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Kejadian Manusia: An “histoire” of Malay/Semai Culture Contact

Abstract

The following paper analyzes the telling of a Malay story by a non-Malay indigene (Orang Asli) about the creation of humankind and the founding of peninsular Malaysia. The paper asserts that this storytelling is neither a monolithic account of Malaysian history nor merely an idiosyncratic Orang Asli myth. Rather, it is a socially constructed history that incorporates Malay Islamic elements with a covert critique of the political relations between Malays and Orang Asli. In this way, folklore telling becomes an act of resistance. The paper hypothesizes that the story represents an adaptation to the cultural and physical impositions on Orang Asli of both Islam and Malay culture, consistent with other Orang Asli nonviolent adaptations throughout history.

Key words: ethnohistory—Malaysia—resistance narrative—Orang Asli—Semai

History and its representations are not nicely distinguishable. To the contrary: history lies in its representations, for representation is as much the making of history as it is consciousness speaking out. Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*

The strong always win and words always deceive.

Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*¹

THE FRENCH WORD *histoire* refers both to “history,” an account of factual events that occurred sometime in the past, and “story,” narrated events, both real and fantastical.² The polyvalence of the term in French underscores the role of narrative in history tellings. Historians often claim a privileged ground for Western academic history and erect barriers between Western intellectual stories of the past and myths, folklore, and legends that also purport to describe past events. The deconstruction of much Western academic writing and consideration of the arbitrariness of sign systems problematizes this division and demands a reevaluation of the role of “story” in “history.” History may be a representation of past events, but it is always articulated or interpreted in the present. Telling and listening, writing and reading, are all active processes that arrange and rearrange the signs that make up the historical memory. All history tellers “utilize, refashion, and manipulate” signs of the past and employ them to achieve their own particular purposes (FOGELSON 1989, 142).

Ruling classes often construct and transmit historical stories to legitimize their power (cf SAID 1978; SCOTT 1990). Those who control the production of historical discourse use it not only to justify their power but also to impose both language and history upon their subordinates (COMAROFF and COMAROFF 1991, 15). Still, a number of theorists have convincingly challenged the notion that producers of knowledge, imposing their own ideologies upon subordinate groups, can produce a state of “false consciousness” in them. Michel DE CERTEAU discusses a way of using an imposed system that constitutes a form of resistance to that system. In this way, for example, Brazilian peasants were able to employ a Christian vocabulary of sainthood to justify their support for a heroic figure whose poverty called into question

the legitimacy of the Spanish Catholic ruling class (1984, xiii, 17). James SCOTT (1985; 1990) provides concrete examples that complement De Certeau's theoretical formulations nicely. He interpreted a number of stories, such as the seventeenth-century Russian tale of the "Czar-Deliverer," in which peasants seemed to reemploy myths of their oppressors for their own ends (1990, 96–103).

Domination and colonization do effect changes in consciousness. However, the strict opposition between hegemony and ideology is a false one, reflected in theories of false consciousness on the one hand, and conscious resistance on the other. Victims of domination sometimes act "strategically" with well-defined political goals and a sense of class or ethnic consciousness. More often, they resist "tactically," by, for example, manipulating mythical spaces and stories of their oppressors (DE CERTEAU 1984, 35–37). Neither Russian peasants nor Brazilian Indians necessarily mean to alter drastically the form of their government or religion. They may believe in these institutions as strongly as the czar or the Spanish Catholics. But they "make do with" (*faire avec*) what they have, creating spaces in which they can live, think, and resist (DE CERTEAU 1984, 18). In this view, (hi)story telling is a kind of adaptation to social and political constraints, a widening of imposed spaces and re-interpreting of imposed language.

The following paper will analyze an indigenous Malaysian's (Semai) telling of a Malay creation story. The story is neither a monolithic account of Malaysian history nor merely an idiosyncratic Semai myth. Rather, it is a socially constructed storytelling that incorporates Malay Islamic elements with a covert critique of Malay/Semai political relations. More tentatively, I hypothesize that the story represents an adaptation to the imposition on Semai of both Islam and Malay, and that this adaptation is consistent with other Semai nonviolent adaptations throughout history.

BACKGROUND

There are numerous scholarly discourses on the history of the Malay Peninsula. Written histories appear in the form of Western historical accounts (cf. RYAN 1976), classical Malay literature or *hikayat* (cf. SHELLABEAR 1964; SYUKRI 1985), and indigenous stories and folktales told primarily through Western anthropologists and missionaries (cf. SKEAT 1900; DENTAN 1968; ENDICOTT 1979) but more recently by the people themselves (JULI EDO 1990). This brief historical summary of Malay history is my own hybrid of these sources. As we turn to rural Malay and Orang Asli accounts of this history, I will highlight their similarities and differences in more detail.

The Malay word "Orang Asli" means literally, "original people," and

implies “the original inhabitants of the land” (WILLIAMS-HUNT and NOR 1993, 2). The term has come to include all of the non-Malay indigenes of the Malay Peninsula. Archaeological and linguistic evidence supports the theory that ancestors of modern-day Orang Asli arrived on the peninsula before the ethnic Malay populations that now dominate the region. Semai Orang Asli seem to have descended from both prehistoric Australoid populations and the Hoabinhian and Ban Kao culture groups that migrated from Thailand, Burma, and South China between 8,000 and 2,000 BC (BELLWOOD 1985, 72–75; DENTAN et al. 1997, 10; HOWELL 1995, 2). Early Austronesian speaking peoples, the population from which modern day Malays have descended, probably arrived from Borneo and Sumatra during a later migration around 1000 BC. Most Orang Asli assimilated to this new population or left the coasts and moved inland where they lived as hunter-gatherers and swidden horticulturalists (DENTAN et al. 1997, 11; RYAN 1976, 4–5; JULI EDO 1990, 48–50). Malay settlements grew along the coasts and many became centers of trade with Indian and Chinese merchants sailing through the straits of Malacca. By the fourteenth century, traders from South India had introduced Islam to the population. Islam became the official religion of the Malaccan empire in the fifteenth century and of the Malayan state after independence from British colonial rule in 1957 (RYAN 1976, 24).

Until the twentieth century, Orang Asli, isolated from Malay influence and the spread of Islam, made their homes in the mountains. Though contact with Orang Asli sometimes involved trade, coastal people frequently raided Orang Asli villages to take slaves. Orang Asli typically adapted to these and later incursions by fleeing into the rain forests (DENTAN 1993; ENDICOTT 1983; 1994, 2; JULI EDO 1990, 50–51). Twentieth-century invaders included British colonialists, communist rebels, and the Japanese during World War II (HOWELL 1995, 4). Today, the overwhelmingly Malay government “administers” Orang Asli through the JHEOA (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli), an organization that the British originally established to enlist aborigines to fight communist rebels and Malaysian nationalists (NICHOLAS and WILLIAMS-HUNT 1996). Current government policy seeks to integrate Orang Asli into mainstream Malay social and cultural life. It condemns as “Western” the notion that “primitive” tribes should be protected from modernization (ANONYMOUS 1983). Here, modernization translates as the institutionalization of the Malay language, conversion to Islam, and the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle.

THE TEXT

The exact circumstances of the recording of “Kejadian Manusia” are unknown. It is a transcription of a common, though idiosyncratic, story of

the creation of humankind and the colonization of the Malay Peninsula by both Malays and Semai. The late Derus *Knoon* Ngah, a West Semai headman, recorded the story for anthropologist Robert Dentan in 1963. The Semai are a group of Orang Asli who live in southeastern Perak and northwestern Pahang states of West Malaysia. They practice swidden horticulture in what remains of the state's rain forests, though the government has "regrouped" many to settlements, where they must practice more intensive agriculture. Semai are probably best known for the peaceability of their communities, which may have developed as an adaptation to incursions by Malay slave raiders (DENTAN 1968, 2; 1993). Derus was "literate, familiar with Malay lore," "expert on spiritual matters," and "an articulate exponent of the thesis that the cosmos runs by dialectic: male/female, day/night, sun/rain, pagan/Muslim." He argued that "to alter these dualisms, e.g., by converting Semai to Islam, would... be cosmically destructive. People like Derus who have access to familiar spirits in dreams and trances are *-halaag*, adept" (DENTAN 1988, 858–59).

