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Pirates, squatters and poachers: the political ecology of dispossession of the native peoples of Sarawak*

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Abstract. The forests of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, are today the scene of a bitter struggle between native peoples trying to maintain their land rights and the timber industry intent on felling their forests for profit. Denied other means of redress, the natives have flung up barricades across the logging company roads to prevent the takeover of their ancestral lands, while politicians have sought to crush native resistance through mass arrests and by invoking national security laws.

As this study reveals, the roots of this crisis go right back into the colonial era, when the economic, legal and administrative machinery of oppression was first established. Having lost control of their traditional trade, the natives became 'pirates', legitimate targets for the British Navy's gunboats. Once their resistance had been crushed by force of arms, their political organisations were co-opted and their initiative subdued by a benign paternalistic administration. Progressively denied effective rights

to their lands, it was not long before the natives became 'squatters' on State land.

After independence the subordination of native rights and interests to external economic and political powers intensified. Top-down development policies have continued to deny popular participation and even the creation of National parks has made them into 'poachers'. Intensive logging, hydropower projects and plantations are progressively taking over larger and larger areas of native land, through a process of development that is dominated by clientelistic political structures controlled by the indigenous elite.

Today, 25 years after Sarawak received its independence, the native peoples remain the victims of an political economy that is undermining their very existence.

Key words. Sarawak, native peoples, landrights, timber industry, development, forest resources.

INTRODUCTION

I beg you to listen to what I have to say, and that you will recollect my words,... Has it ever occurred to you that after my time out here others may appear with soft and smiling countenances, to deprive you of what is solemnly your right—that is the very land on which you live, the source of your income, the food even of your mouths? If this is lost once, no amount of money could recover it... Unless you follow this advice you will lose your birthright, which will be taken from you by strangers and speculators who will, in their turn, become

masters and owners whilst you yourselves, you people of the soil, will be thrown aside and become nothing but coolies and outcasts of the island.

Statement by Charles Brooke, Second Rajah of Sarawak, to the Council Negri, 1915 (Payne 1960).

The ancient tropical forests of Sarawak are coming to their end. Uncontrolled logging is causing such a rapid rate of forest loss that the timber industry will be finished within less than a decade. The original inhabitants, faced with the destruction of their forests and their ways of life which derive from them, have been forced into direct conflict with the loggers.

Moreover, the environmental destruction experienced by these forest peoples has been matched

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by an equally unjust economic marginalization. The massive revenues flowing into the Federal and State coffers from the State's natural resources of oil and timber are barely reaching the rural poor. As a consequence, Sarawak has experienced a political upheaval as native resentment has been translated both into a political voice, demanding rights to land and control over the development process, and into direct action as barricades have been set up to prevent further logging.

So far these expressions of protest have had little effect, so firm is the grip of Sarawak's elite on the country's political economy, yet international concern about the future of Sarawak's forests and indigenous peoples continues to grow. International non-governmental organizations have petitioned the Sarawak government to change its forest policies and recognise the legitimate demands of the native peoples to their lands and to control their own destiny. They have been rebuffed but not ignored.

The controversy has become an international *cause célèbre*, the subject of massive press coverage and television documentaries. Public calls for a boycott of Sarawakian timber have been translated into European Parliamentary resolutions calling for a ban on imports from the country 'until it can be established that the logging does not cause unnecessary environmental damage and does not threaten the way of life of the indigenous peoples'. Numerous governments have sent special missions to Sarawak to investigate the situation. A major investigation by the International Tropical Timber Organisation concluded that rates of logging in Sarawak far exceed a sustainable yield (ITTO, 1990), while a World Bank study concluded that, at present rates, the primary forests in Sarawak will be effectively logged out by 1997 (World Bank, 1992).

As this study reveals, the roots of this social and environmental crisis lie far back in the colonial past when British imperialists and merchants crushed native resistance and took control of the native peoples' lands. Made vulnerable to outside intervention, they have found themselves without political or legal defence when the insatiable demands of western markets and the greed of local politicians have opened their forests to logging.

Sarawak is at a critical moment in its history. Its original social institutions have been badly damaged by its insertion into the global economy and there is no turning back to a bygone era of isolation, nor is that something that the native peoples are demanding;

yet the future path of Sarawak's development is not set in stone. If Sarawak follows its present course, the country risks destroying its natural resource base and condemning to poverty the native peoples who make up the bulk of the rural population. A new path of development must be found based on a respect for the native peoples' rights to land and based on that sense of stewardship for the environment that pervades the natives' way of life but which has been lost in the industrialised world. Finding that path towards real, sustainable development can only be achieved if the native peoples are given a decisive voice in decision about resource use in their areas.

ORIGINS

Nobody really knows where the native peoples of Sarawak come from. Archaeological investigations in the Niah caves in northern Sarawak have revealed that human settlements have existed there since at least 50,000 years ago and show more or less continuous occupation until 250 BC (Porter, 1969). It seems unlikely that the peoples that originally inhabited these caves were ancestral to the Proto-Malay-speaking Dayaks who now form the largest racial group of Sarawak's diverse population.

These Proto-Malay speakers, who gradually peopled almost all the western islands of the Malay archipelago including most of Indonesia, the Philippines and the Malay peninsula, are thought to be more recent comers. Originating in the north, they supposedly gradually swept down the Malay peninsula and across to the islands some 4000 years ago, submerging, absorbing or displacing the previous races who now survive only in isolated areas, such as in the hilly interior of Malaya, the upland forests of the Philippines and in parts of the Indonesian archipelago (Carey, 1976; Winstedt, 1982).

On the island of Borneo the Proto-Malays diversified into a number of different peoples now known collectively as Dayaks, a term that used to have a more restricted application. Their economies and societies adapted to meet a variety of different conditions. Along the swampy coasts, societies such as the Melanau developed a way of life based mainly on fishing and the collection of swamp sago (*Metroxylon sago*). In the interior the dominant form of land use was swidden agriculture, originally of root crops supplemented by forest sago. Around the 5th Century AD hill rice began to be adopted, since when

it has gradually become the main staple in the interior, a process of crop replacement that is still in progress (Strickland, 1986). The steep upland forests with their poor soils made permanent cultivation unsustainable and the people developed a way of life strikingly similar to that found in Amazonia, based on shifting agriculture complemented by hunting and gathering.

In areas where the soils and the aspect provided better conditions for permanent agriculture, wet rice cultivation on well constructed dyked fields was also developed, as among the Kelabit and Lun-Bawang peoples in the central highlands (Harrison, 1959). In other areas, peoples like the Penan eschewed agriculture altogether, adopting instead a mobile existence based exclusively on hunting and gathering, particularly of forest sago from the nanga palm (*Eugeissona utilis*).

If the essence of these cultures was their independence and self-sufficiency, they were neither isolated one from another nor from the outside world. Trade, war and occasional inter-marriage linked the various tribes throughout the island and head-hunting was common, part of a complex ideology of male valour and spiritual power.

There is evidence that, as far back as 200 BC (Chin, 1985, p. 8), the peoples of Borneo engaged in extensive trade with the Chinese who would sail down in their trading junks across the South China seas to exchange local spices, gums, horn and woods for their jade, iron and stoneware pottery, as well as bronze and brass goods. By 500 AD references to Sarawak are found in Chinese historical sources (Porter, 1969).

At what time the Malay culture first spread its influence along the Borneo coast is not known (Andaya & Andaya 1982). It seems that Malays first began to exert some political control over the area from around the sixth to twelfth centuries when the Buddhist Indian cultures in Sumatra and Java extended their influence as far as Sarawak. Almost nothing is known of the extent of this control or on what it was based, but at the end of this period, with the arrival of Islam in the Malay archipelago, direct political control from so far away waned.

Now and then linked to the emerging Islamic sultanates on Peninsular Malaya, the west Borneo coast evolved its own Malay aristocracy, which derived its power in large part from its control of the commerce with the Chinese traders. According to Porter, 'the ruling Malays operated a system of economic oppression—"serah"—under which Dayak communities, and particularly the gentle Land

Dayaks, paid tribute in the form of goods, surrendered possessions for nominal payments and bought goods at exorbitant prices; *serah*, a Malay word, means "surrender"' (Porter, 1969, pp. 3–4).

Paramount among the coastal sultanates was the sultanate of Brunei, which by the end of the seventeenth century laid claim to the entire west coast of Borneo. Principally confined to the coastal areas, nevertheless the Malays gradually took over parts of the immediate hinterland to develop wet rice cultivation along the banks of the lower reaches of some of the major rivers. Just how far inland the sultan's control extended is far from clear. Most probably, coastal influence was limited to a stanglehold on maritime commerce and occasional forays into the interior to capture slaves and exact tribute.

For the most part, it seems, the upland tribes were left to their own devices. Nor were things stable in the interior; the history of the past two centuries is one of forceful migrations of vigorous and expanding peoples taking over the lands of their less numerous neighbours. Thus the Iban, Kenyah and Kayan peoples of Sarawak today are relatively recent arrivals from eastern Borneo who have spread over, and partly absorbed, other groups—Bisayah, Kedayan, Melanau, Tagal, Lun-Bawang, Kelabit, Berawan, Kajang, Bukitan, Ukit, Sihan, Penan and Bidayuh—who have been in Sarawak somewhat longer.

