

# RUPTURING NATION-STATE NARRATIVES FROM THE MARGINS : CELEBRATING THE LITERARY WORKS OF AKIYA, A CONTEMPORARY ORANG ASLI STORYTELLER

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## Abstract

For so long, aspects of Orang Asli indigenous history, culture and identity have been primarily defined by the grand narratives of the Malaysian nation-state. In the ‘authority-defined’ narration of the ‘nation’, Orang Asli communities, marginalised throughout the different phases of Malaysian history, i.e from Malay feudalism to colonial rule, and to what is now an independent nation-state in the postcolonial (now globalising) era, have never really been officially empowered to interpret their own history, nor for that matter, were they given the choice to chart out their own epistemology and notion of development. Power, following Foucault, defines knowledge and imputes meanings among the subjugated.

Modern social anthropology, born in the west as a discourse to study the ‘primitives’ in non-western societies, has witnessed the rise of its own auto-critiques, specifically in questioning the classical author-driven ‘representation’ of ‘the Other’ in traditional anthropological ethnography. The outcome of this ‘literary turn’ in social anthropology takes the form of either a postmodernist brand of writing anthropology, or in critically interrogating ‘colonial knowledge’ (orientalism) by exploring new ‘decolonizing methodologies’ which privilege the indigenous ‘Other’ as “partners” in research, and indeed as “storytellers” in “writing their own culture”.

It is from the above positioning that my paper seeks to explore, contextualise and critically examine the contributions of **Akiya ( Mahat anak Cina )**, a Semai Orang Asli contemporary storyteller, through the following published literary works that he has written for the last fifteen years:

A collection of Orang Asli short stories **TUNTUT** (2001); A novel, **PERANG SANGKIL** (2007), a collection of poetry, **PERJUANGAN WARISAN ORANG ASLI: Suara Dari Dalam** (2009), a historical novel, **HAMBA** (2013) and , another novel, **ORANG KECIL** (2014)