The story appears in Malay, not in Derus's native Semai.³ Derus tells a Malay story of humankind that has little to do with traditional Semai accounts. What, then, does Derus communicate about Semai life in telling a Malay story of creation? Perhaps retelling this story—using the language, form, and narrative conventions found in Malay creation stories—highlights contradictions that Semai experience, contradictions between their treatment by Malays and their perception of a Malay worldview that has been imposed upon them. It may illustrate what DE CERTEAU (1984, 18) means by a "way of using" (*manière d'employer*), of "making do with" what one has (*faire avec*), of "playing with" (*jouer avec*) an imposed system to create a space for resistance, a dissenting voice. Viewing the text in such a way requires extensive contextualization and an understanding of the theoretical framework provided by theorists like De Certeau and Scott. I (Rawski) have chosen, therefore, to reproduce part of the translation with my own commentary inserted into the text. In making my own theoretical orientation explicit in the reading, I hope to further underscore the importance of interpretation in the production of history.

The first section begins with a common rural Malay story about the process of endowing humankind with a soul. The cast of characters is a Biblical one: The Lord, Mohamad, Adam, and the Devil (the Deceiver, Dhajal).

THE CREATION OF HUMANKIND⁴

The Lord of Life⁵ says,
"You may study magic lore."

KEJADIAN MANUSIA

Tuan Nyawa berkata,
"Kamu boleh menuntu ilmu."

Mohamad asks, "What magic?"	Mohamad bertanya, "Ilmu apa?"
"The magic spells ⁶ Mohamad can block."	"Ilmu jampi boleh Mohamad rebat."
The Deceiver ⁷ says, "Hey, who is that screaming at the world? I'm astonished. Oh... perhaps Humankind."	Dhajal berkata, "Hai, siapa-kah yang menjerit ² di dunia? Saya hairan. Oh... rupanya manusia."
"Hey, Humankind is screaming and struggling but cannot wake up." Mohamad says to the Lord of Life.	"Hai, Manusia itu menjerit ² dan bergerak ² tetapi ta' boleh bangun." Mohamad berkata sama Tuan Nyawa.
He says, "Let me heal him."	Dia kata, "Bolehlah saya mengubatnya."
"But how do you intend to heal him, Lord of Life?"	"Tetapi machammanakah hendak mengubatnya, Tuan Nyawa?"
"Mohamad can whisper spells over his heart and his head. Since Mohamad can now use magical spells GO AND SAY SPELLS OVER HIM, MOHAMAD."	"Mohamad boleh jampi di hatinya dan di kepalanya. Kalau Mohamad boleh jampi PERGILAH JAMPI, MOHAMAD."
*	*
*	*
The Deceiver says, "Very well, I can work evil on Humankind."	Dhajal berkata, "Baik-baik, Saya boleh Dhajalkan manusia ini."
And the Deceiver tries to scatter Humankind and he is smashed, all of him. The fingers of Humankind split and his neck twists around.	Dan Dhajal pun menchuba mengelarkan manusia itu dan dipatah ² kan semuanya. Jari manusia itu dibelah ² kan dan dipusing ² kan lehernya.

The problem for Mohamad and the Lord of Life is one that appears throughout rural Malay stories. Adam exists but he has no soul, no *nyawa*. The continual and sometimes comical exchanges between the Lord of Life and Mohamad deal primarily with trying to remedy this situation. Mohamad first tries to say Malay magical spells, *jampi*, to give Adam life: he fails. The Deceiver has broken the body of man that the Lord of Life has created out

of spite, for Deceiver knows that the Lord of Life intends Humankind to be his superior (SKEAT 1900, 21; BANKS 1976, 7).

Not much later,
Mohamad arrives and sees
that Humankind has awakened.

He says,
“Hey,
Adam has awakened
but his sickness still remains.
I am amazed at this.
All right,
I’ll say a spell,
not my spell,
but the Lord of Life’s spell.

*

“I’m amazed.
Why does Adam wake up
and why are his legs
and his arms all crippled?”

“All right,
I don’t want to say spells over him
because his legs,
his arms, and his neck
are completely smashed.
So I will consult the Lord of
Life.

*

*

“Lord of Life,
Adam has awakened and I haven’t
said spells over him yet because...”

(interrupting)

“I was surprised that you didn’t
say spells over him.”

“Because his legs,
arms, and neck
were broken.”

“That’s why you didn’t say
spells over him?”

Mohamad asks,

Ta berapalah lamanya,
Mohamad pun datang dan dilihatnya
manusia itu sudah bangun.

Katanya,
“Hai,
Adam sudah bangun
tapi penyakitnya masih ada lagi.
Saya pun hairan dari itu.
Baiklah,
jampikan,
bukan aku punya jampi,
Tuan Nyawa bagi jampi.

*

“Saya pun hairan.
Apa sebabnya Adam bangun
dan apa sebab kaki,
tangannya habis kena kesat?”

“Baiklah,
Saya ta’ mahu menjampinya
kerana kaki,
tangan, dan lehernya
habis kena patah.
Dari itu saya hendak jumpa Tuan
Nyawa.

*

*

“Tuan Nyawa,
Adam sudah bangun dan saya belum
menjampinya kerana...”

“Saya pun hairan mengapa kau
ta’ menjampinya.”

“Kerana kaki,
tangan, dan lehernya
sudah patah.”

“Sebab itu kah kau ta’ mahu jampi?”

Mohamad bertanya,

“Lord of Life,
why is everything broken?”

The Lord of Life says,
“That breaking is the work of
Master Deceiver.
This is why you did not say
spells?
Mohamad must say spells over him.”

“All right,
Mohamad must say spells over
Adam.”

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*

Mohamad says,
“I did not expect Adam to be
broken.
It seems you are broken because of
Master Deceiver.
All of these injuries,
I must say spells over.”
So Mohamad says spells
over him.

Adam is still lying down
when Mohamad says spells over him
and he does not even scream
because he has already felt the
effects of the spells.

“Hey,
I don’t understand why Adam is
so quiet.”

*
*

“Lord of Life,
Adam has already had spells
said over him.
I do not understand what has
happened,
It’s true, Lord of Life.”

So the Lord of Life says,
“This is why you are worried,
Mohamad ya!”

“This is what worries me, Lord

“Tuan Nyawa,
mengapakah semuanya patah?”

Tuan Nyawa berkata,
“Patah itu ialah kerana
si Dhajal.
Sebab itu kah yang kau ta’ maka
jampi?
Mohamad misti jampi.”

“Baiklah,
Adam misti Mohamad jampikan.”

*
*

Mohamad berkata,
“Saya ta sangka Adam boleh
patah.
Rupanya kau patah kerana
si Dhajal.
Patah patah lah
Saya misti jampi juga.”
Dari itu Mohamad pun
menjampinya.

Adam pun tirus baring
bila Mohamad menjampinya
dan jeritan-jeritannya
pun ta’ ada sebab
sudah kena jampi.

“Hai,
Saya hairan mengapa Adam diam
saja.”

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*

“Tuan Nyawa,
Adam sudah saya jampikan.

Saya pun harian macham mana,
Tuan Nyawa, begitu.”

Jadi Tuannya berkata,
“Sebab itu kah yang kamu risau,
Mohamad ya!”

“Sebab itulah yang saya risau, Tuan

of Life.”	Nyawa.”
“Do not worry about it. As for Adam, he is weak, Mohamad.”	“Janganlah kamu risau kan. Adam, dia letih Mohamad.”
“What is it that makes Adam weak?”	“Kerana apa yang Adam letih?”
“Because he is possessed by a ghost.”	“Sebab dia telah di masuki oleh hantu.”

A ghost in this context is the evil spirit of the Deceiver that inhabits the body of Humankind, preventing its animation. Many Malay stories use this expression, *di masuki oleh hantu*, to indicate “entry by a spirit into its familiar or victim (*di masuki jin*)” (BANKS 1975, 7–8).⁸ The Lord of Life orders Mohamad to perform a ritual with *tepong tawar*,⁹ a powerful substance used for ritual exorcisms and healings. Here, Derus reveals his knowledge of Malay religion.

