



## The Orang Batin/Orang Sakai in the Malay Kingdom of Siak Sri Indrapura

One of the Orang Asli groups of mainland Riau (Sumatra) is the Orang Sakai, formally called Orang Batin. From the few early accounts and recent ethnographic research, this paper reconstructs their political-economic and political-cultural relationship with the former Malay kingdom of Siak Sri Indrapura. The Orang Batin had a specific economic and ritual role within the kingdom, and the Orang Asli/Malay nexus was relatively benign and balanced compared to what was described for some kingdoms of the Malay peninsula and even elsewhere in Sumatra. Further, unlike the Orang Asli of the Malay peninsula, they did not suffer from slave raiding. The paper also reconsiders the Malay-peninsula-centered Orang Asli categories (Northern, Central, Southern Aslian, and tribal Malay). It proposes that most (although not all) of the East Coast Sumatran (tribal) Orang Asli should be considered as forming a fifth category of Orang Asli: Malay-speaking Sumatran Orang Asli.

KEYWORDS: Orang Batin—Orang Sakai—Orang Asli—Siak—Riau

An indigenous Malayan-speaking people have historically inhabited the upstream Mandau area of Riau (East Coast Sumatra). The river Mandau is a tributary of the Siak River that flowed through the capital Siak Sri Indrapura and out to the Malacca Straits. Whereas in the past they referred to themselves as Orang Batin, today they are officially called Orang Sakai. From the eighteenth century and until Indonesian independence (1945), the forest-dwelling forefathers of the Orang Sakai were non-Muslims who lived on the margins of the newly founded Malay kingdom of Siak Sri Indrapura. The Orang Batin were one of many groups of forest-dwelling communities that lived in the upstream river regions of Malay kingdoms on both sides of the Straits of Malacca. Most of these communities (on the Malay peninsula, now West Malaysia, and mainland and island Riau, now Indonesia) are today referred to as Orang Asli. Basing his classification on socio-economic factors, Benjamin (1985, 2002) has classified the East Coast Sumatran Orang Asli (including the Orang Batin/Sakai) as an Austronesian- (Malayan-) speaking Orang Asli group.

There are very few early accounts of the forest-dwelling peoples living in the upstream Mandau area as well as those living in other parts of mainland Riau because of limited Dutch involvement with the kingdom of Siak and its neighboring sister kingdoms, Pelalawan and Rokan. The three main accounts we have of the upstream Mandau people are from the reign of Sultan Syarif Kassim I (1864–89) and Sultan Syarif Hassim's reign (1889–1908). They were first mentioned by two Dutch authors, Rijn van Alkemade (1885, 1887) and Hijmans Van Anrooij (1885) (shortly after the kingdom was officially made into a Dutch protectorate state). Later a Swiss physician, Max Moszkowski, visited the area in 1907 and published the account of his visit in 1909. Van Alkemade and Van Anrooij did not visit the upstream Mandau people but only received their information from kingdom state officials, as Moszkowski asserts (1909b, 707). Moszkowski, who was accompanied by state officials, did stay with one group for a short while. He provided us with some very general but rather accurate ethnographic descriptions, which I was able to corroborate 90 years later during my own anthropological fieldwork with their descendants.<sup>1</sup>

The general literature on the Orang Asli has developed a complex picture of the Orang Asli/Malay relational nexus. Some authors portray the historic relationship between the Orang Asli and Malays as one based on political defeat and

degradation, exploitation as well as slave raiding, and the name “Sakai” that was applied to some of these peoples reflected this (Dentan 1997; Endicott 1983; Nowak 2004, and for the Orang Rimba/Kubu of Southern Sumatra see Sager 2008). These authors based their historical constructions on the social memory of specific indigenous groups as well as on nineteenth-century British colonial writings such as Logan (1847a and b), Clifford (1897), Maxwell (1879), Skeat and Blagden (1906), and numerous other colonial authors who were morally concerned with the practice but who also saw the interactions between human groups in racialized and social Darwinian terms (Khor Manickam 2015). The institution of slavery and debt bondage was ever present in Southeast Asia and even when the relationship between Malay *kerajaan* (kingdoms) and Orang Asli populations was benign, slavery was still part of the Malay raja’s accepted mind frame (Benjamin 2002). Some Orang Asli even took advantage of this (see Maxwell 1879). Other authors (some of whom draw their evidence from mainland and Island Riau) have provided a relatively more positive but general picture of these historic relationships. They see the Orang Asli/Malay nexus as being originally based on constructive political alliances and economic and ritual symbiosis (Dodge 1981; Couillard 1983; Porath 2002a; Edo 2002; Tenas Effendy 1997; Andaya 2002, 2010; Barnard 2007). This group of authors who do acknowledge that slavery and slave raiding was an ever-present threat for the Orang Asli develop their arguments based on Malay *hikayat* (histories), early eyewitness accounts (the abovementioned colonial authors), indigenous legends, and other ethnographic considerations. For example, historians have shown how Malay *hikayat*, which were written as templates for a viable *kerajaan*, portray the ancestors of the various Orang Asli as a necessary component in the establishment of the kingdom and its political, economic, and ritual maintenance. Couillard, an anthropologist working with *hikayat*, has also questioned why Malay rajas would attack and enslave an indigenous population who were already part of their jurisdiction and with whom their kingdom’s polity had a structured political-economic relationship that benefited them. Other authors of this group have also stressed that there was also a magico-ritual factor involved in the relationship between the Malay and Orang Asli populations. Rajas and local villagers utilized their ritual knowledge for particular purposes to have influence through the unseen realm (Tenas Effendy 1997; Porath 2002a).