Today, following over a century of control by colonial powers who encouraged quite extensive settlement by Indians and, particularly, Chinese, Sarawak has a population, of 1.5 million people and continues to grow at 2.7% pa (Malaysia, 1986). The proportions of the different 'races' that now make up Sarawak are shown in Table 1. Populations in some areas of the sparsely inhabited interior are growing faster than on the coast, as high as 5.9%, for example, among the Kenyah of the Baram (Chin, 1985, p. 43).

CONQUEST: THE COLONIAL WARS

The precapitalist regional trade patterns around the globe were not destroyed by the inexorable forces of the market. Instead, it was superior military power that laid the basis for transforming these traditional trade patterns into a world market centred on the needs and interests of Western Europe. The leap ahead in naval power—based on advances in artillery—created the bludgeoning force used to annex

Table 1. Population of Sarawak, 1985 (percentage of population in parentheses).

<i>Natives</i>	
Malay	
Malay	300,000 (20.3)
Melanau	85,000 (5.8)
Sub-total	385,000 (26.1)
<i>Dayak</i>	
Iban	439,000 (29.7)
Bidayuh	123,000 (8.3)
Others	78,000 (5.3)
Sub-total	640,000 (43.3)
<i>Non-natives</i>	
Chinese	434,000 (29.4)
Others	18,000 (1.2)
Sub-total	452,000 (30.6)
Total	1,477,000 (100.0)

Source: *Annual Statistical Bulletin* (1985) Sarawak, 13.

colonies, open trading ports, enforce new trading relations, and develop mines and plantations (Magdoff, 1972, p. 145).

The history of western intervention in the South China Seas is not a pretty one. Driven by commercial interests and given power by their advanced armaments and sturdy vessels, western merchants, with the open support of their Governments and their navies, vied for control of the sea lanes.

Previous regional trade patterns, developed over at least two millennia, were suddenly disrupted and commandeered. Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and British each carved out their own areas of control, all the time resisted by the local powers whose loss was the western traders' gain. The gradual eclipse of the Islamic sultanates ushered in an era of piracy, the suppression of which offered the imperial powers an excuse for further intervention.

As Rutter has pointed out:

While it is clear, therefore, that these Malays were pirates, and as such a menace to European trade, it is but fair to say that it was largely European intercourse with the East that made them so... What was it then that caused these peoples to revert from peace to piracy? The answer is: the greed of the the European powers who traded in the Eastern seas. From time immemorial outside commerce with the Archipelago had been in the hands of the

Chinese, whose junks would come down in the north-east monsoon and return in the south-west laden with precious cargoes of spices, rattans, edible birds' nests, camphor, sharks' fins and pearls. Then came the Portuguese, and after them the Dutch, who, bent on securing the trade for themselves alone, created a system of monopolies... so that thousands of natives were bereft of their normal occupations... They were a proud people, accustomed to freedom; they resented most bitterly the injustice shown them and the restraints imposed by those they regarded as white barbarians. They were accustomed to the sea, and under the leadership of their princes they turned their ways to piracy and plunder. If one may regard that metamorphosis through their eyes, one may see, in the attacks on European shipping that followed, acts of retaliation against those interlopers from the West (Rutter, 1930, pp. 25–27).

Amid this turmoil, the Sultanate of Brunei managed to preserve a facade of independence. The west coast of Borneo, falling between the main centres of Dutch, Spanish and more recent British commerce remained unclaimed by the colonial powers. The sultanate survived through the dangerous game of playing off the pirates and the various colonial mercantile traders against one another. Caught between the protagonists of two very distinct trading economies, the Sultan's power gradually diminished as he gave way in turn, now to one side and now another.

By the mid-nineteenth century the Sultanate's precarious hold on power in the south of his realm faced another threat as a vigorous people, the Iban, expanded from the Dutch side of Borneo into the valley of the Saribas river. Disregarding the Sultan's tenuous control, these 'Sea Dayaks' soon learned the art of piracy themselves from their Malay neighbours, while they gradually expanded north along the coast, ever seeking new areas to settle.

It was into this turbulent situation in 1839 that the English adventurer-trader, James Brooke, sailed in his 140-ton schooner, '*Royalist*', a yacht armed with six 6-pounders, a number of swivel guns and every kind of small arms. Arriving in Kuching, Brooke found himself in, as he put it, a 'trader's paradise', as he counted off the various commercial opportunities: 'antimony, timber, Malacca cane, bird's nest, pipe-clay, sago, vegetable oils, perhaps gold and

diamonds' (Payne, 1960, p. 34). But, within hours of his arrival he was embroiled in a deadly combination of palace intrigue, trading deals and military planning, from which he emerged just over a year later as the local ruler.

The history of how James Brooke established control over Sarawak has been well recounted elsewhere (Payne, 1960). Taking sides with the crown prince of Brunei, who ruled Kuching and the surrounding territory of Sarawak as Rajah, and turning his cannon on those who opposed his will, Brooke quickly established his military supremacy and a tenuous political control. This he expanded by introducing his own laws and code of justice. He secured the assistance of the Royal Navy by opening Kuching as a free port, keeping for himself only a monopoly in the trade of antimony. Dayaks who refused to recognize his sovereignty were captured and put to death.

After a skilful game of brinkmanship with the local potentates and with the support of the colonial power, he found himself independent Rajah of a tiny State only nominally subordinate to the Sultan of Brunei.

For the remaining twenty years of James Brooke's rule his main energies were directed to establishing firm control over his Malay subjects and subjugating the 'piratic Sea Dayaks', the Iban, who resisted his authority. Against the odds, and despite unexpected criticism of his ways by liberal opinion in Britain, James Brooke soon established a virtual trading monopoly over his small realm, which soon freed itself of any obligations to Brunei (Rutter, 1930).

Vested with consular authority by the British Crown and vigorously supported by the men-of-war and steamships of the Royal Navy, the new Rajah of Sarawak waged a brutal war against the bloodthirsty native 'pirates' who made the coasts so difficult for profitable commerce. As he noted in his diary:

My intention, my wish, is to extirpate piracy by attacking and breaking up the pirate towns; not only pirates direct, but pirates indirect... I wish to correct the native character, to gain and hold an influence in Borneo proper, to introduce gradually a better system of government, to open the interior, to encourage the poor natives, to remove the clogs on trade, to develop new sources. I wish to make Borneo a second Java (Payne, 1960, p. 59).

Though the Rajah himself admitted that he actually enjoyed his bloody expeditions against Dayaks and

Malays, the native 'pirates' own fondness for raiding and looting is equally undeniable. The Rajah thus engaged in a series of expeditions against the 'pirate' strongholds in the interior, taking with him considerable forces composed of Royal Navy sailors, reinforced by Malay and Dayak subjects who took advantage of these punitive expeditions to loot and collect heads. While the natives' interest in taking heads was ritual and religious, the zeal of the British sailors was sharpened by more pecuniary interests. For every 'pirate' killed, the Navy captains claimed and received a reward from the British Crown.

If the battles were essentially one-sided affairs, as the superior armaments eventually crushed native resistance, they were certainly not without risk to the western seamen, as this account of an attack on the Iban strongholds on the Skrang river reveals.

About twenty boats were jammed together, forming one confused mass; some bottoms up; the bows or sterns of other only visible, mixed up, pell mell, with huge rafts; and amongst which were nearly all our advanced little division. Headless trunks as well as heads without bodies were lying about in all directions; parties were engaged in hand to hand, spearing and krissing each other. Others were striving to swim for their lives. Entangled in the common melee were our advanced boats; while on both banks thousands of Dyaks were rushing down to join in the slaughter, hurling their spears and stones on the boats below... We now advanced to mid-channel: spears and stones assailed us from both banks. My friend Brooke's gun would not go off so, giving him the yoke lines, he steered the boat while I kept up a rapid fire. Mr. Allen in the second gig, quickly coming up, opened up on them from a congreve rocket tube such a destructive fire as caused them to retire panic struck... (Rutter, 1930, pp. 124–125).

One of the bloodiest battles took place at a place called Beting Marau, where Brooke's forces were reinforced with gunboats from the Royal Navy and the East India Company. Intercepting a fleet of Iban who were returning from a coastal raid on other native communities, the Rajah's combined forces made mincemeat of the poorly armed Iban. The commander of the East India Company steamship *Nemesis* gives us an idea of the encounter.

On coming abreast of them I fired the starboard

broadside with cannister shot along the whole line, the nearest prahu being about 20 or 30 yards distant, the small-arm men at the same time keeping up a constant and important fire upon them. We then wore, breaking the line and driving many prahus ashore in a very crippled state, where they fell easy prey to a division of native boats under Mr Steele of Sarawak, who did good service, without interfering with our fire.

We now followed five prahus which still pressed on for the Batan Lupar, and on coming up with them passed round each successively, and destroyed them in detail, by keeping up a constant fire of grape shot and musketry, until they drifted past us as helpless logs, without a living being on board, their crews having either been killed or jumped overboard, with the hope of swimming on shore, which few could possibly accomplish (Pringle, 1970, p. 82).

