

**URAK LAWOI**

A FIELD STUDY OF THE ORIGINAL NATIVE PEOPLE THE URAK LAWOI OF THE  
ANDAMAN SEA, KO LANTA -  
AND THE PROBLEMS THEY FACE WITH RAPID TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

This essay is about the indigenous people Urak Lawoi in Andaman Sea, outside the west coast of Thailand. The study shows what happens to them when they are being deprived of their territory and are being forced to abandon their culture, lifestyle and traditional economic subsistence.

Urak Lawoi have until recently maintained culture, language and lifestyle apart from the rest of Thai society. During the last one and half decades, rapid tourism development, with large-scale hotels and bungalow resorts, have impacted and disrupted significantly on the nomadic lifestyles of the indigenous Urak Lawoi. They have been pushed away farther from the beaches and into unproductive parts. Powerful global forces linked to the world market economy result in situations that are not favorable for the local people Urak Lawoi and the ecosystems.

My intention is to find out how the Urak Lawoi acts in response to rapid social changes of lifestyle, increasing contacts with outsiders, forced relocation due to the establishment of National Parks, and integration into the global market economy. My essay will also show how inferiority complex of an ethnic community increase under circumstances of social, political and economic pressure. I have focused on the situation for the Urak Lawois in Ko Lanta.



**Plate 1:** Little girl in Sanga-U brings her daily catch of fish.

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## Chao Ley or Urak Lawoi

Chao Lay is the Thai expression for these people. Sea Gypsy or Sea Nomads are the western terms. Chao Lay is described in three different groups, known as Moken, Moklen and Urak Lawoi. The islands and coastal regions along the western shores of Thailand in the Andaman Sea are their home. They are known as nomads on the sea and described according to Hogan (1972:206) as animistic strand-dwellers, gathering rather than cultivating. Even if these people, in some cases, now for several generations have lived on shore or as semi nomadic, their lifestyle, language and culture differ from the rest of the Thai society (Sandbukt 1983:3, UNESCO, Indigenous people and parks 2001:9).



*Map 1:* Thailand

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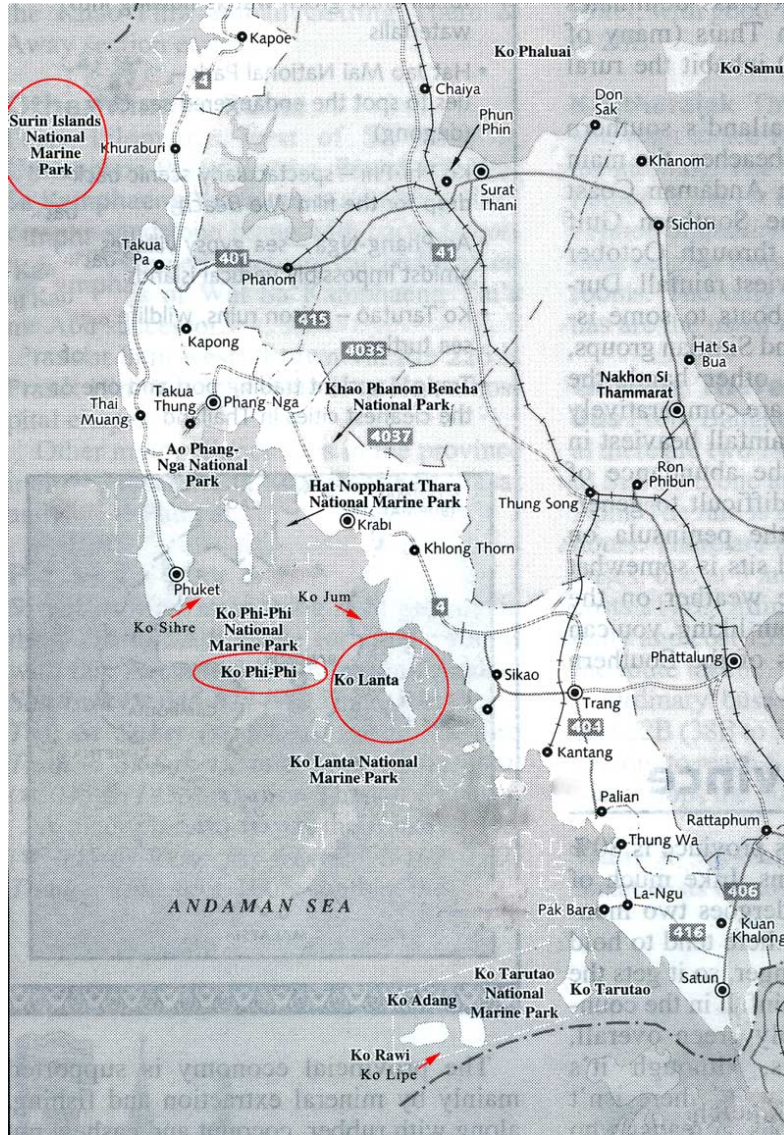
## Foreword

It was in the middle of December 2002. I had just returned to Sweden from 31 days of fieldwork on the Urak Lawoi in Ko Lanta. It was my second trip to them in the same year. I did not know what I was doing back home after such a short time. Would it not have been better if I had sent after my kids to come and stay with me with the Urak Lawois? That Christmas I stayed home as much as possible. I did not gladly leave my house. I stayed home with my three girls in our big house right on the Baltic Sea. We played games, talked about life in front of one of the five burning tiled stoves. I started to make plans inside my head that I would go on a longer field study. My girlfriends wondered what had happened to me. It was like I was in my own world and I just know one thing; I had to go back as soon as possible to the Urak Lawois. There are so many unexpected problems and information I wanted to find out about this indigenous people. I could not get them out my head. My girls wanted to go with me. I did not want to risk that someone told how impossible it would be to go back and do field work with my kids. I therefore did not tell anyone about our plans. I know my oldest daughter could not come with us. It was not the right time for her to take off from school as she was going to a boarding school for designers. But she could visit us for Christmas.

I had no idea where I would get the money. I just knew we would leave in the middle of October ten months later. We would stay in Ko Lanta, the main island for the Urak Lawoi in Thailand. But first I had to write my C-essay about the Urak Lawois and I did not want my children to tell anybody about our plans before it had been graded. There were many practical things to organize before we left. Many of the things had to do with my big house. I was questioning myself, why did I keep it? But at the same time I knew I was coming back.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2003, I had my seminar for my C-essay about the Urak Lawois at the University of Lund. From now on, I could start looking more seriously for scholarships. To financially support my selves I borrowed money from the bank to paint my house. But instead of letting someone else do it for me, I painted the house myself in the summer. The money I borrowed was put in my saving box for Urak Lawoi project. The months before we were leaving, I was busy applying for scholarships. When we left the same year the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, I had no idea if I would receive any or not.





**Map 2:** Islands settled with Chao Lay dealt with in the essay.



Map 3: Ko Lanta Yai

## I INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Inconvenient Picture of the Pristine Paradise for Tourists to Witness

In two daily newspapers in Sweden, Expressen (2004-05-16) and Aftonbladets bilaga (2004-03-07), we get to know about a Swedish family as a result of being exhausted and 'burnt out', how they quit their jobs, sold their house and everything they owned, and moved to Thailand. We are told how the pressure and continuous strive for higher achievement became too much for them in their daily life. Since the middle of the 1990s 'burnt out' has become a

great social and economical problem in Sweden. In general the reason is found in working life. Associate professor and assistant vicar Christian Braw wrote in his article in the daily Swedish morning paper *Barometern* (2004-06-28); another reason for our new endemic disease 'burnt out' is due to a sense of a 'lack of identity' and this causes feelings of insecurity. He claims a way to prevent this lack of confidence is by achievement. One's identity in western cultures is recognized through our job position (my input). One's identity can be identified by achievement in working, contributing to the condition 'burnt out'. Torun Elsrud (2004:20,89,122,175) talks about how travelers escape from clocks, work schedules and other structuring instruments at home (normally 'west'). The journeys appear to release the pressure from the daily activities. 'Here you can just be what you want to be'. Alneng (2002:463-464) points out how escaping from dictated routines to an illusion space as a tourist has become an unofficial civil right normalization in western society. We are talking about 'getting away from it all'. Valene Smith (1989: 23) argues that people look down at the once staying at home for vacation and it is considered not having any vacation at all. My conclusion is by traveling you are 'somebody'. One gets attention and has interesting talks with others like oneself. You make each other become somebody without pressure. This could be one reason for escaping our society for longer periods of time. The journalist and writer Karolina Ramqvist (*Aftonbladet* 2004-07-19) proclaims in her article that the wealthy minority looks at traveling as a human right. Travelers are asking for good tourism. 'A tourism where tourists can feel as good as they deserve' (my translation). At UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) conference in Sao Paolo, summer 2004, and World Tourism Organization claimed tourism could play a key role for development in poor countries. Yes, if so, it must be a good transaction - the westerners need a change of environment and poor people can profit from it. But there are questions and not just one about this transaction. Interesting testimony is what tourists experience it might not be the same as the locals'. They are experiencing two different worlds from the same place. As Kajsa Ekholm Friedman (1998:22,39) states in her work on Hawaii: what the tourists generally meet is not the local culture, but a 'simulated world' built for their consumption.

What happened to the family who left Sweden and moved to Thailand (mentioned at the beginning of the Chapter)? Today, the family arranges 'theme journeys' to Thailand for

Swedish tourists, including Yoga, meditation and therapy talks. The Swedish actress Malin Berghagen is hired as an attraction directing Yoga courses. A Swedish school is established and a 'Swedish colony' is under construction, where Swedes are offered bungalows to buy on the beach. The chosen place is Klong Dau Beach in Ko Lanta, Andaman Sea. The paradoxical problem is: Klong Dau Beach used to be settlements and temporary strand-dwellings for the indigenous people the *Urak Lawoi*. Swedes are going to Klong Dau Beach to find 'inner peace in their souls'. On the travel agency's website on the Internet ([www.travelinsight.net/utvecklingsresor](http://www.travelinsight.net/utvecklingsresor)) one can read:

"For you who want to stop off, listen to oneself and others in an exotic environment. Here you get a chance to develop your assets, widen your outlook and find your own horizons" (my translation).

This Urak Lawois' settlement today is further inland, away from Klong Dau Beach. In resemblance with Torun Elsrud's (2004:16) description: wealthier tourist industry has bought much of the coastal area in Thailand forcing fishing families inland, away from their normal source of income. Travel, as the largest global industry, is not innocent of capitalism (Hutnuk 1996:214). It does not state anywhere in the above travel agency's information about the indigenous people the Urak Lawoi and the destitution many of them live in today, having been pushed away from the beach. Pictures do not show the 'downside'. One of the Thai 'outsiders' moving in to Ko Lanta making a profit from tourism said to me: '[...] there are no 'Sea Gypsies' on Ko Lanta [...] There are just poor Thai people'. Thailand is one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries of Southeast Asia and the national identity is clearly defined according to the dominant Thai group (Jean Michaud 1997:129). How does this fit in to 1992 years Rio-declaration and Agenda 21, there it proclames the State should have respect for indigenous peoples' needs and desires before a development project starts. The development plan should take in consideration their culture and life (see for instance Johansson-Dahre 2001:23,126). As Inge Damm (1995:8) states those who make money from tourism do not have to be the ones who suffer from consequences from the 'invasion'. Johansson-Dahre (2001:126-127) argues pressure of developing tourism many times means stagnation by the local culture because of the economic development. Is this what we call 'natural' development or a modernization process? Or can it rather been seen as an extension of imperialism?

This essay will concentrate on the *Urak Lawoi*. There is little written documentation about this indigenous people. An empirical investigation for this study has therefore been compiled through fieldwork on the Urak Lawoi. They have their settlement along many of the islands from Phuket down south to Ko Lipe, at the Malaysian boarder. Ko Lanta is counted as their island of origin in Thailand. My first visit to the Urak Lawois was in March 2002. My second visit was in November the same year. I returned later in October 2003 for six months field work. My base has been Ko Lanta. I have also visited different islands in Andaman Sea where Urak Lawois or Moken have their homes.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Tourism has become the world's largest industry and an important social factor in our world. It has become an unofficial civil right and normalization in the Western society to escape and 'get away' from a monotonous life. In Thailand tourism has become the leading source of foreign exchange. Thailand's development as an international tourism destination started with the US military presence after the Vietnam War (Hitchcock, King and Parnwell 1993:16,19). To satisfy the tourists, the locals change their way of living and life (Alneng 2002:463 - 464, 484). Great investment in tourism development may draw resources away from other projects, enterprises and social welfare institutions and not unusually, others than the hosts may benefit from tourism development. As Michael J.G. Parnwell (1993:300) states, in Thai development strategies of tourism is economic growth priority rather than the pursuit of social and distributive justice.

Anthropologists have been slow to recognize how tourism has become an important social fact and put it on our agenda. The purpose of this essay is to find out how the fast economic and tourism development affects the Urak Lawois culture and way of living. According to *UNESCO, Indigenous People and Parks* (2001:14), rapid tourism development has drastically impacted on the nomadic lifestyles of the indigenous people Chao Lay (Urak Lawoi or Moken) in Andaman Sea. Because of the great pressure on marine resources in their traditional environment with rapidly changing society, their subsistence lifestyle is in serious danger of

disappearing. FNs declaration 'Draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples', that was assumed in August 1994 states: 'the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent right and characteristics of indigenous peoples, *especially their rights to their land, territories, and resources*, which derive from their political, economic, and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, and philosophies' (Graciela Bilda Ratti de Carbonari 2001:23). The fact that Chao Lay rights to own land or other property is ambiguous under Thai law because, like many indigenous groups, many of Chao Lay are not recognized as Thai citizens and therefore not allowed to own land (UNESCO 2001:14,31). This makes it become an even greater risk of corrupt exploitation by external competitors. A very common conflict I found in Ko Lanta was who is the legal landowner. It was not unusual that two persons indicated that they had the right to the property. It is not unusual with judicial controversy about this problem.

It is not uncommon in tourism anthropology that some ethnic minorities are described as 'disappearing' but others integrate with tourism as one gets the impression that their heritage is strengthened by tourism. I have focused on the questions: *in what extent the fast economic and tourism development affect Urak Lawoi's culture and way of living on Ko Lanta. To what extent can the Urak Lawoi control the tourist process in Ko Lanta? In what way do they make use of it or how are they excluded? What stress factors and problems do these indigenous people face when migrants are exploiting what the Urak Lawoi consider as their territory? How can the future be forecast for the Urak Lawoi livelihood?*

I will show what damage a fast tourism development can do to a local culture, and the inferiority complex an ethnic minority experiences for the dominant culture when they lose their territory.

The study will not deal with the tourist or 'outsiders' view of exploitation. It does not disclose important facts about political leaders' or the ones with power in developing plans for tourism. It turned out to be more sensitive than I expected visiting *Amphur* (district office) of Ko Lanta. After a warm welcome because of my interest for the local history and information about the district, it became silent when I asked for the Urak Lawois rights for land. I wanted

to see maps of their legitimate territory. 'There are no such of papers or maps', I was told. Due to my lack of knowledge of the Thai society and since it turned out to become a sensitive subject, I will not go deeper into how a problem can arise when two persons indicate that they have legal right of the same piece of land.

Other important information (which I touch upon but not deeply investigated) in this essay is interviews with local and outsider entrepreneurs thinking about tourism development and their plans for the future.

My research does not explain why people get 'burnt out' or why they travel. Other information left out is the cosmological insight of the Urak Lawoi society. From an anthropological view: cosmology purpose is a culture's formation of the world image. The process of creation, spirit as world and forces, which influence human life, are included in this worldly image. The *To Maw* (medicine man) role and the ceremonies meanings are just superficially mentioned in this essay. Other important facts to study are the women's world, of which I have not sought a deeper insight.

The essay is divided in four different parts, as part 1 includes a detailed presentation about the fieldwork. It can be seen as an exaggerated description about Ko Lanta Yai society and my fieldwork. I have done so on purpose since I have personally experienced a lack of written documentation about the society I was doing fieldwork or before the development of tourism. In case of a future interest in the society, I wanted to make a description about the society at the transition in to the 'new society'.

Part 2 is ethnographic information about the people Urak Lawoi and a description of the society and environment of Ko Lanta.

Part 3 discusses this studies empirical material. Loss of Urak Lawoi' territory can be seen as their main problem, and it is breaking the core in Urak Lawois identity. A proclamation is discussed about new problems and conflicts which the Urak Lawoi face in the loss of their territory and tourism expansion in Part 4.

Finally, the study will be analyzed and a discussion is held on the result.



### 1.3 Theory

All around the world governments have made reductions in indigenous people's territory and modification of their traditional system in favor for state-controlled systems and forced them into a market economy. Cultures as well as biological multiplicity decrease rapidly all over the world. Today their territory has declined to about 12-19 percent (Graciela Hilda Ratti de Carbonari in Johansson-Dahre 2001:20). Small-scale economic systems have therefore been hard to maintain and to sustain a small-scale culture the people must be allowed to control a territory to preserve their society and culture. Anthropologists have started to realize that the greatest victims of industrial progress have been the several million indigenous people who, even in 1820, controlled over half the globe and the world's ecosystem.

In *Victims of Progress* (1999) John Bodley deals with indigenous people around the world who historically have been conquered, colonized by industrial nations and controlled by the state. He discuss how political autonomy gets lost when the state gain control over a territory inhabited by indigenous people, to prevent themselves acting in their own defense to expel outsiders. Government control always implies transformation of tribal organization and tribal peoples must integrate with social and political systems. Bodley points out, tribal cultures who have surrendered their political autonomy can remain self-sufficient on a small-scale as long as they have access to their territory and not get exploited by outsiders. Experience tells us that many isolated tribes around the world have had contact with civilized traders and kept their culture as long as their territory has not been intruded. A more common consequence however of political conquest is that 'underdeveloped' resources controlled by indigenous people are quickly appropriated. Bodley talks about how the *frontier* makes first contact with indigenous people. Resources are easy available for exploitation by outsiders. Prior ownership rights and interests of aboriginal inhabitants are irrelevant to both the state and the invading individuals. Individuals are 'cunning' to obtain land, labor and other resources.

Indigenous people lose economic autonomy because they must maintain control over their resources to stay self-sufficient. This economic incorporation of small-scale cultures into world market economy is critical. Bodley address how it has ruined millions of indigenous people and cultural groups. It is well known that economic exploitation leads to apathy, dependency, and alcoholism and increases diseases among the people. Among the diseases are:



diabetes, obesity, hypertension but also poverty disease appear in association with the crowded conditions of slums (Bodley 1999a: 133-134). I quote Bodley's statement: 'What is remarkable is the extent of the destruction and the fact that this familiar and uniform pattern has been repeated over the years throughout the world and still continues in some areas today with the implicit approval of the governments involved' (1999:31). He discusses that people themselves must determine the participation in cash economy. Only in this way can the 'price of progress' be minimized. Bodley argues that indigenous peoples differ from the contemporary world because they share a small-scale way of life that is organized and technologically less complex than urban-based societies by the industrial and political organization and market economy. *Small-scale cultures* have a tendency to enjoy greater freedom, equality, security and access to food and natural resources. There is less cultural stimulant to accumulate wealth, as well as little incentive to expand its consumption of resources. They tend to make light demands on their environments and easily support themselves. The opposite is for the culture of capitalism where they devastate their own local resources and outgrow their boundaries. Bodley discusses how ethnocentrism threatens small-scale cultures today through its support of culturally insensitive government policies. An example of ethnocentrism discussed by Bodley is when tribal people are considered to be incompetent and childlike, not unlike the relationship between the tribal people and the state as 'parent-guardian'.

In this essay, in agreement with Bodley's argument, that 'the greatest victims of industrial progress has been indigenous peoples', I state that the victims of tourism development in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World are indigenous peoples. It has a tendency to follow the same 'conquests progress'. I will show this with my ethnographic field study of tourism development impact on indigenous people Urak Lawoi, Andaman Sea in Thailand.

#### **Historical flashback:**

About 6000 years ago the macro cultural process of politicization started to supersede the micro cultural. Some people created centralized political authority and institutions of government. Politicization, a new form of organizing social power, replaced the social

equality, found in tribal micro cultures. Bodley calls this new culture type *large-scale culture* where he claims central political rulers take production and distribution away from households and individuals and promote new technology, population growth to enhance their social power. The development of chiefdoms was a new kind of thinking for small-scale egalitarian societies. Some forced themselves to become chiefdoms and states to defend themselves, but usually small-scale cultures were conquered and transformed into encapsulated taxpaying peasantries.

