

Achievements and Gaps in Orang Asli Research

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the status of research on Orang Asli society and culture, focusing on works that have appeared in the last 25 years, with suggestions on areas and approaches for future attention. Research on Orang Asli religion is considered an achievement. The publication of several major monographs and excellent essays is indicative of this success. However, there exists a need for reliable ethnological schemata as a basis for consistent analytical framework. Several schemata are presented namely, language-based, biological and archeological, and socio-historical. There are still basic areas on Orang Asli ethnology which we are almost completely ignorant. To overcome this deficit, the writer calls for overlapping research so that researchers' special competence, local variation and different theoretical frameworks can be brought to attention. He also calls for the exchange of fieldnotes among researchers, especially those working in the same geographical area. Yet, there are still areas in Orang Asli research that have barely been studied even for the first time; among them the writer lists archeology, linguistics, basic ethnology of several Orang Asli groups, history, technology, ecology and epidemiology.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membincangkan status kajilidikan tentang masyarakat dan budaya Orang Asli dengan memberi fokus kepada karya-karya yang diterbitkan sepanjang suku abad terakhir ini. Beberapa saranan tentang bidang dan pendekatan untuk tindakan selanjutnya telah diberi. Kajian tentang agama orang Asli dianggap mencapai kejayaan dengan terbitnya beberapa monograf dan esei. Namun demikian, satu keperluan bagi mewujudkan satu skema etnologi yang boleh dipercayai untuk dijadikan asas kerangka analitik yang tekal amat dirasakan. Beberapa skema dicadangkan, antaranya yang bertunjangkan bahasa, biologi dan arkeologi, ataupun sosio-historis. Terdapat juga semacam kedangkalan ilmu dalam beberapa aspek etnologi Orang Asli. Hal ini boleh diatasi sekiranya para penyelidik dapat memanfaatkan bersama perbezaan kepakaran, kawasan kajian, dan kerangka teoritikal yang digunakan. Pertukaran nota lapangan khususnya di kalangan mereka yang mengkaji satu kawasan/kaum juga dicadangkan.

Selain itu, terdapat juga aspek-aspek yang masih belum diteroka, antaranya arkeologi, linguistik, etnologi asas untuk beberapa kelompok Orang Asli, sejarah, teknologi, ekologi dan epidemiologi.

THE QUICKENING PACE OF ORANG ASLI STUDIES

Modern social-science research on the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia began, in effect, with Robert Dentan's study of the Semais¹ (1965, 1968); based on fieldwork done in 1962 and 1963. Until then, the literature on the Orang Asli had consisted almost entirely of the valuable, but somewhat old-fashioned, materials of Hrolf Vaughan-Stevens (1892-4), Rudolf Martin (1905), William Walter Skeat (1906), Charles Otto Blagden (1906), Richard J. Wilkinson (1926), Paul Schebesta (1928a, 1928b, 1952, 1954, 1957), Ivor H.N. Evans (1923, 1927, 1937), Fay-Cooper Cole (1945), R.O.D. Noone (1954-55) and Peter Williams-Hunt (1952, 1954-55). Of these, only the work of H.D. ('Pat') Noone (1936, 1939) still reads like the kind of reportage that most sociologists and anthropologists would today regard as the modern way of doing research; but Noone's work remained incomplete at the time of his death in 1942. These remarks imply neither approval of the modern way of research nor disapproval of the old-fashioned way. But since the earlier writers' work is relatively well known, I shall restrict myself in this essay to the less known — but much more extensive — work of the last quarter century.

When I started my own field-research among the Temiars in April 1964, Dentan had yet to publish any of his material, so I had the good fortune to enter what was in effect a new field. By then, the earlier literature had come to form a closed historical corpus, just large enough for any one scholar to master. It was still possible to feel, therefore, that absolutely every item in one's field-notebooks was a new discovery — too precious to let slip by unrecorded, yet too fresh to fit into any general Malayan framework of interpretation. If anyone had convened an international conference on Orang Asli studies in 1965, the list of invitees with the appropriate research experience would, perforce, have included just fourteen names: Asmah Haji Omar, Baharon Azhar Raffie'i, John Blacking, Iskandar Carey, Robert Dentan, Gérard Diffloth, Hoe Ban Seng, Rodney Needham, R.O.D. Noone, Hans Oesch, R. Radhakrishnan, Paul Schebesta, Ute Schwartz and myself²

Times have changed. In 1985, for example, while I was on sabbatical leave in the USA, an 'international' conference on Orang Asli studies was held at the Buffalo campus of the State University of New York (where Robert Dentan holds the chair of American Studies). This was done to take advantage of the presence in north-eastern USA and eastern Canada alone of a dozen or so researchers who had worked professionally on Orang Asli

topics. Many of the participants were meeting each other for the first time.³ The conference from which the present collection of essays derives (Bangi, August 1986) brought together an even greater number of people: some twenty-five speakers (most of whom I was meeting for the first time) presented papers in just two days. This growth is not sudden, though, for an earlier conference on Orang Asli studies was held in Kuala Lumpur in 1977, with much public attention. The fourteen papers presented on that occasion appear as volume 24 of the *Federation Museums Journal*, which now forms a valuable historical document.

Yet another measure of the amount of interest in Orang Asli studies is provided by the circulation-list of the *Orang Asli studies newsletter*, which currently numbers around one hundred persons worldwide. And, most important, the field of Orang Asli studies now includes several researchers who are themselves Orang Asli. Seven Orang Asli presented papers at the first of the present series of conferences, in November 1984.⁴

The scale of these developments is gratifying. But that only makes it all the more difficult to fulfil the commission set by Hood Salleh when he suggested I write an overview of Orang Asli research. Until about ten years ago, such a task would have been relatively easy. In those days, almost all the researchers on Orang Asli topics passed through Singapore (where I live), or they were among the small number of Malaysian university staff members with a common interest in Orang Asli matters. This made it possible for me to keep in personal touch with almost everyone in the field. In the intervening years, however, a large number of Malaysian researchers have entered Orang Asli studies, working mostly at honours-thesis level in local universities.⁵ These researchers do not pass through Singapore on their way to the field, and they leave most of their findings unpublished. Consequently, much Orang Asli research has remained unknown to me, and I therefore cannot avoid painting a somewhat distorted picture of the field.

Several of the 'gaps' pointed to in the first draft of this paper are gaps no longer, for (unknown to me) they had already been filled by Malaysian researchers. I am better acquainted, however, with the work of foreign researchers and of those Malaysians who have written postgraduate theses on Orang Asli topics. Any bias in this paper towards older and more foreign-oriented scholarship will, I hope, be understood as unintentional, and not as a slight on Malaysian scholarship. The other essays in the present volume will, in any case, help to restore the balance.⁶

Although I have tried in this essay to present a fairly comprehensive sampling of the technical literature of Orang Asli studies, the rather lengthy list of references with which it ends should not be regarded as a bibliography, either abridged or complete. The omission of any particular reference is due neither to forgetfulness nor to a desire to suppress the mention of any author's work.

Those who want more information should consult the excellent bibliography of the literature on Orang Asli that was prepared several years ago by the Library staff at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Unfortunately, its very excellence ensured that the bibliography soon became unavailable; the time has come for an updated version to be prepared. Another very useful bibliographical document from Universiti Kebangsaan is the check-list of newspaper references to Orang Asli (*Orang Asli sebagai bahan berita, 1974-1986*) prepared by Hood Salleh and the Orang Asli Studies Group. Other partial bibliographies appear in the special 'Orang Asli' issue of the *Federation Museums Journal*, volume 24 (1979). The more general Malaysian bibliographies are of use only to beginners in the field of Orang Asli studies; the best of these is Patricia Lim's 'Malay World' bibliography (1986).

PRACTICAL MATTERS AND SCHOLARSHIP

My brief was to discuss *scholarly* research on Orang Asli society and culture, and I must therefore leave undiscussed the present-day circumstances of the Orang Asli themselves within Malaysian society, except where this has been the object of professional research. I am not saying that practical day-to-day questions are unimportant, for these are quite the most pressing of all issues touching on the Orang Asli. But there are other workers better qualified than I to discuss contemporary problems, and several of them have contributed to this volume. Nevertheless, a few comments on the relation between academic research and practical issues may be useful here.

Those directly involved in the social, political and economic practicalities of Orang Asli life sometimes feel frustrated when they glance at academic research reports. The reports consequently often remain unread by the very people who could put them to the most direct use. This is not a peculiarly Malaysian problem, of course, for ethnographic research everywhere produces much more *detailed* material than is found in the position-papers preferred by professional administrators.

