THE ORANG ASLI IN THE MALAYSIAN NATION STATE

THE POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT OF A MARGINAL INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

THE ORANG ASLI IN THE MALAYSIAN NATION STATE:
THE POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT OF A
MARGINAL INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

The Orang Asli have been transformed from an independent, autonomous people, to one where others today are determining much of their lives. Whether the motive for organising Orang Asli society has been for reasons of national security or for national integration, it is contended that development policies and programs imposed on them have had a single underlying objective: to enable the control of the Orang Asli, and to control their traditional territories.

This resulted in a contest for Orang Asli traditional territories and resources. As a consequence, Orang Asli began to experience increased social stress, which together with better communication between the communities, provided a powerful means of mobilising them beyond the local-level. A new Orang Asli ethnic label soon developed - largely as a political tool for more effective negotiation.

However, expectations and aspirations vary among the Orang Asli themselves, giving rise to problems of representivity that the state can, and does, exploit. More importantly, this can result in new sources of social stress for the community - from within the community itself.
ABSTRAK
ORANG ASLI DALAM KONTEKS NASIONAL:
POLITIK DAN PEMBANGUNAN KOMUNITI PRIBUMI DI PESISIRAN

Orang Asli telah mengalami perubahan sebagai rakyat yang bebas dan berautonomi kepada penduduk yang mana sebahagian besar kehidupan mereka kini ditentukan oleh pihak-pihak lain. Apapun tujuan untuk menyusun masyarakat Orang Asli, samada untuk keselamatan negara atau untuk integrasi nasional, sesungguhnya di sebalik dasar-dasar pembangunan dan program-program yang dikenakan ke atas mereka mempunyai satu tujuan asas, iaitu untuk membolehkan pengawalan Orang Asli dan kawasan-kawasan tradisi mereka.

Justeru itu, wujud persaingan untuk memperolehi sumber-sumber tradisi Orang Asli. Akibatnya, Orang Asli mengalami peningkatan tekanan sosial, dan bersamaan dengan komunikasi yang lebih baik antara komuniti-komuniti, telah menyediakan saluran yang berkesan untuk mempergerakkan mereka melebihi peringkat mikro. Label etnik Orang Asli yang baru seterusnya terbentuk – sebahagian besarnya adalah sebagai alat politik untuk membuat perundingan yang lebih berkesan.

Walaupun demikian, ekspektasi dan aspirasi di kalangan Orang Asli sendiri berbeda dan ini telah membangkitkan masalah-masalah perwakilan, di mana ia boleh dan sedang dieksploitasikan, oleh pemerintah. Lebih penting lagi masalah ini boleh menghasilkan sumber-sumber tekanan sosial baru untuk masyarakat Orang Asli – iaitu dari dalam masyarakat itu sendiri.
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Jomo, my supervisor, has been supportive right from the beginning. His extensive academic, and general, knowledge provided critical feedback on this work from time to time, and this is really appreciated.

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Mary Tan, Joyce Loh and my mother kept a look out for items on the Orang Asli in the newspapers that I tended to miss. Rajimah and Zubaidah were ever helpful with university matters. Yii Tan allowed me use of his office resources since the early days. Felix and Tian sorted out my Malay abstract. Rajah helped out with some tables, while Henry, in his moment of ill health, tried to help and managed one map. Joceline put up with me all this while and, hopefully, will continue to do so.

However, my greatest gratitude for an intensive level of desperate support must go to Carol Yong and Chong Chiew Hweok, who camped out in my house for (most of) three days and (all of) three nights, helping to remove the many blemishes in the thesis, as I was rushing to meet the deadline in April 1998. Without them, I would have surely had to sign on another year.

The current revision of the thesis benefitted greatly from the comments of my examiners, Kirk Endicott, Hood Salleh, Mohd. Halib, as well as from my supervisor, Jomo, and the Dean of IPSP, Prof. Ansary Ahmed, who chaired the viva committee.

Nevertheless, the blame for whatever shortcomings or errors that remain must rest with me.

Finally, I should add that while writing this dissertation had been purely for academic reasons, and for fulfilling the conditions of a fellowship award from the University of Malaya, that I gratefully acknowledge here, I am nevertheless hopeful that perhaps, but only perhaps, some use will come out of it.

