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Rationalisation and re-enchantment in Malaysia: Temiar religion 1964–1995

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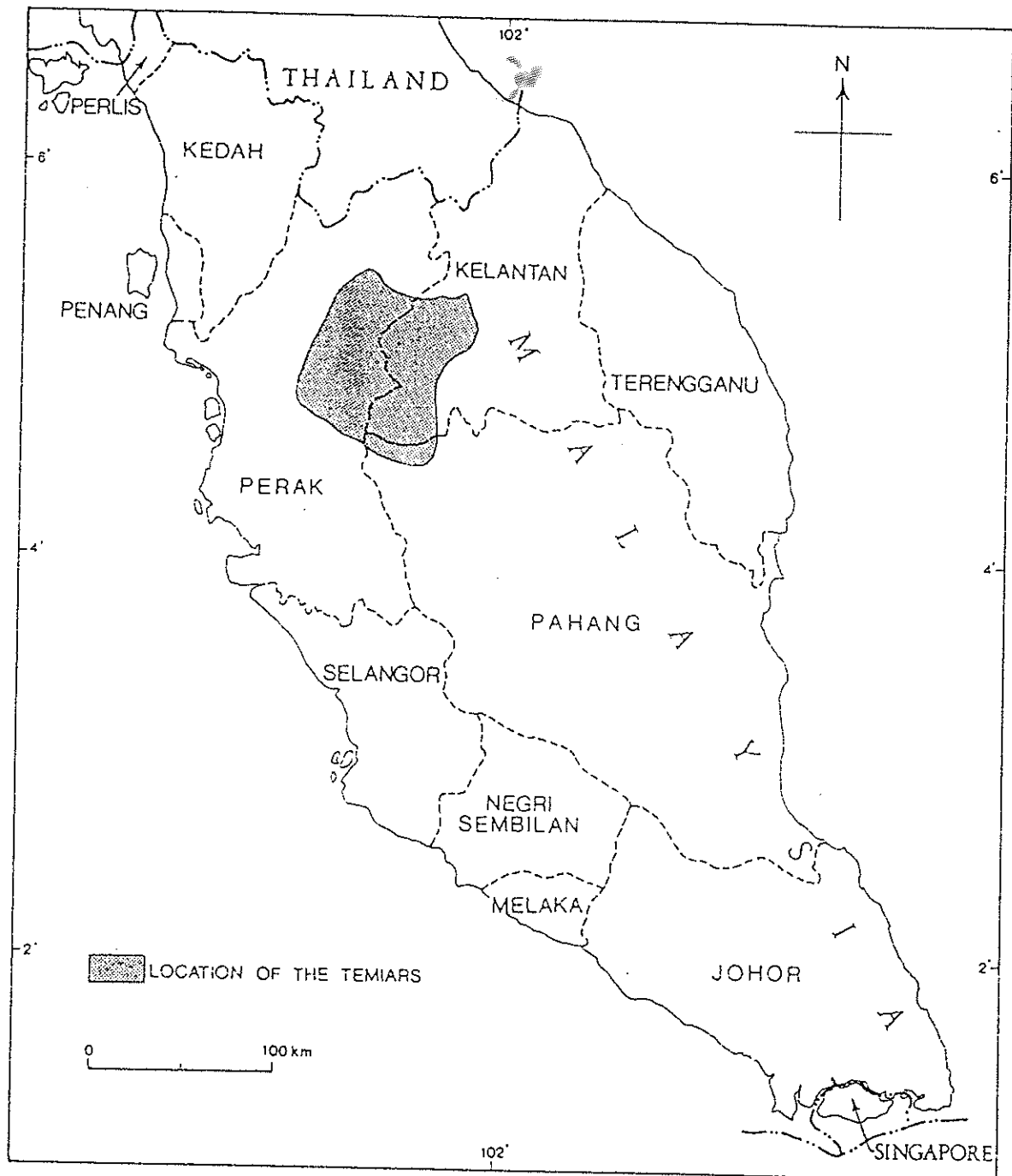
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Map 1: The location of the Temiars in Peninsular Malaysia

Rationalisation and re-enchantment in Malaysia: Temiar religion, 1964–1995

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Introduction

Sociologists of religion have normally studied disenchantment and re-enchantment in urban societies. Indeed, it has often been suggested that urbanism itself is the main factor in these processes. In the present essay, however, I am concerned not only with a very rural situation, but with events situated on the tribal-peasant transition. Approaches deriving from Weber's sociology of religion have rarely been applied to this domain, even though Weber's own account covers the whole range, from tribal ('savage') through peasant to urban ('civil') situations, both ancient and modern. (See Weber 1958 [1922–23] for a condensed discussion.)

Writers dealing with such diverse circumstances have tended, implicitly or explicitly, to take an evolutionary approach to their materials, but Weber is careful to note that changes of the type to be discussed here do not necessarily form stages in an evolutionary sequence:

The increasing intellectualisation and rationalisation [as compared to the forms of practical knowledge found in primitive societies] do *not* ... indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives. It means something else, namely, the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one *could* learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted.¹ One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualisation means. (Weber 1958 [1918]: 139.)

Weber also pays great attention to the social position of the individuals who instigate religious change. He argues (1958 [1922–23]: 268–269) that an economic or religious ethic is initially usually propagated and borne by a particular, socially decisive stratum, even though its effects may be more widespread. He also strongly implies that the stratum in question will be literate, and may not always approve of the life-conduct and status of those in other strata. Whatever the initial character of the ethic in question, however, it tends to be adjusted to the *religious needs* of the succeeding generations (p. 270).

Weber (p. 284) goes on to claim in effect that urban ('civil') life is a major force for the

generation and maintenance of the more disenchanted views of the world, since it is there that the 'practical rationalism in conduct' is at its most developed, in the lives of artisans, traders, cottage-industrialists, and others. This results largely from city-dwellers' detachment from economic bonds to nature. Instead, they rely on technological or economic calculations and on the mastery of nature and people. This predisposes them to an ethical and rational regulation of life, as preached variously by 'exemplary' or 'emissary' prophets (Weber 1958 [1922–23]: 285–6; 1978: 447–48).

The exemplary prophet is associated with a view of deity as supreme but static, in relation to whom one tries to achieve a personally satisfying *psychological* state. The emissary (or 'ethical') prophet, on the other hand, is associated with a view of deity as creatively active in the world, and of people as his active, *rational* vessels. Emissary prophecy is thus linked with the notion of God as transcendental, personal and ethical, as in the monotheistic religions of West Asian origin. Clearly, the emissary or ethical approach fits better with the views propounded by the powers-that-be in most modern states, in their concern for economic development and the shaping of participatory citizenship (cf. Benjamin 1988). It certainly accords well with the religious style currently encouraged by the federal government of Malaysia—the country in which the events recounted here took place.

In the late 1970s many of the Temiars, a tribal Orang Asli (Aboriginal) people living in the interior of Kelantan state (see Map 1), became followers of a highly rationalised version of the Baha'i religion. The religion was taught to them by young Temiars whose actions were rather like those of Weber's emissary prophet. I had studied the Temiars' indigenous animistic religion in detail some fifteen years earlier (see Benjamin 1967a, 1979, 1994), and their decision to embrace Baha'i surprised me greatly when I first encountered it. On later visits, in the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, I discovered that their involvement with Baha'i had waned.² Instead, some of them were continuing to practise their earlier religion in much the same way as before, while others—acting more like exemplary prophets—had begun to follow innovative cults that synthesised the old religion with a variety of other sources. For reasons that will become apparent later, I shall refer to these three phases as 'enchantment', 'disenchantment' (or 'rationalisation'), and 're-enchantment'.

Baha'i receives no mention in the recently published studies of Temiar religious life by Marina Roseman (1991) and Sue Jennings (1994), even though the authors worked in the same part of Kelantan as I did. Jennings's work in the early 1970s was carried out before Baha'i entered the scene, and Roseman's started in the early 1980s, after Baha'i had begun to weaken. If I had not chanced to visit the Temiars myself in 1979, at the height of the Baha'i period, the religion might have gone completely unnoticed—for, to my knowledge, the present essay is the only published account of Baha'i among the Temiars. It is therefore worth asking: would it have mattered if Temiar Baha'i *had* gone unnoticed? Indeed, should any importance be ascribed to an episode so brief that it *could* have gone unnoticed? The answer, I believe, is that despite its apparently fleeting nature, Baha'i among the Temiars was indeed significant—and that it is the sociology of Max Weber, rather than conventional ethnological analysis, that will best help us to delineate that significance.

Since the Baha'i religion has hardly ever been the object of ethnographic or sociological study,³ I shall take this opportunity to give a fairly complete account of my field materials.

My main concern, however, is not with Baha'i as such, but with the general sociology of Temiar religious life over the past thirty years. I must confess at the outset that, because I have done little fieldwork in Temiar country since 1979, my data get thinner as they get more recent. My materials on the 'rationalisation' and 're-enchantment' parts of the story are therefore spotty: in particular, I have no quantitative data on the numbers of people who converted to Baha'i. But I *was* able to observe Baha'i practice directly among the Temiars in 1979, and to talk to several of the primary actors (as well as dissenters), during the early stages of the 'rationalisation' phase. Thus, while it may lack sociological rigour, my account should nevertheless contribute to the study of Temiar (and broader Malaysian) social history, and help to relate events in one small part of the world to processes that are occurring elsewhere.⁴

The Temiar people

The Temiars inhabit the upland parts of Kelantan, Perak and northern Pahang. They constitute the third largest group among the Orang Asli populations of Peninsular Malaysia, but culturally and linguistically, they effectively form the largest uniform group. The Temiars are broadly similar to the other Mon-Khmer-speaking hill peoples of mainland Southeast Asia. They have followed their own unexportable, localised religion in an area where the religion of civilisation was formerly Mahayana Buddhism and is now Islam. They have lived, probably for millennia, by swidden farming supplemented by hunting and fishing, while the rural plains-dwellers have lived variously by swiddening, trading, coastal fishing and, latterly, wet-rice cultivation.

In a country where indigenous records extend to the fourteenth century, the Temiars have no recorded history or writing of their own. But this does not mean that they have remained outside of history, for their circumstances have witnessed several changes of direction, in step with changes elsewhere in the Peninsula and beyond.⁵ Consider only the following examples:

- Large numbers of millennium-old Mahayana-Buddhist votive tablets have recently been found in parts of Temiar country.⁶
- There are Tai, Sanskritic and pre-Malay Austronesian loan words in the Temiar language.
- The considerable dialectal uniformity and morphological regularity of the Temiar language suggest that, though the Temiars constitute a segmentary, politically non-centralised population, they have somehow managed to produce a degree of language standardisation.
- Temiar isolation—especially from neighbouring Malay communities—was greater after the Second World War than it was before. On the other hand, their contact with British, Australian and Malaysian security forces, and with Communist insurgents, was sometimes intense during the succeeding Emergency.

As of 1988, the Temiars numbered more than 12,000 souls, and now probably number over 13,000. Their overall population density was about two persons per square kilometre,

although local densities were higher. Until the 1970s, they were living in small or very small villages, lying some kilometres from each other. The village populations ranged from one dozen to about 150, with a mode of about thirty. In such circumstances, and with kinship and relative age as the main principles of social categorisation, relations were necessarily mostly of the 'face-to-face' type. As discussed in my various papers on Temiar social organisation (see the References), Temiar society has usually been highly solidary at the village level⁷—though this is now changing, in step with the massive changes that have taken place more broadly in Malaysian society over the past thirty years.

In the rural areas, a great deal of government-directed resettlement has taken place, in both Malay and Orang Asli communities, partly in response to the government's security-related relocation programmes in the 1970s. Many Temiars have accordingly made a shift from tribal autonomy to a more peasant-like or proletarian status, and a few have even become entrepreneurial businessmen. Nowadays, following a generation of primary education, most Temiar youngsters are literate in Malay, the national language. But they still live in relative isolation, for no paved roads pass through Temiar country; at most, there are tracks accessible only to four-wheel-drive vehicles. This (among other factors) has greatly restricted the Temiars' access to secondary and tertiary education—especially as compared to the situation among the other large Orang Asli groups, who now count several university graduates among their numbers.

In this study I trace the connection between these broader social changes and the religious life of the Temiars, especially as manifested in the south-western corner of Kelantan state.

Enchantment

Desultory reports on the 'Northern Sakai', as the Temiars were then usually known, survive from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but intensive ethnographic research began only in the 1930s, with the work of H. D. ('Pat') Noone, the staff ethnologist at the Perak Museum. His unfinished account (Noone 1936) concentrated on three main issues: the environment, both natural and social; Temiar social organisation at the village level; and his own proposals for the setting up of Temiar reserves in Perak state and for the enacting of protective legislation. The latter were eventually incorporated into the code of operation of the Malaysian Department of Aboriginal Affairs or JOA,⁸ which was first set up in the 1950s. Since then the JOA has been the single most important factor in the shaping of Orang Asli society.

Of more immediate relevance to the study of Temiar religion is Noone's emphasis on the highly communal, violence-avoiding, character of Temiar society. Although he never published a detailed analysis of this topic, he presented some lectures on it in England in the late 1930s, possibly with the intention of developing his ideas into a doctoral thesis.⁹ The thesis was never written, but Noone's association at that time with a freelance psychoanalyst, Kilton Stewart, led eventually to the wide dissemination of the view that the Temiars held the secret to the maintenance of world peace through their supposed discovery of a technique of controlled dream-maturation.

Noone's role in this is still a matter for debate. Stewart's synthesis first appeared in the

relatively staid form of a doctoral thesis in Anthropology (1947) at the London School of Economics. Later, he set up a psychotherapeutic practice in New York based on an increasingly flamboyant version of what was eventually to become known as 'Senoi dreamwork'. The reprinting of some of Stewart's more messianic papers (1951, 1953, 1954, 1962) after his death in the 1960s led to a flowering of 'Senoi dreamwork' groups, especially in the USA. By this time, the Temiars of popular imagination outside Malaysia had become completely mythologised, while researchers working directly with the Temiars in Malaysia had to deal with a quite different reality. In the last few years the supposed 'Senoi' psychotherapy has been brought into direct confrontation with Senoi (i.e., Temiar and Semai) ethnology. This was spurred mainly by Robert Dentan's widely read and very different account (1968a/1979) of how the Semais (the Temiars' southern neighbours) maintain their non-violent approach to life.¹⁰

Post-War research on Temiar culture began with Iskandar Carey, who headed the JOA in the 1960s. His accounts of the Temiars (1961, and parts of 1976) concentrated on their social organisation and language, but he also incorporated a few details on Temiar religion. I first entered the field in 1964–65, working initially in the same area that Carey had studied. My published accounts of Temiar social organisation, ethnohistory, religion and language (see References) are based on that intensive fieldwork, and on some follow-up visits in the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Succeeding my own Temiar work are the important studies by Sue Jennings (1995) and Marina Roseman (1991). These are based on the doctoral research they did in the 1970s and 1980s respectively, in the same area that Carey and I had worked in. Their intensive, but independent, research into Temiar life approached the materials from angles not considered in the earlier workers' studies. Jennings, a professional drama therapist, worked on Temiar body movement, dance and socialisation, while Roseman's account is based on Temiar music and mediumship, and on their aural domain generally. We thus now possess a fairly rich body of materials relating to Temiar religion, and the time has come to subject them to some sociological analysis.

