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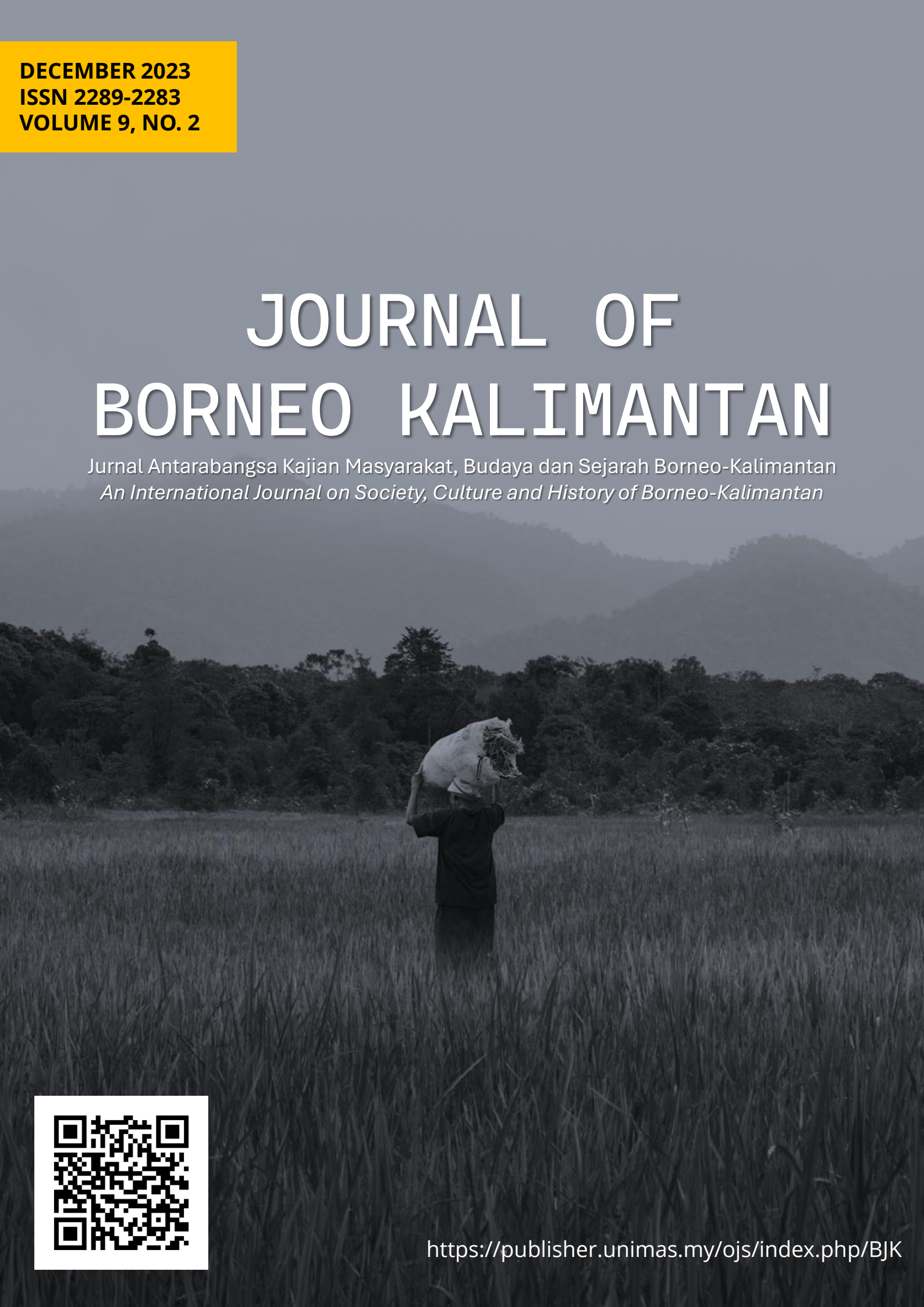

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Chief Editor
Journal of Borneo Kalimantan

Welcome to Volume 9, Issue 2 of the Journal of Borneo Kalimantan!

In this edition, we invite you to explore a diverse range of scholarly investigations that delve into various aspects of Borneo Kalimantan. These investigations cover its rich history, cultural dynamics, and contemporary challenges.

Mashman takes us on a captivating journey in "A History of the Fort at Long Akah: Contact, Collaboration, and Power," where she unravels the stories inscribed in stones and reveals the intricate interplay of contact, collaboration, and power that shaped the region's past.

Tackling the pressing issue of our time, Juna Liau, Sharifah Sophia Wan Ahmad, and Siti Zanariah Ahmad Ishak present "Covid-19, Mortality, and Inequality in Sarawak," providing a critical analysis of the pandemic's impact on vulnerable populations and highlighting areas for improvement in public health responses.

Peter Sercombe delves into the evolving identity of the Iban community in "Crossing The Rubicon?: Maintenance and Change Among Today's Iban in Sarawak," exploring the delicate balance between preserving traditions and adapting to the modern world. Larsen and Teo take us on a fascinating journey with "The Story of the Mysterious Suspension Bridge in Seropak, Bau, Sarawak," weaving a narrative that combines historical research and local legends to unveil the enigmatic mysteries surrounding this iconic structure.

Adding another layer to our exploration, Jayl Langub contributes "State of Belonging: Engaging the State in Borneo," offering valuable insights into the dynamics of engaging with the state in the context of Borneo Kalimantan. Furthermore, Clark and Rikando offer profound insights into the spiritual essence of the Iban people in "The Role of Ancestors in Iban Traditional Religion," shedding light on the enduring connection between the past, present, and the spirit world.

These diverse contributions collectively showcase the richness of academic inquiry in Borneo Kalimantan. We extend our sincere gratitude to all the authors who have shared their expertise and insights with us. We invite you to explore the multifaceted experiences of our region within these pages and join us in fostering a vibrant intellectual landscape. May this issue spark curiosity, ignite meaningful dialogue, and inspire us all to contribute to a brighter future for Borneo Kalimantan.

Professor Dr Poline Bala
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Journal of Borneo-Kalimantan

A History of the Fort at Long Akah: Contact, Collaboration and Power

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ABSTRACT

This paper traces history through the fort at Long Akah during the various eras of the Brooke administration, the colonial government and the Sarawak State government. This study takes its cue from the notion of the fort as a vehicle for a distinctive history of an area and uses indigenous oral histories and recollections as "alternative history." Forts were built during and after pacification and this process was dependent on the collaboration of local leaders whose influence was ritually prescribed by the *adat*. The forts functioned as a place where taxes were paid, where court cases were heard, and where trading took place. While the fort at Long Akah represented locally a locus of power for the Brooke administration, it will be seen that this power was located in a crucial local collaboration in governance, which depended on the role of local leaders.

Keywords: Baram, fort, peace-making, power, trade,

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: Fort at Long Akah 2012 (Photo: Anthony Lawai Karing)

This paper will trace history through the fort during the various eras of the Brooke administration, the colonial government and the Sarawak State government. It was the place where the resident and the district officer were based during their tours of the Baram district. It served as an office and a training

ground for the up-river agent (URA). The fort hosted the Z special Semut 2 forces as they fought together with local volunteers to liberate Sarawak during the Japanese Occupation. It served as a centre for operations during the war of Confrontation with Indonesia. The shops at the bazaar close by were run by Chinese, Malays and Kenyah. It was here that local people traded forest products and rice in exchange for sundry goods such as sugar, salt, cooking oil and soap. As a history with glimpses of social memory, there is also a focus on the people, who are connected to the fort through the longhouse at Long San, ten minutes upriver by boat. Their story is intimately connected to their ancestor Tama Bulan Weng, who established the first fort of the upper Baram at Long Daloh on the Pata River. This history endorses the notion that the Brooke regime depended on its local allies for power (Mashman 2020), and the forts represented a hybrid negotiated form of governance between local people and the Brooke state (Ting 2014). This argument also can be carried over to subsequent eras of government, with the presence of Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau at Long San which became a place of focus for the villages of the upper Baram and during his term of office. It became the centre for Orang Ulu culture, with Indonesian Kenyah artists carving and painting the longhouse and the church. The Roman Catholic Mission established a church, school and clinic which enabled at least two generations of Orang Ulu students to get a basic primary school education. With the death of the Temenggong in 1974, the out-migration of newly-educated young people, and the establishment of the road, the fort and the bazaar declined in the 1970s and 1980s.

Long Akah is within Miri division and was part of the Baram district. The fort at Long Akah was at the transit point for a number of routes to important centres taken both by river and on forest paths: the first route down the Baram River by boat led to the administrative headquarters at Marudi at Fort Hose and eventually to the coast at Kuala Baram. From Ridan near Marudi was a footpath that connected with the Tutong River in Brunei. Another route to Brunei was through the Tutoh River and along the Medalam and Limbang rivers. From Long Akah there was also a route to the Tinjar, which led to Belaga by river and through forest tracks. The Akah and Selungo rivers gave access to the Kelabit highland villages around Mount Murud Kecil. The Moh and Julan rivers provided routes to the Apo Kayan in Dutch Borneo through the Iwan river. The last navigable point of the Baram upriver was at Lio Mato. From there the footpath led to the Kelabit highlands and to the Bahau and Krayan rivers in Dutch Borneo (Figure 2).

Since the establishment of the road in the 1980s**,** Long Akah can be reached from Miri on the coast in about five hours. It is also served by a twice weekly air service for Miri. Long Akah is close to the village of Long San which has a rural health clinic, a primary and secondary school and a Roman Catholic mission and Borneo Evangelical (BEM) church. Today, several ethnic groups, predominantly Kenyah, Kayan and Penan, collectively known as Orang Ulu live in the village of Long San.

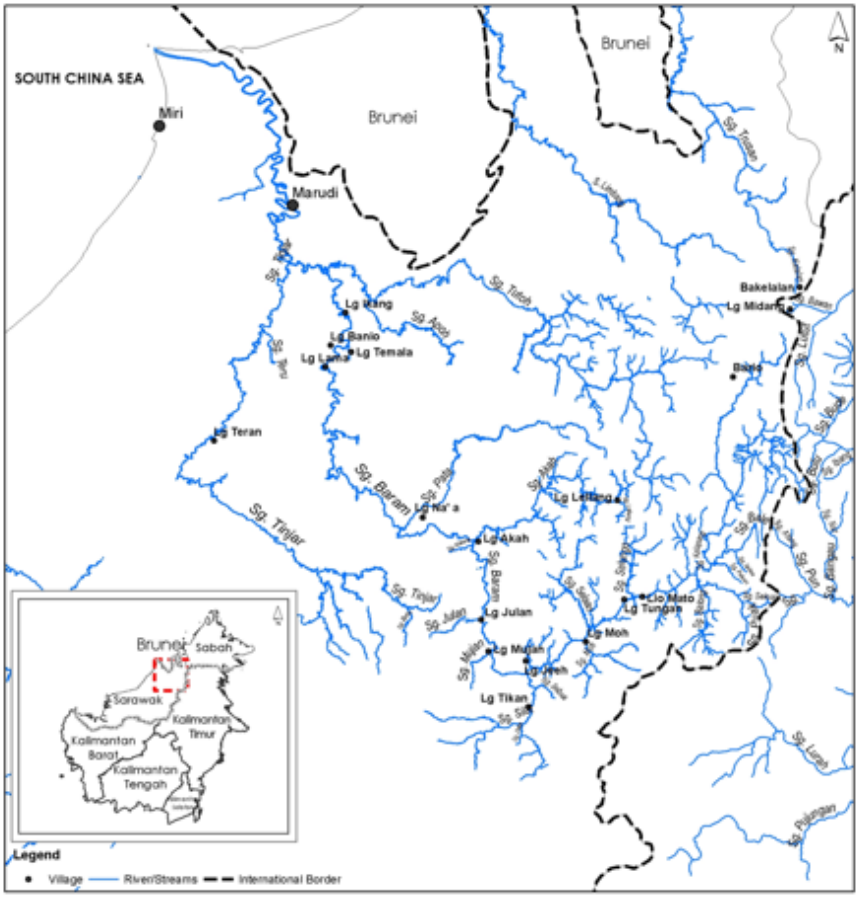

Figure 2: Map of Long Akah and the Baram (Map: Lee Guan Heng)

LITERATURE REVIEW

This history examines not just building of the fort but will set the fort in the context of the transition from Brunei rule to Brooke government and the successive eras of colonial and contemporary governments. A major source for the written history of this era in the Baram is the *Sarawak Gazette*. The limitations of the accounts in the *Sarawak Gazette* are that the reports are influenced not only by colonial bias of the expatriate officers but also by the bias of the specific interests of local leaders and native officers who acted as the collaborators with the district office and as go-betweens for the remoter people living up-river. It is also important to bear in mind that from the 1880s to 1912, the source of the reports was the resident based at Fort Hose in Marudi. After this, headquarters of the Fourth Division Resident shifted to Miri on 12 December 1912 and Marudi became the centre for the District Office for the Baram District.

There are no comprehensive written histories of the Baram region. Tom Harrisson collected a number of oral histories from Kenyah sources in the 1940s and 1950s and these have been documented and are conserved at the Central Borneo Archive at Cornell University Echols Collection. Despite the lack of information on the context and sources for these manuscripts, these are a rich source for Kenyah perspectives on their history.

Richard Goldman's essay is a useful introduction to the history of trade in the Baram from the perspective of Marudi bazaar (Goldman 1968). Daniel Chew's ethnographic account of Chinese traders

in the outstations provides insights into the challenges of the lives of Chinese pioneers upriver (Chew 1990). Jerome Rousseau's panoramic history of Central Borneo (1990) provides useful pointers regarding warfare and migrations of Kenyah and Kayan groups across Borneo. James Ritchie's book on Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau provides an outline of the history of the Temenggong and his family as told by his descendants and provides view of his importance as a local leader based close to the fort at Long Akah (Ritchie 2006). Fong Ah Ong's history of the Baram basin (2008) covers significant eras in the history of Miri and the Chinese community, but barely touches on upriver life. Peter Metcalf's book (Metcalf 2010) serves as a useful background study to the ethnography and history of area, while he focusses more particularly on the Berawan people of the Tinjar, a tributary of the Baram. Helen Godfrey's study of trade in the Baram stresses the agency of its inhabitants and the incoming Chinese and Iban in creating the commercial transformation of the district after the years of cession to Sarawak. Her attention to the details of overland tracks and local knowledge of forest products highlights the strong position of the indigenous people in the trade chain (Godfrey 2014).

John Ting's doctoral thesis is a unique historical architectural and ethnographic study important to understanding the processes of the making of the forts in Sarawak and uncovers that many forts, when they moved on from being a temporary edifice, were constructed with prefabricated parts made by carpenters in Kuching (Ting 2014: 278). His case study of the history of the fort at Skrang and its relocation to Simanggang represents an in-depth exploration of the significance of making forts in the emergent Brooke state. He analyses not only the form of the fort but discusses its architecture in relation to its many functions. In his formulation of a postcolonial framework for his study, he highlights the importance of an ethnographic approach utilizing the perspectives of indigenous peoples. He illustrates how the making of the fort reflected a precarious negotiated form of government that relied on local allies. He concludes that although forts were built according to standard patterns, each fort presents its unique angle on colonial government based on its history and the influence of local and migrant groups (Ting 2014: 281). This study takes its cue from the notion of the fort as a vehicle for a distinctive history of an area and uses indigenous oral histories and recollections as "alternative history" (Tuhiwai Smith 2004:34). Forts were built during and after pacification and this process was dependent on the collaboration of local leaders whose influence was ritually prescribed by the *adat* (Mashman 2020). So, while the fort at Long Akah represented locally a locus of power for the Brooke administration, it will be seen that this power was dependent on a crucial local collaboration in governance.

METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted with members of the Kenyah and Kelabit diaspora in Kuala Lumpur, Kuching and Miri in December 2019 and January 2020 and information was also taken from earlier interviews in the upper Baram in 2018. During January 2020, two extensive focus group meetings were held with elders from Long San in Miri and I draw on their reminiscences. This was supported by email correspondence during the research period in early 2020. Field work at Long San proved impossible because of the movement control order imposed in 2020 due to the Covid19 virus.

THE FORT IN THE PATA -THE PRECURSOR TO THE FORT AT LONG AKAH

The first time a fort in the upper Baram at Long Akah was mooted was in June 1888. This happened when it was reported that the entire Baram population had paid taxes for 1887 and 1888, indicating acceptance of the Brooke regime. The Baram was peaceful, except for friction between local longhouses and wandering Iban jungle produce collectors (Pringle 2010:268). The purpose of this fort would be to defend the frontier with Dutch Borneo and protect the local populations. At the same time, it was felt that the presence of such a fort close to the frontier, would encourage a sense of security in border areas and encourage trade from over the border. Furthermore, the presence of an upriver fort would also ease the workload of the Baram Resident's office in Marudi:

> I am disposed to think that there would be little risk in establishing the station even as far up as Long Akah, which Mr. Daubeny reports to be the most suitable location, particularly if it is impressed on the chiefs and people widely that, the station will be for their protection. (Everett 1888:77).

The rationale at this time for establishing the fort was that the Baram was thought to be a peaceful area, and a lucrative trade might be established with remote tribes living in the headwaters of rivers flowing in Dutch Borneo. It took some time for this to come into fruition. This may have been due to the instability during the 1890s created by the large numbers of displaced peoples, mainly Kenyah Badang, moving into the Tinjar and Silat river systems as a consequence of the expeditions of 1895 and 1896 against the peoples of the Usun Apau (Mashman 2019: 425). In addition, at this time there were continual hostilities between incoming Iban gutta percha collectors working close to Kayan and Kenyah settlements (Godfrey 2014:126). Thus, the Resident was preoccupied with establishing peace with many different groups as the peace-makings of 1896, 1897, 1898 with the Badeng and with the Kelabit in 1898.

The building of the first fort in the upper Baram was the fort at Long Daloh in the Pata close to the longhouse of Penghulu Tama Bulan Wang. Penghulu Tama Bulan Wang was an important local chief in the history of the Baram as he escorted Resident Charles Hose on his momentous journeys into the interior, particularly into Madang country in the headwaters of the Silat and he was responsible for organizing a number of peace-making ceremonies. The fort at Long Akah went on to be identified, with his powerful descendant, Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau.

Tama Bulan's forbears, the Kenyah Long Tekan people, originated from the Usun Apau and migrated to the estuary of the Tekan stream and the Silat river, at a place called Long Tekan. Tama Bulan consolidated his family at a longhouse at Long Daloh on the Pata (Galvin 1975:81). Plans for the fort in the Pata were reported in 1898. The local community at Tama Bulan's longhouse would obtain the "heavy timber" as required. There was a short-term plan for the fort as it was anticipated that if the people from Long Daloh moved onto the main Baram River within the following decade, the fort would be taken with them (Hose 1898a:139). This reflects an indigenous practice of building and dismantling longhouses to accommodate frequent migrations, which was carried over to the forts (Ting 2014:203). The location for this fort was not Resident Charles Hose's ideal choice: he would have preferred to locate this fort at Long Akah or Long Silat. However, he weighed this against Tama Bulan's strong feelings that the fort should be based at Long Daloh. Tama Bulan was more than an ally for Charles Hose, he was an advisor and a major influence on the peoples of the Baram. Hose had no choice but to comply with Tama Bulan's wishes once the Rajah had given the go-ahead for this fort to be built. The Pata River was well populated and Tama Bulan had over two thousand followers. This location had some advantages as it was not far from the Silat or the Kelabit country (Hose 1898b:170). The fort built near his longhouse on the Pata river, was a meeting point for trading activities. However, this was no mere shed nor storehouse, but a fort, built of belian in a strategic and scenic location as Charles Hose reports:

> I reached Tama Bulan's house on 28TH and examined the new Fort which has been built by the Kenyahs in the Pata. It is very well constructed and nearly all the wood used is billian, the position is a good one, and the view exceedingly pretty; the height above the river is about seventy feet (Hose 1899:102).

Such a building, erected with government support at Long Daloh, Tama Bulan's village, enhanced the prestige and stature of Tama Bulan. Its presence was a physical manifestation of the political coalition between Tama Bulan, Penghulu – an appointed leader over a number of Kenyah tribes – and Charles Hose, the Resident. It was referred to as a fort and later in 1904 as a government bungalow, which made

a convenient place for government representatives to stop as they collected taxes (Douglas 1905a:12). As indicated in the map below, Charles Hose marked this site on his 1900 map of the Baram district, but omitted the fort at Marudi, suggesting this was a place of some importance to himself, given the very particular nature of his relationship with Tama Bulan Wang (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Map of Fort on Pata (Map: Charles Hose (1900))

There is a Kenyah oral history about the building of this fort, by the local people, narrating that Hose proposed to Tama Bulan the fort at Long Daloh in the Pata be built as the Kelabit had problems going to Marudi to pay their tax:

> Tama Bulan consented to this and returned, He promptly asked the Kayans and the Kenyahs to gather materials and they built the *kubu* in an ulu style. A Brunei named Yacob was stationed to record payment of tax. It was Tama Bulan who actually received the tax. The Kelabit came to pay their taxes there for about ten years. When that Kubu broke down another was built at Lio Mato[1].

It is also interesting to note that a Brunei Malay was stationed at the fort to keep records for the government, demonstrating the need of the Brooke administration for accountability. The fact that Kelabit went to the Pata river to pay tax is supported by a Kelabit oral history which describes the journey from Long Semiyang to Long Lutin on the Patah using a footpath following the headwaters of Akah river (Mashman 2018:165).

THE BUILDING OF THE FORT AT LONG AKAH

Curiously a blockhouse or fort existed at Long Akah, but there appears to be no report of the making of this in the monthly Baram reports of the *Sarawak Gazette*. A fort existed at Long Akah as recorded in 1905: "A force assembled at the *fort* at Long Akah to prepare for a punitive expedition to Dutch Borneo" (Douglas 1905b:148). It was also described as a block-house "I made the block-house at Long Akah my headquarters" (Douglas 1907:31). Yet these early accounts of the fort seem to escape the attention of the official gazetteers of the fort in the official history of the *Sarawak Gazette*, who write the fort at Long Akah was built in 1914 and rebuilt in 1930. Indeed, the dates given in the Sarawak Gazette for the

[1]Harrisson Manuscript 48/4. *The Kalabits are Subdued*. Echols Collection. Cornell University.p17

fort at Long Akah state that the first fort was built when C.D. Adams was Resident2 which could have been any time from 1914 to 1922. This is borne out by a report in the *Gazette* of the visit of Penghulu Oyong Jau, nephew to Tama Bulan, visiting the Marudi fort.

> Oyong Jau, Kenyah Chief accompanied by Aban Tingang and all their families arrived to pay in tax. Most of the women had never been down to the fort before. The *Penghulu* paid in tax to amount $1,050. He reported that the block-house at Long Akar was nearly finished only the *ataps* remaining to be put on (Aplin 1914a:5).

The use of the term *ataps* suggest a temporary roofing made of palm leaves rather than the more permanent use of belian shingles. The term block-house implies that this fort was a small one-storey building. Oyong Jau and his followers had moved to live opposite the fort at this time (Aplin 1914b:84), and this suggests the Long Tekan people were involved in the building of the fort. Thus, the fort at Long Daloh was abandoned and the fort at Long Akah was rebuilt in fulfilment of the earlier understanding when the fort at Long Daloh was originally built, that it eventually should be moved to the main Baram River, when the Long Tekan people moved there. (Hose 1898a:139).

The fort was rebuilt in 1930 by contract under supervision of the Resident and the Public Works Department. The progress of its construction was indicated in a series of reports indicating the detailed attention of the Resident who personally pegged out the site (Pollard 1930a:77). In the next report, the posts were erected and its "imposing structure" was commended (Pollard 1930b:105). A *dapor* or outhouse used for cooking was the last feature to be added (Pollard 1931a :20). The final report sums up the achievement of the aims of its construction: "The Fort is very well built and will last for years, and the grounds are much better kept than formerly." (Pollard 1931b:67). The fort represented the function of government in the interior and it was essential that its structure was solid and "imposing" and its grounds reflected a colonial sense of propriety and order. The ideal, as expressed by Douglas for Lio Mato, was that a fort should look "clean and civilized" (Douglas 1911: 22).

It is likely that the fort in 1930 was reconstructed using prefabricated parts made by Chinese and Malay carpenters as a two-storey building (Ting 2014: 202). It was two storeys high and built with a corner tower at a 45-degree angle. This type of fort is similar in style to the fort built at Lio Mato.

Figure 4: Fort of Long Akah 2017 (Photo: Abraham Ngu)

The description that follows is based on the vestiges of the two- storey fort at Long Akah (Figure 4). The ground floor was divided in to a large main room and two smaller ones (Figure 5). The main room

[2] Forts of the Baram. *Sarawak Gazette*, October 31,1961:196.

had a low partition which facilitated barter trading (*tamu*) and a smaller room was used to store goods. Another small room was a lock-up for prisoners. A staircase led to the second floor. The second floor was the office and living quarters of the visiting resident, district officer or native officer. The court room had a decorated dais with ornate Kenyah designs for the officiating magistrate (Figure 6). Between the overhanging roof and the timber walls was a long gap reinforced with trellis work made of belian timber to provide ventilation (Figure 6). The original roof was made of belian shingles, but this has been replaced with a metal roof. The men associated with rebuilding the fort in local narratives were called Sulaiman and Ismael Osman (the latter, a URA locally known as Seman) and their names also recur in the stories about the building of Lio Mato. John Wan Usang recalls that the fort had not changed in the 1960s very much from its earlier times, "I remember the wood used to build the fort was rough – possibly was hand hewn and the walls thick. There was a raised platform to sit on."

Figure 5: Ground floor of Fort of Long Akah 2015 (Photo: Christine Horn)

Figure 6: The Upstairs Court Room 2015 (Photo: Christine Horn)

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE FORT: MIGRATIONS ON THE BARAM RIVER

The forts were established during periods of pacification and were places where the Brooke regime could impose law and order at the local level. The regime wanted settlements to move to the proximity of the forts so that communities could be monitored. The forts were also venues where hostile groups could meet for peace-makings. For example, in 1907, there was the first recorded peace-making ceremony recorded at the fort at Long Akah when Utang Ratu, a Kelabit of Pa Mein, swore his loyalty to the government in the presence of Penghulus Lawai Jau and Wan Bayer and Bua Hassan, the chief of the Baram Bruneis. Utang Ratu promised to move down closer to Panglah, on the Tutoh, to comply with the wishes of the Brooke administration that remote people should move closer to the fort as the seat of governance (King 1908:41). However, nothing came of this. According to Kelabit narratives, the Pa Mein people refused to move away from their salt springs to relocate downriver (Lian Saging 1976/77:183). It also took some time for the Kenyah to move from the tributaries to the main river, to be closer to the fort. The idea that the Long Tekan should move to Long Palai after harvest was also proposed in 1907, "and make one large village of the following Kenyah tribes: Long Tikan, Leppu Sang, Long Belukun, Teppu Ann, Leppu Ga, Leppu Likan, Leppu Jingan, Leppu Abong and Leppu Lutong." (Douglas 1907:31). However, this did not happen and the issue of where people should move to was still being discussed when T.S. King visited a year later in 1908 (King 1908 :41). A Kelabit oral history comments on Tama Lawai Jau's reluctance to move onto the main Baram river at this time, possibly because land there was not so fertile (Mashman 2018:169).

Nonetheless, Douglas observed in 1910 that people had begun to move down the Akah and the Silat, tributaries of the main Baram river. "All these people are moving towards the main river and building fine new houses" (1910:26). Two years later, he reported that, "Information was received from Penghulu Tama Lawai Jau that he and his people were all moving out of the Pata River into the *Ulu* Baram and that they had already reached Long Pata" (Douglas 1912a:101). By 1914, Penghulu Oyong Tama Lawai Jau's longhouse was located opposite the Chinese settlement at Long Akah (Aplin 1914b:84).

THE CHINESE BAZAAR AT LONG AKAH AND UPRIVER TRADE

In tracing the history of early settlements in Sarawak, there was a pattern whereby after a fort was built, a trading centre would become soon established (Pringle 2010:91). It is difficult to identify a date for the establishment for the Long Akah bazaar. Chinese boat traders had been visiting Long Akah before 1905 when the Long Lama bazaar was established. Chan Boh Siong who was said to be one of the pioneers of Long Lama bazaar was a former boat trader at Long Akah (Chew 1990:77). A bazaar at Long Akah is mentioned in 1912, when there was a bazaar of 8 shops, all of which were destroyed by a fire originating in Ah Choon's shop (Douglas 1912b:265). By 1920, it was reported that a new bazaar would be built at Long Akah, at the same time that bazaars were being built at Long Lobang and Long Ayah on the Tinjar, and Long Apoh (Adams 1919:247). Chinese traders had managed to negotiate the rapids and penetrate into the Kayan and Kenyah heartlands as Chew notes (Chew 1990:76). For example, Yap Poh Chai, the son of a Long Akah trader was born in 1920 in Marudi. At the age of 16 without any schooling he became a boat trader in the upper Baram plying between Long Akah, Lio Mato and Long Lellang. His boat was large and he took with him several local assistants as boat hands and had to wait patiently for water levels to be safe to negotiate the hazardous rapids. He would only go to Marudi about twice a year, when he had collected enough jungle produce such as gutta percha, damar and bezoar stones. Boat traders such as Yap Poh Chai adapted to riverine life and played an important part in the expansion of trade in the early twentieth century (Chew 1990:96). They took huge risks in providing goods on credit as their clients might subvert the system and take their wares to sell elsewhere in the bazaar and avoiding paying back the debts, they owed the boat traders (Chew 1990:118).