Colonization started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the expansion of market capitalism led to a modern world system which Bodley calls *global-scale culture*, based on global market economy. 'In the global culture, the economy assumes an independent existence and economic growth is universally recognized as the highest priority for government policy, even when what is good for the economy conflicts with the interests of particular human groups' (Bodley 1999:6). The real problem for indigenous peoples who want to maintain cultural autonomy is that their cultural heritage relies on social equality and is the antithesis of global-scale cultures. Within 250 years many self-sufficient small-scale cultures have disappeared and dramatic resource shortages and environmental disasters have occurred.

After World War II, governments started a new worldwide campaign for rapid economic growth. Nations everywhere attempted to raise their GNP. In the project professional development experts, including economists, anthropologists, geographers, agriculturalists and other specialists from different countries were involved. They turned their attention to indigenous people because of their 'backward' cultures were seen to cause obstacles to economic goals. These experts devised special programs to bring unwilling indigenous peoples into national economy. Surprisingly, Bodley proposes, that so many cultures have survived after the state control of the political autonomy and tribal land and put effort to acclimatize the tribe to the dominant culture. Bodley states once the state embarks upon a policy of integrating small-scale cultures, governments could completely destroy any small-scale society's cultural diversity with massive cultural modification programs. Schooling has been the prime instrument.

During the 1970s indigenous people who had experienced external pressure started movements that would be characterized by 'self-determination' that means returning to full local political, economic and cultural autonomy. It does not mean isolation from the world, rather that they would be allowed to control their territory. Many who are prominent in the self-determination movement have had extensive experience and opportunities in the dominant commercial society but have rejected it for their culture. In recent years there has been a steady emergence of regional, national, and international political organizations that have been working with and for the self-determination of indigenous peoples. The only 'movement' that I know about Urak Lawoi is *Andaman Pilot Project*, supported by UNESCO. A brief two-page presentation about the people can be observed on the web site: [www.cusri.chula.ac.th/andaman/en/uraklawoi](http://www.cusri.chula.ac.th/andaman/en/uraklawoi). I have been in touch and written to the organization for more information, but not received any answer what so ever. A similar project 'A place for indigenous people in protected areas, Surin Islands, Andaman Sea, Thailand', was initiated in 1997 to explore development options with the Moken people in the Marine National Park Surin Island. The key players in the project are the coordinator Narumon Hinshiranan in Chulalongkorn University and UNESCO Bangkok Office, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and the interdisciplinary and intersectional platform for 'Environment and development in costal regions and in small islands' (CSI). Anthropologist Narum Hinshiranan has made a great effort to make it possible for Moken to maintain their traditional culture and lifestyle, in spite of park regulations. The Moken no longer have the right to continue traditional resource harvesting or live within the park.

My thesis about why the Urak Lawoi themselves have not started any movements, depends on that they do not 'know the other world yet'. Right now they are in the stage where many of them still would like to integrate with the dominant culture. They feel an inferiority complex. Most of the Urak Lawoi cannot read or write and they have been promised a lot of opportunities if they integrate and collaborate with the dominant culture.

#### **1.4 The Reason for Research Site Selection**

An interesting note about these indigenous people is that they tend to remain ethnically distinct from other coast-dwelling peoples, despite living on-shore for many generations (Sandbukt 1984:3). They are described as shy and escaping extremely fast without any warning in advance (Granbom 2003:7). According to Bodley there are tribal people who have managed to escape in order to preserve their cultures. Bodley emphasizes that there are many little-known tribal people around the world who have managed to retain their cultural integrity until recently. Rarely have these people have been recognized publicly and not by professional agents of cultural change. During my earlier fieldwork for my C-essay about *Urak Lawoi culture and identity*, I found a lot of unexpected problems for the Urak Lawoi. The last two decades the Urak Lawoi have been stressed by the exploding exploitation and dominance they are exposed to in what they feel is their territory. Since the exploitation is going radically fast, I felt an urgency to write about the kind of problems they now are facing. I choose Ko Lanta Yai as my main base because this is the island the Urak Lawoi counts as their main island and ‘capital’ in Thailand. Another importance was that I had cultivated acquaintances with the Urak Lawoi and locals that could make my field study easier to accomplish. The fact that Ko Lanta Yai had come (what I would call it) ‘in the middle of the development in tourism’ which I mean some islands (like Phuket and Phi Phi) tourism has in an early stage made its entrance and affected Urak Lawoi way of living. In contrast, islands like Ko Lipe have been developed later than Ko Lanta Yai by tourism. This made Ko Lanta interesting in the point of comparing the tourist impact on Urak Lawoi before and after entry of the tourism.

Until recently, the Thai government has been reluctant to admit the shattering problems that tourism has entailed (Alneng 2002:483). The environmental resources of Thailand and the islands of Andaman Sea are being rapidly degraded under several pressure from expanding populations and economic development strategies. Natural and cultural landscapes are being exploited in the pursuit of tourism dollars. According to the Surin Island Project (UNESCO, 2001) is the west coast of southern Thailand one area where the conservation of the marine environment is part of the national tourism development plan.

Despite the awareness of conservation in this area, there is reason for concern. Many times the state tries to solve minorities’ people problems, but it isn’t the solution to their problem in

the way minorities look at the problem. The solutions many times rationalize and develop the society into the dominant culture and the States own interests. This lack of knowledge and the civilizations lack of social solidarity can be fatal mistake for the human survival and the ecosystem. The explosive tourism development on the islands in and around Phuket in Andaman Sea causes ecological and social impact on Urak Lawoi communities. Many of the unprotected coastal beaches have been developed with bungalow resorts. The indigenous people Urak Lawoi have been pushed farther and farther away into areas with fewer resources.

This study will contribute to better understanding of the Urak Lawoi' problems since the extremely fast development around the Andaman Sea by outsiders and tourism expansion. It will add to knowledge about how Urak Lawoi' livelihood in a developing society are shaped by tourism, modernization, and the market-economy.

### **1.5 Method**

This material is based on fieldwork and the main emphasis is on the empirical material. I have spent eight months in total in what the Urak Lawoi look at as their territory in Andaman Sea. My base has been Ko Lanta Yai - the main island for Urak Lawoi in Thailand. I have also visited and stayed with Chao Lay, 'Sea Gypsies' or Urak Lawois in different islands such as Ko Phi Phi, Ko Jum, Ko Siehre, Ko Lipe, Ko Adang and Ko Surin in Andaman Sea. I have lived with the Urak Lawois in their homes in Nai Rai in Ko Lanta, Ko Sihre in Phuket and Sai-En and Aow-Bon in Ko Surin. The Chao Lay (called Moken) in Aow-Bon in South Ko Surin told me, that I was the first *farang* (white person from west) who had stayed with them. Doing fieldwork is not easy and I experienced what Dennison Nash (1996:2) classified as the fieldworkers lot: anxiety, rage, accidents, disease and even death.

My fieldwork is from an ethnic perspective, being from one cultural setting studying 'the other'. At the same time I have tried to live nearby and in similar conditions as the Urak Lawois. Which I grow closer, to an emic understanding.

My material was gathered at interviews and common conversations that I wrote down shortly after they took place. I also gathered material through observations. My informants

were of both genders and all ages. I did not find any differences by openness between the sexes or ages.

Since Ko Lanta has a very diverse cultural mix of Thai Muslim, Thai Chinese and Urak Lawois I had to discern a distinction, or division between the different cultures. I also had to spend time with Thai Muslims, Thai Buddhist and Thai Chinese to understand the society and the borders of the different cultures on the same island. It was not easy to try to learn much about so many different ethnic groups at the same time. But it was necessary to more clearly understand the Urak Lawois situation. Urak Lawois symbols, traditions and beliefs may have been influenced by Muslims and Chinese, which I as a westerner misunderstand because of a lack of all the cultures. I also want to point out that my fieldwork includes an Anthropologist's personality in relation to the culture, which is studied, and the people who are studied amongst Urak Lawois. Their impressions of me play an important roll in what kind of information that has been given to me. Two Anthropologists who are studying the same society will probably have two different interpretations depending on the problem statement and the world the Anthropologist is coming from.

I have used motorbike or boat to get to Urak Lawois settlements. I have tried to maintain a daily contact with the Urak Lawoi. To travel long distances by motorbike in 30-40 Celsius degree heat from one place to another has been tuff for a Swede who is used to good asphalt roads and not dusty or muddy roads under water.

I have been using an interpreter when I have been talking to the Urak Lawois. To work together with an interpreter has made me realize how close you get to a person you work with that way. I do not know if it is right to write, but sometimes I felt more like we were two persons in one. Red Hawk, my main and first interpreter, looked me up when I had arrived to Ko Lanta. I had met him during my field study for my C-essay. He told me, if I needed his help he was available for me. He was a Thai Buddhist and lived in his own hut in the Urak Lawois village Sanga-U. Red Hawk is also a musician who had moved to Sanga-U because he is interested in Urak Lawois culture, as he now was writing songs about them. Red Hawk is his

cover name and it turned up that he was a well-known person in Thailand. He was very popular, not just by the Urak Lawois, but also among governments. He opened up lots of doors for me. Red Hawk was diligently engaged in different commissions, such as organizing a Harley Davidson Party in the south of Thailand, fire show in Bangkok and other kind of festivals. He wanted to bring me along on these activities. Of course, it would have been interesting to see from a short distance how these festivals are organized. I was even invited to stay with the popular group '*Job to do*' (their popularity can be compared in Sweden with Per Gessle), while he was working with one of his festivals. But I was in Thailand for different reasons and I had a time limit to collect my sources. Because of this I had to hire a second interpreter. He was a Muslim and could speak the Urak Lawois language. He, like Red Hawk, contacted me and said if I ever needed his help, he would be glad to assist me. The fact that he was a Muslim made me realize how it is to live like a Muslim. Five times a day, we had to stop for prayers. We could not just stop and eat anywhere. Sometimes it could make it complicated when we had to go mile on long detour on our motorbike for a cup of coffee. He did not drink any alcohol. Even my Muslim interpreter turned out to have been well known. He used to be a singer in a Rock band. In the 'old days', he did not have to pay in restaurants or hotels. I found it was still the same. We seldom paid when we had visited a Muslim Restaurant. I do not know if it was because he was a Muslim or because he used to be a 'Star' or because it was just he. I also want to mention if we for some reason had to buy something while we where working - he never let me pay. I was told it would be a shame for a Muslim man if he felt he could not pay for a woman. To have two different interpreters from the Thai Buddhist and the Muslim world, made me even come closer to those societies. Which was good with my work with the Urak Lawois.

Sometimes I did not use an interpreter at all. Many times I just observed their ceremonies or the Urak Lawois way of living.

I had invested in a new digital multi player to make my interviews. Because my lap top travel mate broke down a couple of times during my fieldwork, I felt at risk when taping my interviews when I was not sure they had been properly transferred into the computer. Therefore I took field notes when I was talking with the Urak Lawois. Sometimes I just let my

movie camera go and later listen to the film, what had been said. Or someone later explained for me the film, what Urak Lawois actually were doing, for example in their ceremonies. I have taken all photographs in this essay except for a few taken by my kids' teacher Yvonne.

### **1.5.1 Mine abode on Klong Nin Beach, Ko Lanta**

I was invited to have my permanent stay in Urak Lawoi village Sanga-U, Ko Lanta. I could not accept the offer, because my two girls had to go to school. The Swedish school rule did not accept my second daughter staying with me without a regular school. Therefore I employed a Swedish teacher together with another Swedish family living in Ko Lanta, working in the tourist business. The school was in the north of the 30 km long island, which is the most exploited part of Ko Lanta. Sanga-U was in the south. I decided on the central region to have our permanent residence on Klong Nin Beach. A beach mainly settled by Muslims on the middle of the island. Klong Nin Beach is still a quiet place where westerners and backpackers come to stay but is under a great development and change. Long stay backpackers and tourists from all over the world get here together into a 'fantasy world'. People escape their daily life and activities into an imaginary world that evokes wishes and desires. Alneng talks about 'touristic phantasm'. Phantasms bring people from different cultural contexts closer to each other a period of time, while distance is upheld and reconfirmed (by Spawning in Alneng 2002:465). Many of the tourists are keen on 'grass', as it is easy to obtain.

When we arrived in the middle of October the rainy season was not over. I did not want to stay in a resort. A coincidence let me meet some Thai people from Bangkok who had moved to Klong Nin Beach on Ko Lanta. They invited us to stay with them. I was free to borrow their motorbike and car anytime and we were cooking together and practicing the Thai language. After a week I found out that they were heavily into drugs. They even cultivated their own. I was frustrated about the situation. Maybe they wanted a mother to stay with them together with her children to cover up what they actually were dealing with? I knew I could not stay there with my children. At the same time I refused to stay in a bungalow resort. If I could not stay for practical reasons with the Urak Lawoi, I would at least stay together with Thai people. I could have solved the problem by staying in the Urak Lawois settlement Nai Rai. It is located



in the north of Ko Lanta nearby the school my girls were going to on Klong Dau Beach (see Chapter 1:1, about the Swedish family who moved there). Klong Dau Beach used to be Urak Lawois settlement before they moved to Nai Rai located further away from the beach. Klong Dau Beach is now exploited by mainly outsiders and packed with bungalow resorts and restaurants. It was there my girls went to school. But my girls refused to stay there. They thought this part of the island was too exploited with a lot of tourists. As my second daughter said: ‘what do the kids expect to find and see when they are snorkeling in a swimming pool?’ Even if I have my favorite lady Beeda with high status among Urak Lawois, living in Nai Rai, I found it better to just visit her and stay with her overnight sometimes. The change of lifestyle for Urak Lawois in the north of Ko Lanta was bigger than in the south of the island, where many tourists still do not go.

One evening when I was frustrated about our situation and living, I went for a walk on ‘our beach’ Klong Nin. Suddenly I heard *Rong Ngang* music - the Urak Lawois’ music and dance. I looked up in a hut made of leaves right on the beach. In the light from an oil-lamp and the shine from the moon I could see a guy dancing and people sitting in a circle around him. Without thinking I ran up to them. My knowledge was there were no Urak Lawois on this beach. It was Trai dancing – a Thai from the mainland. He was dancing every night to *Rong Ngang* music to put his friend Charlee’s two small kids to bed. Charlee was married with Net and he had a connection with Urak Lawoi in Sanga-U, since he used to live there and had his ‘adopted’ Urak Lawoi parents living there. It ended up with the day after Charlee and Trai offered to build for me my own bungalow, right on the beach. I paid the material and they did the work.



**Plate2:** Net and Charlee and their two girls.



**Plate3:** Trai and Lotta in my bungalow

Charlee and Trai were poor Thai Buddhists, but they opened their home for us. The hut became our home for the next six months. I wanted to live as much as possible in the same circumstances as most Urak Lawois do. I therefore built my hut with no fan or air conditioner. I had natural air from the chinks in my floor or walls or my windows without glass. I slept on the floor on a two-centimeter mattress (many times this is more than the Urak Lawoi sleep on, who often sleep on leaves right on the floor). We first had our shower in the river, beside Charlee's house. I later invested in a shower - a luxury for the Urak Lawois.



**Plate 4:** Our living on Ko Lanta. From left: Ebba-Lotta, Lisa, Lotta and Malin.

My new life surrounded by Muslims was a new experience for me. Five o'clock in the morning the prayer woke me up from the mosque. I always felt accepted by the Muslims living on the beach. Even if they may have looked a little suspicious when a lone western women with kids moved into Trai and Charlee and wife Net. Because I lived on a Muslim Beach, in respect for them, I did not often swim in a bathing suit. Instead I had my fisherman trousers on. The Muslims laughed at me when I told them I had bought a *burka*. It made sense, I said, to use it to protect my hair when I was riding the motorbike on the dusty roads. I did not use the *burka* but I found a practical use for it in Ko Lanta.

I used to have my morning coffee at a Muslim restaurant. The women were fun to talk with and liked my dread locks. I could not make my own opinion about their hair when most

of the women covered it up. I felt fully accepted by both women and men. One day a little Muslim girl came running up to me while I was out walking on the road. She gave me flowers. They were from her parents who wanted me to have them.

Thai Buddhist who recently had moved from the main land also lived on Klong Nin Beach. They had opened up businesses for tourism. Most of the businesses had to do with alcohol, since Muslims are not allowed to sell alcohol. One older Buddhist couple had opened up a liquor store. Many young Thai Buddhist boys with an uneasy background had come from the main land. Some were working in bars, owned by Thai migrants from the mainland. They worked for free to have somewhere to sleep and eat. If the boys were lucky they got some profit from the jeweler or tattoos, many of them are talented to create. Other boys are running bars in co-operation with local Thai Muslims, who had opened bungalow resorts. The bar was run in connection to the restaurant at the Muslim resort. I always found the relationship and atmosphere between the Thai Buddhist and the Thai Muslims very good. I also found them helping each other with different things if one of the sides had much to do. But I did not see the Muslims stand behind the bar. For some of the Thai boys running their bar in connection to the Muslims, it had gone very well. From the profit from the bar, they had invested in land either on Ko Lanta or on the mainland. The boys made fun of me and could not really understand why I wanted to spend time with Sea Gypsies or Chao Ley, as they called the Urak Lawois. Many of the boys called me 'mom'. Others called me 'the witch' (with humor), when I came to get my girls at night, as they were very keen on 'baby sitting'. The Muslim men, I do think looked at me with respect. If my children or me needed a ride by car it was never any problem. I never had to pay anything for the ride. One of the older Thai Buddhist men and women said I was different from the other *farangs* because as they said to me - I was one of them.

### **1.5.2 Personal experience of doing fieldwork**

I have used a low profile during my fieldwork. I did not take for granted, that Urak Lawois would greet me with great enthusiasm, when I forced my presence as a curious anthropologist upon their culture and society. My first contact with the Urak Lawois, I found them reserved towards me. But they always treated me with kindness and warmth with a few exceptions

when some suspicious women looked at me. I interpreted it as they looked at me as a rival for their men. This feeling did not last very long. The Urak Lawois have always treated me good but it was not until the end of my stay this feeling changed into something of an even more positive nature. They started to treat me different in a positive, more open way. Among other things they told me in advance when they were having a ceremony. Otherwise, this could be a problem to figure out using their moon calendar.

To do field work was not always easy. Many times I questioned why I exposed myself for an environment that was dirty and unhygienic. I got two different skin infections in the tropical climate (I still have not get rid of after 8 months return in Sweden when I have finished this essay). The heat was, many times hard to stand, and sleeping on the floor with big rats in my hut was not fun at all. Why did I take all my savings to do this? No one had asked me to do it. I could just as well have taken my money and lived a decent life for six months among the other tourists on Klong Dau Beach, Ko Lanta. Why did I not do so when I found life so hard sometimes?

I actually tried to live the comfortable way. When my daughter Sha-ba returned from her sickness from the hospital in January, I had to hire a bungalow on Klong Dau Beach right beside the school. But life felt useless to live there, when I know my favorite lady Beeda was living in her shelter not far from my bungalow. She slept on the floor. No air conditioning, no toilet or bathroom. She was poor but she never complained about her situation. Beeda was the Urak Lawois dance leader and a beautiful graceful lady and proud of her heritage. The culture she now faced in a short while was falling apart. I wondered was she was thinking when she took me for walks on Klong Dau Beach. We could not communicate with each other. She walked me up on the small mountain at the end of the beach. She sat down at the top and viewed out at Andaman Sea. She looked below down at Kaw Kwang Resort. The first bungalow on Ko Lanta that was built in the surrounding where Urak Lawois used to have their settlement before they had to move to Nai Rai.



Beeda walked with leveled steps up and down the little mountain. She often took a quiet break from the walk. She just sat down and looked out at Andaman Sea or Klong Dau Beach. We walked along the beach, visited the three Urak Lawoi graveyards on Klong Dau Beach, surrounded by bungalow resorts. She showed me the graves of her ancestors and wiped them off. I felt sad when I walked beside her. Klong Dau Beach had very rapidly been exploited. There was no way back. Not many years ago this was the beach she lived and stayed for camping for months on the shore, collecting food. The same story was repeated again. The western culture had taken over the ethnic minority's way of living. Pushed them further away from their territory. To survive, the Urak Lawois are forced into acclimatization with the world economy. Why does this still happen today and when will we start to learn from our mistakes?

### **1.5.3 Unexpected occurrences during my field work**

I experienced some unexpected situations during my fieldwork. I will mention a few of them to show the problems of being in Ko Lanta as an Anthropologist and not a tourist.

I many times spent time in the bars, discussing everything, which could be of interest to know about Ko Lanta and the life of Urak Lawois. A Chinese Thai from the mainland run one of the bars I used to visit. I always felt welcomed there, even if I sometimes wondered for myself if it was my money they were more interested in than my person. One day there was a new guy in his mid-40's working for them. Because he was new, I wanted to be polite and talk to him. I started the common opening phrases when you meet someone for the first time, like 'Where do you come from?' 'Do you have family' and so forth... He just looked at me with angry suspicious and started to scream at me; 'I know why you are here! They have told me. But I tell you there are no 'Sea Gypsies' on Ko Lanta. Your are making up a story to get back to Europe and write a book, so you get rich. Understand? There are no gypsies here. They are just poor Thai people'. I was kind of shocked over this unexpected unfriendly behavior towards me. He never talked to me again, even if I still visited the same bar and walked up to him with a smile and reached my hand towards him and told him I thought we should sit down to talk and become friends. But he ignored me and he showed me very strongly that I was not welcome to Ko Lanta.