“So this is why he is weak, Lord of Life.”	“Kerana itu kah Adam letih, Tuan Nyawa.”
“Yes Mohamad! Now try this: Take some water, ¹⁰ wipe his face with it, take some tepong tawar, take some incense and spread it all over his heart and his head.”	“Ya Mohamad! Chuba kamu Ambil ayer, sapu kan dimukanya, ambil tepong tawar, ambil keminyan humburkan dihatinya dan di kepala.”
Mohamad leaves him and goes.	Mohamad pun tinggalkan dan dia pergi.
*	*
*	*
Adam then wakes up and he is very confused because he is very weak. And then Mohamad returns.	Adam pun bangun dan dia sangat binggong kerana sangat letih. Dan Mohamad pun datang lagi.
“Hey Adam, you woke up.”	“Hai Adam, kau sudah bangun.”
Adam does not reply. He remains silent.	Adam pun ta’ membalasnya. Chuma diam sadja.
This surprises Mohamad again; “Adam has woken up but he	Mohamad hairan lagi; “Adam boleh bangun tetapi dia ta’

cannot speak.
 In that case, all right,
 I'll go to the Lord of Life again.
 I must go meet with the Lord of
 Life because
 Adam has woken up but cannot
 speak."

boleh berchakap.
 Dari itu, baiklah,
 Saya pergi lagi kepada Tuan Nyawa.
 Saya misti pergi jumpa Tuan
 Nyawa sebab
 Adam boleh bangun tetapi ta' boleh
 berchakap."

Mohamad fails again. This possession is strong, and Adam remains immobile. Derus has Mohamad say spells and perform a traditional healing ritual. Both have failed. The Lord of Life must leave mythic time momentarily to borrow another metaphor, the bacteria or germ, *kuman*. Perhaps it is this that Adam lacks.

"Hey Lord of Life,
 Adam is awake but confused,
 Lord of Life."

"Hai Tuan Nyawa,
 Adam boleh bangun tetapi binggong,
 Tuan Nyawa."

"All right,
 you do not need to worry.
 You must put a germ onto him."

"Baik,
 kamu ta' usah risau.
 Kamu misti bubohkan kuman."

"How should I do this,
 Lord of Life?"

"Macham mana hendak dibuboh,
 Tuan Nyawa?"

"Put it on the tip of his finger."¹¹

"Bubohkan di hujung jarinya."

"All right, Lord of Life,
 I will put a germ onto him."

"Baiklah, Tuan Nyawa,
 Saya akan buboh kuman."

Mohamad then goes and puts
 the germ onto Adam
 and Adam tries to scratch it
 and Adam stands up and walks
 around but Adam is too
 confused to walk.
 He wants to speak but he does not
 know how.

Mohamad pun pergilah membuboh
 kuman itu pada Adam
 dan Adam pun chuba menggaru2kan
 dan Adam pun berdiri dan
 berjalan2 tetapi Adam
 binggong tahu berjalan.
 Sadja nak berchakap ta' pandai.

Not long after,
 Mohamad comes to see Adam.

Ta' berapa lama,
 Mohamad pun datang hendak
 melihat Adam.

"Hey Adam,
 you can already walk
 but how is it that you,
 Adam, cannot speak?
 All right,

"Hai Adam,
 kamu sudah boleh berjalan
 tetapi macham mana kamu,
 Adam, ta' boleh berchakap?
 Baiklah,

I will meet with the Lord of Life because you are unable to speak.”	Saya boleh jumpa Tuan Nyawa sebab kau ta’ pandai berchakap.”
*	*
*	*
“Lord of Life, Adam cannot speak.”	“Tuan Nyawa, Adam ta’ maka berchakap.”
“All right,” says the Lord of Life, “You must order Adam to pray.”	“Baik,” kata Tuan Nyawa, “Adam misti kamu suroh sembahyang.”
“All right,” says Mohamad, “I will order Adam to pray.”	“Baiklah,” kata Mohamad, “Saya boleh suroh Adam sembahyang.”
And Mohamad goes to meet with Adam.	Dan Mohamad pergi berjumpa Adam.

Adam finally has life but no speech. He has no consciousness of himself and he remains confused (*binggong*). For the Lord of Life, as for most gods, it is not really awareness that speech represents, but an ability to defer, to give thanks for existence, and to truly partake of the creator. To speak is to pray. In Derus’s account, Adam seems uncertain whether he likes this arrangement or not.

Mohamad says, “You must pray.”	Mohamad berkata, “Kamu misti sembahyang.”
But Adam doesn’t answer. “Hey,” says Mohamad, “Adam does not want to answer, I must meet with the Lord of Life again.”	Tetapi Adam ta’ menjawab. “Hai,” kata Mohamad, “Adam ta’ mahu menjawab, Aku misti jumpa Tuan Nyawa lagi.”
*	*
*	*
“Lord of Life, Adam does not want to answer.”	“Tuan Nyawa, Adam ta’ mahu menjawab.”
The Lord of Life says, “You must order Adam to pray again.”	Tuan Nyawa berkata, “Misti kamu suroh Adam sem- bahyang juga.”
“All right,” says Mohamad, “I will order him.”	“Baiklah,” kata Mohamad, “Saya misti suroh.”
And Mohamad goes to meet	Dan Mohamad pun pergilah

with Adam again.	berjumpa Adam lagi.
*	*
*	*
“Hey Adam, you do not want to do what I say when I order you to pray. All right, Adam does not want to pray. I will go meet with the Lord of Life again.”	“Hai Adam, kamu ta’ mahu mengikut chakap aku yang aku suroh sembahyang. Baiklah, Adam ta’ mahu sembahyang. Saya pergi jumpa Tuan Nyawa lagi.”
*	*
*	*
“Lord of Life, I ordered Adam to pray but he did not answer.”	“Tuan Nyawa, Saya sudah suroh Adam sembahyang tetapi dia ta’ menjawab.”
“Very well, make him faint.”	“Baiklah, bahagi dia pengsan.”
“Well then, I will make him faint.”	“Bolehlah, Saya bagi pengsan.”
And Mohamad goes to meet with Adam.	Dan Mohamad pun pergilah berjumpa dengan Adam.
*	*
*	*
“Hey Adam, why is it that you do not want to pray? Now... YOU MUST FAINT!”	“Hai Adam, apa pasal kamu ta’ mahu sembahyang, Kamu... MISTI PENGSAN!”
And Adam suddenly faints.	Dan Adam pun pengsanlah.
“Adam has fainted, but now what can I do to make him well again? All right, I will meet with the Lord of Life again.”	“Adam sudah pengsan, tetapi machammana aku hendak buat supaya dia baik? Baiklah, Saya jumpa Tuan Nyawa lagi.”
*	*
*	*
“Lord of Life, Adam has fainted but now what can be done to make him well?”	“Tuan Nyawa, Adam sudahlah pengsan tetapi macham manakah hendak dibuat baik?”
The Lord of Life is happy,	Tuan Nyawa itu senang,

“Take some water and wipe it over his face.”	“Ambil ayer, sapukan di mukanya.”
So Mohamad goes to Adam, takes some water and wipes it on Adam’s face.	Dan Mohamad pun pergilah pada Adam, di ambilnya ayer dan disapukan ka muka Adam.
Adam then regains consciousness and Adam SCREAMS.	Adam pun sedarlah dan Adam pun berngerewit.

Adam has now become conscious and aware (*pun sedarlah*). He inaugurates his entrance into the world of signs with his first representation: a scream.

The first part of this narrative has much in common with other creation stories throughout the peninsula. Batek, or non-Muslim foragers, tell a similar story about the problems that arise in granting humankind life. Batek also incorporate Malay imagery and characters into their stories, although they, like Semai, view their own religion as distinct from and in opposition to Malay Muslim dogmas.¹² The fact that rural Malays, Semai, and Batek share these stories might be read by some as evidence that Orang Asli have assimilated rural Malay and Islamic religious traditions. In Derus’s story, so far, Adam seems to represent an inclusive “Humankind” encompassing Malays and Orang Asli. As the narrative progresses, I read Derus’s portrayal of Adam as representing Orang Asli in their struggle against the imposition of Malay Islam. In fact, the Malay ruling class envisage its approach to Orang Asli as fraught with the same problems Derus’s Mohamad faces in dealing with Adam.¹³ Its explicit aim is to “modernize” the Semai. In Malay that term is *membangunkan*. The sense is to “bring economic development to,” but the underlying meaning is to “awaken” (e.g. from being *binggong*, “dazed, stuporous”) or “make someone stand up.” (DENTAN et al. 1997, 90–92). A JHEOA official might feel about the failure of the Semai to “progress” precisely the same way that the Lord of Life feels about Adam’s failure to “awaken.”