The Admiralty Court in Singapore later concluded that of 2140 natives in the 'pirate' fleet, at least 500 were killed. The enormous sum of £20,700 in 'pirate bounty' was awarded to the British sailors for their part in the action (Pringle, 1970, p. 83).

In this way, within a few years the Sarawak coast near to Kuching soon became safe for western traders and the Iban and Dayak recognized the Rajah's authority so that his will to become 'Chief of the Dyaks' was part realized.

Brooke's authority was soon put to the test again when a violent rebellion of the Chinese miners working the antimony had to be crushed by force of arms. At that time, much of the revenue for the Rajah derived from his control over the Chinese. As the general manager of the Rajah's company noted:

The Chinaman must have his tea, tobacco, opium and samsu, and when he has ready money, he must gamble. He is therefore an excellent subject to tax, and from the opium, arrack and gambling farms the Sarawak Treasury was largely replenished. The Dyaks and Malays are but poor subjects to tax: they work little and require little' (Payne, 1960, p. 86).

When Brooke doubled the tax on opium without consulting the Chinese, their tolerance of his control of their trade reached its limit and a bloody rebellion followed, from which the Rajah barely escaped with

his life and the town of Kuching was put to the torch. Only after a two-month struggle were the Chinese subdued by the superior force of arms of the British and the overwhelming numbers of the Rajah's more loyal Dayak and Malay subjects.

The Brooke Raj's next task was to expand the tiny state. James Brooke annexed the Rajang in 1861 and the succeeding Rajah, Charles Brooke, devoted the early part of his reign to extending his realm by annexing Baram in 1882, Trusan in 1884, Limbang in 1890 and finally Lawas in 1904. Brunei had by then been reduced to a tiny triangle of territory on the coast, surrounded on all sides by the lands of the white Rajah.

To achieve this, Charles Brooke depended on the Saribas 'ex-pirates' (Iban) to assert his authority over other tribes (Leigh, 1979, p. 36). He took advantage of the vigorous northward migration of this 'virile and truculent people' (Freeman, 1955, p. 11), who had become too numerous in the south of the country and were in search of new territory. Riding this wave of spontaneous colonization into the headwaters of rivers such as the Rajang and later the Baram, he expanded his realm to its present boundaries.

His technique was, with the aid of the Iban, to establish small forts in tribal territory, from which the rule of force was gradually replaced by the rule of law. Merciless with those who resisted his authority, the early part of his 50-year rule was a chronicle of wars to put down 'rebellions' in the interior.

Leaving aside the question of whether this extension of political authority eventually brought benefits to the native peoples, it is clear that the wars with these 'pirates indirect', ostensibly to put down the practice of head-hunting, were themselves sanguinary affairs. As Charles Brooke's son Vyner later put it:

What now is the stark truth about Sarawak in the past? My father's policy was to support the virile Sea Dyak tribes against all other tribes. Frequent expeditions, resulting in indiscriminate slaughter, were sent to subdue the recalcitrant natives. Corvee was the inveterate practice and the Malays loathed being ordered to take part in expeditions and gratuitous labour (Payne, 1960, p. 179).

In later life, it seems, Charles Brooke was to reflect on the wisdom of his system of government. Pondering on the cause of rebellion against colonial rule in other parts of the world, he concluded 'the fault lies in

ourselves as governors, and most arises through want of care and knowledge of the native mind... the people were never questioned as to their wishes, and later on, when they demur or show forcible opposition, they are called rebels' (Payne, 1960).

These musings came too late to be of any help to the natives of Sarawak. By then their independent political spirit had been crushed and the frontiers of the White Rajah's realm established. The process of creating loyal subjects from the 'unruly' forest peoples meanwhile embarked on its second phase

ADMINISTRATION: THE EXTENSION OF COLONIAL CONTROL

Domination is only practicable in so far as alien power is translated into terms of indigenous political economy... the financial sinew, the military and administrative muscle of imperialism was drawn through the indigenous elites from the invaded countries themselves (Robinson, 1972, pp. 119–120).

Equally as important as these military conquests was the assertion of long-term political control over the natives by peaceful means. From the time of the first Rajah, the Brookes recruited their senior administrators from Britain and gradually developed a unique and proud band of officials, who, in exchange for local power and privilege, were expected to devote themselves selflessly to the service of the Rajah and his subjects.

However, gaining control over the native peoples was no easy matter, even once they had been subjugated by force of arms (and rebellions were frequent in the early years). In particular, among the Iban, there exist no paramount political authorities and even at the longhouse level political authority is diffuse. Indeed, as Freeman notes, 'the unbroken expanse of the roof tends to conceal the fact that the Iban longhouse is fundamentally a series of discrete entities: the independent units of a competitive and egalitarian society' (Freeman, 1955, p. 1).

The process by which the colonial authorities imposed their control over the native peoples has been well explored by Freeman in his study of the Iban. Iban society, which he characterizes as traditionally 'classless and egalitarian' (ibid, p. 1) contrasted dramatically with the 'highly stratified social order' of the Malays 'in which there was an incessant concern with genealogically defined rank and honorific titles' (ibid., p. 4).

In the coastal areas over which the Malays had extended their weak control, the Malays had introduced titles such as *orang kaya* and *temenggong* and mediated their authority through these new chieftaincies. This structure, introduced particularly among the riverine Iban, was adopted and reinforced by the Brooke Rajahs and gradually extended over the whole territory (ibid., p.15). A further aim, 'to create a stable Iban political institution above the longhouse level' (ibid., p. 16), was achieved by the imposition of the rank of *penghulu* (another Malay term).

As British control over the inland communities stabilized and intensified 'the need arose for a regular point of contact in each of the long-houses'. To gain control also at this local level, one of the traditionally several community leaders was singled out and appointed as official house headman, or *tuai rumah*. The *tuai rumah*, like the *penghulu*, was responsible for implementing Government policy, and in return for his services was entitled to a share of the fines he was authorised to levy on behalf of the Brooke Raj' (ibid., p. 17).

Pressure from the communities for them to be allowed to choose their own representatives was resisted, not only by the British but also by the *penghulu* themselves who were not inclined to relinquish their new-found status. They argued that if the communities were allowed to choose their own representatives they would abolish the tax system so that Government would lose revenue (ibid., pp. 21–22). As the native elite consolidated its power, marked economic inequalities arose within the communities (ibid., p. 23).

A number of upriver societies differed from the Iban in having a strong tradition of social stratification, whereby society was divided into three or four clearly defined classes—'aristocrats', 'commoners' and 'slaves'. The authority and wealth of these 'aristocrats' derived directly and exclusively from the services and labour of their village subjects, albeit sanctioned by supernatural forces. However, with the extension of Brooke rule over these longhouses, the leaders gained a new external validation of their authority. As Nicolaisen notes: 'formalizing the position of (the) aristocrats and endowing them with governmental authority and the right to administer fines, upset the power balance between aristocrats and commoners in favour of the former. This enabled them to act freely at their own will. While their influence earlier was dependant on

the authority they could master within the society due to their capabilities, they (could) now lean on an external power base' (Nicolaisen, 1986, p. 16). The result was that the longhouses progressively became less and less democratic and responsive to the needs and demands of the villagers themselves.

There thus arose two parallel systems of administration both obedient to the Rajah's authority: on one hand, a hierarchical ranking of Government-appointed native chieftains whose duties were to administer traditional law and levy tax for the Rajah, and on the other hand of a system of 'district officers', regional 'residents' and so on, recruited in Britain, whose duty was to administer the introduced western systems of justice, land ownership, schooling, health and labour and to intervene in native affairs when it was considered necessary.

This dual system exists to this day, although many of the *temenggong* (paramount chief), *pemancha* (regional chief), *penghulu* (sub-regional chief), *tua kampong* and *tuai rumah* (village headmen) now also play a part in local politics. The Sarawak legal system still acknowledges the authority of customary law, *adat*, at the local level, administered by these leaders.

These native courts have authority to settle disputes involving *adat*, including disputes of customary land rights, within the community. Indeed, the natives consider that this community justice is often very effective and they are proud of it. More serious offences, such as rape, murder and theft, are referred to the magistrate's court, but many natives are still very reluctant to take actions to these courts, as cases are often lost on technical grounds. Indeed, the opinion is often expressed that, especially with respect to disputes with non-natives, once a case has been referred to the national courts it is as good as lost. Those who win their cases are those who can afford clever lawyers.

From the earliest years, the Brooke administration sought to reinforce its control of the native peoples by reforming their spirit as well as their political institutions. To this end they actively encouraged missionaries to set themselves up in the native communities, for as Charles Brooke was to note: 'the conversion of the Dayaks would be the means of strengthening the government beyond measure' (Pringle, 1970, p. 88). In the event however, the missionaries' endeavours had relatively little success with the independent spirited Iban but found a much more fertile field for conversions among the more hierarchical upriver peoples, notably the Kelabit, for

whom the notion of a paramount and judgemental supreme being was not so foreign..

The paternalistic, if benign, character of the Brooke administration was a mixed blessing to the native peoples (cf. Porter, 1969, p. 4). If, on one hand, it succeeded in effectively protecting them against the kinds of problems experienced in many other parts of the region, where exploitative western economies were allowed untrammelled access to native lands, at the same time the denial of an effective political voice to the communities served to stultify their initiative.