Later, some Thai people warned me about continuing my investigation about the Urak Lawois' right to land. The corruption in Thailand can be bad. First, I ignored the warning. As a Swede, I found it kind of exaggerated. But when I got the warning a second time from another source and I heard there had been a few fatal shootings in Ko Lanta, during my stay there, I felt disturbed. I therefore stopped my investigation of the Urak Lawois land rights for a while. The fatal shootings, I was told, were over internal disagreements. None of the cases that I know about had anything to do with the Urak Lawois.

On the tourist exploited island Phi Phi, I was later told by locals that the Urak Lawois who had refused to leave their settlements two decades ago, while Phi Phi started to become developed, were killed. I was told there was bungalow resort owners exploited Urak Lawois settlements on the beach. The bungalow resort owner had hired someone else to execute. I had for natural reasons no chance to check out this information.

A Swedish Tourist Company on Ko Lanta wanted me to bring some Urak Lawois and come and speak about these indigenous people for a Swedish group doing a Yoga course. It could have been a good idea if it was not for their arrangement. The Tourist Company wanted me to bring some Urak Lawois as an exotic element. They wanted the Urak Lawois to show handcraft on a small island where the actress Malin Berghagen had a Yoga-course. This enterprise would take the Urak Lawois and me the whole day to travel by boat to this island. I felt it was shameful and disrespectful towards the Urak Lawois to take up their time for one day for a half hour appearance (like monkeys) to meet the Tourist Company' tight schedule, without pay. I want to point out that I do not think Malin Berghagen was informed about this enterprise and had nothing to do with the arrangement.

It was not only unpleasant unexpected situations I got involved in. When I arrived at Ko Lanta, the authority treated me very well. They welcomed me to come and live there and write about their culture on Ko Lanta. One government offered to drive me around and show me Ko Lanta. I once was invited to an opening ceremony for a bar, where also the Nai Amphurs from the district of Ko Lanta were honored guests. I was seated at the main table among all the district officers.

When 'Sea Gypsy Home' had their opening ceremony, I was invited as a special privileged guest. 'Sea Gypsy Home' is sponsored by business people and is a centre to preserve and show the Urak Lawois' unique culture for tourists. At the grand opening many tourists came and I was asked to make a speech about Urak Lawoi. I did not just talk about their culture; I also saw my chance to talk about Urak Lawois land problems.

One day I received a telephone call. It was from a Senator in Thailand. He had heard about me and wanted to see me. It felt more like an order that he wanted to see me. I did not feel comfortable going by myself. I therefore brought my friend Charlee. We arrived to see the Senator and his luxury bungalow and hotel construction that he was building. The Senator invited me to stay there. I could come anytime I liked and of course stay for free. He told me, he had been in 59 countries and he would like to have me as his travel mate. I did not accept his invitation but I visited his resort a few more times. I never went there by myself. I did not get clear on what type of land he was building the resort on. For me it seemed like he was building it in a National park, but he denied that.

A more positive invitation was from Walailak University in Nakhon Si Thammarat, where I made a speech about the Urak Lawois for students. I was invited to come back, but the time was too short and the distance too far from where I was doing fieldwork.

#### **1.5.4 Disturbing things about my fieldwork**

The most disturbing thing in my everyday life has been my kids' school. Every day it has reminded me about our civilization and has been an abrupt cut to become acclimatized to the local people. It also meant that I could not bring my kids to the Urak Lawois and their society. But my kids assimilated and became comfortable with the Thai people on Klong Nin Beach. Even my oldest daughter Malin did so, when she came over to visit us for five weeks. My kids started to speak Thai. My third daughter Lisa was 'adopted' by a Thai family and my second daughter Ebba-Lotta got the Thai name Sha-ba. Western people who saw her said to me, she even walked and behaved like a Thai. She soon had more Thai friends than Swedish friends

back home. We realized how important she was among her friends when she became sick on Christmas Eve and she had to be put into the local hospital. Many local people visited her and all brought her presents, even if she was unconscious and did not know who was visiting her. Two days later the ambulance had to bring her to the main land and a bigger hospital. It would take a long time before she recovered. But that is another story...

After a few weeks when we had returned to Sweden from my field study, my daughter Sha-ba was asking me; *Mom what are we doing here?* I had no answer to give. I felt the same. There were so many more things I wanted to find out about the Urak Lawoi. Next time when I go back, I will live with the Urak Lawoi and if the kids want to go with me they have to follow me. If we bring a teacher, the teacher will have to live on our conditions during the fieldwork.

### **1.6 Material from the Field**

Since this material is based on fieldwork the main emphasis is on the empirical material. I have chosen to let the voices of my informants guide us to the conclusion of my thesis. Much of the material I gathered during my fieldwork is of a sensitive nature. I have chosen to let my informants remain anonymous to protect their identity. However, I have used a number of additional sources for facts about 'my field society', historical data and my theories.

Anthropologist Arporn U-krit from Krabi Cultural Center has been a great help to me with her experience from the field with the Urak Lawoi in Ko Lanta. She has written her M.A. Thesis 1989 for Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand about Urak Lawoi Social and Cultural Life in Ko Lanta. A source that is invaluable. Another good resource and help has been Dr. Supin Wongbusarakum. She has done her Doctors degree on the Urak Lawoi in the Adang Archipelago for the department of Geography of University of Hawaii in Manoa. Even if she has been very busy with different projects, she has never hesitated to assist to help me when I felt it necessary. I have kept in touch with her by e-mail, but also visited her for a week on Ko Lipe, while she was there in charge of an Island Ecology and Culture Class with a group of American students from the University of Chiang Mai. A coincidence made us also be at Ko Surin (on the border to Burma) at the same time. We were both there for the first



time. A week earlier Dr. Supin visited Ko Surin; she tried to get in touch with me to visit me on Ko Lanta. Since I had a lot of trouble with my e-mail, I never received her message.

I also want to mention Vira and Pon Changnam as special good sources for me. Vira, from Switzerland, is married to Pon who is Urak Lawoi. The only westerner I know of in Ko Lanta who is married with an Urak Lawoi. Vira and Pon have their son Toby and live with the Urak Lawois in Ko Lanta. Vira has many years of experience of the Thai society, and as a western citizen, she has faced Urak Lawois problems from a short distance and an emic perspective. She has been an enormous help to me, as a westerner in understanding the culture I am writing about. Vira and Pon also opened up their home for me and their hospitality and generosity always made me feel at home when I stayed or visited them.



*Plate 6:* Pon and Vira Changnam

### **1.7 Literature**

It is not long ago that anthropological tourism studies became accepted as social sciences. It is still in its formative stage where exploration is important and boundaries are not well established. There isn't a great deal of theory to consider of the subject, as there are current anthropological explorations (Nash 1996:15, 162). One reason why this field has not been taken seriously and scholarships has been held back is because studying tourism may appear too much like taking vacation and getting paid for it (Wood 1997:3). Interestingly tourists go to the same kind of places as anthropologists used to do scientific work. The contrast is travelers go they're enjoying themselves and not in general interested of understanding the local people (Nash 1996:2,17). The anthropological study of tourism started when researchers accidentally discovered that tourism implicated in the society they had chosen to study (Nash

1996:20, Wilson 1993:33), which was the case with my studies. So far the main picture of tourism in anthropology has emerged from the developmental perspective particular in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World. Earlier anthropological studies have showed that tourism impact on origin people can play a devastating role. Outsider capitalists take control of tourism development and make it impossible for locals to stay, because of raise in value for land property and impossible to invest in tourism because of lack of knowledge and money. It does not give them more opportunity than to work as unskilled labors in tourism. Inhabitant in National parks led to dependence in tourism as they are banned from living there in a traditional way. Debate on tourism in developing countries has focused on whether its effects are beneficial or negative. Dennison Nash is critical to anthropologists who proclaim tourism development as something bad as he states: 'If one already 'knows' the value of something one is investigating, there may be a tendency to slough of diligent science' (Nash 1996:81). From my own experience I am critical to his statement since I came to study *Urak Lawoi Culture and Identity* and from they're on found a lot of unexpected threats to their human rights from the tourism industry. I had no experience or knowledge what so ever about tourism anthropological studies.

Scholars from North America and northwest Europe dominate the field. An early and important contribution to this literature was Valene L. Smith (1977, 1989) with *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Her book might be the best-known book in the field. A year earlier, UNESCO (1976, 75) proclaimed that tourism 'more than an economic phenomenon with social and cultural effects, has become a phenomenon of civilization'. The literature I have used in this essay has been a mixture from different researches that have contributed for a better understanding about the impact of tourism development on indigenous people.

Malcolm Crick has given the field legitimacy and still so far, the only ethnography devoted to the anthropological study of tourism. He has written a deep ethnography from the local people's view. He has also written articles about the roll of tourism anthropology in the field.

Dennison Nash advocates cooperation between anthropologists and tourism entrepreneurs. Anthropological expertise into the cultural background can contribute to better understanding

for Travel agents. I am critical to his discussion why anthropologists and the travel industry has had little dialogue as he believes that [...] 'there aversion to business practices of the establishment, turned of by this kind of thing? Are their patrons and colleagues looking down on them for entering the business world?' (Nash 1996:13). One gets the impression that Nash has superstitious opinions about anthropologists against entrepreneurs. For me it seems like he misunderstands the problem since the sensitive about being dependent for economical reasons on Travel Agencies making anthropological tourism researches would be hard to do an impartial research. Collaboration could be good but it is hard to find an impartial balance.

Eric Cohen who made the field of tourism legitimacy in South-East Asia writes important literature on tourism in South-East Asia. Erik Cohen, the Wise Professor of Sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has since 1977 studied tourism and social change in Thailand. He states that there is limited information about the native people on the islands in Andaman Sea in contrast to the hill tribes in the north. His research on the islands in Thailand shows at first that the development seems to be favorable for the locals and later it has a tendency to changing 'outsiders' control and ownership. Locals find it harder to enter the tourist business with an accelerating development.

Other important writers on tourism in South-East Asia are: Michael Pichard and Robert E. Wood who have edited *Tourism, Ethnicity, and the State in Asian and Pacific Societies*, were they looking at the state's importance on developing tourism in economical and own interests. Pichard discusses as long as ethnic minorities have an impact on tourist development there are no boundaries between 'ours' and 'theirs'. He talks about 'touristic culture' where tourism has become integral part of culture and interaction with tourists is a central component in the definition of ethnic identity and authenticity. Wood discusses the politics in Southeast Asia that governments' promotion of tourism can suppress indigenous groups.

Other interesting literature contributing to this essay has also been articles from the conference at the annual general meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Studies in the United Kingdom, collected in *Tourism in South-East Asia* (1993), edited by Hitchcock, King and Parnwell.

Scandinavian researches used in the subject of this paper are as follows:

Professor Kajsa Ekholm Friedman has together with her husband Professor Jonathan Friedman been working at the University of Lund and has done extensive fieldwork on Hawaii in periods since 1980. They have lived in the 'last Hawaiian fishing village' but to pursue a comprehensive view they have done fieldwork in different environments among other things in the tourism-invaded Waikiki. I found their work contributed to a better understanding of my fieldwork and research.

Social Anthropologist Victor Alneng at Stockholm University is working on his PhD project about domestic and international tourism in Vietnam and has written a few interesting articles in the subject.

*Att kräva livet åter: ursprungsfolkens kamp* (1997, 2001) edited by Ulf Johansson Dahre contains articles from the discourses held by 'IWGIA-Lundgruppen about origin people' during 1995 and 1996. The articles discuss land rights and the conflicts with development and extraction of nature resources, which often are environments, inhabited by indigenous people.

Torun Elsrud has written her doctoral dissertation at dept of Sociology in Lund 2004 about backpackers' journeys to the 3<sup>rd</sup> world. 'It can be understood as a creative effort by the individual to regain control over time and space through to be lost in places travelers call home'. The backpacker makes up an image of the 'primitive other' and think they are 'individual' travelers mastering adventure and risk but they also create a new lifestyle in the 'hosts society'.

Anthropologist Ingrid Damm discusses the importance of local people's influence of developing tourism and the infrastructure in West makes it easier to manage 'tourist invasions', than in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World.

## II ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION on URAK LAWOI

### 2.1 Description of the Society Ko Lanta Yai, of the Fieldwork Research

The 27-kilometre long island Ko Lanta Yai has plenty of fine sandy beaches. The local Urak Lawoi name for the island is *Pulao Satak*, which means exactly 'Island with long beaches'. The beaches stretch along the western coast on the island, separated by some rocky points.

Ko Lanta is the home of three very distinct culture groups - Urak Lawoi, Thai Muslim and Thai Chinese. According to information given to me, they have lived together in peace for hundreds of years on the island. The Chinese are considered as the highest rank, the Muslims class lower status, but Urak Lawoi the lowest in the hierarchy.

The first people, who inhabited Ko Lanta, more than 500 years ago, are said to have been the Urak Lawoi, which are counted as Ko Lanta's indigenous people. Malay Muslims migrated to the island after Urak Lawois. Many of the Muslims have, or had, their income from fishing, coconut or rubber plantations. Chinese merchants arrived later to the island more than 100 years ago. Today they continue on the island as business owners, agriculture farmers and fishermen.

*Ban Ko Lanta* (Lanta Village) in the south; used to be the main town in the district of Ko Lanta. Historically this town, known as *Old Lanta Town*, played a major role as a port for traders from Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. The town acted as the port and commercial center for the island and provided safe harbor for Arabic and Chinese trading vessels sailing between the larger ports of Phuket, Penang and Singapore. Today, Old Lanta Town is a sleepy Chinese inspired city with 100-year-old wooden shacks and shop houses built on stilts over the water. Not many tourists go there but there are some western artists and writers who have found it to be a peaceful place to work. The only Hospital, Police station and the Post office on the island, are still reminders that this city used to be the main town on Ko Lanta.

*Ban Saladan* at the northern tip of the island is nowadays the largest settlement and has a couple ferries of piers and is the business centre and area where most visitors arrive on the island. This part of Ko Lanta Yai is the most exploited part. Since the road connected the northern part of Ko Lanta (1996) to the mainland, the centre has been created in Ban Saladan.

The district (*amphur*) of Ko Lanta has 24 912 residents (information from Amphur, Ko Lanta 2004). Ko Lanta is two islands' actually: Ko Lanta Noi and Ko Lanta Yai. Ko Lanta Noi is the smaller and passes by visitors who are coming by road and car ferry to Ko Lanta Yai. Both islands are part of the Ko Lanta National Park, an archipelago of 15 islands in Andaman Sea. The protected area is 134 sq km sea along the southern tip of Thailand in Krabi province. The National Park was established 1990.

## **2.2 Government on Ko Lanta**

Thailand is the only country of Southeast Asia that has never been colonized by a foreign power. The government of Thailand has normally been a constitutional monarchy. The king appoints all judges who sit on Thailand's supreme court.

Thailand is divided in 76 *Jangwàt* (provinces). Each province is subdivided into *Amphur* (districts), which are then subdivided into *kíng-amphur* (sub districts), *Tambon* (communes or groups villages), *Mo baan* (villages) and *thetsàbaan* (municipalities).

Krabi province is divided into 8 districts (*Amphur*), which Ko Lanta is one of the districts. Amphur Ko Lanta is divided into 5 *Tambon* - Lanta Yai ( 4 861 inhabitants), Saladan (3 443), Lanta Noi (4 195), Kro Krang (6 556) and Klong Yang (4 853). Ko Lanta Yai, where the main fieldwork was done consists of *Tambon* Lanta Yai and Saladan; Lanta Yai is divided into 8 *Mo baan* and Saladan in five.

District officers (*Nai Amphur*) are responsible for the provincial governors. Tambon by elected commune heads (*Gamnan*) and Mobaan represent by elected village chiefs (*Po yài baan*). I do not know of any case in Ko Lanta where Urak Lawois are represented in any of the elected political districts.

### **2.3 The Origin People Urak Lawoi**

Sea Gypsies have been referred to in literature since the seventeenth century (Hogan 1972:207). Characteristic for this group of people is that they have their homes on their boats - nomads on the sea. They are often known as incredibly good divers and according to Hogan (ibid, 207) they are spoken of in some older literature as being wild and piratical nomads. The present Sea Gypsies and Urak Lawoi are in contrast described as unwarlike people, timid and disheartened, subject to authority and anxious to avoid any kind of trouble.

The Urak Lawoi of the Andaman Sea, Thailand is living according to Non Changnam and Arporn Ukrit in Satun Province (Ko Bulon, Ko Lipe and Ko Adang), Phuket Province (Sihre Island, Sapum, Ban Nua, Laem La, and Rawi Beach) and in Krabi Province (Ko Chum (Jum), Phi Phi Don and Ko Lanta). If this information is correct, Wongbusarakum (2002:71) report about Urak Lawoi settlement has to be adjusted. Laem La and Tha Chatchai is the same place. Ko Bulon is not situated in Krabi Province, but in Satun. No Urak Lawoi live in Ko Poo or Ko Ngai. Urak Lawoi are living in a minority situation both as indigenous people in a setting where the Thai culture is dominant, but also in relation to the Thai Muslims and Thai Chinese, inhabiting the islands in Andaman Sea. They prefer to stay in their well-known location. Living as an Urak Lawoi is the lowest step of the social and economic ladder. As many origin people around the world, they are poor and least educated.

### **2.4 Name**

Sea gypsies, sea nomads, Urak Lawoi, Chao Ley, Thai Mai... The names are many of these people, which as a first theoretical and empirical sight can seem kind of confusion. Where do the names come from and which is the 'right name'?

English writers have referred boat nomads as 'sea gypsies' or 'water gypsies'. The world 'sea gypsies' has become popular and is commonly used in tourism brochures. The term 'sea nomads' is the same meaning as 'sea gypsies' but is used mainly by writers in German and Dutch (Sopher 1965:51).

According to local informants the meaning of *Urak Lawoi* is brother from the sea (urak = brother and lawoi = sea). This is the name in their own language and is according to Wongbusarakum (2002:68) equivalent to the Malay *orang laut* (sea people). In Thai they are called *chao ley* or *chao talay* (*chao* = people, and *ley* or *talay* = sea) with different spellings in different literature as *chao lay*, *chao tala*, *chaaw thalee*. This expression I found, they do not appreciate to be called as well as *chao nam* (*nam* = water), *chao ko* or *kon ko* (*chao* or *kon* = people and *ko* = island) are other Thai expressions (ibid, 68).

Urak Lawoi = Orang Laut = Chao Lay = Sea People

The new name *Thai Mai* (*mai* = new), meaning new Thai is an introduction world to integrate the Urak Lawoi into the Thai society, but Thai Mai can not only refer to Urak Lawoi, it is a term used for different minorities in Thailand.

In old maps of Ko Lanta, I was told Urak Lawoi are called *Orang Lonta* (by U-krit in Wongbusarakum 2002:68), meaning people of half land and half sea because they live on land, but make a living in the sea.

In Thai literature, the Urak Lawoi are often grouped together with other sea nomadic people, such as Moken and Moklen. Past literatures often identify these different groups as one group, called *Chao Lay*. According to U-krit (interview 2002-03-10), information given to her from Mokens in Ko Surin, the Mokens divide themselves into *Moken Pulau* (island) and *Moken Tamul* (land). *Moken Tamul* live close by the beaches and land and are married to Urak Lawois in Phi Phi, where they also have their settlement. They still make their living from and on the sea.

(More about their name I want to refer to *Sjözigenares Identitet* by Lotta Granbom, 2002).

## **2.5 Origin**

Ko Lanta is referred to as the original home for the Urak Lawoi of the Andaman Sea in Thailand but their origin has been much disputed. This is the story told by older informants and *To Maw* (medicine man) Sicken of how the first Urak Lawoi came to Ko Lanta; The Urak Lawoi were sailing on deep water on open sea when they were surprised by a big storm. Urak Lawoi followed the fish *Kraben Kra-O* (*Kraben* = fish and *Kra-O* was the name of the fish),



which could talk with them. A white bird, *Bolong Puté*, flew and sat down on the top of the boats mast. When *Bolong Puté* sat down on the mast, the storm became silent.

They were sailing through two cliffs outside Old Lanta Town, Ko Lanta. It was like a door opened up for them with Ko Lanta in front of them.