Colin Nicholas
10 June 1999
ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

4MP  Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-1985
5MP  Fifth Malaysia Plan 1986-1990
adat  Custom, tradition
adat perpatch  Local custom of Negeri Sembilan based on Minangkabau tradition and matrilineal social organisation
akar bahar  a black branching coral
Barisan Nasional  National Front, the present ruling coalition party
ceramah  talk or lecture
COAC  Center for Orang Asli Concerns
dakwah  Muslim missionary activity
DAP  Democratic Action Party
Dato/Datuk  honorary title
DOA  Department of Aborigines
DPOASM  Dewan Peniaga Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia
dusun  fruit garden/orchard
DWNP  Department of Wildlife and National Parks
EIA  environmental impact assessment
Emergency  Malaya’s civil war with the communist insurgents, 1948-1960
Felcra  Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority
Felda  Federal Land Development Authority
gaharu  *Aguillar spp.* The diseased part of the inner core is an important ingredient in the manufacture of some perfumes
gob  outsider, but frequently used to mean Malay in Semai, Temiar, Batek and most Orang Asli languages
Gombak a district in Selangor state where the JHEOA has its hospital and museum complex

IKD Institut Kajian Dasar (Institute for Policy Research)

hari moyang feast day for the ancestral spirits

JAIJ Jabatan Agama Islam Johor (Johor Islamic Religious Department)

JHEOA Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (Department of Orang Asli Affairs)

JKHEOA Jawatanjausa Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (Committee for Orang Asli Affairs)

JOAS Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia)

kafir a Malay term for infidel, unbeliever

KDAJ Koperasi Daya Asli Johor

kebun Farm

Keadilan Parti Keadilan Nasional (National Justice Party)

KEMAS Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat (Department of Community Development)

ketua penggerak masyarakat chief community development officer

kongsi Workers' quarters for a logging operation

KSU Ketua Setiausaha, Secretary-General of a ministry

Lelah Maharajah Setia Rajah title conferred by an Orang Asli chief, in particular from the Jakun and Temuan (formerly called Bijuanda) sub-groups

MAIS Majlis Agama Islam Selangor (Selangor Islamic Religious Council)

Majlis Adat Customary Council

Menteri Besar Chief Minister

Mengkuang Specie of *pandanus*

nenggirik Semai for “country’ or traditional territory

Orang Asal Original, or First Peoples
Parti Melayu Semangat 46  Malay Spirit of 1946 Party

PAS  Parti Islam SeMalaysia (formerly Partai Aislam Sa-Malaya or Pan-Malayan Islamic Party)

Paslim  Peniaga Asli Malaysia

Pemaju masyarakat  community development officer

Penghulu  village head

Perkim  Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia (Islamic Welfare and Missionary Association of Malaysia)

Petai  *Parkia speciosa*. A type of bean which is harvested and sold as an important source of Orang Asli income

POASM  Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Association)

PPRT  Program Pembasmian Rakyat Termiskin (Programme for the Eradication of Hardcore Poverty)

Risda  Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority

RM  Ringgit Malaysia (Malaysian unit of currency, formerly Malaysian Dollar)

RPS  Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula (Regroupment Scheme)

RTM  Radio Television Malaysia, a government-controlled broadcasting station

Sakai  slave, debt-bondsman. Derogatory term used to refer to the Orang Asli

SAS  Special Air Services

SEDC  State Economic Development Corporation

Senoi Praaq  Orang Asli paramilitary force organised under the Police Field Force (now called the General Operations Force)

SPM  Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education)

SRP  Sijil Rendah Pelajaran (Lower Certificate of Education)

Suku-kaum  ethnic sub-groups

Surau  Muslim prayer-hall or chapel

Tanah kosong  vacant lot

Titian Mas  ‘golden bridge’ or foster family programmes
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<td>an Orang Asli village head or chief</td>
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<td>Tripang</td>
<td>sea slug, used as an ingredient in Chinese soups and medicinal preparation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UKM</td>
<td>Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UM</td>
<td>Universiti Malaya (University of Malaya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMNO</td>
<td>United Malays National Organisation</td>
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<td>UNWGIP</td>
<td>United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations</td>
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Map 1

DISTRIBUTION OF ORANG ASLI SUB-GROUPS

Languages
- Northern Asian
- Central Asian
- Southern Asian
- Malay dialects

Austroasiatic
Austronesian

Boundaries
- - Ethnic groups
- - State
- - - International

Source: Geoffrey Benjamin
Map 2

DISTRIBUTION OF THE ORANG ASLI POPULATION, 1991

Each dot represents 100 persons

Source: Department of Statistics (1997), Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia, p. 7.