Thus, in the post-colonial era, the native peoples were not only ill-prepared to take over the administration but, at the community level, they were divided. The villagers remained inexperienced at articulating their needs and aspirations, while the native elite failed to represent community interests, siding rather with the authorities when any conflicts of interest arose. The passive way in which the natives have accepted the progressive takeover of their lands and resources in the post-colonial era (something inconceivable during the rule of the White Rajahs) can in part be explained in these terms.

Today, the fact that the introduced system of chieftaincies continues to be made up of Government appointees, whose authority derives from central government and not from the native peoples themselves, is a major obstacle to effective community development and participation in local affairs. In response to protest from the communities against these imposed leaders, the government replies: 'you can't change leaders like you change clothes' (Harrison Ngau, 1987, pers. comm.).

LAND ADMINISTRATION: THE DENIAL OF LAND RIGHTS

The land belongs to the countless numbers who are dead, the few who are living, and the multitudes of those yet to be born. How then can the Government say that all untitled land belongs to itself, when there had been people using the land even before the Government itself existed? Statement of native elder (Hong, 1987, p. 80).

If one of the most damaging effects of British rule has been this denial of community democracy, an equally serious legacy of the Brooke and colonial administration is that it took control of the land out of

the hands of the natives and entrusted it to Government.

The Brooke and colonial policy towards the natives of Sarawak was one of curious contrasts. If on one hand there was a strong respect for native rights and a firm advocacy of native culture, on the other hand there existed an equally firm assertion of control over the native societies and economies, coupled with an attempt to mould them to suit western perceptions of what is right. This dualism, so manifest in the system of administration, also underlay the land laws that the authorities introduced.

Although the traditional systems of land tenure among the various peoples in Sarawak vary considerably, they share many characteristics and can be perceived as variations on a common theme. Every longhouse community in Sarawak, indeed Borneo, considers itself as owning an extensive tract of communal land, which extends far beyond the areas actually used for swidden agriculture, including areas of swamp and virgin forest used for hunting, for collecting wild produce and as a reserve for future swidden sites, the boundaries of which are typically marked by natural features such as ridges and streams. Traditional ownership rights thus extend to embrace the majority of the island, which was divided into more or less clearly defined areas linked to specific communities (Weinstock, 1979, p. 73; Weinstock & Vergara, p. 4; Sandin, 1980, p. 13; Chin, 1985, pp. 13–18; Brosius, 1986).

Within these communally held territories, individual families, the units that make up the longhouse communities, establish usufructuary rights to the lands that they clear for gardens (Freeman, 1955, p. 21). Individuals retain rights to these plots, originally created only with the consent of the whole community, not only for the period of cultivation but also during the subsequent fallow. Individuals thus have the first option of returning to fallowed areas of secondary forest to clear anew their swiddens. Moreover, these rights to family plots can be inherited and, for most of the peoples of Sarawak, may pass through both male and female lines.

Consequently, within the longhouse community and within the communal longhouse territory each family is, on one hand, more or less self-sufficient, through having exclusive rights to its own farming land, and on the other hand through shared rights to the game, fish and forest produce of the communal territory. In some cases, as among the Berawan,

usufructuary rights to fish in certain stretches of river are also parcelled out to individual families and inherited, and the same may apply to sago stands in other areas. Nevertheless, the economic autonomy of each family should not be exaggerated as the customary sharing of game and the carefully reckoned exchange of labour between longhouse 'rooms' form essential parts of the traditional economy.

The most obvious differences between the various peoples of Sarawak, relating to these customary land rights, lie in the extent to which individuals retain their usufructuary rights to their farming land if they move from the community. Whereas in some communities these usufructuary rights are lost once an individual ceases to live in a longhouse, in others customary law allows that person to maintain their rights for relatively long periods so long as they return to their 'room' in the original community for a certain time each year. The Iban, for example, describe rules by which an individual loses his land rights if he does not keep a candle lighted in the home longhouse for a certain number of days a year.

Whatever the detail, the principle is the same: an individual forfeits his usufructuary rights to farming land through absence and the land then reverts to the community (cf. Freeman, 1955, p. 24). In effect, then, the communally held longhouse territory retains its coherence despite movements of families and individuals between different communities.

The essential interdependence of this system of land tenure with the societies that they regulated, and which regulated them, cannot be overstated. As Porter has noted, 'wherever shifting cultivation occurs—and it occurs throughout Sarawak—it reflects customary law and an ancient, cohesive, communal society in which land has an economic, social and religious significance' (Porter, 1970, p. 198; cf. Hong, 1987, pp. 37–39).

Even among the Penan, who do not practise shifting cultivation, there are close ties between the society and the land. Far from being 'wild nomads' roaming vaguely through trackless jungle, the Penan have an intimate association with and detailed knowledge of their forest, to which they are linked over very long periods. Particular fruit trees and stands of sago have defined owners while their communal territory, criss-crossed by a maze of hunting tracks and trading paths, is defined by a complex naming of streams, rivers, rock and

mountain. The forest is to them a 'dense, intricate network of economically and culturally significant places, linking past, present and future generations. The Penan, quite literally walk in the footsteps of their ancestors, and are conscious that their descendants will one day want to walk in their footsteps... a sense of stewardship constantly informs the manner in which they exploit their environment' (Brosius, 1986).

Sandin, himself an Iban, summarizes native attitudes to land thus:

The customary land rights they hold are precious to the heart and mind of the Ibans and other indigenous people of Sarawak. They represent the fortress of their survival which they have defended from before the earliest days of Brooke rule to the present' (Sandin, 1980, p. 14).

From the very earliest years of the Brooke Raj, the need to accommodate native systems of land tenure was always accepted by the authorities. However, such recognition of the natives' land rights has not been wholly uncompromised and has always been filtered through the perceptions and intentions of the administration.

In the first place, the Rajah asserted his personal ownership over the whole of his domain, an ownership that was in turn passed to the Crown and then, at independence, to the State. Native rights to land, while recognized, were thus technically rights to the use or lease of State lands. This fact substantially weakened the natives' ability to resist land expropriation in later years, when pressure on the interior intensified.

More importantly, the administration had great difficulty in understanding the fact that native rights to land were nested at a number of levels, with a complex pattern of individual use rights being superimposed on the chequerboard of community owned territories. In the expectation that eventually land tenure in Sarawak would evolve towards the more 'advanced' western system of individual land ownership, the legislation alternately emphasized the significance of individual rights to farming land or attempted to subsume all farmed lands within a single communal area, all the while ignoring or diminishing the significance of communal ownership of the much larger and embracing community territories (cf. Hong, 1987, p. 42). Thus, even where the local administration took careful measures to delineate community boundaries, to record them in district surveys and, for lack of survey equipment, in some areas even marked them

out with cairns and by scoring trees, these areas were never accorded clear legal definition.

On top of this, the administration consistently disapproved of the practice of shifting cultivation, which was thought to be wasteful and destructive, and did not fully appreciate the importance that hunting, fishing, gathering and collecting had for the maintenance of the longhouse economy and sound nutrition. From the earliest years, therefore, land laws gave only vague recognition of rights to fallow farming land and hunting territories (Porter, 1969; Colchester, 1991). They had the specific intention of discouraging the extension of swidden agriculture and of inducing 'the native to abandon his present methods of cultivation and to develop land productively in the national interest' (Chin, 1985, p. 72).

This intention was, in particular, reinforced by legislation designed to promote 'modern' and 'rational' forestry. Under the Forest Ordinance of 1953, large areas of forest in the interior were designated as Permanent Forest in which the exercise of native rights was to be closely controlled. Areas could be designated as Permanent Forest even where native rights were already established, and had the effect of extinguishing them. In 'Forest Reserves' the prohibition extended to all native rights, while in 'Protected Forests', though all cultivation was disallowed, hunting, gathering and fishing, etc., might be permitted by the issue of special permits at the discretion of the Forest Department. The explicit aim of this legislation was to curtail shifting cultivation and to reserve the forest lands for timber extraction (Hong, 1987, pp. 75–76).

The various laws passed by the administration thus had the principal aim not of giving legal force to customary land rights but, on the contrary, of encouraging a change in agricultural practice towards settled farming, where individual plots would eventually be formally recognized in a single land register. After a century during which successive attempts to regulate land tenure produced an almost unworkable patchwork of partial legislation, a formal land code was passed into law in 1957 which superseded all preceding land laws and set the pattern which obtains to the present day.

The Land Code, which came into effect on 1 January 1958 and which remains, with only minor modifications, the principal land law in the State, classifies all land in Sarawak into a number of categories. Privately owned land is classified as Mixed Zone Land (comprising only 7.9% of the

area), which is for both native and non-native use, and as Native Area Land (comprising a further 7.4% of the area) where native peoples have individual land title. The great majority is considered State-owned land, in turn divided into Interior Area Land (comprising 68.9% of area) and Reserved Land (a further 15.7% of the area), which is set aside by the state for specific purposes, e.g. forestry.

A fifth category, Native Customary Land, allows communal holdings as Native Reserves to be established on any of these four types of land, except Reserved Land. These lands are legally leased by the State to the native peoples for up to 99 years and are not considered to be owned by them. In recent years the areas recognized under this category have decreased.