The white bird *Bulong Puté* is very important symbol for the Urak Lawoi in their Rong Ngeng song. The white wings are imitated on Urak Lawois temple. They believe this bird can calm storms. The myth says that *Bulong Puté* knows the way back to Gunung Jerai, Kedah



Peak on the coast of Lawoi Kedah, north of Penang in Saiburi State of Malaysia, from where they believe they came sailing, to Ko Lanta. According to Wongbusarakum (2002:71) this connection to Gunung Jerai can be because To Kiri, who was a Muslim traveler and adventurer, came to Ko Lanta and married an Urak Lawoi. A general opinion among the local informants is that their heritage is from Sumatra and the Malay Peninsular.

Sopher indicates that the Urak Lawoi were called *Orang Laut Kappir* on Ko Lanta (*kafir* = unbeliever in Arabic), whose original home was Langkawi in Malaysia, which was conquered by Malays and tried to force the Urak Lawoi to become Muslims. They refused and escaped by sea to Ko Lanta. Also Hogan mentions Langkawi as possible has been the origin home before coming to Ko Lanta. Of interest, Inge Damm (1995:43) writes about the 70 fishing families from Langkawi who 1984 were abruptly moved from the beaches to leave space for hotel constructions. Outsiders often refer to Urak Lawoi as fishing families. I have not found out if these families belonged to the Urak Lawoi, but it is not unlikely that it is so. According to the Urak Lawoi in Ko Lipe, they still have relatives in Langkawi and I am told when the border was created after the War between Malaysia and Thailand - they wished that Langkawi had been included in Thailand.

Some believe that the Urak Lawoi have their origin in Sea Dyak of Borneo (by Johnjud in Wongbusarakum 2002:70). They traveled from Sea Dyak by sea through the Malaga Strait to

the Andaman Sea, west of Thailand and up to Burma. Other sources imply that they used to be indigenous people in Malay, before the Malays migrated there. Some relate them to the Melanesian island in the South Pacific (by Chumpol in *ibid*, 70).

Hogan (1972:218-219) derives Urak Lawois from Celebes and moved by sea to Gunung Jerai and further north to Ranong.

There are also disputes if the Urak Lawoi is related to other 'sea nomads' or not. Some have a theory that they are related to the Mokens. According to informants on Ko Lanta, Mokens and the Urak Lawoi used to be the same people, but now have problems understanding each other's language, which has been influenced by surrounding countries and people. In conformity with Hope (2001:158), who met Urak Lawois in Burma, I met Mokens from Burma and Ranong in Ko Lipe and Ko Lanta.

## 2.6 Character feature

The Urak Lawoi are described as good boatmen, excellent divers and skilled fishermen (Wungbusarakum 2002:87).

They are described as having a great capacity for holding their breath for long periods of time while diving and catching fish with their bare hands (by



**Plate8:** Bada is making an anchor.

Bangkok Post and Eitel in *ibid*, 2002:87) and can see rather

well under water (see more in Anna Gisléns' dissertation *Superior Underwater Vision in Humans*, 2003). They are described as being shy and peaceful and to every extent avoid conflicts of any kind (Hogan 1972:207). Escaping from problems can be explained by the actions of the pirates from Malaysia they have been exposed to, who caught both women and men as slaves. The shyness can also be explained by avoiding acclimatization to the dominant culture. Hogan (*ibid*, 1972:220) states Urak Lawoi do not like to be dominated by the Thai. They submit to it, but they do not like it. Escaping can be an instinct of self-preservation to

avoid conflicts (Granbom 2003:21-22). In old literature, they are often described how they suddenly disappear unobserved from an island. From an ‘outsiders’ point of view, it can seem that they have a base camp, but in a few minutes they have packed all their belongings into their boat and disappeared. This can be compared to how an ‘outsider’ described the Urak Lawoi for me during fieldwork, as not making plans in advance. However if they come up with an idea for a project they start immediately. They can’t wait till tomorrow.

Local informants reside on Ko Lanta describe Urak Lawoi’ as goodhearted people who listen to others and trust what they are told. They are described as not talking directly to you about what they are thinking. They are known to avoid being involved in a discussion and voicing an opinion.

Their physical character features are described as a darker skin than Malays, Burmese and Thais. Their hair is black and can be straight, wavy and curly. In literature they are described as having good physical condition with muscular arms and chest (Sopher 1965:164-165). During my field observation I found that many of the younger and middle-aged women were extremely huge and fat (see more about this in Chapter 4.6). I never saw a fat older woman, as they were often very lithe.



**Plate 9:** Rudol



**Plate 10:** Lotta, Dila & Ebba-Lotta

The language of the Urak Lawoi is a descendent from Malay Polynesian and can be considered, according to Arporn U-krit, as a dialect of Malay. In the “Ethnologue report for language”, one can read that their language is descendent from Austronesian - Malay Polynesian - West Polynesian - Sundic - Malayic - Malayan - Para Malay. There is no written form of the language.

## 2.7 Urak Lawois settlement on Ko Lanta

Urak Lawois settlements in Ko Lanta are: two villages in the north, Nai Rai and Ban Klong Dau. Hue Lem and Sanga-U in the south. I was told that Sanga-U is divided into Sanga-U, Ma Prao, Ao Bon (Pou) and Jo Molé. Molé begins from south of the spring in Sanga-U. I found the Urak Lawoi, living in the exploited northern part more integrated with the ‘outsiders’ than those living in Sanga-U.



*Plate 11:* I-ham in Sanga-U.

The mother of the king Rama IX visited Ko Lanta 2512, (35 years ago according to the lunar calendar). She was told about the Urak Lawois’ land problem. She got involved in their situation and made sure they obtained land for themselves. According to Arporn U-krit, Sanga-U was therefore given to them in 1986. After this, many Urak Lawois moved to Sanga-U. One year after the land in Sanga-U, was given to Urak Lawois, 376 Urak Lawois lived there - 184 men and 192 women (ibid, interview 2004-03-10). Sanga-U is still a village where the Urak Lawoi are left alone and in conformity with Hogan (1972:225), I still did not find this part well integrated. Today the population is 358 people in Sanga-U (Andaman Pilot Project by UNESCO). It is not clear if the people in Jo Molé are included or not.

Hue Lem is still populated by mixed Muslims and Urak Lawois. I found they are very tolerant about their different beliefs and cultures. See more about this in Chapter 2:11.

In the middle of 1990s, the population of Urak Lawoi in Ko Lanta was about 900 (interview U-krit 2004-03-10), but there are more today. I do not know of any ‘census’ count



of the Urak Lawoi population in total in Ko Lanta. There are 632 Urak Lawois living outside Saladan (interview U-krit 2004-03-10) and 358 living in Sanga-U (Andaman Pilot Project by UNESCO). The information is not clear if this count includes all of the Urak Lawois in the north of the island. It does not include everyone in the south, since the Urak Lawoi in Hue Lem are not included. I want to point out that the modern state in Thailand wants all ethnic groups to share the Thai national culture. Therefore all Urak Lawoi may not be registered as Urak Lawoi (more about this in Chapter 4:1). A guess from Vira is that there are about 2 000 Urak Lawoi in Ko Lanta but I want to point out the information is not reliable.

### **2.8 *To Maw* and Relationship in between women and men**

*To Maw* plays an important role in Urak Lawoi culture. He plays the roll as the advisory but not as an authoritarian, which is very common in ‘primitive’ societies. He has no right to decide or special privileges but everyone pays respect to him. *To Maw* is the spirit medium, communicating between the Urak Lawoi and the spirits and has a ceremony when a new house or boat is built. *To Maw* can be seen as the doctor or medicine man and is called for at illness or as a consult if problems arise. He uses natural medicine and ‘magic’. Other important informal leaders are ‘dance-leader’, ‘party-leader’ and the ‘handicrafts-leader’ (information by Apinan). They have no decision making task, but can more be seen as ‘calling together’.



**Plate 12:** *To Maw* Sicken, Lotta & Chai



**Plate 13:** *To Maw* Boden

I am informed that *To Maw* can also be a woman. If so, she has more power than the male *To Maw*. According to *To Maw* Boden (interview 2004-04-11), for a long time in the old days - the women used to be *To Maw*. A woman has never been *To Maw* in Ko Lanta, but in Ko

Adang it has been so. Women, as Boden says, are more eager to learn new things than the men. I did not obtain an answer as to why a woman never has been *To Maw* in Ko Lanta.

Traditionally Urak Lawoi society is seen as a matriarchal society. *To Maw* Boden states (interview 2004-04-11), the Urak Lawoi women in the old days used to have more power than the men. He thinks the women are more important, since as he said: *God created the woman first and then the man*. Even now days, Boden thinks the women have more power. One informant said, *when the man make an official decision, you always know the conclusion come from the women*. My own observation, visiting different islands and settlements with Urak Lawoi is that the more integrated in the commercial life, the less power the women have. I want to point out that my field study and stay in different settlements was too short to make a reliable conclusion.

Vira from Switzerland, who is married to an Urak Lawoi man and has lived on Ko Lanta for many years, has made the observation that Urak Lawoi men treat and behave differently than the Thai men toward their married women. She implies the status among Urak Lawoi women and men to be egalitarian. She has observed and experienced that Urak Lawoi men respect and treat their women better than Thai men as the Urak Lawoi men listen to what the women say, before a decision. Vira thinks they are equivalent. When her future husband brought her to his home the first time, she was not aware of that he was an Urak Lawoi. She thought he was a Thai man. But since she had lived in Thailand for a long time and had earlier experience from Thai relationships, she soon realized that these people behaved different from the Thai she knew. Short after she arrived to Ko Lanta, she saw the women sitting talking to her boyfriend. The female gave him good advice about how to treat his woman and he was told, from now on, he could not have any other women.

## **2.9 Marriage and family**

According to Wongbusarakum (2002:76), addressing a report from the Anthropology and Sociology Department of Songkla Teacher College, 1992: 72% of Urak Lawoi families have made the transition from an extended family to a nuclear family. It is not unusual that the girls get married at an early age. One day they are in love, the next day they are married. Not

uncommonly, the girls have babies at the age of 14-15 years. The boys are generally not much older. Home birth was common on Ko Lanta until the late 1990s, but it still exists. I have been given different information about if the man is present at the birth or not.

Generally they get married with their first boy- or girlfriend. It seems like it is important that the girl is virgin. The Urak Lawoi is expected to live as monogamists. (A characteristic trait, I found, which differs from many Thai men). The parents or other relatives never meddle with whom they want to get married with. Maoris, an older Urak Lawoi man told me: *the important thing is to like making love with each other. You prefer making love than sleeping.* Mixed marriage with other ethnics group has always been accepted, as well as homosexuality. The important thing has been to stay with one partner at a time.

In conformity with Wongbusarakum (2002:78), I confirm that people, who have a mixed ethnic background with only one parent Urak Lawoi, counted themselves as pure Urak Lawoi. Hogan (1972:221) however, has found intermarriage with Malays, Thai, Chinese and some Buginese. In Ko Jum, many Urak Lawoi are mixed with Thai Muslim men. It was in Phuket that it first started to become common through marriage with 'outsiders', especially with Thai Chinese (oral source, Arporn U-krit). Information given to me confirms that historically the Urak Lawoi have always been mixed through marriage with Chinese. Many Chinese who migrated were bachelors who married local women. It is not uncommon that Chinese marry Urak Lawoi woman to strengthen the bonds and relationship between them, usually of economic interest.

My own experience after doing fieldwork is that the young Urak Lawoi wants to continue living among Urak Lawoi after they get married. This is common, even if they get married with 'outsiders'. I found that they bring back their partner to their family and move into the Urak Lawoi parents' house, until they can afford to build their own hut or house. But still, the most common is that they find their partner among themselves, if not on the same island, from other Chao Ley settlement in Andaman Sea.

Divorce has always been accepted, but is not very common.

I want to finish this part by telling a story which happened during my stay in Ko Lanta:

An Urak Lawoi girl in Sanga-U had a Thai boyfriend, running a bar in Ko Lanta. One day

a *farang* (person from the west) girl showed up at their place to visit the Thai boy. She turned out to have been his previous girlfriend and moved into the Thai's place during her stay in Ko Lanta. This was a shame for the Urak Lawoi girl, that her Thai boyfriend let another girl stay with him. I was told, since this is not a custom for Urak Lawoi, she felt so much ashamed about what had happened for her family - that she ran away from home. Her parents were very worried about what had happened and where she had gone. I never found out if they got hold of her, but I know the *farang* girl left the Thai man and Ko Lanta after her holiday there.

### 2.9.1 Dowry

Now days a dowry has to be paid by the bridegroom to the brides' parents. According to a key informant, the amount of money differs depending on the value of the land where the girl has her residence. The most expensive girls to marry are those from Saladan. If the man does not have the money, he cannot marry the girl. The different dowries are:

Saladan	55 000 Bath
Sanga-U	15 000 - 30 000 Bath
Phuket	1 000 - 2 000 Bath
Jum	2 000 - 3 000 Bath
Lipe	2 000 - 5 000 Bath
Moken	2 000 - 5 000 Bath

### 2.10 Traditional Economy Situation

The Urak Lawoi are considered as one of the few hunter-gather people still found in Thailand (according to Engelhardt in Wungbusarakum 2002:76). Hogan (1972:215) describes the Urak Lawoi as 'strand-dwellers', living near the beach. Temporarily, they left their village to gather shells, tripang and other sea-products. They slept in their boats or under the kayak shelter on the shore. Sometimes they built a new little village at a more



*Plate14:* Women also work with fishing.



favorable place, but they always returned back home to their original village. In conformity with Hogan's story from the early -70s, people told how the whole family used to go camping (*bagad*) on the beaches for months, collecting food such as oysters, shells and sea cucumbers. *Bagad* usually took place during the dry season (Wungbusarakum 2002:86). One of the popular beaches was on the west side of Lanta Noi and the beaches on the mainland north of Lanta Noi (information from Pon Changnam). With their semi-nomadic lifestyle, the Urak Lawois make maximum use of the products of their natural ecosystem (Wungbusarakum 2002:86). Food was shared with those who did not have enough. This was a security for everybody. To become independent and free has always been important for the Urak Lawoi. A change in Urak Lawois semi nomadic life style in the north of Ko Lanta, started at the same time as the island started to become exploited.

Historically the Urak Lawoi has like many other isolated tribal people around the world had contact with civilized traders. In the Urak Lawois case, this economic relationship has been with a *taukey* (see Chapter 2.11), a kind of patron - client relationship. To give an example of prices, *To Maw Sicken* (April 2004) addresses the kilo price given to Urak Lawoi for fish as 80 Bath and prawn 120 Bath. The *taukey* gets 120 Bath for fish and 320 Bath for prawn per kilo (100 Bath is about 20 Skr.).

According to Arporn U-krit, the men have had the main responsibility for a long time to support their family. The women's main responsibility is to stay home to cook and take care of the children. Sometimes they go fishing together with their men. *To Maw Sicken* tells stories about how the women used to work different in the old days. Then they were busy fishing, picking sea cucumbers and shells. Both men and women also had to carry fresh drinking water from the spring. Today, many women are working in the resorts and many men besides fishing are working as paid-labour (more about the economic situation in Chapter 4:2.1). Bodley (1999a: 111) emphasizes 'wily' outsiders coerce and manipulate small-scale economies and convert them into market economy. This can be compared with the Chinese *taukey* who introduced gasoline run boats for the Urak Lawoi (my input). The use of engines was one primary reason for being dependent on cash.

## 2.11 Relationship with outsiders

It is not unusual that the Thai Chinese visit the Urak Lawoi's temple. Everywhere, I am told, the Urak Lawoi has lived, a Chinese has settled down in their place. According to the Urak Lawoi, it has always resulted in that the Thai Chinese get rich and the Urak Lawoi work for him. The Chinese have often played the part as *taukey* (Hogan 1972:214, Wongbusarakum 2002:130). A *taukey* can be considered to an entrepreneur or as a patron and client type of relation to the Urak Lawoi. Often this contact has been the only one with outsiders. Urak Lawoi provide in labor and knowledge in harvesting sea products to their *taukey*. The uniform pattern everywhere is *taukey* advance goods to natives (as boats and fishing supplies to Urak Lawoi) on credit in exchange to be delivered in the future. (Bodley 1999a: 41, Wongbusarakum 2002:139). From the Urak Lawoi point of view, many time an uneven distribution. The bad aspects are; they cannot sell their catch directly to other markets. *Taukey* keep the price down and he can in return negotiate a better price for retail dealer on the mainland. Wongbusarakum states that (2002:143) many Urak Lawoi have been dependent of their *taukey* in a capitalist way. The trick is by the *taukey* that the debt is never full paid to him. I am told if the Urak Lawoi needs money or something, they always turn first to the family. If they cannot help, he turns to the *taukey*. O. is given an example of how *taukey* deals with them; *Taukey* buy nets for Urak Lawoi and pay for repair of the boat. If the Urak Lawoi, as in this case, gets paid in advance, the kilo price for the sea harvest becomes lower, to pay back the debt to *taukey*. It is not easy to change *taukey*, once somebody is in debt to him. They are completely dependent of the production on *taukey* and he cannot afford not to go fishing. They are caught in a trap and many Urak Lawoi never become free of working for their *taukey*. Bodley states many times this can be seen as slavery.

The positive aspects about having a *taukey* are; 'You just have to leave your catch for the day right on the pier with just one dealer'. 'One can always borrow money from your *taukey* or ask for advanced payment'. According to Wongbusarakum (ibid, 139-140), the positive parts and why Urak Lawoi choose to work for *taukey* is because of security-related reasons. They have someone to rely on, 'a source of credit, an economic insurance, protection from insecurities and assistance in time of hardship or shortage of necessities'.

Muslims and Urak Lawois have generally had a good relationship in Ko Lanta. The relationship to them has commonly been different than to the Chinese. As an example I am given from Pon: 'if a Muslim wanted to keep his buffalos on our land, they could give us one for free. We always got something back when they asked us for something'. If I understand right, Urak Lawoi felt more equal with



*Plate15: To Maw Sicken greetings ancestors join the Patat Jiri Ceremony in Hue Lem.*

the Muslims, not becoming 'the loser' after an agreement. In Hue Lem, they live side by side. While the Urak Lawois are celebrating their ceremonies, at the same time, not far away, one can hear the prayers from the Mosque. The Urak Lawois describe the Muslims as thinking more about the future than the Urak Lawoi, who they describe as taking one day at a time. They experience the Muslims to be one step ahead from them. By example, is given when the Urak Lawois have a bike, the Muslims have a motorbike.

## 2.12 Ceremonies

I will not get deeper into describing the meaning or symbolism of the different ceremonies the Urak Lawoi still are practicing. It can be considered important to get a deeper understanding of their culture and cosmology, but it is not enough with just 8 months of fieldwork to understand the meaning and different symbolism of their rituals. I have participated and filmed many of their rituals and I will mention a few of them. I also want to point out because of lack of the different cultures on Ko Lanta; there might be things that have been mixed into their culture from the neighboring identities living in Andaman Sea, that I misunderstand because of lack of knowledge of the



*Plate 16: Ramana music*

different cultures and to short a time in field.

I want to mention that at all ceremonies I visited; they were dancing and playing *Rong Ngeng*. Their music is unique because drums and violin are mixed together. According to Arporn U-krit this music is more than 1000 years old and includes a mixture of violin, Arabic drums, Chinese gongs and songs in Malay dialect. *Rong Ngeng* musical origin is said come from Spain and later got mixed with the Muslim in Malay and from there on it was spread to the Muslims and Urak Lawoi in Thailand.



**Plate 17:** Gongs

I found that the Ceremonies are held during daytime, something that suits me well - partying in the daytime instead of nighttime. They might be held during the day, because many Urak Lawoi come from other islands to the rituals. If they went back home the same day, I observed them leaving before sunset.



**Plate 18:** *Rong Ngeng* dance & music

The 'moon calendar' decides when the ceremonies are supposed to be held and exactly the time when it should be started is decided the same day. I found it very hard to get the right time to participate in different rituals. Many times I was given the day when the ritual was expected to be, only to find out when I arrived, it either was held the day before or the day after. I was even given the exact time when the ceremony would start the next day. On my arrival I discovered, *To Maw* had started his rite an hour earlier... Sometimes an unexpected ritual could be held without any announcement. The only explanation I got; *It has to do with the nature*. If I understood right, things had to be right with the nature. Therefore it was hard in advance to put a time for many rites. Possibly, it could also have to do with me. That the Urak Lawoi was careful not to involve me in their privacy, since I found them more open and willing to tell me when different occasions were being held at the end of my stay.

Andaman Pilot Project states the two most important ceremonies are:

1. Paying respects and giving offerings to the female guardian of boat. It is believed that doing so will prevent the boat crew from danger at the sea.

