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THE SOCIOECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE ORANG KANAQ OF JOHOR

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The Orang Kanaq are the Orang Asli group that can only be found in Kota Tinggi, Johor. Originally from Sumatra, the group had a long history as vassals for Johor rulers before losing their influence due to economic and political changes that have occurred in the Riau-Lingga archipelago since the 18th century. This paper examines the early history of the Orang Kanaq, the factors that led to their decline prior to the arrival of European powers, and their migration to Kota Tinggi. Since the end of the 19th century, patron-client ties in modernising Johor have become less important; this has pushed the Orang Kanaq to the margins of society. Forced resettlements during the Emergency (1948–60) and efforts to "modernise" them economically and socially have proven to be challenging tasks for both the government and the Kanaq themselves.

Keywords: the Orang Asli, Orang Kanaq, socioeconomic history

INTRODUCTION

The Orang Kanaq of Johor were dubbed by ethnographers as "a population in crisis" due to their pattern of population growth.[1] Not only is their number small as compared to the other Orang Asli groups,[2] but their customary practices that prohibit intermarriages with other groups pose a threat to their very survival. With an extremely low population growth, ethnographers believe this tribe could face extinction along with its language and culture (Wazir, 2001b: 71); this is a subject of interest to ethnographers and language experts. The current situation with the Orang Kanaq is in stark contrast to their historical role within the patron-client framework of the Riau Archipelago. By looking into the historical perspective, this paper aims to fill a gap in the study of a marginal group with a colourful past.

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EARLY ACCOUNTS OF THE ORANG KANAQ

Since the early 20th century, the 19 Orang Asli tribes in the Malay Peninsula have been ethnographically regrouped into three main divisions: (1) The Negrito (or Semang) often exist in small numbers compared to the other two groups and have been described as the oldest inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula.[3] They follow a nomadic way of life and are found scattered in Kedah, Pahang, Perak, Terengganu, and Kelantan; (2) The Senoi (called "Sakais" by the Malays) form the largest group and are shifting cultivators,[4] found in the central part of peninsular Malaysia; and, (3) The Proto-Malays, or the southern Orang Asli, are found mainly in Selangor, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, and Johor (Skeat and Blagden, 1966). These divisions were used by the The Department of Aboriginal Affairs (JOA), which is the government department in charge of the Orang Asli, to further regroup them into smaller sub-groups according to their linguistic features. Among the smaller tribes within the third group are the Jakun, Temuan, Orang Hulu, Orang Kanaq, Orang Kuala, Orang Kallang and the Orang Seletar. Many of the Proto-Malays were cultivators, but some, like the Orang Seletar and Orang Kallang, practiced nomadic sea-life. The label "Proto-Malay" was given partly due to the several generations of close association with the coastal Malays.

Regarding the origins of the Proto-Malays, the well-known ethnographer Carey (1976) believes these groups were late arrivals to the Malay Peninsula, having migrated there 4,000 years ago. Based on their physical and linguistic features, Carey divides the Proto-Malays into three distinct ethnic categories: First, the pure Malay type, such as the Temuan, who look like typical Malays, speak only Malay, and whose customs are very similar to the Malays; second, tribes such as the Semelai who partly speak Senoi due to intermarriages with the Senoi group; and third, those living on the west coast of Johor, who are placed into a category of their own. These tribes are Muslims, speak a certain Sumatran dialect and, according to Carey, are comparative newcomers to this country. The Orang Kanaq fall into this last category. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia and Kanaq settlements in the Riau islands and Kota Tinggi, Johor. Figure 2 was drawn based on information taken from Sopher (1965), Omar (1978) and an undated typescript from the Department of Orang Asli Affairs, Johor Bahru.

Compared with the other Orang Asli tribes, the Orang Kanaq have received little scholarly attention. The only extended ethnographic study of this group was undertaken by Omar (1978). That study however, did not show the significant role played by the Orang Kanaq within the patron-client system prior to the

Figure 1: Orang Asli distribution according to tribes

Source: Adapted from *Kehidupan, budaya & pantang larang Orang Asli* (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli, 2002)

arrival of British colonial power in the late 19th century. Another study by Mohd. Sharifudin (2006) focused on the demise of the Kanaq language (and also that of the Duano tribes, also located in Johor) due to the decrease in the number of its native speakers. However, this study failed to discuss the historical background; although its author, like Omar, had accepted Sumatra as the original homeland of the Orang Kanaq.

The history of the Kanaq, which Andaya (1975) categorises as part of the Orang Laut or "sea nomads",[5] evolved around their relationship with the Johor kingdom. The relationship was not new, as the Riau Archipelago was for a long period of time part of the Johor kingdom. Andaya believes that the relationship was already in existence from the 7th to the 11th centuries within the patron-client framework of the Srivijaya-Palembang empire and was re-established at the end of the 14th century when the refugee Palembang prince Parameswara (or Seri Teri Buana) founded Melaka. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Orang Laut continued to play an important role in the kingdom of Johor, until the regicide of 1699, which ended the Melaka lineage.

