

Photography Documentary on Social Issues Orang Seletar Malaysia

Visual Ethnography

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Abstract

Orang Seletar's home neighbourhood, Kampung Sungai Temon is in Iskandar Puteri's development zone, although many of them live in abject poverty. The expansion of towns has resulted in brackish water, making it difficult for fish and shellfish to survive. Plastic bottles and trash have accumulated in mangroves and marshes, posing a threat to the livelihood of orang Seletar. The daily routine of Orang Seletar Settlement is observed through documentary photography. Based on the findings of the ethnography, the social difficulties in this settlement may be grouped into four primary categories: children's education, construction consequences, unfavourable living conditions, and livelihood challenges.

Keywords

Orang Seletar, Indigenous people, Orang Asli Laut, Minority group, Photography documentary

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Introduction

The Orang Seletar (also known as Selitar or Slitar) are one of Malaysia's 18 ethnic groups. They are one of Peninsular Malaysia's few indigenous peoples whose way of lifestyle is linked to the sea rather than the tropical forest. The Seletar are settled in Johor; the former can also be found on islands in the Teberau Straits, which separate Malaysia and Singapore (Omar & Yahaya, 2018). Their arrival in the southern half of the Malay Peninsula was just around 200 years ago (Carey, 1976). Some of them live in Kampung Sungai Temon, are thought to be the first settlers in Temasik, having arrived from Singapore (Mahfuz, 2018). Orang Seletar moved to a coastal town in Johor named Kampung Sungai Temon some decades ago as Singapore grew into a metropolitan city (Arlina, 2018). In Malaysia's southern peninsular, Kampung Sungai Temon is one of the minority settlement areas for orang Seletar (Arlina, 2018). Kampung Sungai Temon is located within the development area of Iskandar Malaysia Development Authority (IRDA), which is a Malaysia Government statutory body (Christopher, 2016). People used to name them Orang Seletar because they used to reside aboard a ship near the mouth of the Seletar River (Arlina, 2018). They are indigenous sea nomads known as Orang Seletar; they are also known as Orang Asli Laut since they were born near a sea and rely on it for all of their daily needs; they are familiar with water, and the bond between sea and Orang Asli Laut cannot be divided. Based on their lifestyle, they are very much still primitive people who used to live on boats and huts in the mangrove swamps. The sea water was their main means of earning an income. They are trained to swim and be comfortable with the ocean at a very young age. Very few of them are able to have access to formal education due to their living conditions (Tooranally, 2017)

There are currently 400 people residing in the settlement that faces the Johor Strait in Iskandar Economic. In contrast to the five-star hotels, residences, and shopping malls that dot Causeway Bay, they live in wooden houses (Arlina, 2018). The ancestral grounds of Johor's coastal mangroves have historically been occupied by Orang Seletar, a traditional fishing population (Christopher, 2012). The state government of Johor continues to erode the area and entities, such as IRDA, who continue to occupy the dwelling area of orang Seletar by rapidly developing buildings. For long years, orang Seletar has argued that the land and water areas where they work and forage are traditional ancestral territories (Christopher, 2012). As a result of the government's lack of attention to their pleas, orang Seletar has lost a significant amount of land. Due to the drought in the mangrove swamps and the pollution of the coastal oceans, their livelihoods have been seriously impacted, if not completely abolished (Christopher, 2012). Orang Seletar's home neighbourhood is in Iskandar Puteri's development zone, although many of them live in abject poverty. Even though their land is flourishing, they are unable to benefit from it.

