A sense of space: land struggles of the Semai of peninsular Malaysia
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Chapter Two: Conceptualizing Indigenous Relations and Land Struggles: A Place-Making Approach

Before suggesting a conceptual framework to examine the issue of indigenous relations and indigenous land rights, I wish to clarify the term "indigenous" or "indigenous peoples" as it is used in this text. One major difficulty in defining this term is that it is still a matter of debate between the researcher (most notably the advocacy anthropologist) and the activist (Bose, 1995). The debate is further complicated in that it is mediated by inter-state policy-makers in terms of international law definitions (Brolmann & Zieck, 1993). As such, to this day there is not a universally accepted definition of the term - not among indigenous groups, not among their advocacy organizations, not among academics and not among national or inter-state policy-makers (Bose, 1995). However the term "indigenous peoples" is a designation commonly accepted by the peoples themselves and is adopted by the United Nations and other international organizations (World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territory, Environment and Development, 1992; Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 1995). There is a common opinion in these discussions as to what is the contradistinctive feature of "indigenous peoples" in contrast to other social groups. This distinguishing feature is the special relationship indigenous peoples have with the land (Brolmann & Zieck, 1993; Nettheim, 1988; Pathy, 1988; Moody, 1988; Burger, 1987; van der Vlist, 1994; Swepston & Plant, 1985). Even policy-makers at the international level recognize that the enjoyment of a full-fledged relationship with the land takes a prominent position because threats to that relationship seem to be the primary source of the indigenous peoples' problems (Leckie, 1986; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; ILO 1989; UN, 1995). And indigenous peoples' organizations themselves are asserting this primary element of their social identity (World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territory, Environment and Development, 1992)).

I would suggest therefore that similarly with the terms such as "woman" in feminist studies, "blacks" in black studies, "class" in social studies etc. the term "indigenous" needs to be understood as a social category within the multi-disciplinarity of cultural studies. As with all social categories its constituents cannot be defined in a priori, essential, objective or universal
terms. At best a working definition may be employed but with the qualification that the term must be more specifically grounded and continually interrogated. It is in this sense that I use the term "indigenous" in this text. Therefore, I suggest a provisional definition of the term "indigenous peoples", an emic category borrowed from the indigenous-rights discourse. Indigenous peoples refer to those who possess some or all of the following elements:

1. They are descendants of the original inhabitants of a territory which has been overcome by conquest;
2. They are nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, such as shifting cultivators, herders and hunters and gatherers, and practise a labour-intensive form of agriculture which produces little surplus and has low energy needs;
3. They do not have centralised political institutions and organise at the level of the community and make decisions on a consensus basis;
4. They have all the characteristics of a national minority: they share a common language, religion, culture and other identifying characteristics and a relationship to a particular territory, but are subjugated by a dominant culture and society;
5. They have a different world view, consisting of a custodial and non-materialist attitude to land and natural resources, and want to pursue a separate development to that proffered by the dominant society;
6. They consist of individuals who subjectively consider themselves indigenous, and are accepted by the group as such.

(Burger, 1987:6)

Now I turn to the term "indigenous relations". The term as it is used in this text refers to relations of power specific to indigenous localities. These relations of power are evident in an array of actions, ideas, habits, customs, representations, modes and so on. These relations of power are also revealed in economic relations, institutional arrangements, cultural patterns and psychological-behavioral modes between indigenous peoples and the dominant society. These relations also assign the indigenous peoples attitudes, abilities, personality traits, behavioral patterns, personality traits etc. different from the dominant society. Like gender relations, black relations or ethnic/race relations, indigenous relations are social constructs, which in its historical constitution was informed strongly by an equally constructed genetic or biological determinism. As with all social relations of power, indigenous relations vary over time and place. Indigenous relations also interplay with class, gender, and other structures of social hierarchy to produce specific configurations of power in different localities. Moreover, indigenous relations differentiate, structure and shape relations between indigenous individuals and groups.
Domination, subjugation, exploitation, resistance and protest characterize indigenous relations. Through these processes the hierarchical nature of indigenous relations are maintained and changed in different contexts. More specifically, it is suggested here, that the hierarchical character of indigenous relations is maintained or changed through a process of struggle at making specific social places for indigenous peoples. These places have a material-geographical specificity about them for example Aboriginal Reserves, indigenous dwelling places, ancestral or customary land, governmental and non-governmental offices and departments for indigenous affairs and so on. In geographical terms, these places have a specific location, a fixed point in space and can be topographically referred to by some abstract coordinate system such as latitude and longitude. But these indigenous places also have specific meanings assigned to them. To take the example of Aboriginal Reserves for instance - who may or may not inhabit this place, what rights the inhabitants enjoy therein, how the inhabitants go about their business of everyday social relations etc. are spelt out by a mix of ideologies, material-ecological conditions and social practices. This process of making indigenous places is, moreover, both implicit and explicit. It involves different agencies, located at different spatial scales (from local to global) with differential access to economic, political and social power.

