula ... you know? They [the Orang Asli] always describe the Malays came from elsewhere. But the Malay also claim that they are the indigeneous people of the Peninsula … although most of them admit that they came from elsewhere. This [indigeneity] is more on the political side, you know?

Of all the ethnicities that fall under the classification of *bumiputera*, it is by far the Malays who are its most politically and socio-economically dominant member. The racial denominator *Malay*

in Malaysia's context is in itself a rather ambiguous category as described by Holst (2012) in his work *Ethnicization and Identity Politics in Malaysia*, originating not with a homogeneous populace that was native to Malaya, but instead an amalgamation of various ethnic groups who have their origins in the regions contiguous to the Malay Peninsula and who were consolidated into a homogeneous Malay identity by the "colonial powers in the region." Barnard (2004, p. 8) states:

> There was a broader community of Muslims of a variety of ethnic backgrounds who wrote in Malay (whatever their mother tongue), dressed in a similar Jawi style … and took part in the widespread Malay-language 'civilization' of Islam. Such people might be referred to as 'Malays' by Europeans, but there seems little evidence that they saw themselves in this light.

Holst (2012, p. 34) argues that the arrival of various colonial powers into Southeast Asia and the ensuing power struggles between them "tore apart cultural spheres that existed in the domains of kingdoms that used to span several islands and the Malayan Peninsula." It would appear that this process significantly contributed to the notion of a uniform Malay identity and the dissolution of the various ethnics of Maritime Southeast Asia – comprising Brunei, Indonesia, East Malaysia, East Timor, the Philippines, and Singapore (Tarling, 1999) – that were at the time present in the Malay Peninsula. The London Treaty of 1824, after which "historiographers used Tanah Melayu (literally Malay land) synonymously with the peninsula" (Holst, 2012, p. 34) further crystallized the notion of a homogenous Malay-ness, which, following the import of labour from China and India by the British, led to its "use as a racial or ethnic identifier that could be contrasted" (Holst, 2012, p. 34.) against these immigrant populations. The adoption of the term *tanah Melayu* by the British to refer to the geographical area of the Malay Peninsula was to have significant implications for the future of race relations in the country, the *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay Supremacy) movement – for further reading on Ketuanan Melayu, see Seligman, B. A. (2014, pp. 175-178) "Religious Education and the Challenge of Pluralism" – and post-independence government policies for the nation. It would appear that above all, it implied to the ruling Malay administration that their claim to indigeneity superseded those of other indigenes, evidenced by a statement from the former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad (1981, p. 73):

> The Malays are the original or indigenous people of Malaya and the only people who can claim Malaya as their one and only country. The *Orang Melayu* or Malays have always been

the definitive people of the Malay Peninsula. The aborigines were never accorded any such recognition nor did they claim such recognition. Above all, at no time did they outnumber the Malay.

3.3. Orang Asli and the Malays: Early Contact

Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker (1997, p. 10) postulate that the ancestors of the Orang Asli groups today who speak Mon-Khmer languages may have intermarried with the Ban Kao culture of northern Thailand which may "provide the ultimate source of the Mon-Khmer languages still spoken" by these groups. They further posit that at approximately 1000 B.C., Orang Asli groups had begun specializing their subsistence activities and had branched into foraging and farming communities, which led to the development of trade between various Orang Asli groups (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997). Customarily, the Orang Asli groups that live in the contiguous forested areas central of the Peninsula comprising mostly of the Semang and Senoi groups, practiced hunter-gatherer lifestyles and swidden farming, while the Proto-Malays farther south and in the coastal areas participated in fishing and agricultural activities. That being said, these activities were not absolute distinctions between the various Orang Asli groups. Much of the Orang Asli's early trade activities were carried out between other Orang Asli groups and other early Austronesian settlers from the regions surrounding the Malay Peninsula. The Orang Asli had a network through the contiguous forest paths in the center of the Peninsula that enabled them to trade goods with other Orang Asli groups (Dunn, 1975; Andaya, 1982). The arrival of traders from India, China, and other neighboring regions gave rise to a thriving trade industry as early as 400 A.D. (Andaya, 1982) that saw the Orang Asli selling forest goods such as incense woods, ivory, resins, and gold (Abdullah, 1985). Other forest products that the Orang Asli traded in included "jungle produce such as rotan, jelutong and bamboo" (Jones, 1968, p. 288) in return for much needed "commodities such as salt, jungle knives (parang) and metal axe heads" (Jones, 1968, p. 288).

As an ethnic group, the Malay ethnicity as it is known today appears to be a melting pot of various Indonesian ethnies (Volkmer, 2012), with the later addition of Arab, Indian, and Chinese influences; which is perhaps the reason for the contemporary definition of a 'Malay' along cultural and religious lines, instead of a strictly 'racial' one. Various Indonesian ethnic groups started arriving into the Malay Peninsula in successive waves of migration (Leary, 1994) where

initially, they formed coastal communities that gradually expanded to reach the peripheries of the forest where Malay-Orang Asli interactions became more pronounced. Bertrand in his observation of the Malay Peninsula's interior in 1899, noted that, "from the junction of the Telom and Seram rivers, few Malay houses were found at long intervals, but above that there are none whatever, the whole of it being Sakai country" (Bertrand, 1899, p. 3).

Prior to the 14th century, Malays were primarily adherents of the Hindu-Buddhist religion (O'Reily, 2007; Ooi, 2010) that was widespread in Southeast Asia at the time (McAmis 2002), which they integrated into their native animistic religion (Mutalib, 1990). Much of Peninsular Malaysia was part of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of Srivijaya (7th-13th century), which had its seat of power in Sumatra. This was followed by the kingdom of Majapahit (13th-14th century), which had Java as its seat of power and which also claimed Peninsular Malaysia as part of its territory (McAmis, 2002). Peninsular Malaysia's history as a Malay-Muslim polity and a power in its own right is considered to have begun in the 15th century (McAmis, 2002), following the founding of the Malaccan sultanate by the last king of Temasek (today the city-state of Singapore) the Srivijayan prince Paduka Sri Maharaja Parameswara – or as he is better known in Malaysian history – Parameswara (Ooi, 2004). Following his conversion to Islam, he became known as Iskandar Shah in Malay history and literature. Although a pronounced Orang Asli presence may not prominently feature within the administration's state-building discourse today, a number of stories from the early days of Malaya's oral and written histories appear to reflect a recurring theme of Orang Asli participation and influence in the early days of the establishment of Malay polities and politics.

In discussing the influence the Orang Asli had in the formation of these early Malay polities with Higak, he suggests that neither Orang Asli nor Malay discourse can be truly understood without first recognizing that one cannot be discussed without the other. In describing the influence the Orang Asli had in the founding of the Malacca and Perak sultanates, Higak states:

> If you look from [the] Malacca days, for instance you know all the ... the people who support[ed] Parameswara to develop Malacca at the time [and] establish Malacca at the time are the Orang Laut, which is today the Orang Asli. And then if you go to Perak, you know ... Nakhoda Kassim? A prince from Johor [who was] married to an Orang Asli girl in Perak, and established the state of Perak. It is all surrounded by the Orang Asli you know? During

precolonial period, the Orang Asli and the Malay rulers, not [the] Malay people [but] the rulers. They were very close. The ordinary Malay, they ... they all just have the idiom lah ... yeah ... Orang Asli *kafir* and all that ... you know?

A similar narrative on the founding of the state of Perak can be found in the work of the Semai academic Juli Edo (2002) in his writings on the traditional alliances between the Semai and the Malay in pre-modern Perak, where he relays an old legend regarding the founder of the state of Perak – a Johor prince by the name of Tok Betangkok (also known as Nakhoda Kassim) – and his marriage to an Orang Asli woman in Perak who possessed white blood, following which "he established a state, and this is believed to be the origin of the ancient Malay state and sultanate of Perak" (Juli Edo, 2002, p. 141). The legend of the white-blooded Semang bride can also be found in Skeat's 1906 *Pagan Races of the Malay Peninsula (ii 220), Vol 2, Natural Religion and Folklore*, and Roseman's (2003) writing where she narrates two versions of the founding of the state of Perak, which despite slight differences in the two narratives (one of which belonged to a French mining engineer) preserve the character of the white-blooded Semang bride.

The Malacca sultanate was the most successful Malay-Muslim kingdom to exist in Peninsular Malaysia (Isaacson & Rubenstein, 1999) and it "attracted a diverse mercantile community and, European colonialists looking for established entrepots through which to conduct the long distance trade in Asian luxury goods and tropical cash crops" (Ma and Cartier, 2003, p. 79). In 1511, Malacca fell to the Portuguese, who were led by the Portuguese explorer Alfonso de Albuquerque. In 1641, a little over a century later, the Dutch defeated the Portuguese and gained possession of Malacca (Ma and Cartier, 2003); and in the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, ceded the territory to the last European power to rule Malacca and Malaya – the British.

It appears surprising that despite the close Orang Asli-Malay relationships hinted at in the legends of Parameswara and Nakhoda Kassim above, that the Orang Asli today appear to be largely absent from the country's nation-building discourse. Higak suggests that the exclusion of the Orang Asli in post-independence Malaysia's nation-building process is a complex issue, with roots in colonial attitudes toward the Orang Asli – particularly in the formation of the fledgling government of Malaya by the British – prior to independence. He statesd that:

They [the British] divide Malaysian society according to economic ability, they just left the Orang Asli … they are non-exist[ent] ... in the formation of our country, and from that time, the Orang Asli been left out. They are given freedom to live, to practice their culture, to live in the jungle ... you know? The British only focus[ed on] Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnies to form the country.

He further added that attitudes adopted by leaders of the Malaysian administration sometimes served to minimise Orang Asli contribution in Malaysia's nation-building processes, citing as an example Mahathir Mohammad, Malaysia's former (and longest-serving) Prime Minister, who during his prime-ministership stated that the Orang Asli have made no tangible contribution to Malaysia; a statement Higak asserts was made with a political motive in mind, further adding that the Orang Asli fought alongside other ethnicities during the Communist Emergency to free Malaysia of the perceived Communist threat.

3.3.1. The Slave Trade of 18th and 19th Century Malaya

During Malaya's precolonial period, the Orang Asli resisted the Islamization process that was spreading throughout the Peninsula following the adoption of the religion by the Malaccan sultanate. Over the centuries, they came to be regarded as uncivilised infidels or *kaffir* by the ruling elites and the general Malay populace (Bird, 1980) which legitimised their capture for slavery (Endicott, 2016), and by the 18th and 19th centuries a thriving trade in Orang Asli slaves had taken hold (Endicott, 1983). Quoting a report written in 1890 by the then British Resident of Pahang John Pickersgill Rodger, an engineer by the name of F. M. McLarty (1983, p. 129) stated the following: "the Sakai and Semang in the state [were] enslaved and trampled down by the Malays … who annually forced them to yield up to two-thirds of their crops for no adequate return." According to Jones (1968, p. 289), slavery was "widespread in the Malay states in the nineteenth century … and there were no social, religious or legal obstacles to discourage Malays wishing to enslave members of the jungle community" who were referred to as *sakai*. Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker (1997, p. 52) suggest that the term *sakai* may have its origins in the "Sanskrit *sakhi* meaning 'friend, companion, comrade'" a term given to the Orang Asli by the Indian traders with whom they had trade relations (1997, p. 52), however the term to most Orang Asli from the 18th century to the present still carries much of the connotation of the history of

slavery perpetrated upon them by the Malays, and it is even today considered a highly derogatory term to the Orang Asli.

Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker (1997) have called out what they refer to as a small minority of revisionist historians (including Dodge, 1981 & Sullivan, 1982) who have attempted to downplay the severity of the slave trade, and who have accused colonial British officers of exaggeration. Such revisionist views appear highly doubtful given the dread with which Orang Asli communities still re-tell stories regarding the days of slavery – some of which have been relayed by survivors to researchers in the form of firsthand accounts (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997). Malays slave-raiders "periodically mounted expeditions into the interior to capture slaves for their own use or for sale in the international slave trade" (Duncan, 2004, pp. 26-27). The target of these expeditions was mostly children because they "were regarded as particularly desirable by the slave hunters, as adults were considered too old to train properly and liable to escape …" (Jones, 1968, p. 289). Endicott stresses that these excursions were violent affairs (Endicott, 2016) as adult men were generally killed and the women raped, or captured (Baer, 2006), while "children under the age of ten or twelve were small enough to transport easily … and [to be] tamed" (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997, p. 56). The slave trade left a lasting impression on Orang Asli and Malay relations (Jones, 1968), as well as in other regards such as the dichotomization of gender, which laid the foundation for male authority in some Orang Asli communities. This was depicted during Howell's (1983, p. 80) experience with women from the Che Wong community in the late 1970s, who "felt particularly vulnerable to attacks from the outside in the past when they, and not men, were taken as slaves." Howell further postulates that because Orang Asli women and children were the primary aim of these raids, Orang Asli women have continuously viewed their gender as a vulnerability unto themselves.

Slave-raiding of Orang Asli communities continued even after the arrival of the British, who were "reluctant to oppose slavery, in part because they knew it would sour relations with the Malay ruling class" (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997, p. 58) with whom they enjoyed good relations. However, the enactment of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 in the United

Kingdom, which abolished slavery throughout the realms of the Empire[11] also had implications for the Orang Asli slave trade, although it would take half a century before slavery was abolished in British Malaya. Following mounting pressure from abolitionists in Britain, in 1883 the Malayan colonial administration finally made slave-raiding and the possession of slaves illegal (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997; Duncan, 2004). Records – mostly oral – exist that slave-raiding continued covertly well into the 20th century (Jones, 1968).

3.4. British Malaya and Governance

The arrival of the Portuguese to Malacca opened a new chapter in the history of the Malay Peninsula, which prior to the arrival of the Portuguese had never been under the control of a European power. The Portuguese defeated the Malacca Sultanate in a decisive war on the 15th of August 1511, almost 100 years after the founding of the sultanate. Portuguese rule in Malacca however was only to last a little over 100 years and in January 1641, Portuguese Malacca was conquered by the Dutch East India Company. The Dutch maintained Malacca as a colony for 183 years before signing the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 with Great Britain, which relinquished Dutch claim on Malacca in exchange for the British territory of Bencoolen (Bengkulu) in Sumatra. At this juncture in Malaya's history, the British had already maintained a presence in the Peninsula since their arrival into Penang in 1771, and their control of Singapore in 1824; thus, British control of Malacca cemented their position as the definitive European colonial power in the Malay Peninsula. The earlier Portuguese and the Dutch were not particularly interested in the affairs of the Orang Asli, except perhaps for a passing anthropological curiosity. Leary (1994, p. 93) suggests that the Portuguese administrator Tome Pires was referencing the Orang Seletar in his written correspondence sometime between 1512-1515,

> When the Celates, who are corsairs in small light craft … they are men who go out pillaging in their boats and fish, and are sometimes on land and sometimes at sea ... They carry blow-pipes with their small arrows of black hellebore which, as they touch blood, kill … as they often did to our Portuguese.

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[11] With the exceptions of "*the Territories in the Possession of the East India Company, the island of Ceylon and the island of Saint Helena LXIV: Act not to extend to East Indies & C.*, 3° & 4° Gulielmi IV, cap. LXXIII, *An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves*. 1833.

British control of Malaya was to have profound implications for the inhabitants of the Peninsula, although the effects of colonial rule would not reach the Orang Asli until the Communist Insurgency almost 120 years later. While the Portuguese and the Dutch were only interested in the Straits of Malacca maritime trade route, the British intended to establish an administrative government that controlled the entire Peninsula. This goal was achieved in less than 100 years, and as noted by Andaya (1982, p. 205), "by 1919 the entire Malay Peninsula had come under some kind of British control."

Up until the mid 20th century, "the attitude of the [British] colonial authorities towards the Orang Asli may thus be summarized as generally being one of indifference" (Jones, 1968, p. 293), although this was to change during the Communist Insurgency of 1948. It would appear that Orang Asli life at the time was not significantly affected by British colonisation, as noted by Noone (1936, pp. 61-62) on his observation of the Temiar who "pursued the independent existence of a hill people on the Main Range.[12]" Following their success in gaining control over the states in the Peninsula, the colonial administration "introduced the indirect rule that reinforced the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims" (Couillard, 1984, p. 101) based on an arbitrary system that classified Malay-Muslims as native and the Orang Asli as Aborigines, which paved the way for the "prototype of the Malays, and Orang Asli" (Mohd. Tap, 1990, p. 30).

Prior to the 1950s, the British government generally referred to the Orang Asli collectively as *sakai*, a practice that was remedied in the later years of the colonial administration in favor of 'Aborigines' upon recognition of the former's pejorative insinuation (Gomes, 2007). Nicholas, Jenita & Teh (2010, p. 32) suggest that in line with the popular sentiments of colonial race theories, the British "seemed bent on looking to the Orang Asli for evidence of the prevailing theories of social evolution" which gave rise to a "pervasive assumption that for the most part the Orang Asli represented an early stage of Malay development" and that their "absorption in the Malay community" would facilitate a gradual ascent to a "civilized existence" (Nicholas, Jenita & Teh, 2010, p. 32). Prevailing condescending attitudes of the British administration on the Orang Asli subsequently translated into "various paternalistically oriented policies and programmes for Orang Asli welfare … particularly in the 1930s and during the Emergency"

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[12] Referring here to the Titiwangsa Range of Peninsular Malaysia.

(Gomes, 2007, p. 43). Nicholas, Jenita & Teh (2010, p. 33) provide an example on the prevalence of this attitude when a British Resident was asked to respond to a request by two Orang Asli for titles to their fruit orchards in the state of Selangor, whereby he responded "They must be provisionally treated as children and protected accordingly, until they are capable of taking care of themselves[13]" (Nicholas, Jenita & Teh, 2010, p. 33). Nicholas, Jenita and Teh (2010, p. 33) further suggest that "ethnographic portrayals of the indigenous communities as defenseless creatures with limited intelligence and capacity for self-reliance helped to justify British intervention into their lives, essentially by turning the colonial power into a 'protector' of the Orang Asli."

Although such attitudes appeared not to be uncommon in British Malaya, it seemed there were also colonial officers who were genuinely concerned about the welfare of the Orang Asli and thought they needed protection. One such officer was an anthropologist by the name of H. D. (Pat) Noone (1936), a "colonial administrator appointed to the newly created position of Protector of Aborigines in 1939" (Gomes, 2007, p. 65) who sought to create 'pattern settlements' for the Orang Asli:

> That in each district, a Pattern Settlement be instituted among the border aboriginal population, where culture contact is inevitable, for purpose of controlling the contact and for dissemination of agricultural knowledge and health measures to the group. (Gomes, 2007, p. 65)

Gomes (2007) suggests that Noone was in all likelihood referring to the 'notorious' Indian reservation programmes that were implemented in the United States in the 1800s, and that while part of the aim of these settlements were to enable control of the Orang Asli, "it was also clear that Noone envisaged these projects as a means of facilitating agricultural modernisation" in the hopes of exposing the Orang Asli to a more 'civilised' way of living (Gomes, 2007, p. 65). Noone "sought to perpetuate the view of the British colonialists that the Orang Asli should remain in isolation from the rest of the Malayan population and be given protection" (Nicholas, Jenita & Teh, 2010, p. 33). While it appears that a number of researchers agree that Noone's concern for the Orang Asli was genuine (Gomes, 2007; Toshiro, 2008), unfortunately, his draft

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[13] Sel. Sec/2852/1895

for the 'pattern settlement' was to become the blueprint for the construction of the resettlement camps used to house the Orang Asli during the Communist Insurgency 20 years later (Gomes, 2007; Nicholas, Jenita & Teh, 2010), in which hundreds of Orang Asli individuals perished.

The British had ambitious plans for the development of British Malaya, and one of the earliest initiatives by the colonial government was the expansion of infrastructure to connect the different regions of the Peninsular, which ultimately led to the swift expansion of the British throughout the Peninsula. English law at the time dictated that all land was the property of the state, and thus the "colonial government was able to grant large tracts of land to European interests for mining … at the same time, embarked on a multipronged ambitious agricultural policy" (Shamsul, 2004, p. 20). The British had grown rubber experimentally, but it was the sudden jump in the global demand for rubber – due largely to the growing automobile manufacturing industry in the United States – that cemented their resolve to carry out large-scale rubber plantations in Malaya. According to Shamsul (2004, p. 25), "Between 1900 and 1913, the land acreage planted with rubber … increased from a mere 6000 acres to 1,000,000 acre." Rubber has since remained an important cash crop in the Malay Peninsula. The introduction of rubber was to have significant implications for the Orang Asli, particularly during the government's development and modernisation agendas in the shape of the first two Malaya plans, and the subsequent Malaysia Plans. The need for a work force to service the mining and agricultural industries necessitated the importation of immigrant work labour from China and India by the British. Although unforeseen at the time, this move was also to have implications for the future of the state and the Orang Asli, for whom "their encounter with modernity [began] as these social, political and economic transformations spread into the hinterland of the Malay Peninsula" (Gomes, 2007, p. 46). As a result of the colonial government's mining and agricultural projects in Malaya, at the time of Malayan independence, the country had become "an economy largely shaped by British colonial business interests, built around the export of tin and rubber" (Gomez & Jomo, 1997, p. 10). The colonial administration's resettlement policy for the Orang Asli and the Malayan Emergency will be discussed in the following section.

3.4.1. *Darurat*, and the Regroupment and Resettlement of the Orang Asli

It could be argued that two watershed incidents marked the end of the semi-nomadic way of life of most Orang Asli groups and their transition into sedentary living. The first was the arrival of

the British into Malaya. It would appear that initially the British government was indifferent to the Orang Asli and showed "hardly any concern for their welfare" (Jones, 1968, p. 292), preferring instead to focus on the colonisation of Peninsular Malaysia with "little or hardly any attempt made to administrate the Orang Asli" (Carey, 1976, p. 288). However, the threat of a Communist insurgency in Malaya during the *Darurat* (Malayan Emergency) from 1948-1960 was to change this. The British, fearing that Orang Asli communities deep within the forest networks of Peninsular Malaysia may harbor sympathies for Communist insurgents and fugitives, orchestrated the systematic regroupment and resettlement of Orang Asli communities into guarded camps (Endicoot & Dentan, 2004). Although both the British and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) were fighting the Japanese – whom they both regarded as a common enemy with the MCP providing "the main internal source of resistance to the Japanese occupation" (Endicott, 2016, p. 19) – they were also at odds with each other's political ideologies. Following the withdrawal of the Japanese at the end of World War II, the MCP tried to "gain influence in the post-war government" (Endicott, 2016, p. 19), while the British colonial administration attempted to "exclude the communists … from the anticipated post-independence government" (Duncan, 2004, p. 27).

In retaliation, on the 16th of June 1948, the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) – also known as the National Liberation Army (MNLA) – the military division of the MCP, carried out the assassination of three British plantation owners in Sungai Siput, in the state of Perak. This was to be the catalyst that set off the Malayan Emergency, known in Malay as *darurat* which was to last a total of 12 years, ending on 31st July 1960. During Japanese occupation, the MCP had developed a covert network of forest trails in order to mobilize resistances and strategize operations against the Japanese, and a large number of these forest trails overlapped with ancestral Orang Asli lands and communities. During earlier resistance efforts against the Japanese, the MCP, which was largely Chinese, had formed valuable connections with various Orang Asli communities who provided them with logistical assistance in the forest and whom in turn were protected by the Communists from the Japanese. However, "during the Emergency 'Communist terrorists' (CTs) controlled Orang Asli by persuasion mixed with the threat of violence" (Endicott, 2016, p. 19) to raise insurrections against the British, while also enlisting the assistance of Chinese communities that lived at the peripheries of forested areas. It would appear

however that not all Orang Asli involvement was coerced; Jones (1968, p. 294), in describing the relationship between the Communist insurgents and the Orang Asli, stated that:

> Friendly contacts made … with the Orang Asli before the war became invaluable during the Occupation ... The jungle peoples became targets for Communist propaganda … The M.P.A.J.A. carefully nurtured friendships with the Orang Asli [going] as far as to protect the jungle peoples from … bandits and Japanese troops. In return the Orang Asli aided the Communist forces by providing porters, guides, food and intelligence.

Jones also stated that while the Japanese Occupation left a negligible impression on the Orang Asli, it was their exposure to the MCP's propaganda that largely played a role in their empathy for the Communists. The British, recognizing the threat that this relationship posed, "treated the Orang Asli as suspected CT collaborators" (Endicott, 2016, p.19) and were determined to flush out the Communists and bring an end to the assistance the insurgents were receiving from the Orang Asli. To this end, the colonial government devised what was to become the initial regroupment and resettlement scheme for the Orang Asli. It should be noted here that there were also individuals from Orang Asli communities who worked closely with the British *against* the MCP, as evidenced by Edo and Kamal's narrative on Mat Arip, a leader from the Semai community who was a "good friend of the British" (Endicott, 2016, pp. 253-255). Initially, the strategy of the British was to relocate the Chinese communities who lived at the peripheries of the forests and whom they believed played a larger role in assisting the Communists (Duncan 2004). However, this only served to increase the Communists' reliance on the Orang Asli, which prompted the decision by the British to relocate Orang Asli communities. The Communist insurgents were also strategic in taking advantage of the depreciatory sentiments the colonial government had of the Orang Asli. The colonial government had adopted the local usage of the term *sakai* to refer to the Orang Asli; as discussed, *sakai* is a derogatory term in the Malay vernacular that meant slave – referencing the slave-raiding past of the Malays on Orang Asli communities. The insurgents in their recruitment and mobilization of the Orang Asli, on the other hand, referred to them as *asal* – "a variant of Asli, meaning original [or] aboriginal" (Dentan, 1997, p. 61) a term that gained favor with the Orang Asli. Following Malayan independence in 1957, the affiliation of the term *asal* with the Emergency led the Malaysian

administration to decide against using the word in referring to the Orang Asli, given the coinage of the term by the Communists (Nicholas, 2000).

Two different relocation models were applied on the Orang Asli by the colonial and Malaysian administration at various times during pre and post independence Malaysia: resettlement, and regroupment, and as noted by Carey (1977), the two terms are frequently confused. This is particularly true in Malay, as the acronyms used for both relocation models are the same, that is, RPS – *Rancangan Penempatan Semula* (resettlement scheme) and *Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula* (regroupment scheme). The first refers to an *ex-situ* form of Orang Asli movement by the government, and the latter, to an *in-situ* habitation model. As explained by Carey (1977, p. 159):

> The concept of resettlement implies resettling the Orang Asli outside their natural environment … without the slightest regard as to how they could earn a living there, whereas regroupment [are] … rational proposals to bring facilities to the Orang Asli in the deep jungle, without destroying their way of life.

The resettlement model was practiced by the British government of colonial Malaya in preventing remote Orang Asli communities in the jungle from assisting Communist insurgents – with dire consequences. The British formulated a resettlement strategy for the Orang Asli that was similar to the one they had for the Chinese, however this enterprise did not produce the results they had hoped for. According to Jones (1968, p. 296), "this led to some of the most tragic incidents of the Emergency." The Orang Asli were rounded up by the thousands and "escorted out of the jungle by the police and the army" (1968, p. 296) and placed in camps that did not have "proper shelters, sanitary facilities or nutritionally adequate food" and as a result "large numbers of Orang Asli died from disease, malnutrition and demoralization" (Duncan, 2004, p. 28). Orang Asli who escaped these camps returned to members of their communities deep in the forests and relayed accounts of the cruelty of the British government, and "by 1953 virtually all the Orang Asli of the central highlands … had turned to the Communists for protection against the [British] government" (Duncan, 2004, p. 28).

By 1952, it had dawned on the colonial government that the resettlement of Orang Asli communities was proving to be unstrategic. The Orang Asli were now even more convinced by Communist propaganda and had developed a deep distrust of the colonial administration of the

time. Consequently, the British allowed the remaining Orang Asli to return to their territories and opted to construct jungle forts deep in the forests to construct a "visible evidence of Government" (Jones, 1968, p. 298) to the Communists and to protect the Orang Asli from "guerilla intimidation" (Duncan, 2004, p. 28). Faced with the realization that they had to win back the confidence of the Orang Asli if they were to prevent favorable relations between the Communists and the Orang Asli from redeveloping, the colonial administration began to take a renewed interest in the Department of Aborigines, an institution that was established in 1950, but which had not been given much attention by the colonial administration. Major P. D. R. Williams-Hunt, who was the first Federal Advisor on Aborigines, was replaced by R. O. D. Noone following Williams-Hunt's accidental death in 1953 (Jones, 1968; Duncan, 2004).

The department was expanded and restructured in order to address the multiple issues that had arisen due to resettlement schemes carried out by the British government on the Orang Asli (Federation of Malaya Annual Report, 1954). Realizing the ineffectiveness of resettlement initiatives, the colonial government proceeded as part of their efforts to regain the trust of the Orang Asli, by introducing facilities and services including schools, medical services, shops, and service patrols closer to the jungle forts (Jones, 1968; Endicott, 2016), in more regroupment type sedentarization policies. Some Orang Asli men were also recruited and trained to form the Auxiliary Aboriginal Police (AAP), the Police Aboriginal Guards (PAG) and the Senoi Pra'aq; the Senoi Pra'aq were an anti-guerilla unit which was particularly instrumental in liaisons between the jungle communities and the security forces (Carey, 1976) and contributed substantially to the end of the Communist insurgency in Malaya. These initiatives collectively facilitated improvements in relations between the Orang Asli and the colonial government, despite the recent traumatic events of resettlement. Carey (1977, p. 168), in referencing the advantages of regroupment initiatives over resettlement, states, "regroupment of the Orang Asli is a very different concept to resettlement. It implies leaving the Orang Asli in their natural environment, but creating larger villages ... coupled with generous economic aid to the people involved."

The second watershed incident was the government's attempt to include the Orang Asli into Malaysia's development and modernisation initiatives through the introduction of cash crops. Although proposals in this regard tended more toward regroupment and not resettlement

initiatives, it nevertheless necessitated the sedentarization of all Orang Asli communities where cash crops were introduced, as well as wide-scale clearing of forested areas for the plantation of rubber and oil palm saplings, which appeared to have direct implications on the subsistence abilities of various Orang Asli communities – challenging Carey's earlier assertion that regroupment initiatives did not affect the Orang Asli's way of life. Furthermore, although such regroupment initiatives also appeared to have brought Orang Asli communities in regroupment projects closer to medical, infrastructural and educational facilities, such services have heavily influenced the power dynamics between the Orang Asli and the Malaysian government – the compulsory sedentarization of these communities being one such example – further cementing a client-provider relationship revolving around reliance and dependence of the Orang Asli on the Malaysian administration. Endicott (2016, p. 23) states that today, such regroupment schemes "have become the standard method for 'modernizing Orang Asli economies," although he contends that they "have not succeeded in lifting [Orang Asli] residents out of poverty."

The proliferation of regroupment initiatives in post-independence Malaysia did not necessarily imply the end of resettlement programmes. On the contrary, resettlement programmes appear still to be frequently employed when large tracts of Orang Asli lands are required for the construction of airports, dams and other major development projects. During a visit to Cameron Highlands in August 2014 to attend a government-organised workshop on sustainability and the Orang Asli, I learned that the RM 2.2 billion Ulu Jelai hydroelectric dam project (Plate 2) had resulted in the destruction of Kampung Susu and the resettlement of several Orang Asli families. As some members of these villages preferred continuing their traditional way of life in the proximity of their ancestral lands, and did not want to be resettled into a *Rancangan Penempatan Semula* (resettlement scheme), they went on to set up a new village at the peripheries of their ancestral lands. JAKOA officials informed me that this new village (Plate 3) received no relocation aid, no infrastructural assistance from the government (neither water nor electricity), or medical assistance, as the government considers the village to be *setinggan* – shantytowns inhabited by squatters.

Plate 2. Ulu Jerai Hydroelectric Dam Project in Cameron Highlands

Plate 3. Orang Asli *Setinggan* Village in Cameron Highlands

Some Orang Asli respondents from this study have indicated that the sedentarization of Orang Asli communities through regroupment initiatives has not been entirely negative, and that the ability of the Orang Asli to access education and infrastructure through these settlements has brought about positive changes to the communities; others strongly disagree. Perhaps the following statement by Anggrik, a Hma' Meri woman in her late 20s, best summarizes the Orang Asli's ambivalence on the matter:

> From my point of view, the relocation projects have been good. So Orang Asli communities are more organised … and life is better? But for me, there may also be some bad things about it. Because with the resettlement scheme, we no longer have our identities, our ancestral settlements are gone. When you have a new place, everything is new … this is different from our ancestors' villages … it feels different, because back there we could maintain our culture and our customs.

3.4.2. The Aboriginal Peoples Act of 1954

Act 134 or the Aboriginals Peoples Act of 1954 is perhaps the legislation that has most shaped and influenced the discourse on the Orang Asli in Malaysia. It is the only legislation that directly pertains to the Orang Asli, and together with JAKOA, constitutes the two institutions that govern the Orang Asli in Malaysia (Nicholas, 1991). The Act was founded as the Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance in 1954 and was revised to the Aboriginal Peoples Act in 1974; in that period, the Act was revised twice – in 1967 and in 1974 – to "meet … changing conditions" (Karim, 2014, p. 37). The Act finds its origins in the height of the Malayan Emergency in 1954, when it was enacted by the colonial administration in a claim to ensure that the Orang Asli were "protected from the evil influence of the Communists" (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997, p. 69). The Act is closely related to the Aboriginal Tribes Enactment of 1939 (Rusaslina, 2011) that was designed by the British for the protection of Orang Asli communities in Perak, and was repealed following the enactment of the 1954 Act. The 1939 Act stipulates the appointment of a "protector … to take charge of the aboriginal peoples' affairs" (Chang, Thio, Tan & Yeh, 2014, p. 561). I will now, briefly investigate the contents of the Act.

The contents of the Act starts at Article 3, which introduces the definition of an aborigine[14] as someone who is either born into, or adopted by an aboriginal community/parent who actively observes the aboriginal way of life, belief systems, and speaks aboriginal languages. While the article stipulates that religious conversion does not necessarily negate one's aboriginal identity, it does state in Article 3 (section 3) that ultimately, "Any question whether any person is or is not an aborigine shall be decided by the Minister." Article 4 of the Act describes the duties of the Director General in that he is "responsible for the general administration, welfare and advancement of aborigines." Article 5 states that it is the duty of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong[15] "to appoint a Director General for Orang Asli Affairs, and as many Deputy Director Generals for Orang Asli Affairs and other officers as he may consider necessary for the purposes of this Act" while simultaneously granting both the Director General and the Deputy Directors what appears to be *carte blanche* to "do all acts reasonably necessary and incidental to or connected with the performance of his functions under this Act including the conducting of research into any aspects of aboriginal life" (Article 5, subsections 1 & 2).

Section 2 of articles 6 and 7 specify that with regard to Orang Asli areas and reserves "no land shall be declared a Malay Reservation under any written law relating to Malay Reservations" however Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker (1997, p. 76) contend that "numerous examples … [of] … the pattern is monotonously clear: Malays apply for Orang Asli lands and get it; the Orang Asli are ordered to move." While the state compensates land taken from Malay reserves with an equal amount of land that has equivalent value, this practice does not usually apply to Orang Asli lands – primarily because most Orang Asli individuals do not hold titles to their lands. Malaysian land laws are based in part on the Torrens title system (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997), a legacy of the British stating that "all land not individually owned by registered title deeds was 'crown land,' owned by the individual states in the name of the *sultans* [including] aboriginal lands" (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997, p. 74). This British (and later Malaysian) concept of land ownership was hitherto unknown to the Orang Asli who had their own notions of indigenous land ownership. The introduction of the Torrens title system via the Land Rights Act of 1965 carried severe implications for many Orang Asli communities

[14] Aborigine in the Act refers only to the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia as stated in Article 3, Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954, reprint 2006.

[15] The reigning monarch of Malaysia as determined by the Council of Rulers and the 5 year rotational system practiced by the nine hereditary royal rulers. Nine of Malaysia's 13 states have hereditary royal rulers.

who lacked title deeds to substantiate their land claims, leaving many of them in a position where they are referred to as *tenants-at-will* on their own lands. Hooker (1976, p. 180) contends:

> The area of state land occupied by the Orang Asli is public domain and the greatest title which the Orang Asli can get, either as an individual or as a group, is tenant at will … land as such cannot be owned and no one group can claim rights over it as against another group.

