

## Malayic Aborigines of Malaysia: A Study in Subgrouping

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### ABSTRACT

Malaysian aborigines can only be located in Peninsular Malaysia or Malaya. Linguistically, they are divided into two main groups, based on the languages they speak: one consisting of speakers of languages belonging to the Austronesian stock which places them together with the Malays, and the other of speakers of the Austroasiatic stock which relates them to the Mon-Khmer family of the hill tribes of Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. This article focuses on the first group, consisting of six speech systems, examining their subgrouping based on their geo-history of settlement as well as the linguistic relationship between members of the subgroups. The result of this subgrouping is that five of the six are in dialectal relationship with Malay, while the sixth (originating from Sumatra) is a language in its own right. All the six can be linked to an ancestor form, the Proto-Malayic.

**Keywords:** *Orang Asli, Orang Laut*, ethnolinguistic community, geolinguistic area

### INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian aborigines are better known by the Malay term *Orang Asli* (Original People). This is in fact a new term, a translation from the English word *aborigines* which came into effect after the Second World War, when it was deemed expedient on the part of the British colonial government to place the various groups of these peoples into one category vis-à-vis the Malays who formed the majority section of the native population of Malaya (now Peninsular Malaysia). With this categorization the aborigines were issued with identity cards just like the other settlers in the country, native and non-native. That was the time when the country was facing a continual onslaught from communist insurgents, the period known as the Emergency, beginning from 1947 until 1964; in reality the sufferings of the people from this group of terrorists never really ended until 1984. The need to identify the aborigines as a group whose traditional habitats were the jungles of the peninsula was to protect them from being exploited by the terrorists who took advantage of them.

Prior to the event mentioned above, the aborigines were known by their group name, such as *Semang* (in the north), *Sakai* (in Central Peninsula), and *Jakun* (in the south). They were also known by the generic terms, *Orang Bukit* (hill people), *Orang Hutan* (jungle people), and *Orang Laut* (sea people). The first two terms are synonymous with each other. The label *Orang Hutan* should not be confused with *orang utan* (also meaning “jungle people”, but written in the lower case) which today is used to refer to chimpanzees, specifically the type which is found in Malaysia. Due to the universality of the usage of the latter by zoologists the world over, the former has since sunk into oblivion. In truth, the Malay language has another word, also an indigenous one, for this type of chimpanzee, and that is *mawas*, that did not clash, either phonologically or semantically, with *Orang Hutan*, when the two were in use. However,

*mawas* had to give way to the preference of the scientists. The term *Orang Hutan* for the aborigines has dropped out of use not for this reason, but for the fact that most of the aborigines have come out of the jungles, and now live in settlements and housing projects in urban and semi-urban areas provided for them by the government.

### A general outline of the Orang Asli

According to official usage of labelling the population of Malaysia, there are two groups of natives of the peninsula, the Orang Asli and the Malays. They had been living side by side from time immemorial - the former mostly in the inland areas in the hilly regions, being hunters and food gatherers; the latter in the lowlands cultivating their lands with paddy, fruits and vegetables, and fishing in the seas and the rivers. Relationship between the two groups came with the needs of both sides: the Orang Asli needed salt, salted fish, cooking utensils, knives, and items of clothing from the Malays, which they exchanged with their jungle produce (such as rattan, camphor, medicinal roots etc.) which the Malays sought for the purpose of trade and traditional medicine. Some of the Orang Asli were adopted or recruited to work in royal households. And in some states, such as in Perak, they were given stretches of land with their own chieftains to regulate their community life in accordance with the laws of the state (Juli Edo, 2003, pp. 137-159).

The current population of the Orang Asli is about 100,000. In Table 1 below, the first three columns represent the Austroasiatic group, with the label *Aslian* which is a derivation of the Malay root word *asli*, an adjective, followed by the nominal suffix *-an*. The table includes a subgroup residing along the Malaysia-Thailand border, the Maniq, indicating an unbroken geolinguistic chain of the Northern Aslian. However, the label *Aslian* has not been able to overtake the more familiar term *Orang Asli* which is preferred by the government of Malaysia as seen in official documents. Another factor behind the lukewarm acceptance of *Aslian* is that this particular label seems to motivate an overt division between the Malayic and the non-Malayic Orang Asli which may lead to untoward interpretations, especially on government policies.

