

INTRODUCTION TO THE PEOPLE AND THE STUDY

The Orang Asli are not a homogenous people although shared socioeconomic indicators and social histories can justify their treatment as one. This chapter introduces the Orang Asli, the people who are the focus of this study. It then sets out the research objectives and outlines the research design.

Numbers and Origins

The Orang Asli are the indigenous minority peoples of Peninsular Malaysia. They numbered 103,982 in 1997 – representing a mere 0.5 per cent of the national population.¹ The nomenclature, which transliterates as ‘original peoples’ or ‘first peoples’, is a collective term for the 18 sub-ethnic groups officially

¹ The national population in mid-1997 was 20,997,220 (*The Star* 31.1.1998) while that of the Orang Asli was 103,982 as of 31 May 1997 (JHEOA 1997c). This appears to be a more accurate figure for the Orang Asli compared to earlier official censuses. For example, according to the *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia* (Department of Statistics 1997), the population of the Orang Asli, based on the 1991 census, was 98,494 (Table 1). The JHEOA, on the other hand, reported a figure of 92,529 Orang Asli in 1993 (Table 2). The apparent discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the JHEOA count only covered the 779 Orang Asli rural settlements which come under the purview of the Department. It does not include those Orang Asli living in urban areas and urban settlements (the latter defined as small town centres with a population size between 1,000 and 9,999 persons).

Table 1
Population distribution of the Orang Asli
by sub-groups and state, 1991

| State | Senoj | | | Proto Malay | | | | Negrito | Total |
|----------------|--------|--------|-------------|-------------|--------|---------|-------------------|---------|--------|
| | Temiar | Semai | Other Senoi | Jakun | Temuan | Semelai | Other Proto Malay | | |
| Johor | 90 | 51 | 33 | 3,589 | 448 | 17 | 2,825 | 39 | 7,092 |
| Kedah | 6 | 6 | 8 | 27 | 4 | 4 | 61 | 137 | 253 |
| Kelantan | 5,932 | 58 | 17 | 23 | 18 | 9 | 44 | 843 | 6,944 |
| Melaka | 84 | 9 | 3 | 42 | 642 | 29 | 34 | 9 | 852 |
| Negri Sembilan | 46 | 98 | 8 | 33 | 4,455 | 1,251 | 51 | 10 | 5,952 |
| Pahang | 295 | 9,239 | 5,411 | 12,737 | 2,751 | 2,967 | 169 | 609 | 34,178 |
| Pulau Pinang | 11 | 15 | 8 | 170 | 9 | 2 | 35 | 5 | 255 |
| Perak | 10,010 | 17,973 | 390 | 189 | 703 | 250 | 185 | 1,141 | 30,841 |
| Perlis | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 46 | 13 | 1 | 63 |
| Selangor | 373 | 1,112 | 2,095 | 226 | 5,990 | 184 | 1,025 | 79 | 11,084 |
| Terengganu | 7 | 14 | 341 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 100 | 119 | 594 |
| Kuala Lumpur | 37 | 52 | 28 | 19 | 35 | 14 | 175 | 26 | 386 |
| Total | 16,892 | 28,627 | 8,342 | 17,066 | 15,057 | 4,775 | 4,717 | 3,018 | 98,494 |
| Percentage | 17.1 | 29.1 | 8.5 | 17.3 | 15.3 | 4.8 | 4.8 | 3.1 | 100.0 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 12.

classified for administrative purposes under Negrito, Senoi and Aboriginal Malay.²

The Negritos, comprising a little over 3 per cent of the Orang Asli population, is the smallest of these three categories. They are also the oldest, with some claiming that they came to the Malay Peninsula about 25,000 years ago (Carey 1976: 13). However, current archaeological evidence seems to link the Negritos to the Hoabinhians who lived between 8,000 BC and 1,000 BC during the Middle Stone Age.³ The present Negritos are the direct descendants of these early Hoabinhians, who were largely nomadic foragers; living in one location as long as the food supply was able to maintain the community. Today, however, many of the Negrito groups live in permanent settlements in Northeast Kedah (the Kensiu people), along the Kedah-Perak border (Kintak), Northeast Perak and West Kelantan (Jahai), North-central Perak (Lanoh), Southeast Kelantan (Mendriq), and Northeast Pahang and South Kelantan (Batek). Customarily, some groups enter the forest for varying lengths of time during the fruit season to practise opportunistic foraging, or to extract forest products (such as rattan and

² Earlier official categorisation of the Orang Asli had 19 sub-ethnic groups. I am told by some JHEOA officials that the Temoq have been conveniently dropped as a separate ethnic category, and subsumed under 'Jakun', in part so as to have equally six sub-groups under each of the three main categories. The JHEOA still uses the term 'Proto Malay' as the English translation of 'Melayu Asli' although Geoffrey Benjamin (personal communication, 2 March 1998) contends that the correct translation is 'Aboriginal Malay'. However, I prefer not to use 'Semang' for 'Negrito', as is the current preferred practice among some anthropologists, as the term carries a negative connotation when used by some of the Senoi groups.

³ The discussion on the prehistory of the Orang Asli in this chapter draws on Evans (1927), Tweedie (1953), Benjamin (1976), Adi (1986), Dentan *et al* (1997), and Bellwood (1997).

gaharu) to be exchanged for cash. Such activities have often caused them to be labeled as nomadic and to be considered the more economically backward of the Orang Asli sub-groups.

As the name suggests, the Negritos are generally physically small in stature (1.5 metres or less), dark-skinned (varying from a dark copper to black), typically woolly or frizzy hair, and with broad noses, round eyes and low cheek-bones (Carey 1976: 15). Their language is in the Northern Aslian division of the Aslian family of Mon-Khmer languages (Benjamin 1996).

The Senoi are the largest group of Orang Asli with about 54 per cent of the Orang Asli population. They are a Mongoloid people who are descendants of both the Hoabinhians and the Neolithic cultivators who entered the Malay Peninsula around 2,000BC from the north. They are physically different from the Negrito in that they are slightly taller, their skin is of a much lighter colour and their hair wavy rather than frizzy. They continue to speak Austro-Asiatic languages of the Mon-Khmer sub-group, thereby manifesting their ancient connection with mainland Southeast Asia. Today, the Senoi sub-groups live mainly on both slopes of the Main Range in Perak, Kelantan and Pahang (Semai, Temiar), in Central Pahang (Jah Hut, Che Wong), Coastal Selangor (Mah Meri) and South-central Pahang (Semoq Beri). While they were mainly swiddeners and dependent on the forest for their subsistence in the past, today many of the Senoi have taken to permanent agriculture (managing their own rubber, oil palm or

cocoa farms) and participate in the wage sector (in unskilled, skilled and even professional capacities).

At about 43 per cent of the Orang Asli population, the Aboriginal Malays are the second largest group of Orang Asli. They live mainly in the southern half of the Peninsula – in Selangor and Negri Sembilan (Temuan), Central Pahang and East Negri Sembilan (Semelai), South Pahang and North Johor (Jakun), East Johor (Orang Kanaq) and West and Central Coasts of Johor (Orang Kuala, Orang Seletar). While prehistoric recordings in the south are almost non-existent, it is generally accepted that between 2,000 and 3,000 years ago, the southerly groups encountered the sea-faring peoples from Borneo and the Indonesian islands. Some of these Orang Asli who traded with Austronesian-speakers assimilated with them, hence the term proto- or early- Malays often used to refer to them. The exception perhaps is the Orang Kuala group that migrated from Sumatra about 500 years ago. Today, the Aboriginal Malays are very settled peoples, engaged mainly in permanent agriculture or riverine and coastal fishing. Many of them are also in the wage market as well as in entrepreneurial and professional occupations. Physically, they are very close to the Malays while their languages remain as archaic variants of the Malay language (with the exception of the Semelai and Temoq languages that have links to the Senoic languages).

