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Spotted Doves at War

The *Praak Sangkiil*

Abstract

Senoi Semai of Malaysia have a reputation as one of the most peaceable peoples in the world. But their nonviolence seems not to stem from “cultural tradition” but from a realistic accommodation to a violent political ecology. Epic accounts of the *Praak Sangkiil* (“non-religious war”) like the two texts presented here illuminate the people’s violent past. Although able to resist organized mass invasion, the people remained subject to sporadic vicious raiding by bands of slavers and child-stealers. Eventually, armed resistance gave way to “passive” resistance by flight into the rainforest. This article is a scholarly version of the first chapter of a proposed book that will explore how violence and nonviolence interlace in Semai life and history. An appendix addresses the question of why events like those described find no place in Malaysian history books.

Keywords: Senoi Semai—slaving—violence—Orang Asli—Peninsular Malaysia

If the pressure of outside influence is too great, and their hereditary freedom is in jeopardy, their only defense lies in flight to the interior. But they will take counter action if the pressure is weak, or they think they are being imposed-on or cheated. There are many cases of Chinese and other traders, who, having penetrated up the main rivers, have tried to cheat the hill people, or molested their women. They bide their time, but one night the trader finds his house on fire and his goods destroyed. Such extremes, however, are only resorted to if the safety of the group thereafter can be assured; which means an overwhelming attack force, followed usually by flight. There are other examples of them succumbing initially to threats of violence, and even violence itself; but they have always taken swift retaliatory action if they think they can win.

—R. O. D. Noone, *Communist Subversion of the Hill Tribes*¹

On several points, the writer [a Semai anthropologist] agrees with Dentan's writings. In general it cannot be denied that in most matters this people tends more to compromise with or to mock at than to confront people or to act violently. This nonviolent character not only runs through behavior peculiar to members of this culture but also pervades all aspects of their lives: it is salient in their taboos, customs and belief systems, for example. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that this people certainly tend towards violence if they are pressed too hard. This fact emerges from the oral narratives of this people.... In stories which contain historical elements, this fact emerges when the Indigenous People [Orang Asli] are forced to kill the followers of Panglima [Malay war chief] Hamid because the activities of Panglima Hamid constantly threatened their peace and security. In these narratives, although the violent part is sketched symbolically, still that sketch shows that this people have the tendency to resort to violence when they have no other choice. Thus this [nonviolent] character does not seem as overwhelming as Dentan describes it.

—Juli Edo, *Tradisi Lisan Masyarakat Semai*

THE SENOI SEMAI PEOPLE of Peninsular Malaysia have a deserved reputation as “what may be the most peaceful society known to anthropology” (SPONSEL and GREGOR 1994, 69). But, like the peaceability of other societies, Semai peacefulness seems rooted in a violent past (DENTAN 1992 and 1994). Documentation for that past, however, is scanty. The following account of what Semai call the Sangkiil War is the first available in any language but Malay-Indonesian.²

That version (JULI EDO 1990) is the story as told by Mat Ariff, who has played a significant role in Semai history since the 1920s (see Appendix II). His narrative reflects, of course, his own sense of how Semai should react to the dominant ethnic group in the area, loosely called “Malays” (cf. RAWSKI 1998). The Semai leader, clearly modeled on himself, repeatedly outwits the violent and stupid “Malays.” In more widespread versions, Semai (sometimes led by Malays) overwhelm attacking “Malay” forces by magic or guerilla warfare. The following account conflates these versions.

This essay is a fairly literal translation of an account of the Sangkiil War that I taped in Semai with an old Waar River headman who did not want his name made public and whom I therefore called “Tataa’ Manah,” Old Elder. He was not very happy with this account, which is unpolished, with some repetition. I am not very happy with the translation.

To try to keep some life and accuracy in the narration, I have used some transcription techniques pioneered by Dennis TEDLOCK, the ethnopoetics expert (e.g., 1983; cf. DENTAN 1988a, 55–57). The lines break where the narrator paused briefly for breath; words in smaller letters indicate whispers; and triple asterisks represent long pauses. *Italics* are used for imitative sounds. Hyphens indicate long d-r-a-w-n o-u-t words. Words in all capitals represent LOUD words.

I use crude German to translate the accented Malay spoken in the story by the invading Rawas (“Rawey” in the text) from Indonesia.³ When the narrator’s gestures seem important, I’ve put them in brackets in a different font. Ellipses (...) indicate where I’ve reluctantly left out part of the story.

THE STORY

About those olden times I know that I don’t know
 still despite the fact I don’t know
 well, you could say that of the Sangkiil story I’ve preserved a little
 This Sangkiil story was at the very beginning of those olden times
 “MALAYS” was their name
 ours “HUMANS”⁴
 There really wasn’t any other reason for it
 These people wanted to contest⁵ with us here
 so they said.
 That Malay race [was] not rural Malays from around here
 well, that race of Malays [was] the Raweys
 from inside Rawey
 outside the country
 not this country.

Start of [the city of] Tapah [in southern Perak state] there was none
 Start of [the city of] Bidor [in southern Perak state] there was none
 In Tapah no stores were open yet
 in the time of our origins when war was waged against us by the Raweys
 according to MY grandfather
 according to MY grandmother
 so that was how they [came to] war against us
 Well after that they challenged⁶ our race⁷ the Humans [to war with them]
 THEY [the Humans] DIDN'T WANT TO
 Our race the Humans said
 "We can't make war effectively
 "we here don't have enough
 "not enough weapons
 "not enough things
 "muskets among us there are none"
 They said, "Yes you can.
 "Here WE are
 "[ready to see] who's stronger
 "who loses."
 "Well" said the Humans
 "We, we don't know how to make war effectively"⁸
 Well, not very long after that
 well, figuring they would take [us] on.
 "Take'em on, what's wrong with that?"
 While they were taking us on in olden times
 they invaded Sungkey
 they invaded Bidor
 they invaded this Waar area in three places
 so the chief⁹ of Bidor-Sungkey [in south Perak]
 was Bah Mnra' by name

Well, after that, after "Bah Mnra' by name"
 well, not far from here on this Waar [River]
 in the time of Vanishing Ogre [Nyuyup Smna'¹⁰] that Vanishing Ogre, see,
 [was one of the]
 people who make war effectively [Malays]
 [The Rawey] they tried [and] fought with us Humans
 TO EXTINCTION
 they declared war in every place against us Humans here...
 Well they had enough weapons
 their swords
 their machetes
 their metal-tipped spears
 their bows in the old days
 well, among us Humans the only weaponry was just split-bamboo spears

the weaponry, just dart-quivers
 the weaponry, just blowpipes
 the weaponry, just darts
 “So how many of you want to try fighting, Humans?”
 “OKAY!
 “LET’S TRY
 But we [normally] don’t do it.”
 So the Malays said, “We can war upon your RACE.
 “[We’ll see] who’s stronger
 “who loses
 “if [you] lose, Humans, you [will be] EXTERMINATED [by] us, who are
 known as ‘the Malay people’”
 “O now the cooking’s over,
 if that’s how it is, what can you do,”
 thus [replied] the Humans.
 so when they started the war in those days
 what did they carry?
 they carried their swords
 they carried their metal-tipped spears
 they carried their...
 they carried their muskets
 the muskets in their language were a kind of musket called *kim*...
 they arrived
kan’ kan’ kan’ they tamped down [gestures tamping down muzzleloaders]
plo^{oo}oh the sound of
 their guns
 not like guns NOWADAYS
 so, getting back to the story, so they fought [with us]
 “Ah, wait,” the Humans, “Have mercy on us, no way can we do this war,
 “now you all make war on us Humans, on our race, we don’t do that
 “even though you do that, we don’t do that,
 “really, we Humans we don’t know how to wage war
 “rajahs have we none, you have rajahs
 “you have rajahs, you of the Malay race, you of the Rawey race”
 Said the Raweys arrogantly, “We don’t think you’re human if you’re not
 spotted doves¹¹
 “if you’re not spotted doves, who cares?”
 Of the Raweys how many came up into this country?
 A hundred!
 [To] places like this settlement
hwiiiiii’iinn’ they shrilled [on their war flutes¹²]
 what did they shrill?
 “Herr Kriegsführer lassen wir toten
 greifen wir an!”
 As to the Humans TO THE LAST MAN they fled TO THE LAST MAN

they ran away
 oh were they afraid!
 Let me take "they were afraid" back, half of them were afraid
 half of them killed
 after that
 after a while, no matter where.
 A magician¹³
 at Cba' Tnloop [on the Waar River],
 Vanishing Ogre
 by name [said to the victorious Rawas]
 "Well as you here make war effectively against the Human race
 "have pity a moment, have mercy in your war,
 "COME UP here [into my house]."
 "COME DOWN here"
 said the Malays.
 "COME UP here" said the Human.
 "COME DOWN to the ground."
 [But] they came up, eventually they came up into [his] house
 after they came up, "Here! Eat this one pot of rice, you hundred men
 "this is its bamboo [water] tube
 "this its bamboo
 "[see] if you can drink the water inside at one gulp...
 "you hundred men
 "[if] not, all right.
 "If you can't drink it, I tell all [you] who are of the Malay race
 "get out to the last man
 "truly you sought war with our Human race
 "eat eat eat eat of this rice
 "I've made a cucurbit side dish [for it]"
 Well, all the Humans there had run away, all of them
 all his kinsmen, all his descendants
 all his children
 every single one!
 Here
 in his country
 the outsiders wanted to chop up every last tree [into firewood].
 "Here! Drink the water!"
 they start to drink
 they drink [those] hundred men [out of] the bamboo tube, Ogre's SINGLE
 bamboo tube again
 not empty at all
 "So now if you really can't manage [to do] what we can do, [you'd better]
 acknowledge [the superiority of] us Humans."
 "Hey, easy does it!
 "If this is how things are, don't attack us, don't