Over time, orang Seletar have attempted to integrate into mainstream culture by abandoning their existence on board, constructing homes on land, enrolling in public schools, and studying Malay in the same way that mainstream society does. The Orang Seletar community settlement has altered due to the displacement of the Seletar people from seaside life to houses built on land as a result of Iskandar Region Development Authority development initiatives, forcing them to adapt to the bustle of urbanised habitation. (Peh, 2016). When speaking to their own community, however, they continue to use their native language (Arlina, 2018). Orang Seletar live on the beach, and others still live in stilt huts in the hamlet, living a maritime lifestyle that includes collecting fish, crabs, and mussels, selling to seafood wholesalers, and cooking in a few restaurants (Arlina, 2018). Some orang Seletar marry Chinese or Malays and relocate to cities, while others abandon animist beliefs in favor of Christianity or Islam. Men used to help their wives deliver babies on boats because there

were no hospitals or physicians, but now they go to the hospital when their wives deliver infants (Arlina, 2018). The socioeconomic changes that have occurred in the life of the Orang Seletar. They began working in industries or fish markets. They employ modern equipment instead of traditional fishing ways, and they are more aware of the necessity of education for future generations because they are concerned that their community would be pushed out due to development. They are unable to continue their maritime lifestyle because they are terrified of moving to another place.

Orang Seletar have no issues with modernization, but they do have issues when external development fails to recognize their rights and discriminates against them. These factors make it difficult to participate in mainstream society and force compromise (Arlina, 2018). Plastic bottles and trash accumulate in mangroves and wetlands, making it difficult for fish and shellfish to live in saline water (Arlina, 2018). Orang Seletar are experiencing the loss of their traditional territories and means of income. The kampung Sungai Temon has various social difficulties that are already interfering with people's daily lives. Through the ethnography's findings, we hope to identify the social challenges that exist in Kampung Sungai Temon. Children's education, construction effect, an unpleasant living environment, and a lack of a livelihood are among the social challenges of Kampung Sungai Temon based on the research finding.

The aim of this photo essay is to use documentary photography to convey societal issues of of Kampung Sungai Temon. The small indigenous village's daily routine is documented using documentary photography. Professional photographers frequently employ documentary photography to raise attention to societal issues (Mayfield-Johnson & Butler, 2017). Documentary photography serves a comparable purpose to social consciousness in visual representation. Photography has a key part in describing or telling stories. Not only will documentary photography projects improve public awareness, but the photographers will also learn and receive more knowledge that they would otherwise be unaware of. Photographers can learn more about the dwelling through community-based documentary photography. Participating in community documentary photography projects helps photographers gain a better understanding of complex urban spaces and their ability to understand them in a variety of ways, including gaining critical insights into key theoretical debates about the nature of photographic performance and making plans for local contributions (Klimt, 2018).



Photo 1 Because of their culture, Kampung Sungai Temon has numerous of children; yet, due to financial difficulties, the parents are unable to afford the high school fees, and hence do not send all of their children to school. The children run barefoot around the hamlet, although the ground is covered with stone and sand, and they continue to play. They chase each other around the yard, playing stone and branch with joy, and you can always hear them laughing.



Photo 2 The face of a tiny girl with a wide smile and a snivel. The kids who play around the settlement have a nuttiness about them; they don't care about the minutiae; they're just living in the present. Like the little girl in the photo, most of the kids in Kampung Sungai Temon had huge eyes, double eyelids, a little flat nose with a big smile, and curly hair..



Photo 3 It's time for them to take a shower. Some of them refuse to attend school because they are unable to keep up with the curriculum; others are teased or ridiculed by classmates because their school uniforms are filthy, which their classmates dislike.



Photo 4 A group of Orang Asli teenagers from Kampung Sungai Temon pass by a sea sand suction boat. The teenagers will assist with the simple tasks to relieve their family's strain. The majority of young girls will assist their parents in the village, while the young boys will work part-time in the city on weekends. Because they are indigenous people, they are more likely to be bullied by city bosses. They have a history of being scolded by their bosses and not being paid after working due to the boss's dissatisfaction with their work performance. Because Orang Asli Laut are contented people who like to work with joy even if the money is barely enough to get by, they would return to the village to do what they are used to if they were mistreated.



Photo 5 They rely on the light from street lights and the light from restaurants in the settlement. The settlement used to be extremely busy since many outsiders would come to the village for a seafood meal, especially on weekends, but currently, fewer people come here to eat seafood.