Chinese trading practices came closely under government scrutiny. Traders were not allowed to go beyond certain areas for which they had not been licensed, thus court cases were brought against those

who ventured beyond Long Akah and the Kelabit highlands. Traders were encouraged to settle permanently in bazaars. In 1919 traders at Long Akah were instructed to build a new bazaar and if they did not, they would be declared bankrupt and sent down river (Chew 1990:125). They were admonished for selling medicines to the upriver people "at the most exorbitant prices." (Carpenter 1923a:214). Brooke officers were concerned that trade should be conducted fairly and monitored instruments used for weighing and measuring during their journeys upriver (Owen 1924b:296). Forts such as Marudi, Long Akah and Lio Mato were places where enforcement could take place as traders had to often pass by or stop at these forts where they might be inspected. The courts were used as a means for settling disagreements and numerous cases of debt and cheating were dealt with in the Baram district as Godfrey notes (2014:116). Local court cases were heard at Long Akah by visiting officers for the whole of the upriver district.

THE TAMU AT LONG AKAH

As the Brooke administration began to regulate trade, the *tamu*, which was a barter trade meeting, was conducted officially under government supervision. The *tamu* was based on a time-honoured system of trade in the interior, whereby the Penan in the deep interior traded goods with neighbouring groups. It is possible to detect the emergence of a Kayan and Kenyah trading class such as Muing Tingang and Penghulu Lanyau through success at the *tamu*, who went on to occupy shophouses at Long Akah, alongside their Chinese counterparts. In the 1920s the trade meetings with the Penan at Long Akah, Long Malinau in the Tutoh, and on the Akah and Selungoh rivers were organized through the Baram Resident's office. These were meetings supported by a travelling paramedical assistant known as a dresser. The Resident was escorted by a native officer or upriver agent and Kayans and Kenyahs were intermediaries at the *tamu* who paid tax on behalf of the Penan, which the government officers perceived was against Penan interests (Woodward 1926:153).These meetings continued into the 1930s and the attempts of the government to regulate trade, for example by sacking Penghulu Aban Wan of Long San for violating trading regulations, had little effect on the government's attempt to control trade (Anonymous 1936 :315). Hudden noted that when he travelled the *tamu* circuit to Long Akah, Lio Mato and Long Malinau that attendance of the *tamu* was poor and surreptitious trading was going on which defied government regulations (Hudden 1936:96). Elders from Long San recalled Muing Tingang was always asserting that the Kenyah should not be short-changed by the Chinese in trade. At the same time, they also admitted that the Orang Ulu themselves used to soak the jelutong in water before sending it to the bazaar so that that would fetch a better price as the water made it heavier.[3]

THE ROLE OF THE FORT IN GOVERNMENT – THE URA

A precursory glance at the outstation reports for the Baram can provide some insight into the local component in the management of the area under the jurisdiction of the fort. This is a further illustration of the way governance was dependent on local collaboration. The up-river agents (URA) were like the native officers, in that they served as intermediaries between the local chiefs and the European administrators and ensured that longhouse chiefs cooperated with government (Talib 1995:289). The URA were considered in the same breath as the community leaders such as the Penghulu and Temenggong as "the ears and eyes" of the government. In the colonial era, each Baram fort had a designated URA posted to look after each station. The URA were consulted by the local people who held them in high esteem (Ding n.d. 89). The URA was a jack of all trades a police man, a judge of local matters to be taken to the district office, and alternative place to the headman to take grievances, or he

[3]For the reader who is interested in learning more about the attempts to regulate trade through the *tamu*, they should refer to Jayl Langub's article on the *tamu* (Langub 2013).

might just be a caretaker making sure the fort and grounds were well maintained.4 In the Baram, a number of early URA at the forts were of Lakiput origin such as Bernard Collin Belawing, Melai Usang, Ismail Seman and Tama Usang Bakar. The latter two were both Muslim Lakiput from Kpg. Benawa. In addition, there URA who were Bisaya from Long Linei on the Tutoh river, such as Tama Raud Abang, Datu Mohammed Zen Galau.

DATU MOHAMMED ZEN GALAU AND THE URA AT LONG AKAH

Datu Mohammed Zen Galau who rose in his career in the Sarawak Administration from being URA to become a prominent leader to be honoured with a school, a kindergarten and a kampong named after him. He was fluent in speaking Kelabit, Kenyah, Iban, Malay and few other local dialects and as well as Bisaya. He was very well-versed in the Orang Ulu cultures as well as the Iban, Chinese and Malay culture and was very well respected and able to advise people and resolve disputes (Ding nd:90).

Galau, as he was called in his early career, was the upriver agent or URA most commonly associated with Long Akah in the early days of the fort. He was first referred to as an "inspector" collecting items for a major Sarawak exhibition in Singapore indicating that he was a person held in trust by his superiors Douglas 1922:104). He was literate and when he was stationed for periods at Long Akah he sent regular reports to the Resident. In one of these, he informed the acting Resident H.L. Owen of an influenza epidemic that had killed five of the Long Tekan Kenyah (Owen 1924a:169). As a representative of the Resident's office, Galau had extensive travelling duties, which demonstrate how the Fort at Long Akah was a base for the administration over a very wide area; from the Silat river, to the Akah and to the Kelabit highlands. For example, Galau had to journey to the Silat river with the Penghulus Tama Wan Bayer and Tingang Wan to the Silat to tell the Kenyah and Kayan living there to move to the main Baram River (Carpenter 1923b :252). He went to ask the upriver groups to go to Marudi to pay their gun licences and tax (Owen 1925a:59). When the Kelabit did not do this, he had no choice but to trek up into the highlands to find out why they had not come (Owen 1925b:115). He was an important point of contact between the administration and the Kelabit indicating his seniority over whoever was stationed at this time at the Fort at Lio Mato. He brought a murderer of a Brian from over the border together with his Pa Trap kin to be dealt with by the administration in Marudi (Ermen 1926:16). He travelled extensively with the Resident H.L. Owen to all the villages of Kelabit country with Native Officer Wan Mohammed, collecting taxes and then breaking the journey at Lio Mato and Long Akah and collecting taxes again. (Owen 1926:297). After some leave back in his village of Long Linei, he was certified to be fit for service and was stationed again at Long Akah on a temporary basis as native officer (Pollard 1930a:77). During this term of duty, he was tasked with investigating rumours of an impending attack from people from over the border in the Kelabit highlands (Pollard 1930b:105) A couple of years later, he had to deal with a man who had run amok and killed four people (Pollard 1931c:253) and to assist at the court hearing (Pollard 1932a:17). He escorted the district officer D.C. White as he went to Miri to meet the Rajah with all the leading chiefs of the Baram (White 1933:57). He was the person who was entrusted to seek opinions in each village in the Kelabit highlands regarding the appointment of a new Penghulu, to replace the deceased Penghulu Tingang (Hudden 1936:96). He was also highly regarded by the colonial officers who took over Sarawak after the Japanese occupation, He was asked to escort H.P.K. Jacks on the first trip of the British Colonial administration after the Japanese Occupation to the upper Baram and the highlands. [5] He obtained an MBE for his services and it was hoped that he would continue to "make available to the government his unrivalled knowledge of

[4]Retired civil servant Datu Ose Murang personal communication.

[5] The Ulu Baram and the Kelabit Country. The Visit of the District officer. *Sarawak Gazette*. December 2, 1946:57-59.

the district and its people" (Drake 1952:110). With his ethnically mixed background, he exemplified the potential for the upward mobility of the junior members of the civil service.

Belawing Tingang is another URA who was a significant figure in the history of Long Akah. In 1913 at the age of 15, he was enrolled in the Good Shepherd School in Marudi where he was baptised as a Catholic. From then on he became known as Bernard Collin Belawing. He was Lakiput with Iban and Tanjong ancestry. His first post at the age of 19 was as a policeman in Miri. After returning to his village for a while at Kuala Tutoh, where he married, he went to take up the post of URA at Long Akah in the early 1940s. He looked after the stores at the fort during 1945 when the allied soldiers were based there. He met and married his second wife Asong Paren, a local Kenyah, one of the granddaughters of Tama Bulan Wang. He opened the first school at the fort in 1946. In later years, Belawing was requested by then Penghulu Gau Jau to teach at the first school at Long Ikang in the 1950s. He also taught the Catholic faith to the people of Long Ikan where he stayed until 1956 when returned he to his home village at Kuala Tutoh.

LOCAL MEMORIES OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

When the Japanese occupied the Baram in 1941 they asked the people to join them as soldiers. This was the response of Penghulu Muing Ajang:6 "We the people of the Ulu did not fight against the Japanese. We could not join as soldiers because we do not have enough men to feed our families at home. If there is other work which we can help maybe we accept it." The Penghulu agreed to supply the Japanese with food. He was summoned to three meetings with the Japanese governor and was given a medal by the Japanese. One of the worst aspects of this period was that the Japanese forced the Baram people to surrender their guns, on the pretext that cartridges were not available. This meant that people went hungry. They were also deprived of salt (Harrisson 1966:377). Ping Keling was around eight to ten years old at the time of the Japanese Occupation. She reminisced, "It was a tough time, we couldn't get commodities. There was no cooking oil, no salt, no matches. Our clothes were made of bark cloth *talun*. It was easily torn. We planted tapioca and made it into flour to sell to the Japanese soldiers." Veronica Bungan, a friend of Ping Keling, remembered that the Japanese came regularly to the longhouse. People were forced to give them rice and tapioca. The Japanese who visited went straight to the longhouse rather than the fort, as it was where people were living. Their purpose was to scrounge food from the local people as they were hungry. The fort was left empty at this time. Veronica continues her story: "We were very hungry as we didn't plant much padi. Barely only enough to sell to the Japanese. They took all we had." She remembers it as a time when people's daily activities were curtailed, "We didn't go hunting as we were scared of encountering the Japanese in the forest. There was no fishing nets *jala* -we could only go fishing with a simple rod made from a palm."

Veronica remembers being very frightened of the Japanese soldiers "If someone was ill, they had a strange way of healing people – they would stroke their sword blades on peoples' necks." She would escape to hide in the attic of the longhouse where the mats were kept. People were scared of the Japanese. Ping remembers when the planes came flying over people would hide in cavities in the riverbank. She also recalled that there was a handsome young Japanese soldier who would come to the longhouse who was well-liked. He was escorted by the Malay shopkeepers *towkay* Midin and Ahmad from Long Akah bazaar. People liked this young soldier -they made him feel welcome. There was a particular girl he liked, Balu Dayang Supang. He wanted to take her with him but her family would not let her go.

[6] Also known as Weng Ajang, Wing Ajang. In 1950 he was made Temenggong, paramount chief of all the Orang Ulu and became known as Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau.

The elders from Long San recalled the arrival of the European soldiers. People heard from the Kelabit, that Major Carter and Major Harrisson had landed by parachute in Bario. The Japanese had just left Long Akah for downriver. Penghulu Muing Ajang informed Tom Harrisson that he had gathered his people to come to Long Akah. He sent notice for two men from each longhouse to come and join the European soldiers but no one came, so he gathered a force from his own people (Harrisson 1966:375). The elders of Long San remembered it was an anxious time of decision making – the question was whether these white soldiers should be handed over to the Japanese.

THE REOCCUPATION OF THE FORT AT LONG AKAH 1945

"This substantial old fort built of bellian wood was a logical choice for a HQ."

(Courtney1993:88)

The fort at Long Akah became the base for the Semut 2 operatives who reached there on May 1, 1945 (Figure 7). They were members of the Australian based Z specials, who had first parachuted into Bario on 25 March 1945 led by Major Tom Harrisson. The leader of overall operations and Semut 2 was Major Toby Carter, a New Zealand engineer who had worked for Sarawak Shell as an oilfield surveyor. Major Bill Sochon was with Semut 2 at this initial stage, but went on to lead the operations of Semut 3, based in Belaga. He had worked in Sarawak before the war in the Police and Prison service as Assistant Superintendent. Sochon and Carter made the arduous journey from Bario, through Long Lellang to Long Akah. The downriver journey on the fast-flowing Akah river was done in stages using fresh boats at each overnight longhouse stop. They won favour with the locals, by paying the boat crews 50 cents a day in Straits dollars, which was more than they had ever been paid by the Japanese. They received a warm welcome at the longhouses where they stopped with pigs roasted in their honour and they realized they would have no trouble in raising an army of irregulars to assist them with their mission. The only problem was a lack of weapons (Courtney 1993:87). Sochon describes the moment when he first caught site of the fort, while travelling by river, some four days after leaving Long Lellang: **"**Eventually on the fourth day (May 1) the old Sarawak Government *kubu* (fort) at Long Akah swung into view as we reached the final bend." (Courtney 1993:88).

Once Sochon arrived at Long Akah, he and Carter who had arrived in an advance group four days earlier, went to visit Penghulu Muing Ajang at Long San. They needed to gain his support, as he was an influential chief over the whole of the upper Baram area. They spent anxious hours waiting until the small hours of the morning to see if the Penghulu and his chiefs would agree to assist the Semut operations. Once the Penghulu announced their unanimous support, news spread quickly and many headmen came by boat to the fort to pledge their loyalty and support to Carter. The operatives had to delay further action as they had to wait for an airdrop of radio equipment to replace a damaged transmitter and they spent time training local guerrillas to use .303 rifles (Courtney 1993:88).

Figure 7: Fort at Long Akah in 1945 (*Photo: Sarawak Museum)*

The fort was an important base for the Semut 2 as the presence of the Z special forces demonstrated to all in the vicinity, they had taken control of the area. Datuk Stephen Wan Ullok, a six-year-old boy at the time, recollects "The fort was kept lit up at night by the allies … you could see it from the longhouse at night." At the fort, Bill Sochon was keenly aware of the historical significance of the Semut 2 occupation of the fort and carved a wooden plaque to commemorate the event in history (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Wooden plaque carved by Bill Sochon (Photo Lim (2005: 369)).

It marked "the reoccupation of fort at Long Akah and the reestablishment of the Sarawak Government by HM forces." The names carved on the plaque were as follows Major G.S. Carter, Captain W.L.P. Sochon of the British Army and Warrant Officer II D.L. Horsnell, and Sergeants C.W. Pare, K.W. Hallam J.K.Barrie, The Soen Hin , Abu Kassim of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (Courtney 1993:89). This plaque was originally at the fort for many years, but seems to have disappeared around thirty years ago.

There are random local recollections of this time. There is a local memory attached to a banyan *lunuk* tree on the opposite bank of the river to the fort. Lt W.S. Eldie got stuck in this tree as he parachuted to land at Long Akah. He needed local people to climb the tree and help him down with a rope. He became known as "Tuan Lunuk". Ping Keling remembers that parachute cloth was used in the longhouse for

making clothes. Cloth had been in short supply and this was much more durable than bark cloth. Another memory from Anthony Lawai was that his grandfather, a Kayan, Uloi Jau who had previously helped Ismail Seman rebuild the fort, became a cook and laundryman for the Semut 2 forces and was paid 20 dollars a month. William Jallong recalled how the local population came to support the Z Special forces:

> The local people made the *padang* in front of the fort, by clearing land for the white soldiers. They asked for our help. The reply was, 'If you get together 500 guns for us then we can help you. Many Orang Ulu helped. We managed to get together 500 men. They had to give back the guns after the war.

On 19 May, supplies were dropped and the locals who helped the operatives with collecting their supplies were rewarded with parachute cloth. Among these items was replacement radio equipment. Hallam and Pare organized the radio in a rubber plantation over 300 metres from the fort. They became the subject of great scrutiny by the local Kenyah who would talk very loudly and prevent the operatives from communicating effectively by radio. Hallam and Pare played a practical joke by giving the crowd of men, who were wearing bark-cloth loincloths, a mild electric shock through wires that were wound a hand rail against which these men were leaning. The locals retaliated by blowing blow pipe darts at the operatives while they were washing their shirts in the river (Courtney 1993:90).

On 22 June, Semut 3 leader Bill Sochon, assisted by Keith Barrie and Abu Kassim left Long Akah to journey by river to Long Pawan and then to travel on foot to Belaga. After a very long and difficult journey, they reached Belaga on 1 June 1945 to establish operations as Semut 3 (Fong 2008 :406). The Semut 2 forces master-minded operations against the Japanese in the Baram and Tutoh rivers engaging local guerillas to support them. In early July, the Semut 2 team captured a Japanese communications station at Long Lama, on their journey down river to take control over Marudi. Men from Long San participated on the attack on Long Lama. The soldiers surrounded the fort that was the wireless station. Many of the Japanese escaped. However, the allies took control of the fort and the wireless centre the holes from the bullet holes could be seen at the Long Lama fort. There was an unhappy consequence of the attack on Long Lama. The longhouse at Long Pilah was targeted by the Japanese and some of its inhabitants were wounded. They were brought to Long Akah for treatment, as was a Japanese soldier who was also wounded. He was later sent to Labuan. Carter led the battle for Marudi with 7 European operatives and fifty local guerrillas. They managed to ambush and kill 20 Japanese soldiers and were forced to withdraw upriver, but a well-equipped force of Japanese retaliated by killing 17 local Malay residents of Marudi. Eventually Carter was able to retake control of Miri on 14 July with the help of the Australian 9th division infantry (Fong 2008:405). Some 123 Japanese were killed as a consequence of the action of Semut 2 and approximately another 100 as a result of actions taken by local Dayak and Orang Ulu (Long 1989:107). Not long after the war the Penghulu was given three medals for his service by Sir Anthony Abell. He then became known as the Orang Ulu Paramount Chief, Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau (Figure 9).

This was a significant endorsement of his leadership, which had been effective in bringing disparate groups of Orang Ulu together to fight the Japanese as a common enemy. Working alongside the European soldiers had given the Orang Ulu exposure to people who lived by different belief systems and prepared them for the changes of the post war years.

Figure 9: Senator Dato Sri Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau (Photo: Sarawak Museum)

POST WAR YEARS – A GUEST AT THE FORT WHO WORKED WITH THE PENAN

Former Councillor Anthony Lawai used to spend time at the fort at Long Akah as a child, with his grandfather, Uloi Jau who was charged with looking after the building in the 1950s. He remembers a particular visitor, Rodney Needham, who had a strong friendship with his grandfather. He would go and stay at the fort at Long Akah: "He'd come and help us harvesting. He would spend a lot of time with us in between visits to Penan every two weeks."

Rodney Needham was an anthropologist at the University of Oxford, who was awarded a DPhil for his research on the Penan. He was based for this research mainly in the upper Baram, from May 1951 to May 1952. In 1951, Commissioner-General for the U.K. in South East Asia, Malcolm MacDonald visited Long San. MacDonald recalls Needham as a young anthropologist among the Penan:

> As we breakfasted that morning at Long San, this remarkable young man, Rodney Needham by name, described how he had lived since our meeting with nomadic Penans on the upper Baram. He still resides in the deep jungle with a group of them, having ingratiated himself so successfully among them that they accepted him as a member of their tribe. He travelled, hunted, ate, gossiped and lodged with them… Needham had grown fond of his Penan friends (MacDonald 1968:299).

This impression of Needham is supported by a reminiscence by Kirk Endicott. He had the reputation for going native during fieldwork. He went to live with 'his' people as they did, wearing very little "and starving half the time" (Endicott 2007:17). Needham had "no particular brief for (evangelical Christian) missionaries" who were working in the area, but was keen to testify to MacDonald that their teaching of basic health and literacy was a force for good (MacDonald 1968:301).

In 1958 Needham returned to continue his Penan research and spent three months doing fieldwork, [7] travelling to Long Akah and Lio Mato, to Western Penan Kelame' in the Akah River, the newly settled Penan Silat, and the Muslim Penan in Beluru. Needham spent some time at Long Akah and his report testifies to significant changes he saw between 1951 and 1958. In 1958, he saw an improvement in prosperity indicated by people's clothes, the new outboard engines and the increase in trade in the bazaars. Malaria, venereal disease and yaws had been eradicated, although conjunctivitis and septicaemia were rife. He recommended that a travelling doctor be posted to the Baram to deal with the health issues of rural people. Communications had improved with the airstrip at Long Akah, which was used by the mission planes of the Borneo Evangelical Mission, who helped to send medical emergencies to hospital downriver.

He outlined the problems experienced by the Penan in their trading relationships in which they were exploited by their Kayan and Kenyah overlords but could not see any way of remedying the situation other than to continue the supervision of the *tamu*. He anticipated that any change brought in to further adjust trading relationships would have to be acceptable to the Temenggong who would wish to protect his traditional rights, his prestige and his fortune. He touched on the problematic relationship of indebtedness they had with Muing Tingang. He discussed in detail the possibilities of Penan settlement and a Penan reserve, changes in religious practices and education. The Penan were at a fragile stage in their history and much of his report highlights problems still faced by the Penan today. It is significant that he chose to stay at the fort and make his base rather than the Long San longhouse. For him to stay with the Kenyah leaders at Long San may have compromised his research given the complicated relationships between the Penan with the Long San people, which he touches on in his report.

POST WAR YEARS -BECOMING ROMAN CATHOLIC AND THE FIRST SCHOOL

It is said that URA Belawing Tingang was the person who most influenced the Temenggong -at that time he was known as Penghulu Muing Ajang and the longhouse at Long San to become Catholic. He convinced Penghulu Muing Ajang and his followers to embrace the Catholic faith (*sembayang father*) and abandon their old belief system. Thus, Belawing led some young men two each from every longhouse, Long San, Long Selatong, Long Apu, Long Julan, Long Anap, Long Palai, and Long Tap paddled downriver to Marudi to fetch Father Henry Jensen to Long San to convert the Kenyah under the leadership of Penghulu Muing Ajang in the middle Baram into Catholicism in 1947.[8]

Penghulu Muing Ajang encouraged the establishment of the first school held the fort at Long Akah. Belawing Tingang was the first teacher at the Long Akah school. In the days after the end of the Japanese occupation, the lower floor was used as a school and the upper floor was used by the British Army's repatriating force (Ding n.d.: 187). Later the school took over most of the fort. Datuk Stephen Wan Ullok was an early pupil at the school, "Cikgu Tom Sylvester was my teacher, he was a Long Kiput who became Moslem." This was Guru Belawing's nephew, also known as Guru Selin (Guru Selin @Tom Sylvester) who probably taught together with Guru Belawing. William Jallong Lian went to the school at the fort at around the same time and remembers the following:

> There was Guru Selin and Guru Ta'ie a Malay teacher from Miri. We learnt the Malay language. There were 105 students. We used rocks as slates to write on and smaller stones as writing tools. There were benches for us to sit on. There was a black board and chalk for the teacher. I was in my late teens. All the pupils at the school were teenagers. At that time, there was only one girl at the school, Lohong Ngau.

[7] See Rodney Needham *Further notes on the welfare and administration of the Penan.* Report to the Colonial Government of Sarawak 1959.
[8] Henry Belawing personal communication.

> In the first year of school, we started off in the classroom downstairs and in the second year, we went upstairs. The teachers were paid by the government. We students didn't have to pay fees. The classes ran from 8am -12noon. The teachers were very kind. They did not use any physical punishment. I used to give the teachers papayas from our garden and they were good to me.

The Roman Catholic Mission took over the school in 1948 and eventually the new school building was opened in 1954 by F.B.K. Drake the District Officer for Baram district. The building was constructed of solid wood with the help of Brother Alexander (Drake 1954: 31). The school became a centre for the education of the Chinese, Kenyah and Penan students of the area. Some nine years later the school was inspected and was considered to be of a high standard. The school building was:

> elaborate, perhaps over-elaborate for the position and importance of the school…. There are not enough children in Long San to support such a large school and the pupils in Primary V and VI are almost without exception overaged (Smith 1963:308).

The phenomenon of having adult pupils in primary classes was not unusual in rural Sarawak at this time. Parents were expected to provide a supply of rice to sustain their school-going children. If there was a shortage of rice in the household, pupils could not go to school (Griffin 1950:179). The experience of pupils at rural school recalled by Manson Toynbee, group headmaster for the Baram in 1958, is typical for pupils in rural primary schools in the Baram right up into the 1970s. Pupils would only go back to their villages two or three times a year – and if they lived far away only once a year. Primary school students would take turns collect wood for fuel, light the hearth, cook their own meals. Their day would begin with work parties maintaining the school grounds. After that pupils would have a morning bath in the river, wash their clothes and then have breakfast before school. Lessons would take place from 7.30am until 1pm and then after lunch and a short rest, pupils would work on the school garden to ensure there were sufficient supplies of vegetables. There would be sports activities held in the late afternoon, then another bath in the river, followed by dinner and private study. Toynbee notes that children were unsupervised and didn't seem to need supervision (Toynbee 1997:90-92). Francisca Bilong a pupil at Long San school in the 1960s recalls her experiences which suggest that things became much stricter when the nuns took over the school:

> I was a boarder at Long San school. We were taught by nuns who were so strict that some of the girls refused to go back to school after a term there. I was envious of my cousin who didn't go to school but stayed at home. In fact, I was the eldest and being a girl, I was expected to look after my siblings if my parents went to the farm. Nonetheless my parents still encouraged me to go to school rather against their own needs and interests. We girls were called to do quite a few tasks such as sweeping the church and sweeping at the clinic. It was tough. We had to get up very early make sure we had enough firewood, cook our food, go to church- then have a full day of lessons. We would wash our own clothes collect firewood, gather food.

Another student John Wan Usang from Long San who went on to school at Long Lama was aware of the changing times and the tensions between following tradition and the modern fashions down river:

> The Temenggong would summon us when we got back at the end of term from Long Lama. We got scolded if we'd deviated from the traditional hairstyle of a straight fringe and a long cue at the back … We were keen to try out new hairstyles in the Elvis mode. He would summon us to his section of the verandah and asked us if we could *ngajat*. The verandah exits were sealed- there was no escape -we were forced to learn to dance.

The Temenggong was all too aware of the challenges of modernity and the importance of maintaining aspects of Orang Ulu culture and traditions. Schoolgirls were urged to maintain their extended earlobes and not follow the fashion having them cut, boys were expected to wear the traditional hairstyle with a

straight fringe and a long cue at the back. Girls and boys learnt cultural dancing on Saturday evenings at school and were encouraged to perform. During the Temenggong's time there was a flourishing of the arts at Long San, manifested in the traditional art work at his house. In 1953, Robert Nicholl commented that "his spacious chambers decorated by artists from Indonesia are quite without peer" (Nicholl 1953:208). Sadly, this house was burnt down in a fire in 1955, but the Temenggong managed to replace this artwork as observed by DO Mc Sporran in 1962: "above the wall is a magnificent series of painted carvings by Indonesian Kenyah craftsmen and Tama Berhasap of Long Jegan" (Mc Sporran 1962:159). Elders remember that the walls were decorated with motifs of animals depicting stylized dogs and tigers which were the protectors of the chiefly class of people.

All that remains of this patronage of the arts is his rice barn at Long San. The Roman Catholic church also reflected a local love for traditional motifs with similar embellishment in the interior of the church. This blending of traditional culture with Christian belief came about through the influence of the Temenggong whose vision was for his people to became Christian, to modernise their outlook through education and improved farming techniques but to retain aspects of their traditions such as traditional weddings and naming ceremonies.

FORMATION OF MALAYSIA – CONSULTATIONS IN THE BARAM

When the idea of Malaysia was brought to Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau, he was initially doubtful. He was concerned that his own people might get left behind "in a small part of this new garden of Malaysia and overshadowed by the tall trees; already bearing fruit in the rest of the country." (Galvin 1975:81-88). The Cobbold Commission was briefed to find out how people felt about joining the proposed Federation of Malaysia. Before meeting the Cobbold commission, the Temenggong summoned a meeting of local chiefs and the local priest, who expressed the apprehension that if Malaysia was formed, he might have to leave. It is suggested that this was a factor that influenced the Temenggong's reservation about Sarawak forming the Malaysian Federation as the church had bestowed a school and a church (Ritchie 2006:55) The Cobbold Commission concluded that the Orang Ulu did not want independence because they felt they still needed the British to stay "until they were able to look after themselves" (Cobbold Commission 1993:31).

Despite his reservations, the Temenggong had to accept and promote the concept of Malaysia to his people. In fact, the Temenggong became a member of the Dewan Negara when Sarawak jointly formed Malaysia in 1963 (Galvin 1975:81-88). The Temenggong represented the Orang Ulu on the national and international stage and demonstrated that at Long San, he was the human face of local power as guardian of the *adat* and tradition (Galvin 1975:87). He understood the trappings of power and was able to use these to his full advantage. He was compared to the British statesman Winston Churchill in his boldness, authority and eloquence (Harrisson 1966:374). His longhouse was likened to the glamorous British stately home Chatsworth (Nicholl 1953:208). He was the one who had mobilized the men of the Baram to defend Miri and Marudi during times of military threat in 1945 and later 1962 as will be described below. The fort provided an adjunct to his power, a place where court cases were heard, where visiting government officers and others such as Rodney Needham chose to stay, if they wished to distance themselves from the more luxurious surroundings of the longhouse at Long San.

MEMORIES OF CONFRONTATION

The impact of the War of Confrontation in Borneo from 1963 to 1966 between the newly emergent countries of Malaysia and Indonesia was felt in the border areas of Sarawak where much of the action took place. Long Akah was at a potentially vulnerable location as there were many routes through the border with Indonesia and Brunei. During this time, there was a great deal of activity around the fort at Long Akah. There was a military camp at Long Akah located about a kilometre away from the fort. People in Long San remembered the Kings Light Infantry Green jackets and the 1st Battalion 2nd

Gurkha Rifles -1/2GR who served in the early days of the conflict -although military groups came and went throughout this period. The longhouse was protected by an encampment of Gurkhas.