Nevertheless, while the various Orang Asli sub-groups differ, sometimes widely, in origins, physical features, economic lifestyle, social organisation, religion and

language, they do share something in common: they are descendants of the earliest known inhabitants who occupied the Malay peninsula before the establishment of the Malay kingdoms.

The Orang Asli as a People

Before 1960, the Orang Asli – as an ethnic category – did not exist. The various indigenous minority peoples in the Peninsula did not see themselves as a homogenous 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 place 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.

However, particular ethnic labels and identities had historically been ascribed to indigenous communities by others who wanted to discriminate against them on the grounds of real or assumed ethnic characteristics (Veber and Waehle 1993: 14). The Orang Asli were no exception. In the colonial period, the generic terms ‘Sakai’ and ‘Aborigines’ were commonly used to refer to this group of peoples – terms that carried varying derogatory connotations.

Prior to this, anthropologists and administrators referred to the Orang Asli by a variety of terms. Some were descriptive of their abode (as in *Orang Hulu* –

people of the headwaters, *Orang Darat* – people of the hinterland, and *Orang Laut* – people of the sea). Others were descriptive of their perceived characteristics (as in *Besisi* – people with scales, *Mantra* – people who chanted, and *Orang Mawas* – people like apes). Still others were clearly derogatory and reflected the assumed superiority of the ‘civilised’ speakers (*Orang Liar* – wild men, *Pangan* – eaters of raw food, and *Orang Jinak* – tame or enslaved men) (Skeat and Blagden 1906: 19–24; Wilkinson 1971: 15–20; Wazir-Jahan 1981: 13).

Ironically, it was the communist insurgents and the Emergency of 1948–60 that made the colonial government realise that a more correct and positive term was necessary if they were to win the hearts and minds of the Orang Asli -. Realising that the insurgents were able to get the sympathy and support of the indigenous inhabitants in the forest, partly by referring to them as ‘Orang Asal’ (original peoples), the colonial government in turn adopted the next closest term ‘Orang Asli’ (literally ‘natural people’, but now taken to mean ‘original people’). It soon became official policy that the Malay term be used even in the English language (Carey 1976: 3). However, this in itself was not enough to forge a common identity among the Orang Asli sub-groups, nor was the term immediately accepted by them.

As such, Orang Asli homogeneity was initially a creation of non-Orang Asli perceptions and ideological impositions rather than self-imposed or self-defined.

Nevertheless, with increased contact with the dominant population, it became clear to various Orang Asli groups that they had more in common with one another than they did with the dominant population. This was especially so as not much of this contact was beneficial or amiable. As I argue later, the social stress that they experienced as a result of this contact with the dominant population, caused these groups to develop a common identity under the label 'Orang Asli'.

However, while it is recognised that the various Orang Asli sub-groups that constitute the category 'Orang Asli' are distinct peoples themselves, I have elected, for the purpose of this study, to refer to this generic category as a distinct community vis-à-vis other generic communities in Malaysia. Thus, for example, just as the Chinese people in Malaysia comprise different sub-groups (e.g. Hakka, Cantonese and Hokkien – each with its own language and cultural specifics), so too the Orang Asli can be regarded as a distinct people in Malaysian society. Such categorisation should not be regarded as an attempt to deny the respective Orang Asli sub-groups recognition as distinct peoples in themselves.⁴ Rather, it is used here to demonstrate that the various sub-groups can be regarded as a generic category, as the indigenous minority peoples of Peninsular Malaysia, as they individually satisfy the requirements and indicia

⁴ The use of the term *peoples* has proved sensitive in international practice, principally because it has been employed to designate a category of nonstate groups holding particular international-law rights, most notably the right of 'all peoples' to self-determination. For this reason, states have been reticent about the use of the term 'indigenous peoples' at the international level (Kingsbury 1995: 15)

used in determining indigenous groups. Kinsgbury (1995: 33) lists these requirements and indicia as:

- Self-identification as a distinct ethnic group;
- Historical experience of, or contingent vulnerability to, severe disruption, dislocation, or exploitation;
- Long connection with the region;
- The wish to retain a distinct identity;
- Non-dominance in the national society;
- Close cultural affinity with a particular area of land or territory;
- Historic continuity (especially by descent) with prior occupants of the land in the region;
- Socioeconomic and sociocultural differences from the ambient population;
- Distinct objective characteristics: language, race, material or spiritual culture, etc.; and
- Regarded as indigenous by the ambient population or treated as such in legal and administrative arrangements.

These shared experiences of the Orang Asli sub-groups in many ways reflect their common social history.

Social History

In the main, the Orang Asli groups kept to themselves until about the first millenium AD when traders from India, China and the Mon civilisations in Southern Thailand sought forest products such as resins, incense woods, rhinoceros horns, feathers, and even gold. Orang Asli living in the interior became suppliers of these items, bartering them for salt, cloth and iron tools.

The rise of the Malay sultanates, however, coincided with a trade in Orang Asli slaves that prompted many Orang Asli groups to retreat further inland to avoid contact with outsiders. For the most part, therefore, the Orang Asli lived in remote communities, each within a specific geographical space (such as a river valley) and isolated from the others. They identified themselves by their specific ecological niche⁵, which they called their customary or traditional land, and developed a close affinity with it. Much of the basis of their culture and religion is derived from this close association with the particular environment.

This is not to suggest that the Orang Asli lived in complete isolation, existing only on subsistence production. Economic dealings with the neighbouring Malay communities were not uncommon for the past few hundred years, especially for the Aboriginal Malay groups. There seemed, also, to be a certain amount of interaction between the Orang Asli and the other ethnic groups, particularly the Malays who resided along the fringes of the forest.

The arrival of the British colonialists brought further impacts into the lives of the Orang Asli. After the early interest in the Orang Asli as targets of missionary Christian zeal and as rich subjects of anthropological research, the events of the Emergency – the colonial government's civil war with the communist insurgents from 1948 to 1960 – pushed the Orang Asli into the political arena. The primary

⁵ The term is used by Tachimoto (1997: 33) to refer to a particular geographical space that has a specific ecological identity, or site-consciousness, that is related to a sense of place for its inhabitants.

motive for such new-found interest in the Orang Asli were undeniably that of national security – as Orang Asli help was necessary if the Malayan government was to win the war against the insurgents. The Emergency period also saw the introduction of two administrative initiatives that were to have a lasting impact on the future of Orang Asli wellbeing: the establishment of the Department of Aborigines in 1950, and the enactment of the Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance in 1954.

The post-Independence period, as the later chapters will discuss more fully, proved to be no less impactful for the Orang Asli. The ‘development’ of the Orang Asli became a prime objective of the government. Towards this end, the government adopted a policy in 1961 that sought the Orang Asli’s ‘ultimate integration with the wider Malaysian society’.⁶ The original process was to be by improving the socio-economic position of the Orang Asli. However, with time, the policy began to emphasise their assimilation with the Malay community, and their conversion to Islam (JHEOA 1983).

The last two decades, additionally, was a period of sustained growth for Malaysia. With a development model that emphasised modernisation and industrialisation, especially with a vision to make Malaysia a fully industrialised nation by the year 2020 (Mahathir 1991), the Orang Asli began to experience a contest for their traditional resources. Encroachments into, and appropriation of,

⁶ The original policy statement however advocated the assimilation of the Orang Asli with the Malay section of the national community (JHEOA 1961: 2).