However, the 'practical' and the academic approaches are not necessarily as disparate as they are often thought to be; a complementarity of tasks between them should not be impossible to arrange. The activities involved in decision-making, administration and welfare leave little time for the one or two years of intensive fieldwork necessary to gaining a fuller understanding of what is going on. Administrative officers, happy in the knowledge that someone else is doing the job for them (free of charge!), could therefore make valuable use of the findings that result. Academic researchers, on the other hand, would not generally take it amiss if officials showed an interest in their detailed findings. Such a boost to the

researchers' egos might even encourage them to work for a deeper understanding of the constraints under which officialdom works. It is no secret that scholars often feel uneasy at the thought of tailoring research to fit needs other than those they themselves favour – and I do not wish to suggest any easy compromise on this issue. But it should not prove too difficult for researchers and administrators to meet informally and share each other's views of the issues that concern them both. On balance, the Orang Asli themselves are more likely to gain from this than to lose.

In the rest of this essay, I present a personal view of the current state of scholarly research on the Orang Asli, and I suggest areas and approaches that deserve future attention. Since the aim of this volume is not to indulge in congratulation for what has already been done in Orang Asli studies, but to chart a way ahead, I shall pay more attention to the 'gaps' of my title than to the 'achievements'.

There is at least one general area of research, however, for which 'achievement' is the appropriate word – the study of Orang Asli religion. In recent years this has been the subject of several major monographs and a number of excellent essays, both published and unpublished, and it is with these, therefore, that I start.

AN ACHIEVEMENT: THE STUDY OF ORANG ASLI RELIGION

Unfortunately, there is no commonly accepted way of translating the phrase 'Orang Asli religion' satisfactorily into Bahasa Malaysia. Most Malay writers have avoided using *agama*, the conventional term (which implies a 'religion-of-the-book'), in this context. The most frequently employed alternative, *kepercayaan* ('beliefs'), misses the point almost completely. The word *religi*, found in some Indonesian writings, is a possible alternative. But, whatever choice is taken, it should be borne in mind that the word *agama* when used in its ordinary Malay sense covers only a part of the meaning of the English word 'religion' as used by social scientists.⁷

Malaysia's official language-planning agency, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (1986:1313), has nevertheless chosen *agama* as the correct technical term (*istilah*) for "religion" used in its social-science sense. It is now up to those who write in Bahasa Malaysia (or Bahasa Indonesia), and especially those who work on Orang Asli (or 'Suku-suku Terasing'⁸) cultures, to establish a generally acceptable usage that does not distort the undoubted authenticity of Orang Asli religion.⁹

Whatever label we give it, Orang Asli religious life is rich, subtle and meaningful. It is the product of a long period of historical development, involving inputs from both Mainland and Island Southeast Asia as well as from outside the region. Moreover, despite the differences that exist, a

recognisably common idiom underlies all the Orang Asli religions. My own faltering approaches to this cultural richness (Benjamin 1967, 1979) have since been overtaken by the much more intensive investigations of Hood Salleh (1978), Peter Laird (1978, 1979), Kirk Endicott (1979a), Marie-Andrée Couillard (1980), Wazir Karim (1981), Signe Howell (1984), Marina Roseman (1984, 1986, *in press*) and others. The materials now exist for a thorough comparative study of Orang Asli religious orientations, the more especially as this is the area of Orang Asli studies that has stimulated the greatest degree of interest in other parts of the world. I have no doubt that these findings will soon take their proper place in the wider literatures of Anthropology and the History of Religions.¹⁰ There has already been a flurry of studies, both primary and secondary, attempting to interpret the famed Orang Asli complex that links together blood sacrifice, fear of thunder and the taboo on mocking animals: see Lévi-Strauss 1969: 495-496; Needham 1964; Freeman 1968; Endicott 1979c; Robarchek 1978.

If I have any criticism of the available works on Orang Asli religions, it relates not to their ethnographic or interpretative quality — which is uniformly high — but to their lack of concern with explanation. The ‘what?’ seems often to have drowned out the ‘why?’, leaving the wider culture-historical, social and political contexts largely unexamined. (A similar criticism has been expressed by Hood, 1976: 53, in relation to Orang Asli studies in general). It would be a pity to let this situation persist, as we now have available a body of data tailor-made for the testing of hypotheses: the indigenous Peninsular traditions vary in their organisational details, yet they clearly belong within the same historical matrix. Natural laboratories of this kind are often sought by sociologists and anthropologists, yet too rarely found. Considerable advances in this area of Malaysian studies can therefore be expected over the next years — especially if, as I argue below, *Malay* data are systematically included in the comparison too.

REMAINING GAPS IN ORANG ASLI STUDIES

When placed against achievements in the study of Orang Asli religion, the other areas of Orang Asli research present a bleaker picture. Here we find gaps, even in areas (such as social organisation) that have usually formed the core of ethnographic reportage. True, in almost every area of Orang Asli research there are individual pieces of work that shine out: these have the effect of whetting the appetite for more, which the literature as a whole cannot yet satisfy. The almost complete abandonment of some areas of research — material culture or psychology, for example — can be seen, perhaps, as a consequence of shifts in academic fashion.¹¹ But the lack of development in areas (such as language) that *are* currently in fashion is

beyond my understanding. If I cannot explain the existence of all these gaps, however, I can at least try to point them out (and give credit to those who have made important contributions to the areas concerned).

THE NEED FOR RELIABLE ETHNOLOGICAL SCHEMATA

In assessing whether significant gaps exist within a body of socio-cultural data, it is useful to have available a carefully thought out ethnological schema. Unfortunately, as more than one writer has pointed out, the conventional 'Negrito/Senoi/Aboriginal-Malay' classification of the Orang Asli is at once too multidimensional and too anecdotal; I have yet to see anyone employ it consistently or with serious analytical intent. There are alternatives, however. One such is to employ a classification based on language relationships, currently the best-ascertained domain of Orang Asli culture as a whole.

Language-based schemata As should be generally known by now, the Orang Asli languages — and they *are* most of them languages, not just 'dialects' — fall into two main divisions:

1. The Austronesian languages spoken in the southern parts of the Peninsula. With one exception — the language of the Duano (= Desin Dolaq or 'Orang Kuala') of Benut, Johor — these are local dialects of Malay.
2. The dozen or so Mon-Khmer languages (belonging to the Austroasiatic stock) spoken in the central and northern parts of the Peninsula. These Peninsular varieties of Mon-Khmer are now known in the wider linguistic literature as the 'Aslian' languages, and they fall into three major subgroups: (a) Northern Aslian (or 'Jehaic'), two or three languages, several dialects; (b) Central Aslian (or 'Senoiic'), four languages; and (c) Southern Aslian (or 'Semelaic'), three or four languages.¹²

When brought together with findings from other fields of investigation, these linguistic data are evidence that Malay - an arrival from the south, not from the north as many scholars still wrongly assert - has been spoken for a relatively short time in the Peninsula (perhaps around two thousand years in the south, and less than one thousand years in the north). On the other hand, the same evidence shows that the Aslian languages have been spoken in the Peninsula for much longer. This finding has led both Gérard Diffloth and myself (independently) to use the linguistic materials as a basis for reopening discussion on the Peninsula's pre- and proto-history.¹³

Biological and archaeological schemata Languages, of course, are not the same things as 'societies', 'cultures' or populations. This makes it futile to try and map all of the data on the Orang Asli onto a unidimensional ethnological classification. Different analytical purposes demand different classifications. If, like Polunin (1953), Li-Injo (1976) or Fix (1971, 1982),

you happen to be interested in the biology of Orang Asli populations, you would be ill-advised to accept the conventional classification without closer inspection of what it implies.

Current professional opinions on the genetics and biological history of the Peninsular populations are so different from the four-wave theory ('Negritos', 'Veddoids', 'Proto-Malays', 'Deutero-Malays') beloved of Malaysian textbook writers and (regrettably) social scientists, as to seriously reduce the chances of fruitful cooperation between them.¹⁴ Not only is the four-wave (or *any* wave) theory no longer acceptable to those professional archeologists and biological anthropologists who have re-examined the evidence in detail, but the theories they currently hold imply that the indigenous populations of the Peninsula (i.e. the Orang Asli and the core of the Malays) consist at most of just two major components, southern Mongoloids and Negritos.

However, there are reasons for believing that the so-called 'Negritos' might belong within the *same* southern Mongoloid population as the Malays and the other Orang Asli. On this view, the 'Negritos' would have undergone local genetic differentiation during the last few thousand years and within the Peninsula itself, for reasons that involve social and cultural factors. While this theory is controversial, it is a sign of just how far removed the conventional 'waves' approach is from the kinds of socio-cultural conceptualisation that inform the latest biological and archaeological work on the Peninsula. Paradoxically, this leaves the conventional socio-cultural view prey to a thoroughly *racial* way of viewing things, while the more biologically orientated investigators are now operating within a non-racial approach that is much more consonant with the latest advances in sociological theory! (For discussions of these issues, see Bellwood 1985; Bulbeck 1981; Rambo 1988; Benjamin 1985a; 1986a and especially, Fix, *in press*).