The rights of occupancy for the Orang Asli as detailed in Article 8 of the Act states that:

> The State Authority may grant rights of occupancy of any land not being alienated land or land leased for any purpose within any aboriginal area or aboriginal reserve … and shall be deemed not to confer on any person any better title than that of a tenant at will.

Although many Orang Asli communities have lived or maintained a continued presence on what they considered as native land for generations, they now found themselves to be "squatters on state land" (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997, p. 74). The Orang Asli are also not allowed to "transfer, lease, charge, sell, convey, assign, mortgage or otherwise dispose of any land" (Article 9), without first obtaining the consent of the Director General, which does little in assisting them with the problem of land security and undermines their land entitlements. In defining aboriginal lands, Articles 6 and 7 state that there are to be two forms of gazetted aboriginal lands; the first is Aboriginal Areas which refers to regions inhabited by aboriginals who still practice a mobile culture (Article 6, section 1, subsection (i)), and secondly, Aboriginal Reserve which translates to aboriginal settlements consisting of sedentary aboriginals (Article 7, section 1). While it would appear that the declarations contained within Articles 6 and 7 recognize the aboriginal's claims to the land, section 3 of Articles 6 and 7 stipulates, "The State Authority may in like manner revoke wholly or in part or vary any declaration of an aboriginal reserve made under subsection 1" (Articles 6 and 7, section 3) – and it appears that this has occurred on numerous occasions in the government's development plans (Duncan, 2004; Rusaslina, 2011). Compensation for the loss of land is not a given as indicated in Article 12, which states that the government "may grant compensation" in the event of government appropriation of land, but it guarantees payment only for the loss of fruit and rubber trees planted *on* the land as stipulated in Article 11.

If any land is excised from any aboriginal area or aboriginal reserve … [or] … is revoked wholly or in part, the State Authority may grant compensation therefor and may pay such compensation to the persons entitled in his opinion thereto or may, if he thinks fit, pay the same to the Director General to be held by him as a common fund for such persons or for such aboriginal community as shall be directed.

Where an aboriginal community establishes a claim to fruit or rubber trees on any State land which is alienated, granted, leased for any purpose, occupied temporarily under licence or otherwise disposed of, then such compensation shall be paid to that aboriginal community as shall appear to the State Authority to be just.

Article 12 also states that the compensation awarded for land loss – if granted – is handed to the Director General responsible for aboriginal affairs to manage, as he deems appropriate, and not directly to members of the community. The paternalistic suggestion of this stipulation appears to be a recurring theme in the government's dealings with the Orang Asli; indeed, a number of anthropologists and activists who have worked with the Orang Asli – particularly on the issue of land rights claims – have criticised the paternalistic tone of the Aboriginals Peoples Act of 1954, and have argued that the Act in no small way has, and continues to, colour the relationship between the Orang Asli and the government, including their land rights claims (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997; Dentan, 2004; Gomes, 2007) while positioning the Orang Asli as "wards of the state" (Nicholas, 2000, p. 232; Gomes, 2007, p. 157) to the extent that "government officials, the Malaysian public, and Orang Asli themselves assume that [the] Orang Asli can do nothing without JAKOA guidance and permission" (Duncan, 2004, p. 31). In the eyes of the administration, it appears that the question of land compensation does not consider the intrinsic value of the land to Orang Asli communities, and the significance a geographical space holds as a source of identity to various Orang Asli communities.

The details mentioned in Articles 14 and 15 generally prohibit non-Orang Asli individuals from entering Orang Asli settlements, regardless of whether or not they were invited, or are friends to the Orang Asli. Unauthorized individuals who enter an Orang Asli settlement "may be arrested without warrant by the Director General or any police officer" or issued a fine of 1000 ringgit (Article 14, section 4 (4)). This, coupled with Article 18, which prohibits the adoption of Orang Asli children by non-Orang Asli individuals without the approval of the Director General – an

offence punishable by up to 6 months in prison (or a fine of 1000 ringgit) – all seem indicative of the attitude JAKOA maintains with the Orang Asli. There appeared to be no space for negotiation within the context of the Act that would "allow the Orang Asli any role in the determination of their own affairs" (Rachagan, 1990, p. 110). For the most part, Orang Asli communities have also largely lost their rights to elect their own community leaders due to the stipulation in Article 16 requiring ministerial consent. While the article states that members of a community are able to select their leaders, this is "subject in each case to confirmation by the Minister … [and] … The Minister may remove any headman from his office" (Article 16, section 1 & 2). JAKOA appears to select village heads that are sympathetic to JAKOA's position and prioritises the aims of the state over the interests of the community (Duncan, 2004). Although not all Orang Asli communities have a history of concentrated leadership – see Duncan (2004) on the Batek and East Semai – JAKOA mandates that all Orang Asli settlements have a leader. Historically, Orang Asli communities were (and many still are) based on principles of egalitarianism, and it would appear that the appointment of a leader – female or male – did not necessarily indicate a hierarchical political system. JAKOA's appointment of a head aimed to "create a hierarchical political system in which headmen, rather than representing their people to the outside world, represent the government's authority to the people" (Duncan, 2004, pp. 39-40). As noted by Jimin et al. (1983, p. 135) a former JHEOA Director General once said:

> It is also quite obvious that the traditional socio-political organisation of the Orang Asli has been affected [by JHEOA manipulation]. As a result of their exposure to outside forces, brought about by 'governmental interests,' the traditional organisational structure of the community has, to a certain degree disintegrated.

A precondition in JAKOA's selection of leaders was that only men could be appointed to the position. JAKOA has over the decades, strongly discouraged the practice of female leadership among Orang Asli communities. Karen Endicott (2006, p. 57) during her stay in 1975 with the *Batek 'De* people of the Lebir watershed in Kelantan, made the following observation of Tanyogn, who was a *Batek De'* woman and leader of her community:

Despite the fact that Malays who interacted with Tanyogn acknowledged her as a *penghulu*[16]… the Jabatan Orang Asli (JOA) did not for one simple reason: she was a woman. The JOA reserved the title *penghulu* for men. (Endicott, 2006, p. 57)

As they could do little to change Tanyogn's position as the leader of the *Batek De'*, in their official records, JOA listed Tanyogn as a man (Endicott, 2006). JAKOA's attitude toward gender roles in the Orang Asli community, and the implications of this, will be discussed in the following chapter.

With regard to Orang Asli lands, the government appears not to hesitate in appropriating their territories once it has identified certain areas for development projects, as seen in the reduction of gazetted Orang Asli regions in the state of Selangor and other parts of Malaysia in the 1990s (Nicholas, 2000). Although the Aboriginal Peoples Act appears to have found its origins in the notions of a colonial officer who had "a genuine concern for the Orang Asli" (Gomes, 2007, p. 65), it would appear that today the Act "ultimately limits the autonomy of the community, and puts them in [a] precarious position" (Rusaslina, 2011, p. 65) with regards to the current development focus in Malaysia. In 2001, a statement was issued on the website of the Department of Orang Asli Affairs stating that a board chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister has collectively agreed that the Act is no longer relevant which has necessitated its reexamination. Primary among the concerns stated by the department for the reexamination of the Act are the frequent land rights claims brought by Orang Asli communities that result in verdicts favorable to the Orang Asli – suggesting government dissatisfaction with court rulings in favor of the Orang Asli. The statement (available only on the Malay version of the website) is as follows:

1 *Akta 134, Akta Orang Asli 1954 telah dipinda kali terakhir pada tahun 1967 dan disemak pada tahun 1974. Mesyuarat Pasukan Petugas Peringkat Menteri untuk meningkatkan pelaksanaan projek-projek Luar Bandar Bil. 2/2001 bertarikh 7 Ogos 2001 yang dipengerusikan oleh Timbalan Perdana Menteri berpendapat bahawa Akta Orang Asli 134 tidak lagi sesuai dengan keadaan sekarang dan perlu dikaji semula.*

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[16] Malay for headman or chief.

2 *Kedua, isu-isu tuntutan Orang Asli yang berkaitan dengan tanah yang dibawa ke mahkamah telah meningkat dan seringkali memihak kepada Orang Asli yang mana sepatutnya Akta ini memberi kebaikan kepada kedua-dua pihak atau "win-win situation".*

Translation:

1. Act 134, the Aboriginal Peoples Act was last amended in 1967 and revised in 1974. The Ministerial Task Force for the implementation of Rural Development projects Bil. 2/2001 dated 7th August 2001 chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister has concluded that the Aboriginal Peoples Act of 134 is no longer suitable and requires reexamination.

2. Secondly, there has been an increase in the number of Orang Asli land rights claims brought to court which have resulted in verdicts favorable to the Orang Asli; ideally, an agreement should be reached that is amenable to both parties or a 'win-win situation.'

3.4.3. The Orang Asli Affairs Department

"We take care of them from the womb to the grave," - Jimin bin Idris, former director-general of JHEOA.

The Department of Orang Asli Development, currently known in Malay as Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli (JAKOA), is the department responsible for the welfare of the Orang Asli groups of Peninsular Malaysia. JAKOA has its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur and has "six state branch offices, of which four cover two states or districts: Pahang, Perak/Kedah, Kelantan/Terengganu, Johor, Negeri Sembilan/Malacca and Selangor/Wilayah Persekutuan (Federal Territory)" (Endicott & Duncan, 2004, p. 33). As briefly mentioned earlier with respect to the Malayan Emergency, the origins of the institution can be traced back prior to Malaysian independence in the tumultuous period of the Communist Insurgency during British Malaya, when it was known as the Department of Aborigines. In November 1961, it was made a permanent institution, and with the formation of Malaysia in 1963, its name was changed to the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli – JHEOA). In 2010, the current Prime Minister Najib Razak changed the name of the department to the current Department of Orang Asli Development (Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli – JAKOA).

In 1961, a Blue Book was issued that underlined the "Government's policy for the Orang Asli …
[covering] a range of social, economic and cultural issues" (Jones, 1968, p. 302). It would appear
that at the initial stage of the government's plans for the Orang Asli, the policies the government
had were "… their ultimate integration with the Malay section of the community ..." (Statement
of Policy regarding the Administration of the Aborigine Peoples of the Federation of Malaya,
1961, pp. 3-5) while remaining "culturally distinct from them." However, as argued by Endicott
(2016, pp. 20-21) "some officials in the government, which was – and still is – dominated by
Malays, resented the idea that a category of Malaysians existed that was arguably more
indigenous than the Malays … [and] argued that the government should assimilate the Orang
Asli into the Malay ethnic group, thus causing them to cease to exist as a separate category of
citizens." Government policies for the Orang Asli are administered by JAKOA which is "the
agency charged with administering those policies" (Duncan 2004, p. 32). JAKOA has been
involved with the affairs of the Orang Asli since its inception in pre-independence Malaysia, and
has been directly involved in all of the federal government's development and modernisation
initiatives for the Orang Asli. Although the government has often contended that JAKOA's
purpose is to assist the Orang Asli, Nicholas (2000, p. 107) argues that:

> The department was modeled along the lines of the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs
> and the Australian Department of Aborigines, not just in terms of administrative structure, but
> also in rationale: to 'protect' a class of people deemed to be 'wards of the state'. The policy of
> establishing Orang Asli reserves is an example of policy similarities.

Nicholas (2000) criticises what he considers paternalistic attitudes held by JAKOA towards the
Orang Asli, and the subsequent climate of dependency this has created between certain Orang
Asli communities and JAKOA. He contends,

> JHEOA has continued the British paternalistic and the Malay feudal patronage role toward the
> Orang Asli, so it settles claims and decides policy without actively involving or even
> consulting those concerned. (Nicholas, 2000, p. 110)

In referencing an early policy statement issued by the government in 1961, Gomes (2007, p. 58)
suggests that the aim of JAKOA in adopting a paternalistic role in the lives of the Orang Asli is a
screened attempt to "control the affairs of the Orang Asli or to maintain control of access to

Orang Asli peoples." During my conversations with respondents of this study, it appeared that while some respondents held views not dissimilar from those mentioned above with regards to the undesirable implications of JAKOA's involvement in Orang Asli life, there were also others who voiced a more positive take on the institution. Below are two excerpts from Orang Asli women on JAKOA's role:

As far as I'm aware, I think JAKOA will assist us if we face problems, any type of problem. We can let JAKOA know and they will find a solution, to the best of their ability. So if we have problems, we would take it to JAKOA (Willa, 27, Semelai).

When I was in school, JAKOA helped me out, for instance giving me my pocket money. From when I was 13 until I turned 19 or 20, they gave me my allowances. They also sent Orang Asli children for courses outside of the settlement (Nomi, early 20s, Semai).

The more respondents I spoke to, the more obvious it became that perceptions of JAKOA among the Orang Asli varied. When I questioned Zaitun – who was herself critical of some of JAKOA's policies – regarding the positive feedback I had heard relating to the institution, she replied with respect to the respondents:

I assume they are really young, and they actually graduated ... graduated because of JAKOA and they don't really want to put out a bad image of JAKOA … and also, a bad image for themselves I guess? They probably don't know enough, so they don't ... they don't really give you the correct answer. Could be … you know? Could be ... It's probably different if you go into the community, and then ask whatever.

It would seem that despite contradictory views among respondents, virtually all facets of Orang Asli life are indeed connected to the department, and the department maintains its presence among Orang Asli communities in matters relating to education, healthcare, land rights claims, economic opportunities, and, cultural and religious matters. It appears that JAKOA in effect "performs a vital function other government agencies can only hope for when dealing with communities … the power to represent the Orang Asli" (Nicholas, 2000, p. 110). Nicholas however contends that this representation is more often in the interests of the government than those of the Orang Asli (2000). Some research appear to reflect that over the decades, a number of Orang Asli communities appear to have grown increasingly distrustful of JAKOA, which they

see as advancing the agenda of the government over their own interests (Duncan, 2004). Also, the "fact that all senior JHEOA personnel are Malay influences JHEOA policies and how officials deal with Orang Asli" (Duncan, 2008, p. 34). Finally, despite its inception as an institution committed to serving the interests of the Orang Asli, JAKOA, which is staffed by ethnic Malays, tends to side with "government agencies and Malays in disputes between Orang Asli and others" (Dean & Levi, 2003, p. 55). I will discuss JAKOA's role in the government's development, modernisation and Islamization plans for the Orang Asli in the following chapter.

This chapter has – through its investigation of indigeneity as it is framed in Malaysia – attempted to reveal the many complex issues surrounding the discourse of Malaysian indigeneity. In so doing, it brings to the fore the role of Islam as the religious faith of what the administration deems Malaysia's definitive indigenous community – the Malays – and the way in which the Orang Asli are dichotomized against the Malays as a primitive people without religion – which justified Orang Asli slavery by the Malays in the 18th and 19th century. The chapter also traces the recent histories of Orang Asli movement through the resettlement schemes introduced by the colonial administration as a result of the Communist Insurgency, and the continuation of such schemes by the post-independence Malaysian administration to the present day. The chapter further traces the origins and development of two of the most powerful entities governing the Orang Asli – the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JAKOA) and the Aboriginal Peoples' Act of 1954 – both of which were introduced by the colonial administration, and which continue to wield enormous influence in the everyday lives of the Orang Asli today.

Chapter 4 will examine the Malaysian administration's development and modernisation plans for the Orang Asli as framed within the Malaysia Plans – the blueprints of Malaysia's modernisation initiatives. To this end, the administration's agricultural and development plans for the Orang Asli – as well as the implications of these plans – will be discussed. In addition, the chapter will investigate the ongoing religious proselytisation carried out among rural Orang Asli communities and conclude with a discussion on Orang Asli NGOs.

Chapter 4: The Orang Asli in Post-Independence Malaysia

The Semelai are different, the Jakun are different, the Temuan are different, the Jahai are different. But we have all lived off the land. We plant hill paddy … we plant yams … we plant bananas … our food. Thousands of years ago we were planting all around Bera Lake … planting yams. Now people plant oil palm … so we plant oil palm. People plant rubber … so we plant rubber. In the old days we planted hill paddy, we planted yams, sweet potatoes, bananas. We never bought our food … all our food was from the jungle.

Now everybody wants it easy…

Everybody is looking for money…

Pak Che Jah

This chapter will explore the recent history of the Orang Asli following the end of the colonial administration in Malaya, and the beginning of an independent Malaysia. In so doing, it will examine Malaysia's path of progress by reviewing the Malaysia Plans, which are the country's economic blueprints intended to bring post-independence Malaysia's economic prosperity and modernisation initiatives to fruition, with each plan detailing the government's developmental agenda for the following 5 years (Urrutia & Yukawa, 1988). In short, the Malaysia Plans were – and continue to be – the blueprint for the nation's development and modernisation initiatives. Concomitantly, the chapter will investigate the implications of the government's development programmes for the Orang Asli as contained within the Malaysia Plans, which have centered largely on rubber and oil palm agriculture. Issues such as the appropriation of Orang Asli lands and religious proselytisation by the government in connection to the intersectionality of indigeneity, religion and politics among Orang Asli communities will also be explored.

4.1. Independence

The Federation of Malaya attained independence from the British Crown on the 31st of August 1957; at this juncture, the newly independent state consisted only of the 11 states of the Malayan Federation that were located in the Malay Peninsula (Ismail, 2007) and had yet to incorporate the states of Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (as the state of Sabah was known prior to its incorporation into Malaysia, following which its name was changed under the Twenty-Points

memorandum to Sabah (Lim, 2008). The formation of Malaysia on the 16th of September 1963 following the findings of the Cobbold Commission – a census carried out by the Commission in the states of Sarawak and North Borneo which found that the majority of the two states' inhabitants were in favor of the merger with Malaysia (Lim, 2008) – saw the merging of the Malayan Federation, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah under a common Malaysian government. However, as a result of the nation's complex racial politics and the interests of the new Malaysian administration to maintain a Malay *bumiputera* majority Malaysia, Singapore was forced to secede from Malaysia in 1965 (Holst, 2012).

Following independence, Malaysia aggressively pursued the British legacy of cash crop agriculture – particularly rubber – for the purpose of investment in land development projects; rubber was then replaced by the more lucrative oil palm in the Second Malaysia Plan (Henderson et al., 1977). Urrutia and Yukawa (1988, p. 119) point out that:

> The development plans of the early 1960s and 1970s, also stressed the need for integrating the rural sector with the modern sector, chiefly through advanced technologies from developed nations.

As noted by Urrutia & Yukawa, post-independence Malaysia – particularly during the 1960s-1970s – saw the integration of the rural economy into the modern economy as a prerequisite for the country's development; it was believed that only through this pathway "would economic development and modernisation in Malaysian society be attainable" (Urrutia & Yukawa, p. 119). In its view of what it perceived as a dualistic economy, the Malaysian administration adopted a more Western developmental approach in dichotomizing modernisation and tradition, and "while 'tradition' is equated with indigenous, modernity is equated with 'progressive, [similarly] the former is identified with 'folk' and 'unchanging' while the latter is identified with 'Western,' 'developing,' and 'scientific''' (Lye, 2002, p. 160). The following section will discuss how governmental development programmes and agendas for the Orang Asli were incorporated into the nation's Malaya and Malaysia plans, and their implications for the Orang Asli.

4.1.1. The Malaysia Plans: The Development and Modernisation of Malaysia

In defining development and modernity, I draw from Knauft (2002, p. 18) who describes modernity as "the images and institutions associated with Western-style progress and

development in a contemporary world." He further clarified his definition of modernity by stating that:

> The images of 'progress' and institutions of 'development' in this formulation do not have to be Western in a direct sense, but they do resonate with Western-style notions of economic and material progress and link these with images of social and cultural development. (Knauft, 2002, p. 18)

I engage Knauft in my definition of Malaysia's development process, as Malaysia, similar to the economic models of other newly independent nations between the 1960s-1970s, fashioned a developmental framework that was closely sculpted after Western capitalist models. The extent of Western influence is reflected in the development of the two initial Malaya Plans for the then newly-independent Malaya with the assistance of Western experts from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development – the primary World Bank institution (Urrutia & Yukawa, 1988). An even earlier precursor to the First Malaya Plan of 1956 (thus functioning as the foundation of the Malaya Plans) was the Draft Development Plan – also known as the Yellow Book – which was developed by "British colonial planners and officers of the Economics Department of the Financial Secretary's Office" (Nelson, Meerman & Abdul Rahman, 2008, p. 44). The British – particularly the then British High Commisioner Sir Henry Gurney – foresaw Malaya's independence, and decided that, "a country that is becoming a nation must have a policy and a plan" (Nelson, Meerman & Abdul Rahman, 2008, p. 44).

The Malaysia Plans were initially referred to as the Malaya, and then Malaysia Plans (following the formation of Malaysia with the incorporation of Sabah and Sarawak in 1963), and consist of Malaya Plans 1 – also known as the 'General Plan of Development (1956-1960) and 2 (1961-1965), and Malaysia Plans (*Rancangan Malaysia*) 1-10 (1966-2015). Although most of the plans deal with the issues of rural development and poverty eradication, they do not all make explicit mention of the Orang Asli. As there are a total of 15 Malaysia Plans (including the first two Malaya Plans), only the Plans that make overt mention of the Orang Asli and contain governmental development programmes that are aimed at developing Orang Asli communities will be discussed here. Prior to examining the administration's incorporation of the Orang Asli into the Malaya and Malaysia Plans, it is perhaps necessary to view the ways in which the Orang Asli feature in governmental discourse on development and modernisation. Judging from the

developmental discourse in Malaysia, the government's perception of the Orang Asli appears to stem from a number of interconnected assumptions:

    i)   the Orang Asli and primitivity are inextricably connected,

    ii)   the Orang Asli are intrinsically incompatible with development, and thus,

    iii)   Orang Asli development will not be possible without government intervention.

I will now examine how these three assumptions feature in governmental discourse concerning the Orang Asli and in the government's development programmes for the Orang Asli as laid out in the Malaysia Plans.

Although the trope of the 'primitive indigene' in Malaysia predates the country's independence by almost a century, having been a notion entertained by the colonial administration (see subheading British Malaya and Governance) it is the words of the first Prime Minister of Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman – popularly referred to as Bapa Kemerdekaan[17] or Bapa Malaysia[18] for his role in securing Malayan independence from colonial Britain, that were reflective of the post-independence administration's perception of the Orang Asli:

> There was no doubt that the Malays were the indigenous peoples of this land because the original inhabitants did not have any form of civilisation compared with the Malays ... and instead lived like primitives in mountains and thick jungle. (Nicholas, 2000, p. 90)

I questioned my informant Higak regarding Tunku's statement, and he suggested that the statement was actually said to advance a political argument:

> That is political ... very political. Tunku Abdul Rahman came out with that statement when UMNO[19] was in crisis ... in the 80s. Because the Malays had said that the Chinese were immigrants, you know? And one of the MCA[20] leaders, Lee Kim Sai I think, said the Malays were also immigrants from Sumatera, and that was when Tunku Abdul Rahman came out with the statement.

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[17] From the Malay *bapa* meaning father and the morphological derivation of the Sanskrit *maharddhika* to *merdeka* meaning independence, thus 'Father of Independence.'
[18] From the Malay *bapa* meaning father, thus 'Father of Malaysia.'
[19] United Malays National Organization.
[20] Malaysian Chinese Association.

Regardless of the spirit in which the statement was uttered, it would seem from the phrase "lived like primitives in mountains and thick jungle" that Tunku Abdul Rahman was dichotomizing the 'primitive' nomadic lifestyle of the Orang Asli against the 'civilised' settled one of the Malays. The association of a non-sedentary way of life with primitivity by Tunku Abdul Rahman appeared to resonate with the point of view of the earlier colonial administration. Furthermore, it would seem that the statement by Jones (1968, p. 304) that "success in this sphere will encourage more of them [Orang Asli] to follow a settled way of life," in alluding to the initiatives mapped out in the Second Malaya Plan for the Orang Asli, suggests that the colonial and early Malayan administration both viewed the adoption of a sedentary way of life by the Orang Asli as integral to Orang Asli progress toward a 'civilised' way of life. Accordingly, in the Second Malaya Plan, and whenever the subsequent Malaysia Plans referred to the Orang Asli, sedentarization was almost always proposed by the government as a necessary step towards Orang Asli development.

As indicated by Higak's statement, The Second Malaya Plan (1961-1965) appears to be the first Plan that makes explicit mention of the Orang Asli. The fledgling Malayan administration had set aside a total of M$[21] 1.5 million for "projects intended to benefit the jungle community" (Jones, 1968, p. 303) which was channeled into three schemes; the first scheme was the 'Extension of Government Services to the Deep Jungle' which was to improve the lives of Orang Asli communities who practiced swidden-farming, and the management of deep forest administrative, medical, and educational facilities, with provisions made for medical teams and teachers working with Orang Asli communities. The second scheme was the 'Minor Schemes for the Economic Advancement of the Aborigines' which was an attempt to encourage the Orang Asli to settle and forgo nomadic foraging through the provision of livestock such as cattle and goats. In encouraging Orang Asli communities to settle, Eight Pattern Settlements were to be constructed "to set examples to the Orang Asli of what could be accomplished by planned development" (Jones, 1968, p. 303). The final scheme for the Orang Asli in the Second Malaya Plan was called 'Investigations and Surveys' which was aimed at "establishing better contact with remote Orang Asli groups as a result of which it was hoped to introduce the Orang Asli concerned to development plans" (Jones, 1968, p. 303).

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[21] The currency was officially changed from the Malaysian Dollar to Ringgit Malaysia in August 1975 (Okposin & Cheng, 2000, p.79).

In describing the initiatives laid out in the Second Malaya Plan, Jones states – perhaps naively – that "the Malaysian Government, fully aware of its obligations … is now pressing ahead with plans aimed at bringing the Orang Asli to a position where they can enjoy and participate in modern Malaysian life" (Jones, 1968, p. 303). There appears to be two assumptions at work here. The first, which goes back as far as Malaysia's early administration in the 1960s, is that if the Orang Asli were to be 'developed,' they first had to be settled. The second, was that the Orang Asli were unable to develop themselves, and thus the Malayan government was 'obligated' to intervene. In referencing the more recent National Social Policy, Kamarulzaman & Osman (2008, p. 90) describe the administration's policy for Orang Asli development as follows, "Assistance takes the form of encouraging involvement in income-generating activities, namely, land development schemes, vegetable farming, livestock-rearing, retail business and cottage industries." As can be seen, government development programmes for the Orang Asli today still appear to reflect economic initiatives that would necessitate sedentary living as the 'preferred' path to Orang Asli development, underlining the need for sedentarization. While the majority of the Malaysia Plans (The First Malaya Plan, and the First, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Eighth and Tenth Malaysia Plans) appear to suggest that the introduction of agriculture into Orang Asli communities as central to the uplifting of the Orang Asli's socio-economic welfare, all the Malaya and Malaysia plans unanimously hold sedentarization as necessary if the Orang Asli are to be integrated into the socio-economic prosperity of mainstream Malaysia. Below are brief excerpts from the various Malaysia Plans (MP) stating governmental development plans for the Orang Asli:

Advance economic and social status of aborigines and integrate them … by encouraging more new land development, self-help schemes and programmes to provide improved education and health facilities. (Article 844, Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975)

New schools were built [and] an increasing number of pupils were enrolled in secondary schools … [and] 145 medical … posts were established [also] a total of $22 million … for the socio-economic development programs of the Orang Asli during 1976-80. (Article 1445 & 1463, Third Malaysia Plan 1976-1980)

An estimated 5,951 hectares of land were developed for agriculture benefitting 1,270 Orang Asli families … [also] to upgrade the socio-economic wellbeing of Orang Asli community

and to accelerate their integration into the mainstream of society. A sum of $40.1 million is provided for the opening up of new lands for agriculture. (Article 1101 & 1102, Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-1985)

Efforts to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of Orang Asli and encourage the adoption of modern and systematic agricultural practices … to further integrate Orang Asli into the mainstream of development [and] the provision of basic facilities and amenities such as education, health, electricity, water supply, housing and roads. (Fifth Malaysia Plan 1986-1990)

Eradicating poverty in … Orang Asli community … through an integrated, multi-sectoral and village-focused approach. (Article 3.47, Seventh Malaysia Plan: 1996-2000)

Implementation of new land development and resettlement projects … benefited 8,100 Orang Asli families … [and] a special allocation of RM100 million for the ASB-PPRT scheme [with] … RM79 million disbursed by the end of 1999, benefiting 15,820 Orang Asli households. (Article 3.13, Eight Malaysia Plan 2001-2005)

Implement a comprehensive plan to accelerate the development of the Orang Asli community. (Article 71, Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010)

Reduce the incidence of poverty among Orang Asli communities from 50.0% in 2009 to 25.0% in 2015 [through] land development and ownership … to enable them to become land owners and active farmers. The Government will develop Orang Asli reserve land for agriculture use. (Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015)

Although the excerpts provided are brief, they clearly point toward development projects that necessitate sedentarization. The usage of lexemes such as 'advance,' 'integrate', 'provide,' 'benefitting,' 'improve,' 'enable,' in the excerpts above in relation to the government's stand on Orang Asli development, appears to be reminiscent of the sentiment echoed in the statement by Jimin Idris, the former director-general of JHEOA, "We take care of them [Orang Asli] from the womb to the grave" (Duncan, 2008, p. 35) and the broader administrative assumption that the Orang Asli require government intervention if they are to progress. The language of the text notwithstanding, the government has – through the Malaya and Malaysia Plans over the last 60

years – attempted to develop Orang Asli communities. Thus, it is perhaps relevant that we examine how these initiatives have translated into real change for the socio-economic wellbeing of the Orang Asli.

On his study of Orang Asli social indicators in 2000 (based on the government's statistical data for the Orang Asli in 1999), Nicholas observed that 81.4% of the Orang Asli at the time lived below the poverty line – in comparison to 8.5% of the Malaysian population (2000). When considering that at any given year the Orang Asli generally constitutes only 0.5% of the national populace, it comes as a surprise that despite the government's insistent claims of multimillion ringgit projects to 'uplift' the socio-economic welfare of Orang Asli communities, poverty still holds such a pervasive grip among the Orang Asli. In reviewing other social indicators among Orang Asli communities, Nicholas (2000) noted that:

> … only 46.4% of Orang Asli households had some form of piped water, either indoors or outdoors, with 3.9% depending on rivers, streams and wells for their water need (p. 30)

> … toilet facilities as a basic amenity was lacking in 47% of the Orang Asli housing units, compared to only 3% at the Peninsular Malaysia level (p. 30)

> Almost half (49.2%) of the Orang Asli are illiterate while the reminder (38.5%) have mainly primary education [and] about 62% of Orang Asli school children drop out of school each year while 94.4% do not go beyond secondary level (p. 24)

> … are still disproportionately afflicted with … tuberculosis, malaria, leprosy, cholera, typhoid, measles and whooping cough … malnutrition is highly prevalent, even 15 years after … government resettlement schemes (p. 28)

> … recorded a much higher infant mortality rate (median = 51.7 deaths per 1000 infants) than the general population (median = 16.3). Similarly, the crude death rate for the Orang Asli (median = 10.4) was double that of the national population (median = 5.2) (p. 27)

> … life expectancy at birth (estimated at 52 years for females and 54 years for males) was also significantly lower than that that for the national population (68 years for females and 72 years for males) (p. 28)

… of the 42 mothers who died during homebirths in 1994, 25 (60%) were Orang Asli women. Given that the Orang Asli community [was] only 0.5% of the national population … an Orang Asli mother in 1994 was 119 times more likely to die in childbirth than a Malaysian mother nationally (p. 128)

It would seem that the overall socio-economic wellbeing and quality of life for the Orang Asli has yet to rival that of mainstream Malaysia. Indeed, from the statistics given above, it would appear that the Orang Asli are perhaps one of the most (if not *the* most) marginalised groups in Malaysia. Reviewing the work conducted by Tarjimi, Masami & Norhasimah on the Orang Asli's economic health in 2013, it appears that after almost 15 years since the statistics given by Nicholas in 1999, not much has changed for the Orang Asli in terms of their economic wellbeing. While the national poverty rate has seen a reduction to 5.6%, the poverty rate for the Orang Asli is still at a high 76.9 % (Tarjimi, Masami & Norhasimah, 2013) meaning almost three quarters of all Orang Asli still live below the poverty line. In addition, the Orang Asli populace located within the 'hardcore poor' category is 25 times the national average of 1.4% (Tarjimi, Masami & Norhasimah, 2013) translating to 35.2% of the population. While the authors have only focused on the Orang Asli communities' economic health, it appears likely that similar levels of disparity might be reflected in social indicators between the Orang Asli and the rest of the Malaysian populace. It appears that in tandem with this increase in poverty, is an increase in the number of Orang Asli communities who have been dispossessed of their lands (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997; Duncan, 2004; Rusaslina, 2011; Resurreccion & Elmhirst, 2012), and as noted by Nicholas (2000, p. 321):

The realisation that the size of gazetted Orang Asli reserves had actually declined from 20667 hectares in 1990 to 19507.4 hectares in 1999 – a decline of 1159.6 hectares. Similarly approval for gazetting have been withdrawn from 7443.8 hectares of the 36,076 hectares originally approved before 1990.

He juxtaposes the decrease in Orang Asli gazetted lands with the increase in "new applications for gazetted Orang Asli reserves, mainly for new regroupment schemes where Orang Asli are to be relocated to once their original lands have been taken" (Nicholas, 2000, p. 321). This appears to suggest a correlation not of territorial loss and a subsequent rise in poverty, but of *ancestral* territorial loss and the increase in socio-economic challenges seen among Orang Asli

communities. This distinction between territories versus ancestral territories appears to be a critical one, particularly in light of the government's rhetoric of developing the Orang Asli by relocating them to more 'developed' resettlement schemes. As indicated by the statistics above, after a 60-year span, sedentarization initiatives by the government to develop the Orang Asli appear not to be meeting their intended goals. Nicholas (2000) suggests that this may perhaps have less to do with the implementation of development policies for the Orang Asli, and more to do with governmental agendas to tap into the natural resources on Orang Asli lands. Internal colonialism and the appropriation of Orang Asli lands will be discussed in the following section.

4.2. Internal Colonialism and Orang Asli Lands

Despite the withdrawal of colonial power from Third World countries, forms of oppression that might well be termed "colonial" still persist in many of them — the oppression wrought by nationalist Third World governments whose regimes fail to respect the rights of indigenous minorities. For ethnic and regional minorities in many Third World countries, the arrogance and injustice of these governments matches — and often exceeds — those of the departed European colonial regime. (Pfaffenberger, 1984, p. 15)

The dismantling of Western colonialism between the mid to the end of the last century did not necessarily furnish indigenous peoples with the freedom enjoyed by many newly-liberated communities in former colonies. Following the decolonisation process, it seemed that a number of newly-independent nations maintained similar dichotomizing relationships that were found in colonial societies, which meant that for those living in the peripheries of society, such as indigenous minorities, nothing much appeared to have changed. Concomitantly, the modernisation theory was embraced by postcolonial nations as a desired goal toward addressing the socio-economic afflictions of former colonies in Africa, Asia (Bilimoria & Irvine, 2010) and Latin America. In his critique of the modernisation movement among newly-independent countries in relation to ethnic minorities, the Mexican sociologist Pablo González Casanova (1965), in his seminal essay *Internal Colonialism and National Development* defines the concept of 'internal colonialism' as:

A structure of social relations based on domination and exploitation among culturally heterogeneous groups. If it has a specific difference with respect to other relations based on

superordination, it inheres in the cultural heterogeneity which the conquest of some peoples by other historically produces. It is such conquests which permit us to talk not only about cultural differences (which exist between urban and rural populations and between different social classes) but also about differences between civilizations." (Casanova, 1965, p. 33)

It is perhaps necessary to state here that the definition of 'majority' group in the context of internal colonialism does not in itself necessarily indicate a superordinate founded on ethnic homogeneity. As is evident in multicultural states such as Malaysia and the United States, the definition of dominant group(s) in juxtaposition to marginalised or periphery groups differ considerably depending on the issue being problematized. However, in the discourse on development and internal colonialism, it would appear that while the minority group in question is almost always indigenous, the majority group in question may either be relatively homogeneous – as seen in Sweden and Russia – or heterogeneous as seen in Malaysia. The development discourse in Malaysia for instance, while essentially founded on the problematization of apparent discrepancies in the distribution of wealth across the three major ethnies of Malay, Chinese and Indian, appears to consistently single out the Orang Asli in its perceived dichotomies of the advanced collective majority comprising the three aforementioned groups versus the backward minority status of the Orang Asli. Brym & Lie (2009, p. 259) contend that internal colonialism not only causes resentment within a community, but also as a result of systematic discrimination, cultivates racism and reinforces racist attitudes against said community by "segregating the colonized in terms of jobs, housing and social contacts." As discussed earlier in this study, the association between primitivity and the Orang Asli in Malaysia's development discourse is a trope that is decades-long, despite administrative recognition that indigeneity in Malaysia is not homogeneous, as is evident through the administration's diverse operationalization of the term 'indigenous' in the Malaysia Plans to refer to the Malays, the *Pribumi* of Sabah and Sarawak and the Orang Asli.