Table 3
Number and growth rate of the Orang Asli population,
1947-1991.

| Year | Number | Period | Average annual growth rate (per cent) |
|------|--------|-----------|--|
| 1947 | 34,747 | 1947-1957 | 1.9 |
| 1957 | 41,360 | | |
| 1970 | 53,379 | 1957-1970 | 2.2 |
| 1980 | 67,014 | 1970-1980 | 2.5 |
| 1991 | 98,494 | 1980-1991 | 4.3 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 3.

Table 4
Percentage distribution of the Orang Asli by location,
1980, 1990 and 1991

| Location | 1970 | 1980 | 1991 |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Urban areas | 1.6 | 3.8 | 8.9 |
| Small urban towns | 2.4 | 2.9 | 2.4 |
| Rural areas | 96.0 | 93.3 | 88.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Numbers | (53,349) | (67,014) | (98,494) |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 6.

The JHEOA frequently puts forward a figure of 40 per cent for the number of Orang Asli who live in forest areas.⁷ The 1991 census survey, however, showed that 88.7 per cent of the Orang Asli lived in the rural areas while the rest (11.3 per cent) lived in urban areas or in small urban towns (Table 4). Those living in the rural areas are engaged in a variety of occupations, most of which are related to agriculture or forest resources. The Semai, Temiar, Che Wong, Jah Hut, Semelai and Semoq Beri, for example, live close to, or within forested areas where they engage in swiddening (hill rice cultivation) and some hunting and gathering. These communities also trade in petai, durian, rattan and resins to earn cash incomes. On the other hand, the Orang Kuala, Orang Laut, Orang Seletar and Mah Meri, live close to the coast and are mainly fisher folks. A fair number of Orang Asli – especially Temuan, Jakun and Semai – are involved in permanent agriculture and now manage their own rubber, oil palm or cocoa smallholdings.

Only a very small number – less than one per cent of the Orang Asli population – among the Negrito groups (such as Jahai and Batek) are still semi-nomadic, preferring to take advantage of the seasonal bounties of the forest. However, a significant number of Orang Asli live in the urban areas or urban settlements, engaged in various occupations, either as proprietor or as an employee. From Table 5, for example, we find that of the 30,695 Orang Asli with an occupation, 19 per cent (5,835 persons) were not in agriculture or forest-related occupations,

⁷ Lim Hin Fui (1997: 42), analysing JHEOA's raw data, computed that of the 774 Orang Asli villages in 1990, 120 (16 per cent) were easily accessible, 379 (49%) were in forest-fringed areas and 275 (35%) were in remote areas.

and were generally urban-based. This figure correlates with the difference in census figures by the JHEOA and the Department of Statistics (Table 6), where the latter statistics show an additional 7,177 Orang Asli who are not accounted for.⁸

Tables 5 and 7 also throw light on other types of occupations the Orang Asli were involved in. Among the professional and semi-professional group, most were employed as teachers and medical assistants. Of those in the service sector, the males were mainly in the protective sectors as members of the police force (*Senoi Praaq*) and forest rangers, whereas the females worked as maids and cooks. However, the majority of those involved in factory work (as electrical and electronic equipment assemblers) were females. From Table 7, it will be seen that for both sexes, participation in agriculture was the highest for those in the older age groups, particularly for females (93 per cent). Relatively high proportions of females in the 10-24 age group (14.6 per cent) were also employed in production and related occupations (Department of Statistics 1997: 37). For this reason, the two peninsula states that have no natural Orang Asli populations – Penang and Perlis – now show Orang Asli residing there (Table 8). This attests to the mobility of the Orang Asli as their presence in these two states is largely due to their employment in the electronics and textiles sectors there.

⁸ The difference between the shortfall of 7,177 and the number listed as engaged in urban occupations (5,835) is probably due to unemployed Orang Asli individuals accompanying their employed relatives in the urban areas.

Table 5
Occupational distribution of the Orang Asli
by selected occupations, 1991.

| Major occupational groups | Selected minor group | Total |
|---|--|--------------|
| Professionals, technical and Related workers | Professionals | 21 |
| | Semi-professionals | 41 |
| | Medical assistants | 72 |
| | Teachers (college, secondary, primary) | 143 |
| | Social workers | 38 |
| | Total | 431 |
| Administrative and managerial workers | Total | 43 |
| Clerical and related workers | Government executive officials | 152 |
| | Typists, stenographers, book-keepers, cashiers | 53 |
| | Clerks | 173 |
| | Total | 425 |
| Sales workers | Working proprietors (wholesale, retail) | 190 |
| | Salesman, shop assistants | 141 |
| | Street vendors | 58 |
| | Total | 416 |
| Service workers | Cooks, waiters, maids | 255 |
| | Policemen and detectives | 1,271 |
| | Protective services, not elsewhere classified | 329 |
| | Total | 2,120 |
| Agricultural, animal husbandry and Forestry workers, fishermen and Hunters | Specialized field crop farmers | 9,687 |
| | Specialized livestock farmers | 43 |
| | Other agricultural and animal husbandry workers | 8,510 |
| | Field crop and vegetable farm workers | 1,045 |
| | Fruit tree and related tree and shrub workers | 3,656 |
| | Loggers | 365 |
| | Forestry workers | 195 |
| | Fishermen, hunters | 1,268 |
| Total | 24,860 | |
| Production and related workers, Transport equipment operators And labourers | Miners and quarrymen | 75 |
| | Sawyers, plywood makers | 103 |
| | Cabinet-makers and related wood workers | 96 |
| | Machinery fitters, assemblers (except electrical) | 113 |
| | Electrical and electronic equipment assemblers | 215 |
| | Production and related workers, not elsewhere classified | 197 |
| | Bricklayers, carpenters and other construction workers | 200 |
| | Motor vehicle drivers | 115 |
| | Labourers, not elsewhere classified | 437 |
| | Total | 2,400 |

Note: The totals shown are for each major occupational group and the detailed occupations given will not add up to the total, as only selected occupations are shown.

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 36.

Table 6

Number and percentage distribution of major Orang Asli Sub-groups
as enumerated by the 1991 Census and JHEOA (1992)

| | Senoi | Proto Malay | Negrito | Total |
|-------------------------------|--------|-------------|---------|--------|
| Population Census 1991 | | | | |
| Number | 53,861 | 41,615 | 3,018 | 98,494 |
| Per cent | 54.7 | 42.2 | 3.1 | 100.0 |
| JHEOA (1992) | | | | |
| Number | 49,562 | 39,054 | 2,701 | 91,317 |
| Per cent | 54.3 | 42.8 | 2.9 | 100.0 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 10.

Table 7

Percentage distribution of the employed Orang Asli
aged 10 years and over
by occupation, sex and broad age group, 1991.

| Occupation | Male | | | Female | | |
|---|---------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 10-24 | 25-44 | 45+ | 10-24 | 25-44 | 45+ |
| Professional, technical and related workers | 0.5 | 1.7 | 1.4 | 1.3 | 2.7 | 0.8 |
| Administrative and managerial Workers | - | 0.3 | 0.1 | - | 0.2 | 0.0 |
| Clerical and related workers | 0.6 | 2.0 | 1.0 | 1.3 | 2.5 | 0.2 |
| Sales workers | 1.1 | 1.3 | 1.4 | 1.8 | 1.4 | 1.8 |
| Service workers | 3.4 | 13.2 | 4.8 | 4.4 | 3.4 | 1.4 |
| Agricultural, animal husbandry and forestry workers, fishermen and hunters | 83.5 | 74.6 | 88.6 | 76.5 | 82.9 | 93.2 |
| Production and related workers, transport equipment operators and labourers | 10.9 | 6.9 | 2.8 | 14.6 | 6.9 | 2.7 |
| Total employed | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Numbers (thousands) | (7,478) | (10,393) | (4,941) | (3,349) | (3,369) | (1,556) |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 37.