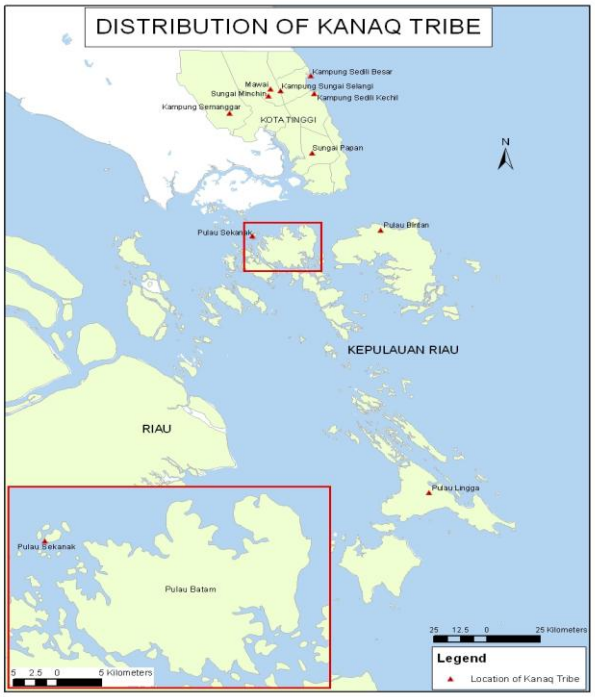

Figure 2: Distribution of Kanaq tribe

The Malay rulers utilised the Orang Laut as rowers, men-of-war, and royal messengers. Besides being part of the patron-client relationship, this arrangement was also due to mutual economic interests. The Orang Asli, on the whole, were the major supplier of forest produce in Malay-Chinese trading networks since time immemorial. Although it is generally believed that their involvement in international trade began with Melaka, the Orang Asli had put in place an ancient tradition of exchange with the outside world that lasted from the Hoabinhian period (about 8000 BC) to the 15th century. The high demand for jungle produce by Chinese traders indirectly led to the formation of linkages between the Orang Asli and the Malay royalty. In the process, the Orang Asli were "Malayised" in terms of religion, language, culture, and way of life, including economic activities (Andaya, 2008).[6] Meanwhile, the Orang Laut became the prime collector of sea products for the China market.[7]

Interestingly, and despite their long existence in the area, there is no mention of the Orang Kanaq people in earlier writings addressing the myriad of indigenous tribes of the Malay Peninsula, although references to them in the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay annals) are legendary. In his writing on the tribes of Johor that was

published in 1847, Logan mentioned only a few groups, such as the Orang Binua, whom he believed had occupied the Johor interior, the Orang Sabimba, the Orang Kallang and the sea nomad-like Orang Tambusa. (Logan, 1847a: 246). A century later, Williams-Hunt, a member of the Home Affairs Departments and Adviser on Aboriginal Affairs, made a brief reference to the Orang Kanaq in his study published in 1952. Without mentioning their origin, Williams-Hunt reiterated that the Orang Kanaq could only be found in Kota Tinggi and were the only aboriginal group that did not practice ear piercing but possessed an Iban-type blowpipe. With a population of 34 in 1952, this group had close contact with the Chinese but not with the other tribes, and Williams-Hunt considered them too wild for intermarriage.

Later scholars provide a clearer picture about the origins of the Orang Kanaq. According to Sopher (1965), the Orang Kanaq were among the eight tribes who frequented the Johor-Singapore coast in the early 19th century. Together with the Orang Galang Barok, Moro and Sugi, they were labelled incompetent pirates, living on various islands and sailing as far as Siam and Cochin-China on plundering expeditions. As reiterated by Logan (1847b), all of these tribes who had inhabited the Johor archipelago were considered vassals of the Johor ruler. They originated from the Lingga Islands but moved to the Sekana Bay on the north coast of Singkep to pursue their plundering activities. They were led by Panglima Raman, who was a native of Lingga; Raman's father was a Bugis trader, and his mother, the daughter of one of the leading *rakyat*[8] in the locality, was most probably related to the Orang Kanaq. Panglima Raman was a close friend of the ruler and later became one of his principal officers. On his maternal side, Raman had connections with the boat people; he was also a leader of the *rakyat* and was heavily involved in supporting his political master.

The Kanaq's plundering raids were a consequence of their relationships with their nominal overlords, the rulers of Bintan and Lingga. These rulers provided boats and arms, two items that were necessary to persuade them "to work". In 1843, it was believed that the Kanaq pirates of Lingga had been partially suppressed. The Sultan of Lingga was finally persuaded to give up the Orang Kanaq and other similar groups to the Dutch authorities. Later that year, a Dutch force destroyed the Orang Kanaq village at Sekana Bay, forcing the Kanaqs to move inland. They were also persuaded by the Sultan of Lingga to abandon piracy and to undertake agriculture which was totally alien to them. However, the Kanaqs agreed to accede to their overlord's request by the symbolic act of burning their boats that had once been used for plundering raids. With the encouragement of the Malay rulers, these nomadic folks reluctantly settled on the land and began to acquire skills in crop cultivation.

Despite the changes they had gone through, the Orang Kanaq and other Orang Laut still contributed *kerah* (corvee) to their overlord. Befitting their status as a junior branch of the Johor ruling house, the Suku Bintan, for instance, were honoured as retainers at state weddings and other royal occasions. The Suku Galang, Kanaq, and Sugi manned the sultan's ships, descendants of the Bugis were appointed as warriors and conscripted into the military force, and the Suku Gelam worked as boat builders, whereas the remaining Sukus were recruited as boat rowers. Quite often, these tribes had to leave their settlements on the various islands for long periods, at times for more than a year. The Kanaq had a settlement near Bintan Island.

While Andaya (2002) saw the introduction of new commodities like tin and pepper to replace forest produce as the primary exchange items in international trade between the 15th and the 18th century which saw Malay and Chinese dominations eroding the economic importance of the Orang Asli, Sopher (1965) claims the Malay rulers were equally responsible for the constant shifts of these groups. The Orang Asli were constantly moved to new locations to provide much-needed services or to provide the necessary manpower for the exploitation of forest resources. Barnard (2007) suggested that the decline had actually begun when patron-client ties were shattered following the assassination of Sultan Mahmud in 1699. The regicide caused a split when the Malays and the Orang Laut no longer showed their loyalty to the new rulers from the Bendahara line. Following the regicide, Andaya claims that the Orang Laut no longer had any specific loyalty and that "their proud and ancient status had gone" (Andaya and Andaya, 2001: 87). Though some followed Raja Kecik[9] (who claimed himself to be the son of Sultan Mahmud and, with the help of the Orang Laut, defeated Sultan Abdul Jalil in 1718), others retreated to Johor's peripheral territories like Siantan and resumed piracy.

A more threatening scenario appeared in the 1770s with the emergence of the new ally to the Siak rulers, the Illanun, who overshadowed the Orang Laut in term of weapons, vessels and manpower. This new group was also sought by the Bugis in 1787 to attack Riau, which was under Dutch control. However, the issue of loyalty remained a sore point, as the Illanun were more interested in fortune. This posed a threat to the Malay rulers and, with the British ports in Penang and Singapore, as well as the new commercial trading that was monopolised by new migrants (from Bugis and Illanuns to Europeans), the patron-client link was no longer important because "the Malay world was now controlled by groups that did not have to act as patrons to the sea people of the region" (Barnard, 2007: 47). Dutch anti-piracy campaigns in 1834 destroyed the Illanun settlement in Reteh, and British attacks on the Orang Laut settlements in Galang and Karimun were the final blow to the Orang Laut who, along with the Orang Kanaq, were forced to flee for safety and a new life. Despite this setback, some of these *sukus* still

retained their original functions at the Johor court. As in the distant past, when these Orang Laut came to serve the ruler, it was customary for the latter to provide them with food (Andaya, 1975: 47).