Temiar animism¹¹

As noted, the so-called 'Senoi dreamwork' practised in the USA bears only a spurious relation to the practices of the Malaysian Aborigines, but this revelation has left undisclosed the reasons for the high regard that the Senoi peoples do hold for dreams and trance states. If the Temiars' propensity for dream-derived activities does have anything to do with their reasonably good mental health, this would result not from any psychotherapeutic counselling techniques, but from the way in which their trancing and (lucid) dreaming puts them in direct touch with what their cosmological notions lead them to think of as the fundamental basis of existence.¹²

Like everybody else, Temiars are forced to map less graspable notions onto more familiar surrogates (cf. Harris 1980: 44–78). The Temiar mode of surrogation represents the cosmos, and the religious and social relations that occur within it not in terms of things or words but in terms of the direct experience that individual human beings have of their own subjectivity. This psychocentrism is founded, moreover, on a thoroughly dialectical orientation of atten-

tion as between Self and Other. Unlike more familiar modes of orientation, in which either Self or Other is suppressed as the explicit focus of attention,¹³ the dialectical mode takes as its starting point the very mutuality of Self and Other. In Temiar culture, this dialectic serves as the tacit, pre-reflective notion out of which coherence is constructed: the Temiar Self can be focused on and talked about, not as an autonomous entity, but only in ways that also implicate Other (and vice versa).

This construction derives its plausibility from individual Temiars' experience of their own subjectivity as simultaneously a controlling actor and an undergoing patient. Verbally, the closest they come to articulating this central unspoken mystery is when talking of the various communicable-with subjectivities (or 'souls') that are thought of as animating the people, animals, plants and other salient things that inhabit their world. In human beings these subjectivities are the *hup* 'heart' and the *rəwaay* 'head-soul',¹⁴ the corporeal seats of doing (or willing) and of experiencing (or undergoing), respectively. The same animistic imagery extends throughout the rest of creation: any entity which appears capable of attracting to itself the attention of a human being is thought of as being able to do so by virtue of the simultaneously *hup*- and *rəwaay*-like subjectivity that constitutes its essential core. The same holds, in reverse, for the Temiar supposition that non-human entities too can become aware of and act upon the subjectivity of individual human beings.¹⁵

The dialectical mutuality of agent and patient, subject and object, colours all domains of the Temiar worldview. Ordinary social relations (as already mentioned) exhibit a complicated balance between extreme communalism and extreme individual autonomy, which would be very difficult to maintain under any non-dialectical mode of orientation. The cosmos itself is thought of as a subjectivity, linked somehow with thunder. It is simultaneously both the creator and the world it creates, constantly employing the bootstrap cosmogonic power of its own imagination to maintain the differentiated character of the physical world as the Temiars know it. If human beings (or any other agency) should by their actions distract the cosmos's attention away from this task, then it is thought likely that the cosmos will de-differentiate, through the agency of thunder (*Karey*, the cosmos's voice) and flood, into a muddy undifferentiated chaos. If that should happen, everything in this world would lose its identity and disappear, through the cosmic merging of above and below, subjectivity and objectivity.

Plants and animals are thought to partake in this interplay just as fully as human beings. The temporarily disembodied upper- and lower-body souls of various mountains, animals and plants (seasonal fruit trees, especially) become the personal spirit-guides to which Temiars direct their religious action. These spirits are called by various special names, but they are uniformly reported to take the same shape when they appear in (lucid) dreams¹⁶ or trances: upper-body souls become young men or women, lower-body souls become tigers of varying stripes.

Individuals enter into initial communication with their spirit-guides through dreams. If they feel so inclined, they may then make their spirit-guide's power-for-good available to the rest of the community by serving as a *halaa*?—someone adept at spirit-mediumship. Mediumship centres on night-time trance-dancing ceremonies involving one or more *halaa*?, performing to the accompaniment of contrapuntally sung music. Each song is supposedly passed on by its composer (the spirit-guide) to its initial performer (the *halaa*?) in revelations

that occur while the latter is in a waking dream, most typically around dawn. The *halaa*? will often be called upon to perform healing rituals on the sick during the ceremonies. But he (sometimes she) may also be asked to do so in non-ceremonial circumstances during the daytime.

Trancing and lucid dreaming are altered states of consciousness in which one becomes simultaneously one's own subject and object, since one is then *undergoing* whatever one is *doing*. In Temiar terms, as various grammatical constructions indicate, these are *activities* in which one's *rəwaay* is experiencing what one's *hup* is simultaneously willing into existence. Trance, for example, is talked of as 'forgetting one's *hup*'; but the trancer still retains his or her own *rəwaay*, or there would otherwise be no means of experiencing the trance. Lucid dreaming, on the other hand, requires one to retain one's *hup*, as the locus of one's active participation in whatever is going on in the dream (which, in turn, is thought of as being located in one's *rəwaay*'s experience). Thus, the *rəwaay* ~ *hup* dialectic is founded on the trance- and lucid-dream-experience of simultaneously undergoing and controlling the products of one's own imagination, as if those products were autonomous 'real-world' entities. By giving themselves over to trance and lucid-dreaming, Temiars thereby enable themselves to experience directly the self-same subjective processes that the cosmos itself is thought to employ in keeping itself going. But that experience is ineffable in character, formed of notions, not concepts. It involves the dreamer or trancer in a symbolic condensation that fuses mind, body, social relations and the world onto a dialectically self-transforming, indescribable (and hence unspoken) unity. Relatively few Temiars become specialists in these activities, but virtually all seek to enter into trance and lucid dreaming on occasion, if only once in their lives. They thus disguise the surrogational character of their psychocentrically constructed cosmos by fusing it with what for them is the 'really real'—the direct experience of controlling and being controlled by the creatures of their own imagination. In this way, they provide themselves with an authentically unmediated experience of the very state-of-mind that supposedly holds everything together on both the cosmic and mundane levels.¹⁷

The ceremonial centrepiece of Temiar life consists of public spirit-mediumship, performed at night inside the house, and involving choral singing, dance and/or trance. (These

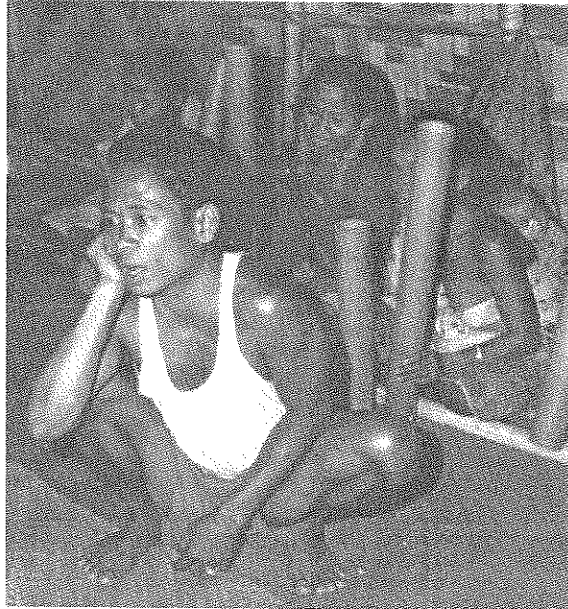


Figure 1

**A lead singer and chorus at a *gənaabag*
Humid village, Kelantan, 1964**

[For notes on this and the other photographs, see Appendix 2]

activities continued even in communities that adopted the Baha'i religion.) The sessions are known as *gənabag* 'singsongs' and are put on whenever there is a demand for shamanic healing rituals, or someone's spirit-guide has indicated in a dream that it wishes to be entertained, or simply for musical entertainment without overt religious aim. (See Figures 1 and 2: the first photograph was taken at an amusement session without mediumship, the second at a mediumistic session.) Most of the community is involved, with the women and children singing responses in overlapping canon to the lead verses sung by one or more mediums. (See Roseman 1984 for an account of this musical structure, and Jennings 1985 for the associated dance techniques.) The song lyrics are thought of as the spirit-guide's own, sung *through*—not by—the medium. A much rarer kind of performance involves tiger-spirit shamanism, performed by a medium squatting within a special palm-leaf hut set up inside the house. This is performed only by a so-called 'big' *halaa*?, without dancing, with the fires extinguished, and with distinctively minor-mode melodies (e.g., band 17 in Roseman 1995).



Figure 2
Chorus of children
and young women
at a séance, Jak,
Kelantan, 1965

Other rituals are performed more casually and on a small scale; they are typically 'magical' in character. These include the pouring of warmed (i.e., 'enculturated') water over a newly delivered woman or into the post-holes of a new house, and the special treatment accorded to some specially selected rice grains at the beginning of the planting season. There are also what might be called anti-rituals. These are an open-ended collection of rather oddly chosen acts that must be avoided if the thunder deity is not to strike. One should not laugh at butterflies, display coloured mats outdoors, dress animals in human clothing, laugh too loudly, and so on. Such acts are classed as *misik* (probably from the Malay *bising* 'disturbing noise'), and seem to have in common the property of attracting the undue attention.¹⁸ As already explained, one should avoid disturbing the cosmos's attention for fear of causing disastrous flood and storm. If these do nevertheless occur, then individuals who feel themselves guilty of having committed *misik* might slash their shin with a bamboo sliver, gather up some of the blood, mix it with water, and throw it up as an appeasement offering to Karey, the thunder deity. This blood sacrifice is performed among other Orang Asli groups

(especially the Semang), on whom it has occasioned a secondary literature,¹⁹ but it is (now?) very rarely performed among the Temiars.

Temiar ideas about disease reflect these broader cosmic and animistic conceptions, and also the central position of the *halaa?* mediums in Temiar life. Diseases are largely seen as due to the improper interpenetration of domains or spiritual agencies that should remain separate. This can occur between spatial domains, or through soul-loss and spirit-invasion. The attendant symptoms do not always fit tidily into a biomedical framework of analysis, though they are certainly often real enough. Thus gout-like or arthritic symptoms are often explained as the result of getting one's leg trapped in mud: human beings belong in the domain of off-the-ground, not in-the-ground. Likewise, it is dangerous to let ants carry one's left-over food underground, for fear of severe headache or other afflictions. Depression or neurotic symptoms may be regarded as due to *reywaay* 'loss of the *rəwaay* head-soul'. More severe psychosis-like behaviour may be thought of as due to invasion by the disembodied soul of an animal. Contravention of food taboos (most of which are either completely personal or affect young children and their parents) is often blamed for convulsive and other symptoms (Benjamin 1994: 53–57).

Treatment includes herbal and mineral remedies ingested or rubbed on the body, shaded segregation within the house, casual laying on of hands, 'blowings' performed through cupped hands by anyone with *halaa?* powers, or full ceremonial shamanism performed in trance by several *halaa?* acting together. The spiritual treatment offered by the *halaa?* (see Figure 3) must be judged successful in psychiatric terms: certainly, Temiars express themselves uneasy at the thought of falling ill with no *halaa?* to help them. Jennings's work on the attendant dance and body movement (1985, 1995) and Roseman's (1991) on the music has gone a long way to explaining the therapeutic efficacy of Temiar mediumship.



Figure 3

**Mediumistic treatment at a séance
Lambok, Kelantan, 1970**

Analysis: Temiar animism as many-stranded

The indigenous religion of the Temiars thus exhibits a unitary, monophysite—but dialectical—view of the person and the cosmos: what goes for people goes for everything else in nature too (cf. Needham 1964: 148). Elsewhere, I have discussed why the Temiars should have opted for such a highly dialectical approach to life (see especially Benjamin 1985, 1986, 1987a, 1993a). There is no room to re-state the arguments here, except to note that the reasons involve the Temiars' long-term relations with other Peninsular populations,

considered in archaeological, linguistic, ecological, social-organisational and political terms. It should be noted, though, that the general shape of Temiar ideas is typical of traditions that have not been reorganised to fit the dualistic, salvationist approaches propagated by most of the historical world religions. And it is even less congruent with the 'rational', intellectualised religious styles favoured by governments concerned with economic 'development' and 'nation-building'. In this respect, Temiar religion is an archetypal example of the kind of activity identified by Ernest Gellner (1988: 43–49) as 'many-stranded'.

For Gellner, the classical sociological distinction between *many-stranded* and *single-stranded* activities provides the key to explaining the 'primitive'/'modern' distinction.²⁰ Moderns wrongly assume that 'primitive' many-stranded activities are single-stranded. Thus, Gellner says, the Nuers' ritual identification of cucumbers with sacrificial animals (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 141–142, 203–204) has been interpreted single-strandedly by modern-minded scholars *either* as making statements about empirical reality *or* as recording the Nuers' loyalty to a given social order. But the many-stranded Nuers themselves had no need for such distinctions; indeed, they probably *depended* on the absence of such distinctions. For moderns, on the other hand, the division of labour, the separation of functions, is 'inscribed into the very constitution of nature and thought.'

This leads Gellner to re-define Weber's ideas about rationality. Where Weber talked of (formal) rationality as the belief that one can in principle master all things by calculation, Gellner re-states it as 'the single-minded pursuit of a single aim (say maximum economic gain)'. This, of course, is precisely what is precluded in many-stranded situations. Thus, a direct connection can be drawn between division of labour, population size and rationality. The fewer the people, the *more* conflated things get, whereas 'large societies can afford the luxury of neatly separated activities.'²¹

Whenever Temiar life gets increasingly single-stranded—as it did for many of them in the 1970s—the indigenous religious framework comes to be seen as too complex to be put into words and talked about explicitly. From a modernist point of view, indigenous Temiar religion measures up poorly against the more easily expressible ideas of the various monotheistic religions, with their written sources and ready catechisms. Temiars who have taken up more modern ways of life will therefore find it harder to talk about the older religion, and far from easy to maintain its details in their own minds. Temiar religion does not even possess a name, let alone a formulated doctrine. At best, its followers would be thought of as possessing 'superstitions' or 'beliefs', but not a rationally ordered book-based 'religion'.

As Gellner points out (1988: 43–49), the ease with which things can be talked about relates directly to the shift from many-stranded to single-stranded activities. In many-stranded situations, language-use conflates several different purposes and meanings, without privileging any one of them. But the single-stranded situations typical of modern life privilege the *referential* use of language, and all other modes of language-use are demoted to secondary status or treated as metaphor. Such referential language-use may lack excitement—'without absurdity, no logical fireworks' (Gellner 1988: 49)—but it is an eminently more amenable form of discourse for those who wish to lead rationalised, 'modern' lives, and it is accordingly favoured by the proponents of more intellectualised varieties of religion.

This does not mean that individual Temiars were never capable of standing apart from

their religious institutions to pass critical or even dissenting comments on them (cf. Bellah 1969: 267–268). In 1965, for example, Penghulu Dalam, the headman of my home village of Humid (*Hāmij*), expressed scepticism about spiritual matters.²² He asserted, for example, that he did not believe in an afterlife, and that when we die we just rot like logs. The conversation was couched in terms that would have been thought atheistic—or at least single-strandedly rational—in other contexts. Yet even in those days, Dalam would sometimes perform his own spirit-guide’s songs; and later, in the 1970s, he began practising as a ‘big’ tiger-spirit shaman. (He figures as a medium in both Roseman’s and Jennings’s accounts.) To my mind, this shows that, even if Dalam may not in *all* senses have ‘believed’ what he was saying, it was at least possible for him (and hence others) to mount a rhetoric of standing apart from Temiar culture in a manner usually thought more typical of disenchanted situations.

But the situation was even more complicated than this. In my PhD thesis I reported a further conversation with Dalam on a similar theme. This conversation was indeed full of ‘logical fireworks’.