To account for the negative and exploitative relationship that developed between Malays and Orang Asli, Couillard, L. Andaya, and Barnard have argued that the late eighteenth and nineteenth century was a turning point in the relationship between the two. Sager also suggests this in his account of the Orang Rimba (Kubu) of Jambi (2008, footnote 33). The European presence interfered with the indigenous system of organization, and by doing so it increasingly disempowered the natives by limiting their ability to define their worlds (Shamsul 2004, 137). The socio-economic and ritualized relationship between the ancestors of the Orang Asli and Malay kingdoms was part of this disrupted local thought system. But in some kingdoms the more positive and protective relationship between the forest-based people and the Malay *kerajaan* remained intact until the twentieth century (Benjamin 2002, 49).

The following is a modest attempt at reconstructing the historical picture of the Orang Batin/Orang Sakai in the Malay kingdom of Siak Sri Indrapura, based on the early accounts available as well as evidence drawn from my own ethnographic fieldwork, which makes two main points in relation to the Orang Asli literature. I argue that in Siak and its neighboring sister kingdoms of mainland Riau, slavery was less of an issue and these kingdoms managed to preserve the “official” Malay/Sakai socio-economic and ritualized symbiotic model well into the twentieth century. In so doing the data contributes to the argument that the negative relationship between Orang Asli and Malay was not necessarily inherent in the relational nexus but may have emerged due to other political-economic causes. I also propose—in contrast to Benjamin’s (1985) fourfold Orang Asli classification—that the Orang Batin/Orang Sakai and other East Coast Sumatran groups (but not all—see conclusion) should be considered as forming a fifth Orang Asli category, the Malay-speaking East Coast Sumatran Orang Asli. With these proposals I hope that the particulars of this account about an Orang Asli people who “slipped out” of the ethnographic record will contribute a past-picture that will help broaden our understanding of the historic Malay/Orang Asli relations, which has largely been developed through a Malay-peninsula-focused model.

#### CONSIDERING THE PROBLEMATIC NAME “SAKAI”

In the literature on the Orang Asli of the Malay peninsula, the term “Sakai” has always been problematic. The term was a generic and dominant Malay term for a population that lived on the forest margins of the Malay kingdoms (Skeat and Blagden 1906, chap. 1). In the earlier literature the term had disparaging connotations relating to slavery and bondage (Annandale and Robinson 1903, 1; Dentan 1968, 2). So negative was this term that Skeat and Blagden felt impelled to comment in a passing sentence that the term did not mean “dog” (1906, 22). On the peninsula the term came to be understood as a term of abuse, and it has been abolished as a name for the indigenous peoples since 1960; the name Orang Asli as a general term for the various forest-based peoples has been used instead. Couillard (1983), basing her argument on other possible etymological meanings given by Skeat and Blagden, has argued that the term Sakai might have originally derived from a Sanskrit word, *sakhi*, meaning “friend,” and this would also explain other definitions given such as “retainer” and “follower of a chief” (see also Benjamin 2002; Porath 2002a). She argues that the term was not a term for an ethnic group but for people who had entered into an alliance with Malay chiefs, kingdom builders, and economic counterparts at an earlier date. It was only during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century and under changed political, economic, and religious conditions—particularly due to British colonial involvement—that the term took on a more negative connotation and was pronounced with a tone of disparagement, disgust, or ridicule. The term was also used at times in some kingdoms of Borneo for the non-Muslim forest-based population living there (Brown 1970, 5).

Rijn Van Alkamade and Hijmans van Anrooij both referred to the people living in the upstream Mandau area of the Siak kingdom as Orang Sakai. Moszkowski

also mentions that the people there were called Orang Sakai and used the term as an ethnic appellation, as did Loeb following him. Moszkowski even presented a map of the area and its *pebatin* (clan) divisions with the words “Sakai Gebiet” (Sakai territory) written across it, although he stressed that the people themselves rejected the name, finding it offensive, and called themselves Orang Batin. From these accounts the term Sakai was used in Siak as an administrative label for only the non-Muslim forest-based communities of the upstream Mandau. For example, Moszkowski mentions the existence of a small community of Orang Akit living by the banks of the Penaso Estuary in the Sakai territory, which originally came from Bengkalis (1909b, 709). Even though some men from this small community married Orang Batin women, Moszkowski does not call them Sakai.

In the Malay kingdom of Siak a *pebatin* was a group of kin-related people living in an administrative territorial unit and headed by a *batin* headman who, among other matters relating to custom, also mediated their concerns with the kingdom. The names of some of the territorial *pebatinan* (plur. for *pebatin*) were also the names of the rivers they flanked. By the mid-nineteenth century the people of the upstream Mandau formed thirteen *pebatinan* and the kingdom administratively called them Orang Sakai (Sakai people). Indonesia abolished the *pebatinan* system and reorganized the area into modern administrative villages (*desa*), adopting the term Sakai from the Siak administration as an ethnic name for them: Orang/Suku Sakai. During the late twentieth century the people of the upstream Mandau area have come to more or less accept the name Sakai for themselves as an ethnic label, although every Sakai is fully aware that it is an exonym and generally people do not know why they were called this or where the name originally comes from. There seems to be a cultural amnesia as to the origin of the name and today there is a (wrong) speculation that it is a name of Japanese origin.

One term that the Sakais I lived with totally rejected and made clear to me that they found offensive was the Indonesian administrative term *suku terasing* (outsider people or tribes). Instead the term they used for themselves, other than Orang Kampong (village people) and Orang Sakai, was Orang Asli. Riau Malays (Indonesians of the province) also referred to them and other similar groups in Riau as the Orang Asli of the province. Further, to differentiate themselves from indigenous Malay people of their area (who they call Sakai Melayu) and from descendants of Sakai/Chinese unions (Sakai Cino), Sakais have also come to call themselves Sakai Asli (Original Sakai).

As Khor Manickam (2015) points out for the Malay Peninsula, Orang Asli names have political-contextual meaning. In this paper I will refer to the people of the area prior to the 1960s as the “upstream Mandau people” (Orang Mandau Hulu) or Orang Batin unless I am referring to Siak administrative matters, for which I shall use the word Sakai. For more specific locations within the area, I refer to the particular named *pebatinan* location, as people identified themselves with their place of abode and their headmen. For post-1960s Indonesian developments (for example, when referring to data from my fieldwork) I will use the term Orang Sakai or Orang Asli depending on the context. Officially though, their ethnic name today is Orang (Suku) Sakai.

