Tribal Communities in the Malay World

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Tribal Communities in the Malay World

Historical, Cultural and Social Perspectives

Edited by
Geoffrey Benjamin & Cynthia Chou

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P.O. Box 9515
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E-mail: iias@let.leidenuniv.nl
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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Jennifer ALEXANDER	University of Sydney, Australia
Paul ALEXANDER	University of Sydney, Australia
Geoffrey BENJAMIN	Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
Cynthia CHOU	University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Robert K. DENTAN	State University of New York, Buffalo, USA
Juara R. GINTING	Leiden University, The Netherlands
Annette HAMILTON	University of New South Wales, Australia
Signe HOWELL	University of Oslo, Norway
JULI Edo	University of Malaya, Malaysia
Gerco KROES	Leiden University, The Netherlands
Lioba LENHART	University of Cologne, Germany
LYE Tuck-Po	Centre for Environment, Technology and Development, Malaysia
MARIAM Ali	International Medical Corps, Madura, Indonesia
Colin NICHOLAS	Centre for Orang Asli Concerns, Malaysia
Gerard PERSOON	Leiden University, The Netherlands
Nathan PORATH	Leiden University, The Netherlands
Marina ROSEMAN	Indiana University, Bloomington, USA
Tine G. RUITER	University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Reimar SCHEFOLD	Leiden University, The Netherlands
TENAS Effendy	Setanggi Foundation, Pekanbaru, Indonesia
Vivienne WEE	City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR

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PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Words in Aslian and related languages are transcribed in this volume according to the orthography currently used in Mon-Khmer linguistic studies. The symbols employed are pronounced approximately as indicated below:

Vowels

- *i* As in Malay *tapis*: Kensiw *kəlaŋis* "liver".
- *e* As in Malay *leher*: Jahai *teʔ* "earth".
- *ɛ* As the *e* in English *get*: Temiar *lɛh* "wife".
- *ʉ* As the *u* in Scottish *hus* ("house") or the *ü* in German *Hütte*: Jah Hut *kəbʉs* "dead".
- *ə* The "neutral" schwa (*pěpět*) vowel, like the *e* in Malay *betul* or *sumber*: Jah Hut *bəs* "throw away".
- *a* As in Malay *belah*: Semai *gərpar* "pigeon".
- *u* As the first *u* in Malay *pucuk*: Temoq *luk* "dart quiver".
- *o* As the *o* in Malay *gol* ("goal" in football): Lanoh *dooʔ* "father".
- *ɔ* As the *au* in English *taut*, but shorter: Jah Hut *jɔŋ* "foot".
- *ɯ* As the Vietnamese vowel *ư* (or somewhat like the Russian vowel usually romanized as *y*). Pronounced like *u* but with the lips unrounded.
- *ɤ* As the Vietnamese vowel *ơ*. Pronounced like *o*, but with the lips unrounded.
- *ɒ* As the *o* in (British) English *hot*.

Nasal vowels are written with a superscript tilde: Chewong *haʔũt* "rotten". The phonemically long vowels of Central Aslian are written doubled: Temiar *tɛʔ* "earth", *tɛɛʔ* "earlier today".

Consonants

These are mostly written and pronounced as in the modern romanized spelling used for Bahasa Malaysia, but some of the symbols require further explanation:

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- *c* Pronounced like the *c* in Malay *cuci*; unlike Malay, this consonant commonly occurs word-finally, as in Temiar *bəcuuc* “sour”.
- *j* Pronounced like the *j* in Malay *janji*; this too can occur in positions unknown in Malay: Batek *hãj* “rain”, Temiar *bɛjbɔɔj* “lick”.
- *ɲ* Pronounced like the *ny* in Malay *nyanyi*. The uppercase form is *Ɲ*.
- *ŋ* Pronounced like the *ng* in Malay *nganga* or English *singer* (not as in *finger*). The uppercase form is *Ŋ*.
- *ʔ* The glottal stop (*hamzah*), a consonantal phoneme, sounding like the *k* in Peninsular Malay pronunciations of *duduk* or *rakyat*. The uppercase form is *Ɂ*.
- *k* Always pronounced as a velar, like the *k* in Malay *makan*, and not as a glottal stop, even word-finally.

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1

INTRODUCTION

Cynthia Chou and Geoffrey Benjamin

This volume focuses on a distinct historical singularity – the Malay World – even though much of the material presented may seem familiar to researchers who have worked on other parts of the world.[1] It should not come as a surprise to find, for instance, that certain peculiarities in the Malay World correspond to generalities uncovered by analyses of situations elsewhere.[2] Such being the case, the aim of this volume is to offer theoretical, descriptive, and practical perspectives that will be relevant to researchers working on both the Malay World and beyond.

The scope of the volume is sufficiently narrow for historical, ecological, and cultural factors to be held relatively constant – notwithstanding the variations that do occur in the region – but it is also sufficiently wide for each of us to learn from the findings of the others. The collation of materials on Peninsular Malaysia with work from South Thailand, Indonesian Sumatra, Sarawak in eastern Malaysia, and from Singapore, has been a valuable exercise. This is especially so, as the contributions cover contemporary ethnography, sociology and political science on the one hand, and historical issues on the other.[3]

The tribal and recently-tribal people of the Malay World cover a broad spectrum. They include, as this volume shows, nomadic foragers (inland, coastal, and maritime), swidden farmers, traders in forest and marine products, petty commodity producers, emergent and established peasantries, proletarians, and professionals, among others.

Many broad themes can be found in this volume, some of which we highlight here. However, the issues discussed in all the contributions overlap in numerous ways. Therefore, rather than organizing the chapters according to the usual thematic groupings, which would direct the reader's attention unnecessarily to one or another frame of reference, we have instead arranged them along a north–south axis, commencing in South Thailand, moving southwards through Malaysia and Singapore, and finally reaching Indonesia. In so doing, we believe that the reader will gain a panoramic view of all the themes and issues that interlock in each of these areas.

SOME GENERAL THEMES

New Theoretical Perspectives

This volume introduces to a wider readership some of the imaginative theoretical work that is currently going on in Southeast Asian studies. Different approaches to the study of tribal communities are demonstrated in the following pages, for example, a radically rethought "orientalist" approach to historical ethnology (Dentan), and the mythologizing (Hamilton, Porath), invisibilizing (Mariam) and postmodern (Roseman, Lye) approaches.

Ethnogenesis

There is much evidence to show that insider–outsider imagery is a basic theme in human cultures generally. What is important in the Malay World, however, is that this theme has often had to be established within a relatively homogeneous population – especially where the tribal peoples in question are also indigenously Malay-speakers. The question of being an insider or outsider has thus become more pronounced in the Malay World than elsewhere and it has become an important feature in social discourse and local historical documents. Concern over the question of autochthony and indigeny is a characteristic feature of the Malay World. In Malay-type polities, it seems necessary for self-declared "outsiders" to capture, subvert or replace a *recognized* indigeny via subjugation-through-marriage and cultural suppletion (Ginting, Schefold, Alexander & Alexander). In Thailand, however, the rulers must be seen as both autochthonous and Thai (Hamilton, Porath). In neither case do the polities treat their minorities in accordance with the wishes of the minorities themselves. Thai and Malay polities both find it difficult to "place" their indigenous minorities (tribal or otherwise) conceptually in their scheme of social order – though their difficulties differ in character.

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This difference reflects, in turn, the real ethnology of the situations. Malay states were formed by differentiation *within* an essentially homogeneous population by leaders who chose to present themselves as different (for example, *murni* "pure" versus *asli* "indigenous"). Thai states, on the other hand, were formed by actual linguistic and cultural *suppletion* from the outside, over a formerly Mon-speaking population. Yet, the leaders, who may or may not have been truly outsiders, persisted in seeing themselves as indigenous. In both cases, the tribal populations provide a conceptually dissonant and troubled backdrop to state ideologies.

Inter-group Interaction

Several studies in this volume have much to say about the nation-states – and former colonial polities – in which the research was carried out. The real test of a political system is how it treats its minorities, a theme that all the contributors have highlighted.

First, what can be learnt about the historical Malay states (Juli, Ginting, Ruiter) and the region's modern nation-states (Mariam, Chou & Wee, Persoon) through studying the tribal populations that fell or fall under their influence? Second, in what ways does our concept of "tribal society" correspond to the imagery employed by the tribal people themselves, by their non-tribal neighbours, and by power-holders in the state (Hamilton, Porath, Lenhart)?

Third, what are the mechanisms of cultural interaction and contestation within and between culture-groups (Kroes, Alexander & Alexander, Howell, Tenas, Ruiter, Persoon)? What are the corresponding intra- and inter-group negotiation processes (Juli, Dentan, Kroes, Alexander & Alexander, Lenhart)? The flow of broader cultural elements into tribal communities has a long history, indicating that they have indeed been active members of a larger social universe, even if they have frequently dissented within that universe (Dentan, Schefold).

Fourth, how are boundaries conceptualized and put into operation? What are the material, environmental and spatial bases of the relations between the tribal peoples themselves, and between them and the state (Lye, Nicholas, Chou & Wee, Tenas)?

An important topic closely linked to the issues just highlighted is the theme of assimilation: the Malay view of culture requires that one remember the Malay Sultanate era, be it bygone or current (Porath, Hamilton, Mariam). This in turn raises an interesting issue: how would the Malays define themselves if there were no Orang Asli?[4] When Malays need to construct boundaries – as when setting up conservation areas in order to "protect" modernity (Lye)

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– do they also need to keep tribal peoples around to protect their progressive Malayness? There is much ambivalence here: Malays are often embarrassed by "modern" Orang Asli who refuse to *masuk Melayu* (enter Malayness), and seek to resolve this by converting them to Islam (Lenhart). On the other hand, Malays often seem unwilling to conceive of even "traditional" Orang Asli as autonomous populations who can run their own affairs (Nicholas). In Malay polities, the tribal peoples are often pushed into "protected' situations, whether they like it or not. This may well help to explain the problems the Orang Asli have met with in gaining the kinds of land-rights that Malaysian Malays get easily (Nicholas).[5]

Alternative Modernities

Is change necessary? Should development be state-imposed or self-generated? Are the tribal communities willing and/or capable of participating in the modernization programmes directed at them, or do they have other ideas on how to proceed? Some of the sure paths to tribal alienation are examined in this volume. For example, in order to assimilate, "integrate" or simply de-recognize the Orang Asli, the authorities must first alienate them from their land – the basis of their identity (Nicholas, Mariam, Chou & Wee, Tenas). Several contributors present alternative perspectives and responses to modernity as proposed by the tribal communities themselves (Roseman, Howell, Lye). They show how tribal communities can incorporate the modern and postmodern worlds that now form the broader context of their lives. Taken as a whole, these chapters constitute a study in alternative modernities and a radical plea to drop all pretence at thinking evolutionarily when dealing with people who are, after all, contemporaries (Benjamin).