For months he had tried to persuade me that any claims that Temiar shamans could turn into tigers were quite unfounded, despite what was said by everyone else. But once when discussing his visits to town he described, to my great surprise, how he had seen a Batek headman [from an Orang Asli group living to the east of the Temiars] become tiger-like in his sleep, growling and clawing—*na-lāās* ‘he had metamorphosed.’ This took place in the hotel room they were sharing in Kuala Kerai. When I challenged him about his earlier apparent disbelief in spiritual matters (which had expressed itself in other respects also) he replied that it was the Temiars he had doubts about: the people *kēed ?is* ‘at the base of the sun [i.e., the east]’ most certainly *could* change into tigers, and frequently did. Furthermore, he was in consequence afraid to have too much contact with the Menriq and Batek tribes. (Benjamin 1967: 279, with some revised spellings.)

What are we to make of this apparently vacillating way of talking? Gellner (1988: 52) notes that although traditional society has many domains of discourse that are impermeable to empirical evidence it also has a few areas that *are* so permeable. So, while the bulk of traditional language-use may indeed be ritualistic—what Malinowski called ‘phatic communion’—there is still the possibility of a more referential usage. ‘A nature independent of society cannot be avoided; but there is no need normally to systematize it into a single socially independent, unified system.’ However, encounters with reality under such circumstances are themselves many-stranded and the pure ‘empirical’ content can therefore easily be over-ridden by the other, more ‘ritualist’ dimensions.

Gellner’s argument about language-use relates directly to proposals I have made myself (Benjamin 1988: 27–29) with regard to the emergence of the modern state. *Gemeinschaft* (local community) and *Gesellschaft* (wider society) were *both* present in pre-modern societies; but, through the deliberate *suppression* of *Gemeinschaft*, only *Gesellschaft* has been allowed to persist. Thus we may assume that rationality or disenchantment in Weber’s sense is not simply the outcome of certain circumstances of life, but that it needs also to be constantly engineered by those who have an interest in its maintenance. Keeping people disenchanted and (formally) rational requires the expenditure of political energy—a point I

return to at the very end of this paper. But there was no such pressure on Dalam when he made the comments reported above. He could pass in and out of disenchantment with such ease precisely because his broader situation remained many-stranded. Feelings of 'bad faith' at talking like this (cf. Berger 1966: 164–171) were unlikely to trouble him, as they probably would if he had been living in a single-stranded situation—like the modern intellectuals for whom this paper is written or like some of the younger Temiars I am about to discuss.

As already noted, a degree of single-strandedness did eventually emerge in Temiar country. Many Temiars—though not Dalam himself—responded to this new circumstance by embracing apparently 'rational' religions that were easier to put into words. Some became Muslims, especially in Perak, where the state government had been organising conversion activities among the Orang Asli for many years. Here, however, I am concerned with those Temiars, especially in Kelantan, who turned to the highly monotheistic Baha'i faith during the 1970s. As far as I could tell from my discussions with them (see below), they were looking for an organised religion comparable to those that the Malaysian authorities had been urging all citizens to follow. Baha'i, as I shall show in the next section, suited these mostly younger Temiars' desire for an easily explained religion, as well as for one that suited their emerging sense of individualistic modernity.

Disenchantment

The original push for the Temiars to embrace a named religion came from regular exhortations on the government-run radio stations that every citizen should have an *agama* (or *ugama*), a religion-of-the-book.²³ Since the 1970s, articles in the JOA's in-house magazine, *Nong Pai*, had made it clear that the Orang Asli should preferably choose Islam.²⁴ In most of the Peninsular states, both the JOA and the state Muslim missionary authorities have been mounting conversion campaigns in the more accessible Orang Asli communities. They have built prayer-houses (*surau*) in the villages, and in some cases they have given preferential welfare to those individuals who have become Muslims. This is probably in line with the official treatment of the Orang Asli as potential or incomplete Malays, for they are included within the 'Malay' figures in the published versions of the national censuses. Governmental policy towards the Orang Asli has long proposed that their integration into the broader Malaysian community should be brought about by assimilating them into the Malay community, which by local custom and national law is Sunni Muslim by religion. JOA officers have been heard to comment that the Orang Asli 'problem'—usually defined as that of poverty—would disappear if they became Muslims, and hence Malays. In September 1996, the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Land and Co-operative Development (Datuk Nik Mohamed Zain bin Nik Yusof), gave the following justification for the Federal government's newly announced review of legislation relating to Orang Asli land rights:

If these amendments are made, Orang Asli can be more easily integrated into Malay society. It will help them to embrace Islam and follow Malay customs too. (*Straits Times* (Singapore), 3 September 1996: 16.)

This statement was made at 'the first national conference of aborigines from Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah', representing '95 tribal groups with a combined population of

over two million people in Malaysia.²⁵ It must be assumed, then, that religious assimilation of the Orang Asli is still a goal of Federal policy.²⁶

However, the Malaysian government's pro-religion stance is driven not simply by piety or cultural ideology, but also by a quite instrumental concern with administration, social control, ethnicity and modernisation. For example, campaigns on Malaysian television have urged that it is one's *religious* duty to keep clean or to arrive at work on time. Over-enthusiastic displays of Islamic piety that go beyond the bounds of the regularly required practices have either been contained or co-opted by the authorities. The officially supported forms of Islam correspond to the rational, urban type, and not to the mystical, charismatic types, which have a history of being suppressed in Malaysia as deviant teachings (*ajaran sesat*).²⁷ On the other hand, the federal government also avoids the more legalistic approaches: they have consistently opposed the application of Shari'a law to anything other than marriage, divorce, inheritance or—optionally—Islamic banking practices. They have also opposed the imposition of social constraints on women of the sort that typify some other Muslim countries. Indeed, the government has portrayed itself as a positive example of a society that can be both Muslim and gender-blind. Yet, at the same time, official Malaysian Islam has also tended to support a hierarchical, state-connected orientation, rather than the activist egalitarianism more typical of urban Islam further west.²⁸

There is a further complication: Malaysia is a federation of partly autonomous states (mostly sultanates), each with its own local government in control of land policy and Islamic institutions. The JOA too operates at the state as well as federal level. The situation of the Orang Asli with respect to Islam therefore varies from state to state. The Temiars (discounting the very few who live in Pahang) are roughly divided into those who live in Perak (66%) and those who live in Kelantan (34%). While many of the Perak Temiars have converted to Islam, at least nominally, there are very few such cases in Kelantan.²⁹ On the other hand, it seems that the majority of the Baha'i conversions took place in Kelantan. Given that Islam has played a bigger political role in Kelantan than elsewhere in the country—it has been ruled for two periods by an overtly Islamist party, the PAS—why should this be?³⁰

One obvious reason for the difference between the two states is that in Perak many more Temiars have lived near road-heads than in Kelantan, where the bulk of Temiar villages lie beyond the access of land transport.³¹ But this is not the only reason. It is the very strictness of organised Islam in Kelantan that has allowed the Temiars there a noticeably higher degree of religious choice than is available in practice to their cousins in Perak. The Kelantan state government has a special bureau for non-Muslim affairs, which paradoxically protects the Orang Asli against the kind of Islamic proselytisation that characterises Perak, among other states. There is also evidence to suggest that the relatively greater piety of the Islamist politicians in Kelantan makes them more aware of the formal Islamic doctrine that conversion is acceptable only if the converts understand what they are doing and are acting of their own free will. Conversions brought about for other reasons would presumably be less acceptable to the Islamic clergy in Kelantan. These very opinions were expressed by Temiars at Lambok when I visited them briefly in April 1994—which shows that they had a good understanding of the broader situation.³²

Even for those Orang Asli who *are* interested in adopting a formal religion, political push-factors and linguistic pull-factors make the choice between Baha'i and Islam less than neutral. First, the push-factors. Some of the authorities in Malaysia have continued to regard Baha'i as an Islamic heresy, although it has been officially recognised as a religion. And, as already noted, Baha'i is sometimes seen as inappropriate for adoption by the Orang Asli—a population usually viewed by government officers as Malay-like, and hence as potentially Muslim. As I shall show later, these factors did indeed cause problems for some of the Temiars who adopted the Baha'i faith.

The main pull-factor concerns language. In addition to English, Baha'i employs Malay (the national language) and various Aslian languages in its liturgy and catechismal literature, which can therefore be more easily understood by the Orang Asli. Islam, on the other hand, employs Arabic, a language that is understood by none of the Orang Asli nor by most of those who seek to convert them to Islam. While the use of an opaque language usually does not matter to those born into a religion—especially Islam, with its great emphasis on the *sound* of its liturgy—it is likely to weigh heavily on anyone wishing to convert to a new religion.

This does not mean that there are no Muslim Temiars. Reportedly, a sizeable number of Temiars in Perak have become Muslims in recent years, but the religious nature and social effects of this change cannot be characterised as yet, for no detailed research has been done on the issue.

While Temiar conversion to Islam is mostly a new phenomenon, this is not the first example of religious communication between Temiars and Malays. Many of the Malays currently living in the Kuala Betis area are the descendants of those who, two or three generations ago, regularly engaged in joint animistic practices with the Temiars living there. On the Temiar side, this led to the development of a ritual genre known as *pəhnəɔh gəb* 'Malay-style mediumship' (Benjamin 1967: 281–284). As Roseman has pointed out, this genre (at least as practised around Kuala Betis) involves solo singing, accompanied only by a drum and bamboo stampers—but no female chorus. Given the importance that Temiars normally ascribe to the females 'following' (*wad*) in canon along the 'path' (*nəŋ*, i.e., 'melody') of the medium, this probably marked a significant break in their view of things. In Roseman's words (1984: 427):

The suppression of the chorus in the 'Malay-style ceremonies' heralds the emergence of the audience in Temiar musical events. It presents a marked contrast with the choral response of Temiar-type ceremonies, which actively integrate the *halaa*? and the community. The emergent audience of Malay-type ceremonies polarizes the participant and the nonparticipant. This process finds its parallel in the formalization of leadership into ranked headmanship with the concomitant increase in the distance between the leaders and the led. Both trends arise through historical interactions with hierarchical Malay society.

Thus, the Kuala Betis Temiars had already received intimations of single-strandedness before the Second World War, and it is perhaps not surprising that this is the area that has since witnessed a greater intensity of spontaneous religious developments, both towards rationalisation and re-enchantment, than most other parts of Temiar country.

In the rest of this section I shall concentrate not on Islam but on the Baha'i religion, with special attention to the ethnography of its brief implantation among the Kelantan Temiars in the 1970s. I shall then try to draw some sociological conclusions about what the whole episode means.

Baha'i: an outline

There is space here only for a summary account of the history, doctrine and general sociology of Baha'i. The 'new' religion of Baha'i arose as an offshoot of a Shi'a sect (the Babis) in Persia during the 1860s. By a series of transformations it has now become a highly rationalised monotheistic religion, considered to have been founded by the prophet Baha'u'llah (or Baha'u'llah). Baha'i is attractive mainly to members of the urban middle-classes in various parts of the world, although rural communities also exist. MacEoin's account (1985) notes that there are underlying social strains in Baha'i—between egalitarianism and authoritarianism, and between theology and ritual practice. It is not clear to what extent that insight is yet relevant to the situation in Malaysia, however.

According to MacEoin, the Baha'i view of history is very linear, and it deals in long time-spans (500,000 years). It regards itself as the current, but not the final, manifestation in a long series of monotheistic revelations. For Baha'is these include Buddhist, Hindu and Confucian sources alongside the more conventionally monotheistic traditions, from which it clearly in fact derives. (Together, these are the 'Nineteen Religions' mentioned in Baha'i texts.) Baha'i nevertheless claims explicitly to be a new religion, not a sect of Islam.

Baha'i preaches obedience to the state, but it also proclaims the oneness of humankind. As a corollary it insists on education and equal rights, especially of women and men. It rejects priesthood. It approves of science, preaches monogamy, treats public service as a form of worship, enjoins hard work, and supports the search for an institutional basis for world peace. Accordingly, it claims universality as *the* world religion of the future.

Baha'i makes much use of local languages in its printed materials. In practice its major texts consist of English translations, rather than the original (bad) Arabic and Farsi. The texts are thus relatively accessible and not too mysterious, even if the English is often portentous and 'biblical' in style. The religion has been the most successfully missionised of the new religions in Africa, India, East Asia (although in the latter area it has received competition from other new religions recently). The first Westerners to convert to Baha'i did so as long ago as 1894.

The religion's earlier more charismatic mode of organisation lapsed with the death in 1957 of Shoghi Effendi, the last hereditary Guardian. Since then it has established a formally routinised structure of authority and local organisation. The National Assemblies are regulated by the Baha'i World Centre. Tight control is maintained over Baha'i publications. Since 1918, Baha'i has emphasised social and moral issues, rather than esoteric ones.

Baha'i in Malaysia

Baha'i is recognised by the Malaysian authorities as an autonomous and permitted religion. For example, since 1974, Baha'is in government service have been allowed to take leave on up to five of their nine annual religious holidays (*Malaysian Baha'i News*, vol. 9 (4): 38).

Membership of the religion, however, is permitted only to the non-Malay sectors of the population.

The Baha'i headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, which I visited in 1979 just after encountering the religion among the Temiars, was situated quite openly on a busy urban street. The men and women in charge of the centre were mostly Malaysian Chinese and Indians, and I got the impression that there was a high proportion of school-teachers among them. The considerable amount of literature available there was mainly in English, but there was also some in Malay (as the national language) and in several Sarawak languages. Baha'i also has followings among other Malaysian communities, in particular Indian estate workers, the Ibans of Sarawak and the Semais of Perak. A Semai man, Bah Deraoh, served as a Malaysian representative at the international Baha'i Congress in London as early as 1963 (*Malaysian Baha'i News* 6 (2), 1970: 5).³³

The only source available to me in reconstructing the history of Baha'i among the Orang Asli is the aforementioned *Malaysian Baha'i News*, a restricted-circulation publication that appeared between 1961 and 1974. The details that follow come from its pages.³⁴ Baha'i began its spread in Malaya around 1950; the first Malayan to convert, Mr Yang Kee Leong, did so in Seremban in 1953. In 1959 a few Orang Asli in the Semai village of Chang, Perak, converted to Baha'i under the guidance of Mr Yang. In 1964, the first 'Aborigine Teaching Committee' was formed, and the 'first translation of Baha'i into Asli dialect' (Semai) was done, by K. Krishnan. In the same year there was an attempt to ban the religion in Malaysia, but this was 'averted through legal action'. The 'first course for teachers to teach in Asli areas' was held at 'Teaching Institute Malacca' in 1969. In 1971, the Local Spiritual Assembly in Seremban became the headquarters of the 'Asli Committee', and 'Asli training courses' began. Translation of literature into five 'Asli dialects' was completed in 1971 by Lim Kok Hoon, as part of the world-wide Nine Year Plan. (The same Lim Kok Hoon was reported in the December 1968 issue, p. 15, as having translated the talk of a visiting Baha'i leader into the 'local dialect', presumably Semai, at Kampong Chang.) Most significantly, the first two 'Asli' Local Spiritual Assemblies were registered in 1973, at Kampung Sungei Jentong and Kampung Menderang, Perak—both, presumably, Semai settlements.