Most native people actually live with a mixed economy as fishers, hunters, gatherers and shifting cultivators in areas officially defined as 'Interior Area Land' or as 'Reserved Land'. The Land Code recognizes that the natives may enjoy 'Native Customary Rights' to use parts of these areas of State land, but takes no steps to define exactly which areas are recognized as such.

The most important effect of the Land Code was that it effectively froze the extension of native customary rights, understood as individual rights to farming land, by insisting that they could only be taken out, and then only on Interior Area Land, after a specific permit had been obtained. Similarly, under the Land Code special permits are also required for hunting and gathering in areas where natives do not already have rights. These permits have proved hard to obtain so, rather than draw attention to themselves and risk having to fell plots or go hunting after being refused permission, most native people simply ignore the law. It is thus the case that the majority of native people in Sarawak are, technically at least, 'squatters' on their own, traditional, lands.

Among all the Dayak peoples, the land laws have proved especially prejudicial to the Penan, a hunter-gatherer people not much involved in cultivation, but rely rather on a mobile and subtle use of forest resources. Denied any land rights at all by Sarawakian laws, these people have found themselves almost totally unprotected when unscrupulous business interests have sought to exploit their forest areas.

If the intention of the Land Code was to halt land disputes and to make finally clear where native rights

ended and exclusively owned State lands began, it failed utterly. In the absence of a formal register of what areas had been acknowledged as native customary lands before the act, neither the Government nor the natives had any clear idea of the boundaries. Moreover the law provided the Government with extensive powers to extinguish native rights (Hong, 1987, pp. 55–56), while a host of anomalies and irregularities remain in the law, which have aggravated the ensuing disputes over land (Porter, 1969).

On one hand, for example, the State has given express recognition of the existence of the Penan's rights to hunt and gather, if not own, some of their customary lands, by granting them exclusive rights to continue their traditional economy within the confines of the Mulu National Park. Such recognition of hunting and collecting rights is in line with the tacit recognition afforded them by the Forest Ordinance and the Land Code; the former recognizes them by extinguishing them, the latter recognizes them by forbidding their extension without permit. On the other hand, the Government has issued repeated statements that the Penan 'have no rights' and cannot have any until 'they settle down', carrying on the colonial tendency of limiting a recognition of customary rights to farmed land.

A detailed examination of Sarawakian land law and colonial practice suggests that, legally, Native Customary Rights do have a real if unclear basis in law and may extend over farmed and fallow areas, as well as the broader community territories (Colchester, 1991). However, the State continues to interpret the law to its advantage; most recently, for example, claiming that 'the Land Code does not recognise native customary rights on lands under forests' (Sarawak, 1992).

The reality is that as pressure on land in the interior has intensified, the tendency of Government has been to give less and less recognition to the natives' ill-defined customary rights. The end result of all this legislation has been that if, in the past, the administration tacitly once regarded native rights as rights of ownership (Porter, 1970, p. 202), such is certainly not the case today. On the contrary, taking advantage of the ambiguities in the colonial legislation, the State has given itself increasing powers to prosecute natives for encroachment on 'State' lands and to lease out these lands as timber concessions and alienate them to establish plantations.

INDEPENDENCE: THE EVOLUTION OF SARAWAKIAN POLITICS

...the end of colonialism by no means signifies the end of imperialism. The explanation of this paradox is that colonialism, considered as the direct applicator of military and political force, was essential to reshape the social and economic institutions of the dependent countries to the needs of the metropolitan centres. Once this relationship had been accomplished economic forces—the international price, marketing and financial systems—were by themselves sufficient to perpetuate and indeed intensify the relationship of dominance and exploitation.... (Magdoff, 1972, p. 164).

After a brief if bloody period of rule by the Japanese, Sarawak was ceded by the third of the Brooke Rajahs to British colonial rule in 1946. For 17 years the new Crown Colony experienced an accelerated development under a colonial order that was responsible for introducing some of the more restrictive laws alluded to above. Then in 1963, after consultation with a small number of the more prominent Sarawakians, it was decided to include Sarawak in an independent Federation of Malay States, called Malaysia, which was also to include Sabah, Singapore and the various states of Malaya.

Coming so suddenly after long years of colonial control, it was inevitable that the creation of such a nation should not be without tensions. In recognition of the fact that, once part of the Federation, the more numerous, populous and 'advanced' states of Peninsular Malaysia would be likely to exercise a dominating control over the affairs of the smaller and less developed Borneo States, special provisions were written at once into the Constitution in an attempt to assure them a measure of autonomy.

Yet, despite this, and despite the strenuous efforts of certain Sarawakian politicians to resist the policies and politics of the peninsula, the reality has been that power has to a large extent remained at the centre in the hands of the small, mainly Malay elite dominating the Federal Parliament in Kuala Lumpur.

Michael Leigh (1974) has characterized the emerging political system in Sarawak as a process whereby political parties at first emerged along ethnic lines. However, largely because 'within each ethnic community the control of disposable wealth is in the

hands of a very small clique' (Leigh, 1979, p. 372), simultaneously opposition parties emerged internally within each ethnic group, making majority government possible only through the bridging of ethnic divides. This evolution he saw as a healthy one as it made possible the emergence of a sound and relatively united multi-racial society, albeit not without its injustices.

The evolution of political affairs on the peninsula traced a quite different course. The numerical majority of the Malays meant that they could be assured of retaining political power even if, or rather especially if, they pursued divisive policies that cleaved along racial lines. Not without some economic justification it must be noted and in accordance with the aims of the *Rukunegara*, the cornerstone of the Malaysian constitution, Malay politics has been characterized by laws which positively discriminate in favour of the *Bumiputera* ('sons of the soil'—autochthonous). The aims of this has been to transfer, by development not redistribution, a greater share of the national wealth to the Malay people, with a corresponding reduction in the proportion of the economy owned by the Chinese.

Translated to Sarawak, the divisive policies of the peninsula have had a very damaging effect. As Leigh has noted, the Federal Government's intervention has 'exacerbated relations between ethnic groups within Sarawak' (Leigh, 1979, p. 161) and has 'supported efforts to assert the primacy of racial politics over those based on shared interest'. Presciently, Leigh predicted that political divisions in Sarawak would emerge as a conflict between native and non-native groups if freedoms were restricted.

Moreover, pro-*Bumiputera* policies on the peninsula, aimed at empowering the Malays, transferred to Sarawak far from benefiting the numerically dominant but economically weak Dayak groups have continued to favour the relatively powerful and affluent Malays; nor have the Malay parties on the Peninsula avoided using extra-legal means to ensure their supremacy in Sarawak.

During the late 1960s, the numerically strong Iban people began to play a prominent role in Sarawakian politics, their main political vehicle being the Sarawak National Party (SNAP). By participating in the 'National Front' coalition, which on the Peninsula is dominated by the main Malay party UMNO (the United Malay National Organization), SNAP was able to obtain not only state ministerial portfolios but

also, in the person of the Iban, Dato Ningkan, the position of Chief Minister of Sarawak. However, tensions between the Federal and State policy-makers quickly escalated. Resistance to attempts to introduce a new Land Bill in 1965, which threatened to further weaken *adat* rights, was followed a year later by an attempt to refuse to have Malay as an official State language. Unable to tolerate such independent Sarawakian power, elements in the Federal Government swiftly intervened, by unconstitutional means, to remove the native Chief Minister from his post. SNAP was forced into opposition (Wong, 1983, pp. 17–18). Since 1971, the post of Chief Minister in Sarawak has been occupied by members of the Malay-Melanau elite.

Yet, even in opposition, SNAP was perceived as a threat to Malay hegemony, with Malay sensitivities sharpened by SNAP's 1970 election slogan 'Sarawak for the Sarawakians'. As SNAP's power base expanded, its enemies on the Peninsula and their Malay-Melanau allies in Sarawak embarked on a sustained campaign of vilification, with accusations that members of the party were plotting to secede parts of Sarawak to Brunei. Finally, when this attempt to discredit SNAP failed, the Federal authorities decided to invoke anti-terrorist laws and locked up the opposition leader for a period of 15 months.

As the principal victim of this shabby misuse of democracy himself claimed 'I was plainly the victim of political opponents who saw me as a threat and who abused their power... (and) who trumped up accusations of disloyalty... just as an excuse to get me out of the way' (Wong, 1983, pp. xi-xii). For all that, the move was effective. SNAP soon passed back into the 'National Front' coalition and, denuded of native support, gradually became a political vehicle for Chinese commercial interests and for an emerging native elite that was increasingly distant from its grassroots (Leigh, 1974).

As this example reveals, the alliance of Malay forces in Sarawak with those on the Peninsula has led to a progressive distortion of the State's democratic process, effectively frustrating native attempts to gain control of their destinies through the ballot box. The result has been to reinforce the profound feelings of powerlessness, already so well established in the native longhouses through the colonial and post-colonial manipulation and control of their community leaders.

Moreover, while the Government has progressively limited popular involvement in politics in the name of

security and stability, it has also prevented the emergence of unofficial movements of a political character. Restrictive legislation on the creation of public interest groups discourages them from making any overt comment on Government policies.