In the following sections I shall elaborate on this conceptual framework and discuss how it was derived and how it can be a useful framework to analyse the data in this research. However, it should be noted that this framework is not intended to explain the origins of the hierarchical nature of indigenous relations. Rather I wish to argue that it is a useful way to conceptualize how domination, subordination and exploitation of indigenous peoples are currently structured and perpetuated and how/where they are changed. In particular, this framework enables an analysis of how the land rights struggles structure, maintain and change indigenous relations.

Semai Notions of Places and Practices of "Place-Making"

The particular group of indigenous peoples studied in this research is known as Semai, the largest of the nineteen different groups that constitute the Orang Asli or aboriginal people of Malaysia. The "ethnographic community" I worked with consists of several Semai villages,
details of which I shall elaborate as I go on. While the term "Semai" is another ethnological term which is widely used by "outsiders" as well as by these peoples themselves, the word they use to refer to themselves in their own language is "Sengoi" which means "persons/people coming from or originating from". In this study, I shall employ the word "Semai" because the villagers I worked with used this term to distinguish themselves from other Sengoi groups in the country. The conceptual framework suggested in this chapter section is derived, in part, from certain key notions and social practices of this Semai group. More specifically, these are notions and social practices by which, as I shall argue, members of this group perceive their "society" to be, and how it is organised or "reorganised", or changed.

This way of conceptualizing indigenous social relations, therefore, is from the "actor's" point of view as it were:

The analysis of the way an actor gives meaning to and orders the social world involves the study of the core symbols, or what others have called the central terms or the key notions, which she or he uses and shares with other actors (Eickelman 1981:189). Especially Geertz has stressed the need to study vocabulary and see words and values as two aspects of the same thing (1979:199). These central symbols are situated within the particular social and historical conditions, and are "highly ambiguous, expressive, and inherently susceptible to many interpretations; this is what makes them central".

(Rabinow 1975:3, as quoted from Jansen, 1987:13)

There are many significant notions, symbols and social practices which the Semai adhere to and share among themselves in different scales of their lived world. As the above-mentioned quote suggests these central frames of meaning are historically and socially specific and are therefore open to many interpretations. More specifically, different persons holding different positions of power within the group, as well as outside the group, experience and interpret these meanings differently. The Semai notions that are considered central and the way they are interpreted in this text as a conceptual framework were determined by my communication with the main contributors and how I listened and re-told their stories.

Perhaps a key notion or concept to start with in Semai social relations lies in their very name itself. As I mentioned earlier the term "Semai" is an ethnological term which is widely used by "outsiders" as well as by the indigenous peoples themselves but the word they use to refer to themselves in their own language is "Sengoi" which means "persons/people coming from or originating from". In fact it is believed that the name "Semai" was derived from a designation given these peoples by their northern-located neighbours - the Temiars who speak a
variant dialect of the common Austroasiatic language shared by both these groups (Green, 1949:130). In the Sengoi dialect of the Temiar s *seman* means "people from the southern hills", referring to the Semai-Sengoi (Ibid.) though Dentan (1975:51) suggests that it could also have been used to refer to another Orang Asli group called the Semang. However, for the Semai in general, individuals and groups are primarily represented in terms of the places-they-come-from or places-they-belong-to. When talking to a Semai about society or the world in general people are divided into two broad groups: *sengoi bandar* (people of/from the town/city) or *sengoi darat* (people of/from the interior). The Semai would also frequently use the Malay terms *orang bandar* (town/city people) and *orang ulu* (interior people) to represent these two broad social worlds. In representing the differentiation among the *sengoi darat* (interior people), the Semai would classify the *sengoi darat* and themselves in terms of the places a group/individual belongs to or comes from. Even about their more immediate Semai neighbours, whether kin or non-kin, people are identified with place: *mai cenan* (they of the mountains), *mai kui teow* (they of the headwaters), *mai baruh* (they of the plains), *mai pungkal cenan* (they of the foothills) and so on. Groups of Semai are also represented in terms of *gu* (watersheds), *tmpaat* (settlement places), or the towns where they are proximately settled, for example *mai Tapah* (they of/from Tapah town), *mai Sungkai* (they of/from Sungkai town) and so on. The list of "people-places" is endless. As the very term "sengoi" implies people are defined in terms of the place they come from or the place they belong to.