2. **Loy Rua** (boat-floating) is the most important ceremony held during full moon in May and October. A ritual boat is built of zalacca palm (Hogan 1972:216). The festival lasts for two or three days and is organized to take away the 'bad luck' from all the villages. Urak Lawoi come from far distant islands to participate. Carved effigies representing clan members are placed in the *Bajak* boat. Other objects are also placed in the boat, such as food and personal mementos like nail-clippings and hair. On the last day of the ceremony, the boat is taken to the sea. The saying is it will go to their original place, where the Urak Lawoi come from. It is bad luck to find the boat again. A big party is held, with a lot of alcohol. The old songs that are sung are about where the *Bajak* boat is going.

Other important ceremonies that I observed:

3. **Paniai** (Urak Lawoi) or *Kaebon* (Thai) - is a 'Thanking Ceremony' to the spirits when someone has been sick and recovered.

4. **Tambon Ban Party** or 'Luckeparty' - is celebrating when a house is completed. It will bring success for the people moving into the house and will keep diseases and other bad luck away from the family. I was told that Buddhists are celebrating a similar rite to 'Luckeparty'.

5. **Patat Jiri** or Teng Pleo (Thai) or 'Cleaning the Grave'- I found this ceremony very big and important to celebrate, since it was celebrating different days in different Urak Lawoi graveyards on different islands in Andaman Sea. People came from far distant islands to participate in this ceremony on the different graveyards. Patat Jiri is celebrated to honor the dead ancestors and spirits. After the ceremony is over, a party is held right on the graveyard, drinking and eating together with their dead relatives.



*Plate 19: Patat Jiri Ceremony*

6. **Loy Krahtong** - is an animistic costume, but today it includes also religious elements. Celebrated at full moon in November as one of Thailand's biggest festivals. The spirit of the sea is honored. A basket or part of a bamboo tree is decorated with flowers and candles and put adrift on the sea after sunset. Personal things such as, haircut and nails are also placed in the basket to symbolize bad luck to going away.

To finish this chapter I want to tell about one occurrence that happened to me. Just to show misunderstanding that can happen when two cultures cross - in this case, me as an anthropologist from the western society and Urak Lawoi with an animistic belief.

I was invited to participate in *Patat Jiri Ceremony* (cleaning the grave) in Hue Lem. The ceremony started early and I was there at 7 o'clock in the morning. Urak Lawoi from all of Ko Lanta and nearby islands and visitors so far as Ko Lipe had come to participate. Everyone was just waiting for *To Maw Sicken* from Sanga-U to turn up and start the ceremony. Finally he arrived as a passenger on the back on a motorbike that a young Urak Lawoi fellow was driving. They stopped the motorbike in front of me, where I was standing. I was surprised about Urak Lawoi's reaction, when *To Maw* finally got there it was like every one ignored him. I felt a bit ashamed over their impolite behavior towards him. This old, timid and sensible man I thought, was at least worth some respect. But no one paid attention to him and I felt I had to do something to make him feel welcomed. I therefore stepped forward and greeted him in the Thai costume way with bent head and holed my hands together under my face. His reaction to my greeting astonished me, since he waved me away by his hand. He showed me clearly that he did not like me to be there and did not greet me back.

I did not know what I had done wrong, since Sicken always use to greet me with a great smile and welcome me in his house. This reaction towards me was something new. It was later explained that walking in front of *Ta Maw* when he arrives to the ceremony was not good at all. It meant bad luck to step in front of him since he was driving away evil spirits. Someone walking in front of him could get the bad spirit with him...

### **III Tourism makes its entrance in Ko Lanta**

The pristine paradise made Ko Lanta an interesting destination for Westerners and tourists to go for vacation. Tourist development came suddenly to Lanta Island a few years ago. The same Chinese family started the first resorts of Kaw Kwan and Lanta Villa, both on Klong Dao Beach, in the early 1990s. The third resort, Paradise was built on Klong Nin Beach by a local Muslim family. In 1997, there were seven resorts on Ko Lanta. Today (April 2004) there is said to be in between 150 - 170 resorts on the island. Since the late 90s the exploitation has increased greatly. One reason for the pressure of the expanding population in the north is, the road- and ferry connection (1996) from the mainland over Lanta Noi to Saladan. It put Ko Lanta within easy reach. Putting effort into road constructions is still a major thing, since the conditions of the roads is a big problem. Before the tourism exploitation, traveling to different parts of the island was mainly done by boat. The traffic accident levels are large in Ko Lanta on the unmade roads. According to Lanta Hospital the accidents registered in 2003 where 291 in Ko Lanta, 28 by car and 263 by motorbikes including 4 fatalities by motorbike.

Migrants from the mainland and western society have put severe pressure of expanding population on Ko Lanta for tourism development strategies. Outsiders are coming to make their fortune in the tourism business. Many of them are westerners. Some are big tourist companies with knowledge of the business. Others are Thai Chinese or small investors from the mainland. Local investors are Muslims and Thai Chinese. Many locals have become dependent on the tourism industry. People from the northern Thailand and countries on the border in the north, have come to work with tourism and as unskilled labor on Ko Lanta. Sex-tourism is not yet a big thing in Ko Lanta, but it is changing and especially in the north of the Island it has started to appear. Thailand is now one of the countries where AIDS and HIV increase quickly and according to Aleng (2002:483), through the benefits of tourism. Also very common in Thailand is that tourism brings electricity, roads and telephone connections to the islands. The telephone net came year 2000 to Ko Lanta (information given by local people in 2004). Electricity arrived in the late 90s.

The contact with the western world has caused a lot of social problems and worries for the Urak Lawoi. They attempt to assimilate into Thai society, accommodate a market economy

and adapt to modernization to survive. This view is dualistic - they want to integrate with the dominant culture, as they have an inferiority complex and many now strive daily after material goods. They feel ashamed to belong to the poor uneducated minority Chao Lay (labeled by the Thai) and prefer to be called Thai Mai (New Thai). At the same time they feel proud about their heritage (within the group) and are worried about the rapid change of lifestyle.

When the Urak Lawoi understand that I have not come to 'spy' on them, I find in them a strong sense of pride of their ethnic origin. The closer I get to the Urak Lawoi, the more open they become about their inheritance and stories about sensitive incidents they have been exposed to. They do not gladly talk about their problems for outsiders. Wongbusarakum (2002:164) had the same experience after her field study in Ko Lipe, where she finally was told 'they might be shot if they say something'. One day I got the unexpected question; 'Is it true there is no corruption in Europe?' I was surprised by the question, since I had not earlier talked with any informant about corruption. 'You do not have to be afraid of getting arrested when you write?' I found them cautious when complaining about their situation, as they told me they were afraid to get into trouble and get arrested. But I did not find them taking the role of victims who have been pushed away from their settlement or temporary camping for strand dwellers.

Loss of land, the growing fishing industry and proclamation of National parks are the main problems and crises the Urak Lawoi face. These central problems lead to other new problems for the Urak Lawoi. According to Ulf Johansson-Dahre (2001:119) restriction in accessibility of land (which in the Urak Lawoi' case also should include the sea) is a threat for indigenous peoples' cultural life. Losing what they view their territory is breaking the core of the Urak Lawois identity.

Part III will continue deprive of Urak Lawoi territory which can be seen as the core that creates new problems.

### **3.1 Urak Lawoi abandon Klong Dau Beach**

Urak Lawoi informants in the north of Ko Lanta told how life changed dramatically 1 ½ decades ago, when tourism made its entrance;



Life wasn't stressed in the old days. It was plenty of time to socialize...  
One had a feeling everyone belonged to each other and lived together...  
...no alcohol problems in the old days...  
The nature around Klong Dau Beach has changed a lot the last few years...  
Klong Dau Beach used to be a silent place...

At the beginning of the 90s when tourists found their way to Ko Lanta and 'outsiders' came for tourist development, the Urak Lawoi started to get disrupted on Klong Dau Beach. The group moved from the beach and settled down in different places a bit from the shore and started to split up. Many of the Urak Lawoi living on Klong Dau Beach 15 years ago claims they did not have any intention of leaving the beach.

...we did not want to move, but everybody moved...  
We did not want to stay alone on Klong Dau Beach... And people started to frighten us, who did not want to sell... at nighttime... They made us sell. We were afraid...

Most of Klong Dau Beach has been developed and this part is the most exploited of the island. The north part of Klong Dau Beach, what is now known as Kaw Kwang Resort, was first developed, in about 1990. On the south part of the beach, the Urak Lawois used to live where Lanta Garden Home is now located and utilized Klong Dau Beach to the very south end, where two of their graveyards are located.

Many Urak Lawoi moved to Nai Rai (not connected to the beach) and some moved to the mountains. The first concrete house for the Urak Lawoi was built at the beginning of the -90s in Nai Rai. Earlier this piece of land used to be rice cultivations. The Urak Lawois settlement today in Nai Rai is built on the ancient rice fields. The jungle at that time was spread out close to Nai Rai and buffalos still used to walk on Klong Dau beach (information by local Urak Lawoi). Today the jungle is located in the centre of Ko Lanta.

Sorn Kobkon, 25 years old who was born on Klong Dau and now resided in Nai Rai tells about the development on Klong Dau Beach (interview 2004-04-02):

... Seven years ago tourist on Klong Dau lived in bamboo bungalows with the toilet outside.  
There are no longer any simple huts on Klong Dau Beach. The bungalows are built more luxury by cement... Tourists who are looking for the nature and Thai inspired bungalows

A western Resort owner on Klong Dau Beach told me about when he arrived in 1996; there were still Urak Lawoi camping on the beach, which belonged to his newly, purchased land. The Urak Lawoi could remain for three months camping. He thought it was okay as long as they did not stay there permanently.

According to Bodley complex networks, not easily understood by outsiders, generally control access to land in self-sufficient small-scale cultures. That someone would have a permanent right to a piece of land is inconceivable. Land is to be used by the tribe, not owned by individuals. All tribal members have access and can use the land. Land also often holds important symbolic and emotional meaning for indigenous peoples as the repository for ancestral, clan origin points and other sacred features. Most known in history are the Indians who lost millions of acres against their will. Peoples who was threatened or misled about what they agreed to gave it. Hunter-gatherers often use their territory in cycles and leave some areas undisturbed and later return to them. Some areas are just used during special occasions. Governments have often claimed non-occupied land is wasteland especially in areas with increasing land value (Bodley 1999a: 78). Bodley states the state will not see the contribution that nomads make to the national economy. Governments have usually solved the nomads 'problem', which is converting all nomads into sedentary villages, making propaganda on the good of settled life and new opportunities. Surprisingly, Bodley argues, that some social scientists have supported the government of assimilation. As was the case, Awad, who in 1960 participated as chairman of UNESCO executive board. He felt that the initiative must come from government as rapidly as possible to convert them to a sedentary life (Bodley 1999a: 107). Amazingly, governments around the world show little willingness to protect the rights of tribal peoples against intruding settlers. Most often the government has responsibility over what can considered being tribal lands or not. Killing of tribal peoples has generally been to remove them from the land. Less violent methods have also been used, which are equally effective. For example, Aborigines in Australia and Indians in America became unable to feed themselves and were forced either to beg for food from the missions or to work for settlers to stay alive. As soon as governmental control has occurred over tribal land, it has turned to

maximize economic productivity.

### **3.2 Deprive of the Urak Lawois Territory**

Erik Cohen (1996:161) describes how so-called 'Sea Gypsies', who used to live in boats around Phuket, is now settled in slum-villages. They can be mentioned as attractions in the brochures, but not as inhabitants of the beaches, which tourism have captured. Laurence Wai-Teng Leong (1997:72) discusses that the State stimulate marketing of some local groups for tourism while other groups are forgotten or ignored. This has to do with the States own interests and international struggles. My conclusion and possible not unlikely reason why information for tourists about the Urak Lawoi situation and living not is favored is the need for the beaches and their territory. The tourists have everything they ask for - beautiful beaches in beautiful weather, were they can relax and sunbathing. By receiving tourists, it is not necessary to market one 'exotic ethnic minority', which can be a tension when the tourists and the Urak Lawoi require the same environment.

I found the group has a tendency to split up with the transition into the 'modern world' and loosing their territory. This seems to become a big problem, since belonging to the group always has been a base in the Urak Lawois identity.

### **3.3 Land**

Wongbusarakum (2002:78) describing the Urak Lawoi;

They are tolerant and forgiving,  
managing to live peacefully side by side with people they have had trouble with,  
including those who violently forced them off their property,  
or those who make their livelihood difficult.

The two types of landowner ship that are normal today are either the state or private owned (IWGIA 1996:86). This chapter will deal with how the Urak Lawoi got and still are getting cheated by their land caused by tourist development. Bodley addresses the fact that tribal people in Thailand had equal rights to land with other citizens as he argues was probably the simplest ways to accomplish the goal of replacing tribal peoples with more productive populations and ownership systems (Bodley 1999a: 92).

In contrast to Hogan (1972:224-225), who made a visit to Ko Lanta more than 30 years ago when this study is written, I found a big problem of lack of land for the Urak Lawoi in Ko Lanta. Many of them state that this is their biggest problem. I am told the same story over and over again how the Urak Lawoi sold land to outsiders. They did not understand the consequences about selling land, since it had not been important for them to own land. Erik Cohen states that change of land ownership for Chao Lay (Urak Lawoi) is the most serious problem threatening the survival of their society and could mean death to their identity (Cohen 1996b: 245). Mr. Tem, who used to live next to Kaw Kwan Resort (the first resort built on Ko Lanta), is telling how his family did not understand that the sale of land was going on. They sold their land in conformity with others and moved away from the beach as everyone else did. Wongbusarakum (2002:187) emphasizes how Urak Lawoi in Ko Lipe describe how land was disrupted for the Urak Lawoi; 'their relatives on other islands sold their land to capitalists for a lump sum of money. Not knowing how to save the money, these relatives soon spent it all and were chased out by capitalists who now owns the land'.

T, a 45-year old man who is working for one of the resorts as a gardener and driving tourist on snorkel-tours believes one reason why it has not been important for them to own land is that they do not make plans in advance for the future. They live day by day. The important thing for an Urak Lawoi is to become satisfied by having enough food and enjoy life, as they believe these pursuits don't make you sick. The Urak Lawoi probably thought that the earth's resources were not a problem.

This is what I am told by Urak Lawoi in Nai Rai about the land selling in the north on Klong Dau Beach, next to Kaw Kwang Resort the Urak Lawoi were selling their pieces of land because they were happy to get some money. They were told that if they moved to Nai Rai, they would get a better and more comfortable life. Since their culture is shares surpluses, not many Urak Lawois saved any money for the future. Some Urak Lawoi refused to move from Klong Dau Beach, but felt at the end they had to. They were frightened to be left alone, since everyone else left and the Urak Lawoi always used to live together. They were threatened that their huts would be burnt if they did not move and sold their land. They also felt afraid at night, when they felt people sneaked around their settlement and frighten them. They could

never picture what it would mean for them, selling their land and moving away from the beach. They could not image the rapid development. Someone said: *we had never been in a city, so we did not understand how it would be. Life was much better before.* They did not know what kind of papers they were signing before moving, because they could not read. They did not really understand the purpose of selling land. But they were attracted to the money they would get. With the money they could buy alcohol, a car or motorbike and even build a concrete house.

I am told it still happens today that the Urak Lawoi gets cheated. I was informed about the following that happened during my stay in Ko Lanta. An Urak Lawoi family who still owned land on Klong Dau Beach was pleaded with to sell their land. Even if they knew the progress they decided to sell after a long deliberation. Their land was surrounded with bungalows and development and they needed the money. They thought they got a fairly good offer; if they sold their land right on the beach, they would keep their land further back from the shore. The money would be enough for building four concrete houses for the big family. The purchase was carried out. They got their money and asked for their papers for their land property. The buyer told them, that something went wrong with the papers... Their land was not split in two parts. On the papers it said that the new landowner had bought all their property, but of course as a nice fellow the new landowner is, he would let them build their houses on 'his' piece of land. The Urak Lawoi family is now building their new concrete houses on leasehold property. Even if it is not a problem today, coming from a western society, I know it is not exaggerating to say that this might be a future problem for the family, having built their houses on a developing, very attractive part of the island.

It even happens in Nai Rai, (the little village Urak Lawoi had to move to, from Klong Dau beach) that they get betrayed. One of the stories, I was told, happened in 1996. A Chinese man came to one of the older ladies. He was very friendly with her and made jokes and offered her whisky. Without her childrens knowledge she sold land to him. She sold it for 'nothing' and her grandchildren believe she misunderstood him. The buyer built a big house right on the land border, which is adapted to fit four families. He rents out three of the homes and lives in the

biggest himself. Because he built his house right on the land border, he has no space for a garden. He has therefore ‘quietly’ extended ‘his garden’ into an Urak Lawoi property. The Urak Lawois around him are afraid to do anything about it.

Many Urak Lawoi claim that lack of land is their biggest problem. Their children have no money to get their own piece of property to build their hut. They ask me: ‘What can we do about it?’ This is a common problem faced by many locals around the world land speculation raises the cost of living and makes it impossible for the locals to buy land (Ekholm Friedman 1998:37).

### 3.3.1 Lack of Land for Burial sites

This chapter will deal with the conflict arises with tourism development on some of the beaches where the Urak Lawoi have their graveyards. Of tradition they need a lot of land space to honor their ancestors. In contrast to the Thai Buddhists, Urak Lawoi bury their dead. I observed they take care of their ancestors’



graves, many times much better than their own homes. *Plate20:* The Graveyard in Ko Jum.

*To Maw* Boden explains that if they do not take care of the graveyards lots of ghosts will look them up. According to Arporn U-krit, the reason why they take very good care of their graves is that their ancestors and spirits will give them good luck in the future. If they make money, they will build a roof to shield the grave. The reason why Urak Lawoi is buried in sand is because they want to hear the waves from the sea. *To Maw* Boden told me that it is always important that the graveyard is placed in a good spot, close by the water. The climate is humid close by a stream and it use to rain more often and it is not to hot. It brings good luck to have the rainbow over the graveyard.

At Klong Dau Beach there is three



*Plate21:* One of the three graveyards on Klong Dau Beach, Ko Lanta.

different graveyards to be found. There, they practice their ceremonies and I found it is a common custom for the Urak Lawoi to party together with their dead ancestors. This has become a problem for the Urak Lawoi, since their graveyards, on Klong Dau Beach are now surrounded by resorts. Tourists complain about the noise from their ceremonies and the trash following a party. Even I experienced the complaints from tourists. When I told them the purpose of the party, they seemed to accept the noise during daytime. Often uninvited guests join the festivities. The Urak Lawoi does not understand why ‘outsiders’ join their parties as uninvited guests. As they say to me: they would never go uninvited to someone else’s ceremony, for example Christmas. *Why do ‘outsiders’ come to our ceremonies?* They believe the reasons why ‘outsiders’ join their ceremonies might be they like dancing. The Urak Lawois’ ceremonies always include a lot of dancing and music. Many Urak Lawoi are worried about the future celebration of their ceremonies at the graveyards because the surrounding bungalow resorts squeeze their graveyards into narrow beach strips. *How can we organize a ceremony in the middle of bungalow resorts in the future?* Their main anxiety is that celebrating ceremonies at the graveyard will be forbidden.



**Plate 22:** A grave in Ko Jum

Developers have sometimes tipped soil at one of the graveyards. The Urak Lawois feel that ‘outsiders’ do not share the same respect for their graveyards. It has even happened that their graveyards have been vandalized. Another problem for one of the graveyards is that a proper path has not been created to the ground. They now have to walk over other peoples land. As long as bungalows no are built there it is no problem, but the concern is what will happen in the future? Many also keep their boats and fishing equipment at the graveyard, since it is located at the beach and their homes are now further up. They work from the graveyard. This causes problem due to the development of the beach. Developers are not happy to have them close to the tourist bungalows because tourists complain about the trash around the working spot.

The lack of land at their graveyard is a problem. Traditionally they need a lot of space for

their dead ancestors. If I understand right, the lack of clarity regarding the meaning and rights of ownership of the graveyards land has caused some worries for the Urak Lawoi. In contrast to this information, some said the Government has talked in favors of them keeping most of their graveyards.

In the south part of Ko Lanta, I was told that in 2002 they had to move 10 bodies from one graveyard, because the land did not belong to them. The bodies were moved to Hue Lem but also Sanga-U. They had no choice but moving the bodies. Otherwise Thai people would shovel over the graves. Hue Lem is said to be the oldest graveyard in Ko Lanta and this land belongs to the Urak Lawoi.

In the south of Hue Lem, during my fieldwork they had to move their temple to the graveyard in Hue Lem. The temple was moved away from the spot the legend say was the first place the Urak Lawoi arrived in Ko Lanta. The land was sold to new owners that did not want the Urak Lawois temple there.



*Plate23:* The graveyard in Hue Lem.

Information given about who owns the land at the graveyards on Klong Dau Beach is as follows: the most southerly one is a smaller older graveyard which, belongs and is maintained by the same Urak Lawoi family.