As Leigh points out, the net result of this approach to politics has been to institutionalize 'a pattern of operating that eschews popular participation in decision-making and substitutes the threat of force' (Leigh, 1979, p. 372). What the long-term political costs of this repression may be is hard to judge. Denied political and legal means of redress the only option for the people is direct action. Since 1987 the logging industry has experienced, to its cost, exactly what that means.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SARAWAK

Politics in Sarawak is concerned essentially with the control of land, timber and minerals. A consequence of the quest to attain power is the accretion of wealth from these natural assets. This quest leads to conflicts which can be expressed in crude communal terms (Leigh, 1979, p. 371).

Sarawak's main exports are petroleum and oil, which together comprise 60.4% of its foreign earning power. However, the vast majority of the revenues from these products is syphoned off into the Federal coffers: only 5% of the total revenue drawn from the State's oil and gas is appointed to the State's finances. Thus, for the year 1985, Sarawak exports of oil, gas and petroleum products was valued at M\$ 5,946,100,000. During the same period the total Federal Government expenditure on Sarawak was M\$ 860,546,000 (Department of Statistics 1986).

By contrast, 'all the royalties collected from logging operations go to Sarawak's treasury, making logging the single largest source of revenue for the state government' (INSAN, 1986, p. 3). By 1991, Sarawak was exporting over 18 million m³ of timber per year (World Bank, 1992). About 93% of this timber leaves the country in the form of whole logs, the rest being locally processed.

Thus, the principal sources of wealth in Sarawak are in the hands of the State (Malaysian and Sarawakian) in the form of forest estate (timber) and minerals. Since most of the oil wealth leaves Sarawak and does not return, it is the control of timber which lies at the heart of Sarawak's political economy.

Consequently, an understanding of the links between the political process and the control of the timber industry are central to an understanding of the fate of the native peoples and forests of the country.

Like many Third World economies, in Sarawak the pattern has been 'for the state to assume political leadership of the capitalist revolution given the relative weakness of the domestic capitalist class. The bourgeoisie has... developed within the framework of state-led capitalism in which political ascendancy lies with the officials of the state itself'. Having full control over access to the State's natural resources, state officials are able to dispense favours as they choose, thus perpetuating the social relations inherent in the Sultanates of the pre-colonial era. In those times, as Robison has noted, the 'networks of political loyalties focused around personal attachment to individual leaders and dispensers of beneficiaries, whose political fortunes decided the fate of a host of clients' (Robison, 1986, pp. viii, 13). In recent years the anatomy of this political economy has been clearly revealed to the public gaze.

By 1983, many Dayaks felt so frustrated by the Federal/Malay-Melanau manipulation of the SNAP leadership that they abandoned SNAP to form a new party, the Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS). At first the Chief Minister of Sarawak sought to cocoon this new expression of native political aspirations within the 'National Front' coalition but, by 1986, it was clear that this was no longer possible. In early 1987 a rift within the dominant family of the ruling elite itself led to a political crisis, with a majority of the State assembly expressing a loss of confidence in the Chief Minister. To avoid having to resign from power, the Chief Minister promptly called an election. The opposition faction of the Malay-Melanau elite led by the Chief Minister's own uncle, himself an ex-Chief Minister, created its own new party, PERMAS, and forged an opportunistic alliance with the PBDS.

What the election clearly demonstrated was that a new sense of unity among the Dayak peoples, or at least the numerically superior Iban, had emerged. While the PBDS was an expression of this new unity, and temporarily attracted members of the native elite from many of the other parties, the Malay-Melanau defectors in PERMAS sought to ride this wave of ethnic strength into power. To take advantage of this, they chose a single rice stalk as their symbol, the *padi pun*, that was also incorporated in the PBDS flag.

What the Dayaks were seeking was a greater share in the wealth of the nation, which they felt that the

'National Front's' 'politics of development' was not giving them. As one Iban said to the author:

We don't want to be against the other races, we just want our rights to be respected. We want to be recognised as a community. We want to participate in the economy' (Langga Lias, 1987, pers. comm.).

April 1987 thus witnessed one of the most revealing and exciting political struggles in Sarawak's history, reminiscent of 150 years earlier, when internecine quarrels among the ruling Malays had been settled by recruiting the virile strength of Iban 'pirates'.

As the infighting between uncle and nephew grew more bitter Sarawak was treated to a famous public laundering of dirty linen. With the breakaway of the Chief Minister's uncle to form his new party, the Chief Minister, in his new capacity as Minister for Forestry, struck back by freezing 25 logging licences, with an estimated area of 1.25 million ha, valued at between M\$ 9 billion and M\$ 22.5 billion! (*New Straits Times*, 10 April, 1987; Apin, 1987, p. 187). This was followed by revelations in the press that the Chief Minister had taken advantage of his office to grant himself, his family and his nominees extensive areas as logging concessions. The opposition accused him of giving out logging licences as political favours. Counter-allegations immediately followed and the ex-Chief Minister was forced to admit that when he had been in office he too had given out concessions to all state assemblymen 'in order that they might help their constituencies' (*New Straits Times*, 15 April, 1987). He also defended this practice on the grounds that 'granting concessions to politicians would free them from being obliged to their sponsors' (*New Straits Times*, 10 April, 1987).

From these revelations it became clear that the practice of dealing out logging licences to members of the State legislature had been commonplace over many years, and had created a class of instant millionaires; 'nearly every state assemblyman over the years was one' (*New Straits Times*, 15 April, 1987). It was revealed, moreover, that while the former Chief Minister had given timber licences to each of his eight daughters, the sister and friends of the present Chief Minister had been similarly blessed. The Minister for the Environment and Tourism himself had especially massive interests in logging (Beard, 1987).

As in many ostensible democracies, access to cash is a major constraint to achieving political power,

especially as driving the campaign bandwagons during elections is a costly business. During the 1987 elections some M\$ 62 million was spent chasing the 625,000 voters (*Asiaweek*, 21 April, 1987). As one local observer of the political scene put it:

The whole electoral machinery is fairly expensive to operate because of the remoteness of many of the communities and their inaccessibility. Invariably, helicopters become necessary, so it is taken for granted that no politician can operate effectively in the context of Sarawak without having a tremendous amount of financial resources to call upon. That's where the timber comes in (Beard, 1987).

More importantly, money from logging holds together the patron–client relations that structure Sarawakian politics. As one study has noted:

The Sarawak political elites' control over awarding logging licences gives them the means to maintain and tighten their grip on state power—by alternately rewarding their cronies and followers, and buying off their political rivals and opponents. In short, the logging industry's role within the system of patronage politics in Sarawak is vital and cannot be underestimated (INSAN, 1986, p. 3).

The results of this kind of manipulation of representative democracy are, of course, dire. Popular aspirations are denied and power rests in the hands of those who can cannily control the process of Government to suit their own personal interests. The consequence, as Leigh notes, is that:

the benefits accrue to an ever increasing degree to an urban rich who model themselves on the 'international set' and who live in a world of palatial homes, air-conditioned Mercedes, and helicopters—a group characterised by highly conspicuous consumption. It is the choice of this set of political goals and practices that threatens to block development in the State (Leigh, 1979, p. 372).

It is no coincidence that the only car factory to have existed in Sarawak assembled BMWs.

THE LOGGING INDUSTRY

We are not saying that not a single tree should be cut down, we only demand that logging

should be managed in such a way that it genuinely benefits the local peoples (Harrison Ngau, 1987, pers. comm.).

Although timber extraction has long been an important part of the Sarawak economy, until the Second World War such commercial logging as took place was largely confined to the swamp forests along the coast. Here, felled timbers could be easily slid down to the maze of waterways and floated out to ships for loading and export, without the need for complex technology.

After the war, however, the situation changed dramatically, as mechanical logging commenced in Sarawak in 1947 (WWF(M), 1985, p. 84). The new machinery, in the form of light and efficient chainsaws, powerful tractors and winches, made possible the extraction of timber from the much less accessible upland forest of the interior. A pioneer in this process was James Wong, later to become President of the Sarawak National Party and Minister of the Environment and Tourism. In 1949, with capital loaned by banks in oil-rich Brunei, Wong set a new direction for his three-year-old company, Limbang Trading, having obtained from the colonial authorities a licence to extract timber in the Upper Limbang district of Sarawak's Fifth Division (Wong, 1983). The course of the future 'development' of Sarawak was set.

By 1971, Sarawak was exporting 4.2 million m³ of logs per year, a figure which more than doubled to 8.7 million by 1981. By 1985, log production had reached 10.6 million m³, providing M\$ 1.6 billion in revenue and, according to the Government, employing 96,000 people (Apin, 1987, p. 187); others put the total employment somewhat lower, at 22,000 workers, some 9% of the total workforce (INSAN, 1986, p. 3). By 1991, total annual exports had exceeded 18 million m³ (World Bank, 1992). Well over half this timber was coming from the interior forests, the traditional lands of the Dayak peoples.

