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Orang Suku Laut ethnicity and acculturation


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A Malay teacher:
‘The sea tribe people in this Malay area do not know any religion. They also do not know how to socialize, and do not have any kind of customs. They are extremely backward, very dirty [...] they smell like fish, their body is scaly [...] they are disgusting. They do not want to live in houses [...] they are born in their boats, eat, sleep, obey the call of nature in the boats [...] and do not have any feeling of shame. Where there is fish, there they go. Their everyday principle is only to eat and to drink. They always avoid mingling with us, the Malays, and they do not want to become too familiar with us. We, ourselves, are afraid just to approach them [...] they like to use magic powers against people, therefore we must be careful not to make any mistakes. Otherwise, their magic will get us. They can make us ill or we must follow them. This aboriginal lifestyle, whether willingly or not, has to vanish totally [...] if not, in the course of time we all shall become backward.’ (28 December 1989.)

‘The Suku Laut communities live in small groups. Social life is based on tribal views and they are always suspicious of everything coming from outside, especially if it is intended to influence their traditional value system. However, the development of the Suku Laut people [...] has to be implemented [...] to renew their way of life [...] to drive forward the wheels of development of this region more quickly, [...] so that they become equal with the already progressive Indonesian society, without intending to abolish their customs and traditions as long as these are not contradictory to current ordinances.’ (Camat Pembantu Bupati Wilayah IV Bintan 1989:20, 24, 33.)

These statements by a Malay teacher and a local official are typical for many land dwellers with whom I talked during field research on the Orang Suku Laut or Sea Tribe People of the Riau archipelago, a region that is part of the Republic of Indonesia. However, it belongs culturally and historically to the Malay world, and is now undergoing a process of rapid modernization.¹ The Orang Suku Laut have always been confronted with prejudices and pejorative behavior by outsiders. Contact between them

¹ I conducted field research among the Orang Suku Laut in 1988-1990, and revisited my former research sites in 1991 and 1993. I am indebted to all who supported my research, which was carried out under the auspices of LIPI (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia), the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, and under the scientific sponsorship of Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, the Indonesian Ministry for Education and Culture, Department for Culture, Directorate for History and Cultural Values. It was made possible by a grant given by DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), the German Research Association.
and members of the Malay majority and other ethnic groups is still the exception rather than the rule. On the other hand, economic, ecological and demographic changes in this rapidly modernizing region and government projects of directed change conducted among the Orang Suku Laut have proven to be the main factors pushing for change in their present way of life. Today, their sedentarization is regarded as the first step to release them from the misery of nomadism, or a way of life which is thought to be suspect, uncivilized, insufficient and a hindrance for nation building and economic development. Their integration into the wider society is intended to imply the continuous merging of their culture and way of life into that of the mainstream culture.

This paper deals with Orang Suku Laut ethnicity (Burgess 1978:265-85; Lenhart 1993:3-5) with regard to interethnic contact and acculturation. It takes up and extends my account of the Orang Suku Laut’s concepts of the ethnic self with reference to basic (Lenhart 1993) and situational identities (Lenhart 1994a:11-21). The emphasis is to examine non-Orang Suku Laut views, such as those of the Malays and other population segments of the Riau islands as well as of government officials, on the Suku Laut people in the context of a Malay region and a modernizing postcolonial state.

In the first section, I start by drawing an outline of the region and its history. Then, I give an overview of the striking characteristics of the region and its history.

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2 ‘Ethnicity’ is a term used in cultural anthropology and sociology to describe the combined interplay of specific characteristics of an ethnic group (language, descent and territory of origin, kinship ties and principles of social organization, religion and fundamental values), which becomes meaningful in relation to and in comparison with other ethnic groups by processes of mutual delimitation with reference to the respective other. 

3 The term ‘acculturation’ refers to a specific form of culture change, namely exogenous change induced by outside stimuli affecting a specific culture system, or more precisely, the prevailing ideas, the behavior standards and the social network systems’ members, as well as the individuals’ personality structure. For analytic reasons, two types of exogenous change are distinguished. First, there is selective change experienced by the members of a culture system in contact with another culture system who are mutually exchanging ideas and other kinds of innovations. This type of change is characterized by a certain degree of freedom of decision making by the respective systems’ members with regard to the adoption of rejection of such innovations, but weighing up the two possibilities in relation to their own perceived needs. The second type is directed change where innovations are brought into a specific culture system with the intention to induce changes. This type is characterized by conscious and planned efforts of the members of a changes agency, mostly representatives of a system dominant over the system undergoing change (LeVine 1973:3-5; Redfield, Linton and Herskovits 1935/36:229-33; Rogers and Shoemaker 1971:7-8, 11-40, 98-112, 174-96, 250-66, 339-45; Barnett et al. 1954:974-94). Acculturation can lead to assimilation that is understood as the complete merging of a culture system into another dominant culture system. Assimilation implies a fundamental change of values and a change of reference group on the part of the merging system’s members, and also their acceptance by the dominant system’s members who have become their new reference group (Teske and Nelson 1974:365).
Orang Suku Laut as a unique ethnic group. In the second section, I discuss acculturative effects on the Orang Suku Laut’s present way of life. I sum up the economic, ecological and demographic changes accompanying the modernization process in the Riau islands that affect the natural habitat and the social environment of the Orang Suku Laut. In this section, I will also describe government programs of directed change conducted among them. In the third section, I look at the Orang Suku Laut through the eyes of the Malays, government officials and other population segments in the region. I compare these opinions with those of the Orang Suku Laut on themselves. The non-Orang Suku Laut’s views on the Orang Suku Laut are specifically shaped by the majority’s self-other ascriptions of Malay versus Orang Suku Laut identity which, on the part of the Malays, sometimes still refer to a societal reality during the time of past Malay kingdoms. These views continue to influence current interethnic contact and have proven to be a hindrance to the Orang Suku Laut’s acculturation. The government programs of directed change conducted among the Orang Suku Laut, and indeed the whole Indonesian policy regarding ethnic minorities, are molded by a view of such peoples as backward, isolated and tribal. This policy, an integral part of Indonesian development and nation-building policies, aims at the integration of these peoples into the wider Indonesian society. Thus, that is also why the accompanying measures are hastening the pace of the Orang Suku Laut’s acculturation. Because Malays and officials differ with regard to the cultural, spatial and temporal orientations that frame their particular perspectives, the discussion of Orang Suku Laut ethnicity in the views of those in daily contact with them and those who intend to integrate them into wider Indonesian society considers the various realities constructed by them and imposed on a presumed being of the Orang Suku Laut in the region and the state.

In the fourth section, I discuss reactions of an Orang Suku Laut community that has recently been resettled in a village built by the government. Against this background, I examine some striking problems of resettlement, not only for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the acculturation process experienced at present by the Suku Laut people, but also to examine measures to avoid interethnic conflicts.

**The Region**

The Riau archipelago has a long history as a highly conspicuous area because of its position as a ‘bottleneck for the movement of culture and trade’ (Sopher 1977:365) between India, Southeast Asia and China. The migration of different ethnic peoples to this Malay region, and the national and international political as well as economic interest in this area have been an enduring phenomenon since the time of former native maritime kingdoms and British and Dutch colonial powers up to the postcolonial...
The forces of globalization that have evolved over the last centuries, and which today strongly affect the economic, political and cultural landscape of Indonesia, have also become increasingly tangible again in this region. The process of globalization has given renewed relevance to the old, still unsolved problems of regionalism as well as of localism, and raises questions about the cultural affiliation of majorities and minorities.