Baha'i among the Temiars

First reports

Although I had previously heard rumours of large-scale conversions of Temiars to Baha'i, the first sure information I received was at the end of January 1979, while carrying out exploratory fieldwork among the Lanohs and Temiars living at the large relocation settlement at Kuala Dala (*Denlaa?*), Perak. There, I was told by a Special Branch officer that the Kelantan Temiars had converted to Baha'i, especially in the Yai (*Yaay*), Perias (*Peryas*) and Lambok (*Lamug*) areas. (Lambok is situated in the downstream portion of the area in which Carey, Roseman, Jennings and myself had done most of our Temiar research.) A Semai man from the Baha'i 'headquarters' in Kampar, Perak, had been telling the Temiars that Baha'i was the 'Asal' ('original', but also 'Aboriginal') religion. The converts were giving frequent cash donations to the Baha'i headquarters; they practised a fasting period (*puasa*); they ate vegetarian food on Fridays; and they had been told that the original Baha'is may be seen in

Lasah (a village in Perak, on the borderland between Temiar and Malay country); their bodies were bear-like above, but human below. The Officer had sent a report about this to the Police in Ipoh, who in turn had sent a summary of it to the JOA.

Having previously encountered Baha'i as an urban religion in other parts of the world, and knowing that there were indeed some Semais who had become Baha'is (see Benjamin 1979: 24), I was able to recognise this account as a mixture of truths, half-truths, and downright mythopoeia. But I was unable to investigate the claims further until, a week later, I moved to the aforementioned Lambok, to re-visit the Temiars I had been working with since 1964.

The testimony of a non-Baha'i

At Lambok, Penghulu Dalam (who had moved there from Humid some years earlier) told me all he knew about Baha'i, even though he had not converted to the religion himself. He said that the first Temiar to bring the Baha'i religion into the area was Cik Gu Kermal (*Kermal*, official name Kamaruddin), from the village of Cherber (*Cerber*), a day's walk upstream. Kermal had that very day arrived at the settlement across the river from Lambok. The Baha'i leaders were all called 'Cik Gu'—the normal Malay title for a teacher—and there were many of them.

Kermal had first heard about Baha'i in Cherber. The news had reached there about three years previously (i.e., around 1976) from Temiars in Ulu Berok (*Bərək*, the headwaters of the Kelantan/Nenggiri river), two valleys away to the south. They had brought the religion from Berok through the intervening Ber (*Bər*) valley, to villages upstream from Cherber. The Ulu Berok people had studied Baha'i (in a place I wasn't able to identify) after some Semais from Bidor (Perak) had taught them that Ugama Baha'i was their own religion. The religion came from their own original god, Tohan (who was 'not the same as Allah').³⁵ They should now pray to Tohan by saying: *Aləwəh bəhaaʔ, bəhay ʔalah*.³⁶

Kermal had gone to Tapah town to work with the Baha'i centre ('HQ') there some two or three years earlier. When he first arrived in the Lambok area after his period in Tapah he said he would collect 50 cents from each person. People willingly contributed, especially in the villages of Belawan (*Bəlawan*), Bawik (*Bawīʔ*), Jias (*Jəyas*), Chengkelik (*Cəŋkəliʔ*) and Lambok (*Lamug*). The Kuala Betis (*Bək Bətus*) people refused, however, as they feared the Malays who were living nearby (and who were the descendants of the Malays who had lived there before the Second World War and the ensuing Emergency). Kermal had said he would take the money to Bidor or Tapah to a fund, from which each man would get a return of RM500 for each RM10, if he needed the money, as a kind of bank loan. (Dalam said he had heard that the Temiars in Telur (*Təluur*) village, Ulu Betis, had bought a battery-powered TV set from their contributions.) Kermal had also travelled north to the Yai valley, but Dalam didn't know how much money was collected there. Kermal then went to the town of Cameron Highlands, later returning with calligraphically inscribed plaques (*pələk*: see Figure 4) for the donors to wear around their necks as an overt sign that they had become Baha'is.³⁷

They were then taught to eat a communal feast once a week, but there were no food taboos. Before eating they were to pray by putting their hands together and raising them to their foreheads while chanting *ʔaləwəʔ bəhay*, and so on. Dalam had seen this once for himself, in the village across the river from his own, where the main group of Baha'is in that part of Temiar country lived. Further upstream, at Cherber, Dalam said that everyone had converted,

including one of my main helpers during my initial fieldwork in 1964 and an old man whom I had known well years before. At Hau (*Haw*), yet further upstream, the converts included Penghulu Hitam Tamboh—whom I had also known very well in the 1960s, and who figures as a singing medium in the recently published field recordings of Temiar music made by Marina Roseman (1995: Band 17). According to Dalam there was no Baha'i prohibition on trancing, and many of the converts were still keen *halaa*?, as I was able to confirm for myself a few days later.

Apparently the Baha'i leaders had warned people not to throw their plaques into the fire or there would be a flood; if they laughed at the pictures of the prophet Abdul Baha there would be a serious thunderstorm. (As mentioned earlier, these views derive from the indigenous religious framework.)

Dalam said that Kermal had claimed that the three most senior officers of the JOA—all of them Muslims whom he listed by name—had ordered the Orang Asli to become Baha'is. It had also been put around by some of the Baha'is in Hau that two of those officers and myself

had actually become Baha'is. (Later, I found out from Kermal himself that people had mistakenly confused our knowing *about* Baha'i as constituting membership of the religion.)

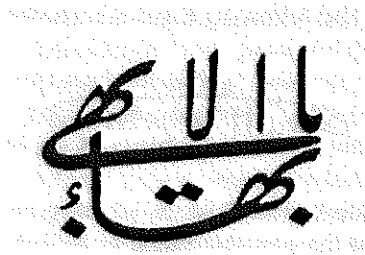


Figure 4

Calligraphic design on the *palek*

As the appointed chief of the area, Dalam had been visited the previous year by the authorities from Gua Musang, the nearest town and administrative centre. The Imam (mosque leader) and Kadi (Muslim judge), as well as the District Officer and the Malay Headman asked whether it was true that Temiars had 'entered' the Baha'i religion. Dalam replied that he had heard

about it but had hardly yet seen it for himself. He added that 'it was the Aboriginal (*Sarak*) custom to "follow" anything that came from outside.' The visitors then declared that Baha'i was 'deceiving', and came from outside the country. Islam was the proper religion of this area and, what's more, it did not collect any money from people.³⁸

The Baha'is at Lambok present themselves

The next day, a young man called Jamel (*Jamel*), whom I had known as *?adon* when he was a child, brought me all the Baha'i literature that was in the hands of the local leader, Cik Gu Damak. There were eight items in all, published by the Majlis Rohani Kaum Baha'i Malaysia [The Baha'i Spiritual Assembly of Malaysia], 32 Jalan Angsana, Setapak, Kuala Lumpur:

- *Majlis Rohani Tempatan* ['Local Spiritual Assemblies'], 1977, 12pp., proper printing. Instructions on forming local Baha'i groups, with rules of proper behaviour.
- *Bes* [badge] or *palek* [plaque] with writing in Arabic script. (See Figure 4.)³⁹
- *Ajaran-ajaran Baha'u'llah* ['The Teachings of Baha'u'llah'], 16pp. A catechism, with hymns at the end.
- *Marob Kalimat-kalimat Tjab-tjab Baha'i Lenglek: bahasa Malaysia (Malay), Loghat Temiar (a Malayan aboriginal dialect)* [Subtitled 'Some facts every Baha'i knows' in Temiar and Malay], 26pp. A few prayers, followed by a catechism. (See Figure 5.)⁴⁰

- *Kalender Baha'i* ['Baha'i Calendar']. Shows that there should be a feast-day (Khenduri) every 19 days; and it lists the 'Hari besar Baha'i', the Baha'i religious festivals.
- *Surat Khenduri Hari 19* ['Letter for the 19th-Day Feast'] 3pp. Cyclostyled, 24 June 1978. A newsletter, including news of a Kuching Chinese who had been expelled for contravening the Baha'i marriage laws [which are strictly monogamous].
- Photographs of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

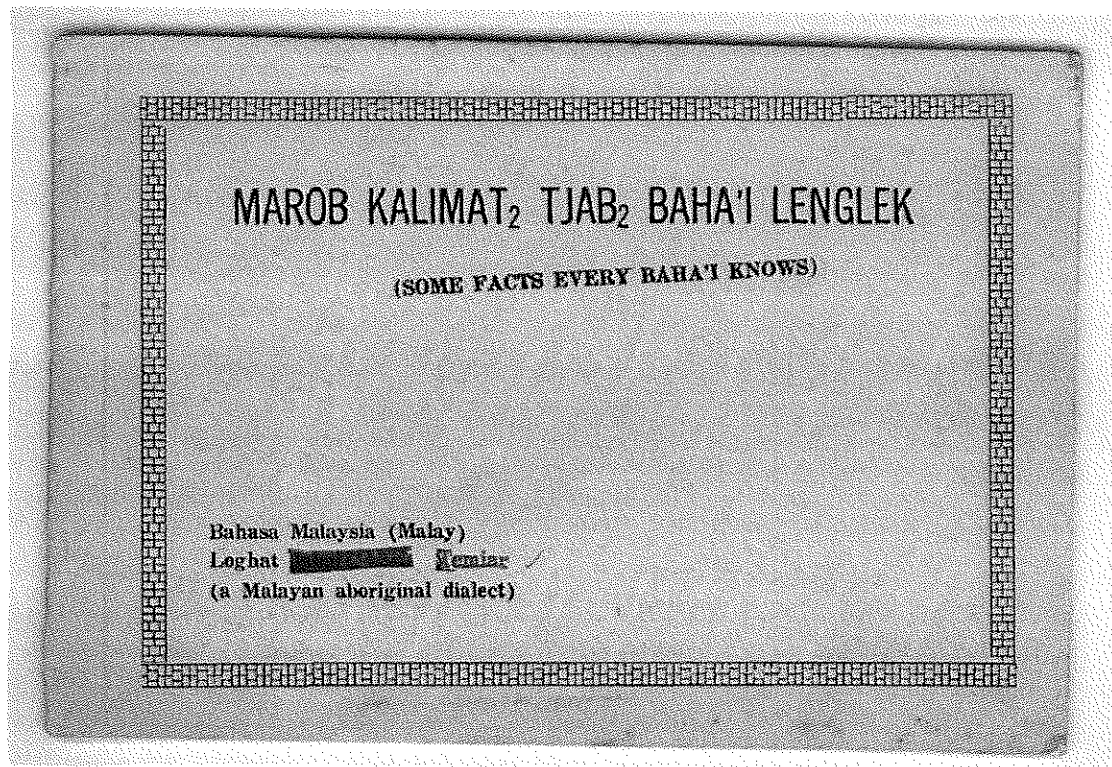


Figure 5

Front cover of a Baha'i book in Temiar

A discussion with Dalam and the mostly young Baha'is then produced the following points. First, the proselytising of Baha'i among the Kelantan Temiars was done by Temiars only. Literate Temiars were keener than the non-literate ones in performing their prayers and other duties. Second, there was a general fear that the JOA would cause trouble if they displayed the Baha'i icons, as the JOA officers downstream had already declared the religion to be *haram* 'religiously forbidden'. The JOA had especially hit hard at the collecting of money. Third, Jamel himself preferred Baha'i to Islam for two reasons: it did not involve any food taboos (he simply ignored the Baha'i prohibition on tobacco!), and the prayers could conveniently be said in Malay. (He couldn't read the so-called Temiar versions!) Fourth, no one recognised any conflict with older Temiar practices. Baha'i seemed to syncretise easily. Fifth, Jamel, at least, knew that the claim that Baha'i was the *asal* ('original') religion was meant to be a universal one, and not just for the Orang Asli. (But the possibility of de-

liberately confusing *Asli* 'Aboriginal' and *Asal* 'original' must have been too good to miss.) Six, the claims that flood and thunderstorms would result from wrong treatment of the icons were merely supposition on the part of the ignorant. It was not part of Baha'i as taught here.

Kermal, the subject of Dalam's account the day before, then turned up at the house with a host of his people. I immediately took the opportunity to talk directly with him, the first local Temiar to become a Baha'i. Kermal had left school in 1965, fourteen years earlier. He heard of a new religion among the Temiars of Sinderut, Ulu Berok, so he went there to learn all about it. At Fort Brook, also in Ulu Berok, there were both Semais and Temiars who had been on the Baha'i course at Tapah, and in 1975 he went there himself at their direction. He took a three-day course, under a Chinese named Leong Choo,⁴¹ and then returned to Cherber, his wife's village. There he taught people to 'pray' (for which he used the Malay word *sembahyang*), to follow the laws of the Malaysian government, and to follow the laws of Tohan, who was the creator of all—and who was the same as Alüj (*ʔaluj* 'last born': the mythic hero who created Temiar culture) and Allah.

They prayed in Temiar, 'like when we perform healing rituals (*soʔ*) and utter spells (*jampiiʔ*)', three times a day. Kermal himself taught them the words. He also taught the religion in Hau and the rest of the Perolak (*Perlobb*) valley. After about a year he came downstream to Lambok, and taught the religion there. Jamel and Kermal's younger brother Angah (*ʔanjah*) then also went on courses. Later, Ulu Betis was proselytised, but from Perak, over the watershed; from there, Baha'i spread across to the Perias and Yai valleys in Kelantan.

Kermal had since been on courses in Berinchang (near Cameron Highlands), Kuala Lumpur, Port Dixon and Seremban. There he told the various Baha'i assemblies about the threats issued by the JOA officials that Baha'i was not only 'religiously proscribed' (*haram*) but 'communist', and that they might be arrested by the Police or the Special Branch. Consequently, they had concealed all the signs of their religion. Kermal said that although there were some Chinese Baha'is in Kelantan at Kuala Kerai and Gua Musang, he had met them only when attending courses in the towns on the western side of the Peninsula.

I asked about the co-existence of Baha'i with indigenous Temiar religion. He explained this as being the gift of Tohan, for it is Tohan who gives *peʔnoʔ* '(spirit-)dreaming' to the *halaaʔs*. I then asked about Karey, the Temiar thunder-deity: if Tohan is the same as Alüj (Karey's younger brother), and if there can only be one god, then what about Alüj's elder brother? To this he replied that we must drop belief in Karey, because Karey only gives death, whereas Alüj/Tohan gives life. (This view does indeed accord well with the roles of these personages in Temiar mythology: cf. Benjamin 1967: 316–325.)

After this, they turned to me for advice. In face of pressure from the Kelantan JOA, should they secretly hold on to their books and pictures or should they simply give up the Baha'i religion? I replied that what really mattered was their own commitment, how *they* felt about it. Then Kermal's father said that they did want to keep their religion, but were afraid. Also, as Orang Asli, they were in the habit of merely following whatever outsiders offered them. But in the case of Islam, no one had ever properly *explained* the religion to them, nor were they in any position to give up the hunting and eating of game animals forbidden to Muslims. The Baha'i religion, on the other hand, was presented to them in plain Malay; it

fitted well with their beliefs; and it involved no change of ethnicity from Temiar to Malay.

My general impression was that they had no real interest, as yet, in the content of the Baha'i religion, but that they dearly wanted to have an 'ugama'. They certainly were cavalier about some of the rules (such as no smoking!), and their prayers, I suspected, were probably perfunctory. (Later, I found that this was not so.) They were not able to tell me *why* they wanted a religion, however—despite my attempts to demonstrate that they already had a religion, namely the one described in my PhD thesis!

A Baha'i prayer session and discussion

The following day (9 February 1979) I went with Dalam to a Baha'i prayer session across the river; Dalam too was curious. Strangely, although I had been in Lambok many times in the previous fifteen years, I had only once before crossed to the village on the other side, the inhabitants of which were within hailing distance of Lambok but belonged to a rather different kin network.

