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# Reimagining the Lines in Orang Asli Studies

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores how discourse on the Orang Asli built principally on narratives of victimisation consigns them as a problematic community within the public consciousness. The paper problematises the academic inclination of framing Orang Asli studies within a victim space in the context of Malaysia's discourse on indigeneity at the risk of suspending positive representations on the Orang Asli. This paper suggests that the field of Orang Asli studies may benefit from an exercise in self-reflection to consider if colonial imaginings of indigeneity and the values contained therein continue to overshadow research on the community. Apropos to this, the paper contends that the Critical Discourse Analysis approach – engaged by many postcolonial academics in forwarding instances of Orang Asli marginalisation – is deficient when not applied in conjunction with a counter-narrative such as Positive Discourse Analysis (Martin, 2004). The continuous depiction of the Orang Asli as a victimised group of people internalises them within the public consciousness as a community with little agency, which hinders their ability to self-determination, and consequently, their capacity to mobilise change. Accordingly, Positive Discourse Analysis – when included to the narrative on the Orang Asli to forward instances of indigenous resilience and adaptability – provides a positive counterbalance of Orang Asli representation due to its direct role in the formation, shaping and expressing of positive Orang Asli political identity – an important consideration within any community seeking to assert itself.

**Keywords:** *indigenous victimisation, narratives, Orang Asli, Positive Discourse Analysis, indigenous resilience, Malaysia*