As editors of this volume, we hope to have presented an inter-disciplinary forum, rich in themes but focused on one geographical area, that will stimulate future research efforts in Southeast Asia and promote discussions among scholars working in other fields. Above all, we hope that the ideas and information presented in this volume will eventually prove useful to the tribal communities themselves in finding ways to ameliorate their situation.

Notes

1. This volume is based on selected material from a conference bearing the same title as this volume that we convened at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, in March 1997. (Two of the contributors, Lye Tuck-Po and Marina Roseman, were unable to attend the conference.) The conference was hosted by

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the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden, The Netherlands; the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore; the Centre for Environment, Gender and Development, Singapore; and the Institut für Ethnologie, Westfälische-Wilhelms-Universität, Münster, Germany. We also thank the Japan Foundation for funding a part of the publication of this volume. Gérard Diffloth helped with some of the Aslian-language transcriptions. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the skilled attention of Rahilah Yusuf, Production Editor at ISEAS, to the details and overall design of this volume.

2. When the framework for the conference was first conceptualized (by Cynthia Chou and Vivienne Wee), we were motivated by the wish to transcend national boundaries and colonial realities. Historically, the Isthmus of Kra, the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, Riau, Sumatra, and Kalimantan have belonged to one historical reality – the Malay World, which forms the context of this volume. Geographically, this is an area interconnected by well-traversed bodies of water – the Straits of Melaka, the Straits of Singapore, and the South China Sea. Politically, however, this area has been fragmented. The most significant event of fragmentation occurred in 1824 when the Treaty of London split this Malay World into two zones of influence: the British zone of influence north of the Straits of Singapore and the Dutch zone of influence south of Singapore. In our current postcolonial reality, these colonial zones of influence have been nationalized as Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia respectively. These colonial realities and national boundaries have greatly shaped the context of research and scholarly discourse.
3. The discussions at the conference were further enriched by sociological, linguistic and archaeological presentations from Reinald Döbel, Narifumi Maeda Tachimoto, Wan Zawawi Ibrahim, Mohd Razha Rashid; James T. Collins; and Nik Hassan Shuhaimi bin Nik Abd Rahman, respectively.
4. This is the reverse of a question first posed by Dentan (1975), "Would there be any Malays if there were no Orang Asli?".
5. This has also been thoroughly documented in the volumes by Dentan et al. (1997) and Nicholas (2000), as well as in the collection edited by Razha (1995). For the directly expressed views of Orang Asli themselves, see Zawawi (1996).

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2

ON BEING TRIBAL IN THE MALAY WORLD[1]

Geoffrey Benjamin

The "Malay World" is here defined narrowly, and in an historically responsive manner, to refer to the areas currently or formerly falling under *kerajaan Melayu*, the rule of a Malay king (Milner 1982). It does not refer to insular Southeast Asia at large, and certainly not to the Austronesian-speaking world as a whole – both of which are usages of "Malay World" that have crept into scholarly discourse in the last decade.[2] In this sense, the Malay World (*Alam Melayu*) refers to the various Malay kingdoms and their attendant hinterlands that have existed or still exist along the coasts of Borneo, the east coast of Sumatra, and on the Malay Peninsula.

My title has three components: "being", "tribal", and "Malay World", each of which needs further discussion.

BEING TRIBAL

With the word "being" I mean to indicate not the passive condition of a whole group of people, but the active *agency* of *individuals*. Too often, tribespeople – to use an amended version of Sahlins's term "tribesmen" (1968) – have been characterized as total collectivities rather than as people. How many of us, following the quaint English idiom reserved just for "tribes", still refer to the Nuers as "the Nuer"? Why is it that "the Nuer are …", with its

missing plural marker *-s*, does not jar the ear, when the phrase "the American are …" certainly does?[3] Tribespeople, however, do not follow the dictates of some collective inborn drive: they engage severally in a culturally mediated social *strategy*, whether out of choice or under geographical or political constraint. "Tribal" thus refers not to some sort of "ethnic" category, but to particular socio-political circumstances of life, which (like all such circumstances) demand to be understood in terms of their specific histories and with constant acknowledgement of the people's own agency. "We need to problematize the notion of community: we need to stop talking of the community as a unitary subject and to analyse axes of contestation within it" (Alexander & Alexander, in this volume).

The history of non-literate populations is of course difficult to get at, and it often requires a higher proportion of conjecture than a professional historian would feel comfortable with.[4] But if such conjecture pays due attention to questions of agency, it is less likely to go astray. In any case, documents *do* exist, and several contributors to this volume make thorough use of them.

Contemporary anthropologists pay much attention to both choice and constraint in discussing the tribal situation. Writers in other fields, however, are more likely to emphasize the supposed effects of ignorance or isolation – approaches that anthropologists would often ascribe to the ignorance of the *writers*, rather than of the tribespeople. In any case, most of the tribal populations discussed in this volume have not been especially isolated, and the few isolated ones have still taken their neighbours into account in formulating their way of life.

Tribality and the State

Tribal circumstances have not existed from time immemorial,[5] but came into being with the emergence of centralized polities – states and the civilizational culture that goes with them. These include the modern nation-state, with its history of just a few centuries, but also the many kinds of pre-modern and colonial state formations that preceded it.

The essence of civilization lies in the attempt to impose and maintain a centralized state organization and a homogeneous cultural regime throughout a region which had previously harboured autonomous local communities. ("Autonomous" does not mean that they did not have social relations with each other, only that the degree of mutual interference and control was relatively low.) The classical civilizing process engenders *three* basic types of sociocultural situation, where in pre-state times there had been just one. Those who place themselves in command belong to what we can loosely call

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the *ruler* category, used here as a shorthand term for priests, tax collectors, soldiers and so on, as well as kings. Those who allow their lives to be controlled by agencies of the state, which they provision in exchange for a little reflected glory but no counter-control, are *peasants*.[6] But those who stand apart from the state and its rulers, holding themselves culturally aloof in a "sub-nuclear" fashion (see below), are in the *tribal* category. The character of tribal society – in Asia especially – is shaped nevertheless by the proximity of civilization.

Two things must be emphasized about this Tribespeople–Peasants–Rulers typology. First, it is not an evolutionary series. It is, rather, a single complex, formed of alternative, mutually dissimilatory responses to the same sociopolitical circumstance – the imposition of a hierarchically organized, supralocal, state apparatus. On this view, all historically and ethnographically reported tribal societies are *secondary* formations, characterized by the positive steps they have taken to hold themselves apart from incorporation into the state apparatus (or its more remote tentacles), while often attempting to suppress the knowledge that their way of life has nevertheless been profoundly shaped by the presence of the state, or whatever locally represents its complexifying effects.[7]

The structure and formation of tribal societies, especially in Southeast Asia, is best understood as an adaptation to the broader state situations in which they are found. But the tribespeople nevertheless talk as if they *believed* themselves to be culturally autonomous – as Edmund Leach (1954) pointed out decades ago in his study of the Kachins of northern Burma. Frequently, they lack an institutionalized means of mounting a discourse about the broader framework that subtends their social formation. Individual tribespeople, however, *can* succeed in mounting such a discourse, acknowledging perfectly well what their situation is.

Tribal Traditions in the Malay World

The ethnology of the Malay World appears to support both of these claims – first, that tribality has resulted largely from choice; and second, that the presence of a state-based civilization (both modern and pre-modern) has figured hugely in that choice. For example, the Peninsular Orang Asli have long had the choice of becoming Malay peasants, even in pre-Islamic times. Some did so, and in consequence much of the Malay peasantry has an origin in the Orang Asli population. In some parts of the Peninsula, the proportion appears to be high (cf. Noone 1936, pp. 54–56). But those who did *not* become Malay peasants had to set up their own cultural and social institutions,

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operated largely through "switches" in their kinship patterns, to block off that option and to make alternative, tribal, ways of life seem more appropriate. In so doing, they generated three institutionalized societal patterns – the "Semang", "Senoi", and "Malayic" – as well as some less well-defined ones (Benjamin 1985). These three patterns have been aimed at retaining the people's social and cultural autonomy in the face of the state, while allowing them nevertheless to sustain relations with each other and with the civilizational centres downstream.[8]

The Semang pattern is followed in northern parts of the Malay Peninsula by an egalitarian, low-density population, maintained by marriage over large distances. The people live by a generalized foraging off whatever is available to them. Hunting and gathering in the immediate forest environment has been a major component, but they have also "foraged" off the other polities and economies in their vicinity. (See Benjamin 1973, and the commentary on it by Rahmann 1975.)

The "Senoi" pattern is espoused primarily by Temiars and upland Semais in the central parts of the Peninsula. They have lived mainly by swidden farming combined with some trading and trapping. Maintaining a high degree of autonomy from the state, they still continued to trade with it and to have dealings with outsiders. This, of course, they could get away with quite easily until very recently, living in the central mountain fastnesses. In so doing, they developed cultural frameworks of a highly "dialectical" kind, as exemplified in the chapters by Roseman and Dentan. The Senoi societal pattern is characterized by an egalitarian, medium-density population, a prohibition on marriage with traceable consanguines, and a preference for marriage with affines. This led to the development of relatively autonomous deme-like concentrations of population in each of the major river valleys within their territory.

The "Malayic" pattern – which is found also in lowland Sumatra and the neighbouring islands, includes the traditions often referred to as Aboriginal Malay, Jakun,[9] or Orang Laut, and by various other terms in mainland Sumatra. Existing in many varieties, it is based on the fusion of farming- or fishing-based subsistence with a livelihood based on the collecting of forest or marine products for trade with outsiders (Dunn 1975). (For a detailed contemporary account, see Gianno 1990.) The collecting component would have intensified around 2000 years ago, when Chinese, Indian, and West Asian interests had led to the exploitation by tribal "fetchers" of the region's lac, wood-oil, camphor, and minerals (Wang 1958; Wheatley 1959; Dunn 1975). The various centralized states that have characterized the Malay World since the seventh century CE or earlier emerged out of this matrix.

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Consequently, the Malayic tradition now exhibits two major facies: the state-centred Melayu traditions, and the relatively autonomous tribal-Malay traditions. These latter traditions are culturally Malay in many senses – but on their own terms, and without assimilating completely to full *Melayu*-ness (in which conversion to Islam now plays a large part). The Malayic tradition (both Melayu and tribal-Malay) is characterized by hierarchical, medium- to high-density populations, and a preference for consanguineal (cousin) marriage that effectively downplays the structural importance of affinal relations. The local populations have tended to orientate themselves more towards the non-tribal outsiders with whom they have trade relations than towards their fellow tribespeople in other settlements.