## THE MALAY KINGDOM OF SIAK AND ITS DIVERSE POPULATION

Siak and neighboring areas on the East Coast of Sumatra were caught between two major spheres of political influence: Pagar Ruyung in West Sumatra and Johor on the Malay peninsula. This frontier zone was a blend of West/Central Sumatran and Johorean Malay customs (B. Andaya 1997, 489). Barnard, following on the trail of an article by Maier (1997), has referred to Siak as a *kacu* (mixed and mingled) polity with communities recognizing and being pulled by multiple centers of authority (2003). After the fall of Malacca, Johor governed the area of Siak through a *syahbandar* (harbor master), although the kingdom's influence reached only as far as the Mandau estuary. Those further upstream were under the influence of Pagar Ruyung. In 1699 a group of noblemen (*orang kaya*) assassinated Sultan Mahmud of Johor and this led to developments culminating in the creation of the Kingdom of Siak in 1724 by Raja Kechil. These events have been well studied by historians (Netcher 1862, 1870; Andaya 1972; Kathirithamby-Wells 1993, 1997; B. Andaya 1997; Barnard 1994, 2003).

Siak was a downstream, coastal state, and its economic base was dependent on the collection and export of forest products. Through headmen, the kingdom encouraged the various hinterland and upstream-dwelling people (*orang bulu*) to search for forest produce to supply the trade (Kathirithamby-Wells 1997, Barnard 1998, 90). The main forest products were ivory, rhino horn, gall bladder (*guliga*), honey, timber, rattan, and river products (Gramberg 1864, 524; Kathirithamby-Wells 1997, 219).

According to Hijmans van Anrooij (1885, 323) the kingdom categorized its inhabitants into three groups of people, which conforms to Benjamin's tripartite distinction of Royal Malay, Rayakat Malay, and Tribal Malay (Benjamin 2002). The *anak raja* (royal Malay or children of the Raja) were descended from the sultans; their ministerial head was the *mankubumi* (the Kingdom's regent). The *anak raja* category was mostly concentrated in the area of Siak town and in Tebbi Tinggi. They were private landowners who used laborers and serfs. They also were the kingdom's noble merchants (*orang kaya*). By the latter half of the nineteenth century people of this social category were *sayids* claiming descent from the prophet Muhammad via Arab traders who dominated the timber trade during the late seventeenth century and who married into the Malay nobility (Barnard 1998, 2003).

The second category was the *hamba raja*, or the Raja's subjects. This was a diverse category comprised of non-noble Muslim people of Siak. The *empat suku* or the "four groups" were of this category. Three of these four groups were matrilineal people of West Sumatran origin. The fourth group were Malays living in the Kampar area also known as Suku Kampar. The headmen of each of these four groups comprised the officials of the Siak-river area. The "four groups" formed the social inner core of the kingdom and like pillars kept it standing (Hijmans van Anrooij 1885; Barnard 2003).

Other Malay communities were also *hamba raja*, all of whom were administered through territorial administrative units, called the "Malay *pebatin*." Respected elders served as *batin* headmen in each jurisdiction. The *batin* elders were arbiters of local custom and were locally elected. They had the right to tax people living in their jurisdiction and they mediated between the *pebatin* clan (*anak buah*) and the

kingdom. *Batin* headmen also owned the large *sialang* trees (trees in which bees make their nest), which supplied the valuable commodities of honey and beeswax (Tenas Effendy 1997, 2002). In some areas, state representatives gradually superseded the indigenous *batin* headmen.

The westernmost outpost of Malay Siak was the trading area that is today Pekan Baru (Hijmans van Anrooij 1885, 292). Goods from Central and West Sumatra entered the kingdom of Siak through this market town via a network of people who customarily practiced matrilineal descent and inheritance. Some of these groups simply had to recognize the Sultan of Siak as their king and be conscripted to his army at times of war. Their role was to keep the trade from West and Central Sumatra flowing downstream to Siak. They were not taxed by the Sultan. People from these areas were relatively independent and they sometimes provided labor to other neighboring kingdoms (Hijmans van Anrooij 1885, 286).

A third category of people was the *rajat raja* (or serfs), who were either recent converts to Islam (although nominally so) or non-Muslims. The sultanate administration codified the nominally Muslim people who lived in the forest south of the Siak River and in the downstream Mandau area as Orang Talang, suggesting their forest-based marginality. The *rajat raja* group comprised of a further subcategory, the Orang Rajat Benang, who were non-Muslim. These were small communities living at the peripheries of the kingdom like dangling strands on the edge of cloth. The Orang Batin/Sakai of the upstream Mandau area (Orang Sakai) fell into this category. Other Benang groups were pockets of Orang Akit and Orang Rawa (marsh people).

Unlike the *hamba raja*, the *rajat raja* people had no legal rights in the kingdom but were dependent on the whims and favors (*kasihan*) of the raja. They were forbidden from eating with people from the other group and *rajat raja* men were forbidden from marrying Muslim women from the superior *hamba raja* category. The non-Muslim groups did not own the territories they inhabited, as, according to Islamic law, non-Muslims were prohibited to own land. Theoretically their territories belonged to the sultanate, which granted them the right to live and use the land they inhabited.

Rice and forest products were taxed by the sultanate in order to secure the official economy. The level of taxation was determined according to a socio-religious classificatory system. Unlike the *hamba raja* people, who were taxed by their local headman, the sultan had the right to tax one-tenth of the *rajat raja*'s forest produce and rice harvest. The sultan also had the first right to purchase their forest produce and at a much lower price than they would otherwise receive from traders. Different groups were obliged to produce specific products. One Talang group had to sell the oil they produced only to him at a very cheap price (Hijmans van Anrooij 1885, 340). Marsh-dwelling people south of the River Siak who did not farm land had to supply honey and wax to the sultan and other forest produce they collected. The Rajat Benang people also had to provide labor for the sultan's public works.