While both administrative and social relations between Malaysia's three major ethnies of Malay, Chinese and Indian appear to be grounded on the recognition of the socio-cultural differences between the groups, arguably, as members of Malaysia's mainstream collective, they appear to participate in a sentiment of nationality that Durkheim (2014, p. 63) refers to as a "conscience collective" through the sharing of mutual interests, objectives and values in that "the totality of

beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own." In referring to this *conscience collective*, Durkheim further contends: "by definition it is diffused over society as a whole, but nonetheless possesses specific characteristics that make it a distinct reality." While it could be argued that the application of this *conscience collective* in the Malaysian context is problematized by the country's racial politics and the apparent tensions between the various ethnic groups, there does appear to be a mutual recognition of the presence and contribution of each ethnie in the national developmental discourse of mainstream Malaysia as interpreted by the administration and the general populace. Hechter (1975, p. 5) illustrates this creation of national culture as a process in "which core and peripheral cultures … ultimately merge into one all-encompassing cultural system …" with the occasional exception of "the less advanced … because it is not in the interests of the institutions within the core" (p. 9). In his criticism of the establishment of JAKOA as an institution that claims its goal of "integrating the Orang Asli into the wider national society" Nicholas (2000, p. 109) contends that "the existence of a separate agency to look into Orang Asli affairs serves as a constant reminder of their minority status."

In would seem that in juxtaposition to the wider Malaysian *conscience collective* and creation of national culture, is the apparent exclusion of Orang Asli communities as peripheral members of the broader Malaysian community, who, despite their objections, are widely regarded as anti-development by the government. It would appear that the Malaysian administration, with its formative powers to create and implement developmental agendas for the country, appears to do so by prioritizing the developmental interests of the government and the mainstream majority at the expense of peripheral communities such as the Orang Asli. Keal (2003, p. 47) contends that this "marginalization of indigenous peoples [through] the maintenance of cultural difference" is operationalized in internal colonialism which views the *cultural difference* between mainstream society and the indigenous as *"something negative"* which, when carried over into the administration's discourse on the Orang Asli, gives rise to statements such as "Malaysian developers and JHEOA officials agree[ing] [the Orang Asli] are *kurang maju*" [i.e. rather backward]' (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997, p. 92). As discussed in the earlier section on the Malaysia Plans, development plans that do involve the Orang Asli appear to unequivocally mandate sedentarization of Orang Asli communities. The government appears to consistently problematize semi-nomadic Orang Asli cultures as the reason for the failures and

inconsistencies in implementing developmental initiatives for the Orang Asli. It is perhaps important then to investigate why governmental development initiatives for the Orang Asli are so focused on the need for sedentarization.

As indicated earlier in the discussion on the Malaysia Plans, Malaysia's economic and developmental trajectory was largely modelled on Western development and modernisation models (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997). The country practiced a *laissez-faire* economic system that saw minimal government intervention, until its departure from the system in 1970 (Nelson, Meerman & Embong, 2008) as a result of the Sino-Malay racial riots of May 1969, after which the government introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) to address what it viewed as growing socio-economic disparities between the *bumiputera* and non-*bumiputera* groups. After 20 years, the NEP was officially terminated in 1990, although it "still takes a center stage when ethnicized positions of power and access to resources are being contested" (Holst, 2012, p. 89). A more neo-liberalist approach to development was adopted in the 1990s "that promotes and advocates privatization as a means of reducing government intervention in, and expenditure on, development programmes and in the process, facilitating greater 'free market' involvement (Gomes, 2007, p. 60) which was achieved "through export orientation and capital intensive manufactures" (p. 49). Regardless of the economic system in place, it appeared that the Malaysia Plans were resolute in furthering a capitalist model of economic development for Malaysia. A British legacy in Malaysia was the introduction of cash crops into the country during colonial rule, with the two most important being rubber and oil palm. Malaysia, recognizing the growing global need for latex and oil palm, and its own need for capital, strategically tapped into this resource and included in the vast majority of its Malaysia Plans ambitious rubber and oil palm plantation projects to be implemented in the states of western Peninsular Malaysia – primarily in the states of Kedah, Selangor, Malacca and Johor. This in turn necessitated aggressive clearing of forested areas in order to meet the high demand for the raw materials so crucial to an industrializing economy (Cheng & Le Clue, 2010).

The large-scale rubber and oil palm cultivation projects in Peninsular Malaysia necessitated the need for fertile, arable land, much of which overlapped with Orang Asli territories. Conversion of Orang Asli forested lands into vast rubber and oil palm monoculture plantations, and the subsequent governmental sedentarization of the Orang Asli through cash crop intiatives, "have

largely destroyed the basis of the traditional economy" (Endicott, 2016, p. 228) of a number of Orang Asli groups. As noted by Beckford (1972, p. 177), "inherent in a plantation system is a tendency toward monopolization of land by plantation owners as a device to deprive the majority of people access to an independent livelihood and therefore to ensure the plantation of labour supplies." To date, almost 2.52 million hectares of rainforests in Peninsular Malaysia have been converted into oil palm plantations, much of which were Orang Asli lands. The argument that land loss to monoculture has direct and long-lasting implications for the ability of indigenous people to provide both for themselves and their communities is articulately expressed by Duncan (2008) in his criticism of monoculture oil palm plantations on indigenous lands in Sumatra and Kalimantan, where he states that land loss to monoculture is a much larger threat even when juxtaposed against the destructive timber concession industry simply because in a monoculture, no natural resources remain. In referencing Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1990), Sittirak (2000, pp. 24-25) contends that as a result of such neocolonialist development and modernisation strategies,

> People lose control of their decision-making power over the uses of the local natural resources which had previously been determined by local collective effort based on the consideration of social and environmental needs. Moreover since these natural resources are the basis for both a traditional economy and women's sustaining economy, the conversion generates the condition for local scarcity as 'resources which supported their survival [are] absorbed into the market economy while they themselves [are] excluded and displaced by it.

It would appear then that access to resource-rich Orang Asli lands forms the underlying *raison d'être* of governmental sedentarization schemes for the Orang Asli. The proximity with which the Orang Asli live and are associated with the forest hinders government plans to access the natural resources contained within these areas through activities that "include logging, mining and plantation agriculture" (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997, p. 89) in its attempt to harness resources that it views as necessary to its economy as a newly-industrialized market economy. It follows then that against the backdrop of Malaysia's aggressive land development schemes, the single most critical issue to the Orang Asli developmental discourse today appears to be the question of customary land ownership (Gomes, 2004; Nicholas, 2004).

The argument posited by both Shiva and Sittirak carry greater implications for communities such as the Orang Asli for whom hunting-foraging lifestyles are central to their subsistence and socio-cultural practices. As noted by Nowak (2016), by practising the Torrens land title system of land ownership (see subheading 3.4.2. The Aboriginal Peoples Act of 1954), the state adopts the view that all Orang Asli lands are properties of the state, because "land not secured by an official title was by default state-owned, *terra nullius,* 'no man's land'" (Endicott, 2016, p. 336), and while some of these lands are gazetted as Orang Asli reserves, such "administrative action does not accord the Orang Asli with any ownership rights over such lands" (Nicholas, 2004, p. 33). A case in point is the development of much of the prime real estate surrounding Kuala Lumpur Tower (*Menara Kuala Lumpur*), *Bukit Nenas* and the *Damansara Perdana* areas which were indigenous Temuan territories. As private and governmental modernisation plans expanded in Kuala Lumpur, the need for residential and commercial developments schemes prompted the government to carry-out large-scale property development projects – many of which engulfed substantial tracts of Temuan land. The forced relocation of two Temuan communities to *Kampung Gerachi* in order to clear approximately 600 hectares of forest area (JOANGOHutan, 2006) to construct the Sungai Selangor Dam (completed in 2002) in Selangor is another such case in point. To this end, a number of researchers have pointed out instances where Orang Asli lands have been appropriated for the construction of golf courses, airports, dams, and roads (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997).

In the wake of the second Communist threat in the mid-1970s, and to pre-emptively avoid Orang Asli communities from once again harboring Communists, the Malaysian government (in shadowing the example of the colonial administration) initiated a second attempt at Orang Asli regroupment and resettlement. It would seem that this sedentarization scheme was soon tied in with the government's development initiatives for the Orang Asli in an attempt to seek legitimacy through the following claims,

  i)   substituting swiddening for settled cash crop agriculture,
  ii)   reducing the Communist threat, and,
  iii)   reuniting the Orang Asli with other communities in the country

(Duncan, 2003, pp. 41-42)

Allegedly, a large part of the government's rational for regroupment and resettlement was the notion that the Orang Asli were being left behind in the country's path to progress. The First (1966-1970) and Second (1971-1975) Malaysia Plans ambiguously (and very briefly) stated the necessity for Orang Asli communities to be settled in order to enable their integration into Malaysian society. While there is mention of the need to "advance the economic and social status of aborigines" (Article 844, Second Malaysia Plan) there is no mention of how this is to be done. It is with the Third Malaysia Plan (1976-1980) that the government first explicitly mentions cash crops as its strategy to address Orang Asli poverty. This strategy was to be repeated in the Fourth and Fifth Malaysia Plans, however it would seem that the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Malaysia Plans make no mention on the role of agriculture. The Tenth Plan however states that agriculture will be an instrument through which the administration aims "to reduce the incidence of poverty among Orang Asli communities from 50.0% in 2009 to 25.0% in 2015." State development models for Orang Asli modernisation was to involve monocrop cultivation such as rubber, oil palm, and other cash crops (Mohd. Tap, 1990; Duncan, 2008), although such initiatives for the Orang Asli appear to have had mixed results.

Much of the government's development initiatives for the Orang Asli appeared to have been modeled after similar economic plans for mainstream Malay communities, and several government-led development plans – mostly consisting of rubber plantations – were introduced into Orang Asli settlements. As noted by Endicott (2016), JAKOA is the vehicle through which the government attempts to 'modernise' Orang Asli economies, "by which is meant getting them to replace their subsistence activities with activities directed toward market exchange, selling commodities or labour, and buying food and other necessities" through the cultivation of "cash crops, including rubber trees, oil palms, coconut trees and fruit trees" (Endicott, 2016, pp. 22-23). However, the FELCRA[22] models developed for the Orang Asli in the early and mid 1990s proved to be unsuccessful among the Orang Asli who felt that the FELCRA developmental model was unsuited to their idea of land use (Lim, 1997), primarily because such land use schemes involve the growing of cash crops that take years to mature, running contrary to the day-to-day harvesting of forest commodities carried out by the Orang Asli community for subsistence (Mohd. Tap, 1990). While communities closer to the mainstream population appear

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[22] Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority. In Malay, *Lembaga Penyatuan dan Pemulihan Tanah Persekutuan.*

to derive incomes from oil palm and rubber agriculture (Reita, 2007), and as noted by Wazir and Mohd. Razha (2016) in their work with the Hma' Meri, have made a "successful transition to life in the market economy" (Endicott, 2016, p.28), other groups appear to have been disenfranchised by sedentary agriculture practices, "having experienced 'poverty eradication' programmes that do not fulfill their purposes" (Nah, 2004, p. 69). Endicott further contends that the hunter-gatherer Semang communities, which include the Kintak, Jahai, Batek, Lanoh (as well as the Menraq and Kensiu) have been especially affected by cash-crop induced sedentarization, citing the Jahai as an example whereby the community's health "has seriously deteriorated due to pollution and communicable diseases" (Endicott, 2016, p. 28). It also appears that some plantations were initiated to depose Orang Asli from their lands, as contended by Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker (1997, p. 103), "the main effect of private plantations and FELDA[23] schemes on Orang Asli is to displace them from their land" citing an instance where 5000 acres of Orang Asli lands were cleared in Kampung Chawak in the state of Perak, leaving only 100 acres of forest, with the authors further adding that "FELDA schemes often bring displacement without compensation."

In criticising government cash crop initiatives for the Orang Asli as a supposed means of socio-economic improvement, Khor (1994, p. 123) contended that:

> There exists an over-simplified assumption that introduction to cash-cropping will lead to increased income, which will provide more money for food, and in turn result in improvement in nutritional status …. In reality, relocation entails cultural uprooting and lifestyle changes which may not be overcome by the provision of physical facilities and economic incentives only.

In referencing the Menraq people, Gomes (2007) narrated the implications of the Orang Asli settlement programmes in the mid 1970s on the Menraq's hunter-gatherer culture:

> The early years [of] resettlement economy was a domestically unproductive, dole-driven economy … fulfilled by external inputs rather than through local effort. This should not be interpreted to say that the [Menraq] had developed a dole mentality ... On the contrary, the ration system was very much in keeping with their foraging mindset, where to the Menraq,

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[23] Federal Land Development Authority.

government handouts … [was] another source of food open to them to 'forage.' Waiting for rations rather than working on some other activity makes perfect economic sense for opportunistic foragers like the Menraq, who would seize any chance that presented itself in order to eke out a living. (Gomes, 2007, p. 116)

Governmental rhetoric of the Orang Asli as being a community against development have been challenged by Orang Asli spokespersons who have, on a number of accounts, insisted that they are not opposed to development and modernisation efforts but wish for developmental initiatives that are more attuned to Orang Asli socio-cultural values and "economic development that leads to their overall wellbeing" (Nah, 2004, p. 69). A case in point that reflects the incongruity between the government's perception of indigenous development needs and their actual needs is the study carried out by Lyndon et al. (2013) on the *Pribumi* Bidayuh people of Sarawak – an indigenous group from Sarawak and West Kalimantan unrelated to the Orang Asli – which revealed that while the federal government only had seven quality-of-life indicators with which they based their developmental projects among the Bidayuh, the Bidayuh themselves identified 23 quality-of-life indicators that they felt should have been used as indicators in development plans concerning their community:

[As] the meaning of quality of life that is understood by the rural Bidayuh … involves aspects such as residence, income, infrastructure, land, accessibility, health, education, family relationship as well as relationship between the community members … (Lyndon et al., 2013, p. 33)

The following statement was made by an Orang Asli headman in response to the Johor's Chief Minister's development projects for the state's Orang Asli,

We are not the same Orang Asli community as thirty years ago which was then set in its primitive ways and had rejected development … The government should not think the Orang Asli were stupid people who did not understand what was good for them. (New Straits Times, 27.1.1997)

It would seem that although previous Orang Asli protests of governmental and private development plans on their lands centered on the deep spiritual and cultural connections of the Orang Asli peoples to these lands, increasingly, the Orang Asli are also aware of the implications

of land loss to the material and economic wellbeing of their communities (Nicholas, 2004). It would appear that for the Orang Asli, the loss of ancestral lands brings with it not only the erosion and extinction of cultural and spiritual identities (Duncan, 2004), but also those of economic opportunities – both in terms of subsistence and trade. Ostensibly, their "ability to be self-subsistent and self-reliant [is] drastically impaired" (Nicholas, 1990, p. 78) due to the replacement of forested areas into vast tracts of monoculture which appear to be major contributing factors to the collapse of their indigenous economies (Dentan, 2004) and perhaps a contributing factor in rural-urban Orang Asli migration.

4.3. Malaynization though Islamization

To be a Malay for the purposes of the Constitution you need not be of Malay ethnic origin. An Indian is a Malay if he professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks Malay and conforms to Malay custom." [A quote by Tun Mohammed Sufian Hashim] (Nicholas, 2000, pp. 76-77).

While the previous section discussed the Malaysian administration's economic development plans for the Orang Asli, this section will attempt to explore the sociocultural agenda of the government with regard to the Orang Asli community. Prior to this, it may perhaps be of significance to explore the dynamics of ethnic construction within the majority population, which concomitantly happens to be the ethnic group primarily associated with Orang Asli affairs – the Malay. In examining the Malay ethnic group, it is perhaps equally necessary to examine the role of Islam in the construction of the Malay ethnie.

The Malay ethnic group occupies a unique position within Malaysia's ethnic discourse as discourse on the Malay ethnie in Malaysia is almost always framed against the 'racial' backdrop of the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups; as such, reference to these groups is necessary in framing the Malay community. While the circumstance of being Chinese or Indian is associated primarily with the supposed physiological manifestations of ethnic heritage (followed by religious background), I contend that the Malays appear to be subject to this physiological categorization to a much lesser extent, with religion appearing to be the primary marker for 'Malayness.' By stating this, I do not by any means suggest that the Malays are not considered a racial category in Malaysia – quite the contrary – they are ethnically defined by the

administration as Malaysia's definitive indigenous group, as discussed in the Malaysia Plans and other governmental documents pertaining to Malaysian indigeneity referred to elsewhere in this study. Being Malay in Malaysia has more than just ethnic implications: it also signifies the individual's access to a range of socio-economic privileges that are largely excluded from the country's Chinese and Indian ethnicities. These privileges are far ranging, and relate to education, property, finance, land claims, commerce and politics, among others.

Earlier in this study (see subheading 3.2 Indigeneity in Malaysia) I discussed the historical construct of the Malay ethnic group, and the role of the British in cementing its construct as an ethnic denominator indicating difference from the Chinese and Indians. In defining the Malay, it is perhaps first necessary to explore what it means to *be* Malay in post-independence Malaysia. The often-cited Article 160 of the Malaysian Constitution states that a person (having been born in either Malaysia or Singapore) is considered Malay if they fulfill the following three criteria: i) is an adherent of Islam, ii) is an habitual speaker of the Malay language, and iii) practises Malay customs (Simon, 2012; Joseph, 2014; Endicott, 2016). Joseph (2014) contends that the earliest reference made to the fulfillment of a set of criteria in defining the Malay can be found in the Malay Reservations Act of 1913, where a Malay was "any person belonging to the Malay race, [spoke] Malay or any other Malayan language [and] professed Islam" (Joseph, 2014, p. 26). It would appear that the definition of the Malay 'race' since its first mention in 1913, has undergone important changes, particularly in the de-categorization of 'the Malay race' to the arguably more fluid 'practises Malay customs,' and from the previously more accommodating 'any other Malayan language,' to the arguably more restrictive 'habitual speaker of Malay.'

In writing on the influences of language and religion in the construction of sociocultural identities, Holst (2012, pp. 28-29) contends that sociocultural constructs based on these two identifiers "easily become salient points of reference in a society," and in his application of this theory on the Malay ethnic group, argues that "as a sociocultural identity defined by … speaking Malay … [and] … practicing Islam," the Malay construct is "probably the largest reference group that Malays can somehow relate to – at least on an abstract level[24]… because the former [Malay language] enables people to communicate about the values derived … from the latter [Islam]" – both of which I contend are more salient manifestations of the Malay identity in

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[24] Here referring to Anderson's *Imagined Communities*

contrast to the more abstract *mengamalkan adat budaya Melayu*[25]. As a Malaysian myself, while I find Holst's insight into the construct of the Malay ethnie within Malaysia's ethnic discourse particularly illuminating, I contend that even within the critical framework of language and religion, that it is by far religion that appears to be central to the construction of the Malay ethnie in Malaysia. I will proceed to examine the role of religion as the primary marker for Malaysian Malayness by first addressing the ethnocultural and linguistic spheres of Malay racial formation.

As discussed earlier in the study under the subheading 'Indigeneity in Malaysia,' the Malay 'race' as it is known today appears to be an amalgamation of the various Malay ethnies that were settled in Peninsular Malaysia originating from various areas across the historical pre-colonial *Nusantara*[26] area, with *Nusantara* historically encompassing "the present Brunei Darussalam, various parts of western and eastern Indonesia, Malaysia, Patani in southern Thailand, parts of the southern Philippines, and Singapore" (Woolf, 2014, p. 586). Barnard (2004) contends that the consolidation of such a diverse group of peoples under a homogeneous Malay ethnie by the colonial administration was done on the basis of perceived similarities within the "broader community of Muslims of a variety of ethnic backgrounds … [who] … whatever their mother tongue … took part in the widespread Malay-language 'civilization' of Islam" (Barnard, 2004, p. 8) suggesting that despite the ethno-linguistic differences, the commonality of Islam among the various Nusantara ethnies was instrumental in this early crystallization of the Malay racial category by the British.

In this regard, it would appear that the Malay ethnic group first began to be regarded as a distinct homogeneous racial category defined by its Islamic faith vis-à-vis the Chinese and the Indians through the operative definition of Malay as it was coined by the colonial administration (Holst, 2012). It would appear that this apparent lack of emphasis on geographical origin or ethnic identity in defining Malayness continues to persist in post-independence Malaysia, and is made manifest through Malaysia's Prime Ministers both past and present – all of whom are of mixed ancestry and/or have recent non-Malay admixture (Wain, 2012). Arguably, their acceptance by both the Malaysian administration and the broader Malay community (Wain, 2012) as being Malays – despite their mixed ethnic backgrounds – is reflected in their *de facto* position as

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[25] Malay for "practices Malay customs."
[26] Predating the modern Indonesian concept of *Nusanatara* which only refers to the Indonesian archipelago.

President of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) – the Malaysian political party "that regards itself as the champion of Malay rights" (Boon, 2002, p. 186). Indicating the permeability of the 'racial' dimensions of the Malay ethnie, this non-racial yet still racial categorization of Malay as defined by the Malaysian constitution – while providing for an interesting paradox – underlines the non-racial aspect of the Malay ethnie as presented in the opening statement of this subchapter by Tun Mohammed Sufian Hashim.

Independent of Islam, the functions of the Malay language and Malay culture as markers of Malayness appear to be problematized by the occurrence of communities that largely function in the Malay/Malay-creole language spheres, and/or have adopted Malay customs, yet are not considered Malay by the government or the broader Malay community; this would include the *Chitty* community who are an ethnic group resulting from the 16th century intermarriage of South Indian traders with local Malay women (Abu, 2014) and who speak a creole Malay known as Chitty Malay (Noriah, 2009); the *Peranakan* community who have also adopted Malay attire and culture and who speak a Malay creole known as Baba Malay (Beng, 2003); and the *Kristang*, who are descendants of 16th century Portuguese-Malay unions and who speak the *Kristang* language, a creole that is lexically Malayo-Portuguese and structurally Malay (Baxter, 2012). Despite the substantial Malay influences in the culturo-linguistic spheres of these communities, they continue to practise their respective religions; the *Chitty* are Hindu, the *Peranakan* are largely Taoist, and the *Kristang* are Catholics. In juxtaposition to these groups is another mixed community – the *Jawi Peranakan*. The *Jawi Peranakan* community flourished in mid-19th century Malaya prior to its virtual absorption into the mainstream Malay community at the turn of the 20th century. The *Jawi Peranakan* community was a result of intermarriages among local Indian, Arab and Malay bloodlines (Daniels, 2004) and were ethnoculturally mixed like the *Chitty, Peranakan* and *Kristang*. However, the *Jawi Peranakan* was considered part of the broader Malay community, because in contrast to the three aforementioned groups, the *Jawi Peranakan* were Muslim. Prior to their complete absorption into the Malay community, "they identified easily with, and were accepted by Malays within a broad rubric of a Malay-Muslim society in which ethnicity or descent was secondary" (Khor, Nasution, Loh & Yeoh, 2009, p. 16).

I have through the brief discussion above, attempted to argue that despite the constitutional necessity for an individual claiming Malayness to fulfill all three requirements as stated in Article 160, it would appear that over the more ambiguous culturo-linguistic requirements, it is the individual's connection with the Islamic faith that appears to be the defining characteristic to the claim to Malaysian Malayness and which is central to the formation of the notion of a 'Malay' racial group within the broader context of Malaysia's discourse on race. In bridging the above argument to the Orang Asli, I reference Endicott (2016, p. 21) who argues "since many Orang Asli could already speak Malay and Malay customs were highly variable, the major task was to get the Orang Asli to adopt Islam." Having explained the role of Islam in the formation of the Malay ethnie, I will now turn toward the government's proselytisation initiatives for the Orang Asli. As discussed earlier, governmental claims for development plans among the Orang Asli appear to largely revolve around the rhetoric of assimilating the community into Malaysia's "national mainstream" (Duncan, 2004, p. 29). However, it is perhaps necessary to investigate what this rhetoric of 'national mainstream' actually means. It is clear that the matter of indigeneity in Malaysia is a contentious one, and indicative of this is the administration's ruling that discourse pertaining to indigeneity is an offence that is punishable by law (Duncan, 2004) under Section 3(1)(f) of the Seditions Act of 1948, which states:

> … to question any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty or prerogative established or protected by the provisions of Part III of the Federal Constitution or Article 152, 153 or 181 of the Federal Constitution.

Of the three Articles mentioned, it is Article 153 that refers to the matter of indigeneity, which states:

> (1) It shall be the responsibility of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities in accordance with the provisions of this Article.

> (2) … the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall … safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and to ensure the reservation for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak of … positions in the public service … and of scholarships, exhibitions and other similar … privileges or special facilities…

As is apparent from the articles above, while explicit mention is made of the Malay and *Pribumi* peoples of Sabah and Sarawak as groups deserving of special interests on account of their status as the indigenous peoples of Malaysia, the Orang Asli seem not to have been included by the Federal Constitution as members of Malaysia's indigenous community. Dentan, Endicott, Gomes and Hooker (1997) contend that this seeming invisibility of the Orang Asli within the country's indigeneity discourse is also apparent in other areas of Malaysia's indigeneity discourse, because:

> The government's ultimate goal is to absorb the Orang Asli into the Malay population. Officials do everything they can bureaucratically to expunge the idea that Orang Asli differ from Malays [and] submerge Orang Asli population figures in the Malay category. (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes and Hooker, 1997, p. 142)

It is through this statement that the apparent invisibility of the Orang Asli in the Federal Constitution begins to grant us some insight into the government's primary agenda for the Orang Asli, concomitantly explaining the doublespeak behind the 'national mainstream' rhetoric – that of Orang Asli assimilation into the broader Muslim Malay community. In referencing the 1961 Ministry of the Interior's Statement of Policy for the Orang Asli, Duncan (2004, p. 29) contends that the early administration's goal for the Orang Asli was "their ultimate integration with the Malay section of the community" suggesting a "close … but … culturally distinct" relationship with the Malay community. However, due to pressure from the Islamic Affairs section of the Prime Minister's department, "by the early 1980s the department [JHEOA] had tilted decisively in favor of assimilation" (Duncan, 2004, p. 29) and "the Islamization of the whole Orang Asli community" (JHEOA, 1983, p. 2) through direct measures such as "building community halls containing Muslim prayer halls (*surau*) in Orang Asli villages, [and] posting 'community development officers' trained by the Department of Religious Affairs in Orang Asli communities" (Endicott, 2016, p. 21). In 1990, JHEOA's former Director-General Jimin Idris expressed the department's intention of fully assimilating the Orang Asli into mainstream society "preferably as an Islamized subgroup of the Malays" (Todd, 1990, p. 11).

Writing decades ago in 1968, Jones – in referring to the integration process outlined in the 1961 Statement Policy – foresaw the government's plan for Orang Asli assimilation: "all this seems strongly to suggest that the metamorphosis envisaged for the Orang Asli involves their adoption

of Islam and their disappearance presumably into the mass of rural Malays" (Jones, 1968, p. 302). Assimilation into mainstream society as it is imagined here suggests assimilation into the broader Malay community. Dentan, Endicott, Gomes and Hooker (1997, p. 144) contend that this process is encouraged through "positive discrimination" practices where Muslim converts are supplied with "better housing, income-earning opportunities, schooling, health and transportation facilities than it supplies non-Muslims" (Duncan, 2004, p. 45). Endicott contends that while the construction of Muslim prayer-houses or the posting of 'community development officers' are not regular features of the government's Islamic proselytisation efforts today, "the Islamization programme is still active, and government officials threaten to arrest, under the Internal Security Act, anyone who interferes with it" (Endicott, 2016, p. 21).

The primary reason for the government's assimilationist policy for the Orang Asli appears largely to be related to Malaysia's racial politics. The presence of Orang Asli groups that predate pan-Malay settlement in Malaysia by tens of thousands of years (Frazee, 2002; Glover 2004) undermines the Malay claim to indigeneity; subsequently, the administration's agenda in assimilating the Orang Asli into the broader Malay community through Islamization would appear to *turn* the Orang Asli into Malays, known colloquially among the Orang Asli as '*masuk Melayu*' – literally 'entering/becoming Malay' (Gomes, 2007, p. 149). Ultimately, it would appear that the absorption of the Orang Asli community would leave the Malay as the definitive indigenous hegemony within Malaysia's indigeneity discourse. Concomitantly, the assimilation of Orang Asli communities into the mainstream Malay community would appear to suggest no further threats to the concept of Malay supremacy and ownership of the land (Endicott, 2000), known in Malaysia by the rhetoric of "*Ketuanan Melayu*" – literally 'Malay Ownership' [of the land]. Gomes (2007, p. 150) describes the assimilationist process as "a form of ethnocide, a means of eradicating the Orang Asli and in the process removing a sore point in Malay claims to indigenous status." I discussed the issue of Islamic proselytisation with Higak:

> To kill a race, you just kill the language, you know? So in order [for] the [Islamic] missionary to teach the Orang Asli and their children in [an] easier way, they have to learn Malay. So it's easy to transfer knowledge from the missionaries, from the *ustaz*[27]. They start teaching Malay language from the very beginning, and then when they [Orang Asli] are Muslim, it's a must to

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[27] Of Persian origin, *ostad* meaning an Islamic scholar.

leave your traditional culture. So they are bringing up a new race you know? One of the DG [Director-General] for JHEOA at that time, said, "We must target the later generation, second, third and fourth generation, not the present generation," so they are doing that. So despite development programs and education for the Orang Asli, JAKOA is also … you know, involved in Malay-nizing the Orang Asli. They call it *'masuk Melayu*,' so that is through religion.

In order to maintain an Islamic hegemony in proselytisation efforts among the Orang Asli, JAKOA instrumentalizes the Aborigines Peoples Act of 1954, in which Article 14 (4-5) explicitly states that penalties will be incurred on non-Orang Asli individuals attempting to enter Orang Asli settlements (Duncan, 2004) without departmental approval, thus circumventing Christian proselytizing by "excluding Christian missionaries from Orang Asli communities" (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes and Hooker, 1997, p. 146), primarily as Christian Orang Asli converts would thwart the administration's aim for the Orang Asli's assimilation into the Malay community (Duncan, 2004). Higak, a Semai, suggests that the Christianization of Orang Asli communities also has implications for the broader Orang Asli community, and he pointed out the issue of fragmentation among Orang Asli Christians in particular, saying:

They [Orang Asli] have Gospel Hall, they have Methodist, they have Catholic, they have groups from Korea, and they have groups from East Malaysia. So many of them ... and they are not united. They are split … you know?

I wanted to speak to a respondent from another Orang Asli community to see if perhaps this point of view was shared, and queried Zaitun, a Christian Semelai, regarding Higak's statement on the fragmentation of the Orang Asli due to exposure to missionaries:

Yes, it's true actually ... what he said is true. There is some sort of truth inside the statement … you know? Religion brought segregation into [Orang Asli] society. I didn't believe it before, and [initially] I refused to believe it. But when I went back [to the settlement] and then studied the community … I realized it is. [It] used to be *puyang*[28] who actually brought the community together, but now because the community is really close to outsiders [missionaries] and then these outsiders bring in religion and new interpretations … and then

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[28] Shaman in the Semelai community.

they have to rely on these outsiders … so it became complicated and brought a lot of segregation into the society.

Zaitun went on to say that despite religious differences, members from the broader Orang Asli community still come together when there are issues concerning land rights – regardless of religious differences.

In referring to the 1961 Statement Policy of Orang Asli integration, Jones (1968, p. 303) made an observation regarding the government's assimilationist aspirations for the Orang Asli into the broader Malay community: "if this [assimilation] is indeed the intention it would be interesting to know if the Orang Asli are aware and approve of what is planned for them in the long run." It would seem that almost 50 years later, the Orang Asli continue to resist assimilation into the Malay community. Duncan (2004, p. 48) contends that the resistance seen among the Orang Asli who refuse to convert to Islam is because "they simply do not want to 'become Malays.'" Duncan (2004) states that as some Orang Asli communities are aware of the government's agenda of Orang Asli assimilation into the mainstream Malay community, they resort to adopting Christianity as a means of resisting assimilation "and preserving traditional values, since converting Christians poses legal problems but converting 'animists' does not" (Duncan, 2004, p. 47). I have also found the same to be true over the course of my interviews, being informed by some respondents that certain Orang Asli individuals have converted to Christianity in order to avoid harassment by Islamic missionaries to convert to Islam.

This is not to say that no Orang Asli communities have converted to Islam. However, when writing in 1997 (p. 46), Duncan notes that the figures were "unimpressive" and that by 1997, despite active proselytisation efforts by the government spanning almost half a century, only "16 percent of Orang Asli were Muslims" suggesting that the government's initiative for Orang Asli assimilation into the Malay mainstream through Islamization appears largely to have failed (Duncan, 2004, pp. 46-48). Writing in 2007, the success rate appears to have further dropped, with Gomes (2007, p. 46) observing that "only about 10 percent of Orang Asli have become Muslims." In describing Muslim Orang Asli converts, Duncan (1997, p. 46) observes, "many 'converts' are Muslims in name only. They do not believe or even understand Islamic doctrine, and they follow few if any Muslim practices."

Similar observations were made during my session with respondents, with a number of them indicating that many Muslim converts among the Orang Asli are only Muslims on paper. According to the following Jakun respondents:

They don't practice, it's only on paper … they still associate with their non-Muslim relatives, and their traditional ways. There doesn't appear to be a difference to me (Hasibah, late 20s).

They build a mosque, but the mosque is empty. The villagers are still drinking alcohol, and others do not even pray (Supian, 25).

A number of respondents have also voiced their disappointments in what they refer to as deceitful conversions, stating that illiterate Orang Asli communities are sometimes unknowingly made to sign official conversion papers to Islam. According to Pahang-born Supian:

From what I can see about the spread of Islam in my community, most members of my community were converted without their knowledge. What really disappoints me is when certain parties take advantage of an opportunity to Islamize my community. I don't think it's right. I think it's a form of oppression. These people [Islamic missionaries] give my people a bag of rice or sugar, and then Islamize them.

Consider the following excerpt from Geriheg, a Semelai elder in his 70s, on his experience with Muslim missionaries:

Saya sini pun pernah datang orang ... orang ugama Islam ... suruh masuk Islam. Saya cakap saya tak boleh Islam ... Kristian kita boleh makan apa saja tapi kalau segi dia punya ... apa undang? Segi agama tu ... sama juga dengan orang Islam. Kira-kira kan? Sama jugak kalau kita patuh undang-undang dia. Kita tak boleh jahat. Kita tak boleh buat apa-apa dengan orang. Nak buat jahat ke .... nak perli orang, nak caci orang ... tak boleh. Itulah ... kira samalah. Tapi kalau Islam, dia satu hari lima waktu dia sembahyang. Tapi kalau Kristian, dia satu minggu sekali. Itu aje. Kalau barang makan-makanan, kita boleh macam apa saje kita boleh makan kan?

Translation:

> I've been approached by Muslim missionaries … asking me to convert into Islam. I said "I can't." In Christianity you can eat anything you want … yet from the perspective of their value systems they are the same as Muslims. More or less, yes? The laws are the same. We cannot be evil. We cannot harm others. You cannot be bad, or ridicule others, or gossip. You can't. So … it [Christianity] is about the same [with Islam]. But in Islam, you have to pray five times a day. In Christianity, it's just once a week. That's it. And we can eat whatever we want [in Christianity] can't we?