The underlying reason for this tripartite patterning appears to be the long-established presence in the region of three main modes of environmental appropriation: foraging (nomadic hunting-and-gathering), horticulture (semi-sedentary swidden-farming), and collecting (the gathering of natural products for trade with outsiders). These, separately or in combination, have been the major factors in the evolution of the different patterns of social organization in the Malay World. While the patterns were combined together to varying degrees in the lifeways of some of the constituent populations, it seems that most of the populations preferred to allow just one of the modes to dominate their lives. This led to the instituting of a distinct societal pattern in each population, aimed at "locking" them into the appropriate demographic and ideational response to maintain the chosen mode. Thus arose the close association of the Semang pattern with foraging, the Senoi pattern with horticulture, and the Malayic pattern with collecting (fused with horticulture). While examples of each of these appropriative modes are still to be found in almost any part of the region, there is a discernible geographical pattern to their distribution as the *dominant* modes in different areas. In the Peninsular north, on both sides of the Thai border, foraging has been dominant until very recently. Horticulture has been dominant in the mountains and hills of the Peninsular centre. Collecting – almost always combined with horticulture or fishing in a distinctive way – has been dominant in two main varieties, which are themselves complementary with each other: the land-based and the sea-based. Collecting of this sort is found mainly in the lowlands of the Peninsular south and mainland Sumatra, as well as on the islands between them.[10]

Several other non-Malayic-speaking (but Austronesian) tribal communities that do not fit these patterns are also discussed in this volume: the Lahanans of Sarawak (Alexander & Alexander), the Bataks of North Sumatra (Ruiter, Ginting), and the Mentawaians or Sakuddeis of Siberut Island off the west

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coast of Sumatra. These populations all fall to varying degrees within the ambit of *kerajaan Melayu*, and have been much influenced by it.

Terminological Issues: Why "Tribal"?

Tribality in the Malay World (as elsewhere) is thus a relational, not a primordial, quality – even if the resulting degree of cultural distinctiveness often comes to *seem* primordial. Its characteristics vary with the broader contemporary setting within which the people live. (I comment below on some still-current conceptions of tribal society as "primordial".) This much is surely acceptable to most anthropologists. But is the term "tribal" analytically useful? Could it and should it be replaced by some other term?[11]

It is now recognized that "tribes", in the sense of discrete, total social units, do not exist outside of the popular, administrative or sociological imaginings.[12] Scholars have frequently criticized the idea of "*the* tribe", regarding it as a chimera induced by a misreading of segmentary social organization by outsiders accustomed to more hierarchized and bounded circumstances. Most commonly, this has arisen whenever attempts are made to bring the segmentary populations under the umbrella of centralized state administration.

At base, then, tribality is an individual matter rather than a total societal one: tribal individuals can coexist with peasants or proletarians even within the same family. I know several Temiar families in which this situation currently holds, and the same is now true for most of the other (formerly) tribal populations in the Malay World. If one accepts that being tribal is a matter of social action, rather than a passive condition of existence, this should not prove difficult to understand.[13]

To make my point clear, let me now distinguish explicitly between tribality and the other conditions of social life with which it is frequently confused. This will require discussion of some major macrosociological themes, as well as the question of terminological political correctness.

"Tribal"

People sometimes find the word "tribal" offensive. Unfortunately, political correctness, however justified it may be on occasion, constantly deprives us of words that we need. Social labels are not usually *inherently* offensive; normally, they simply *become* offensive when used by those who despise the people referred to. The solution is not to constantly re-make our lexicon, but to mend our attitudes. In Malaysia, for example, the perfectly good word "aborigine" has been all but banished under the wrong impression that it is

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insulting.[14] Presumably, some of those who wish to ban the word have less than comfortable feelings about Australian Aborigines, for I have been told firmly that the Orang Asli have no connection whatsoever with Australia and the word "aborigine" must therefore be avoided in Malaysia!

On the other hand, the word "native", much avoided in "correct" circles elsewhere, is employed openly in Sabah and Sarawak. Similarly, the word "Sakai" has been reworked into a supposedly insulting word in Peninsular Malaysia, where it has been used historically mainly to refer to non-Malay-speaking tribal Aborigines. In modern spoken Malay it is also used more casually to refer to "tribespeople" anywhere in the world (as Porath, in this volume, also reports for Indonesia). Nevertheless, "Sakai" is still used as a fairly neutral term in both South Thailand (where it refers to Mon-Khmer-speaking populations related closely to the northernmost Malaysian Orang Asli) and in Sumatra (where it refers to Malay-speaking tribal populations), as Hamilton and Porath both demonstrate in this volume. In Brunei "Sakai" even labels a stratum *within* the established hierarchy of Brunei-Malay society (Brown 1970, p. 5).[15]

Given such vagaries of usage with terms that are sometimes seen as disparaging, I see relatively little harm in using the word "tribal" as a term of sociological analysis, but with the positive meanings I have proposed in the last few pages. "Tribal" remains useful precisely because it refers to a characteristic way of life and of social organization for which no other unambiguous label exists. The current alternative terms, such as "segmentary" or "indigenous", employed perhaps as politically correct euphemisms, do not really address the central issue of tribality. "Tribal" *overlaps* with "segmentary" or "indigenous", for example, but is not the same thing as either, for each of these terms has its own sociology. Let me make this clear by briefly examining these and other terms that are sometimes employed in place of "tribal".

"Segmentary"

Durkheim's term *segmentary* (or *segmental*) refers to social formations consisting of local or regional segments (lineages, clans, villages, hordes, and so on) that are not integrated into any higher-level unity. Each segment is organizationally similar to the others, but no one segment has control over all the others. If ranking is present – as it is among some southern Orang Asli, and in some of the tribal populations of Sarawak and Sumatra – the pattern of ranking is replicated separately in each segment, but no overall ruler is found. This formulation corresponds to Durkheim's idea of "mechanical" solidarity.[16]

At first glance, the term "segmentary" has its attractions. It sounds value-

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neutral, since it obviates the problems caused by using words like "primitive" or "simple". Moreover, it facilitates those styles of comparative social analysis that are based on the idea of differentiation, some of which have been very subtle indeed (for example, Gellner 1988). "Segmentary" is also very similar in meaning to the older sense of "tribal", for etymologically the latter word means not "belonging to a tribe", but "living in a social formation that is *divided into tribes*".[17] Despite these undoubted advantages, however, the term "segmentary" is too concerned simply with questions of social morphology. Just as Durkheim's *Division of Labour* study ignores politics and history (see Barnes 1966), so also does the term "segmentary". "Segmentary" usually implies that the people have not yet come across any alternative ways to organize themselves. But, as the chapters in this volume illustrate, tribespeople have frequently maintained their society in a segmentary formation out of deliberate choice. "Segmentary" therefore does not capture the sheer *work* that lies behind such an outcome. This is a drawback, for the tribal way of life is usually based on the positive desire to retain segmentary organization – which can be realized only through political action.

"Indigenous"

The term "indigenous" is the most usual epithet for the kinds of lifeway here called "tribal". This usage was further reinforced by the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Peoples (1993), which (despite its name) clearly referred to the world's disadvantaged *tribal* populations, and not to the many other populations in the world who can equally claim to be indigenous. (See Waterson 1993 for a comprehensive summary of the situation that the *Year* was trying to address.) "Indigenous" sounds value-neutral at first hearing, but as anyone knows who has had to grapple with the complexities of Malaysian *Bumiputera*-ness or Indonesian *Pribumi*-ness, the concept is utterly value-filled – especially when it becomes an explicit political rallying-cry.[18] It is true, of course, that most tribal populations are indeed indigenous to the areas they inhabit. But there is a much larger number of *non*-tribal people who are also in various senses indigenous to where they live. Moreover, some tribal groups (such as the Orang Kanaq mentioned later) are *not* indigenous to their places, or even countries, of residence. The overlap between tribality and indigeny is interesting, but it can be misleading. Both are of fundamental sociological importance, but they are *different* issues, that need to be kept separate if analysis is to proceed.

Elsewhere (Benjamin, ms), I have tried to sketch out what a sociology of indigeny (and its reciprocal, exogeny) might look like, and to demonstrate

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just how important it is. A key point is that indigeny has to do with *family*-level connections to concrete *places*, and not with the connection of whole ethnic groups (whatever they may be) to broad territories. The social situation of indigenes – non-tribal as well as tribal – differs in profound ways from that of exogenes. The difference cuts right *through* "societies", and not (as commonly thought) just between them. The two main examples in my study concerned the Welsh in Wales and the Malays of Singapore – largely indigenous populations, but hardly tribal! In the latter case, I tried to show that differences *within* the Malay community in relation to their degree of familial indigeny were at least as significant sociologically as differences between the Singapore Malays as a whole and the republic's other ethnic "groups". (Most Malays in Singapore are, of course, descended from areas outside the republic.)[19]

In sum, then, the term "indigenous", though well-intentioned, does not fully capture the social and political issues that attach to tribespeople, and it removes a fundamental sociological concept from its proper context of discourse. (See also footnote 28.)

"Sub-nuclear"

A term that comes much closer to the sense of "tribal" that I have in mind here is "sub-nuclear society", proposed by Frederick K. Lehman in his book on the Chins of Burma (1963). Building on Leach's ideas about the relations between the Kachins of northern Burma with the neighbouring Shan states, Lehman argues that in Southeast Asia the tribal populations are neither "primitive" in the commonly understood sense of being completely distinct from and autonomous of civilization, nor are they peasants, incorporated culturally into the mainstream civilization. However, they share with peasants a positive orientation to civilization. Everywhere, they have been brought (if only minimally) into the national government's orbit, and supplied with schools and health services. Money has been circulating in the tribal economy, coupled with newer desires that necessarily tie them in to the larger society. Sometimes, though not often, they have become the major source for a rare product. (Examples in the Malay World would be *jelutung* latex, wood oils, sea slug, and bird's nest, which are still primarily produced by tribal populations, and then sent out into the world market.) Normally, the orientation is one-way: the tribal population is orientated to the larger society, but the reverse is not true. (The pre-modern Malay state is a partial exception to this generalization: see below.) Thus they have a relationship to civilization that is tenuous, one-sided, almost wholly economic and ideological in character, but

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stable over a considerable period of time. (Lehman was writing forty years ago, and such stability can no longer be guaranteed, now that highly capitalized commercial ventures have moved into the hinterlands.) This relationship displays many of the same characteristics as that which holds between peasants and industrial civilization, but unlike the case of peasants, it is accompanied by the retention of distinct cultural styles, languages, and religions.

It is this neither-one-nor-the-other type of situation that led Lehman to propose the label "sub-nuclear", to refer to a societal type distinct from both peasant and ("primitive") tribal patterns, and characteristic of the special hills/plains relation found in Southeast Asia from Assam to tribal southwest China, and from Laos to Sumatra and eastwards. Its characteristics according to Lehman are as follows. First, sub-nuclear societies abut on "nuclear" civilization, but remain distinct: the sub-nuclear society's adaptation to the relationship is complete, even if the people might not picture themselves that way. Second, they lack their own supra-local political organization, and do not participate in nation-wide politics. And third, they retain a marginal dependence on the larger society, but not so great as to change their own cultural traditions. (Although that was not part of Lehman's purpose, these characterizations also provide a means of recognizing the degree to which former tribespeople cease to be tribal, under conditions of social change.)