THE PRACTICALITY OF PRAYER

Adam regains consciousness.	Adam pun sedarlah.
Adam is thirsty and feels hungry.	Adam telah haus dan berasa lapar.
Because of this, Mohamad is very pleased.	Daru itu, Mohamad sangat suka.
Mohamad says, “All right, I can give you some water.”	Mohamad berkata, “Baiklah, Aku boleh bagi ayer.”

So Mohamad gives him some water. When Mohamad gives him some water, Adam gets up and Mohamad asks Adam to pray,	Mohamad pun bagilah ayer. Bila Mohamad bagi ayer, Adam pun bangkit dan Mohamad bagi pada Adam supaya Adam sembahyang. tetapi Adam ta' membalas.
but Adam does not reply.	
So Mohamad tells him to again pray.	Tetapi Mohamad suroh lagi sembahyang.
*	*
Adam does not reply to Mohamad's words at all.	Adam sikit pun ta' mambalas perkataan Mohamad.
Several times Mohamad orders him until Adam realizes that what Mohamad is telling him might be true. And he then feels hungry and thirsty.	Beberapa kali Mohamad menyurohnya, Maka ia pun teringat barangkali betul juga yang Mohamad menyurohnya itu. Dan ia pun merasa lapar dan haus.
Adams thinks "What is it that my Lord asks me to do? What will happen if I pray?"	Adam berfikir, "Macham manakah yang Tuan menyurohkan? Saya sembahyang apakah balasannya nanti?"
Adam thinks and thinks, until he decides to try praying. Adam begins to pray but he feels very weary and thirsty. And then Adam hears a voice telling him that the obedient will pray...	Adam berfikir-fikir, Maka ia pun hendaklah menchuba sembahyang. Adam pun sembahyanglah tetapi dia chukop merasa letih dan dahga. Dan Adam pun terdengerlah satu suara berkata supaya ia ta'at akan sembahyang...

Adam has discovered the practical aspect of being obedient and faithful (*taat*). It produces results. It quenches his hunger, his thirst, and what else?

Adam then hears the voice of Mohamad ordering him to pray. So he prays. After he is finished praying, some rice appears. After he is finished eating,	Adam pun terdengar suara Mohamad menyuroh dia sembahyang. Dia pun sembahyanglah. Bila dia sudah sembahyang, nasi pun adalah. Bila dia sudah makan,
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he says,
 “All right then,
 I will pray.”

After Adam is finished eating,
 he goes walking.
 Soon he begins to feel hungry,
 so he prays,
 obeying the words of
 Mohamad.

Adam says,
 “All right,
 I don’t want to pray
 because if I pray,
 I will only receive more food.
 I already have food
 but no house in which to live.”

Mohamad orders Adam
 to pray.
 When he finishes praying,
 a house appears for him.
 So Adam moves into
 this house.
 When he feels hungry and thirsty,
 he prays.
 When he prays,
 there is food.

Not much later,
 he hears the voice of
 Mohamad say,
 it says,
 that he should pray three
 times each day.
 So Adam prays for seven
 days
 without stopping to eat
 or even stopping to drink.

At the end of the seven days,
 he says,
 “I pray,”
 but then he adds,
 “What is the meaning of prayer?”
 And Mohamad is astonished
 that Adam does not want to pray.

dia berkata,
 “Baiklah,
 aku sembahyang.”

Adam sudah makan
 dia pun berjalanlah.
 Bila dia berasa lapar,
 dia pun sembahyanglah,
 kerana dia mengikut chakap
 Mohamad.

Adam berkata,
 “Baiklah,
 saya ta’ mahu sembahyang
 sebab kalau saya sembahyang,
 pun chuma makan sadja
 yang ada
 tetapi rumah ta’ ada.”

Tetapi Mohamad menyuruh Adam
 pun sembahyanglah.
 Bila dia sudah sembahyang,
 adalah sebuah rumah untuknya.
 Dan Adam pun tinggallah di
 rumah itu.
 Bila dia merasa lapar dan dahga,
 dia pun sembahyanglah.
 Bila dia sembahyang,
 makanan pun adalah.

Ta berapa lama,
 terdengarlah suara
 Mohamad berkata,
 mengatakan,
 supaya dia sembahyang 3
 kali sehari.
 Tetapi Adam sembahyang selama 7
 hari
 ta’ berhenti makan tidak
 minum pun tidak juga.

Chukop 7 hari,
 dia pun berkata,
 “Aku sembahyang,”
 tetapi dia berkata lagi,
 “Sembahyang apakah artinya?”
 Dan Mohamad pun hairan
 kerana Adam ta’ mahu

<p>Mohamad says, “All right, I will meet with the Lord of Life.”</p>	<p>sembahyang. Mohamad berkata, “Baiklah, saya akan berjumpa dengan Tuan Nyawa.”</p>
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After taking advantage of prayer to acquire both food and shelter, Derus has Adam bluntly question its meaning. Mohamad’s constant surprise (*hairan*) at Adam’s curiosity or defiance sometimes seems comical. The narrative avoids the solemn tone of more orthodox religious texts.¹⁴

<p>The Lord of Life says, “Go and order Adam to pray again. In the early morning, he must bathe. After he bathes, he must pray three times each day.”</p> <p>So Mohamad orders Adam to do this. Adam obeys the words of Mohamad. He prays as often as three times each day.</p> <p>Once, as he finishes praying, he happens to see a pair of crows and he says, “How very nice it is for that crow. He has a companion. But I am all alone. Because of this, I do not want to pray. Even though I am hungry, I will carry on.”</p> <p>Then he thinks, “Day is the opposite of night, and woman of man, as the moon is the opposite of the sun.”</p> <p>As he is thinking about this, he hears the voice of Mohamad ordering him to pray.</p>	<p>Tuan Nyawa berkata, “Suroh juga supaya Adam sembahyang. Pagi-pagi, dia misti mandi. Lepas mandi, dia misti sembahyang 3 kali sahari.”</p> <p>Mohamad pun menyurohlah pada Adam. Adam pun mengikutlah perkataan Mohamad itu. Dia pun sembahyang sebanyak 3 kali sahari.</p> <p>Bila dia sudah sembahyang, dia terlihatlah sakelamin burung gagak dan dia pun berkata, “Alangkah bagusanya burung itu. Dia ada kawanya. Tetapi saya chuma saorang sahja. Dari itu, saya ta’ mahulah sembahyang. Biar pun saya lapar, saya akan tanggung.”</p> <p>Tetapi dia berfikir, “Siang lawannya malam, perempuan laki laki, bulan lawannya mata hari.”</p> <p>Tengah dia berfikir itu, terdengerlah ia suara Mohamad menyuroh sembahyang.</p>
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Mohamad then goes to meet with the Lord of Life.	Tetapi Mohamad pergilah berjumpa pada Tuan Nyawa.
He tells the Lord of Life why Adam does not want to pray.	Dia kata pada Tuan Nyawa sebab Adam ta' mahu sembahyang.
And the Lord of Life says, "What is so difficult?"	Dan Tuan Nyawa berkata, "Apa pasal?"
The Lord of Life says, "Go and tell Adam to pray."	Tuan Nyawa berkata, "Suroh juga Adam sembahyang."
So Adam prays.	Dan Adam pun sembahyanglah.
When he is finished praying, he sees a woman in his house,	Bilalah dia lepas sembahyang, dia pun terlihatlah saorang perempuan di rumahnya,
and he embraces the woman.	dan pun menerkan pada perempuan itu.

This account of the origin of Eve is found in other rural Malay myths. Compare Derus's version to a Malay myth reported by Skeat in his own creative Christian gloss of this encounter between Adam, the Angel Gabriel (Mohamad), God Almighty (the Lord of Life) and "our Lady Eve":

Adam beheld [two?] peacocks¹⁵ of no ordinary beauty.
And the Angel Gabriel appeared.
"Verily, O Angel Gabriel, I am solitary,
Easier is to live in pairs, I crave a wife."
God Almighty spake, saying, "Command Adam
To pray at dawn a prayer of two genuflexions."
Then Adam prayed, and our Lady Eve descended,
And was captured by the prophet Adam;
But before he had finished his prayer she was taken aback,
Therefore Adam prayed the prayer of two genuflexions as desired,
And at the last obtained our Lady Eve. (SKEAT 1900, 20)

For our Lord of Life, two genuflexions did not suffice. Three prayers a day must have tired Adam. He no longer wants to pray...