Representing people in terms of places is not merely a habit of Semai semantics. Places are integral constituents of Semai shared meanings and social relations. To demonstrate the significance of this Semai association of people and place, social activities/practices and place, I examine what is perhaps the single most important place for the Semai - the *lengriik*. *Lengriik* translates literally into "country" and it is one of the central Semai notions in the organizing of their everyday life. It is in fact this *lengriik* land that the Semai are claiming in their current land struggles to be recognized as their rightful communal heritage. The *lengriik* is a specific geographical location marked by landscape features such as ridges, rivers and hills. According to Beh Tani, whose great-grandfather is recognized as the pioneer and first Mairaknak (elder of the people) of this Darat Legep *lengriik* (Map...), the original geography of their country was much larger than the area now commonly accepted by the villagers. I shall elaborate on the
particular history of this *lengriik* in Chapter Three. For now, the point I wish to make is that the Semai of the villages studied in this research can identify the physical markers of their common *lengriik* and all the different places within this territory. The significance of the *lengriik*-place and how it impinges on the social relations of the Semai can be demonstrated in the ways, for instance, the three villages of Canu, Pendue and I'ni are organized. These three villages were established in the 1960s as state-administrative village-units within the boundaries of the Batang Padang District in the state of Perak (Map ...). During the period of Japanese Occupation (1940 - 1945) and the subsequent Communist Insurgency (1948 - 1960), some Semai settlements belonging to a common territorial (*lengriik*-based) group had centralized their settlement sites in this area. With the end of the Emergency era, as the communist insurgency period was referred to, these Semai settlements were organized by the state into two neighbouring village-units of Canu and Pendue. A few years later a third Semai village, I'ni, was relocated as another neighbouring village to Canu and Pendue. I'ni was also a collection of Semai settlements but from another territorial group. It was initially established as a village unit at a location about thirty kilometres away from the Canu-Pendue site. While the three villages are organized as village-administrative units they also adhere to certain Semai practices of kinship and territoriality in terms of the *lengriik*. This is demonstrated, for instance, in their jural system governing land-ownership, the inheritance of usufruct rights in territory and inheritance of fruit trees. One way to begin to understand the particular practices of kinship and territoriality vis-a-vis the *lengriik* is to see the Semai as what anthropologists would call an ambilineal cognatic descent type society. Ambilineal societies are characterized by:

1. ambilineal ramiages where "affiliation in each successive generation is acquired through either parent and depends, not on filiation links radiating outward from an individual as in the case of a bilateral kindred, but on chains of filiation links converging upon a common ancestor, from whom land rights are derived...",
2. extended families,
3. ambilocal residence,
4. affiliation not ordinarily maintained with the natal groups of a parent who has changed residence, and
5. membership in a descent group usually determined by parents' choice of marital residence. Occasionally present are bilateral kindreds, kinship groups that are ego-centred and consist of ego's relatives on both mother's and father's side. In addition, ambilineal descent groups characteristically practise monogamy, extend marriage prohibitions to all second as well as first cousins, apply sibling terms to first cousins,
and employ avuncular terminology of the generational type, extending the term for both father's brother and mother's brother.

(Murdock, 1960:10-11)

There is, however, one major qualification that needs to be stressed about the Semai cognatic system. For the Semai a non-member of a descent group, whether Semai or otherwise, can cultivate (hiit) consanguineal relationships and earn membership into a ramage group. Consequently, the non-member becomes "kin" or is socially recognized as such and thus enjoys similar usufruct and inheritance rights in the descent group. It was in this manner of cultivating consanguineal or fictive relationships that I'n villagers earned their membership into the Canu-Pendue lengriik-community. Any individual or group who migrates into the river basin of another band, as the I'n villagers had done, can inhabit a certain area with the permission of the raknak (elders) of that particular lengriik. Thus when the I'n villagers were evicted from their previous settlement site their headman-raknak approached the elders-headmen of Canu and Pendue and requested permission for I'n villagers to migrate to the Canu-Pendue territory. Only after acquiring the necessary permission from the Canu-Pendue elders did the I'n headman inform the Department of Orang Asli Affairs who then assisted them in the movement and construction of their houses. However, being non-members to any of the Canu-Pendue descent groups I'n villagers were not entitled to use the territory except for building their houses and selai nyeng (house gardens). More importantly, I'n villagers could not plant fruit trees anywhere in the territory because fruit trees are a marker of a ramage member's usufruct and inheritance rights over that territory and the fruit trees. I'n villagers could seek permission to acquire rights of access to the produce of a ramage's area but no planting of fruit trees was allowed. The giving of non-ramage members permission to plant fruit trees in ramage territory has implications for future generations and therefore not acceded to lightly. There was, therefore, a basic differentiation in membership and rights to the lengriik between the Canu-Pendue and the I'n villages. For the Canu-Pendue Semai their territory was recognized as their lengriik pasak or "original country" and their claims in land were based on their membership in the mai pasak or "they of the original country" group. I'n villagers, on the other hand, only had territorial rights in accordance with their relations to the land as their lengriik numpuk (residential country). Over the months and years, however, since the I'n villagers first migrated to Canu-Pendue territory the former were able to cultivate "consanguineal" ties with various Canu-Pendue descent groups.
whose members then granted them permission to plant fruit trees on portions of ramage territory. In this way, therefore, the Ini villagers had to negotiate their full membership into the lengriik community and earn their rights in the territory lands.

The way a non-member cultivates consanguineal ties into a descent group in order to earn rights in land follows the same procedures that a ramage member has to observe to gain social recognition of his/her already existing land rights. Ramage members as well as newcomers must demonstrate their interest in the affairs of the group, maintain constant and close ties and interact with others and show an interest as well as work on the maintenance and reproduction of the kampok (orchards). This is how ramage members may re-activate their rights when they migrate or return to another lengriik in which they have usufruct and inheritance rights based on ambilocal residency. As I will illustrate with more examples later, the Semai in these three villages recognize themselves as belonging to a common lengriik-space or lengriik-community and adhere to certain rules or customs of this place in their social practices. An important tenet of these land customs is the practice of cultivating or reproducing lengriik relations. A member, who does not show his/her interest in reproducing the lengriik, by observing the necessary land practices, is said to have "forgotten" (inseep) his/her lengriik and thereby may lose his/her rights in lands therein.