Border scouts were recruited from Long Akah, Long San and the surrounding villages. Their role was, in Tom Harrisson's words, to "serve as an auxiliary with expert local knowledge -aggressive within Sarawak's own territory and opposing any intruders" for training under the command of D squadron, 22nd SAS (Heimann 1998:344). They were first recruited in mid 1963 and were put under training by the SAS. Among those men people recall who joined the border scouts were Kallang Lenjau, Gau Engang, Mering Ngau, Arang Apui and Usang Laeng. In the 1940s, these men were able-bodied men who had come together to liberate Sarawak from the Japanese, in the 1960s they were men were coming together to fight incursions from over the border.

There was shooting practice held across the river. As a young boy Ho Thian Seng grew up at his father's shop, Chop Hong Ann at the bazaar at Long Akah and remembers watching the shooting practice. "I saw machine guns and mortar launchers. There were big green tents around the fort. The soldiers wore green uniforms. As young boys we were fascinated by the training sessions. We went to collect empty mortar shells. I suppose it was quite dangerous."

At the initial stages of the conflict, border scouts were sent out on missions on their own across the border to gather intelligence for the security forces. In early 1964 they came to work together with the Gurkhas and the SAS (Heimann 1998:345-346). The airstrip was a busy place with choppers constantly landing. The helicopters enhanced the capability of the security forces as the terrain was difficult and vast areas needed to be covered. With the use of helicopters and rural bases built at a distance from local settlements such as Bario, Lio Mato and Long Akah operations became decentralized. This meant that the helicopters and forward troops were kept together, instead of flying in and out from a central base. The advantage of this was that pilots were familiar with operations at the ground level, they got to know the terrain and were ready to respond to every emergency (James and Sheil-Small 1979:86).

The airfield had been built in 1957 at Long Akah, however the surface was not stable and it was considered unsuitable for scheduled flights by Borneo Airways. In 1962, a RAF twin pioneer bearing the Cobbold Commission got stuck and had to be dug out. In 1964, an aircraft was seriously damaged on landing because of problems with the surface which was described by an engineer as "a raft of grass flaring on slime" (Tan 2008:226). It was decided that the Gurkha engineers of 69th Gurkha Independent Field Squadron would extend the airstrip and improve the drainage and covered with pierced steel planking. In September 1965, two bulldozers, a tractor and a roller were dropped by a Beverley transport plane of No 34 Squadron and an Argosy of No 215 Squadron of the Far East Air force. Although Gabriel Tan writes these were "the heaviest objects to be airdropped in Borneo" (Tan 2008:226), John Wan Usang remembers the bulldozers coming down in component parts and rebuilt on site. "Bulldozers were parachuted down in pieces. Drums of petrol were parachuted in and broke we salvaged the kerosene." There were a number of logistical challenges involved in the rebuilding of the airstrip which included the transporting of the pierced steel planking by launch to Long Lama. It was then picked by longboat and transported to Long Akah (Tan 2008:226).

Arang Apui who is in his eighties and who lives in Long Jeh remembers an incident during his time as a border scout:

> There was the sad news that two border scouts and a Gurkha were killed at the border…. when Tom Harrisson heard about this he was very angry and physically attacked Commanding Officer Thomas. He tore the epaulettes off his shirt. He said the local staff had been in adequately trained. He said two weeks practice was not enough.

This calls to mind a reference to an incident on the border area near Long Banga on December 10 1963, when two members of the security forces were killed in an attack on 40 Indonesians in the mountainous area close to Long Banga (Tan 2008:119). Tom Harrisson acted as an advisor to the security forces utilizing his combat experience during the Japanese Occupation. As a founder of the border scouts, he would have felt strongly about their training and their abilities in the field. He advocated for rigorous weapons training: "Firepower must be sufficiently strong and well-handled to give confidence and to counter trained intruders with automatic weapons" (Heimann 1998:344). This is further supported in a field report by Superintendent John Cross, Commandant of the border scouts which indicated that they had insufficient training and there was no proper structure of command (Cross 1964).

Members of the Long San and Long Akah communities have vivid memories of the experiences of this time. Ho Thian Seng recalls:

> I do have memories of going over to "sell," or rather to barter trade freshly baked loaves of bread made by my mother to the British soldiers who were stationed there. I exchanged the bread for canned food. There were canned sweets, cheese, juice, stews…. That was my first encounter with cheese and not knowing how to eat it, I used it as fishing bait.

The exchange of food and tasting food from tins or chocolate is a theme that recurs when local people speak about this time. The Long San community remember special fishing trips. In the dry season before padi planting all the kampong people from all around would go fishing together using hand grenades in the river instead of the traditional method of using *tuba* poison. The fish would be smoked and dried over a fire. It would sustain people over the busy planting period.

MIGRATIONS DOWNRIVER

The Confrontation undoubtedly heralded an era of huge changes for Long Akah and Long San. Students in school saw larger vistas and were attracted to the many opportunities for training farther afield, which eventually contribute to the depopulation of the area. Some students had already made the difficult journey downriver to go to school, which meant separation from their families. One such person is Datuk Stephen Wan Ullok who was seven years old when Long San became Roman Catholic in 1947. His own father had died during the Japanese Occupation. He had a painful parting from Long San in 1951 when he left to go to school in Kuching at Batu Lintang. "It was sad when I last said goodbye to my mother. I knew I wouldn't see her again. She was ill and being nursed at Kuala Tutoh. She didn't want me to leave and go to Kuching to school."

In later years, others made similar journeys as they left home to train to serve in government jobs or in the private sector. Francisca Bilong went on to work as a ground stewardess for Malaysian Airlines, based in Kuching, attracting the attention of passengers with her elongated earlobes, heavy earrings and radiant long hair. Her class-mate Ho Thian Seng, the youngest in his family, followed a similar trajectory, which led him to study in the UK and eventually live and work in Singapore, epitomizing the way that the younger generation of the Chinese community in Long Akah shifted their focus to enterprises downriver.

My schooling journey can be likened to the Baram River and I always tell that to people. The Baram river flows out to the sea. I went to primary school in Long San. Went down the Baram river to lower secondary school in Long Lama. Having completed Form 3 in Long Lama I followed the Baram River to Marudi where I studied in Marudi Secondary School for my 'O' level. After my 'O' level I followed the Baram river to Miri where I completed my 'A' level. I then went on the Liverpool for my university studies. I studied engineering. When I left school in Long San, my parents retired and left the shop and went to Miri. That was 1966.

The bazaar gradually became abandoned as people began to find different ways of trading in Miri. The village economy began to rely on the Long San diaspora living on the coast sending money and goods. The fort fell into disrepair but took on the again the role of a rest house, a place of temporary lodging for Penan visiting Long San to take their children to school or the clinic. In 2011 and 2016 appeals were made to the Sarawak Museum for extensive repairs by Former Councillor Anthony Lawai and his family (see Appendix 1 and 2).

WHAT DID THE FORT MEAN TO PEOPLE?

For those travelling downriver to Marudi, in particular for the Kelabit from Long Lellang, the fort at Long Akah was an important stage in their journey, after the gruelling journey down the rapids of the Akah river. Pemanca Freddy Abun remembers the journeys of his youth:

> We wouldn't have survived without the fort. It was a long dangerous journey to Long Akah taking six days- four days when we had boat engines. We were grateful to stop there and rest. The village of Long San was still two rapids away. We would take produce such as *damar,* wild rubber, and tobacco all the way to Marudi where we would get the best prices. We stayed at the fort downstairs so we were ready to go and bale out water and retie the boats to adjust with the rising water, if it rained. We brought our own sleeping mats and our own firewood with us.

To these travellers, the fort was a stage in a hazardous journey, a place of rest and safety. To others, the fort was a place they had been taught to fear. The court at the fort was where justice was meted out and transgressors of the law were punished. John Usang Wan recalls that naughty children were told that their parents would send them to court if they misbehaved. Francisca Bilong remembers the fort as a young schoolgirl, "As we went to the bazaar we could see the fort. We were told not look inside. There were two women locked up in the fort who were there because they had committed adultery, people said." Thus, the fort with its lock-up cell was the sort of place where things happened to people who stepped out of line, who violated what was consider acceptable behaviour. It represented a place beyond the longhouse, a place of punishment, of government and perhaps justice. "My memory of visiting the fort was when I was six or so …with my mother. There were lots of people there. Perhaps there was a big court case on," recalled John Usang Wan. Court cases were randomly remembered as fragmentary almost painful memories that people did not wish to elaborate. An early memory came from one the oldest men interviewed regarding a child whose parents had not married. "There was one court case, Tuan Griffin9 came. It was a paternity case regarding a child. The father of the child denied he was the father." A later case was recalled by elders discussing as a group: **"**There was a time in the era of Aban Asang in the 1970s when someone was locked in fort. There was case of jealousy and a man was shot and the culprit was put in the lock up."

CONCLUSION

The reference to the presence of the Fort at Long Akah in 1905 predates the official records which date it to 1914 when the Long Tekan people moved to the vicinity of Long Akah. Situated at the hub of different routes into different rivers systems and across borders, it served as a strategic location for trade and governance. Its social roots are deep in the history of the of the Long Tekan Kenyah at Long San whose ancestor Tama Bulan Wang was a crucial ally and source of power for the Brooke regime. His fort at Long Daloh on the Pata River was an important centre for the payment of tax, an action which symbolized loyalty to the Brooke regime, not just for the Kenyah and Kayan on the Pata River but also for the Kelabit who took an overland route to reach it. The fort at Long Akah that followed, attracted the growth of a bazaar with not only Chinese shops but Malay and Kenyah shops as well. In the1930s,

[9] A.F.R. Griffin was DO Baram 1948, Resident 4th Division 1949. Then he had another term as Acting Resident 4th Division 1953-54 (Batty-Smith 1999:59).

the fort was the place where junior local staff learned the ropes of the Sarawak Civil Service as URA, for example the young Zen Galau distinguished himself as an exemplary native officer and Belawing Tingang as a pioneering teacher and catechist. The fort hosted the forces of Semut 2 from the Z specials in 1945 and the allied forces during Confrontation. The local people came together in these eras to fight with support these forces, whose presence were also a force for change.

In its heyday the fort is remembered as representing the power of local government as the place where taxes were paid, and where law and order were maintained through the court. For many, the Temenggong represented a local source of power that complemented the presence of the fort. There were gala occasions when illustrious statesmen such as the Governor, or Malcolm Mc Donald or Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie visited the longhouse. With the passing of the Temenggong, outmigration from Long San and the development of the road in 1980s, the bazaar and the fort became deserted, except for when the Penan used it as a rest house. The question that remains is what happened to local statesmen, local leadership and local government? There is another story to be told about the local economy, politics, the rise of the state and the abandonment of fort. The fort should be rebuilt to provide a reason for the telling its illustrious story, so the local contributions to the recent history of the upper Baram may not be forgotten.

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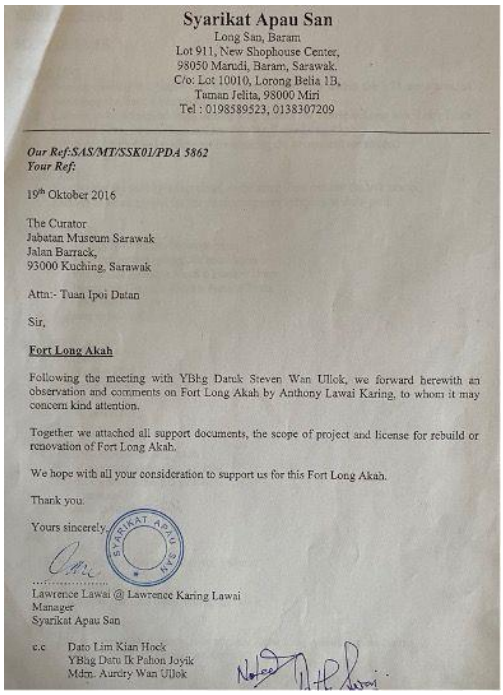
Appendix 1: Request for Renovation to the Fort written by Lawrence Lawai to the Sarawak Museum



Syarikat Apau San
Long San, Baram
Lot 911, New Shophouse Center,
98050 Marudi, Baram, Sarawak.
C/o: Lot 10010, Lorong Belia 1B,
Taman Jelita, 98000 Miri
Tel : 0198589523, 0138307209

Our Ref:SAS/MT/SSK01/PDA 5862
Your Ref:

19th Oktober 2016

The Curator
Jabatan Museum Sarawak
Jalan Barrack,
93000 Kuching, Sarawak

Attn:- Tuan Ipoi Datan

Sir,

Fort Long Akah

Following the meeting with YBhg Datuk Steven Wan Ullok, we forward herewith an observation and comments on Fort Long Akah by Anthony Lawai Karing, to whom it may concern kind attention.

Together we attached all support documents, the scope of project and license for rebuild or renovation of Fort Long Akah.

We hope with all your consideration to support us for this Fort Long Akah.

Thank you.

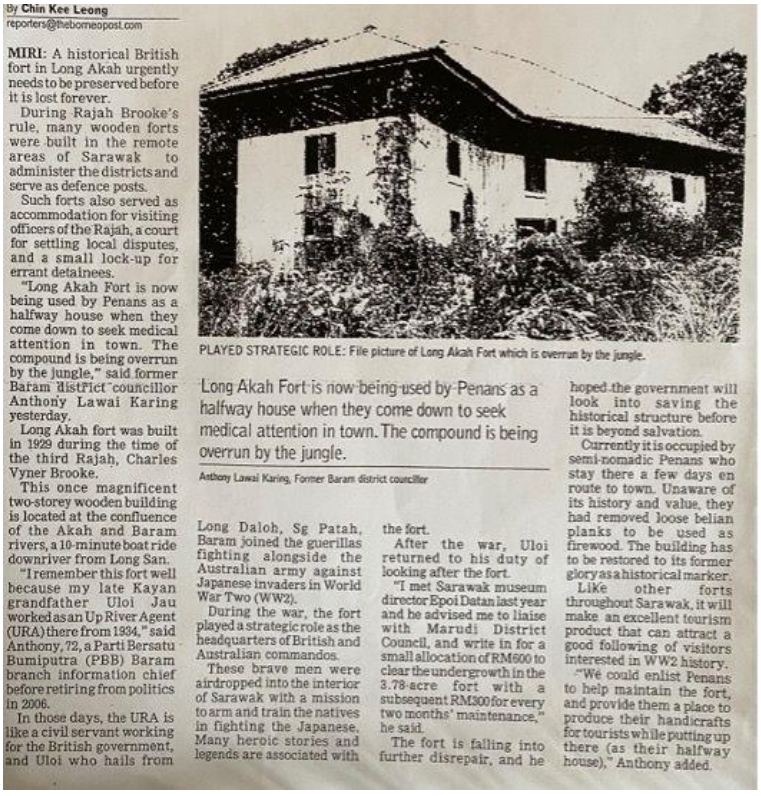
Yours sincerely,

SYARIKAT APAU SAN

.....
Lawrence Lawai @ Lawrence Karing Lawai
Manager
Syarikat Apau San

c.c Dato Lim Kian Hock
YBhg Datu Ik Pahon Joyik
Mdm. Aurdry Wan Ullok

Appendix 2: Borneo Post 2/5/2011



By Chin Kee Leong
reporters@theborneopost.com

MIRI: A historical British fort in Long Akah urgently needs to be preserved before it is lost forever.

During Rajah Brooke's rule, many wooden forts were built in the remote areas of Sarawak to administer the districts and serve as defence posts.

Such forts also served as accommodation for visiting officers of the Rajah, a court for settling local disputes, and a small lock-up for errant detainees.

"Long Akah Fort is now being used by Penans as a halfway house when they come down to seek medical attention in town. The compound is being overrun by the jungle," said former Baram district councillor Anthony Lawai Karing yesterday.

Long Akah fort was built in 1929 during the time of the third Rajah, Charles Vyner Brooke.

This once magnificent two-storey wooden building is located at the confluence of the Akah and Baram rivers, a 10-minute boat ride downriver from Long San.

"I remember this fort well because my late Kayan grandfather Uloi Jau worked as an Up River Agent (URA) there from 1934," said Anthony, 72, a Parti Bersatu Bumiputra (PBB) Baram branch information chief before retiring from politics in 2006.

In those days, the URA is like a civil servant working for the British government, and Uloi who hails from Long Daloh, Sg Patah, Baram joined the guerillas fighting alongside the Australian army against Japanese invaders in World War Two (WW2).

During the war, the fort played a strategic role as the headquarters of British and Australian commandos.

These brave men were airdropped into the interior of Sarawak with a mission to arm and train the natives in fighting the Japanese. Many heroic stories and legends are associated with the fort.

After the war, Uloi returned to his duty of looking after the fort.

"I met Sarawak museum director Epoi Datan last year and he advised me to liaise with Marudi District Council, and write in for a small allocation of RM600 to clear the undergrowth in the 3.78-acre fort with a subsequent RM300 for every two months' maintenance," he said.

The fort is falling into further disrepair, and he hoped the government will look into saving the historical structure before it is beyond salvation.

Currently it is occupied by semi-nomadic Penans who stay there a few days en route to town. Unaware of its history and value, they had removed loose belian planks to be used as firewood. The building has to be restored to its former glory as a historical marker.

Like other forts throughout Sarawak, it will make an excellent tourism product that can attract a good following of visitors interested in WW2 history.

"We could enlist Penans to help maintain the fort, and provide them a place to produce their handicrafts for tourists while putting up there (as their halfway house)," Anthony added.

PLAYED STRATEGIC ROLE: File picture of Long Akah Fort which is overrun by the jungle.

> Long Akah Fort is now being used by Penans as a halfway house when they come down to seek medical attention in town. The compound is being overrun by the jungle.
>
> Anthony Lawai Karing, Former Baram district councillor

Journal of Borneo-Kalimantan

Covid-19, Mortality and Inequality in Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

The first two males' mortality in Malaysia due to COVID-19 announced by the authority on March 13, 2020. The fatalities became the major headlines on the media. Although many people discussed 'actively' about COVID-19, however conversations about deaths or funerals of victims from COVID-19 are quite 'passive' during the initial stage of the pandemic. When death occurs, biomedical examiners must examine death causation, mechanism and manners of death because COVID-19-related deaths are contagious. As a results, corpses are managed by authorised personnel with no or limited intervention from family or community members. These social responses to deaths from COVID-19 are paradox as funerals are traditionally communities' responsibility. Due to surging cases of COVID-19, drastic measures are taken by the government globally to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and for social, economy and environment sustainability. This study aims to examine COVID-19 mortality patterns and its socio-cultural dimensions in Sarawak. Data are collected in the duration of 18 months from official sources and from participant observation. Data are analysed in several aspects including age, gender and co-morbidity. The findings show that mortality rates among males are significant higher compared to females. Most casualties occurred among age groups: 70-79, 60-69 and 50-59. The majority of cases have co-morbidity.

Keywords: *COVID-19, mortality, inequality, gender, Sarawak*

INTRODUCTION

In the late December 2019, COVID-19 detected in Wuhan (Hubei, China) and as at Feb 17, 2020 the outbreak has spread to 27 countries, with more than 70,000 cases (Dong, Du and Gardner, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2021). Although WHO announced COVID-19 as global emergency, the media statement by the Sarawak Disaster Management Committee (SDMC) on the March 11, 2020 indicated contrary situation: "Since the COVID-19 outbreak there is no known COVID-19 infection in Sarawak". Most populations especially in isolated geographical locations in Sarawak carried on with their socio-economic activities with no or little fear and with no or limited knowledge about COVID-19 (Liau and Wan Ahmad, 2022).

On January 25, 2020, the first case of COVID-19 detected in Peninsular Malaysia and the cases are traced back to 3 Chinese nationals who previously had close contact with an infected person in Singapore (Elengoe, 2020). According to the SDMC the first cases of COVID-19 in Sarawak was recorded two days after the declaration of COVID-19 as pandemic when 3 people are tested positive. 173 persons are instructed by the authority to be home surveillance and 63 persons-under-investigations (Sarawak Disaster Information, 2020). All these 236 cases in Sarawak are associated with religious gathering in Selangor Peninsular Malaysia from February 28, 2020 to March 1, 2020 (refer Table 1).

Table 1: Number of participants of religious gathering at the Sri Petaling Mosque

No	Division	Number of Person Traced/ Self-declared		
		Home Surveillance	Person-Under-Investigation	Total
1	Kuching	22	6	28
2	Samarahan	57	3	60
3	Serian	8	1	9
4	Sri Aman	3	0	3
5	Betong	7	0	7
6	Sarikei	0	3	3
7	Sibu	21	5	26
8	Mukah	14	1	15
9	Kapit	1	0	1
10	Bintulu	29	0	29
11	Miri	11	18	29
12	Limbang	0	26	26
	Total	173	63	236

Source: SDMC, 13 March 2020

On March 15, 2020 the National Crisis Preparedness and Responses Centre (CPRC) of the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MoH) and the WHO reported that the pandemic has spread to 146 countries with 156,162 total cases and 5,612 deaths, while Malaysia recorded 238 cases with no death. In Sarawak, the first death from COVID-19 was reported by the SDMC on March 17, 2020 and the victim was a pastor from the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Kuching Sarawak (SDMC, 2020; Borneo Post Online, 2020). The deaths of the 60-year-old pastor and the 34-year-old man from Johore became the eyes opener for many people who previously not aware of the grave danger of COVID-19.Lockdowns implemented by many countries globally to curb the spread of COVID-19. Malaysia implemented the first Movement Control Order (MCO) (from March 18-31, 2020) to prevent the spread of COVID-19, followed by the second MCO (from April 1-14, 2020), the third MCO (from April 15-30, 2020) and the fourth MCO (May 1-14, 2020). After 8 weeks of lockdown, the authority continued with a range of measure to curb COVID-19 including 'conditional' lockdown, borders surveillance and enforcement of laws.

Information on the COVID-19 cascaded by respective authorities (e.g. the National Security Council (MKN), MoH and SDMC via several platforms including their official websites and social media platforms. Announcement via prime media and social media highlighted the need of everyone to practice new habits such as physical distancing (of at least 1 meter in public places), avoiding crowded places, washing hands and using face masks. Information related to COVID-19 cascaded by the MKN via messages sent to the mobile phones of population members. People with access to the internet can download MySejahtera application that linked to the MoH. Through MySejahtera, mobile phone users can perform several activities such as following COVID-19 updates, identify COVID-19 hotspots, register for vaccination and check-in with MySejahtera before entering all public premises such as supermarkets and cafes. Before the pandemic, family and community members in Sarawak especially the Dayak communities are involved in all funeral proceedings: vigil night, cremation and funeral. Among the Sarawak Malays, they are involved actively in post-funeral rites such as prayers and feasts. During the pandemic when deaths occur these events are divided to two categories: contiguous (i.e. deaths from COVID-19) and not contiguous. Handling of dead bodies and burial related to COVID-19 are managed by biomedical personnel; while deaths that are confirmed 'not contiguous' managed by respective family and community members with adherence to the Standard Operating Procedures.

Despite the availability of significant statistical information and data related to COVID-19 particularly among urban dwellers, the understanding of deaths from COVID-19 in Sarawak is scarce. For instance, the search on Google Scholar with keywords 'anthropology of death, COVID-19 and Sarawak' yielded limited results (from year 2020 - 2021). Although death is part of human life on earth however, research on deaths is limited in Sarawak partly attributed to the fact that deaths are surrounded with taboos and evoked the feeling of fear. Researchers like Lupton (2020), Ward (2020) and Will (2020) suggesting that sociological contribution is needed in understanding social phenomena such as deaths, funerals and

impact of COVID-19. Therefore, this study aims to examine deaths patterns from COVID-19, inequality and socio-cultural aspects related to the overwhelming situations.

Pictures of COVID-19 Confirmed Cases and Deaths

Table 2 highlighted the pictures of COVID-19 pandemic on the March 17, 2020 at the global level (i.e. involving 157 countries), national level (Malaysia) and local level (Sarawak). The first two deaths from COVID-19 in Malaysia became the major headlines on the printed media and digital media. However, the news about the deaths are slow to reach those people living in interior areas with no or limited access to the internet and with no or limited television and radio networks.

Table 2: Pictures of COVID-19 Confirmed Cases and Deaths on 17 March 2020

Level	Confirmed Cases	Total Deaths
Global[1]	181,556	6,442
Malaysia[2]	673	2 (Patient 358 and Patient 178)
Sarawak[3]	45	1 (Case 358)

Source: [1]CPRC MoH & WHO, [2]CPRC MoH and [3]MoH and Sarawak Disaster Information

Following the first death from COVID-19 in Sarawak, the SDMC made a press release with details on the age, occupation and workplace of the victim:

STATE DISASTER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

FOR IMMEDIATE MEDIA/PRESS RELEASE

SARAWAK RECORDS FIRST NATION COVID-19 DEATH TODAY.

The victim, a 60-year-old pastor from Emmanuel Baptist Church Kuching passed away at 11:00 am at Sarawak General Hospital. The State Health Department is still in the process to identify the source of his infection. Meanwhile, 193 closed contacts of the deceased have been traced and are undergoing home-quarantine.

Sarawak today recorded eleven (11) new positive cases. There are 6 from Kuching, 3 from Limbang and 1 each from Betong and Lawas. They are now being treated at the three designated hospital namely, Sarawak General Hospital, Sibu Hospital and Miri Hospital.

Sarawak today recorded another 35 Person-Under-Investigation (PUI), while 204 patients are still awaiting results.

Currently, 45 COVID-19 cases in Sarawak had been traced to four clusters namely, Sri Petaling Cluster, Kuching (Church) Cluster, Sarikei Cluster and one more cluster in Kuching, the source of which is yet to be identified.

SECRETARIAT

SDMC

17th MARCH 2020

5:00 PM

While most media platforms reported the first fatality in Sarawak based on the SDMC's press release, a few online newspapers highlighted the victim's personal details such as the picture, age, name and occupation. For example, the Star wrote: "Pastor from Sarawak is first COVID-19 fatality in Malaysia" (The Star Online, 2020) while the New Straits Times (2020) highlighted the name of Case 358. In all official reports cascaded to the public members in Malaysia, details in respect to name, ethnicity and home address of the deceased persons are not available due to ethical reasons. According to Aimi Nadia et. al., (2020), the sharing of personal information raises the risk of stigmatization, discrimination and blame. Bagcchi (2020) reported that patients and healthcare workers who have survived COVID-19 are facing stigma and discrimination all over the world.

From a total of 673 confirmed cases and 2 deaths in Malaysia on March 17, 2020; the total confirmed cases of COVID-19 increased to 327,253 with a total of 1,220 deaths (0.37%) and 310,958 recovered (95.02%) on March 17, 2021. Similarly, in Sarawak, from a total of 45 confirmed cases and one death on the March 17, 2020; a total confirmed cases on March 17, 2021 are 13,110 with 94 deaths. Based on the statistics by MySejahtera on May 30, 2021 at the global level, there are 170,659, 373 (World Confirmed Cases): 152, 814,747 (World Recovered Cases) and 3,549,694 (World Deaths). At the world level, the top 10 countries with the highest confirmed cases are the United States, India, Brazil, France, Turkey, Russia, the United Kingdom (UK), Italy, Argentina and Germany. In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) the top 3 countries with the highest total confirmed cases are Indonesia, Philippines and Malaysia (MySejahtera – Statistics 30 May 2021). COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted socio-economic inequality among countries and communities such as inequality access to healthcare and management of dead bodies from COVID-19. In India high number of infections and deaths among the poor populations and the rising cost of cremation have caused some families and communities to resort to immersing dead bodies in the Gangga River (Ali, 2021). What had happened in India highlighted the attitudes and behaviours of peoples in moments of fear and desperation in dealing with large-scale outbreak and systemic failures.

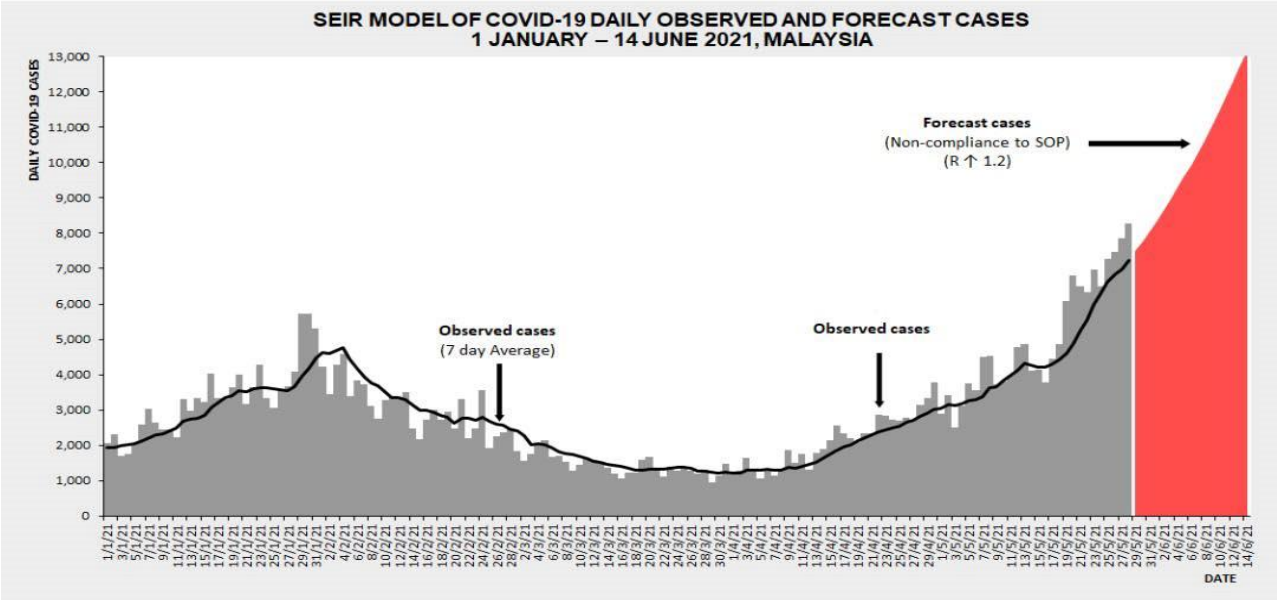
From a total of 6,075 confirmed cases on May 19, 2020 in Malaysia, the total cases on May 20, 2021 are 492,302 with a total of 2,099 deaths. As highlighted in Chart 1, deaths from COVID-19 on the May 29, 2021 is the highest in Malaysia since March 17, 2020. Therefore, the situations of COVID-19 pandemic reported in digital newspapers are labelled 'dark' and 'grim'. The surging cases in Malaysia in May 2021 are associated with celebration of Eid-Mubarak on May 13, 2021 and involvement of peoples in socio-cultural gatherings. Daily infection cases (i.e. 9,020) also the highest (refer Chart 2) and deaths continued to rise from May 19, 2020 to May 31, 2021. Therefore, in Sarawak MCO is implemented from May 29 to June 11, 2021. Gawai Dayak which is celebrated on the 1-2 June every year prior to the pandemic is not celebrated in big scale in 2020 and 2021. In Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah another MCO is implemented from June 1-14, 2021. Due to the detection of new variants of COVID-19 (e.g. the UK, South Africa and the Philippines variants) by the Institute of Health and Community Medicine UNIMAS, scientific community become more vigilant but this discovery contributed to fear among public members in Sarawak. Many people living in Sarawak are afraid of what happened in the other regions in Malaysia with high infection rates (e.g. Selangor, Federal Territory Kuala Lumpur and Sabah) to repeat or occur in Sarawak. With poorly equipped healthcare clinics and sub-standard physical infrastructures in rural areas severe infections among rural community will pose the danger to sustainability of healthcare services and the livelihood of the populations.