Socio-historical schemata Most Orang Asli studies are concerned, of course, with socio-cultural problems and it is here that the lack of a valid ethnological schema has had the most serious effects. Thus unarmed, investigators have tended either to take up implicitly (or even explicitly) evolutionary-ladder approach to cultural differences or to see those differences as part of a mosaic of autonomous 'cultures'.¹⁵ Consequently, differences that have in fact resulted from *choice* (such as following a foraging way of life instead of a swiddening or an intensive-agriculture one) have been seen instead as unavoidable steps in a progression from primitivity towards civilisation (the standard textbook view)¹⁶ or as unrelated, independent 'cultural systems' that require *no* explanation (the classical social anthropological approach).

One way out of this impasse is to treat *all* the indigenous societal traditions of the Peninsula — the Malay tradition as well the various Orang

Asli ones — as the result of choices made within the same, pan-Peninsular, field of social, political and ecological relations. In so doing, it has seemed to me that most (though not all) of the Peninsular ‘cultures’ have followed one or other of just three societal traditions (which I label ‘Semang’, ‘Senoi’ and ‘Malay’) for many centuries, and perhaps millennia. These traditions — which have nothing to do with ‘ethnic groups’ and little to do populations — are definable by the distinctive socio-political constraints that they each impose upon the ways in which individuals live their lives.

On this approach, Malay (*Melayu*) culture is part of a wider category that also includes several of the southern Orang Asli traditions: as one of several ‘Malay’ societal traditions, Melayu culture is just as *asli* ‘(ab)original’ as the cultures of the ‘Orang Asli’ proper. However, this inclusive approach has been criticized by some of my co-workers, perhaps because it contradicts present-day Malaysian terminology, which has accustomed us to treating ‘Orang Asli’ and ‘Melayu’ always as separate categories — which indeed they *are*, in the contemporary socio-political context. But the term ‘Orang Asli’ is a very recent invention, made for purposes quite different from those of scholarly research; and ‘Melayu’ used in this particular way dates effectively only from the 1874 Treaty of Pangkor. The very word *Melayu* used as an ethnic label long post-dates the emergence of centralized Malay polities (Matheson 1979, Benjamin *in preparation*). In fact, the official usage that honours the southern Orang Asli with the appropriately ambiguous label *Orang Melayu Asli* ‘Aboriginal Malays’ — not, please, ‘Proto-Malays’! — provides a much better representation of the historical, social and linguistic realities. (The results of this approach can be inspected in Benjamin 1980, 1985a, 1986a, *in press*).

Commentators have also feared that this ethnological schema might place the Orang Asli at a disadvantage in relation to land-rights claims. However, this ignores the fact that specific land-rights can be guaranteed under Malaysian law only on the basis of individual claims, not family-, village- or ethnic-group-based ones (Barry Hooker *in press*, and personal communication). The ethnological studies just discussed relate not to specific individuals or populations, but to the cultural and social traditions they have had to choose between.

WHAT STILL NEEDS DOING

It is sometimes claimed that the basic data of Orang Asli ethnology have already been gathered, and that it remains only to bring the information up to date or to do research of a purely ‘practical’ kind. This is far from the truth: there are still basic areas of which we are almost completely ignorant. It is not even certain just how many Orang Asli ‘cultures’ there are, for hitherto unreported Orang Asli groups and languages are still occasionally being discovered.¹⁷

THE NEED FOR OVERLAPPING RESEARCH

Even if the supposedly basic data had already been gathered, it would not mean that each Orang Asli group had been 'done' and that there was therefore nothing left worth doing. No single investigator can possibly encompass all aspects of a people's way of life, even at the same point in time. Apart from our necessarily restricted areas of competence as individual investigators, the facts of inter-village variation, socio-cultural change through time and the existence of different theoretical frameworks (all of which are inevitable) mean that we should never consider any Orang Asli group to be 'already done' as a topic of scholarly research. Indeed, one of the more encouraging features of recent Orang Asli research has been the multiple coverage of a single Orang Asli population by separate investigators. On occasion these investigators have worked in different settlements at the same time, and on other occasions they have worked in the same settlement at different times. To take examples:

1. The Semais of Perak have now been studied by Hrolf Vaughan-Stevens (1892-94), Rudolf Martin (1905), G.B. Cerruti (1908), R.J. Wilkinson (1915), Paul Schebesta (1928b: 111-166), H.D. Noone (1939), Fay Cooper-Cole (1945: 92-110), Peter Williams-Hunt (1952), Robert Dentan (1969), Barry Hooker (1968), Gérard Diffloth (1976a, 1977), Alan Fix (1971, 1982), Jimin Idris, Carole Robarchek (1980), Clay Robarchek (1977, 1979, 1980), Colin Nicholas (1985), Natalie, Paul and Gordon Means (1986; but work started in the 1930s), Alberto Gomes (1986), Anthony Williams-Hunt (MA dissertation in progress), and others.

2. The Mah Meri (or the Ma' Betise', or the Besisi – take your choice!) have been studied by W.W. Skeat (1906, II: 634-688), I.H.N. Evans (1913), Shahrum Yub (1964, 1965), Iskandar Carey (1973), Roland Werner (1974), Satkuna Devi Ayampillay (1976) [now writing as Mathur (1986)], Wazir Karim (1980, 1981), Robert Dentan, Barbara Nowak (1982, 1984) and Nik Safiah Karim.

3. The Semaq Beri have been studied by Rodney Needham (1974), Knud-Erik Jensen (1977-78), Kirk Endicott (1977), Nik Safiah Karim and Ton Ibrahim (1979), Danielle Seguin, Kimball Morris (1985) and Yukio Kuchikura (1987).

4. The Temuans have been studied by Abdullah Hassan (1969), Baharon Azhar Raffie'i (1973, 1983), Dee Barr (1973, *et al*, 1976), Frederick Dunn (1975, 1977), Lee Kok Joo (1976), Azizah Kassim (1976), Patricia Gall (1977), Koh Bee Hong (1978) and several members of the Department of Anthropology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. (The last is in the spirit of an historical debt, for the UKM campus is situated on land originally inhabited by Temuans!)

The same is true of the Temiars, the Orang Hulu (or 'Jakuns'), the Bateks and several other groups.

It has been an especial pleasure for me that other investigators have been studying Temiar culture in the years since I did my own earlier work — just as my research was able to build on that of H.D. Noone and Iskandar Carey. The information obtained since (and independently) by Gérard Dffloth, Tan Chee Beng (1973), Safian Mohd Nazir (1976), Marina Roseman (1984, 1986, *in press*) and Sue Jennings (1986, 1988) has not simply transformed Temiar ethnography into Temiar historiography, but made me rethink some of the understandings I had come to think of as the established facts of Temiar culture. Given that at least two of these fieldworkers often worked with the very same individual Temiars that I worked with myself — just as I sometimes chanced to work with individuals who had worked with Noone and Carey — this is all the more remarkable. Marina Roseman's research, for example, have generally confirmed my own conclusions about the character and organization of Temiar religion. But, apart from the fact that, working nearly twenty years later, she was able to incorporate much important cultural change into her researches, she has taken the study of even the relatively slower-changing elements much further. In her explorations of the inner spiritual life of Temiar shamans and the subtleties of their poesy, for example, she has moved into areas of Temiar life that I didn't even know existed, despite having written my doctoral thesis on Temiar religion.

Although this kind of overlap has not often amounted to positive cooperation among researchers on Orang Asli, it has not led either to the sort of animosity that is not uncommon among ethnographers working elsewhere. If relations remain as easy as hitherto, that will be to everyone's advantage. Researchers will then be free to disagree with each other when necessary without feeling that their personal integrity has been impugned. This in turn should help to retain the good-will of the Orang Asli themselves towards the researchers who work with them, avoiding the put-upon feeling that has developed in similar situations in some other countries.

FIELDNOTES AS AN HISTORICAL RESOURCE

One way of achieving positive cooperation would be to allow researchers, who work on the same area to make use of each others' fieldnotes. There is usually much more material buried in ethnographic notebooks than we ever manage to make use of in publications. By granting other workers access to these materials we would enhance the historical richness of future studies on any one Orang Asli cultural tradition, as well as helping the Orang Asli themselves to obtain something they now largely lack — a documented history. Ethnography and sociography are, after all, just special forms of historiography, and it is as history (not sociology or anthropology) that future generations of Orang Asli (and other Malaysians too) will most value these writings.

Much could be achieved if interested Orang Asli were allowed access to researchers' fieldnotes when writing on their own people. Education has already led to generalised literacy among younger Orang Asli; it may eventually lead also to the development of a modern, indigenously produced, Orang Asli literature (albeit mostly in Bahasa Malaysia or English). The equivalent has happened in Sabah and Sarawak, and there is no good reason why it should not happen in Peninsular Malaysia too. (A start has already been made with the recent commercial publication of a book *in Jah Hut for Jah Hut* readers to enjoy (Holaday, Chin and Teoh 1985). It would be sad if future Orang Asli authors were denied access to the major body of written materials on their own history - the fieldnotes of those who lived for a while with their parents and grandparents.