“don’t you war against our Malay race [We] can’t win.”
 “Win or lose, it’s not for us to decide, not for us Humans.
 “You all, you declared war on us Humans
 “We wouldn’t have gone to war otherwise.”
 “Oh, okay, we command retreat home.”
 They retreated *strrrrrraightaway* to the lowlands.
 A little bit later, a little after that,
 again it happened that they appeared
mwiiiiis they shrilled
 What was that *mwiiiiis*? What was that shrilling?
 Bambuskriegsflaute!⁴
 [That’s what they] called [them]

 “WHERE
 “are any other Humans around here?
 “if there are [any] we want
 “unsere Schwert zu fressen!”
 What happened then?
 Bees.
Oooooo these
 these instead of their victims
 they loosed
bzzzzzzzz [went] these bees
 every last man was stung
 as many as a hundred Malays were stung
 but not really bees at all
 the stings weren’t bee stings but poisoned darts
 so they were exterminated
 so every last one of them died
 when they got home
 to their houses
 “They mutated, the Humans
 “they turned into bees
 “*Aiiiy* we lost, we Malays
 “Okay, it was bad luck, no matter”
 they said
 “it’s our turn now instead of the Humans’, we’ll test their mettle
 “Test them”

 one day they came back up
 how did they come back up?
 showed up quick and quiet
 at the settlement they made noise
 “*woooOOOOH!!*”
 Yelled everywhere

“K-o-m-m-en S-i-e a-n!
 “Toten!
 “Greifen wir an!
 “Wir Rasse malaische
 “Rasse Rawey” they [cried].
 “Have pity! with your weapons” [cried an adept]¹⁵
 “c-o-m-e u-p here” [into the adept’s house]
 up they come
 come up again
 [The adept] dumps out his dart quiver
 look! his darts rustle [as he dumps them out] he counts them “one
 “two three four”
 f-i-n-g-e-r-n-a-i-l-s
 remains one
 just one left then: “If
 “if I can pull out enough darts here for you hundred men
 “you, don’t you make war”
 Pull pull pull pull. Pull pullpullpull
 one hundred his darts
 [from the] one left
 [his] fingernails [were] his darts
 bones
 as he pulled out his bones
 he counted
 he said “Ein zwei drei vier fünf sechs sieben acht neun zehn”
 “OOOO mercy!
 “we can’t deal with this his darts are so many”
 “so if you’re asking for mercy [remember it was]
 “you there who were attacking us Humans here.”
 All aflutter¹⁶ they retreat home
 “Going home? Okay,
 okay, give it up.”
 Later one day
 another morning
 they appeared again
 what was their objective?
 The place was in Cba’ Tnloop the place of Bah Tony downstream there¹⁷
 they surrounded it
 they broke up into two parties fording the river

 they started to be blowpiped by the Humans
 they started
 “what’re the rules covering two parties fighting in the middle of a river?”
 They blowpiped again and again againagainagain
 wiped out [were the] Malays

half [of]
 them fled
 already unable to fight [back]
 “Ooo we can’t fight [back] instead [it’s] the Humans who [are] really strong”
 said the Rawey the story goes
 “still no matter
 “noch ein anderes Mal
 “in return I will kill
 “these Humans
 “I will exterminate them
 “to the last man, woman and child.”
 One person of the Humans
 was constructing
 a fish weir
 c-o-n-s-t-r-u-c-t-i-n-g it¹⁸ in the river this way
 [as] he constructed it he checked [each part] of the weir. Not long after
 in Cba’ Lngkaa’ [on the Waar] was the place
 finally “*WOOOooo*” went the war whistles
 “K-o-m-m-e-n S-i-e!
 “Wir wollen toten!
 Greifen wir an!”
Weeeeeeeel [the nasal sound of the Semai man] spinning with his sword
 “What’s that spinning?”
 Vanished this Human
 into his weir
 became a giant carp¹⁹
 a fish
 he metamorphosed! this Human!
 He was metamorphosing when they arrived
 “WHERE
 “is [the person] who was here?”
 They looked hard but he wasn’t there
 “*Ooooooooo!* Here [he is]!”
 They SLASH at the fish here
 they slash he escapes he
 he flops around flipflop flipflop flipflop flipflop flipflop flipflop flipflop
 he attacks the Malays ripslash ripslash ripslash ripslash ripslash ripslash
 his tail has become a sword!
 This Human metamorphosed
 See, that person had magical powers
 So, coming back to his magical powers,
 so the Malays were vernichtet
 pellmell they fled
 “*Aiiiy*, these Humans have a lot of magical Wissenheit
 “we here can’t handle them

“WHATEVER will I do with these Humans?
 “Ja, never mind,
 “I’ll start noch einmal the war again”
 How did they start the war “noch einmal” again?
 After they went up the Sungkey river.
 “Da kommt der verfluchte Herr Kriegsführer” [in the choked voice of a trancing adept]
 said one of the Humans there
 Bah Mnra’ by name²⁰
 carrying his sugarcane this way [in one hand like a spear]
 carrying his sugarcane this way because it was magically metamorphosed
 into his spear into his sword
 not just a single thing his sugarcane
wheeeeeeeel they shrill
 “K-o-m-m-e-n Sie!
 Wir wollen Krieg zu führen
 diese Schwerter [schwirren] *wheeeeeeeel*”
 He grasps [his sugarcane stalk] he stabs with his sugarcane
 so he stabs with his sugarcane become spear
 here there here there a hundred Malays
 half [of them] flee to last man
 So the Sangkiil War they tell about this way like this is its name
 So half those Humans
 after they fled to this area
 half these people
 they prepared darts
 Humans of our race
 “Women and children” said the Human magician
 “you prepare lots of darts
 “bags and bags full.”
 They whittle and whittle they smear [on the poison]
 night and day they work
 So after all of that there
 Our Humans here
 whatever [kind of] attack the Malays tried
 didn’t worry them
 they didn’t care [whether it was] night
 they didn’t care [whether it was] day
 they blowpiped
 and after they’d blowpiped
 n-o w-a-y could the Malays win.
 Look, they came up into Cba’ Tnloop
 caught by surprise
 scattered
 they were shitting
 dead meat

buried
 the Raweys
 split and chopped up [the scene was like a Chinese] graveyard
 that's what happened there
 Meanwhile
 a whole bunch of them invaded Sungkey
 the Humans they massacred
 t-h-e-r-e w-a-s a cripple
 after [the fleeing Humans] were all gone
 this one cripple
 [had been] told to get into a rice bin.
 He s-a-t there silent and motionless like this
Whiiiiiiinh they shrilled
 they looked around
 deserted houses
 instead of the Humans this cripple
 creak! the cripple w-a-s inside [the rice bin]
 they open here and here the bins
 they chopped down the houses
 they tear the houses apart
 they searched for the Humans who had fled the war
 silent and still in the rice bin
 open look
 [Say to each other] "We should be merciful don't let's kill someone who's already dying"
 [Say to the Human] "OOO. YOU'RE DYING.
 "WHERE ARE YOUR KINSMEN?" "They've gone."
 [Say to each other] "They're all gone already."
 [Say to the Human] "WHICH WAY DID THEY GO?"
 "Downstream" But his kinsmen had gone upstream
 "Zehr GUT! No problem, you STAY here"
 They footed it b-a-c-k to the lowlands from here
 the cripple got better
 abandoned
 "O relatives
 "the Raweys have come up
 "they have given us death
 "remember!"
 After that
 it happened that they
 they infiltrated Sungkey
 they laid an ambush
 in [a place] called Jirm Kawad [i.e., Malay Jeram Kawan].
 In Jirm Kawad the Humans of Sungkey laid an ambush
 They [the Raweys] came up
 They came up they [Semai] attacked ferociously they blowpiped