Orang Asli converts continue to negotiate resistances in attempts to hold on to their indigenous identities. Although a number of Orang Asli converts appear to conflate publicly articulated ideals of Islam with their behavioural norms due to pressure from JAKOA and the administration to assimilate, my personal experience with Muslim Kensiu converts in Baling during my stay with the community in 2012 revealed rather relaxed attitudes toward the adherence of Islamic practices such as the wearing of the *tudung,* the Islamic headscarf as it is known in Malay: for instance, donning the *tudung* in anticipation of visits by JAKOA or Muslim clergy, but the swift removal of it upon their departure. It would seem that my experience is not unique: in describing his experience with the Menraq community in Rual, Gomes (2007, p. 153) observed "several incidents at Rual that also go against the assumption that the people [the Menraq] have 'accepted Islam fully.'" Nobuto (2007, p. 491) in summarizing the Orang Asli's response to the administration's assimilationist attitudes, states:

> The Islamization policy has caused great resentment toward the government and the JHEOA in particular [and] the Orang Asli resist joining regroupment schemes in part, because doing so exposes them to relentless pressure to convert to Islam.

Higak, in explaining the administration's strategy for converting the Orang Asli, hints at changes in the government's approach toward achieving this goal due to unsatisfactory results, stating:

> Islamization those days, they say they want to come into the [Orang Asli] society from the 'front door,' that means they want to Islamize all the well-off Orang Asli first. People who are working, people who are involve in business. They have so many strategies [but] I don't want to say only lah ... because ... it's very sensitive you know? I think one or two you know … to

offer them wives for instance. They ... they target for like 20 years [but] it is not achieved, [so] now they come from the 'back side.' That's why they Islamize the Orang Asli from the interior [remote]. You go interior Orang Asli [communities], almost 80 … 70 percent of them are Islam [sic] already.

4.4. Orang Asli NGOs and Indigenous Activism

In response to perceived dissatisfactions with JAKOA, the Orang Asli community has over the years formed a number of national Orang Asli-led organisations and networks aimed at protecting their interests in Malaysia, which include the Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Association – *Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia* (POASM) – formed in 1977, and the Center for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC). POASM started out in its early years as a small gathering of Orang Asli individuals who were employees of JHEOA (now JAKOA), but which by 2011 had grown to an organisation that was almost 10 000 strong (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997). COAC was established in 1989 and is headed by Dr. Colin Nicholas, a prominent lawyer and activist who works with Orang Asli communities for the recognition of ancestral Orang Asli lands, and land rights claims. As part of its advocacy work with the Orang Asli, COAC provides legal and financial aid to Orang Asli individuals in court proceedings involving land rights issues, and has successfully won a number of court cases for Orang Asli individuals and communities. A case in point is the 2010 landmark victory in the 14-year long *Sagong Tasi* case between 26 Temuan families in the state of Selangor whose lands were appropriated by the state for the construction of the Nilai-KLIA highway and the Selangor State Authorities, in which the courts ruled in favor of the Temuan plaintiffs. The state was ordered to pay the plaintiffs "a lump sum of RM 6.5 million for the acquisition of their land in 1995 … [setting an] … important precedent for Orang Asli claims to their native title rights over their customary lands" (COAC, 2010).

The Orang Asli are also – together with members from the indigenous communities of Sabah and Sarawak – involved with the Malaysian pan-indigenous organisation known as the Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia – *Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia* (JOAS) – which champions indigenous rights and advocacy in Malaysia. An umbrella organisation, JOAS "strives to unite indigenes from the Peninsular and the Bornean states" (Dean & Levi, 2003, p. 159) and comprises 21 community-based organisations across Malaysia "representing different indigenous

peoples and communities … [to] … provide indigenous communities with representation nationally, regionally and internationally" (Wessendorf, 2009, pp. 327-328). Both COAC and JOAS maintain websites and Facebook pages to disseminate information to local indigenous members and to network with regional and international indigenous and non-indigenous groups and organisations.

More recently, the Orang Asli have also been involved in ethnopolitical movements which engage the notion of indigeneity on a supranational level, as seen in their involvement with international indigenous platforms such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the sending of representatives by Orang Asli NGOs to global indigenous initiatives and meetings. There is also macro-national level participation as seen in engagements with *Pribumi* communities from Sabah and Sarawak (JOAS) and also at a micro level, seen through the mobilization of Orang Asli individuals from different communities in land rights claims, demonstrations and negotiations. Orang Asli communities across the Peninsula have also formed local organisations that seek to address issues faced by regional Orang Asli communities at the village and state levels, while also working to preserve the cultural traditions of these various Orang Asli communities. Some of these include Sinui Pai Nanuk Sngik (SPNS) – New Life, One Heart – which was formed in 1995 in West Malaysia by Tijah Yok Chopil and has grown into a "network linking five states in Peninsular Malaysia … [becoming] … what is now known as the Village Network of Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli (Jaringan Kampung Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia)" (The Star, 2013), *Kumpulan Yok Sang* in the state of Johor, and the Perak Orang Asli Arts and Cultural Association or *Persatuan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Orang Asli Negeri Perak* (PKKOAP). The Orang Asli have also formed networks with non-Orang Asli organisations that seek to address issues dealing with inequalities and injustices within Malaysia such as the Malaysian Centre for Constitutionalism and Human Rights (MCCHR), the Foundation for Community Studies and Development (FOCUSED) which works with the Jakun community in Tanjong Keruing in the state of Pahang, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and KOMAS, a non-governmental organisation that champions equality and democracy in Malaysia. Orang Asli activism has not been without its challenges. According to the 2014 U.S. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for Malaysia, the Malaysian administration blocked an attempt by SUHAKAM in 2013

to introduce a parliamentary debate on the conditions of the Orang Asli as the country's most marginalised community (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

Of the various Orang Asli organisations mentioned above, POASM appears to be the NGO that most respondents of this study are familiar with, followed by COAC. This could be because POASM does – or at least used to – maintain an active presence at the Orang Asli settlements in the fringe and remote parts of the Peninsula, while COAC appears to have a more pronounced urban presence – particularly within the Klang Valley. Furthermore, while COAC's focus is its advocacy work with the Orang Asli – which includes land rights claims – POASM has a slightly more political mission aimed at Orang Asli representation, with some respondents recalling POASM's door-to-door recruitment efforts at their settlements. This strategy at the settlements may also explain why POASM is more known among rural-urban Orang Asli migrants. However, at the time of writing, it appears that POASM is no longer active, due to what Zaitun refers to as issues concerning internal politicking and administrative problems.

In pursuing lines of questioning to determine respondents' participation in peaceful land rights demonstrations organised by NGOs like COAC, it was interesting to note that while the majority appeared to support the cause behind land rights demonstrations, only one respondent had actually participated in such demonstrations. A number of reasons were given by respondents, including commitment to work and family, busy schedules, lack of information, etc., but the reason that was most mentioned was the fear of governmental retribution. In Malaysia, demonstrations expressing dissatisfaction with governmental policies are strongly discouraged by the administration through the threat of sedition laws, and it is not uncommon to hear of individuals being imprisoned, physically assaulted or struck with a police record. It appears likely that with Orang Asli land rights claims demonstrations – an issue which inadvertently raises questions on the topic of indigeneity and the nation's racial politics – that the threat of governmental retribution is a very real one, with personal and professional implications for anyone brave enough to participate. Any individual caught questioning indigeneity, governmental policies, or the special rights of the Malays – all of which are issues at the nexus of Orang Asli land rights claims (and considered seditious by the administration) – may be charged with violating the Seditions Act of 1948, a remnant of the British penal code introduced into

Malaya by the colonial administration. Among other conditions, Section 3 of the Seditions Act (2003, p. 11) broadly defines sedition as any action or statement to:

… bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against any Ruler or against any Government,

… promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes of the population of Malaysia,

… question any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty or prerogative established or protected by the provisions of part III of the Federal constitution or Article 152 (the special position of Malay as the national language), 153 (the special position of Bumiputras and legitimate interests of other communities) or 181 (the special position of Malay as the national language) of the Federal Constitution.

Respondents – particularly civil servants and students – have mentioned fears of losing their jobs, facing legal implications, or being marked out by the government, threats which appear to be reasons enough to dissuade them from participating in demonstrations. Anggrik, the one respondent in this study who has actually participated in land rights demonstrations, requested that I turn off my audio recording device before she answered the question, as she was now a civil servant, and feared she might be identified by her voice.

While the overwhelming majority of respondents appear to support the work carried out by the earlier-mentioned NGOs, Shidah, a Semai woman in her mid 30s who works in a managerial position at a multinational, questioned the involvement of non-Orang Asli individuals in such organisations – particularly in roles of leadership. In referencing COAC's leadership, Shidah says:

I feel that sometimes when the leadership isn't someone who is born and bred Orang Asli, they don't truly understand it? I mean … they also have their own agenda? I feel that if it's being helmed by an Orang Asli … who belongs to that community, then it'll be more effective? That's just my opinion. I know they are very passionate about it [but] basically it's an outside influence … an outside influence. So as long as the people [the Orang Asli] COAC is helping is aware? You know … of everyone's agenda? As long as they're clear,

then … it should be fine. But I hope that they [the Orang Asli] are … aware of it and not ... giving a hundred percent control to bodies like COAC or even JHEOA for that matter.

I asked Shidah to elaborate on what she meant by 'agenda':

Well … of course being an NGO is always you know … left wing? You know … like not ... not a supporter of the government right? So that's always been my concern. Sometimes I feel that yes, they [NGOs] are there to be the check and balances for the government that is ruling, but I hope that with education, the Orang Asli community themselves can provide a check and balance to the NGOs that are helping them out (laughs). Because it's easy for you to be fed with … you know, information and not make decisions on their own, [and] while we rely on help from NGOs, I think it's ... crucial for the Orang Asli community to be well-educated enough to be able to decide for themselves rather than just fully rely on NGOs. I'm … suspicious of any attempt to provide help because I feel that there's a lot of cases of Orang Asli communities being taken advantage of ... you know? By the people who claim to want to help ...

Some respondents thought that legal recourse was a more productive usage of NGO resources, and that demonstrations largely did not effect change, as seen in the following statements:

In my personal view, I don't think it really works. Yeah. Because the way that … all the approach that they made to ... to ... I mean to get to the minister [and] the ministry … to get the memorandum signed … whatever … it's not really working actually. I think success came from the lawyers and all the hard work in court. (Emmett, 33, Semai).

I think the Orang Asli who participate in demonstrations don't cause any change. It's good to have demonstrations so other communities can see the problems we face as Orang Asli … but I think matters should be brought to the country's judiciary. That's better. (Supian, 25, Jakun).

Mokhtar, a Semelai and a civil servant, stated that while there were good things to the work carried out by the NGOs, questions should also be asked regarding their source of funding:

From the work they do, there appears to be positives and negatives [but] I'm not sure how they are funded. It looks like they're trying to fight for Orang Asli rights, but as to where they receive their funding from, I'm not sure. Because nothing's for free, right? So I'm concerned

they might use the Orang Asli as a business. As I said, the positive is that they fight for Orang Asli rights, but I'm not sure about that [funding], that has to be checked out in more detail.

Rafee, a doctor with the government, was of the opinion that Orang Asli NGOs and the government should work together to address issues facing the orang Asli today, and that the empowerment of NGOs through cooperation with bodies like JAKOA and the Economic Planning Unit are necessary so they can work together toward achieving common goals. This way, he argues, the expertise of JAKOA and the government can be synced with the connectivity and interpersonal relationships NGOs have with the broader Orang Asli community. I asked Higak if there was any form of bilateral or multilateral cooperation between NGOs such as COAC and POASM with the government, to which he replied:

> Not really ... not really ... we have to get involved with them [the government], you know? We have to invite them to get together. When POASM invites them, sometimes they come, sometimes ... [but] most of the time they don't. This is the kind of drama you know? But they don't really help. And then of course COAC is considered as, quote and unquote 'enemy to the government' (laughs). The government tries to avoid ... avoid relationships with COAC and Christian-based associations … other NGOs [and] internal and international based NGO associations.

Higak went on to say that the only institution he was aware of that was involved in cultivating an Orang Asli-Malay relationship was JAKIM – *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* – the reason for which he suggests goes back to the government's agenda of Islamizing the Orang Asli. I asked Higak if he thought NGOs played a role in unifying the Orang Asli, to which he answered:

> Yeah, that's why there are efforts initiated by COAC to get NGOs from Sabah [and] Sarawak and [Peninsular] Malaysia to get together … they call it Jaringan [Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia]. That is a good start, but this Jaringan, the ... the problem with Jaringan is … [the government] always accuses Jaringan as anti-government, you know?

Higak contended that organisations such as COAC played integral roles in encouraging cohesiveness between the various Orang Asli communities, and from my time in the field, it appeared that there was a lot of truth to this statement. As a relatively small community numbering approximately 180 000 individuals, the different Orang Asli groups are dispersed at

considerable distances from each other, and many Orang Asli individuals I met had never met members from some of the other Orang Asli groups. However, most of them were aware of cross-cultural Orang Asli NGOs such as POASM and COAC, which appears to facilitate the idea of a broader abstract Orang Asli community that all Orang Asli groups can identify with, regardless of their location in the Peninsula, or their ethno-linguistic backgrounds.

In summary, this chapter traces the modernisation and developmental agenda of the Malaysian administration through the use of the Malaysia Plans following independence from colonial rule. In so doing, it investigates the ways in which Western developmental discourse of modernisation did – and continues to – shape governmental agendas for the development and modernisation of the broader Malaysian society, and more specifically for the Orang Asli – primarily through the implementation of cash crop agriculture. The sedentarization of Orang Asli communities necessary for such developmental models and the implications of sedentarization on Orang Asli communities were also explored, which when viewed collectively do not seem to indicate the attainment of better socioeconomic indicators among the Orang Asli, strongly suggesting that Western-centric developmental models – while perhaps achieving success with mainstream communities – do not suit the developmental needs of the Orang Asli. The chapter further investigates the incompatibility of development models based on cash-crop agriculture with the worldview of hunter-gatherer Orang Asli groups, indicating the importance of recognizing diverse development needs among different Orang Asli groups in order for development intiatives to succeed. In addition, the chapter explores the ongoing phenomenon of religious proselytisation orchestrated by the government in rural Orang Asli settlements, and Orang Asli resistances against the same. The chapter concludes by exploring a number of Orang Asli NGOs which were founded by them and the thoughts of some of the study's respondents on these.

The following chapter will investigate traditional Orang Asli perceptions of gender and gender roles, while exploring the role of women in the traditional leadership structures of some Orang Asli communities. In so doing, the chapter will also examine the implications of JAKOA's involvement in Orang Asli affairs on the position of Orang Asli women within their communities.

Chapter 5: Orang Asli and the Question of Gender

Research suggests that over the decades, stratification of gender roles and the adoption of non-Orang Asli heteronormatives by Orang Asli communities appear to be increasing (Howell, 1983; Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah, 2003, p.31). As urban areas expand and the rural-urban socio-economic divide narrows through the proliferation of small townships and growing infrastructure, larger numbers of Orang Asli are opting to seek employment opportunities in towns and cities. However, it appears that most employment opportunities continue to remain inaccessible to the Orang Asli – either as a result of racism, or the high education dropout rate (Gomes, 2007) – often leaving manual labour such as wage employment at rubber and oil palm estates, and construction, as the only options available to the Orang Asli. Such jobs appear to be more accessible to Orang Asli men as opposed to women, due to the physically demanding nature of manual labour. The collapse of Orang Asli economies due to sedentarization and land loss, and the ensuing role of men as providers appear to have made Orang Asli women increasingly dependent on their men (Howell, 1983). There are also decreased employment opportunities for Orang Asli women at the settlements – most of which are located in the rural regions of Peninsular Malaysia. It would appear that this has implications for the gender roles of Orang Asli communities and their perceptions of gender roles. This chapter will explore the implications of Malaysia's development and modernisation initiatives on Orang Asli gender roles.

5.1. Orang Asli Perceptions of Gender Roles

Gender roles in the context of this study refers to: i) the historically egalitarian cultural understanding of gender among Orang Asli communities insomuch that it meant the division of labour according to physiological boundaries and the absence of hierarchical structures on the basis of biological sex; this also lends itself to an absence in a scale-of-importance with regards to hunting, foraging and agricultural activities at the settlements, and ii) in contemporary settings, as sociocultural distinctions placed by a patriarchal hegemony which assigns a hierarchical distinction between women and men based on arbitrary culturally-specific values.

5.1.1. Gender Narratives in Recent Orang Asli Histories

The literature on Orang Asli gender relations appear to point toward cultures that were historically largely egalitarian (Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah 2002; Baer 2006; Karen 2006; Nowak 2006; Gomes 2007) and their creation myths seem to reflect this. Origin stories tend to involve non-human animals and the "progenitors of people might be monkeys and gibbons, a white alligator and a porpoise, supernatural beings or even a drop of water" (Baer, 2006, p. 24). Although some communities do have supernatural beings in their creation stories, there did not appear to be a hierarchy in the gender placement of the beings, and many narratives involving supernatural beings tended to depict women as the first humans, or a supernatural female as being the progenitor of humans (Baer, 2006), although this was not exclusively the case. In her conversation with Nowak (2006), Sinah, a Btsisi' girl mentions, "Among the Btsisi', God is not male or female, but both. How could God be anything other than both, it would be incomplete" (Nowak, 2006, p. 135). The egalitarian views of Orang Asli groups regarding their origin stories appear, in some measure, to have carried over into the value systems of Orang Asli communities. Integrated gender roles in the division of labour for instance, seem to be the norm among a number of Orang Asli communities.

The notion of a family head does not appear to feature with Orang Asli groups. Among the Batek De' both husbands and wives decide matters such as "where to live and what to do" together (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997, p. 26). During their stay with the Batek people, the Endicotts (2008) noted the following regarding the division of labour: "the Batek value system does not give high prestige to some jobs while devaluing others" (Endicotts, 2008, p. 108), while a similar observation was made by Howell (1983, pp. 68-69) during her stay with the Che Wong in the late 1970s, where she noted that "perceived significant attributes of a Che Wong person are identical for men and women … marriage is primarily regarded as a cooperative union in which the couple form a self-sufficient economic unit. Together they accomplish all tasks necessary for survival." Nowak (1987, p. 340) describes Sinah's narrative of a Btsisi' couple as follows: "husband and wives … have an ethos of cooperation … Many of the tasks mother and father perform required them to work in concert." In describing the old Semai leadership structure, Higak – a key respondent – stated the following:

It is always a fair pair you know? Because those days, for a person to be a *tok batin* or a person to be a *penghulu* they must have knowledge in traditional healing [and] must possess deep knowledge in healing, you know? In customs ... *adat resam* they call it, you know? And the wife is always the midwife. The *bidan* [midwife] is considered female, [and] *halaa'* so it's always a pair lah. As usual ... the wife is always the husband's first adviser in decision-making, so her voice is there, but indirectly … you know? In common practice according to the Semai *adat warisan*.

As presented in Higak's narrative, the relationship between wife and husband within the old Semai leadership structure appeared to be grounded in mutual respect for the complementary role played by the other, with little indication of a power hierarchy. Baer (2006, p. 11) contends that even in divorce, egalitarianism was practised among the Kensiu, with "divorce among the Kensiu … based on mutual agreement. Any common property was divided equally and the children lived thereafter with either parent, again by mutual agreement" with the same egalitarian principles practiced with regards to inheritance. Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker (1997, p. 26) noted similar relaxed attitudes among the Batek De' where "either spouse could initiate a divorce simply by leaving." Other egalitarian features of Orang Asli groups appear to be the absence of corporal punishment (Duncan, 2004; Baer, 2006), the infrequency of violence (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997) and nonappearance of rape (Howell, 1983). Endicott (2016, pp. 8-9) posits an interesting theory on the prohibition of interpersonal violence among Orang Asli communities "both within their own groups and with outsiders" due to their experience with Malay slave raiders in the 18th and 19th centuries – from whom fleeing was the best survival strategy. Orang Asli groups place high regard on the autonomy of the individual and the family; and this applies to children as well, who if they do not wish to, are not obligated to obey their parents (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997). This appears to be a widespread practice among many, if not most, Orang Asli groups.

Prior to interference from JAKOA, there have been women who until recent decades held positions of authority among the Orang Asli. The Malay chronicler Abdullah bin Kadir noted in 1849 that Jakun women taught their children to climb trees, utilize blowpipes, and took them hunting into the jungle and mountains, practices which today are largely considered as "male activities" (Nicholas, Tijah and Tiah, 2003, p. 21). In describing the Temuan people in the 1960s,

the ethno-ecologist F.L. Dunn (1975) made the observation that although Temuan boys and girls grew up learning different skills – the boys hunting, collecting and gathering while the girls learned agricultural practices and education in medicinal and edible plants – their responsibilities were not stratified along gender lines, and overlapping was not uncommon. More importantly perhaps, was the notion that the contributions of both genders, although different, were equally important. During his stay with the Menraq, Gomes (2007, P. 135) noted the following regarding the division of labour in the community:

> Menraq accord equal importance to male work and female work … women are not prohibited from performing male work [and] … hunting. Males are … not averse to … domestic tasks, [such as] cooking or taking care of their children while their spouses are out gathering food or firewood or doing the laundry.

For the most part, it would seem that among earlier Orang Asli communities – and even some communities today – participation in subsistence activities such as hunting, gathering, and fishing are not stratified along the lines of gender. Depending on the Orang Asli community in question, activities that did not demand great stamina such as fishing were carried out either by women, or men. Exceptions to the rule appear to exist due to external variables, for instance, while among the Kensiu fishing appears to be an activity carried out by both women and men (Govindran, 2012), among the Hma' Meri it was more common for the men to fish. A possible reason for this could be that as a coastal people, the Hma' Meri ventured out to sea to fish, an activity that required more strength and involved considerably more risks as opposed to inland fishing in small freshwater rivers and streams within forested areas. Labour ethics among the Orang Asli appear largely to be stratified along the lines of physical strength and ability, not sex, meaning a woman could participate in activities that generally saw a large degree of male involvement such as the collection of forest products – as long as she was physically capable. The most evident exception to this rule appears to be those that are grounded in the spiritual – seen among some Orang Asli groups – involving hunting-related prohibitions and taboos relating to women. In the case of the Semelai, this takes form in a menstrual taboo, as narrated by Semelai respondent Zaitun:

> I assume because it's quite dangerous and female can't really go inside [the forest] when it's her menstrual period? So we believe that … we believe in the Semelai community that when

you have your period, spirits easily attach to you. Meaning they could easily attack you spiritually. So it's not really convenient for females to go inside the jungle for months, and that's why hunting ... because in the old days, hunting can actually take one week or two weeks and only then do they come back. Because it wasn't easy to get food. So maybe only a group of males went together and came back.

In a follow-up session, she further explained the Semelai exclusion of menstruating women from hunts was connected to *sial*[29] – a Semelai belief roughly corresponding to 'something that prevents.' For instance, if a menstruating woman were to participate in a hunt, the Semelai believe that game animals would be able to detect the strong scent given off by the menstruating women and thus become aware of the hunters' presence. Thus, the hunt returns empty as a result of this *sial* – in the form of the woman's scent. According to Zaitun, the "sial term can [be] quite abstract … relating to dreams, your first steps out of your house (*langkah*), etc." It is also because of *sial* that pregnant Semelai women are not encouraged to join hunts. When Semelai women are pregnant, a spell or *jampi* is placed upon them to protect the unborn child. However, the Semelai also believe that this *jampi* is *sial,* as it prevents the hunting group from catching, or even encountering, potential game animals. As Zaitun explains, "it isn't really the woman but the concept behind it that was quite difficult to explain … so people tend to say '*sial* … [and] … *sial* is connected with the spirit."

It would appear that for the most part, various Orang Asli groups tended to share responsibilities in performing chores – without necessarily subscribing to a gender division nor regarding the activities of one gender as more important than those of the other. Regarding the Che Wong, Howell (1983, p. 72) noted that "no one labour or task carries any special status among the Che Wong. Unlike many other hunter-gatherer societies where, according to the literature, the activities concerned with hunting are most prestigious, the Che Wong make no such distinction."

The Italian explorer G.B. Cerruti (1908, p. 126) who was appointed 'superintendent to the Sakais' for a period of 16 years by the British, wrote the following of the '*Sakai*':

Among these uncivilized people there are no chivalrous traditions, it is true, but neither have their women been driven to seek emancipation because, sharing with perfect equality the

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[29] Of Malay origin, meaning 'unlucky' or 'misfortune.'

rights of the men, none remain for them to claim, and they have no wrongs to revenge! [Among] the Sakai the one sex is not the slave of the other.

Cerruti's observations complement those of Collings (1949, p. 100) who during his visit to the Orang Kuala in Batu Pahat, noted that despite adopting the Muslim faith, "the women seemed to have kept the position and freedom of former times." Prior to JAKOA intervention, it would appear that gender was not a concern when it came to leadership among the Orang Asli. As noted by Endicott (2006, p. 57), "In keeping with the egalitarian ethic that permeated Batek social, economic and religious life, the gender of a natural leader made no difference." It would appear that for the Batek, as for most Orang Asli groups, the question of who should be leader seemed to be whomever was most capable, regardless of gender (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997). During her stay with the Batek De' – a community of 350 individuals – Karen Endicott (2006, p. 58) describes the leadership of the Batek De' under a woman by the name of Tanyogn, whom she noted "exhibited natural leadership in many ways." Tanyogn's leadership was not only recognized among her community, but by outsiders as well, as observed by Endicott: "Malay traders who came to Batek camps regarded her as a *penghulu* and sought her out. If she was away from camp and working in the forest, they waited for her to return, even when other Batek were present" (Endicott, 2006, pp. 56-57). Tanyogn played the role of matriarch to the Batek De', and of intermediary between the Batek De' and traders who traded with the community. Her role as leader went so far as to challenge outsiders when members of her community were dealt with unfairly; for instance when "Malays stole corn from a Batek woman's garden … she demanded payment" and obtained the money; and when rattan collected for traders were swept away in a storm due to the negligence of the traders (who then demanded the Batek obtain more rattan), "she bellowed … [saying] they [the traders] were foolish to leave the rattan in the stream" – an argument, Endicott noted, she won (Endicott, 2006, p. 56). Despite her position as matriarch, Tanyogn was nevertheless among the most productive members of her community, contributing laboriously to food and rattan gathering excursions where she "hauled as much as some of the men" (Endicott, 2006, p. 56). Following Tanyogn's death in the late 1980s, Endicott (Endicott, 2006, p. 60) found that "by the late 1990s, her [Tanyogn's] reputation had actually spread … [and] other Batek groups talked of Tanyogn as the Batek who stood up to the Malays."

In a number of Orang Asli communities, including the Jakun, Temiar, Hma' Meri, Semai, Orang Laut, and Che Wong, midwifery or *bidan* – as the practitioner of midwifery is known in Malay – was a gender-neutral service from a spiritually-guided individual in the community to an expectant mother. However, it appears (from my interviews, readings, and casual conversations) that in almost all Orang Asli groups today (with the exception of the Semelai), midwifery is now considered to be woman's work. Anggrik, a 26 year old Hma' Meri woman from Carey Island, had this to say regarding the decline of male midwives in the Hma' Meri community:

Ooh … *bidan*, today they are mostly women, but when I was younger, my grandmother used to tell me that we had male *bidan* as well. Maybe, modernisation is responsible for the destruction of male *bidan*. Changing times yeah? Ever changing. It's that change that is the reason we no longer have male *bidan*. Change after change. Also, another factor could be that men have lost interest – what with hospitals and health clinics – there's no reason for a male *bidan.*

Interestingly, it seems that the opposite holds true with the Semelai; while most Orang Asli communities have seen a decline in male participation in midwifery, it is female participation in midwifery practices among the Semelai that has seen a decline. Gianno (2004, 2004, pp. 31 & 33) noticed a rapid decline in women's participation in midwifery among the Semelai of Tasik Bera in the early 1990s, and then by the late 1990s, in most Semelai communities. She noted:

During the twentieth century, there were both male and female Semelai village midwives. In fact, in 1980, while doing fieldwork at Tasek Bera, I was present at a birth attended by a female midwife. However, by 1992, there were only male midwives practising there. In 1997-1998, I found that this transition held for most other Semelai areas as well. When I asked why there were no longer any women midwives, I was told, by both men and women, that 'they were not brave enough' [*da? de kali*]. When I asked why women in the past were brave enough while women today are not, people were unsure.

Interestingly, I encountered the notion of 'bravery' in the context of male midwifery when discussing the issue with Semelai respondent Zaitun,

There are some [female *bidans*] when I was young, but it gradually changed. It has something to do with *mati anak*. Every bidan has to connect with [the] spirit to help in the delivery

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process, and most women are not brave enough to befriend a spirit, It's related to bravery. If you're brave enough then you can be a midwife. If you're not brave enough … then don't.

Gianno (2004) suggests that the intersectionality of Islamic modesty, biomedical modernisation, and the perceived closer association of males with the spirit world have collectively contributed to the decline in female participation in Semelai midwifery, and my sessions with Semelai respondents appear to suggest similar reasons. Within Semelai cosmology, male shamans are assisted by female spirits, and female shamans by male spirits:

It's about the spiritual because the bidan connects … connects with the spirit of ... *mati anak*. *Mati anak* is *pontianak* in Malay and *pontianak* is usually female. The spirit is usually a woman's spirit that helps the ... the man with the delivery process. So that's why I assume, so many male *bidans* [exist] instead of female. Because in Semelai society, spirits helping men are usually female. (Zaitun)

Mati anak is the Semelai equivalent of *pontianak* – a Malay word meaning vampire spirit; however, while in Malay *pontianak* refers to the vampire spirit of a woman who died during pregnancy, *mati anak* among the Semelai – although lexically Malay in origin – (Gianno, 2016) refers to the malicious spirit of a woman who died in childbirth[30]. According to the Semelai, the *mati anak* is a spiritual being through which a Semelai individual may be given the *cengroh* for a particular skill, position or ability. Loosely translated, *cengroh* refers to an omen or sign from the spirit world that imbues the recipient with an ability. In describing *cengroh,* Zaitun states*, "cengroh* is specific to that person, it could be in your dream, or when you walk, but it is something that seeks you and attaches to you spiritually." Because the experience of receiving the *cengroh* almost always occurs during forest excursions such as hunting, it stands to reason that among the Semelai – who practice slash and burn agriculture – that it is usually the men who are at the receiving end of *cengroh*, as it is largely the men who venture into the forest to hunt. As noted by Gianno (2004, p. 45), *cengroh* could take any number of forms, "For midwifery, one omen would be seeing a banana flower open. Another would be a cascade of water from a forest tree (thought to be the water from a mati anak … bathing her child)." Willa – a Semelai respondent I spoke to – made no mention of a child, stating instead that it was the bathwater of

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[30] The corresponding Malay word for the spirit of a woman who died in childbirth is *langsuir*.

the *mati anak* itself falling on a Semelai man that confers him with the *cengroh* for midwifery. When asked if the *bidans* in her community were female or male, she responded, "*Bidan*? As far as I'm aware, only men are *bidans*. My grandfather is a *bidan* and yeah, I've never heard of a woman *bidan*. Although … nowadays, it looks like we no longer have *bidans*."

As noted by Willa, it appears that midwifery as a service is increasingly rare amongst the Semelai today. In suggesting possible reasons, Zaitun describes how in Semelai traditions, being a *bidan* is not a paid service, and functions on ties of morality, kinship and a reciprocal value system – all of which have been affected by the decades-long ongoing monetization of Semelai economy. She also explains that medical services provided by the state directly contribute to the diminishing role of the Semelai *bidan*, as government medical institutions now provide house-to-house maternal and childcare services through the office of the *pegawai masyarakat* (community officer), which makes the role of *bidan* redundant. In investigating the reasons for the displacement of women in Western midwifery, Gianno (2004, p. 31) echoes a similar sentiment, suggesting that the "masculinization of midwifery" through the "medicalization of midwifery" by doctors and obstetricians in Western societies is to blame. My interviews with respondents from various Orang Asli ethnic groups appear to indicate that the complex nexus of modern healthcare practices, governmental policies, and changing Orang Asli value systems, appear to form a collective driving force behind the changes seen, and gradual disappearance of both female and male *bidans* among orang Asli communities. Amongst communities that have historically had both female and male *bidans*, but now no longer have male *bidans* – such as the Hma' Meri, Semai, and Che Wong – the modernisation of maternal care accompanied by heightened notions of morality and propriety (seemingly as a result of increasing exposure to Islamic values from surrounding Malay communities) appear to contribute to the decline in male *bidans*. Among the Semelai however, it seems that in addition to the reasons stated above, the unique characteristics of agricultural slash and burn Semelai life – which see a greater degree of female participation in the domestic realm – would mean that it is largely the men who have conducted forest excursions over the last few decades, both for hunting and gathering, thus limiting female interaction with the forest spirit world, and the associated midwifery-conferring *cengroh*.

Egalitarianism among Orang Asli communities does not appear confined solely to gender relations; but also in the way communal responsibilities, as well as food and resources, are shared (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997; Baer, 2006). It would appear that a number of Orang Asli groups practiced belief systems that warn of retribution from supernatural forces should individuals refuse to share their food with their community. Nicholas, Tijah and Tiah (2003, p. 50) discuss the concept of *gernhaq* among the Semai, which they posit is "responsible for the complex system of food sharing and exchange relationships that exist in Semai society." In Semai cosmology, an individual runs the risk of incurring *gernhaq* when she/he "willingly withdraws from sharing whatever food he may have with the other members of his community" (Nicholas, Tijah and Tiah, 2003, p. 50). The consequences of gernhaq, although not particularly severe, may cause an individual to "experience extreme difficulty in obtaining food (hunting or fishing), or the food he consumes would cause him discomfort or illness" (Nicholas, Tijah and Tiah, 2003, p. 50). Among the Batek De', the natural resources within the community's territory "were free to all Batek and only became personal property once collected. [And] … they shared both traded and foraged foods throughout the camp so no one went hungry unless everyone did" (Dentan, Endicott, Gomes & Hooker, 1997, p. 25). The Menraq have a concept similar to the Batek's *gernhaq*, referred to as *punan,* which leaves an individual who does not share food "at risk of attack by supernatural forces and/or wild animals and/or susceptible to accidental injury, illness, and even death" (Gomes, 2007, p. 113). During his time with them and upon inquiring as to the reasons for the Menraq's *punan* taboo, Gomes was told by the community that they did so to "help each other', that it was "*adat menraq*" (our custom), and that "we've always done this, it's a custom from our ancestors" so "it's *punan* (taboo) not to do so" (Gomes, 2007, p. 112).

The egalitarian nature of most Orang Asli groups began undergoing a slow transformation to more gender-divisive norms following the Orang Asli's exposure to the British colonial administration, the introduction of cash crops, and their experience with JAKOA, the latter penetrating almost all aspects of Orang Asli life. Gomes (2007, p. 35) during his work with the Menraq noted that they had begun adopting Malay norms in the division of labour and decision-making processes due to "Menraq experiences of modernity, particularly the introduction of male-dominated forms of social organization via resettlement and Malay-Muslim gender models." Over the decades following modernisation initiatives by the government, it appears that the Menraq were not the only Orang Asli group to see changes in this regard. When I questioned

Higak on Gomes' observations of the Menraq's *punan* philosophy, he responded by suggesting that in some way, modern schooling systems also contributed to the erosion of indigenous value systems among Orang Asli communities, as Orang Asli children are brought up exposed to the outside world, and are less likely to subscribe to the notion of divine retribution:

> Those days yeah … they still believed it, but ... but... it's … declining, you know? The modern ... modern generation is more individualistic. Among the old people they still believe, but … it is … what do they call it? It is the confrontation between indigenous knowledge and ... modern education, you know? The old people you know, try to maintain … try to propose indigenous knowledge as they did those days, you know? If you don't share, you will be punished by a … spiritual being. But … when the children go to school – the teachers say otherwise! So it's … now in transition, a kind of transition period for them, you know? I remember this old man ... He said to his grandchild that there is a thunder god living on the clouds, you know? And always … watching over us to see if we are doing anything wrong … Always punishing … [Then] the grandchild said, "don't they get hit by airplanes?" (Higak laughs). This is the kind of thing ... (continues laughing) ... So I think … this is a … kind of a … they call it *'pertembungan'* lah. Clash [of cultures].

5.2. Gender Anxiety – Implications of a Cash Economy

The construction of gender roles as opposed to the physical distinction of sex is contended by Rogers (1989) to be a socio-cultural phenomenon, and that gender is therefore "learned behaviour" (1989, pp. 12-13). The argument made by Rogers, and perhaps hinted at by Beauvoir in her statement on women's reproductive abilities (Webster 1975; Guenther 2012) suggest that the manipulation of the biological framework of sex[31] by patriarchal hegemonies in assigning arbitrary values to genders, were done with the aim of constructing gender roles favorable to male members of the species. Marketed as 'absolute truths,' and incorporated into socially accepted gender norms, these values and traditions continue to influence contemporary societies.