This manner of cultivating or growing into relationships around a specific spatial context is a significant feature of Semai social relations in general. A Semai individual or group identity and relations with each other is not only represented but constructed in terms of places. Within the space of their lengriik, for instance, the Semai would further differentiate themselves in terms of tmpaat (settlement place), kampung (administrative village); or as belonging to the lengriik pasak (original country) dimension of their lengriik or lengriik numpuk (residential country) dimension of the lengriik and so on. Different Semai in one lengriik also belong to other lengriiks in the locality, by way of kinship and marriage. The nature of their relations and extent of rights to the other lengriik depend on their participation and interaction in the latter place. This is the process that I refer to as the Semai practices of "place-making". In subsequent chapters I shall examine other people-places beyond the lengriik which the Semai identify with and construct relations around, for example the gu (watershed) of another group of Semai, the bandar (town), and so on. For now I wish to elaborate another notion and level of Semai "place-
making" - that of their religious beliefs or metaphysics. In doing so I wish to underscore the norms and values by which the Semai go about making places.

Central to Semai (religious/metaphysical) thought is the concept of the ruai, the closest translation of which is "soul" or "psyche". Interestingly, this Semai term resonates with the Hebrew ruah or the Australian-Aboriginal rai, both the latter terms also refer to the life-force or life-breath of the soul/person. For the Semai, the ruai is a a tmpaat (place) located just behind the center of the forehead. As Beh Panei, a mai halaa (one who has the ability to communicate with the world of "spirits") explains it, however, the identity and location of the ruai are seen as always shifting:

...this tmpaat looks like the shape of the body of the person, but much smaller, about the size of my small finger... this is how the Semai believe... the ruai is also a bird. At night the ruai-terek (ruai-bird)]will leave the body and travels and in these travels dreams will happen as the ruai meets other ruai, the ruai of other peoples, the ruai of animals, the ruai of mountains, winds and rivers... if in these dreams we hear a song from another ruai we must listen carefully so as to remember the music the next morning... our way is very different then the orang bandar... but that ruai will come again in our dreams and teach us the song but if we keep inseep (forgetting) the song we will not meet that ruai again. If we remember the song, the music and the words then we can have halaa'(the ability to communicate with the "spirits") and the ruai who has taught us the song will become our gunig (a ruai with whom/which one forms an intimate relationship with)...my gunig is a tiger that guards the gharu tree... that's why I must not collect gharu from the forests or eat what the tiger does not eat...the Semai are so strange, ah? ... but its true, if a person's gunig is a ruai of a Malay then s/he must not eat food which is haram (an Arabic-Malay term meaning "forbidden") to the Malays... The ruai is also a little child and little children can be easily frigthened so the ruai can be easily frigthened.... sometimes ruai can be lost.... Sometimes ruai can be captured or made ill by a bad nyani' (spirit). If that happens we must call for a shewang (dance-sing sessions)...those who have halaa' like myself sing the songs they we have learnt from our gunig. The gunig comes to us and the I ask what nyani' has caused this illness, if the sick person's ruai has been captured the mai halaa' (the person who has the ability to communicate with the "spirits") will send his/her gunig to rescue the ruai ...this is why we Semai take the name of our first child... Semai are not like the orang bandar... when the Semai has a child they take the child's name... so different... but there is a reason, we must protect the ruai of the child. When it is a girl people will call the parents Beh Balez and Ken Balez, when it is a boy people will call the parents Beh Yok and Ken Yok when you see the Semai they are so different, different adat (custom)...the grandparents also follow the same. My eldest child's name is Panei so my parents are called Jenang Panei... only when the orang bandar like yourself come to stay with us then you can understand our way, it will be familiar to you, you get used to it... but there is meaning. It doesn't matter when you have no children but when you do you must protect the child's ruai because everyone's ruai is a child. With regard to lineit (the collections of Semai
beliefs and religious practices) the Semai are still strong, other matters, well that's another story with regard to lineit still strong. When you muiit ugama (to enter into religion) and take Christian, Muslim or Baha'i names that is no problem but once you have a child you must take the child's name even if you want to give the child a christian name... the lineit is still strong... if we don't protect the ruai then when it becomes a bird and travels into dreams a bad nyani may frighten it, even capture it and the child will fall ill... the Semai believe this. But some people don't follow this lineit anymore, they are jah [having lost the ability of the ruai]... but most Semai still follow this way... but the ruai can also become an animal...

There are several other aspects of the ruai, the central component or process of the human person as the Semai express it, as well as its implications in terms of social practice centred around places. What is of significance here is the notion of the ruai as a place that has neither fixed identity nor boundaries. The ruai is both inside and outside the person, and its identity is defined not in counterposition to another ruai but through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections with other ruai (places). Moreover, given the “traveling” nature of the ruai any attempts to fix the meaning of the space it inhabits or enclose it with a fixed identity will in itself distort the uniqueness of the ruai. These unique features of the ruai, the different places of its identity, the different identities of its place and its underlying mobility is characteristic of Semai place-making at other levels of their lived world as well. I have already discussed the Semai notion of the lengriik and how within this place relationships can be forged in such a way as to change both the natures of the place as well as its inhabitants. There are other Semai-constructed places both within the lengriik and beyond it, which the Semai identify with and relate to in terms which demonstrate the features of the ruai-place, as far as the Semai perceive and express them. They include places in the lengriik such as the different villages/tmpaat; other places such as the home, the deuk penghulu (headman's house), the kampok (orchard), the wal (fireplace) etc.; or certain places situated beyond the villages such as the forests beyond their lengriik-territory, Baha'i/Christian urban meeting-centres, the towns/cities etc. These places are all perceived as "people-places" which contain specific identities, yet the containment is not so fixed as to disallow a forging of new identities in those places.