what did they blowpipe what did they win
 the Humans?
 A person of our race the Humans a shaman
 descended from our ancestors
 he won
 he was the one who metamorphosed into mortars²¹
 they won
 metamorphosed into giant carp
 they won
 metamorphosed into bees
 they by the way speaking of their becoming bees
 they look at the mortar this way they WHACK
 they whack at the mortar
 they think its a mortar but it's a person
 so they pull the mortar loose they roll it over only it rolls over the Malays
 [killing] every last one
 they'd thought it was a mortar but it was a person.
 To return to the story
 so they all decided to invade the Waar [river basin] since they'd lost at
 Sungkey they invaded WAAR
 they invaded Waar here
 Malays on the warpath again
 so we were thinking about how they made war
 Malays don't wage war like us....
 They wanted war
 They wanted war, so
 what sort of a war?
 So they studied, the people of Smna' the people of Cba' Tnloop they fought
 upstream and down
 We lived in the mountains...
 they came up
 they shrilled [their war flutes]...
 so after all that they started to make war again
 me, I don't know the year
 in that year who knows how many moons they managed to make war
 who knows if there were moons or not
 they say in the war in the Jrnang lowlands the Raweys turned the place
 into a GRAVEYARD
 Among the people who drove them off, made them retreat, resisted them,
 one man stood out in this Waar area
 HE was daring
 "The Rawey race want to wipe you out, don't let them kill you, don't let
 them kill me
 "if they're killing
 "if they're waging war DON'T let them bring up men [as reinforcements]"

they brought up a thousand men
 one time
 “Bring on your Truppeführer
 “What do they bring now?”
 AGAIN they came up
 AGAIN they
 were blowpiped
 AGAIN
 AGAIN were blowpiped
 again they attacked again were blowpiped
 anywhere at all ambushed in the evening ambushed in the daytime
 ambushed at night ambushed in the rain ambushed in the storm
 in their latrines, so what?
 They were shitting, so what?
 They were pissing, so what?
 not just one blowpipe attack but all the time
 blowpiping with *halaa'* darts²²
 blowpipetherejumpawayhere
 blowpipeherejumpawaythere
 blowpipeherejumpthere
 theseoutsiderschopthere [but] who'dtheystab?
 Shottheirgunsthere [but] who'dtheyinjure?
 So after that they sued for peace
 sued for peace and mercy in that peace
 but the war didn't satisfy our *sngii'* [spirit²³] we Humans didn't want this
 peace
 we didn't seek this peace
 “This isn't our war, us Humans. [It's] a war by your race, you Malays came
 looking to harass us
 “Now you want peace but our *sngii'* isn't satisfied
 “so gibt's noch einmal you wanted a war, you got it now, FIGHT ON!
 “Bring on as many of your people as you can
 “so your [whole] RACE
 your race
 the Rawey race
 “Malay race
 “however many millions
 “however many thousands
 “bring them on against us inland people us Humans you want to harass”
 after that
 AGAIN they
 attacked
 Finally
 at long last
 who knows

how many thousand
 fought fiercely to the last man
 harried and blowpiped
 so then what do you know
 what are you aware of
 in the war they tell about the war with the Raweys
 your fathers recount
 the war wasn't fought physically
 it was fought with *nhalaa'* supernatural power...
 of the hundred men who came up in one day he spared one
 he s-p-a-r-e-d o-n-e
 [on a rising note] set one aside....
 "Mercy! We can't fight you Humans, what we understand is war at seven
 o'clock, eight o'clock, twelve o'clock
 "But you Humans make war in dark and daylight you make war where we
 shit when we bathe you make war in the rivers you make war anywhere
 any time
 all we can do now is beg for mercy."
 "Now you beg for mercy. So what?
 "Unless your whole Malay race
 "begs for mercy to the last man
 "If they don't beg for mercy this is our sign
 "we Humans: in days to come when you're moving towards war
 "when you're about to come to harry us
 "us the Human race
 "guns have we none
 machine guns have we none
 bombs have we none
 land mines have we none
 swords have we none
 [military] science have we none
 martial arts have we none
 "but this we have"
 he tied his poison dart on the Malay's arm
 and slashed the arm he tied the dart to
 "this is the sign of us Humans am Ende Krieges you waged against us
 Humans
 "you here you carry [this dart]
 "to your war council
 "carry it straight
 "to your chief
 "carry it to your rajah
 "when you bring it to him [tell him] 'I want you to send as many men as
 your Malay race can up into these hills'
 "this I give you as a sign...

“if you show up noch einmal again we’re not worried
 “we’ll harry [you] out of there right away, right
 “back to your own country
 “we don’t care WHAT race you are
 “we don’t pick and choose
 “Malay, Chinese, Rawey, Pale People [Europeans]
 “because
 “we don’t care, we Humans
 “we don’t fight by rules
 “we don’t fight by custom.”
 Then after that
 with the dart tied to his left [arm]
 he took it straight to his country
 the rajah saw it
 he stared s-t-a-r-e-d and s-t-a-r-e-d and s-t-a-r-e-d
 “Oh, mercy
 “So against the Human race, our race, the Malay race, the Rawey race,
 couldn’t prevail against those HUMANS....
 “DON’T harass the Humans
 “the Poor People
 “they don’t make war by our rules
 “they make war without even CONSIDERING the formalities
 “they war on us at night they war on us in the daylight then they war on us
 some more
 “for our part when we’re going to war we check
 “whether it’s one o’clock
 “or two o’clock
 “while at night when we’re asleep they make war some more
 “in days to come
 “don’t you harass [them]
 “these people, what sign did they send us?
 “So if we harass them any more
 “though we have bombs
 we have machine guns
 we have mortars
 we have all kinds of weapons
 “we can’t prevail over the Humans
 “whatever we have
 “see how they make war
 rustle-rustle here
 rustle-rustle there
 rustle-rustle everywhere
 “their bodies invisible
 “that Human race we can’t beat
 “since we can’t beat them DON’T you wage this war

“so now we FORSWEAR war
 “since we forswear war this will be a zone of PEACE....”
 Tniwey was the patriarch²⁴
 among
 Rawey headmen
 he was in command in the old days
 he advised every person
 including the communities throughout the area
 wherever the rivers
 so they came together in Tapah they met they gathered
 they denounced this war
 “Outsiders cannot mess around
 “with the race
 “of the Poor
 “let us never never molest [them]
 “the race of the Poor makes war like spotted doves they don’t understand
 [proper warfare]
 “we’re out of here, right away, totally and completely
 “we’re not kidding around.”
 The people worked together [if not] there’d be no paved roads in Tapah
 you [Dentan] wouldn’t be here, pal
 My father said that back then there were lots and lots of us
 we came in our grandmothers’ times from Teluk Anson [in lowland Perak]
 that’s our territory
 during the war the outsiders forced us out so they retreated s-t-r-a-i-g-h-t there
 it was jammed with Malays and Chinese and Tamils
 under a durian tree in Teluk Anson [Malay “Durian Se-Batang”]
 OUR heritage
 this place is our place Teluk Anson not a place for MALAYS
 not a place for Chinese...
 when they [the ancestors] went to Tapah
 they went on foot
 they were even wearing LOINCLOTHS
 no shirts did they wear
 no, uh, trousers
 what they wore was loincloths of breadfruit tree [*Artocarpus elastica* barkcloth]
 loincloths of *taḡooc* [*Artocarpus* sp. bark]
 for them clothing was just this one thing
 not cloth the way it became now
 that was our name
 that the outsiders gave us in olden times
 we were the “Sakai” people [a harshly derogatory term]
 that’s what they stuck us with
 “POOR”
 as if we’d LOST

we never had enough
 for clothes we had, first, eaglewood [*Aquilaria malaccensis* barkcloth]
 second for us backbaskets
 third for us blowpipes
 fourth for us loincloths
 fifth for us headbands
 that's all we had
 so we went down to Tapah nobody bothered us
 that's when we were seen by your race, pal [Europeans]
 so you never did bother us because of our history
 if you thought of bothering us you decided against it
 decided against it because this history was known
 since then it is not permitted to call Humans "the Poor"
 nor to call them "the have-nots"
 IT IS NOT PERMITTED
 even the Malays who wanted to harass our race were afraid to
 the reason they were afraid is in the story of this war
 so finally after all that
 for the very first time peace was established, at the finish of the Sangkiil War....