As discussed in the previous section, the socio-economic structures of pre-independence Orang Asli communities appeared to function in the absence of gender-stratified hierarchical

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[31] Sex defined here as a biological dichotomy of complementary reproductive functions between females and males of the species *Homo sapiens.*

assumptions. The varied division of labour saw only negligible sexual differentiation among various Orang Asli communities, and "the goal was to contribute to the peaceful and successful continuity of the family unit, and thus of the community" (Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah, 2000, p. 82). It appears that the division of labour among various Orang Asli communities was quite fluid, and there was no area of work that was considered the exclusive domain of either sex. In this regard, Orang Asli communities appear not to exhibit gender anxiety in switching between 'female' and 'male' responsibilities within the community – as such distinctions were rarely found. In describing the division of labour within the Menraq community, Gomes (2007, p. 135) while acknowledging that gendered division of labour did "predominantly, but not rigidly" exist, observed:

> Menraq accord equal importance to male work and female work … women are not prohibited from performing male work … [and] may on occasions join their husbands on hunting excursions … Males are clearly not averse to carrying out domestic tasks … [such as] cooking or taking care of their children while their spouses are out gathering food or firewood or doing the laundry.

Baer (2006, p. 35) makes reference to an anecdote conveyed to her by an American nurse who during the Malayan Emergency, witnessed men from the Temiar community having an active role in the care of their children while their wives were engaged in the fields. She states:

> When Kensiu men go into the forest to collect rattan and other resources … Kensiu women … were working members of the rattan-collecting groups. This is also known to have been the case for … the Jakun and Che Wong.

Gianno (2006, p. 99), in her description of Semelai agriculture, states that while both sexes are involved in agricultural activities, at rice harvesting, the husband stays at home to tend to the children, while the wife harvests the rice. Gianno further contended that:

> The Semelai define the roles of husband and wives in marriage as complementary … [and] women often go with their husbands [into the forest] to collect resin and rattan … [although] the division of labor is clear, an important dimension is … men can … cross over to do any of the women's jobs … and vice versa.

As illustrated in the examples above from different Orang Asli communities, while rudimentary structures of labour division did exist, they seemed to be fluid, and it was not forbidden for members of either sex to participate in virtually all aspects of communal life, making gender anxiety a non-issue. Women, as evidenced above, seemed to have played significant roles in subsistence economies, and both Orang Asli women and men were complementary in ensuring the socioeconomic wellbeing of their communities. In recent decades however, the monetization of Orang Asli economies appears to have had implications for the role and position of Orang Asli women within their communities. Additionally, the introduction of technology and modern machinery may also have implications for gender roles among Orang Asli communities that have had a historically more pronounced division of labour between the sexes – particularly with horticultural communities such as the Semelai – as noted by Zaitun:

> If you look at agricultural work, women and men worked together. So women and men make the same decisions – except for maybe hunting or work – because that really needs strength you know? So when men make decisions, women withdraw because of the … [lack of] capability. And we didn't have tools to help us. It's different today because today women can work on a farm and everything, because they have tools. For example, my sister uses a chainsaw to fell a tree and everything – because of tools!

In this regard, Semelai women are now able to participate in what were previously 'male activities' – such as the felling of trees – due to the introduction of technological machinery. Despite this, several prominent researchers (Nicholas, 2000; Gomes, 2004) have theorized that the monetization of Orang Asli communities appears to have wide-ranging implications for gender relations at Orang Asli settlements that are not altogether positive for the position of Orang Asli women. Howell (1983) and Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah (2003) suggest that gradual exposure to the largely patriarchal nature of the wider Malaysian community and economy through governmental development plans for the Orang Asli – such as the Malaysia Plans – as well as the rapid monetization of Orang Asli communities, may potentially play significant roles in the stratification of gender and gender roles – largely due to decreased employment opportunities for Orang Asli women. In their work with a number of Orang Asli communities, Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah (2003, p. 31) noted:

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Gender specific values have emerged in contemporary Orang Asli society [including] the notion that Orang Asli men and women are intrinsically unequal, that Orang Asli men have certain roles and Orang Asli women others, and that politics is the realm of Orang Asli men, not women.

The authors contend that this is a departure from earlier Orang Asli norms where "sexual differentiation and gender inequality were non-issues to start with" (Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah, 2003, p. 31) suggesting that up until recent decades, Orang Asli cultures were still largely non-stratified along gender norms – an observation also observed by Endicott (1999, p. 411). Their findings are substantiated by other researchers (Howell, 1983; Baer, 2006) who have worked with Orang Asli communities over the decades, and who have noted the changes occurring in gender roles and relations among various Orang Asli communities. It would seem that Orang Asli women at the settlements are increasingly disadvantaged at both the macro and micro levels: 'macro' with respect to limited employment opportunities (Dentan et al., 1997; Resurreccion & Elmhirst, 2012), limited access to education and inadequate access to healthcare (Baer, 1999; Nicholas, 2000), and 'micro' with respect to a loss of standing in community and family due to monetary dependence on their men (Howell, 1983). Gomes (2004, p. 145) contends, "With the development of commodity production, women become less involved in production and are consequently confined to the domestic sphere" as "men have greater access to money and knowledge of the outside world" (p. 137). Often times, this appears to translate to Orang Asli women seeking employment in informal economies and unregulated sectors, which increases their vulnerability.

In her work with the Che Wong, Howell (1983) postulates that the introduction of the cash economy through the commercialization of the Malacca cane *Calamus scipionum* may be a significant factor in the erosion of what was previously an egalitarian culture. She cites the trade in Malacca cane as an example of how a cash economy carries implications for gender roles among the Che Wong. The demand for Malacca cane – a supple cane that is much sought after in the Malaysian furniture industry – made the collection and sale of the cane an extremely profitable venture (Howell, 1983). The Malacca cane was much larger and heavier than the strains of cane ordinarily collected by the Che Wong, and its growth was spread out over large areas of the forest. Howell contends that both the physical strength and endurance needed to

collect the cane meant that women from the Che Wong tribe were excluded from the activity – contributing to what became a largely male-dominated venture – leading Howell to make the observation that Che Wong women were being "excluded from this new-found wealth from the start" (Howell, 1983, p. 81). She also noted that Che Wong women began making what she refers to as "blanket, gender-based generalizations" such as "The men are going to buy radios" and "women cannot obtain such amounts of money" (Howell, 1983, p. 81) – statements she had previously not noted among the Che Wong, suggesting that much of these generalizations began to associate Che Wong men with being providers, a departure from the traditional gender-integrated income of the Che Wong. Consequently, Howell (1983, p. 81) observed that "Che Wong women were beginning to see themselves less as independent agents and more as dependents on their husbands."

I asked Higak if based on his observations of various Orang Asli communities over the decades, if he had noticed changes with regards to the egalitarian values among Orang Asli communities due to the ongoing monetization of their economies:

> Today? Yes! yes! It's changed a lot you know? Even among the Batek whom Karen Endicott described [as] the most egalitarian society in the world. But they changed now because as Albert [Gomes, 2004] said, you know … [the] penetration of capitalism changed a lot of values and changed a lot of customs. They are more individualistic, not as egalitarian today. You know? And even ... sharing and all that, you know? It's no longer practiced. It is still practiced … but not as strict as those days you know? You must … you have the responsibility to share things. Today not necessarily, because most of the goods are bought from shops. So who ... who has the money, they buy. Those days … you know, jungle produce and all that, they had to work together so they had to share.

The ongoing loss of standing of Orang Asli women within their communities due to the monetization of Orang Asli economies may have profound implications for the family unit at a basic level, and the community as a whole. As the smallest unit of the Orang Asli community (Ingold, Riches & Woodburn, 1988; Dentan, 1997), the degradation of the family unit appears to have considerable effects on the wellbeing of the community as a whole. Cursory studies seem to suggest that increased dependency of Orang Asli women on their men (Howell, 1983; Dentan, 2008; Dallos, 2011) appear to be characteristic of the dramatic changes in gender inequalities

that seem to be afflicting most Orang Asli groups. The demand for valuable forest products such as Malacca cane and agarwood[32] – both of which are sources of income accessible primarily to Orang Asli men – appears to further widen the gap between Orang Asli women and men. The resinous heartwood 'agarwood' also known as *gaharu,* is particularly valuable as it is used in the production of perfumes and incense, "and is extremely sought after due to its increased rarity and market demand, fetching as much as MYR 47, 000/per kilogram" (Govindran, 2012).

As the collection of such lucrative forest products are both time and effort intensive, they appear to have become primarily male-oriented activities. As it is also the men who interact with traders and receive payments for these products, the growing dependence of Orang Asli women on their men, as illustrated by Howell (1983), appears to be increasing. Concomitantly, it would seem that the exclusion of such community-level economic prospects for Orang Asli women at the rural areas of the Peninsula may be a contributing factor in the rural-urban migration of Orang Asli women in search of employment.

Howell's description of the Che Wong economy in the early 1980s indicates a shift from purely subsistence activities to the gathering of forest products that have high commercial value. It appears that Howell's description of the changes occurring among the Che Wong may well be indicative of similar changes occurring across other Orang Asli communities. During the course of my M.A. fieldwork with the Kensiu of Baling in the northern Malaysian state of Kedah in 2012, I had the opportunity to accompany Kensiu men on their hunting and gathering expeditions on a number of occasions. It appeared that hunting – unlike fishing – was a male-dominated activity among the Kensiu (Govindran 2012, p. 36). Prior to governmental sedentarization initiatives, the Kensiu were a highly nomadic hunter-gather society, I can thus only assume that the gender stratification seen in hunting among the Kensiu – as with some other Semang groups – is a result of sedentarization. During these trips I observed that for the most part, forest products gathered by Kensiu men took the form of commercially profitable herbal and medicinal plants such as *tongkat ali (Eurycoma longifolia)*, *kacip Fatimah (Labisia pumila)*, and *gajah beranak (Goniothalamus macrophyllus)* – all of which are in high demand in Southeast Asia's immense Complementary and Traditional Medicines (CTM) industries (Govindran, 2012, pp. 40-42) – as well as the precious *gaharu*. Plants for personal consumption

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[32] Known in Malay as *gaharu*. Of Sanskrit origin, *aguru*. A precious resin used in the incense/perfumery industries.

were collected if and when encountered, but did not appear to form the primary objective of these excursions. If they were lucky, they also managed to capture *tenggiling* (pangolins) for sale to Chinese middlemen, who would sell them for domestic consumption (Govindran, 2012) or export them to the global blackmarket trade. Such lucrative economic activities however appeared to be largely accessible only to Kensiu men, which has contributed to similar circumstances as observed by Howell (1983) vis-à-vis the monetization of the Che Wong economy, ultimately leading to an increased dependence of Kensiu women on their men.

Arguably, in some Orang Asli communities, the financial dependence of Orang Asli women on their men may carry implications for the ability of women to contribute to both domestic and community-level decision-making processes. Some of the questions I asked respondents in this study centered on decision-making processes in their grandparents' and parents' generations. Emmett, a 33 year-old administrative staff at a local public university and member of the Perak Semai community, described to me two different situations he experienced with regards to women's decision-making abilities at different villages. The first narration is of his grandparents' village where women were largely unemployed:

> No … no participation from the females, so all the males discuss about divorce, marriage, and everything else regarding village welfare. Females can participate but only to listen in to the discussions. Male participants in the discussion do not really accept opinions from a woman's perspective – especially from a woman in the village – because most of the decision-making power comes from men, and so they are more likely to hear a man's perspective. The women just help to serve drinks [but] they have no say about the discussions.

This second excerpt is Emmett's description of village meetings in his mother's village, where most women were wage earners in rubber and palm oil industries,

> Women, females, also work to support the family, as opposed to the traditional kind of village. My mother's village always has meetings. Because the discussion is regarding the village, my mother – and most woman – participate in these discussions – and they love it! I mean they love to participate, and to try discussing issues. Some of the more outstanding opinions and perspectives usually come from these women!

According to Emmett, although the final decision-making process in his mother's village still rested with the men, the women were nonetheless active contributors at these village meetings and voiced their opinions and views on matters being discussed. Although both the Kensiu community and the west Semai[33] community that Emmett belongs to are Orang Asli settlements known as *Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula* (RPS) – that is, the government's sedentarization initiative for the Orang Asli – the difference between the two communities was that rubber had been successfully introduced into the RPS settlement that Emmett's mother was from, whereas governmental initiatives for rubber among the Kensiu had largely failed due to systemic shortcomings on the part of governmental agricultural programmes, and JAKOA's lack of understanding of the value system of the Kensiu as a nomadic hunter-gatherer group, who have little affinity with sedentarised agricultural practices.

From my interviews, it appears that rubber tapping is largely a gender-neutral activity, and almost all respondents (who come from various Orang Asli communities) have stated that both Orang Asli women and men from their communities tap rubber, thus making it an economic resource accessible to both women and men. However, unlike the west Semai who are horticulturists, the Kensiu are hunter-gatherers, and I believe this may partly explain why the introduction of rubber was unsuccessful among the Kensiu – the successful implementation of which would have otherwise provided Kensiu women with a source of income. Prior to sedentarization, the Kensiu hunted game and fished when they needed meat (which is still carried out, but to a much smaller extent). They also obtained almost all of their carbohydrates from wild yams with rice being a relatively recent introduction into the Kensiu diet (Govindran, 2012, p. 39). In short they obtained their food directly from the forest, and unlike Orang Asli groups including the west Semai, Semelai and Temuan, the Kensiu did not practice swiddening or any other form of horticultural activity. Thus the notion of investing time (it takes rubber saplings almost 6 years to mature) and effort on caring for rubber saplings before they can be tapped, did not appear to be particularly compatible with the Kensiu value system due to their longstanding hunter-forager culture. A similar observation was made by Gomes (2007, p. 96) in describing the hunter-forager economy of the Menraq community in Kelantan, which he classifies as being an "immediate-return system" defined by "the lack of future orientation and

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[33] The Semai community is divided into the West and East Semai. The former is concentrated in the state of Perak and practice horticultural farming, whereas the latter is concentrated in Pahang state and carry out swiddening.

lack of desire (or ability) to accumulate" both traits that he contends "are inimical to a 'modern' economy based on the production of commodities."

Secondly, as detailed in my M.A. thesis, government initiatives to introduce rubber to the Kensiu through RISDA – Rubber Industry Smallholder Development Authority – has been riddled with corruption, abuse of power, and mismanagement of both funds and rubber saplings (Govindran, 2012, pp. 48-49), which may have contributed to the Kensiu's disenfranchisement with the prospect of cash crop agriculture.

5.3. Leadership Structures: Past and Present

Prior to exploring leadership among Orang Asli communities, it should be noted that contrary to my intial assumptions at the beginning of this study, I have found – over the course of my literature review, and through conversations with respondents and individuals from Orang Asli leadership structures – that female leadership among Orang Asli communities may not have been as widespread as I had first assumed. While there have been notable female Orang Asli leaders in the past (Lye, 2004; Endicott, 2006) my time in the field suggests that female leaders appear to be the exceptions rather than the norm among Orang Asli communities. During my conversations with a number of *gedo semaq*[34] elders from the Semelai community in Tasik Bera, Pak Che Jah – an elder in his seventies – stated that he had never heard of a woman leading a Semelai community. Furthermore, historic incidences of female leadership among the Orang Asli appeared to have occurred largely in the Semang groups of the north, and to a lesser extent among the Senoi and Aboriginal Malay groups of the central and southern parts of the Peninsula (with the exception of female Batins appointed by JAKOA). My conversations with Zaitun (a key respondent from the Semelai community) regarding Orang Asli leadership structures, corroborates Gianno's (2016) observation that the prominence of men in leadership structures among communities such as the Semelai may be due to the historical movements (or lack thereof) and subsistence practices of the different Orang Asli ethnolinguistic groups. While many Orang Asli communities from the Semang, Senoi and Aboriginal Malay groups historically engaged in trade, thus necessitating external contact, it is possible that for Semang communities – who, unlike the Senoi and Aboriginal-Malay communities, were largely nomadic hunter-

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[34] Semelai: literally 'old person.' A term used to refer to someone regarded as an elder within the community.

gatherers and less reliant on swidden farming and other horticultural practices – the potential for external threats such as slave-raiding were largely diminished, whereas Aboriginal Malay and Senoi groups were more exposed to such threats which gave rise to the greater roles played by men in both groups as defenders (leaders) of their communities. Communities from both the Aboriginal Malay and Senoi groups have been known (in varying degrees) to include horticulture as part of their subsistence practices which would necessitate at the very least a certain degree of sedentarization (Endicott, 2016) – making them especially vulnerable to external threats such as slave-raiding. The Semang communities of the north on the other hand were historically hunter-gatherer communities (Endicott, 2016), although as observed by the author (Endicott, 2016), horticulturalism is not unknown to Semang communities such as the Mendriq. The active nomadic cultures of these communities potentially lessened the likelihood that their whereabouts could be identified by slave-raiders and other potential external threats, contributing to a culture that emphasised leadership qualities that focussed not on physical strength, but on individual attributes such as knowledge of healing practices, hunting skills and sound judgement-making ability – all of which are arguably non gender-stratified leadership qualities. The observation by Endicott (2016, p. 8) that "mobile hunting and gathering peoples, including some Semaq Beri, strongly emphasise personal autonomy, and social relations are egalitarian between males and females" further lends support to this argument.

Nicholas, Tijah and Tiah (2003) argue that although there was a certain degree of gender stratification with regard to roles and functions in historical Orang Asli communities as a result of physiological differences (Howell in Baer et al., 2006) it appears that the extent of gender disparity seen today among Orang Asli communities is unprecedented. As discussed in the previous section, it would seem that a number of colonial era Orang Asli communities were still able to maintain the egalitarian customs of their cultures, as seen in this statement by Baer (2006, p. 11) "European observers also wrote that Orang Asli women had the same social rights as men. Indeed this is an important hallmark of traditional Orang Asli society." However, this egalitarianism among Orang Asli cultures appears to have begun fragmenting in the early years of post independence Malaya.

The role of gender as the organizing principle of social structure appeared to be a norm that was imbedded in the culture of the ruling British administration among its colonial territories, as is

suggested by Baer's reference to a colonial officer by the name of Wilkinson, who "did not take kindly to any report that Orang Asli women were leaders" (Baer, 2006, p. 30). In criticizing the bias of Western (and presumably male) anthropologists, Rogers (1989, p. 33) quips, "judgments by anthropologists and sociologists about the 'status of women' in other societies may tell us more about those who are making these judgments than about their subjects." Colonial British categorizations of gender, and 'gender appropriate' norms were disseminated across Britain's realms and incorporated (either willingly or systemically) into local systems of governance and law. The theme of internal colonialism discussed earlier in this study explored how the internalization of social structures – which includes gender as introduced by the British – have survived and continued into the administration of post independence Malaya. Howell (1983, p. 81) contends that the internalization by the Orang Asli of male dominance in the public sphere began in colonial Malaya, when British-Orang Asli interactions "reinforced the male-oriented bias [as] no British women were seen." She anecdotally states that in the 40 odd years since the Che Wong's first (of many) encounters with the British, "they had not seen a European woman until I arrived" (Howell, 1983, p. 80). It would seem that to a large extent, the British legacy of utilizing gender in shaping social structure has also influenced the way in which the Malaysian government views and interacts with the Orang Asli. As the sole governmental department responsible for overseeing Orang Asli affairs, JAKOA appears to not have been immune to the intrusion of the framework of gender as the 'appropriate' social structure in its dealings with the community.

A number of researchers (Carey, 1970; Benjamin, 1985; Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah, 2003; Baer et al., 2006; Resurreccion & Elmhirst, 2012) have suggested that JAKOA's patriarchal attitude and position of non-negotiation with Orang Asli women has resulted in their exclusion from virtually all decision-making processes pertaining to the management of their lands and Orang Asli developmental frameworks. It would seem that the voices of Orang Asli women in particular have been subject to systematic and systemic silencing by JAKOA, arguably as a result of the institution's patriarchal stance in its appointment of male-only leaders among Orang Asli communities; and in its unwillingness to include Orang Asli women in discussions concerning governmental development projects and initiatives for the community, save for areas it perceives as belonging to women's spheres of 'expertise' such as weaving and other crafts. As discussed in the previous section, the appointment of leaders among many traditional Orang Asli

communities was based on merit, and the ability to lead, and not contingent on the individual's gender. Writing in 1878, Maclay observed that leadership among Orang Asli women differentiated them from the position of women in the Malay world, and that it was "characteristic of the position of Sakai women as compared to Malay women" (Maclay, 1878, pp. 215-216).

The practices of a number of Orang Asli communities notwithstanding, it should be noted that there are Orang Asli communities that have a historic and culturally-sanctioned practice of male leadership with a strong male presence in decision-making processes (Endicott, 2016). As narrated to me by Anggrik, a Hma' Meri woman, the *lembaga adat* – which is the indigenous Hma' Meri leadership structure responsible for the society's socio-cultural affairs – comprises the *batin, jenang, penghulu, penggawa* and *jegerah*, with all five positions being held by men. Each of these five men have their respective '*anak buah*' or disciples, all of whom are men, so that they may assume responsibilities should any of the five primary members of the *lembaga adat* become unable to carry out their responsibilities. Anggrik explained that there were no women in the Hma' Meri leadership structure because women did not know the community's laws, the roles of each of the five positions and the unique language register utilized by members of the *lembaga adat*, all of which are only passed down to the aforementioned male disciples of the five primary *lembaga adat* members.

The Semelai leadership structure is collectively known as the *gedo semaq* – an informal circle of Semelai elders who are responsible for the socio-cultural leadership of the Semelai community. I use the term 'informal' because within the Semelai community, the members of the *gedo semaq* are not elected by the community through a formal electoral process. One does not 'become' a *gedo semaq*. Instead, a Semelai is recognized as being a member of the *gedo semaq* as a result of the individual's contribution to the community. It was only over the course of the second component of my fieldwork[35] that I began to understand the *gedo semaq* structure of the Semelai. The following is an excerpt of my conversation with Zaitun:

Zaitun: It is a title people give to ... give to people. The *gedo semaq* is something that the Semelai don't speak of, but people know that they are *gedo semaq* ... throughout the process

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[35] Conducted in the Semelai community of Tasik Bera, Pahang – of which key informant Zaitun is a member.

you know? It's when they are in the hall[36] and they deal with people, then they become *gedo semaq* … It is given by the community through a very long process [of recognition].

How do they know who should get into the balai?

Zaitun: When you start dealing with disputes. When you start dealing with ... trying to make peace between two people you know? That's when you become one of the *gedo semaq* …you become part of the *gedo semaq* society and you know a lot of things … when people start coming to you.

Is there a gedo semaq meeting where they get together to discuss things?

Zaitun: Yes there is. But they don't ... they don't usually say, "We are *gedo semaq* [or] *gedo semaq* meeting." They don't. They just like ... kind of like... it's really informal ... and yet it's quite formal for the Semelai …

(Italicised sentences belong to the researcher)

As detailed by Hood Salleh in his 1978 PhD dissertation, the leadership of the Semelai community is divided into the binary of *besenget* [dark] and *terang* [light] leaderships. Each leadership structure comprises a number of individuals with specific titles[37] who play distinctive roles and have corresponding responsibilities. There are other titles within both leaderships such as *panglima*, *tok empat*, etc. which are rarely seen or used today, and so are not discussed here. The leadership structure of the *besenget* – known as *adat puyang* [traditions of the *puyang*] – is headed by a male member of the Semelai community known as the *puyang,* who are Semelai shamans whose potency of power lies in their ability to heal and rich knowledge of Semelai spirituality and religious cosmology; while the leadership structure of the *terang* which is known as *adat batin* [traditions of the *batin*] is led by the *batin*, who is largely responsible for the politico-administrative affairs of the community. Among the Semelai today, the office of *batin* is largely decided by JAKOA, while that of *puyang* still rests within the realm of the Semelai's culturo-religious cosmology. As noted by Gianno, while the office of *batin* is a political one,

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[36] Known in Semelai as *balai* – the hall where the *gedo semaq* deliberate on issues concerning the community and settle disputes.
[37] There are other titles within both leaderships such as *panglima*, *tok empat*, etc. which are rarely seen or used today, and so are not mentioned here.

"*puyangs* are quasi-members of the political establishment, participating in some judgements and fines, such as violations of marriage rules" (Gianno, 2016, p. 211), but unlike *batin*, *puyang* is "not an inherited office, although descent from a *puyang* may enhance one's credentials" (Endicott, 2016, p. 211). She further illustrates the position of the *puyang* within the community by noting that the Semelai "provides a formal status for those who can communicate and interact with the spirit world [*puyang*] and gives them potentially great power" (Endicott, 2016, p. 223). Consider the following excerpt by Geriheg – a Semelai elder who is regarded as *gedo semaq* by members of his community – on the relationship between the spiritual world and the office of *puyang*:

Ilmu tu dia belajar ... ada orang tunjuk tapi bukan orang macam kita ni takde ... manusia lain … panggil malaikat lah kira. Ada orang tunjuk tapi bukan macam kita manusia macam ni. Baru itulah betul-betul orang jadi *puyang*. Tapi kalau kita menuntut tu takde. *Tok puyang* belajar jadi itu kira tak berapa kuat lah.

Translation:

The knowledge is learned … someone teaches you but they are not people like us … no, they are different humans … we can call them angels. Someone teaches them but they are not people like us. Only then does one really become a *puyang*. But if someone just studies the knowledge [without spiritual intervention] then no. *Puyangs* who become *puyang* because they only studied *puyang* knowledge are not that powerful.

Customary offices under the *puyang* are the *tarun* [the *puyang's* assistant], *mudin* [circumciser] – the Semelai are the only Orang Asli community to practice ritual circumcision – *bomoh* [shaman/witch doctor] and *bidan* [midwife], and while there are sometimes overlaps in terms of duties among these offices, there are also instances when this is advised against. For instance, although a *puyang* outranks a *bidan* in terms of spiritual energy, he would not assist the *bidan* in midwifery, as it is believed that the blood issued by a woman during childbirth is unclean, with implications for the *puyang's* spiritual energy. Zaitun recounted the story of her brother-in-law who was a *puyang*:

When a woman gives birth, the blood is considered dirty to some spirits so they are unable to heal people. My brother-in-law claims that his healing power decreased after helping his wife –my sister – with her delivery."

The *batin* on the other hand has the *menteriq*[38], *pemangku* [*batin's* proxy], and *jurukrah*[39], under his jurisdiction. It would appear that a certain degree of cultural erosion has taken place among the Semelai leadership, as noted by Hoe (2001) during his time with the Semelai in the mid 1970s. Hoe observed that the headmen were themselves unsure of the particular responsibilities and functions of each title. I asked Zabidi, a 26 year-old Semelai man if he had ever seen women within the *gedo semaq* structure:

Usually in an event, the *gedo semaq* will meet on a *balai* [platform]. When there is … say a wedding, we will build a platform where the *gedo semaq* will meet to discuss the event. In the past 26 years that I've lived, they've always been men … and when I've been to weddings or funerals, the [*gedo semaq*] elders discussing these things are always men.

Although there have been female *bidans* and *bomohs* within the Semelai community, it appears that women are largely absent from the *gedo semaq* structure. During the course of my fieldwork at Tasik Bera, Zaitun invited me to a Semelai wedding where I was able to observe the role of the *gedo semaq* as a mediating power in Semelai weddings. With the exception of one woman – the *penjaga adat*[40] – who was seated at the end of the *balai*, every other member of the *gedo semaq* present were male. I questioned Zaitun on the apparent absence of women in the *gedo semaq* structure:

Zaitun: There ARE *wanita* (women) in the *gedo semaq!*

Ohh ... there are?

Zaitun: Yeah there are! The one that holds the *adat* (customs) … She actually knows the adat during the wedding. What you should do and what you should not do ...

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[38] From the Malay *menteri*, ultimately from the Sanskrit *mantri*, meaning sage. Formerly a military title, this position is almost never seen today in the leadership structures of Semelai communities.
[39] The *jurukrah* is responsible for disseminating information/instructions from the *puyang* or *gedo semaq* to community members.
[40] Malay: literally 'protector or guardian of customs.'

Ohh... I thought we had this conversation and you mentioned ... positions of leadership are male only?

Zaitun: It's not ... it's not ...

You know ... like mudin and jurukrah ...

Zaitun: Yes ... there are some ... that are male only … but some are not ... *penjaga adat* usually … could be a man … could be a woman …

Aaah ... OK. So there are women in the gedo semaq ... but not in positions like jurukrah?

Zaitun: Not in big positions ... yeah ...

(Italicised sentences belong to the researcher)

Zaitun went on to explain that while women did play a significant role as custom keepers within the Semelai community, decision-making processes were largely left within the confines of the male sphere:

> It's egalitarian in a sense but still ... the power of men. I mean, they prefer men in every, in almost every decision-making. In a sense, it's equal. The women are able to give opinions but they're not really sitting in the hall [*gedo semaq*]. They are helping the men. Let's say, during a funeral [or] during a wedding, women complement the other's other work you know? If the man wants to do something, then the woman will provide all the materials needed. For example, the woman will provide all the ... if in *berjampi* [spells], O.K. the man will do the *berjampi*, but then the woman will provide the things needed like ... *pekakas* [necessities]. It's complementary – most of the time – but there are certain rules that apply only to men.

I had asked a number of Orang Asli women and men in the Klang Valley on the notion of women in positions of leadership. Some, like Irfan, a 28 year-old soldier of Semai origin, expressed support for the idea,

> I don't think that's a problem. If Thailand could have a woman – a reference to Yingluck Shinawatra, the 28th Prime Minister of Thailand – why can't we? (laughs). Women today are not like the women of before. Women used to be gentle but now they ride motorbikes. I

would encourage her; I wouldn't stop her if she had the necessary experience, as long as she thinks of the village.

Overwhelmingly however, answers I received were more similar to the ones expressed by respondents below:

Well, if you ask me … women don't make for good leaders because they are emotional. Women cannot escape their emotions, which is why they are unable to make decisions. The thing with women is they make a decision, but that decision would change after 5 minutes. In the first five minutes of her anger she'll say 'yes,' and after another 5, she'll rethink it. Because women, they're emotional. (Nizam, Temuan)

Maybe it's because men are more familiar with *adat* [customary laws]. He holds the adat in the *kampung*. You see, with the Semelai, they prioritise *adat*. The *adat* is not just any *adat*, it's meant to discipline the members of the community. So the people who would know these *adat* are the men. As they say, men are the head of the family, so he would be the one in possession of the *adat*. (Anita, Semelai-Temuan)

As people say … fact of the matter is, men are intelligent and more resourceful. This has even been mentioned by religion. So the truth is, men have bigger roles to play than women. Women have their limits. It's not to say men have [better] abilities, they are just more responsible, and so they are given bigger roles because they have their advantages. Women should assist. Men are leaders of the household right? We don't say women are the leaders of the household do we? Because men have bigger responsibilities. (Mokhtar, Semelai)

These responses appeared to indicate a permeation of what might best be considered heteronormative gender assumptions found in 'mainstream' Malaysian discourse and/or value systems regarding gender, that women are unable to lead as a result of their emotions, or that men were natural leaders, or that men were customary guardians of cultural laws (Anita), which led me to wonder if the rhetoric of egalitarianism so often found in the scholarship concerning Orang Asli value systems was being gradually replaced by non-Orang Asli values. As I often did, I discussed the above responses with Zaitun. The following is an excerpt of her response:

Those are really Malay words. Yeah ... yeah. When I was growing up, I didn't really hear such words, you know? It's Malay, introduced by the Malay, because in ... Orang Asli society, we don't compete for leadership. We've never said we are leaders of anything … we [just] do things. Everything is in action. So we don't say ... "it's a norm that the people in the *balai* are men, and those who are helping them are women." Those who look after the *adat* are actually women, as men are not really efficient in doing that. When ... when the Malay came, they interfered in all the [Orang Asli] systems and a lot of young people now don't understand certain rules – including me.

It appeared that neither Anita nor Nizam's responses were 'typically' Malay, as the notion that men are just 'better leaders' featured somewhat prominently in many patriarchies across the world who justify male-centric leadership systems through their own histories and culturally-specific value systems. Furthermore, as a person of Indian descent, such rhetoric was to me abundant in my own community, as well as in a number of other non-Malay Malaysian ethnies. However, that Zaitun chose to attribute what she perceived as non-Orang Asli values to the Malay struck me as not only a subconscious acknowledgement of the historicity and complexity of Orang Asli-Malay relations and their associated conflicts, but also a reflection of how the Orang Asli appear to form an understanding of their own value systems by differentiating them from those belonging to the Malay; and although Zaitun as a Semelai is a member of the Aboriginal Malay Orang Asli group – the Orang Asli group which purportedly has the closest cultural ties to the Malay community – her reply to the responses presented by Anita and Nizam seem to be an indication of the cultural divide between Orang Asli and Malay value systems in the psyche of the Orang Asli.

Historically, and even today, as most Semelai communities are located within the contiguous forest complex that includes Taman Negara, as well as the Tasik Bera lake system and its associated forest complex, and were thus not as accessible to outsiders, their primary exposure to the outside world is most likely (and continues to be) through JAKOA. As discussed earlier, female exclusion from the position of *puyang* appears to be justified by the Semelai through the spiritual, as the spiritual entities that imbue potential male *puyangs*, *bidans, bomohs, etc.* with the abilities necessary for their office are female. Similarly, as noted by Gianno (2004), should the *bomoh* or *bidan* be female, then the spirit familiar associated with her would be male. To become

puyang however, a woman or a man must be chosen by the female spirit familiar known as *Mambang Kerdor*. A *puyang* is said to receive his inspiration and the source of his knowledge through the '*puyang* asal' or 'original *puyang'* known as *Mambang Kerdor,* who is a female spirit familiar in the world of Semelai shamanism (Mohd. Taib, 1991). The word *mambang* means 'spirit' in Malay, whilst *kerdor* is a Semelai word meaning 'woman.' According to Zaitun:

> *Puyangs* believe that women can't control the spirits. So if a woman becomes a *puyang*, she will become evil ... She will become evil .... because she can't control it."

As it is only the spirit familiar *Mambang Kerdor* who is able to imbue a person with the ability to become *puyang,* it is here that the apparent complication lies; as it is suggested that the union of the female *Mambang Kerdor* with a woman may have terrible implications for the community. From my interviews with Semelai respondents, and from my readings, there appear not to be reasons related to ability or aptitude that exclude women from positions of leadership. On the contrary, it appears that nowhere is it explicitly mentioned in Semelai cosmology that women are disallowed from occupying the office of *bidan* or *puyang*. There are only warnings – such as those mentioned by Zaitun above – which hint at spiritual implications. On the evening of the Semelai wedding, I took the opportunity to discuss female puyangs with Zaitun's sisters. The following is a translation of our exchange from the original Malay:

> *Is there a puyang in every village?*
>
> Sister 1: There used to be a *puyang* in every village … But now it isn't so …
>
> Sister 2: It's by descent … by descent …
>
> *Were they always men?*
>
> Sister 3: Up until now they've just been men. If it's a woman … she's evil (*jahat*) …
>
> *Why evil? If the puyang is a woman, she's evil? Is that how it always is? Or ...?*
>
> Sister 3: Well no … but yes … If it's a woman, people say she will be evil …
>
> *Why is that?*

Sister 3: I don't know. Maybe it's what she gets ... that magic ... it makes her evil …

The magic makes her evil? Is this because the magic is not a match to her?

Sister 2: It isn't a question of match. It's the magic that makes her do it. It's like … Usually a *puyang* would know ... they'd chase it away so it isn't in them. Usually a *puyang* would know which magic is good and which is bad …

Ohh … so if the puyang is a woman, will she be evil for sure? Or could she also be good?

Sister 2: She has half. Half of her is evil ... and the other half is good …

Depending on the woman?

Sister 2: No, it doesn't depend on her … It depends on …

Sister 3 (interjects): The magic!