## THE “THIRTEEN BATIN” (ORANG SAKAI) OF THE UPSTREAM MANDAU AREA

In the kingdom of Siak the upstream Mandau area formed a border region of dense forest that was sparsely populated and loosely connected to the kingdom. As already mentioned, the Thirteen Batin (Orang Sakai) were a *raja benang* people. According to the Sakai (as was also the case with most of the other hinterland Orang Asli groups of mainland Riau and Sumatran provinces further south), their ancestors are said to have originated from the Minangkabau kingdom of Pagar Ruyung in West Sumatra. Moszkowski (1909a, 1909b) also noted this origination legend. A recent version claims that the ancestors of the *Orang Sakai* fled from Pagar Ruyung following their dissatisfaction with the kingdom.<sup>2</sup> One legend of origination tells of Minangkabau soldiers who, on being sent out to scout the territory where the Sakai now live, could not find their way back.<sup>3</sup> West Sumatrans (Orang Minangkabau) living in Riau sometimes claim them to be an originally Minangkabau people who fled eastward to avoid conversion to Islam.

In the area between the upstream Mandau and the Rokan there were five *batin* headmen who had allied themselves to Siak at an early date, known as the Batin Limo. Their territories flanked the tributaries with the same name: Batin Minas, Batin Belutu, Batin Beringin, Batin Penaso, and Batin Tenganau. Beyond these *pebatinan* were other non-Muslim Batin people allied to the neighboring Rokan kingdom. Sometime during the early nineteenth century, eight *batin* headmen and their people (*anak buah*) allied to Kota Intan shifted their allegiance to Siak. These were the Batin Selapan (the eight Batin), who were: Batin Paoh, Batin Batuah, Batin Sebang, Batin Singa Meraja, Batin Berumbang, Batin Semunai, Batin Bramban, and Batin Pinggir. In shifting allegiance to Siak, they tied their political-economic future and subsequently their ethnic and cultural fate to the five *pebatinan* already allied to it. The remaining non-Muslim *pebatinan* of the Rokan area are today another Orang Asli group, who are ethnically called the Orang Bonai.

It is not clear why the eight *batin* shifted allegiance. According to local legend, the eight *batin* headmen (Batin Selapan) shifted their allegiance to “Ajo Siak” (the Sultan of Siak) because the raja of the Rokan demanded too many young women to be sent to his court. The truth of this story cannot be definitively ascertained, but in the Malayan/Sakai socio-political imagination, the symbolism of offering a (virgin) maiden to a powerful “other,” such as a raja, merchant, or spirit, is an act of submission and allegiance to an outside power. This theme is common in traditional South East Asian political cultures where marriage alliances secured patron/client and trade relations between political and economic parties and incorporated inhabited territories into political centers (Kemp 1978, 79). Barnard (2003) has clearly shown how the establishment and development of Siak was based on such marriage alliances as well as demands that young women be sent to the court. Raja Kecil, the founder of the kingdom of Siak, is known to have implemented such a policy with subversive groups in the early days of the establishment of his kingdom. The Sakai legend then might reflect the Batin Selapan dissatisfaction with the Rokan kingdom’s overburdening policies and subsequent turn to Siak.

Moszkowski (1909b) provides a snippet of interesting information about the eight *pebatin* that might be of relevance here. He mentions that in an earlier period,

parents with *kurap* (Sakai: *ku'o*; an itchy skin disease common to forest dwellers of the region) would disown their children if they did not also show symptoms on their skin. He stresses that this was practiced only by people of the eight *pebatinan*. He does not tell us what the fate of the child was. It is tempting to hypothesize that this practice may have had something to do with the demands of the Raja of Rokan and the *kurap*-free child was sent to his court. Moszkowski makes it clear that the original five *pebatin* of Siak did not practice this form of child disownment, and the practice stopped once the eight *batin* entered the Siak jurisdiction.

At any rate, by shifting allegiance, these *pebatinan* also brought their territory into the kingdom of Siak and severed it off from the Rokan. According to Moszkowski this area was a zone of contention between the two kingdoms over which they even waged a battle. In 1907 the Dutch colonial government resolved the dispute by signing an agreement recognizing the area as belonging to Siak (Moszkowski 1909a).

The Orang Batin people in this area lived in swidden-clearings (*ladang*) and in secondary-growth wooded areas. They built their H-frame houses on poles about two to three meters above ground, which usually consisted of one main room with a hearth in the corner (Porath and Persoon 2008). Sometimes a kitchen extension was constructed at the back. The walls of the house were made of barkshard and the roof thatched with *kopau* palm-leaf. A few related families built their houses within walking distance from each other. Surrounding their houses were swidden-fields and patches of wild growth. Large unburnt, felled logs crossed the *ladang*, which were used as pathways between the neighboring houses. Beyond these scattered houses were other bark-houses dotting the swidden landscape. Encircling the swidden-clearings and scattered bark-houses was deep jungle. Sometimes families built their houses close to the river's edge. At the turn of the twentieth century Moszkowski relates that the villagers of Pebatin Pinggir barricaded their swiddens and the path leading to their houses with large felled logs criss-crossing each other (1909b). He was told that the felled timber was constructed to keep elephants, tigers and other animals from raiding their cassava swiddens. Moszkowski also relates that climbing over this barricade of timber was the only real obstacle a visitor had in reaching that particular settlement. From his own experience we know that the barricade also gave villagers time to flee to the woods on a stranger's arrival (1909b, 713).