Northern Aslian		Central Aslian		Southern Aslian		Malayic	
"Maniq"	200	Lanoh	359	Semoq Beri	2,488	Temuan	16,020
Kensui	224	Temiar	15,122	Semelai	4,103	Jakun	16,637
Kentaq	359	Semai	26,049	Mah Meri	2,185	Orang Kanaq	64
Jahai	1,049	Jah Hut	3,193			Orang Seletar	801
Mendriq	145					Duano	2,492
Batek	960					Urak Lawoi'	(not available)
Chewong	403						
SUB-TOTALS:		3,340	44,723	8,776		36,014	

**Table (1): Statistics of the Aborigines of Malaysia as of the year 2000**

**Source: Adapted from Benjamin, 2003, p.22 – with the addition of Urak Lawoi', and the replacement of the name *Besisi* by *Mah Meri***

As evident from the above table, the Austroasiatic group forms the majority, and they seem to be more diverse in their sub-group membership. In other words, this group has a number of heterogeneous languages which are closely related to one another. And cumulatively, in terms of their locations from north to south, they occupy a larger geographical region of the peninsula compared to the Austronesian group. For example, in the Gerik District of Northern Perak there are six heterogeneous subgroups, speaking different languages: Temiar, Jahai,

Kintaq, Kensiu, Lanoh, Jahut (Roshidah et al., 2015). More or less the same pattern of heterogeneity occurs with the Austroasiatic group in the adjacent state of Pahang. In the southern part, the Austroasiatic group is represented by only the Mah Meri in Selangor, speaking their Mah Meri language which is quite different from Temiar etc. (Asmah Haji Omar, ed., 2014).

Conditions have changed since the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are no hunters and gatherers any more. The people can choose to stay put in the jungle areas where they used to live, or to re-locate to housing areas outside their erstwhile natural environments, such that they are closer to the other communities, such as the Malays and the Chinese. Either way, houses are built for them by the government through the Department of Orang Asli Affairs. According to the census in 1969 carried out by the Department, there were 53,000 Orang Asli in the country (Carey, 1970a), and at that time most of them were still living in the jungles (Carey, 1970b). The figure by now should be more than that given in 2000. This shows that life, especially in terms of health, has been better for them.

### **The Malayic Orang Asli - an ethnic narrative**

The Malayic Orang Asli (hence, MOA) is placed in the last column in Table 1. Here the Jakun is a member of this category, whereas in older literature this label refers to the whole group. In terms of its population, as given in Table 1, this group is numerically smaller than the Austroasiatic group; so is it in terms of subgroups. However, most writings on MOA do not include a community known as Urak Lawoi', living in the group of islands known as Pulau Adang in the Andaman Seas, which until 1909 was a territory of the Malayan Sultanate of Kedah. The date was the historical signing of the Anglo-Siam Treaty by which the British colonial government ceded the islands together with the adjacent mainland territory of Satun (also belonging to the same Sultanate) to Siam. In this article, we have decided to include the Urak Lawoi' as part of the non-political Malay Peninsula, beside the fact that we have done a great deal of work on their speech system.

As linguists, our narrative is not based on any theory of anthropology but on what we see for ourselves of the way of life, inclusive of the belief system, of the people concerned. Our ethnolinguistic exposition is centred on their way of life based on our observation while doing collecting linguistic data in their settlements. Hence, rather than referring to them as tribes (see Benjamin & Chou, 2003; Carey 1976), we will henceforth refer to each member of the MOA as an ethnolinguistic community.

Following their geolinguistic areas, the Malayic Orang Asli (MOA) can be divided into two subgroups: the Land MOA, and the Sea MOA, as shown in Tables 2 and 3. The former is lacking in terms of an 'umbrella' label to it, but the latter is better known by their generic name *Orang Laut* (Sea People). The locations given are those where the people live in permanent communities of their own ethnic group. There are those who have chosen to live in housing areas among other races of Malaysia, and being in the socio-cultural environment they are in, they may not be suitable informants for this aspect of research on their peoples. For this reason, they are not included in our study.

In publications of the history of the peoples of Malaya, both the land and the sea MOA are referred to as Proto-Malays. They are supposed to have Austro-Melanesoid strain akin to the Papuans of New Guinea, and for this they were considered to be different from the Malays who are given the label of "Deutro-Malay". Winstedt (1935, p.3), was opposed to this idea, as seen in the following passage:

*So strong are the Papuan characteristics in some of the Johor Jakun that the first thought of the unscientific tourist is that some Negro stalker has been their father. However the Austro-Melanesoid strain is merely an element in their physical synthesis, as also is the Indonesian strain; for all the Jakun tribes, both of land and sea are Mongoloid and the civilised Malays, most of them having bullet heads and lank hair.*

In our study of MOA, we find the term “Proto-Malay” inaccurate both ethnically and linguistically, as will be shown as we discuss their way of life and their speech systems in relation to the Malays.