Sister 2: Yes, the magic …

(Italicised sentences belong to the researcher)

The above exchange lays out a spiritual reasoning for the apparent absence of Semelai women within the Semelai's spiritual leadership structure, based on the argument that female *puyangs* are less likely to be able to control the spiritual powers that come with the office of *puyang*. This leads me to believe that non-spiritual claims of female incompatibility with positions of leadership and the rhetoric of men as natural leaders among the Orang Asli are foreign, and come from outside the community. Thus, while the influence of urban living, its associated value systems and its effects on the respondents should not be underestimated; it is perhaps the role of JAKOA as a primarily Muslim-Malay institution with the most influence in Orang Asli affairs that should be explored – particularly its role in the normalization of male leadership amongst various Orang Asli communities.

It appears that JAKOA's insistence on male-only leaders or *batins* appears to have implications for the perception of gender roles among Orang Asli communities – primary of which appears to be the internalization of the notion among Orang Asli communities that women are not suited to lead, nor should they maintain a presence in the public sphere. In the event that a community

insists on selecting its own leader, JAKOA has released a set of guidelines, known as the *Garispanduan* (JHEOA, 1998) – Guidelines for the Appointment of Orang Asli Village Heads or *Garis Panduan Prosedur Perlantikan Penghulu dan Batin Orang Asli* – which the proposed leader must fulfill; primary of which is that the leader is a male. Other stipulations are that the proposed leader must be able to converse in Malay, will be heading a community of not less than 100 individuals, agrees to a background check by JAKOA, and adheres to JAKOA's directives and instructions – failing which he may be dismissed. Nicholas, Jenita and The (2010) in their criticism of the *Garispanduan* contend that the guidelines:

> Aim at reinforcing the male chauvinistic tendencies of mainstream society and [are] in complete repudiation of the fact … [of] village heads who were women … exclud[ing] older leaders who, despite being knowledgeable in the customs of the community … are frequently illiterate … [and] excludes several hamlet-sized groups of … Orang Asli who are still semi-nomadic … [It] is another bureaucratic snare to control the community." (Nicholas, Jenita and Teh, 2010, pp. 114-115)

Zaitun echoed a similar sentiment regarding the government's policy of electing only *batins* who fulfill the '*Tiga M*' or Three M criteria – '*Membaca* (reading), *Menulis* (writing) and *Mengira* (counting)' – stating,

> Because of JAKOA's influence, batins are now required to have an education. But they don't really know [Orang Asli] customs, and they don't really know the culture. Not to mention lacking knowledge of medicinal .... charms or spells.

Historically, while being a *batin* was a reflection of an individual's extensive knowledge on survival skills, healing practices, mediating ability, and issues relating to the spiritual realm, a *batin* today is elected on the basis of his ability to write, read and count (the 3 Ms). This signals a departure from the more community-based leadership structure of the Orang Asli into leadership structures that are more compatible with governmental agendas to sedentarize and assimilate the Orang Asli into the nation's modernisation initiatives. As the new requirements stipulated by JAKOA for *batins* appear to no longer include expertise in spiritual matters or cultural knowledge, this may have implications for the survival and integrity of Orang Asli cosmologies among the various Orang Asli groups. Zaitun further adds:

They [JAKOA] prefer to have a *batin* who can speak … who can talk to them. Who can ... communicate with them because they have so many rules recently. For instance, *batins* have to collect household surveys, and register marriages. They need someone who can read … can write. So he has all the criteria that JAKOA wants, but he doesn't really know [Orang Asli] culture and customs? He doesn't even get involved in weddings or any dispute ... [not] like the old *batin* used to.

Semai respondent Higak suggested that JAKOA maintains a male hegemony among the Orang Asli leadership in accordance with the administration's wishes to emulate Islamic leadership practices:

I think because … the government is maintaining the Islamic value [system] you know? In the administration they want males to be the leaders, so maybe that's the reason."

This appears quite likely, especially considering that the government has (through JAKOA) attempted to enforce Muslim-Malay cultural practices on the Orang Asli – especially following Islamization initiatives – such as encouraging the speaking of Malay, and pressuring Orang Asli women to don the headscarf. Whether advertently or through an organic process of lateral cultural diffusion, it is perhaps unavoidable that after centuries of life in such close proximity, Malay value systems and cultural normatives have gradually seeped into some Orang Asli communities, particularly Orang Asli communities that are located in the central and southern parts of the Peninsular such as the Semai, Semelai, Jakun and Hma' Meri. It seems however, that JAKOA's interference into Orang Asli's leadership structures has somewhat hastened this process. In a chapter he wrote on Semai-Malay contact in pre-modern Perak, Juli (2002, p. 144) contends that prior to Malay influence on Semai society, the Semai "appointed their group leader from among the elders … called *pawang* or *halaa'*" however following the penetration of Malay influence, "the Semais had two leaders at once: the *pawang* as an opinion leader, and the *penghulu* as group leader or headman." He further notes that the position of *penghulu*[41] is inherited as per the Malay practice – in the Malay cultural practise, the office of penghulu is always held by a male – whilst that of *pawang* is staying true to its Semai origin – in that it is non-inherited – and may be taken up by older members of the community, both female and male.

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[41] In the Malay pattern, the office of *penghulu* is held by a male.

It is interesting to note that within the Malay language, the dichotomies of 'king and queen' remain the only instance in which the position of a ruler or leader is dichotomized by gender. Presumably, this is the result of the import and incorporation of early Hindu (*raja vs. rani*[42]/ *permaisuri*[43]) and then Islamic (*sultan vs. sultanah*[44]) influences into the Malay lexicon through the spread of religion and trade. Native Malay words denoting leader such as *batin, penghulu, ketua kampung* are all gender-neutral. As a member of the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the broader genderless Austronesian language family, the Malay language is largely gender-neutral (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995) – with the exception of borrowed words. However, the immediate assumption within the public consciousness when these positions are referred to in Malaysia is that these are positions of leadership occupied by men. Such assumptions are reinforced by JAKOA in its dealings with the Orang Asli, whereby the leader of the community is a headman (*batin*) appointed by the department whom it perceives as amenable to JAKOA's cause, and by proxy, the government's interests. "It [JAKOA] does not appoint headwomen. The department also 'recognizes' heads of households as men, rather than as a husband and wife combination" (Baer, 2006, p. 30). JAKOA's interference into Orang Asli leadership structures through its selection of headmen and its ability to remove community-elected leaders through the Aboriginal Peoples Act (Duncan, 2004) has substantially impacted the societal dynamics among Orang Asli communities. Interestingly, some Orang Asli communities have resisted this interference by JAKOA into their internal affairs through certain measures of resistance, as illustrated by Nicholas (2000, p. 209):

> It is not uncommon to have two headmen in a particular settlement: one hereditary or elected by the community, the other appointed by the JHEOA. The tendency is for the JHEOA to appoint someone who is at least a little literate in Malay, and preferably someone who is amenable to its [JHEOA's] dictates. This usually implies a younger person, and therefore usually someone less experienced in the traditions and customs of the community … with the hereditary headman being called *'Batin Besar'* ('Big' headman) by the villagers so as to distinguish him from the JHEOA-preferred headman.

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[42] Of Sanskrit origin, *rājā* meaning 'ruler,' with *rani* referring to his consort.
[43] Of Sanskrit origin, *parameśvarī* meaning 'supreme lady.'
[44] Of Arabic origin, *sulṭān* meaning 'ruler or monarch,' with *salṭanah* referring to his consort.

JAKOA's preference for male-bias leadership, which is arguably representative of the broader Malaysian government's patriarchal ideology of appointing men in positions of governance (Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah, 2003), is not dissimilar from Roger's (1989) description of Western developmental models in the late 20th century:

> It is thought 'natural' that a woman's place is in the home and that she has a very specific set of tasks … based on the biological imperatives of sex … most important[ly] … the bearing and bringing up of children. A man … is seen as the natural head of the family, its representative in the outside world, and therefore the person with whom planners will deal. (Roger, 1989, p. 11)

Manifestations of male hegemony in JAKOA's interactions with Orang Asli communities are evidenced in the way "almost all government officials – extension workers, JHEOA officers, and health and education personnel – who visit or work … are male" (Gomes, 2007, p. 137). It would seem that JAKOA considers men as the *de facto* 'natural' leaders among Orang Asli communities and thus "only consult with the males at the resettlement about development plans and projects" (Gomes, 2007, p. 137). While conducting fieldwork with the Kensiu community in Kampung Lubok Leggong, Kedah, in 2012, on a number of occasions I managed to observe JAKOA's interaction with Kensiu women. Government initiatives and directives were passed through a JAKOA official to men from the community – although it was usually the women who informed and mobilized other Kensiu individuals in implementing these directives. Baer (2006, p. 31) similarly notes that in mobilizing Orang Asli men for JAKOA's activities, that "women are not invited to JHEOA meetings or JHEOA-sponsored junkets." During her time with them in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Howell (1983, p. 80) observed that the Che Wong community was fully aware of the gender stratification of their Malay neighbors:

> They [Che Wong] know that headmen exist in the political system of their Malay villages … stratified, [and] they are dominated by men. The Che Wong talk about these situations among themselves, usually contrasting them [the Malays] to their own [Che Wong's] traditions and practices.

In describing the experiences of Orang Asli communities in encountering outside cultures, Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah (2003, pp. 23-24) state that some "Orang Asli tend to pick up new values

and lifestyles by absorbing and emulating others, especially their neighbors … [as] the outside group is invariably perceived as superior and as something to be adopted." When viewed through the lens of the state government's dichotomy of modernity versus indigeneity, it is perhaps not too surprising to understand why certain Orang Asli communities may feel compelled to embrace notions of patriarchal gender roles as forwarded by JAKOA. It would appear that in this regard there are two internalizations at work; the first is the internalization of mainstream society's patriarchal values, and the second, the internalization of colonial mentality among Orang Asli communities due to their experience of internal colonisation, which seem to give rise to feelings of inferiority. Howell (1983, p. 79) contends that "Che Wong women have learned, through received ideas and experience of the outside male world … to regard themselves as particularly vulnerable in it, in ways … different from … men. [This] affect[s] the way the women perceive themselves."

JAKOA's initiatives to encourage the participation of Orang Asli men in the public sphere by facilitating excursions "to visit towns, and attend seminars and workshops sponsored by the JHEOA and other government agencies" (Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah, 2003, pp. 23-24) further decreases the visibility of Orang Asli women, as it relegates them to the private spheres of family and village while further contributing to the internalizations of patriarchal values among Orang Asli men. It would seem that even in the resistances formed by Orang Asli communities against the perceived inadequacy of JAKOA in addressing their concerns, manifested through the mobilization of grassroots indigenous associations such as *Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia* (Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Association), the internalization of JAKOA's – or perhaps Malaysia's broader patriarchality – appears to manifest itself in the lack of women in leadership roles within such indigenous mobilizations, where women are instead assigned responsibilities such as "preparing and serving refreshments at meetings or functions, or acting as secretaries" (Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah, 2003, pp. 23-24), raising interesting questions on the extent to which gender role segregation has become a normative among certain Orang Asli communities.

JAKOA's patriarchal interactions with Orang Asli communities may further compound pre-existing feelings of vulnerability among Orang Asli women due to their previous experience with aggressive outsiders. In referencing the Che Wong, Howell (1983, p. 79) contends that the

historic experiences of Che Wong women with outside (Malay and Chinese) men have resulted in heightened anxiety for most Che Wong women. Howell appeared to suggest a historical context by stating:

> The women immediately pull up their sarongs to cover their breasts. They know that naked breasts are regarded as unacceptable by Malays and Chinese, and they believe that the sight of them is likely to provoke men to attack.

It seems unlikely that the reaction of Orang Asli women to outside men stems solely from the historical experience of slavery perpetrated by the Malays. The Chinese were largely yet to have had a significant presence in Malaya prior to British colonisation, and would thus most likely not have been involved in the Orang Asli slave trade. What would seem more likely is the possibility that Orang Asli women have learned to fear outside men as a result of recent physical assaults against them. This appears to be a more plausible explanation, given that acts of aggression such as "rape [was] unknown among the Che Wong" (Howell, 1983, p. 79).

This section has attempted to discuss how Orang Asli experiences with JAKOA and its institutionalized patriarchy have had implications for gender roles among various Orang Asli communities. In referencing the Semai (although the same could be said of many Orang Asli communities), Nicholas, Tijah & Tiah (2003, p. 98) contend that JAKOA "is without doubt the single most important vehicle [in] bringing about colossal change to the Semai social order."

5.4. Contemporary Gender Relations among Urban Orang Asli Migrants

At the time of writing, I was still hard-pressed to find available literature on gender relations among urban migrant Orang Asli individuals. Most of the content included in this subchapter consists of narratives from respondents discussing issues and themes relating to the intersectionality of migration, gender and Orang Asli identity in contemporary urban Malaysia.

One of my respondents, a Semelai woman in her early 40s by the name of Melati, suggested I interview her sister Mawar who lives in Sg. Buloh. Melati, who lives in central Kuala Lumpur, drives 25 km every fortnight to visit her sister, and suggested I accompany her on one of these

trips. On a Thursday morning, she collects me from the Pekeliling bus terminal[45] and we made our way to Mawar's house in Sg. Buloh, which took about 45 minutes of driving. The house was a stand-alone structure with zinc-roofing and concrete flooring, but without an actual compound – it simply stretched out to a large oil palm plantation that was located behind it. As we sat on stone stools outside her house and began to chat, I learnt that Mawar lives with her five children, and unlike her sister Melati, Mawar is a Muslim. She converted to Islam so she could become a second wife to her Malay husband. When I asked her about her thoughts on the matter, her response was quite stoic; as a divorcee, she felt it was the best option for her and her then two children, and accepted his proposal. Mawar is now the mother of five children – two boys from her previous marriage – and one girl and two boys from her current husband. Her daughter, who at 16 is the youngest, is still in secondary school, while all her sons have completed their schooling and help her manage the family business. Her husband lives with his first wife, whom Mawar says does not like her, and comes to visit her on Tuesdays and Thursdays. He runs a *yong tau foo* (tofu filled with fish paste or ground meat) business at a number of night markets, and has given Mawar the responsibility of managing some of the stalls. As night markets in Malaysia generally open only once a week in a given neighborhood, Mawar runs the business in a different neighborhood each night with the help of her sons. During the course of our interview, Mawar prepares what she needs for her *yong tau foo* stall. I wanted to know what Mawar thought of the structure of the predominantly male Semelai leadership, and gender relations at her community, and so I asked her, if over the years, she felt that changes had occurred in terms of gender equality and leadership at her settlement in Pahang:

> It's not to say that it wasn't fair, but perhaps it was just our way of life. Previously, we were not very exposed to the outside world, so we relied on customs and our traditions. It's not a question of fairness – that isn't really an issue. Even now the question isn't about fairness, but about how modernised we've become. Regardless of whether we are men or women, we've become so much more knowledgeable, haven't we? So it really is just because we've had more exposure. That's it. Being a man or a woman, it's just become more similar now.

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[45] A well-known major bus terminal serving routes to a number of destinations – particularly to rural Pahang. It has been in operation for more than 20 years.

I then asked Mawar what she thought were the reasons behind the transformations she saw in the Semelai community:

> Perhaps it's because we are becoming increasingly open. Also, we are now more educated, so it doesn't seem to matter much any longer if we are either male or female. Sometimes, it is just about … how do I say it? Intelligence? An individual's knowledge on current affairs where both men and women may be informed. So now when there are issues at the village, women are also able to be more vocal and be heard. Because we now have education, and we have more knowledge.

Mawar was not the only respondent to imply a growing awareness among Orang Asli women of their potential. Another Semelai respondent, Minnie, is a civil servant from Pahang with a tertiary degree. Minnie suggested that there has been a realization among Orang Asli women of their personal agency in contributing to the family economy:

> What I'm seeing now is that women who are housewives are aware that they are capable of doing more than just housework. She is also able to assist her husband or her partner in generating the family's economy. Women are now aware that the husband is not the only person responsible for generating the family's economy. Maybe it's because of modernisation or because she is also aware that if anything bad were to happen in the future, she should be able to fend for herself instead of depending on men.

However, as with most issues concerning the Orang Asli community, the observations made by Mawar and Minnie did not seem to be representative of changes occurring amongst all Orang Asli communities. Hasibah, a Jakun woman from Pahang and also a civil servant, said that there was a correlation in her community between women who work and one's marriage status:

> Women of my generation at the village? Well they have started to leave the village and have started becoming wage earners. They work, they earn, but, if they are married, they stop working … when they marry, most of them decide to stay home and become housewives, looking after their children while their husbands work.

Informed by the increasing number of Orang Asli women who are completing their education at the tertiary level, and who have gone on to successfully secure employment in the Klang Valley,

I wanted to understand how gender roles and responsibilities in the domestic sphere were negotiated between these women and their husbands or husbands-to-be. One of the questions I asked married, or soon-to-be married men, was who they thought was responsible for managing household chores and for the rearing of children:

In my opinion, rearing of children … well, if it takes a man and a woman to create a child, then it also takes a man and a woman to rear one. What's important is it can't just be the women rearing the children while the men are away at work. I feel that wouldn't work. There has to be cooperation between a married man and woman. (Supian, 25, Jakun)

In this regard we follow the law like everyone else. Although both husband and wife may be working, and no matter how tired the wife may be, she cooks and sorts everything out. She can't say, "I am working as well, you do it instead" because then she's rotten (laughs). (Irfan, 28, Semai)

The thing with women, is they have different instincts to men. Her 'motherly' nature is stronger than a man's. Even if there are men who are able to raise children, I think they [women] are better able to rear children … as they say, the nursing baby has a bond with its mother yes? So she would better understand. (Mokhtar, 39, Semelai)

Rearing the child, that's for women, because they rear them with love … People say love and moral values … so as long as a child loves it's mother, it will not break the law. The man, he provides some support; for instance if the woman teaches the child, the man is the one to buy books, pencils … but the one who teaches is the mother. (Nizam, 29, Temuan)

The responses above are representative of a majority of the views I encountered during my sessions. It appears that the tropes one commonly hears in child rearing, such as maternal instincts, women and their inherent motherliness, and the role of women as natural caretakers (of children), appear to have entered the language and value systems of urban migrant Orang Asli men. This signals a departure from the value system of non-gender specific sharing of domestic responsibilities discussed earlier in traditional Orang Asli communities (see subheading Gender Anxiety: Implications of a Cash Economy). Responses that suggested an equal responsibility between the genders in child rearing – such as Supian's – were largely exceptions to the rule. As detailed under the subheading 'Gender Narratives in Recent Orang Asli Histories,' historical

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narratives of various Orang Asli communities at the settlements have typically indicated an egalitarian division of responsibilities – including child-rearing – which appear not to be stratified along gender lines. It is quite apparent now that a certain degree of change has occurred in this regard. For instance, what I found interesting in Irfan's response was his choice of words in the phrase 'we follow the law like everyone else' when referring to the role of women in the domestic sphere, which in the original Malay transcript was *"kami pun ikut undang-undang macam orang lain jugak."* Clearly, Irfan was not referencing law in the legal sense – because such laws do not exist in the Malaysian legal system – and it is also highly doubtful that it originated from the Semai value system. The reason for this as explained earlier under the previous subheading, is that despite their differences in leadership structures, cosmologies and cultural values, rural Orang Asli communities appear to have shared the distinction of not differentiating work as being women's or men's. The work was done by whomever was able to do it. Irfan's usage of the legal term *undang-undang* or 'law' to assert a woman's position in the domestic sphere may indicate the extent to which cultural permeation from mainstream heteronormative gender roles have seeped into urban Orang Asli understanding of the same, and are increasingly considered absolute truths.

Based on the responses I received from the men to the above line of questioning, I was interested to find out if they thought that women were simply inherently different from men. I asked them if they thought that women and men had equal intellectual abilities and capabilities:

> Yes they do because ... this falls back to my exposure in the urban space. At my work in the environment sector, I can say 60 percent of the managers – team leaders – are women. So for me, from my point of view, both have equal ability and uhmm ... capability to become a leaders, yes. (Raif, 28, Semai)

> I think ... there's a difference, because woman tend to focus on the details, but not men. Men ... often see … the issue from the bigger perspective … you know? Yeah bigger picture ... I think are men ... I mean... [men] can become better leaders. (Emmett, 33, Semai)

> Yes, from an emotional perspective. We often see that they are unable to control their emotions, whereas men … they are able to control their emotions. That's the difference. (Nizam, 29, Temuan)

My aunties, although they are women, they're still able to do things that a man does. So there doesn't appear to be much difference between men and women in that regard … If they're given an opportunity, they would be able to give the community their opinions, but in my community, the members of the *gedo semaq* are all men, so women are unable to participate. (Zabidi, 26, Semelai)

I think from a mental perspective, there are a lot of women who could be leaders. I have many female friends who I think have better leadership skills than men. Not all men make good leaders. One would have to look at leadership values … that is what's important, not whether they're male or female. (Supian, 25, Jakun)

Most men indicated that they didn't think there were differences between the sexes, which leads me to believe that the association between women and the domestic sphere among migrant Orang Asli men in the urban areas was not grounded on perceptions of women's incompatibility with the work force or leadership, but perhaps due to the internalization of mainstream gender heteronormatives by these men. Respondents who thought women differed from men justified their opinions through what they referred to as 'feminine traits' such as an inability to lead, a tendency to act emotionally, and an inability to view the bigger picture. Although most male respondents agreed that there were no real differences between Orang Asli women and men with regards to their intellect, this did not necessarily translate into an actual recognition of domestic equality in gender roles. When I queried them on how they would feel if their wives were to be the primary income earner in the family, most men appeared to be rather disagreeable to the idea. As shown below, the aversion seemed to stem largely from the perspective of 'propriety,' suggesting that it would be 'inappropriate' for their wives to be the primary income earner:

Oh I couldn't do that! As a man I would not be willing. The world has not turned upside down just yet (laughs). When people are willing to do that, it can only mean that the world has turned topsy-turvy … you should know your role, shouldn't you? It's true, there are some who are willing to let that happen, but for me, the role of the man is to lead. It isn't right that women lead men. (Mokhtar, 39, Semelai)

From my point of view (laughs), I can't be a stay-at-home husband. I'm afraid of what everyone else is going to say. (Supian, 25, Jakun)

When a man marries a woman, we are given the responsibility to care for that woman, feed her and everything. So no matter how high her salary may be, and her ability to sustain the family, I think it is better for the man to support his wife. (Zabidi, 26, Semelai)

Men are the head of the family, they should work. If they stay at home, that would look so wrong (laughs). It's my male ego. We pride ourselves on our careers, so I would continue working … yes. (Raif, 28, Semai)

The available literature on the Orang Asli indicates that even in recent decades, Orang Asli women and men did not regard child-rearing, or duties within the domestic sphere, as belonging exclusively to women. As detailed on a number of occasions in this study through references to the scholarship on various Orang Asli communities, gender-based lines appear not to have been drawn around domestic responsibilities. Some of the statements given by the respondents above, which encompass notions of the role of men as primary providers, and the perceived 'dominion' of man over the domestic sphere, appear to be an abrupt departure from what much of the available literature on the Orang Asli describes. It should be noted here that all the references made in this study with regards to the scholarship on various Orang Asli communities in the last 60-70 years were based on research conducted at Orang Asli settlements in the rural and interior areas of the Peninsular. This is largely because detailed studies on Orang Asli communities in an urban environment – including both permanent and transient populations – have yet to be carried out. It appears quite likely then that much of the *un-Orang Asli* rhetoric and value systems observed during the course of this study have to do with the movement of Orang Asli women and men to the urban areas, and the effect of urbanisation on their respective value systems.

This chapter, through its exploration of gender constructs in early and contemporary Orang Asli communities and the implications of cash crops on Orang Asli gender roles, indicates that most (if not all) Orang Asli communities were rarely stratified along the lines of gender norms – both within the domestic and communal spheres. While exceptions to the rule do appear, they seem to largely revolve around Orang Asli cosmology, or taboo laws – such as those pertaining to hunting – and not to the division of labour. Leadership among most Orang Asli communities – particularly with regards to the nomadic Semang groups of the north – were also not stratified by gender. As discussed in the chapter, for communities where male leadership is the norm – particularly among semi-sedentarized horticultural communities such as the Semelai – this may

have arisen as a result of confrontations with outsiders and recurring slave raids, thus necessitating a more pronounced male presence. The chapter further investigates cash economies centered on valuable forest products which – due to inherent physical challenges – are inaccessible to women. In the process it examines the implications of this male-dominated economic venture on gender roles among certain Orang Asli communities – including decision-making processes at the domestic and communal levels – as well as for the rural-urban movement of Orang Asli women in search of employment. The chapter also explores how JAKOA's decades-long involvement within Orang Asli communities through the selection of male-only *batins* and their preference to deal only with male members of the community, has normalised the notion of male leadership among a number of Orang Asli communities.

Chapter 6 will explore administrative categories of Orang Asli settlement communities as framed by the government's development discourse, the implications of rural-urban migration on the gender roles of Orang Asli women, and the ways in which rural-urban migrants maintain cultural and communal relationships with their community at the rural settlements. The chapter ends by examining the implications of rural-urban Orang Asli movement on individuals from various Orang Asli communities.

Chapter 6: Migration and Urban-Kampung Dynamics

The chapter will examine the differentiation of Orang Asli communities into urban, fringe and remote by the administration based on a number of predetermined socio-economic indicators. The implications of rural-urban migration on the gender roles of the Orang Asli will be discussed, as well as the ways in which rural-urban Orang Asli migrants continue to maintain connections with their communities in the rural settlements through a number of sociocultural constructs including customs and customary laws.

Malaysia's urban growth patterns appear to reflect global trends of population increase (UN DESA, 2015), and in the last 10 years statistics by the World Bank indicate that most Malaysians have moved to the urban areas of the country. The percentage of Malaysians living in urban areas in 2006 stood at 67.5 percent, and this percentage increased to 74 percent by the year 2014 (World Bank, 2015). Although the data for year 2015 has yet to be released, based on current patterns, it is likely that the percentage will increase. In 2010, the World Bank recorded Malaysia as having 19 urban areas that had more than 100,000 inhabitants, one (Kuala Lumpur) with more than 5 million, two (Georgetown and Johor Bahru) between 1-5 million, five that had 500,000-1 million inhabitants, and 11 urban areas which had a population between 100,000-500,000 people (World Bank, 2015). At the time of independence in 1957, Malaya only had two urban areas with populations of more than 150,000 people – Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown (Masron, 2012). Table 9 in Appendix D presents comparative data between the year 2000 and 2015 by age and sex for population growth in Malaysia's urban spaces.

Figure 1 in Appendix C reflects the distribution of Malaysians by region between 1970 up until the 2020 forecast. The graph illustrates that the increase in Malaysia's urban population correlates with a decrease in its rural inhabitants, which suggests that a significant factor in the increase of Malaysia's urban populations is a result of rural-urban migration. It is highly likely that this includes the movements seen in the respondents of this study – who have moved to the Klang Valley as economic migrants – indicating that the Orang Asli are not isolated from global patterns of urbanisation. The Malaysian Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) for 2014 revealed that incidences of poverty remained higher in rural areas at 2.7 percent as opposed to 0.5 percent in the urban areas (HIES, 2014), suggesting that better economic prospects in the

nation's urban areas may be a significant pull factor for economically disadvantaged rural migrants.

Available data appear to reflect that in comparison to the 5.9 percent reduction experienced in the growth of rural areas between the period 2000-2015, urban areas appear to have experienced substantial growth (Figure 1, Appendix C), recording an almost 68% increase between the same period (DOSM, 2015). Furthermore, although marginal in comparison to the changes seen in urban areas, rural areas appear to be experiencing a gradual reduction in terms of population size over the last 15 years. Official data released by the government in its 10th Malaysia Plan, reflect that in the first decade of the 21st century, Malaysia continued to experience rapid urbanisation, with urban inhabitants increasing by 2.2 percent between the period 2000-2009, whereas rural populations experienced a growth of only 1.6 percent for the same period (Abdul, 2011). As most Orang Asli communities are located in the rural areas of the Peninsula, it stands to reason that they form part of the rural exodus contributing to the growth in Malaysia's urban areas. According to Yaakob, Masron & Masami (2010), the number of people living in Malaysia's urban areas (urban areas classified as those containing 10,000 individuals or more) increased from 250,790 in 1911 to 13, 725,609 in the year 2000. The authors also noted that with the exception of Singapore, Malaysia has the distinction of having the highest number of urban inhabitants in Southeast Asia, with two-thirds of its population being urbanites.

6.1. Framing and Differentiating Rural and Urban Spaces

The Klang Valley region is both the most urbanized region in Malaysia, and the most heavily populated; it encompasses all of Kuala Lumpur, and some parts of the state of Selangor – the state within which Kuala Lumpur is situated. The federal territory of Kuala Lumpur – known in Malay as *Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur* – and the Selangor districts of Gombak, Petaling Jaya, Hulu Langat and Klang, as well as a few local authorities including Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Shah Alam City Council and Petaling Jaya City Council, collectively form the conventional definition of the Klang Valley region (Dong-Chun, 2016) at 2,843 square kilometers (DBKL, n.d.). Increasingly however, the Klang Valley region is interpreted to include the southern Selangor districts of Sepang (KLIA, Serdang, Bangi, Cyberjaya, Putrajaya, etc.) and Kuala Langat due to the economic and infrastructural relationships between these districts and the Klang Valley. This extended region of 4,000 square kilometers is known as the Klang-Langat

conurbation or *"Wilayah Lanjutan Klang-Langat"* (Rostam, 2006, p. 4). Kuala Lumpur, which lies at the heart of the conurbation, is the most densely populated area at 5,639 persons per square kilometer (Dong-Chun, 2016,). As indicated in Image 2, this study defines the Klang Valley to include the wider Klang-Langat conurbation of 4,000 square kilometers (deep pink), of which the capital is Kuala Lumpur. The northern Selangor states of Kuala Selangor, Sabak Bernam and Hulu Selangor (pale pink) are generally excluded when defining the Klang-Langat conurbation.

Image 2. The Klang-Langat Conurbation within Selangor State (Adapted from DOSM, 2010).

The World Bank studies urban spaces through the use of a number of indicators, some of which include sanitation facilities, water source, population, and poverty gap (World Bank, 2015). In this regard, although the Department of Statistics Malaysia has a number of different indicators that it utilizes in studying Malaysia's urban spaces, it does share a number of similar indicators

with the World Bank in its referencing of urban space, such as access to clean water, sanitation, and total population in urban areas. Some of the other indicators utilized by the Department of Statistics Malaysia are access to basic infrastructure, economic growth, and land development projects.

Masron & Masami (2010, p. 81) argue that the definition of an urban area in Malaysia was first established in 1947 to mean villages with populations of 1000 or more, following which "the definition was expanded to include municipalities, town council areas, town board areas, local council areas, new villages, or villages with 2,000 inhabitants or more." Then in 1970, during the first nationwide census, townships that had 10,000 or more inhabitants were given recognition as urban areas (Masron & Masami, 2010, p. 81) and those that had less than 10,000 inhabitants, were designated as rural areas. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2008), an urban area consists of a specific high-density geographic location amounting to, or in excess of, 10,000 individuals. In addition to this, at least 60% of the population within this area who are aged 15 or more, must be involved in non-agricultural activities, and have access to modern sanitation facilities within their homes. Based on this definition, there were 140 urban centers in Malaysia in the year 2000, in comparison to the 8 in 1911 (Masron, Yaakob, Norizawati & Aimi, 2012); with the urbanisation process itself increasing from 10 percent in 1911 to 28.4 percent in 1970 and 61.8 percent in 2010 (Yaakob, Masron & Masami, 2010). A rural area on the other hand, is defined as a low-density geographic location with less than 10,000 inhabitants, whose economic landscapes are characterized by their dependence on agricultural activities and their association with forests, coastlines and islands. The definition of agricultural activities as defined by the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development encompasses the cultivation of all plants and nurseries and the breeding of all animals including the capture, collection, breeding, and rearing of marine life (KKLW, 2011). The National Census also defines urban and rural communities on the number of inhabitants within a set geographic location, and their corresponding economic activities.

While there are Orang Asli populations in both the Peninsula's rural and urban regions, JAKOA's categorization of these communities does not appear to correspond to the federal government's rural/urban dichotomy. While JAKOA continues to maintain the 'urban' (*bandar*) category, it has two other classifications – 'fringe' (*pinggir*), and 'remote' (*pedalaman*) – to

describe non-urban Orang Asli communities. Furthermore, unlike the primary indicator of population size used by the federal government to determine its rural/urban binary, JAKOA's primary indicators (Table 10) tend towards those that assess quality of life.

As presented in Table 10, JAKOA's classification of Orang Asli settlements is based on a number of criteria, which include infrastructural facilities, economic development, accessibility, availability and economic activities (JAKOA, 2010). According to JAKOA's 2010 statistics, there were 327 Orang Asli villages designated as remote, 519 fringe settlements and 6 urban settlements throughout Peninsular Malaysia. This information was later updated in the same year to reflect the change of status of 5 Orang Asli villages from remote to fringe, taking the total number of fringe and remote villages in 2010 to 525 and 322 respectively (JAKOA, 2010). Of the 12 states in Peninsular Malaysia, only the states of Perlis, Penang and the federal territory of Kuala Lumpur do not have a contemporary Orang Asli presence; while the states of Kedah, Perak, Kelantan, Terengganu, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor, and Pahang, are inhabited by the various Orang Asli communities that make up the 853 Orang Asli settlements of Peninsular Malaysia. Of the six Orang Asli settlements that have been categorised as urban, four are located within the Klang Valley, and the remaining two in Pahang (the Semai community of Kg. Sg. Ruil, Cameron Highlands) and Johor (the Orang Kuala community of Pulai Sebatang, Pontian) respectively. As shown in Table 11, the four urban Orang Asli settlements in the Klang Valley – Sg. Rasau Hilir, Sg. Rasau Hulu, Air Kuning and Desa Temuan (Bukit Lanjan) – are all located within the district of Petaling (in the state of Selangor), and comprise ethnic Temuans.

Table 10

Categories of Orang Asli Settlements in Peninsular Malaysia (JAKOA, 2015).

Settlement Category	Criteria
Remote (*Pedalaman*)	a. Accessible only through dirt roads, trails or waterways.
	b. No access to clean potable water, no 24-hour uninterrupted electricity supply, and no basic infrastructure.
	c. Irregular economies
Fringe (*Pinggir*)	a. Located close to a Malay village.
	b. Accessible through tarmacked roads.
	c. Access to clean potable water, uninterrupted 24-hour electricity supply.
	d. Land development projects and a stable economy.
Urban (*Bandar*)	a. Well-equipped facilities
	b. No land development projects.

Table 11

Urban Orang Asli Settlements in the Klang Valley (Adapted from JAKOA, 2010).

District	Ethnic Group	Settlement Classification	Settlement	Household Heads	Household Members	Total Pop. Per Village
Petaling	Temuan	Urban	Sg. Rasau Hilir	90	190	280
			Sg. Rasau Hulu	37	177	214
			Air Kuning	33	118	151
			Desa Temuan (Bukit Lanjan)	200	435	635
Total				**360**	**920**	**1280**

As JAKOA does not regard Orang Asli communities in the state of Selangor as remote, the 70 other non-urban Orang Asli settlements in the state of Selangor are classified as fringe. To gain a better understanding of JAKOA's classification of Orang Asli communities into urban, fringe and remote, I spoke to Dr. Rafee, a contact of mine in the field:

Remote … none of the *kampung* have electricity, not even water supply ... so that would be considered remote, O.K.? Fringe-wise, fringe is normally easily accessed by road. Road, and the *kampung* have electricity, and receives water supply from the authorities. I think … with fringe [*kampungs*], you can sometimes find the nearest next town in half an hour or maybe a few kilometers.

Rafee explained to me that the changes in classification from remote to fringe could occur within a period of as little as a few months – as long as basic infrastructural and development indicators were met – whereas a change from fringe to urban would take a substantially longer period due to the much more complex economic and social indicators involved in defining an urban environment. To illustrate this, he explained the reclassification of Pos Mensun in Cameron Highlands, Pahang, from a remote settlement to a fringe community,

Because you see … Pos Mensun was once considered *pedalaman* [remote]. But because Tenaga Nasional Berhad [Malaysia's national and Southeast Asia's largest electric utility company] built a dam project there – called Empangan Ulu Jelai – they built a road. So now the, the *kampung* folk at Pos Mensun can easily access Ringlet [a major tourist town in Cameron Highlands]. So based on the infrastructure available … I would consider it as fringe.

