

A Note on Frontier Settlements in Johor

Narifumi MAEDA*

This note reports preliminary fieldwork carried out at Mukim Sungai Karang, Daerah Pontian, Johor, Malaysia, in September and October, 1986. It aims primarily to lay a foundation and outline a framework for future research; but even in its present form, I hope it contributes to studies on frontier society in general, giving a transformative perspective of frontiers.

I Outline of the Community

1. Administration and Population

At the southeastern tip of the Malay Peninsula, the Sungai Pulai flows out into the Johor Straits. It has many branches on the eastern bank, e.g., Sungai (Sg) Boh, Sg Karang and Sg Redan, which has further branches like Sg Buluh Kasap, Sg Punai,

Table 1 Population and Number of Households by Kawasan, Mukim Sg Karang

Kawasan	Population	Households	Average Members
I	363	84	4.32
II	502	113	4.44
III	367	62	5.92
IV	633	117	5.41
Total	1,865	376	4.96

Source: SERU 1986 Maklumat Kampung

* 前田成文, The Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

Sg Peradin, Sg Belokok, and Sg Sunai. Mukim Sg Karang is situated along and between these small rivers, more than a half of the area being a forest reserve of mangrove.

The *mukim* (sub-district) borders on Mukim Jeram Batu, Mukim Rimba Terjun, Mukim Ayer Masin and Mukim Serkat, all of which have paved roads giving easy

Table 2 Number of Houses by Kampung, Mukim Sg Karang

Kawasan	Kampung	Houses	SERU 1986
I	Sg Karang	20	
	Buluh Kasap	23	
	Sg Punai	25	
	Permas	7	
	sub-total	75	84
II	Belokok	56	
	Parit Jerman	20	
	Peradin	28	
	Sg Sunai	14	
	sub-total	118	85
III	Simpang Kiri	44	
	Sg Boh	59	
	sub-total	103	70
IV	Baharu	25	
	Permas Ulu	30	
	Permas Sg Karang	31	
	Parit Md Nor Kg Baharu	35	
	sub-total	121	117
Total		417	356

Source: Pembantu Pertanian Mukim Sg Karang and SERU 1986 Maklumat Kampung

access to towns, while Mukim Sg Karang has recently acquired laterite roads.

The mukim is divided into four *kawasan* (areas), each comprising several *kampung* (hamlets, villages). For example, Kawasan I consists of Kampung (Kg) Sg Punai, Kg Sg Karang, Kg Buluh Kasap and a part of Kg Simpang Kiri. As its name suggests, Kg Sg Karang is considered to be the oldest settlement in the mukim. However, the administrative center is located in a newer area, Kg Belokok of Kawasan II. Table I gives a rough idea of population distribution. Table 2 shows the number of houses by kampung as reported by an agricultural extension worker in 1987.

While the mukim is supposed to have a clear-cut boundary, it is sometimes socially continuous with kampung belonging to other mukim. For example, Parit Jerman belongs to two mukim, Sg Karang and Ayer Masin, but the *parit* (canal) unites more than it divides the settlements on opposite banks. As another example, Kg Sg Boh is said to be a center for Kg Sg Karang, Kg Simpang Kiri, Kg Permas Ulu of Mukim Sg Karang on the one hand, and for Kg Sg Sam, Kg Sg Dinar, Kg Sg Chengkeh, Kg Permas of other mukim on the other.

Areas of police jurisdiction also differ totally from the local administrative mukim. Kg Belokok and Sg Sunai come under the Pontian police station, while other kampung come under Kukup.

The *kawasan* is also an artificial administrative unit. Kg Simpang Kiri is divided between Kawasan I and III. Even kampung do not have clear boundaries.

Mukim Sg Karang has two *penghulu*

(sub-district heads). Four other mukim in the District of Pontian also have two heads, although their administrative areas are rather larger than this mukim's. The old penghulu was appointed in 1981 and the new one in January, 1987. The latter lives in the Penghulu Complex in Kg Belokok, the former in his own house in the next mukim. Unlike a traditional penghulu, the present-day penghulu tend to be more bureaucratic administrators. However, personal relationships are still highly regarded in people's interactions with penghulu. Perhaps this tendency also prevails in the state structure of administration in general, which in turn is closely associated with the political structure.