Chart 1: Latest Status of COVID-19 in Malaysia

Source: MoH, 2021

Chart 1 and Chart 2 showed that since May 19, 2021, new cases of COVID-19 in Malaysia indicated the trend of 'risky' situations with significant increase of the daily cases. Based on the Susceptible-Exposed-Infectious-Recovered (SEIR) Model the situations are forecasted to be 'grim' if the populations in Malaysia are not observing the SOP and subsequently affects the inability of the healthcare staff members dealing with overwhelming situations and the shortage of healthcare facilities.

Chart 2: SEIR Model and Forecast Cases (January 1, 2021 to June 14, 2021)



Source: Director General of Health Malaysia, Facebook, 29 May 2021

The data in Table 3 showed that COVID-19 pandemic placed significant impact to all aspects of lives in Malaysia at the level of individual, household, community and the nation-state. For instance, infected individuals, family and communities have to be isolated in the event of infections and the relevant government agencies are expected by the needy populations to extend relevant social services including the distribution of food and medical supplies to them.

Table 3: Status of COVID-19 in Malaysia (May 15-31, 2021)

Date	Infections		Deaths	
	Daily Confirmed Cases	Total Confirmed Cases	Daily Deaths Cases	Total Deaths Cases
31/5/2021	6,824	572,357	67	2,796
30/5/2021	6,999	565,533	79	2,729
29/5/2021	9,020	558,534	98	2,650
28/5/2021	8,290	549,514	61	2,552
27/5/2021	7,857	541,224	59	2,491
26/5/2021	7,468	533,367	63	2,432
25/5/2021	7,289	525,889	60	2,369
24/5/2021	6,509	518,600	61	2,309
23/5/2021	6,976	51,2091	49	2,248
22/5/2021	6,320	505,115	50	2,199
21/5/2021	6,493	498,795	50	2,149
20/5/2021	6,809	492,302	59	2,099
19/5/2021	6,075	485,496	46	2,040
18/5/2021	4,865	479,421	47	1,994
17/5/2021	4,446	474,556	45	1,947
16/5/2021	3,780	470,110	36	1,902
15/5/2021	4,140	466,300	44	1,860

Source: Ministry of Health, 2021

As this study attempt to examine COVID-19 pandemic particularly on death patterns in Sarawak, the researchers are going to describe socio-cultural context of communities and societies in Sarawak in the next section.

SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF SOCIETY IN SARAWAK

The link between economic class and health have been observed by scholars. The empirical findings so far predict the link is indeed positive (Phelan, Link and Tehranifar, 2010). Low socioeconomic status is related to higher mortality and poor health, with chronic diseases, communicable diseases and injuries are associated with diseases and causes of death in lower socioeconomic groups. Reading into the association is therefore to argue that deployment of resources may play an important role to weaken and reverse the disadvantages, although, researchers cautioned that higher socioeconomic status does not itself bring health advantage, and their relation is difficult to be tested empirically (Phelan, Link and Tehranifar, 2010, p. 31).

Nettleton (2015) summarises three explanations that linked social class and health. The health selection explanation looks at the influence of health in shaping one's long term social position. Nettleton cited a study by Wadsworth (1986) who used data from the British National Birth cohort which had shown males who had poor health in younger age tend to end in lower social classes. The second explanation looks at how social classes cause variations in health outcome. This was observed in the lifestyle of the groups in lower socioeconomic position which tend to be unhealthy, such as drinking alcohol and eating food with excessive amount of sugar and fat. The unhealthy lifestyle poses risk to health, whose presence is more frequent among the lower social classes. Finally, the materialist explanation views structural disadvantages in housing condition, unemployment and pollution increases the risk to health to those in lower social classes, such as exposure to respiratory illness and heart disease (Wadsworth, 1986, pp. 160-163).

In connection to socioeconomic as one of the predictors of health, regional differences are also read in parallel. Thus, region which is more deprived of economically and structurally, tend to display a higher rate of mortality than a developed region. Challier, Meslans and Viel (2000) studies the link between deprivation and attendance to cervical cancer screening for women aged 25-65 who lived in 594 municipalities in France. The study utilised several characteristics for deprivation, which covered demography (women's mean age, average net income per household, population density) and health care access (density of physicians and density of paramedical facilities). They found attendance to the health screening was lower in urbanised areas that were more deprived, to which they recorded lower average income, higher mean age of women and poor medical facilities (p. 160). Researchers who adopted the socioeconomic link to health tend to study the socioeconomic determinants such as education, occupational class and income as independent variable that leads to a direct pathway to health. Researchers from Finland, Lahelma et. al. (2004), investigated each indicator to test their independent link. Their study used baseline data from 2000 and 2001 survey of middle age women and men employed by the City of Helsinki, with a sample size of 6243, with 80% of the respondents were women. Their research discovered all three socioeconomic indicators showed interrelation to health inequalities. Among women, educational disadvantages were mediated through occupational and household income, while only small part of income inequalities can be explained by educational and occupational class. Similar results reported among men, and only 20% of the occupational class inequalities were mediated through income (p. 331). Hence, the study concludes that the socioeconomic determinant to health should be studied in conjunction with other determinants of inequalities, and broader incorporation such as youth and parental home.

Learning the theoretical and empirical contexts connecting health with socio-economy provide a scholarly basis to argue that the same nexus is observable in the scenario of public health in Malaysia. Khazanah Research Institute (KRI) released a report Social Inequalities and Health in Malaysia, which examined the ways in which social factors, specifically income and work, that affect the health outcomes of Malaysians. Overall, the data from 1970 to 2020 suggests the upward trend for life expectancy in 2020 which sees Malaysians are living longer, where a male and female newborn can expect to live to the age of 72.6 and 77.6 years, respectively. However, the data also found some intractable connection between states in Malaysia and the outcome of health, which suggests to some forms of inequalities. Among other findings, the research team found "significant variation" in life expectancy between states.

For example, a male newborn in Sarawak is expected to live to 74.6 years, whereas a male newborn in Perlis is only expected to live up to 69.2 years (p. 10). Another finding on children under 5 mortality rate also looks encouraging for Sarawak, which recorded lower deaths per 1,000 births, compared to children under 5 in Kelantan, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang.

These findings are at least, startling, given the economic dimension, notably on the income factor, that presented mixed pictures of the health-socioeconomic nexus of those states under comparison. Economic Planning Unit (EPU) at the Prime Minister's Department, Household Income, Poverty and Household Expenditure data (1970-2019) stated the mean of monthly gross income for Sarawak in 2019 was RM5959, Perlis RM5476, Negeri Sembilan RM6707, Pahang RM5667 and Kelantan RM4874. The incidence of relative poverty in Sarawak was reported at 15.2%, Perlis at 12%, Negeri Sembilan at 11.6%, Pahang at 6.0%, and Kelantan 9.9%. For the incidence of absolute poverty, Sarawak recorded 9.0%, Perlis 3.9%, Negeri Sembilan 4.3%, Pahang 4.3% and Kelantan 12.4%. Despite Sarawak having a relatively higher household income to other states mentioned earlier, the incidence of poverty, both relative and absolute, pointed to the variation of income between states in Malaysia do not necessarily produce clear linkage with the health outcomes of the people in those states. On the other hand, one should exercise caution on the numbers and the possible unified representation they generate. The spatial, urban-rural dimension is a distinctive reality in Sarawak, aggravated by the differing access to roads, communications and public facilities, and their likely cumulative influence upon the health outcome of those populations may not be visibly captured in those data.

In the context of administration, Sarawak is divided into 12 divisions namely Kuching, Samarahan, Serian, Sri Aman, Betong, Sarikei, Sibu, Kapit, Mukah, Bintulu, Miri and Limbang. All of these divisions have districts and sub-districts. With two cities (Kuching and Miri) and one town in each division, the populations in Sarawak live in two worlds: urban and rural areas. Many people commute daily to and forth from their homes in rural areas to urban areas due to work or because of other socio-economic activities. The movement from urban to rural areas or vice versa significant in the weekends before COVID-19 pandemic such as weddings celebration, attending funerals and getting social services. The Department of Statistics (2010) stated that 53.8% populations in Sarawak are living in urban areas while 46.2% living in rural areas. In rural areas peoples are living in the villages with separate dwellings and/or longhouses. The majority of the indigenous Iban and Orang Ulu are living in the longhouses with close proximity to each other, for instance, they shared common areas (e.g. *ruai*) with their neighbours and other villagers. Communalism significantly influenced the behaviours and ideas of communities in Sarawak in which portrayed in their community-based activities such as worshipping, celebrating wedding and working together (Liau and Wan Ahmad, 2022). With the availability of airports in major cities or towns (e.g. Kuching, Sibu, Bintulu, Miri and Limbang), the mobility of peoples in these areas are more complex. The movement of populations in areas with access via roads and rivers transportation are slightly less complex. People with no ownerships of private vehicles depending on public transport to move around such as by using public bus and van services, taxis and express boats in which physical distance with other people is an issue and subsequent pose risk of COVID-19 infection. A travel by bus from Kuching to Bintulu could take between 10-12 hours and this journey is long and tiring.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used secondary data from official reports on COVID-19 and data obtained through participant observation. Secondary data include the review of messages sent by the MKN, the analysis of report by MoH and Sarawak Disaster Information and the review of posts of the Director General of Health Malaysia on social media. As all the researchers are living in Sarawak, participant observation are carried out in different settings in both rural and urban areas. During the death of first author's neighbor due to COVID-19 the observation of the events take place behind curtain from the bedroom and the researcher was afraid to draw closer to the family members of the deceased. The first author only talked to deceased's brother three days after the funeral with the used of face mask and physical distancing.

The researchers used participant observation because we aimed to grasp the research participants' point of view, their relation to life, their vision of their worlds (Malinowski, 1922 in Erickson, 2011).

Understanding what has been done by others (Eisenhart and Jurow, 2011), and finding a way to frame the research enquiries analytically and conceptually, are critical steps in any research (Seale, 2008). The researchers used the combination of the research methods to answer the following research questions:

i) What are mortality patterns of COVID-19-related deaths in Sarawak?
ii) What measures are taken to ensure sustainability of social, economy and environment?
iii) How COVID-19 influenced community ideas and behaviours related to deaths?

Data for research questions i and ii are obtained significantly from official reports (e.g. MoH and SDMC Reports) while significant data for research questions iii are gathered from participant observation. All the registered deaths from COVID-19 are examined based on to the following areas: date of reported deaths, number of deaths, age, gender, case reference or patient identification, co-morbidity, date of an individual tested positive for COVID-19, citizenship and the place of death. Sometimes personal information about the deceased individuals are shared by social media users (e.g. in Facebook and Whatsapp groups). Leak of information could pose negative implications such as stigmatization and discrimination (Aimi Nadia et al., 2020). Systematic reviews of official reports conducted for 18 months (from the January 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021) carried out with the aim of finding existing evidence without bias in order to produce systematic investigation. Almost all the official reports available in Malaysia are in national language (i.e. Bahasa Malaysia).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, findings and discussion cover the following areas: urban-based deaths in Sarawak during the initial stage of COVID-19 pandemic, deaths in January 2021 to June 2021, total deaths (from March 2020 to June 2021), deaths among citizens and non-citizens, deaths among males and females, deaths based on age groups, pre-existing health conditions of the causalities, place of deaths, and impact of deaths. The data cited in the findings, unless indicated otherwise, were sourced from the Ministry of Health (Table 3) and Sarawak Disasteer Management Committee (Table 4).

Deaths during initial stage of the pandemic

The SDMC announced that Sarawak records three positive cases for COVID-19 on the March 13, 2020. The initial data on COVID-19 cases in Sarawak during the earlier stage of the pandemic detected among persons who had interactions with others outside or inside Sarawak due to religious gatherings (SDMC, 2020). Initial infections and deaths are classified urban-based, for example most cases of infection detected in Kuching, indicated by the admission to the Hospital Umum Sarawak (HUS) (refer to Table 4). Therefore, to contain the spread of COVID-19, all entries of people to Sarawak (either via air, sea and land) are required to go through stringent monitoring and quarantine for 14 days in the designated quarantine centers. The implementation of the MCO for 8 weeks (from March 18, 2020 to May 14, 2020), and regulated movement between zones or divisions have prevented the virus from spreading to interior communities in Sarawak such as in the Upper Baram and Upper Balui. 17 deaths out of the total 19 deaths (from March 17, 2020 to July 31, 2020) from COVID-19 are recorded in HUS located in Kuching City, one death (in HUS Sarawak Heart Institute (IJN) in Kota Samarahan, one death (in Miri Hospital) and one death (in Limbang Hospital). As initial infections are urban-based the deaths also occurred among people living around or near towns or cities. The age of the victims ranged between 23-79 years old: 9 persons are 60 years old and above while 10 individuals are below 60 years old. 8 deaths are documented in March 2020, 9 deaths in April 2020 and 2 deaths in July 2020. No death occurs in 2 months (May 2020 to June 2020) and between August 2020 to December 2020 (refer Table 4).

Table 4: Deaths due to COVID-19 in Sarawak (January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020)

Month/ Year	Date of Death Reported	Number of Death	Case Reference	Gender	Age	Place of Death
Aug 2020 - Dec 2020		0				
Jul 2020	27/7/2020	1	19 (589)	Female	63	HUS
	11/7/2020	1	18 (8702)	Male	72	HUS
Jun 2020		0				
May 2020		0				
Apr 2020	29/4/2020	1	17 (5282)	Male	72	HUS IJN
	22/4/2020	1	16 (5483)	Female	72	HUS
	19/4/2020	1	15 (4090)	Male	69	HUS
	11/4/2020	1	14 (4314)	Female	47	HUS
	9/4/2020	1	13 (2864)	Female	23	HUS
	5/4/2020	1	12 (3073)	Male	53	HUS
	5/4/2020	1	11 (2210)	Male	72	HUS
	4/4/2020	1	10 (2850)	Male	56	HUS
	2/4/2020	1	9 (1273)	Male	61	HUS
Mar 2020	31/3/2020	1	8 (1275)	Male	40	HUS
	30/3/2020	1	7 (2471)	Female	46	Hospital Miri
	30/3/2020	1	6 (1941)	Male	47	HUS
	23/3/2020	1	5 (595)	Female	51	Hospital Limbang
	23/3/2020	1	4 (1006)	Male	49	HUS
	21/3/2020	1	3 (595)	Female	40	HUS
	21/3/2020	1	2 (1031)	Female	79	HUS
	17/3/2020	1	1 (358)	Male	60	HUS

Source: MoH and Sarawak Disaster Information, 2020

From the total of 45 cases in Sarawak on the March 17, 2020 with one identified cluster (i.e. cluster related to religious gathering in Petaling Jaya) and sporadic cases, Sarawak is perceived by many people 'safe' from the pandemic. However, with the surging cases of COVID-19 in Peninsular Malaysia (particularly in Selangor and Federal Territory Kuala Lumpur) and Sabah the pandemic eventually evoked fear among populations in Sarawak. Based on the Sarawak Disaster Information's report on the December 31, 2020, Sarawak has a total of 1,117 confirmed cases, 19 deaths and a total of 1,069 persons are successfully treated and subsequently discharged from hospitals.

Deaths in January 2021 to June 2021

Year 2021 is considered a 'grim' moment for peoples living in Sarawak. After 5 months (from August 2020 to December 2020) of no fatality due to COVID-19, death numbered 20 is documented on the January 16, 2021. A total of 19 deaths are reported in January 2021. From the total of 409 deaths recorded from March 17, 2020 to June 30, 2021, 95.4% (390 deaths) listed in January 2021 to June 2021. The highest number of deaths are registered in May 2021 (28.4% or 116 deaths), June 2021 (28.1% or 115 deaths) and April (17.1% or 70 deaths). These figures are alarming as more positive cases detected and more community-related clusters declared by the authority between the months of January 2021 to June 2021. Furthermore, year 2021 considered 'risky' for peoples in Sarawak because many cases of COVID-19 are asymptomatic or showing no symptoms and infections have spread to marginalized communities and rural areas and subsequently pose risks towards vulnerable groups such as the aging populations and people with chronic illnesses.

Deaths among citizens and non-citizens

Out of the total of 409 deaths in Sarawak (from the March 17, 2020 to June 30, 2021) almost all fatalities (99.3% or 407 deaths) involved Malaysia citizens (i.e. local Sarawak) while only 0.7% (N=2) involved non-citizens. The two non-citizens are 43-year-old citizen of the Philippines and 40-year-old citizen of Indonesia. These non-citizens are classified as migrant workers in Sarawak. The former was found fainted at home and subsequently died while the latter received treatment in HUS. Low rates of deaths among non-citizens is part attributed to the fact that many migrant workers recruited to work in Sarawak legally are 45-year-old and below, and they must be certified healthy by medical doctors. There is no reported death case among illegal immigrants in Sarawak.

In 2020, there are an estimated 138,000 foreign workers in Sarawak (World, 2020). Oil palm plantation and construction are two economic sectors that depend heavily on migrant workers. They are among the most vulnerable groups during COVID-19 pandemic (Douglas, et. al., 2022). However, migrant workers' mortality pattern is depended on many factors including their assigned accommodation. The cramp accommodation such as crowded and confined hostel or detention centre contributed to the higher rates of COVID-19 patients such as in Peninsular Malaysia (Wahab, 2020) and Singapore (Koh, 2020). However, in Sarawak, the mortality rate of migrant workers is the lowest. One of the reasons is due to their accommodation that situated within the community and shophouses (Sarawak Voice, 2022).

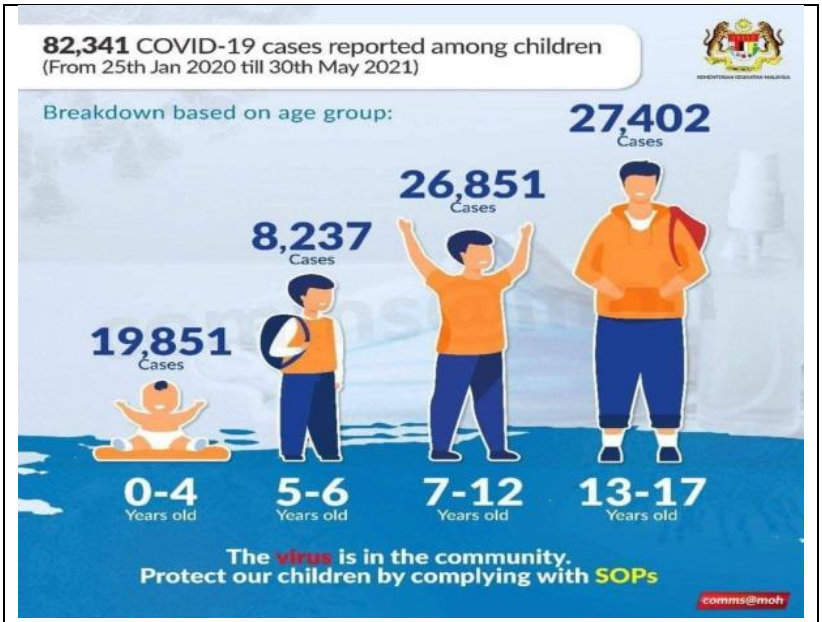
Deaths among males and females

60.5% (248 deaths) are among males while 39.5% (161 deaths) among females. Mortality rates among males in Malaysia is significant in part because males are more likely be involved in socio-cultural activities outside homes (e.g. working outside homes and hanging out in public places) and therefore they faced higher risk of infections. Furthermore, males are more likely than females involved in significant riskier behaviours (e.g. smoking and drinking alcohols excessively) and therefore their health statuses are affected by these behaviours.

Deaths based on age groups

In terms of casualties based on age groups, the highest top three deaths involved peoples aged 70-79 (31.5% or 129 deaths), 60-69 (22.7% or 93 deaths) and 50-59 (15.9% or 65 deaths). The data showed that fewer deaths are recorded in younger age groups compared to older age groups. The age ranged for male who died due to COVID-19 are between 30-92 years old while for females are between 23-91 years old. The youngest deceased (i.e. 30-year-old man and 23-year-old woman) had pre-existing health conditions. Although Sarawak has a relatively young population, the chances of recovery are significantly affected when people had comorbidity such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus and dyslipidemia reflected in almost all cases of deaths in this study. In terms of aged group: no death occurs among people 19-year-old and below in Sarawak from the March 17, 2020 till June 30, 2021. However, according to the Director General MoH Malaysia on the June 2, 2021, 3 deaths among children are registered in 2020 and another 3 deaths in 2021 (from January 2021 to May 2021). The closure of childcare centres, pre-schools, schools, colleges and universities in Malaysia during the pandemic had prevented severe infections among young people. As younger populations are physically active, the closure of these educational institutions highlighted the crucial need in regulating their mobility and controlling their activities inside or outside learning institutions. Based on Chart 3, there are 82,342 cases among children (from January 25, 2021 till May 30, 2021). Out of 82,342 COVID-19 cases: 24.1% involved the youngest age group, 10% cases involved children from 5-6 years old, 32.6% involved the 7-12 years old and 33.3% involved those children between the aged of 13-17 years old. Based on the data there is need for individuals, households, communities and the government to protect these young populations from infections especially infants, toddlers and adolescent. As younger populations are the assets of every societies or countries provision of safe learning environment is stipulated in the Sustainable Development Goals, that is Goal 4.

Chart 3: Confirmed cases among children (From January 25, 2021 till May 30, 2021)



Source: MoH, 2021

Pre-existing health conditions of casualties

The majority of deaths occurred among peoples with comorbidity: 379 deaths (92.9%). Comorbidity refers to the occurrence of more than one illness or condition at the same time (The Free Dictionary, 2022). A range of pre-existing health conditions are experienced by the deceased persons including hypertension, diabetes, dyslipidemia, and obesity. 22 deaths (4.4%) had "No Comorbidity" while 8 persons (2.7%) pre-existing health conditions are "Not Stated." Almost all "Not Stated" pre-existing conditions are recorded during the deaths of people from COVID-19 in March 2020 and during the earlier stage knowledge about the virus was still developing.

Place of deaths

In Sarawak, the top 6 divisions with the highest confirmed cases are Sibu, Bintulu, Kuching, Miri, Kapit and Sarikei. The mortality rates also significant higher in the hospitals in these divisions such as Sibu Hospital, Bintulu Hospital, Sarawak General Hospital (HUS), Miri Hospital, Kapit Hospital and Sarikei Hospital. 156 deaths (38.1%) occurred in Hospital Sibu, followed by Hospital Bintulu with 53 fatalities (13%), Hospital Miri with 51 deaths (12.5%) and HUS (48 deaths or 11.7%). The percentage of deaths in Hospital Sibu is among the highest in Sarawak in which out of 47,329 cases in Sarawak on the May 31, 2021 (MoH, 31 May 2021), 12,398 confirmed cases recorded in Sibu. Cluster Pasai in Sibu Division recorded the highest infections in Sarawak (i.e. 2,693 positive cases involving 29 deaths). Pasai Cluster is associated with inter-state and inter-district travels due to funeral, and impacted many rural longhouses. Furthermore, with the role of Sibu Hospital as an important hospital in the middle regions of Sarawak, many cases from nearby clinics and health centres in Kapit, Sarikei and Mukah Divisions are referred to Sibu Hospital. These factors contributed to significant burden on healthcare facilities, healthcare workers in Sibu Hospital and families who had lost their loved ones.

Brought-in-Death

Another significant finding in respect to deaths in Sarawak is linked to Brought-in-Death (BID). BID refers to a situation in which a death occurs at home and the deceased is sent to hospital for further investigation. For instance, 13 BID registered in June 2021: 8 males and 5 females and almost all are found fainted at their homes and died before they were sent to the hospitals. According to Ebrille et al., (2020), the severity of COVID-19 symptoms can range from none to very mild or severe, and the

symptoms usually appear 2 to 14 days after virus exposure and can include fever, cough, shortness of breath, headache, diarrhea, vomiting, runny nose, sore throat, conjunctivitis, tiredness, and aches. Ebrille et al., (2020) also indicated that syncope alone has not been described as a symptom associated with COVID-19 infection and therefore they reported a case series of syncope as the presenting symptom in otherwise asymptomatic patients with COVID-19 infection.

Out of the total of 2,650 deaths in Malaysia on the May 29, 2021, 14.5% deaths occurred at homes and these incidents are influenced by several factors including the inability of persons and family members identifying asymptomatic cases and the refusal some parties in getting professional healthcare services. Another explanation is related to socio-cultural beliefs and practices in which family members' decided to take care of their infected loved ones (e.g. aging parents) at homes which in line with the concept of filial piety and the perception of homes as the most suitable place of caregiving.

Impact of deaths

The impact of the death of a family member due to COVID-19 can be categorized into measurable impact (e.g. the loss of income in the event of death of a breadwinner) and unmeasurable impact such as emotional stress and loneliness. In addition, the effects of COVID-19-related deaths is disproportionate impact vulnerable individuals, families and communities. The deaths of peoples at homes or outside homes due to COVID-19 also influenced households, family members' and community members' in respect to their attitudes and behaviours to physical distancing, fear of infection and vigilant measure. The death of first author's neighbour due to COVID-19 caused families living on the right and left, and opposite of the dead person neighbourhood showed panic behaviours such closed the windows and doors, and observing from afar. Only 5 members of the deceased family are observed present immediately after the death together with biomedical personnel dressed in Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs). The first author experienced several months of trauma and fear due to her 40-year-old neighbor's death linked to COVID-19 in early February 2021. Researchers also attended funerals of family members and friends not related to COVID-19 with shorter duration of a visit. When dealing with infectious diseases (e.g. HIV and H1N1 influenza (swine flu), the fear of infection fed social exclusion and unpleasant imagination (Manderson and Levine, 2020). In addition, impacted people have to learn to lower social expectation towards others and learned to cope independently. Similarly, the death of immediate family members due to COVID-19 highlighted feelings of agony, regret and fear as depicted in the late Deputy Chief Minister of Sarawak's Facebook post and his comments on online newspapers due to the death of his brother in Kapit Hospital:

Source: Facebook, 2 June 2021

In addition, his post showed that funeral practices in Sarawak is impacted due to COVID-19 such as family members are not allowed to go near the gravesites and they do able to hold or see the loved ones for the last time. Despite feeling painful, people also showed hope associated with vaccination and reminded other to be vigilant (HarianMetro, 5 June 2021).

CONCLUSION

Data from this study showed that inequality is an overarching aspect in this study. Inequality observed at the individual, household, community levels. Impact of COVID-19 is unequal between individuals or family who lost their members due to COVID-19 compared to individuals or family whose experienced no death. Those with comorbidity also succumbed to deaths more than those without comorbidity. Based on the findings of this study, we would like to rethink deaths due to COVID-19 in Sarawak. Rethinking deaths from COVID-19 will enhance our understanding and contributes to the policy formulation and implementation related to COVID-19 pandemic. These include sustainability related to social, economy and environment such as strong social support systems, employment and conducive working environment. Communities need to informed and trained to manage contagious disease and deaths related to the disease and understanding funeral proceedings.

As communalism, supernaturalism and family are significant themes among communities and societies in Sarawak (Liau and Wan Ahmad, 2022), these aspects influenced peoples' attitudes and behaviours such as their perceptions towards new normal (e.g. social distancing, sanitizing and using face masks) and individuals's agency towards SOP. Most infections and deaths occurred between the months of January 2021 to May 2021 due to significant involvement of people in socio-cultural activities such as family reunion, cultural celebrations, weddings, funerals, and working in groups. The numbers of infections and deaths are significant higher after Eid-Mubarak celebration on the May 13, 2021 due to inter-districts and inter-states travels, and socio-cultural gatherings. As mentioned earlier individuals and members need to reflect many aspects including on which habits are useful or risky during a pandemic.