It took some time for people to turn up, and the women were in any case all away harvesting rice. Eventually, with about ten men sitting around the edge of the floor and with Kermal sitting on a mat at the centre, he read out the first few prayers in the little *Doa Baha'i* book. Although he had excused himself for using Malay, he did in fact read the Temiar version (perhaps for my benefit, or to impress me). The others, however, merely listened in silent respect, but with no signs of assent or of joining in. Kermal read in a quiet but clear voice. Afterwards there was a long, somewhat embarrassed silence, as they seemed not to know of any formal closing ritual. Eventually they started chatting and smoking furiously (Kermal included).

A discussion began on the possibility that the government might suppress Baha'i among the Temiars. It transpired that nothing had been heard from the JOA for over a year, so I suggested that the authorities must have accepted the *fait accompli*. At this, they mentioned that even the Special Branch officer (a Malay) at Kuala Betis, just downstream from Lambok, had been along and examined their books and icons, and done nothing. The discussion also showed to what extent these Temiars were in fear of the outside world. There was much talk of *penpok kuy* 'head-chopping' (a reference perhaps to the famous *kapak kecil* 'little axes' of Kelantan), and some said that JOA officers had deliberately tried to put fear into them by referring to the towns as gangster-ridden. Their self-ascribed ignorance came through when they acknowledged that though Baha'i was openly—and hence quite legally—practised in Malaysian towns, they would readily believe the claims of the Kelantan JOA officers that it is nevertheless *haram* ('proscribed').

Kermal then declared that, of the 'nineteen *ugamas*' in the world, this was the one that he had fallen for, just like he might fall for a woman, even if she was old and covered with skin disease! In other words, he could not explain why he chose Baha'i, and it may well have its faults as a religion. Islam simply had never been made attractive enough by its proponents. Some of the other men commented that, although the government had frequently dropped hints that they should adopt an 'ugama', no one had ever bothered to explain Islam properly. They talked as if they were regretful at a missed opportunity.

Analysis: disenchantment

I spent the next few days upstream at the village of Pedpod (*Pedpɔɔd*), where I recorded a Baha'i hymn-singing session. Not only was the singing performed in a diatonic 'hymn-tune' style quite different from the scale-structure of the Temiars' own music, but it was strictly homophonic, not canonic. Sociologically, this implied a concern for uniformity, overriding all social distinctions, and it thereby contrasted with the dialectical overlapping between the men's and women's voices, and between the *halaa*'s and the non-*halaa*'s' voices, that is normally so highly valued in Temiar music. (See also Roseman 1989.) However, the session took place directly beneath the ritual paraphernalia left hanging from the previous night's mediumistic séance (like those illustrated in Figures 3 and 8). After returning to Lambok I replayed the recording to Dalam and Jamel, which led to a brief discussion between them. Dalam, who had never been tempted to become a Baha'i, claimed there was nothing new about Tohan. Tohan was the source of the *halaa*'s powers, so what was so special about Baha'i? Jamel replied that now *everyone* could understand clearly what it was all about, while *jab buhmɔɔ*? 'you bomohs' had a specialised knowledge that was not open to everyone. (*Bomoh* is the usual Malay word for 'traditional healer', including those who act as spirit-mediums.)

Here, in a nutshell, was the essence of rationality and disenchantment: a clearly stated, preferably written-down, framework of ideas that could be understood by anyone without reference to their social background. As Weber put it (1958 [1918]: 139), rationality is the knowledge or belief that if one but wished, one *could* learn anything at any time. In Gellner's terms this is a single-stranded ideal. But Dalam, himself a practising spirit-medium, was quite happy to remain entangled in a many-stranded framework of ideas that required not explanation and propagation, but simple *doing*. How then are we to explain these intimations of rationality and disenchantment in Malaysia's social and geographical hinterland?

This was not the first appearance of a world religion among the Orang Asli. As already mentioned, some Semais had been Lutherans for decades (Means and Means 1981) as a result of missionary activity in the 1930s. Further south, there have been a few Catholic communities among the Temuans (a Malay-speaking group) for over a century (Borie 1886). The so-called Portuguese of Melaka are in all probability descended from former Besisis and/or Malays who converted to Christianity in the 16th century, when religion and ethnicity were less tightly connected than they are now. And yet other Orang Asli groups, such as the Mah Meri (i.e., the Besisis) and the Jah Hut, long ago re-formed their indigenous religions to accord better with the sociocentric pattern appropriate to those whose lives had fallen more completely under the sway of external political and economic forces (see Benjamin 1979: 20–21). Thus, in turning to Baha'i, the Temiars too seemed finally to be taking the same route. Several factors were involved, some of which made the situation increasingly many-stranded, while others resulted from the Temiars' closer connection with broader Malaysian society. There were also factors that derived from events peculiar to the particular corner of Kelantan state inhabited by the Temiars.

Why did the Temiars not turn instead to Christianity or Islam? Unlike the situation in Sabah and Sarawak, and despite the few cases just mentioned, Christianity has not been a significant option among most of the indigenous populations of Peninsular Malaysia, where

the Malay (and hence Muslim) presence is much stronger. As part of its agreements with the Malay sultans, British colonial practice in the 19th century avoided interfering with Malay religion, and protected the Malays from missionary activity by other religions. This pattern persists today in Peninsular Malaysia. In any case, the Temiars have been almost completely insulated by geography from Christian influence. As for Islam, the Temiars have probably avoided this in the past because conversion would almost certainly have made them not just Muslims, but Malays. In the Malay world, 'entering Islam' (*masuk Islam*) is synonymous with 'entering Malaydom' (*masuk Melayu*), and the Temiars were far too secure in their own very different cultural and linguistic framework to entertain such a radical change. It would have meant giving up their tribal autonomy for peasant dependency, thereby losing the economic advantages they derived from the complementarity between themselves and the Malays. Moreover, it would have meant joining a group that had often raided them for slaves (cf. Endicott 1983). The much later conversions to Baha'i discussed in this paper took place under very changed circumstances, after the Temiars' physical isolation had been reduced somewhat. Baha'i spread among them not from external missionary activity, but from the autonomous initiatives of some younger Temiars. (For further discussion of the long-term situation of various world religions in the Peninsula, see the last part of Benjamin 1979.)

The timing of the advent of Baha'i is significant. As best I can reconstruct, the religion arrived in Temiar country in 1976, just as the area was being opened up by the construction of wide tracks to allow the extraction of timber by private companies. Several things resulted from this: many Temiars gained an extra source of cash income as labourers in the (mainly Chinese) logging camps, and they also learnt a few new technical skills. (They did not, however, receive any royalties for the timber extracted from their land, which was regarded as the state's to dispose of.) At the same time, large-scale 'relocation' programmes (*rancangan penempatan semula*) had most of the Temiar population of the Perolak and Betis valleys resettled in just two custom-built villages, with zinc-roofed, plank-walled, houses arranged in streets, at a fairly high population density. These were built by the JOA as a compromise, aimed at preventing the Orang Asli from being removed wholesale from the forested areas by the military. The latter wished to have unimpeded access to allow easier combating of the Communist insurgents who were still operating in the area. (The insurgency ended only in 1989.)

The relocation settlements greatly restricted the amount of land available for farming, so the Temiars living there became reliant on hand-outs and shop-purchases for their daily needs. Moreover, commercial logging activities muddied the rivers so badly that fishing ceased to be viable. Consequently, the new settlements became relatively dense concentrations of people who could no longer produce their own food. From a Temiar point of view, these new circumstances represented the closest approach to civic urban life, short of migrating to a city. This 'civic' development was reinforced by the younger people's literacy (in Malay) and their increased worldly sophistication, for most of them had by then received some elementary schooling. As Weber noted (1958 [1922–23]: 284), rationalisation is most characteristic of civic strata precisely *because* of their removal from direct contact with nature—i.e., food production.

Linked with these changes was the growing importance of the cash nexus. Previously it

was just possible for Temiars to live entirely without cash if they worked at it, but now it was no longer possible. Cash is the single most salient factor in the generation of single-stranded society, for it allows social relations to become anonymous, context-free and, above all, purely instrumental. The scene was thus set for experimentation with a religion that promised modernity, rationality, universality, and a learnable theology. The literacy of the younger Temiars was obviously a factor here. Baha'i reversed the usual order of authority in the community: the young people were now in charge, and making use of the one thing that most of their elders did not possess—literacy and the experience of book-learning. This explains their preference for Malay as the new liturgical language over Arabic or Temiar: the national language was transparent, whereas Arabic was opaque and Temiar ritual language was too allusively condensed. They had finally done what the government had been urging them to do—they had got themselves a religion-of-the-book.

Unfortunately, they met with uncomprehending resistance from most of the governmental agencies who had dealings with them. The Temiars could not have known that the peculiar historical ancestry of Baha'i would lead many better-educated Muslims to see it as a heresy that must be stamped out. But there was a further complication, which had nothing to do with Islam as such. The Baha'i teachers' enthusiastic claims that this was the eventual universal religion of humankind, got transformed into the idea that it was the *asal* 'original' religion (a view also found among Muslims about their own religion). Unfortunately, to the Malaysian authorities the word *asal* in this context called to mind the 'Asal cells' that the Communist insurgents had formed among the Orang Asli during the Emergency, to which a very high proportion of the people had belonged. (See Leary 1995: 101–108 for a detailed account.) The Special Branch officers still operating in Temiar country in the 1970s can therefore be excused for initially thinking that this '*asal*' religion was the creation of a Communist front organisation. It seems that it took about two years before the matter was cleared up, but by that time the damage had been done, and the Temiar followers of Baha'i had learnt that it was not advisable for them to be too open about their new-found allegiance.

Further opposition came from the local rural Malays, relatively unknowledgeable in Islamic history, doctrine and language (despite their devotion to the religion). For them the problem of the Temiars' adoption of Baha'i was rather different. They had hoped, of course, that the Temiars would eventually become Muslims, and they had sometimes urged this directly. But, as Malays, they had themselves all been *born* into Islam, and had never experienced it as a matter of choice, rational or otherwise. As a consequence, they had had no experience of *explaining* their religion to non-believers—which is exactly what some of the Temiars were hoping they would do.⁴² Moreover, if sociability and *communal* religion were what counted for the Malays, then it follows that to be surrounded by non-Muslims might have made them doubt their own allegiance to Islam (a religion that relatively few of them understood intellectually, anyway). This would have enhanced their eager wish to make the Orang Asli into Muslims as well. Ethnicity was not the main issue here; rather, the Malays seem to have regarded it as a genuine puzzle and cognitive threat that the Orang Asli could not see the point of Islam.⁴³

The rejection of the Temiars' involvement with Bahai by governmental agencies and the nearby Malays thus placed them under a great deal of strain, as reported earlier. At other

times and places, people in such a position might have responded with defiance or renewed religious involvement. This seems not to have happened here, however. Instead, the Baha'i following among the Temiars began to wither, perhaps because there were yet other, more home-grown, reasons why they could not sustain their devotion. For one thing, they remained peripheral to any sophisticated contact with Baha'i teaching. The Baha'i religion is primarily urban in its situation, and few Temiars had any direct contact with the Spiritual Assemblies in the towns.⁴⁴ The life-blood of the religion seems to have dried up, for, like any monotheistic religion, it needs constant re-affirmation if its credibility is to be maintained.⁴⁵ Such 'urbanisation' as the Temiars did experience began to fall away as the pressure to house them in relocation settlements lapsed after the Communist insurgents capitulated in 1989. The Kelantan Temiars remain rural, and most have now returned to live in their old village sites, newly rebuilt in forest clearings upstream.

Their position in the cash economy is also tenuous. Some individuals, especially those living downstream near the main Nenggiri river have done quite well economically and become entrepreneurs in a variety of activities, such as rattan trading and eco-tourism. Those who remained upstream have mostly been able to revert to a forest-based subsistence, by growing and finding their own food. Thus most of the conditions that seemed ripe a few years ago for the propagation of a rationalised form of religion have now fallen away, and the religion itself has gone into abeyance, perhaps permanently, perhaps temporarily.

Economic hardship, including considerable hunger at times, seems to have hit mostly the people living in the middle stretches between the highlands and the lowlands, because they have had access to neither set of opportunities. Lambok and the nearby villages fall right in this zone, and it is precisely there that the final, 're-enchantment', part of my account took place.

Re-enchantment

In 1992, terracotta Mahayanist votive tablets began to be found in large numbers in cave sites a few kilometres from Lambok. This was a completely new development, as the sites in question had only just been made accessible along tracks constructed by the logging companies. (The sole advantage of deforestation in Kelantan is that archaeology will be easier there in future!) The tablets (see Figure 6) are similar to those previously found in Kedah, Perlis and Isthmian Thailand (Lamb 1961: 76–78, 1964), but this was the first time they had been found so far inland. On iconographic grounds they have been dated to around 800 CE by scholars who have seen photographs of them. The sites were probably used by Buddhist monks for meditation; they presumably came to know of the area because gold was being obtained from the nearby rivers. The Sanskritic elements in the Temiar religious vocabulary (some of which were reported on in my PhD thesis) probably derive from associated sources.

Marina Roseman, who was in the Lambok area in 1992 soon after the discovery of the tablets, told me that some of the Temiars had been placing them in shrines, and that they had become objects of religious veneration. Through the kindness of Adi Haji Taha, who had been researching there since 1993, I visited the sites myself in April 1994. On my way back to town I visited the Temiar settlement at Lambok, and noted a red-painted, fenced-off wooden shrine built on a polished cement platform on the ground near the house of Ading

Kerah (Dalam's successor as senior chief). Ading told me that he had built the shrine himself. Inside he had placed a variety of objects: not just Buddhist votive tablets, but also Hindu objects that he had been given in Kuala Kerai. He said that this was his own place of worship, and then showed me how he did it: wearing a Temiar-style woven crown on his head, he



Figure 6

Ancient Buddhist votive tablets found in Temiar country, 1992

sat on the ground as a Temiar spirit-medium might, but waved a bundle of joss sticks, Chinese style. (See Figure 7.) He uttered a few words, and left some offerings of fruit and oil

in the shrine. The shrine was in fact quite Chinese in appearance, although there were no Chinese images inside. It immediately brought to mind the much less elaborate, but genuinely Chinese, shrines that I had seen fifteen years earlier at Lambok, placed there by Chinese loggers to placate the local earth spirits. Those earlier shrines, though very rudimentary, were probably the prototypes for the one that Ading had built.

Ading is not an ordinary Temiar. In the 1960s he single-handedly ran the then twice-weekly Temiar-language broadcasts from Radio Malaysia's studios in Kuala Lumpur. He translated the world news bulletins into Temiar, played his own field recordings of Temiar music, and conducted interviews (including two with me, in Temiar, that were broadcast in 1965). In the 1970s, however, having tired of life in Kuala Lumpur, he moved back to Kelantan to conduct business and live again in his home area. After the death of Penghulu Dalam in 1985, Ading was appointed by the JOA to succeed him as senior chief of the area. Despite his literacy and familiarity with urban life, Ading had always continued to be a

Temiar-style spirit-medium, singing his own spirit songs (some of which relate to his part-Mendriq ancestry): he appears on Marina Roseman's recently published recording of Temiar music (Band 18). Regrettably, my 1994 visit to Lambok was too short (just two hours) to allow any proper investigation of what the innovative shrine meant. It is reasonable, however, to see it as representative of a re-enchantment motive on Ading's part.