Although the State's forest policy explicitly prioritizes the 'prior claims of local demands' over the 'profitable export trade in forest produce' (ITTO, 1990, p. 16) and notes that 'the cultivation of essential foodstuffs by systems of settled agriculture, including properly managed bushfallow, on suitable soils will normally take precedence over forestry' (WWF(M), 1985, pp. 79–80), the reality is that Forestry Policy in Sarawak has been subverted to serve the interests of the ruling elite, who have used

the handing-out of logging concessions as political favours and as a source of personal wealth, to ensure their positions. Ever since 1966, all Sarawak's State Ministers of Forestry have been from the Malay-Melanau elite and members of the governing party PBB. Both between 1970–81 and since 1985, the Chief Ministers have jealously kept this portfolio in their own office: for it is a portfolio of extreme power. The power to grant or deny logging licences lies entirely with the Minister for Forestry (INSAN, 1986, p. 5).

Despite the fact that it is the rich and influential who secure logging licences, it is not their companies which actually extract the timber. On the contrary, in the main, it is Chinese companies who actually carry out the logging and who have both the necessary technical expertise and equipment. These relationships between political patron and sub-contractor are very common in the Malay world, dominating commercial transactions in both Malaysia and Indonesia, the so-called 'Ali Baba' system (c.f. May, 1978).

In theory, logging is quite carefully controlled in Sarawak, particularly in areas defined as 'Protected Forests'. But there are a number of means by which the loggers manage to get around these controls. In the first place, a great many of the forestry officials themselves have shares in the licensed companies, generally through relatives and nominees, and they thus have a vested interest in maximizing short term returns to the company rather than in assuring the careful management of State forest estate.

In startling contrast to Peninsular Malaysia, where there are strict controls on the export of whole logs (Ngau, Jalong & Chee, 1987, p. 175), in Sarawak fully 93% of exported timber leaves the country in unprocessed form, implying a massive loss of both revenue and employment to the state. All whole logs are exported through the company Archipelago Shipping, an import-export company part-owned by the State and part-owned by a relative of the Chief Minister. As one of the natives said to the author: 'from A to Z the logging is in the hands of the Chief Minister'.

THE IMPACT OF LOGGING

We aren't quite sure who is cutting our forests and who is going to flood our land, but we know they live in towns, where rich people are getting richer, and we poor people are losing what little we have. Iban statement (Sutlive, 1984).

Of the 9.43 million ha of Forest Estate in Sarawak, some 60% (5.4 million ha.) had already been licensed out to logging by 1985 (WWF(M), 1985, p. 110). Calculations based on total production in tonnage suggest that by 1985, some 270,000 ha of primary forest were being logged each year in Sarawak, while according to another estimate the rate of forest loss was 410 km² per annum (Ngau, Jalong & Chee, 1987, p. 175). By 1991, rates of logging had increased a further 40% and had penetrated to the most vulnerable headwater forests on the Indonesian border (World Bank, 1992).

In State forest (where 60% of all concessions have been granted), measures are rarely taken to protect the forest and clear cutting is permitted, with serious consequences. Yet even in areas of so-called Protected Forest where the cut is supposed to be controlled to ensure the regeneration of the forest cover, the effects are severe. Studies have shown that even where precautions are taken to protect the forest and regulations are observed, hill forest logging in Sarawak removes about 46% of the natural cover (WWF(M), 1985, p. 87).

Despite assertions to the contrary by individuals such as the Environment Minister James Wong, who claims that 'logging in Sarawak will go on for ever and ever', the consensus of botanists, foresters and conservationists alike is that if present trends and practices are not radically changed, the logging industry in Sarawak will not last another five years; by then there will be barely any primary forest left. The World Bank, in a report that has been suppressed by the Malaysian government, characterizes logging in Malaysia as a 'sunset industry' (World Bank, 1992).

The use of heavy machinery for the extraction of the logs is one of the principal problems of the timber industry. The machines churn up the soil, compacting the lower layers and rendering it impermeable. Logging thus not only exposes the soils direct to rain, by removing the protective canopy, but increases the run-off by reducing the soils' capacity to absorb water. The direct result is a vastly accelerated rate of erosion which besides seriously reducing soil quality and the capacity of the forest to regenerate, causes heavy pollution of rivers. There is a complete absence of legislation to control this (WWF(M), 1985, p.19). The Federal Government's own 5-year plan notes that 'soil erosion and siltation have now become (Sarawak's) main water pollution problem'; only 41% of Sarawak's rivers remain unpolluted (Malaysia, 1986, pp. 290, 285). In many parts of

Sarawak, rivers have become permanently turbid (WWF(M), 1985 p. 78). Stocks of fish, a major component of the native peoples' diet and essential source of protein, have crashed as a result, while the silt has blocked village water pipes and polluted drinking water.

Despite the increasing dependence of many Dayak peoples on store-bought foods, hunting remains an integral part of the economy in many rural areas. According to Julian Caldecott (1986), of the WWF(M), the annual consumption of wild animals in Sarawak is at least 20,000 tonnes. Such food provides essential nutrition for many rural groups, having a market value of at least M\$300 million. Caldecott estimates that only about one-third of this meat is caught with traditional methods (blowpipes, traps, spears and dogs), the rest falling to Sarawak's 61,500 licensed shotguns, which discharge some 2 million cartridges a year. Between 60 and 90% of the kills made are of deer and wild pig: some 1 million pigs, 23,000 rusa deer and 31,000 muntjac (barking deer) are consumed annually (WWF(M), 1985, p.73).

Although the impact of this hunting on certain species, such as clouded leopards, may be considered damaging, the overall impact of present hunting levels is not thought to present a threat to wildlife, according to the World Wildlife Funds's study. By contrast, logging operations have devastated habitats and led to an evident decline in faunal populations. Caldecott notes a fall in wild meat consumption over the last 30 years from 54 kg per person per year to only 2 kg, a loss he attributes largely to the depredations of the timber industry.

Local diets have also suffered from the sawdust, mud and diesel oil pollution of the rivers which have caused the decline in fish stocks. Timber has thus undermined the quality of rural health, at the same time increasing the dependence of rural communities on the cash economy as they attempt to substitute canned meats and dried seafood for traditional protein supplies. Local earning power—although temporarily inflated by jobs in the logging camps—has also been hit by the logging. Trade in foodstuffs has been directly affected. Forest products such as *illipe* nuts and resins, major sources of cash income for some communities, have become unavailable and trade in basketry and bamboo goods made impossible as the logging has destroyed the forests from which such products come (WWF(M), 1985, p. 96; *The Star*, 14 September, 1987). Even finding timber for longhouse and canoe building has become difficult in some areas.

Moreover, apart from the toll that logging takes of the environment and human welfare, it has also proved very costly in human lives. On the basis of the injuries reported between 1973 and 1984, it can be calculated that seven lives are lost for every million m³ logged in Sarawak, with one serious injury for every 7000 m³. These mortalities are some 21 times as bad as those that occur in the logging industry in Canada. The major causes of these deaths stem from the lack of precautions taken by both the workers and their employers. Much of the labour force is employed on a piecework basis, with the inevitable result that corners are cut—and then limbs. No laws exist in Sarawak to enforce safety regulations and although this problem was officially recognized more than 7 years ago, no steps have been taken to remedy the situation (Zainorin, 1985). Although the most serious logging accidents are to the head, hard hats are not provided by the companies, while compensation for loss of life, limbs or for other disabilities is set at a maximum of M\$19,000 by the Workers' Compensation Scheme.

One of the inevitable results of the logging has been increasing problems of flooding. According to Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia) flooding in 1981 cost the local economy some M\$12 million in damage to crops and livestock alone, and even the State Agriculture Department admitted that if the flooding is to be controlled, the felling of the forest should stop immediately (*Survival International News*, 1984 (5): 5; Hong, 1987, p. 120).

LAND DEVELOPMENT AND RESETTLEMENT

Realizing the potential of land which is a major resource for the development of our state, the Barisan Nasional Government is implementing massive programmes to develop vast areas into agricultural estates, including mini-estates, and organised farm units Sarawak. 'National Front' Election Manifesto, 1987.

Unusual among the territories of the Far East, in Sarawak the process of 'developing' the economy through conversion of forest lands to plantations, was never strongly advocated by the Brooke or colonial administrations. While the Dutch were advancing their *cultuurstelsel* in the islands of Indonesia, while the Spanish and later the Americans expanded their plantations in the Philippines, while the North Borneo Company took over vast areas of native lands in

present-day Sabah and while, in Malaya, the expatriate British planters cleared vast areas of forest to achieve immense profits from the sale of rubber, in Sarawak such developments were not encouraged.

It is ironic, therefore, that having avoided this fate for so long, today such 'agricultural development schemes' are seen by both the State and Federal planning units as the way forward for Sarawak's rural sector. While shifting cultivation is perceived as a wasteful form of land use by government and as 'a major constraint on the full utilization of natural resources', the Government is strongly promoting the conversion of farming and forest land to plantations. Today, Government investment in 'land development' constitutes the single largest category of State expenditure, after road- and bridge-building.

The government claims that, in Sarawak, there are 2.2 million ha of land being inefficiently used 'largely due to traditional agricultural practices' (Malaysia, 1986, p. 169). To overcome this 'problem', the aim is to 'rehabilitate' the 'large tracts of idle land' through 'integrated agricultural development projects' which 'will introduce modern and highly productive agricultural practices to the people' (ibid, p. 196).