[A discussion of the introduction of a money economy followed, but a group of children erupted into my house, ignoring Tataa' Manah's attempts to wave them away, and I have had to omit a good deal of the resulting disjointed account of currencies and prices.]

So after that
 they fix
 the price of goods
 this price of goods we didn't understand what we understood was the
 pleasure of complete peace...
 [but] after a l-o-n-g t-i-m-e there followed another war [World War II]
 u-p a-n-d u-p went the price of goods as a result
 as for that inflation
 our people weren't in the money economy the way we are nowadays
 at the end
 the end
 of that war
 no one got peace
 got hardship instead
 still as things worked out
 we always remembered
 we don't worry about hardship or riches what we worry about is first our
 dart quivers
 second we worry about our little framed noose traps
 third we worry about our big framed noose traps
 fourth we worry about our blowpipes
 fifth....

[Tape ended here, disconcerting both of us. With the children and the general difficulty of the narration, the next tape consisted mostly of repetition of themes already introduced. I have omitted all but the closing].

W-e-l-l t-h-a-t-'s the story you wanted to hear about the Sangkiil War
 Endlich das ist alles...
 that's it
 thus
 my speech is finished.

DISCUSSION

THE RESULTS OF "USELESS WARFARE FOR A WORTHLESS OBJECT"

During the whole period between 1786 and 1867 the Malay states of the peninsula were hard at work committing political "hara-kiri." The process had begun at a much earlier date; but during the nineteenth century it became greatly accelerated. There were constant wars between the different Sultans, and the states were also weakened by frequent civil wars between rival claimants to the throne. The power of the Sultans decayed, till even petty rajas were able to set themselves up as independent local rulers, free to plunder and fight pretty much at will. Piracy flourished, and trade declined... With the breakdown of the central government, the vassals seized the opportunity to establish themselves in a position of local independence at the expense of their weaker neighbours and the peasantry. No man's life and property were safe unless he were strong enough to defend them. (MILLS 1960, 203–204)

Internal evidence suggests that the events that gave rise to Tataa' Manah's story happened in the middle or late nineteenth century, when British dominance was already established in the state of Perak, the western of the two states where most Semai live. But neither the British nor the sultan had yet managed to establish order or even to eliminate slaving.

The Rawas may have wanted to set up a little state on their own, in the Malaysian traditional manner:

The Malay race has not been known as an overtly acquisitive people. The antecedents of Malay royalty were the pirate chiefs roaming the Malay archipelago long before the arrival of Islam, trading influences and the colonising powers. The successful pirates established dominance, instituted control over their spheres of influence and manifested Sultanates. The Malay trait of acquisition was until then initially expressed

as piracy and subsequently as feudal regimes to gain hegemony and subservience of their subjects.

(“Pak Sanno” personal correspondence, 24 Dec 1998)

Their attacks on other Malaysian indigenes had opened up other areas for Rawas to occupy.

The Rawas’ motive for waging genocidal war against Semai appears in Tataa’ Manah’s account as mere bravado: “Let’s see who’s going to win this.” They may have had the same motive as the British had in waging a similar war against the tiny Minangkabau state of Naning, a war that the British leaders described as a “useless war for a worthless object” (quoted in MILLS 1960, 149) and historians agree was “an egregious blunder” that “bordered on the farcical” (MILLS 1960, 137). Like Semai territory, Naning was “a poor unprofitable possession” (Crawford, quoted in MILLS 1960, 137). The Minangkabau Malays fought off superior numbers of British troops, using tactics like those Semai used against Rawas, and were finally defeated only by a force of peninsular Malays. Once committed to the war, the British felt they had to continue it, despite their losses and the inanity of victory, because defeat would undercut the prestige that allowed them to loot the local economy without actually fighting.

One line suggests another reason that Rawas, an Indonesian people devoted to piracy, would want to come to Malaysia and kill Semai in the first place:

maay -hɔ'-cr-cɔr diic

the outsiders wanted to chop up every last [tree for firewood]

The British colonial government wanted to transform rural Malaysia into a wet-rice growing area to feed the Chinese and Indian coolies they were importing as a labor force for tin mines and rubber plantations (HALL 1955, 436; SPENCER 1963, 88 fn). The Rawas were “ready to clear the jungle, cut down trees, plant, and generally prepare the land for a better state of things” (MCNAIR 1972, 133). British policy encouraged Rawa incursions by giving the immigrants tax breaks and titles to the land from which they had driven the indigenous people (BANKS 1976; for British land policy, which did not recognize any Semai rights to any land at all, NONINI 1992, 46–55), a legal fiction still in effect. Most immigrants were young single men, the most violent and irresponsible cohort in any society (ANDERSON 1991, 99–100; STEPHENSON 1995). British policy thus transformed the relatively static frontier between the expanding Malay Muslim population and the indigenous Mon-Khmer-speaking peoples into an encroaching European-style one of the sort that devastated the indigenes of the Americas (DENTAN 1992

and 1997; TACHIMOTO 1994, 199–202).

But the narrator says to the Euro-American anthropologist, using the companionable pronoun *har*, “we-two,” in the sense of “you, pal,” if the Semai had not let the Rawas sue for peace, there would have been no development of Semailand and *har walah*, “you wouldn’t be here, pal.” That is, without Semai cooperation, the British-Rawas policy would have failed and Malaysia would not have become safe for Western anthropology.

The colonial government turned a blind eye to the brutality of Rawas warfare. In the nineteenth century Rawas exterminated one group of Malaysian indigenes, the Mantra, and drove three others—Temuan-Belandas, Semelai, and Btsisi’ (“Mah Meri”)—far from their native lands, with great loss of life (AYAMPILLAY 1976, 174, 176; GIANNO 1997; SKEAT and BLAGDEN 1906, I: 532–33, 538–39; II: 276–81).²⁵

But Mantra themselves had their own epic account of a war with invading Indonesians bent on genocide, in their case the Batak. The second half of the Mantra story dated back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the rest was “evidently in regard to the invasion of the Malays in the twelfth or thirteenth century” (CAMERON 1865, 114–18). There is no reason, in other words, to think that the intensification of slaving under British rule was a qualitative change nor that this story is anything but the last version of an ancient tale continually requiring adaptation as a new set of incursions occurred in the service of a succession of slavocratic states.

ETHNIC IDENTITY

Time, as we experience it, is continuous; it contains no discrete “events.” The events are put there by reflection on the past. As the past becomes more remote the remembered events become fewer in number and more limited in kind. It is for psychologists to say just why we remember this and forget that, but at the end of the day, the remembered past reflects our interests. It makes us what we are now.

(LEACH 1990, 227)

Although as history Tataa’ Manah’s *Praak Sangkiil* is so romanticized as to be barely recognizable, I do not doubt that Semai violently resisted incursions by Rawas and others. Moreover, Malays in south Perak also recount the story of a war against the Rawas by themselves. Tataa’ Manah’s version seems to be an amalgam of two different stories, one prosaic and stressing the practical measures Semai guerrillas took against “Malay” (Rawas) invaders bent on genocide, and the other magical and stressing the supernatural skills of their (indigenous) “Malay” leaders.

Most Semai in Perak and a good many in Pahang have heard some version of the story. They can identify the rocks on which the slavers whetted their swords (Batu' Cwiis), the spot near the Tnloop delta where people threw the corpses of the dead Rawas (Huuk Crlök Gyp), the places where all the events in the story happened. These are what FUJITANI (1993, 89) calls "mnemonic sites" that help conserve memory and serve as symbolic markers (cf. NICHOLAS 1998, 17).

That's why the colonial dispossession and "relocation" of Semai that began with the British and continues today is not merely a cynical land grab but also, inadvertently, a destruction of their historical and ethnic consciousness as particular places, and toponyms embody that consciousness (OBEYESEKERE 1994, 12–13). It began with the relocation of entire settlements during the Communist insurrection of the 1950s, while British and Malay surveyors were renaming the landscape without even asking what the Semai names were. The result was not only to devalue Semai history but to deny the people their identity, "to obliterate difference in a cosmographic reordering of the local geography through the power of naming" (ANAGNOST 1994, 240).