One other Temiar responsible for religious innovation is the well-known spirit-medium Abilem Lum, who lives on the main Nenggiri river at the village of Bawik, right on the eastern edge of Temiar country, and therefore close to some recently re-established Malay settlements. Abilem figures as a major source in the monographs of both

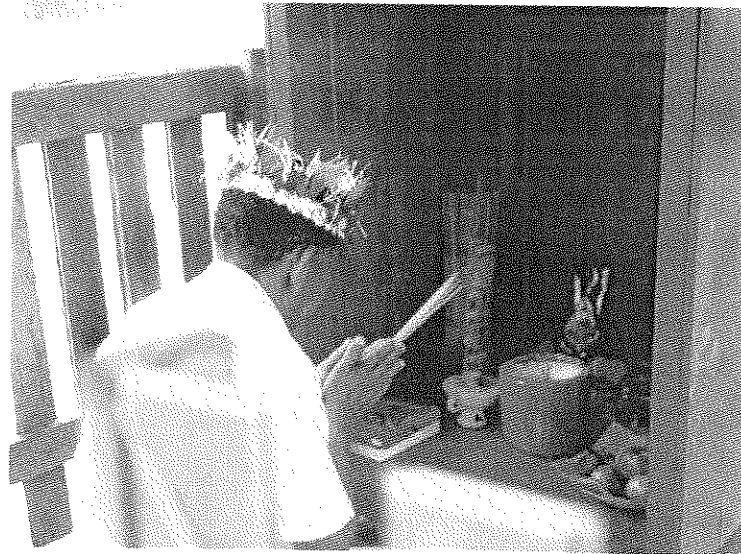


Figure 7

Ading Kerah at his shrine, Lambok, April 1994



Figure 8

**Abilem Lum (dancing, left) performs at the Cultural Centre,
University of Malaya, July 1995**

Roseman and Jennings, and his voice can be heard on Roseman's CD recording (Bands 3, 15). I have met Abilem only once (although we already knew of each other), and that was at the special occasion in July 1995 when Marina Roseman organised a three-day Workshop on Temiar Dance and Music at the Cultural Centre, University of Malaya. The star of this Workshop was Abilem, with his troupe of accompanying singers and dancers (see Figure 8), all from Bawik, and all of them new to performing under the somewhat theatre-like circumstances in Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁶ I heard that he too has a shrine in his village, similar to Ading's. The importance of Abilem is that in recent years he has received a dream revelation, Temiar style, of a new and much less localised spirit that he has identified as *Seri Kelantan* 'the Glory of Kelantan.' The new spirit is none other than the State of Kelantan itself. Old-style Temiar spirits are usually animal or plant species, or are associated with specific places. Although the dance and song genres associated with this new cult fall recognisably within Temiar tradition, *Seri Kelantan* relates to a territory, not a place, thereby marking a considerable shift of reference from the here-and-now to the there-and-then.⁴⁷ Abilem, like Ading, is also not an ordinary Temiar. He worked for many years as a field assistant in the JOA, and was therefore used to receiving a regular wage. He too has now retired, and his *Seri Kelantan* cult should therefore also be considered as a form of re-enchantment.

Analysis: re-enchantment

Why should there have been any re-enchantment at all in Temiar religious life? It is dangerous for me to attempt to draw conclusions on the basis of such thin data, but let me try. As already discussed, the young Temiars who acted as emissary prophets of Baha'i could not sustain their position on their own: the lack of close contact with more formal Baha'i sources and the general egalitarianism of Temiar society made that difficult. The *Seri Kelantan* cult and the cultic shrines are thus, in part, a return to what Weber (1964 [1920]: 20–31) would have called 'magic'—but one led by individuals (Ading and Abilem) who were in a better position to serve as (exemplary) prophets, since they are older men who had worked successfully in broader Malaysian society.

But that was not the only reason. 'Development' has failed to alleviate the economic and social position of most of the Temiars. With few exceptions, they are still at the bottom of the heap. But now the relative prosperity and security of non-Temiars is more clearly visible to them: Malays have moved back into the Kuala Betis area, and a plantation economy has emerged in neighbouring parts of Temiar country. For sophisticated older Temiars like Ading and Abilem, the relative disparities must have seemed even greater than for those who had not 'progressed' so far in the past.⁴⁸

The reappearance of Malays in the Kuala Betis area may well have stimulated the Temiars to develop their own nativistic response—but one which (with its obvious iconography and institutionalised 'places of worship' represented by the shrines) would be more congruent with what outsiders might expect of a 'religion'. Related to this was Ading's use of *objects* (Figures 7 and 9), which contrasted sharply with the absence of objects from both traditional Temiar mediumistic practice (other than perishable plant materials) and from Baha'i practice (except for the plaque amulets). As I argued in an earlier paper (Benjamin 1979: 20–21), there is in the Peninsula an association between peasantisation and the use of an overt

'sociocentric' iconography. On the other hand, the discovery of the Mahayanist votive tablets may have played a special part too, for Temiars have always treated culture as pertaining primarily to *place* rather than people. The tablets, coming right out of the ground, would for that very reason have been accorded a heightened transcendentalising power by any Temiar seeking a new religious orientation.

Most importantly, the newer Temiar cults are more congruent with the continued practising of traditional Temiar religion than Baha'i ever was. Neither Islam nor Baha'i could answer the deeper-felt *religious* needs of people living in the manner still followed by most of the Temiars (as Weber, 1922–23: 270, would presumably agree).⁴⁹ Any universalising features that were present in Baha'i

must have come to seem illusory, as its Temiar followers realised that they were still being treated primarily and paternalistically as Orang Asli, and hardly at all as individually responsible and religion-bearing Malaysian citizens. They appear to have felt that they might as well live with this by 'going under' religiously, through developing their *own* cults of re-enchantment—in a process that brings to mind Weber's version (1958 [1922–23]: 270) of Nietzsche's theory of 'resentment':

As is known, this theory regards the moral glorification of mercy and brotherliness as a 'slave revolt in morals' among those who are disadvantaged, either in natural endowments or in their opportunities as determined by life-fate. The ethic of 'duty' is thus considered a product of 'repressed' sentiments for vengeance on the part of banausic men who 'displace' their sentiments because they are powerless, and condemned to work and to money-making. They resent the way of life of the lordly stratum who live free of duties.

The Temiars, of course, live under very different conditions from those of the urban proletariat that Weber was writing about, and their religious style is different. But with due regard for the special circumstances, these remarks appear to apply just as well to the Temiar case.

Closely related to this is an important set of contrasts that lie implicit in most of Weber's writings. For Weber, the choice between formal and substantive rationality is not a neutral matter. Other things being equal, formal rationality favours those who already hold power or

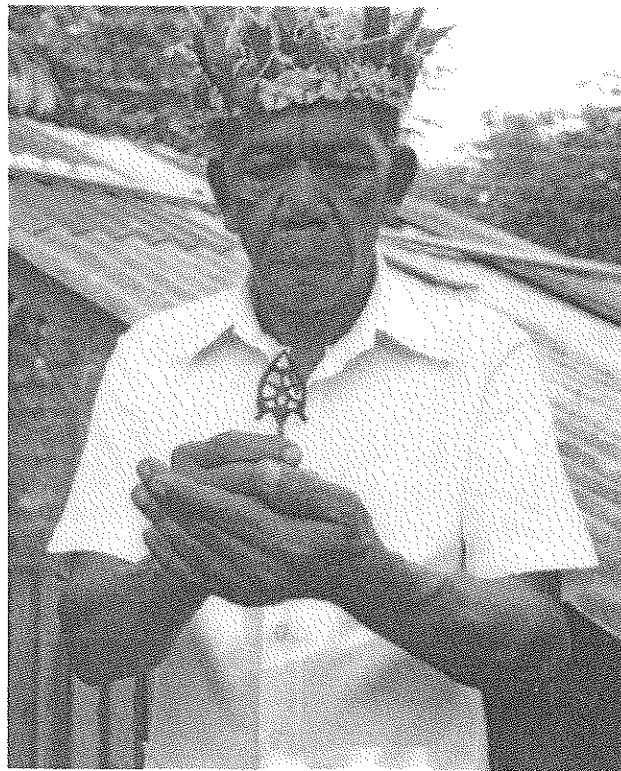


Figure 9

Ading Kerah holds up a ritual object presented to him by a Hindu in Kuala Kerai (April 1994)

might wish to gain power. Substantive rationality, on the other hand, favours those on the losing end of power relations. As Weber put it (1978: 979–980), talking here of law and administration:

‘Equality before the law’ and the demand for legal guarantees against arbitrariness demand a formal and rational ‘objectivity’ of administration If, however, an ‘ethos’... takes hold of the masses on some individual question, its postulates of *substantive* justice, oriented toward some concrete instance and person, will unavoidably collide with the formalism ... of bureaucratic administration. [...]

The propertyless masses specially are not served by the ‘formal equality before the law’ and the ‘calculable’ adjudication and administration demanded by bourgeois interests. Naturally, in their eyes justice and administration should serve to equalize their economic and social life-opportunities in the face of the propertied classes. Justice and administration can fulfill this function only if they assume a character that is informal because ‘ethical’ with respect to substantive content (*Kadi-justice*).

Formal rationality is typically associated with intellectualised discourse, of the sort made possible not only by single-strandedness, but by literacy. In the religious sphere this is most obviously manifested in the book-based *theology* favoured, among others, by emissary prophets. This leads rapidly to the characterising of certain religious practices as *correct* and others as *incorrect*—a distinction fundamental to the schoolmasterly authority that underpins the position of the clergy in many religious traditions. Thus we might expect that, under conditions of religious change, actors would choose one or other of the following chains of elective affinity:

Formal rationality	Substantive rationality
Domination	Autonomy
Emissary prophecy	Exemplary prophecy
Disenchantment	(Re-)enchantment

The emissary implantation of Baha’i among the Temiars was therefore unlikely to succeed: it would have required a far greater display of interpersonal power than Temiars can normally stomach. On the other hand, the ‘autonomy’ later espoused by the exemplary prophets of re-enchantment was far more congruent with the general tenor of social life as led in most Temiar villages. Ading’s shrine was ‘his’: he had no obvious will to organise other people around it, and his cultic activity remained as esoteric as that of the indigenous mediumship that he and others continued to practise. But Kernal’s preaching of Baha’i *was* intended to organise people, in relation to an exoteric teaching (Baha’i) available to all. It could not have worked unless a sufficient number of individuals agreed to do what he and the other teachers told them to do—and it seems that most Temiars, despite their exposure to education and the cash nexus, are still not sufficiently ready to follow the path of rationalisation and disenchantment for long.

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I am grateful to Gehan Wijeyewardene for inviting me to the conference in Canberra where the first draft of this text was presented. It provided just the right opportunity to prepare a paper I had been meaning to write for many years. At the conference, I received valuable comments from (among others) Gehan Wijeyewardene, James J. Fox, Grant Evans and Anthony Reid. I would also like to thank Marina Roseman and Mohd Anis Md Nor for arranging my involvement in the Temiar Music and Dance Workshop at the University of Malaya in July 1995, reported on the last part of this paper. In Singapore, Michael Hill, Syed Farid Alatas, Leong Wai Teng and Kwok Kian Woon took time to comment on the text or provide me with further information. None of these colleagues is responsible for the remaining faults or gaps.

As always, I am indebted to many Malaysian friends, Temiar and non-Temiar, who have aided my researches over the years. I hope that they or their family members will not be offended at anything said here, for no offence was meant. I would especially like to mention Ading Kerah, Abilem Lum and the late Penghulu Dalam. Also, thanks to Abur (the son of Salleh in Figure 1) and to Adi Haji Taha for arranging the trip to Kelantan in April 1994, and also to Bah Tony Williams-Hunt for the succeeding brief visit to Perak. This paper is presented as a contribution to the writing of Temiar history and to the analysis of the Temiars' situation in modern Malaysia. That it is also presented as a contribution to social theory—and to the fusion of anthropology and sociology—should not obscure this.

Appendix 1

The following summary of a lecture given by H. D. Noone appears among the reports of the Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute (*Man*, April 1939: 57). I reproduce it here for several reasons. First, it is almost unknown to writers on Orang Asli religion; I was unaware of it myself when writing my PhD thesis and some of my later papers. Second, it appears to report an earlier instance of 'prophet'-led re-enchantment among the Temiars consequent on cultural transition. Third, although the text was written by an anonymous rapporteur, it is probably as close as we shall ever get to an account of Temiar religion by Noone himself. Fourth, the *Chinchem* (*Cincem*) complex still survives, but routinised as just one among many Temiar song- and dance-genres, rather than as a distinct cult in either the anthropological or sociological senses. (See Stewart 1947: 218f., Noone 1955: 4, Benjamin 1967: 289–290, and Roseman 1995: CD band 3, notes pp. 10–11 for more details.)

Finally, Noone's account provides valuable material for discussion of Temiar religious change in terms of broader 'secularisation' theory. Do the last sixty years of Temiar religious history exhibit a basically long-term (secular?) tendency to rationalisation and disenchantment (cf. Wallis and Bruce 1995), or do the pendulum-swing, 'religious economy', approaches of Gellner (1969) or Stark and Bainbridge (1985) better apply?

Chinchem: a Study of the Rôle of Dream-Experience in Culture-Contact amongst the Temiar Senoi of Malaya. Summary of a communication by H. D. Noone, M.A., Field Ethnographer, F.M.S. Government, 7 March, 1939.

Shamans amongst the Temiar Senoi find their spirit-guides through dreams of association, in which they are endowed with powers, usually for healing sickness. A leading Shaman in a border group has introduced a ceremonial dance-and-song complex called *Chinchem*, obtained from a dream revelation on the tribal pattern. This has mobilized the morale of his group towards more effective adjustment in the contact situation. There are certain similarities with the Ghost Dance Revivals of North America.

Analysis of the behaviour of symbols in ordinary Temiar dreams showed when a chief symbol could become a potential spirit-guide; this could be expressed in terms of the degree of its identification with the dreamer, and other symbols in the dream. Some dreams of aspiring Shamans give additional evidence of this process. The power of spirit-guides depends upon what kinds of diseases they promise to aid in healing, whether caused by intrusion (treated during Round-dance) or soul-loss (treated through Medicine-hut). In a very few dreams a spirit guide also identifies himself with the welfare of Society as a whole, or even with a veritable Cosmogony; the Shaman being chosen as interceder. *Chinchem* has developed from such a dream of intercession.

The originator of *Chinchem* was a Shaman and leader of a community [Jalong, Perak] settled in the foothills close to Malay, Chinese, Hindu, and even European contacts. From the point of view of their economy, the group had survived the transition stage; herding tame elephants and buffaloes, and 'panning' for alluvial tin, whilst still maintaining their plantations and trade in jungle produce. Signs of social disintegration and spiritual conflict, however, appeared:—frequent divorces; quarrels for leadership; increasing death-rate, especially among younger children.

In this situation, *Chinchem* became established. Both individual and cultural antecedents to the central dream experience of Datok Bintang are assessed; in particular, the impact of Moslem ideas of conduct. The spirit of his dead wife becomes his spirit-guide, giving him new ethical values and therapeutic powers, which are now focused in the *Chinchem* dance and its cycle of songs. Although based on Temiar tradition showing Malay influences, *Chinchem* exhibits vital features new to both cultures. It is an instance of a force towards a new social integration, in which the stress of culture-contact, which has arisen through the medium of dream-experience.

