

# LIVING ON THE PERIPHERY; Development and Islamization among the Orang Asli in Malaysia

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LIVING ON THE PERIPHERY  
Development and Islamization  
among the Orang Asli in Malaysia

Nobuta Toshihiro

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# LIVING ON THE PERIPHERY

## Development and Islamization among the Orang Asli in Malaysia



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## Abbreviations

The names of the governmental and other bodies are fully spelled out when first mentioned and thereafter referred to by their abbreviations. The following abbreviations are used:

CPM	Communist Party of Malaya
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
JAKIM	Department of Islamic Development
JHEOA	Department of Orang Asli Affairs
JKKK	Village Development and Security Committee
PERKIM	Muslim Welfare Organization of Malaysia
POASM	Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Association
PPRT	Program for the Development of the Hardcore Poor
RISDA	Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority
UMNO	United Malays National Organization

## Malaysian Currency

The Ringgit is the currency of Malaysia. One ringgit is divided into 100 sen. At the time of the research, a ringgit was worth about 50 Japanese yen: one U.S. dollar was worth about 2.7 ringgit. The abbreviation RM (Ringgit Malaysia) is used in the charts.

## Preface

This book grew out of the doctoral dissertation I submitted to the Graduate School of Social Science, Tokyo Metropolitan University, in 2002. It has been revised and edited extensively for publication. The preliminary research for the study was carried out over two months from December 1995 to February 1996, and was funded by the Shibusawa Fund for Ethnological Studies. The main fieldwork was conducted over twenty-seven months from May 1996 to September 1998, and was funded by the Fuji Xerox Setsutaro Kobayashi Memorial Fund and the Asian Scholarship Program of the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of Japan. The supplementary research was carried out over two weeks in March 2001, and was funded by Tokyo Metropolitan University.

The aim of this book is to elucidate the processes of development and Islamization among the Orang Asli from a social anthropological point of view. The Orang Asli are the indigenous minority in the Malay Peninsula, and have been marginalized in Malaysian history and society. In this book I try, as much as possible, to understand and consider the life of the Orang Asli and the world from their point of view.

In the early part of my fieldwork I was adopted as a member of an Orang Asli family and became deeply involved in their everyday lives and their religious problems. I gradually felt sympathy for those who were attempting to resist the state-led Islamization policy. As an ethnographer, as well as “a member” of their community, I felt the necessity of recording their everyday practices and writing down their behaviors and emotional responses to the Islamization processes.

I cannot mention all the people for whose help and encouragement I owe many thanks. First, however, I would like to thank the Orang Asli people, especially the villagers in Kampung Durian Tawar (which is a pseudonym) for their warm hospitality and support. Without their help, I could not have completed my fieldwork. In particular, I would like to thank Asat, who is my research assistant and my “brother”. And my special thanks go to Tok Batin, my “uncle”.



**Plates 1 & 2: The adoption ceremony.** I was adopted (*kedim*) as a “younger brother” (*adik angkat*, adopted younger sibling) of the daughter of a deceased sister of Batin Janggut (in striped shirt). Members of Batin Janggut’s matrilineal descent group participated in the *kedim* ceremony. I became a member of this group and was given the title of Panglima (warrior) and the village name of Rantau by Batin Janggut. In the village, I was addressed as (Panglima) Rantau. [NT-1997]

For my research in Japan during my graduate school studies I would like to thank Professor Makoto Itoh (my supervisor), Professor Makio Matsuzono, Professor Yoshio Watanabe, Professor Kazuo Ohtsuka and Professor Satoshi Tanahashi at the Department of Social Anthropology, Tokyo Metropolitan University. Under their guidance, I learned how to think as a social anthropologist. For the periods during and after my fieldwork, I owe many thanks for the help and encouragement of the

following: Professor Masaru Miyamoto, who was also a member of my doctoral dissertation committee, Professor Tomiyuki Uesugi, Professor Hisashi Endo, Professor Koji Miyazaki, Professor Yasushi Kosugi, Professor Akitoshi Shimizu, Professor Narifumi Tachimoto and Professor Tsuyoshi Kato.