Based on the MoH announcement on June 11, 2020 there are 8,369 confirmed cases involving migrant workers in Malaysia. Out of a total of 8,369 positive cases, 556 migrant workers (6.6%) are working in Sarawak. Only 2 deaths are recorded among migrant workers in Sarawak: 1 death in March 2020 and 1 death in April 2021. The death of 40-year-old Filipino migrant worker suggests the need to further examine issues related to migrant workers such as the needs and welfare of migrant workers because COVID-19 disproportionate impact vulnerable and minority communities. Data from this study also showed that mortality rate is higher among males than females. For instance, the incidence of death in the male populations in Sarawak for 16 months (March 2020 to June 30, 2021) is 60.5% compared to 39.5% among females. The inequality in terms of deaths between genders indicated that risks to infections and deaths are unequally experienced by men and women in Sarawak. In terms of fatality among males, the youngest age is 30 while among females is 23.

Although deaths among people aged 19 and below did not occur in Sarawak, infections among these aged group existed and this will place significant impact on family in both urban and rural areas such as they are separated physically from each other, e.g. the bonding between mothers and children are affected during quarantine especially those children aged 5 and below as the children are separated from the closest family members. Data from this study also suggesting that COVID-19 impacting aging population significantly. This study also highlighted inequality among 'healthy' or 'not healthy' populations and raised issue on the moral and ethical obligations of 'healthy' people to protect 'unhealthy' people from infections and subsequent deaths. Thus, early stages of vaccination are targeting frontliners (e.g. doctors, nurses and police) and people with pre-existing health conditions (e.g. people living with diabetes and aging populations). Similarly, the attempt to prevent people from travelling between sub-districts, districts and divisions in Sarawak showed efforts to contained the virus transmitting to aging and vulnerable populations especially in rural areas.

As a result of significant infections and deaths in certain divisions (e.g. Sibu Division) there is a need to upgrade health facilities and improve health services in those areas. The funding for the facilities should be drew from the government, private sectors and investors. Furthermore, high infections in particular regions in Sarawak may suggest underlying conditions such as poverty, lack of awareness and negative attitudes towards people infected by COVID-19. In addition, BID cases require further study to examine the underlying factors contributing to the incidents and may suggest way on how to manage pandemic which may occur in the future. In other words, holistic approach to pandemic preparation and management is crucial in Sarawak in line with WHO's (2022) call to encourage countries to engage the whole communities for effective pandemic preparedness and response. Lastly, deaths due to COVID-19 we suggest the need of people to rethink socio-cultural practices which could place danger on individuals, households and the communities or societies during pandemic such as forsaking handshaking, avoiding hugging and not participating in big-scale social-cultural gatherings.

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Crossing The Rubicon?
Maintenance and Change Among Today's Iban in Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

Among communities reliant on subsistence agriculture as a means of production, transition to wage work may seem indicative of economic progress. In the 21st century, the Iban in East Malaysia utilise three production modes: subsistence rice farming; commerce; and, waged work, to support food requirements and satisfy consumer needs. Waged work is increasingly important, even replacing subsistence and commerce. This study considers perceptions of maintenance and change among the Iban in the Sri Aman Division of Sarawak. The purpose is to gain perspectives of heads of households about "maintenance" and "change". Research was conducted qualitatively, via observation and interviews. Maintenance is reflected through ongoing use of the Iban language; the longhouse is seen as being of continuing importance for resident and non-resident relatives, even if no longer bound to ancestral longhouse territory. Changes include new technologies, the importance of money, reduced adherence to Iban traditions, and conversion to Catholicism, among the community studied here. Salience of these matters lies in Iban understanding of ways in which modernisation is occurring in their community, in a region known for its biological, cultural and linguistic diversity, providing a voice for community members, and their insights about the contemporary Iban world.

Key words: *change, Iban, maintenance*

INTRODUCTION: MAINTENANCE AND CHANGE

It was the 2014 annual harvest festival in *Rumah Panjai* Bungkang (Bungkang Longhouse), a noisy and joyous affair. A can of beer was thrust into my hands as celebrations got under way. *Gawai* (festival) is a significant annual event, held on June 1st, including offerings to deities – *piring*, and giving thanks to gods for a rice harvest. The beer exemplified how shop-bought goods were replacing home-made rice wine. Padoch and Peluso (1996) suggested any study of Borneo's inhabitants or geography must be about change (cf. Hasegawa, 2018; see also, DeKoninck, Bernard, & Bissonnette, 2011; and Tsing, 1993).

Maintenance relates to continuity, while change is about transition (Mortimer, 2014). No society is without some maintenance, while change is constant. "So far as technical inventions are concerned … no culture is absolutely stationary" (Lévi-Strauss, 1952, p. 39). Some groups appear amenable to social change; Lévi-Strauss (1966) distinguishes between "hot" and "cold" societies, the former being understood as "open", more likely to accept change, while the latter are seen as more "closed" to external influences.

Western societies are often seen to represent modernity to which other nations aspire, passing through common stages, notwithstanding local variation (Klüver, 2008):

- Traditional societies are overseen by institutions, predominantly families, tribes or clans with members holding ascribed roles, within which production is mainly agricultural
- Increased use of technology results in food surpluses and their commercialization
- Traditional social institutions become less relevant
- Merit tends to replace ascription with reference to social and cultural roles
- Societies manufacture goods and enter (international) trading networks
- Money becomes a standard unit, replacing barter trade, and "development works on the assumption that the introduction of cash is invariably an improvement" (Norberg-Hodge, 2000, p. 143)
- Development is realised through mass consumption, more citizens reside in urban settings and work in industry
- The world's societies become more integrated via development of global financial institutions (Rostow, 1960; see also Hopper, 2007; and Macionis, 1987)

Detractors suggest that change is not just linear (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Nonetheless, many societies seem to transition from "hunting and gathering" to "agriculture," towards "commerce" and "industrialisation", leading "to cultural losses, such as interdependence and collectivism, and cultural gains, including independence and individualism (Greenfield, 2016, p. 84). Processes of modernisation are seen as irreversible (Abdollahian et al., 2012, p. 830), and theories of sociocultural change share the trend of simplicity towards complexity. However, theories do not always reflect reality (cf. Ember & Ember, 2011), as maintenance and change co-occur. A person may farm manually but drive to their field, having previously walked. Consequently, "in the social sciences, there is no generally accepted single explanation of change; rather, there is a spectrum of competing theories which stress economic determinism at one end and cultural determinism at the other" (Trigger, 1998, pp. 9-10).

METHODOLOGY

This is an ethnographic study, undertaken through observation and interviews with members of the community, in order to gather Iban/emic views of ways in which life ways have been maintained, and those they consider to have altered or evanesced. The approach here is a form of applied ethnography (Chambers, 2003). Following an initial visit (in 1989), I later spent certain periods in the longhouse, on rice farms, at events (such as *Gawai*), and at the local market, over four stays of 1-3 weeks. During the initial visit, Bungkang longhouse was an hour's walk from the nearest metalled road, where public transport was available to Sri Aman town, the division's administrative centre five kilometres away. Bungkang was a traditional wooden longhouse, on stilts without electricity or piped water. Residents considered it to be decaying and referred to it as *temawai* (old abandoned longhouse). It was rebuilt, but destroyed by accidental fire (with no harm to inhabitants). Observations and resident responses to enquiries were juxtaposed and considered to the extent they result from Iban social structure, or on the basis of individual agency.

Maintenance and Change among Iban at Bungkang Longhouse

It is suggested the term, Iban, derives from a Kayan exonym meaning 'roving stranger' (Richards, 1981, p. 111). Sather (2004, p. 623) states that "more likely it comes from the Iban word *iban*, meaning 'a person,' 'human being,' or, more specifically, a 'layperson,' as opposed to a ritual specialist." Since 1970, "Iban" has been universally accepted as a term of self-reference, both officially and by Iban themselves. Ancestors of the Iban, now in western Sarawak, began migrating from the Kapuas River of West Kalimantan in the sixteenth century (Sandin, 1967). Subsequently, the Iban moved into the central Rejang Basin, and beyond, being known for their physical mobility (Austin, 1976) and as the most numerous group in Sarawak, residing in all 11 of the state's present administrative divisions (see Map 1).

Figure 2: Sarawak (CartoGIS Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University

Source: https://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/base-maps/sarawak)

Residence

The Iban comprise around 30% of Sarawak's total population and are the numerical majority in Sarawak's Sri Aman Division. Iban traditionally occupy a longhouse (*rumah panjai*), constructed of wood, raised on stilts (for safety from floods, or attack from enemies). Comprising a single row of family households (*bilik*), generally located beside and parallel to a river (Sather, 1993), longhouses can be small, or may house a hundred or more families. A longhouse is entered by ascending a scored log, leading to a raised, exposed porch, (*tanju*), a space for drying clothes or husked padi. The egalitarian nature of Iban society is invoked by the form of a longhouse roof which is uniform in size and shape, compared to those of other Dayaks (Ting, 2005) that vary in size to reflect social hierarchy. Behind the *tanju* is a covered veranda (*ruai*), a social space, where people undertake craft work and socialize. A longhouse gallery preferably faces east towards sunrise (Sather, 1993), as in Bungkang. Leading off the *ruai* are separate *bilik* (family compartment), where people cook, eat, sleep, and store belongings. Each family's loft, (*sadau*), is no longer just used for storing rice, but is also a sleeping area. Residence can be in the natal home of the husband or wife, Iban society being utrolocal (Freeman, 1956), as in Bungkang.

According to a resident, Kuling (not his real name, as with the other residents) Bungkang longhouse was said founded by Dong, the original community leader. Dong came from the Skrang River, southeast of Bungkang (prior to the arrival of British adventurer, James Brooke, Sarawak's first "official" ruler, in the 1800s). Dong's son was Alak and his offspring, Nichoi, is referred to as great-great-grandparent to a number of Bungkang residents.

There are fewer permanent residents of Bungkang than previously, 24 n 2022 compared to over double that in 1989, similar to many other longhouses as part of a trend of out-migration (Abdullah, 2016). Bungkang comprises five *bilik*, occupants being mostly elderly or below school age. The longhouse, at

ground level, is constructed of bricks and mortar, with a corrugated iron roof and cement floor, these being "cheaper" than natural products, labour being viewed as of higher value than the cash needed to purchase prefabricated materials. The ongoing use of a traditional longhouse layout invokes continuity (see Postill, 2000) of *tanju*, *ruai*, and *bilik*, as with most longhouses in coastal areas nowadays, while construction materials illustrate change.

Social Structure

Before Sarawak came under control of the Brooke family in the 19th century, Iban leaders were not underpinned by state power (cf. Clastres, 1989). James Brooke, the first Rajah of Sarawak (1842-1868), implemented official state roles, including *tuai rumah* ("headman" or, rarely, "head woman"), imposing administrative structure on Dayak societies (Sutlive, 1992), as Iban came under centralized government control following Sarawak's absorption into Malaysia in 1963.

The Iban have a cognatic or bilateral kinship system (Freeman 1953) without formal institutions of hierarchy (Leach, 1950). The position of chief relies on goodwill in the community from which power ultimately derives. Leaders may be chosen (not necessarily hereditarily) from families seen as influential (Freeman, 1992), as in Bungkang. Iban children are traditionally subject to birth rites, after an initial period of maternal confinement (Sather, 1996), oral literature being used to socialize children, a means to make sense of the world (Appell, 2001). However, Bungkang residents do not nowadays recognise a role for oral literature. Head-of-house, Kumang, says, as echoed by other residents:

"Maya aku mit, cerita Kumang enggau Keling cuma cerita aja nya aja."
"Since I was small, tales of Kumang and Keling have only ever been stories."

In late adolescence, male Iban normally undertake *bejalai*, initiation through travel, aiming to return home with "trophies" (previously, human heads), and secure a bride. Concomitantly, females demonstrate prowess through production of ceremonial clothes (*pua kumbu*), rattan baskets and mats. Residents say that *bejalai* and *pua kumbu* no longer hold cultural prominence, although leaving a longhouse for employment is increasingly common, for financial (not cultural) reasons (also considered under "work and means of production," and "cultural matters"). At the end of life, there are detailed death rites, as described by Sather (1993, p. 89-95, regarding Saribas Iban), but these were unfamiliar to the Bungkang residents.

The Iban are described as "aggressively egalitarian" (Sather, 1996: 102) yet "intensely competitive" (1996, p. 74). Any person can determine their existence and express their own opinions (Sutlive 1992). Rousseau (1990) challenges the egalitarian character of Iban society by "stressing that the same individual very commonly holds both the offices of *tuai rumah* and *tuai burong*, exercising strong *de facto* authority over his longhouse's families," according to Sellato (2002, p. 73). Iban tend to be less deferential to authority than other Dayak groups, exhibiting greater equity between genders than other Dayak or Malay groups (Davison & Sutlive, 1991), while maintaining internal status differences, but less rigidly than other Dayaks.

The Iban social strata include *raja berani*, 'wealthy and brave,' and *mensia maioh*, 'commoners,' being linked to success in rice harvests (Sutlive, 1992). Such categories are no longer used or are unknown to Bungkang residents, about which Kuling was assertive.

"Nadai pakai perkataan macam 'raja berani' dan 'mensia maioh'"
"(We) do not use words like *'raja berani'* and *'mensia maioh*'"

"Nadai orang ngena Raja Berani maya zaman diatu, tu cerita aja."
"People are not familiar with terms of those times, they are just stories."

The Iban experience increased state control as exemplified by compulsory education, increased legislation and centralisation of state government power: "Changes to the native customary law under Taib's leadership have gradually undermined the position of the Dayaks" (Postill 2003: 189; also, cf. Boulanger 2009). It is also argued that Malaysia "has become more corporate, intrusive, and punitive as it has embraced neoliberal globalization" (Peletz, 2015, p. 144).

Work and Means of Production

Each Iban *bilik*-family is an autonomous economic unit within a longhouse (Sather, 1996), traditionally comprising three generations (Uchibori, 1978) and responsible for its own food production (Sutlive, 1992). Like other settled Dayak groups, the Iban primary means of production was shifting cultivation of hill rice (also, swidden farming), a search for new land occurring when soil is exhausted of nutrients, one year's use requiring around 7 years of fallow, if '*padi bukit*' (Cramb, 2007). Appell (2001, p.: 6) describes the as "an expansive form of cultural ecology that depended on consuming more and more virgin forest." Successful rice cultivation "has been described as the *sine qua non* for prestige" (Sutlive, 1992, p. 26) among the Iban. Each family maintains a rice seed bank. Sacred rice, *padi pun*, was planted to safeguard a rice crop, at a field's centre, synchronized ripening among families helped reduce a family's losses from insects, birds or animals, allowing for commonly-timed harvest ceremonies. Nowadays, there is no sacred rice. A resident, Kumang, only knew of *padi pun* from her late father.

Surplus rice allows Iban to obtain objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990). This would previously have meant rice used as currency to trade for prestigious brass gongs or Chinese ceramic jars. These no longer have the same symbolic value (Sercombe, 1999). Besides domestic consumption, rice has long since been an aspect of commerce, although many families now depend as much, or more, on cash from employment.

The Iban in Bungkang continue to engage in subsistence agriculture, while undertaking commerce, and waged work, where available. Every Bungkang *bilik* has a farm, aiming to produce enough rice to support a family, with surplus to sell. A "hectare can provide enough to feed up to 8 people for a year" (Heyzer, 1995, p. 41). Women continue to have the primary role in cultivation, and remain '"custodians of fertility" and guardians of rice (Mashman, 1991, p. 259).

Bungkang residents report that wet rice farming only began replacing swidden cultivation in the 1990s (cf. Sutlive, 1992), a transition well underway among other coastal-dwelling Iban communities there being more swamp-land in this coastal area. With a finite amount of land available, this transition is described as a response to population pressure on resources, requiring changes in agricultural techniques (Padoch, 1982).

"Diatu maioh orang nadai bumai bukit laban kelalu maioh kerjanya orang diatu bumai, padi paya aja lebih mudah diatu dijaga."

"Nowadays many people do not plant hill rice, because of the work needed to farm this way."

There is, traditionally, a detailed set of steps for hill rice cultivation (Freeman, 1953; Sutlive, 1992). The contemporary calendar, described by Bungkang residents (see Table 2, below), is attenuated compared to Freeman's (1992, p. 242) ritual-laden growing cycle (cf. Christiansen, 2002, p. 36). Planting was previously punctuated with four sets of rites and adherence to stellar lore, to ensure a safe harvest (Freeman, 1992, p.: 171). Residents now employ government-provided fertilisers to increase productivity, towards the end of the growing cycle when soil nutrients have diminished (cf. Soda, 2001; see also Hansen & Mertz, 2006), *padi pun* being redundant. When asked why, residents mentioned:

- Fewer physical demands, as there is no longer a need to remove large trees from steep slopes when preparing land for cultivation, given "Shifting cultivation is highly labour intensive" (Heyzer, 1995, p. 41)
- A shorter distance to transport harvested rice from fields
- Overall rice yield is larger relative to the area needed for cultivation than for hill rice
- There is no need to search out new plots for cultivation (see also Sutlive, 1992)

However, wet rice farming has reported downsides: no intercropping with other cultivars is possible. Hill rice is considered to have more flavour and, nostalgia arises regarding swidden farming. Hill farms tend to be located in forested areas some distance from a longhouse, often necessitating a journey of hours to a farm hut (where there are tools and basic accommodation). People spend extended periods at farms, clearing land, planting, weeding, and harvesting, are recalled as communal activities, children playing with friends, collecting wild foods to be cooked and eaten together. Nonetheless, evanescence of these is not seen to outweigh benefits of wet rice farming, even if people reminisce about the past.

"Maya agi mit suba sigi rindu enti maya orang nugal padi bukit, ingatan ti – pemadu manah."
"When small, before, people really enjoyed planting hill rice, it is a lovely memory."

Kumang describes her farming year as commencing with planting of rice seeds around mid-August, needing a week to complete this. She replants seedlings to her main field around mid-September, completing around 2 acres in a fortnight. She harvests in March, taking about a month to complete.

Table 1: Current calendar for wet rice cultivation in Bungkang (cf. Freeman, 1992, p. 242)

January	Little rice field work	
February		
March	*Ngetau* (harvest)	Harvesting period
April	Little rice field work	Selection of rice strains for planting
May		Clearing and cutting in preparation for planting
June		
July	*Manchit*	Spraying weedicide
August	*Nanam benih*	Sowing
September	*Ujung bulan bertambak*	Replanting of seedlings to main field
October	*Mantun*	Weeding
November	Little rice field work	Weeding (hill padi only)
December		

From March until August, rice fields are fallow, when harvested rice is dried and stored, to consume throughout the year, share with relatives, or sell, depending how much excess there is. Kumang obtains up to 50 gunny sacks of rice per year (1 gunny is around 50 kgs), from the 6 rice varieties cultivated, around half the number she planted a decade ago (cf. Christensen, 2002, p. 59). Varieties would be even fewer, Kumang maintains, but for commercial motives, as each variety has a different flavour and colour, appealing to diverse consumer tastes (cf. Janowski, 2005). The farming cycle remains, but there is no longer an "inauguration" or other rice-farming associated rites (see Freeman, 1992).

Commerce is largely related to wild and cultivated vegetables, fruits, rice, and commodities, grown for sale, e.g. rubber, cocoa, and pepper, to supplement subsistence with cash (Soda, 2001). Many Iban turned to cash crops in the in the early 20th century, or before (Jensen, 1966; see also Postill, 2000), with the rising significance of cash (Jensen 1974; cf. Soda, 2001). Flora cultivated for commerce opened new means to wealth (Sutlive, 1992), but the price of commodities is influenced externally over which Iban (as with other Dayaks) have no control. Commodity cultivation has increased under state influence.

‘Subsidy schemes — the planting of rubber, pepper, cocoa, and oil palm on a commercial basis to encourage cash cropping — have been extensively employed as a tool for persuading the Dayak communities to abandon subsistence agriculture’ (Ngidang, 1995, p. 306).

Kumang has two three-acre plots of rubber trees, extraction of sap being possible all year round, providing a small but steady income. She also has eight durian trees; a bundle of three durian sells for approximately US$ 2.50, and is sought-after as a delicacy, yielding between 1 and 2 crops per year. Kumang goes to Sri Aman open market most mornings, to sell produce. She sold around 26 gunny sacks of rice, at US$2.50 per kilo in 2021. Sutlive (1992) suggests rice accounts for up to 50% of a longhouse Iban’s diet. Kumang estimates that commerce accounts for around 70% of her household income, as she has no wage employment (cf. Sather, 1996; and Soda, 2001). Other residents estimate that revenue from the sale of foraged and cultivated produce provides around 30% of income and waged work the other 70%. Residents considered that rice farming is more important for those in the interior, than for those in coastal areas with road access to towns, while Cramb (pers. comm) suggests “the reverse may be the case. Closer to the coast Iban have access to land for wet rice cultivation which gives them a good return for little labour, whereas many upriver longhouses have given up on hill rice cultivation and rely on cash crops and/or remittances” (see also Abdullah, 2016, p. 178).

A further change is a decline in craft production. Residents say they continue to produce fishing nets, baskets and mats, but for personal use. The latter two may also be constructed from shop-bought plastic strips, requiring cash; and, jungle knives (*parang*, ubiquitous tools), are now often shop-bought, rather than being forged domestically. Weaving of decorative and ceremonial cloth (*pua kumbu*) no longer occurs at Bungkang, although one family keeps a loom in their loft, for sentimental reasons, they say, as can also be said of musical instruments, bezoar stones, wild boar teeth, and hornbill beaks. Production and sale of woven cloth is not seen as a viable income source, in the face of commercial production at lower cost in Indonesian Kalimantan. However, production of *pua kumbu* has become institutionalized in Sarawak, and supported by the Tun Jugah Foundation (TJF) in Kuching, where Iban women produce *pua kumbu*, that the TJF helps to market (Sather, pers. comm): http://tunjugahfoundation.org.my/textile-museum-gallery/).

Work opportunities, beyond subsistence, have increased considerably since the Iban were attracted to Brunei after oil was first discovered in 1921 (Sercombe, 1999). The topic of employment generated much discussion among residents about living costs. Bungkang residents view employment as replacing subsistence farming and commercial agriculture for males, while matters are less clear for females. A paid job is an aspiration explicitly stated by male (and some unmarried female) residents, a regular income being the attraction.

“Maioh perempuan Iban bejalai sekarang ‘sangat moden…’”
“Many women work away nowadays and this is seen as ‘very modern’.”

Those with qualifications, or relevant skills choose paid work (ahead of commerce and farming), and participation in the wider economy. As mentioned, *bejalai* is no longer culturally prescribed (Kedit, 1991; cf. Clastres, 1989), but a matter of perceived need, referred to as *kerja*, i.e. ‘work,’ in the form of “wage labor” (Soda, 2001). The coast of Sarawak is more urbanised, where Iban are generally closer to wage work opportunities (Arenz et al., 2017, p. 14) than those upriver. There has been an “increase in female out-migration” (Soda, 2001, p.: 94; see also Girard & Hindstrom, 2015) among the unmarried. No *bilik* in Bungkang still relies solely on subsistence (see also Iskandar & Ellen, 1999; cf. Soda, 2001). Subsistence, and sale of wild and cultivated produce, are not sufficient to sustain a household without other means, i.e. a wage, or salary. Each Bungkang household has one or more family members in employment, not necessarily resident at the longhouse (as in Table 3 below). Rice is seen as purchasable, although the civil servant and his nurse wife view rice cultivation as a way to maintain links with

tradition. Money earned from employment is of more value than the time expended to cultivate rice over one cycle. Cash is thus seen to allow greater choice over resources use.

"Duit sigi paling berguna maya ke diatu, tong beras enggau nangkap jelu nginti ikan enggau sayur liar pan agi penting amai arinya sida boleh duit."

"Money is most important nowadays, but rice, game, fish, wild vegetables are also means to obtain money."

No resident denigrates subsistence cultivation. The Sarawak government has long seen "shifting cultivation … as an obstacle to development since the exploitation of timber resources and subsequent conversion to oil-palm plantations" (Hansen & Mertz, 2006, p. 136). Two household heads are in full-time employment, one a lorry driver, the other a government-employed administrator. The latter's wife is a nurse, they are not permanent resident, but live in government-provided accommodation in Sri Aman, returning at weekends. This exemplifies what Soda (2001, p. 99) describes as a "new trend of mobility from the longhouse to urban areas".

Table 2: Paid occupations by bilik (household), Bungkang Longhouse: 'n-r' = non-resident; 'r' = resident; 'f' = female; 'm' = male

	Bilik (Household)				
	A	B	C	D	E
Work type ▸	1. Civil servant (m); (n-r) 2. Nurse (f); (n-r)	1. Coolie (m); (r) 2. Soldier (m); (n-r)	1. Lorry driver (m); (r) 2. Soldier (m); (n-r)	1. Occasional work (m); (r)	1. market seller (f); (r) 2. Electric company employee/coolie (m); (r)

A longstanding, ongoing aspect of paid employment includes remittances to longhouse family members from relatives working elsewhere. Four Bungkang heads-of-household say remittances are pivotal for livelihoods, echoing Inglehart and Baker's (2000) claim about the ongoing role of the family for survival in pre-industrial societies (cf. Griffin, 1978), and the obligations of offspring to take care of parents via financial support.

"Ibu bapa pilih siapa tinggal …. Anak ti bekerja di tempat bukai ia ka agi bujang enggau dara nadai nguan apai enggau indai anak ti nguan apai enggau indai sigi diau bak bilik nya nyaga semua reta."
"Parents choose who will remain … (The) child who works elsewhere who is still single does not look after (their) mum or dad (but they send remittances), it's the child who remains who does this."

Support is reflected materially, e.g. in home interiors that invoke pride in relatives and new types of cultural capital facilitated by family remittances (Zharkevich 2019), as stated by residents, as well as reproducing kinship "across time and space" (2019, p. 884) through these practices.

Culture-Related Issues

This is necessarily an amorphous topic, concerned with matters raised by the Bungkang residents, not solely about "work," "residence," or "social organization" (although inevitably interconnected). Among perceptions, material infrastructure is significant, and was mentioned more than other matters:

- Piped water from a central supply; reduces labor demands, ensures near-constant availability, enhancing hygiene, health, and convenience
  "Ai paip datai bak kampong Entulang Bungkang taun 2009."
  "Piped water arrived at Kampong Entulang Bungkang in 2009."
- Mains electricity (installed in 2012) and benefits accruing from this, e.g. lighting, as well as use of white and brown goods
  "Api karan datai bak Kampung Entulang Bungkang taun 2012".
  "Electricity arrived at Kampong Entulang Bungkang in 2012."

Every Bungkang *bilik* has electricity, fans, a refrigerator, a stereo system, and a television. Postill (2008) claims television has resulted in less socializing, but I did not notice this, as people talk over broadcasts, as if they are background. Stereos have largely replaced bards at festive occasions, being cheaper, besides there being few people with the relevant musical skills. There is at least one mobile phone per household, important for maintaining social relations, especially via WhatsApp. Each household uses a gas cooker, bottles being delivered by lorry, monthly, although open fires are used when cooking outside in bamboo, especially if game meat is obtained.

In 1989, there was no personal motorised transport at Bungkang. Now, there are 2 cars and 3 motorbikes, among the 5 households, 1 *bilik* being unable to afford personal transport. The standard rate for the ride to Sri Aman is around US$0.80. Residents state personal motorised transport is essential to access paid work and for getting goods to market. People do not have the capital to purchase vehicles outright, taking out loans, reinforcing a need for cash. Private transport ownership appears to have increased in inverse proportion to the decrease in local public bus services.

The Bungkang Iban, also have a wider diet choice of manufactured goods, with more disposable cash, besides a rise of fast food outlets in Sri Aman town. Processed foods are more common, e.g. dried noodles sometimes eaten straight from a packet by children as a snack. Tinned meat is also common and relatively cheap, e.g. sardines (*sadin ikan*); and pork (*sadin babi*). *Sadin*, adapted from English, "sardines", is often uttered with a modifier, e.g. *sadin ikan*, meaning "tinned fish", specifying what the tin contains. Frozen meat is relatively newly available, but more expensive than tinned meat, requiring cold storage, with less dependence on foraging, but a greater need for cash.

Non-Material Cultural Matters

Religious beliefs have long pervaded Iban life, being holistic and "polytheistic" (Freeman, 1960, p.76), with four main spiritual authorities, including *lemambang*, "priest bard", *manang*, "shaman", *tukang sabak*, "soul guide", and *tuai burung*, augur (see Appell, 2001; cf. Graham, 1983). However, Iban beliefs have been "reshaped," in that Bungkang residents converted to Catholicism in the 1990s, influenced by head of household, Kuling. When asked why, residents hoped they might benefit in ways similar to western people, becoming modern, better-educated and wealthier, rather than offering spiritual reasons. Many Iban initially had become Anglican Christians in the Sri Aman area (Sather pers. comm). No one in Bungkang appears to attend church, pray, own a bible, talk about their religion, or show other outward signs of being institutionally religious. Bungkang residents did not become Christian following an epiphany, and have not greatly changed their lifestyle (Hasegawa 2018). Chua (2012) argues conversion to a mainstream religion can catalyse ongoing links between traditional ways and the new religion, in this case Catholicism, by which conversion is part of a continuum of experience not an end in itself. Nonetheless, Iban conversion does appear as if a shift from polytheism to monotheism. Kumang said:

"Hari Gawai agi penting …sigi agi penting bagi bangsa Iban ti diau bak rumah panjai."
"Gawai is still very important for people in the longhouse."