The middle graveyards' land belongs to Muslims. Earlier there have been problems with this graveyard since the owner would like to sell the desirable land for exploitation. All land around and nearby is bought for exploitation. The Government has talked with the Muslim family about this problem and the Urak Lawoi feel relieved and do not feel worried getting chased from this holy place anymore.

The north graveyard belongs to an Urak Lawoi family.

### **3.4 Fishing industry**

During the nights one can see the commercial light-luring boats on the horizon outside Ko Lanta. The fact is, that commercial fishermen catch much more than the quantity of fish caught



by locals. This chapter will answer the questions how the extended fishing industry has affected Urak Lawoi self-sufficient life and in what extent Urak Lawoi economically favor from the extended desire for fish with tourism development.

Since 1960, fisheries in Southeast Asia have been rapidly developed. New effective techniques and technologies have been developed for industrial purposes. Thailand is the country in Southeast Asia that has been most successful in this. Fishing products in Thailand have been one of the major foreign exchange earners (Torell 1984: 77,83,89). According to Wongbusarakum (2002:146-147), Thailand is one of the ten top nations in the fishing industry. It has grown extremely fast from 220,000 tons in 1960 to 2,900,320 in 1998 (National encyclopedia states the producing was 3,600,000 ton 1996).

Two separate fishing sectors have developed and run parallel to each other - one traditional or small-scale and one modern or high-technology. The conflict between small-scale and large-scale fishermen is one of the biggest problems within the fisheries and is a common opinion among authors in Thailand (Torell 1984: 108).

The commercial fishing has no connection with the Urak Lawoi small-scale fishing. Few Urak Lawoi have worked for these commercial boats. But large-scale commercial fishing has a strong impact on the Urak Lawois' living and fishing.

Fishing commercially means that access to money requires large investments which causes many of them to go after large quantities of fish, even 'trash fish' (small in size and low in price). Torell (1984:111) states effects of over-fishing are more serious for small-scale fisheries than for the large-scale ones as a decline in catches is noticed immediately.

Illegal methods and tools in prohibited areas such as National Marine Parks are very common (Wongbusarakum 2002:146-157). Wongbusarakum states that the Urak Lawoi considers most damage to coral reefs and turtles; are caused by trawlers. The most common incident is fishing with trawlers within the forbidden area of 3 km from shore (which I in person witnessed a few times). The Urak Lawoi complain about the trawlers fishing closer

than 3 km 'sucking up' all the prawns. Small-scale fishing activities are usually limited to fishing close to the coast (Torell 1984:104). Inge Damm (1995:43) addresses how shellfish in Thailand are slowly disappearing. This is a big problem for the Urak Lawoi and they find it harder to harvest prawns and squid when they are diving.

In resemblance with Wongbusarakum study, I found that the Urak Lawoi complained about how commercial fishing boats' damaging or destroying their small-scale gear and responsible for lose of their fish traps when the trawlers operated in shallow water, by over fishing their normal fishing zone.

Corruption and the boats' advanced communication systems make it easy for trawlers to get away with their illegal actions.

Chai, still living on fishing, told me that the Urak Lawoi are not allowed to catch squid in traps close by Ko Lanta anymore. They have to go far out in Andaman Sea, which means their traps get damaged by commercial fishers. He beliefs the trawlers do not want them there because they find it a problem with that the Urak Lawoi fish with traps.

The Urak Lawoi complain competition for harvesting fish has been tuff with the increase of tourism and commercial fishers. It is harder to find fish for themselves, since *farang* needs fish at the resorts. Especially in Sanga-U, they are complaining about that their lives have become harder with smaller catch since they do not speak English in Sanga-U and hard to find jobs with tourism.

Others mean that it is better with the tourists since they get a higher price for their harvest during the tourist season, but some claim this rise price do not compensate the increase in other goods.

Another problem is the gasoline on the boats. They never know if they will get any or not when they go out fishing, but the expense of gas are the same with or without a catch. Some sources state that Urak Lawoi started to get dependent on money when *taukey* gave them marine engines to catch more fish.

A new problem for the Urak Lawoi is, as they express for me, that only 'rich' people can

afford to have their boat at the pier in Saladan. Before, the Urak Lawoi and Chinese used to work together with fishing and it was no problem for the Urak Lawoi to have their boat there. Now, the Chinese are building houses at the pier developing tourism and it is not easy to keep boats there anymore. Problems have also arisen by having their boats at the pier. The boat can be stolen. According to the Urak Lawoi, it happens every year. They claim the police do nothing about it. The Urak Lawoi believe the police get bribes from the other partner and the Urak Lawoi do not have any money to pay bribes and they do not like paying bribes, as they think that justice should rule.

To sum up, the Urak Lawois are worried about their life situation in fishing. Smaller catch every year, means less food. It is impossible for the Urak Lawoi to live without depending on other economic sources.

### **3.5 National Marine Park**

“We can no longer go out fishing in the National Park or Kaw Kwan.

The area has to be protected for tourist goes snorkeling.

But we need fish... since we have no education...”

Pon Changnam describing the National Park.

Lanta National Park was established in 1990 including the southern tip of Ko Lanta Yai and another 15 small nearby islands in a 134 square kilometer archipelago in Krabi Province. It became Thailand’s 62<sup>nd</sup> official National Park. The Urak Lawoi do not have their settlement in their park, which many times make it easier for them to live than for example Urak Lawoi in Ko Lipe who live in the National Park. There, they feel pressured and frustrated living in a park and do not feel it has been beneficial to them. ‘The way of living before the Park came was *sanuk* (fun)’ (Wongbusarakum 2002:166). Now they need permission to build a hut to live in. Not unusually, the establishment of National Parks is primarily concerned with environmental conservation rather than needs of the local population. In accordance with Dennison Nash (1996:27) it can easily be argued that the restrictions for local people in a National Park to live their traditional way of supporting themselves, makes them dependent on the tourism industry.

I received different opinions about the National Park in Ko Lanta. Some thought it is good for nature to be left alone from exploitation by outsiders. Others claimed that the National Park has influenced their life. It has caused problems with fishing and collecting important things for them in the forest and sea. A big problem I was told with the change to National Park for Urak Lawoi is woodcutting, because they need wood to make fish traps (*sai*) and build houses. Trees to be cut are not allowed there or in the jungle anymore. The police catch anybody who fishes or cuts down trees in the National Parks. They get arrested and put in the police station in Old Lanta Town. Wongbusarakum states (2002:168) in Ko Lipe, the Park official admits that the amount of woodcutting for the Urak Lawoi is relatively small when compared to that what people take by outsiders

I want to point out, since the Urak Lawoi are careful about their problems for outsiders, they might have been cautious telling me about their concerns. It can also be what U-krit states, that the National Park has not made a big change for Urak Lawois' living. But as well known around the world it is not unusual that National Parks affects local people. The people on the island Komodo (in between Sumbawa and Flores in Indonesia) can be an example of this. After the declaration of their territory becoming a National Park, cultivation was restricted, hunting and tree felling was regulated but continued fishing was permitted. New buildings were allowed only to replace existing ones. The scientists hoped the people would find employment as guides, boatmen, laborers, hotel workers and making handicrafts for sale. It has showed that the local people have not benefited from the tourism. Employment at the park was largely restricted to unskilled posts. Trained personnel have been brought in from elsewhere in Indonesia to run the park. The population of Komodo grew rapidly in the 1980s, but the number of jobs could not keep pace with the rising number of people. Making handicrafts for tourists did not succeed since they lacked the material they needed from trade with the Bimanese. Not able to support oneself in the traditional way made the local inhabitants dependent on imported food, which has to be paid for by cash. The National Park made a big difference to the lifestyle of the local people in Komodo and they have gained little in economic terms through tourism (Hitchcock 1993:310-315).

### **3.6 Environmental Consequences with Tourist Development**

The fast increase of population in Ko Lanta is causing unexpected environmental problems. Tourism-generated problems are to be found in most developed destinations in Thailand (Cohen 1996a: 226). The Urak Lawoi in the south complains that there isn't enough water for them anymore. They claim the waterfall used to have plenty of water, but nowadays it dries out. *To Maw Sicken* mentioned that people cut down the trees in the jungle. He let me know it is not allowed, but a lot of strangers come and cut the trees down. Wood is needed for the new houses and bungalows that are under construction for tourism. *To Maw Sicken* thinks there are too many people living on Ko Lanta today as they utilize nature more than is good for it. Tourism-generated environmental problems have a special impact on islands. For two reasons: first the tropical islands are generally fragile eco-systems, their resources are limited and the most attractive spots, the beaches and coastal waters, are sensitive and easy despoiled environments. Second, the islands are supposed to be advertised for tourists as the pristine paradise that is an invention of an image. The gap in between image and reality can have pernicious feedback not only on tourism itself but also with the local economy (Cohen 1996a: 226-227). Conflicts easy come up with indigenous people need to the nature's resources and the developing plans. Many times, and especially in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World, realization of economic development are seen as a human collective right even if this affects the environment (Johansson-Dahre 2001:126). Leong (1997:71-72) argues the State cannot be left out in tourism, as tourism is primarily an industry generating foreign exchange. For this reason, the State oversees private tourism enterprisers. The State has an interest in providing services for tourists such as water, housing, roads, electricity etc.

### **III Urak Lawoi and the ‘Modern World’**

The modern state, particularly in Thailand, tends to create a kind of national culture. Even though there is recognition of ethnic minority culture, the national culture is what the government would like all ethnic groups to adhere to, expecting them to speak Thai language. Buddhism is the religion [...] According to the government, ethnic groups may remain different in terms of language, custom and clothing. But they will have to share the common national culture, including learning the national language and subscribing to national religion and ideology.

IWGIA 1996:87

The Chapters in Part III will deal with problems and stress factors the Urak Lawoi face by losing land, and pressures of integrating with the dominant culture. In what way do the expansion of tourism and integration into global market economy affect their culture and living? Can the Urak Lawois make use of it or are left out?

TV's introduction to the Urak Lawoi made a big change. According to Pon, a 28-year-old guy, it was when the TV appeared that he and his friends understood it was not 'normal' to be naked in front of the other sex. He told the story where he grew up next to Kaw Kwan Resort now located on Klong Dao Beach. The girls and boys were swimming naked after a long walk back from school. The school was located a bit outside Saladan at that time. At the end of the 1980s and early 90s they started to hide their naked bodies. He narrated how 'city life' made its entrance and so did clothes. Before they used to have naked torsos - both men and women (My comment; Chao Lay (Moken) at Surin still have naked torsos, but they are told by the National Parks staff, to get dressed when they are working in the park among tourists).

Mr. O. in the late 40s works in a resort 12 hours a day, 7 days a week all year around. He has worked in the same resort for 15 years and never had vacation. He works as a gardener or driving the long tail boat for tourists on snorkel trips. He earns 4 500 Bath (900 Svkr) a month. Before his family sold the land, he lived next to Kaw Kwan on Klong Dau Beach, where he was fishing:

Life was much better before the tourists came to Ko Lanta and we still lived at Kaw Kwang.

We lived much more freely at that time and lived closer to nature.

According to Mr. O, life did not turn up to be the way he thought it would be if they

moved. They were promised more than it turned out to be:

Even if it is not a city we live in, life reminds us more about that kind of lifestyle,  
than the life we used to live...

They told us that we would get a better life if we moved... It is not true. It was better before...

Moving from the beach means that it is impossible to collect food the way they used to do. Tourism results in the need for money. They have to start cultivating or earning money to buy food. Hogan proclaims there was Urak Lawoi who started to cultivate before exploitation. I also found the same on other islands that the Urak Lawoi has been cultivating before exploitation. The difference is that before exploitation they were not dependent on it for a living.

Vira believes the changes went too fast for the Urak Lawoi, to acclimatize to the new world. They had no chance to adapt to the 'new world'. Inge Damm (1995:101-103) argues it is important that the development of tourism happens slowly and at the local people's pace. A fast development often leads to ruining a place's authenticity in benefits for tourists' demand. An informant says:

It was a shock for us how fast the change went [...]  
Suddenly we saw beautiful houses and boats growing up... Very fast...  
...we had never seen a city and could never expect how it would be on Ko Lanta [... ]  
[...] we did not know this kind of life existed...

Vira is telling a story how she brought her mother-in-law to the city for the first time. Her mother-in-law was 'scared to death' to go on the escalator.

Someone describes their situation as being locked up in an enclosure where they cannot escape or a blind alley. They know it is impossible to get back to the old lifestyle, at the same time they cannot get rich (as someone expressed it) and nowadays they do not even dispose of their land. They sold their land for a pittance to make it possible to build a house and buy a long tail boat.

#### **4.1 Outsiders view of Urak Lawoi**

This Chapter will analyze how the dominant culture recognizes the Urak Lawoi and how the Urak Lawoi themselves want to be recognized for outsiders.

To be an Urak Lawoi is a matter of choice for them. They are born Urak Lawoi but also as

Thai citizens. If they choose not to be Urak Lawoi, the rapid tourism development would soon acclimatize them as Thai people and outsiders would look at them as poor Thai people (see Introduction I and Chapter 1.5.3 how I got a rating, as I was told there are no Urak Lawoi - just poor Thai people). This statement can be compared with Katarina Sjöberg's research about Ainu people in Japan. The dominant culture asserts that all inhabitants are a homogenous group of people and has wanted to assimilate Ainu and make them 'invisible'. They can choose if they want to register as Ainu or not (Sjöberg 2001:106-107). Many development authorities propagate that tribal people should have freedom of choice if they want to belong to their own culture or civilization. The problem is that tribal people do not generally know what they are choosing and are not given a clear picture how the future will be. 'Education'-programs may deny them from choosing their own culture (Bodley 1999a: 23). In Thailand, the Urak Lawoi is given the new name of 'Thai Mai' (New Thai) to make them feel integrated with the Thai. A name that is given not just to Urak Lawoi, but all ethnic minorities registered in Thailand.

I found that many Urak Lawoi working with tourism are denied of their heritage. It could happen that I recognized someone from their village working for one of the resorts or restaurants I visited. When I said 'hello' to the person, they often acted like they had never seen me before and denied that they belonged and lived with Urak Lawoi. Next time I saw the person (it could be at one of the ceremonies) they ran up to me with a familiar smile. The Urak Lawoi want me to recognize them as the Urak Lawoi but not outside of the group. It is among their own people they find a sense of belonging. I found many feel ashamed over their heritage, working in tourism for other entrepreneurs. In resemblance with Katarina Sjöberg's research with Ainu, I found many Urak Lawoi want to become Thai in the promise of being complete Thai citizens, as they believe it will favor them and make life easier to handle. The problem is when becoming a Thai, the Thai look at them as poor Thai people - the lowest in the hierarchy. Today many outsiders and tourists cannot differentiate the Urak Lawoi from other Thai inhabitants. The only difference is that they just look at them as poor Thai people. At Ainu, this discrimination has resulted in their land being taken to satisfy the dominant culture. As a consequence of this overexploitation of nature the Ainu's needs have been restricted (ibid, 2001:112).



## 4.2 Transition from a Sharing into Market- and World economy

‘If a Chinese and an Urak Lawoi earn 10 Bath each.  
The Urak Lawoi spend 9 of these and the Chinese 1 Bath’.  
(Pon Changnam about Urak Lawoi’ handle with money)

Reciprocity and generosity are important in the Urak Lawoi society. As Wongbusarakum (2002:77) maintains: [...] ‘food was shared when another party needed it, and this provided a basic security for all’. Sharing one’s possessions is one important feature in the Urak Lawoi culture or identity. As Dila - the only Urak Lawoi I met with an University degree expresses: *It is important for us to give, because you know it always get back to you in one or another way. The things should circulate... when you know you have had something long enough; you give it to someone else.* Chou (2003:86) found during her fieldwork among the ‘sea gypsies’ Orang Laut in Malay that: ‘they aim at restricting the circulation of things to insiders only. These forms of exchange construct and maintain group boundaries for the Orang Laut and Malays’.

Circulating things can be implicit of ideal behavior (ibid, 2003:86). This does not only ensure survival, but also strengthens the social bonds within the group. The custom in anthropology of explaining exchange networks is linked through reciprocity, where Marcel Mauss has contributed anthropological theories about giving in primitive societies. He claims, that giving is not only an economical activity, but also a social fact, including the cultural meaning of social, political and religious aspects in a society. Prestige is reached by giving the most, not owing a lot (Hastrup 1982:198-199). Wongbusarakum (2002:77) indicates that the Urak Lawoi feel proud over sharing the harvest for those who didn’t get any for the day in Adang Archipelago. I have to include my personal experience about my first visit in Adang Archipelago on Ko Lipe (November 2002) that has been later developed than Ko Lanta. When I arrived there and told about my proposed trip, an Urak Lawoi informant said to me: ‘You have to talk with ‘Jerry’ He is a good man [...] He splits everything 50 - 50 that he earns’. I looked ‘Jerry’ up and he told me about his ideals:

When we are born, we have nothing

When we die, we still have nothing

And we only have day and night

You do not die daytime, but at night and that is what you will bring with you

It will only be words left, talking about you  
Either they speak good or bad about you  
What people talk about you after your dead, continue living...

Wongbusarakum finds the sharing practice common on Ko Lipe, is unusual in many other Urak Lawoi villages today. The Urak Lawoi on Ko Lanta indicate that the moral helping of each other isn't common today, because they in the first hand have to think about supporting the own core family. They did not have to think this way before as there was plenty of food and they did not have any need for money. Today they need money to satisfy themselves materially (Andaman Pilot Project 2004:2). But a Muslim informant states the Urak Lawoi are still different to the Muslims and the Chinese, and he claims that they are good and generous people. An argument he gives is that the Urak Lawois always feed their guest and share their surplus with others. He finishes his statement with following words:

[...] no they are different.. They have a good heart.

I am told by an Urak Lawoi informant, that sharing not only used to be an Urak Lawoi custom. It also used to be a Muslim tradition in the old days (as late as 1980s) in Ko Lanta.

The new economic view is saving for tomorrow - even if most Urak Lawoi does not live after this principle. Arporn U-krit does not think the tourist development has changed the Urak Lawoi plan for the future. Saving for the future is still not many Urak Lawoi' custom. A conflict arises when integrating with a marketing economy.

### **4.3 Economic Situation**

This part will deal with the consequences for the Urak Lawoi when impossible to live their traditional self-supported life. The need for cash, what opportunities do they have in transition into market-economy to support themselves?

Throughout human history, we have been hunter-gatherers for ninety-five per cent of the time (Wachle 2000:1). However, the heritage and life form as hunter-gatherers seems to be forgotten and lost to most people today. The few remaining suffer consequently. The Urak Lawoi is one of the few hunter-gather people still found in Thailand. What they gathered

during the day they ate in the evening. Wongbusarakum proposes that with increasing contacts with outsiders, integration into global market economies through tourism and commercial fishery and modernization, their traditional way of food foraging has changed. Their livelihood depends upon resource sharing with outsiders and rapid integration into the marketing economy. They make their living by fishing, tourism (jobs as driving tourist on snorkel trips or diving tours, working in restaurants or cleaning bungalow resorts) and paid laborers on road constructions. In Ko Lanta there is some interests for Urak Lawoi to start their own businesses in tourism, but they lack capital but also access to attractive land. They have no choose but work as unskilled labors with low salary to sustain.

Not unusually around the world, dominant groups are marketing ethnic minorities in tourism and making profit from them, a people they used to look down upon as savages. The traditional economic way is banned and ethnic minorities become dependent on tourism as unskilled laborers. The capital and knowledge entering the tourism business is missing (Nash 1996:20-21, 35, Hitchcock, King and Parnwell 1993:19-20, 295, Wilson 1993:41, Wood 1993:62). Social Anthropologist Jean Michaud has done fieldwork and done her doctoral dissertation about the Hmong 'hill tribe' in the north of Thailand. The Thai state has been prohibiting their traditional economic way by clearing the forests and nomadic living into permanent villages. For economical reasons many Hmong today have to leave periodically for paid work, which they find very stressful. Another economic resource Hmong has been dependent on is trekking trips for tourist. In total, only around 1.5 % of the money paid by the customer to the travel office actually reaches the Hmong village. Trekking tourists often ask for opium and drugs. Since Hmong nowadays rely on cash to buy what they eat, the selling from opium makes a welcome income. Abandoning agriculture to host tourists breaks the community circle and isolates from the family, which is the most important segment of their society (Jean Michaud 1997:133,140-147). This is a common problem not just for indigenous people and hunter and gathers in Thailand, but all around the world.

In resemblance with Hmong hill tribe in the north of Thailand, I found some Urak Lawoi traveling to other parts of Thailand to work in tourism. Those who have worked and lived

separate from their family, have a tendency to move back home. The explanation they gave was simply that they wanted to live close by their family. Narin 28 years old returning both with money and the knowledge how to speak English explains: *I am happy here. People are not sick here. If I move from here, maybe my mom will be sick...*

It is hard for the Urak Lawoi to get used to work for a boss or someone else. Some are too proud to put themselves in that position. They want and like to be free.