The Riau archipelago is located at the far northwestern Indonesian border. In 1950, this area became part of the Republic of Indonesia, which had declared its independence five years before. Nowadays, the Riau archipelago is divided into two administrative units, the subdistrict Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau and the municipality Kotamadya Batam, with its autonomous status as an area for industrial development. Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau and Kotamadya Batam are part of the province of Riau.

The population of the Riau archipelago consists of about 565,000 people (1990), with half of them living on the main islands of Bintan and Batam in the north. The rate of population growth in Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau now amounts to 5.9 percent (1988-1992) and in Kotamadya Batam to 13.6 percent (1983-1990) (Mari Pangestu 1991:82). These figures are expected to increase again in the course of the coming decades due to an ongoing influx of migrant workers from all over Indonesia in connection with the rapid economic development in this region (Mari Pangestu 1991:82-3).

The population comprises various ethnic groups with different religious denominations, namely the Malays as the majority, followed by the Javanese, Baweanese, Minangkabau, Buton, Flores, Batak and other native Indonesians who profess Islam or Christianity as their religion. The Chinese (Teochiu, Hokkien, Hailam, Hakka, Cantonese and others) are mostly Buddhists. The aboriginal ethnic groups comprising the Orang Suku Laut in the Riau-Lingga area, the Orang Suku Hutan who are also called Orang Suku Dalam or Orang Suku Asli in Rempang, and the Orang Suku Akit and Orang Suku Kuala in Kundur form the minority groups. The majority of these aboriginal groups still follow animistic beliefs, although some have nominally become Muslims or Christians (Bappeda dan Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau 1988:32).

4 However, there was a spell of some decades when Riau reposed in relative obscurity as a periphery of the newly independent Indonesian state.
5 See the contribution by Barbara Watson Andaya to this volume.
7 See also Putut Trihusodo and Irwan Siregar (1992:97), and Riau Pos, 22-02-1991.
8 See also Bupati Kepala Daerah Tingkat II Kepulauan Riau (1988:1-2); Departemen Sosial Republik Indonesia (1994:45); and Kantor Departemen Penerangan Kotamadya Batam (1988). In contemporary Indonesia and Riau, with the exception of the Chinese (whose number amounts to 4 million or 2.5% - 3% of the total population, and 15% of the population of the Riau Archipelago (Uhlig 1988:511-12; Ng Chin-Keong 1976), exact statements of the number of the ethnic groups are lacking because, among other things, the national censuses (1961, 1971 and 1981), and the
of the different groups of the population show a more or less clear ethnic differentiation accompanied by a distinct ethnic division of labor. These features are typical for most Southeast Asian states (Uhlig 1988:512). In Riau, the majority of the Indonesian ethnic groups live in rural areas and are for the greater part fishermen and horticulturists. The Chinese, for the most part, have settled in the towns or the hinterland and are engaged in local and regional trade. Higher positions in administration, the police force and military are mostly held by the Javanese. The lower positions are occupied by members of other Indonesian ethnic groups, but rarely by the Chinese. Members of the aboriginal groups do not play any role in the political and economic hierarchy (Wee 1988:198-209).

Until the beginning of the 1970s, Riau was not only a peripheral geographic region of Indonesian state territory with a subordinate political and administrative position, but also a rather neglected area in the context of the national economy. This situation has changed rapidly due to the subsequently forced national politics of economic development for Riau. The focus has been on the exploitation and industrial use of the rich natural resources of the islands and the sea (minerals, for example, oil, gas, bauxite, tin, and forest and marine products), the development of tourism, agro-based industries, manufacturing of electrical and electronic products, food processing, ship repair and maintenance, textiles, warehousing and transportation. Economic development has been accompanied by the creation of an infrastructure that fits the industrial needs, an influx of migrant workers from other parts of Indonesia, and – because of special conditions granted to foreigners – of foreign investments that bring a large amount of foreign capital into the region in addition to the unstable rupiah. Up to 1990, economic development activities were mainly concentrated on Batam, which in 1970 had become a designated area of industrial development and, some years later, a bonded area or duty-free zone. Since 1990, the whole northern part of the archipelago has been included in economic development politics. At that time it became part of a regional economic community or Growth Triangle, with Riau/Indonesia, Johor/ Malaysia and Singapore as partners. The aim of this Growth Triangle is to build up an economically integrated area with free movement of goods, services and

regional censuses omitted the question of ethnic origin. It was argued that the relations between the ethnic groups and the regions were still unstable and therefore this question could weaken the sense of national unity (see Kompas, 03-01-1991). The following figures for the population of the subdistrict East-Bintan, one of the 18 sub-districts of the district of the Riau Archipelago, located in the north, demonstrate the ethnic and religious differentiation (Camat Pembantu Bupati Wilayah IV Bintan 1989: 10-11). In 1989, 7.85% of the total population of the district or 32,819 people lived in this subdistrict, namely Malays (30.60%), Javanese (23.83%), Chinese (18.00%), Baweanese (10.00%), Minangkabau (6.39%), Buton (3.52%), Bugis (2.05%), Flores (1.93%), Batak (0.81%), and others (2.87%). Their religious denominations were Islam (82.49%), Buddhist (13.09%), Protestant (2.39%), Catholic (1.68%), Hindu (0.08%) and others (0.27%).
people to make the whole area attractive as one investment location. On the part of Indonesia, the economic cooperation with Johor and Singapore in the long term is intended to include not only the whole area of the Riau islands, but the entire province of Riau (Mari Pangestu 1991:75-115).

Culturally and historically, the Riau archipelago has always belonged to the Malay world (alam Melayu) of genealogically related kingdoms. The region had already been a peripheral area of the Malacca-Johor sultanate ruled by a Malay dynasty who resided on the Malayan peninsula (1400-1699), and subsequently became the center of power of the Riau-Lingga sultanate governed by a coalition of Malay and Buginese dynasties whose courts were seated in the Riau archipelago itself (1722-1911). The nobility of the Riau-Lingga sultanate constituted an ethnically segmented as well as politically and socially stratified society. It also assumed an important political role until the first decade of this century when the area came under the direct rule of the Dutch colonial government. However, more importantly, it represented a Malayan cultural continuity. Until today, the Malay majority of the population of the Riau islands is highly aware of its history and cultural heritage, which in the opinion of some is still represented by the successors of the Sultans. However, the features ascribed to Malayness (kemelayuan), a category of cultural affiliation that is basically associated with the adherence to Islam, the Malay language and the practice of Malay custom (Nagata 1974:335-7; 1982:98-100; Wee 1985:59-60).

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9 See also Department of Information, Republic of Indonesia (1991:71, 120-1, 126-30, 191-205); Mubyarto (1992:1-12); Uhlig (1988:210-11, 491, 544-7, 550-2, 568-73); as well as the contributions by Mubyarto, and Vivienne Wee and Cynthia Chou to this volume.

10 Geographically, the alam Melayu includes present-day peninsular Malaysia, the east coast of Sumatra, the coast of Borneo from Brunei to Banjermasin, and the Riau archipelago. Thus, on the one hand exceeding the borders of the Republic of Indonesia, and on the other hand, excluding some parts of the Indonesian territory of state such as Java, Bali, and the eastern islands (Wee 1985:59-60).