In relation to my stay as a student in Malaysia, I would like to thank Professor Hood Salleh, Professor Hasan Mat Nor and Professor Shamsul Amri Baharuddin at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Without their help and support I could not have continued my study and conducted my field research among the Orang Asli. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Mohamed Yusoff Ismail and his family for their warm hospitality and support. I also would like to thank Dr. Colin Nicholas for his appropriate advice as to the current political and economic situation of the Orang Asli. I thank Dr. Kazufumi Nagatsu and Dr. Naoki Soda for their useful contributions to our discussions about Malaysian society and politics.

It took quite a while before I was able to publish my book. In May 2002, on Professor Narifumi Tachimoto's suggestion, I submitted my original manuscript, written in Japanese, to the editorial committee of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University. The book was published in Japanese by Kyoto University Press in December 2004 after about two years of extensive revisions based on the editorial committee's suggestions. I would like to thank Dr. Noboru Ishikawa and the anonymous referees.

After the publication of my book, I attempted many times to translate the book into English. However, because of my poor ability in English, the work did not progress well. In November 2005 I decided to apply to the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science to have my book published in English. My application was accepted in April 2006. I am deeply grateful to the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for the "Grant-in-Aid for Publication of Scientific Research Results", which made this publication possible. In the process of translation, which took two years, the editors and translators at Kyoto University Press and Trans Pacific Press were always helpful to me.

I submitted the English manuscript to the editorial committee of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University in February 2007. I would like to thank Professor Yoko Hayami and the anonymous referees of the manuscript, who read it with great care and gave me thought-provoking comments and suggestions. Dr. Colin Nicholas, one of the referees, recommended that the editorial committee publish my

book in Malaysia. I am especially grateful to Dr. Nicholas for his kind consideration.

This edition of the book is published by COAC (Center for Orang Asli Concerns). I am very thankful to Dr. Colin Nicholas, Ms. Puah Sze Ning, and Ms. Jenita Engi for their good services in the process of preparing this book for publication. This edition has a new fine layout and many more photos.

The publication of this book in Malaysia was funded by the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan. I wish to express my gratitude to the members of editorial committee of the National Museum of Ethnology for their kind considerations.

The comments and suggestions I received from Professor Tsuyoshi Kato, one of recommended referees of the editorial committee of the National Museum of Ethnology, were invaluable in rewriting the manuscript at the final stage of editing. Thanks to his comments and suggestions, this book is better than the one in Japanese.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, my parents-in-law and my sister's family for their support and encouragement. And my special thanks go to my wife, Tomomi, and my dear daughter, Shizuka. In particular, I would like to thank Shizuka for giving me a new opportunity to think about people living on the periphery.

March 2009  
Kyoto

# Prologue

## **Evolution of the Research Topic**

This ethnographic study examines the impact of state-led development projects and Islamization on Orang Asli society, and the Orang Asli's reactions to these forces.

The Orang Asli are believed to be descendants of the first settlers on the Malay Peninsula. They are believed to have settled there earlier than the Malays, who are the core of the Bumiputra (meaning original settlers, literally “sons of the earth”).<sup>1</sup> The Malays claim political supremacy over the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia because of their earlier arrival in the country. Yet such claims conflict with the position they have taken with regard to the earlier settlers, the Orang Asli.<sup>2</sup> The question of where to position the Orang Asli in respect to national unity is of prime importance for the Malaysian government's Orang Asli policy. The government considers the most appropriate path to take is to classify them as Bumiputra in preparation for their eventual assimilation with the Malays.

The Orang Asli are marginal dwellers when seen from the central position of the nation-state. On the periphery, they have formed their own world and have existed relatively independently of the nation-state. The government in the center has been deploying various measures to integrate those people living on its margins. In this context, the development projects and the Islamization policy intended for the Orang Asli have become firmly entrenched as the mechanism for their integration into the nation-state.

This book discusses the development projects and the Islamization policy directed towards the Orang Asli. The issue of Islamization runs through the entire volume, along with issues arising from development projects. This book does not deal directly with the development projects aimed at the Orang Asli, but in discussing the socioeconomic state of a village we need to consider the aspect of development.