### **Ethnolinguistic Communities of Land MOA**

Land MOA consists of three ethnolinguistic communities, as given in Table 2 below. They are settled in the central-to-southern part of the Malay Peninsula. Table 1 shows that in terms of population, the Jakun and the Temuan appear to be more or less equal to one another. The Kanak seems to be much less, but the figure may be much higher if those in the islands of the Riau-Lingga, south of Singapore, are taken into consideration.

<b>Ethnolinguistic Communities</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Speech System</b>
1. Jakun	<b>Pahang:</b> Pekan (Kampung Batu 8), Kampung Dusun; Rompin (Kampung Sungai Kalong) <b>Johor:</b> Endau (National Park)	Bahasa Jakun
2. Kanak	<b>Johor:</b> Bukit Tinggi (Sungai Selangi)	Bahasa Kanak
3. Temuan	<b>Selangor:</b> Central – South <b>Negeri Sembilan:</b> Various districts, e.g. Jelebu, Parit Gong, Bukit Payung <b>Melaka:</b> Alor Gajah	Bahasa Temuan

**Table 2: Ethnolinguistic Communities of Land MOA**

There may be several factors for the stark difference in the population figures of the Kanak on the one hand, and the Jakun and Temuan on the other. One is that even from the beginning of their settlement in Malaya, the Kanak were a much smaller group compared to the other two. This can be deduced from historical records that they were a small group who split from their community in the islands south of Singapore and came to Johor about 200 years ago (Carey, 1976). On the other hand, the other two groups had arrived much earlier than them, and had had a much longer period of time to build their communities in more than one location, compared to the Kanak whose settlement is only located in Bukit Tinggi, Johor.

Ill-health could also be a factor. The team of linguistic researchers of the University of Malaya working among the Kanak in 2006 report on their unhygienic living conditions, not for the lack

of the facilities given to them in their residential area by the government. This observation concurs with several writings on this community (Mohd Sharifudin, 2013, p.108). Another explanation lies in them being Muslim. This means that in all probability a great number of them have intermarried with Malays, and have gone to live among the Malays and been absorbed into the Malay community, thus contributing to the diminishing population of their original ethnic group.

The Kanak community area is surrounded by oil palm estates on almost all sides, where most of them are given jobs to take care of their livelihood. There is also ample space for them to plant fruits and vegetables. Some of them get jobs with government departments. Their children go to the national school nearby where the medium of teaching is standard Malay which is based on the Johor dialect.

The two states, Pahang and Johor, can claim to have the Jakun as part of their population. There are Jakun who have re-located to the urban areas and lived among the other communities. They have salaried jobs as semi-skilled labourers, and office staff in government offices and industries. There are those who have graduated from universities and other tertiary institutions. Our guide during the time we conducted our fieldwork in Endau and Rompin in 2008 and 2009 had a college diploma and operated his own tour service. In Pekan, the royal town of Pahang, we ate at a stall in a food court which was run by a Jakun.<sup>1</sup>

Endau and Rompin is a vast region divided by a deep gorge with a river in between. The northern part of this gorge, Rompin, belongs to Pahang, and the southern part, Endau, to Johor. The whole area is known as Endau-Rompin National Park. The Endau part of the park is deep in the forest and it takes two hours by jungle road from the nearby town of Kluang in Johor. There is a research-cum-holiday park there, with chalets around the main office. Except for the high level management of the park, most of the staff were Jakun. They live in timber houses built specially for them there.

In 2008, the Jakun in the National Park were all school-educated at least up to the primary level, and could speak the standard Malay very well. None of them converted to Islam or any other religion. They do not seem to have any form of spirit-worship, although they believe in ghosts, and observe their ancestral traditions in birth, marriage and death. The traditions as narrated to us appear to be very much like those of the Malays, except that the Malays of today would always invoke the name of Allah and His attributes as well that of the Prophet Muhammad in the conduct of those traditions.

Though not being Muslim, the Jakun of the Endau National Park, specifically those who work for the park, are aware of cleanliness and the taboos in the food and its preparation for Muslims. From the first day we were there they assured us that everything served was halal, as they got the food stuff from halal shops and markets in Kluang. When asked about their diet, their response was that they do not eat "that thing" (Malay: *benda 'tu*), referring to pork, except on rare occasions. And when they eat it, the event always takes place deeper into the forest, away from the park's centre point. The reason was to respect Muslim guests, not to mention members of the Johor royal house who have their chalets there. Not using the nouns referring to the pig or pork is a manifestation of politeness to Muslims.<sup>2</sup>

The Jakun of Endau has an oral tradition of the history of their arrival to where they are now, and this is corroborated by the Jakun in Pahang. According to them, their ancestors came from the north by sea, trailing along the east coast of the Malay Peninsula (the South China Sea), and finally ended on the beach opposite Kampung Peta, i.e. their present-day settlement which has

been turned into National Park. From there, some had crossed over to Pahang in the north. There their locations are more open in the sense that they are not confined to surroundings like that of a national park. The community area in Sungai Kalong, Rompin, is right in the middle of rubber and oil palm estates.