With due allowance for regional differences, most of Lehman's characterization of "sub-nuclear" society would seem to fit the situation of the various tribal populations discussed in this volume. Zawawi (1995) has reopened discussion of these issues in his thoughtful analysis of the character of tribality in southern Peninsular Malaysia. Most of what he has to say about the neither-peasant-nor-"primitive" character of contemporary Orang Asli life sounds very like what Lehman was driving at forty years ago. Today we have available a more critical analytical apparatus – anthropology and sociology have moved on a bit – for dealing with the economic and cultural features of situations, as well as a wealth of comparative material to lean on. These, Zawawi uses to the full. In other words, Lehman's idea of "sub-nuclear" corresponds well to at least one recent sophisticated approach to "tribality".

My main objections to "sub-nuclear", as opposed to "tribal", are that it is rather a mouthful and that its meaning would not always be self-evident.

Terasing and *Orang Asli*

In formal Indonesian usage the closest equivalent of "tribal" is *suku* (or *masyarakat*) *terasing*. *Suku* signifies some kind of societal segment, including

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especially segmentary tribal society.[20] *Masyarakat* is the usual word for "(a) society". *Terasing*, however, is more complicated: it is certainly not a simple equivalent to "tribal", even though it refers mostly to populations that happen to be tribal. The word is compounded of *asing* "apart, separate, distinct, foreign, remote, isolated" and the "involuntary" agency-neutral prefix *ter-*. It would therefore seem to mean something like "separated off and distinctive through no fault of their own". In confirmation of this, the Indonesian documents I consulted (see below) include some Melayu and Acehnese villagers as *terasing* too. Clearly, here at least, the term is meant to denote "geographically remote" populations rather than simply "tribal" ones.

Nevertheless, the term *terasing* still has relevance to the tribal populations, for it implies that tribality and other forms of apparent social backwardness are simply a consequence of being left out of the mainstream for purely logistical reasons. This could then be used as justification for the central or provincial government to move in and "improve" the situation. All the more reason, then, for *us* to remember that many tribal populations have been living in geographically remote areas out of choice, as part of a strategy to keep the state off their backs.[21]

The Malaysian label *Orang Asli* "original people" was initially intended as an etymologically responsible translation for "aborigine" (Latin, "from the origin") during the anti-Communist "Emergency" in the late 1950s. This Arabo-Malay phrase – which is increasingly used in Indonesia too – carries connotations that are lacking from its English prototype. As already noted, some Malaysians feel that "aborigine" is a derogatory term.[22] "Asli" on the other hand carries the opposite connotation, for it also means "genuine, authentic, natural" (as in *getah asli* "natural rubber").

While one must applaud this attempt to improve the image of a formerly little-respected population, one should also guard against the opposite tendency – to see the Orang Asli as noble savages who only require conservation. This charge has already been made by Malaysian government spokesmen when expressing annoyance at publications critical of official policies towards the Orang Asli. They have repeatedly claimed that anthropologists and other researchers are opposed to the modernization of Orang Asli facilities and want only to preserve an outdated way of life. This assertion – which runs counter to what is actually stated in all such publications that I have read – must seem all the easier to accept for those who have never read the literature in question, simply because of the "noble savage" connotations that attend the label "Asli". (See Nicholas's chapter in this volume for further analysis of the relation between ethnic labelling and the administration of Orang Asli communities.)

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THE PEOPLE(S) OF THE MALAY WORLD

The action-based view I have been presenting is unfortunately often hard to maintain, for a "race"-based chimera continues to stalk the field of Malay World studies. I refer to the *kuih lapis* (layer cake) folk-scholarly ethnology that stratifies the region's population into "Negritoids", "Veddoids", "Proto-Malays", and "Deutero-Malays" (with "Australoids", "Melanesoids", and even "Palaeo-Alpines", sometimes thrown in for good measure) – all, it seems, originating in Yunnan, southwestern China! This has the cumulative effect of characterizing the people themselves as the passive exponents of preformed, evolutionarily-ranked "cultures". A version of this story currently (December 2000) appears on the "profile" page of the website of the JHEOA, the Malaysian Department of Orang Asli Affairs (<www.kempadu.gov.my/jheoa/Engfile/orang%20asliEGH.htm>) presented here unedited. (The final paragraph is modified directly from a passage in Winstedt 1961.)

> According to historical researchers the Negritos are descendants of the pre-historical man known as Australia-Melanesians that migrated to south east from China 7,000 to 10,000 years ago. However, there are also ancient historical records that suggest that they have been in this area much earlier.
>
> The Senois and Proto-Malays are descendants from the pre-historical man known as Austranesian (Malayo-Polynesian) which is believed to have gradually migrated in small numbers from southern China and Taiwan to South East Asia up to the east approximately 3,000 to 5,000 years ago. Nevertheless there were evidence of intermarriage and assimilation between these two groups of historical men.
>
> Historian also concludes that the present Malays, Indonesian and Filipinos are of Proto-Malays descent after intermarriage with the Chinese during the Chao Dynasty, Indians from Bengal and Dacca together with the Arabs and Thais.

Kuih Lapis Ethnology

The *kuih lapis* view has not yet fallen out of favour in Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean academic circles. If this were just a matter of pure prehistoric research, it would not require much discussion here. Unfortunately, this ethnological framework still has consequences far beyond academe, long after it was shown to be wrong. It still needs to be repeatedly and firmly rejected.[23]

Whether they realize it or not, those in Malaysia and Singapore who persist in asserting the *kuih lapis* view derive their ideas from Winstedt's decades-old analysis (1961, pp. 5–17) of Malay ethnology, or from the small

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number of yet earlier writers from whom Winstedt took some of his ideas. But even in Winstedt's time, several scholars (such as Wilkinson 1939) disagreed with him. For Sumatra, the *kuih lapis* view probably derives more directly from Loeb's classic account of that island's ethnology (Loeb 1932/1972). Heine-Geldern (1965) too, in a thought-provoking essay on the area's art history, applied this approach to Borneo. However, over the last three decades archaeologists, linguists and human biologists have shown that the processes of socio-cultural and demographic differentiation took place in a quite different manner from the simple layering of separate migrational waves, whether from southwest China or elsewhere.[24]

The issue is not simply a matter of antiquarian interest. The peoples labelled "Negritos", "Veddoids" or "Proto-Malays" are contemporary human beings whose ways of life are not mindless replications of ancestral cultural forms established thousands of years ago. Their lives are lived *now*, and with constant regard for how their neighbours live now as well. The racial approach, if taken seriously, would preclude any serious sociological or historical appraisal of the lifeways of the tribal (or any other) populations – just as it would remove from discussion any consideration that they have strategies and wishes of their own.

It is true that serious writers sometimes reiterate the *kuih lapis* scenario in the opening pages of their essays only to move on to responsible and enlightened sociological analysis. One such is the Indonesian researcher Djatmiko (1993) in his useful survey of the social situation of the tribal communities of Riau province. Here, his race-based introduction seems to have served as little more than a familiarizing device to help orientate the reader.[25] All too often, though, writers fall into the trap of presenting the tribal communities as if they occupied different steps on a culture-evolutionary staircase – what Keesing (1981) calls the "ladder" approach. This is notably true of the textbooks employed in Malaysian schools, including those attended by Orang Asli children. One such book that I picked up in an Orang Asli school taught that the Senoi are *lebih berakal* (cleverer, more capable) than the Negritos, and that the Proto-Malays are in turn more *berakal* than the Senoi.

This approach also precludes considering the possibility of *secondary* tribality, a phenomenon of some importance in parts of Southeast Asia. The Tasadays of Mindanao and the Phii Tong Luang of northern Thailand are examples. More to the point, the Orang Suku Laut of Johor-Riau have probably been more tribal in recent decades than they were in the heyday of the Sultanate. (See Leonard Andaya 1975; Wee 1987, 1988; Trocki 1979; Sather 1999; and the chapters by Chou & Wee and Lenhart in this volume.)

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Ethnology as Ideology

The *kuih lapis* approach is not simply a matter of outdated scholarly fashion, for the contrast between indigeny and exogeny that underpins it also serves significant political and ideological ends – for both indigenes and exogenes. The highly assimilatory character of Melayu culture means that it must be constantly *cultivated*, as a means of supplanting whatever went before. In Melayu imagery, as McKinley (1979) and Wee (1987, p. 162ff.) have shown, one's cultural progress is monitored by regularly glancing back at what one has left behind. There is no shame in having *been* a pagan, a "Hindu-Buddhist" or a tribal indigene (*asli*) in a former era (*zaman*), so long as one consciously moves forward into the era of proper religion (*agama*), purified (*murni*) culture (Wee 1988, p. 212), and "modern" citizenship.

Consequently, the more self-conscious varieties of Melayu culture display a shifting content. At different times, the focus has fallen on proper language, deportment, deference, dress, religion, food, and even music, as the sign that one's manners indicate a successfully achieved and maintained Melayu-ness. It is of course the ruling classes who define – and even invent – these criteria, the initial introduction of which must seem like an invitation to adopt foreign ways. In effect, this gives authoritative precedence to those who came later into Melayu-ness. Those who continue to demonstrate dyed-in-the-wool indigeny (*asli*) are seen as less fit to rule than those (the *murni*) who have remade themselves culturally. The more recent the "arrival", the more legitimate is the right to rule.

In the Malay World (as in many other regions), the ability to claim an exogenous origin therefore lends legitimacy to the right to rule. Sultans, nobles and prime ministers alike are not shy about their less-than-solely Melayu origins.[26] Contrariwise, to be fully indigenous (*asli*) implies that one is born to *be* ruled. The enthusiasm still engendered by the *kuih lapis* view of ethnology and the search for Malay "origins" therefore reflects political ideology writ large: "Proto-Malay" and "Deutero-Malay" are political rather than ethnological categories.[27] In effect, Proto-Malays (and "Negritos", "Veddoids", etc.) are those who do *not* need to be consulted whenever administrative decisions are made (by "Deutero-Malays") that affect their livelihood. Nicholas's chapter in this volume provides several explicit examples of this outlook, culled from the speeches of Malaysian leaders. The passage quoted earlier from the JHEOA's website provides another example – this time implying that Deutero-Malays were formed by the intermarriage of Proto-Malays with a variety of people from beyond the Malay World.