Kampung Durian Tawar (pseudonym), the village where I carried out my research, has become stratified along socioeconomic lines as a result of the development projects. I stress this because, in Kampung Durian Tawar, the social order established in response to the introduction of the state-led development projects in the 1970s has in turn been reorganized due to the impact of Islamization since the late 1990s. The lower economic segment of the village population has been targeted for Islamic conversion. The upper economic segment of the population has opposed Islamization in order to protect the social order established as a result of the development projects. It is important to note that both the development projects and Islamization, though implemented in different decades, have been imposed by a nation-state keen to see the Orang Asli integrated.

There is no shortage of problems arising from development projects and Islamization in the history of Kampung Durian Tawar. In short, anyone doing fieldwork in this tiny village in Malaysia at the end of the twentieth century would have been confronted by the problems caused by development projects and Islamization. I want to stress here that I had done no research into these problems before, but, by being there, I inevitably stumbled onto the topic of “development and Islamization among the Orang Asli”.

My initial study topic had been to examine the socioeconomic situation of a village and to learn about its relationship with the state-led development projects. My application to the Malaysian government for a permit to carry out research did focus on that aim, although I also wanted to investigate the survival strategies of the Orang Asli in multi-ethnic Malaysia. However, the state-led Islamization policy and the Orang Asli’s response were not included in my initial research objectives.

My experiences in the field engaged my research interest in Islamization, as well as in the development projects. In June 1996 I began my field research while living in an Orang Asli village, or, to be more precise, a village of the Temuan people, in the state of Negeri Sembilan in Malaysia. In the village in which I first lived, Kampung Banning (pseudonym), I began to acquire the unique language of the Orang Asli, which might be considered a Malay dialect, through attending the village primary school and playing with the children who lived in the dormitory adjacent to the school. I also attempted to mingle with the village community by frequenting the village shop and having rudimentary conversations with the villagers over a cup of tea. I gradually increased my local knowledge, in bits and pieces. When I thought the villagers were used to my presence, I began an interview survey of households.

I became accustomed to life there and began to understand the social structure of the village. However, due to various unforeseen circumstances, I had to change field locations. One such circumstance was that I became ill with urethral calculus, to the point of being hospitalized. After I was discharged from the hospital, I could not continue my research in Kampung Baniang due to the fatigue from the operation and the fever.

Worse, while I was recuperating, a youth from next door, who was a troublemaker in the village, started to take out his frustrations by harassing me. He was frustrated because the village had ostracized him and his family because they had converted to Islam (his father was Orang Asli-Chinese and his mother was Malay). He vented his unhappiness by consuming alcohol and illicit drugs, by gambling, fighting and stealing, and by harassing me, the outsider. Being in the same age group (I was twenty-seven and he was in his early twenties), I tried hard to understand him in the very early stages of my research, but in the end it did not work out.<sup>3</sup> It became too difficult to remain in Kampung Baniang. This had a great impact on my subsequent research. In December 1996 I moved to Kampung Durian Tawar, the setting for this book.

When I made up my mind to change field locations, I wanted to leave Kampung Baniang as quickly as possible. In a way, I felt depressed by a sense of failure. I was also becoming aware of the position of Islamic converts in Orang Asli society. In Kampung Durian Tawar I was adopted by a family so that I could be protected from any trouble I might encounter.<sup>4</sup> The relatives were obliged to look after me as an adopted family member. I acquired an uncle, aunt, brothers, cousins, nephews and nieces. In Kampung Baniang I had been just a researcher, an outsider to the villagers. They had no obligation to help me, even when I was in trouble.

I welcomed being adopted as a member of the village of Kampung Durian Tawar, but it restricted my movements as a researcher. I was adopted by a family who had not converted to Islam, so I was not welcomed by some converted families. The problems associated with Islamization were even more serious at this village, which had a population of about 400; converted Muslims made up some thirty members of them. This number includes those who converted during my stay. As from March 1997, tensions surrounding the Islamic converts began surfacing in the village.

Before beginning my research I did not really understand the seriousness of the problems the Orang Asli were having with Islamization, and had virtually no information on the subject. I gained knowledge as I carried out my research. Every time I heard about an incident involving

Islamic conversion, I found myself thinking about what Islam meant to the Orang Asli. I initially looked for written material on the subject, but finding any was quite difficult, due to the sensitivity of the issue. The Malaysian government does not welcome discussion on the Islamization of the Orang Asli.