MIGRATION TO KOTA TINGGI (JOHOR)

From Bintan, the Orang Kanaq moved to Kota Tinggi, although the exact date of their movement is still a matter of conjecture. Carey (1976) gives contradictory dates and at one point writes that "the Orang Kanaq migrated to Malaya from their homes in some of the Indonesian Islands to the south of Singapore only about 100 years ago" (around 1876). Elsewhere he writes that "the Orang Kanaq are quite recent immigrants to Malaya, having arrived some two 200 years ago" (around 1776). An ethnographical study by Omar (1978) and undated typescript by the Department of Orang Asli, Johor Bahru are similarly unable to fix the exact date that the Orang Kanaq left their homeland, although Kanaq informants cited in these publications were fairly convinced that Riau Island was their original homeland.

Based on the historical development in the archipelago during the 18th century, Omar (1978) offers two possibilities with regard to the date of departure of the Orang Kanaq from Riau. First, it could be 1784, when a Dutch fleet sailed into the archipelago and signed a treaty with the Johor sultan. Through this treaty, the Dutch acquired sovereignty over the Riau island, and this was followed by the arrival of the first Dutch resident in 1785. In 1787, the Dutch were driven out from Riau by pirates (Illanun) from Borneo, although they returned soon after. Omar believed the return of the Dutch could have been the first occasion for the Kanaq's departure from Riau. Another date, according to Omar, could have been a quarter of a century after the Dutch regarrisoned Riau in 1818. After 1862, there were no more signs of the Orang Kanaq at Sekana Bay (Sopher, 1965: 100). The Kanaq informants in Omar's study gave two reasons for the departure of their ancestors from the Riau Archipelago. According to one of the oldest Orang Kanaq men at Kampung Mawai, Kota Tinggi, his ancestors, numbering some 150, had left Riau because they were afraid of the "Orang Belanda" (the Dutch), which supports the view expressed by Sopher above. The other reason the informants gave is that their ancestors were brought to Johor by the sultan himself. According to Omar's informants, the ancestors of the Orang Kanaq sailed in small *prahus* towards the upper Sedili River and settled at Mawai Lama, which is located seven kilometres to the northwest of the present Orang Kanaq settlement. Mawai Lama was chosen due to its isolated location; this situation enabled them to avoid contact with outsiders, a fear that was inherited from oppressive Dutch treatment in Riau.

On the other hand, the undated typescript by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs, Johor Bahru gives a different story to the Kanaq migration. It claims that the earliest group of Orang Kanaq had arrived in 1758 at Sungai Papan in the Kota Tinggi district to work on a Chinese owned pepper plantation. After the plantation's closure, the Kanaq moved to Lebak Mincin, also in the Kota Tinggi district, to plant fruit trees, grow vegetables and collect jungle produce.[10] It is commonly believed that this move originated with the sultan of Johor, who decreed that the Kanaqs should settle permanently in one place. In the Johor sultanate, apart from the earlier traditional relationship with the Orang Laut until the regicide of 1699 and their occasional contribution of *kerah* to the sultan, their special relationship was traceable during the reign of Temenggong Ibrahim (1825–1848). Until the 1840s, Johor was said to be a jungle territory without people. The state was fortunate, as its forest provided an abundance of gutta percha or *getah taban* (Trocki, 1979).[11] This discovery provided immense wealth for Temenggong Ibrahim, enabling him to start agricultural development of the state, notably the planting of gambier. The Temenggong resettled many groups of aborigines in areas where they later proved to be useful. They also provided information on the state's resources, and the ruler became better acquainted with the state's resources and geography.

It is not surprising that the Orang Kanaq regard Lebak Mincin as their *saka* or ancestral land (presently gazetted as forest reserve land). It is common practice among the Orang Asli to have *saka* land that is described as an "uninhabitated site scattered through the forest, several kilometres upstream and downstream of the current site", and uncommon for them to have *saka* land within the same area (Benjamin, 2001a). Today, the Orang Kanaq still commute to this ancestral land during the fruit season or when there is not much work at the settlement.[12] The land, located 15 kilometres from Kampung Sungai Selangi, was left by the Orang Kanaq during the Emergency for security reasons. Based on the importance of Lebak Mincin to the tribe, it can be concluded that this area was the earliest Orang Kanaq settlement in the Malay Peninsula before they moved to Mawai Lama.[13] In Mawai Lama, the Orang Kanaq lived a traditional life, supporting the family by collecting jungle produce, rattans, wild yams and so forth.[14] They were not involved in paddy planting and, as reiterated by Williams-Hunt, the Aboriginal Adviser, the Orang Kanaq "grew almost nothing" (The Sunday Times, 1951). Before the 19th century, paddy, especially wet paddy, was not common among the Orang Asli; in fact, in Johor, their staple foods were yam and caladium (Gianno and Bayr, 2009). Their traditional and carefree life, however, was severely disrupted by the Malayan Emergency.

THE EMERGENCY (1948–1960) AND THE EFFECT OF RESETTLEMENT

The Malayan Emergency marked the beginning of the modern history of the Orang Asli in Malaysia. Since this time, the Orang Asli have been accorded serious government attention. In fact, the Emergency began the formal link between the Government and the Orang Asli with the establishment of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1950[15]. The reason for this development was mainly strategic and military. In the early years of the Emergency, the communists relied heavily on Chinese squatters living on the jungle fringes as their main suppliers for food and medicines. To sever this linkage, the government embarked on a massive relocation of Chinese squatters into heavily-guarded "New Villages" that straddled almost the whole peninsula. Named after Sir Harold Briggs, the then Director of Operations, the Briggs Plan started in June 1950 with the purpose of cutting the close ties between Chinese squatters and the communists. The communists then turned to the more accessible Orang Asli community to provide food. The communist foray into the Orang Asli was a cause of concern for the government and the military leaders, especially when it was reported that by 1953, 30,000 Orang Asli were under communist influence (Carey, 1976: 311). As a result, the Briggs Plan was extended to include the Orang Asli as well.