Kuih lapis ethnology also relates to an existing tendency in the Malay

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World to look on tribal peoples – especially the nomadic ones who eat wild animals – as being close to animals themselves. This connection of wilderness with animalian wildness is discussed explicitly in this volume by Lye and Persoon. Alternatively, as Schefold shows in his valuable survey, "autochthony" has often been accommodated in pre-modern Southeast Asia by assimilating it to a virtual affinal relationship set up between the tribal people and their immigrant overlords through a mythic marriage between their leading families. This serves to "domesticate" the wilderness inhabited by the tribal populations, so that it can all the more easily be incorporated into the state's domain. The tribal people too, have incorporated recognition of this relationship into their still-"tribal" ritual and expressive culture. (Negeri Sembilan is another case, mentioned by Nicholas.)

On the other hand, the claim to "indigeny" by tribal and formerly tribal peoples themselves is an increasingly important device in the battle to gain political recognition of their rights in the face of modern state actions. As Gray (1995, p. 40) puts it: "Indigenousness is an assertion by people directed against the power of outsiders." Contrariwise, the resistance to that claim by the powers-that-be often takes the form of an attempt to dilute that sense of indigeny. Nicholas (2000, p. 175) provides an example of this from Malaysia, and several other examples are given elsewhere in this volume.[28]

Just *who*, then, are the people of the Malay World? To answer this question, let us first take a brief look at some of the current population data, and then at the evidence of linguistics. I leave questions of human biology and regional archaeology for brief discussion later. I must reiterate that these different criteria do not overlap in a solidary manner. The degree of correlation between language, cultural tradition, conscious identity and population-genetics within the Malay World is at best partial. The interflow of genes, ideas and languages has often been so intensive and multidirectional as to render futile any attempt to delineate the various "peoples" in terms of completely distinct bundles of geographical, linguistic, biological, or culture-historical features. The search for the remoter "origins" of any of the constituent populations will therefore be misconceived – and with it the search for a supposedly single "origin" for the Malays themselves.

Demographics

It is uncertain how many tribespeople there are currently in the Malay World. Reliable figures are more easily available for some areas than for others. Truly detailed demographic profiles, such as that by Fix (1977) on the Semais, are very few indeed. This is therefore not the place to explore the wider information

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that can be gleaned from demographic studies, such as questions of population viability, age-distribution, health, reproduction or migration.[29] Instead, I shall limit myself to presenting what is known of the total population figures for the tribespeople in two of the three major sub-regions of the Malay World: the Peninsula and the Malay-World parts of Sumatra. I shall also briefly discuss the situation in Borneo.

The Peninsula

The most reliable figures available to me for the Peninsular Orang Asli are as shown in Table 2.1, which I have retabulated from the JHEOA website as of December 2000. Unfortunately, no date is given, but I suspect that figures relate to 1996. The JHEOA ignores the linguistic divisions used here, preferring instead to employ its own version of *kuih lapis* categories: "Negrito", "Senoi", and "Proto-Malay". (The JHEOA is the only source for Orang Asli population figures, as the published *Census of Malaysia* absorbs them into the Malay figures.)

I have given the ethnic categorization mainly in terms of the official JHEOA labels, which absorb some smaller groups into neighbouring populations. As Nicholas points out in his chapter, this procedure produces a tidy list of just six "tribes" within each of the three major categories. The Semelai figure probably includes that for the very small Temoq population (cf. Gianno 1997). There are a few smaller groups, such as the Mintils (or Batek Tanum), and the various populations (such as the Semnams and Sabüms) lumped together under "Lanoh", whose distinctiveness has never

TABLE 2.1
Tribal Populations of Southern Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia, 2000

LINGUISTIC AFFILIATION							
MON-KHMER						AUSTRONESIAN	
Northern Aslian		Central Aslian		Southern Aslian		Malayic	
"Maniq"	±200	Lanoh	359	Semaq Beri	2,488	Temuan	16,020
Kensiu	224	Temiar	15,122	Semelai	4,103	Jakun	16,637
Kentaq	359	Semai	26,049	Besisi	2,185	Orang Kanaq	64
Jahai	1,049	Jah Hut	3,193			Orang Seletar	801
Mendriq	145					Duano	2,492
Batek	960						
Chewong	403						
SUB-TOTALS:	3,340		44,723		8,776		36,014

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been recognized by the JHEOA, probably because they are too small to make any notable statistical difference. The Besisis are referred to as Mah Meri by the JHEOA, who also employ certain spellings that are not found in the scholarly literature.

Table 2.1 indicates that (in 1996?) there were a total of 92,853 (rural-dwelling) Orang Asli, if we include the guessed-at number for Thailand. However, the current (2000) population is thought to be closer to 115,000 (Colin Nicholas, personal communication). The "missing" figures are due in part to natural increase, but also to the fact that the JHEOA's own census enumerations cover only the rural settlements that come under their administration. A significant number of Orang Asli now live in urban areas, and their numbers can only be guessed at, as they are not recorded separately from the Malays. This does not mean, however, that they have assimilated into the Melayu community.

Sumatra

The figures for the tribal population of this large island are rather inconsistent, both statistically and in terms of the ethnic classifications employed. My two main sources are documents prepared by the Direktorat Bina Masyarakat Terasing (1990, 1994/95), a division of the Republic's Social Department.[30] Additional sources for portions of Sumatra's tribal population are Djatmiko 1993 for Riau Province as a whole, and FKKS–Batam for the Orang Suku Laut of Riau.[31]

The variant figures for Riau province (Table 2.2) illustrate the inconsistencies. Presumably, these are due in part to the fusion in 1993 and

TABLE 2.2
Tribal Populations of Riau Province, Sumatra

	Population		
Suku or sub-*suku*	*DBMT* 1990	Djatmiko 1993	*DBMT* 1994/95
Orang Laut	5,402	9,582	7,179
Talang Mamak	6,983	6,983	5,311
Bonai	2,244	3,790	2,269
Hutan	5,334	8,682	5,270
Akit	3,456	3,995	2,376
Sakai	5,437	2,824	3,251
Kuala/Laut	3,872	?	?
Bertam	?	?	814
Total:	32,728	35,856	26,470

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TABLE 2.3
Tribal Populations of Sumatra (Other Selected Provinces)

Province	*Suku* or sub-*suku*	Population	
		DBMT 1990	*DBMT* 1994/95
Jambi	Anak Dalam [Kubu]	3,718	5,142
	Masyarakat Talang	2,040	—
	Masyarakat Terasing [*sic*]	83	—
	Bajau/Suku Laut	2,943	2,481
	Talang Mamak	575	—
	Sub-total:	9,359	7,623
Sumatera Selatan	Anak Dalam [Kubu]	7,188	1,086
	Laut	2,676	—
	Ameng Sawang	—	451
	Sub-total:	9,864	1,537
Sumatera Utara	Nias	1,877	no data
Bengkulu	Serawai	8,512	8,152
	Rejang	11,040	9,915
	Kaarubi, Kaano	—	1,125
	Sub-total:	19,552	19,192
	Grand Total:	40,652	28,352

1994 of the "Kuala Laut" figures (reported separately in 1990) with the "Orang Laut" figures. Unfortunately, it is not clear what ethnological import, if any, these partly distinct labels carry.[32]

The same inconsistencies are apparent in the figures from the other Sumatran provinces that also have a Malayic tribal population (Table 2.3).

Borneo

Tables 2.1 to 2.3 exclude Sarawak, Indonesian Borneo, and the remaining provinces of Sumatra. Borneo is ethnologically too complicated to discuss here in any detail, and the data are often gratuitously masked by the custom of referring generically to the island's tribal populations as "Dayaks" (uplanders, inlanders). Nevertheless, portions of Borneo's coastal areas are important parts of the Malay World. In Brunei, Sarawak, and the Indonesian provinces of West and South Kalimantan, for example, the Melayu population has long been added to by assimilatory Malayization-cum-Islamization of other Austronesian-speaking communities, as mentioned later.

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One estimate given in 1996 for the number of tribal people in the whole of Malaysia was "ninety-five tribal groups with a combined population of over two million people". This statement was made by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Land and Co-operative Development at what was billed as "the first national conference of aborigines [at least they used the word there!] from Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah" (*Straits Times*, 3 September 1996, p. 16). This figure of two million for the "tribal" population of Malaysia was heavily weighted towards the large, "Native" populations that constitute the majorities in Sabah and Sarawak, Malaysia's Borneo states.[33] Only a small minority among these people are still tribal in any normal sociological sense of the term. (The Lahanans, discussed in this volume by Jennifer and Paul Alexander, form one such population.) It is more probable that the official's statement was yet another example of *kuih lapis* race-based thinking, in which tribality is seen as some kind of unchanging essence – "Proto"-Malayness perhaps, as opposed to the "Deutero"-Malayness of the Orang Melayu. Today, the circumstances of these Bornean people are in almost all respects different from those of the 100,000 or so Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia. Among other features, they possess legislation that (in principle, at least) guarantees them land rights, while the Orang Asli do not.

Figures for the *suku terasing* population of Indonesian Borneo are given in the same publications from which I obtained the Sumatran figures, but they indicate only those who have been the recipients of government resettlement and welfare programmes. Since I cannot tell what proportion of the total tribal population is formed by these people, I have not cited the figures. In any case, the ethnological and linguistic situation in most of Borneo is more complex than in Sumatra, and the former Malay sultanates of Borneo are discontinuously distributed. This means that these outposts are sandwiched between large tracts that probably do not belong to the Malay World as narrowly defined. Thus, great distances separate Brunei on the north coast from Pontianak on the west coast and from Banjarmasin in the south.

LANGUAGES: AUSTRONESIAN AND MON-KHMER

The indigenous populations of the Malay World speak languages belonging to two different stocks: Austronesian and Austroasiatic. The former is represented primarily by Malayic, a relatively homogeneous low-level genetic grouping that includes Malay (with its many dialects) as one of its members. The latter is represented by Aslian, a less homogeneous, higher-level grouping that falls within the major subdivision of Austroasiatic known (after two of its

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major members) as Mon-Khmer. (The other major Austroasiatic subdivision consists of the Munda languages of India.)

The linkages of the two groups of languages lie in opposite directions: Aslian with the Southeast Asian mainland lying to the north, and Malayic with the insular areas (Borneo and Sumatra in particular) to the south. Correlated with this to a certain degree are differences in the overall societal patterns. Historically, the Aslian-speakers have constituted themselves into egalitarian tribal formations, largely in abreaction from the various Malay states that lay downstream. The Malayic-speaking tribespeople, on the other hand, have usually formed variably ranked societies that differ from Melayu society mainly in the absence of a centralizing state formation and its attendant religious institutions (formerly Mahayana Buddhism, now Islam). As already noted, Melayu social organization is therefore best understood as a variant on a more broadly shared "Malayic" theme. However, there are some Orang Asli populations, such as the Semelais and Besisis, who are Malayic in social formation but Aslian (Mon-Khmer) by language.