I became interested in the attitudes of the Orang Asli who continued to resist Islamic conversion, particularly in today's Malaysia where Islam is overwhelmingly dominant. Refusing to be converted was not necessarily a wise socioeconomic strategy. Being converted and being able to enjoy equal rights with the Malays would seem to be a wiser, more rational strategy.

Yet they continued to resist conversion. Why, I wondered, when the benefits of becoming Muslim were right in front of their eyes, did they so stubbornly resist conversion to Islam? This was the question I found myself asking as a result of my fieldwork experiences. In this book I develop this question further and examine it through data gathered in the field, as well as through some written documents. The starting point for my book was, thus, not among written texts, but in the field.

### **Development and Islamization**

In the insular Southeast Asian countries, development policies targeting the marginal areas have been extensive. The objective has been to integrate the marginal regions into the respective nation-states. The policies have brought about drastic social changes to marginal areas, increasingly integrating them socioeconomically and politically into the system of the nation-state.

In this book I describe various incidents that have taken place in response to the development projects in Malaysian villages, noting, in particular, that these alter not only economic conditions but also people's consciousness and even identity. As Adachi (1993) notes, people do not become aware of their "underdeveloped-ness" just because this best describes their condition, but because this is what they are told by others. It is also possible that some people, who initially accepted the argument for development, may have changed their minds after living through the projects.

In Kampung Durian Tawar those who have accepted the development projects criticize those who attain value from their traditional livelihoods (i.e. hunting and gathering, and day laboring). Conversely, those who have not accepted the development projects envy the economic affluence enjoyed by those who have accepted them. There are cases of anti-development

people who have converted to Islam (even though this is linked to the development), and pro-development people who have refused conversion (a situation not anticipated by the government).<sup>5</sup>

The cause of these phenomena lies in the fact that in Malaysia, where the state religion is Islam, the state-led development projects implicitly and explicitly carry religious connotations. Under the New Economic Policy, which has been followed since the 1970s and favors the Malays among the Bumiputra, being a Muslim is an unstated prerequisite for receiving economic benefits. As Chapter 2 shows, the government's Orang Asli policy since the 1980s has included in its economic development projects the clear aim of promoting conversion to Islam.

Although they have maintained their own unique society on the peripheral area of the larger society, Orang Asli autonomy has been undermined by state-led development projects and Islamization. This has created a situation that can be described as "internal colonialism" (Nicholas 2000: 233).

The response of the Orang Asli to Islamization under these circumstances is either to accept conversion to a world religion, or to refuse it. Of course, there are a myriad of options between these two. First, the Orang Asli may convert to Islam. While some genuinely convert, others do so only nominally. Second, going against the tide of Islamization, conversion to Christianity or another world religion is possible, and they do not need to convert to Islam. Here, too, the conversion can be genuine or just for the sake of convenience. Third, some convert to Islam for personal reasons, such as marrying a Muslim ("Marrying a Muslim but remaining non-Muslim" is not an option according to the national law of Malaysia, nor to Islamic law).

Refusing Islamic conversion, and therefore resisting Islamization, may seem difficult to understand for the proponents of Islamization. To resist Islam, the state religion, is seen as an act of defiance against the nation-state, and is politically very dangerous. The alternative – converting to Islam – opens the door to receiving government assistance and becoming part of the dominant ethnic group of the Malays. In these circumstances, it appears unwise not to convert to Islam and unreasonable to resist Islamization.

To be perfectly clear, the meaning I want to convey by the phrase "resisting Islamization" is evident in the following story that I heard. A man was being forced by the relatives of his wife (who had converted to Islam) to sign and to put his fingerprint on the paper to accept conversion. The converted people grabbed the man by the right arm, in order to

force him to sign and stamp his finger on the paper. The man desperately resisted. This man's determination is my starting point.<sup>6</sup>

The decision to convert or to resist conversion has brought about a division in the Orang Asli community. The ethnic classification of Orang Asli, used merely to describe a concept in opposition to the Muslim Malay population, includes a range of diverse people – from Muslim people very much like the Malays to non-Muslims who differ markedly from the Malays, and converts to non-Islamic religions. In some villages one group of people lives separately from the others as a result of conflict between them over religious matters. There are some instances where such divisions cross village borders. There are also splits between family members and relatives, which clearly show the seriousness of the problems caused by Islamization.<sup>7</sup>