It would appear that infrastructure – more specifically accessibility, access to electricity, and potable water – is a significant benchmark in determining if an Orang Asli settlement is either remote or fringe. In describing a remote community, Rafee gave the following description of Kampung Sungai Kejar in the Kejar-Tiang basin within Royal Belum state park:

[Royal Belum] is considered remote. Yeah? If you want to go to Kampung Sungai Kejar, you would have to take a boat. The journey takes about ... if you go by speedboat … about one hour ... one hour plus. If you use a small boat ... then perhaps four hours? This village has no electricity … no water supply. The people there are referred to as *'miskin tegar'* [hardcore poor] yeah?

Remote settlements such as the one described by Rafee make up approximately one-third (37.7%) of the Orang Asli settlements in Peninsular Malaysia, with more than half of them located in the states of Pahang (113) and Perak (112) respectively. The remaining remote settlements (97) are distributed across the states of Kelantan (73), Johor (20), and Negeri

Sembilan (4). Settlements classified as fringe on the other hand are more numerous and make up approximately two-thirds (61.54%) of total Orang Asli settlements, again with the bulk of the settlements located in the states of Pahang (148) and Perak (143), and the remaining fringe settlements distributed across Selangor (70), Negeri Sembilan (64), Kelantan (45), Johor (37), Melaka (14), Terengganu (3) and Kedah (1). Lastly, the urban settlements (0.7%) are only found in three states – Selangor (4), Pahang (1) and Johor (1), (JAKOA, 2010).

6.2. From the Settlements to the City: Investigating Orang Asli Movement

In its guide to housing indigenous peoples in cities, UN Habitat (2009) suggests that the urbanisation of indigenous communities arise as a result of two possible circumstances. The first involves subsumption of an indigenous community's ancestral lands by an advancing urban space – for instance through the expansion of villages into towns, followed by towns into cities, etc. – and the second, when rural indigenous peoples move to urban spaces for various reasons. It would appear that within the context of the Klang Valley, both forms of indigenous urbanisation occur – albeit involving different Orang Asli groups. For instance, over the last few decades, the four (*Sg. Rasau Hilir, Sg. Rasau Hulu, Air Kuning* and *Desa Temuan/Bukit Lanjan*) urban Orang Asli settlements in Selangor were gradually subsumed by the increasing mass of Kuala Lumpur's urban territory. "When indigenous land is engulfed in urban space, the indigenous community continues to live on ancestral lands, although now in an urbanized setting" (UN Habitat, 2009, p. 1). That being said, it appears that some indigenous communities – such as the Temuan of Bukit Lanjan – do experience a degree of relocation while still being in the vicinity of their ancestral lands. As the Orang Asli community closest to the epicenter of the Klang Valley and thus situated closest to Kuala Lumpur, the Temuan people of Desa Temuan were originally inhabitants of the wider Bukit Lanjan hill area. They were removed from this wider hill region and given residential properties in a smaller adjacent settlement known as Desa Temuan in 1996 (see Image 3), following acquisition and development of most of their ancestral lands into the Damansara Perdana development project for residential (including Neo Damansara) and commercial ventures (including Empire Damansara and Perdana Business Center) by the EMKAY group. Although projects are still ongoing within the Damansara Perdana area, most projects were initiated in the late 1990s, with the bulk of them completed by the mid 2000s. Today, Damansara Perdana forms part of the Golden Triangle area of the city of Petaling Jaya.

Image 3. Satellite image of the Bukit Lanjan area with Desa Temuan demarcated in yellow, (Wikimapia, 2016).

Orang Asli communities such as the Temuan of Desa Temuan, as well as the Temuan communities in the other three urban Orang Asli settlements of the Klang Valley were gradually absorbed into an urban space as a result of urbanisation processes that spanned several decades. The respondents that form the core sample of this group however, unlike the aforementioned urban Temuan communities, are relatively recent migrants into the Klang Valley's urban space. Unlike the Temuan, they are not homogeneous and consist of various Orang Asli communities from across the Peninsula, who appear to have migrated to the Klang Valley for a number of reasons, although my study strongly indicates economic motivations as a primary factor. In this regard, they ostensibly fall under the second category of urbanized indigenous peoples as defined by UN Habitat (2009), namely, the phenomenon of rural indigenous peoples moving to urban spaces for various reasons.

In her attempts to understand the urbanisation of Canada's First Nation peoples, Peters (2002) explored the movement and experiences of rural First Nation migrants between the years 1945-1975 into Canada's urban areas. She noted that an overwhelming majority of First Nation peoples living in Canada's urban spaces migrated for economic reasons, in order to escape the "economic limitations inherent in the reserve system," (Peters, 2002, p. 79). This trend is not dissimilar from those seen among the Orang Asli – particularly Orang Asli women – as indicated earlier in the subheading 'Gender Anxiety – Implications of a Cash Economy' due to the

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exclusion of Orang Asli women from certain cash crop sectors such as oil palm and commercially-valuable forest products. As is often the case, there appears to be socio-economic similarities among indigenous populations with regards to the effects of land dispossession and economic disadvantages brought about as a result of administrative establishment and continuation of indigenous settlements. Poverty brought about by the loss of ancestral land, deforestation and land dispossession, as well as the associated decrease in a community's ability to meet its subsistence needs, appears to have motivated a number of Orang Asli migrants into the country's urban areas in search of better employment prospects.

It would seem that with regards to the Orang Asli, land loss, or the loss of susbsistence ability does not always correlate with the development of the area in question. Sometimes, it is the protection of such spaces through environmental acts which may also have negative implications for the subsistence capabilities of indigenous communities. For instance, conservation efforts that have received wide coverage and support by key players in global conservation efforts such as the Ramsar convention – of which Malaysia became a signatory in 1994 – have had effects that are detrimental to the ability of certain Orang Asli communities to meet their socio-economic and subsistence needs. The designation of Tasik Bera in southeast Pahang as a Ramsar site has had implications on the ability of the approximately 2000 native Semelai to provide for their communities. As the largest freshwater lake in the country, Tasik Bera has an area of 31,120 hectares with an additional 6800 hectares of associated wetlands, and 77,380 hecatres that comprise the buffer zone (DWNP, 2016), within which the Semelai settlements are located, as well as large swathes of government owned plantation schemes of oil palm and rubber. The Semelai practice slash and burn agriculture as a means of cultivating "a number of varieties of hill rice including glutinous types, manioc, gourds, cucumber, corn bananas, sweet potatoes, eggplant and tobacco" (Kruspe, 2004, p. 27); indicating that swidden agriculture is of particular importance to the Semelai as a primary source of carbohydrates as well as goods with which to trade. However, following the designation of the Tasik Bera complex in its entirety as a Ramsar site, the Semelai are no longer allowed to clear forested areas to conduct slash and burn agriculture, nor are they allowed to carry out commercial fishing and game hunting within the complex (UNDP, 2003), which deprives them of traditional farming grounds, and leaves them with fewer economic opportunities. While there are Semelai households that have resorted to rubber and oil palm agriculture, they have largely been excluded from the more financially

lucrative tourism economy. This may have implications for the Semelai's ability to provide for themselves, contributing to the movement to urban areas in search of employment.

As indicated in Table 13 (Appendix E), the male respondents of this study (from various Orang Asli communities) migrated to the Klang Valley in search of employment, or, as in the case of Supian and Zabidi, to gain an education in order to secure an employment opportunity later on. During one of my conversations with Mokhtar, a late 30s Semelai man in the civil sector, he stated the following reason as to why many members of the Semelai community in his village move to the Klang Valley:

> From the perspective of those in the Klang Valley, there are not as many employment opportunities in the rural areas. They are very limited … it's really difficult from that aspect. Because there are many opportunities available in the Klang Valley, like I said earlier, as long as you have a good background and education, you could find yourself a job – just like anyone else.

My interviews with female respondents of this study (Table 12, Appendix E) revealed that for many their movements were motivated primarily by employment opportunities in the Klang Valley. Migration for purposes of education was viewed as a means through which one could potentially improve one's socio-economic status, while giving one an advantage in a competitive job market. Although I had also initially included 'healthcare' as a possible factor, none of the respondents of this study mentioned this as reasons for moving to the Klang Valley. This may be the result of the strong presence of governmental clinics, hospitals and health care facilities available in the rural areas of the Peninsula – even remote Orang Asli settlements are provided with mobile health services – though these services tend to be intermittent, and serious health complications would still require travel to one of the major townships. Nonetheless, this would mean that unless continued specialized treatments were necessary, migration for healthcare appears to be an unlikely factor. Access to primary and secondary education also did not seem to be a factor. This could largely be a result of the government's policy of establishing primary and secondary schools throughout the country – even in rural villages – with almost 6000 and 2000 primary and secondary schools respectively (MOE, 2015). These numbers do not include the various other primary and secondary institutions that may be found in Malaysia such as vernacular, polytechnic, vocational and boarding schools.

Although none of the female respondents moved to the Klang Valley as a result of marriage, interestingly, a number of them did undergo the migration in order to avoid, or delay it. A few female respondents indicated that migrating to the Klang Valley has allowed them to escape marrying at a younger age, something most of them indicated would have significantly altered their futures. Urban mobility appears to have been – for these women at least – a means through which they were able to attain greater personal freedom, and gain access to employment opportunities. Shida, a Semai woman in her mid 30s who is an Internal Communications Manager at a major multinational, described to me the implications of her family's decision to move from her mother's remote settlement into a small township in Pengkalan Hulu:

> If we had grown up maybe just somewhere in Parit, in Perak, where my mother grew up, maybe life's circumstances would have been different. If we had stayed in ... that *kampung*, I think I would probably have gotten married at 19, and have … you know, 5 children now ... (laughs) Do you know what I mean? Yeah.

In referring to Orang Asli women at the settlements, Willa, a Semelai woman in her late 20s, expressed hope that younger Orang Asli women would refrain from getting married too young, stating:

> I hope they study hard, and do not disappoint their families. Many of them study and after they are done studying, end up getting married. I find that to be so disappointing. They should start on a career, and then perhaps in 2 to 3 years, consider getting married … or stay single. I would advise them to get an education, build a career and then decide what they want.

Sara, a 24 year-old Semai woman who works as an administrative officer, described her experience with her family when she made the decision to migrate to the Klang Valley for work:

> They were supportive, and they encouraged me. It wasn't like it would have been before. A woman my age would already have been married. But now, at my age, I can work outside [in the city], and look for an income for my family.

Nomi, also an administrative assistant, is in her early 20s and one of the youngest respondents of this study. Her narrative indicated to me that her move to the Klang Valley was not just about employment, but also to enjoy her youth:

My community? They wanted me to gain some experience, and told me that I was still young and shouldn't get married now. I think as young people we should explore the outside world, and enjoy it. I wish Orang Asli women wouldn't get married so soon. Enjoy life and study hard. Because as women, if we don't at least have an education, then we have nothing.

When I queried some respondents on what their aspirations were for young Orang Asli women, a large number hoped that Orang Asli girls would stay in school and complete their education, stating that this would be an important step toward bettering Orang Asli communities. With the exception of some of the older respondents, a large number of this study's respondents had successfully completed secondary education, which appeared to have facilitated their entry into the Klang Valley. During our conversations, it appeared that respondents who were my contemporaries in age or younger ($\leq$ 35) experienced comparably little difficulty in adapting to the urban environment of the Klang Valley compared to individuals from their parents' generation. At the same time, it seemed that there were a number of factors involved, such as whether individuals spent their formative years in small townships or remote settlements, as well as their education level, and the education levels of their parents. Furthermore, religion also appeared to play a role, as a couple of Muslim Orang Asli respondents were brought up in close association with Malay individuals which made them more familiar with Malay cultural norms and value systems. It was my observation that closer associations with the Malay community through religious affiliation translated into smoother assimilation into mainstream society. While the parents of a number of respondents appeared to be more comfortable at the settlements or in the smaller townships, younger individuals appeared to face considerably less difficulty in adapting to the Klang Valley. Although a number of them did mention the initial challenges faced upon arrival, which included a lack of financial resources and a limited social circle, most of them now appear to have settled in quite successfully, displaying socio-economic indicators of relative prosperity such as the ownership of cars, properties and stable employment. While Orang Asli communities that experienced sedentarization firsthand may find themselves somewhat in a position of uncertainty – unable to return to their previous close association with the forest and finding it difficult to assimilate into a modernizing Malaysia – it appears that younger Orang Asli individuals face fewer challenges when attempting to assimilate into contemporary Malaysia.

6.3. Maintaining Urban-Rural Connections

As the most developed urban area in Malaysia, many of the perceived opportunities in the Klang Valley come with the challenges typical of heavily urbanized environments, including the high cost of housing, vehicle maintainance, and food expenditure. In this regard, some respondents view frequent trips back to the rural settlements as opportunities to escape the stressful urban environment. Respondents stated that when they return to their settlements, many of them revert to doing the activities they did before they migrated to the Klang Valley, which may include helping out in the family garden, forest excursions, and even tapping rubber in the family's rubber grove. Currently in her late 20s, Anggrik, who returns to her Hma' Meri settlement on Carey Island every weekend, described what it meant to her:

> Although we live outside [in the Klang Valley], we do village work when we are back. I enjoy it, and it de-stresses me. If I'm stressed, I don't need to waste my money at a karaoke session in the city, I just drive back to my village and start digging so I can plant yams. At least that has some form of return (laughs).

I asked respondents if their family and community members were supportive regarding their migration to the Klang Valley. By asking this question I was hoping to find out how Orang Asli individuals at the settlements felt about the urban space, or if they had preconceived notions regarding the Klang Valley. Almost all respondents replied that their family and community members were overwhelmingly supportive of the idea. I asked respondents what this mobility mean to them? Did this rural-urban movement necessitate a complete casting away of their indigenous identity and the donning on of an urban one in order to become 'true' participants in the Klang Valley? When I questioned Mokhtar on what it meant to be urban and indigeneous, his reply suggested a certain transient quality regarding his position:

> Well I'm not really migrating am I? It's sort of 'on and off' isn't it? By 'on and off' I mean to say we know where we came from, and we know where we're returning to. So the meaning of 'on and off' is that you don't forget your place of origin … we need to remember that we move to the city and that we also have family in the village, so we divide ourselves, in that way both [environments] can be experienced.

From my conversations with respondents, it seemed that respondents did not tend to see themselves as urban indigenous participants, but as indigenous participants in an urban space. With the exception of one participant who was born to convert Muslim parents and brought up in a peri-urban environment away from her parents' settlement, most respondents appeared not to view themselves as urban Orang Asli, but as still being members of their rural communities. Peters (2002, p. 85) observed a similar dynamics among Canada's First Nation peoples:

> Although a large number of Indians have left their home reserves … this cannot reasonably be interpreted to mean that these people are rejecting their Indian culture and traditions, their home reserves or their fellow band members … the general discussions that interviewers held indicate that the vast majority of Indians living in cities still consider themselves to be members of their band — not urban Indians.

Most respondents in this study were unmarried; of the total 23 female and male respondents in this study, four were married, and only two of them had children. I asked unmarried respondents where they would want their children brought up, and almost half (10) wanted their children brought up in the Klang Valley primarily due to reasons ranging from education, infrastructure, and urban acculturation. Four respondents preferred the settlements, and eight were unsure. However, despite the difference of opinion, and the majority who preferred an urban environment for their children, virtually all respondents wanted their children to maintain connections with the settlement in the form of frequent visits and extended stays in order to cultivate and maintain cultural ties with their respective Orang Asli cultures. In this regard, some respondents appeared to associate the raising of children at the village with the imbuement of Orang Asli culture, beliefs and value systems. The following are excerpts from the interviews regarding child-raising at the village:

> I would like to maintain between the city and the village, but I would prefer the village because then they can learn how to speak Hma' Meri, and know the lifestyle of the Orang Asli. When they live in the city, I worry they will forget. (Anggrik, late 20s, Hma' Meri)

> Well, one of the factors is that if at all possible, I want them to know what Orang Asli customs and belief systems are. So at least when they know what it is, they can feel it – just

like I felt it when I was a child. Only then would they be allowed to leave [to the city]. This is so they know their identity as Orang Asli. (Zabidi, 26, Semelai)

We want them to know the culture of the *kampung*. Because the people of the village, they know the city, but the people of the city, they do not know the village. This is why we need to raise them at the village. (Nizam, 29, Temuan)

I guess just for the sake of education? Not really for the [city] lifestyle? Because I still want them to have the [village] influence yeah? This Orang Asli heritage and everything, so I still need them … I still want them to know my language. To know how to be able to speak in my language. (Emmett, 33, Semai)

These statements appear to reflect a view among respondents that as cultural hubs, Orang Asli settlements in the village play important roles in instilling Orang Asli value systems and cultural norms into the minds of their children, and upcoming Orang Asli generations. Furthermore, it appears to be the case that for respondents who want their children to be brought up at the settlements, that a childhood in the settlement is the best way in which to cultivate an Orang Asli identity. While all respondents may not necessarily share this point of view, a majority of them appear to share the notion that a close relationship with the settlement is necessary in fostering the development of Orang Asli identity, and its associated value systems and cultural norms. Again, this finding appears to bear close similarity with Peters' (2002, p. 79) observation of rural-urban First Nation migrants in Canada, "For many First Nations people living in cities, the reserves and rural areas of their genesis were places that still represented home, places that were important for their sense of cultural identity, and places to which they wished to return to raise their children or to retire." As I attempted to understand how connections between urban Orang Asli respondents and their rural communities were maintained, there appeared to be three recurring sociocultural themes between respondents and their respective communities – marriage/divorce, the sociality of sharing, and the role of the community as mediators – that play substantial roles in maintaining the integrity of the urban-rural connection.

6.3.1. Marriage and Divorce

When discussing the question of marriage with a number of female respondents, I came to realize that the selection of prospective partners and the process leading up to marriage appeared

to heavily necessitate the involvement of their family and communities back at the settlements – regardless of whether the women were financially independent and lived in the Klang Valley. It appears that while women and men were free to marry whomever they chose, certain traditional cultural observations still had to be followed – including the seeking of permission by both the bride and the groom to their respective potential in-laws – and certain community customary laws concerning courtship and betrothal. The exclusion of the couple's families and communities – in particular that of the bride's – appeared to have potentially dire consequences for the bride should the relationship sour in the future, or face complications. I asked Nomi, a young Semai respondent in her early 20s how important parental consent and customary laws were should she decide to get married:

> It's important. Especially important because if I select someone, and I don't let it be known – for instance if I pick my partner and I don't inform them – one day if we get into a quarrel or if any problems arise, my family will not bear any responsibility … because that was my choice. Yes, this is the custom of the Semai and that of the *waris* [in the Semai community, the *waris* is the "wrongdoer's kindred … who is called upon to speak in the defense of the 'law breaker'" (Gomes, 2004, p. 33)] of my village. They will not help me. But if they do take pity on me and decide to help me, I will be punished, and scolded … the punishment would be a fine.

Nomi's narrative suggests that urban-rural connections are kept alive through the involvement of the community and family in the respondent's marital decision-making processes via the platform of Orang Asli customary laws, the exclusion of which may result in the loss of both filial and communal support structures in the event of a negative marriage outcome. It is particularly important to note that Orang Asli individuals appear not to approach institutions and organisations outside of their respective communities for assistance with regards to marital or domestic problems. I questioned Semelai respondent Zaitun on the likelihood of a woman from her community approaching an NGO or helpline for marriage-related problems:

> No, there is no such thing. To request [help] just like the Malays you mean? No, it doesn't happen, because [the issue] is in the community, within the community. It's within the community … [so] they will go to the hall ... the *gedo semaq* hall, and they will settle everything there.

When discussing the matter of divorce or abuse with respondents, almost all of them hinted at the role of their respective indigenous leadership structures in mediating such issues, while stressing the exclusion of external non-indigenous influences in conflict resolution. The following are excerpts from my conversations with Hasibah, a Jakun woman and Zeeza, a Semelai woman, on how women from their communities would deal with abuse:

> If it's family related, she has to refer to her own family. Or if there is to be a divorce, then she will refer to the *batin* – the same *batin* who married them. You can't say you've ever heard of an Orang Asli abuse case being reported in the papers … yes? Or that an Orang Asli woman was abused by her husband? Because such issues are solved within the family, whereby they will approach the in-laws to resolve the issue, perhaps through divorce. (Hasibah, late 20s)

> The nature of Orang Asli [women] in the Klang Valley is if their husbands abuse them, they will return to the family home [in the settlement]. They will not go to a woman's shelter or do such things. They will return to the family home, and tell them "my husband is doing this to me" and everyone will discuss it. If it cannot be resolved, then they will get divorced. (Zeeza, mid 20s)

Although it appears that all Orang Asli communities have experienced varying degrees of alteration to the egalitarian values of their communities due to decades-long exposure to external influences, it still seems that Orang Asli women continue to enjoy a high degree of personal rights and freedoms with regards to divorce, while experiencing little stigma as divorcees, in comparison to mainstream ethnic groups. This appears largely due to the support that a woman receives from her community and family, as narrated by Melati, a single Semelai mother in her late 40s:

> If the wife really no longer likes her husband, she will let her parents know, saying "I no longer want to be with this man." So the next step is her parents will see the *batin*, call the husband's side of the family, and discuss the issue. If there is to be a divorce, they get divorced. If they would like to give it another chance, then they do so.

The involvement of the family and community at the intial stages of courtship and marriage appears to provide Orang Asli women with a 'safety net' structure – based on filial and communal relational worlds – in the event of a divorce or if faced with an abusive relationship in

the future. It also appears that with regards to an abusive relationship, the punishment meted out by the community on the perpetrator of the crime may even transcend the lifetime of the attachment of the couple in question. Zaitun, in narrating how Semelai men who physically abuse their wives are punished through the customary Semelai tribunal system, stated the following:

> If he remarries another woman, and then let's say he has children who want to get married to another person – maybe a few years into the future? What happens then is the people – particularly the family [of the abused woman] could prevent [the marriage] from happening. Say[ing] that this man had a very abusive father – after which the story will start to spread. That's the kind of control the community has. It's a way of prevension … through the use of shame. The moral implications are that you shouldn't do certain things or people in the community will talk about it for the rest of your life – or for the rest of your generation's line.

As seen in Zaitun's narrative, the involvement of the community structure in marriage – especially in the unfortunate future scenario of abuse – has far-reaching implications that carry on to the abuser's sons. She also indicates the manner in which such 'shaming' measures function as deterrents against abuse in Semelai relationships. From my interviews, it appears that such indigenous structures appear also to be important when seeking marriage-related compensation, or when arguing one's case before indigenous Orang Asli tribunal systems. This indicates that despite the educational or professional backgrounds of the respondents, the role of the community in marriage as a life milestone event appears to play a crucial role in maintaining rural-urban connections between respondents and their respective Orang Asli communities.

6.3.2. The Sociality of Sharing

A recent study (Thambiah, Zanisah & Rusaslina, 2015, p. 463) noted that "Orang Asli identity and roots are linked to their land. Most of them continue to connect with their ancestral land by visiting their family and attending weddings and funerals in their villages." However, there appear to be more than settlement-related events that connect urban Orang Asli migrants to their communities. In this regard, urban Orang Asli migrants also appear to be active participants in forming and maintaining connections with their rural settlements, as discussed below.

The bulk of the respondents of this study were between the age of 25-35, and with this younger generation, a form of cultural code-switching could be seen with regards to their ability to negotiate both the Orang Asli value systems of their rural settlements and the urban environment of their employment, using both locations as reference points in determining their behaviour in the Klang Valley. It appeared that the ties connecting these urban Orang Asli respondents to their communities were not exclusively grounded on traditions and customary laws. While cultural institutions that originate in rural Orang Asli settlements such as the *gedo semaq* of the Semelai and the *lembaga adat* of the Hma' Meri, as well as varying forms of non-institutionalized codes of conduct found in other Orang Asli communities may encourage adherence to Orang Asli cultural and value systems, there also appeared to be connections that originated from the urban space towards the rural realm, that play a role in maintaining urban-rural connections. In this regard, a recurring theme I came across in my conversations with respondents were their attempts to reach out to their friends and younger members of their community who were still living at the settlements, in order to encourage them to venture into the Klang Valley and participate in its economic opportunities.

I found this to be particularly interesting, as this need to share what they felt were economic opportunities with members of their community appeared to be an extension of the foraging patterns of many pre-sedentarized Orang Asli communities, who similarly shared forest resources with other members of their immediate bands. As detailed under the subheading 'Gender Narratives in Recent Orang Asli Histories,' observations have been made by a number of scholars on the sharing practices of various Orang Asli communities, and the cultural taboos that facilitate this sharing. Although most pre-sedentarized Orang Asli communities appeared to have regarded the nuclear family as the basic unit of the community (Tachimoto & Baer 2001; Gomes 2004; Nobuta 2008), with complete autonomy in its movements and foraging practices, substantial food items procured from the forests by a family were typically shared with other members of the community. As contended by Gomes (2007, p. 112) "sharing is a way of redistributing resources which are naturally spread widely and unequally among people in a group in order that everyone benefits and nobody is disadvantaged from the vagaries of the food quest."

While Gomes was discussing the sharing of food among the Menraq at the level of the rural community, the sharing of economic opportunities in the city by urban Orang Asli migrants appears to closely address the related notions of community survival, as seen in the following statements by respondents:

If I meet my people at the village, I say to them, O.K., you go out into the city and see what there is, look for good things [and] then go back to the village. Whatever you've learned from the city, develop it in the village and help our Orang Asli. Learn from the other ethnic groups; for instance from the Chinese, because they are known for their business skills, so we learn and we make our own businesses in the village. (Supian, 25, Jakun)

They [parents] keep reminding me … me and my brother. I mean their sons, not to forget where they come from. I mean yeah, so at the same time we're in the city, we are receiving the goods of modernisation … all the information, technology, but at the same time we still keep in touch with our folks back in the village. So in a sense we do influence … men and women … whereby we let them see the potential of moving outside the village. (Raif, 28, Semai)

The statement by Raif illustrates the Orang Asli migrant's experience of the positive aspects of urban living as well as its associated privileges. Concurrently, the urban migrant's active role in maintaining strong connections to the settlement through efforts to draw members of the community into the urban space that they may access the opportunities available therein could be viewed as *the act of sharing*. Supian further explained that he wanted his community to achieve the same status of development as the other major ethnies in the country, and that exposure to the urban environment would play a significant role in facilitating the advancement of his community:

We motivate the kids, and the villagers, also our relatives … since we've been out to the city, we share with them the challenges we faced while we were there. We must tell them what opportunities are available there. I think this would already be of great help. We're not talking about giving them money, because money isn't necessarily going to help them. In fact, the advice we give them is more valuable than money. (Supian, 25, Jakun)

While historically foraging may have involved shorter distances and more immediate returns, foraging for the Orang Asli today necessitates migration to urban areas for work. What appears to remain the same – at least in practice – is their tendency to share their findings with other members of their community, so that all may share in available opportunities. To this end, it could be said that opportunities such as those brought about when Raif and Supian share their experiences of the Klang Valley with members of their community, create a platform that enables not only the formation of additional connections between urban Orang Asli migrants and their communities at the settlements, but also fulfills a functional role: that of sharing resources potentially contributing to Orang Asli resilience in an urbanizing Malaysia. Such circumstances echo Gomes' (2007, p. 112) observation on the "sociality created by sharing in the functionalist sense, [in] that it establishes and maintains social relations among members of the band" promoting cohesiveness for all members of a particular Orang Asli community – both at the settlements and the urban migrants in the city.

6.3.3. The Community as Mediators

Despite their movement to the urban space of the Klang Valley, it appears that when married Orang Asli couples face domestic issues, the involvement of the settlement community as mediators is the norm. Furthermore, domestic issues rarely appear to revolve around the incidence of domestic abuse, and most respondents were of the opinion that with the exception of isolated incidences which were drug or alcohol related, domestic abuse did not appear to feature widely in their communities. From personal observations, it appears that there is a likelihood that this could be a result of the relatively high degree of autonomy still held by Orang Asli women, and the lack of stigma should she decide to return to her parents' domicile, or if she should action divorce, thus removing her from situations where she might otherwise be at higher risk of experiencing physical abuse. This lack of stigma among Orang Asli communities towards female members who are divorced or who are single mothers appears to be a reflection of the egalitarian values that many academics consider the defining trait of Orang Asli communities.

Furthermore, there appears to be a direct correlation between the support a woman receives from her family and community, and her risk of staying in an abusive relationship. According to Adam and Trost (2004, p. 153), certain "marriage traditions are such that they undermine the ability of women to escape abusive relationships" citing examples of parents of Indian women

with abusive husbands who were unwilling to take their daughters back due to fears of having to pay back, or repay, a second dowry to the husband's family. The authors further add: "women are socialized within such a dominant patriarchal value system that they accept the rights of husbands to discipline them, especially when the wife violates traditional gender norms" (Adam and Trost, 2004, p. 153), indicating the role of community structures in abusive relationships. While I have explored what appears to be the seeping in of mainstream heteronormatives into contemporary Orang Asli value systems in the previous chapter, gender anxiety appears largely to still be confined to superficial notions of a woman's responsibilities in the domestic sphere. From my time with the respondents of this study, as well as the available literature on the changes occurring among the Orang Asli today, the degree of patriarchy observable in the major non-Orang Asli ethnies of Peninsular Malaysia does not seem to feature among the Orang Asli. Meaning that largely, the crystallization of rigid gender roles between Orang Asli women and men have yet to occur, although as indicated in the previous chapter, there appear to be signs that this is now changing. Although physical abuse appears not to be a common feature amongst Orang Asli communities, the monetization of the same appears to have given rise to incidences of economic abuse at the settlements, as narrated by Supian:

> Abuse well … I very rarely hear of [physical] abuse among the Orang Asli. There might be one or two cases that are alcohol or drug related. However, some of these Orang Asli men hold back from giving their wives money; so she can't buy what she needs. Men whose wives don't work; in these cases, the men should fulfill their responsibilities but they don't.

During the course of my interviews, I asked both female and male respondents if they were aware of a shelter, or safe space that was available to Orang Asli women in the Klang Valley who might need to escape mental or physical abuse, and if the establishment of such centers would be useful. Although some did think such centers could potentially be useful, many of them also thought that it would be redundant, and perhaps not achieve its intended goal as a safe space for Orang Asli women. The reason for this appeared to lie in the importance that the Orang Asli placed in their communities as mediators in resolving domestic issues. Neil, a 39 years-old Semai father pointed out:

> In our community, I feel that most cases involving domestic affairs will be resolved through customary law at the village. This is why I don't know if a shelter should be established. We

may need a center, but for the moment I think … not to say that we don't want one, but the problem is usually resolved sooner [at the village]. I mean, this even includes divorce.

I asked 26 years-old Zabidi, how issues such as divorce was handled among migrant Semelai in the Klang Valley, to which he responded:

Common practice among the Orang Asli is if there is a problem – issues to do with the domestic sphere – they will refer the matter to the *gedo semaq* or to the *waliq* who married them. That is if they cannot resolve the issue among themselves.

It appears that it is not only the indigenous leadership structure of the Orang Asli community in question which functions as a mediating force, but also linkages formed through marriage customs with members from each individual's in-laws. Zaitun said that in addition to the Semelai's *gedo semaq*, the women are also protected through a marriage custom known as the *waliq* system:

In the Semelai community, females are protected by the entire community. When you are married, you have [a] *waliq*. One *waliq* is from the man to the woman, and the other *waliq* is from the woman to the man, I mean … it's like [a] cross. The representative of the man must come from [the] woman's family, and the representative of the woman must come from the man's family; because if anything happens in the marriage, then the woman can refer to the uncle from the man's side. She will consult him, and if they can't avoid a divorce, then the *waliq* [from the husband's side], will speak to the other *waliq* [from the wife's side] and then they will try to settle it between them [between the *waliqs*] first, and if they are still unable to resolve the issue, then they will talk to the parents.

Zaitun also indicated that the *waliq* system is held in particularly high regard among the Semelai, and that both the parents of the wife and husband, even if they are aware of the marital problems affecting their children, will not discuss the matter unless first approached by the *waliqs*. When considering the dynamic relationship between Orang Asli migrants with the urban area of their employment and their settlements in the rural areas of the Peninsula, it appears that there seems to be a dynamic and complex intersectionality born out of the individual's indigeneity, their economic needs which are met in an urban space, as well as their cultural dependency toward

their communities in a rural space. Rural-urban Orang Asli migrants appears to be continuously informed by their identity as a member of a rural indigenous community in an urban space, and when returning to their settlements, readily assimilate into their communities through a cultural code-switching process.

In summary, chapter 6 illustrates the way in which the Malaysian administration frames Orang Asli communities into remote, fringe, and urban, based on a number of socio-economic indicators that are largely tied to governmental development discourse and associated developmental programmes for the Orang Asli. Remote Orang Asli settlements are often associated with the hardcore poor and a lack of discernible infrastructure – including medical facilities and schools. By drawing from similarities between the experiences of Malaysia's Orang Asli and Canada's First Nation peoples, the chapter brings to the fore the implications of land dispossession and the similarities between the lived experiences of indigenous communities from both countries with regards to rural-urban migration, and their contestation of indigenous identities as framed by the dominant discourse. The chapter further explores the ways in which rural-urban Orang Asli migrants continue to maintain connections to their rural settlements of origin through Orang Asli socio-cultural constructs of marriage and divorce, the sociality of sharing, and the role of the community as mediators, thus ensuring that ties between the rural and urban spaces are continuously sustained and not lost.

The final chapter will investigate historical and contemporary framings of the Orang Asli – particularly with regards to their depiction by the Malay administration – to understand the implications of such discourse on Malay-Orang Asli relations today and the way in which this colours perceptions of the Orang Asli in the psyche of Malaysia's public consciousness. In so doing, it will illustrate how such narratives may undermine Orang Asli efforts to self-empowerment and self-representation. After revisiting some of the key findings of this study, the chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 7: Orang Asli Research – Where to?

The aims of the study were to investigate: i) how have Malaysia's development and modernisation efforts impacted gender roles among the Orang Asli, and ii) has migration to the Klang Valley for the purpose of paid employment had any implications for the gender roles among Orang Asli today, and what, further, are their perceptions of these changes? That is, the study set out to address gaps that exist in the literature concerning the experiences of Orang Asli individuals in the urban spaces of modernizing Malaysia, and the implications of the administration's development programmes – which have largely been agricultural – on the gender roles of the Orang Asli.

Despite decades-long scholarship on the Orang Asli by researchers both local and foreign, the bulk of such scholarship has focused on the circumstances and experiences of Orang Asli communities in the overwhelmingly rural spaces of their settlements. This study engages postcolonial feminism and the decolonisation of indigenous research methodologies toward working with the Orang Asli. Furthermore, it identifies emerging themes in investigating rural-urban Orang Asli movement for paid work, and the implications of this movement on Orang Asli gender roles. In so doing, the study is one of very few which engages the lived experiences of urban Orang Asli through their own narratives in the aim of contributing to positive contemporary discourse on the Orang Asli – vis-à-vis their resistances and resilience – and the construction of knowledge in this area.

7.1. Can the Orang Asli Speak?

Through its exploration on the intersectionality of colonialism, gender studies, indigenous Orang Asli identity, and postcolonial development and modernisation, the study explores various historical and contemporary representations of the Orang Asli. In so doing, this study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis in examining texts that were written on the Orang Asli in order to examine power relations between the Malaysian administration and the Orang Asli. Some of these texts were observations made by early colonial anthropologists and officers, while other more recent discourse come from Malaysian administrative officers, as well as academics and scholars who have worked with various Orang Asli communities over the decades following

independence to the present day. Rarely however, have representations of the Orang Asli been made by the Orang Asli themselves, and the wry borrowing of Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as this subheading's title problematises this issue.

Orang Asli discourse in Malaysia is largely framed by the administration through the Malay versus Orang Asli binary, where the gaze of successive Malay administrations has been to view the Malays in the Peninsular as 'civilised' due to their association with Islam and practice of settled, non-nomadic societies, as opposed to the more 'mobile' characteristics of Orang Asli communities. Such sentiments by the administration have to a certain degree been internalized into the public consciousness of the Malaysian community-at-large. Pejorative terms that reference the Orang Asli such as '*sakai*' and '*jakun*' are still widely used by individuals from various Malaysian ethnies to indicate an individual's ignorance or lack of civility, as indicated by Higak:

> The Malay always see the Orang Asli as as *kafir*, non-Muslim. We are backwards you know? Because the idiom was ... "*kamu tidak mandi macam Sakai*" [you do not shower, like the *Sakai*], "*kamu tak pandai baca Quran, macam Sakai*" [You don't know how to read the Quran, like a *Sakai*] … the religion is used to depict everything that is wrong with the Orang Asli. It shapes the relationship between the Orang Asli and the Malay.