The office of *ketua kampung* (village chief; or more exactly, *ketua kawasan*) is open to any resident. Although the *menteri basar* (chief minister) officially appoints the chief upon the recommendation of the Jawatankuasa Tindakan Daerah (District Executive Committee), he should by custom be approved by a local member of the state council. He receives an honorarium of 1,200 *ringgit* (Malaysian dollars) per year. The most recently appointed ketua kampung, the chief of Kawasan II, was selected in 1981, and the most senior one is a brother-in-law of the last penghulu in the traditional line. Because of various government projects, aid, and subsidies through the district office or the party line, the ketua kampung seems to be kept busy planning and applying for funds and spending the allocated budget in time.

Politically this area is under the control of the ruling party, and only a few individ-

uals are said to support opposition parties. The Wakil Rakyat Negeri (State Council Representative) is a UMNO Malay in Serkat, and the Wakil Rakyat Parliament (Member of Parliament) is an MCA Chinese living in Johor Bahru.

Ethnically, the majority of residents are descendants of Bugis or South Sulawesi migrants. A few others are of Malay, Chinese and Javanese ethnic origin. Penghulu are Malays and all ketua kampung are Bugis descendants.

2. Economy

The villagers are peasants with small *kebun* (gardens, fields, estates) many of whom, other than residents of Kawasan IV, are engaged in catching shrimps in the mangrove rivers.

By area, rubber is planted in some 1,000 ha, oil palm (*kelapa sawit*) in 358 ha, coconut palm (*kelapa*) in 208 ha and orchard (*dusun*) crops in 11 ha (SERU 1986 Maklumat). The data reported to the Mukim office by a PL (agricultural extension worker) are as follows: rubber, 852 ha; kelapa sawit, 327 ha; kelapa, 257 ha; pineapple, 159 ha; coffee, 36 ha; banana, 6 ha; dusun, 3 ha; vegetables, 3 ha; and cocoa 1 ha.

The shrimp catching system is a traditional one using a headlamp and a scoop. Operating territory is allocated to individuals and is quite limited in area. Thus, although an effort is being made to organize a cooperative, little change in the method can be expected in near future. There is no *empang* (fishpond) in the area, but one trial is being conducted to raise crabs.

According to the Maklumat Kampung

SERU, sixteen villagers work for the government, eighteen are employed in factories, mostly in Pekan Nanas, and twenty are engaged in commercial activities. One hundred and fifty-five peasants are engaged in catching shrimps, most of whom also do other jobs like rubber tapping. Few appear to be defined simply as rubber tapper, fisherman, merchant, or by any other occupation, because their means of livelihood are always multiple. Whenever and wherever there is a chance to earn money, they will take it.

3. Kinship

Cousin marriage was frequent among the older generations. Thus, kinship networks extend to other areas of Bugis concentration, like Benut, or even across the Melaka Straits. Interethnic marriages are said to have been rare in this area. Today's youth, however, seem to select partners outside the circle of kin or the Bugis community. Marriages arranged by parents are becoming unpopular. Inheritance tends to be by equal sharing among siblings regardless of sex.

According to the SERU census, 376 households live in 356 houses. The small family household seems to be in the majority. Those who get stable jobs outside tend to leave the villages, and the younger generation tend to move away either in the tradition of *merantau* (migration) or in pursuit of an urban job.

4. Identity

Most household heads are second- or third-generation descendants of the first Bugis settlers. They speak fluent Malay and

read Jawi. Relatively few people appear able to read Bugis script, although those above forty or fifty years old converse in Bugis at home and among themselves. School children usually speak Malay, even at home. Various Bugis customs brought by the first generation are also said to have disappeared, especially since the 1960s. Relationships with Indonesian Bugis seem to have been severed since it became difficult for them to migrate to places other than east-central Sumatra and adjacent islands. Politically active people become spearheads in a movement toward Malay identification. Complete Malayization may happen in the next generation.

There are five mosques and seven *surau* (small places of worship) and their number is increasing. As some former migrants from South Sulawesi regarded Johor as a half-way stopover to accumulate the expenses to go to Mecca, there are quite a number of *haji* (a title given to an accomplished pilgrim) in the older generations. Thirteen villagers made the *haj* (pilgrimage) in 1986. Islam is promoted as a uniting force by leaders, but strong religious leadership appears to be lacking.