Once Adam finds the woman in his house, he no longer wants to pray nor does he even want to eat.	Bila dia sudah dapat perempuan, sembahyang pun dia ta' mahu makan pun tidak.
Eve cannot tolerate this, so Eve reports to Mohamad all that Adam was doing...	Dan Hava pun merasa ta' tahan, Maka Hava pun meneporkan pada Mohamad akan perbuatan Adam yang dimikian...

Not much later, he sees the crow with its wife and child. This makes Adam feel sad because he does not have a child.	Ta' berapa lama, dia terlihat burung gagak itu dengan anak dan istrinya. Adam pun merasa sedih kerana dia ta' ada anak.
Soon afterwards, he sees the crow again having sex. So he pays close attention to the crow. He then does as the crow.	Ta' berapa lama, lagi ia terlihat pula akan burung gagak itu sedang membuat jahat. Maka Adam memerhatikan burong itu. Dia pun membuatlah samacham burong itu.
For seven years, he has sex with Eve ¹⁶ but she gives birth to no children...	Salama 7 tahun, dia berjahat dengan Hava tetapi ta' juga melahirkan anak...
Finally, Eve becomes pregnant. All at once, Eve gives birth to thirty children.	Lama lama, Hava pun mengandonglah. Sakali, Hava melahirkan anaknya 30 orang.

In expressing uncertainty about Mohamad's command to pray, Adam articulates what, for him (and thus for all the Humankind he personifies), are the essentials of life: food, shelter, and family. The first several times that Mohamad commands Adam to pray, Adam ignores Mohamad or refuses outright. When he does capitulate, it is in exchange for both rice and water, the second time in exchange for a house, the third time for his "Lady Eve," and the fourth time for a child. He even questions the importance of prayer until his next need arises. Adam's skeptical submission to Mohamad's requests approaches closely the modern Semai dilemma of whether or not to capitulate to the efforts of the Department of Religion and convert to Islam in exchange for the social and economic benefits that seem to accrue to converted Orang Asli. The paternalistic Mohamad and the reluctant Adam seem to fit the modern roles of JHEOA official and Orang Asli subject. Derus need not be an overtly political person to tell such a story. Conflict with Malays over these issues is a day-to-day reality for many indigenous Malaysians (DENTAN et al. 1997, 142–50; NICHOLAS and WILLIAMS-HUNT 1996, 458).

INTERLUDE: VISION 2020 FOR THE "ORIGINAL PEOPLES," ORANG ASLI AND BUMIPUTERA

Political consciousness as a group called "Orang Asli" is something very new among the indigenous people of the Malay Peninsula (GOMES 1985). There

have been a number of attempts to cultivate Orang Asli political consciousness to aid in the fight for land rights and increased participation in government. POASM (Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia), an Orang Asli political action group, with an Orang Asli senator, submitted a proposal to the Malaysian government in which they set forth explicit demands for the improvement of the condition of Orang Asli (summarized in DENTAN et al. 1997, 155–59; NICHOLAS and WILLIAMS-HUNT 1996, 468–73). It is written in Malay, like Derus’s account, and speaks to the dominant themes in a peculiarly Malaysian government form of development discourse. The proposal itself is titled, “The Development of the Orang Asli in the context of ‘Vision 2020.’” The government, it says, is correct in wanting to develop Orang Asli communities and integrate them into mainstream society. The proposal sets its demands within the framework established by the Malaysian government, their “vision” of the future of Malaysia. The demands include land rights, improved educational services, access to medicine, and the recognition of Orang Asli customary laws. POASM’s proposal “plays with” Malaysian government discourse about “modernizing” Orang Asli. The authors of the proposal ask that the government allow Orang Asli to participate in this process as fully “integrated” Malaysians. Though the proposal makes some strong claims, they are nearly always qualified and defer to the “vision” articulated by the government.

From the point of view of development, this society [Orang Asli] is left far behind nowadays when compared to other groups. It is as if they were secluded from the mainstream of development.

(POASM 1991, 3; italics added)

The authors employ the common Malay conception of Orang Asli as lazy and living off of the charity of the state in order to justify their demands for increased participation in government. For development to be successful, they claim, Orang Asli must be included in the political process “so that they are not only the “takers” but also the “contributors” (POASM 1991, 3–4).

Central to POASM’s proposal to the Malaysian government and to Derus’s account is the claim that Orang Asli are the original inhabitants of the peninsula. In Malaysia today, the issue of “indigeness” is ubiquitous and problematic. Its definition lies at the foundation of modern Malay politics. In post-Independence Malaya/Malaysia, the government has used the term *bumiputera*, Sanskrit for “princes of the soil,” as a label for the indigenous people of the peninsula. *Bumiputera* receive many socioeconomic advantages over non-*bumiputera*; including access to low-interest loans, etc. An extensive quota system requires businesses to hire a certain percentage of

bumiputera. In official government discourse, the term may include both Malay and Orang Asli citizens and exclude Chinese, Indians, and other more recent immigrants. Census takers count both Orang Asli and Malays as *bumiputera*. Yet in practice, that is, in the distribution of benefits and government entitlements, *bumiputera* has come to mean Malay and Muslim (TAN 1993, 3–4). UMNO (United Malay National Organization), the political party of the Malay ruling class, reproduces the Malay/non-Malay distinction by distributing *bumiputera* aid almost exclusively to Malays. UMNO justifies neglecting Orang Asli development by saying that Orang Asli already have their own government organization, the JHEOA, to minister their needs.

In the Orang Asli proposal for Malaysia's "Vision 2020," POASM and the Orang Asli senator begin by claiming *bumiputera* status.

Historical, anthropological, and archeological data show that they [Orang Asli] have been on the peninsula before the Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Moreover, this concept of ORANG ASLI which is brought to the public has the legal connotation and the implication that they were the original inhabitants of this area. (POASM 1991, 3)

Though in practice *bumiputera* means Muslim Malay, the writers of this proposal take advantage of the ambiguity of the government's terms. They describe their ethnic identity in terms of Orang Asli and *bumiputera*, a vocabulary that Malays produce. They play with (*jouer avec*) this terminology and attempt to use it to their advantage. Similarly, Derus will enfold his claims for Orang Asli "indigenoussness" within the cloak of a Malay narrative about the establishment of Malaysia.¹⁷

That such a proposal can appear is testimony to the fact that other "spaces" (besides the clandestine and the mythical) occasionally open up in which Orang Asli can make themselves heard. The Malaysian government has yet to fulfill its promises to Orang Asli. Effective criticisms are often those that point up contradictions within dominant discourses themselves instead of overtly challenging them.

THE PEOPLING OF MALAYA

Next, the narrative leaves the mythical space of the Lord of Life, Mohamad, and Adam and Eve. It enters into historical time with the peopling of the Malay Peninsula. The text follows Adam's oldest child and his family in search of a land in which to settle. This "vanished tribe" (*orang yang hilang*) of husband, wife, and daughter finds itself on an island. We rejoin Derus's narrative as they set forth from this mythical center to land at the historical center of Malay power, Malacca, on the Malay Peninsula.

<p>So they go to look for a land.¹⁸ Then the young girl says, she says, “Where can we hope to go? We are surrounded by ocean.”</p> <p>So they go for a walk. During their walk, they come across a big piece of wood floating near the edge of the water.</p> <p>“All right,” says the husband, “Let’s take this piece of wood and we will go from this place.”</p> <p>“Hey,” says the husband, “If our luck is good, the wind will blow this wood away. Wherever it takes it, there we will also go. Alive or dead, one cannot guess.”</p> <p>The wind then blows them to Melaka where they topple right onto the beach.</p>	<p>Dan mereka pun pergi chari negeri. Maka berkatalah Si anak perempuan tadi, katanya, “Kamankah kita hendak pergi? Keliling semua kita ini semua laut.”</p> <p>Maka mereka berjalan. Dengan perjalanan, mereka tadi terjumalah satu ketul kayu yang besar dan terapong di tepi pantai tadi.</p> <p>“Baiklah,” kata si suami tadi, “Kita naik atas batang kayu ini kita akan pergi dari tempat ini.”</p> <p>“Hai,” kata si suami tadi, “Kalau ledah yang ada tuah, tiup oleh angin si kayu ini. Di mana dia bawa, di situ kita pergi. Hidup atau mati, tidak kira.”</p> <p>Di tiup angin sampai ka Melaka tergolek2 di tepi pantai.</p>
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This event marks the movement from a mythical to a historical space in the narrative. The characters of myth and religion, Mohamad and the Lord of Life, Adam and Eve, even the “vanished people,” disappear. Derus replaces them with the equally elusive and ambiguous modern political entities, Orang Asli and Malay.