The one unambiguous feature that seems to separate the Orang Asli from the Malays – in the eyes of the administration – is their supposed godlessness vis-à-vis the *kafir* trope (see subheadings 3.3 Orang Asli and the Malays: Early Contact, and 4.1.3. Malayization through Islamization), which justified Orang Asli slavery by Malays in 18th and 19th century Malaya; and to this day, continues to play a major role in shaping the government's arguably paternalistic policies for the Orang Asli. Consider the following excerpt of my conversation with Higak:

> The Malay always regard Orang Asli as without religion, yeah? When you have no religion, you have no civilization ... *tak bertamadun* [uncivilised]. All the idioms, all the assumptions [are] based on the notion of an uncivilised people. [The Orang Asli] are not good in education … you are poor, you are dirty. Dirty in so many sense ... from the religious point of view and the normal sense, you know? From the religious point of view, [because] you are not praying, it means you are dirty. Your soul is dirty ... In social reality [it is] because they [the Orang

Asli] are poor, live in the interior, without proper infrastructure. They are dirty. You know? *Tak mandi* [do not shower] you know? Very smelly ... and the other thing is that the relationship between the Orang Asli and the Malay are also shaped by ethnocentric [views]. Yeah? The Malay always feel that they are superior, and these people [the Orang Asli] are inferior, you know? So although some Malays are very poor, you know? Not educated ... but this, [even] this group also sees the Orang Asli as bad. You know? So this is the thing.

As powerful constructors of the discourse on the Orang Asli, the Malaysian administration, through various machineries of meaning-making, wields a great deal of authority in the ways in which the Orang Asli are constructed and represented in the public consciousness, which may explain why many tropes concerning the Orang Asli are accepted by many Malaysians as 'truthful' representations of the community: for example, primitive/uncivilised/anti-development – (Rusaslina, 2011). Such categorisations marginalise other representations of the community – including those framed by the Orang Asli community itself – such as their repeated assertions that they are not anti-development, but instead seek forms of development that are fair, beneficial, and meet the development needs of their communities. The need for the administration to form an in-depth ethnographic understanding of Orang Asli communities prior to devising developmental agendas is made abundantly clear in this observation by Lye (2011):

> Much of social policy is based on incomplete information (or wilful ignorance of established "truths"). The standard development model is premised on one-size-fits-all ideologies ... Policies are made and implemented without sensitivity to the diverse ways of life of disparate Orang Asli communities. What works for some Orang Asli may not work for others. Just to take one example, between town-based Temuan in Selangor and forest-dwelling Batek in Taman Negara there is very little socio-cultural similarity. However, as they are all Orang Asli, they come under the same administration and are expected to adapt themselves to the same standard model of development. Policy (e.g., in land, health, education and poverty alleviation) might improve if it were based on basic acknowledgement of this diversity. On the other hand, much of the necessary documentation has not been done.

While the media plays an important role in bringing to light social injustices, and the imbalances in power distribution within a society, Malaysian media falls short due to governmental

interference through a set of penal laws and codes such as the Publishing Acts and Seditions Act which prevent transparent reporting, and grant the government control of the media (with the exception of certain online independent agencies) by proxy. Thus depictions by the mainstream media of the Orang Asli are almost always when an organisation or institution provides economic or medical assistance to Orang Asli communities, with considerably less attention given to forms of Orang Asli resistance such as land rights demonstrations. Both governmental and media depictions of the Orang Asli continue to feed into stereotypes of Orang Asli victimisation and vulnerability, crystallizing the Orang Asli as either a people in need of assistance, or as primitives who are 'trapped in the past.'

It would seem that for the most part, non-governmental discourse on the Orang Asli also focuses on the victimisation of the Orang Asli as a people dispossessed, disenfranchised, and in need of assistance. Such discourse – while highlighting the decades-long lived experiences of the Orang Asli vis-à-vis land loss – has an unfortunate backlash when it functions as the primary identifier of Orang Asli identity in that it tends to inadvertently contribute to the formation of counterproductive binaries such as oppressor/victim, and strong/weak, while reinforcing governmental constructed binaries such as advanced/backward within the greater Malaysian public consciousness. The pervasiveness of such binaries among urban Malaysians is evident in casual conversations on the Orang Asli, where it is not uncommon to hear Malaysians associating the Orang Asli with poverty, illiteracy, primitiveness, and as a people to be sympathized, which further contributes to the public consciousness of Malaysians of a people with little or no agency. The exceptions to this rule are the sporadic pieces on successful Orang Asli land rights' claims, but these victories tend to be far and few between.

Against the backdrop of this complex discourse on Orang Asli representation, I have, over the course of my study, reconsidered (and considerably amended) many of my initial framings of the study's subject matter. In this regard the guidance afforded by my supervisory team (who have themselves worked with various indigenous communities), has proved to be critical in the deconstruction of approaches toward indigenous research. The study has attempted to prioritise Orang Asli narratives in describing their experiences and ways of knowing. In attempting to do this, I regularly discussed my findings and work with a key informant Zaitun, herself an Orang Asli, and an academic at a public university in Malaysia. The study also applies a more

discursive approach towards data gathering during the interview process by adopting Kvale's metaphor of the 'interviewer as a traveller' (Kvale, 2009), which is better-suited to the oral cultures of Orang Asli communities. As a product myself of Malaysia's education system, and its society, many of my initial approaches to working with indigenous communities at the beginning of my PhD were coloured by the very paradigms that this study attempts to deconstruct. In this regard, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) seminal book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* has contributed immensely to the decolonisation of the study's research methodologies – not only with regards to my work with the Orang Asli – but also in my ability as a young academic to critically question the many assumptions of 'absolute truths' found in popular discourse today on indigenous communities worldwide, many of which unfortunately stem from an assumed position of ethnic superiority over the indigenous. It is through this process of self-realization that I have come to appreciate the power that popular discourse holds towards the construction of the subject matter within the public consciousness – in this instance, the Orang Asli as they are represented by the media and the Malaysian administration – and the implications of such representations on the Orang Asli themselves.

Further crystallizing the notion of the disadvantaged Orang Asli is the longstanding tradition in Orang Asli scholarship of the dispossession and victimisation of the Orang Asli – as a people to whom *things are done to*, but who are able to do little themselves. Although issues such as land loss, health, education and poverty are all critical considerations involving the Orang Asli which must be addressed, the study contends that continuous depictions of the Orang Asli as a people victimized at the cost of positive discourse on the Orang Asli does little to constructively address these issues. Instead, it appears to further cement the stereotype that the Orang Asli are a people in need of external assistance, which in some way echoes the decades-old paternalistic sentiments behind the conceptualisation and implementation of the Department of Orang Asli Affairs in colonial Malaya. While this study in no way disregards the critical scholarship of researchers past and present who have undertaken much valuable work toward deepening our understanding of the Orang Asli, it does however forward the argument that discourse that focuses exclusively on the victimisation of the Orang Asli – at the cost of excluding that which depicts Orang Asli resilience – may unintentionally crystallize the image of a vulnerable people in the minds of Malaysia's public.

7.2. Implications of this Study

The study – through its investigation of the urban experiences of Orang Asli migrants as voiced by the study's respondents – has the potential to contribute to the policy-making process with regards to governmental developmental agendas for the Orang Asli. As discussed elsewhere in this study, policy-making in Malaysia – including that concerning the nation's indigenous groups – is almost always a top-down process. There appears to be little consideration given to the suitability of governmental development projects for the Orang Asli – including the cosmology and ways of knowing of the various Orang Asli communities. In 2012, during the course of my Masters fieldwork, I worked with the Kensiu people at the Kensiu resettlement village in Baling, Kedah. During one of my conversations with a JAKOA officer, I was told that the government's animal husbandry projects for the Kensiu were largely a failure, with the blame placed on the Kensiu's lack of cooperation. When I broached the subject with my Kensiu informant, he explained to me how as a formerly nomadic hunter-gatherer community, animal husbandry did not fit into the Kensiu's subsistence activities, and that the Kensiu had grown fond of the chicken and cattle that were given to them. When the time came to slaughter the animals, they were unwilling to do so, preferring instead to set the animals free. This was interpreted by JAKOA as irresponsibility on the part of the Kensiu, with little effort made to understand the Kensiu value system.

A potential area of application for this study is in joint Orang Asli-governmental outreach programmes for Orang Asli women who experience spousal abuse. As discussed in Chapter 5, the Orang Asli are largely unwilling to approach external non-Orang Asli intermediaries – including individuals from other Orang Asli communities in the event of domestic abuse when in the Klang Valley – preferring instead to return to their respective communities to resolve such issues. Understanding the unique value systems of different Orang Asli groups may contribute considerably to the successful implementation of assistance programmes that meet governmental aims to assist abused Orang Asli women while still operating within the framework of Orang Asli value systems; one possibility may be working together with indigenous Orang Asli leadership structures in resolving and preventing instances of domestic abuse. Such initiatives however, should begin with a non-hierarchical approach toward Orang Asli issues.

As discussed earlier in this study, gender research among the Orang Asli has largely been carried out at Orang Asli settlements and in communities outside the Klang Valley – particularly in the states of Pahang and Perak. It would seem that most Orang Asli scholarship for that matter, occurs outside the Klang Valley area. It would be of great interest and a valuable addition to Malaysia's Orang Asli studies for further detailed research concerning gender roles – and changes occurring in the same – in Malaysia's urban spaces. Potentially, this could include a comparative study on Orang Asli lived experiences in a number of urban spaces in Peninsular Malaysia, toward determining similarities and differences in challenges as well as various forms of resistance and resilience displayed by the Orang Asli in these diverse spaces.

Zaitun played a key role in introducing me to members of the *gedo semaq* structure – Semelai elders who are informally regarded by the community as leaders. Interestingly, as a male (albeit an outsider), the researcher was privy to some of the gender-specific (or sensitive) knowledge of the Semelai – some of which were not accessible to Zaitun on account of her being female. Furthermore, my sex allowed me to broach certain questions regarding the *gedo semaq* – which allowed me to form a rudimentary understanding of the Semelai leadership structure. My fieldwork with the Semelai gave Zaitun the opportunity to ask certain questions she would ordinarily not have been able to – including detailed questions on the circumcision practices of the Semelai. She confided later that as she was present during the course of my interviews with the elders, it gave her access to information she would otherwise not have been privy to – as well as the opportunity to ask questions on certain religious practices of her community – a body of knowledge largely contained within the male Semelai religious cosmology. In this regard, she (as an insider Semelai woman) 'piggybacked' on my position (as an outside male researcher) to access what would usually be considered male-only knowledge among the Semelai. This experience was unique to both of us – for me as an outside non-Orang Asli researcher, and for Zaitun, as an indigenous Orang Asli researcher.

7.3. Orang Asli Movements and Gender

Many similarities and points of congruence can be found in the large body of scholarship on rural Orang Asli communities with regards to the shared experiences of land loss and territorial displacement. These similarities have been pointed out by a number of scholars based on their observations and the decades-long studies that have been conducted among rural Orang Asli

communities. However, as this is perhaps the first study of its kind to explore rural-urban Orang Asli movement and its implications on Orang Asli gender roles, caution is advised against generalizing the experiences of all Orang Asli migrants in any of Malaysia's other urban spaces based on the findings of this study.

The findings of this study suggest that the migration of Orang Asli individuals to the urban areas of the Klang Valley is a dynamic multifaceted process, and more than a one-directional movement to secure a higher standard of living. Respondents of this study – both female and male – have indicated varying degrees of cultural code-switching when in the urban space, maintaining what are largely egalitarian Orang Asli value systems within the domestic sphere or when at the rural settlements, but 'complying' with the arguably more patriarchal value system of the urban Klang Valley when located there for work. Despite this, mainstream heteronormatives such as the position of men as 'natural leaders' appear to be undergoing a certain degree of normalization among some younger respondents. While Chapter 5 illustrates that certain Orang Asli communities in the north of the Peninsula – particularly the Semang groups – have a more gender-neutral practice of leadership positions due to the historically lower likelihood of slave-raids among those communities, communities further south such as the Semelai and the Hma' Meri have historically prioritised male leadership for what appeared to be spiritual or practical reasons – issues that had little to do with the actual *ability* of women to lead. This however, appears to be changing, as seen in the following excerpt from my conversation with Nomi, a female Semai respondent in her early 20s:

> Even if she had potential, it would be strange. It's weird. It's weird because there has never been a female leader in the Semai community … they lack confidence … even if there were, they would be one in a thousand. It would be hard to find … hard to appoint a woman as the head of a village. It is really difficult because the responsibility is a heavy one, the responsibility is more suited to men.

As discussions on the question of female leadership were carried out with younger respondents, an interesting observation presented itself. While the studies presented by scholars working with various Orang Asli communities have largely faulted governmental interference (via JAKOA and the cash economy) for the degradation of Orang Asli egalitarianism, a few younger respondents were of the notion that the possibility of a female leader within their communities

could only occur through JAKOA's intervention of what they perceived to be patriarchal Orang Asli value systems within their own communities. I discussed this with Zaitun, and her opinion was that the largely younger respondents who held this sentiment did so because they did not know enough about the history of their communities – something I had also suspected when speaking to respondents in their early twenties. It is possible that because many of the younger Orang Asli respondents had been born into Orang Asli communities that had already been stratified along gender lines in recent decades due to external interference and the cash economy, it is possible that they are not aware of the egalitarian value systems so often depicted in Orang Asli scholarship written between independence (1950s) to the late 1970s. Regardless, it was interesting to hear such sentiments being mentioned – in sharp contrast to the overwhelmingly critical scholarship of JAKOA's role in the stratification of gender roles among Orang Asli communities.

This study concludes that the permeation of mainstream heteronormative value systems into what was largely egalitarian value systems is an ongoing phenomenon, and that while Orang Asli women from certain communities appear to accept the new status quo, others in turn seem to respond to this change by securing higher levels of education and employment, in order to ostensibly 'level the playing field.' The process of urbanisation brought about by rural-urban migration appears to indicate a certain transformative relationship between the individual and their community, through the fostering of settlement-urban bonds and the formation of unique relationships between the migrant and their community. In other words, urban migration does not seem to translate into a lack of continuity nor the replacement of settlement Orang Asli cultures into urban ones. The attempt by respondents of this study to create new ways in which to build connections between their communities and the Klang Valley also appear to indicate that they view the urban space to be more than just a monolith that grants them access to economic opportunities, but as a dynamic space that could potentially better the socio-economic circumstances of their communities. Their involvement in indigenous activism, public demonstrations and engagements with the media, as well as other non-governmental organisations not only increases their visibility in the public space and public consciousness, but also suggests an awareness on the part of the migrant Orang Asli on their abilities to effect change – as seen in Orang Asli resistances, and contestations of their depictions within the urban space.

7.4. Scope for Future Research

As mentioned at the beginning of this concluding chapter, the study has only begun to graze the surface of Orang Asli research in Malaysia's urban spaces. Given the relatively new field of urban Orang Asli research in Malaysia, statistical figures were hard to come by and do not feature prominently in the study. To this end, future researchers working with urban Orang Asli should endeavour to conduct, produce and document, empirical – particularly statistical – data of Orang Asli experiences in Malaysia's urban spaces.

Despite the centrality of spirituality in the formation of Orang Asli cosmologies and ways of knowing, the study only briefly explores spirituality in its description of the indigenous Semelai leadership structure, and even then, only in its investigation of men in the position of *puyang* within the Semelai community. This is largely due to the ethnolinguistic and cultural plurality of the respondents involved in this study who come from different communities across the Peninsula, and who are informed by their respective cosmologies. Even with its focus on the Semelai community as a case study, the study does not presume to understand Semelai religious cosmology in the space of a few months. It should also be noted that from conversations with key informant Zaitun, Semelai leaders are reluctant to speak to outsiders regarding the inner spiritual practices and customs of the community. As it is with most indigenous communities, the process of an outsider being accepted, and eventually initiated into a community is a process that is built on a foundation of trust and familiarity between the outside scholar, members of the community, and community elders. Understandably, the formation of such trust would require many months of residence at a particular Orang Asli settlement.

The apparent exclusion of women from the indigenous leadership structures of certain Orang Asli communities such as the Semelai and Hma' Meri almost certainly suggests that gender does play a role in the leadership dynamics of certain Orang Asli communities – particularly communities that practice horticulturalism. This is in distinct contrast from the leadership structures of Orang Asli communities that are largely nomadic – particularly those of the Semang communities in the north of the Peninsula. The dynamics of gender and indigenous leadership structures at the settlements and its implications for the broader gender relations and gender roles of Orang Asli individuals in urban areas may potentially provide for interesting future research. While this study appreciates the potential connections between rural indigenous gender dynamics

and the lives of migrant Orang Asli individuals in the urban space, it does not – as a result of its particular focus on urban Orang Asli migrants – explore this connection in significant depth. This does however, raise potentially interesting research questions for future scholars. With regards to Orang Asli gender studies and the urban space, future research that aims to understand the perception of Orang Asli youth who were born in Malaysia's urban spaces and thus are urban participants from birth, may potentially reveal even more varied perceptions, views and understandings from those presented here in this study with regards to issues such as gender and gender roles.

In adding to the earlier observation of Zaitun's 'piggy-backing' on this study as a result of the complex intersectionality of gender, cultural value systems and Semelai religious cosmology, the experience further highlights the importance of understanding differing Orang Asli value systems when engaging with their leadership structures: an understanding that would be of considerable importance to government officers and development bodies seeking to approach and work with Orang Asli communities. To this end, research carried out with the aim of better understanding the different attitudes of differing Orang Asli communities in relation to gender and gender-specific knowledge may prove to be invaluable in developing policies for Orang Asli services – for example with regards to education and health-based programmes.

Finally, it should be said, the study contributes to the work that is increasingly being undertaken with indigenous peoples worldwide. A larger study might investigate similarities and dissimilarities between select indigenous peoples from different parts of the world with respect to some of the key issues discussed herein, namely, gender roles, indigenous identity in the urban space, displacement, paternalism, gender and mobility, and assimilation. It is further hoped that future research into the urban Orang Asli will depart from metanarratives typically found in governmental descriptions of the Orang Asli and focus on the resistances among urban Orang Asli and their contestations of popular discourse on the representation of their communities. Future researchers intending to work with the Orang Asli should endeavour to incorporate Orang Asli respondents into critical aspects of the research's decision-making processes, as well as in the analyses of findings, in the aims of producing a more accurate and equitable depiction of Orang Asli lived realities. Such forms of participatory research may better contribute towards a greater understanding of the rich diversity of experiences and ways of knowing found within the

broader Orang Asli community, and contribute to the overall academic robustness of both indigeneity scholarship in Malaysia; as well as Malaysia studies as a whole.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Table 8 *Respondents of This Study.*

No.	Sex	Name	Age	State of Origin	Klang Valley Location	Job	Ethnic Group	Religion
1	F	Zaitun	Mid 30s	Pahang	Kajang	Student	Semelai	Christian
2	F	Minnie	Early 30s	Pahang	Gombak	Human Resource	Semelai	Animist
3	F	Minti	Early 50s	Perak	Kuala Lumpur	Manager	Semai	Muslim
4	F	Hasibah	Late 20s	Pahang	Putrajaya	Admin.	Jakun	Animist
5	F	Nomy	Early 40s	Perak	Kajang	Hotel Chamber Maid	Semai	Christian
6	F	Anggrik	Late 20s	Carey Island	Gombak	Admin.	Hma' Meri	Animist

7	F	Shidah	30s	Perak	Shah Alam	Manager	Semai	Muslim
8	F	Sara	Early 20s	Perak	Gombak	Admin.	Semai	Animist
9	F	Melati	Late 40s	Pahang	Brickfields	Front Desk	Semelai	Agnostic
10	F	Nomi	Early 20s	Perak	Gombak	Admin.	Semai	Animist
11	F	Amelia	Late teen	Pahang	Damansara	Chamber Maid	Semelai	Animist
12	F	Zeeza	Mid 20s	Pahang	Petaling Jaya	Sales Rep.	Semelai	Animist
13	F	Anita	Mid 20s	Pahang	Shah Alam	Junior Consult.	Temuan	Animist
14	F	Willa	27	Pahang	Kuala Lumpur	Human Resource	Semelai	Animist
15	F	Mawar	40s	Pahang	Sg. Buloh	Entrepreneur	Semelai	Muslim

16	M	Supian	25	Pahang	Petaling Jaya	Contractor	Jakun	Animist
17	M	Nizam	29	Pahang	Seri Kembangan	Entrepreneur	Temuan	Animist
18	M	Neil	39	Perak	Bangi	Factory Worker	Semai	Christian
19	M	Mokhtar	39	Pahang	Kajang	Information Officer	Semelai	Animist
20	M	Emmett	33	Perak	Lembah Pantai	Admin. Officer	Semai	Muslim
21	M	Irfan	28	Perak	Keramat	Soldier	Semai	Animist
22	M	Zabidi	26	Pahang	Kajang	Tutor & Postgrad. Student	Semelai	Animist
23	M	Raif	28	Perak	Puchong	Financial Planner	Semai	Animist

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM (PICF)

*   *

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Project Title: *Indigenous Women and Gender Roles: Migrant Orang Asli Women in the Klang Valley, Malaysia.*

Investigators:

1. Chief Investigator:

   Dr. Yaso Nadarajah, B.Sc. (Chen.), MA (Chen.), TESL (Sing.), MEd (Melb.), PhD (Melb.).
   E-mail: yaso.nadarajah@rmit.edu.au, Phone No: +61399253542

2. Co-Investigator:

   Dr. Peter Phipps, B.A. (Hons.), PhD (Melb.).
   E-mail: peter.phipps@rmit.edu.au, Phone No: +61399252039

3. Principal Research Student:

   Govindran Jegatesen, B.A., M.A.
   E-mail: [@student.rmit.edu.au, Phone No: +61xxxxxxxxx (AU) / +60xxxxxxxxx (MY)](mailto:@student.rmit.edu.au)

Dear participant,

You are invited to join a research project by RMIT University. Please read this sheet carefully and be sure you understand it before deciding if you would like to join this interview. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

- I, Govindran Jegatesen, am the Principal Research Student carrying out this research. Dr. Yaso Nadarajah is my Chief Supervisor and Dr. Peter Phipps is my Second Supervisor respectively.

- This research is being conducted for my PhD degree at RMIT in Global, Urban and Social Studies.
- This research project has been examined and approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee.

Why have you been approached?

I approached Associate. Professor Juli Edo from the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Universiti Malaya and explained my research to him. Following our meeting and my need for suitable respondents, he contacted you, and gave me your contact details.

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?

- This study will look at the lives of Orang Asli women who migrate to the Klang Valley for work, to see how moving and living in the city may have resulted in changes to the relations between Orang Asli women and men. The primary research aims are:

    i)   To discuss the relations between women and men in early Orang Asli communities,

    ii)   To consider how Malaysia's development have changed relations between Orang Asli women and men,

    iii)   To research how relations between Orang Asli women and men today may have changed because of migration to the Klang Valley for work, and what they may think of these changes.

- I will interview a total of 30 respondents for this research.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?

If you agree to be interviewed, we will most likely meet for two interview sessions that may last for about one hour per session. I will start by asking a few questions, after which your reply will be recorded as data. The interviews will be arranged to fit your time schedule. You are encouraged to read the interview questions before you decide to join. I will ask you for your permission before recording the interview. If you are not comfortable with being recorded, I will not record the interview, but take handwritten notes.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages?

- The interview process will investigate issues that may cause distress among respondents. As such, please note that should the interview process prove too distressful or overwhelming to you, that you are under no obligation to continue with the interview. You may also withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions. You are also at liberty to bring a companion along for the interview process to provide some comfort

should the need arise. Your name and personal details will remain confidential and a false name utilised.

What are the benefits associated with participation?

- Although participation in this research may not benefit you directly, this study may contribute to understanding the unique situations facing migrant Orang Asli women as indigenous Malaysians in the Klang Valley.

What will happen to the information I provide?

Confidentiality & Anonymity

- Data collected would be treated confidentially and uploaded to my computer, which will be password protected. The data will only be accessible to my supervisors and me. To prevent data corruption and loss, I will also store a back-up copy of my data on a separate hard drive. My data will also be stored on the Google RMIT network drive so my supervisors can access the data I have collected. You will remain anonymous throughout the process of this study. You will also remain unidentifiable after this study is published

- The results of this study will be presented at conferences and maybe published in a journal publication. The thesis produced from this research will be available in the RMIT Repository, and accessible to the public.

- Your identity will remain anonymous and a false name used. You will also not be identifiable through the use of data.

- Although the final research paper will remain online, the data from our interviews will be destroyed after being kept securely at RMIT for 5 years after publication.

What are my rights as a participant?

- The right to withdraw from this study at any time,
- The right to be accompanied by a friend during interview sessions should I choose,
- The right to stop any recording,
- The right to have any unprocessed data destroyed, as long as it can be identified as yours,
- The right to have any questions answered at any time.
- The right to have the results of this study available to me upon request.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions?

- In the event of doubts or questions, please feel free to contact either Dr. Yaso Nadarajah (+61399253542) or Dr. Peter Phipps (+61399252039).

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Yaso Nadarajah
BSc (Chen.), MA (Chen.), TESL (Sing.), MEd (Melb.), PhD (Melb.).

Dr. Peter Phipps
B.A. (Hons.), PhD (Melb.).

Govindran Jegatesen
B.A., M.A.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

1. The project has been explained to me, and I have read the information sheet

2. I agree to participate in the research project as described

3. I agree**:**
   - to be interviewed
   - that my voice will be audio recorded

4. I acknowledge that:

   (a)   I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussion, and have any unprocessed data destroyed, as long as it can be identified as mine.

   (b)   I have been informed that I may bring a friend for emotional support and/or company during the course of the interview.

   (c)   The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.

   (c)   My personal information will be protected and only revealed if I agree or if required by law.

   (d)   The research data will be securely protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected from this study may be published. Any information which may identify me will not be used.

   (e)   The results from this study will be made available to me upon request.

Participant's Consent

Participant: _____   Date: _____

            (Signature)

Witness:

Witness: _____   Date: _____

            (Signature)

Participants should be given a photocopy of this PICF after it has been signed.

Notification of Ethics Approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee

RMIT UNIVERSITY

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)
Research and Innovation office
NH&MRC Code: EC00237

Notice of Approval

Date: **29 September 2015**

Project number: **19382**

Project title: **Indigenous Women and Gender Roles - Migrant Orang Asli Women in the Klang Valley, Malaysia**

Risk classification: **More than low risk**

Chief investigator: **Dr Yaso Nadarajah**

Status: **Approved**

Approval period: From: **29 September 2015**   To: **31 March 2016**

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

Title	Version	Date
19382 Nadarajah final version	Final	29/09/2015
Participant Information Statement & Consent Form – Final	Final	29/09/2015
Participant Information Statement & Consent Form – Final [Malay]	Final	29/09/2015

The above application has been approved by the RMIT University HREC as it meets the requirements of the *National statement on ethical conduct in human research* (NH&MRC, 2007).

Terms of approval:
1. **Responsibilities of chief investigator**
   It is the responsibility of the above chief investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by HREC. Approval is valid only whilst the chief investigator holds a position at RMIT University.
2. **Amendments**
   Approval must be sought from HREC to amend any aspect of a project. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the HREC secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from HREC.
3. **Adverse events**
   You should notify the HREC immediately (within 24 hours) of any serious or unanticipated adverse effects of the research on participants, and unforeseen events that might affect the ethical acceptability of the project.
4. **Annual reports**
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. Annual reports must be submitted by the anniversary of approval (16 September 2015) of the project for each full year of the project. If the project is of less than 12 months duration then a final report only is required.
5. **Final report**
   A final report must be provided within six months of the end of the project. HREC must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
6. **Monitoring**
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by the HREC at any time.
7. **Retention and storage of data**
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data according to the requirements of the *Australian code for the responsible conduct of research* (section 2) and relevant RMIT policies.
8. **Special conditions of approval**
   Nil.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.

Notification of Ethics Approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee
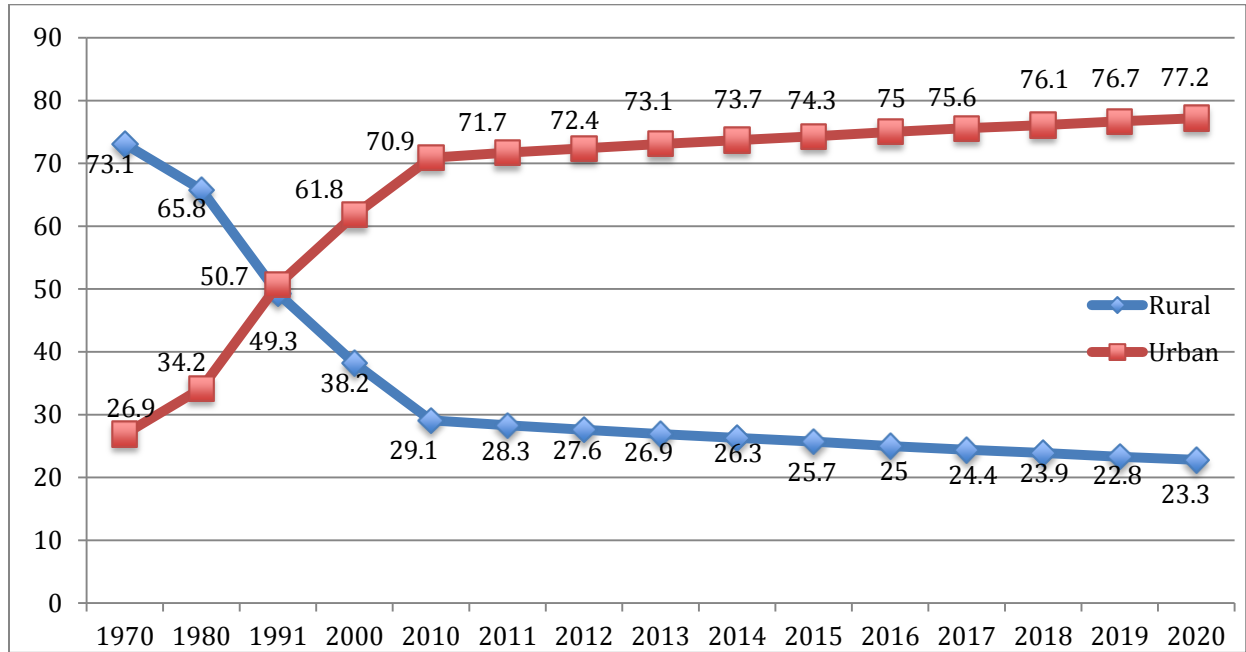

Human Research Ethics Committee(HREC)
Research and Innovation office
NH&MRC Code: EC00237

A/Prof Barbara Polus
Chairperson
RMIT HREC

cc: Dr Peter Burke (HREC secretary)
        Mr Govindran Jegatesen (student investigator)
        Dr Peter Phipps (co-investigator).

Appendix C

Figure 1 Percentage Distribution of Rural/Urban Malaysians 1970-2020 (DOSM, 2015).

Appendix D

Table 9 *Urban Growth by Age and Sex, 2000 & 2015.*

(Adapted from DOSM 2015, p. 13).

Age Group	2000				2015			
	Man ('000)	**Woman ('000)**	**Total ('000)**	**%**	**Man ('000)**	**Woman ('000)**	**Total ('000)**	**%**
0-14	2,209.1	2,083.5	4,292.7	31.3	2,888.3	2,717.3	5,605.6	24.4
15-40	3,166.1	3,200.4	6,366.5	46.4	5,576.4	5,186.2	10,762.6	46.8
41-64	1,346.5	1,251.5	2,598.0	18.9	2,740.6	2,633.9	5,374.6	23.4
65 ++	208.9	248.9	457.7	3.3	624.2	648.3	1,272.5	5.5
Total	**6,930.7**	**6,784.2**	**13,714.9**	**100.0**	**11,829.5**	**11,185.7**	**23,015.3**	**100.0**

Appendix E

Table 12 *Reasons for Migration among Female Respondents.*

Respondents	Education	Employment
Zaitun	-	-
Minnie	-	-
Minti		-
Hasibah	-	-
Nomy		-
Anggrik		-
Shidah	-	-
Sara		-
Melati		-
Nomi		-
Amelia		-
Zeeza	-	-
Anita		-
Willa		-
Mawar		-

Appendix F

Semi-structured Interviews

In line with the three focal areas of this study, the semi-structured questions for the preliminary interviews are:

1. Early and Post-independence Gender Roles and Malaysia's Development Agenda for the Orang Asli:

- At your community, was there division of labour in your grandparents'/parents' generations i.e. 'women's work and men's work?' (child-rearing, hunting, farming, fishing, etc.) How has this changed in your community today?

- Do women and men both participate in *sewang* (ritualistic dancing and singing) at your community? How has the participation of both sexes changed from your grandparents'/parents' generations to yours?

- Traditionally, was the *Tok Batin* in your community female or male? Has this changed, and if yes, why?

- In your grandparents'/parents' generations, was the office of midwife carried out by a woman or a man? Has this changed today? How and why?

- Have you ever had a female Tok Batin (village head) in your community? And if yes, when was the last time a female Tok Batin led your community?

- In your grandparents'/parents' generations, did both female and male members of your community have equal say in decision-making processes concerning the wellbeing of the community, and has this changed in your generation? If yes, how?

- Does you community today have an assembly of elders that decides on the wellbeing of the community? If so, does the assembly comprise of both women and men, or just men?

- Has the government's Orang Asli regroupment/resettlement schemes changed gender roles in your community? If yes, how?

- How has JAKOA's appointment of male-only Tok Batin changed the perception of women in your community?

- How does JAKOA engage members of your community? Do they approach female or male members of your community to discuss development/aid/funding projects? And how has this changed from your grandparents/parents generation to yours?

- Has government development projects for the Orang Asli – particularly the introduction of rubber and oil palm, as well as settled agriculture, changed gender roles at your community? If yes, how?

- Do you think the Islamization agenda by the government for Orang Asli communities has changed gender roles in your community? If yes, how?

2. Rural-Urban Migration and Life in the Klang Valley:

- Why did you decide to relocate to the Klang Valley?

- How does your community feel about your decision to work in the Klang Valley and your move away from the community?

- What are some of the challenges of seeking employment in the Klang Valley as an Orang Asli woman?

- Is there a discrepancy in wage between Orang Asli men and women at your work place?

- Are you aware of Orang Asli NGOs such as the Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC) and Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia (POASM)? And what attempts have these NGOs made to connect with you?

- How do you feel you are represented by these NGOs as an Orang Asli woman?

- How do these NGOs attempt to understand the issues you may face as an Orang Asli woman in the Klang Valley?

- Do you participate in the peaceful land rights claims demonstrations mobilized by the Orang Asli NGOs in Kuala Lumpur?

- What are some of the opportunities here that in your opinion may not be available to you at your community settlement?

- How long do you plan to stay in the Klang Valley? And if you intend to have children, do you want them to be brought up here or at the settlements, and why?

- Do you face pressure at your workplace or in your daily interactions to convert to Islam? If yes, elaborate.

- Is there a support network for Orang Asli women who require advice on personal/career/family/health issues?

- Are there safe spaces for Orang Asli women who are seeking safety from abusive relationships? If yes, who runs them?

3. Post-migration Gender Roles as a result of Urban Living:

- How are you perceived in your community as a result of your status as an wage earner?

- How have relations between you and your community changed as a result of urban migration?

- How do you make important life decisions? Does the opinion of your family/community have an influence on the decisions you make? Has there been any change in this regard? If yes, elaborate.

- How has your decision-making processes regarding personal life choices such as obtaining an education, marriage, management of personal funds, etc. changed as a result of urban migration?

- Explain the division of labour (clearing of fields, hunting/gathering, etc.) in your community at the settlements?

- How has the division of labour mentioned in the previous question changed for you as a member of your community during your periodic visits home?

- If married, what are the changes between your relationship with your husband/family due to your status as a wage earner?

- If married, how are decisions concerning household affairs made? How is your ability to make decisions different from those of women at your settlement?

- Who is responsible for the caring/raising of children? Has any change occurred in this regard?

- How are household chores negotiated at your home? Has urban migration resulted in a change? If yes, elaborate.