Table 8

Distribution of the Orang Asli population by state, 1947-1991.

| State | Number | | | | | Percentage distribution in 1991 |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------------------------|
| | 1947 | 1957 | 1970 | 1980 | 1991 | |
| Johor | 1,389 | 1,329 | 3,292 | 3,883 | 7,092 | 7.2 |
| Kedah | 182 | 90 | 227 | 289 | 253 | 0.3 |
| Kelantan | 4,569 | 3,995 | 4,758 | 5,005 | 6,944 | 7.0 |
| Melaka | 241 | 256 | 427 | 681 | 852 | 0.9 |
| Negri Sembilan | 1,826 | 2,313 | 2,688 | 3,003 | 5,952 | 6.0 |
| Pahang | 13,173 | 16,076 | 18,822 | 24,157 | 34,178 | 34.7 |
| Pulau Pinang | 68 | 9 | 152 | 440 | 255 | 0.3 |
| Perak | 10,208 | 13,103 | 16,863 | 21,123 | 30,841 | 31.3 |
| Perlis | 0 | 58 | 12 | 45 | 63 | 0.1 |
| Selangor | 2,907* | 4,032* | 5,906* | 6,547 | 11,084 | 11.2 |
| Terengganu | 174 | 99 | 232 | 398 | 594 | 0.6 |
| WP Kuala Lumpur | - | - | - | 421 | 386 | 0.4 |
| Total | 34,737 | 41,360 | 53,379 | 65,992 | 98,494 | 100.0 |

* Includes Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 5.

Table 9
Age distribution of the Orang Asli,
1980 and 1991.

| Age groups | 1980 | 1991 | 1980 | 1991 |
|-------------|--------|--------|------------|-------|
| | Number | | Percentage | |
| Total | | | | |
| 0-14 | 30,715 | 46,396 | 45.9 | 47.1 |
| 15-24 | 13,273 | 18,612 | 19.8 | 19.0 |
| 25-34 | 8,007 | 13,967 | 11.9 | 14.2 |
| 35-44 | 6,629 | 8,120 | 9.9 | 8.2 |
| 45-54 | 4,521 | 5,847 | 6.7 | 5.9 |
| 55-64 | 2,614 | 3,550 | 3.9 | 3.6 |
| 65 and over | 1,255 | 2,002 | 1.9 | 2.0 |
| Total | 67,014 | 98,494 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| | | | | |
| Male | | | | |
| 0-14 | 15,727 | 23,607 | 45.4 | 47.1 |
| 15-24 | 6,518 | 9,088 | 18.8 | 18.1 |
| 25-34 | 4,043 | 6,905 | 11.7 | 13.8 |
| 35-44 | 3,568 | 4,228 | 10.3 | 8.4 |
| 45-54 | 2,478 | 3,191 | 7.2 | 6.4 |
| 55-64 | 1,517 | 1,936 | 4.4 | 3.9 |
| 65 and over | 782 | 1,180 | 2.2 | 2.3 |
| Total | 34,633 | 50,135 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| | | | | |
| Female | | | | |
| 0-14 | 14,988 | 22,789 | 46.4 | 47.2 |
| 15-24 | 6,755 | 9,524 | 20.9 | 19.7 |
| 25-34 | 3,964 | 7,062 | 12.2 | 14.6 |
| 35-44 | 3,061 | 3,892 | 9.4 | 8.0 |
| 45-54 | 2,043 | 2,656 | 6.3 | 5.5 |
| 55-64 | 1,097 | 1,614 | 3.4 | 3.3 |
| 65 and over | 473 | 822 | 1.4 | 1.7 |
| Total | 32,381 | 48,359 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 13.

Age Indicators

The Orang Asli have a very young population (Department of Statistics 1977: 13). Table 9 shows that 47 per cent of the Orang Asli were below 15 years of age in 1991. This compares with only 36 per cent for the total Peninsular Malaysia population in the same age group. The median age (16.4 years in 1991) further substantiates the youthful characteristic of the Orang Asli population.

Table 10 provides more age indicators for the Orang Asli. The child/woman ratio⁹ showed an increase from 8.5 in 1980 to 8.9 in 1991, indicating continuing high birth rates. The corresponding ratio for Peninsular Malaysia was only 5.2 in 1991. A significant increase was also observed for the child dependency ratio,¹⁰ from 87.6 in 1980 to 92.6 in 1991. In comparison, the child dependency ratio for Peninsular Malaysia was only 61 in 1991. The old age dependency ratio¹¹ for 1991 was 4.0, which was much lower than the 6.6 for the whole of Peninsular Malaysia.

Several implications can be drawn from the prevalent age distribution of the Orang Asli. Considering the youthfulness of the age structure, we can expect the growth rates to be maintained at high levels for some time, even with relatively

⁹ This is the ratio of children aged 0-4 years to women aged 15-44 years.

¹⁰ This is the ratio of children aged 0-14 years per 100 persons aged between 15-64 years.

¹¹ This measures the proportion of elderly persons (aged 65 years and above) per 100 persons aged between 15-64 years.

Table 10

Age indicators of the Orang Asli population and total population,
1980 and 1991.

| Age indicator | Orang Asli | | Total population (Peninsular Malaysia) 1991 |
|--------------------------|------------|------|--|
| | 1980 | 1991 | |
| Median age | 17.0 | 16.4 | 22.2 |
| Dependency ratio | 91.2 | 96.6 | 67.6 |
| Child dependency ratio | 87.6 | 92.6 | 61.0 |
| Old age dependency ratio | 3.6 | 4.0 | 6.6 |
| Child/woman ratio | 8.5 | 8.9 | 5.2 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 14.

modest birth rates. The large proportion of the population below 15 years also implies that development plans and strategies need to give greater emphasis to this age group, especially in terms of educational facilities and healthcare. There is also a need to give greater emphasis to young mothers especially in terms of nutrition and healthcare. Also, the high dependency ratio implies a heavier burden on the working age population (15-64 years) towards those younger and older to this group. Thus, if the policy of Orang Asli integration into the mainstream were to be pursued actively, it would require the provision of adequate employment opportunities and the development of sufficient economic activities to sustain this large dependent age group (Department of Statistics 1977: 15).

Educational Attainment

In February 1998, Zaleha Ismail, the Minister for Social Services and National Unity, under whose charge the JHEOA falls into, stated that, while a total of 21,724 Orang Asli in 1997 had some formal education – 18,211 at primary schools and 3,513 at secondary schools – the dropout rate among Orang Asli students was 50 per cent (*New Straits Times* 20.2.1998). However, Hasan (1997: 21), analysing JHEOA's statistics, found it to be an average of 62.14 per cent per annum for the period 1971-1995. Hasan (1977: 26) also found that, on average, of the Orang Asli school children who registered in Primary One, 94.4 per cent of them never reach the end of secondary schooling 11 years later (Table 11).