II Sociocultural Formation at the Frontier

1. Sg Karang: The History of a Frontier

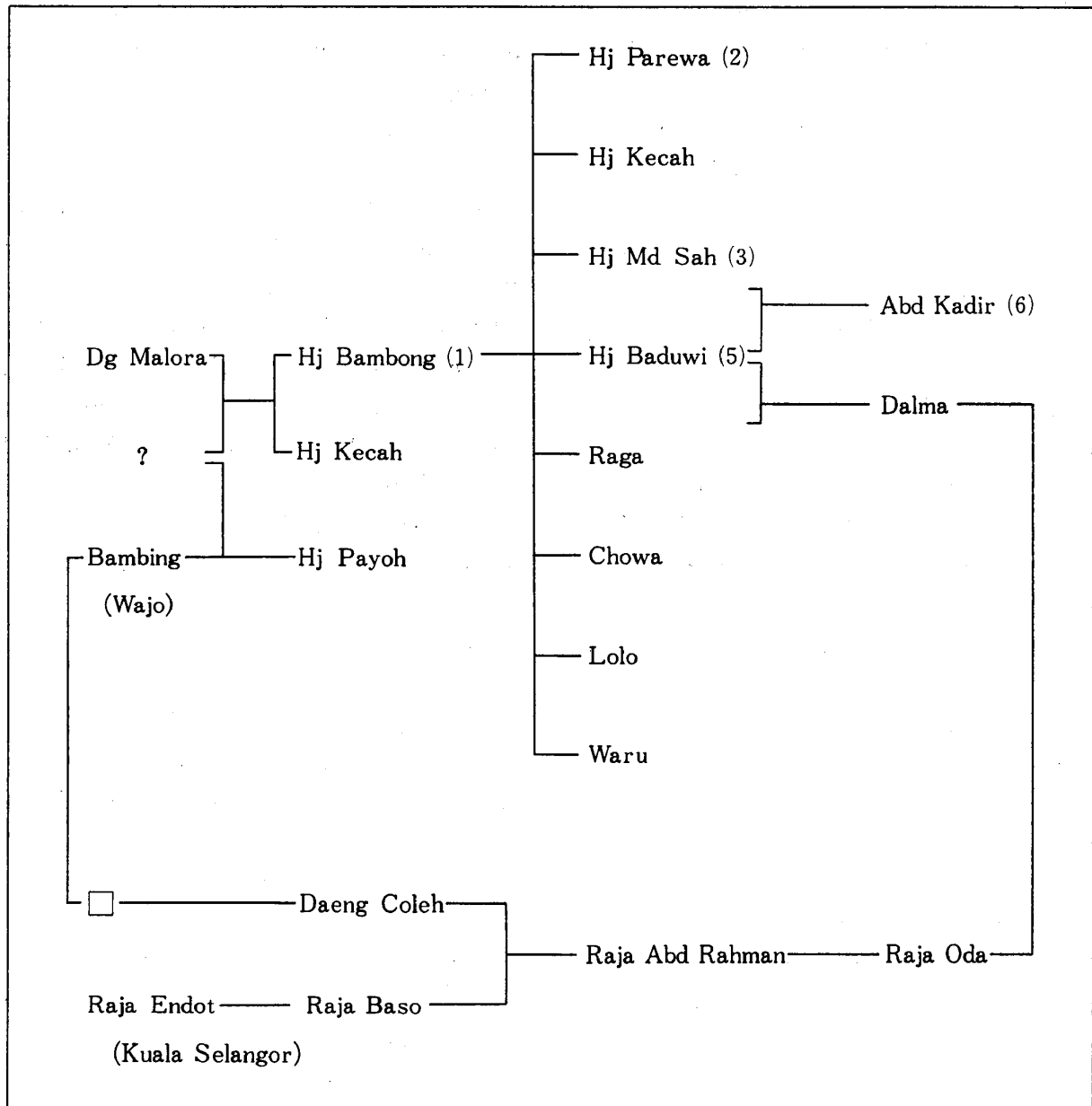
The eastern part of the mukim is covered with mangrove forests. Its land is classified as *kanji siris* (mud). The western part is *gambut dalam* (peat). The waterheads (*hulu*) of small rivers are the *pengkalan* (landing places) where the first settlers ar-

rived and from where the products were exported. They opened land near the waterheads, on the gambut land beyond the mangrove forests.

From the nineteenth century, there was a continuous flow of immigrants from South Sulawesi into Sg Pulai. A certain Haji Bambang is believed to be one of the first settlers in Sg Karang and adjacent areas. He became the first penghulu of Mukim Sg Karang and died at an age of more than ninety years in A.H. 1322 or A.D. 1904. Fig. 1 shows his descendants.