The nature of the Semai movements and relations to these places, the ways they organize their relations around these places reflect an openness, flexibility and mobility with regard to the Semai approach to place-making. The practice of cultivating consanguinity between descent
group members and outgroupers vis-a-vis the lengriik is but one illustration. In later chapters I shall discuss how in different historical contexts of their social relations, there were many instances whence the Semai forged different identities in one place or multiplied the places of their various interactions through various means of mobility and extension. The ruai features are also mirrored in the unique manner and mix of Semai religious practices/beliefs and why/what/where cultural relations are changing. The pragmatism of the ruai concept is also evident in the many flexible and mobile combinations of Semai economic strategies in the contested geography of the forest. But there are certain places the Semai are averse to. These are places where they are disinclined to forge relationships with others thus demonstrating the conditions attached to their openness, flexibility and mobility. The Semai frequently speak of certain people and places to which they adopt an attitude of a-bor (caution or guardedness). A-bor is also the term used when greeting someone goodbye which then means cip a-bor (be careful or take care as you walk). There are two types of people and places the Semai consider with the attitude of a-bor. First, people who are newcomers, whether migrants such as the Ini villagers were to the Canu-Pendue Semai when the former first arrived or visitors as I was to them. Therefore places associated with the newcomers, or when newcomers are present in Semai places, these places are treated with a-bor until "consanguineal" ties are forged. The initiatives, however, must come from the newcomers. Second, the Semai also take great pains to avoid places of people who have caused persusah to them. The term persusah is derived from the Malay causative prefix per- and the word susah (to make difficult, to cause distress or trouble). The Semai employ this term to define the action of a person who causes another to slide into an unpleasant emotional state. It is used to refer to the actions of a person who interferes in the affairs of another. For example, a headman who gets involved in a matter which does not concern him or an issue that is not a formal quarrel settlement. It is also used to describe the actions of the Gob (Malay) who want to impose their religion on the Semai or who, in previous times were raiding Semai settlements in their hunt for slaves. Persusah is also used on the orang bandar (urban people), the orang kerajaan (government people) more specifically the orang JOA (the JHEOA or "Department of Orang Asli Affairs" people). In the past, especially during their internment in a military camp during the emergency years, but also currently the Semai have experienced many unpleasant encounters with these groups of people.
There are also instances, in the past as well as currently, when persusah experiences among the Semai if not adequately resolved in a formal quarrel settlement will result in an individual, a family or a group of families moving out of the settlement to join another elsewhere. Therefore, the Semai would also avoid frequenting places of those people among themselves who have been the cause of persusah feelings.