Among the steps taken by the government to sever Orang Asli-communist ties was the relocation of the former into new villages of their own that were put under close government surveillance. This plan included the Orang Kanaq. From Mawai Lama, the Orang Kanaq were moved in 1951 to the Aborigine Research Centre in Sungai Gombak, eight miles from Kuala Lumpur. Did the resettlement, which was undertaken for security reasons, help to develop them economically and socially? Williams-Hunt (1952) claims that the move to the Research Centre opened new opportunities for the staff to learn more about the group as well as opportunities to teach the Orang Kanaq to grow vegetables and to make handicrafts. Interestingly, though the Research Centre claimed that they tried to maintain the natural environment as much as possible, the settlement, which stood on three acres of land, was enclosed by barbed wire and was guarded by specially recruited aboriginal constables was a totally new environment for the Orang Kanaq. Unable to adjust to camp life, many of them fell ill. Available census figures show that by 1953, only 40 Orang Kanaq had survived this relocation. On realising that the policy was a complete failure, resettlement was abandoned in 1955, and the Orang Kanaq were brought back to Johor and settled in a new area located at Kampung Semangar, also in the Kota Tinggi district. However, the Orang Kanaq were unhappy with their new settlement, as it placed them a mere 250 yards away from the Jakuns (APOAJ 6/55 Monthly Reports From the Field Assistant Johor, 30 October 1955). They lived in Semanggar until

1959. With decreasing communist threats, the Orang Kanaq were moved in December 1959 to Batu 9, Jalan Mawai, where they lived until 1963. In 1964, the Orang Kanaq were moved again to a new location in Kampung Sungai Selangi, which was subsequently gazetted as their reserve land.[16]

As reiterated by Carey (1976), the Orang Asli resettlement policy was a failure and shows government ignorance towards this group. Thousands of Orang Asli were uprooted from their natural environment of the jungle and resettled elsewhere. They found themselves surrounded by barbed wire, under heavy guard and, unlike the Chinese in their new villages, without any proper shelter. The Emergency not only disrupted the Orang Asli (including the Orang Kanaq) traditional mode of life, but their traditional lifestyle was also significantly transformed. It was the beginning of the modern history of this community that was replete with challenges for the Orang Asli and the government, notably the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli or JHEOA), the agency that oversaw their affairs.

THE POST-EMERGENCY PERIOD: ISSUES OF DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNITY

The post-emergency period saw the seriousness of the government's intent to develop the Orang Asli community in Malaya. This was undertaken under the modernisation programme that was included in the government Policy Statement of 1961:

> "The social, economic and cultural development of the aborigines should be promoted with the ultimate object of natural integration as opposed to artificial assimilation. The primary objective should be the fostering of individual usefulness and initiative" (Razha, 2001: 64).

Though most of the Orang Asli in Malaya supported the policy, as stressed by Razha, their interpretation of "development" contradicts the "development" as espoused by the government. Whereas "development" on the government side often means relocation, promoting agricultural skills and cash crops in addition to providing basic amenities like water, electricity, roads, housing, education and health service, the Orang Asli wanted to continue their way of life and to have free access to their ancestral land, forests and mangroves in order to hunt and gather forest products.

The constant shifts and close government control, in addition to official pressure to modernise, are cause of concern to the Orang Asli themselves. The constant

shifts have caused considerable hardship; the shifts have also affected their relationship with the land. Traditional land use has always been an important aspect of the Orang Asli way of life, which was at best semi-sedentary. In the past, this traditional lifestyle had managed to fulfil both their economic and spiritual needs. Their enforced transmigrations from a freer environment to the closely controlled reservations disrupted the patterns of traditional life, with negative consequences on the community's socioeconomic life. Compared to other Orang Asli groups, the Orang Kanaq were much more affected by these changes, as they were a shy people who had avoided contact with outsiders.[17] The Johor Department of Orang Asli Affairs had attempted to ameliorate the situation by prompting the general population against marginalising the Orang Kanaq through the allotment of 27.92 hectares of reserve lands to the Orang Kanaq of Kampung Sungai Selangi, Mawai. In a letter to the headmaster of Sekolah Laksamana (in Kota Tinggi) dated 12 December 1963 with regard to the possible future enrolment of Kanaq children in the school, the Kota Tinggi Orang Asli officer highlighted the historical experience of the Orang Kanaq, especially the unpleasant transitions in their life caused by the constant shifting that promoted their avoidance of contact with outsiders. Their forced migration from Riau was to avoid pirates who preyed on their livestock and food. This caused the Orang Kanaq to lose interest in farming or livestock rearing; it also cultivated the habit of running away from outsiders or visitors. In the letter, the department reminded the school staff and pupils as well as the public to not treat them as "museum exhibits" but instead to accept them as part of the national community and to accord them equal rights and responsibilities (POAJ. KT, NO.2 Pejabat Hal Ehwal Orang Asli).

Since the introduction of the government policy on Orang Asli in 1961, the Johor Department of Orang Asli Affairs has embarked on a scheme to improve the social life of the Kanaq of Kampung Sungai Selangi. Efforts undertaken include the opening of rubber orchards, with 7½ acres given to each family in Sungai Selangi, well digging, the construction of a shelter to store rattans collected from the jungle, the construction of a connecting road into the village and ground levelling for the purpose of housing construction. On Orang Kanaq dwellings, the Orang Asli Officer for south Johor in the late 1950s wrote:

> most of the Orang Kanaq that I have come across live in dilapidated structures akin to a chicken shed. They were simply unable to find attap for the roof and walls of the shed as they were too busy earning a living for their daily sustenance (POAJ KT. No. 2 Pejabat Hal Ehwal Orang Asli)

However, as reiterated by Carey (1976), the government was partly responsible for the delay in the disbursement of the necessary allocations to construct shelters

for the Orang Asli. In the case of the Orang Kanaq, requests for such allocations had been forwarded by the Johor Department of Orang Asli officials since 1959, when the Kanaq first moved to Batu 9, Jalan Mawai; by 1964, when they had moved to the present settlement, the issue was still being debated by various authorities responsible for managing the Orang Asli. It was only in 1966 that nine new houses were completed under the Rapid Housing scheme, although a few were lacking proper drainage and latrines (J/T ANI (KT) AAKT.160 Laporan Rancangan Kilat Kampung Selangi, Mawai, Kota Tinggi, 3 February 1966).