Two film examples show alternative perspectives about change, exploring perceived challenges of the Iban transition to "modernity." These include: *Bejalai* (1989), selected for the Berlin film festival, and "the first to be made in the Iban language in Sarawak … concerns the conflict between the ancient and traditional life and the destruction of that life by deforestation and the flooding caused by massive hydroelectric projects … told through the eyes of Rentap, a young man who finds the only work available to him as part of the crew that is cutting down the forests of his home": https://www.allmovie.com/movie/bejalai-v176109.
There is also the "story of Tonny Anak Iman featured in a short social film, *Pengidup Aku* ('My life') which focuses on the effects of urban migration of Indigenous People in Sarawak rural area (East Malaysia). It shows how communities living in the traditional longhouses are affected by the COVID-19 outbreak and how they will prepare to celebrate the annual 'Harvest Festival *Gawai'* (in June 2020) in the midst of Covid-19 lockdown: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/stories/fading-iban-longhouse-culture-east-malaysia_mt

DISCUSSION

The article has gathered Iban emic views of ways in which life ways appear to have been maintained or altered. The Iban in Bungkang have sustained themselves as distinct, while adapting in response to changing circumstances, especially economically. Traditional societies tend to be overseen by family institutions, tribes or clans with members holding ascribed roles, within which the main mode of production is agricultural. The Iban in rural areas are described as having experienced slower socioeconomic development than those in urban areas (Jawan, 1994; and J.S. Sercombe, 2008). A longhouse's location is likely to, at least partially, reflect community circumstances; those in more rural (non-coastal) areas tend to have less easy access to facilities (e.g. medical clinics), but this is changing, especially with expansion of logging roads. The Bungkang longhouse remains a focal place, valued by residents, including the civil servant, Hugo (who lives mostly elsewhere), as a place people come from, where they return at key moments, particularly *Gawai*, New Year and Christmas, if able to.

"Rumah panjai ami agi penting … Keluarga agi penting."

"Our longhouse is still important … family is still important."

Continued use of a traditional longhouse layout invokes continuity and the values that reflect this. Iban appear a hot society (Lévi-Strauss, 1966), ready to embrace economic, technological and religious change, these also being catalysts for community, e.g. remittances (Inglehart & Baker, 2000), and mobile phones, while also retaining practices that explicitly uphold a sense of community, such as *Gawai*. While New Year and Christmas fulfil similar functions, they do so as a result of attributing community to these, especially when celebrated in the longhouse. Maintenance of internal relations and symbiosis remain, exemplified in small ways such as residents frequently bringing small gifts of food to neighbours, a hand of bananas, a bundle of ferns, a bowl of snails, invoking a sense of community, and this appears to endure (cf. Davison & Sutlive, 1991). However, game food has long since grown in commercial value, an exception being if people hunt in a group (when game obtained is shared). Otherwise, sharing is voluntary. As elsewhere in Sarawak (and not just among the Iban), "sharing" of perishable resources is not comprehensive. Wild boar meat is sold, if caught, due to its scarcity and financial value. One kilo fetches around US$5 (cf. Hasegawa, 2018).

"Enti maya orang bisi bulih jani haya diatu orang nadai berbagi ka nya. Zaman diatu orang nadai bebagi ke utai. Enti nuan ka makai nya nuan mesti meli enggau duit."

"If a person catches some wild boar, they do not share with other people. Nowadays, people do not share things. If you want to eat this, you need to buy with money."

There is increased national presence in many areas of life, as the reach of state and national governments is extended in economics, education, and media, the latter being either owned or controlled by the state in Malaysia (cf. McDaniel, 2002). An Iban university academic, Ngidang, argues (1995, p. 1) that "a variety of reasons have been used to explain the peripheral role of the Iban in the socioeconomic development of Sarawak today," in that "Iban's mode of existence does not operate within dynamics of market economics" (1995, p. 12), although one can argue Iban modes are appropriate at the local level (cf. Clastres, 1989). Conversion to Catholicism initially appears as if a fundamental shift in beliefs, but this seems more in line with socioeconomic advancement than a fundamentally different spiritual outlook. During visits to Bungkang, residents unilaterally talked more, and longer, about material and monetary issues than all other topics combined, indicating these were uppermost in people's minds. No resident is penniless, and food resources appear sufficient. Focal issues were work and work types, i.e. farming, commerce and, primarily, the importance of wage work. The Iban in Bungkang appear to be between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (cf. Tonnies, 2001). Symbiosis and institutionalised internal relations among family are still the norm, i.e. *Gemeinschaft* (with the sale of game being an exception), but those who work (and also reside) outside the community undoubtedly enter a more impersonal, transactional *Gesellschaft* world compared to those in Bungkang, returning to community, *Gemeinschaft*, generally at key events (that maintain and reinforce community). Change includes: new technologies; the importance of money, as suggested by Steward (1972; and Sahlins & Service, 1960), linking community with larger society; reduced adherence to Iban traditions and conversion to a mainstream religion, proposed by Sahlins and Service (ibid) are influenced by wider society and impact on a sense of community.

CONCLUSION

In today's world, change (and the speed of it) seems more normal than continuity (Greenfield, 2016). Change tends, nonetheless, to be a prerequisite for improvement, but by itself certainly does not inevitably lead to improvement. Bungkang residents see some changes as progress, such as conversion to Catholicism, and wage employment. Economic aspects of contemporary material culture (motorised transport, piped water, mains electricity, and white goods) are more prominent and valued than previously significant symbolic artefacts and beliefs, as the pragmatics of economic necessity, tied to a change in beliefs have superseded other concerns. There are necessarily interconnections, e.g. ways technology facilitates social relations, a form of "spill-over" by which one area of life influences perceptions of another. What one might conclude for Bungkang and its residents is that "A main characteristic of our society is a willed coexistence of very new technology and very old social forms" (Williams, 1980, p. 191). This article has inevitable omissions in that it only considers a small community of downriver Iban. The article does not aspire to generalise findings. The range of social and cultural variables involved, and their interconnections combine in stochasticity, and make simple conclusions unrealistic. Of the **characteristics that distinguish modern from traditional society, exemplified by Hall and Gay (1996; see Appendix 1), two seem highly applicable to Bungkang residents. "Economics," and a "**rise of rationalist, cost-benefit ways of looking at the world" appear to have overtaken other values, while not entirely replacing them given the ongoing importance of community and place. These push society in several directions simultaneously, invoking multilinearity. Bungkang is still overseen by longhouse institutions, while commercialisation has greatly affected the world of work in that resident's value paid employment over self-employment where this is viable.

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Unfolding the story on the mysterious suspension bridge in Seropak, Bau, Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

In 2005, a steel suspension bridge, hitherto unknown to those outside the community, was discovered in a remote corner of Sarawak. This paper describes the discovery and subsequent stepwise uncovering of the story of the bridge. The research included the study of old records and publications and communication with museums, archives, and historians in the UK. The history and purpose of the bridge is now uncovered.

Keywords: Industrial archaeology, Historical steel suspension bridges, Rajah Brooke history

INTRODUCTION

The history of Sarawak is fascinating and unique. The more than 100 years of rule by the White Rajahs have provided Sarawak with a history like nowhere else. Around the state there are several heritage sites that provide the people, local or foreign, with memories and knowledge on this unique past. Protecting these heritage sites is a great importance to commemorate the history and past. Without knowing where we come from, our understanding of the present and the future will diminish.

This research is about such a spectacular heritage site - the steel suspension bridge at Kampung Seropak in the Bau District in the westernmost corner of Sarawak. Although known and used by the villagers, it was only in 2005 that the existence of this remote bridge became commonly known. Before this time there were rumours of a red bridge in the area, but they were more considered fiction than fact.

This story is about the discovery of the bridge and uncovering its history. A 20-year journey that today enables us to tell the history of a 120-year-old beauty.

THE MYSTERIOUS RED BRIDGE – FACTS OR FICTION

In the years after the turn of the millennium, we occasionally came across rumours of an old steel suspension bridge – the red bridge – located in the middle of the jungle in the Bau region in the westernmost corner of Sarawak. It sounded very unlikely that anybody would construct such a structure in the middle of nowhere. However, it was the late Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Dr. James Davos Mamit that convinced us, that the bridge did in fact exist, so we realised that we had to investigate the matter.

According to Datuk Seri Dr. James, the bridge should be found somewhere not too far from Kampung Seropak in the Bau region. So, in July 2005, Ib and his wife Lillian set off to investigate the matter. They asked around in the kampung (village), but nobody seemed to know about the bridge. Finally, a young girl confirmed that she knew about it and consented to show them the place. She drove in front of them on her motorbike, along the newly finished Krokong Road. When she stopped, she pointed

down a small path through the jungle, used by the villagers to get to their gardens. They went down the path for less than hour before reaching the beautiful Staat River. They continued along the banks and then, shortly after, they saw the bridge, just in front of them! A remarkable structure. The steel masts still standing high with large spires on the top, pointing towards the sky. The thick suspension wires still carrying the deck with no visible signs of weakening. The wooden deck was, however, in poor condition; all the planks were more or less rotten. To be able to continue using the bridge, the villagers had placed planks transversely of the old planks, but these too had also started rotting.

Fig 1. The Red Bridge in Seropak July 2005 (Photo Ib Larsen)

Following this intial visit, several more visits to the bridge were carried out by interested persons, including documenting that the track passing the bridge continued all the way along the Staat River to the long-ago closed remote Tegora mercury mine. However, at many places this Tegora track had vanished, especially where small streams merged with the Staat River. Among the group of persons from Kuching checking the path was Robert Basiuk, Tim Hatch, Louise and Polycarp Teo, Patricia Nayoi and Rahim Bugo. So gradually, knowledge of the existence of the bridge became more widespread.

The presence of the jungle path from the Krokong Road to the bridge proved that the villagers were still using it, so it followed that more information should be available in Kpg Seropak. So, one day in December 2007, we headed out to meet the headman of Kpg Seropak.

Fig2. Location of Red bridge and Tegora Mine. (Map by Josephine Wong)

It quickly became clear that the village was perfectly well aware of the bridge. The Headman K.K. Enneng Joseph informed that it locally was called the "White man's bridge".

Mr. Enneng knew that the bridge was used by the Japanese during World War II. The Japanese used the bridge to reach the closed Tegora mercury mine, which they reopened, and they further used the bridge to get to their headquarters. The stables for the mine were located at Simpang Kuda.

Mr. Enneng did not know when the bridge was built, but the local legend went that some Indonesians were sacrificed as offerings, when it was built. The Indonesians were apparently told that there were coins in the bottom of a hole that had been dug out. When they went down into the hole to collect the coins, they were immediately covered with soil and buried.

Luckily Mr. Nyaun, a 77-year-old villager that participated in the meeting, knew more about the origin of the bridge. His father had been the Temengong, and he got the information from him.

According to him, the Japanese did not build the bridge. The bridge was there before the opening of the Dahan Rubber Estate in 1903. The estate was located just after crossing the bridge towards the Tegora mine. The Japanese had just repaired the bridge and the track leading to the mine. They also threw everybody out of the Dahan Estate and used this as their headquarters.

He also supplemented this information with some stories about life on the track during the war: *The Japanese restored the old track with stones, using prisoners of war (POW) as labourers. The villagers supplied river-stones for the purpose. They received RM 4.00 for a 4 feet x 4 feet basket. The locals would be beaten if they talked with the POW. However, the villagers provided the POW with some food, as they only got rice with salt. The villagers would make some food and hide it along the riverbank. They pretended to fish and through certain movements with the fishing gear would tell the POW that*

there was food hidden nearly. Afterwards a shirt or something would flow down the river as payment. Nyaun claimed to have even got a watch.

The miners were Chinese. The ore went through a process, changing the colour from red to white. The Ibans carried the very heavy processed ore-blocks manually, 2 per block, along the trail to the Sarawak River.

After the meeting we continued for a revisit to the bridge. Much had changed since our first visits. The jungle walk from the Krokong Road to the bridge was gone forever. Now oil palms had taken over. The bridge was now much easier to access. Also, the bridge was under renovation. The ramps had been reconstructed, and the deck was being renewed.

Fig 3. The Red bridge in Seropak 2018 (Photo Ib Larsen)

But several questions remained unanswered. When exactly was the bridge built and for what purpose? Who commissioned the bridge and who built it?

WHO CONSTRUCTED THE RED BRIDGE?

As it appeared to be few records, it proved very difficult to uncover when the bridge was built, by whom and for what purpose. But the authors of this article took on the challenge to uncover the story.

The easiest way to obtain information on old steel suspension bridges would normally be to contact the producer. The bridge was most likely British, and British companies usually kept detailed inventories on the bridges they supplied. Furthermore, British bridge makers always provided their bridges with a badge or plague with the necessary information about the producer. The problem was that this bridge did not wear a badge! This was probably removed when the Japanese renovated the bridge during WWII.

A few years were used to search archives and libraries in the UK to try to identify the producer of the bridge. The breakthrough came in June 2021 when Louise received a mail from David Denenberg, who was making an inventory of all known steel suspension bridges worldwide[1]. Denenberg informed that the bridge with big certainty was a Harpers Bridge. He gave us the contacts to Douglas Harper, the great-grandson of the founder of the Harpers steel suspension bridge company in Aberdeen; a company that provided many bridges for the empire between 1870 and 1910.

Douglas Harper confirmed that the Red Bridge was indeed a Harper Bridge. The bridge was a 6-foot wide, 200-foot-long standard Harper Bridge. A similar sized Harper Bridge was among others constructed in Nepal at Charchare near Butwal. According to Douglas Harper it was likely that the Sarawak Government commissioned the bridge from the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, with whom Louis Harper (designer) and Harpers Limited (manufacturer) usually dealt with. But for the last, of course we cannot be certain.

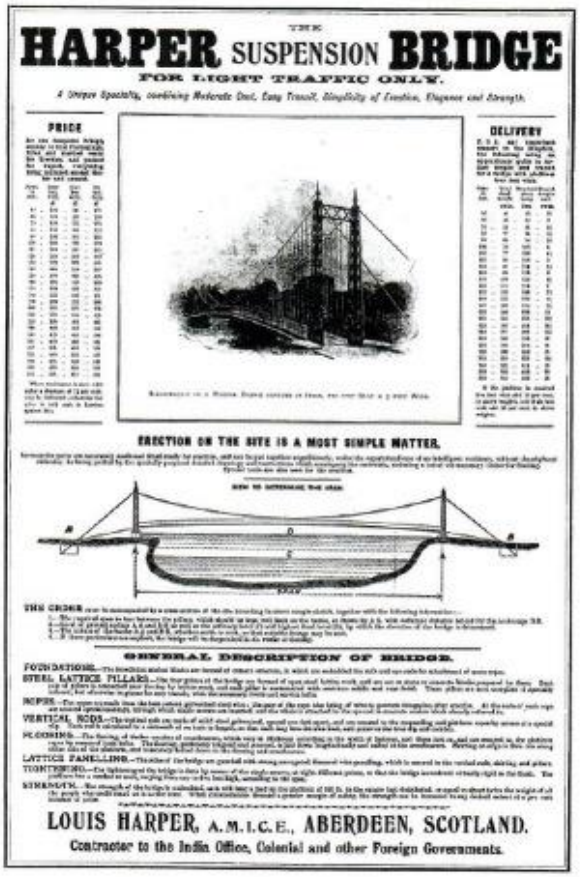
THE
HARPER SUSPENSION BRIDGE
FOR LIGHT TRAFFIC ONLY.
A Unique Specialty, combining Moderate Cost, Easy Transit, Simplicity of Erection, Elegance and Strength.
PRICE
DELIVERY
ERECTION ON THE SITE IS A MOST SIMPLE MATTER.
GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF BRIDGE.
FOUNDATIONS.
STEEL LATTICE PILLARS.
ROPES.
VERTICAL RODS.
FLOORING.
LATTICE PANELLING.
TIGHTENING.
STRENGTH.
LOUIS HARPER, A.M.I.C.E., ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND.
Contractor to the India Office, Colonial and other Foreign Governments.

Fig 4. Harper Bridge advertising[2].

Douglas had established a website[3] and published a book on the known Harpers bridges[4], but unfortunately there were no records on any Harper Bridges in Malaysia, so the mystery of who commissioned the bridgewas not yet solved!

[1] https://www.bridgemeister.com/
[2] From Harper, Douglas (2015), appendix 2
[3] https://www.harperbridges.co.uk/
[4] Harper, Douglas (2015)

WHEN AND WHY WAS THE RED BRIDGE CONSTRUCTED?

The fact that the track from bridge proved to continue all the way to the old remote mercury mine in Tegora, far into the interior of the Bau District, obviously pointed in the direction that the bridge was constructed for transporting the ore from the mine to the Sarawak River. This mine was established shortly after the manager of the Borneo Company, Ludvig Verner Helms, in 1867 discovered the ore in this remote and previously uninhabited area[5].

According to Porritt, the bridge was recognised before WWII. He further assumes that the bridge have been comissioned to provide access to the Tegora mine:

"*In 1938, a 60 x 1.8 meter suspension bridge near Kampung Seropak some 80 km south-southeast of Bau was found by a group en route to visiting the BCLS mercuric sulphide mining site at Mt. Tcgora which had been abandoned in 1895 (Martine 1946: 39). The bridge was completely overgrown but on clearing found to be in good condition. No record of the bridge was found in government or BCLS records, although it is reasonably certain that it was built by BCLS as part of their mining operations"*[6].

Some additional information further pointed in that direction: The Tegora mine was visited by Hornaday in 1878. He recorded the following from his trip: *"Presently we came to the Staat River, a small shady stream, along the south bank of which the road winds for several miles. .... at last, when we came to where the road crosses the stream on a high bridge, a deep shady pool in the bend below looked so inviting...."*[7]. No doubt this is the location of the Red Bridge! We never missed swimming in the "deep shady pool in the bend below" when we visited the bridge! From this we can conclude that there was a high bridge at the site in 1878!

However, it appeared that this bridge could not be our Red Bridge. Douglas Harper informed us that the type of bridge, which we saw in Seropak was only produced in the period 1898-1905. Before that time, the bridges supplied by Harpers would have been constructed with timber masts and the timber for the deck sourced locally. It is known that John Harper was exporting them in the 1870s to such places as Africa, Sri Lanka, and India.

The narrow timespan for the construction of the Red Bridge-type, brought us very close to dating the bridge, but it also raised other uncertainties. The bridge, which Hornaday crossed, must predate the current bridge. Bridges with timber masts could of course only have a limited lifespan in the tropics. Perhaps the Harper's bridge had succeeded an earlier bridge with timber masts at the same site to service the Tegora mine.

Other records support that the previous bridge must have been simpler. Archibald Allison, the manager of the Tegora Mine 1882-84, wrote about his time at the mine, referencing a local dispute: *"The gang next apparently determined to stop Europeans from coming to Tegora, or at least my house, and apparently tried to induce Mr Tawdry not to visit me. The bridge on the Tegora road was bodily lifted and a round tree left to do the duty as bridge across the river. The object being to deter Europeans from going to Tegora* [8]. For sure, the current steel bridge would not have been easy to body-lift!

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[5] Helms, Ludvig V. (1882), p. 244

[6] Refer to the section on rubber in: Porritt, L Vernon (2015)

[7] Hornaday, William T. (1885) – here after page 11 in the following document: https://www.scribd.com/document/74688738/Tegora-a-mercurial-anthology

[8] Allison, Archibald (1898)

We also know, that at least from 1886 the production of ore in the Tegora mine had become so low, that it would give no meaning to import a new bridge from the UK[9]. So, any bridge constructed to service the Tegora mine must have been constructed earlier than the 1880´s.

So, why was the Red Bridge then erected? As described above, Mr. Nyaun from Seropak had been very firm about the bridge being constructed before the opening of the Dahan Rubber estate, located adjacent to the bridge. Thus, Mr. Nyaun had related the construction of the bridge to the commencement of the rubber plantations.

The track and the earlier bridge would have provided access to an area, which, from around year 1900, was dedicated for rubber plantations. Rubber plantations commenced in Sarawak around 1900 and the first concession given in 1901 was in the Poak area, where the bridge is situated. This was then developed into the Dahan Estate, located just across from the bridge, The estate commenced in 1903[10].

The bridge and the track had opened-up the area all the way from the Dahan Estate to the Tegora mine, so the Borneo Company in the 1890´s obtained concession for rubber plantations all the way from the Dahan Estate down to the Tegora mine. In his book "the Borneo story", describing the first 100 years of the Borneo Company, Henry Longhurst writes: "*In the nineties… the company secured what was known as the Poak concession – a 20,000 acre strip extending from what is today the Dahan Rubber Estate to Tegora Mountain*"[11].

Indeed, the rubber boom in the area around year 1900 would have justified the replacement of the previous bridge.

RECORDS ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE RED BRIDGE

Major developments and construction works in the State would be expected to be recorded in the official Sarawak Gazette. So, a final step was to explore if the Sarawak Gazette from the period just around the year 1900 gave any records on the construction of a suspension bridge in the area.

An examination of the Gazette certainly proved this to be the case. The only problem was that the Gazette refers to 2 different bridges – the Puak Bridge and the Staat Bridge. in March 1907 the Bau annual report in the Gazette reveals the expenditures for the repair of two different bridges: Staat Bridge (expenditure 1,111.12 $ in 1905 and 402.14 $ in 1906) and Puak bridge (expenditure 173.36 $ in 1906).

The Staat river and the Puak river is actually the same river. Upstream it is called Puak River, and further downstream it is called Staat river. At the location of the Red Bridge the river is called Puak River.

The 1903-04 editions of the Gazette give the following information on the Staat bridge:

- Sarawak Gazette November 1903: "*On 6th and on 27th, when I visited Puak, a gang of coolies had begun to make the concrete foundations for the Staat Bridge*"
- Sarawak Gazette July 1904. "*On 31st I visited Puak and found the Staat suspension bridge had been finished, except the approaches on either side"*.
- Sarawak Gazette 1907: The deck of the suspension bridge over the Staat River needs repair.

[9] Ooi, Keat Gin (1995)
[10] Refer to the section on rubber in: Porritt, L Vernon (2015)

[11] Longhurst, Henry (1956), p. 65

The following record from Sarawak Gazette April 1904, probably concerns the Puak bridge, as it is explained that it had no foundations – in contrast to the above explanation on the concrete foundations in the note from the November 1903 issue:

"On the 3rd when I visited Puak to look at the bridge under construction. I considered a total lack for foundation… which, with the whole weight of the bridge was unsatisfactory". This is followed up in the March 1907 edition, where it is explained that *"the large belian bridge at Puak, which was on the point of collapsing on account of the foundations giving away, had to be hauled into position and repaired"*.

Based on these descriptions, it certainly seems most likely that our bridge is indeed the Staat bridge. It is explicitly described as being a suspension bridge, while the Puak bridge at the same time is explained to be a *belian* bridge and to have no concrete foundation. Nonetheless, whichever it is, the construction is documented in the Gazette.

Thus, without much doubt, it may hereafter be concluded that the Red Bridge in Seropak was constructed in 1904 to provide access to the newly established rubber plantations.

CONCLUSION

To find and to determine the history and purpose of the Red Bridge in Seropak has been a nearly 20 year long, but exciting journey. Today we can conclude that bridge was constructed in 1904. It is a Harpers Bridge from Harpers Steel Suspension Bridge Company in Aberdeen. It was constructed to provide access to the new rubber plantations that opened-up in the area from around 1903. The bridge followed a predecessor, which was constructed to provide access to the remote Tegora mercury mine. During WW2 the Japanese renovated the bridge to be able to reopen the Tegora mine and also to provide access to their headquarters, which they installed in the Dahan estate. The story about a previously unknown Harper bridge now finds its way to the Harperbridge homepage[12].

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our strong gratitude to Douglas Harper for taking such effort in supporting the uncovering of this story, and for finding and providing a large amount of information. Your support was essential for the success of the project. Our strong gratitude also to Robert Basiuk for assisting in uncovering the story from the very beginning at the meeting in kampung Seropak in 2007 to the final version of this paper.

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[12] Refer to note 3

https://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+Borneo+Company%27s+role+in+the+economic+development+of+Sarawak...-a0462983521

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Journal of Borneo-Kalimantan

The Role of Ancestors in Iban Traditional Religion

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ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural studies of religion have consistently treated ancestor worship as a specific, narrow practice that is found in many traditional societies but far from all of them. In contrast, Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley (1996) have proclaimed that ancestor worship was a universal behavior in traditional, small-scale societies and that the practice is found in societies where it was previously thought to be absent. In this paper, we describe one such society, the Iban, whose religious practices are often claimed to not include the worship of ancestors, despite ancestors being central to their religion. We demonstrate that many of the gods and spirits of the Iban supernatural pantheon are most clearly understood as ancestors. Furthermore, we argue that the Iban example may not be an outlier, and that ancestor worship may be prevalent in many more societies than previously claimed. We end by describing the weaknesses of some of the common reasons used to downplay the ubiquity of the practice in previous ethnographic treatments and cross-cultural studies.

Keywords: ancestor worship; Iban; supernatural beings; religion

INTRODUCTION

The universal, or, at the very least, near universal, supernatural claims of ancestors in societies all over the world has only been appreciated by a few scholars (e.g. Clark & Coe, 2021; Crespi & Summers, 2014; Lahti, 2009; Steadman & Palmer, 2008; Steadman, Palmer, & Tilley, 1996), despite the practice enjoying the attention of numerous studies (e.g., Coe & Begley, 2016; Couderc & Sillander, 2012; Fortes, 1961; Glowacki & Malpass, 2003; Hu, 2016; Kopytoff, 1971; Luwayi, 1988; Middleton, 1960). Most researchers who have studied ancestor worship in depth have tended to break up ancestor worship into differing levels of veneration by descendants and/or influence of ancestors on descendant's behavior, arguing that ancestor worship is too broad of a category to be meaningful for study. Instead, they argue that ancestor worship takes specific forms in each society with only a loose association with them as a general category of ancestor worship. The worship of ancestors, in this line of thinking, should be treated on a case-by-case basis rather than be lumped into the practice of 'ancestor worship' (Sheils, 1975).

Treating ancestor worship on a case-by-case basis, although essential for ethnographic insights into the variances between peoples, may lead to overly narrow definitions of the practice (Steadman, Palmer, & Tilley, 1996). Confusion over how widespread ancestor worship is may be due to many previous researchers having defined ancestor worship based on specific cases to particular cultures or specific ideas. Bloch (1996), for example, notes that ancestor worship concerns beliefs about dead ancestors influencing the living. While a respectable definition of the practice, we have two primary concerns with Bloch's approach. The first is the assumption that belief is a primary aspect of ancestor worship. We

make no such assumptions due to beliefs being unverifiable (Rappaport, 1999; Steadman & Palmer, 1995, 2008). Second, and most importantly for our purposes here, Bloch limits ancestor worship to the dead influencing the living, leaving out claims of the living being able to influence the dead. Many anthropologists have described claims of ancestors being upset with their descendants, such as when Turner (1967) points out that any Ndembu displaying conduct that an ancestor would disapprove of would anger that ancestor. Being able to influence the mood of ancestors is one way in which the living can influence the dead, and, hence, needs to be included in any definition of ancestor worship.

Given the shortcomings of Bloch's (1996) and other definitions of ancestor worship, we follow Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley (1996) and Clark and Palmer (2016) in describing the defining features of ancestor worship as the claim that ancestors influence the living and can be influenced by the living. This definition is specific enough to promote an understanding of the practice of ancestor worship, yet general enough to apply cross-culturally. A more general and nuanced approach to ancestor worship elucidates the widespread claims of ancestors in cultures all over the world and is broad enough to be conducive to different forms of analysis. Most importantly, we argue that this definition most accurately depicts what peoples and ethnographers mean when they refer to ancestor worship (e.g., claims that ancestors care about your behavior after they have died).

In this paper, we demonstrate the utility of a broad approach to ancestor worship with examples from the Iban of Borneo. Using data drawn from the ethnographic literature on the Iban, supplemented with ethnographic insights drawn from fieldwork in Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, we argue that the Iban, whom have been cited as or implied to not practice ancestor worship (e.g., Freeman, 1970; Swanson, 1960), do worship their ancestors. Indeed, ancestors are a central feature of Iban religion from their creation stories to modern religious rituals (Sather, 2012). Again, following Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley (1996) we argue that the Iban are likely not the only culture whose practices of ancestor worship have previously gone unrecognized, and end by giving a few examples of other cultures and cross-cultural studies that have overlooked, misidentified, or deemphasized ancestor worship in the ethnographic record.

THE IBAN

One of the Dayak groups of northwestern Borneo, the Iban traditionally inhabit the rivers and tributaries of Sarawak, Malaysia, where they are the largest Dayak group, and West Kalimantan, Indonesia (King, 1993). Most of the Iban live on the Malaysian side of the border (Barrett & Lucas, 1989). Individuals on the Indonesian side of the border will often travel back and forth between the two countries for work, and many of these individuals may have dual citizenship. The Iban individuals working in the cities or abroad will often send back remittances to their family in their natal homes or, traditionally, return with prized items such as Chinese gongs (Kedit, 1991; Mashman, 1991).

The Iban subsist primarily on swidden hill and wet rice horticulture (Cramb, 1989). The Iban traditionally reside in longhouses, but some households have more recently adopted single-family homes. Freeman (1970) termed the pattern of Iban household composition as the *bilik*-family to represent the basic unit of economic organization (*bilik* being the Iban word for household). Thus, when Iban refer to members of or situations pertaining to members of their household, they use the phrase *kitai sabilik* (we of one household). Beyond the household, kinship is reckoned bilaterally, with equal recognition of an individual's father's and mother's kin (Davison & Sutlive, 1991). Freeman (1970) equates the Iban term *kaban* with what anthropologists refer to as the kindred, an outward extension of genealogical relatives from Ego.

To keep track of their vast network of kin, the Iban traditionally memorize the genealogical links to their forebears; the recitations of which are called *tusut*. *Tusut* are common when strangers visit an area or longhouse unfamiliar to them. When this occurs, individuals will "tie up the fishnet" until they find a common genealogical link (Sutlive, 1978). According to Sutlive (1978), most often Iban individuals are able to find a kinship link and thus find hospitality anywhere they travel within Iban territory. *Tusut* recitation rituals effectively make it so that an Iban "rarely meets a "nonkinsmen"" (Sutlive, 1978 p. 57). As Clark and Coe (2021) have argued, this extensive form of kin recognition may have been a crucial feature supporting Iban ancestor worship by providing a means of linking extended kinspersons with altruism. While some behaviors have changed or completely ceased from ordinary life, other behaviors remain traditional, such as their labor exchange system (*bedurok*), and customary laws (*adat*) (Clark, 2021).