Some men after returning back home from working on the big boats in fishing industry have brought back Aids to their community. I have no record or how many Urak Lawoi are infected by aids, but I am told there are at least two or three Urak Lawoi in Nai Rai who have died from this disease.

The Urak Lawoi traditional way of providing for the family, still exists, but is falling apart. They are forced into a job-market where they are employed as laborers with minimum wages. According to Sorn, a normal monthly wage working in a resort is 3 000 Bath (about 600Sk.). If one is lucky, the salary might be 4 000 - 5 000 Bath a month. A normal daily paid laborer makes 200 Bath (40Sk.) for a day, but some do not make more than 100 Bath a day. Kajsa Ekholm Friedman (1998:36-37) proclaims the tourist industry many times demand 'low-skill and low-pay' workers to cope with the competition. It is not unusual that the tourism industry leads to deterioration for the local people. Travel Agents or tourists do not question why it's cheap or which consequences it has on the local peoples. Erik Cohen who has studied tourism in Thailand since 1977 states that the total income from tourism is larger for 'outsiders' than the locals after the rapid development. Jennie Dielemans states 70 % of the money spent by tourists in Thailand are leaving the country (DN 2004-10-24). Not all Westerners entrepreneurs hire locals. An example can be given with the 'Travel Company' started by the Swedish family, mentioned in Introduction. They bring their own staff from Sweden working as 'specialists' in different subjects for low salary to get the opportunity to live in the 'pristine paradise'. There are other example that many Westerners *farangs* work for food, accommodation and no salary. The locals in other words do not benefit from tourism exploitation at the extent they could favor economic from it.

Cohen found after his research about tourist development on beaches in Andaman Sea, at first many locals look at the 'outsiders' investigations as new opportunities. After the development takes off rapidly (this stage is initiated by 'outsiders' as the increasing demand for tourist facilities), the locals find it harder to enter the tourist business and may be squeezed out from it. Land rises in value and luxurious resorts will replace small entrepreneurs from the beach (Cohen 1996a: 18,161,215,223-224). If so, the future employment for Urak Lawoi in Ko Lanta does not have very optimistic prognoses.

I will give an example the critical point in the transit from insider to outsider control on Ko Lanta. Bau (a local Thai from one nearby island of Ko Lanta) is married with an Urak Lawoi woman from Ko Lanta and have two children. They are an exception from the Urak Lawoi in Ko Lanta, since they started a restaurant for tourists on Klong Dau Beach in the 1990s. The restaurant is built on a small piece of land right on the sea, surrounded by fancy bungalow resorts and restaurants. The whole family is working in the business along with family members from the Urak Lawoi. They rent the 75m<sup>2</sup> land from a *farang* and since the *farang* is not the true landowner, he rents the land from a Thai citizen from Trang. Bau pays 20 000 Bath in rent for a year. Next season (2004-2005) he has to pay 100 000 Bath if he wants to keep his restaurant in what now has become very valuable piece of land. He is worried about the situation and at the time I left Ko Lanta, (April 2004) he was not sure if he could keep his business or not.

#### **4.4 Garbage**

Investors take everything... The local people get garbage and pollution

By Traisawasdichai in Cohen 1996:234

My first visit to the Urak Lawoi was in March 2002 (Granbom 2003:5). It was in Sihre outside Phuket and I must admit it was a kind of shock when I saw how the people lived that I had come to 'study'. The environment around their sheds was full of garbage. It did not at all look like the 'pristine paradise', from the written information I had read about these people. The house I stayed in did not have a WC or bathroom. In between the narrow sheds I had a 'shower' from the water in a big bucket. In the morning when I was going for a swim down at

the beach, it was full of number two. It was not tempting to have a morning swim or a clean up. I found the garbage in the Urak Lawoi's settlement was quite 'normal' for them today. When I asked why they just put the trash in front of them instead of taking care of it, I was simply told, they were not used to plastic bottles, cans or boxes filled with food. In the old days they just throw away everything, since everything they used come from nature. I was told they have not got used to the new custom of taking care of trash. Bodley discusses, how sanitary disasters in slum villages are followed by infections, increase stress and poor nutrition. According to Cohen's studies in Phuket (1996a: 233) the total garbage production is 750 tons a day, but the provincial government is only able to pick up about 170 tons of rubbish a day. If this is correct, it means that uncollected garbage is almost 600 tons a day!

The paradox is that tourists are asking for a healthy well-preserved environment, but the increase in tourist development means an increase in garbage and damage to the environment. Sewerage out in the water scares away fish and damages corals (many times the sewerage goes right out in the ground), garbage is thrown in the water and in unprotected areas. Tourism development has expanded much faster than the public and private sector have been capable of sewerage disposal water and energy supply (see for instance Hitchcock, King and Parnwell 1993:21). Boats going with tourists to the islands pollute the water (I witnessed extreme discharges of pollution in the water on the ferries in between the islands). The paradise become a man-made develop tourist place as swimming pools took over the beaches, air-conditioned rooms and all the routinely expected traits of 'paradise' (Cohen 1996a: 152). The pollution which tourism inflicts on the environment must be paid attention with the highest priority for not ruining the environment. As Anne V. Akeroyd (in Nash 1981:468) states: 'the tourist takes his cultural baggage with him but expects the host community to meet his requirements; whereas [...] (say) Turkish labor migrants in Europe, it is the migrant who is primarily expected to adopt [...]'. Tourists may not surprisingly abandon environmental degradation in tourist-developed places in the future. This has happened in Pattaya Beach: sewerage and pollution at sea became so acute that tourists had to preferred to swim in the pool (Cohen 1996a: 233). I could see the same tendency in Phi Phi Island.

#### **4.5 School and education**

This part deals with in what extent the Thai school makes an effort to integrate Urak Lawoi into the dominant culture.

Bodley states (1999a: 101-102) that schooling has been the prime instrument of cultural modification and proves a highly effective way of destroying the minorities' cultural and fostering new needs. The teacher from the dominant culture represents power over students, their parents and traditional leaders. A conflict arises between children's education from participation in their own culture. Tribal cultures generally require specialized knowledge of natural environment and special training in folklore, religion, ritual and other skills. The years the students need to study their own culture is in competition to the studying of the dominant cultures textbooks. Arporn U-krit states the tradition is that the adults raise the children until 5-6 years old. Then the boys join their fathers on trips to sea while the girls help their mother doing housework (in Andaman Pilot Project).

The ideology taught at school is the Thai culture in the Thai language (IWGIA 1996:83). No teacher is Urak Lawoi. School makes them feel ambivalent about their culture heritage. Many wish their traditions and culture could be taught at school, as well as they find it important to teach their language at school. Now days everyone can go to school for 9 years.

The schools are different in Sanga-U and Saladan. The students in Sanga-U are all Urak Lawoi. In Saladan, the Urak Lawoi students are mixed with Thai Chinese and Thai Muslims. They have friends among different ethnic groups and get affected by the Internet, fashion, city life, traffic, parties, drugs and tourism. It is different in Sanga-U where Urak Lawois live more isolated. Most children stop school after 6 years in Sanga-U. It has never happened that anyone from Sanga-U has sent children to high school. In the north of Ko Lanta I am told that one student has higher education - trained as a farmer. The reason why the Urak Lawois do not continue to higher education is, apart from the lack of money; they feel isolated away from their homes and families. They do not know anybody who can take care of their children on the mainland. People on the mainland make fun of them and call them 'stupid people', as they speak a different Thai accent. In other words, they have an inferiority complex for their

heritage.

C. - a man in the 30s from Sanga-U, told me that he would like to speak to the Government about sending children to High School from Sanga-U. When asked, why he does not do so, he answered me that he is afraid to do it. He is afraid to talk with 'the people who decide'. He states: *Everyone is afraid to talk with the one who has the power.*

I never became clear about what they are afraid of. The only explanation I get is; they do not know how to talk with authorities. They have not learnt how to talk with them and do not feel they understand their world, since they are not educated. They feel inferior and uncertain towards authorities. Sometimes, C. told me that they talk with *Tambun, Moban* and *Abaton*, but C. means; they do nothing about this problem. The Urak Lawoi thinks spokesmen talk more than they realize what they are talking about. They feel they need to talk with a *senator* in the province about their education problem. As some express themselves to me: 'going to school means you get a good job and a good life'. It seems like many of the Urak Lawoi would like to send their kids to school if it was possible. At the same time it seems like many do not think it is necessary.

Many find it important to learn English in school, so they get a better chance to get a job with tourism. They do learn English at school, but they do not think there is enough teaching. After school they have to pay 3000 Bath a month to take an English course (compared with a normal monthly salary working at a resort of 3000 Bath).

#### **4.5.1 The Language of the Urak Lawoi**

As mention earlier the Urak Lawoi have kept their language in spite of living close by other ethnic groups and surrounded by the Thai society. The Urak Lawoi language is spoken at home, even if most of them today speak Thai. But I found that the younger generation living in Nai Rai does not use the Urak Lawoi language in daily conversation at home. Even if they understand the language - they do not speak it with their parents or each other. In this part of the island, I also found, that many Urak Lawoi understand English. A natural explanation is that this part is developed and many work with tourism and therefore many think it is more



important to learn how to speak English instead of speaking Urak Lawoi. Many of those who not speak Urak Lawoi have also married someone from another ethnic group, but they still live among the Urak Lawois. The people who do not speak their language at home say to me they will start to do it when they have children. Many feel worried about their language disappearing since it is not unusual to marry a Thai. For natural reasons, Thai will be the language they speak at home with their children. Some Urak Lawois are concerned about the trend that younger avoiding speaking their language. As 'Jerry' said: [...] *if the language is gone, we are gone. We do not know our heritage.*

I also found a dualistic reasoning 'among' the Urak Lawoi in north Ko Lanta who seemed to have integrated well with the Thai society and market economy. At first they denied that they were different from the Thai and in the next sentence talk about their worries about their language disappearing. They seemed concerned that the Thai Government does not think it is important for them to keep their language. They compare with the American Indians and are afraid they will meet the same destiny and forget about their heritage.

In Sanga-U everyone still talks Urak Lawoi at home. I found the same in Ko Lipe. In Siehre everyone speaks Urak Lawoi but just a few can speak Thai.

#### **4.6 Alcoholism and Drugs**

I found both men and women consume a great deal of alcohol. Chang-beer and cheap Thai whisky have been an important input in their ceremonies. The usage of alcohol is not an indigenous habit 'among' the Urak Lawoi. I was told it started to become a problem one to two decades ago. According to the Urak Lawoi informants, they did not drink at their



**Plate 24:** Celebrating *Patat Jiri* at one of the burial sites, Klong Dau Beach.

parties or ceremonies in the old days. The increasing amount of alcohol can be seen as escapism from the pressure of the new way of life for them. Vira thinks the Urak Lawoi greatest problem is alcohol since many spend money on it as soon as they get their salary and

it is hard to get a job. A bottle of Thai whisky cost 70 Bath on Ko Lanta. Compared with this, the lucky ones get paid 200 Bath for a day's work. Ten day's working and drinking will mean 700 Bath being spent on alcohol instead of saving for tomorrow, when maybe no job is available.

I did not find the Urak Lawoi smoked marijuana or any other drugs, even if drugs are quite common among the Thai citizens and tourists in the touristy developed parts on Ko Lanta. But in Ko Lipe, Narin proclaims that Thai moving onto the island brought marijuana that some Urak Lawoi become dependent on. I was told how the drug has become a problem while they are diving. Some have died from being 'high' while they are working under water. The main reason why the Urak Lawoi in Ko Lanta do not smoke pot, I believe has to do with lack of money. I did not see any abuse of opium in any Urak Lawoi settlements.

A common every day drug 'among' both women and men - young or old - is betel nut. I witnessed how older women gathered together and started their day by chewing this drug before eating.



*Plate25:* The abuse of betel nut

#### **4.7 Changes in Diet**

During my field observation I found many of the younger and middle age women extremely huge and fat. I never saw older fat women, who were very lithe. Many of the older women showed proof for this when they where dancing by bending their bodies close above the ground. According to U-krit, some families are obese and others are small, but I never saw any obese men, except for some very young boys. My hypothesis is the change in food might be one reason. Today, Coke and beer are very popular to drink. Factory-made snacks and instant noodle have been popular food after integration to commercial life. Bodley indicates the change in diet for indigenous people involved in the world-economy has been catastrophic. White flour and refined sugar are two major things. Their diets are adapted to their nutritional needs and available food resources. Anthropologists have long recognized that dental and physical condition of indigenous peoples is excellent among the people who have retained

their diets (Bodley 1999a: 138-139). Another reason for obesity among the ladies, might be the change in lifestyle for the women, who as according to *To Maw Sicken*, used to work differently and more actively in the old days (see Chapter 2.10 how the women used to work).

#### **4.8 Participate in Modern Lifestyle**

This Chapter will deal with how the daily life has changed since tourism development and how the future can be fortunes for the Urak Lawoi live hood.

*To Maw Boden* in Nai Rai is concerned about the fast changes in life style. He let me know it is hard for the Urak Lawoi to find their new roll in the new society but he is aware it is impossible to find the way back to live in their old traditional way. *To Maw Sicken* from Sanga-U points out how they used to live a simple life before tourists arrived to Ko Lanta.

But in many ways they found life easier. For example it has become easier to transfer between the Urak Lawoi settlements on the islands. It doesn't take so long to visit each other as it used to do. *To Maw Boden* also find it convenient with electricity.

Mavee who is in the mid-sixties and Sanga-Us' violin player told me what tourism has done to the children. 'The children want to become like tourists [...] piercing and new music. Young people do not like *Rong Ngang* music'. Since Mavee is a man with strength and fills an important task as the only violin player left in Sanga-U, I ask him if he teaches the younger generation their traditions? 'How can this be done?' he asks me. Mavee means there is no time anymore for the younger generation to learn about their culture. 'Now days every one has to work for money and they have to work hard for it'. He thinks that there is not enough time to teach the culture. Urak Lawoi do not have much free time or any vacation. Their traditional way of living is impossible to live. Stefano from Italy, living on Ko Lipe is married with an Urak Lawoi where he now has his residence among her family. He told stories about how the Urak Lawoi used to travel and visit each other during the dry season. It is not possible anymore, he says, since for the last 3-4 years everyone is dependent on tourism and cannot just take off from work, as they like. A conflict arises: One can look at the Urak Lawoi traditional hunt and gather way of life as giving a lot of free time socializing. It did not take long to gather or fish food for the family and there was plenty of time for visiting, entertaining and dancing. A lot of leisure was a normal 'activity'. It might be what Nash (1981:464) indicates that

hunter-and-gather societies spend more time in tourist activities than any industrial society. This can be seen in contrast to the transition into the 'modern-world' where working for supporting the family has been necessary to feed the family and satisfy materialistic needs.

Arporn U-krit do not think the tourist invasion has changed the Urak Lawoi way of living when thinking more about the future. They still live day by day but the change is the importance to achieve a TV or a car. Arporn U-krit and Mapin Taleluk states the younger generation isn't interested in learning the old music or songs. They are not interested in learning how to play the violin. Maybe it depends on TV, they think. New impressions from TV, radio and CD, have replaced old traditions. They believe the old culture will disappear. This is resembling to what was discussed at Chang Mai Conference 1995 (IWIGA 1996:84): it seems like more development introduced to ethnic communities in Thailand become less capable to maintain their control of life, managing their own resources and maintaining their ethnic identity.

#### **4.9 The Authority Marketing Urak Lawoi for Tourists**

This chapter will reflect on current problem about celebrating their ceremonies but also how 'outsiders' market the Urak Lawoi as an exotic element.

Ko Lanta is becoming a society, which the tourist experience, or is differentiated from the rest of the host society. One effect of this is what Dennison Nash (1981:466) call 'demonstration effect' when 'outsiders' developers, entrepreneurs or locals make up 'invented traditions' to make something up for tourists. Inventions are common components in the on-going development of authentic cultures identities. The complex question is in what way tourism enters and takes part in this on-going process (see Nash 1981:466, Hitchcock, King and Parnwell 1993:8-16, Wood 1993:59, 64-66). The fact that the tourists' assessments are inaccurate or unrepresentative doesn't make it less real for the tourist. In Ko Lipe for example the transit from their *Rong Ngang* music and dance, has been influenced by Hawaiian when I observed their entertainment for tourists on Lipe Restaurant. They had flowers in their hair and the outlook seemed to be of importance since everyone dancing was young and beautiful. I never have seen the Urak Lawoi perform this way before. When I have witnessed their dancing at ceremonies their age are mixed and also the sexes. Older women have always been more

represented dancing than young girls, boys and men. It was not so at the arranged performance for tourist in Ko Lipe. I want to point out, traditionally it might have been that younger people has been more representative in the *Rong Ngeng* dance than today, since disco music has made its entrance it has become an important musical element for teenagers.

It is important for the Urak Lawoi to keep their traditional ceremonies alive, even though drinking and partying has become an important element in celebrating these activities. To get together one achieves a sense of belonging to something larger than your self. I have focused on their central ceremony *Loy Rua* that is celebrated twice a year. I did not witness the occasion that I will write about because I arrived for my fieldwork, one week after the festival was held in October 2003. I was told the following: 2003 they were given a new piece of land and as they understood it were given by the Government or the Queen. The Government gave permission to celebrate *Loy Rua* twice a year in May and October. I am told the Queen gave her agreement for the Urak Lawoi to celebrate their ceremonies on this piece of land. The land is situated close by the pier in Saladan, next to the sea and surrounded by nature and woods. Informants told me that there are signed papers about this agreement. The Urak Lawoi was allowed to build huts for living during the festival. They were happy about the attention from the 'outside' and wanted to start immediately. To start with they had to build a long wooden bridge to get to the area, since the place is like a swamp. The wood they were told they could take for free from the place. A Thai citizen who kept his big boat close by this place wanted them to build a jetty for him to anchor his yacht. They did so, cut trees and built bridges. Some built small huts. A new temple was built in cement. The Urak Lawoi who could was all involved in the project. They complained about those who did not help with the project. But those who couldn't be there to assist building the new ceremony place, told me they had to work. Not all of them could just take off from their job and work for nothing since they had a family to support and obligations to their employer. Those who were busy working with the project, did not think that those who did not help should join the ceremony.

Some Urak Lawois, who were working with the jetty for the Chinese, suddenly stopped with the woodwork, as they were thinking: 'why do we do this? This bridge has nothing to do with our ceremony and we are building a long jetty for a man who does not even pay for the

wood'. They stopped building when there was only one meter left to connect the jetty with their bridge.

At the beginning of October 2003 *Loy Rua* ceremony was held for the first time on their new holy place. Many 'outsiders' were involved in the ceremony and different TV channels were invited to participate and make programs about the Urak Lawoi unique culture.

After the ceremony was over, the TV channels and 'important' guests for the ceremony left the island. A few weeks later the Urak Lawoi were ordered to tear down their huts. The huts were just meant for ceremonial purposes. The Urak Lawois were shocked over this treatment. They thought they were given this piece of land for recreation and to be left alone close by the water with their customs. 'How can we build up everything again when we know we have to take it down again after a few days? We are not lazy, but we have no power to do it twice a year'. 'It feels useless to work when you know you have to destroy everything after a few days'. 'It feels more like we are doing this ceremony for others, not for ourselves anymore'.



**Plate26:** *Loy Rua* Ceremony place, Saladan



**Plate27:** After the trees have been cut, Saladan

Why did they have to move their houses, I asked? They are not clear about why they had to knock down their huts after three days of ceremony in October 2003. One thing they heard is some Thai citizens wants to extend their property close by the pier. The Urak Lawoi does not think the Queen knows anything about this. Six months later they are expected to build up 'the scene' again for a new *Loy Rua* ceremony.

Laurence Wai-Teng Leong (1997:72-73) discusses how the State used to look at minorities and 'primitives' as a problem since they have difficulties in assimilating with the

dominant culture but now the State finds minorities may contribute to the economy via tourism. Robert E. Wood suggests since the State has great power on tourism and what should be developed, they have a great deal of influence what shall be marketing of cultural meanings and practices.