Figure 3: The present settlement in Kampung Sungai Selangi, Mawai Baru
Source: Fieldwork material taken on 17 December 2008

Like other Orang Asli groups in Malaysia, the Orang Kanaq were put under the supervision of a field assistant who would convey messages from the government through their *tok batin* (the headman). Theoretically, the post of *tok batin* was inherited patrilineally, but the community had the right to reject those appointed. In such cases, an election would be held to choose a new *tok batin.* The *tok batin* not only plays the role of leader within his community but also acts as agent to the outside world, for instance, to negotiate with Malay and Chinese strangers or middlemen, to act as an agent of the government to his people and to convey the peoples' wishes and aspirations to the government (Tachimoto, 2001). As seen in other Orang Asli communities, the Orang Kanaq relations with the outside world, including the government, were under the control of the *tok batin.* Thus, the *tok batin*-field assistant relation was crucial to the extent that licences to cut rattan and so forth in the forest reserve were obtained through the field assistant. Baba Gendok, the *tok batin* of the Kanaq from 1960–1994, for instance, had submitted many applications in the 1960s on behalf of his people to secure licenses and permits to cut timber or to collect gutta percha (POA.JB 10/5 Permohonan Lesen Baba a/l Gendok Orang Kanaq, Kota Tinggi).

Though this could be seen as a positive side of the Orang Kanaq-government relations, this does not mean that the Orang Kanaq had recognised the government as their ally. After being brought back to Johor in 1955 and relocated in a few areas by the government, their distrust for the government was unavoidable. They looked for their old allies, the middlemen whom they trusted, usually the Chinese traders (*tauke*). Since the early 20th century, the Orang Kanaq had depended on middlemen to market their jungle produce,[18] employ them as labourers on the *tauke"s* plantations or orchards[19] and provide them with loans for feasts and weddings. The Orang Kanaq never imagined themselves as subordinate to the *tauke;* as experienced by the Orang Hulu, the Orang Kanaq were treated as a source of cheap labour for plantations/orchard. They were supplied with meagre basic necessities.[20] In the long run, this situation proved detrimental to their agricultural pursuits (APOAJ 22/59 Aborigines in Kota Tinggi District). The situation worsened with the Kanaqs' regular shifts from one economic activity to another just to supplement their income. In 1963, an Orang Asli official of Kota Tinggi wrote:

> It's really difficult to give any advice to these Kanaqs, as I believe they were never united or speak in one voice. Their numbers might be very small and there are no other tribal groups near them, but they never fully gave their trust to government officials except the middlemen who provided them with food so as to get more rattans from them (POAJ KT. No. 2, Pejabat Hal Ehwal Orang Asli, Johor).

Owing to their ignorance, the Orang Asli were often cheated by middlemen who paid very low prices for the jungle products and then resold them at much higher rates. Still, without the middlemen, they would not be able to find a market for the jungle produce (POA. JB 10/10 Pemasaran Hasil Hutan). Although the Johor Department of Orang Asli Affairs had attempted to market the jungle produce, the efforts failed because the Orang Asli were more willing to work with the Chinese, whom they believed were helpful to them. The over-dependence and trust they had with the Chinese meant they were willing to sell the licences issued by the Johor Forest Department to work the jungle produce to these middlemen for a small fee (C.L.R.MG 45/54 Working of Forest Produce by Aborigines).

In addition to the Chinese, the Orang Kanaq had also interacted with other communities, like the Malays and Indians, in both economic and social matters. Omar (1978) observed during his two-month stay at the Orang Kanaq settlement in Kampung Sungai Selangi in 1977 that, in their day-to-day life, the Orang Kanaq were very close to the local Malays, who visited them frequently to obtain medicinal roots or visit their *bomoh* (shaman). This relationship was still in place in December 2008; during the research[21] visits to the settlement, there was a

female shaman treating a Chinese and Indian family with charms (*jampi)*. The Kanaq seldom visited the neighbouring villages, except to buy groceries from the Chinese, Indian or Indian-Muslim shopkeepers.

Figure 4: The female shaman
Source: Fieldwork material taken on 17 December 2008

The Orang Asli were exploited not only economically but also socially. There were cases of Orang Asli women, including young girls, who were taken to Singapore in the 1950s by middlemen to take part in cultural performances[22] or to work as dance hostesses. However, there was no sign of Kanaq involvement in these unsavoury activities, although the JHEOA was duly worried that this group might be coerced into participating in these activities. In December 1961, the Johor Assistant Protector of Aborigines issued a directive to all Field Assistants to warn all Orang Asli against taking part in any stage performance so as to avoid them being exploited by promoters in Singapore (APOAJ 6/55 Monthly Reports from Field Assistants, Johor).[23]

Education for the Kanaqs remains a contradiction and a difficult issue for the Johor Department of Orang Asli, although the department did build special schools for the Orang Asli. The needs of these schools, in terms of food, uniforms, books and stationery, were provided for by the department. Until July 1958, there were five such schools in Johor, located in Kahang (Kluang), Kampung Labung (Endau), Semanggar (Kota Tinggi), Benut (Pontian) and Kuala Redan (Pontian). Out of the five, only the Semanggar Orang Asli School is non-operational, due to a lack of teachers (P/OA/J1 R 54/13 pt. 1. Pejabat Hal Ehwal

Orang Asli (Pelbagai Jenis). As a result, most of the Orang Asli children in Kota Tinggi (including the Kanaq children) were sent to other schools within the district. In 1966 (by this time, they had moved to Kampung Sungai Selangi), there were eight Kanaq children in Sekolah Kebangsaan Mawai Baru (a primary school); they were provided with books, school uniforms, pocket money and a taxi to carry them to and from school. However, when the 1967 term reopened, none of the Kanaqs were in school. Officials believed this rejection of modernity was related to their refusal to be integrated with other children. With dwindling numbers, state education officials were reluctant to send teachers to the Semanggar school (POAJB/3B 17/4 Sekolah Kebangsaan Mawai, Kota Tinggi).