The penghuluship passed to Hj Bambang's sons, then to Abd Latif, a Bugis married to a granddaughter of Hj Bambang, who became the fourth penghulu. He was succeeded by another son and a grandson of Hj Bambang. The seventh and eighth penghulu, i.e., the present ones, are Malay administrators. The brother-in-law of the sixth, also a descendant of the royal family of Selangor, is a ketua kampung of Kawasan I.

Other pengkalan were occupied by different settlers, most of whom originated from Wajo and Bone in South Sulawesi. Sg Boh, however, was opened by three Malay households from Singapore. A *naiib penghulu* (vice chief), a Malay, resided there in the beginning of this century. In the area of Sg Dinar and Sg Sam, nearer to the mouth of Sg Pulai but outside of the mukim, a Malay penghulu in Sg Cengkeh ruled over the mixed communities before World War II. Thus, the kinship-based network of today is homogeneous in terms of the origin of its members, but the Bugis community overall contains heterogenous elements.



Note: Numbers show succession to penghuluship.

Fig. 1 Penghulu Hj Bambong and His Descendants

Javanese settlers live further inland, having approached from the west coast of the peninsula. Peradin, the name of a river and a parit, is said to be a Javanese name, although it is not possible to trace who Peradin was. There were also Chinese pioneers in this area, who gave pineapple

seeds to peasants and bought their products in the early days. Only six households now remain in the mukim.

Before World War I, a German estate operated in Parit Jerman and Parit Peradin, now in Kawasan II. The deserted estate was reclaimed in the 1950s by individual resi-

dents of Kg Sg Peradin. A small portion of a neighboring estate in Mukim Ayer Masin also lies in this mukim.

2. *Frontier*

Tropical lowland was ecologically one of the most difficult areas for human habitation and was long regarded as the last frontier, owing to the difficulty of communication and prevalence of disease. Tropical rainforest lowland in the past can be compared to a black hole in space, sucking in a considerable flow of population attracted by its natural riches, but leaving little vestige of permanent, enduring settlement because of the fever and disease in its interior (Y. Takaya). This situation was changed by the improvement of medical treatment and of communication and technology, especially in the nineteenth century.

Geographically, the frontier is an extension of the habitable land. As it is supposed to be uninhabited (nobody knows whether anyone has previously tried to settle there), anyone can take part in the reclamation.

Economically, the development of the area is largely dependent on commercial plantations like pineapple, rubber, copra or, most recently, oil palm; in general terms, it depends on economic demand from the outside world. Subsistence economy may be very limited. In the area studied, rice had to be purchased from outside, and even sago was imported from Sumatra or adjacent islands.

Socially, heterogeneous populations agglomerated in the area. Politically, territorial ambiguity causes either a strong identity with a center, atavism toward a primordial

tie with the homeland, or indifference to any center. Culturally, symbolic reconstruction activates a new sociocultural formation.

For the peasants, movement to other frontiers to open new land is easy, and in this sense they are mobile. In short, the frontier is a junction of networks or a half-way center in the movement of people and the flow of information. This abstract characterization of the flow-oriented frontier applies not only to rural frontiers as peripheries but also to cities as centers. Frontiers take various forms: black-hole, rural, bazaar, colonial, urban, and so on. This concept contrasts with that of a *negara* polity, where a symbolic capital as a stock is stored in the center of an "unchanging" world, i.e., a village-polity with concrete symbolic capitals.

III The Movement of People and Sociocultural Transformation

1. *A Model*

Sociocultural formation in the frontier is a transformation from the local tradition of original place and an accommodation to a new central tradition to which the frontier belongs. The process may vary, among other things, with migration patterns, the ecological and economic conditions of the frontier, the degree of retention of ethnic tradition, and the force of integration of a nation-state.

Schematically the process may be illustrated in Fig. 2.

