BEING HUMAN
RESPONDING TO CHANGES

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Changes, whether technological or social or cultural, happen continuously in every society, and they change how members of the society live their lives. This book, which is research based, discusses how changes affect societies and individuals in terms of their practices and rituals as well as the way they view the world. It consists of seven chapters written by eleven authors with different educational background and academic disciplines. The writings in this book highlight how different communities in different countries (i.e., Malaysia, Pakistan, and Philippines) change and modify their traditional practices and worldviews in order to meet the technological and societal demands. This book is a good reading to those who are interested to understand humans' capability for change in preserving and sustaining their lifestyles and Weltanschauung in the ever changing and challenging world.
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Traditions and practices evolve and change in many societies around the world. This happens basically due to many factors such as changes in demography, exposure to better education, and innovations of advanced technology. In the past, how members of a society viewed their society and the immediate environment was very much restricted by their own cultural perspective since they lived a closed society and they were not exposed to other cultural perspectives. Due to technological inventions and innovations leading to information explosion and increased intercultural interactions among members of different societies, the way humans view the world and their immediate environment also changes. Consequently, their worldviews, responses and attitudes towards the changes, whether social, cultural, economical or technological, are also different as compared to those held years or decades ago.

One of the frequently debated issues in the contemporary society is the transformation of traditional gender-identified professions. In Chapter 1, Farah Saeed and Rabia Ali discuss the changes in the structure of human resources and gender-based professions where there has been an increase in the number of male workers joining the female-dominated profession in Pakistan. Their data indicate that the number increased in three industries, namely healthcare or hospitals, designer
galleries and beauty salons, and this happened due to many factors such as job benefits and career opportunities.

In Chapter 2, Nerawi Sedu discusses the usage of new technology in spreading Islamic teachings by some Muslims. He found that the spread of new technology, including social media, has caused some Muslims to share and disseminate information on Islam to the global audience. In this study, the author states that YouTube has been utilized extensively by some Muslim YouTubers to share Islamic contents and messages, such as religious talks and speeches delivered by prominent and well-known Muslim scholars, with others. Based on the number of views for the videos, the author concludes that YouTube could be an effective and promising tool for spreading the Islamic teachings or messages to the global community due to its features.

In Chapter 3, Jamel Cayamodin writes about the level of political participation among Meranaos, one of the major Muslim ethnic groups in Lanao Del Sur, Philippines. In order to examine indicators of political participation and their influence on the political attitude of Meranaos' political participation, the author employed quantitative and qualitative approaches. This study involved the participation of 321 respondents and the author took five months to complete the data collection. Based on the findings, Jamel Cayamodin states that the Meranaos prefer to be spectators solely and are not interested to be involved in political activities, whether at transitional or gladiatorial level. The author adds further that this happens because of the sense of scepticism of the political system among the Meranaos.

In a time where having a smartphone is a trend and a requirement because of its features and advantages, its effects on human life have received a lot of attention from scholars and researchers. In Chapter 4, Malek Hamid and Zaid Aqil Zainuddin provide some insights on the effects of smartphone usage on human health. The authors study this issue by evaluating the relationship between the number of screen touches and duration of active screen and DeQuervain's Tenosynnovities. The results from their experiment indicate that a person's ability to pinch, grasp and wring is affected by massive usage of smartphone. The authors point out that having an awareness about
the negative effect due to excessive usage of smartphone on one’s thumb and fingers is important to maintain good physical health.

The ever-changing world today has inevitably caused people to affect alterations or modifications in their lives, making necessary adaptations to suit social, cultural, economic and political changes. In Chapter 5, the issue of one’s identity in a foreign land as discussed by Rosila Bee Mohd Hussain is one example of how people attempt to fit themselves into a new environment yet at the same strive to retain their identity or self. In doing so, as pointed out by the author, the preservation of one’s identity is possible by clinging to something central where in the case of Malay postgraduate students in Australia, their religion, Islam.

Chapter 6 looks at minority students’ participation in sport. Baidruel Hairiel and Nurazzura Mohamad Diah who conducted a qualitative study on the Orang Asli, Cambodia, Rohingya and Chinese students discovered that sport activities play an important role to integrate minority students in many activities at school. Sport is also used to regulate minority students’ behaviour. Their participation in sport has led them to conform to school regulations. Students who come to school to attend sports training in addition to academic obligations have improved their attendance rate at schools.