The Jakun intermarry with other non-Muslim Orang Asli, including those of the Austroasiatic group, and with the Chinese. Very few intermarry with Malays because they find it hard to observe the many taboos in Islam, especially when it comes to food.

The Temuan geolinguistic area stretches from Central Selangor (Kuala Kubu, Kuang and the surroundings) to the south, over to Negeri Sembilan Melaka. This area of the Peninsula shows the stretch of land on the west coast to be more or less parallel with the region occupied by the Jakun on the east coast, and this parallelism is reflected in their population (see Table 1). In Selangor, their settlements are dotted all over from Kuala Kubu Baharu and Kuang down to Bukit Lanjan, Dengkil, Bangi, Hulu Langat, Banting, etc., and Selangor seems to outdo the other two states in the number of settlements and with it the number of the people concerned. Like the Jakun, the Temuan have progressed in life.

Modern housing is built for them in their original environment. That is to say, as a general rule, the Temuan are not re-located to some other place, even if a new city centre is built in their neighbourhood. An example is the Bukit Lanjan settlement which is close to Bandar Sri Damansara in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. It takes time for some of the people concerned to get used to the new look of their original environment. In 2002, we interviewed the Temuan in Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan, for a program sponsored by the Institute of Language and Literature (*Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka*) and TV3. The government had built terrace houses of bricks for them in the town, not far from their traditional settlement. However, some of them preferred to live in their houses on stilts at the foot of the hills. One Temuan lady (with the Muslim name, Aminah, which she gave herself though she was not a Muslim), told us that the hills and the jungles offered everything her people needed. Food was aplenty with fish in the clear river, and animals (especially the various types of monkeys) which they could hunt at any time for their protein consumption, not to mention the abundance of fruits and jungle vegetables. And there was no necessity for a refrigerator to keep their food fresh, or an electric fan to keep their bodies cool. They already had a supermarket where they did not have to spend a single cent!

### **The Sea MOA: the *Orang Laut***

The *Orang Laut* as a people who live in boats in the seas are often mentioned in writings of Europeans passing through the Malay Archipelago. They are referred to as sea people or *lanun*. The latter is a Malay word for "pirates". This is due to them marauding in the seas and the straits, and attacking ships along the way. Captain Sherard Osborn of the British Royal Navy made the following observation:

*Eagerly believing, eagerly listening to all that transpired around us, --- it may be supposed that nothing was more keenly sought for, by all on board the "Hyacinth," than news about Malay pirates, those ogres, those bogies of the Archipelago; and just then two events happened, sufficient to satiate the appetite for the piratical for some time to come (Osborn, 1857: p. 17).*

Both the events mentioned occurred when the Hyacinth had to save the "Wolf", which Osborn referred to as a "sister-sloop". The first event took place in Southern Johor, where the Wolf is said to have fallen in with the pirates "in a fine bay near Cape Romania, the extreme southern point of the Malayan peninsula" (p. 18). The pirates came in their *prahus* "twelve or thirteen in

number, fought the boats and escaped, the forces being very disproportionate” (p. 18). These pirates could be the group referred to as the Duano, who are now settled in the very area described by Osborn.

In the second event, the pirates came in six large *prahus*. But the Royal Navy boats managed to defeat them, and sent them in the direction of the Sulu Sea in the east, “to return to their own homes --- a sea voyage of about twelve hundred miles” (p. 21). These people could have been the Bugis of the Celebes, and the description of the boats and the men with their weapons and the clothes they wore add to the clues as to their ethnic group.

The Orang Laut of the Malayan waters are the Seletar and Duano. On the other hand, there is also the group known as Urak Lawoi’ in a region which was originally Malayan but is now part of the Satun Province of Thailand. Compared with the Land MOA, their total population is very small (see Table 1). However, the population for Urak Lawoi’ is not available, but we can estimate from our visit to the Adang Islands in 2010 that those in the area are less than a hundred.

As said earlier, as a label *Orang Laut* refers to any sea people. This means that they led their life in the sea, making the boats their homes. As the world around them progressed in terms of civilization, they too progressed in the sense of building a habitat on land but still close to the sea. The three communities of Orang Laut discussed in this article no longer live in the sea, or even build houses on stilts in the sea. Their settlements are on the coastal areas of the mainland or islands, such that they can still carry on with the activities of supporting themselves and their families through fishing and collecting items of some commercial value which the sea can offer. One can say that they have become land settlers but are still connected with the sea.