Table 11

Dropout Rate from Primary 1 to Secondary 5,
1971-1995

| Year of Admission | No. of registered students in Primary 1 | No. of students continuing to Secondary 3 | | No. of students continuing to Secondary 5 | | Dropout Rate (%) |
|-------------------|---|---|--------------|---|--------------|------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| 1971 | 997 | 1979 | 250 | 1981 | 39 | 96.1 |
| 1972 | 1,236 | 1980 | 309 | 1982 | 88 | 92.8 |
| 1973 | 1,471 | 1981 | 229 | 1983 | 82 | 94.4 |
| 1974 | 1,710 | 1982 | 234 | 1984 | 101 | 94.1 |
| 1975 | 1,969 | 1983 | 271 | 1985 | 114 | 94.2 |
| 1976 | 2,105 | 1984 | 292 | 1986 | 94 | 95.3 |
| 1977 | 2,151 | 1985 | 430 | 1987 | 102 | 95.2 |
| 1978 | 2,317 | 1986 | 318 | 1988 | 126 | 94.5 |
| 1979 | 3,102 | 1987 | 330 | 1989 | 107 | 96.5 |
| 1980 | 2,304 | 1988 | 348 | 1990 | 128 | 94.4 |
| 1981 | 2,416 | 1989 | 328 | 1991 | 121 | 94.9 |
| 1982 | 2,729 | 1990 | 420 | 1992 | 147 | 94.6 |
| 1983 | 2,868 | 1991 | 375 | 1993 | 186 | 93.5 |
| 1984 | 2,651 | 1992 | 429 | 1994 | 235 | 91.1 |
| 1985 | 2,879 | 1993 | 430 | 1995 | 174 | 93.9 |
| TOTAL | 32,905 | | 4,993 | | 1,844 | 94.4 |

Source: Hasan Mat Nor (1997). *Kajian Keciciran Di Kalangan Pelajar Orang Asli Peringkat Sekolah Rendah*, p. 26.

Table 12

Percentage distribution of Orang Asli population aged six years and over by educational attainment and sex, 1980 and 1991.

| Level of educational attainment | Total | | Male | | Female | |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | 1980 | 1991 | 1980 | 1991 | 1980 | 1991 |
| No schooling | 66.4 | 51.4 | 61.2 | 46.3 | 72.0 | 56.6 |
| Primary | 27.3 | 37.8 | 30.6 | 41.7 | 23.6 | 33.8 |
| Lower secondary | 4.6 | 7.8 | 5.7 | 8.7 | 3.4 | 6.8 |
| Upper secondary | 1.2 | 2.4 | 1.7 | 2.6 | 0.8 | 2.1 |
| Tertiary | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0.6 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total (Numbers) | 52,800 | 75,800 | 27,500 | 38,200 | 25,300 | 37,600 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 27.

Table 13

Percentage distribution of Orang Asli population aged six years and over by educational attainment and stratum, 1991.

| Educational attainment | Urban | Rural |
|------------------------|-------|--------|
| No schooling | 24.4 | 54.0 |
| Primary | 40.9 | 37.6 |
| Lower secondary | 19.8 | 6.6 |
| Upper secondary | 10.1 | 1.6 |
| Tertiary | 4.8 | 0.2 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Numbers | 6,885 | 69,950 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 28.

In general, while there has been significant improvements made in the overall school attendance of the Orang Asli, the years of actual schooling leaves much to be desired. Table 12 provides some idea of the educational levels attained by the Orang Asli community aged 6 years and over. The 1991 census revealed that 37.8 per cent had at least primary schooling whereas only 7.8 per cent had reached lower secondary school. Even fewer – 2.4 per cent – had reached upper secondary school.¹² While the proportions have been small, a significant number of Orang Asli have also reached tertiary education. As of June 1997, 138 Orang Asli had completed tertiary education with government assistance, while another 99 were still continuing their education (*The Star* 1.11.1997).

Although the proportion of Orang Asli with no schooling declined 15 percentage points for both males and females, as Table 12 shows, males indicated lower levels of those without any education, i.e. 46.3 per cent compared to 56.7 per cent for females. The same applies for primary education. However, the differences were not very significant for both sexes for secondary and tertiary educational attainment (Department of Statistics 1997: 27).

¹² Merely having been attending school is not fully indicative of educational attainment. Pass rates among Orang Asli schoolchildren have not been too encouraging, though it has been improving over the years. For example, Lim (1997: 45) comments that, the percentage of passes among Orang Asli schoolchildren taking the SRP (Primary 6) exam in 1990-1992 was between 43 and 59 per cent, compared to 69 to 78 per cent at the national level. Similarly, for the 1993-1995 period, the proportion of Orang Asli passing the SPM (Secondary 5) exams was 51 to 54 per cent, compared to 66 to 67 per cent nationally.

As expected, Orang Asli who lived in the urban areas at the time of the 1991 census displayed much higher levels of education, as can be seen from Table 13. Some 10 per cent of the urban Orang Asli had completed upper secondary education while another 5 per cent had obtained tertiary education. In contrast, only 1.6 per cent of rural Orang Asli completed upper secondary school, while only 0.2 per cent obtained tertiary education.

In all, about 92 per cent of the rural Orang Asli had no schooling or only primary schooling at the time of the 1991 census. This motivated the government to transfer the responsibility of Orang Asli education from the JHEOA to the Ministry of Education with effect from 1st January 1995. This move, apart from benefiting the Orang Asli, also helped the state achieve its objective of integrating the Orang Asli with the mainstream society.

Health

It is generally accepted that there has been a marked improvement in the provision and availability of health facilities for the Orang Asli. However, there is still much more that needs to be done.

For example, it was reported (*The Sun* 28.9.1996) that of the 42 mothers who died during delivery in 1994, 25 (60 per cent) were Orang Asli women. Given that the Orang Asli community is only 0.5 per cent of the national population, this means that an Orang Asli mother in 1994 was 119 times more likely to die in

childbirth than a Malaysian mother nationally.

The crude death rates and infant mortality rates for the Orang Asli also do not compare well with the national statistics. Table 14 shows that, for 1984-1987, the Orang Asli recorded a much higher infant mortality rate (median=51.7 deaths per 1,000 infants) than the general population (median=16.3). Similarly, the crude death rate for the Orang Asli (median=10.4) was doubled that of the national population (median=5.2). Accordingly, their life expectancy at birth (estimated at 52 years for females and 54 years for males) was also significantly lower than that for the national population (68 years for females and 72 years for males). The lower life expectancy at birth for Orang Asli females could be due to their higher maternal death rates caused by child-birth or poor maternal health (Ng, *et al* 1987, cited in Razha 1996: 13), or that Orang Asli mothers are overburdened with reproductive, as well as productive tasks.

With regard to diseases inflicting Orang Asli, Veeman (1987) found that the diseases that persist are infectious and parasitic diseases, specifically tuberculosis, malaria, leprosy, cholera, typhoid, measles and whooping cough. This is concurred by the Director of the JHEOA Hospital in Gombak, who disclosed that the main cause of admissions in 1996 was infectious and parasitic diseases (Roslan 1997: 61). Of the 785 admissions for that year (including for childbirth complications and motor vehicle accidents), almost half (368 or 46.8

Table 14

Crude death rates and infant mortality rates for Orang Asli
and general population in Peninsular Malaysia,
1984-1987.

| Year | Crude Death Rate | | Infant MortalityRate | |
|--------|------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | Orang Asli | National Population | Orang Asli | National Population |
| 1984 | 9.4 | 5.3 | 47.0 | 17.5 |
| 1985 | 11.3 | 5.3 | 56.9 | 17.0 |
| 1986 | 11.0 | 5.0 | 56.4 | 15.5 |
| 1987 | 9.7 | 4.8 | 46.7 | 14.4 |
| Median | 10.4 | 5.2 | 51.7 | 16.3 |

Source: Ng Man San, et al (1987), *Demographic Situation of the Aborigines in Malaysia*.
Department of Statistics, Kuala Lumpur, p. 13, cited in Razha (1996: 13).