11 The members of the Malacca-Johor ruling dynasty were descendants of the Palembang (Srivijaya) ruling house (Wolters 1970:77-107). The Riau-Lingga sultanate was reign by the Malay sultans of Abd al-Jalil descent (who had been the prime minister and later successor of the last sultan of the Malacca-Johor dynasty), and their Buginese viceroys of Opu Tendriburang Daeng Riaga descent (who had been the head of the Buginese and who had helped the Abd al-Jalil dynasty to attain and retain power) (Wee 1985:597). Although from 1784 to 1787 there were already some Dutch residencies in the territory of the sultanate, the last sultan of Riau was forced to abdicate as late as 1911. However, from the 16th century until the middle of this century the European colonial powers continuously succeeded in dominating trade and politics in the region and in weakening the power of the local rulers, before they finally replaced the native dynasties.

1985: 448-64), are to a certain degree variable. For some, *Melayu* is a rather strictly defined category with fixed subcategories. It can be ascertained on a continuum between the two poles of pure Malayness (*Melayu murni*) and impure Malayness (*Melayu yang tidak murni*). The successors of the ruling nobility of the sultanate view themselves as subsumed under the first subcategory, and the successors of the former vassals as under the second rubric. This view still connects Malayness with zaman sultan (the era of the sultanate), whereby descent (*keturunan*) and rank (*derajat*) in the sultanate’s societal hierarchy demanded the submission of the lower-ranking population segments to members of the ruling houses. However, this ‘rear-view image of zaman sultan’ (Wee 1985:166) is not uniformly shared by all. For others, *Melayu* is a fluid category that has to be traced within a field of a mixed Malayness (*Melayu kacukan*), which encompasses different cultural influences.

The Orang Suku Laut

The Orang Suku Laut or Sea Tribe People of the Riau archipelago – one of several small ethnic groups found scattered throughout Southeast Asia, popularly known as sea nomads or sea gypsies are descendants of a Proto-Malayan population who probably immigrated before AD 1000. They are estimated to number between 3,000 to more than 5,000 people (Walikotamadya Kepala Wilayah Kotamadya Administratif Batam 1986:3-6), having their own ‘language of the sea’ (*bahasa laut*), or more precisely, speaking various Suku Laut dialects closely related to Riau Malay. Their way of life is well adapted to the ecological zone of the sea, mangrove swamps and adjacent coastal areas. At the very most, approximately half of them still follow a nomadic way of life. The others live in coastal settlements or recently built villages given to them by the government. Some of the Orang Suku Laut still return seasonally to their boat-dwelling way of life.

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12 See Wee 1985:59-65, 162-6, 235-302, 318-21, 447-69; 1988:209-15, who discusses the construction of a Malay identity by the successors of the sultanate’s ruling nobility in reference to historical ‘beings in Riau’ – the societal hierarchy of the sultanate system as well as the associated concept of Malayness – which today are transmitted symbolically to the present ‘being in Riau’. See also the contribution by Vivienne Wee and Cynthia Chou to this volume.

13 See the contribution by Henk Maier to this volume.

14 Concerning historical sources and research on sea nomads up to the first decades of this century, see the standard work of Sopher 1977. For an overview of recent research on sea nomads, see Lenhart 1995b.

15 This is an approximate figure, due to the general difficulty of recording nomadic people statistically. The figure is also based on the following sources: Bupati Kepala Daerah Tingkat II Kepulauan Riau 1988:1-2; Departemen Sosial Republik Indonesia 1994:45; Kepala Kantor Departemen Sosial Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau 1988:1-2; Ketua Bappeda Tingkat II Kepulauan Riau 1990/91:2, 6; Priyono B. Sumbogo and Linda Djalil 1988:64; and *Riau Pos*, 22-02-1991.
The Suku Laut people navigate through the archipelago by following ocean currents and tides, winds, fishing grounds, position of the sun, moon and stars, about which they bear a remarkable knowledge. Also, their beliefs and convictions refer to their natural environment, which they experience as animated nature. They make their living from fishing and strand collecting of marine products for both subsistence and small-scale trading with Chinese middlemen (tauke). Besides this, some are seasonally employed as woodcutters and workers at the tauke’s charcoal kilns. For a time not too long ago, they bartered some of their products for things to cover their daily needs (such as oil, matches, rice) without using money. Nowadays, they sell and buy things instead of bartering. However, they still do not accumulate stocks, goods or money. Their social organization is characterized by the principles of independence, equality and seniority. Its basis is kinship ties and the ideal of marriage is endogamy. They travel around in small groups of kinsmen under the leadership of an elder, or live in corresponding groupings in settlements ashore. The most common form of a household comprises members of a nuclear family. Orang Suku Laut society as a whole is segmentary, consisting of several clans (the Suku Galang, Suku Mapor, Suku Mantang and Suku Barok, et cetera), which are further divided into various subgroups.

According to historical sources,16 most of the forefathers of the present Orang Suku Laut were an integral part of the population of the kingdom of Malacca-Johor and the sultanate of Riau-Lingga respectively, and belonged to the stratum of the nobility’s vassals (orang kerahan). One of their duties consisted of supplying the local rulers with marine products such as tripang (sea cucumber), pearls, seaweed and birds’ nests for international trade, especially with China. A few Orang Suku Laut clans living close to the centers of power gained an important role in politics as the Sultans’ military forces and coastal guards. The other clans of the peripheries formed the lowest-status groups who were difficult to control and could often escape their feudal duties. Besides these, some clans on the peripheries were not regarded as subjects and were therefore able to continue their life under the leadership of their tribal chiefs (batin). In the nineteenth century, certain members of the kingdom’s ruling nobility who had lost their former position of power and who had started to engage in

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16 In sources of the sixteenth until the nineteenth century, the putative forefathers of the present Orang Suku Laut appear under the collective terms of Celates (a Portuguese term probably derived from the Malay selat, ‘straits’, which might be translated as ‘people of the straits’), Orang Laut (sea people), or Orang Pesukuan (people of the divisions). In practice, these terms were applied to a congeries of variously named groups consisting of sea nomads and other coastal populations (Sopher 1977:53, 266, 326-7; Andaya 1975:44). Only a few sources differentiate the indigenous population of the archipelago – Proto-Malayan sea nomads – from their sedentary descendants and the sedentary coastal Malays (Anonymous 1953; Mohd. Appan 1932; Schot 1882; 1884).
piracy — which was hardly regarded as a criminal act — were supported by some of their Orang Suku Laut loyalists (especially members of the Suku Galang). In the course of time, those Orang Suku Laut clans who had played an important role in the politics of the former kingdoms have experienced a continuous assimilation process. Today, their lifestyle and customs do not differ very much from those of the Malay population. The other clans, which since former times have lived far away from the centers of power and have not been assimilated to other population segments, have remained geographically peripheral and socially marginal until now.

Acculturative Effects on the Orang Suku Laut in a Rapidly Modernizing Region

The manner and the qualities of contact between the Orang Suku Laut and members of the other ethnic groups cannot be discussed without considering the Riau archipelago as a region undergoing a process of rapid economic and technological modernization. The measures of economic development affect not only the natural habitat of the Suku Laut people, but also their social and cultural environment. Besides this, as an integrated part of government programs for economic development of the region, projects of directed change are being conducted among the Orang Suku Laut and aim at their integration into the wider society of the islands and Indonesian society as a whole.

Interrelated economic, ecological and demographic factors shaping the development process in the Riau islands are pushing for the Orang Suku Laut’s acculturation. Because of them, the habitat and ecological niches used by Orang Suku Laut as a basis for securing their material and cultural existence are altering and under serious threat.