<p>“Hey, by the will of Allah, our luck is good.”</p> <p>Then they walk on the shore of Melaka and they settle at Melaka.</p> <p>Some days later,</p>	<p>“Hai, nasib baik kita ini dengan kuasa Allah.”</p> <p>Mereka itu pun naiklah ka darat Melaka. Mereka itu pun diamlah di Melaka.</p> <p>Selang beberapa hari,</p>
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they go to climb Mt. Linge’.	mereka itu pun pergilah mendaki gunong Linge’.
They become friendly with the tigers.	Mereka bersahabat dengan harimau.
After this,	Lepas itu,
they go to Mt. Makh lok. ¹⁹	mereka pergi ka gunong Makh lok.
After this,	Lepas itu,
they go and spread all over Malaya.	mereka pun pergilah merata2 Tanah Melayu.
Several years pass before those two people become many.	Entah beberapa tahun maka biaklah daripada orang yang berdua tadi menjadi ramai.
And they go to live on the shores of the rivers, in their estuaries, and by the ocean.	Dan mereka itu diam di tepi2 sungai, di kuala2 sungai, dan di tepi laut.

What better place than Malacca to enter into history? For Malays, Malacca signifies not only a geographic place on the western shore of the peninsula but an era that current rulers reconstruct and deploy as a sign of Malay supremacy. Malaysian school textbooks often begin with the founding of Malacca. At one time, the Malaccan empire controlled trade from the Middle East to many of the islands in Southeast Asia.

Derus’s retelling of the story causes some confusion. The migrants thank Allah for their luck upon arrival, as we would expect of Malay Muslims. But Derus tells us that they spread across the peninsula, into the mountains, befriending tigers, while Malays have always dwelt by the coasts, avoiding the mountains and forests. “Becoming friendly with tigers” seems to refer to Orang Asli shamans. This suggests that the newcomers were Orang Asli. Derus seems to conflate the Malay migration from Sumatra with the arrival of Orang Asli to the peninsula and a Malay point of origin with a Semai one.

The Semai seem to know little about their own history beyond the fact that they were the original inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula. Some Semai say that the Senoi peoples originated at a place called Sakai Jadi [Malay for “become Senoi”] in what is now the Western part of Semai land. Since then, the Semai say, they have always been where they are today. (DENTAN 1968, 2)

Ambiguities and contradictions are common in Derus’s account of Malay history. Again, this is no surprise. Such ambiguities are what makes covert resistance possible. In our story, Malacca and Sakai Jadi are more than places

on a map: they are contested, practiced spaces (DE CERTEAU 1990, 172). Their significance is neither fixed nor clear.

A number of years later, some Malays come from Sumatra.	Beberapa tahun lamanya, barulah datang orang2 Melayu dari Sumatera.
They want to settle in Malaya.	Mereka hendak berkampong di Melaya.
They ask the Orang Asli who live by the ocean and those people give them permission to settle there because they [Malays] had no way of surviving in their own country.	Mereka minta pada orang asli yang diam di tepi laut dan jawab orang itu boleh sebab orang itu tiada mata penchariannya di negri mereka.
At first, only one Malay couple settles there.	Orang Melayu yang mula2 datang itu ialah sakelamin.
Since they are content in Malaya, they go and call their friends.	Maka bila mereka rasa senang di Melaya, mereka pun pergilah memanggil kawan2 mereka.
And the Orang Asli give them all permission to settle together there.	Dan Orang Asli itu pun mengatakan boleh tinggal beramai2.

Now, Derus opposes, rather than conflates, Orang Asli and Malays. It is this opposition that has come to shape modern Orang Asli ethnic identity more than any other. The very use of these terms by Derus implies a sophisticated political sense of Semai as part of a larger group of indigenous Malaysians who have “not being Malay” as their common attribute. Malay histories draw these lines of difference just as clearly,

Under the shelter of thick jungle and together with the wild animals there were two kinds of human beings of a primitive type.... They were the Semang people and the Sakai people. Although both peoples are called human, actually their condition and way of life were still primitive, and far from the ways of civilized humans. (SYUKRI 1985, 3–4)

Derus clarifies that Orang Asli were on the peninsula before Malays; that Orang Asli had already spread throughout the peninsula, by the time Malays first began to arrive from Sumatra. Most importantly, Derus’s history has the Malays asking Orang Asli for permission to settle on their lands. His narrative establishes Orang Asli as the original inhabitants of the region, exercising

rights over land and having the authority to give it to others. Today, Orang Asli lack such power. Though federal laws have established Orang Asli Reserves, this land is not individually owned, and can be revoked at will by the state (ENDICOTT 1994, 5; DENTAN et al. 1997, 73–76, 109–16; NICHOLAS and WILLIAMS-HUNT 1996, 470–71). This inversion of present-day Malay/Orang Asli power relations challenges official government discourse on “indigenouness.”

<p>When Malaya becomes crowded with Malays, Orang Asli go to live somewhere else because they do not want to mix with the Malays. Orang Asli do not want to mix because the food they ate was not halal.</p>	<p>Bila sudah ramai Orang2 Melayu di Melaya, Maka Orang2 Asli itu pergi ka lain tempat kerana mereka itu ta' mahu berchampur. Sebab Orang Asli itu ta' suka berchampur kerana makanan mereka ta' tentu.</p>
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The arrival of more Malays forced the coastal Orang Asli into the interior. That the Malays arrived after Orang Asli and subsequently drove them from the coasts is no surprise. It is echoed in the accounts of both Malay and Western historians. It is Derus's explanation for the move to the interior that is notable. In Derus's account, the coastal Orang Asli voluntarily leave the coasts because they do not want to violate Malay food taboos.²⁰ It is more likely that Orang Asli fled into the mountainous interior to escape Malay slave raiders or other conflicts (ENDICOTT 1983).

<p>It soon becomes very crowded with Malays and they decide to make someone into Raja. The Malays then become envious of the Orang Asli who had left. So the Malays go to look for the Orang Asli who had left.</p> <p>When the Malays find them, they give them salt, betel, or other things.</p>	<p>Orang2 Melayu itu pun sangatlah ramai dan mereka pun berfikir hendak membuat saorang Raja. Orang2 Melayu itu pun merintat akan Orang2 Asli yang telah pergi. Make Orang Melayu itu pun pergilah menchari akan Orang Asli yang pergi itu.</p> <p>Bila Orang Melayu itu sudah berjumpa, mereka beri garam, sirih, atau lain2 lagi.</p>
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They then look for tree resin to give to the Malays who gave them salt and other things.	Mereka pun menchari damar untuk Orang2 Melayu yang memberi garam dan lain2 pada mereka.
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In contrast to the Malay *hiqayat* that describe the inhabitants of the interior as uncivilized, Derus accuses the Malays of being jealous of the lifestyle of the Orang Asli and their access to the riches of the forest. It is this that inspires the Malays to enter the interior.²¹ The narrative places Orang Asli in a privileged position compared to the Malays. Few explanations for their subjugation today seem more plausible to Orang Asli than Malay envy. Envy permeates our text. The envy of the Malays driving Orang Asli into the forest parallels the envy of Dhajal, the Deceiver, shattering Humankind into pieces in the beginning of our story.

THE BIRTH OF THE RAJA

Trade in forest goods did not satisfy the Malays for long. So they decided to install a king, a Raja, and make all of Malaya their kingdom. These new rulers tried to establish a centralized political system and incorporate Orang Asli into it. Malay rulers appointed leaders to rule over each region. These appointed leaders often mistook Semai leaders to be Malay-style authoritarian headmen. The egalitarian Semai, however, were particularly resistant to this sort of control. A Semai elder is “more a spokesman for public opinion than a molder of it” (DENTAN 1968, 68). It is, therefore, not surprising that the process of establishing a kingdom meets with resistance among the Orang Asli of the interior. It is also not surprising that this resistance does not take the form of armed rebellion by Orang Asli. It takes a less tangible form.