As for their locations (see Table 3), the Duano and the Seletar are settled in Johor; the former may also be found on islands in Teberau Straits separating Malaysia and Singapore. The Urak Lawoi’, on the other hand, inhabit the islands opposite Satun on the mainland; they come under the administration of the Satun Province of Thailand.

<b>Ethnolinguistic Communities</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Speech System</b>
1. Orang Seletar	<b>Johor:</b> Coastal areas of South Johor - Masai, Perling, Pasir Gudang, Teberau etc.	Bahasa Seletar
2. Duano	<b>Johor:</b> Batu Pahat (on the west coast) and the surrounding areas	Bahasa Duano
3. Urak Lawoi’	<b>Adang Islands:</b> Pulau Adang, Pulau Lipe’, Pulau Rawi	Bahasa Urak Lawoi’

**Table 3: Ethnolinguistic Communities of Land MOA**

According to records in Malay texts, the Seletar have their kinsmen in the Riau-Lingga archipelago south of Singapore. This group of islands as well as Singapore were once part of

the Malay Johor-Riau empire. Singapore was sold to the British in 1819. And following the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, the whole of Riau-Lingga archipelago came under Dutch rule (Winstedt, 1935, pp. 213-217), and later became part of Indonesia.

The Malayan Orang Seletar live along the coastal areas of southern Johor, mostly in Masai, Johor Bahru, Gelang Patah, Pasir Gudang and Teberau (Samsur Rijal Yahaya, 2015). According to Iskandar Carey (1976), their arrival in the southern part of the Malay Peninsula is relatively recent, about 200 years ago. In his autobiography, *Hikayat Abdullah*, Abdullah Munshi, the Malay tutor Sir Stamford Raffles (founder of modern Singapore), when Raffles took over Singapore from the Sultan of Johor, there were Orang Laut there. They lived in boats in the sea, and went on land to sell fish and other sea-produce to the people on the island. They preferred to barter their produce with tobacco and husked rice than to take money. The moment their purpose for coming on land was done, they would disappear into the sea (Datuk Besar and Roolvink, 1959, pp. 176-177).

In Riau-Lingga where these people are said to have originated from, they are not known by the name *Orang Seletar*. The term only refers to the branch in Malaysia and Singapore. People have been guessing on how this name came about. We have a linguistic explanation to its origin through the analysis of the word *sellates* or *cellates* that occurs in the writings of English seamen plying the seas of the Malay world particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This word in whatever spelling it is given, could have been derived from the Malay word *selat* "straits", as this region of islands is full of straits, the most relevant to our study being the Straits of Melaka, and the Straits of Teberau (between Johor and Singapore). So, with the suffixation of the English *-er*, the sea people of these straits became *Sellater*. The word had not entered Abdullah Munshi's writing of the 1840's, as to him they were just Orang Laut. It could be the English rulers of Singapore who invented the word which later on was given the Malay spelling *Seletar*.

Mariam Ali mentions the presence of Orang Seletar and Orang Selat. According to her they seem to speak a dialect of Malay and are said to come from the islands south of Singapore (in Benjamin and Chou, 2003, Chapter 12). Since Mariam's work does not offer the necessary linguistic data, one can only infer that that in terms of ethnolinguistics, and from the labels given to them, the two belong to one and the same group.

Orang Seletar of Malaysia are Muslim. Their conversion to Islam could have taken place after they had settled on Malaysian soil. Those in Singapore became Muslim in the 1980's (Mariam Ali, *Ibid.*). Abdullah Munshi's account depicts a picture of them as people who did not have any religious faith. They still went about naked, except for a loin cloth, such that one day when they came on land, Sir William Farquhar, who succeeded Raffles as governor of Singapore, decided to give them material for clothing in addition to money and rice (*Hikayat Abdullah*, p. 177). They could not have been the pirates involved in fighting with the Royal Navy ships as they do not seem to have the type of *prahu* or the stature to be involved in an armed conflict.

The Orang Duano, who could have been the pirates in the first event mentioned by Captain Osborn, inhabit the length of the west coast of Johor, and are also known as *Orang Kuala*; the reason being that their natural habitat in Johor has always been close to the mouth of the river (*kuala*). They are said to be related to an Orang Laut group in Sumatra, known as *Dessin Dolak* (Carey, 1976, pp. 269-270). In his book, Captain Osborn also mentions pirates who fitted out on the Sumatran coast, at a place called Battu-putih, or White Rocks, and carrying out two thousand fighting men (p. 22).