As much as the Semai are cautious or avoid certain people-places their underlying attitude remains one of openness to other or different places. We can see this in two examples of place-making demonstrated at two levels of their lived world. First, at the level of the ruai. We already saw what Beh Panei had said about a Semai ruai meeting up with a Malay ruai. Despite their aversion towards the Malays the Semai would adopt Malay customs of eating if s/he had encountered a Malay ruai in their dream travels. A further example, at the level of the ruai is the Semai belief that a nyani (bad spirit) has the potential to become a gunik (good spirit). In fact, gunik were once nyani but they had encountered a Semai-ruai in dreams and had asked to be "kin" and had given their songs to their Semai "kin". In this process, then the nyani becomes a gunik and is called "son" or "daughter" by its Semai "father" or "mother" and becomes sibling to their children. Just as an outgrouper in-marrys or migrates into a lengriik and grows into the network of kin relations (to become hii) so a nyani can become a gunig. The Semai openness to a people-place despite their aversion to it may be seen at another level as well. In the Semai's general social division of the world into orang bandar and orang ulu the bandar (town/city) is a place infused with meanings of suspicion, fear, etc. The town/city and the folks there are also places the Semai are often humiliated or looked down upon. Many Semai were also detained in internment camps in the towns during the Emergency period, an experience still talked with anguish among the Semai. Yet, despite these strong reservations or identifying against the town/city place and its peoples, the Semai remain open to the possibilities of forging relations in town/city people-places. Some writers have explained these Semai relations with the urban as part of a socio-economic dependence (Cerruti, 1908: 48; Endicott, 1983:232; Dentan, 1968). Certainly, there is an element of socio-economic dependence of the Semai in their urban relations just as there is a dependence of the urban, for instance, on the Semai for the latter's seasonal labour or for the Semai-gathered products of the forest. But the nature of the Semai relations with the urban cannot be simply reduced to one of dependence. The Semai "sense of
places" (this is also a conceptual term which I shall elaborate later) do configure in their making of places with the urban. An example may suffice to illustrate this point. For the villagers of Canu, Pendue and Ini, Beh/Wah Keneng's house serves as the recruiting center for urban employers seeking Semai contract-labour from these villages. Beh Keneng organizes the male labourers when they are required and Wah Keneng the female labour. The reason for Beh/Wah Keneng's house becoming the recruiting place and they assuming this mediating role in recruiting Semai labour for the urban is in no less measure due to the location of their house. Their house is situated at the entrance of the path leading into the access road connecting the villages to the town. Depending on the nature of the work and the requirements of the employers Beh/Wah Keneng would recruit Semai from the different villages and negotiate the terms of the work with the employers. When the Semai engage themselves as contract-labour in the towns they always do so as groups not only because the type of work generally requires it but as Beh/Wah Keneng explains, the Semai are apprehensive of the town places and will never venture alone in "orang bandar places". Even when in the case of the restaurant owner, from a nearby town, who was seeking only one Semai kitchen-helper from their village, Beh/Wah Keneng insisted that he employ at least two persons. But there is yet another way the Semai senses of place shape their relations with their urban employers. Semai contract-work teams, whether they travel daily from the village to the urban work-sites or are housed in workers quarters in the town, will not report for work on a particular day should any member of their team is "not feeling up to it". A member of the work team may have fallen ill or just does not have a good feeling about the "work-place" that particular day. The Semai use two terms to explain these events. One is serenglok which translates as "the right/proper location to place something/someone in" and the other is serengih which means a "pre-arranged agreement/understanding among a group of persons to go somewhere at a particular time". These terms are also applied to those occasions when a group of Semai decides to meet at a certain time and place to make a hunting/gathering/fishing trip into the forests but one or more members of that team does not show up at the pre-arranged time and place. On these occasions, just as in the case of contract-work at the urban work-sites, the group will abandon their plans to go where they had agreed to. The arrangement to go somewhere (serengih) or that place itself is not serenglok (the right/proper location to be placed in). There have been many instances of
Sema ii contract-work teams not turning up at work-sites due to these reasons. And the effect of this pattern on the urban employers, according to Beh/Wah Keneng is that only those employers who have come to understand and accept these "Sema ways" are the ones who continue to return to their house seeking out Sema labour. There are other aspects to the relations between the Sema and the urban people-places which I shall attend to in the next section, most notably the unequal relations between them, but the point here is to underscore the significance of place-making in Sema social relations in general.

This Sema way of identifying themselves and other collectives in terms of places have been pointed out in previous Orang Asli studies (Dentan, 1975; Fix, 1971; Robarchek, 1977). But the significance of place to Sema social relations has not been pursued in these studies. Their descriptions of Sema-perceived places are almost ideographic - describing in some length the many places the Sema identify with/against and move within or away from. These studies, however, fail to interrogate the connections between Sema places and their social relations. They also do not look into how these places are represented and constructed out of Sema social relations which in turn shape their social relations. For example, in his discussion of the Sema and their social divisions, Dentan (1975) quite elaborately classifies the groups he studied in the terms provided by his informants - i.e. in terms of the places identified with particular groups. He notes how the Sema represent the world at large in terms of sengoi pekan (marketplace folk) and sengoi darat (hinterland folk); how they represent the communist insurgents as "really" "market people" who turned into "they of the primary forests", other Sema groups in terms of various locations and so on (Ibid. pp. 51f). Interestingly, even Dentan and his wife were represented, by a Sema, in the characteristic Sema style but the signficance of place seemed to have gone unnoticed: "...my wife and myself were, as one man told a shy spirit, "really our people", even though we were born elsewhere and looked different" (Ibid.).

Dentan's as well as other research on Sema social relations have provided a wealth of information and insights into the world of the Sema. The Sengoi, in general, are best known from the many Orang Asli studies for their peaceful and non-violent nature because of their highly developed dream-based system of interpersonal relations (Dentan, 1983; Braunlein, 1984; Domhoff, 1985). And the Sema sub-group of the Sengoi are especially well known from these anthropological studies as a "non-violent people of Malaysia" (Dentan, 1968), virtually
free of interpersonal violence (Robarchek, 1977). Some scholars have even referred to the Semai example to counter arguments for human's innate aggressiveness (Alland, 1972) or explain how human conflicts need not result in violence and war (Robarchek, 1990). And there is much more that studies on the Semai have contributed to understanding the social relations of this indigenous group (Benjamin, 1989). But in terms of the interplay between Semai social relations and their system of shared meanings (culture), however, there is still much to be learnt about the significance of place and place-making in Semai thought and social practices. Interestingly, many Orang Asli scholars have continued to classify the Semai in general, following Dentan's pioneering ethnography of this group - in terms of their geographical location. Dentan distinguished this Orang Asli group in terms of the West Semai and the East Semai arguing that the latter have preserved more of their traditional culture than the former due to their varying geographical-cultural distance from the Malay/Chinese and urban centres (Dentan, 1968). But this seems to be as far as he goes in examining the linkages between place and Semai social relations. One reason, perhaps, of this oversight or neglect of the significance of place in these Semai studies is a projection of a "commonsense" and conventional social-science sense of place onto an understanding of Semai social relations. By this I mean that there is a unquestioned tendency in these studies to accept "places" either as ideographic backdrops across which social processes happen or a set of fixed containers at particular scales for cultures and social relations. That this is a commonsense and conventional social-science sense of place is well-argued in recent scholarship (Agnew, 1993). What this sense of place implies for social relations, culture and identity is that "places make people" rather than "people make places". And this is precisely not the case with the Semai, as I have demonstrated. They make places even if in circumstances not of their own choosing. But this is not to say that Semai social relations are not shaped by the physical and social landscapes of the places they live and move in.