The growing mechanization of old-established economic sectors (such as fisheries, agriculture and quarrying of mineral resources) and the establishment of new small-scale and medium-scale industries, accompanied by the building up of an infrastructure to ensure a more effective distribution of products from production centers to consumers, affect the natural environment. Striking examples are extensive logging and leveling down of hilly formations to quarry bauxite in Bintan, or pollution of the sea by sewage and feces from the biggest pig farm in Indonesia, as well as other effluent from various industrial plants in Batam. Simultaneously, the continuous and increasing migration of workers from all over Indonesia to

On the role of the Orang Suku Laut in the Malacca-Johore and the Riau-Lingga sultanates, see Lummer 1993:5-26; Andaya 1975; Anonymous 1953; Brown 1970; Logan 1847; Mohd. Appan 1932; Schot 1882; Sopher 1977; Tarling 1963; Tate 1971; Trocki 1979; Wolters 1970. On piracy in the Malay world, see Andaya and Andaya 1982:131; Lummer 1992:139-42); Tarling 1963:1, 10-11, 39, 123 (also referring to the part the Orang Suku Galang played in piracy during the nineteenth century); Trocki 1979.
the previously thinly populated Riau islands (its skilled and non-skilled manpower not being sufficient to cope with the economic development), are changing demographic patterns. The extraordinary population growth, as well as mechanization and commercial marketing strategies in various economic sectors, result in growing competition for resources in general, and natural resources in particular. Competition has a reverse effect on the resources. If their exploitation reaches a still greater extent, sooner or later they will be reduced drastically. Therefore, alternative economic resources are needed. This reinforces industrialization measures.

The factors mentioned affect the Orang Suku Laut's traditional way of life, which is characterized by adaptation to the specific ecological zone of the small islands and the mangrove coasts. In this habitat, the Orang Suku Laut can survive because of their nomadic or semi-nomadic spatial behavior; the living in small groups of kinsmen rather on their own, under the leadership of the respective groups' elders; and their utilization of natural marine and coastal resources mainly for subsistence needs, without endangering the ecological balance, supported by beliefs that refer to an animated nature with the Orang Suku Laut as part of it.

Today, as a result of ongoing economic and accompanying ecological and demographic changes, the Orang Suku Laut have to face the problem that other population segments are beginning to show an interest in spatial and ecological niches Orang Suku Laut previously possessed alone. This questions every aspect of the Orang Suku Laut's traditional way of life, such as nomadism or semi-nomadism, subsistence economy, patterns of social organization and beliefs. Due to the growing competition for space and natural resources, possibilities of withdrawal are decreasing. On the other hand, interethnic contact is intensifying and with this, mainstream values continue to spread. All this leads not only to growing sedentarism among the Orang Suku Laut and to the modification of their economic activities or adoption of others; but widening interethnic conflict also accompanies sedentarism, and the social and cultural orientations of the Orang Suku Laut are influenced as well. Their confrontation with new values – of which many do not coincide with their traditional cultural and social values – and strong pressures to assimilate to the wider society of the Riau islands, are undermining their ethnic self-awareness. The undermining of the Orang Suku Laut's ethnic self-awareness is compounded by special government projects of directed change imposed on them to accelerate their acculturation.

**Directed change**

As one of several hundred numerically small ethnic groups living in Indonesia, the Orang Suku Laut are officially categorized as isolated communities or isolated tribes (*masyarakat terasing, suku terasing*). All of these groups are remnants of an old immigrant population that settled in regions
now belonging to the Indonesian state before the arrival of the dominant populations.\textsuperscript{18} Based on various decrees by the President and the Minister for Social Welfare of the Republic of Indonesia (Menteri Sosial Republik Indonesia 1988)\textsuperscript{19} and conducted under the auspices of the Department of Social Welfare (Departemen Sosial) and associated government institutions in the context of a program entitled ‘Development of the Isolated Tribal Communities’ (Pembangunan Masyarakat Suku Terasing or PMST),\textsuperscript{20} projects of directed economic, social and cultural change aim at the integration of these minorities into the wider Indonesian society. Scheduled as a first step is the adaptation of the masyarakat terasing to the regional majority society. This is regarded as a precondition for reaching their political maturity and as a chance to integrate them into the national society. It is stated that in modern Indonesia neither the masyarakat terasing’s subsistence economies can be maintained, nor their social life within the close boundaries of their respective communities. Instead, they should become an integral part of the superordinate economic and social life of the country and accept new values, namely individual independence, self-fulfillment and orientation to the future to enable them to cope with modernization. Also, according to the first principle of the state philosophy of Pancasila, they should believe in the one and only God and therefore abandon their animistic beliefs. Their cultures or at least their respective folklores should continue to exist in so far as they do not hinder the development of the regions and the national economic, social and political aspects of the Indonesian nation-building process (Gatot Soeherman 1993:iix-x).\textsuperscript{21}

Projects for the Orang Suku Laut and some other groups in the province
of Riau, which are included in the category *masyarakat terasing*, are part of the government measures for the region’s development. They are based on the guidelines of the fifth Five-Year Plan of Development (Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun V or Repelita V), and are expected to be translated into action by province, district and subdistrict authorities. The measures for the *masyarakat terasing* of the region are carried out in the context of a program of the Department of Social Welfare, entitled ‘Building-up of Social Welfare of the Isolated Tribal Communities of Riau’ (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Sosial Masyarakat Terasing/PKSMT Riau).

Until the beginning of the 1990s, the authorities were able to motivate about 19 percent of the Orang Suku Laut population to move to resettlement sites in the target areas of Singkep, Lingga and Galang located in Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau and the islands of Kotamadya Batam (this figure is based on an estimated population total of 5,000 Orang Suku Laut with an average family size of 5 persons). In view of the intense efforts to hasten Orang Suku Laut resettlement, I suppose that this figure has already increased. The projects reflect three approaches to sedentarization/resettlement as developed by the innovators, namely: sedentarization/resettlement in houses on land, in pile dwellings in the sea with a connecting bridge to the land, and in floating dwellings that are moored near the coast. The last two approaches have resulted from the relative failure of the first. However, all of them, to varying extent, face the general problem that formerly boat-dwelling Orang Suku Laut tend not to take to resettlement in houses for long. Many leave the resettlement sites and return to their houseboats. The main measures intended are sedentarization of nomads, supported by

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22 In the area of Kotamadya Batam and Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau, besides the Orang Suku Laut (with an estimated population figure of more than 5,000 people in 1988-1994), there are three other ethnic groups which are categorized as *masyarakat terasing*: the Orang Suku Hutan (25 people in 1988), the Orang Suku Kuala (140 people in 1988), and the Orang Suku Akit (190 people in 1988). The majority of the last two groups, whose ways of life and total numbers are comparable with the Orang Suku Laut, live in adjacent districts.