Ten years later, the situation had not changed. Based on Omar's observation during his two-month stay with the Orang Kanaq (April to June 1977), none of the Orang Kanaq children were attending school. The reason was simply economic: these children usually accompanied their parents to collect rattan or to look after their siblings while their parents were away for a few days in the forest to collect rattan. Traditionally, rattan collecting was more important to the Orang Kanaq than education. Thus, the children were frequently absent or withdrawn from school because it conflicted with the parents' traditional economic pursuits. This was still taking place during the visit in December 2008, although most of the village children were attending school (Sekolah Kebangsaan Kampung Mawai was less than one kilometre away from the Orang Kanaq settlement). Kanaq women who were interviewed claimed they never forced their children to go to school and were not very upset if their children came back early from school. They too would bring the children to the forest to help in gathering jungle products if the latter refused to go to school.[24] This was confirmed by a kindergarten teacher (an aborigine from the Orang Kuala group) in the settlement; she claimed that she had to go to every house that had children below eight years old to take them to kindergarten.[25] In 2008, 27 Kanaq children attended primary schools, but none enrolled in secondary school for that year.[26] Most of the children chose to continue their parents' traditional economic pursuits in the jungle.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Traditionally, the Orang Kanaqs were forest collectors. Rattan collection became their main activity and source of income since their arrival in Kota Tinggi. It was undertaken with much ceremony; mantras were uttered before the group made the entry into the jungle to obtain blessings and protection from jungle spirits and to produce a successful outing. The rattan collection involved groups of families. Huts were built in the main collecting area where the tribe would stay for a few days during each visit, especially when rattan was plentiful. In 1965, the Orang

Kanaq collected 20 lorries of rattan, which were sold to middlemen (POA. JB 10/10 Pemasaran Hasil Hutan).

Figure 5: Faces of the Orang Kanaq
Source: The Orang Asli Museum, Gombak

Figure 6: Two elderly women

Figure 7: Rattan collected for side income

Though rattan and jungle products were the major cash earners for the Orang Kanaq, the people hardly used rattan, except to make brooms and rattan pith (Omar, 1978: 154). The visits to the settlement in 2008 and 2009 found that this situation had not changed. However, one of the inhabitants claimed rattan collection was becoming less attractive to the Orang Kanaq because the collecting area was quite far from their settlement and the rattan plants were diminishing rapidly due to excessive cutting. In 1965, the same issue was highlighted by an official in the Johor Department of Orang Asli Affairs regarding the over dependence of the community on rattan collecting.[27] The Orang Kanaq also made a living by collecting and selling forest produce in addition to fishing and hunting.

Figure 8: The resting hut used after returning from work
Source: Fieldwork material taken on 17 December 2008

Owing to their excessive concerns over their daily life in the forest, the Orang Kanaq were not averse to agriculture. They slowly cultivated a number of crops, such as tapioca, sweet potatoes and wild yams, which were their main staples besides rice. These crops were for their own consumption or were sold in case of surplus. These crops were grown quite a distance away from their homes because the land around the settlement (in Semanggar and in the present settlement in Kampung Sungai Selangi) was not fertile for crops.[28] The total land reserved for the Orang Kanaq at Kampung Sungai Selangi is 27.92 hectares, and the village itself occupies only 0.6 hectares. They used much of the rest of the reserve land for the planting of their crops.

The Orang Kanaq were also involved in a small rubber holding that covered 3.02 hectares of the reserved land. Each family was given four rows of trees. Although originally the plantings belonged to the community, the Orang Kanaq showed no interest in rubber cultivation. The trees were left to grow unattended, as reported by an official of the Johor Department of Orang Asli of Kota Tinggi in 1964:

> "The budgrafted rubber plants which were being experimented with the Mawai Kanaqs have been 50% destroyed by deer which came to eat the rubber shoot. In addition the Kanaqs had often left for the jungle and I do not see them much around to clear their lands" (POAJB 16/3 Kebun Getah/Dusun Orang Kanaq, Mawai Kota Tinggi).

They finally agreed to let the *tok batin* manage the rubber orchards but then later rented it to a local Chinese man for RM30.00 a month (Omar, 1978: 200).[29]

The collection of rattan and forest produce proved to be inadequate for the tribe, requiring the men to become wage workers in private plantations or on government land schemes within the local area. However, this was not without its share of problems. In 1961, many men found employment in a timber area owned by a Chinese in Semanggar but were unhappy with the low pay (RM4.00 a day). In January 1965, some men were hired to kill monkeys on a government land scheme at Pasak in Kota Tinggi. However, they discontinued working during the durian season and never returned, as they were happier to work in their orchards (APOAJ.22/59 Aborigines in Kota Tinggi District; PPOA-JOH/ADM/G/3 Aborigine Labour).

In 1977, a few men worked in a Chinese-owned oil-palm estate located near the settlement; again, they were exploited. Although promised daily wages of RM4.00, they were seldom paid or rarely received the full value of what they had earned. The estate owner would keep the money to ensure the Kanaqs would continue to work on their plantations. Thus, to meet their basic subsistence, the

community depended on monthly food assistance from the Johor Department of Orang Asli Affairs. This situation raised a question of whether the subsidy was responsible for making the Orang Asli less serious about raising their own income[30] During the visits in 2008 and 2009, most of the Kanaqs were found to be self-employed. They still collected rattan and jungle produce for the extra income, and their main income came from oil palm. In 1983, the Johor Department of Orang Asli Affairs entrusted one agency, the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA), to develop the village by planting oil palm on an area of 24.74 hectares. A total of 12 families took part in the project, with incomes of RM200–RM300 per month.[31] Their income could be increased if they worked on the plantation. All interviewed Kanaqs indicated insufficiency of their income, yet most were unwilling to find employment on the plantation and were happy to live in the old ways of collecting rattan and jungle produce.[32]

CONCLUSION

Studies on the Orang Kanaq are fraught with many problems ranging from the lack of primary sources to the attitudes of the Kanaqs who habitually shy away from other people, including other Orang Asli groups. However, the evidence collected thus far show the tribe does have a colourful past that is quite unknown to others. From being an influential group of pirates and plunderers to having a close relationship with the Johor-Riau-Lingga sultanate to being forced by the Dutch to evacuate the sea lanes and later move to Kota Tinggi, the Kanaqs have changed their way of life from seafaring to agricultural. Yet, agriculture remains alien to them; as the JHEOA files show, the Kanaqs are never really serious in their agricultural pursuits. Besides being participants in the two FELCRA schemes of Sungai Layau and Mawai (both in Kota Tinggi District) and collecting jungle produce, other agricultural activities are minimally pursued in the Sungai Selangi settlement. This may be attributed to a number of factors. It could be that their long tradition as seafarers make it difficult for them to adjust to agriculture. The resettlement policy during the Emergency, which disrupted their traditional lifestyle and subsequently sowed their distrust towards government officials, is another reason why efforts taken by the JHEOA to "modernise" them may have been less than successful. As discussed earlier, the Kanaqs gave their trust to middlemen (who were usually Chinese) in their economic pursuits rather than to officials of the JHEOA. Undeniably, though the JHEOA had done much to provide basic amenities, including education, for this group, a psychological approach is still necessary to gain their trust. This could be achieved by organising more community services in the settlement. This move would perhaps make the tribe feel that they are part of mainstream society instead of just being at the periphery.