The role ethnicity plays in this tale is pretty complicated and needs some commentary. First, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the basic division is between invaders and people in what ecologists call refuges, where scattering and fleeing is normally an effective counter to attack but does not work against genocide and occupation (cf. DENTAN 1992; HEADLAND and HEADLAND 1997). "Semai" ethnic identity is a modern development, which the British colonial administration fostered and modern Malaysian politics brought home to some Semai (GOMES 1988). Rawas, who speak a language related to Malay but not to Semai, and who were simply intensifying the land-grabbing policy Semai associated with Malays, seemed pretty "Malay" to Semai. "Malay" ethnic identity, which begins around the founding of Malacca, becomes more and more inclusive over time because of its political usefulness to the (British and "Malay") ruling classes (e.g., ANDERSON 1991, 164–66; NAGATA 1974). Ethnic identity here is not the folk-biological "race" that it is in America. It is a convenience that opens and shuts lines of support and obligation.

Like the British and the successor Malay-dominated governments, Semai narrators play with notions of "Malayness." In Tataa' Manah's version, the Rawas are sometimes "Malays"—but so is Nyuup Smna', the shamanic hero. Mat Ariff's version (JULI EDO 1990, 50–53) has a good (Malay) sultan but a bad (Malay) vizier, like Chinese myth. In his version, Semai simply outwit the genocidal, rapacious, and ruthless Malays at every turn. That version coincides with Mat Ariff's vision of recent Semai history

(JULI EDO n.d.), in which the Malay sultan co-opted Mat Ariff's ancestors into the Malay state by giving them fancy titles and authority. In fact, by the beginning of the twentieth century, British "advisors" were pushing the puppet sultans towards increasing their power by establishing personalized links with the countryside, undercutting the authority of local leaders (cf. NOWAK 1987, 35; and cf. Appendix I).

Similarly, Tataa' Manah rarely uses the name "Semai," a foreign ethnonym. He (and JULI EDO 1998) prefer the generic term for (hill) person, which I have translated "Human." Tataa' Manah's story, like Mat Ariff's, lacks the underpinning of fossilized cultural racism that the American focus on ethnicity provides. The heroes are rural people on the margins of the Malay state; people who, says the story, "have no rajahs"; people who are intelligent and resourceful, usually with friends in high places, but who appear *miskin*. The term *miskin* means "poor," but in Semai usage, as in Arabic and Malay, strongly connotes "pathetic" and "helpless." That is, it is not just an economic term but also tells you something about people's position in society and how more powerful people think about them. Slavocrats everywhere despise slaves; in the eyes of their masters Semai became *miskin*, even physically repulsive (DENTAN 1997): "fearful, tired people easily appear repulsive to a superficial observer" (Gerhard Schonberner, quoted in HUPPAUF 1997, 9). These stereotypes mystify and justify the slavery that makes people tired and fearful.

Tataa' Manah plays ironically with the stereotype: the people regarded as *miskin* by the arrogant genocidal invaders from a rich alien state baffle and smash their powerful enemies. This kind of irony depends on the "double consciousness," the awareness not only of who you are and what you are doing but also of how more powerful other people construe your identity and actions, the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (DUBOIS [1903] 1979, 3; cf. DENTAN 1976 and 1997). The villains, by contrast, are arrogant bloodthirsty invaders, originating from a rich alien state and bent on genocide for the hell of it. The narrator grinned fiercely each time he referred to Semai as *maay miskin*, relishing the irony: the worms had turned on their tormentors.

American discourse about societies often builds on ethnicity and "race." But Southeast Asian hill peoples, including Semai, see their lives in terms of economic and political power, and traditionally took on whatever ethnic identity seemed appropriate at the time. Poverty is more persistent and salient in Semai lives than ethnicity; if they convert to Islam, they become impoverished Malays. They are not the only indigenous people to see their poverty as more important to their identity than their "culture" (see e.g., FEI 1980, 99).

Semai in these histories do not say they are against war because of their “cultural values,” just that they do not have the weapons or cultural experience to wage one. Thus they may need cleverness or Malay magician leaders. But, once committed to violence, they become extremely dangerous. The mindless, no-holds-barred style of guerrilla warfare—“like spotted doves”—seems appropriate for people who, having no tradition of waging war, have no rules for how to conduct a war. This inexperience with organized violence may in part account for the extreme brutality of Semai at war, when they say they suffer *blnuul bhiip*, intoxication by blood, and become ruthless killers of anyone they encounter (e.g., DENTAN 1995). Only warlike people, I suspect, wage “civilized” wars; spotted doves do not understand the Geneva Conventions. Undermine the self-discipline that daily Semai life requires, and you don’t have any chivalric code, no cost-benefit analysis, no “no hitting girls or people with glasses.” Anything goes (cf KNAUFT 1987).

To the degree that Semai have a military tradition, the *Praak Sangkil* is it. People sometimes refer to it when they are talking about the possibility of violent resistance to dispossession and impoverishment. In one instance in 1990, a young man used one of the slogans in the story when he was talking with other young men about organizing a self-defense force to ward off attack by organ-nappers. But my impression is that the story is less inspiring than reassuring. It does not glorify or prompt violence but simply asserts that successful resistance, violent or not, is possible.

OUTCOMES

The guerrilla tactics and mindless violence the story describes put a temporary halt to the invasion and conquest of the highlands by the slavocratic state and its British sponsors. Malays came to think of the rainforest and the blowpipe as fearsome. In the area of Teiø R’eeis the little boys in a Malay settlement might hoot at a visiting Semai headman, ridiculing his accent, loin-cloth, loose-limbed walk, and so on; the adults were interested in Orang Asli only as agents in clearing the rainforest, trading partners, or assistants to child-stealers (MAXWELL 1880, 50). But these same people would not invade the forest, because they “dread[ed]” the poisoned blowpipe darts “more than rifle bullets” (SWETTENHAM 1880, 59; cf. Daly, quoted in SKINNER 1878, 59).

The highlands and foothills were difficult terrain, not particularly attractive to the British and their native agents. Both Malays and British agents could get most jungle produce more cheaply by trade, often coerced, with frontier Semai and other indigenous people than by trying to invade and occupy the steep highlands where Semai lived (DUNN 1975). In this sense, the Semai retained a geographic refuge (DENTAN 1992).

But by the middle of the nineteenth century the state had partial control

of lowland south Perak, the western part of Semailand. And Semai did have one resource frontiersmen could take without trading: their children. The children were not very valuable as slaves, too small and dark for Malay standards of strength and beauty, but they were useful for sexual purposes and for household drudgery. And any slave, even a Semai child, raised the prestige of the Malay owner, an almost obsessional concern of the Malay ruling classes (DENTAN 1997). In Malay feudalism control over slaves and other “dependents” served many of the same functions as control over land did in the analogous European system (RUITER 1997, 4; WARREN 1996, 14). Slave traders could bribe or intimidate people who lived on the frontier, Malay peasants or Temiar indigenes, to kidnap the children, if only to save their own children from enslavement. Semai lacked the numbers, technology, and military skills to mount punitive raids against the raiders’ home base within the slaver state. The headman of Pangkaad, on the Teiō R’eiis, explained the Semai position this way:

Other people kill us, we don’t kill other people. We never get so angry [-*bl’aal*] that we go to war. How could we? We lack the equipment. *Hii’ ha luuy, maay jng’ooy, tɔ’ jadi’ mah.* We are alone, other peoples are many, it’d be futile. Malays and Pale People have many weapons, many people. Though we -*bl’aal*, there’s nothing we can do.... We flee. *Mn pe’ lalu’ hii-lawan, hi-jaar leh!* Since we can’t fight back, we flee, of course.

Nearby indigenous Malay settlements often had friendly ties with the hill people, so raiding them would be counterproductive (JUMPER 1997, 33). And Semai egalitarianism militated against counter-slaving.

So, from their sanctuary within the colonial state, slavers raided the settlements of Semai and other Malaysian indigenous people like Btsisi’:

Hunted by the Malays, who stole their children, they were forced to leave their dwellings and fly hither and thither, passing the night in caves or in huts... which they burnt on their departure. “In those days,” they say, “we never walked in the beaten tracks lest the print of our footsteps in the mud should betray us.” For wherever the Malay perceived any indication of their presence, he would build himself a small shelter, and never leave it until he had discovered the place of retreat where they generally spent the night. Accompanied by a few accomplices, he would then repair to the spot at nightfall, and the party, concealing themselves until dark, would wait until the “Hill-men” were asleep. The Malays would then fire several rifle shots, spreading terror and confusion in every family, whose breaking up made them an easy prey to their

assailants, who would promptly rush to the spot where they heard the shrieks of the women and children.... There is hardly a family that has not its own especial calamity to relate.... Any act of vengeance, moreover, would be fatal to them, in view of their insignificant numbers and lack of means of defence. They prefer therefore to sacrifice the part for the whole, and this is certainly the only possible course open to them.