The final chapter or Chapter 7, which is co-authored by Nur Asmira Anuar and Fauziah Fathil, discusses the relationship and commonalities between Adat Benar (practised by the Indigenous community or Orang Asli) and Adat Perpatih (practiced by Minangkabau people) in one state in Malaysia, i.e. Negeri Sembilan. They assess different aspects of life of these two distinct communities such as politics, inheritance of property, ancestral lineage, marriage proposal and death.

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Malay Native ‘Self’: Social and Cultural Identity Reconsidered

Rosila Bee Mohd Hussain

Introduction: Defining the ‘Malay self’

A great deal has been written about ethnic Malays in South-east Asia, but there is still much ambiguity in relation to the question of Malay identity. According to Barnard (2004, p. ix), the word Melayu (Malay, Maleis) appeared in 7th century Chinese sources with reference to Sumatra, and it has been used in South-east Asia ever since, carrying with it notions of a culture, a people and a location. The Malays are always on the move and transforming themselves, often very elusively, and theirs is a contested and wandering identity. However, discussions in this article concentrate on Malay postgraduate students in Western Australia, and how the Malay students are going through a phase of transition in a foreign context. What is to note in this article is how the
Malay postgraduate students, apart from being Muslims, still have to position themselves between traditional beliefs and development.

Despite being in Western Australia, the idea of Malay culture and adat¹ (traditional custom) are two factors that are sometimes seen as intertwined with each other and hard to separate in relation to Malay-Muslim life practice. However, Islam is also seen as too integral as part of the Malay culture to be a force for much changes in the new environment. Religion is then seen as playing a larger role in a Malay student’s identity, and Islam has always been a key element of Malay cultural identity, though not an exclusive one. Therefore, there are limits to this adjustment in order to justify their actions as will be shown in the following discussion.

In discussing the Malay society, it is essential to develop an understanding of the cultural formations and constructions of the Malay adat. According to Zainal Kling (1997, p. 8), adat represents a ‘commonsense’ construction of everyday life. Adat provides the means by which identity is sustained. Syed Hussein Alatas (1996) has distinguished aspects of the ‘New Malay’ and ‘Old Malay’ by observing how the New Malays have claimed that Islam and their unique adat (culture) are features of their identity. Alatas refers to the New Malay as Malays with a new consciousness who “will be selective of positive and negative influences that have been left in the past” (1996, p. 6). He characterises the New Malay as rational, moral and selective. This means the New Malays have maintained their identity and culture, but rid themselves of regressive traditions by being rational and selective. According to Kahn (2006, p. 88), some consider Malay culture as disappearing, but feel this is desirable to the extent that traditional Malay practices contradict the tenets of Islam.

S. Husin Ali (1984, p. 16) has pointed out that although it may appear that each ethnic group is a homogeneous entity quite distinct from the others, within each group there exist differences. According to him:

¹ Peletz (1987) describes adat as ‘customary law’. 
[F]or example, the Malays consist of various categories of people, including those who have migrated to the Peninsula from different parts of the Malay Archipelago. The latter are represented by the Minangkabau and Acehnese from Sumatra, Javanese from Java, Bugis from Makasar and Banjarese from Borneo. Each of these categories ... has its own language and socio-cultural practices pertaining to family life. Among all the sub-ethnic groups who make up those who regard themselves as Malays, new internal group differences which are becoming more marked now have been produced by the socio-economic changes taking place in the country.

When the Malays enter the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about the new environment. They will be interested to see how they should conceptualize themselves and their attitude to the new culture, that could help them define the new situation and enable others to know their ‘self’ and what to expect of their ‘self’ and what they may expect of others (Goffman, 1959). In brief, the new encounters of the Malay ‘self’ with the others are organized by means of a special set of acts and gestures compromising communication and communicating (Goffman, 1959). In the process, the Malays through the encounter will take the initiative to employ the means and make the necessary adjustment to their Malay ‘self’ identity in their new environment.

Objective and Methodology

The fieldwork undertook for this research was in Western Australia which enabled the researcher to become an insider anthropologist living and interacting among ‘others of similarity’ and ‘others of difference’. In other words, the researcher and the informants involved in this study are experiencing the transnational conceptual distinction of ‘home’