The origin of the term *Dessin Dolak* can be traced to their language, where *desin* [dəsin] means “people”, and *delek* [dələk] “man-male”. It could have been that when they encountered with foreigners in the seas, they introduced themselves with the expression *desin delek*, giving the message to their would-be antagonists that they were brave men. The equivalent expression in Malay is *anak jantan*. The term *desin delek* when heard frequently by others eventually came to be the reference term for the Duano.

The name *Duano* most probably has its origin in the word *danaw* (lake) in the language of these people as well as in Malay and other related languages in Sumatra and Malaysia. In Sumatran languages, there is a number of variations in the pronunciation of the word, specifically in the final syllable where the diphthong *-au* or *-aw* varies with *-o*. If this is the case, *danaw* then takes the form *dano* or *duano*, which also attests to the fact that while still in Sumatra these people lived in the regions of the great lakes.

In the district of Batu Pahat alone, according to the census of 2008 conducted by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs of Johor, there were 356 families in six villages, making the total Duano population of the area as 1897 (Nur Hidayah Mohamed Sulaiman, 2015, p. 19). This makes Batu Pahat the main Duano region not just in Johor, but in the whole country. The reason for this could be the availability of jobs in this district, as Batu Pahat is now a thriving industrial area offering various types of jobs for the people living there. At the same time, it is not far from the sea such that the Duano people can still be involved in their traditional form of livelihood, that is fishing.

The total Duano population of over 2,000 are Muslim. They have had a long history of intermarrying with Malays, and get absorbed into the Malay community. They also intermarry with the Chinese, and this means that the Chinese partner has to convert to Islam, and the children become Malays.

*Urak Lawoi'* is a variation of *Orang Laut*, which reflects the phonology of the language the people speak. The people discussed in this article are those whose geolinguistic region i.e. the group of islands known as Pulau Adang, was part of Malaya until 1909. This region forms the southern end of a chain of *Urak Lawoi'* geolinguistic area that starts from the Phuket Island in the north along the west coast of Thailand.

The Adang archipelago consists of several islands in the Andaman Sea, and the biggest of them all is the one that bears the name *Pulau Adang*. The *Urak Lawoi'* inhabit only three of these islands, and these are *Pulau Adang*, *Pulau Lipe'*, and *Pulau Rawi*, all of which are close to the mainland, the Province of Satun, and 68 nautical miles to Malaysia's Langkawi Islands in the south.

The islands (*pulau*) bear names which are linguistically Malay. *Adang* means “to shield” someone or something, i.e. from the wind, or any form of danger. This is obvious from the island's imposing size compared to those around it. The word *lipe'* with the meaning “flat” is a variation of standard Malay *leper*, besides other variations in Malay dialects in Malaysia, such as *lepe*, and *lepea'* (Kedah dialect). Indeed, the island is flat; approaching it from the north or south one does not see the kind of topography that islands offer to travellers, that is one that resembles a hill. As for the name *Rawi*, it could be the result of a misreading of the name written in the *Jawi* (Malayised Arabic) script, which should be *rawai* [rawaj], meaning “a contrivance for catching fish”, which has the following description:

*This contrivance consists of a number of unbaited sharp hooks hanging very close to one another and catching any fish which attempts to pass among them (Wilkinson, 1903, p. 320).*

From *rawai* comes *merawai*, a verb form denoting action or practice of using a *rawai*. There are places along the rivers in the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra which are given the name *Merawai*, or the truncated form *Mawai*, an attestation to the activity in those localities of the type of fishing using the method described above.

The Orang Laut are mentioned in texts of the Kedah Sultanate and in those of literary genre which were written when the islands were still part of the Sultanate. Malay texts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century right up to the decades after the Second World War were still written in the *Jawi* script in which there is no special diacritic symbol to differentiate the diphthong *ai* from the monophthong *i*; hence, the confusion in the reading of *rawai* as *rawi*. However, the form *rawi*, an Arabic loan, is also a lexical item in Malay with the meaning “narrator”, or “story-teller”, but it is hardly a suitable reflection of the life history of the island under discussion.