Semai Place-making in the wider social context

Locality studies are an effective way to reveal the complex interactions that connect the spheres of politics, culture and economy in the process of social change. This research is a study
on one locality - that of the Semai. The notions such as lengriik, ruai, a-bor, etc. can contribute to this type of study in clarifying how certain places in their locality are made or constituted by Semai subjects who perceive, represent and over time construct them even though in circumstances not of their own choosing. In terms of the ruai, as mentioned earlier, neither places or identities within a particular locality are to be understood in terms of bounded, fixed, unproblematic and singular meanings. There is an on-going process of producing places in the locality. It is a process in where the relations between ideologies, material conditions and practices are thoroughly interconnected. But there is a range of different scales of the locality at which these operations of place-making are happening. In the previous section I focused on the Semai subjects and their perspectives at reproducing certain people-places such as the ruai, lengriik, bandar, etc. One way to understand the scales of Semai place-making is to see the places in their locality as a series of "locales". The "locale" is a term suggested by Giddens (1983:79) to describe the physical settings in which social relations are constituted. According to Giddens, locales are social constructs - sites or areas which have become such because subjects have acquired the knowledge necessary to recognize the particularity of their attributes to grasp the potential "modes of realization" which they represent to draw upon their features in order to perform (Giddens, 1985:271f). Locales are nested within locales, which are hierarchically differentiated and may range in scale from the spatiality of the body to the nation state. But as others have pointed out (Massey, 1994; Pred, 1986) Gidden's locale needs to be expanded in its conceptualization to include the fact that places are also the medium and outcome of human agency and social relations operating at various spatial scales.

Notions of the lengriik and the ruai also serve as ideologies in the every-day Semai process of place-making. These notions can be described as a way of Semai feeling and thinking about particular places whether it is their individual bodies or specific social places within or beyond their locale. Geographers would call this a "sense of place" (Rose, 1995:88; Agnew, 1993:263), referring to the manner in which a person/group identifies with or against a place. But this sense of place is not to be seen only as an individual's or group's emotional sentiments about places. Rather it needs to be understood as a "structure of feeling", to use the phrase from Williams (1977), which has emerged from every aspect of the individual's/group's life experiences and pervades their everyday life, social practices and experience. This Semai sense
of place reinforces the social-spatial definition of place from "inside" so to speak whether the "inside" locale is that of the body or the lengriik. Thus, in terms of the range of spatial scales of social relations this "sense of place" or "structure of feeling" represents relations at the subjective and inter-personal scales of their locality. In other words, this sense of place or "subjective territorial identity" (Agnew, 1992:263) of the social self is a key tenet which needs to be considered in understanding the process of place-making. This sense of place is not merely a "natural" territorial instinct, a desire to "belong somewhere" (Rose, 1995). As much as place is constructed, a sense of place is also constructed by underlying socio-economic structures of power by systems of shared meaning embedded in those structures of power and by a politics of identity generated by contestation over different claims over place (Ibid.). What this means, therefore, is that a "sense of place" is not a fixed or rigid framework of understanding and ordering of social relations within a particular spatial realm. In fact, the nature of the Semai sense of place in itself militates against an absolute fixing of ideas. Perhaps in this sense Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" (1977) can also serve to clarify this understanding of "sense of place". Bourdieu explains "habitus" as:

...systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (Bourdieu, 1977)

However, in adopting Bourdieu's term I do so with the qualification that the habitus is also produced/reproduced/changed in the context of structures and processes operating at various spatial scales beyond the immediately lived micro-world of individuals/groups.

Semai places, such as the lengriik, overlap with and are divided up by larger socially organized spaces such as State Forests Reserves and Orang Asli Reserves/Areas. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the lengriik is nested within or beside other locales in a hierarchical social arrangement. In Semai interactions within these larger social networks, the agencies which hold positions of dominance in the wider territorial society have contrasting designs vis-a-vis Semai places and identities. In contrast to Semai notions, these State-, capital-, bureaucratic-, etc. principles of organizing places express themselves as exclusivist claims to
places, attempts to fix the meaning of particular Semai places and claim them for one's own. Different state agencies at different historical contexts have imposed various and specific spatial means of control over Semai places and identities which the latter had to negotiate and struggle with. Currently, however, the spatialization of cultural politics has taken new twists especially since the emergence of the Orang Asli movement. While state strategies of spatial control has changed little over time, the Semai are taking their struggles to new places. They are indigenizing resources and inputs from local to global places and reconfiguring their political identity vis-a-vis the state at the same time reconstituting the notion of the lengriik. At the same time, they are also struggling to articulate their claims over land and identity in terms understandable/acceptable to the state authorities yet consonant with their own particular ways of relating to certain places. In this regard, the state networks are not the only arenas within which the Semai have to struggle with to resist the fixing of singular boundaries and identities over their places and identities. Their places are a part of a larger space of accumulation and the Semai are faced with capitalist and bureaucratic networks who see the forests and the trees from quite a different discourse than the Semai. The latter are also struggling with non-governmental agencies that they have collaborated with in their land struggles.