The Orang Batin were matrilineal and the settlements were matrifocal (Moszkowski 1909a, 39). The mother's elder brother (*mamak*) was the dominant person of any group of sister-based households. *Batin* headmanship was inherited matrilineally from a man to his sister's son. Once chosen, the individual had to travel downstream to the palace in Siak to have his position and authority ratified by the Sultan. Van Anrooij wrote that the raja granted the *batin* headmen sarongs and bands, but by the turn of the twentieth century Moszkowski reveals that the sultan gave them old uniforms rather than sarongs and bands. On his return to the settlement the newly appointed *batin* had to be ritually treated. The shaman carried out an immediate healing ceremony for him in order to notify the spirits of the new

appointment as well as neutralize the newly appointed headmen from the hierarchic power of the palace that he brought back with him (Suparlan 1995).

According to present-day Sakai accounts of the past, people could marry their grand-mother's sister's daughter's children (matrilateral second cousins) on condition that the prospective husband paid double the conventional wedding gift. This fine was called "breaking the custom" that prohibited marriage between people of the same matriline or the "children of the mother's line" (*anak mak*).

Moszkowski (as well as present day Sakais) described marriage as it was practiced then to be a flexible affair. Young men floated around settlements in search of a wife while women rarely ventured out of their settlement. Staying in a settlement gave a man and woman time to get to know each other under the gaze of their parents and mother's brother. On choosing a favored woman who responded favorably to his flirtatious interest, the man had to ask the mother or the mother's brother (*mamak*) for the right to marry her. The elders deferred the request to the daughter who made the final decision. If the daughter agreed to the marriage the family could not reject the man. The bridegroom had to pay a bride price of cloth and other agreed-upon goods.

Moszkowski tells us that bride price was introduced to them through the Sultan's policies that tried to Malayize their more flexible marriage customs. Sakai confirm that the *batin* headman conducted the marriage by drawing a figure of a man and below that a figure of a woman, on the king post of his house. After a communal meal in which rice was served for the special occasion, the married couple first slept in the wife's parent's house until building their own.

The Orang Batin were strictly monogamous although divorce was frequent and a straightforward affair, and many people had numerous partners during their lifetime. In the marital custom of the *pebatin* a man and woman had to remain together for at least three nights, after which either party had the right to leave (see also Moszkowski 1909, 642). Both women and men could instigate a divorce; women by demanding that the spouse should leave and men by leaving. Divorce involved the *batin* headman tying two pieces of rattan together into a flat knot and cutting it with a machete in public view. Each party took one piece and went their separate way. Divorce could also be effected if one spouse left the area without notice and the remaining spouse was then free to marry again after a certain period of the other's absence.

Moszkowski suggested three months whereas some Sakai told me six months. Another customary acknowledgment reflecting the lax divorce procedures is reflected in the custom of elopement. A husband whose wife eloped with a lover had seven days to find them (Moszkowski 1909b). If he succeeded, the wife had to return to her husband and the lover was fined according to the dictate of the *batin*. If the husband failed in finding her within the seven-day period he had to relinquish his matrimonial claim. Moszkowski also adds that on separation (divorce) the husband had to forgo the children as well as property, which remained with the wife. Further, on death the wife was buried with one third of the household property, the other two thirds being divided between the children and the spouse (see also Loeb [1935] 1989, 293).

THE TRADING ECONOMY OF THE NON-MUSLIM BATIN PEOPLE OF  
THE UPPER MANDAU IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Unlike other forest-dwelling peoples (Orang Talang) who grew rice, the Orang Batin staple was cassava (*mengallo*) and taxing its harvest did not interest the sultanate.<sup>4</sup> The following Sakai legend collected by the author recalls the problem of the rice tax for the Orang Batin:

There was once a couple that wanted to cut a swidden. Each time they tried to plant their cassava crop they found it uprooted the next day. They did not suspect that their field lay on land that belonged to a local spirit. One day, the angered spirit decided to play some mischief on the couple. It took the form of the husband and visited his wife. When the husband returned home, the wife was shocked to discover that there were two identical men claiming to be her husband. To solve the problem, she took both men to the (Malay) raja. The raja asked a few questions and the wife was able to determine which man was her real husband. The spirit, however, did not want to concede defeat and retained the form of the man he was impersonating. The raja could not persuade the spirit to give up the form of the woman's husband. Now, in the palace, the Raja had a very clever monkey. The monkey demanded an audience with the raja, claiming that he could solve the problem that the raja could not. The monkey played to the spirit's conceit and said that if it were as powerful as it claimed to be, then it should prove it. "Can you make yourself as large as this palace?" cajoled the monkey. The spirit took the bait and transformed itself into the size of the palace. Then the monkey asked whether the spirit was so powerful that it could make itself so small that it could enter a bottle. The spirit reduced itself in size and jumped into the bottle. At this moment the monkey took a cork, plugged it into the bottle, and threw the bottle with the spirit into the fire. While the bottle burned, the spirit cursed the couple that for this deception their descendants would always be afflicted with illness. As the couple was leaving to return to their swidden they forgot to thank the monkey, but only the raja. Offended, the monkey said that for this offence, the couple and their descendants would not be taxed by the raja, but one tenth of their crop would be taxed by his descendent monkeys. Hence from then on, people of the upstream Mandau area suffer illness wrought by spirits and monkeys raid their cassava fields.

This legend (reminiscent of the legends affirming the wisdom of King Solomon) is trickster-type. It affirms the hegemonic power relation with the Malay raja as it manipulates the legendary space by turning it on its head (Rawski and Derus 1998, 191). It shifts the power and wisdom of the raja to the monkey. It not only explains why simians raid swiddens but also reflects the propensity of the cassava swiddeners to remain aloof from the Malay kingdom's economic control; the Orang Batin of the upstream Mandau area avoided growing rice, which exonerated them from paying one tenth of a paddy harvest as tax to the raja. This seems to have been an issue at the turn of the twentieth century as Sultan Syarif Hassim tried to implement agricultural policies among the upstream Mandau people as part of the general modernizing reforms of his kingdom. He encouraged them to grow rice rather than cassava. To implement his rice farming policy, the sultan even went as

far as authorizing a month's imprisonment of non-Muslims who did not comply (Moszkowski 1909a, 27; 1909b). People (Sakai) of *pebatin* Paoh, who according to Moszkowski were more sedentarized than other Orang Batin, did comply. They planted rice, but then neglected the fields and returned to the forest. When the time came for the harvest they did not reap the rice. The rice remained un-harvested and the planters were admonished for their non-compliance. According to Moszkowski, the group retorted that the sultan's original wording had ordered them to plant rice, but had not also exhorted its harvesting (1909a, 95). This anecdote, which was probably related to Moszkowski by the officials accompanying him to the area, is reminiscent of the stories that present-day officials relate about the difficulties of "developing" indigenous peoples.