There have been remarks in scholarly works that very little has been written on the Urak Lawoi’, especially those in the Adang Islands (e. g. Hogan, 1972). This may be true to some extent. Captain Osborn in his book mentions of pirates who were patronised by an ex-rajah of Kedah. From the following passage, one can infer that they could be the Urak Lawoi’:

*This fleet of prahus, styled by us a piratical one, sailed under the colours of the ex-rajah of Quedah; and although many of the leaders were known and avowed pirates, still the strong European party at Penang maintain that they were lawful belligerents battling to regain their own (Osborn, 1857, p. 22).*

In the last line of the above quotation, the “lawful belligerents battling to regain their own” refers to the Orang Laut who were recruited by Kedah to fight against Siam, in the 1840’s in the Sultanate’s effort to be free from remaining a colony of Siam, and directly ruled by the son of the governor of Ligor (Muhammad Hassan, 1968).

The participation of the sea people in the Kedah army in the Siam-Burma war of 1811 is mentioned in the *Sha’ir Sultan Maulana*, an epic in verse form of this war. At that time Kedah, a vassal of Siam, was ordered by the King of Siam to send her army to assist in Siam’s fight against the Burmese. The Orang Laut of the Adang Islands, which were still part of Kedah, were fighters in the Kedah army, fighting side by side the Malays, to help Siam free Ayuthaya from Burma. They were given a flotilla of their own by the Kedah Sultan. The Burmese were finally defeated and driven out of Ayuthaya (Muhammad Yusof, 1989). Letters of Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah of Kedah written between 1881 and 1895 mention of the Orang Laut of Adang Islands in many places, particularly referring to their involvement as collectors of birds’ nests in caves of the islands, which were sold to Chinese traders (Asmah Haji Omar, 2013, pp. 102-108).

The Urak Lawoi’ in the Adang region mostly live in Pulau Adang. Here as well as in Pulau Rawi, they carry on with their traditional type of earning a livelihood, i. e. of fishing and collecting other sea produce, such as corals and sea lichens, which they sell to mainland retailers, or to traders further south in Pulau Langkawi which they call Pulau Kawi. They are also tourist guides using their own *sampan* (small rowing boats). In Pulau Lipe’, they find jobs in the restaurant, and in cleaning the chalets and the compound of the resort.

There is a primary school in Pulau Lipe', where the language medium is Thai, the official language of Thailand. For a higher level of education, the children have to go to Satun on the mainland. Thai is the primary language for them, but they still maintain their Urak Lawoi' language in the home and community. They also speak the Kedah dialect, which is the home dialect of the Malays in Satun. Using this dialect helps them to communicate with traders from Satun (where the Malays still use it) and Pulau Langkawi, and in general with visitors from Malay-speaking countries.

### Linguistic subgrouping of MOA

The Orang Asli discussed in this article is given the label *Malayic* by linguists because of the speech systems they use, which indicate their historical relationship with Malay. Determination of the relationship between these speech systems makes use of the lexicostatistic tests based on the Swadesh list of 100 words, which is considered by linguists to be the basic core vocabulary applicable to all languages of the world, where concepts of the words chosen are universal, and hence culture free. Percentages in the cognates between two different languages are taken as a reflection of the historical distance or proximity between the pair compared. The results of this comparison where Malay is the matrix language are given below.

	Temuan	-	96%
	Jakun	-	92%
	Kanak	-	91%
Malay -	Urak Lawoi'	-	90%
Seletar		-	86%
Duano		-	69%

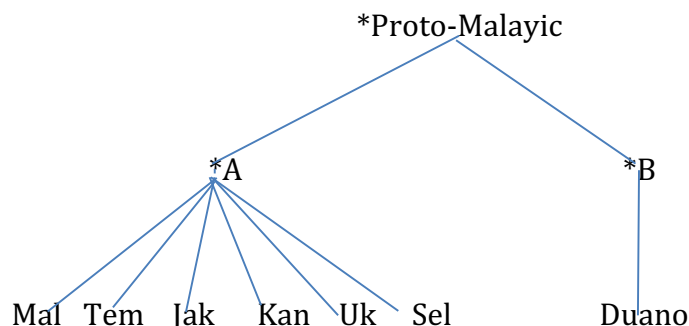
**Table 4: Percentages of Cognates of Malay and the MOA Languages**

Percentages from the lexicostatistic tests indicate the distance/proximity between the pairs involved, i.e. whether the components of the pair are dialects of one and the same language, or that they are two heterogeneous language but are genetically related to one another. Using the standard cut-off points of 85 and 86, the pairs which score 86% and above are in dialectal relationship (indicating proximity), while those 85% and below are languages in their own right (indicating distance).