(SKEAT and BLAGDEN 1906, II: 532–33)

These raids, in which groups of five to twenty brutal attackers concentrated overwhelming force on particular settlements or isolated homesteads, left Btsisi'

a shy, unwarlike people who have accepted without resentment the wrongs inflicted on them by past generations of Malays. Ask any of them for his family history and you will often be told a harrowing tale of the cold-blooded murder of some parent or relative.... From the days of Mudzafar Shah of Malacca [d. ca. 1460 A.D.] he has been exploited and persecuted. (WILKINSON 1971 [1923], 18–19)

Traders found these raids useful as a way of intimidating their partners into supplying jungle produce cheaply and reliably: look what will happen to you, and to your children, if you let us down.

Thus the story eventually ends in the defeat of organized violence as a tactic against the slavocracy and its agents and the adoption of a tactic of scattering and flight (DENTAN 1992 and 1997; JUMPER 1997, 33–42; JULI EDO 1998, 119 n. 34; cf. NOWAK 1987, 30–38; cf. WAZIR JAHAN BEGUM KARIM 1995, 114–15, n. 125). In general, people find the possibility of their being involved in military exploits funny. I got a lot of laughter when I asked about them; a typical response was that “even in the Emergency, all I did was run away” [-*jaar*]. The following dialogue indicates their attitude toward killing:

A. No, we don't do that. The Japanese killed some of *us* in the olden days. Three men for lying to them.

Q. You people ever kill any Japanese?

A. [laughs]. I never heard of us killing *anybody*. Not even in the Emergency. Chinese [terrorists] killed two of us with machetes. The Malays and Pale People never killed any of us. But I hear a lot of Malays got killed in the *Praak Sangkil* by our people. (Headman at 'Icek, 24 March 1992)

Semai children learned early that strangers were monsters and that any safety or love the outside world seemed to offer was often illusory and never

reliable, a lesson the raids reinforced among adults. The cosmos had become a place of menace and disorder. Only in the peace of one's own community was there any security, and even there security was fragile.

NOTES

1. NOONE (1961) is writing here about Temiar, relying heavily on the work of his elder brother, Herbert (Pat) NOONE (1936). Temiar are close neighbors of Semai, with a similar history and culture.

2. The Semai word for "war," *praak*, is a dialect version of Malay *perang*. Malays distinguish between *perang* and *serang*, "attacks." Similarly, some Semai distinguish "war" (*praak*) from "raiding" (*sngraak*), a word MEANS and MEANS (1986, 89) define as "attack" or "fighting." In the first instance, you are just following orders; in the second, you are fighting for personal reasons. So the *Praak Sangkiil* is really a *sngraak*: "The Malays attacked us." Normally, Semai do not *br-praak* or *br-sngraak*, say most Semai.

SCHEBESTA (1952, 17) suggests that a laconic reference to bowmen in *The Malay Annals* (SHELLABEAR 1961, 14) may indicate that Semang (Peninsular Malaysian Orang Asli foragers) fought on the side of Siamese and Tamils against invading Malays in 1201. The *Annals* in turn may reflect the account in the oldest Malay history, the *Hikayat Marong Mahawangsa*, of the defeat of the Siamese and their indigenous Aslian allies ('ABDUL-HADI 1925, 16–23; cf. DE MORGAN 1886, 58–61). But evidence of recent warfare is lacking.

Only one Semai I talked with, a very intelligent man from Klubii" (see DENTAN 1995), had any idea what *sangkiil* meant. He said the term contrasts with *sabil*, an Arabic term associated with jihad or holy war. The Malay homonym means something like "having a precise goal," so the equivalent might be a "limited war" similar to the American Persian Gulf war. It was also, people listening to his chat with me said, different from slaving, which went on all the time and involved slaughtering all the adults and taking their children (see Appendix I).

3. Rawas from east Sumatra settled in south central Perak, around Gopeng, in the eighteenth century. Although the government officially counts them as "Malays," the way Semai do, they retain their ethnic identity in small communities like Kampung Sungai Itek, Gunung Mesah Hulu, Gunung Panjang, Kampung Lawan Kuda, and Jahang (KHAIRUN NAZIRAH 1992). The name comes from the Rawas River in Sumatra, where the dominant people were "of more open, lively, and enlightened character than those I had anywhere encountered... altogether a more likeable people than any other in the Residency" (FORBES 1885, 246). They lived next to a set of foragers, the Kubu, whose original ethnic and "racial" identity has been a matter of speculation (for which, see LEBAR 1972, 46–47; FORBES 1885, 240–41, 243–45). Their relationship with Kubu was much like that between the Indonesian immigrant "Malays" and Semai, with much the same results, even in Kubu mannerisms. As Malays often remarked about traditional Semai (DENTAN 1997), the eyes of the Kubu were

restless and glancing, as if ever on the alert... [Malays] consider the Kubus far their inferiors, a position which the latter seem to accept with very marked submissiveness. "You Kubu!" is a term of opprobrium which I have often heard one native apply to another with whom he had quarrelled. The village people consider them little other than beasts.... Leading so nomadic a life, the jurisdiction that can be exercised by any one over them can be but very slight.... It will be seen that the Kubus differ much in their habits and ways of life from those about them; but whether they are the last sur-

vivors of their race, or are only a straggling remnant, kin to those about them, who at some time past were driven from below the family rooftree to save their lives in the forest fastness, and who, even when persecution has ceased, yet cling to the shade of those pillars which in their need afforded them the kindly refuge they sought, are questions on which the osteological evidence must be appealed to. (FORBES 1885, 241–43)

I use German to translate Rawas–Malay because Semai feelings in this account parallel those people in my country felt about Germans when I was growing up during World War II. All the Rawas say in their alien tongue is “Let’s make war,” “Attack!” etc., so it is only important to understand the alienness; the content goes without saying (or translating), as in the World War II propaganda movies and comic books from which I first learned a bit of German. My intent is to connote the long lasting prejudices which wars leave behind, not to denigrate the German people or to mangle their language unnecessarily.

4. Most nonindustrialized peoples call themselves by some term that means, roughly, “people” or “The People.” In Semai, the word *maay* refers to all “peoples,” a category that includes demons and animals, while the term *sn[ɡ]’ooy* refers to human beings, not demons or animals. In Semai thinking, it refers especially to “Orang Asli,” Austroasiatic Mon–Khmer indigenous peoples of the Malaysian hinterlands, and particularly to Semai. Thus Semai call themselves ‘The Humans.’

5. Tataa’ Manah uses the Malay word *coba*’, “try, test,” turning the war into a test of strength. I have usually used “contest” or “take [someone] on” or “fight” to translate it.

6. For “challenge” the narrator uses the word *smaañ*, demand, ask for.

7. Tataa’ Manah uses the Malay word *bangsa*’, which can mean “race” or “ethnic group.” It has some of the folk-biological connotations of the Anglo-American notions (see DENTAN 1997). Translating his version of Rawas speeches, I have used the German word *Rasse*.

8. I have had trouble glossing the Malay word *lalu*, to “carry out” or “wage.” For the narrator, it seems to connote being used to making war effectively or having the equipment to do so. When in the text Semai say they “don’t [normally] make war” they are saying they do not *lalu* making war, they are “not really up to it,” as Americans say.

9. The word for “chief,” *kupala*’, is from a Malay word for head. I have never heard it in ordinary Semai speech but Lanoh Semang use it for trader-appointed middlemen who recruit rattan-collectors for outsiders and thus become influential in community affairs (AIIMAD EZANEE 1972, 14–16; NAGATA 1997).

10. The name is puzzling. The first word refers to “vanishing.” The latter, said the narrator, refers to bamboo, perhaps “bamboo thicket.” This interpretation may somehow involve *buus mnra*’, Mnra’ sugarcane, a hardy cane associated with a Sangkiil War hero named Mnra’ and discussed below. Phonologically, it may be a variant of *cmna*’ “Ogre,” as in the tale of “Ja’ Cmna” (JULI EDO 1990, 76–86), in which metamorphosis is a recurrent theme, as in this version of the Sangkiil War.

11. That is, real humans would fight back as fiercely as doves do, not flee the way Semai prefer to. For Rawey, as for most patriarchal peoples, courageous resistance is a virtue; for Semai, exposing oneself to harm is not smart. The reputation of doves as birds of peace in the West comes from the Biblical narrative of Noah. That story in turn probably reflects the fact that doves were cheap sacrificial animals, as opposed to sheep or oxen, and thus the common medium for approaching Yahweh. In the natural world, mating doves engage in brutal bloody battles, often until the loser is pecked to death. In the story, fighting like doves means fighting mindlessly, without the rules that for Malays, as for other piratical feudal peoples like the English, set standards of propriety in the manner of contesting with equals or slaughtering defenseless people. Tataa’ Manah’s comparison of Semai guerrilla warfare to the battles of

mating doves suggests the cold butchery that accompanies a state of mind that Semai call “blood intoxication,” *blnuul bhiip* (DENTAN 1995).