AREAS STILL NEEDING BASIC RESEARCH

I come now to the 'gaps' in Orang Asli research — those that have barely been studied even for the first time. Every one of these areas would make an excellent topic for an Honours, Master's or Doctoral thesis, yet far too few local students have risen to the challenge. Is this because they prefer to follow the crowd, and work on well-worn topics? Or is it because their supervisors are uninterested in the many opportunities that still exist?

ARCHAEOLOGY

It may seem strange to start this list of gaps in Orang Asli research with a topic that most people would not consider to be of any direct relevance to the Orang Asli. The editor of this collection obviously thought differently, however, or he would not have arranged for archaeologist Adi Haji Taha — who has carried out ethnographic work among a contemporary Orang Asli group as well as much excavational research into Malaysia's past — to contribute to the volume. I have no intention of wandering too far into Encik Adi's territory. I want only to re-assert that, contrary to the commonly-expressed view that the 'origins' of the Orang Asli are shrouded in mystery, Malayan archaeology is for the most part Orang Asli archaeology.¹⁸

The prehistorians have ceased to think of the Malay Peninsula as the corridor through which wave upon wave of different racial groups flooded into the Island world. There is no longer any need, therefore, to assume that the human and artefactual remains discovered in early Peninsular sites were deposited by peoples who have long since moved on to eastern Indonesia or Australia. This view, still too firmly held to by scholars who have read little of the professional literature on Malaysian prehistory written since Winstedt's version of ideas current in the 1930s, is not only

quite wrong — it has the effect of denying to the Orang Asli (and to the Peninsular Malays, for that matter) their own authentic prehistory.

Those still in doubt about the place of the Orang Asli in Malaysian archaeology should read the admirably clear statement provided by Peter Bellwood in his recent book (1985) on our region's prehistory. Bellwood's page-references list some twenty separate mentions of Orang Asli-related topics. Here, surely, is where all non-specialist discussions of Peninsular and Orang Asli prehistory should start, and not by resurrecting yet again the old 'layer-cake' migratory theories that were far from sound even when first announced. Others who have taken this newer approach are Frederick Dunn (1975), Wilhelm Solheim (1980), Terry Rambo (1979b, 1988), and myself (Benjamin 1985a, 1986a, *in press*). A notable addition to this list is the Andayas' textbook of Malaysian history (1982) — the sole such book to have incorporated this newer perspective. Adi Haji Taha (1985: 72-75), in his recently published excavation report on the pivotal Hoabinhian/Neolithic site at Gua Cha, Ulu Kelantan, in what is still Orang Asli (Temiar and Mendriq) territory, also argues that the remains must have been left there by the ancestors of the Orang Asli. Zuraina Majid's recent discoveries in the middle Perak valley, some of them likely of palaeolithic provenance, will probably fit with this approach too when fully published, for that area was until recently occupied solely by Lanoh-and Temiar-speaking Orang Asli.

My reasons for discussing Malayan pre- and proto-historic archaeology *as* Orang Asli research are threefold. First, now that there exists a respectably modern professional literature on Peninsular prehistory and archaeology, it should be regarded as required preparatory reading for those about to do ethnographic, linguistic or sociographic research among the Orang Asli. At present, the number of scholars (even of anthropology) who have read that literature is very small indeed: they too, like workers in other fields, have tended to be satisfied with the incompetent sketches of Peninsular prehistory and ethnology presented in the standard history textbooks. If taken as a background to further research, these old-fashioned accounts will make it unnecessarily difficult for any proper understanding to be attained even of contemporary social and cultural processes. (The recent scholarly literature on Malaysian ethnology, sociology and linguistics does in fact contain many instances in which a mistaken interpretation of current circumstances has been reached through taking outmoded views of Malaysian prehistory as a starting-point).

Second, the reverse claim also holds: archaeologists could gain by reading the literature of Orang Asli research. Frederick Dunn, Peter Bellwood and Adi Haji Taha are among those who have done so. But this poses a problem: the archaeologist is likely to feel that the ethnographer, especially the self-declared 'social anthropologist', provides inadequate

coverage of topics relating most directly to archaeological interests. Such problems as habitation-site utilization, the statistics and ethno-science of plant and animal utilization, long-distance communication routes, the material aspects of hunting, gathering, swiddening and collecting-for-trade, and the technological and behavioural details of tool-use are not typical social-anthropological fare. This means that increased collaboration between ethnographers and archaeologists would benefit both, by enriching the range of data they would think it worthwhile to gather.

Third, the emergence of scholars who are trained in both archaeology and ethnography has been a very welcome addition to Orang Asli studies. Frederick Dunn's excavation of the Hoabinhian/Neolithic site of Gua Kecil was carried out in direct association with his own studies of Temuan trading and forest-utilisation techniques. Adi Haji Taha's Honours thesis (1974) was based on an ethnographic study of Che' Wong social organisation. While this was not directly related to his later archaeological work, the experience has probably made it easier for him to draw conclusions from the raw archaeological data he now handles. Zuraina Majid, another active Malaysian archaeologist, has worked both in Sarawak and the Peninsula; but her work extends also to ethnographic and sociological aspects of contemporary Malaysia, with a consequent broadening of her range of interest in both domains. Recently, Rosemary Gianno (1985) carried out a very detailed ethnographic study among the Semelai, the aims of which were formulated with direct reference to the problems she had become aware of during her archaeological training. Although she focused on the contemporary utilisation of *damar* resins and other 'traditional' forest products (especially as trade-goods), she also gathered a solid body of material on social organisation, language, material culture and inter-group relations.

Developments such as these should eventually greatly enrich what has tended to be a rather narrowly-focused field of study.

LINGUISTICS

Writing in 1972, I made the following suggestions as to the most suitable and urgent tasks for future research on the Aslian (i.e. Mon-Khmer) languages of the Peninsula (Benjamin 1976a: 94-95):

1. A thorough survey of the Aslian languages based not on the standard taxonomic categories but on new categories derived from fresh field research. A thorough hunt must be made for hitherto unreported languages, especially those spoken by groups already recognised ethnologically and administratively but whose speech may well turn out to be other than expected. Special attention should be paid to small rapidly disappearing speech communities, as these may serve to indicate chain-like relationships where none would otherwise be suspected. Areas where such a search would probably be most fruitful are: Southern Thailand, the

hills west of Baling in Kedah, the mid-reaches of the Perak river, the Kelantan-Trengganu-Pahang border areas, the slopes and foothills of Gunong Benom in central Pahang, the Jakun-Semelai hinterland south-east of Tasek Bera extending from Pahang into north-east Johor, and those parts of Selangor separating Mah Meri and the Semai outlier from the main body of Aslian languages. Coupled with this should be dialect surveys of the kind already begun for Semai by Diffloth.

2. For the purposes of historical linguistics, it is clear that the 'outlier' languages Che' Wong, Jah Hut and Mah Meri are crucial for the reconstruction of Proto-Northern – Central and – Southern Aslian respectively. At the other end of the scale, attention should be paid to apparently insignificant dialects in the reconstruction of more recent stages; for example, the Lanoh and Sabum dialects are essential for a study of the history of Temiar.

3. From a more practical point of view, straightforward descriptive studies are needed: these would provide excellent topics for research by students of Linguistics at the University of Malaya. With data on Kintaq Bong, Temiar and Semai already collected (if not published) the following additional languages would seem to offer the widest scope in terms of practical accessibility to informants and of maximum diversity in structure: Mendriq, Che' Wong, Jah Hut, Semelai, and Mah Meri.

Sadly, in the decade-and-a-half since these paragraphs were written little has happened to require that they be rewritten, except perhaps to note that there are now at least *three* universiti departments of Linguistics in Malaysia, all busily avoiding work on Orang Asli languages! This continued scholarly neglect of field-research in Orang Asli linguistics is an academic scandal.

The volume in which the above suggestions appeared did contain a handful of studies on Orang Asli languages: Asmah (1976) on Kintaq Bong (based on research done for her Honours thesis, 1963); Diffloth on Semai and other Senoic (i.e. Central Aslian) languages (1976a, 1976b); Benjamin on language classification (1976a) and Temiar grammar (1976b). Since that time, almost all the fresh material to achieve publication has been researched and written by Gérard Diffloth, who has produced studies on the history of the Aslian languages as a whole (1975, 1976c, which succeed in fulfilling the second of the desiderata spelled out above), the historical dialectology of Semai vowels (1977), the grammar of Jah Hut (1976d), and certain features of Semai grammar (1972, 1974, 1976a). These essays happen to be outstanding examples of their kind, but Diffloth's later work on a soon-to-be-published lexicon of Proto-Mon-Khmer, based on his own very extensive fieldwork on some two hundred languages further north in mainland Southeast Asia, is in some measure a temporary loss to Aslian studies (though he has promised to return to the field before too long).¹⁹ The same can be said of Asmah's extensive contributions to Malay and Austronesian studies since the late 1960s, which have taken her away from Aslian linguistics. Unfortunately, neither of these scholars has succeeded in persuading their students to take up where they themselves left off.