From the results of the calculation of cognates as given in Table 4, all except Duano are dialects of Malay. However, the degrees of their dialectal relationship with Malay vary from pair to pair. Temuan is the closest to Malay with a divergence of only 4%. Next in line are Jakun, Kanak and Urak Lawoi' with the divergence between 8% and 9%. As for Seletar, it is really on the border line of the dialect-language dichotomy in its relationship with Malay. All this means that when it comes to speaking with the speakers using their dialects, it is easier to understand Temuan and Jakun compared to understanding, Kanak and Urak lawoi', and all these four compared to Seletar. This group of MOA can be said to have the same ancestor as Malay, which can be termed Proto-Malay. The time-depth between them can be calculated using a formula given in glottochronology; however, this is not the focus of this article.

Duano is definitely a different language altogether. Its cognate score of 69% is above the Iban-Malay score which is 63%, and these two are much higher than the Malay-Javanese

lexicostatistical relationship which is 35% (Asmah Haji Omar, 2013, p. 25; 2008, pp. 4-8). Duano appears to have branched off from another proto-language, which shares a common ancestor with Proto-Malay, and this common ancestor can be termed "Proto-Malayic". The relationship between the groups can be seen in the diagram below:



**Diagram Showing the Linguistic Subgrouping of the MOA**

In the above diagram, \*A represents the proto-language which is shared by Malay, Temuan, Jakun, Kanak, Urak Lawoi' and Seletar, and the other Malay dialects spoken in the Malay Peninsula. \*B represents the proto-language which branches off into Duano, and other languages of the Malayic group which shows cognates which are approximately of the same value as Duano, such as Iban. At the moment we are not able to suggest the name for \*B for lack of sufficient data.

The descendants of \*A are clearly in a dialectal relationship with one another. In this sense the label Proto-Malay refers to a reconstructed proto-form from which these dialects branched away from the parent language, to stand as separate dialects. In this sense the term "Proto-Malay" cannot be used to label the MOA, or the Jakun tribes, as has been in currency in the writings of historians. In this connection we agree with Benjamin who says that the term together with "Deutro-Malay" emerged as a result of the search for Malay origins, and has a political flavour:

*... and the search for Malay "origins" therefore reflects political ideology writ large: "Proto-Malay" and "Deutero-Malay" are political rather than ethnological categories. (Benjamin, in Benjamin & Chou, 2003, p. 20).*

### CONCLUSION

This article is an attempt to divide the Malayic Orang Asli into subgroups. They have been popularly identified as sea people and land people, based on their traditional habitats. As of today this division does not seem to be relevant any more.

The subgrouping based on the lexicostatistics of the 100-words of the Swadesh list appears to coincide with their geographical grouping at least 200 years ago. Those in a dialectal relationship with Malay, i.e. being branches of \*A in the above diagram, were historically located on the east of the Straits of Melaka, in the peninsula and the islands. The people known as Temuan, Jakun, Kanak, Urak Lawoi', and Seletar could have arrived in the Malay world (consisting of the Malay Peninsula and the islands south of it) roughly at about the same time. Although the Orang Kanak are said to have come and settle in Johor about 200 years ago from Riau-Lingga, they were just re-locating from one place to the other in the same Malay-speaking area. So were the Seletar.

The Duano speakers, who in the 1840's (according to Osborn's narrative) were still anchored on the east coast of Sumatra (on the western side of the Straits of Melaka) had come to the west coast of Johor in the course of their sea-faring activities, and some may have already

settled there. Their speech system, being a language totally different from Malay and the other dialects, must have been rooted in Sumatra in a geolinguistic area with its own dialects, and in the neighbourhood of related languages. Compared to Temuan, Jakun and the rest of the dialects, the arrival of the Duano language in the Malay Peninsula is more recent. Its presence means the addition of another Austronesian language to the peninsula, besides Malay and the Orang Asli dialects of Malay.

## Notes

1. From time to time local newspapers publish news of socio-economic achievements of Orang Asli. The *New Straits Times* of 12<sup>th</sup> July 2017, has a column titled *Small Retailer Transformation: Program Changes Orang Asli's Life*. The first part of the news article about the entrepreneurial spirit of the Orang Asli from Pekan, Pahang reads as follows: "When Orang Asli Rasika Ishak opened a sundry shop in Kampung Dusun here six years ago, his premises had only a zinc roof and no electric supply. Rasika did not keep records of his business transactions and retail items were displayed on wooden shelves and in huge plastic bags. But his business took a turn for the better last year when he secured a RM80,000 loan from the Small Retailer Transformation (Tukar) Programme. ... "I used to make RM100 a day, but now I can earn up to RM800. This modern shop with proper shelves helps boost my business." (p. 22).
2. This attitude is also observed among the Iban of Sarawak, who would not use the Iban or Malay word for pig when talking to a Muslim, but instead resort to an idiom couched in the Malay language, *kambing batu* which can literally be translated as "a goat which looks like a rock" (*kambing* = goat, *batu* = stone).

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