The Malayic Dialects

The Austronesian languages, originating in the eastern end of the archipelago (probably Taiwan) some five or more millennia ago (Blust 1988), reached the current territory of the Malay World around two to three thousand years ago. The many Malayic dialects (including Malay itself) count among the more recent of these languages, having emerged initially in northwest Borneo and moving therefrom to Sumatra and the southern part of the Peninsula, as well as eastwards around the Bornean coast to Brunei and beyond. In Sumatra, several substantial inscriptions in Old Malay attest to the importance of Malay as an official state language as early as 683 CE, in what are the present-day provinces of South Sumatra and Jambi (Coedès 1930; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi 1992). The tribal populations of Sumatra, both current and former, live mostly in those same areas today, and (with some important exceptions, such as the Bataks of North Sumatra and the people of Siberut Island) they speak Malay or other Malayic dialects as their own languages. Although current Malaysian usage would not accord the label *Orang Melayu* to these Malay-speaking tribal populations, they are sometimes called "Melayu" in Sumatra (see the chapters by Tenas, Porath, and Chou & Wee), and there seems little reason to doubt that they are indeed descendents of the same population from which the majority of the Malays "proper" also descended.

Fifty years ago, Leach (1950, p. 53) was so impressed by evidence that Malayness was not restricted to the Malays proper, that he coined the label

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"para-Malay". Para-Malays share the same general background with the Orang Melayu, but they lack one or more criteria (Islam, ethnic identity, language, the centralized state) of full Melayu-ness. Leach was referring specifically to northern Borneo and to populations speaking non-Malayic languages, but para-Malay populations of this sort are widely found, elsewhere in Borneo, in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. Vivienne Wee (1988) has researched these issues in the Riau Archipelago of western Indonesia, an area which the Orang Melayu themselves regard as one of their major centres of distribution. Ethnologically, Riau has turned out to be quite heterogeneous despite the obvious "Malayness" of all the various populations. Similar points are made by Sandbukt (1982) with regard to Sumatra's Jambi province, and by Yampolsky (1996) in his concentrated general account (1996) of the Melayu parts of Sumatra.[34]

This close interplay between the tribal and the non-tribal facies of Malayness is still apparent today. In a detailed study, Kähler (1960) demonstrated that the Malay dialects spoken by the Peninsular Jakuns continue on through Singapore (the Orang Seletar), into the Riau Islands (the Orang Suku Laut) and on to mainland Sumatra, albeit with some dialectal variation between them. This gives substance to Skeat's decision a century ago to refer to the Orang Laut as "Sea Jakun" (Skeat and Blagden 1906, vol. 1, p. 87).

In the Lingga Islands south of Riau, the descendants of the old Malay royal families even today speak a variety of Malay recognizably closer to that spoken by the tribal Orang Laut of the area than to the Malay spoken by the Bugis-descended Malays, who had replaced them on Pulau Penyengat in the early 1700s (Vivienne Wee, personal communication). Moreover, the Lingga royals use several forms of expression that the present-day Riau royals affect to despise as sounding too "tribally" coarse. Since Standard Malaysian and Standard Indonesian are both derived from the written version of this suppletive Riau variety of Malay, this point is of great socio-linguistic interest, and warrants further research. More generally, there are grounds for holding that Malay has been standardized several times over out of the various local Malay dialects (Teeuw 1959), most of which in earlier times would have been essentially "tribal" ones. These standardized varieties presumably go back at least as far as the Old Malay of the seventh-century Sumatran inscriptions. Adelaar (1992*b*) has demonstrated how a knowledge of these tribal forms of Malay and other Malayic dialects can help elucidate, and even revise, our understanding of several obscure points in those inscriptions.

Further light is thrown on this question by a (probably) Malayic language still spoken today in the very area where these early developments took place. I refer to Duano, spoken by Orang Asli (the so-called Orang Kuala) on both

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sides of the Straits, in the Pontian area of Johor (Malaysia) and on Pulau Rangsang and the Jambi coast of Sumatra (Indonesia). The brief grammatical sketch of this language with accompanying texts provided by Kähler (1946–49) affords a fascinating glimpse of the complicated linguistic mix out of which Malay itself probably emerged some 2,000 years ago. Linguists have so far paid little attention to this important material, the significance of which I commented on in a recent study on Malay linguistics (Benjamin, forthcoming *a*).[35]

In this regard, it is interesting to note that the Temuan language as described by Abdullah Hassan (1969), spoken by a large Orang Asli population in Negeri Sembilan, is much closer to "standard" Malay than is the famously variant form spoken by the Malays of the area. Since the latter people are descended from Minang migrants who moved across from West Sumatra some centuries ago, bringing their own Malayic dialect with them, it is Temuan, not Negeri Sembilan Malay, that should be considered as the historically "authentic" Malay dialect of that part of the Peninsula (Asmah Haji Omar, personal communication). This suggests that the Temuans at some stage assimilated to an unselfconscious Malayness (probably from a Central-Aslian-speaking tradition) at a time when language, but not yet Islam, was the key criterion. If so, Malayness at that time did not preclude tribality, even in the Peninsula.

To complete the picture, I should note that the Malay World also contains populations who speak non-Malayic but still Austronesian languages (such as Batak, Mentawaian, and Lahanan), just as it contains Malayic speakers (such as the Ibans) who do not fall into the "Malayic" societal pattern.

The Aslian Languages

As already noted, some 65,000 of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia and southern Thailand speak languages belonging to the southern Mon-Khmer division of the Austroasiatic stock. In the professional linguistic literature these are known as the "Aslian" languages, and current opinion places them closest to the Monic group within Mon-Khmer. The remaining 45,000 Orang Asli who currently speak Malay or other Malayic dialects contain many individuals who descend from people who spoke Aslian languages as recently as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Benjamin 1997, p. 110). Because the Aslian languages exhibit much greater variety than the Malayic dialects spoken in the Peninsula, it must be assumed that they have been present for a much longer period (Benjamin 1976; Diffloth 1975). Current opinion seems to be agreed that the nearly twenty Aslian languages

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have a history in the Peninsula of at least three millennia, while the Malayic dialects have been present for less than two millennia in the Peninsula, and for a little longer in Borneo and Sumatra.

The Mon-Khmer family in general has been less thoroughly researched than the Austronesian languages, but thanks especially to the researches of Gérard Diffloth, the picture is becoming clearer. Diffloth began his historical-linguistic work on all branches of Mon-Khmer with a study of Semai and other Aslian languages in the 1960s. Since then, a few other linguists have researched these languages, and the information available has begun to expand rapidly since the late 1990s. It turns out that, apart from their intrinsic linguistic interest, the Aslian languages have much to tell us about the broader culture-history of mainland Southeast Asia. They are phonologically, morphologically and semantically very conservative, retaining features that have largely been lost elsewhere – and lost especially from the family's largest member, Vietnamese. Moreover, the Aslian languages reveal evidence of a complex pattern of interaction within the subfamily and with other non-Aslian languages. This has made it possible to suggest in some detail that the early history of the Malay Peninsula was much more complicated than normally assumed. Linguistic research has also demonstrated the intrusive presence at various times of Austronesian languages other than Malayic, as well as of Khmer, Mon and even Tai, spoken presumably by traders, miners, and perhaps administrators. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the issue, which I have treated in a little detail elsewhere (Benjamin 1997, 2001*a*, forthcoming *b*). For now, let Diffloth's recent ideas (personal communication) on the etymology of "Senoi" suffice to give a taste of what can be learnt from this approach.

The word "Senoi" derives from the Temiar *sɛnʔɔɔy* or Semai *səŋʔɔɔy*, both of which mean "human being, people, person". But that is not the end of the etymological story, for the word appears to be a Khmer loan that originally meant something quite different. In the Khmer currently spoken in Surin province, Thailand, *səŋʔɒɒy* – clearly a cognate of the Aslian "Senoi" words – means "to be peevish, cry-baby; to be knowledgeable, but unwilling to boast about it". The word has also been borrowed into Thai as *samʔɔɔy*, with the meaning "cry-baby". Related to this is the Surin-Khmer expressive *tasʔɔɔy sʔɔɔy* "to act slowly, unsure, insecure; preferring not to finish something for fear of doing it wrong". The reconstructible Khmer root must therefore be **sʔɔɔy*, with the basic meaning "insecure, shy". These words have not (as yet) been found elsewhere, which suggests that in both Thai and Aslian, they are loans from Khmer. In Khmer, an infixed nasal, like the *-m-* of *samʔɔɔy*, indicates an adversative, "disapproving" meaning, quite appropriate when calling someone

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a cry-baby. The Khmers therefore presumably saw shyness as an undesirable quality. Judging by the nasals *n* and *ŋ* that are still infixed into the Temiar and Semai words, the Orang Asli seem to have accepted the Khmers' description of them as shy – though the Senoi people themselves presumably saw it as a desirable quality.

This reconstruction fits well with what little we know of Temiar and Semai history, in which flight deep into the forest has been their normal response to slave-raiding and other depredations. However, the fact that they now call themselves by an originally Khmer word demonstrates that the flight response was balanced by the continued maintenance of relations with outsiders, for trade and other pursuits. The dialectic of *both* having contact with outsiders *and* shying away from such contact delineates the overall trajectory of Senoi history.[36]

THE MALAY WORLD AS A SOCIOLOGICAL FIELD OF STUDY

At least five major issues attend the study of social process in the Malay World. I would like to illustrate these with appropriate examples from the ethnographic and historical literature. Some of these features have already been mentioned briefly; others are introduced here for the first time.

First, there is the contrast between tribality and non-tribality – a contrast that is found outside the Malay World as well. This is a *process*, not a fixed primordial contrast. Just as detribalization is currently an increasingly frequent happening, the tribalization or retribalization of formerly non-tribal people has also occurred. In the Malay World, however, this contrast is frequently established *within* populations (the "Malayics") that share the same basic cultural and linguistic matrix. To that extent, Malay World tribality shares something of the features that characterize tribality in parts of West Asia, such as Afghanistan or the Arabian Peninsula.

Second, there is the generation of mutually dissimilatory difference, to produce the various societal patterns mentioned earlier, as well as the complementarity between the sea peoples and the land peoples among the Malayic populations commented on by several authors in this volume. Historically, these differences have been related most closely to different alternative modes of livelihood, but reactions to political pressures have also played a part.

Third, pre-modern Malay states – initially emerging from within the (tribal-)Malayic societal tradition – evinced a peculiarly close relation between the tribal populations and the ruling classes, such that the peasantry has often

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been peripheral, or even non-existent. The pre-modern Malay state therefore acted to reconstitute, and sometimes reinforce, tribality in various ways. This involved such institutions as slavery and tribute relations.

Fourth, there is the process of assimilation to Melayu-ness or resistance to it, with which all tribal populations in the Malay World must come to terms. With the increased association of the Malay state with Islam especially, the assimilation of difference is a positively held value in Melayu culture – a feature that is not necessarily found in other parts of Southeast Asia, such as the Thai realm. The different varieties of Malayness, therefore, constitute a major sociological theme.