Table 15

Number of Malaria and Tuberculosis cases among the Orang Asli,
1981-1995

| Disease | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 |
|--------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Malaria | 4,356* | 4,810 | 7,215 | 6,186 | 6,142 |
| Tuberculosis | 293 | 177 | 171 | 162 | 200 |

* This figure is for cases treated at the JHEOA hospital in Gombak only.

Sources: Malaria figures from Roslan Ismail (1997) and Lim Hin Fui (1997);
Tuberculosis figures from Fadzillah Kamaludin (1997)

per cent) were from such preventable diseases as malaria, tuberculosis and scabies. In fact, malaria and tuberculosis continue to plague the Orang Asli, as Table 15 indicates. The figures are more disturbing when compared to the national statistics. For example, of the 7,752 malaria cases reported in Peninsular Malaysia in 1995, more than three-quarters (79.2 per cent) were from the Orang Asli (6,142 cases). Similarly, for tuberculosis, the incidence of the disease is 5 to 7 times greater for the Orang Asli than for the rest of the country.¹³

Data on Orang Asli health also indicate that malnutrition is prevalent among Orang Asli. Khor (1994: 123), for example, found that even in regroupment schemes, some 15 years after relocation, the nutritional status of Orang Asli children can be described as poor with a moderate to high prevalence of underweight, acute, and chronic malnutrition. This is supported by three studies examining growth retardation in Orang Asli children (Table 16). The prevalence of underweight Orang Asli children ranged from 18 to 65 per cent, while stunting (an indication of under-nourishment) ranged from 15 to 81 per cent. A few cases of wasting (an indication of severe malnutrition) were also found. Concurring with this, Chee (1996: 63) opines that together with the nutritional problems – poor diet, low growth achievement, anaemia, diarrhoea – it appears that the poor

¹³ For example, Kumar Devaraj (personal communication, 1996) reports that for Perak, there were 72 tuberculosis cases in 1996 for an Orang Asli population of 26,542. In contrast, there were 550 cases for the whole state population of 1,440,500 (including the Orang Asli). As such, 2.71 out of every 1,000 Orang Asli contracted tuberculosis, compared to 0.38 out every 1,000 individuals for the state.

health of the Orang Asli is tightly bound to the destruction of their traditional subsistence base and their resultant material deprivation.

Nevertheless, despite relatively good medical service provision, the health problems which the Orang Asli face are still those which reflect underdevelopment (Chee 1996: 63). They continue to suffer from a disproportionate incidence of tuberculosis, malaria, skin diseases and malnutrition (*New Straits Times*, 19.6.1999). However, in a review of Orang Asli health, disease and survival, Baer (1999) found that there is sufficient information on Orang Asli health available to enable the Orang Asli to enjoy and benefit from better healthcare facilities, especially since most Orang Asli health problems are easily preventable and curable.

Poverty and Wealth

Statistics revealed by the Director-General of the JHEOA (*The Star*, 19.2.1997) show that 80.8 per cent of the Orang Asli live below the poverty line (compared to 8.5 per cent nationally), of which 49.9 per cent are among the very poor (compared to 2.5 per cent nationally).¹⁴

¹⁴ These statistics are based on the 1993 PPRT (Programme for the Eradication of the Very Poor) survey. They are similar to those divulged by Long Jidin in Zawawi (1996: 105). However, in an apparent retraction of the data, the Director-General Ikram Jamaluddin, argued in his farewell press release dated 31 October 1997, that the figure is actually an "under-estimation" as it does not reflect the "real income" of the Orang Asli. Furthermore, he added, the incidence of abject poverty among the Orang Asli is not that significant since, of the 100,000 extremely poor families in the country, only 7 per cent are Orang Asli. However, that the Orang Asli are only 0.5 per cent of the national population, and thus this figure would actually account for an incidence of poverty 14 times greater than all the other communities put together, was conveniently sidestepped.

Table 17a

Percentage distribution of Orang Asli housing units
by type of supply of drinking water, 1991.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| Piped water inside housing units | 26.8 |
| Piped water outside housing units | 19.6 |
| Well | 23.6 |
| Others (rivers, etc.) | 30.0 |
| Total housing units | 20,841 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 46.

Table 17b

Percentage distribution of Orang Asli housing units by
type of toilet facility, 1991

| | |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Flush | 13.4 |
| Pour Flush | 31.4 |
| Pit | 5.7 |
| Enclosed space over water | 2.9 |
| None | 46.6 |
| Total housing units | 20,841 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 48.

Table 17c

Percentage distribution of Orang Asli housing units
by type of lighting, 1991

| | |
|---------------------|--------|
| Electricity | 36.2 |
| Gas lamps | 1.0 |
| Oil lamps | 57.0 |
| Others | 5.8 |
| Total housing units | 20,841 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 47.

Table 18

Percentage of Orang Asli households
with household items by location, 1991.

| Household items | Urban | Rural | Total | Total households (Peninsular Malaysia) |
|----------------------------|-------|--------|--------|---|
| Motorcar | 29.2 | 4.1 | 7.9 | 34.2 |
| Motorcycle | 39.8 | 35.0 | 35.8 | 52.9 |
| Bicycle | 44.6 | 21.2 | 24.8 | 42.0 |
| Refrigerator | 59.5 | 8.3 | 16.1 | 63.5 |
| Telephone | 29.6 | 1.8 | 6.0 | 34.0 |
| Television | 75.8 | 30.7 | 37.6 | 82.1 |
| Video | 28.7 | 3.4 | 7.3 | 32.6 |
| Radio/hi-fi | 72.2 | 49.3 | 52.7 | 78.3 |
| None of the items | 3.4 | 25.6 | 22.2 | 3.4 |
| Total number of households | 3,313 | 18,460 | 21,773 | 2,875,154 |

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1997), *Profile of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia*, p. 41.

Other indicators also point to the poor quality of life that the Orang Asli experience. For example, only 46.4 per cent of Orang Asli households had some form of piped water, either indoors or outdoors. As expected, almost all the houses served with piped water were urban-based (Department of Statistics 1997: 46). However, the 1991 census also showed that almost a third of Orang Asli households still depended on rivers and streams for their water needs (Table 17a).

The availability of toilet facilities as a basic amenity was lacking in 47 per cent of the Orang Asli housing units, compared to only 3 per cent at the Peninsular Malaysia level (Department of Statistics 1977: 47). For example, some 9,700 Orang Asli households (49.5 per cent) in 1991 reported having no toilet facilities, and most were in the rural areas (Table 17b).

For lighting their homes, 36.2 per cent of Orang Asli households enjoyed electricity, while the majority depended on kerosene lamps (*pelita*). Much of the availability of electricity supply in the interior rural settlements was derived from generators, either provided by the JHEOA under the RPS development schemes, or purchased by individual households (Table 17c).¹⁵

¹⁵ Lim Hin Fui (1997: 62) reports much lower attainment levels for electricity and water supply in Orang Asli homes. Based on raw data from the JHEOA, of the 774 Orang Asli villages surveyed in 1990, only 149 (19 per cent) had electricity and 232 (30 per cent) had (piped) water supply. Nevertheless, even if we were to accept the higher figures of the Department of Statistics, the low level of attainment of these facilities by the Orang Asli is still a cause for concern.

Another indicator of wealth (or poverty) is the availability (or absence) of selected household items that could provide an approximate measure of material wellbeing. Table 18 shows that the motorcycle is an important means of transportation in the rural settlements, where about a third (35 per cent) of the households own one. In general, however, as is to be expected, more of the urban Orang Asli possessed household items when compared to the rural Orang Asli.