The Semai lengriik, therefore, is not merely a locale isolated from other locales or a social place to be reproduced and changed only in terms of a Semai sense of place. In fact, this idea is consonant with Semai thought on how the ruai is constituted. Different ruai (places) are interconnected and the interactions of one ruai with another influence and changes both of them. In terms of the ruai perspective the Semai "sense of place" or "structure of feeling", and therefore the making of places is not simply a question of Semai experience of their own "micro" world. The ruai, thus the making of places, according to Semai thought cannot be isolated from senses of place or structures of feeling located in sites beyond the personal/social self. These interconnections of Semai places, the flows between them and their effects on each other may be also seen at another spatial scale than the psychic ruai. Consider the Semai practices of the lengriik, persusah and a-bor which I mentioned in the previous section. There are certain people-places around which the Semai would create kinship relations such as the lengriik. There are other places they would be physically cautious of or distance themselves from altogether. In other words, at the different scales of their locality the Semai identify with
certain places and not with others. Seen in this way, the way the Semai perceive their sense of place or making of places at the scale of the local is also informed by their relations in a wider context.

At this point in the discussion, it is necessary to address directly the relationship between social inequality and senses of place. Whose sense of place is more powerful in terms of Semai social relations? Whose sense of place has to struggle to be expressed? Why are some senses of place negative for the Semai? To answer these questions we need to understand that the interconnections and flows between places are not only uneven but also unequal. The Semai sense of place is not only different to that of other dominant groups in society but is part of unequal social relations. As I shall examine in subsequent chapters the idea that the forests occupied by the Orang Asli were perceived as "empty no-man's land" or vast tracks of "wastelands" to be opened up for development legitimated colonial and postcolonial economic exploitation of the area. The sense of place Malay territorial regimes and later the British authorities conveyed about Orang Asli places - as less than civilized - justified a colonizing of these places by refusing to recognize the difference of culture and peoples of the forest. Sense of place, then, should also be seen as part of underlying structures of power (Rose, 1995).

Many commentators have linked the claim to belong to a particular place to the dynamics of power relations. Robert Sack is quite clear about this: "Territoriality is a primary geographical expression of social power. It is the means by which society and space are related" (Sack, 1986:5). He argues that territoriality is nothing more or less than a claim to control people by controlling an area. Those who belong to a particular place are distinguished from those who do not; and while the latter may be excluded from that place, the former is expected to conform to its conventions. Sack's description of territoriality corresponds to that which has been described as the Semai sense of place that is, identifying with somewhere. However, his argument about senses of place and social power is also relevant to all senses of place.

The most obvious example of the way power relations can structure senses of place is cases where one sense of place becomes so dominant that it obscures other, perhaps more important, understandings about that same place. I have already mentioned the examples of how Semai-occupied lands were perceived as "no man's land" or "wastelands" to dominant colonizing regimes in the 19th and early twentieth centuries. In the 1940s to the 1960s Orang
Asli inhabited areas were literally battle-grounds, first for the Japanese and the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army, and then for the Communist guerillas and British-Malayan military forces. Whichever warring party controlled these areas was assured the stability and strength of their territorial regime. In these warring parties' attempts to establish their sense of place in order to assert control over these areas, all other alternative interpretations of those places were erased. By the 1960s Semai places of inhabitation were converted into administrative villages and whatever lengriik principles of Semai social relations became clearly subordinate to the organizing principles of a state, bent on securing their control over those "communist-infested jungle areas".

There are other examples of how the Semai senses of place and their specific locale were subjected to structures of power with clearly contrasting senses of the same place. Caught in a system of unequal social relations, the persistent effect of the structural power of the state, capital etc. are those, which dominates the senses of place through which the Semai places are understood and represented. In terms of the range of scales of the place-making process, therefore, we need to see that the Semai locale is also a "location" within a wider territorial society. John Agnew defines "location" as the "effects upon locales of social and economic processes operating at wider scales" (Agnew, 1993:263). Seen this way, therefore, both the Semai locale or lengriik and their "structure of feeling" about that place are located according to the demands of a spatially extensive division of labour, the global system of material production and distribution and variable patterns of political authority and control. But the attempts at fixing the meaning of particular social spaces, to enclose them with fixed identities and to claim them for one's own does not mean that places are necessarily fixed and bounded. If anything, these exclusivist claims to places only generates contestation. Seen from the perspective of the Semai notions mentioned earlier, places are not merely given topographical points on the map. They are articulations of social relations continually produced, reproduced and changed. Semai land struggles, therefore, are such articulations of place-making happening in one locale but interconnected to processes at wider spatial scales. In the following chapters I shall examine the specific practices of different agencies at particular places to illustrate what has been discussed thus far in rather abstract terms.