There has been very little other published material on Aslian languages. Nik Safiah and Ton published an outline (1980) of Semaq Beri phonology and grammar. Means and Means (1986) published a 'Sengoi' (i.e. Semai) dictionary, valuable for its definitions but too wayward in its transcription of Semai speech-sounds to be used with any security as regards pronunciation. As mentioned earlier, Holaday *et al.* (1985) have made available some carefully-transcribed Jah Hut story-texts together with an English translation (though, unfortunately, not a word-for-word one).²⁰ I have in typescript (Benjamin Ms.) an uncompleted lengthy study of the interplay of speech-sounds, semantics, grammar and social interaction in Temiar. The only bright spot James Matisoff's insightful synthesis of the scattered materials on the Aslian languages prepared for inclusion in his volume on Mainland Southeast Asia in the *Cambridge language surveys* series. This extended essay is unfortunately not yet published, but I have been able to study Professor Matisoff's draft; if this fails to stimulate linguists to research the Aslian languages, then nothing will!²¹

One thing that *has* changed significantly since 1972 is the circumstances of the Aslian languages themselves. It is now probably too late to undertake on-the-ground surveys of dialects in many of the areas listed under heading (1) above. The speakers of those languages have become thoroughly mixed up with speakers of other dialects and languages as a result of the large-scale regroupment of Orang Asli communities during the last decade. In 1979 I tried to do what fieldwork I could on the several varieties of Lanoh, but the security situation did not allow me to complete this research the following year, as I had intended. Although some of the data I gathered are of value, it was all but impossible to reconstruct the earlier distribution of Lanoh-like dialects along the Perak river and its tributaries.

If Aslian linguistics is in bad health, research on the distinctive Malay dialects spoken by the southern Orang Asli is even less advanced. There has been one detailed study of value, however — Abdullah Hassan's MA thesis on Temuan (1969). Yet, he too has not returned to Orang Asli studies. To my knowledge, there has been only one study since then of any Orang Asli form of Malay — James Collins's brief account (1985) of some interesting features of the phonology of an Orang Hulu dialect from Pahang.

It is cause enough for wonder that Malaysian students have been ignoring the riches offered by the Aslian language, where they could so easily make an academic 'killing'. It is inexcusable that they should also ignore the irreplaceable information on the history of Malay offered by the Orang Asli dialects of that language. At the *Workshop on the Reconstruction of Proto-Malay* held in 1984 at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, this very issue was raised frequently during the discussions on how future studies into Malays linguistic history should proceed.

Let us hope that something tangible will result, preferably in the form of MA and PhD dissertations on Aslian and Aboriginal-Malay from the various Malaysian departments of linguistics and from some of the many Malaysian students who have pursued postgraduate linguistic studies overseas. (Students from Thai universities have shown much more enterprise in this field; see, e.g. Phaiboon 1984, Chantanakomes 1980).

There would seem to be only one other solution to this problem: if the linguists won't do the job, then the ethnographers, ecologists, sociologists and others must do it in their place. Dee Baer, a geneticist, has shown the way with her comprehensive and careful Temuan word list (1973), gathered while doing biological field research in Selangor. Normally, anthropologically trained ethnographers are expected to do basic linguistic research, but in reality none but a few of the American-trained ones have seemed up to the job in Malaysia. With this in mind, I recently published in the *Orang Asli Studies Newsletter* a detailed practical guide to the pronouncing and writing-down of Orang Asli languages (Benjamin 1985b, 1986b) for those who lack linguistic training but who have the will to treat language as seriously as they would any other ethnographic data.

BASIC ETHNOLOGY

In this section I would like to list those regions of the Orang Asli distribution pattern that still need the most basic of research.

SEMANG

The western and northern Semang groups (such as the Lanohs, Kintaqs, Kensius and Jehais) have received only casual attention since the time of Schebesta. Several students from Universiti Sains Malaysia did some brief fieldwork among them in the early 1970s (e.g. Mohd Razha bin Haji Abd Rashid 1973, Syed Jamal Jaafar 1973, and Khadizan bin Abdullah & Abdul Razak Yaacob 1974), as I did myself. Shuichi Nagata's interest in the northwestern Semang was stirred at that time, and he has recently undertaken further fieldwork among them. But the fact remains that these people, once the best-known of all Orang Asli groups, are now among the least known. The residential regroupment they have undergone in recent years has, of course, made these Semang groups rather less attractive to researchers who are interested in the kinds of thing that the Semang were once famous for — nomadic foraging, in particular. Almost certainly, there are a few nomadic groups left, though keeping up with them would probably involve the investigator in traversing the security-restricted area of the Thai-Malaysian border.²² But not all Semang groups were fully nomadic even in 'traditional' times: their *sedentism* too, whether old-style or new-style, is of great sociological and ethnological interest (cf. Benjamin

1986a: 262-263). Alberto Gomes has demonstrated something of this in his fascinating study (1983) of the demographic and social-organisational adaptations that occur when Semang groups settle in one place.

ABORIGINAL MALAYS

The Orang Hulu (or 'Jakun') of Johor and southern Pahang have also suffered somewhat in the ethnographic stakes. A century ago they were better known than any other Orang Asli group, perhaps because they were within relatively easy reach of Singapore or Melaka. Moreover, having always been recognised as a division of the Malay population, the Orang Hulu must have seemed less exotic than the Senoi and Semang populations further north. That, at least, is the only reason I can suggest for their subsequent neglect by researchers. Despite the publication of a series of excellent studies (mostly in Japanese, alas) on the easterly Orang Hulu by Narifumi Maeda (1967a, 1967b, 1969, 1971), mystery still surrounds the details of Orang Hulu social organisation, religion, language and subdivisions.²³ The Danish anthropologist Jacob Clemmesen studied the Orang Hulu during the 1970s, as did the Australian graduate student, Andrew Hill, but they have yet to publish their findings. A small amount of ethnographic information was included in the Southeast Pahang survey carried out by a group of sociologists from Universiti Sains Malaysia (Sharpe 1976).

The same is true of a couple of studies of the Orang Kanaq of the Sedili valley that originated as student research exercises (Mahdi 1970, Omar bin Abdul 1978). Some further details on them can be found in a recent ethnographic film, made by Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) in association with Hood Salleh, which was shown successfully on Malaysian television. The Orang Kanaq, famous for their minute group size and aloofness from other Orang Asli communities, were originally immigrants from Pulau Sekanak in the Riau Island — but they are none the less 'Jakun' for that.

Closely related to the Orang Hulu are the various 'sea peoples' or Orang Laut: Blagden actually referred to them as 'Sea Jakun'. They too have attracted more attention in the past than they do at present. The older literature on the Orang Laut was thoroughly analysed in Sopher's doctoral dissertation (1965). Little has been done since, apart from a few rather thin student exercises on the Orang Seletar of Singapore and Johor (Asiah Harun & Suradi Sarmadi 1978, Ariffin bin Nopiah 1979) and some more significant treatment in the doctoral dissertations of Øyvind Sandbukt (Cambridge University, ca. 1980; details not to hand) and Vivienne Wee (1985; see also 1988). The Singapore situation has gained some recent coverage in the Honours theses of Normala Manap (1983) on the 'Orang Selat' Malays of Pulau Seking and of Mariam Mohd Ali (1984) on the

indigenous populations (including the Orang Seletar) of the main island's north coast.

These coastal populations were once very important politically, as is spelled out in Andaya's study of the history of Johor (1975). Indeed, their present-day circumstances might well result from a process of voluntary retribalisation following the demise of their more peasant-like heyday in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This possibility will remain unexplored, however, until researchers provide a thorough account of these most neglected of Orang Asli communities.

Another Orang Laut group, the Duano or 'Orang Kuala' of Benut in Johor, are triply interesting. They are true seafarers, not strand dwellers like the other Peninsular groups; the majority of them live on the Indonesian side of the Straits (Kähler 1946-49). They speak the only non-Malay Austronesian language still extant in the Peninsula (Kähler 1946-49, Collings 1949). And they are Muslims who nevertheless prefer to remain categorized as Orang Asli rather than Malays. The Duano were included in Sandbukt's doctoral research on Orang Laut fishing economy, and a student exercise (Singham 1965) is also available on them. Sandbukt (according to a recent *Orang Asli Studies Newsletter*) is hoping to publish a monograph on these people.

LOWLAND SENOI

The lowland Temiars and Semais have yet to be studied in any depth. To my knowledge there is only one truly lowland Temiar community (near Tanjung Rambutan in Perak), but many Semai communities have been established for at least a century in peri-urban conditions near such towns as Tapah dan Teluk Intan. These have been mentioned by H.D. Noone (1939), Dentan (1968) and Gomes (1986), but it would be good to have a detailed account of their way of life. Do they, for example, represent a model of what other Orang Asli communities might come to be like as modernisation takes hold? Or do they represent a very early, and hence very special, mode of adaptation to near-urban life? And what is the significance and nature of their brand of (Lutheran) Christianity, established among them in the 1930s (not to mention their more recent attachment to Baha'i)? There is a small amount of missionary literature on the 'Sengoi' churches (e.g. Means and Means, n.d.), but what might a sociologist of religion discover there?