IBAN RELIGION

The religion of the Iban spans a wide gamut of claims, rituals, and practices referencing the supernatural (Motey, Senang, & Tugang, 2018). Iban religion also involves various religious personnel, such as shamans (*manang*), bards (*lemambang*), and soul guides (*tukang sabak*), and locations within and outside of the longhouse (Sather, 1993, 2001). The focus of this paper, however, is on who is being referenced during such rituals and in daily religious claims, no matter where they occur. This is because there is a discrepancy between our observations of Iban religious behavior and what has been previously described by some ethnographers. Nearly all of the early literature on Iban religion does not recognize the importance of ancestors, although some authors have recognized the role of ancestors more recently (e.g., Béguet, 2012; Sather, 2012; Wadley, 1999).

This may occur in part because, as has been pointed out elsewhere, the Iban have no word directly translating as ancestor (Sather, 2012; Wadley, 1999). Thus, the Iban refer to their ancestors as *aki' ini'*, which literally translates as 'grandfather-grandmother', but is also used to denote ancestors beyond them (Sather, 2012; Wadley, 1999). This is pattern of using grandfather-grandmother to reference ancestors is common in Borneo societies (Sillander, 2012). Thus, the term *aki' ini'* may be the clearest representation of ancestors in the Iban vocabulary. Previous research has illuminated the connection between the *aki' ini'* and Iban ancestors (Beguet, 2012; Sather, 2012; Wadley, 1999) but it is worth further emphasizing here.

Wadley (1999) points out that the Iban rarely reference their ancestors as *aki' ini'* in their prayers or rituals but prefer the term *betara* (often translated as gods; see Betara section below) in these circumstances. Making the connection clearer, they may use *betara aki' ini'* to denote distant ancestors during ceremonies (Sather, 2003), especially during rice ceremonies (Sather, 1980; 2012).

Beyond *aki' ini'*, the Iban religious pantheon includes references to cultural mythic heroes, gods, and spirits, but ancestors are often relegated to a miniscule role, if any, in the Iban spiritual pantheon. Béguet (2012), describes a pantheon of power differences for the supernatural beings that are claimed by the Iban. First, are the *betara* (gods), and, more specifically, the great *betara*. Second, are the mythic heroes (*Orang Panggau*) of Iban lore. And third, are the *antu* (spirits) of the deceased. Béguet (2012) notes a hierarchical structure with *betara* at the top, and argues that this reflects their removed nature compared to their counterparts, but other researchers point out the contrary (see *betara* section below). Here we describe how gods, mythic heroes, and spirits are better represented as ancestors, following the work of Wadley (1999), Sather (2012), and Béguet (2012). But first we briefly summarize Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley's (1996) original claim that the Iban make supernatural claims about one of the lesser-known ancestors, the *ngarong*.

Ngarong

In Steadman, Palmer and Tilley's (1996) brief treatment of Iban religion, the authors focus on the *ngarong* (secret helper), as cited in Hose and McDougall's (1912) classic work. The *ngarong* "seems to be usually the spirit ancestor or dead relative . . . [who] becomes the special protector of some individual Iban" (Hose & McDougall, 1912 cf. Steadman, Palmer, & Tilley, 1996 p. 67). Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley (1996) go on to describe an Iban man who refused to kill a gibbon because his grandfather's *ngarong* was a gibbon. These authors note the implied possibility that, through claims of *ngarong*, the living can influence the lives of the dead and thus conform to their definition of ancestor worship. Although this is an example of the Iban claiming a descent connection with their *ngarong*, and therefore an example of ancestor worship, there are more direct paths to connect Iban religion with the worship of their ancestors which we explain below.

Orang Panggau

The *Orang Panggau* are the mythic culture heroes of the Iban. The stories of *Orang Panggau* are passed down through oral myths and are of great importance to Iban culture. Rituals and everyday activities, such as weaving and rice farming, either trace their origins to or involve the of *Orang Panggau* (Sandin, 1994). Particularly important rituals involving the *Orang Panggau* are the reading and interpreting of bird omens (Freeman, 1960; King, 1977, 1980; Metcalf, 1976; Sandin, 1980), and *gawai* (rituals) (Sandin, 1994; Sather, 1994). Sather (1994) emphasizes their importance to *gawai* rituals when he states that the *Orang Panggau*, "are invisible intermediaries, who, for example, during major Gawai festivals, welcome and entertain the gods and goddesses whom the human bards have called down from the sky to bless the ritual sponsors and to participate, unseen, in the ritual work of the Gawai" (p. 31). Much of Iban behavior can trace their beginnings to the directives of the *Orang Panggau* through various myths of the original Iban culture heroes.

Given their mythic importance, ethnographers have been split on whether the *Orang Panggau* are best described as ancestors or some other kind of deity. Sather (1994), for example, notes that ancestors are central to Iban myths of the past, and that they shared "a common world with *Orang Panggau*" (p. 32). This statement implies that, although the two supernatural entities are close in proximity, they are entirely different entities. This continues a pattern that draws sharp distinctions between ancestors and deities, and treats them as separate categories of supernatural beings (see also Sandin, 1968).

Making a direct connection between the Iban *Orang Panggau* and ancestors, Jensen (1974) reveals that Sera Gunting, also referred to as Surong Gunting, is the original Iban ancestor. Sera Gunting, according to Iban myths, is the grandson of one of the most important of the Iban mythic heroes, Sengalang Burong (whose full name is Lang Sengalang Burong). To briefly summarize the myth, a mortal man named Menggin unknowingly marries the daughter of the Sengalang Burong and they have a son (Jensen, 1974; Sandin, 1994; Sather, 2012). The son, Sera Gunting, later appeals to his grandfather for recognition of being part spirit due to his ancestry with Sengalang Burong, and is put through many trials to prove it (Sandin, 1994). Eventually, Sera Gunting successfully proves his spirit ancestry to his grandfather, whom formally recognizes their kinship and eventually grows to like his grandson (Sandin, 1994).

As the origin story of Sera Gunting demonstrates, Sera Gunting is considered an ancestor, and, by extension of being his grandfather, so is Sengalong Burong. Sather (1994) alludes to this genealogical link by recording that "many present-day Saribas Iban trace their genealogies to Sera Gunting and to other early ancestors and so, through them, to the gods themselves" (p. 119). Sather's quote emphasizes the specific connection of the Iban claims of ancestry to Sera Gunting, which he notes gives the Iban a claimed link to the gods. Jensen (1974) further elaborates by stating "[i]n all the myths which relate to Sengalang Burong and his relatives, he shows himself well disposed toward the Iban. But the spirits are not simply benevolent, superior beings, able and willing to guide the Iban. They are actually kin (*kaban*)" (p. 92). Furthermore, Jensen (1974) Sera Gunting "stands at the head not only of the Iban spirit

pedigree but also of their physical ancestry" (p. 84) Thus, the Iban explicitly claim their traditional gods are ancestors by claiming that they are their descendants.

Betara

Betara (also called *petara;* we will use *betara* except when directly quoting other researchers) are most often referred to as gods (e.g., Davison, 1987; Freeman, 1970; Jensen, 1974; Sutlive, 1978). *Betara* are often portrayed by scholars of Iban culture as supernatural beings who behave kindly towards the living. Exemplifying their kindness, Sather (1994) notes that "[e]ssentially, the term *petara* refers to all supernatural beings who have benevolent intensions toward humankind" (p. 30) In early accounts of Iban religion, *betara* were often lumped into a single monotheistic deity (Jensen, 1974). These accounts suggested that the Iban practice monotheism, and their creator god was 'Batara' (Low, 1848). This would suggest a lack of ancestor worship.

Béguet (2012) describes *betara* as "transformed ancestors" that represent all of the dead, including "historical figures with remembered pedigrees" (p. 247). These historical figures include the *Orang Panggau* outlined above. Similarly, Jensen (1974) notes that "[a]mong the Iban, petara is used as an honorific for important spirits, in particular as a general title for Sengalong Burong, Pulang Gana, and other prominent members of the spirit hierarchy" (pp. 100-101). As is argued here, the supernatural beings of that make up the *Orang Panggau* and *betara* share an important connection of being identified as ancestors by the Iban.

Furthermore, Sather (2012) also notes that *betara* are ancestors, but also continues to use the term to refer to gods, but further notes that the Iban will use *aki' ini' betara* (grandfather-grandmother gods). This usage may continue create confusion regarding the nature of the *betara*, especially in reference the ancestral nature of *betara*. In contrast, Wadley (1999) states that "*betara* are most commonly the spirits of distant ancestors" (p. 599). *Betara*, according to Wadley, are most often invoked during religious rituals and are the named ancestors in the *tusut* genealogical recitations.

Antu

In contrast to *betara*, *Antu* are generally referred to as spirits, and, as mentioned above, often have negative associations (Masing, 1997). Giving examples of the negative connotations that *antu* possess for the Iban, Tugang and Kiyai (2022), Sutlive (1978), and Sather (2001) list the different *antu* spirits and their associated negative impacts on individuals and communities. Such spirits include *antu* gerasi, *antu* tinggi, and *antu* Kamba, while *antu* are associated with hiding children, dilapidated longhouses, and bringing misfortune generally (Sather, 2001; Sutlive, 1978; Tugang & Kiyai, 2022). Further contrasting the differences in *betara* and *antu*, Sutlive (1978) states that "the antu are negative influences and things to be avoided" (p. 101). Geddes (1957), studying the Land Dayaks, noticed a similar usage by referring the *antu* as demons.

Despite apparently seeking to avoid *antu*, *antu* form the theme of many *gawai* (rituals) (Hasegawa, 2018), especially the *Gawai Antu*, which is festival that honors the dead (Jensen, 1974). According to Hasegawa (2018), *Gawai Antu* marks the official end of the mourning period. In the context of *Gawai Antu*, the most important of all the gawai rituals (Uchibori, 1978), it suggests the importance of *antu*, and the dead in general, to Iban religious behavior.

Demonstrating the ancestral nature of *antu*, Sather (2012) and Béguet (2012) point out that the distinction between *betara* and *antu* are often blurred by being used interchangeably, but reiterate the that *betara* and *antu* are often used to distinguish good versus malevolent spirits Thus, *antu* and *betara* are two words describing the same beings, depending on the negative or positive associations with the situation. *Antu* and *betara* are therefore claimed to be ancestors of the Iban. There is no assertion in our approach of ancestor worship that ancestors must only be benevolent. In the Iban case, ancestors are referred to by different words depending on the good-natured or foul-natured supernatural being in

question. Wadley (1999) makes the case of *antu* being ancestors more directly, by stating that "the dead are generally referred to as *antu*" (p. 599). Clearly, *antu* are Iban ancestors, whether directly referred to as the dead or through their associations of being malevolent *betara* (see Table 1).

Table 1: Summarizes how the common claims of supernatural beings in the Iban religious pantheon have ancestral qualities.

Supernatural Being	Common Translation	Connection to Ancestors
Ngarong	Secret helper	Claimed to be spirits of dead relatives
Orang Panggau	Mythic heroes	Claimed to be atop the Iban genealogical pedigrees
Betara	Gods	Claimed to be distant ancestors
Antu	Spirits	Claimed to be the spirits of the dead

ANCESTOR WORSHIP CROSS-CULTURALLY

Previous research obscures the importance of ancestors because some cultures may not explicitly have a term for 'ancestor.' In fact, many cultures indeed lack a word for ancestor(s), calling them spirits, shades, totems, or other names not translating directly as 'ancestors' (Steadman & Palmer, 2008). For instance, Turner (1967) clarifies that what he calls 'shades' are actually "the spirits of deceased relatives" (p. 9). Referring to deceased ancestors as 'shades', Turner explains, is due in part to the association of ancestors with more distant or remote relatives. For the Ndembu, the shades that are most salient to daily life are those ancestors that played prominent roles in the lives of the living. Changing the term from ancestors to shades allows Turner to emphasize the recency of the deceased spirit. Despite the use of a different term for ancestors, ancestors are clearly integral to Ndembu religion.

The Yanomamö provide a similar example. As also exemplified by Steadman and Palmer (2008), Yanomamö, religion is centered on ingestion of hallucinogenic drugs and spirits called *hekura* (Chagnon, 1997). The true concept of *hekura* lies in the other claims that the Yanomamö make about their origins. Chagnon (1997) reports that "when the original people died [the *no badabö*], they turned into spirits: hekura… In the context of myth and stories of the cosmos, it [the term *no badabö*] means the original humans…" (102). Thus claims about hekura refer to the spirits of the original people, otherwise known as ancestors (Steadman & Palmer, 2008). In the Yanomamö case, as well as the Ndembu, ancestors are central to the lives of the living despite being referred to by a different term.

Regardless of what they are referred to as in cultures throughout the ethnographic literature, talk about dead ancestors was, and in many cases still is, prevalent in traditional societies. While peoples throughout the world and the anthropologists who studied them have used other words to refer to ancestors for various reasons, deceased ancestors are important in all, or at least nearly all, human societies. Others have realized the importance of cross-cultural analysis of ancestor worship, and have set out to further define the subject. Once again, variation in claims and practice concerning ancestors have led to dividing ancestor worship into differing levels of veneration based on the claims of each society (e.g. Sheils, 1975, 1980). This has primarily taken the form of the level of interest that ancestors are claimed to have in the lives of the living.

Swanson (1960) provides an example in his classic work, *The Birth of the Gods*. In his book, Swanson codes the claims of the level of ancestor's interests of activity in the lives of their descendants. The Active Ancestral Spirits section of the cross-cultural study codes ancestors as absent (0) or present (1-3), with further specifications for the present spirits. When ancestors are present, they are further divided

into three more categories: (1) nature of activity unspecified; (2) aid or punish living humans; or (3) are invoked by the living to assist in earthly affairs (Swanson, 1960, pp. 210-11).

According to Swanson's (1960) cross-cultural analysis, many societies either lack ancestor worship all together (coded 0), or the nature of ancestor's is unclear or unspecified (coded 1). Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley (1996) reanalyzed the data presented in Swanson's study and found that each society coded as 0 or 1 does indeed make claims about ancestors. Because each society previously coded as 0 or 1 was shown to worship ancestors, albeit in their own ways, Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley, declared ancestor worship to a human universal in traditional societies.

Another study followed up on the work of Swanson, and similarly breaks down the variations in ancestor worship. Tatje and Hsu (1969) take the initial four categories of ancestor involvement in the lives of descendants and add three more categories, for a total of seven levels of variation. Tatje and Hsu's (1969) define the varieties of ancestor worship as; (1) absence of spirits; (2) neutral spirits; (3) undifferentiated spirits; (4) malicious or capricious spirits; (5) punishing spirits; (6) rewarding-punishing spirits; (7) benevolent-rewarding spirits (pp. 156-157).

The primary difference between Swanson's schematic and that of Tatje and Hsu is that the latter further differentiate the claimed behavior of the ancestors. Tatje and Hsu regard ancestors that are claimed to be malicious or punishing towards the living differently from those who are rewarding and punishing, and further split those ancestors that are claimed to be only rewarding towards the living. Arguing that it is also important to differentiate ancestors who are neutral from those who are undifferentiated, Tatje and Hsu hope to include any claims that peoples make about ancestors. Both Swanson and Tatje and Hsu recognize the importance of ancestor worship and kinship systems.

A more recent approach to by Peoples, Duda, and Marlowe (2016) recognizes that ancestor worship takes many forms, but splits the practice into sub-categories. Following the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (Murdock & White, 1980), Peoples, Duda, and Marlowe code ancestor worship as (1) absent or (2) present but ancestors are inactive in human affairs, (3), active in human affairs but may not be influenced by the living, and (4) active in human affairs and may be influenced by the living (p. 266). The second broad category coded by Peoples, Duda, and Marlowe is 'Active Ancestor Worship' where the spirits of the dead are active in human affairs whether or nor they can be influenced by the living (p. 267). It is unclear how their 'Active Ancestor Worship' category differs from category 4 within the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. Regardless of how active ancestors are claimed to be within a society, the fact that they are claimed to exist beyond death will still influence the behavior the living—making the claim itself serve as one piece of evidence.

Despite the differences in attitudes, ancestors are still claimed to influence and/or be influence by the lives of their descendants, and therefore ancestors still play a role in the lives of the living. Thus, differentiating more categories within the broad category of ancestor worship does not imply that ancestor worship is not universal. Tatje and Hsu's (1969) argument is theoretical and they do not use a dataset to support their hypotheses, so it is not possible to test their claim that ancestors do not play a role in some societies in the same way that Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley (1996) checked the work of Swanson (1960). Peoples, Duda, and Marlowe (2016) similarly fail to recognize that ancestors still influence the behavior of their descendants regardless of the specific claims made by individuals in different cultures.

DISCUSSION

As we have outlined in this article, many supernatural beings of the Iban are best understood as ancestors. The *Orang Panggau*, *betara*, and *antu*, are all manifestations of ancestors in that they are claimed to be the dead forebears of the Iban. Through myths and rituals, ancestors influence the behavior of the Iban, especially in acting cooperatively and altruistically towards in each other (Clark & Coe, 2021). Given the ancestral claims of the *Orang Panggau*, *betara* and *antu*, and the influence that these claims have on the behavior of their descendants, the Iban display every facet of the definition of ancestor worship that we have described above and analyzed here.

Although we have argued that the traditional Iban religion is best described as a cult of the ancestors, there has been considerable change in the religious claims that the Iban make over the years. With the introduction of Christianity by missionaries in the mid-1800s (Pringle, 1970), the religious behavior of the Iban began to shift toward a syncretization of their traditional ancestor worship with the Christian faith. The Iban of Wong Garai, West Kalimantan, Indonesia (a pseudonym), for example, would claim that their rituals were aimed at both the Christian God and ancestors. Common rituals such as *biau* (a fowl-waving ritual) would be for God and ancestors alike. This ritual was described to one of the authors as being a traditional version of a prayer that now involves God (Clark, 2021). Therefore, ancestors are not the sole supernatural entities in the Iban pantheon in the modern context.

This pattern has taken place in other societies all over the world (e.g., Turdieva, 2022), including in the societies we outlined above. We do not expect ancestor worship, therefore, to be as prevalent in modern societies as they likely were when before the spread of world religions. Ancestor worship is a product of traditional, kinship-based societies (Clark & Coe, 2021), and may be the oldest religion (Steadman & Palmer, 2008). The case for ancestor worship in Iban culture stems from the traditional nature of the practice, but many of the supernatural claims about ancestors are still made today at Wong Garai, and likely elsewhere (see Béguet, 2012; Sather, 2012). If the future generations of Iban discontinue the traditional religious behaviors of their forebears, then the practice will continue to fade until it ultimately ceased to exist.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have argued that much of the previous research on Iban religion has downplayed or disregarded the importance of ancestors. We have shown that the Iban religious pantheon, although extensive in terminology, is filled with ancestors at various levels. We claim that the *ngarong*, *Orang Panggau*, *betara*, and *antu* are all variations of Iban ancestors, and hence the Iban practice ancestor worship. Furthermore, we go beyond what Motey, Senang, and Tugang (2018) claim, and argue that there is a direct connection between modern Iban communities and the claims about their ancestors (whether *Orang Panggau*, *betara*, or otherwise). We have also described some of the reasons that ethnographers and researchers conducting cross-cultural studies may misinterpret the religious claims of other cultures while arguing that ancestor worship is more prevalent than the ethnographic record suggests.

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State of Belonging: Engaging the State in Borneo

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ABSTRACT

The Penan argue that their rights and attachment to the land are more than the mere felling of trees to open up land areas for cultivation to create native customary rights land. Their relationship with the landscape have turned hilltops and depressions between two connecting hills into campsites, thus giving these spaces a sense of residence. Their relationship with their rivers and streams is reflected through the naming of these tributary systems, names that are imbued with rooted histories and events narrated over generations. This paper provides an overview on how the Penan constantly navigate the values governing their ever-changing landscapes brought by external forces. In doing so, it charts the history of Penan struggles with state policies, logging activities, and how they assert their rights to their landscape by engaging with not only the state but also environmental and human rights activists, international non-governmental organisations, and other local grassroots organisations. Engagements with these state and non-state institutions and organisations have enabled the Penan to articulate their identities and rights to their resources. Based on these engagements, this paper argues that the Penan rights and way of life is closely related to particular spaces in the landscape, their space of belonging.

Keywords: *Blockades, landscapes, Penan, space, state*

INTRODUCTION

In March 1987 indigenous peoples of Sarawak, largely Penan[1] people, put up a number of barricades across logging roads in various parts of Baram and Limbang districts where logging was at its heaviest[2]. Altogether 25 blockades were set up, comprising logs or frail wooden structures put across the roads, together with scores of men, women and children sitting across the roads, preventing timber lorries from passing through. These blockades marked Penan continuing engagements with the state to assert their rights to areas they currently occupy. Described as 'meek', 'inoffensive', 'peaceful' and 'politically irrelevant' it is remarkable that such a people challenged the might of the state.

[1] On the basis of dialect, Rodney Needham (1972) divides the Penan population into Eastern and Western Penan. The Eastern Penan comprise all those Penan living roughly to the east of the Baram River while the Western Penan are located around the watershed of the Rejang River, and along the Silat River in Baram District. There are also some Penan settlements along the Tinjar River in Baram District, the Jelalong River and coastal area of Bintulu District, and in the Suai-Niah area of Miri District. In linguistic term, these groups appear to be closely related to the Western Penan. There are some minor differences between the two divisions, but broadly speaking in way of life and socio-economic terms they are very similar and consider themselves and are recognized by others as the same people.

[2] For detail see World Forest Movement and Sahabat Alam Malaysia, *The Battle for Sarawak's Forest* (New Edition), Penang, Malaysia, 1990.

Unlike such groups as the Hmong, Kachin and Karen who pre-1945 had the political choice to keep the state at bay or escape beyond its reach to a zone of refuge (Scott 2010)[3], the Penan have no other choice but to confront the state. The following pages are an attempt to describe this confrontation, and the reasons behind the steps taken.

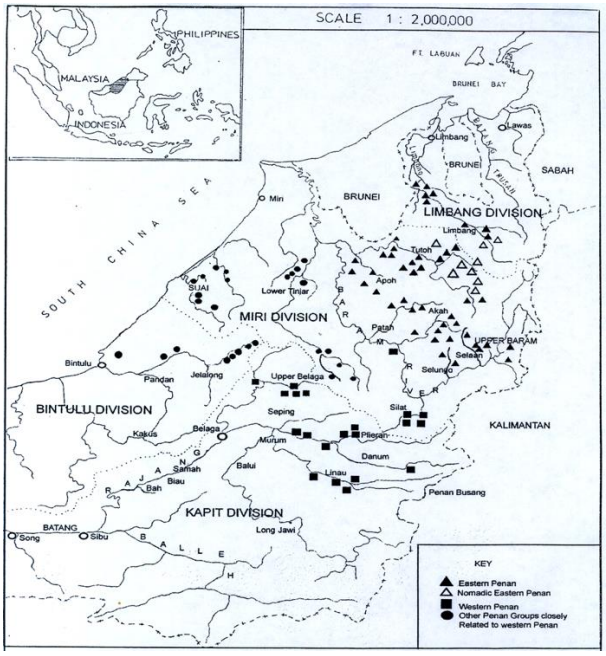
PENAN IN PERSPECTIVE

Traditionally a hunting-gathering people, the Penan occupy a specific niche as a major supplier of jungle products[4] (Brosius 1999:350), which they traded with longhouse-dwelling swidden agriculturalists for export overseas, thus linking them to global trade. Today, they number some 16,000 people occupying the most interior of northern Sarawak in the headwaters of its two biggest rivers, the Rejang and Baram (see Map 1). The first group to settle down did so in the first quarter of the 1800s (Needham 1965)[5], with the majority settling down in the 1960s and 1970s. Although largely sedentary today, the majority of them still depend on the forest for food: wild sago, game, fish, and jungle vegetables. The forest is also a source of cash income: rattan which they weave into mats and baskets for the market, and trade items such as *gaharu* (incense wood) and *ketipe* (a wild rubber), a popular item their neighbours need for gluing.

[3] Scott's (2010:19) book, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Arnarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* is an analysis of the hill populations of Zomia who prior to 1945 "actively resisted incorporation into the framework of classical state, the colonial state, and independent nation-state". He uses the term Zomia to describe this zone of refuge for the aforementioned groups, a geographical area comprising northeast India, Bangladesh, the adjacent parts of China/Tibet and all of mainland Southeast Asia.

[4] In the past camphor, *jelutong* (a type of latex), *dammar* (a resin), bezoar stones, and rhinoceros horn were important trade items the Penan exchanged with their neighbours for salt, cloth, tobacco, cooking utensils, metal, and other essential items.

[5] These groups are today's Penan residing in the Suai-Niah area of Miri District, the Jelalong and Labang rivers of Bintulu District, and Tinjar River, Baram District. According to Needham the Penan at Suai settled in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Jellalong in 1820, Labang 1885, and Tinjar in the early and middle nineteenth century.



Map 1 Showing Distribution of Penan in Sarawak (Langub, 2004)

A browse through the brief history of Sarawak might be useful as this has a bearing on the Penan relationship with each successive government, which in turn has ramification on their protest against logging. The modern history of Sarawak begins with the founding of the Brooke Raj in 1841, lasting 100 years with three successive leaders: James Brooke (1841-1868), Charles Brooke (1868-1917), and Vyner Brooke (1917-1941). James Brooke laid the foundation of the Brooke government, Charles Brooke expanded, stabilized and increased the prosperity of the state, and Vyner Brooke continued the work of his two predecessors until the Japanese invasion in 1941[6]. From 1941 to 1945, Sarawak was under Japanese Occupation. In 1946 Sarawak became a colony of Britain and gained independence within Malaysia in 1963.

As mentioned earlier, the Penan have, for many years, barter-traded with their longhouse neighbours. In these trades they were unfairly exploited, with their trading partners making huge profits of 600 to 1000% (Ermen 1927:185). A shy and peaceful people, the Penan were also sometimes victims of headhunting raids[7]. From their earliest encounters with Penan, Brooke officials had voiced concern and a desire to protect them from exploitation. Thus, in 1906 a regular government-supervised trade meeting known as *tamu* was established between the Penan and longhouse traders to ensure fair trade. These meetings were held three or four times a year at mutually agreed locations. Fifty three years later a British anthropologist, Rodney Needham (1959:5 para. 22) commented that:

[6] For detail account of this historical period, see S. Runciman, *The White Rajah: A History of Sarawak from 1841 to 1946,* Cambridge University Press, 1960; R. Pringle, *Rajahs and Rebels: The Ibans of Sarawak Under Brooke Rule, 1941 to 1941,* London: MacMillan, 1970; and Naimah S. Talib, *Administrators and Their Service Under the Brooke Rajahs and British Colonial Rule,* Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1999.

[7] Charles Hose *(Natural Man: A Record From Borneo.* Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 35) considers the Penan as the earliest people to inhabit the island of Borneo, and did not indulge in headhunting, but would retaliate if attacked. The *Sarawak Gazette* January 1, 1905 Vol. 35(469) p. 35 reports that the Penan Bunut in the interior of Belaga District were attacked by Iban resource collectors resulting in several people killed, but the Penan succeeded in beating off the Iban, killing Tedong, the attackers' leader.

> …[T]he government goes on to quite extraordinary lengths to protect the Penan, who on the whole receive as fair a deal as they might hope for. I cannot imagine the Indonesian government for example, putting itself to such expense and constant concern on behalf of such a tiny, dispersed, and politically irrelevant people as the Penan.

'Illegal' trading was seen as a threat to tamu, and the idea of fair trade for the Penan. A District Officer made it known that there was a considerable number of 'illegal' trading without official supervision going on upriver. In an official memorandum ref. 108 in D. O. 10 dated July 4, 1957, to the Resident, 4th Division Miri, the District Officer, Baram wrote:

> From all sorts of sources I hear traders go off into jungle and trade with Penans offering ridiculously low prices for Penans' produce and insisting on criminally high ones for articles sold to them. Many traders will find a Penan in the jungle and tell him "you owe me so and so, therefore now hand over to me the jungle produce you have so far collected". This happens both with Nomadic Penans and relatively long settled one as are those in the ulu Tinjar.

Concerned with the situation, Needham (1959:7-8 para. 30) makes the following comments:

> I was unable to obtain any confirmation of this in my recent visit, but I know that some went on in 1951-2. A specific case is Oyau Lejau of Long San, whom I actually met in the forest two days walk from the river, en route to the Penan. The difficulties of any extensive illegal trade are, I think, too great for any constant threat to the Penan or the Administration's arrangement to persist.

Despite setbacks, the *tamu* system lasted some 70 years. The last was held in 1976, some thirteen years after Sarawak's independence within Malaysia (Langub 1984:12). The reason for its discontinuance is unclear. Notwithstanding the clandestine and unsupervised trade meetings in the forest, the Brooke policy of providing protection to the Penan in bringing about fair trade, was in some ways successful. *Tamu* was a clever way out to get longhouse traders to trade honestly and honourably, without interfering with the way they traditionally relate with the Penan. Needham (1959:6, para. 23) who witnessed one such trade meeting has the following comments on how a young Sarawak Administrative Officer conducted transactions:

> …I should particularly like to put on record my admiration for the conscientious way in which he conducted the trading and constantly guarded the interests of the Penan. It would be very easy, I suppose, for a young and junior officer on distant duty, working with a people who can hardly be provoked to complaint, and facing river personalities who can be redoubtable, to be suborned into careless ineffectiveness; but it would be difficult to imagine that anyone without the District Officer's final authority in the area could have run the meetings better. If conscientious and responsible supervision were enough the Penan could hardly be in a safer position than they are today.