### **A History of Orang Asli Studies**

Early studies of the Orang Asli focused on aspects of their livelihood such as hunting and gathering, and swidden cultivation; their traditional belief system, including animism; their kinship organization and their social order; their mode of living as forest people; and so on. These studies treated the subject as a static entity, and have been criticized. More recently, studies focusing on the dynamic relationship of the Orang Asli with the nation-state are gaining in popularity. The research focus has shifted from the “traditional” mode of living to the contemporary way of life of the Orang Asli. Orang Asli scholars, for example, are becoming more interested in problems arising from inadequate land ownership, poverty and other social problems caused by the development projects and social changes.

Scholars are also more interested in the ethnic identity of the Orang Asli, and in other contemporary issues including their political rights. My period of field study coincided with the time when these discussions about the contemporary Orang Asli situation were taking place. In the following paragraphs I reflect on the history of studies of the Orang Asli.<sup>8</sup>

Writings about the Orang Asli date back to the early British colonial period (e.g. Anderson 1824, 1850; Newbold [1839] 1971; Logan 1847; Farve 1848; Mikluho-Maclay 1878; Maxwell 1880; Swettenham 1880, 1887; Borie 1887). These writings tended to be collections of fragmented descriptions based on each writer's experiences. Later, an increasing number of more detailed ethnographical reports appeared (e.g. Anandale and Robinson 1903; Skeat and Blagden 1906; Cerruti 1904, 1908; Evans 1923; Schebesta [1928] 1973; Noone 1936). However, apart from the works

of Evans and Noone, most were in essence reports of the writer's field trip experiences. As directors of the Perak Museum, Evans and Noone carried out research on a number of visits to different Orang Asli communities on the Malay Peninsula. Evans visited Negeri Sembilan (Evans 1915), the same setting for this book. Noone lived for a long period with the Orang Asli, and married an Orang Asli woman.

British colonial rule ended with the Japanese military invasion, and the surrender of the Japanese was followed by the Emergency period (1948-60). During this time of turbulence, virtually no research was conducted on the Orang Asli. Politically, however, this time of upheaval was most significant for the Orang Asli. It was during this time that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs was established. The first two directors of the department each conducted research on the Orang Asli (Williams-Hunt 1952; Noone, R.O.D. 1954). Williams-Hunt's *An Introduction to the Malayan Aborigines* (1952) was written primarily as a guidebook on the Orang Asli for British Commonwealth soldiers.

Scholarly fieldwork studies increased in number after the independence of Malaysia, and were mostly carried out by social and cultural anthropologists. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, European and American, as well as Japanese, anthropologists conducted fieldwork studies (e.g. Needham 1964a; Dentan 1965, 1968; Benjamin 1967; Endicott 1974, 1979; Dunn 1975; Robarchek 1977; Laird 1978; Couillard 1980; Rambo 1982, 1988; Howell 1984; Gianno 1990; Roseman 1991; Jenning 1995; Nagata 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Kuchikura 1996; Maeda (Tachimoto) 2000). At the same time, Malaysian scholars were also carrying out fieldwork research (Carey 1976a; Baharon 1973; Hood 1974, 1978; Wazir 1981; Mohd. Tap 1977, 1990; Gomes 1982, 1986; Nicholas 1985; Hasan 1992; Ramle Abdullah 1993; Razha Rashid 1996; Williams-Hunt 1996; Zawawi 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Lye 1997, 2000, 2004).<sup>9</sup>

The Orang Asli have also become an ideal subject of study for anthropological fieldwork for universities in Malaysia. From the undergraduate level to the postgraduate level, the Orang Asli have been studied in different disciplines<sup>10</sup> – proof that the Orang Asli are the nearest “other” in Malaysia to non-Orang Asli Malaysians, at least in the Malay Peninsula.

The objective of Orang Asli studies in post-independence Malaysia has been to compile ethnographic details of their society. Orang Asli society has often been mentioned as an ideal means of exploring the foundation of the Malay world. For example, Tachimoto conducted a field study into the Orang Hulu of the Melayu Asli group. While admitting

the limitations of his work as a “still picture”, he nonetheless presents the “family circle” – an important theoretical concept for Southeast Asia studies – by demonstrating that the Orang Asli society is a prototype of the Malay world (Tachimoto 2000: 7).