NOTES

1. As the complete census of the Orang Kanaq is unavailable, their population from 1900 to 2009 below is adapted from various sources: PPOA. JOH/ADM/G/6; APOAJ 6/55; POAJ. KT. 2; Omar (1978); Wazir (2001b); census for 2008 by JHEOA; sources from the JHEOA, 2011

1900	1955	1960	1961	1963	1964	1965	1969
100	38	38	39	38	38	48	50

1977	1980	1994	2004	2006	2008	2009–2010
39	37	62	86	86	85	87

2. See Appendix 1. The 2008 census data issued by the Johor Department of Orang Asli show there were about 11,701 Orang Asli in the state. The census covered five main groups of Proto-Malays, namely the Jakun, Seletar, Orang Kuala, Temuan and Kanaq in the districts of Mersing, Kluang, Johor Bahru, Segamat, Batu Pahat, Pontian, Kota Tinggi and Muar. The census shows the Jakun as the largest group with a population of 5833, or 49.85% of the state's Orang Asli population, whereas the Orang Kanaq are the smallest with only 85, or 0.72% of the total population of the Proto-Malays.
3. The Negritos probably had inhabited the jungles of Peninsular Malaysia for at least 10,000 years.
4. They were not nomadic tribes in the true sense of the word, as they usually stayed in one place for several years to cultivate the field before moving on once the soil lost its fertility.
5. Orang Laut, or sea-nomad, refers to the coastal people who inhabit the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, the Pulau Tujoh group, the Batam archipelago, and the coast and off-shore islands of eastern Sumatra and the southern part of the Malay Peninsula. The most powerful Orang Laut groups were associated with the larger islands located on major trading lanes such as the Orang Suku Bintan from Bintan, the Orang Suku Mepar from Lingga, the Orang Suku Bulang from Bulang and the Orang Suku Galang from Galang. In Singapore there were the Orang Laut and the Orang Persukuan. All were vassals of the Johor ruler.
6. Dunn (1975) emphasised that the forest collector-primary traders of the 1400–1800 period were almost exclusively the Orang Asli while the secondary traders (middlemen) were Malays.
7. For further details, see, Andaya (2008).
8. *Rakyat* refer to the Orang Laut of the Lingga archipelago.
9. Raja Kecik moved his capital to eastern Sumatra along the Siak River.
10. *Maklumat Orang Kanaq Kg. Sg. Selangi*, JHEOA: Kota Tinggi (undated typescript accessed on 29 May 2008).
11. *Getah taban* is the latex-like sap of various varieties of Blanco Palaquin. Its most important use is in the coating of trans-oceanic telegraph cables, for surgical and chemical apparatus, corks, golf ball and dental fillings.
12. Interview with Mak Mah, 5 December 2009.
13. Interview with Mutalib, the present *tok batin* of the Orang Kanaq on 21 November 2009; interview with Mak Sarah, 5 December 2009. According to the *tok batin* and Mak Sarah, during the fruits season, the Orang Kanaq (men and women) would visit their *saka* land in Lebak Mincin to collect fruits. They built huts so that they could spend a few days at the orchard. See also, Mohd Sharifudin (2006).
14. For further details, see, Omar (1978).
15. After independence, it became the Department of Orang Asli Affairs.
16. *Maklumat Orang Kanaq Kg. Sg. Selangi*, JHEOA: Kota Tinggi (undated typescript accessed on 29 May 2008); APOAJ 7/54 Position of Aboriginal Kampongs before and after Emergency.

17. Until today, they avoided outsiders who came to their settlement unless accompanied by someone they knew and trusted. Interview with Shahrol Rozaat Abdul Raseh, an official with the Johor Department of Orang Asli Affairs in Johor Bharu on 7 December 2009. Our research group had a similar experience during visits to the settlement. After a few visits in 2008 and 2009, some of the Orang Kanaq (mostly women) become more approachable and began to converse with us.
18. The Chinese acted as the middlemen in buying jungle produce collected by the Orang Asli. These middlemen usually provide an advance and then collect the jungle produce at the village.
19. The Johor Survey Department received many applications from the Chinese since 1910 to acquire land in Kota Tinggi for planting, including a rubber plantation. For further details, see P/UPN/J2 Survey Department, Johor, 1910–1960.
20. POAJ KT. No. 2, Pejabat Hal Ehwal Orang Asli, Johor. The Orang Kanaq, for instance, had been collecting rattan in the area owned by a Kota Tinggi Chinese tauke, Koh Jit Thong, since the Japanese Occupation. They were provided food rations consisting of broken rice, sugar, wheat flour, cigarettes and gasoline. Koh Jit Thong, however, paid very low prices for the rattan collected by the Orang Kanaq compared to other buyers.
21. The research was funded by the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS), titled "Multimedia Documentation and Analysis of Endangered Indigenous Languages, Knowledge and Culture of Orang Kanaq, Kensiu, Mendriq and Kintaq in Peninsular Malaysia". The research project involved six researchers from Universiti Sains Malaysia. The group made three visits to the Kanaq settlement in Kampung Sungai Selangi between May 2008 and December 2009.
22. Very often, they were required to perform traditional dances or shoot blowpipes.
23. In the December 1955 report, it was claimed that a few Orang Seletar girls were approached by their headmen to go to Singapore to work as dancers/hostesses. See also, PPOA-JOH Aborigines Arts and Crafts. In December 1961, a stage promoter from Singapore, Lim Kuan Yong, managed to bring 15 Orang Asli, including three women, to Singapore to take part in stage performances.
24. Interview with Mak Sarah, 5 December 2009.
25. Interview with Norlela Mohamad, a kindergarten teacher at the Orang Kanaq settlement on 18 December 2008. There were 9 pre-school children in the settlement in that year.
26. Quoted from a typescript by the JHEOA titled *"Kampung Orang Asli Sungai Selangi"*, dated 2008.
27. Interview with Mak Mah and Mak Sarah on 5 December, 2009. See also, POA. JB 10/10 Pemasaran Hasil Hutan
28. See, APOAJ 6/55 Monthly Reports from Field Assistants, Johor. In his report from October 1955, the field Assistant of Johor Department of Aboriginals reported that the land area for the Orang Kanaq in Semanggar was not fertile for crops.
29. The rent is based on Omar observation in 1977.
30. Omar Abdul (1978: 204–206). These aids were given through the *tok batin*, who would later distribute them to the individual families. The food subsidy, including tobacco and kerosene, is worth RM120.00. See also, POAJB 09/3 Bantuan Kebajikan Orang Kanaq Kota Tinggi, 1965. This kind of subsidy was started when they first moved to the present settlement in Kampung Sungai Selangi.
31. Quoted from an undated typescript from the Johor Department of Orang Asli titled *"Maklumat Orang Kanaq Kg. Sg, Selangi, Kota Tinggi"*.
32. Interview with Mak Sarah, 18 November 2009; Saadiah, 18 September 2009; Bedah, 19 September, 2009; Shahrol Rozaat Abd Raseh, an official at the Johor Department of Orang Asli Affairs, Johor Bahru, 2 December 2009.