Fifth, the Malay World now extends over five different modern nation-states, each of which has different views of both Malayness and tribality. These modern states, too, have acted to reconstitute the character of tribality, normally in a manner that leads to detribalization but sometimes, by abreaction, to the further intensification of tribality.

TRIBAL/NON-TRIBAL

The boundary between tribality and non-tribality in the Malay World is a porous one, with movement occurring in both directions. At one extreme are the Chewongs (Howell) in the centre of the Peninsula, who have resolutely reasserted their positive tribality at every opportunity by moving as far away from mainstream society as they can. Much the same applies to some of the Semang ("Sakai") groups of southern Thailand (Porath, Hamilton). Sandbukt (1984) has described an even more committedly tribal Malayic population living in the forests of Jambi province, Sumatra. At the other extreme are populations whose members have left tribality behind for good, even if they and their neighbours retain a memory of their formerly tribal status. The Bataks of North Sumatra (Ruiter, Ginting) are a clear example. Even where they continue to live in their ancestral villages and houses (some of which have been in continuous use for more than two centuries), the Bataks' life circumstances now fall variously into the peasant, petty commodity-producer, proletarian or bourgeois categories. The same finally became true of Singapore's Orang Seletar and Orang Selat (Mariam) as recently as the late 1980s, when they were faced with obligatory resettlement into government flats.

However, most of the populations discussed in this volume display a less uniform profile, without necessarily losing their sense of sameness. Increasingly, this expresses itself as an explicitly ethnic "identity", in the modern sense (Nicholas, Kroes, Ruiter). In other cases, however, the feeling of sameness is founded in a more implicit acknowledgement of cultural continuity, whether

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based on language, music (Roseman), religion or locality. The Lahanans of Sarawak (Alexander & Alexander) demonstrate a strong attachment to an explicit identity (not normally recognized by others) that is founded *both* on cultural concerns and on the need to assert an "ethnicity" in the face of massive disruptions caused by the state's development plans. In the long run, ethnicity will presumably win out in all these populations. But just how long *is* the long run? One factor that affects this outcome is the dialectical mode of orientation that still characterizes many of these cultural traditions, which seems capable of envisioning a considerable degree of difference as being somehow the "same".

The Temiars have managed to absorb even consumerist capitalism into their dialectically shaped cultural and musical framework (Roseman) without necessarily pushing the people into peasantlike or proletarian circumstances – at least for the moment. Nevertheless, a certain amount of overt consciousness of their changed circumstances has begun to emerge, as in the development of innovative syncretic cults, incorporating Malay, Chinese and Hindu elements, within the broader framework of Temiar mediumistic religion. Moreover, for a few years, the highly formalized Baha'i religion gained a substantial number of converts among the Temiars (Benjamin 1996). A "commercial pop" (*their* description) CD record by the Temiar-Semai band Jelmol ("Mountain"), with two of the tracks sung in Temiar, has had quite some success in Kuala Lumpur.[37] Temiar tribality, therefore, is still in a state of flux.

Semai communities have exhibited this kind of variation since at least the late 1920s, when a motor road was built from Tapah town right through Semai country to the newly opened hill station of Cameron Highlands. This greatly facilitated their access to the urban areas and the cash economy. Nowadays, like the Bataks, Semais fall individually into many different socio-economic categories. This differentiation is further reinforced by the long-standing difference between the lowland Semais ("like Malays") and the hill-dwelling Semais ("those Temiars", "those Semang") – the epithets as reported in Dentan's well-known monograph (1979, p. 15). The hill Semais even now retain some dialecticism, and still have at least one foot in the tribal camp, despite the influx of cash, employment, schooling, and medical services. Many Semais however – perhaps the majority – live as peasants, proletarians, or petty commodity-producers; a growing number are tertiary graduates following professional careers. The chapters in this volume by Dentan, Juli (himself a Semai) and Kroes richly illustrate this diversity "on the ground", while Nicholas mentions the activities of many Semais in the modern sector of Malaysian life. Of course, this heterogeneity begs the question: in what

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sense can we talk of *the* Semais? Gomes (1988) has shown that the people themselves began to wear this homogenizing label only in the early twentieth century, and that it still rests uneasily on top of the many socio-cultural differences – now including the tribal/non-tribal distinction – that characterize them.

On Siberut, the Mentawaians are currently experiencing strongly differentiating forces emanating from the Sumatran mainland. This has produced some "moderns", some "traditionalists", and a majority who fit somewhere in between (Persoon). Schefold, looking at the more "traditional" side of the same situation, demonstrates just how profoundly the people have incorporated their awareness of these outside influences by integrating them into their own expressive culture – much as Roseman describes for the Temiars and Dentan hints at for very much more ancient times among the Semais. Once again, as Persoon remarks, "it is hard to talk about *the* local people."

The Orang Suku Laut (Lenhart, Chou & Wee) have long managed to encompass the differences between their constituent communities. The presence among them of an increasingly non-tribal membership (as marked in part by conversion to Islam or Catholicism) is therefore not a completely new element. In any case, some of these communities were *less* tribal in the past than they became in later times. Such an intensification of tribality can occur for several different reasons. In Riau (see below) this occurred because the sultanate sought advantage in having a mobile segmentary population at its beck and call. In some of the Malayic "collecting" regions, including the maritime portions, tribality has sometimes intensified in step with the increasing demand for forest or marine products: it is to the commercial advantage of the collecting communities to retain their detailed knowledge of the forests and seas, and their willingness to exploit it.

A somewhat ironic example is presented by the Bateks living in Malaysia's National Park. Lye shows that the park's administrators have erected a conceptual boundary around it, in order to emphasize their respectably modern concern for the "Nature" it encapsulates. Everything inside the park, including the Bateks – its *Naturvolk* – must remain "frozen in idealized time" so as to sanctify the "development" that has been achieved outside the park. *Kuih lapis* ethnology here meets and fuses with modernization. Unusual though it is, this example illustrates how intolerant the modern world is of the dialectical mindset (even if post-modernists have begun to favour a version of it). Indeed, as Ruiter argues with regard to the nineteenth-century Bataks, the most general form of *de*tribalization is conversion into an unambiguously non-dialectical "ethnic group" following the penetration of

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state administration or capitalist enterprise. (On this theme, see also Kubitschek 1997; McCaskill 1998.)

Dissimilation

The ethnology of the Malay World tells a story of continued complementarity between the tribal communities themselves and between them and the neighbouring non-tribal domain. As mentioned earlier, this interaction appears to have led to a series of mutual assimilations and dissimilations that generated three major patterns of societal organization: the Semang, Senoi, and Malayic. The details of this argument, which involve a close examination of kinship and other such institutions, are presented elsewhere (see especially Benjamin 1985, 1999). Here, I present brief accounts of some other culture-historical features relating to dissimilatory processes that are relevant to the understanding of broader Malay World issues. First, I shall discuss the population that, from the Malay standpoint, is the most "different": the Semang negritos of southern Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia. Then I shall make some suggestions as to the long-term historical place of a population that is much more closely related to the Orang Melayu "proper": the Malayic sea peoples.

Negrito Foraging and Semang Distinctiveness

The various populations who follow the Semang pattern are not simply hunter-gatherers, for they actually forage off *anything* that comes their way, including the Malay state.[38] (See, for example, Benjamin 1973.) They have worked the fields for Malay farmers, served as porters for forest travellers, sold or bartered forest products with outsiders, and even desultorily cultivated their own swiddens. Of course, they will also forage by hunting and gathering if the opportunity arises – as it frequently does – but their foraging is not necessarily *definable* in terms of hunting and gathering. On the other hand, what the Semang do *not* do is just as interesting. Even now, they avoid both trapping and long-term integral swidden farming, for these activities would require them to reside for long periods in the same place. This would clash with their desire to retain complementarity with the more sedentary populations around them – the Malays, Temiars, and (formerly) the Semais. Thus, the Semang imperative has had three main components: the maintenance of a widespread low-density population, a minimalist social organization that allows them to break into conjugal-family groups at almost a moment's notice, and an avoidance of a long-term commitment to sedentism. As I have argued elsewhere, these ends were achieved by the instituting of a distinct

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kinship pattern that (a) favoured patrifilial consociation, and (b) enjoined avoidance between adult consanguines and in-laws of opposite sex. This had several consequences, including a marriage pattern that required one to marry at considerable distances, and a low rate of population growth. These institutions may well be connected with the genesis and/or maintenance of the physical distinctiveness of these populations.

Because of their unusual "negrito" somatotype it has often been assumed that the Semang are the remnants of a formerly more widespread population, related distantly to those of Melanesia and Aboriginal Australia.[39] On this view, they became peripheralized early on by the arrival of Mongoloid populations speaking Mon-Khmer and Austronesian languages. The main proponent of this interpretation is the prehistorian Peter Bellwood (1993, 1997, pp. 71–74), whose detailed integrative analysis of the prehistory of island Southeast Asia also links the Semang to some extent with the so-called "negritos" of the Philippines and the Andaman Islands. The negrito phenotype, with its dark skin and purportedly small body size – often more a myth than a reality – is usually seen as adaptive to a nomadic deep-forest life. Bellwood nevertheless acknowledges that the ancestry of the negritos is not "simple", since they display a genetic variability that is partly due to a "reticulate" pattern of interbreeding with neighbouring Mongoloid populations. This interpretation is consistent with the view that Semang hunting and gathering is primordial, not secondary, and that they are therefore the direct inheritors (in part, at least) of practices invented in the Hoabinhian period and earlier. On this view, their presumed later adoption of Mon-Khmer (or in the Philippines, Austronesian) speech is seen as a palaeo-sociolinguistic problem needing explanation.

This approach has not gone unchallenged. An alternative view, proposed most strongly by Rambo (1988), suggests that the negrito phenotype exhibited by most of the Semang population has evolved comparatively recently in the Malay Peninsula out of the basically Mongoloid population that was already there. This could even have been recent enough to have occurred after the emergence of farming, and hence consequent upon the complementary dissimilation between the two lifeways commented on earlier. Such a view would pose fewer (socio)linguistic problems, and it would allow for a relatively large part of Semang hunting and gathering to be secondary in character – though presumably still intensive enough to exert a strong selective effect on bodily physique. (It would also imply that the three geographically distinct "negrito" populations of Southeast Asia do not share a uniquely common ancestry.) As yet, the genetic evidence is neither sufficient in quantity nor sufficiently analysed to decide the issue.[40] Such a rapid rate of genetic evolution

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is not impossible, however, given the low-density "fission-fusion" breeding patterns that have characterized populations with the kind of breeding pattern followed by the Semang (cf. Fix 1982, 1995).