The more time passes, the more crowded with Malays it becomes in Malaya. Then the Malays decide to make someone Raja but when they choose someone, he dies within a week.	Makin lama, makin ramailah Orang2 Melayu yang tinggal di Melaya. Bila Orang2 Melayu itu hendak membuat saorang Raja tetapi orang dipilih itu ta' sampai saminggu Raja itu pun mati.
As times passes, this happens again and again and the Malays are surprised that the people who they choose all die. They say that each of the rivers must have a Raja	Makin lama, begitu juga dan Orang2 Melayu itu pun hairan kerana orang2 yang dipilih itu semua mati. Mereka mengatu satu Sungai misti ada Raja

but the Raja did not survive.	tetapi Raja pun ta' tahan.
So they meet in order to choose a child suitable to become the new Raja.	Mereka pun bermashuarat hendak pilih anak siapa yang layak menjadi Raja.
The people answer, "We want one of our own children."	Jawab orang ramai, "Kami sayang anak kami."
They go to get a child from Sumatra to be made Raja of Malaya.	Mereka pergi ka Sumatra untuk mengambil anak orang di Sumatra supaya dijadikan Raja di Melaya.
But within a week after he is crowned, the child dies.	Tetapi apa bila ditabal, tak sampai saminggu budak itu pun mati.

None of the children chosen by the Sumatrans live long enough to become Raja. Derus's narrative resists the establishment of this new political system. This is resistance without an agent. The children simply die as if it were an act of God (or the Deceiver?). Similarly, Derus's use of a Malay rather than a Semai tale as this framework renders himself invisible. The "author" of the story is ambiguous. On the surface it remains a Malay tale. There is one place in the narrative where Orang Asli claims do become more visible. Both Malay and Semai interests reach a juncture at the conclusion of our story. The search for a child Raja leads us to this intersection...

So the people meet again at the house of an old woman.	Mereka pun bermashuarat lagi di rumah Nenek.
This old woman, she goes fishing every day.	Nenek itu, kerjanya memancing tiap2 hari.
One time while she is fishing, she comes across an Orang Asli child near the edge of the river.	Pada suatu apabila ia sedang memancing, berjumpalah dengan saorang budak Orang Asli di tepi sungai.
The child is about ten years old. The child's body is covered with ringworm.	Budak itu kira2 berumur 10 tahun. Badan budak penoh dengan kudis.
So the woman takes the child and brings it back to her house.	Nenek pun mengambil budak itu dibawanya ka rumahnya.
The old woman treats the child but the sores do not go away.	Nenek ubatkan budak tetapi kudis tadi ta' mahu elok.
The people who want to choose a Raja meet again at the house of the old woman.	Orang2 yang memilih Raja itu bermashuarat lagi di rumah Nenek.

They see the child that she has found in the old woman's house.	Mereka lihat ada budak di rumah Nenek.
They ask the old woman, "Where did you find this child all covered with ringworm?"	Mereka bertanya kepada Nenek, "Mana Nenek dapat budak yang kudis ini?"
She answers, "I found him in the forest."	Jawab Nenek, "Saya dapat di dalam hutan."
The people say, "As for us, we do not want him because he has yaws. If there were no yaws, we would take him home. Because of the yaws we do not want him."	Kata orang2 itu, "Kalau kami, tidak hendak sebab puru. Kalau tak puru, tentu kami bawah rumah ini. Kerana puru kami ta' hendak."
She answers, "I brought him here because he is human."	Jawab, "Saya bawa sebab manusia."
The people say, "Human but with yaws."	Kata orang2 itu, "Manusia pun puru."
The old woman says, "I care even for animals, so much more I care for Humankind."	Kata Nenek, "Alangkah binatang saya bela, ganda pula manusia."

The final segment of Derus's narrative is a particularly interesting telling of another common rural Malay folktale. In the complete Malay tale, the old woman and the sick Orang Asli boy give birth to a child.²² It is this child, part Sumatran and part Orang Asli, that lives to become Raja. The modern Malay ruling class, in some tellings, traces its ancestry back to this child, creating a history that justifies their claim to indigenosity and their special treatment as *bumiputera*.

Derus's telling of the story problematizes this claim. As noted above, "indigenosity" is a powerful part of Malay political discourse. This particular story marks a juncture between Malay and Orang Asli storytellings about "indigenosity" in Malaysia. In this storytelling, the Malay claim of Orang Asli ancestry might be read as an assertion of Orang Asli indigenous status and land rights. In this way, Derus's story can be read as legitimizing the Orang Asli demand that they too be treated as *bumiputera*. The story marks a space within Malay folklore that resonates for both Malay and Semai.

CONCLUSION

Through POASM and similar organizations, Orang Asli are becoming more active and present in public discourse. The POASM proposal explicitly claims indigenous status. But Derus's narrative illustrates that such claims do not only occur in government discourse. These political narratives are built upon a largely "invisible" tradition of subversive storytelling. This adds further evidence to De Certeau's insistence that resistance takes place in the "practices of everyday life," in speaking about the world. It resonates with Scott's assertion that the existence of an intelligentsia or political representative is neither a prerequisite for ethnic consciousness nor for resistance. Derus's narrative exhibits both. In this way, storytellers and political advocates, such as Derus and POASM, both manipulate the contradictions in a dominant discourse, such as Malay folklore and Vision 2020, to their own rhetorical advantage.

Though Orang Asli political organizations have tried to articulate the demands of the Orang Asli community in the public arena, most Orang Asli express their views in less confrontational ways. In an environment of political oppression often the only way for subordinate groups to make themselves heard at all is to "insinuate their resistance in disguised form into the public transcript" (SCOTT 1990, 136). The religious or mythic voice is a perfect vehicle for this. Derus comments on his people's situation by creating and manipulating "celestial landmarks" (DE CERTEAU 1984, 16): the creation of man, the teachings of Mohamad and Adam, the establishment of a Raja in Malaya and, by extension, the modern nation of Malaysia. Out of necessity, he creates a space where covert protest can occur. Further, by adopting the narrative style and vocabulary of Muslim Malays, he undermines the dominant discourse while remaining safely concealed within it; he "escapes without leaving" (DE CERTEAU 1984, xiii). Indeed, as the government relocates Orang Asli into lowland settlements and continues to destroy what is left of the Malaysian rain forests, the traditional Orang Asli adaptation to conflict—retreat into the refuge of the interior—is no longer an option (DENTAN 1993).

Assuming that Malays and Orang Asli will continue to live together in the space of the peninsula, Orang Asli communities will assimilate to much of Malay and Western culture. Likewise, aspects of their own cultures and religions may persist. Neither Malay nor Orang Asli culture will remain the same. In fact, it is deceiving to think of Orang Asli culture and Malay culture as distinct and bounded entities. These terms accrue meaning through their use by human beings who find themselves dominating or subordinate to other human beings. Every practice reshapes the structures that guide it. History is no exception. It is neither entirely imagined nor adopted. When

we tell stories about the past, we are appropriating “bits and pieces” of histories, our own and others’, that correspond somehow to our “hopes and tribulations of the present” (TAUSSIG 1987, 368). Malays and Semai will not continue to tell stories that simply preserve the memory of past events. They will tell stories that resonate somehow with their experience.

This sounds deceptively empowering. It is both a tribute to the tenacity of human beings and a testimony to their cruelty. The struggle for the rights of Orang Asli over their land and culture has only recently been recognized in Malaysia, and even now, only tacitly. The epigraph that opened this paper could just as easily appear at the end: “The strong always win and words always deceive.”

NOTES

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1. *Là, toujours, les forts gagnent et les mots trompent* (DE CERTEAU 1990, 32).

2. *histoire...I. 1. Connaissance et récit des événements du passé... II. 1. Récit d'actions, d'événements réels ou imaginaires... 2. Histoire inventée, invraisemblable ou destinée à tromper, à mystifier* (REY 1989, 629). Notice the move from history to story in this definition alone; from *connaissance des événements* to *récit d'actions* to *histoire inventée*.

3. Semai, an Austroasiatic language, takes no written form. The many words and concepts common in both Semai and Malay reflect the long history of interaction between these language groups. Though Derus never attended Malay schools, he grew up in a West Semai settlement in Perak, a lowland area that is largely shared by rural Malays (DENTAN 1968, 4). Late in his life, he taught himself how to read and write.

4. Using traditional Malay written literature (*hiqayat*) as models, scholars have often imposed order on folktales by transcribing them into unnaturally strict verse form (SWEENEY 1987). My translation and presentation of “Kejadian Manusia” follows methods of some Native and Central American folklorists, particularly Dennis TEDLOCK (1983). His method aims to reconstruct the orality of texts by retaining natural spoken pauses, repetition, and parallelisms and, to the extent possible without a recording of the performance itself, to indicate voice quality and intonation.