In fact, there is very little difference between the proportions of availability of household items between urban Orang Asli households and the overall Peninsular Malaysia. This suggests that urban Orang Asli households are not materially very different from their non-Orang Asli neighbours. Of significant note, also, is that a fair proportion of both rural and urban Orang Asli households have access to a radio or television, thereby negating any presumption that they are 'isolated', or that they are blissfully impervious to outside influences. Significantly, also, almost a quarter (22.2 per cent) of all Orang Asli households said that they did not have any of the selected household items – indicating a “certain lagging in economic development” (Department of Statistics 1997: 42).

Ownership of Land

The attachment Orang Asli have to their traditional lands cannot be over-emphasised. Most Orang Asli still maintain a close physical, cultural and spiritual relationship with the environment. Increasingly, however, Orang Asli are beginning to see the ownership of their traditional lands as an essential prerequisite

for their material and economic upliftment. Under present Malaysian laws, the greatest title that the Orang Asli can have to their land is one of tenant-at-will – an undisguised allusion to the government's perception that all Orang Asli lands unconditionally belong to the state. However, provisions are made for the gazetting of Orang Asli reserves, although such administrative action does not accord the Orang Asli with any ownership rights over such lands.

The status of gazetting Orang Asli land is given in Table 19. In 1996, a total of 131,736 hectares of Orang Asli land were given some form of recognition by the government. Of this, 18,587 hectares (14.1 per cent) were gazetted Orang Asli reserves, while another 29,879 hectares (22.7 per cent) had been approved for gazetting but have yet to be officially gazetted. Still, another 83,270 hectares (63.2 per cent) have been applied for gazetting and for which no approval had been obtained as yet. However, it should be stressed again that these areas are merely those that the government deem to be Orang Asli lands. From calculations made based on the JHEOA's *Data Tanah* (1990), it was found that the area gazetted represented only 15 per cent of the 779 Orang Asli villages. The remaining villages faced (even greater) insecurity of tenure over their territories.

Of more concern is the realisation that the size of gazetted Orang Asli reserves had actually declined from 20,667 hectares in 1990 to 18,587 hectares in 1996 – a decline of 2,080 hectares. Similarly, approval for gazetting have been withdrawn from 6,198 hectares of the 36,076 hectares originally approved in 1990. However,

Table 19
 Status of Gazetting Orang Asli Land,
 1990, 1994, 1996 (hectares)

| Land status | 1990 | 1994 | 1996 | Change (1990-1996) |
|---|------------|------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Gazetted Orang Asli Reserves | 20,666.96 | 17,903.61 | 18,587.26 | -2,079.70 |
| Approved for gazetting, but not gazetted as yet | 36,076.33 | 34,599.24 | 29,878.63 | -6,197.70 |
| Total Orang Asli land with some legal status | 56,743.29 | 52,502.85 | 48,465.89 | -8,277.40 |
| Applied for gazetting, but not approved yet | 67,019.46 | 79,684.94 | 83,269.86 | 16,250.40 |
| Total | 123,762.75 | 132,187.79 | 131,735.75 | 7,973.00 |

Source: JHEOA, *Data Tanah*, 1990.

Press statement by Minister of National Unity and Social Development, 4 March 1994.
 Extracted from Nik Mohd Zain Yusof, Secretary-General, Ministry of Land and Cooperative Development (1997: Appendix E).

Table 20
Orang Asli Land Status by State
1996 (hectares)

| State | Gazetted Orang Asli Reserves | Orang Asli land approved for gazetting but not gazetted yet | Orang Asli land applied for gazetting | Total |
|---------------|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Perak | 5,189.41 | 7,277.22 | 17,297.52 | 29,764.15 |
| Kedah | 173.38 | - | - | 173.38 |
| Pahang | 4,013.62 | 13,718.17 | 43,495.13 | 61,226.92 |
| Kelantan | 0.16 | 3,893.52 | 12,573.00 | 16,466.68 |
| Terengganu | 1,312.60 | 200.66 | 161.94 | 1,675.20 |
| Selangor/W.P. | 1,586.91 | 1,213.30 | 4,583.96 | 7,384.17 |
| Johor | 3,859.16 | 2,081.07 | 2,600.52 | 8,540.75 |
| N. Sembilan | 2,336.05 | 1,176.76 | 2,547.69 | 6,060.50 |
| Melaka | 115.97 | 317.93 | 10.10 | 444.00 |
| Total | 18,587.26 | 29,878.63 | 83,269.86 | 131,735.75 |

Source: Nik Mohd. Zain bin Nik Yusof (1997), Dasar Pemilikan Tanah oleh Orang-Orang Asli di Semenanjung Malaysia. Paper presented at the National Conference of the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Malaysia to Land and Identity, Kuala Lumpur.

Table 21
Gazetted Orang Asli Reserves and Orang Asli Population
by state, 1996

| State | Gazetted Orang Asli Reserves (ha.) | Orang Asli Population | Hectares per person |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Perak | 5,189.41 | 30,841 | 0.17 |
| Kedah | 173.38 | 253 | 0.69 |
| Pahang | 4,013.62 | 34,178 | 0.12 |
| Kelantan | 0.16 | 6,944 | 0.00002 |
| Terengganu | 1,312.60 | 594 | 2.21 |
| Selangor / W.P. | 1,586.91 | 11,470 | 0.14 |
| Johor | 3,859.16 | 7,092 | 0.54 |
| Negri Sembilan | 2,336.05 | 5,952 | 0.39 |
| Melaka | 115.97 | 852 | 0.14 |
| TOTAL | 18,587.26 | 98,176* | 0.19 |

* The difference of 318 individuals from the national Orang Asli population of 98,494 is due to those in Penang and Perlis being excluded here.

Source: Calculated from Tables 1 and 20.

there had been an increase (of 16,250 hectares) in new applications for gazetted Orang Asli reserves. While this may seem as a consolation for the gazetted and approved lands lost, these new applications are invariably for new regroupment schemes. Table 24 shows that a total of 13,944 hectares have been applied for, but not yet approved, in regroupment schemes while another 5,798 hectares were in the process of being applied for.¹⁶

More recently, on 9 May 1999, the Finance Minister, Daim Zainuddin, speaking at the opening of the Annual General Meeting of POASM, revealed the status of Orang Asli land as follows:

Table 23
Status of Orang Asli Land, 1999

| Land status | Hectares |
|---|-----------|
| Gazetted Orang Asli Reserves | 19,507.4 |
| Approved for gazettement but not gazetted yet | 28,932.2 |
| Applied for gazettement, but not approved yet | 78,795.0 |
| Total | 127,234.6 |

This announcement was given wide coverage in the local media, with the newsreports taking the line that the Orang Asli are finally going to be given land rights to an "area slightly smaller than the state of Malacca" (*New Straits Times*,

¹⁶ Even if all such applications were to be considered favourably by the respective states, it is unlikely that all the affected Orang Asli will consider this as a positive move for them – for as we shall see later, regroupment is an alternative that not all Orang Asli see eye-to-eye with the planners.