23 Until 1989, 602 persons or 145 families were included in government programs conducted in Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau in the target areas of Singkep (1982-83), Lingga (1985-86) and Galang (1988-89) (Bupati Kepala Daerah Tingkat II Kepulauan Riau 1988:6; Ketua Bappeda Tingkat II Kepulauan Riau 1990/91:2). In 1989, plans for the (re)settlement of the Orang Suku Laut population in the subdistrict of East-Bintan were made, and in 1993 35 families had moved into their new houses, while many more houses were in the process of being built (Camat Pembantu Bupati Wilayah IV Bintan 1989). The Orang Suku Laut in Kotamadya Batam have aroused official attention since 1986 (Walikotamadya Kepala Wilayah Kotamadya Administratif Batam 1986). In 1987-88, the first 14 of about 100 planned houses were built on Bertam island, a large-scale project which aims to concentrate all Orang Suku Laut of this area (Forum Komunikasi dan Konsultasi Sosial (FKKS) Batam (1987:4-5); 1988; Institut Teknologi Bandung, Fakultas Teknik Sipil dan Perencanaan, Jurusan Teknik Arsitektur 1988). Another resettlement site with 24 floating houses in front of the island of Lingke, very close to Bertam, was opened in 1991 (see Kompas, 18-05-1991 and 22-09-1991).
construction of houses in special large-scale resettlement sites; formal education of children in schools and campaigns to increase the literacy rate of adults; religious education; political education regarding Indonesian history and present politics; measures to improve health conditions and increase involvement in the national birth-control program; teaching of alternative or supplementary livelihoods; and assistance programs (via sports; material aid in the form of clothes, food and the like; joint activities to build facilities in resettlement sites and to keep the Orang Suku Laut clean) (Bupati Kepala Daerah Tingkat II Kepulauan Riau 1988:3-6).

Views on the Orang Suku Laut in a Malay Region and a Modernizing Nation State

The Malays and other population segments in the region as well as government representatives concur in considering the Orang Suku Laut to be a marginal minority in the region and the state, and in need of development. Even so, with regard to social intercourse with the Orang Suku Laut, the arguments of the regional majority prove rather to be a hindrance to the Orang Suku Laut's acculturation, whereas the official view is conducive to it. The underlying conceptions in evaluating contact with the Orang Suku Laut are different and, to a certain degree, reflect spatial, temporal and cultural oppositions, namely, the Riau archipelago regarded either as part of the Malay world or as part of the Indonesian state; the construction of 'past-in-the-present'-day reality according to either a 'rear-view image of the past' as in the time of the early immigrations and the era of the Malay sultanate (Wee 1985:162), or the image of the modern state undergoing a process of nation building; and a cultural focus put either on Malayness (to evoke a regional sense of belonging) or on Indonesianness (to create a national identity).

Not only in the present, but also in a historical perspective it is pure fiction to regard the Orang Suku Laut as an isolated ethnic group. Due to their extensive local mobility, they have always been in contact with members of various other ethnic groups in the region. During the time of the Riau-Lingga sultanate, most Orang Suku Laut clans were an integral part of the kingdom's society. However, those contacts were mostly confined to the fulfillment of feudal duties and bartering or small-scale trading activities. At present, both sides meet in daily life, from time to time and in different places, but nevertheless still tend to avoid social contacts apart

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25 Mohd. Appan 1932:3 describes the relationship of the various parts of the sultanate society as 'sebagai pertjampuran air dengan minjak sadja djadi hingga sekarang tiadalah begitu susah buat membedakannya' (like a mixture of water and oil, thus until now it has not been difficult at all to differentiate them).
from economic transactions. Besides these situations of interaction, Orang Suku Laut and officials who conduct projects of directed change today meet in various Orang Suku Laut resettlement sites.

In daily life, Orang Suku Laut and members of other ethnic groups for various reasons withdraw from most social contact. From the perspective of the non-Orang Suku Laut, the Orang Suku Laut are a people without religion and culture. People who profess to Islam also regard the Orang Suku Laut as impure. The avoidance of contact is justified with ideas about the Orang Suku Laut way of life, namely the unhygienic conditions of Orang Suku Laut families who are crammed into their small houseboats, and the Orang Suku Laut habit of hunting and eating wild pigs, drinking alcohol and keeping dogs. Non-Orang Suku Laut are also afraid of the extraordinary magic powers that they ascribe to the Suku Laut people. Also, the Orang Suku Laut themselves normally avoid social contact with the non-Orang Suku Laut. The Orang Suku Laut are aware of the arguments used against them and often experience negative behavior based on these attitudes. Moreover, the Orang Suku Laut reinforce outsiders’ fears by creating an awesome and ominous magic aura around themselves, thereby contributing to maintaining the interethnic status quo of mutual contact avoidance (Lenhart 1993:19-24).

Contact between the Orang Suku Laut and representatives of the local government, as discussed above, has recently been intensified on the part of the officials. Normally, officials meet with Orang Suku Laut in various resettlement sites while carrying out measures of directed economic, social and cultural change in order to fulfill their political task of developing the Orang Suku Laut as an ethnic minority in the context of the region and the state, and to integrate them into the wider Indonesian society. For these reasons, their social intercourse with the Orang Suku Laut is quite intense, although in a private capacity, their ideas about the Orang Suku Laut way of life and culture concur with those of the regional majority. In the beginning, many Orang Suku Laut did not exactly understand who the officials were, or which institution they represented. Many of the Orang Suku Laut were not aware of their citizenship – and some are still not – and could not define the pemerintah (government) accurately and regarded it as an authority similar to the ruling houses of the former Malay sultanate, the president being equated with the Sultan. However, now that the official goal of resettlement has become widely known among the Orang Suku Laut, they have started to learn about their citizenship.

During field research, I interviewed non-Orang Suku Laut officials as well as non-officials in contact with Orang Suku Laut about their knowledge and their opinion of the Orang Suku Laut way of life. These research findings (Lenhart 1995a:17-22) give an impression of the negative image

26 An exception are the long-integrated groups, especially the Orang Suku Galang. See footnote 29.
of the Orang Suku Laut that influences the extent and quality of inter-ethnic intercourse. This also explains why the Orang Suku Laut are considered to be a people in urgent need of development. The evaluation by officials and non-officials concerning the character and appearance of the Orang Suku Laut, their attitudes to life in general and their attitudes and behavior regarding interethnic contact in particular, did not differ much. According to the most extreme items mentioned, the Orang Suku Laut are shy individuals, have ugly black skin, a dirty, foul-smelling body and like to wear clothes with garish colors; they are a backward, ignorant and pitiful ethnic group, take each day as it comes and show no concern for the future; they do not want contact and isolate themselves, frighten other people and are vindictive, for example, and they like to take revenge by using black magic. Also, my interviewees said that they had no personal interest in the Orang Suku Laut culture and traditions. All of them shared the opinion that the Orang Suku Laut must leave their backward lifestyle behind and be developed. On my question as to whether the culture of the Orang Suku Laut should be protected in the course of ongoing economic and social change in Riau and what measures could be taken to do so, nearly all interviewees answered that the Orang Suku Laut must adapt to conditions of modern life, which inevitably necessitates the change of their culture. At the most, some respondents agreed that folklore aspects of culture, for example the Orang Suku Laut’s traditional dances, could be preserved. Some of my interview partners did not accept this question and instead of answering, asked me if I thought that the Orang Suku Laut were really a people with an original culture worth preserving.

The Malay View

The views of the Malay majority and other population segments living in the Riau archipelago often encompass a comparison between the Orang Suku Laut and the Malays as the indigenous inhabitants of this part of the Malay world in Indonesia. In principle, subsuming the Suku Laut people under this generic group – which with regard to language, traditional beliefs and customs of both groups is obviously true\(^{27}\) – implies that they are Proto-Malay aboriginals or orang Melayu asli (aboriginal Malays), whereas the Malay majority who immigrated later are therefore orang Melayu dagang / pendatang (foreign Malays / newcomers). However, if membership is defined in terms of cultural affiliation – thus referring to Islam being the Malays’ faith, to Malay customs and Malay language as the main criteria quoted for being Malay (Melayu) – the Orang Suku Laut are marginalized or even expelled from this group as bukan Melayu (not being Malay).