12. Traditional Southeast Asian warfare followed the classic Indian model, in which an attacking army played noisy instruments before battle (WHEATLEY 1964, 90). One of the themes of this Semai epic is that Semai ignored the rules of battle.

13. This “magician” is a *pahawək* from Malay *pawang*, not the ordinary Semai adept, *halaa'*, but a Perak specialist, found also among Malays, whose services in curing disease and placating the spirits of rice fields entitled him to maintenance and fees (e.g., ENDICOTT 1970, 13, 114, 147–71; HUSIN ALI 1981, 44–45). I have translated this word as “shaman,” *halaa'* as “adept.” A person who is a *halaa'* adept has a demon lover who helps him cure the sick, and so on (for details, see DENTAN 1979, 85–86; 1983; 1988b; 1988c; and JULI EDO 1998, 62–67). Adepts often metamorphose, and metamorphosis is a common theme in Semai oral literature (DENTAN 1988c). Other myths also credit the Semai ability to elude and baffle their enemies to their metamorphic abilities (e.g., JULI EDO 1998, 106–107).

14. *Tuweek* in the original, from Malay *tuang* (warpipe).

15. See note 13 above.

16. Like a flock of hens, said the narrator later, referring to the noise they made. Semai is rich in words for flight. The word throughout this narrative is *-jaar*; to run away in panic and escape. To *-duu'* is to move off, usually in a hurry; to leave someone or something behind. To *tao* is to jump up or leap away in order to escape a menace. But there is a good deal of overlap between the words. Waar Semai would say *Ki-pra'-duu' 'i hal 'i gnsir; ki-pr-duu' 'i luuy* (she cleared out to avoid the issue with her husband; she made herself go). But JULI EDO says that lowland people would use *tao* in this sense, e.g., for “a woman who leaves her home and asks for a divorce from her drunken husband” (1998, xxix). For comparison, see JULI EDO 1998, s.v. “jar, deq, tutaw”; MEANS and MEANS 1986, s.v. “jar, deu tau”; SKEAT and BLAGDEN 1906, II: s.v. J19, R200).

17. Bah Tony Williams-Hunt was a Semai leader and friend of mine in the early 1990s. He was a native of Cba' Tnloop, “Telom Delta” on the Teiø Waar. In the mid-1990s he converted to Islam, divorced his Semai wife, and married a Malay, losing most of his credibility as a leader. For his early life, see GLENTON 1953, GOULDSBURY 1960, and MOSS 1964.

18. The drawn-out verb indicates that the construction was painstaking.

19. “A giant carp” is a *Tor tambroides* (Bleeker), the largest freshwater carp in Malaysia, about 250 cm long. The name is *klah* in Malay and Semai (MOHSIN and AMBAK 1991, 37). It has large (and edible) scales (MOHSIN and AMBAK 1991, 99).

20. This puzzling name could be a nominalized version of one or both of two other words. “Merah” is an old Sumatran Malay title for a headman (see, e.g., ABDULLAH 1960, 287). A *ceep mara'* (demon bird) is the green peafowl (*Pavo muticus*), associated, like the larger argus pheasant, with dangerous supernatural powers. It would make some sense if one hero were an ogre and the other a demon. The term *mara'* for death demon is of Sanskrit origin. Waar River Semai use the term *buus mnra'*, Mnra' sugarcane, for a sort of wild cane that “Chinese” plant in the raw earth left by landslides along mountain roads, to prevent further soil erosion.

21. This is part of the story that Tataa' Manah forgot to include earlier. An old woman says the transformation of the mortars refers to an ambush at the fourteenth milestone of the road between Tapah and the Cameron Highland. People from around there had cleared a steep slope of obstacles and rolled boulders and mortars down on the Rawas as they passed beneath.

22. Darts imbued with supernatural powers.

23. The narrator says *pe' puas lhvum*, “our breath was not satiated.” The breath, in Semai

psychophysiology, is the expression of the *sngii'*, a complex notion meaning something like will, consciousness, or spirit. For a brief sketch of the notion of *sngii'* see DENTAN (1979, 82).

24. Tniwey, says the narrator, is the Semai name of Tok Bayas, a Malay aristocrat. The word for leader here translated as "patriarch" is *mnii'*, the narrator's dialect for "father."

25. The Mantra equivalent of the *Praak Sangkiil* involved Batak invaders from Sumatra (BORIE 1887, 288–89). The mythic Mantra leader, Meralang, like the Semai one in some versions of the *Praak Sangkiil*, is a foreigner with magical powers, in the Mantra case with ties to Rum (Byzantium) and the power of invulnerability. Like the Semai hero, Meralang kills all the invaders save one, who is to bring the bad news back to Indonesia (BORIE 1887, 288–89).

APPENDIX I: SLAVING AND SILENCE

Records are preserved because they provide a charter for what historians believe about the present. Different historians may believe different things and the records are interpreted (and modified) accordingly... The cultural values of Western scholars of the twentieth century lead us to believe that "good" history really records what happened in the past while "bad" history does not, but the basis on which we can make this kind of distinction is always very insecure. "Bad" history is seldom constructed out of fantasy; it is simply that we tend to accept as good history whatever is congenial to our contemporary way of thinking. (LEACH 1990, 227–29)

[F]or the people affected, the reality of the events that in the narrative are summarised with expository detachment meant in fact sudden death, separation of spouses, abduction of children, wholesale robbery, the burning of homes and possessions and means of livelihood... We can be incited by such incidents to try to conceive, also, the grief and distress and hopeless despondency of those who were enslaved, and their abject fate at the hands of foreign masters... Somehow, the adjuration to be fair to the marauders... to consider these matters not in "unflattering terms" but in their proper "context," seems out of any humane scale with what was really done to the people....

(NEEDIAM 1983, 41–42)

Recapitulating the voluminous historical evidence that the "most important precolonial institutions in Southeast Asian political economy were slave-raiding and coerced trade" (HOSKINS 1996, 3) would take a book. Still, it is worth noting that Malaysian bureaucrats choose to play down the significance of slave raids on the societies of the hill peoples. Nothing surprising there:

All societies are hypocritical, with the possible exception of the classical despotic societies [like Rawas] who needed no justification other than the legitimacy of force. The gap between words, statements, programmes and aims on the one hand, and facts on the other, is everywhere glaringly apparent. (CIAIAND 1987, 20)

Some of this bureaucratic revisionism reflects an ignorance of exactly what "Western" scholars say. This ignorance, in turn, is in part a product of self-censorship by "Western" publishers. For example, *Asiaweek*, published in Hong Kong, consciously avoids topics that might offend the Malaysian government (RAMSEY 1994); and the distributors of a book (DENTAN et al. 1997) critical of Malaysian policies towards people like Semai do not distribute the book in Malaysia or Singapore. Thus the bureaucratic ignorance is not entirely self-inflicted and self-sustaining.

In this context it seems only fair to publish the core of the critique issued at the end of October 1997 by the retiring head of the Department of Aboriginal People's Affairs, which focuses on the work of ENDICOTT (1983) and which received scant coverage even in the tame Malaysian press (but see NICHOLAS 1998 for a point by point rebuttal). Omitting ad hominem arguments, he writes:

Saya telah banyak bertanya orang tua di tempat saya (Taph dan Kinta) dan juga beberapa Orang Asli, dan mendapati sukar untuk mempercayai cerita-cerita itu. Daripada cerita-cerita orang-orang, mereka mengatakan sejak zaman dahulu lagi, hubungan Orang-orang Melayu dengan Orang-orang Asli adalah lebih berasaskan perdagangan. Orang-orang Melayu bertukar barang-barang seperti beras, tembakau dan gula dengan hasil-hasil hutan yang dicari oleh Orang Asli. Secara logiknya pula, Orang-orang Melayu pada masa itu adalah seperti petani yang cukup hidup dan tidak memerlukan tenaga buruh luar. Jika mereka memerlukan tenaga tambahan, mereka amalkan institusi gotong royong dan seraya. Bagi kaum bangsawan pula mereka menggunakan sistem kerahan untuk melakukan kerja-kerja tertentu seperti majlis-majlis sambutan atau kenduri-kendara. Sebagai Orang Islam, mereka juga tahu Islam melatrag tambahan...