Appendix 2: The photographs and other figures

In deciding which of my photographs to use as illustrations, one problem had to be faced: whether or not to publish pictures of people who have since died. Temiars normally shy away from anything resembling a memorial cult, and they surround mention of their deceased relatives with linguistic taboos. (See Benjamin 1968a for a discussion of Temiar death-names—‘necronyms’—and burial names.) At the risk of offending Temiar readers, I have decided that the positive value of photography as an aid to the public presentation of Temiar history narrowly overweighs the negative considerations just mentioned. In any case, Temiars themselves now keep albums of family photographs and have become used to seeing the images of their deceased relatives. In the notes that follow, however, I have refrained from stating the name of anyone I know to have died since the photographs were taken. This compromise fits well with the Temiars’ own primary emphasis on tabooing the personal name of someone who has died.

Figure 1: A lead singer and chorus. The singer is Salleh, accompanied by his wife and wife’s sister. At the time, Salleh was referred to by some as ‘the P. Ramlee of the Perolak valley.’ Although he has never been very active as a medium, the high quality of his singing has always been appreciated. Salleh now lives near Lambok. Note the baby slung on the back of the woman at the right: this is a typical example of how Temiars just *grow* into their religion, without need for special introductions or explanations.

Figure 2: Chorus of children and young women. Jak village, high in the headwaters of the Perolak valley, was the home of Penghulu Hitam Tamboh, mentioned later in this paper. The young woman in the middle is his daughter. Hitam Tamboh was the first Temiar to tell me any significant details about the workings of spirit-mediumship, just a few months after my fieldwork began. Jak is now uninhabited, but in the 1960s it was a remote mountain-plateau settlement, notable for growing millet rather than rice as its staple crop.

Figure 3: Mediumistic treatment at a séance. This séance occurred during the cessation-of-mourning (*tərenpuk tenmooh*) celebrations some weeks after the death of a villager at Lambok. The younger Aiding Kerah can be glimpsed (in trousers) at the back. The widely-known medium at the right is seen transferring the essence (*kahyek*) of his spirit-guide (*gonig*) to another man, belonging to the mourners’ family. Note that the medium’s hands are placed on the mourner’s head and chest—respectively the sites of his *rəwaay* and *hup*. The leafy wreaths hanging from the rafters serve as the places of welcome (*tənamuu?*) for the visiting spirit-guides. Note also the generally vegetal character of the ceremonial dress. I take this to be an unspoken acknowledgement by the Temiars that while *they* see their spirits in essentially human terms they nevertheless expect their (mostly plant-derived) spirits to see them in essentially plant-like terms. Thus, their thorough-going dialecticism requires them, in effect, to look like trees when they welcome the spirit-guides into the human domain.

Figure 4: Calligraphic design. According to MacEoin (1994: 49), this inscription, found throughout the literature of Baha’i, is known as ‘The Greatest Name’. The Arabic words are *ya baha’ al-abha* ‘O glory of the most glorious.’ However, few if any Temiars seemed to know the literal significance of what was written on their plaques.

Figure 5: Front cover of a Baha’i book. This rough and ready piece of book production was printed at The Ganesh Printing Works Penang, and ‘approved for publication by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Malaysia.’ Its twenty-six pages contain a catechism and some quotations from Baha’u’llah, with the Malay text on the left and a Temiar translation on the facing page. To my

knowledge, this is the only printed book in Temiar. The bracketed subtitle was printed from a rubber stamp, as is the word 'Temiar'. The latter replaces the crossed-out 'Jahai', the name of a language spoken by fewer than one thousand Orang Asli in the far north of Peninsular Malaysia: this suggests that some Jahais too may have converted to Baha'i, but I have no other relevant information. (Note also that whereas Malay is referred to as a 'language' (*bahasa*), Temiar is labelled a mere 'dialect' (*loghat*!))

Figure 6: Ancient Buddhist votive tablets. The narrow depth of field and the absence of a tripod mean that areas of this photograph are less sharp than they should be. The tablets are of red clay, and some have an inset blue coloration on the face. They may not be strictly *terracotta*, in that they were probably just dried, not baked. Most are broken, but the iconographic details are reasonably clear. To discourage looting, and also because the sites are still under study by Adi Haji Taha, I have not revealed the provenance of the tablets. They appear to be authentically ancient, however, dating from so-called 'Srivijayan' times. After examining some half-dozen photographs I showed him, Professor Stanley O'Connor of Cornell University suggested (in a letter to me, 26 April 1993) that the tablets

are in an iconography, style, and type that comes into the Peninsula sometime in the late eighth or ninth centuries. Previously in the Peninsula, votive tablets were rectangular in form, Theravada in religious intention, and were carefully stamped and baked. [These tablets] reflect a later tradition in which the tablets are round or pear-shaped, unbaked, and Mahayana in content. These later tablets seem to have been formed rapidly and repetitively, as if they were the plastic equivalent of reciting a mantra or other efficacious formula.

These later tablets are usually associated with 'Srivijayan' influence, thus intruding a political entity into what is really a change in style, type, and religious content. I am not persuaded that this is, in fact, the case. Certainly the style is to be associated with that of Pala India and that is an international idiom. Similarly, the tantric-tinged Buddhism of India spread widely throughout the Buddhist world leaving its impression as far as Japan. In a cultural cross-roads like the isthmian tract of the Peninsula, a flux of ideas may be present without being imposed by military or political domination.

Presumably some of the rectangular and arched tablets found in the Peninsula are matched by tablets found in Dvaravati sites in Central Thailand. Either they are part of a broadly shared Mon visual culture or both areas drew their style and iconography from a common Indian source.

It is clear, then, that Temiar country was open to wide-ranging contacts at least a millennium ago, the specific details of which require further research.

Figure 7: Ading Kerah at his shrine. The unboundedly syncretic character of Ading's shrine is illustrated here. Wearing a Temiar medium's crown of plaited pandanus leaves and squatting like a *halaa*?, he waves Chinese joss-sticks in front of a plank-built shrine painted (Chinese-style) bright red, before placing them in a Chinese urn. The objects of ritual attention (not all visible in the photograph) include ancient Buddhist votive tablets, Hindu ritual objects obtained from town, and a swordfish's 'sword'. There are no Chinese-derived objects of worship, but the offerings of fruits and oil are typical of Chinese practice. (For an account of what makes a shrine 'Chinese' see Wee 1977: 80–82.)

Figure 8: Abilem Lum performs at the University of Malaya. Here Abilem, with his relatives and friends, dances and trances while singing in Temiar style. He had earlier allowed members of the audience to join in, but after a few minutes he had them return to their seats as he felt that they were not sufficiently attuned to the seriousness of the occasion. Although 'staged' to a small degree—the troupe bowed to the audience at the beginning and end of the proceedings—the session was for the Temiars an authentically spiritual occasion. Earlier, over several days, Abilem and the others, under the cultural mediation of Marina Roseman, had been training some postgraduate students of ethnomusicology and Asian dance in all aspects of the performance: preparing the ceremonial clothing and decorations, making the bamboo stampers, and getting the subjective feel of the dance steps. The Workshop was important because this was the first time that any Orang Asli performance art had been presented

seriously and in depth to a broader Malaysian audience.

Figure 9: Ading holds up a ritual object. Of this brass object, Ading said only that it had been given to him in Kuala Kerai, and that it had come out of the ground. My colleague Ananda Rajah and his student Thirunabukarasu have identified it as a *vel* (Tamil: ‘spear’), normally used as a tongue- or cheek-skewer in the more ecstatic versions of popular Hinduism, such as during the Thaipusam festival. Thus, the object is not unconnected with medium-like practices, and may well have been given to Ading by someone who knew of his reputation as a spirit-medium. Kuala Kerai, known to the Kelantan Temiars as *Bock Kereel*, but situated many miles away from Temiar country, was formerly the only real town that they had dealings with. It marked the furthest point to which they would raft downstream to sell forest products—a major journey taking several days. Nowadays, Temiars can get to Kuala Kerai by train or bus from Gua Musang town.

Notes

1. Weber’s word is *entzaubert*: literally, ‘un-magicked’. In this extract, the distinction between practical and intellectualised knowledge corresponds to what Weber discusses elsewhere under the labels ‘substantive’ and ‘formal’ rationality. It is often overlooked that when Weber uses the term ‘rationality’ without further qualification, he is referring solely to ‘*formal* rationality’ as opposed to all the other kinds, which he places under the general label of ‘substantive rationality’. This point is important, for the distinction between ‘substantive’ and ‘formal’ rationality relates to a wider range of issues (including power relations) than is hinted at here. I return to this theme in the final part of the paper.
2. I have heard no mention of Baha’i since the mid-1980s when talking to Temiar friends from Kelantan, but I cannot be sure that the religion has completely ceased to be practised.
3. An excellent brief account of Baha’i, incorporating much sociological discussion, is MacEoin 1985, which I shall refer to later. He has also written in detail on the sources of Baha’i ritual (MacEoin 1994). The most accessible monograph on the history of the religion is by Smith (1987), a sociologist of religion who is himself a Baha’i. The well-known sociologist Peter Berger wrote his PhD thesis (1954) on Baha’i origins; regrettably, this is unpublished (but see Smith 1978).
4. It is precisely because of the dearth of historical writing on the Orang Asli that I have presented so many footnotes referring to publications and documents not readily available to most readers. The same applies to those footnotes where I have tried to relate my empirical materials to a range of theoretical issues discussed in the broader sociological literature. Weber’s work looms especially large here, not simply for its intrinsic merits but because this paper was originally prepared for a conference whose terms of reference derived directly from Weber’s work. (If, like one of Lat’s cartoon characters at a hawker’s stall, I am guilty of having *semua taruh* ‘piled a bit of everything on my plate’, so be it!)
5. For discussions of the Orang Asli in relation to Peninsular linguistics, archaeology and history, see Benjamin 1976b, 1986, 1987a, and *in press* (1996). For recent summaries of the wider long-term perspectives, see Bellwood 1992 and Fix 1995. A valuable recent addition to the literature is Leary 1995, the first extended piece of document-based historical writing on the Orang Asli.
6. These sites and their contents (see Figure 6) are currently being researched archaeologically at the Australian National University by Adi Haji Taha of the Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur. I say a little more about them in the last part of this paper. For a published account, see Puig 1996. For more details, see the note to Figure 6 in Appendix 2.

7. I make this claim not out of any respect for functionalist social theory, but solely because that is how matters seemed *in this instance*. I do not hold solidarity to be a general—or even, necessarily, a desirable—feature of social relations as such.
8. JOA stands for *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli*. This government agency operates only in the states of Peninsular Malaysia; there is no equivalent agency for the so-called ‘native’ peoples—the majority—of Sabah and Sarawak.
9. Appendix 1 reproduces an account of one of Noone’s lectures. It is directly related to my argument here, for Noone appears to have been reporting an example of re-enchantment among the Temiars some sixty years ago.
10. The best known advocacy for ‘Senoi Dreamwork’ is contained in Garfield (1974), now in its second edition (1995). An accessible brief account in ‘coffee-table book’ format can be found on p. 11 of Coxhead and Hiller 1976. The major critical sources are Domhoff 1985 and Dentan 1983. Domhoff presents a sociological analysis and psychological critique of the rise of ‘Senoi dreamwork’ in the USA, while Dentan presents a detailed analysis of what, in his view, is really going on when Temiars and Semais pay attention to their dreams. A German master’s thesis (Bräunlein 1984) discusses the issues from a wider theoretical perspective. There are further studies in preparation by other authors.

Internet searches under the heading ‘Senoi’ demonstrate that ‘Dreamwork’ still flourishes unabated in North America and Germany, regardless of the situation in Malaysia. Those interested in the real-world Senoi will find detailed accounts in the recent books by Marina Roseman (1991) and Sue Jennings (1994).

11. This section is based on parts of Benjamin 1993b and 1994.
12. Mental illness does nevertheless occur among the Temiars, and there is no good reason to think that it is a new phenomenon. See also Dentan 1968b for a discussion of how the neighbouring Semais regard mental illness.
13. I have discussed these non-dialectical modes of orientation elsewhere (Benjamin 1987b) under the labels ‘transcendental’ and ‘immanent’. The terms are modified from Weber’s usage; he in turn took them from Christian theology, which received them from Bishop Berkeley. Note that the cultural mode identified here as ‘dialectical’ is sometimes placed under the heading of ‘immanent’ by authors (such as Bellah, 1969) who use this terminology. I would wish to distinguish categorically between the immanent and dialectical modes, however.
14. Temiar words are printed here in a phonemic orthography uniform with the one generally employed in Mon-Khmer studies. (These languages possess many more vowels than can be transcribed using just the standard five ‘vowel’ letters. Extra symbols are therefore unavoidable, especially for Temiar, which has no fewer than thirty vowel phonemes!)
Vowels are pronounced approximately as in the following (southern Peninsular) Malay or (British) English words: *i* as in *tapis*, *e* as in *leher*, *ɛ* as the *e* in *get*, *ə* as the *e* in *betul*, *a* as in *belah*, *u* as the first *u* in *pucuk*, *o* as the *o* in *gol* (football), *ɔ* as the *au* in *taut*, *ʊ* as in Scottish *hus* (i.e. ‘house’); doubled vowels are pronounced longer than single vowels; vowels with a superscript tilde, as in *ē*, are pronounced nasally. Consonants are mostly pronounced as in Malay; *c* is a palatal stop similar to the *c* in *macam*; *ɲ* is the palatal nasal continuant, as the *ny* in *nyawa*; *ŋ* is the velar nasal continuant, as the *ng* in *singer* (not as in *finger*); *ʔ* is the glottal stop, a consonantal phoneme, like the *k* in the Peninsular Malay pronunciations of *duduk* or *rakyat*. The Temiar *k*, even word-finally, is always pronounced as a velar, not a glottal, stop. Word-stress is on the final syllable.
15. This animistic approach to Temiar and other Malayan religions is explored in Benjamin 1979, 1994, and it is substantially supported by Roseman’s independent account (1991).
16. A lucid dream is one in which the dreamer is consciously aware that he or she is dreaming. For an

- account of the physiology of lucid dreaming, and how it is investigated in the laboratory, see La-Berge 1985. There is reason to assume that many of the Temiars' spirit-guide dreams are 'lucid'.
17. The broader theory of religion that underlies this approach is spelled out in Benjamin 1987b.
 18. Lévi-Strauss's view of similar anti-rituals as reported from neighbouring Semang groups (1969: 495) is that they constitute a 'misuse of language', similar to the conceptual confusion associated with incest. This is because such actions as dressing animals in human clothing or imitating their calls collapse together the fundamental distinction between Human and Non-human, Culture and Nature. It is Lévi-Strauss himself, of course, who chooses to highlight the Nature-Culture opposition, but it does indeed (in this instance) correspond closely to the Temiar view. Judging by the reaction of the Temiars at Humid village one day in 1964, the worst obscenity I committed was to confuse the Nature/Culture distinction by using the verb for 'eat flesh' (*rec*) instead of the proper verb (*caa*? 'eat') when the object was a durian fruit. Temiar mythology contains several references to the mutual transformation of plants and animals into humans, and vice versa: my slip of the tongue must have reminded them of this embarrassing idea, which contravenes their empirical knowledge that, as humans, they were quite distinct from other living things.
 19. See, among others, Lévi-Strauss 1969: 494–495, Needham 1964, Freeman 1968, Endicott 1979a, Robarchek 1987.
 20. Gellner is here explicitly following a well-established, yet far from exhausted, sociological tradition. Although he does not say so, he is also in part re-working issues that were touched on rather differently by Marx (1986 [1844]: 35–47, 'species-being' and 'alienation'), Maine (1907: 172–174, 'status' and 'contract'), Durkheim (1902: Chapters 2 and 3, 'mechanical' and 'organic' solidarity), Tönnies (1955 [1887], *Gemeinschaft* 'community' and *Gesellschaft* 'society'), the later Lévy-Bruhl (as implied in 1975 [1938], 'participatory' and 'discursive' mentalities), Mauss (1938, the evolution of the various notions of the Self and the person), Fortes (1962, 'multiplex' and 'simplex' social relations), and several others, including Bellah (1969, 'undifferentiated' and 'differentiated'). However, Gellner adduces more features of social and cultural organisation than those authors, and in a manner that allows direct connections to be made with more conventional sociological and demographic issues. In sum, his approach enables us to bridge the gap between cultural anthropology and hard-core sociology, and between interpretative and more positivist approaches.
 21. A similar approach is taken by Bellah (1969), in distinguishing between (on the one hand) the 'undifferentiated', 'immanent' character of Aboriginal Australian and Dinka religions and (on the other) the 'differentiated', 'transcendental' character of the religions found in more complex societies. While the broad Weberian sweep of Bellah's argument is impressive (and its influence on my own approach should be clear), I feel that it just misses the fundamental sociological point that Gellner has identified.
 22. Penghulu (or 'Panglima') Dalam son of Bejau was the senior government-recognised headman of the area, and one of my own chief mentors in Temiar matters since 1964. He was born around 1910 and died in 1985. Some details of his background and reminiscences appear in Benjamin 1966: 19, 1968b: 9–10, and 1987a: 142–145.
 23. In Malaysia, as in Indonesia, a citizen with no officially accepted religion—no *ugama*—is liable to be considered an atheist, and hence a Communist. *Ugama* is defined as a named religion, with a founding prophet, a sacred book, a clergy, and formal places of worship. It is little wonder that the Malaysian authorities regard the Orang Asli as having no religion—at least, not until they become Muslims (the preferred choice) or Christians. At best, they might be spoken of as having 'beliefs' (*kepercayaan*). The situation of Baha'i in the authorities' eyes is more complicated, as I shall show in the next section. The requirement for belief in God (*Tuhan*, a non-denominational usage) or The Great Oneness (*Yang Maha Esa*, a usage that seems to reflect Javanese mysticism as well as mono-

theism) is inscribed as the first clause in the official national ideologies of both countries—respectively, Malaysia's *Rukun Negara* and Indonesia's *Panca Sila*.