\(^{27}\) On the Riau-Malays’ culture, see Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan 1977/78.
The debate on the inclusion of the Orang Suku Laut into the category of Malay is more relevant to the Malays themselves than to the other population segments. Also, on the part of the Malays, this is more relevant to some and less to others. A specific form of inclusion, combined with the idea of superiority versus inferiority, is expressed by some of the successors of the sultanate’s nobility, who construct a relationship between themselves and the non-aristocratic parts of the Malays, including the Orang Suku Laut, with reference to the past societal reality of the sultanate.\textsuperscript{28} In their discourse, the Orang Suku Laut’s possible inclusion as Malays is weighed in regard to the various degrees of Malayness that can be detected by reviewing descent and inherited rank (Wee 1985; 1988). According to the Malays, the Orang Suku Laut as the first inhabitants of the region are indeed \textit{orang (Melayu) asli}, whereas they themselves are \textit{orang (Melayu) dagang} of Johor-Malay and Bugis descent. Furthermore, they regard themselves as \textit{orang Melayu murni} (pure Malays), because they are of noble birth and have had a high rank in the sultanate’s hierarchy, due to which they became not only nominal Muslims, but true practitioners of Islam and were able to develop a refined Malay language and sophisticated manners. This, in their view, proves not to be the case for the population segments identified as descendants of the vassals of the past kingdom, including various Orang Suku Laut clans, who are therefore regarded as impure Malays (\textit{orang Melayu yang tidak murni}) (Wee 1985:406-16, 464-96; 1988:209-15). Within the group of the former vassals, the Orang Suku Laut clans (as well as some other non-sea-tribe descendants) are further divided. Some Orang Suku Laut are ranked lower than others. For example, the Orang Suku Mapor rank lower in comparison to the Orang Suku Galang. In contrast to the views expressed by the aristocratic Malays, the common Malays normally regard the Orang Suku Laut as not being Malay (\textit{bukan Melayu}). The Orang Suku Laut’s general image, particularly the boat-dwelling sections on the peripheries, among most Malays is that of a people who have (nearly) no culture, because they do not profess a faith and because their language and manners are uncouth.

Among the Suku Laut people, the different opinions expressed with regard to their cultural affiliation with the Malays are also more relevant to some and less to others, depending on the different rates of contact between individual Orang Suku Laut groups and Malays as well as on these groups’ knowledge and valuation of the outsiders’ views of them (Lenhart 1993:19-24, 26-7). However, some Orang Suku Laut go so far as to emphasize that they are \textit{orang Melayu asli} (aboriginal Malays), whereas others explain that they are \textit{orang asli} (aboriginal people), but not \textit{orang

\textsuperscript{28} Wee 1988:209 emphasizes that ‘in a situation where there is no longer a sultanate [...] ranks have hardly any political substance. Yet they remain significant [...] as a remembered order which exists as the-past-in-the-present.’
Melayu (Malays), whom they regard to be the most extreme opposite to themselves.\textsuperscript{29}

The Official View

The official view, expressed by government representatives, implies a comparison of refinement between the Orang Suku Laut and wider present-day Indonesian society. As mentioned, the Orang Suku Laut are subsumed under the minority category of isolated (tribal) communities (masyarakat [suku] terasing), that is, small ethnic groups who still lead a life of backwardness, and therefore – in contrast to the majority – prove to be neither able to adapt to modern conditions nor to take part in the process of nation building. Hence, in order to integrate them into the wider society and to let them profit from modernization they have to be made a subject of directed development. The official view approaches the need for change in the way of life and cultures of the masyarakat terasing on different levels of argumentation. First, the official definition of the masyarakat terasing focuses on a cultural, social, economic and political gap between the tribal communities and the majority, thus accounting for the necessity for change. Second, the conception of dominant and subordinate groups as complementary parts of a multi-ethnic society justifies the need to direct

\textsuperscript{29} For instance, my Orang Suku Laut informants – members of the Orang Suku Laut clans of Suku Mapor, Suku Mantang and Suku Barok – never referred to themselves as orang Melayu asli. Instead, they explained that the Orang Suku Laut form a separate category, which they justified in reference to the mythical past, that is, when the Orang Suku Laut as the first people came into this world and therefore became the original inhabitants of the Riau Archipelago (Lenhart 1993:12, 15, 25). Furthermore, they stressed that they neither remembered the Orang Suku Laut's positions in the societal hierarchy of the past sultanate, nor knew anything about the Orang Suku Laut’s former feudal duties. In these respects, they differ from the members of the Suku Galang and of other Orang Suku Laut groups living in the immediate neighborhood of the Orang Suku Galang, who frequently called themselves orang Melayu asli. The memory gaps of my informants, which contrast with other Orang Suku Laut sections (albeit every suku in question is mentioned by name in various historical sources as having been part of the sultanate’s society), certainly has to do with the distance of their habitat to the former centers of power and with status differences in the sultanate’s society. The forebears of the subgroups of the suku my informants belonged to had lived at a considerable distance from the sultanate’s centers, and therefore had only marginally been embedded in the sultanate society or not at all. In general, they had been regarded as inferior groups. Due to their peripheral position in the sultanate, it may be that the memory of this time had actually vanished, or that the descendants of these sections do not want to remind themselves of their inferior position that has been associated with a pariah status until now. In contrast to them, the Orang Suku Galang and members of other Orang Suku Laut groups living in their immediate neighborhood had lived close to the former sultanate’s northern power center, and in the case of the Orang Suku Galang had gained a quite high status in the sultanate society. Such groups proudly remember their prestigious status until today, whereas other neighboring groups of formerly inferior status are still reminded of their lower position to the Orang Suku Galang, and are thus denied an escape from these views on them even by means of constructing conscious gaps in their memory.
change from above. Finally, the formative ideas of Indonesian nation building explain why change is indispensable in a context of more general, national needs. All these conceptions mold the ethnic minority policy as a part of the state's development policy (Lenhart 1994b:87-105), by which they are transformed into concrete measures carried out in the regions.

According to the definition of masyarakat terasing given by the Department of Social Welfare, the isolated tribal communities have the following characteristics. Their social organization is based on kinship ties, they practice subsistence economics, follow animistic beliefs, thus have no future orientation; they isolate themselves and reject interethnic contact and innovations from outside, due to their fear that in the course of development their cultural values and social norms might be destroyed.\(^{30}\) This definition is related to the conception of dominant and subordinate groups as complementary parts of a multi-ethnic society. It is argued that history shows that the dominant group's culture has the potential for functioning as a model or orientational frame, guiding interethnic communication and the structuring of interethnic relations. With reference to this conception, the masyarakat terasing are regarded as subordinate groups or backward microsocieties in modern Indonesia, which are not able to develop by themselves to become responsible citizens. It is argued that, due to their backwardness in their way of life and culture, their development can only be achieved by the leadership (pembinaan)\(^{31}\) of the representatives of the dominant group and that they therefore have to be made a ward of government officials. The guidance of the tribal communities' development from masyarakat terasing to an integrated part of the population of modern Indonesia necessitates not only the inducement of economic and social changes, but also implies cultural development, understood as the directed selection of cultural traits. Some of these traits

\(^{30}\) For a translation of the Indonesian quotation into English, see Lenhart 1994b:89. Both the term and definition of masyarakat terasing were criticized by a panel of experts acting as representatives of the Department of Social Welfare, the Community of Indonesian Anthropologists, the Research Group Masyarakat Terasing and journalists who met on 13 December 1990 in Jakarta to discuss the program of the Department of Social Welfare. This debate is documented in Kompas, 03-01-1991 and 04-01-1991, inter alia because in fact there are no ethnic groups living in total isolation and the term and its definition possess negative connotations. However, despite all objections, it was agreed that the term should be kept because it has already become generally known in Indonesia. It was also felt that the term would promote a more realistic image of the respective groups among the ranks of government and administration, as well as in the public eye.