At the end of World War II, Vyner Brooke, the third and last Rajah Brooke handed Sarawak to Britain as a crown colony. This event marked a change in policy on indigenous peoples from one of preservation and protection to that of social transformation. For the Penan it meant a transformation from a nomadic to a settled life. With regard to this rapid transformation, Needham (1959:12, para 42) expresses his astonishment thus:

> I was astonished to see the rate at which the Penan of both tribes have been settling in the last few years, in the Silat, the headwaters of the Baram, and the ulu Akah. Had I been asked to make a prediction six years ago I should have proclaimed it very unlikely. The Western Penan in effect live in villages in the forest which they occupy for some years, so it is not so surprising when they settled; but it is quite remarkable that the Eastern Penan should also be showing a tendency to settle.

When Sarawak gained independence, there was a further shift in policy: an emphasis on large development projects, such as extraction of timbers and plantations. Since independence Sarawak has made remarkable economic progress with export of timber playing a significant role. But large-scale development projects are not of much help to the Penan as they struggle to adjust to the settled life. The majority of them are settled only in name, as they spend much of their time in the forest processing sago, hunting, fishing and collecting jungle products (Brosius 1999:353).

By the 1980s Sarawak was a major supplier of tropical hardwood, most of which came from areas occupied by Penan. Logging brought serious consequences to both the environment and people living in the area of operation. It opened the canopy and increased the volume of erosion. Riverbanks and ridges were bulldozed for roads causing massive landslides, choking rivers with silt. Wild sago palms (staple food of the Penan), rattan (source of income), fruit trees, trees that provide poison for blowpipe darts for hunting, and other essential plants were uprooted and felled. Game disappeared, and massive river pollution and siltation killed fish. For the Penan, nomadic or settled, logging means hunger and impoverishment. Of concern to the Penan most is the total alteration of the landscape in which they live. As Brosius notes (2006:288):

> Where once the forest floor was relatively open, an impenetrable mass of thorny vines and shrubs becomes established. Recognizable viewpoints are transformed, if not obliterated, and movement over the landscape becomes difficult. In this way, the cultural density of the landscape – all the sites with biographical, social, and historical significance – is transfigured. Thus, logging not only undermines the basis of Penan subsistence, but destroys those places that are iconic of their very existence as a society.

BLOCKADES

The basis of Penan unhappiness is that timber companies have penetrated areas they consider their ancestral land, causing hardship and destruction to resources upon which they survive. The Penan made known their plight to both timber companies and the government. They talked to camp managers, and company officials higher up the hierarchy, and wrote them letters. They pleaded with the local district officers and sought the help of local NGOs to write letters and petitions to government officials. Their pleas fell on deaf ears, their letters if answered, contained vague explanations. After a long wait, the Penan, in March 1987, decided to erect barricades across logging roads at various locations.

The immediate response of the government was to send groups of senior civil servants to the logging sites to persuade the Penan to dismantle the blockades. Penan were told they have no customary rights to the land, and that logging is done on state land, a point I will return to later. A law was passed to make it illegal to erect blockades on logging roads. Scores of Penan blockaders were arrested, including an eleven-year-old boy charged with burning some bridges belonging to a timber company. Following a report commissioned by the State Minister in-charge of Penan Affairs in October 1987, the government

built a number of service centres, comprising a primary school, health clinic, and an agriculture station[8]. In addition, the Penan Volunteer Corps was established to help Penan adjust to the settled life[9]. The government also provided building materials for housing, and timber companies helped build longhouses for some groups of Penan.

The Penan, of course, recognize the importance of the service centre and volunteer corps, but that did not prevent them from criticizing the programmes as mere window dressing exercises. They charge that only four centres were implemented, hardly sufficient to cover the over one hundred Penan settlements spread in the interior of Baram and Belaga districts, and in none of the centres is the promised agriculture extension worker provided to help Penan in food cultivation. The idea of a service centre is not new. It had been providing services long enjoyed by other communities, long overdue to the Penan. With regard to the volunteer corps programme, it was half-heartedly implemented, with lack of supervision and no commitment from government agencies responsible for its implementation. Today, the volunteer corps programme is inactive, practically useless, and exists only in name.

International NGOs from Europe and North America have played no small part in the Penan struggle against logging. Bruno Manser who lived with the Penan for six and a half years helped spread the news of the Penan struggle through letters and films made by western filmmakers visiting him in the deep forest of Sarawak. These NGOs were banking on the issues of environment and rights of indigenous peoples to generate interest. Personalities such as Al Gore and Prince Charles and others joined the bandwagon to condemn Malaysia on its treatment of indigenous peoples and destruction of the environment. Malaysia countered by saying that western nations such as the US and Australia are no better in their records on issues of the environment and treatment of indigenous peoples. European and North American NGOs are accused of confusing the Penan and instigating them to protest against logging.

Penan insist that they are not instigated: they protest on their own accord though with support of NGOs, both local and international, precisely because of loss of livelihood and way of life. These problems, they argue, are tied to land given to timber companies at the expense of their customary rights to the land and its resources. They look at the whole situation as a form of exploitation similar to that when they were exploited in barter-trade during the Brooke era. Not being protected like in the days of the Brookes, they protested against the state. Disappointed with the attitude of the state, which they accuse of siding with timber companies, older Penan express a wish for the return of either the Brooke or colonial government. One Penan elder expressed his community's view of the Brooke or colonial government as "*peritah eh mejam mengen urip kelunan*" or "a government that understands how to take care of its citizens"[10]. It is here that Needham's comments on the Brooke policy of protecting the Penan are of considerable interest to the present situation. In "Further Notes on the Welfare and Administration of the Penan" which he submitted to the Colonial Government in 1959, Needham (1959:16 para. 54) expresses his concern for the future of the community thus:

[8] Five service centers were initially proposed, but only four implemented: three in Baram District, located at Long Kevok, in the Apoh-Tutoh area, Batu Bungan, in the vicinity of the Mulu National Park, Long Jekitan in the Silat River; and one in Belaga District at Lusong Laku in the Linau River.

[9] The Editorial column of the *Sarawak Gazette* 117(1514), 1990, pp. 1-2 mentions that the first batch of volunteers comprised 15 Penan youths of both sexes, and the number increased considerably over the years. Initially, the programme achieved some success in community hygiene, fruit orchards, and kindergarten, largely due to three capable officers based at the Resident Office in Miri, District Office, Marudi, and District Office, Belaga who monitored the programme closely and made field visits to settlements where the volunteers were posted. When the three officers were transferred, their successors did not continue the work left by their predecessors.

[10] Interview with a Penan elder at Long Nen, Layun River, Baram District, March 11, 2010.

> I have remarked on the Penan's need for protection and careful guidance and have praised the care devoted to them by the Government; but this very protection may eventually prove to the disadvantage of the Penan in the future unless the transition to membership of a Sarawak society is effected fairly soon…I have said the above that I could not conceive a certain other government taking such expensive care of the Penan; and from my experience in Malaya I am sure that peoples similar to the Penan there cannot hope for consideration that Penan receive in Sarawak…If independence…comes in anything like fifteen years then increased efforts will be needed to bring the Penan through this period of transition in such a way as to enter the new political status with some chance of effective citizenship. They may be a small and unimportant group, but their development seems to me one of Sarawak Government's moral responsibilities.

Prophetic as Needham's observations are to the existing situation of the Penan, it is remarkable that the vacuum left by the Brookes' policy of protecting the Penan is in ways being filled by NGOs, local and international. It would be hard to imagine the Penan success in engaging with the state alone without the assistance and support of NGOs.

One often-used interpretation of what constitutes native customary rights is confined to cultivated land as contained in the 1958 Land Code (Cap. 81) section 5(2). According to this interpretation, the first person to fell an area of land before 1958 for the purpose of cultivation secures rights to the land, inheritable by succeeding generations of heirs. The mere felling of trees and opening up the land for cultivation secures rights of access and ownership. However, before 1958 Penan were largely nomadic and did not fell trees for cultivation. Despite this fact, Penan insist that they do have rights to land they occupy under section 5(2) which provides various "methods by which native customary rights may be acquired" as below:

> the felling of virgin jungle and occupation of the land thereby cleared;
>
> the planting of land with fruit trees;
>
> the occupation or cultivation of land;
>
> the use of land for burial ground or shrine;
>
> the use of land of any class for rights of way; or
>
> any other lawful method.

Penan argue that their rights come under section 5(2)(f) – "any other lawful method" – of the 1958 Land Code (Cap. 81). However, in 2000 the Land Code was amended, altering the contents of section 5. Some lawyers told the Penan that amendment has no retrospective power, and that whatever they were entitled to before 1958 under section 5(2)(f) of the Land Code (Cap. 81) still stands.

THE LANDSCAPE

Since the first blockades of 1987 and despite being told they do not have customary rights to the land, the Penan have not abandoned the idea of blockading timber roads as a way of engaging the state to negotiate their customary rights to land they occupy. They are convinced of their stand on moral grounds, the basis of which is the way they relate to the landscape. Penan argue that the way they relate to the landscape is by sculpting it in the process to make a living and maintain a long-term relationship

(Langub 2007; 2010). As they move across the landscape, they establish a series of campsites (*lamin*)[11] which they leave behind as *la'a*[12] (old campsites) representing their 'footprints' (*uban*)[13]. The *la'a*, often associated with events, such as deaths, births, even humorous occurrences, become significant *uban* of both the group and individuals linked to these episodes. Movements across the landscape within an area or specific river systems are motivated by the cycle of resource availability. As they harvest resources, they establish tenure (*olong*) over them to ensure systematic management, husbandry, and inheritance to future generations. Thus, what appears as a natural environment is, in fact, one that has undergone the process of human activities by way of methodological sculpting. As Brosius (1986:174-178; 2001:134-139) noted among the Western Penan some years ago, what appears to be empty space is instead a landscape that encapsulates history and a way of life. Penan often express the view that they are part of the landscape as much as the landscape is part of them; thus, what is territory is space of belonging, our space, *okoo ami'*.

In terms of right to the land they occupy, the Penan relationship with the landscape is consistent with article 26(1) and (2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) 2007 of which Malaysia is one of the signatories, that reads as follows:

> (1) Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.
>
> (2) Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired.

Furthermore, article 26(3) outlines the responsibility and role of the State toward right of the indigenous peoples to land thus:

> (3) States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories, and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect of the customs, traditions, and land tenure systems of the indigenous people concerned.

It is within this human-environment interaction that the Penan, notably Eastern Penan, establish their sense of belonging to the place they call *ukoo bu'un* or place of origin, to be discussed in some detail later. In some ways, the Penan relationship with the landscape is similar to the way the Western Apache of Arizona relate to theirs. As Basso (1996:76) puts it, "[b]ecause of their inseparable connection to

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[11] *Lamin* refers to any dwelling place; it also refers to a nomadic camp comprising several family huts or lean-tos.

[12] *La'a* in Eastern Penan *(laa lamin* in Western Penan) refers to a former site of a *lamin tana'* or nomadic camp. A *lamin tana'* may be occupied for a period of several weeks or months depending on the amount of food resources in the surrounding area. During that occupation Penan would have eaten all sorts of fruits and the seeds thrown all over the camp. When these seeds grow and become fruit trees, ownership resides with the group as a community. These trees also help future generations to identify former *lamin* sites or *la'a* occupied by their ancestors.

[13] Writing about *uban* in the case of Western Penan, Brosius (2001:138) says that: "In its broadest sense, *uban* refers to an empty place left behind by the withdrawal of an object or being. For instance, pig tracks are referred to as *uban mabui,* young men often speak of former lovers as their *uban,* and an empty place in a hut left by someone who is away or has died is referred to as that person's *uban.* In the later case, and in reference to former *lamin* sites or other places where past events occurred, *uban* is an evocative and emotionally laden word". With regard to Eastern Penan, *uban* carries the same meaning as described by Brosius for the Western Penan. However, there are two other meanings of *uban* in Eastern Penan. First, it means "because", for example, *akeu'be'omok tai Marudi* ***uban*** *be'pu'un ligit* (I can't go to Marudi **because** I don't have money). Second, it means "why", as in the following example, ***Uban*** *ineu'kau be'tai Marudi?* (**Why** are you not going to Marudi?).

specific localities, place-names may be used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional association – association of time, space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one's life". This sense of belonging is greater than legal rights to the land.

Surrounding the *la'a* is what the Penan call *tana' pengurip*[14], the land that provides them the essentials of life: food and other resources they collect for barter trade or convert into handicrafts for domestic use and for sale. In the *tana' pengurip* Penan stake a claim to forest resources such as wild sago, rattan, and various species of trees for different uses. In the *la'a* may be found fruit trees growing from seeds that their ancestors ate. Such fruit trees become common property of the group and are inherited by its descendants. Ancestral graves may be found in the vicinity of the *la'a*. All these serves as evidence of former occupation and rights to the area and resources therein.

As the *tana' pengurip* was first utilized and taken care of by their ancestors, Penan sometimes refer to it as *tana' pohoo* or ancestral land to which they are the rightful heirs. Penan say that their *adet* (custom) is different from their neighbours, Kayan, Kenyah, Kelabit or Iban. Their neighbours cut the forest and create what is known in Sarawak as native customary rights land. However, the Penan create *la'a* in the landscape and stake claim to resources in the surrounding area, which they refer to as *tana' pengurip* or *tana' pohoo*. When groups of Penan settle down part of the *tana' pengurip* or *tana' pohoo* is cultivated with food crops such as rice and cassava, sugar cane, fruit trees etc, and the remainder conserved for regeneration of resources such as sago, rattan, wild fruit trees to complement cultivated crops.

With regard to Eastern Penan each group refer to specific areas as okoo bu'un or place of origin, from the words okoo=place, and bu'un=beginning. Okoo bu'un is used to assert one's rights to places one's parents or apical ancestors were born in; and one can trace one's ancestral roots to other places and establish relationship.

MOLONG

Article 36(1) of UNDRIP stipulates that, "Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands, territories and resources." The Penan strategy of resource use and practice of laying a claim to resource is known as *molong*. *Molong* is not only to lay a claim to a resource, but most importantly it means to foster it for the future. For example, when an individual *molong* a wild sago, he extracts the mature tree and conserve the bud for the future. They also rotate their harvest of sago from one clump to another such that it allows for regeneration of previously harvested clumps. A Western Penan illustrates this harvesting strategy thus:

> If we harvest the Ulu Jek first and finish the *nangah* (mature sago) there, we *molong* [preserve] the *uvud* [the young sago]. When it is finished in Ulu Jek, we go to Ulu Seping. We harvest the *nangah*, and *molong* the *uvud*; just the *nangah* we harvest and just the *uvud* we *molong*. Then, when the mature sago there is finished we go to Ulu Kelatong, to Ulu Utan, Ulu Igam. As we harvest the *nangah*, we *molong* the *uvud*. After two or three years mature sago will grow out of the young sago that we preserve. Then we go back to Ulu Jek, Ulu Seping, Ulu Kelatong, Ulu Utan, Ulu Igam. *Molong*

[14] *Tana'*=land and forest, and *pengurip,* from the root word *urip*=life. Therefore, *tana' pengurip* means land that provides food and essential resources for survival, in other words, foraging area. *Tana' pengurip* conveys the same meaning with that of the Iban *pemakai menua* described by Gerunsin Lembat (1974) which is recognized by a court judgement as encompassing the notion of customary rights land (Nor Anak Nyawai & ors vs Borneo Pulp Plantation Sdn. Bhd. & ors, the High Court Sabah & Sarawak, Kuching [Suit No. 22-28-99-1] 12 May, Ian H. C. Chin, J *Current Legal Journal* 2001, p. 797).

> is a very important concept to us Penan. If we don't *molong*, if we finish all the sago off, we won't have anything to eat. That is why we *molong uvud*.[15]

With regard to the harvest of rattan the Penan utilize the same management strategy similar to that of sago. The same Western Penan explains the harvesting strategy this way:

> It is the same with sago. We go to get rattan at the Payao River. If it is finished there, we move to get it elsewhere. A long time after, we can get it at the Payao River again – 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, 4 years, it is large again. Then we go back (to collect it), like when we were at the Payao River. It is like sago because we wait for it to live. That is why when we get the rattan, we don't cut the young plants, the offspring of the rattan, its children. We can't kill the offspring. We *molong* the offspring, so that we can get them later. It is the same meaning as with sago. If there is a small sago, we don't kill it. We don't kill the *uvud*. After a long time, when the *uvud* become sago, we extract it. It is the same with rattan. After a while it will be long. We will get rattan for mats, baskets, for us to get money.[16]

Molong has two obvious functions. First, it serves as a monitoring device to account for the quantity of resources over vast tracts of forest area where Penan exercise stewardship. Second, it serves to prevent over-exploitation of these resources. These two functions are extremely important to hunter-gatherers for the simple reason that long-term availability of resources is crucial to the survival of succeeding generations. When Penan think of long-term availability of resources, they not only think of their children and children's children but beyond.

Molong is well documented by Brosius (1986, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1997) and Langub (1988, 1989, 1993) for the Western Penan. It is the same with Eastern Penan. When an Eastern Penan *molong* a resource, a sago clump or a rattan stand, for instance, he places an *olong oroo* (to claim a mark or sign) on it to indicate 'ownership'. Once an individual *molong* a resource, he is responsible for its upkeep and sustainable management. He establishes exclusive rights to the resource. These rights are heritable and pass down from one generation to the next of household members. Other members of the community may harvest the resource with permission of the person who *molong* it. *Molong* can be done individually or communally; the basic principle is the same. Penan rights to the land are also established through *molong*, a form of resource tenure similar to the Iban tree tenure system described by Clifford Sather (1990).[17]

Emphasizing their intimate relationship with the landscape, the Penan say that there are two land features of importance: *berusu* (hilltop) and *sawa'* (a depression between and connecting two hills). Eastern Penan like to build their *lamin* (camp huts) on hilltops for several reasons. The trees are shorter and sparse with less danger of branches falling down on the huts or people. It is a location that is cooler and breezy, with spectacular view. One early morning while we were sitting around the fire in a camp hut

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[15] See Langub (1993 p. 103), "Hunting and Gathering: A View From Within", in Vinson H. Sutlive (ed.) *Change and Development in Borneo* (Selected Papers from the First Extraordinary Conference of The Borneo Research Council held in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, August 4-9, 1990), published by the *Borneo Research Council, Inc.* Phillips, ME, USA.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[17] For the Iban, Sather (1990 pp. 31 and 32) says that claims to trees are created in two ways. First, the first person to find a tree claims it by clearing the undergrowth around its base. When this act is drawn to public attention, the claimant establishes exclusive rights over the tree. Such rights are heritable and pass down to descendants of the claimant. Second, a tree is planted and the planter establishes rights to it which is inherited by his future descendants.

in the Puak watershed, a gibbon called from a distance. An old man sitting next to me remarked: "It's so lovely to hear the call of the gibbon in the early morning when you are on the top of a hill".

Nomadic Penan like to keep a number of monkeys as pets. They are taken when young after they are separated from their mothers. They are very well looked after and tied to trees around the huts. These monkeys are very sensitive to movements around the camp and alert the people in the camp that there are people around or visitors on their way to the camp. Older people say that in the past monkeys were used to warn people of enemies coming to attack.

The disadvantage of a camp on the hill is that one is far from the source of water. I remember going down for a bath in the stream at the foot of the hill, only to find out when I returned to the camp that I needed another bath!

If there is no suitable hilltop in the area, the other choice is the *sawa'*. The advantage of the *sawa'* is that it is at a lower elevation and close to water sources. One is spared the torture of carrying a heavy wild boar or other load up and down the hill. But as soon as there is a hilltop with enough space for a camp, the Eastern Penan would build their camp on a *berusu'* rather than a *sawa'*.

Berusu and *sawa'* are significant to Penan as they often become burial sites for individuals who died there. Some *berusu* and *sawa'* are named after persons who died there or are remembered in their deaths by the name of the landmarks. The designation of place names for the names of the deceased or vice versa is used as an idiom for historical and genealogical information linking descendants to the landscape. Kin living in different settlements, far from each other, establish social relationship by tracing their common ancestors buried at particular river systems or land features. Burial places are not simply landmarks to identify where dead ancestors are buried, but more importantly they serve to establish rights to exploit resources in a given area (Brosius 1986:175).

As Brosius (1986:174-175; 2001:134-135) tells us of the Penan Gang, rivers are an important aspect of the landscape as they provide the framework by which all manners of information are organized, historical, cultural, and ecological. I have observed similar relationship between Eastern Penan and rivers in that it is via the complex system of rivers that they organize the geography of the landscape. This experience is not unique to Penan as other Bornean interior groups share similar affinity with the landscape. Penan knowledge of rivers is phenomenal, and practically all rivers and streams, big or small are known and named. They know which rivers and streams share watersheds, and the direction they flow into other bigger rivers.

Rivers or streams are named after features of the landscape, such as trees or plants that grow along river or stream banks, animals, birds, and events. For instance, a tributary of the Ubong is named Ba' Batu Bala, river of red stones, after the colour of stones in it; a true left bank of the tributary of the Marong is named Ba' Jakah as there are *jakah* palms (*Arenga undulatifolia*) growing abundantly along its banks; two stream upriver is Ba' Bavui Megut, named after a hairless wild boar caught there some generations ago; and a right hand tributary of the same Marong River is named Ba' Tevaun after the number of helmeted hornbills that frequent the area. A right bank tributary of the Marong is named Ba'Pepak Telo (Broken Quiver River) after the quiver of a hunter mysteriously disintegrated. In neighbouring Apoh River, the Penan of Long Belok named a tributary below their longhouse Ba'Adin[18] (Hudden River), after Donald Hudden[19], a popular District Officer, Baram during the reign of Vyner Brooke. Ancestors of the Penan of Long Belok were camped at that river when Hudden paid them an official visit. Oral

[18] Penan pronounce Donald Hudden's name as Adin or Tuen Adin.

[19] Alastair Morrison (1993) writes glowingly of Donald Hudden in *Fair Land Sarawak: Some Reflections of an Expatriate Official*, Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, Studies on Southeast Asia No. 13, pp. 82-3.

narratives suggest that it was an ordinary visit by a government official, but because of the man Hudden was, their ancestor decided to name the river after him. Years later, the event of the District Officer's visit was used by the Penan to assert territorial rights to the area, in a dispute with a neighbouring longhouse.

Parts of rivers such as rapids (*diham*), pools (*levahau*) and so on are given particular names. For instance, just below the confluence of Kuba'an and Tutoh is a lovely pool with lots of fish. The Penan in the area named it after a high-ranking government official who they chanced to see cast his fishing net there.

Apart from rivers and particular land features, there are numerous man-made jungle trails (jalan toto) in areas occupied by Penan, linking various settlements. These trails continue to be used today when, for example, visiting relatives in other settlements. Along these trails are found resting places (*lasan*) located on hilltops or knolls. In some of these *lasan*, wooden benches have been prepared for passers-by to sit on. When one feels tired after walking a long distance, the *lasan* is a welcome site, and one normally gets a good view of the landscape below.

Strewn across the Penan landscape are the sign-sticks, *oroo*[20]. They are used as a mean of communicating between individuals and groups of families camped in different parts of the landscape, or on a lengthy hunting trip. Messages are given by sticks planted in the ground, supporting symbols made of leaves, stalks, roots etc. inserted in the notches along the length of the sticks, being conventional symbols that communicate messages to someone or individuals following from behind.

Each *oroo* conveys a different meaning. The following are some examples: 1) *oroo sakit* placed on the foot path indicates danger, for instance, a wasp nest in front, and a diversion path is indicated in the message; 2) *oroo penusa* indicates that some one in the pointed direction is sick or in distress; if he is hungry oroo *la'u* is added to indicate he needs food; 3) *oroo tebai* indicate an invitation to a pointed direction, probably to eat wild boar that has been caught in a nearby hunting hut; and 4) or*oo meta* indicates a warning. I have seen an *oroo meta* in the Puak River with a piece of rock hung onto the stick to indicate the seriousness of the warning.

The Penan have a word *tawai* that expresses in a particular way their sentiment to the landscape. *Tawai* is an expression of nostalgia, fondness and longing for the landscape, its wholeness and memory of events, important or inconsequential, that took place there, of group activities, of life in general, with food aplenty or not, successful hunt or not, sad times or happy times. At Long Nen, in the Layun River, Baram District, a story was told of Ayat Lirong who at 80 plus years in 2008 climbed Sawa' Anau, a hill not far from the village with plenty of sago, rattan, and fruit trees, to collect shoots for the family meal. Sawa' Anau has numerous *la'a* or former camp sites. Villagers often go there to collect food resource, rattan, and fruit. On his trip there Ayat fell off a cliff and was found lying down on the ground two days later. Miraculously he survived. Asked why he made the trip there alone in his advanced years, his reply was "*tawai*", nostalgia, a longing for the place. Ayat also has a past personal story of himself associated with the hill, Sawa' Anau. Many years ago, when his group was camped there – he was about six years old – he lost a toenail due to misadventure. He was severely rebuked by the elders for being naughty, but the memory of that event is used by the present community as a mark of their link and

[20] There are two interesting articles on sign sticks, one by Guy Arnold "Nomads of the Upper Rejang (Plieran), Sarawak" *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1958, 31(1):40-82, and the other by Tom Harrisson "Three 'Secret' Communication Systems Among Borneo Nomads (and Their Dogs)" *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1965, 38(2):67-86.

attachment to the hill and surrounding area. The recent event of Ayat Lirong's fall strengthens further the community attachment to the hill, Sawa' Anau[21].

Penan insist that *tawai* differentiates their relationship with the landscape from others who relate to the same. For instance, a timber company and its workers do not have tawai for the land. Once they get what they want, they leave, leaving no feeling for the place. The Penan feeling for the land is told and retold in *tesok* (oral narratives) to succeeding generations. It is also expressed in *sinui* (Western Penan) and *jajan* (Eastern Penan) sung for entertainment[22].

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Penan argue that their rights and attachment to the land are more solid than the mere felling of trees to open up land for cultivation to create native customary rights land. In their relationship with the landscape, they have turned hilltops and depressions between and connecting two hills into campsites giving a sense of residence. Clusters of wild sago, rattan stands and wild fruit orchards in the vicinity of campsites which they nature are their supermarkets. Through a series of former campsites (*la'a*) and the system of resource tenure they have in fact turned the landscape into a series of 'forest farms', providing them with their basic needs. Criss-crossing the length and breadth of their landscape are man-made jungle tracks and nicely kept resting places (*lasan*) which not only make walking through the forest comfortable but create a sense of 'kinship' with the environment.

All the above ways in which they relate to the landscape and stake claims to resources, comprise the moral basis upon which Penan continue to engage the state by way of blockading timber roads. The Penan literally walk as one with the natural landscape they inherited which is expressed in their concept of *tawai*. They are convinced that their stand falls within various articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples especially Article 26(1) which states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired", and Malaysia is a signatory to this Declaration.

The Penan relationship with the state through historical period differed, from the 1840's, markedly with those of the hill tribes described by Scott (2010) in Zomia. While hill tribes in Zomia evaded the grasp of the state from tyranny, slavery, corvée, taxation, conscription, and warfare (Scott 2010:76), the Penan were enjoying the protection of the state under the Brooke regime and colonial rule from headhunting raid (Sarawak Gazette 1905 vol. 35(469):35) and trade exploitation by their powerful neighbours (Ermen 1927:185, Needham 1959:5 para. 22). However, when Sarawak became an independent state within the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, areas occupied by the Penan were found to be lucrative for timber exploitation at the expense of Penan livelihood. As the state ignored their rights to the land, the Penan accused it of siding with timber companies. With no place of refuge, the Penan have no choice but to stay put on the land, engaging the state through non-violent means which included among other

[21] Among the Western Apache of Arizona, United States of America, described by Keith H. Basso(1996) in *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache,* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, story-telling is a powerful tool to establish bonds between people and the landscape. Oral histories connect them and their cultural roots to their historical environments.

[22] *Sinui* is a popular tune sung by the Western Penan in Belaga District and Silat River, Baram District. Singing without instrumentation, the main singer sings an impromptu narrative in poetic rhyme that is accompanied by a form of choral 'harmony'. *Sinui* often expresses feelings of love, happiness, merriment, sadness, loneliness or grief in praise of or remembrance of a person, an event or a landscape. The beauty of the sentiment expressed in rhyme and narrative is often equally matched by the vocal style. The incredible skill of the lead singer's improvised story-telling and rhyming have no match in the modern or western musical world. The Eastern Penan *jajan* is a vehicle for an individual to express his or her feelings on any topic, including the landscape.

actions, erecting timber blockades[23]. Gaining public sympathy and support especially from groups of NGOs, local and international, timber blockades have become a moral weapon to defend their rights. Moreover, the aftermath of World War II paved the way for the formation of the United Nations, which amongst others changed, the internal political landscape of nation states with legal provisions associated with universal human rights such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to protect the rights of such peoples. This gave the Penan confidence to engage with the state for their rights.

As recently as September 2, 2010, some 150 Penan representing settlements from different parts of Baram and Limbang districts gathered at a Penan village in the Apoh area of Baram District not only to commemorate the anniversary of various blockades held the previous year, but more importantly to honour three decades of struggle against what they consider a violation of their native customary rights to land[24]. It was held as a reminder to the people to appreciate their rights and way of life, closely tied to a particular space in the landscape, the space of belonging.

[23] Interview with a Penan elder at Long Nen, Layun River, Baram District, March 11, 2010.
[24] Conversation with a Penan headman in Miri, September 21, 2010.

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