SEMAI WOMEN IN TRANSITION:
A CASE STUDY IN KAMPUNG CHANG
SUNGAI GEPAI, BIDOR, PERAK

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SYNOPSIS (ENGLISH)

This study documents and analyzes the environmental, economic and ideological changes that have occurred among the Semai of Kampung Chang Sungai Gepai. The study looks at these issues from a gender perspective.

The research method is eclectic and primary data was collected through a number of methods, including group discussions, participatory observation, non-structured and structured interviews. Meanwhile, secondary data was gathered from journals, books, newspapers, dissertations and other written material.

The social changes that have occurred among the Semai of Kampung Chang Sungai Gepai have generally been brought about by the dual forces of modernization and development in Peninsula Malaysia. Due to these, traditional Semai subsistence farmers have transformed into the commodity producers and wage labourers of today. Emphasis is given to the roles of the state, merchant capital and land-appropriating agents as the main agents of change. In addition, modern mainstream ideology has had a profound influence on traditional Semai ideology and consciousness, which in turn, influenced their social actions.

The findings reveal that these social changes have been largely detrimental to the lives of the Semai concerned. Firstly, state laws and policies, and the encroachment of land-appropriating agents have caused traditional land to diminish radically. Furthermore, the traditional system of land ownership and use which was more communal and egalitarian in nature was transformed into one that stressed on the commoditization,
individualization and male appropriation of land. Meanwhile, the undiscerning use of water by outsiders and villagers alike have caused the deterioration of water quality and quantity and diminished the aquatic life found within. These factors have led to a loss of land and access to natural resources among the Semai. This pattern was more pronounced among the womenfolk and eventually created a double burden for them.

Secondly, the very same agents of change have strongly enhanced gender differentiation among the villagers by further dichotomizing male and female spheres of activities and influence. Women have been relegated to domestic tasks and use-value production whilst men have become predominantly involved in the public sphere and exchange-value production, which was nonetheless exploitative of them. This trend has allowed men to have much control over limited productive resources. This has caused many women to become economically dependent on their men. Furthermore, there has been a decline in women's access to the traditional sharing of food and labour. Lastly, the more egalitarian traditional Semai ideology has been influenced by patriarchal mainstream ideology and has been developing patriarchal traits.
SINOPSIS (BAHASA MALAYSIA)


Kaedah penyelidikan ini adalah eklektik dan data primer dikumpul dengan pelbagai kaedah, termasuk perbincangan dalam kumpulan, pemerhatian sambil melibatkan diri, dan termurahah yang formal serta tidak formal. Data sekunder pula dikumpul dari bahan-bahan tertulis seperti jurnal, buku, akhbar dan dissertasi.


Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa perubahan-perubahan sosial ini telah membawa banyak kesan-kesan yang buruk kepada kehidupan penduduk-penduduk kampung. Pertamanya, perundangan dan dasar-dasar kerajaan negeri serta pihak-pihak penceroboh telah mengakibatkan penduduk kampung kehilangan sebahagian besar daripada tanah saka
mereka. Tambahan pula, sistem pemilikan dan penggunaan tanah tradisional yang mengutamakan masyarakat kampung dan bersifat adil telah berubah menjadi sistem yang mengutamakan pemilikan dan penggunaan tanah secara individu, komoditisasi tanah dan pengawalan tanah oleh kaum lelaki. Penyalahgunaan air pula oleh pihak luar dan penduduk kampung telah menjejaskan kualiti dan kuantiti air dan kehidupan aquatik. Faktor-faktor ini telah membawa beban yang besar kepada kaum wanita. Ini adalah kerana mereka telah kehilangan lebih tanah dan hak penggunaan terhadap sumber-sumber semulajadi, berbanding dengan kaum lelaki.

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