**Plate28:** Red Hawk in front of the wooden bridge to *Loy Rua* ceremony place.



**Plate29:** *Phee Phea* protects Urak Lawoi from bad spirits.

‘Gypsy Home’ (see Chapter 1.5.2) can be another example of ‘outsiders’ marketing the Urak Lawoi culture. Business people to preserve and show Urak Lawoi unique culture for tourists on Ko Lanta sponsor the centre or new ‘village’. The idea is good to preserve their culture in one place and leave the Urak Lawoi alone at their settlement. The criticism on this arrangement is that the initiative came from the ‘outside’ and no Urak Lawois have an active influence of the project. The Urak Lawois are expected to voluntarily build up the village with important elements such as temple and boat. Only ‘outsiders’ live in the village and make a profit from it. The Urak Lawoi does not make the jewelry and art. If no special arrangement is held, there are no Urak Lawoi found in the centre. I did not find that the Urak Lawoi have much influence on ‘Gypsy House’. During the end of my fieldwork (march-april 2004) I observed it a popular place for *farang* and Thai migrants to visit and smoke pot. I want to point out I do not think the landowner or sponsors know anything about this. Responsible for this rumor of ‘Gypsy Home’ might have been the people hired to be in charge of the place. In resemblance with Wai-Teng Leong (1997:72-73) I found, ethnic differentiation is not based on anthropological concerns for humanism or the survival of cultural groups. Tourism including ethnicity is a resource to generate income. I want to finish the story about ‘Gypsy House’ by inform the center might have been different with other people in charge for the ‘village’.

#### **4.10 *To Maw* or Local Leadership**

This Chapter will discuss who represents the Urak Lawoi political within and outside the group.

*To Maw* (medicine man) is representing the Urak Lawoi (See more in Chapter 2:8 about *To Maw's* duties). I found most of the *To Maw* is coming of age, in different islands. The concern is who will be the next one. Since it is hard to find a qualified *To Maw*, someone 'good enough' who knows *To Maw's* duties, anyone who is interested in learning from *To Maw* is welcome to do so. From there on *To Maw* can inform the Urak Lawois who will be the next *To Maw*. The problem is that younger people do not take the time or want to learn the customs. Another problem is the Urak Lawoi traditional leader play the roll as advisory not as an authoritarian or right to decide for the group. A conflict arises since this is a contrast how the dominant culture thinks of a political leader representing a group of people.

A new informal leader amongst the Urak Lawoi has been developed, what Apinan Jitsopa call 'business leader'. This new type of leader is someone who knows how to make money. He keeps his popularity by giving. It can be such a thing as a boat for the village or money to other Urak Lawoi. In some extent he is replacing *To Maw*, but the problem is he is not familiar with *To Maw* duties. He cannot be seen as representative for Urak Lawoi, since he has money and many times feel kind of outside within the group. At the same time he feels outside in any other ethnic group, but he is many times the one the dominant culture contact about information to Urak Lawoi.

The government has a tendency to expand the control over ethnic minorities communities and therefore new leaders are appointed to represent the Urak Lawoi instead of *To Maw* (the medicine man). According to IWGIA (1996:84) this is a common way to replace the traditional leaders. The government's position is to put law and order in place and for development and economic improvement.

Ko Lanta Yai consists of two Tambon where the elected commune heads, *Gamnan* represent Urak Lawoi and is their spokesman to district officers (*Nai Amphur*) and the Government. *Gamnan* also represent the Urak Lawoi for TV and media. Ko Lanta Yai is



divided into 13 Mo Baan (villages) that are represented by *Po yái baan*. I only know of one case in Ko Lanta where Urak Lawoi represents the politic leaders as *Po yái baan*. The relation of the Urak Lawoi and government officials is tense. They are afraid of talking with the governors because they do not know how to express themselves. They explain this by having no education and do not know how the society works. They feel inconvenienced by people in authority as lawyers and the police. They are afraid of being arrested or taken away since they want to stay with the family. The Urak Lawoi are afraid to become enemies with somebody. This causes problems since it means they are afraid of helping each other through authorities. The Urak Lawoi think, this can be one of the main reasons why the Urak Lawoi has a tendency to split up and everyone just thinks of themselves. They do not cooperate like they used to do and this makes the group split up. Some realize if they would collaborate, they would get strong. 'But everyone is just thinking of money', someone say. 'Thai, Buddhists, Muslims, Chine's and Urak Lawoi are the same regarding this'.

Wongbusarakum (2002:163-164) had the same experience during her fieldwork in Adang Archipelago that the Urak Lawois do not voice their concerns to outsiders and especially not to Governmental staff. Some even told Wongbusarakum that they might be shot if they say something. Because there is corruption in Thailand, they try to stay out of all kind of problems and avoid supporting anyone who has trouble with outsiders. Those with money in Thailand can pay duty to get out of the problem, but since the Urak Lawoi do not have any money they avoid getting in this kind of situations.

#### **4.10.1      *To Maw* or Hospital**

*To Maw* still practices as their doctor. When someone gets sick he is sent for. I will not analyze in this study his medical treatment. Some Urak Lawoi prefer *To Maws'* treatment in the long run. The opinion about the hospitals' importance is ambiguous. Many find it is good that they can go to see the hospital if they need it. Others claim because they have access to an identity card that proves they are poor and therefore entitled to discounted hospital treatment. They experience that they do not get the same good treatment as others because they have this reduction card and do not have to pay more than 30 Bath for a visit to the hospital. Under 13

years old they go for free. This fee is not available in case of an accident. Many are superstitious about the hospital treatment, as they think 'one seldom come back alive from there'. If it is because they go there 'to late' with their patient or if it is what they say, they get worse treatment - I do not know.

Sirikon and Bau find the ferryboats as a problem for Urak Lawoi if they need to visit the hospital acute at the mainland. It costs 50 Bath to go by car ferry. If the ferry doesn't run, it costs 2000 Bath. In case of an accident and emergency, the Urak Lawois are not aloud to pass the line-up to the ferry. The ferry does not leave until the ferry is completely full. A third discrimination that the Urak Lawoi experiences is if the ferry already has departed when they arrive, the ferry does not turn back to pick up the sick person. The Urak Lawoi tells me that the ferry does for others. 'It would be better for us with a bridge if we need to go to the hospital'. I want to put in my own experiences about the car ferry while I lived in Ko Lanta. As an 'outsider' I do not have the same experience which the Urak Lawoi are talking about. I found the service very good. In some cases better than it would have been in my own country. My daughter Shaba became sick and had to be transported by ambulance to one of the hospitals on the mainland. We did not have to wait in any queue for the ferry, but drove right on the boats. Another experience was when my daughter who was on her way to the airport back to Sweden. After we had been in a dramatic car accident, our taxi arrived late with us to the ferry. The people driving the ferry were called out. In the middle of Ko Lanta Yai and Ko Lanta Noi, the big ferry turned around to pick us up. It also happened to us another time when we were taking the public ferry to the main land. The Muslim who was driving us to the ferry drove slowly to the ferry. When we got there the ferry was on the way out from the harbor. Packed with tourists, it made an inconvenient turn around and pushed out the gangway towards us.

### ***To Maw calling...***

I want to finish my essay writing about my last day in Ko Lanta and Thailand before flying back home to Sweden from my 6 months of fieldwork.

On my last day I was writing e-mails from an Internet cafe' in Saladan. While I was sitting writing I saw Sorn, a 25-year old Urak Lawoi woman pass by on the street outside. Sorn is a

'modern' woman who has acclimatized into the new world. She knows how to speak English and has a good job with good pay for a scuba diving enterprise. She is not married and does not have any children. I ran outside and called out her name at the direction she was walking. While I was shouting her name, my mobile phone rang. I ran inside to pick up my phone. To my surprise when I answered the telephone. It was Sorn! 'Ooo... I saw you', I started to say. 'You are in Saladan?!' Sorn just answered: '*To Maw* is waiting for you. He wants to see you. He is waiting for you at his home'. I told Sorn, I would be right there, since I had rented a car for my last day in Ko Lanta. Twenty minutes later I was sitting in front of *To Maw* Boden's veranda. Sorn was also waiting for me. I was surprised she had returned so quickly from Saladan, but I did not want to take up *To Maw* Boden's time by asking how Sorn came back. Instead I had an interesting talk with Boden for a few hours with Sorn as an interpreter. At the end of our conversation he started to talk about how the Urak Lawoi can be seen at two places at the same time. I had heard the stories before but had not paid much attention to it. I looked at Sorn while Boden was telling me how the Urak Lawoi could be at two different places at the same time. My heart started beating faster. 'Sorn where were you actually when you called for me to come and see *To Maw*?' 'I was calling from home'. 'But I saw you in Saladan... I know it was you. You even had your hair the same way and the same clothes...' Sorn and Boden just looked at me. That was my last visit and chat with the Urak Lawoi before returning back home...



**Plate 30:** Lotta and Bada visiting the Moken in Ko Surin on the border to Burma.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this essay is to explore the extent to which rapid developments in economics and tourism have affected the Urak Lawoi's culture and lifestyle on Ko Lanta. To what extent can the Urak Lawoi control the tourist process in Ko Lanta? In what ways do they make use of it, and how are they excluded? The answer is that the Urak Lawoi's cultural heritage is still important to them, but is falling apart. Through loss of land they are losing their self-sufficiency and are becoming increasingly dependent on money to support their families. This is splitting the group, and making it difficult for the entire community to gather and celebrate their ceremonies. Ranked lowest in the new social and economic hierarchy that has been imposed on them, they have no chance whatsoever to control Ko Lanta's tourism development; the only economic profit they gain from it is as unskilled laborers.

From my earlier research about them (Lotta Granbom 2003), it appeared that the Urak Lawoi have been able to maintain their culture, identity and language despite influence from surrounding ethnic groups. Though they have adjusted their economy to the dominant culture during historic contacts with civilized traders, they have kept their own unique culture and identity alive because they had access to their traditional territory: the sea and the shores on the islands in Andaman Sea. Previously, this province was uninteresting from a western economic point of view. However, territorial deprivation is the greatest challenge the Urak Lawoi culture now faces from tourism development as it overtakes their pristine paradise, its beaches and crystal clear waters.

To what extent do rapid economic and tourism development affect the Urak Lawoi's culture and lifestyle on Ko Lanta? The Urak Lawoi are considered to be one of Thailand's few remaining hunter-gather groups. The loss of access to natural resources within 'their' territory has forced them to abandon their traditionally self-sufficient lifestyle, thus making it hard to maintain their culture. They are unable to live their long-established day-by-day life of freedom, which entails temporarily leaving their home base for long sea voyages or extended periods of shoreline camping to gather sea products. Without access to traditional food sources they become dependent on cash and payment for their labor in order to buy food and material goods. This creates an inferiority complex with regard to western culture. As individuals begin

to operate more independently, identity crises grow among people accustomed to belonging to a tight group.

Outsiders represent the elected commune heads for the Urak Lawoi, who fear these authorities and do not freely discuss their problems and concerns with outsiders. According to Bodley, political autonomy is lost when the state takes control of a territory, which can be observed with the Urak Lawoi. Government control creates a profound transformation of tribal organization, as tribal peoples must integrate with an unfamiliar social and political system.

My conclusion is that the Urak Lawoi's loss of control over their traditional territory makes it increasingly difficult for them to sustain their cultural heritage.

To what extent can the Urak Lawoi control the tourist process in Ko Lanta? In what way do they make use of it, or how are they excluded? It emerges that the Urak Lawoi, as indigenous people, do not benefit or enjoy great economic advantage from the gigantic tourism developments on the islands because outsiders and other ethnic groups exclusively exploit 'their' territory. The Urak Lawoi are forced to accommodate to new circumstances as they lose access to attractive land, making it very difficult to remain self-sufficient. Lacking knowledge, the capital to run a business or access to prime land deprives the Urak Lawoi of the economic benefits from tourism, and they cannot rise above the level of unskilled laborers. Outsiders exploit their Loy Rua ceremony, forcing the natives to adapt it as a tourist attraction. However the economic profit does not advantage the Urak Lawoi, but outsiders.

My conclusion is the Urak Lawoi have no influence over tourism development in Ko Lanta, and with few exceptions, they are excluded from its benefits.

What stress factors and problems do these indigenous people face when migrants exploit what the Urak Lawoi consider as their territory? The main stress factor is lack of natural resources. Development has led to jungle deforestation and has dried out waterfalls. They are concerned about lack of fresh spring water in the future and reduced access to free food and fish. They are worried they will not have enough money to support their families, and that the attractiveness of local land for tourism has increased its value beyond what they can afford to pay for it.

Change has created ambivalence over identity. The Urak Lawoi do not feel at home in the dominant culture as poor Thai people, and acknowledgement as 'invisible' minorities increases their feeling of being outsiders. As a result of this, and other problems stemming from tourism and the new market economy, drug use has become a major concern in the last decade. There also seems to be a general increase in stress-related health problems, for instance the Urak Lawoi talk about unexplained stomach pains and insomnia.

The Urak Lawoi express concern that their own language is being replaced by Thai and English, and that they no longer have free time to socialize because they work long hours to support their families. The Thai school system also competes for family time, and teaches the younger generation new customs in an attempt to acclimate them to Thai society, though ultimately they have difficulty finding a place in it. After elementary school teenagers must find work to help with family support and increased desires from exposure to wealthy outsiders and tourists. However, there is no tradition or money to send them on to higher education on the mainland. Thus they find work only as laborers.

Conclusion: The dominant culture is successfully integrating the Urak Lawoi into the Thai society as poor Thai citizens.

### **Final Discussion**

I find ample evidence to support my hypotheses that the Urak Lawois' inferiority complex has increased with expanding exploitation by outsiders. They fear authority figures. The Thai people look upon them as poor, 'stupid' Thai Mai (New Thai), on the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. They are ashamed of this before outsiders, with whom they try to erase their identity. Convinced of their inferiority, they seek to assimilate with the dominant Thai culture, believing this will make them more effective and provide new opportunities. The Urak Lawois are also afraid of the official consequences if they fail to be subjected to Thai culture. But their integration is only surface deep. For example, they pretend to be Buddhist, but never attend a Buddhist temple. They still believe in the worship of their ancestors. This may be compared with Kajsja Ekholm Friedman's work with Hawaiians. They did not want to identify

themselves as Hawaiians, but in their own minds they still were, and they did not disappear and become 'the other' (1998:63-64). With Urak Lawoi's strong feeling of affinity, remaining part of the groups' identity is important. This is demonstrated by those of mixed background who never hesitates to say they are Urak Lawoi, and do not think of themselves as mixed.

My hypotheses regarding the future of the Urak Lawoi is that as long as they have no influence over or confident understanding of the 'other world' that now dominates their territory and dictates adaptive lifestyle changes, they will continue to suffer the effects of the resulting inferiority complex. This tendency is not unusual. Worldwide, as long as indigenous people are oppressed and naive, they feel inferior and are easily dominated. According to Kajsa Ekholm Friedman (ibid, 68) education increased Hawaiians' ethnic self-awareness and empowered them. With education, indigenous people gain influence in the dominant culture and quite often enjoy a rebirth of native pride and a new interest in minority rights. For instance, outsiders considered Hawaiian culture to be lost and for many years it was a disadvantage to be a native Hawaiian. When the native movements started, the number of registered Hawaiians suddenly increased as people celebrated their culture heritage once again.

I contend that the Urak Lawoi have not yet had any native pride movement because of their fear of authority, and their lack of knowledge and experience with 'the other world'. Most Urak Lawoi cannot read or write. They are currently in the stage where their inferiority complex compels many of them to integrate with the dominant culture, which has promised them opportunities if they merge and collaborate. Once some of them receive an education and take non-menial jobs it will be easier to 'stand behind' their ethnic identity and culture. Though they are not completely cut off from their cultural roots in the way that is so common in Western society, they recognize the loss of identity, which might be the cause for new problems as previously discussed in Introduction. Another factor contributing to the fear of authority could be the unexplainable shootings in Ko Lanta. During my fieldwork, there were three deadly shootings of locals. It was widely believed that authorities or those they hired carried out their murders. I only learned of this because of my friendships with locals.

By encouraging cultural pride over feelings of inferiority, the State may intervene to save

ethnic minorities. However, this is usually done in their own interest to strengthen a tourist project. The 'hill tribes' in the north of Thailand are one example. The goal of saving these tribes is to provide an attraction for trekkers, who visit this exotic minority during their vacation. By contrast, in the homeland of the Urak Lawoi, experiencing Thai culture is exotic enough, and the natives find themselves in competition with tourists for the use of the sea and beaches.

It is well known that a society isn't so sensitive to changes if tourism supplements rather than replaces customary support systems. Societies where inhabitants return during low season to their traditional lifestyle are more stable. The Urak Lawoi's increasing dependence on tourism is therefore a big worry as they lose their capacity for a hunter-gatherer economy through lack of access to the sea and beaches. Recently terrorist attacks on tourism have been featured in the news. Disturbances in the Muslim-dominated south of Thailand are likely to increase with devastating consequence for the tourism. Certain developers fail to consider both social and environmental costs, including the fact that Ko Lanta is 80% Muslim. Social insensitivity has brought almost-naked tourists in bikinis plus a thriving sex trade. The fact that this is so unwelcome by the local Muslim population is one reason why terror attacks are feared in tourist destinations. Second, Ko Lanta's developers lack consideration for the environmental consequences of their projects on an island with limited natural resources. For example, tourists are big consumers of water for showers, swimming pools, beautiful fountains and gardens, and the island has no capacity for the volume of garbage they generate. Additionally, no busses run on the island. Small entrepreneurs have found they can earn a better living as taxi drivers instead of bus drivers, which creates a tremendous traffic burden on Ko Lanta's undeveloped roads.

As an island destination, Ko Lanta is highly susceptible to falling out of favor with tourists when it becomes less natural and more contrived. It is well known in Thailand that tourists tend to avoid over-exploited resorts that have put too much pressure on the environment, the very resource on which the industry is built. Islands are especially sensitive due to their limited resources. By the time this cycle fully progresses, the natives have forgotten their traditional



livelihood and lifestyle, thus the drop in the tourism upon which they depend has devastating consequences. Tourists will continue to abandon one 'pristine paradise' and popularize another, which have the same destiny if environmental controls are not put in place.

Another potential problem is that foreigners may outnumber locals on Ko Lanta, producing a social stress that appears when tourists invade the private lives of locals (Smith 1989: 10). This is especially problematic when the new 'elite' from outside controls the development process to favor themselves. A personal experience illustrates this. We wanted to surprise my oldest daughter with a birthday party a few days before returning to Sweden. She was visiting us at the time, so we had temporarily rented the most luxury bungalow house on Klong Dau Beach. The Western resort owner knew about the surprise party, to be held during daytime. As our guests began to arrive we soon realized there was a big problem . . . all of them happened to be Thai, and not high ranking in the social hierarchy. A few days later we were asked to leave the resort, as they did not like having locals coming by to ask for us.

It is important for the future that the Urak Lawoi get involved with local tourist development if there is any possibility to 'be what they are'. If more 'Gypsy Villages' are to be built, they must be involved, organizing the project and profiting from it, without outside interference. If current trends continue, coping with inferiority complex and the need to integrate into the marketing economy will keep young people away from their native culture, music and *To Maw*' duties. Important information, customs and traditions will follow the older Urak Lawoi to the grave. Possible movements in the future to strengthen the Urak Lawoi identity might then be built on nostalgia, and new traditions may be invented. It is important to remember that cultural identity is an on-going process and the interference of tourism and its effects on that process is a complex issue.

My need for interpreters to accomplish field research may have influenced my results. In some cases the interpreter might have been looked upon as Thai authority and therefore important information might not have been conveyed and is therefore missing from this report. Considering the turbulence associated with tourism, one must speak their language in order to

completely understand the Urak Lawoi as that might increase their confidence in the investigator. The point of view represented is exclusively that of the Urak Lawoi. Opinions regarding tourist development held by authorities, outsiders and other local ethnic groups, though of interest, are not presented.

Lack of written information about the Urak Lawoi is an obstacle to research. The Urak Lawoi has no written language, therefore have produced no literature. With environmental geographers providing nearly all-existing information about tourism and the environment on the islands of Thailand, there is certainly a need for anthropological studies on the Urak Lawoi and island tourism. Detailed ethnographic studies are the most pressing need at the moment. Anthropological material is needed through empirical research strategy, which seeks hermeneutic understanding in ongoing transition of tradition and authenticity. As human beings, the Urak Lawois' voices must be heard and heeded. They unable to tell the world about their situation, therefore the need for anthropologists to bring their concerns to the public are most urgent. The Urak Lawois wish that outsiders would get involved in their situation. This need seems acute since according to Cohen (1996b: 238) minorities in Thailand are forced to enter the wider society on its lowest rank. Thai people tend to disregard hunter-gatherers since they are considered barbarian, savage and non-human, and have even been put on display in Bangkok department stores.

In summary: This research confirms Bodley's discussion: just as 'the greatest victims of industrial progress have been indigenous peoples', indigenous peoples are now the victims of tourism development in the Third World. The Urak Lawois in Ko Lanta, Thailand, are following the familiar progression. Their political autonomy was lost when the state gained control over their territory. Tourist exploitation in Ko Lanta can be seen as an extension of imperialistic activity. It convinces the Urak Lawoi and local people that exploitation will benefit poor people. Even if economic gain is realized, the relationship between hosts and guests has colonial overtones. If the Urak Lawois' plight is not heard, in the near future most of them will live in miserable slum villages as poor Thai people.

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