The process of integration is often co-efficient with the development of commun-

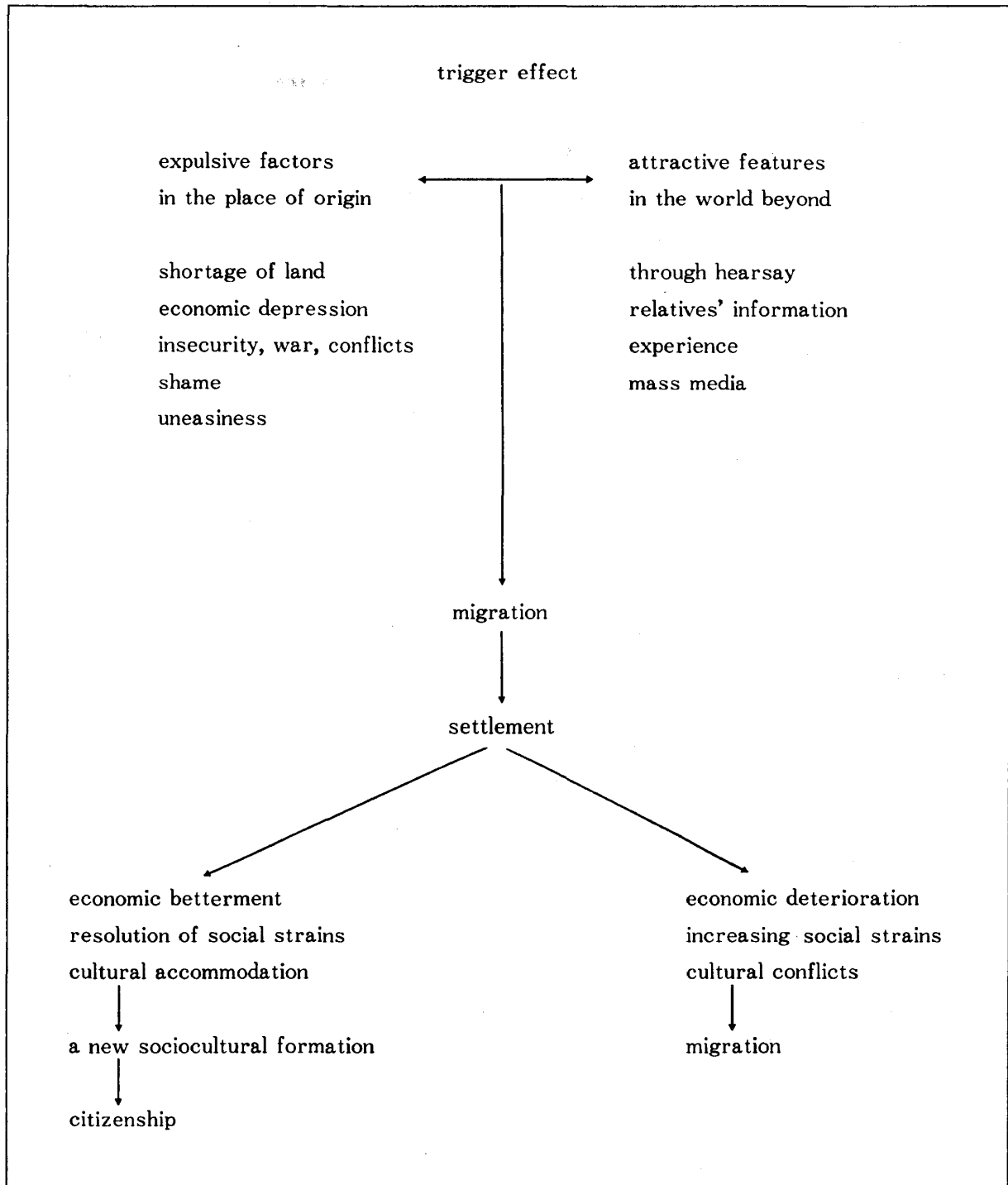


Fig. 2 Schematic Model of Migration

ication and education in addition to individual efforts. In the early stage of a frontier, communication flows only toward other frontiers or outside metropolises including the

place of origin. The development of transportation connects the frontier to the metropole on which it relies economically, and mass media extend to the frontier. Edu-

cation gives people the opportunity to take better jobs outside the frontier and integrates the descendants of settlers into a national unity.

Frustration caused by the shortage of capital, fragmentation of land by inheritance, lack of land to reclaim, paucity of job opportunity, and so on—all may be cause for remigration.

2. *A Comparison*

Transformation processes can be traced by historical inquiries into oral history and archival sources. But a comparison of Bugis settlements also sheds light on the process. As an example, I will present a brief, comparative discussion of four communities: (1) Amparita, Sidenreng, Sulawesi Selatan (fieldwork in 1975, 1982 and 1984); (2) Pulau Kecil, Sg Reteh, Riau (1984); (3) Sg Karang, Pontian, Johor (1987 and 1988); and (4) Bukit Pegoh, Pernu, Melaka (1970-71 and 1984).