\(^{31}\) In the job description for the petugas lapangan (fieldworkers) of the PKSMT Riau-program, pembinaan is emphasized as their main task (Menteri Sosial Republik Indonesia 1988). Pembinaan (literally, building up) aims at influencing the knowledge, attitudes and abilities of the persons involved by the measures of instruction, guidance, development, stimulation, and control in accordance to the values promoted by the representatives of the state on the basis of the Indonesian state philosophy Pancasila (Hidayat 1978:26).
are seen as worth preserving and others such as the belief in and practice of ancestor-spirit worship\(^{32}\) as better forgotten. The intended changes are regarded as indispensable not only in the interest of these minority groups, but also in the interest of Indonesia as a whole. That is why the ethnic minority policy which translates minority development goals into action is conceptualized as an integrated part of the nation-building policy. The nation-building policy or *pembangunan nasional* (national development) is understood as the interrelated processes of technological-economic modernization and creation of a national society and culture. The building up of a national identity shared by all citizens is seen as one of the most critical tasks in the process of national development, being the precondition of modernization and continuous economic growth that, in turn, contributes to the improvement of the living conditions of the population. It is hoped that this national identity will develop on the basis of a national culture, as already conceptualized in the Constitution of 1945, Article 32, in the form of a synthetic mixture of selected traits of those Indonesian cultures regarded as superior such as Javanese, Sundanese, Buginese-Macassarese and Malay, enriched by Western values of humanism. It is argued that, to reach the goal of instilling a consciousness of national unity and a shared feeling of belonging to the nation among all citizens, the development of this national culture has to be directed by representatives of the government (Budhisantoso 1985:B3-6).\(^{33}\)

Applied to the case of the Orang Suku Laut, the official logic reads as follows. Due to its general backwardness, this marginal sector of the society of the Riau islands is not only at a disadvantage, but also obstructs regional and hence national development. In the Orang Suku Laut’s own interest, as well as in the interest of Riau and Indonesian society as a whole, their backward way of life and their inferior culture have to be changed by measures directed from above. This has to be based on evoking a sense of Indonesian identity and a consciousness of national unity, being preconditions for the measures of change to lead to the goals of turning the Orang Suku Laut into an integrated part of the wider society and into beneficiaries of the region’s modernization. Furthermore, the projects for the Orang Suku Laut have to be evaluated against the regional

\(^{32}\) Here I refer to statements by officials whom I interviewed during field research. They emphasized that the state philosophy of *Pancasila* calls for the belief in only one God, and therefore active endeavors to proselytize are indispensable.

cultural setting. As part of the development and nation-building policy, they should also oppose Malay regionalism as well as the ethnic segmentation of the society of the Riau islands that over centuries have evolved in the context of the sultanates, so that the various population segments of this region together with all parts of the ethnically diversified Indonesian society can melt into a big whole.

The officially induced changes concern the very basic way of life and culture of the Orang Suku Laut, and so have become consciously discussed themes among the Orang Suku Laut. Therefore I now turn to the way the Orang Suku Laut cope with directed change.

Some Remarks on Orang Suku Laut Reactions to Directed Change

Although this paper focuses on non-Orang Suku Laut's perceptions of Orang Suku Laut in connection with the acculturation process they are experiencing at present, I will not end without giving some attention to Orang Suku Laut's reactions. I refer to the example of a settlement where the Orang Suku Laut had already been living for some years when it became a designated resettlement site. First, I describe reactions of different factions of this settlement at the time government initiatives started. Following that, I want to draw attention to some problems of resettlement which I noticed two years later.

During field research (1988-90, and 1991), I realized that the Orang Suku Laut were aware of the negative image in the views of others. In addition, I observed various behavior strategies used by the members of this settlement to cope with problems arising from interethnic contact with regard to their ethnic affiliation. These strategies were influenced by the outside stereotypes to which they themselves refer, either in a confirming way, or to refute them (Lenhart 1993:21-7).

When contacts with officials started, I recognized that the behavior of individuals correlated with basic attitudes with regard to contact, in which they had different interests and expectations. Against the background of these basic attitudes and manners, the members of this settlement could be divided into three factions labelled as modern minded, tradition minded, and doubting minds. Each of these factions coincided with one of the three groups of kinsmen living in the settlement. These groups showed a high degree of internal interaction and exchange of opinions. However, contact and communication between these groups were rather infrequent. The three groups differed in the degree of sedentarism and their descent;

34 I want to stress that I present a generalized picture here. Of course not all Orang Suku Laut who were associated with one of the three mentioned groups behaved in the same manner. Differences varied due to individual personality features, the relative extent of conflict felt in situations of contact, as well as the specific interests and expectations of the respective contact partners. However, I am unable to discuss the details to all these aspects in this paper.
their readiness to interact with the non-Orang Suku Laut and their acceptance of outside influences penetrating into their immediate living sphere; and the importance attached to outside acceptance.

The modern-minded Orang Suku Laut had become sedentary house dwellers many years ago, and since then only rarely left the settlement for temporary fishing trips. The forefathers of a few of them were of Chinese or Malay descent. The doubting Orang Suku Laut had been living a semisedentary way of life for a couple of years, but some of them regularly returned to their houseboats. They had no non-Orang Suku Laut forefathers. The tradition-minded Orang Suku Laut had become house dwellers only recently and still returned to the boat-dwelling habit for months at a time. Among them were some families who oscillated between being exclusively house dwelling or exclusively boat dwelling. All of them were descendants of Orang Suku Laut. Each of the three groups had nomadic relatives who frequently visited the settlement for days or even for a couple of weeks.

When government officials visited the settlement, the modern-minded Orang Suku Laut normally joined the meetings. They also regularly attended gatherings to learn the tenets of Islam and took part in joint work programs to build a house of prayer (surau) and other projects proposed by the officials. They agreed fairly quickly to the officials even if they had not understood the intentions of the officials very well. The tradition-minded Orang Suku Laut, on the other hand, were not ready to accept any kind of contact and attended neither meetings nor joint activities. In principle, they tended to refuse everything. When the officials came to the settlement, they avoided contact by withdrawal. They did this either by not leaving their houses or leaving the settlement before the officials arrived. The doubting Orang Suku Laut took a position between the two other groups. Interests expressed by the modern-minded Orang Suku Laut with regard to contact with officials were material expectations (for example, houses given to them by the government). Furthermore, they hoped that their relationship with the officials would, in the long run, help them to become accepted by the members of the surrounding society. In contrast, the tradition-minded Orang Suku Laut showed no interest and expressed the wish to be left alone. The opinions of the doubting Orang Suku Laut oscillated between those expressed by the two other groups. With regard to ethnic self-ascription in situations of interethnic contact inside and outside the settlement, I was able to observe that the modern-minded and to a lesser degree the doubting Orang Suku Laut tend to avoid ethnonyms such as orang suku laut (sea tribe people), orang sampan (boat people), orang suku Mapor (the Mapor tribe people) as symbols of identity. This was so even with those who, among themselves and while talking to me, had no problem speaking openly and with pride about Orang Suku Laut culture and way of life. Situationally, some of them assigned themselves in a vague way to another ethnic group for example.
by stressing that 'anyway, actually we are also Malays', and simultaneously tried to disguise features characteristic of Orang Suku Laut ethnic affiliation. In contrast, the tradition-minded Orang Suku Laut did not try to get in line with outsiders and always referred to themselves as *orang suku laut*, or even as *orang sampan*, terms which, if used by non-Orang Suku Laut, have pejorative connotations.