The Orang Batin tributary obligation to the sultan was to give him *bezoar* stones (*guliga*) and aloe wood (*kayu gaharu*). Moszkowski tells us that the *batin* headman of each *pebatin* sent only small quantities of these items to the sultan, trading the rest with Chinese merchants in the area.

From the late nineteenth century their contribution to the kingdom's economy was through the *serahan* trade (*serah* meaning "to hand-over"). According to Hijmans van Anrooij (1885) this was a trade network which, although found elsewhere in Sumatra, was instituted in the kingdom of Siak by Sultan Syarif Kassim I. It provided people in the upriver and interior areas with basic commodities such as salt, *parang* (cutlasses) and iron, sarongs and cloth, and other consumables in exchange for forest produce (*hasil hutan*) (Hijmans van Anrooij 1885, 339). The forest people canoed their forest produce downriver to barter for the desired consumables at a fixed time and place with the *serahan* traders. As nobody was appointed to ensure fair trade the traders could easily abuse the trade network system by leading the forest folk into debt. It was recorded that in the late 1870s the highest debt incurred to the *serahan* trade was in the Mandau river area (Hijmans van Anrooij 1885, 339). This also suggests that there was a personal and established relationship between the area's trading parties. Traders could locate their debtors through the *batin* headmen who, as officials of the state, had to comply with requests for such information. Sometimes though, a tribal group would simply flee to the forest if the debt was too high and pressure for reimbursement too great. The group would reinstate itself in the kingdom's economic network only after a higher authority intervened.

Sultan's Syarif Kassim's successor enabled greater access to the area after he planted his own rubber plantation of approximately half a million trees along the left bank of the Mandau River (Moszkowski 1909a, 42). To facilitate the transportation of rubber from the plantation downstream, he had parts of the Mandau River cleared of its undergrowth. Around the same period, the sultanate also permitted many Chinese merchants to enter the upstream areas of the Siak interior, to trade their goods. Local people saw Chinese merchants as temporary visitors to the kingdom who settled in an area in order to trade. It was expected that they would later move their trade elsewhere or return to China (B. Andaya 1997, 497). Chinese merchants competed for the forest products against the *serahan* traders and drove down the exchange rates. Inter-marriage between Chinese merchants and

indigenous women was common and many merchants could mobilize their affines to search for forest produce. Once trade was complete the sojourning Chinese merchants left their indigenous wives and children when they moved elsewhere. The relationship between the upper Mandau women and Chinese merchants continued until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> A small *entrepôt* village developed, which today is called Balai Pungut and which still serves as a local commercial center for the Orang Asli and migrants of the area.

#### FOREST-BASED RITUAL KNOWLEDGE AND POLICIES OF MALAYIZATION

Benjamin describes the Malay-speaking Orang Asli of the Malay peninsula as being outward focused to a world beyond their immediate environment (Benjamin 1980, 23; 1985, 236). The upstream Mandau people, although fearful and shy of the outside, were also outward focused. During the Siak administration period the “outside” came to the upstream Mandau people via Malay. The following Sakai legend given to me in 1997 reflects this nicely and contextualizes the upstream Mandau people’s political-cultural nexus with the Malay kingdom and the Malay hegemonic process.

There was once a tiger that was raiding a Malay village. People were so scared of the tiger that they stayed at home, closed their doors, and dismantled their roofs so they could at least collect rainwater to drink. One day, two forest people were looking for wild yams and arrived at the Malay village. They were amazed that all the doors of the houses were shut and asked why this was so. The villagers told the couple that their village was being raided by a tiger and warned them that they should leave for their own safety. The couple decided to stay the night in the village, but no Malay family wanted to open their doors to them and give them refuge. The couple took shelter under one of the Malay houses. Later that night, the tiger came to the settlement. The couple, possessing powerful ritual knowledge, were able to overpower the tiger, catch it, cut it up into pieces and started cooking the meat. The Malays were overwhelmed by the forest couple’s ability to overpower the tiger but also shocked that they wanted to eat it. They opened their doors and invited the couple in and gave them food in gratitude for their help in relieving them of the tiger’s threat. They redefined the forest people as their brethren and suggested that the couple’s daughter should marry one of their sons.

The daughter learnt to live in a village of bark houses, cut rice swiddens, raise chickens, and eat chilies. When her parents came to visit her and persuade her to return to the forest, the daughter tried to persuade her parents to learn the knowledge that she had learnt from the Malays. The parents, being forest folk, mistook the domesticated vegetables for wild ones, and the chickens for forest birds and wanted to eat them immediately. Seeing their ignorance, the daughter, who had now been accustomed to Malay ways, did not want to return with them to the forest. From this moment onward a relationship developed between the Malays and the forest folk, who gradually learned to build bark houses, cut swiddens, and raise chickens.

The story of the tiger and the Malays reveals a tension in the relationship between the two parties instigated by the latter's hierarchic cultural aloofness. The tiger is associated with the depths of the forest, as were the upstream Mandau people, who were also believed to have the power to tame the tiger as well as access other forces of the forest environment. The Malays first reject the forest folk but become dependent on their ritual knowledge gained from their forest-based life-way.