24. At that time, almost every issue of *Nong Pai* (Temiar: *nɔŋ paay* 'new way') contained a section on Islam entitled *Sudut Ugama* 'religion corner'. The following are among the relevant news reports in *Nong Pai*:
 - 'Unit Pembangunan Rohaniah mula menjalankan kegiatannya [The Spiritual Development Unit gets under way]', August–December 1979: 23–24. This gives details of Islamic training programmes organised for Orang Asli in several states.
 - 'Perasmian surau Orang Asli Sungai Badok [Official opening of the Orang Asli prayer-house at Sungai Badok]', January–February 1984: 1. This front-page article gives an account and colour photograph of events at a small Temiar village near Ulu Chemor, Perak, at which the Director-General of the JOA officiated.
25. The figure of two million cited here for the 'tribal' population of Malaysia includes only a small number who would normally be considered tribal in terms of their socio-political organisation. The surprisingly high figure also includes the 'native' peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, whose often large populations constitute the majorities in those states. Their circumstances are in almost all respects different from those of the 100,000 or so Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia, for they possess legislation that (in principle, at least) guarantees them land rights, and they are not currently under official pressure to become Muslims.
26. This preference for talking about religion and economics as if they were a single issue probably derives from the *evolutionary* view of culture that still informs much of Malay social thought. As McKinley (1979) and Wee (1987) have shown, in Malay imagery one's progress is monitored by regularly glancing back at what one has left behind. There is no shame in having *been* a pagan, a 'Hindu-Buddhist' or a tribal indigene (*asli*) in a former era (*zaman*), so long as one consciously moves forward into the era of proper religion (*agama*), purified (*murni*) culture and 'modern' citizenship. For those who hold this view it is a foregone conclusion that economic improvement will follow religious improvement, and there would be no point in considering other possible outcomes.
27. As of June 1996, there were attempts to declare it illegal for Malays to join even the canonical Shi'a tradition. (Presumably, Muslims of other ethnic groups may continue to follow Shi'a if they wish, so long as they keep it to themselves.) Public discussion in Malaysia has suggested that the move was based on the fear that Malays might be attracted to the revolutionary theocratic model followed by Iran. It is safe to assume, though, that the underlying reason relates to the Sunni tradition's preference for 'rational' bureaucratic organisation, which is much more congruent with 'modernity' than the charismatic structure of authority followed in Shi'a, and especially in Iran. To employ Gellner's terms (1969), the Malaysian government has elected to go with 'P-type', not 'C-type', Islam. (Though he does not explicitly say so, Gellner's imagery here clearly relates to the somewhat parallel, though anachronistic, Protestant/Catholic divide.)
28. Gellner (1992: 6–22) provides an excellent outline of the Islamic sources for such diverging views, though his primary focus is on the West Asian and North African countries. For a subtle account of the historical connection between Islam and Malay kingship, see Milner 1981. Lyon 1979 and Nash 1991 discuss the situation of reformist Islam as an element in Malaysian national politics.
29. I am personally acquainted with only two instances among the Kelantan Temiars. One was a former field officer of the JOA who in the 1970s claimed to be a Muslim; but he continued to live in the community as an ordinary Temiar, following no Islamic observances that anyone was aware of. The other case concerned a married couple I met in Kuala Lumpur in the 1960s, who had not only converted to Islam, but had fully entered the Malay community. The husband, in particular, was quite embarrassed that I had discovered his Temiar background and that I knew many of his unconverted,

still-Temiar kinsfolk quite well. His wife, on the other hand, was quite pleased to learn of my connections with her Temiar relatives.

30. See Kessler 1978 for a detailed account of Islamist politics at the grass-roots level in Kelantan during the first of these periods. As of August 1996, Kelantan state politics was in turmoil. The 'Partai Melayu Semangat 46' (PMS46) partner had recently decided to withdraw its support for the dominant Islamist party (PAS) in the ruling coalition, in favour of rejoining the main nation-wide Malay party, UMNO, from which it had split several years previously. Semangat 46 then decided to dissolve itself nationally, and encourage its members to join UMNO. Since those Temiars who had voted for the anti-UMNO Kelantan state government were likely to have done so in favour of Semangat 46 rather than PAS, they will presumably view the issues differently in future. The Temiars form an active and very significant portion of the electorate in the constituency of Tengku Razaleigh, uncle of the Sultan of Kelantan and the national leader of Semangat 46. (For further information on the Temiars of Kelantan in relation to national politics, see Noraini 1991.)
31. See Appendix 1 for an account of religious change among the Temiars at a road-head community in Perak sixty years ago.
32. Two days later I paid a brief visit by road to a Temiar village in Perak, where the population (and to some extent the housing) was clearly divided into those who had become Muslims and those who had not. The prayer-house (*surau*) was unused, however. The contrast with Kelantan was striking.
 I do not mean to imply, however, that the Temiars at Lambok had necessarily gained a *true* assessment of their situation. They were neither concerned nor familiar with what was going on in the urban parts of Kelantan, where the state government had imposed stringent restrictions against, for example, physical contact (whether deliberate or accidental) between unrelated men and women. (Men and women must line up in separate queues at supermarket checkouts, and 'unisex' hairdressing salons are banned.) In August 1996, the same government declared that 'good-looking' women and those who wear 'excessive' lipstick would find it harder to get jobs in the public service than plainer-looking ones, so that the male officers could concentrate better on their work; and in any case lipstick was banned in the *Qur'an* (*Straits Times* [Singapore] 2 September 1996: 28). Against such a background, therefore, the position of the Temiars in Kelantan with regard to Islam cannot be stated with any certainty. It may simply be their non-urban situation, rather than any specific policy of the state government, that currently leaves them relatively untroubled at their situation in this respect.
33. Other Perak Semais have been Lutheran Christians since the 1930s, although they still form a small minority within the total Semai population (see Means and Means 1981), which mainly adheres to indigenous religious practices.
34. An especially useful account is the anonymous article on pp. 49–51 of vol. 9 (4), July 1974, entitled 'Milestones in W. Malaysian Baha'i history.' Other articles (mostly anonymous) relating to the Orang Asli in the *Malaysian Baha'i News* are:
 1970: 'Asli teaching course', vol. 6 (1): 4
 1970: '[An] Asli marriage', vol. 6 (2): 5
 1970: 'A greenhorn crosses the Main Range' by A. Machambo, vol. 6 (3): 33–34
 1971: 'Aboriginal participation [at the 8th National Convention, Kuala Lumpur]', vol. 7 (1): 19
 1973: 'A tenderfoot's experience' by G. A. Naidu, vol. 9 (2&3): 16–17
 1974: 'When the Aslis came to [National] Convention' by Shantha Sundram, vol. 9 (4): 17–18
 1974: 'Asli [Local Spiritual] Assemblies officially registered' and 'First Penghulu's Conference', vol. 9 (4): 38

These articles are almost entirely about Perak Semais; they contain no mention of Temiars.

35. In Temiar, the Austronesian term *Tohan* or *Tuhan* 'God < Lord' is usually assimilated to *Tohaat*,

which also means 'healer'. In these Temiars' unselfconscious but explicit identification of the Baha'i Tohan with Tohaat/Alūj, we see that an 'otiose god', such as Tohan (Tohaat) used to be, may cease to be otiose in a situation of religious change. There are probably many other features of Temiar religion ripe for reworking under new circumstances.

36. This is presumably a Temiarised version of the Baha'i phrase *Allaahu abhaa* 'God is Most Glorious' (MacEoin 1994: 43) and of Baha'u'llah, the name of the founder of Baha'i.

The assertion that Tohan is not the same as Allah contravenes formal Baha'i teaching—just as the public assertion by some Malaysian Muslims that Allah is not the same as the Christian God contravenes formal Muslim teaching. Such statements are not simply matters of ignorance; they directly reflect the complicated partial fusion of religion with ethnicity in Malaysia.

37. Talismans are still very important in Baha'i practice, despite the ostensibly 'rationalised' character of the religion (MacEoin 1994: 48–51).
38. They made no mention of the Arab sources of Islam or of the collection of *fitrah* and *zakat* religious tithes, nor did they acknowledge that Malaysians—though not Malays—are legally free to practise the Baha'i religion.
39. This was the same as the calligraphic device illustrated by MacEoin (1985: 491), composed of the words *Ya baha' al-abha* 'O splendour of the most splendid'.
40. In my field notes I wrote 'the Temiar is pretty bad, both in its transcription and choice of words; it is probably a Semai's attempt to write Perak Temiar.' (Certain tell-tale grammatical features identified it as Perak, not Kelantan, Temiar.) However, I now think it likely that the translation was done by Lim Kok Hoon, mentioned in the *Malaysian Baha'i News* as a translator of Baha'i materials into five Aslian languages.
41. This Leong Choo ('Master Leong'?) was probably the Mr Yang Kee Leong mentioned earlier as the first Malayan to convert to Baha'i.
42. This contrast between the socially peripheral but religiously adventurous Temiar Baha'is and the socially more central but religiously conservative Malay Muslims recalls one of Weber's key passages (1952 [1917–19]: 206). The scale of Weber's references is much greater than the issues under discussion in this paper, but the principle is the same—and it would surely apply to differences in religious orientation *within* the Malay community as well. (It is unfortunate that the published English translation reads so clumsily.)

Rarely have entirely new religious conceptions originated in the respective centers of rational cultures. Rational prophetic or reformist innovations were first conceived, not in Babylon, Athens, Alexandria, Rome, Paris, London, Cologne, Hamburg, Vienna, but in Jerusalem of pre-Exilic [times], in Galilaea of late Jewish times, in the Roman province of Africa, in Assisi, in Wittenberg, Zurich, Geneva and in the marginal regions of the Dutch, Lower-German and English cultural areas, like Frisia and New England. To be sure this never occurred without the influence and impact of a neighbouring rational civilization. The reason for this is always the same: prerequisite to new religious conceptions is that man must not yet have unlearned how to face the course of the world with questions of his own. Precisely the man distant from the great culture centers has cause to do so when their influence begins to affect or threaten his central interests. Man living in the midst of the culturally satiated areas and enmeshed in their technique addresses such questions just as little to the environment as, for instance, the child used to daily tramway rides would chance to question how the tramway actually manages to start moving.

43. I am grateful to Vivienne Wee for most of the ideas presented in this paragraph.

Several years ago, when I gave a talk on Orang Asli at Universiti Sains Malaysia (Penang), a Malay student questioner raised this very question: why couldn't the Orang Asli see how beautiful and desirable it was for them to become Muslims? I replied that they already had religions that they

thought beautiful and desirable. But, because of the mismatch between the English word 'religion' (i.e., *any* religious activity) and the Malay word 'ugama' (an institutionalised, named religion-of-the-book, with an historical founder), my point was lost.

44. Also relevant is the commonly expressed belief that, under Malaysian law, new religions may be proselytised among the Orang Asli only by other Orang Asli. In fact, no such law is stated in any of the relevant legislation—the *Aboriginal Tribes Enactment, Perak, 1939*, the federal *Aboriginal Peoples Ordinance, 1954* which replaced it, or the revised (and still current) *Aboriginal Peoples Act, 1974*. But the belief that there is such a law seems to have prevented any access by urban Baha'i catechists into Temiar communities, as the following item from a 1974 issue of the *Malaysian Baha'i News* (vol. 9 (4): 38) suggests:

The first Asli Penghulu's Conference was held in July at Trolak, Perak, where about thirty penghulus (headmen) met with members of the National Assembly and the Auxiliary Board. The meeting was of great importance *as Asli teaching work is carried on entirely by the Aslis themselves*. [Emphasis added.]

However, no such belief has prevented outsiders from attempting to propagate Islam or Christianity among the Orang Asli.

45. This claim is discussed further in Benjamin 1987c.
46. This event was made possible by the enthusiasm of Professor Mohd Anis Md Nor, Director of the Centre at the time. Accounts by Alina Raneer of the workshop and the attendant performances and panel discussion can be found in *New Sunday Times*, 6 August 1995, p. 15 and *New Straits Times*, 7 August 1995 ('Lifestyle' section), p. 8. An account by Joseph Edwin of his experiences while visiting Ading Kerah and Abilem Lum at their homes in Kelantan appeared in *New Sunday Times*, 11 June 1995, p. 10. These excellent pieces of journalism include interviews with both Ading and Abilem.
47. I have explored this theme more generally in Benjamin 1995.
48. See Zawawi 1996: 89–94 for the directly-reported views of four young Temiars from Kelantan on the current socio-economic situation there. Zawawi (1995) has recently also written more broadly on the current situation of 'tribal' populations in Peninsular Malaysia. His general finding is that the Orang Asli do want 'development'—on their own terms—but that, for reasons beyond their control, they have mostly found themselves misunderstood and frustrated in that respect. Much the same was reported nearly twenty years earlier by Endicott (1979b). Zawawi also presents a valuable analysis of how the meanings of 'tribal' and 'peasant' should be rethought under contemporary circumstances.
49. I agree with van Baal (1971: 214–241), Polanyi (1975: 149–160) and other such writers that being human—and not simply social—does indeed generate specific needs in individuals that can validly be thought of as religious. Just how these needs are met—through conventional 'religions' or through other means—is a different question. (This is discussed further in Benjamin 1987b.)

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