This book focuses on Orang Asli responses to the government’s national policies, and provides ethnographically detailed information about the inside workings of Orang Asli society. The focus here is on contemporary issues. This is because of the current predicament of the Orang Asli. It has become increasingly difficult to find in Orang Asli society the sort of cultural phenomena described in previous ethnographic studies. What we can more clearly see is the transformed society itself. Colin Nicholas, the coordinator of the Center for Orang Asli Concerns, which was established in 1989, describes the loss of traditional culture as “de-culturalization” (Nicholas 2000: 111). Partly because of this, a more contemporary focus on the relationship of the Orang Asli with the nation-state, rather than a detailed ethnographic focus, has become more common in Orang Asli studies since the 1990s (e.g. Zawawi 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Razha Rashid 1996; Nicholas 1994, 2000).

Nicholas (2000) points out that the study of the Orang Asli has shifted from a “traditional” ethnographical one to a discussion of issues that were once considered to be too sensitive and were thus avoided, such as the impact of development projects and policies, and political representation and indigenous rights, especially land rights. In these studies, the Orang Asli are not “other beings” to be objectified; their words are listened to and taken seriously. The focus of study has adjusted to what the Orang Asli themselves see and respond to in relation to government policies and the outside world.<sup>11</sup>

Among the many contemporary issues concerning the Orang Asli, this book deals with Islamization and its links to state-led development projects. This is mostly because the location of my study happened to be in one of the areas experiencing these problems, but also because I came to realize that these problems vividly illustrate today’s Orang Asli society. All the problems and issues – such as social conflict and the collapse of social order in the villages due to division over Islamic conversion, the distortion brought about by Islamization coupled with the development projects, and the issue over the legal status of the non-Muslim indigenous people in the Islamic state of Malaysia – relate to “development and Islamization”.

The main subject of this book has been discussed widely from various perspectives and positions. Endicott (1979: 199-202) argued that most of

the forest resources the Orang Asli used, and the land they had owned, had been taken away from them as a result of forced exposure to the cash economy through forest development projects. Hood and Hassan (1982) claimed that the Orang Asli had been transformed into settled farmers because of the cash economy and a shortage of land. In contrast to these arguments, Baharon, the former director of the Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (JHEOA, the Department of Orang Asli Affairs), insisted that it would be possible for them, like farmers around them, to be integrated into the national economy (he based this on his research experience in Kampung Durian Tawar).<sup>12</sup> In Kampung Durian Tawar, he reasoned, the village economy had already come to rely on the market economy, and it had adapted well.

Jimin (1992), the successor to Baharon in the position of JHEOA director, also cited Kampung Durian Tawar as a successful example. Of course, their opinions heavily reflected their political stance as directors of the JHEOA. It is remarkable that two JHEOA directors mentioned Kampung Durian Tawar village as a successful example. This book re-examines the JHEOA's claim, using concrete, empirical data. This will no doubt cause some unease in discussions among government officials about development projects and the Orang Asli.

The Islamization of the Orang Asli and its associated problems have not been discussed in any real depth in Orang Asli studies. Descriptions of the reality of Islamization emerged only in the late 1990s, when discussion of its impact took place in a more critical light (Dentan et al. 1997: 142-50; Nobuta 1999a; Nicholas 2000: 98-102).

One can think of many reasons for the paucity of analytical studies carried out on the Islamization of the Orang Asli. These include timing, politics, lack of interest on the part of academics and "silence" on the part of the Orang Asli. By timing, I mean that the villagers were not being subjected to intense Islamization in the period when the studies were carried out. Politically, the subject is too sensitive to be discussed openly in Malaysia. Scholars may not have been very interested in Islamization from the start, or, at best, may have been reluctant to address the issue. The problems may not have been apparent because the Orang Asli themselves kept quiet and refrained from action, due to the political nature of Islamization.