ORANG ASLI SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The study of Orang Asli kinship and social organization seems curiously underdeveloped, as if modern researchers are shy of entering an esoteric field that they preferred to leave to hard-core social anthropologists. There have certainly been some sophisticated studies, such as Karen Endicott's

(1979) on the Bateks, Hood Salleh's (1974) on the Semelais and Peter Laird's (1978) on the Temoqs (all unfortunately unpublished as yet). Rodney Needham, usually associated with work elsewhere in the region, also put his brief Orang Asli experiences (Needham 1956) to trenchant use in one of his best known comparative studies (Needham 1966). Two other studies that bring Orang Asli data to bear on wider social-organisational theory are Karen Endicott 1981 and Jensen 1977-78.

Most of the available studies have a perfunctory air about them, however. They raise questions in the reader's mind but provide too few answers. Moreover, they exhibit a fair number of inaccuracies of ethnographic reportage and in the employment of kinship and social-organisational theory. These gaps — for that, in effect, is what they are — became apparent while reading the modern Orang Asli literature in preparing a comparative study (Benjamin 1980) of Peninsular social-organisational patterns. It is in this area especially that a joining-together of Orang Asli and Malay studies is called for. As a model of what *can* be done, I recommend David Banks's excellent book *Malay kinship* (1983).²⁴

ORANG ASLI HISTORY

Professional document-based historical study of the Orang Asli has barely begun — and hardly anyone seems interested in pursuing it. An inkling of what lies in wait is provided by such studies as Ron Hill's (1977) on upland agricultural history and Kirk Endicott's (1983) on the history of Orang Asli enslavement, both based on a wide range of documentary sources, published and unpublished. Other examples are Leonard Andaya's (1975) and Marina Roseman's (1979 Ms) studies of the role of the Orang Asli in the processes of state formation in Johor and Perak respectively, and Leary's study (1989) on the Orang Asli during the Emergency. The historical studies of Dodge (1981) and McLellan (1985) on Orang Asli incorporation by the state are spoilt, regrettably, by their almost complete neglect of the scholarly literature on the people they are discussing.

Several researchers have discovered the usefulness of the special sections on the Orang Asli that appeared in the *Census of Malaya* for the years 1921, 1931 and 1947. Other useful demographic and historical sources are embedded in the holdings of the Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli. Unfortunately, much of this still is under a security embargo dating from the Emergency years. The Research section of the JOA would be providing a valuable service therefore, if they made a thorough survey of the documents in their possession and removed the 'security' classification from those that now, thirty years later, can be read or referred to publicly without posing any danger.

Much historical material is to be found in the Malaysian mass media, which often carry stories, occasionally big ones, on Orang Asli happenings.

The check-list of newspaper references compiled by Hood Salleh (1986) is a useful starting point; Anthony Walker (now at the Department of Anthropology, University of Ohio, Columbus) compiled a very comprehensive collection of newspaper cuttings on Orang Asli during the many years he was in Malaysia and Singapore. The Malaysian television channels frequently show short films on Orang Asli events during their news bulletins or current affairs programmes; these should not be overlooked by anyone intending to do historical research. The Orang Asli section of Radio Malaysia should still have in its keeping tapes of the many interviews with Orang Asli, in their own languages as well as in Malay, that have been broadcast over the years.

Not to be overlooked are the many biographical and travel-adventure books on the Malay Peninsula which contain specific accounts of Orang Asli events that are unobtainable from any other source. Claudia Parsons' amusing *Vagabondage* (1941), for example, devotes a few pages (177-180) and two intriguing photographs to the time she spent among the Korbu Temiars in the mid-thirties with H.D. Noone and Kilton Stewart, whose secretary she was. Pamela Gouldsbury's *Jungle nurse* (1960), written 'to the memory of Peter Williams-Hunt and also for his son Bah Toneh', provides a great deal of information on the proto-history of the Jabatan Orang Asli and of the Ulu Gombak hospital during the 1950s, in which events she was intimately involved.

Professor Khoo Kay Kim and Dr Shahril Thalib, two leading Malaysia historians, have personally affirmed the possibility for historical research on the Orang Asli. As a starting point, they suggested examining the many scattered references to Orang Asli that appear in the Colonial records and in records kept in the various State Secretariat libraries.²⁵ Researching into sources of this kind requires a thoroughly professional approach, and is therefore best left to an historian rather than to a sociologist or anthropologist. But there are enough people qualified in both fields, or who are unafraid of working across disciplines, for the task to be undertaken without delay.²⁶ Ideally, the writing of Orang Asli history should commence as a series of MA or PhD theses jointly supervised by historians and social scientists. In Malaysia the mood of academic history is at present so thoroughly sociological that it should not prove difficult to find two or three young scholars to take up this most urgently-needed task.

MATERIAL ASPECTS OF ORANG ASLI LIFE: ARTS, TECHNOLOGY, ECOLOGY, EPIDEMIOLOGY

A few studies have appeared on each of these topics, some quite excellent. Kirk Endicott (1972) published a photo-essay on Batek blowpipe-making. Marie-Andree Couillard's book (1980) on Jah Hut wood carving gives much space to the social, cultural and economic context of this now famous

body of indigenous art. The same topic was worked on from a different angle by Roland Werner (1975), who (with his background as a professor of otorhinolaryngology) also published a professional, even clinical, study (1973) of the 'embouchure' aspects of Orang Asli nose-flute playing! He worked on Mah Meri carving (1974) as well, a field to which Shahrum Yub (1964, 1965) also made a contribution. John Blacking, now a distinguished ethnomusicologist, wrote an account (1954-55) of the Orang Asli musical instruments available in the museum collections during the 1950s; unfortunately he has never returned to Orang Asli studies.

Rosemary Gianni made a very thorough and fully documented collection of Semelai material culture, on which I hope she will one day publish. Also unpublished is a detailed study by Robert Dentan (1963) of Semelai technology, which includes much relevant behavioural information along with the material analyses. One other Semelai study is legal-scholar Barry Hooker's account (1968) of the housebuilding processes he observed while researching Semelai jural notions of the person. According to the *Orang Asli Studies Newsletter*, Amir Rahman, working in Switzerland, has been making studies of Temiar material culture, but I am not aware of any publications by him on the topic.

These various essays might seem to add up to a lot, but the study of Orang Asli material culture is still in its infancy — and at current rates it may never mature. No one, to my knowledge, has attempted to put it all together in a systematic way, and hardly anyone places material culture high on their list of priorities when planning to do Orang Asli research. Yet this is the domain of Orang Asli culture that is currently changing most rapidly, and it will soon be too late to recover it in detail.

If, as is often claimed, the Orang Asli invented an outstandingly rich 'bamboo culture', then it should be recorded in loving detail now, before it disappears. In the mid 1960s I took a group of younger Temiar men to the Taiping Museum and the Muzium Negara, only to find that I had to explain to them just what were the various objects on display in the Orang Asli collection, for the objects had already passed out of use. Only once have I seen an Orang Asli wearing clothing made of barkcloth: that was in 1964, in a remote Temiar village high up in the mountains of Perak. Some older people could then still give me an account of how barkcloth was made, but they never actually did the job any more.

These comments may read like an exercise in sentimentality: but what has disappeared represents a serious loss of human *knowledge*, of the sort that we have a duty to record for future generations. Just how vast was the knowledge people had of handling and transforming materials is apparent from the researches of Professor Hal Conklin among the Ifugao of highland Luzon. Anyone who feels able to take on the task of studying Orang Asli material adaptations before it is too late should try to work with Professor Conklin: failing this, a careful reading of his magistral

Ethnographic atlas of Ifugao culture would be a good place to start.

Much cultural knowledge, also under threat, lies embedded in Orang Asli performance arts: music, dance and oral literature. Mieczyslaw Kolinski wrote a comparative study of Orang Asli music (1930), working from cylinder recordings made by Schebesta in the 1920s (which have recently been tracked down in Austria by Shuichi Nagata). The Swiss musicologist Hans Oesch made extensive field recordings in 1963, from which he has produced a valuable, commercially available, three-disc compendium accompanied by copious notes (Oesch n.d.). He has also published a few technical papers on Orang Asli music (e.g. Oesch 1973, 1974). Marina Roseman has carried out very detailed ethnographic research on Temiar music and its sociocultural context (e.g. Roseman 1984, a prize-winning essay!), nicely complemented by Sue Jennings's independently pursued studies (1986, 1988) of dance and bodily techniques in the same Temiar communities. Couillard, Cardoza and Martinez have published an analytical essay (1982) on Jah Hut music.