Jika adapun Orang-orang Melayu menangkap Orang Asli untuk dijual sebagai hamba, itu adalah kes-kes luarbiasa. Kemungkinan besar ialah oleh kerana pada masa tersebut berlaku peperangan diantar raja-raja Melau, serangan-serangan ke kampung-kampung Orang Asli ialah sebahagian daripada peperangan itu. Ini adalah kerana kedapatan Orang Asli menyokong raja-raja yang berlainan. (IKRAM JAMALUDDIN 1997)

I have interviewed many old people from my home area, Tapah and Kinta [in southern Perak], and also some Indigenous People [Semai], and find it difficult to credit these stories. According to people's stories, they say that in the olden days the relationship between Malays and Indigenous People was based on trade. Malays exchanged things like rice, tobacco, and sugar for forest produce which the Indigenous People collected. Logically, since Malays at the time were self-sufficient peasants, they did not need to exploit workers from outside. If they needed a larger work force, they made use of the institutions of cooperation and money contributed by their neighbors. As for the nobility, they used a corvée system for certain projects, like mosque celebrations or festivals. As Muslims, they also knew Islam forbids slavery. And if there were Malays who kidnapped Indigenous People to sell them as slaves, those were unusual cases. In all likelihood it would be because, at that time, wars were being waged between Malay rajahs, and attacks on Indigenous Peoples' settlements would have been a part of such wars. That would be to capture Indigenous People who were supporting the other rajahs. (My translation)

Let us take these assertions, which are largely correct, in order. Semai agree that local Malay peasants were not the problem. They were subject, indeed, to the same pressures as Semai, although the distinction between "forced trade" and slavery is one that looms larger in twentieth-century armchairs than on the margins of nineteenth-century forests (cf. DENTAN 1992). Like most traditional slaving, Malay slaving was not for field hands but for domestics and sexual objects to serve the ruling classes, many of whom came from off the peninsula.

Malay law classified Muslim slaves, *hamba*, as "free men," since Islam forbids enslaving Muslims. Semai slaves were *abdi*, utterly without rights. But euphemistic legalisms aside, *hamba* were also slaves, and Ikram uses the term as an equivalent of "slave." Semai slaves

were not Muslims, and therefore were not *hamba* but *abdi*, a lower category yet (DENTAN 1997). Like their Christian counterparts, Malay slavers managed to finesse religious constraints on their cruelty.

The Sangkiil War may, in fact, have some connection with the sort of internecine Malay struggle Ikram describes, as indicated above. For Semai narrators, the reasons for a genocidal attack seem to have been less important than the fact of the attack itself.

Ikram's concern to distinguish the Malay successor government from its British colonial predecessors prompts the observation that, although Semai remember the closing days of the *ancien regime* as a sort of Golden Era, in fact, except for a spate of generous policies designed to "win over the hearts and minds" of Semai during a Communist insurrection in the 1950s, British policies towards Semai were indifferent to Semai interests. This indifference to the plight of Semai shows up, for example, in records of the Perak Forestry Office, uncovered by the Semai anthropologist JULI EDO (1998). No one interfered with Chinese squatters who ousted Semai from the Kurong River area, but there was a flurry of concern when the displaced people entered the Kroh Forest Reserve. The British offered land in the hills to Mat Ariff, the people's spokesman (mentioned in the opening text of this paper) who later became a mentor of both Juli Edo and myself. Being lowland people, the Semai at first declined but finally agreed to go to the hills if the British would let them enjoy forest products and "even tin ore." The Senior Forest Officer reports (in memoranda #34 in Ft.Pk. 89–36 on 28 Aug. 1937 and #60 on 4 May 1938):

On account of this last condition no notice was taken of this offer, and though the S.F.O. offered the same terms as other Sakai [a derogatory term for indigenous people, used by the British as an ethnic label] in reserves get, the Secretariat did not pass the offer on, merely refusing the application for the area in Kroh.... [Mat Ariff] has been described by the officers who have had to deal with him as "obstinate," "sophisticated," and "impossible...."

Later the S.F.O. writes:

The Sakai are being allowed to remain in their present settlement in Kroh Reserve until their crops... are ripe. As soon as they have reaped them they will be required to leave the reserve.... They have given a considerable amount of trouble [to British bureaucrats, by not simply abandoning their traditional lands].... Bah Mat Arif [sic] has adopted a most insolent attitude throughout. In March they started felling again in Kroh Res. for which they were prosecuted. They were fined \$5 or a week's imprisonment. As they could not pay the fine they all went to prison accompanied by their wives and families. Unfortunately, Bah Mat Arip [sic] was not among those who were prosecuted.... A short term of imprisonment would be a most salutary lesson for Bah Mat Arip [sic].

In other words, one of the few times Semai protested land grabbing, the Perak government subjected them to a penalty they still talked about in the 1970s as torture. The question of compensating them never came up. Mat Ariff's objections to the theft of his people's land led the British to call him "the Sakai Mussolini" (NOONE 1938). Of letting them remain in the reserve briefly, the S.F.O. remarked:

It is extremely embarrassing to be jockeyed into such a position through no fault of our own and to have to submit to having our hand forced in this way, but if government

is not willing to force the Sakai to move to available State land elsewhere, admittedly a difficult matter, I do not see what we can do.

Replacing British officers with Malay ones after independence has not changed the policy (DENTAN 1997; DENTAN and ONG 1995; DENTAN et al. 1997). Incidentally, I have respected and admired Mat Ariff for thirty years. I use his *muh pspot*, identity card orthography, because that is the one I learned first. But there are several ways of spelling it, and, like most Semai, he has other names (see e.g., JULI EDO 1990, 26–29).

APPENDIX 2: A BRIEFER VERSION OF THE “SANGKIL WAR,”

BY JNANG PUK, 13 OCTOBER 1991

Manah ntuum jadii' maay praaḵ maay waay jii' sng'ooy

In olden times, well, they [non-Semai] made war they harried us Humans.

Dalam maay waay ajeeh, prdaad leh, nnaay prdaad kraul, krduur nnaay'ain skjap, tengah nong nnaay prdaad

While hunting us down, [they] *killed*, they killed men, women they carried off for a little while, on the way they killed them.

[Interruption from the audience: *Hi' paneey mah nnaay'uuy? Ngroo' Gyp "memalukan."*

You understand what they did? What Malays call “outraged their modesty.”]

Maay kee' neic asiik kampuk.

They looked again for other settlements.

Ji-sooc, sampeey maay ra'naa' jii' deic.

We withered up, to the point that our elders were all gone [dead].

Ki-pr'aman ya Tuan Bɔd. Ki-br'asal Pulaω Pinang. Ki-pr'aman.

Peace was made by Lord Bot. He came from Penang. Peace was made.

Ki-hɔɔd blaω, lək, ragu', tapɔk, snguu', sureey, pnsɔɔl, krusɔb, ginggung, krawɔɔk, ragu' trnwaak, galung, tnpɔɔ'.

He wanted blowpipes, quivers, open-weave backbaskets, purses, hairpins, combs, nose flutes, two-string zithers, rice bins, shamanic headbands, double baskets, water vessels, regular headbands.

Ki-'uuy sbageey sambud la Tuan Bɔd.

Lord Bot held something like a reception [Malay *sambut* ?].

[Interruption from the audience: *Hi' paneey rtii' "sambud"? Sbageey "merdeka" ngroo' Gɔp.*

You understand what “*sambud*” means? It's like “independence” in Malay.]

Lpas sambud ajeeh ki-tujuḵ ku penghulu adeeh jii' sng'ooy sbap ki-pr'aman jii' sng'ooy

After that reception he pointed out to the [Malay] headmen there us Humans because he was bringing peace to us Humans

Ki-'ɔk cngrooy, yuud, jee', 'abaad, 'ɔɔ.

He gave [us] husked rice, machetes, axes, cloth, fire [matches or lighters].

Ki-'ɔk duit.

He gave [us] money.

Lpas ajeeh 'araab 'ajeeh tɔ'pe' looy ku tɔk jii' sng'ooy.

[But] later those things did not get into the hands of us Humans.

Ki-tipu' la penghulu Gɔp.

He was deceived by the Malay headmen.

Dalam ki-tipu' Gɔp bujeeh, ki-'urɔɔ'-'urɔɔ' sbageey sng'ooy jii' ki-lɔk pakaiian sbageey jii'.

In that deception, they spoke with accents like us Humans, they wore clothes like ours.

(JULI EDO supplies some details on the Praak Sangkiil [1990, 30–34; 1998, 302–303, 328 n. 8] and reports that Batak also harassed Semai [1998, 196, 214 n. 20].)

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