Colonial authors on the peninsula commonly mentioned the theme of Malay fear and interest in Orang Asli ritual knowledge (magic) but always in somewhat ridiculing tones. Moszkowski is silent on this for mainland Riau. However, present day Sakai recall that during the period of Kerajaan Siak another important function of theirs was to provide *kesaktinan* (ritual power), for which their shamans would don a yellow cloth when performing for royalty. Further, in present-day mainland Riau, the Orang Sakai ritual specialists (as well as those of the Orang Kubu) are believed to be the most powerful in this respect. Malay neighbors living adjacent to the Sakai fear what they see as their ability to affect emotions. Provincial Malays would constantly warn me that when with Sakais one has to constantly think about Allah or God (if Christian) or maintain a rational disposition at all times, for if caught off-guard the Sakai reality can slip in, causing the unguarded to lose perspectival reasoning and identify with the Sakai and their way of life and consequently remain with them for good. Unable to leave the Sakai village the "civilized Malay" "reverts" into being a "Sakai" (*menjadi Sakai* or becomes Sakai). For a Malay outsider this would be like a "kidnapping" from civilization and a turning of the individual on his head. Sakai ritual specialists are fully aware of this acknowledgment of the power (*kesaktinan*) of their rites and rituals. People can recount how in the past, before they (nominally) converted to Islam, even a Muslim dignitary who wanted to convert them but would make disparaging comments about their dilapidating bark houses could be gradually brought round to see their dwellings as palaces fit for a raja and found it difficult to leave. Magic has and still does serve the Orang Batin/Orang Sakai as a power of the weak against Malay feelings of superiority—a point that Skeat and Bladgen (1906) recognized for peninsula Orang Asli groups. Crediting them with such powerful knowledge as well as fearing them because of it is a means of recognizing and respecting their precedence in the area from where this knowledge is thought to be drawn.

Notwithstanding the use and popular fear of Sakai ritual-based knowledge there also has been a Malay hegemonic pull on the Orang Batin/Sakai. Thus in the tale, the moment the couple dismembered the forest tiger for the Malays, they also dismembered their own forest identity associated with the tiger. The story reminds us of Sandbukt's (1984) own account of the Kubu of Jambi, who according to him associate Malayization with cultural withering. Hence by entering the Malay house (*masuk 'umah Melayu*), which at first rejected them, the forest couple entered the Malay civilizational realm. The daughter who marries a Malay is transformed into a village person and creates a link of Malay cultural civility for her forest-dwelling family. From the forest-people's side of the nexus the Malays are the source of novel exogenous knowledge and civilizational life-way. Today Sakais have an image of Riau Malays as a sibling *suku* ("leaves of the same tree" as L. Andaya, 2010, puts it),

who do not always want to share the benefits of their civilization and who frequently disparage them (and against which their magic provides them with some respite).

Moszkowski's account clearly reveals that Sultan Syarif Hassim took measures to reorganize the populace according to peninsula Malay cultural principles. A pressing issue for the Sultan was the Islamization of the Orang Batin. By Moszkowski's time of writing, *batin* headmen had been forced to accept the faith, although nominally so. Moszkowski tells us that some people did try to follow the Islamic festivals but they celebrated the festivals on the wrong days as the newly Islamized individuals did not fully comprehend the calendars. Circumcision was another issue as the Orang Batin themselves practiced sub-incision. Although converting the people in this area was encouraged, there was also local resistance, as reflected in the following anecdote. One evening, the state official travelling with Moszkowski started to proselytize. He approached one person with "*mau masuk Islam?*" (Want to become Muslim?), only to elicit the response "*baik baik, tapi mau makan babi*" (Good but I still want to eat pork!) (Moszkowski 1909a, 100).

The sultan also tried to transform the marriage and inheritance practices of the area. The marital customs of the Orang Sakai fell short of what Muslim Malays would consider a marriage. The sultan's policies encouraged inheritance through the male line of descent, the payment of bride price on marriage, and the father's consent to his daughters' marriage.

It seems that the *serahan* trade instituted by Sultan Syarif Hassim's predecessor provided the Orang Batin with easier access to basic commodities including cloth and forged metal. Nevertheless the Orang Batin also made homemade clothes of bark cloth (*baju puduk*). Male dress consisted of bark cloth jacket and breeches. Women wore bark cloth dresses. Older people admit that their forbears would have always worn cloth (*kain*) when available and clothes made of bark were worn when working in the woods. Sakai associate lack of cloth in the Mandau area with an ailing downstream economy, which compelled people to revert to wearing clothes made of bark. Moszkowski's photos of Sakai taken in 1907 confirm some of the present-day Orang Asli elders' comments about cloth. Moszkowski's own account and photos reveal (and to his dismay, as he was really searching for the scantily-clad "primitive") that both men and women wore cloth in his presence. Women particularly wore Malay-style clothing and wealthier women wore Malay-style jewelry (1909a, 90). This suggested that there was some form of wealth differentiation, which he also reveals to us after inspecting some Sakai graves. However, the people Moszkowski met were from Pebatin Pinggir, whose headman was a head *batin* through whom contact with other *batin* headmen could be conducted. The Orang Batin here were the most responsive to the transformations the Sultan was trying to induce through his modernizing policies of Malayization.

#### CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The general ethnographic picture of the Orang Asli/Malay nexus has mainly been developed through what we might call a "Malaysian-Malay"-peninsula model that excludes the experiences of the Orang Asli of East Coast Sumatra. Models on the

historic Malay/Orang Asli nexus should be framed comparatively with both sides of the straits of Malacca in view. Benjamin and Chou (2002) have tried to remedy this. However, in Benjamin's classification (which is understandably Malay-Peninsula focused) the East Coast Sumatran groups are brought under the general category of Malay-speaking Orang Asli in contrast to the Aslian groups. Instead I propose that there are five Orang Asli groups and not three—the fifth being the Coastal Sumatran Orang Asli. These are Orang Asli groups with similar socio-economic characteristics that Benjamin associates with the Malay-speaking Orang Asli of the peninsula, but who claimed an early descent or association with Pagar Ruyong and the Minangkabau and practiced some form of matrilineal or matrilineal kinship and inheritance arrangement (or showed hints of matrilineal influences in the past). Other general cultural features (which I could not discuss in this paper), such as their shamanic traditions, also resemble each other to some extent. These East Coast Orang Asli are the Orang Bonai, Orang Sakai, Petalangan, Talang Mamaq, and although not called Orang Asli in their areas, the various *anak dalam* (Orang Rimba/Kubu) living in more southern provinces of Sumatra. After the seventeenth century these groups were governed and influenced by Malay-style polities. However, not all the Orang Asli of mainland Riau are of this Sumatran Orang Asli category. For example, the Malay-speaking people who were called Orang Utan, but today call themselves Suku Asli, as well as the Orang Akit and Rawa do not have these origination legends (Osawa 2016). These communities would seem to be tribal Malay branch-off groups that migrated westward to areas under Siak authority sometime before 1885 when Hijmans van Anrooij first mentions them. Moszkowski also recognized that they came from the straits of Malacca. The issue of their migration still resonates today against their claims of indigenous status-hood, as Osawa has shown for the Suku Asli (Orang Utan).

Likewise, the historic problem of slavery endemic to the region has also been modeled on the Malay-peninsular Malay/Orang Asli experience, although there have also been similar accounts of slave raiding in southern Sumatra. In Riau the Orang Sakais do not seem to have a social memory about being victims of slave raiders. The legend of the Raja of Rokan demanding too many maidens to be sent to his court might be a reflection of an extreme moment in the relationship between that kingdom and the eight *pebatin*, but it is difficult for us to fully interpret it in terms of actual historical events of power and repression.

In Siak (and other kingdoms of mainland Riau) the Orang Asli groups had specific economic and ritualized roles in the kingdoms and there were a number of factors that allowed for the Siak/Sakai relationship to remain positively intact and protective of them. Siak was a young kingdom that developed on the multiple centers of authority (in Barnard's expression) of the region. Most of its indigenous hinterland people were established communities that were originally Pagar Ruyong related. Barnard tells us that the founding of the Siak Kingdom and its subsequent political developments were forged out of the interstices of Pagar Ruyong and Johor and developed along a Malay kingdom-type model similar to the kingdoms on the Malay peninsula (2001a). The Siak polity found in the matrilineal upstream Mandau people the "Sakai" component of a Malay kingdom and

administratively called them this. Siak extended its protection to its nominally Muslim and non-Muslim population and particularly the Orang Batin, thus gaining their loyalty in a manner reminiscent of the ideal raja Malay/Sakai model expressed in the *hikayat*, and which models the accounts of historians.

A second factor was that although Siak was the first protectorate Malay state, for much of the period under discussion the Dutch left it to deal with its own internal workings (Barnard 2001b). Neither did the colonials' limited presence weaken the Sultans or disturb the kingdom's Malay/Sakai nexus. Both Sultan Kassim I and Sultan Hassim were allowed to reintegrate and modernize the kingdom after its deterioration and near dissolution by their immediate predecessors. Sultan Hassim was an enterprising monarch who was concerned with modernizing his kingdom and ordered the laws of Siak to be codified. He also implemented a constabulary (Barnard 2001b). The policies of Malayization among the Orang Batin at the end and turn of the twentieth century were part of this modernizing trend and should be seen as a state development project. Further, and contrary to everywhere else in the archipelago, the Sakai social memory is also relatively positive about the Dutch period, which was mainly experienced from a distance through "floating signs" of their presence. Moszkowski believed that he was the first European the Orang Batin had ever met face-to-face and he probably was right.

Barnard argues that although we might be able to speak of a model *kerajaan*, each Malay kingdom had undergone varied experiences internally and in relation to the empires that imperially integrated them. Undisturbed, the Dutch protectorate kingdom of Siak remained a *kerajaan* with its Malay/Sakai relationship somewhat intact until its abolition in 1945.

When the Indonesian authorities started building roads in the area during the 1950s and early 1960s they found many marginalized people dressed in bark-cloth fearfully hiding in the forests not knowing what their political fate would be under the new conditions. The state of Indonesia persuaded them out of the forests to live on the edge of roads (Porath 2002b). Suharto's regime then expropriated their land and forest reserves while at the same time inviting migrants from elsewhere to populate the area and participate in its development. The Orang Sakai subsequently became a minority indigenous ethnic group (most nominally converting to Islam, some to Christianity) practicing bilateral kinship relations<sup>6</sup> and living in clusters of bark and small-timber houses scattered amid a large migrant population with limited economic resources. Notwithstanding the hegemonic social construction of Orang Asli peoples by Malay local elites (Dentan 1997), it would seem that the Orang Sakai of mainland Riau had a finer and more politically manageable historic hour as the Orang Batin under the governance of the Malay kingdom of Siak Sri Indrapura.

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#### NOTES

1. Loeb's ([1935] 1989) short description of the Orang Sakai is a summary of Moszkowski's account. My own fieldwork spanned approximately eighteen months over three different periods in 1995–1999.

2. See Suparlan for one interesting version (1995, 74).

3. Sager (2008, 200, and page 332 footnote 30) provides similar Jambi Malay legends for the origination of the Orang Kubu (*anak dalam*).
4. Boomgaard (2000, 598) notes that cassava was introduced to Sumatra in the nineteenth century. He suggests that there was a shift from taro (endogenous to the region) to introduced tubers, first yams followed by sweet potato and lastly cassava.
5. For a similar situation among the Temiars in Ulu Kelantan of Malaysia see Benjamin (1966, 6).
6. The Sakai kinship arrangements had undergone a bilateral shift. Whereas one still cannot marry one's mother's sister's children (*anak mak*), marriage can be contracted with second degree cousins of the mother's line without incurring a fine.

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