Two years later, in 1993, I revisited this settlement, which had then become a site with more than 30 houses. This settlement now included some of the old inhabitants and many newcomers from nearby as well as distant locations. Among them were also a few newly settled nomads. At that time, the population had increased from about 70 to more than 150 people. Many new houses were nearly ready to be inhabited. I met many of the people I had known from my first and second protracted visits. However, some I did not meet again because they had left the place. Among the people I met were all those who formerly had shown a modern-minded attitude; and now they expressed their satisfaction with the development. The tradition-minded and the doubting ones had either left or still tried to continue their avoidance pattern of behavior with decreasing 'success'. Obviously, not all Orang Suku Laut could cope with the development and innovations in the same way. This was especially so among those who were continuously torn between the alternatives of conformity or withdrawal. Those who were not able to make a decision seemed extremely insecure.

As for resettlement, I noticed some striking problems arising from both project planning and daily project reality. A basic problem on behalf of the planning authorities proved to be their lack of knowledge about the Orang Suku Laut’s way of life and culture, which in turn affected the activities in the resettlement site. Also, the social workers living on the resettlement site had not been sufficiently trained for their job. They had some difficulties in explaining their tasks. These workers were also quite young and were therefore not accepted by many members in the resettlement site. A fundamental problem for the Orang Suku Laut emerged in that they were neither used to living on land (especially nomads), nor in settlements with a dense population. The fact that the Orang Suku Laut had been used to living together in small groups of kinsmen, corresponding groups now had chosen neighboring houses in the resettlement site, but seldom interacted with other such factions of their new community. Therefore, the social workers had problems in coordinating and involving many people in activ-

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35 Regarding *masyarakat terasing* in general, this criticism is also expressed by some leading representatives of the Department of Social Welfare as well as Indonesian anthropologists.

36 For example, in another resettlement site it could be observed that those who were uneasy in this unaccustomed situation stayed in the houses during the day. However, by night they returned to their boats. Finally, many left the fixed dwellings that had been given to them for good.
ities concerning the community as a whole. A communal spirit had not developed because the different factions were unable to agree on an official representative for the various groups of kinsmen. Also, there were regular quarrels between the factions. The material aid provided to the Orang Suku Laut also led to dependence on others while decreasing their self-confidence. I observed that many Orang Suku Laut, especially those in the younger generation exhibited a certain *laisser-faire* manner. For example, they stayed in the settlement instead of going out to fish and often drank too much. Finally, I recognized that accelerated proselytization had not led to religious conviction. The new converts seldom fulfilled their religious duties. Many community members referred to the old beliefs again; and suddenly some began to favor another faith (Christianity), which seemed to me to be a choice of strategy rather than a choice based on conviction.

In my opinion, which I share with some local members of the ranks from the Department of Social Welfare as well as the Indonesian anthropological community, the problems summarized above could be reduced by taking the following measures. In general, one has to rethink whether resettlement really makes sense. Resettlement puts the Suku Laut people in a position apart from the other sections of the Riau population. In this respect, resettlement is contradictory to the aim of integrating the Orang Suku Laut into the wider society. Also, as a general precondition for avoiding the failure of projects, it makes sense to consider the fact that the Orang Suku Laut are neither used to living on land nor to socializing in numerically big groups. Therefore, houses and settlements provided for them should be pile buildings in moderately scaled accumulations on the coast. Moreover, instead of large amounts of material aid, promotion of self-help programs would be much better. Measures to strengthen ethnic self-awareness could also be considered. More persuasive work rather than prescription is needed. With regard to the projects, preparatory research prior to the implementation of the program on the Orang Suku Laut and continued research during the implementation of projects are necessary. The course of a project should also be monitored by mid-term and post-implementation evaluation reports. Simultaneously, better training is needed for the social workers engaged in the projects. These measures

37 On a discussion of problems related to these issues, see also the contributions by Cynthia Chou and Ashley Turner to this volume.

38 The essential need is problem-oriented and long-term qualitative research, in which the perspective of the group concerned and different standpoints within this group become clear with regard to the group’s culture and way of life, culture contact and intended culture change. This fact was also voiced by some participants at the conference ‘Masyarakat Terasing di Indonesia’, on 13 December 1990 in Jakarta. Others emphasized that during planning and execution of the projects, the findings of anthropological theory, especially of the acculturation approach, should not be ignored. See Kompas, 03-01-1991 and 04-01-1991.
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would help to change the commonly held ideas about the Orang Suku Laut that, at present, influence the projects' designs and according to which stagnation in development is attributed all too simplistically to the obstacle of stubbornness in backward individuals sharing a static culture. This is hardly conducive to considering the potential for development. Furthermore, the projects have to be oriented to local needs, that is, to include the views of and address the needs perceived by the Orang Suku Laut themselves and to concede a formative part in culture-changing measures for them. This can be done by building up village councils and in giving local leadership positions to some of their members.

**Final Statement**

My anthropological work is concerned with issues relating to the inherited cultures and identity articulations of ethnic groups, as well as their responses and cultural adaptations to changing environments. Hence, because I look upon change as an inherent aspect of culture, I by no means subscribe to the idea of living museums preservation programs, or more precisely, freezing persons and cultures. Against this background, I do not dismiss the fact that global modernizing processes are affecting even the most remote areas and their peoples. Furthermore, I understand that every state with a multi-ethnic population has to solve the problem of integrating the different cultures and ways of life of majorities and minorities for the sake of the whole.\(^\text{39}\)

With regard to the Orang Suku Laut in the Riau islands, I am realistic enough to see that the possibilities of withdrawal necessary for them to continue with their traditional way of living are decreasing. The impact of development on the Suku Laut people – who are only gradually getting used to dealing with this situation – should lead neither to social and cultural assimilation nor to social and cultural estrangement. In my opinion, persuasion should take the place of regulations in every single measure.

\(^{39}\) I am grateful to the Orang Suku Laut who supported my work by teaching and accepting me and my curious questions with much tolerance, patience, understanding and humor. I am also indebted to the Indonesian society and its representatives who welcomed me as a guest in their country, and who kindly supported my research by granting permission, and offered helpful suggestions and comments. During my stay in Indonesia, I learned much about the cultural heritage of the Suku Laut people, and also about the changes they have already experienced in history. They are now facing a time of much faster and more drastic transformations. Because I was treated with openness and interest during my stay in Indonesia, I feel an obligation to be equally honest about my own stance, which is based on practical experiences and the circumstances I encountered during field research. However, I do not mean thereby to turn against development as such. Thus I hope that this paper will be perceived as a constructive contribution to the discussion on ethnic minorities in Indonesia – a country with hospitable people and which continues to interest me intensely – and not as an inappropriate perspective through Western-centric spectacles, which I have tried my best to avoid.
concerning Orang Suku Laut affairs. That implies taking them as autonomous individuals who are able to think about matters fundamentally affecting their way of life. This also implies working toward dismantling the disparaging stereotypes about them that are still shared by the majority and are influencing interethnic contact. By pursuing alternative ways of communication and interaction, numerically small ethnic groups with an equally worthy cultural heritage will also have the chance to take a position in the Indonesian society that the majority groups already possess, in accordance with the state motto of national unity in cultural diversity.

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