10.5.1999, 11.5.1999; *Berita Harian* 10.5.1999, 11.5.1999, 12.5.1999; *The Sun*, 10.5.1999). What was not mentioned was that these figures were not at all new. In fact, some of the approvals for gazetting were given in the 1960s and 1970s (JHEOA 1990a) and yet no action had been taken since then to gazette the reserves. Furthermore, comparing the 1999 figures with those for 1996 (given in Table 19), it is clear that some discrepancies exist. For example, while the total gazetted reserves had increased by 920.14 hectares in the ensuing three years, another 5,241.29 hectares are now 'missing' from the category of Orang Asli lands that have been approved for gazetting (down 946.43 hectares from 18,587.26 hectares in 1996) or that have been applied for gazetting (down 4,294.86 hectares from 83,269.86 hectares in 1996). If we deduct the new gazetted Orang Asli reserves (920.14 hectares) from the 'missing' 5,241.29 hectares that have been taken off the 'approved' or 'applied' lists, we are faced with no explanation as to what happened to the remaining 4,320.15 hectares.¹⁷ As we shall see later, problems related to the status of traditional territories frequently arise and cause much distress for the Orang Asli.

¹⁷ Perhaps the case of Kampung Peretak and Gerachi in Kuala Kubu Bahru that has surfaced recently might throw some light on how some Orang Asli lands can be taken off the schedule. According to the JHEOA *Data Tanah* (1990a), a total of 595.25 hectares were approved for gazetting in 1965. However, when the issue of the proposed Sungai Selangor dam came to the fore, and the status of the Temuans' land was discussed, the Director-General of the JHEOA, citing the department's 1996 survey (JHEOA 1997d) asserted that the land in question was never approved for gazetting and that it is instead state forest reserve (*The Star* 27.4.1999). When asked how the gazette approval got into the department's 1990 survey, the Director-General explained it was a "typo" (*The Star* 7.6.1999).

Land, however, is constitutionally a state matter. How a state perceives the problem of Orang Asli rights to their traditional lands is reflected in Tables 20 and 21. For example, Pahang and Perak – the states with the largest Orang Asli populations – have been generally slack in gazetting Orang Asli lands. These states had the largest quantum of applications and approved applications awaiting gazetting.

Kelantan, on the other hand, has an even more dismal record of gazetting Orang Asli land, with only 0.16 hectare gazetted in 1996.¹⁸ Even Melaka, with a small Orang Asli population, has not acted positively towards gazetting Orang Asli lands - it set aside only 0.14 hectare of gazetted reserve for each Orang Asli (the national average being 0.19 hectares).¹⁹ Kedah and Terengganu rank better, where the size of gazetted reserves per Orang Asli was 0.69 and 2.21 respectively.

In terms of actual titled ownership to Orang Asli traditional lands, the statistics are even more dismal. As can be seen from Table 22, only 51.185 hectares (0.28 per cent) of the 18,587 hectares of gazetted Orang Asli reserves were securely

¹⁸ The policy apparently has been to grant Orang Asli in Kelantan Temporary Occupancy Licenses (TOL) for Orang Asli settlements, including JHEOA regroupment schemes (as in Sungei Rual, Jeli). The other possible reason is that almost the whole of the state, with the exception perhaps of the urban areas, has been designated as Malay Reserve Lands (Lim Heng Seng, 1996, personal conversation).

¹⁹ However, even this figure compares poorly to the same computation for the Malays. With the size of the total Malay Reserve Land being 4.413 million hectares (*The Sun* 23.5.1996), and with a Malay population of 10.2 million in 1996 (*The Star* 31.1.1998), the Malay reserve land to population ratio is 0.43 hectare per person. This is more than double that for the Orang Asli (0.19).

titled. Furthermore, in an interview with the JHEOA Director-General (*The Star* 19.2.1997), in terms of individuals, only 0.02 per cent of Orang Asli (19 individuals) have title to their land.

The dismal record of securing Orang Asli land tenure – coupled with increased intrusion into, and appropriation of, Orang Asli traditional lands by a variety of interests representing individuals, corporations and the state itself – have placed the Orang Asli in a state of social stress. The contest for their lands has forced the Orang Asli to respond varyingly, and with equally varying success. It is contended that this ‘contest for traditional resources’ can be a useful framework by which to study the place of the Orang Asli in national development.

Objective of the Study

The study aims to situate the Orang Asli in the Malaysian nation state insofar as it has affected the Orang Asli’s political position over time. It also seeks to address issues of social and distributive justice affecting the Orang Asli today as a marginal community, in a polity generally opposed to granting it recognition as an indigenous people. The contest for the Orang Asli’s traditional resources, and the nature and content of the social stress this brings about, are also investigated. The study also looks at the responses of the Orang Asli to national integration and ethnic accommodation, especially as it relates to a contest for Orang Asli traditional resources.

More specifically, the study will:

- Briefly trace the role, involvement and contribution of the Orang Asli during various epochs in history, and examine their relationship with the wider political and developmental framework;
- Evaluate the content and impact of various government policies and programmes as they relate to the Orang Asli's aspirations and needs; and
- Examine the responses of the Orang Asli to the political and economic changes they are now confronted with, especially as it relates to Orang Asli organisation, identity and political and economic advancement.

Research Questions

The following questions have been useful in guiding the research effort in meeting the objectives of this study:

- What is the Orang Asli's place in Malaysia's history, and how is this history perceived today?
- Why were the main government policies and programmes conceived, and what have been the consequences for the Orang Asli?
- How does the exercise of Orang Asli identity and representivity impact on Orang Asli political and economic advancement?

Research Design and Data Collection

Because of the wide scope and nature of the research objectives, the study was structured using a broad-based, multi-disciplinary research design incorporating various methods of data-gathering, followed by interpretative analysis of the information gathered.

The broad scope, as outlined in the research objectives, was developed early in the research and remained a focus of the observations made and information gathered. This, however, did not mean that non-relevant data or observations were not gathered or were ignored at the data-gathering stage. With the exception of published historical information, data was also collected while observing and documenting events as they happened, from information related to me, or when information or data were specifically sought by me. The task was to document and analyse each activity as it occurred, or to note when it was documented elsewhere. With research involving contemporary responses to very current events and issues, there was no way to tell how an individual or a community, for example, would react to a 'development issue', or to know that a dispute between Orang Asli and outsiders over land would end up with lives lost, or that the personal and political ambitions of some vocal Orang Asli leaders would surface in unexpected circumstances.

As the focus of the research was on the politics and development of the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia – *as a people* – the usual anthropological method of

extended fieldwork in a particular community was not adopted. Nevertheless, the anthropological method of participant-observation was used widely especially in my concurrent capacity during the research period as Coordinator of the non-governmental organisation, Center for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC). While I was a passive actor in Orang Asli matters for the most part, I was also, on some occasions, an interested player, rather than an objective researcher. However, I take comfort in the observation of Edward Said, who said that, while the researcher only occasionally appears explicitly in the text, he is nevertheless always there because "no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances" (Said 1979: 11, cited in Devalle 1992: 15).

In any case, my direct involvement in some of the issues the Orang Asli faced frequently gave me better insights into particular situations in which I was to study and appreciate at close quarters.

I should add, however, that this study makes no pretence of being a study written by the Orang Asli or that it is a statement of what the Orang Asli want. Without doubt, they are capable of doing this themselves, and have in fact done so on various occasions. On the contrary, this study is undertaken by a person sitting on the outside listening to, and noting, what is being said, by whom, and why, and observing events as they unfold around the Orang Asli. The aim is to try to assess the future direction of Orang Asli politics and development and to help

inform actors accordingly.

Data gathering for the purpose of this study began in mid-1990. Several visits were made to a broad spectrum of the Orang Asli communities for first hand information on issues faced by them. Data were also gleaned from archival records, published and unpublished works (including the newspapers and official documents), participation in Orang Asli meetings, forums and conferences, and direct involvement in some legal cases involving Orang Asli. The majority of the data used here was obtained prior to April 1998 when the thesis was submitted. Since then, several new cases or situations have surfaced lending further support to the argument in this study. These were incorporated in the current revision of the thesis in May 1999.