Sulawesi Selatan is a homeland for the Bugis, Makassar and Selayar who spread widely across the archipelagic world. A major transformation of Bugis society, in the case of Bone, is argued to have occurred around A.C. 1400 (C. C. Macknight), i.e., a major change from political power essentially associated with maritime trade to power based primarily on the control of agriculture and those involved with it. Yet the Bugis people, especially the Bone and the Wajo, are famous for their mobility, even after the sixteenth century. Theirs is not a swidden type of mobility, with field-forest rotation within a territory, but movement of settlement, either individually or in a group.

Moreover, internal wars and conflicts caused outflows of population.

Against the background of basic cultural similarity, people tend to break up into patchwork of small groupings. Luwu, the first kingdom, was culturally influential in that it provided a mythological epic, "I La Galigo," and that it was always regarded as the homeland of Bugis kingdoms. However, Luwu seemed not to have created a political unity in Sulawesi or even among the Bugis. Although it encompassed polities with various degrees of independence, patches remained that were not included in a state organization.

Heterogeneous societies are formed in isolated patches in Sulawesi through differences in language and religious identity. The main ethnics, Bugis, Makassar, Mandar or Toraja, are classified by language. The people on the borders are often distinguished, like the Duri, who lie between the Toraja and the Bugis. The Bugis-Makassar are Muslims, while the Toraja comprise local religionists, Christians and a small number of Muslims. Among the Bugis-Makassar there is a spectrum of heretical belief, from an apparent rejection of Islam to the belief in being followers of "true" Islam.

This trend, although negligible within the whole framework of the Bugis-Makassar, is quite interesting, since their reputation of being zealous followers of Islam is widely known in Nusantara. In the seventeenth century, the villagers of Wani in the Wajo Kingdom rejected the enforcement of Islam and deserted to Sidenreng, where they were accepted upon entering a contract with a

Muslim king. They live in Amparita and are called Towani Tolotang. Theirs was a migration undertaken to uphold an older tradition against the acceptance of a new faith; they often claim to be the true carriers of the Bugis tradition. Since there are no essential differences in their rituals from those of the Muslims, the discrimination against them must historically have been generated either by the Towani themselves or by outsiders, i.e., so-called authentic Muslims.

However the Bugis might be ambiguous in their religious adherence in Sulawesi; once they migrate to other areas, Muslim identity seems to become a part of Bugis ethnicity.

All three of the communities, Pulau Kecil, Sg Karang and Bukit Pegoh, include Bugis descendants among their residents. Pioneers from Sulawesi in Bukit Pegoh arrived in the seventeenth century. Theirs was a typical migratory pattern, in which a noble leader, after contests with a brother, left Sulawesi together with kin and followers. Six or seven generations have passed since then, and the Bugis identity has faded; but an awareness of Bugis descent remains to some extent among some people, owing to the advent of later Bugis migrants in the two or three ascending generations. Nevertheless, they are now authentic Malays.

Sg Karang, as shown above, is a community mainly formed by Bugis remigrants from adjacent areas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Relatively isolated from Malay communities, it affiliated economically with Singapore, a heterogenous metropolis.

Conscious assimilation with Malays might have started after the independence of Malaya. Pulau Kecil comprises Javanese, Banjarese, Bugis and Minangkabau. Most of the Bugis came from Bone in the 1950s and 1960s, after the turmoil of the Kahar Muzaffar uprisings in South Sulawesi. They are immigrants of the first generation and some find difficulty in speaking Indonesian.

In short, the case of Amparita shows a strong attachment to Bugis tradition, even a pre-Islamic one. Pulau Kecil and Sg Karang are rural frontiers, where reference to Bugis tradition is no longer available. Pulau Kecil does not have any ethnic reference group, while Sg Karang can regard the Malays as a reference group. Bukit Pegoh is a completely assimilated Malay community, where only ancestors of some six generations earlier are remembered as Bugis, but Bugisness is totally irrelevant in daily interactions.

Changes in ethnic traditions should be analyzed through modifications in rituals, *adat* (customs) and *bahasa* (language). It should also be remembered that rituals and *adat* may change in places of origin. The change of *bahasa* is a more intelligible indication by which to gauge the degree of assimilation.

Through the combination of detailed community studies with a comparative analysis of particular ethnic transformations, we can know more exactly the process of integration into a national unity and the direction of development in the frontier area.