Motivated more by connoisseurship than musicology, I made many hours of high-fidelity music recordings among the Temiar, Semais, Jehais, Mendriqs and Bateks in the 1960s and 1970s — including some re-takes of performances by the same individual singers that H. Noone had recorded in 1940. I have yet to do any serious research on this material.²⁷ Ivan Polunin, who has many commercial sound-recordings and ethnographic films to his credit, has also captured much Orang Asli music on tape, especially from the south of the Peninsula. Radio Malaysia possesses a large collection of musical field-recordings, made by their Orang Asli staff since the early 1960s. In the past, they have been willing to make copies of these available in exchange for other private recordings that they felt they could use.

Orang Asli knowledge of the environment is still far too under-researched, although it formed one of the central themes of Dunn's valuable study (1975) of Temuan forest-utilisation. Some years ago, Terry Rambo (1979b) surveyed the ethnographic literature for information on Orang Asli environmental orientations: he found it grossly lacking. While he was teaching at the Universiti Malaya in the 1970s, Rambo himself managed to supervise some sophisticated ecological studies (Koh 1978, Ali 1980, Gomes 1979) on a range of Orang Asli settlements, done from the 'flow of energy' point of view. This promising work has not been continued, however, except insofar as Gomes has carried some of the ideas over into his study (1986) of Semai economics. Recently, Rambo published a taut, classically ecological, monograph (Rambo 1985) based on his researches among the Semang of north Kelantan. He shows, contrary to accepted wisdom, that even at such a minimal population density the Semang way of life produces a measurable degree of environmental degradation, albeit less than that produced by other modes.

Unknown to almost all other researchers on the Orang Asli, the Japanese anthropologist Yukio Kuchikura presented a very detailed and highly ecological account of Semaq Beri foraging as his PhD dissertation — written, and now published (1987), in English. This is a major contribution to ecological and hunter-gatherer studies in general. One other thoroughly ecological study, still awaiting publication, is Kirk Endicott's Harvard PhD dissertation (1974) on Batek modes of livelihood. It has remained unpublished because it was written before the author had a chance to live with Bateks who were still following a regime of nomadic foraging. He and his wife, Karen Lampell Endicott, have since done the necessary fieldwork, and they will eventually be producing a monograph on the subject.

Despite the relative success of these efforts towards an understanding of foraging and collecting, we have yet to see a study of Orang Asli (or Malay or Chinese!) swidden-farming that can begin to measure up to the standards set by Freeman (1955) on the Iban or Conklin (1957) on the Hanunō. Again, it may soon be too late to do such work. An indication of what can be done is given by Cole's study of Temiar swiddening (1959) and Foo Eng Lee's unpublished study (1972) of Orang Asli approaches to the plant world.

A concentrated research effort on Orang Asli ecology is certainly desirable, for much of the work done on Orang Asli ways of life, especially that which claims to be concerned for 'development' or 'modernisation', is seriously spoiled by a lack of hard ecological understanding on the part of the authors. The same fault is often shared by practical development schemes, so that fundamental misunderstandings of the environmental constraints under which the Orang Asli (no less than other Malaysians) live are built into the plans. When the people themselves sometimes fail to follow the planners' dictates, they are seen as irrational or conservative, rather than — as is usually the case — simply more knowledgeable about their circumstances than others have credited them with being. Here, surely, is one area where scholarly and practical concerns can be brought together in a fruitfully collaborative research effort. (Some of these issues are discussed more concretely in Endicott 1979b).

Linked to ecology are the epidemiological concern of certain medical, genetic and physiological researchers. The classical study of this kind among the Orang Asli is Ivan Polunin's doctoral dissertation, published in 1953 as an issue of *The Medical Journal of Malaya*. The rather dismal health picture presented in that study is a detailed indictment of the conditions suffered by Orang Asli living in guarded camps during the earlier years of the Emergency, for that is where most of Polunin's research had to be carried out. A careful reading of Polunin's study will reveal much besides of ethnographic and biological-anthropological interest. Polunin later moved in both directions, for he was among the first to publish important blood-group data for Southeast Asia, including the Orang Asli

(Polunin and Sneath 1953), and he has more recently investigated the indigenous medical system of the Jah Hut.

As far as I know, there was no study to equal the scope of Polunin's until the recent doctoral dissertation of Khor Geok Lin (1985), in which she minutely related Semai nutrition both to their physiology and their life-circumstances. It is a pleasure to note also that some of the overworked medical staff at the Ulu Gombak Hospital have taken the time to publish their epidemiological findings; with their special knowledge of the situation, they were better placed to relate the data to their patients' way of life than many other medical researchers have been. I cannot claim any special knowledge of the medical literature on the Orang Asli but the following studies are representative, and contain bibliographical references to further relevant literature: Boltan 1972, Robson, Boltan and Dugdale 1973, Khoo 1977.

ORANG ASLI ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY

This is one field in which the gap appear to be closing up, as the papers collected in this volume make clear. Studies of Orang Asli economics are now well under way (see, for example, Kirk Endicott 1984, Nicholas 1985) — though I suspect that few can have been carried through in such detail as Gomes's recent study (1986) of commoditisation in a single Semai village near Tapah. One general lesson to be learnt from Gomes's research is that the concept 'subsistence economy' can be a false friend to the fieldworking economist. It has become habitual to regard a subsistence economy as present in Orang Asli communities, even when it is not: this should be examined, not assumed. Kirk Endicott's survey of the current economic status of the Orang Asli (1979b) makes the same general point — that things are not always what they seem to the outside observer when economic behaviour is involved. The literature has already witnessed a small but heated discussion on the problems of conceptualising Orang Asli economic orientations (Morris 1983, Couillard 1983). I cannot usefully add anything to this particular aspect of Orang Asli studies, which seems set to take on a life of its own.

Yet other aspects of recent socio-economic and political change warrant urgent study: the regroupment of Orang Asli settlements, the spread of world religions among the Orang Asli, interethnic relations between Orang Asli and the wider population, the role of the Ulu Gombak hospital in forging an explicit Orang Asli identity, and (most important) the organisational sociology of the Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli. Much of this work, however, would require the special cooperation of the administrative authorities if research is to get beyond the trivial, since the administration itself is an active element in the processes under question. From a sociological point of view — or just in order to gain some human understanding of the current situation of the Orang Asli — these are crucial

issues to investigate. Such work has started: see, for example Jones 1968, Carey 1976: 283-337, Walker 1983, Gordon Means 1978, Clammer 1987. The view from the administrator's position is presented at length in Jimin *et al*, 1983. A number of conference papers have also been presented on this theme in recent years, both in Malaysia and overseas, ranging from approving to critical of the current situation. Though marked 'not for citation', some of these will undoubtedly eventually be published.

It would be good if researchers who consider themselves to be sociologists (or political scientists or economists) took a bigger role in Orang Asli studies, not at the expense of other approaches but as the bearers of a potentially valuable complementary approach. There has been a tendency in Malaysia to link 'anthropology' with 'Orang Asli', almost to the extent of excluding the anthropologists from any other field of study and the sociologists from Orang Asli studies. This is justifiable neither in social theory nor in investigative practice. It lead, moreover, to a self defeating approach — the treatment of the Orang Asli as a people or society apart, when in fact they have been intimately involved in social currents flowing throughout the Peninsula for centuries and millennia past, as they continue to be today. One way in which this tendency can be diluted is if more researchers were to work on both Orang Asli and Malay society. A few have already done so,²⁸ but there is room many more.

NOTES

¹The addition of a pluralising *-s* to the end of this and other Orang Asli ethnonyms is deliberate. The aim is to supplant such old-fashioned usages as 'the Temiar' or 'the Semelai', for these imply that we are referring to homogeneous 'tribes'. It is better, I think, to view the Orang Asli as pluralities of *individuals* — 'the Temiars', 'the Semelais' — whose lives are sometimes, somehow, but non-determinedly, relatable to the ethnic labels. Those who find this usage strange should note that only a few decades ago English writers regularly used 'the Malay' in favour of the now universal 'the Malays'. As recently as 1945, for example, the anthropologist Fay-Cooper Cole titled three successive chapters in the same book *The Pygmies, The Sakai and The Malay of the Peninsula*, the first of which indicates that he had a plural meaning in mind for all. (The plural *-s* does not work well however with such forms as *Semaq Beri, Orang Hulu, or Hma' Betise'*, where the word-shapes resist suffixation). This procedure is admittedly not without its ambiguities: but I believe we should at least try to shape our usage to suit what we really mean, in this field especially.

²A valuable account of the state of Orang Asli studies up to that time is provided by Ute Schwartz's PhD thesis (1971): but since this study is unpublished, and in German, it is likely to remain unknown to the majority of Malaysian researchers.

³Remarkably, I had never before met Robert Dentan, despite twenty years of sporadic letter writing. For a brief report of the Buffolo symposium, see *Orang Asli Studies Newsletter* no. 5 (October 1986), p.1.