What this really means is that the State and Federal authorities plan to resettle the Dayaks from their longhouse communities and take over their lands for conversion into plantations and agribusinesses, where the native people will become a labour force more obedient to the dictates of central government and the external market.

The Government's aims in promoting these resettlement and estate development programmes are manifold. During the late 1960s, at the time of *konfrontasi* when Sarawak was embroiled in conflict with Indonesian-backed communist insurgents, the political intent of the programme was explicit. The principal goal of resettlement was simply to relocate rural peoples away from sensitive and troubled border regions. If the projects were not economically viable this was not important, for they successfully accomplished their primary aim of asserting government control over the rural population (Masing 1985).

Since then, however, the projects have been, ostensibly, promoted for other reasons. On one hand, the stated aim has been to diversify the economic base of the State, by increasing exports of plantation products; palm-oil, rubber, cocoa and tea. On the other hand, the tacit goal has been to remove the

native peoples from the extensive lands that they are using so 'wastefully' so that the State can alienate them to other purposes: be it for 'forestry' (i.e. logging), hydropower or the creation of national parks.

The Government also claims that such development programmes will be of direct benefit to the rural people who participate in them. The Government asserts, for example, that it is financially impossible for it to provide basic amenities to people if they continue to live in a widely scattered way (*Sarawak Tribune*, 20 October, 1985). According to the then Malaysian Minister for Land and Regional Development, Datuk Seri Adib Adam, 'Land Development is the key to solving most of the problems faced by those living in interior areas' (*Sunday Mirror* 13 February, 1986). Government figures show that, by 1985 over 40,000 ha of land in Sarawak had been developed as palm-oil, cocoa and rubber estates and land schemes (Department of Statistics, 1986).

The idea that resettlement and plantations programmes are being implemented to aid the poor is not just propagated by those in Government service. Even opposition politicians, such as the PBDS leader Dr James Masing, have been quoted as saying that such programmes are 'an indication of the Government's desire to help the poor' (*Sunday Mirror*, 13 February, 1986).

Despite such assurances, the plantation schemes have been beset by serious problems. Poor management and a glut in the world market for plantation produce has meant that the estates have rarely been economically successful, so that by early 1986 it was estimated that the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Agency (FELCRA) was losing M\$1.9 million a month (*Borneo Post*, 17 April, 1986).

Local communities have borne a disproportionate share of the burden, while losing their lands to the plantations. Besides the immediate disruptions to their subsistence economies caused by land loss and local ecological and climatic changes, those relocated as a labour force on the plantations have found conditions far harder than they had been led to expect. The changeover from the relative autonomy of village life to the controlled circumstances of plantation labour has been hard to bear and as wages have declined in real terms resistance and strikes have ensued. These have been met with police violence, arrests and detentions under the repressive

national security laws (Yu Loon Chin, 1987; Colchester, 1989).

Problems caused by forced resettlement and ensuing protests have been strongest in areas cleared for inundation by hydroelectric projects (Sarawak Museum, 1979; WWF(M), 1985, p. 78; *Survival International Urgent Action Bulletin*, May/June, 1986; Hew Ching Sim, 1986) but even National Parks are proving a problem to some local communities. While, theoretically, they provide protection against logging, they may also result in the extinction of native rights, which results in native hunters finding themselves reclassified as 'poachers'. Top-down planning with inadequate consultation with local peoples has inevitably led to opposition and mistrust (WWF(M), 1985, p. 23; Colchester, 1987).

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

The process of developing the agricultural sector using the old method of waiting for gradual changes not only slowed down the achievements of the New Economic Policy objectives but is obsolete in the modern era (Datuk Patinggi Taib Mahmud, Chief Minister for Sarawak: *Borneo Post*, 28 September, 1986).

If development is to have real benefit to the native peoples of Sarawak, major changes in Government policy are urgently needed. The present Chief Minister has given expression to his Government's 'politics of development' by insisting that 'it is vital for the local folks to grab every opportunity given to them' (*Borneo Post*, 7 April, 1986). However, this kind of 'smash and grab' development has proved largely illusory for the native peoples. Opportunities for 'grabbing' have been provided very unequally, being mainly available to the local politicians, whose profits have been made at the local peoples' expense.

Perhaps one of the main problems is the lack of a vision of alternative development strategies between, on one hand, the maintenance of traditional longhouse life and, on the other, its complete abandonment and replacement with 'modern' development through dams, mines and plantations. Under pressure, both internally from rising expectations and interest in consumer goods and externally from interests competing for their lands, longhouse life is fast disappearing.

This lack of vision seems to be shared both by Government and by the native peoples themselves.

The only immediate alternative for the longhouse people has been to drift to the cities with the attendant problems which we have already noted. Part of the reason for this lack of initiative is the result of the socially destructive political dependency created during the colonial era and maintained since then. This has led to a prevailing expectation among the rural peoples that it is government which takes the initiatives. In this sense the native peoples, too, have been waiting for change to happen to them, rather than going out and achieving it.

Some outside observers have therefore advocated that the Government should be concentrating its attention on building up the rural economy based on the traditional systems of Sarawak's rural people. For example, Robert Cramb of the University of Queensland, who has also been strongly critical of the Malaysian policy of large-scale plantation programmes (Cramb, 1989b), notes:

Village-based land tenure, is a low-cost, flexible and acceptable way of administering agricultural land (from the point of view of the communities concerned) which lends itself both to individual peasant initiatives and medium-scale group-farming activities. Further the family labour unity is highly motivated to work on its own land and typically uses the different classes of worker (male and female, old and young) to maximum advantage, particularly in a diversified farming system. Village-based peasant families also have the ability to pool and exchange labour at critical times, with minimal supervision and control. Hence village-based peasant agriculture provides a viable framework for development and should not be viewed merely as an obstacle to large-scale land development (Cramb, 1989a, p. 13).

Since 1986, the rural peoples have been far from passive in the face of logging, mining, hydropower development and plantation schemes. The politicization of Dayak demands through the PBDS has been one expression of this growing assertiveness, but direct action through erecting barricades to prevent logging has been the most widely noted. Despite continual police harassment and some 500 individual arrests, blockades of logging company roads continue (Colchester, 1989; WRM/SAM, 1990; SAM, 1992).

The demands of those erecting the blockades vary from an insistence on better monetary compensation

and employment opportunities to offset logging damage to a demand to halt logging altogether. In all cases, the demands are based on the indigenous perception that the forests belong first and foremost to the local people and not to the State or outside interests.

The inland peoples have realized that if they are to prosper, they must be given more control over their lands and lives than the present political process allows. Radical changes are needed in the land laws to ensure that longhouse communities have unequivocal rights of ownership to their communal territories, in accordance with the exigencies of international law (ILO Convention 107, Article 11).

To ensure that native leaders genuinely represent local communities, means must be found to ensure that their power base and economic interests are located within the community, and not, as at present, outside it. The recent emergence in the Baram region of 'Longhouse Associations,' with elected longhouse representatives, is an encouraging sign that this is indeed possible even in areas where traditional societies were highly stratified, and where traditional respect for 'aristocrats' has meant that longhouse members continued to follow the directives of their leaders long after these had allowed their personal interests to take precedence over the shared interests of the community.

These novel longhouse associations are likely to take a long time to establish themselves and in the meantime entail bitter disagreements between the old longhouse aristocracies and the new emerging leadership. The trend, however, may be irresistible. In 1992, the Orang Ulu Association, largely made up of the traditional longhouse leaders whose present status derives from State appointments, passed a resolution calling on the government to allow villages to elect their own leaders (Thomas Jalong, August 1992, pers. comm.). The Government has yet to respond to the demand.

So long as the political economy continues to be dominated, on one hand, by the timber industry and on the other by the political elite in Kuala Lumpur, it seems unlikely that the electoral process at the State level will be able to bring about such changes. Vested interests have made it all too plain that they intend to maintain the forests as the exclusive preserve of the 'State', in other words of the timber barons who run it. The latest Forest Amendment Bill (November 1987) gives yet further powers to the Minister of Forestry and makes any disruption of the logging process a statutory

offence, regardless of whether it is claimed that the loggers are trespassing on native lands or not. The same vested interests have also made it plain that they will not tolerate opposition to their policies.

Despite these rather overwhelmingly gloomy clouds, there are signs that the situation is changing. The realization that present forest policies are bankrupting the country are widely shared by the Sarawakian public, by many scientists, by the development agencies and increasingly by Malay politicians. Above all there is increasing understanding of their problems within the Dayak communities themselves, in some places fostered by the dedicated work of the few non-government organizations that have managed to establish themselves in Sarawak despite the repressive political climate. The most obvious expression of this 'Dayakism', as it has come to be called, has been the upsurge of support for the PBDS party. However, as this study has shown, the natives' hope of achieving change through the electoral process may be misplaced. Real change will only come about with the expansion of the grass roots network that is just beginning to emerge.

It is in the native peoples' own determination to achieve a better future for themselves that the real hope lies. As one native said to the author (Michael Egang Wan Anyi, 1987, pers. comm.)

We can go hunting and fishing. We have land, so we can also do our farming. Because we have land we are free to do as we choose. But now we must struggle to maintain our freedom.

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