It is very difficult to identify the reality of Islamization among the Orang Asli. Islamic studies students at universities in Malaysia have discussed Islamic missionary activities and Islamic conversion (for example, in undergraduate academic papers).<sup>13</sup> However, the subject is always seen

from the missionaries' viewpoint – their interest in the Orang Asli is only as successful examples of Islamization and only Muslim Orang Asli are examined. These studies do not consider the viewpoint of the Orang Asli and their reactions to Islamization.

In this book, Islamization in progress among the Orang Asli is understood to be a process of integration of the marginal periphery into the nation-state. The number of Islamic converts among the Orang Asli is on the increase; if this trend continues, eventually most of them will become Muslims. The Orang Asli as an ethnic group might disappear and become Malay. Should this day arrive, this book may be considered to be a primary research-based historical record of the Islamization of the Orang Asli.

### **A Brief Summary**

This book is an ethnographic record of a community whose population, tightly knit through kinship, has been torn apart by pressures from the outside world, resulting in strife, conflict, breakdown and reconciliation. External pressure is not limited only to the present day. It has affected the community one way or another since at least the period of British colonialism. From the Orang Asli community's point of view, the development projects and Islamization, as apparatuses for national integration, are part of an historically continuous pressure exercised by the outside world.

I managed to get first-hand experience of the community response to Islamization. My experience could be incidental, but when one considers the nature of Islamization as the apparatus for national unity, it could be a logical necessity. From a broader perspective, what happens in an Orang Asli village in Malaysia at the end of the twentieth century should be examined with regard to the Orang Asli's historical and stratified relationships with the outer world.

The people living in the community are, in a sense, the people who just happened to be classified as "Orang Asli" as a matter of historical coincidence. In order to grasp what is happening to them, we need to understand the special circumstances and situations associated with the Orang Asli.

In Part I of this book I discuss the Orang Asli in the macro system, focusing on their history and the government's policies towards them. The Malaysian government has carried out its development projects and Islamization in the name of national unity, and has targeted these at the Orang Asli. Islamization, intended by the government to function as the

apparatus of integration and assimilation of these marginal people into the nation, has not functioned as anticipated.

In Parts II and III, I develop a micro-level discussion set in the village. We see what the villagers on the ground do, without losing focus on the position of the Orang Asli in the macro structure. In Part II we see the impact of external pressure on the community, in the name of the development projects. Part III looks at the effect of Islamization and how the community has responded. What I stress in the second part is that Kampung Durian Tawar has become stratified since the development projects were initiated. That is to say, there has been an economic divide between those who accepted the projects and those who either did not accept them or were excluded from them.

The socioeconomic changes brought about as a result of the projects have created splits and disharmonies in the tiny community of Kampung Durian Tawar. As I explain in Chapter 7, what I noticed was the way those who have accepted the logic of development use the forest resources. Even though they have been overwhelmed by the logic of development, they subjectively apply it to their environment. That attitude reminds me of the way they employ their customs (*adat*) in their lives.

Part III focuses on how the people respond to Islamization. Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 reveal – mainly through the villagers' thoughts on *adat* – that Kampung Durian Tawar is not a monolithic entity. The pressure of Islamization on the Orang Asli is overpowering, but even under these circumstances there are people who fight desperately to maintain their own identity. Their response may seem trivial and minor, but it should not be overlooked. Chapters 10 and 11 show the responses to Islamization.

Chapter 12, the concluding chapter, is based on my experience of revisiting Kampung Durian Tawar and examines the people's responses to Islamization. This chapter addresses the fundamental reasons for their protest against the state-led Islamization. The relationship between the stratified order created as a result of the development projects and Islamization is also considered.