⁴Akim bin Buntat, *Masalah sosial dan latihan dalam perniagaan Orang Asli di Malaysia*; Long bin Jidin, *Pembangunan dan masa depan Orang Asli di Semenanjung Malaysia*; Itam Wali bin Nawan, *Sikap dan penyertaan politik di kqlangan Orang Asli*; Juli Edo, *Bentuk pendidikan dan masalah pencapaian akademik Orang Asli kini*; Uda Hassan Itam, *Imej Orang Asli dan interaksi sosial dalam masyarakat Malaysia*; Achom Luji, *Kebudayaan Orang Asli dan*

kebudayaan kebangsaan; Tony Williams-Hunt, *Masalah Ekonomi Orang Asli*.

The *Symposium Pembangunan dan Masa Depan Orang Asli di Semenanjung Malaysia* was held at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, on 26 November 1984.

⁵The after mentioned 1979 issue of the *Federation Museums journal* contains useful lists of such studies — including pieces of merely 'attempted research'! — prepared by Azizah Kassim, Anthony Walker, the University of Malaya Library and the Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli.

⁶The task of keeping in touch with recent research would have been much easier if everyone who had written a thesis, book or article about the Orang Asli had announced the fact in the *Orang Asli Studies Newsletter*. Currently, the editor is Professor Kirk Endicott, Department of Anthropology, Dartmouth College, Hanover NH 03755, U.S.A The *Newsletter* it distributed free to all who wish to receive it — on the unspoken assumption that, whenever possible, they contribute appropriate information to the editor to make its continued publication feasible.

⁷Some Malay speakers are reluctant to apply the word *agama* to any other religion than Islam; this has already led to occasional confusion among Malaysian researchers.

⁸*Suku-suku terasing* appears to be term currently favoured in Indonesia to refer that country's pagan tribal communities. I assume that *terasing* here means 'accidentally apart [from the mainstream]' (rather than 'foreign' or 'exotic', as the word might imply to many Malaysians).

⁹The best possible outcome, in my view, would be for the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's suggestion, *agama*, to be accepted by all, in the *general* sense intended by the English term 'religion'. This, it is true, may conflict too much with the ordinary use of the word *agama* in Malay — though it should be remembered that those who write in English meet with similar problems when using the word 'religion' as a technical term.

¹⁰An interesting side-effect of these studies has been to force a re-assessment of the major, though spurious, claim to fame of the Orang Asli in the wider world, the USA especially. I refer to the assertion that the Orang Asli hold the secret of maintaining world peace through a highly developed dream-based psychotherapeutic system. Although we have probably not heard the last of 'Senoi dream-therapy' — I still regularly receive enquiring letters on the topic from all over world — the issues have been very thoroughly discussed and disposed of in several recent studies: Dentan 1983, Bräunlein 1984 and Domhoff 1985. Other studies are in preparation.

Paradoxically, while the non-academic public has tended to see the Senoi as paragons of peaceableness, a growing number of professional anthropologists with no direct field-experience of Malaysia have been seeing the very same people as prime exponents of an innately aggressive 'blood drunkenness'. The reasons for this misreading are tracked down in Dentan and Robarchek 1987, where the claim is thoroughly refuted.

¹¹Howell (1981), Jennings (1988) and Clayton Robarchek (1977, 1979), however, are rare examples of psychologically orientated work on the Orang Asli.

¹²Let me re-assert the 'Aslian' as a linguistic term properly applies only to the Mon-Khmer languages spoken by Orang Asli (and their immediate relatives in southern Thailand), thought of as a distinct sub-family within Mon-Khmer. 'Aslian' does not refer — as several writers seem to have assumed — to just *any* Orang Asli language. Moreover, the Aslian languages are not merely 'related to' "connected with" the Mon-Khmer languages, as may authors still put it the *are* Mon-Khmer languages, as fully so as any other members of that family.

¹³The main sources for this classification are Diffloth 1975 and Benjamin 1976a. The importance of the Aslian languages for an understanding of Peninsular history and ethnology has been discussed in Diffloth 1977, 1979, Bellwood 1985, Benjamin 1985a, 1986a, *in press*, and Fix *in press*. For a detailed language map of the Malay Peninsula, see Benjamin 1983.

¹⁴On the other hand, Malaysian archaeologists (such as Adi Haji Taha, Zuraina Majid, Nik Hassan Shuhaimi bin Nik Abd Rahman and Leong Sau Heng) are well acquainted with the issues, for they have been making original contributions to the field. It is regrettable that their opinions have not been sought more often by local textbook-writers and journalists, who continue to employ long-outdated theories of the peopling of Malaysia.

¹⁵See Keesing 1981, Chapter 7, for this most useful way of characterising certain favourite social-science approaches.

¹⁶Some such textbooks have been read by Orang Asli children in their primary schools. One of these books, opened at random some years ago while I was visiting a Temiar school in Ulu Kelantan, proclaims that the 'Jakun' are *lebih berakal* 'brighter' than the 'Senoi', and that the Senoi are in turn *lebih berakal* than the 'Negritos'. No Malaysian, let alone an Orang Asli schoolchild, should be treated to such a misunderstood and demeaning variety of vulgarised cultural-evolutionism. This particular book — which I hope was an isolated example — must have got through the usually quite stringent screening applied by the Educational Ministry to school textbooks and by the Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli unfavourable characterizations of the Orang Asli in newspapers and other media.

¹⁷One such group are the Mintils of northern Pahang, some of whom I met in the late 1960s at the Ulu Gombak hospital while collecting lexical materials on the Aslian languages. The Mintils have still not been studied in the field, despite the fact that their language shows them to be distinct from any group mentioned in the standard classification of Orang Asli groups; the closest relative is Batek. (The Mintils sometimes appear on Orang Asli distribution-maps as southerly 'Mendriq' — which they are not, either linguistically or by self-identification). They were visited in their home territory by nursing staff from Gombak hospital in the 1960s, when some of them could occasionally be seen around Cegar Perah railway station in northern Pahang.

¹⁸Malayan archaeology is, of course, *Melayu* archaeology too, for at prehistoric time-depths (as I argued earlier) the current distinction between 'Melayu' and 'Orang Asli' fades almost into nothingness. The appropriate English-language cover-term here is 'indigenous', and I have used it elsewhere quite happily with this meaning (see, e.g., Benjamin 1979). The reason I have not referred these ideas to the current Malaysian term *Bumiputera* ('son-of-the-soil', 'indigenous') is simply that this semi-official word makes appeal solely to present-day political formulations; its use in any other sphere of discourse would greatly confuse the issues. However appropriate the word *Bumiputera* may — or may not — be in other contexts, it does not serve as the appropriate translation into Malay of 'indigenous' as used in the present context.

¹⁹Diffloth's current work makes use of Aslian materials, however, thereby helping us to see the broader regional picture. The phonologically conservative character of these languages makes them crucial to the historical study of Mon-Khmer — the language-family most clearly indigenous to mainland Southeast Asia — and hence of the utmost importance to the study of the region's complicated history and ethnology. This argument has been presented in non-technical terms by Diffloth himself (1979).

²⁰It is pity that Signe Howell's collection of Chewong stories (1982) appears only in English translation, for there are no useful published materials on this fascinating language.

²¹A version of Matisoff's study may appear in the *Orang Asli studies newsletter* before undergoing final revision for Cambridge University Press.

²²The Semang of southern Thailand are even less well known, although there are at least two groups there — the Tèn'en of Satun (Phaiboon 1984:8) and the Mos of Patalung (Evans 1927: 1-4) — in addition to those further south (mainly Kensius and Jahais) who still move back and forth across the border between Thailand and Malaysia.

²³Maeda subsequently went on to study Malay Society in Melaka; later still he did fieldwork

in Sulawesi. Once again, we have to record the loss of a major researcher from Orang Asli studies.

²⁴Plans are under way for the publication of a collection of essays on the theme of Orang Asli social organisation, under the joint editorship of Rosemary Gianno and Barbara Nowak: this should help right the balance somewhat.

²⁵One such document, made available to me by Kirk Endicott, is Signor C.F. Bozzolo's account (1880) of his travels in the inland portions of Patani, Perak and Kelantan a century ago. I found this very useful in preparing an ethnohistorical paper on Kelantan (Benjamin *in press*). Several other such sources are listed in Ron Hill's book (1977).

²⁶As a model, think only of the work of J.M. Gullick (1987, especially) on the historical anthropology of the Peninsular Malays.

²⁷I shall be happy to make copies of these tapes available to those who feel they can make use of them. H.D. Noone's 1940 recordings are available commercially on an LP entitled *Temiar dream songs from Malaya*, Ethnic Folkways Library P460; the accompanying notes on the song-lyrics by Noone himself, though detailed, are unfortunately rather inaccurate.

²⁸Among others: Abdullah Hassan, Asmah Haji Omar, Azizah Kassim, Marie-Andrée Couillard, Kirk Endicott, Hood Salleh, Barry Hooker, Narifumi Maeda, Mohd Razha bin Haji Abd Rashid, Nik Safiah Karim, Normala Manap, Wazir Karim, Vivienne Wee (just over the border, in Singapore and Indonesian Riau), and myself.

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