The total Semang population has numbered around two or three thousand since counts and estimates were first published about two hundred years ago (Schebesta 1952, pp. 163–65). Because of epidemics, this figure has not remained truly constant over the short term (Schebesta 1952, p. 167), but its long-term constancy is striking. However, as Gomes (1982) has demonstrated, this very low rate of population growth is associated specifically with nomadism. When the people are made to settle down, their population growth-rate rapidly increases. Nomadic foraging is associated with a low value of children: until they reach their teen years children are net consumers rather than producers, and as infants they encumber the nomadic way of life. This suggests that the Semang probably had the means to keep their population growth low by spacing their births far apart.

How has the Semang pattern managed to be so persistent? Two main problems had to be solved. First, how to sustain an egalitarian low-density population over such a large territory, and segmentary right down to conjugal-family level? Second, how to retain their complementary distinctiveness from the more settled, farming-based ways of life espoused by their neighbours, the Senoi peoples and the Malays? I shall limit myself here to a bare sketch of the mechanisms they appear to have employed, which are founded on their distinctive kinship pattern (Benjamin 1985, 2001*b*).

As I have already suggested, the first problem – the maintenance of a low-density non-increasing population – was solved in two main ways. First, marriages usually had to be contracted over great distances. Second, they had children as infrequently as possible, through two mutually reinforcing mechanisms: (a) a ban on sexual intercourse for about two years after a woman had given birth, and (b) a preference for delaying weaning for two years. The latter practice suppresses ovulation through hormonal mechanisms, especially in women with low body fat (Bongaarts 1980). Moreover, the Semang pattern of sexual avoidance between traceable consanguines *and* affines meant that the husband could not easily find a substitute sexual partner at this time. The net result was a very slow, or perhaps flat, rate of population growth so long as the people remained nomadic. On settling down, however, the population growth rises spectacularly: the provision of alternative food supplies allows the mothers to wean their children earlier (onto grain-based porridge), and the people allow a concomitant relaxation of the post-partum coital taboo.[41]

Why should the Semang populations have bothered to organize their

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lives in this way? I suggest that they did so in order to maintain a lifeway that was distinctively complementary to that of their neighbours, the Senoi and the Malays. By so doing, they were able to reduce any competition that may have emerged between themselves and the other populations who shared their environment. But to achieve this end they had to positively maintain a commitment to nomadic foraging that was binding on a just-sufficient number of people to maintain a viable self-reproducing population. Any attraction to the long-term sedentism espoused by their neighbours would have dissolved away this selective advantage. Differential kinship patterns had a great deal to do with this: the distinctive Semang and Senoi kinship rules generated the demographic structure appropriate to each of the lifeways, and served to sustain an ideology that painted the other population's ways as inappropriate. To give just one example: where the Semang forbade sexual relations with both traceable consanguines and affines, the Senoi actually favoured sexual and marital relations with close affines, even to the extent of instituting sexually charged joking relations between siblings-in-law of opposite sex. This, as Semang individuals have remarked to several investigators (including myself), is immoral behaviour that just should not be emulated. The Malay pattern, on the other hand, favours an ideal of close consanguineal marriage, something that followers of both the Semang or the Senoi pattern find hard to accept.

Thus, it is possible that even some of the genetic features characteristic of at least one of the constituent populations of the Malay World has its roots in the kind of deliberate dissimilatory complementarity between populations that is typical of the whole region. (For further discussion of this hypothesis, see Fix 1995.)

Let me now turn to another instance in which such complementarity has been of socio-historical importance.

The Varieties of Malayness

As we have seen, the Malayic societal pattern exists in several different varieties: tribal *versus* centralized, and maritime *versus* land-based. It has long been noted that there is a close linguistic and cultural similarity between the Melayu Malays "proper" and the tribal Malays. Logan (1847, p. 249), for example, reported that numerous Malays possessed pagan cousins or even brothers: the Jakuns differed from the Malays in physical appearance only because their "air, manner and expression constituted the great distinction between them". A little further south, Williams-Hunt (1952, pp. 13, 19, 44) included the Orang Selat among the 1,000 "Aborigines" that he estimated to

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be living in the Colony of Singapore in the early 1950s. These people had been (nominal) Muslims for several generations and were regarded by almost all outsiders simply as Malays. They regarded themselves as Malays too, but as Malays who had not yet forgotten their distinct tribal-group (*suku*) origins in particular parts of the Riau archipelago. Likewise, Mariam Ali (this volume) was told by some north-coast Singapore Malays that they were of Orang Laut ancestry. Similar observations have been made with regard to several parts of Sumatra: as Persoon remarks (this volume), "though the Orang Kubu are hunters and gatherers wandering around in the remaining forests of central and south Sumatra, it is evident from their language, magical spells, and folk stories that there have been interactions between them and the Minangkabau and Orang Melayu for a very long time, and even a common origin." Very similar findings are reported by Sandbukt (1984) and Chou (1995), as well as by Porath and Tenas in this volume.

Clearly, a significant number of observers have been convinced that the Orang Melayu share a common background with most of the tribal peoples living in the region. The label "Aboriginal Malay", first proposed by Williams-Hunt, encapsulates this idea very well, and it has been adopted by the JHEOA as the basis for their Malay-language term, *Orang Melayu Asli*, for these populations. Needless to say, ordinary up-country and island Malays have also long been aware of this close relationship. (See Chou 1995 for a particularly explicit example, among the Melayu people and the neighbouring Orang Suku Laut of the Riau Islands.)

It is not surprising then to discover that fears of reassimilation into tribality are common in the Melayu community. As already noted, Melayu cultural rhetoric takes much pride in what it has discarded, historically speaking, in its quest for cultural self-improvement. Favre (1848, pp. 272–73) noted the "extreme fear" that obtained between Orang Melayu and Jakuns in Johor, in places where the Orang Melayu were themselves recently Malayized Jakuns. This was probably because the Jakuns still knew the "secret" of the local Malays' origins, while at the same time the latter were pressuring the Jakuns through slave-raiding and land-expropriation. Logan (1847, p. 4) also noted that such forest-spirits as *pontianak* and *hantu* were probably instituted to socialize the neo-Melayu children into fear of entering the forest – where they might disconcertingly meet up with their Jakun "cousins" and learn their true origins. Porath (this volume) reports that the same fears of entrapment magic are still expressed by Sumatran Malays with regard to the Sakais of the area, as also does Lenhart for the Riau Islands. All these reports mention in particular the fear that Orang Melayu will be enticed into marriage or sexual intrigue with a tribal-Malay, leading to the dissolution of the civilizational

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difference between them. In a fascinating reversal, Sandbukt (1984) reports that at least one group of Kubus in Jambi regard the outside world as disease-laden, which they associate with the supposedly life-destroying (*layu* "fade") effects of too much contact with Malays (*Me-layu*). (It is interesting to note that reports of such magical entanglement appear to be lacking for those parts of the Peninsula where the Orang Asli speak Mon-Khmer languages, and are therefore clearly not Malayic by language or cultural pattern.)

What then is the basis for this socio-cultural commonality between populations who otherwise differ greatly along the tribal/non-tribal dimension? To answer this question, we need to look more closely at the Malayic societal tradition and its genesis. (The following sections summarize material that I have published elsewhere in greater detail: see Benjamin 1985, 1999, 2001*b*.)

The Malayic Societal Pattern Revisited

One of the distinctive features of the Malayic societal pattern is that it brings matrifilial and patrifilial organizational biases together with a tendency to village-internal ranking. The centralized Melayu states that arose within this same region did so primarily by adding a further level of organization to what had already developed in these tribal-Malay circumstances.

I suggested earlier that the Malayic societal pattern was instituted as a means of locking into place a productive regime composed of *both* swidden farming *and* intensified collecting. These activities if carried out on a regular basis, impose contrary organizational problems. Farming requires the joint co-operation of the men and the women within the village sphere, but collecting-for-trade requires the dispersal of the men away from the village for considerable periods. I suggest that this organizational paradox was solved by imaging the contrast between the two spheres of enterprise as being based on the apposition of matrifilial and patrifilial modes of incorporation. Within-village (and hence farming-related) core-group relations came to be thought of as matrifilial relations, while the dispersed extra-village relations generated in trading with outsiders were thought of as patrifilial.[42] Yet, this matri-/patri-filial image, if acted upon too literally, would generate an organizational pattern increasingly incompatible with the requirements of the males' collecting-for-trade. Sedentary farming carried out by a matrifiliated core of villagers would lead, if intensified, to a network of matrifocal local groups whose male members move in from elsewhere upon marriage. Closely related males would therefore tend to become dispersed and lose effective co-operation with each other, while the males within each local community would tend to be unrelated to each other and less inclined to co-operate. The people seem

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to have solved this problem by instituting a preference for marriage to take place within their own community and/or between cousins – with their own people, so to speak.[43] The males of each village could now think of themselves as consanguineally related after all, so that they could continue without hindrance to treat their co-operative collecting and trading activities as patrifiliatively organized. At the same time, their links with males in other villages could now be thought of as falling outside of the sphere of kinship, preparing them ideologically for the competition that would have arisen between residents of different villages for the goodwill of the traders downstream.

Thus, I suggest, the Malayic local communities came to combine a sexual division of labour with a preference for relatively closed consanguineal settlements. They were linked through their male members with wealthy outsider trading-partners, but displayed a matrifiliative bias with regard to village residence. Such social formations tend to become ranked, primarily because they bring together in the same settlement in-married males who are otherwise unrelated to each other and who would get on badly unless organized into an institutionalized hierarchy (cf. Murphy 1957). The Orang Melayu and many of the southern Peninsular Orang Asli (such as the Temuans, Jakuns, Semelais, Temoqs, and Besisis) do in fact display a formal political hierarchy (*pangkat, derajat*, etc.) that probably pre-dates the development of centralized states in the Peninsula.

I have less information of this kind on the Sumatran populations (but see below on the maritime ones). However, in an unpublished field report on the Kubus (Orang Rimba), Sandbukt (1979, p. 7), mentions transmission of unequal trading relations with Malay headmen as passing from wife's father to daughter's husband. Residence also is uxorilocal. This is admittedly not a patrifilial pattern, but it probably represents a yet further transformation-by-fusion of the two filiative biases. In this regard, it sounds similar to the situation among the Aslian-speaking, but societally otherwise "Malayic", Temoqs of Pahang, Peninsular Malaysia, which I have analysed elsewhere (Benjamin 1999).

How do the various maritime tribal-Malays fit into the picture? The Orang Suku Laut have shown great complementarity with the non-tribal landed people they have dealings with (as well as with some of the tribal ones). This complementarity had two main components: trade, and (as discussed below) the various degrees of political association with the Malay state. This complementarity is well exemplified in several contributions to this volume (Mariam, Lenhart, Chou & Wee). Sather (1999, pp. 3–12) in a recent review of the literature has also highlighted it as a fundamental

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