5. The translation of “Lord of Life” from the Malay *Tuan Nyawa* requires some explanation. *Tuan* is a Malay term of address for respected adult males (ECHOLS and SHADILY 1989, 588). In Malay cosmology, *nyawa* refers to the life breath (cf. Greek *pneuma*) that God gives to man (BANKS 1976, 5).

The *nyawa* according to the Patani Malays is the breath of life; it is almost, but not quite, a physical thing. According to many people, it is the part of man that goes to heaven (*surga*) or hell (*jehannam*) after death. The removal of the *nyawa* is synonymous with death. The *nyawa*, then, is the aspect of the human soul that distinguishes the living from the dead and, in its wider distribution, distinguishes man and the higher animals from the “on-living” rest of creation. (ENDICOTT 1970, 65)

6. *Ilmu* includes knowledge of all kinds but “in popular speech, *ilmu* is used with a special suggestion of magic” (WILKINSON 1959 (I), 421). When Semai talk about *ilmu* (*Gop*), they mean Malay magic in general, *jampi* (*jnampi*) spells in particular. *Jampi*, a word of Sanskrit origin, refers to whispering verbal spells, almost all in Malay and involving non-Islamic spirits. Semai use such spells independent of the indigenous traditions of *hmalaa'* (DENTAN 1968, 85–86). It may be that *rebat*, which means something like blocking access with a barrier, refers to the Islamic prohibition of “black magic.” Mohamad is about to get permission to *jampi* people.

7. The word “*dajal*” among Muslims refers to “a being of the days preceding the Last Judgement who tempts humans to evil, especially licentious activities” (ECHIOLS 1989, 128).

8. Though they have much in common with the evil spirits of Semai myth (*nyani*), these ghosts have Islamic origins, or at the very least, Islamic names:

when He [Allah] created man in the form of Adam, in fashioning a new kind of essence in flesh and blood on earth, a group of *jinn* rebelled, saying that they were prior to Adam and should have the right to the life breath (*nyawa*) that God had given to man. In rebelling they set the pattern for a basically adversary relationship between man and all of the spirits. They ran off to become part of the world and to tempt him.

(BANKS 1975, 5; cf. ENDICOTT 1979, 53)

9. *Tepong tawar* means “flour without flavor or distinctive characteristics” (WILKINSON 1959, 279). “This is sprinkled or daubed on people or things from which, it seems, an essence is to be extracted or into which one is to be inserted.... Perhaps the neutrality of the rice flour, its lack of distinctive characteristics, deprives the object on which it is brushed of the qualities that tie it to one or another category” (ENDICOTT 1970, 136–37; cf. JULI EDO 1990, 47; SKEAT 1900, 230–33, 239, 293, 354, 361).

10. Skeat writes of the use of *ayer tolak bala* (evil-dispelling water) in purificatory rites (SKEAT 1900, 361).

11. The finger does have special significance in Malay cosmology: “when the Angel reached forth to take the heart of the Earth from which God would mold man, the Earth-spirit caught hold of this finger [middle finger], stretching it until it became longer than the rest” (SKEAT 1900, 20). Malay spirit familiars also feed upon blood from the tip of their owner’s finger (ENDICOTT 1970, 58).

12. The following exchange takes place after Allah (Mohamad in Derus’s account) and Tohan (our Lord of Life) discover, after shaping humankind (Adam) from the soil, that he (Adam) cannot stand up:

Allah asked Tohan to give him (Adam) some *nawa*, the life soul and, after much persuasion, Tohan agreed. He gave Allah some *nawa' tom*, water life-soul. Allah took the *nawa' tom* in his hands, but on the way back, he tripped and spilled it. Tohan quickly spat on the place where it fell and somehow was able to draw it back to himself, whereupon he hid it under his seat. After looking for the *nawa* for seven days, Allah went back to Tohan and asked for more, but Tohan refused. Allah borrowed some *nawa* from a banana plant; this was *nawa angin*, wind life-soul. He took it back to their inert bodies in a bottle and blew some of it onto their fontanelles... and some on their chests, over the heart. After the *nawa* was absorbed into their bodies, they came to life and stood up.

(ENDICOTT 1979, 83)

13. Throughout this paper, I treat the opposition of Malay/Semai as though it were equal

to dominant/subordinate. I am uncomfortable with this ethnic distinction though it does serve my theoretical purpose. In fact, traditional Malay stories, told by Malays, might be viewed as the discourse of a subordinate group of people. Rural Malays and Orang Asli have much in common when it comes to their economic and political position vis-à-vis urban Malays or the Malaysian ruling class. My intention is merely to avoid the mistake of scholars who point to shared stories as evidence of ideological assimilation by the minority (not just the assimilation of a narrative style and vocabulary as I suggest here).

14. Stories told by Semai about “High Gods,” such as “Thunder” (Engku), show a general lack of reverence and often end with the narrator “gasping with laughter” (DENTAN 1968, 2).

15. The transformation of peacock to crow is of interest. Semai may associate themselves with the crow and Malays with the peacock. *Ceep mara*, in Semai, means “demon bird.” They associate this bird with frightening evil spirits, the *nyani*. The “demon bird” is none other than the peacock (Dentan personal communication).

16. *Berjahat* is a distinctly Malay notion for having sex, and can also mean a sinful act or something naughty. This contrasts with the Semai *ninoy* (Dentan personal communication).

17. “Playing with the dominant discourse” is not restricted to peasants and oppressed indigenes. The Malay government itself employs the international discourse on “national sovereignty” to justify its own manipulation and definition of the discourse on “indigeneness” within Malaysia. At the International Seminar on Indigenous People 1993, in Kuala Lumpur, the Deputy Minister of Culture, Arts, and Tourism said in his closing speech:

the real meaning we put to “status” and “rights” must be fully discussed, because each country defines the “status” and “rights” of its indigenous people according to its own constitution. This is a sovereign right, and it is also consistent with the United Nations stand that to be indigenous or native depends on the perspective of the State at any one time. No matter how we see the issue, we cannot quarrel with a nation’s conceptualization of the problem. (CIAN 1993, 4)

18. Derus’s choice of the word *negeri* is interesting. It implies that the landing of the Lost People is more than the first of a wave of migrations into the Malay Peninsula. The following landing has something to do with the founding of a political entity of which Derus is a citizen. SYUKRI writes,

The word *negeri* derives from Sanskrit *nagari*, and in Southeast Asia has been used to designate entities ranging from villages in west Sumatra to states comprising the modern nation of Malaysia. In general, the word *negeri* implies the existence of an organized polity. *Negeri* could also be translated as “state” in the general sense of an area of territory with an independent ruler. (1985, 80)

19. A mountain in the north of Malaysia near Thailand.

20. *Ta’ tentu*, translated as “not normal” in the text, is how you say *rawooc* (Semai) in Malay. The term refers to any action performed without guidelines. In this case, it refers to eating without reference to Islamic rules, although Semai themselves have an elaborate set of food taboos of their own (cf. DENTAN 1970; 1988). Ignoring those taboos is also eating *ta’ tentu*. In Semai anthropologist JULI EDO’s account of a similar story, Semai moved to the interior of the peninsula so they would not be required to observe Malay Muslim food taboos (1990, 48).

21. This account is consonant with DUNN’s (1975) conjectural history of trade relations on the peninsula. Batek Orang Asli tell a similar story about their leaving the coasts, their

entry into the interior, and the consequences of Malay envy. Notice that the Batek story reverses the roles that Batek and Malays play today, where Batek subsist in the forest and Malays on rice in the lowlands:

A long time ago the Batek and Malays lived close together at a place near the sea in Trengganu. In those days the Batek were living on rice and other crops grown in clearings (*ladang*), and the Malays lived in the forest on wild foods. The Malays were jealous of the Batek, who had enormous clearings and a huge surplus of food. So they set fire to the grass (*lalang*) surrounding the Batek camp. The Malays ran downstream to escape the flames and the Batek ran upstream. (ENDICOTT 1979, 86)

22. Skeat refers to the marriage of Nakhodah Kasim and the "white" Semang: a legendary Orang Asli said by Malays to have white blood and by Semai to have been covered with a hideous skin disease. They too gave birth to a similar Malay/Semang hybrid (SKEAT 1900, 18).

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