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PPOA.JOH Pejabat Orang Asli Johor, 1963–69

PPOA.JOH/ADM/G Pejabat Hal Ehwal Orang Asli Johor, 1960–67

PPOA.JOH/FIN/A Pejabat Hal Ehwal Orang Asli Johor, 1960–67

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PPOA.JOH. PLB.AM Pejabat Hal Ehwal Orang Asli Johor, 1969–70

POAJ.KT Pejabat Hal Ehwal Orang Asli Johor, 1960–69

PPJT/AOJC Pejabat Pertanian Negeri Johor, 1948–70

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APPENDIX

Table 1: The number of Orang Asli population according to districts in Johor in 2008

No.	District	Village	No. of Family	No. of occupants	Tribes
1	Mersing	1. Kg Peta	52	302	Jakun
		2. Tanah Abang	74	561	Jakun
		3. Tanjung Tuan	22	161	Jakun
		4. Punan	50	220	Jakun
		5. Labong	86	397	Jakun
		6. Sg Tuba	14	63	Jakun
		7. Pengkalan Bukit	7	51	Jakun
		8. Sg Padang	12	75	Jakun
		9. Tewowoh	15	54	Jakun
			332	1884	
2	Kluang	10. Tanah Runtuh	32	140	Jakun
		11. Kuala Sengka	20	77	Jakun
		12. Ayer Pasir	32	109	Jakun
		13. Sedohok	34	129	Jakun
		14. Sg Peroh	21	89	Jakun
		15. Puchor	15	57	Jakun
		16. Bt 25 Punjut/Berasau	58	242	Jakun
		17.Bt 26 Kahang, Sri Kenangan	17	56	Jakun
		18. Pengkalan Tereh	76	323	Jakun
		19. Layang-layang	16	78	Jakun
		20. Seri Tanjung	15	76	Jakun
			336	1376	

(continued)

Table 1: (*continued*)

No	District	Village	No of Family	No of occupants	Tribes
3.	Johor				
	Bahru	21. Bakar Batu	26	108	Seletar
		22. Sg Temun	52	244	Seletar
		23. Simpang Arang	109	575	Seletar
		24. Pasir Salam	19	112	Seletar
		25. Kuala Tiram	5	14	Seletar
		26. Kuala Masai	25	121	Seletar
		27. Telok Kabong	21	9	Seletar
		28. Telok Jawa	21	97	Seletar
		29. Pasir Putih	12	50	Seletar
			290	1411	1330 [sic]
4.	Segamat	30. Sri Tembayan	35	155	Jakun
		31. Segamat Kecil	74	352	Jakun
		32. Ulu Juaseh	30	179	Jakun
		33. Kudong	81	310	Jakun
		34. Selai	38	154	Jakun
		35. Kemidak	25	81	Jakun
		36. Tamok	27	129	Jakun
		37. Lenek	28	104	Jakun
		38. Putting	22	128	Jakun
			360	1592	
5.	Batu Pahat	39. Sri Pantai	107	535	Kuala
		40. Kuala Rengit	120	680	Kuala
		41. Sarang Buaya	19	113	Kuala
		42. Kg Dalam/Sejagong	38	93	Kuala
		43. Parit Sulong Kangkar	11	52	Kuala
		44. Minyak Beku	61	424	Kuala
			356	1897	

(continued)

Table 1: (*continued*)

No	District	Village	No of Family	No of occupants	Tribes
6.	Pontian	45. Kuala Benut	67	435	Kuala
		46. Pontian Besar	96	640	Kuala
		47. Sri Tanjung	11	75	Kuala
		48. Kg Nelayan Benut	15	78	Kuala
		49. Api-api	11	34	Kuala
		50. Pontian Kecil	9	30	Kuala
			209	1292	
7.	Kota Tinggi	51. Sg Layau	138	670	Kuala
		52. Sayong Pinang	38	200	Jakun
		53. Pasir Intan/Pasir Asam	33	171	Jakun
		54. Semanggar	38	152	Jakun
		55. Selangi	**23**	**85**	**Kanaq**
			270	1278	
8.	Muar	56. Batang Lesa	4	15	Jakun
		57. Air Tawas	15	72	Temuan
		58. Tanah Gemboh	52	285	Temuan
		59. Sg Mering	26	156	Temuan
		60. Sg Puyu	4	20	Jakun
		61. Tambak Dapor	4	15	Jakun
		62. Sentosa	52	303	Jakun
		63. Bukit Panjang	19	105	Jakun
			176	971	
			2329	**11701**	

Source: Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli, Johor Bahru (2008)