## Notes

1. The category of Bumiputra includes the Malays, Orang Asli (including non-Muslims), indigenous people (including non-Muslims) in Sabah/Sarawak and so on. This category excludes the Chinese and Indian Muslims (Horii 1989: iv). For a comprehensive discussion on the political and identity issues of the Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra, see Shamsul (1996a; 1996c).
2. Malay politicians consider the existence of the indigenous Orang Asli as a nuisance. Their existence means that the Malays are “migrants and latecomers” (Mohd. Tap 1990: 13). This is not openly discussed for fear of undermining the Malay’s privileges.
3. When I revisited Kampung Durian Tawar in March 2001, I was told this youth had died in a motorcycle accident. Some said he was drunk and ran off the road, while others said he was beaten to death in a fight with some Indians. Whatever the actual cause, I was told that he was found dead one morning on the roadside with his face covered in blood.
4. Baharon, who did his research in the early 1970s, also went through family adoption (*kedim*) and became a “little brother” (*adik angkat*) of Batin Janggut (pseudonym), and was given the title (*gelaran*) of Panglima Tunggal (Baharon 1973: 31–34). *Kedim* is also practised among the Malays (cf. Swift 1965: 21, 137, 175). Incidentally, Baharon is a Malay originating from the state of Kelantan. I was adopted as a “little brother” of the daughter of a deceased sister of Batin Janggut and given the title of Panglima (warrior) Rantau. In the village I was addressed as Rantau.
5. A number of scholars have pointed out that some Orang Asli refuse to be converted to the Islamic faith even though, through the development projects, they have become settled farmers, just like the Malays, and have adopted the Malay culture (Carey 1976: 201; Dentan 1968: 103; Hood 1974: 175).
6. I need to point out here that the Orang Asli in Kampung Durian Tawar were the marginalized and the oppressed. In the village non-Muslims were marginalized and oppressed by people from the outside world (mostly Malays) and were socially discriminated against. In Malaysia having no religion is a good enough reason for discrimination. When

thinking about these situations, it may be true that they resisted the oppressors because they were the oppressed. Moreover, their resistance is actually aimed at the nation-state that represents the oppressors.

7. In this book, because I am dealing with Islamization, some may argue that I needed to examine Islamic studies carried out in Southeast Asia. However, I felt this was of secondary importance. It is understood that there has been a rise in interest in Islam in Southeast Asia in recent times. The social, political and economic aspects of Muslims in Southeast Asia have been studied by anthropologists and others (e.g. Bowen 1993; Hefner and Horvatic 1997; Hefner 2000; Pelez 2004). Some of the discussions have included the issue of Islamic practices and the opinions of “ordinary Muslims”, and the “Islam versus tradition” issue arising from Islamization at the village level (Pelez 1997; Rossler 1997). This book departs from the typical studies of Muslims. Unlike studies on Muslims that focus on “Muslim society” (for example, the Malay community), this book is, like Hefner’s work on the “Hinduists” in Java (Hefner 1985), about a “non-Muslim society”. This book is distinctive in that it deals with the Islamization of a “non-Muslim society”.
8. Concerning the history of Orang Asli studies, Lye Tuck-Po compiled a comprehensive and annotated bibliography (Lye 2001).
9. Orang Asli studies based in Malaysia were initially carried out mostly by Malay scholars, but more recently some studies have been conducted by the Orang Asli themselves (e.g. Juli Edo 1990). As it has become more difficult to obtain a study permit, Orang Asli studies based in Malaysia are increasing in number.
10. There are many dissertations based on fieldwork done by students at Malaysian universities such as Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia and supervised by professors specialized in Orang Asli studies (such as Gomes, Nagata, Hood, Hasan). (For example, Abdul Malik 1977; Abd. Razak 1986; Bustami 1980; Chan 1995; Ho 1994; Jaharah 1974; Juli Edo 1990; Khadizan and Abdul Razak 1974; Khoo 1991; Koh 1978; Lee 1976; Norsiah 1984; Omar 1978; Osman 1994; Rajmah 1971; San 1994; Shamsul et al. 1972; Siti Nazly 1993; Soh 1980; Tek 1994; Uma 1995; Zainab et al. 1972; Zainudin 1977).

11. This is not only occurring on an academic level but also in society, with the voices of Orang Asli people increasingly being heard and their social movements becoming more visible.
12. Baharon joined JHEOA in 1963 and was appointed its director in 1969 (Baharon 1973: 2).
13. Examples can be found in, for instance, bachelor theses at the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. As examples, see Abdullah Muhammad (2000); Ahmad (1984); Burhanuddin (1987); Faridah (1987); Hussein (1986); Karusin (1984); Mahi Din (1983); Nafisiah (1985); Nor Fariza (1994); Fasnida (1991); Rosnida (1991); Rohima (1988); Ruslan (1991); Siti Rohana (1984); Zainuddin (1995).

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