Photo 6 The girl is playing with the sand, while the boys are on their phones. For the children in Kampung Sungai Temon, everything can be a toy; they play with sand, stones, branches, and even trash. To support their family, young people are now working part-time on land. For them, having a low-cost or used smartphone is a luxury.



Photo 7 This is one of the mussel farming areas by the Orang Seletar of Kampung Sungai Temon in the waters of the Straits of Johor. Development along the Danga River's banks has resulted in tremendous pollution, resulting in lower yields and damage to fish cages.



Photo 8 Building behind is the Country Garden Project by Chinese China construction company, which line the banks of the Sungai Danga River, provides a stark contrast to Kampung Sungai Temon. Construction sites pollute the sea, which has an impact on Orang Seletar's daily existence. The Orang Seletar will see those construction every time they go fishing. They understand that the reason for the decrease in fish numbers is due to building issues, but they are unable to remedy the situation. *Our lives are currently quite difficult. Since the rapid growth of Sungai Danga, the number of fish has decreased dramatically, and that area no longer has fish to catch.*



Photo 9 Construction sand piles turn into dune formations. The sand had piled up in the river for a long period, preventing it from functioning and polluting the sea. As a result of the sea pollution, many fish died, and the seafood prepared by the seafood restaurant at Kampung Sungai Temon was stale and unfit for consumption, resulting in a considerable decrease in the number of customers.



Photo 10 Fishermen are the primary source of income for the Orang Seletar of Kampung Sungai Temon. They only needed a handcrafted fishing fork and a Google to catch fish; no further safety equipment was required; all he had to do was a jump into the water and catch fish.



Photo 11 Orang Seletar built a jetty to dock their boat right behind their house; one jetty can accommodate several boats, each with its own owner. The fishing boat is the most crucial thing for them to get to work, but not every family in the community owns one, therefore some of the poor fishermen would borrow boats from others to go fishing. If they don't have the financial means to buy a boat they can rent a boat for a day for RM50. But they can't guarantee that their daily fishing income will be more than RM50.



Photo 12 Due to the problem of sea pollution, Orang Seletar's main source of income is gathering mussels. Hot water should be used to clean the mussels, and the beard that comes from the shell should be removed. Taking meat from mussel shells is the final stage in the cleaning process of mussels collected from the sea. This work is mostly done by Orang Seletar women, and it is part of their daily routine. Orang Seletar have a wonderful relationship and enjoy chit-chatting in their own language with one another, so no matter what they are doing together. Their daily routines are filled with delight while they work together.



Photo 13 Many children will be aborted because our lives are tough; we must work when pregnant, hauling big objects, and traveling out to sea, and many of our babies will be accidentally aborted at this time. If a woman is fortunate enough to have a child, she must continue working without restriction, which is not good for our women's bodies, and it will be more difficult when they are older.



Photo 14 All of the garbage that floats on the river's surface is brought in by outsiders, and the garbage follows the river water from the city and drifts toward the villages. The trash entangled with the roots of the mangrove trees in Kampung Sungai Temon, emitting a horrible odour.



Photo 15 When the tide rises, all of the trash floats to the road, taking time for the locals to clean up their settlement. The majority of trash is made of plastic and Styrofoam, which cannot decompose naturally. A large number of lorries will transport construction trash and daily garbage to the barren area adjacent to Kampung Sungai Temon. It is against the law to dump trash there, but it happens all the time as these unscrupulous businesses want to avoid paying waste disposal fees.



Photo 16 This is the Orang Seletar's kitchen, which is made up of basic and rudimentary materials and is surrounded by mosquitoes, houseflies, dogs, cats, and trash. This will be a place for the women to prepare food for their families as well as a place to rest.



Photo 17 The boy carrying an unused piece of Styrofoam becomes the boy's temporary toy. The dog pack remains by the boy's side, and the mother's dog is nursing her baby. There are many stray dogs in the village, and the people will not drive them away. Instead, they will treat them with kindness, especially the children, who can be friends with the dogs. They are sharing space and coexisting together in the village.

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